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Help Wanted

Looking for a fun, part-time job? Groton Dairy Queen is now hiring. Stop in for an application. (0216.0316)

Bates Township ROW Maintenance

Bates Township Board of Supervisors reminds all landowners and tenants that the road right-of-way extends 33 feet from the center of the township road. This ditch is to be maintained and mowed. Any crops planted in the road right-of-way will be mowed and expenses charged to the landowner.

Landowner is responsible for spraying all noxious weeds.

Bates Township Board of Supervisors

Betty Geist
Township Clerk
(0313.0320)

Published twice at the total approximate cost of \$20.11. 17307

CLOSED! Recycling Trailer in Groton

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



National Honor Society

The National Honor Society ceremony was held Monday, March 18. Pictured above are the members and the new inductees. In front, left to right, are National Honor Society Members – Anne Marie Smith, Cassandra Townsend, Tylan Glover, Alexis Simon and Emily Thompson. In back, left to right, are the Inductees – Payton Colestock, Kaitlyn Anderson, Kaycie Hawkins, Nicole Marzahn, Taylor Holm, Caitlynn Barse, Ashley Garduno and KaSandra Pappas. (Photo by Renee Marzahn)

NOW HIRING!

Truss Pros

10954 424th Avenue | Britton, SD 57430

Looking for assemblers - both shifts &
Class A CDL Drivers

New Starting Competitive Wages
Overtime Available

BENEFITS INCLUDE:

- Comprehensive Health, Dental & Vision insurance
- Life Insurance
- STD
- LTD
- 401k
- Holiday Pay
- Vacation Pay
- Paid Sick Leave
- Referral Bonuses

To apply visit www.uslbm.com/careers or call Diane at 605-448-2929.

Storm sewer change order approved

Terry Herron reported that it would cost \$11,185.70 to do a storm sewer inlet repair project at the southeast corner of Washington Street and Sixth Avenue West. It was not part of the summer street project. There will not be a summer chip seal project this year so there would be money available to do this project. Herron said the city will still do the crack seal project this spring. The council approved the change order. "It will help make the whole intersection look a lot better," Herron said. Councilman Jay Peterson suggested that the city try to get the snow hauled away from the work zone.

Next Tuesday the load limits will be in place where garbage pickup will be on Main Street, Sixth Street, Railroad Avenue and Broadway.

Peterson said he would like to go on record to say "thank you" to the city employees for all of their work in snow removal and for opening up the drains around town.

At the recommendation of Doug Hamilton, the council adjusted the Legion coach salary from \$3,500 to \$3,000.

The council hired Ashley Flihs and Erin Unzen as ticket takers. Spencer Locke and Aaron Severson will be splitting the wage for the junior teenager team.

The city council then went into equalization. Doug Sombke came before the board said that his valuation rose by 10.73 percent compared to 4 percent for his surrounding neighbors. Russ from the Assessor's office will be doing a complete evaluation of his home on Friday, both inside and outside. Sombke said the biggest issue is that assessors have not been properly trained in doing valuations and it's different from county to county.

Then the city continued going through each property in town. The residential properties in town increased in valuation by about 4 percent.



**4255 6th Ave
SE, Aberdeen**

Hi, my name is Bary Keith, a Groton resident. I have just recently joined the Harr Motors sales team. I'm excited to start helping people get into the right vehicle for them. Right now, any vehicle purchased from me, until the end of April, will receive an Autostart at no charge. Give me a call (605-216-6952) or (605-725-8624) or stop out and see me at Harr Motors today!!!

Brown County to offer text alerts

Brown County Emergency Management has teamed up with South Dakota Helpline Center (211) to bring you "Public Impact Text Alerts".

What is Public Impact Text Alerts?

This is a program that you can sign up for to receive text messages that will inform the general public when events occur that affect the community by disrupting day to day services or routines.

Subscribers will receive official notifications regarding incidents that have public impact such as:

- Travel Advisories
- Extensive Road Closure as a result of infrastructure failure or accident
- Traffic hazards
- Fire, Haz Mat, or other evacuations / closures
- Weather alerts (non-severe)

To be alerted of these and other public impact occurrences, subscribe by texting AlertBrown to 85511. You will receive an automatic message that states "you will now receive public impact text alerts affecting Brown County".

Flooding Closes State Parks Along Big Sioux River

PIERRE, S.D. – Several state park and public water access areas near Sioux Falls are closed due to flooding along the Big Sioux River.

The following parks are closed effective immediately:

Beaver Creek Nature Area near Valley Springs
Big Sioux Recreation Area near Brandon
Palisades State Park near Garretson
Lake Alvin near Harrisburg

The following Public Water Access areas are closed effective immediately:

9 Mile near Lake Alvin
Klondike north of Canton
McKee near Newton Hills
Fish near Fairview
Oakridge south of Fairview
Bent River east of Alcester
Cut-Off Bend
Petry-Conway
Willow Run east of Spink
Ryan east of Elk Point

Portions of the following parks are closed:

Good Earth State Park near Sioux Falls - lower trail system
Newton Hills State Park near Canton - horse camp and Lake Lakota

In addition, the Jay Heath Canoe and Kayak Trail is closed effective immediately.

The closures will be in place until flooding subsides and the areas are useable. Campers will be notified by park officials if the closures are expected to impact their stay.

Noem Approves Enhanced Concealed Carry in State Capitol

PIERRE, S.D. – Governor Kristi Noem yesterday signed SB115, a bill to allow individuals with an enhanced concealed carry permits to bring firearms into the South Dakota State Capitol building.

“The state Capitol is already a safe place thanks to the dedicated men and women of our Highway Patrol,” said Noem. “With this law in place, law-abiding citizens with the proper permit will be able to carry in the Capitol, just like they can in so many other places.”

Enhanced concealed carry permits require individuals to apply, pay a fee, and complete a qualifying handgun course taught by a South Dakota certified instructor. People with an enhanced permit must notify the superintendent of the Highway Patrol at least 24 hours in advance and provide dates they will carry in the Capitol.

South Dakota is one of 18 states that allow concealed carry in their respective state Capitol. The law will go into effect July 1.

Governor Noem signed the following bills into law:

HB1050 – An act to revise certain provisions regarding the use and possession of scanning devices and reencoders

HB1053 – An act to revise the value of gifts permitted for certain insurance advertising or promotional programs

HB1103 – An act to establish a lemon law for certain farm machinery

HB1202 – An act to revise the number of qualified directors of a corporation needed to take certain actions

HB1272 – An act to provide for remote notarization

SB55 – An act to require the national motto of the United States to be displayed in public schools

SB68 – An act to define certain acts as misbranding of food products

SB96 – An act to expand application of the tax credit for contributions to a scholarship granting organization

SB115 – An act to authorize the conditional carrying of a concealed pistol in the state capitol by certain persons

SB155 – An act to authorize additional nursing facility beds for the Michael J. Fitzmaurice Veterans Home

Noem Encourages Residents of Big Sioux River Valley to Prepare for Flooding

PIERRE, S.D. – Governor Kristi Noem today encouraged people living in the Big Sioux River Valley in eastern South Dakota to start preparing for record flooding.

Winter snowmelt and rain have raised the water levels in Big Sioux River Valley areas north of Watertown to south of Sioux Falls. At this time, the National Weather Service predicts that when flooding starts sometime this weekend or next week, the flooding levels could reach historic levels, some levels not seen since 1969.

“Flooding is not a matter of if, but when,” said Noem. “These levels will impact homes, businesses, roads, and farms. It’s important that those living in the Big Sioux River Valley start their flooding preparations now.”

Noem last week ordered the opening of the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) in the Mickelson Law Enforcement Center in Pierre to help coordinate the state’s response to last week’s blizzard and flooding. Several state agencies are working within the SEOC to prepare for upcoming flooding.

Residents in the area where flooding is expected to occur are urged to take the following basic precautions to protect themselves and their property from flooding:

When driving, avoid going through flooded roads and do not drive around barricades. Take alternate routes. Check safetravelusa.com/sd or call 5-1-1 for the most up-to-date information on state highways. Check with your county law enforcement or emergency management office for county and township road closures.

Make sure you have enough supplies, including needed medication, on hand.

Safeguard your possessions. Put copies of insurance policies, financial records and other critical documents in a waterproof container, along with an inventory of major household items.

Make sure the sump pump is working and consider a battery-operated backup. Consider adding a sewer plug to your system.

If possible, move furniture and valuable items such as photo albums and family keepsakes to a safe place.

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Today in Weather History

March 20, 1982: A winter storm dropped 10-20 inches of heavy wet snow across the northern two-thirds of South Dakota. Five persons were killed and eight others injured in indirect accidents. Downed power lines caused isolated power outages. A half dozen newborn calves died of exposure near Lemmon in Perkins County. Also, 5% of the pheasant population in Brown, Edmunds, and Faulk Counties were killed. The weight of the snow collapsed a canopy of a grocery store in McLaughlin, Corson County, tearing out part of the brick front and breaking windows in the store.

March 20, 2008: An upper-level disturbance coupled with an area of low pressure moving across the Central Plains brought widespread heavy snow from the late afternoon through the early morning hours to north-central and northeast South Dakota. Heavy snow of 6 to as much as 18 inches fell in this area resulting in school delays and cancelations along with treacherous travel conditions. Some snowfall amounts included: 6 inches at Bowdle, South Shore, and Bradley; 7 inches at Eureka, Chelsea, Bristol, and Pollock; 8 inches near Hosmer, Osaka, and Roscoe; 9 inches at Victor; 10 inches at Westport and Ipswich. Locations with a foot or more of snowfall included: 12 inches at Columbia, Milbank, and Waubay; 13 inches at Sisseton and Webster; 14 inches at Big Stone City; 15 inches at Summit; 16 inches at Roy Lake; 18 inches at Wilmot and Pickerel Lake State Park.

1948: The city of Juneau received 31 inches of snow in 24 hours, a record for the Alaska Capitol. (20th - 21st)

Also on this day, an F3 tornado tracked through Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma City, OK just before 10 p.m. destroying 54 aircraft, including 17 transport planes valued at \$500,000 apiece. Total damage amounted to more than \$10 million, a record for the state that stood until the massive tornado outbreak of 5/3/1999. Major Ernest W. Fawbush and Captain Robert C. Miller were ordered to see if operationally forecasting tornadoes were possible. The tornado prompted the first attempt at tornado forecasting. Forecasters at Tinker believed conditions were again favorable for tornadoes and issued the first recorded tornado forecast. Five days later on 3/25 at 6 pm, a forecasted tornado occurred, crossing the prepared base and damage was minimized. The successful, albeit somewhat lucky forecast, paved the way for tornado forecasts to be issued by the U.S. Weather Bureau after a lengthy ban.

1986: Great Britain recorded their highest wind gust ever as the summit of Scotland's Cairngorm Mountains, at 4,085 feet had a gust of 172 mph.

1998: A deadly tornado outbreak occurred over portions of the southeastern United States on this day. Particularly hard hit were rural areas outside of Gainesville, Georgia, where at least 12 people were killed during the early morning hours. The entire outbreak killed 14 people and produced 12 tornadoes across three states. The town of Stoneville, North Carolina hard hit by the storms.

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Today

Tonight

Thursday

Thursday
Night

Friday



Sunny

Partly Cloudy

Mostly Sunny

Partly Cloudy

Sunny

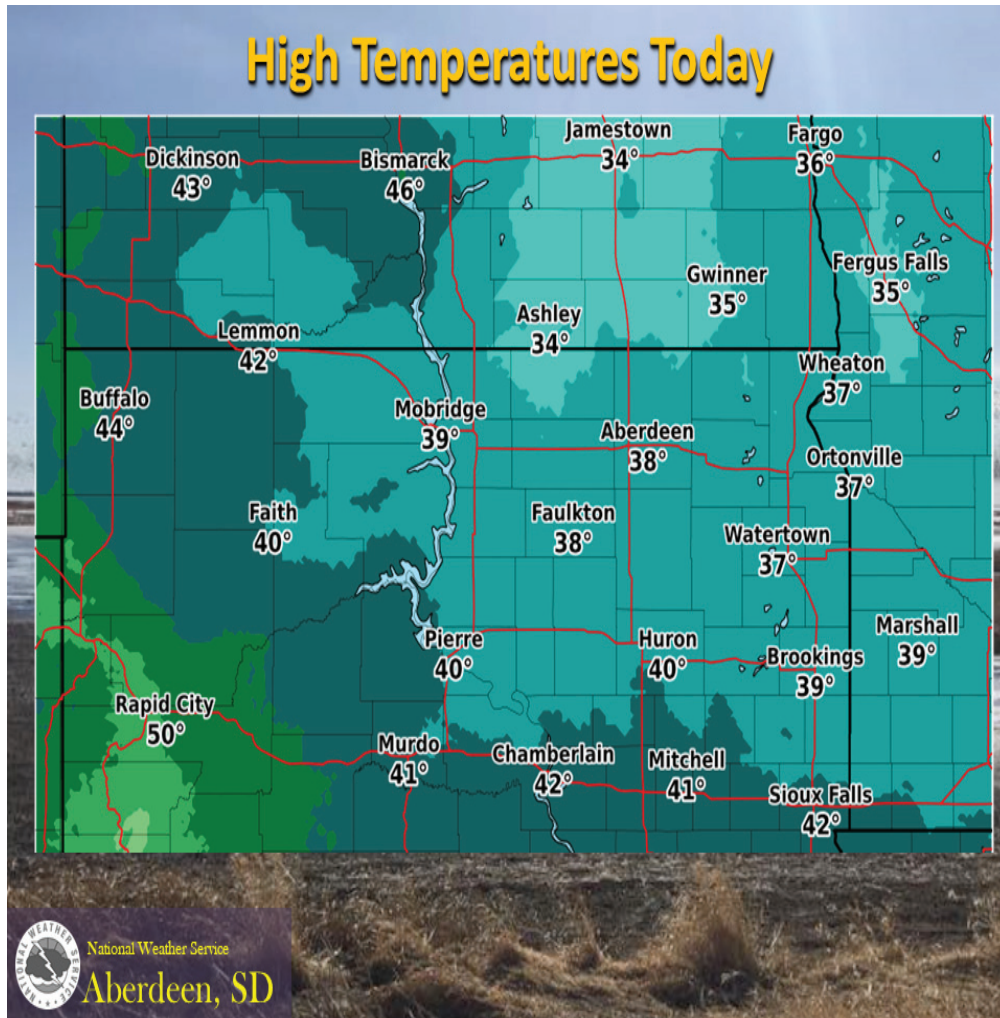
High: 37 °F

Low: 20 °F

High: 41 °F

Low: 19 °F

High: 40 °F



Ample sunshine will result in more steady but slow melting today, allowing temperatures to again rebound into the mid and upper 30s. The steady warm up continues through the end of the work week, and despite some light moisture coming in for the weekend, readings will continue to slowly warm straight into next week as well.

