

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Sunday, Feb. 9

### SUPER BOWL SUNDAY

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

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion/milestones/Souper Bowl of Caring, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; Choir, 6 p.m.

United Methodist: Conde, 8:15 a.m.; Groton, 9:30 a.m.; Britton, 11:15 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 10:30 a.m.

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PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

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



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.;

## Monday, Feb. 10

Senior Menu: Hamburger gravy, mashed potato, green beans, tropical fruit, whole wheat bread.

Junior High Boys Basketball at Britton-Hecla, 7th at 4 p.m., 8th at 5 p.m.

Girls Basketball at Great Plains Lutheran: C at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m., varsity to follow.

School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

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

Groton United Methodist: PEO Meeting, 7 p.m.

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

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# 1440

**Why 1440? The printing press was invented around the year 1440, spreading knowledge to the masses and changing the course of history. More facts: In every day, there are 1,440 minutes. We're here to make each one count.**

## Why Do We Age?

### Background

Aging is the progressive decline of the human body's function that results from a combination of genetic, environmental, and metabolic factors. As our cells accumulate damage, important systemic processes within the body become dysregulated, leading to an increased rate of disease and mortality.

The global population is aging at an unprecedented rate, a phenomenon that carries significant social and economic challenges. Societies are investing heavily in the fight against aging—a recent analysis revealed that a slowdown of aging by just one year could be worth \$38T in the US alone.

### What Happens to the Body

As we age, our cells accumulate damage on many fronts, including mutations in DNA (the information code of our cells), shortening of telomeres (protective end caps on DNA strands), and epigenetic alterations (changes in how our cells read DNA information).

This causes our microscopic machinery to go awry. The result is decreased cellular function, impaired mitochondrial energy production, and less efficient repair mechanisms. Read more about the causes of cellular aging.

As our body's building blocks break down, our organs and tissues experience an associated loss of structure and function. This results in a cycle of inflammation and tissue fibrosis that reduces the functional capacity of our vital organs.

All of these microscopic changes add up to what we see as "getting older." Our bones lose the ability to resist stress (i.e., osteoporosis), the structural integrity of our skin fails (i.e., wrinkles), our heart no longer pumps with the necessary strength (i.e., heart failure), and we are more at risk of injury and disease.

### What Happens to the Brain

The same cellular- and tissue-level changes associated with aging have a particularly destructive effect on our brains.

As cellular function decreases, inflammation rises and the accumulation of cellular waste disrupts the ability of our brain cells to talk to each other. This impairs our processing of complex cognitive tasks and weakens our memory (what happens to your brain through life).

These neurologic changes often translate to depression, social withdrawal, and increased susceptibility to diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's dementia.

### Chronological Versus Biological Aging

While the most familiar convention of measuring age is "chronological" (that is, measuring age in years), there is an emerging interest in determining "biological age."

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This method uses formulas or blood test results to estimate the cellular age of a person. In other words, biological age is not a function of time but rather of how well cellular and organ systems are functioning in each individual. In this way, interventions such as exercise, healthy lifestyles, and perhaps even medications could reverse one's biological age—all while their chronological age increases.

While some testable biomarkers have emerged as candidates (e.g., the epigenetic clock), there is ongoing research to uncover simple, reliable means to measure and track one's biological age over time.

## Lifespan Versus Healthspan

While tremendous recent progress has been made in the field of aging, the emphasis has begun to shift from extending lifespan (the number of years one is alive) to maximizing an individual's healthspan (the number of years one is active and without disease).

Researchers emphasize a holistic approach to nurturing your healthspan, including consistent daily movement and exercise, high-quality sleep hygiene, a balanced diet with whole foods, and more.

Editor's note: This page was written and developed with the help of Dr. Nick Golinvaux. A practicing orthopedic surgeon, Dr. G helps answer questions on bone, muscle, and joint health in his weekly newsletter.

## This Week in Tiger Sports:

### Monday, February 10th:

- GBB @ GPL (C @ 5pm, JV @ 6pm, Varsity to follow)
- JH BB @ Britton/Hecla (7th Grade @ 4pm, 8th Grade @ 5pm)
- JH WR @ Mobridge (5pm)

### Tuesday, February 11th:

- BBB vs. Leola/Frederick (C @ 5:15pm, JV @ 6pm, Varsity to follow)

### Saturday, February 15th:

- DH @ Mobridge/Pollock (C Girls @ 11am, C Boys @ 12pm, JV Girls and JV Boys @ 1:15pm, Varsity Boys @ 2:45pm, Varsity Girls @ 4:30pm)
  - JH BB @ Mobridge/Pollock (8th @ 11am, 7th @ 12pm)
- Good Luck, Tigers!!

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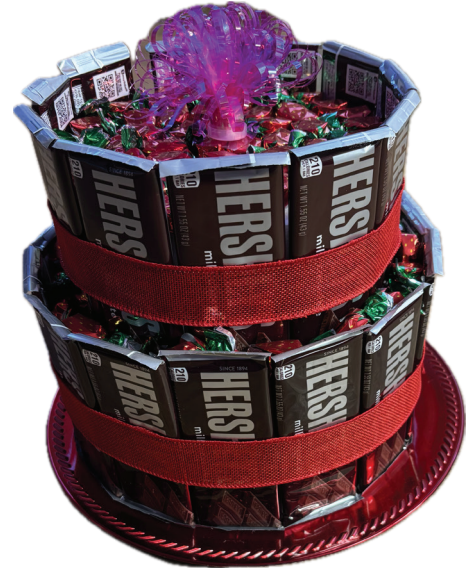
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2. White vase with sour suckers. \$7.50



3. Kit Kat Cake with Valentine suckers on top. \$35



4. Hersheys Cake, two tier with strawberry hard candy. \$40



7. Valentine container with fake roses and white bears. \$5



8. Reeses candy bars with Valentine suckers. \$50



9. Heart basket with assorted candy. \$15



10. Vase filled with strawberry drops and chocolate rose candy. \$9



12. Valentine's love balloon with fake flowers, MMs, skittles. \$15



14. Mini chip ahoy's cookies, be mine valentines book, a bear with a love heart on it and some hot wheels in it. \$12

15. Bet-sie Voucher book, puppy, mini chocolate hearts. Behind the dog a bag of heart bear gummies and a small box of mix chocolates. \$12



## Gov. Rhoden's Inaugural Address

By: Gov. Larry Rhoden

February 8, 2025

Mr. Chief Justice, honorable members of the Supreme Court, Lt. Governor Venhuizen, senators, legislators, constitutional officers, family, friends, and my fellow South Dakotans:

Good afternoon! Before I begin, I want to thank our people for this honor. Our state is great because "Under God, the People Rule." It is truly an honor to serve our people as Governor. And as a former Guardsman who served for six years, it is a great honor to serve as Commander-in-Chief of the South Dakota National Guard.

South Dakota has given so much to me and my family. I'm a fifth-generation South Dakotan on my mom's side and a fourth-generation South Dakotan on my dad's. My roots are in South Dakota – and I'm never leaving.

About a week ago, I was at Longhorn Steakhouse out in Rapid City. An older rancher walked up to my table and asked, "you Larry Rhoden?" I said, "Yes I am." He said, "Well, it's good to meet you. You built me a couple sets of branding irons a few years back, and they work great!" I can think of very few things that he could have said that would have made me feel better.

The truth is, we are all called to serve one another. Everything that we do for each other should be done to the best of our ability. If we work hard and put others first, things tend to work out. If we do a great job, it will stick with people. But we don't do these jobs to be remembered. We do them because it's right. Public service requires someone to step up and do the right thing on behalf of the people.

100 years ago, another governor gave his inaugural address to the South Dakota Legislature. Carl Gunderson had grown up a farmer. Before he became Governor, he served five terms in the South Dakota Senate, then as Lieutenant Governor for four years. Does that sound familiar to any of you? When he delivered his inaugural address, he spoke of many things that might be familiar to us. He talked about the ups and downs of agriculture; how property taxes are too high; how we need to find ways to make government more efficient. Some of the specifics are different today, but the basic needs facing our state are very much the same. I want to read you one paragraph from the end of his speech:

"The solution of South Dakota's problems will not come through legislation. The tendency toward state and federal supervision, inspection, and regulation has resulted in a lessening of the spirit of self-reliance. We look to government for too much aid. We need a revival of the spirit of the 'covered wagon.' The spirit that traveled by covered wagon in the early sixties across the prairies of Iowa to the Dakotas; the spirit that made its home temporarily in the 'dugout,' the 'sod shanty,' and the log cabin along the streams. It was the spirit that came more to give, than to receive; the spirit that served humanity and the future of a great state."

My goodness, those words still ring true today. That same spirit of the "covered wagon" brought my



**South Dakota Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden delivers his inaugural address Feb. 8, 2025, at the Capitol in Pierre.** (Courtesy of the Governor's Office)

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own family west to South Dakota more than 100 years ago. Through the generations, my family passed down that same spirit that "came more to give, than to receive." Service runs strong in our veins. And it runs every bit as strong in the veins of my own children.

Governor Gunderson's statue sits out in front of the Governor's Residence. He's sitting on a hay bale fixing a wagon wheel. He was a down-to-earth South Dakota man. And when his time serving as Governor was finished, he went back to farming.

Many of you probably didn't know who Carl Gunderson was. And 100 years from now, folks might not remember who Larry Rhoden is. If we remember that, making the best decisions for our people suddenly becomes a lot easier.

I promise to be a Governor who remembers that the solution to our problems will not come through legislation. Rather, it will come from providing our people the opportunity to do right for their families. I promise to set a tone of civility and respect, and the example will start from the top. I pledge to govern with openness and responsiveness.

My focus will always be to keep South Dakota strong, safe, and free. I want to keep South Dakota strong – strong families, strong businesses, and strong institutions. I want to keep South Dakota safe – with low crime and respect for law enforcement. And I want to keep South Dakota free – freedom will continue to be our calling card as long as I am governor.

I will extend a renewed hand to everyone in our state: East River and West River; small towns and big cities; and yes, our tribal communities. I will be available to discuss the challenges that you face and how we can turn them into opportunities.

I believe that the distinction between challenges and opportunities is largely one of perspective. A challenge is many times an opportunity not yet recognized or realized. Whenever I have a task in front of me, I try not to look at it as an obstacle to be overcome. Rather, if I look at it as an opportunity to achieve something, the task at hand becomes a lot easier.

I want that same mindset to be the foundation of everything that we do during my administration. Five years ago, Governor Kristi Noem declared South Dakota "Open for Business." That bold stand was put to the ultimate test during COVID. We overcame that challenge and turned it into South Dakota's greatest opportunity. Now, I want to apply that same approach to all of our work.

I want to keep South Dakota "Open for Business." But more than that, I want our state to be "Open for Opportunity." That means opportunity for families to do what is best for their kids; opportunity for our communities to respond to whatever unique situations they're facing; opportunity for kids graduating high school to go into whatever college or career field is right for them; opportunity for farmers to be able to keep earning a strong living so that they can pass that farm down to their kids; opportunity for every hard working South Dakotan to seek out better and higher paying jobs; opportunity for our businesses to keep growing at a tremendous rate.

When we protect opportunity in South Dakota, we pave the way for better jobs for my children and grandchildren – and yours. We create new educational opportunities that don't pit this group against that group, but instead allow every child to succeed. We don't build new prisons just to lock more people up; instead, we use those facilities as an opportunity to get people back on their feet and contributing to our society.

Opportunity is not limited by my vision, or even the vision of anyone in this Rotunda today. It is as broad as the South Dakota prairie and as high as Black Elk Peak. If we all link arms and pledge to chase down opportunities together, our state will be in pretty good shape. And if years from now, someone remembers the work that we did together, then that's just a bonus.

I want to thank my family for giving me this opportunity to serve. I especially want to thank my wife, Sandy. She has been my most loyal supporter and chief confidant for almost 44 years. I would not be here today without her love and support. I want to thank the Good Lord for putting me in the position to serve as your Governor. And I want to thank the people of South Dakota. Thank you for trusting me with this honor. And thank you for celebrating with me and my family.

Thank you. May God bless you all. And may God continue to bless the great state of South Dakota.

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## Redfield is the lone winner at the NEC-DAK XII Clash

Redfield, who has yet to win a Northeast Conference game, had a 12-point win over Madison at the NEC-DAK XII Clash. The NEC dropped the other eight games. Those close were Vermillion with a one-point over Sisseton. Sisseton tied the game with 10 seconds left in the game, but committed a foul with 3 seconds left. One of two free throws were made and Vermillion pulled out the one-point win. Groton Area dug a first half hole and was able to get a one-point lead early in the fourth quarter, but was unable to hang on as the Huskies won, 43-37. Canton edged Milbank by five, 52-47, and Dakota Valley beat Hamlin by eight, 63-55.

- Game 1 - Redfield 38 Madison 26 - Player of the Game – Charli Jungwirth – Redfield
- Game 2 – Lennox 60 Clark/Willow Lake 26 - Player of the Game – Gavyn Herlyn – Lennox
- Game 3 – Dell Rapids 60 Deuel 45 - Player of the Game – Rorie Thoreson – Dell Rapids
- Game 4 – Vermillion 47 Sisseton 46 – Player of the Game – Kasey Hanson – Vermillion
- Game 5 – West Central 67 Webster Area 29 – Player of the Game – Ellie Knight – West Central
- Game 6 – Elk Point/Jefferson 43 Groton Area 37 - Player of the game – Bentlee Kollbaum – EPJ
- Game 7 – Tri-Valley 66 Rapid City Christian 62 OT - Player of the game – Izzy Davie – TV
- Game 8 – Sioux Falls Christian 64 Aberdeen Roncalli 42 – Player of the Game – Ruth Dvoracek – SFC
- Game 9 – Canton 52 Milbank 47 – Player of the Game – Jenna VanderWeerd – Canton
- Game 10 – Dakota Valley 63 Hamlin 55 – Player of the Game – Ella Otten Dakota Valley

## Groton Area Lady Tigers Fall in Hard-Fought Battle Against Elk Point-Jefferson



**Faith Traphagen**  
(Photo by Paul Kosel)

Madison, SD - In a clash of conference powerhouses, the Groton Area Lady Tigers fought valiantly but ultimately fell short in a 43-37 battle against the Elk Point-Jefferson Huskies on Saturday. The game, filled with momentum swings and dramatic rallies, kept fans on the edge of their seats until the final buzzer.

The opening quarter saw a back-and-forth exchange, with the lead changing hands three times before the Huskies gained control. Elk Point-Jefferson capitalized on a strong run, scoring 10 consecutive points to build an 11-5 lead at the end of the first quarter. Their hot streak continued into the second quarter, stretching the margin to 16-5. At one point, Groton trailed 22-7, struggling to find an offensive rhythm against the Huskies' tough defense.

However, the Lady Tigers refused to go down without a fight. A late push before halftime trimmed the deficit to 22-9, and coming out of the break, Jerica Locke gave Groton an immediate spark. Her deep three-pointer set the tone for a strong third quarter, where the Tigers clawed their way back into the game with a 13-6 run. Groton was aggressive at the free-throw line, sinking 8 of 10 attempts in the third quarter alone. By the end of the period, they had closed the gap to just five points, trailing 32-27.

With momentum shifting, sophomore Taryn Traphagen ignited the offense in the fourth quarter. She knocked down back-to-back three-pointers, electrifying the Groton bench and giving the Tigers their first lead since the opening minutes at 33-32 with just under five minutes remaining. But the Huskies had an answer. Elk Point-Jefferson countered with three clutch three-pointers from three different players, regaining the lead in the final minutes.

Despite their efforts, Groton was unable to complete the comeback. With the Huskies leading 38-37 and under three minutes to play, Elk Point-Jefferson executed down the stretch, closing the game on a 5-0 run to seal the 43-37 victory.

Traphagen led the Tigers with 11 points, while Jayden Penning controlled the boards with eight rebounds. Locke dished out three assists, and Kennedy Hansen provided a defensive spark with three steals. Shooting woes plagued the Tigers throughout the game, as they converted just 19% of their two-point attempts (5-for-26) and 29% from beyond the arc (5-for-17).

Elk Point-Jefferson's Bentlee Kollbaum proved to be the difference-maker, leading all scorers with 17 points and earning Player of the Game honors. Ashley Brewer added 10 points for the Huskies, who improved to 14-3 on the season.



**Taryn Traphagen**  
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



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With the loss, Groton Area drops to 12-5 but will look to bounce back quickly traveling to Great Plains Lutheran in Watertown on Monday. Despite the setback, the Lady Tigers showed resilience and fight, setting the stage for an exciting final stretch of the season.

- Story compiled by ChatGPT

Taryn Traphagen: 11 points, 1 rebound, 1 foul.

Jerica Locke: 9 points, 6 rebounds, 2 assists, 1 steal 4 fouls.

Faith Traphagen: 7 points, 5 rebounds, 2 assists, 1 steal, 3 fouls.

Jaedyn Penning: 4 points, 8 rebounds, 1 assist, 2 fouls.

Kennedy Hansen: 4 points (4-4 in free throws), 3 rebounds, 3 steals, 3 fouls.

Rylee Dunker: 2 points, 1 rebound, 2 steals, 2 fouls.

Laila Roberts: 1 foul.

Chesney Weber: 1 rebound, 1 foul.

2-Pointers: 5-26 19%, 3-Pointers: 5-17 29%, Free Throws: 12-18 67%, 25 rebounds, 15 turnovers, 6 assists, 7 steals, 17 fouls.



**Kennedy Hansen**

(Photo by Paul Kosel)



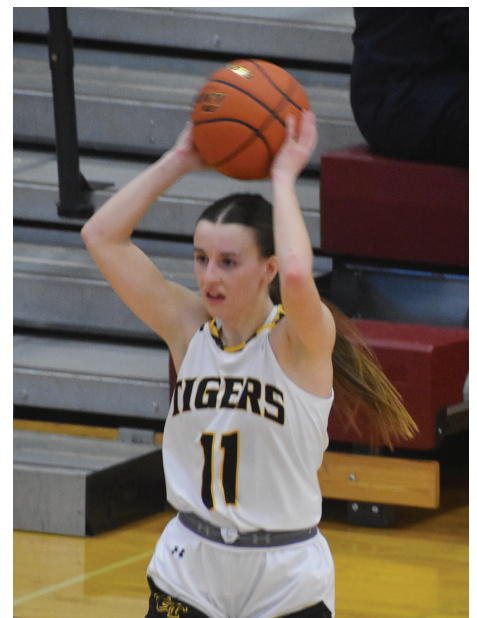
**Brooklyn Hansen**

(Photo by Paul Kosel)

Elk Point-Jefferson: Bentley Kollbaum 17, Ashley Brewer 10, Cera Schmitz 9, Kaitlyn VanRoekel 8.

Field Goals: 14-40 35%, Free Throws: 7-13 54%, 17 fouls and 10 turnovers.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM and simulcast over Madison's Hudl stream, sponsored by Agtegra, Avantara Groton, Bierman Farm Service, BK Custom T's & More, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Jungle Lanes & Lounge, Locke Electric, Krueger Brothers, R&M Farms/Rix Farms, The Meathouse in Andover. Paul Kosel and Jeslyn Kosel were on hand for the action.



**Jerica Locke**

(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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**Head Coach Matt Locke talking with his team during the time-out with Trent Traphagen giving suggestions.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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## Groton Area grapplers have clean sweep at Lyman Quadrangular

Groton Area's wrestling squad posted three dual wins at the Lyman Quadrangular, picking up 15 wins on the mat and 16 forfeit wins.

### Groton Area 54, Bennett County 18

Groton Area had seven forfeit wins and two match wins en route to a 54-18 win over Bennett County. Having forfeit wins were Donavon Block, Walker Zoellner, Ben Hoeft, Korbin Kucker, Isiah Scepaniak, Charlie Frost, Gavin Englund and Wyatt Hagen.

Getting the wins on the mat were Ben Hoeft with a pin over Jordan Risse in 2:33 at 165 pounds, and Keegan Kucker at 113 pounds with a pin over Ruger Smokov in 1:50.

Kyson Kucker, 120, lost by a technical fall to Maddux Risse, 18-0, in 2:38.; Lincoln Krause, 126, lost by a decision to Rhyder Harris, 17-12; Chris Schwab, 138, lost by a technical fall to Lyle Noell, 17-2, in 2:24; and Kason Oswald, 144, lost by a technical fall to Gavin Risse, 17-2, in 1:42.

### Groton Area 66, Marion/Freeman 16

Groton Area had six forfeit wins and won five matches on the mat with pins as the grapplers defeated Marion/Freeman, 66-16.

Picking up forfeit wins were Kyson Kucker, Chris Schwab, Ben Hoeft, Korbin Kucker, Isiah Scepaniak and Charlie Frost.

Getting wins were Gavin Englund, 285, with pin over Raymond Arnold, 0:39; Wyatt Hagen, 106, with a pin over Josh Oleson, 1:52; Keegan Kucker, 113, with a pin over David Wollmann, 2:30; Kason Oswald, 150, with a pin over Thomas Ding, 0:22; and Walker Zoellner, 157, with a pin over Hunter Spangler, 1:27.

Lincoln Krause, 126, lost by a technical fall to Logun Pankratz, 15-0, in 2:26; and Donavon Block, 132, lost by technical fall to Keaton Preheim, 15-0, in 2:21.

### Groton Area 68, Lyman 12

Groton Area had three forfeit wins, won six matches via a pin and two more with major decision as the wrestlers defeated Lyman, 68-12.

Winning by forfeits were Donavon Block Chris Schwab and Charlie Frost. Collecting wins with a pin were Keegan Kucker, 113, over Lief Henriksen, 2:32; Kyson Kucker, 120, over Callen Gran, 1:15; Walker Zoellner, 150, over Skyler Langenbau, 3:27; Christian Ehresmann, 157, over Braydon Oldenkamp, 1:46; Ben Hoeft, 165, over Julian Hickey, 0:36; Korbin Kucker, 175, over Bennett Kinsley, 2:15; and Gavin Englund, 285, over Desmerius McGhee, 3:35. Winning with a major decision were Wyatt Hagen, 106, over Ryatt Knippling, 19-6; and Lincoln Krause, 126, over Lane Coleman, 15-3.

Kason Oswald, 144, was pinned by Lane Olivier, 1:40; and Isiah Scepaniak, 190, was pinned by Maverick Johnson, 1:31.

## Krueger takes first at Big Dakota Conference Tournament

Liza Krueger picked up two pins and one decision to take first place at the Big Dakota Conference wrestling tournament. She defeated Marlee Miller, Ellendale/Edgeley/Kulm, 10-3; she pinned Timber Hanson, Stanley County 2:59; and she pinned Hailey Schafer Miller/Highmore-Harrod, 3:18.



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Felony ingestion vote in state Senate, embrace of HOPE program mark shift in Pierre

**Little-used probation program lauded as better approach to drug abuse**

**BY: JOHN HULT - FEBRUARY 8, 2025 2:34 PM**

On Thursday in Pierre, state senators did something no previous Senate had been willing to do: Endorse a bill to change South Dakota's unique-in-the-nation felony drug ingestion law.

Under the statute, the presence of a controlled substance in someone's urine carries the same criminal weight as a controlled substance pulled from their pocket by a police officer.

A person found guilty can spend time in state prison. With or without a prison sentence, the guilty party typically has a felony record that can make it harder to get a job, housing or schooling for years thereafter.

In South Dakota, only a pre-sentencing plea bargain or a governor-backed pardon can clear a felony from a person's record.

This year in Pierre, lawmakers are once again discussing the wisdom of felony ingestion.

Senate Bill 83 passed 18-17, a few days after clearing a Senate committee that needed two separate deliberative days.

The legislation calls for misdemeanor charges on first- or second-ingestion offenses. Its language calls out the state's drug-focused HOPE probation program by name as a more effectual response to failed drug tests.

Thursday's vote was a big moment for the bill's sponsor, Sen. Tamara Grove, R-Lower Brule, as well as for the other lawmakers in the room who'd tried and failed to make similar proposals stick during every legislative session but one since 2020.

The state is in the throes of debate over the most expensive capital project in its history: an \$825 million men's prison south of Sioux Falls, proposed to be built on the heels of an \$87 million women's prison under construction in Rapid City.

The prison population is expected to keep growing, Grove said on the Senate floor.

"Where are we going to go with these people after we've already spent a billion dollars to build a new prison?" Grove said. "What we are doing right now does not work. If it worked, I wouldn't be here, because



**State Sen. Tamara Grove, R-Lower Brule, speaks on the South Dakota Senate floor on Jan. 22, 2025.** (Makenzie Huber/South

Dakota Searchlight)

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this bill has been brought way too many times. It's actually kind of embarrassing."

By funneling people into things like the HOPE program, the state can deal with drug abuse "on the front end, when we can actually support these individuals in addressing the addiction," said Sen. Red Dawn Foster, D-Pine Ridge, "not after this harm has grown so far that it has destroyed families, the community, and costs us as taxpayers a billion dollars."

## Softer approach fails (so far)

The legislation is the latest shot at a perennial target. No one tried to change the law in 2024, but Republican Sen. Mike Rohl of Aberdeen tried in 2023. That effort came closer than any previous one had until Thursday, failing by one vote on the Senate floor. He gave it a try in 2021, as well, with less success.

Sen. Jamie Smith, the Sioux Falls Democrat who challenged Gov. Kristi Noem in 2022, carried the anti-felony mantle in the statehouse that year. Former Democratic Sen. Craig Kennedy took aim in 2020.

They all said charging people with felonies for failing drug tests — at times conducted as a person is booked at a local jail on a separate charge — contributes to South Dakota's swollen prison population.

According to the latest numbers from the state Department of Corrections, ingestion is the most serious offense for 19% of the men in state prison for nonviolent crimes. For women, ingestion is the top charge for 23% of nonviolent prisoners (more than half of all female inmates are in prison for nonviolent offenses; drug charges represent 77% of those offenses).

In total, at the end of 2024, ingestion was the most serious charge for 231 state prison inmates.

The ingestion law erodes hope for drug users whose lives grow more difficult to manage with a felony on their record, its opponents argue, and does little to lessen the number of people hooked on controlled substances like methamphetamine.

"For far too long, we've looked at addiction as a moral failure," Smith said Thursday on the Senate floor. "Addiction is not a moral failure. It's an illness."

The law's supporters have a different take. They tend to note, correctly, that state law requires judges to put people convicted of drug ingestion on probation, absent aggravating circumstances.

A person needs to fail repeatedly before they catch a whiff of prison air, they argue, and the threat of the penitentiary time serves as a powerful motivator for positive personal growth.

Felony ingestion does what its opponents want, they say: Funnels users into programs that can help them get sober and grow into productive, law-abiding citizens.

Authorities, after all, often find out someone's been using drugs when they fail tests administered after they're charged for crimes like burglary, assault or robbery.

"They're not getting arrested because they're using fentanyl quietly on a park bench," Sen. Helene Duhamel, R-Rapid City, said Thursday.

## HOPE program helps 2025 effort

This year's support for an ingestion statute revamp got a boost from its nod to the HOPE program.

The bill doesn't mandate its use, just suggests it as an option for probationers.

Even so, committee members seemed pleased this week to know there was an evidence-based program a step beyond typical probation.

Grove, who represents tribal areas, told her fellow lawmakers that HOPE is used within tribal borders, but that it's underutilized statewide. She's talked about it as a sort of mini-drug court, which is what she's familiar with in tribal courts.

It's true that it's less widespread than other probation options. But at the state level, it's not really akin to a drug court. It's probation, but a more intensive version of it.

The original idea came from Hawaii in 2004. Out in the Pacific, HOPE is short for "Hawaii Opportunity Probation with Enforcement." In South Dakota, the acronym stands for "Honest Opportunity for Probation Enforcement."

Drug users on HOPE supervision call a phone number every day to check with the probation office. On

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randomly assigned days, they're told to appear for a drug test and expected to show up right away to take it. If they don't – or if they fail the test – they might spend some time in jail, and they need to ask the judge for another chance. Judges have discretion in setting up sanctions, but once the wheels start turning, those sanctions are meant to be swift and certain.

Substance abuse evaluations and treatment might be part of a judge's expectations, but aren't necessarily a requirement.

HOPE is similar to the state's 24/7 sobriety program, wherein people either take breathalyzer tests for alcohol every day, wear alcohol monitoring bracelets, or are tested for drug use on a set schedule. Failures bring sanctions. The primary operational difference with HOPE, according to a program document sent to South Dakota Searchlight by the state's Unified Judicial System (UJS), is the moving-target nature of the testing schedule and the expectation of greater-than-average involvement by a participant's probation officer.

In South Dakota, HOPE was added as an option during the same wave of mid-2010s criminal justice reforms that gave birth to the mandated probation for most drug felons now cited as a reason to hold firm to felony ingestion.

The UJS says HOPE is available in every judicial circuit but one: the second, which covers the Sioux Falls area.

Even so, Grove's characterization of HOPE as an also-ran in the state's probationary toolbox is accurate.

None of the budget documents presented to lawmakers last month mention HOPE by name. The words "HOPE probation" were never spoken during the system's budget hearing on Jan. 22.

HOPE's participant numbers can't hold a candle to those of the state's 24/7 sobriety program or its alternative courts.

The UJS would not make anyone available to talk about HOPE, but a spokesperson did say that there are currently 37 participants statewide. Between July 2023 and last July, 197 people had taken part.

For comparison, 43,433 people have done breath testing alone in the 24/7 program across its 19-year lifespan. In Minnehaha County, the state's most populous, there are currently 334 people enrolled in some form of 24/7 – 158 of whom appear at the jail twice a day for a breath test.

Last month, State Court Administrator Greg Sattizahn told lawmakers that alternative courts served more than 800 people. Those courts involve weekly group meetings before a judge that play out more like support group meetings than criminal proceedings. There are incentives to encourage good behavior, treatment expectations and extra probationary support between meetings to help participants stay the course of sobriety.

At the moment, the HOPE program's less rigorous probationary programming is only open to people charged with felonies. If Grove succeeds in changing the state's ingestion law, she'd like to see it used for misdemeanor drug users, and she said she believes that could happen.

On the floor of the Senate, she noted that the UJS has signaled that it expects to ask for more money to fund its probation services in the coming years, and said that Sattizahn had suggested HOPE as an option when she asked about what might fit with her bill's goals.

The relative cheapness of probation compared with prison was a big selling point for Sen. Greg Blanc, R-Rapid City.

"What moved my vote from a soft no to a relatively strong yes is that right now it costs \$92 a day to incarcerate," Blanc said. "It's not just a judicial problem, it's a fiscal problem. It costs \$10 a day for probation."

Having passed the Senate, SB 83 is headed to a House committee.

*John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.*

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## Northern Men Out-Rebound Bemidji State in Saturday Loss

Aberdeen, S.D. – The Northern State University men’s basketball team fell to Bemidji State on Saturday from Wachs Arena. The Wolves trailed by just five at the half, however the Beavers pulled away in the second.

### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 70, BSU 84

Records: NSU 2-22 (1-17 NSIC), BSU 10-14 (7-11 NSIC)

Attendance: 1689

### HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern scored 39 points in the first and 31 in the second, while Bemidji tallied 44 in the first and 40 in second

They led the contest with 36 rebounds and seven steals, while adding 16 assists and eight made 3-pointers  
NSU shot 40.0% from the floor, 25.8% from the 3-point line, and 46.2% from the foul line

They scored 36 points in the paint, 22 points off the bench, 12 points off turnovers, ten fast break points, and nine points off 14 offensive boards

Tobi Obiora and James Glenn led the team with 16 points apiece, while Marcus Burks notched a double-double with ten points and ten rebounds

Burks also dished out a team leading six assists, while Obiora was second on the team with eight rebounds

### NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Tobi Obiora: 16 points, 72.7 field goal%, 8 rebounds, 1 steal

James Glenn: 16 points, 4 assists, 3 rebounds, 1 steal

Marcus Burks: 10 points, 10 rebounds, 6 assists

### UP NEXT

Northern travels to Concordia-St. Paul and Minnesota Duluth next Friday and Saturday. Game times are set for 5:30 p.m. on Friday against the Golden Bears and 3:30 p.m. on Saturday versus the Bulldogs.

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## Wolves Triumph Over Beavers to Close the Weekend

Aberdeen, S.D. – The Northern State University women's basketball team secured a 77-65 victory over Bemidji State on Saturday night. Madelyn Bragg paced the team with 24 points, while Michaela Jewett contributed 20 points.

### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 77, BSU 65

Records: NSU 15-9 (NSIC 12-6), BSU 5-17 (NSIC 3-15)

Attendance: 2159

### HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern State recorded 23 points in the first quarter, 19 in the second quarter, 21 in the third quarter, and 14 in the fourth quarter

The Wolves shot well on the night, posting a 48.3% shooting percentage from the floor, 35.3% from beyond the three-point line, and 92.9% from the foul line

They tallied 32 points in the paint, 19 assists, 18 points off the bench, and 13 points off of turnovers on the night

Madelyn Bragg led the charge for the Wolves with 24 points, two rebounds, and two blocks while connecting on 7-of-8 shots from the foul line

Michaela Jewett followed with 20 points and six rebounds while posting a 60.0% shooting percentage from the floor

In 29 minutes of play, Izzy Moore was first off the bench with ten points and five rebounds on the night

### NORTHERN STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Madelyn Bragg: 24 points, 2 rebounds, 2 blocks, 47.1% FG

Michaela Jewett: 20 points, 6 rebounds, 60.0% FG

Izzy Moore: 10 points, 5 rebounds, 3 assists, 50.0% 3PT

Rianna Fillipi: 6 points, 5 rebounds, 5 assists

Morgan Fiedler: 5 points, 6 rebounds (Career-High), 2 assists, 2 steals

### UP NEXT

Northern State is back on the road to take on Concordia-St. Paul and Minnesota Duluth. Tip-offs are scheduled for Friday, February 14 at 7:30 p.m. from St. Paul, Minnesota, against the Golden Bears and Saturday, February 15 at 5:30 p.m. from Duluth, Minnesota, against the Bulldogs.



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## Girls NEC Standings

Hamlin	6-0	12-3
Roncalli	7-1	11-4
Groton Area	7-2	12-5
Milbank	5-3	9-7
Clark/Willow Lake	4-3	9-6
Sisseton	4-3	10-6
Webster Area	4-5	8-7
Deuel	2-4	3-11
Britton-Hecla	2-4	4-11
Tiospa Zina	0-7	6-10
Redfield	0-8	2-14

Groton 59, Deuel 30  
Milbank 48, Aberdeen Roncalli 38  
Webster 58, Redfield 36  
Sisseton 55, Clark-Willow Lake 37

Feb. 11  
Hamlin at Roncalli  
Clark/Willow Lake at Britton-Hecla  
Sisseton at Milbank

Feb. 13  
Sisseton at Tiospa Zina  
Hamlin at Deuel

Feb. 18  
Hamlin at Britton-Hecla  
Sisseton at Deuel  
Tiospa Zina vs. Clark/Willow Lake at Clark

Feb. 20  
Deuel at Roncalli  
Milbank at Webster Area  
Clark/Willow Lake at Hamlin

Feb. 21  
Groton Area at Britton-Hecla  
Tiospa Zina at Redfield

## Boys NEC Standings

Hamlin	6-0	13-2
Groton Area	8-1	10-5
Clark/Willow Lake	6-1	12-3
Deuel	4-2	10-5
Roncalli	4-3	6-9
Britton-Hecla	3-4	9-6
Milbank	3-4	6-9
Sisseton	2-5	5-8
Webster Area	2-6	4-11
Tiospa Zina	0-5	2-13
Redfield	0-6	1-13

Groton 75, Deuel 43  
Milbank 48, Aberdeen Roncalli 38  
Clark-Willow Lake 64, Sisseton 31

Feb. 11  
Hamlin at Roncalli  
Clark/Willow Lake at Britton-Hecla  
Sisseton at Milbank

Feb. 13  
Hamlin at Deuel

Feb. 14  
Tiospa Zina at Sisseton

Feb. 17  
Tiospa Zina at Roncalli

Feb. 18  
Hamlin at Britton-Hecla  
Sisseton at Deuel  
Tiospa Zina vs. Clark/Willow Lake at Clark

Feb. 20  
Deuel at Roncalli  
Clark/Willow Lake at Hamlin

Feb. 21  
Groton Area at Britton-Hecla  
Webster Area at Milbank  
Tiospa Zina at Redfield

Feb. 22  
Redfield at Webster Area

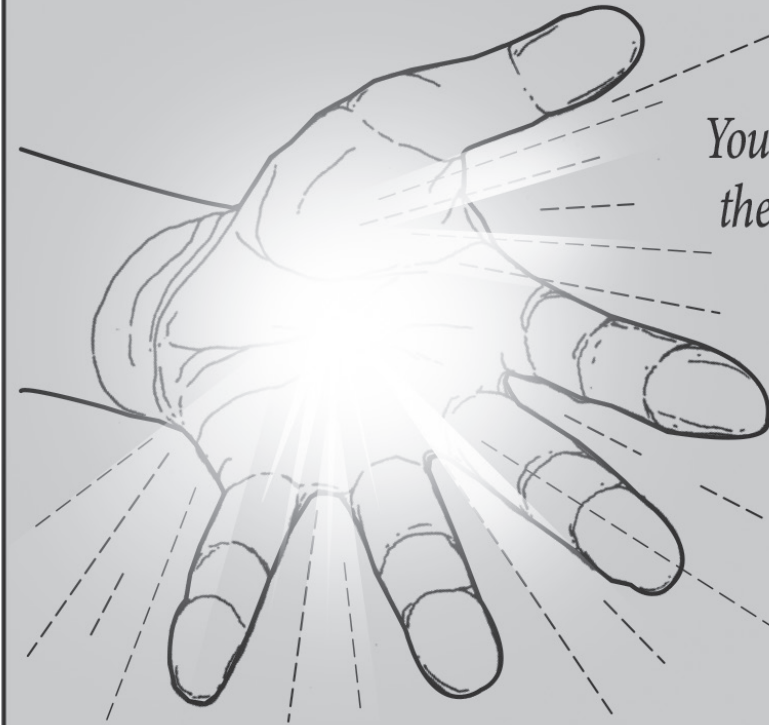
Feb. 28  
Milbank at Tiospa Zina

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## THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE



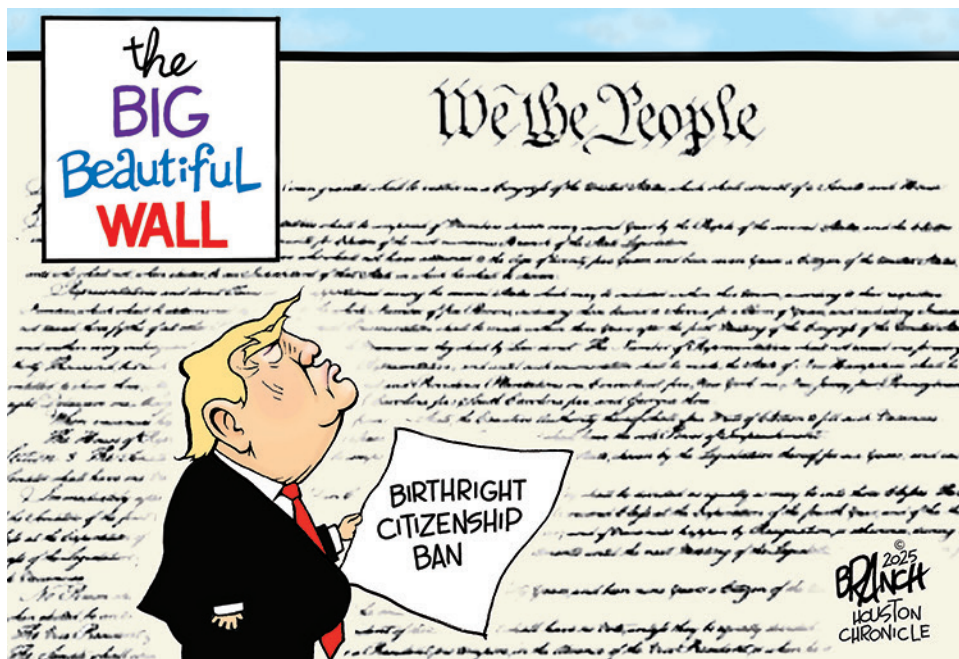
*You open Your hand and satisfy  
the desire of every living thing.*

*The Lord is righteous  
in all His ways,  
gracious  
in all His works.*

PSALM 145: 16,17



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## BIBLE

## TRIVIA

by Wilson Casey

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

2. What's the finish to this Proverbs 14:23 verse: "In all labor there is ..."? *Profit, Righteousness, Grace, Rewarding*

3. At whose well did Jesus meet the Samaritan woman? *Joshua's, Jonah's, Jacob's, Judas'*

4. From Revelation 21, how many gates does the New Jerusalem have? *1, 4, 12, 16*

5. Who was king during Zechariah's time of prophecy? *David, Daniel, Darius, Saul*

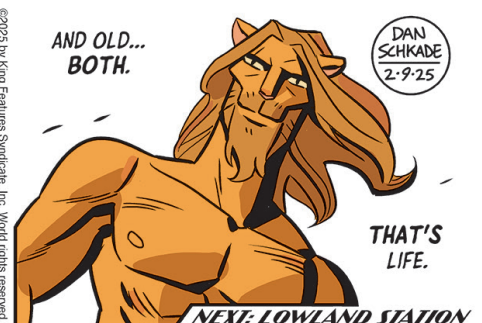
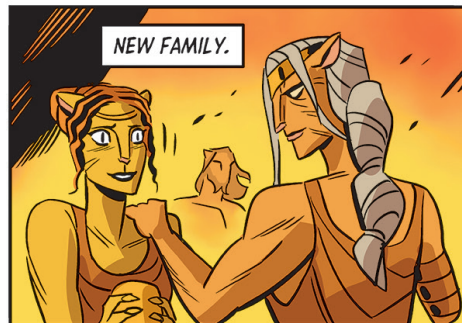
6. How long did Aaron's followers mourn him? *3 days, 13 days, 30 days, 3 months*

ANSWERS: 1) Old, 2) Profit, 3) Jacob's, 4) Twelve, 5) Darius, 6) 30 days

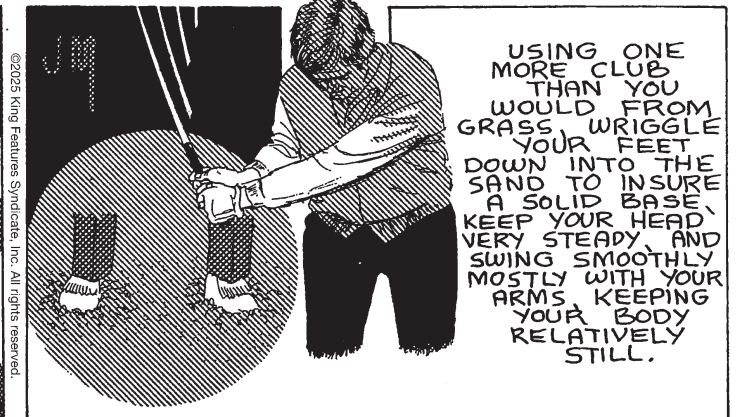
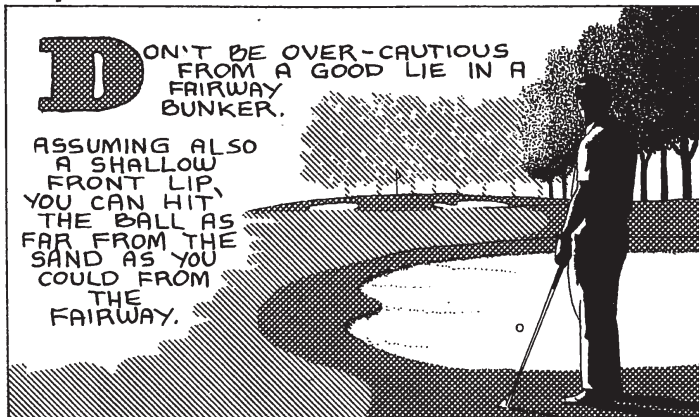
*Comments? More Trivia? Gift ideas? Visit [www.TriviaGuy.com](http://www.TriviaGuy.com).*

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## Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS





## Elderly Man Weighs 84 Pounds Decades After His Stomach Removal

DEAR DR. ROACH: Is 18 years a record for living without a stomach? A family member had stomach cancer when he was 70 and had his stomach removed. He consulted with a dietician and has been able to eat small but frequent meals. He can also take enzymes, vitamins and other things, but slowly he has lost weight.

Now at 88, he is down to 84 pounds, and his muscles are also affected. He used to play racquetball regularly, but this came to an end during COVID and wasn't picked back up after the pandemic. He can no longer walk without assistance. They are putting a feeding tube into his small intestine to supplement what he usually eats.

Are you familiar with this type of thing? What else can be done, or is this the end? Will he starve to death? -- Y.F.

ANSWER: I have seen many patients with stomach cancer and have never seen this degree of weight loss, but weight loss is very common after removing the stomach. This degree of weight loss is very disturbing and usually results in a worse outcome, so effective treatment is overdue. A feeding tube, which isn't often the appropriate treatment for weight loss, seems to be an important short-term treatment. I assume that he has had extensive evaluations for the recurrence of diseases, including CT scans.

You mention that he has been getting vitamins; B12 and vitamin D levels are often profoundly low after gastrectomy (removal of the stomach), so these should be checked, even if he has been on replacements. If no other cause is found, it might be worth a try to use an appetite stimulant.

In addition, I would formally measure his total calorie input in a day to see whether the problem really is that he isn't getting enough calories. I would be worried that he isn't absorbing all of them.

There is no reason for him to starve to death. In the very worst case, nutrition can be given intravenously while they figure out why he is losing so much weight.

\*\*\*

DEAR DR. ROACH: I am an 84-year-old male in amazingly good health and have great physical abilities, but after running about 3 miles, I noticed some minor chest discomfort. After a calcium score test and stress test, my doctor wanted to place stents in my coronary arteries.

I read a National Institute of Health study from 2020 regarding stent outcomes versus medication and lifestyle changes, and it showed no difference in the outcomes. So, I decided not to do the stents.

I no longer do any distance running, but I do weight training and a stationary bike exercise for 10 minutes without any chest issues. I now take statin drugs, blood pressure medicines, and baby aspirin.

Are you familiar with this study, and am I doing a reasonable thing by not having the stents inserted? -- T.E.

ANSWER: Whether stents are beneficial in people with stable coronary artery disease remains somewhat controversial. Although stents in combination with a healthy diet, exercise and medication may improve symptoms better than lifestyle changes and medication alone, there are no data to show an improvement in lifespan or in preventing heart attacks.

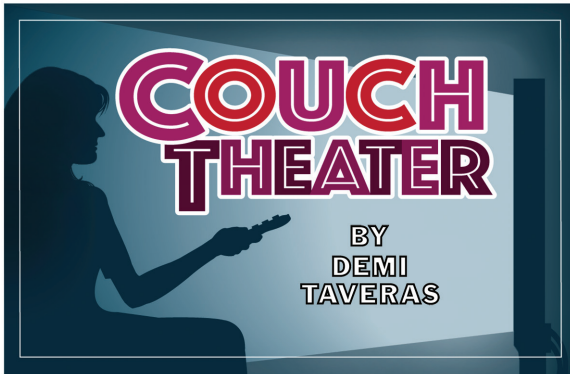
Your cardiologist wanted to reduce your symptoms, but if you aren't having any now, then stenting isn't indicated. If you had to reduce your running because of chest discomfort, then stenting might possibly allow you to do more exercise without having these symptoms.

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

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**Anya Taylor-Joy, left, and Miles Teller star in "The Gorge."** Courtesy of AppleTV+

"Kinda Pregnant" (R) -- Rally your friends, get some snacks and adult beverages, then gather around for a proper girls' night with this hysterical comedy film out now on streaming. Starring Amy Schumer ("Unfrosted"), who also co-wrote the script, the film centers around Lainy, who's pretty

much your average woman. And of course, it is sometimes natural for the average woman to experience jealousy after her best friend falls pregnant. What isn't natural, however, is a woman putting on a fake belly to appease her envy. But this is exactly what Lainy does, and as she soon finds out when she meets the man of her dreams, her fake belly might not have been the best approach. Jillian Bell ("Reunion"), Will Forte ("That '90s Show"), and Brianne Howey ("Ginny & Georgia") co-star. (Netflix)

"Bridget Jones: Mad About the Boy" (R) -- "Bridget Jones" is the film franchise that keeps on giving, with an astonishing 24 years between the release of the original film and the fourth installment, which will shortly be available to stream on Feb. 13. Renee Zellweger reprises her role as the titular character, who now navigates life as a single mom. With people around her eager to get her back in the saddle when it comes to dating, Bridget finally decides to try her hand at it when a younger man named Roxster (Leo Woodall) shoots his shot. Although she attempts to get enveloped by this new love interest, memories of her former husband still fill her mind, leaving her to crave a more secure and stable man who could be a better match. Guess we'll have to wait and see who Bridget Jones finally ends up with! Hugh Grant, Emma Thompson, and Colin Firth reprise their roles from the previous films as well. (Peacock)

"The Gorge" (PG-13) -- Miles Teller took a break from acting after an exciting 2022 with the release of "Top Gun: Maverick." Now he's back ahead of his role as John Branca in the upcoming biopic "Michael," and he stars opposite Anya Taylor-Joy ("Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga") in this film that has a taste of many genres -- sci-fi, horror, action, and a bit of romance! Out on Feb. 14, "The Gorge" follows two elite operatives named Levi (Teller) and Drasa (Taylor-Joy), who are tasked with guarding either side of a mysterious gorge. These two snipers must carry out their mission without contacting one another, but with the gorge being described as the "door to hell," they are forced to work together when the evil inside of the gorge finally emerges. (Apple TV+)

"You're Cordially Invited" (R) -- The romantic comedies are in full supply this week! Starring two A-list actors Will Ferrell and Reese Witherspoon, this movie is reminiscent of others like "Shotgun Wedding" (2022), where viewers just know they're going to be taken on an unbelievably wild ride in a traditional wedding setting. Ferrell plays single father Jim, whose daughter plans to get married in a small inn; the catch is, Margot (Witherspoon) also booked the same inn on the same day for her sister and future brother-in-law. When the two parties show up on the same weekend, Jim and Margot start scrambling to figure out how to keep the peace. Lucky for us viewers, their plans backfire into buffoonery. Out now! (Amazon Prime)

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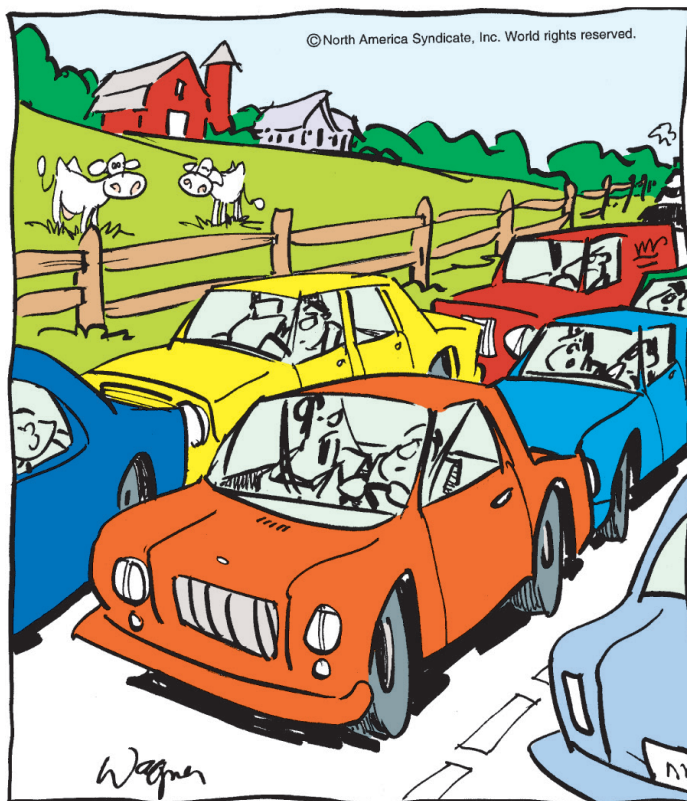
1. Name the town mentioned in "Last Chance to Turn Around."
2. Who wrote and released "Love Is All Around"?
3. Which group wrote and released "The Tracks of My Tears"?
4. Who wrote "Anticipation"?
5. Name the song that contains this lyric: "I know you don't know what I'm going through, Standing here looking at you."

Answers

1. Brooklyn, in the 1965 song by Gene Pitney. Besides creating his own hits, Pitney penned chart toppers for others, including the Crystals, Ricky Nelson, Vikki Carr and Roy Orbison.
2. The Troggs, in 1967. The song charted around the globe, but it really took off when Scottish band Wet Wet Wet covered the song for the film and soundtrack "Four Weddings and a Funeral." Their version topped the charts nearly everywhere.
3. Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, in 1965. In 2021 it was ranked as "The Greatest Motown Song of All Time."
4. Carly Simon, in 1971.
5. "Hurt So Bad," by Little Anthony & The Imperials, in 1964. The song was a hit for the group, especially after they sang it on "The Ed Sullivan Show." The song has been covered by numerous others, including The Lettermen and Linda Ronstadt.

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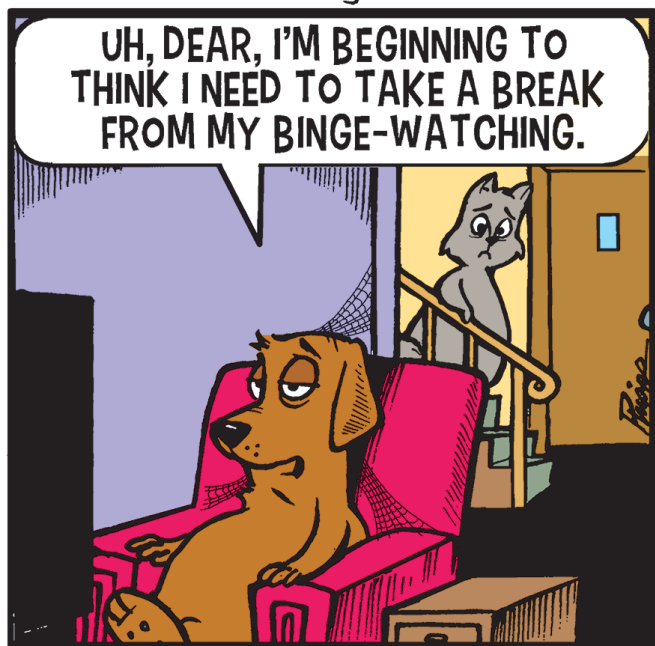
## GRIN and BEAR IT <sup>by Wagner</sup>



"It isn't a scenic drive unless you're in the right lane!"

## Just Like Cats & Dogs

by Dave T. Phipps

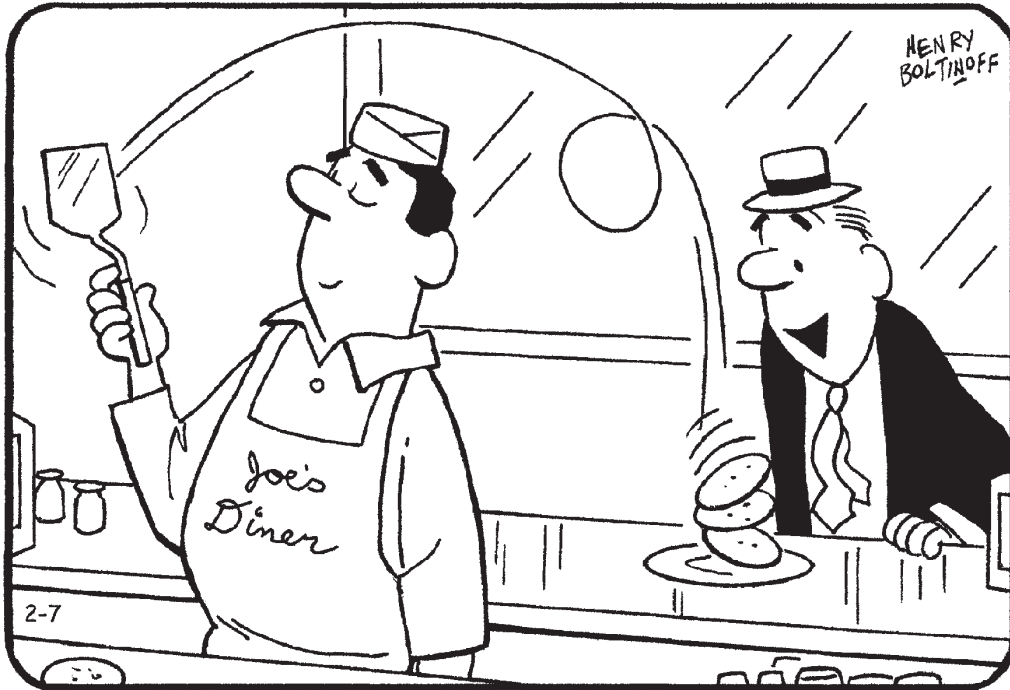


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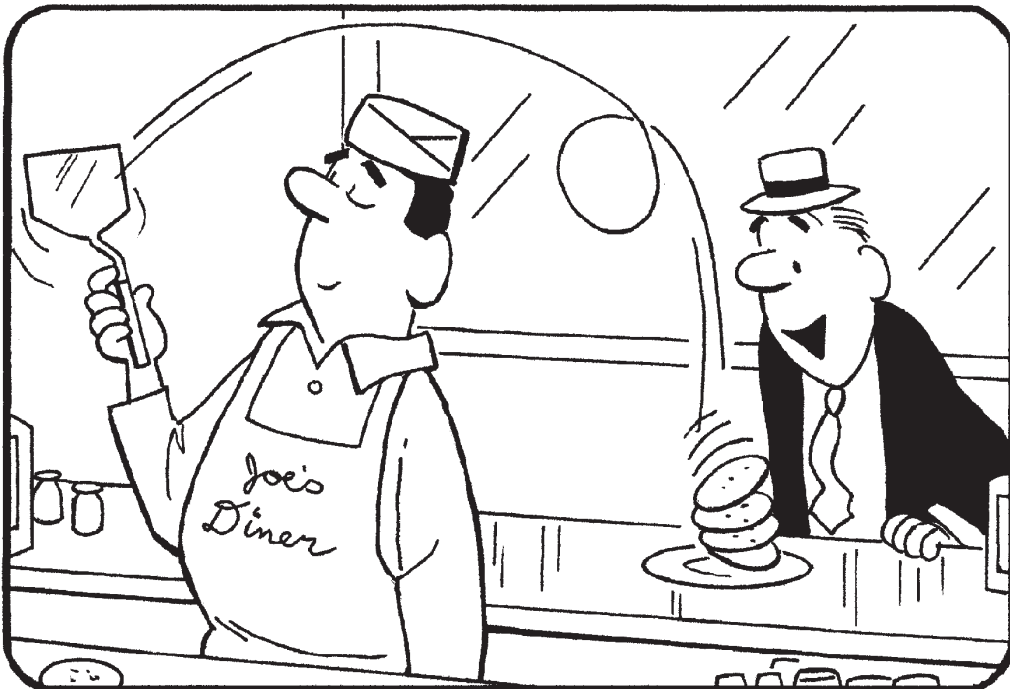
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## HOCUS-FOCUS

BY  
HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



Differences: 1. Spatula is wider. 2. Tie is different. 3. Sleeve is longer. 4. Ear is larger. 5. Pancake is added. 6. Cap is larger.

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\* When you finish a wood-working project, save your leftover bits of sandpaper and use them to sharpen your scissors. All you need is a piece long enough to make a few cuts through.

\* "Plastic grocery bags are handy for so many uses, but keeping them organized was always a pain, until I discovered that I could use an empty tissue box to store them. I just ball up each bag individually (so there is no air trapped) and stuff it in the tissue box. You can do the same thing for larger amounts of bags by using an empty 12-pack box from soda. I store one of these in my shop." -- Fred C. from Pennsylvania

\* "Tired of squirrels on your bird feeders? String a line of 2-liter soda bottles (as many as you like) together, and hang them between two trees, with the feeder in the middle. Works

like a charm." -- C.V. in Maine

\* If your kids (or you) like cereal, be sure to save the heavy plastic liners that hold the cereal inside the box. They are really handy when freezing meat patties in stacks. You can use them to separate layers of cookies, too.

