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**Holiday
Trash Pick-Up**

Garbage pick-up will NOT be on Christmas Day instead pick-up will be the following day, Wednesday, December 26!!

Garbage WILL be picked up on New Year's Day, January 1st!!

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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



Put our experienced team to work for you!

GROTON
Ford
GROTONFORD.COM 605-397-2311

Homecare Services Caregivers
Flexible, part time positions available in the Groton area. Home Care Services is looking for friendly dependable people to provide care and companionship for elderly and disabled people in their homes. You will be assisting our clients with personal care needs, meal preparations, light housekeeping, errands and other tasks. If you have a passion for helping others and need a flexible schedule, please call our office at (605) 225-1076 or 1-800-899-2578. (1218.0101)

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Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Jordan Wright

The Minnesota Vikings moved to 8-6-1 this season after a 27-9 win over the Detroit Lions (5-10) this past Sunday. The Vikings were sluggish to start the game, with the offense non-existent and the defense bending but not breaking in the first half. Fortunately, the second half was much better for the Vikings on both sides of the ball, and they pulled away from the Lions to secure the win. A game-winning, last-second field goal for Philadelphia meant the Vikings didn't clinch a playoff spot this week, but they are still in the driver's seat, meaning if they win next week, they are in.

The Vikings offense, after coming out on fire last week, amassed only two yards on their first four drives combined. The Vikings didn't pick up a first down until there was less than four minutes left in the first half, but things finally began to click, and the Vikings scored two quick touchdowns to take a 14-9 lead going into halftime. The second half wasn't perfect offensively, but the Vikings were able to tack on an additional 13 points to put the game away.

Kirk Cousins completed 21 of 28 passes (75%) for 253 yards, three touchdowns and zero interceptions. Cousins' 405 completions this season are a new Vikings' team record. Adam Thielen and Stefon Diggs continue to put up underwhelming stats, with the pair combining for only seven catches, 90 yards and a touchdown. Dalvin Cook once again showed off his impressive athleticism, touching the ball 19 times for 108 yards. He has become the focal point for the offense over the last few weeks, and I would be surprised if that didn't continue.

Just like the offense, the Vikings' defense was stagnant to open the game, allowing Detroit to score three field goals on their six first-half drives. The second half was a different story, as the defense limited Detroit to only 26 yards if you take the final drive out of the equation, since the Vikings were in prevent defense. Just like when these two teams played earlier in the season, the Vikings were once again living in Detroit's backfield. The defense finished with three sacks, 12 tackles for a loss, and 8 quarterback hits.

The player of the game on offense was Kyle Rudolph, which is perfect since it's Christmas time! Rudolph the red-zone reindeer caught nine passes for 122 yards and two touchdowns – one of which was a deep shot by Kirk Cousins as time expired in the first half. Rudy has been quieted this year, but this game may have been a coming-out party for the Vikings' tight end. If opposing defenses continue to focus on stopping Thielen and Diggs, Rudolph should be able to capitalize.

The player of the game on defense was Eric Wilson, who started in place of linebacker Eric Kendricks. Wilson had some big shoes to fill, as Kendricks is one of the most important cogs in the Vikings' defense, but Wilson was up to the challenge. He ended the game with a team-leading nine tackles to go along with a sack, three tackles for a loss, and three quarterback hits. Hopefully Kendricks can make it back for the playoffs, but if he can't, it's great to know Wilson can step in when needed.

Looking ahead, the Vikings return home and will play the Chicago Bears with the playoffs on the line. The game has been flexed and will now start at 3pm (CT). If the Vikings win, they are in. If they lose, they can still make the tournament but will need some help in the form of a Philadelphia loss or tie. ESPN gives the Vikings a 56% chance to win the game, but even though the Bears have already locked up a playoff spot, they won't overlook a chance to potentially knock a divisional rival out of the playoffs. This game will be a great test for the Vikings, and I have faith they will come out strong to get the victory. Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays! Skol!

If you have any questions or comments, reach out to me on Twitter (@JordanWrightNFL)

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GROTON KIWANIS CLUB

Lee Schinkel was program leader for last week's Kiwanis Club. Lee introduced St. John's Lutheran Church' nursery school, who presented a great musical Christmas program

What's going on in state government this week

Wednesday, December 26 – The South Dakota Department of Labor and Regulation will hold itinerant office hours. Both job seekers and employers interested in receiving employment and career services at no cost may visit or call during these office hours. More information on programs and services is available at www.sdjobs.org. Itinerant office hours will be held at the following locations:

Wednesday, December 26, 1 – 4:30 p.m. CST, Wagner – At City Hall, 60 S. Main. For more information, call 605-487-7607, ext. 207 or 212, or visit www.sdjobs.org.

Wednesday, December 26 – Benefits specialists from the Department of Social Services' Division of Economic Assistance will be available at the following itinerant office locations. For more information, contact Tia Kafka, 605-773-3165.

Dupree, 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. MST

Salem, 9:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. CST

Wanblee, 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. MST

Flandreau, 8:30 a.m. – 4 p.m. CST

Thursday, December 27 – The South Dakota Department of Labor and Regulation will host Job Search Assistance Programs (JSAP). JSAP is a workshop for people recovering from job loss or enhancing their job search skills. Trained instructors speak on modern-day techniques used to successfully find employment. Topics covered include resume and cover letter writing, interviewing etiquette, networking effectively, using social media and much more. JSAP will be offered at the following locations:

Thursday, December 27, 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. CST, Mitchell – At 1321 N. Main St. For more information, call 605-995-8060 or visit www.sdjobs.org.

Thursday, December 27 – Benefits specialists from the Department of Social Services' Division of Economic Assistance will be available at the following itinerant office locations. For more information, contact Tia Kafka, 605-773-3165.

Canton, 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. CST

Kyle, 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. MST

Flandreau, 8:30 a.m. – 4 p.m. CST

Lemmon, 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. MST

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The Wolves fell to the Dragons in a game that went down to the wire

Moorhead, Minn. – The Northern State University men’s basketball team suffered their first NSIC loss of the 2018-19 season, falling 71-69 on the road. The Wolves drop to 9-3 overall and 5-1 in league action.

Northern had possession with four seconds remaining, down two, but the Wolves were unable to hit the final shot with a missed 3-pointer. The Wolves shot 50.9 percent from the floor, out-shooting the Dragons by 2.6 percent. They trailed 38-29 at the half, but stormed back with 40 points to Moorhead’s 33 in the second.

NSU grabbed a game high six made 3-pointers, and out-rebounded MSUM 37-23 in the game. The Wolves grabbed a game high 38 points in the paint, and added nine points off the bench, eight second chance points, and seven points off turnovers. Northern gave up 14 turnovers in the loss, which resulted in 17 Dragon points, and shot a 4-game low 35.3 percent from the arc.

Parker Fox led three Wolves in double figures in the first start of his Northern State career. The redshirt freshman drained 19 points, and grabbed a team high eight rebounds. He hit 8-of-13 from the floor and 3-of-4 from the free throw line.

Bo Fries and Ian Smith followed with 15 and 14 points respectively, as well as four rebounds and three assists apiece. Fries was perfect from the arc, going 2-for-2, which Smith shot 50.0 percent from the field and led the team with three steals.

Gabe King and Andrew Kallman rounded out the starting five with eight and four points respectively. Kallman was second on the team with a career high seven rebounds and three assists, while King knocked down two threes and added two rebounds.

Jordan Belka led the Wolves off the bench with four points and three rebounds. The freshman shot 50.0 percent from the field. Cole Dahl and Ethan Kranhold followed with three and two points respectively. Dahl added two rebounds and one assist, while Kranhold notched three rebounds and one block.

The Northern State men will have a 16-day break before traveling to Upper Iowa and Winona State on January 4 and 5. Tip-off is set for 7:30 p.m. on Friday in Fayette and 5:30 p.m. on Saturday in Winona.

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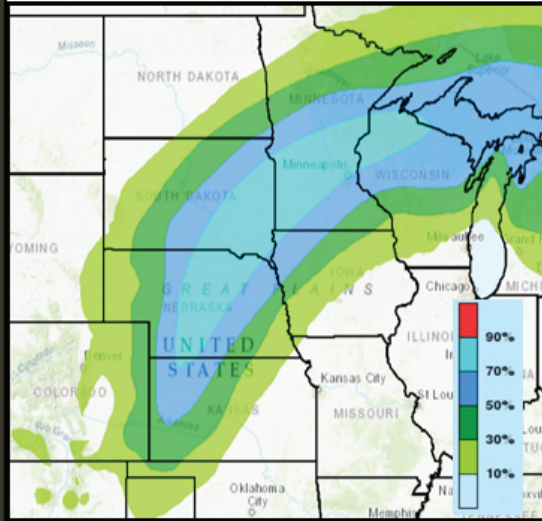
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National Weather Service Aberdeen SD



Updated: Major Winter Storm Still Looms For Thursday Into Friday



Thursday/Thursday Night

What we know:

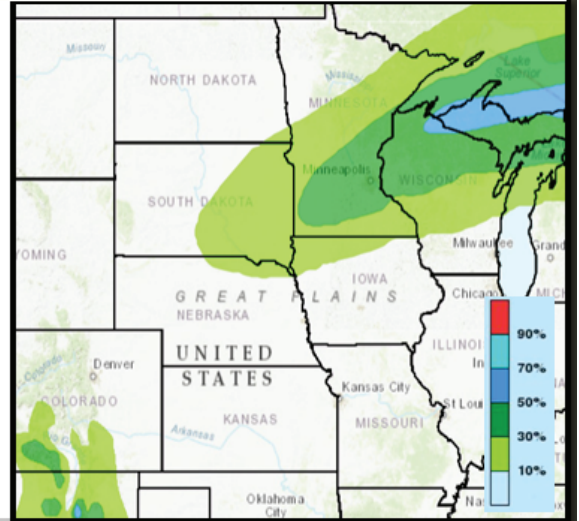
- A winter storm will impact the region late this week.
- Heavy snow and a wintry mix may impact travel.

What We Don't Know:

- Exact precipitation amounts, including snowfall, and the location of the highest amounts.

Stay Tuned!

Maps show the probability of exceeding .25" liquid equivalent of snow/sleet



Friday

Published on: 12/23/2018 at 2:50PM

For Thursday and Friday, a storm will move into the Northern Plains, with travel likely impacted at that time. Exact snow amounts are still a bit allusive, but heavy snow appears possible. Remain tuned into the latest forecasts/watches/warnings.

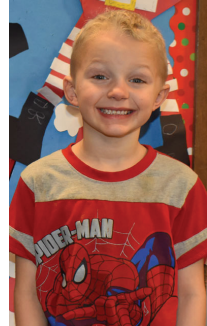
Merry Christmas from the Groton Area Kindergarten Students



Amara Freeland, daughter of Sara Freeland, Houghton. What does Christmas mean to me? Is lots of presents and toys.



Andi Iverson, daughter of Jeremy and Jacki Iverson, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? I will see my cousins and grandma and grandpa



Brayson Hubbs, son of Kandi and Dustin Wiseman, Columbia. What does Christmas mean to me? A Christmas tree and Santa and the reindeer



Ayce Warrington, son of Neil and Amy Warrington, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? Celebrate Jesus' birthday and to get presents



Ambrielle Feist, daughter of Michael and Ashley Feist, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? About opening presents



Addison Steffes, daughter of Jared and Jennie Steffes, Bristol. What does Christmas mean to me? Giving people some presents



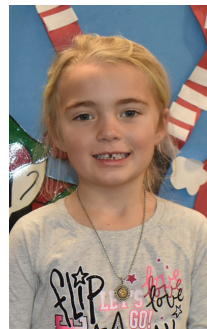
Cash Reif, son of Kyle and Margo Reif, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? Happy and open presents



Bella Barrera, daughter of Tasha and Beltran Barrera, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? presents



Caelynn Pullan, daughter of Danielle and Jason Pullan, Columbia. What does Christmas mean to me? That we get presents



Brynlee Dunker, daughter of Craig and Tasha Dunker, Conde. What does Christmas mean to me? Jesus and Santa



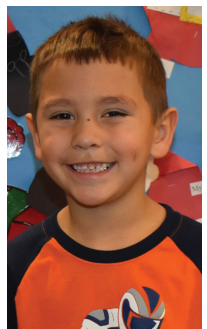
Charli Jacobse, daughter of Matt and Nicole Jacobsen, Conde. What does Christmas mean to me? You get presents and have fun



Cheyenne Powell, daughter of Amber Hommel and John Powell, Andover. What does Christmas mean to me? Being with your family



Colton Morehouse, son of Brent and Jessica Morehouse, Andover. What does Christmas mean to me? Santa and reindeer and Christmas tree



Connor Hagenson, son of Anthony Hagenson and Parmalie Hagenson, Aberdeen. What does Christmas mean to me? decorate your tree and get presents



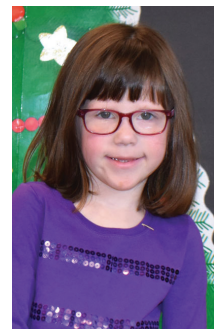
Drew Fjeldheim, son of Ryan and Sue Fjeldheim, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? fun, getting to spend time with our cousins in Fargo.



Carter Boerger, son of Kristen Winther and Jayme Boerger, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? It means you get presents



Graham Rose, son of Ian and Karen Rose, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? Ornaments on my tree



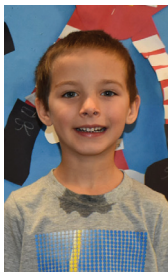
Danielle Franken, daughter of Adam and Jenna Franken, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? The birth of Jesus'

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Easton Larson, son of Josh and Desa Larson, Columbia. What does Christmas mean to me? It is Jesus' birthday



Grady Zeck, son of Trevor and Jessie Zeck, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? Presents and snowball fights



Hank Hill, son of Jason and Tara Hill, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? Santa comes and snow and elves



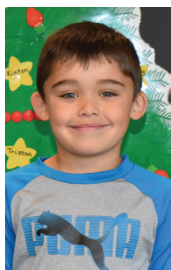
Hadley Heilman, daughter of David and Kari Heilman, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? Presents from



Ivan Schwan, son of Anna and Brett Schwan, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? Presents and toys.



