

Groton Area Schedule of Events

Monday, January 21, 2019

Groton Area boys basketball hosts Northwestern Area. (C game at 5:15 p.m. followed by junior varsity and then the varsity game)

6:00pm: Wrestling: Boys JH Tournament vs. Redfield-Doland @ Redfield Jr-Sr High School

7:00pm: City Council meeting at Groton Community Center.

Tuesday, January 22, 2019

6:30 p.m.: Groton Area girls basketball hosts Clark/Willow Lake

Wednesday, January 23, 2019

8:30pm- 12:15pm: MathCounts at Aberdeen Simmons Middle School

Thursday, January 24, 2019

4:00pm: Wrestling: Boys Varsity Northeast Conference @ Deuel High School

Friday, January 25, 2019

Lewis and Clark Debate at Yankton High School

Boys basketball at Clark (7th grade at 4 p.m., 8th grade game at 5 p.m., junior varsity at 6:30 p.m. followed by varsity game.)

Service Notice: Linda Dobbins

Services for Linda Dobbins, 70, of Groton will be 11:00 a.m., Thursday January 24th at Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton. Rev. Bill Duncan will officiate. Burial will follow in Summit at a later date.

Visitation will be held at the chapel from 5-7 p.m. on Wednesday.

Linda passed away January 18, 2019 at Avera McKennan Hospital, Sioux Falls.

Ava Tunheim Update

Ava has a terrible fungal infection in her lungs. She has been intubated right now and we are helpless in this situation. It's very hard to see my little girl like this and not being able to do anything but sit and wait.

- Nathan Tunheim

Skating Rink Hours

Open Monday - Thursday: 4 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Friday: 4 p.m. to 10 p.m.

Saturday: 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Sunday: 1 p.m. to 9 p.m.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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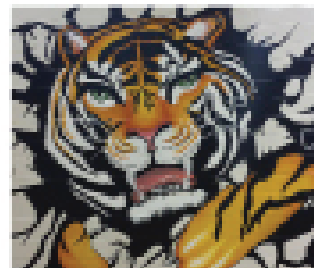
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It's Boys' Basketball Action on GDILIVE.COM



**Northwestern
Wildcats**

VS



Groton Area Tigers

Monday, Jan. 21, 2019

8:00 p.m.

at the Groton Area Arena

Broadcast Sponsored by
Allied Climate Professionals
Bahr Spray Foam
Blocker Construction
Doug Abeln Seed Company
James Valley Seed - Doug Jorgensen
John Sieh Agency
Locke Electric
Milbrandt Enterprises, Inc.
Northeast Chiropractic Clinic
Professional Management Services, Inc.
Sanford Health
Tyson DeHoet Trucking
Weber Landscaping

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Weekly Vikings Roundup

Playoff Edition

By Jordan Wright

So far, the 2019 NFL playoffs have been anything but boring. This past weekend, however, was the most exciting yet. Both games needed overtime before a winner could be declared, but we now know who will be playing for the Lombardi Trophy on February 3 – the New England Patriots and the Los Angeles Rams. Before we get into the matchup, let's examine how those teams got there.

The first game on Sunday was the Rams traveling to New Orleans to square off with the Saints. The Saints have one of the best home-field advantages in the league, which helped them take an early 13-0 lead. The Rams scored 10 straight points before halftime, and the game remained close before a Greg Zuerlein field goal with 15 seconds left in the fourth quarter tied it up and sent the game to overtime. The Saints got the ball to start OT, but Drew Brees threw an interception and the Rams kicked a 57-yard field goal for the 26-23 win.

Brees threw for 249 yards, two touchdowns, and one costly interception, but it was the lack of a running game that ruined the Saints. Running backs Alvin Kamara and Mark Ingram combined for only 46 yards on 17 carries (2.7 yards per carry), although Kamara redeemed himself by leading the team in receptions (11) and receiving yards (96).

Brees' counterpart, Jared Goff, struggled early but found his groove in the second quarter, finishing the game with 297 yards, one touchdown, and one interception. The Rams' playmaker on offense, running back Todd Gurley, has been dealing with a knee injury the past few weeks, but that doesn't explain why he only got four carries (10 yards) compared to 16 carries (44 yards) for C.J. Anderson. Wide receiver Brandin Cooks led the Rams in receptions (7) and receiving yards (107).

The second game on Sunday was between the Kansas City Chiefs and New England Patriots. The Chiefs had an explosive offense this season, but they were held scoreless in the first half of this game, the first time that has happened to them all season. The Chiefs scored 31 points in the second half, however, including a 39-yard field goal with eight seconds left to send it to overtime. The Patriots got the ball to start OT, and Tom Brady led them down the field for a 75-yard scoring drive and a 37-31 victory.

Brady threw for 348 yards, one touchdown, and two interceptions. He got better as the game went on and was unstoppable in overtime. The Patriots' rookie running back Sony Michel carried the ball 29 times for 113 yards and two touchdowns, with Rex Burkhead chipping in another 44 yards and two touchdowns. Julian Edelman and Rob Gronkowski led the team in receiving yards with 96 and 79 yards respectively.

Chiefs' quarterback Patrick Mahomes played great in the second half and ended the day with 295 yards and three touchdowns. Kansas City couldn't get anything going on the ground against the Patriots, finishing the day with only 41 rushing yards. The Patriots did a good job of defending Travis Kelce and Tyreek Hill, so Sammy Watkins ended up leading the team in receiving yards with 114.

Looking ahead, the Pro Bowl is this Sunday, January 27 at 2pm (CT) and the Superbowl will be February 3, at 5:30pm (CT) on CBS. Next week I will have a matchup breakdown for the Superbowl, as well as a quick recap of the Pro Bowl. The Vikings will be represented in the all-star game by WR Adam Thielen, DE Danielle Hunter, LB Anthony Barr and S Harrison Smith. Skol!

If you have a question or a comment, reach out to me on Twitter (@JordanWrightNFL)

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Today in Weather History

1863 - A severe coastal storm dropped heavy rain on the Fredericksburg area of Virginia. It disrupted a Union Army offensive in an ill famed "mud march." (David Ludlum)

1982 - The second of two major snowstorms to hit southern Minnesota came to an end. Minneapolis received 20 inches of snow in 24 hours to break the previous record of 17 inches in 24 hours established just a few days earlier. A record 38 inches of snow covered the ground following the two storms, with drifts ten feet high. (David Ludlum)

1985 - Three days of snow squalls at Buffalo NY finally came to an end. The squalls, induced by relatively warm water in Lake Erie, produced 34 inches of snow at the International Airport, with up to 47 inches reported in the suburbs of Buffalo. The New York "blizzard of '85" left many counties disaster areas. (19th-21st) (Weather Channel) (Storm Data) President Reagan was sworn in for a second term in the coldest Inauguration Ceremony of record. Cold and wind resulted in wind chill readings as much as 30 degrees below zero. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1987 - Low pressure over Minnesota produced high winds in the Northern Plains Region. Winds gusted to 66 mph at Rapid City SD, and reached 70 mph at Belle Fourche SD. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - High pressure over northern Nevada and low pressure off the coast of southern California combined to produce high winds in the southwestern U.S. Wind gusts in the San Francisco area reached 70 mph at Fremont. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Cold and snow prevailed in the northeastern U.S. Up to 13 inches of snow was reported between Woodford and Searsburg in Vermont. Montpelier VT reported a wind chill reading of 42 degrees below zero. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Unseasonably warm weather prevailed across the state of Florida. Eight cities reported record high temperatures for the date, including West Palm Beach with a reading of 86 degrees. Rain in southern New England changed to freezing rain, then to sleet, and then to heavy snow during the late morning. Most of Massachusetts was blanketed with 6 to 10 inches of snow. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



81st Annual

Carnival of Silver Skates

Sunday, January 27th—2:00 and 6:30

Groton Ice Rink—West Side of Groton, SD

Join us for a fun "Road Trip"!

Admission: 13 & older—\$3.00 / 6-12—\$2.00

Parking: Provided around the rink and on the ice or cozy up on the bleachers
(Ice parking begins at 10 am, then again at 4:30 pm)

**Check us out on Facebook at "Silver Skates"

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M.L.King Day

Tonight

Tuesday

Tuesday Night

Wednesday



60% → 20%

Snow Likely and Areas Blowing Snow

High: 16 °F



50% → 90%

Chance Snow and Patchy Fog then Snow and Areas Fog

Low: 10 °F



50%

Chance Snow then Partly Sunny

High: 16 °F



Partly Cloudy

Low: -1 °F



Mostly Sunny

High: 25 °F

More Snow To Start Out The Week

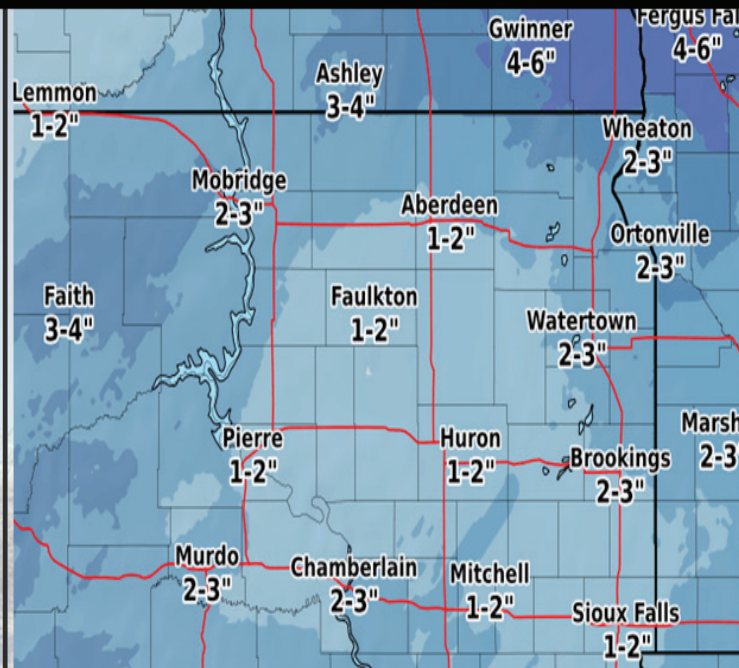
Updated Snow Totals

Today

Snow exiting by late morning. Breezy winds and patchy blowing snow remain.

Tonight - Tuesday

More widespread snow in the area Monday evening through Tuesday. Amounts of 1-3" expected.



Updated: 1/21/2019 5:01 AM Central

Published on: 01/21/2019 at 5:07AM

The active pattern continues this week. The first round of snow will exit by mid morning today. Breezy winds will result in some patchy blowing snow today. The next system will move in this evening and bring some additional light snow to the region. A light glaze of freezing drizzle is also possible in central SD. More snow and increasing winds are expected Wednesday night into Thursday with dangerously cold wind chills developing by Friday morning.

