

Groton Daily Independent

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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
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.
City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.

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

Monday Blessings

Good Morning

May your day be filled with peace, joy, and countless blessings. Take time to rest, reflect, and cherish the moments that make life beautiful.

I have a blessed day!



Wednesday, Feb. 19

Senior Menu: Chesseburger casserole, brussel sprouts, fruit, bread stick.
Groton United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.
Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.
Groton United Methodist: Groton Ad Council, 7 p.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.

Thursday, Feb. 20

Senior Menu: Turkey, mashed potato with gravy, carrots, mixed fruit, dinner roll.
Junior High Boys Basketball at Warner: 7th at 6 p.m., 8th at 7 p.m.

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1440

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

Officials Meet on Ukraine

Secretary of State Marco Rubio and other top US officials will meet their Russian counterparts in Saudi Arabia today to begin discussing a path toward ending the war in Ukraine, according to reports. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said his country had not yet been invited to participate.

The meeting follows a call between President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin last week and is the latest in the Trump administration's swift effort to draw down US involvement in the conflict. US officials in recent days have called on Europe to assume more control over its security situation, warned against Ukraine's pending NATO membership, and more.

The shifting dynamics come amid an uncertain time for Western Europe, with Germany—the bloc's largest economic power—set to hold snap elections Sunday. Current Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Social Democratic Party has fallen to third place, behind the center-right Christian Democrats and the nationalist-populist Alternative for Germany (abbreviated as AfD).

Polar Vortex Returns (... Again)

The vast majority of the US will see subfreezing temperatures this week, as the latest in a series of winter storms sweeps across the country.

The weather pattern marks the 10th polar vortex to dip down into the contiguous 48 states this winter season, compared to the two to three seen during an average winter. The phenomenon occurs when the polar vortex weakens and destabilizes the polar jet stream, becoming wavy and stretching down into the US. Researchers are unsure why it has occurred so frequently this season.

Thermometers are expected to drop below minus 10 degrees in the Dakotas and Upper Midwest, and below or near zero in areas ranging from Kansas to Maine. Regions as far south as Atlanta and Austin, Texas, could reach into the teens. By Wednesday, multiple inches of snow and ice are on track to blanket the Mid-Atlantic.

Cult Killings

A search is underway for members of the cultlike Zizian group following a series of violent incidents across multiple states. The FBI conducted a search earlier this month in a wooded area near Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where the group had previously rented properties, and the effort follows a deadly shootout with Border Patrol officers in Vermont that left one agent dead.

The Zizians, led by 34-year-old Jack "Ziz" LaSota—who uses female pronouns and allegedly faked a death in 2022—are linked to at least six deaths in three states. The group, composed mainly of young, intelligent computer scientists, is known for its radical veganism and anarchist beliefs. Members often wear long black coats and have been involved in protests and violent confrontations, including an attack on a landlord in California and the double murder of a couple in Pennsylvania.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

"Conclave" is big winner at 2025 British Academy Film Awards, hauling in four wins, including best film; see full list of BAFTA winners.

YouTube TV and Paramount reach deal to keep Paramount channels, including CBS and Nickelodeon, on the streamer.

Team USA hockey tops Canada 3-1 in 4 Nations Face-Off round-robin, will advance to Thursday's Final.

Baltimore Ravens kicker Justin Tucker accused by seven more women of sexual misconduct, bringing total accusations to 16.

William Byron wins back-to-back Daytona 500 races for NASCAR Cup's season opening victory.

Stephen Curry named NBA All-Star game MVP, Mac McClung wins third-straight dunk contest.

Science & Technology

Apple to add its AI-powered assistant platform, Apple Intelligence, to Vision Pro headsets, along with more immersive content, in coming months.

Scientists develop synthetic diamond with 40% more toughness than diamonds found naturally on Earth; material was first observed in a meteorite but proved difficult to replicate.

New study suggests evolution of intelligent life on Earth was much more likely than previously assessed, challenging the current "hard steps" theory.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 0.0%, Dow -0.4%, Nasdaq 0.4%); all three indexes gain on the week, S&P 500 ends near record high.

Trump Media, the parent company of Truth Social, reports \$400M in losses in 2024, \$3.6M in annual revenue.

Uber sues DoorDash, accusing the food delivery platform of anticompetitive practices, including threatening restaurants unless they agree to exclusive partnerships.

Cryptocurrency scams reached at least \$10B in 2024, driven by surge in "pig butchering".

Politics & World Affairs

Israel and Hamas complete sixth prisoner swap; 19 Israelis and more than 1,000 Palestinians have been exchanged since first phase of ceasefire went into effect Jan. 19.

Justice Department asks judge to drop corruption case against New York City Mayor Eric Adams (D) after seven federal prosecutors, including the top Manhattan official, resign over orders.

Trump administration directs federal agencies to begin terminating employees still within their one- to two-year probationary periods.

Energy Department attempts to rehire nuclear safety experts laid off in broad firings.

Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Jordan Wright

With the Super Bowl now in the rearview mirror, the NFL offseason is officially in full swing. For the Minnesota Vikings, that means shifting focus to the 2025 season and evaluating the roster from top to bottom. Which positions are solid heading into next year, and where do they need upgrades? Over the coming weeks, we'll break down each position group, analyzing strengths, weaknesses, and potential moves the team could make to build a contender. Let's dive in.

And before we get too far, I want to mention that the Vikings' head coach, Kevin O'Connell, was named as the 2024 NFL Coach of the Year. This is only the second time a Vikings' coach has won the award (Bud Grant, 1969). The honor was well deserved, as O'Connell took a team that was predicted to be in contention for the number one overall pick and turned them into a team that won 14 games and was in contention for the number one seed in the NFC. Congrats coach!

We start, as we always do, with the most important position on the field: quarterback. Last year, the Vikings drafted J.J. McCarthy with the 10th overall pick, the highest pick the team has ever used on a QB. They also signed Sam Darnold to a one-year deal in free agency, bringing him in to compete with McCarthy and potentially hold down the fort until McCarthy was ready to take the reins. Instead, J.J. was injured in his first preseason game and missed the entire 2024 season.

To the surprise of many, Darnold took his game to another level under the leadership of coach O'Connell. The former 3rd overall pick started all 17 regular season games and completed 66.2% of his passes for 4,319 yards, 35 touchdowns, and 12 interceptions. Although he faltered down the stretch, Darnold still had a great year and proved he's worthy of being a starting QB in the NFL. Unfortunately for the Vikings, Darnold was only signed to a one-year deal and will be a free agent this offseason.

Normally it would be a given that the top 10 pick would be starting his sophomore season, but McCarthy's injury complicates things. On one hand, he was in the building and learning the Vikings' offense all year, so mentally he should be ready. On the other hand, we have no idea how McCarthy's body will respond after the injury.

Besides Darnold and McCarthy, the Vikings also had Nick Mullens, Brett Rypien, and Daniel Jones in the QB room last season. Mullens and Jones are free agents this offseason, while Rypien has only started four games in his career.

There are several ways the Vikings can address the QB position this offseason, but it all revolves around Darnold. The Vikings could franchise tag him, keeping him under contract for one more season, but this option would cost the team around \$40 million. However, the team could also tag and trade with another team, bringing in much-needed draft picks. The Vikings could also sign him to a multi-year deal, but there is a very good chance another team will offer Darnold considerably more money in free agency, and the Vikings likely don't want to be on the hook for a highly paid QB when they have McCarthy waiting in the wings. The option I believe is the most likely is for the team to sign Daniel Jones to a deal similar to what they gave Darnold in 2024, letting him compete for the starting spot and potentially filling in until McCarthy is ready to start.

“There are more than ample reasons to be concerned about your vision ”

Recently, I had a gentleman come for an annual wellness visit. He hadn't had one for quite some time, and I could tell he was a little uncertain about what to expect. He was patient while we reviewed his family history, and tolerant while we talked about diet and exercise, but he'd had enough when I asked about the last time he'd been to the dentist and the eye doctor. "What is this about?" he asked me, somewhat exasperated. I suppose people don't usually expect to go to their primary care doctor and have her nag them about their teeth or their eyes!

But both teeth and eyes are really important to your overall well being. There is ample evidence linking poor dental health to other issues, like heart disease and preterm births. The eyes provide clues to many systemic diseases, such as autoimmune diseases like rheumatoid arthritis, cancers, various infections, genetic conditions like Marfan's syndrome, and of course more mundane issues like high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Naturally, I harp on people with diabetes to get to the eye doctor almost every time I see them! Diabetes can damage small blood vessels, and in the eye this damage may lead to blindness.

Even if you don't notice any problems with your vision, it's important to see your eye doctor periodically. Diseases like glaucoma can be silent, and the visual loss so gradual that you don't notice it until it is advanced. Glaucoma can be successfully treated, but only if it is detected! Macular degeneration is also silent in the early stages, but can be detected by a careful eye exam by an ophthalmologist or optometrist.

Most of us understand instinctively that we would face additional challenges if we had poor vision. There would be no hopping in the car to drive to the store. There would be no picking up a magazine to leaf through in the waiting room. There would be no recognizing an old friend from across the street. We might not consider that these circumstances contribute to increased social isolation and depression, or increased risk of injuries. Some research links vision loss, like hearing loss, with dementia, although the nature of that relationship isn't clear. Nevertheless, there are more than ample reasons to be concerned about your vision!

In addition to those regular trips to the eye doctor, there are some steps you can take to protect your eyes. Keep your chronic medical conditions, like diabetes and high blood pressure, under control. Don't smoke or vape. Wear sun glasses with UVB protection. Eat lots of fruits and vegetables. Don't drink much alcohol. And of course, protect your eyes from injury: over a million Americans live with significant vision loss in at least one eye because of eye trauma.

My answer to my patient's very reasonable question was simple: anything that impacts your well being deserves consideration from your doctor. And that most definitely includes your eyes!

