

Groton Daily Independent

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Sunday, Dec. 22

St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's at 9 a.m.; at Zion at 11 a.m.; Voter's Meeting, 9:45 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; No Sunday School, 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.

United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:30 a.m., at Groton, 10:30 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

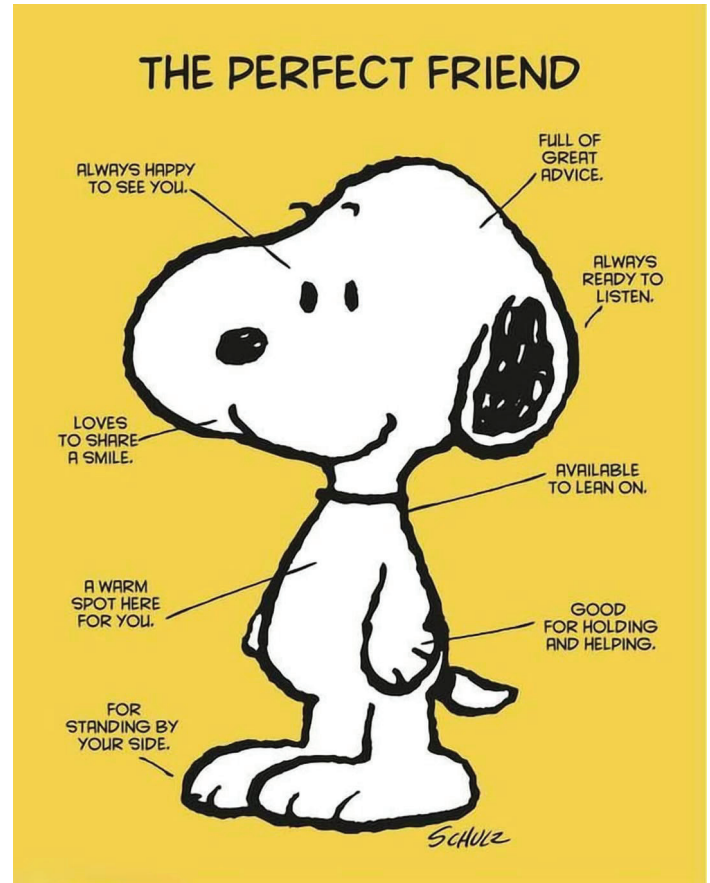
Monday, Dec. 23

Senior Menu: Spanish rice, green beans, vanilla pudding with oranges, whole wheat bread.

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

Groton Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Community Center with a noon potluck.

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



Tuesday, Dec. 24

Senior Menu: Creamed chicken, mixed vegetables, biscuit, fruit.

St. John's Lutheran: Christmas Eve Service, 4 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Christmas Eve Service, 7 p.m.

Common Cents Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., 209 N Main.

Pantry is closed.

United Methodist: Groton Service at 5 p.m. Conde Service at 7 p.m.

Wednesday, Dec. 25

St. John's Lutheran: Christmas Day Service at Zion, 9 a.m.

Thursday, Dec. 26

Senior Menu: Tuna noodle hot dish with peas, California blend, peaches, whole wheat bread.

Groton Daily Independent
PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445
Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460

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Groton Area's boys wrestling team takes second at Sioux Valley Tournament

Groton Area had 12 wrestlers place at the Cossack Avalanche Tournament held Saturday at Sioux Valley. The number of wins racked up points for the Tigers and it boosted them to a second place finish. Kingsbury County won the tournament with 217.5 points while Groton Area had 209.5 followed by Aberdeen Central JV with 140.5, Sioux Valley 122, Chamberlain JV 92, West Central JV 78.5, Brookings JV 70.5, Deuel/Deubrook Area 68.5, Tri-Valley 38.5, Canton JV 26.5, Yankton JV 19, Mitchell JV 10.5, and Dell Rapids JV 3.

Placing first were Christian Ehresmann at 157 and Korbin Kucker at 175; in second place were Kyson Kucker at 120, Chris Schwab at 144, Walker Zoellner at 150, Gavin Englund at 285; those taking third were Wyatt Hagen at 106, Keegen Kucker at 113 and Donavon Block at 132; and in fourth place were Noah Scepaniak at 120, Lincoln Krause at 126 and Ben Hoeft at 165.

106 Wyatt Hagen (5-3) placed 3rd and scored 16.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Wyatt Hagen (Groton) 5-3 received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Wyatt Hagen (Groton) 5-3 won by fall over Micah Bennett (Mitchell JV) 1-2 (Fall 1:07)

Semifinal - Bailey Gillen (Aberdeen Central JV) 7-1 won by decision over Wyatt Hagen (Groton) 5-3 (Dec 4-1)

Cons. Semi - Wyatt Hagen (Groton) 5-3 won by fall over Spicer Johnson (West Central JV) 2-2 (Fall 2:27)

3rd Place Match - Wyatt Hagen (Groton) 5-3 won by decision over Gavin Mattson (Deuel/Deubrook Area) 5-2 (Dec 11-9)

113 Keegen Kucker (6-2) placed 3rd and scored 18.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Keegen Kucker (Groton) 6-2 received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Keegen Kucker (Groton) 6-2 won by fall over Carter Radel (Mitchell JV) 0-2 (Fall 0:55)

Semifinal - Chase Henriksen (Kingsbury County) 9-3 won by fall over Keegen Kucker (Groton) 6-2 (Fall 2:40)

Cons. Semi - Keegen Kucker (Groton) 6-2 won by fall over Colton Bairey (Chamberlain JV) 1-2 (Fall 3:39)

3rd Place Match - Kucker 6-2 won by fall over Bentley Fokken (Deuel/Deubrook Area) 6-5 (Fall 4:02)

120 Kyson Kucker (5-2) placed 2nd and scored 18.0 team points.

Quarterfinal - Kyson Kucker (Groton) 5-2 won by fall over Briggs Archer (Brookings JV) 3-1 (Fall 3:25)

Semifinal - Kyson Kucker (Groton) 5-2 won by fall over Noah Scepaniak (Groton) 3-4 (Fall 3:53)

1st Place Match - Mason Backous (Aberdeen Central JV) 6-2 won by fall over Kucker (Groton) 5-2 (Fall 4:36)

120 Noah Scepaniak (3-4) placed 4th.

Quarterfinal - Scepaniak (Groton) 3-4 won by fall over Erich Fokken (Deuel/Deubrook Area) 1-4 (Fall 3:17)

Semifinal - Kyson Kucker (Groton) 5-2 won by fall over Noah Scepaniak (Groton) 3-4 (Fall 3:53)

Cons. Semi - Noah Scepaniak (Groton) 3-4 won by fall over Hunter Mellon (Brookings JV) 1-6 (Fall 3:58)

3rd Place Match - Briggs Archer (Brookings JV) 3-1 won by tech fall over Noah Scepaniak (Groton) 3-4 (TF-1.5 3:59 (21-1))

126 Lincoln Krause (6-4) placed 4th and scored 16.5 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Krause (Groton) 6-4 won by fall over Kaeden Needham (Yankton JV) 1-6 (Fall 4:56)

Quarterfinal - Aiden Warren (Deuel/Deubrook Area) 5-5 won by fall over Krause (Groton) 6-4 (Fall 1:31)

Cons. Round 2 - Krause (Groton) 6-4 won by forfeit over Logan Heier (Aberdeen Central JV) 3-4 (For.)

Cons. Round 3 - Lincoln Krause (Groton) 6-4 won by tech fall over Stratton VanOverschelde (Mitchell JV) 3-7 (TF-1.5 2:22 (18-0))

Cons. Semi - Krause (Groton) 6-4 won by fall over Deegan Goodman (Chamberlain JV) 2-2 (Fall 0:20)

3rd Place Match - Karsten Lerwick (Kingsbury County) 7-6 won by fall over Krause (Groton) 6-4 (Fall 4:40)

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132 Donavon Block (7-2) placed 3rd and scored 19.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Donavon Block (Groton) 7-2 won by tech fall over Haiden Baxter (Brookings JV) 2-2 (TF-1.5 4:19 (17-1))

Quarterfinal - Donavon Block (Groton) 7-2 won by tech fall over Jaxton Rinehart (Tri-Valley) 3-6 (TF-1.5 3:14 (16-1))

Semifinal - Cody Zell (Kingsbury County) 6-3 won by major decision over Donavon Block (Groton) 7-2 (MD 8-0)

Cons. Semi - Donavon Block (Groton) 7-2 won by fall over Haiden Baxter (Brookings JV) 2-2 (Fall 2:35)

3rd Place Match - Donavon Block (Groton) 7-2 won by fall over Tyson Hagberg (Deuel/Deubrook Area) 7-6 (Fall 3:43)

138 Kason Oswald (1-4) scored 3.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Evan Hirsch (Mitchell JV) 2-2 won by fall over Kason Oswald (Groton) 1-4 (Fall 1:02)

Cons. Round 1 - Kason Oswald (Groton) 1-4 won by fall over Kayden Chaulk (Canton JV) 0-2 (Fall 1:22)

Cons. Round 2 - Hunter Opitz (Aberdeen Central JV) 3-2 won by tech fall over Kason Oswald (Groton) 1-4 (TF-1.5 2:46 (15-0))

144 Chris Schwab (5-3) placed 2nd and scored 18.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Chris Schwab (Groton) 5-3 received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Chris Schwab (Groton) 5-3 won by fall over Prestyn Haugen (Chamberlain JV) 8-7 (Fall 2:39)

Semifinal - Chris Schwab (Groton) 5-3 won by decision over Wyatt Tuntland (Canton JV) 3-2 (Dec 6-5)

1st Place Match - Greyson Nielson (Kingsbury County) 11-3 won by tech fall over Chris Schwab (Groton) 5-3 (TF-1.5 4:16 (17-1))

150 Walker Zoellner (6-2) placed 2nd and scored 22.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Walker Zoellner (Groton) 6-2 won by fall over Slayton Swenson (Canton JV) 0-2 (Fall 1:38)

Quarterfinal - Walker Zoellner (Groton) 6-2 won by fall over Cyrus Blum (Chamberlain JV) 0-2 (Fall 1:10)

Semifinal - Walker Zoellner (Groton) 6-2 won by fall over Vanden Virchow (Sioux Valley) 10-5 (Fall 1:43)

1st Place Match - Blake Jennings (Kingsbury County) 10-2 won by decision over Walker Zoellner (Groton) 6-2 (Dec 1-0)

157 Christian Ehresmann (5-0) placed 1st and scored 24.0 team points.

Quarterfinal - Christian Ehresmann (Groton) 5-0 won by fall over Tyler Glammeier (Dell Rapids JV) 0-2 (Fall 1:58)

Semifinal - Christian Ehresmann (Groton) 5-0 won by fall over Donovan Sandven (Kingsbury County) 4-3 (Fall 0:14)

1st Place Match - Christian Ehresmann (Groton) 5-0 won by fall over Peyton Haugen (Chamberlain JV) 9-6 (Fall 1:59)

165 Ben Hoeft (4-4) placed 4th and scored 11.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Ben Hoeft (Groton) 4-4 received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Gabe Sumner (Aberdeen Central JV) 4-1 won by fall over Ben Hoeft (Groton) 4-4 (Fall 1:41)

Cons. Round 2 - Ben Hoeft (Groton) 4-4 won by decision over Gile Rud (Sioux Valley) 2-4 (Dec 11-4)

Cons. Round 3 - Ben Hoeft (Groton) 4-4 won by forfeit over Caden Walsh (Brookings JV) 0-2 (For.)

Cons. Semi - Ben Hoeft (Groton) 4-4 won by fall over Colten Walsh (Brookings JV) 2-2 (Fall 2:53)

3rd Place Match - Gabe Sumner (Aberdeen Central JV) 4-1 won by major decision over Ben Hoeft (Groton) 4-4 (MD 13-1)

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175 Korbin Kucker (6-0) placed 1st and scored 22.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Korbin Kucker (Groton) 6-0 received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Korbin Kucker (Groton) 6-0 won by major decision over Hunter Frederick (Chamberlain JV) 4-8 (MD 13-1)

Semifinal - Korbin Kucker (Groton) 6-0 won by major decision over Isaac Price (Aberdeen Central JV) 7-3 (MD 15-2)

1st Place Match - Korbin Kucker (Groton) 6-0 won by decision over Wyatt Hardt (Sioux Valley) 8-8 (Dec 10-3)

190 Layne Johnson (1-4).

Quarterfinal - Harvey Hardt (Sioux Valley) 5-9 won by decision over Layne Johnson (Groton) 1-4 (Dec 8-1)

Cons. Round 1 - Damian McIntosh (Aberdeen Central JV) 3-3 won by fall over Layne Johnson (Groton) 1-4 (Fall 0:37)

285 Gavin Englund (5-1) placed 2nd and scored 22.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Gavin Englund (Groton) 5-1 won by fall over Tytian Lauseng (Deuel/Deubrook Area) 3-6 (Fall 1:21)

Quarterfinal - Gavin Englund (Groton) 5-1 won by fall over Gabe Armstrong (Brookings JV) 0-2 (Fall 1:43)

Semifinal - Gavin Englund (Groton) 5-1 won by fall over Grady George (Chamberlain JV) 8-6 (Fall 1:19)

1st Place Match - Owen Vandeweerd (Sioux Valley) 13-2 won in tie breaker - 1 over Gavin Englund (Groton) 5-1 (TB-1 2-1)

285 Charlie Frost (2-2)

Champ. Round 1 - Owen Vandeweerd (Sioux Valley) 13-2 won by fall over Charlie Frost (Groton) 2-2 (Fall 4:58)

Cons. Round 1 - Charlie Frost (Groton) 2-2 received a bye () (Bye)

Cons. Round 2 - Charlie Frost (Groton) 2-2 won by fall over Gabe Armstrong (Brookings JV) 0-2 (Fall 0:18)

Cons. Round 3 - Charlie Frost (Groton) 2-2 won by fall over Drace Gaskins (Yankton JV) 2-6 (Fall 1:28)

Cons. Semi - Wyatt Nelson (Sioux Valley) 6-3 won by fall over Charlie Frost (Groton) 2-2 (Fall 2:41)

Krueger takes first at 3rd Annual Girls` Border Brawl

Liza Krueger took first place at the Girls` Border Brawl held Saturday at Ashley, N.D. She won two matches with a major decision and one with a pin.

106 Liza Krueger (14-1) placed 1st and scored 24.5 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Liza Krueger (Groton Area) 14-1 received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Liza Krueger (Groton Area) 14-1 won by major decision over Vivian Backer (Bismarck Century) 7-8 (MD 11-3)

Semifinal - Liza Krueger (Groton Area) 14-1 won by tech fall over Lucia Cheverie (Dickinson) 7-3 (TF-1.5 3:29 (17-0))

1st Place Match - Liza Krueger (Groton Area) 14-1 won by decision over Monica Boakye (Minot) 9-2 (Dec 7-4)

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NSU Women's Basketball

Wolves Cruise to Victory Over Golden Eagles

Aberdeen, S.D. – A team effort led the Northern State University women's basketball team to take down Minnesota Crookston. The Wolves saw four players reach double-digit points, while the team recorded a total of 19 assists. Izzy Moore had a standout performance, setting two career highs with 14 points and four steals, fueling the team's explosive night.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 69, UMC 60

Records: NSU 6-5 (NSIC 3-2), UMC 4-7 (NSIC 2-3)

Attendance: 1115

HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern State scored 16 points in the first quarter, 18 in the second, 19 in the third, and 16 in the fourth

The Wolves shot well on the night with a 38.2 field goal percentage and 30.0 three-point percentage

They recorded 34 points in the paint, 22 points from the bench, 19 assists, 11 points from free throws, and six points off turnovers

Izzy Moore and Morgan Fiedler led the way for the Wolves with 14 points each, both shooting better than 50.0 percent from the floor

In addition, Moore notched two career highs with 14 points and four steals

The playmaker for NSU was Rianna Fillipi with seven assists on the night, along with 13 points

Michaela Jewett rounds out the top scorers in the win with 12 points and nine rebounds

NORTHERN STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Morgan Fiedler: 14 points, 3 rebounds, 5 assists, 50.0 FG %

Izzy Moore: 14 points (career-high), 5 rebounds, 4 steals (career-high), 54.5 FG %

Rianna Fillipi: 13 points, 9 rebounds, 7 assists, 2 blocks

Michaela Jewett: 12 points, 9 rebounds, 2 assists, 45.6 FG %

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NSU Women's Basketball

Wolves Take Down Beavers in NSIC Action

Aberdeen, S.D. – A powerful start by the Northern State women's basketball team led them to cruise to a 78-52 win over Minot State. Michaela Jewett led the charge with her second double-double of the season, and Izzy Moore recorded a career-high seven rebounds.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 78, MISU 52

Records: NSU 7-5 (NSIC 4-2), MISU 3-10 (NSIC 2-4)

Attendance: 1009

HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern State notched 20 points in the first quarter, 23 points in the second, 25 in the third, and ten points in the fourth quarter.

They shot well on the night with a 45.5 field goal percentage and 33.3 percent from beyond the three-point line.

The Wolves tallied 38 points in the paint, 30 points off the bench for a team season high, 20 points off turnovers, and 11 points from the foul line.

Michaela Jewett led the charge on the night with her second double-double of the season, with 19 points and 11 rebounds, along with a 53.8 shooting percentage from the floor.

Izzy Moore and Deontee Smith followed behind with 12 points each, while grabbing seven and eight boards, respectively.

In addition, Moore notched a career-high seven rebounds, while Smith tied her career-high with eight.

Rianna Fillipi led the team with five assists on the night, along with eight points and seven rebounds, as well as a 50.0 shooting percentage from the floor

NORTHERN STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Michaela Jewett: 19 points, 11 rebounds, 53.8 FG%, 50.0 3PT%

Izzy Moore: 12 points, 7 rebounds (career-high), 40.0 FG%

Deontee Smith: 12 points, 8 rebounds, 45.5 FG%

Rianna Fillipi: 8 points, 7 rebounds, 5 assists, 2 blocks, 50.0 FG%

Madelyn Bragg: 8 points, 5 assists, 3 rebounds, 57.1 FG%

UP NEXT

Northern State returns to the court to take on Minnesota Duluth and Concordia-St. Paul at Wachs Arena. Tip-offs are set for 5:30 p.m. on Friday, January 3rd against the Bulldogs and 4:00 p.m. on Saturday, January 4th against the Golden Bears to kick off the new year.

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NSU Men's Basketball

Friday Contest Slips Away from the Wolves

Aberdeen, S.D. – The Northern State University men's basketball team fell to Minnesota Crookston Friday evening with less than a minute to play. Four Wolves scored double figures in the contest, however Northern struggled to capitalize off offensive rebounds and UMC turnovers.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 71, UMC 73

Records: NSU 1-10 (0-5 NSIC), UMC 3-8 (2-3 NSIC)

Attendance: 1226

HOW IT HAPPENED

The Wolves led 48-44 at the half, however the Golden Eagles took the second by a score of 29-23 and sealed the victory

Northern shot 39.0% from the floor, 35.7% from the 3-point line, and 65.2% from the foul line in the game

They out-rebounded the Golden Eagles 44-42, tallying 11 offensive boards, and led the game with 16 assists, ten made 3-pointers, and seven steals

NSU scored 24 points in the paint, eight points off turnovers, six points off the bench, and four second chance points

James Glenn led the team with 23 points, knocking down 7-of-16 from the floor with five made 3-pointers

Kwat Abdelkarim followed with 15 points and seven rebounds, shooting 50.0% from the floor

Tobi Obiora notched a double-double, pulling down a career high 13 rebounds and adding 11 points

Marcus Burks rounded out the double figure scorers with ten points, eight rebounds, and a team leading seven assists

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

James Glenn: 23 points, 43.8 field goal%, 6 rebounds, 2 assists

Kwat Abdelkarim: 15 points, 50.0 field goal%, 7 rebounds, 2 assists

Tobi Obiora: 11 points, 13 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 steal

Marcus Burks: 10 points, 8 rebounds, 7 assists, 2 steals

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NSU Men's Basketball

Men's Basketball Comes up Short Against No. 12 Beavers

Aberdeen, S.D. – The Northern State University men's basketball team battled on Saturday, sitting tied at the half with No. 12 Minot State. The Wolves ultimately fell to the Beavers in the contest despite a career high by Marcus Burks and Tobi Obiora's second straight double-double.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 58, MiSU 64

Records: NSU 1-11 (0-6 NSIC), MiSU 15-0 (6-0 NSIC)

Attendance: 1068

HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern tallied 33 points in the first and 25 in the second, while Minot notched 33 in the first and 31 in the second

The Wolves shot 38.7% from the floor, 21.1% from the 3-point line, and 50.0% from the foul line in the game

They scored 40 points in the paint, a season high 16 second chance points, eight points off turnovers, and five points off the bench

The Northern defense held Minot State to 6-of-21 from 3-point land and forced nine turnovers

In addition, NSU out-rebounded MiSU 39-34 in the contest and recorded ten assists, four steals, and three blocks

Burks and Obiora led the team with 21 and 17 points respectively, with Obiora adding a team leading 12 rebounds

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Marcus Burks: 21 points (career high), 52.6 field goal%, 6 rebounds, 3 assists

Tobi Obiora: 17 points, 43.8 field goal%, 12 rebounds, 2 assists

UP NEXT

Northern remains at home to open 2025 in January. The Wolves will host Minnesota Duluth and Concordia-St. Paul January 3 and 4 in Wachs Arena. Start times are set for 7:30 p.m. on Friday against the Bulldogs and 6 p.m. on Saturday versus the Golden Bears.

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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!