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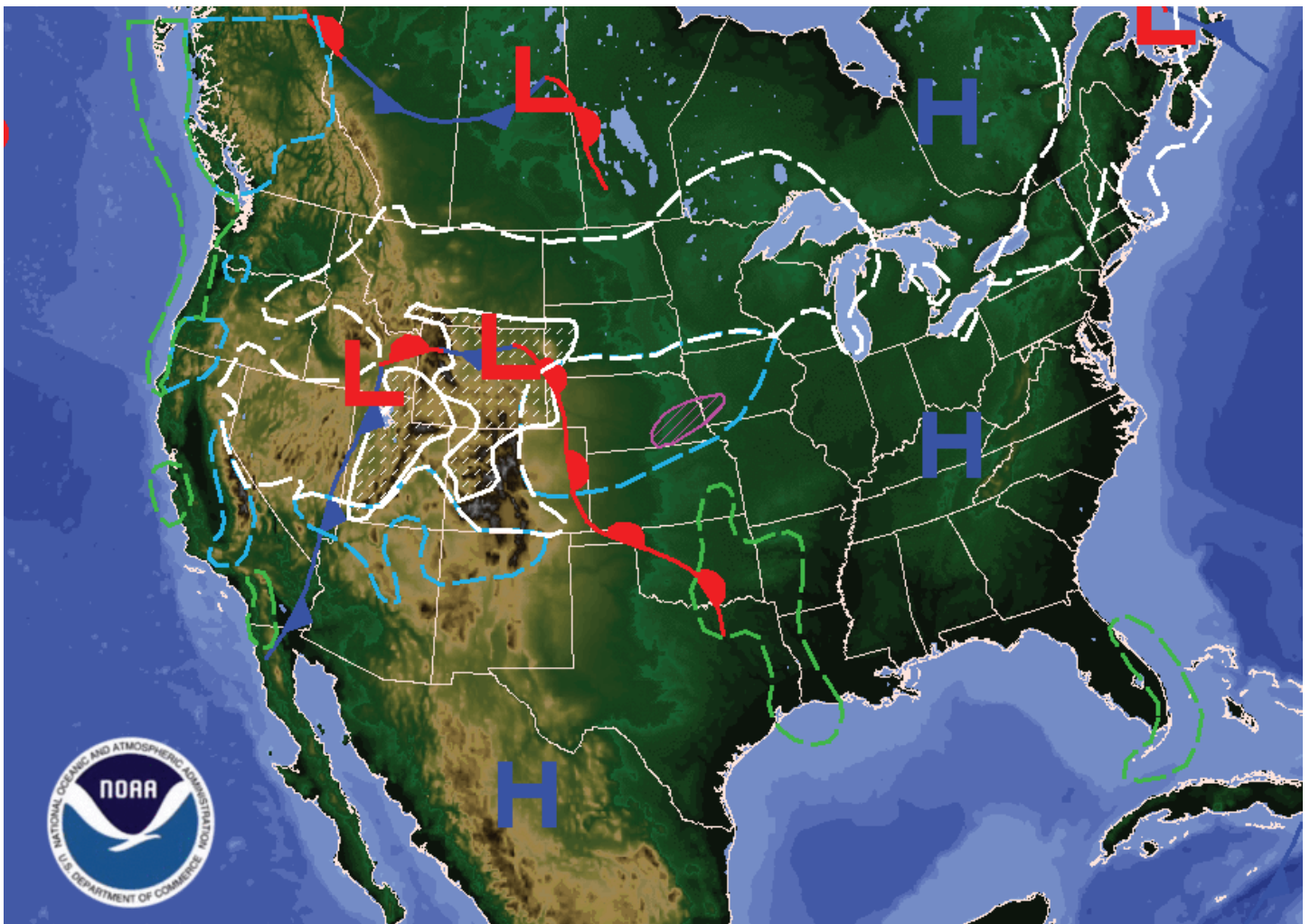
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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 4 °F at 3:01 PM
Low Outside Temp: -4 °F at 6:45 PM
High Gust: 25 mph at 10:13 PM
Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 57 in 1942, 1900
Record Low: -31 in 1949
Average High: 23°F
Average Low: 1°F
Average Precip in Jan.: 0.32
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 0.32
Precip Year to Date: 0.00
Sunset Tonight: 5:25 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:05 a.m.



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Mon, Jan 21, 2019, issued 4:52 AM EST
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by McCreynolds with WPC/SPC/NHC forecasts

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

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MOVING ON

There is a story of a patient in a mental institution who sits alone and looks longingly out the window. Every now and then he wistfully moans, If only I had... And his voice trails off as his mind recalls a past event.

At one time he was a brakeman on a freight train. On a bitterly cold night, he decided not to light his lantern and leave the warmth of his caboose to warn an oncoming train that his train had stopped to reload its coal car. He had been at this particular place before and could not remember if there were any trains that needed a warning.

Unfortunately, an oncoming train did not see his caboose and crashed into it leaving three of his friends dead. He escaped with severe bodily injuries that healed, but, mentally he could not escape the scene. Whenever his mind recalled the event, he would say, If only I had...

Many of us have memories that have left scars we wish we could erase. David had one. He traded a peaceful mind for a moment of pleasure that left him overwhelmed with grief. Finally, he cried out, Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways. According to Your love, remember me for You are good, O Lord.

Was that prayer answered? Indeed. When we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us. And He also promises, Their sins and iniquities I will remember no more.

There is no sin beyond Gods forgiveness! And, no forgiveness without asking!

Prayer: Lord, we accept Your forgiveness and cleansing. But may we never forget that they cost You Your life. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Psalm 25:7 Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways. According to Your love, remember me for You are good, O Lord.

2019 Groton SD Community Events

- 01/27/2019 Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm
- 03/17/2019 Groton American Legion Spring Fundraiser
- 04/13/2019 Easter Egg Hunt (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
- 04/27/2019 Fireman's Stag
- 05/04/2019 Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Saturday in May)
- 05/27/2019 Groton American Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Program
Transit Fundraiser (Middle Thursday in June)
- 06/14/2019 SDSU Golf Tournament at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 06/15/2019 Triathlon (Saturday before Father's Day)
- 06/21/2019 Best Ball Golf Tourney
- 07/04/2019 Firecracker Golf Tourney (4th of July)
- 07/14/2019 Summer Fest
- 08/22/2019 First Day of School
- 09/07/2019 Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
- 09/08/2019 Sunflower Classic at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 10/12/2019 Pumpkin Fest (Saturday before Columbus Day)
- 10/11/2019 Lake Region Marching Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)
- 10/31/2019 Trunk or Treat/Halloween on Main
- 11/09/2019 Groton American Legion Post #39 Turkey Shoot (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
- 12/07/2019 Olive Grove Golf Course 2019 Holiday Party
- 12/07/2019 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services

News from the Associated Press

Black Hawk man gets 12 years for assaulting ex-girlfriend

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Black Hawk man who authorities say took his ex-girlfriend to a remote area and pointed a gun at her head while she was on her knees has been sentenced to serve 12 years in prison.

Thirty-eight-year-old James Higgins was accused of assaulting the woman on April 22, 2018, taking her by force from a bar, into the rural area, then to his house where he further physically assaulted her.

Prosecutor Adam Shiffermiller says the victim “believed she was going to die on multiple occasions.”

Defense attorneys argued the woman’s story was inconsistent, and that at the time of the incident Higgins hadn’t been taking medication for PTSD and a bipolar disorder.

The Rapid City Journal reports Higgins recently pleaded guilty to aggravated assault, and prosecutors dropped a kidnapping count.

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

South Dakota native enjoying time at US Military Academy

By DAN CRISLER, Watertown Public Opinion

WATERTOWN, S.D. (AP) — Few can withstand the rigors of the United States Military Academy in West Point, N.Y.

With its emphasis on academics and conduct expected of the academy’s future military officers, just getting into the nation’s academy is difficult enough let alone staying.

In short, it’s not for the typical college-aged student.

Fortunately, Watertown’s Zachariah Markel appears to be doing just fine.

After speaking to Immaculate Conception School students and answering questions about his experience on Friday, Jan. 4, Markel, 20, spent time speaking with the Watertown Public Opinion before flying back to start the spring semester last week.

Having just begun the second half of his second year, or as West Point cadets and alumni call it, his Yuk year, the 2017 Watertown High School and 2013 IC School graduate is establishing himself in West Point’s culture after spending his first year learning what is expected of him and his fellow cadets at the prestigious Army academy.

“As a Plebe, or freshman, it was kind of learning the ropes of like how West Point is and just sticking to my own memo,” Markel said. “After that, it was just making sure I was doing well in my classes.”

Of course, that doesn’t mean his first year wasn’t enjoyable. Quite the opposite, in fact.

Each December, thousands of cadets from both the United States Military Academy and the United States Naval Academy come to cheer on their respective football teams in the Army-Navy Game, perhaps the nation’s most rivalry football game.

With each military academy located slightly over two hours away from the game’s host sight in Philadelphia, the game builds camaraderie among the cadets no matter who they’re rooting for. In the week leading up to the game, some cadets swap academies leading to pranks being pulled.

“Cadets are kind of strange people but also very nice,” Markel said. “You make friendships that last for a long time despite whatever you may go through. I have some friends I’m really close with. We’re from all parts of the country but we all have similar interests. We’d do anything for each other.”

For as much as West Point expects from its cadets, Markel said the academy is willing to go to great lengths to help them.

“It can be a struggle, but if you want to stay, you’ll be there to stay,” he said. “The teachers are really helpful. Most of them are willing to make time to help give you additional instruction and make sure you succeed.”

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Markel also has gotten to brush shoulders with some distinguished military officers, including a three-star general who helps run West Point.

"They're awesome people and really partake with the cadets," he said.

If there's one aspect of the military lifestyle Markel hopes he rarely, if ever, encounters, it would be to find himself in a situation where he has to consume meals ready-to-eat.

Designed to give military members a full meal without fear of spoiling, the 1,200-calorie meals have drawn a negative reputation due to their taste.

While Markel said some MREs are delicious, others look disgusting.

"Creamy spinach sounds good on paper. But when you open it and let it finish heating, it smells really gross," Markel said. "You just can't stick it your mouth because, on its own, the smell is just so bad ... It doesn't look good. It looks kind of like a dog food meat coming out of a can situation.

"But when you're hungry and just trying to get energy to get through the day, you tend to just eat it and not think about it."

Now that he's in the latter half of his second year, Markel's future after graduation is starting to take on a clearer focus. Needing to serve at least a five-year military commitment upon graduation, cadets can list preferences for what military career field they would like to do. Markel said the chances of cadets landing one of their top preferences is tied directly to how they perform in school.

"Most of it is based on your class rank," he said.

In an ideal world, Markel said he would to work in the cybersecurity sector upon graduation.

"If I don't get that, I really want to go Signal. They do a lot of communication work. I'm still very interested in that," he said. "For my third top choice, I really want to do air defense artillery. I would get to work with technology as well as the combat arms people in that branch."

Markel said he's not too concerned on what military base he may ultimately be stationed at.

"For my top two, I really would like to be stationed up in Alaska or Germany. Besides that, I really don't have a preference," he said. "That's all willing to change."

For now, Markel is focused on keeping his nose to the grindstone and enjoying his West Point experience.

"It's a fun experience. Once I got past some of the grind and struggles, I honestly have come to love the place," he said.

Information from: Watertown Public Opinion, <http://www.thepublicopinion.com>

Sioux Falls schools consider workforce readiness test

By MEGAN RAPOSA, Argus Leader

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The Sioux Falls School District is looking to ensure more students graduate ready to enter college or the workforce, and adding another test could be part of the solution.

District officials earlier this month presented school board members with their case to consider adding the National Career Readiness Certificate to the list of assessments for high school students, the Argus Leader reported .

Officials took a closer look at NCRC in the weeks after learning that, per state accountability scores, most Sioux Falls high school graduates aren't ready for college or a career. The readiness certificate may help improve that score.

