

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Sunday, Dec. 15

St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion: at St. John's, 9 a.m.; at Zion, 11 a.m. Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Sunday School kids practice for program. 9 a.m.; Sunday School Christmas Proram, 10:30 a.m.; Choir, 6 p.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.

Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.; Christmas program and dinner, 5 p.m.

United Methodist: Conde worship at 8:30 a.m.; Groton Sunday School program at 10:30 a.m.; Sunday School Christmas Practice, 9:30 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Lunch at Groton, 11:30 a.m.

## Groton Daily Independent

PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460



The greatest gift you will ever receive is when Jesus comes to live inside your heart!

## Monday, Dec. 16

Senior Menu: Chicken tetrazzine, peas and carrots, pineapple tidbits, breadsticks.

School Breakfast: Breakfast sliders.

School Lunch: Chicken legs, mashed potatoes.

Groton Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Community Center, 1 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Christian Literature Circle, 7:30 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

JH GBB at Sisseton, one game at 4 p.m.; Boys JH Wrestling at Webster, 4:30 p.m.; Boys JV Invitational Wrestling at Madison, 5 p.m.

Pantry, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Groton Community Center



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## **GDILIVE.COM**

**Sisseton Boys C**  
~~Sisseton Girls C~~  
**Sisseton Boys JV**  
~~Sisseton Girls JV~~  
**West Central Boys C**  
~~West Central Girls C~~  
**West Central Boys JV**  
~~West Central Girls JV~~  
**Webster Boys C**  
~~Webster Boys JV~~

**\$25 per  
game**

**Some games may not  
have commentary but  
will have the score**

**Text Paul at  
605-397-7460**

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**Pictured with Santa are Quinton, 9; Hadlee, 4; Kase, 6; and Jax 6 from the Leah Ronning family. Photo taken at Santa Day at Professional Management Services. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)**

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**Pictured with Santa are Sawyer, 5, and Sage, 1. They are children of Andrew and Emily Kappes. Photo taken at Santa Day at Professional Management Services.** (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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**Pictured with Santa are Briggs, 6; Kase, 2; and Parker, 4. They are children of Quintin and Meghan Biermann. Photo taken at Santa Day at Professional Management Services. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)**

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**Pictured with Santa is Lexie Locke, daughter of Kellie and Spencer Locke. Photo taken at Santa Day at Professional Management Services. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)**

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**Pictured with Santa is Emmett, son of Tyler and Skyler Wadman. Photo taken at Santa Day at Professional Management Services. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)**

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**Pictured with Santa are Waylon, River and Maya from the Laura Anderson family. Photo taken at Santa Day at Professional Management Services. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)**



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**Pictured with Santa is Andrew, 4, from the MacKenzie Heilman family. Photo taken at Santa Day at Professional Management Services. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)**

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**Pictured with Santa are Rudy, 2; and Hank, 4, children of Jacque and Delton Hoff. Photo taken at Santa Day at Professional Management Services. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)**

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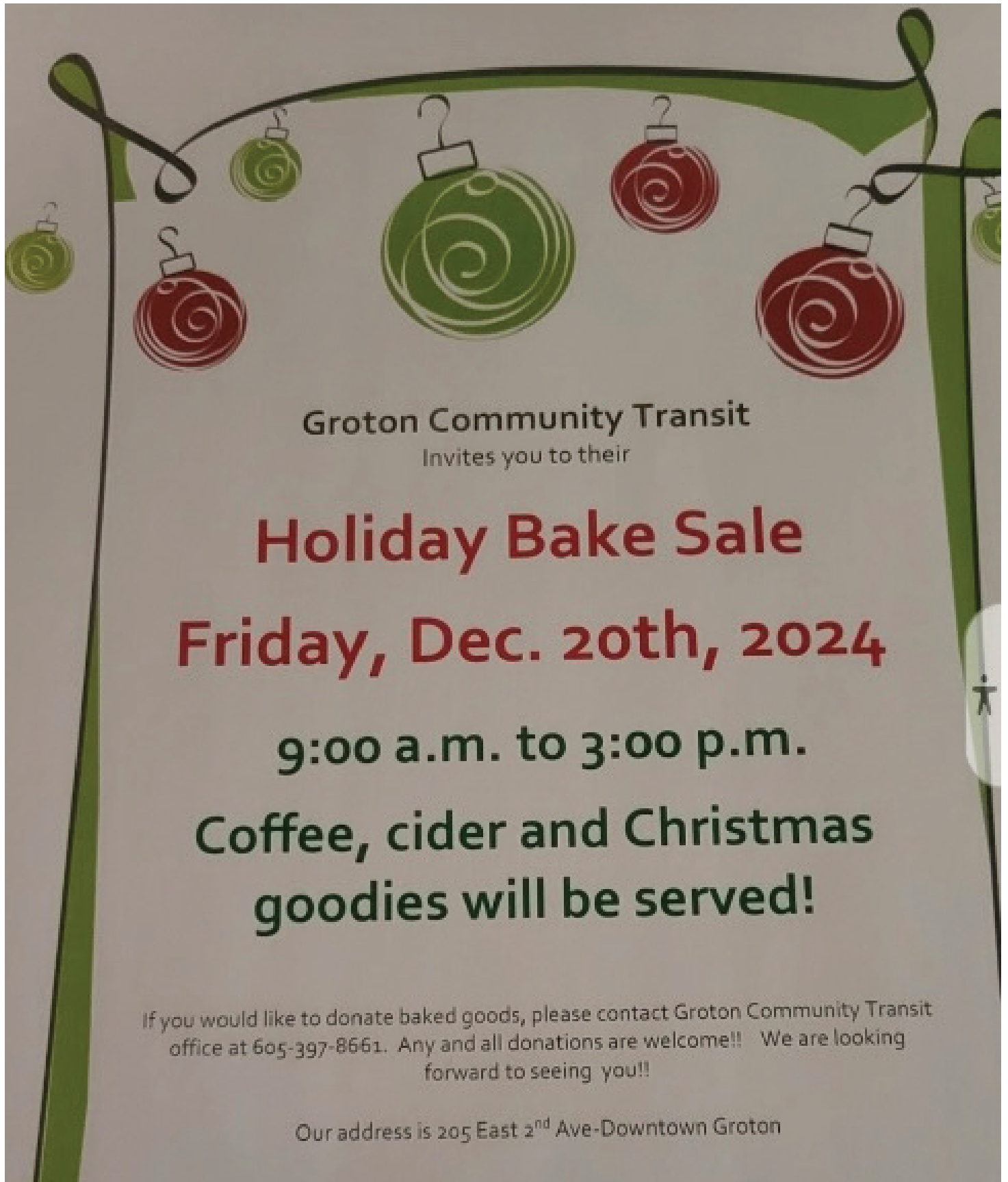
**Pictured with Santa are Brantley, 10; Bayleeann, 6; and Bellamy, 5; children of McKenzie and Chris West. Photo taken at Santa Day at Professional Management Services. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)**

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**Pictured with Santa are Olivia, 3; Ella, 18 months, with their mom, Micaela, and hidden in the carrier is 6 month old Sophia. Photo taken at Santa Day at Professional Management Services. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)**



Groton Community Transit  
Invites you to their

## Holiday Bake Sale

### Friday, Dec. 20th, 2024

9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Coffee, cider and Christmas  
goodies will be served!

If you would like to donate baked goods, please contact Groton Community Transit  
office at 605-397-8661. Any and all donations are welcome!! We are looking  
forward to seeing you!!

Our address is 205 East 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave-Downtown Groton

## HOLIDAY BAKE SALE

12/20/2024-Friday

Happy Holidays! We hope this finds all of you staying well and healthy! Hoping you can enjoy what this wonderful season brings!

We are looking for donations of baked goods for our upcoming bake sale on Friday, December 20<sup>th</sup> 2024. If you would like to donate items please contact the dispatch office at 605-397-8661. Baked goods need to be delivered to the transit by 8:00 am the morning of the bake sale. Please feel free to package your items to your liking. We will price items as they are brought in. As always, we would like to thank you for supporting the GCT!! We look forward to hearing from you!

Please don't hesitate to call to arrange pickup of your donation...We would be happy to come and grab from you!!

Sincerely & Thank you Again!!

Groton Community Transit



## Card Shower

Merry Jo Ball will be celebrating her  
on December 24, 2024.



Greetings may be sent to  
915 Arbor Lane Apt 37  
Aberdeen SD 57401

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## You have to start some time! Why not **now!**

5 months to get your through the winter!

Student: \$175.75, Single: \$202.40, Couple: \$298.90,

Family: \$362.15

This will get you into the gym through the end of May!



Gift  
Certificates  
Available!

Daily Pass Available for \$5

Age 65 or older  
Physical Therapy  
\$20 per month

Annual Memberships:

Student: \$255.60

Single: \$319.50

Couple: \$575.10

Family: \$702.26



15 N Main St. - Ste. 101

Downtown Groton

Call/Text Paul: 605-397-7460

Call/Text Tina: 605-397-7285



Living Heart Fitness Center

Open 24/7



**Groton Christian & Missionary  
Alliance Church**

**Presents "God's Gift of Love"**

**December 15th at 5pm**

**706 N Main**

**A ham and turkey dinner with all the  
trimmings will be served as a gift to  
the community! The public is invited!**



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## Krueger places third at Rapid City Wrestling Tourney

Groton Area's Liza Krueger took part in the Rapid City Invitational Wrestling Tournament this past weekend. She placed third after losing the semifinal match.

**107: Liza Krueger (10-1) placed 3rd and scored 24.0 team points.**

Champ. Round 1 - Liza Krueger (Groton Area) 10-1 received a bye ( ) (Bye)

Champ. Round 2 - Liza Krueger (Groton Area) 10-1 won by fall over Chloe Caton (Yankton) 9-5 (Fall 3:00)

Champ. Round 3 - Liza Krueger (Groton Area) 10-1 won by decision over Taylor Brouillette (Williston) 8-3 (Dec 10-6)

Quarterfinal - Liza Krueger (Groton Area) 10-1 won by fall over Brooke Warejcka (Canton) 8-2 (Fall 5:17)

Semifinal - Annalee Pierson (Sturgis Brown) 8-1 won by decision over Liza Krueger (Groton Area) 10-1 (Dec 5-3)

Cons. Semi - Liza Krueger (Groton Area) 10-1 won by fall over Taylor Brouillette (Williston) 8-3 (Fall 2:55)

3rd Place Match - Liza Krueger (Groton Area) 10-1 won by fall over Brooke Warejcka (Canton) 8-2 (Fall 4:34)

## NSU Men's Basketball Falls to St. Cloud State in NSIC Action

St. Cloud, Minn. – The Northern State University men's basketball team rallied back in Saturday's second half at St. Cloud State, however it was not enough to secure the league victory. The Wolves trailed by ten at the half and could not overcome the double digit deficit.

### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 57, SCSU 67

Records: NSU 1-8 (0-4 NSIC), SCSU 6-6 (2-2 NSIC)

Attendance: 372

### HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern tallied 26 points in the first and 31 in the second, shooting 38.9% from the floor, 38.1% from the 3-point line, and 58.3% from the foul line

They recorded 26 rebounds, eight made 3-pointers, six assists, five steals, and four blocks in the loss

The Wolves scored 20 points in the paint, eight points off the bench and four points off turnovers, while the Huskies recorded 38 points in the paint, 17 points off the bench, and 15 points off turnovers

James Glenn led three in double figures with 20 points, knocking down 7-of-15 from the floor, including three made 3-pointers

Marcus Burks and Kaleb Mitchell followed with 12 and 11 points respectively, while Tobi Obiora led the team with seven rebounds

### NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

James Glenn: 20 points, 46.7 field goal%, 6 rebounds, 2 assists

Marcus Burks: 12 points, 50.0 field goal%, 5 rebounds, 2 steals

### UP NEXT

Northern hosts the University of Jamestown on Monday evening for a non-conference match-up. Tip-off is set for 7 p.m. against the Jimmies. Monday is study break night for students with free pizza.

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## Wolves Fall Short Against Huskies in Saturday Night Action

St. Cloud, Minn. – The Northern State women’s basketball team fell to St. Cloud State in the final seconds, 75-72. The night saw the lead change eight times in the contest, along with three Wolves notching double digits in points.

### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 72, SCSU 75

Records: NSU 5-5 (NSIC 2-2), SCSU 6-3 (NSIC 3-1)

Attendance: 326

### HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern State tallied 23 points in the first, eight in the second, 19 in the third, and 22 in the fourth quarter. They shot well on the day with a 48.3 field goal percentage and a 40.0 three-point percentage. NSU recorded 38 points in the paint, 15 points off the bench, nine points off turnovers, and eight points from the foul line.

The contest saw the lead change eight times and tied three times.

Madelyn Bragg led the charge for the Wolves with 19 points, eight boards, and two blocks on the night. Michaela Jewett followed behind with 16 points and four assists, with a shooting percentage of 54.5.

First off the bench was Decontee Smith with 15 points and connected on six-of-seven shots from the floor.

The playmaker for the Wolves was Rianna Fillipi with ten assists on the night, along with eight points and four rebounds.

### NORTHERN STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Madelyn Bragg: 19 points, 8 rebounds, 2 blocks, 1 steal

Michaela Jewett: 16 points, 4 assists, 3 rebounds, 54.5 FG%

Decontee Smith: 15 points, 2 steals, 85.7 FG%

Rianna Fillipi: 8 points, 10 assists, 4 rebounds, 2 steals

### UP NEXT

Northern State returns home to close out the first half of the season against Minnesota Crookston and Minot State. Game times are set for 5:30 p.m. on Friday, December 20, against the Golden Eagles and 4:00 p.m. on Saturday, December 21, against the Beavers from Wachs Arena.

## Name Released in Grant County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash

Where: 149th Street and 481st Avenue, two and a half miles east of Milbank, SD

When: 2:38 p.m., Tuesday, December 10, 2024

Driver 1: Ronald Lee Vernlund, 81-year-old male from Milbank, SD, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2000 Ford F250

Seat belt Used: No

Grant County, S.D.- A Milbank, SD man received fatal injuries in a single vehicle crash Tuesday afternoon, two and a half miles east of Milbank, SD.

Preliminary crash information indicates Ronald Lee Vernlund, the driver of a 2000 Ford F250, was traveling east on 149th Street near 481st Avenue when the vehicle slid across the slick roadway and into the north ditch and rolled into a field. Vernlund was ejected and received fatal injuries in the crash.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is only preliminary.

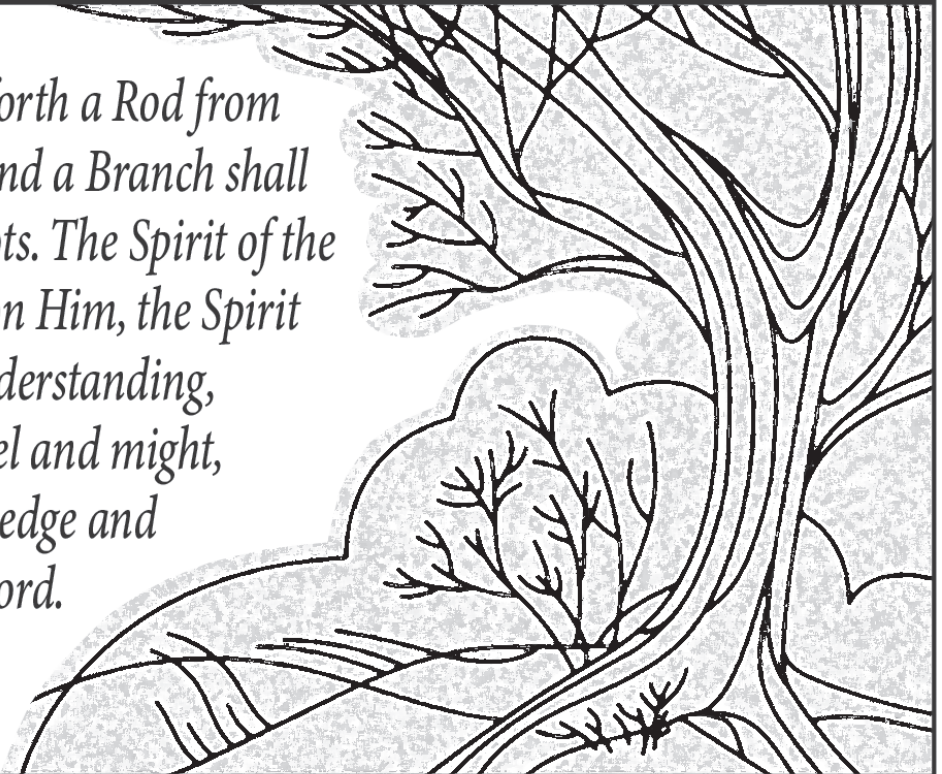
The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.



## THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE

*There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.*

ISAIAH 11:1,2



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## BIBLE

## TRIVIA

by Wilson Casey

1. Is the book of Immanuel (KJV) in the Old or New Testament or neither?

2. Which Old Testament prophet said the most about the birth of Christ?  
*Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Jeremiah*

3. From Matthew 1:18, when Mary became pregnant, she and Joseph were ...?  
*Married, Engaged, Just friends, Strangers*

4. In Luke 2:8-11, how did the shepherds learn of Christ's birth?  
*Magi informed, Joseph announcement, Mighty wind, Angel appearance*

5. Where did the wise men go first when they arrived in the Holy Land?  
*Nazareth, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron*

6. What does the Bible record as to when Jesus was born?  
*Late September, Dec. 25, March 17, Does not*

ANSWERS: 1) Neither, 2) Isaiah, 3) Engaged, 4) Angel appearance, 5) Jerusalem, 6) Does not

*"Test Your Bible Knowledge," a book with 1,206 multiple-choice questions by columnist Wilson Casey, is available in stores and online.*

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**FLASH GORDON**

LAWS ARE WHAT CIVILIZATION IS BUILT ON, BUT THEY AREN'T REAL. YOU CAN'T TOUCH THEM.

THEY'RE JUST TALK. PROMISES.

LIKE WRITING YOUR NAME IN THE WATER.

WE PULL OUR SUB-CARRIER UP TO THE BEACH. THE LIONS ARE WAITING FOR US. THEY'RE A DAY LATE -- WHICH WAS, OF COURSE, THE PLAN.

UNDER TOA'S LAW, I -- DEEP CHIEF KALA -- CAN NOW CHALLENGE KING JUGRID FOR THE RIGHT TO TAKE THIS SUMMIT INTO OUR TERRITORY.

WE EVEN HAVE THE KIRAN GENERAL TAHL ON HAND TO JUDGE. CONVENIENT, EH?

LOOK AT HIM. WISE JUGRID. A MIGHTY WARRIOR IN HIS DAY.

IT'S MY DAY NOW.

I'M TEMPTED TO FINISH IT RIGHT HERE, BUT FLASH GORDON FORCES TAHL TO CALL THE FIGHT.

NO MATTER. I WIN. THE ROYAL FAMILY MUST COME WITH US NOW -- AWAY FROM THEIR GUARDS AND ARMIES.

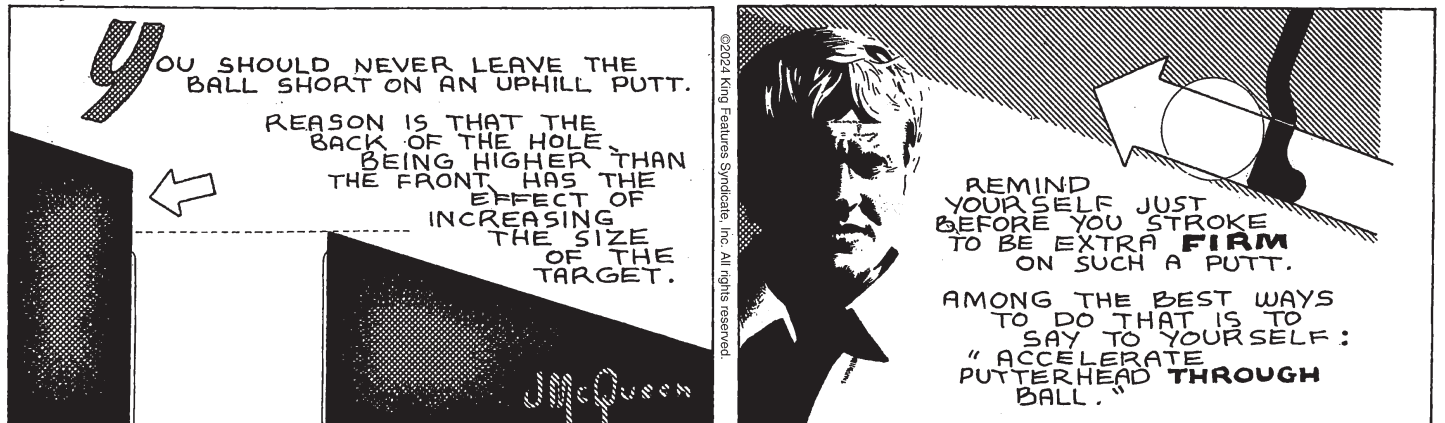
IT'S THE LAW.

DAN SCHKADE 12-15-24

NEXT: AWAY FROM THE SUN

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## Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS



**Y**OU SHOULD NEVER LEAVE THE BALL SHORT ON AN UPHILL PUTT. REASON IS THAT THE BACK OF THE HOLE BEING HIGHER THAN THE FRONT HAS THE EFFECT OF INCREASING THE SIZE OF THE TARGET.

REMINDE YOURSELF JUST BEFORE YOU STROKE TO BE EXTRA **FIRM** ON SUCH A PUTT. AMONG THE BEST WAYS TO DO THAT IS TO SAY TO YOURSELF: "ACCELERATE PUTTERHEAD THROUGH BALL."

JMcQueen

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## Semaglutide Assists With Weight Gain Caused by Antipsychotics

DEAR DR. ROACH: I was wondering whether Ozempic might be prescribed for somebody who gained weight due to antipsychotics or drugs for depression. I read some years ago that the weight gain associated with antipsychotics had something to do with blood sugar levels (or some other metabolic reason). -- K.

ANSWER: You are quite right that many medications, including some antipsychotic and antidepressant medicines, are commonly associated with weight gain. There are many mechanisms at work here, but the blood sugar increase is probably secondary to the weight gain, rather than the other way around. Some medicines are worse than others, so a wise prescriber

chooses the least-harmful option when possible. But sometimes the only medication that works for a mental health issue does cause weight gain.

For decades, psychiatrists and others have prescribed metformin to help with weight gain due to medications. It's certainly better than nothing, but you are right that semaglutide (Ozempic when prescribed for diagnosed diabetes and Wegovy when prescribed for weight loss) will be more effective. A 2023 study showed that semaglutide was effective for people who gained weight due to psychiatric drugs and did not respond to metformin.

Getting insurance companies to cover these expensive medications is often the biggest barrier.

\*\*\*

DEAR DR. ROACH: You recently wrote about colitis, aka inflammation of the colon. Could you please explain how to treat and prevent it? -- M.C.

ANSWER: "Colitis" does mean inflammation of the colon, but it isn't just one disease. It's a finding that is associated with many diseases, so treatment depends on the exact cause.

Colitis can be due to infection. Diseases like diverticulitis and gastroenteritis are inflammatory due to the presence of a pathogen. A pathogen is an unhealthy germ in the colon that leads to symptoms such as fever and diarrhea. Often these infections do not need antibiotics, just support until the body gets rid of the infection itself. Other infections are more serious, like *Clostridioides difficile* ("C. diff"), which is life-threatening and requires powerful treatment.