Debra Johnston, MD. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices as a Family Medicine Doctor at Avera Medical Group in Brookings, South Dakota. Follow The Prairie Doc® at www.prairiedoc.org, Facebook, Instagram, Youtube and Threads. Prairie Doc Programming includes On Call with the Prairie Doc®, a medical Q&A show (most Thursdays at 7pm on SDPB or streaming on Facebook), 2 podcasts, and a Radio program (on SDPB), providing health information based on science, built on trust.



Debra Johnston, MD

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EARTHTALK

Dear EarthTalk: Does the rise in diseases like Lyme Disease and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever mean tick populations are on the rise? Are there eco-friendly ways to control ticks? – J.B. via email

Common tick-borne diseases include Lyme disease, anaplasmosis, babesiosis and Rocky Mountain spotted fever. Lyme disease is the most well-known, caused by the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi*, and is transmitted by black-legged ticks, commonly known as deer ticks. Unfortunately, these miniscule creatures can be found everywhere, and according to Dr. Ben Beard, from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Risk occurs in backyards, as well as in neighborhood green spaces and public lands used for recreation." Symptoms of Lyme disease can range from a characteristic bullseye-shaped rash to fever, joint pain, and, in severe cases, neurological problems.

In addition to Lyme disease, ticks can spread other diseases. *Anaplasma phagocytophilum* causes anaplasmosis, which can lead to fever, headache and muscle aches. Babesiosis, another tick-borne illness, involves a parasitic infection that affects red blood cells, leading to fever and fatigue. Rocky Mountain spotted fever, caused by *Rickettsia rickettsii*, can cause severe symptoms like rash, fever and nausea, and can be fatal. According to public health expert Annalies Winny, rising heat and humidity helps ticks thrive in more places for longer periods, and could be contributing factors to the tick's increase.

Ticks become infected with disease-causing microorganisms when they feed on infected animals like deer, rodents or birds. Once infected, they can transmit these pathogens to humans through bites, if attached for a certain period (usually 36-48 hours). Try to avoid tick-prone areas, like tall grasses and wooded environments, especially during warmer months when ticks are most active.

Spending time outdoors is great, but ticks can be a bit of a buzzkill. To protect yourself, apply an EPA-registered insect repellent. Wear long sleeves, pants and socks, and tuck your pants into your socks or boots to keep ticks at bay. Stick to well-cleared trails, as ticks tend to hide in tall grasses and wooded areas. After your outdoor adventure, check your body, especially in the cozier areas such as the armpits or behind the knees. Tweezers will do the job to remove a tick, if found. Then, clean the area with rubbing alcohol or soap and water. It is helpful to shower within two hours to wash off any ticks, and wash your clothes in hot water to kill any that might have hitched a ride. If you develop flu-like symptoms, a rash or other signs of illness within a few weeks of a tick bite, consult a healthcare provider. Early treatment with antibiotics is effective in treating many tick-borne diseases, including Lyme disease.

To keep ticks at bay naturally, try using essential oils like lavender, lemon eucalyptus, and tea tree oil, which can be applied to skin or outdoor areas. Diatomaceous earth, a natural powder, can also be sprinkled around your yard to dry out ticks. Planting tick-repelling plants such as rosemary, mint, and geraniums adds another layer of defense. Beneficial nematodes, tiny worms that target tick larvae, can safely be used in gardens. Keeping grass short, wearing treated clothing, and avoiding wooded areas further reduce tick exposure. These eco-friendly methods work together to protect your home and health without harmful chemicals.

Ticks are most active in spring and summer, but they can be found year-round, depending on your location. Ticks can pose a significant threat, so stay vigilant and take proactive measures.

• EarthTalk® is produced by Roddy Scheer & Doug Moss for the 501(c)3 nonprofit EarthTalk. See more at <https://emagazine.com>. To donate, visit <https://earthtalk.org>. Send questions to: question@earthtalk.org.

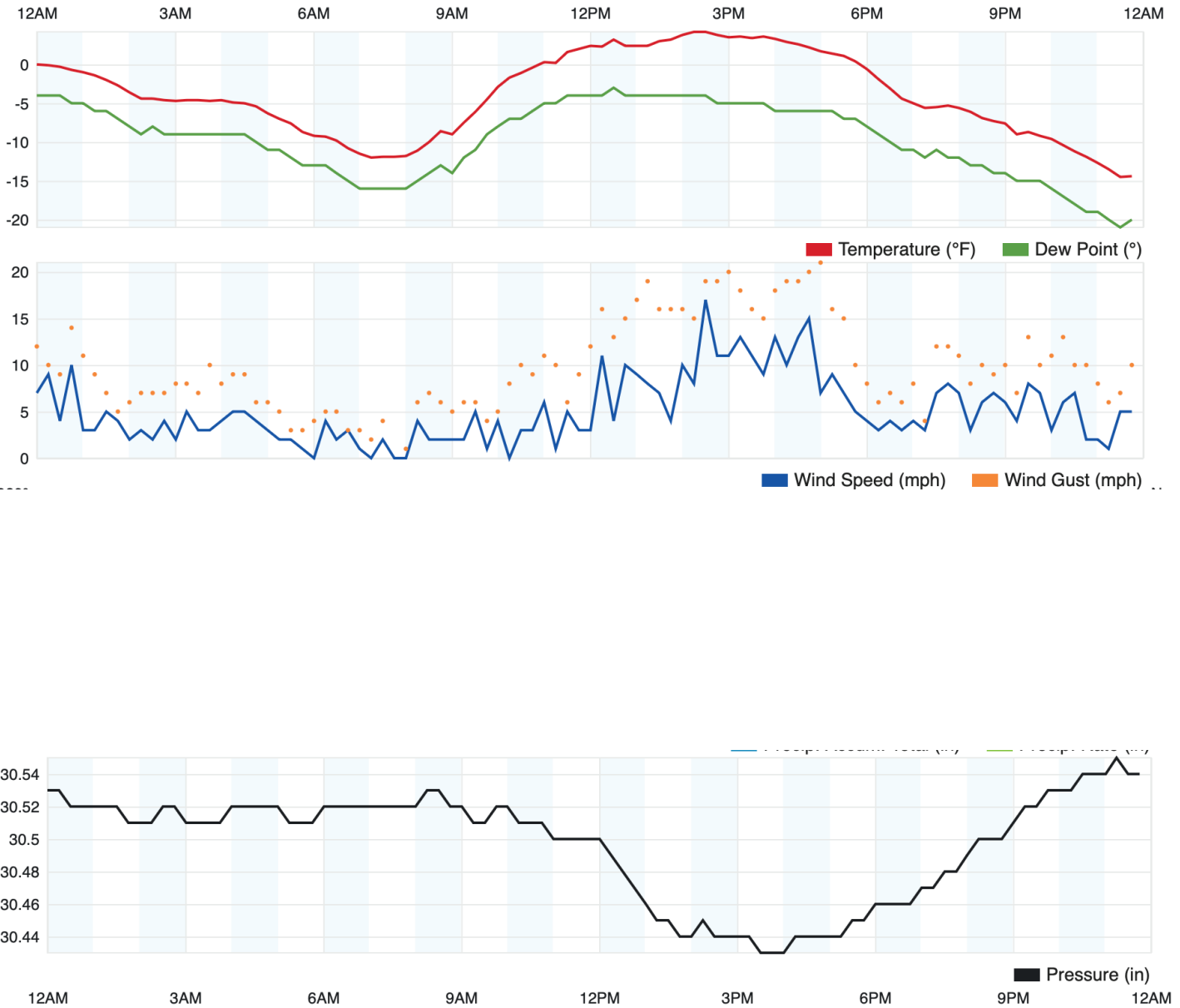


The deer tick may not seem very imposing but it can deliver a jolt of Lyme Disease to your system that can be hard to shake for years. Credit: Pexels.com.

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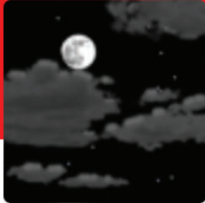



Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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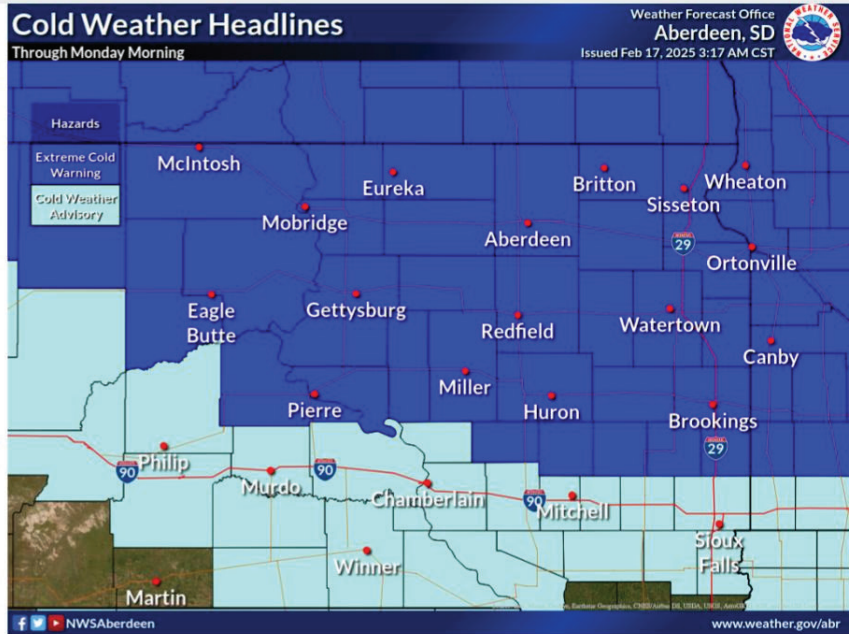
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Extreme Cold Warning

Washington's Birthday	Tonight	Tuesday	Tuesday Night	Wednesday
				
High: -8 °F	Low: -31 °F	High: -5 °F	Low: -29 °F	High: 0 °F
Cold	Partly Cloudy	Cold	Partly Cloudy	Cold

Dangerously Cold through Wednesday February 17, 2025 3:57 AM

- An **Extreme Cold Warning** is in effect through Tuesday morning.
 - Warning continues through Wednesday morning for north central and northeastern SD as well as western MN.
- A **Cold Weather Advisory** is in effect through this morning.
- Wind chills between **-25° to -50°** are possible during these times.
 - **These wind chills could cause frostbite in as little as 10 minutes.**



NWSAberdeen

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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Timing of the Coldest Wind Chills

February 17, 2025
3:57 AM

- Very cold wind chills through Wednesday morning with some improvement Thursday morning.
 - Wind chills as low as -30° to -50° possible.
 - Many places will stay below -20° even during the daytime.
- Stay inside if possible, and use caution when heading outside. Dress in several layers covering all exposed skin. Remember to bring your pets inside!