"What we need to figure out is: what's the benefit of giving this assessment? Is there a benefit to the student?" Superintendent Brian Maher asked board members.

Maher has not yet asked board members to vote on adding the extra assessment.

The measure of college or career readiness is a new one for South Dakota. The state added the metric to its annual school "report cards" in the last year after changes in federal education law became fully cemented.

The report cards award points to districts based on assessment scores and the type of coursework students take, e.g. Advanced Placement tests or career and technical education classes.

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In Sioux Falls, assessment scores currently only measure ACT scores and scores from Smarter Balanced, South Dakota's statewide standardized test. Both of those tests are primarily academic, but adding NCRC to the mix would give the district a sense of what types of jobs students could handle upon graduation, Assistant Superintendent Teresa Boysen said.

The readiness test — administered by the Department of Labor — measures job skills. Students are asked practical questions from counting back change to reading and interpreting information from charts and documents. Students then earn a certificate they can use to show employers their skill set.

Since 2013, nearly 100 schools statewide have begun using NCRC, and the number continues to grow, said Laura Scheibe, director of career and technical education for the state Department of Education.

"Roughly half of our public school kids are taking it," Scheibe said.

Board Member Carly Reiter questioned the measure of the NCRC test, asking if it's an "easy out" for students who don't score well on more academic-focused tests like the ACT or Smarter Balanced.

But state officials say the tests are intended to show different skills.

"You can't equate an NCRC certificate to an ACT score because they're different things ... it's another piece of information to demonstrate whether a student is ready to move on," Scheibe said.

Not all students in South Dakota go on to college. For those who choose to go straight into the workforce, NCRC is a way to show employers what they're ready for, Scheibe said.

The readiness assessment isn't something Scheibe sees becoming mandatory for high school students, but since it contributes to how districts are held accountable for student success, she anticipates more schools will sign on to offer the test.

Maher expressed skepticism of the state's report card and the picture it paints of student preparedness. He noted the difference in accountability scores between the Brandon Valley and Sioux Falls School Districts.

Brandon's score showed 66 percent of students ready for college or a career, more than double Sioux Falls' score of 32 percent, but Maher said he doesn't see Sioux Falls students as any less prepared.

"The scores, I really don't think they give any indication of students being more prepared for college and career readiness, regardless of what you might read," Maher said.

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

Jackson hits 4 3s, scores 21 as Omaha beats S. Dakota 75-68

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Zach Jackson and Mitch Hahn combined to score 29 of their 36 points in the second half and Omaha beat South Dakota 75-68 on Sunday night to snap a three-game skid against the Coyotes.

Jackson had 16 of his 21 points in the second half and Hahn finished with 15 points. JT Gibson also scored 15 points, on 7-of-9 shooting, and Matt Pile added 12 points for Omaha (11-5, 5-1 Summit League). The Mavericks have won four in a row and eight of their last nine.

KJ Robinson and Hahn hit back-to-back 3-pointers to spark a 13-3 run that made it 40-35 when Gibson made a jumper with 16:14 left and Omaha never again trailed. Stanley Umude and Cody Kelley sandwiched 3s around a layup by Hahn before Umude hit 1 of 2 free throws to trim South Dakota's deficit to 68-66 with 1:04 to play but Hahn answered with a 3-pointer. Jackson and Hahn each hit two foul shots in the final 29 seconds to seal it.

Umude had 20 points and Triston Simpson scored 17 for South Dakota (8-11, 2-4).

Mayors: Airline ends service to Pierre, Watertown

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Passenger air service has stopped to the South Dakota cities of Pierre and Watertown. Watertown Mayor Sarah Caron and Pierre Mayor Steve Harding said in a statement Sunday that California Pacific Airlines has stopped service to their cities.

CP Air provides essential air service to the two South Dakota cities. The mayors say both their communities currently have no scheduled air service and there is no information indicating that it will resume.

Harding says his city — the state capital — relies on air service for state and federal employees and

businesspeople.

CP Air did not immediately respond to requests for comment Sunday.

The mayors say the Department of Transportation has called for proposals from airlines interested in serving Pierre and Watertown. The deadline for submitting proposals is Jan. 30.

Study initiated to bring Missouri water to Rapid City

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — University researchers and a local water development board have teamed up to survey the prospect of channeling Missouri River water to Rapid City and western Pennington County

Four staff members and three students at the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology have piloted the study, the Rapid City Journal reported.

The West Dakota Water Development District subsidized their effort with a \$37,341 contract. The district board said their mission is “partnering with state and local entities to protect water resources.” The district is supported by a tariff of 2.4 cents per \$1,000 of valuation paid by property owners, which produces about \$230,000 in annual profits.

Nathan Gjovik, a West Dakota Water Development District board member, described the study as crucial to the future of the Rapid City region.

“From my perspective, this is the kind of project that this board is set up to try to develop,” Gjovik said.

The district has held a future-use license to extract up to 10,000 acre-feet of water per year, equal to more than 3 billion gallons, from the Missouri River since 1976. The permit has never been used for a water project, but the district has renewed the permit every seven years, most recently in 2017.

The study’s preliminary projections are that locally available water resources could be fully tapped as early as about 2040 if the area population grows. This means usage could outpace natural replenishment of water resources.

“I don’t want this just to be another study that sits on somebody’s shelf and gathers dust,” Gjovik said. “I want this to be a good expenditure of taxpayer funding that we can use to present to decision-makers.”

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

Lawmakers to debate legislation on gun rights, nepotism

By JAMES NORD, Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota lawmakers this week plan to hear Gov. Kristi Noem’s first budget address and debate bills that would expand gun rights, void an activities association policy for transgender student athletes and block state officials from hiring relatives.

A glance at the agenda when legislators return to the Capitol on Tuesday:

BUDGET PLAN

Noem will present her state budget proposal to the Legislature on Wednesday. In her State of the State address earlier in January, Noem discussed priorities including mental health, fighting the methamphetamine epidemic and connecting more people to high-speed internet. She has said the budget address will follow the outline she gave in the State of the State.

CONSTITUTIONAL CARRY

The full state Senate is scheduled to take up a measure this week that would allow people to carry concealed handguns without a permit in South Dakota. It’s a conservative prize that supporters hope will be won under Noem’s new administration.

Right now, it’s a misdemeanor for someone to carry a concealed pistol or to have one concealed in a vehicle without a permit; openly carrying a firearm in South Dakota is legal.

Former Gov. Dennis Daugaard vetoed a so-called constitutional carry bill in 2017, but Noem offered support for such a law during her campaign.

TRANSGENDER STUDENTS

A measure that would void an activities association policy allowing transgender students to request to play on the athletic team that matches their gender identity has been revived this year. The Senate Edu-

cation Committee is scheduled Thursday to debate the bill.

It would require a student's sex to be determined by their birth certificate or a South Dakota High School Activities Association physical exam form.

Republican Sen. Jim Bolin, the bill's main sponsor, has said the legislation is "all about fair competition." Libby Skarin, policy director at the American Civil Liberties Union of South Dakota, said in a statement that the measure is another attempt to "single transgender students out for discrimination" in South Dakota.

NEPOTISM

The Senate State Affairs Committee plans to take up a bill Wednesday seeking to bar state officials from hiring relatives. The proposal comes after Noem announced in December that her daughter would be a policy analyst in the governor's office.

Republican Sen. Stace Nelson, the bill's sponsor, said in an earlier statement that outraged residents contacted him after the hiring.

He said state employment should be based on merit, not on "political family power."

Noem spokeswoman Kristin Wileman said the governor should be able to develop a team who will deliver results for the state "regardless of their last name."

After 2016 ruling, battles over juvenile lifer cases persist

By SHARON COHEN and ADAM GELLER, AP National Writers

Locked up for life at 15, Norman Brown remains defined by the crime that put him behind bars.

Twenty-seven years ago, Brown joined a neighbor more than twice his age to rob a jewelry shop in Chesterfield, Missouri, and the man shot the owner to death. The shooter was executed. But state officials, bound by a 2016 U.S. Supreme Court ruling, pledged to give Brown an opportunity to get out — then rejected parole in a process a federal judge ruled recently must be overhauled.

Three years after the Supreme Court gave inmates like Brown a chance at freedom, the justice system is gaining speed in revisiting scores of cases. About 400 offenders originally sentenced to life without parole as juveniles have been released nationwide, and hundreds of others have been resentenced to shorter terms or made eligible for release by law.

But most remain behind bars as prosecutors and judges wrestle with difficult cases. Tensions have mounted and lawsuits have been filed in states like Missouri, while in 21 others, life-without-parole sentences are prohibited for those 17 and younger. About a third of those bans have been approved since 2016, according to the Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth.

"The national trend is certainly one where states are moving away from these sentences, whether by legislation or through the courts," said Jody Kent Lavy, executive director of the group. But "there are still some outliers that in many ways are refusing to comply with the court's mandate."

In Missouri, lawmakers decided the more than 100 inmates serving life for adolescent crimes would get a parole hearing after 25 years. But the state is in court because the parole board has denied release in 85 percent of cases it has heard and has yet to free anyone.

Parole hearings have been brief and focused on inmates' crimes, with little, if any, attention on the circumstances preceding them or what offenders have done to rehabilitate themselves, a lawsuit filed by the MacArthur Justice Center alleges.

The board's actions violate the constitutional requirement that inmates be provided a "realistic opportunity for release," a federal judge determined in October, ordering changes. Missouri's corrections agency and attorney general's office declined comment.

After Brown's hearing in May 2017, the board cited his crime in denying parole. The state has since argued he is not yet eligible because he received consecutive sentences. Brown, now 42, said he hopes the board will eventually recognize his remorse, as well as his thousands of hours in restorative justice programs and work as a prison hospice caretaker and training rescue dogs.

In a telephone interview from Potosi Correctional Center, Brown recounted what he did that night in 1991.

"It's shameful. ... Because I'm an adult now, I know what it is to love your family," he said. "I can defi-

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nately see where (opposition to release) comes from, and I think it comes from a place of pain.”

Florence Honickman’s husband, Stephen, was killed by Brown’s companion, and she vividly recalls the teen snatching a pendant off her neck as she lay bleeding from bullet wounds. She lives in Florida but returned to Missouri to oppose Brown’s parole.

“My family was turned upside down and inside out,” she said in an interview. “Do you really know deep down that this man — he’s a man now, not a child — has he really, really changed?”

The high court’s 2016 decision, one of four in recent years focused on the punishment of juveniles, hinged partly on research showing the brains of adolescents are slow to develop, making teen offenders likelier to act recklessly but capable of rehabilitation. The court said they must not be punished with the same severity and finality as adults, and that a life-without-parole sentence should be reserved for those inmates deemed beyond rehabilitation.

At the time, more than 2,000 inmates were serving mandatory life-without-parole sentences, most for murder convictions. And most cases were clustered in a few states.

In Pennsylvania, 399 of more than 500 juvenile lifers have been resentenced and 163 have been released, according to the Department of Corrections. Bradley Bridge, of the Defenders Association of Philadelphia, said the last of that city’s 325 lifers could be resentenced this spring. Judges have recently rejected some negotiated sentences as too light. The last of their deliberations are complicated by the fact that many still awaiting resentencing have served less time and have less of a prison record to assess, or they have mental illnesses or a history of prison violations.

“The cases we have remaining are probably the toughest ones,” Bridge said.