Microscopic colitis diseases are unusual and possibly autoimmune. They are sometimes triggered by medications and treated with anti-inflammatory medicines such as budesonide.

The underlying cause of inflammatory bowel disease (Crohn's and ulcerative colitis) still isn't well-understood. Although anti-inflammatory medicines like steroids still form part of the treatment for IBD, current treatment uses biological agents to target molecules that form part of the disease response -- without the long-term toxicity of steroids.

There are many other causes of colitis. Treatment is highly variable, and prevention isn't always possible. Still, a healthy diet with a large variety of foods, especially plants, will help keep your colon in the best shape to ward off infections. It's much easier to get an infection after antibiotics, for example, since the healthy bacteria are largely killed off.

I do not recommend probiotics in healthy people. Your microbiome -- the "suite" of bacteria, viruses and other microbes that live in your gut -- respond better to a good diet than a large number of limited bacteria. There is almost no evidence of benefit when it comes to probiotics in healthy people.

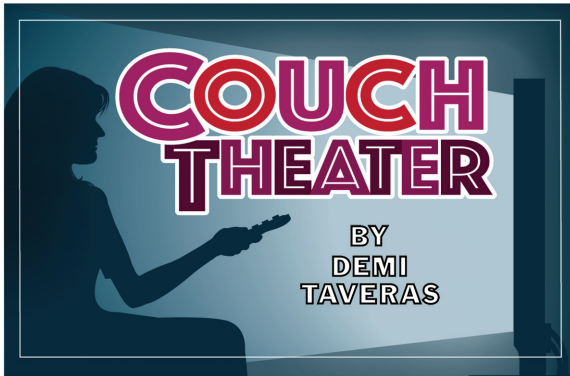
Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to [ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu](mailto:ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu).

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**Florence Pugh, left, and Andrew Garfield star in "We Live in Time."** (Courtesy of MovieStillsDB)

"It Ends with Us" (PG-13) -- This romantic drama from Justin Baldoni ("Will & Harper") is a film adaptation of the 2016 bestselling novel by Colleen Hoover. Blake Lively ("Deadpool & Wolverine") stars as florist Lily Bloom, who recently lays her abusive dad to rest. With their complicated rela-

tionship at the forefront of her mind, Lily meets Ryle (Baldoni) and forms a relationship with him, even though Ryle is bad-tempered. As Ryle's anger issues escalate into physical abuse, Lily is forced to either take a stand against him or submit to the same toxic cycle that enveloped her mother. The film, out now, received mixed reviews from critics, while the story's powerful message against domestic violence was drowned out by the on-set drama between Baldoni and Lively. (Netflix)

"We Live in Time" (R) -- Here's another romantic drama that's sure to bring on the tears! Starring two young powerhouses, Andrew Garfield ("Spider-Man: No Way Home") and Florence Pugh ("Dune: Part Two"), the film follows couple Tobias (Garfield) and Almut (Pugh) throughout 10 years of their relationship. Viewers watch along in a non-linear fashion as Tobias and Almut cross paths for the first time, fall in love, and start a family. So, what's the tear-jerking catch? During their relationship, Almut receives a diagnosis of ovarian cancer, leaving their future hanging in the balance. Most critics gave the film positive reviews, commending Garfield and Pugh's magnetic performances. Out now to rent. (Apple TV+)

"Red One" (PG-13) -- This Christmas movie out now with Dwayne Johnson ("Moana 2") and Chris Evans ("Pain Hustlers") takes viewers on an exciting holiday adventure! As the head of Santa Claus' security detail, Callum Drift (Johnson) finds himself at a loss when his jolly boss gets kidnapped by a black ops team on Christmas Eve. The North Pole team tracks down the person who compromised their position, a hacker named Jack O'Malley (Evans); Jack agrees to help Callum find Santa for double the payment. As clues lead them to a winter witch named Gryla (Kiernan Shipka), they'll need all the Christmas magic and wonder they can to free Santa from her icy grip. J.K. Simmons ("Saturday Night") makes a hilarious (and buff) Santa. (Amazon Prime Video)

"Juror No. 2" (PG-13) -- Even pushing 95 years old, director Clint Eastwood ("Cry Macho") still seems to have a few tricks up his sleeve! While this thriller didn't impress at the box office, it did move many critics with its intriguingly twisted story. Nicholas Hoult ("The Menu") leads the film as journalist Justin Kemp, who gets called for jury duty on a case involving a woman named Kendall Carter. Kendall was found dead under a bridge after a fight with her boyfriend, who is the main suspect. But when prosecutor Faith Killebrew (Toni Collette) begins to lay out the case, Justin is horror-struck to realize that he might be responsible for Kendall's death, as he recalls hitting something with his car at the same bar on the same night she died. Will he speak the truth or watch an innocent man get convicted instead? Premieres Dec. 20. (Max)



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1. "You're the One That I Want" was used in which musical film?
2. Name the all-girl group that released "I Met Him on a Sunday."
3. Which artist released "The Wanderer"?
4. Who released "People Got to Be Free"?
5. Name the song that contains this lyric: "Sometimes the love rhymes that fill that afternoon, Lose all their meaning with the rising moon."

Answers

1. "Grease," in 1978. The duet was performed by Olivia Newton-John and John Travolta. The song hadn't been used in the stage version of the musical and was written especially for the film. More recently the song was used in the superhero film "Deadpool & Wolverine."

2. The Shirelles, in 1958. The four friends formed a group and wrote the song before performing in their high school talent show.

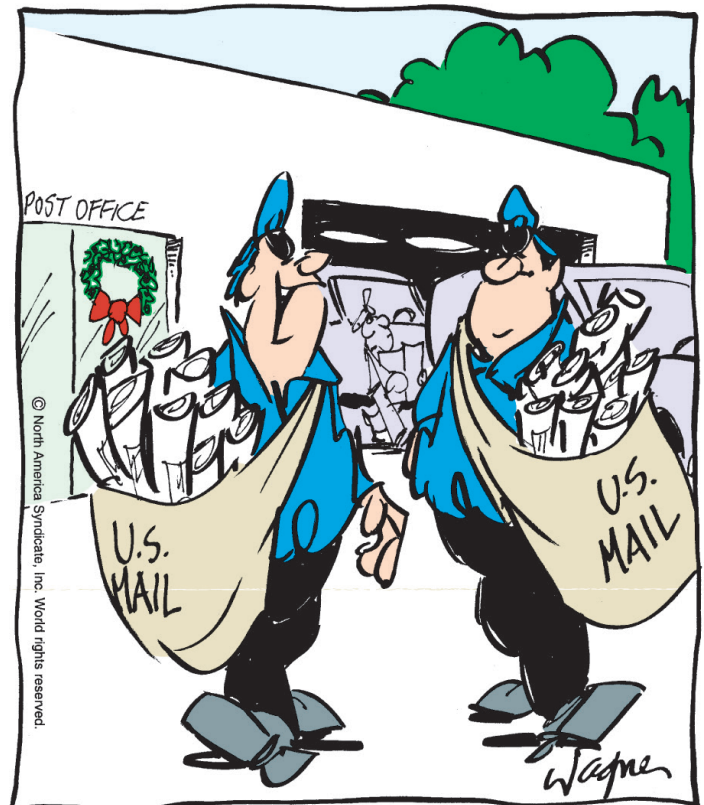
3. Dion, in 1961. He recorded the song as a b-side single, but it became the more popular of the two songs.

4. The Rascals, in 1968.

5. "Do You Wanna Make Love," by Peter McCann, in 1977. McCann was well known as a songwriter, producing chart-topping music for a long list of artists across the genres, including pop and country, and was active for decades lobbying for the rights of songwriters.

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## GRIN and BEAR IT <sup>Wagner</sup>



"The Christmas catalogs aren't so bad. ... Last year I had fruitcake delivery."

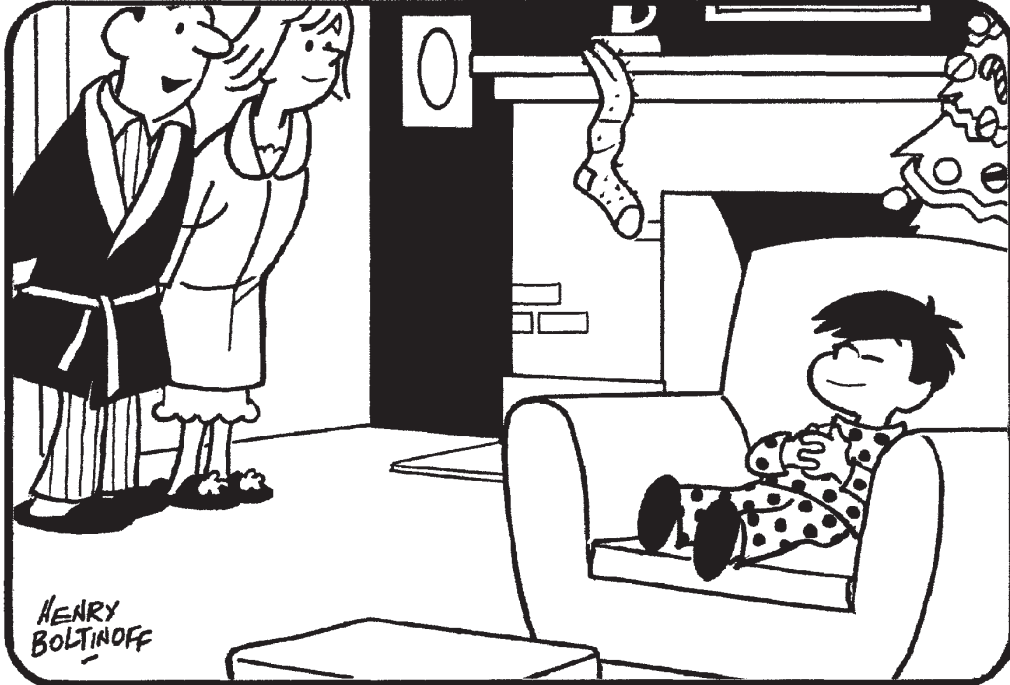
## Just Like Cats & Dogs <sup>by Dave T. Phipps</sup>



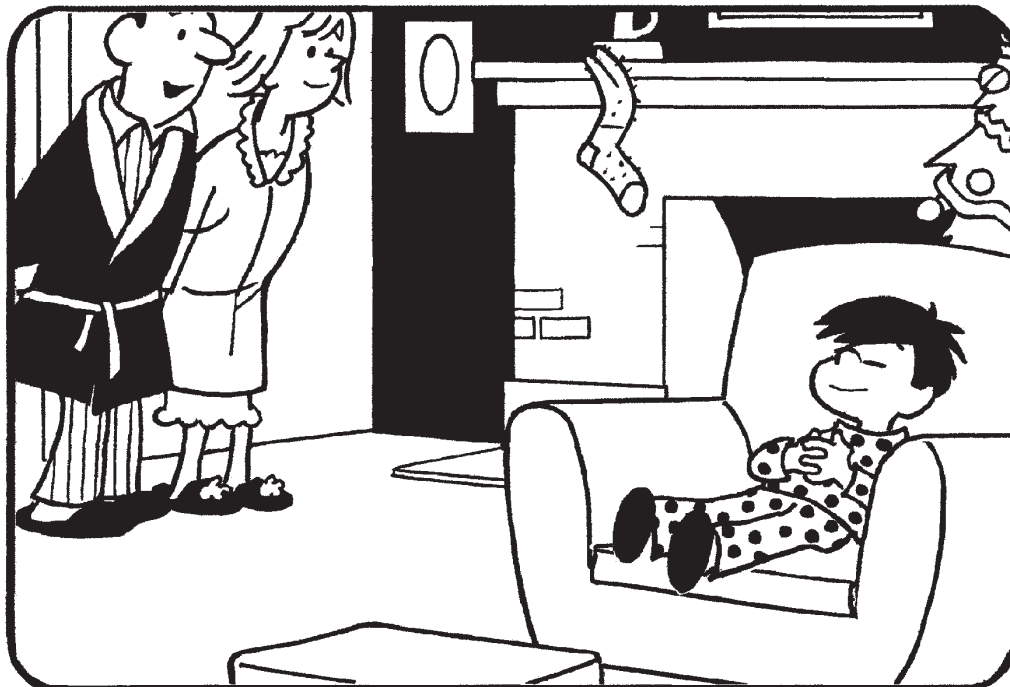
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## HOCUS-FOCUS

BY  
HENRY BOLTINOFF



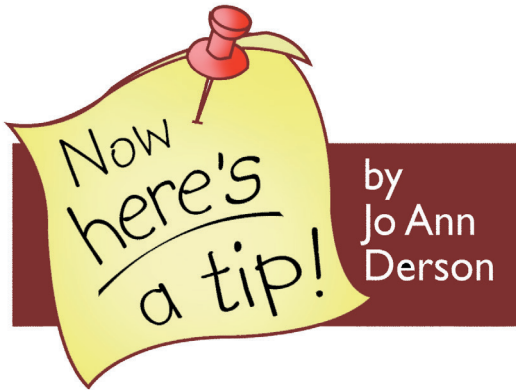
Find at least six differences in details between panels.



Differences: 1. Boy's legs are longer. 2. Tree is moved. 3. Stocking is shorter. 4. Woman's leg is moved. 5. Belt is shorter. 6. Robe collar is different.

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\* "Save egg cartons for children's painting palettes. It's very easy to give kids a small amount of many colors, and they don't spread them out and run them together as quickly when they are each in their own cup. Plus, they are easy to carry." -- O.L. in Utah

-- O.L. in Utah

\* Remove price tag residue off hard surfaces with hairspray. Or WD40 works well too.

\* Make your own frozen dinners by purchasing divided trays and using them to store leftovers. Slip each into a plastic bag and label. On busy nights, you can take your favorite out and microwave it.

\* "A beautiful but stained or worn tablecloth can find a new life at your dinner table. Cut into napkin sizes, and give any

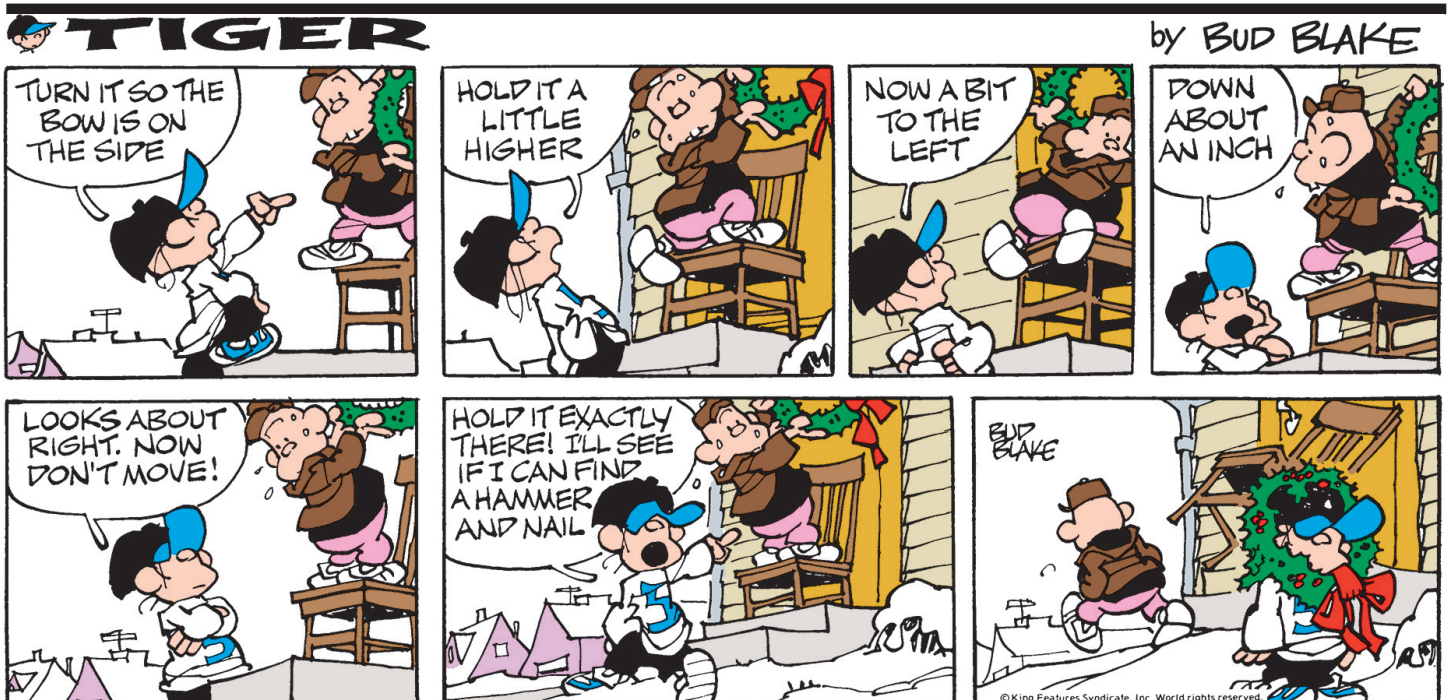
frayable ends a hemming." -- A.S. in Oregon

\* A great winter tip that's double purpose: After your dishwasher has done its job, open the door and let the dishes air dry rather than machine dry. You'll save on energy, while you add warmth and humidity to your home's air.

\* Damp cloth plus baking soda should be your first weapon against stains in the kitchen and bathroom. It's eco-friendly, and a mild abrasive, which works without scratching!

Send your tips to Now Here's a Tip, 628 Virginia Drive, Orlando, FL 32803.

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## King Crossword

### ACROSS

- 1 Nuisance
- 5 Emmy winner Alan
- 9 Blond shade
- 12 Actor Epps
- 13 — -do-well
- 14 Female rabbit
- 15 Biscuit type
- 17 Poetic tribute
- 18 Big bargains
- 19 Himalayan land
- 21 Baseball's Cobb
- 22 Meager
- 24 Boxing arbiters
- 27 Hasten
- 28 Flintstones' pet
- 31 Capote nickname

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8		9	10	11
12					13					14		
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18								19	20			
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31					32					33		
34			35		36				37			
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41	42						43			44	45	46
47					48	49	50					
51					52					53		
54					55					56		

- 32 Very long time
- 33 Itinerary word
- 34 Long tale
- 36 Boring routine
- 37 Superman's alias
- 38 Alphabetized list
- 40 Yours truly
- 41 Lauder of cosmetics
- 43 Tyke
- 47 Marseilles monarch
- 48 Relating to the intellect
- 51 Calendar abbr.
- 52 Sandwich treat
- 53 Exploits
- 54 Away from WSW
- 55 Canine cry
- 56 Section
- 7 "Lion" star Patel
- 8 Stadium
- 9 Like some parents
- 10 Fizzy drink
- 11 Cad
- 16 Devious
- 20 Conclusion
- 22 Crazy Horse, for one
- 23 Penny
- 24 ACLU concerns
- 25 Time line period
- 26 Escapee
- 27 Roll call reply
- 29 French diarist Anais
- 30 Feedbag tidbit
- 35 Hydrocarbon suffix
- 37 Didn't lag
- 39 Shill
- 40 French pronoun
- 41 Sea eagle
- 42 Any time now
- 43 L-Q bridge
- 44 Tower city
- 45 Always
- 46 Try out
- 49 Raw rock
- 50 Solidify

### DOWN

## — King Crossword —

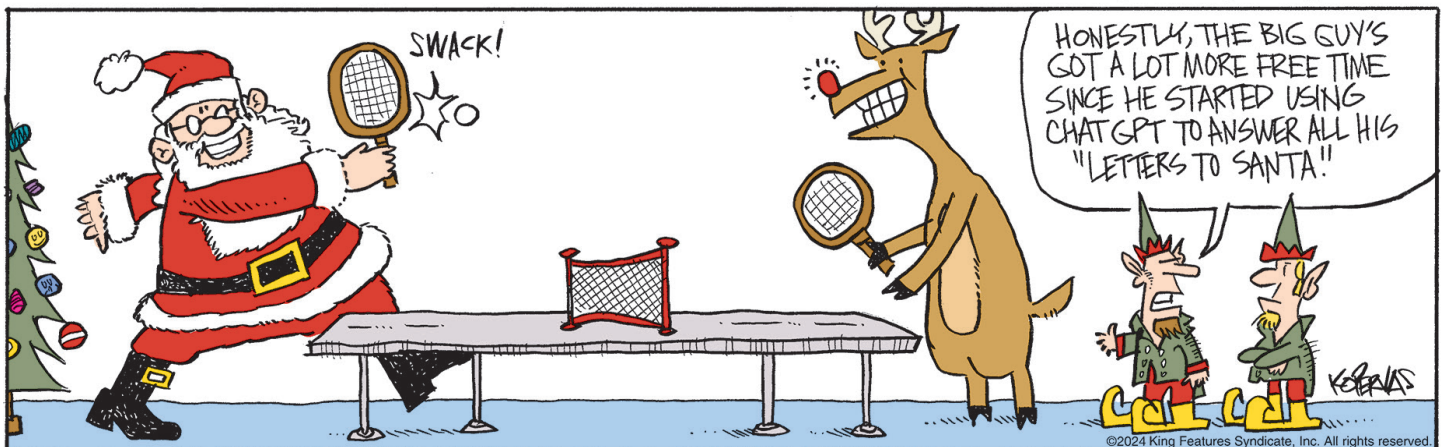
Answers

Solution time: 25 mins.

P	E	S	T		A	L	D	A		A	S	H		
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S	T	E	A	L	S				N	E	P	A	L	
			T	Y			S	C	A	N	T			
R	E	F	S		H	I	E			D	I	N	O	
T	R	U			E	O	N			V	I	A		
S	A	G	A		R	U	T			K	E	N	T	
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R	O	I			C	O	G	N	I	T	I	V	E	
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E	N	E			Y	E	L	P		P	A	R	T	

Out on a Limb

by Gary Kopervas



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THIMBLE THEATRE PRESENTS  
**POPEYE**  
BY RANDY MILHOLLAND

BLUTO, DO YOU LIKE IT WHEN COMICS BREAK THE FOURTH WALL?

NO, IT'S ANNOYING.

AND WHAT DO YOU ALL TH--

STOP IT!

SMACK!

HEY THERE! DID YOU KNOW DECEMBER 19TH WILL BE THIS COMIC'S 105TH ANNIVERSARY?

HERE'S SOME "THIMBLE THEATRE" STORYLINES FROM YEARS GONE BY!

1926 - THE COMIC WELCOMES OLIVE'S NEPHEW, BLUBBE OYL.

1953 - POPEYE GOES BEFORE THE HOUSE UN-AMERICAN ACTIVITIES COMMITTEE OVER THE RED SPINACH SCANDAL.

IT'S LOVELY WIT' CURRY.

1969 - OLIVE HARSHES VIBES.

"OCTOPUS'S GARDEN" TOOK AWAY SPACE FOR A GEORGE TRACK!

1985 - SEA HAG BECOMES A TELEVANGELIST.

... AND THEN A VISION OF A NINE-HUNDRED-FOOT-TALL JEEP TOLD ME TO RAISE TEN MILLION DOLLARS FOR A HOLY JETLINER!

1989 - ROBO-SWEEPEA.

2002 - ALICE THE GOON'S EPIC RAP BATTLE WITH HAGAR THE HORRIBLE.

WHAT?

HOW COME I KIN'T 'MEMBER NONE O' THAT?

BECAUSE YOU WEREN'T AROUND WHEN I MADE IT ALL UP.

BARNEY GOOGLE AND  
**SNUFFY SMITH**

IT'S "BY TH' CHIMNEY WIF CARE," PAW !!

OUR HOUSE AIN'T THAT BIG, MAW-- THAR BY TH' CHIMNEY NO MATTER WHAR I PUT THEM !!