\* "I just finished packing up my house to move, and this little tip was a dandy: Use a toothpick to keep the open end of your tape from disappearing. When you cut the tape, slip a toothpick at the end that's still on the roll. You will never have to go fishing for it again." -- L.K. in New Mexico

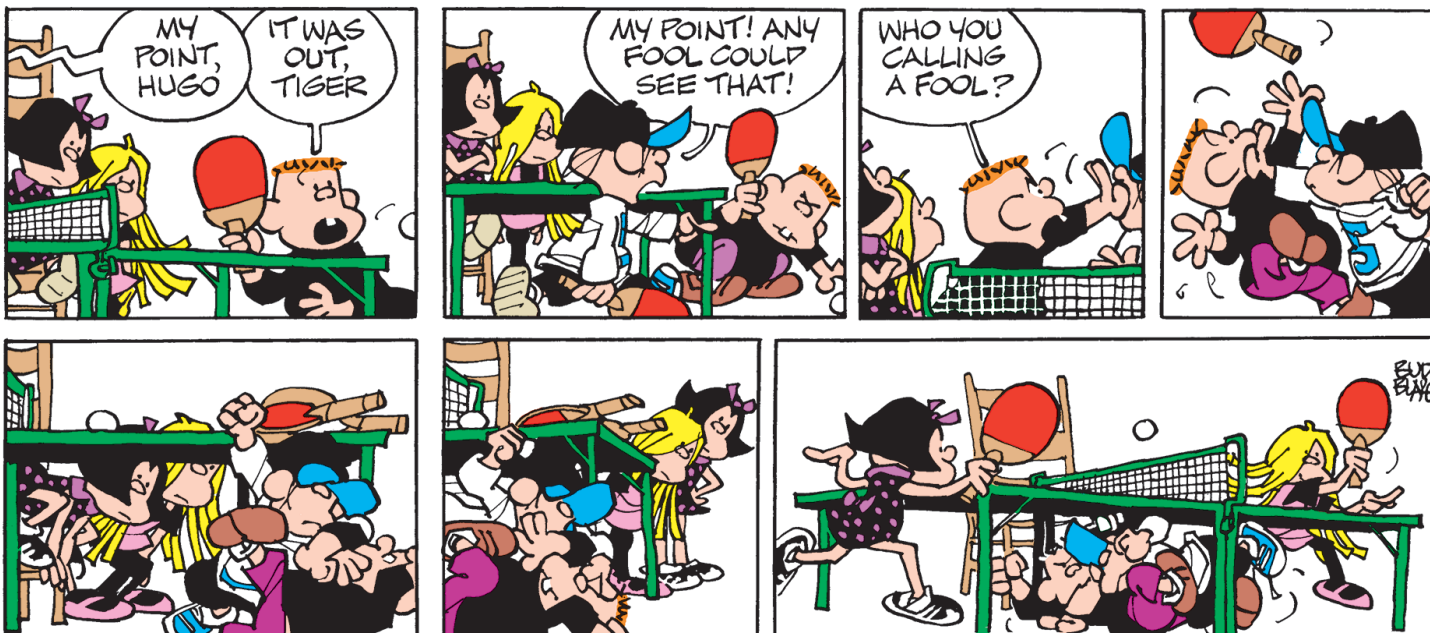
\* If your water takes a minute to warm up, keep a pitcher by the sink. Let the water flow into the pitcher until it gets warm. Then, use that water (that otherwise would have been wasted) on your houseplants and in your garden.

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 Water, in Mexico
- 5 Sprite
- 8 Pedestal
- 12 Like holiday decorations
- 14 Ogled
- 15 D.C. veteran
- 16 Ms. Moore
- 17 Pentagon gp.
- 18 Mild cheese
- 20 Singer Mann
- 23 "— Las Vegas"
- 24 Not that
- 25 Verbal attack
- 28 Yr. parts
- 29 Some latte sizes
- 30 Cut the lawn
- 32 Italian corn-meal recipe
- 34 Race finish
- 35 Rapsallions
- 36 Word list, for short
- 37 Goldberg on "The View"
- 40 — Lingus
- 41 Honker
- 42 Refines
- 47 Duel tool
- 48 Investigates
- 49 Holler
- 50 "Mayday!"
- 51 Taxpayer IDs

### DOWN

- 1 Venomous viper

1	2	3	4		5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12				13					14			
15									16			
			17				18	19				
20	21	22				23						
24					25					26	27	
28				29						30		31
	32		33						34			
				35				36				
37	38	39					40					
41					42	43				44	45	46
47					48							
49					50				51			

- 2 Earth (Pref.)
- 3 "Friendly skies" co.
- 4 Stage comments
- 5 Oklahoma city
- 6 Fond du —
- 7 Fleet of ships
- 8 Pandemonium
- 9 Pro votes
- 10 Big rig
- 11 Tend texts
- 13 Oklahoma tribe
- 19 Currier's partner
- 20 \$ dispenser
- 21 Denny's rival
- 22 Japanese soup
- 23 Battery measures
- 25 Primitive flutes
- 26 Apple desktop
- 27 Club in a Manilow song
- 29 Office part-timer
- 31 Charlotte's creation
- 33 Toy train maker
- 34 Sculpted trunks
- 36 Bridal cover
- 37 Curds' partner
- 38 Great expectation
- 39 Hurler Hershiser
- 40 Swiss peaks
- 43 Tic-tac-toe loser
- 44 Storefront sign abbr.
- 45 Poetic dusk
- 46 Hot wok sound

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## — King Crossword —

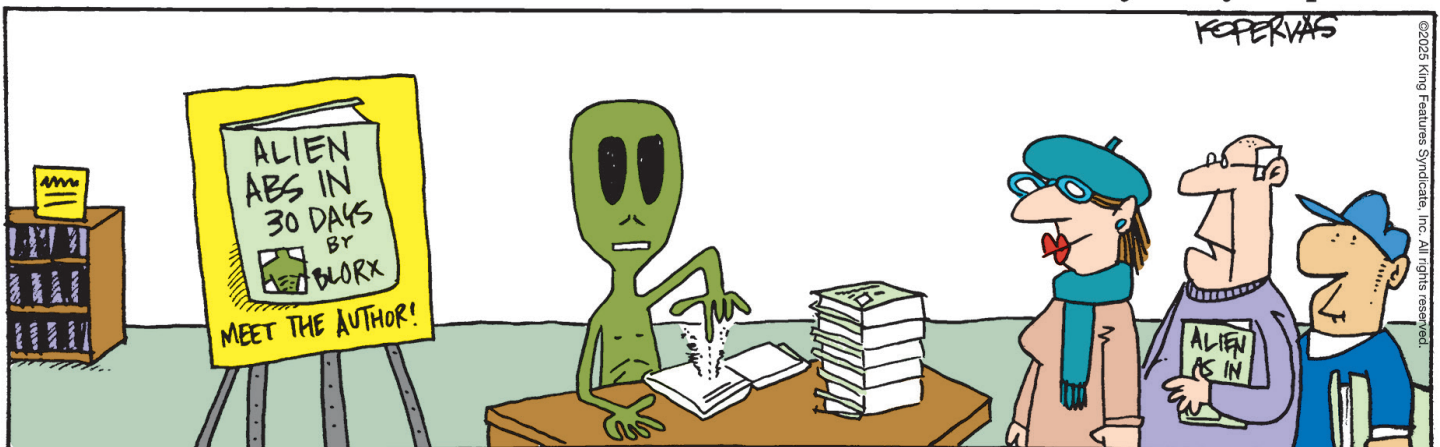
Answers

Solution time: 22 mins.

A	G	U	A		E	L	F		B	A	S	E	
S	E	A	S	O	N	A	L		E	Y	E	D	
P	O	L	I	T	I	C	O		D	E	M	I	
			D	O	D			T	I	L	S	I	T
A	I	M	E	E		V	I	V	A				
T	H	I	S		P	O	L	E	M	I	C		
M	O	S		T	A	L	L	S		M	O	W	
		P	O	L	E	N	T	A		T	A	P	E
				I	M	P	S		V	O	C	A	B
W	H	O	O	P	I		A	E	R				
H	O	R	N		P	O	L	I	S	H	E	S	
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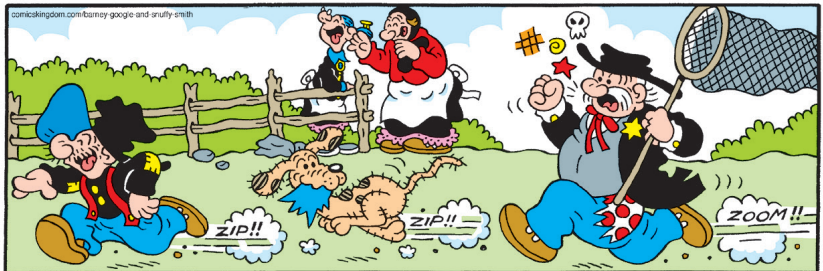
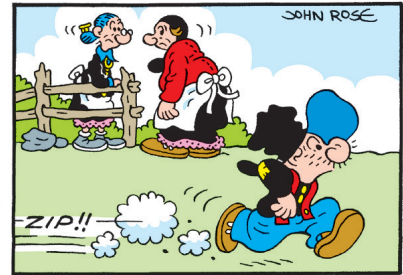
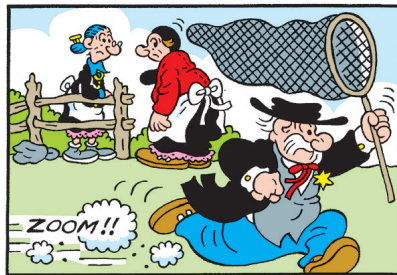
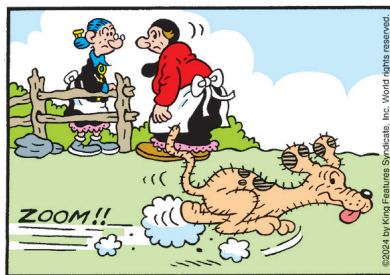
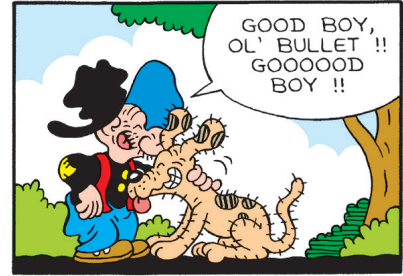
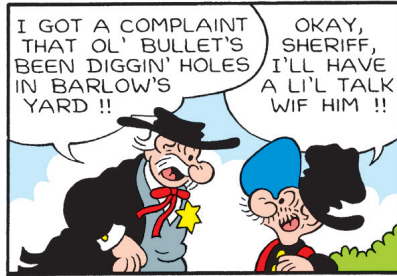
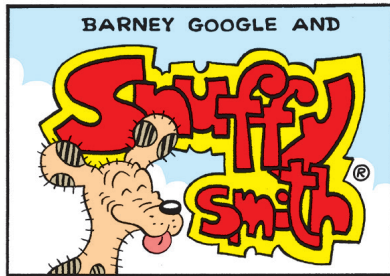
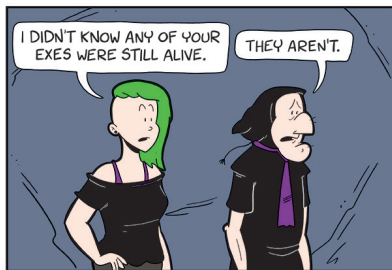
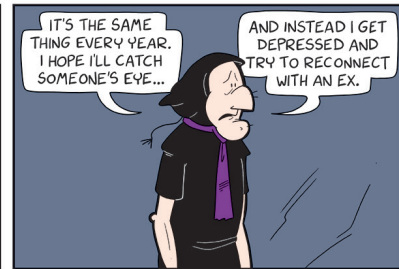
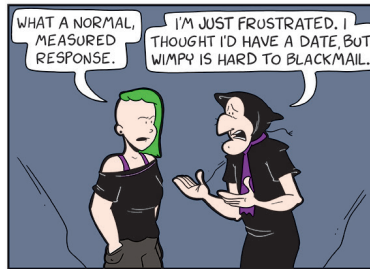
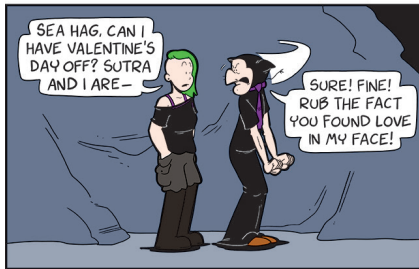
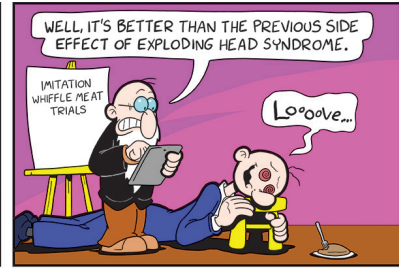
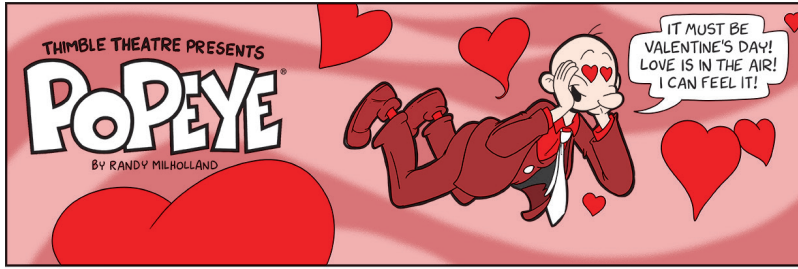
Out on a Limb

by Gary Kopervas



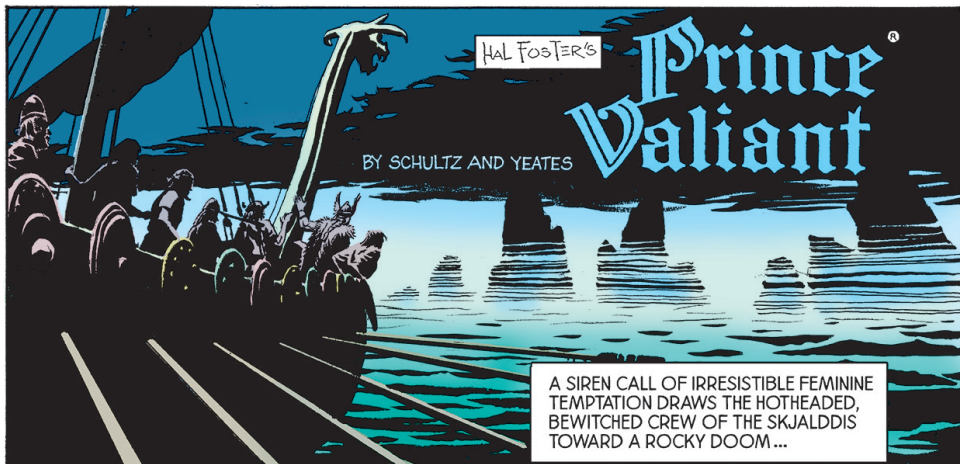
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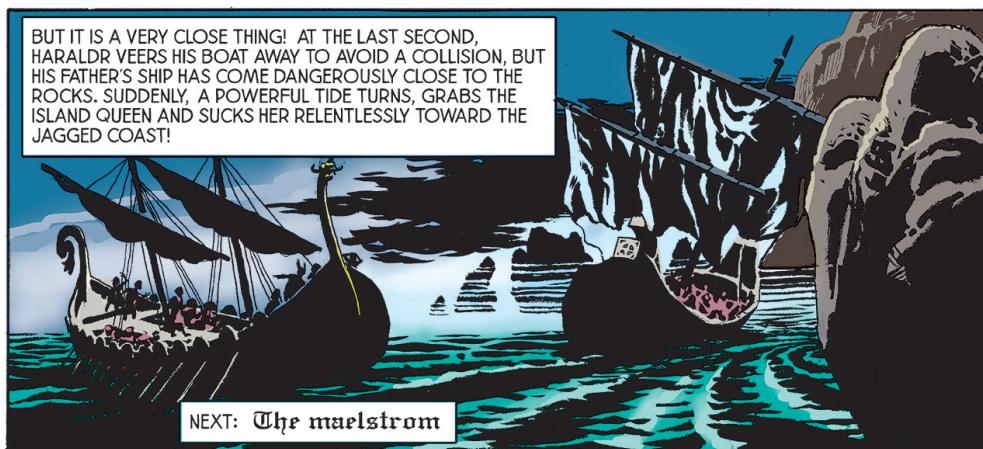


... WHILE THE BESOTTED MEN OF THE ISLAND QUEEN WATCH IN CONFUSED FASCINATION, ALETA HAS HAD ALL SHE CAN TAKE: "SHAKE THAT HARLOT'S CALL FROM YOUR STUPID HEADS AND SET A COURSE TO INTERCEPT THE SKJALDDIS, OR I SWEAR I'LL CUT YOU ALL TO PIECES!"



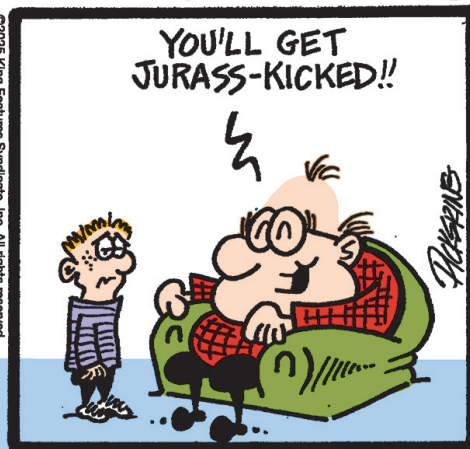
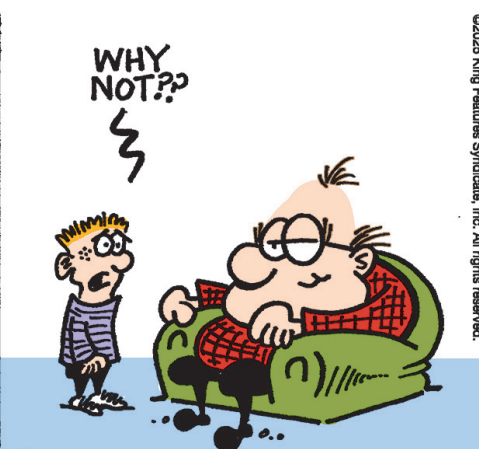
THE FULL FORCE OF ALETA'S ANGER IS A WONDERFUL ANTIDOTE TO THE ALLURING SONG-SPELL. VAL AND GUNDAR HARL ARE SHOCKED INTO ACTION, AND HOLD THE HEADWIND JUST CLOSE ENOUGH TO OUT-MANEUVER THE DRAGON BOAT.

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## The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



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## SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

### AARP membership: It's worth having

After many years at the same cost, AARP increased their membership fee to \$20 at the beginning of this year. But it's still a bargain when you consider the additional benefits, savings and discounts that are available, as well as the newspaper and magazine.

The website (aarp.org) lists discounted gym memberships, travel and vacation packages, insurance, flowers and so much more. If you need computer help such as hooking up to a wireless network or printer, you can get 15% off the Norton Ultimate Help Desk.

The health benefits especially are worth considering. If you suspect you need hearing aids, AARP Hearing Solutions offers a free hearing exam and then 20% off hearing aids, should you need them.

If you need at-home physical therapy, AARP offers the service through Luna, and it's covered by Medicare, Aetna, Anthem and Cigna.

Check the Optum Rx page on AARP's website for prescription drug discounts. Enter your drug in the search box and it will find the best price. Print out your discount card or have it sent to you in email.

In my area, I qualify for discount tires, Dr. Scholl's shoes (20% off) and half-price car washes, among other things.

The discounted items aren't the only thing you'll find with AARP. The Tax Aide Locator is set up to help low and moderate income seniors with tax preparation -- or, if you prefer to do it yourself with just a little bit of coaching, they can provide that, too.

The advice and how-to columns alone are worth the cost of the membership. Digitizing your old home movies, tips to help prevent falls and seven ways to avoid germs at the gym are just a few of the current columns on AARP's online front page.

To learn more about the benefits of an AARP membership, check the website or give them a call at 888-687-2277.

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1. This relief pitcher won World Series titles with the 1969 New York Mets and the 1980 Philadelphia Phillies. His son is a country music star. Who is he?

2. Who did Muhammad Ali defeat in a hard-fought unanimous decision to retain the undisputed heavy-weight championship at New York City's Madison Square Garden on Sept. 29, 1977?

3. Name the motorsports driver, engineer, designer and businessman from New Zealand who was killed in 1970 while testing a new racecar in England.

4. Center Will Perdue won three NBA championships with the Chicago Bulls from 1991-93 and won his fourth title with what team in 1999?

5. Pro Football Hall of Fame wide receiver Calvin Johnson, who played for the Detroit Lions from 2007-15, was nicknamed after what "Transformers" character?

6. Atlanta Drive GC, Boston Common Golf, Jupiter Links GC and The Bay Golf Club are among the teams in what indoor/virtual golf league?

7. Name the Hall of Fame jockey who won the Kentucky Derby riding Sea Hero in 1993 and Grindstone in 1996.



## Answers

1. Tug McGraw (his son is Tim McGraw).

2. Earnie Shavers.

3. Bruce McLaren.

4. The San Antonio Spurs.

5. Megatron.

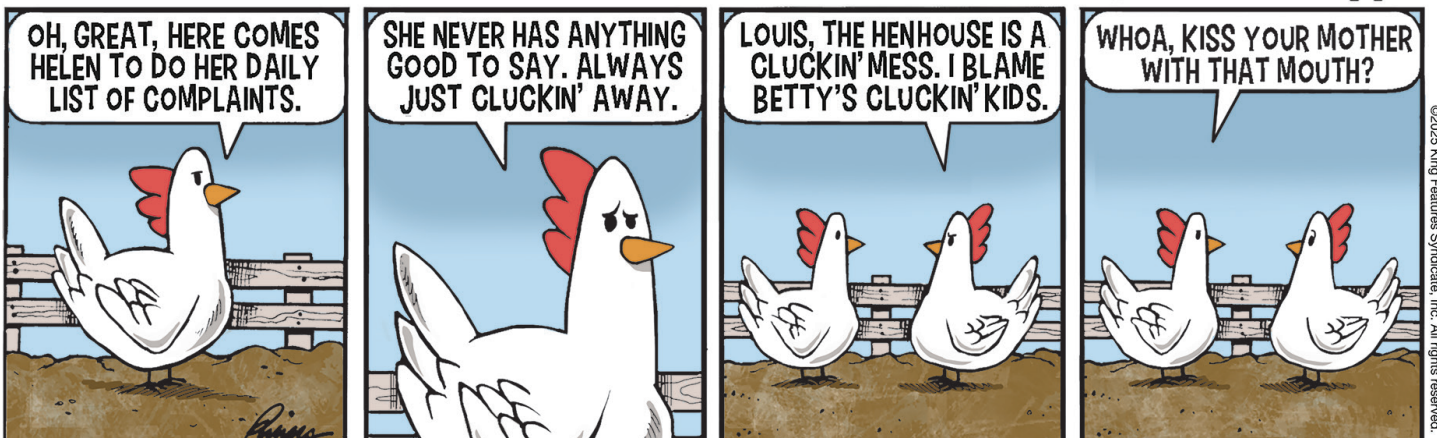
6. TGL Golf.

7. Jerry D. Bailey.

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## Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps



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\* Read a week's worth of The New York Times and you'll have absorbed more information than the average 17th-century citizen would have encountered in their lifetime.

\* A 1972 plane crash that claimed the lives of 101 people occurred because the crew was distracted by a burned-out landing gear indicator light and failed to notice that the autopilot had inadvertently been disconnected.

\* California was named for a fictional island in a 16th-century romance novel.

\* Researchers testing insect repellents used Victoria Secret's Bombshell perfume as a standard and accidentally discovered that it repels mosquitoes better than

many repellents on the market.

\* In 19th-century Maryland, it was illegal to sell mineral water on a Sunday.

\* People's body temperature drops when they watch videos of other folks putting their hands into cold water.

\* Onychophagia is the technical term for biting your nails.

\* A man who tattooed the word "Netflix" on his body and then tweeted a picture of the ink to the company was rewarded with a year's worth of free service.

\* In Wisconsin, the most frequently googled "how to spell" word is Wisconsin.

\* When Prohibition started, alcohol could only be bought for medicinal and religious purposes, from a pharmacy or a doctor. "Medicinal whiskey" was prescribed for just about anything and used to treat conditions such as toothaches and the flu. With a prescription, a patient could legally purchase up to 1 pint of hard liquor every 10 days.

\* In medieval times, the word "abracadabra" was written out in the shape of a triangle and worn around the neck in an amulet to prevent deadly diseases.

\* It takes somewhere between 144 and 411 licks to reach the center of a Tootsie Pop.

\*\*\*

Thought for the Day: "The purpose of life is a life of purpose." -- Robert Byrne

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## Strange BUT TRUE

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### The Garden Bug


**Mix one part borax with 3 parts powdered sugar.** Fill tiny containers (such as bottle caps) with the bait, and place them where you suspect ants are entering your house.

If you see trails of ants, place small containers of the mixture directly in their path. They will carry the bait back to the nest, unable to differentiate between the borax and sugar, and the borax particles will eventually kill the entire colony.

**Making your own ant bait**

Keep leaving out bait until no more ants are seen wandering.

- Brenda Weaver



Source: diynatural.com



by Freddy Groves

## Take charge of your medical care

The Veterans Administration Office of Inspector General has been busy. As always, their focus is on identifying problems that cause harm to veterans.

For example, in one VA medical center there were concerns about the care given by a dermatologist on staff. Specifically, there were 48 instances where biopsies weren't done quickly, which allowed cancers to grow and spread. And abnormal test results weren't communicated, which delayed treatment. And the dermatologist documented procedures that weren't actually done. And specialists weren't called in. And inadequate treatment was given for certain cancers. And the dermatologist had been in the habit of copying and pasting previous notes from one appointment to the next, which meant that new information wasn't added to patient files. And, and, and ... so many instances of deficiency in care, all by one dermatologist. This went on from 2021 to 2023.

The supervisors weren't let off the hook in the OIG report. During performance reviews, they rated the dermatologist as "unsatisfactory" but focused on tardiness problems instead of big concerns like not actually doing biopsies. Instead of bouncing the dermatologist out the door, they decided to recommend nonrenewal of clinical privileges, which allowed the dermatologist to keep working with patients.

And (it just keeps getting better and better) senior staff claimed not to know about what was going on despite continued reporting by staff of their concerns and the dermatologist having been given two unsatisfactory reviews. Further, they didn't follow policy and report the dermatologist to the state licensing board.

Enter the VAOIG -- in response to allegations of deficiencies in care -- and patient records were finally reviewed, including 13 additional records given to the OIG. What the OIG found was grim, especially with cancer diagnoses.

If you have a medical concern, be sure that it's addressed. If a test or biopsy is done and no one calls you, get on the phone to them in seven days and insist on knowing the result. Don't trust that "no news is good news."

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## Wishing Well®

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

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1. GEOGRAPHY: What is the highest mountain in Canada?
2. TELEVISION: Who is the host of the long-running reality series "Survivor"?
3. LITERATURE: Which animals represent the Communist Party in "Animal Farm"?
4. U.S. STATES: Which state is the birthplace of the singer Elvis?
5. ASTRONOMY: How long does it take the moon to orbit the Earth?
6. MOVIES: What is the score Elle receives on her law school admission test in "Legally Blonde"?
7. AD SLOGANS: Which product's slogan is "Is It In You"?
8. LANGUAGE: What is an eraser called in the United Kingdom?
9. SCIENCE: What are the four primary precious metals?
10. GENERAL KNOWLEDGE: Valentine's Day arose from which Roman ritual?

### Answers

1. Mount Logan.
2. Jeff Probst.
3. Pigs.
4. Mississippi.
5. 27.3 days.
6. 179.
7. Gatorade.
8. A rubber.
9. Gold, silver, platinum and palladium.
10. Lupercalia.

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South Dakota Governor



## Larry Rhoden



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

### Keeping South Dakota Safe

I've now been Governor of South Dakota for about 2 weeks. We finally have bills reaching my desk. I just signed my first bill as Governor, Senate Bill 7, which bans Sanctuary Cities in South Dakota.

This bill is a strong piece of legislation. It's a show of support for President Trump's work to make America safe again. This bill reiterates South Dakota's respect for the rule of law.

Unfortunately, South Dakota is impacted by the unlawful and uncontrolled immigration. The decisions made by the previous administration in Washington turned every state into a border state. Thankfully, President Trump is putting a stop to that. And our own South Dakotan, Secretary Kristi Noem, is on the frontlines getting that work done.

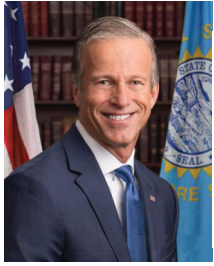
In the meantime, South Dakota has been doing our part to stop the flow of illegal immigrants into our country. We've sent National Guard soldiers to the southern border on several occasions over the last few years to help Texas enforce the rule of law and build border fencing. And I will continue looking for ways to work with the Trump Administration to support their immigration enforcement efforts.

This bill is an important step to keep South Dakota strong, safe, and free. My office worked on getting this bill passed. I am very glad that the legislature got it to my desk quickly, and I am proud to sign it into law.

I am very supportive of President Trump's efforts to deport criminal illegal immigrants first. His administration has been operating fairly and effectively. They are focused on public safety. I am encouraged by what they've already accomplished.

I realize that sanctuary cities have not been a challenge for us in South Dakota, and this bill ensures that they never will be. As politicians in other cities and states try to stand in the way of President Trump's enforcement efforts, this bill ensures South Dakota will be an ally to the federal government as they carry out this important work.

I look forward to continuing to work with the legislature throughout the rest of this session to keep South Dakota strong, safe, and free. This bill is an important step to keep our state safe.



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

## Where's the Beef From?

Grazing cattle are not an uncommon sight in South Dakota. Ranching has long been a part of our way of life, and we take our beef seriously. But when you go to the grocery store, you can't determine if the beef you're buying is from the ranch down the road or from another country. You can look at the label on your shirt to find out where it's from, but why don't we label the beef we eat?

I'm a longtime supporter of mandatory country of origin labeling (MCOOL) for beef. American beef producers – in South Dakota and across the country – work hard to produce high-quality beef. Many consumers would prefer to know whether the package of ground beef or steak that they're buying is an American product. Requiring a country of origin label would provide transparency that benefits both consumers and producers.

I supported provisions in both the 2002 and 2008 farm bills that required MCOOL for beef. Unfortunately, in 2015, the World Trade Organization (WTO) struck down America's labeling requirements. Since then, I've worked with many of my colleagues in Congress and successive administrations to restore country of origin labeling for beef. While I appreciate recent U.S. Department of Agriculture changes limiting the voluntary "Product of the USA" label to beef born, raised, slaughtered, and processed in the United States, there is still more work to be done.

I recently reintroduced the American Beef Labeling Act, which would require the U.S. trade representative (USTR) and the secretary of agriculture to develop a WTO-compliant means of reinstating mandatory country of origin labeling for beef. My bipartisan bill would require the USTR to have a reinstatement plan in place within six months and implement it within the following six months. If a year passes without MCOOL being reinstated, it would be automatically restored.

South Dakota beef producers will have a friend at the U.S. Department of Agriculture in the Trump administration. President Trump's choice for secretary of agriculture, Brooke Rollins, grew up on a family-run farm. She understands the needs of farmers and ranchers, and I was pleased that she expressed a willingness in her confirmation hearing to work with me to reinstate MCOOL for beef.

South Dakota agriculture producers work hard every day to produce high-quality food and fuel for America and the world. They deserve fair and transparent markets to sell the fruits of their labor. I will continue to work to keep America's farms and ranches strong.

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## Keeping men out of women's sports and fentanyl off our streets

### **BIG Update**

The Biden Administration's open border policies allowed fentanyl to flow across the border for four years. The outcome is tragic. Fentanyl poisoning is the leading cause of death for Americans ages 18-45. This illicit drug has ended thousands of lives, causing heartbreak and distress in families and communities nationwide.

Most of this fentanyl is coming from China, where it's manufactured and then smuggled across America's borders. I've been leading efforts to get tough on China and voted to pass the HALT Fentanyl Act to prevent fentanyl from becoming street-legal, ensuring law enforcement have the authority to seize the lethal drug and keep Americans safe.