In Louisiana, after years of resistance by courts and prosecutors, the state is reconsidering the sentences of roughly 300 offenders. Through December, 45 had come before a parole committee, with 37 approved for release and 31 of those now out, according to the Board of Pardons and Parole.

Ivy Mathis was released in December after serving 26 years for killing a man during a home robbery. Mathis said that in prison she outgrew the rebelliousness of her teen years, worked in hospice care and got culinary training. She now works as a cook in two restaurants.

“I’m just thanking God, and I made up my mind, I will never return to prison. ... I’m not taking this second chance for granted,” she said.

Henry Montgomery, whose case was at the center of the Supreme Court’s 2016 ruling, has not been so lucky. Montgomery, 72, was denied parole last year. He was 16 when he killed a police officer who caught him skipping school. Montgomery, who worked in a prison silk screening shop and founded a boxing association for inmates, will be eligible for another hearing in February 2020.

“He’s stoic,” said Keith Nordyke, a lawyer with the Louisiana Parole Project. “You know one of the things that prison teaches you — 54 years of prison — is patience.”

Louisiana prosecutors are seeking new life sentences for 80 other inmates; the state recently approved \$1.3 million for inmates’ defense.

In Michigan, where a case before the state Supreme Court delayed reconsideration of many cases, more than 140 inmates have been resentenced, and about half of them have been freed. But prosecutors are pursuing new life-without-parole sentences for about 200 others.

Kent County Prosecutor Chris Becker has sought no-parole terms in about half of his 24 cases, and judges so far have agreed for four inmates — including Damon Jackson, 39, convicted in the death of his infant son. The boy was shaken, sexually abused and left blind and deaf before dying 2½ years later.

“We tried to take the worst of the worst, the most depraved ones,” Becker said.

In some cases, judges have rebuffed prosecutors’ bids for new life terms.

In another Kent County case, a judge recently resentenced inmates Chad Maleski and Joshua Rogers to 35 to 60 years, making them parole-eligible in about 17 years. Maleski and Rogers were 17 when they joined two others in abducting 66-year-old Willie Jones outside a Grand Rapids bowling alley. Jones was stuffed in the trunk of his car, repeatedly stabbed and left to die in a field. The judge cited Rogers’ remorse and participation in prison self-improvement programs and Maleski’s cooperation that led authorities to Jones’ body. Both men apologized.

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James Jones, the victim's nephew, had planned to speak harshly about Rogers at his resentencing. But after praying and hearing of the inmate's progress, he offered forgiveness.

"Who knows what God has (in store) for this young man?" Jones said.

While the Supreme Court's decision has prompted change, the justices have shown little appetite for revisiting the issue of juvenile sentences, leaving unsettled what to do with the thousands of other former teen offenders who are legally entitled to parole but serving such lengthy terms they are unlikely to ever get out.

In April, the court declined to hear the case of Missouri offender Bobby Bostic, who was 16 when he and a friend held up people delivering donated Christmas gifts to a poor St. Louis family. Bostic fired a shot that grazed one man. The teens also forced their way into a woman's car and demanded cash at gunpoint. Bostic's friend groped the victim before the two teens released her.

Bostic, who turned down a plea bargain, was sentenced to 241 years and won't be eligible for parole until he turns 112. He unsuccessfully appealed his sentence to Missouri's top court. And despite an earlier ruling banning life sentences for juveniles who did not kill, the high court declined to take the case.

"I'm not the victim," said Bostic, 40, who dreams of publishing six nonfiction books and nine volumes of poetry if released. "But a teenager dying in prison, what lesson do you teach him? He's got nothing to hope for."

In Maryland, the American Civil Liberties Union alleges in a lawsuit the state's parole system is unconstitutional because the release of juvenile offenders is rare and decided in secrecy. When the case was filed in 2016, no juvenile offender had been paroled for nonmedical reasons in two decades, said Sonia Kumar, an ACLU lawyer.

State law requires the governor to approve parole for any inmates sentenced to life. Gov. Larry Hogan has granted parole to three former juvenile offenders since taking office in 2015, all for medical reasons, and has granted clemency to two others.

Kumar argues there still is no meaningful opportunity for the state's 200-300 juvenile lifers to get out, even if they have evidence of rehabilitation. She represents two inmates recommended for clemency in 2017 whose cases are still pending with the governor. Both have served more than 35 years, have almost perfect prison records and have taken education classes, held jobs and won praise from corrections officers. Hogan's spokeswoman said these decisions require a "thorough deliberative process."

Other governors have recently approved inmates' release.

Before exiting office, Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam granted clemency this month to Cyntoia Brown, who was 16 when she got life for fatally shooting a Nashville real estate agent after he picked her up and paid her for sex. Brown's lawyers contended she was a sex trafficking victim who not only feared for her life but also lacked the mental capability to be culpable in the slaying because she was impaired by her mother's alcohol use while she was in the womb.

Under Tennessee's sentencing laws, Brown, now 30, would not have been eligible for parole until after serving 51 years — a mandate the governor said was "too harsh, especially in light of the extraordinary steps Ms. Brown has taken to rebuild her life."

Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper granted clemency last month to Curtis Brooks, serving life for his role in a 1995 fatal carjacking at the age of 15. Brooks already has served about 24 years; if he'd been resentenced per the Supreme Court's ruling, he would have faced at least six more before becoming eligible for parole.

Brooks was homeless when he met three boys and joined in a plan to steal a car in exchange for a place to stay, according to his former public defender, Hollynd Hoskins, who shepherded his clemency petition. Christopher Ramos, 24, was killed in the carjacking; Brooks was not the shooter.

Brooks' release was championed by a juror who convicted him, the trial judge, the lead detective in the case and his former elementary school teacher, who is now a Maryland legislator. He plans to work for her after his release in July. The victim's family had opposed clemency, however, and Brooks said he would not presume to ask for their forgiveness.

"It's not that I don't want it. I don't know if I am deserving," he said in a phone interview from prison. "I

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want them to see in the way I live my life that I do understand the impact of what happened that night... I want them hopefully one day to see the person I was, not the person I am."

See AP's full coverage of the aftermath of the court's ruling on juvenile lifers here .

Kamala Harris jumps into presidential race

By JUANA SUMMERS, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Kamala Harris, a first-term senator and former California attorney general known for her rigorous questioning of President Donald Trump's nominees, entered the Democratic presidential race on Monday. Vowing to "bring our voices together," Harris would be the first woman to hold the presidency and the second African-American if she succeeds.

Harris, a daughter of immigrant parents who grew up in Oakland, California, is one of the earliest high-profile Democrats to join what is expected to be a crowded field. She made her long anticipated announcement on ABC's "Good Morning America."

"I am running for president of the United States," she said. "And I'm very excited about it."

The 54-year old portrayed herself as a fighter for justice, decency and equality in a video distributed by her campaign as she announced her bid. "They're the values we as Americans cherish, and they're all on the line now," Harris says in the video. "The future of our country depends on you and millions of others lifting our voices to fight for our American values."

Harris launched her presidential as the nation observes what would have been the 90th birthday of the slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. The timing was a clear signal that the California senator— who has joked that she had a "stroller's-eye view" of the civil rights movement because her parents wheeled her and her sister Maya to protests — sees herself as another leader in that fight.

She abandoned the formality of launching an exploratory committee, instead going all in on a presidential bid.

She plans a formal campaign launch in Oakland on Jan. 27. The campaign will be based in Baltimore, with a second office in Oakland.

Harris joins what is expected to be a wide-open race for the Democratic presidential nomination. There's no apparent front-runner at this early stage and Harris will face off against several Senate colleagues.

Sens. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts and Kirsten Gillibrand of New York have both launched exploratory committees. Sens. Cory Booker of New Jersey, Sherrod Brown of Ohio and Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota are also looking at the race.

If Booker enters the race, he and Harris could face a fierce competition for support from black voters.

Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, who unsuccessfully sought the 2016 Democratic nomination, is also considering a campaign. Several other Democrats have already declared their intentions, including former Maryland Rep. John Delaney and former Obama administration housing chief Julian Castro.

Harris launches her campaign fresh off of a tour to promote her latest memoir, "The Truths We Hold," which was widely seen as a stage-setter for a presidential bid.

She is already planning her first trip to an early primary state as a declared candidate. On Friday, Harris will travel to South Carolina to attend the Pink Ice Gala in Columbia, which is hosted by a South Carolina chapter of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, which Harris pledged as an undergraduate student at Howard University. The sorority, founded more than 100 years ago, is a stronghold in the African-American community.

South Carolina, where black voters make up a large share of the Democratic electorate, is likely to figure heavily into Harris's prospects. And early voting in Harris's home state of California will overlap with the traditional early nominating contests, which could give Harris a boost.

Harris's campaign team is already taking shape and includes several veterans of Democratic politics.

Juan Rodriguez, who ran Harris's 2016 Senate campaign, will manage her presidential bid. Her sister, Maya Harris, a former top adviser to Hillary Clinton, will be the campaign chair. The veteran campaign

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finance lawyer Marc Elias will serve as the Harris campaign's general counsel, and Angelique Cannon, who worked for Clinton's 2016 campaign, will serve as national finance director. David Huynh, who was Clinton's director of delegate operations in 2016, will serve as a senior adviser. Lily Adams, a Clinton campaign alum who has worked as Harris's spokeswoman, will be communications director.

Her staff says she plans to reject the assistance of a super PAC, as well as corporate PAC money. She's invested heavily in cultivating a digital, small-dollar donor network before her presidential bid.

Before her 2016 victory in the Senate race, Harris made her career in law enforcement. She served as the district attorney in San Francisco before she was elected to serve as attorney general.

Harris is likely to face questions about her law enforcement record, particularly after the Black Lives Matter movement and activists across the country pushed for a criminal justice overhaul. Harris's prosecutorial record has recently come under new scrutiny after a blistering opinion piece in The New York Times criticized her repeated claim that she was a "progressive prosecutor," focused on changing a broken criminal justice system from within.

Harris addressed her law enforcement background in her book. She argued it was a "false choice" to decide between supporting the police and advocating for greater scrutiny of law enforcement.

She "knew that there was an important role on the inside, sitting at the table where the decisions were being made," she wrote. "When activists came marching and banging on the doors, I wanted to be on the other side to let them in."

Harris supported legislation that passed the Senate last year that overhauled the criminal justice system, particularly when it comes to sentencing rules.

Harris is framing her campaign through her courtroom experience. The theme of her nascent campaign is "Kamala Harris, for the people," the same words she spoke as a prosecutor, trying a case in the courtroom.

Shutdown goes on as Trump offer doesn't budge Democrats

By JILL COLVIN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Thirty-one days into the partial government shutdown, Democrats and Republicans appeared no closer to ending the impasse than when it began, with President Donald Trump lashing out at his opponents after they dismissed a plan he'd billed as a compromise.

Trump on Sunday branded House Speaker Nancy Pelosi a "radical" and said she was acting "irrationally." The president also tried to fend off criticism from the right, as conservatives accused him of embracing "amnesty" for immigrants in the country illegally.

Trump offered on Saturday to temporarily extend protections for young immigrants brought to the country illegally as children and those fleeing disaster zones in exchange for \$5.7 billion for his border wall. But Democrats said the three-year proposal didn't go nearly far enough.

"No, Amnesty is not a part of my offer," Trump tweeted Sunday, noting that he'd offered temporary, three-year extensions — not permanent relief. But he added: "Amnesty will be used only on a much bigger deal, whether on immigration or something else."