Minimum Wind Chill Forecast (°F)

	2/17 Mon				2/18 Tue				2/19 Wed				2/20 Thu														
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm								
Aberdeen	-42	-39	-29	-28	-33	-39	-44	-46	-46	-39	-27	-22	-27	-32	-37	-40	-41	-34	-21	-16	-23	-28	-31	-23	-23	-21	-10
Britton	-47	-42	-34	-26	-35	-37	-44	-45	-47	-41	-29	-24	-29	-35	-38	-40	-41	-37	-26	-21	-26	-31	-33	-25	-26	-23	-14
Chamberlain	-29	-28	-25	-21	-23	-26	-29	-31	-33	-30	-21	-17	-19	-21	-21	-26	-27	-25	-16	-9	-14	-19	-15	-28	-28	-24	-12
Clark	-43	-39	-33	-32	-37	-39	-44	-45	-44	-39	-23	-23	-28	-29	-32	-35	-36	-34	-26	-23	-26	-29	-30	-29	-29	-23	-10
Eagle Butte	-41	-39	-29	-33	-42	-45	-46	-47	-46	-44	-32	-24	-29	-32	-35	-37	-38	-33	-20	-15	-22	-30	-35	-38	-39	-34	-20
Eureka	-45	-43	-35	-34	-45	-48	-53	-51	-51	-44	-28	-26	-32	-39	-44	-50	-51	-45	-31	-24	-29	-35	-36	-40	-40	-32	-17
Gettysburg	-39	-37	-30	-32	-39	-42	-47	-48	-48	-42	-29	-24	-28	-31	-36	-40	-41	-39	-24	-16	-22	-27	-33	-34	-33	-29	-15
McIntosh	-46	-43	-32	-32	-42	-48	-51	-50	-48	-46	-29	-25	-30	-34	-42	-48	-48	-42	-23	-17	-30	-37	-44	-48	-49	-42	-23
Milbank	-40	-35	-31	-30	-32	-33	-37	-39	-39	-36	-28	-24	-26	-29	-31	-33	-34	-32	-23	-20	-23	-26	-27	-29	-28	-18	-2
Miller	-30	-29	-24	-25	-32	-33	-37	-39	-39	-36	-25	-20	-23	-25	-28	-30	-31	-31	-18	-13	-18	-22	-25	-26	-27	-23	-9
Mobridge	-36	-32	-28	-29	-36	-39	-46	-46	-46	-39	-24	-22	-26	-27	-25	-29	-36	-34	-19	-9	-11	-17	-22	-34	-35	-29	-13
Murdo	-32	-31	-27	-21	-28	-34	-37	-37	-41	-40	-29	-23	-21	-23	-28	-32	-33	-32	-19	-14	-20	-28	-34	-37	-38	-32	-17
Pierre	-28	-25	-20	-21	-29	-36	-36	-39	-39	-32	-21	-17	-15	-18	-20	-25	-26	-23	-14	-7	-10	-11	-25	-29	-29	-25	-11
Redfield	-36	-28	-25	-26	-32	-36	-40	-44	-44	-41	-26	-22	-25	-28	-31	-34	-35	-34	-20	-14	-20	-25	-27	-18	-27	-24	-10
Sisseton	-45	-43	-34	-29	-32	-35	-41	-41	-41	-36	-26	-24	-27	-32	-35	-38	-38	-34	-24	-21	-26	-29	-29	-29	-30	-19	-7
Watertown	-40	-36	-31	-30	-35	-36	-40	-42	-42	-35	-25	-22	-24	-28	-31	-33	-34	-32	-22	-20	-23	-28	-29	-27	-17	-12	-5
Webster	-45	-40	-35	-31	-37	-39	-42	-45	-45	-38	-27	-26	-27	-30	-34	-39	-39	-35	-28	-23	-26	-30	-32	-30	-19	-17	-10
Wheaton	-45	-44	-38	-31	-35	-39	-41	-41	-44	-41	-30	-26	-30	-33	-36	-38	-39	-38	-27	-22	-24	-28	-31	-33	-31	-25	-12

Created: 3 am CST Mon 2/17/2025 | Values are minimums over the period beginning at the time shown.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Wind chills as low as -30° to -50° are possible through Wednesday morning, with some improvement Thursday morning. Many places will stay below -20° even during the daytime. Stay inside if possible, and bundle up when going outside!

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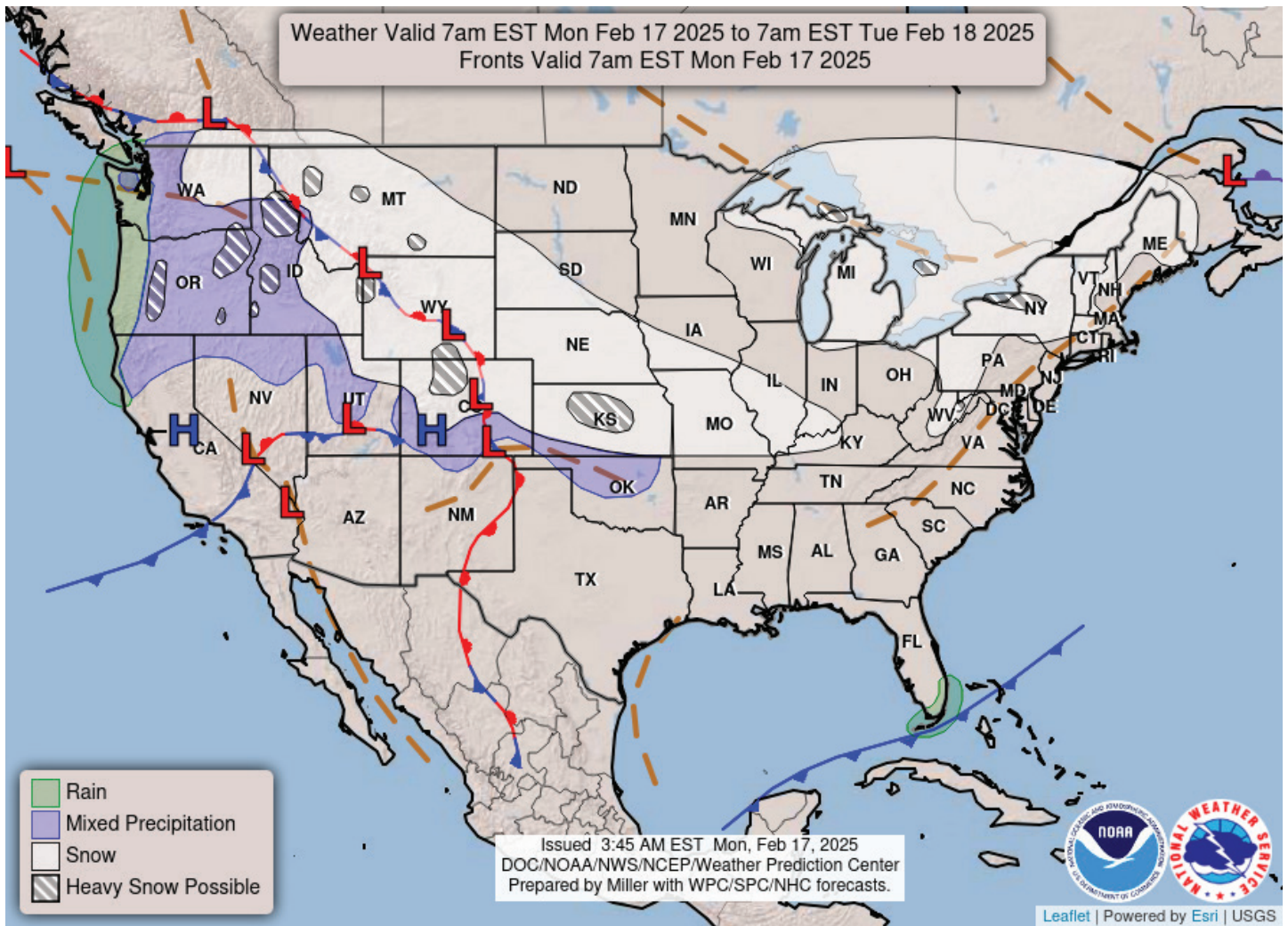
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 4 °F at 2:14 PM
Low Temp: -14 °F at 11:28 PM
Wind: 22 mph at 2:51 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 10 hours, 35 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 58 in 1930
Record Low: -39 in 1903
Average High: 29
Average Low: 7
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.35
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.20
Average Precip to date: 0.90
Precip Year to Date: 0.20
Sunset Tonight: 6:04:18 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:26:43 am



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Today in Weather History

February 17th, 1962: Very heavy snow of 20 to 30 inches fell across the southeastern half of South Dakota. One location had 44 inches of snowfall from the storm. Everything was shut down due to the storm, including roads, schools, and businesses. Some snowfall amounts included 10 inches at Bryant, 11 inches at Miller, 20 inches at Mitchell, 21 inches at Redfield, 23 inches at Huron, and 32 inches at Sioux Falls.