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Physical Therapy
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Student: \$255.60

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Couple: \$575.10

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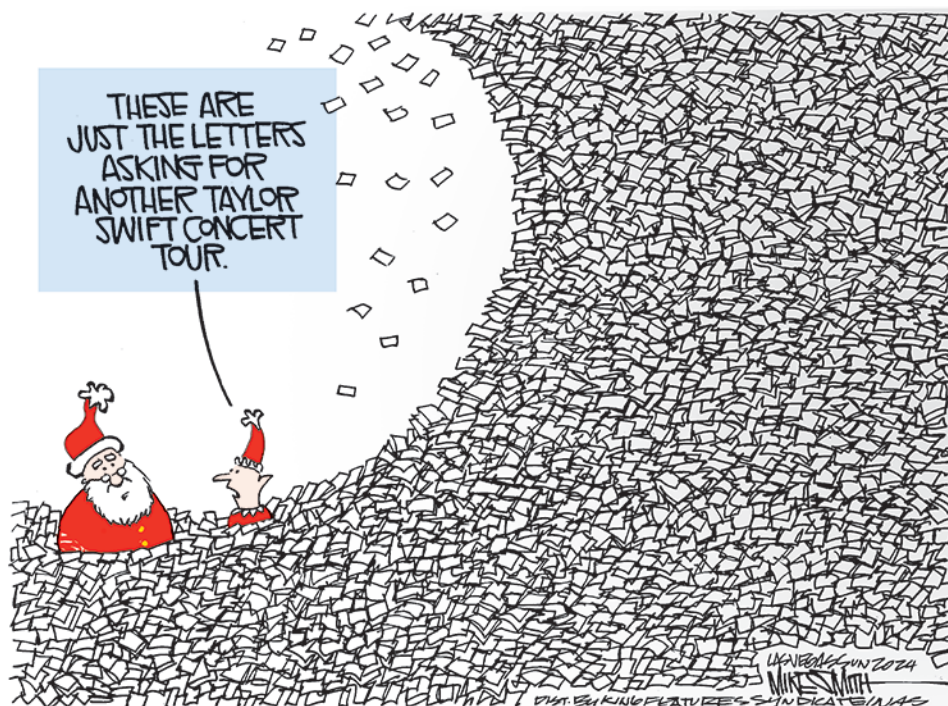
THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE



Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

LUKE 1: 26, 27

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BIBLE

TRIVIA

by Wilson Casey

1. The main Christmas story is paraphrased from which two New Testament books (KJV)? *Mark/John, Acts/Romans, Matthew/Luke, Jude/Revelation*

2. Who visited Jesus on the night of His birth and found Mary, Joseph and the babe lying in a manger? *Innkeeper, Shepherds, Herod, Magi*

3. Where was the young child when the Magi came to visit Him to present gifts? *Manger, Under the stars, House, Temple*

4. How many times does the word "Christmas" appear in the Bible (KJV)? *Zero, 1, 2, 7*

5. Who was King of Judaea at the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem? *Solomon, Herod, Balak, Belshazzar*

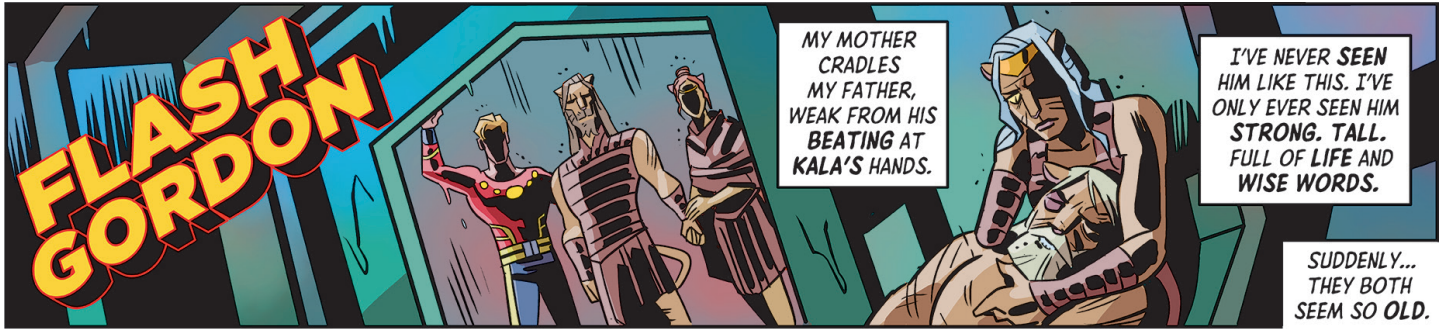
6. What animals were present at Jesus' birth? *Lions and bears, Sheep and goats, Cows and donkeys, No mention of animals*

ANSWERS: 1) Matthew/Luke, 2) Shepherds, 3) House, 4) Zero, 5) Herod, 6) No mention of animals (in Bible)

Hardcore trivia fan? Visit Wilson Casey's subscribersite at www.patreon.com/triviaguy.

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FLASH GORDON

MY MOTHER CRADLES MY FATHER, WEAK FROM HIS BEATING AT KALA'S HANDS.

I'VE NEVER SEEN HIM LIKE THIS. I'VE ONLY EVER SEEN HIM STRONG. TALL. FULL OF LIFE AND WISE WORDS.

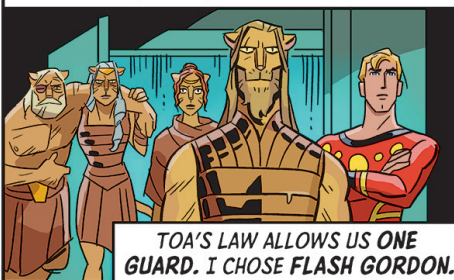
SUDDENLY... THEY BOTH SEEM SO OLD.

SHARK CITY DRAWS ITSELF DOWN, AWAY FROM THE SUN AND INTO THE DARK OF THE SEA.



WE'RE HERE AS PRISONERS IN ALL BUT NAME.

MY PARENTS, DOVA, AND ME -- PRINCE THUN.



TOA'S LAW ALLOWS US ONE GUARD. I CHOSE FLASH GORDON.

KALA, LEADER OF THE SHARK MEN, IS USING THAT LAW TO ISOLATE US FROM OUR PEOPLE.



DAN SCHKADE 12-22-24

TURNING THIS PEACE SUMMIT INTO A ROBBERY.

HIS PRICE FOR PEACE -- AND OUR FREEDOM -- IS OUR MUNITIONS AND GYROFLEET.



DECLAWING THE LION MEN.

HE GIVES US THE NIGHT TO DECIDE.

IN OUR PRIVATE CHAMBER, FLASH'S HEAD STARTS ACHING... HE HEARS VOICES...



...NO, ONE VOICE:

DALE -- REACHING THROUGH THE FATHOMS WITH ONE OF OUR THOUGHT PROJECTORS.

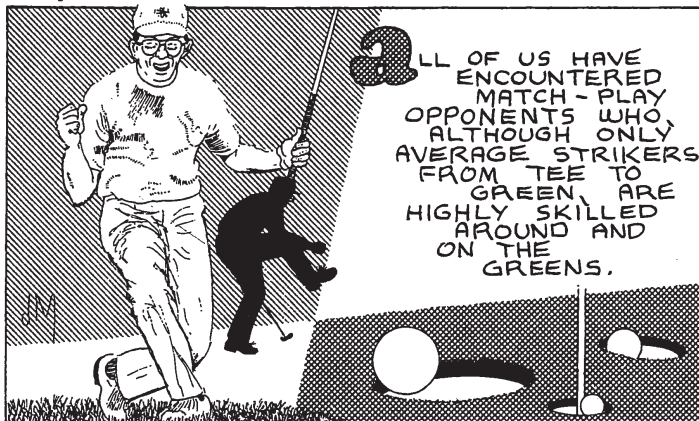


SHE'S BEEN READING UP ON TOA'S LAW... AND SHE MAY HAVE FOUND US A WAY OUT.

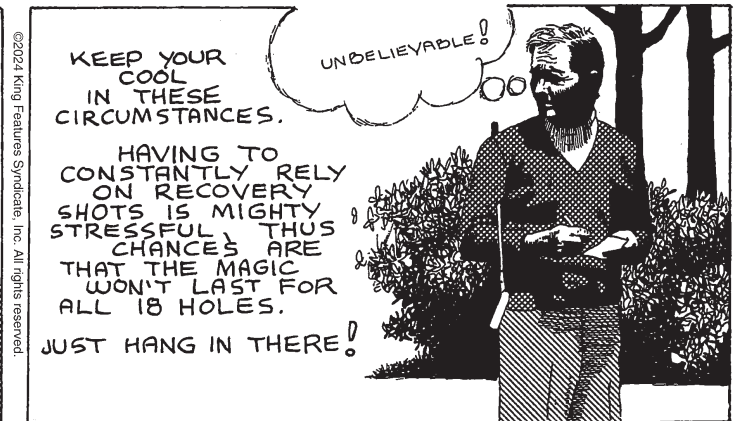
NEXT: THE MAN FOR THE JOB

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Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS



ALL OF US HAVE ENCOUNTERED MATCH-PLAY OPPONENTS WHO, ALTHOUGH ONLY AVERAGE STRIKERS FROM TEE TO GREEN, ARE HIGHLY SKILLED AROUND AND ON THE GREENS.



KEEP YOUR COOL IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES.

HAVING TO CONSTANTLY RELY ON RECOVERY SHOTS IS MIGHTY STRESSFUL, THUS CHANCES ARE THAT THE MAGIC WON'T LAST FOR ALL 18 HOLES.

UNBELIEVABLE!

JUST HANG IN THERE!

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Eighty-Year-Old Man Considers Having a Child With His Partner

DEAR DR. ROACH: I am a reasonably healthy 80-year-old man who is fortunate enough to have a partner of child-bearing age. She would like to bear us a child, but I am concerned about any potential problems with my old genes and any birth defects that might be caused by them. Please help us decide. -- R.B.

ANSWER: This is a question I usually hear from my patients when they are in their 60s or 70s. Eighty is quite old to be considering fathering a child.

The first issue is that men get less fertile as we age. Older men are less likely to get their partners pregnant, and this difference is apparent by the age of 35. There are not good data for potential fathers in their 80s.

If you and your partner do have a successful pregnancy, there is an increased risk of deleterious genetic conditions and birth defects that are more likely in children who have older fathers. Down syndrome, which is normally associated with an advanced maternal age, is also more common among the offspring of older fathers.

Some heart conditions are more common. Epilepsy and schizophrenia are more common as well, as are autism spectrum disorders. Some cancer rates are increased. Babies are more likely to have a low birth weight, be born premature, and require the neonatal ICU.

However, the magnitude of the effect is modest. On average, 1 in 50 pregnancies with a father under the age of 30 will have one of the common health conditions that are studied in couples. With children who have a father over 50, the rate is 1 in 38. Even though the odds are that you would have a healthy child, the likelihood of a significant health issue for a man over 80 will be substantially more concerning. There just aren't data for men as old as you are that can give us a reliable estimate.

Another issue to consider is whether you will be around to see your child grow up and be there as a father. The average 80-year-old man has a life expectancy of just under eight years. If you are substantially healthier than average, or if your parents lived for a very long time, this number could be better. But the average 80-year-old (assuming your partner has the child while you are still 80) is not likely to see their child reach their 10th birthday. The early death of a father has a negative impact on the physical and mental health of a child.

I conclude that there are significant risks in bringing a child into the world at your age.

DEAR DR. ROACH: I got my first dose of Shingrix in 2022 and forgot to get the second. Do I need to get two more doses now or just one? -- L.B.S.

ANSWER: According to the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, the vaccine series does not need to be restarted, and you can just take the second dose.

However, this type of delayed administration hasn't been thoroughly tested. I've had patients come back several years after the first dose and elect to redo the whole series just to be sure.

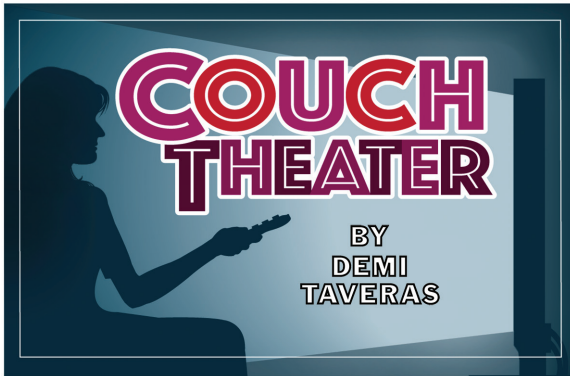
Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu.

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Kate Winslet, left, and Saoirse Ronan star in "Ammonite." (Courtesy of MovieStillsDB)

"Maria" (R) -- Angelina Jolie is well on her way to winning an Oscar, thanks to this biographical drama film that transforms her into opera singer Maria Callas. "Maria" is the third film in director Pablo Llorain's trilogy about 20th-century women, the first being "Jackie" (2016) and the second being "Spencer" (2021). During her final years in the 1970s, Maria is living in Paris to avoid the public eye, yet she can't help but reminisce on the experiences throughout her life that led to her becoming a renowned artist. Maria's intense connection to the stage and music is portrayed in such a way that fully draws the audience into her personal world. Jolie spent seven months training to sing opera for the film, which is available now. (Netflix)

"Laid" (TV-MA) -- Based on the Australian series of the same name, this new series stars Academy Award nominee Stephanie Hsu ("Everything Everywhere All at Once"). Hsu plays Ruby, a single woman dealing with the qualms of the modern dating scene when she suddenly hears news of one of her exes dying. As the days go on, Ruby hears more and more news that a whopping six of her ex-boyfriends have mysteriously died. Wracked with guilt, even though it's not her fault, Ruby decides to go on a mission with her best friend, AJ (Zosia Mamet), to track down all of her exes and inform them of their impending deaths. All eight episodes are out now. (Peacock)

"Iana Glazer: Human Magic" (TV-MA) -- Comedian Iana Glazer ("Broad City") is back with a new special that talks about the magic of being human. Now a new parent, Glazer walks us through their perspective of parenthood, how life has evolved for them, and the magic that is childbirth. In their signature no-filter style, they also take us back into their awkward high school years and dive into the ugly (yet funny!) truths about being a human. This is Glazer's second special following "The Planet Is Burning," and it was taped in Toronto during their 48-city tour across the U.S. and Canada this year. (Hulu)

In Case You Missed It

"Ammonite" (R) -- This romantic-drama film went under the radar after its release a few years ago, with complaints from viewers about its slow pacing and scarce dialogue. But for those who appreciate a palpable on-screen chemistry and beautiful cinematography, "Ammonite" is a must-watch. Starring Kate Winslet ("The Regime") and Saoirse Ronan ("Blitz"), the film follows British paleontologist Mary Anning (Winslet), a recluse who's stuck taking care of her embittered and ill mother. One day, while Mary's working in her shop, the melancholic Charlotte Murchison (Ronan) wanders in with her husband, and the two women are forced to become friends. Through this friendship and their eventual affair, Mary opens herself up to the world in a way that she never thought possible before, while Charlotte starts to overcome her deep-seated depression. Out now to rent. (Amazon Prime Video)

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1. The Temptations were first known by what name?
2. Who wrote and released "Same Old Song and Dance"?
3. Which artist was the first to release "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother"?
4. Name the Gibb brother who released "I Just Want to Be Your Everything."
5. Name the song that contains this lyric: "We used to have good times together, But now I feel them slip away, It makes me cry to see love die."

Answers

1. The Elgins. They were renamed the Temptations when they signed on with Motown in 1961.
2. Aerosmith, in 1974. It was penned by Steven Tyler. The version on the group's Greatest Hits album had 52 seconds cut out and the lyrics changed.
3. Kelly Gordon in 1969. The Hollies followed with what became the more widely known version, although it only topped the charts in South Africa. Years later, Bill Medley added his version to "Rambo III," in 1988.
4. Andy, on his debut album. The 1977 song was penned by his brother Barry.
5. "So Sad," by the Everly Brothers, in 1960. The song charted around the globe, and numerous artists released their own covers, including Steve Wariner and Emmylou Harris.

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Just Like Cats & Dogs

by Dave T. Phipps



GRIN and BEAR IT

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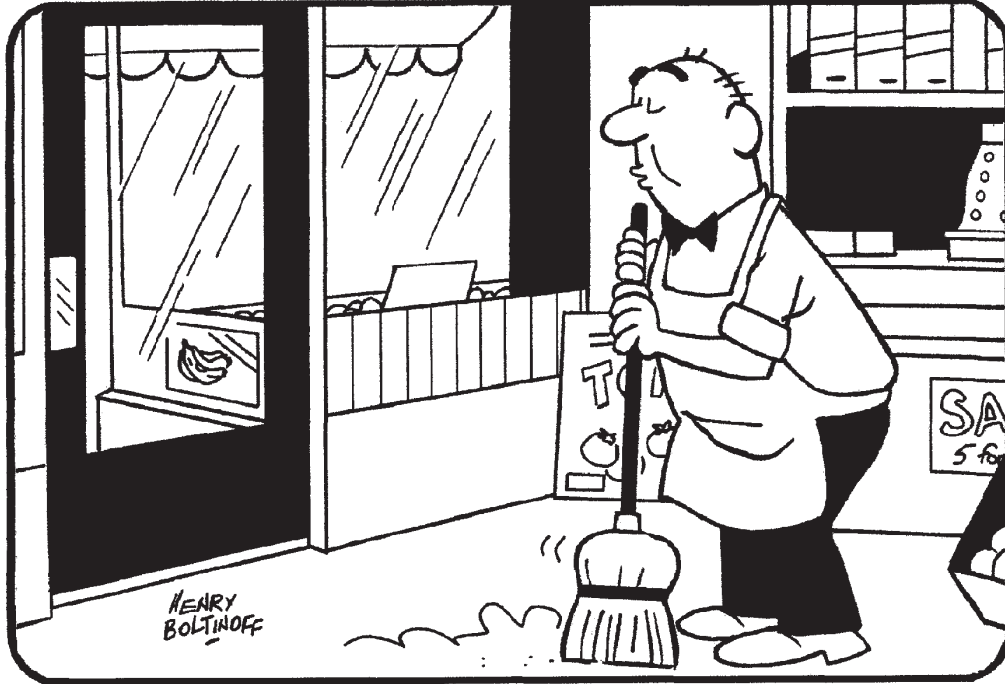
"My diet was going well until I had those visions of sugar plums."

Groton Daily Independent

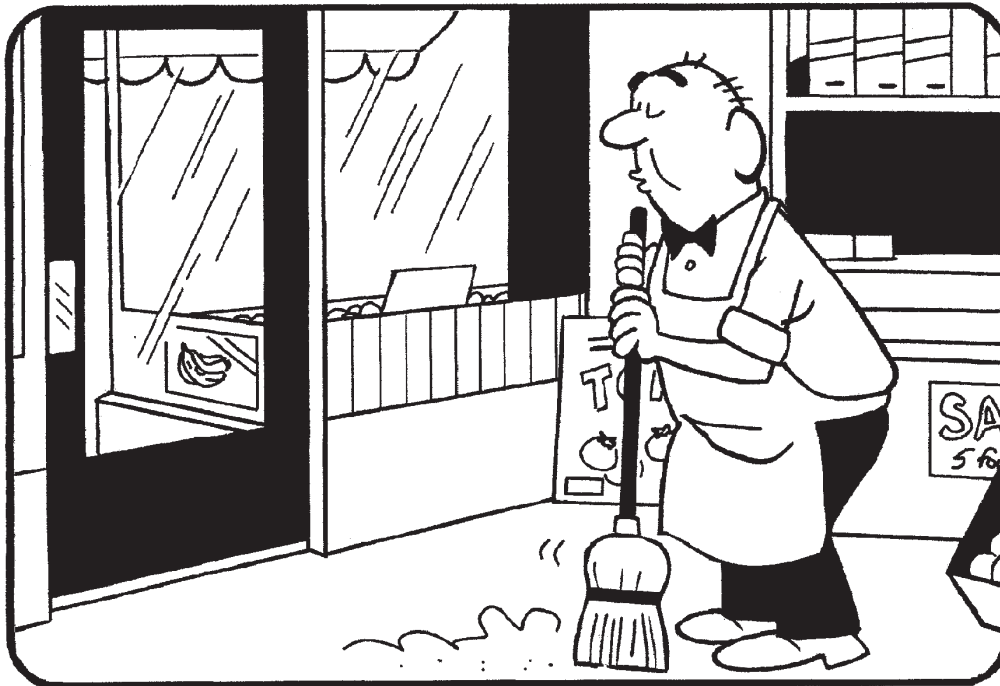
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HOCUS-FOCUS

BY
HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



Differences: 1. Ear is larger. 2. Button is added. 3. Apron is longer. 4. Broom is narrower. 5. Cash register is missing. 6. Awning is not as wide.

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* "Fill a quart-size zip-top bag with water and double-bag it, making sure there is no air in the bag. Place it inside the toilet tank, on the opposite side from the pump. Secure it there, if you can. This will displace some of the water when you flush, and you will use less water as a consequence." -- E.S. in Florida

* If you have a stained porcelain sink, try using it to soak your stained garments. The presoak can do double duty on the stained sink and washable alike.

* To make your own breadcrumbs without a chopper or blender, place dry bread pieces in a plastic bag. Use a rolling pin to "roll" them to crumbs.

* Save water in the shower by using your kitchen timer, set for no more than 5 minutes. If you can find a digital one, you

will know better how much time you have left. After a little while, you almost don't need the timer.

* "If you seal your jelly jars with wax, here's a good tip for you: Place a small piece of string into the wax before it hardens. Then you'll be able to pull on the wax to remove the wax when you are ready to enjoy your homemade goodies!" -- U.L. in Maine

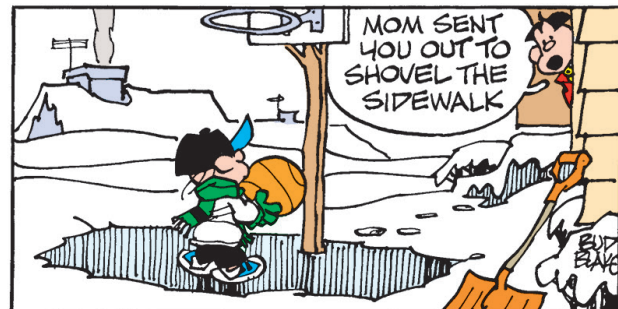
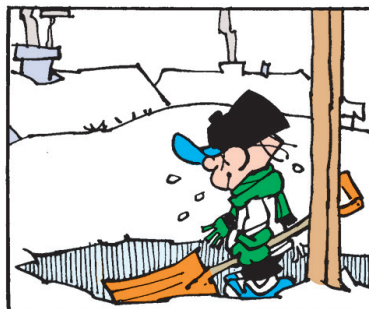
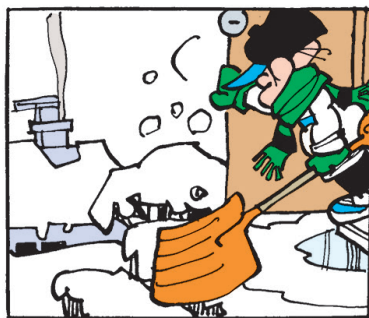
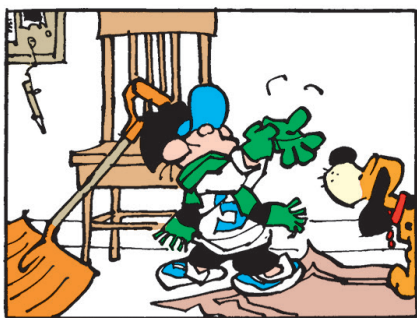
* "Laundry stain removers can be good to remove stains from concrete drives. For instance, my relatives' car was leaking, and I was able to get the stains from my pavers using a spray and wash stain remover that I borrowed from the laundry room. It worked very well." -- S.E. in Arkansas

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

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TIGER

by **BUD BLAKE**



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King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Airport screening org.
- 4 Out of control
- 8 Appear ominously
- 12 Pioneering ISP
- 13 Kid's plea
- 14 "The Music Man" setting
- 15 Oafs
- 17 Daniel Craig role
- 18 "Homeland" star Danes
- 19 Devious
- 21 ER workers
- 22 Persuades
- 26 Track races
- 29 Wee dollop
- 30 Goat's plaint
- 31 Symphonic gp.