President Trump has been leading efforts to crack down on Chinese fentanyl in America. Working with Congress, we will secure the border and get fentanyl off the streets.

### **BIG Idea**

I met with Clay County Sheriff Andy Howe to discuss the Regional Information Sharing System (RISS). RISS is an important tool that assists law enforcement at all levels to help facilitate information sharing for criminal investigations and protect officers.

### **BIG News**

February 5 was National Girls and Women in Sports Day. We've heard stories like Riley Gaines' who had to compete against a biological man in a collegiate women's swimming event. This is unfair to female athletes who have worked for years to improve and excel at a sport.

This week, President Trump signed an executive order to protect women's sports. Whether at the elementary, middle, high school, or college level, females will no longer be forced to compete against biological men.

I strongly agree with the President and millions of Americans who want to ensure a level playing field for our daughters, nieces, granddaughters, and sisters. I cosponsored and voted to pass the Protection of Women and Girls in Sports Act to do the same as Trump's executive order to permanently prevent men from competing in women's sports. Now, the Senate must pass this bill so it can become law.

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**JANUARY 27 - FEB. 2, 2025**

Welcome back to the Weekly Round[s] Up. Before we begin, I wanted to take a moment to remember all of the victims of this past week's plane crash near Reagan National Airport in Washington, D.C. It's an unbelievable tragedy and we continue to keep the families of the victims in our prayers. We also say thank you to all of our first responders who worked tirelessly

– including through the night – to assist.

Similar to past weeks, we are working to confirm President Trump's cabinet nominees. This includes holding open hearings in our committees, business meetings to report nominees out of committees and eventually confirming them with a vote on the Senate floor. Four of these nominees were confirmed this past week. We heard from Tulsi Gabbard, President Trump's nominee to serve as his Director of National Intelligence. More on that later! Here's my Weekly Round[s] Up:

Nominee meetings: I met with Stephan Miran, nominee to lead the Council of Economic Advisers.

Other meetings: Rob Greenway, Director of the Allison Center for National Security at the Heritage Foundation; Kevin Fromer, President and CEO of the Financial Services Forum; and Brig. Gen. Patrick Karuretwa, head of international military cooperation at Rwanda Defense Force. I attended an event hosted by Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI, to preview and discuss advancements in AI. I also attended my weekly Senate Bible Study and Senate Prayer Breakfast, where I was our speaker!

Hearings: I attended three hearings. One was in the Senate Armed Services Committee, where we heard from witnesses about defense innovation and acquisition reform. You can watch a clip of my questioning here.

We also had two hearings in the Select Committee on Intelligence. On Tuesday afternoon, we had one hearing that was entirely closed. On Thursday, we had a confirmation hearing for Tulsi Gabbard, President Trump's Nominee to serve as Director of National Intelligence. Her hearing had both a closed and an open session. You can watch a clip of my questions during the open session here.

Classified briefings: I had one classified briefing on Spectrum.

Votes taken: 10 – As I mentioned, we confirmed four cabinet nominees: Scott Bessent to lead the Department of the Treasury, Sean Duffy to lead the Department of Transportation, Lee Zeldin to lead the Environmental Protection Agency and Doug Burgum to lead the Department of Interior. We also had procedural votes on Thursday evening, teeing up final votes to confirm Chris Wright to lead the Department of Energy and Doug Collins to lead the Department of Veterans Affairs this week.

Subcommittee assignments: This past week I received my subcommittee assignments for the Senate Committee on Appropriations. This committee is split into 12 subcommittees that oversee funding for federal departments that fall within our jurisdiction. I've been assigned to serve on six of these committees:

Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies

Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development

Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies

Subcommittee on Legislative Branch

Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies

Legislation introduced: This past week, I introduced the Marcella LeBeau Recognition Act. This legislation would designate the federal office building in Pierre as the "Marcella LeBeau Federal Building." She was a lifelong South Dakotan, a World War II Veteran, a nurse and a well-respected leader of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe. You can read more about Marcella LeBeau and this legislation here.

Caucus membership: This past week, I announced that I've joined the Senate's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) Caucus. The DOGE Caucus is a bipartisan, bicameral group of members ready to work hand-in-hand with the Trump administration to identify and eliminate wasteful spending in the federal government. Read more about this here.

My staff in South Dakota visited: Aberdeen, Rapid City and Pierre.

**Steps taken: 57,879 steps or 28.52 miles**



## Dr. James L. Snyder Ministries

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### **A Needle Named Miss Ouch**

My father has been gone for 15 years. It hardly seems that long, but time goes by, and you can't stop it.

One of my father's "jokes" was, "Son, I'm so sick and tired of being sick and tired." Then he would laugh, and I would, of course, join in with his laughter. Although I was laughing, I did not get the punch line.

I may be getting a little closer to understanding that joke, but believe me, I'm not laughing.

In the hospital recently, I thought about my dad's "joke." And believe me, I was sick and tired of being sick and tired of the hospital. I think I was there for four days and four nights, but I can't be too sure.

One thing I learned during my time in the hospital was how important nurses and the nursing staff are. Everything I needed was at their disposal, and all I had to do was ask—and sometimes, I didn't even have to ask.

I had about six nurses in my room daily, including nursing staff and technical nurses. They were cheerful and encouraging, and I enjoyed getting to know them.

I was, however, very anxious to leave the hospital and go home. I didn't have anything against the hospital staff; I just wanted to go home. I was sick and tired of being sick and tired in the hospital.

Every morning, I would ask one of the staff if I was going home today. It was the first thing on my mind when I woke up. Is today the day?

The staff always replied, "No, I don't believe you'll be going home today. Maybe tomorrow."

Well, everybody knows that tomorrow never comes. And I was sorry to hang around in this atmosphere much longer.

Every day, I had nurses coming in with their favorite instrument, the needle, to give me my shots for the day. I'm not sure I counted right, but I think I had at least 10 shots daily. Even now, my stomach is still black from all of the needles poked in my stomach. I'm not sure what the needles in the stomach were for, but they were there.

Pain is something that is not one of my friends. I don't like pain. Those needles in the hands of those nurses created pain in this body of mine.

On the first day, when one of the nurses came in to give me my first needle shot, she said, "There's no need to worry. This will not hurt in any way." Then she smiled at me, a smile I'll never forget until I'm in my coffin.



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To this day, I do not know what she understood pain to be. But that very first needle shot in my stomach was painful, according to my definition of pain.

After I gasped most hurtful, the nurse said, "See, that didn't hurt, did it?"

Since this nurse with the needle in hand was female, I responded to her as I would to my wife. I smiled and said, "I didn't feel a thing." She smiled back at me most wonderfully.

That was just the beginning.

Every time the nurse came into my room, I froze in expectation of pain. I tried to hide behind a pseudo-smile so the nurse would think I wasn't in pain.

After the third day of being stuck with needle after needle after needle, I leaned back in my bed and thought a lot about those needles. Then, a thought came to my mind. What that nurse held in her hand as she entered my room was "A Needle Named Miss Ouch."

Every time I looked at Miss Ouch, my body froze in expectation of pain.

Those needles were causing me a lot of pain, and I wanted to do something to get rid of every needle in the hospital. It was those needles causing me pain.

Every time I got a needle shot in my stomach, the nurse always looked at me, smiled, and said, "This isn't going to hurt."

Of course, it's not going to hurt her. Doesn't she understand that the hurt is on my side of the needle, not hers?

As I was recovering from the last shot from Miss Ouch, I began to rethink this whole matter. Was it really that needle causing me pain? I thought about that for a while.

Then, my thinking went in the direction of the nurse. Would the needle pierce my stomach if it was not for the nurse? The pain is not a result of the needle but rather a result of the nurse. She is the source of my pain.

That caused me to think a little bit. Because the nurse was in control of the needle, it could be more or less painful, and I tried to make sure that it was going to be less painful. I tried to smile cheerfully at my nurse and not let her know I was in pain. I did not want to upset her because an upset nurse can cause more pain through the needle.

Resting in my bed a verse of scripture came to mind. James 1:2-3, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience."

With the needle came pain, but also, the medicine I need. Through pain comes my medical solution.

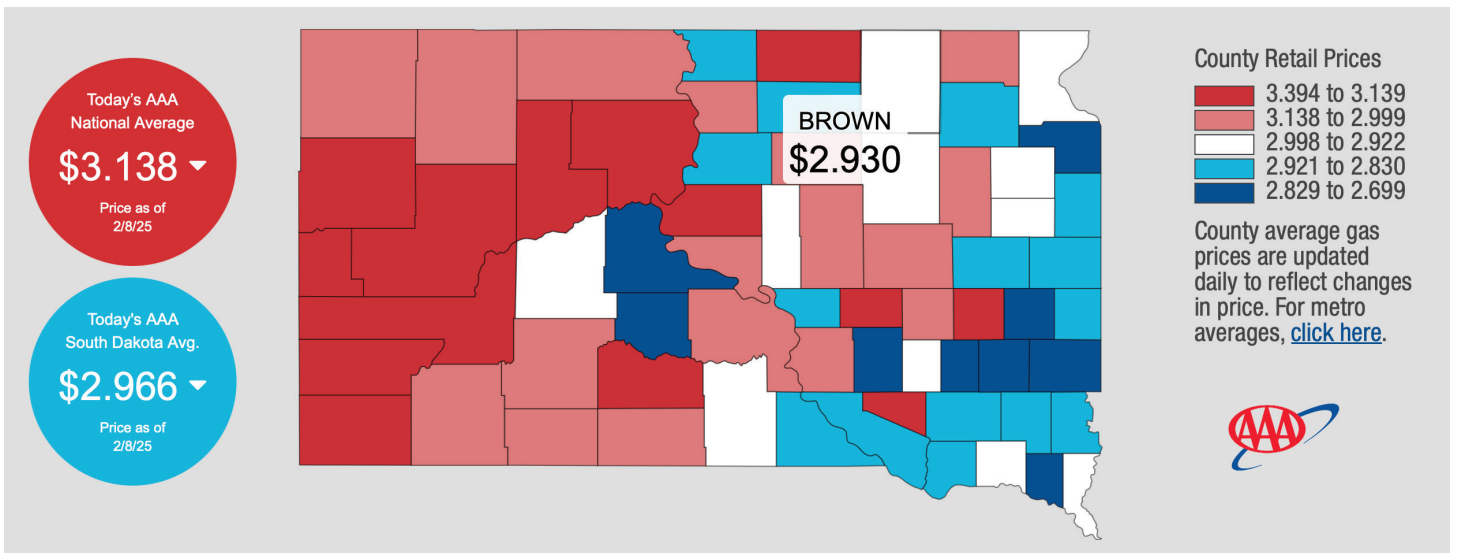
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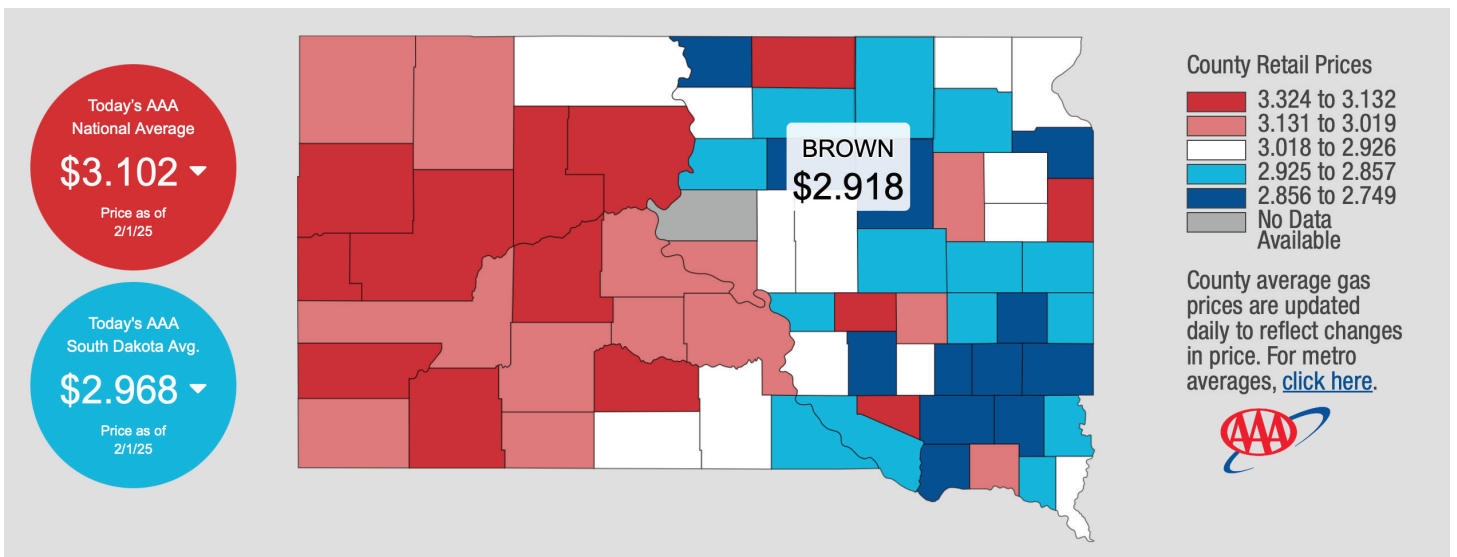
## South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$2.966	\$3.140	\$3.578	\$3.446
Yesterday Avg.	\$2.970	\$3.160	\$3.599	\$3.436
Week Ago Avg.	\$2.968	\$3.146	\$3.587	\$3.394
Month Ago Avg.	\$2.832	\$3.048	\$3.469	\$3.302
Year Ago Avg.	\$2.813	\$3.001	\$3.443	\$3.560

### This Week



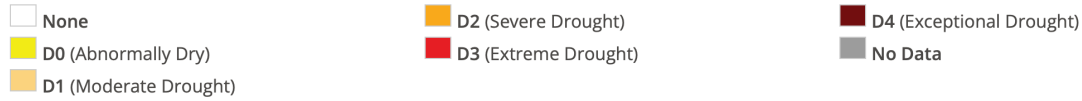
### Last Week



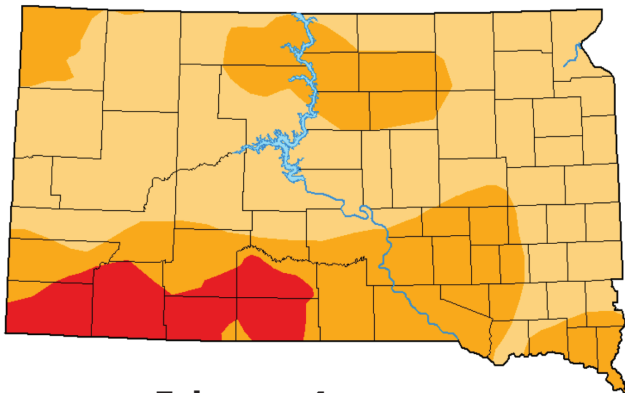
# Groton Daily Independent

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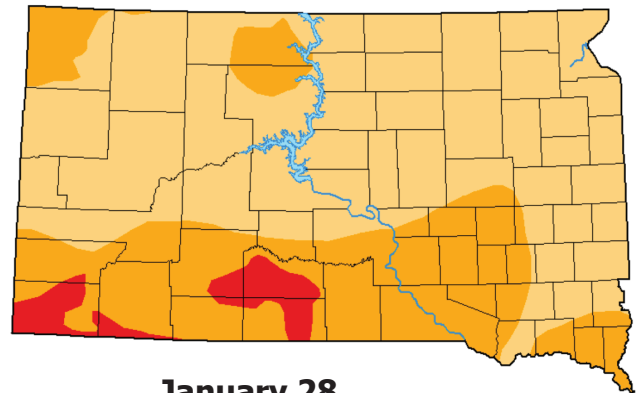
## Drought Classification



## Drought Monitor



February 4



January 28

Like much of the central part of the country, the High Plains were 5 to 10 degrees warmer than usual. Little precipitation led to minor improvements in southeast Nebraska, northeast Kansas and along the Wyoming Rockies. Due to prolonged dryness, South Dakota saw the expansion of severe drought in the north-central eastward and extreme drought in the southwest.

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## EARTHTALK

Dear EarthTalk: Is leisure travel so bad for the planet that we are all better off just staying home?  
-- Jackie Smith, Boston, MA

According to the International Air Transport Association, in 2024 global air travel increased by 10.4 percent. Behind this surge in tourism is growing affluence in developing countries, demographic shifts to younger generations, convenience of travel, and increasing awareness through social media.

Despite the booming economies traveling creates, there lurks the harsh penalties that each flight, drive and cruise puts on Mother Earth. Tourism accounts for about eight percent of world greenhouse gas emissions. University of Queensland Associate Professor Ya-Yen Sun conducted a study showing how tourism is the leading producer of greenhouse gases of all global economic sectors. Dr. Sun and his research team anticipate "annual increases in emissions of three to four percent" from travel alone.

Transportation is the primary contributor of greenhouse gases from travel, almost half of tourism's carbon footprint. Online emissions calculator, Atmosfair, shows that a single round-trip flight from New York to Los Angeles for a typical family emits 7.1 metric tons of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>). This is equivalent to the greenhouse gas emissions from approximately 1.7 gasoline-powered vehicles driven in one year.

"Goods" and "Food & Beverage" make up the next largest contributors of greenhouse gases. These categories encompass the souvenirs and shopping experiences of tourism, considering production, manufacturing and shipping. Food production entails growing, processing, transporting, and much more, thus multiplying its carbon footprint.

Visualizing the effects of global warming is difficult, even with these numbers and facts. Rising sea levels and dwindling ice sheets seem hardly connected to one airplane ride. The gradual nature of such changes helps to ease its burden on the mind. But individuals collectively have a rather hefty effect. University of Tennessee Professor John Nolt concluded after calculations that "the average American is responsible, through his/her greenhouse gas emissions, for the suffering and/or deaths of one or two future people."

The future may appear bleak factoring in these stats and research. Yet, we can and are doing more to combat travel's eco-damage. Aircraft emissions are being lowered through biofuels, electric motors and efficient design. Quitting travel is extreme, but consider the impacts of your next trip. And if the answer to travel or not is yes, decrease your carbon footprint: buy offsets, choose efficient airlines, fly during the day. And remember what Dorothy concluded after her travels: "There's no place like home."

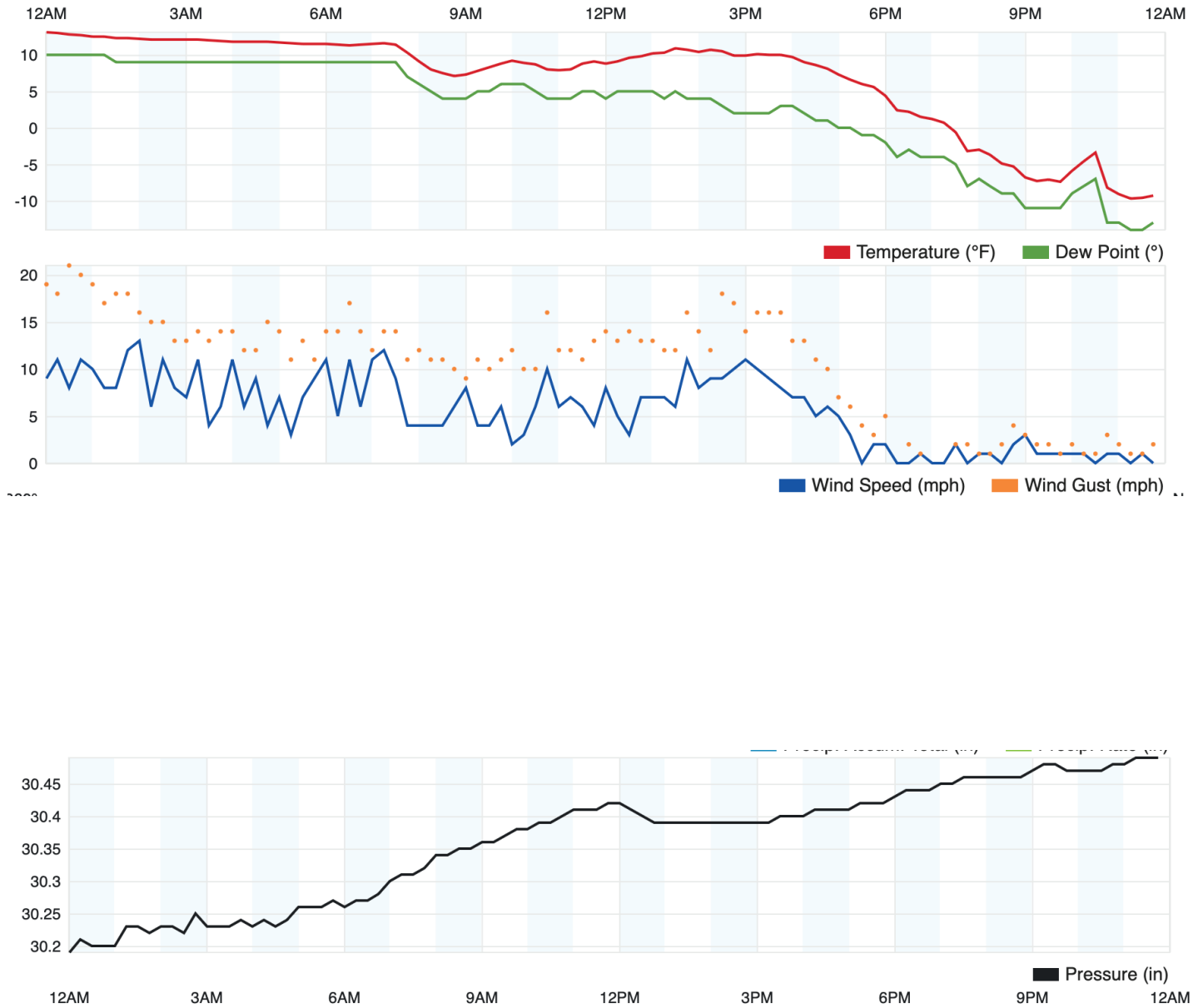


**Vacation is a state of mind, so those watching their carbon footprint might consider just staying at or near home.** Credit: Pexels.com.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 17 °F

Sunny

Tonight



Low: -12 °F

Mostly Clear

Monday



High: 9 °F

Mostly Cloudy  
then Slight  
Chance Snow

Monday Night



Low: -20 °F

Mostly Clear

Tuesday



High: 4 °F

Cold



## Arctic Air Continues This Week

February 9, 2025  
3:25 AM

### Minimum Wind Chill Forecast (°F)

	2/9 Sun				2/10 Mon				2/11 Tue				2/12 Wed			
	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	
Aberdeen	-25	-2	-16	-22	-22	-12	-26	-33	-34	-17	-20	-21	-21	-9	-21	
Britton	-25	-5	-20	-24	-24	-14	-26	-34	-35	-24	-23	-24	-24	-11	-23	
Brookings	-14	0	-13	-14	-6	-6	-19	-26	-25	-13	-12	-14	-15	-3	-16	
Chamberlain	-3	16	8	1	-1	-1	-12	-16	-14	-6	-7	-7	-6	-2	-9	
Clark	-19	2	-9	-16	-16	-10	-23	-29	-29	-18	-18	-18	-18	-9	-19	
Eagle Butte	-19	-2	-9	-17	-21	-13	-25	-29	-29	-14	-14	-18	-20	-14	-18	
Ellendale	-26	-6	-21	-24	-24	-16	-30	-34	-35	-21	-28	-28	-26	-13	-26	
Eureka	-25	-10	-23	-28	-29	-19	-34	-40	-40	-22	-24	-26	-26	-19	-26	
Gettysburg	-20	-3	-9	-15	-19	-12	-23	-29	-29	-15	-14	-18	-19	-13	-17	
Huron	-12	6	-6	-8	-7	-5	-18	-23	-22	-10	-12	-13	-12	-3	-15	
Kennebec	-8	15	4	-3	-6	-3	-13	-17	-18	-4	-7	-9	-9	-2	-12	
McIntosh	-22	-10	-20	-24	-25	-19	-32	-39	-39	-20	-24	-26	-26	-19	-25	
Milbank	-21	2	-13	-17	-19	-9	-21	-29	-29	-15	-19	-21	-20	-3	-19	
Miller	-14	7	-3	-7	-12	-7	-18	-23	-23	-9	-12	-14	-14	-4	-14	
Mobridge	-23	-3	-12	-18	-20	-11	-20	-28	-27	-10	-14	-17	-19	-11	-10	
Murdo	-5	13	6	-5	-10	-6	-14	-18	-17	-7	-7	-9	-12	-6	-10	
Pierre	-8	12	6	-2	-8	-2	-11	-15	-15	-4	-3	-8	-8	-3	-8	
Redfield	-20	7	-12	-16	-18	-7	-21	-27	-28	-12	-14	-16	-16	-5	-17	
Sisseton	-20	-1	-14	-20	-21	-12	-25	-31	-31	-18	-21	-23	-21	-9	-20	
Watertown	-21	2	-12	-17	-17	-9	-21	-27	-29	-15	-16	-17	-17	-5	-19	
Webster	-20	-2	-17	-22	-22	-13	-26	-32	-33	-21	-20	-21	-21	-11	-22	
Wheaton	-23	-1	-14	-21	-23	-13	-25	-32	-32	-19	-22	-25	-23	-8	-19	



### Key Messages

- High confidence in cold air for much of the week
  - 20-30 degrees below average
- **Tuesday morning will be the coldest** with wind chills ranging from **-20 to -40°F**
- Dress in several layers before heading outdoors, covering all exposed skin
  - Frostbite can occur in as little as **10 minutes**
- Remember to bring your pets inside!

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

20-30 degree below average temperatures will continue through the week. This will bring some very cold wind chills to the region as well. Tuesday morning will be the coldest with wind chills ranging from -20 to -40 degrees. At this temperature, frostbite can occur in as little as 10 minutes so be sure to bring your pets inside and bundle up before going out!

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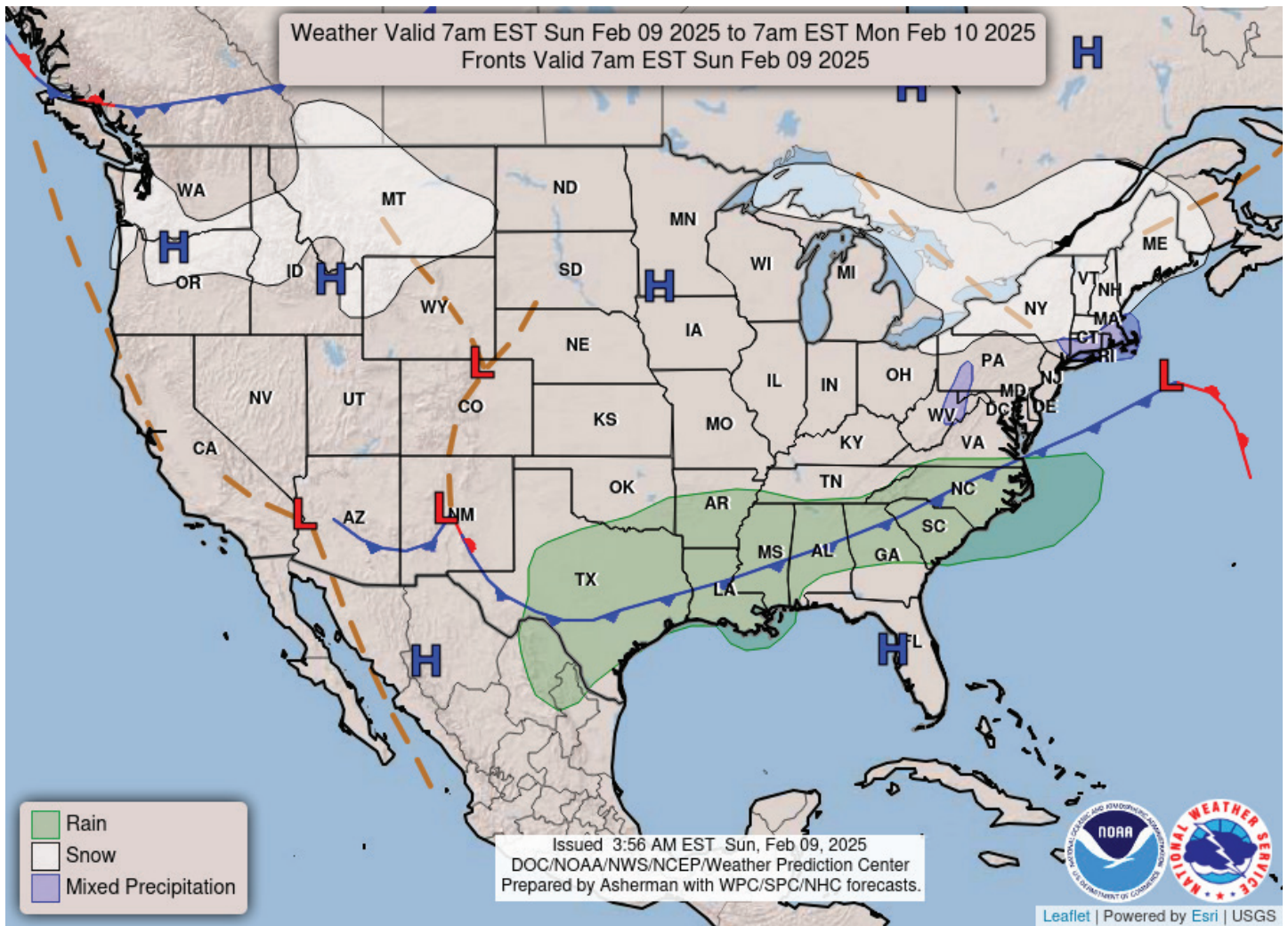
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 13 °F at 12:00 AM**  
**Low Temp: -10 °F at 11:10 PM**  
**Wind: 21 mph at 12:26 AM**  
**Precip: : 2" of Snow. .06 of moisture**

Day length: 10 hours, 12 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 53 in 1987  
Record Low: -45 in 1994  
Average High: 27  
Average Low: 4  
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.18  
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.20  
Average Precip to date: 0.73  
Precip Year to Date: 0.20  
Sunset Tonight: 5:52:46 pm  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:38:57 am



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## Today in Weather History

February 9, 1899: Extreme cold blanketed most locations east of the Rocky Mountains during the first half of February. For South Dakota, the minimum temperature was the lowest experienced for many years, at least, and probably since its settlement. The week ending the 13th of February, the Weather Bureau stated: "With respect to temperature, this week is probably the most remarkable in the history of the Weather Bureau, over the greater part of the country east of the Rocky Mountains a large number of stations reporting the lowest temperatures recorded since their establishment. Over the whole region, extending from the eastern Rocky Mountain slope to the Atlantic coast and from the Gulf to the Great Lakes, the average daily deficiency exceeded 20 degrees. It ranged from 30 degrees to 35 degrees over an extensive area embracing the central valleys and portions of the Lake Region."