Kinton Tracy, son of Ryan and Carla Tracy, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? Fun to open presents.



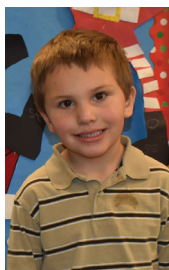
Quinton Flores, son of Jackie Krueger, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? Having time with my family.



Preston Hinkelman, son of Anje and Delbert Hinkelman, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? Santa gives me new boots.



Libby Johnson, daughter of Gene and Tayla Johnson, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? It is baby Jesus' birthday



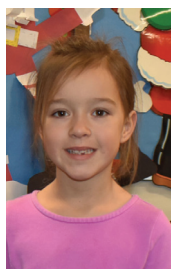
Emmett Zoellner, Son of Casey and Kayla Zoellner, Conde. What does Christmas mean to me? playing in the snow and play with



Jaila Flihs, daughter of Lance and JoAnn Flihs, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? Dress up like Santa Claus and play with my brothers



Kendall Kroll, daughter of John and Katie Kroll, Bath. What does Christmas mean to me? You can decorate the Christ-



Kinley Sandness, daughter of Brock and Julie Sandness, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? We get to open presents and get toys



Knox Mulder, son of Tony and Jackie Mulder, Bath. What does Christmas mean to me? toys, Christmas trees and Santa



Lilly Davies, daughter of Tony and Christine Davies, Columbia. What does Christmas mean to me? you get presents and it is Jesus' birthday at Christmas



Maycee Moody, daughter of Eric and Darcie Moody, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? We celebrate God's birthday



Taylynn Traphagen, daughter of Trent and Heather Traphagen, Aberdeen. What does Christmas mean to me? It is Jesus' birthday



Zoe Olson, daughter of Ryan and Carrie Olson, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? Baby Jesus has a birthday



Tristan Powell, son of Amber Hommel and John Powell, Andover. What does Christmas mean to me? The Christmas trees are cool.



Rylee Hofer, daughter of Jennifer and Mark Hofer, Columbia. What does Christmas mean to me? It's God's birthday.

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Merry Christmas!



Parker Zoellner, son of Darin and Anne Zoellner, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? Open presents and eat Christmas cookies



Victoria Schuster, daughter of Tom and Sarah Schuster, Bath. What does Christmas mean to me? Open presents and eat Gingerbread houses



New Construction
Remodeling
Hoop Barns ~ Shops

Perry Blocker

13379 Sperry Ln, Bath

605/216-2677

prblocker@hotmail.com

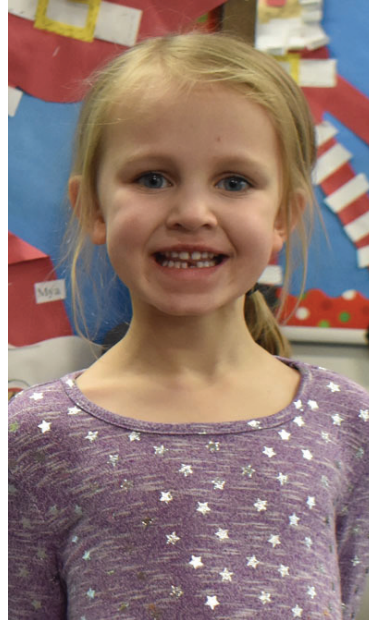
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Merry Christmas!



Mya Moody, daughter of Eric and Darcie Moody, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? Having presents



Rayna Loeschke, daughter of Jerrica Loeschke and Derrick Johnson, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? See my Grandma and Grandpa and celebrate Christmas at my house



**Groton American
Legion Post #39**

Lounge: 397-2603 • Downtown Groton



GLORIA IN EXCELSIS DEO

With highest praise to the Lord at the birth of our Savior, and many thanks to you, our friends and neighbors for your goodwill during this past year. With exceeding great joy we bid you and yours a very joyous Merry Christmas.

Professional Management Services, Inc.

111 N Main, Downtown Groton

605/397-3333



Purina

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Bentley Ehresmann, son of Tracy Johnson and Chris Ehresmann, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? I want a football and presents.



Lori's Pharmacy
Lori Giedt, RPh



1205 N 1st St., Groton • 397-2363



Mason Locke, is the son of Matt and Tammy Locke, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? it means to be with family and be nice

Ken's SUPER FAIR FOODS
FOOD FAIR & SHELL EXPRESS
Groton ~ 397-8456 ~ kenssuperfair.com

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Today in Weather History

December 24, 1985: Snow fell over western South Dakota on December 23, with the greatest amounts in the northern Black Hills. Strong winds gusting to 50-60 mph developed over the western part of the state on the evening of December 23rd and continued into the morning of the 24th, with gusts to above 40 mph in the east. The winds caused ground blizzard conditions in the northern and central sections of South Dakota, and many vehicles were reported in ditches. Many people were stranded for a time in Martin in Bennett County. Several roads were completely blocked during this time, such as Highway 248 near Murdo in Jones County.

December 24, 1992: A deep area of low pressure traveled across the United States/Canada border, dragging a cold front southward across South Dakota and Minnesota by Christmas Day. Southerly winds gusted up to 50 mph over western Minnesota on the 23rd in advance of the storm, causing ground blizzard conditions. As the arctic cold front swept across the area, temperatures tumbled from the 20s and 30s to well below zero by Christmas morning. Wind gusts were up to 50 mph behind the front, causing ground blizzard conditions and wind chill readings from 40 to 60 degrees below zero. A church that was under construction in Litchfield in Meeker County, Minnesota was destroyed by strong winds. Many motorists were stranded on Christmas Eve and spent the night at area homes and motels. Interstate 94 from Alexandria to Moorhead, MN was closed for nearly eight hours. High winds gusted up to 55 mph in the Watertown, SD area, causing a steel frame building under construction to collapse sometime between 9 and 10 pm CST.

December 24, 2009: A broad upper level low pressure area over the Upper Midwest associated with an intense surface low pressure area brought widespread heavy snow along with blizzard conditions to central and northeast South Dakota as well as west central Minnesota. The storm was a slow mover and produced several rounds of snow over a three-day period. Total snowfall amounts were from 7 to as much as 25 inches. The heavy snow combined with winds of 25 to 40 mph with gusts to 50 mph brought widespread blowing and drifting snow with visibilities frequently less than a quarter of a mile. This blizzard ranked in the top three for South Dakota snowfall with a state average of 15.4 inches. Most of the state received 10 inches of snowfall or more with many locations with 20 inches or more. Pollock in north central South Dakota set an all-time high three-day snowfall total with 17 inches. Prior to the onset of the storm, the Governor declared a state of emergency for South Dakota. Large portions of both Interstates 29 and 90 across South Dakota were closed late on Thursday, December 24th. Both Interstates were closed through Christmas Day and into Saturday, December 26th. There were some stranded holiday travelers due to the road closings along with a few rescues. Most roads were reopened by Sunday morning, December 27th. There were also several vehicle accidents with nothing serious. Several airports were also closed throughout the storm along with a few spotty power outages occurring in Lyman County in central South Dakota. Total snowfall amounts over the three-day period predominantly ranged from 1 to 2 feet. Snowfall amounts with a foot or more included; 12 inches at Mobridge, Eureka, Waubay, and Eagle Butte; 13 inches at Highmore and Miller; 14 inches at Castlewood, Summit, Watertown, Pierre, and Ree Heights; 15 inches at Groton, Gettysburg, Webster, Wilmot, Hayti, and McLaughlin; 16 inches at McIntosh, east of Hayes and east of Hosmer; 17 inches at Timber Lake, Britton, and Pollock; 18 inches near Victor; 20 inches near Keldron; 22 inches at Murdo; 23 inches at Sisseton and 25 inches at Kennebec. In west central Minnesota Wheaton received 11 inches, Browns Valley received 15 inches with 16 inches at Ortonville and Artichoke Lake.

December 24, 2004: An extremely rare snowstorm impacts southeastern Texas on this day. Corpus Christi International Airport officially measured 4.4 inches from this event. This was their second white Christmas ever recorded in Corpus Christi. The other white Christmas occurred in 1918 when 0.1 inches was reported.

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Today



Partly Sunny

High: 36 °F

Tonight



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 14 °F

Christmas Day



Mostly Cloudy

High: 26 °F

Tuesday Night



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 13 °F

Wednesday



60% → 90%

Snow Likely then Snow

High: 27 °F

Today: Highs 28-45°
Tonight: Light Snow Possible
Lows in the Teens

Christmas: Highs 23-38°

Chance of Seeing 4+ Inches of Snow Wednesday through Wednesday Night

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

12/24/2018 5:29 AM

Published on: 12/24/2018 at 5:34AM

A weak system moving through tonight could bring light snow, mainly to central South Dakota. A storm system will begin impacting the region on Wednesday with accumulating snow expected for most locations by Wednesday night. The system is slow moving with snow likely through at least Thursday night.

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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 29 °F at 12:00 AM

Low Outside Temp: 11 °F at 9:54 PM

High Gust: 22 mph at 5:46 AM

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 50° in 1943, 1893

Record Low: -24° in 1996

Average High: 23°F

Average Low: 4°F

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.38

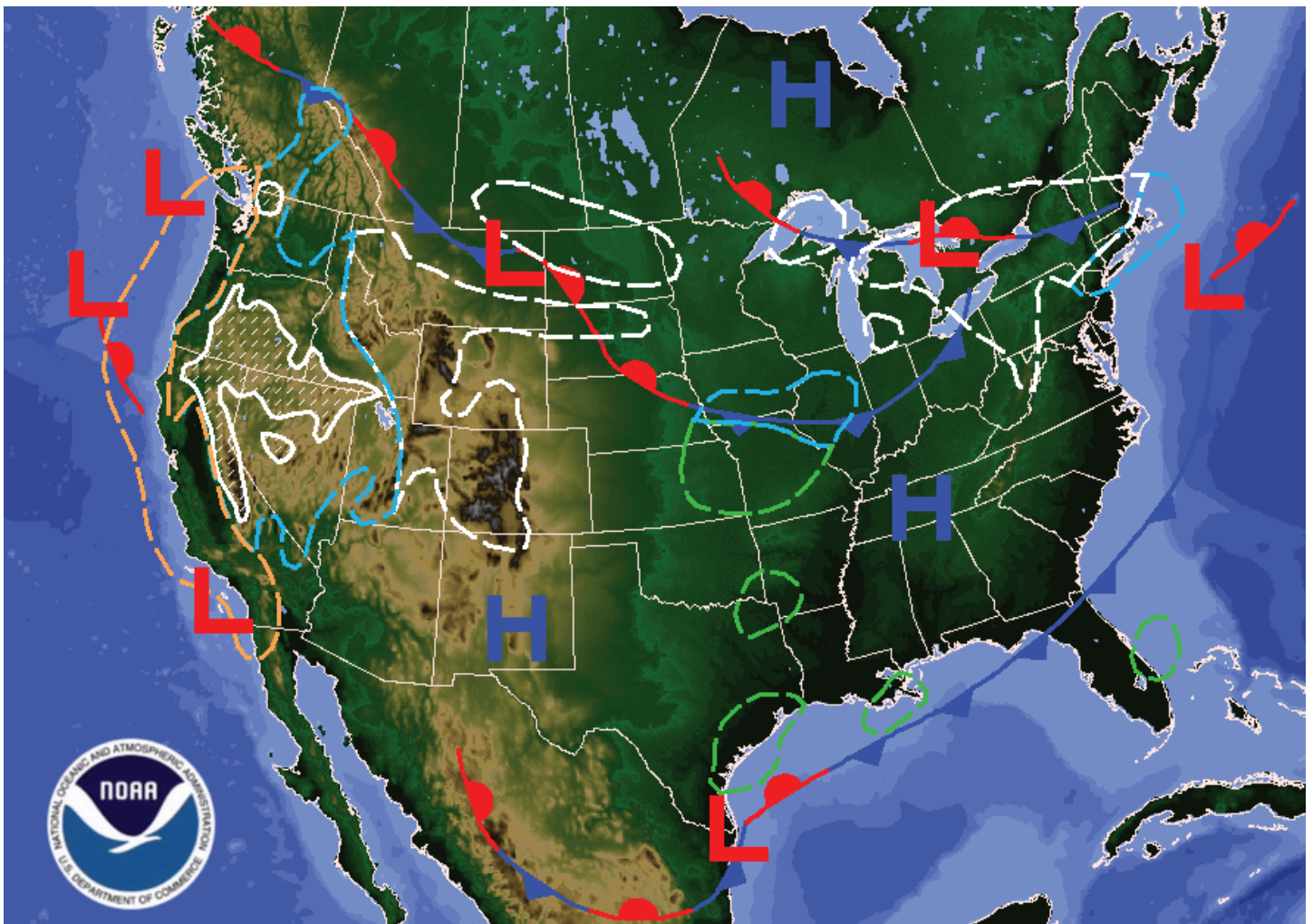
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 21.58

Precip Year to Date: 15.81

Sunset Tonight: 4:55 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:12 a.m.



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Mon, Dec 24, 2018, issued 4:30 AM EST
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by McCreynolds with WPC/SPC/NHC forecasts

Rain
Rain and T'Storms
Rain and Snow
Snow

Flash Flooding Possible (hatched)
Severe T'Storms Possible (hatched)
Freezing Rain Possible (hatched)
Heavy Snow Possible (hatched)



JOSEPHS DREAM

Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.