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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 35 °F at 5:46 PM

Low Outside Temp: 22 °F at 7:05 AM

High Gust: 11 mph at 4:51 PM

Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 75° in 2010

Record Low: -6° in 1965, 1893

Average High: 42°F

Average Low: 22°F

Average Precip in Mar.: 0.63

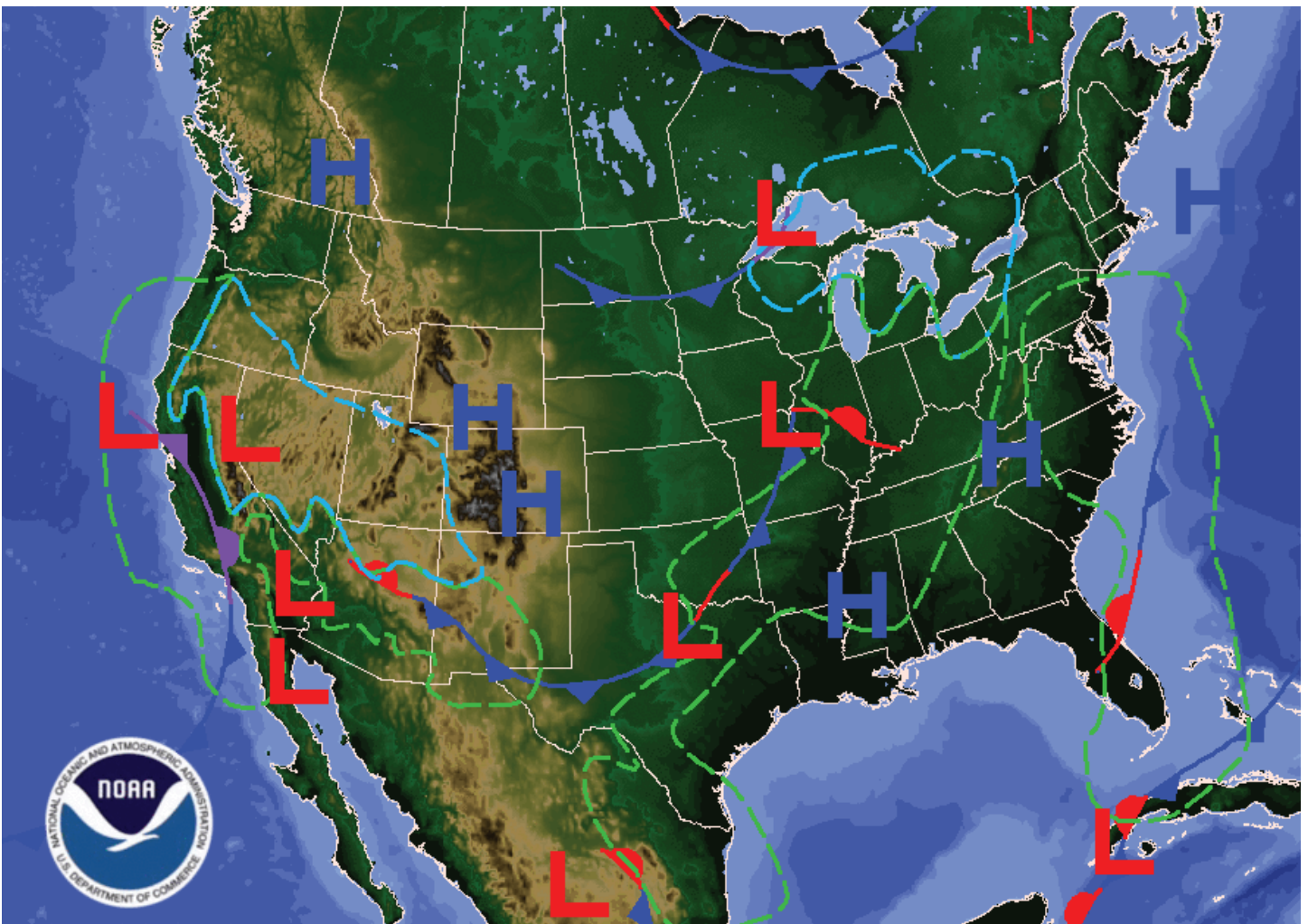
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.87

Average Precip to date: 1.65

Precip Year to Date: 3.06

Sunset Tonight: 7:46 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:35 a.m.



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Wed, Mar 20, 2019, issued 4:43 AM EDT
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by Oravec with WPC/SPC/NHC forecasts

Rain

Rain and T'Storms

Rain and Snow

Snow

Flash Flooding Possible (hatched)

Severe T'Storms Possible (hatched)

Freezing Rain Possible (hatched)

Heavy Snow Possible (hatched)



DOES GOD HAVE AN ATTITUDE?

Attitude is an interesting word. And it has different meanings to different people. There are times when we speak of a good attitude, and times when we speak of a bad attitude. Normally, an attitude refers to a position that someone has about something or even someone else. But, is it fair to say that our God, who is compassionate and caring, has an attitude?

There are six things the Lord hates; seven are an abomination to Him. Well, if we learn what those things are, is that all we have to worry about? Not really. These things are not intended to be an exhaustive list. We all make lists that we can add things to or remove things from - even God can do this. But these things are very serious to God and build on the list Solomon began earlier. Here, however, he reinforces the Lord's attitude toward such things. Read the list very carefully and discover some things that God has an attitude toward:

1. Haughty eyes: A proud, condescending glare that comes from a heart full of arrogance and deceit.
2. A lying tongue: God only honors truth and purity.
3. Hands that shed innocent blood: Any person unjustly killed, which certainly includes the unborn child.
4. Hearts that devise wicked schemes: Using scams to hide the truth from simple and trusting folk.
5. Feet that rush to evil: Feet follow the plans of the heart and engage the soul in sin.
6. A false witness: Lies, to some, are as natural as breathing.
7. Strife-spreaders: Trouble-makers are all around us and will be destroyed.

Prayer: Lord, if we took Your Words as seriously as You do, what beautiful lives we would live! Help us to avoid these things and be pleasing to you. We need You. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Proverbs 6:16-19 There are six things the Lord hates, seven things he detests: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that kill the innocent, a heart that plots evil, feet that race to do wrong, a false witness who pours out lies, a person who sows discord in a family.

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2019 Groton SD Community Events

- 01/27/2019 Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
- 03/17/2019 Legion Post #39 Spring Fundraiser (Sunday closest to St. Patrick's Day, every other year)
- 04/13/2019 Easter Egg Hunt (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
- 04/27/2019 Fireman's Stag (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
- 05/04/2019 Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Saturday in May)
- 05/27/2019 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Program (Memorial Day)
- 06/13/2019 Transit Fundraiser (Thursday Mid-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
- 06/22-23/2019 Groton Junior Legion Tournament
- 06/29/2019 Groton U10/U12 Round Robin Tournament
- 07/04/2019 Firecracker Golf Tourney (4th of July)
- 07/14/2019 Summer Fest/Car Show (Sunday Mid-July)
- 07/18/2019 Olive Grove Golf Course Pro Am Tournament
- 07/21/2019 Granary Ice Cream Social & Family Music Fest
- 08/02/2019 Olive Grove Golf Course Wine on Nine
- 08/09-11/2019 State Junior Legion Tournament in Groton
- 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
- 09/08/2019 Granary Living History Fall Festival
- 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 (Halloween)
- 11/09/2019 Legion Post #39 Turkey Shoot (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
- 12/07/2019 Olive Grove Golf Course Holiday Party
- 12/07/2019 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services
- Bingo: every Wednesday, Labor Day-Memorial Day, 6:30pm at the Legion Post #39

2020 Groton SD Community Events

- 4/4/2020 Easter Egg Hunt (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
- 4/25/2020 Fireman's Stag (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
- 5/2/2020 Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Saturday in May)

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

10-42-53-67-68, Mega Ball: 15, Megaplier: 3

(ten, forty-two, fifty-three, sixty-seven, sixty-eight; Mega Ball: fifteen; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$45 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$550 million

Osetkowski leads Texas over S. Dakota St. 79-73 in NIT

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Dylan Osetkowski had a career-high 26 points as Texas defeated South Dakota State 79-73 in the NIT first round on Tuesday night.

Osetkowski shot 4 for 6 from beyond the arc.

Courtney Ramey had 13 points for Texas (17-16). Kerwin Roach II added 12 points.

Mike Daum had 25 points and 11 rebounds for the Jackrabbits (24-9). David Jenkins Jr. added 19 points. Skyler Flatten had 14 points and six rebounds.

For more AP college basketball coverage: <https://apnews.com/Collegebasketball> and http://twitter.com/AP_Top25

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South Dakota artist designs retro-futuristic guitars

By MATTHEW GUERRY Rapid City Journal

SUMMERSET, S.D. (AP) — At 68, John Backlund feels like he's yet to get his big break.

Still, he concedes, he's satisfied knowing there are scores of people who own and play the guitars that bear his last name — especially when that list includes names like Todd Rundgren and Joe Walsh.

"It gives you a lot of street cred to have those guys play that stuff," Backlund told the Rapid City Journal.

A professional illustrator of more than 40 years, Backlund has been designing electric guitars for roughly the past 10. The cozy living room of his Summerset home is strewn with guitars, the looks of which are often compared to classic car tail fins and vintage motel signs.

"Retro-futuristic is one of the terms they use for it," he said. "That's sort of a mythical future as predicted or viewed from the past."

Prior to moving to Summerset in 1993, Backlund and his wife, Teresa Verburg, worked as textbook illustrators at a small firm in Minneapolis. The two took to the Rapid City area having previously passed through on motorcycle trips.

While he prefers playing acoustic guitar, Backlund began sketching electric ones in the mid-2000s that were inspired by design trends of the 1930s, '40s and '50s. Backlund works now with the Ontario-based Eastwood Guitars to bring them to life, and they run between \$1,200 and \$1,600 a pop.

"The people who like them really like them, and I've known about them for probably 10 years before we got together with John," Eastwood President Michael Robinson said.

Most Backlunds look classically automotive, sporting pastel colors and bearing shiny, steel inlays. The first few models are unique in their winged shape, but recent ones take their cues from more recognizable body

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styles: the figure-eight form of the Rockerbox, the newest model, calls to the Gibson Les Paul to mind.

The Model 200, meanwhile, resembles a Fender Telecaster.

"I didn't try to reinvent this wheel, but I put a shinier, brighter white wall hubcap on the old one," Backlund said.

Growing up in Pipestone, Minnesota, Backlund said he didn't doodle more than any other kid. He entered the art industry as a self-taught artist with little in the way of formal training.

"All of it's instinctive," he said.

After dropping out of high school at age 17 and earning his GED, he briefly studied art at Southwest Minnesota State University but withdrew after six months. He soon moved to St. Paul, where he began working as a freelance illustrator.

One of his early gigs was cartooning for the Saturday editorial page of the St. Paul Pioneer Press.

His career would take him all throughout the Midwest. He and Verburg met in Mason City, Iowa, in 1983 while working in the art department of Decal Specialties.

His foray into guitar design wouldn't come until years later.

"I would sketch little designs for different guitar bodies," he recalled. "I would post them on some of the guitar forums on the internet, in particular one called Harmony Central."

The drawings caught the eye of a luthier in Chattanooga, Tennessee, who wanted Backlund to build them for real. They went into business together for several years, with the very first Backlund guitars fetching prices of more than \$3,000.

Backlund began working with Eastwood about three years ago. If all goes smoothly, he said, it takes three to four months for a rough drawing to become a playable instrument.

Designs are first sketched and refined in pencil. Backlund further polishes them using a 10-year-old version of Corel PaintShop Pro.

Eastwood then works with their manufacturer, which Backlund said is based in South Korea, to determine how something practical can be built from the drawings. Because Backlund doesn't render the guitars as 3D models, technicians must work to see how and where individual parts can be mounted.

"They try as well as they can to make them as faithful to my original art as possible," Backlund said.

Inevitably, a few quirks are left on the cutting room floor. Original drawings of the rocket-shaped Backlund Marz, for example, featured a grill-like cover over the bridge.

The piece would have been too expensive to machine en masse, Backlund said, and would likely have got in the way of players' hands.

Robinson said that most of Eastwood's guitars are sold online, and Backlunds appeal to a small crowd rife with repeat customers.

"If somebody buys one, they buy five or six of them," Robinson said.

That Rundgren, Walsh and other rock stars are among them, Backlund said, is surreal. Rundgren played several of them onstage during his Utopia tour last year.

"I didn't do it to stand out. I started doing this because I wanted to have guitars that really appealed to me. And it just so happened enough other people liked them," Backlund said.

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

Rapid City Diocese publishes list of accused priests

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — The Rapid City Diocese has published a list of 21 priests credibly accused of sexual abuse.

The list includes priests who were credibly accused while in schools, churches, hospitals and on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations from 1951 to 2018.

Bishop Robert Gruss wrote in a letter posted on the diocese's website that publishing the list is "essential in restoring the trust that has been broken as the result of the misconduct of a few."

The Rapid City Journal reports the 21 priests include those who were permanently assigned to the diocese

as well as those who served in the diocese but fell under control of a different bishop or religious order. All are dead except for John Praveen, a priest who awaits sentencing after pleading guilty in February to sexually touching a 13-year-old girl.

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

All Shopko stores in the Dakotas to close by mid-June

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — All Shopko stores in the Dakotas will be closing by mid-June, as the Wisconsin-based retail chain has decided to close its remaining 120 department stores around the country.

The retailer filed for bankruptcy protection in January and began announcing store closings, including closings in about a dozen communities in North Dakota and South Dakota. The number in the two states will now increase to nearly two dozen.

Shopko said Monday that the company was unable to find a buyer for its business, and it plans to begin winding down its retail operations this week.

Ex-USD football player accused of rape gets plea deal

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — A former University of South Dakota football player who was accused of raping a woman in her dorm room has pleaded no contest to a lesser charge of aggravated assault and been sentenced to 10 years of probation.

Dale Williamson Jr., of Texarkana, Texas, entered the plea Monday. A no contest plea isn't an admission of guilt but is treated as such for sentencing. He also must pay nearly \$1,400 in restitution to the victim, the Argus Leader reported.

Prosecutor Alexis Tracy told the court that Williamson went into the victim's dorm room while she was sleeping, "pinned her down," and raped her. The victim woke up, pushed him off of her, grabbed her phone and ran to the bathroom, she said.

"This matter has changed her forever," Tracy said.

Judge Tami Bern didn't consider certain details about the attack that Tracy offered during the hearing because she said Williamson was not being sentenced for a sex crime. Bern did say, however, that Williamson, 23, was in an environment that made him feel "entitled to sexual exploitation," and "I find that abhorrent."

The victim had a sexual assault exam performed at a Sioux Falls hospital about 12 hours after the attack, but she didn't want to report it to law enforcement at that time and the kit was saved by the hospital as a "Jane Doe."

The victim came forward to Vermillion police in October 2017, about a week after news broke that Williamson and another football player, Danny Rambo, were accused of trying to rape someone else. A jury acquitted Williamson in that case last year and Rambo pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor in March 2018 and was sentenced to 10 days in jail.

Tracy did not comment Tuesday on why prosecutors allowed Williamson to plead to a lesser, non-sex-related charge. She did tell The Associated Press that victim credibility and Williamson's acquittal in the other case were not factors.

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

Environmentalists oppose off-roaders' lawsuit over bird plan

By SCOTT SONNER Associated Press

RENO, Nev. (AP) — Conservationists want to join a legal battle in opposition to off-road vehicle users who are trying to overturn U.S. protections for a type of imperiled bird found only along the California-Nevada line.

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Four environmental groups filed the request to intervene in the case over the bistate grouse in U.S. District Court in Reno on Friday. That's the same day the Trump administration finalized changes to federal land use plans that eased restrictions on energy companies across 11 Western states where the larger population of greater sage grouse lives.

The conservationists argue that those changes are one of the reasons they should be granted intervenor status for the bistate grouse, which they say is more at risk than the greater sage grouse. Scientists say as few as 5,000 of the chicken-sized, ground-dwelling birds remain.

The Fish and Wildlife Service in 2015 scrapped a proposal to list the bistate grouse as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, but a federal judge reinstated it last year.

"The Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service and FWS once made promises to conserve the bi-state sage grouse and its habitat," Steve Holmer, vice president of the American Bird Conservancy, said in the request to intervene, along with the Center for Biological Diversity, Western Watersheds Project and WildEarth Guardians.

The government's failure to list the bird "is indicative of the agencies' unwillingness to commit to conservation measures for the birds," he said.

The California Four Wheel Drive Association and off-road groups in the Sierra Nevada and Nevada's Pine Nut Mountains sued the Forest Service in December, arguing that a bistate protection plan enacted last year could increase fire danger across the bird's rangeland habitat.

They say protection measures in the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest weren't included among the alternatives subjected to scientific scrutiny and public comment as required by federal law.