In South Dakota, the cold weather that culminated in the extremes began on January 26th and continued with little abatement over most of the state until February 12th. During the first twelve days of February, the Weather Bureau stations' daily average temperatures ranged from zero to 27 degrees below zero.

Some low-temperature readings from February 8th through the 12th include:

- 29 in Spearfish on the 11th
- 30 in Yankton on the 11th
- 34 in Milbank on the 9th
- 34 in Rapid City on the 11th
- 35 in Aberdeen on the 8th and 12th
- 36 in Chamberlain on the 9th
- 36 in Waubay on the 8th
- 37 in Ipswich on the 8th
- 38 in Watertown on the 11th
- 39 in Mellette on the 11th
- 39 in Mitchell on the 11th
- 39 in Pierre on the 12th
- 39 in Wessington Springs on the 9th
- 40 in DeSmet on the 10th
- 40 in Highmore on the 12th
- 42 in Gann Valley on the 8th
- 40 in Redfield on the 9th
- 42 Sioux Falls on the 9th

February 9, 1994: Widespread record cold occurred across central, north-central, and northeast South Dakota as well as west-central Minnesota. Record lows were set at Aberdeen, Mobridge, Pierre, Sisseton, Timber Lake, and Wheaton, with overnight lows in the 30s below to 40s below zero across the entire area. Aberdeen fell to 45 degrees below zero or one degree off the record low of 46 degrees below zero. Mobridge dropped to 38 degrees below zero, and Pierre fell to 35 degrees below zero. Watertown came just one degree short of their daytime record, with 35 degrees below zero.

1870: President Ulysses S. Grant signed a law "to provide for taking meteorological observations at the military stations in the interior of the continent." A petition submitted by Increase A Lapham to Congressman Halbert E Paine in December 1869 began this process.

1994: A devastating ice storm struck Mississippi, Louisiana, and extreme northwest Alabama. Freezing rain began falling over northern Mississippi during the early morning hours and continued until midday on the 10th. Ice accumulated 3 to 6 inches thick on exposed objects in the affected area. Due to the weight of the ice, power lines, trees, and tree limbs were down. Nearly one million people were without power after the storm, some for a month.





## HIDING "WHAT IS"

In ancient Greece the theaters had no scenery, and the actors wore no costumes. To portray a character, however, they carried hand-held masks which they would place in front of their faces. It was designed to portray the character of the person in the role they were playing. They would walk onto the stage, mask in hand, and when speaking, hold it before their face.

The word hypocrisy, as we know it today, had its roots in the Greek word hupokrisis. It meant "acting a part in a play or feigning to be what one is not." In other words, a hypocrite is one who wears a "mask" to hide their real identity.

John addressed hypocrisy when he wrote, "If someone says I belong to God, but doesn't obey God's commandments, that person is a liar and does not live in the truth." Strong words that leave no "wiggle room."

True Christian faith results in consistent Christian living. John is confronting all of us because Christian faith results in Christian living and Christian service.

If we profess to be "Christian" but do not demonstrate Christlike behavior in "word and deed," we are wearing a mask to present ourselves as someone other than who we truly are. We are "feigning" to be who we are not.

John is encouraging us to look at our behavior in the light of God's Word. He says candidly that "the way we act gives us the assurance that we belong to Christ!"

Prayer: Father, we are all capable of hiding who we truly are from others. But we cannot hide ourselves from You. May we come out of hiding and be truly Christians. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Someone may say, "I am a Christian; I am on my way to heaven; I belong to Christ." But if he doesn't do what Christ tells him to, he is a liar. 1 John 2:4

*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: 02.07.25

4 24 32 41 55 16

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$110,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.08.25

2 5 6 30 50 6

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$23,570,000**

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.08.25

1 7 15 17 40 18

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 13 Hrs 41 Mins 43 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.08.25

11 20 26 28 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$32,000**

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.08.25

5 20 23 36 53 17

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.08.25

23 44 57 60 62 9

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$142,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

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## Upcoming Groton Events

- 01/05/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 01/26/2025 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed at the Community Center 10am-1pm
- 01/26/2025 87th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm
- 02/02/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 02/05/2025 FB Live Electronic Hwy 12 Sign Drawing City Hall 12pm
- 03/02/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 03/22/2025 Spring Vendor Fair at the GHS Gym 10am-2pm
- 04/05/2025 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39, 6-11:30pm
- 04/06/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 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
- 06/07/2025 Day of Play
- 07/04/2025 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/13/2025 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm
- 07/09/2025 Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar at the Groton Legion 11am-1pm
- 08/09/2025 2nd Annual Celebration in the Park/Rib Cook-Off 1-9:30pm
- 09/06/2025 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 10/31/2025 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
- 11/27/2025 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1:30pm

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News from the **AP** Associated Press

## Saturday's Scores

The Associated Press

### **GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL**

Bennett County 61, Hay Springs, Neb. 28  
Beresford 49, Alcester-Hudson 33  
Brandon Valley 59, Rapid City Stevens 30  
Canton 52, Milbank 47  
Custer 50, Belle Fourche 43  
Dakota Valley 63, Hamlin 55  
Dell Rapids 60, Deuel 45  
Elk Point-Jefferson 43, Groton 37  
Estelline-Hendricks 72, James Valley Christian School 24  
Great Plains Lutheran 44, Arlington 36  
Herreid-Selby 45, Jones County 43  
Highmore-Harrold 45, Philip 42  
Huron 35, Sturgis Brown High School 31  
Kadoka 46, Edgemont 25  
Lakota Tech 78, Pine Ridge 33  
Langford 61, Wilmot 55, OT  
Lennox 60, Clark-Willow Lake 26  
Lyman 63, North Central 33  
Mahpiya Luta Red Cloud 84, Lead-Deadwood 19  
Miller 56, Platte-Geddes 15  
Northwestern 59, Waubay/Summit 47  
Redfield 38, Madison 26  
Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 63, Wolsey-Wessington 33  
Sioux Falls Christian 64, Aberdeen Roncalli 41  
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 57, Rapid City Central 38  
Spearfish 54, Mitchell 49  
Tea 55, T F Riggs High School 48  
Tri-Valley 66, Rapid City Christian 62  
Tripp-Delmont-Armour 31, Wessington Springs 26  
Vermillion 47, Sisseton 46  
Viborg-Hurley 43, Dell Rapids St Mary 41  
Warner 50, Waverly-South Shore 33  
West Central 67, Webster 29  
White River 62, New Underwood 48  
Winner 60, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 38

### **BOYS PREP BASKETBALL**

Bennett County 76, Hay Springs, Neb. 67  
Beresford 78, Alcester-Hudson 71  
Brandon Valley 52, Rapid City Stevens 39  
Castlewood 58, DeSmet 38  
Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 37, Winner 32  
Custer 79, Belle Fourche 32

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Estelline-Hendricks 86, James Valley Christian School 62  
Great Plains Lutheran 67, Arlington 35  
Herreid-Selby 45, Jones County 43  
Hill City 55, Hot Springs 25  
Huron 60, Sturgis Brown High School 54  
Kadoka 56, Highmore-Harrold 42  
Lyman 60, North Central 32  
Mahpiya Lúta Red Cloud 63, Lead-Deadwood 56  
Mitchell 49, Spearfish 47  
Philip 62, Burke 39  
Pine Ridge 97, Lakota Tech 56  
Platte-Geddes 46, Miller 43  
Sioux Falls O’Gorman 78, Rapid City Central 59  
Sioux Valley 66, Tiospaye Topa 25  
Tea 60, Sioux Falls Jefferson 48  
Wall 68, Faith 35  
Waubay/Summit 54, Northwestern 42  
Waverly-South Shore 55, Warner 34  
Wessington Springs 58, Tripp-Delmont-Armour 53  
Wilmot 68, Langford 40  
Wolsey-Wessington 54, Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 50

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

## As female representation hits new highs among states, constitutions still assume officials are male

By SEJAL GOVINDARAO Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — South Dakota’s constitution refers to the governor as a “he.”

But for the past six years, the governor was a “she” — Kristi Noem, the first female to hold the position there. The conservative Republican pushed a constitutional amendment to change the gendered language. But voters rejected the measure in the 2024 general election that also would have been inclusive of nonbinary people.

Across the nation, state constitutions presume officeholders are male, and they increasingly are outdated. This year, a record of 13 women were serving as governor before Noem stepped down to serve in President Donald Trump’s Cabinet. In state legislatures, 2,469 women are serving, according to the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University.

Most states haven’t modernized their constitutions to reflect the rise of women in politics. Among those that have are New York’s, which became gender-neutral in 2001, and Vermont’s, where voters approved a change from “men” to “persons” in 1994.

An effort in Washington state to update the state’s constitution died in a legislative committee in 2023. In Connecticut, state Sen. Mae Flexer says she’ll make another run at revising the constitution in this year’s legislative session. Some states, like Nevada and California, have made changes within their legislatures to refer to lawmakers as assemblymembers instead of assemblymen or assemblywomen.

“Language matters, it conveys a message about values, it conveys a message about who belongs,” said Debbie Walsh, director of the Center for American Women and Politics.

Noem began her 2023 State of the State address with a call to update the state’s constitution, which was created in 1889.

“The South Dakota state constitution requires the governor to begin each legislative session by giving the Legislature information concerning the affairs of the state and recommending the measures he con-

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siders necessary," Noem said. "Notice I didn't say 'she.' The constitution doesn't say she, and maybe we should fix that sometime."

A few months later, Noem signed a bill to update male references to more gender-neutral language in state law, such as changing "he shall deem" to "the Governor deems." But amending the state's founding document requires voter approval — and South Dakotans didn't go for it.

The bill's sponsor, Republican state Sen. Erin Tobin, saw it as a way to reflect the state's progress in electing women and celebrating them. She said the amendment failed partly because of the word "pronoun" in the ballot question.

It entangled the effort with the broader conservative sentiment that "nonbinary" is not a legitimate gender identity. Others cited a lack of campaigning for or against the measure and concerns over the financial cost of making a change.

Although "he" and "she" are inherently inclusive of many transgender people who use those pronouns, Noem has a track record opposing gender transitions.

Noem signed a bill in 2023 prohibiting gender-affirming care for youth and in 2022 signed a bill banning transgender girls and college-age women from playing in school sports leagues that match their gender identity.

Noem resigned her office in late January to oversee the U.S. Department of Homeland Security under Trump, who issued an executive order last month directing the federal government to recognize only two sexes — male and female. Trump also signed an executive order Wednesday that intended to prohibit transgender athletes from participating in girls' and women's sports.

Trump emphasized his opposition to transgender rights in his 2024 presidential bid. Aligned political action committees spent tens of millions of dollars on anti-transgender attack ads.

Had she been unfamiliar with the South Dakota measure, Tobin said she would have voted no based on how it read. The state's attorney general writes the titles and explanations for constitutional amendments.

Republican South Dakota state Rep. Brandei Schaeffbauer was among those who encouraged voters to turn down the measure.

Schaeffbauer said she supports referring to officeholders as "he" or "she" but opposes gender-neutral references.

"That is one of my biggest oppositions to this," Schaeffbauer said. "We are male and female, and when this was gender-neutralized in the constitution, it was taking away the personhood and that is not how I live my life."

Neil Fulton, dean of the University of South Dakota School of Law, said that masculine pronouns have long been understood to encompass all people and its usage in the state constitution reflects the drafting convention at the time.

"Certainly we know that the officeholder limits in South Dakota have never been interpreted to preclude female officeholders," said Fulton. "Why? We have a female governor and we've had a variety of state-wide female elected officials previously. And no one's ever challenged that, so it would not have worked substantive change."

He said language use and convention evolve "dramatically" over time, and proponents argued those conventions are changing. The state's legislative drafting manual discourages the use of male pronouns when referring to an individual or class of individuals. \_\_\_\_ The Associated Press' women in the workforce and state government coverage receives financial support from Pivotal Ventures. AP is solely responsible for all content. Find AP's standards for working with philanthropies, a list of supporters and funded coverage areas at AP.org.

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## **Forte has 14 in South Dakota's 75-74 win over Oral Roberts**

By The Associated Press undefined

TULSA, Okla. (AP) — Chase Forte's 14 points helped South Dakota defeat Oral Roberts 75-74 on Saturday night.

Forte made the second of two free throws with about three seconds left. Following an Oral Roberts timeout, Issac McBride then missed a 3 to end it.

Forte added eight rebounds for the Coyotes (15-10, 6-4 Summit League). Paul Bruns scored 11 points while shooting 3 for 7 (1 for 4 from 3-point range) and 4 of 5 from the free-throw line and added eight rebounds and three steals. Isaac Bruns had nine points and shot 3 for 12, including 1 for 6 from beyond the arc.

McBride led the Golden Eagles (6-17, 2-8) in scoring, finishing with 24 points. JoJo Moore added 12 points, seven rebounds and two blocks for Oral Roberts. Darius Robinson Jr. also recorded 11 points.

## **Ecuador votes for president, with the conservative incumbent and a leftist lawyer in the lead**

By REGINA GARCIA CANO Associated Press

GUAYAQUIL, Ecuador (AP) — Ecuador's presidential election Sunday is shaping up to be a repeat of the 2023 race, when voters chose a young, conservative millionaire over the leftist protégée of the country's most influential president this century.

President Daniel Noboa and Luisa González are the clear front-runners among the pool of 16 candidates. All have promised voters to reduce the widespread crime that pushed their lives into an unnerving new normal four years ago.

The spike in violence across the South American country is tied to the trafficking of cocaine produced in neighboring Colombia and Peru. So many voters have become crime victims that their personal and collective losses will be a determining factor in deciding whether a third president in four years can turn Ecuador around or if Noboa deserves more time in office.

Voting is mandatory in Ecuador. In the port city of Guayaquil, people lined up under a light rain outside a public university where tens of thousands of voters were expected to cast ballots.

"For me, this president is disastrous," said Marta Barres, 35, who went to the voting center with her three teenage children. "Can he change things in four more years? No. He hasn't done anything."

Barres, who must pay \$25 a month to a local gang to avoid harassment or worse, said she would vote for González because she believes she can reduce crime across the board and improve the economy.

More than 13.7 million people are eligible to vote. To win outright, a candidate needs 50% of the vote or at least 40% with a 10-point lead over the closest challenger. If needed, a runoff election would take place on April 13.

Noboa defeated González in the October 2023 runoff of a snap election triggered by the decision of then-President Guillermo Lasso to dissolve the National Assembly and shorten his own mandate as a result. Noboa and González, a mentee of former President Rafael Correa, had only served short stints as lawmakers before launching their 2023 presidential campaigns.

Noboa, 37, is an heir to a fortune built on the banana trade. He opened an event organizing company when he was 18 and then joined his father's Noboa Corp., where he held management positions in the shipping, logistics and commercial areas. His political career began in 2021, when he won a seat in the National Assembly and chaired its Economic Development Commission.

Under his presidency, the homicide rate dropped from 46.18 per 100,000 people in 2023 to 38.76 per 100,000 people last year. Still, it remains far higher than the 6.85 per 100,000 people in 2019.

González, 47, held various government jobs during the presidency of Correa, who led Ecuador from 2007 through 2017 with free-spending socially conservative policies and grew increasingly authoritarian in his last years as president. He was sentenced to prison in absentia in 2020 in a corruption scandal.



González was a lawmaker from 2021 until May 2023, when Lasso dissolved the National Assembly. She was unknown to most voters until Correa's party picked her as its presidential candidate for the snap election.

## Rescuers recover 1 body and search for 28 people in a landslide in southwest China

BEIJING (AP) — Emergency teams in China's southwestern Sichuan province raced against time Sunday to locate 28 people after a landslide triggered by rains killed one person and buried homes.

Nearly 1,000 personnel were deployed following the landslide in the village of Jinping in Junlian county on Saturday. Some officers navigated through the remains of collapsed buildings, using drones and life-detection radars to locate any signs of life with the help of locals who were familiar with the area, state broadcaster CCTV said.

Two injured people were rescued and about 360 others evacuated after 10 houses and a manufacturing building were buried, CCTV reported.

At a news conference Sunday, authorities said preliminary assessments attributed the disaster to heavy rainfall and local geological conditions. They said these factors transformed a landslide into a debris flow about 1.2 kilometers (more than half a mile) long, with a total volume exceeding 100,000 cubic meters (3.5 million cubic feet).

The rescue operation was hampered by continuous rainfall and more landslides. According to preliminary estimates, the collapsed area was about 16 football pitches in size and many houses were carried far by the debris flow.

Chinese Vice Premier Liu Guozhong was at the site to guide the operation and visited the affected residents, according to official news agency Xinhua.

Liu also noted the surrounding slopes still pose collapse risks, calling for scientific assessment to ensure the safety of the operation and prevent another disaster, Xinhua said.

China has allocated 80 million yuan (about \$11 million) to support disaster relief and recovery efforts.

Landslides, often caused by rain or unsafe construction work, are not uncommon in China. Last year, a landslide in a remote, mountainous part of China's southwestern province of Yunnan killed dozens of people.

## A presidential first: Trump at the Super Bowl, latest chapter in a complicated legacy with football

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — As a student, Donald Trump played high school football. As a business baron, he owned a team in an upstart rival to the NFL and then sued the established league. As president, he denigrated pros who took a knee during the national anthem as part of a social justice movement.

On Sunday, he adds to that complicated history with the sport when he becomes the first president in office to attend a Super Bowl.

Trump's appearance at the Superdome in New Orleans to watch the two-time defending champion Kansas City Chiefs take on the Philadelphia Eagles follows the NFL's decision to remove the "End Racism" slogans that have been stenciled on the end zones since 2021.

Trump recently ordered the cancelation of programs that encourage diversity, equity and inclusion across the federal government and some critics see the league's decision as a response to the Republican president's action. But NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell said the league's diversity policies are not in conflict with the Trump administration's efforts to end the federal government's DEI programs.

Trump, who attended the Super Bowl in 1992, has avoided choosing sides in Sunday's matchup despite public comments and social media posts that suggest an affinity for Kansas City.

Last week, when asked which team would win, Trump said, "I don't want to say, but there's a certain quarterback that seems to be a pretty good winner." That appeared to be a reference to the Chiefs' Patrick Mahomes.

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Trump also posted congratulations to the Chiefs in January after they won the AFC Championship.

The president played football as a student at the New York Military Academy. As a New York businessman in the early 1980s, he owned the New Jersey Generals of the United States Football League. Trump had sued to force a merger of the USFL and the NFL. The USFL eventually folded.

Friction existed between Trump and the NFL during his first term as president.

Trump took issue with players kneeling during the national anthem to protest social or racial injustice. That movement began in 2016 with then-49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick taking a knee during "The Star-Spangled Banner" during an exhibition game in Denver.

Trump, through social media and other public comments, insisted that players stand for the national anthem and he called on team owners to fire any player who took a knee.

"Wouldn't you love to see one of these NFL owners, when somebody disrespects our flag, you'd say, 'Get that son of a bitch off the field right now. Out! He's fired,'" Trump said to loud applause at a rally in Hunstville, Alabama, in 2017.

Trump is expected to watch the game from a box in the company of House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., among others. Trump won Missouri and Pennsylvania — the states represented in the game — on his way to a second term in November.

His interest in sports extends beyond football. Trump is an avid golfer who owns multiple golf courses and has hosted tournaments. He sponsored boxing matches at his former casinos in Atlantic City, New Jersey, and attended a UFC match at Madison Square Garden weeks after winning a second term.

Some NFL team owners have donated to his campaigns and Trump maintains friendships with Herschel Walker and Doug Flutie, who played for the Generals. Trump endorsed Walker's unsuccessful bid as the Republican candidate for a U.S. Senate seat from Georgia in 2022, and has tapped him to become ambassador to the Bahamas.

Trump signed an order last week that is intended to block transgender women and girls from competing in women's sports by targeting federal funding for schools that fail to comply.

Alvin Tillery, a politics professor and diversity expert at Northwestern University, said in an interview that the NFL's decision to remove "End Racism" slogans was "shameful" given that the league "makes tens of billions of dollars largely on the bodies of Black men."

He said the NFL should explain who it was aiming to please. The NFL said it was stenciling "Choose Love" in one of the end zones for the Super Bowl to encourage the country after a series of tragedies so far this year, including a New Year's Day truck attack in the host city of New Orleans that killed 14 people and injured dozens more.

Tillery wasn't convinced. "I think they removed it because Trump's coming," he said.

## **Kosovo votes for new parliament as foreign aid dwindles and talks with Serbia are stalled**

By LLAZAR SEMINI Associated Press

PRISTINA, Kosovo (AP) — Kosovars cast their votes Sunday in a parliamentary election considered a key test for Prime Minister Albin Kurti as talks on normalizing ties with rival Serbia remain stalled and foreign funding for one of Europe's poorest countries in question.

Kurti's left-wing Vetevendosje!, or Self-Determination Movement Party, is seen as the front-runner but is not expected to win the necessary majority to govern alone, leaving open the possibility the other two contenders join ranks if he fails to form a Cabinet.

The other challengers are the Democratic Party of Kosovo, or PDK, whose main leaders are detained at an international criminal tribunal at The Hague accused of war crimes, and the Democratic League of Kosovo, or LDK, the oldest party in the country that lost much of its support after the death in 2006 of its leader, Ibrahim Rugova.

The parties made big-ticket pledges to increase public salaries and pensions, improve education and health services, and fight poverty. However, they did not explain where the money would come from, nor

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how they would attract more foreign investment.

Ties with Serbia remain a concern

Kurti has been at odds with Western powers after his Cabinet took several steps that raised tensions with Serbia and ethnic Serbs, including the ban on the use of the Serbian currency and dinar transfers from Serbia to Kosovo's ethnic Serb minority that depends on Belgrade's social services and payments. The U.S., the European Union and the NATO-led stabilization force KFOR have urged the government in Pristina to refrain from unilateral actions, fearing the revival of inter-ethnic conflict.

This is the first time since independence in 2008 that Kosovo's parliament has completed a full four-year mandate. It is the ninth parliamentary vote in Kosovo since the end of the 1998-1999 war between Serbian government forces and ethnic Albanian separatists that pushed Serbian forces out following a 78-day NATO air campaign. Serbia does not recognize Kosovo's independence.

The vote will determine who will lead the Kosovo in negotiations with Serbia, which stalled again last year.

Some aid funds are suspended

The EU has suspended funding for some projects and set conditions for their gradual resumption, linked to Kosovo taking steps to de-escalate tensions in the north, where most of the Serb minority lives.

Kosovo is also suffering after Washington imposed a 90-day freeze on funding for different projects through the U.S. Agency for International Development, which has been key in promoting the country's growth.

Some 2 million eligible voters will elect 120 lawmakers from 1,280 candidates from 27 political groupings. One independent candidate is also running. The Kosovar parliament has 20 seats reserved for minorities regardless of election results, 10 of which are for the Serb minority.

"I encourage all the citizens of Kosovo to use this opportunity to decide on the next four years," Kurti said after casting his ballot.

There have been sporadic violent incidents. Prosecutors said they detained five people for trying to influence voters.

Kosovars abroad started voting on Saturday at 43 diplomatic missions. There are some 20,000 voters from the diaspora of nearly 100,000 casting ballots at the missions, and the rest by mail.

Although crucial for the region's stability, negotiations with Serbia have not figured high on any party's agenda.

"What can we do? We were born here. Our graves are here. It will be better, I hope. We have to come out and vote. That is our duty," Mileva Kovacevic, a Serb resident in northern Mitrovica, said.

Kosovo, with a population of 1.6 million, is one of the poorest countries in Europe with an annual gross domestic product of less than 6,000 euros per person.

KFOR has increased its presence in Kosovo after last year's tensions with Serbia as well as for the election.

A team of 100 observers from the EU, 18 from the Council of Europe and about 1,600 others from international or local organizations will monitor the vote.

## **31 suspected Maoist rebels and 2 police officers are killed in forest combat in central India**

By INDRAJIT SINGH Associated Press

PATNA, India (AP) — At least 31 suspected Maoist rebels and two police officials were killed on Sunday in the deadliest combat so far this year in central India, police said.

Hundreds of police and paramilitary soldiers launched an operation in the forests of the Indravati area of Chhattisgarh state based on intelligence that large number of rebels had gathered there, said state police Inspector General Pattilingam Sundarraj.

Sundarraj said as the troops conducted a search operation fighting erupted in the forest, killing at least 31 insurgents and two police officials. Two other police were injured. He said search operations were continuing in the area and the troops had recovered some arms and ammunition, including automatic rifles.

There was no immediate statement from the rebels.

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Sunday's fighting is the biggest so far this year and the second major clash in less than a month in Chhattisgarh, according to police officer Jitendra Yadav.

At least 16 rebels were killed in the state's Gariband district on Jan. 23. According to Indian officials, the government had issued a bounty for 12 of them totaling about \$345,000. Eight rebels were killed in a gunbattle with troops in the Bijapur district on Jan. 31.

Indian soldiers have been battling the Maoist rebels across several central and northern states since 1967, when the militants, also known as Naxalites, began fighting to demand more jobs, land and wealth from natural resources for the country's poor indigenous communities. The insurgents are inspired by Chinese revolutionary leader Mao Zedong.

Years of neglect have isolated many locals, who face a lack of jobs, schools and health care clinics, making them open to overtures by the rebels. The rebels speak the same tribal languages as many villagers and have promised to fight for a better future especially in Chhattisgarh, one of India's poorest states despite its vast mineral riches.

The rebels have ambushed police, destroyed government offices and abducted officials. They've also blown up train tracks, attacked prisons to free their comrades and stolen weapons from police and paramilitary warehouses to arm themselves.

## Trump's AI ambition and China's DeepSeek overshadow an AI summit in Paris

By SYLVIE CORBET and KELVIN CHAN Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — The geopolitics of artificial intelligence will be in focus at a major summit in France where world leaders, executives and experts will hammer out pledges on guiding the development of the rapidly advancing technology.

It's the latest in a series of global dialogues around AI governance, but one that comes at a fresh inflection point as China's buzzy and budget-friendly DeepSeek chatbot shakes up the industry.

U.S. Vice President JD Vance — making his first trip abroad since taking office — will attend the Paris AI Action Summit starting Feb. 10, while China's President Xi Jinping will be sending his special envoy, signaling high stakes for the meeting.

Here's a breakdown:

Summit basics

Heads of state and top government officials, tech bosses and researchers are gathering in Paris for the two-day summit cohosted by French President Emmanuel Macron and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The event aims to address how to harness artificial intelligence's potential so that it benefits everyone, while containing the technology's myriad risks.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen is attending, along with officials and CEOs from 80 countries, including German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, Microsoft President Brad Smith and Google CEO Sundar Pichai.

Tesla CEO Elon Musk, who attended the inaugural 2023 summit at former codebreaking base Bletchley Park in England, and DeepSeek founder Liang Wenfeng have been invited, but it's unclear if either will attend.

Panel talks and workshops at the Grand Palais venue on Monday will be followed by a dinner at the Elysee presidential palace for world leaders and CEOs. Leaders and company bosses are expected to give speeches at Tuesday's closing session.

What's at stake?

More than two years after ChatGPT's debut, generative AI continues to make astounding advances at breakneck speed. The technology that powers all-purpose chatbots is transforming many aspects of life with its ability to spit out high-quality text, images or video, or carry out complex tasks.

The 2023 summit in the U.K. resulted in a non-binding pledge by 28 nations to tackle AI risks. A follow-up meeting hosted by South Korea last year secured another pledge to set up a network of public AI safety

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institutes to advance research and testing.

AI safety is still on the agenda in Paris, with an expert group reporting back on general purpose AI's possible extreme dangers.

But this time organizers are expanding the discussion to more countries, and widening the debate to a range of other AI-related topics. Like previous editions, this summit won't produce any binding regulation.

"The summit comes at a time when many are trying to position themselves in the international competition," Macron told reporters, according to La Provence newspaper. "It's about establishing the rules of the game. AI cannot be the Wild West."

The deliverables

Organizers are working on getting countries to sign a joint political declaration gathering commitments for more ethical, democratic and environmentally sustainable AI, according to Macron's office. But it's unclear whether the U.S. would agree to such a measure.

Another big goal is securing an agreement for a public-interest partnership for AI. Paris seeks to raise 2.5 billion euros (\$2.6 billion) for the public-private partnership involving governments, businesses and philanthropic groups that will provide open-source access to databases, software and other tools for "trusted" AI actors, Macron's office said.

Macron's team wants to shift the focus away from the race to develop better-than-human artificial intelligence through sheer computing power and, instead, open up access to data that can help AI solve problems like cancer or long COVID.

"We now have this incredible opportunity to figure out not only how we should mitigate the potential harms from artificial intelligence, but also how we can ensure that it's used to improve people's lives," said Martin Tisné, the summit's envoy for public interest AI.

Trump's team

U.S. President Donald Trump has spoken of his desire to make the U.S. the "world capital of artificial intelligence" by tapping its oil and gas reserves to feed the energy-hungry technology. Meanwhile, he has moved to withdraw the U.S. — again — from the Paris climate agreement and revoked former President Joe Biden's executive order for AI guardrails.

Trump is replacing it with his own AI policy designed to maintain America's global leadership by reducing regulatory barriers and building AI systems free of "ideological bias."

The U.S. position might undermine any joint communique, said Nick Reiners, senior geotechnology analyst at the Eurasia Group.

"Trump is against the very idea of global governance," Reiners said. "It's one thing to get countries to agree that AI should have guardrails and that AI safety is something worth caring about. But they've widened the scope to talk about the future of work and the environment and inclusivity and so on — a whole range of concepts. So it's hard to imagine getting a widespread agreement on such a broad range of subjects."

China's role

Chinese leader Xi is sending Vice Premier Zhang Guoqing, who's been elevated to the role of Xi's special representative.

It's a big step up from the 2023 Bletchley meeting, when the Chinese government sent the vice minister of science and technology. It signifies that Xi wants China to play a bigger role in global AI governance as Trump pulls back, Reiners said.

DeepSeek's release last month stunned the world because of its ability to rival Western players like ChatGPT. It also escalated the wider geopolitical showdown between Beijing and Washington over tech supremacy.

Trump said DeepSeek was a "wake-up call" for the U.S. tech industry and his AI advisor David Sacks accused DeepSeek of training its model on stolen OpenAI data. The DeepSeek chatbot app now faces investigations, and in some cases, bans in the U.S. and a number of other countries over privacy and security concerns.

Yet the rise of DeepSeek, which built its open source AI model at a fraction of the cost and with fewer chips, also puts China's interests in line with France's.

French organizers said "the summit aims at promoting an ambitious French and European AI strategy" as advances in the sector have been led by the U.S. and China. Macron hopes to make room for others, including French startup Mistral, which also uses an open source AI model.

"DeepSeek is being seen as a kind of vindication of this idea that you don't have to necessarily invest hundreds of billions of dollars in in chips and data centers," Reiners said.

