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## Sunday, Feb. 16

- Open gym, 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.
- Junior High State Wrestling at Pierre.
- St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion at St. John's, 9 a.m.; at Zion, 11 a.m.; No Sunday School.
- Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; No Sunday School; Choir, 6 p.m.
- United Methodist: Conde, 8:15 a.m.; Groton, 9:30 a.m.; Britton, 11:15 a.m.; No Sunday School; Coffee Hour, 10:30 a.m.
- Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.
- First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.
- Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.

**Groton Daily Independent**

**PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445**

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



## Monday, Feb. 17

- PRESIDENT'S DAY - No School
- National FFA Week
- Boys Basketball hosts Florence-Henry: C game at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m., varsity to follow; in gym: boys 8th at 4 p.m., boys 7th at 5 p.m.
- Pantry, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Groton Community Center
- City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.
- Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.
- St. John's Lutheran: Christian Literature Circle, 7:30 p.m.

## Tuesday, Feb. 18

- Senior Menu: Ranch chicken, sweet potato, Monterey blend, oranges, whole wheat bread.
- Common Cents Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., 209 N Main.
- Pantry, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m., Groton Community Center
- Groton United Methodist Bible Study, 10 a.m.
- St. John's Lutheran: Quilting, 9 a.m.

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## Groton Area Dominates Moberidge-Pollock in Basketball Showdown

MOBRIDGE, S.D. - It was a day of fierce competition as Groton Area traveled to Moberidge-Pollock for a full slate of basketball action. The boys' varsity team put on a dominant second-half performance, securing a 64-49 victory, while the girls' varsity team fell short despite a strong second-half push, losing 46-34.

### Boys Varsity:

#### Groton Area Pulls Away in the Second Half

The varsity boys' matchup was a battle early, with both teams exchanging leads six times in the first quarter before ending tied at 13. The intensity continued into the second quarter, featuring two more lead changes and three ties before Moberidge-Pollock took a narrow 28-26 lead into halftime.

But Groton Area wasted no time taking control after the break. Becker Bosma came out firing, scoring the first six points of the third quarter off offensive rebounds and a layup, sparking a 32-28 lead. The Tigers of Groton then went on an 11-0 run later in the quarter, pushing their advantage to 48-36. Moberidge-Pollock fought back, cutting the deficit to 10 in the fourth, but that was as close as they would get as Groton Area closed out the 64-49 victory.

Keegen Tracy led Groton Area with 14 points, while Karson Zac (12), Ryder Johnson (11), and Becker Bosma (10) also reached double figures. Bosma grabbed six of the team's 29 rebounds, and Johnson dished out five of the team's 14 assists. Defensively, Johnson and Zac each had three of Groton's seven steals, while Gage Sippel recorded two blocks.

Both teams shot well from the free-throw line, each making 9-of-11 (82%). Groton Area hit 67% of their two-pointers (20-of-30) and 33% from beyond the arc (5-of-15). Moberidge-Pollock shot 40% from the field (16-of-40). Shane Henderson led Moberidge-Pollock with 15 points, while Easton Eisemann added 10.

#### Girls Varsity: Groton Area Struggles in the Second Quarter

The Groton Area girls' varsity team got off to a solid start but ran into trouble in the second quarter, leading to a 46-34 loss.

Moberidge-Pollock held a narrow 11-8 lead after the first quarter, but Groton's offense went ice cold in the second. They missed all nine of their field goal attempts and struggled from the free-throw line, making just 3-of-12. That allowed Moberidge-Pollock to take a commanding 23-11 halftime lead.

Groton Area showed signs of life in the third quarter, with Kennedy Hansen scoring six points to help trim the deficit to eight at 32-24 heading into the final frame. The Lady Tigers kept the pressure on, cutting the lead to five at 33-28 early in the fourth, but Moberidge-Pollock responded by hitting 8-of-12 free throws down the stretch to seal the win.

Kennedy Hansen led Groton Area with 13 points, while Rylee Dunker pulled down six of the team's 28 rebounds. Taryn Traphagen dished out two of Groton's five assists. The team struggled at the free-throw line, making just 6-of-21 (29%) compared to Moberidge-Pollock's 20-of-29 (68%).

Blake Thompson led Moberidge-Pollock with 16 points, and Tegan Konold added 11.

#### Boys JV & C Teams Cruise to Victory

Groton Area's junior varsity boys dominated Moberidge-Pollock 66-27. Easton Weber had a stellar performance, scoring 24 points, while Asher Johnson added 12 and Anthony Tracy had 10. The Tigers led 11-6 after one quarter, 28-15 at halftime, and 55-26 after three before enforcing the mercy rule with a 30-point lead.



**It was senior recognition day in Moberidge. In addition to recognizing their own seniors they also recognized Groton Area's seniors.** (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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The C-team followed suit with a commanding 38-15 win. Groton jumped out to a 13-0 first-quarter lead and never looked back, holding a 24-4 halftime advantage before cruising to the finish. Anthony Tracy led with 14 points, while Asher Johnson added 11.

## Girls JV & C Teams Shine

The Groton Area junior varsity girls secured a 44-35 comeback victory, overcoming a 33-28 deficit in the fourth quarter with a dominant 9-0 run to close the game. Chesney Weber led the team with 13 points, while McKenna Tietz chipped in 11.

The C-team left no doubt in their matchup, enforcing the mercy rule in the first half on their way to a 49-16 blowout win. Tevan Hansen led all scorers with 14 points, while Ashlynn Warrington added 11. Groton held a commanding 33-3 halftime lead and never looked back.

## Final Thoughts

Groton Area's boys' teams put together a strong showing across all levels, highlighted by a key varsity win that improved their record to 12-5. The girls' varsity team will look to bounce back after a tough second quarter cost them against Mobridge-Pollock. With postseason play approaching, both programs are sharpening their play for the final stretch of the season.

- Story compiled by ChatGPT

## Boys Varsity: Groton Area 64, Mobridge-Pollock 49

Keegen Tracy: 14 points 2 rebounds 2 assists, 3 fouls 1 block.

Karson Zak: 12 points, 4 rebounds, 3 assists, 3 steals, 1 foul.

Ryder Johnson: 11 points, 4 rebounds, 3 steals, 2 fouls.

Becker Bosma: 10 points, 5 rebounds, 2 assists, 2 fouls.

Turner Thompson: 6 points, 2 rebounds, 2 fouls, 1 block.

Easton Weber: 5 points, 4 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 foul.

Jayden Schwan: 1 rebound.

Logan Warrington: 2 rebounds.

2-Pointers: 20-30 67%, 3-Pointers: 5-15, 33%, Free Throws 9-12 75%, 29 rebounds, 15 turnovers, 14 assists, 7 steals, 14 fouls, 4 blocks.

Mobridge-Pollock: Shane Henbderson 15, Easton Eisemann 10, Shooter Frederick 9, Jackson Eisemann 8, Kale Jnudson 4.

Field Goals: 16-40 40%, Free Throws: 9-11 82%, 14 fouls, 12 turnovers.

## Boys JV: Groton Area 66, Mobridge-Pollock 27

Groton Area: Easton Weber, Asher Johnson 12, Anthony Tracy 10, Jace Johnson 9, Jayden Schwan 4, Logan Warrington 3, Ethan Kroll 2, Ryder Schelle 2.

Mobridge-Pollock: Jesse Schneider 8, Kyson Good SHield 7, Dylan Fjeldheim 4, Caige Yellow 3, Maxx Saxon 2, Trueth Crow Ghost 1.

## Boys C: Groton Area 38, Mobridge 15

Groton Area: Anthony Tracy 14, Asher Johnson 11, Ethan Koll 8, Jace Johnson 3, Ryder Schelle 2.

Mobridge-Pollock: Tyral Bleye 6, Bryson Andrews 3, Dylan Fjeldheim 3, Andrew Ulmer 2, Trayden Stambach 1.

## Girls Varsity: Mobridge-Pollock 46, Groton Area 34

Kennedy. Hansen: 13 points, 2 rebounds, 3 steals, 3 fouls.

Rylee Dunker: 5 points, 6 rebounds, 2 steals, 1 foul.

Jerica Locke: 3 points, 4 rebounds, 1 assist, 2 steals, 5 fouls.

Brooklyn Hansen: 3 points, 1 rebound.

Faith Traphagen: 3 points, 2 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 steal, 1 foul.

Chesney Weber: 3 points, 2 rebounds, 1 steal, 1 foul.

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Laila Roberts: 4 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 steal, 4 fouls.

2-Pointers: 11-30 37%, 3-Pointers: 2-14 14%, Free Throws: 6-21 29%, 28 rebounds, 21 turnovers, 5 assists, 11 steals, 23 fouls, 1 block.

Mobridge-Pollock: Blake Thompson 16, Egan Konold 11, Brooke Bain 5, Cheyenne Rath 5, Faith Heil 4, Jayda Thompson 3, Jacy Netterville 1, Charley Henderson 1.

## Girls JV: Groton Area 44, Mobridge-Pollock 35

Groton: Chesney Weber 13, McKenna Tietz 11, Talli Wright 8, Mia Crank 8, Ashlynn Warrington 4.

Mobridge-Pollock: Shayla Rath 16, Cheyenne Rath 6, Pacey Konold 4, Jayda Thompson 3, Jersey Fredrick 2.

## Girls C: Groton Area 49, Mobridge-Pollock 16

Groton: Tevan Hanson 14, Ashlynn Warrington 11, Kella Tracy 8, Makenna Krause 5, Emerlee Jones 5, Kinsley Rowen 2, Teagan Hanten 2, Sydney Locke 2.

Mobridge-Pollock: Ava Wolff 4, Marayha Bleyle 3, Emma Brown 2, Dawsyn Wientjes 2, Haprer Baumann 2, Candace Hill 2, Avarie Wientjes 1.

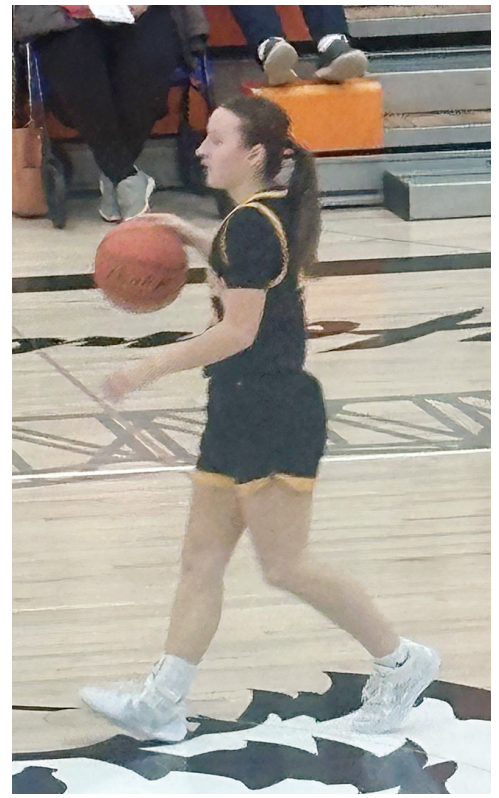
All six games were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM with Paul Kosel and Jeslyn Kosel. The varsity sponsors were Agtegra, Avantara Groton, Bierman Farm Service, BK Custom T's & More, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Jungle Lanes & Lounge, Locke Electric, Krueger Brothers, R&M Farms/Rix Farms and The Meathouse in Andover. Paul did the boys JV, sponsored by Hefty Seed. Jeslyn did the girls JV, sponsored by Weber Landscaping. The girls C game was sponsored by Locke Electric and the boys C game was sponsored for the grandparents watching.



**Easton Weber**  
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Jerica Locke**  
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Sydney Locke in the C game**  
(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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**Ryder Johnson going up against Shooter Frederick.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Ashlynn Warrington in the C game.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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## Northern Stat Men Drop Road Contest at Minnesota Duluth

Duluth, Minn. – The Northern State University men's basketball team fell to the University of Minnesota Duluth on Saturday in their final road contest of the 2024-25 season.

### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 52, UMD 83

Records: NSU 2-24 (1-19 NSIC), UMD 18-8 (13-7 NSIC)

Attendance: 480

### HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern tallied 23 points in the first and 29 in the second, while Duluth notched 40 in the first and 43 in the second

NSU recorded 28 rebounds 13 assists, seven made 3-pointers, six steals, and three blocks in the game, shooting 40.4% from the floor, 28.0% from the 3-point line, and 42.9% from the foul line

They scored 28 points in the paint, 13 points off the bench, and seven points off turnovers

Tobi Obiora led NSU with 14 points, hitting 7-of-9 from the floor, and added a team second best seven rebounds

Kaleb Mitchell led the team at the rim with eight rebounds, while Marcus Burks notched a team best five assists

Ethan Russell led NSU off the bench and was second on the team with nine points

### NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Tobi Obiora: 14 points, 77.8 field goal%, 7 rebounds, 2 assists, 1 steal

Ethan Russell: 9 points, 1 rebound, 1 steal

### UP NEXT

Northern will close out the regular season next Friday and Saturday, hosting Sioux Falls and Southwest Minnesota State. Tip-off times are set for 5:30 p.m. on Friday against the Cougars and 4 p.m. on Saturday versus the Mustangs.

## This Week in Tiger Sports:

### Sunday, February 16th:

- State MS Wrestling in Pierre (8am)

### Monday, February 17th:

- BBB vs. Florence/Henry in Groton (C @ 5pm, JV @ 6pm, Varsity to follow)

- JH BB vs. Florence/Henry in Groton (8th grade @ 4pm, 7th grade @ 5pm)

### Thursday, February 20th:

- JH BB @ Warner (7th grade @ 6pm, 8th grade @ 7pm)

### Thursday, February 20th:

- Girls Region Wrestling in Clark (4:30pm)

### Friday, February 21st:

- Doubleheader @ Britton/Hecla (C boys and girls @ 4pm, JV boys and girls @ 5pm, Varsity Girls @ 6:15pm, Varsity Boys @ 7:45pm)

### Saturday, February 22nd:

- Boys Region Wrestling @ Hamlin (9:30am)

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## Wolves Women Down Bulldogs in NSIC Action

Duluth, Minn. – A powerful start propelled the Northern State University women's basketball team to a 77-59 victory over Minnesota Duluth. The game saw Rianna Fillipi set a new all-time career steals record with 262 steals. Madelyn Bragg led the Wolves with her fifth double-double of the season, scoring 27 points and grabbing 11 rebounds.

### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 77, UMD 59

Records: NSU 16-10 (NSIC 13-7), UMD 8-17 (NSIC 6-14)

Attendance: 880

### HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern State scored 22 points in the first quarter, 16 in the second, 22 in the third, and 17 in the fourth. The Wolves tallied the paint with 42 points, along with 14 second-chance points, 11 fast-break points, and 10 points off turnovers.

NSU shot efficiently, posting a 43.5% field goal percentage, 31.3% from three-point range, and 78.3% from the free-throw line.

Madelyn Bragg recorded her fifth double-double of the season, contributing 27 points and 11 rebounds, along with two steals.

Rianna Fillipi added 22 points, six rebounds, and four assists.

Michaela Jewett posted a double-double as well, with 12 points, 12 rebounds, and a 57.1% three-point shooting performance.

### NORTHERN STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Madelyn Bragg: 27 points, 11 rebounds, 2 steals

Rianna Fillipi: 22 points, 6 rebounds, 4 assists, 2 steals

Michaela Jewett: 12 points, 12 rebounds, 3 blocks, 57.1 3PT %, 2 steals

Alayna Benike: 8 points, 4 rebounds, 2 assists

### BEYOND THE BOX

Rianna Fillipi broke the school record for career steals with 262 career steals; the previous record of 261 was set by Jammie Coyle from 1996-2000.

### UP NEXT

Northern State will return home to wrap up the regular season, hosting Sioux Falls and Southwest Minnesota State. Tip-off is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. on Friday, February 21 against the Cougars and 6:00 p.m. on Saturday, February 22 against the Mustangs at Wachs Arena.

## Death Notice: Leonard Garness

Leonard Garness, 90, of Sun City West, Arizona and formerly of Groton passed away February 14, 2025 at Aria Ranch in Sun City West. Services are pending with Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.

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## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Resistance to final budget request for new prison 'a real possibility' in Pierre

**Lawmakers question wisdom of upfront payments in tight budget year**

**BY: JOHN HULT - FEBRUARY 16, 2025 7:00 AM**

PIERRE — There is "a real possibility" that South Dakota lawmakers say no to Gov. Larry Rhoden's request for the final \$182 million needed to fund a new men's prison, a Republican leader said Thursday at the Capitol in Pierre.

The comments were in part a response to questions about how the state intends to meet its constitutional obligation to balance its budget in the face of a significant revenue shortfall.

Republican leaders intend to hit the balanced budget target through spending cuts. Assistant Senate Majority Leader Carl Perry, R-Aberdeen, said he could see some support for a proposed "sin tax" on nicotine products like vape pens and nicotine pouches. But Senate Majority Leader Jim Mehlhaff, R-Pierre, said the general consensus is that cuts are a preferable approach.

House Assistant Majority Leader Marty Overweg, R-New Holland, waved off the nicotine tax as anathema to his party's DNA.

"I'm a Republican," said. "I don't like to raise taxes."

Former Gov. Kristi Noem's proposed budget would cut programs and services. Some of her ideas, like a \$1 million cut to the State Library, have run into fierce resistance, and none of the cuts have yet to earn either chamber's full-throated support. One of her budget increases — a \$4 million fund to let parents use public money for private education — was dashed early in the legislative session.

Rhoden, who took office when Noem ascended to a cabinet post with the Trump administration, reiterated on Thursday that Noem's budget is also his, and that budget cuts are his preferred approach, although he's open to discussing specific cuts.

He also promised a "reset" with lawmakers in some areas where they'd clashed with the former governor. From his first day, however, he's held fast to Noem's yearslong commitment to a controversial plan for a new men's prison, and to the still-more controversial site the state selected south of Sioux Falls.

#### Lawmaker concerns

Rhoden's certainty has clashed with the growing concerns of GOP legislative leaders during the 2025 session. Past legislatures signed off on \$62 million in preparatory spending for the 1,500-bed facility, meant to replace the 144-year-old state penitentiary in Sioux Falls.

They've also opted to fund a new \$87 million women's prison in Rapid City — a project that's faced no public outcry — and placed nearly \$600 million into an interest-bearing "incarceration construction fund" meant to help the state pay for a new men's prison without bonding.

In November, the Department of Corrections announced it had been handed an \$825 million "guaranteed maximum price" for the men's facility.

Last week, a House panel pondered a Rhoden administration bill that would top off the prison fund with \$182 million and clear the DOC to begin using the money. The project would convert the Lincoln County site from a corn field encircled by gravel roads into a sprawling modern correctional campus accessible by paved roadways and serviced by city-level utility infrastructure.

Lawmakers on the committee were lukewarm to the idea.

On Thursday, one day after that House panel sent the prison money request to the House budget com-

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mittee with a neutral recommendation and a host of questions about ongoing expenses, at least one state GOP leader said the quiet part out loud: The state's 105 lawmakers might say no to the \$182 million prison question.

"That's a real possibility right now," Overweg said. "It's early. I don't think anything is cast in stone when it comes to the prison. I think we have a lot of conversations to have yet. I think there's a lot of decisions that need to be made. In the end, it's going to come down to 105 different votes."

Three of the four leaders on hand for Thursday's press conference in the Capitol's Rushmore Room voiced misgivings of varying degree. Perry, for example, said he's not especially bothered by the location of the facility, but that "the funding mechanism" troubles him.

"I don't think that people are saying no to a prison. What they're saying is maybe no to the financing," Perry said. "Instead of taking that \$182 million and putting it into the prison right away, maybe we could take \$80 million of that and use it for other projects."

The state could consider bonding for at least part of the prison's construction bills, he suggested – especially given the tight budget.

House Majority Leader Scott Odenbach, R-Spearfish, said he has concerns about the price of roadways, potential change orders to the prison and ongoing operational costs.

DOC and Rhoden officials said Wednesday that the \$825 million guaranteed maximum price — a figure that would make the prison the most expensive taxpayer-funded capital project in state history — doesn't include every cost.

The state has \$24 million set aside for "contingency," for use in the event of change orders, for example. The price to pave roads is also not included, and the state has yet to produce an estimate for the available options.

"Nobody likes surprises, and those things, when you collectively add them up, can be big surprises," Odenbach said, adding that he's worried his grandchildren will be on the hook for the high price of ongoing operations.

In response to Odenbach's questions the day before, DOC Secretary Kellie Wasko told the House panel on Wednesday that the new facility would cost \$21 million more each year to run than the penitentiary.

Taken together with the unknowns on the construction side, Odenbach said, "we have to be very careful as stewards of the taxpayers' dollars" to make sure all the money questions are answered.

Mehlhoff spoke up on behalf of the lawmakers with fewer lingering concerns. There's "diversity of opinion" within the caucus, he said.

"I fear that we are falling into analysis paralysis, and that's going to wind up costing our taxpayers probably \$1.2 billion if we continue to twiddle our thumbs."

Mehlhoff's higher figure was a nod to the DOC's assertion that extended delays and redesigns could add up to hundreds of millions of dollars in additional costs.

## **Governor decries delay suggestions**

That was Gov. Rhoden's starting point in his response to the lawmakers' comments, which came less than an hour later in the same room. The longer the state waits, he said, the more the prison will cost.

When told of the suggestion that a no vote on the prison funding was a "real possibility," Rhoden said "I hope that's not accurate."

Paying upfront spares the state from interest payments that would accompany bonding, he said. A January budget overview handed to appropriators points out that the use of one-time dollars translates to about \$600 million in dodged interest.

He described the site as a "gift from God," because of its proximity to Sioux Falls and the fact that it was already state property. Before it was chosen as the prison site, the state had leased it as cropland and used the profits for public schools.

The thought of a pause "makes me sick to my stomach," he said, because finding another site or reworking the current plans would amount to "starting from square one."

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He also repeated something his staffers said on Wednesday: delays would hike the price through inflation by as much as \$40 million a year.

The guarantee of an \$825 million top-end price expires on March 31.

"I hear stuff being said that there are all these unanswered questions. Well, quite frankly, that is just not the case," Rhoden said. "There are a lot of questions that have been answered, very thoroughly, and if you haven't gotten your questions answered, you haven't been listening."

The administration, he said, has been "palms up" in the process.

Rhoden toured the existing penitentiary recently and said the pre-statehood facility is unsuited for modern correctional purposes. The time to build is now, he said Thursday.

"We are this close to having this project fully funded," Rhoden said. "They need to understand the ramifications of not getting this done. We will cost the taxpayers of this state tens of tens of millions of dollars by not getting this across the finish line."

*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.*

## COMMENTARY

### Governor's property tax plan will have unexpected consequences

State risks making the same mistake it made with sales taxes

by Brad Johnson

Gov. Larry Rhoden's "rifle shot" Thursday to limit the countywide assessed value of owner-occupied residential property to 3% annual growth for five years is a simplistic plan that will create future problems.

Senate Bill 216 as proposed will shift taxes even further onto commercial property and people that own second homes, such as on lakes or in the Black Hills. It perpetuates an already unfair system.

Rather than fix a program that heavily favors agricultural land, this temporary proposal becomes obsolete after the 2031 tax year. Some other legislature will have to clean up the wreckage this creates.

Knee-jerk action already messed up the sales tax system. Let's not do it with property taxes as well.

We remember Sept. 28, 2022, when then-Gov. Kristi Noem surprised everyone at a campaign stop in Rapid City by calling for eliminating the sales tax on food.

She argued at the time that the state could afford it, as it had a \$115.5 million budget surplus, the unemployment rate was low and resident income growth was solid.

Legislators disagreed with cutting it just on food but did pass a reduction in March 2023 of the state's overall sales tax from 4.5% to 4.2% for four years, at a cost of \$104 million per year. That sunsets in 2027.

At the time, the state opened the session with \$423 million in reserves. Much of that was driven by massive one-time federal funding. How quickly things change as legislators now struggle to balance their budget and pay for a new prison.

Why a bad budget year is a good time to mess with property taxes is perplexing. But legislators often defy logic.

Ironically, increasing the state sales tax is one other idea being proposed to provide property tax relief. As legislators and the governor dive into the issue, they should start with reality.

While commercial and residential property is assessed based on market value, agricultural land is taxed differently.

According to "Property Taxation – A Modern History," produced by the South Dakota Legislative Research Council, HB 1005 in 2008 "moved the assessment of agricultural land from the market system to a productivity system. This system uses the income value of agricultural property. It is comprised of eight years of data and throws out the high and low income value (Olympic average) as determined by the production of crops for each county."

The result is a property tax system unrelated to the actual value of agricultural land. SB 216, similarly,

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eventually will detach owner-occupied residential property from market reality as similar homes may be taxed differently.

In the past five years, South Dakota's agricultural land values have increased 64.6%, according to a Jan. 7, 2025, report by Farm Credit Services. Twice a year, Farm Credit has its appraisal staff appraise its benchmark farms. South Dakota was up 9.5% in the past year, well above the surrounding states.

Iowa was down 5.1%, Nebraska was down 0.4% and Wyoming was up 2.7%. Meanwhile, the one-year increase in pasture/ranch value in South Dakota was 21.6% while in Nebraska it was 0.4% and Wyoming changed 1%.

The disparity in taxes paid is obvious to real estate appraisers, especially those who work in all sectors of South Dakota's market.

Here is a quick comparison.

In December 2024, a buyer paid \$960,000 for 160 acres of Spink County crop land. The assessed value of that property was \$250,984. While land values were increasing nearly 65%, that land's assessed value went down from its 2020 assessment of \$259,287. Taxes payable in 2025 are \$1,180.62, about the same as in 2020. Over the last five years, taxes paid were \$5,648.60.

Similarly, a 160-acre property in Brookings County sold in February 2024 for \$1,552,000. The five year average assessed value was \$404,600 and five years of taxes paid were \$18,913.

Consider the taxes paid by an owner-occupied residential property owner in Watertown. This home sold for \$905,000 on Jan. 3, 2022, and again for \$950,000 on July 11, 2024. During the last five years it was assessed at an average of \$927,000.

Its average annual tax bill was \$10,907, or a five-year bill of \$54,535. No wonder residential property owners are revolting.

Next is the commercial sector. In 2022, a strip mall in Watertown sold for \$1,100,000. During the past five years, it had an average assessed value of \$904,300 and the owner paid about \$66,600 in property taxes, an average of \$13,320.

One of many side effects of South Dakota's unbalanced property tax system is that it inflates the value of agricultural land. Investors see it as a great tax shelter and are willing to pay higher prices. That's probably why Ted Turner is the state's largest landowner.

Of the agricultural land purchases made primarily in 2023, about 24.2% were by investors, said the 1991-2024 annual land report issued by South Dakota State University.

Now, in addition to protecting agricultural landowners, there is a desire to protect homeowners, especially those with lower incomes. But SB 216 will impact property values in unexpected ways.

Instead of haphazardly making unwise "rifle shot" changes to the property tax system, legislators should correct past mistakes. The sales tax fiasco should be a lesson.

*Brad Johnson is a certified general real estate appraiser and longtime journalist. He is past president of South Dakota Lakes and Streams Association, president of the South Dakota Wildlife Federation and served 16 years on the South Dakota Board of Water and Natural Resources. He lives in Rapid City and Watertown.*

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Girls NEC Standings

Hamlin	8-0	15-3
Roncalli	7-2	13-5
Groton Area	7-2	13-6
Milbank	6-3	10-8
Clark/Willow Lake	5-3	10-7
Sisseton	5-4	11-7
Webster Area	4-5	10-9
Deuel	2-5	3-14
Britton-Hecla	2-5	5-12
Tiospa Zina	0-8	6-12
Redfield	0-8	2-15

Groton 59, Deuel 30  
 Milbank 48, Aberdeen Roncalli 38  
 Webster 58, Redfield 36  
 Sisseton 55, Clark-Willow Lake 37  
 Hamlin 55, Aberdeen Roncalli 35  
 Clark-Willow Lake 62, Britton-Hecla 32  
 Milbank 50, Sisseton 47

### Feb. 13

Sisseton 59, Tiospa Zina 22  
 Hamlin 63, Deuel 22

### 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	8-0	15-2
Groton Area	8-1	12-5
Clark/Willow Lake	7-1	14-3
Deuel	4-3	11-6
Roncalli	4-4	7-10
Britton-Hecla	3-5	9-8
Milbank	4-4	8-9
Sisseton	3-6	6-10
Webster Area	2-6	4-13
Tiospa Zina	0-6	2-14
Redfield	0-6	1-14

Groton 75, Deuel 43  
 Milbank 48, Aberdeen Roncalli 38  
 Clark-Willow Lake 64, Sisseton 31  
 Hamlin 65, Aberdeen Roncalli 30  
 Clark-Willow Lake 66, Britton-Hecla 36  
 Milbank 55, Sisseton 36

### Feb. 13: Hamlin 71, Deuel 24

### Feb. 14: Sisseton 67, Tiospa Zina 50

### 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

Region 1A		Season			Seed Pts
#	Name	W	L	PCT	PTS
1	 Aberdeen Roncalli	13	5	.722	43.611
2	 Groton Area	13	6	.684	43.526
3	 Sisseton	11	7	.611	42.722
4	 Milbank	10	8	.556	40.944
5	 Webster Area	10	9	.526	40.684
6	 Britton-Hecla	5	12	.294	38.000
7	 Redfield	2	15	.118	36.412

Region 1A		Season			Seed Pts
#	Name	W	L	PCT	PTS
1	 Groton Area	12	5	.706	43.059
2	 Milbank	8	9	.471	40.294
3	 Aberdeen Roncalli	7	10	.412	40.000
4	 Britton-Hecla	9	8	.529	39.000
5	 Sisseton	6	10	.375	38.250
6	 Webster Area	4	13	.235	37.529
7	 Redfield	1	14	.067	34.533



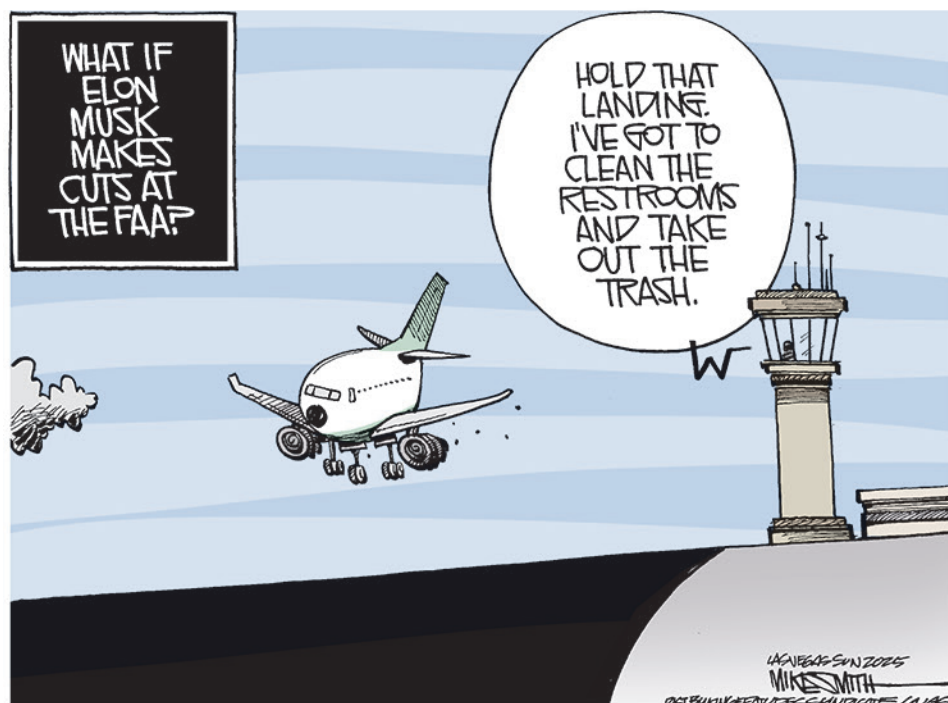
## THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE



*Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.*

ACTS 17: 30,31

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## BIBLE

## TRIVIA

by Wilson Casey

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

2. From Matthew 5:5, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the ...” *Kingdom, Earth, Compassion, Heavens*

3. In which book’s 10th chapter do we find the good Samaritan parable? *Matthew, Mark, Luke, John*

4. From Proverbs 29, what happens when the wicked have authority? *People mourn, Heavens blackened, Masses kill, Taxes abound*

5. In Numbers 22, what animal did God allow to speak? *Lamb, Donkey, Camel, Ram*

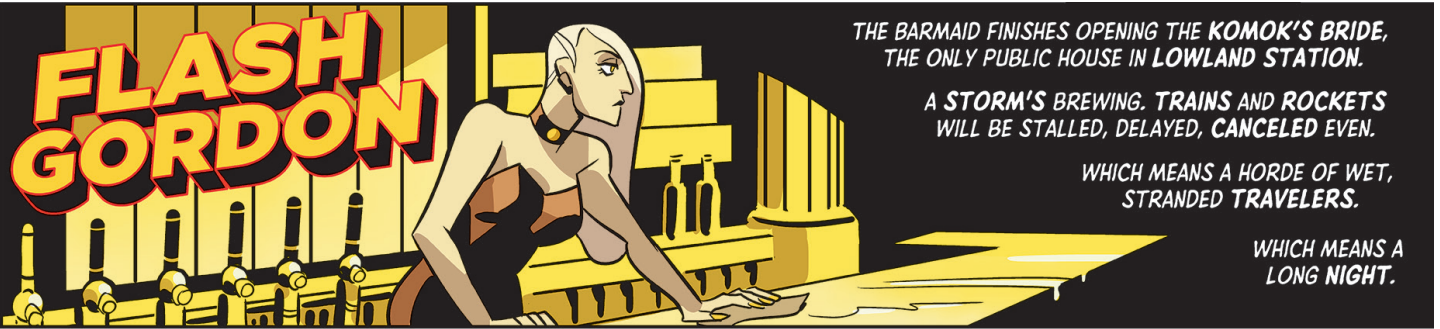
6. From II Chronicles, what did Solomon ask for? *Wealth, Long life, Wisdom, Honor*

ANSWERS: 1) Neither, 2) Earth, 3) Luke, 4) People mourn, 5) Donkey, 6) Wisdom

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

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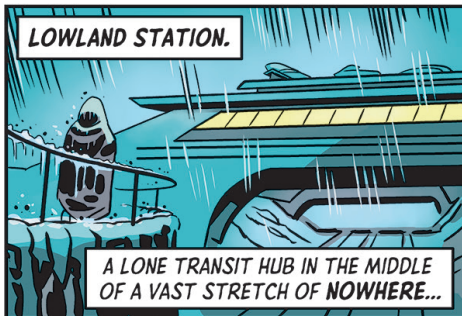


THE BARMAID FINISHES OPENING THE KOMOK'S BRIDE, THE ONLY PUBLIC HOUSE IN LOWLAND STATION.