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45	46	47			48	49						
50					51					52		
53					54					55		

- 32 Sleep acronym
- 33 Dick Tracy's love
- 34 Consumed
- 35 Chignon
- 36 Walking sticks
- 37 Persian king
- 39 Mined-over matter
- 40 Ordinal suffix
- 41 Blue hue
- 45 Hoodlum
- 48 Defeats cleverly
- 50 Mexican money

- 51 Worry
- 8 Tripoli's land
- 33 Cardio-boxing routine
- 52 TV's Longoria
- 9 Tic-tac-toe win
- 35 Wager
- 53 Mideast gulf
- 54 Belongs
- 10 Possess
- 36 Seals and — (soft rock duo)
- 55 Knight's address
- 11 Irate
- 16 Wharton's "House of —"
- 38 Noble gas
- 39 Group of eight

DOWN

- 1 Body powder
- 20 Arcing tennis shot
- 42 Chopping tools
- 2 Satan's purchase
- 23 Marvel superheroes
- 43 Jeans maker Strauss
- 3 — mater
- 24 Lighten
- 44 Romanov ruler
- 4 Squirrel's stash
- 25 Get lippy
- 45 Transcript no.
- 5 High points
- 26 Deception
- 46 British ref. work
- 6 Low digit
- 27 Deco artist
- 47 Sugary suffix
- 7 Big-screen airtainer of stadium smooches
- 28 Computer brand
- 49 Swiss canton
- 29 Lion's home
- 32 Exit in haste

— King Crossword —

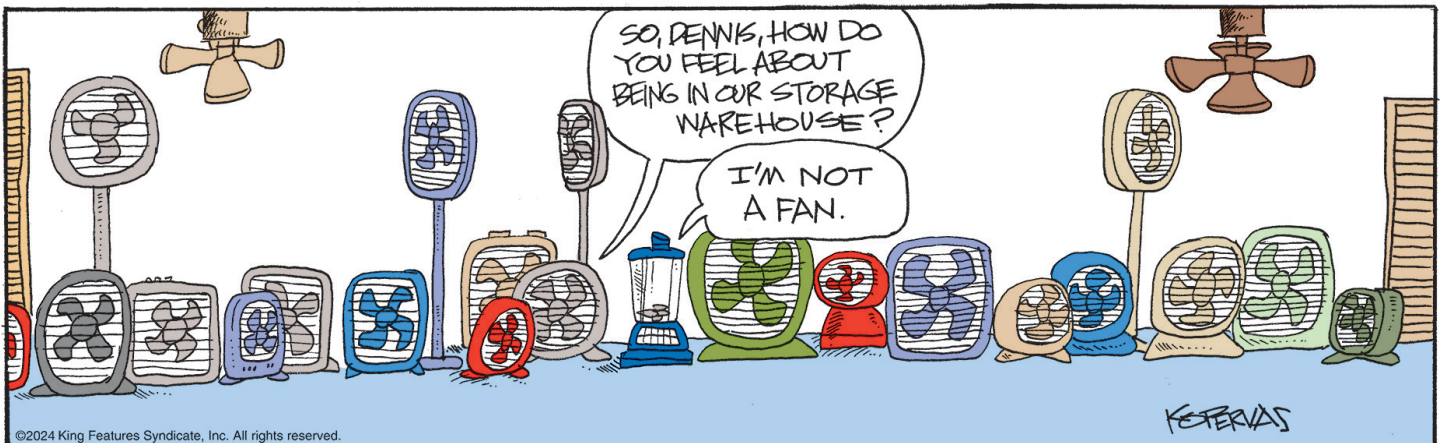
Answers

Solution time: 26 mins.

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C	L	A	I	R	E		S	L	Y			
			R	N	S		C	O	A	X	E	S
H	E	A	T	S		D	A	B		M	A	A
O	R	C	H		R	E	M		T	E	S	S
A	T	E		B	U	N		C	A	N	E	S
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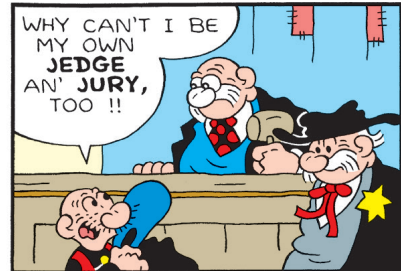
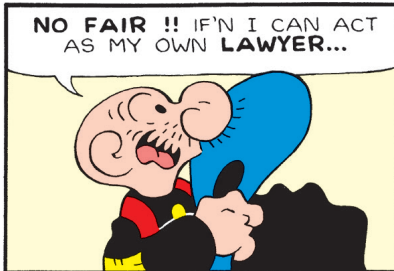
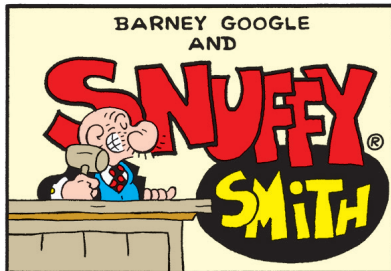
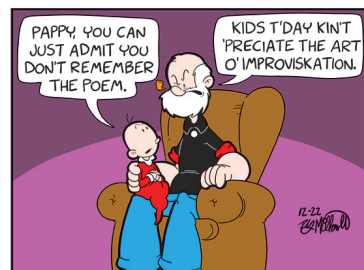
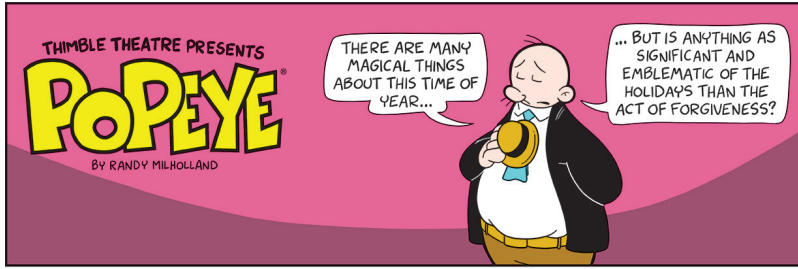
Out on a Limb

by Gary Kopervas



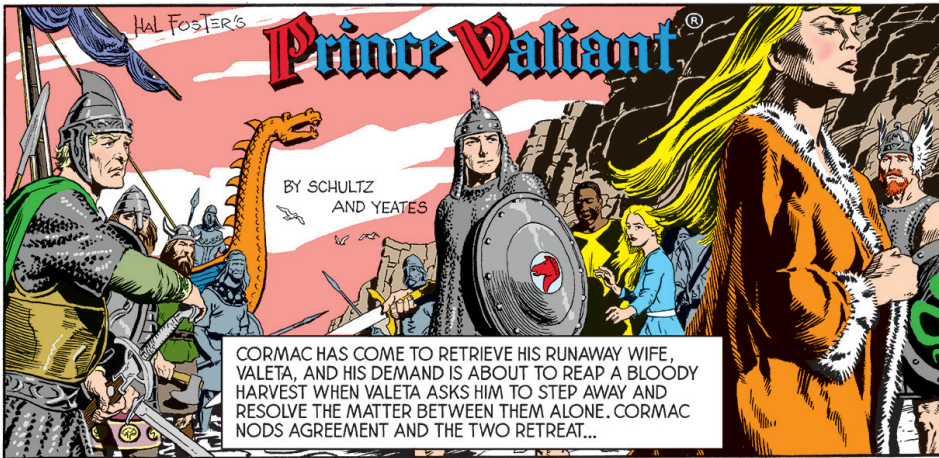
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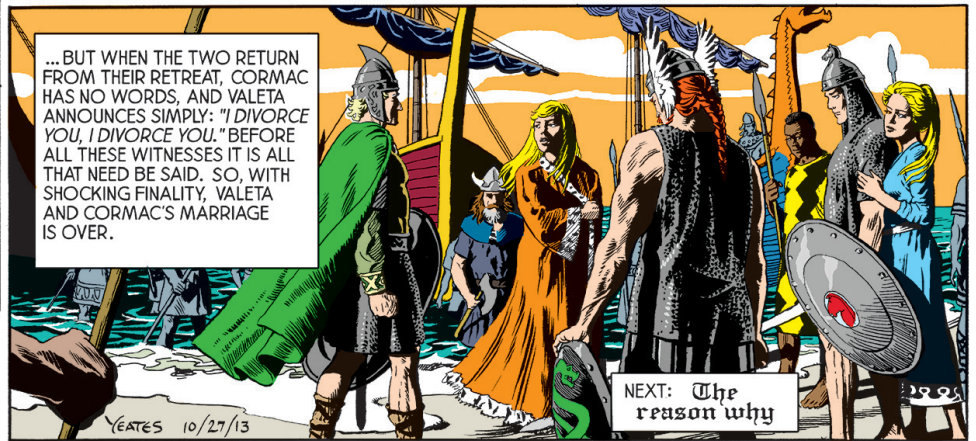


...TO A LONELY POSITION ABOVE THE BEACH. VAL CAN ONLY GUESS AT WHAT PASSES BETWEEN THEM, BUT THEIR GESTURES INDICATE MUCH PASSION.

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VAL LIKES TO THINK THAT VALETA SPEAKS WITH REASON - AS WOULD A LEADER OF MEN - AND USES LOGIC TO CONVINCE HER MATE OF THE FUTILITY IN THIS COURSE OF ACTION. PERHAPS THEY WILL EVEN RECONCILE ...

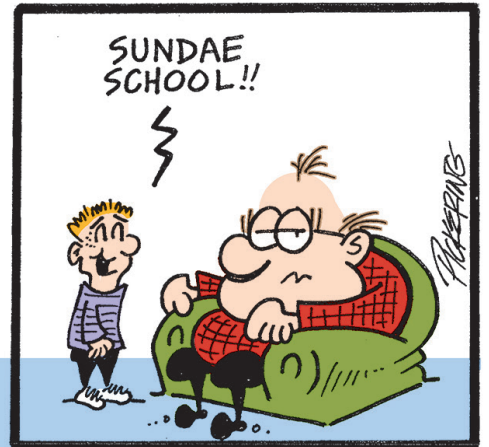


The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



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SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

Planning 2025

I don't know what it is about hanging up a new calendar that makes me want to organize the whole year and set goals. But once again, as I hung up the 2025 calendar on the kitchen wall, I immediately began to consider how I might make the new year better and more productive.

As part of being "organized," I decided to set daily, weekly and monthly goals.

Here is what my 2025 will look like:

On a daily basis I will do some form of exercise. (Let's see how long this lasts.) It might be 15 minutes on the treadmill, 20 minutes of bicep-building with hand weights. I'll spend 30 minutes on the piano, and for brain strength I'll do one or more crossword puzzles.

I will read one book per week. This shouldn't be too hard, thanks to Kindle Unlimited on Amazon. Each week I will vacuum, whether I want to or not, and complete one section in my free online French lessons (www.duolingo.com). I've already started playing online chess (see chess.com) against the computer as a skills brush-up before signing up for weekly in-person chess at the rec center.

Monthly I will try to increase my savings by cutting back on what I spend. This one might be tough. And I've already volunteered to make the morning hello calls from the senior center on four days next month.

In the middle of all that, I'll organize and plan for summer, when I'll grow a few vegetables. I'll vow to donate half the fresh veggies to the food bank. And I want to do a slow but thorough decluttering before next fall.

How about you? Does that new 2025 calendar with all the empty boxes make you want to fill them out? What will you do with your 2025?

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1. What Swedish tennis player won the Australian Open, French Open and U.S. Open singles titles in 1988?

2. At the 2024 Paris Games, Greco-Roman wrestler Mijain Lopez became the first Olympic athlete in any sport to win five gold medals in the same individual event. For what country did he compete?

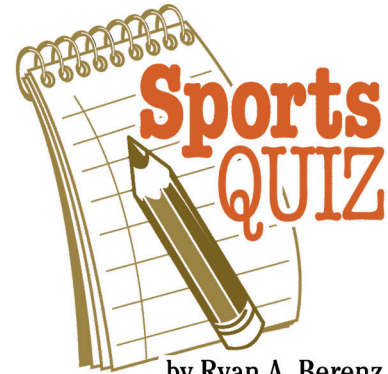
3. Name the goalkeeper who started for Brazil in its 1958 and '62 FIFA World Cup championships and was awarded with the FIFA Order of Merit in 1998.

4. What bowler was the first to complete the PBA career triple crown -- winning the U.S. Open, PBA National Championship and Tournament of Champions -- when he accomplished the feat between 1963-69? (Hint: His son is a comedian and TV personality.)

5. Since 2008, the college football rivalry game between the Ole Miss Rebels and the LSU Tigers has been known as what?

6. Bananas T. Bear is the mascot of what university's athletic teams?

7. In August 2022, New York Yankees pitcher Arodis Chapman was placed on the injured list for an infection in his leg caused by what?



by Ryan A. Berenz

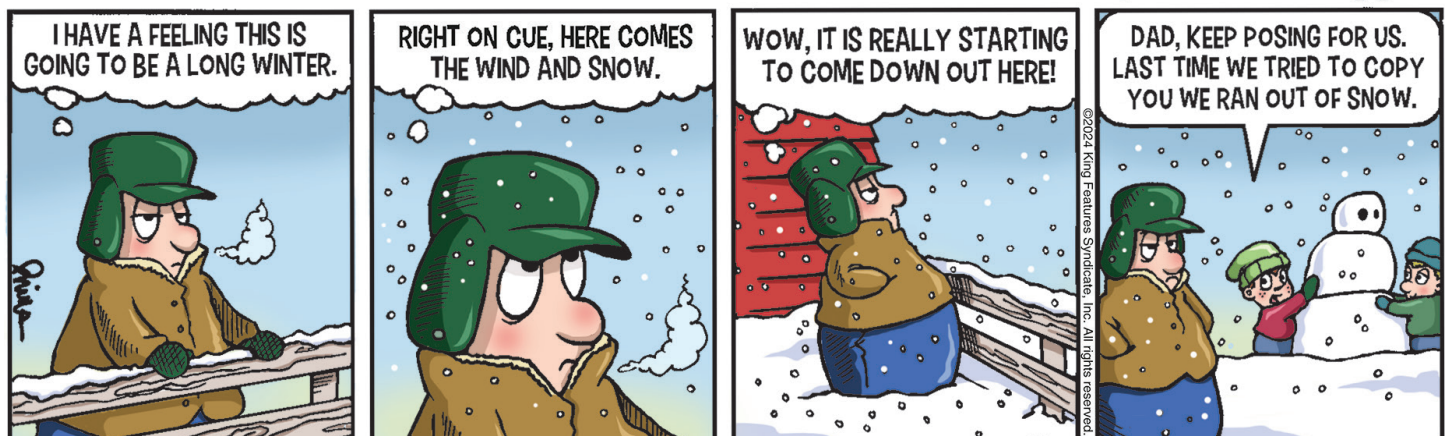
Answers

1. Mats Wilander.
2. Cuba.
3. Gilmar.
4. Billy Hardwick (his son is Chris Hardwick).
5. The Magnolia Bowl.
6. The University of Maine Black Bears.
7. A recent tattoo.

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Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps





A safe and happy Christmas to all, large and small

DEAR READERS: As we prepare for Christmas in this hectic holiday season, it's a wonderful opportunity to spend time with all of them and celebrate togetherness. But the holiday season can also present dangers to your pets, especially if you have a lot of guests over.

Here are some important safety tips:

-- Don't let dogs drink from the Christmas tree's water pan; it may be contaminated with dirt and debris from the tree trunk or parts of decorations (like tinsel and fake snow) that can harm them.

-- In fact, just keep pets away from the tree in general.

Cats love to jump up and knock glass ornaments from the branches; dogs may chew on the pine needles or candy canes.

-- Scented candles can irritate pets; lit candles on low tables can be knocked over. Keep them away from pets.

-- Use sturdy, snap-top lids on garbage cans so pets don't sneak in to purloin tasty scraps. Some of that food can be harmful to them, like onions, garlic or raisins.

-- Put chocolate and sugar-free candies out of reach of pets; both present toxic dangers to them (cocoa and xylitol sweetener).

-- During parties and dinners, place your pets in a safe room with water, food and toys. They'll be much happier without the noise and bustle, and you won't have the stress of keeping an eye out for them.

Finally, once the hectic unwrapping of gifts and serving of food is over, make some space and time to relax with your pets. After all, the holiday season is all about being with loved ones -- and our pets are part of the family group!

A very merry Christmas to all my readers, far and wide. Thank you for making this world a wonderful place for all our pets, great and small.

Send your tips, comments or questions to ask@pawscorner.com.

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Strange BUT TRUE

* Jim Cummings, who voices Winnie the Pooh, calls sick children in hospitals and talks to them in the character's voice. He once phoned a little girl who was fighting cancer, and her mother told him it was the first time the child had smiled in six months.

* The odds of giving birth to a baby at 12:01 a.m. on Jan. 1 are around 1 in 526,000 -- roughly the same as the odds of getting struck by lightning.

* In ancient Greece, throwing an apple at a woman was

considered a marriage proposal.

* Iceland has one of the largest gun ownership rates in the world, but one of the lowest crime rates in the world.

* The dragon tree of the Canary Islands is famous for its thick, deep-red sap. Called dragon's blood, the resin might be responsible for the intense hue of the famous Stradivarius violins built in the 17th and 18th centuries.

* All telephone service in the U.S. and Canada was silenced for one minute on Aug. 4, 1922, to mark the funeral of Alexander Graham Bell.

* Lawyer James Thornton successfully sued the U.K. government to admit that it was breaching legal limits for air pollution.


* The East China Sea parts annually and exposes a narrow 2.9 km-long strip of land, allowing thousands of people to cross from Jindo Island to Modo Island of Korea. This land is exposed about an hour each day for approximately four days every year.

Thought for the Day: "If you want evidence that the world is a terrible place, watch the news and surf the web. But if you want to remember how incredible this planet is, go out into nature. Unlike social media and the news, nature has no incentive to keep us agitated, angry and anxious." -- Austin Perlmutter

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The Garden Bug

Christmas rose



Helleborus niger is a member of the Ranunculaceae plant family and closely related to the Lenten rose. It is a herbaceous perennial plant with leathery, evergreen foliage. In mild winter regions, it may indeed flower by Christmas. It will self-sow in areas advantageous to its growth, and the seedlings can be moved to new locations while still small; but mature Christmas roses resent being disturbed, so avoid moving or dividing mature plants if at all possible. - Brenda Weaver

Sources: ipm.missouri.edu, perennials.com



by Freddy Groves

MDMA study for PTSD

With money from the National Defense Authorization Act for 2024, a \$1.5 million grant program is beginning a study using Methylendioxyamphetamine-assisted (MDMA, also known as ecstasy) psychedelic therapy for alcohol use disorder (AUD) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The Department of Veterans Affairs will hook up with researchers at Yale and Brown universities to use the drug along with psychotherapy. The goal, says a news release, is to use the drugs to "increase emotional openness, reduce fear and promote

introspection during therapy." Test subjects will either be given the real dose or a low dose as a placebo.

The West Haven VA Medical Center in Connecticut and the Providence VA Medical Center in Rhode Island are the sites for the study, and they're starting soon.

The standard PTSD treatment, using selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI) doesn't work on approximately one-third of people. The difference between the two (SSRI vs. MDMA) is how much serotonin is released. While the SSRI class of drugs blocks the release of serotonin, MDMA aids it, bringing feelings of euphoria ... hence the street name "ecstasy."

MDMA isn't going to be the whole answer, however. Treatment will need to be in conjunction with therapy and under highly controlled circumstances. In any event, it will be the first time since the 1960s that they've tried psychedelic-assisted therapy.

There are those who worry about going down this road, as well they should. Once it gets out that the VA is actually doing studies on using a street drug as a treatment, those who suffer from PTSD or AUD might decide to take matters into their own hands and self-medicate. The potential for disaster comes from the amount of the drug to be used. In therapy the amount will be minuscule. With a drug acquired on the street, there's no telling what's really in it, and there will be no accompanying therapy.

If you want to participate in the VA study, your first step will be to contact your care team at the local VA medical facility to ask for a referral.

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Wishing Well®

3	6	3	5	2	6	4	8	2	8	3	7	5
Y	C	O	C	G	H	R	L	E	E	U	F	I
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S	G	A	W	A	T	R	A	T	I	U	H	E
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5	8	7	4	5	7	5	7	6	5	4	5	5
E	S	E	V	D	A	T	R	E	A	E	P	E

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. MOVIES: What is the name of the snowman in the animated movie "Frozen"?
2. GEOGRAPHY: How many U.S. states does the Mississippi River run through or along?
3. ADVERTISING: Which product uses a cartoon character whose first and middle names are Horatio Magellan?
4. MUSIC: In the song "The Twelve Days of Christmas," how many "geese a-laying" are given to the narrator's true love?
5. FOOD & DRINK: What kind of nuts are in a Snickers candy bar?
6. BIOLOGY: What is epimorphic regeneration?
7. TELEVISION: Who starred in the 1980s exercise video series "Sweatin' to the Oldies"?
8. ANATOMY: How much of the human brain is made up of fat?
9. MEASUREMENTS: How many cups are in a pint?
10. LITERATURE: Which famous author often uses Castle Rock as a setting in his novels?

Answers

1. Olaf.
2. 10 states.
3. Cap'n Crunch cereal.
4. Six.
5. Peanuts.
6. Regeneration of a specific part of an organism, like when a lizard can regrow a tail.
7. Richard Simmons.
8. 60%.
9. Two.
10. Stephen King.

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South Dakota Governor

Kristi Noem



South Dakota: *Under God, the People Rule*

Through a Child's Eyes

Every year, I am always blown away by the decorations at the South Dakota State Capitol. Volunteers decorate dozens of trees and decorate the whole Capitol in a theme. This year, the theme is "Through a Child's Eyes," and everything is larger than life to make you feel like a little kid again. If you've never experienced Christmas at the Capitol, I would encourage you to do so before the season is over – the last day to see the trees is December 26.

When my kids were little, I was driving with them out to Rapid City, and we stopped at the State Capitol to see the trees. Booker was about four years old, and when we came in the doors, he threw his arms out and exclaimed, "It's the North Pole!" So when I think about seeing Christmas "Through a Child's Eyes," I remember how Booker saw the Capitol that year.

This theme truly is a reminder of how we should view the world – and how we should celebrate Christmas. We should look at the world with hope and optimism. We should see everything as new the way that our kids do. Our kids look forward to the holidays because we tell them stories; we spend time with family; we teach our kids about the birth of our Savior and the salvation that He brings. And yes, there's always gifts, but we also celebrate the gifts we are blessed with like living in the wonderful state of South Dakota in the freest nation to ever exist.

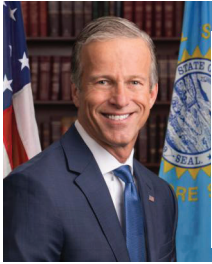
Bryon shared with me that one of his favorite Christmas memories was always going to the Christmas Eve service with his family, particularly holding the candle. He loved being trusted with that candle, and he remembers how magical it was to look around the church at all the other candles – how quiet and holy it seemed spending time together in worship.

When I was a kid, my parents would always give me and my siblings one gift together. On Christmas Morning, they'd hide it somewhere on our farm and ranch, and we would go on a scavenger hunt as a family to find it. We find notes in the barn, in the shop, or in a tractor – one time a note was taped to a cow's head – pointing us in the direction of our gift. It might take us an hour or two to solve, but at the end of the hunt, we didn't just have a present – we had a memory together as a family. That was often much more special than the gift itself.

As kids, we would always get up early and do chores for our dad. We would get up before he even woke up so that we could surprise him with the fact that he didn't need to do any work on Christmas Morning.

We tried to create those memories for our kids, as well. None of our children were allowed to come out of their rooms until I rang the Christmas Bell. It was tradition that once mom was ready, I'd ring the bell, and the celebration would begin.