MERRY CHRIS'MIS, BARNEY !!

SNUFFY !! YOU GOT ME A PRESENT !!

EVEN WRAPPED IT MYSELF !!

ER, YEAH, I SEE THAT !!

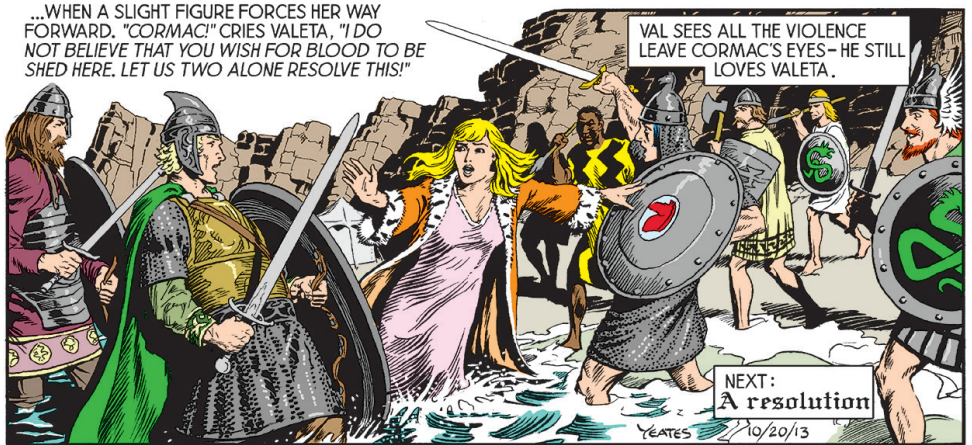
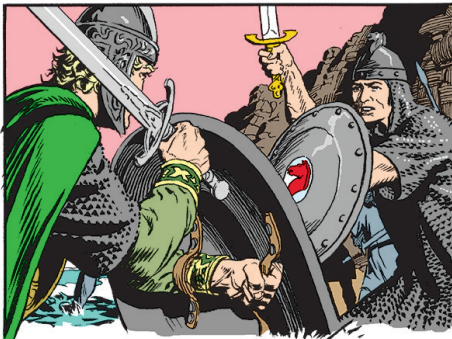
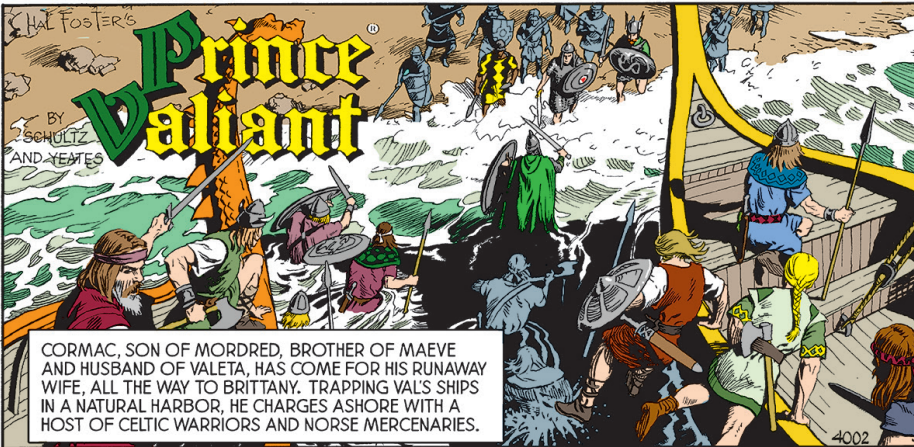
AN' YA KNOW WHAT THEY SAY, BARNEY--IT'S TH' THOUGHT THAT COUNTS, SO...

MERRY CHRIS'MIS, OL' PAL !!

BARNEY, I'M THINKING OF YA!  
-SNUFFY

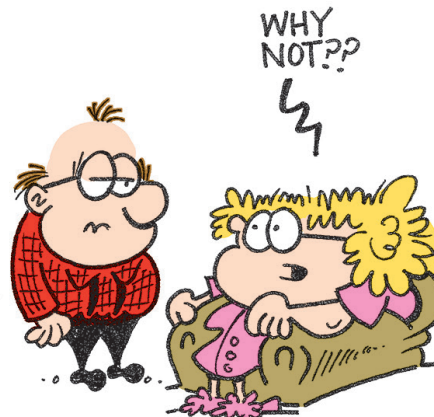
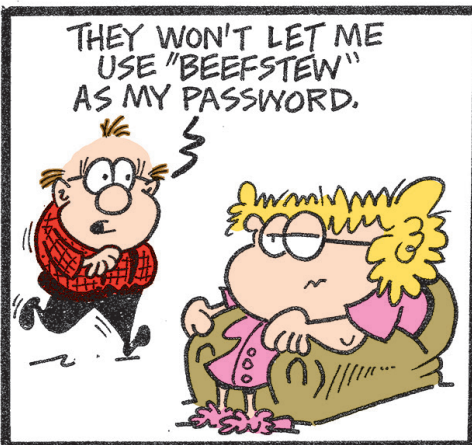
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## The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



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## SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

### Changes to Social Security login

If you use the My Social Security account online, you'll need to make several changes or you'll be locked out. If you haven't updated your account since Sept. 18, 2021, using the new method, the login for checking your Social Security account is no more and your username won't work. You'll now need to create a new account using one of their credential service providers at Login.gov.

Having access to your Social Security information can have several benefits, whether you currently receive benefits or not. You can get an estimate of future benefits, check on the status of your application or get a replacement card. You can confirm your earnings or get an SSA-1099 tax form. You can update your information such as address and either set up or change your direct deposit.

Security is one big reason they've made this change. You'll be using federal authentication standards that provide safe and secure online access.

To get started on creating your new My Social Security account, go online to [www.ssa.gov/myaccount](http://www.ssa.gov/myaccount). Scroll down to click the link to a 3-minute YouTube video that will give step-by-step instructions. (Beware: Below the video are links to several other videos, but only click on ones listed as the U.S. Social Security Administration.) Also take a look at the Frequently Asked Questions for more good information.

During the process of creating your account, you'll need to receive a call or text that will give you a special code to verify your identity. If you run into problems and can't access an activation code, you might need to receive your activation code by mail. Call for assistance at 800-772-1213, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. When the machine answers, say, "Help desk."

Each time you sign into your account, you'll be sent a one-time code for security as part of two-factor authentication.

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Downtown Groton

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Call/Text Tina: 605-397-7285



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Senior Citizens 65+  
Physical Therapy. **\$20 a month**



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1. Name the Miami Dolphins wide receiver who caught the final touchdown pass of quarterback Dan Marino's NFL career in January 2000.

2. Quinn Buckner compiled a 13-69 record in his lone season as an NBA head coach of what team from 1993-94?

3. Nafissatou Thiam, who won gold medals in the women's heptathlon in the 2016, 2020 and 2024 Olympic Games, competed for what country?

4. Hilda "Howlin' Hilda" Chester (1897-1978), known for her cowbell and "Hilda Is Here" sign, was a famous fan of what Major League Baseball team?

5. Between Formula 1 rivals Alain Prost and Ayrton Senna, who won more drivers' championships?

6. What former NFL referee was a colonel in the Army Reserve and won the Bronze Star for actions in the Persian Gulf War?

7. The Cy-Hawk Trophy is awarded to the winner of the rivalry game between what two college football teams?



## Answers

1. Oronde Gadsden.
2. The Dallas Mavericks.
3. Belgium.
4. The Brooklyn Dodgers.
5. Prost, with four (Senna had three).
6. Jeff Triplette.
7. The Iowa State University Cyclones and the University of Iowa Hawkeyes.

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## Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps



## Holiday travel with a pet



DEAR PAW'S CORNER: We are bringing our new dog, "Mara," with us to visit relatives in Ohio this Christmas. They are aware and said that our guest room is prepared with a dog bed so that she will be comfortable. However, we've never traveled with a pet before, and Mara is an energetic Border Collie. Do you have any advice for a pleasant road trip? -- Dave and Diane in Sarasota, Florida

DEAR DAVE & DIANE: The best advice is to plan, plan, plan around Mara's needs during your drive to Ohio. As an energetic dog, Mara needs frequent walk breaks to get out of the car and work off some energy. You'll also need to stay at a pet-friendly hotel if you're not driving straight through the night.

Here are some important tips as you prepare:

- Make sure your dog's vaccinations are up to date, and carry a copy of her records.
- Consider microchipping your dog before the trip if you haven't done so, and make sure an ID tag is attached to her collar.
- Pack a bag just for Mara with her preferred food, treats, toys, cold weather gear and medications. Add an extra leash and collar just in case.
- Install a sturdy crate big enough for your dog to turn around in -- either in the back seat or, if you have an SUV, in the cargo area. This will be secure and comfortable for a big dog.
- Take Mara on a few short car trips so she gets familiar with the travel crate.
- The day of the trip, feed and walk Mara at least an hour before departing. She may get carsick if she eats too soon before starting off.
- Never let Mara off leash during your trip.

Send your tips, comments or questions to [ask@pawscorner.com](mailto:ask@pawscorner.com).

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## Strange BUT TRUE

\* You're more likely to have weirder, scarier and sexier dreams when sleeping on your stomach.

\* The cymothoa exigua, a parasite that severs the blood vessels of a fish's tongue and becomes a new functional tongue, is the only known parasite capable of replacing an entire organ.

\* Are you a java junkie? Scientists found specific genes that are more caffeine-loving than others, so addiction to it might be genetic. In other words, you can go ahead and

blame your parents for your coffee obsession.

\* "Family Feud" host Richard Dawson met his second wife, Gretchen Johnson, when she was a contestant on the show in 1981. And yes, he did kiss her.

\* After four years of planning and two months of working nightly from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m., a team of hackers at MIT turned their Earth and Planetary Sciences Department building into a giant, multicolored, playable Tetris game.

\* It is considered unlucky to clean your house on the Chinese New Year. You risk sweeping away the good luck of the coming year.

\* "Gigi" author Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette could only write after she had plucked fleas off her dog.

\* If you pour cold water into a person's ear, their eyes will move in the direction of the opposite ear. If you pour warm water into their ear, their eyes will move toward that ear. Used to test for brain damage, this process is called "caloric stimulation."

\* Some areas in Scotland and Japan switched to blue street lights at night and saw a decrease in crime and suicide rates.

\*\*\*

Thought for the Day: "I realized that if I wait until I am no longer afraid to act, write, speak, be, I'll be sending messages on the Ouija board, cryptic complaints from the other side." -- Audre Lorde

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### The Garden Bug

Grow  
your own  
Christmas  
tree



Source: [modernfarmer.com](http://modernfarmer.com)

A "Christmas tree" seedling should be planted outdoors in a moderately cool season such as early fall or late spring. Dig a hole the same size as the seedling's container; gently loosen the roots if the soil is impacted, then place the seedling and soil in the hole. Gently fill in and pat down where needed.

Water it weekly in its first year; after that, only water the tree during dry months or during a drought. After the first two to three years you can start to prune and shear it. Harvest time will depend on what tree you've decided to grow, but it's best to cut it down in late fall when it is full of moisture.

This ensures your tree stays as green as possible during the holidays. - Brenda Weaver



by Freddy Groves

## Mistakes in PACT Act claims

It seems that when there are new rules and regulations to be followed, the Department of Veterans Affairs often needs time to get caught up and understand new procedures. The Office of Inspector General for the VA investigated whether veterans were given the correct benefits after the PACT Act expanded eligibility for toxin exposure. The news isn't good. What the OIG found was that service-connected claims were improperly handled before they were denied.

Processing staff made several errors as they handled the claims. They asked for medical opinions to see if there were service connections even though the PACT Act clearly designated certain illnesses as service connected. Staff asked for exams that weren't warranted, which delayed the processing of claims. Staff also made their decisions after examinations resulted in inconsistent results.

OIG investigators found that two veterans were denied \$56,700 in claims after their service connections were denied. The OIG discovered that there was \$1.4 million in costs (for a six-month period) for exams and medical opinions that weren't necessary and 870 potential benefits-related errors. It seems that staff didn't understand that presumptives don't need a medical opinion after it's already been established that a veteran was in a certain location at a certain time.

Mistakenly denying conditions covered under the PACT Act wasn't the only Act-related snarl. Under the PACT Act, survivors of service members who died in the line of duty or from service-related illness who'd had their expanded toxic exposure claims denied were allowed to refile and receive retroactive benefits. Survivors due benefits under Dependency and Indemnity Compensation didn't receive the correct payments when they refiled.

The OIG investigated two groups of claims over a six-month period: those that were refiled and denied a second time and those that were refiled and approved. Processing staff didn't have a clear understanding of how to do the math, it seems, resulting in \$33 million of underpayments to survivors.

If you're filing under the PACT Act, keep an eye on what's going on -- and ask a lot of questions.

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## Wishing Well®



4	5	8	3	7	5	2	4	2	6	8	4	6
L	L	B	L	A	E	A	I	P	E	E	F	N
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8	6	5	4	6	8	4	5	7	2	8	3	6
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4	2	4	2	5	8	6	7	5	2	8	6	2
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3	7	6	7	3	7	3	7	3	7	3	7	3
H	I	S	N	A	G	N	D	G	A	E	Y	S

HERE IS A PLEASANT LITTLE GAME that will give you a message every day. It's a numerical puzzle designed to spell out your fortune. Count the letters in your first name. If the number of letters is 6 or more, subtract 4. If the number is less than 6, add 3. The result is your key number. Start at the upper left-hand corner and check one of your key numbers, left to right. Then read the message the letters under the checked figures give you.

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1. GEOGRAPHY: What is the northernmost capital city in the world?
2. U.S. STATES: Which state is the driest?
3. MOVIES: In the movie "It's a Wonderful Life," what is the name of the angel who saves George Bailey?
4. LITERATURE: Which American novelist also wrote under the pen name Edgar Box?
5. SCIENCE: What is the process called in which plants lose water through their leaves?
6. HISTORY: What was the name of the international group that was supposed to keep the peace after World War I?
7. TELEVISION: Which TV sitcom featured a holiday episode titled "Abed's Uncontrollable Christmas"?
8. ASTRONOMY: What is it called when a group of stars forms a pattern?
9. MUSIC: What is the top-selling holiday song of all time?
10. GENERAL KNOWLEDGE: How many years are in a millennium?

### Answers

1. Reykjavik, Iceland.
2. Nevada, with an average of 10 inches of rain a year.
3. Clarence Odbody.
4. Gore Vidal.
5. Transpiration.
6. The League of Nations.
7. "Community."
8. Constellation.
9. "White Christmas" by Bing Crosby.
10. 1,000.

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South Dakota Governor

**Kristi Noem**



**South Dakota:** *Under God, the People Rule*

## Hunting Traditions Remain Strong in South Dakota

**By: Secretary Kevin Robling**

The noise of wingbeats flying above the cattails creates instant excitement for my two yellow labs. Ducks start landing in the decoys, and my two oldest sons (who are four and six) look up at me with huge smiles on their faces – duck calls in hand and Grandpa by their side. The clock strikes the magic hour, and memories that last a lifetime are created.

A few hours later, the pursuit of our state bird follows, filling the day with cackling roosters, laughter, and high fives. As I tuck the kids into bed after a full day outdoors, my four-year-old looks up and me and says "Dad, that was the best day ever!" I can't help but think he's exactly right.

There is a lot to love about South Dakota, but for many of us, nothing beats Autumn. Autumn in South Dakota features great fishing, beautiful colors in our parks, and, of course, hunting seasons! Hunting is tradition in South Dakota. It's part of who we are as South Dakotans, and I am so proud to say our traditions have never been stronger!

Hunting participation rates across South Dakota continue to rise, with 24% of South Dakota residents participating in hunting, the highest per-capita rate in the country. While South Dakota offers incredible hunting opportunities for mule deer, white-tailed deer, antelope, elk, prairie grouse, and waterfowl, we are most known for our world-class pheasant hunting.

South Dakota is the greatest state to pheasant hunt, with over 187,000 residents and nonresidents taking to the fields to hunt our state bird this year! Great habitat and a little help from Mother Nature equal great bird numbers. This combination, coupled with access to these birds, has brought hunters to the fields from across the state and the country.

In 2019, we celebrated 100 years of pheasant hunting. Following this celebration, we began working with Governor Noem on her Second Century Initiative. The goal: to ensure the next 100 years of pheasant hunting are just as great as the first – we're doing just that!

Habitat is the foundation of wildlife management; it's the key ingredient to having abundant wildlife populations. As a result, the wildlife division within the Department of Game, Fish and Parks has made habitat development and enhancement our number one priority. Working closely with farmers and ranchers, we have grown quality habitat acres across South Dakota. On top of that, hunters now have more places to hunt, with over 1.6 million acres of private land open for public hunting – a new all-time high enrollment benchmark. Thank you to all the participating landowners.

Whether you're a lifelong hunter or just looking to get into the sport, there is no greater place to be than South Dakota. Hunting is the truest form of conservation, so hunters are our greatest conservationists.

As the sun starts to set on another amazing hunting season, remember it's not over yet!

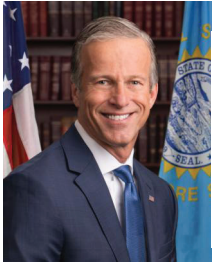
When I say goodnight to my kids, I always ask them if they want me to wake them up early to go hunting in the morning. The other night, my six-year-old looked right at me with a stern face and said, "Dad, stop asking me if I want to go hunting. Of course I do – it's my favorite thing in the whole world to do!" My response, "Mine too buddy, mine too."

Happy hunting!

*Kevin Robling is the Cabinet Secretary for the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks.*

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**JOHN THUNE**  
U.S. SENATOR FOR SOUTH DAKOTA

## Help Is on the Way

Next month, Americans will turn the page on the Biden presidency. For many Americans, that day can't come soon enough. The last four years have been characterized by a number of crises. With President Trump back in office and Republican majorities in Congress, I can assure you that help is on that way.

Addressing the Biden border crisis will be one of our top priorities. President Biden has overseen four record-breaking years of illegal immigration. His open-border policies created this crisis and opened the door to 10 million illegal border crossings on his watch. Border Patrol, border cities, and places far from the border have been overwhelmed by illegal immigrants and illegal drugs that can be traced back to the chaos at the border.

Republicans will get right to work to make a once-in-a-generation investment in border security and immigration enforcement. We'll provide the resources needed to execute the tough border security policies Americans can expect from President Trump.

We'll also have to clean up the economic crisis left by the Biden administration. Prices have risen by more than 20 percent since President Biden took office, spurred in no small part by his reckless spending. All told, it costs a typical household more than \$13,000 more per year to maintain the standard of living it enjoyed at the beginning of this administration.

Hardworking Americans have had to cut back on their purchases and scale back their dreams for the future as inflation has taken a bite out of their budgets. Republicans will work to advance pro-growth economic policies, like preserving the Trump tax cuts that delivered higher take-home pay and grew our economy, and we will roll back some of the 1,000-plus Biden regulations that have choked our economy.

The Biden administration's agenda has also jeopardized our nation's energy security. Energy prices have increased across the country, and the Biden administration's actions have threatened the reliability of our already shaky electrical grid. Republicans will work with President Trump to reverse these policies. We will unleash American energy and restore American energy dominance for the sake of our energy security and national security.

It's been a long four years, but things are about to turn around. President Trump and congressional Republicans will work together to deliver policies that keep our country secure and our economy strong.

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## Restoring American Values

### **BIG Update**

A federal court recently ruled that Congress does have the authority to force a sale of TikTok from its current owner, ByteDance. A bill that was signed into law this year would do exactly that, or else TikTok would no longer be allowed to operate in America. TikTok is Chinese malware that is installed on more than 100 million American devices, giving China access to users' passwords, internet history, voice, fingerprint, and facial data, and more.

This court ruling is a big win for Americans' privacy and in combatting the Chinese Communist Party. ByteDance is now up against the clock to sell TikTok by January 19 to continue operating in America. Tick tock, TikTok.

### **BIG Idea**

28% of Gen Z hold a favorable opinion of the term "communism" compared to just 6% for Boomers and 3% for the Silent Generation. 18% of Gen Z thinks communism is a fairer system than capitalism and deserves consideration in America. 19% of Gen Z believes that dictatorship is the best political system, compared to only three percent of the Silent Generation.

This is incredibly concerning. Communism, dictatorship, and totalitarianism are completely contrarian to America's founding principles, values, and freedoms.

Ronald Reagan said, "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction." Seeing these statistics, you can see how his statement is true. We must fight for freedom, democracy, and capitalism to ensure our kids will grow up in a safe and free America.

I recently voted to pass the Crucial Communism Teaching Act to educate high school students on the dangers of communism and totalitarianism and to help ensure the foundational values of our nation are not abandoned.

### **BIG News**

Over the past four years, the Biden Administration has shifted the Department of Defense's focus from military readiness to social agendas, like DEI, Critical Race Theory, abortion, and gender transition for minors. This politically 'woke' culture has infiltrated our military, but this year's annual defense package puts an end to some of those policies, like paying for gender transition treatments for youth.

The annual defense bill includes a nearly 15% pay raise for junior enlisted service members, supports our B-21 bombers, and includes my provisions to hold China accountable for unfair shipping practices, and strengthens the Second Amendment.

Passing the annual defense package is critical to strengthening our military and giving the Department of Defense the resources they need to project a strong military abroad—and stay focused on lethality. Our servicemembers deserve the investment this bill provides, and I was proud to vote yes.



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Dr. James L. Snyder Ministries

PO Box 831313 - Ocala, FL 34483

1-352-216-3025

## A Surprised Pre-Christmas Gift Special

Like everyone, I enjoy the Christmas holiday from beginning to end. It's my favorite time of the year. The most important thing is the family gathering in the celebration.

I enjoy everything about Christmas except that I'm not so fond of Christmas shopping. That is not something I enjoy. Compared to The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage, who is the Queen of cash registers, I am not qualified to do shopping.

Perhaps I got it from my very frugal father. He could squeeze a nickel so hard that the Buffalo would scream. I take after him a little bit. I don't want to buy anything that I don't need. So, Christmas shopping for presents is low on my list of things to do.

Buying gifts for people is a challenge for me. I don't even know what gift I like. If I want something, and if I can afford it, I buy it. However, I don't know how to get gifts for family members.

Mostly, I don't know how to get a present for The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage because she has everything she needs. And for me to find out one thing that she needs for Christmas would be a miracle in and of itself.

Something happened this week that encouraged me in this line. I got a pre-Christmas gift that I was not expecting.

The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage was using a paper cutter for her Christmas card work in my office. All of a sudden, I heard her groan in agony. She doesn't do that unless something terrible happens.

She walked out carrying one of the paper cutting boards. I asked what was going on, and she told me that it broke while cutting some paper.

"I'm just going to throw it away and use another board."

"Wait a minute," I said, "maybe I can fix it for you?"

It took her a while to calm down from hilariously laughing at me. Then she said, "What, you fix something?" and continued laughing.

I thought that this was a good time to catch her in something. She graciously handed me the cutting board and showed me where it was broken. But it wasn't actually broken. One of the levers popped out of its socket, and it was almost impossible to put it back in.

That's why the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage gave up and was ready to throw it away. She didn't have time to work on that project.

She handed it to me, walked away snickering, and I began looking at the little board, trying to figure out what I could do.

I have a stellar reputation for being unable to fix anything. Sure, I can fix some of my writing projects, but outside of that, I am no Mr. Fix-It Man.

I thought about this for a while, thinking it would be an excellent opportunity to challenge that image of me. What would happen if I could fix this little cutting board and hand it back to her?