A STORM'S BREWING. TRAINS AND ROCKETS WILL BE STALLED, DELAYED, CANCELED EVEN.

WHICH MEANS A HORDE OF WET, STRANDED TRAVELERS.

WHICH MEANS A LONG NIGHT.



LOWLAND STATION.

A LONE TRANSIT HUB IN THE MIDDLE OF A VAST STRETCH OF NOWHERE...



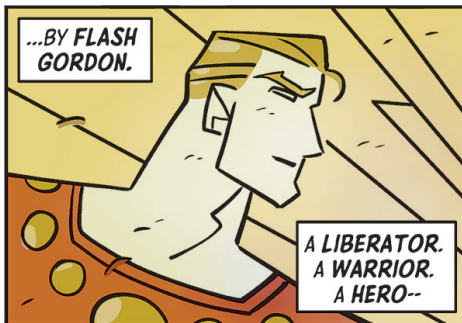
...CHOKED WITH TRAVELERS FROM ALL CORNERS OF PLANET MONGO.

WAR IS LOOMING, AND EVERYONE'S TRYING TO GET SOMEWHERE ELSE BEFORE IT HITS.



THEY WERE TOLD THERE'D BE PEACE NOW.

AFTER ALL, MING HAD BEEN DEFEATED...



...BY FLASH GORDON.

A LIBERATOR. A WARRIOR. A HERO--



--TO SOME.

TO OTHERS, HE'S AN INTERLOPER. A TERRORIST. AN ALIEN INVADER.



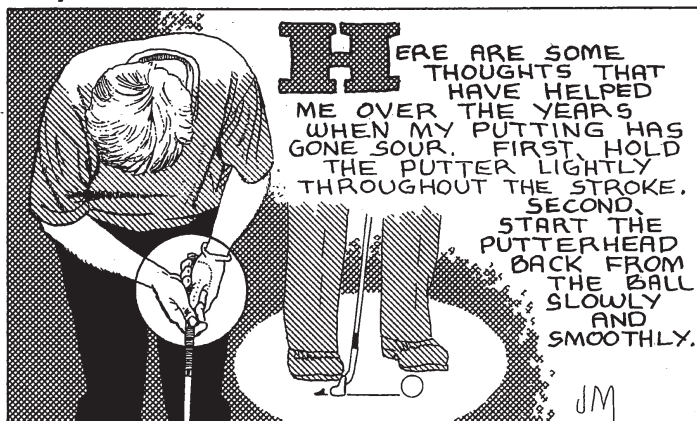
HE'S TOUCHED COUNTLESS LIVES. SIX OF THEM ARE HERE IN THIS PUB.

DAN SCHKADE 2-16-25

THESE ARE THEIR STORIES OF THE MAN FROM EARTH...

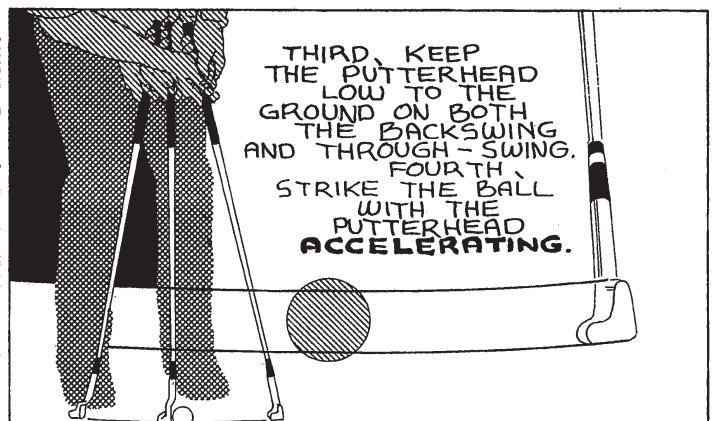
NEXT: THE GLADIATOR

## Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS



HERE ARE SOME THOUGHTS THAT HAVE HELPED ME OVER THE YEARS WHEN MY PUTTING HAS GONE SOUR. FIRST, HOLD THE PUTTER LIGHTLY THROUGHOUT THE STROKE. SECOND, START THE PUTTERHEAD BACK FROM THE BALL SLOWLY AND SMOOTHLY.

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THIRD, KEEP THE PUTTERHEAD LOW TO THE GROUND ON BOTH THE BACKSWING AND THROUGH-SWING. FOURTH, STRIKE THE BALL WITH THE PUTTERHEAD ACCELERATING.





## Long-Term Use of High-Dose Gabapentin Causes Great Concern

DEAR DR. ROACH: Am I a doomed man? When I was 25, I survived a battle with testicular cancer. The good news is that 45 years later, after two kids and three grandkids, I'm in good health. The only medicine I take is gabapentin for peripheral neuropathy that was caused by the chemotherapy drugs I received during the cancer treatment. One or more of these drugs caused neuropathy in my feet.

A neurologist prescribed 800 mg three times a day, and I took this for about 15 years. As I got older, it became 800 mg four times a day for the past 20 years. As I talk to people, they seem shocked that I'm still alive after taking so much gabapentin. But I've never experienced any known

side effects from it.

I have read that the long-term use of gabapentin can increase the chances of dementia. Are there specific things that I should have my regular doctor test me for because of my long-term use of gabapentin? -- C.P.

ANSWER: Testicular cancer is one of the most curable cancers because it is sensitive to both radiation and chemotherapy. However, both of these modalities can lead to problems years after the treatment was successful.

For many years, platinum-based chemotherapy has been one of the mainstays for advanced testicular cancer. Painful peripheral neuropathy, especially in the hands and feet, is a common side effect. Gabapentin is a commonly used medication to relieve pain from damage to the peripheral nerves that occurs in diabetes or with chemotherapy.

I don't often see doses as high as you are taking, but they are certainly used. In a seminal trial on pain following a shingles infection (post-herpetic neuralgia), the target dose of gabapentin was 900 mg four times daily. It often takes weeks or months to build up to this dose so that people can tolerate it, but it is very effective. The most common side effect is sedation, but increasing the dose slowly reduces this effect.

The evidence of gabapentin and dementia is mixed, with two studies that looked at hundreds of thousands of people and came to completely different conclusions. In the study suggesting that there was a dementia risk, it was strongest in younger people.

I conclude that you aren't doomed. While most authorities don't suggest screening tests for dementia, there are some memory and cognitive tests that are easy to do for people who have concerns about their memory, or those whose doctors are concerned about a possible change in function. If there are abnormalities, a person can then be referred to a memory expert.

\*\*\*

DEAR DR. ROACH: In a recent column, you discussed IBS-C (irritable bowel syndrome). I have IBS-D and had very serious episodes for several years. The cramping was enough to keep me in bed for two to three days. The episodes started happening more frequently three years ago and occurred every three to four weeks.

I read that yogurt can help, so I began to eat plain yogurt every day (although I added fruit and granola). I haven't had an episode in two-and-a-half years! Why isn't this suggested by doctors? The change has been amazing. -- K.V.

ANSWER: I am very pleased that you had such great results. Yogurt is often recommended due to the live bacteria in it, which is thought to be beneficial for the gut. Unfortunately, my experience (like most trials) has shown that it doesn't help the majority of people. The lactose (milk sugar) is problematic for many IBS sufferers as well.

Still, it may be worth a try, and I agree with eating plain yogurt.

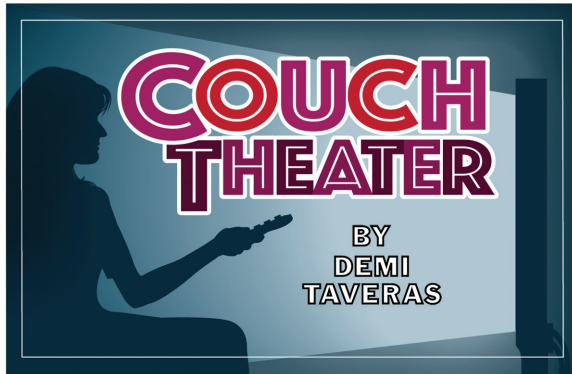
Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to [ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu](mailto:ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu).

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**Robert De Niro, left, and Angela Bassett star in "Zero Day."** Courtesy of Netflix

"Mufasa: The Lion King" (PG) -- This musical drama tells the story of an orphaned lion who would later become a king through the eyes of Academy-Award-winning director Barry Jenkins ("Moonlight"). Taking place after the events of "The Lion King" (2019), the film picks up after

Simba, Mufasa's son, becomes King of the Pride Lands and now has a young daughter, Kiara, with his wife, Nala. While Simba's trusted friends Timon and Pumbaa watch over Kiara, the shaman Rafiki pays them a visit and decides to tell Kiara the story of her grandfather, letting viewers get whisked away to the time when Mufasa first stepped foot onto the Pride Lands. New additions to the cast include Blue Ivy Carter in her feature film debut, Mads Mikkelsen, and Thandiwe Newton. Available to rent on Feb. 18. (Amazon Prime Video)

"One of Them Days" (R) -- This comedy led by Keke Palmer and SZA can be compared to the 1995 film "Friday," starring Ice Cube and Chris Tucker. The two female leads respectively play waitress Dreux (Palmer) and aspiring artist Alyssa (SZA), who face eviction after their rent fails to get paid on time. Dreux and Alyssa deduce that Alyssa's boyfriend, Keshawn, took the rent money for his own gain, so the two women are forced into a series of shenanigans to obtain \$1,500 before the day is over. Lil Rel Howery, Katt Williams, and Maude Apatow co-star in this ridiculously entertaining film that is out now to rent. (Apple TV+)

"The White Lotus: Season 3" (TV-MA) -- Mike White's smash-hit series "The White Lotus" recently premiered its third season, with the first episode out now to stream! This season is in Thailand and follows a new set of self-absorbed characters who are doomed to experience some kind of ego death while they're on vacation. Jason Isaacs (of "Harry Potter" fame), Leslie Bibb ("Palm Royale"), and Walton Goggins ("Fallout") are some of the new additions to the cast, while Natasha Rothwell reprises her role as Belinda, a spa manager from the first season that took place in Hawaii. Viewers will be glued to their screens for this show until the season's finale on April 6, and a fourth season has already been greenlit by HBO. (Max)

"Zero Day" (TV-MA) -- It is hard to believe that the prolific Robert De Niro hadn't yet taken on a main role in a television series, but this role as ex-president George Mullen in Netflix's new political-thriller mini-series is his first! In a reality that looks scarily akin to ours, George is tasked by President Evelyn Mitchell (Angela Bassett) with heading a commission for cybercriminals after a global cyberattack leaves the world in devastation. But as George begins his investigation, he's thrust into a deeply hidden conspiracy that will test his patriotic morals. Lizzy Caplan ("Fatal Attraction"), Jesse Plemons ("Civil War") and Connie Britton ("Winner") were perfectly picked to co-star and dial in the drama. All six episodes are out now for your viewing pleasure! (Netflix)

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1. Who was the first to record "This Time I'm in It for Love"?
2. Name the trio that released "Candida."
3. Which artist was a regular on a daytime soap opera at the same time he had a song hit the top of the charts?
4. Name the only No. 1 song by Spandau Ballet.
5. Name the song that contains this lyric: "I can't help it, I can't help it, if I cry, I remember that you said goodbye."

Answers

1. Austin Roberts, in 1976, followed by a Player cover in 1977. Roberts was best known for "Rocky" in 1975.

2. Tony Orlando and Dawn, in 1970. The song charted around the world, was covered by several others and was even recorded in foreign languages.

3. Rick Springfield. He had a role on "General Hospital" and released "Jessie's Girl" in 1981. He later won a Grammy Award for Best Male Rock Vocal Performance.

4. "True," in 1983.

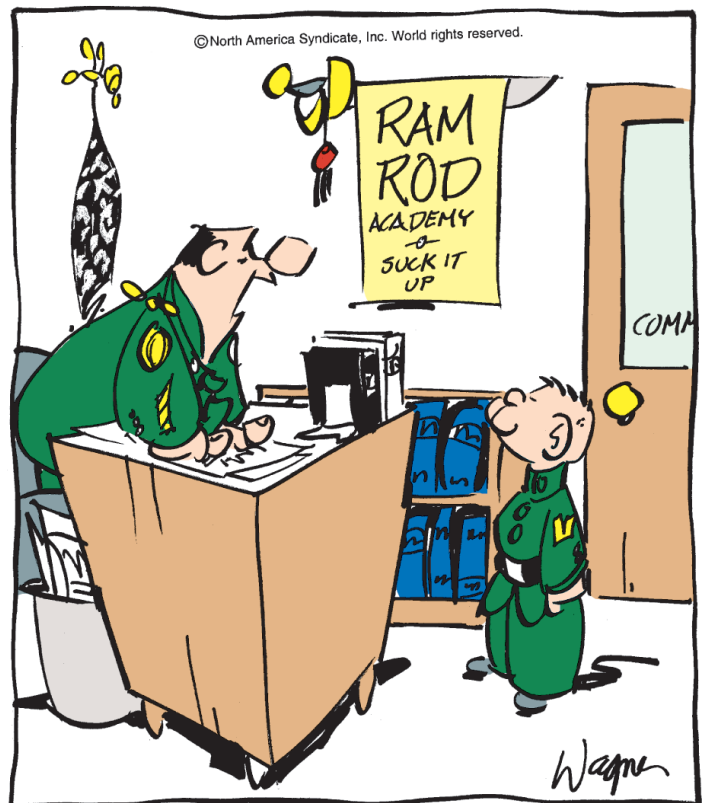
5. "In Dreams," by Roy Orbison, in 1963. Penned by Orbison himself, the song ended up on the Rolling Stone "500 Greatest Songs of All Time." While on tour with the Beatles, Orbison got 15 calls for encore while the Beatles cooled their heels backstage.

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## Just Like Cats & Dogs by Dave T. Phipps



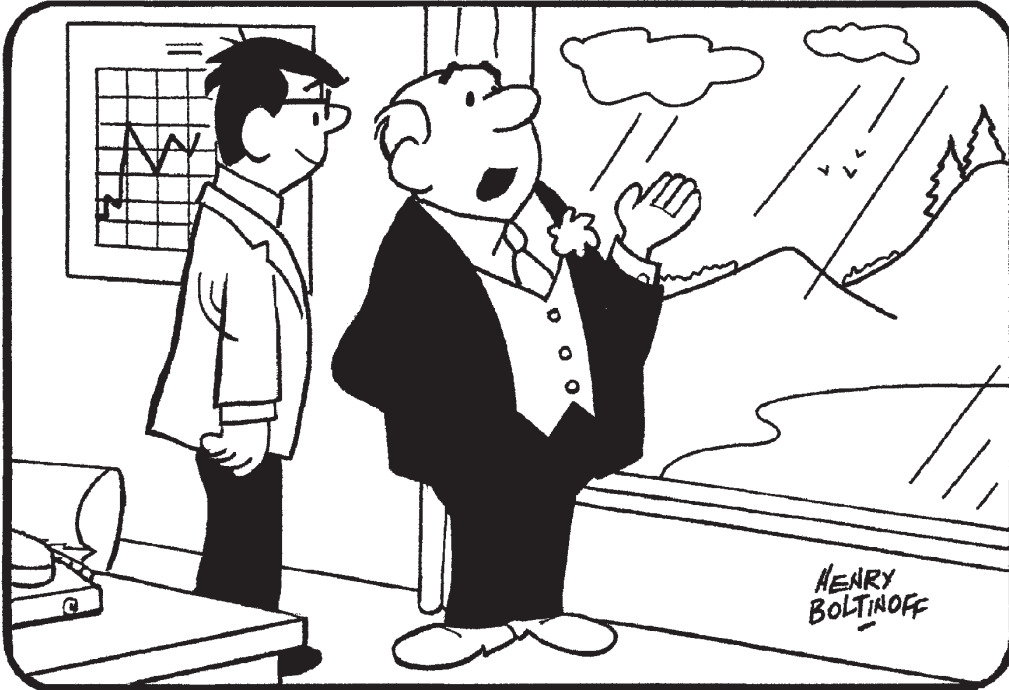
## GRIN and BEAR IT



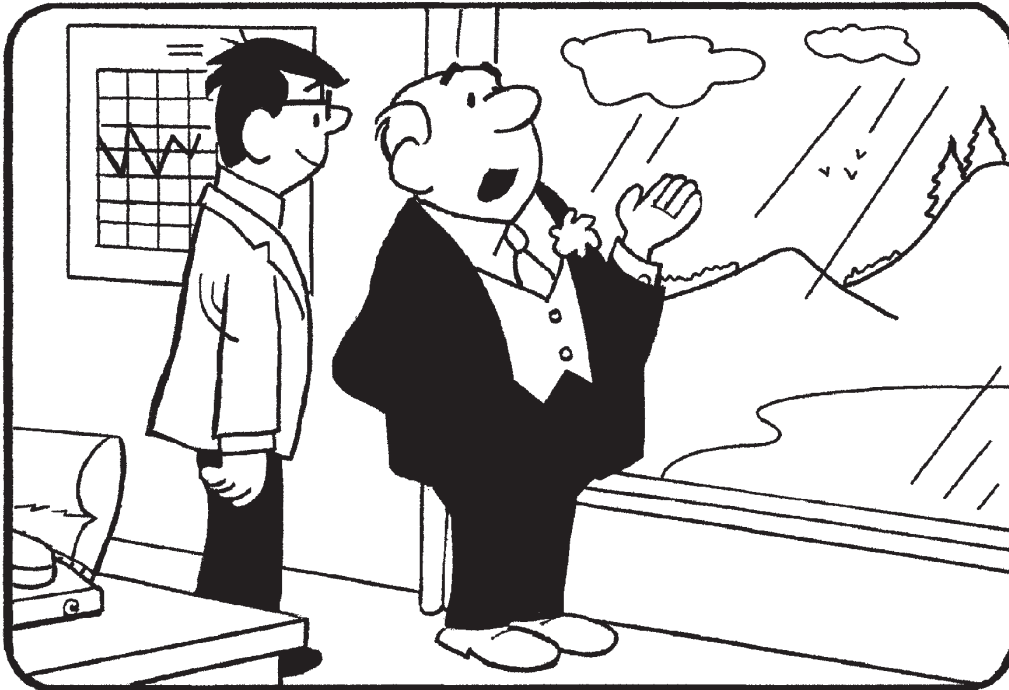
"Figby, we've had reports that you've been combative. Congratulations!"

## HOCUS-FOCUS

BY  
HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



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Differences: 1. Vest is shorter. 2. Arm is longer. 3. Chair is taller. 4. Foot is moved. 5. Chart is different. 6. Curtain is not as wide.

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\* Smartphones and computers are notorious for viruses -- but I'm thinking of the kind that can make YOU sick. These devices are touched by us constantly. And then we stick them right to our faces! Take the time daily to clean off your device with an alcohol wipe to decontaminate it. Your respiratory and digestive systems will thank you.

\* "We are always prompted to choose strong passwords, but a random collection of letters, numbers and special symbols can be hard to remember. I make a strong password by using a coded phrase, like "My three boys are number one," which might be "MY3boysR#1." Just thought I'd share my trick, but not my password!" -- R.W. in Iowa

\* Use secure networks to transfer data. When out and about, if you are using free Wi-Fi hotspots, choose ones that encrypt data. You can check the web address and look for a padlock icon, or addresses that begin with https://. The "S" means "secure."

\* "Sign out of all accounts when you are using someone else's computer. I can't tell you how often I have used the computers at the library and went to sign into my webmail only to find that the previous user's email comes up. Navigating away from a page usually doesn't work, closing the browser sometimes doesn't work, but logging off ALWAYS works. The same for shopping sites, like Amazon. If you don't log off, because these sites use "cookies" to remember you, someone could potentially use your account." -- M.L. in Florida

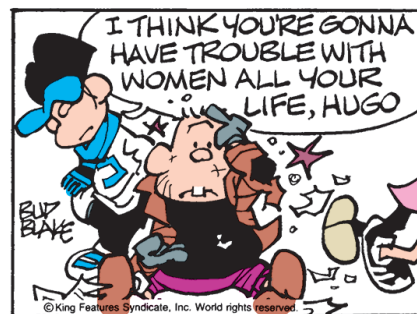
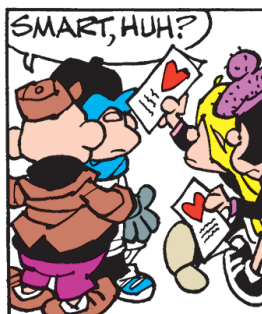
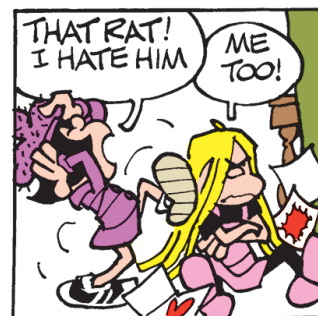
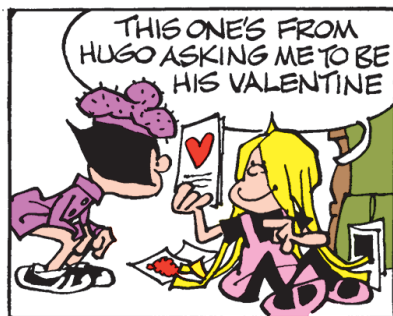
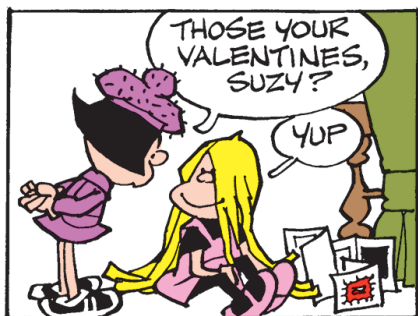
\* Lock your device! Just as you wouldn't leave your door unlocked, so too should you not leave your phone unlocked, particularly if you have applications on your smartphone that can be easily accessed. Lock it up, and be smart.

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

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## TIGER

by BUD BLAKE



# Groton Daily Independent

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## King Crossword

### ACROSS

- 1 Actress Hatcher
- 5 Slender
- 9 Venomous viper
- 12 — Bator
- 13 Director Wertmuller
- 14 Cutesy- —
- 15 Beau
- 17 "Nova" ailer
- 18 Oodles
- 19 Media mogul Winfrey
- 21 Brother of Moses
- 24 Concerning
- 25 Large amount
- 26 Novelty dance at a wedding
- 30 Pampering, for short
- 31 Sri —
- 32 Tokyo's historic name
- 33 Quarantines
- 35 L-Q bridge
- 36 Baseball legend Willie
- 37 Mission man
- 38 Arizona city
- 40 Pants part
- 42 Flamenco cheer
- 43 Exceed
- 48 — -Manuel Miranda
- 49 Clump of grass

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				52						53		

- 50 Locks
- 51 Young bloke
- 52 Summers in Paris
- 53 Sciences' partner
- DOWN**
- 1 Vat
- 2 "Xanadu" band
- 3 Comic Romano
- 4 Cash received
- 5 Skirt feature
- 6 Fibs
- 7 Hostel
- 8 "Vogue" singer
- 9 Collar, as a suspect
- 10 Japanese noodles
- 11 Ritzy
- 16 Director Howard
- 20 Snoop
- 21 Sparkling Italian wine
- 22 Shakespeare title starter
- 23 Advise
- 24 Pen fluids
- 26 Cave creatures
- 27 French article
- 28 Air freshener target
- 29 Vatican VIP
- 31 Infant's outfit
- 34 Napkin's perch
- 35 Green tea variety
- 37 — de deux
- 38 Bridge fee
- 39 Director Kazan
- 40 Ump's ruling
- 41 Tolkien creatures
- 44 Trench
- 45 Oft-pierced body part
- 46 Petty peeve
- 47 ER workers

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## — King Crossword —

Answers

Solution time: 23 mins.