I hope that all of you have the opportunity to celebrate your own Christmas traditions this year. Please think about the holiday season "Through a Child's Eyes." You'll find the season even more beautiful, more memorable, and more special. God bless you all – and Merry Christmas!



JOHN THUNE
U.S. SENATOR FOR SOUTH DAKOTA

Improving National Security for a Dangerous World

Looking around the world today, there is an increasing level of instability. American service members have come under attack in the Middle East. China is taking brazen actions in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. Israel and Ukraine continue to defend themselves against unjustified aggression. And there is a disturbing trend of collaboration among our adversaries to sow chaos and challenge American influence and interests.

The United States military stands guard against these threats and countless others. It's critical that it has the resources and capabilities it needs to deter threats against America and to respond, if necessary. But our military readiness is not where it needs to be. Adversaries are outpacing us in defense investments, and we're falling behind in critical technologies. The number of combat-ready Air Force planes and Navy ships is approaching record lows, the supply and production of munitions is inadequate, and our military relies on a rapidly aging infrastructure. We need to turn this around.

Congress recently passed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for fiscal year 2025. It's not a perfect bill, but it begins to address some of these critical challenges. It upgrades our capabilities in advanced technologies like hypersonics, missile defense, drones, and artificial intelligence. It addresses our munitions challenges, expands Navy shipbuilding, and reverses the shrinking Air Force fleet. It ensures the Pentagon is focused on defense, not diversity programs. It supports our allies in Israel and Taiwan, and it provides a pay raise to our troops and a larger pay hike for junior enlisted members.

This bill takes important steps toward closing the readiness gap, and South Dakota will play an important role in this effort. In 2019, the Air Force designated Ellsworth Air Force Base as the first home for the B-21 Raider mission. The B-21 will be the backbone of the Air Force's bomber fleet, a long-range strategic bomber capable of projecting power and deterring threats around the world. This year's NDAA fully funds the coming mission at Ellsworth, as well as investing in the support facilities that will be necessary for the new mission.

Looking at Ellsworth today, it's hard to believe that the base was slated for closure not long after I was first elected to the Senate. I spent some of my first months as a senator in a sprint to save the base. There were some who doubted that a state like South Dakota would have enough clout to protect Ellsworth. But we got to work, and with the combined efforts of a lot of people, Ellsworth remained open. We didn't stop there, though. We went right back to work to make sure the base would never again be threatened with closure. Today, it is an undisputed asset to the Air Force and our national defense.

National security has always been a priority for me. I believe in peace through strength. I believe that deterrence works, and it's a lot cheaper to invest in a strong military by choice than to spend on a war by necessity. I will continue to close the readiness gap and ensure that the U.S. military has everything it needs to defend our freedoms and keep the peace.

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Looking for a Christmas Miracle

BIG News

Earlier this week, the House put forward a continuing resolution (CR) spending bill that contained too many unrelated provisions. Many members of Congress, including myself, indicated our opposition to that bill.

That caused us to go back to the drawing board. I worked with House leadership and President Trump to craft a clean CR, eliminating 1,400 pages of unrelated policies. Ultimately, Democrats voted against that bill, abandoning disaster victims, letting family farms fail, and shutting down the government.

We've continued to work on this issue, and I expect in the next few hours we will be successful in funding government until March, when we can work with President Trump to secure the border and restore fiscal sanity to our nation.

BIG Update

The House DOGE Caucus held its first meeting this week and I was excited to be a part of it. Making our government more efficient and cutting spending is a big priority of the caucus and Trump's presidency.

We had a great conversation on ideas to streamline the government to make the best use of taxpayer dollars, which is why I would have voted against the CR earlier this week. I heard from many of you who opposed the bill, and I agree, it was too big and spent too much money.

BIG Idea

In 2022, fentanyl was responsible for nearly 70% of drug overdose deaths for adults ages 18-45 – a staggering and preventable loss of life. Most of that fentanyl is coming from China. Steps must be taken to prevent this lethal drug from coming across our borders.

I'm a member of the Fentanyl Policy Working Group within the Select Committee on China and this week, we introduced three pieces of legislation to attack this part of the China threat from all sides. These bills will save lives and make our communities safer.

The bills would:

Establish a joint task force to counter synthetic narcotics, primarily focusing on fentanyl coming from China.

Establish new sanctions authorities against actors involved in fentanyl trafficking and expands existing sanctions authorities to target People's Republic of China (PRC) vessels or ports that knowingly aid in fentanyl trafficking.

Impose "docking fees" on PRC entities that fail to implement safeguards against the production and export of fentanyl precursors.

Making our communities safer requires securing our borders and staying tough on China.

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Dr. James L. Snyder Ministries

PO Box 831313 - Ocala, FL 34483

1-352-216-3025

My Little Dear, It's Not Warm Outside!

Once again, it is the Christmas season, which means I have to put up with people offended by everything, particularly that pertains to Christmas.

When I was young, we had a little saying, "Sticks and stones may break your bones but words will never hurt you." And as far as I understand, we stood by that saying.

Most people today have never heard that saying and maybe somebody ought to educate them on some of the realities of life. If words are hurting you, something is wrong with "you."

Everybody is offended by something. I am offended by people who are offended by things I say, which makes no sense whatsoever to me.

Where people got this offend-itis disease is beyond me. I wonder if there is any cure for this kind of disease?

I was in the restaurant the other day and behind me, a person sneezed. Instinctively, I turned around and said, "God bless you."

Of course, I was not ready for the reply when the man said to me, "I'm an atheist don't you dare use that word 'God' around me."

I am a gentleman otherwise I might have been tempted to say something like, "Well, then, God curse you." Thankfully, I did not say anything like that. I wonder if unspoken thoughts really matter along this line?

What puzzles me is why somebody who does not believe in God is offended by the word "GOD." The fact that he was offended by that word tells me that somewhere deep inside of him he believes there is a God. Otherwise, it would never have offended him.

If I was an atheist and someone said to me "God bless you," I would laugh it off because I do not believe in God. To be offended by something you do not believe has to be the epitome of stupidity.

Another offensive phrase is, "Merry Christmas." I happened to mention this to a person I was passing in the store and they looked at me kind of Scrooge-like and said, "Don't you dare wish me a Merry Christmas."

I would like to know why two words like "Merry Christmas" are offensive to anyone?

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Being an amateur wordsmith, I like to research words and try to find out their original meaning. There is no way I have found that the two words "Merry" and "Christmas" have anything whatsoever offensive to them. Those offended by those two words have a chimney that is not smoking.

If you are offended by those two words, maybe you should consider the fact that I may be offended by you being offended by those words. What offends one person does not make any sense to someone else. This is America so keep your offending attitude to yourself.

Just the other day I was going into a store and there was a lady behind me, so as a gentleman, I opened the door for her and said, "Ladies first." I would have a hard time understanding the offensiveness of those two words.

The lady looked at me and said, "That is the most sexist thing I have heard all day."

I have been trying to find out what is sexist about those two words.

I am either homophobic (whatever that means), racist or sexist. I do not know if I am all of these things at different times or what. I never know if I am one of these until somebody tells me I am one.

There are Christmas songs that we cannot play on the radio anymore, movies that we cannot watch at Christmas time, decorations that we cannot put outside our home anymore.

I heard recently that the song, "Baby, It's Cold Outside," is offensive to some people. I have listened to that for years and cannot figure out the offensive side of that song.

What's crazy to me are those offended by that song are completely okay with some female singer getting on stage barely clothed, singing a depravity soaked song with lustful lyrics you can't use in public.

Why is that okay and not sexist, but when I open a door for a lady and say, "Ladies First," that is sexist?

Some people refer to this as the war on Christmas. If that is true, I believe those people are losing that war. No matter what anybody says or thinks I still will celebrate Christmas, wish people "Merry Christmas" and say, "God bless you" when somebody sneezes and open a door for the ladies.

If those things offend people, I am happy and most delighted to keep doing them.

For years now, there has been a war on Christmas, but it seems that Christmas comes every year at the same time. Isn't that simply amazing? No matter what people say or how offended they are by it, Christmas still comes.

I could think of quite a few things that would offend me. However, I have a thick skin and a tender heart. My life is not depended upon somebody being offended.

One of my favorite verses in the Bible is in the book of Proverbs.

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

I refuse to let people who are offended by everything direct my path. My trust is not in man, but rather "in the Lord."

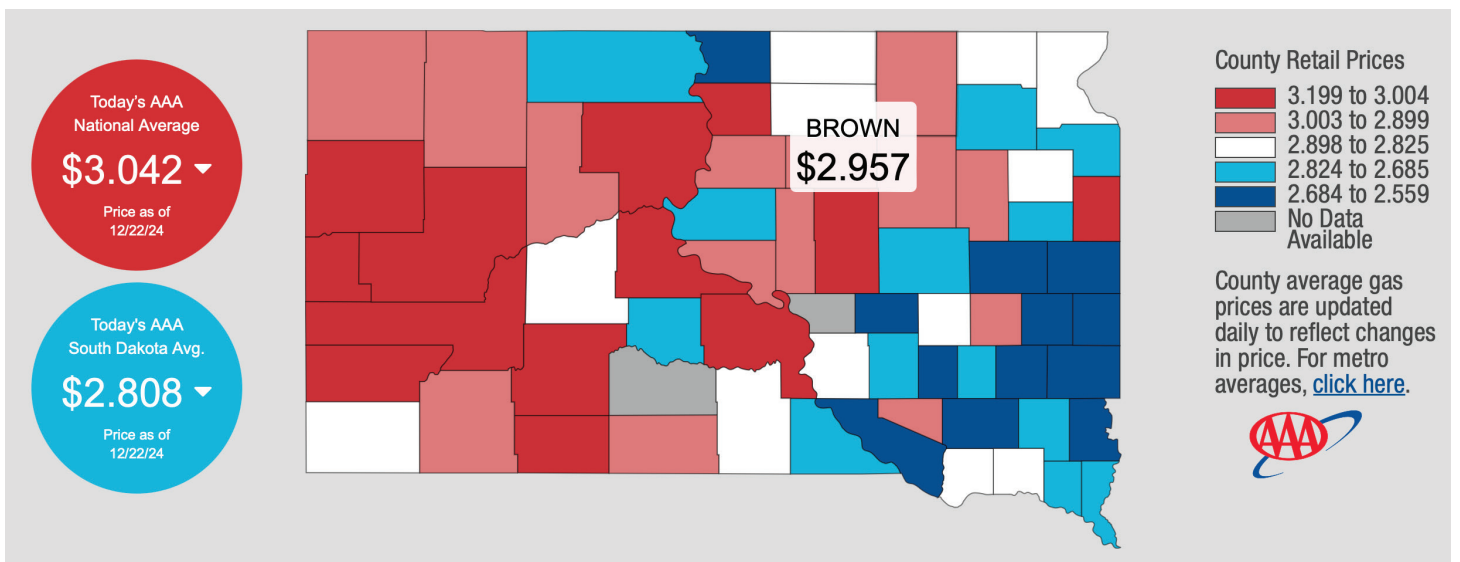
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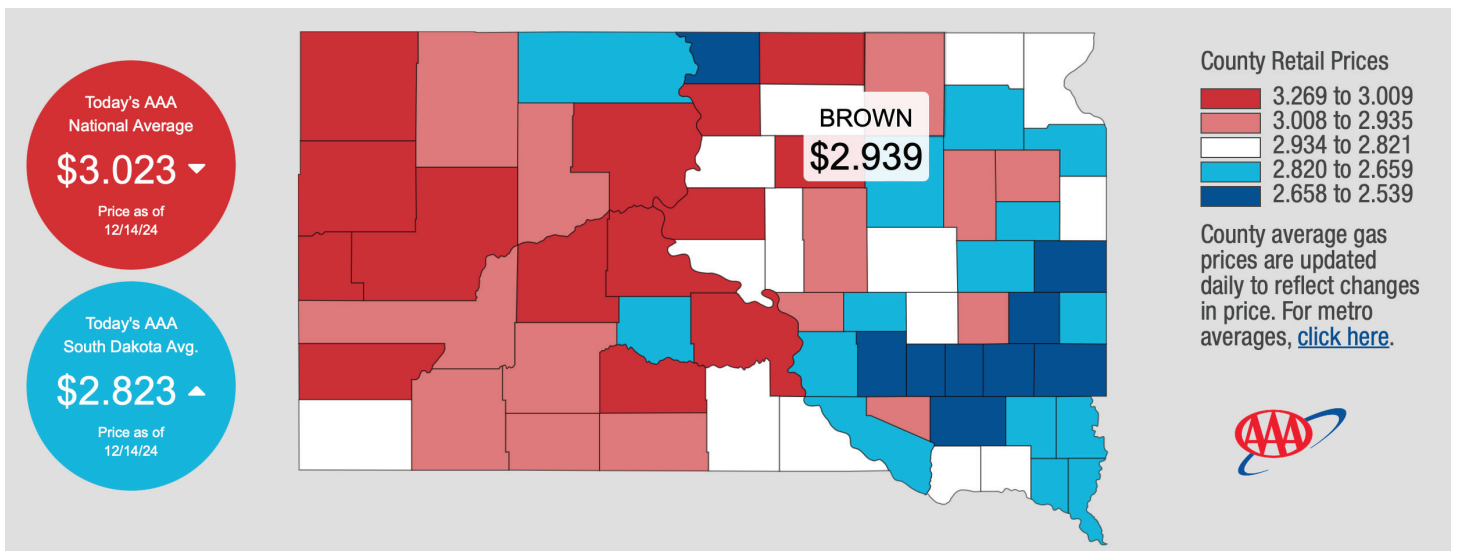
South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$2.808	\$3.040	\$3.469	\$3.210
Yesterday Avg.	\$2.825	\$3.037	\$3.464	\$3.223
Week Ago Avg.	\$2.805	\$3.028	\$3.461	\$3.214
Month Ago Avg.	\$2.867	\$3.077	\$3.472	\$3.232
Year Ago Avg.	\$2.981	\$3.157	\$3.618	\$3.752

This Week



Last Week



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Drought Classification

None

D0 (Abnormally Dry)

D1 (Moderate Drought)

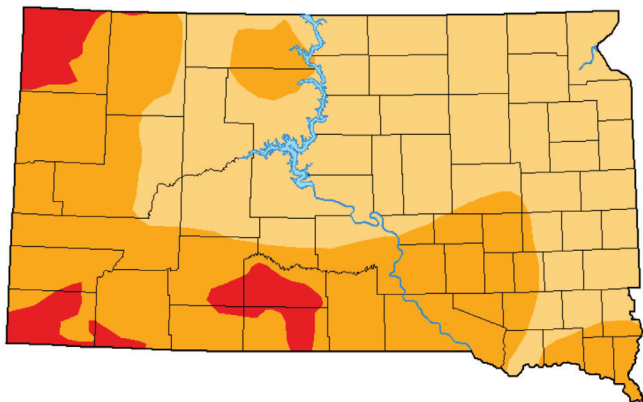
D2 (Severe Drought)

D3 (Extreme Drought)

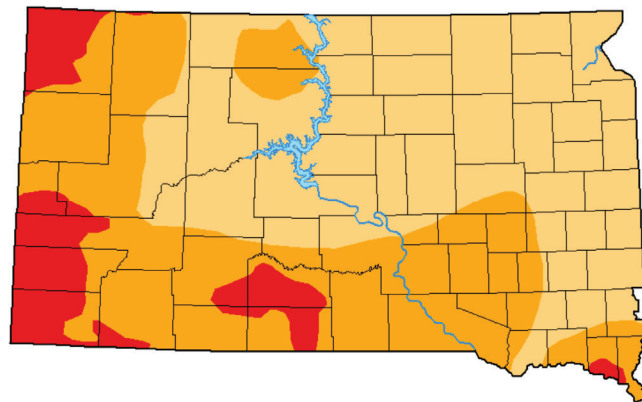
D4 (Exceptional Drought)

No Data

Drought Monitor



December 17



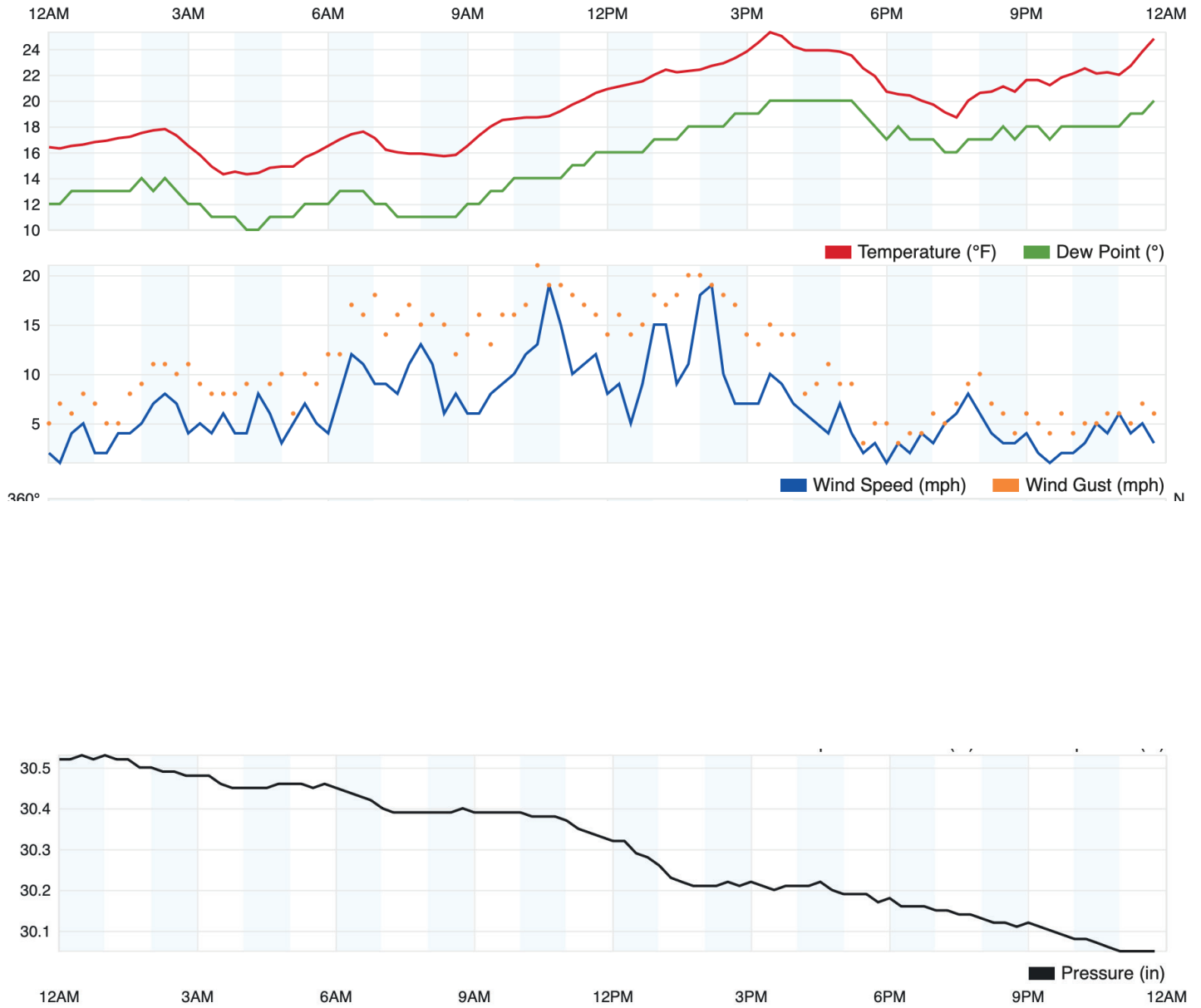
December 10

It was a dry week for most of the region with only areas of southeastern Nebraska, northeastern Kansas, northern North Dakota and the Plains of eastern Wyoming and Montana showing any above-normal precipitation. Temperatures were cooler than normal over the Dakotas with departures of 3-6 degrees below normal while most of the rest of the region was 3-6 degrees above normal for the week. Abnormally dry conditions improved over southwest and southeast Kansas while severe drought improved in northeast Wyoming and into western South Dakota. The extreme drought in northeast Nebraska was reassessed and removed as the convergence of the indicators at extreme drought levels no longer existed, even with some long-term signals still showing some dryness in the extreme levels.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 30 °F

Increasing
Clouds

Tonight



Low: 15 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Monday



High: 23 °F

Partly Sunny

Monday Night



Low: 14 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Tuesday



High: 31 °F

Partly Sunny



Warmer Air remains in place...

Mainly Dry!

Warmest and fewest
clouds over central
South Dakota

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD
weather.gov/abr

Today		30-45°
Monday		21-40°
Tuesday		28-45°
Wednesday		33-47°
Thursday		34-44°
Friday		35-41°

Expect mainly dry conditions to continue, along with warm air. The warmest air and fewest clouds will be over central South Dakota. There is a 15 to 25 percent chance of a light wintry mix near the North Dakota and South Dakota border this afternoon into this evening, with a higher chance across North Dakota.

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Light Wintry Mix this afternoon & evening

December 22, 2024

3:44 AM

Mainly across ND & far northern SD/west central MN

- **Potential for icing has diminished.** However, there is still the potential for light icing near and north of the North Dakota/South Dakota border
- 15 to 25% chance of a light wintry mix near ND/SD border
 - This afternoon: Rain or freezing rain over north central SD
 - This evening: Freezing rain or snow over northeastern SD
- **Little to no accumulation expected at this time.** Still, a light glaze of ice on roadways would cause dangerous driving conditions.

	12/22 Sun				12/23 Mon
	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am
Aberdeen	10%	15%	20%	20%	15%
Britton	10%	15%	20%	20%	15%
Ellendale	10%	15%	20%	15%	10%
Eureka	10%	15%	20%	10%	10%
McIntosh	20%	20%	10%	10%	5%
Mobridge	10%	10%	5%	5%	5%
Sisseton	10%	10%	20%	15%	10%
Webster	5%	10%	15%	15%	10%
Wheaton	5%	10%	20%	20%	15%

- Rain + - Fz Rain + - Snow +



Check latest road conditions at...