As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. Joseph, son of David, the angel said, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

All of this occurred to fulfill the Lords message through his prophet:

Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means God is with us.

When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife.

When the Lord calls us to do His work, and we are faithful and obedient to Him, great things happen!

Matthew 1:18-24 New Living Translation

2018 Groton SD Community Events

- Groton Lion's Club Bingo- Wednesday Nights 6:30pm at the Groton Legion (Year Round)
- Nov./Dec./Jan./Feb./Mar. Groton Lion's Club Wheel of Meat- Saturday Nights 7pm at the Groton Legion (Fall/Winter Months)
- 1/27/2019 Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm
- 4/13/2019 Easter Egg Hunt (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
- 5/4/2019 Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Saturday in May)
- 5/27/2019 Groton American Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Program at the Cemetery, Lunch to follow at the American Legion (Memorial Day)
- Transit Fundraiser (Middle Thursday in June)
- SDSU Golf at Olive Grove
- 6/15/2019 Triathlon (Saturday before Father's Day)
- 7/4/2019 Firecracker Golf Tourney (4th of July)
- 7/14/2019 Summer Fest
- 9/7/2019 Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
- 10/12/2019 Pumpkin Fest (Saturday before Columbus Day)
- 10/11/2019 Lake Region Marching Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)
- 10/31/2018 Trunk or Treat (Halloween)
- 11/10/2018 Groton American Legion Post #39 Turkey Shoot (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
- 12/01/2018 Olive Grove Golf Course 2018 Holiday Party
- Best Ball Golf Tourney
- SDSU Golf Tourney
- Sunflower Golf Tourney
- Santa Claus Day
- Fireman's Stag
- Tour of Homes
- Crazy Dayz/Open Houses
- School Events

News from the Associated Press

Police: Man struck by pickup in Sioux Falls dies

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Police in Sioux Falls say a 68-year-old man died after he was struck by a pickup. The crash happened around 10:15 p.m. Sunday. Police say the man was crossing a street when he was struck by a pickup driven by a 75-year-old man from Sioux Falls.

Authorities say the pedestrian was taken to a hospital where he died from his injuries.

The name of the victim was not released. Police continue to investigate.

Black Hills medieval enthusiasts connect to reenact history

By **ALEX PORTAL, Black Hills Pioneer**

SPEARFISH, S.D. (AP) — There are a lot of small towns, cities, and communities in the Black Hills, but there's only one shire, the Shire of Noiregarde. However, there are no hobbits in this shire, no wizards, no dragons — only "SCAdians," the name applied to members of the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA).

The SCA is a group devoted to recreating the arts and skills of pre-17th century European life. It began in California in 1966 as little more than a themed graduation party, the Black Hills Pioneer reported. In the 52 years since, the SCA has boomed into a massive network of like-minded medieval enthusiasts, hosting more than a thousand events spanning five continents every year.

"They started building armor out of carpet and using old Freon tanks for helms," Pat Haley, of Spearfish, said. "And now we've got people that make a living manufacturing armor for the SCA."

In 2002, Haley and a small group of friends founded the Shire of Noiregarde, a local branch of the SCA in the Black Hills.

Members are encouraged to create a persona when joining the SCA; however, the level of thought or backstory one chooses to put into that persona is entirely up to the individual. Members of the SCA are people who find some aspect of medieval times interesting, whether that's the food and drink of the period, the fashion, the art and culture, or the warfare, which became something of an art in those times, as well.

"We're trying to recreate history, so we're a historical reenactment thing," Haley said.

Haley said that since the SCA was started, its main focus has been medieval history, specifically Europe between the years 800-1600 AD. As the organization has evolved, it has grown to accept a much wider definition of "medieval history" to include cultures that didn't even have contact with Europe for the majority of the given timeframe.

"There's a guy that fights, and he dresses Native American," Haley said as an example. "He's wearing SCA (safety) minimums ... otherwise, it's skin, which hurts I guarantee you, but that's how he fights."

Haley explained that SCA fighting is very different from live action role playing (larping). SCAdians study the fighting techniques and battle tactics of the period, and apply that knowledge to live exhibition tournaments, while wearing actual period appropriate armor.

"We study period manuals," he said. "For example, in rapier we study Capo Ferro, Giganti, di Grassi, all these guys who wrote manuals in the 1500s about how to fence."

Larping, on the other hand, is more unstructured.

"I've never done larping, so I may get crucified for saying the wrong thing, but larping is something that has nothing to do with reality," Haley said. "Usually they're in stuff that looks like armor and hitting each other with padded swords, and they'll throw a bean bag at you and call it a fire ball."

Though most "fighting" takes place at demonstrations or crowning tournaments, which are held annually to determine the King and Queen for the upcoming year, several times a year multiple "Kingdoms" will come together for what are affectionately called "wars."

"It developed into things like we have now such as Pennsic War," Haley said. "Where you've got 10,000 people show up for two weeks, camp out, dress in period, cook in period, and fight in as close to period

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without people really dying as we can.”

There are 20 kingdoms in the “Knowne World” of the SCA. Each kingdom is divided up into local chapters or “shires.” Unlike the feudal structure of medieval times, each local chapter has a roster of officers that are voted on by its members.

“It’s fun to play,” Haley said. “When you go to an event, and His Majesty comes in and you’re like, ‘Oh, your Majesty; all rise for His Majesty,’ and everybody stands and bows. ... It’s just fun to play the game.”

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

Waterfowl droppings are a year-round problem

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — People who watch and feed the ducks and geese in Rapid City’s parks should also watch their step.

Parks Division Manager Scott Anderson told Rapid City Journal that waterfowl droppings are a messy problem year-round in areas of the city with open water, including Canyon Lake, Meadowbrook Golf Course and Memorial Park, and along Rapid Creek.

In spite of the city’s annual efforts, geese and ducks gather during the fall and spring migrations on water that remains unfrozen.

“It doesn’t help with the winter time and the migrant geese population,” Anderson said. “We’re always going to have that come through. It’s always going to be there with the open water.”

The city will work with Game, Fish & Parks to reduce the resident Canada goose population in the summer. This year’s roundup resulted in about 90 geese being captured and killed.

A few years ago, the city considered using a drone designed to make eagle noises to help scare the geese off. The drone could be programmed to fly along fairways near the golf course to frighten away the geese. The proposal was written off as too expensive, Anderson said.

“Maybe if we could get some eagles to nest here that would help keep the geese away,” he said.

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

Rapid City man sentenced to 10 years on child porn charge

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Rapid City man has been sentenced to 10 years in federal prison on a child pornography charge.

Twenty-eight-year-old Alex Nolan was convicted of attempted receipt of child pornography. Authorities say he exchanged pornographic images with others on Facebook in January 2016.

In addition to the prison sentence, Campbell was ordered to pay \$100 to the federal crime victims fund and register as a sex offender.

The case was investigated the internet crimes against children task force.

Anonymous donor gives gift cards for Watertown families

WATERTOWN, S.D. (AP) — A secret Santa is spreading holiday cheer for dozens of families in the eastern South Dakota city of Watertown.

The Sioux Falls Argus Leader reports that an anonymous donor gave 20 gift cards worth \$400 each to the Watertown Police Department. The certificates were to be given to families in order to help them pay for gifts, food or anything else they might need.

Officer Matt Hegg says the same donor delivered gift cards to the police department a few years ago, but this year decided to increase the amount on each gift card.

The families are chosen by the police department, which receives recommendations from the Watertown school district and other community organizations.

Hegg, who helped delivered the gift cards, says families were shocked and overjoyed by the presents.

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

Sioux Falls police to begin 5th annual deer harvest in city

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The Sioux Falls Police Department will begin its fifth annual deer harvest in city limits this week.

Authorities say the initiative is meant to reduce property damage and improve the health of the deer populations. High deer numbers lead to poor health due to increased competition for food resources and a higher potential for the spread of disease.

Last year's harvest yielded 50 deer that were removed from southeastern and northeastern Sioux Falls. The city has requested a permit for the removal of 60 deer this year.

This past fall, deer counts indicated a slight increase in the deer population in southeastern and north-eastern Sioux Falls. Researchers found 49 deer in various parks in southeast Sioux Falls, which is a slight increase from the past three years.

3 deer taken in gun season test positive for chronic wasting

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — North Dakota wildlife officials say three deer taken during the 2018 gun season have tested positive for chronic wasting disease.

State Game and Fish Department wildlife veterinarian Charlie Bahnson says two of the infected deer were found in unit 3F2 in southwestern North Dakota, along the South Dakota border, and another was found in Divide County.

Bahnson says the Divide County case was not surprising because chronic wasting disease was found in Saskatchewan last spring. He says wildlife officials are taking measures to limit the spread within the county.

Since 2009, all 14 positive cases were from unit 3F2, which includes parts of Sioux, Grant, Morton, Hettinger and Adams counties.

Chronic wasting disease is transmitted by contact with an infected animal's saliva, blood, urine and other fluids or tissues.

Land mines will be hidden killer in Yemen decades after war

By JON GAMBRELL and MALAK HARB, Associated Press

ADEN, Yemen (AP) — They lurk under shifting desert sands, amid the debris of urban roadsides and inside abandoned schools, some set to go off at the lightest touch.

Land mines scattered by Yemen's Houthi rebels are largely unmapped and will remain a threat even if the latest push for peace succeeds in halting the conflict, those involved in their eradication say.

While the Houthis' use of Scud and other retrofitted ballistic missiles has drawn attention for striking deep inside Saudi Arabia, their widespread use of mines represents a risk for generations to come in the Arab world's poorest country.

"Mines today exist in every single area of Yemen," Ousama al-Gosaibi, the program manager for the Saudi-funded Masam demining project, told The Associated Press during a trip to the southern city of Aden organized by the Saudi military. "It's not being used as a defensive (or) offensive mechanism. It's being used to terrorize the local population across Yemen."

A Houthi official acknowledged the rebels widely use mines, but said Saudi-led airstrikes have left behind ordinance that is just as deadly.

Yemen's war pits the Iran-aligned Houthis against the internationally recognized government, which is backed by a coalition led by Saudi Arabia and supported on the ground by the United Arab Emirates.

More than 60,000 people have been killed in the war since 2016, according to the U.S.-based Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, or ACLED, which tracks the conflict. The fighting has displaced 2 million, spawned a cholera epidemic and pushed the country to the brink of famine. Millions wake up hungry each day, not knowing from where their next meal will come. Many civilian deaths in the war have been blamed on Saudi-led airstrikes, which have hit markets, health facilities and weddings.

Among the dangers facing combatants and civilians alike are land mines. The Houthis looted government

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armories when they captured much of northern Yemen, including vast stockpiles of anti-tank mines. Anti-personnel mines also litter the country, despite the government joining a 1997 international convention banning their use.

A U.N. panel of experts said in 2016 that the Houthis had used land mines in their retreat from the southern city of Aden. Since 2016, land mines and other explosives planted by the Houthis have killed at least 222 civilians and wounded others in 114 incidents, according to ACLED.

"Due to the difficulty of obtaining accurate estimates, these figures are likely to make up a fraction of all mine detonations involving civilians in Yemen," ACLED said.

Making things worse is the fact that a third of all health facilities in Yemen are closed, said Nasser Baoum, the government's health minister.

"Mines have caused a huge problem," Baoum told the AP. "It's OK for an army person to be injured during battle or to be hit by a mine, but for a child to be hit while she's in the field or on the way to fetch water, that's a tragedy."

Al-Gosaibi accused the Houthis of reconfiguring anti-tank mines that previously needed over 100 kilograms (220 pounds) of pressure to detonate so that they require less than 10 kilograms (22 pounds) — meaning a child could trigger the explosive.

Yahia al-Houthi, the former director of the Yemen Executive Mine Action Center, a Houthi-controlled demining center, acknowledged the rebels use anti-tank mines but denied tampering with them to target individuals. He also claimed the Houthis never used anti-personnel mines, despite widespread evidence to the contrary.

Brig. Gen. Yahia al-Sarie, a Houthi officer, said the rebels only use land mines on the battlefield and not in civilian areas. "This is a war, so what do you expect us to do? Receive the other side with flowers?"

He said the rebels had mapped the mines and would be able to remove them "in no time" once the fighting ends.

Al-Gosaibi accuses the Houthis of using Iran-supplied technology like infrared sensors and of adopting Iranian tactics like hiding bombs inside fake rocks. A report in March by the group Conflict Armament Research said roadside bombs disguised as rocks in Yemen bore similarities to others used by the Iran-backed Hezbollah in southern Lebanon and by Iran-linked insurgents in Iraq and Bahrain.

Mines planted by the Houthis, some resembling a model previously displayed in Iran, also have been found in the Red Sea, according to a 2018 U.N. experts report. Those mines "represent a hazard for commercial shipping and sea lines of communication that could remain for as long as six to 10 years," the report warned.

The Saudi-led coalition, Western countries and U.N. experts accuse Iran of supplying weaponry from assault rifles to ballistic missiles to the Houthis. Iran supports the Houthis but denies arming them, and Iran's mission to the U.N. dismissed the latest allegations of "Iranian ghost weapons."

"Yemen has long been awash with a wide range of weapons — including ballistic missiles — and Yemenis do not need Iranian weapons to conduct war," said Alireza Miryousefi, a spokesman for Iran's mission.

Unexploded cluster munitions and bombs dropped by coalition aircraft — including some manufactured in the United States — also litter Yemen, according to the U.N. The coalition has faced widespread international criticism over indiscriminate airstrikes that have killed large numbers of civilians.

Al-Houthi said their forces had removed 500,000 missiles and cluster munitions from Saud-led strikes.

Saudi Arabia has alleged as many as 1 million mines may have been laid by the Houthis. Al-Gosaibi described Yemen as being the most-mined nation since World War II, based on his group's estimate of the mines laid by the rebels. Saudi officials have released pictures showing fields of deactivated land mines.