February 17th, 1972: In Minnesota, high winds of 30 to 50 mph across southern and central Minnesota reduced visibilities to zero at times from blowing snow. Wind gusts of 90 mph were reported at Worthington and Fairmont. Snow of 2 to 6 inches fell across the state. The blizzard stopped almost all traffic from west-central through the south-central part of the state. Most schools in the area were closed. Dozens to hundreds of people were stranded in nearly every town. Many communities stopped all traffic from leaving town. The snow derailed a train at Butterfield. In South Dakota, freezing rain followed by snow accompanied by winds of over 60 mph produced hazardous driving conditions in the area. Traffic was brought to a standstill in many areas resulting in cancellations of school and other activities. Some accidents occurred due to the icy roads. Although the snowfall was light, strong winds caused drifting with visibilities to near zero at times.

February 17th, 1991: On February 17th, a significant snowstorm dumped massive amounts of snow on most of the state from the Black Hills, southwest, central, east-central, and the northeast. At the storm's end, parts of the black hills received up to 2 feet of snow while the rest of the affected area had between 8 and 15 inches. The heavy snow caused most of Interstate 90 west of the Missouri River to close and many other highways in the central part of the state. In addition, many cars and trucks skidded off the roads, causing many minor injuries. The only serious injury was a man rolled his vehicle over after losing control near Belvidere.

1894: According to Grazulis, an estimated F2 tornado hits 5 miles south of Warren, Arkansas. An older woman was killed in one of the small homes that were destroyed. In addition, fruit trees were ripped out and carried a half-mile. Another tornado, estimated F3, killed two people in Claiborne County, Louisiana.

1926: A deadly avalanche, Utah's worst, demolishes 14 miner's cottages and a three-story boarding house in Bingham Canyon. Thirty-six were killed and 13 injured.

1930 - Eureka, CA, reported an all-time record high of 85 degrees, a record which lasted until September of 1983. (The Weather Channel)

1958: From the 14th through the 17th, one of the most significant snowstorms of the mid 20th century struck the northeastern U.S. The storm produced 30 inches of snow in the interior of New England, including more than 19 inches in 24 hours at the Boston Airport. The same storm produced up to three feet of snow in the Middle Atlantic Coast Region, with 14 inches in Washington D.C. and 15.5 inches in Baltimore, Maryland. The storm resulted in 43 deaths and 500 million dollars damage over the Middle Atlantic Coast States.

1973: Snow showers moved across southeast Texas, with most locations only reporting snow flurries. However, the Houston Intercontinental Airport measured 1.4 inches of snow.

1987 - A couple of winter storms, one off the Atlantic coast and another over the south central U.S., produced snow and ice from the Mississippi Valley to the Mid Atlantic Coast Region. Freezing rain produced a coat of ice three inches thick in northern South Carolina, and 30,000 homes around Pee Dee were left without electricity. Parts of south central Kentucky were without electricity for three days following the storm, which was their worst in 35 years. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Santa Ana winds in southern California gusted to 63 mph at Ontario. Heavy snow blanketed parts of Colorado, with 11 inches reported at Strontia. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - The biggest winter storm of the season hit the Pacific Coast Region. In northern California, snow fell along the coast, and two day totals in the mountains ranged up to 67 inches at Echo Summit. Snowfall totals in the mountains of southern California ranged up to 48 inches at Green Valley, with 46 inches reported at Big Bear. Up to two feet of snow blanketed the southern Cascade Mountains of Oregon, and 20 to 35 inches were reported in the northern Cascades of Oregon. Up to ten inches of snow blanketed Seattle WA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



NOT IMPOSSIBLE FOR GOD!

Mr. Williams always took great care to encourage his students. Each day he would challenge them to do and be their best.

One Monday morning he decided to begin the week asking each student to share their goals in life.

"Matt," he asked the sad looking child in the front row, "what do you want to be when you grow up?"

"Possible," came the forlorn reply.

"What do you mean, 'possible', Matt?" he wondered.

"Well," he said in a hopeless voice, "my Dad's always saying to me, 'Son, you are impossible.' So, someday I want to know what it's like to be possible, I guess."

Jesus on many occasions dispelled the "myth of the impossible." On one occasion He said, "Nothing will be impossible for you." On another, He promised, "With men this is impossible, but not with God. All things are possible." Then again He said, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."

Paul said, "I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need." And he did! He was a warrior who became the ultimate witness. He was the one who approved the stoning of Stephen, yet he became one of God's most famous saints. He was the one who demonstrated to us that freedom comes from surrendering our plans to the plan that God has for us. He was the one who first proclaimed that forgiveness and eternal life are available to anyone who believes!

Prayer: Help us, Heavenly Father, to look beyond what we are to what we can become when we make ourselves available to Your transforming power. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. Philippians 4:13

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: 1 Days 14 Hrs 59 Mins
40 Secs

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: 14 Hrs 14 Mins 40
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.16.25

3 15 16 19 32 3

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 29 Mins 40
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.15.25

19 25 30 32 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$38,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 14 Hrs 29
Mins 40 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.15.25

12 18 43 58 61 19

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 58 Mins 40
Secs

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: 14 Hrs 58 Mins 40
Secs

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

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Oscar Cluff posts double-double to help South Dakota State hold off South Dakota 94-91

By The Associated Press undefined
VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Oscar Cluff scored 21 points and grabbed 16 rebounds to help South Dakota State hold off South Dakota 94-91 on Sunday.

Cluff added five assists for the Jackrabbits (18-9, 9-3 Summit League). Jaden Jackson hit four 3-pointers and scored 19. Matthew Mors had 15 points and shot 5 of 8 from the field and 5 of 5 from the free-throw line.

Isaac Bruns had 21 points and Quandre Bullock scored 20 for the Coyotes (16-11, 7-5). Chase Forte finished with 16 points and four assists.

Cluff scored eight points in the first half and South Dakota State went into the break trailing 42-40. Paul Bruns scored South Dakota State's last six points as they finished off a three-point victory.

Watchdog says Israel is to expand West Bank settlement as the region marks 500 days of war

By MELANIE LIDMAN and SALLY ABOU ALJOUND Associated Press
JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel has issued a tender for the construction of nearly 1,000 additional settler homes in the occupied West Bank, an anti-settlement watchdog said Monday. Israelis and Palestinians meanwhile marked the 500th day since Hamas' attack into Israel ignited the war in the Gaza Strip.

Peace Now says the development of 974 new housing units would allow the population of the Efrat settlement to expand by 40% and further block the development of the nearby Palestinian city of Bethlehem. Hagit Ofra, who leads the group's settlement monitoring, said construction can begin after the contracting process and issuing of permits, which could take another year at least.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli government.

Israel captured the West Bank, along with the Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem, in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians want all three territories for their future state and view the settlements as a major obstacle to peace, a position with wide international support.

The war in Gaza was paused last month when a fragile ceasefire took hold. The first phase of the truce is set to end in early March, and it's unclear whether it will be extended to allow the release of dozens more hostages, or if Israel will renew its military offensive against Hamas with U.S. support.

An Israeli strike in Lebanon killed a senior Hamas leader there a day before Israel is to complete its withdrawal from the country under a separate ceasefire with the Hezbollah militant group.

Settlement expansion is set to accelerate with Trump in office

President Donald Trump lent unprecedented support to the settlements during his previous term. Israel has also steadily expanded settlements during Democratic administrations, which were more critical but rarely took any action to curb them.

Israel has built well over 100 settlements across the West Bank, ranging from hilltop outposts to fully developed suburban communities, with apartment blocks, malls and parks.

Over 500,000 settlers live in the occupied West Bank, which is home to some 3 million Palestinians. The settlers have Israeli citizenship, while Palestinians live under military rule with the Western-backed Palestinian Authority administering population centers.

The Israeli government views the West Bank as the historical and biblical heartland of the Jewish people and is opposed to Palestinian statehood, while human rights groups have accused Israel of discrimination against and oppression of Palestinians in the West Bank.

Peace Now, which favors a negotiated two-state solution to the conflict, accused Prime Minister Benja-

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min Netanyahu's government of pressing ahead with settlement construction while dozens of hostages captured in Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack languish in captivity in the Gaza Strip.

"The Netanyahu government is operating 'on steroids' to establish facts on the ground that will destroy the chance for peace and compromise," it said in a statement.

Israelis mark 500 days of war and captivity

Israelis held protests across the country on Monday calling for the ceasefire to be extended so that more hostages can be released. Demonstrators blocked a main intersection in Tel Aviv, and some protesters planned to fast for 500 minutes in a show of solidarity with the captives.

"All I care about, all I want, is for my friends to return. There were six of us living in unbearable conditions, in a six-square-meter (65-square-foot) space. I got out, but they are still there," Ohad Ben Ami, a hostage who was released a week and a half ago, told Israeli President Isaac Herzog on Monday. He added that hostages don't count days while in captivity, they count minutes and seconds.

Hamas is set to continue the gradual release of 33 hostages during the current phase of the truce in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners. Israeli forces have pulled back from most parts of Gaza and allowed a surge of humanitarian aid.

But the two sides have yet to negotiate the second phase, in which Hamas would release more than 70 remaining hostages — around half of whom are believed to be dead — in exchange for more Palestinian prisoners, a full Israeli withdrawal and a lasting ceasefire.

Netanyahu and the Trump administration have given conflicting signals over whether they want to continue the ceasefire or renew the war. Both they say are committed to the eradication of Hamas and the return of all the hostages, but those goals are widely seen as incompatible.

Hamas-led militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, in the Oct. 7, 2023, attack and abducted around 250. More than half of the hostages have been returned in agreements with Hamas or other deals, while just eight have been rescued in military operations.

The militant group, though weakened, remains in full control of the territory. Hamas has said it is willing to relinquish power to other Palestinians but will not accept any occupying force.

Israel's air and ground war has killed over 48,000 Palestinians, more than half of them women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not say how many were combatants. The war destroyed vast areas of Gaza and at its height had displaced around 90% of the population of 2.3 million.