T	E	R	I		S	L	I	M		A	S	P	
U	L	A	N		L	I	N	A		P	O	O	
B	O	Y	F	R	I	E	N	D		P	B	S	
			L	O	T	S			O	P	R	A	H
A	A	R	O	N			I	N	R	E			
S	L	E	W		B	U	N	N	Y	H	O	P	
T	L	C		L	A	N	K	A		E	D	O	
I	S	O	L	A	T	E	S		M	N	O	P	
		M	A	Y	S			P	A	D	R	E	
T	E	M	P	E		S	E	A	T				
O	L	E		T	R	A	N	S	C	E	N	D	
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L	A	D		E	T	E	S		A	R	T	S	

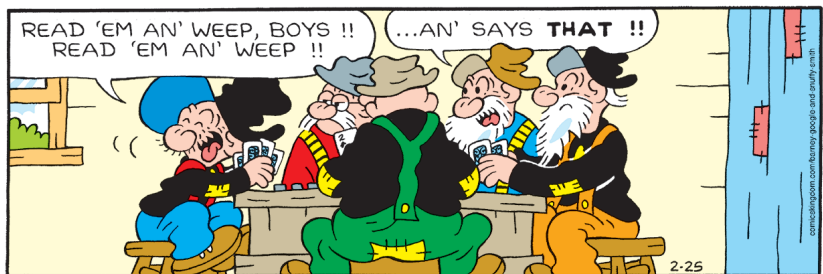
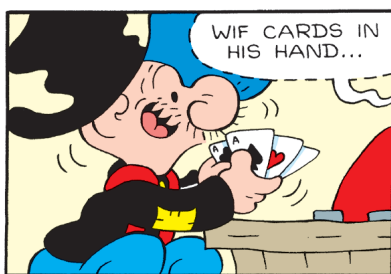
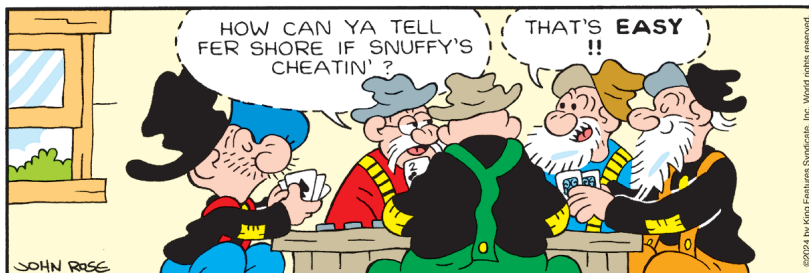
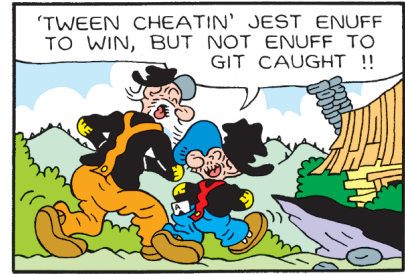
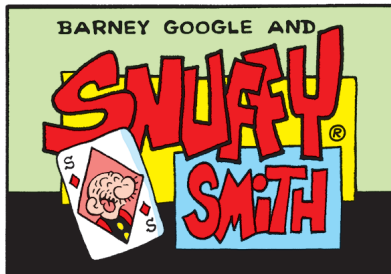
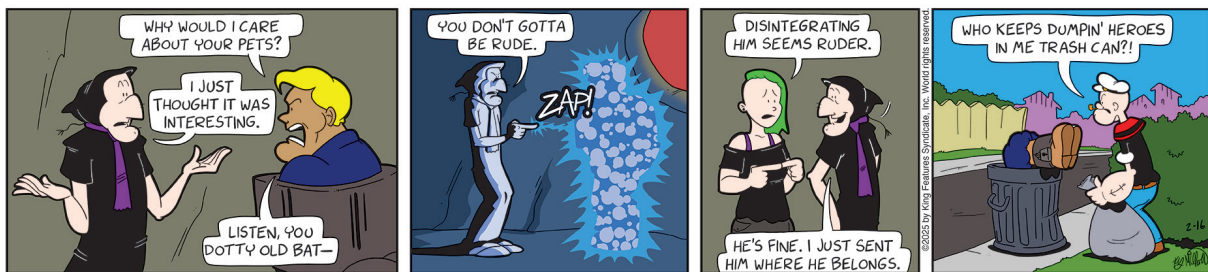
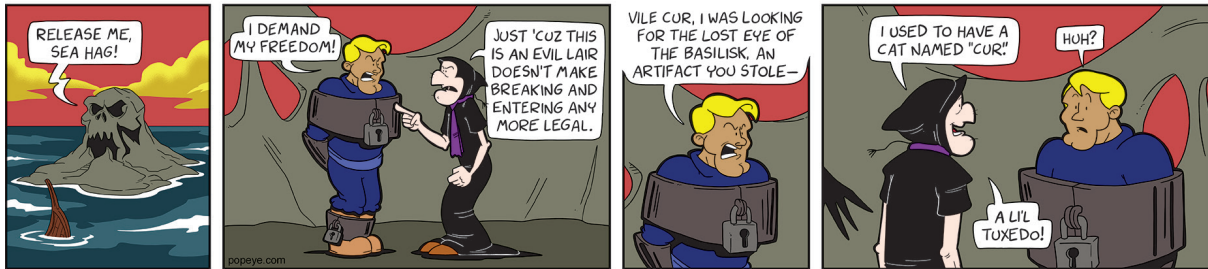
Out on a Limb

by Gary Kopervas



# Groton Daily Independent

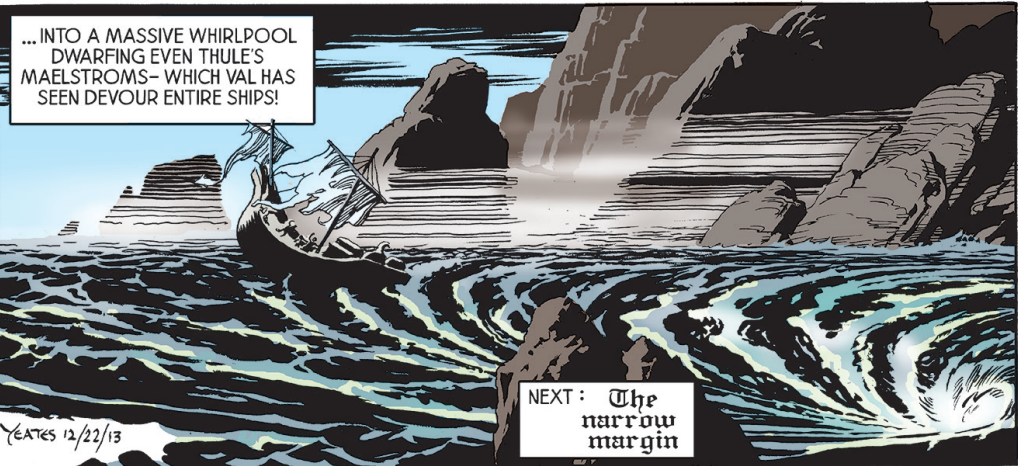
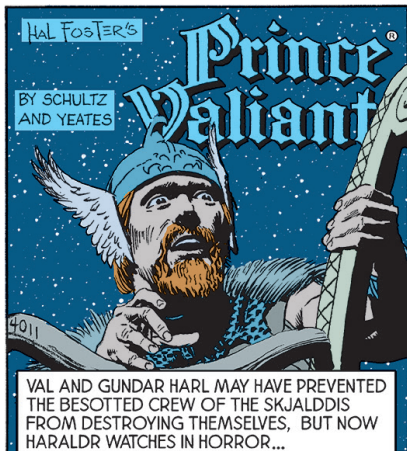
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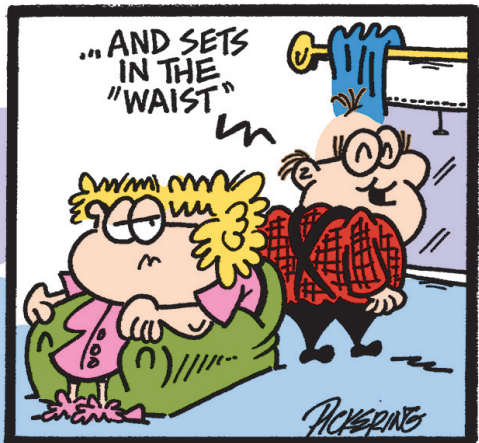
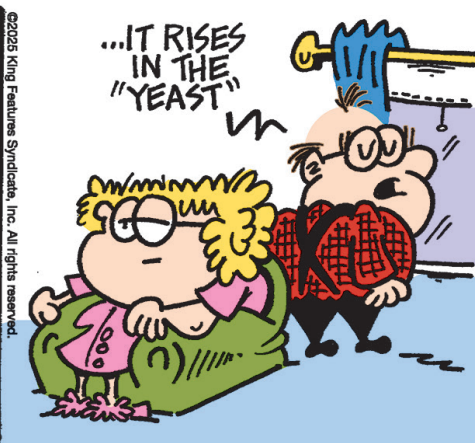
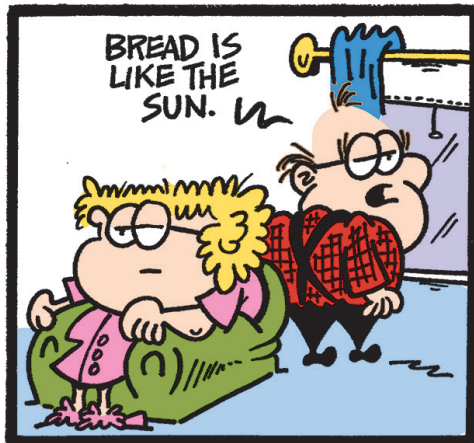
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## The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



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PICKERING

## SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

### Going back to work?

A small recent survey revealed that 51% of the retired senior respondents are considering going back to work, also known as "unretiring." The reason, of course, won't be a great surprise: They need to go back to work because the cost of everything is going up. The amount of money they're trying to earn is \$500 per month on average.

To be considered before you rush into unretirement:

-- If you're collecting Social Security and are under full retirement age, your benefit amount might be reduced while you're earning that extra income. After you reach full retirement age, you'll be able to work and not have your benefit amount reduced.

-- Your full retirement age depends on your month and year of birth. See the charts on the Social Security website ([www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov)) to determine your full retirement age.

-- If you've been retired, consider if you're ready to make that adjustment to your life that returning to work would bring. It might make the difference between seeking a part-time job as opposed to working full time.

-- If you plan on going back to work and need to provide a resume, don't use a resume you created years ago. Have a resume service do it for you, if possible.

-- If you do it yourself, don't list everything you've ever done. Go back a maximum of 15 years and don't detail your work history with every date. Instead, go for broad categories such as your experience, qualifications, skills and accomplishments in previous jobs. If you're especially skilled with technology, be sure to say so. Leave out the dates of any degrees and awards.

For ideas and hints, search online for "resumes for seniors going back to work" or "resumes for retirees." Look at the National Council on Aging ([www.ncoa.org](http://www.ncoa.org)) for their resume writing guide and AARP ([aarp.org](http://aarp.org)) for information on writing a resume after the age of 50.

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1. What team did Basketball Hall of Famer Al McGuire lead to an NCAA championship in his final season as head coach in 1977?

2. Brazilian footballer Ricardo Izecson dos Santos Leite, winner of the 2007 Ballon d'Or, was commonly known by what name?

3. Name the brothers who played together on the NHL's Chicago Black Hawks for eight seasons from 1964-72.

4. What Washington placekicker led the NFL in scoring in 1991 with 149 points, more than the 143 points scored by the entire Indianapolis Colts team that season?

5. Women's Basketball Hall of Famer Jennifer Azzi won an NCAA championship in 1990 as a member of what team?

6. Who became the first U.S. women's figure skater since Alissa Czisny in 2010 to win the ISU Grand Prix Final when she accomplished the feat in December 2024?

7. The Patrick Mannelly Award, founded in 2019, is presented annually to the best U.S. college football player at what position?



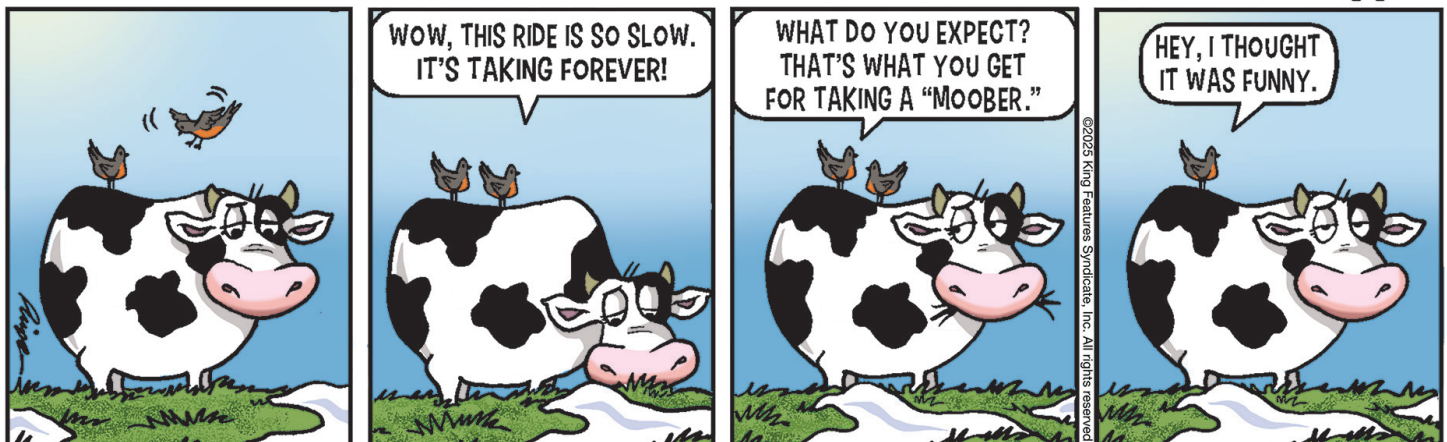
## Answers

1. The Marquette University Warriors.
2. Kaka.
3. Bobby and Dennis Hull.
4. Chip Lohmiller.
5. The Stanford University Cardinals.
6. Amber Glenn.
7. Long snapper.

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## Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps





## My neighbor yells at her dog. Is it abuse?

DEAR PAW'S CORNER: Every morning, my next-door neighbor walks her dog past my house. Every morning, she berates her dog, calling him an idiot and a bad dog, especially after picking up his poo. I cannot see the dog doing anything wrong, so I don't know why she's constantly yelling at him. I know it's affecting him, though -- he has his tail between his legs most of the time. Is there anything I can do for that dog? -- Bill in Oshkosh, Wisconsin

DEAR BILL: That's hard to watch -- emotional abuse can be as damaging to an animal as physical abuse.

Strong verbal correction is OK in obedience training when you need a dog to stop doing something immediately. But it should be limited to a firm "No!" and a quick tug on the leash if necessary -- followed by proper corrective training.

When an owner simply berates the dog and takes out their anger verbally on them, it isn't training. It doesn't correct their behavior. Behavioral issues often get worse, not better. And the mixed signals and negative feedback that the dog constantly receives can cause trust issues that never fully go away.

What can you do as an outside observer? Rescues or animal control likely won't intervene in a simple case of yelling at a dog.

If you feel safe talking to the owner, try starting a conversation with them. You may be able to glean more info about why they are yelling at the dog, and you might be able to give training advice.

However, you should also observe and document the situation. Write down the dog's physical condition and behavior and note if they deteriorate. If you see physical abuse from the owner, note the date, time and place and, contact animal control.

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

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## Strange BUT TRUE

\* In Israel, the movie title “Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs” was translated as “It’s Raining Falafel.”

\* The Latte Index, which was developed by The Wall Street Journal, compares the price of a tall Starbucks latte in dozens of cities around the globe to estimate which currencies are overvalued and undervalued.

\* While Finland refers to itself as the “Land of 1,000 Lakes,” it actually contains 188,000.

\* Gucci manufactured a pair of jeans named the Gucci

Genius Jeans that sold for an astonishing \$3,134.

\* In 1859, America was swept by a moral panic over young people playing ... too much chess.

\* Eighty-five percent of Vakkaru Island in the Maldives is made up of fish feces.

\* After Thomas Edison was confined to a wheelchair in his last years, his good friend Henry Ford bought one as well so the two could have wheelchair races around their adjoining Florida estates.

\* Fifteen minutes of shivering from cold temperatures can be the metabolic equivalent of one hour of exercise.

\* At the age of 104, a fellow by the name of Jack Reynolds became the oldest known person to get a tattoo. He followed that up by becoming, at age 105, the oldest person to ride on a roller coaster.

\* St. Nicholas is the patron saint of penitent murderers.

\* America’s first female state senator was a Mormon polygamist who not only ran against, but defeated, her husband.

\* In 2009, an Italian neurosurgeon had a heart attack in the middle of performing surgery. He powered through it when he realized his patient wouldn’t recover if he stopped. Half an hour after finishing the surgery, the dedicated doctor had an angioplasty.

\*\*\*

Thought for the Day: “You have enemies? Good. That means you’ve stood up for something, sometime in your life.” -- Victor Hugo

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### How to air-dry your roses

1. Strip leaves from the stem, leaving the flower. Cut stems no shorter than six inches. Remove from sunlight after cutting.
2. Secure the bottom of the stems to a hanger so that they hang upside down to dry. Find a dark, dry area with good circulation, such as an attic or unused closet, and leave flowers to hang there for two to three weeks until completely dry.
3. When dry, spray with unscented hairspray for protection.

– Brenda Weaver  
Source: [www.proflowers.com](http://www.proflowers.com)





by Freddy Groves

## Create your own Veterans Legacy Memorial page

The Department of Veterans Affairs has just expanded the use of the Veterans Legacy Memorial (VLM) -- the online digital platform dedicated to the memory of veterans who have passed away. Until now, a page for a veteran was created, usually by family, after that veteran died. Now the new feature -- "Your Story, Your Legacy" -- means that living veterans can create their own page, to be activated after their death.

This is a great addition to the project, especially for veterans who have no family who would create the page. The veteran can submit all the information in advance and have it just the way he or she wants. The VLM will hold the information until they're notified of the death and burial.

There is one caveat: The veteran needs to have advance approval for pre-need eligibility for burial in a VA national cemetery.

Have you seen the Memorial? At this point there are 10 million Legacy pages. (The VLM automatically creates a generic page when there is a burial in a VA national cemetery.) Go online to [www.vlm.cem.va.gov](http://www.vlm.cem.va.gov) and explore the various ways the memorial pages have been done. Standard information includes the dates of birth and death, rank and branch of service, decorations, plus the location of burial (including a satellite photo of the location) and a photo of the marker.

But you'll also find a variety of ways that veterans have been memorialized by additions from friends and family, with photos, bio, historical documents, stories and more. You can create your page any way you'd like -- after you've been approved for burial in a national cemetery.

For pre-need approval for burial, you'll need several documents, including DD-214, and the completed application VA Form 40-10007. (Download the form at [va.gov/find-forms/about-form-40-10007](http://va.gov/find-forms/about-form-40-10007).) If you need help with the paperwork, call the National Cemetery Scheduling Office at 800-535-1117.

For more information about the creation of your Legacy page, see [vlm.cem.va.gov/livingveteranhome](http://vlm.cem.va.gov/livingveteranhome) or call them at 866-245-1490.

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## Wishing Well®

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Y	G	O	I	L	J	D	B	V	O	A	O	E
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6	7	2	8	6	7	8	6	3	8	7	8	4
F	U	T	M	O	R	I	T	I	L	I	E	T
7	6	4	3	4	3	7	3	6	4	6	4	6
T	H	U	E	R	R	Y	S	E	N	R	S	S

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

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1. TELEVISION: How many cast-aways are on "Gilligan's Island"?
2. GEOGRAPHY: Which Asian nation's nickname is "Land of the Thunder Dragon"?
3. LITERATURE: What is author J.K. Rowling's real first name?
4. SCIENCE: What is a type of material that can't carry an electrical charge?
5. U.S. STATES: Which state's nickname is "The Last Frontier"?
6. MEASUREMENTS: How many quarts are in a half gallon?
7. MOVIES: Which famous landmark is featured in the movie "Rebel Without a Cause"?
8. ANATOMY: What does the cerebellum control in the human brain?
9. U.S. PRESIDENTS: Where is the late Jimmy Carter's presidential library located?
10. HISTORY: When did the Great Fire of London occur?

### Answers

1. Seven.
2. Bhutan.
3. Joanne.
4. An insulator.
5. Alaska.
6. Two.
7. Griffith Observatory.
8. Movement and balance.
9. Atlanta, Georgia.
10. 1666.

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South Dakota Governor



## Larry Rhoden



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

### Open for Opportunity

Just a few days ago, I was formally inaugurated as Governor at the South Dakota State Capitol. Hundreds of South Dakotans came to celebrate with me and my family, and I could not be more grateful for their support. That day, I delivered an inaugural address – I shared that I will be available to discuss the challenges that South Dakotans 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.

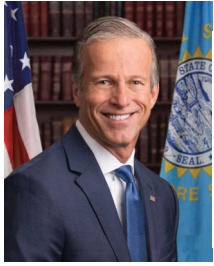
I want to keep South Dakota “Open for Business.” But more than that, I want our state to be “Open for Opportunity.”

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 and ranchers to be able to keep earning a strong living so that they can pass that farm or ranch 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 any individual in our state. 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.





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

## No Time to Waste to Secure the Border

The need to secure the border has never been clearer than in the last four years. The Biden administration's open-border policies allowed criminals and gang members into the United States. South Dakota law enforcement traced drugs on our streets back to the southern border. And we all heard the tragic stories of Americans killed by illegal immigrants who should have never been in our country in the first place.

Like many Americans, I'm glad that President Trump wasted no time fulfilling his promise to crack down on illegal immigration and secure the border. It's difficult to believe that some of the individuals who have been arrested were still in this country: members of violent international gangs and individuals arrested for murder, rape, kidnapping, drug trafficking, sexual crimes involving children, and human smuggling. Our communities are safer with these individuals in custody.

The chaos of the last four years was dangerous. More than 10 million individuals came across the southern border. Law enforcement officials were overwhelmed. Officers were pulled from guarding the border to process the flood of migrants. Border cities and other cities across the country struggled to deal with the influx. This chaos was an invitation to terrorists, smugglers, drug cartels, and other dangerous individuals to enter our country.

President Trump, Secretary Kristi Noem, and Border Czar Tom Homan have spent their first days in office making it clear that illegal immigration will no longer be tolerated. Congress also got right to work. The first bill that we sent to President Trump's desk, the Laken Riley Act, ensures that illegal immigrants who steal, assault a law enforcement officer, or kill or seriously injure another person are detained instead of being allowed back out on the street. We're making progress turning things around, but there's still much more to do.

Tom Homan recently briefed Republican senators on the administration's progress. He also made clear that Border Patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) will need additional resources to continue the important work of securing the border and getting criminals off of our streets.

Republicans are prepared to deliver those resources. The U.S. Senate has begun the process of producing legislation that will lay the foundation for a transformational investment in border security and immigration enforcement, as well as national defense. Congress will provide resources to increase the number of ICE officers and Border Patrol agents, expand detention space, facilitate deportations of dangerous individuals, and obtain the barriers and technology that we need to secure the border.

No longer will Americans be asked to tolerate rampant illegal immigration. We will get the border under control, finish the wall, and get dangerous illegal immigrants off the streets. The American people made it clear that border security is one of their top priorities, and Republicans are working to swiftly deliver it.

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## Restoring Fairness to Tribal Education

### **BIG Update**

School conditions are dire in Indian country. For years, they haven't received the funding they need, and now, unfortunately, schools are riddled with leaky roofs, broken heaters, mold, and more. Congress and the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) must do better to uphold our trust and treaty obligations to tribes.

I recently called on the House Natural Resources Committee to hold an oversight hearing on BIE failures and I'm glad they responded by doing so. This week, I had the honor of introducing Cecilia Fire Thunder of the Oglala Sioux Tribe for her testimony on the state of tribal education.

Committee discussion revealed that fifty percent of recommendations to BIE to improve its mismanagement of funds and allocation of resources have gone unimplemented. BIE must improve its systems to meet the basic needs of Native American students..

### **BIG Idea**

Our nation's highways need consistent maintenance and improvement, and these projects are primarily funded by the Highway Trust Fund (HTF), which is mostly funded by federal gas tax. Unfortunately, current projections show the HTF becoming insolvent by 2028, and its instability has worsened due to increased electric vehicle (EV) adoption. California and the federal government have been doling out tax credits for EV purchases to the detriment of our federal roads and bridges.

Gas-powered cars contribute by paying the federal gas tax when they fill up at the pump. While EVs use the same roads as vehicles with internal combustion engines, they don't contribute to the HTF. Additionally, due to the heavier weight of an EV, they cause more wear and tear on the roads than a standard gas-powered vehicle.

To remedy this and support improvements to our federal roads and bridges, I introduced the Fair SHARE Act to ensure EVs contribute their fair share to the HTF. My bill would impose a \$1,000 fee on all-electric vehicles at the point of sale and an additional \$550 one-time fee on each battery that weighs more than 1,000 pounds. These fees would be directed to the HTF to ensure the vehicles are fairly contributing to road and bridge maintenance.

### **BIG News**

On Sunday, I had the privilege of watching South Dakota-native Dallas Goedert as he helped the Philadelphia Eagles win the Super Bowl against the Kansas City Chiefs. After graduating from Britton-Hecla High School, Goedert was recruited by South Dakota State University's football program. He's had an impressive career with the Eagles over the past several years and represents South Dakota well.

I ran into President Trump while at the Super Bowl – he's the first sitting President to attend this major sporting event.

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## FEBRUARY 3-9, 2025

Another week, another Weekly Round[s] Up! We had a busy week out in Washington as we continue working to confirm President Trump's cabinet members. This weekend, I had the opportunity to have dinner with President Trump and most of my Republican colleagues in the Senate at Mar-a-Lago in Florida. It was great to sit down with the President to discuss our legislative

priorities for the upcoming year. I had hearings in the Senate Banking Committee and the Select Committee on Intelligence. The best part of this past week was the 12 different meetings I had with groups from South Dakota, with 27 different towns across the state represented. Read more about all of these groups, as well as the rest of the week, in my Weekly Round[s] Up:

South Dakotans I met with: Associated School Boards of South Dakota; Mike Behm, Director of the South Dakota Department of Transportation's Division of Planning and Engineering; a group of leaders from Special Olympics of South Dakota; South Dakota Association of Rural Water Systems; Troy Wellman, Moody County Sheriff; Erik Gaikowski and Doug DeGroot with AARP South Dakota; Jonathan Kleinjan, Executive Director of the South Dakota Wheat Commission; Tracey LeBeau, Administrator and CEO of the Western Area Power Administration; the South Dakota Native Homeownership Coalition; the Community HealthCare Association of the Dakotas; leaders from tribal colleges and universities in South Dakota; and Ivan Giraud, CEO of Bel Brands USA, which has a facility in Brookings.

South Dakota towns represented: Aberdeen, Arlington, Beresford, Britton, Brookings, Canistota, De Smet, Egan, Fort Thompson, Howard, Huron, Kimball, Kyle, Lake Andes, Madison, Miller, Mission, Mobridge, Pierre, Rapid City, Sioux Falls, Sisseton, Tea, Toronto, Watertown, White River and Woonsocket.

Other meetings: Peter Pham from the Atlantic Council's Africa Center; Gabriel Schulze, Co-Head of Cerberus Frontier; Ronald Gidwitz, former United States Ambassador to Belgium; a group of cadets from the United States Military Academy at West Point; Michael Duffey, nominee for Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment; Elbridge Colby, nominee for Undersecretary of Defense for Policy; David Arons, CEO of the National Brain Tumor Society; and Robert Cook, President and CEO of FINRA. I also met with several groups of leaders from countries in Africa, including leaders from Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya and Rwanda.

I attended our weekly Senate Bible Study. Instead of our usual Senate Prayer Breakfast this week, we had the annual National Prayer Breakfast. This was hosted in Statuary Hall in the Capitol with leaders from across Washington. We had many readers and musical guests, but our main speaker was President Trump. You can watch his remarks here.

Hearings: I attended three hearings this week. Two of them were closed hearings in the Select Committee on Intelligence. One of these hearings was in the Senate Banking Committee, where we heard from witnesses and discussed debanking issues. We even had a South Dakota connection at that hearing – Nathan McCauley from Anchorage Digital headquartered in Sioux Falls was one of our witnesses. You can watch a clip of my questions here.

Votes taken: 20 – we continue to work on getting President Trump's cabinet confirmed. This past week, we confirmed Chris Wright to lead the Department of Energy, Pam Bondi to serve as Attorney General, Doug Collins to be Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Scott Turner to lead the Department of Housing and Urban Development and Russ Vought to lead the Office of Management and Budget. For those keeping track at home, we confirmed five cabinet members in one week, bringing the total to 13. We had only confirmed six cabinet nominees three weeks into President Trump's first term in 2017 as well as President Biden's term in 2021.

Legislation introduced: I led the Timber Harvesting Restoration Act, legislation which would require the United States Forest Service to improve timber sales numbers in the Black Hills National Forest. In recent years, timber sales in the Black Hills National Forest have steadily decreased, putting a significant strain on manufacturers of timber products. In addition, timber harvesting is necessary to keep the Black Hills healthy, prevent wildfires and preserve its beauty for generations to come. Read more about this legislation here.

I also introduced the Taking Account of Institutions with Low Operation Risk (TAILOR) Act. This legislation would require federal regulatory agencies to take risk profiles and business models of institutions into account when crafting regulations. Read more about this bill here.

Inauguration resolution: I introduced a resolution to honor the personnel who worked to support the ceremonies and events for the 60th Presidential Inauguration that took place on January 20, 2025. Read the full resolution here.

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

Steps taken: 50,847 steps or 25.54 miles.

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Dr. James L. Snyder Ministries

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1-352-216-3025

## My Tok Doesn't Always Tik

Throughout my life, I have always lived on a schedule. Every day is devoted to certain tasks, and it has worked for me so far.

I know what day it is by what I am doing that day.

Unlike The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage, I cannot multitask. I have to do one thing at a time, which has to be on my schedule.

I am often impressed by my wife's ability to multitask. She can do a dozen things at once and get them accomplished the way they are supposed to be, but I have a hard time knowing what she is doing at any given time.

I plan my week in a very precise routine. I can only do one thing at a time, which must be on my schedule.

I schedule each week by assigning a particular project to each day. I spend one day doing my radio ministry, another doing my weekly column, and then several days working on my sermon for Sunday. I follow my routine very precisely each week.

Unfortunately, my schedule has been interrupted. I spent five days in the hospital and then over two weeks in bed recuperating from my health problem.

Being in the hospital is a very boring time. There is not much I can do because I have medical personnel coming in and out poking me with needles and all sorts of things. Just when I think I'm asleep someone comes.

Some even came in around 3 a.m., and unfortunately, I was not sleeping because how in the world can you sleep in a hospital with such a routine?

I never knew what day it was and was so very confused. One day was just like the other, and I was not getting anything done.

Now, I'm trying to get back on schedule. Boy, is this difficult. I guess it's because of my age I can't begin to pull everything back together again as quickly as I need to.

Every day of the week is identified by the project I'm working on. Now, I'm so confused that I have no idea what day it is or what I should be doing.

I remember asking The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage one day, "What day is it today?"

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Looking at me with one of her grimaces, she said, "What day would you like it to be?" Then she laughed and walked away.

If I had my way, today would be the day before I went into the hospital.

I had to spend some time searching my journal to figure out what I had been doing before I went into the hospital. The good thing is that I keep notes or I would be completely lost.

I spent one whole day going through four years of journals to figure out what I was doing each day. I carefully made notes and began understanding what I was doing Monday through Friday.

Going through these journals enabled me to figure out my schedule for the week. I usually don't spend much time figuring out what I'm doing; I just do it. I was getting close to the end of my research and was happy to work these out.

One morning, I got up and walked out to the kitchen, where The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage was preparing breakfast. She looked at me and said, "So, what day is it for you?"

Looking at her I said, "Today is National Apple Fritter Day."

I laughed and went to sit down in my chair, and then realized I didn't know what day it was. Now, what do I do? If I don't know what day it is, how will I know what I'm supposed to be doing today?

It could be my old age, but I'm terrible at remembering the day. If I don't know what day it is, how am I going to spend the day productively and what project I am going to be working on.

The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage brought my breakfast and a nice hot cup of coffee. Before walking away, she said, "Today is Wednesday, and it's the day you do your radio work." Then she went back into the kitchen.

Aha. That will solve my problem for today. I'll spend the morning doing my radio programs for the week. I was kind of happy to hear that. Now I know how I will spend the day.

Nothing is more satisfying than knowing what you're doing. Unlike The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage, I'm not multitasking because if I was, I would never get back to my schedule like I had it before. I cannot handle 100 tasks like my wife can. I can only handle one task at a time.

I often think about what it would be like to multitask and juggle hundreds of tasks simultaneously. I wonder how much I could get done if I could do that. My Tok needs to Tik on time everyday.

Getting back to my regular schedule is a very relaxing thing for me.

I thought of a verse of scripture along this line. Ephesians 5:15-16, "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

Although the days are evil, each day I need to walk exactly in a way that honors God.