ND <https://travel.dot.nd.gov/>

SD <https://www.sd511.org/>

MN <https://511mn.org/>

There is a 15 to 25 percent chance of a light wintry mix near the North Dakota and South Dakota border this afternoon into this evening, with a higher chance across North Dakota. Little to no accumulation expected at this time. Still, a light glaze of ice on roadways would cause dangerous driving conditions. Check the latest weather forecast and road conditions before heading out.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 25 °F at 3:29 PM

Low Temp: 14 °F at 4:18 AM

Wind: 21 mph at 10:20 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 8 hours, 46 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 59 in 2020

Record Low: -28 in 1990

Average High: 26

Average Low: 6

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.42

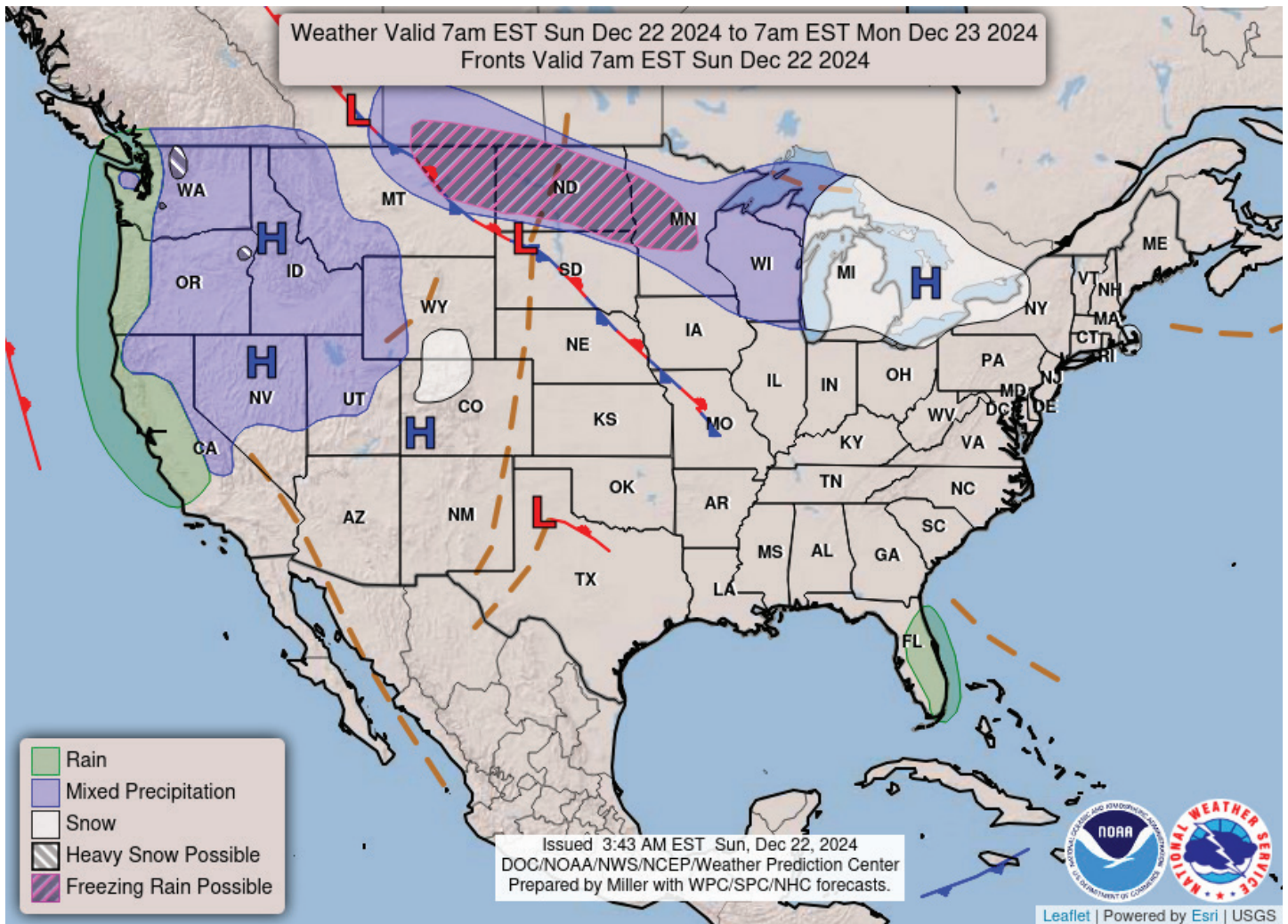
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 21.63

Precip Year to Date: 21.71

Sunset Tonight: 4:54:28 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:08:37 am



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Today in Weather History

December 22, 1990: Strong northwest winds, combined with air temperatures below zero, created wind chills from -40 to -65 degrees over west-central Minnesota early in the day on the 22nd. Air temperatures were generally in the -20 to -25 degree range, with afternoon highs around 15 below zero.

December 22, 1990: Strong northwest winds gusted to 35 miles per hour and caused near-whiteout conditions over a wide area of southwest and west-central Minnesota during the late afternoon on the 21st into the early morning of the 22nd. Several car accidents ensued. A 30-year old man was killed when he lost control of his truck and slid into a ditch in the near-blizzard conditions.

1839 - The second of triple December storms hit the northeastern U.S. The storm produced 25 inches of snow at Gettysburg, PA, and gales in New England, but only produced light snow along the coast. (David Ludlum)

1961 - Holiday travel was paralyzed over extreme northeastern Kansas, and adjacent parts of Missouri, Iowa and Nebraska. The storm produced 5 to 15 inches of snow, with drifts up to ten feet high. (22nd-23rd) (The Weather Channel)

1983 - On the first day of winter 75 cities reported record low temperatures for the date, with twelve of those cities reporting record low temperatures for the month as a whole. The mercury plunged to 51 degrees below zero at Wisdom MT, and Waco TX set an all-time record low a reading of 12 above zero. (The National Weather Summary)

1987 - The first day of winter was a relatively tranquil one for much of the nation, but heralded a winter storm in the Central Rockies. The storm produced 40 inches of snow at the top of the Pomerelle Ski Resort, south of Burley ID, the heaviest snow of record for that location. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Strong winds prevailed in the foothills of Wyoming and Colorado. Winds gusted to 123 mph southwest of Fort Collins CO, and reached 141 mph at the summit of Mount Evans. An ice storm paralyzed parts of Upper Michigan during the day. The freezing rain left roads around Marquette MI blocked by cars and semi- trucks. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989: The most significant cold spell of the century for the Deep South occurred from the 22 to the 26. New Orleans experienced 64 consecutive hours at or below 32 degrees Fahrenheit and a total of 81 out of 82 hours below freezing. A total of 15 hours was below 15 degrees with the lowest reading of 11 degrees on the morning of the 23rd. A low temperature of 8 degrees was recorded at Baton Rouge. Snow and sleet paralyzed transportation systems where as much as two to four inches of snow accumulated in Lafourche and Terrebonne Parishes. Snow and ice-covered the ground in New Orleans. The most significant impact was the breaking of water pipes in homes and businesses. Over 100 fires resulted in the New Orleans area within 24 hours due to a loss of water pressure and improperly utilized heating sources. Ice formed over shallow lakes and waterways where commercial fishing took heavy losses. Five weather-related deaths occurred in the service area during this rare Arctic outbreak.

1989: Between December 22 and December 24, 1989, deepening low pressure pulled a frigid arctic air mass into the southeastern United States. This sequence of events produced a historic snowstorm and a rare white Christmas across the region. At Charleston, South Carolina, the storm deposited 8 inches of snow – the greatest snowfall in modern history. At Savannah, Georgia, the storm total accumulation of 3.6 inches tied the greatest snowfall in modern history.

2002: Heavy rains prompted flooding in the mountain city of Teresopolis, located about 90 km north of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. A mudslide was responsible for 9 deaths and 50 injuries.

2004: Tremendous snows occurred in the Ohio Valley. The following cities set new records for their most significant snowstorm ever: Evansville, Indiana 22.3 inches, Dayton, Ohio 16.4 inches, and Paducah, Kentucky 14.2 inches. Other big snowfall totals were 31 inches at Liberty, Indiana, 28 inches at Buena Vista, Indiana, 24 inches at Greenville, Ohio, and 23 inches at Mansfield, Ohio.



Christ's Day

On Mother's Day, we focus all of our attention on our Mothers, recalling and remembering how much they struggled to raise us. Lovingly we shower gifts on them, purchase cards that describe her many sacrifices for us, and the unending care she gave to us. She deserves all of the attention and recognition we can give her.

On Father's Day, we turn our thoughts to "Dad" – what he has done for us and then express our gratitude to him for the time he spent with us. We recall his efforts to teach us to throw a ball, catch a pass, cast a fishing line or attend a special event. He, too, deserves all the attention and recognition we can give him.

We also give recognition and attention to our Grandparents, to brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles and friends and relatives on their special days.

But what will we do that is really special or unique to show our appreciation and gratitude for Jesus on His day this year?

Will there be an envelope under the tree with a special love-offering that recognizes His importance in our lives? Will it match the amount we gave others?

Will we sacrifice some of our time to show God's love by being with those who would otherwise be alone and lonely on His day?

Will we share a meal with someone who is hungry? Give some clothes to those who are cold and have little? Spend time reading His story to children?

"In as much as you have done it to the least of these, you have done it unto Me!"

Prayer: Take Your peace from us Father, until and unless we show others Your love on Your day. Why? "In as much as you have done to others, you did to Me." In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Matthew 25:40 And the King will answer and say to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me."

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:

12.20.24

2 20 51 56 67 19

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$344,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.21.24

9 19 30 39 44 4

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$18,510,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.21.24

2 9 10 41 42 9

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 44 Mins
DRAW: 57 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.21.24

9 22 28 30 32

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$172,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.21.24

29 45 46 51 59 3

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.21.24

1 12 17 21 58 1

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$103,000,000

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

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Central 55, Sturgis Brown High School 43

Aberdeen Roncalli 53, Northwestern 40

Alcester-Hudson 32, Parker 21

Baltic 50, Estelline-Hendricks 24

Belle Fourche 60, Newcastle, Wyo. 33

Centerville 48, Vermillion 45

Chadron, Neb. 69, Douglas 37

Chester 44, Castlewood 29

Clark-Willow Lake 52, Florence-Henry 32

Cody-Kilgore, Neb. 48, Colome 26

Crofton, Neb. 50, West Central 40

DeSmet 51, Garretson 34

Dell Rapids St Mary 49, Flandreau 35

Deubrook 58, Dell Rapids 35

Deuel 47, Iroquois-Lake Preston 40

Edgemont 47, Banner County, Neb. 18

Elkton-Lake Benton 36, Madison 21

Ethan 75, Freeman Academy-Marion 26

Hamlin 57, Colman-Egan 37

Highmore-Harrold 51, Faulkton 41

Hitchcock-Tulare 45, Langford 25

Irene-Wakonda 66, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 31

Jones County 60, Bison 17

Lemmon High School 46, Grant County/Mott-Regent, N.D. 36

Lyman 51, Bennett County 49

McIntosh High School 66, Strasburg, N.D. 17

Mitchell 50, Rapid City Central 30

Mobridge-Pollock 58, Herreid-Selby 27

North Central, Neb. 43, Gregory 29

Philip 50, Faith 41

Rapid City Stevens 55, Huron 39

Redfield 41, Aberdeen Christian 25

Sioux Falls O'Gorman 60, Sioux City, West, Iowa 36

Sioux Valley 61, Arlington 47

Spearfish 62, T F Riggs High School 45

Wagner 47, Lennox 39

Warner 57, Potter County 42

Waubay/Summit 54, Leola-Frederick High School 51

Waverly-South Shore 55, Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 44

Webster 49, Ipswich 43

Wessington Springs 63, Howard 37

Lakota Nations Invitational=

He Sapa Bracket=

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Championship=
Pine Ridge 33, Tiospa Zina 32
Consolation Championship=
St. Francis Indian 59, Takini 12
Seventh Place=
Oelrichs 57, Crazy Horse 44
Third Place=
Santee, Neb. 59, Wakpala 37
Makosica Bracket=
Championship=
Tiospaye Topa 55, Crow Creek Tribal School 46
Fifth Place=
Little Wound 51, Todd County 44
Seventh Place=
Marty 44, Dupree 42
Third Place=
Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 58, Lower Brule 55
Oceti Sakowin Bracket=
Championship=
Mahpiya Lúta Red Cloud 62, Rapid City Christian 31
Fifth Place=
White River 59, Omaha Nation, Neb. 53
Seventh Place=
McLaughlin 43, Custer 38
Third Place=
Lakota Tech 56, Wall 41
Winter Border Brawl=
Cheyenne Central, Wyo. 46, St Thomas More 38

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Christian 60, Sisseton 39
Aberdeen Roncalli 57, Dell Rapids 41
Chadron, Neb. 50, Douglas 41
Edgemont 42, Banner County, Neb. 35
Gregory 61, North Central, Neb. 23
Howard 47, Wessington Springs 40
Huron 56, Rapid City Stevens 43
Leola-Frederick High School 51, Waubay/Summit 50
Mitchell 61, Rapid City Central 47
North Central 51, South Border, N.D. 16
St Thomas More 47, Cheyenne Central, Wyo. 37
Strasburg, N.D. 55, McIntosh High School 8
Warner 61, Potter County 47
West Central 59, Crofton, Neb. 24
Lakota Nations Invitational=
He Sapa Bracket=
Consolation Championship=
Wakpala 66, Tiospaye Topa 38
Seventh Place=
Oelrichs 41, Takini 40

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Matosica Bracket=
Championship=
Todd County 65, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 52
Fifth Place=
Lower Brule 75, Omaha Nation, Neb. 69
Third Place=
Santee, Neb. 78, White River 47
Oceti Sakowin Bracket=
Third Place=
Custer 56, Lakota Tech 23
Stateline Shootout in Sundance=
Belle Fourche 62, Newcastle, Wyo. 48, OT
Sundance High School, Wyo. 59, Lead-Deadwood 51

Some high school basketball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

Bal's 20 lead Santa Clara past South Dakota 98-81

By The Associated Press undefined

SANTA CLARA, Calif. (AP) — Adama Bal's 20 points helped Santa Clara defeat South Dakota 98-81 on Saturday night.

Bal also added five rebounds and five assists for the Broncos (8-5). Tyeree Bryan scored 16 points while shooting 7 for 16, including 1 for 6 from beyond the arc. Johnny O'Neil shot 5 for 8, including 4 for 6 from beyond the arc to finish with 15 points.

The Coyotes (9-6) were led in scoring by Kaleb Stewart, who finished with 15 points and two steals. Isaac Bruns added 13 points and seven rebounds for South Dakota. Cameron Fens also put up 12 points, eight rebounds and three blocks.

Mellott leads Montana State over South Dakota 31-17 to reach FCS championship game

BOZEMAN, Mont. (AP) — Tommy Mellott rushed for two touchdowns and passed for another to lead Montana State to a 31-17 victory over South Dakota on Saturday and a berth in the FCS championship game.

The top-seeded Bobcats (15-0) will play No. 2 seed North Dakota State in the title game Jan. 6 in Frisco, Texas. The Bison beat South Dakota State 28-21 earlier Saturday. NDSU defeated Montana State 38-10 for the 2021 championship. The Bobcats' only FCS title came in 1984 when they beat Louisiana Tech 19-6.

Mellott fumbled a bad shotgun snap but the ball bounced back into his hands and he went up the middle, hurdling a defender for a 41-yard TD run and a 31-14 lead early in the third quarter.

A field goal cut the lead to 14 then South Dakota (11-3) drove to the Montana State 11 midway through the fourth quarter but came up short on a fourth-down pass to the 2. The Coyotes again drove deep into Montana State territory but a bad snap cost yardage and a down before a fourth-down pass to the end zone was broken up. A final possession ended on the first play with a fumble.

The Bobcats went in front 24-14 at halftime on Scottre Humphrey's 1-yard run to finish a long drive midway through the second quarter and Myles Sansted's 28-yard field goal.

In the first quarter, Mellott hit Taco Dowler with a 34-yard TD pass and scored on a 5-yard run. South Dakota's Travis Theis scored on a 55-yard run in the first quarter and Charles Pierre Jr. went 45 yards to tie at 14-all early in the second.

Mellott rushed for 125 yards and passed for 134.

South Dakota's Aidan Bouman passed for 236 yards and Theis rushed for 110.

Lance and Miller team to send North Dakota State to FCS title game with 28-21 win over Jackrabbits

FARGO, N.D. (AP) — Bryce Lance caught three touchdown passes from Cam Miller, including a one-handed game-winner, to give North Dakota State a 28-21 win over two-time defending national champion South Dakota State on Saturday and a berth in the FCS title game.

The second-seeded Bison (13-2) will take on top-seeded Montana State for the championship on Jan. 6 in Frisco, Texas. Montana State defeated South Dakota 31-17 Saturday.

NDSU, winner of nine FCS titles with its last coming in 2021, won its 20th straight home playoff game and beat the Jackrabbits for the second time this season. Those two teams and South Dakota tied for the Missouri Valley Football Conference title.

After the third-seeded Jackrabbits (12-3) tied the game at 21-all, the Bison drove 75 yards and scored with 4:18 remaining when Lance snagged a pass with his right hand and managed to get control and a foot down in the right corner of the end zone. The play was initially ruled an incomplete but overturned on review.

On South Dakota State's final possession, Mark Gronowski was sacked on fourth-and-17 at the Jackrabbits' 31.

The teams traded touchdowns in each of the first two quarters before both punting three times in the third quarter.

Miller found Lance deep for a 47-yard score early in the fourth and the Jackrabbits tied it midway through the period on Gronowski's 14-yard pass to Gram Goering.

Lance, brother NFL quarterback Trey Lance, made six catches for 125 yards, his other TD coming on a 21-yarder. Miller was 13 of 19 for 179 yards and also rushed for 93 yards and a TD.

Gronowski was 14-of-25 passing for 204 yards and he also ran for a score. Amar Johnson rushed for 77 yards and a touchdown.

Stampedes in Nigeria leave at least 32 dead in a rush to get Christmas gifts

By DYEPKAZAH SHIBAYAN Associated Press

ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) — The death toll from stampedes during two Christmas charity events in Nigeria has increased from 13 to 32, police said Sunday. The victims, including at least four children, collapsed during crowd surges as people grew desperate for food items while the country grapples with the worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation.

The dead included 22 people in southeastern Anambra state's Okija town, where a philanthropist on Saturday organized a food distribution, local police spokesman Tochukwu Ikenga said. Ten others died in the capital, Abuja, during a church-organized similar charity event.

Police said they were investigating the two incidents, only days after another stampede in which several children were killed.

Africa's most populous country is seeing a growing trend by local organizations, churches and individuals to organize charity events ahead of Christmas to ease economic hardship caused by a cost-of-living crisis.

Witnesses of the Abuja stampede told The Associated Press there was a crowd surge at one of the church gates, as dozens tried to enter the premises at around 4 a.m., hours before gift items were to be shared.

Some of them, including older people, waited overnight to get food, said Loveth Inyang, who rescued one baby from the crush.

The stampedes prompted growing calls for authorities to enforce safety measures at such events. Nigerian police also mandated that organizers obtain prior permission.

Winter is hitting Gaza and many Palestinians have little protection from the cold

By WAFAA SHURAFI and FATMA KHALED Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — Winter is hitting the Gaza Strip and many of the nearly 2 million Palestinians displaced by the devastating 14-month war with Israel are struggling to protect themselves from the wind, cold and rain.

There is a shortage of blankets and warm clothing, little wood for fires, and the tents and patched-together tarps families are living in have grown increasingly threadbare after months of heavy use, according to aid workers and residents.

Shadia Aiyada, who was displaced from the southern city of Rafah to the coastal area of Muwasi, has only one blanket and a hot water bottle to keep her eight children from shivering inside their fragile tent.

"We get scared every time we learn from the weather forecast that rainy and windy days are coming up because our tents are lifted with the wind. We fear that strong windy weather would knock out our tents one day while we're inside," she said.

With nighttime temperatures that can drop into the 40s (the mid-to-high single digits Celsius), Aiyada fears that her kids will get sick without warm clothing.

When they fled their home, her children only had their summer clothes, she said. They have been forced to borrow some from relatives and friends to keep warm.

The United Nations warns of people living in precarious makeshift shelters that might not survive the winter. At least 945,000 people need winterization supplies, which have become prohibitively expensive in Gaza, the U.N. said in an update Tuesday. The U.N. also fears infectious disease, which spiked last winter, will climb again amid rising malnutrition.

The U.N. Agency for Palestinian Refugees, known as UNRWA, has been planning all year for winter in Gaza, but the aid it was able to get into the territory is "not even close to being enough for people," said Louise Wateridge, an agency spokeswoman.

UNRWA distributed 6,000 tents over the past four weeks in northern Gaza but was unable to get them to other parts of the Strip, including areas where there has been fighting. About 22,000 tents have been stuck in Jordan and 600,000 blankets and 33 truckloads of mattresses have been sitting in Egypt since the summer because the agency doesn't have Israeli approval or a safe route to bring them into Gaza and because it had to prioritize desperately needed food aid, Wateridge said.

Many of the mattresses and blankets have since been looted or destroyed by the weather and rodents, she said.

The International Rescue Committee is struggling to bring in children's winter clothing because there "are a lot of approvals to get from relevant authorities," said Dionne Wong, the organization's deputy director of programs for the occupied Palestinian territories.

"The ability for Palestinians to prepare for winter is essentially very limited," Wong said.

The Israeli government agency responsible for coordinating aid shipments into Gaza said in a statement that Israel has worked for months with international organizations to prepare Gaza for the winter, including facilitating the shipment of heaters, warm clothing, tents and blankets into the territory.

More than 45,000 Palestinians have been killed in the war in Gaza, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. The ministry's count doesn't distinguish between civilians and combatants, but it has said more than half of the fatalities are women and children. The Israeli military says it has killed more than 17,000 militants, without providing evidence.

The war was sparked by Hamas' October 2023 attack on southern Israel, where the militant group killed 1,200 people and took 250 hostages in Gaza.

Negotiators say Israel and Hamas are inching toward a ceasefire deal, which would include a surge in aid into the territory.

For now, the winter clothing for sale in Gaza's markets is far too expensive for most people to afford, residents and aid workers said.

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Reda Abu Zarada, 50, who was displaced from northern Gaza with her family, said the adults sleep with the children in their arms to keep them warm inside their tent.

"Rats walk on us at night because we don't have doors and tents are torn. The blankets don't keep us warm. We feel frost coming out from the ground. We wake up freezing in the morning," she said. "I'm scared of waking up one day to find one of the children frozen to death."

On Thursday night, she fought through knee pain exacerbated by cold weather to fry zucchini over a fire made of paper and cardboard scraps outside their tent. She hoped the small meal would warm the children before bed.

Omar Shabet, who is displaced from Gaza City and staying with his three children, feared that lighting a fire outside his tent would make his family a target for Israeli warplanes.

"We go inside our tents after sunset and don't go out because it is very cold and it gets colder by midnight," he said. "My 7-year-old daughter almost cries at night because of how cold she is."

Israeli strikes across Gaza kill at least 20 as Vatican envoy visits Christians in the territory

By WAFAA SHURAF and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli strikes across the Gaza Strip overnight and into Sunday killed at least 20 people, including five children, Palestinian medical officials said.

Israeli authorities meanwhile allowed Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the leader of the Catholic Church in the Holy Land, to enter Gaza and celebrate a pre-Christmas Mass with members of the territory's small Christian community.

A strike on a school housing displaced people in Gaza City killed at least eight people, including three children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. The Civil Defense, first responders affiliated with the Hamas-run government, had earlier said four children were among those killed.

The Israeli military said it carried out a precise strike on Hamas militants sheltering there.

A strike on a home in the central city of Deir al-Balah late Saturday killed at least eight people, including three women and two children, according to Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, which received the bodies. A man and his wife were killed in a strike in the southern city of Khan Younis on Sunday, just after midnight, according to the nearby Nasser Hospital. A strike on a car in Gaza City killed two people, according to the Health Ministry.

There was no immediate comment from the military on those strikes.

Israel has continued to carry out daily strikes in Gaza more than 14 months into the war with Hamas. It says it only targets militants, accusing them of hiding among civilians, but the bombings frequently kill women and children.