The off-road groups say the Forest Service nearly doubled the size of buffer zones around bird breeding grounds, known as leks, to 4 miles (6.5 kilometers) between an initial draft and final guidelines on off-road travel.

It also extended the season when motorized traffic is banned through June 30, forcing the Sierra Trail Dogs Motorcycle and Recreation Club to postpone by a month a 250-mile (402-kilometer) motorcycle race typically done in mid-June.

Racing through high-desert sagebrush after June 30 "greatly increases fire risk and safety concerns due to greater heat and reduced moisture," according to the lawsuit. "It is nearly impossible to design a viable route system in the project area ... that does not include a route passing within 4 miles of such leks."

Paul Turcke, an Idaho-based lawyer for the off-roaders, said he didn't anticipate opposing the environmentalists' request but declined further comment.

A Forest Service spokeswoman said the agency doesn't comment on pending litigation.

Patrick Donnelly, Nevada director of the Center for Biological Diversity, said bistate grouse "are teetering on the brink of extinction across much of their range."

"Running a motorcycle race through this imperiled bird's habitat during the lekking season would only add to threats that are pushing this population over the cliff," said Laura Cunningham, California director for the Western Watersheds Project.

Nonprofit brings flood-stricken Nebraska ranchers hay help

By **BLAKE NICHOLSON** Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A farm aid nonprofit is launching an effort to deliver donated hay to ranchers in flood-stricken Nebraska, resurrecting a program first used nearly two years ago to help cattle producers facing drought conditions in the Upper Midwest.

North Dakota-based Farm Rescue is seeking volunteer drivers and donations of hay and money for what it calls "Operation Hay Lift" to help Nebraska ranchers dealing with widespread flooding after a massive late-winter storm.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with those suffering from this natural disaster," Bill Gross, founder and president of Farm Rescue, said Tuesday.

The Nebraska Farm Bureau estimates that farm and ranch losses in that state could reach \$1 billion. The

amount of hay needed hasn't yet been determined, according to the Nebraska Cattlemen rancher group, which also has launched a disaster relief fund .

"Some folks are still battling floodwaters and have not been able to access their hay to determine what was lost," spokeswoman Talia Goes said. "However, we have heard from some folks that nearly 50 to 100 percent of their hay has been ruined or taken with the raging waters. Also, many folks will battle damaged hay and pasture fields from the water and the debris."

The first Operation Hay Lift was launched in July 2017 in the midst of devastating drought in the Upper Midwest. The program lasted 10 months, with 75 volunteer truckers hauling nearly 300 semitrailer-loads of hay to 154 ranch families in the Dakotas and Montana. More than 10,000 large, round hay bales were hauled a total of more than 200,000 miles, according to Farm Rescue spokesman Dan Erdmann.

Farm Rescue provides free physical labor for farmers and ranchers dealing with an injury, illness or a natural disaster in six Plains states — North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, Minnesota and Montana. The nonprofit's services include crop planting and harvesting, haying, and livestock feeding. It has helped nearly 600 farm families since starting in 2006 and relies on volunteers from around the country, donations and corporate sponsors.

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

Midwest floodwaters tear through or spill over many levees

By JIM SALTER Associated Press

ST. LOUIS (AP) — Floodwaters driven by a swift current have torn through and spilled over levees at countless locations across the Midwest, swamping hundreds of homes and businesses. The levees are meant to protect people and property from rising water in rivers, creeks, lakes and even drainage ditches. But none of them is flood-proof. Here are some answers to common questions about levees:

Q: What are levees?

A: Levees are earthen flood barriers typically covered in grass. They generally don't have bushes or trees because the roots can create structural weakness and provide crevices where water can get in. Sometimes rocks are added to help prevent erosion.

Levees are different than floodwalls, which are typically concrete, but floodwalls are sometimes part of levee systems. In Hannibal, Missouri, for example, a levee protects Mark Twain historic sites from the Mississippi River, but the levee has openings allowing street traffic to the riverfront. When floodwaters threaten, concrete floodwalls slide into place to fill the gaps.



Volunteers fill sandbags in preparation for flooding along the Missouri River in St Joseph, Mo., Monday, March 18, 2019. Hundreds of homes flooded in several Midwestern states after rivers breached at least a dozen levees following heavy rain and snowmelt in the region, authorities said Monday while warning that the flooding was expected to linger. (AP Photo/Orlin Wagner)

When floodwaters threaten, concrete floodwalls slide into place to fill the gaps.

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Q: How many levees exist in the U.S?

A: The Army Corps of Engineers oversees 2,148 levee systems totaling 14,150 miles. But there are many other small levees too, some privately owned, as well as a few operated by other federal agencies. The National Committee on Levee Safety estimates there are more than 100,000 miles of levees nationwide.

California has the most, with 9,144 miles of levees in 3,291 systems. The Mississippi and Missouri river basins in the Midwest and South are dotted with thousands of miles of levees. Missouri alone has 318 levee systems stretching a combined 2,038 miles, according to the Corps.

Q: Who operates levees?

A: The Corps of Engineers operates and maintains only a small percentage of levees, just some of the big ones. About 85 percent of the 14,150 miles of levees under the agency's oversight are actually operated by counties, cities or designated levee districts. The vast majority of the other 86,000 miles of levees have no federal oversight.

For non-federal levees, it's up to the operator to take care of maintenance, keeping drains and wells in working order and making sure the turf (and sometimes rock) isn't compromised. In times of flooding, it's also up to the local operator to patrol the levee, shore up any trouble spots with sandbags and to inform the community of any dangers.

Q: How susceptible are levees to flooding?

A: It ranges broadly. Some small agricultural levees are meant to hold back only minor flooding and, in fact, are expected to succumb to higher water. Other levees are built high and wide with the goal of protecting against even catastrophic floods.

But there are no guarantees. Extreme weather has increased in recent decades, and so has serious flooding. Consider Clarksville, Missouri, a scenic Mississippi River town, where seven of the 10 worst floods on record have happened since 1993.

Then there's Chesterfield, Missouri, a well-to-do St. Louis suburb along the Missouri River. The massive 1993 flood swamped a 7-mile long valley in Chesterfield, destroying most everything in its path.

After the levee was rebuilt bigger and stronger, hundreds of millions of dollars of development emerged in the Chesterfield valley, including shopping centers, big box stores and restaurants.

Levees like Chesterfield's shouldn't create a false sense of security, said Scott Vollink, a levee safety program manager for the Army Corps of Engineers.

"The public needs to understand that no levee system is flood-proof," Vollink said. "Levees reduce that risk of flooding, but no levee system is going to eliminate all that flood risk."

Q: How bad is levee damage from the current flood?

A: It's bad, particularly in Nebraska and Iowa and northwestern Missouri. Corps of Engineers officials say around two dozen levee systems have sustained either breaches (holes in the levee) or overtoppings (water flowing over the levee) since the flood began. The Corps said virtually every Missouri River levee along a 100-mile stretch south of Omaha was breached or overtopped.

There is no estimate of the cost of the repairs, nor is it clear how much the federal government will help fund.

Q: What is the repair plan?

A: Vollink said the agency hopes to have all of the damaged levees fully repaired by the spring of 2020. But with more flooding certain this spring, Vollink said the Corps will work with levee operators to expedite interim repairs.

"If there's a levee breach, if we could get some intermediate level of levee back into place very, very quickly while we develop the final detailed design to restore back into the original condition, that would be considered," Vollink said. "But it's very situational. It's hypothetical until we see what's out there."

Q: Does the Corps of Engineers keep tabs on levee conditions?

A: The Corps maintains the National Levee Database, and it is working with states and levee operators on a new national review of the levee system. The database includes information on inspections, levee conditions and flood risks. It isn't clear when the review will be complete since Congress has not authorized funding.

Police arrest man in fatal stabbing in Rapid City

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Rapid City police have arrested a 54-year-old man in the fatal stabbing of another man in an alleyway.

Police say the suspect faces potential charges of first-degree murder and aggravated assault on law enforcement, for allegedly waving a knife at officers.

Police were called late Monday about an unconscious man lying in the alley. Police arrived to find one man unconscious and bleeding on the ground and another man sitting on the ground.

Police say as CPR was performed on the unconscious man, the other man refused to give the officer enough room. When a second officer arrived, the man brandished a knife and had to be subdued with a stun gun.

The unconscious man, identified as 53-year-old Fredrick Ladeaux of Rapid City, was declared dead. The other man was taken to jail.

Augustana University revives special ed master's program

By SHELLY CONLON Argus Leader

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A university in Sioux Falls is reviving a teaching program after a 20-year hold to help put a dent in the nationwide special education teaching shortage.

Augustana University will be launching an online-only master's of arts and special education program this fall, in hopes of giving more teachers access to proper certifications, said Laurie Daily, chairwoman of the university's education department.

"In South Dakota, there's a critical shortage of special ed in the rural areas and the more urban areas like Sioux Falls, where they consistently fall short in trying to meet the needs and have certified teachers in their classrooms," Daily told the Argus Leader.

Nationally, the number of special education teachers has dropped more than 17 percent in the last decade, according to a December article by Education Week, a nonprofit news source for K-12 education. But special education in general has been a critical shortage area in teacher education and certifications since the 1980s in all states, Daily said.

At about that same time, Augustana started its initial special education teaching program. But the program faded between 2004 and 2005 because students wanted something other than face-to-face education, Daily said.

Now, 36 interested students can specialize in one of two areas, K-12 or early childhood special education, and manage the workload from wherever they are, Daily said.

The new special education teaching program joins one of at least two others offered in the state, with one at the University of Sioux Falls and the other at University of South Dakota.

Still, the struggle behind the shortage lies in actually attracting educators to the classroom, Daily said.

"It's a high burn-out field, so the demands are great," she said.

And districts across South Dakota have had to work with the Department of Education to have educators become alternatively licensed, Daily said. That means those hired into special education positions are often completing the requirements to become certified while they're teaching.

But Augustana's new program will allow certified teachers to simply add a specialization to the degree they already have.

"We're building on a long history of undergraduate programming in special education, and graduate programming in special ed," Daily said. "We wanted to design a program that would be responsive to needs not only within South Dakota, but across the country."

Sioux Falls School District has stayed ahead of the shortage for the most part, said Deborah Muilenburg-Wilson, the Sioux Falls School District's special services program director.

But in the last five years, the district has had to step up its game to recruit and retain special education teacher candidates, Muilenburg-Wilson said.

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With about 300 special education teachers district-wide, filling open positions sometimes takes right up until the beginning of a new school year, Muilenburg-Wilson said. Because of the shortage, the district has had to move up its timeline for hiring new educators.

"Every year, when we get that last special ed teaching position filled, HR and I do a little 'woohoo,'" Muilenburg-Wilson said. "Then I thank goodness I'm in Sioux Falls because it's probably an appealing place for teachers to come to. I'm not going to pretend we have some advantages."

Muilenburg-Wilson is on the Augustana University education advisory board and helped design parts of the program.

Having more certified teachers in special education helps solve two main issues, she said. The first — and main reason educators go into the field — is the service element behind helping a student with disabilities learn in a classroom setting, she said.

"The other part you can't pretend isn't there is the whole compliance and regulatory part, which is kind of laden in paperwork," Muilenburg-Wilson said. "Sometimes, people choose special ed because of this intervention and work with youth. Then they get in the field and learn about this other piece, and that's harder for them."

Sarah Henrichs has been a special education teacher in the district for about 18 years. She's seen the strain of the shortage firsthand in both rural and urban school districts.

"Sioux Falls, I feel doesn't feel the shortage as small as some of the other towns around," said Henrichs, who works at McGovern Middle School. "But I have had positions I've worked with that aren't certified. They're not responsible for the paperwork piece, the legal documents that need to be done."

In some instances she's had to take over the other half of the position, and mentor teachers through the compliance side of the job, she said.

"The years it's happened, you're just busier. You just have so much more going on, your case load is so much larger than typical," she said. "When I seem to notice it is the year after, when I have a normal case load."

In response, the district has increased its number of student teachers and has hired instructional coaches to help new teachers during their first years, Muilenburg-Wilson said.

The district has also brought in a facilitator to help with the clerical side of the job and works closely with universities and colleges to make sure future educators know Sioux Falls is a potential career choice, she said.

"We've tried to put pieces in place to set ourselves above the level of support we provide to teachers," Muilenburg-Wilson said.

Augustana's new master's program will only add another layer of support for Sioux Falls. And as someone who grew up in a small town and moved to the largest city in the state, Muilenburg-Wilson said she knows the online program will do even more for potential educators in rural areas.

"I think about that school I went to, which doesn't exist anymore. There were good people who had the skills to be a teacher, but were committed to living in that part of the world or maybe had family ties and couldn't move," Muilenburg-Wilson said. "The Augie program will offer someone in that kind of situation an opportunity to pursue a special education teaching degree that you would not have had 20 years ago."

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

Semitrailer-SUV crash in Hughes County kills woman

BLUNT, S.D. (AP) — A woman is dead after a crash in Hughes County involving a semitrailer and a sport utility vehicle.

The Highway Patrol says the SUV the 55-year-old woman was driving drifted into the path of the semi on U.S. Highway 14 on Monday afternoon. She died at the scene about a mile east of Blunt. Her name wasn't immediately released.

The driver of the semi was taken to a Pierre hospital with minor injuries.

Mozambique mourns as Cyclone Idai's toll rises above 300

By FARAI MUTSAKA Associated Press

CHIPINGE, Zimbabwe (AP) — Mozambique on Wednesday began three days of national mourning for more than 200 victims of Cyclone Idai, one of the most destructive storms southern Africa has experienced in decades. In neighboring Zimbabwe, state media said the death toll was above 100.

The full extent of the devastation will only be known once floodwaters from torrential rains, expected to continue into Thursday, recede. It will be days before Mozambique's inundated plains drain toward the Indian Ocean, and aid groups have warned the waters are still rising.

People have been reported clinging to rooftops and trees since the cyclone roared in over the weekend. The United Nations humanitarian office said the town of Buzi, with some 200,000 people, was at risk of becoming at least partially submerged.

"Flood waters are predicted to rise significantly in the coming days and 350,000 people are at risk," the U.N. office said.

Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa received a somber welcome in the hard-hit mountain community of Chimanimani near the border with Mozambique. Zimbabwean officials have said some 350 people may have died.

Some bodies from Zimbabwe have been swept down the mountainside into Mozambique. "Some of the peasants in Mozambique were calling some of our people to say, 'We see bodies, we believe those bodies are coming from Zimbabwe,'" said July Moyo, the minister of local government.

Mozambique's president late Tuesday said more than 200 people were confirmed dead there. President Filipe Nyusi after flying over the affected region on Monday said he expected more than 1,000 deaths.

Aid workers were shocked as they arrived in the badly hit Mozambique port city of Beira, estimated to be 90 percent destroyed. Its 500,000 residents are scrambling for food, fuel and medicine. Some neighborhoods are below sea level.

"The power of the cyclone is visible everywhere with shipping containers moved like little Lego blocks," the aid group CARE's Mozambique country director Marc Nosbach said.

International aid has started trickling in to ease the crisis, while churches in Zimbabwe collected supplies to send on.

"Everyone is doubling, tripling, quadrupling whatever they were planning" in terms of aid, said Caroline Haga of the Red Cross in Beira. "It's much larger than anyone could ever anticipate."

On Wednesday, the Emirates News Agency cited the Emirates Red Crescent as saying that the United Arab Emirates would provide 18.3 million dirhams (\$4.9 million) to Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi. Zimbabwe's president said a planeload of aid from the UAE was expected to arrive in the capital, Harare, later Wednesday.

The chairman of the African Union Commission said the continental body would provide \$350,000 in immediate support to the countries.

The European Union has released 3.5 million euros (\$3.9 million) in emergency aid, and the United Kingdom pledged up to 6 million pounds (\$7.9 million). Tanzania's military has airlifted 238 tons of food and medicine, and three Indian naval ships have been diverted to Beira to help with evacuations of stranded people and other efforts.