Trump has called for Gaza's population to be permanently relocated to other countries and for the United States to take ownership of the territory and rebuild it for others. Israel has welcomed the plan, while Palestinians and Arab nations have universally rejected the idea.

Rights groups and experts say the proposal, if implemented, would likely violate international law.

The proposal has meanwhile cast further doubt over the future of the ceasefire. Hamas may be unwilling to release the remaining captives — its only bargaining chips — if it believes Israel is going to resume the war with the goal of expelling the Palestinian population.

Israel kills senior Hamas official in Lebanon

An Israeli drone strike targeted a car in Lebanon's southern port city of Sidon, the deepest strike since the ceasefire between Hezbollah and Israel took effect in November.

Israel said it targeted Muhammad Shaheen, the head of Hamas' operations in Lebanon. Footage circulating online showed a car engulfed in flames. The strike occurred near a Lebanese army checkpoint and Sidon's municipal sports stadium.

The original withdrawal deadline was in late January, but under pressure from Israel, Lebanon agreed to extend it to Feb. 18. It remains unclear whether Israeli troops will complete their withdrawal by Tuesday.

Since the ceasefire, Israel has continued airstrikes in southern and eastern Lebanon, saying it is targeting military sites containing missiles and combat equipment. Each side has accused the other of violating the truce.

Top Russian and American officials will hold talks on ending the Ukraine war without Kyiv

By The Associated Press undefined

Senior American and Russian officials, including the countries' top diplomats, will hold talks on improving their ties and negotiating an end to the war in Ukraine, the Kremlin said Monday, in what would be the most significant meeting between the sides since Moscow's full-scale invasion nearly three years ago.

The talks, scheduled for Tuesday in Saudi Arabia, mark another powerful step by the Trump administration to reverse U.S. policy on isolating Russia, and are meant to pave the way for a meeting between U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin. The moves have sent Kyiv and key allies scrambling to ensure a seat at the table, and France called an emergency meeting of European Union countries and the U.K. on Monday to decide how to address the U.S. blitz.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and foreign affairs adviser Yuri Ushakov will fly to the Saudi capital later in the day. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, national security adviser Mike Waltz, and Special Envoy Steve Witkoff will meet the Russian delegation, State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce said. Ukraine will not participate.

Peskov said the talks will be primarily focused on "restoring the entire complex of U.S.-Russian relations, as well as preparing possible talks on the Ukrainian settlement and organizing a meeting of the two presidents."

Speaking on Fox News Channel's "Sunday Morning Futures" program, Witkoff said he and Waltz will be "having meetings at the direction of the president," and hope to make "some really good progress with regard to Russia-Ukraine."

In his TV interview, Witkoff didn't directly respond to a question about whether Ukraine would have to give up a "significant portion" of its territory as part of any negotiated settlement. U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said last week that NATO membership for Ukraine was unrealistic and suggested Kyiv should abandon hopes of winning all its territory back from Russia — two key items on Putin's wish list.

Lavrov and then-U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken talked briefly on the sidelines of a G-20 meeting in India nearly two years ago. The two chatted for about 10 minutes, and there was no indication of any movement toward easing the intense tensions between their two nations at the time. In the fall of 2022, U.S. and Russian spymasters met in Turkey.

Tuesday's talks will follow last week's telephone call between U.S. President Donald Trump and Putin in which Trump said they "agreed to have our respective teams start negotiations immediately." The call upended years of U.S. policy, ending the isolation of Moscow over its Feb. 24, 2022, invasion of Ukraine. After the call, Trump phoned Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to inform him about their conversation.

Trump on Sunday told reporters that Zelenskyy "will be involved," but did not elaborate. Zelenskyy said Monday his country had not been invited to the upcoming talks and won't accept the outcome if Ukraine doesn't take part. Ukraine's participation in any peace talks had been a bedrock of U.S. policy under Trump's predecessor, Joe Biden.

Speaking to journalists on a conference call from the United Arab Emirates, Zelenskyy said the meeting would "yield no results," given the absence of any Ukrainian officials.

Zelenskyy said he would travel to Turkey on Monday and to Saudi Arabia on Wednesday, but that his trip to the Arab nation was unrelated to planned U.S.-Russia talks there on Tuesday. Andriy Yermak, a top Zelenskyy adviser, has said there is no possibility of Ukrainian and Russian representatives meeting directly "until we develop a plan" to end the war and bring about a "just peace."

EU officials have pushed for the bloc to have a say in any Ukraine peace talks, and Zelenskyy and his officials also insisted that Europe needs to be present at the negotiations.

Lavrov on Monday was dismissive when asked about a possible role for Europe, saying that "I don't know what they have to do at the negotiations table."

European leaders regroup in Paris for strategy huddle after Trump diplomatic blitz on Ukraine

By RAF CASERT and SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — French President Emmanuel Macron called leaders from key European Union nations and the United Kingdom to his ornate Elysee Palace on Monday for an emergency meeting on how to react to the U.S. diplomatic blitz on Ukraine, which left the once rock-solid partner as a potential political liability.

The first visit by top U.S. officials to Europe has left the impression that the Trump administration was ready to embrace the Kremlin while it cold-shouldered many of its age-old European allies.

Despite belligerent warnings for months ahead of Donald Trump's reelection as U.S. president, EU leaders publicly ignored the ominous forebodings and somehow hoped Trump would stand side by side with Europe, while the continent would finally start to act on beefing up its defenses and become less reliant on the firepower of Washington.

But a flurry of speeches by Vice President JD Vance and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth during their initial visits to Europe last week questioned both Europe's security commitments and its fundamental democratic principles. Macron said their stinging rebukes and threats of non-cooperation in the face of military danger felt like a shock to the system.

The tipping point came when Trump decided to upend years of U.S. policy by holding talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin in hopes of ending the Russia-Ukraine war. Then, Trump's special envoy for Ukraine and Russia on Saturday all but ruled out the inclusion of other Europeans in any Ukraine peace talks.

Annalena Baerbock, Germany's foreign minister, called the week "an existential moment. It's a moment where Europe has to stand up."

That's where Macron hopes to step in with Monday's meeting. Even if Jean-Noël Barrot, Macron's foreign minister, sought to play down the significance of the emergency huddle of Europe's main leaders, the weekend scramble to set up the meeting underscored something much more fundamental.

Ever since World War II, the United States and western European nations have basically walked in lockstep as they confronted the Soviet Union during the Cold War right up to the increasingly aggressive actions of current-day Russia close to its borders. Even if there had long been U.S. complaints about the reluctance of many European NATO nations to step up their defense efforts, they never boiled up to the political surface as they have over the past days.

On Monday, Macron will have afternoon talks with the leaders of Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, Poland, Spain, the Netherlands, Denmark and the European Union on how to deal with Europe's security quandary. NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte will also attend.

French officials said no firm decisions are expected to emerge beyond a show of unity of European leaders.

"There is a wind of unity blowing over Europe, as we perhaps have not felt since the COVID period," said Barrot, referring to the pandemic in 2020 when the 27 EU nations had to stand side by side to stave off a health catastrophe.

A strong U.S. link, though, will remain essential for the foreseeable future since it will take many years before European nations can ratchet up defense equipment production and integrate it into an effective force.

That U.S. bond also applies to dealing with war in Ukraine, said U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer. "U.S. support will remain critical and a U.S. security guarantee is essential for a lasting peace, because only the U.S. can deter Putin from attacking again," Starmer wrote in Monday's Daily Telegraph.

While many EU nations are still mulling whether to contribute troops to a potential force in Ukraine after a peace deal, Starmer said that the U.K. was "ready and willing to contribute to security guarantees to Ukraine by putting our own troops on the ground if necessary.

"I do not say that lightly. I feel very deeply the responsibility that comes with potentially putting British servicemen and women in harm's way," he wrote.

European nations are bent on boosting Ukraine where they can, and EU nations see eye to eye when it comes to upping defense spending. However, even if there is a general consensus to move beyond the

goal of spending 2% of gross domestic product on defense, it is hardly clear how to get to 3%.

Some EU nations are insisting on an agreement on joint borrowing for massive defense projects, while others are insisting it is the task of the nations that lag in spending to get to the 2% threshold first. That issue is also set to be discussed at the meeting.

But some of the EU nations balked at the thought of the restrictive Elysee meeting with only a few chosen leaders while others were left in the cold. For an uncomfortable number of decisions, the EU needs the backing of all 27 nations. It raises the issue of veto power, which Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban as a staunch Putin ally has already threatened to use on plenty of occasions.

Slovenian President Nataša Pirc Musar said the selective list of invitees was proof that the EU member states are not treated equally. "This is not Europe that commands respect abroad. This is not the Europe that would be a serious partner to the North American ally," she said.

Here are some takeaways from the first month of Trump's Mideast diplomacy

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — When Hamas threatened to call off the planned release of three Israeli hostages last week, U.S. President Donald Trump stepped into the picture with an unexpected ultimatum.

Speaking in the Oval Office, Trump called on Hamas to release all of the more than 70 hostages it is holding by noon on Saturday. Otherwise, he warned, "all hell is going to break loose."

"They'll find out what I mean. Saturday at 12," Trump declared. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in lockstep with the president, hinted the entire deal could collapse.

Hamas ended up releasing the three hostages as originally planned. Netanyahu freed scores of Palestinian prisoners in return, and Trump's noon deadline came and went with no further hostage releases.

The drama was the latest glimpse of Trump's Mideast diplomacy — a world of big declarations, chaotic unpredictability and mixed results.

In some cases, this approach has yielded great dividends — most notably the 2020 Abraham Accords between Israel and four Arab countries. But it also has threatened to destabilize an already unstable region and shown little success resolving Israel's decades-old conflict with the Palestinians.

Here are a few takeaways from Trump's first month in office:

A surprise Gaza proposal

Trump has built his career on tough talk, threats and ultimatums — along with surprises that supporters say are meant to shake up the status quo.