Transatlantic tensions

Another showdown could involve Brussels, which has long been a thorn in the side of U.S.-based Big Tech companies, cracking down with antitrust penalties against the likes of Google, Apple and Meta. Trump lashed out at last month's World Economic Forum with "very big complaints" about the EU's multibillion-dollar fines, calling them a tax on American companies.

More recently, the EU's artificial intelligence regulation has met resistance from the companies. The European Union recently unveiled a non-binding "code of practice" for its AI Act but Meta's top lobbyist said the company, which owns Facebook and Instagram, won't sign up.

The EU guidelines, intended to standardize how the AI Act's regulations are applied across the 27-nation bloc, are "unworkable" and the continent's regulatory environment is "pushing Europe to the sidelines," Chief Global Affairs Officer Joel Kaplan told a Brussels event.

## **Kurds in the new Syria want to preserve the cultural rights they gained in years of war**

By BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

QAMISHLI, Syria (AP) — Kurds in Syria were marginalized during five decades of Assad family rule, with many denied citizenship and wrongly described as Arabs. Now they are seizing the chance during the post-Assad transition to keep the cultural gains they made in the northeast enclave they carved out during the country's civil war.

Mothers can now give children Kurdish names. The Kurdish language is taught in schools. The new year, Nowruz, can be celebrated openly. The Kurds, one of the world's largest populations without a state of their own, have been feeling some control over their lives and want to make that permanent with a new government in power.

But that depends on Syria's new leaders, and the outcome of an ongoing conflict between the Kurds and Turkish-backed rebels that's been overshadowed by the dramatic shift from Assad rule. Two months of fighting have left scores dead on both sides.

"We have made all these gains. There is no way we will abandon them, even over our bodies and the bodies of our children," said Amira Ali, a Kurdish woman from the northeastern city of Hassakeh whose husband is a member of the local police force known as, "Asayish," the Kurdish term for security.

Shortly after the uprising against the Assad government began in 2011, the Kurds filled the vacuum created by the withdrawal of government forces from wide areas of Syria's northeast. The main Kurdish-led force now controls about 25% of Syria. An autonomous authority runs day-to-day affairs of the region that many Kurds call "Rojava Kurdistan," or "western Kurdistan."

Now Kurdish leaders are negotiating with the new authorities in Damascus on the future of their people, who made up 10% of the country's prewar population. They don't want full autonomy with their own government and parliament; they want decentralization, room to run their day-to day-affairs.

The new authorities, however, are allied with the Turkish-backed armed groups that launched an offensive against the Kurds in December during the chaos around Assad's fall. The fighting between the Kurds and the coalition known as the Syrian National Army has forced about 100,000 people to flee their homes.

The conflict has major implications for Syria's future as its new government, led by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham former Islamist rebel group, tries to consolidate control and begin rebuilding after nearly 14 years of civil war.

Mazloun Abdi, commander of the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, the main Kurdish-led force, said the country should be a secular, civil and decentralized state that treats all citizens equally. Western countries have called on Syria's new rulers to respect minorities and women's rights.

Abdi recalled the Syrian identity cards that described all its citizens as "Syrian Arab citizens," including non-Arabs like the Kurds. They want it to be changed to "Syrian citizens."

"Kurds were persecuted by previous authorities," he said. He wants anti-Kurd laws to be abolished.

Abdi and others point out that the Kurds played an important role in defeating the Islamic State group as it rampaged across Syria and neighboring Iraq for years during Syria's civil war.

The Kurdish-led SDF was formed to fight the extremists, and in 2019, SDF fighters captured the last sliver of land they held, the eastern Syrian village of Baghouz. The SDF and other members of the U.S.-led coalition continue the fight against IS sleeper cells.

The SDF lost thousands of its members in fighting IS, as well as against the armed factions backed by Turkey. Ankara regards the SDF as an extension of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, a Kurdish separatist militant group it has designated a terrorist organization.

Turkey has launched four incursions into northern Syria since 2016, capturing wide areas along its borders and displacing hundreds of thousands of people. It is not clear whether those incursions will stop after Assad's fall.

The streets in northeast Syria are decorated with photographs of fallen Kurdish fighters.

"God willing, the blood of these martyrs will not be wasted," said Amina Hussein, 57, as she lit incense on the grave of her son Dersim Sheikhi, killed in 2015 while fighting IS.

"Kurds have achieved a lot, and we should preserve this," she said on a cold morning in the SDF's Martyrs Cemetery, where hundreds of men and women are buried.

The offensive by the Turkish-backed armed groups is the latest challenge to Kurdish gains.

The 70-year-old Goulieh Abdu has been displaced twice in the past two months by the fighting. Now she shelters in a compound once run by forces loyal to Assad after SNA shelling forced her to flee to the city of Qamishli.

"I swear to God that displacement has killed us," Abdu said, sitting on a mattress next to a diesel heater on a cold January morning. "What did we do to be punished this way?"

Another woman, Elham Horo, fled Tel Rifaat with her children and grandchildren in the SNA offensive.

"All what we have left is our souls. If they want to take it, then let them do it," Horo said as she sat with her grandchildren on the floor of a classroom in Qamishli now used as a shelter for the displaced.

In Tel Rifaat, now seized by the SNA, its fighters blamed Kurdish gunmen for displacing Arabs from the town over the years. Arab residents said they could now return to their homes.

"They left us nothing," said resident Muhammad Kabso, 42, who said he returned home to find that the Kurd who had been living there had burned his cherished olive and pomegranate trees.

Both the SDF and the authorities in Damascus have been sending positive signals about their talks on the future of Syria's northeast and the Kurds. Authorities have said the Kurds were unjustly treated under Assad.

"We will work together to build a country in which everyone feels equality and justice," Syria's Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shibani recently posted on X — in Kurdish.

## 2 mass graves with bodies of nearly 50 migrants found in southeastern Libya

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Libya authorities uncovered nearly 50 bodies this week from two mass graves in the country's southeastern desert, officials said Sunday, in the latest tragedy involving people seeking to reach Europe through the chaos-stricken North African country.

The first mass grave with 19 bodies was found Friday in a farm in the southeastern city of Kufra, the

security directorate said in a statement, adding that authorities took them for autopsy.

Authorities posted images on its Facebook page showing police officers and medics digging in the sand and recovering dead bodies that were wrapped in blankets.

The al-Abreen charity, which helps migrants in eastern and southern Libya, said that some were apparently shot and killed before being buried in the mass grave.

A separate mass grave with at least 30 bodies was also found in Kufra after raiding a human trafficking center, according to Mohamed al-Fadeil, head of the security chamber in Kufra. Survivors said nearly 70 people were buried in the grave, he added. Authorities were still searching the area.

Migrants' mass graves are not uncommon in Libya. Last year, authorities unearthed the bodies of at least 65 migrants in the Shuayrif region, 350 kilometers (220 miles) south of the capital, Tripoli.

Libya is the dominant transit point for migrants from Africa and the Middle East trying to make it to Europe. The country plunged into chaos following a NATO-backed uprising that toppled and killed longtime autocrat Moammar Gadhafi in 2011. Oil-rich Libya has been ruled for most of the past decade by rival governments in eastern and western Libya, each backed by an array of militias and foreign governments.

Human traffickers have benefited from more than a decade of instability, smuggling migrants across the country's borders with six nations, including Chad, Niger, Sudan, Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia.

Once at the coast, traffickers pack desperate migrants seeking a better life in Europe into ill-equipped rubber boats and other vessels for risky voyages on the perilous Central Mediterranean Sea route.

Rights groups and U.N. agencies have for years documented systematic abuse of migrants in Libya including forced labor, beatings, rapes and torture. The abuse often accompanies efforts to extort money from families before migrants are allowed to leave Libya on traffickers' boats.

Those who have been intercepted and returned to Libya — including women and children — are held in government-run detention centers where they also suffer from abuse, including torture, rape and extortion, according to rights groups and UN experts.

## **North Korea's Kim slams US-South Korea-Japan partnership and vows to boost his nuclear program**

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said an elevated U.S. security partnership with South Korea and Japan poses a grave threat to his country and vowed to further bolster his nuclear weapons program, state media reported Sunday.

Kim has previously made similar warnings, but his latest statement implies again that the North Korean leader won't likely embrace President Donald Trump's overture to meet him and revive diplomacy anytime soon.

In a speech marking the 77th founding anniversary of the Korean People's Army on Saturday, Kim said the U.S.-Japan-South Korea trilateral security partnership established under a U.S. plot to form a NATO-like regional military bloc is inviting military imbalance on the Korean Peninsula and "raising a grave challenge to the security environment of our state," according to the official Korean Central News Agency.

"Referring to a series of new plans for rapidly bolstering all deterrence including nuclear forces, he clarified once again the unshakable policy of more highly developing the nuclear forces," KCNA said.

Amid stalled diplomacy with the U.S. and South Korea in recent years, Kim has focused on enlarging and modernizing his arsenal of nuclear weapons. In response, the United States and South Korea have expanded their bilateral military exercises and trilateral training involving Japan. North Korea has lashed out at those drills, calling them rehearsals to invade the country.

Since his Jan. 20 inauguration, Trump has said he would reach out to Kim again as he boasted of his high-stakes summit with him during his first term.

During a joint news conference with Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba on Friday, Trump said that "We will have relations with North Korea, with Kim Jong Un. I got along with him very well, as you know. I think I stopped the war."



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During a Fox News interview broadcast on Jan. 23, Trump called Kim “a smart guy” and “not a religious zealot.” Asked whether he will reach out to Kim again, Trump replied, “I will, yeah.”

Trump met Kim three times in 2018-19 to discuss how to end North Korea’s nuclear program in what was the first-ever summitry between the leaders of the U.S. and North Korea. The high-stakes diplomacy eventually collapsed because Trump rejected Kim’s offer to dismantle his main nuclear complex, a partial denuclearization step, in return for broad sanctions relief.

North Korea hasn’t directly responded to Trump’s recent overture, as it continues weapons testing activities and hostile rhetoric against the U.S. Many experts say Kim is now preoccupied with his dispatch of troops to Russia to support its war efforts against Ukraine. They say Kim would still eventually consider returning to diplomacy with Trump if he determines he would fail to maintain the current solid cooperation with Russia after the war ends.

In his Saturday speech, Kim reaffirmed that North Korea “will invariably support and encourage the just cause of the Russian army and people to defend their sovereignty, security and territorial integrity.” Kim accused the U.S. of being behind “the war machine which is stirring up the tragic situation of Ukraine.”

In South Korea, some worry that Trump might abandon the international community’s long-running goal of achieving a complete denuclearization of North Korea to produce a diplomatic achievement.

But a joint statement issued by Trump and Ishiba after their summit stated the two leaders reaffirmed “their resolute commitment to the complete denuclearization of the DPRK,” the acronym of North Korea’s official name, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. The statement said the U.S. and Japan also affirmed the importance of the Japan-U.S.-South Korean trilateral partnership in responding to North Korea.

## **Britain navigates rough transatlantic waters as Trump roils the ‘special relationship’**

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Ever since Winston Churchill coined the phrase in the wake of World War II, politicians have extolled the “special relationship” between the United States and Britain.

Under President Donald Trump’s second administration, Britain will settle for a merely functional relationship with its former colony turned most important ally. As Trump threatens to slap tariffs on America’s neighbors, mulls buying Greenland and suggests the U.S. could “take over” and reconstruct Gaza, Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s government is racing to bolster its diplomatic and economic defenses for a turbulent new transatlantic era.

“We’re in such uncharted waters that anyone who claims to know what in the hell is going on is just lying,” said Kathleen Burk, emeritus professor at University College London and an expert on U.S.-U.K. relations.

High stakes for Britain’s Washington envoy

British officials say Starmer hopes to visit Washington in the coming weeks, but he has yet to receive an invitation from Trump.

In the meantime, a heavy burden rests on Britain’s new ambassador to Washington, Peter Mandelson. A towering figure in Starmer’s Labour Party who served in the governments of former Prime Ministers Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, Mandelson replaces veteran diplomat Karen Pierce, who was widely respected by both Democrats and Republicans in Washington.

It’s rare for a politician, rather than a career civil servant, to be given a key U.K. ambassadorial post. The center-left former lawmaker is not an obvious emissary to the Trump administration. Mandelson once called Trump a “danger to the world” — words he now says were “ill-judged and wrong.”

But some analysts see Mandelson as a canny choice. A controversial figure who twice resigned from government over allegations of financial or ethical impropriety, he has — like Trump — repeatedly bounced back. His mastery of political intrigue brought him the nickname “Prince of Darkness.”

Jill Rutter, a senior fellow at the Institute for Government, said Mandelson is “a considerable political talent” with economic expertise from his time as the EU’s trade commissioner between 2004 and 2008.

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"He's also very comfortable with very rich people," Rutter said. "He's very well connected. He will give very classy parties."

In addition to diplomatic clout, Britain plans to deploy another key asset: the royal family. Trump, whose mother was born on Scotland's remote Isle of Lewis, owns two Scottish golf courses and is a fan of the royals. He praised the late Queen Elizabeth II, who hosted him at Buckingham Palace during a 2019 state visit, and said he had a "great talk" with Prince William when the two men met in December.

A return visit to the U.K. for Trump, replete with pomp and pageantry, seems likely.

Stuck in the middle with EU

Some politicians on the right of U.K. politics see Trump's return as an opportunity for deeper U.K.-U.S. trade ties, maybe even a long-elusive free trade agreement.

Talks on a trade deal started after Britain left the European Union in 2020 but foundered on issues including agriculture, with strong opposition in Britain to importing chlorine-rinsed chicken or hormone-treated beef.

A further complication is Starmer's desire for closer trade with the EU as part of a "reset" with the bloc after years of acrimony over Brexit. Sandwiched between the U.S. and the EU, Britain could face pressure to pick a side.

"Surely the choice is obvious," Conservative Party lawmaker John Cooper said during a recent debate in Parliament. "Under President Trump, the American eagle is starting to spread its wings. ... Europe is fading, with sclerotic growth amid political turmoil."

But Leslie Vinjamuri, director of the U.S. and the Americas program at the international affairs think-tank Chatham House, said choosing between Europe and America was a "ridiculous proposition." While the U.S. is Britain's biggest individual trading partner, half of Britain's trade is with the 27 EU members.

"They can't choose," Vinjamuri said. "At the end of the day, Europe, the U.S. and the U.K. are in this together, and so they have to find different ways of working" together.

Pressure over trade and defense

Trump has already ratcheted up pressure on longstanding allies, announcing he would impose tariffs on all goods from Canada and Mexico, then postponing them after getting pledges from the two countries to beef up border security.

Trump has suggested Britain could escape similar tariffs. "I think that one can be worked out," he said.

Britain is helped by the fact that, according to official U.S. statistics, the U.S. sells more goods to the UK. than it imports.

Britain is also facing pressure from Trump to increase defense spending. Trump has long questioned the value of NATO and threatened not to defend members of the alliance that fail to meet defense-spending goals.

The president has said NATO countries should spend at least 5% of their income on defense, up from the current 2% target. Britain spends 2.3% of GDP on defense and says it will increase that figure to 2.5%.

"The one thing that the Americans will pay attention to is the defense budget, because Britain started losing leverage with the U. S. when its army and its navy started going down in the 1970s," Burk said.

Britain is one of the biggest supporters of Ukraine in its war against Russia's invasion — a war Trump wants to end, on terms that remain unclear. Starmer and his officials hope to press the U.S. government not to abandon Ukraine or back a deal favorable to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

British diplomats and spies are also trying to assess what the new U.S. government means for vital intelligence-sharing. Britain and the U.S. share top-secret intelligence as members of the "Five Eyes" group with Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

U.K. officials were somewhat relieved by the appointment of Secretary of State Marco Rubio, an experienced politician and a known quantity. They have little acquaintance with, and some concerns about, Trump's nominee for FBI director, Kash Patel, and his pick to oversee national intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard. Gabbard has repeatedly echoed Russian propaganda used to justify the Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine and in the past opposed a key U.S. surveillance program.

Expect the unexpected

It's impossible to prepare for everything the next four years could bring.

Rutter said ministers and civil servants need to think about the unthinkable. For instance, what happens if deep cuts to regulation and the machinery of government mean parts of the U.S. start failing?

"When do you start having to give people warnings not to fly to the U.S. because we don't trust your aviation regulation anymore?" she said.

Vinjamuri said the coming years will test to the limit Britain's historic strength of quiet diplomacy, "working very pragmatically below the headline to try and get things done."

"The challenge is, we have some known unknowns, (like) what will happen when it comes to America's support for Ukraine and for Europe's security," she said. "But we have a lot of unknown unknowns, too. And that, I think, is going to be the much trickier part."

## **Latino workers working to overcome a technological divide brought on by automation, AI**

By FERNANDA FIGUEROA Associated Press

As jobs become more reliant on technology some Latino workers can be left behind due to a lack of digital skills exacerbated by a lack of accessibility.

Latinos remain an integral part of jobs in agriculture, construction, retail and food services but these jobs are also at risk of automation, leaving some Latinos unprepared for a changing role that relies more on technology, according to a new report by researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Analysis from the UCLA Latino Policy Institute shows Latinos are overrepresented in fields at risk of automation. The report also provides some suggestions on how to improve Latino economic mobility.

"This report sheds light on a critical but often overlooked reality: Automation is not just a technological issue but an equity issue, said Misael Galdámez, co-author of the report, "On the Frontlines: Automation Risks for Latino Workers in California."

"Latino workers are on the frontline of automation risk, facing barriers like limited English proficiency, low digital access and educational gaps," Galdámez said.

Valerie Gills, 32, spent three years as a receptionist at a hotel in Phoenix, but in 2023, the hotel set up self-check kiosks and installed AI-powered chatbots on its website to handle reservations and requests. The changes made it clear that Gills was no longer essential.

"I knew businesses were always trying to improve efficiency," she said, "but it seemed to me as though technology was taking opportunities away from us."

Gills eventually lost her job. She found temporary positions but nothing as stable as her hotel job had been. Her employment troubles weighed on her mental health and "reminded me how weak workers like me can be when industries get everything automated."

Ramiro Cavazos, president and CEO of the United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, said that while automation displaces those with limited skills, it can also create new roles, provide better working conditions and prevent burnout.

"Automation affects people that don't have access to the Internet," Cavazos said. "Latinos, who traditionally are the ones impacted, have made great progress as we become more educated, more skilled."

As Gills looked for a new job, the reality set in: She would need to learn a new skill to stay ahead of the curve. Ultimately she was able to get an internship as a blog editor, but she is actively looking for a tech-study program in data analytics and software development, including boot camps online, so she can be a competitive candidate.

Cavazos said the Hispanic Chamber works with over 500 foundations to ensure corporations contribute to providing skills training that Latinos need to compete in the current job market. He has seen a lot of investment to ensure Latino workers have the skills they need to succeed.

During former President Joe Biden's administration, the U.S. Department of Labor's division on employment and training focused on providing Latinos a pathway to learn new skills through apprenticeship

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programs, said Manny Lamre, then deputy assistant secretary for employment and training. According to Lamare, the apprenticeships were perfect for Latinos as they met their needs to have high-paying, family-supporting careers.

"We do think it's really important to continue to engage individuals and meet them where they are," Lamarre said at the time. "Quite frankly the Biden-Harris Administration has been intentional about making investments supporting Latino and Hispanic communities. We are hopeful those investments continue."

Department of Labor officials under President Donald Trump, who has issued several orders targeting diversity, equity and inclusion, or DEI, did not immediately confirm whether the apprenticeship programs are still active.

Carlos Vasquez, founder of Miami Ed Tech, a nonprofit focused on providing skills Latino students need for upward mobility, said apprenticeships are extremely favorable to Latinos as they are paying jobs from day one with a promise of training from an organization.

Miami Ed Tech offers two apprenticeships in AI, data science and web design.

"Everyone thinks it's only for like, the trades," Vazquez said. "But that was the other thing that the Biden administration really pushed, is building more apprenticeships in nontraditional and emerging sectors. So we are kind of like, trying to also emulate that by offering in our community any employer who doesn't know but wants to get involved, because there's a lot of benefits. So it's a win-win for everyone."

Historically, Latinos have always been impacted by automation due to their relation to labor-intensive roles, especially in retail and food service. Cavazos said it is crucial to "teach Latinos more digital skills to evolve with the workforce."

A study by UCLA this year found that in California, 2.3 million Latinos are employed in roles most at risk of becoming automated. Of the Latinos working in automation, 21% of them do not have access to high-speed internet at home, a hindrance to digital upskilling, the study found. A 2021 Pew Research study also found that only 67% of Hispanic adults reported owning a desktop or laptop computer, compared with 8 in 10 white adults.

Diana Caba, vice president for community and economic development at the Hispanic Federation, said that as the world becomes more digital, it can become a huge obstacle for Latinos who do not have digital skills. Therefore the nonprofit has partnered with over 50 community-based organizations to decrease the digital divide by providing Latinos training, including access to technology.

Caba said that of the 35,000 people they've trained, 70% have completed the training. She said 6,000 have gone on to new jobs, and about 10,500 have gotten a six-figure salary.

"Automation is a big threat for our community, considering that we are in these low-paying sectors that are actually very vulnerable and don't really offer much opportunities for economic mobility," Caba said. "It's been really exciting to take this approach and meet the needs of increasing the digital acumen of the Latino community."

Dylan Pravia started as an intern with Miami Ed Tech, which he said provided him the opportunity to use computers and learn about AI and programming. He is now able to use what he learned there as a mechanical engineering student at Florida International University.

"I really like what Miami Ed Tech is doing," Pravia said. "They are providing that training, that opportunity, to students. Talent is everywhere, and we should give (Latino) students as much training as they can, all those opportunities, so we can see the talent and their skills in the world."

Gills, the former hotel receptionist, said she understands technology is the future but automation feels like a double-edged sword. While it can open opportunities for high-skilled labor, it also diminishes the number of low-skill jobs that many Latinos need, she said.

"I've seen firsthand how many co-workers were swapped for kiosks or chatbots," Gills said. "Retraining workers and preparing them for new jobs needs to be better supported by the system. To be honest, these times with automation and AI feel very unreliable and constantly changing, but I guess we just have to learn how to adapt."

## **A 7.6 magnitude earthquake shakes the Caribbean, some islands urge residents to leave coastlines**

MEXICO CITY (AP) — A magnitude-7.6 earthquake shook the Caribbean Sea south of the Cayman Islands Saturday, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. Several islands and countries urged people near the coastline to move inland but authorities in most places later lifted the tsunami alerts.

The quake struck at 6:23 p.m. local time in the middle of the sea and had a depth of 10 kilometers, the USGS said. Its epicenter was located 130 miles (209 kilometers) south-southwest of George Town in the Cayman Islands.

The U.S. National Tsunami Warning Center said there was no tsunami alert for the U.S. mainland but issued a tsunami advisory for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, which was later cancelled.

Hazard Management Cayman Islands urged residents near the coast to move inland and to higher ground, warning that wave heights of 0.3 to 1 meter were expected. The Cayman Islands government later issued an "all clear" on its Facebook site.

Puerto Rico Gov. Jenniffer González Colón said in a statement she is in contact with emergency agencies after the tsunami advisory, but did not recommend anyone leave the coast.

The sounding of alarms in Puerto Rico's northwest region had caused people to leave coastal areas and caused heavy traffic, according to local media.

The Dominican government also issued a tsunami alert and recommended residents on the coast move to high areas "of more than 20 meters of altitude and 2 kilometers inland." But it later canceled the alert.

Honduran authorities said there are no immediate reports of damages, but urged its residents to stay away from beaches.

The Cuban government requested people to leave beachfront areas.

The U.S. government's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said "tsunami waves reaching 1 to 3 meters above the tide level are possible along some coasts of Cuba."

## **Released Thai hostages return to Bangkok after being held for over a year in Gaza**

By JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Five Thai workers released after being held hostage for over a year in Gaza arrived in Bangkok on Sunday.

Sarusak Rumnao, 32, Watchara Sriaoun, 33, Sathian Suwannakham, 35, Pongsak Thaenna, 36, and Banawat Saethao, 27, were freed on Jan. 30 as part of an exchange arrangement.

They were embraced by family members, some of whom cried, in the arrivals hall at Suvarnabhumi airport. Thai Foreign Minister Maris Sagniampongsa and the Israeli Ambassador to Thailand Orna Sagiv were both at the airport to welcome home the freed hostages.

"We are all very grateful and very happy that we get to return to our homeland. We all would really like to thank you. I don't know what else to say," Pongsak told a news conference at the airport.

Maris said the Thai government "never gave up hope and here is the result today. The tears of joy are our encouragement." He added that Bangkok would continue working to secure the release of the remaining Thai hostage.

The group quickly left the news conference to return to their hometowns in Thailand's northern and northeastern regions.

They were the second batch of Thai hostages released since the war broke out. During an earlier ceasefire in November 2023, 23 Thai nationals were released in a deal negotiated between Thailand and Hamas, with assistance from Qatar and Iran.

All five men were assessed at a hospital outside Tel Aviv prior to their return. Four of them were joined by one relative each earlier this week. The trip was sponsored by the Israeli government, according to the Thai Embassy in Tel Aviv.

Hamas militants kidnapped 31 Thai nationals during the Oct. 7, 2023, assault on southern Israel, making them the largest group of foreigners held captive. Many of the Thai agricultural workers lived in compounds on the outskirts of southern Israeli kibbutzim and towns, and Hamas militants overran those places first.

A total of 46 Thais have been killed during the conflict, including two Thai citizens who were killed during the attack and their bodies taken into Gaza, according to Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

There was no immediate information available about Nattapong Pingsa, who is the last Thai hostage left in Gaza, nor the two Thai workers whose bodies were taken into Gaza.

Maris, the Thai foreign minister, traveled to Israel to visit the five freed men shortly after their release. Maris met with his Israeli counterparts seeking support to secure the release of the remaining Thai hostage and retrieve the bodies of the two deceased Thais.

Thai workers remain the largest group of foreign agricultural laborers in Israel. The countries implemented a bilateral agreement a decade ago specifically easing the way for Thai agricultural workers. Many Palestinian workers had since returned, and before the Hamas attack about half of Israel's workforce was made up of foreign and Palestinian laborers.

## Who are the five Thai hostages released by Hamas as part of the ceasefire in Gaza?

By JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Five Thai nationals held hostage by Hamas since its attack on Israel returned home on Sunday after their release from captivity last month.

The group was the second batch of 31 Thai hostages released so far since the war broke out on Oct. 7, 2023. During an earlier ceasefire in November 2023, 23 Thai nationals were released in a deal negotiated between Thailand and Hamas, with assistance from Qatar and Iran. Two others were confirmed dead and the status of one remaining person is not clear.

Thais were the largest group of foreigners held captive by Hamas militants. Many of the Thai agricultural workers lived in compounds on the outskirts of southern Israeli kibbutzim and towns, and Hamas militants overran those places first. A total of 46 Thais have been killed during the conflict, according to Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In the early days after the Oct. 7 attack, then-Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin pressed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in phone conversations to assist the Thai hostages.

These are the latest Thai nationals to have been freed.

Watchara Sriaoun, 33

In the Oct. 7 attack, militants overran the compound where agricultural workers lived on Kibbutz Nir Oz. Of the 16 Thai workers living there, 11 were killed and five, including Watchara Sriaoun, were abducted.

They were among at least 31 Thai workers taken in the assault.

During the November 2023 ceasefire, 23 were released in a deal negotiated between Thailand and Hamas, with assistance from Qatar and Iran.

Sathian Suwannakham, 35

Sathian Suwannakham was also taken from Nir Oz. The kibbutz has continued to advocate for the release of the Thai workers by posting regularly about them on social media.

Sathian told Thai officials he had been working in a chicken farm for about four years when he was taken hostage, according to an official news release.

About 30,000 Thais were working in Israel when the war started, according to the Thai Foreign Ministry, the vast majority in agriculture. About 5,000 lived in the southern area near the border with Gaza.

Surasak Rumnao, 32

Surasak Rumnao was abducted from the town of Yesha, near the southern Gaza Strip.

His mother, Khammee Lamnao, said the Thai embassy in Israel informed her that her son would be released.

"I cannot wait to see my son," the 53-year-old said. "I've been waiting for him."

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Surasak had been working in the agricultural sector in Israel for 15 months when he was taken hostage. Pongsak Thaenna, 36  
Pongsak Thaenna was also taken from Yesha. He had been working in Israel since 2016. "It felt like I died and I was reborn," he said in an interview video distributed by Thai officials. "I really want to see my daughter."  
His father, Wilas Thaenna, wept after receiving a call to say his son had been freed. "I never thought this day would come," the 65-year-old told the BBC. "I don't know how to explain how I got through all that happened. My son was taken captive, I lost my wife, I had to stay strong."  
Bannawat Saethao, 27  
Bannawat Saethao was also abducted from the town of Yesha. The youngest of his three children was just one month old when he was taken hostage, according to reports. "I'm so relieved," he said in the video handout from Thai officials. "When I was there, I never knew if I'd ever get to return home."

## Here's what we know about a commuter plane crash in Alaska that killed 10 people

By BECKY BOHRER Associated Press  
JUNEAU, Alaska (AP) — Authorities are working to recover the wreckage of a plane crash in western Alaska that killed 10 people while investigators are trying to determine what caused the small commuter aircraft to go down in the icy Bering Sea.  
The single-engine turboprop plane was traveling from Unalakleet to the hub community of Nome when it disappeared Thursday afternoon. The Bering Air plane was found the next day after an extensive search. Nine passengers and the pilot were killed.  
Crews on Saturday succeeded in recovering the remains of those killed in the crash from a drifting ice floe before the anticipated onset of high winds and snow.  
Here are things to know about the plane crash, which is one of the deadliest plane crashes in the state in 25 years.  
The plane was reported missing near Nome  
Officials said contact with the Cessna Caravan was lost less than an hour after it left Unalakleet on Thursday. Authorities said the flight was a regularly scheduled commuter trip, and the aircraft went missing about 30 miles (48 kilometers) southeast of Nome.  
The wreckage was found Friday by rescuers who were searching by helicopter. Local, state and federal agencies scoured large stretches of icy waters and miles of frozen tundra before finding the plane.  
Officials say a Black Hawk helicopter will be used to move the aircraft, now that bodies have been removed. The wreckage was located atop sea ice that is drifting about 5 miles (8 km) per day, complicating efforts.  
Unalakleet is a community of about 690 people about 150 miles (about 240 kilometers) southeast of Nome and 395 miles (about 640 kilometers) northwest of Anchorage. The village is on the Iditarod trail, route of the world's most famous sled dog race.  
Nome is just south of the Arctic Circle and is known as the ending point of the 1,000-mile (1,610-kilometer) Iditarod.  
The cause of the crash is under investigation  
The National Transportation Safety Board is sending people from various states to investigate the crash. Radar data provided by the U.S. Civil Air Patrol indicated the plane rapidly lost elevation and speed, but it is not clear why that happened, according to the U.S. Coast Guard.  
Coast Guard Lt. Cmdr. Benjamin McIntyre-Coble said he was unaware of any distress signals from the aircraft. If a plane is exposed to seawater, an emergency locating transmitter sends a signal to a satellite, which then relays that message to the Coast Guard. No such messages were received by the Coast Guard.  
Flying is an important mode of transportation in the largest U.S. state

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Alaska's vast landscape and limited infrastructure makes traveling by plane a common thing. Most communities are not connected to the developed road system that serves the state's most populous region.