Sacha Myers of the nonprofit Save the Children described rising floodwaters and "rivers and dams bursting their banks." She said getting aid to affected areas was difficult as roads and bridges across the region have been washed away or submerged.

Now hunger and illness are growing concerns. Crops across the region have been destroyed. Waterborne diseases are likely to spread.

"There are large areas where people are really finding it difficult to find sources of clean water," Gert Verdonck, the emergency coordinator with Doctors Without Borders in Beira, said in a statement. He added: "On top of all of that, there's the issue of how to treat people who fall sick with so many health centers damaged or destroyed."

Associated Press writers Andrew Meldrum and Cara Anna in Johannesburg and Matt Sedensky in New York contributed.

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Arts and crafts see special counsel Robert Mueller as icon

By **CLAIRE GALOFARO AP National Writer**

Her family wanted a puppy, so Alicia Barnett dreamed they would find one that was smart, steady and a bit mysterious. She hoped their new addition could share a personality — and a name — with the man who has become her rather unlikely idol.

At Christmas, her teenage son brought home a 10-week-old chocolate Lab. “The strong, silent type,” Barnett observed. And then she named him Mueller, an homage to the stoic special prosecutor appointed to investigate Russian interference in the 2016 election and whether members of the Trump campaign played any part.

For devoted Democrats like Barnett, Robert Mueller has become a sort of folk hero since his appointment in May 2017. To them, he represents calm in the face of a storm, quiet in a city of bombast, a symbol of hope that a presidency they view as dishonorable might soon face some type of consequences.

“He gives me reassurance that all is not lost,” says Barnett, who lives with her family and Mueller the puppy in Kansas City, Kansas. “I admire his mystique. I admire that I haven’t heard his voice. He is someone who can sift through all this mess and come up with a rationale that makes sense to everyone.”

The special counsel — a 74-year-old registered Republican, Marine and former director the FBI — has even inspired his own genre of arts and crafts. One can buy Mueller paintings, prayer candles, valentines and ornaments. A necklace, earrings, keychains. A stuffed toy of Mueller in a Superman outfit, cross-stitch patterns, baby onesies — even an illustration of his haircut to hang on the wall.

“Stare at Special Counsel Mueller’s crisp coiffure for three minutes and you will notice a sense of calm come over you,” that artist, Oakland, California-based Wayne Shellabarger, wrote in his online listing for a \$10 print. “That’s a haircut you can set your watch to.”

Mueller has become a boogeyman for many of President Donald Trump’s most ardent supporters, as the leader of the investigation the president derides as a “witch hunt.” But his fans often speak of him in soaring analogies. Barnett imagines him as a duck’s legs: kicking heroically to keep things afloat but under the water, out of view. Karen Adler, a Placerville, California, crafter who sells a coffee mug with Mueller dressed as a saint and wearing a crown of laurels “for victory,” describes him as “Paul Bunyan-esque,” a man of superhuman labor. Shellabarger thinks of him “almost like Bigfoot,” a mystical creature rarely seen in public.

Mueller has remained completely silent as the ceaseless speculation about his investigation turned him into one of the most famous men in America. He hasn’t given a single interview, and his office does not leak.

When Kim Six posted her cross-stitch tribute to Mueller on her Facebook page, some people told her to keep politics out of crafting. The framed stitching featured the letters “M.A.G.A.” down the side, a reference to Trump’s “Make American Great Again” slogan but with these words substituted: “Mueller Ain’t Going Away.” Her critics assumed she was far-left, but she considers herself a centrist, having voted in the past for moderate Republicans.

Her husband is a “card-carrying Trump fan,” says the resident of California’s Bay Area. They agree to disagree, and she thinks Americans should be able to do the same. To her, Mueller represents a middle ground where facts exist, as opposed to the ideological rants that consume political discourse.

“Let’s get all the facts on the table,” she says, “and let this impartial person come in and tell us what the truth is — not spin, just truth.”

She’s imagined findings so thorough Congress and voters would be forced to act accordingly. But as the investigation has continued on, with 34 people charged and five sentenced to prison, she’s noticed

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Americans retreating to their corners and rearranging the facts to fit their political position.

She's losing faith that Mueller's probe, whenever it does come to an end, will change anything at all.

"How naive I was," she says. "I have this fear, no matter what happens, either side is going to spin it the way they want to. So I don't know anymore if he's the coming savior we had hoped for."

Carmen Martinez feels doubt, too. She and her business partner in New York City have sold 500 Christmas ornaments and earrings with Mueller's face. They tend to get a rush of orders after major Mueller news: indictments, sentencings. Martinez saw him as the one person who could lead the country out of chaos with truth, and believed his report would push everyone to turn away from Trumpism.

But Martinez, a Peruvian immigrant, was shocked last year by the administration's policy of separating children from their parents at the Mexico border. She started to wonder: If images of children in cages don't sway many minds, how could Mueller's report, just words on paper?

Others remain hopeful: "I feel like we're in the middle of a book, like a saga," says Janice Harris, a textile artist in Detroit. "And we're just waiting for the climax."

She was never a particularly political person before Trump's election — much of her work featured kittens or dancers. But she was inspired to immortalize Mueller on handmade makeup bags. She had custom fabric printed with Mueller's face, stitched it into her pouches and sold around 50.

Wayne Shellabarger has sold two prints of his Mueller haircut illustration. One happy customer wrote that using the print as a meditation aide allowed her to stop taking anti-anxiety medication.

"The world has gone completely insane and topsy-turvy," Shellabarger says. "Mueller's hair is one little shining piece of sanity in a sea of madness, so precise and sober and straightforward and without deceit, absolutely by the book, the opposite of everything that's going on in the world."

He hung one of the haircut prints in his own living room in Oakland, California — close to the television, so when he watches the news and his heart starts to pound, he can glance up at it.

There is such a thing as fact, it reminds him.

"And that gives me hope," Shellabarger says, "that since he's in charge, the world can be normal again."

Trump keeps a sharp focus on Ohio for the 2020 campaign

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is returning to the state that foretold his 2016 victory and serves as the linchpin of his re-election effort.

Trump's visit to Ohio on Wednesday marks his first trip to the state since last year's midterm election campaign, when the state was a rare bright spot for Republicans in the upper Midwest. But with Trump's path to another four years in the White House relying on a victory in the state, his nascent campaign is mindful of warning signs that Ohio can hardly be taken for granted in 2020.

Perhaps no state has better illustrated the re-aligning effects of Trump's candidacy and presidency than Ohio, where traditionally Democratic-leaning working-class voters have swung heavily toward the GOP, and moderate Republicans in populous suburban counties have shifted away from Trump. It's for that reason, administration officials said, that Trump keeps returning to Ohio — this week's visit marks his 10th to the state since taking office.

The visit is part of a 2020 Trump strategy to appear in battleground states in his official White House capacity as much as possible this year, said a person with knowledge of the plans who was not authorized to speak publicly. Trump is expected to make similar trips throughout the year as he seeks to boost enthusiasm to counter an energized Democratic base. It's a strategy employed by previous presidents, both to leverage the prestige of office for political purposes and to offset the steep costs of presidential campaign travel with corresponding taxpayer-funded events.

Trump is set to visit the Lima Army Tank Plant, which had been at risk for closure but is now benefiting from his administration's investments in defense spending. He'll also hold a fundraiser for his re-election campaign in Canton. Administration officials said the resurgence of the tank plant, which has benefited

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that region of the state, offers a compelling story for Trump to relate.

For both parties, the results of the 2018 midterms have become a sort of "choose-your-own-adventure" moment for 2020 prognosticators. Republicans contend that the election of the state's GOP governor, Mike DeWine, largely mirrored Trump's 2016 path to victory and proves the strength of his coalition. They believe Trump's coattails in the state are long, as incumbent Republican congressional candidates in suburban counties like Reps. Steve Chabot and Troy Balderson won re-election last year in no small part because of the president's frequent visits to the state.

"He's a fighter," said Ohio GOP Chair Jane Timken, "and that's one of the reasons why if you look at the Mahoning Valley, that's become a Republican portion of the state."

Democrats, for their part, highlight the re-election of Sen. Sherrod Brown, viewing his victory on a populist appeal as a signpost for their 2020 ticket. "A lot was driven by a realignment occurring among former Republican strongholds in the suburbs," said Ohio Democratic Party Chairman David Pepper. "With the right candidates, with the right message, 2020 could look a lot like Sherrod Brown's victory."

Nationally, Democrats have placed less of an emphasis on the traditional battleground state. Ohio was conspicuously absent from the list of key 2020 states — Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Florida — that are receiving a share of a \$100 million investment by the Democratic super PAC Priorities USA. The state doesn't even make the PAC's "phase two" roster, which includes Nevada, Arizona, Georgia, North Carolina and New Hampshire.

The Republican National Committee, in laying the groundwork for the Trump campaign's field program, has maintained a constant presence in Ohio since 2012. Former RNC co-chair Bob Paduchik, who ran Trump's 2016 effort in the state, is repeating his role.

Trump's visit comes days after he railed against the closure of a General Motors plant in Lordstown, a significant contributor to the economy in the eastern part of the state. The plant, which produced Chevy Cruze sedans, closed earlier this month despite bipartisan pressure on the automaker, which claims it is responding to consumer demand for larger vehicle types.

"Because the economy is so good, General Motors must get their Lordstown, Ohio, plant open, maybe in a different form or with a new owner, FAST!" Trump tweeted Saturday. It marked a reversal from his comments to Fox News last year on the plant closing that "it doesn't really matter" because the state would replace the jobs quickly.

Trump allies acknowledged that Trump may be limited by what he can accomplish for the Lordstown plant, but said his vocal advocacy signaled to his supporters in the area that he is fighting on their behalf.

On Sunday, Trump criticized a local union leader's handling of the closure after the leader was quoted on Fox News discussing the episode and after the president had a phone conversation with GM CEO Mary Barra. "Democrat UAW Local 1112 President David Green ought to get his act together and produce," Trump said. He later tweeted of his conversation with Barra, "She blamed the UAW Union," though the company disputed the president's account.

Pepper, the Democratic chair, blasted Trump's criticism of the UAW leader, comparing it to Republican Mitt Romney's pre-2012 column opposing the Obama-era auto bailout program," saying, "Trump couldn't have offended more of the nerves that are at the heart of the valley than he just did."

Associated Press writer Catherine Lucey contributed to this report.

Disney closes \$71B deal for Fox entertainment assets

By MAE ANDERSON AP Technology Writer

Disney has closed its \$71 billion acquisition of Fox's entertainment business, putting "Cinderella," "The Simpsons," "Star Wars" and "Dr. Strange" under one corporate roof.

The deal is likely to shake up the media landscape. Among other things, it paves the way for Disney to launch its streaming service, Disney Plus, due out later this year. It will also likely lead to layoffs in the thousands, thanks to duplication in Fox and Disney film-production staff.

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By buying the studios behind "The Simpsons" and X-Men, Disney aims to better compete with technology companies such as Amazon and Netflix for viewers' attention - and dollars.

Disney needs compelling TV shows and movies to persuade viewers to sign up and pay for yet another streaming service. It already has classic Disney cartoons, "Star Wars," Pixar, the Muppets and some of the Marvel characters. With Fox, Disney could add Marvel's X-Men and Deadpool, along with programs shown on such Fox channels as FX Networks and National Geographic. Fox's productions also include "The Americans," "This Is Us" and "Modern Family."

The deal helps Disney further control TV shows and movies from start to finish - from creating the programs to distributing them through television channels, movie theaters, streaming services and other ways people watch entertainment. Disney would get valuable data on customers and their entertainment-viewing habits, which it can then use to sell advertising.

Disney CEO Bob Iger said in an earnings call in February that Disney Plus and other direct-to-consumer businesses are Disney's "No. 1 priority."

Cable and telecom companies have been buying the companies that make TV shows and movies to compete in a changing media landscape. Although internet providers like AT&T and Comcast directly control their customers' access to the internet in a way that Amazon, YouTube and Netflix do not, they still face threats as those streaming services gain in popularity.

AT&T bought Time Warner last year for \$81 billion and has already launched its own streaming service, Watch TV, with Time Warner channels such as TBS and TNT, among other networks, for \$15 a month.

In addition to boosting the Disney streaming service, expected to debut next year, the deal paves the way for Marvel's X-Men and the Avengers to reunite in future movies. Though Disney owns Marvel Studios, some characters including the X-Men had already been licensed to Fox.

Disney also gets a controlling stake in the existing streaming service Hulu, which it plans to keep operating as a home for more general programming. Family-friendly shows and movies will head to Disney Plus.

No pricing has been disclosed for Disney Plus. The streaming service will feature five categories of material: Disney, Pixar, Marvel, Star Wars and National Geographic. Disney charges \$5 a month for ESPN Plus, a service that offers programming distinct from the ESPN cable channel.

Meanwhile, Fox Corp. — the parts of 21st Century Fox that are not part of the deal, including Fox News, Fox Sports and Fox Broadcasting — started trading on the Nasdaq under the "FOX" and "FOXA" tickers on Tuesday.

Shifting hopes as Republicans and Democrats await Mueller

By JONATHAN LEMIRE and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — It's a witch hunt, a vendetta, the worst presidential harassment in history.

That's what President Donald Trump has shouted for two years about the special counsel's Russia probe. Now, barring an eleventh-hour surprise, Trump and his allies are starting to see it as something potentially very different: a political opportunity.

With Robert Mueller's findings expected any day, the president has grown increasingly confident the report will produce what he insisted all along: no clear evidence of a conspiracy between Russia and his 2016 campaign. And Trump and his advisers are considering how to weaponize those possible findings for the 2020 race, according to current and former White House officials and presidential confidants who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations.

A change is underway as well among congressional Democrats, who have long believed the report would offer damning evidence against the president. The Democrats are busy building new avenues for evidence to come out, opening a broad array of investigations of Trump's White House and businesses that go far beyond Mueller's focus on Russian interference to help Trump beat Democrat Hillary Clinton.

It's a striking role reversal.

No one knows exactly what Mueller will say, but Trump, his allies and members of Congress are trying

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to map out the post-probe political dynamics.

One scenario would have seemed downright implausible until recently: The president will take the findings and run on them, rather than against them, by painting the special counsel as an example of failed government overreach and Trump himself as the victim who managed to prove his innocence.

The top Republican on the House Judiciary Committee, Georgia Rep. Doug Collins, said on the House floor last week that he had a "news flash" for Democrats who had high hopes that the report would be damaging to Trump.

"What happens when it comes back and says none of this was true, the president did not do anything wrong?" Collins asked. "Then the meltdown will occur."

Trump's tweeted version was even more graphic: The Democrats' House investigative committees were going "stone cold CRAZY."

That was in reaction to Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler's document requests to 81 people, businesses and organizations related to Trump. Nadler said his panel must look at "a much broader question" than Mueller has.

Adam Schiff, chairman of the intelligence committee, also said there's much more to look into. Mueller, he said, "can't be doing much of a money laundering investigation" if he hasn't subpoenaed Deutsche Bank, which has loaned millions of dollars to Trump. Schiff's panel, along with the House Financial Services Committee, is looking into money laundering and Trump's foreign financial entanglements.

"We have a separate and independent and important responsibility," Schiff has said. "And that is to tell the country what happened."

The Russia probe, taken over by Mueller in May 2017, has posed a mortal threat to the presidency since Trump was elected — a possible case for collusion or obstruction of justice that could begin a domino effect ending with impeachment. Those fears still exist, but as the investigation winds down, other feelings have taken hold in the White House, namely a cautious optimism that the worst is over, that no smoking gun has been found.

Even if Mueller's final report does not implicate the president in criminal conduct, the investigation was far from fruitless. His team brought charges against 34 people, including six Trump associates, and three companies. His prosecutors revealed a sweeping criminal effort by Russians to interfere in the 2016 presidential election and showed that people connected to the Trump campaign were eager to exploit emails stolen from Democrats.

