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Harvest a great pumpkin

Don Morton helped his daughter Jessica Adams (above) wrestle a pumpkin from Morton's backyard Thursday to a scale where it weighed in at 90 pounds. Morton and a neighbor moved it from there to the trunk of his daughter's car, bound for Hays. Adams gave it to Kaitlin Williams, her boyfriend's sister and a mother of three. Morton has had a pumpkin patch for years (right) and said he has always given pumpkins away to friends and relatives.

SAM DIETER/Colby Free Press



Deal reached to avoid default

By Alan Fram

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate leaders announced a last-minute agreement today to avert a threatened Treasury default and reopen the government after a partial, 16-day shutdown. Congress raced to pass the measure by day's end.

The Dow Jones industrial average soared on the news that the threat of default was fading, flirting with a 200-point gain in morning trading.

"This is a time for reconciliation," said Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of the agreement he had forged with the GOP leader, Sen. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky.

McConnell said that with the accord, Republicans had sealed a deal to have spending in one area of the budget decline for two years in a row, adding, "we're not going back."

One prominent tea party lawmaker, Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas,

said he would oppose the plan, but not seek to delay its passage.

That was a key concession that signaled a strong possibility that both houses could act by day's end. That, in turn, would allow President Barack Obama to sign the bill into law ahead of the Thursday deadline that Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew had set for action to raise the \$16.7 trillion debt limit.

Officials said the proposal called for the Treasury to have authority to continue borrowing through Feb. 7, and the government would reopen through Jan. 15.

There was no official comment from the White House, although congressional officials said administration aides had been kept fully informed of the negotiations.

In political terms, the final agreement was almost entirely along lines Obama had set when the impasse began last month. Tea party conservatives had initially demanded the defunding of the

health care law as the price for providing essential federal funding.

Under a strategy set by Obama and Reid, Democrats said they would not negotiate with Republicans in exchange for performing what the White House called basic functions of keeping the government in operation and preventing Treasury from defaulting on its obligations.

A long line of polls charted a steep decline in public approval for Republicans in the course of what Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., pronounced a "shameful episode" in the nation's history.

While the emerging deal could well meet resistance from conservatives in the Republican-controlled House, the Democratic Leader, Rep. Nancy Pelosi of California, has signaled she will support the plan and her rank and file is expected to vote for it in overwhelming numbers.

That raised the possibility that more Democrats than Republicans would back it, potentially causing additional problems for House Speaker John Boehner as he struggles to manage his tea party-heavy majority.

Boehner and the House Republican leadership met in a different part of the Capitol to plan their next move. A spokesman, Michael Steel, said afterward that no decision had been made "about how or when a potential Senate agreement could be voted on in the House."

The developments came one

day before the deadline Lew had set for Congress to raise the current \$16.7 trillion debt limit. Without action by lawmakers, he said, Treasury could not be certain it had the ability to pay bills as they come due.

In addition to raising the debt limit, the proposal would give lawmakers a vote to disapprove the increase. Obama would have the right to veto their opposition, ensuring he would prevail.

House and Senate negotiators would be appointed to seek a deficit-reduction deal. At the last minute, Reid and McConnell jettisoned a plan to give federal agencies increased flexibility in coping with the effects of across-the-board cuts. Officials said that would be a topic for the negotiations expected to begin shortly.

Despite initial Republican demands for the defunding of the health care law often derided as "Obamacare," the pending agreement makes only one modest change in the program. It requires individuals and families seeking subsidies to purchase coverage to verify their incomes before qualifying.

There were some dire warnings from the financial world a day after the Fitch credit rating agency said Tuesday it was reviewing its AAA rating on U.S. government debt for possible downgrade.

John Chambers, chairman of Standard & Poor's Sovereign Debt Committee, told "CBS This

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County jail problems pointed out

By Sam Dieter

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The Thomas County commissioners heard about a security breach at the Thomas County Jail and discussed putting a temporary barrier around the outdoor exercise yard at their meeting Monday.

"There was some contraband sneaked into the jail in broad daylight," Sheriff Rod Taylor said, adding that the material was given to current inmates by former prisoners. "It could have been something that could have been very harmful to us."

Taylor would not say what the "contraband" was, but he said it was pushed into the exercise area behind the jail. He asked the commissioners to consider some sort of metal shell or other wall around the fenced-in exercise yard.

He thinks the former prisoners sneaked to the outside of the exercise area and pushed the items underneath the fence. At the same

time, some of the inmates were standing in front of a camera trained on the inside of the yard. Undersheriff Marc Finley later said there are not enough cameras to cover the whole exercise area.

After he stepped out of the meeting, Taylor explained that the jail does not schedule exercise at any regular time. He said that some of the inmates have been in the state penitentiary and know a lot about smuggling, but it was different prisoners who were involved in this case.

When Commissioner Mike Baughn who, used to be the sheriff, asked if anyone was directly supervising the inmates, Taylor said no. Baughn asked about sending prisoners to Sherman or Wallace counties, but the sheriff said he didn't want to do that.

Taylor also mentioned that the jailers cannot shut off the water in individual cells without entering them. This means one prisoner

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Time to check home for radon

The Thomas County Extension office has radon test kits to help people check their homes for this radioactive gas next week during National Radon Week, from Sunday to Saturday, Oct. 26.

Radon is an invisible, odorless gas, according to the U.S. Centers for Cancer Prevention, which killed more people nationwide last year than firearms, fires and carbon monoxide combined. It is the leading cause of lung cancer for non-smokers.

The gas may seep into peoples' homes from underground, through cracks in the basement and walls. It does not discriminate among different home types or regions; high levels are found in about one in every 15 American homes.

Extension Agent Diann Gerstner said the office sells testing kits for \$5. They are simple to use, and she gives people directions, but they need to be left in a home for at least 72 hours.

Fixing lights downtown



SAM DIETER/Colby Free Press

City workers changed a light on East Fourth Street Tuesday afternoon.

Health meet cancelled

A health-insurance teleworkshop tonight at Citizens Medical Center has been cancelled due to illness among the presenters.

Hospital spokesperson Jeanene Brown said she did not know this morning whether the event, to be conducted by the Kansas Insurance Department on the Affordable Care Act, would be rescheduled. For information, call her at 460-4881.