International groups dealing with land mines have been hesitant to estimate the scale of the crisis, given the limited information they have. Yemen is also littered with mines from previous conflicts.

"It's going to take years," al-Gosaibi said. "You cannot rebuild Yemen without addressing the mine issue. It's us on the ground first before rebuilding starts."

Mattis leaving Pentagon sooner than planned, Shanahan tapped

By LOLITA C. BALDOR, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The sooner-than-expected departure of Defense Secretary Jim Mattis shifts the focus to President Donald Trump's appointment of an acting Pentagon chief and plans for a permanent replacement.

It also signals an acrimonious end to a tense relationship between Trump and Mattis that had eroded in recent months. A fracture developed last week over Trump's decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria and worsened after Mattis' public disagreement with Trump, aired in his resignation letter.

Deputy Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan will take over as acting secretary on Jan. 1, Trump announced in a tweet Sunday. He had worked for more than three decades at Boeing Co. and was a senior vice president when he became Pentagon deputy in July 2017.

In the new year Trump wants to focus on streamlining purchases at the Pentagon, an issue on which Shanahan has already been working, a White House official said. The official asked not to be identified publicly discussing personnel matters.

U.S. officials said they didn't know if Shanahan would be Trump's nominee to replace Mattis. During a lunch with conservative lawmakers Saturday at the White House, Trump discussed his options. They were "not all military," said Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., who was among those attending.

Shanahan's biography on the Pentagon's website does not list military experience for the longtime Boeing executive. He earned a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Washington, then a master's degree in mechanical engineering as well as an MBA from the Sloan School of Management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

In addition to work in Boeing's commercial airplanes programs, Shanahan was vice president and general manager of Boeing Missile Defense Systems and of Boeing Rotorcraft Systems. In a March 2016 report, the Puget Sound Business Journal called Shanahan a Boeing "fix-it" man who was central to getting the 787 Dreamliner on track after production problems in the program's early years.

An acting defense secretary is highly unusual. Historically when a secretary has resigned, he has stayed on until a successor is confirmed. For example, when Chuck Hagel was told to resign in November 2014, he stayed in office until Ash Carter was confirmed the following February.

Mattis, a retired Marine Corps general, had been expected to retain his position as Pentagon chief through February. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, not the president, notified Mattis of Trump's decision to put in place Shanahan, said a senior administration official who insisted on anonymity to discuss personnel issues.

The sudden change stripped Mattis of any chance to further frame national security policy or smooth rattled relations with allies over the next two months. But U.S. officials said the reaction to Mattis' decision to leave — it sparked shock and dismay on Capitol Hill — annoyed Trump and likely led to pushing Mattis out.

"When President Obama ingloriously fired Jim Mattis, I gave him a second chance. Some thought I shouldn't, I thought I should," Trump tweeted Saturday, foreshadowing his displeasure and the Sunday announcement. He also fumed over the media coverage of his Syria withdrawal order, suggesting he should be popular for bringing troops home.

"With me, hit hard instead by the Fake News Media. Crazy!" Trump tweeted.

A White House official said Trump decided Mattis should leave the administration earlier than planned to avoid a drawn-out transition when someone on hand whom they consider a qualified deputy capable of running the Pentagon in an acting capacity. The official asked not to be identified publicly discussing personnel matters.

While Mattis' resignation followed Trump's announcement that he would soon pull all of the approximately 2,000 U.S. troops out of Syria, officials said that the decision was the result of an accumulation of disagreements.

In a stunning resignation letter, Mattis made clear he did not see eye to eye with a president who has expressed disdain for NATO and doubts about keeping troops in Asia. Mattis was also unhappy with Trump's

order to develop plans to pull out up to half of the 14,000 U.S. forces in Afghanistan.

Earlier Sunday, Trump's acting chief of staff said that Trump had known for "quite some time now" that he and Mattis "did not share some of the same philosophies ... have the same world view."

Mick Mulvaney told ABC's "This Week" that the president and his defense chief "just could never get on the same page" on Syria, adding that Trump had said since his presidential campaign that "he wanted to get out of Syria." Mulvaney said the president "is entitled to have a secretary of defense who is committed to that same end."

Asked whether Trump wanted a Pentagon leader willing to challenge him or someone in lock step with his views, Mulvaney said "a little bit of both."

"I've encouraged him to find people who have some overlap with him but don't see the world in lockstep with him," Mulvaney said.

Meanwhile, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., joined leading Republicans on foreign affairs in urging Trump to reconsider his decision to withdraw American forces from Syria and called it "a premature and costly mistake." They asked Trump to withhold a final decision for 90 days to allow time to study the impact of the decision, but Mulvaney told ABC that Trump wouldn't change his mind.

Just after tweeting the announcement about Shanahan, Trump said he had had "a long and productive call" with Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Trump said they discussed IS, "our mutual involvement in Syria, & the slow & highly coordinated pullout of U.S. troops from the area. After many years they are coming home."

Associated Press writers Robert Burns, Darlene Superville and Lisa Mascaro contributed to this report.

White House: Trump would accept less money for border wall

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Both sides in the long-running fight over funding President Donald Trump's U.S.-Mexico border wall appear to have moved toward each other, but a shutdown of one-fourth of the federal government entered Christmas without a clear resolution in sight.

In fact, a top White House official warned the shutdown could stretch into January.

Acting White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney, who is also the budget director, said he was waiting to hear from Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York about a counteroffer the White House presented Schumer over the weekend.

Mulvaney would only say the offer was between Trump's \$5.7 billion request and \$1.3 billion Democrats have offered.

"We moved off of the five and we hope they move up from their 1.3," Mulvaney said less than a day after a senior administration official insisted that Congress would have to cave into Trump's demand for the shutdown to end, highlighting Trump's unpredictable negotiating style.

Schumer's office said the parties remained "very far apart."

Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., argued for increased use of technology along the border instead of "some medieval wall." Asked whether he's willing to offer more money as long as it is not spent on a wall, Durbin responded: "Absolutely."

A stalemate over the wall led parts of the government to shut down Saturday after funding for numerous departments and agencies expired. The closure affects hundreds of thousands of federal workers across the country and was expected to last at least through Thursday, when the House and Senate meet again.

Monday and Tuesday, Christmas Eve and Christmas, respectively, are federal holidays, meaning the government would have been closed anyway. That means Wednesday is the first day the public could begin to feel the effects of lost government services, Mulvaney said.

He predicted the shutdown could go into January, when Democrats assume control of the House based on their midterm election gains.

"It's very possible that this shutdown will go beyond the 28th and into the new Congress," Mulvaney said.

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Justin Goodman, a spokesman for Schumer, countered: "If Director Mulvaney says the Trump Shutdown will last into the New Year, believe him, because it's their shutdown." Trump recently declared he'd be "proud" to shut down the government over border issues.

Democrats held firm Sunday in opposition to a wall, which Trump promised his political base he would build. Mulvaney said "the president's not going to not accept money for a border wall."

Trump tweeted Sunday, the shutdown's second day, that what's needed is "a good old fashioned WALL that works," not aerial drones or other measures that "are wonderful and lots of fun" but not the answer to address drugs, gangs, human trafficking and other criminal elements entering the country.

He put off plans to spend Christmas at his Florida estate and remained in Washington.

The routines of about 800,000 federal employees, meanwhile, were about to be disrupted.

More than half of those employees are deemed essential, such as U.S. Secret Service agents and Transportation Security Administration airport agents, must work without pay, though retroactive pay is expected. Another 380,000 were to be furloughed, meaning they will not report to work but would be paid later. Legislation ensuring that workers receive back pay was expected to clear Congress.

Trump had savored the prospect of a shutdown over the wall, saying he'd be "proud" to force one over an issue that was one of his biggest campaign promises. He had said he wouldn't blame Democrats for a shutdown but now blames them for not contributing to the 60 votes needed for such legislation to clear the closely divided Senate.

But Democrats aren't the only ones resisting Trump on the wall. Republican Sen. Bob Corker of Tennessee, who is leaving Congress in January and has criticized Trump on other issues in the past, called the border-wall fight a "made-up fight so the president can look like he's fighting."

"This is something that is unnecessary. It's a spectacle. And, candidly, it's juvenile. The whole thing is juvenile," Corker said, arguing for measures that he said would secure the border better than a wall.

Democrats said they were open to proposals that don't include a wall, which Schumer said is costly and ineffective. They have offered to keep spending at existing levels of \$1.3 billion for border fencing and other security.

Senators have approved a bipartisan deal to keep the government open into February and provide \$1.3 billion for border security projects, but not the wall. But as Trump faced criticism from conservatives for "caving" on a campaign promise, he pushed the House to approve a package temporarily financing the government but also setting aside \$5.7 billion for the border wall. That bill lacks the votes to pass the Senate.

The stalemate blocked money for nine of 15 Cabinet-level departments and dozens of agencies, including Homeland Security, Transportation, Interior, Agriculture, State and Justice.

The Pentagon and the departments of Veterans Affairs and Health and Human Services are among those that Congress has fully funded and will operate as usual.

Mulvaney appeared on "Fox News Sunday" and ABC's "This Week." Durbin spoke on NBC's "Meet the Press" and Corker was interviewed on "State of the Union" on CNN.

Associated Press writers Alan Fram, Mary Clare Jalonick, Jill Colvin, Lisa Mascaro and Kevin Freking contributed to this report.

Follow Darlene Superville on Twitter: <http://www.twitter.com/dsupervilleap>

Indonesia tsunami survivors sought as families mourn dead

By NINIEK KARMINI, Associated Press

TANJUNG LESUNG, Indonesia (AP) — Indonesian government workers and volunteers searched debris-strewn beaches for survivors and bodies, while families tried to identify their loved ones and grieved for the dead on Monday after a nighttime tsunami struck without warning, killing more than 280 people.

The waves that swept terrified locals and tourists into the sea Saturday night along the Sunda Strait followed an eruption and apparent landslide on Anak Krakatau, or "Child of Krakatoa," one of the world's

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most infamous volcanic islands.

At least 281 people were killed and more than 1,000 were injured. Dozens remained missing from the disaster areas along the coastlines of western Java and southern Sumatra islands, and the numbers could increase once authorities hear from all stricken areas.

The Indonesian Medical Association of the worst-affected Banten region said that it sent doctors, medical supplies and equipment, and that many of the injured were in need of neuro- and orthopedic surgery. It said most patients are domestic tourists who were visiting beaches during the long weekend ahead of Christmas.

It was the second deadly tsunami to hit seismically active Indonesia this year. A powerful earthquake triggered a tsunami that hit Sulawesi island in September, giving residents a brief warning before the waves struck.

On Saturday night, however, the ground did not shake to alert people before the waves ripped buildings from their foundations and swept terrified concertgoers celebrating on a resort beach into the sea.

Dramatic video posted on social media showed the Indonesian pop band Seventeen performing under a tent on Tanjung Lesung beach at a concert for employees of a state-owned electricity company. Dozens of people sat at tables while others swayed to the music near the stage as strobe lights flashed and theatrical smoke was released. A child could also be seen wandering through the crowd.

Seconds later, with the drummer pounding just as the next song was about to begin, the stage suddenly heaved forward and buckled under the force of the water, tossing the band and its equipment into the audience.

The group released a statement saying their bass player, guitarist and road manager were killed, while two other band members and the wife of one of the performers were missing. On Monday, five more bodies were recovered around the hotel, including a little boy.

"The tide rose to the surface and dragged all the people on site," the band's statement said. "Unfortunately, when the current receded, our members were unable to save themselves while some did not find a place to hold on."

Disaster agency spokesman Sutopo Purwo Nugroho said Monday morning that 281 deaths had been confirmed and at least 1,016 people were injured.

The worst-affected area was the Pandeglang region of Java's Banten province, which encompasses Ujung Kulon National Park and popular beaches, the agency said.

Indonesian President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo arrived at the disaster area by helicopter on Monday. A day earlier, he expressed his sympathy and ordered government agencies to respond quickly to the disaster.

"My deep condolences to the victims in Banten and Lampung provinces," he said Sunday. "Hopefully, those who are left have patience."

In the city of Bandar Lampung on Sumatra island, hundreds of residents took refuge at the governor's office, while at the popular resort area of Anyer beach on Java, some survivors wandered in the debris.

Many of the affected areas are popular weekend getaways for residents of Jakarta, Indonesia's capital, but foreigners were also visiting the area over the long holiday weekend. A Norwegian photographer and volcano enthusiast posted on Facebook that he had to run to escape the waves while on the beach photographing the volcano.

Yellow, orange and black body bags were laid out, and weeping relatives identified the dead.

Scientists, including those from Indonesia's Meteorology and Geophysics agency, said the tsunami could have been caused by landslides — either above ground or under water — on the steep slope of the erupting volcano. The scientists also cited tidal waves caused by the full moon.

The 305-meter (1,000-foot) -high Anak Krakatau lies on an island in the Sunda Strait between Java and Sumatra islands, linking the Indian Ocean and the Java Sea. It has been erupting since June and did so again about 24 minutes before the tsunami, the geophysics agency said.

The volcanic island formed over years after the 1883 eruption of the Krakatoa volcano, one of the largest, most devastating in recorded history. That disaster killed more than 30,000 people, launched far-reaching tsunamis and created so much ash that day was turned to night in the area and a global temperature

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drop was recorded.

Most of the island sank into a volcanic crater under the sea, and the area remained calm until the 1920s, when Anak Krakatau began to rise from the site. It continues to grow each year and erupts periodically.

Gegar Prasetya, co-founder of the Tsunami Research Center Indonesia, said Saturday's tsunami was likely caused by a flank collapse — when a big section of a volcano's slope gives way. It's possible for an eruption to trigger a landslide above ground or beneath the ocean, both capable of producing waves, he said.