Israel and Hamas have recently appeared to draw closer to a ceasefire agreement that would include the release of Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners, but several obstacles remain, and the long-running indirect talks have repeatedly stalled.

Vatican envoy celebrates Mass with Gaza's Christians

Dozens of worshippers gathered in the Holy Family Church in Gaza City as Pizzaballa and other clergy celebrated Mass. A Christmas tree was decorated with golden ornaments and twinkling white lights, and altar boys wearing red and white robes held candles.

"For Christmas, we celebrate the light and we are wondering where the light is. This is one of the places where the light is," Pizzaballa said.

The buzz of Israeli drones circling overhead, a sound that has grown ubiquitous across Gaza during the war, could be heard throughout the Mass.

The rare visit to Gaza by the Latin Patriarch came a day after Pope Francis had again criticized Israel's actions in Gaza. Francis said Saturday that his envoy had been unable to enter the territory because of Israeli bombing.

"Yesterday children have been bombed. This is cruelty, this is not war," Francis said during his annual

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Christmas greetings at the Vatican.

The pope recently called for an investigation to determine if Israel's actions in Gaza constitute genocide, a conclusion later reached by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. The International Court of Justice is investigating genocide allegations brought against Israel by South Africa.

Israel, which was founded as a refuge for Jews after the Nazi Holocaust, adamantly rejects such allegations. It says it has made great efforts to spare civilians and is only at war with Hamas, which it accuses of genocidal violence in the attack that ignited the war.

War grinds on as winter sets in

Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel in a surprise attack on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 250. Around 100 hostages are still in Gaza, at least a third of whom are believed to be dead.

Israel's subsequent bombardment and ground invasion have killed over 45,000 people in Gaza, more than half of them women and children, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between fighters and civilians in its count.

The offensive has caused widespread destruction and displaced some 90% of Gaza's 2.3 million people, often multiple times. Hundreds of thousands are packed into squalid tent camps along the coast as the cold, wet winter sets in.

Israel has been carrying out a major operation in northern Gaza since early October, battling Hamas in the most isolated and heavily damaged part of the territory. Tens of thousands have fled as the military has ordered a complete evacuation and allowed almost no humanitarian aid to enter.

The Israeli military body overseeing civilian affairs in Gaza, known as COGAT, said it had facilitated the evacuation of over 100 patients, caregivers and others from the Kamal Adwan Hospital and Al-Awda Hospital in the far north, which have struggled to function. COGAT said it had also facilitated the delivery of 5,000 liters of fuel and food packages to the hospitals.

German police say 4 women and a boy were killed in the Christmas market attack

By MICHAEL PROBST and VANESSA GERA Associated Press

MAGDEBURG, Germany (AP) — More details emerged Sunday about those killed when a man drove a car at speed through a Christmas market in Germany, while mourners continued to place flowers and other tributes at the site of the attack.

Police in Magdeburg, the central city where the attack took place on Friday evening, said that the victims were four women ranging in age from 45 to 75, as well as a 9-year-old boy they had spoken of a day earlier.

Authorities said 200 people were injured, including 41 in serious condition. They were being treated in multiple hospitals in Magdeburg, which is about 130 kilometers (80 miles) west of Berlin, and beyond.

Authorities have identified the suspect in the Magdeburg attack as a Saudi doctor who arrived in Germany in 2006 and had received permanent residency.

The suspect was on Saturday evening brought before a judge, who behind closed doors ordered that he be kept in custody pending a possible indictment.

Police haven't publicly named the suspect, but several German news outlets identified him as Taleb A., withholding his last name in line with privacy laws, and reported that he was a specialist in psychiatry and psychotherapy.

Describing himself as a former Muslim, the suspect appears to have been an active user of the social media platform X, sharing dozens of tweets and retweets daily focusing on anti-Islam themes, criticizing the religion and congratulating Muslims who had left the faith.

He also accused German authorities of failing to do enough to combat what he referred to as the "Islamification of Europe."

The horror triggered by yet another act of mass violence in Germany make it likely that migration will remain a key issue as German heads toward an early election on Feb. 23.

The far-right Alternative for Germany party had already been polling strongly amid a societal backlash against the large numbers of refugees and migrants who have arrived in Germany over the past decade.

Right-wing figures from across Europe have criticized German authorities for having allowed high levels of migration in the past and for what they see as security failures now.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who is known for a strong anti-migration position going back years, used the attack in Germany to lash out at the European Union's migration policies.

At an annual press conference in Budapest on Saturday, Orban insisted that "there is no doubt that there is a link between the changed world in Western Europe, the migration that flows there, especially illegal migration and terrorist acts."

Orban vowed to "fight back" against the EU migration policies "because Brussels wants Magdeburg to happen to Hungary, too."

As flooding becomes a yearly disaster in South Sudan, thousands survive on the edge of a canal

By FLORENCE MIETTAUX Associated Press

AYOD, South Sudan (AP) — Long-horned cattle wade through flooded lands and climb a slope along a canal that has become a refuge for displaced families in South Sudan. Smoke from burning dung rises near homes of mud and grass where thousands of people now live after floods swept away their village.

"Too much suffering," said Bichiok Hoth Chuiny, a woman in her 70s. She supported herself with a stick as she walked in the newly established community of Pajiek in Jonglei state north of the capital, Juba.

For the first time in decades, the flooding had forced her to flee. Her efforts to protect her home by building dykes failed. Her former village of Gorwai is now a swamp.

"I had to be dragged in a canoe up to here," Chuiny said. An AP journalist was the first to visit the community.

Such flooding is becoming a yearly disaster in South Sudan, which the World Bank has described as "the world's most vulnerable country to climate change and also the one most lacking in coping capacity."

More than 379,000 people have been displaced by flooding this year, according to the U.N humanitarian agency.

Seasonal flooding has long been part of the lifestyle of pastoral communities around the Sudd, the largest wetlands in Africa, in the Nile River floodplain. But since the 1960s the swamp has kept growing, submerging villages, ruining farmland and killing livestock.

"The Dinka, Nuer and Murle communities of Jonglei are losing the ability to keep cattle and do farming in that region the way they used to," said Daniel Akech Thiong, a senior analyst with the International Crisis Group.

South Sudan is poorly equipped to adjust. Independent since 2011, the country plunged into civil war in 2013. Despite a peace deal in 2018, the government has failed to address numerous crises. Some 2.4 million people remain internally displaced by conflict and flooding.

The latest overflowing of the Nile has been blamed on factors including the opening of dams upstream in Uganda after Lake Victoria rose to its highest levels in five years.

The century-old Jonglei Canal, which was never completed, has become a refuge for many.

"We don't know up to where this flooding would have pushed us if the canal was not there," said Peter Kuach Gatchang, the paramount chief of Pajiek. He was already raising a small garden of pumpkins and eggplants in his new home.

The 340-kilometer (211-mile) Jonglei Canal was first imagined in the early 1900s by Anglo-Egyptian colonial authorities to increase the Nile's outflow towards Egypt in the north. But its development was interrupted by the long fight of southern Sudanese against the Sudanese regime in Khartoum that eventually led to the creation of a separate country.

Gatchang said the new community in Pajiek is neglected: "We have no school and no clinic here, and if you stay for a few days, you will see us carrying our patients on stretchers up to Ayod town."

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Ayod, the county headquarters, is reached by a six-hour walk through the waist-high water.

Pajiek also has no mobile network and no government presence. The area is under the control of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition, founded by President Salva Kiir's rival turned Vice President Riek Machar.

Villagers rely on aid. On a recent day, hundreds of women lined up in a nearby field to receive some from the World Food Program.

Nyabuot Reat Kuor walked home with a 50-kilogram (110-pound) bag of sorghum balanced on her head.

"This flooding has destroyed our farm, killed our livestock and displaced us for good," the mother of eight said. "Our old village of Gorwai has become a river."

When food assistance runs out, she said, they will survive on wild leaves and water lilies from the swamp. Already in recent years, food aid rations have been cut in half as international funding for such crises drops.

More than 69,000 people who have migrated to the Jonglei Canal in Ayod county are registered for food assistance, according to WFP.

"There are no passable roads at this time of the year, and the canal is too low to support boats carrying a lot of food," said John Kimemia, a WFP airdrop coordinator.

In the neighboring Paguong village that is surrounded by flooded lands, the health center has few supplies. Medics haven't been paid since June due to an economic crisis that has seen civil servants nationwide go unpaid for more than a year.

South Sudan's economic woes have deepened with the disruption of oil exports after a major pipeline was damaged in Sudan during that country's ongoing civil war.

"The last time we got drugs was in September. We mobilized the women to carry them on foot from Ayod town," said Juong Dok Tut, a clinical officer.

Patients, mostly women and children, sat on the ground as they waited to see the doctor. Panic rippled through the group when a thin green snake passed among them. It wasn't poisonous, but many others in the area are. People who venture into the water to fish or collect water lilies are at risk.

Four life-threatening snake bites cases occurred in October, Tut said. "We managed these cases with the antivenom treatments we had, but now they're over, so we don't know what to do if it happens again."

Two US Navy pilots shot down over Red Sea in apparent 'friendly fire' incident, US military says

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Two U.S. Navy pilots were shot down Sunday over the Red Sea in an apparent "friendly fire" incident, the U.S. military said, marking the most serious incident to threaten troops in over a year of America targeting Yemen's Houthi rebels.

Both pilots were recovered alive after ejecting from their stricken aircraft, with one suffering minor injuries. But the shutdown underlines just how dangerous the Red Sea corridor has become over the ongoing attacks on shipping by the Iranian-backed Houthis despite U.S. and European military coalitions patrolling the area.

The U.S. military had conducted airstrikes targeting Yemen's Houthi rebels at the time, though the U.S. military's Central Command did not elaborate on what their mission was and did not immediately respond to questions from The Associated Press.

The F/A-18 shot down had just flown off the deck of the USS Harry S. Truman aircraft carrier, Central Command said. On Dec. 15, Central Command acknowledged the Truman had entered the Mideast, but hadn't specified that the carrier and its battle group was in the Red Sea.

"The guided missile cruiser USS Gettysburg, which is part of the USS Harry S. Truman Carrier Strike Group, mistakenly fired on and hit the F/A-18," Central Command said in a statement.

From the military's description, the aircraft shot down was a two-seat F/A-18 Super Hornet fighter jet assigned to the "Red Rippers" of Strike Fighter Squadron 11 out of Naval Air Station Oceana, Virginia.

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It wasn't immediately clear how the Gettysburg could mistake an F/A-18 for an enemy aircraft or missile, particularly as ships in a battle group remain linked by both radar and radio communication.

However, Central Command said that warships and aircraft earlier shot down multiple Houthi drones and an anti-ship cruise missile launched by the rebels. Incoming hostile fire from the Houthis has given sailors just seconds to make decisions in the past.

Since the Truman's arrival, the U.S. has stepped up its airstrikes targeting the Houthis and their missile fire into the Red Sea and the surrounding area. However, the presence of an American warship group may spark renewed attacks from the rebels, like what the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower saw earlier this year. That deployment marked what the Navy described as its most intense combat since World War II.

On Saturday night and early Sunday, U.S. warplanes conducted airstrikes that shook Sanaa, the capital of Yemen that the Houthis have held since 2014. Central Command described the strikes as targeting a "missile storage facility" and a "command-and-control facility," without elaborating.

Houthi-controlled media reported strikes in both Sanaa and around the port city of Hodeida, without offering any casualty or damage information. In Sanaa, strikes appeared particularly targeted at a mountainside known to be home to military installations. The Houthis later acknowledged the aircraft being shot down in the Red Sea.

The Houthis have targeted about 100 merchant vessels with missiles and drones since the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip started in October 2023 after Hamas' surprise attack on Israel that killed 1,200 people and saw 250 others taken hostage.

Israel's grinding offensive in Gaza has killed more than 45,000 Palestinians, local health officials say. The tally doesn't distinguish between combatants and civilians.

The Houthis have seized one vessel and sunk two in a campaign that has also killed four sailors. Other missiles and drones have either been intercepted by separate U.S.- and European-led coalitions in the Red Sea or failed to reach their targets, which have also included Western military vessels.

The rebels maintain that they target ships linked to Israel, the U.S. or the United Kingdom to force an end to Israel's campaign against Hamas in Gaza. However, many of the ships attacked have little or no connection to the conflict, including some bound for Iran.

The Houthis also have increasingly targeted Israel itself with drones and missiles, resulting in retaliatory Israeli airstrikes.

Isolated Chicago communities secure money for a coveted transit project before Trump takes office

By JEFF McMURRAY Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Adella Bass dropped her in-person college classes because it was just too hard to get there from the far South Side of Chicago, where the city's famous elevated train doesn't run. And it can take her nearly two hours to get to the hospital where she is treated for a heart condition.

But things are looking up, with bright red signs across the area boldly proclaiming, "Ready, Set, Soon!" Next year, the city is poised to start making good on a decades-old promise to connect some of its most isolated, poor and polluted neighborhoods to the rest of the city through mass transit.

The Biden administration notified Congress last week that it would commit \$1.9 billion toward a nearly \$5.7 billion project to add four new L stations on the South Side, the Chicago system's largest expansion project in history. The pledge, which the Federal Transit Administration is expected to formally sign before President Joe Biden leaves office in January, essentially locks in current and future funding.

Still, Bass fears President-elect Donald Trump's administration might try to scuttle it.

Signals abound to assure residents that the project is "a go," said Bass, who is raising three young children and works on health equity issues that affect residents of a massive public housing development near her South Side home. "But you just never know with Trump."

Could Trump slash transit funding?

The \$1 trillion infrastructure plan Biden signed into law in 2021 focused far more heavily on transit than

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anything his predecessor advocated. That is why there has been a scramble to finalize some transit grants before Biden's term ends, including commitments last week for rapid transit upgrades in San Antonio and Salt Lake City.

Yonah Freemark, a researcher at the Urban Institute, said Trump unsuccessfully encouraged Congress in his first term to pass budgets eliminating funding for some new transit projects that hadn't secured their grant agreements. But it has been practically unheard of for administrations to claw back projects after they won final approval.

Steve Davis, who handles transportation strategy for Smart Growth America, said Trump could try to redirect future competitive grants to prioritize highway construction over alternative transportation methods such as transit. He said Trump's Transportation Department could potentially slow down some allocations from already approved infrastructure projects but would have trouble halting them entirely.

"If you're building an enormous \$2 billion road widening, you need to know you're going to have money in year four or five and there's nothing a hostile administration could do to stop it," Davis said.

Bringing back jobs through access

One of the communities that would be served by a new Chicago L station is Roseland, a once-thriving, predominantly Black business district that has fallen victim to the loss of manufacturing and a spike in crime.

Jervon Hicks, who spent many years in and out of jail on gun charges, turned his life around and ended up becoming a mentor for at-risk youth. The new station could help quicken the same transition for others, he said.

"Roseland needs a makeover," Hicks said. "We lack a pet store. We used to have a theater. Take some of these abandoned buildings and turn them into job opportunities."

Unlike the busy "Magnificent Mile" shopping district on Michigan Avenue in the downtown Chicago Loop, the business district on South Michigan Avenue in Roseland has fallen from more than 90% occupancy decades ago to around 10% now.

Among the surviving businesses is Edwards Fashions. Owner Ledall Edwards hopes transportation will spur more to return.

"I don't think it'll get to the level it was back in the 1970s, but I think the environment is going to improve because of the accessibility," he said. "You're going to be able to get people here in this area much faster."

Rogers Jones, who for 30 years has run the Youth Peace Center next to the future train station, said he can't wait for the transformation.

"The community is going to change," Jones said. "It's going to be a vibrant community, and people are excited. I know I'm excited."

A 55-year-old promise

Former Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley told residents of Roseland and surrounding areas in 1969 that the L would eventually expand there.

Tammy Chase, a spokesperson for the Chicago Transit Authority, said the cost then would have been \$114 million compared to around \$5.7 billion now, a figure that would keep rising the longer construction is delayed.

The agency has hired a construction firm, opened a Roseland office in a former paint store and begun boarding up homes that will be demolished for the tracks to run through. Ground is expected to be broken in late 2025, Chase said.

U.S. Rep. Mike Quigley of Illinois, the top Democrat on the subcommittee that oversees transportation spending, points out Chicago's transit system survived wars and depression. It surely also can withstand a pandemic and a presidential administration with different priorities, he said.

"The big infrastructure projects stand the test of time," Quigley said. "These ups and downs, you have to adjust to them, but you recognize transit always comes back. If transit doesn't come back, it stymies opportunities going forward."

Caitlin Clark effect hasn't reversed the decades-long decline in girls basketball participation

By JOSH FUNK Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Plunging participation in girls basketball led one of Nebraska's largest high schools to cancel its varsity team for the year.

The decision by Grand Island Senior High School — the state's third-largest with more than 2,600 students — reflects a national decline in participation in the girls sport, even as the popularity of women's basketball behind the likes of Caitlin Clark and Angel Reese has sent record numbers of fans flocking to arenas or tuning in on TV.

Schools across the country have made similar choices, but that hasn't made the move any easier for those passionate about Grand Island basketball.

"We've seen the train coming. I mean we've been sitting on the tracks forever. But frankly, people just didn't want to do the heavy lifting that was required," said Jeremy Jensen, a former Grand Island mayor and high school soccer coach who wishes more had been done to build a sustainable girls basketball program.

What happened in Grand Island?

The high school in the largely blue-collar city of 52,000 about 120 miles (190 kilometers) west of Omaha decided to cancel its varsity and junior varsity teams this year after no juniors or seniors went out for the sport.

The team suffered a series of lopsided losses, and with many young athletes choosing to specialize in one sport and other activities competing for girls' time, the school decided to focus on developing young players instead of putting a team of freshman and sophomores on the court.

Still, the school's decision was jarring at a time when college and professional women's basketball has been surging in popularity, partly due to the phenomenal success of WNBA Indiana Fever guard Clark, who set records at the University of Iowa.

Kansas State University women's basketball coach Jeff Mittie said more viewers doesn't necessarily mean more players.

"Certainly in college, all of our games are on TV, easy for people to find, but that doesn't necessarily mean they're playing the sport," Mittie said. "It just means they're interested in watching it."

A declining trend

Since Clark was born 22 years ago, participation in girls high school basketball has dropped nearly 20% and the sport has fallen from most popular to number four behind volleyball, soccer and track and field, which all have seen double-digit surges in participation, according to the National Federation of State High School Associations.

Even as the basketball numbers have dropped, total participation in high school sports has grown, with more than 3.4 million girls competing in high school sports last year.

Losing takes a toll

In the past few years in Grand Island, Jim Ward watched every player on his oldest daughter's middle school team quit basketball in high school, either to focus on another sport like volleyball or wrestling or because they lost interest. During that time, the high school girls team was losing games by margins of 70 points or more.

The team lost 43 of its last 44 varsity games and has not won more than three games in a season since 2016-17, with its last winning season in 2009-10.

"If you're Grand Island going into Omaha facing some kids that are going to go D-1 (Division I) and you can only keep up with them for the first half of the first quarter, would you want to play longer?" asked Ward, who serves on the booster club board and has a daughter on the team in 10th grade.

Kelli Jefferies knows success is possible in Grand Island because she led the school to its only state championship in 1979 as a player and racked up 231 victories over 33 years as coach before stepping down in 2012.

But Jefferies said she understands the current struggles.

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"When you're not really able to compete and be competitive, you can see why kids don't want to do it anymore," Jefferies said. "That's not fun for everyone, for coaches and players and anyone involved."

Costly competition

The problems in Grand Island and elsewhere run much deeper than a losing record.

In some communities it can be hard for girls to find opportunities to compete and learn the game when they are young. Many families can't afford to invest the thousands of dollars and countless hours required to play club basketball to prepare them to compete in high school, putting them behind in development.

As teams get competitive earlier and earlier, girls might quit the sport if they are cut in grade school.

Families in Grand Island who want their kids to compete at the highest levels of club sports must drive about two hours twice a week to Lincoln or Omaha for practices and again on the weekends for tournaments if they are not traveling farther to other cities.

Can the sport recover?

Grand Island's current coach, Kathryn Langrehr, works with middle schoolers and offers free basketball clinics at all the city's elementary schools to help build a pipeline of players for the sport.

But rebuilding could be challenging, especially given the pressure on kids to specialize in just one sport.

"It kind of speaks to the world that we're living in with club sports and specialization of sports, where kids want to participate or are only able to participate in one activity," said Jon Dolliver, who oversees basketball at the Nebraska School Activities Association.

Volleyball in particular grew tremendously as the sport became much more visible on television and social media and the U.S. emerged as a world power.

The sport is especially popular in Nebraska, where Creighton University and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the state system's flagship campus, are ranked in the collegiate top 10. Nebraska fell short in the national semifinals on Friday. Last year, 92,003 people filled Nebraska's football stadium to watch a volleyball match, setting a world record for attendance at a women's sporting event.

Brandon Traudt's daughter was a strong basketball player in middle school after growing up alongside her brother Isaac, who now plays for Creighton, but she always preferred volleyball. She will soon pursue that passion at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas.

"I think girls just naturally — especially in the state of Nebraska — gravitate towards volleyball," Traudt said. "Volleyball is just very, very good in this state."

Maybe the popularity of the WNBA and players like Clark could change the trends, but Ward, the Grand Island dad, can envision an 8-year-old telling her parents she wants to play basketball only to be told there is no time for that with volleyball and dance.

"I think the Caitlin Clark thing — it's tough to say if this third grader sees it that she's just going to quit volleyball and start playing basketball now. I don't know," Ward said.

In Assad's hometown, few shared in his family's fortune. They hope they won't share in his downfall

By ABBY SEWELL Associated Press

QARDAHA, Syria (AP) — On the walls of the palatial mausoleum built to house the remains of former Syrian President Hafez Assad, vandals have sprayed variations of the phrase, "Damn your soul, Hafez."

Nearly two weeks after the ouster of his son, Bashar Assad, people streamed in to take photos next to the burned-out hollow where the elder Assad's grave used to be. It was torched by rebel fighters after a lightning offensive overthrew Assad's government, bringing more than a half-century rule by the Assad dynasty to an end.

The mausoleum's sprawling grounds — and the surrounding area, where the ousted president and other relatives had villas — were until recently off limits to residents of Qardaha, the former presidential dynasty's hometown in the mountains overlooking the coastal city of Latakia.

Nearby, Bashar Assad's house was emptied by looters, who left the water taps running to flood it. At a

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villa belonging to three of his cousins, a father and his two young sons were removing pipes to sell the scrap metal. A gutted piano was tipped over on the floor.

While the Assads lived in luxury, most Qardaha residents — many, like Assad, members of the Alawite minority sect — survived on manual labor, low-level civil service jobs and farming to eke out a living. Many sent their sons to serve in the army, not out of loyalty to the government but because they had no other option.

“The situation was not what the rest of the Syrian society thought,” said Deeb Dayoub, an Alawite sheikh. “Everyone thought Qardaha was a city built on a marble rock and a square of aquamarine in every house,” he said, referring to the trappings of wealth enjoyed by Assad’s family.

In the city’s main street, a modest strip of small grocery stores and clothing shops, Ali Youssef, stood next to a coffee cart, gesturing with disdain. “This street is the best market and the best street in Qardaha and it’s full of potholes.”

