

Rodent says 6 more weeks of winter

By Associated Press

PUNXSUTAWNEY, Pa. — The handlers of Pennsylvania's most famous groundhog, Punxsutawney Phil, said Monday the furry rodent has forecast six more weeks of winter.

Members of the top hat-wearing Inner Circle announced the "prediction" Monday morning.

A German legend has it that if a furry rodent sees his shadow on Feb. 2, winter will last another six weeks. If not, spring comes early.

The forecast was also announced on Twitter, as was referenced in the official proclamation read by Bill Deeley, president of the Inner Circle.

"Forecasts abound on the Internet, but, I, Punxsutawney Phil am still your best bet. Yes, a shadow I see, you can start to Twitter, hash tag: Six more weeks of winter!"

The forecast was delivered after a steady pre-dawn rain turned to snow as temperatures dropped from the high 30s to around freezing. They were forecast to keep dropping over much of the state, prompting the state Department of Transportation to lower the speed limit to 45 mph for many interstate highways which were already wet and expected to freeze or be covered with snow as the day wore on.

The rain kept some revelers away, with state police estimating the crowd at around 11,000, slightly smaller than in recent years when upward of 15,000 attended.

No mention was made of Sunday night's Super Bowl, unlike Groundhog Day 2009 — the last time the celebration occurred

the morning after the big game – which was won by the nearby Pittsburgh Steelers that year.

Despite the German legend, Phil's handlers don't wait to see if he sees his shadow – as he likely would not have on such an overcast day. Instead, the Inner Circle decide on the forecast ahead of time and announce it on Gobbler's Knob, a tiny hill in the town for which the groundhog is named, about 65 miles northeast of Pittsburgh.

Records going back to 1887 show Phil has now predicted more winter 102 times while forecasting an early spring just 17 times. There are no records for the remaining years.