"Actually, the tsunami was not really big, only 1 meter (3.3 feet)," said Prasetya, who has studied Krakatau. "The problem is people always tend to build everything close to the shoreline."

Indonesia, a vast archipelago of more than 17,000 islands and home to 260 million people, lies along the "Ring of Fire," an arc of volcanoes and fault lines in the Pacific Basin. Roads and infrastructure are poor in many areas, making access difficult in the best of conditions.

A powerful quake on the island of Lombok killed 505 people in August. The tsunami and earthquake that hit Sulawesi in September killed more than 2,100, while thousands more are believed to still be buried in neighborhoods swallowed by a quake phenomenon known as liquefaction.

Saturday's tsunami also rekindled memories of the massive magnitude 9.1 earthquake that hit Indonesia on Dec. 26, 2004. It spawned a giant tsunami off Sumatra island, killing more than 230,000 people in a dozen countries — the majority in Indonesia.

Associated Press writers Margie Mason and Ali Kotarumalos in Jakarta, Indonesia, contributed to this report.

Santa gets pushed out as China's leaders emphasize tradition

By ERIKA KINETZ, Associated Press

SHANGHAI (AP) — It took less than 24 hours for all the Christmas trees, lights and bells to disappear from a 27-story shopping and office complex in the Chinese city of Nanyang.

Even the giant teddy bear at the mall entrance wasn't spared, said Ma Jun, who works at a tutoring company in the building.

"Everything is gone and cleaned," she said.

Christmas continues to be a shopping festival across most of China, with huge trees adorning shopping malls in Shanghai and Beijing, but a growing emphasis on traditional culture by the ruling Communist Party and the systematic suppression of religion under President Xi Jinping are imperiling Santa Claus's position.

At least four Chinese cities and one county have ordered restrictions on Christmas celebrations this year, according to official notices and interviews. Students, teachers and parents from 10 schools around China told The Associated Press that Christmas celebrations have been curtailed.

"The ongoing local reaction against Christmas is part of the wider sentiment since Xi took power," said Zi Yang, a China expert at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore.

Xi is trying to broaden the appeal of the Communist Party by casting it as a crusader for Chinese tradition in a fast-changing world, he said. "Therefore, foreign cultural elements such as Christmas are placed on the chopping block."

The seasonal humbug follows similar outbreaks of anti-Christmas rhetoric in 2014 and 2017. It appears not to be centrally organized, but rather a spreading resistance to foreign festivals by local authorities seeking to align themselves with the growing tide of cultural nationalism.

The squeeze on Christmas is an example of how efforts to "normalize" thinking bleed into the everyday lives of many Chinese. That push exploded into view this year through re-education camps for Uighur Muslims and a crackdown on Christian churches that has continued with force in recent weeks.

In Nanyang, about 950 kilometers (600 miles) west of Shanghai, government officials stopped by the office and shopping complex on Dec. 16 to say that Christmas decorations would have to come down, said Ma, the tutoring company employee.

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An official from the city's urban management bureau hung up when asked for comment.

Nine hours by car south, Hengyang, a city in Hunan province, said in a Dec. 19 notice posted on an official government social media account that anyone caught holding Christmas sales or celebrations that blocked the streets would be punished. Communist Party members, the notice said, should avoid foreign festivals and instead be "models of adherence to Chinese traditional culture." Hengyang police posted a video on their official social media account of locals discussing the importance of Chinese culture and plans to avoid ostentatious Christmas celebrations.

Langfang city, just south of Beijing, banned Christmas stage performances and merchandising promotions, according to a notice circulated on social media.

Shop windows were to be stripped of Christmas stickers and streets kept free of Christmas banners and lights. Law enforcement patrols were to be stepped up Dec. 23-25 to prevent illegal signs of celebration.

The Langfang urban management bureau declined comment. The state-run Global Times newspaper argued that Western media are exaggerating China's crackdown on Christmas and reported that the restrictions in Langfang were aimed not at Christmas but at cleaning up roadside stalls and migrant vendors in hopes of winning a "National Civilized City" award from the Communist Party.

Some 270 kilometers (167 miles) west, Fuping county, also in Hebei province, issued a similar clean-up notice. Though the Dec. 21 announcement mentions Christmas eleven times, an official from the Fuping urban management bureau said the rules were aimed at street vendors generally, not Christmas.

Police in the Panlong district of Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province in southern China, circulated a notice that hotels, karaoke parlors, internet cafes, bars and other crowded places must prohibit Christmas-related decorations and activities.

"It is forbidden to hang Christmas stockings, wear Christmas hats, place Christmas trees, and so on," the notice read.

It wasn't clear if the notice applied to all of Kunming city, though a police officer told the AP that the order to circulate it came from city officials.

Reverend Jonathan Liu, founder of the Chinese Christian Fellowship of Righteousness, a California non-profit, said the pushback against Christmas reflects Xi's efforts to "Sinicize" religion.

Preachers are coached on how to convey Communist Party core values in their sermons and national flags and songs have been injected into some church services, he said.

Liu provided the AP with a notice sent to churches in Zhoukou, a city to the east of Nanyang in Henan province.

It tells churches to vet Christmas plans with the government, forbids minors from participating in Christmas events and caps expenses at 2000 yuan (\$290). "I wish you all a happy Christmas! God bless you," read the notice, which Liu received from a pastor in China.

An official at the United Front Work Department in Zhoukou referred queries to the religious affairs bureau, which could not be reached for comment.

Before becoming president, Xi went to Finland in 2010 and was photographed with Santa Claus. That kind of chumminess appears to be a thing of Christmas past, experts say.

The central government issued guidelines last year for a cultural revival project that calls for a marked boost in the international influence of Chinese traditional culture by 2025.

"You have a culturally conservative ethos in the country that has definitely been encouraged by the central party-state," said Guo Yingjie, a professor of Chinese studies at the University of Sydney. "It's not hard for university presidents or officials to say, 'OK celebrating Christmas can easily be seen as de-Sinicification or promoting Western culture.'"

Students have taken to social media to complain about restrictions on Christmas celebrations at their schools.

At a top Shanghai university, a student union had its Christmas plans cancelled for the first time, an organizer told the AP on condition of anonymity, fearing rebuke.

The students came up with a solution: By replacing "Christmas" with "New Year's" in their activity proposal and changing the date from Dec. 25, it sailed past school administrators.

Students in the city of Qingdao were reprimanded for hosting an event about gratitude on Thanksgiving Day and warned not to celebrate Christmas publicly, according to a student, who also spoke on condition of anonymity, fearing retribution.

Liu Kaiming, president of the Institute of Contemporary Observation, a civil society group in the city of Shenzhen, said that despite the drumbeat of official discontent, Christmas cheer continues to spread in China.

"The sound of resistance is more powerful on the surface, but it has no practical effect," he said. "Young people's enthusiasm for the festival is ever-increasing."

Associated Press researcher Chen Si contributed to this report from Shanghai.

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Trump's coalition cracking over his policies and personality

By STEVE PEOPLES, HANNAH FINGERHUT and COREY WILLIAMS, Associated Press

BLOOMFIELD HILLS, Mich. (AP) — Jill Mott doesn't like the tweets. The hard line on the border is too hard. And when asked whether she will vote for President Donald Trump a second time, she lets out a long, deep sigh.

"That is the question," said Mott, a Republican from suburban Detroit.

In her moment of hesitancy, Mott is the portrait of a small, but significant slice of voters poised to wield considerable influence in the 2020 presidential campaign. They are the 18 percent of voters who described themselves as only "somewhat" approving of the president.

It's a group whose backing for Trump is most tenuous and whose reservations about his personality and his policies reveal warning signs for Republicans, perhaps even more so as he dug in on his demand for a U.S.-Mexico border wall, leading to a budget impasse with Congress that has shut down the government around Christmas.

An analysis of VoteCast, a nationwide poll of more than 115,000 midterm voters conducted for The Associated Press by NORC at the University of Chicago, highlights the fractures.

Compared with the 27 percent of voters who describe themselves as strong Trump supporters, the "somewhat" Trump voters are much more likely to disapprove of Trump on key issues such as immigration and health care, and to express divergent opinions on a need for a border wall, gun control and climate change. They are much more likely to question his trustworthiness and temperament.

They are less likely to call themselves conservative, less likely to be evangelical Christians and more likely to have voted for Democrats in 2018. They are more educated, somewhat more likely to be women, and more likely to live in suburbs.

"How he presents himself is the biggest issue," said Mott, a 52-year-old occupational therapist, who addressed her concerns this past week during a break from Christmas shopping outside the Gucci store at the Somerset Collection luxury mall. She also worries about the president's fiery approach to immigration.

"I understand what he's going for — trying to keep out criminal activity," Mott said, pointing to Trump's rhetoric about a caravan of Latin American migrants seeking asylum at the U.S. border. "However, I think he could do much better in showing concern for these people, offering short-term help."

As Trump barrels into his third year in office, and tightens his focus on his own re-election, he has paid scant attention to shoring up support from voters such as Mott.

Still, Trump's political future may depend on whether he can retain their support, particularly among the more educated and affluent suburban women who set aside their concerns about Trump two years ago and will be asked to do so again in 2020. Their backing helped Trump carve a path to the presidency through the industrial Midwest, but with little margin for error. The president won Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania by fewer than 80,000 votes combined.

VoteCast found that 16 percent of those who "somewhat" supported Trump's job performance decided

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to vote for Democratic House candidates in the November midterms. That's compared with 6 percent of those who self-identified as Trump's "strong" supporters.

That difference helped Democrats capture the House majority, picking up 21 of their 40 new seats in districts Trump carried only two years earlier. The flipped Trump districts include Michigan's 8th Congressional District, a swath of suburban middle-class America set between Detroit and Lansing.

Dozens of recent interviews across the area show that most reluctant Trump supporters aren't ready to turn their backs on him or his party.

Michael Bernstein voted for Trump in 2016 and said he is likely would do so again in 2020. Bernstein, 52, points to the economy and to Trump's success in getting justices approved to the U.S. Supreme Court as evidence that he chose the right candidate, but the freelance auto writer from suburban Detroit could do without some of what Trump brings.

"He's supposed to represent the country and the people who don't like him," Bernstein added. "He doesn't. He prefers to play in the dirt."

Still, November's elections bear out signs of erosion. In Michigan's 8th Congressional District, two-term Republican Mike Bishop was ousted by Democratic newcomer Elissa Slotkin, who attributes her victory in part to skeptical Trump supporters.

"That's part of the reason we won — those voters who kept an open mind, who never really liked the tweeting and the chaos and the vitriol who maybe thought the president would become more presidential," Slotkin said in an interview.

"We had lots of voters who said I was the first Democrat they ever voted for," she said. "They're not necessarily becoming Democrats. They just voted for the candidate who most represents their values."

The VoteCast analysis suggests that a significant share of these wary Trump supporters have some views in common with Democrats in the Trump era.

About half of Trump's "somewhat" supporters said Trump has the right temperament to serve effectively as president or considered him honest and trustworthy.

On health care, reluctant supporters are more likely to think government should be responsible for making sure all Americans have coverage and they're far less likely to think President Barack Obama's health care law should be repealed entirely.

Trump's reluctant supporters also are far more concerned about climate change than are other Trump backers and more likely to call for tighter gun laws.

Immigration exposed another clear rift in the Trump coalition.

Most Trump supporters favor building the border wall, but just 32 percent of his somewhat supporters are strongly in favor, compared with 80 percent of his strong approvers.

While 60 percent of strong Trump backers said immigrants living in the United States illegally should be deported, about 6 in 10 reluctant supporters said those immigrants should be offered a chance to apply for legal status.

Still, it's not safe to assume that reluctant Trump supporters will abandon the president in his 2020 re-election, said Republican pollster Frank Luntz, also a Trump skeptic.

"They have rejected the Democrats. But they don't fully embrace Trump. So, the question is whether they stay with Trump or whether they stay home," Luntz said.

Republican leaders are aware of the divisions within Trump's base of support, yet few expect Trump to moderate his tone or policies to appeal to wavering supporters. Some hope he'll learn to focus his message on the economy.

About 90 percent of Trump's somewhat supporters are still supporting of his handling of the economy, and 8 in 10 said he is a strong leader, he is bringing needed change to the government and he stands up for what he believes.

"Of course there are frustrations at times, however I know I have more money in my paycheck, more people working in our community, home values are up," said Theresa Mungioli, the GOP chairwoman of Oakland County, Michigan, where Republicans lost two congressional seats this fall.

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She acknowledged that some midterm voters, particularly women, may have soured on Trump's leadership, especially as it pertains to security issues.

"Maybe in part because the president can be — likes to bluff in his negotiations, which makes it look like we're on the brink of war," Mungioni said. "That kind of instability was something that voters expressed."

Fingerhut reported from Washington.

AP FACT CHECK: Trump garbles Syria story, poverty record

By HOPE YEN and CHRISTOPHER RUGABER, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is garbling his story about what's going on with the Islamic State group. Has it been defeated or is it still a fighting force? He had it both ways over the course of several days.

In a tumultuous week capped with the launch of a partial government shutdown, Trump also spread misinformation about poverty, the Russia investigation and immigration as he lost his defense secretary and his envoy to the anti-IS coalition after announcing U.S. troops will be pulled from Syria.

A look at some claims and the reality:

SYRIA

TRUMP: "We have defeated ISIS in Syria, my only reason for being there during the Trump Presidency." — tweet Wednesday.

THE FACTS: The militants are a diminished but deadly force, and U.S. partners warn that a premature American withdrawal will allow them to storm back. Trump seemed to contradict his own assertion when he tweeted the next day that the U.S. withdrawal means Russia, Syria and Iran "will have to fight ISIS and others, who they hate, without us."

Then on Saturday he said the group is "largely defeated" and other countries "should be able to easily take care of whatever remains."