Trump's boldest and most controversial plan so far has been his call for all of Gaza's 2 million people to be removed from the territory, for the U.S. to then take "ownership" and then to oversee a yearslong reconstruction process. The Palestinians, he says, would not be allowed to return — a nightmare for a people whose core grievance is the mass displacement they suffered during Israel's creation 76 years ago. The Palestinians have rejected the plan out of hand.

Trump has not said how this plan would work, where Palestinians would go, who would take them in or who would pay. Human rights groups and international law experts believe the plan would amount to a war crime.

It is not clear whether the plan is a serious proposal or an attempt to shock the region's players into returning to the negotiating table. But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Sunday the plan "is right on the dot. It's the right plan."

Israelis love him

If Israel were part of the United States, it would be a bright red state when it comes to presidential politics. Opinion polls last November showed Israelis overwhelmingly believed Trump would be better for their country than Democratic nominee Kamala Harris.

That support has shown no signs of softening. Early this month, Netanyahu was warmly received as the

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first foreign leader to visit the White House, where Trump unveiled his plan for Gaza.

While the idea of a mass transfer of Palestinians was once an idea of Israel's most radical ultranationalist fringe, Netanyahu has warmly embraced it since it was floated by Trump.

Since then, the Israelis appear to be taking their cues from Trump. Netanyahu repeatedly consulted with the Americans during last week's standoff.

Hosting U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Netanyahu once again called Trump "the greatest friend that Israel has ever had" in the White House.

He said the two nations stood "shoulder to shoulder" in confronting archenemy Iran and that he was working in "full cooperation" with Trump on a postwar plan for Gaza. He even adopted Trump's language in threatening to open "the gates of hell" on Hamas if remaining hostages aren't released. Yet he has continued with ceasefire talks at the prodding of the Americans.

Arab angst

America's closest Arab allies have rejected Trump's plans, which pose an existential threat to the Palestinian cause and their own stability. But some also face the threat of Trump cutting off badly needed aid.

King Abdullah II of Jordan, one of Trump's hoped-for destinations for uprooted Palestinians, gently refused the plan during his own White House visit last week.

Egypt, which borders Gaza and has been named as another potential landing spot for displaced Palestinians, has also ruled it out.

A key test for Trump is Rubio's visit to Saudi Arabia on Monday.

Trump and Netanyahu have made clear they would like to see the establishment of full diplomatic relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia.

But the Saudis oppose the mass transfer of Palestinians out of Gaza and want a clear pathway for Palestinian independence as part of any normalization deal with Israel. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's accusations that Israel committed "genocide" in Gaza could also complicate the talks.

After the war

Trump's postwar plan has sent shockwaves across the region.

Endorsing the forced expulsion of millions of Palestinians would be risky for U.S. allies.

The populations of countries like the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt are deeply sympathetic to the Palestinian people and going along with such a plan could trigger domestic unrest. Egypt has warned it could endanger its peace agreement with Israel — a cornerstone of regional stability for nearly half a century.

At the same time, Trump's plan appears to have bred a sense of urgency. Egypt says it is now working on its own postwar plan for Gaza and is set to host an Arab summit later this month.

Rubio has said that if others don't like the American ideas, they should offer an alternative. "It may have shocked and surprised many, but what cannot continue is the same cycle where we repeat over and over again and wind up in the exact same place," he said.

From the Arabs' perspective, what has been tried and failed for decades is America's unquestioning support for Israel as it occupies lands the Palestinians want for a future state, expands settlements and tries to impose a military solution on the conflict — all of which is set to accelerate under Trump.

More uncertainty ahead

Trump's Mideast team, led by envoy Steve Witkoff, played a key role in securing the current six-week ceasefire, even before taking office.

The current phase of the ceasefire is set to expire in two weeks, and Netanyahu has sent mixed signals about what happens next.

Netanyahu has repeatedly threatened to resume the war, as demanded by the hard-line partners in his governing coalition.

But he also has committed to continuing negotiations on a second stage that could ultimately end the war. It's impossible to say which path he and his unpredictable friend in the White House will choose.

Downloads of DeepSeek's AI apps paused in South Korea over privacy concerns

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — DeepSeek, a Chinese artificial intelligence startup, has temporarily paused downloads of its chatbot apps in South Korea while it works with local authorities to address privacy concerns, South Korean officials said Monday.

South Korea's Personal Information Protection Commission said DeepSeek's apps were removed from the local versions of Apple's App Store and Google Play on Saturday evening and that the company agreed to work with the agency to strengthen privacy protections before relaunching the apps.

The action does not affect users who have already downloaded DeepSeek on their phones or use it on personal computers. Nam Seok, director of the South Korean commission's investigation division, advised South Korean users of DeepSeek to delete the app from their devices or avoid entering personal information into the tool until the issues are resolved.

DeepSeek got worldwide attention last month when it claimed it built its popular chatbot at a fraction of the cost of those made by U.S. companies. The resulting frenzy upended markets and fueled debates over competition between the U.S. and China in developing AI technology.

Many South Korean government agencies and companies have either blocked DeepSeek from their networks or prohibited employees from using the app for work, amid worries that the AI model was gathering too much sensitive information.

The South Korean privacy commission, which began reviewing DeepSeek's services last month, found that the company lacked transparency about third-party data transfers and potentially collected excessive personal information, Nam said.

Nam said the commission did not have an estimate on the number of DeepSeek users in South Korea. A recent analysis by Wiseapp Retail found that DeepSeek was used by about 1.2 million smartphone users in South Korea during the fourth week of January, emerging as the second-most-popular AI model behind ChatGPT.

Fixing Germany's economy is a critical task for the country's next government

By DAVID McHUGH AP Business Writer

MULFINGEN, Germany (AP) — Germany needs a new business model. The old one, fueled by cheap natural gas from Russia and lucrative exports to China, is broken, leaving Europe's biggest economy mired in stagnation and angst about the future.

Delivering that fresh growth strategy is going to be the biggest challenge for the government that takes office after a national election set for Feb. 23, seven months ahead of schedule. The nation that became known for the quality of its products has not seen real economic growth for five years.

Multiple factors conspired to take Germany from industrial powerhouse to post-pandemic straggler: too much bureaucracy, a shortage of skilled workers, slow deployment of technology and a lack of clear direction from the outgoing coalition government are among them. Rising competition from China and high energy prices due to Russia's war in Ukraine were additional hits.

"We really need a more company- and enterprise-friendly politics," said Klaus Geissdoerfer, CEO of industrial fan manufacturer EBM-Papst. "We have bright talent in Germany. We have good companies, but at the moment we don't have the awareness on the political level."

Business criticism gets louder as election nears

With 2.5 billion euros (\$2.6 billion) in annual revenue and plants on three continents, EBM-Papst describes itself as the global leader in its field. The company reported last year that it was "suffering in Germany in particular" and experienced a 4.1% revenue decline in its home market.

Geissdoerfer said EBM-Papst's heating technology division lost 18.7% of its sales through a clumsily handled push to get property owners to replace gas furnaces with less polluting electric heat pumps.

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The requirements of the Building Energy Act put forward by Chancellor Olaf Scholz' three-party coalition were so confusing, people put off the upgrades to their heating systems or rushed to buy new gas devices before the law took effect, he said. That sapped demand for the ultra-quiet heat pump fans EBM-Papst makes.

Consumers wondered, "What is the right technology for my house?" Geissdoerfer said. "And so everybody said, 'If I don't have to, I better wait.'"

Geissdoerfer made a complaint heard across industry: Germany's bureaucracy is excessive. A 2023 law that requires public and private entities to combat climate change by reducing their energy use means EBM-Papst must assign employees to detail what the company is doing to comply, he said.

"So now, instead of implementing measures, they write and report," the CEO said, adding that the documentation work is a poor use of time at a company whose core business is energy-saving equipment. "I really hope with the new government we can get this solved, because at the moment it's too much."

EBM-Papst is moving in the direction where economists say Germany as a whole should put its industrial resources: into green and digital technology. The company, headquartered in Mulfingen, a town of 3,700 residents in rural southwest Germany, is equipping energy-hungry artificial intelligence data centers with efficient cooling systems for their servers. It also is working on incorporating AI features to help tech companies optimize their power use and to predict when equipment needs to be replaced.

In the meantime, EBM-Papst is coping with Germany's economic malaise by shifting its investment focus to Asia and the United States. The company now supplies U.S. customers, for instance, from plants in Farmington, Connecticut, and Telford, Tennessee. Its moves to localize production abroad predate the coronavirus pandemic but give EBM-Papst a shield against any new import taxes imposed by U.S. President Donald Trump.

Ties to China and Russia put Germany in a bind

On top of the homegrown issues, international relations have dealt another blow. Russia cut off most of the country's natural gas supplies over the German government's wartime support for Ukraine. Electricity prices, a key cost for industry, have risen to 2 1/2 times higher than in the U.S. and China.

Metalworking firm Mecanindus-Vogelsang Group, which makes precision parts for automakers and other manufacturers, says it pays twice as much per kilowatt hour for the electricity its German plants use as it does for its U.S. sites in Mt. Sterling, Kentucky, and Lakewood, New Jersey. That's 100,000 euros in added costs and "a gigantic competitive disadvantage" CEO Ulrich Flatken said.

"To avoid deindustrialization, which is already taking place, we urgently need internationally competitive energy prices," Flatken said.

Another shock came from China, which throughout the 2010s served as a lucrative market for German-made machinery and automobiles. Once Chinese companies started making those same products, backed by government subsidies, German exports suffered.

Germany's economy contracted in each of the last two years. By the end of 2024, it was only 0.3% bigger than it was in 2019, before the pandemic. The U.S. economy grew by 11.4% during over the same period, while China's expanded by 25.8%, according to Germany's Federal Statistical Office.

Complacency and depression

Marcel Fratzscher, president of the German Institute for Economic Research, thinks complacency set in during the boom years of exports to China. German companies weren't quick enough to respond to technological trends, such as the move to electric cars, he said.