Some high school teams fly to sporting events against rival high schools, and goods are brought to many communities by barge or by air.

Who was on the plane?

Authorities on Saturday identified the crash victims, who ranged in age from the 34-year-old, Nome-based pilot to a 58-year-old passenger, also a resident of Nome.

Also among those killed were Rhone Baumgartner and Kameron Hartvigson of Anchorage, ages 46 and 41, respectively. They had traveled to Unalakleet to service a heat-recovery system vital to the community's water plant, according to the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium.

"At this time, our thoughts are with the families and loved ones of those affected by this tragedy," the flight operator Bering Air wrote in a statement on its website. "We recognize the profound loss this has caused, and we want to extend our sincerest condolences to everyone impacted."

The flight company said it had set up telephone hotlines staffed with specialists to provide emotional support and updates to people who had loved ones on the flight.

Other recent U.S. plane crashes are also under investigation

The Alaska plane's crash marks the third major U.S. aviation mishap in eight days.

A commercial jetliner and an Army helicopter collided near the nation's capital on Jan. 29, killing 67 people.

A medical transportation plane crashed in Philadelphia on Jan. 31, killing the six people on board and another person on the ground.

## Rescuers search for at least 29 people after a landslide in southwest China

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese rescuers searched for at least 29 people after a landslide on Saturday in southwestern Sichuan province buried 10 houses and forced hundreds of residents to evacuate.

The Ministry of Emergency Management deployed hundreds of rescuers including firefighters following the landslide in a village in Junlian county. Two people were pulled out alive with injuries, and about 200 others were relocated, state broadcaster CCTV said. A manufacturing facility was also buried.

The disaster was caused by recent heavy rainfall and geological conditions, authorities said in a news conference on Sunday. These factors transformed a landslide into a debris flow, resulting in an accumulation of debris stretching about 1.2 kilometers (0.7 miles) in length, with a total volume exceeding 100,000 cubic meters (3.5 million cubic feet).

Authorities were still confirming the total number of missing.

A villager told BeijingNews that rocks were frequently seen rolling down the mountain since the second half of 2024, in some cases making sounds similar to firecrackers. The villager said geologists had inspected the area late last year, the state-run newspaper reported.

President Xi Jinping expressed his concern and urged authorities to make every effort to search for the missing people and minimize casualties, the official Xinhua news agency reported.

Chinese Premier Li Qiang asked for an investigation and inspection of potential geological hazard risks in nearby areas. Li also said residents who were under threat should be evacuated to prevent another disaster, according to Xinhua.

China has allocated 80 million yuan (about \$11 million) to support disaster relief and recovery efforts.

Landslides, often caused by rain or unsafe construction work, are not uncommon in China. Last year, a landslide in a remote, mountainous part of China's southwestern province of Yunnan killed dozens of people.

## Avian flu suspected in up to 15 bird deaths at New York City zoos

NEW YORK (AP) — At least three and possibly up to 15 birds have died of avian flu at two New York City zoos, according to the organization that operates the facilities.



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The Wildlife Conservation Society said three ducks at the Queens Zoo died after contracting the virus, and lab tests are pending on three ducks and nine wild birds that died at the Bronx Zoo after possible exposure.

"As a precaution, over the last two weeks, we have moved vulnerable bird species to protected areas in our parks," officials said in a statement.

On Friday, state officials ordered bird markets in the metropolitan area to close for a week after seven cases of avian flu were detected during routine inspections in the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens. Gov. Kathy Hochul said there was no immediate threat to public health and the temporary closures were done out of an abundance of caution.

Avian flu has hit farms nationwide, leading to the slaughter of millions of birds and driving up egg prices.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said the virus poses low risk to the general public. The agency said there have been 67 confirmed cases of bird flu in humans in the U.S., none of them in New York.

## Hamas releases 3 frail-looking Israeli hostages for Palestinian prisoners under Gaza ceasefire

By WAFAA SHURAF, MOHAMMAD JAHJOUH and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Hamas-led militants released three gaunt, frail-looking Israeli hostages and Israel freed nearly 200 Palestinian prisoners Saturday in the latest exchange of a ceasefire that has paused 16 months of war in Gaza.

The hostages' condition and scenes of Hamas forcing them to speak in a handover ceremony sparked outrage in Israel and could increase pressure on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to extend the ceasefire beyond its current six-week phase.

Netanyahu has signaled he would resume the war, even if that means leaving dozens of hostages in captivity. "President Trump completely agreed with me: We will do everything to return all the hostages, but Hamas will not be there," Netanyahu said after the exchange.

Civilians Eli Sharabi, 52; Ohad Ben Ami, 56; and Or Levy, 34, were among about 250 people taken during the Hamas-led attack on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, that sparked the war.

Israelis' joy turned to shock and tears when they saw their emaciated state.

Later Saturday, Israel released 183 Palestinian prisoners, some also appearing gaunt and weak. The Red Crescent said seven were taken to hospitals. Many Palestinians released during the ceasefire have appeared emaciated, and have alleged abuses in custody.

It was the fifth exchange since the ceasefire began Jan. 19. Twenty-one hostages have now been freed.

The Red Cross said it was "increasingly concerned about the conditions surrounding release operations" and urged all parties to ensure releases are dignified and private.

A dozen more hostages yet to be freed in first phase

An Israeli Health Ministry representative, Dr. Hagar Mizrahi, noted "severe malnutrition" and a "significant decrease" in body weight in the hostages released, as families again feared for the dozens of others still held in Gaza. Not all are alive.

"If anyone had any doubt about how urgent it is to bring everyone back ... today we got a wake-up call," Moshe Or, brother of hostage Avinatan Or, told a weekly rally in Tel Aviv.

Gal Hirsch, Netanyahu's coordinator for hostages, said that "we will not remain silent about this. A message has been passed on to the mediators, and action will be taken accordingly."

Hamas' military wing said it had made efforts to preserve the hostages' lives "despite the (Israeli) bombardment."

The ceasefire's first phase calls for the release of 33 hostages and nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners, the return of Palestinians to northern Gaza and an increase in humanitarian aid to the devastated territory. Israel says Hamas has confirmed eight of the 33 hostages are dead.

U.S. President Donald Trump's stunning proposal to transfer the Palestinian population out of Gaza could

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complicate talks over the second and more difficult phase, when Hamas is to release dozens more hostages in return for a lasting ceasefire. His proposal was welcomed by Israel but rejected by Palestinians and most of the international community.

Hamas may be reluctant to free more hostages if it believes the U.S. and Israel are serious about depopulating Gaza, which rights groups say would violate international law.

Netanyahu on Saturday directed a delegation to go to Qatar to discuss the ceasefire agreement's technical details, and the security Cabinet will meet about negotiations on the truce's second phase, according to an Israeli official who spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss details of the talks.

Hostages learn of loved ones' fate

Sharabi and Ben Ami were captured from Kibbutz Beeri, one of the farming communities hardest hit by the Hamas attack, while Levy was taken from the Nova music festival.

They are only now learning the fate of some family members, according to Israeli media. Sharabi's wife and two teenage daughters were killed, and his brother Yossi died in captivity. Levy's wife was killed. Ben Ami's wife, Raz, was released during a weeklong ceasefire in November 2023 that saw more than 100 hostages freed.

"It's over, it's over," Levy's brother Michael said as they embraced.

"I left XXL, I came back medium," Ben Ami said as he hugged his daughters. One of them, Ella, told Israeli channel 12 that "it took me a moment to realize that this was my father."

The Palestinian prisoners released include 18 serving life sentences for deadly attacks on Israelis, 54 serving long-term sentences and 111 Palestinians from Gaza detained after the Oct. 7 attack but not tried for any crime. All are men, ages 20 to 61.

Virtually every Palestinian has a friend, relative or acquaintance who has been imprisoned.

Seven of the released prisoners were transferred to Egypt. Others were transferred to Palestinian custody in the occupied West Bank, where cheering supporters welcomed them. Some had been detained over offenses ranging from bomb attacks to involvement in militant organizations.

They include Iyad Abu Shakhdam, 49, locked up for nearly 21 years over his involvement in Hamas attacks in crowded civilian areas that killed dozens of Israelis. That included a 2004 suicide bus bombing in Beersheba that killed 16 people.

"From Oct. 7, 2023, to today we don't know anything about what is happening outside the prison," Shakhdam said.

Another is Jamal al-Tawil, a prominent Hamas politician, whose last reported arrest was in 2021 over alleged efforts to entrench Hamas' leadership in the West Bank. He was transferred to administrative detention, a renewable six-month period in which suspects are held without charge or trial.

War could resume in March without a deal

The war — the deadliest and most destructive fighting ever between Israel and Hamas — could resume in early March if no agreement is reached.

Israel says it is committed to destroying Hamas, which reasserted its rule over Gaza within hours of the ceasefire. Hamas says it won't release remaining hostages without an end to the war and a full Israeli withdrawal.

In the Oct. 7 attack, about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, were killed. More than 47,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's retaliatory war, over half women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not say how many were militants.

The Israeli military says it killed more than 17,000 fighters, without providing evidence. It blames civilian deaths on Hamas for operating in residential neighborhoods.

## Teddy bear helps hostage's British family come to terms with grief amid joy over his release

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — As Gillian Brisley and her husband, Pete, watched their son-in-law's release from captivity on Saturday morning, she clutched a teddy bear to her chest.

It was a reminder of everything the family has suffered since Hamas militants attacked Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing their daughter, Lianne Sharabi, and teenage granddaughters, Noiya and Yahel, while taking son-in-law Eli Sharabi hostage. Eli's brother Yossi was also killed.

The stuffed toy, which once belonged to Lianne, was a tangible link between the Brisleys and events in the Middle East as they watched the hostage handover unfold on TV at their home in South Wales.

"While Gill was crying, she was holding on to the teddy bear, which was Lianne's from the age of about 10 years old and which we were lucky enough to find on Kibbutz Be'eri when we went to the house," Pete Brisley said. "When we went to the house, it was filthy, bullet holes everywhere. So we tidied up the house, tidied up the garden, so if Eli wanted to come home to it, then it looks reasonable because it was an absolute shambles."

Even that simple cleanup was an act of faith because the family had received no word on Sharabi at all since the militants took him back to Gaza with more than 200 other hostages.

Out of nowhere, the Brisleys were told Friday that Sharabi, 52, was to be one of three hostages released the next day. So they got up early Saturday morning to see their son-in-law walk free.

The moment was bittersweet. They were thrilled that he was finally free but horrified by the pale, emaciated figure they saw on TV. This wasn't the swarthy, robust man they last saw 18 months ago. The spark that always glinted in his eyes was gone.

"He looks as though he's been to Belsen," Pete Brisley said, referring to the World War II concentration camp.

Sharabi's release also triggered other emotions for family members, who had suppressed their grief by focusing their energies on securing his freedom.

When asked how she felt, Gillian Brisley said she was relieved he was free. But there was more to say.

"The emotion of seeing him also then brought the grief of losing our girls right up to our throats," she said. "We just sat here and we cried. We cried for our loss. We cried with relief that Eli was on his way home. We cried for Yossi. Just, you know, mixed emotions."

Then there's the continuing concern for Sharabi.

Sharabi was told only after his return that his wife and two daughters were killed on Oct. 7, according to reports in Israeli media. The family had hoped that he was told beforehand so that he wouldn't have to process that grief after surviving 490 days in captivity, said Stephen Brisley, Lianne's brother.

Lianne met Eli Sharabi on a three-month work experience assignment at Kibbutz Be'eri, married and then made her home in Israel.

Naturally, the bear came along. Growing up in Wales, the bear was part of the family.

When they were being naughty, her brothers would hide the bear from her, or stick it in a drawer with only its toes dangling out, Stephen Brisley remembered. It also participated in tea parties on the bedroom floor and sat in the audience as the kids pretended to hold rock concerts with tennis rackets for guitars and broomsticks for microphones.

For a family that isn't religious and doesn't find strength in prayer, the bear now provides a link to lost loved ones.

"Mum has found it a great comfort to speak to Lianne's bear, and she says basically she speaks to the bear every morning, every evening and she speaks to the bear as though she's talking to Lianne," Stephen Brisley said.

"I think it's been a cathartic experience for her. ... It's a tangible sort of physical connection to somebody that you can't have that real hug with."

## Winter storm to bring up to a foot of snow in parts of the Northeast US

CONCORD, N.H. (AP) — A strong storm is expected to bring moderate to heavy snowfall across parts of the Upper Great Lakes on Saturday before intensifying overnight across the Northeast.

The National Weather Service said a storm over the central and southern plains will move northeastward Saturday, producing a swath of 4 to 8 inches (10 to 20 centimeters) of snow across parts of Minnesota and the Great Lakes. Saturday night into Sunday, upstate New York and New England could see up to a foot (30 centimeters) of accumulation. Hazardous travel conditions were likely due to low visibility and snow-covered roads.

"One good thing with this storm, it is moving pretty quickly, so it's not gonna be a prolonged winter weather event," said Bob Oravec, lead forecaster with the National Weather Service in College Park, Maryland. "It looks like the snow will definitely be coming to an end earlier in the day on Sunday, after which the weather will be fairly tranquil for a few days."

In the meantime, a mix of snow, sleet and freezing rain from the Ohio Valley into the northern Mid-Atlantic region could result in significant icing in the Central Appalachians, forecasters said. Freezing rain on roadways was expected to make travel dangerous, and power outages were possible.

## Arrests in luxury home burglaries targeting NFL, NBA players are the 'tip of the iceberg'

By JOHN SEEWER and DAVE COLLINS Associated Press

For months, daring bands of thieves linked to South American gangs have been making off with piles of jewelry and cash from the homes of the biggest superstars in sports, targeting the likes of the NFL's Patrick Mahomes and Travis Kelce.

Sophisticated pillagers have deployed drones and signal jamming devices, sometimes posing as delivery drivers or maintenance workers, to gain access to gated neighborhoods and thwart home security systems, according to warnings issued by the NFL and NBA.

But in recent weeks, investigators across the U.S. have made a handful of arrests connected to at least one of the high-profile heists and discovered stolen sports memorabilia, jewelry and art stuffed into storage units in New Jersey.

A group of Chilean men stopped in January while driving in Ohio were charged Monday with stealing nearly \$300,000 worth of designer luggage, watches and jewelry from Cincinnati Bengals quarterback Joe Burrow's house. Photos showed one suspect wearing a sparkly necklace with Burrow's jersey number that he had worn during interviews, according to a federal complaint unsealed Wednesday.

"These individuals seem to be the alleged tip of the iceberg," said Kenneth Parker, the U.S. Attorney in southern Ohio, who believes the men are working with South American theft rings that for years have been ransacking opulent homes from coast to coast.

Some luxury watches and jewelry stolen from homes across the country — not just those belonging to athletes — ended up being sold at a pawnshop in Manhattan's Diamond District and stashed away in nearby storage units, federal authorities said in court documents released Tuesday that accuse two men of fencing the items.

Whether the entire string of burglaries targeting athletes are connected to the same crews from South America or if those groups are working together isn't clear. Federal authorities leading the investigations have been tight-lipped since the FBI warned in December that crime organizations were preying on professional athletes.

Superstar athletes targeted in home burglaries

Investigators say international crime rings have looted high-end houses for years, but now they're going after some of the biggest names in the NFL, NBA and NHL.

Thieves broke into the homes of Kansas City Chiefs teammates Mahomes and Kelce within days of each

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other in October around the time they played New Orleans and Kelce's superstar girlfriend Taylor Swift watched the game from the stands.

Mahomes and Kelce on Sunday will try to lead the Chiefs to a record three straight Super Bowl titles.

Jewelry valued at about \$30,000 was stolen from NBA All-Star Luka Dončić's home in Dallas in December. Pittsburgh Penguins star Evgeni Malkin reported a home invasion in January that happened while his team was playing at home.

Similarities in the string of break-ins

Law enforcement officials warned sports leagues last fall that thieves had been striking on game days when they knew the players would not be home, often smashing through rear windows.

Some of the groups scoped out their targets by posing as home delivery drivers or joggers in secluded neighborhoods.

Burrow's home in Ohio, which sits on a gated street tucked along a wooded area, was broken into while he was in Dallas for a Monday Night Football game in December. The men charged in the invasion were found weeks later traveling with a Husky glass-breaking tool that one of them bought at Home Depot, an FBI agent wrote in an affidavit.

Players have been advised to not only beef up their home security but also avoid posting their whereabouts on social media.

Thieves targeting items that can be sold underground

The theft rings are focused on cash and items that can be resold on the black market, such as jewelry, watches and luxury bags, according to an NBA warning based on information from the FBI.

The two men indicted this week in New York City were accused of buying stolen watches, jewelry and other expensive items from a variety of burglary crews and reselling them at their pawnshop in Manhattan since 2020.

Court documents said the pair were tied to five separate burglary crews and linked one of the two suspects to the men accused of breaking into the residence of a "high-profile athlete in Ohio" on the same day that Burrow's home was hit.

A judge on Friday denied bail for the pawnshop owners, saying it would be "ironic" to release them just before the Super Bowl.

"This is one Super Bowl Defendants will have to watch from the sidelines," U.S. District Court Judge William Kuntz wrote in his decision. "They will not be players this weekend."

## War-torn Lebanon forms its first government in over 2 years to end deadlock

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB and ABBY SEWELL Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Lebanon's new prime minister on Saturday formed the country's first full-fledged government since 2022.

President Joseph Aoun announced in a statement that he had accepted the resignation of the former caretaker government and signed a decree with new Prime Minister Nawaf Salam forming the new government.

Salam vowed to "restore confidence between citizens and the state, between Lebanon and its Arab surroundings, and between Lebanon and the international community" and to implement reforms needed to bring the country out of an extended economic crisis.

"Reform is the only path to a true salvation," he said in a speech on Saturday.

He also promised to follow up on implementation of a ceasefire agreement that ended the most recent war between Israel and the Lebanese militant group and political party Hezbollah in late November and to ensure that Israeli forces "withdraw from Lebanese territory until the last inch." He pledged to ensure reconstruction in areas that suffered destruction during the war.

Salam's cabinet of 24 ministers, split evenly between Christian and Muslim sects, was formed less than a month after he was appointed, and comes at a time where Lebanon is scrambling to rebuild its battered

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southern region and maintain security along its borders.

Lebanon is also still in the throes of a crippling economic crisis, now in its sixth year, which has battered its banks, destroyed its state electricity sector and left many in poverty unable to access their savings.

Salam, a diplomat and former president of the International Court of Justice, has vowed to reform Lebanon's judiciary and battered economy and bring about stability in the troubled country, which has faced numerous economic, political, and security crises for decades.

New government marks a shift away from Hezbollah

Though Hezbollah did not endorse Salam as prime minister, the Lebanese group did engage in negotiations with the new prime minister over the Shiite Muslim seats in government, as per Lebanon's power-sharing system.

That was despite comments by U.S. envoy Morgan Ortagus who said in a speech in Beirut Friday that Washington had "set clear red lines from the United States" that Hezbollah would not be "a part of the government." The comments drew backlash from many in Lebanon who saw them as meddling in internal Lebanese affairs.

Lebanon's new authorities also mark a shift away from leaders that are close to Hezbollah, as Beirut hopes to continue improving ties with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf nations that have been concerned by Hezbollah's growing political and military power over the past decade.

In early January, former army chief Aoun was elected president, ending that position's vacuum. He was also a candidate not endorsed by Hezbollah and key allies.

Aoun has shared similar sentiments to Salam, also vowing to consolidate the state's right to "monopolize the carrying of weapons," in an apparent reference to the arms of Hezbollah.

Clashes on eastern border continue

While the formation of a government appeared to be a sign of hope for the country's future stability, Lebanon is still facing a tense security situation on more than one front.

Clashes broke out ongoing on the eastern border with Syria earlier this week between Lebanese clans and the security forces of the new Syrian government, which are largely made up of former members of the Islamist militant group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham.

The porous border has long been a conduit for smuggling of people, weapons and drugs. Syrian officials said security forces were cracking down on smuggling gangs.

The Lebanese army said Saturday that several Lebanese areas had been "subjected to shelling and gunfire" from Syria and that it had given orders for soldiers stationed in the border area to "respond to sources of fire launched from Syrian territory."

Ceasefire agreement extended

Separately, six people were killed and two injured in an Israeli drone strike Saturday in the area of Janata, near the eastern border with Syria, Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported.

The Israeli military said in a statement that it had struck "Hezbollah operatives" who "were operating in a strategic weapons manufacturing and storage site" belonging to the militant group.

Israel has continued to launch near-daily strikes on what it says are Hezbollah facilities in Lebanon since the implementation of the ceasefire agreement. The deal stipulates that both Israel and Lebanon maintain the right to act in "self defense" but does not define what qualifies as self defense.

The original 60-day deadline for implementing the terms of the ceasefire agreement expired in late January, but Lebanon and Israel agreed to extend it until Feb. 18.

## **Trump says some white South Africans are oppressed, could be resettled in the US. They say no thanks**

By GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — Groups representing some of South Africa's white minority responded Saturday to a plan by President Donald Trump to offer them refugee status and resettlement in the United States by saying: thanks, but no thanks.

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The plan was detailed in an executive order Trump signed Friday that stopped all aid and financial assistance to South Africa as punishment for what the Trump administration said were "rights violations" by the government against some of its white citizens.

The Trump administration accused the South African government of allowing violent attacks on white Afrikaner farmers and introducing a land expropriation law that enables it to "seize ethnic minority Afrikaners' agricultural property without compensation."

The South African government has denied there are any concerted attacks on white farmers and has said that Trump's description of the new land law is full of misinformation and distortions.

Afrikaners are descended from mainly Dutch, but also French and German colonial settlers who first arrived in South Africa more than 300 years ago. They speak Afrikaans, a language derived from Dutch that developed in South Africa, and are distinct from other white South Africans who come from British or other backgrounds.

Together, whites make up around 7% of South Africa's population of 62 million.

'We are not going anywhere'

On Saturday, two of the most prominent groups representing Afrikaners said they would not be taking up Trump's offer of resettlement in the U.S.

"Our members work here, and want to stay here, and they are going to stay here," said Dirk Hermann, chief executive of the Afrikaner trade union Solidarity, which says it represents around 2 million people. "We are committed to build a future here. We are not going anywhere."

At the same press conference, Kallie Kriel, the CEO of the Afrikaner lobby group AfriForum, said: "We have to state categorically: We don't want to move elsewhere."

Trump's move to sanction South Africa, a key U.S. trading partner in Africa, came after he and his South African-born adviser Elon Musk have accused its Black leadership of having an anti-white stance. But the portrayal of Afrikaners as a downtrodden group that needed to be saved would surprise most South Africans.

"It is ironic that the executive order makes provision for refugee status in the U.S. for a group in South Africa that remains amongst the most economically privileged," South Africa's Foreign Ministry said. It also criticized the Trump administration's own policies, saying the focus on Afrikaners came "while vulnerable people in the U.S. from other parts of the world are being deported and denied asylum despite real hardship."

There was "a campaign of misinformation and propaganda" aimed at South Africa, the ministry said.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa's spokesperson said: "South Africa is a constitutional democracy. We value all South Africans, Black and white. The assertion that Afrikaners face arbitrary deprivation and, therefore, need to flee the country of their birth is an assertion devoid of all truth."

Whites in South Africa still generally have a much better standard of living than Blacks more than 30 years after the end of the apartheid system of white minority rule in 1994. Despite being a small minority, whites own around 70% of South Africa's private farmland. A study in 2021 by the South Africa Human Rights Commission said 1% of whites were living in poverty compared to 64% of Blacks.

Redressing the wrongs of colonialism

Sithabile Ngidi, a market trader in Johannesburg, said she hadn't seen white people being mistreated in South Africa.

"He (Trump) should have actually come from America to South Africa to try and see what was happening for himself and not just take the word of an Elon Musk, who hasn't lived in this country for the longest of time, who doesn't even relate to South Africans," Ngidi said.

But Trump's action against South Africa has given international attention to a sentiment among some white South Africans that they are being discriminated against as a form of payback for apartheid. The leaders of the apartheid government were Afrikaners.

Solidarity, AfriForum and others are strongly opposed to the new land expropriation law, saying it will target land owned by whites who have worked to develop that land for years. They also say an equally contentious language law that's recently been passed seeks to remove or limit their Afrikaans language in

schools, while they have often criticized South Africa's affirmative action policies in business that promote the interests of Blacks as racist laws.

"This government is allowing a certain section of the population to be targeted," said AfriForum's Kriel, who thanked Trump for raising the case of Afrikaners. But Kriel said Afrikaners were committed to South Africa.

The South African government says the laws that have been criticized are aimed at the difficult task of redressing the wrongs of colonialism and then nearly a half-century of apartheid, when Blacks were stripped of their land and almost all their rights.

## Leaders from eastern and southern Africa call for a ceasefire and negotiations in Congo

By RODNEY MUHUMUZA Associated Press

KAMPALA, Uganda (AP) — Leaders from eastern and southern Africa on Saturday called for an immediate ceasefire in eastern Congo, where rebels are threatening to overthrow the Congolese government, but also urged Congo's president to directly negotiate with them.

Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi, who attended the summit in the Tanzanian city of Dar es Salaam by videoconference, has previously said he would never talk to the Rwanda-backed M23 rebels he sees as driven to exploit his country's vast mineral wealth.

A communique at the end of talks urged the resumption of "direct negotiations and dialogue with all state and non-state parties," including M23. The rebels seized Goma, the biggest city in eastern Congo, following fighting that left nearly 3,000 dead and hundreds of thousands of displaced, according to the U.N.

The unprecedented joint summit included leaders from the East African Community bloc, of which both Rwanda and Congo are members, and those from the Southern African Development Community, or SADC, which includes countries ranging from Congo to South Africa.

Rwandan President Paul Kagame attended the summit along with his South African counterpart, Cyril Ramaphosa, who has angered the Rwandans by deploying South African troops in eastern Congo under the banner of SADC to fight M23.

Rwanda has blamed the deployment of SADC peacekeepers for worsening the conflict in North Kivu, a mineral-rich province in eastern Congo that's now controlled by M23. Kagame insists SADC troops were not peacekeepers because they were fighting alongside Congolese forces to defeat the rebels.

The rebels are backed by some 4,000 troops from neighboring Rwanda, according to U.N. experts, while Congolese government forces are backed by regional peacekeepers, U.N. forces, allied militias and troops from neighboring Burundi. They're now focused on preventing the rebels from taking Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu province.

Dialogue 'is not a sign of weakness'

The M23 rebellion stems partly from Rwanda's decades-long concern that rebels opposed to Kagame's government have been allowed by Congo's military to be active in largely lawless parts of eastern Congo. Kagame also charges that Tshisekedi has overlooked the legitimate concerns of Congolese Tutsis who face discrimination.

Kenyan President William Ruto told the summit that "the lives of millions depend on our ability to navigate this complex and challenging situation with wisdom, clarity of mind, empathy."

Dialogue "is not a sign of weakness," said Ruto, the current chair of the East African Community. "It is in this spirit that we must encourage all parties to put aside their differences and mobilize for engagements in constructive dialogue."

The M23 advance echoed the rebels' previous capture of Goma over a decade ago and shattered a 2024 ceasefire, brokered by Angola, between Rwanda and Congo.

Some regional analysts fear that the rebels' latest offensive is more potent because they are linking their fight to wider agitation for better governance and have vowed to go all the way to the capital, Kinshasa, 1,600 kilometers (1,000 miles) west of Goma.



Rebels face pressure to pull out of Goma

The Congo River Alliance, a coalition of rebel groups including M23, said in an open letter to the summit that they are fighting a Congolese regime that "flouted republican norms" and is "becoming an appalling danger for the Congolese people."

"Those who are fighting against Mr. Tshisekedi are indeed sons of the country, nationals of all the provinces," it said. "Since our revolution is national, it encompasses people of all ethnic and community backgrounds, including Congolese citizens who speak the Kinyarwanda language."

The letter, signed by Corneille Nangaa, a leader of the rebel alliance, said the group was "open for a direct dialogue" with the Congolese government.

But the rebels and their allies also face pressure to pull out of Goma.

In addition to calling for the immediate reopening of the airport in Goma, the summit in Dar es Salaam also called for the drawing of "modalities for withdrawal of uninvited foreign armed groups" from Congolese territory.

A meeting in Equatorial Guinea Friday of another regional bloc, the Economic Community of Central African States, also called for the immediate withdrawal of Rwandan troops from Congo as well as the airport's reopening to facilitate access to humanitarian aid.

## **The US stopped allowing passport gender marker changes. Here are some of the people affected**

By GEOFF MULVIHILL and JOHN HANNA Associated Press

The day after President Donald Trump returned to office, Lisa Suhay took her 21-year-old daughter, Mellow, to a passport office in Norfolk, Virginia, where they live.

Getting a passport for Mellow, who is transgender, was urgent.

In an executive order Trump signed the night before, the president used a narrow definition of the sexes instead of a broader conception of gender. The order says a person is male or female and it rejects the idea that someone can transition from the sex assigned at birth to another gender. The framing is in line with many conservatives' views but at odds with major medical groups and policies under former President Joe Biden.

Her family wants Mellow to be able to leave the country if things became unbearable for transgender people in the U.S. as the federal government increasingly moves not to recognize them.

"If the worst was to come to worst and things were to threaten my life," she said, "I would have some way out."

Trump's Jan. 20 order, which questions the existence of transgender and nonbinary people, created confusion and pain for Mellow and others seeking new, renewed or updated passports. A group of impacted people challenged the policy with a lawsuit filed Friday in federal court in Boston.

The State Department fell in line with Trump's order

The State Department quickly stopped issuing travel documents with the "X" gender marker preferred by many nonbinary people, who don't identify as strictly male or female. The department also stopped allowing people to change the gender listed on their passport or get new ones that reflect their gender rather than their sex assigned at birth.

Applications that had already been submitted seeking gender marker changes were put on hold. The State Department also replaced its webpage with information for "LGBTQI+" travelers to just "LGB," removing any reference to transgender or intersex people.

Knowing about the policy change, Mellow checked the box for "male," even though that's at odds with her life and her state-issued driver's license.

"We had to swear oath to the fact that the information that we presented was true, even if what we had to do was not truthful to ourselves" Mellow said. "It was emotional because it was in a way lying to yourself."

Her mother worries that Mellow might not be granted a passport — or that it could create legal problems

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if her documents don't match or because she swore to something that's not true.

Trump has targeted transgender people on several fronts

The passport policy is among several actions Trump has taken since returning to office that could stifle rights and legal recognition of transgender, intersex and nonbinary people.