IS militants still hold a string of villages and towns along the Euphrates River in eastern Syria, where they have resisted weeks of attacks by the U.S.-supported Syrian Democratic Forces to drive them out.

The pocket is home to about 15,000 people, among them 2,000 IS fighters, according to U.S. military estimates.

But that figure could be as high as 8,000 militants, if fighters hiding out in the deserts south of the Euphrates River are also counted, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which monitors the conflict through networks of local informants.

Observatory head Rami Abdurrahman said they include seasoned militants who have fought global wars of jihad since the 1990s.

The SDF, a Kurdish-led force that is America's only military partner in Syria, said Thursday: "The war against Islamic State has not ended and the group has not been defeated." The group is at the front lines of the battle against IS along the Euphrates River.

It said a U.S. withdrawal would leave Syrians "between the claws of enemy forces."

At their height in 2014, IS militants controlled approximately one-third of territory in Syria and Iraq, including major cities in both countries. The group flourished in the political vacuum of Syria's civil war, in which President Bashar Assad has violently put down a 2011 uprising against his family's 40-year rule.

The pocket along the Euphrates represents just one percent of the territory it once held. But recent attacks in Iraq show the group is still capable of mounting deadly assaults even without holding urban areas.

Trump's own advisers have described the battle against IS as a long-term commitment that depends on stabilizing Syria after nearly eight years of civil war.

Brett McGurk, the special presidential envoy to the coalition to defeat IS in Syria and Iraq, said earlier this month, "Nobody is declaring mission accomplished" and it would be "reckless" to do so. After Trump announced the withdrawal of troops, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, then McGurk, resigned. Trump said he did not know his envoy.

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TRUMP: "Russia, Iran, Syria & many others are not happy about the U.S. leaving, despite what the Fake News says, because now they will have to fight ISIS and others, who they hate, without us." — tweet Thursday.

THE FACTS: Actually, Moscow welcomed the development, which gives both Russia and Iran more of a chance to spread influence in Syria. A lawmaker in Damascus put it bluntly, saying a U.S. withdrawal would be "recognition that Syria has won" the war.

The U.S. military presence has been contentious for Assad and Russian and Iranian allies. In an otherwise negative appraisal of relations with the U.S., Russian President Vladimir Putin said Trump "has done the right thing" in deciding to pull troops out of Syria. He has long argued that the U.S. presence in Syria is illegitimate because it wasn't vetted by the U.N. Security Council or approved by Assad's government.

ECONOMY

KEVIN HASSETT, chairman of the White House Council of Economic Advisers: "Survey data suggests that the capital spending plans over the next year are very strong, or over the next six months." — phone call with reporters on Wednesday, the one-year anniversary of passage of the administration's tax cuts.

THE FACTS: Actually, most economists note that surveys and more-reliable economic data point to a slowdown in capital spending growth next year. This is a critical point because Hasset is arguing that administration's tax cuts will continue to spur investment in large machinery, computers and other long-lasting equipment. Such investment not only lifts short-term economic growth but also can make the economy more efficient, which accelerates growth over time. Capital investment did increase markedly in the first half of this year, probably in part because Trump's tax cuts sharply reduced corporate taxes.

But the most recent data suggests investment will slow, not accelerate, next year. U.S. factory orders for large capital goods have fallen in three of the past four months. Surveys by regional Federal Reserve banks show that companies are planning to spend less on capital equipment next year. That's one reason many economists forecast economic growth will slow in 2019 from a pace of about 3 percent this year.

POVERTY

TRUMP: "Last year alone, we lifted 1 million Americans out of poverty, which is a record." — remarks Dec. 12.

THE FACTS: It's not a record and barely a decline.

The Census Bureau did report that the number of Americans living in poverty last year was 39.7 million, a decline of 918,000 from 2016. But the bureau said the 39.7 million is not a meaningfully different number statistically from 2016, when the figure stood at 40.6 million. In other words, the drop could be accounted for by variations in sampling the population rather than by an actual decline in the number of poor people.

Last year's drop of 918,000 is also dwarfed by bigger decreases in the number of poor people of 2.5 million in 2016 and 3.5 million in 2015.

The biggest recorded decline came in 1966, when nearly 4.7 million Americans were found to have been lifted above the poverty line. The agency considers declines of that size to represent a "a true difference that exists in the population as a whole," rather than just a sampling variation.

RUSSIA INVESTIGATION

PRESS SECRETARY SARAH HUCKABEE SANDERS, on Michael Flynn, Trump's former national security adviser: "We're arguing that he was certainly ambushed and that the FBI, that we know, had clear political bias." — interview Tuesday with Fox News.

SANDERS: "The FBI broke standard protocol in the way that they came in and ambushed Gen. Flynn and in the way that they questioned him." — news briefing Tuesday.

THE FACTS: She's suggesting impropriety in the FBI's questioning of Flynn that Flynn himself rejected in court.

Sanders was echoing an argument by Flynn's lawyers in court filings that Flynn may have been tricked

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into lying by FBI agents. His lawyers had pulled from FBI documents in pointing out that unlike other defendants in the Russia investigation, Flynn wasn't warned in advance that it was a crime to lie to the FBI. Trump himself has argued that Flynn was unfairly targeted by special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia investigation and suggested that Flynn did not actually lie, despite having fired him nearly two years ago for just that reason.

But at his sentencing hearing Tuesday, Flynn told Judge Emmet Sullivan that he knew it was a crime when he lied to the FBI in January 2017. Flynn declined to accept the judge's offer to withdraw his guilty plea. Neither he nor his lawyers disputed that he had lied to agents.

Sullivan asked Flynn and his lawyers several times whether they believed Flynn was entrapped or if Flynn wanted to challenge the circumstances of his conversation with the FBI that led to charges.

"No, your honor," Flynn said.

BORDER WALL

TRUMP: "Mexico is paying (indirectly) for the Wall through the new USMCA, the replacement for NAFTA! Far more money coming to the U.S. Because of the tremendous dangers at the Border, including large scale criminal and drug inflow, the United States Military will build the Wall!" — tweet Wednesday.

THE FACTS: He's making a flimsy assertion intended to cover up the fact that Mexico refused to pay for a U.S. border wall, as Trump promised it would do during the 2016 campaign.

Trump is arguing that new terms of trade with Mexico will increase economic growth in the U.S. and produce more tax revenue. As part of that, he hopes for a lower trade deficit with Mexico. But those outcomes are not 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 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.

He wants \$25 billion from Congress for wall construction over five years. If Trump gets the money, it will not be because lawmakers expect a refund to the treasury in future years from extra growth produced by a trade deal.

TRUMP: "Illegal immigration costs the United States more than 200 Billion Dollars a year. How was this allowed to happen?" — tweet Tuesday.

THE FACTS: He's exaggerating the costs of illegal immigration.

"I'm not sure where the president got his numbers," said Dave Ray, a spokesman for the nonprofit group FAIR, the Federation for American Immigration Reform, which advocates for lower immigration numbers.

Neither the White House nor the Department of Homeland Security has said where Trump's estimate of \$200 billion to \$250 billion comes from.

The Heritage Foundation, for instance, estimated in 2013 that households headed by immigrants living in the U.S. illegally impose a net fiscal burden of around \$54.5 billion per year.

Trump himself has contradicted the figure. During his 2016 campaign, Trump claimed that illegal immigration cost the country more than \$113 billion a year — less than half the number he tweeted Tuesday.

That estimate appeared based on a paper by FAIR, which released an updated report in 2017 that claimed taxpayers "shell out approximately \$134.9 billion to cover the costs incurred by the presence of more than 12.5 million illegal aliens, and about 4.2 million citizen children of illegal aliens" at the federal,

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state and local levels, with "a tax burden of approximately \$8,075 per illegal alien family member and a total of \$115,894,597,664."

The \$116 million figure included services such as health care and education, as well as spending on agencies including U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, minus the \$19 billion the group concluded those who are living in the country illegally pay in taxes. But it also included costs associated with the children of those immigrants in its tally, even when they are U.S. citizens. The estimate was criticized for making broad generalizations and other major methodological flaws.

Associated Press writers Eric Tucker and Cal Woodward in Washington and Philip Issa in Baghdad contributed to this report.

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Eagles stay alive with 32-30 win over Texans

By **ROB MAADDI, AP Pro Football Writer**

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Nick Foles ran back onto the field after a hard shot knocked him out for a play and the crowd roared, seemingly knowing he was about to do it again.

Jake Elliott kicked a 35-yard field goal as time expired after Foles led the offense into position and the Philadelphia Eagles beat the Houston Texans 32-30 Sunday to keep their playoff hopes alive.

"Foles was so confident and everyone was so calm," said Zach Ertz, who set a single-season record for most receptions for tight ends. "No one flinched. Guys stuck together."

Foles threw for a franchise-record 471 yards.

The defending Super Bowl champion Eagles (8-7) need a win at Washington (7-8) next week and for Minnesota (8-6-1) to lose at home to Chicago (11-4) to get a wild-card berth.

The Texans (10-5) missed an opportunity to clinch the AFC South and also allowed New England (10-5) to take control of the No. 2 seed. But when Pittsburgh lost to New Orleans, Houston earned at least a wild-card berth.

The Texans would secure the division title with a victory against Jacksonville next week. They'd get a first-round bye with a win and if the Patriots lose or tie.

"I'll put that on my shoulders," J.J. Watt said. "The offense did a great job giving us a chance, and we just didn't get a stop at the end."

Filling in for the injured Carson Wentz for the second straight week, Foles again played like the Super Bowl MVP who led Philadelphia to a victory over New England.

"We stuck together through the ups and downs," said Foles, who choked up when asked about possibly playing his last game in Philadelphia.

Deshaun Watson had two TD passes and ran for two scores.

Watson threw a 35-yard touchdown pass to Vyncint Smith with 2:04 remaining as Houston rallied from a 13-point deficit.

But Foles brought Philadelphia back.

Foles was injured on a late hit by Jadeveon Clowney while completing a 19-yard pass to Alshon Jeffery to the Texans 30 on third-and-10. Nate Sudfeld came in and threw an incomplete pass, but Foles returned on the next play. His 20-yard pass to Ertz on third-and-10 put Philadelphia at the Houston 35.

The Eagles ran the clock down and Elliott made the kick to make up for missing an extra point earlier in the quarter.

"When it ends a game, you get to enjoy it a little bit longer," Elliott said.

Watson threw a 14-yard TD to DeAndre Hopkins to cut the deficit to 29-23 with 4:48 left and the Texans got the ball back at their 20 after a three-and-out.

Watson made an incredible escape on third-and-11 and threw 22 yards to Jordan Akins for a first down

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at the Philadelphia 34.

On third-and-11, he hit Smith deep in the back of the end zone. Smith made an outstanding catch, and dragged his feet to stay inbounds.

Foles connected with Nelson Agholor on an 83-yard TD in the third quarter to give the Eagles a 23-16 lead. Foles changed the play at the line of scrimmage and fired a deep pass that Agholor caught in stride at the Texans 30 and ran untouched to the end zone, stopping at the 1 and falling backward in for the score.

The Texans had a first down at the Eagles 31 on the ensuing drive but Chris Long sacked Watson, forcing a fumble that was recovered by Fletcher Cox and returned to the Houston 49.

Foles then connected with Ertz on a 23-yard TD to give the Eagles a 29-16 lead. Elliott missed the extra point.

Ertz had 12 catches to break Jason Witten's record. Ertz has 113. Witten had 110 catches for the Dallas Cowboys in 2012.

Watson ran in from the 5 on one play after Clowney's strip-sack and recovery, giving the Texans a 9-7 lead.

The Eagles scored a TD on their opening drive for just the fourth time this season. Darren Sproles turned a short pass from Foles on fourth-and-2 into a 37-yard TD to give Philadelphia a 7-0 lead.

INJURIES

Texans: WR Demaryius Thomas (right leg) was carted off the field in the fourth quarter. CB Kareem Jackson (knee) and CB Kayvon Webster (thigh) were injured in the first half. CB Johnathan Joseph (neck) went down in the third quarter.

Eagles: LT Jason Peters (quad) got hurt on the first possession.

UP NEXT

Texans: Host the Jacksonville Jaguars next Sunday.

Eagles: Visit the Washington Redskins (7-8) next Sunday.

More AP NFL: <https://apnews.com/NFL> and https://twitter.com/AP_NFL

Saints narrowly upend Steelers and take top NFC seed

By **BRETT MARTEL, AP Sports Writer**

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Drew Brees found a receiver who hadn't played most of the season to sustain a late touchdown drive. The Saints' defense found a way to force two fumbles in the fourth quarter. And New Orleans' punt-return unit stopped a fake punt less than a yard short of a conversion that might have helped Pittsburgh protect a late lead.

Combine that with some good fortune on decisions by the officials, and it added up to a third straight fourth-quarter comeback for these charmed 2018 Saints, who'll finish the regular season as the best team in the NFC.

Brees capped a 326-yard passing performance with 2-yard touchdown toss to Michael Thomas with 1:25 left, Sheldon Rankins stripped JuJu Smith-Schuster in the final minute, and the Saints clinched the top seed in the NFC playoffs with a 31-28 victory over the Steelers that dealt a significant blow to Pittsburgh's playoff hopes.

"That's one thing these guys have done a good job with, coming up with plays when we needed it. We've won a lot of different ways this year," Saints coach Sean Payton said after New Orleans (13-2) reached 13 victories for the third time since he became coach in 2006. "I'm proud of this team. Man, they've showed a great resolve — dealt with injuries, dealt with all the adversity you might have in a long season."

Pittsburgh drove into potential tying field-goal range on its final drive, but Smith-Schuster fumbled while landing on Rankins after a short reception and linebacker Demario Davis recovered.

"One thing you know about this team is we're resilient," Rankins said.

Alvin Kamara gained 105 yards from scrimmage and ran for two touchdowns for New Orleans. Receiver Tedd Ginn Jr., playing for the first time since Week 4, caught a 25-yard pass on third-and-20 during the Saints' go-ahead series.