Trump, of course, has railed relentlessly against the probe, deeming it a baseless "witch hunt," sometimes in all capital letters, and has said it was based on unfounded allegations perpetrated by his "deep state" enemies in the Department of Justice, as well as his foes in the Democratic Party and the media.

If the report proves anticlimactic, says former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, a strong Trump ally, "there would no longer be any justification for what the House Dems want to do. They have their report, they had the guy they wanted writing it, and he had the full power of the federal government behind him and they still didn't get the president.

"Trump can say: Here is the report. I didn't fire Mueller, I didn't interfere with him. If you want to keep investigating me, it just shows that it is purely partisan."

In fact, Trump has told his inner circle that, if the report is underwhelming, he will use Twitter and interviews to gloat over the findings, complain about the probe's cost and depict the entire investigation as an attempt to obstruct his agenda, according to advisers and confidants.

The president's campaign and pro-Trump outside groups will then likely amplify the message, while his advisers expect the conservative media, including Fox News, to act as an echo chamber. A full-throated attack on the investigation, portraying it as a failed coup, could also be the centerpiece of Trump campaign events, including rallies, they say.

While Trump's base has long been suspicious of Mueller, the president's team believes independents and moderate Democrats who backed him in the last election but have since soured may return to the fold if convinced he has been unfairly targeted.

In the meantime, the president and his surrogates will labor to link the report with the mounting inves-

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tigations launched by House Democrats.

One of Trump's most ardent defenders, North Carolina Rep. Mark Meadows, tweeted last month that Democrats will "keep investigating if Mueller doesn't find what they want. Amazing."

Meadows wrote in a separate tweet: "Their message is shifting. The 'Russian collusion' narrative is falling apart, and they know it."

Lemire reported from New York. Associated Press writer Eric Tucker contributed to this report.

Follow Jalonick on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/@MCJalonick> and Lemire at <http://twitter.com/@JonLemire>

10 Things to Know for Today

By The Associated Press undefined

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

1. NEW ZEALAND HOLDS FIRST FUNERALS FOR MOSQUE SHOOTING VICTIMS

A father and son who fled the civil war in Syria for "the safest country in the world" are buried before hundreds of mourners.

2. DISNEY CLOSES \$71 BILLION DEAL FOR FOX'S ENTERTAINMENT ASSETS

The deal paves the way for Disney to launch its streaming service, Disney Plus, and will also likely lead to thousands of layoffs.

3. WHERE TRUMP IS HEADED

The president is returning to Ohio, the state that foretold his 2016 victory and serves as the linchpin of his re-election effort.

4. SOUTHERN AFRICA REELING FROM IDAI

Zimbabwe is retrieving and burying bodies as Mozambique begins three days of national mourning for victims of a devastating cyclone and subsequent floods.

5. MAY PREPARES TO ASK EU FOR BREXIT DELAY

The British prime minister is preparing to ask for a short delay to the country's divorce from the European Union but the bloc may not decide how to proceed this week.

6. CONGRESS' INACTION ENDANGERS BLACK LUNG FUND

Federal budget officials say the program might not have enough to cover the cost of doctors' visits and medicines for about 25,000 retired coal miners starting next year, AP learns.

7. FDA APPROVES DRUG FOR POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION

The health agency approves Sage Therapeutics' Zulresso, an IV drug given over 2 1/2 days to treat a condition that affects some 400,000 American women a year.

8. FOR DEVOTED DEMOCRATS, SPECIAL COUNSEL IS AN ICON

Robert Mueller has inspired his own genre of arts and crafts including paintings, jewelry, prayer candles, valentines and ornaments.

9. WOODSTOCK TURNS 50

Jay-Z, Dead & Company and the Killers will headline one of the 50th anniversary shows commemorating the groundbreaking Woodstock festival this summer.

10. 'I CAN'T WAIT'

Alex Ovechkin and the Stanley Cup champion Capitals will visit Trump at the White House, but teammate Brett Connolly says he has chosen not to attend.

Foreign aid begins flowing to cyclone-hit southern Africa

By MATT SEDENSKY AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — International aid has started trickling into the east African countries of Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi to ease the humanitarian crisis created by floodwaters from Cyclone Idai.

Relief efforts that were initially stifled by airport closures slowly gained steam Tuesday, and foreign governments began pledging aid to help the region recover from the worst flooding in decades.

"Everyone is doubling, tripling, quadrupling whatever they were planning," said Caroline Haga of the Red Cross in Beira, Mozambique, referring to supplies and aid workers. "It's much larger than anyone could ever anticipate."

The European Union released 3.5 million euros (\$3.9 million) in emergency aid, and the United Kingdom pledged up to 6 million pounds (\$7.9 million). Neighboring Tanzania's military airlifted 238 tons of food and medicine.

Matthew Pickard of the humanitarian organization CARE said the response to Idai has been similar to prior natural disasters. Local authorities and international non-governmental organizations worked their way to the area in the first days, with additional aid destined to arrive soon after. The slow-moving catastrophe of the flooding and the inability to access some of the hardest-hit areas has limited the ability of some to see the scale of the cyclone. But, Pickard said, as those details become clearer, aid will spike.

"Over the next few days we'll learn just how big it is," he said by phone from Lilongwe, Malawi. "These are countries that are not usually making headlines and they're making headlines. With the story comes people's intent to respond empathetically."

Sacha Myers of the nonprofit Save the Children, speaking from Maputo, Mozambique, described rising floodwaters, "rivers and dams bursting their banks" and a death toll in the hundreds that was destined to climb.

She was awaiting the arrival of a cargo plane carrying 51 tons of emergency supplies, but said getting them where they needed to go remained difficult with roads washed away or submerged and few options for storage in dry areas.

"We're having an unfolding crisis that's getting worse and worse," she said.

The United Nations was deploying resources too, deputy spokesman Farhan Haq said, but logistics remained challenging and the hardest hit areas, including Chimanimani, Zimbabwe, remained inaccessible.

As better data emerges from the disaster zone, donors will be standing by to make money and other resources such as medicine available, said Dr. E. Anne Peterson of the nonprofit health organization AmeriCares.

"It's early and a really big disaster gets attention fast, and the more media covers it, the more people realize there is a need and the more likely we are to see them getting engaged," she said.

Ilan Noy, chair in the economics of disasters at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, said aid was likely to flow from dozens of countries to the African nations. How much is pledged and when, he said, correlates to the media coverage a given disaster gets, not to mention factors such as the geostrategic interests and previous colonial ties of an affected country. Ultimately, the dollar figures that are announced can bear little meaning, with the numbers typically stand-ins for the value of salaries and supplies sent overseas.

"They don't have enough helicopters or they don't have enough doctors," Noy offered as an example. "In that emergency phase, it doesn't really matter how you count it. You need resources. You don't need cash."

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Associated Press Writer Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations contributed to this report.

Floodwaters threaten millions in crop and livestock losses

By DAVID PITT AND MARGERY BECK Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Farmer Jeff Jorgenson looks out over 750 acres of cropland submerged beneath the swollen Missouri River, and he knows he probably won't plant this year.

But that's not his biggest worry. He and other farmers have worked until midnight for days to move grain, equipment and fuel barrels away from the floodwaters fed by heavy rain and snowmelt. The rising water that has damaged hundreds of homes and been blamed for three deaths has also taken a heavy toll on agriculture, inundating thousands of acres, threatening stockpiled grain and killing livestock.

In Fremont County alone, Jorgenson estimates that more than a million bushels of corn and nearly half a million bushels of soybeans have been lost after water overwhelmed grain bins before they could be emptied of last year's crop. His calculation using local grain prices puts the financial loss at more than \$7 million in grain alone. That's for about 28 farmers in his immediate area, he said.

Once it's deposited in bins, grain is not insured, so it's just lost money. This year farmers have stored much more grain than normal because of a large crop last year and fewer markets in which to sell soybeans because of a trade dispute with China.

"The economy in agriculture is not very good right now. It will end some of these folks farming, family legacies, family farms," he said. "There will be farmers that will be dealing with so much of a negative they won't be able to tolerate it."

Jorgenson, 43, who has farmed since 1998, reached out to friends Saturday, and they helped him move his grain out of bins to an elevator. Had they not acted, he would have lost \$135,000.

Vice President Mike Pence surveyed flooded areas in Nebraska Tuesday, where he viewed the raging Elkhorn river, talked to first responders and visited a shelter for displaced people. He promised expedited action on presidential disaster declarations for Iowa and Nebraska.

"We're going to make sure that federal resources are there for you," Pence told volunteers at Waterloo, a town of less than 1,000 residents about 21 miles (34 kilometers) west of Omaha that was virtually cut off by the floodwaters.

The flooding is expected to continue throughout the week in several states as high water flows down the Missouri River. Swollen rivers have already breached more than a dozen levees in Nebraska, Iowa and Missouri, according to the Army Corps of Engineers.

The flooding, which started after a massive late-winter storm last week, has also put some hog farms in southwest Iowa underwater. The dead animals inside must be disposed of, Reynolds said.

The water rose so quickly that farmers in many areas had no time to get animals out, said Chad Hart, an agricultural economist at Iowa State University.

"Places that haven't seen animal loss have seen a lot of animal stress. That means they're not gaining weight and won't be marketed in as timely a manner, which results in additional cost," he said.

In all, Nebraska Farm Bureau President Steve Nelson estimated \$400 million of crop losses from fields left unplanted or planted late and up to \$500 million in livestock losses.

In a news release issued Tuesday, Gov. Pete Ricketts said there have been deadlier disasters in Nebraska but never one as widespread. He said 65 of the state's 93 counties are under emergency declarations.

In neighboring Missouri, water was just shy of getting into Ryonee McCann's home along a recreational lake in Holt County, where about 40,000 acres (16,188 hectares) and hundreds of homes have been flooded. She said her home sits on an 8-foot (2.5-meter) foundation.

"We have no control over it," the 38-year-old said. "We just have to wait for the water to recede. It's upsetting because everything you have worked for is there."

The Missouri River was forecast to crest Thursday morning at 11.6 feet above flood stage in St. Joseph, Missouri, the third highest crest on record. More than 100 roads are closed in the state, including a growing section of Interstate 29.

Leaders of the small northwestern Missouri town of Craig ordered an evacuation. The Holt County Sheriff's Department said residents who choose to stay must go to City Hall to provide their name and address in

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case they need to be rescued.

In nearby Atchison County, Missouri, floodwaters knocked out a larger section of an already busted levee overnight, making the village of Watson unreachable, said Mark Manchester, the county's deputy director of emergency management/911.

Officials believe everyone got out before thousands of more acres were flooded. But so many roads are now closed that some residents must travel more than 100 miles (160 kilometers) out of their way to get to their jobs at the Cooper Nuclear Station in Nebraska, he said.

"It's a lot harder for people to get around," Manchester said.

River flooding has also surrounded a northern Illinois neighborhood with water, prompting residents to escape in boats. People living in the Illinois village of Roscoe say children have walked through floodwaters or kayaked to catch school buses.

Flooding along rivers in western Michigan has damaged dozens of homes and businesses.

Associated Press writer Margery Beck reported from Omaha, Nebraska. AP writers Jim Salter in St. Louis and Heather Hollingsworth in Kansas City, Missouri, contributed to this report.

Check out the latest developments on flooding in the Midwest.

APNewsBreak: Congress' inaction endangers black lung fund

By DYLAN LOVAN Associated Press

COEBURN, Va. (AP) — Former coal miner John Robinson's bills for black lung treatments run \$4,000 a month, but the federal fund he depends on to help cover them is being drained of money because of inaction by Congress and the Trump administration.

Amid the turmoil of the government shutdown this winter, a tax on coal that helps pay for the Black Lung Disability Trust Fund was cut sharply Jan. 1 and never restored, potentially saving coal operators hundreds of millions of dollars a year.

With cash trickling into the fund at less than half its usual rate, budget officials estimate that by the middle of 2020 there won't be enough money to fully cover the fund's benefit payments.

As a surge of black lung disease scars miners' lungs at younger ages than ever, Robinson worries not only about cuts to his benefits, but that younger miners won't get any coverage.

"Coal miners sort of been put on the back burner, thrown to the side," Robinson said recently, sitting at his kitchen table in the small Virginia town of Coeburn, near the Kentucky border. "They just ain't being done right."

President Donald Trump, who vowed to save the coal industry during the 2016 campaign, has repeatedly praised miners. At an August rally in West Virginia filled with miners in hard hats, he called them "great people. Brave people. I don't know how the hell you do that. You guys have a lot of courage."

Trump made no mention of restoring the 2018 tax rate in his proposed budget released in mid-March.

The White House said in a statement Tuesday that "President Trump and this administration have always supported the mining industry by prioritizing deregulation and less Washington interference."

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, whose home state of Kentucky is third in the nation in coal production, told a reporter from Ohio Valley ReSource in October the tax rate would "be taken care of before we get into an expiration situation."

That didn't happen. McConnell spokesman Robert Steurer didn't repeat that pledge this week; rather, he wrote in an email, "benefits provided through the Black Lung Disability Fund continue to be provided at regular levels" and that McConnell "continues to prioritize maintaining and protecting the benefits."

Trump and McConnell have reaped large contributions from the coal industry, according to the political money website Open Secrets.

Trump received more than \$276,000 during the 2016 presidential election from political action committees and individuals affiliated with coal companies. His inaugural committee received \$1 million from Joe Craft,

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CEO of Alliance Resource Partners in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and \$300,000 from the Murray Energy Corporation, the nation's largest privately-owned coal-mining company.

McConnell received more than \$297,000 in coal industry donations since 2014, when he was last up for election.

Congress established the trust fund in 1978. Until the rate expired, money came from an excise tax of \$1.10 per ton on underground coal and 55 cents on surface-mined coal that brought in \$450 million last year. Rates fell to about 50 cents and 25 cents when lawmakers failed to act on its Dec. 31 expiration date.

The fund provides health benefits and payments to about 25,000 retired miners. Most worked for companies that are now bankrupt. Many, including Robinson, struggle to breathe as their lungs are slowly stifled by tiny dust and particles trapped there.

Robinson was 47 when he was diagnosed, part of a wave of younger miners that doctors and experts say have been swept up in a new black lung epidemic in Appalachia. Robinson, now 53, and others who depend on the fund are disappointed in McConnell and other leaders who typically enjoy miners' support.

"I just feel that Mitch McConnell has let the citizens of Kentucky down, especially the miners," said Patty Amburgey, whose husband, Crawford, died of black lung disease at age 62 in 2007. She draws a monthly widow's payment through his black lung disability benefits. "And now there's an epidemic of black lung."

Dr. Brandon Crum has watched that epidemic unfold at his Pikeville, Kentucky, radiology clinic. In less than four years, Crum has seen 200 miners diagnosed with a severe form of black lung disease, called pulmonary massive fibrosis. The nation had 31 such diagnoses in the 1990s, according to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

"We're looking at men in their 30s and 40s on oxygen, being evaluated for lung transplants," Crum said. "Those are usually middle-age individuals with younger families, so it affects their wives, a lot."

His findings were published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in a December 2016 report that showed a shockingly high level of severe black lung cases at his clinic.

Amburgey, of Letcher County, Kentucky, said there will be fewer benefits for the growing number of younger miners with black lung if the fund is depleted. Robinson said he's now worried the trust fund's "pot of money will dry up."

West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin and other coal-state Democratic senators are pushing a bill to shore up the fund by restoring the larger tax for 10 years. Manchin said in a statement that lawmakers "cannot continue to allow these solutions to be put off again and again." That bill is in a Senate finance committee.

The mining industry supported the increased tax rate's expiration, calling the effort to maintain it an unnecessary tax increase. The National Mining Association, which speaks for the industry, says the lower rate "will be sufficient to cover monthly benefit costs for the fund." The group argued extending the rate would lead to job losses.

The May 2018 GAO report contradicts that claim, saying the fund's beneficiaries could multiply "due to the increased occurrence of black lung disease and its most severe form, progressive massive fibrosis, particularly among Appalachian coal miners."