The criticism from both sides underscored Trump's boxed in-position as he tries to win at least some Democratic buy-in without alienating his base.

With hundreds of thousands of federal workers set to face another federal pay period without paychecks, the issue passed to the Senate, where Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has agreed to bring Trump's proposal to the floor this week.

Democrats say there's little chance the measure will reach the 60-vote threshold usually required to advance legislation in the Senate. Republicans have a 53-47 majority, which means they need at least some Democrats to vote in favor.

McConnell has long tried to avoid votes on legislation that is unlikely to become law. And the Kentucky Republican has said for weeks that he has no interest in "show votes" aimed only at forcing members to take sides after Trump rejected the Senate's earlier bipartisan bill to avert the shutdown.

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What's unclear is how McConnell will bring Trump's plan forward — or when voting will begin. The Republican leader is a well-known architect of complicated legislative maneuvers. One question is whether he would allow a broader immigration debate with amendments to Trump's plan on the Senate floor.

McConnell spokesman David Popp said Sunday, "When we have (a plan) we will be sure to let everyone know."

One key Republican, Sen. James Lankford of Oklahoma, said that he and other lawmakers had been encouraging the White House to put an offer on the table — any offer — to get both sides talking.

"Get something out there the president can say, 'I can support this,' and it has elements from both sides, put it on the table, then open it up for debate," Lankford said on ABC's "This Week."

"The vote this week in the Senate is not to pass the bill, it is to open up and say 'Can we debate this? Can we amend it? Can we make changes?'" Lankford said. "Let's find a way to be able to get the government open because there are elements in this that are clearly elements that have been supported by Democrats strongly in the past."

"The president really wants to come to an agreement here. He has put offers on the table," said Rep Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., on NBC's "Meet the Press." "The responsible thing for the Democrats to do is put a counteroffer on the table if you don't like this one."

Vice President Mike Pence said on "Fox News Sunday" that Trump had "set the table for a deal that will address the crisis on our border, secure our border and give us a pathway" to reopen the government.

Democrats, however, continue to say that they will not negotiate with Trump until he ends the shutdown, the longest in American history.

"The starting point of this negotiation ought to be reopening the government," Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va., told NBC. "We cannot reward the kind of behavior of hostage taking. Because if the president can arbitrarily shut down the government now, he will do it time and again."

As news media reported the outline of Trump's proposal ahead of his Saturday speech, Pelosi and other Democrats made clear the president's plan was a non-starter — a quick reaction Trump took issue with Sunday.

"Nancy Pelosi and some of the Democrats turned down my offer yesterday before I even got up to speak. They don't see crime & drugs, they only see 2020," he said in first of a flurry of morning tweets.

Trump also lashed out at Pelosi personally — something he had refrained from early on — and accused her, without evidence, of having "behaved so irrationally" and moving "so far to the left that she has now officially become a Radical Democrat."

He also appeared to threaten to target millions of people living in the country illegally if he doesn't eventually get his way, writing that "there will be no big push to remove the 11,000,000 plus people who are here illegally-but be careful Nancy!"

Pelosi responded with a tweet of her own, urging Trump to "Re-open the government, let workers get their paychecks and then we can discuss how we can come together to protect the border."

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer also dug in during an appearance in New York, where he predicted Democrats would block the president's proposal from passing the Senate.

"If he opens the government, we'll discuss whatever he offers, but hostage taking should not work," Schumer said as he pushed legislation that would protect government workers who can't pay their bills because of the government shutdown. "It's very hard to negotiate when a gun is held to your head."

Associated Press writers Lisa Mascaro in Washington and Mike Balsamo and Julie Walker in New York contributed to this report.

Frigid air, high winds cause dangerous travel conditions

By The Associated Press

Frigid air and high winds are causing dangerous travel conditions throughout the eastern U.S. after a powerful winter storm pummeled the region over the weekend.

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The National Weather Service forecasts Monday's temperatures will be more than 20 degrees below normal across the Northeast.

Freezing rain and more snow is expected in parts of New England and the Great Lakes. The bitter cold is expected to stymie travel once again with FlightAware reporting nearly 250 flights canceled as of early Monday morning.

Another storm system is already developing over the Rockies that could blanket the same region with more snow by the end of the week.

Patriots make 3rd straight Super Bowl, beat Chiefs 37-31 OT

By BARRY WILNER, AP Pro Football Writer

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — It's the dead of winter, meaning the weather in New England can be brutal. And that the Patriots are headed to the Super Bowl.

It took them overtime and more of Tom Brady's brilliance to get there — for the third straight year. While the folks back home dealt with a frigid storm, Brady blew through Kansas City's exhausted defense on a 75-yard drive to Rex Burkhead's 2-yard touchdown run in a 37-31 victory Sunday for the AFC championship.

The drive, during which New England (13-5) had three third-down conversions, was reminiscent of when the Patriots beat Atlanta in the only Super Bowl to go to OT two years ago.

"Overtime, on the road against a great team," Brady said. "They had no quit. Neither did we. We played our best football at the end. I don't know, man, I'm tired. That was a hell of a game."

Awaiting them in Atlanta are the Los Angeles Rams, who won 26-23 in overtime in New Orleans for the NFC championship. The Rams (15-3) last made the Super Bowl in 2002 while based in St. Louis, losing to the Patriots.

New England benefited from two critical replay reviews and made its ninth Super Bowl with Brady at quarterback and Bill Belichick as coach.

"This is crazy," said Brady, who was 30 of 46 for 348 yards. "What a game."

It's the first time both conference title games went to OT. The last time both visitors won conference championship matches was 2012; New England was 3-5 on the road this season.

"We knew what our record was, but we didn't let that dictate us," said defensive end Trey Flowers, who led a staunch charge on Patrick Mahomes. "Whatever happened in the regular season happened. We came out and did it when it counted."

Several times, the Patriots appeared to have it won, only to see Kansas City (13-5) come back in spectacular fashion.

Brady, at 41 already the oldest quarterback to have played in a Super Bowl, drove New England 65 yards in 1:24 to Burkhead's go-ahead 4-yard touchdown with 39 seconds left in regulation. That was enough, though, for his far younger counterpart, the 23-year-old All-Pro Mahomes, to take the Chiefs 48 yards to Harrison Butker's 39-yard field goal with 8 seconds left to force overtime.

It was a sizzling offensive showing in the fourth quarter after defense had been in charge most of the way. Indeed, the Chiefs were blanked in the opening half for the first time all season.

And they never saw the ball in overtime, which along with the two replay decisions might call into play NFL rules and officiating.

"I thought if we got the chance," Mahomes said, "we'd score."

Mahomes finished 16 of 31 for 295 yards and three touchdowns.

New England became the third franchise to reach three Super Bowls in a row. And Belichick now has 30 postseason victories, more than Bill Walsh and Don Shula combined. That Hall of Fame coaching duo also won five Super Bowls; Belichick shoots for No. 6 in two weeks.

An apparent muff by the usually reliable Julian Edelman on a fourth-quarter punt return was overturned by a lengthy video review, prompting raucous booing and some demonstrative arguing from the usually laid-back Andy Reid. Edelman definitely touched his next try when Brady's pass deflected off his hands directly to safety Daniel Sorensen. His 22-yard return set up Kansas City at the Patriots 23, and Damien

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Williams, who scored three times, had no defender near him down the left sideline for the score that made it 21-17, KC's first lead.

Back came Brady, engineering a 75-yard march on which Chris Hogan's diving one-handed catch on third down appeared to touch the ground. Reid challenged — and lost.

Minutes later, rookie Sony Michel scored from the 10, his second TD of the night.

With 3½ minutes remaining, there was plenty of time for more points. Williams' 2-yard run gave the Chiefs a 28-24 edge that New England took up most of the remaining time overcoming. The Patriots were helped by an offside call on linebacker Dee Ford that negated an interception which would have clinched a KC victory.

Butker's field goal sent it to overtime.

"We put ourselves in position to win the game, that's what makes it so tough," Reid said. "If it's a rout, you chalk it up to experience. But this one right here, where you're in it to win it, that's a tough deal. We gave ourselves every opportunity to do it, and they got us in overtime."

The Chiefs hadn't been blanked in any half this season, but they barely were a presence in the first 30 minutes, when they had the ball for 8:53. Mahomes was sacked three times for 43 yards; Kansas City's record-setting attack ran only 16 plays and gained a mere 32 yards.

The zero disappeared quickly in the third quarter. Finally given solid protection, Mahomes unleashed a 54-yard completion to Sammy Watkins over All-Pro cornerback Stephon Gilmore. He then hit another All-Pro, tight end Travis Kelce, on a slant to make it 14-7 — and awaken the slumbering crowd.

But one of several bad decisions further damaged Kansas City when Tyreek Hill, the All-Pro flex player, retreated deep in Chiefs territory returning a punt. Eventually, KC had to punt and the Patriots had excellent field position, setting up a 47-yard field goal by Stephen Gostkowski.

Not one to be shy about innovation, Mahomes completely sidearmed a throw to Watkins for 10 yards on a third down, then a dump-off to Williams covered 33. Kelce drew a pass interference call on J.C. Jackson in the end zone, and Mahomes threw a strike to Williams for the score.

Although the Chiefs were on their heels much of the night, they were down only 17-14.

LOPSIDED FIRST HALF

Just as they did last week in manhandling the Chargers early and cruising, the Patriots delivered a message — and a touchdown — on their first series. It was a classic, covering 80 yards in 15 plays and using up more than eight minutes. Michel, who had 113 yards rushing, scored from the 1.

But Brady made a rare mistake on the next dominant drive. His third-down pass from the 1 for Rob Gronkowski was short and Reggie Ragland picked it off.

Brady had never thrown an interception from the 1.

When the Chiefs finally got a trademark big play on Mahomes' 42-yard completion to Hill, it went for naught. Mahomes overthrew a wide-open Williams near the end zone, then took a 14-yard sack to send KC out of field goal range.

Big mistake.

The Patriots kept dominating the line of scrimmage, Brady took them 90 yards and connected with Phillip Dorsett over sloppy coverage by Steven Nelson to make it 14-0 with 27 seconds left in the half.

STATS

In Week 6, the Patriots beat the Chiefs 43-40 in a game featuring 946 yards total offense. This one had 814. ... New England has played in eight straight AFC title games, but this is its first road playoff win since the 2006 season vs. San Diego. ... Brady matched former Patriots K Adam Vinatieri, now with the Colts, for the most wins in NFL history (236). ... Kansas City's defense tied for first in the NFL with 52 sacks, but had none on Sunday. New England had four.

COIN TOSS

Reid's decision to defer after winning the opening coin toss proved unwise as New England had 22 plays in the opening period, and Kansas City had seven. Then, the Chiefs lost the more important toss before overtime. Less than five minutes later, they were headed to the offseason.

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UP NEXT

The Patriots head to Atlanta to play the Rams in the Super Bowl.

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

2-for-1: Total lunar eclipse comes with supermoon bonus

By MARCIA DUNN, AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — The only total lunar eclipse this year and next came with a supermoon bonus.

On Sunday night, the moon, Earth and sun lined up to create the eclipse, which was visible throughout North and South America, where skies were clear. There won't be another until the year 2021.

It was also the year's first supermoon, when a full moon appears a little bigger and brighter thanks to its slightly closer position.

The entire eclipse took more than three hours. Totality — when the moon's completely bathed in Earth's shadow — lasted an hour. During a total lunar eclipse, the eclipsed, or blood, moon turns red from sunlight scattering off Earth's atmosphere.