Looking at that cutting board, I didn't know where to start. You have to know where to start in order to fix something, and I needed to figure out how to begin this project.

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Thinking to myself, I saw this as a great opportunity for me. So I struggled, looked at the board from front to back, and tried to understand how it worked. I came close to giving up.

I saw one of the levers that had popped out of the socket, so I needed to figure out how to pop it back in. I couldn't see anything broken on the board, so I didn't understand how it came out. According to The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage, she let it fall; when it fell, one lever popped out.

After fiddling with it for several minutes, I suddenly saw how it could be fixed. I was surprised at myself. But with a little twisting and turning, I could pop that lever back in where it belonged. When I did that, the board was back to normal. I'm not sure I was.

I was so happy I didn't know what to do, and I certainly didn't want to sing. But I called The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage and said, "Oh, my dear. Would you please come in here for a moment?"

She showed up quickly, and I handed the cutting board back to her and said, "I fixed it for you so now you can continue using it."

She looked at me, then at the board I had just handed her, and in a low tone, she said, "How in the world did you fix that?"

Getting an early Christmas present is a very wonderful thing. I could not have gotten a better one than this.

As I was musing over this great gift, I couldn't help but think of the greatest gift in the world.

The verse that came to mind was John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Christmas is the celebration of God's greatest gift coming into the world. During this illustrious celebration, I do not want to forget what God's gift has done for me. The gift from God is "everlasting life" that comes to those who believe in Him.

## EARTHTALK ™

Dear EarthTalk: What is the status of the monarch butterfly in the U.S. and is it listed as threatened or endangered?

-- M. Smith, Raleigh, NC

The monarch butterfly, known for its awe-inspiring migration across North America, has become a symbol of both ecological wonder and environmental decline. Once abundant across the continent, their numbers have plummeted in recent decades, raising concerns about the species' long-term survival.

In 2014, the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD), a leading conservation group, petitioned the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) to list the monarch as "threatened." FWS launched a review of the butterfly's status, concluding six years later that listing was warranted although other species took priority. In 2022, CBD filed a federal lawsuit and won a settlement calling for the government to decide whether to list monarchs by late 2024, which FWS did in December, finally granted "threatened" status to the species.

The monarch's eastern population, which migrates from the U.S. and Canada to central Mexico for the winter, has experienced a staggering 80 percent drop over the past 20 years, largely due to habitat loss, especially the destruction of milkweed—the sole food source for monarch larvae. The widespread use of herbicides and pesticides kill both milkweed and other pollinator-friendly plants. Climate is compounding the issue by altering the availability of suitable habitats, affecting migration patterns. The monarch's western population migrates along the U.S. West Coast to winter in California, and has also seen a drastic decline. It has not yet been listed as threatened or endangered by FWS, but the western monarch is still considered to be in serious jeopardy, with some estimates suggesting a 99 percent decline since the 1980s.

Being listed as "threatened" means that while monarchs are not yet in immediate danger of extinction, their populations are at significant risk. This status has prompted federal agencies to prioritize monarch conservation, leading to a variety of initiatives aimed at halting or reversing the decline. FWS has created a recovery plan, which includes restoring migratory and breeding habitats, reducing pesticide use and raising public awareness about the importance of monarchs and pollinators in general.

Despite official recognition of the problem and action, habitat destruction continues at an alarming rate, exacerbated by logging and urban sprawl. In response, conservation and governmental agencies and researchers are all working toward restoring monarch habitats and promoting the planting of milkweed.

Everyone can play a role in helping the monarchs. Readers can help by planting milkweed in your garden, backyard or community space. You can also reduce pesticide use in your yard and choose organic gardening practices. Support organizations working to protect monarch habitats and advocate for policies that protect pollinators and raise awareness about their decline can also create broader change.



**The federal government recently granted threatened status to monarch butterflies after a decade of petitioning by green groups.**

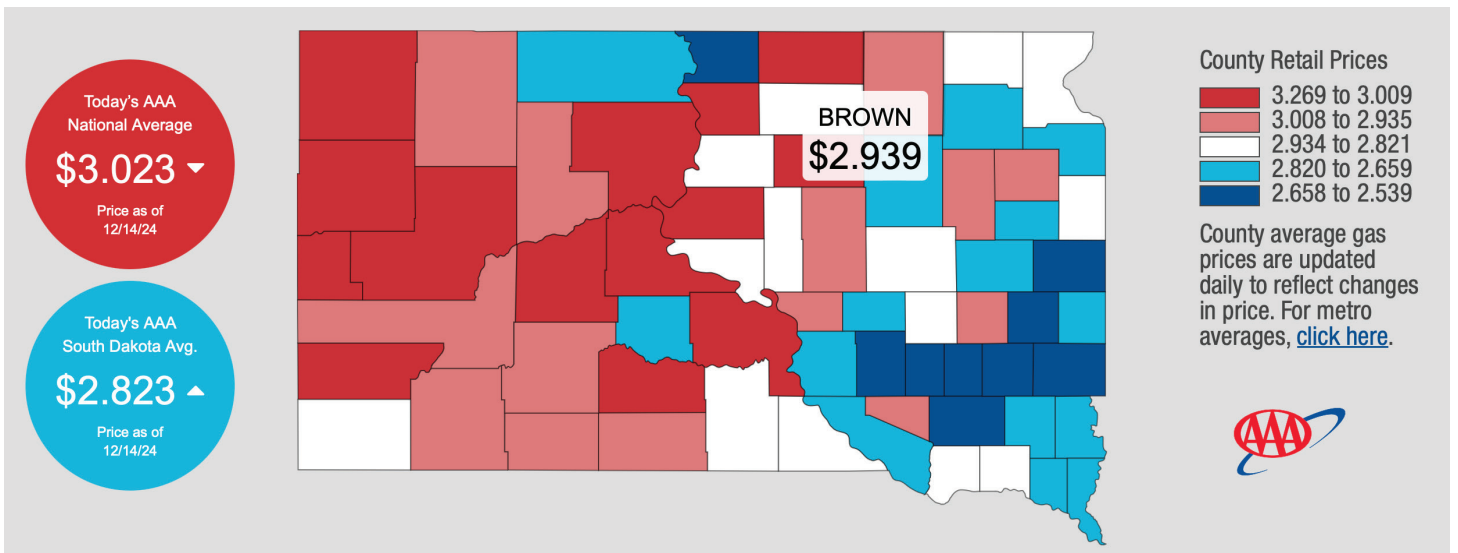
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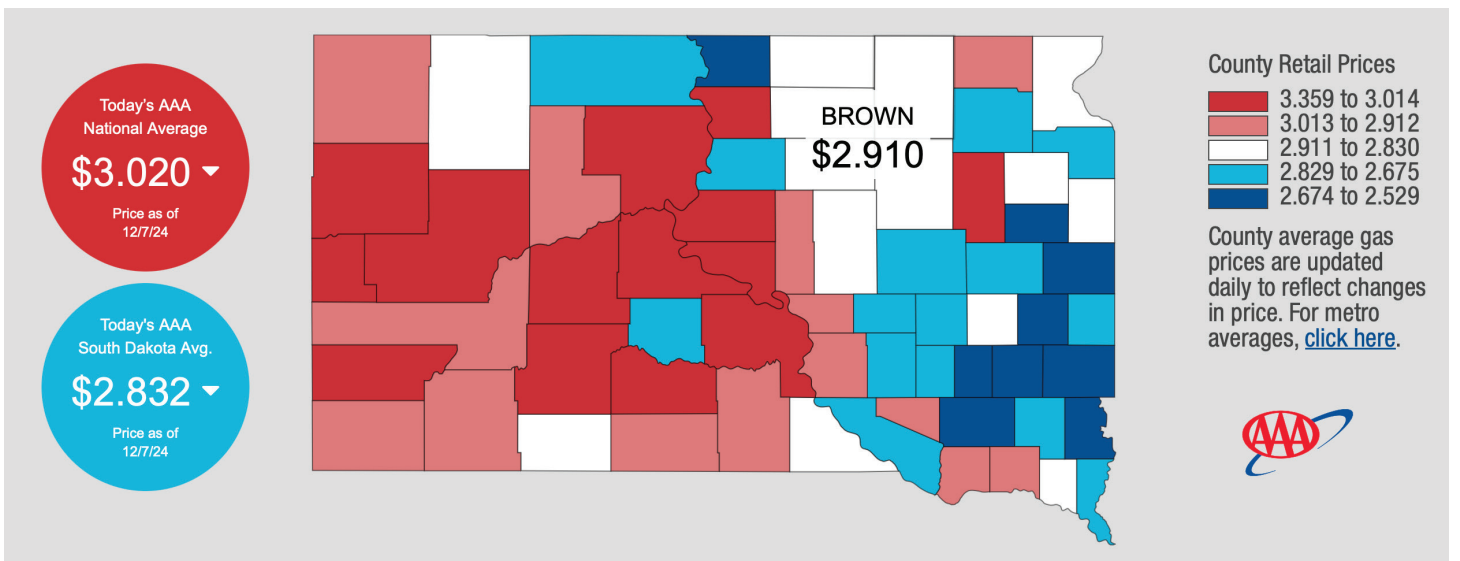
## South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$2.823	\$3.023	\$3.458	\$3.234
Yesterday Avg.	\$2.818	\$3.023	\$3.451	\$3.242
Week Ago Avg.	\$2.832	\$3.033	\$3.442	\$3.251
Month Ago Avg.	\$2.902	\$3.121	\$3.528	\$3.231
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.022	\$3.212	\$3.675	\$3.825

### This Week



### Last Week



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## Drought Classification

None

D0 (Abnormally Dry)

D1 (Moderate Drought)

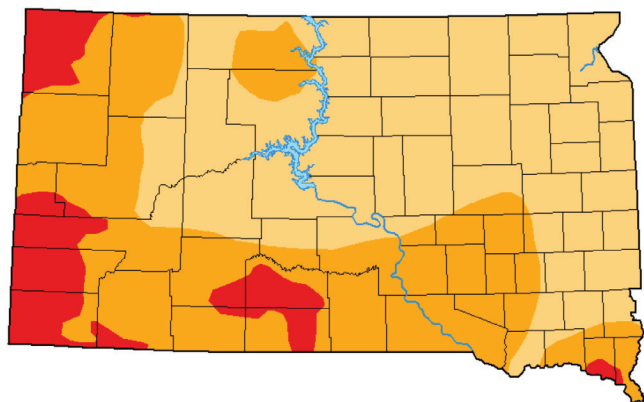
D2 (Severe Drought)

D3 (Extreme Drought)

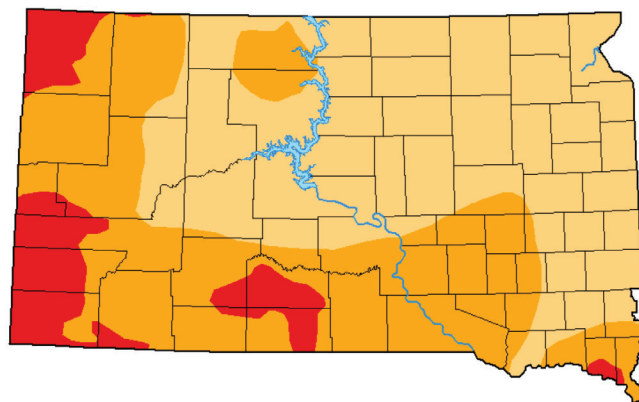
D4 (Exceptional Drought)

No Data

## Drought Monitor



December 10



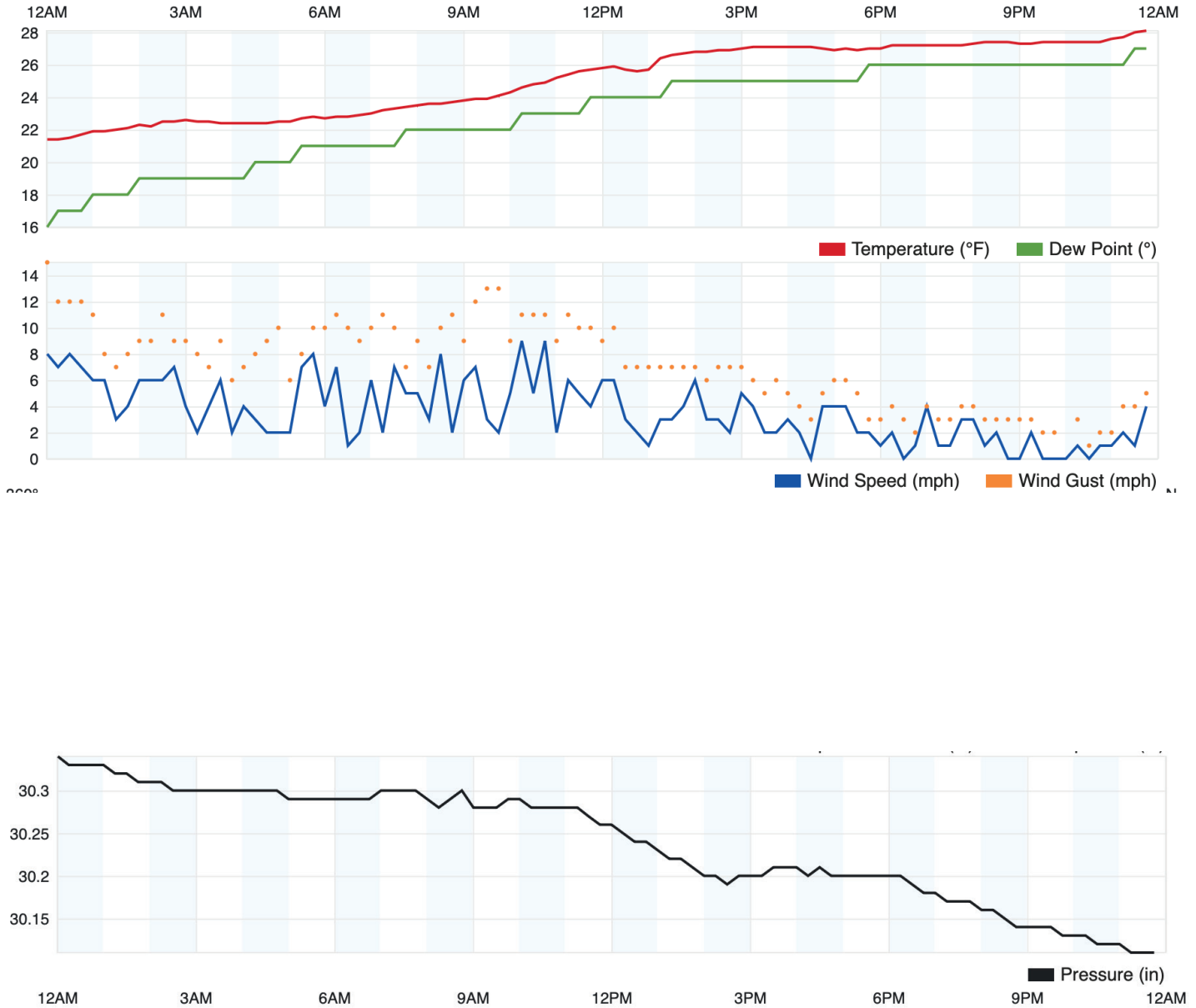
December 3

Except for parts of the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains in Colorado, weather across the High Plains region was mostly dry this week. Temperatures were primarily warmer than normal, ranging from 3-12 degrees above normal in most areas (with locally warmer readings). Drought and abnormal dryness coverage remained mostly unchanged. Moderate drought coverage was reduced southwest of the Denver area as precipitation deficits lessened there. Abnormal dryness was also removed from west-central Kansas after conditions were reassessed there following wetter-than-normal weather over the last couple of months. Well-below-normal early season snowpack and short- and long-term precipitation deficits led to expansion of extreme drought in parts of the Wyoming, Wind River and Bighorn mountain ranges in Wyoming. Water usage is currently restricted to essential use only, due to low well levels, in the communities of Auburn and Peru in southeast Nebraska, where moderate drought is ongoing.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Sunday

Sunday Night

Monday

Monday Night

Tuesday



20%

High: 37 °F

Slight Chance  
Wintry Mix  
and Dense  
Freezing Fog



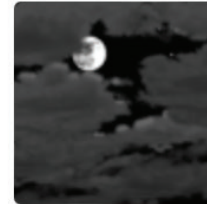
Low: 25 °F

Mostly Cloudy



High: 35 °F

Partly Sunny  
and Breezy



Low: 15 °F

Mostly Cloudy



30%

High: 23 °F

Chance Snow



## Temps Rise Above Freezing Today

December 15, 2024  
3:41 AM

Rising temps will bring an end to icy roads

### Key Messages

- Low clouds and dense fog will clear from west to east this morning. Temperatures will then begin to warm, with above freezing temperatures by mid to late morning.
- **Untreated roads will continue to be slick until temperatures reach greater than 32 degrees.**



### Maximum Temperature Forecast (°F)

	12/15 Sun						12/16 Mon							
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm
Aberdeen	28	33	37	38	34	29	31	31	30	32	34	34	27	22
Britton	30	31	34	34	30	26	27	28	28	29	30	30	24	21
Brookings	29	32	35	35	32	31	31	32	31	32	34	33	28	25
Chamberlain	27	37	47	48	39	37	37	36	34	37	42	42	34	28
Clark	28	30	33	35	32	30	31	31	31	30	31	31	26	22
Eagle Butte	22	28	36	38	36	35	33	31	29	31	34	34	28	24
Ellendale	28	31	34	35	30	26	28	28	28	30	30	31	26	22
Eureka	23	28	34	36	30	29	31	29	28	29	31	31	25	21
Gettysburg	23	32	38	39	34	33	33	31	30	32	34	35	29	23
Huron	29	33	39	39	33	33	34	34	34	35	37	37	30	26
Kennebec	26	42	49	48	37	35	36	33	32	39	41	42	33	27
McIntosh	22	24	30	33	31	31	31	28	27	29	31	32	25	20
Milbank	28	31	34	36	33	31	31	31	32	34	34	32	28	25
Miller	27	34	43	44	36	35	35	34	33	37	38	39	31	27
Mobridge	28	31	37	39	34	35	36	33	31	34	36	37	29	26
Murdo	27	43	47	45	37	36	35	32	31	38	41	41	34	28
Pierre	27	37	44	45	39	38	38	35	33	38	41	41	34	28
Redfield	28	33	39	40	35	32	33	33	32	36	38	38	30	24
Sisseton	29	32	34	35	33	31	31	32	33	32	32	31	27	25
Watertown	29	31	33	35	33	31	31	31	31	32	32	31	27	23
Webster	29	31	33	35	32	30	29	30	31	29	29	29	25	22
Wheaton	29	32	34	35	33	30	29	28	30	32	31	30	26	23

Created: 2 am CST Sun 12/15/2024 | Values are maximums over the period beginning at the time shown.

Rising temperatures will bring an end to icy roads and sidewalks today. Slightly cooler conditions return on Monday.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 28 °F at 11:28 PM

Low Temp: 21 °F at 12:01 AM

Wind: 13 mph at 12:19 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 8 hours, 47 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 60 in 1939

Record Low: -24 in 1917

Average High: 29

Average Low: 8

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.29

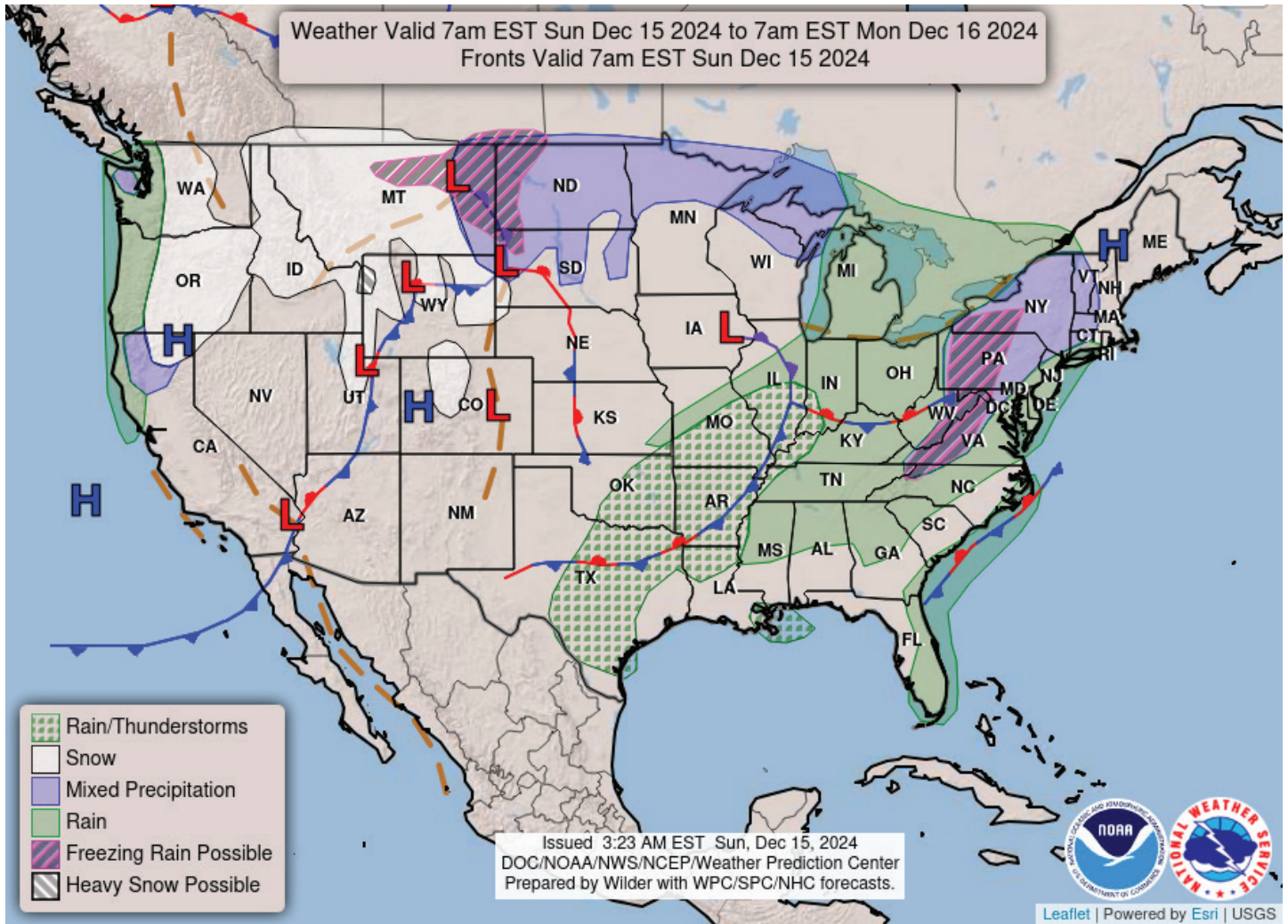
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 21.50

Precip Year to Date: 21.71

Sunset Tonight: 4:51:36 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:04:50 am





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## Today in Weather History

December 15, 1983: A storm system impacted the region on the 14-15th with five inches of snow and high winds to produce blocked roads and numerous school closings on the 15th throughout most of the eastern third of South Dakota. No travel was advised from late afternoon on the 14th due to low visibility and blocked roads in Roberts and Brookings Counties. The conditions contributed some to several traffic accidents. Meanwhile, snow also spread across Minnesota on December 13th and diminished late on the 15th. Snow accumulations ranged from 1 to 2 inches in west central Minnesota to higher amounts over 10 inches to the east. Winds increased and temperatures began to fall on December 14th as an arctic cold front pushed through the state. The strongest winds occurred during the night of December 14th and into the morning of December 15th. Near-blizzard conditions developed in the southwest and west-central sections of Minnesota where the visibility was reported to be near zero with winds of 20 to 30 mph. The wind chill index dropped to 30 below to 60 below zero. Blowing and drifting snow conditions occurred to some degree throughout all of Minnesota. Snow drifts caused many roads to close. Drifting snow continued during the evening of December 15th as the winds and snowfall gradually diminished. This event, associated with an arctic cold front, was the beginning of what would become, and remains, the coldest stretch of December days on record across most of the area. For the next nine days, beginning on December 16th, Aberdeen did not warm above -6 degrees, enduring temperatures as low as -34 F and high temperatures as low as -15 F. Other stations around the region had very similar cold temperatures during the December 16th through December 24th period, with temperatures warming into single digits above zero on Christmas Day.