The increase in younger black lung sufferers will put more pressure on the fund, as the industry continues to shrink.

"I think people always thought they would get (black lung) if they worked long enough in the mines, but I think it's a disease they thought would affect them at the end of their life, in their 70s or 80s," Crum said.

Amburgey says Trump reneged on his pledge to support miners.

"Mr. Trump promised that he would bring the mines back and take care of the miners, and that is not happening," she said. "He promised us a snowball in July."

Follow Lovan on Twitter at twitter.com/dylanlovan

California National Guard to leave border, help stop fires

By DON THOMPSON Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California is calling in the National Guard for the first time next month to help protect communities from devastating fires like the one that largely destroyed the city of Paradise last fall.

It's pulling the troops away from President Donald Trump's border protection efforts and devoting them to fire protection, another area where Trump has been critical of California's Democratic officials — even repeatedly threatening to cut off federal disaster funding.

Starting in April, 110 California National Guard troops will receive 11 days of training in using shovels, rakes and chain saws to help thin trees and brush, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection spokesman Mike Mohler said.

They will be divided into five teams that will travel around the state working on forest management projects, mainly clearing or reducing trees and vegetation in an effort to deprive flames of fuel.

"They will be boots on the ground doing fuels projects alongside CalFire crews," Mohler said. "We've had them out for flood fighting, several different operations, but this would be the first time their mission would be fuels thinning and forest management."

They have helped fight fires before, however.

Former Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger was the first in recent decades to deploy California National Guard troops as firefighters. That occurred on July 4, 2008, after lightning storms sparked hundreds of fires, Guard Lt. Col. Jonathan Shiroma said.

He referred questions about the latest effort to CalFire, which is directing the Guard's new assignment.

The training is similar for firefighting and fire protection. Mohler said the troops also will receive some training in forest management, "so they're not just out there cutting brush" but understand why they're doing what they're doing.

For instance, firefighting crews generally cut fire lines down to mineral earth during active wildfires, while fuels management crews often do less-intensive thinning of trees and chaparral to slow advancing flames.

That often involves creating fuel breaks. They can range from stripping away all woody vegetation on wide strips of land to thinning larger trees and removing shorter trees, brush and debris to discourage fires from climbing into treetops and jumping from tree to tree.

Critics say the work damages forests and can be useless against wind-driven fires, like the one that jumped a river to rain embers on the Sierra Nevada foothills community of Paradise last year, killing 85 people in and around the Northern California city of 27,000 people.

"CalFire is taking the Trump approach, logging the forest and weakening critical environmental protections, and that's the exact opposite of what we need to be doing," Center for Biological Diversity scientist Shaye Wolf said.

She said the better approach is to make homes more fire resistant while pruning vegetation immediately surrounding homes.

CalFire this month listed 35 fuel-reduction projects it wants to start immediately, covering more than 140 square miles (362 square kilometers) — double the acreage in previous years. But state officials estimate 23,438 square miles (60,704 square kilometers) of California forestland need thinning or other restoration.

"It's not a problem that's going to get fixed overnight," Mohler said.

Such thinning operations are getting more attention in recent years, with the U.S. Forest Service estimating last month that 18 million trees died in California over the last year.

The agency estimated that more than 147 million trees have died across nearly 15,625 square miles (40,469 square kilometers) during a drought that began in 2010, while about 1.5 million dead trees have been cut down.

Moreover, investigations have often blamed recent wildfires on utilities not doing a good enough job of clearing vegetation around power lines and equipment. Democratic state Sen. Bill Dodd of Napa has proposed legislation that would require CalFire to tell utilities which trees and brush to remove and then inspect the work.

Aside from Guard troops, CalFire also is creating 10 civilian fuels management crews this year. The 10-member crews could help with initial fire suppression if need be but will primarily reduce fuels, Mohler said.

"It's going to be a pretty amazing sight to see as these crews get out there on the ground," he said. "There's hundreds of, unfortunately, Paradises cross the state, (so) the public needs to understand this."

Sorrow revisited: Re-creating Katrina's muck in New Orleans

By KEVIN MCGILL and STACEY PLAISANCE Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Patches of black mold on the ceiling. Water marks on the dingy walls. Toys, furniture and a baby grand piano tossed about and covered in a gray muck.

The busted floodwall behind the long-abandoned house in New Orleans' Gentilly neighborhood was mended over a decade ago but the house looks, again, as though head-high floodwaters had only just receded.

It's just an illusion, however, created by volunteers and theater artists who've turned two rooms in the house next to the London Avenue Canal into a life-sized diorama and the city's latest monument to the disaster that struck on Aug. 29, 2005, when levees and floodwalls failed against the storm surge of Hurricane Katrina and 80 percent of New Orleans flooded.

A project of the donor-funded nonprofit group Levees.org, the Flooded House Museum is unique among the city's monuments to Katrina's destruction. There are markers at various sites, including some of the places where floodwalls gave way. But there's nothing like this re-creation by artists Aaron Angelo and Ken Conner. They were tasked with depicting what homeowners would have found once they were allowed back into the area in the months after the storm hit, once the water had receded and roads were cleared of debris.

They used donated materials — furniture, art, household bric-a-brac — while drawing on research and memories as they painstakingly conjured a disaster scene, taking care to accurately depict how the watermarks formed on the walls as the putrid water dropped in stutter-step stages over the days and weeks following the storm.

"The water was not clean water," Conner said one recent morning as he and Angelo rushed to complete the project, which will be formally unveiled Saturday. "It was salty water with a variety of contaminants. So each layer took on different looks."

He was working around a piano that sat akimbo in the middle of the floor. Angelo had earlier re-created nature's force by taking a sledgehammer to one of its legs.

This was a sort of Act II for the project. The rooms were first unveiled in August as a portrayal of the way they might have looked on Aug. 28, 2005 — art hanging neatly on freshly painted walls, toys on the throw rugs and a newspaper on the coffee table with an ominous headline: "KATRINA TAKES AIM."

"Anytime you see devastation on a mass scale in world history, we always try to preserve one of the bad elements of it to illustrate to future generations what happened," said Angelo, who not only donated effort but also some toys his 6-year-old daughter had outgrown. "And, so, this place, the more I've spent time with it, the more I realize how dynamic of a story it is."

The finished product, which visitors will be able to view through the front windows of the house, will be a permanent installation. And it may be expanded to other parts of the house, which, now, is mostly gutted.

Levees.org was founded soon after the storm by Rosenthal and her then-teenage son to educate the public about the causes of the catastrophe — chiefly the failures of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers flood walls that gave way in numerous locations.

"It was not a shining moment for American civil engineering, specifically the Army Corps of Engineers," Rosenthal said during a recent visit to the house.

And the stretch of road paralleling the floodwall is not yet a shining example of New Orleans' strong recovery. The area is still pocked with blight. It's off the usual paths taken by tourists, although tour buses do make stops there and Rosenthal is hoping it becomes more of a tourist draw. Levees.org established

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a small park next to the house, with a flower garden and a covered walkway lined with panels of photos and texts explaining the history of the storm.

Darlene Shortell, a tourist from Nova Scotia, visited the site while work on the exhibit was finishing up. She said it was important to see some of the devastated areas during her visit.

"Like any disaster, if we don't remember, then it could happen again," she said. "If we remember, then we can maybe prevent it or get through it a little better the next time."

Gentilly resident Sabrina Harris, whose home flooded in 2005, welcomes the exhibit as an educational tool for those who are unfamiliar with the story of Katrina, although the re-creation falls short of the reality.

"It is a good representation, but, when you actually saw the mold, the smell as you entered the city is something I'll never forget."

Fed is likely to stay 'patient' and project fewer rate hikes

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Federal Reserve is expected to end its latest policy meeting Wednesday by refining its new overarching message that it plans to be "patient" about any further interest rate hikes.

The Fed is all but sure to keep its key short-term rate in a range of 2.25 percent to 2.5 percent, still low by historical standards. And most analysts think the policymakers will scale back their projection of rate hikes this year from two to one or perhaps even none.

The central bank's new theme of patience and flexibility reflects its calming response since the start of the year to slow economic growth at home and abroad, a nervous stock market and persistently mild inflation. The Fed executed an abrupt pivot when it met in January by signaling that it no longer expected to raise rates anytime soon.

The shift toward a more hands-off Fed and away from a policy of steadily tightening credit has pleased investors and encouraged the view that the central bank is done raising rates for now and might even act this year to support rather than restrain the economy.

Besides issuing a new policy statement Wednesday, the Fed will provide an updated economic outlook and Chairman Jerome Powell will hold a news conference. Powell is expected to note that while the U.S. economy is on firm footing, it faces risks from slowing growth and trade conflicts. Against that backdrop, the thinking goes, it would be unwise to keep raising rates.

There is also anticipation that the Fed will specify when this year it expects to stop shrinking its huge portfolio of bonds, part of its balance sheet. Doing so would help keep a lid on loan rates.

All of which suggests that the Fed may recognize that it went too far after it met in December. At that meeting, the Fed approved a fourth rate hike for 2018 and projected two additional rate increases in 2019. Powell also said he thought the balance sheet reduction would be on "automatic pilot."

That message spooked investors, who worried about the prospect of steadily higher borrowing rates for consumers and businesses and perhaps a further economic slowdown. The stock market had begun falling in early October and then accelerated after the Fed's December meeting.

President Donald Trump, injecting himself not for the first time into the Fed's ostensibly independent deliberations, made clear he wasn't happy, calling the December rate hike wrong-headed. Reports emerged that Trump was even contemplating trying to fire Powell, who had been his hand-picked choice to lead the Fed.

But after the December turmoil, the Fed in January began sending a more comforting message. At an economic conference soon after New Year's, Powell stressed that the Fed would be "flexible" and "patient" in raising rates — a word he and other policymakers have invoked repeatedly since — and "wouldn't hesitate" to change course if necessary.

Powell, appearing last week on CBS's "60 Minutes," denied that pressure from Trump had influenced the Fed's policy shift. Private economists generally agree that a slowing economy and a sinking stock market, which eased Fed worries about any possible stock bubble, were more decisive factors.

Economists expect the Fed's updated forecasts to downgrade its estimate of growth in light of a slowdown

in manufacturing and retail, sluggish housing and construction activity and global pressures, including an ongoing trade war.

After sharply falling in December, stocks have rallied and recouped most of their late-year losses in trading since the start of 2019, a rebound credited larger to the Fed's easier monetary stance.

Some analysts say they think the Fed won't raise rates at all this year if the outlook becomes as dim as they are forecasting.

That view is supported by the CME Group, which tracks trading in futures contracts on the Fed's benchmark rate. It says traders now put the probability of any Fed rate hike this year at zero and project a one-in-four chance that the Fed will actually cut rates by year's end to help prevent a slowing economy from toppling into a recession.

Records show special counsel zeroed in on Cohen early on

By **JIM MUSTIAN** and **LARRY NEUMEISTER** Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Hundreds of pages of court records made public Tuesday revealed that special counsel Robert Mueller quickly zeroed in on Michael Cohen, President Donald Trump's former personal attorney and fixer, in the early stages of his Russia probe.

The heavily blacked-out records, released by a judge at the request of news organizations, show that Mueller was investigating Cohen by July 2017 — much earlier than previously known.

That was two months after Mueller was appointed to investigate Moscow's election interference and practically a year before an FBI raid on Cohen's home and office.

The full scope of Mueller's interest in Cohen is not clear from the documents, which include search warrant applications and other records. More extensive files from the special counsel investigation remain under seal in Washington.

But the documents made public Tuesday show that Mueller's investigators early on began looking into possible misrepresentations Cohen made to banks to shore up his financially troubled taxi business.

They were also initially interested in money that was flowing into Cohen's bank accounts from consulting contracts he signed after Trump got elected. Prosecutors were looking into whether Cohen failed to register as a foreign agent.

Some of the payments he received were from companies with strong foreign ties, including a Korean aerospace company, a bank in Kazakhstan and an investment firm affiliated with a Russian billionaire.

By February 2018, though, the records show Mueller had handed off portions of his investigation to federal prosecutors in Manhattan. And by the spring of 2018, those prosecutors had expanded their investigation to include payments Cohen made to buy the silence of porn star Stormy Daniels and a Playboy centerfold, both of whom claimed to have had affairs with Trump.

The newly released documents indicate authorities continue to probe campaign violations connected to those hush money payments. Nearly 20 pages related to the matter were blacked out at the direction of a judge who said he wanted to protect an ongoing investigation by New York prosecutors.

Where that investigation is headed is unclear. But prosecutors have said Trump himself directed Cohen to arrange the hush money. The president has denied any wrongdoing.

Cohen ultimately pleaded guilty to campaign finance violations over those payments. He also pleaded guilty to tax evasion, making false statements to banks and lying to Congress about Trump's plans to build a skyscraper in Moscow. He was not charged with failing to register as a foreign agent.

He is scheduled to begin serving a three-year prison sentence in May.

Lanny Davis, an attorney for Cohen, said Tuesday that the release of the search warrants "further his interest in continuing to cooperate and providing information and the truth about Donald Trump and the Trump Organization to law enforcement and Congress."

The FBI raided Cohen's Manhattan home and office last April — the first public sign of a criminal investigation that has proved an embarrassment for Trump.

The newly released records show that several months earlier, in July 2017, Mueller's office got a judge

to grant him authority to read 18 months' worth of Cohen's emails.

In their investigation, Mueller's prosecutors also obtained Cohen's telephone records and went so far as to use a high-tech tool known as a Stingray or Triggerfish to pinpoint the location of his cellphones.

FBI agents also scoured Cohen's hotel room and safe deposit box and seized more than 4 million electronic and paper files, more than a dozen mobile devices and iPads, 20 external hard drives, flash drives and laptops.

Both Cohen and Trump cried foul at the time over the raids, with Cohen's attorney calling them "completely inappropriate and unnecessary" and the president taking to Twitter to declare that "Attorney-client privilege is dead!"

A court-ordered review ultimately found only a fraction of the seized material to be privileged.

Tuesday's release of documents came nearly six weeks after U.S. District Judge William H. Pauley III partially granted a request by several media organizations, including The Associated Press, that the search warrant be made public because of the high public interest in the case.

But he ordered certain material withheld, acknowledging prosecutors' concerns that a wholesale release of the documents "would jeopardize an ongoing investigation and prejudice the privacy rights of uncharged third parties."

"The unsealed records provide significant insight into the investigations of Michael Cohen and serve as an important safeguard for public accountability," AP's director of media relations, Lauren Easton, said Tuesday.

David E. McCraw, vice president and deputy general counsel for The New York Times, which initiated the request for the documents, said he is hopeful Pauley will approve the release of additional materials in May after the government updates the judge on its investigation.

For more in-depth information, follow AP coverage at <https://apnews.com/TrumpInvestigations>

Officials: Air is safe near Houston-area petrochemical fire

By TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

Houston authorities on Tuesday assured residents that there were no measureable air-quality problems from a petrochemical storage terminal fire despite a huge black plume of smoke that could be seen for miles. The fire began Sunday at the International Terminals Co. in the suburb of Deer Park, southeast of Houston, and officials said it is uncertain how long it will burn.

Here is a look at the situation:

Q: Why are residents being told it's safe?

A: The plume of smoke extended above 4,000 feet (1,219 meters) on Tuesday and was being carried away on the wind, so most of the chemicals and fine particles released or generated by the fire are not affecting the surrounding neighborhoods, said Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo, the county's top administrator. A private company hired by ITC, Center for Toxicology and Environmental Health, said monitors in the neighborhoods found no abnormal readings.

Monitoring conducted by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and the Environmental Protection Agency also reported nothing alarming, officials at those agencies said.

The Environmental Defense Fund, an advocacy group, said it also would undertake its own monitoring.

The biggest concern will be pollutant concentrations when and where the plume eventually makes contact with the ground, said Chris Frey, an air pollution expert and environmental engineering professor at North Carolina State University who was not involved in the response. He said the concentrations likely will decrease as the plume disperses and some of the chemicals degrade.