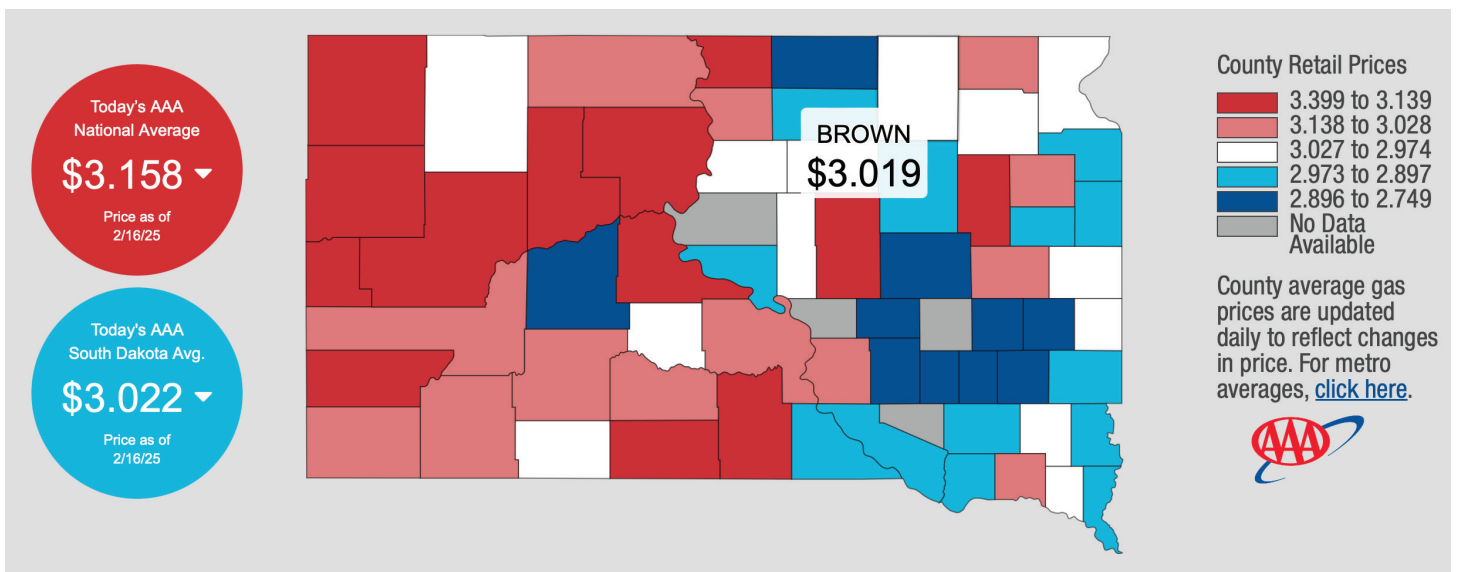
# Broton Daily Independent

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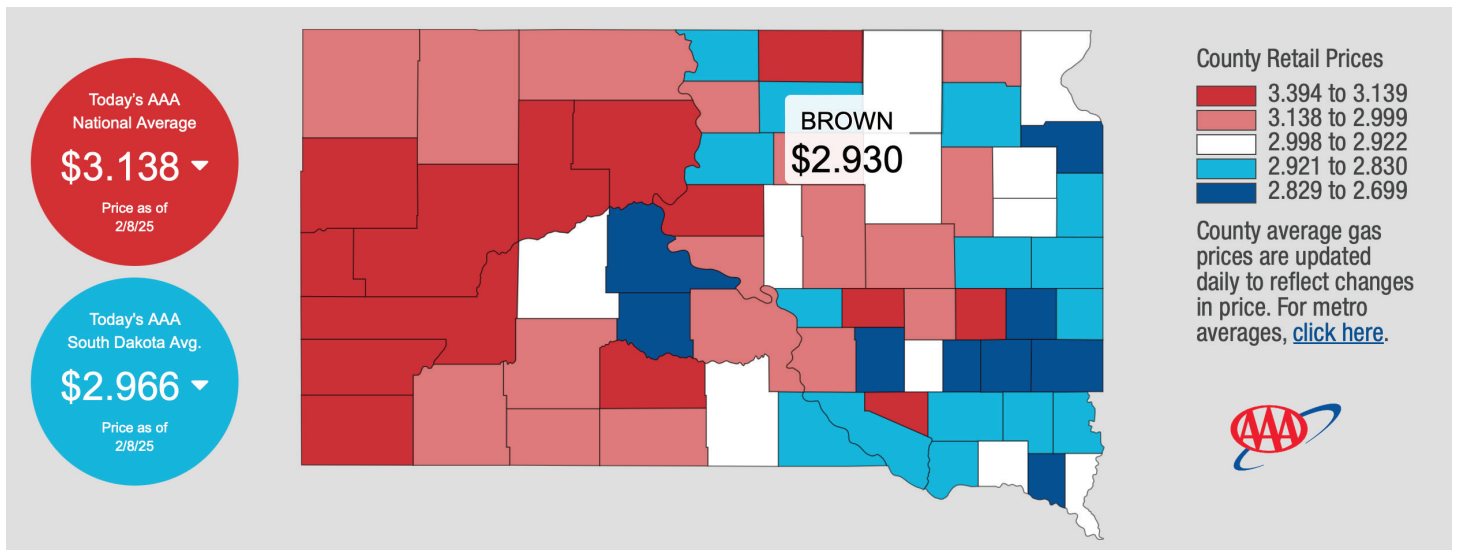
## South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$3.022	\$3.181	\$3.639	\$3.437
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.035	\$3.199	\$3.628	\$3.428
Week Ago Avg.	\$2.964	\$3.140	\$3.577	\$3.430
Month Ago Avg.	\$2.862	\$3.068	\$3.473	\$3.325
Year Ago Avg.	\$2.942	\$3.132	\$3.566	\$3.769

### This Week



### Last Week



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## Drought Classification

None

D0 (Abnormally Dry)

D1 (Moderate Drought)

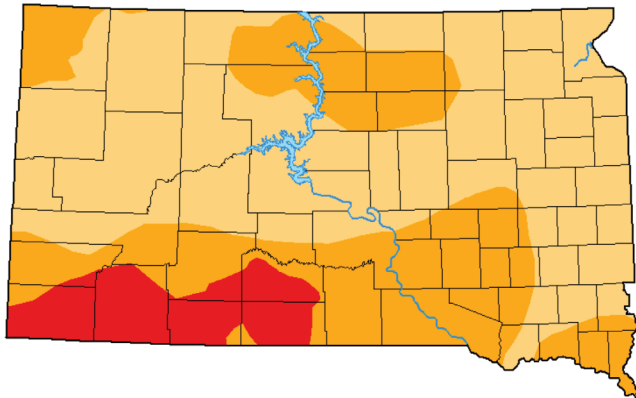
D2 (Severe Drought)

D3 (Extreme Drought)

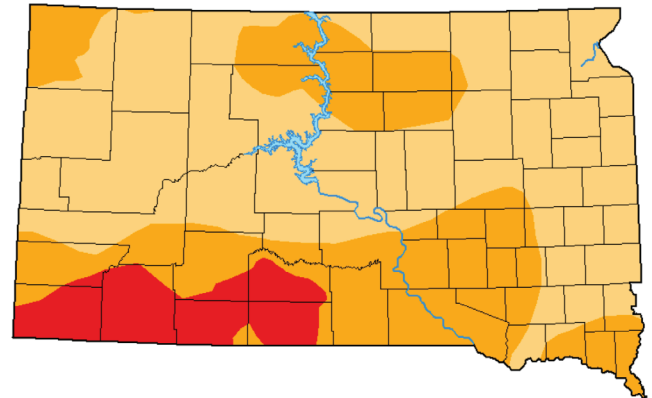
D4 (Exceptional Drought)

No Data

## Drought Monitor



February 11



February 4

The High Plains once again missed out on the precipitation that moved through the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic parts of the U.S. Western Nebraska and Kansas saw degradation as the lack of precipitation continues to affect the area. Colorado also saw degradations. In the far Northeast, abnormally dry conditions expanded from Nebraska and Kansas. Western Colorado continues to see degradations in the Western Slope and San Juan regions. Wyoming did see some extreme drought removal in the northwest and north central areas as snowpack has markedly improved in the non-mountainous areas.

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## EARTHTALK

Dear EarthTalk: What can we expect regarding changes President Trump is promising regarding: climate, environment and energy policy?

-- Name withheld

Despite only being in office for a second term for a few weeks, Donald Trump has already begun rolling back climate initiatives and environmental regulations. Trump, who has previously called global warming a "hoax," made bold decisions in his first term; notably, he slashed the budget of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and also replaced Obama's Clean Power Plan which mandated states to reduce carbon emissions. With his return, Trump has pledged more efforts as follow-ups to his previous acts.



**Donald Trump is making good on all of his campaign promises one by one, and America's era leading on climate & conservation is over.** Credit: Michael Vadon, FlickrCC.

One of his promises is removing strict environmental regulations on the fossil fuel economy. On January 20, Trump announced a "national energy emergency"—the first in Presidential history, only preceded by regional energy crises in the early 1970s. This assertion gives Trump the authority to limit environmental regulations on oil firms and boost the use of natural resources like coal. Yet, the U.S. isn't facing a fuel shortage like in the 70s: Bank of America analysts predict that oil prices will fall in 2025 as the American crude supply surpasses its demand. In his second inaugural address Trump stated, "we have the largest amount of oil and gas of any country on Earth, and we are going to use it," adding that America stands on "liquid gold." While more drilling could lower energy prices, this optimistic outcome isn't guaranteed and could also spark a price resurgence from the oil industry's boom-bust cycle. His policies, however, do assure an increase in national emissions and pollutants that would exacerbate global warming.

Trump is also targeting the electric vehicle (EV) industry. Over the last four years, Biden's administration promoted emission-reducing cars and put regulations on total emissions for gas vehicles. By removing these standards, Trump hopes to save "our auto industry" and keep his "sacred pledge to our great American autoworkers"—though he misinterprets Biden's regulations and treats them as mandates to ban gas vehicles entirely. Trump will soon work to remove more integrated EV policies such as tax credits.

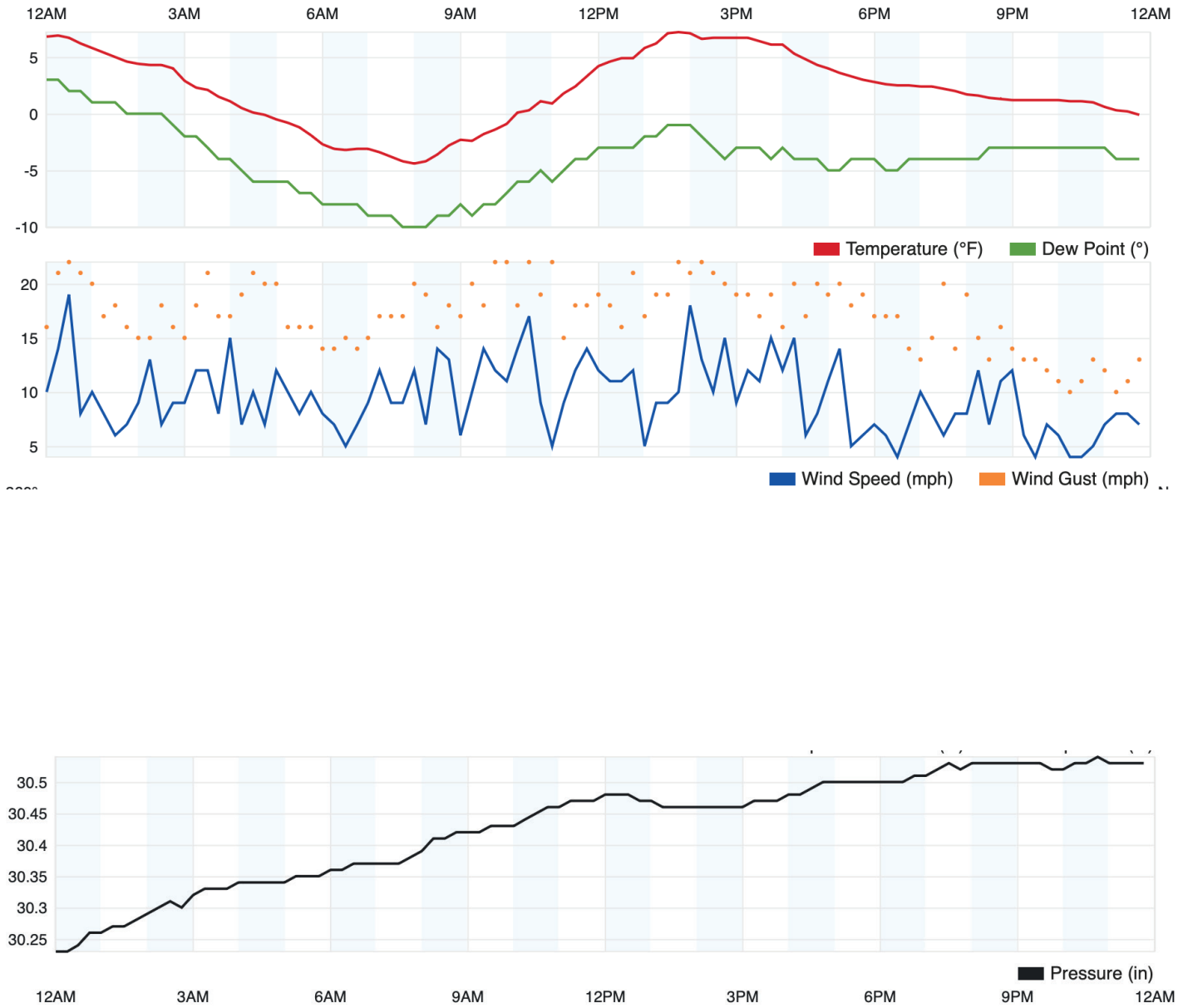
Trump has also withdrawn from the Paris Agreement—an international treaty with over 190 countries aimed to combat climate change via emissions reductions—just like he did in his first term. He hopes to save America "trillions of dollars" by pulling out of these climate accords first ratified 10 years ago. With 2024 already exceeding the agreement's intended limit of 1.5 degrees Celsius as the hottest year ever recorded, global warming will likely continue to rise during his presidency. That said, many leaders are optimistic about halting climate change. Said Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson, "Chicago and our peer cities are, and will remain, at the forefront of climate action." To fight environmental deregulation, contact your local representatives, join advocacy groups, or donate relevant organizations.



# Groton Daily Independent




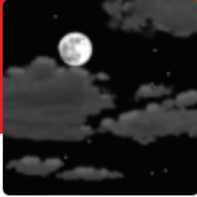

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Extreme Cold Warning			
Today	Tonight	Washington's Birthday	Monday Night	Tuesday
				
<b>High: 6 °F</b>	<b>Low: -24 °F</b>	<b>High: -7 °F</b>	<b>Low: -32 °F</b>	<b>High: -6 °F</b>
Cold	Partly Cloudy	Cold	Partly Cloudy	Cold



## Dangerously Cold Starting this Evening

February 16, 2025  
5:14 AM

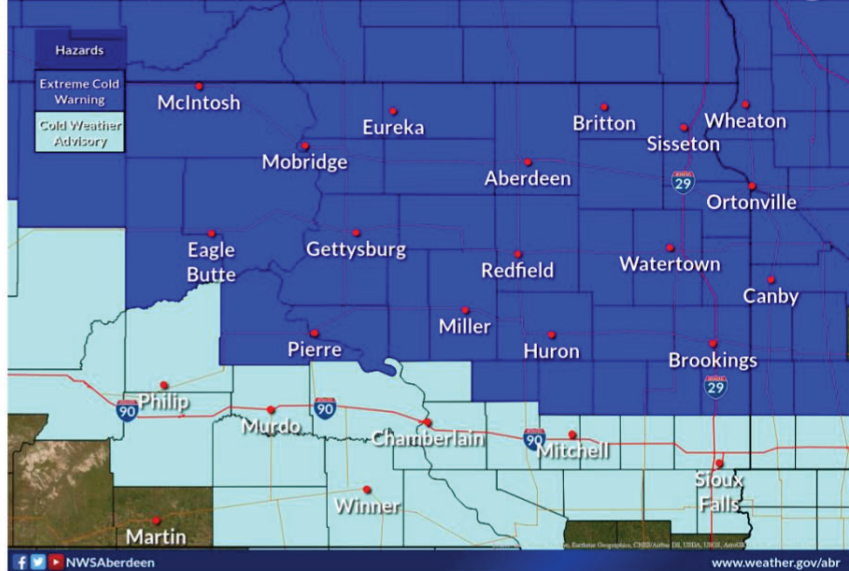
- An **Extreme Cold Warning** is in effect starting this evening
- A **Cold Weather Advisory** is in effect from late tonight through Monday morning
  - Some headlines continue through Wednesday morning
- Wind chills between **-25 to -50°** are possible during these times
  - *These wind chills could cause frostbite in as little as 10 minutes.*



### Cold Weather Headlines

From Sunday Evening through Monday Morning

Weather Forecast Office  
Aberdeen, SD  
Issued Feb 16, 2025 3:11 AM CST



NWS National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

An Extreme Cold Warning is in effect for areas along and north of Hwy 14 starting this evening. Additionally, a Cold Weather Advisory has been issued for Buffalo, Jones, and Lyman counties through Monday morning. Wind chills between -25 to -50 degrees are possible during these times.

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## Coldest Wind Chills

February 16, 2025  
5:19 AM

- Very cold wind chills Sunday evening through Wednesday morning

- Could get as low as -30 to -50°

- Use caution when heading outside, dress in several layers covering all exposed skin.

- Remember to bring your pets inside!

**Minimum Wind Chill Forecast (°F)**

	2/16 Sun		2/17 Mon							2/18 Tue							2/19 Wed							
	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm
<b>Aberdeen</b>	-23	-31	-37	-42	-42	-39	-29	-28	-31	-37	-42	-44	-44	-38	-25	-21	-26	-29	-32	-34	-34	-32	-19	-17
<b>Britton</b>	-26	-34	-41	-44	-45	-39	-31	-29	-33	-38	-42	-43	-41	-39	-28	-24	-30	-34	-37	-40	-41	-35	-25	-20
<b>Chamberlain</b>	-7	-11	-16	-23	-26	-26	-22	-19	-24	-25	-27	-28	-28	-27	-20	-15	-15	-17	-19	-23	-23	-22	-17	-9
<b>Clark</b>	-23	-26	-36	-39	-41	-39	-32	-30	-32	-37	-39	-40	-39	-35	-26	-24	-27	-31	-33	-37	-37	-33	-25	-21
<b>Eagle Butte</b>	-18	-28	-33	-40	-43	-42	-34	-30	-36	-39	-42	-44	-45	-40	-30	-25	-28	-30	-34	-37	-38	-33	-23	-17
<b>Eureka</b>	-26	-35	-43	-47	-47	-42	-34	-32	-36	-43	-47	-49	-50	-44	-31	-26	-31	-36	-39	-44	-44	-40	-29	-24
<b>Gettysburg</b>	-19	-26	-34	-41	-44	-44	-32	-29	-33	-37	-41	-43	-42	-38	-29	-23	-27	-30	-34	-38	-39	-35	-25	-18
<b>McIntosh</b>	-24	-36	-42	-47	-47	-42	-36	-31	-37	-41	-45	-48	-47	-42	-31	-25	-30	-36	-40	-44	-44	-39	-24	-18
<b>Milbank</b>	-20	-27	-34	-39	-40	-35	-30	-28	-32	-35	-37	-38	-39	-35	-27	-24	-27	-30	-32	-35	-35	-32	-22	-18
<b>Miller</b>	-14	-20	-29	-35	-36	-35	-26	-25	-29	-31	-34	-35	-35	-32	-23	-20	-22	-24	-26	-28	-29	-28	-19	-13
<b>Mobridge</b>	-21	-31	-39	-43	-48	-41	-34	-28	-33	-36	-41	-44	-43	-38	-23	-20	-26	-29	-32	-37	-38	-32	-18	-11
<b>Murdo</b>	-6	-14	-20	-28	-31	-32	-26	-22	-25	-31	-36	-39	-40	-38	-31	-24	-22	-23	-27	-30	-31	-29	-22	-14
<b>Pierre</b>	-9	-15	-21	-28	-31	-29	-26	-18	-25	-28	-31	-32	-32	-29	-20	-13	-17	-20	-22	-24	-25	-24	-15	-10
<b>Redfield</b>	-19	-25	-36	-39	-41	-36	-29	-26	-31	-34	-37	-39	-39	-35	-25	-20	-23	-26	-28	-31	-32	-29	-20	-15
<b>Sisseton</b>	-22	-29	-37	-41	-42	-39	-30	-29	-34	-37	-39	-41	-41	-38	-27	-25	-28	-33	-34	-37	-38	-34	-26	-21
<b>Watertown</b>	-20	-26	-32	-37	-40	-36	-29	-28	-31	-36	-38	-40	-40	-33	-24	-21	-25	-29	-32	-34	-34	-29	-22	-17
<b>Webster</b>	-24	-31	-39	-41	-43	-37	-34	-32	-34	-38	-41	-43	-44	-37	-28	-26	-29	-32	-35	-37	-38	-33	-26	-22
<b>Wheaton</b>	-26	-32	-37	-44	-45	-40	-30	-28	-33	-37	-39	-42	-42	-39	-30	-27	-30	-33	-35	-38	-38	-35	-27	-22



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Very cold wind chills that could get as low as -30 to -50 degrees will occur Sunday evening through Wednesday morning. These wind chills could cause frostbite in as little as 10 minutes. If you are going outside, take caution and make sure to dress in several layers to cover exposed skin.

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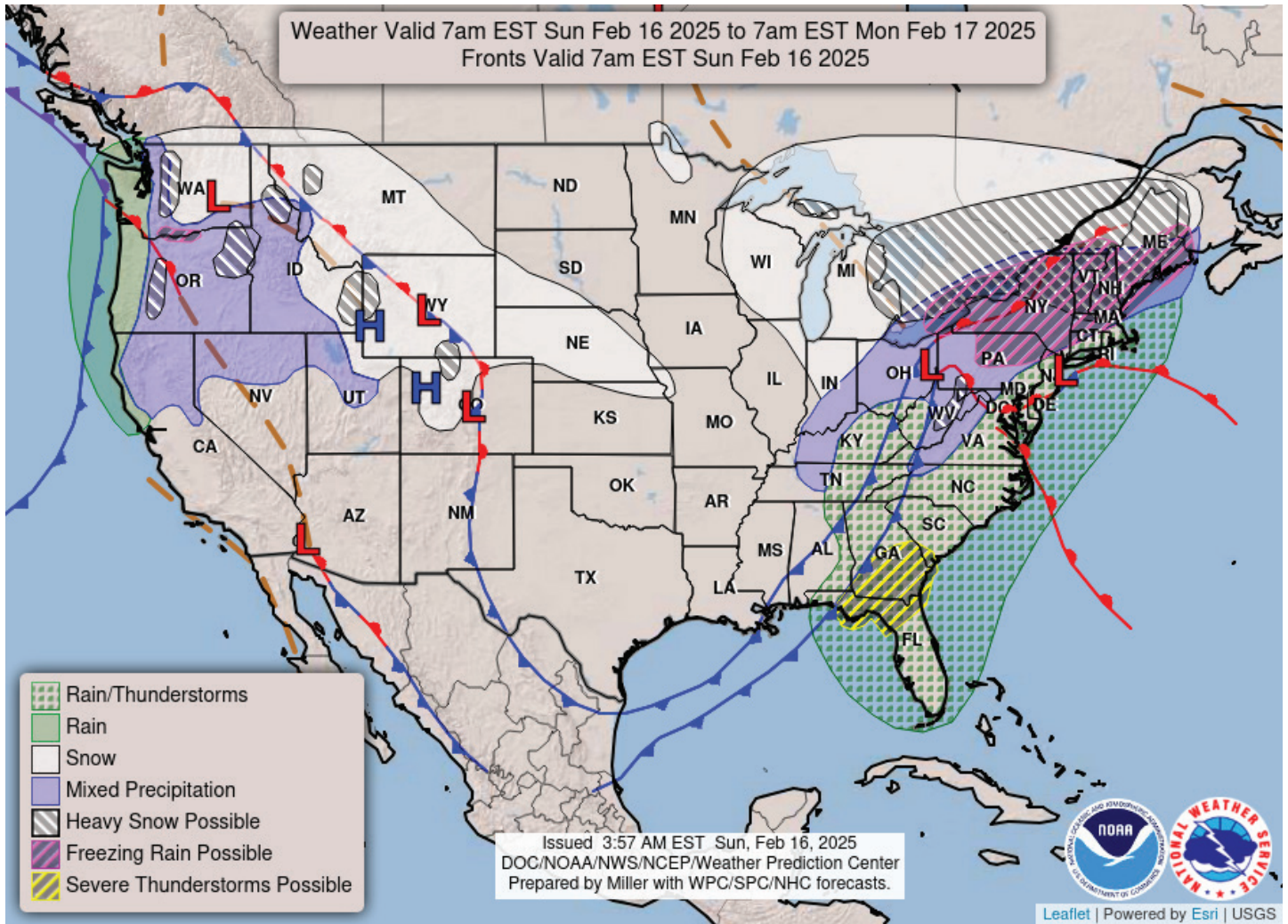
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 7 °F at 1:45 PM**  
**Low Temp: -4 °F at 7:54 AM**  
**Wind: 22 mph at 12:28 AM**  
**Precip: : 0.00**

Day length: 10 hours, 32 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 56 in 1981  
Record Low: -40 in 1936  
Average High: 29  
Average Low: 7  
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.33  
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.20  
Average Precip to date: 0.88  
Precip Year to Date: 0.20  
Sunset Tonight: 6:02:52 pm  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:28:19 am



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## Today in Weather History

February 16th, 1969: Freezing drizzle and thick fog formed a heavy glaze on utility lines resulting in several broken power and telephone lines across northern South Dakota.

1898: A series of wildfires swept through South Carolina on February 16-17, 1898. Unconfirmed reports indicate that 14 people were killed, numerous homes and sawmills burned, and up to 3,000,000 acres of forest land were charred from Aiken County, S.C. to Chatham County, N.C., and east to Marlboro County, S.C. There were probably a dozen wildfires raging at the same time driven by a 40 mph wind.

1899 - Washington D.C. received 1.26 inches of rain in six hours atop a snow cover more than 30 inches deep making it the soggiest day of record. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1903: Pokegama Dam, Minnesota saw three straight days with low temperatures 50° below zero or colder, including 59° below zero on the 15th. The minus 59° established a state record for the lowest measured temperature in Minnesota. Pokegama Dam held the record until February 2nd, 1996 when the temperature fell to 60° below zero at Tower.

1943: Record cold prevailed in the northeastern United States. The mercury plunged to 37°F below zero at Concord, New Hampshire, and to -39 degrees at Portland, Maine. The morning low of -32°F at Falls Village, Connecticut, established a state record. The Connecticut record low was tied on January 22nd, 1961, when Coventry fell to -32°F.

1987 - A winter storm produced snow and ice in the Ohio Valley and the Appalachian Region. Snowfall totals in Virginia ranged up to 14 inches around Farmville, while Granville NC reported eight inches of sleet and ice. Freezing rain in eastern North Carolina caused extensive damage to power lines. Gales lashed the coast of Virginia and North Carolina. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Santa Ana winds in southern California gusted to 50 mph in the Rancho Cucamonga area. Quiet weather prevailed across the rest of the nation. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - A surge of arctic air produced all-time record high barometric pressure readings of 31.08 inches at Duluth MN, 30.97 inches at Chicago IL and 30.94 inches at South Bend IN. Readings of 31.00 inches at Milwaukee WI and 30.98 inches at Rockford IL tied their all-time records. Unseasonably warm weather prevailed across the southeastern U.S. Highs of 81 degrees at Athens GA, 87 degrees at Charleston SC, 85 degrees at Macon GA, and 86 degrees at Savannah GA were records for February. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Strong thunderstorms developing ahead of an arctic cold front produced severe weather across the southeastern U.S. between mid morning on the 15th and early evening on the 16th. Thunderstorms spawned thirteen tornadoes, including one which, prior to dawn on the 16th, injured eleven persons near Carrollton GA. There were also 121 reports of large hail or damaging winds. A late afternoon thunderstorm on the 15th produced baseball size hail at Jackson MS, and prior to dawn on the 16th, a thunderstorm produced high winds which injured four persons at Goodwater AL. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



## NO ENEMIES YET, PASTOR

Six-year-old George listened very attentively to his pastor's sermon. As he and his father were leaving church he said, "Pastor, I heard you say that I should love my enemies. I'm only six and I don't have any. But I hope to have some next year when I'm seven."

Individuals tend to become enemies when they cannot agree on an issue or a course of action or a goal. The differences become insurmountable, positions harden, and opinions become set in stone. We could say that enemies are "made." Unfortunately, it is easy to make them, and they usually last a lifetime.

On the other hand, friendships are formed when individuals have common likes and dislikes, goals and values. There are "common denominators" that draw them together and a sense of mutual trust. And we read in Proverbs, "A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in times of need."

Perhaps the greatest part of friendship is loyalty – standing with or alongside of someone when they are enduring times of distress or disappointment, sickness or struggles that never seem to end. When there are "calm seas and gentle winds" carrying us along life's journey, we can pretty much make it on our own.

But when the waves are crashing and the winds are howling – that's when we discover the true meaning of friendship and loyalty. There seems to be nothing as valuable as a friend. We need to make more of them!

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to reach out and make friends with those who are our sisters and brothers in Christ so that we may grow together in loyalty and service. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need. Proverbs 17:17

*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: 02.14.25

11 19 31 49 56 16

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$145,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.15.25

17 29 39 41 52 3

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$23,990,000**

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.15.25

21 34 38 40 48 10

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 11 Hrs 31 Mins 23 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.15.25

19 25 30 32 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$38,000**

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.15.25

12 18 43 58 61 19

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.15.25

3 16 45 54 56 12

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$183,000,000**

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

### **BOYS PREP BASKETBALL**

Bridgewater-Emery 53, White River 37  
Canistota 49, Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 46  
Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 75, Wakpala 58  
Dell Rapids St Mary 68, Freeman 56  
Flandreau Indian 87, Takini 8  
Gregory 49, Corsica/Stickney 36  
Groton 64, Mobridge-Pollock 49  
Hamlin 62, St Thomas More 42  
Harrisburg 43, Rapid City Stevens 41  
Hill City 66, Lakota Tech 49  
Howard 53, Parkston 49  
Kadoka 64, Belle Fourche 47  
Lemmon High School 56, New Underwood 42  
Leola-Frederick High School 70, Webster 42  
Little Wound 70, Lead-Deadwood 65  
Madison 70, Canton 24  
Mahpiya Lúta Red Cloud 76, Douglas 57  
McCook Central-Montrose 85, Philip 43  
Milbank 60, Tri-Valley 48  
Miller 74, Todd County 63  
Northwestern 60, North Central 42  
Rapid City Central 58, Yankton 50  
Rapid City Christian 59, Viborg-Hurley 38  
Sioux Falls Christian 97, Pine Ridge 41  
Sioux Falls Lincoln 74, T F Riggs High School 51  
Sioux Valley 80, Parker 49  
Sunshine Bible Academy 64, Sioux Falls Lutheran 32  
Upton, Wyo. 37, Lyman 35  
Wall 69, Timber Lake 52  
Wessington Springs 63, Hanson 49

### **GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL**

Aberdeen Roncalli 68, Highmore-Harrold 33  
Alcester-Hudson 45, Freeman Academy-Marion 36  
Avon 58, Burke 39  
Brandon Valley 66, Sioux Falls Lincoln 28  
Canton 60, Madison 33  
Centerville 65, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 52  
Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 88, Wakpala 64  
Faith 52, Castlewood 44  
Flandreau Indian 52, Takini 33  
Gayville-Volin High School 45, Corsica/Stickney 36  
Langford 45, Jones County 38

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Lemmon High School 39, New Underwood 28  
Lower Brule 35, Aberdeen Christian 28  
Mahpiya Lúta Red Cloud 64, Douglas 9  
Miller 57, Todd County 25  
Mobridge-Pollock 46, Groton 34  
North Central 58, Northwestern 44  
Rapid City Central 61, Yankton 49  
Rapid City Stevens 60, Harrisburg 47  
Scotland/Menno 41, Irene-Wakonda 36  
Sioux Falls Lutheran 51, Colome 24  
Sioux Valley 67, Parker 38  
Sturgis Brown High School 57, Custer 38  
Sully Buttes 38, Waverly-South Shore 36  
Tri-Valley 57, Milbank 54  
Tripp-Delmont-Armour 48, Marty 41  
Warner 53, Herreid-Selby 49  
Webster 56, Leola-Frederick High School 25  
Wilmot 49, Wolsey-Wessington 41

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

## Finland president urges Europe to firm up Ukraine's hand for US-sought talks with Russia to end war

By EMMA BURROWS Associated Press

MUNICH (AP) — Finland's president on Sunday urged the rearming of Ukraine and putting "maximum pressure on Russia" through sanctions and asset freezes in the lead-up to possible negotiations sought by the U.S. on ending the war.

The comments by Alexander Stubb came as France was set to host a meeting to help firm up Europe's answer to assertive American diplomacy.

On the final day of the Munich Security Conference, Stubb and other European leaders sought to plot how the European Union can move from talk to more action and stay relevant as Washington pushes to stop the fighting. He laid out three phases: "pre-negotiation," ceasefire and long-term peace negotiation.

"The first phase is the pre-negotiation, and this is a moment when we need to rearm Ukraine and put maximum pressure on Russia, which means sanctions, which means frozen assets, so that Ukraine begins these negotiations from a position of strength," he said.

There were early signs of efforts for a quick reaction from EU leaders.