1839 - The first of triple storms hit Massachusetts Bay. The storm produced whole gales, and more than 20 inches of snow in interior New England. There was great loss of life at Gloucester MA. (David Ludlum)

1901 - An intense cold front swept across the eastern U.S. The cold front produced heavy rain in Louisiana, and heavy snow in the northeastern U.S. (David Ludlum)

1945 - A record December snowstorm buried Buffalo, NY, under 36.6 inches of snow, with unofficial totals south of the city ranging up to 70 inches. Travel was brought to a halt by the storm. (14th-17th) (The Weather Channel)

1988 - High pressure in the Pacific Northwest and low pressure in the southwestern U.S. combined to produced high winds from Utah to California. Winds gusting to 70 mph in the San Francisco area left nearly 300,000 residents without electricity. Winds in Utah gusted to 105 mph at Centerville. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - A couple of low pressure systems spread heavy snow across the northeastern U.S. Up to two feet of snow was reported along Lake Erie in northeastern Ohio, and up to ten inches was reported in Connecticut. Heavy snow squalls developed over Michigan for the third day in a row. Three Oaks MI reported 25 inches of snow in two days. Twenty-six cities in the north central U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date. The low of 10 degrees below zero at Wichita KS was a December record for that location. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1992: Cyclone John hit the sparsely populated northwest coast of Australia with winds gusting to 185 mph. John was the strongest cyclone to hit Australia in over 100 years.

2005 - Freezing rain and ice pellets fell throughout portions of the southeast U.S. The accumulation of ice caused about 683,000 utilities customers to lose power from northern Georgia northward through the western Carolinas. The power outages were the result of ice accretions of up to three-quarter inch in thickness. The ice storm was blamed for at least four deaths (Associated Press).

2010 - A winter storm swept across parts of the Southeast U.S., bringing a mixed bag of snow, sleet, and freezing rain, making for treacherous travel conditions. At least eight people were killed in Alabama, Mississippi, and North Carolina in weather-related traffic fatalities. Schools were forced to close and thousands of residents lost power in North Carolina and Virginia. The winter storm also impacted Missouri, Tennessee, Kentucky, Ohio, West Virginia, Delaware, Maryland, and Washington D.C. (NCDC)



## Facing Fear With Facts

A bright light on a dark night would frighten most individuals if it was unexpected. How much more frightening would it be if an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and God's glory lit up the area where sheep were quietly sleeping, and shepherds were watching them carefully and constantly to make certain that they were safe.

Sensing the fear of the shepherds, the angel said confidently, "Don't be afraid of this Light!" The angel wanted to calm their pounding hearts. "I came with Good News. News that will bring great joy to everyone, everywhere who is willing to accept this Good News!"

How gracious is our God! The shepherds did what any of us would have done: react with apprehension and fear. Yet, God, in His love and mercy, first gave them His assurance that they were safe and then explained to them what had happened: "A Savior, Christ, who is the Anointed One, the One that you have been waiting for, even the LORD, has been born!"

There is a wonderful lesson here for each of us. Rarely do we get through any day without something unusual – sometimes a tragedy, perhaps a life-threatening or grief-producing event – invading our lives. It is normal and natural to react with fear when the unwelcomed comes.

But, as God said to the shepherds then and as He says to us every day, "Don't be afraid. Good News awaits you. Your Savior is with you. Turn to Him in faith and He will save you!"

Prayer: How thankful we are, Father, to know that Your Son, our Savior, is with us every moment of every day. Calm our fears and bring peace to our hearts through Him. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Luke 2:8-12 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.

*We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him*

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.13.24

36 43 52 58 65 16

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$740,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.14.24

2 8 47 51 52 3

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$17,460,000**

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.14.24

10 16 35 40 42 16

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 8 Mins 24 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.14.24

1 9 19 21 31

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$156,000**

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.14.24

12 16 36 55 64 3

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.14.24

12 17 23 52 67 1

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$55,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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## Upcoming Groton Events

07/04/2024 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course  
07/09/2024 FREE SNAP Application Assistance 1-6pm at the Community Center  
07/14/2024 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm  
07/17/2024 Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar at the Groton Legion 11am-1pm  
07/17/2024 Pro Am Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course  
07/25/2024 Dairy Queen Miracle Treat Day  
07/25/2024 Summer Downtown Sip & Shop 5-8pm  
07/25/2024 Treasures Amidst The Trials 6pm at Emmanuel Lutheran Church  
07/26/2024 Ferney Open Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Start  
07/27/2024 1st Annual Celebration in the Park 1-9:30pm  
08/05/2024 School Supply Drive 4-7pm at the Community Center  
**Cancelled:** Wine on 9 at Olive Grove Golf Course 6pm  
08/08/2024 Family Fun Fest 5:30-7:30pm  
08/9-11/2024 Jr. Legion State Baseball Tournament  
08/12/2024 Vitalant Blood Drive at the Community Center 1:15-7pm  
09/07/2024 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm  
09/07-08/2024 Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport  
09/08/2024 Sunflower Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 10am  
10/05/2024 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm  
10/11/2024 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am  
10/31/2024 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm  
10/31/2024 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm  
11/16/2024 Groton American Legion "Turkey Raffle" 6:30-11:30pm  
11/28/2024 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm  
12/01/2024 Groton Snow Queen Contest, 4:30 p.m.  
12/07/2024 Olive Grove 8th Annual Holiday Party with Live & Silent Auctions 6pm-close  
12/14/2024 Santa Day at Professional Management Services, downtown Groton  
04/12/2025 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt at the City Park 10am Sharp  
05/03/2025 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm  
05/26/2025 Memorial Day Services Groton Union Cemetery with lunch at Legion Post #39, 12pm  
07/04/2025 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course  
07/09/2025 Legion Auxiliary Salad Luncheon  
07/13/2025 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm  
09/06/2025 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm  
09/20/2025 NSU Gypsy Day  
10/31/2025 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm  
11/27/2025 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm

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## News from the **AP** Associated Press

### Saturday's Scores

The Associated Press

#### **BOYS PREP BASKETBALL**

Alliance, Neb. 55, Hot Springs 49  
Andes Central/Dakota Christian 56, Platte-Geddes 47  
Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 69, Miller 56  
Clark-Willow Lake 46, Sioux Valley 42  
Estelline-Hendricks 63, Sioux Falls Lutheran 39  
Garretson 51, Chester 35  
Harding County 64, Lead-Deadwood 60  
Highmore-Harrold 47, Jones County 29  
Hill City 58, Mahpiya Luta Red Cloud 45  
Ipswich 54, Hitchcock-Tulare 38  
Kadoka 55, Faith 40  
Lakota Tech 62, St. Francis Indian 51  
Lennox 58, Milbank 27  
Leola-Frederick High School 70, Langford 25  
Little Wound 61, Crow Creek Tribal School 47  
Lower Brule 72, Marty 42  
Lyman 68, Potter County 51  
Madison 65, Elk Point-Jefferson 51  
McCook Central-Montrose 55, Parker 32  
Mobridge-Pollock 60, Sisseton 31  
New Underwood 79, Dupree 69  
Rapid City Christian 72, Douglas 51  
Rapid City Stevens 50, Aberdeen Central 40  
Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 71, Sunshine Bible Academy 26  
St. Joseph Michigan Lutheran, Mich. 61, Great Plains Lutheran 57  
T F Riggs High School 62, Rapid City Central 56  
Todd County 66, Chamberlain 44  
Wakpala 75, Oelrichs 17  
Warner 57, Webster 52  
Border Battle Showcase=  
Dickinson Trinity, N.D. 64, Lemmon High School 35  
Gillette Early Bird Tournament=  
Campbell County, Wyo. 76, Pine Ridge 66  
St Thomas More 66, Worland, Wyo. 52  
The Associated Press

#### **GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL**

Andes Central/Dakota Christian 59, Platte-Geddes 27  
Bennett County 53, Lakota Tech 51  
Bridgewater-Emery 58, Freeman Academy-Marion 44  
Chester 62, Garretson 38  
Corsica/Stickney 69, Colome 7  
Elk Point-Jefferson 67, Madison 16  
Ethan 74, Hanson 22

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Harding County 64, Lead-Deadwood 19  
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Some high school basketball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

## South Dakota State rolls past Incarnate Word 55-14, advances to FCS semifinals

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — Mark Gronowski threw for three touchdowns and ran for two in leading two-time defending champion South Dakota State past Incarnate Word 55-14 on Saturday in an FCS quarterfinal.

Third-seeded South Dakota State (12-2) will face No. 2 North Dakota State in the semifinals. North Dakota State defeated Mercer 31-7 on Saturday.

In the first half, Gronowski completed only 4 of 11 passes but two of the completions were touchdown throws to Griffin Wilde. Gronowski also had touchdown runs of 3 yards and 1 yard.

The South Dakota State defense allowed only 121 yards in the first half and set up the offense for 10 points. An interception by Matthew Durrance set up a short touchdown drive and a fumble recovery by Tucker Large led to a field goal that made it 31-0 at halftime.

Gronowski connect with David Alpers on a 59-yard catch-and-run touchdown early in the third quarter for a 38-7 lead.

UIW scored on back-to-back possessions to get within 38-14 but the Jackrabbits broke it wide open in the fourth quarter with a field goal and 1-yard touchdowns by Kirby Vorhees and Brenden Begeman.

Gronowski finished with 174 passing yards on seven completions in 16 attempts. Amar Johnson ran for 133 yards. The Jackrabbits gained 477 yards on offense.

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Zach Calzada was 37-of-51 passing for 249 yards with a touchdown for UIW (11-3). UIW finished with 337 yards of offense but was 4-for-15 converting on third down and 1 for 5 on fourth. South Dakota State also defeated UIW in the regular season, 45-24 on Sept. 7. All three of UIW's losses were against Missouri Valley Football Conference opponents, two against South Dakota State and one against Southern Illinois.

## **Forte scores 21, South Dakota beats Western Illinois 89-66**

By The Associated Press undefined

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Chase Forte scored 21 points as South Dakota beat Western Illinois 89-66 on Saturday.

Forte added six rebounds and five assists for the Coyotes (9-4). Cameron Fens added 17 points while going 5 of 8 and 7 of 9 from the free-throw line while grabbing six rebounds. Isaac Bruns had 13 points and shot 4 for 10 (1 for 3 from 3-point range) and 4 of 5 from the free-throw line.

Marko Maletic led the Leathernecks (6-5) in scoring, finishing with 24 points. Julius Rollins added 13 points for Western Illinois. Sean Smith had 11 points.

South Dakota's next game is Thursday against Utah Tech on the road. Western Illinois hosts Tennessee Tech on Tuesday.

## **Pope Francis arrives on 1st papal visit to Corsica, with focus on regional crisis, popular piety**

By PAOLO SANTALUCIA and SILVIA STELLACCI Associated Press

AJACCIO, Corsica (AP) — Pope Francis' one-day visit to the French island of Corsica on Sunday, two days before his 88th birthday, puts a dual focus on the Mediterranean, highlighting local traditions of popular piety on the one hand and migrant deaths and wars on the other.

A brass band and children in traditional garb greeted Francis at the airport, and thousands lined the route of his motorcade waving flags and shouting greetings. The pope stopped along the way to listen to a choir of children singing.

The visit to Corsica's capital Ajaccio, birthplace of Napoleon, is one of the briefest of his papacy beyond Italy's borders, just about nine hours on the ground, including a 40-minute visit with French President Emmanuel Macron.

It is the first papal visit to the island, which Genoa ceded to France in 1768 and is located closer to the Italian mainland than France.

Corsica stands out from the rest of secularized France as a particularly devout region, with 92 confraternities, or lay associations dedicated to works of charity or piety, with over 4,000 members.

"It means that there is a beautiful, mature, adult and responsible collaboration between civil authorities, mayors, deputies, senators, officials and religious authorities," Ajaccio Cardinal François-Xavier Bustillo told The Associated Press. "There is no hostility between the two. And that is a very positive aspect because in Corsica there is no ideological hostility."

Renè Colombani traveled with 2,000 others by ship from northern Corsica to Ajaccio, on the western coast, to see the pope.

"It is an event that we will not see again in several years. It may be the only time that the pope will come to Corsica. And since we wanted to be a part of it, we have come a long way" Colombani said.

Papa Francescu, the pope's name in Corsican, will address more than 400 participants at the Conference on Popular Religiosity in the Mediterranean, organized by Cardinal Bustillo.

The pope's remarks will include reflections on local religious traditions, especially strongly held in Corsica, including the cult of the Virgin Mary, known locally as the Madunnuccia, which protected the island from the plague in 1656 when it was still under Genoa.

"The Mediterranean is the backdrop of this trip, surrounded by situations of crisis and conflict," which is



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expected to be echoed in the pope's address, Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said. The pope has often referred to the tragedy of migration, which he has said has turned the Mediterranean into "Europe's largest cemetery."

After the conference address, he will travel to the 17th-century cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta to meet with clergy, stopping along the way at the statue of the Madunnuccia. Francis will celebrate Mass at the Place d'Austerlitz park, where it is said Napoleon played as a child. Around 7,000 faithful are expected. He will meet privately with Macron at the airport before departing for the 50-minute flight back to Rome.

The pontiff pointedly did not make the trip to Paris earlier this month for the pomp surrounding the reopening of the Notre Dame Cathedral following the devastating 2019 fire. The visit to Corsica seems far more suited to Francis' priorities than a grand cathedral reopening, emphasizing the "church of the peripheries."

It is Francis' third trip to France, each time avoiding Paris and the protocols that a state visit entails. He visited the port of Marseille in 2023, on an overnight visit to participate in an annual summit of Mediterranean bishops, and went to Strasbourg in 2014 to address the European Parliament and Council of Europe.

Corsica is home to more than 340,000 people and has been part of France since 1768. But the island has also seen pro-independence violence and has an influential nationalist movement, and last year Macron proposed granting it limited autonomy.

## South Korean leaders seek calm after Yoon is impeached

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's opposition leader offered Sunday to work with the government to ease the political tumult as officials sought to reassure allies and markets, a day after the opposition-controlled parliament voted to impeach conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol over a short-lived attempt to impose martial law.

Liberal Democratic Party leader Lee Jae-myung, whose party holds a majority in the National Assembly, urged the Constitutional Court to rule swiftly on Yoon's impeachment and proposed a special council for policy cooperation between the government and parliament.

Yoon's powers have been suspended until the court decides whether to remove him from office or reinstate him. If Yoon is dismissed, a national election to choose his successor must be held within 60 days.

Lee, who has led a fierce political offensive against Yoon's embattled government, is seen as the front-runner to replace him. He lost the 2022 presidential election to Yoon by a razor-thin margin.

He told a televised news conference that a swift court ruling would be the only way to "minimize national confusion and the suffering of people."

The court will meet to discuss the case Monday, and has up to 180 days to rule. But observers say that a court ruling could come faster. In the case of parliamentary impeachments of past presidents — Roh Moo-hyun in 2004 and Park Geun-hye in 2016 — the court spent 63 days and 91 days respectively before determining to reinstate Roh and dismiss Park.

Lee also proposed a national council where the government and the National Assembly would work together to stabilize state affairs, and said his party won't seek to impeach Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, a Yoon appointee who's now serving as acting president.

"The Democratic Party will actively cooperate with all parties to stabilize state affairs and restore international trust," Lee said. "The National Assembly and government will work together to quickly resolve the crisis that has swept across the Republic of Korea."

It's unclear if Lee's proposed council will be realized.

In a meeting with the parliament speaker, who touched upon Lee's idea, Han said he will closely cooperate and communicate with the National Assembly but didn't specifically say whether the government intends to join the council. Kweon Seong-dong, floor leader of the ruling People Power Party, separately criticized Lee's proposal, saying that it's "not right" for the opposition party acting like the ruling party.

Kweon, a Yoon loyalist, said that his party will use existing PPP-government dialogue channels "to con-

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tinue to assume responsibility as the governing party until the end of President Yoon's term."

The Democratic Party has already used its parliamentary majority to impeach the justice minister and the chief of the national police over the martial law decree, and had previously said it was also considering impeaching the prime minister.

Upon assuming his role as acting leader, Han ordered the military to bolster its security posture to prevent North Korea from launching provocations. He also asked the foreign minister to inform other countries that South Korea's major external policies will remain unchanged, and the finance minister to work to minimize potential negative impacts on the economy from the political turmoil.

On Sunday, Han had a phone call with U.S. President Joe Biden, discussing the political situation in South Korea and regional security challenges including North Korea's nuclear program. Biden expressed his appreciation for the resiliency of democracy in South Korea and reaffirmed "the ironclad commitment" of the United States, according to both governments.

Yoon's Dec. 3 imposition of martial law, the first of its kind in more than four decades, lasted only six hours, but has caused massive political tumult, halted diplomatic activities and rattled financial markets. Yoon was forced to lift his decree after parliament unanimously voted to overturn it.

Yoon sent hundreds of troops and police officers to the parliament in an effort to stop the vote, but they withdrew after the parliament rejected Yoon's decree. No major violence occurred.

Opposition parties have accused Yoon of rebellion, saying a president in South Korea is allowed to declare martial law only during wartime or similar emergencies and would have no right to suspend parliament's operations even in those cases.

Yoon has rejected the charges and vowed to "fight to the end." He said the deployment of troops to parliament was aimed at issuing a warning to the Democratic Party, which he called an "anti-state force" that abused its control of parliament by holding up the government's budget bill for next year and repeatedly pushing to impeach top officials.

Law enforcement institutions are investigating Yoon and others involved in the martial law case over possible rebellion and other allegations. They've arrested Yoon's defense minister and police chief and two other high-level figures.

Yoon has immunity from most criminal prosecution as president, but that doesn't extend to allegations of rebellion or treason. He's been banned from leaving South Korea, but observers doubt that authorities will detain him because of the potential for clashes with his presidential security service.

South Korean media reported that prosecutors asked Yoon to appear at a prosecution office for questioning on Sunday but he refused to do so. The reports said prosecutors plan to ask him to appear again. Repeated calls to a prosecutors' office in Seoul were unanswered.

Lee called for authorities to speed up their probes and said that an independent investigation by a special prosecutor should be launched as soon as possible. Last week, the National Assembly passed a law calling for such an investigation.

## **One week into a new Syria, rebels aim for normalcy and Syrians vow not to be silent again**

By SARAH EL DEEB Associated Press

DAMASCUS (AP) — At Damascus' international airport, the new head of security — one of the rebels who marched across Syria to the capital — arrived with his team. The few maintenance workers who showed up for work huddled around Maj Hamza al-Ahmed, eager to learn what will happen next.

They quickly unloaded all the complaints they had been too afraid to express during the rule of President Bashar Assad, which now, inconceivably, is over.

They told the bearded fighter they were denied promotions and perks in favor of pro-Assad favorites, and that bosses threatened them with prison for working too slowly. They warned of hardcore Assad supporters among airport staff, ready to return whenever the facility reopens.

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As Al-Ahmed tried to reassure them, Osama Najm, an engineer, announced: "This is the first time we talk." This was the first week of Syria's transformation after Assad's unexpected fall.

Rebels, suddenly in charge, met a population bursting with emotions: excitement at new freedoms; grief over years of repression; and hopes, expectations and worries about the future. Some were overwhelmed to the point of tears.

The transition has been surprisingly smooth. Reports of reprisals, revenge killings and sectarian violence have been minimal. Looting and destruction have been quickly contained, insurgent fighters disciplined. On Saturday, people went about their lives as usual in the capital, Damascus. Only a single van of fighters was seen.

There are a million ways it could go wrong.

The country is broken and isolated after five decades of Assad family rule. Families have been torn apart by war, former prisoners are traumatized by the brutalities they suffered, tens of thousands of detainees remain missing. The economy is wrecked, poverty is widespread, inflation and unemployment are high. Corruption seeps through daily life.

But in this moment of flux, many are ready to feel out the way ahead.

At the airport, al-Ahmed told the staffers: "The new path will have challenges, but that is why we have said Syria is for all and we all have to cooperate."

The rebels have so far said all the right things, Najm said. "But we will not be silent about anything wrong again."

Idlib comes to Damascus

At a torched police station, pictures of Assad were torn down and files destroyed after insurgents entered the city Dec. 8. All Assad-era police and security personnel have vanished.

On Saturday, the building was staffed by 10 men serving in the police force of the rebels' de facto "salvation government," which for years governed the rebel enclave of Idlib in Syria's northwest.

The rebel policemen watch over the station, dealing with reports of petty thefts and street scuffles. One woman complains that her neighbors sabotaged her power supply. A policeman tells her to wait for courts to start operating again.

"It will take a year to solve problems" he mumbled.

The rebels sought to bring order in Damascus by replicating the structure of its governance in Idlib. But there is a problem of scale. One of the policemen estimates the number of rebel police at only around 4,000; half are based in Idlib and the rest are tasked with maintaining security in Damascus and elsewhere. Some experts estimate the insurgents' total fighting force at around 20,000.

Right now, the fighters and the public are learning about each other.

The fighters drive large SUVs and newer models of vehicles that are out of reach for most residents in Damascus, where they cost 10 times as much because of custom duties and bribes. The fighters carry Turkish lira, long forbidden in government-held areas, rather than the plunging Syrian pound.

Most of the bearded fighters hail from conservative, provincial areas. Many are hardline Islamists.

The main insurgent force, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, has renounced its al-Qaida past, and its leaders are working to reassure Syria's religious and ethnic communities that the future will be pluralist and tolerant.

But many Syrians remain suspicious. Some fighters sport ribbons with Islamist slogans on their uniforms and not all of them belong to HTS, the most organized group.

"The people we see on the streets, they don't represent us," said Hani Zia, a Damascus resident from the southern city of Daraa, where the 2011 anti-Assad uprising began. He was concerned by reports of attacks on minorities and revenge killings.

"We should be fearful," he said, adding that he worries some insurgents feel superior to other Syrians because of their years of fighting. "With all due respect to those who sacrificed, we all sacrificed."

Still, fear is not prevalent in Damascus, where many insist they will no longer let themselves be oppressed.

Some restaurants have resumed openly serving alcohol, others more discretely to test the mood.

At a sidewalk café in the historic Old City's Christian quarter, men were drinking beer when a fighter patrol passed by. The men turned to each other, uncertain, but the fighters did nothing. When a man waving a

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gun harassed a liquor store elsewhere in the Old City, the rebel police arrested him, one policeman said. Salem Hajjo, a theater teacher who participated in the 2011 protests, said he doesn't agree with the rebels' Islamist views, but is impressed at their experience in running their own affairs. And he expects to have a voice in the new Syria.

"We have never been this at ease," he said. "The fear is gone. The rest is up to us."

The fighters make a concerted effort to reassure

On the night after Assad's fall, gunmen roamed the streets, celebrating victory with deafening gunfire. Some security agency buildings were torched. People ransacked the airport's duty free, smashing all the bottles of liquor. The rebels blamed some of this on fleeing government loyalists.