Families resorted to eating bread dipped in oil and salt because they could not afford meat or vegetables, he said. Youssef said he dodged mandatory military service for two years, but eventually was forced to go.

“Our salary was 300,000 Syrian pounds,” a month, he said — just over \$20. “We used to send it to our families to pay the rent or live and eat with it” while working jobs on the side to cover their own expenses.

“Very few people benefited from the former deposed regime,” Youssef said.

So far, residents said, the security forces made up of fighters from Hayat Tahrir al-Sham — the main group in the coalition that unseated Assad, and which is now ruling the country — have been respectful toward them.

“The security situation is fine so far, it’s acceptable, no major issues,” said Mariam al-Ali, who was in the market with her daughter. “There were a few abuses ... but it was fixed.” She did not elaborate, but others said there had been scattered incidents of robberies and looting or threats and insults.

Al-Ali called Assad a “traitor,” but she remained circumspect about her Alawite community’s position in the new Syria.

“The most important thing is that there should be no sectarianism, so there will be no more blood spilled,” she said.

Dayoub, the Alawite sheikh, described “a state of anticipation and caution among all citizens in this area, and in general among Alawites,” although he said fears have started to ease.

At the town’s municipal building, dozens of notables sat on bleachers discussing the country’s new reality and what they hoped to convey to the new leadership.

Much was centered around economic woes — retired public servants’ salaries had not been paid, the price of fuel had risen, there was no public transportation in the area.

But others had larger concerns.

“We hope that in the next government or the new Syria, we will have rights and duties like any Syrian citizen — we are not asking for any more or less,” said Jaafar Ahmed, a doctoral student and community activist. “We don’t accept the curtailment of our rights because the regime was part of this component.”

Questions also loomed about the fate of the area’s sons who had served in Assad’s army.

Since the army’s collapse in the face of the rebel advance, residents said several thousand young army recruits from Qardaha have gone missing. Some later turned up on lists of former soldiers being held at a detention center in Hama.

“These are young guys who are 22 or 23 and they never took part” in active combat, said Qais Ibrahim, whose nephews were among the missing. Over the past few years, active combat was largely frozen in the country’s civil war. “We send our children to the army because we don’t have any other source of income.”

Um Jaafar, who gave only her nickname out of fear of reprisals, said the family had no information about the fate of her two sons, stationed with the army in Raqqa and Deir Ezzour, though one son’s name later turned up on the list of those imprisoned in Hama.

“My children got the best grades in school, but I didn’t have the ability to send them to the university,” she said. “They went to the army just for a salary that was barely enough to cover their transportation

costs.”

Syria’s new authorities have set up “reconciliation centers” around the country where former soldiers can register, hand over their weapons and receive a “reconciliation ID” allowing them to move freely and safely in Syria for three months.

But Ahmed, the doctoral student, said he wants more. As the country attempts to unify and move on after nearly 14 years of civil war, he said, “We want either forgiveness for all or accountability for all.”

Ahmed acknowledged that during the war, “rural Latakia was responsible for some radical groups,” referring to pro-Assad militias accused of widespread abuses against civilians. But, he said, opposition groups also committed abuses.

Rebels often indiscriminately targeted Alawites because they were seen as the firmest pillar of Assad’s rule — and some Islamist extremists among the rebels consider them heretics.

“We hope that there will be either an open process of reconciliation ... or transitional justice in which all will be held accountable for their mistakes, from all parties,” he said.

“We can’t talk about holding accountable one ... group but not another.”

The water was their livelihood. Now Thailand’s sea nomads work to preserve a vanishing way of life

By HUIZHONG WU and JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI Associated Press

SURIN ISLANDS, Thailand (AP) — When Hook was a child, he started his days by jumping off the boat that his family lived on and into the ocean. By age 3, he could already swim and dive in shallow waters. His home was a kabang, a boat, that his family sailed in Thailand’s southern waters. The ocean was his backyard.

Now Hook, whose full name is Suriyan Klathale, lives on land like the rest of his community, a people known as the Moken. The recollections of his childhood, which many Moken of his generation still have, are mostly just memories.

The community, a group of indigenous people from Thailand and Myanmar, came to worldwide attention for its members’ understanding of waves when the Indian Ocean Tsunami struck in December 2004 and killed more than 200,000 people. The few tourists who happened to be on the islands inhabited by the Moken survived because locals knew when they saw the water recede that people needed to get to higher ground.

Today, things are different and changing fast. This once free-sailing people have been grounded by powerful forces of change.

How do you hold onto tradition when everything is working against it?

The Moken are one of the various tribal groups and indigenous communities not formally recognized by the Thai government. For years, activists from these communities have tried to push for formal recognition with a bill that would help them hold on to traditions.

But as recently as October, the latest draft of this proposed bill, called the Protection and Promotion of Ethnic Groups’ Way of Life, was tabled by Parliament. The bill would legally guarantee these communities’ basic rights, such as health care, education and land, as well as provide government support to preserve their ethnic identities.

For the Moken, the kabang and their way of living on the ocean are something they hope the law could help preserve. The wooden boat, with a distinctive curve that juts out from its bow and a pavilion set in the middle, is central to the Moken’s identity. “It’s like a lifetime of a person, of a family,” Hook said. “In the past, we lived and died on that boat.”

Multiple generations could live on a kabang, which were much bigger in the past. The parents would stay in the middle of the boat; their married children lived at the front until they built their own boat.

Tat, an elder in the Moken community who uses only one name, said that a Moken became an adult when he could build a boat. It meant he was capable of starting a family.

Today, though, almost no one lives on a boat. Narumon Arunotai, an associate professor at Chulalongkorn

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University in Bangkok who has worked with the Moken and other indigenous communities for decades, said the shift toward permanent dwelling on land had already started more than 40 years ago.

It was a gradual shift, driven both by stricter border controls as well as the inability to get the wood necessary to build the kabangs. Further, the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004 destroyed many of the traditional boats. The change to dwelling on land has happened with other communities known colloquially as sea nomads in Thailand as well.

The Moken are scattered across an archipelago of some 800 islands on the coast of Myanmar and Thailand. In the days when they lived on boats, Moken stayed on land only during the monsoon season, which started around May. They'd stay on land until the winds shifted, usually around December, and then abandon their temporary homes for the sea. For food, they fished and foraged.

Many of the older generation were born on boats and sailed regularly amongst the islands.

"We could move freely without having to worry about the Myanmar government or the Thai government," said Tawan Klathale, Hook's older brother, who was born on a boat. All Moken in Thailand use the surname Klathale, given to the community by one of Thailand's former queens.

"Back then," said the brother, who is known as Ngui, "there was no clear line to where is Myanmar and where is Thailand."

Freedoms began to constrict, and making boats became harder

But by the time Ngui and Hook were teenagers, they could no longer travel as freely between those islands. Many Moken started settling more permanently in the Surin Islands, off the Thai coast. Some came from Myanmar to Thailand, looking for jobs and safety from pirates. Hook's family stayed ashore.

The parts of the community that stayed in Thailand found that the land they had always visited each season had become a national park by 1981. As a result, they could no longer cut down the large trees they needed to build their boats.

To make a kabang, one needs a good strong tree, at least 1 meter wide and 10 meters tall. The trunk needs to be straight and be free of defects. Over the course of months, men of the community would dig out the trunk and carve it into a boat's hull, while also using fire to make the wood pliable and stretch it out. It was a communal thing, involving up to 10 people.

Now, it's difficult to gather enough people. Other men of the village would often be out working during the day. They did not have time to join and work together on a boat.

Ngui and other members of an informal group called Moken Pa Ti'ao, concerned they were losing the knowledge of boat-building, said they approached the park now and then across the years get a tree to make the boat. They were refused years ago by the chief of Mu Ko Surin National Park. The group hasn't asked since.

The park allows them to cut down only small trees, said Ngui, who is also assistant to the village chief in Surin Island. "The restrictions has been like this as far as we can remember."

Today, the village in Surin only has one kabang, built by Tat and used mostly to ferry tourists and take children out on day trips. Hook, who lives on the mainland in Thailand, also has a kabang built with the funding of a private donor from Norway after a filmmaker made a documentary about his journey to make one such boat in 2014. But his kabang is built with planks of wood, rather than a single hollowed out tree.

They are among the few keen to remember the boats and other traditions. Tat says he has made sure to pass down what he knew to his children, from songs to boat building.

"If my generation is gone, there would be just very few people left who know how to do these things," Tat said.

Learning about the ocean remains a priority

Together, Tat and Wilasinee Klathale, a teacher at the school on the island, also try to take village children out on the boats to teach them about the ocean as well as about music and dance.

"It's not in the curriculum, but I added them myself, because I could see that these things are going to be lost," Wilasinee said.

Today, young Moken are more worried about their livelihoods and finding jobs than how to build a boat. Most only make money during Thailand's peak tourist season when the national park is open to tourists,

from November to April, and have to live on that money for the rest of the year.

Boyen Klathale, a young Moken man, said it's difficult to find a job. On Surin, the opportunities are either with the national park or operating boats to take tourists out. Though it's peak season, he wasn't able to find a job this year, and he didn't want to leave behind his family to find work on the mainland.

The Moken have asked for more fishing rights in the past, but were denied a further quota beyond the subsistence amount they're allowed from the park. Ngui, the village chief's assistant, said he hopes the Moken can sell the souvenirs they make to tourists all year around with help from the government.

The future holds some hope. In 2024, the Surin Islands National Park appointed a new chief, Kriengkrai Pohcharoen. In a shift, he said he was open to collaborating with the Moken on a kabang — as long as it was a tree that fell over on its own.

"I think about how to improve their quality of life, and how they can sustainably live in nature," he said. "I want them to have a good quality of life."

The Moken are realistic about their permanent switch to land. These days, most prefer it. But some still remember the old ways — and an aquamarine bay filled with handmade kabangs.

"The world is changing and that's the way it is, if you ask me," Ngui said. "I think everything is bound to be lost at some point, but I just want it to stay as long as possible."

What Trump's decision to wade into spending fight tells us about the next 4 years

By CHRIS MEGERIAN, STEPHEN GROVES, JILL COLVIN and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — After days of threats and demands, Donald Trump had little to show for it once lawmakers passed a budget deal in the early hours of Saturday, narrowly averting a pre-Christmas government shutdown.

The president-elect successfully pushed House Republicans to jettison some spending, but he failed to achieve his central goal of raising the debt limit. It demonstrated that despite his decisive election victory and frequent promises of retribution, many members of his party are still willing to openly defy him.

Trump's decision to inject himself into the budget debate a month before his inauguration also showed that he remains more adept at blowing up deals than making them, and it foreshadowed that his second term will likely be marked by the same infighting, chaos and brinksmanship that characterized his first.

"Stay tuned. Buckle up. Strap in," said Rep. Steve Womack, R-Ark., a senior appropriator.

A glance at Trump's agenda shows a cascade of opportunities for similar showdowns in the years to come. He wants to extend tax cuts that he signed into law seven years ago, slash the size of government, increase tariffs on imports and crack down on illegal immigrants. Many of those efforts will need congressional buy-in.

For many of Trump's supporters, disruption could be its own goal. Thirty-seven percent of those who voted for him this year said they wanted "complete and total upheaval," according to AP VoteCast, a broad survey of more than 120,000 voters. An additional 56% said they wanted "substantial change."

But the past few days made clear the difficulty Trump could face in quickly fulfilling his goals, especially with Republicans holding only thin majorities in the House and the Senate. Some lawmakers already seem weary of the apparent lack of a unified strategy.

Sen. Kevin Cramer, R-N.D., said the budget battle was "a valuable lesson in how to get our act together." "There are no layoffs and it gets more complicated," he said.

How Trump's demands fell flat

The trouble started when top lawmakers released a copy of the bill, known as a continuing resolution, that was required to keep the federal government functioning until March. It wasn't the president-elect but Elon Musk, the world's richest man and a Trump confidant, who first began whipping up opposition to the legislation on social media by calling it excessive spending.

Trump eventually waded into the fight. He ordered Republicans to cancel the bipartisan deal they had made with Democrats. And he demanded they increase the debt limit — the cap on how much the gov-

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ernment can borrow — in hopes of preventing that thorny issue from coming up while he is in charge of the government.

He ratcheted up the pressure even as his demands shifted. First he wanted to eliminate the debt limit altogether. Then he wanted to suspend it until 2027. Then he floated an extension until 2029.

If there was a shutdown, Democratic President Joe Biden would take the blame, Trump insisted.

"All Republicans, and even the Democrats, should do what is best for our Country, and vote "YES" for this Bill, TONIGHT!" Trump wrote Thursday, before a vote on a version of the bill that included a higher debt limit.

Instead, 38 Republicans voted no. It was a stunning brush-off to Trump, whose power over his party has at times seemed near-absolute.

"Without this, we should never make a deal," he wrote on Truth Social, his social media site.

If he didn't get what he wanted, Trump said, there should be a government shutdown. He also said members of his own party would face primary challenges if they refused to go along, saying "Republican obstructionists have to be done away with." He singled out Rep. Chip Roy of Texas by name and with insults.

But in the end, lawmakers left out that debt ceiling increase, and a final deal passed early Saturday.

Musk and other Trump allies tried to frame it as a win because the final legislation was significantly slimmed down and omitted unpopular items such as a pay raise for members of Congress. Charlie Kirk, the prominent conservative activist, wrote on X that Trump "is already running Congress before he takes office!"

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said he had been in "constant contact" with Trump, who, he added was "certainly happy about this outcome."

If Trump agreed, he didn't say so himself.

After days of frequent social media messages, Trump again went silent on Friday. He did not offer a reaction to the final vote or issue any statements. Instead, he went golfing at his Florida resort.

Karoline Leavitt, a spokesperson for Trump, said the president-elect helped prevent an original deal "full of Democrat pork and pay raises for members of Congress."

"In January, President Trump and DOGE will continue this important mission to cut the waste out of Washington, one bill at a time," she said. DOGE is a reference to the Department of Government Efficiency, an advisory panel that will be led by Musk and entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy.

More clashes to come

The circus-like atmosphere of the funding fight was reminiscent of Trump's first term. Back then, one budget standoff led to a government shutdown when Trump demanded money for his U.S.-Mexico border wall. After 35 days — the longest shutdown in history — he agreed to a deal without the money he wanted.

It was a political low point for Trump, and 60% of Americans blamed him for the shutdown, according to an Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll at the time.

Trump didn't stop trying to bend Republicans to his will then. He's certainly not going to do so now.

He is cranking up the pressure on his own party over his Cabinet picks, pushing reluctant Republican senators to get on board with some of his most controversial choices, such as anti-vaccine activist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as health secretary and Fox News host Pete Hegseth as defense secretary.

The spending debates next year seem certain to further test Trump's influence in the House. Many conservatives view the rapid growth of the federal debt as an existential threat to the country that must be addressed. But some Republicans fear a voter backlash if steep cuts are made to federal programs upon which Americans rely.

Concerns about deficit spending could intensify if Trump pushes expensive tax cuts that he promised during the campaign, such as eliminating taxes on tips, Social Security and overtime pay.

He also wants to extend the tax cuts he signed into law in 2017 that are set to expire next year. He has called for further lowering the U.S. corporate tax rate from 21% to 15%, but only for companies that produce in the United States.

Trump has said he will pay for the dips in revenue with aggressive new tariffs that economists warn will lead to higher prices for consumers.

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Rep. Dan Crenshaw, R-Texas, said reducing spending would likely continue to be a gulf between Trump and House Republicans.

"That's never been really a campaign promise of Trump, but it's a big priority for House Republicans," he said.

There was no sense that the animosity was dying down on Saturday. Some Republicans faulted the House leadership for not securing Trump's "blessing" on the original deal. Democrats cast Trump as second fiddle to Musk.

While Trump stayed quiet, Biden announced that he signed the budget legislation.

"This agreement represents a compromise, which means neither side got everything it wanted," he said. "But it rejects the accelerated pathway to a tax cut for billionaires that Republicans sought, and it ensures the government can continue to operate at full capacity."

Germans mourn the 5 killed and 200 injured in the apparent attack on a Christmas market

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER, GEIR MOULSON and VANESSA GERA Associated Press

MAGDEBURG, Germany (AP) — Germans on Saturday mourned the victims of an apparent attack in which authorities say a doctor drove into a busy outdoor Christmas market, killing five people, injuring 200 others and shaking the public's sense of security at what would otherwise be a time of joy.

The alleged attack Friday evening in Magdeburg, about 130 kilometers (80 miles) west of Berlin, killed a 9-year-old and four adults and injured 41 people badly enough that authorities warned the death toll could rise.

Magdeburg marked the tragedy Saturday with the tolling church bells at 7:04 p.m., the exact time of the attack in the city of roughly 240,000 people.

The driver, a 50-year-old doctor who immigrated from Saudi Arabia in 2006, surrendered to police at the scene. He's being investigated for five counts of suspected murder and 205 counts of suspected attempted murder, prosecutor Horst Walter Nopens said at a news conference.

Among other things, investigators are looking into whether the attack could have been motivated by the suspect's dissatisfaction with the way Germany treats Saudi refugees, Nopens said.

"There is no more peaceful and cheerful place than a Christmas market," Chancellor Olaf Scholz said. "What a terrible act it is to injure and kill so many people there with such brutality."

More on the suspect police arrested

Although Nopens mentioned the treatment of Saudi immigrants angle, authorities said Saturday that they still didn't know why the suspect drove his black BMW into the crowded market.

Police haven't publicly named the suspect, but several German news outlets identified him as Taleb A., withholding his last name in line with privacy laws, and reported that he was a specialist in psychiatry and psychotherapy.

Describing himself as a former Muslim, the suspect appears to have been an active user of the social media platform X, sharing dozens of tweets and retweets daily focusing on anti-Islam themes, criticizing the religion and congratulating Muslims who had left the faith.

He also accused German authorities of failing to do enough to combat what he referred to as the "Islamification of Europe."

Magdeburg is shaken

The violence shocked Germany and Magdeburg, which is the capital of the eastern state of Saxony-Anhalt, bringing its mayor to the verge of tears and marring the centuries-old German tradition of Christmas markets. It led several other communities to cancel their weekend Christmas markets as a precaution and out of solidarity with Magdeburg's loss. Berlin kept its many markets open but increased its police presence at them.

Germany has suffered a string of extremist attacks in recent years, including a knife attack that killed three people and wounded eight at a festival in the western city of Solingen in August.

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Friday's attack came eight years after an Islamic extremist drove a truck into a crowded Christmas market in Berlin, killing 13 people and injuring many others. The attacker was killed days later in a shootout in Italy.

Chancellor Scholz and Interior Minister Nancy Faeser traveled to Magdeburg, where a memorial service took place Saturday. Faeser ordered flags lowered to half-staff at federal buildings across the country.

Although many people went to the site with candles to mourn the victims, several hundred far-right protesters gathered in a central square in Magdeburg with a banner that read "remigration," German news agency dpa reported.

A witness recounts the horrifying attack

Verified bystander footage distributed by dpa showed the suspect's arrest at a tram stop in the middle of the road. A nearby police officer pointing a handgun at the man shouted at him as he lay prone, his head arched up slightly. Other officers swarmed around the suspect and took him into custody.

Thi Linh Chi Nguyen, a 34-year-old manicurist from Vietnam whose salon is in a mall across from the Christmas market, was on the phone during a break when she heard loud bangs that she thought were fireworks. She then saw a car drive through the market at high speed. People screamed and a child was thrown into the air by the car.

Shaking as she described what she had witnessed, she recalled seeing the car bursting out of the market and turning right onto Ernst-Reuter-Allee street and then coming to a standstill at the tram stop where the suspect was arrested.

The number of injured people was overwhelming.

"My husband and I helped them for two hours. He ran back home and grabbed as many blankets as he could find because they didn't have enough to cover the injured people. And it was so cold," she said.

The market itself was still cordoned off Saturday with red and white tape and police vans, as armed officers guarded at every entrance. Some thermal security blankets still lay on the street.

Former walk-on DeLuca provides early spark, Penn State drills SMU 38-10 in CFP; Boise State up next

By WILL GRAVES AP National Writer

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. (AP) — In a time of incessant change, Penn State linebacker Dominic DeLuca is a throwback.

The former walk-on's team might be one too.

DeLuca was guaranteed nothing when he arrived on campus nearly four years ago without the promise of a scholarship or much of anything else. He poured himself into his craft, carving out a niche as a special teams ace while working his way into the rotation on a defense that considers itself the best in the country.

With sixth-seeded Penn State off to a somewhat jittery start on Saturday against SMU in the first round of the College Football Playoff, the Nittany Lions needed a jolt.

DeLuca provided two.

The first came on a pick-6 that gave Penn State an early lead. The second cut short an SMU drive when the Mustangs were threatening to get back in the game and set the stage for a 38-10 blowout that pushed the Nittany Lions (12-2) into the CFP quarterfinals against third-seeded Boise State in the Fiesta Bowl on New Year's Eve.

"Dom is just a baller," Penn State head coach James Franklin said after picking up his 100th victory with the school.

One whose journey may become increasingly rare when the NCAA trims roster sizes to 105 starting next season.

"It breaks my heart a little bit that maybe Dom isn't here if these rules were in place (when he arrived)," Franklin said.

The old ones still exist, for now. And Franklin used them to build a team that now has as many wins as any of the 130 editions that came before it.

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"We're a college football program that everybody should be proud of because those guys are doing it the right way at a time when it's more challenging than it's ever been," he said.

Linebacker Tony Rojas added a pick-6 of his own and Penn State shut down Kevin Jennings and the high-powered Mustangs (11-3), whose breakout season ended amid a flurry of mistakes and miscues and did little to shed the notion — particularly by those in Alabama — that the ACC runners-up didn't necessarily deserve a spot in the 12-team field in the first place.

"I can't control the debate," SMU coach Rhett Lashlee said. "I can't control what people are going to say. We got in. Today we got beat. We got beat soundly by a very good team."

Two weeks after getting pushed around by Oregon in the Big Ten title game, Penn State responded by forcing three turnovers and collecting three sacks while holding the Mustangs to season lows in points and yards (253).

"We wanted to put on a defensive performance like we did," Penn State defensive tackle Dvon J-Thomas said. "Two pick-6s. Stopped the run. Stopped the pass game. We truly shut everything down."

Jennings, whose electrifying play fueled SMU's undefeated regular-season sprint through the ACC, finished 20 of 36 for 195 yards with a late touchdown and three picks. He began the day by missing a wide-open tight end Matthew Hibner at the goal line to end the Mustangs' promising opening possession, and things only got worse from there, for Jennings and everyone else who made the nearly 1,400-mile trip from Dallas to central Pennsylvania.

His flip to Brashard Smith on SMU's second drive sailed over the running back's head and into the arms of an awaiting DeLuca, who raced 23 yards to the end zone to give Penn State the lead. Early in the second quarter, Jennings scrambled to his right and threw against his body into triple coverage. Rojas snagged it and weaved 59 yards to stake the Nittany Lions to a 14-0 lead they never came close to squandering.

Kaytron Allen ran for two scores and Nick Singleton added another for the Nittany Lions, a bruising 1-yard gash late in the first half that put Penn State up 28-0. Singleton punctuated it by jawing with Franklin on the sideline.

"He screamed at me and used some words ... and said 'I'm a violent man,'" Franklin said. "I kind of agreed with him."