"They enjoyed the success of the 2010s and they have been too slow in understanding that they need to change and adapt," Fratzscher said.

As the economic woes drag on, "mental depression" has set in, he said. "The pessimism is enormous among companies and citizens, and that's an important explanation why companies are not investing."

Many business executives and economists argue that Germany's next government should work to loosen constitutional limits on debt so it can increase public spending on infrastructure and education. Fratzscher wonders if political leaders, like the economy, will falter in adopting new ways of doing things.

"For the past 75 years, Germany has been built very much on consensus, stability oriented, lots of checks

and balances in the political system, and that makes rapid change very difficult," he said. "We need to change the mindset, to understand we need to be much faster on economic transformations."

China says US has 'gravely backpedaled' on Taiwan

BEIJING (AP) — China's Foreign Ministry took issue Monday with a revised U.S. government fact sheet that removed a line on American opposition to independence for Taiwan.

The United States has "gravely backpedaled" on its position on Taiwan and sent the wrong message to "separatist forces" on the island, ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said.

Taiwan and China split in 1949 during the civil war that brought the communists to power in China. The defeated Nationalists fled to Taiwan and set up a rival government there. Taiwan has its own government and military but has never declared formal independence from China.

"We urge the U.S. to ... stop emboldening and supporting Taiwan independence and avoid further damaging China-U.S. relations and the peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait," Guo said when asked about the revision at a daily media briefing.

The Taiwan Strait is a narrow waterway that separates the island of Taiwan from China's east coast.

The U.S. State Department removed the phrase "we do not support Taiwan independence" from the fact sheet last week. The document on America's relations with the self-governing island is posted on its website.

Taiwan's government welcomed the move, though a statement sent to The Associated Press on Monday did not mention the language specifically.

"The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has noted that the U.S. State Department updated the 'Current State of U.S.-Taiwan Relations' page ... with text that is positive and friendly toward us, reflecting the close and amicable partnership between Taiwan and the United States," it said.

It's not the first time the State Department has removed the phrase. It did so in May 2022 but restored it a few weeks later after a strong protest from China.

It's unclear why the State Department changed the language again and whether it signals any shift in policy under President Donald Trump, who returned to the White House last month.

The government in Taiwan is worried that Trump might not be as steadfast a supporter of the island as his predecessor, former President Joe Biden.

The U.S. does not recognize Taiwan as a country but is its strongest backer and biggest arms supplier.

Trump said last week that Taiwan, a leading maker of semiconductors, had taken the chip business away from the U.S. and that he wants it to come back.

China, which says that Taiwan must come under its control, has stepped up military exercises around the island of 23 million people in recent years. The U.S. government fact sheet says that it expects "differences to be resolved by peaceful means, free from coercion, in a manner acceptable to the people on both sides."

'Life-threatening cold' expected as polar vortex stretches across U.S. after deadly weekend flooding

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — Harsh weather moved west on Monday as a polar vortex was expected to grip the Rockies and the northern Plains after winter storms pummeled the eastern U.S. over the weekend, killing at least 10 people, including nine victims in Kentucky who died during flooding from heavy rains.

The National Weather Service warned of "life-threatening cold" into Tuesday, with temperatures in northeastern Montana predicted to dip as low as 45 degrees below zero (-42.7 degrees Celsius) with wind chills down to 60 below (-51 degrees Celsius).

Meteorologists said several states would experience the 10th and coldest polar vortex 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.

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In Kentucky, Gov. Andy Beshear said Sunday that the death toll rose to nine.

"I am sad to share some more tough news tonight, Kentucky. We just confirmed another weather-related death out of Pike County, bringing our total loss to 9 people."

Beshear had said earlier Sunday that at least 1,000 people stranded by floods had to be rescued. President Donald Trump approved Kentucky's request for a disaster declaration, authorizing the Federal Emergency Management Agency to coordinate relief efforts throughout the state.

Beshear said most of the deaths, including a mother and 7-year-old child, were caused by cars getting stuck in high water.

"So folks, stay off the roads right now and stay alive," he said.

Parts of Kentucky and Tennessee received up to 6 inches (15 centimeters) of rain, said Bob Oravec, a senior forecaster with the National Weather Service.

"The effects will continue for awhile, a lot of swollen streams and a lot of flooding going on," Oravec said Sunday.

In Alabama, the weather service in Birmingham said it had confirmed an EF-1 tornado touched down in Hale County. Storms there and elsewhere in the state destroyed or damaged a handful of mobile homes, downed trees and toppled power lines, but no injuries were immediately reported.

A state of emergency was declared for parts of Obion County, Tennessee, after a levee failed on Saturday, flooding the small community of Rives, home to around 300 people in the western part of the state. "There will be mandatory evacuations in effect for the residents in Rives due to the rising water, no electricity, and freezing temperatures creating a life-threatening situation," Mayor Steve Carr said in a statement Sunday.

In Atlanta, a person was killed when a large tree fell on a home early Sunday, according to Atlanta Fire Rescue Capt. Scott Powell.

Dangerously cold wind chill temperatures as low as 50 degrees below zero (minus 45.6) were expected in most of North Dakota, which remained under an "extreme cold warning" along with large swaths of South Dakota and Minnesota, according to the weather service.

Severe flooding

Water submerged cars and buildings in Kentucky and mudslides blocked roads in Virginia over the weekend. Flood warnings extended throughout Tennessee and Arkansas.

The mother and child were swept away Saturday night in Kentucky's Bonnieville community, Hart County Coroner Tony Roberts said. In southeastern Kentucky, a 73-year-old man was found dead in floodwaters in Clay County, county Emergency Management Deputy Director Revelle Berry said. There were a total of four deaths in Hart County, Beshear said.

The Kentucky River Medical Center in the city of Jackson said it had closed its emergency department and transferred all patients to two other hospitals in the region due to a nearby river flooding.

High winds brought down trees and power poles across Albermarle County, Virginia. The Charlottesville Police Department said Sunday on social media that officers' response times could be delayed due to "an overwhelming number of weather-related calls for service." Police urged residents to stay off the roads.

Power outages were reported along much of the eastern seaboard, from New York south to Georgia.

In West Virginia, 13 southern counties were under a state of emergency for flooding and some areas were cut off to vehicle traffic Sunday. Several volunteer fire departments dealt with flooding in their own buildings while answering rescue and evacuation calls.

Rockies, Midwest, Northeast hit with snow storms, Polar Vortex on the way

Ice and snow made road travel treacherous in large swaths of Michigan, which remained under a winter weather advisory until Monday afternoon. Michigan State Police reported 114 crashes Sunday around the Detroit area since snow started falling Saturday.

"Fortunately, most were one-car spin outs and there were no serious injuries," Michigan State Police said on X.

Authorities in Colorado reported eight people were killed in fatal vehicle crashes since Valentine's Day and warned drivers to be cautious as the weather made driving more difficult. The causes of the fatal crashes weren't immediately known.

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Also in Colorado, three state patrol cruisers that had pulled over along roadsides were struck by other vehicles, including one on Sunday where a trooper had stopped as officials prepared to close a road because of ice. In each case the troopers were out of their cruisers at the time and were uninjured.

Avalanche warnings were issued for numerous areas of the Rocky Mountains stretching from Colorado to Washington state, with the danger rated highest in Utah.

'Saturday Night Live' celebrates 50 years with comedy, music and show's many, many famous friends

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

Paul Simon and Sabrina Carpenter duetted on Simon's "Homeward Bound" to open the show, five-decade "Saturday Night Live" luminary Steve Martin delivered the monologue, and Paul McCartney gave an epic closing to a 50th anniversary special celebrating the sketch institution that was overflowing with famous former cast members, superstar hosts and legendary guests.

The 83-year-old Simon has been essential to "SNL" since its earliest episodes in 1975, and told the 25-year-old pop sensation of the moment Carpenter that he first performed "Homeward Bound" on "SNL" in 1976.

"I was not born then," Carpenter said, getting a laugh. "And neither were my parents," she added, getting a bigger laugh.

McCartney closed with the rarely performed song cycle from the Beatles' "Abbey Road," "Golden Slumbers/ Carry That Weight/The End," with its wistful ending, "the love you take, is equal to the love you make."

Lil Wayne and Miley Cyrus were among the night's other musical guests, though the show's musical legacy also had its own night with a Radio City Music Hall concert on Friday.

"SNL50: The Anniversary Celebration" aired live from New York, of course, on NBC and Peacock. The pop culture juggernaut has launched the careers of generations of comedians including Eddie Murphy, Kristen Wiig and Will Ferrell, who all appeared in early sketches.

And the evening included epic cameos that included Meryl Streep, Jack Nicholson and Keith Richards.

Steve Martin's opening sets tone for 'SNL50,' 'Update' keeps it rolling

Martin, one of the show's most prolific hosts and guests since the first season in 1975, tried to keep it current in the monologue even on a backward-looking night.

Martin said when the show's creator Lorne Michaels only told him he'd be doing the monologue, "I was actually vacationing on a friend's boat down on the Gulf of Steve Martin."

He was joined by former "SNL" luminaries and frequent hosts Martin Short and John Mulaney, who looked at the star-studded crowd full of former hosts in the same Studio 8H at 30 Rockefeller Plaza that has been the show's longtime home.

"I see some of the most difficult people I have ever met in my entire life," Mulaney said. "Over the course of 50 years, 894 people have hosted 'Saturday Night Live,' and it amazes me that only two of them have committed murder."

Later, on the night's "Weekend Update," anchor Colin Jost said there are so many former hosts and musical guests that wanted to see the show that many had to be seated in a neighboring studio and some had to watch "from the Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn" as a photo of Sean "Diddy" Combs appeared.

Martin took a jab at the always-difficult-to-wrangle Bill Murray in his monologue.

"We wanted to make sure that Bill would be here tonight," Martin said, "so we didn't invite him."

Murray appeared on "Weekend Update" to rank the show's anchors since they began with Chevy Chase. He poked at the whiteness of the group by first ranking its Black anchors, a list of just one, current co-anchor Michael Che.