French President Emmanuel Macron will convene top European countries in Paris on Monday for an emergency "working meeting" to discuss next steps for Ukraine after the U.S. announcements last week, French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot said Sunday.

Speaking to public broadcaster France-Info, Barrot underscored a growing cohesion among European allies and said: "A wind of unity is blowing over Europe, as we perhaps have not felt since the COVID period."

News reports said that Prime Ministers Keir Starmer of the United Kingdom, Mette Frederiksen of Denmark and Donald Tusk of Poland were among those set to attend the Paris talks.

Trump's diplomatic push setting a pace

U.S. President Donald Trump's push for a quick way out of Russia's all-out war in Ukraine, which began nearly three years ago on Feb. 24, 2022, has stirred concern and uncertainty in Munich.

After a phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin last week, Trump said that he and Putin would likely meet soon to negotiate a peace deal over Ukraine. Trump later assured Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy he also would have a seat at the table. U.S. officials have indicated that European nations,

however, wouldn't be involved.

"Don't underestimate Trump as a negotiator. I genuinely believe that Putin is baffled and afraid what might be coming from there," Stubb said. "Right now, the ball is in our court here in Europe. We need to convince the Americans where's the value added, and then get back into the table."

"I think in Europe we need to talk less and do more," he said later.

President Edgars Rinkēvičs of Latvia, which like Finland borders Russia, agreed that "if we are strong, if we have something to offer ... then we are going to be interesting to the United States. If you just continue having those nice conferences, talking and whining, then we are not going to be interesting to our own publics very soon."

He also noted "a point that probably went unnoticed Friday" in Munich, which was European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's "important announcement" that she would propose a temporary waiver of EU budgetary rules in crisis situations — this time to allow for extra defense spending.

"I can announce that I will propose to activate the 'escape clause' for defense investments," she said. "This will allow member states to substantially increase their defense expenditure. Of course, we will have to do this in a controlled and conditional way."

Much more at Munich: Tariffs and trade too

The three-day Munich conference was a hub of crisscrossing diplomacy on issues of politics, economics, and defense and security, with top envoys on hand from places as diverse as Syria and Saudi Arabia, and Japan and South Korea, as well as many European leaders.

On Saturday, Zelenskyy called for the creation of an "armed forces of Europe" to better stand up to an expansionist Russia that also could threaten the 27-nation EU.

In an interview with U.S. television network NBC that aired on Sunday, Zelenskyy ratcheted up his warnings and said that Ukraine had shared intelligence with partners indicating that Putin was "preparing to train 150,000 people mostly on the territory of Belarus." He also said that Europe has fewer brigades than Russia.

"The risk that Russia will occupy Europe is 100%," he said in comments to the "Meet the Press" program recorded Friday.

On Saturday, Zelenskyy told The Associated Press that he had directed his ministers not to sign off on a proposed agreement to give the United States access to Ukraine's rare earth minerals, because the document was too focused on U.S. interests.

The proposal was a key part of his talks with U.S. Vice President JD Vance on the sidelines of the Munich event, according to one current and one former senior Ukrainian official familiar with the talks. Zelenskyy's decision not to sign a deal, at least for now, was described as "shortsighted" by a senior White House official.

Japanese Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya told reporters in Munich on Saturday that he has asked U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio to exclude Japan from steel and aluminum tariffs as well as from reciprocal tariff measures.

Iwaya, who had a brief chat with the top U.S. diplomat on the sidelines of the conference, said that he also "raised the issue" of automobile tariffs, though he gave no further details. If imposed, the impact of the tariffs on the Japanese auto industry would be huge, experts say.

## **A year after Navalny's death, the Russian opposition struggles without its charismatic leader**

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

The stunning news came in a terse statement from the Russian penitentiary service a year ago: Opposition leader Alexei Navalny had died in the Arctic Circle penal colony where he was serving a prison sentence.

In the year since the death of Navalny at age 47, the Russian opposition has struggled to find its footing against President Vladimir Putin.

Outlawed at home and operating from exile abroad without Putin's fiercest foe, it has failed to form a united front and a clear plan of action against the Kremlin. Instead, rival groups have traded accusations

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that some see as efforts to discredit each other and vie for influence.

Navalny's death was a blow to hope

Navalny's death was "a point of no return" and left an impossible void to fill, said Oleg Ivanov, a supporter who left Russia after it invaded Ukraine in 2022 and lives in Los Angeles.

"Alexei was the only hope that Russia has, at least potentially and hypothetically, some kind of a meaningful leader who could unite all the people willing to change something in our country, in our lives," Ivanov said in an interview with The Associated Press.

Ivanov, who joined the mass protests that erupted across Russia in 2017, said that since Navalny's death, "I'm afraid that there is no one left who could somehow resist" the Kremlin.

On the anniversary of his death Sunday, Navalny's grave at the Borisovsky Cemetery in Moscow was covered with flowers and cards as supporters flocked to pay tribute to him. Western diplomats, including those from the U.S., U.K. and European Union, also came to honor his memory.

Navalny's parents were greeted with applause and calls of "Thank you!" from hundreds of people.

"We are mourning. We were mourning last year and we are mourning today. We really miss him," said a Muscovite who gave only her first name of Anastasiia because she feared for reprisal. "There are no people like him anymore."

Navalny is the second opposition leader whose sudden death shocked Russia and the world. In February 2015, prominent politician Boris Nemtsov was gunned down on a bridge near the Kremlin just days before he, Navalny and others were expected to lead a mass anti-Putin rally.

Millions viewed his anti-corruption videos

Navalny's vision of a "beautiful Russia of the future," where leaders are freely and fairly elected, corruption is tamed, and democratic institutions work, earned him widespread support in the vast country.

His charisma and sardonic humor drew young, energetic activists to his side — a team that resembled "a fancy startup" rather than a clandestine revolutionary operation, according to his memoir, "Patriot," released eight months after his death.

Together they created colorful, professionally produced videos exposing corruption by government officials. Millions viewed them on YouTube and tens of thousands attended rallies even as authorities cracked down harder on dissent.

Attacks with dye, then a poisoning

As Navalny aspired to public office, authorities responded by bringing multiple criminal charges against him, his allies and even relatives. Regularly jailed, he was physically attacked by Kremlin supporters, one of whom threw green dye in his face that nearly cost him the vision in one eye.

He finished second in the race for Moscow mayor in 2013 amid allegations of vote rigging. In 2017, he announced plans to run for president and set up a sprawling network of regional offices across the country, recruiting local activists. When he was eventually barred from running, he kept those offices open, extending his reach across Russia's 11 time zones.

In 2020, Navalny was poisoned with a nerve agent attack he blamed on the Kremlin, which always denied involvement. His family and allies fought to have him flown to Germany for treatment and recovery. Five months later, he returned to Russia, where he was immediately arrested and imprisoned for the last three years of his life.

But even behind bars, in incredibly harsh conditions of constant pressure and surveillance, Navalny found a way to relay messages. His popular social media accounts were regularly updated with sarcastic vignettes about prison life and political statements.

Thongs attended his funeral in show of defiance

Authorities blamed Navalny's death, announced Feb. 16, 2024, on natural causes — a sudden spike in blood pressure and chronic diseases. His family and allies reject that and insist he was killed on orders from the Kremlin — accusations its officials deny.

Tens of thousands of people attended his funeral March 1 at the Borisovsky Cemetery in a rare show of defiance in a country where any street rally or even single pickets often result in immediate arrest. For

days afterward, people brought flowers to his grave.

At the cemetery on Sunday, Navalny's mother, Lyudmila, once again called for those responsible for his death to be brought to justice.

"The whole world knows the person who ordered (it). But we want those who carried it out to be known, too," she told reporters.

Longtime ally Vladimir Ashurkov described Navalny as "a political figure that basically defined the generation of Russians over the last 15 years."

"While he was alive, even from prison, he was raising his voice against the war and against Putin's tyranny," Ashurkov told AP in London.

Putin's exiled foes face 'dark times'

His widow, Yulia Navalnaya, has vowed to continue his fight. She has recorded regular video addresses to her supporters and has met Western leaders and top officials, advocating for Russians who oppose Putin and his war in Ukraine.

"We know exactly what we are fighting for. The Russia of the future that Alexey dreamt of - free, peaceful, beautiful - is possible. Let's make everything to make his dreams come true," she said in a video released Sunday to mark one year since her husband's death.

Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation continues to expose corruption in Russia in colorful videos and organizes occasional protests abroad, condemning Putin and the war in Ukraine.

A landmark East-West prisoner swap in August freed other key dissidents like Ilya Yashin and Vladimir Kara-Murza, promising to reinvigorate the opposition movement unmoored by Navalny's death. So far, however, they haven't gone beyond meetings with Western officials and supporters in exile, or a few rallies — actions unlikely to dent Putin's war effort or his ever-growing crackdowns that sweep up remaining dissidents and ordinary Russians alike.

Ashurkov describes the situation in Russia and Ukraine now as "dark times" and "difficult times."

But he notes that Navalny went through many difficulties and pressure in his life.

"His advice and his motivation to all of us has been, 'Don't sit still. Try to do something to change the situation, and be prepared for change,'" he said.

## **Rubio in Israel says Hamas must be eradicated, casting further doubt on Gaza's shaky ceasefire**

By MATTHEW LEE and NATALIE MELZER Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Sunday fully endorsed Israel's war aims in the Gaza Strip, saying Hamas "must be eradicated" and throwing the shaky ceasefire into further doubt.

Rubio met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem at the start of a regional tour, where he is likely to face pushback from Arab leaders over President Donald Trump's proposal to transfer the Palestinian population out of Gaza and redevelop it under U.S. ownership.

Netanyahu has welcomed the plan, and said he and Trump have a "common strategy" for Gaza's future. Echoing Trump, he said "the gates of hell would be open" if Hamas does not release dozens of remaining hostages abducted in its Oct. 7, 2023, attack that triggered the 16-month war.

Their remarks came two weeks before the ceasefire's first phase is set to end. The second phase, in which Hamas is to release dozens of remaining hostages in exchange for more Palestinian prisoners, a lasting truce and the withdrawal of Israeli forces, has yet to be negotiated.

Rubio said Hamas cannot continue as a military or government force. "As long as it stands as a force that can govern or as a force that can administer or as a force that can threaten by use of violence, peace becomes impossible," he said. "It must be eradicated."

Such language could complicate continued talks with Hamas, which remains in control of Gaza despite suffering heavy losses in the war.

Rubio is also set to visit regional heavyweights the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

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The Israeli military meanwhile said it carried out an airstrike Sunday on people who approached its forces in southern Gaza. The Hamas-run Interior Ministry said the strike killed three of its policemen while they were securing the entry of aid trucks near Rafah, on the Egyptian border.

Hamas called the attack a "serious violation" of the ceasefire and accused Netanyahu of trying to sabotage the deal.

Resuming the war could doom hostages

Resuming the war could be a death sentence for the remaining hostages and may not succeed in eliminating Hamas, which reasserted control over Gaza when the ceasefire took hold last month.

Netanyahu has signaled readiness to resume the war after the current phase and has offered Hamas a chance to surrender and send its top leaders into exile.

Hamas has rejected such a scenario, and spokesman Abdul Latif al-Qanou told The Associated Press the group accepts either a Palestinian unity government or a technocratic committee to run Gaza. The group insists on Palestinian rule.

Hamas last week threatened to hold up the latest release of hostages because Netanyahu has yet to approve the entry of mobile homes and heavy machinery into Gaza as required by the ceasefire agreement, before proceeding with the release Saturday based on what it called assurances from Arab mediators Qatar and Egypt.

An Israeli official, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with regulations, said the issue would be discussed in the coming days and that Israel was coordinating with the United States.

In another sign of the allies closing ranks, Israel's Defense Ministry said it received a shipment of 2,000-pound (900-kilogram) MK-84 munitions from the United States. The Biden administration had paused a shipment of such bombs last year over concerns about civilian casualties in Gaza.

'If someone has a better plan ... that's great'

In a radio interview last week, Rubio indicated that Trump's proposal was in part aimed at pressuring Arab states to come up with their own postwar plan that would be acceptable to Israel.

He also appeared to suggest that Arab countries send in troops to combat Hamas.

"If someone has a better plan, and we hope they do, if the Arab countries have a better plan, then that's great," Rubio said Thursday on the "Clay and Buck Show."

But "Hamas has guns," he added. "Someone has to confront those guys. It's not going to be American soldiers. And if the countries in the region can't figure that piece out, then Israel is going to have to do it."

Rubio was not scheduled to meet with Palestinians on his Mideast trip.

Arabs have limited options

For Arab leaders, facilitating the mass expulsion of Palestinians from Gaza or battling Palestinian militants on behalf of Israel are nightmare scenarios that would bring fierce domestic criticism and potentially destabilize an already volatile region.

Egypt will host an Arab summit on Feb. 27 and is working with other countries on a counterproposal that would allow for Gaza to be rebuilt without removing its population. Human rights groups say the expulsion of Palestinians would likely violate international law.

Egypt has warned that any mass influx of Palestinians from Gaza would undermine its nearly half-century peace treaty with Israel, a cornerstone of U.S. influence in the region.

"The continuation of the conflict and broadening its scope will harm all parties without exception," Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi said Sunday, according to a statement from his office.

Arab and Muslim countries have conditioned any support for postwar Gaza on a return to Palestinian governance with a pathway to statehood in Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem, territories Israel seized in the 1967 Mideast war.

Israel has ruled out a Palestinian state and any role in Gaza for the Western-backed Palestinian Authority, whose forces were driven out when Hamas seized power there in 2007.

Rubio to visit regional heavyweights

The United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia also have rejected any mass displacement of Palestinians and would be key to any regional response.

The United Arab Emirates was the driving force behind the 2020 Abraham Accords in which four Arab states normalized relations with Israel during Trump's previous term. Trump hopes to expand the accords to include Saudi Arabia, potentially offering closer U.S. defense ties, but the kingdom has said it will not normalize relations with Israel without a pathway to a Palestinian state.

Rubio will not be visiting Egypt or Jordan, close U.S. allies at peace with Israel that have refused to accept any influx of Palestinian refugees. Trump has suggested he might slash U.S. aid to the countries if they don't comply, which could be devastating for their economies.

Rubio is also skipping Qatar.

## **US presented Ukraine with a document to access its minerals but offered almost nothing in return**

By EMMA BURROWS Associated Press

MUNICH, Germany (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says he directed his ministers not to sign off on a proposed agreement to give the United States access to Ukraine's rare earth minerals because the document was too focused on U.S. interests.

The proposal, which was a key part of Zelenskyy's talks with U.S. Vice President JD Vance on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference on Friday, did not offer any specific security guarantees in return, according to one current and one former senior Ukrainian official familiar with the talks.

Zelenskyy's decision not to accept the proposal, at least for now, was described as "short-sighted" by a senior White House official.

"I didn't let the ministers sign a relevant agreement because in my view it is not ready to protect us, our interest," Zelenskyy told The Associated Press on Saturday in Munich.

The proposal focused on how the U.S. could use Kyiv's rare earth minerals "as compensation" for support already given to Ukraine by the Biden administration and as payment for future aid, the current and former senior Ukrainian officials said, speaking anonymously so they could speak freely.

Zelenskyy insists on security guarantees

Ukraine has vast reserves of critical minerals that are used in the aerospace, defense and nuclear industries. The Trump administration has indicated it is interested in accessing them to reduce dependence on China but Zelenskyy said any exploitation would need to be tied to security guarantees for Ukraine that would deter future Russian aggression.

"For me is very important the connection between some kind of security guarantees and some kind of investment," the Ukrainian president told AP.

Zelenskyy did not go into details about why he instructed his officials not to sign the document, which was given to Ukrainian officials on Wednesday by U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bassett on a visit to Kyiv.

"It's a colonial agreement and Zelenskyy cannot sign it," the former senior official said.

White House National Security Council spokesman Brian Hughes did not explicitly confirm the offer, but said in a statement that "President Zelenskyy is being short-sighted about the excellent opportunity the Trump administration has presented to Ukraine."

The Trump administration has grown weary of sending additional U.S. aid to Ukraine and Hughes said a minerals deal would allow American taxpayers to "recoup" money sent to Kyiv, while growing Ukraine's economy.

Hughes added that the White House believes "binding economic ties with the United States will be the best guarantee against future aggression and an integral part of lasting peace." He added: "The U.S. recognizes this, the Russians recognize this, and the Ukrainians must recognize this."

Ukrainians worry about securing mineral sites from Russian attacks

U.S. officials in discussions with their Ukrainian counterparts in Munich were commercially minded and largely concentrated on the specifics of exploring the minerals and how to form a possible partnership to do that with Ukraine, the senior official said.

The potential value of the deposits in Ukraine has not yet been discussed, with much unexplored or



close to the front line.

The U.S. proposal apparently did not take into account how the deposits would be secured in the event of continuing Russian aggression. The official suggested the U.S. did not have "ready answers," to that question and that one of their takeaways from discussions in Munich will be how to secure any mineral extraction operation in Ukraine involving people and infrastructure.

Any deal must be in accordance with Ukrainian law and acceptable to the Ukrainian people, the senior Ukrainian official said.

"Subsoil belongs to Ukrainians under the constitution," Kseniia Orynychak, founder of the National Association of Mining Industry of Ukraine, previously told the AP, suggesting a deal would need popular support.

Zelenskyy and Vance did not discuss the details of the U.S. document during their meeting Friday at the Munich conference, the senior official said. That meeting was "very good" and "substantive," with Vance making it clear his and Trump's main goal was to achieve a durable, lasting peace, the senior official said.

Zelenskyy told Vance that real peace requires Ukraine to be in a "strong position" when starting negotiations, stressed that the U.S. negotiators should come to Ukraine, and that the U.S., Ukraine and Europe must be at the negotiating table for talks with Russia.

No Europeans at the negotiating table?

But Gen. Keith Kellogg, Trump's special envoy for Ukraine and Russia, all but cut Europeans out of any Ukraine-Russia talks, despite Zelenskyy's request.

"You can have the Ukrainians, the Russians, and clearly the Americans at the table talking," Kellogg said at an event hosted by a Ukrainian tycoon at the Munich conference. Pressed on whether that meant Europeans won't be included, he said: "I'm a school of realism. I think that's not going to happen."

Ukraine is now preparing a "counter proposal" which will be delivered to the U.S. in "the near future," the official said.

"I think it's important that the vice president understood me that if we want to sign something, we have to understand that it will work," Zelenskyy told the AP.

That means, he said, "it will bring money and security."

## **Suspect in fatal stabbing in Austria had an 'Islamic terror motive,' officials say**

By STEPHANIE LIECHTENSTEIN Associated Press

VIENNA (AP) — Austrian authorities said the stabbing of six people that left a 14-year-old boy dead was carried out by a man with possible connections to the Islamic State group who appeared to have acted alone.

The suspect, a 23-year-old Syrian, was arrested after the attack, which took place on Saturday afternoon in the center of the southern city of Villach, close to the main square. Police said he used a folding knife. Those wounded were two 15-year-old boys and men aged 28, 32 and 36. Two were seriously wounded and two others are also still receiving hospital treatment, while one was treated for minor injuries.

"This is an Islamist attack with an IS connection by an attacker who radicalized himself within a very short time via the internet," Interior Minister Gerhard Karner told reporters in Villach Sunday.

State Gov. Peter Kaiser thanked a 42-year-old man, also a Syrian, working for a food delivery company who drove toward the suspect and helped prevent the situation from getting worse. "This shows how closely terrorist evil but also human good can be united in one and the same nationality," he said.

As the focus shifted to migration and asylum-seekers, Karner said that it will ultimately be necessary to "carry out a mass screening without cause, because this assassin was not conspicuous."

He did not elaborate on his plans. It was unclear how long the suspect had been in Austria, although authorities said he had a residence permit. Austria's far-right leader Herbert Kickl, whose party won a national election four months ago, called for "a rigorous crackdown on asylum" in the wake of the attack.

On Sunday, Kickl said that since all other parties in Austria had failed to implement the necessary asylum restrictions, it is crucial for his party to control the Interior Ministry — which is in charge of asylum and

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migration — in any future government.

Last week, coalition talks in Austria collapsed for a second time when Kickl's Freedom Party and the conservative People's Party were unable to agree on who would oversee the Interior Ministry.

The mayor of Villach, Günther Albel, said the attack was a "stab in the heart of the city."

State police director Michaela Kohlweiss said police searched his apartment with sniffer dogs and found IS flags on the walls. No weapons or dangerous objects were found, but police seized mobile telephones.

"The current picture is that of a lone perpetrator," Kohlweiss said. Police presence will be increased in the streets of Villach and at events in the weeks ahead, Kohlweiss added.

### A second deadly attack in Austria

This marks the second deadly extremist attack in Austria in recent years. In November 2020, a man who had previously attempted to join the Islamic State group carried out a rampage in Vienna, armed with an automatic rifle and a fake explosive vest, killing four people before being fatally shot by police.

Last August, authorities foiled an attack on Taylor Swift shows in Vienna that was inspired by the Islamic State group.

The Islamic Religious Community in Austria expressed sympathies to the victims and their families in a statement on Sunday and said that it is "fully committed to peaceful and respectful coexistence." The President of the Islamic Religious Community, Umit Vural, added that the attack "has nothing in common with the true values of our faith."

Residents began placing candles at the site of the attack in the city of about 60,000 inhabitants. A group of young people who knew the boy who died in attack gathered at the crime scene on Sunday morning to mourn and tearfully light candles, local media reported.

President Alexander Van der Bellen called the attack "horrific."

"No words can undo the suffering, the horror, the fear. My thoughts are with the family of the deceased victim and the injured," he posted on X.

The Free Syrian Community of Austria issued a statement on Facebook distancing itself from the attack and expressing its deepest condolences to the victims' families. "We all had to flee Syria, our home country, because we were no longer safe there — no one left their country voluntarily. We are grateful to have found asylum and protection in Austria," the association said.

"Anyone who causes strife and disturbs the peace of society does not represent the Syrians who have sought and received protection here," the statement concluded.

### Calls to strengthen migration rules

Kickl wrote on X Saturday that he is "appalled by the horrific act in Villach."

"At the same time, I am angry — angry at those politicians who have allowed stabbings, rapes, gang wars and other capital crimes to become the order of the day in Austria. This is a first-class failure of the system, for which a young man in Villach has now had to pay with his life," Kickl said.

"From Austria to the EU — the wrong rules are in force everywhere. Nobody is allowed to challenge them, everything is declared sacrosanct," he said, adding that his party had outlined what he viewed as necessary changes to immigration laws in its election platform.

Conservative party leader Christian Stocker said on X that the attacker "must be brought to justice and be punished with the full force of the law."

"We all want to live in a safe Austria," he said, adding that this means political measures need to be taken to avoid such acts of horror in the future.

The leader of the Social Democrats, Andreas Babler, said, "Crimes like this one simply should not happen in our society."

## **Flooding in US Southeast leaves 2 dead while snow, ice and wind cause winter misery elsewhere**

By DYLAN LOVAN Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — Much of the U.S. faced another round of biting winter weather on Sunday, with torrential rains causing intense flooding in Kentucky and resulting in at least two deaths. The Northern Plains faced life-threatening cold, and tornado watches were issued for parts of Georgia and Florida.

A 73-year-old man was found dead in floodwaters in Clay County, WKYT-TV reported. Clay County Emergency Management Deputy Director Revelle Berry confirmed the fatality but did not provide additional details.

Severe storms also swept through parts of Florida and Georgia, where tornado watches were in effect early Sunday, the National Weather Service said.

Elsewhere, bone-chilling cold is expected for the Northern Plains with low temperatures into the minus 30s F near the Canadian border. Dangerously cold wind chill temperatures in the Dakotas and Minnesota of minus 40 Fahrenheit (minus 40 Celsius) to minus 50 F (minus 45.6 C) are expected.

Heavy snowfall amounts were expected in parts of New England and northern New York. In some areas, wind gusts could reach 60 mph (about 97 kph) and create "hazardous whiteout conditions," the NWS said.

### **Kentucky faces severe flooding**

The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife said there was an investigation into a death and a rescue operation was underway in Hart County, WNKY-TV reported. The station reported a youth died and a second victim was missing in flooding Saturday evening.

The Fish and Wildlife department and the Hart County Sheriff's Office did not immediately respond to a request for more information from The Associated Press.

Water submerged cars and buildings in Kentucky and mudslides blocked roads in Virginia. Both of the states were under flood warnings, along with Tennessee and Arkansas. The National Weather Service warned residents to stay off the roads.

Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear preemptively declared a state of emergency in Kentucky, where flash flooding was expected into Sunday. Flash flooding hit some roads in Bowling Green and parts of western Kentucky could face up to 8 inches (20.3 centimeters) of rain.

"We want to specifically put assets in places that flood and have flooded in the past," Beshear said on social media.

Beshear later used social media to update residents on areas in danger of flooding, including Jackson County, and said Kentucky State Police officers were performing wellness checks while shelters were opening in Pike County and Jenny Wiley State Resort Park in Prestonsburg.

Beshear said in a post late Saturday that he had written to the White House requesting an emergency disaster declaration and federal funds for impacted areas.

The Kentucky River Medical Center in the city of Jackson said closed its emergency department and was transferring all patients to two other hospitals in the region. The hospital said it would re-evaluate conditions Sunday morning to determine when it can safely reopen. The north fork of the Kentucky River was forecast to crest nearly 14 feet (4.3 meters) above flood stage that afternoon, the weather service said.

Photos posted by authorities and residents on social media showed cars and buildings underwater in south-central and eastern Kentucky. In Buchanan County, Virginia, the sheriff's office said multiple roads were blocked by mudslides.

The Simpson County Office of Emergency Management in Kentucky said authorities performed several rescues from stalled-out vehicles in floodwaters.

"Stay home if you can," the office said on Facebook.

### **New England faces snow, then sleet**

Meanwhile heavy snow was expected to blanket much of New England and then transition to sleet, making travel nearly impossible. The heaviest accumulations, possibly a foot (30.5 centimeters) or more, were expected in upstate New York and portions of northern New England.

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"Ice accumulations up to a quarter inch are forecast for some areas, making driving conditions dangerous. Heavy icing in some locations may result in downed trees and power outages," the weather service warned.

Snow and arctic temperatures swept much of the Midwest and Upper Plains, covering roads in eastern Nebraska, northern Iowa and much of Wisconsin. Winter weather advisories were issued for parts of those states and Michigan, with up to 4 inches (10.6 centimeters) of snow predicted throughout Iowa, southern Wisconsin and most of Michigan by Sunday evening.

Frigid polar vortex

Meteorologists said the U.S. was about to get its 10th and coldest polar vortex stretching event this season, with the northern Rockies and northern Plains first in line. Weather forces in the Arctic are combining to push the chilly air that usually stays near the North Pole into the U.S. and Europe.

In Denver, where temperatures were expected to dip as low as 14 degrees (minus 10 degrees Celsius) over the weekend, the city opened shelters for those living on the streets.

California struggles with mudslides

Dry weather returned to Southern California after the strongest storm of the year. But the risk of rock and mudslides on wildfire-scarred hillsides continued because dangerous slides can strike even after rain stops, particularly in areas where vegetation that helps keep soil anchored has burned away.

Water, debris and boulders rushed down the mountain in the city of Sierra Madre on Thursday night, trapping at least one car in the mud and damaging several home garages with mud and debris. Bulldozers cleaned up mud-covered streets in the city of 10,000 people.

A storm in the Sierra Nevada dumped 6 feet (1.8 meters) of snow over 36 hours. Two Mammoth Mountain ski patrol workers were caught in an avalanche during avalanche mitigation work Friday morning, the resort said in a Facebook post. One was extracted and was responsive, while the other was taken to a hospital with serious injuries.

## Rwanda-backed rebels reach the center of east Congo's 2nd major city in an unprecedented expansion

BUKAVU, Congo (AP) — Rwanda-backed rebels reached the center of east Congo's second largest city, Bukavu, on Sunday morning and were present in most parts of the city after little resistance from government forces in an unprecedented expansion of their reach in their yearslong fighting.

Associated Press journalists witnessed scores of residents cheering on the M23 rebels in central Bukavu on Sunday morning as they walked and drove around the city center after a dayslong march from the region's major city of Goma 63 miles (101 kilometers) away, which they captured late last month. Several parts of the city, however, remained deserted with residents indoors.

The M23 rebels are the most prominent of more than 100 armed groups vying for control of Congo's mineral-rich east, and are supported by some 4,000 troops from neighboring Rwanda, according to the U.N. The fighting has displaced more than 6 million people in the region — the world's largest humanitarian crisis — at least 350,000 of whom were left homeless after the rebels' advance into Goma.

It was not clear if M23 had taken decisive control of the city of about 1.3 million people. The rebels were stationed at the South Kivu administrative office and in several other key locations in the city. There were no signs of fighting or of Congolese forces in most parts of Bukavu on Sunday.

Blaise Byamungu, 37, one of the residents still in Bukavu, said the rebels marched into the city that was "abandoned by all the authorities and without any loyalist force."

"Is the government waiting for them to take over other towns to take action? It's cowardice," said Byamungu.

Unlike in 2012 when M23 only seized Goma in the fighting connected to ethnic tension, analysts have said the rebels this time are eyeing political power.

Many Congolese soldiers were seen on Saturday fleeing the rebels' advance into Bukavu alongside thou-

sands of civilians amid widespread looting and panic.

Congo's President Felix Tshisekedi late Saturday held a security meeting in the faraway capital of Kinshasa, where officials noted that Bukavu was "briefly" invaded by M23 but remains under the control of the Congolese army and allies from local militia, the presidency said on X.

Tshisekedi has warned of the risk of a regional expansion of the conflict. Congo's forces are being supported in Bukavu by troops from Burundi and in Goma by troops from South Africa.

Burundi's president, Evariste Ndayishimiye, appeared to suggest his country will not retaliate in the fighting. In a post on X, he said that "those people who were ready to get profit of the armed attack of Rwanda to Burundi will not see this."

The conflict was ranked high on the African Union summit's top agenda in Ethiopia on Saturday, where U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres warned it risked spiraling into a regional conflagration.

"The sovereignty and territorial integrity of (Congo) must be respected," Guterres said.

Still, African leaders and the international community have been reluctant to take decisive action against M23 or Rwanda as most continue to call for a ceasefire and a dialogue between Congo and the rebels.

The Congo River Alliance, a coalition of rebel groups that includes M23, said it was committed to "defending the people of Bukavu" in a Saturday statement that did not acknowledge their presence in the city. "We call on the population to remain in control of their city and not give in to panic," Lawrence Kanyuka, the alliance's spokesperson, said in a statement.

The fighting in Congo has connections with a decadeslong ethnic conflict. M23 says it is defending ethnic Tutsis in Congo. Rwanda has claimed the Tutsis are being persecuted by Hutus and former militias responsible for the 1994 genocide of 800,000 Tutsis and others in Rwanda. Many Hutus fled to Congo after the genocide and founded the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda militia group. Rwanda says the group is "fully integrated" into the Congolese military, which denies the charges.

## **The collapse of a gold mine has killed 42 people and injured several others in Mali**

By BABA AHMED Associated Press

BAMAKO, Mali (AP) — A gold mine collapsed in eastern Mali, killing dozens of people and injuring many more, according to Malian television and officials in the Kéniéba district where the accident occurred. It is the second major accident this year in the French-speaking West African country, which is one of Africa's top three gold producers.

Late on Saturday, Malian television announced the collapse of the site at Bilali Koto in the commune of Dabia, with a provisional death toll of 42 and many injured.