In addition to the Americas, the entire lunar extravaganza could be observed, weather permitting, all the way across the Atlantic to parts of Europe.

Bolton's test: Massaging Trump tweets into foreign policy

By ZEKE MILLER, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In President Donald Trump's Washington, matters of war and peace are decided in 280-character bursts. It's up to John Bolton to massage them into a foreign policy.

The mustachioed national security adviser developed a reputation as a bureaucratic bulldozer through more than three decades in and out of government. But the wrangling over Trump's decision to pull troops out of Syria demanded a new skill — the ability to dramatically redraft the president's policy without provoking a hint of protest from the commander in chief.

When Trump announced on Dec. 19 that he saw no need for U.S. troops to remain in Syria, senior U.S. officials expected the Trump-ordered withdrawal to be completed within a month. Aides, lawmakers and overseas allies were beside themselves with concern that the U.S. was betraying its Kurdish allies in the fight against the Islamic State and ceding influence in the region to Iran and Russia. Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis quit in protest.

But one month after Trump declared that U.S. forces were "coming back now" and White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said the administration had "started returning United States troops home," the drawdown of U.S. troops has only just begun. The explanation, senior White House officials said, is the behind-the-scenes effort by Bolton.

Bolton was always an unlikely pick to be Trump's third national security adviser, with a world view seemingly ill-fit to the president's isolationist "America First" pronouncements. He's espoused hawkish foreign policy views dating back to the Reagan administration and became a household name over his vociferous support for the Iraq War as the U.S. ambassador to the U.N. under George W. Bush. Bolton even briefly considered running for president in 2016, in part to make the case against the isolationism that Trump would come to embody.

Yet he earned Trump's ear in part through his frequent appearances on Fox News, the president's favored network. And despite the president's aversion to his bushy mustache, the two have formed a close relationship since Bolton took over at the National Security Council in April.

"Frankly, what I have said in private now is behind me," Bolton told Fox News last year just after joining the White House. "The important thing is what the president says and the advice I give him."

Longtime associates credit Bolton with a keen ability to manage-up to the president — a key differentia-

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tor between Bolton and his predecessor, H.R. McMaster, an Army general whose professorial tones grated on Trump.

That doesn't mean that Bolton was on board with Trump's impulsive policy announcement on Syria, officials said. Rather than go public with the same concerns aired by Mattis and others, though, Bolton quietly set out on a monthlong revision of Trump's order, leading to critical adjustments that the administration, at least publicly, is loathe to acknowledge.

"A lot of the press coverage about the decision on Syria missed what the president had in mind," Bolton insisted in Jerusalem this month, overlooking the fact that many of Trump's own aides were also in the dark. His role, Bolton said, "is to help elaborate what the president's conditions are and what he expects."

He and Trump have harshly pushed back on any notion of a policy reversal. White House aides cast Bolton's role as merely "elucidating" or "clarifying" the president's initial order.

"No different from my original statements," Trump tweeted on Jan. 7.

In reality, there were key changes. One month in, materiel has been removed from northeastern Syria, but troops remain. In the war-torn country's south, 200 U.S. service members serving in al-Tanf are now remaining in place indefinitely as a check against Iran — a step sought by Israel. And in a trip to the Middle East this month, Bolton announced new "conditions" on the withdrawal, including demanding assurances from Turkey it won't attack Kurdish fighters in Syria.

The pace of the planned withdrawal was dramatically slowed, first, after Trump's three-hour December visit to Iraq to meet with U.S. commanders in which they argued that they, not allies, were best positioned to destroy the last vestiges of the Islamic State's territorial caliphate in Syria. Then came concerns about the fate of the Kurds, who face assault from Turkey, which considers them a terrorist group, and Iranian regional influence.

According to seven administration officials, Bolton's influence was central to the "reinterpretation" of Trump's initial order and convincing the stubborn commander in chief to go along with it. White House aides maintained that the two have a strong relationship in part because Bolton has tried not to draw attention to the changes. The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe Bolton's role and the administration's policy thinking.

It was a sign of Bolton's outsized role in foreign policy that when he traveled to Israel and Turkey earlier this month to clarify the policy, he brought along a contingent of press aboard a modified Boeing 757 of the type typically used by the vice president and secretary of state. It was the first trip by a national security adviser to include reporters in recent memory.

Bolton, who was briefly considered by Trump for the role of U.N. ambassador, was clearly in his element, taking in cultural sites with allies and soberly delivering dire warnings to foes. Unafraid to stir the pot, he didn't seem to mind a bit when Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan very publicly accused him of making "a very serious mistake" in saying the U.S. would insist that Turkey refrain from attacking its Kurdish partners.

The episode led Erdogan to scrub plans to meet with Bolton and sent relations between the NATO allies to a fresh low.

Bolton's approach has drawn some charges of heavy-handedness from other corners of the administration, as some Trump loyalists argue he's using the NSC to implement his own priorities over the president's. Some in the White House were shocked that the NSC took hours to explain Trump's Syria decision, chalking it up to Bolton's objection to the policy. But Bolton allies contend he's fulfilling the president's wishes in fleshing-out the president's top-line decisions, and White House officials insist reports of bad blood between the two are misguided.

Bolton "works every day to advance President Trump's national security strategy to keep our country safe and secure," Vice President Mike Pence said in a statement. "Ambassador Bolton is a strong leader who is respected by our allies around the world. He understands that America First means strong U.S. leadership is critical on the world stage and it is my great honor to serve with him."

Associated Press writer Matthew Lee contributed to this report.

The shutdown today: Trump lashes out after Dems reject offer

By The Associated Press

What's up with the partial government shutdown on Day 31:

WHAT'S NEW

President Donald Trump lashed out at House Speaker Nancy Pelosi after Democrats made clear they would not accept his proposal to fund a border wall in exchange for temporarily protections for young immigrants brought to the country illegally as children and those fleeing disaster zones.

Trump had billed the plan as a compromise, but Democrats said it didn't go nearly far enough, prompting a flurry of Sunday morning tweets.

"Nancy Pelosi and some of the Democrats turned down my offer yesterday before I even got up to speak. They don't see crime & drugs, they only see 2020," Trump wrote. He also accused the California lawmaker, without evidence, of having "behaved so irrationally" and moving "so far to the left that she has now officially become a Radical Democrat."

Pelosi responded with a tweet of her own, urging Trump to "Re-open the government, let workers get their paychecks and then we can discuss how we can come together to protect the border."

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer also dug in during an appearance in New York.

"If he opens the government, we'll discuss whatever he offers, but hostage taking should not work," Schumer said.

QUOTES OF THE DAY

"No, Amnesty is not a part of my offer," Trump tweeted in response to criticism he's also getting from the right. "It is a 3 year extension of DACA. Amnesty will be used only on a much bigger deal, whether on immigration or something else. Likewise there will be no big push to remove the 11,000,000 plus people who are here illegally-but be careful Nancy!"

"You've got to start by opening the government. What we cannot do, and I've actually had Republicans as well recognize this, is that we cannot reward the kind of behavior of hostage taking. Because if the president can arbitrarily shut down the government now, he will do it time and again," Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va., told NBC's "Meet the Press."

WHAT'S COMING NEXT

Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has agreed to bring up legislation this week based on the proposal Trump outlined Saturday.

But Democrats say there's little chance the measure will reach the 60-vote threshold usually required to advance legislation in the Senate. Republicans have a 53-47 majority.

It's also unclear how McConnell will bring Trump's plan forward — or when voting will begin. The Republican leader is a well-known architect of complicated legislative maneuvers. One question is whether he would allow a broader immigration debate with amendments to Trump's plan on the Senate floor.

WHAT REMAINS CLOSED

Nine of the 15 Cabinet-level departments have not been funded, including Agriculture, Homeland Security, State, Transportation, Interior and Justice. Some iconic National Park facilities are shuttered as are the Smithsonian museums and the National Zoo in Washington. Nearly everyone at NASA is being told to stay home.

WHO IS AT WORK BUT NOT GETTING PAID

Employees of the Transportation Security Administration are among the estimated 460,000 federal employees who have been working without pay. The agency has been experiencing far higher than usual unscheduled absences during the shutdown — and now the agency says staffers have been calling out

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of work because they can't afford to get there.

According to a Sunday release, "many employees are reporting that they are not able to report to work due to financial limitations."

Indeed, the agency said that, on Saturday, 8 percent of employees skipped work compared to 3 percent a year ago.

The disruption has forced screening area closures at some airports, including at Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport, where "Checkpoint A" was closed Saturday.

Still, TSA reports that, on Saturday, 99.9 percent of passengers waited less than 30 minutes and 93.8 percent waited less than 15 minutes.

For AP's complete coverage of the U.S. government shutdown: <https://apnews.com/GovernmentShutdown>

AP FACT CHECK: Trump's murky claims on weather, shutdown

By HOPE YEN and CALVIN WOODWARD, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — There's nothing like a cold snap to bring out the global-warming skepticism of President Donald Trump.

The fact that periods of extreme cold happen in a warming climate is well known by his government but Trump's crack Sunday — "Wouldn't be bad to have a little of that good old fashioned Global Warming right now!" — suggests that hasn't sunk in for the president.

Over the past week and through the weekend, Trump and his team misstated the reality on myriad issues, many connected with the partial government shutdown, Trump's proposed wall and the Russia investigation. Here's a look:

RUSSIA

TRUMP: "Remember it was Buzzfeed that released the totally discredited 'Dossier,' paid for by Crooked Hillary Clinton and the Democrats (as opposition research), on which the entire Russian probe is based!" — tweet Friday.

THE FACTS: Trump's claim that special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia probe is based on a "discredited dossier" is false. The FBI's investigation actually began months before it received a dossier of anti-Trump research financed by the Democratic Party and Hillary Clinton's campaign. The FBI probe's origins were based on other evidence — not the existence of the dossier, which has not been discredited.

Last year, the Republican-controlled House Intelligence Committee found the Russia probe was initiated after the FBI received information related to Trump campaign foreign policy adviser George Papadopoulos, not the dossier. The committee's final report was praised by Trump.

CLIMATE CHANGE

TRUMP: "Large parts of the Country are suffering from tremendous amounts of snow and near record setting cold. Amazing how big this system is. Wouldn't be bad to have a little of that good old fashioned Global Warming right now!" — tweet Sunday.

THE FACTS: Trump is suggesting, as he has done before, that global warming can't exist if it's cold outside. But he is conflating weather and climate. Weather is like mood, which changes daily. Climate is like personality, which is long term.

The climate is warming, which still allows for intense cold spells.

While much of the United States was frigid Sunday, that is still less than 2 percent of the world. Earth on Sunday was about 0.9 degrees (0.5 Celsius) warmer than from 1979-2000, according to the University of Maine's Climate Reanalyzer.

The White House in November produced the National Climate Assessment by scientists from 13 Trump administration agencies and outside scientists. It amounted to a slap in the face for those who question whether climate is changing.

"Climate change is transforming where and how we live and presents growing challenges to human health and quality of life, the economy, and the natural systems that support us," the report says.

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The White House report swept aside the idea, already discredited, that a particular plunge in temperatures can cast uncertainty on whether Earth is warming. It says more than 90 percent of current warming is caused by humans: "There are no credible alternative human or natural explanations supported by the observational evidence."