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The late rally came after New Orleans kept it close with two crucial fourth-quarter stops. Safety Kurt Coleman forced Pittsburgh's first fourth-quarter turnover when he stripped Stevan Ridley and defensive end Alex Okafor recovered in Saints territory.

The Steelers briefly preserved their four-point lead when L.J. Fort blocked Wil Lutz's 50-yard field goal attempt with 6:16 left. But New Orleans quickly forced a fourth-and-5 and then stopped upback Roosevelt Nix a yard short of a first down when he took the snap on a fake punt with a little more than four minutes to go.

"I just wanted to be aggressive," Steelers coach Mike Tomlin said. "I like the play."

Ben Roethlisberger passed for 380 yards and three touchdowns for the Steelers (8-6-1), connecting 14 times with Antonio Brown for 185 yards and two touchdowns. Pittsburgh fell into second in the AFC North behind Baltimore and out of playoff position.

The Steelers could still win the division with a victory next week and a loss by the Ravens. Their path to a wild card is unlikely at best because it would require Indianapolis and Tennessee to tie. Pittsburgh's loss also clinched a playoff spot for the AFC South-leading Houston Texans.

"We're playing pretty good football, but it might not matter," Roethlisberger said. "Obviously we don't control our destiny anymore. We have to take care of business next week.

"You can be as skillful as you want on both sides of the ball and special teams, but there is still a small element of luck involved in football. A play here, a play there. If that's what it is, I don't know, but it's the game of football."

New Orleans went up 24-14 in the third quarter when Kamara dove over blockers at the line of scrimmage, capping a drive highlighted by his career-long 42-yard reception.

But the Steelers seized momentum back with a nine-play, 75 yard drive that included three passes to Brown, the last a 3-yard TD toss. Pittsburgh then took a 28-24 led with on its next drive, which again ended with a TD pass to Brown, who split double coverage by Coleman and Marshon Lattimore for his 20-yard score.

FLAG FORTUNE

The Saints' final scoring drive was aided by a pass interference call on fourth down, marking the third Saints touchdown drive of the game aided by such a call.

The first also came on a fourth-down play in the first quarter when Joe Haden placed his hand on Kamara's back on a pass that appeared overthrown.

"I don't know what they saw. I just tried to jump up and go get the ball," Haden said. "It's an offensive game. You can't touch these guys. ... I'm very frustrated."

A play later, Mark Ingram scored from a yard out for his franchise-record 50th rushing touchdown, surpassing Deuce McAllister's mark set in 2008.

KICKING STREAK

Before Lutz had a kick blocked, he made his franchise-record 26th straight field goal, surpassing the Saints mark set by Hall of Famer Morten Andersen during the 1992 and '93 seasons.

BEN AND BROWN

Roethlisberger now has 33 TDs passing, breaking his single-season mark of 32 set in 2007 and 2014.

Brown clinched a sixth straight season with at least 100 catches — making him the only NFL receiver to do so — and six straight seasons with 1,200 yards receiving. He also has 15 touchdown catches, surpassing his career best.

INJURIES

Steelers: Nickel cornerback Mike Hilton was examined in the blue tent by team medical staff but returned to action. ... Starting linebacker Vince Williams left the game in the second half.

Saints: Left tackle Terron Armstead left the game in the first half, returned to action a few series later, but then left the game again for good in the second half. After that, Andrus Peat moved to left tackle and rookie Will Clapp took over at left guard.

UP NEXT

Steelers: Host Cincinnati on Sunday, needing a win to have any hope of advancing to the playoffs.

Saints: Finish the season at home against Carolina on Sunday.

More AP NFL: <https://apnews.com/NFL> and https://twitter.com/AP_NFL

London airport open, but location of drone culprit up in air

By GREGORY KATZ, Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — London's Gatwick Airport operated without problems Sunday, but the fugitive drone operators who brought incoming and outgoing flights to a standstill over multiple days remained at large — and a potential threat — after police cleared two local residents who were arrested as suspects.

Sussex Police were hopeful they had halted the disruptive and costly drone incursions during one of the heaviest travel periods of the year with Friday's arrests of a couple who live near the airport. But they were released Sunday, and police said they were no longer suspects.

Tens of thousands of passengers suffered through long flight delays or were stranded by cancellations after two drones were reported seen above the airfield at Gatwick on Wednesday night, prompting an immediate suspension of all air traffic.

Sussex Chief Detective Jason Tingley said Sunday he could not rule out new drone activity at Gatwick or other U.K. airports. He also said it was possible that witnesses who reported sightings after the first ones aroused alarm were mistaken.

"Of course, that's a possibility. We are working with human beings saying they have seen something," Tingley told the BBC.

At the same, he said police were making progress in a three-pronged investigation: tracking "persons of interest," investigating 67 reported drone sightings, and examining a damaged drone found near Gatwick.

The drone in police hands may provide useful forensic clues, such as the DNA of people who handled it, Tingley said. But the rain the London area got on Friday and Saturday might have washed away some evidence, he said.

Airport authorities consider drones a menace because they could damage a plane in flight or be sucked into a plane's engine, causing a deadly crash

After the shutdown extended into Thursday, increased military protection was brought in Thursday night to watch for more drones while planes resumed taking off and landing at Britain's second-busiest airport.

The government has kept the details of the security operation secret, but the military equipment is thought to offer better tracking capabilities and give authorities early warning if drones approach Gatwick, located 30 miles (45 kilometers) south of London.

At the airport on Sunday, flight arrival and departure boards showed fewer delays than on Saturday. Additional tracking gear at the periphery of the runway and an increased police presence were the only clear signs of the headaches experienced there in the past four days. But officials have stepped up surveillance of the surrounding airspace behind-the-scenes.

British Transport Secretary Chris Grayling has said the unspecified "military measures" have bolstered confidence that the airport will be able to remain open without further interruptions. But anti-drone technology is a relatively new, imperfect field, Grayling said.

It is not clear how officials will respond if another drone gets too close. The best guide may be what happened on Friday night, when the airport was shut down for 70 minutes after a drone was spotted. The military deployment allowed the airport to reopen relatively quickly, authorities have said.

No confirmed drone incursions have taken place since then — a factor that led many to assume police had found the responsible operators when they arrested the two suspects Friday night.

That hope ended Sunday when the couple — a 47-year-old man and a 54-year-old woman — was allowed to return to their home in Crawley, a 5-minute drive from Gatwick.

Detective Tingley said he is satisfied the two were not involved. He is hoping a tip will provide a crucial lead.

Tingley said police did not identify the suspects but The Mail on Sunday tabloid named them and pub-

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lished a large front-page photo of them with the headline, "Are These the Morons Who Ruined Christmas?"

The crisis at Gatwick marked the first time drones caused sustained disruption at a major airport. There is not much data on the dangers drones pose to airplanes because they are a relatively new phenomenon.

Police say the motive for the drone incursion is not yet known but they do not believe it is "terror-related."

Gatwick Airport, which handles roughly 43 million passengers per year, has offered a 50,000 pound (\$63,000) reward through Crimestoppers for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the drone operators.

Profiting off presidency? Trump biz takes hit since election

By **BERNARD CONDON, AP Business Writer**

NEW YORK (AP) — When workers pried the Trump name off another Manhattan building earlier this year, it capped a bad few weeks for the president's businesses.

Donald Trump's golf resorts in Scotland had just posted millions of dollars in losses, one of his hotels in Panama had rebranded itself a Marriott, and New York officials announced they were looking into how he avoided paying tens of millions in taxes.

All that, along with the daily drumbeat of Trump tweets and headlines about investigations into his administration, led Austin, Texas, tech executive Gary Barrett to finally give up hope of ever turning a profit on an apartment he bought as an investment in a Trump tower in Las Vegas.

"People with enough cash to buy these units seem to be shying away from the Trump name," says Barrett, calling it "the Trump effect."

From golf fees and licensing deals to prices for Trump condos, many metrics used to gauge his business in the first two years of his presidency are down as the divisive comments and policies so beloved by his political base have turned off a group just as dear to him — the affluent who fuel his businesses.

"He can be very polarizing. ... The brand has been diminished," says Jeff Lotman, CEO of licensing firm Global Icons. New York brand consultant Robert Passikoff puts it more bluntly: "The Trump brand has lost its mojo."

Though it's difficult to know just how badly Trump's privately held businesses are hurting, Associated Press interviews with two dozen club members, condo buyers and real estate experts suggest the impact has been broad and sustained, with the same political divisions among voters playing out on the links and in clubhouses and condo board meetings.

The Trump Organization did not respond to repeated requests for comment but has said in the past its core operations are strong.

From the beginning, though, there were signs that mixing politics and business were backfiring. It started when Trump announced his candidacy in 2015, calling some Mexican immigrants crossing the border illegally "rapists," and then snowballed the next year following the "Access Hollywood" tape of him boasting about grabbing women by the genitals.

Macy's and Univision severed ties with his brand, mattress maker Serta stopped licensing his name, NASCAR and the PGA booked events that used to be held at his Doral resort in Miami elsewhere, and the TV network that aired his "Apprentice" — NBC — ended its relationship with him.

Then Trump blamed "both sides" at the neo-Nazi rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in the summer of 2017, and more than a dozen charities and other organizations canceled galas and other parties at his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida. A hotel in the Soho section of Manhattan that had a licensing agreement to use his name took it off its building, following a decision by one in Toronto to do the same.

The revolt has extended to new Trump hotel ventures aimed at those who can't afford \$450 or more to stay at his big-city hotels. Early last year, the Trump Organization announced the rollout of two chains — one mid-priced, the other budget — and said it had signed letters of intent for possible deals with more than 20 developers.

Today, only one deal, in Mississippi, has been announced. Hotel experts say potential partners don't

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want to deal with the controversy the Trump name brings.

"In today's politically charged environment, everyone is cautious," says Lee Hunter, CEO of consultancy Hunter Hotel Advisors in Atlanta. "You want as many guests staying with you as possible."

Trump's condos in New York have taken a hit, too.

An AP analysis of sales data from brokerage CityRealty shows prices per square foot have fallen in nine of the 11 Trump-branded buildings in Manhattan in the first 10 months this year after dropping last year, too. Since Trump has taken office, prices have fallen 9 percent on average and are now down to levels not seen in five years. In that time, Manhattan condos overall have risen 29 percent.

CityRealty consultant Zach Gutierrez says Trump buildings are suffering partly because they look dated next to all the new luxury buildings that have gone up in recent years. But he adds that it doesn't help that some apartment hunters won't even consider a Trump building now.

"His politics are definitely alienating people," Gutierrez says.

Ivanka Trump's business has been hit by the political backlash, too.

The president's daughter shut down her company making dresses, shoes, handbags and other accessories in July after boycotts against her brand and after retailers such as Saks Fifth Avenue and Nordstrom decided to drop her line, the latter specifically citing weak sales. Her company said at the time that business was strong and that the shutdown was triggered by Ivanka's desire to focus more on her work as a White House adviser.

Ivanka's brother Eric Trump is similarly optimistic about his father's 17 golf resorts around the world, telling the AP earlier this year that the clubs are doing "spectacularly."

The few public numbers available suggest otherwise.

Financial reports released by the British and Irish governments in October show two Scottish resorts and one in Ireland lost millions last year, the fourth year in a row of losses. Revenue at his public course in the Bronx fell 9 percent in the first six months of this year, on top of a 7 percent drop for all of last year. Revenue from his Doral golf resort in Miami, which generates the bulk of Trump's golf revenue, is estimated by Forbes magazine to have plunged 26 percent last year.

Another business facing trouble: Trump's "condo-hotel" business, in which people looking for income buy hotel rooms in Trump hotels and hand them over to his company to rent out to guests.

"When I bought, it had to do with the Trump name. It was a respected name," says Terry Gould, who sold two condos in his Trump's Vegas tower last year out of frustration with what he says was the puny income from them. "I don't know what the market sees in it now."

The Washington Post says private documents it has seen show income to condo-hotel owners at a New York property dropped 14 percent from 2015 to 2017. The newspaper reported a similar drop at a Trump hotel in Chicago.

Previously, Donald Trump Jr. and his brother Eric have said that new limits their father has placed on his businesses, such as agreeing not to strike any new business overseas, have indeed slowed deal-making. But they said that might be the price to pay for their father being president.

To be sure, it hasn't been all bad news. Trump's businesses still hauled in at least \$453 million in revenue last year, according to the president's financial disclosure.

His Washington hotel, which took in \$40 million of that, is doing a brisk business with Republican Party officials, lobbyists and business groups that can lose or win big on changes in regulations and laws.

Foreign diplomats and dignitaries and groups with ties to the governments of Turkey, Azerbaijan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and other countries have held events or stayed at the hotel, too. Referring to his decision to throw a party there in June, the Philippine ambassador wrote in a newspaper op-ed, "Since several other embassies have also held their national day celebrations at the Trump hotel which were well attended — I decided — why not do it there, too."

The Trump Organization has promised to donate any profits tied to foreign governments to the U.S. Treasury to allay conflict-of-interest concerns, and made a payment of \$151,470 to the agency earlier this year to cover 2017. The company has declined to provide details on how the figure was calculated.

Trump's summer White House at his Bedminster, New Jersey, golf club — where he has spent 71 days

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of his presidency — is benefiting from political spending, too.

A group backing New Jersey Rep. Tom MacArthur's re-election campaign spent more than \$15,000 on rent and food for an event at the club, and fellow New Jersey Rep. Daryl Kipnis spent \$8,000 the next year. Both lost in the midterms.

A group supporting the president's 2020 re-election — Donald J. Trump for President Inc. — spent more than \$50,000 at the club since he was elected, part of a \$3 million spending spree by the group at Trump properties.