The prefect of Kéniéba, who represents the government in the locality, confirmed the incident. "The death toll of 42 should be definitive," Mohamed Dicko told The Associated Press on Sunday.

"The accident happened yesterday, Saturday. It was a landslide at a site run by Chinese nationals," said community leader Falaye Sissoko. Dicko said authorities were still trying to establish whether the mine was operating legally.

This is the second time in less than a month that such an accident has occurred in Mali. On Jan. 29, a landslide killed several gold miners, mostly women, in the Koulikoro region in the south of the country.

In January last year, an unregulated gold mine collapsed near the capital, Bamako, killing more than 70 people.

In recent years, there have been concerns that profits from unregulated mining in northern Mali could benefit extremists active in that part of the country.

"Gold is by far Mali's most important export, comprising more than 80% of total exports in 2021," according to the International Trade Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce. It says more than 2 million people, or more than 10% of Mali's population, depend on the mining sector for income.

Artisanal gold mining is estimated to produce around 30 tons of gold a year and represents 6% of Mali's annual gold production.

## At least 18 people are dead after a stampede at New Delhi railway station in India

NEW DELHI (AP) — At least 18 people, including 14 women, were killed in a stampede at a railway station in India's capital of New Delhi, the Press Trust of India news agency reported Sunday.

Many of the victims were Hindu pilgrims who were traveling to the Maha Kumbh festival in Prayagraj in northern India, according to Delhi's caretaker chief minister, Atishi, who uses only one name.

The stampede happened late Saturday while thousands of people were gathered at the New Delhi railway station waiting to board a train. The incident occurred after some passengers slipped and fell on others while coming down from a footbridge that connects train platforms, authorities said.

Sheela Devi, who was at Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narain Hospital in New Delhi to collect her daughter-in-law's body, said an announcement about a change of train platforms created confusion among the passengers that led to the stampede.

"The crowd went out of control and no one could control it," said Nikhil Kumar, a shopkeeper who witnessed the crowd surge.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that he was "distressed by the stampede."

"My thoughts are with all those who have lost their loved ones. I pray that the injured have a speedy recovery. The authorities are assisting all those who have been affected by this stampede," he said on the social platform X.

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said that an investigation has been ordered to find what led to the stampede.

At least 30 people were killed in a stampede at the six-week festival last month after tens of millions of Hindus gathered to take a dip in sacred river waters.

## In Ukraine, a potential arms-for-minerals deal inspires hope and skepticism

By SAMYA KULLAB and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KIROVOHRAD REGION, Ukraine (AP) — The mineral ilmenite is extracted from mounds of sand deep in the earth and refined using a method that summons the force of gravity, resulting in a substance that glimmers like a moonlit sky.

Ukraine boasts vast reserves of ilmenite — a key element used to produce titanium — in the heavy mineral sands that stretch for miles along the country's embattled east.

Much of it, as with all of Ukraine's critical minerals industry, is underdeveloped because of war as well as onerous state policies.

That is poised to change if U.S. President Donald Trump's administration agrees to a deal with Ukraine to exchange critical minerals for continued American military aid.

In the central region of Kirovohrad, the ilmenite open-pit mine is a canyon of precious deposits that its owner is keen to develop with U.S. companies. But many unknowns stand in the way of turning these riches into profit: cost, licensing terms and whether such a deal will be underpinned by security guarantees.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Saturday at the Munich Security Conference that he did not permit his ministers to sign a mineral resource agreement with the U.S. because the current version is not "ready to protect us, our interests."

Ukrainian businessmen with knowledge of the minerals industry also privately expressed skepticism about whether a deal is viable. The capital-intensive industry is unlikely to yield results in years, if not decades, as geological data is either limited or classified. Many question what conditions American companies are willing to risk to build up the industry and whether existing Ukrainian policies that have so far deterred local businessmen will accommodate foreign investors.

"The main thing we can gain is certain security guarantees obtained through economic means, so that someone stronger than us has an interest in protecting us," said Andriy Brodsky, CEO of Velta, a leading

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titanium mining company in Ukraine.

The question of security guarantees

A deal, which would essentially barter one resource for another, could help strengthen Kyiv's relationship with the Trump administration.

The United States is a major consumer of critical raw earth minerals such as lithium and gallium, two elements that Ukraine has in proven reserves. Trump has specifically mentioned rare earth elements, but these are not well researched, industry experts told The Associated Press.

Titanium, used in aerospace, defense and industry, is also high in demand and the U.S. is a leading importer of ilmenite. Sourcing the minerals from Ukraine would reduce future reliance on Russia and China.

In exchange, Kyiv would continue to receive a steady stream of American weaponry that offers leverage against Moscow and without which Ukraine cannot ward off future Russian aggression in the event of a ceasefire.

The question of security guarantees is a sticking point for companies, Ukrainian businessmen and analysts said. A senior Ukrainian official, speaking anonymously to describe private conversations, told the AP that U.S. companies expressed interest in investing but needed to ensure their billions will be safeguarded in the event of renewed conflict. But once invested in Ukraine, the presence of American business interests alone might act as a guarantee, Brodsky said.

"If this process starts, it will continue," Brodsky said. "Once the investment figures exceed hundreds of billions, the Americans, a highly pragmatic people, will protect their profits earned on Ukrainian soil. They will defend their interests against Russia, China, Korea, Iran and anyone else. They will protect what they consider theirs."

Growing American interest

Brodsky, who just returned from a trip to Washington and New York, said the conversation among U.S. businesses is changing in Kyiv's favor.

"A lot of people in very serious and wealthy offices are saying that now, we — our country and my company — are in the right place and doing exactly what needs to be done at this moment," he said.

Velta has worked with American partners for many years. Brodsky has begun negotiating with companies he believes could be a partner in the event of a deal.

Ukraine has never been attractive to foreign investors because of prohibitive government policies — not offering incentives to attract foreigners, for instance. Brodsky believes that international companies will need to pair up with local partners to flourish.

American companies have several ways to enter the market, explained Ksenia Orynychak, director of the National Association of Extractive Industries of Ukraine, but would require traversing "certain circles of hell" in Ukraine's bureaucracy. Teaming up with an existing Ukrainian license owner is possibly the most straightforward.

She said more exploration is needed in the field and hinted existing data may have been acquired through ulterior motives. Under the Soviet system, geologists stood to gain if they claimed to have found large reserves.

"Someone did it so that Moscow would praise Ukrainian geologists or Soviet geologists," she said.

She advises American investors to lower existing thresholds for exploration because bidding can take place in areas where reserves are only presumed, not proven.

"I believe, and so does the expert community, that this is not right. In fact, we are selling a pig in a poke," she said.

A historically untapped sector

At the extraction site, the air is dense with ilmenite dust. When the afternoon sun's rays pierce the darkened space, they sparkle and dance in the air. The soot covers the faces of workers who spend hours inside every day extracting the precious material from sand.

The gravity separation method removes unwanted elements in the ore and water separated from the mineral rains down through metal-lined floors. Workers are used to getting wet and don't bat an eye.

Titanium is developed from the purified ilmenite at a different facility.

Velta began in the form of an expired license for geological exploration and a business plan for \$7 million when Brodsky acquired the company. It would be eight years and many millions more invested before he could even think about production capacity.

The deal also does not factor in a crucial element that could prove challenging later: The position of Ukrainian people themselves. According to the Constitution, the subsoil where extraction would take place belongs to Ukraine.

"I am very afraid that they (Ukrainian people) already had disapproving reviews, that everything is being given away. Who allowed him? He had no right? And so on," Orynachak said.

Those sensitivities were echoed among workers at the Velta mine. Speaking anonymously to voice his true thoughts, one said: "If you have a vegetable garden in your home, do you invite a foreigner to take it?"

The high risk often is a key reason that some Ukrainian businessmen privately express skepticism about the deal.

When one businessman of a major group of companies heard about the arms-for-minerals deal, his first impression was: "This is just hot air," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity to speak freely about his thoughts. "This is a very capital intensive industry. Just to take ground from an open pit will cost you billions. Not millions, billions."

## Scientists are racing to discover the depth of ocean damage sparked by the LA wildfires

By DORANY PINEDA Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — On a recent Sunday, Tracy Quinn drove down the Pacific Coast Highway to assess damage wrought upon the coastline by the Palisades Fire.

The water line was darkened by ash. Burnt remnants of washing machines and dryers and metal appliances were strewn about the shoreline. Sludge carpeted the water's edge. Waves during high tide lapped onto charred homes, pulling debris and potentially toxic ash into the ocean as they receded.

"It was just heartbreaking," said Quinn, president and CEO of the environmental group Heal the Bay, whose team has reported ash and debris some 25 miles (40 kilometers) south of the Palisades burn area west of Los Angeles.

As crews work to remove potentially hundreds of thousands of tons of hazardous materials from the Los Angeles wildfires, researchers and officials are trying to understand how the fires on land have impacted the sea. The Palisades and Eaton fires scorched thousands of homes, businesses, cars and electronics, turning everyday items into hazardous ash made of pesticides, asbestos, plastics, lead, heavy metals and more.

Since much of it could end up in the Pacific Ocean, there are concerns and many unknowns about how the fires could affect life under the sea.

"We haven't seen a concentration of homes and buildings burned so close to the water," Quinn said.

Fire debris and potentially toxic ash could make the water unsafe for surfers and swimmers, especially after rainfall that can transport chemicals, trash and other hazards into the sea. Longer term, scientists worry if and how charred urban contaminants will affect the food supply.

The atmospheric river and mudslides that pummeled the Los Angeles region last week exacerbated some of those fears.

When the fires broke out in January, one of Mara Dias' first concerns was ocean water contamination. Strong winds were carrying smoke and ash far beyond the blazes before settling at sea, said the water quality manager for the Surfrider Foundation, an environmental nonprofit.

Scientists on board a research vessel during the fires detected ash and waste on the water as far as 100 miles (161 kilometers) offshore, said marine ecologist Julie Dinasquet with the University of California, San Diego's Scripps Institution of Oceanography. Things like twigs and shard. They described the smell as electronics burning, she recalled, "not like a nice campfire."

Runoff from rains also are a huge and immediate concern. Rainfall picks up contaminants and trash



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while flushing toward the sea through a network of drains and rivers. That runoff could contain "a lot of nutrients, nitrogen and phosphate that end up in the ash of the burn material that can get into the water," said Dias, as well as "heavy metals, something called PAHs, which are given off when you burn different types of fuel."

Mudslides and debris flows in the Palisades Fire burn zone also can dump more hazardous waste into the ocean. After fires, the soil in burn scars is less able to absorb rainfall and can develop a layer that repels water from the remains of seared organic material. When there is less organic material to hold the soil in place, the risks of mudslides and debris flows increase.

Los Angeles County officials, with help from other agencies, have set thousands of feet of concrete barriers, sandbags, silt socks and more to prevent debris from reaching beaches. The LA County Board of Supervisors also recently passed a motion seeking state and federal help to expand beach clean ups, prepare for storm runoff and test ocean water for potential toxins and chemicals, among other things.

Beyond the usual samples, state water officials and others are testing for total and dissolved metals such as arsenic, lead and aluminum and volatile organic compounds.

They also are sampling for microplastics, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, or PAHs, that are harmful to human and aquatic life, and polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, a group of man-made chemicals shown to cause cancer in animals and other serious health effects. Now banned from being manufactured, they were used in products like pigments, paints and electrical equipment.

County public health officials said chemical tests of water samples last month did not raise health concerns, so they downgraded one beach closure to an ocean water advisory. Beachgoers were still advised to stay out of the water.

Dinasquet and colleagues are working to understand how far potentially toxic ash and debris dispersed across the ocean, how deep and how fast they sunk and, over time, where it ends up.

Forest fires can deposit important nutrients like iron and nitrogen into the ocean ecosystem, boosting the growth of phytoplankton, which can create a positive, cascading effect across the ecosystem. But the potentially toxic ash from urban coastal fires could have dire consequences, Dinasquet said.

"Reports are already showing that there was a lot of lead and asbestos in the ash," she added. "This is really bad for people so its probably also very bad for the marine organisms."

A huge concern is whether toxic contaminants from the fire will enter the food chain. Researchers plan to take tissue fragments from fish for signs of heavy metals and contaminants. But they say it will take a while to understand how a massive urban fire will affect the larger ecosystem and our food supply.

Dias noted the ocean has long taken in pollution from land, but with fires and other disasters, "everything is compounded and the situation is even more dire."

## How Presidents Day has evolved from reverence to retail

By BEN FINLEY Associated Press

NORFOLK, Va. (AP) — Like the other Founding Fathers, George Washington was uneasy about the idea of publicly celebrating his life. He was the first leader of a new republic, not a king.

And yet the United States will once again commemorate its first president on Monday, 293 years after he was born.

The meaning of Presidents Day has changed dramatically, from being mostly unremarkable and filled with work for Washington in the 1700s to the bonanza of consumerism it has become today. For some historians, the holiday has lost all discernible meaning.

Historian Alexis Coe, author of "You Never Forget Your First: A Biography of George Washington," has said she thinks about Presidents Day in much the same way as the towering monument in D.C. bearing his name.

"It's supposed to be about Washington, but can you really point to anything that looks or sounds like him?" she remarked in an interview with The Associated Press in 2024. "Jefferson and Lincoln are presented as people with limbs and noses and words associated with their memorials. And he's just a giant, granite

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point. He has been sanded down to have absolutely no identifiable features.”

Here is a look at how things have evolved:

Washington’s birthdays were celebrated, sometimes

Washington was born Feb. 22, 1732, on Popes Creek Plantation near the Potomac River in Virginia.

Technically, though, he was born Feb. 11 under the ancient Julian calendar, which was still in use for the first 20 years of his life. The Gregorian calendar, intended to more accurately mark the solar year, was adopted in 1752, adding 11 days.

Either way, Washington paid little attention to his birthday, according to Mountvernon.org, the website of the organization that manages his estate. Surviving records make no mention of observances at Mount Vernon, while his diary shows he was often hard at work.

“If he had it his way, he would be at home with his family,” Coe said. “Maybe some beloved nieces and nephews (and friend) Marquis de Lafayette would be ideal. And Martha’s recipe for an indulgent cake. But that’s about it.”

Washington’s birthday was celebrated by his peers in government when he was president, mostly.

Congress voted during his first two terms to take a short commemorative break each year, with one exception, his last birthday in office, Coe said. By then, Washington was less popular, partisanship was rampant and many members of his original Cabinet were gone, including Thomas Jefferson.

“One way to show their disdain for his Federalist policies was to keep working through his birthday,” Coe said.

The Library of Congress does note a French military officer, the comte de Rochambeau, threw a ball celebrating Washington’s 50th birthday in 1782.

After his death, a market for memorabilia is born

Washington was very aware of his inaugural role as president and its distinction from the British crown. He didn’t want to be honored like a king, Seth Bruggeman, a history professor at Temple University in Philadelphia, told the AP last year.

Still, he said, a market for Washington memorabilia sprang up almost immediately after his death in 1799 at age 67, with people snapping up pottery and reproductions of etchings portraying him as a divine figure going off into heaven.

“Even in that early moment, Americans kind of conflated consumerism with patriotic memory,” said Bruggeman, whose books include “Here, George Washington Was Born: Memory, Material Culture, and the Public History of a National Monument.”

Making it official with parades and festivals

It wasn’t until 1832, the centennial of his birth, that Congress established a committee to arrange national “parades, orations and festivals,” according to the Congressional Research Service.

Only in 1879 was his birthday formally made into a legal holiday for federal employees in the District of Columbia.

The official designation for the holiday is Washington’s Birthday, although it has come to be known informally as Presidents Day. Arguments have been made to honor President Lincoln as well because his birth date falls nearby, on Feb. 12.

A small number of states, including Illinois, observe Lincoln’s birthday as a public holiday, according to the Library of Congress. And some commemorate both Lincoln and Washington on Presidents Day.

But on the federal level, the day is still officially Washington’s Birthday.

A shift to consumerism

By the late 1960s, Washington’s Birthday was one of nine federal holidays that fell on specific dates on different days of the week, according to a 2004 article in the National Archives’ Prologue magazine.

Congress voted to move some of those to Mondays, following concerns that were in part about absenteeism among government workers when a holiday fell midweek. But lawmakers also noted clear benefits to the economy, including boosts in retail sales and travel on three-day weekends.

The Uniform Monday Holiday Act took effect in 1971, moving Presidents Day to the third Monday in

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February. Sales campaigns soared, historian C. L. Arbelbide wrote in Prologue.

Bruggeman said Washington and the other Founding Fathers "would have been deeply worried" by how the holiday became taken over by commercial and private interests.

"They were very nervous about corporations," Bruggeman said. "It wasn't that they forbade them. But they saw corporations as like little republics that potentially threatened the power of The Republic."

Coe, who is also a fellow at the Washington think tank New America, said by now the day is devoid of recognizable traditions.

"There's no moment of reflection," Coe said. Given today's widespread cynicism toward the office, she added, that sort of reflection "would probably be a good idea."

## Hong Kong residents compete to name twin panda cubs who just turned 6 months old

By KANIS LEUNG Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Panda craze has once again gripped Hong Kong as residents compete to name the territory's first locally-born giant panda cubs who just turned six months old.

The competition to name the twin cubs, born Aug. 15, launched Saturday following a celebratory ceremony attended by Hong Kong leader John Lee and other officials at Ocean Park, the theme park that houses the twins, their parents and two other giant pandas that arrived from mainland China last year. Residents can submit their suggestions via the park's website.

Lee said the southern Chinese city now has the largest number of pandas in captivity outside of mainland China, and the cubs' names would be announced in the first half of this year.

The pair, currently identified as the "Elder Sister" and the "Little Brother," will make their public debut on Sunday and meet visitors for five hours daily. Those who want to enjoy time with the cubs outside regular visiting hours, before the park opens, can pay 1,500 Hong Kong dollars (about \$190).

During a media preview session on Saturday, the male cub laid on a swing playing with a tree stick before a carer placed him on a slide. The female cub explored the enclosure before climbing onto a tree.

The panda carers said the female cub seemed more active than her male twin. She loves climbing the tree inside the enclosure and resting there while her brother likes to wander around and play with the plants. The male cub has been marked with two purple food-coloring spots on its back to distinguish it from his sister.

The birth of the baby pandas last year made their mother Ying Ying the world's oldest first-time panda mom.

Their popularity on social media also raised hopes for the city's tourism boost. Officials have encouraged businesses to capitalize on the panda craze to seize opportunities in what some lawmakers have dubbed the "panda economy."

Ocean Park's chairman Paulo Pong told reporters on Saturday that the park already saw income increases over the Christmas period and Lunar New Year holiday, alongside an uptake in overseas tourists, after the newly arrived pandas from mainland China started to greet the public.

"We're turning the page and we believe the pandas are definitely helping the income of the park," he said.

But caring for pandas in captivity is expensive. Ocean Park recorded a deficit of 71.6 million Hong Kong dollars (\$9.2 million) last financial year, and in 2020 required a government relief fund to stay afloat. Observers are watching if taking care of six pandas will add to its burden or give it a chance to revive its business.

Pong said raising pandas was about animal conservation and education, instead of "just a money exercise."

Pandas are considered China's unofficial national mascot. The country's giant panda loan program with overseas zoos has long been seen as a tool of Beijing's soft-power diplomacy.

## **A 23-year-old man stabbed 6 people in Austria killing 1 in what police describe as a random attack**

By STEPHANIE LICHTENSTEIN Associated Press

VIENNA (AP) — A 23-year-old man stabbed six passersby in southern Austria on Saturday in what police said was a random attack that left a 14-year-old dead and five others injured.

The suspect was detained in the city of Villach, where the attack took place, police said. He is a Syrian national with legal residence in Austria, they said.

Police spokesperson Rainer Dionisio said a motive was not immediately known. He added that police were investigating the attacker's personal background. "We have to wait until we get secure information," he said.

A 42-year-old man who works for a food delivery company witnessed the incident from his car, police said. He drove toward the suspect and helped to prevent things from getting worse, Dionisio told Austria's public broadcaster ORF.

The victims were all men, with two seriously injured and two sustaining minor injuries, police said. Later on Saturday, police said a fifth person, also a man, was injured in the attack.

Peter Kaiser, the governor of the Austrian province of Carinthia, expressed his condolences to the family of the 14-year-old victim.

"This outrageous atrocity must be met with harsh consequences. I have always said with clarity and unambiguously: Those who live in Carinthia, in Austria, have to respect the law and adjust to our rules and values."

Far-right leader Herbert Kickl said on the X social media platform that he is "appalled by the horrific act in Villach" and wished the family of the 14-year-old victim who was killed in the attack "much strength."

"At the same time, I am angry — angry at those politicians who have allowed stabbings, rapes, gang wars and other capital crimes to become the order of the day in Austria. This is a first-class failure of the system, for which a young man in Villach has now had to pay with his life," Kickl said.

"From Austria to the EU — the wrong rules are in force everywhere. Nobody is allowed to challenge them, everything is declared sacrosanct," he said, adding that his party had outlined what he viewed as necessary changes to immigration laws in his party's election platform.

"We need a rigorous crackdown on asylum and must not continue to import conditions like those in Villach."

Conservative party leader Christian Stocker said on X that the attacker "must be brought to justice and be punished with the full force of the law."

"We all want to live in a safe Austria, adding that this means political measures need to be taken to "avoid such acts of horror in the future," he said.

The leader of the Social Democrats, Andreas Babler, said on X that "the full force of the law" must be used. "Crimes like this one simply should not happen in our society."

Austria's Interior Minister Gerhard Karner was expected in Villach on Sunday morning, according to Austria's public broadcaster ORF.

On Sunday, authorities planned to establish a zone in the city center for those who want to grieve.

Police said it wasn't clear whether the suspect acted alone and continued to search for potential additional suspects. It wasn't immediately known whether there is any connection between the attacker and the victims.

According to the Interior Ministry, 24,941 foreigners applied for asylum in Austria in 2024. The largest group of applicants was from Syria, followed by Afghanistan.

Over the past two years, the number of asylum seekers has decreased significantly. In 2022, applications peaked at over 100,000, while approximately 59,000 individuals sought asylum in 2023.

Several European countries, among them Austria, said in December they are suspending decisions on asylum claims by Syrian nationals because of the unclear political situation in their homeland following the fall of Bashar Assad.

The issue of migration has taken center stage in many European countries, with far-right parties making inroads in elections.

In Austria, migration was a prominent topic leading up to last year's election, which resulted in the far-right Freedom Party securing its first national election victory since World War II.

On Saturday, police in neighboring Germany said a 2-year-old girl and her mother died two days after being injured in a car-ramming attack during a labor union demonstration in Munich. It marked the fifth attack involving immigrants in Germany over the past nine months, with migration becoming a significant issue ahead of upcoming elections on Feb. 23.

## **Rwanda-backed rebels advance and Congolese forces retreat from eastern Congo's second largest city**

By JUSTIN KABUMBA, SAM METZ and RODNEY MUHUMUZA Associated Press

GOMA, Congo (AP) — Panic swept through eastern Congo's second-largest city on Saturday as residents and soldiers fled by the thousands, scrambling to escape the looming advance of Rwanda-backed rebels.

The morning after M23 fighters entered the outskirts of Bukavu — a city of about 1.3 million people that lies 63 miles (101 kilometers) south of rebel-held Goma — some streets were flooded by residents attempting to leave and looters filling flour sacks with what they could find. A pall of silence set in later in the day as residents and business owners braced for what comes next.

But on Saturday, M23 did not appear to have taken decisive control of Bukavu. The group did not announce advances like a day earlier when they took control of an airport outside the city.

A relative calm returned as gunfights stopped after Congolese troops exited the city and drove south, Bukavu resident Alexis Bisimwa said.

"We're no longer waiting for the crackling of bullets as we were during the day," he told The Associated Press by telephone.

Residents said they were shocked to see corpses burnt to ash lying strewn in the streets — casualties of the looters who filled the vacuum left by Congolese soldiers abandoning their posts.

"They set fire to the ammunition they were unable to take with them," said Alain Iragi, among the residents who fled in search of safety on Saturday.

Reports and social media videos showed the region's factories pillaged and prisons emptied while electricity remained on and communication lines open in most places.

"It's a disgrace. Some citizens have fallen victim to stray bullets. Even some soldiers still present in the city are involved en masse in these cases of looting," a 25-year-old resident of a neighborhood being looted told the AP.

The Congo River Alliance, a coalition of rebel groups that includes M23, blamed Congolese troops and their allies from local militia and neighboring Burundi for the disorder in Bukavu.

"We call on the population to remain in control of their city and not give in to panic," Lawrence Kanyuka, the alliance's spokesperson, said in a statement on Saturday.

Pierre Bahizi, the rebels' new self-proclaimed governor of Bukavu, implored the city's residents to remain calm and organize among themselves to bring a return of order.

"We must not leave power in the street," he said Saturday.

Rebels push south after seizing Goma last month

M23, a rebel group backed by about 4,000 troops from neighboring Rwanda, is the most prominent of more than 100 vying for control of Congo's mineral-rich east.

Its southward expansion encompasses more territory than rebels had previously seized and poses an unprecedented challenge to the central government in Kinshasa. Taking Bukavu could risk deeper scrutiny from an international community whose attentions have been divided amid several global conflicts. French President Emmanuel Macron on Saturday called for an immediate ceasefire, an M23 withdrawal and a safe return of Congolese authorities to Bukavu.

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The rebellion underway has killed nearly 3,000 people in eastern Congo and stranded hundreds of thousands of displaced. At least 350,000 internally displaced people are without shelter, the U.N. and Congolese authorities have said.

The rebels show little sign of slowing. On Friday, they claimed to have seized the airport serving Bukavu, located in a town north of the city.

The AP couldn't confirm who was in control of the strategically important airport, which Congolese forces use to resupply troops and humanitarian groups to import aid. Congo River Alliance said on Saturday that M23 had taken control of the airport to prevent Congolese forces from launching airstrikes against civilians.

Government officials and local civil society leaders didn't immediately comment, though Congo's Communications Ministry said the rebels had violated ceasefire agreements and attacked Congolese troops working to avoid urban warfare and violence in Bukavu.

The reports of looting and disorder come a day after residents told the AP that soldiers in Kavumu — the airport town north of Bukavu — had abandoned their positions to head toward the city. The chain of events mirror what transpired last month in the lead-up to the M23's capture of Goma. Congo's military, despite its size and funding, has long been hindered by shortcomings in training and coordination and recurring reports of corruption.

African leaders worry conflict could spread

The conflict was among the top agenda items at the African Union summit in Ethiopia on Saturday, where U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres warned it risked spiraling into a regional conflagration.

"Regional escalation must be avoided at all costs," Guterres told the African Union summit. "The sovereignty and territorial integrity of (Congo) must be respected."

Yet African leaders and the international community have been reluctant to take decisive action against M23 or Rwanda.

Though Guterres said that the solution to the conflict lay in Africa, African leaders disagree on how to resolve the conflict in a way that satisfies the warring parties.

Despite universal calls for a ceasefire, the rebellion has inflamed historic tensions within the Great Lakes region. Troops from Burundi and the Southern African Development Community are deployed in support of Congolese forces. Ugandan troops are fighting other rebel groups in other regions within eastern Congo, where attacks on civilians have been reported in recent months.

In Ituri, hundreds of kilometers north of where M23 is on the march, Ugandan troops are hunting members of the Islamist Allied Democratic Forces.

The fighting risked severe escalation on Saturday. Muhoozi Kainerugaba, Uganda's top military commander, told all armed forces in the province's capital that they had 24 hours to surrender and warned that it would soon be under Ugandan Army control.

"If they don't, we shall consider them enemies and attack them," Kainerugaba said in a post on X, without identifying the other forces.

## **Israel and Hamas complete their latest exchange as ceasefire's first phase has just 2 weeks left**

By MOHAMMAD JAHJOUH, MELANIE LIDMAN and JALAL BWAITEL Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israel and Hamas completed the sixth exchange of hostages and Palestinian prisoners on Saturday with just over two weeks remaining in their fragile Gaza ceasefire's initial phase, and U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio landed in Israel to begin a Mideast tour.

Israelis expressed relief as the three hostages — Argentinian-Israeli Iair Horn, 46; American-Israeli Sa-gui Dekel Chen, 36; and Russian-Israeli Alexander Troufanov, 29 — seemed in better condition than the emaciated ones freed a week ago.

Troufanov was informed of his father's death in the Hamas-led Oct. 7, 2023, attack that sparked the 16-month war. Chen was meeting his youngest daughter for the first time. Horn's brother, Eitan, remains in captivity.

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Armed militants made the pale, worn men speak to a crowd before handing them over to the Red Cross in the southern city of Khan Younis. The 369 Palestinian prisoners were later released.

A tense dispute had threatened to derail the ceasefire, but Hamas said Thursday it would move ahead with the planned exchange after it said mediators Egypt and Qatar pledged to "remove all hurdles" so Israel would allow more tents, medical supplies and other essentials into devastated Gaza.

U.S. President Donald Trump's proposal to remove Gaza's over 2 million Palestinians and settle them elsewhere in the region also shook the truce. Rubio will hear more about that, starting with his meeting Sunday with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Trump on Saturday posted on social media that "Israel will now have to decide what they will do about the 12:00 O'CLOCK, TODAY, DEADLINE imposed on the release of ALL HOSTAGES. The United States will back the decision they make!"

Israel has not imposed such a deadline. Netanyahu's office said he would convene the Cabinet as soon as possible to decide on next steps.

In the occupied West Bank, released prisoners were greeted by a cheering crowd. Some appeared gaunt, and the Palestinian Red Crescent emergency service said four were taken for treatment. Buses transported 333 others to Gaza.

The ceasefire took effect on Jan. 19. Before Saturday, 21 hostages and over 730 Palestinian prisoners had been freed during the truce's first phase.

There have not been substantive negotiations over the ceasefire's second phase, in which Hamas would release all remaining hostages in return for ending the war.

The hostages and prisoners released

The three hostages had been abducted from Kibbutz Nir Oz, a community hard-hit in the Oct. 7 attack. Horn was taken with his brother, who is not expected to be released in the ceasefire's first phase.

"Now, we can breathe a little. Our Iair is home after surviving hell in Gaza," his family said. "Now, we need to bring Eitan back so our family can truly breathe."

Chen's wife, Avital Dekel Chen, hid in a safe room with their daughters. She gave birth to their third daughter two months later. She told Israeli media she was overwhelmed with happiness to see her husband back in Israel, where he was meeting his youngest daughter, Shachar.

Troufanov was taken hostage with his grandmother, mother and girlfriend. The women were released during a brief ceasefire in November 2023. His family said they were "overwhelmed with emotion and gratitude" Saturday.

Of the 251 people abducted during the Oct. 7 attack, 73 remain in Gaza, around half believed to be dead. Nearly all are men, including Israeli soldiers.

One hostage, 65-year-old Keith Siegel, said Friday in a video message addressed to Trump that his captors treated him worse as the war intensified, kicking him, spitting on him and holding him without water or light.

The released Palestinian prisoners included 36 serving life sentences for involvement in deadly attacks against Israelis. They include Ahmed Barghouti, 48, a close aide of militant leader and iconic Palestinian political figure Marwan Barghouti. Twenty-four of those will be exiled abroad.

"When I saw my son, my soul came back to me again and I came back to life," said Om Bashar, mother of Hassan Aweis, sentenced to life in 2002 on charges of voluntary manslaughter, planting an explosive device and attempted murder.

Israel also committed to releasing over 1,000 detained from Gaza provided they did not participate in the Oct. 7 attack.