It's not an ideal situation when chemicals are burning outdoors, but "If the plume is dispersing and being carried by the wind ... it does mean that concentrations are going to be substantially diluted," Frey said. "For someone 50 miles away, there probably is no discernable (risk)."

Hidalgo said authorities would continue to monitor conditions and post the results on the county website.

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Q: Should anyone be worried?

A: The greatest potential risk could be from particles produced by the fire, experts said. Residents have reported seeing ash in their neighborhoods, which officials say can be washed away.

But smaller particles can be breathed in and cause respiratory problems. The tiniest particles, which can be seen only under a microscope, can lodge deep in the lungs and enter the bloodstream, causing lung and heart problems.

The company and the county also are monitoring for those particles and say they've found no levels of concern so far. But fog is forecast for the area Wednesday morning, which could drag the plume downward and make air quality worse, officials said.

Health experts say people with cardiac and respiratory problems, including asthma, and the elderly and pregnant women should take extra precautions, including limiting their time outdoors. Dr. Umair Shah, head of Harris County Public Health, also says anyone who experiences symptoms such as coughing, difficulty breathing and irritation to the skin, eyes, nose and throat should contact a doctor.

Neil Carman, a former refinery inspector for the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and now a clean air advocate with the Sierra Club, said some of the chemicals that come down could be unburned and new chemicals could have been formed during combustion.

"I would tell (people) to go inside or leave the area," he said.

Q: What were they testing for?

A: Center for Toxicology and Environmental Health tested dozens of locations for chemicals that included benzene, naphtha, toluene and xylene, as well as volatile organic compounds and microscopic particles. Officials said they made sure that hand-held monitors were at the same level as people breathe.

Only particles and VOCs were detected, they said, but none at levels of concern.

Most of the chemicals in the burning storage tanks contained components of gasoline, including naphtha and xylene, ITC officials said. Another contained toluene, often used in nail polish remover and paint thinner.

Q: What will happen now?

A: Hidalgo said monitors will be moved to any other areas of concern as the fire continues to burn and the plume moves.

"We're sharing information with the public so that everybody knows what we know, what we're doing and where we're headed," Hidalgo said. "We're prepared for any contingency."

Associated Press writer Juan A. Lozano in Houston contributed to this article.

Father and son who fled Syria are buried in New Zealand

By NICK PERRY, JULIET WILLIAMS and KRISTEN GELINEAU Associated Press

CHRISTCHURCH, New Zealand (AP) — A father and son who fled the civil war in Syria for "the safest country in the world" were buried before hundreds of mourners Wednesday, the first funerals for victims of shootings at two mosques in New Zealand that horrified a nation known for being welcoming and diverse.

The funerals of Khalid Mustafa, 44, and Hamza Mustafa, 15, came five days after a white supremacist methodically gunned down 50 worshippers at two mosques in Christchurch — a massacre that he broadcast live on Facebook.

Hamza's high school principal described the student as compassionate and hard-working, and said he was an excellent horse rider who aspired to be a veterinarian.

Those present included Hamza's younger brother, 13-year-old Zaed, who was wounded in an arm and a leg. The boy tried to stand during the ceremony but had to sit back into his wheelchair, one mourner said.

"We tried to not shake his hand, and not touch his hand or his foot but he refused, he wanted to shake everybody's hand, he wanted to show everyone that he appreciated them. And that's amazing," said Jamil El-Biza, who traveled from Australia to attend the funeral.

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The Mustafas had moved to New Zealand last year, after spending six years as refugees in Jordan. Mustafa's wife, Salwa, told Radio New Zealand that when the family asked about New Zealand they were told "it's the safest country in the world, the most wonderful country you can go ... you will start a very wonderful life there."

She added: "But it wasn't."

Families of those killed had been anxiously awaiting word on when they could bury their loved ones. Police Commissioner Mike Bush said police have now formally identified and released the remains of 21 of those killed. Islamic tradition calls for bodies to be cleansed and buried as soon as possible.

The burials began shortly after Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern renewed her call for people to speak of the victims rather than the man who killed them.

Ardern's plea against giving him notoriety followed the accused gunman's move to represent himself in court, raising concerns he would attempt to use the trial as a platform for airing his racist views.

During a visit Wednesday to the high school Hamza and another victim attended, Ardern revisited that thought and asked students not to say the attacker's name or dwell on him.

"Look after one another, but also let New Zealand be a place where there is no tolerance for racism," she told students at Cashmere High School. "That's something we can all do."

Another Cashmere student, 14-year-old Sayyad Milne, also died in the attack.

About 30 people wounded in the attacks remained hospitalized as of Tuesday evening. About 10 of them were in critical condition, including a 4-year-old girl.

Australian Brenton Harrison Tarrant, 28, has been charged with murder and is next scheduled to appear in court on April 5. Police have said they are certain Tarrant was the only gunman but are still investigating whether he had support from others.

Ardern previously has said reforms of New Zealand's gun laws would be announced next week and she said an inquiry would be convened to look into the intelligence and security services' failures to detect the risk from the attacker or his plans.

New Zealand's international spy agency, the Government Communications Security Bureau, confirmed it had not received any relevant information or intelligence before the shootings.

Sheik Taj El-Din Hilaly, of Sydney, traveled to Christchurch to attend or lead some of the funerals. Through a translator, he said he felt compelled to support the grieving. A nationwide lockdown on mosques was imposed until Monday, which Hilaly said had upset Muslims whom he had visited in Auckland. Police continue to guard mosques across the country.

Residents of this close-knit city have created makeshift memorials near the two targeted mosques and at the botanical gardens, where a mountain of flowers has grown by the day.

Janna Ezat, whose son, Hussein Al-Umari, was killed in the Al Noor mosque, visited the memorial at the gardens and became overwhelmed by the outpouring of love. She knelt amid the flowers and wept, grabbing at daisies and lilies as though she might find her boy in them.

Ezat is comforted by reports that Hussein confronted the killer, charging at him after surviving the first spray of bullets.

"I'm very happy. I'm wearing white. We normally wear black," she said. "But he is a hero and I am proud of him."

Associated Press writers Stephen Wright and Steve McMorran contributed.

AP source: Trout, Angels close to record \$432M, 12-year deal

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

Mike Trout is on the verge of becoming baseball's first half-billion dollar man.

Trout and the Los Angeles Angels are close to finalizing a \$432 million, 12-year contract that would shatter the record for the largest deal in North American sports history, a person familiar with the negotiations told The Associated Press.

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The deal was disclosed Tuesday by a person familiar with the negotiations who spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because the agreement had not been finalized. The contract was likely to be announced by the end of this week, the person said.

Trout would set a baseball record for career earnings at about \$513 million, surpassing the roughly \$448 million Alex Rodriguez took in with Seattle, Texas and the New York Yankees from 1994-2017

"I'm pretty sure I ain't paying one more dinner for him," said fellow Angels star Albert Pujols, in the midst of a \$240 million, 10-year deal. "It's well deserved. I don't think there's anybody in baseball besides him who deserves that."

Trout's latest deal would top the new \$330 million, 12-year contract between Bryce Harper and the Philadelphia Phillies, and Trout's \$36 million average annual value would surpass pitcher Zack Greinke's \$34.4 million in a six-year deal with Arizona that started in 2016. The contract also would best Mexican boxer Canelo Alvarez's \$356 million deal with sports-streaming service DAZN.

Progress toward an agreement was first reported by ESPN.

Whether Trout's contract is the largest in the world for a team athlete is difficult to determine. Forbes estimated Lionel Messi earned \$84 million from Barcelona in 2017-18 and Cristiano Ronaldo \$61 million from Real Madrid, but precise details of their contracts are not known.

"You think about Angels, you think about Mike Trout," Los Angeles shortstop Andrelton Simmons said, "You locked up the best player in the game. That's a big first step to take. You can build off of that. That's a good base to the house."

Trout's deal would include a signing bonus and supersede the \$144.5 million, six-year contract that had been set to pay him \$33.25 million in each of the next two seasons.

While the marketplace has been slow for many players this offseason, prompting complaints from the players' association, top stars have gained robust deals. Four of the largest seven contracts will have been agreed to since Feb. 19, with Trout and Harper joined by Manny Machado (\$300 million for 10 years with San Diego) and Nolan Arenado (\$260 million for eight years with Colorado).

Los Angeles selected Trout with the 25th overall pick in the 2009 amateur draft, and he signed for a bonus of \$1,215,000. He made his major league debut on July 8, 2011.

A 27-year-old entering what should be his prime years, Trout is considered baseball's top player and would have been coveted as a free agent after the 2020 season. He lives in southern New Jersey, and Harper said he was excited about trying to recruit Trout to join him in Philadelphia.

Although Trout recently built a home in his native Millville, New Jersey, he is staying on the West Coast with the Angels, who are coming off three straight losing seasons and haven't won a playoff game during his career.

Trout and wife Jessica have made no secret of how much they enjoy living in laid-back Southern California, and the low-key outfielder decided to skip the pressure of free agency entirely.

Trout has been an All-Star in each of his seven full big league seasons and hit .312 with 39 homers, 79 RBIs, 24 steals and 122 walks last year. He led the major leagues in OPS in each of the last two seasons.

Trout has a .307 average with 240 homers, 648 RBIs, 189 steals and 693 walks in eight big league seasons. He was voted AL Rookie of the Year in 2012, won the AL MVP award in 2014 and '16 and finished second in MVP voting four times, tying the record shared by Stan Musial, Ted Williams and Pujols.

Big-money deals have not worked out for the Angels in the past. Pujols reached his big deal with the Angels before the 2012 season but has not matched his previous performance with St. Louis. Josh Hamilton signed a \$125 million, five-year contract before the 2013 season and contributed just 31 homers and 123 RBIs in two years with the Angels.

Trout is viewed differently as a home-grown Angels player and forms a core with Japanese star two-way player Shohei Ohtani, who is recovering from Tommy John surgery. Ohtani is expected to be able to hit for the Angels at some time in the first half of the season and to resume pitching in the 2020 season.

Trout has reached the playoffs just once, when the Angels won the AL West in 2014 and were swept by Kansas City. Los Angeles is coming off three straight losing seasons, and Brad Ausmus replaced Mike

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Scioscia, the team's manager since 2000.

Los Angeles has a lucrative television contract, a fan base that has packed Angel Stadium with 3 million fans for 16 consecutive seasons and an owner in Arte Moreno who rarely hesitates to spend. The Angels' farm system has improved sharply during general manager Billy Eppler's three-year tenure.

AP Sports Writer Greg Beacham in Los Angeles and AP freelance writer Carrie Muskat in Tempe, Arizona, contributed to this report.

More AP MLB: <https://apnews.com/MLB> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Nominee to lead FAA will face challenge on Boeing oversight

By DAVID KOENIG and TOM KRISHER Associated Press

President Donald Trump has tapped a former Delta Air Lines executive to lead the Federal Aviation Administration as the regulator deals with questions about its approval of a Boeing airliner involved in two deadly crashes within five months.

The White House said Tuesday that Trump will nominate Stephen Dickson to head the FAA. The agency has been led by an acting administrator since January 2018.

Separately, the Transportation Department confirmed that its watchdog agency will examine how the FAA certified the Boeing 737 Max 8 aircraft, the now-grounded plane involved in two fatal accidents within five months.

The FAA had stood by the safety of the plane up until last Wednesday, despite other countries grounding it. Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao formally requested the audit in a letter sent to Inspector General Calvin Scovel III on Tuesday.

Chao, whose agency oversees the FAA, said the audit will improve the department's decision-making. Her letter confirmed that she had previously requested an audit. It did not mention that the inspector general and federal prosecutors have already started looking into the development and regulatory approval of the jet, as reported by news outlets, including The Associated Press.

The letter requests "an audit to compile an objective and detailed factual history of the activities that resulted in the certification of the Boeing 737 Max-8 aircraft." It also says the audit will help the FAA "in ensuring that its safety procedures are implemented effectively."

Boeing said Tuesday that it will fully cooperate with the audit.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., called Chao's three-paragraph request for an audit "inadequate and incomplete."

In his own letter to the inspector general, Blumenthal said the watchdog should examine whether problems with the plane were missed because Boeing employees did some safety-certification work on FAA's behalf. He also questioned whether the FAA should have done more after the first 737 Max accident, and why the FAA didn't ground the plane as quickly as other regulators around the world.

Questions about the FAA's handling of the issue extend beyond U.S. borders and will pose an immediate challenge for Dickson if he is confirmed to lead the agency.

Canadian Transport Minister Marc Garneau said this week that even if FAA certifies Boeing's fix for the software on the 737 Max jet, "we will do our own certification."

Dickson was Delta's senior vice president of flight operations until retiring on Oct. 1 after 27 years with the airline, including time flying the 737 and other Boeing jets. Before that, he was an Air Force pilot. He emerged in recent weeks as the likely choice to lead FAA.

For the past 14 months, the agency has been under an acting administrator, Daniel Elwell, a former Air Force and American Airlines pilot.

A Lion Air Boeing 737 Max 8 crashed off the coast of Indonesia last October, and an Ethiopian Airlines Max 8 crashed this month near Addis Ababa.

Investigators suspect that incorrect sensor readings feeding into a new automated flight-control system

may have played a role in the Indonesian crash, and the Ethiopian plane had a similar, erratic flight path.

Boeing began working on an upgrade to software behind the flight-control system shortly after the Lion Air crash. CEO Dennis Muilenburg said in recent days that the company is close to finishing the update and changes in pilot training to help crews respond to faulty sensor readings.

Elwell told House Transportation Committee members that Boeing expects the software update to be finished by Monday, according to a person familiar with the briefing who spoke on condition of anonymity because they are not authorized to speak on the timing publicly. The FAA earlier required design changes to the flight-control system "no later than April."

After Boeing finishes the software, the FAA still must approve it.

The Associated Press reported Monday that the Justice Department is probing the development of the Max, according to a person briefed on the matter. It is unclear when that inquiry began.

Critics have questioned the FAA's practice of using employees of aircraft manufacturers to handle some safety inspections. FAA inspectors review the work of the manufacturers' employees, who are on the company payroll and could face a conflict of interest.

A federal grand jury in Washington sent a subpoena to someone involved in the plane's development seeking emails, messages and other communications, the person told The Associated Press.

The Oct. 29 Lion Air crash killed 189 people, and 157 died in the March 10 accident involving an Ethiopian Airlines jet. Both accidents happened shortly after takeoff.

Other nations banned the Max 8 and a slightly larger model, the Max 9, in the days after the Ethiopian crash. The FAA and U.S. airlines that use the planes stood by the plane's safety until last week.

There are about 370 Max jets of various models at airlines around the world. American, Southwest and United have said the grounding of their Max jets have led to some canceled flights.

The plane is an important part of Chicago-based Boeing's future. The company has taken more than 5,000 orders and delivered more than 250 Max jets last year. Boeing still makes an older version of the popular 737, but it expected the Max to account for 90 percent of all 737 deliveries this year.

Koenig reported from Dallas and Krisher reported from Detroit. AP staff writer Rob Gillies in Toronto contributed to this report.

NYC official: Kushner firm flouted rules, endangered tenants

By BERNARD CONDON AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A New York City councilman accused the Kushner family real estate company on Tuesday of putting tenants in danger by allowing several of its buildings to avoid safety inspections.

New York Oversight Committee Chair Ritchie Torres said his investigation showed that the firm once run by President Donald Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, has been renting apartments to hundreds of tenants in nine buildings with certificates of occupancy that expired months or years ago. Torres also said that the company has been trying to push low-paying tenants out of its buildings and didn't want the regulatory scrutiny that comes with inspections required to renew the certificates.

"The goal here is a concerted campaign to evade scrutiny," said Torres at a news conference outside the Kushner Cos. headquarters at 666 Fifth Avenue. "The company is engaged in what I call the weaponization of construction — the use of construction as a weapon for harassing tenants out of their apartments."