The public stayed indoors, peeking out at the newcomers. Shops shut down.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham moved to impose order, ordering a nighttime curfew for three days. It banned celebratory gunfire and moved fighters to protect properties.

After a day, people began to emerge.

For tens of thousands, their first destination was Assad's prisons, particularly Saydnaya on the capital's outskirts, to search for loved ones who disappeared years ago. Few have found any traces.

It was wrenching but also unifying. Rebels, some of them also searching, mingled with relatives of the missing in the dark halls of prisons that all had feared for years.

During celebrations in the street, gunmen invited children to hop up on their armored vehicles. Insurgents posed for photos with women, some with their hair uncovered. Pro-revolution songs blared from cars. Suddenly shops and walls everywhere are plastered with revolutionary flags and posters of activists killed by Assad's state.

TV stations didn't miss a beat, flipping from praising Assad to playing revolutionary songs. State media aired the flurry of declarations issued by the new insurgent-led transitional government.

The new administration called on people to go back to work and urged Syrian refugees around the world to return to help rebuild. It announced plans to rehabilitate and vet the security forces to prevent the return of "those with blood on their hands." Fighters reassured airport staffers — many of them government loyalists — that their homes won't be attacked, one employee said.

But Syria's woes are far from being resolved.

While produce prices plunged after Assad's fall, because merchants no longer needed to pay hefty customs fees and bribes, fuel distribution was badly disrupted, jacking up transportation costs and causing widespread and lengthy blackouts.

Officials say they want to reopen the airport as soon as possible and this week maintenance crews inspected a handful of planes on the tarmac. Cleaners removed trash, wrecked furniture and merchandise.

One cleaner, who identified himself only as Murad, said he earns the equivalent of \$15 a month and has six children to feed, including one with a disability. He dreams of getting a mobile phone.

"We need a long time to clean this up," he said.

## Storms across US bring heavy snow, dangerous ice and a tornado in California

By JOSH FUNK Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Inclement weather plagued areas of the U.S. in the first half of the weekend, with dangerous conditions including heavy snow in upstate New York, a major ice storm in Midwest states, severe weather warnings around Lake Tahoe and unusual tornado activity in Central California.

The ice storm beginning Friday evening created treacherous driving conditions across Iowa and eastern Nebraska Friday and into Saturday and prompted temporary closures of Interstate 80 after numerous cars and trucks slid off the road. In upstate New York, more than 33 inches (84 centimeters) was reported near Orchard Park, which is often a landing point for lake-effect snow.

On Saturday, a tornado touched down near a shopping mall in Scotts Valley, California, about 70 miles (110 kilometers) south of San Francisco, around 1:40 p.m. The tornado overturned cars and toppled trees

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and utility poles, the National Weather Service said. The Scotts Valley Police Department said several people were injured and taken to hospitals.

Some trees toppled onto cars and streets and damaged roofs in San Francisco. The damage was being assessed to determine if the city was indeed hit by a tornado, which had not occurred since 2005, according to the weather service.

Roger Gass, a meteorologist in the weather service's office in Monterey, California, said the warning of a possible tornado in San Francisco was a first for the city, noting an advanced alert did not go out before the last tornado struck nearly 20 years ago.

"I would guess there wasn't a clear signature on radar for a warning in 2005," said Gass, who was not there at the time.

The fast-moving storm prompted warnings for residents to take shelter, but few people have basements in the area.

"The biggest thing that we tell people in the city is to put as many walls between you and the outside as possible," Meteorologist Dalton Behringer said.

More than a foot (30 centimeters) of snow fell at some Lake Tahoe ski resorts, and a 112-mph (181-kph) gust of wind was recorded at the Mammoth Mountain resort south of Yosemite National Park, according to the weather service's office in Reno, Nevada. Up to 3 feet (91 centimeters) of snow was forecast for Sierra Nevada mountaintops.

The Tahoe Live music festival at Palisades Tahoe ski resort in California was expected to go ahead as planned Saturday and Sunday in spite of a winter storm warning for the area. Lil Wayne was scheduled to perform Saturday night, with Diplo as the headliner on Sunday, the festival's website said.

A winter storm warning was set to expire at 10 p.m. Saturday, but an avalanche warning remained in effect into the following night for elevations above 8,000 feet (about 2,400 meters) around Tahoe.

Interstate 80 was closed along an 80-mile (130-kilometer) stretch from Applegate, California, to the Nevada line just west of Reno on Saturday. The California Highway Patrol reopened the road in the afternoon for passenger vehicles with chains or four-wheel drive and snow tires.

The severe weather in the Midwest resulted in at least one death. The Washington County Sheriff's office in Nebraska said a 57-year-old woman died after she lost control of her pickup on Highway 30 near Arlington and hit an oncoming truck. The other driver sustained minor injuries.

Businesses announced plans to open late Saturday as temperatures rose high enough in the afternoon to melt the ice in most places.

"Luckily some warmer air is moving in behind this to make it temporary," said Dave Cousins, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service's office in Davenport, Iowa.

Tens of thousands of people in western Washington state lost electricity Saturday as the system delivered rain and gusty winds, local news outlets reported.

## After a 15-year pause in executions, Indiana prepares to put to death a man who killed 4

By RICK CALLAHAN Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Indiana officials are preparing to execute the state's first death row inmate in 15 years, who was convicted a quarter-century ago of killing his brother and three other men.

Joseph Corcoran, 49, has been on Indiana's death row since 1999. If he is put to death as scheduled Wednesday, it will be the state's first execution since 2009. In that time, 13 executions were carried out in Indiana but those were initiated and performed by federal officials in 2020 and 2021 at a federal prison.

Corcoran is scheduled to be executed before sunrise Wednesday at the Indiana State Prison in Michigan City, about 45 miles (72 kilometers) east of Chicago.

Indiana's resumption of executions is refocusing attention on Corcoran's case and questions about how the state has been able to obtain a drug for lethal injections.

What was Corcoran convicted of?

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Corcoran was 22 on July 26, 1997, when he fatally shot his brother, 30-year-old James Corcoran, and three other men: Douglas A. Stillwell, 30, Timothy G. Bricker, 30, and Robert Scott Turner, 32.

According to court records, Joseph Corcoran was under stress because the forthcoming marriage of his sister to Turner would necessitate moving out of the Fort Wayne, Indiana, home he had shared with his brother and sister.

He awoke to hear his brother and others downstairs talking about him, loaded his rifle and then shot all four men, records show.

While jailed, Corcoran reportedly bragged about shooting his parents in 1992 in northern Indiana's Steuben County. He was charged in their killings but acquitted.

#### Corcoran's sibling opposes execution

Corcoran's sister, Kelly Ernst, who lost a brother and her fiancé in the 1997 shootings, declined to discuss whether she believes her younger brother killed their parents.

But Ernst, who lives in northeastern Indiana, said she believes the death penalty should be abolished and her brother's execution won't solve or change anything. She does not plan to attend his execution.

Ernst said she had been out of contact with her brother for 10 years until recently. She believes it's "fairly obvious" he has a serious mental illness.

"I kind of just feel that there's no such thing as closure," Ernst, 56, said Friday. "I just don't know what else to say. I haven't slept in weeks."

#### Why did Indiana stop executions?

Indiana last executed Matthew Wrinkles, who was put to death in 2009 for killing his wife, her brother and sister-in-law in 1994.

State officials said they couldn't continue executions because a combination of drugs used in lethal injections had become unavailable. There has been a yearslong nationwide shortage because pharmaceutical companies — particularly in Europe, where opposition to capital punishment is strongest — have refused to sell their products for that purpose.

That has prompted states to turn to compounding pharmacies, which manufacture drugs specifically for a client. Some states have switched to more accessible drugs such as the sedatives pentobarbital or midazolam, both of which, critics say, can cause excruciating pain.

#### Indiana is following that lead, planning to use pentobarbital to execute Corcoran.

The federal government also used pentobarbital in the 13 federal executions carried out during the final six months of then-President Donald Trump's first term.

#### Secret source of the drug

Many states, including Indiana, refuse to divulge where they get the drugs. When asked how the state obtained the pentobarbital it plans to use in Corcoran's execution, the Indiana Department of Correction directed The Associated Press to a state law labeling the source of lethal injection drugs as confidential.

In June, Gov. Eric Holcomb announced the state had acquired pentobarbital and asked the Indiana Supreme Court to set a date for Corcoran's execution. The high court set his Dec. 18 execution date in September.

#### The state's execution plan

State law lays out the specific timing and process. It also limits the people who have a role in an execution and shields their identities and specifies who can witness executions at the Indiana State Prison.

At the time of an execution, Indiana code states that the only people allowed to be present are the prison warden, those selected to assist in the execution, the prison physician, one additional physician, the condemned person's spiritual adviser and the prison chaplain.

Up to five friends or relatives of the person being executed and up to eight relatives of the victims of the crime are allowed to view the process.

The Indiana Department of Correction did not respond to multiple queries from the AP asking whether any of the staffers who will help carry out Corcoran's execution have previously taken part in a state execution.

#### No media can witness Indiana executions

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Indiana is one of only two states, along with Wyoming, that do not allow for members of the news media to witness state executions, according to a recent report by the Death Penalty Information Center.

That report states "unobstructed media access to executions is critical because the media observes what the public cannot. States generally prohibit citizens from attending executions, so the media becomes the public's watchdog, providing important information about how the government is following the law and using taxpayer funds."

Is there a fight to stop the execution?

Corcoran had exhausted his federal appeals in 2016.

But on Wednesday, his attorneys filed a petition in U.S. District Court of Northern Indiana asking the court to stop his execution and hold a hearing to decide if it would be unconstitutional because Corcoran has a serious mental illness.

They argue he has "severe and longstanding paranoid schizophrenia" and his condition "manifests as auditory hallucinations and delusions that prison guards are torturing him with an ultrasound machine."

"Indeed, he has volunteered to be executed, and is eager to be executed, because he believes his execution will give him relief from the perceived pain his delusions and hallucinations inflict upon him," the filing states.

Corcoran's attorneys asked the Indiana Supreme Court to stop his execution but were denied on Dec. 5. The high court also denied petitions by his lawyers to argue whether he is competent to be executed.

In a handwritten affidavit to the justices, Corcoran said he no longer wanted to litigate his case.

"I am guilty of the crime I was convicted of, and accept the findings of all the appellate courts," he wrote.

## Colorado two-way star Travis Hunter wins Heisman Trophy as college football's top player

By MIKE FITZPATRICK AP Sports Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Travis Hunter turned every play into prime time — on both sides of the ball — and ultimately took home the Heisman Trophy.

Now he's got a leg up on his celebrity coach at Colorado.

The two-way star won college football's most prestigious award Saturday night, punctuating a tireless performance all season by a dynamic player with a unique combination of skills.

"Never thought I would be in this position," a tearful Hunter said as he thanked everyone from his fiancée to family members and former and current coaches. "It's crazy. Belief takes you a long way."

While posing for countless photos with the iconic statue over the past two days, Hunter made a point not to put his hands on the Heisman. He said he didn't want to touch it unless it was his.

Once it finally was, he grabbed the trophy hard with two hands and let loose a happy scream: "Let's go!"

Next stop, a local spot he reserved to celebrate with teammates.

"I don't like to be out late, but I'm going to be out late tonight," Hunter said, smiling.

A big-play wide receiver and lockdown cornerback, Hunter dominated on offense and defense for coach Deion Sanders and the Buffaloes, joining late running back Rashaan Salaam in 1994 as the only Heisman winners in school history.

Hunter received 552 first-place votes and 2,231 points in a comfortable victory. Boise State running back Ashton Jeanty was the runner-up with 309 first-place votes and 2,017 points, the closest margin since 2009.

Hunter garnered 80.14% of possible points, the 11th-highest in Heisman Trophy history, and joined Michigan cornerback Charles Woodson (1997) as the only full-time defensive players to claim the prize. Woodson also made some big plays at wideout, but didn't spend nearly as much time on offense as Hunter.

Oregon quarterback Dillon Gabriel came in third and Miami quarterback Cam Ward finished fourth in balloting for the 90th Heisman Trophy, presented annually since 1935 to the nation's most outstanding player. This year's ceremony was held at Jazz at Lincoln Center in Manhattan, where Sanders was in attendance.

It marked only the fifth time this century a quarterback didn't win. The last time no signal-caller placed in the top two was 2015, when running backs Derrick Henry of Alabama and Christian McCaffrey ran 1-2

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in voting.

Hunter also won The Associated Press player of the year among a string of other individual awards this week. He helped spark an impressive turnaround at Colorado, from 4-8 in 2023 when he missed 3 1/2 games because of injuries to 9-3 this year in Sanders' second season. The 20th-ranked Buffaloes got their first bowl bid in four years and will face No. 17 BYU (10-2) in the Alamo Bowl on Dec. 28.

Hunter has pledged to play, rather than skip the game to prepare for the NFL draft and prevent any possible injury as many top prospects do. The 6-foot-1, 185-pound junior from Suwanee, Georgia, plans to pass up his senior season in Boulder and is expected to be a top-five pick by the pros — perhaps even No. 1 overall.

"He wants to be great at everything," Sanders said. "He wants to have a commitment to excellence in everything he does — including fishing."

Showcasing his blazing speed and explosive playmaking, Hunter rarely came off the field this year — making him an every-down throwback to generations gone by and the first full-time, true two-way star in decades.

On offense, he had 92 catches for 1,152 yards and 14 touchdowns, plus a rushing score. On defense, he made four interceptions, 32 tackles, broke up 11 passes and forced a critical fumble that secured an overtime victory against Baylor.

With the Buffaloes winning games and challenging for a Big 12 title, he soared from a long-shot underdog in Heisman futures last summer to a heavy betting favorite this week.

All the while, striking the Heisman pose with teammates to celebrate big plays as it became more and more clear Hunter was the man to beat.

"I definitely can kick, (too). I've just got to practice," he said. "I can't stop moving when I'm not on the field."

Hunter played nearly 700 snaps each on offense and defense — the only Power Four conference player with 30-plus snaps on both sides of the ball, according to Colorado research.

It would seem an overly exhausting workload for any player these days, both mentally and physically, but not Hunter.

"I think I laid the ground for more people to come in and go two ways," he said Friday. "It starts with your mindset. If you believe you can do it, then you'll be able to do it. And also, I do a lot of treatment. I keep up with my body. I get a lot of recovery."

Rated the country's top recruit in the 2022 class, Hunter stunned many observers when he committed to play for Sanders at Jackson State, an HBCU that competes in the lower-level FCS, with the promise of playing both offense and defense.

"A lot of people told me I couldn't do it," said Hunter, wearing white shoes and a light blue suit — his favorite color. "I always say I'm going to prove them wrong and I'm going to prove myself right."

After one season, Hunter followed Sanders to Colorado and was a consensus All-America selection as an all-purpose player last year despite sitting out three games with a lacerated liver caused by a late hit.

Following his recovery, a healthy Hunter finished strong in 2023 and then really took off this season, catching passes from Shedeur Sanders, the coach's son, and becoming Colorado's first Heisman Trophy finalist in 30 years.

The 21-year-old Hunter, who plans to get married in May, is the sixth transfer to take the award over the past eight years and the first winner to begin his career in the FCS.

"Look where I'm at. It paid off," Hunter said.

"I wanted to be different," he added later. "Me being different makes me feel more comfortable than doing the norm."

Deion Sanders, nicknamed Prime Time during his playing days — seemingly by himself — was a two-time All-America defensive back at Florida State and finished eighth in 1988 Heisman voting.

An electrifying kick returner, who also played major league baseball by the way, Neon Deion went on to a Hall of Fame career as an NFL cornerback but mostly just dabbled on offense besides a 36-catch season



with the 1996 Dallas Cowboys.

Nothing quite like Hunter, who now has Heisman bragging rights on Coach Prime forever.

## Storms encase Iowa and eastern Nebraska in ice and generate first tornado warning in San Francisco

By JOSH FUNK Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — A major ice storm created treacherous driving conditions across Iowa and eastern Nebraska this weekend and prompted temporary closures of Interstate 80 after numerous cars and trucks slid off the road.

Many events were canceled across the region when the storm hit Friday evening, and businesses announced plans to open late Saturday as officials urged people to stay home if possible. Temperatures rose high enough in the afternoon to melt the ice in most places, however.

“Luckily some warmer air is moving in behind this to make it temporary,” said Dave Cousins, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service’s office in Davenport, Iowa.

At least one person died in a crash caused by the icy roads in eastern Nebraska. The Washington County Sheriff’s office said a 57-year-old woman died after she lost control of her pickup on Highway 30 near Arlington and hit an oncoming truck. The other driver sustained minor injuries.

Elsewhere a storm and wind gusts of up to 60 mph (96 kph) prompted the first tornado warning in San Francisco and caused some damage. Parts of neighboring San Mateo County were also included in the warning, which went out at 5:51 a.m. to about 1 million people and was lifted about 20 minutes later.

Later Saturday a tornado touched down near a shopping mall in Scotts Valley, about 70 miles (110 kilometers) south of San Francisco, overturning cars and toppling trees and utility poles, the National Weather Service said.

“Based on video, photos, firsthand accounts, and radar signatures a tornado occurred (at) 1:40 PM,” the service said, adding that a team will investigate and provide a ranking.

Images uploaded to social media showed at least three vehicles on their hood or side, with their windshields smashed and trees and power lines on the ground.

Several people were injured and taken to hospitals, the Scotts Valley Police Department said.

“The tornado has caused extensive damage in several areas, including overturning several vehicles in and around the shopping district on Mt. Hermon Drive,” the department said in a statement. It asked people to avoid the area.

One of those injured was a battalion chief with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, KSBW-TV reported.

In San Francisco, some trees toppled onto cars and streets and damaged roofs. The city has not seen a tornado since 2005, according to the Weather Service. The damage was being assessed to determine if the city was indeed hit by a tornado.

“This was the first ever warning for a possible tornado in San Francisco. I would guess there wasn’t a clear signature on radar for a warning in 2005,” said Roger Gass, a meteorologist in the Weather Service’s Monterey, California. He said he was not there in 2005.

The fast-moving storm prompted warnings for residents to take shelter, but few people have basements in the area.

“The biggest thing that we tell people in the city is to put as many walls between you and the outside as possible,” Meteorologist Dalton Behringer said.

In upstate New York, people were digging out after heavy snow fell. More than 33 inches (84 centimeters) was reported near Orchard Park, where residents are used to dealing with lake-effect snow this time of year.

And in Nevada, up to 3 feet (91 centimeters) of snow was forecast for Sierra Nevada mountaintops. More than a foot (30 cm) fell at some Lake Tahoe ski resorts, and a 112-mph (181-kph) gust of wind was recorded at the Mammoth Mountain resort south of Yosemite National Park, according to the National Weather Service’s Reno office.

A winter storm warning was set to expire at 10 p.m. Saturday, but an avalanche warning remained in effect into the following night for elevations above 8,000 feet (about 2,400 meters) around Tahoe.

Interstate 80 was closed along an 80-mile (130-kilometer) stretch from Applegate, California, to the Nevada line just west of Reno, where rain was falling and a winter weather advisory was in effect through the afternoon. The California Highway Patrol reopened the road in the afternoon for passenger vehicles with chains or four-wheel drive and snow tires, though it remained closed to semitrailer trucks.

In western Washington, tens of thousands of people lost electricity Saturday, local news outlets reported, amid a system that brought rain and gusty winds.

## **ABC agrees to give \$15 million to Donald Trump's presidential library to settle defamation lawsuit**

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — ABC News has agreed to pay \$15 million toward Donald Trump's presidential library to settle a defamation lawsuit over anchor George Stephanopoulos' inaccurate on-air assertion that the president-elect had been found civilly liable for raping writer E. Jean Carroll.

As part of the settlement made public Saturday, ABC News posted an editor's note to its website expressing regret over Stephanopoulos' statements during a March 10 segment on his "This Week" program. The network will also pay \$1 million in legal fees to the law firm of Trump's attorney, Alejandro Brito.

The settlement agreement describes ABC's presidential library payment as a "charitable contribution," with the money earmarked for a non-profit organization that is being established in connection with the yet-to-be built library.

"We are pleased that the parties have reached an agreement to dismiss the lawsuit on the terms in the court filing," ABC News spokesperson Jeannie Kedas said.

A Trump spokesperson declined comment.

The settlement agreement was signed Friday, the same day a Florida federal judge ordered Trump and Stephanopoulos to sit for separate depositions in the case next week. The settlement means that sworn testimony is no longer required.

The agreement bore Trump's bold, distinct signature and an electronic signature with the initials GRS in a space for Stephanopoulos' name. Debra OConnell, the president of ABC News Group and Disney Entertainment Networks, also e-signed the agreement.

ABC News must transfer the \$15 million for Trump's library to an escrow account that's being managed by Brito's law firm within 10 days, according to the agreement. The network must also pay Brito's legal fees within 10 days.

While sizeable, ABC's contribution to Trump's presidential library will likely cover just a fraction of the cost. Former President Barack Obama's library in Chicago, for example, was estimated to cost \$830 million as of 2021.

Trump sued ABC and Stephanopoulos in federal court in Miami days after the network aired the segment, in which the longtime "Good Morning America" anchor and "This Week" host repeatedly misstated the verdicts in Carroll's two civil lawsuits against Trump.

During a live "This Week" interview with Rep. Nancy Mace, R-S.C., Stephanopoulos wrongly claimed that Trump had been "found liable for rape" and "defaming the victim of that rape."

Neither verdict involved a finding of rape as defined under New York law.

In the first of the lawsuits to go to trial, Trump was found liable last year of sexually abusing and defaming Carroll. A jury ordered him to pay her \$5 million.

In January, at a second trial in federal court in Manhattan, Trump was found liable on additional defamation claims and ordered to pay Carroll \$83.3 million.

Trump is appealing both verdicts.

Carroll, a former advice columnist, went public in a 2019 memoir with her allegation that Trump raped

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her in the mid-1990s at Bergdorf Goodman, a luxury Manhattan department store across the street from Trump Tower, after they crossed paths at an entrance.

Trump denied her claim, saying he didn't know Carroll and never ran into her at the store.

After Trump lashed out, calling Carroll a "nut job" who invented "a fraudulent and false story" to sell her memoir, she sued him for unspecified monetary damages and sought a retraction of what she said were Trump's defamatory denials.

Testifying in April 2023, Carroll told jurors: "I'm here because Donald Trump raped me, and when I wrote about it, he said it didn't happen. He lied and shattered my reputation, and I'm here to try and get my life back."

After she'd agreed to help Trump shop for a gift for a woman, Carroll testified that he pushed her against a dressing room wall, stamped his mouth onto hers, yanked down her tights and shoved his hand and then his penis inside her while she struggled against him.

She said she finally kned him off her and fled.

In upholding the \$5 million judgment in the first trial, U.S. District Judge Lewis Kaplan wrote that the unanimous verdict was almost entirely in favor of Carroll, except that the jury concluded she had failed to prove that Trump raped her "within the narrow, technical meaning of a particular section of the New York Penal Law."

Kaplan, who presided over both of Carroll's lawsuits against Trump, said the definition of rape in the state code was "far narrower" than how rape is defined in common modern parlance, in some dictionaries, in some federal and state criminal statutes and elsewhere.

Under New York law, a rape finding requires vaginal penetration by a penis. Forcible penetration without consent of the vagina or other bodily orifices by fingers or anything else is labeled "sexual abuse."