The same order that seeks to define the sexes to exclude them would also require housing transgender women in prison in men's facilities. Additional orders could open the door to kicking transgender service members out of the military, barring the use of federal taxpayer money to provide gender-affirming care to transgender people under 19 and keeping transgender girls and women out of girls and women's sports competitions.

The lawsuit filed Friday by ACLU lawyers challenging the passport change contends that the order discriminates against people based on their sex or transgender status, depriving them of their rights to equal protection, privacy and speech. It also contends the abrupt policy change violates the requirement for a 60-day notice and comment period.

Trump's administration has said the policy would not affect existing unexpired passports.

Groups such as New Jersey-based Garden State Equality warned transgender and nonbinary members that they could be at risk when returning to the U.S. after traveling abroad, particularly if their passport has the "X" gender marker.

A family is in limbo over one son's application

Elise Flatland, a mother of four in the Kansas City suburb of Olathe, Kansas, is still waiting to hear about whether a passport has been approved for her 12-year-old transgender son.

The family filled out the application in December at the same time they requested passports for two of their other children. The others have arrived, but his has not. Flatland said it's essential to have the travel document so the family could go to another country for gender-affirming care if it becomes unavailable in the U.S.

It would also help her son in other ways. A 2023 Kansas law left them unable to change his birth certificate, so he has no government-issued document that reflects his gender. Having one could help answer fellow sixth graders who question his identity, more so since Trump was elected in November.

"There is definitely a sense of everyone being emboldened in their anti-trans, anti-LGBTQ attitudes, and they have no need to act politely in public," Flatland said.

Seeking a passport change means handing over documents

Anticipating a passport change, Ash Lazarus Orr, a West Virginia advocate for transgender people, sent in an expedited application to change the gender marker on his passport from "F" to "M" days before Trump took office.

But it wasn't processed until after inauguration, and Orr doesn't expect the change will be made.

A complication for Orr is that the State Department has his current passport, which doesn't expire for several years, his birth certificate and marriage license. That has put some upcoming international travel plans into question.

He said he hopes his non-updated passport will be returned, so he can travel. "Worst-case scenario, I could see this lost through the entire administration where I don't have a passport," Orr said.

The State Department said it "corrected" a passport application

Zaya Perysian, a 22-year-old content creator who lives in Los Angeles, tried to change the gender mark on her passport once she heard about Trump's passport policy.

She bought a plane ticket to Canada to serve as the basis for a request for expedited service. After an appointment at a passport office, she hoped the switch would be approved.

Days later, her new passport arrived in the mail along with a letter explaining that the application had been "corrected" to male.

She said the issue is bigger than the travel document.

"They don't want any trans person to feel validated," she said in an interview. "They want it to go back to how it used to be, where we were seen as like these creatures, and that we were just like night stalkers."

Both Orr and Perysian are among the plaintiffs in the lawsuit seeking to halt the policy.

## Who are the Palestinian prisoners released in exchange for Israeli hostages?

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

RAMALLAH, West Bank (AP) — Israel released 183 Palestinian prisoners on Saturday in the latest exchange for Israeli hostages held in Gaza, part of a ceasefire that has paused the war but whose future is uncertain.

Israel views the prisoners as terrorists, while Palestinians see them as freedom fighters resisting a decadeslong military occupation.

Nearly every Palestinian has a friend or family member who has been jailed by Israel at some point, for militant attacks or lesser offenses such as rock-throwing, protesting or membership in a banned political group. Some are held for months or years without trial in what is known as administrative detention, which Israel says is needed to prevent attacks and avoid sharing sensitive intelligence.

Eighteen of those released Saturday had been sentenced to life and 54 were serving long sentences for their involvement in deadly attacks against Israelis. Some have been in jail for two decades. In the West Bank town of Beitunia, whistling crowds greeted the released prisoners as heroes, waving flags and chanting support for Hamas.

Some of the released men dropped to their knees as they stepped off the bus, weeping as they kissed the cold pavement. They were greeted by tearful relatives before traveling on to their homes throughout the West Bank.

"We've been waiting. And waiting is the most painful thing, it wears on the nerves," said Samah Abu Aliya, whose 34-year-old son, Imad Abu Aliya, was freed Saturday after serving four and a half years for his affiliation with Hamas. "Thank God he's been released. Now we wait for the other prisoners, we wait for the negotiations. That's what we do in this country, wait."

Seven of those convicted of the most serious crimes were transferred to Egypt and under the terms of the ceasefire agreement will either stay in that country or be deported elsewhere.

Also among those released were 111 Palestinians from Gaza who were rounded up after Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack on southern Israel, which triggered the war in Gaza. They had been detained without trial. The Red Cross brought them to the European Hospital in Gaza's southern town of Khan Younis, where scores of people poured into the streets in celebration.

A look at some prominent Palestinian prisoners released since the truce went into effect on Jan. 19:

Iyad Abu Shakhdam

Abu Shakhdam, 49, was sentenced to the equivalent of 18 life sentences over his involvement in Hamas attacks that killed dozens of Israelis during the second intifada, or Palestinian uprising, between 2000 and 2005.

Among the most infamous of those attacks was a double suicide bombing that blew up two buses in the southern Israeli city of Beersheba in 2004, killing 16 Israelis, including a 4-year-old, and wounding more than 100 others. In interviews with Arabic news outlets, he described his militancy as a desire for revenge stemming from his brother's killing by Israeli security forces in 2000.

Abu Shakhdam was on the run for weeks before his arrest in his hometown of Hebron in the West Bank in November 2004, following a gunfight with Israeli security forces in which he was shot 10 times.

During 21 years in prison, his family said, he finished high school and earned a certificate for courses in psychology.

As he stepped off the Red Cross convoy into the town of Beitunia, Abu Shakhdam was hoisted up onto the shoulders of dozens of supporters. Hugging his father tight, a sense of relief and defiance washed over him.

"From the moment I entered prison, I was sure, one day, I'd go home," he told The Associated Press. "The prison guards didn't believe me. But this whole time, I was sure that, with God's help, I'd be free."

Jamal al-Tawil

Al-Tawil, 61, a prominent Hamas politician in the occupied West Bank, has spent nearly two decades in

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and out of Israeli prisons, in part over allegations that he helped plot suicide bombings.

Most recently, the Israeli military arrested al-Tawil in 2021, saying that he had participated in violent riots and mobilized Hamas political activists in Ramallah, the seat of the semiautonomous Palestinian Authority and Hamas' main rival.

He had been held without charge or trial since then. After his arrest, he went on a hunger strike for more than three weeks to protest his administrative detention.

During one of al-Tawil's stints in Israeli prison in the early 2000s, he ran a successful electoral campaign from custody to become mayor of Al-Bireh, a West Bank town abutting Ramallah.

U.S. court documents from 2007, filed by the families of Israelis killed during the second intifada, show that al-Tawil had served for years as chairman of Al-Islah Charitable Society, a front organization to raise money for Hamas. The case accused al-Tawil of recruiting a Hamas militant to carry out a 2001 suicide bombing that targeted a crowded pedestrian mall in Jerusalem, killing 11 people.

His daughter, 32-year-old journalist Bushra al-Tawil, was among the dozens of women and teenagers released in the first round of prisoner-for-hostage exchanges on Jan. 19.

Before her father's release, she wrote on Instagram that Israeli security forces burst into their house near Ramallah at dawn and threatened her with rearrest if her family engaged in any form of public celebration. The Israeli military did not respond to an email seeking comment.

Too weak to walk, al-Tawil had to be lifted off the bus of prisoners and taken immediately to a hospital for treatment. His family shared photos of him lying on a hospital cot, looking exhausted. Six other Palestinian prisoners were also taken immediately to the hospital after their release.

Mohammed el-Halabi

The Palestinian manager of the Gaza branch of World Vision, a major Christian aid organization, was arrested in 2016 and accused of diverting tens of millions of dollars to Hamas in a high-profile case that drew criticism from rights groups. He was freed on Feb. 1.

Both el-Halabi, 47, and World Vision vigorously denied the allegations and independent investigations found no proof of wrongdoing. One independent audit found that el-Halabi had enforced internal controls and ordered employees to avoid anyone suspected of Hamas ties.

Rights groups say el-Halabi was denied a fair and transparent trial, as he and World Vision had no chance to review the evidence against them. U.N. experts say el-Halabi was questioned for 50 days without access to a lawyer. He was sentenced to 12 years in prison.

Israel has attributed the closed hearings to sensitive security information being discussed.

Shadi Amouri

Amouri, 44, from the northern West Bank city of Jenin, was arrested and accused of being involved in manufacturing a powerful car bomb that detonated beside an Israeli bus packed with passengers on June 5, 2002, killing 17 Israelis in what became known as the Megiddo Junction suicide bombing.

The attack during the second intifada took place in northern Israel. The Palestinian militant group Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility.

Amouri was sentenced to life in prison, plus 20 years. He was among those transferred to Egypt on Feb. 1 and released into exile.

Zakaria Zubeidi

Zakaria Zubeidi is a prominent former militant leader and theater director whose dramatic jailbreak in 2021 thrilled Palestinians across the Middle East and stunned the Israeli security establishment.

Zubeidi was a senior militant in the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade in the urban Jenin refugee camp in the West Bank. After the second intifada in 2006, he co-founded a theater in Jenin to promote what he described as cultural resistance to Israel. The Freedom Theater has put on everything from Shakespeare to stand-up comedy to plays written by residents.

In 2019, after Zubeidi had already served years in prison for attacks in the early 2000s, Israel arrested him again, accusing him of being involved in shooting attacks that targeted buses of Israeli settlers but caused no injuries.

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Zubeidi had been awaiting trial in prison before he was released on Jan. 30 into the West Bank. He denies the charges, saying that he gave up militancy to focus on his political activism after the intifada.

In 2021, he and five other prisoners tunneled out of a maximum-security prison in northern Israel. All six were recaptured days later.

Mohammed Abu Warda

A Hamas militant during the second intifada, Abu Warda helped organize a series of suicide bombings that killed over 40 people and wounded more than a hundred others. Israel arrested him in 2002, and sentenced him to 48 terms of lifetime imprisonment, among the longest sentences it ever issued.

As a young student, Abu Warda joined Hamas at the start of the intifada following Israel's killing of Yahya Ayyash, the militant group's leading bombmaker, in 1996.

Palestinian authorities said at the time that Abu Warda had helped to recruit suicide bombers, whose attacks targeting crowded civilian areas in Israeli cities killed scores of people in the early 2000s.

Abu Warda was released and deported on Jan. 30.

Mohammed Aradeh, 42

An activist in Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Aradeh was sentenced to life in prison for a range of offenses going back to the second intifada. Some of the charges, according to the Israeli Prison Service, included planting an explosive device and attempted murder.

He was credited with plotting the extraordinary prison escape in 2021, when he and five other detainees, including Zubeidi, used spoons to tunnel out one of Israel's most secure prisons. They remained at large for days before being caught.

From an impoverished and politically active family in Jenin, in the northern West Bank, Aradeh has three brothers and a sister who have all spent years in Israeli prisons.

He was welcomed as a sort of cult hero in Ramallah on Jan. 25 as family, friends and fans swarmed him, some chanting "The freedom tunnel!" in reference to his jailbreak.

Mohammed Odeh, 52, Wael Qassim, 54, and Wissam Abbasi, 48

All three men hail from the neighborhood of Silwan, in east Jerusalem, and rose within the ranks of Hamas. Held responsible for a string of deadly attacks during the second intifada, the men were handed multiple life sentences in 2002.

They were accused of plotting a suicide bombing at a crowded pool hall near Tel Aviv in 2002 that killed 15 people. Later that year, they were found to have orchestrated a bombing at Hebrew University that killed nine people, including five American students. Israel had described Odeh, who was working as a painter at the university at the time, as the architect of the attack.

All three were transferred to Egypt on Jan. 25. Their families live in Jerusalem and said they will join them in exile.

Mohammad al-Tous, 67

The 67-year-old al-Tous had held the title of longest continuously held prisoner in Israel until his release last Saturday, Palestinian authorities said.

First arrested in 1985 while fighting Israeli forces along the Jordanian border, the activist in the Fatah party spent a total of 39 years behind bars. Originally from the West Bank city of Bethlehem, he was among the prisoners exiled on Jan. 25.

## Trump's 3rd week saw more executive orders, a trade war that wasn't and a Mideast jolt

BY WILL WEISSERT and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Three weeks in, President Donald Trump keeps cranking out executive orders designed to remake the government while billionaire Elon Musk hunts for more ways to upend the federal workforce.

Trump also provoked — then called off — trade wars with Canada and Mexico but allowed one with

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China to move forward. He seemingly made light of potentially thorny political issues while insisting he was serious about the United States seizing Gaza, emptying out its residents and redeveloping the area into "the Riviera of the Middle East." It was an idea that friend and foe alike around the world rejected.

Here are some Week 3 takeaways:

So many executive orders

Trump has spent 20 days in office, and on nearly every one of them, he has signed executive orders — often several.

Just like Presidents Barack Obama and Joe Biden before him, Trump used Inauguration Day to put pen to paper on actions meant to wipe out large numbers of his predecessor's policies. Trump also issued Day 1 orders to pardon most members of the mob that attacked the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, withdraw the U.S. from the Paris climate accord and keep TikTok functioning.

He hasn't stopped since, taking at least 92 presidential actions, including one marking the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. One that would ban paper straws is supposed to come soon.

The president signed most of the orders in the Oval Office; some were done aboard Air Force One. At times, officials have carted around a mini desk, affixed with the presidential seal, for the signings. It was there in the White House's East Room when Trump signed an order intended to ban transgender athletes from participating in girls' and women's sports.

Trump used a similar desk to sign executive orders during a rally at Capital One Arena after his inaugural address. It's a prop Trump loves. He even mused about incorporating a special desk into his presidential swearing-in ceremony before it happened.

"I may even have a very tiny little desk put on the 20th stair because I always like to sign with a desk," Trump said in Iowa on Nov. 18, referring to his Inauguration Day walk up the Capitol steps.

Trade wars are off, for now

Trump temporarily backed away from his tariff threats against Canada and Mexico, staving off a possible North American trade war as the U.S. holds separate talks over the next 30 days with its two biggest trading partners.

But Trump followed through on trade penalties against China, imposing a 10% tax on imports from that country.

White House aides say that tariffs, and Chinese retaliations, are not the start of a trade war because Trump's executive orders said the taxes were meant to force countries to address drug smuggling and, in the case of Canada and Mexico, illegal immigration.

Still, Trump asserted that he wants to fix the trade imbalance as part of the negotiations with Canada and Mexico. Trump posted on his social media site regarding Canada that the talks should produce "a final Economic deal."

The White House treated Canada's decision to create a "fentanyl czar" and Mexico's deployment of 10,000 National Guard troops to the border as wins for Trump. But by most economic analyses, this was also a near catastrophe averted. The tariffs, if put in place, could increase inflation and subtract from growth.

DOGE access to vital federal payment system is challenged in court

The week featured another avalanche of activity to disrupt the government.

The Musk-led special commission known as the Department of Government Efficiency helped pull almost all U.S. Agency for International Development workers off the job worldwide, while a push to pressure millions of federal workers into resigning has engulfed even the CIA.

Lieutenants for Musk, the Tesla and X owner, also temporarily got access to the Treasury Department payment information system, setting off concerns about transparency and accountability that led to a court challenge.

A federal judge early Saturday blocked DOGE from accessing those records and set a hearing for Feb. 14.

The payments system handles trillions of dollars annually. It's a hidden part of the government plumbing that's essential for paying income taxes, collecting tax refunds, distributing money to contractors and paying out Social Security and Medicare benefits — and one of those parts of government that cannot afford to be broken.

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The Treasury Department tried to assuage Democratic lawmakers with a letter claiming that no changes were being made to the system. But people familiar with the situation, who spoke on condition of anonymity to provide details that have not been made public, said Musk's team had been looking for ways to block USAID payments.

'Half-jokingly, but also serious'

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt was asked on Fox News Channel why Trump nominated Linda McMahon as head of the Education Department when he had suggested shutting down the agency entirely.

"You heard the president say half-jokingly, but also serious, he wants Linda McMahon, who will lead that agency, to put herself out of a job," Leavitt said.

Joking, but maybe not joking, is a favored Trump tactic going back to his first term. And he's been doing it again.

Asked about data and other key information disappearing from government websites as federal officials scrambled to comply with new Trump administration rules, the president said he didn't know. But, he added, "That doesn't sound like a bad idea."

He has also repeatedly laughed about seeking a third term as president — constitutional prohibitions be damned.

"It will be the greatest honor of my life to serve not once but twice or three times or four times," Trump said during a recent rally in Las Vegas. "No, it will be to serve twice."

At a House Republican meeting in Florida, Trump said he had leftover campaign funds that could go toward running for a third term. He joked that he assumed he could not "use for myself, but I'm not 100% sure."

"Am I allowed to run again?" Trump asked House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La. "Mike, I better not get you involved in that."

Gaza gobsmacker

One area where it seemed like Trump might be joking — but insists he wasn't — is Gaza.

Trump caused an uproar by suggesting that the U.S. could seize long-term control of the war-ravaged territory, force its Palestinian population to live elsewhere — perhaps permanently — and use a massive redevelopment project to make it a tourist destination along the Mediterranean Sea.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio later repeatedly suggested that any resettlement would be on an interim basis, and even Leavitt insisted that such a relocation would be temporary.

But that only made Trump double down, saying that the U.S. would "slowly and carefully begin the construction of what would become one of the greatest and most spectacular developments of its kind on Earth."

## Spending bill talks bog down after Trump's efforts to slash government

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Before President Donald Trump and Republicans in Congress can enact much of their legislative agenda, they have to deal with some unfinished business — completing work on the current budget year's spending bills. It's a task that by all accounts is not going well.

The current stopgap measure lasts through March 14. After that, without congressional action, there would be a partial government shutdown.

Five weeks is an eternity when it comes to resolving spending bills in Washington. But Trump's first weeks in office have escalated tensions between the two parties as the new administration reshapes agency priorities and dismantles existing programs without congressional approval.

A look at where the talks stand:

Republicans accuse Democrats of abandoning negotiations

Republican and Democratic leaders of the two appropriations committees in Congress were holding

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spending bill talks in late January; aides said the two sides were committed to getting a deal done. But optimism has faded in recent days.

"Obviously, the Democrats are not in a good place right now, so they walked away from talks. But it'll have to resume," House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, R-La., said Thursday.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., gave a similar assessment, contending that comments by House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York and some of his colleagues made it seem as though they are "trying to set up some sort of government shutdown, which I think is very unfortunate. We were negotiating in good faith and trying to get the topline number, but so far as I know, they've been sort of unresponsive the last two days or so. So I hope we can get back to it."

Rep. Tom Cole, the chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, said that he heard from Democratic lawmakers as recently as Thursday so he did not believe they were walking away from talks.

"But, we're not making the progress I would hope," said Cole, R-Okla.

Democrats dispute GOP leadership's characterization

Connecticut Rep. Rosa DeLauro, the lead Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee, said "that is false" in response to the assertion that Democrats have withdrawn from negotiations.

"The Democrats have made their offer. We have not walked away from the table," DeLauro said.

Jeffries told reporters that DeLauro "has been trying to get Republicans to respond to her for weeks."

"I'm hopeful that Republicans are actually willing now to sit down at the table and reach a spending agreement, in the best interest of the American people, not in the best interest of their billionaire donors," Jeffries said.

Tensions over topline spending levels

Under terms of an agreement that former Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., worked out with then-President Joe Biden, spending for defense and nondefense would increase by 1% for the current budget year, which began Oct. 1. That would bring the tallies to about \$895.2 billion for defense and \$780.4 billion for nondefense.

Congress set the spending levels to grow below the rate of an inflation, at the insistence of Republicans, as part of a package that also suspended the debt limit so that the federal government could continue paying its bills. Democrats say an agreement is an agreement.

"That is the path forward that will allow everyone to come together to reach a spending agreement that meets the needs of the American people," Jeffries said.

Republicans don't see it that way.

Cole said Democrats are having a hard time adjusting to the reality of Trump being in the White House and Republicans controlling both chambers of Congress.

"We have to remember the deal they are trying to enforce is when we had a Democratic president and a Democratic Senate. We don't have those anymore," Cole said. "And in particular, the president doesn't feel bound by an agreement made by another president that didn't go down on his watch."

Cole said that "there's only one signature that matters right now and it's not Joe Biden's anymore."

Democrats wary as Trump and Musk revamp federal government

Democrats are struggling to keep up and provide a unified response to Trump's first weeks in office as government workers are pushed to resign, entire agencies are dismantled and Elon Musk's team from the so-called Department of Government Efficiency gains access to sensitive information of countless Americans.

They are worried about how current government services are being affected, with Democrats accusing the administration of blocking hundreds of billions of dollars in previously approved funding. Those concerns are also swaying their thinking as they approach the spending bill negotiations.

"The level of trust is at the lowest I have ever seen it here in Congress," said Washington Sen. Patty Murray, the top Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee. "It is up to our Republican colleagues to stand up to this and assure us an agreement and a law is real."

DeLauro said Democrats need assurances that Republicans will follow through on whatever spending agreement the negotiators reach.

"You won some. I won some. We lost some each. But we have a deal. And that's got to be it. Those



assurances have to be made," DeLauro said.

Plan B

If lawmakers fail to reach agreement on a full-year spending measure, then it's possible that they could also pass another temporary measure to keep the government open for a few more weeks or months while they try to work out their differences.

Such stopgap measures, called continuing resolutions or CRs in Washington parlance, generally fund government programs and agencies at current levels.

"I don't want a CR," Cole said. "But I certainly prefer a CR to a shutdown."

## Trump's DEI order leaves academic researchers fearful of political influence over grants

By OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ, TERRY CHEA and MAKIYA SEMINERA Associated Press

BERKELEY, Calif. (AP) — President Donald Trump's crackdown on diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives in programs receiving federal money has thrown into doubt the future of research Kendra Dahmer has been doing on intestinal parasites in India and Benin.

Dahmer, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of California, Berkeley, has a grant from the National Institutes of Health, the single largest public funder of biomedical research in the world.

The grant is supposed to cover her research through the summer of 2026, but now she wonders if that will be possible. She received diversity-based funding as the first college graduate in her family and a woman in science and, more broadly, she is uncertain how Trump's anti-DEI executive order could affect support for her areas of study.

"There's also this aspect of research that funds specific studies in specific populations that are now being deemed DEI," Dahmer said. "So, like HIV research in Africa may be deemed DEI, malaria research, which also happens in low and middle income countries, may be considered DEI. And these are really important diseases that kill hundreds of thousands of people every year."

Two days after Trump signed the executive order on DEI on Jan. 21 researchers became even more alarmed when the White House called for a funding freeze to conduct an ideological review of all federal grants and loans. After days of chaos and legal wrangling, two judges intervened and the administration rescinded the freeze. The National Institutes of Health and National Science Foundation, which fund a large chunk of research in the country, this week began releasing grants.

But that hasn't eased the fears of scientists and researchers whose work is funded by federal grants. The NSF said it is still conducting a review of "projects, programs and activities to be compliant with the existing executive orders." It's not yet clear what may happen to new and existing NIH grants either.

On Friday night, the NIH announced it was cutting payments toward overhead costs for research institutions that receive its grants, a policy that could leave universities with major budget gaps. Currently, some universities receive 50% or more of the amount of a grant to put toward support staff and other needs, but that would be capped at 15%.

Universities, which received almost \$60 billion for research in the 2023 fiscal year, have been mostly quiet, explaining in statements to their staff and students they are still trying to clarify the implications of the executive order on DEI. Meantime, they are navigating the order's impact on their own institutional policies supporting underrepresented students.

The University of California said in a statement it is "evaluating recent executive orders issued by President Trump and the subsequent agency guidance to understand their potential impact on our communities."

Even though there is no clarity on the new policies yet, some projects already have been put on hold amid uncertainty over the future of research touching on issues related to diversity, said Todd Wolfson, president of the American Association of University Professors.

Some of the studies already being halted include research on artificial intelligence and how racism can be coded into systems, he said. Other projects Wolfson has heard about getting stopped include research on health equity and studies on the urban literacy rate as it relates to class in places with large concentra-

tions of Black people.

"I think the people who are making these decisions are very clear that they want to create a society that's based on deep-set inequities that are hard baked and don't transform whether that's around race, whether that's around class, whether that's around gender," he said.

The Education Department did not respond to an email message seeking comment.

Threats to funding for research related to DEI could eliminate a lifeline for historically Black colleges and universities, which are already significantly underfunded compared to predominantly white institutions.

North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, the largest HBCU in the country, has been on a yearslong mission to become one of the first to reach R1 status — a distinction from the Carnegie Foundation that denotes a university as having high research activity, but the president's intervention on federal funding could slow that down, said Joseph Graves, a biology professor. As it is, biology department students have to conduct research in hats and gloves during the winter because of a lack of heat in the old building, he said.

New scrutiny on federal research grants could also hurt students at HBCUs who have federally funded fellowships for research, Graves said. Those scholarships, which could be at risk, allow minority students to pursue opportunities they might not have been able to afford.

The Trump administration's perception of diversity, equity and inclusion could make HBCUs a target because of its high population of minority students, Graves said.

"They will look at our excellence in doing work that is changing the demography of science, and they will attack it as DEI," Graves said. "Whatever we do, we're doing DEI whether they like it or not."

## **Trump says he's firing Kennedy Center board of trustees members and naming himself chairman**

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump says he is firing members of the board of trustees for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and naming himself chairman.

He also indicated that he would be dictating programming at one of the nation's premier cultural institutions, specifically declaring that he would end events featuring performers in drag.

Trump's announcement Friday came as the Republican president has bulldozed his way across official Washington during the first weeks of his second term, trying to shutter federal agencies, freeze spending and ending diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives across the government.

"At my direction, we are going to make the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C., GREAT AGAIN. I have decided to immediately terminate multiple individuals from the Board of Trustees, including the Chairman, who do not share our Vision for a Golden Age in Arts and Culture," Trump wrote on his social media website.

"We will soon announce a new Board, with an amazing Chairman, DONALD J. TRUMP!"

In a statement later on its website, the Kennedy Center said it was aware of Trump's post. "We have received no official communications from the White House regarding changes to our board of trustees," the statement said. "We are aware that some members of our board have received termination notices from the administration."

The statement continued: "Per the Center's governance established by Congress in 1958, the chair of the board of trustees is appointed by the Center's board members. There is nothing in the Center's statute that would prevent a new administration from replacing board members; however, this would be the first time such action has been taken with the Kennedy Center's board."

Drag artists accused Trump of targeting them because of who they are in a country where freedom of expression is guaranteed by the Constitution.

"This is about who gets to exist in public spaces and whose stories get to be told on America's stage," said Blaq Dinamyte, president of Qommittee, a national network of drag artists and allies. "Banning an entire art form is censorship, plain and simple. Americans don't have to agree on everything, but we should be able to speak our minds and perform our art without bans, retaliation, or intimidation."

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Unlike Democratic President Joe Biden and other presidents through the decades, Trump did not attend the annual Kennedy Center Honors ceremonies during his first term.

Shortly after Trump's post, the Kennedy Center website began experiencing technical difficulties. Visitors got a message reading "We are experiencing high traffic" and were redirected to a "waiting room" that listed how many hundreds of people were trying to access the site ahead of them.

Trump suggested in his post that he would be implementing some changes to the center's performance schedule, noting that last year "the Kennedy Center featured Drag Shows specifically targeting our youth — THIS WILL STOP."

According to its website, the center in July hosted a preshow titled "A Drag Salute to Divas" and a November "Drag Brunch."

In his post, Trump did not clarify which board of trustee members he would terminate besides the current chairman, philanthropist David Rubenstein. The board often features political powerbrokers and major donors, and is currently made up of members from both sides of the aisle.

Rubenstein was first elected to the post in 2010 and reelected each year since that time. He was originally appointed to the Kennedy Center board by Republican President George W. Bush and subsequently reappointed by Democratic President Barack Obama and Biden.

The current board features Biden's White House press secretary, Karine Jean-Pierre, as well as Mike Donilon, Biden's longtime ally, and Stephanie Cutter, a former Obama adviser. The treasurer of the center's board of trustees is television producer Shonda Rhimes, who hosted fundraisers for Biden before he abandoned his reelection bid last summer.

But the current board also features Trump allies, including Pam Bondi, his recently confirmed attorney general, and Lee Greenwood, whose song "God Bless the USA," was the unofficial anthem of Trump's presidential campaigns.

During his first term in 2019, Trump announced that he was tapping actor Jon Voight, a longtime supporter, to the board, along with former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, who is Trump's second-term pick to be the U.S. ambassador to Israel.

## Today in History: February 9

### The Beatles first performance on 'The Ed Sullivan Show'

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Sunday, Feb. 9, the 40th day of 2025. There are 325 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Feb. 9, 1964, the Beatles made their first live American television appearance on "The Ed Sullivan Show," broadcast from New York on CBS. The quartet played five songs, including "She Loves You" and "I Want to Hold Your Hand," to a crowd of screaming teenagers in person and more than 70 million viewers across the country.

Also on this date:

In 1825, the House of Representatives elected John Quincy Adams president after no candidate received a majority of electoral votes.

In 1943, the World War II Battle of Guadalcanal in the southwest Pacific ended with an Allied victory over Japanese forces.

In 1950, in a speech to the Women's Republican Club in Wheeling, West Virginia, Republican Sen. Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin charged that the State Department was riddled with Communists.

In 1971, a magnitude 6.6 earthquake in California's San Fernando Valley claimed 65 lives.

In 1984, Soviet leader Yuri Andropov, 69, died 15 months after succeeding Leonid Brezhnev; he was followed by Konstantin Chernenko (chehr-NYEN'-koh), who would only be in power for 13 months before his own death in office.

In 1986, Halley's Comet made its closest pass by Earth since 1910. (The comet's next appearance will be in 2061).

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In 2009, New York Yankees third baseman Alex Rodriguez admitted to taking performance-enhancing drugs, telling ESPN he'd used banned substances while with the Texas Rangers for three years.

In 2020, "Parasite," a film from South Korea, won the Academy Award for Best Picture, becoming the first non-English language film to do so.

In 2021, the Senate moved ahead with a second impeachment trial of former President Donald Trump, rejecting arguments that the chamber could not proceed because Trump was no longer in office.

Today's birthdays: Artist Gerhard Richter is 93. Nobel Prize-winning author J.M. Coetzee is 85. Singer-songwriter Carole King is 83. Actor Joe Pesci is 82. Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz is 82. Author Alice Walker is 81. Actor Mia Farrow is 80. Actor Judith Light is 76. Golf Hall of Famer Sandy Lyle is 67. Writer-producer David Simon (TV: "The Wire") is 65. Country singer Travis Tritt is 62. Baseball Hall of Famer Vladimir Guerrero is 50. Actor Charlie Day is 49. Actor Zhang Ziyi is 46. Actor Tom Hiddleston is 44. Actor Michael B. Jordan is 38. Actor Rose Leslie is 38. NFL running back Saquon Barkley is 28.