The Israeli Prison Service released the Palestinians in sweatshirts emblazoned with a Star of David and the phrase "Never forgive, never forget" in Arabic. Some threw their sweatshirts on the ground and burned them.

The truce remains fragile

Netanyahu's far-right allies want the war to resume in early March with the goal of destroying Hamas. The

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militant group remains in control of the territory after one of the deadliest and most destructive military campaigns in recent history.

Hamas may be unwilling to release more hostages if it believes the war will resume.

Many Israelis want a deal to bring all remaining hostages home, fearing time is running out. They urge Netanyahu to send a senior-level delegation to talks on the ceasefire's second phase. "Any other decision is sabotage that endangers the lives of the abductees," Einav Zangauker, mother of hostage Matan Zangauker, told Saturday's rally in Tel Aviv.

A new challenge is Trump's proposal to relocate Palestinians from Gaza, welcomed by Israel's government. It has been rejected by Arab countries and Palestinians, who fear they won't be able to return. Human rights groups say the relocation could amount to a war crime.

Trump also proposed that once the war ends, Israel would transfer control of Gaza to the United States, which would redevelop it as the "Riviera of the Middle East."

At its height, the war displaced 90% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million. Hundreds of thousands have returned to their homes during the ceasefire, though many found only rubble, human remains and unexploded ordnance.

The war has killed over 48,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not say how many were fighters. Israel says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence.

## **EEOC seeks to drop transgender discrimination cases, citing Trump's executive order**

By CLAIRE SAVAGE and ALEXANDRA OLSON Associated Press

Signaling a major shift in civil rights enforcement, the federal agency that enforces workplace anti-discrimination laws has moved to dismiss six of its own cases on behalf of workers alleging gender identity discrimination, arguing that the cases now conflict with President Donald Trump's recent executive order, court documents say.

The requests by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission mark a major departure from its prior interpretation of civil rights law, and a stark contrast to a decade ago when the agency issued a landmark finding that a transgender civilian employee of the U.S. Army had been discriminated against because her employer refused to use her preferred pronouns or allow her to use bathrooms based on her gender identity.

Just last year, the EEOC updated its guidance to specify that deliberately using the wrong pronouns for an employee, or refusing them access to bathrooms corresponding with their gender identity, constituted a form of harassment. That followed a 2020 Supreme Court ruling that gay, lesbian and transgender people are protected from employment discrimination.

Nearly all workplace discrimination charges must pass through the EEOC — at least initially — and the agency's decision to drop at least six of the cases raises serious questions about whether its protections will continue to extend to transgender and gender nonconforming people going forward.

The EEOC is seeking to dismiss three cases in Illinois as well as one in Alabama, New York and California. In each instance, the original complaints allege discrimination against transgender or gender nonconforming workers. The agency cites Trump's Jan. 20 executive order declaring that the government would recognize only two "immutable" sexes — male and female — as the reason for why it no longer intends to pursue the cases.

The Alabama case charged that Harmony Hospitality LLC discriminated against an employee who identifies as a gay nonbinary male by firing him hours after co-owners learned of his gender identity. The New York lawsuit alleged that Boxwood Hotels LLC fired a transgender housekeeper who complained that a supervisor repeatedly misgendered them and made anti-transgender statements, referring to the housekeeper as a "transformer" and "it."

Another suit alleged that Wendy's franchisee Starboard Group, Inc. subjected three transgender employ-



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ees to pervasive sexual harassment at a Wendy's restaurant in Carbondale, Illinois, claiming a supervisor demanded to know if one employee had a penis. In another Illinois case, a transgender Reggio's Pizza cashier at Chicago O'Hare International Airport was "outed" by her manager, called a racist, homophobic slur by coworkers, and fired when she complained. In southern Illinois, at a hog farm called Sis-Bro, Inc., a coworker allegedly exposed his genitals to a transgender employee and touched her breasts.

And in Santa Clara, California, the EEOC charged that a Lush Handmade Cosmetics store manager sexually harassed three gender nonconforming employees with "offensive physical and verbal sexual conduct."

Former EEOC General Counsel and Professor and Co-Dean Emeritus at Rutgers Law School David Lopez, who served in the agency for more than 20 years, on Friday said in his experience, the EEOC has never dismissed cases based on substance rather than merit — until now.

For the country's anti-discrimination agency "to discriminate against a group, and say, 'We're not going to enforce the law on their behalf' itself is discrimination, in my view," Lopez said. "It's like a complete abdication of responsibility."

The EEOC's requests to dismiss the cases come just weeks after Trump dismissed two Democratic commissioners of the five-member EEOC before their terms expired, an unprecedented decision that removed what would have been a major obstacle to his administration efforts to upend interpretation of the nation's civil rights laws. Had the commissioners been allowed to carry out their terms, the EEOC would have had a Democratic majority well into Trump's term. The administration also fired Karla Gilbride as the EEOC's general counsel, replacing her with Andrew Rogers as acting counsel.

Shortly after their dismissals, acting EEOC chair Andrea Lucas, a Republican, signaled her intent to put the agency's resources behind enforcing Trump's executive order on gender. She announced in a statement that one of her priorities would be "defending the biological and binary reality of sex and related rights." Later, she ordered that the EEOC would continue accepting any and all discrimination charges filed by workers, although complaints that "implicate" Trump's order should be elevated to headquarters for "review."

"Biology is not bigotry. Biological sex is real, and it matters," Lucas said in her statement. "Sex is binary (male and female) and immutable. It is not harassment to acknowledge these truths — or to use language like pronouns that flow from these realities, even repeatedly." She removed the agency's "pronoun app," which allowed employees to display their pronouns in their Microsoft 365 profiles, among other changes.

The EEOC in fiscal year 2023 received more than 3,000 charges alleging discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, "the most since the agency started tracking these charges in FY 2013, and up more than 36% from the previous year," according to the agency's website, which also provides a link for more information on discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. But the information appears to have been removed and the link now leads to a blank page with the message: "The requested page could not be found."

Jocelyn Samuels, one of the Democratic EEOC commissioners who was fired last month, said via email that Trump's executive order and the EEOC's response to it "is truly regrettable."

"The Administration's efforts to erase trans people are deeply harmful to a vulnerable community and inconsistent with governing law," she said.

Sarah Warbelow, vice president of legal at LGBTQ+ rights group Human Rights Campaign, added in an emailed statement: "This is the inevitable outcome when the EEOC is weaponized to greenlight discrimination against American workers.

"Instead of standing up for the rights of everyone to a workplace free from discrimination, including harassment and bias, the Trump administration is making it abundantly clear they will not protect working people."

## **A Vermont border agent's death was the latest violence linked to the cultlike Zizian group**

By HOLLY RAMER, PATRICK WHITTLE and MARK SCOLFORO Associated Press

In the wooded outskirts of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, a perplexed landlord noticed odd sights at two of his rental properties.

Tenants wore long black coats and parked box trucks outside the duplexes. They ran an electrical cord from one box truck into one of the condos, and kept a stretcher inside another.

A neighbor remembers similarly dressed figures walking around at night holding hands. They never spoke a word.

By the time the FBI searched the property last week, one of the most recent tenants had been killed in a shootout with U.S. Border Patrol agents in Vermont, and a second was under arrest. A third, a shadowy figure known online as "Ziz," remains missing after authorities linked their cultlike group to six deaths in three states.

Officials have offered few details of the cross-country investigation, which broke open after the Jan. 20 shooting death of a Border Patrol trooper in Vermont during a traffic stop. Associated Press interviews and a review of court records and online postings tell the story of how a group of young, highly intelligent computer scientists, most of them in their 20s and 30s, met online, shared anarchist beliefs, and became increasingly violent.

Their goals aren't clear, but online writings span topics from radical veganism and gender identity to artificial intelligence.

At the middle of it all is "Ziz," who appears to be the leader of the strange group, who called themselves "Zizians." She has been seen near multiple crime scenes and has connections to various suspects.

She was even declared dead for a time, before reappearing amid more violence.

Who is Ziz?

Jack LaSota moved to the San Francisco Bay area after earning a computer science degree from the University of Alaska Fairbanks in 2013 and interning at NASA, according to a profile on a hiring site for programmers, coders and other freelance workers. NASA officials did not respond to a request to confirm LaSota's internship, but a Jack LaSota is listed on a website about past interns.

In 2016, she began publishing a dark and rambling blog under the name Ziz, describing her theory that the two hemispheres of the brain could hold separate values and genders and "often desire to kill each other."

LaSota used she/her pronouns, and in her writings says she is a transgender woman. She railed against perceived enemies, including so-called rationalist groups, which operate mostly online and seek to understand human cognition through reason and knowledge. Some are concerned with the potential dangers of artificial intelligence.

LaSota began promoting an extreme mix of rationalism, ethical veganism, anarchism and other value systems, said Jessica Taylor, an AI researcher who met LaSota both in person and online through the rationalist community and knew her as Ziz.

When LaSota left the rationalists behind, she took with her a group of "extremely vulnerable and isolated" followers, Anna Salamon, executive director of the Center for Applied Rationality, told the San Francisco Chronicle.

Taylor said Ziz adherents use the rationalist ideology as a reason to commit violence. "Stuff like, thinking it's reasonable to avoid paying rent and defend oneself from being evicted," she said.

Poulomi Saha, a professor who has studied cults, said LaSota's beliefs and writings may have made readers feel seen, an often central factor in the formation of groups commonly labeled cults. That's especially true in the era of online communities, in which it's easier for marginalized people to seek fellow believers.

"For the person who feels hailed by that blog post, there is likely to be a kind of dual experience," said Saha, co-director of the program in critical theory at the University of California, Berkeley. "One where they feel like 'I have been saying this, or thinking this, all along, and no one has believed me.'"

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LaSota, 34, has not responded to multiple Associated Press emails in recent weeks, and her attorney Daniel McGarrigle declined to comment when asked whether she is connected to any of the deaths. She has missed court appearances in two states, and bench warrants have been issued for her arrest. Associated Press reporters have left numerous phone and e-mail messages with LaSota's family and received no response.

Ziz and followers' first run-in with the law

In November 2019, LaSota was arrested along with several other people at a protest outside a Northern California retreat center where the Center for Applied Rationality was holding an event. Sheriff's deputies called in a SWAT team and armored vehicle after the mask-wearing group blocked the property's exits and handed out fliers railing against the rationalist organization. The group said they were protesting sexual misconduct inside the rationalist group.

The case against LaSota, Emma Borhanian, 31, Gwen Danielson and Alexander Leatham, 29, was pending in August 2022 when the U.S. Coast Guard responded to a report that LaSota had fallen out of a boat in San Francisco Bay. Her body wasn't found, but her mother confirmed the death and an obituary was published.

It wasn't long before Ziz surfaced again.

A landlord is attacked in California

By the autumn of 2022, LaSota had moved with other group members, including Borhanian and Leatham, into vans and box trucks on property owned by Curtis Lind in Vallejo, about 30 miles north of San Francisco. "Emma's van was amazing," said someone who knew Borhanian. "It had a refrigerator and freezer and microwave. It was truly a work of art."

The person, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of fears for her safety, described Borhanian as a kind and loving young woman so smart that she worked at Google while in college. Google did not respond to an inquiry about Borhanian's employment there.

Prosecutors say she was among those who attacked Lind on Nov. 13 when he tried to evict the group for not paying rent.

Impaled by a sword and partially blinded, Lind fought back, fatally shooting Borhanian. Concluding that Lind acted in self-defense, officials charged Leatham and Suri Dao, 23, with murder in Borhanian's death, as well as attempted murder of Lind.

A person reached by an Associated Press reporter at a phone number listed for Alex Leatham's father declined to comment. Attempts to reach family members for Dao were not successful.

Police believe LaSota was at the scene of the crime, but she was not arrested.

An elderly couple is killed in Pennsylvania

On New Year's Eve of 2022, a couple was shot and killed in their home in Chester Heights, Pennsylvania.

A doorbell camera captured audio and video of a car pulling up to the home of Richard Zajko, 71, and his wife, Rita, 69. A voice shouts "Mom!" and another voice exclaims, "Oh my God! Oh, God, God!" according to a Pennsylvania state police affidavit. Police found the couple shot in the head in an upstairs bedroom after they failed to show up to take care of Rita's mother.

Police questioned the couple's daughter, Michelle, at her home in Vermont, and a few weeks later, took her into custody at a Pennsylvania hotel. She wasn't arrested or charged with anything. LaSota was at the hotel, too, and was arrested after refusing to cooperate with officers, and charged with obstructing law enforcement and disorderly conduct.

Six months later, LaSota was released on bail but stopped showing up for court.

LaSota's attorney, Daniel McGarrigle, said last month his client was "wholly and unequivocally innocent of the charges filed in this case."

The landlord in California is found dead

Meanwhile, the case regarding the landlord in California was headed to trial. The landlord, who was 82, was the only eyewitness, and prosecutors wanted to hurry along the proceedings.

But on Jan. 17, Lind's throat was cut, and he died, not far from where he had survived the earlier attack.

Maximilian Snyder, 22, who is charged with murder, appeared in court Feb. 6, only long enough to re-

quest a new attorney. It's not clear how he was identified as a suspect; he has ties to a woman who just days later would be involved in a shootout.

Snyder is listed as in custody in the Solano County Jail in California. Attempts to reach family members of Snyder were not successful.

A Border Patrol agent dies in a shootout Vermont

On Jan 20, in Vermont, U.S. Border Patrol agents stopped a vehicle carrying two people connected to the Ziz group. A hotel worker had called authorities after seeing one of them, Teresa Youngblut, with a gun.

Youngblut was driving the car when it was pulled over on Jan. 20, and authorities say she quickly opened fire on officers. The passenger, Felix Bauckholt, a German national who is also listed in court documents as Ophelia, died, along with the border patrol agent, David Maland.

Youngblut was wounded and arrested and has pleaded not guilty to firearms charges.

Authorities who searched the car found a ballistic helmet, night-vision goggles, respirators and ammunition, the FBI said. They also found two-way radios and used shooting range targets.

Youngblut applied for a marriage license with Snyder, the man accused of murdering the elderly landlord. He was a childhood friend; it was unclear if they were married. Authorities say the gun she was carrying was purchased by a person of interest in the Zajko killings.

The last sighting of Ziz

Youngblut and Bauckholt had been living at the two condos in North Carolina, where the landlord and neighbors now say they saw the odd behavior.

LaSota also had been living there as recently as this winter, said the landlord, who reviewed LaSota's 2019 police booking photo. He spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity because he was concerned for his safety.

Expressing similar concerns, a neighbor who lived in the other side of Bauckholt's duplex until September 2023 recalled seeing three people wearing long black robes and tactical clothes.

"They rarely came out during the day but would walk around the neighborhood and in the woods at night," the former neighbor said, who also spoke only on condition of anonymity because of concerns for their safety. "Sometimes all three of them would go for a walk and they all held hands. They seemed to care for each other a great deal."

## Zelenskyy calls for 'armed forces of Europe' as EU leaders bristle at new US policies on Ukraine

By JAMEY KEATEN, EMMA BURROWS and SUSIE BLANN Associated Press

MUNICH (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Saturday that the time has come for the creation of an "armed forces of Europe," because the U.S. may no longer be counted on to support the continent.

Meanwhile, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz hit back at Americans for meddling in his country's election after U.S. Vice President JD Vance scolded European leaders over their approach to democracy and met with the leader of a German far-right party.

Forceful speeches from Zelenskyy and Scholz on Day 2 of the Munich Security Conference underlined the impact of a blizzard of decisions by U.S. President Donald Trump that show a rapidly growing chasm in trans-Atlantic ties.

European leaders are reeling after Trump's decision to upend years of U.S. policy by holding talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin in hopes of ending the Russia-Ukraine war. Trump's special envoy for Ukraine and Russia on Saturday all but ruled out that Europeans would be included in any Ukraine peace talks.

Ramping up his desire for a more muscular Europe, Zelenskyy said that Ukraine's nearly three-year fight against Russia's full-scale invasion has proved that a foundation exists for the creation of a European army — an idea long discussed among some leaders on the continent.

"I really believe that time has come," he said. "The armed forces of Europe must be created."

It's unclear whether the idea will catch on with European leaders. Zelenskyy has sought greater military

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and economic support from the European Union for years and repeatedly warned that other parts of Europe could be vulnerable to Russia's expansionist ambitions.

While the bloc — along with the United States — has been one of Kyiv's strongest backers, pockets of political disagreement over its approach to Moscow and economic realities, including national debt levels that have crimped defense spending, have stood in the way of greater support.

Zelenskyy also told The Associated Press on Saturday that he "didn't let" his ministers sign an agreement with the U.S. on the extraction of minerals in the country, because "it is not ready to protect us, our interest." Ukraine is hoping to offer rare earth elements essential for many kinds of technology in exchange for continued military aid.

Earlier, Zelenskyy alluded to a phone conversation between Trump and Putin this week, after which Trump said that he and Putin would likely meet soon to negotiate a peace deal over Ukraine — breaking with the Biden administration's harder line against Moscow over Russia's all-out assault on Ukraine, which began on Feb. 24, 2022.

Russia's Foreign Ministry and the U.S. State Department said Saturday that Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio had spoken by phone. Rubio reaffirmed Trump's "commitment to finding an end to the conflict in Ukraine. In addition, they discussed the opportunity to potentially work together on a number of other bilateral issues," U.S. State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce said.

Trump previously assured Zelenskyy that he would have a seat at the table to end the war, and the Ukrainian leader insisted that Europe should also have one.

"Ukraine will never accept deals made behind our backs without our involvement, and the same rule should apply to all of Europe," Zelenskyy said, adding that "not once did (Trump) mention that America needs Europe at the table."

"That says a lot," he said. "The old days are over when America supported Europe just because it always had."

### Europeans likely excluded from Ukraine peace talks

European leaders have been trying to make sense of a tough new line from Washington on issues including democracy and Ukraine's future, as the Trump administration continues to upend trans-Atlantic conventions that have been in place since after World War II.

Gen. Keith Kellogg, Trump's special envoy for Ukraine and Russia, all but cut Europeans out of any Ukraine-Russia talks, despite Zelenskyy's call for Europe to take part.

"You can have the Ukrainians, the Russians, and clearly the Americans at the table talking," Kellogg said at an event hosted by a Ukrainian tycoon. Pressed on whether that meant Europeans won't be included, he said: "I'm a school of realism. I think that's not going to happen."

"We need to ensure Ukrainian sovereignty," he said, before adding: The "European alliance ... are going to be critical to this."

At the conference, Annalena Baerbock, Germany's foreign minister, described the new U.S. stance as a "moment of truth" that requires European leaders to overcome their differences and unite for a meaningful peace in Ukraine.

"This is an existential moment. It's a moment where Europe has to stand up," she said. "There won't be any lasting peace, if it's not a European-agreed peace."

### Iceland's prime minister, Kristrún Frostadóttir, lamented a lack of clarity from Washington.

"People are still not sure what the U.S. wants to do. And I think it would be good if we came out of this conference if they had a clear picture of it," she said.

### German chancellor hits back at Vance

Earlier, Scholz said that he was "pleased" at what he called a shared commitment with the United States to "preserving the sovereign independence of Ukraine" and agreed with Trump that the Russia-Ukraine war must end.

But Scholz also condemned the new political tack from Washington, affirming his strong stance against the far-right and said his country won't accept people who "intervene in our democracy."

A day earlier, Vance chastised Europe's leaders at the conference and suggested that free speech is "in retreat" across the continent. Vance said that no democracy could survive telling millions of voters that their concerns "are invalid or unworthy of even being considered." He also met with the co-leader of the far-right Alternative for Germany, or AfD, party, which is polling second ahead of Scholz's own Social Democrats before the Feb. 23 election in Germany.

Alluding to Germany's Nazi past, Scholz said that the longstanding commitment to "Never Again" — a return to the extreme right — wasn't reconcilable with support for AfD.

"We will not accept that people who look at Germany from the outside intervene in our democracy and our elections and in the democratic opinion-forming process in the interest of this party," he said. "That's just not done, certainly not amongst friends and allies. We resolutely reject this."

Not all responses from European leaders were negative.

President Karin Keller-Sutter of Switzerland, which isn't an EU member, was quoted by Swiss daily *Le Temps* as saying Vance had spoken about "values to defend and that we share, like freedom and the possibility for people to express themselves."

## **IRS will lay off thousands of probationary workers in the middle of tax season**

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The IRS will lay off thousands of probationary workers in the middle of tax season, according to two sources familiar with the agency's plans, and cuts could happen as soon as next week.

This comes as the Trump administration intensified sweeping efforts to shrink the size of the federal workforce, by ordering agencies to lay off nearly all probationary employees who had not yet gained civil service protection.

It's unclear how many IRS workers will be affected.

Previously, the administration announced a plan to offer buyouts to almost all federal employees through a "deferred resignation program" to quickly reduce the government workforce. The program deadline was Feb. 6, and administration officials said employees who accept will be able to stop working while still collecting a paycheck until Sept. 30.

However, IRS employees involved in the 2025 tax season were told they will not be allowed to accept a buyout offer from the Trump administration until after the taxpayer filing deadline, according to a letter sent recently to IRS employees.

It is unclear how many workers will be impacted by the layoff announcement plan. Representatives from the U.S. Treasury and IRS did not respond to Associated Press requests for comment.

Jan. 27 was the official start date of the 2025 tax season, and the IRS expects more than 140 million tax returns to be filed by the April 15 deadline. The Biden administration invested heavily in the IRS through an \$80 billion infusion of funds in Democrats' Inflation Reduction Act, which included plans to hire tens of thousands of new employees to help with customer service and enforcement as well as new technology to update the tax collection agency.

Republicans have been successful at clawing back that money, and billionaire Elon Musk and his Department of Government Efficiency have called for the U.S. to "delete entire agencies" from the federal government as part of his to radically cut spending and restructure its priorities.

Elected officials are trying to fight against DOGE plans. Attorneys general from 14 states challenged the authority of to access sensitive government data and exercise "virtually unchecked power" in a lawsuit filed Thursday.

The lawsuit, filed in federal court in Washington, says the actions taken by Musk at the helm of DOGE can only be taken by a nominated and Senate-confirmed official. It cites constitutional provisions that delineate the powers of Congress and the president.

## **NAACP lists companies that dump DEI in its tactical spending guide for Black Americans**

By MATT BROWN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The NAACP wants Black Americans to steer their buying power toward companies that haven't pulled back from diversity, equity and inclusion programs under conservative pressure, and the nation's oldest civil rights organization is listing which brands have stood by — or reversed — past commitments to DEI.

The NAACP says the spending guide it published Saturday is needed because DEI initiatives promote the social and economic advancement of Black Americans, who are projected to consume nearly \$2 trillion in goods and services in nominal dollars by 2030, according to the McKinsey Institute for Black Economic Mobility.

"Diversity is better for the bottom line," NAACP President Derrick Johnson said in an exclusive announcement to The Associated Press. "In a global economy, those who reject the multicultural nature of consumerism and business will be left in the past they are living in."

Keisha Bross, an economic strategist at the NAACP, says they are not calling for a "boycott" of companies but instead encourage consumers to "buy-in" on companies that back their values. People of all backgrounds are encouraged to use the Black Consumer Advisory.

The NAACP is speaking with executives at companies named in the advisory for reversing their DEI policies — including Lowe's, TargetWalmart, Amazon, Meta, McDonald's, and Tractor Supply — and will update its guidance as companies roll back or reaffirm commitments to DEI.

The advisory praises Costco for standing by previous commitments, as well as Apple, Ben & Jerry's, Delta Airlines, e.l.f. Cosmetics and JPMorgan Chase & Co.

The effort comes as corporations, governments and other major institutions face pressure to roll back DEI policies amid a backlash from the Trump administration and Republican-led state governments.

Soon after taking office, President Donald Trump signed an executive order directing federal agencies to end "illegal preferences and discrimination" in government and instructed federal agencies to find ways alongside the Justice Department to "encourage the private sector to end illegal discrimination and preferences, including DEI."

DEI policies are a catchall term for programs meant to promote fair treatment, impartial hiring and cooperation between people from different backgrounds. Such policies vary wildly but often include anti-discrimination mandates and training meant to inform people about how to promote inclusive values. Some institutions hire staff who focus on implementing DEI policies.

The advisory looks at which companies are backtracking on prior commitments, including by eliminating diversity officer positions, ending hiring practices meant to boost staff diversity or supplier diversity standards, or reducing investments in Black communities such as support for historically Black colleges and universities.

The study by McKinsey also found that Black Americans are more likely to live in communities that lack access to the goods and services of major companies.

Johnson, the NAACP president, said he wants to provide a framework for Black communities "as we make difficult decisions on where to spend our hard-earned money."

"If corporations want our dollars, they better be ready to do the right thing," he said.

Trump's orders also face legal pushback. In February, a group that included the mayor of Baltimore and an association representing university professors sued the Trump administration over the orders, claiming that the directives violated civil rights law.

"In his crusade to erase diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility from our country, President Trump cannot usurp Congress's exclusive power of the purse, nor can he silence those who disagree with him by threatening them with the loss of federal funds and other enforcement actions," the plaintiffs in the lawsuit wrote.

More litigation surrounding DEI in the private sector is pending. The Federal Communications Com-

mission recently sued Comcast over its DEI policies. And the state of Missouri in February filed a lawsuit against Starbucks over its DEI policies. Companies including Apple, Berkshire Hathaway, Coca-Cola, IBM, Mastercard and Pepsico face shareholder resolutions challenging their DEI practices.

## **Justice Department fires 20 immigration judges from backlogged courts amid major government cuts**

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — The Trump administration fired 20 immigration judges without explanation, a union official said Saturday amid sweeping moves to shrink the size of the federal government.

On Friday, 13 judges who had yet to be sworn in and five assistant chief immigration judges were dismissed without notice, said Matthew Biggs, president of the International Federation of Professional & Technical Engineers, which represents federal workers. Two other judges were fired under similar circumstances in the last week.

It was unclear if they would be replaced. The U.S. Justice Department's Executive Office for Immigration Review, which runs the courts and oversees its roughly 700 judges, did not immediately respond to a request for comment Saturday.

Immigration courts are backlogged with more than 3.7 million cases, according to Syracuse University's Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, and it takes years to decide asylum cases. There is support across the political spectrum for more judges and support staff, though the first Trump administration also pressured some judges to decide cases more quickly.

The Trump administration earlier replaced five top court officials, including Mary Cheng, the agency's acting director. Sirce Owen, the current leader and previously an appellate immigration judge, has issued a slew of new instructions, many reversing policies of the Biden administration.

Last month, the Justice Department halted financial support for nongovernmental organizations to provide information and guidance to people facing deportation but restored funding after a coalition of nonprofit groups filed a federal lawsuit.

The firings touch on two top Trump priorities: mass deportations and shrinking the size of the federal government. On Thursday, it ordered agencies to lay off nearly all probationary employees who had not yet gained civil service protection, potentially affecting hundreds of thousands of workers. Probationary workers generally have less than a year on the job.

Biggs, the union official, said he didn't know if the judges' firings were intended to send a message on immigration policy and characterized them as part of a campaign across the federal workforce.

"They're treating these people as if they're not human beings," he said. "It's bad all around."

## **Serbia's protesting students and supporters of the president hold parallel rallies as tensions spike**

By IVANA BZGANOVIC Associated Press

KRAGUJEVAC, Serbia (AP) — Serbia's striking students and supporters of populist President Aleksandar Vucic held parallel rallies Saturday as both marked a major holiday in the country with notably contrasting messages.

The student-led protest is the latest in a nationwide anti-graft movement that reflects mounting calls for fundamental political changes in the Balkan state, triggered after a concrete canopy on a railway station in the northern city of Novi Sad collapsed on Nov. 1, killing 15 people.

The rally in the central industrial city of Kragujevac drew tens of thousands of people who, besides demanding justice over the tragedy, have been demanding that officials root out rampant endemic corruption and respect for the rule of law.

Students chose Kragujevac for Saturday's rally because of its history. In 1835, Serbia was still part of the Ottoman Empire, and people in Kragujevac announced a new constitution that sought to limit the powers



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of the then rulers. The date is now celebrated as Statehood Day, a national holiday.

People from all over the country streamed into Kragujevac for Saturday's gathering.

"I am here to support this student rebellion, which has grown into a civil rebellion, and to fight for the rule of law and justice in this society, so that Serbia becomes a country where life is dignified," said a woman from Belgrade who identified herself only by her first name Teodora because she didn't want to be targeted by state authorities.

The students arrived to cheers from the residents. Before the protest, they organized marches in various parts of the country, encouraging people to converge in Kragujevac. Some walked, others ran or cycled. Along their journey, people greeted them with food and refreshments and offered accommodation, many crying and expressing hope for change.

Meanwhile, in Sremska Mitrovica, a small town northwest of Belgrade, Vucic recycled a traditional nationalist theme, warning that the West wants to unseat him by force and that this could lead to the breakup of the country.

Before the rally attended by thousands of his supporters, Vucic said that the student protests "will go down in the history of dishonor" as "the dirtiest color revolution in the history of mankind," referring to Ukraine and other uprisings against authoritarian governments in Eastern Europe and elsewhere in the 1980s and '90s.

At the rally, Vucic said that more than 3 billion euros (\$3.14 billion) have been invested from abroad to topple him from power, but that the student "revolution" has failed. He didn't offer any proof for those claims.

"They have already lost, they don't see how the political wheel has already turned," Vucic said, referring to the return to the White House of U.S. President Donald Trump, who the Serbian leader supports. "Unless they kill me."

"You who organized an attempted colored revolution in Serbia, I will destroy you in the whole world," said Vucic, pledging to write a book on how he destroyed the student uprising that he said will be published abroad, including China.

Authorities in Serbia bused in thousands of supporters to the pro-Vucic rally from throughout the country as well as neighboring Bosnia.

The anti-graft movement is Vucic's biggest challenge in recent years. The president — who has ruled Serbia with a firm grip on power for more than a decade — and his right-wing Serbian Progressive Party have been previously accused of stifling democratic freedoms, publicly discrediting opponents and rigging elections, according to international vote observers.

The canopy disaster, widely believed to have happened because of government corruption, has become a flashpoint for wider discontent with the authoritarian rule, with university students at the forefront of the anti-graft uprising. Their determination, youth and creativity have struck a chord among people widely disillusioned with politicians.

Prosecutors have charged 13 people over the canopy fall, and protests have forced the resignation of Serbia's prime minister. But students have said that their protests will continue until their demands for full accountability are met.

In the past three months, the president has shifted between accusing the students of working for foreign powers to offering concessions and claiming he has fulfilled each of their demands.

During Vucic's trip to the Serb-controlled part of Bosnia earlier this week, he stressed Serbian unity with the Serbs in Bosnia, where a bid to create a pan-Serb state in the 1990s was widely blamed for triggering a bloody war that left more than 100,000 people killed and millions displaced.

At the pro-Vucic rally, Bosnian Serb separatist leader Milorad Dodik said that Serbs in Bosnia don't want to remain a part of Bosnia, but want to join Serbia in a joint state.

"We love Serbia," he said to the cheers of the crowd.

## Doctors order 'absolute rest' for Pope Francis while he's being treated for a respiratory infection

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Doctors on Saturday prescribed "absolute rest" for Pope Francis and modified the treatment for his respiratory tract infection, the Vatican said, a day after the 88-year-old pope was admitted to a hospital following a weeklong bout of bronchitis.