THE SHUTDOWN

TRUMP: "As a candidate for President, I promised I would fix this crisis, and I intend to keep that promise one way or the other. ...To physically secure our border, the plan includes \$5.7 billion for a strategic deployment of physical barriers, or a wall. This is not a 2,000-mile concrete structure from sea to sea. These are steel barriers in high-priority locations." — remarks Saturday.

THE FACTS: His campaign promise to build a concrete border wall continues to evolve.

During the 2016 campaign, Trump pledged to build a "big, beautiful wall" made of concrete, rebar and steel across the length of the southern border with Mexico. Back then, he lashed out at the suggestion that what he was proposing had anything in common with mere fencing.

"Jeb Bush just talked about my border proposal to build a 'fence,' he tweeted in 2015. "It's not a fence, Jeb, it's a WALL, and there's a BIG difference!"

And as recently as Dec. 31, he tweeted, "An all concrete Wall was NEVER ABANDONED."

He now commonly refers to the wall as "steel slats" and "steel barriers."

TRUMP: "If we build a powerful and fully designed see-through steel barrier on our southern border, the crime rate and drug problem in our country would be quickly and greatly reduced. Some say it could be cut in half." — remarks from White House on Saturday.

TRUMP, on the virtues of a wall: "We can stop heroin." — White House remarks Saturday.

THE FACTS: His comments fly in the face of findings by his government about how drugs get into the county. Drugs from Mexico are primarily smuggled into the U.S. at official border crossings, not remote lands that can be walled off. His proposal Saturday to end the government shutdown implicitly recognizes that reality by proposing money to improve drug-detection technology specifically at land ports of entry.

Even so, Trump pitched a wall as a solution to drugs and crime.

The Drug Enforcement Administration says "only a small percentage" of heroin seized by U.S. authorities comes across on territory between ports of entry. It says the same is true of drugs overall.

Even if a wall could stop all drugs from Mexico, America's drug problem would be far from over. For example, the government says about 40 percent of opioid deaths in 2016 involved prescription painkillers, made by pharmaceutical companies. Some feed the addiction of people who have prescriptions; others are stolen and sold on the black market. Moreover, illicit versions of powerful synthetic opioids such as fentanyl have come to the U.S. from China.

On crime, many researchers have found that people in the U.S. illegally are less likely to commit violence than U.S. citizens.

TRUMP: "Nancy Pelosi's in Hawaii over the holidays, now she's in Puerto Rico with a bunch of Democrats and lobbyists, you know, enjoying the sun and partying down there." — Fox News interview on Jan. 12.

TRUMP: "I'd rather see the Democrats come back from their vacation and act. ... I'm in the White House, and most of them are in different locations. They're watching a certain musical in a very nice location." — Fox News interview.

TRUMP: "A lot of the Democrats were in Puerto Rico celebrating something. I don't know, maybe they're celebrating the shutdown." — comments Jan. 14.

THE FACTS: Far from "enjoying the sun" in Puerto Rico, Pelosi stayed in Washington, which got a big snowfall. She spent that weekend working at the Capitol, said Drew Hammill, her deputy chief of staff.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer did not go to Puerto Rico, either. The senator from New York spent that weekend in New York, said spokesman Justin Goodman.

Most Democratic lawmakers were somewhere other than Puerto Rico. Most who went are members of

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the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. They attended the annual winter retreat of the caucus's political and fundraising arm.

Some attended "Hamilton" as the musical opened a two-week run in Puerto Rico expected to raise millions of dollars for artists and cultural groups struggling in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. Referring to Democrats at the fundraising performance in his Fox News interview, Trump called it "frankly, ridiculous."

During the trip, lawmakers indeed met political contributors but also made several visits to local and federal institutions, said Marieli Padro, spokeswoman for Puerto Rico Resident Commissioner Jenniffer Gonzalez. Last Saturday, a small group visited the veterans' hospital to learn about its needs post-hurricane, while another group met U.S. Coast Guard officials.

Trump is correct that Pelosi visited Hawaii over the Christmas holiday.

TRUMP: "We need strong barriers and walls. Nothing else is going to work." — remarks Thursday at the Pentagon.

TRUMP: "You can have all the people you want dressed in military. You can have ICE. You can have Border Patrol. If you don't have that barrier, there's not a thing you can do. You know, they all say, 'We like technology.' I like technology, too. But we can have all the drones in the world flying around; we can have all the sensors in the world, but if you don't have a strong steel or concrete barrier, there's no way you're going to stop these people from rushing." — remarks Jan. 14 in New Orleans.

THE FACTS: The evidence is inconclusive on the effectiveness of border walls or other barriers.

The Government Accountability Office, Congress' auditing arm, reported in 2017 that the government does not have a way to measure how well barriers work to deter illegal immigration from Mexico. Despite \$2.3 billion spent by the government on such construction from 2007 to 2015, GAO found that authorities "cannot measure the contribution of fencing to border security operations along the southwest border because it has not developed metrics for this assessment."

Few people dispute that fences contributed to a sharp drop in crossings in cities such as San Diego and El Paso, Texas. Before fences were built in San Diego, crossers played soccer on U.S. soil as vendors hawked tamales, waiting until night fell to overwhelm agents. But those barriers also pushed people into more remote and less-patrolled areas such as in Arizona, where thousands of migrants have perished in extreme heat.

When barriers were built in the Border Patrol's Yuma, Arizona, sector in the mid-2000s, arrests for illegal crossings plummeted 94 percent in three years to 8,363 from 138,438. When barriers were built in San Diego in the 1990s and early 2000s, arrests fell 80 percent over seven years from 524,231 in 1995 to 100,681 in 2002. But both areas also saw sharp increases in Border Patrol staffing during that time, making it difficult to pinpoint why illegal crossings fell so dramatically.

KEVIN HASSETT, Trump economic adviser: "You know as soon as it's resolved, then people get their paychecks and the government will go back to acting normal and the economy will go back to the 3 percent growth that President Trump's policies have delivered." — interview Tuesday with Fox Business Network.

THE FACTS: It's true the economy probably will get a boost once the shutdown ends, but few independent economists think that boost will be sustained. The economy is facing other headwinds that make it unlikely growth will return to 2018's pace. Before the shutdown, most independent economists already were forecasting that growth would slow this year as the impact of President Trump's tax credit fades and trade tensions and slowing global growth take a toll.

Even if the government shutdown ends up being a wash in economic terms, with strong growth in the second quarter offsetting weakness in the first, the economy is likely to be weaker this year than last. Scott Anderson, an economist at Bank of the West, expects last year's stock market drop will cause many wealthier households to pull back on spending, a drag on growth this year.

He's not alone. A group of 15 economists at major U.S. banks earlier this month projected that growth would slow to just a 2.1 percent pace in 2019, down from roughly 3 percent in 2018.

The economy's current health is difficult to gauge because the partial shutdown means many economic

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statistics aren't being released. Recent signs are mixed: The job market is strong, with few layoffs in sight, and manufacturing output rose in December. But higher interest rates have also caused home prices and sales to fall.

SYRIA

VICE PRESIDENT MIKE PENCE: "The caliphate has crumbled, and ISIS has been defeated." — remarks Wednesday at State Department.

THE FACTS: Pence's remark followed the deadly suicide bombing claimed by IS, which demonstrated the extremist group, however weakened, has not been vanquished. The bombing underscored Pentagon assertions that IS still poses a threat and is capable of deadly attacks.

The attack killed at least 16 people in Syria, including two U.S. service members and two American civilians. It was the deadliest assault on U.S. troops in Syria since American forces went into the country in 2015.

A tweet Wednesday morning by Pence's press secretary, Alyssa Farah, indicated the vice president had been briefed on the attacks before he delivered his remarks claiming the defeat of IS. Pence later released a statement acknowledging the fatalities and IS "remnants" but reaffirming Trump's plan to withdraw troops.

"We will never allow the remnants of ISIS to re-establish their evil and murderous caliphate," he said.

Trump, in a Dec. 19 tweet, announced the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria. He said: "We have defeated ISIS in Syria, my only reason for being there during the Trump Presidency." He said the troops would begin coming home "now." That plan triggered immediate pushback from military leaders and the resignation of Defense Secretary Jim Mattis.

Over the past month, however, Trump and others have appeared to adjust the timeline, and U.S. officials have suggested it will probably take several months to withdraw American forces from Syria safely.

VETERANS

TRUMP: "Just announced that Veterans unemployment has reached an 18 year low, really good news for our Vets and their families. Will soon be an all time low! Do you think the media will report on this and all of the other great economic news? — tweet Tuesday.

THE FACTS: Trump is wrong in terms of up-to-date monthly data, right when measuring veterans' unemployment over a longer term.

It is true that the average veterans' unemployment rate for 2018 was 3.5 percent, the lowest annual figure since 2000, when it was 2.9 percent.

On a monthly basis, the rate is more volatile. The lowest vets' unemployment rate under Trump was 2.7 percent in October 2017, and it has risen a bit since then to 3.2 percent in December, the latest data available. In the 18 years that the government has tracked veterans' unemployment data, the lowest monthly rate was 2.3 percent in May 2000.

Veterans' unemployment has fallen mostly for the same reasons that joblessness has dropped generally: strong hiring and steady economic growth for the past eight years.

TRUMP: "We got Veterans Choice. We got Veterans Choice approved, which is pretty amazing. They've been trying to get that for years and years — decades and decades." — remarks Jan. 14 in New Orleans.

THE FACTS: No, he is not the first president in "decades and decades" to get Congress to pass a private-sector health program for veterans. Congress first approved the Veterans Choice program in 2014 during the Obama administration.

The program was approved after some veterans died while waiting months for appointments at the Phoenix VA medical center. It allows veterans to see doctors outside the VA system if they must wait more than 30 days for an appointment or drive more than 40 miles to a VA facility.

Trump did sign legislation in June to expand the Choice program, part of his campaign promise to give veterans greater access to private care at government expense. The exact scope of that new program will be subject to yet-to-be-completed rules that will determine veterans' eligibility as well as federal funding. The VA has yet to resolve long-term financing due to congressional budget caps that could put money for

VA or other domestic programs at risk later this year.

Associated Press writers Eric Tucker, Christopher Rugaber, Seth Borenstein and Jill Colvin in Washington and Danica Coto in San Juan, Puerto Rico, contributed to this report.

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Teen in confrontation with Native American: I didn't provoke

By JEFF KAROUB and ADAM BEAM, Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — The student who stared and smiled at an elderly Native American protester drumming in his face outside the Lincoln Memorial as his schoolmates chanted and laughed says he did nothing to provoke the man in the videotaped confrontation and was only trying to calm the situation.

The student identified himself in an email statement Sunday evening as junior Nick Sandmann of Covington Catholic High School in a northern Kentucky suburb of Cincinnati. An official working with the family confirmed Sandmann's identity, speaking on condition of anonymity because the source didn't want to distract from the statement.

Videos posted of the confrontation drew wide criticism on social media. "I am being called every name in the book, including a racist, and I will not stand for this mob-like character assassination of my family's name," wrote Sandmann, who added that he and his parents have received death threats since video of Friday's confrontation emerged.

Both Sandmann and Nathan Phillips say they were trying to defuse tensions that were rising among three groups on a day Washington hosted both the March for Life and the Indigenous Peoples March. But video of Sandmann standing very close to Phillips, staring and at times smiling at him as Phillips sang and played a drum, gave many who watched it a different impression. Other students appeared to be laughing at the drummer; and at least one could be seen on video doing a tomahawk chop.