Tax dollars spent at Bedminster to put up and feed aides and other support staff for the president's many stays have helped Trump's company, too — a full tally of which has not been made public.

Then there is all the untapped opportunity abroad after the presidency. Since the election, an AP review of trademarks around the world shows the president has received approval for dozens of trademarks in China and other countries to set up new businesses and license products.

Larry Chiagouris, a marketing professor at Pace University, thinks Trump will move fast to make money off those trademarks after he leaves office, particularly in emerging markets where newly wealthy consumers are less concerned about his divisive comments and policies.

"He'll go to work and put product underneath them and his business will be worth a lot more," Chiagouris says.

Others are less optimistic.

Consultant Passikoff has been surveying consumer attitudes toward Trump for 30 years and says his data shows the brand was so popular at one point that Trump could get people to pay 30 percent more than they would for rival brands on hotel rooms, steak, bottles of vodka and other goods and services.

"Once you've lost the brand value," he says, "it's hard to get it back."

Condon can be reached on Twitter at @BernardFCondon.

School bus driver shortage creates headaches for districts

By GRANT SCHULTE, Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — School districts throughout the U.S. are struggling to find school bus drivers, a challenge that has worsened with low unemployment and a strong economy.

The problem has become so severe that some districts are offering sign-up bonuses for new drivers, while others rely on mechanics, custodians and other school employees to fill the gap. For parents and students, the shortage can mean longer waits for a ride to school and more crowded buses.

The shortage stems from a variety of factors, including limited work hours and high barriers to entry. Drivers generally need a commercial driver's license, which requires training, sometimes without pay, said Mike Martin, executive director of the National Association of Pupil Transportation.

"Unless you have something to fill in the gaps (between drives), you can't make the money you need to support your family," Martin said. "These days, most people are looking for some kind of regular, full-time hours."

In Iowa's Southeast Polk Community School District, transportation director Daniel Schultz said the persistent shortage has grown worse in the suburban Des Moines district because there aren't as many retired farmers, a group that commonly took the job for extra income. Now, the district relies on 51 drivers — mostly retirees and stay-at-home parents — to transport roughly 3,400 students to and from school each day.

Even with administrators and bus mechanics filling in, the shortage has also resulted in fewer routes, more children waiting at each stop, and crowded buses. The district needs to hire six to eight more drivers, Schultz said.

"We have to do double duty," Schultz said. "Right now, I'm driving and doing my regular job. The mechanics are driving and doing their regular jobs — so, instead of having eight hours a day, I only get them for four. It's like pulling a teacher out of the classroom for half a day and still expecting the same job to

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get done.”

Pay starts at \$19.10 an hour, followed by a \$2-an-hour raise after six months, Schultz said, but the district struggles to fill open jobs. Schultz said he’s now considering a “monthly rodeo” where potential drivers could test-drive a bus in a school parking lot.

“We’re just trying anything we can right now,” he said.

In St. Paul, Minnesota, some students are arriving late to school because fill-in drivers aren’t familiar with the normal routes. A school district in Ypsilanti, Michigan, had to cancel a day of school in February because there weren’t enough substitute drivers to cover for sick drivers.

And in Hawaii last year, a driver shortage in Maui forced state officials suspend bus rides for some students and limit rides for some others. The district offered free monthly bus passes on local public transportation.

In Lincoln, Nebraska, some positions remain unfilled even after the local school district offered \$1,000 signing bonuses for new hires and a guaranteed six-hour day for all drivers. Officials also recruited an Omaha-based contractor to provide extra drivers when needed to help transport roughly 4,000 students a day. The district faced a shortage of 32 drivers this year but has reduced it to eight, transportation director Ryan Robley said.

Kristi Meyers, a Lincoln Public Schools bus driver for six years, said she loves her job and knows every student by name, but wouldn’t have been able to stay without the guaranteed hours and retirement benefits offered to senior drivers. Meyers drives routes throughout the day for elementary-age children and older youths who are in a job-skills training program. In the summer, she drives a bus carrying farm workers to make ends meet.

“It’s a good job, and these are great kids,” she said.

But Meyers said the job is considered part-time work, which prevents drivers from collecting unemployment benefits if they get laid off or getting paid holidays.

Martin, of the National Association of Pupil Transportation, said many districts require split morning and afternoon shifts for their drivers, which some consider a hassle. Keeping an eye on noisy children while facing away from them can be difficult as well, he said.

“It really takes a special type of personality” to deal with the issues, Martin said. “Many people just don’t have a burning desire to face those aspects of the job.”

Follow Grant Schulte on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/GrantSchulte>

Scandal and justice: #MeToo reached the sports world in 2018

By WILL GRAVES, AP Sports Writer

One by one they came forward, more than 150 in all. Fearful yet defiant. Vulnerable but resolute, buoyed by the hope of catharsis and the promise of justice.

Standing in a Michigan courtroom last January, women and girls sexually abused by Larry Nassar confronted the former Michigan State University and USA Gymnastics doctor, and over seven draining days detailed the devastating effect the molestation had on their lives.

The #MeToo movement reached the sports world in 2018 with a scandal that reverberated not just in locker rooms and gyms but in courthouses, in boardrooms and at kitchen tables. The sight of women being not just heard but believed — combined with other breakthroughs for female athletes in the fight for fair treatment — created a sense of real momentum in sports over the past year.

Female athletes “are taking control, and that’s what it’s all about,” tennis star Serena Williams said. “Taking control of who you are.”

While 2017 brought the downfall of TV personalities Matt Lauer and Charlie Rose and Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein, a scandal in the sports world that had been brewing for a few years blew up in 2018 into shocking front-page news.

Nassar was sentenced to 40 to 175 years in prison in a case that has had widespread and devastating fallout. Michigan State agreed to settle victims’ lawsuits for \$500 million. The university president lost her

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job and was charged with lying to police. Others at the school or at gymnastics' national governing body, USA Gymnastics, also face charges. And the future of the organization is in limbo.

Jordyn Wieber, a member of the gold-medal 2012 Olympic gymnastics team, planned to detail her allegations against Nassar quietly in a lawsuit. Yet as she watched other victims share the most difficult memories of their lives in open court, with their tormentor 20 feet away and a TV camera broadcasting it to the world, Wieber decided to testify, too.

"I saw this effect and this power we as Olympians had by using our voice," the 23-year-old Wieber told The Associated Press. "I felt really responsible to do that. If I could do one small thing in the world of gymnastics, the world of sports, this was it. I knew it wasn't going to be easy, but I felt like it was worth it."

The young women also played a role in trying to hold USA Gymnastics and other organizations accountable for the way Nassar's abuse went unchecked for decades.

When USA Gymnastics continued to use the Karolyi Ranch training center in Texas even after victims told of how they were abused by Nassar there, reigning Olympic champion and Nassar victim Simone Biles went on Twitter to ask why. The organization announced almost immediately it was leaving the facility.

Biles took then-USA Gymnastics president Kerry Perry to task in August for not speaking up to outline a way forward for the embattled organization. Perry resigned less than a month later.

"The fact Simone is able to effect the amount of change she's been able to is a testament that athletes are starting to have a little bit of power," said former gymnast Rachael Denhollander, who filed a criminal complaint against Nassar in 2016.

The year 2018 also saw the swift downfall of former Carolina Panthers owner Jerry Richardson — who sold the team and was fined \$2.75 million by the NFL after he was accused of sexual harassment — and the continued pursuit of equal treatment of women in sports like tennis and soccer.

The French Open angered some in May when it declined to seed three-time winner Williams following a 14-month break from tennis in which she gave birth to a daughter. Last week, the women's tennis tour announced that starting in 2019, players coming off maternity leave or major injury may use a special ranking for up to three years upon their return.

"Serena is mainly responsible for bringing that issue to the forefront: Should you be treated the same for pregnancy as you are if you miss time with an injury?" tennis Hall of Famer Chris Evert said. The new rule "obviously was an advancement in the women's game."

The push by female athletes to transform their sports wasn't limited to the U.S.

The South Korean women's curling team that won a surprise silver at the 2018 Olympics came forward in November to complain of verbal and psychological abuse by their handlers, a pattern that included withholding prize money and threatening to bench the captain after learning she wanted to start a family. The handlers admitted to some of the allegations but denied others while resigning under pressure this month.

And members of Argentina's women's soccer team used social media to express mounting frustration over unequal treatment, including being barred from the training complex traditionally reserved for the men and receiving minimal financial support. Argentine soccer officials relented, allowing the women to work out at the same facility as the men.

"Teams are standing up and saying — and it's South America, it's Africa, it's Europe — 'This isn't good enough, this isn't right,'" said two-time Women's World Cup champion-turned-TV analyst Julie Foudy.

As for the effect on the world outside sports, Denhollander, who is now a lawyer, said prosecutors have told her about a spike in the number of abuse victims from other walks of life coming forward since Nassar's sentencing. Still, she cautioned that the Nassar case was just one battle in a continuing fight.

"The cultural impact is huge," Denhollander said. "The personal impact, feeling like they can finally tell someone, that's huge. On the flip side, there's a danger of feeling like we've accomplished more than we really have."

AP Sports Writers Howard Fendrich, Teresa Walker, Anne Peterson, Larry Lage and Eddie Pells and Associated Press writer Kelli Kennedy contributed to this report.

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More AP sports: <https://apnews.com/apf-sports> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Monday, Dec. 24, the 358th day of 2018. There are seven days left in the year. This is Christmas Eve.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 24, 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower supreme commander of Allied forces in Europe as part of Operation Overlord.

On this date:

In 1814, the United States and Britain signed the Treaty of Ghent, which ended the War of 1812 following ratification by both the British Parliament and the U.S. Senate.

In 1865, several veterans of the Confederate Army formed a private social club in Pulaski, Tennessee, that was the original version of the Ku Klux Klan.

In 1871, Giuseppe Verdi's opera "Aida" had its world premiere in Cairo, Egypt.

In 1906, Canadian physicist Reginald A. Fessenden became the first person to transmit the human voice (his own) as well as music over radio, from Brant Rock, Massachusetts.

In 1913, 73 people, most of them children, died in a crush of panic after a false cry of "Fire!" during a Christmas party for striking miners and their families at the Italian Hall in Calumet, Michigan.

In 1914, during World War I, impromptu Christmas truces began to take hold along parts of the Western Front between British and German soldiers.

In 1968, the Apollo 8 astronauts, orbiting the moon, read passages from the Old Testament Book of Genesis during a Christmas Eve telecast.

In 1974, Cyclone Tracy began battering the Australian city of Darwin, resulting in widespread damage and causing some 65 deaths.

In 1980, Americans remembered the U.S. hostages in Iran by burning candles or shining lights for 417 seconds — one second for each day of captivity.

In 1990, actor Tom Cruise married his "Days of Thunder" co-star, Nicole Kidman, during a private ceremony at a Colorado ski resort (the marriage ended in 2001).

In 1992, President Bush pardoned former Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and five others in the Iran-Contra scandal.

In 1993, the Rev. Norman Vincent Peale, who blended Christian and psychiatric principles into a message of "positive thinking," died in Pawling, N.Y., at age 95.

Ten years ago: A man dressed in a Santa Claus suit shot his way into the Covina, Calif., home of his former in-laws and set it on fire, killing nine people (the attacker, identified as Bruce Jeffrey Pardo, committed suicide the next day). The Federal Reserve granted a request by the financing arm of General Motors to tap the government's \$700 billion rescue fund, bolstering GM's ability to survive. Nobel Prize-winning playwright Harold Pinter died in London at age 78.

Five years ago: In Egypt, a car bomb ripped through a security headquarters in the Nile Delta city of Mansoura, killing 16 people, almost all policemen. Britain's Queen Elizabeth II granted a posthumous pardon to code-breaker Alan Turing, who was convicted of homosexual behavior in the 1950s. Pope Francis lauded Jesus' humble beginning as a poor and vulnerable baby as he celebrated his first Christmas Eve Mass as pontiff in St. Peter's Basilica.

One year ago: Peru's president announced that he had granted a medical pardon to jailed former strongman Alberto Fujimori, 79, who had been serving a 25-year sentence for human rights abuses, corruption and the sanctioning of death squads. In Christmas eve remarks, Pope Francis likened the journey to Bethlehem by Mary and Joseph to the migrations of millions of people today who are forced to leave homelands for a better life, or just to survive. Hundreds of supporters of Russian opposition leader Alexei

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Navalny nominated him for president, allowing him to file the required endorsement papers and putting pressure on the Kremlin to allow him to run. (Navalny was blocked from the ballot because of a felony conviction in a case that his supporters regarded as falsified.)

Today's Birthdays: Songwriter-bandleader Dave Bartholomew is 100. Author Mary Higgins Clark is 91. Federal health official Anthony S. Fauci, M.D., is 78. Recording company executive Mike Curb is 74. Actress Sharon Farrell is 72. U.S. Former Attorney General Jeff Sessions is 72. Actor Grand L. Bush is 63. Actor Clarence Gilyard is 63. Actress Stephanie Hodge is 62. The former president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai (HAH'-mihd KAHR'-zeye), is 61. Rock musician Ian Burden (The Human League) is 61. Actor Anil Kapoor (ah-NEEL' kuh-POOR') is 59. Actress Eva Tamargo is 58. Actor Wade Williams is 57. Rock singer Mary Ramsey (10,000 Maniacs) is 55. Actor Mark Valley is 54. Actor Diedrich Bader is 52. Actor Amaury Nolasco is 48. Singer Ricky Martin is 47. Author Stephenie Meyer is 45. TV personality Ryan Seacrest (TV: "Live With Kelly & Ryan") is 44. Actor Michael Raymond-James is 41. Actor Austin Stowell is 34. Rock singer Louis Tomlinson (One Direction) is 27.

Thought for Today: "To perceive Christmas through its wrapping becomes more difficult with every year." — E.B. White, American author and journalist (1899-1985).