The judge said the verdict did not mean that Carroll "failed to prove that Mr. Trump 'raped' her as many people commonly understand the word 'rape.' Indeed ... the jury found that Mr. Trump in fact did exactly that."

## South Korea's parliament votes to impeach President Yoon Suk Yeol over his martial law order

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's parliament on Saturday impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol over his stunning and short-lived martial law decree, a move that ended days of political paralysis but set up an intense debate over Yoon's fate, as jubilant crowds roared to celebrate another defiant moment in the country's resilient democracy.

The National Assembly passed the motion 204-85. Yoon's presidential powers and duties were subsequently suspended and Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, the country's No. 2 official, took over presidential powers later Saturday.

The Constitutional Court has up to 180 days to determine whether to dismiss Yoon as president or restore his powers. If he's thrown out of office, a national election to choose his successor must be held within 60 days.

It was the second National Assembly vote on Yoon's impeachment after ruling party lawmakers boycotted the first floor vote last Saturday. Some People Power Party lawmakers had since said they would vote for Yoon's impeachment as public protests intensified and his approval rating plummeted.

National Assembly Speaker Woo Won Shik said Yoon's impeachment was an outcome driven by "the people's ardent desire for democracy, courage and dedication."

Hundreds of thousands of people gathered near the parliament roared in jubilation, waved banners and brandished colorful K-pop glow sticks, as a lead activist shouted on stage, "We have preserved the constitutional order!"

"The impeachment has been done in line with the people's demand and I hope a decision to dismiss

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Yoon Suk Yeol will come as soon as possible," said Kim Su-bong, a protester. "I'm very happy and moved. I view it as a victory of the people."

In a central Seoul plaza, another huge crowd gathered supporting Yoon, but they grew subdued after hearing he had been impeached.

The acting leader bolsters the country's security posture

Yoon issued a statement saying he would "never give up" and calling for officials to maintain stability in government functions during what he described as a "temporary" pause of his presidency.

"I will carry with me all the criticisms, encouragement and support directed toward me, and I will continue to do my utmost for the country until the very last moment," Yoon said.

Yoon's Dec. 3 imposition of martial law, the first of its kind in more than four decades in South Korea, lasted only six hours, but has caused massive political tumult, halted diplomatic activities and rattled financial markets. Yoon was forced to lift his decree after parliament unanimously voted to overturn it.

Han, the acting leader, ordered the military to bolster its security posture to prevent North Korea from launching provocations by miscalculation. Han asked the foreign minister to inform other countries that South Korea's major external policies remain unchanged, and the finance minister to work to minimize potential negative impacts on the economy by the political turmoil, according to Han's office.

"I earnestly ask public servants this. At this moment, we have the critical task of ensuring normal and stable operations of state affairs ... I ask you to carry out your duties without any neglect to ensure that the government is operated without being shaken," Han said in a televised statement.

Han's office said he had a phone call with U.S. President Joe Biden on Sunday, discussing the political situation in South Korea and regional security challenges, including North Korea's nuclear program and its ongoing military cooperation with Russia, and reaffirming their mutual commitment to maintaining and strengthening their alliance.

South Korea's executive power is concentrated with the president, but the prime minister leads the country if the president becomes incapacitated. Han is a seasoned official and has previously held a string of top government posts such as trade minister and finance minister. He also served as a prime minister from 2007-2008.

U.S. Ambassador Philip S. Goldberg wrote on X that the U.S. supports South Korea's "democratic and constitutional process here and stands with its people." Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba told reporters Saturday that Tokyo was closely watching the developments in South Korea but said that "the importance of Japan-South Korea relations is not affected."

After declaring martial law, Yoon sent hundreds of troops and police officers to the parliament to try to impede its vote on the decree, before they withdrew after the parliament rejected Yoon's decree. No major violence occurred.

Opposition parties accuse Yoon of rebellion, citing a law that categorizes as rebellion the staging of a riot against established state authorities to undermine the constitution. They also say that a president in South Korea is allowed to declare martial law only during wartime or similar emergencies and has no right to suspend parliament's operations even under martial law.

The impeachment motion alleged that Yoon "committed rebellion that hurt peace in the Republic of Korea by staging a series of riots." It said Yoon's mobilization of military and police forces threatened the National Assembly and the public and that his martial law decree was aimed at disturbing the constitution.

Yoon remains defiant

In a fiery speech on Thursday, Yoon rejected the rebellion charges, calling his martial law introduction an act of governance. The conservative Yoon said he aimed to issue a warning to the main liberal opposition Democratic Party, calling it "a monster" and "anti-state forces" that he argued has flexed its legislative muscle to impeach many top officials and undermine the government's budget bill for next year. He claimed the deployment of troops was meant to maintain order, rather than disrupt it.

Democratic Party leader Lee Jae-myung called Yoon's speech a "mad declaration of war" against his own people.

Observers say Yoon's speech suggested a focus on legal preparations to defend his martial law decree

at the Constitutional Court, even as opinion surveys showed more than 70% of South Koreans supported his impeachment. A survey released Friday put Yoon's approval rating at 11%, the lowest since he took office in 2022.

Some of Yoon's claims don't align with testimony by some military commanders whose troops were deployed to the Assembly.

Kwak Jong-keun, commander of the Army Special Warfare Command, said that Yoon had asked for his troops to "quickly destroy the door and drag out the lawmakers who are inside." Kwak said he didn't carry out Yoon's order.

Yoon is the third South Korean president impeached while in office. In 2016, parliament impeached Park Geun-hye, the country's first female president, over a corruption scandal. The Constitutional Court upheld her impeachment and dismissed her from office.

In 2004, President Roh Moo-hyun was impeached at parliament over an alleged election law violation but the court later overturned his impeachment and restored his presidential powers.

Yoon has been banned from leaving South Korea. Yoon's defense minister and police chief and two other high-level figures have been arrested over the martial law enforcement.

He has the presidential privilege of immunity from criminal prosecution but that doesn't extend to allegations of rebellion or treason. But observers doubt that authorities will forcefully detain him because of the potential for clashes with his presidential security service.

## **Trump gets warm welcome as he watches Army-Navy game alongside key allies, nominees and Daniel Penny**

By NOAH TRISTER, TARA COPP and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

LANDOVER, Md. (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump huddled with allies and a Republican cause célèbre at Saturday's Army-Navy football game, taking in one of the most storied rivalries in college sports while spotlighting his emerging national security team.

Trump was joined by Vice President-elect JD Vance, embattled Pentagon pick Pete Hegseth, potential backup defense secretary option Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, and others to watch Navy beat Army 31-13 in the 125th matchup between the service academies.

Daniel Penny, a military veteran who was acquitted of criminally negligent homicide this past week in the chokehold death of an agitated subway rider in New York, also was a guest in the president's suite. Penny was invited by Vance, who accused prosecutors of trying to "ruin" Penny's life by charging the Marine veteran in the death of Jordan Neely in 2023.

Trump arrived at Northwest Stadium just before kickoff and was greeted warmly by the crowd, which erupted in cheers when the president-elect, Vance and Elon Musk, who Trump has appointed to help lead a proposed Department of Government Efficiency, appeared on the scoreboard video screen.

The president, who was seated with his entourage in a stadium suite, mouthed "thank you" and the crowd erupted in a chant of "USA, USA!"

Trump, who attended Army-Navy games as president-elect in 2016 and during his first term, has been making an increasing number of public appearances before his inauguration on Jan. 20, 2025. He was accompanied by his family and Vance on Thursday as he rang the opening bell for the New York Stock Exchange after being recognized as Time magazine's person of the year.

Trump spent the weeks after the Nov. 5 election holed up at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida assembling a team to help lead his next administration.

He and his aides have become bullish about Hegseth's chances of winning Senate confirmation. The Army combat veteran and former Fox News host's chances of becoming defense secretary had appeared in peril amid allegations of excessive drinking, sexual assault and his views on women in combat.

DeSantis, a former Navy lawyer who competed against Trump for the Republican presidential nomination, is among the possible replacement candidates Trump has considered if Hegseth's bid fizzles.

But Saturday's game offered Trump a chance to display his commitment to Hegseth's nomination. The

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embattled nominee even stood with Trump and Vance for the playing of the national anthem.

The mood appeared celebratory for Trump and his team on Saturday.

Hegseth along with fellow Army veterans Rep. Mike Waltz, Trump's incoming national security adviser, and Tulsi Gabbard, Trump's pick to serve as director of national intelligence, posted a short video on X shortly before the game to make their allegiances clear.

"We love our Navy, except today" said Waltz, a retired Army National Guard colonel who did multiple combat tours in Afghanistan, the Middle East and Africa.

"Go Army!" Gabbard added.

Trump also spent time during the game with Air Force Gen. CQ Brown, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, whose future could be on shaky ground in the new Trump administration.

Biden last year tapped Brown for a four-year term as the nation's highest-ranking military officer, but military leaders serve at the pleasure of the president.

Brown, a combat pilot and just the second Black officer to serve as chairman, spoke out after the police killing of George Floyd, a touchstone moment in the Black Lives Matter movement, about the bias he faced in his own life and career.

But Trump has expressed disdain for equity and diversity programs. And his defense secretary pick Hegseth has decried a "woke" agenda that he argues is undermining U.S. military strength. Hegseth, days before he was announced as Trump's Pentagon nominee, called for firing Brown and generals that have promoted diversity policies in a podcast hosted by Shawn Ryan, a former Navy SEAL.

Trump also made time for Republican lawmakers that he'll need to get his agenda through Congress.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., was among the lawmakers that chatted up Trump at the game. He brought with him a contingent of other GOP lawmakers, incoming Senate Majority Leader John Thune and Pennsylvania Sen.-elect David McCormick, that vied for face time with the incoming president weeks before Republicans take control of the White House and both branches of Congress.

Johnson, who could be seen talking with the president-elect before kickoff, had said he would discuss with Trump plans for a legislative package that could move through Congress next year with a simple majority in the face of expected Democratic opposition.

Vance brought Penny, a fellow Marine veteran, as his guest. Penny was cleared of criminally negligent homicide in Neely's death after a judge had dismissed a more serious manslaughter charge last week because the jury deadlocked on that count.

The case was a flashpoint in the long-standing debates over racial justice and as well as failures by New York City to address homelessness and mental illness, both of which Neely had struggled with.

"Daniel's a good guy, and New York's mob district attorney tried to ruin his life for having a backbone," Vance said in a post on X on Friday. "I'm grateful he accepted my invitation and hope he's able to have fun and appreciate how much his fellow citizens admire his courage."

## **Mystery drone sightings keep happening in New Jersey. Here's what we know (and don't know)**

By BRUCE SHIPKOWSKI and KEN MILLER Associated Press

A large number of mysterious drones have been reported flying over parts of New Jersey and the East Coast in recent weeks, sparking speculation and concern over who sent them and why.

New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy wrote to President Joe Biden asking for answers. New Jersey's new senator, Andy Kim, spent Thursday night on a drone hunt in rural northern New Jersey, and posted about it on X.

Murphy and law enforcement officials have stressed that the drones don't appear to be a threat to public safety, but many state and municipal lawmakers have nonetheless called for stricter rules about who can fly the unmanned aircraft.

The FBI is among several agencies investigating and has asked residents to share videos, photos and other information they may have about the drones.

What's the deal with the drones in New Jersey?

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Dozens of witnesses have reported seeing them in the state starting in November.

At first they were spotted flying along the scenic Raritan River, which feeds the Round Valley Reservoir, the state's largest aquifer, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) west of New York City.

But soon sightings were reported statewide, including near the Picatinny Arsenal, a military research and manufacturing facility, and over President-elect Donald Trump's golf course in Bedminster.

The aircraft have also recently been spotted in coastal areas.

Republican U.S. Rep. Chris Smith said a Coast Guard commanding officer told him a dozen drones closely followed a Guard lifeboat near Barnegat Light and Island Beach State Park in Ocean County over the weekend.

Federal officials offer assurances that drones don't pose a threat

The growing anxiety among some residents is not lost on the Biden administration, which has faced criticism from Trump for not dealing with the matter more aggressively.

In a call with reporters Saturday that was organized by the White House, senior officials from the FBI, Pentagon, FAA and other agencies sought to assure people that the drones are not a national security or public safety threat or the handywork of a malicious foreign actor.

An FBI official, who spoke on condition of anonymity under ground rules set by the White House, said the public concern is understandable but added, "I think there has been a slight overreaction."

Pentagon spokesperson Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder said Thursday that the military's initial assessment after consulting with the Department of Homeland Security and the National Security Council — that the drones are not of foreign origin — remained unchanged.

New Jersey congressman wants the military to take action

A New Jersey congressman has urged the Pentagon to authorize the use of force to bring down one or more drones to try to figure out who deployed them.

The objects could be downed over the ocean or in an unpopulated area on land, Smith said Saturday at a news conference.

"Why can't we bag at least one of these drones and get to the bottom of it?" Smith said.

Rep. Jeff Van Drew, another Republican Jersey Shore-area congressman, has also called for the military to shoot down the drones.

Monmouth County Sheriff Shaun Golden said people should not take it into their own hands to shoot down drones, which would break state and federal laws.

Drones have been spotted over New York City

Drone sightings have now been reported in New York, where a permit is required, and Mayor Eric Adams said the city was investigating and collaborating with New Jersey and federal officials.

The runways at Stewart International Airport — about 60 miles (100 kilometers) north of the city — were shut down for about one hour Friday night because of drone activity in the airspace, Gov. Kathy Hochul said.

"This has gone too far," she said in a statement.

The governor called on Congress to strengthen the FAA's oversight of drones and give more investigative authority to state and local law enforcement.

"Extending these powers to New York State and our peers is essential," she said. "Until those powers are granted to state and local officials, the Biden administration must step in by directing additional federal law enforcement to New York and the surrounding region to ensure the safety of our critical infrastructure and our people."

Are these drones dangerous?

The White House has said that a review of the reported sightings shows that many of them are actually manned aircraft being flown lawfully, echoing the opinion of officials and drone experts.

The federal Homeland Security Department and FBI also said in a joint statement they have no evidence that the sightings pose "a national security or public safety threat or have a foreign nexus."

Assemblywoman Dawn Fantasia, who was briefed by the Department of Homeland Security, said the reported drones have been up to 6 feet (1.8 meters) in diameter and sometimes travel with their lights switched off. This is much larger than those typically flown by drone hobbyists, and she said they appear

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to avoid detection by traditional methods such as helicopter and radio.

Who sent the drones?

Authorities say they do not know.

The FBI, Homeland Security and state police are investigating the sightings. Authorities say they don't know if it is one drone that has been spotted many times or if there are multiple aircraft being flown in a coordinated effort.

Speculation has raged online, with some expressing concerns that the drone or drones could be part of a nefarious plot by foreign agents.

Officials stress that ongoing state and federal investigations have found no evidence to support those concerns, but Rep. Smith on Saturday echoed such speculation.

"The elusive maneuvering of these drones suggests a major military power sophistication that begs the question whether they have been deployed to test our defense capabilities — or worse — by violent dictatorships, perhaps maybe Russia, or China, or Iran, or North Korea," he said.

Pentagon spokeswoman Sabrina Singh said Wednesday that the aircraft are not U.S. military drones.

What have officials said about the sightings?

Trump has said he believes the government knows more than it's saying. "Let the public know, and now. Otherwise, shoot them down!!!" he posted on his social media site.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut said Thursday that the drones should be "shot down, if necessary."

"We should be doing some very urgent intelligence analysis and take them out of the skies, especially if they're flying over airports or military bases," Blumenthal said.

Experts, however, warn not to shoot at anything in the sky.

Trisha Bushey, 48, of Lebanon Township, New Jersey, lives near Round Valley Reservoir where there have been numerous sightings and said she doesn't believe the assertion that the drones aren't a risk to public safety.

"How can you say it's not posing a threat if you don't know what it is?" she said. "I think that's why so many people are uneasy."

Are drones allowed in New Jersey?

The flying of drones for recreational and commercial use is legal in the state, but it is subject to local and Federal Aviation Administration regulations and flight restrictions.

In New York City, a permit is required to take off or land an unmanned aircraft.

Operators must be FAA-certified.

Have drones been spotted anywhere else?

Sightings also have been reported in Virginia and elsewhere.

Two people said they spotted an aircraft Thursday night near Virginia Beach that was unlike any other they've seen.

The object was over the ocean, and they watched as it slowly moved over an Army National Guard facility, John Knight told The Virginian-Pilot.

"It was definitely different," said Knight, who took videos of what he thinks was a drone the size of a small truck.

"It flew like a helicopter but made no noise," he added.

The Virginia National Guard did not have any aircraft operating in the area Thursday night, according to spokesperson A.A. "Cotton" Puryear. Its leadership is aware of the incident and it's under investigation.

Another military installation in the area is Naval Air Station Oceana Dam Neck Annex. NAS Oceana, the East Coast master jet base in Virginia Beach, is aware of recent reports of sightings in the area and is coordinating with federal and state agencies to ensure the safety of its personnel and operations, Katie Hewett, public affairs officer, said Friday by email.

Knight submitted the videos Thursday night to the FBI tip line.

In Massachusetts, 10 to 15 drones were reported hovering over a home Thursday night in Harwich on Cape Cod. A resident told police they were bright and she observed them for more than an hour.

Earlier that evening, an off-duty police officer in the same town noticed similar activity near a public



safety complex, police said. The information was forwarded to the FBI and Massachusetts State Police. Drones were also spotted last month in the U.K. The U.S. Air Force said several small unmanned aircraft were detected near four military bases in England that are used by American forces.

## Ex-soccer player Kavelashvili becomes Georgia's president in a blow to country's EU aspirations

By SOPHIKO MEGRELIDZE Associated Press

TBILISI, Georgia (AP) — Former soccer player Mikheil Kavelashvili became president of Georgia on Saturday, as the ruling party tightened its grip in what the opposition calls a blow to the country's EU aspirations and a victory for former imperial ruler Russia.

Kavelashvili, 53, who was the only candidate on the ballot, easily won the vote given the Georgian Dream party's control of a 300-seat electoral college that replaced direct presidential elections in 2017. It is made up of members of Parliament, municipal councils and regional legislatures.

Georgian Dream retained control of Parliament in the South Caucasus nation in an Oct. 26 election that the opposition alleges was rigged with Moscow's help. The party has vowed to continue pushing toward EU accession but also wants to "reset" ties with Russia.

Georgia's outgoing president and main pro-Western parties have boycotted the post-election parliamentary sessions and demanded a rerun of the ballot.

In 2008 Russia fought a brief war with Georgia, which led to Moscow's recognition of two breakaway regions as independent, and an increase in the Russian military presence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Critics have accused Georgian Dream — established by Bidzina Ivanishvili, a shadowy billionaire who made his fortune in Russia — of becoming increasingly authoritarian and tilted toward Moscow, accusations the ruling party has denied. The party recently pushed through laws similar to those used by the Kremlin to crack down on freedom of speech and LGBTQ+ rights.

Pro-Western Salome Zourabichvili has been president since 2018 and has vowed to stay on after her six-year term ends Monday, describing herself as the only legitimate leader until a new election is held.

Georgian Dream's decision last month to suspend talks on their country's bid to join the European Union added to the opposition's outrage and galvanized protests.

Who is the outgoing president?

Zourabichvili, 72, was born in France to parents with Georgian roots and had a successful career with the French Foreign Ministry before President Mikheil Saakashvili named her Georgia's top diplomat in 2004.

Constitutional changes made the president's job largely ceremonial before Zourabichvili was elected by popular vote with Georgian Dream's support in 2018. She became sharply critical of the ruling party, accusing it of pro-Russia policies, and Georgian Dream unsuccessfully tried to impeach her.

"I remain your president — there is no legitimate parliament and thus no legitimate election or inauguration," she has declared on the social network X. "My mandate continues."

Zourabichvili rejects government claims that the opposition was fomenting violence.

"We are not demanding a revolution," she told The Associated Press. "We are asking for new elections, but in conditions that will ensure that the will of the people will not be misrepresented or stolen again."

"Georgia has been always resisting Russian influence and will not accept having its vote stolen and its destiny stolen."

Zourabichvili said Saturday's vote was a "provocation" and "a parody" while a leader of one of Georgia's main opposition parties said it was unconstitutional.

Giorgi Vashadze of the Unity National Movement Coalition said Zourabichvili is "the only legitimate source of power."

Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze said Kavelashvili's win "will make a significant contribution to strengthening Georgia's statehood and our sovereignty, as well as reducing radicalism and so-called polarization."

"The main mission of the presidential institution is to care for the unity of the nation and society," said

Kobakhidze, a former university professor and later chairman of Georgian Dream.

Who's the ruling party presidential candidate?

Georgian Dream nominated Kavelashvili — mocked for lacking higher education by Georgia's opposition. Some protesters outside Tbilisi's Parliament building on Saturday morning brought their own university diplomas while others kicked soccer balls.

Kavelashvili was a striker in the English Premier League for Manchester City and played for several soccer clubs in the Swiss Super League. He was elected to Parliament in 2016 on the Georgian Dream ticket and in 2022 co-founded the People's Power political movement, which was allied with Georgian Dream and become known for its strong anti-Western rhetoric.

Kavelashvili was one of the authors of a controversial law requiring organizations that receive more than 20% of their funding from abroad to register as "pursuing the interest of a foreign power," similar to a Russian law used to discredit organizations critical of the government.

The EU, which granted Georgia candidate status in December 2023 on condition that the country meets the bloc's recommendations, put its accession on hold and cut financial support in June following approval of the "foreign influence" law.

How did opposition protests unfold?

Thousands of demonstrators converged on the Parliament building every night after the government announced the suspension of EU accession talks on Nov. 28.

Riot police used water cannons and tear gas almost daily to disperse and beat scores of protesters, some of whom threw fireworks at police officers and built barricades on the capital's central boulevard. Hundreds were detained and over 100 treated for injuries.

Several journalists were beaten by police and media workers accused authorities of using thugs to deter people from attending anti-government rallies, which Georgian Dream denies. The crackdown has drawn strong condemnation from the United States and EU officials.

French President Emmanuel Macron on Friday, in a video statement in support of the protests, said Georgia's "European dream must not be extinguished."

"Europe does not seek to sow chaos, Europe does not seek to destabilize or subjugate its neighbors," he said. "The voice of Georgians must be listened to and respected."

"(Kavelashvili) is not elected by us. He is controlled by a puppet government, by Bidzina Ivanishvili, by Putin," protester Sandro Samkharadze said outside Tbilisi's Parliament building. Another protester waved a sign saying "We are children of Europe."

Demonstrators vowed the rallies would continue. "If (the government) wants to go to Russia, they can go to Russia, because we are not going anywhere. We are staying here," said protester Kato Kalatozishvili.

## Trump nominees should 'steer clear' of undermining polio vaccine, McConnell says

By MORIAH BALINGIT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, a childhood polio survivor, said any of President-elect Donald Trump's nominees seeking confirmation should "steer clear" of efforts to discredit the polio vaccine.

"Efforts to undermine public confidence in proven cures are not just uninformed — they're dangerous," McConnell said in a Friday statement. "Anyone seeking the Senate's consent to serve in the incoming Administration would do well to steer clear of even the appearance of association with such efforts."

The 82-year-old lawmaker's statement appeared to be directed at Trump's nominee for health secretary, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., after a report that one of his advisors filed a petition to revoke approval for the polio vaccine in 2022. It was a sign that Kennedy, who has long advanced the debunked idea that vaccines cause autism, could face resistance in the soon-to-be GOP-controlled Senate.

"Mr. Kennedy believes the Polio Vaccine should be available to the public and thoroughly and properly studied," said Katie Miller, the transition spokeswoman for Kennedy, in response to questions.