But a city regulator that oversees landlords called the expired certificates cited by Torres and tenant watchdog group, Housing Rights Initiative, "paperwork lapses" and blasted the findings as "pure grand-standing."

Our "top priority is safety — and indeed, we have inspected all these buildings or renovated units and deemed them safe to occupy," said Buildings Department spokesman Andrew Rudansky in an emailed statement.

The Kushner Cos. said that the problems with the certificates stretch back to its previous owners. Certificates for two of the nine buildings expired while Jared Kushner was CEO.

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"Similar to many other landlords, we inherited from prior owners certificates of occupancy with various issues," it said in an email. "Kushner will continue the long and detailed process to work with our consultants and the Department of Buildings to correct every issue outstanding."

The city requires a certificate of occupancy whenever significant renovation is done such as changing the layout of a building or of its fire exits. Most of the nine Kushner buildings cited are in the East Village section of Manhattan and appear from city records to have undergone substantial renovation and faced several violations.

The Kushner Cos. was fined \$210,000 by city regulators last year after an Associated Press report found that the company had submitted paperwork to regulators that claimed it had no low-paying, rent-stabilized tenants in dozens of its buildings when it, in fact, had hundreds. The false paperwork allowed the company to avoid inspections and other scrutiny during construction work that critics have said are often used by landlords to chase low-paying renters out.

The Kushner Cos. has said that the paperwork was handled by another firm and mistakes were corrected when they came to its notice.

The Wall Street Journal on Tuesday reported that the Kushners have hired a broker to sell five apartment buildings in the East Village as their company comes under public and media scrutiny. It is not clear if those are among the nine buildings with expired certificates of occupancy.

Jared Kushner stepped down as the head of his family firm two years ago to become a White House adviser. He still owns stake in Westminster Management, the Kushner Cos. subsidiary that oversees its residential properties. A financial disclosure filed with federal ethics regulators shows he earned \$1.5 million from the holding last year.

At Tuesday's news conference, the head of Housing Rights Initiative said that many landlords, not just the Kushners, were flouting the rules and regulators need to crack down.

"A certificate of occupancy is essentially like a driver's license for landlords," said Aaron Carr, executive director of the group. Ignoring the lack of one is like "a police officer pulling someone over and forgetting to check their license."

Trump buddies up with Bolsonaro, the 'Trump of the Tropics'

By JILL COLVIN and PETER PRENGAMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump welcomed Brazil's new far-right leader to the White House Tuesday and made clear that flattery pays.

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro — the "Trump of the Tropics"— ran an unabashedly pro-Trump, pro-American campaign last year, emulating Trump in tone and style. It seems to have paid off for Bolsonaro on his first official trip to Washington.

At a joint news conference, Trump announced that he'd agreed to designate Brazil a "major non-NATO ally" — something Brazil had pursued to smooth U.S. weapons purchases and military coordination. Trump even said he'd be open to granting full NATO membership to Latin America's largest and most populous nation, even though Brazil doesn't qualify to join the North Atlantic alliance.

The showing was the latest example of the premium Trump puts on personal relationships and the extent to which he's willing to work with those who sing his virtues. And it renewed focus on the growing wave of populist strongmen who have captured voters' support with blunt admonitions of "political correctness" and hardline immigration views.

As they sat down for the first time, Trump hailed Bolsonaro's run as "one of the incredible campaigns," saying he was "honored" it had drawn comparisons to his own 2016 victory. And he predicted the two would have a "fantastic working relationship," telling reporters at a joint press conference that they have "many views" in common. The two also exchanged soccer jerseys in a sign of their budding friendship.

Bolsonaro was equally complimentary, predicting Trump would win re-election in 2020 and drawing parallels between their efforts.

Standing side-by-side in the White House Rose Garden, Bolsonaro said their two countries "stand side

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by side in their efforts to ensure liberties and respect to traditional family lifestyles, respect to God, our Creator, against the gender ideology or the politically correct attitudes and against fake news."

"I'm very proud to hear the president use the term 'fake news'," Trump later remarked.

The embrace represents a shift in U.S.-Brazilian relations. In 2013, leaks from Edward Snowden revealed that the National Security Agency had wiretapped conversations of former President Dilma Rousseff, leading to several years of tense relations between the nations.

Bolsonaro had arrived in the U.S. with a half a dozen ministers and a goal of expanding trade, diplomatic and military cooperation between the two largest economies in the Western Hemisphere. And Trump appeared eager to deliver.

He announced he would back Brazil's effort's to join the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, while floating the idea of full NATO membership, though he said he'd "have to talk to a lot of people" for Brazil to join the organization.

However, James Stavridis, a retired Navy admiral who was the Supreme Allied Commander at NATO from 2009 to 2013, said Brazil does not qualify for full membership under the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949.

"The idea of formal membership is a nonstarter in every dimension — the treaty doesn't allow it, the Brazilians wouldn't want it and the Europeans wouldn't approve," Stavridis said in an email exchange.

The efforts came as both countries continue to denounce the crisis in Venezuela and called on members of the Venezuelan military to end their support for President Nicolas Maduro. Both the U.S. and Brazil have recognized opposition leader Juan Guaido as Venezuela's legitimate leader, and Trump reiterated that "all options" to address Venezuela's economic and political crisis remain on the table.

The leaders also were expected to discuss a range of other issues, including expanding trade relations and increasing U.S. private-sector investment in Brazil.

Bolsonaro has much in common with Trump. He, too, ran an insurgent, social media-powered campaign. And like Trump, he has blasted unflattering stories as "fake news" and used Twitter and Facebook to bypass mainstream news organizations.

As a congressman, Bolsonaro frequently made disparaging comments about gays, women, indigenous groups and blacks, and he has praised torture and killings by police and waxed nostalgic for Brazil's old military dictatorship. While such comments have drawn sharp criticism, they have also generated attention and fed into his narrative as a leader unencumbered by political correctness.

Bolsonaro has also echoed Trump's hardline immigration policies, calling immigrants from several poor countries the "scum of the world" and saying Brazil cannot become a "country of open borders."

In an interview with Fox News Monday, Bolsonaro said he supported Trump's immigration policies and his efforts to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border.

"The majority of potential immigrants do not have good intentions or do not intend to do the best or do good for the American people," he said.

Bolsonaro also had the support of Trump's former chief strategist Steve Bannon, who has since parted ways with the White House. While Bolsonaro has dismissed reports that Bannon played a key role in his campaign, Bolsonaro's son Eduardo approached Bannon in July of last year and the two struck up a friendship. In August, Eduardo posted a picture of the two of them on Instagram with a caption that said Bannon was an "enthusiast" of his father's candidacy and that they would "unite forces against cultural Marxism." It was one of several meetings, Bannon said.

On Sunday, Bannon joined Bolsonaro for a dinner at the Brazilian Embassy along with various Cabinet members and other leaders, where they discussed subjects including the country's economic plans.

Bolsonaro, Bannon told The Associated Press, "understands the Trump program and understands President Trump" and said both represent a "tectonic plate shift in the world of politics" toward blunt, politically incorrect leaders in the model of Trump.

"This is a new kind of global political moment," he said.

In advance of the meeting, the countries signed several bilateral agreements, including one that allows the United States to use Brazil's Alcantara Aerospace Launch Base for its satellites. Brazil also announced

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an end to visa requirements for U.S. tourists who visit the country, while Trump agreed to Brazilian participation in the Trusted Traveler "Global Entry" program.

Days after taking office on Jan. 1, Bolsonaro, a former army captain, said Brazil would consider letting the U.S. have a military base in the country as way to counter Russian influence in the region, particularly related to Brazil's neighbor Venezuela.

That statement was roundly criticized, including by former military members of his government, and the administration backed off.

Prengaman reported from Rio de Janeiro. Associated Press writers Mauricio Savarese in Madrid and Ben Fox, Robert Burns, Matthew Lee, Catherine Lucey and Darlene Superville in Washington contributed to this report.

Asian markets trend lower, tracking Wall St losses

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

BANGKOK (AP) — Markets in Asia are mostly lower after a lackluster day of trading on Wall Street.

Mixed signals on the progress of China-U.S. trade talks also revived caution in Chinese markets. The Shanghai Composite lost 1 percent to 3,059.17 in early trading Wednesday and Hong Kong's Hang Seng fell 0.5 percent to 29,318.53.

Japan's Nikkei 225 index edged 0.1 percent higher to 21,577.82, while the S&P ASX 200 gave up 0.1 percent to 6,177.50. South Korea's Kospi sank 1.1 percent to 2,154.23.

Shares were higher in Taiwan, Thailand and Indonesia but fell in Singapore.

Investors are looking ahead to the Federal Reserve's interest rate policy update due later Wednesday. The central bank has signaled that it will be "patient" in raising interest rates.

"Against the backdrop of heightened concerns over U.S.-China trade and ahead of the Fed meeting, Asia markets may well trade cautiously once again," Jingyi Pan of IG said in a commentary. She added that "the broad sense is that regional markets will be attuned toward the Fed meeting."

U.S. stock indexes closed mostly lower Tuesday after a late-afternoon splash of selling erased early gains, ending a weeklong rally.

Banks accounted for much of the decline, along with utilities and industrial companies. Those losses offset gains in health care, technology and consumer products stocks.

The benchmark S&P 500 ended barely lower, losing less than one point to 2,832.57, its second loss over the past seven trading days. It's still up 13 percent so far in 2019.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 0.1 percent to 25,887.38. The Nasdaq composite gained 0.1 percent to 7,723.95, while the Russell 2000 index of smaller-company stocks gave up 0.6 percent, to 1,554.99.

More stocks fell than rose on the New York Stock Exchange. Major indexes in Europe finished higher.

The Fed has made clear that with a dimmer economic picture in both the United States and globally, it no longer sees the need to keep raising rates as it did four times in 2018. Among the key factors, besides slower growth, are President Donald Trump's trade war with China, continually low inflation levels and Prime Minister Theresa May's struggle to execute Britain's exit from the European Union.

White House officials said Tuesday that top U.S. trade and economic officials will visit China late next week for another round of negotiations on their dispute over Beijing's industrial policies and other issues.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer will lead the delegation, Trump administration officials said. The sources spoke on background because they weren't authorized to comment publicly.

The scheduled talks suggest the two sides believe they can make at least some progress, though they're taking place at a time when administration officials had previously hoped to sign an agreement at Mar-a-Lago, the president's Florida resort. Business lobbyists say an agreement now probably won't be reached until late April.

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CURRENCIES: The dollar rose to 111.59 Japanese yen from 111.40 yen. The euro slipped to \$1.1346 from \$1.1351 on Tuesday.

ENERGY: Benchmark U.S. crude oil lost 16 cents to \$59.13 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It gave up 9 cents to close at \$59.29 a barrel on Tuesday. Brent crude, the international standard, slipped 3 cents to \$67.58 a barrel.

AP Business Writers Damien J. Troise and Alex Veiga contributed.

Today in History By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, March 20, the 79th day of 2019. There are 286 days left in the year. Spring arrives at 5:58 p.m. Eastern time.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 20, 1995, in Tokyo, 12 people were killed, more than 5,500 others sickened when packages containing the deadly chemical sarin were leaked on five separate subway trains by Aum Shinrikyo (ohm shin-ree-kyoh) cult members.

On this date:

In 1413, England's King Henry IV died; he was succeeded by Henry V.

In 1760, a 10-hour fire erupted in Boston, destroying 349 buildings and burning 10 ships, but claiming no lives.

In 1815, Napoleon Bonaparte returned to Paris after escaping his exile on Elba, beginning his "Hundred Days" rule.

In 1854, the Republican Party of the United States was founded by slavery opponents at a schoolhouse in Ripon (RIH'-puhn), Wisconsin.

In 1942, U.S. Army Gen. Douglas MacArthur, having evacuated the Philippines at the order of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, told reporters in Terowie, Australia: "I came out of Bataan, and I shall return."

In 1952, the U.S. Senate ratified, 66-10, a Security Treaty with Japan.

In 1969, John Lennon married Yoko Ono in Gibraltar.

In 1976, kidnapped newspaper heiress Patricia Hearst was convicted of armed robbery for her part in a San Francisco bank holdup carried out by the Symbionese Liberation Army. (Hearst was sentenced to seven years in prison; she was released after serving 22 months, and was pardoned in 2001 by President Bill Clinton.)

In 1977, voters in Paris chose former French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac to be the French capital's first mayor in more than a century.

In 1985, Libby Riddles of Teller, Alaska, became the first woman to win the Iditarod Trail Dog Sled Race.

In 1990, singer Gloria Estefan suffered a broken back when a truck rear-ended her tour bus on a snow-covered highway in Pennsylvania. (Surgeons implanted titanium rods to stabilize her spine, and Estefan was able to make a comeback after months of intensive physical therapy.)

In 2004, Hundreds of thousands of people worldwide rallied against the U.S.-led war in Iraq on the first anniversary of the start of the conflict. The U.S. military charged six soldiers with abusing inmates at the Abu Ghraib prison.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama reached out to the Iranian people in a video with Farsi subtitles, saying the U.S. was prepared to end years of strained relations if Tehran toned down its bellicose rhetoric; Iranian officials dismissed the overture, saying they wanted concrete change from Washington before they were ready to enter a dialogue. Pope Benedict XVI, visiting Angola, condemned sexual violence against women in Africa and chided those countries on the continent that approved abortion.

Five years ago: President Barack Obama ordered economic sanctions against nearly two dozen members of Russian President Vladimir Putin's inner circle and a major bank that provided them support, raising

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the stakes in an East-West showdown over Ukraine. Four gunmen opened fire in a crowded restaurant frequented by foreigners at the Serena Hotel in Kabul, Afghanistan, killing nine people.

One year ago: Investigators pursuing a suspected serial bombing in Austin, Texas, shifted attention to a FedEx shipping center near San Antonio, where a package had exploded. In a phone call to Vladimir Putin, President Donald Trump offered congratulations on Putin's re-election victory; a senior official said Trump had been warned in briefing materials that he should not congratulate Putin.

Today's Birthdays: Singer Dame Vera Lynn is 102. Producer-director-comedian Carl Reiner is 97. Actor Hal Linden is 88. Former Canadian prime minister Brian Mulroney (muhl-ROO'-nee) is 80. Country singer Don Edwards is 80. Basketball Hall of Fame coach Pat Riley is 74. Country singer-musician Ranger Doug (Riders in the Sky) is 73. Hockey Hall of Famer Bobby Orr is 71. Blues singer-musician Marcia Ball is 70. Actor William Hurt is 69. Rock musician Carl Palmer (Emerson, Lake and Palmer) is 69. Rock musician Jimmie Vaughan is 68. Country musician Jimmy Seales (Shenandoah) is 65. Actress Amy Aquino (ah-KEE'-noh) is 62. Movie director Spike Lee is 62. Actress Theresa Russell is 62. Actress Vanessa Bell Calloway is 62. Actress Holly Hunter is 61. Rock musician Slim Jim Phantom (The Stray Cats) is 58. Actress-model-designer Kathy Ireland is 56. Actor David Thewlis is 56. Rock musician Adrian Oxaal (James) is 54. Actress Jessica Lundy is 53. Actress Liza Snyder is 51. Actor Michael Rapaport is 49. Actor Alexander Chaplin is 48. Actor Cedric Yarbrough is 46. Actress Paula Garces is 45. Actor Michael Genadry is 41. Actress Bianca Lawson is 40. Comedian-actor Mikey Day is 39. Actor Nick Blood (TV: "Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.") is 37. Rock musician Nick Wheeler (The All-American Rejects) is 37. Actor Michael Cassidy is 36. Actress-singer Christy Carlson Romano is 35. Actress Ruby Rose is 33. Actress Barrett Doss is 30.

Thought for Today: "Every spring is the only spring, a perpetual astonishment." — Ellis Peters (Edith Pargeter), British author (1913-1995)