The dueling accounts emerged Sunday as the nation picked apart footage from dozens of cellphones that recorded the incident on Friday in Washington amid an increasingly divided political climate fueled by a partial government shutdown over immigration policy.

Phillips had approached Sandmann, but well before that, both his group and Sandmann's, which had taken part in the anti-abortion rally, were confronted by a third group that appeared to be affiliated with the Black Hebrew Israelite movement.

Videos show members of the religious group yelling disparaging and profane insults at the students, who taunt them in return. Video also shows the Native Americans being insulted by the small religious group.

Sandmann wrote that the students were called "racists," "bigots," "white crackers" and "incest kids" by the third group. He said a teacher chaperone gave the students permission to begin their school chants "to counter the hateful things that were being shouted at our group."

One of those chants, however, is what led Phillips and Marcus Frejo, a member of the Pawnee and Seminole tribes, to approach the youths.

It was a haka — a war dance of New Zealand's indigenous Maori culture, made famous by the country's national rugby team. Frejo, who is also known as Chief Quese Imc, told the AP in a phone interview that he felt the students were mocking the dance.

Phillips, an activist described by the Indian Country Today website as an Omaha elder and Vietnam War veteran, said in an interview with The Associated Press that he was trying to keep peace between the high school students and the religious group.

He said he heard people chanting "Build that wall" or yelling, "Go back to the reservation." At one point, he said, he sought to ascend to the Lincoln statue and "pray for our country." Some students backed off, but one student wouldn't let him move, he added.

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"They were making remarks to each other ... (such as) 'In my state those Indians are nothing but a bunch of drunks.' How do I report that?" Phillips said. "These young people were just roughshodding through our space, like what's been going on for 500 years here — just walking through our territories, feeling like 'this is ours.'"

Sandmann said he heard no student chant anything beyond school spirit chants, and that he hadn't even been aware of the Native American group until Phillips approached him.

"The protester everyone has seen in the video began playing his drum as he waded into the crowd, which parted for him. I did not see anyone try to block his path," Sandmann wrote. "He locked eyes with me and approached me, coming within inches of my face. He played his drum the entire time he was in my face."

Sandmann said one of the Native American protesters yelled at them that they "stole our land" and they should "go back to Europe," but that he never spoke to or interacted with Phillips. "To be honest, I was startled and confused as to why he had approached me."

He wrote that he "believed that by remaining motionless and calm, I was helping defuse the situation." "I said a silent prayer that the situation would not get out of hand," he wrote. He said the incident ended when the buses arrived and his teacher told him it was time to leave.

Though many commenting on the internet were taken back by Sandmann staring at Philipps, the teen said he was "not intentionally making faces at the protestor. I did smile at one point because I wanted him to know that I was not going to become angry, intimidated or be provoked into a larger confrontation." He said he had never encountered any kind of public protest before.

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Covington apologized for the incident on Saturday, saying "this behavior is opposed to the Church's teachings on the dignity and respect of the human person." They promised to take "appropriate action, up to and including expulsion."

Sandmann said he has provided a copy of his statement to the diocese and said: "I stand ready and willing to cooperate with any investigation they are conducting." A spokeswoman for the diocese did not return an email Sunday night.

Covington Catholic High School, in the northern Kentucky city of Park Hills, was quiet Sunday as the area remained snow-covered with temperatures in the teens. The all-male school, which has more than 580 students, appeared deserted with an empty police car parked in front of the building.

Beam reported from Frankfort, Kentucky. Associated Press writer Lisa Cornwell in Park Hills, Kentucky, contributed.

Blown call, Zuerlein's 57-yard FG send Rams to Super Bowl

By PAUL NEWBERRY, AP National Writer

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A big comeback. A blown call. And, finally, a booming kick that sent the Los Angeles Rams to the Super Bowl.

After rallying from an early 13-0 deficit, the Rams stunned the New Orleans Saints with Greg Zuerlein's 57-yard field goal in overtime for a 26-23 victory in the NFC championship game Sunday — an outcome that might not have been possible without an egregious mistake by the officials in the closing minutes of regulation.

Los Angeles cornerback Nickell Robey-Coleman committed a blatant interference penalty with a helmet-to-helmet hit on Tommylee Lewis well before the pass arrived inside the 5, forcing the Saints to settle for Wil Lutz's 31-yard field goal that made it 23-20 with 1:41 left in regulation.

"Came to the sideline, looked at the football gods and was like, 'Thank you,'" Robey-Coleman said. "I got away with one tonight."

After the no-call, Jared Goff had enough time to lead the Rams down the field for Zuerlein's tying field goal, a 48-yarder with 15 seconds remaining.

New Orleans won the coin toss and got the ball first in overtime. But, with Dante Fowler Jr. in his face and striking his arm, Drew Brees fluttered up a pass that was picked off by John Johnson III, who was

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able to hang on to the interception while stumbling backward. Johnson hopped up and celebrated by doing the "Choppa Style" dance popularized by New Orleans rapper Choppa, whose namesake song had become a Saints' rallying cry and was even performed during the halftime show.

The Rams weren't able to do much offensively, but it didn't matter. Zuerlein booted through the winning field goal from just inside midfield with plenty of room to spare. The NFL said it the longest game-winning kick in playoff history.

"It's unbelievable, man. I can't put it into words," said Goff, who at 24 became the youngest quarterback to win an NFC title. "The defense played the way they did to force it to overtime. The defense gets a pick and Greg makes a 57-yarder to win it. That was good from about 70. Unbelievable."

The Superdome, which had been in uproar all afternoon, suddenly turned eerily silent. It was the first home playoff loss for the Saints with Brees and coach Sean Payton, who had been 6-0 in those games since their pairing began in 2006.

This one really hurt.

If the pass interference penalty had been called, the Saints could've run most of the time off the clock to set up a winning field goal from chip-shot range. A replay was shown over and over on the Superdome's giant video boards, prompting some fans to toss trash on the field.

"Being that it happened right there in front of the person who would be the one to make the call, and everyone in the stands saw it, everyone watching at home on TV saw it, that makes it even more difficult to take," Brees said. "Because of this, I'm sure there will be a lot of talk about reviewing penalties, perhaps game-changing penalties."

The Rams (15-3) and their 32-year-old coach, Sean McVay, capped a remarkable rise since moving back to Los Angeles three years ago. The team will be appearing in its first Super Bowl since the 2001 season, when the "Greatest Show on Turf" was still in St. Louis.

The team hasn't won an NFL title in Los Angeles since 1951, well before the Super Bowl era. The team moved to St. Louis in 1995, only to return to Southern California two decades later.

"Shoot, I don't even know what day it is," McVay said. "All I know is we're NFC champs, baby!"

It was another bitter end for the Saints, who lost the previous season in the divisional round on the "Minnesota Miracle" — the Vikings' long touchdown pass on the final play of the game.

This time, New Orleans (14-4) couldn't hang on to the lead or overcome that officiating mistake.

Payton said he talked to the NFL office after the game and was told that Robey-Coleman should have been flagged.

"Not only was it interference, it was helmet to helmet," the coach said. "I don't know if there was ever a more obvious pass interference."

The Saints were on the verge of blowing out the Rams, scoring on their first three possessions and taking advantage of an interception when Todd Gurley let a pass slip through his hands.

Then a fake punt early in the second quarter gave Los Angeles its initial first down of the game. Sparked by that gutsy call, the Rams finally came to life offensively and drove into position for the first of four field goals by Zuerlein.

Gurley made it 13-10 at halftime on a 6-yard touchdown run just before the intermission.

New Orleans restored its double-digit lead on Brees' 2-yard scoring pass to third-string quarterback Taysom Hill, the first TD catch of the super sub's career. Goff countered with a 1-yard touchdown toss to Tyler Higbee, setting up a wild fourth quarter.

Zuerlein tied the score at 20-all with a 24-yard field goal after McVay passed on a shot at the go-ahead touchdown with fourth-and-goal from inside the 1. A delay of game while lining up for the kick scuttled any thoughts of leaving the offense on the field.

BREES' FUTURE

The 40-year-old Brees made it clear he's got no plans to retire.

"I plan on being here next year and making another run at it," said Brees, who was denied a shot at adding to the Super Bowl title he won during the 2009 season.

He hopes another gut-wrenching loss in the playoffs will spur the team to even greater heights.

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"Last year really brought us together as a team and strengthened us," Brees said. "I hope this will too."

INJURY REPORT

The Saints lost tight end Josh Hill to a concussion in the first quarter.

Hill was injured after hauling in a 24-yard pass from Brees. While making the tackle, Los Angeles Rams linebacker Cory Littleton delivered a forearm to Hill's head.

No penalty was called, but Hill staggered off the field to be evaluated by the medical staff. Just before halftime, the Saints announced he was done for the game.

The loss of Hill led to a much bigger role in the offense for Garrett Griffin, who spent most of the season on the practice squad. He caught a 5-yard pass for his first career touchdown.

UP NEXT

The Rams head to Atlanta in about a week for the Feb. 3 Super Bowl at Mercedes-Benz Stadium. They will face the five-time champion Patriots, who won the AFC title in a game that also went to overtime. New England defeated the Kansas City Chiefs 37-31 in overtime Sunday night.

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Death toll reaches 85 in Mexico fuel pipeline fire horror

By MARK STEVENSON, Associated Press

TLAHUELILPAN, Mexico (AP) — People in the town where a gasoline explosion killed at least 85 people say the section of pipeline that gushed fuel has been a habitual gathering site for thieves, repeatedly damaged and patched like a trusty pair of jeans.

"It was the popular tap," said Enrique Cerron, 22, who lives near the field. "You could pass by at 11 or 12 in the morning and see people filling up here."

On Friday, amid countrywide fuel shortages at gas stations as the government attempts to stem widespread fuel theft, this particular section of pipeline had come back into service after being offline for nearly four weeks when somebody punctured the line again. Word quickly spread through the community of 20,000 people that gas was flowing. Come one, come all.

Hundreds showed up at the spigot, carrying plastic jugs and covering their faces with bandanas. A few threw rocks and swung sticks at soldiers who tried to shoo them away. Some fuel collectors brought their children along.

Tlahuelilpan is a largely agrarian community located 90 minutes by car from the capital and just 8 miles (13 kilometers) from the state-run Tula oil refinery. It's surrounded by verdant alfalfa fields and power plant stacks, and is reasonably affluent by rural Mexican standards. Hidalgo state data shows about half the community lives in moderate poverty, in line with the national average.

At first the gasoline leak was manageable, locals say, emitting a tame fountain of fuel that allowed for filling small buckets at a time. But as the crowd swelled to more than 600, people became impatient.

That's when a man rammed a piece of rebar into a patch, according to Irma Velasco, who lives near the alfalfa field where the explosion took place, and gasoline shot 20 feet (6 meters) into the air, like water from a geyser.

A carnival atmosphere took over. Giddy adults soaked in gasoline filled jugs and passed them to runners. Families and friends formed human chains and guard posts to stockpile containers with fuel.

For nearly two hours, more than a dozen soldiers stood guard on the outskirts of the field, warning civilians not to go near. Officials say the soldiers were outnumbered and their instructions were to not intervene. Only a week earlier, people in a different town had beaten some soldiers who tried to stop them from gorging on state-owned fuel.

The lure of free fuel was irresistible for many: They came like moths to a flame, parking vehicles on a