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The New York Times reported Friday that a lawyer who is helping Kennedy select candidates for health official positions filed a petition to get the government to revoke its approval of the polio vaccine — widely considered to have halted the disease in most parts of the world — and pause distribution of several other vaccines. The Washington Post also confirmed the petition. The AP has not independently confirmed the petition, which was filed in 2022, according to the Times.

Vaccines have been proven to be safe and effective in laboratory testing and in real-world use in hundreds of millions of people over decades — they are considered among the most effective public health measures in history.

McConnell contracted polio at 2 years old but survived, he said Friday, because of “the miraculous combination of modern medicine and a mother’s love.” He praised the “saving power” of the polio vaccine for the “millions who came after me.”

Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer also responded Friday to the Times report. In a post on X, formerly Twitter, he called it “outrageous and dangerous for people in the Trump Transition to try and get rid of the polio vaccine that has virtually eradicated polio in America and saved millions of lives.

He called on Kennedy to clarify his own position on it.

Trump nominated Kennedy last month, saying he would work to protect Americans “from harmful chemicals, pollutants, pesticides, pharmaceutical products, and food additives.”

But his nomination was immediately met with alarm from scientists and public health officials, who fear Kennedy would unwind life-saving public health initiatives, like vaccines.

Kennedy has pushed other conspiracy theories regarding vaccines, such as that COVID-19 could have been “ethnically targeted” to spare Ashkenazi Jews and Chinese people, comments he later said were taken out of context. He has repeatedly brought up the Holocaust when discussing vaccines and public health mandates.

Kennedy said he plans to remake the Department of Health and Human Services, an agency with sprawling reach and a \$1.3 trillion budget, if he is approved. He has suggested the Food and Drug Administration is beholden to “big pharma,” and his anti-vaccine nonprofit has called on it to stop using COVID-19 vaccines.

During the COVID-19 epidemic, his nonprofit group, Children’s Health Defense, petitioned the FDA to halt the use of all COVID vaccines. The group has alleged that the FDA is beholden to “big pharma” because it receives much of its budget from industry fees and some employees who have departed the agency have gone on to work for drugmakers.

Children’s Health Defense currently has a lawsuit pending against a number of news organizations, among them The Associated Press, accusing them of violating antitrust laws by taking action to identify misinformation, including about COVID-19 and COVID-19 vaccines. Kennedy took leave from the group when he announced his run for president but is listed as one of its attorneys in the lawsuit.

## **US officials have been in direct contact with the Syrian rebel group that ousted Assad, Blinken says**

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

AQABA, Jordan (AP) — American officials have been in direct contact with the terrorist-designated rebel group that led the overthrow of Syrian President Bashar Assad, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Saturday.

Blinken, speaking at a news conference in Jordan, was the first U.S. official to publicly confirm contacts between the Biden administration and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS, which led a coalition of armed opposition groups that drove Assad from power and into asylum in Russia last weekend.

Along with counterparts from eight Arab nations and Turkey and senior officials from the European Union and United Nations, Blinken signed off on a set of principles meant to guide Syria’s transition to a peaceful, nonsectarian and inclusive country.

Blinken would not discuss details of the direct contacts with HTS but said it was important for the U.S. to convey messages to the group about its conduct and how it intends to govern in a transition period.

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"Yes, we have been in contact with HTS and with other parties," Blinken said in the port city of Aqaba. He added that "our message to the Syrian people is this: We want them to succeed and we're prepared to help them do so."

HTS, once an affiliate of al-Qaida, has been designated as a foreign terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department since 2018. That designation carries severe sanctions, including a ban on the provision of any "material support" to the group or its members.

The sanctions do not, however, legally bar U.S. officials from communicating with designated groups.

In an interview Saturday on Syrian television, the group's leader, Ahmad al-Sharaa, formerly known as Abu Mohammed al-Golani, did not address any direct contact with the United States, but said the new authorities in Damascus are in touch with Western embassies.

He also said that "we don't intend to enter any conflict because there is general exhaustion in Syria."

HTS has worked to establish security and start a political transition after seizing Damascus and has tried to reassure a public both stunned by Assad's fall and concerned about extremist jihadis among the rebels. Insurgent leaders say the group has broken with its extremist past.

Blinken also stressed that "the success that we've had in ending the territorial caliphate" of the Islamic State group remains "a critical mission." And citing the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, the Kurdish fighters who in recent years drove IS out of large areas of Syria, he called it "very important at this moment that they continue that role because this is a moment of instability" in which IS "will seek to regroup and take advantage of."

A joint statement after the meeting of foreign ministers urged all parties to cease hostilities in Syria and expressed support for a locally led transitional political process. It called for preventing the reemergence of extremist groups and ensuring the security and safe destruction of chemical weapons stockpiles.

"We don't want Syria to fall into chaos," Jordan's foreign minister, Ayman Safadi, told journalists.

A separate statement by Arab foreign ministers called for U.N.-supervised elections based on a new constitution approved by Syrians. Their statement condemned Israel's incursion into the buffer zone with Syria and adjacent sites over the past week as a "heinous occupation" and demanded the withdrawal of Israeli forces.

U.S. officials say al-Sharaa has been making welcomed comments about protecting minority and women's rights but they remain skeptical that he will follow through on them in the long run.

On Friday, the rebels and Syria's unarmed opposition worked to safely turn over to U.S. officials an American man who had been imprisoned by Assad.

U.S. officials are continuing their search for Austin Tice, an American journalist who disappeared 12 years ago near Damascus. "We have impressed upon everyone we've been in contact with the importance of helping find Austin Tice and bringing him home," Blinken said.

In other developments:

—Turkey reopened its embassy in Damascus, becoming the first country to do so since the end of Assad's rule. The embassy suspended operations 12 years ago due to insecurity during Syria's civil war.

—Al-Sharaa said in the TV interview that "the pretexts that Israel uses have ended" for its airstrikes that have destroyed much of the Syrian army's assets in recent days. He said "the Israelis have crossed the rules of engagement" but that the insurgent group is not about to enter a conflict with Israel.

—The leader of Lebanon's Hezbollah militants said the group has lost its military supply line through Syria but that the new authority there might reinstate the route.

—A Syrian war monitor and a citizen journalist said gunmen attacked members of a Syrian insurgent group, Failaq al-Sham, in the country's coastal region, killing or wounding 15 of them on Saturday. That region is home to many members of Assad's minority Alawite sect.

## Woman accusing Jay-Z and Sean 'Diddy' Combs of sexual assault acknowledges inconsistencies

HALLIE GOLDEN Associated Press

A woman who accused rappers Jay-Z and Sean "Diddy" Combs of sexually assaulting her when she was 13 at an awards show after-party has acknowledged certain inconsistencies in her story, while her lawyer said he will continue to vet her claims.

The unnamed woman described being driven from Rochester, New York, to New York City for the MTV Video Music Awards in 2000 and then Combs' limo driver offering her a ride to an after-party, NBC News reported on Friday. She claimed she spoke with musicians Benji Madden and his brother at the party, and her father picked her up after the alleged assault.

But a representative of the Maddens confirmed to NBC that they were on tour in the Midwest during the VMAs, while her father said he doesn't remember the drive home of more than five hours. The woman's friend who reportedly drove her to the awards has since died, NBC reported.

The woman had first sued Combs, alleging she was raped at an after-party, and then amended the lawsuit Sunday to include a new allegation that Jay-Z, whose legal name is Shawn Carter, also was at the party and participated in the sexual assault.

Jay-Z said in a statement that the article proves Tony Buzbee, a personal injury lawyer in Houston, filed a false complaint against him for money and fame.

"This incident didn't happen and yet he filed it in court and doubled down in the press," he said. "True Justice is coming. We fight FROM victory, not FOR victory. This was over before it began. This 1-800 lawyer doesn't realize it yet, but, soon."

Buzbee told The Associated in an email that if someone raises a new issue which didn't previously exist, his legal team's job is to continue collecting facts and evidence.

Jay-Z's attorney, Alex Spiro, asked the court to dismiss the case, saying in a statement, "It is stunning that a lawyer would not only file such a serious complaint without proper vetting, but would make things worse by further peddling this false story in the press."

The woman admitted to making "some mistakes" when recalling that night, but said she stands by her allegations.

Combs' attorney, Teny R. Geragos, said in a statement emailed to The Associated Press on Saturday: "Yesterday, a lawyer admitted that over 50 people falsely claimed to be victims. Today, for the second time this week, a Buzbee plaintiff has been exposed. This is the beginning of the end of this shameful money grab."

The litigation is part of a wave of sexual assault lawsuits levied against Combs as the hip-hop mogul remains in custody in New York awaiting trial on federal sex trafficking charges.

The unnamed woman said that while she was in the limousine, she was asked to sign a nondisclosure document. Once at the party, the lawsuit said, she took a drink that made her feel "woozy and lightheaded" and went into a bedroom to lie down.

She said Combs and Jay-Z then barged into the room, along with another unnamed celebrity, and raped her. The woman said she eventually escaped the room, fled the house and called for a ride from a nearby gas station.

Jay-Z, a 24-time Grammy award winning rapper, producer and music mogul, anonymously sued Buzbee last month, alleging he was attempting to blackmail the rapper by threatening to make the rape allegation public if he did not agree to a legal settlement. Jay-Z said Buzbee sent a letter to his lawyer appearing to seek a settlement, which had the "opposite effect" on him.

Buzbee previously said the notion that he was trying to blackmail Jay-Z is "stupid and laughable" and his letter simply sought confidential mediation in the litigation.

Buzbee announced at a news conference in October that he represents some 120 people, men and women, with allegations of sexual misconduct against Combs.

His firm, which has set up a toll-free phone line for accusers, began filing a wave of lawsuits against the

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hip-hop mogul a few weeks later.

Combs was denied bail a third time last month. He has pleaded not guilty to charges he coerced and abused women for years and faces trial in May.

Lawyers for Combs did not immediately respond to emails seeking comment.

Jay-Z and Combs are part of a generation of hip-hop titans who rose to prominence in the 2000s, emerging as wide-ranging entrepreneurs and two of the world's wealthiest rappers. Earlier this year, Forbes estimated Jay-Z's net worth to be \$2.5 billion.

The artists have collaborated over the years, with Jay-Z featured on Combs' debut album, "No Way Out," and Combs appearing on Jay-Z's sophomore album, "In My Lifetime, Vol. 1."

While frequently photographed together at events, they also have been business competitors. Diddy launched his Bad Boy Records around the same time Jay-Z launched his Roc-A-Fella record label.

## **Pelosi has hip replacement surgery at a US military hospital in Germany after a fall**

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi had hip replacement surgery Saturday at a U.S. military hospital in Germany after falling while at an event in Luxembourg with other members of Congress.

Pelosi, 84, "is well on the mend," said Ian Krager, a spokesman for the California Democrat, in a statement.

Pelosi thanked the staff at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center and the hospital in Luxembourg, where she was also treated, for "their excellent care and kindness."

She was in Europe with a bipartisan congressional delegation to mark the 80th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge in World War II.

Pelosi tripped and fell while at an event and fractured her hip, according to people familiar with her injury who were not authorized to publicly discuss the matter and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Among those on the trip was Rep. Michael McCaul, R-Texas, who posted on social media Friday that he was "praying for a speedy recovery," for Pelosi. The two lawmakers were captured holding hands in a group photo that day at the U.S. Embassy in Luxembourg.

Pelosi was first elected in 1987. She served as speaker twice, stepped down from her leadership post two years ago but remained in Congress and was reelected to represent her San Francisco district in November.

## **A diminished Hezbollah is made even weaker by the toppling of Assad in Syria**

By BASSEM MROUE and KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — A severely hobbled Hezbollah was in no position to help defend former Syrian President Bashar Assad, a longtime ally, from the lightning-fast insurgency that toppled him. With Assad gone, the militant group based in Lebanon is even weaker.

Hezbollah was dealt a major blow during 14 months of war with Israel. The toppling of Assad, who had strong ties to Iran, has now crippled its ability to bounce back by cutting off a vital weapons-smuggling route through Syria.

Hezbollah officials are deeply concerned but defiant.

"What is happening in Syria is a major, dangerous and new change, and to know why this happened needs evaluation," Hassan Fadlallah, a Lebanese lawmaker who represents Hezbollah's political wing, said during a speech at a funeral for militants killed by Israel. "Whatever is happening in Syria, despite its dangers, will not weaken us."

Analysts say the diminishment of Hezbollah will have big consequences for Lebanon, where for decades it has been a major political player — and for Iran, which has relied on the group as one of several proxy forces projecting power across the Middle East. It is also a game-changer for Israel, whose nemesis on

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its northern border is now at its most vulnerable point in decades.

Ties to Syria influenced the rise and fall of Hezbollah's power

The Assad dynasty, which ruled Syria for half a century with an iron fist, played a crucial role in empowering Hezbollah, which was founded in the early 1980s by Iranian advisers who came through Syria. In addition to being a conduit for Iranian weapons, Syria also was a place where Hezbollah trained fighters and manufactured its own weapons.

As Hezbollah grew more powerful, it became a force Assad could rely on for protection in times of crisis. Hezbollah sent thousands of fighters to bolster Assad's forces when a civil war broke out in 2011.

As insurgents swept across Syria in early December and took the city of Homs — a stone's throw from a Syrian border town where Hezbollah had a presence — many expected the militants to put up a fierce fight. After all, they did just that in 2013, preventing Assad's opponents from advancing into Damascus.

This time, Hezbollah was in disarray. Many of its top officials, including longtime leader Hassan Nasrallah, were killed in Israeli airstrikes. And months of Israeli bombardment destroyed much of its military infrastructure. With Syria's key international allies, Russia and Iran, on the sidelines, Hezbollah withdrew, and Assad was ousted quickly.

"The fall of the regime marks the end of Iran's arms in Syria and Lebanon," said Lt. Col. Fares al-Bayoush, a Syrian army defector who fought in the civil war against Assad's forces and Hezbollah until 2017, when he moved to Turkey.

Lebanon begins to grapple with Hezbollah's 'new reality'

In Lebanon, the sapping of Hezbollah's strength has given the army the opportunity to reassert control it had ceded, especially along its southern border. A U.S.-brokered ceasefire between the militant group and Israel states that Hezbollah should have no armed presence along that border and it has led to growing calls within Lebanon for the group's disarmament.

"To Hezbollah, it's game over," Samir Geagea, who leads the Christian Lebanese Forces Party, said in a statement on Sunday, hours after insurgents took Damascus. "Sit with the Lebanese military to end your status as an armed group, and transform yourselves into a political party."

But Hezbollah's longtime sway in the political arena in Lebanon also faces a major challenge.

Many in Lebanon are angry with the group. Critics say Hezbollah violated its promise to use its weapons only to defend Lebanon when it began firing rockets into Israel last year, the day after Hamas — another Iranian-backed group — attacked Israel.

Nearly 4,000 people were killed in Lebanon during the war with Israel, according to the country's health ministry. Entire towns and villages where Hezbollah militants and their supporters lived have been flattened. More than 1 million people have been displaced, and the country's economy — which was in bad shape before the war — is in a deep hole.

"With the (Syrian) regime gone, Hezbollah in Lebanon faces an entirely new reality," said Firas Maksad, of the Middle East Institute.

Maksad said many Lebanese leaders have yet to grasp the magnitude of the change that has taken place. Even some onetime allies of Hezbollah in parliament have begun distancing themselves from the group.

Gebran Bassil, a lawmaker who represents the Free Patriotic Movement, Lebanon's other major Christian party, said Hezbollah's loss of a weapons pipeline from Iran could help Lebanon extract itself from regional conflict.

"Hezbollah should focus on internal affairs and not the wider region," Bassil, a former ally of Hezbollah, said.

It may have no choice but to narrow its ambitions. With the fall of Assad, Iran has lost control of a corridor of land that stretched through Iraq and Syria all the way to the Mediterranean, and which gave it an unimpeded route to supply Hezbollah.

"They can maybe fly in some things and smuggle some things, but that's not gonna be on the same scale, not even close," said Aron Lund, a Syria expert with Century International, a New York-based think tank.

For Israel, breaking Iran's regional network has been a major goal, though it is wary over Islamic militants among the insurgents who toppled Assad. Israel on Sunday moved troops into a demilitarized buffer zone

with Syria by the Israel-held Golan Heights in what it called a temporary security measure.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called Assad's fall a "historic day," saying it was "the direct result of our forceful action against Hezbollah and Iran, Assad's main supporters."

## Notre Dame reopening spectacle caps a stellar year for luxury house LVMH

By THOMAS ADAMSON AP Fashion Writer

PARIS (AP) — The reopening of Notre Dame was a solemn celebration of cultural and spiritual renewal. Yet for some, the historic cathedral's revival also felt like a meticulously choreographed branding event by LVMH and other luxury conglomerates.

Bernard Arnault, the lowkey billionaire behind luxury powerhouse LVMH and a key Notre Dame donor who regularly tops the list of the world's richest men, was at the center of the celebration. He was surrounded by his family, the French president, the archbishop and clergy, and the unmistakable symbols of his luxury empire's influence, including its brands Louis Vuitton and Dior.

France's first lady Brigitte Macron and her U.S. counterpart, Jill Biden, both had Lady Dior handbags. Louis Vuitton artistic director Pharrell Williams performed kitted out in Louis Vuitton. South African soprano Pretty Yende also contributed with a rendition of "Amazing Grace" while wearing a Dior gown adorned with 110 carats of diamonds.

Welcome to the "inauguration of the LVMH arena," commented television journalist Yann Barthès about the cathedral ceremony.

LVMH has enjoyed unprecedented visibility in France in 2024, especially as a high-profile sponsor of the Paris 2024 Olympics.

Some questioned the taste of such brand prominence occurring in a sacred space like the beloved Gothic monument, while noting LVMH's crucial contribution to the reconstruction.

"You can't blame monsieur Arnault, a businessman, to do business. But people are now asking if it was an appropriate venue for a display like that," said fashion PR consultant Theo Fontaine.

"It's been a great PR year for LVMH — that's for sure," Fontaine added. "The Olympics and now Notre Dame. The whole world has been watching."

Not far behind Arnault sat representatives of Kering, adding another layer to the ongoing rivalry between France's two largest luxury conglomerates.

Kering CEO François-Henri Pinault attended alongside his wife, actress Salma Hayek, who wore a tailored Gucci coat. Gucci is Kering-owned.

The event, marking the culmination of an 840 million euro (\$882 million) restoration effort following a devastating 2019 fire, brought together global dignitaries and cultural icons.

The restoration united France's corporate giants. Arnault's 200 million euro donation was the largest, followed by 100 million euro contributions from Pinault and the Bettencourt-Meyers family of L'Oréal. Over 250 companies and 2,000 craftspeople contributed to the five-year restoration effort, which reconstructed the spire, repaired vaulted ceilings and restored stained-glass windows.

As the bells of Notre Dame rang out across Paris, the cathedral's rebirth stood as a testament to collective effort — but also for some as a symbol of how France's seats of power and its prized luxury industry are inextricably intertwined.

French President Emmanuel Macron and Brigitte Macron welcomed heads of state, including President-elect Donald Trump, Britain's Prince William and Elon Musk, to a ceremony steeped in tradition — and high fashion.

Arnault attended with his family, including Dior chair and CEO Delphine Arnault, LVMH image and environment director Antoine Arnault, Moët Hennessy deputy CEO Alexandre Arnault, LVMH Watches CEO Frédéric Arnault, and Louis Vuitton product and development director for watches Jean Arnault. Antoine Arnault's wife, model Natalia Vodianova, was also in attendance.

"I am proud of the outpouring of generosity from all over the world, to which the LVMH Group and my



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family wanted to contribute from the very beginning, which has enabled the restoration of this jewel of our heritage," Antoine Arnault said in a statement posted to LinkedIn.

"This extraordinary project highlighted the excellence of French know-how and the talent of nearly 2,000 architects, workers and craftsmen of all trades," he added.

Yet, public reaction was mixed

Papuna Biliseishvili, 24, who watched the ceremony in Paris, quipped, "If the devil wears Prada, the cathedral wears Louis Vuitton and Dior."

Cari Lefebvre, 27, said "this is the most PR the Catholic Church has seen in centuries."

Marie-Claire Dubois, a 45-year-old Catholic worshiper from Paris, expressed her disapproval. "This is a sacred place. It is beautiful that these companies contributed, but the branding should have remained outside," she said "Notre Dame deserves respect as a house of God, not a showcase for luxury."

While the grandeur of the reopening sparked debate, Arnault's donation and LVMH's contributions to the cathedral restoration—including 36 300-year-old oak trees for the spire—have been widely praised.

LVMH's influence at the Paris 2024 Olympics further cemented its stellar year. The company crafted custom display cases for 5,000 medals and the Olympic torch, showcasing its artistry and precision. Berluti, another LVMH brand, designed costumes for the opening ceremony, while an Olympic-themed Vogue World fashion show, supported by the group, drew international attention during Paris Couture Week.

Tensions between Arnault and Pinault, the driving forces behind LVMH and Kering respectively, were on full display with their brands' prominent appearances at the cathedral. This rivalry dates back decades to a bitter bidding war over Gucci in the late 1990s, which Pinault's Kering ultimately won. Since then, their competition has extended beyond fashion into the realms of art, philanthropy and global influence.

In Notre Dame, French luxury was also championed by the French Catholic church — and was on display even in the stitch of the liturgical vestments. French fashion designer Jean-Charles de Castelbajac was called on by the church to design the cathedral's 2,000 garments. The unorthodox designs were fun, modern — and perhaps shockingly minimalist. They ensured that even the clergy's robes reflected high-fashion artistry, further underscoring the intersection of faith and fashion at the event.

## Today in History: December 15, the Bill of Rights takes effect

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Sunday, Dec. 15, the 350th day of 2024. There are 16 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Dec. 15, 1791, the Bill of Rights, the first 10 amendments to the U.S. Constitution, went into effect following ratification by Virginia.

Also on this date:

In 1890, Hunkpapa Lakota Chief Sitting Bull and 11 other tribe members were killed in Grand River, South Dakota, during a confrontation with Indian agency police.

In 1939, the Civil War motion picture epic "Gone with the Wind," starring Vivien Leigh and Clark Gable, had its world premiere in Atlanta.

In 1944, a single-engine plane carrying bandleader Glenn Miller, a major in the U.S. Army Air Forces, disappeared over the English Channel while en route to Paris.

In 1967, the Silver Bridge between Gallipolis (gal-ih-puh-LEES'), Ohio, and Point Pleasant, West Virginia, collapsed into the Ohio River, killing 46 people.

In 2011, the flag used by U.S. forces in Iraq was lowered in a Baghdad airport ceremony, marking the formal end of a war that had left 110,000 Iraqis and 4,500 Americans dead.

In 2013, Nelson Mandela was laid to rest in his childhood hometown, ending a 10-day mourning period for South Africa's first Black president.

In 2016, a federal jury in Charleston, South Carolina, convicted Dylann Roof of killing nine Black church members who had welcomed him into their Bible study gathering.

Today's Birthdays: Singer Cindy Birdsong (The Supremes) is 85. Rock musician Dave Clark (The Dave Clark

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Five) is 85. Baseball Hall of Fame manager Jim Leyland is 80. Actor Don Johnson is 75. Film and theater director Julie Taymor is 72. Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va., is 70. Rock musician Paul Simonon (The Clash) is 69. Actor Adam Brody is 45. Actor Michelle Dockery is 43. Actor Charlie Cox is 42. Actor Camilla Luddington is 41. Rock musician and actor Alana Haim is 33. Actor Maude Apatow (AP'-ih-tow) is 27.