Drew Allar completed 13 of 22 passes for 127 yards while playing every meaningful snap after backup Beau Pribula — who occasionally and effectively spelled Allar throughout the year — entered the transfer portal earlier this week.

And unlike the ACC title game against Clemson — when the Mustangs roared all the way back from a 17-point second-half deficit to tie it before falling on the final snap — this time there would be no rally.

The last two quarters were mostly a chance for the crowd of over 106,000 that braved temperatures in the low-20s with a pretty steady breeze to soak in the kind of big game victory that hasn't happened quite as often as they would like during James Franklin's largely successful 11-year tenure.

With one test now passed, another big one awaits in the desert on the last day of 2024.

Takeaways

SMU: The Mustangs' historic first season in the ACC after coming over from the American Athletic ended with a disappointing thud. If Jennings hits Hibner for a score, maybe things change. They'll have all off-season to think about it.

Penn State: Singleton and Allen believe they are the best running back combination in the country. They certainly looked it while teaming up to run for 160 yards and three scores.

Up next

SMU: will try to back up their audacious ACC debut next fall, when their conference slate includes games against Miami, Clemson and Louisville.

Penn State: Will try to win a 13th game for the first time in the program's 131-year history when it heads to the Fiesta Bowl, a game in which the Nittany Lions are 7-0 all-time.

38 people are dead and over 100 missing in Congo after a ferry capsizes on the Busira River

By JEAN-YVES KAMALE and WILSON McMAKIN Associated Press

KINSHASA, Congo (AP) — A ferry overloaded with people returning home for Christmas capsized on the Busira River in northeastern Congo, leaving 38 people confirmed dead and over 100 others missing, officials and eyewitnesses said Saturday. Twenty people have been rescued so far.

The sinking of the ferry late Friday came less than four days after another boat capsized in the country's northeast, killing 25 people.

The ferry was traveling as part of a convoy of other vessels and the passengers were primarily merchants returning home for Christmas, said Joseph Joseph Kangolingoli, the mayor of Ingende, the last town on the river before the site of the accident.

According to Ingende resident Ndolo Kaddy, the ferry contained "more than 400 people because it made two ports, Ingende and Loolo, on the way to Boende, so there is reason to believe there were more deaths."

Congolese officials have often warned against overloading boats and vowed to punish those violating safety measures on rivers. However, in remote areas many people cannot afford public transportation on the few available roads.

At least 78 people drowned in October when an overloaded boat sank in the country's east while 80 lost their lives in a similar accident near Kinshasa in June.

The latest accident prompted anger at the government for not equipping the convoy with flotation devices.

Nesty Bonina, a member of the local government and a prominent figure in Mbandaka, the capital of the Equateur province where the ferry sank, condemned authorities for not properly handling the recent sinkings.

"How can a ship navigate at night under the watchful eye of river service agents? And now we're recording over a hundred deaths," said Bonina.

The capsizing of overloaded boats is becoming increasingly frequent in this central African nation as more people are giving up the few available roads in favor of wooden vessels crumbling under the weight of passengers and their goods for security reasons.

The roads are often caught up in the deadly clashes between Congolese security forces and rebels that sometimes block major access routes.

A rocket from Yemen strikes Tel Aviv, injuring 16, and Palestinians mourn a dozen children in Gaza

By MELANIE LIDMAN and WAAFA SHURAFU Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — A rocket fired from Yemen hit an area of Tel Aviv overnight, leaving 16 people injured by shattered glass, the Israeli military said Saturday, days after Israeli airstrikes hit Houthi rebels who have been launching missiles in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza.

Another 14 people had minor injuries as they rushed to shelters when air raid sirens sounded before dawn, the military said.

The Houthis in a statement on Telegram said they had aimed a hypersonic ballistic missile at a military target that they did not identify. Israel's military said it was investigating, adding that "we emphasize that aerial defense is not hermetic."

"A flash of light, a blow and we fell to the ground. Big mess, broken glasses all over the place," said Bar Katz, a resident of a damaged building.

The Houthis' media office later reported airstrikes on Yemen's Houthi-held capital, Sanaa. U.S. forces conducted airstrikes against a missile storage facility and a command facility operated by the Houthis, the U.S. Central Command said in a statement on X.

The attack on Tel Aviv came after Israeli airstrikes on Sanaa and the port city of Hodeida killed at least nine people Thursday. The strikes came hours after a missile from Yemen hit a school building in central

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Israel. The Houthis also claimed a drone strike targeting an unspecified military target in central Israel that day.

Israel's military says the Iran-backed Houthis have launched more than 200 missiles and drones during the 14-month Israel-Hamas war in Gaza. The Houthis have also attacked shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden and say they won't stop until there is a ceasefire in Gaza.

The Israeli strikes Thursday caused "considerable damage" to the Houthi-controlled Red Sea ports, U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said. The Hodeida port has been key for food shipments into Yemen in its decade-long civil war.

Israeli strikes in Gaza kill a dozen children

Mourners in Gaza held funerals for 19 Palestinians — 12 of them children — killed in Israeli strikes on Friday and overnight.

One strike hit a residential building in the built-up Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza, killing at least seven, including five children and one woman, and injuring 16 others, health officials said.

In Gaza City, a strike on a house killed 12, including seven children and two women, according to Al-Ahli Hospital where the bodies were taken. One man cradled a tiny shroud-wrapped body as mourners gathered.

Later Saturday, al-Awda Hospital said an airstrike hit a house in Nuseirat and killed four people including two children, with 14 other people wounded. Israel's military said it was checking the report.

And Saturday night, large explosions could be seen on the Gaza skyline. Five bodies arrived soon afterward at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah.

More than 45,200 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza since October 2023, when a Hamas attack in Israel killed about 1,200 people and triggered the war. Gaza's Health Ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants but has said more than half of fatalities are women and children.

Israel faces heavy international criticism over the unprecedented levels of civilian deaths in Gaza. It says it only targets militants and blames Hamas for civilian deaths because its fighters operate in residential areas.

Northern Gaza hospital says it is told to evacuate

The director of Kamal Adwan Hospital in Beit Lahiya in largely isolated northern Gaza said in an online message late Saturday that Israel's military had told the facility to evacuate.

Dr. Husam Abu Safiyeh asserted that the intensive care unit, maternity ward and other departments were being targeted, and said evacuating would mean transferring 66 patients.

Israel's military in response to questions said it was "not aware of any strikes in the area of the hospital at this time." There was no immediate response to questions about the reported evacuation order.

Gaza's Health Ministry earlier reported continuous gunfire and Israeli shelling near the hospital, and it issued an urgent appeal for medical and food supplies to be delivered to the facility as Israel's military pressed its latest offensive.

Safiyeh has said the facility faced "severe shortages" including of food and asserted that requests for essential medical supplies and ways to maintain oxygen, water and electricity systems "have largely gone unmet."

Aid groups have said Israeli military operations and armed gangs have hindered their ability to distribute aid.

The Israeli military organization dealing with humanitarian affairs for Gaza said Saturday it had led an operation delivering thousands of food packages, flour and water to the Beit Hanoun area in the north..

A killing in Syria

Iran on Saturday said unknown gunmen killed a local staffer of the Iranian Embassy in Syria in Damascus last Sunday, the official IRNA news agency said.

Its report quoted Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei as saying "terrorists" opened fire on Davood Bitaraf's car. It did not say what he did with the embassy. The shooting happened the day that opposition fighters took Damascus and ousted Syrian leader Bashar Assad.

Baghaei said Iran considers Syria's interim government responsible for finding and prosecuting those behind the killing. Iran had been a key Assad ally.

Amazon and Starbucks workers are on strike. Trump might have something to do with it

By HALELUYA HADERO AP Business Writer

Amazon delivery drivers and Starbucks baristas are on strike in a handful of U.S. cities as they seek to exert pressure on the two major companies to recognize them as unionized employees or to meet demands for an inaugural labor contract.

The strikes that started Thursday and Friday followed other recent standoffs between corporate America and organized labor. Large and established labor unions secured meaningful employer concessions this year following strikes by Boeing factory workers, dockworkers at East and Gulf coast ports, video game performers, and hotel and casino workers on the Las Vegas Strip.

But workers at Starbucks, Amazon and some other prominent consumer brands still are fighting for their first contracts. Amazon refuses to acknowledge the organizing efforts of drivers and warehouse workers — many of whom have voted to unionize — even though the powerful Teamsters union says it represents them. Starbucks long resisted the unionization of its stores, but had agreed to negotiate a contract by the end of the year.

Why are the strikes happening now?

Strikes — particularly ones that happen during the holidays, a time of high economic activity — can help unions exercise leverage during negotiations or flex their muscles by garnering support from workers and sympathetic consumers.

Both Amazon and Starbucks saw a wave of organizing efforts following the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic focused attention on front-line workers and the impact of economic inequality on the lives of wage-earning Americans.

Employees organized at bookstores, where unions are rare, and were successful with campaigns at some stores run by Apple, Trader Joe's and the outdoor equipment company REI.

But turning those wins into contracts can be a challenge. At Amazon and Starbucks, which were not unionized before the pandemic, workers have yet to secure an agreement with the e-commerce and coffee giants, which both have their headquarters in Seattle.

John Logan, director of labor and employment studies at San Francisco State University, said he thinks the Amazon and Starbucks workers are "desperate" to make progress before President-elect Donald Trump gets to appoint a Republican majority to the National Labor Relations Board, which is expected to be less friendly to unions during his administration.

"The unions want to make these disputes public and bring political pressures on the companies," Logan said in a written statement. "If these disputes drag on until next year, and if they are fought largely through the labor board and the courts, the unions and workers will almost certainly lose. This might be their last, best chance to pressure the companies in public before Trump comes into office."

However, Trump has also given some signs that he might be friendlier to labor during his second term compared to his first term. Last month, he picked Oregon Rep. Lori Chavez-DeRemer to lead the Department of Labor in his new administration, elevating a Republican congresswoman who has strong support from unions, including the Teamsters. Teamsters President Sean O'Brien also spoke at the Republican National Convention this past summer.

Teamster-led strikes at Amazon

The Teamsters say workers at Amazon are striking at seven delivery stations in Southern California, San Francisco, New York City, Atlanta and Skokie, Illinois, because the company ignored a Sunday deadline the union had set for contract negotiations. At midnight on Saturday, the Teamsters say workers will also strike at a prominent warehouse in New York, which voted to join the fledgling Amazon Labor Union in 2022 and have since elected to affiliate with the Teamsters.

The prominent labor group says it's fighting for higher wages, better benefits and safer working conditions for Amazon employees, many of whom experience economic insecurity while working for a company worth \$2.3 trillion. It has not said how many Amazon warehouse workers or drivers are joining the striking.

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The union has mainly focused on organizing delivery drivers, which the company says are not its workers because they are directly employed by contractors Amazon recruited to handle package deliveries.

That type of setup gives the Amazon more cover from unionization attempts in an industry — transportation and trucking — that's dominated by the Teamsters. However, the union has argued before the National Labor Relations Board that the drivers, who wear Amazon's ubiquitous gray-blue vests and drive similarly colored vans, should be classified as company employees.

Meanwhile, the online retailer has accused the union of pushing a "false narrative" about the thousands of workers it claims to represent. Amazon has also touted its pay, saying it provides warehouse and transportation employees a base wage of \$22 per hour plus benefits. It also recently boosted hourly pay for the subcontracted delivery drivers.

In September, the NLRB, which has taken a more pro-labor stance under President Joe Biden, filed a complaint that found the drivers to be joint employees of Amazon. The agency also accused Amazon of unlawfully failing to bargain with the Teamsters on a contract for drivers at a California delivery hub.

The Teamsters union says it also represents Amazon warehouse workers, including thousands of employees at the major New York City fulfillment center who voted to be represented by the Amazon Labor Union.

Amazon objected to the 2022 warehouse election results, alleging the Amazon Labor Union and the federal labor board had tainted the vote. A regional NLRB director issued a complaint last year that accused Amazon of violating the law by refusing to bargain with the union.

Amazon, in turn, is challenging the constitutionality of the NLRB in federal court along with Elon Musk's SpaceX. In June, the Supreme Court made it harder for the agency to win court orders in labor disputes, siding with Starbucks in a case brought by the company.

Contract negotiations at Starbucks

Unlike Amazon, contract negotiation have been underway at Starbucks.

But Starbucks Workers United, the union that has organized workers at 535 company-owned U.S. stores since 2021, said the company has failed to honor a commitment made in February to reach a labor agreement this year.

The union also wants Starbucks to resolve outstanding legal issues, including hundreds of unfair labor practice charges that workers have filed with the National Labor Relations Board. The agency also has opened or settled hundreds of charges against Amazon.

In launching the strikes that started Friday in Chicago, Los Angeles and Seattle, Workers United said Starbucks proposed an economic package with no new wage increases for unionized baristas now and a 1.5% increase in future years.

Union leaders said the strikes expanded on Saturday to include stores in Denver, Pittsburgh and Columbus Ohio with plans for baristas to join the picket lines in New Jersey, New York, Philadelphia, and St. Louis on Sunday.

Without providing a specific number, labor leaders said dozens of Starbucks stores are now affected by the strike.

Starbucks said Workers United prematurely ended a bargaining session this week. The company also says it already offers pay and benefits worth \$30 per hour for baristas who work at least 20 hours per week.

Starbucks workers walked off the job on two occasions last year. Workers United has said the latest strikes could spread to hundreds of stores across the country by Christmas Eve.

Patricia Campos-Medina, who recently ran for the U.S. Senate as a Democrat in New Jersey and leads Cornell University's Worker Institute at the School of Industrial and Labor Relations, said she expects there to be more union activity before Trump takes office.

Trump's reactions will give the public a chance to see what his "commitments are to the working class," Campos-Medina said.

Shutdown saga exposes new fault lines for Speaker Johnson and tests his grip on the gavel

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — One of the most turbulent sessions of Congress in the modern era is about to make way for the next one.

Midnight passage of the government shutdown package put in sharp focus the political fault lines emerging in Washington, as President-elect Donald Trump returns to the White House, House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., fights for his job and Republicans sweep into control of the House and Senate in the new year.

It took bipartisan votes, Republicans and Democrats, to keep government running for a few more months and provide some \$100 billion for disaster aid. Working together, the parties showed the House and Senate can still function, at times, to accomplish the basics of governing.

"After a chaotic few days in the House, it's good news that the bipartisan approach in the end prevailed," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a Democrat. "It's a good lesson for next year. Both sides have to work together."

But next year, with big GOP promises to cut taxes and slash spending, while also pumping in new money to fund Trump's border security and deportation operations, Republicans intend to go it alone.

"We are set up for a big and important new start in January," Johnson said. "We can't wait to get started."

First, though, Johnson needs to be sure he has a job.

Johnson's shaky grip on the gavel

The first vote of the new House, when lawmakers are sworn in on Jan. 3, is on electing a speaker. That leaves Johnson little time to calm the criticism after facing stark blowback over his management of the government shutdown fight.

Johnson was never the House Republicans' top choice for the speaker's office but he emerged when they couldn't agree on a replacement once they kicked out the last speaker, Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif.

Keeping the gavel is only becoming more difficult. The government shutdown saga exposed the limits of Johnson's influence over his majority, and Trump, when his first two funding plans collapsed. It's unclear if Johnson will have enough support from his ranks.

"It's always the big question, right?" said Rep. Tim Burchett, R-Tenn., among the handful of mainly fiscal conservatives who cast their votes to oust McCarthy. "Ultimately, and let's be honest, that's going to be — a large portion of that — will be up to Donald J. Trump."

And yet, Johnson was able to buy time, convincing Trump he would meet the president-elect's demands to raise the debt limit in the new year. Johnson has worked hard to stay close to Trump — dashing to Mar-a-Lago and joining him ringside at Madison Square Garden — and the investment shows.

Johnson insisted Trump was "certainly happy" with the final deal.

"The Speaker did a good job here, given the circumstances," posted Trump ally Elon Musk, who has been mentioned as a potential replacement, since the speaker does not need to be a member of Congress.

Johnson has no votes to spare, having actually lost House seats in the fall election, shrinking his majority. Democrats will oppose him with their own speaker candidate, Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York.

"Clearly, Johnson is not up to the task," said Trump ally and podcast provocateur Steven Bannon at a conservative conference. "He doesn't have what we call the right stuff — that combination of guts and moxie and savvy and toughness."

Musk emerges as a power broker on Capitol Hill

The world's richest man is fast becoming Capitol Hill's most feared influencer.

Musk intervened in the government shutdown debate using the enormous power of his social media platform, X, to ravage Johnson's original 1,500-page bipartisan bill, swiftly tearing it down.

In post after post, hour after hour, Musk unleashed his criticisms, and sometimes inaccurate claims, sending his army of online followers to figuratively flood the Capitol, warning that if lawmakers voted for it he would take them on with primary elections. His vast wealth and America PAC backed up his threats.

"Kill the bill," Musk demanded.

Musk had his moment, but also launched a new one for himself.

Democrat after Democrat, and at least one Republican, turned on Musk, seeing not a benevolent billionaire wading into the political process, but a symbol of extreme U.S. wealth and power run amok.

Sen. Bernie Sanders, the Vermont independent, decried the health care and other bipartisan provisions stripped from the bill to scale it back as Musk had demanded.

"The precedent that has been set today in Congress should upset every American," Sanders said in a statement announcing his refusal to support the final bill. He voted against it.

"It appears that from now on no major legislation can be passed without the approval of the wealthiest person in this country," Sanders said. "That's not democracy, that's oligarchy."

Trump runs the GOP but not the deficit hawks

One of the most outspoken conservatives in the House Freedom Caucus is Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, who led the charge against Trump's demand for a debt limit hike as part of the government shutdown package.

Trump tried to bully and blister Roy into submission. It didn't work.

"The very unpopular 'Congressman' from Texas, Chip Roy, is getting in the way, as usual," Trump posted on social media.

Trump suggested there should be a primary challenge against Roy. "Republican obstructionists have to be done away with," he said.

Roy, though, has his own popular following as a leading deficit hawk. He held his own, ignoring Trump's attack and admonishing his colleagues not to go along with Trump's demand to boost the debt ceiling and allow more borrowing.

"You go out and campaign, say you're going to balance the budget, and then you come in here," he shouted, choking up at times during the floor debate. "It's embarrassing."

In the end, 38 House Republicans including Roy sided with Democrats and tanked Trump's debt ceiling increase.

The next debt limit fight is coming soon

The failure of Trump's preferred spending bill, with the debt limit increase, signals problems ahead.

Republicans will have to raise the debt ceiling in the first half of the year — likely by early summer according to some estimates — and there will be a large price to pay. It is leverage in any policy talks.

As part of the deal Johnson made to pass the temporary government funding package, he struck a "gentlemen's agreement" behind closed doors with his fellow Republicans ahead of Friday's vote.

The House Republicans agreed to slash some \$2.5 trillion from federal spending over the next decade as part of the emerging tax cut bill, which is an enormous sum in federal budgeting, in exchange for boosting the debt limit, as will need to happen to avoid a federal default.

Burchett, for one, had no interest in any such deals.

"I said, 'This ain't no place for gentlemen,'" he said. "That's when I yelled out, 'You're losing me.'"

Trump may have lost the deficit hawks on the vote, but not his own political sway on Capitol Hill.

"He's still strong," Burchett said. "People still love him back home. And that's all that really matters."

Ex-OpenAI engineer who raised legal concerns about the technology he helped build has died

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

Suchir Balaji, a former OpenAI engineer and whistleblower who helped train the artificial intelligence systems behind ChatGPT and later said he believed those practices violated copyright law, has died, according to his parents and San Francisco officials. He was 26.

Balaji worked at OpenAI for nearly four years before quitting in August. He was well-regarded by colleagues at the San Francisco company, where a co-founder this week called him one of OpenAI's strongest contributors who was essential to developing some of its products.

"We are devastated to learn of this incredibly sad news and our hearts go out to Suchir's loved ones

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during this difficult time," said a statement from OpenAI.

Balaji was found dead in his San Francisco apartment on Nov. 26 in what police said "appeared to be a suicide. No evidence of foul play was found during the initial investigation." The city's chief medical examiner's office confirmed the manner of death to be suicide.

His parents Poornima Ramarao and Balaji Ramamurthy said they are still seeking answers, describing their son as a "happy, smart and brave young man" who loved to hike and recently returned from a trip with friends.

Balaji grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area and first arrived at the fledgling AI research lab for a 2018 summer internship while studying computer science at the University of California, Berkeley. He returned a few years later to work at OpenAI, where one of his first projects, called WebGPT, helped pave the way for ChatGPT.

"Suchir's contributions to this project were essential, and it wouldn't have succeeded without him," said OpenAI co-founder John Schulman in a social media post memorializing Balaji. Schulman, who recruited Balaji to his team, said what made him such an exceptional engineer and scientist was his attention to detail and ability to notice subtle bugs or logical errors.

"He had a knack for finding simple solutions and writing elegant code that worked," Schulman wrote. "He'd think through the details of things carefully and rigorously."

Balaji later shifted to organizing the huge datasets of online writings and other media used to train GPT-4, the fourth generation of OpenAI's flagship large language model and a basis for the company's famous chatbot. It was that work that eventually caused Balaji to question the technology he helped build, especially after newspapers, novelists and others began suing OpenAI and other AI companies for copyright infringement.

He first raised his concerns with The New York Times, which reported them in an October profile of Balaji.

He later told The Associated Press he would "try to testify" in the strongest copyright infringement cases and considered a lawsuit brought by The New York Times last year to be the "most serious." Times lawyers named him in a Nov. 18 court filing as someone who might have "unique and relevant documents" supporting allegations of OpenAI's willful copyright infringement.

His records were also sought by lawyers in a separate case brought by book authors including the comedian Sarah Silverman, according to a court filing.

"It doesn't feel right to be training on people's data and then competing with them in the marketplace," Balaji told the AP in late October. "I don't think you should be able to do that. I don't think you are able to do that legally."

He told the AP that he gradually grew more disillusioned with OpenAI, especially after the internal turmoil that led its board of directors to fire and then rehire CEO Sam Altman last year. Balaji said he was broadly concerned about how its commercial products were rolling out, including their propensity for spouting false information known as hallucinations.

But of the "bag of issues" he was concerned about, he said he was focusing on copyright as the one it was "actually possible to do something about."

He acknowledged that it was an unpopular opinion within the AI research community, which is accustomed to pulling data from the internet, but said "they will have to change and it's a matter of time."

He had not been deposed and it's unclear to what extent his revelations will be admitted as evidence in any legal cases after his death. He also published a personal blog post with his opinions about the topic.

Schulman, who resigned from OpenAI in August, said he and Balaji coincidentally left on the same day and celebrated with fellow colleagues that night with dinner and drinks at a San Francisco bar. Another of Balaji's mentors, co-founder and chief scientist Ilya Sutskever, had left OpenAI several months earlier, which Balaji saw as another impetus to leave.

Schulman said Balaji had told him earlier this year of his plans to leave OpenAI and that Balaji didn't think that better-than-human AI known as artificial general intelligence "was right around the corner, like the rest of the company seemed to believe." The younger engineer expressed interest in getting a doctorate and exploring "some more off-the-beaten path ideas about how to build intelligence," Schulman said.