On doctors' orders, Francis won't deliver his traditional Sunday noon blessing, which he could have done from his hospital room if he was well enough.

The Argentine pope, a known workaholic who keeps up a grueling pace despite his many ailments, was admitted to Rome's Gemelli hospital on Friday after his bronchitis worsened. It was his fourth hospitalization since his 2013 election and raised questions about his increasingly precarious health.

Preliminary tests showed that he had a respiratory tract infection, which was confirmed Saturday. In a late afternoon bulletin, the Vatican said that Francis had no fever on Saturday and that tests showed improvement in some parameters.

Francis slept well during a quiet first night in the hospital, ate breakfast, read the newspapers and received the Eucharist on Saturday, alternating rest with prayer and reading during the afternoon, the Vatican said.

The Vatican canceled his audiences through Monday at least.

Francis, who had part of one lung removed after a lung infection when he was a young man, has kept up a frenetic pace of late. He has packed his days with private audiences while taking on the added obligations of steering the Catholic Church through its Holy Year.

Starting at Christmas, he has had Jubilee events nearly every other weekend, including one honoring the armed forces last weekend in which he presided over a chilly outdoor Mass, despite having already been diagnosed with bronchitis, and advice to stay indoors.

On Monday alone, he met separately with the Vatican ambassador to Croatia, a group of visiting bishops from Madagascar, the European Union's foreign policy chief, a candidate to be the next UNESCO chief, the rector of the grand mosque of Paris and Nikas Safronov, a Russian painter.

This weekend, he was supposed to have presided over a Jubilee audience for artists, celebrate Mass for them and then on Monday, meet with them at Rome's famed Cinecitta film studios. Instead, they and thousands of other pilgrims gathered and prayed for the pope in a basilica on Saturday morning.

"Pope Francis is always pushing himself, he always wants to fulfil his commitments at all costs," said the Rev. Enzo Fortunato, communications director for St. Peter's Basilica. "And then not to make the situation worse 'Holy Father that's enough now.' And he obeyed, he obeyed."

Francis, who is prone to respiratory infections in winter, was diagnosed with bronchitis on Feb. 6, but had continued to hold daily audiences in his Vatican hotel suite. But he handed off his speeches for an aide to read aloud, saying he was having trouble breathing.

"To facilitate his recovery, the medical staff prescribed absolute rest," a Vatican statement said.

Francis has other health problems as well and this marks his fourth time in the papal suite on the 10th floor of Rome's Gemelli hospital. He uses a wheelchair, walker or cane when moving around his apartment and recently fell twice, hurting his arm and chin.

In 2021, he had 33 centimeters (13 inches) of his large intestine removed because of a narrowing of the colon. He had further abdominal surgery in 2023 to remove intestinal scar tissue and repair a hernia. During another 2023 hospitalization, he was diagnosed with what he later said was "an acute and strong pneumonia in the lower part of the lungs."

Sometimes bronchitis can lead to pneumonia, a deeper and far more serious infection of the lungs' air sacs. Doctors may detect pneumonia by listening for a crackling or whistling sound in the lungs while the patient breathes, but often other tests are needed including a chest X-ray and pulse oximetry that measures how much oxygen is in the blood.

Treatment varies by severity but can include providing oxygen through a nasal tube or mask, intravenous fluids — and treatment of the underlying cause of the infection.

## Woman withdraws civil lawsuit against Jay-Z, Sean 'Diddy' Combs alleging she was raped at age 13

By SUSAN HAIGH and JONATHAN LANDRUM JR. Associated Press

An Alabama woman who said she was raped by rappers Jay-Z and Sean "Diddy" Combs when she was 13 withdrew her civil lawsuit against both men on Friday, according to court filings.

The unidentified woman in December added Jay-Z, whose legal name is Shawn Carter, to a lawsuit she had filed against Combs in Manhattan federal court, alleging that she was attacked by the singers in 2000 after Combs' limo driver offered her a ride to an MTV Video Music Awards after-party.

The court document submitted by the woman's attorneys announcing the voluntary dismissal did not include any reasons or explanation for the withdrawal.

Jay-Z, who vehemently denied the claims and tried to get extracted from the lawsuit, called the woman's decision to withdraw her claim "a victory" and said the "fictional tale" she and her lawyers created was "laughable."

"The frivolous, fictitious and appalling allegations have been dismissed," he said in a statement posted on social media. "This civil suit was without merit and never going anywhere."

Combs remains jailed in New York awaiting a criminal trial on federal sex trafficking charges. He also faces a wave of sexual assault lawsuits, many of which were filed by the plaintiff's lawyer, Tony Buzbee, a Texas attorney who says his firm represents over 150 people, both men and women, who allege sexual abuse and exploitation by Combs.

Lawyers for Combs said dismissal of the lawsuit without a settlement confirmed that other lawsuits he is facing are built on falsehoods.

"For months, we have seen case after case filed by individuals hiding behind anonymity, pushed forward by an attorney more focused on media headlines than legal merit. Just like this claim, the others will fall apart because there is no truth to them," they said in a statement, adding that Combs "has never sexually assaulted or trafficked anyone — man or woman, adult or minor."

When asked for a response, Buzbee responded "no comment" in an email Friday night.

Buzbee's firm, which has set up a 1-800 number for accusers, has filed a wave of lawsuits against the hip-hop mogul. Buzbee's lawsuits allege that many of the people he represents were abused at parties in New York, California and Florida where individuals were given drinks that were laced with drugs.

Statements from both rappers derisively referred to Buzbee and his firm as the "1-800-lawyer." Jay-Z accused him of "hiding behind Jane Doe" for financial gain.

"When they quickly realize that the money grab is going fail, they get to walk away with no repercussions," he wrote. "The system has failed."

Jay-Z and Combs are part of a generation of hip-hop titans who rose to prominence in the 2000s, emerging as wide-ranging entrepreneurs and two of the world's wealthiest rappers.

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

Diddy launched his Bad Boy Records around the same time Jay-Z launched his Roc-A-Fella record label. The pair has been frequently photographed together at events.

Jay-Z has won 25 Grammys while Diddy has collected three trophies. His Roc Nation company served as co-executive producer of the recent Super Bowl halftime show.

## Cher, Lady Gaga, Miley Cyrus, Snoop Dogg:

### 'Saturday Night Live' is feted with a concert for the ages

By DAVID BAUDER and JOCELYN NOVECK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — By the time Cher sang "If I Could Turn Back Time," it seemed as if time had indeed been turned back, and every single "Saturday Night Live" musical guest of 50 years had magically found their way to Radio City Music Hall.

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Of course, it was only a smattering. But "SNL50: The Homecoming Concert" boasted an epic lineup. It was an evening of memorable solo performances and often fascinating, one-time-only collaborations: Bonnie Raitt and Chris Martin. Arcade Fire, David Byrne, St. Vincent and the Preservation Hall Jazz Band. Post Malone and Nirvana.

The concert, hosted by Jimmy Fallon, was only one element of what has become an enormous celebration of the show's 50 years in existence, leading up to Sunday's "SNL50: The Anniversary Special," live from Studio 8H.

But Friday night was all about music.

Some highlights:

Return of the 1990s

If a decade can win the night, let's hear it for the 1990s. A classic performance from that decade was most likely to get the Radio City audience on its feet, singing along and pulling out their phones to record.

The Backstreet Boys proved irresistible when they broke into "I Want it That Way." Snoop Dogg may have sung "Gin and Juice," but he was trailed by enough smoke to give nearby audience members a contact high.

Wearing a gigantic coat befitting a winter night, Lauryn Hill commanded the stage with Wyclef Jean and the crowd melted at the first notes of "Killing Me Softly."

Yes, (some) comics can do music

Naturally, some former "SNL" cast members reprised old characters, with varying levels of success.

The Culpes, the stuffy music teachers played by Will Ferrell and Ana Gastayer, hit harder and funnier than they ever did on the show. Their attempts at being current were hilarious and they even worked in a few verses of "Not Like Us," with a plea for harmony between Kendrick Lamar and Drake.

Andy Samberg and Chris Parnell's "Lazy Sunday" was welcome, but too short. Lady Gaga was a good sport, replacing Justin Timberlake to sing about a Christmas gift whose title can't be repeated here. But Bill Murray's lounge singer "foursome" routine with Gastayer, Maya Rudolph and Cecily Strong fell a bit flat.

They love Lorne

"SNL" creator Lorne Michaels didn't perform, but he was referred to all night long.

"I love you, Lorne Michaels," declared Miley Cyrus, dedicating her hit song "Flowers" to the show's founder.

Raitt, finishing "I Can't Make You Love Me," thanked Michaels for having her on the show so many times.

"Let's give it up for Lorne," said former cast member Adam Sandler, introducing a collaboration between Post Malone and Nirvana. "We love you buddy."

And Marcus Mumford, lead singer of the British folk band Mumford & Sons, said he was there to represent Michaels' admirers from across the pond.

Creative collabs

The night featured fascinating collaborations that brought together musicians of all kinds.

Cyrus teamed with Brittany Howard to sing Queen's "Crazy Little Thing Called Love."

Arcade Fire joined with David Byrne, St. Vincent and the Preservation Hall Jazz Band to perform David Bowie's "Heroes." Byrne later also collaborated with Robyn, in matching khaki suits, for "Dancing On My Own" and "This Must Be the Place (Naive Melody)."

And for Raitt's second song, she sat down with Chris Martin, the Coldplay frontman becoming her pianist for "I Can't Make You Love Me."

In another collab of sorts, the B-52s were joined on "Love Shack" by former and current SNL cast members Fred Armisen, Bowen Yang and Sarah Sherman, singing the "bang bang" lyrics.

Lady Gaga collaborated with herself, singing both parts of "Shallow" and bringing down the house.

Most valuable player

Questlove is more associated with the "Tonight" show, but he is proving to be the MVP of these "Saturday Night Live" anniversary festivities.

Not only did the drummer produce the splendid documentary on the "SNL" musical legacy, but he effortlessly kept the beat with The Roots, his legendary hip-hop group and "Tonight" show house band, as they covered every style imaginable, from Snoop to Eddie Vedder to Brandi Carlile. Byrne bowed in appreciation.

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No 'Joke'

Carlile has become known lately for her collaborations, most notably coaxing Joni Mitchell back to the stage.

Friday night provided a reminder of her own artistry with the political climate adding a special urgency to her impassioned version of "The Joke."

A second Nirvana reunion

For the second time in as many weeks, the surviving members of Nirvana reunited.

Rather than the quartet of women who fronted the band for the Fire Aid concert, Malone took Kurt Cobain's place on Friday.

Their version of "Smells Like Teen Spirit" was fierce, a reminder of why the song packed such a wallop when it was first heard.

## AP reporter and photographer barred from Air Force One over 'Gulf of Mexico' terminology dispute

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

The White House barred a credentialed Associated Press reporter and photographer from boarding the presidential airplane Friday for a weekend trip with Donald Trump, saying the news agency's stance on how to refer to the Gulf of Mexico was to blame for the exclusion. It represented a significant escalation by the White House in a four-day dispute with the AP over access to the presidency.

The administration has blocked the AP from covering a handful of events at the White House this week, including a news conference with India's leader and several times in the Oval Office. It's all because the news outlet has not followed Trump's lead in renaming the body of water, which lies partially outside U.S. territory, to the "Gulf of America."

AP reporters and photographers travel with the president virtually everywhere as part of a press "pool" and have for decades. AP journalism serves millions of readers and thousands of news outlets around the world.

Journalists consider the administration's move a violation of the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment — a governmental attempt to dictate what a news company publishes under threat of retribution. The Trump administration says the AP has no special right of access to events where space is limited, particularly given the news service's "commitment to misinformation."

AP calls that assertion entirely untrue.

"Freedom of speech is a pillar of American democracy and a core value of the American people. The White House has said it supports these principles," AP spokeswoman Lauren Easton said Friday night. "The actions taken to restrict AP's coverage of presidential events because of how we refer to a geographic location chip away at this important right enshrined in the U.S. Constitution for all Americans."

The body of water in question has been called the Gulf of Mexico for hundreds of years. AP, whose influential stylebook is used by news outlets as an arbiter of language and usage, advised that because of its broad set of global customers, it would both refer to the body of water as the Gulf of Mexico and also reference Trump's order changing the name to the Gulf of America within the United States.

At the same time, the AP switched style last month from Denali to Mount McKinley for the mountain in Alaska that Trump ordered renamed. That location lies entirely within U.S. jurisdiction.

Taylor Budowich, White House deputy chief of staff, said in a post to X Friday — one that was later released as a White House statement — that the AP "continues to ignore the lawful geographic name change of the Gulf of America. This decision is not just divisive, but it also exposes The Associated Press' commitment to misinformation."

While the First Amendment protects the AP's "right to irresponsible and dishonest reporting," it doesn't ensure unfettered access to limited spaces like the Oval Office and Air Force One, Budowich said. He said AP would retain its credentials to the White House complex overall.

On Friday, an AP reporter and photographer had traveled to Joint Base Andrews for their participation

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in the traveling press pool to Trump's Florida residence. But, after clearing security, neither was allowed to board Air Force One, a decision they were told was "outlet-specific." Meanwhile, reporters in the press pool who were permitted on the plane sent the AP journalists pictures of cards with their names saying "welcome aboard" on their empty seats.

Other news organizations, like The New York Times and Washington Post, have also said they would primarily use Gulf of Mexico. Fox News said that it was switching to Gulf of America.

The White House Correspondents Association has issued statements condemning the action against AP. Although there are talks going on behind the scenes, individual news outlets have been relatively quiet.

The Times, through spokesman Charles Stadtlander, said on Friday that "we stand by The Associated Press in condemning repeated acts of retribution by this administration for editorial decisions it disagrees with. Any move to limit access or impede reporters doing their jobs is at odds with the press freedoms enshrined in the Constitution."

In a statement, the Washington Post said that the AP's "access to the administration is central for all journalistic organizations, including The Washington Post, in serving millions of Americans with fact-based, independent journalism each day."

The issue was gaining some international attention.

"We would never kick a news agency out of the press room of our Chancellery," said Friedrich Merz, the top opposition leader in Germany and front-runner in polls ahead of the country's Feb. 23 elections. He spoke Saturday at a security conference in Munich also attended by U.S. Vice President JD Vance and top Trump administration officials.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt, who on Wednesday used the word "lies" in describing AP content, posted on X Friday afternoon about executive orders Trump had signed before his departure. She ended her post: "The @AP was not invited."

## **Trump moves with dizzying speed on his to-do list. But there are warning signs in his first month**

By WILL WEISSERT, JOSH BOAK and LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As President Donald Trump approaches the first-month mark in his second term, he has moved with dizzying speed and blunt force to reorder American social and political norms and the economy while redefining the U.S. role in the world.

At the same time, he has empowered Elon Musk, an unelected, South African-born billionaire, to help engineer the firing of thousands of federal employees and potentially shutter entire agencies created by Congress.

Those efforts have largely overshadowed Trump's crackdowns on immigration and the U.S.-Mexico border, and his efforts to remake social policy by wiping out diversity, equity and inclusion programs and rolling back transgender rights.

The president has also imposed scores of new tariffs against U.S. trade partners and threatened more, even as economists warn that will pass costs on to U.S. consumers and feed inflation.

Here's a look at the first four weeks:

Mass federal firings begin

The Trump administration fired thousands of workers who were still in probationary periods common among new hires. Some had less than an hour to leave their offices.

Those potentially losing jobs include medical scientists, energy infrastructure specialists, foreign service employees, FBI agents, prosecutors, educational and farming data experts, overseas aid workers and even human resources personnel who would otherwise have to manage the dismissals.

At the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which was created to protect the public after the 2008 financial crisis, employees say the administration not only wants to cut nearly the entire workforce but also erase all its data from the past 12 years. The administration agreed to pause any further dismantling of the agency until March 3, under a judge's order.

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While Trump promised to turn Washington upside down, his moves could have far-reaching implications for thousands of federal employees around the country and drive up the unemployment rate if large numbers of layoffs happen at once.

Legal challenges mount

Court challenges to Trump's policies started on Inauguration Day and have continued at a furious pace since Jan. 20. The administration is facing some 70 lawsuits nationwide challenging his executive orders and moves to downsize the federal government.

The Republican-controlled Congress is putting up little resistance, so the court system is ground zero for pushback. Judges have issued more than a dozen orders at least temporarily blocking aspects of Trump's agenda, ranging from an executive order to end U.S. citizenship extended automatically to people born in this country to giving Musk's team access to sensitive federal data.

While many of those judges were nominated by Democratic presidents, Trump has gotten unfavorable rulings from judges picked by Republican presidents, too. Trump suggested he could target the judiciary, saying, "Maybe we have to look at the judges." The administration has said in the meantime that it will appeal, while White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt railed against the orders slowing the president's agenda, calling each "an abuse of the rule of law."

The administration has notched a few wins, too, most significantly when a judge allowed it to move forward with a deferred resignation program spearheaded by Musk.

The economic outlook worsens

Amid the policy upheaval, the latest economic data could prompt some White House worries.

Inflation rose at a monthly rate of 0.5% in January, according to the Labor Department. Over the past three months, the consumer price index has increased at an annual rate of 4.5% -- a sign that inflation is heating up again after having cooled for much of 2024.

Trump told voters he could lower inflation, and do so almost immediately after taking office. But Leavitt, while blaming Trump's predecessor, Democrat Joe Biden, acknowledged the latest inflation indicators were "worse than expected."

More trouble signs came when the Commerce Department reported that retail sales slumped 0.9% on a monthly basis in January. A drop that large could signal a weakening in consumer confidence and economic growth.

The Federal Reserve's report on industrial production also found that factory output slipped 0.1% in January, largely due to a 5.2% drop in the making of motor vehicles and parts.

These could all be blips, which means the monthly data in February will really matter.

The 'fair trade' Trump wants isn't necessarily fair

After previously imposing tariffs on China and readying import taxes on Canada and Mexico, Trump rolled out what he called the "big one." He said his administration would put together new tariffs in the coming weeks and months to match what other countries charge.

Other nations hardly find Trump's approach fair.

From their vantage point, he is including items other than tariffs such as value added taxes, which are akin to sales taxes. That means the rates could be much higher than a standard tariff in Europe.

On top of that, Trump plans separate additional tariffs on autos, computer chips and pharmaceuticals, in addition to the 25% tariffs on steel and aluminum that he announced on Monday.

It is not clear whether these trade penalties are mainly negotiating tools or ways for Trump to raise revenues. So far, he has suggested that they are both.

Congress watches its authority erode. But there are signs of pushback

Congress finds itself confounded by the onslaught as its institutional power — as the Constitution's first branch of government with its unmatched authority over federal spending — is being eroded in real time.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said he finds the work of Musk's team "very exciting." Johnson said Trump is "taking legitimate executive action."

But even among congressional Republicans there were small signs of protest emerging — letters being written and phone calls being made — to protect their home-state interests and constituents as funding

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for programs, services and government contracts is being dismantled.

Rep. Carlos Gimenez, R-Fla., urged the Homeland Security Department not to issue blanket deportations for Venezuelan migrants who fled their country and now call the Miami-area home. "I'm not powerless. I'm a member of Congress," he said.

Democratic lawmakers have joined protesters outside shuttered federal offices, arguing Trump and Musk had gone too far. Democrats suggested legislation to protect various programs, and even filed articles of impeachment against the president over his plans to bulldoze and redevelop Gaza.

Trump wants a new world order

With his phone call to Russian President Vladimir Putin this past week, Trump is hoping he initiated the beginning of the end of the Kremlin's war on Ukraine.

The leaders agreed to have their teams "start negotiations immediately." After getting off the phone with Putin, Trump called Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to discuss getting both sides to the negotiating table.

The Putin call is a monumental development in a war that has left hundreds of thousands dead or seriously wounded.

But the way ahead remains complicated.

Zelenskyy said he will not meet with Putin until a plan for peace is hammered out by Trump. Trump has gotten blowback when European leaders sharply criticized him and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth for suggesting that NATO membership was not in the cards for Ukraine.

The White House faces a further quandary with Zelenskyy wanting the U.S. and other countries to provide security guarantees for Ukraine, and Zelenskyy insisting that he and Trump iron out an agreement on the contours of any peace deal.

## **From roses in Vietnam to engraved 'love locks' in Germany, the world celebrates Valentine's Day**

For anyone who's been searching for signs of love in this world, there was proof of it this Valentine's Day on the Eiffel Tower, where a couple embraced in a kiss that was 674 steps above the avenues of Paris.

But love was also on display in far less iconic locales: A couple kissed on a park bench in Bucharest, Romania. Florists made bouquets in a flower shop in Lagos, Nigeria. Heart-shaped plaques were tied to a tree branch at a shrine in Tokyo.

Associated Press photographers on Friday captured moments of the holiday around the world.

In Germany, people walked across the Hohenzollern Bridge in Cologne, where an estimated 500,000 "love locks" were attached, the padlocks engraved with inscriptions of lovers. In Erbstetten on the Swabian Alb, a wedding couple was made of bales of straw.

In Rome, flowers were placed next to "St. Valentine Skull" in the Santa Maria in Cosmedin Basilica. On Thursday, visitors admired the statue "Paolina Borghese as Venus Victorious" during an event at the Galleria Borghese museum.

And in a different take on the tradition of giving flowers to one's Valentine, in Cambodia's southern Phnom Penh, villagers made flowers from corn husks in Thout Chum Village. While back to the traditional, a florist arranged a rose bouquet outside a flower shop in Hanoi, Vietnam.

## **Red dye No. 3 has been banned, but what about other artificial food dyes?**

By JONEL ALECCIA AP Health Writer

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration banned the dye known as Red 3 from the nation's food supply in January, setting deadlines for stripping the brightly hued additive from candies and cough syrup, baked goods and frozen treats.

The agency said it was taking the action because studies found that the dye, also known as erythrosine,



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caused cancer in lab rats. A federal statute requires FDA to ban any additive found to cause cancer in animals, though officials stressed that the way Red 3 leads to cancer in rats doesn't happen in people.

But the dye is only one of several synthetic colors widely found in common foods and other products.

As their use is questioned by experts and consumers, here's what you need to know:

What are artificial colors?

Synthetic dyes are petroleum-based chemicals that don't occur in nature. They're widely used in foods to "enhance the visual appeal" of products, according to Sensient Food Colors, a St. Louis-based supplier of food colors and flavorings.

Nine dyes, including Red 3, have been allowed in U.S. food. The other common color additives in food are Blue 1, Blue 2, Green 3, Red 40, Yellow 5 and Yellow 6. Two permitted colors are used more rarely: Citrus Red 2 and Orange B.

The FDA certifies synthetic color additives and regulates their use.

With the FDA's recent order on Red 3, manufacturers have until January 2027 to remove the dye from their products. Makers of ingested drugs like cough syrups have until January 2028.

Who is concerned about these dyes and why?

Consumer advocates, including the Center for Science in the Public Interest, had long lobbied to ban Red 3 from food because of the rat-cancer link. The dye was prohibited for decades in cosmetics, but not in food or ingested medications.

Other research has tied artificial colors to behavioral problems in some children, including hyperactivity and impulsivity, particularly for those at risk for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD.

"Artificial colors are not the main cause of ADHD, but they may contribute significantly to some cases," said Dr. L. Eugene Arnold, an emeritus psychiatry professor at Ohio State University who studied dyes and their effect on behavior and now advises CHADD, a support group for people with ADHD.

The FDA says it has reviewed and evaluated the effects of color additives on children's behavior. It says its scientists believe that most children suffer no adverse effects when consuming them, though it acknowledges some children may be sensitive to them.

About two-thirds of Americans favor restricting or reformulating processed foods to remove ingredients like added sugar or dyes, according to a recent AP-NORC poll.

Will other colors be banned?

Momentum is building for the removal of synthetic dyes in foods.

Last year, California became the first state to ban six artificial food dyes from food served in public schools. More than a dozen state legislatures may take up bills this year that would ban synthetic dyes in foods, either for school lunches or in any setting. In October, protesters demanded that WK Kellogg Co. remove artificial dyes from cereals such as Apple Jacks and Froot Loops.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr., recently confirmed as the U.S. secretary of health and human services, campaigned on a promise to "Make America Healthy Again," including a focus on artificial dyes and other chemicals in food. His support has been buoyed by "MAHA moms," women on social media calling for an end to artificial ingredients and ultraprocessing in the U.S. food supply, among other concerns.

"I was called a conspiracy theorist because I said that red dye caused cancer," Kennedy said during his confirmation hearing. "Now, FDA has acknowledged that and banned it."

What about natural colors?

It is possible to add color to foods with natural ingredients. Some manufacturers have already reformulated products to remove Red 3. In its place they use beet juice; carmine, a dye made from insects; or pigments from foods such as purple sweet potato, radish and red cabbage.

But it's tricky, said Meghan Skidmore, a Sensient spokesperson. Natural dyes may be less stable than synthetic dyes and may be affected by factors including heat and acid levels.

"It's not impossible to replace, but there's not a single solution," she said.

How can you avoid synthetic dyes?

Because the dyes are so widely used, it can be difficult to find foods that don't contain color additives.

The best way to avoid the dyes is to read ingredient labels, said Arnold.

"If the list is so long that you don't want bother reading it and it probably has things in it you can't pronounce, don't buy it," he said.

## Eastern U.S. braces for flooding while fire-damaged California city now faces mudslides

By OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ and EUGENE GARCIA Associated Press

SIERRA MADRE, Calif. (AP) — Much of the Eastern U.S. braced for a renewed round of harsh, soggy weather on Saturday, with thunderstorms and melting snow combining to pound the Ohio and Tennessee valleys. The lower Mississippi valley was facing the threat of strong tornadoes.

Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia and Arkansas were under flood warnings, and residents were warned by the National Weather Service to stay off roads. Parts of western Kentucky could face up to 8 inches of rain.

"This may be a major, potentially historic, flash flood event," the NWS said.

Heavy snow, meanwhile, was expected to blanket much of New England and then transition to sleet, making travel nearly impossible, the NWS said.

In northern New York, heavy mixed precipitation is expected throughout the weekend. Weather forecasters said residents should expect snow, sleet and ice accumulations of six to 13 inches and wind gusts as high as 45 mph (72 kph) late Saturday and Sunday.

"Power outages and tree damage are likely due to the ice and strong winds. Travel could be very difficult to nearly impossible, the NWS said.

### California struggles with mudslides

In Southern California on Friday, a mountain community near the Eaton Fire burn scar dug out of roads submerged in sludge after the strongest storm of the year swept through the area, unleashing debris flows and muddy messes in several neighborhoods recently torched by wildfires.

Dry weather returned to the region but the risk of rock and mudslides on wildfire-scarred hillsides continued Friday since dangerous slides can strike even after rain stops, particularly in scorched areas where vegetation that helps keep soil anchored has burned away.

Water, debris and boulders rushed down the mountain in the city of Sierra Madre on Thursday night, trapping at least one car in the mud and damaging several home garages with mud and debris. Bulldozers on Friday were cleaning up the mud-covered streets in the city of 10,000 people.

"It happened very quickly but it was very loud and you could even hear the ground or feel the ground shaking," Bull Duvall, who has lived in Sierra Madre for 28 years, said of the debris flows.

Sierra Madre officials issued evacuation orders for areas affected by the Eaton Fire, warning that fire, police and public works personnel would not enter areas experiencing active mud and debris flows and anyone who remained in a home under evacuation orders would need to shelter in place until areas are deemed safe for city personnel to enter. Residents of the city also had to evacuate during the Eaton Fire, which destroyed 15 homes in the community.

In Pacific Palisades on Friday, some residents washed their mud-covered driveways and bulldozers worked to clear mud-coated roads not far from where, just weeks ago, officials moved abandoned cars after people fleeing last month's wildfires got stuck in traffic and fled on foot.

The vehicle of a member of the Los Angeles Fire Department was pulled out of the water in Malibu after it was pushed into the ocean on Thursday. A fire department employee was able to exit with minor injuries, department spokesperson Erik Scott said.

Southern California reported 1 to 3 inches (2.5 to 7 centimeters) of rain in coastal areas and valleys and 3 to 6 inches (7.6 to 15.2 centimeters) across the coastal slopes on Thursday, said Mike Wofford, a meteorologist with the weather service.

The precipitation was badly needed, as much of Southern California remains in extreme or severe drought, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor. In neighboring Nevada, the weather service said it recorded a measurable amount of rain in Las Vegas, ending a streak of 214 days without precipitation.

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A storm in the Sierra Nevada mountains dumped 6 feet (1.8 meters) of snow over 36 hours. Two ski patrol staff from Mammoth Mountain were caught in an avalanche during avalanche mitigation work Friday morning, the resort said in a Facebook post. One was extracted and was responsive, while the other was taken to a hospital with serious injuries.

More winter weather is descending on the U.S.

Meteorologists warn that the U.S. is about to get its 10th and coldest polar vortex stretching event this season. Weather forces in the Arctic are combining to push the chilly air that usually stays near the North Pole into the U.S. and Europe. The latest projected cold outbreak should first hit the northern Rockies and northern Plains on Saturday and then stick around all next week.

In Denver, where temperatures are expected to dip as low as 14 degrees (minus 10 degrees Celsius) over the weekend, the city has extended its cold weather shelters for those living on the streets. The Denver Coliseum — an arena with some 10,000 seats — will be opened Saturday for additional space, while a free bus will loop between the shelters across the city.

In the Rocky Mountains, skiers eager for the long Presidents' Day weekend are already facing a closure on a section of Interstate 70 due to snow as officials warn of hazardous conditions on the mountain roads over the weekend.

## Today in History: February 16, Castro sworn in as Cuban leader

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Sunday, Feb. 16, the 47th day of 2025. There are 318 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Feb. 16, 1959, Fidel Castro was sworn in as premier of Cuba, six weeks after dictator Fulgencio Batista announced his resignation and fled the country into exile.

Also on this date:

In 1862, the Civil War Battle of Fort Donelson in Tennessee ended with the surrender of some 12,000 Confederate soldiers; Union Gen. Ulysses S. Grant's victory earned him the moniker "Unconditional Surrender Grant."

In 1923, the burial chamber of King Tutankhamen's recently unearthed tomb was unsealed in Egypt by English archaeologist Howard Carter.

In 1960, the nuclear submarine USS Triton departed New London, Connecticut, on the first submerged circumnavigation by a vessel.

In 1996, eleven people were killed in a fiery collision between an Amtrak passenger train and a Maryland commuter train in Silver Spring, Maryland.

In 2018, in an indictment, special counsel Robert Mueller charged 13 Russians and three Russian companies of an elaborate plot to disrupt the 2016 U.S. presidential election via a social media trolling campaign, aimed in part at helping Donald Trump win the presidency.

In 2024, Russia's prison agency announced that Alexei Navalny, activist and Russian opposition leader, had died in the Arctic penal colony where he was serving a 19-year sentence on charges of extremism; the news brought outrage and criticism from world leaders toward Russian president Vladimir Putin.

Today's birthdays: Businessman Carl Icahn is 89. Author Eckhart Tolle is 77. Actor William Katt is 74. Model-TV personality Janice Dickinson is 70. Actor LeVar Burton is 68. Actor-rapper Ice-T is 67. Tennis Hall of Famer John McEnroe is 66. Football Hall of Famer Jerome Bettis is 53. Olympic track and field gold medalist Cathy Freeman is 52. Actor Mahershala Ali is 51. Rapper Lupe Fiasco is 43. Sen. John Ossoff, D-Ga., is 38. Actor Elizabeth Olsen is 36. Singer-actor The Weeknd is 35.

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