The extravaganza came after months of celebrations of "Saturday Night Live," which premiered Oct. 11, 1975, with an original cast that included John Belushi, Chase and Gilda Radner.

It's become appointment television over the years as the show has skewered presidents, politics and pop culture.

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"It is a honor and a thrill to be hosting weekend update for the 50th and if it was up to our president final season of SNL," Jost said.

The show had its typical ending, with all involved looking exhilarated and exhausted on the studio stage. This night it was so crowded with luminaries it looked like it might break. Led by Short, they all applauded in tribute to Michaels, who created the show and has run it for 45 of its 50 years.

Cameos and memorials

Alec Baldwin, the show's most frequent host with 17 stints, appeared to introduce an evening of commercial parodies, seven months after his trial was halted and an involuntary manslaughter charge was dropped in the shooting of cinematographer Halyna Hutchins.

Aubrey Plaza made one of her first public appearances since the January death of her husband when she introduced Cyrus and Howard's performance.

The 87-year-old Nicholson was once a constant in the front rows of the Oscars and Los Angeles Laker games, but is rarely seen out anymore. He introduced his "Anger Management" co-star Adam Sandler, who sang in his signature style about the show's history. He gave a roll-call of cast members, giving special attention to several who have died, including his friends Chris Farley and MacDonald along with Radner, Jan Hooks and Phil Hartman.

It ended with, "six years of our boy Farley, five of our buddy Norm."

The show didn't have a formal "in memoriam" section, though it pretended to when 10-time host Tom Hanks came out somberly to mourn "SNL characters and sketches that have aged horribly."

A montage began with the late Belushi's "Samurai" character. The word "Yikes" appeared on screen in a sketch that included Mike Myers and a young Macaulay Culkin in a bathtub. A "body shaming" label appeared over the beloved sketch of Farley and the late Patrick Swayze as Chippendale's dancers, and "slut shaming" appeared over one of the show's earliest, catchphrases, Dan Aykroyd saying "Jane, you ignorant slut" to Jane Curtin. The current-day Aykroyd was a notable absence.

The oldest former cast member, 88-year-old Garrett Morris, appeared to introduce a film that showed the whole original cast.

"I had no idea y'all that I would be required to do so many reunion shows," he said.

Sketches and bits jam-packed with former cast and hosts

The first sketch featured a mash-up of former cast members and hosts. Fred Armisen hosted a "Lawrence Welk Show" that featured Ferrell as Robert Goulet.

Former hosts Kim Kardashian and Scarlett Johansson — Jost's wife — gave an updated version of the elegant singing Maharelle Sisters with former cast members Ana Gasteyer and Wiig, who provided the traditional punchline "And I'm Dooneese" with a balding head and creepy, tiny doll arms.

It was followed by "Black Jeopardy," hosted by the show's longest running (and still current) cast member, Kenan Thompson, who called the game show the only one "where every single viewer fully understood Kendrick's halftime performance."

It showcased many of the show's most prominent Black cast members through the years including Tracy Morgan and Murphy, doing a Morgan impression.

"Big Dog gonna make some big money!" Murphy-as-Morgan shouted.

Streep walked on as the mother of McKinnon's constant alien abductee Miss Rafferty, with the same spread legs and vulgar manner.

Streep's fellow all-time-great actor Robert De Niro paired with Rachel Dratch in a "Debbie Downer" sketch with its traditional trombone accompaniment.

Former cast member Amy Poehler and former lead writer Tina Fey, who partnered as "Weekend Update" anchors, led a Q-and-A with audience questions.

Ryan Reynolds stood, and they asked him how it's going.

"Great, why?" he said defensively. "What have you heard?"

Reynolds and wife Blake Lively, sitting next to him, have been locked in a heated legal and media battle with her "It Ends With Us" director and co-star Justin Baldoni.

Julia Louis-Dreyfus, Adam Driver, Cher, Bad Bunny, Peyton Manning and Richards were also featured in

the bit.

Poehler also paired with Rudolph for a revival of their mock talk show "Bronx Beat," that featured Mike Myers as his mother-in-law-inspired, Streisand-loving character "Linda Richman."

"Look at you, both of you, you look like buttah," Myers said.

Experts push to restore Syria's war-torn heritage sites, including renowned Roman ruins at Palmyra

By SALLY ABOU ALJOUD and GHAITH ALSAYED Associated Press

PALMYRA, Syria (AP) — Experts are returning to Syria's war-ravaged heritage sites, hoping to lay the groundwork for restoring them and reviving tourism, which they say could provide a much-needed boost to the country's decimated economy after nearly 14 years of war.

Once-thriving landmarks like the ancient city of Palmyra and the medieval Crusader castle of Crac des Chevaliers remain scarred by years of conflict, but local tourists are returning to the sites, and conservationists hope their historical and cultural significance will eventually draw international visitors back.

Palmyra

One of Syria's six UNESCO World Heritage sites, Palmyra was once a key hub to the ancient Silk Road network linking the Roman and Parthian empires to Asia. Located in the Syrian desert, it is renowned for its 2,000-year-old Roman-era ruins. It is now marked by shattered columns and damaged temples.

Before the Syrian uprising that began in 2011 and soon escalated into a brutal civil war, Palmyra was Syria's main tourist destination, attracting around 150,000 visitors monthly, Ayman Nabu, a researcher and expert in ruins told The Associated Press. Dubbed the "Bride of the Desert," he said "Palmyra revitalized the steppe and used to be a global tourist magnet."

The ancient city was the capital of an Arab client state of the Roman Empire that briefly rebelled and carved out its own kingdom in the third century, led by Queen Zenobia.

In more recent times, the area had darker associations. It was home to Tadmur prison, where thousands of opponents of the Assad family's rule in Syria were reportedly tortured. The Islamic State group demolished the prison after capturing the town.

IS militants later destroyed Palmyra's historic temples of Bel and Baalshamin and the Arch of Triumph, viewing them as monuments to idolatry, and beheaded an elderly antiquities scholar who had dedicated his life to overseeing the ruins.

Between 2015 and 2017, control of Palmyra shifted between IS and the Syrian army before Assad's forces, backed by Russia and Iran-aligned militias, recaptured it. They established military bases in the neighboring town, which was left heavily damaged and largely abandoned. Fakhr al-Din al-Ma'ani Castle, a 16th-century fortress overlooking the city, was repurposed by Russian troops as a military barracks.

Nabu, the researcher, visited Palmyra five days after the fall of the former government.

"We saw extensive excavation within the tombs," he said, noting significant destruction by both IS and Assad government forces. "The (Palmyra) museum was in a deplorable state, with missing documents and artifacts — we have no idea what happened to them."

At the theater, the Tetracylon, and other ruins along the main colonnaded street, Nabu said they documented many illegal drillings revealing sculptures, as well as theft and smuggling of funerary or tomb-related sculptures in 2015 when IS had control of the site. While seven of the stolen sculptures were retrieved and put in a museum in Idlib, 22 others were smuggled out, Nabu added. Many pieces likely ended up in underground markets or private collections.

Inside the city's underground tombs, Islamic verses are scrawled on the walls, while plaster covers wall paintings, some depicting mythological themes that highlight Palmyra's deep cultural ties to the Greco-Roman world.

"Syria has a treasure of ruins," Nabu said, emphasizing the need for preservation efforts. He said Syria's interim administration, led by the Islamist former insurgent group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, has decided to

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wait until after the transition phase to develop a strategic plan to restore heritage sites.

Matthieu Lamarre of the U.N.'s scientific, educational and cultural organization UNESCO, said the agency had since 2015, "remotely supported the protection of Syrian cultural heritage" through satellite analyses, reports and documentation and recommendations to local experts, but it did not conduct any work on site.

He added that UNESCO has explored possibilities for technical assistance if security conditions improve. In 2019, international experts convened by UNESCO said detailed studies would need to be done before starting major restorations.

Crac des Chevaliers

Beyond Palmyra, other historical sites bear the scars of war.

Perched on a hill near the town of Al-Husn, with sweeping views, Crac des Chevaliers, a medieval castle originally built by the Romans and later expanded by the Crusaders, was heavily bombarded during the Syrian civil war.

On a recent day, armed fighters in military uniform roamed the castle grounds alongside local tourists, taking selfies among the ruins.

Hazem Hanna, an architect and head of the antiquities department of Crac des Chevaliers, pointed to the collapsed columns and an entrance staircase obliterated by airstrikes. Damage from government airstrikes in 2014 destroyed much of the central courtyard and the arabesque-adorned columns, Hanna said.

"Relying on the cultural background of Syria's historical sites and their archaeological and historical significance to enthusiasts worldwide, I hope and expect that when the opportunity arises for tourists to visit Syria, we will witness a significant tourism revival," he said.

Some sections of Crac des Chevaliers were renovated after airstrikes and the deadly 7.8 magnitude earthquake in 2023 that struck a wide area of neighboring Turkey and also Syria, Hanna said. However, much of the castle remains in ruins.

Both Nabu and Hanna believe restoration will take time. "We need trained technical teams to evaluate the current condition of the ruin sites," Nabu said.

The Dead Cities

In Northwest Syria, more than 700 abandoned Byzantine settlements called Dead Cities, stretch across rocky hills and plains, their weathered limestone ruins featuring remnants of stone houses, basilicas, tombs and colonnaded streets. Despite partial collapse, arched doorways, intricate carvings and towering church facades endure, surrounded by olive trees that root deep into history.

Dating back to the first century, these villages once thrived on trade and agriculture. Today, some sites now shelter displaced Syrians, with stone houses repurposed as homes and barns, their walls blackened by fire and smoke. Crumbling structures suffer from poor maintenance and careless repurposing.

Looters have ravaged the ancient sites, Nabu said, leaving gaping holes in search of artifacts. Local visitors carve names and messages into centuries-old walls. Sheep enclosures dot the ruins, plastic debris blending with ancient stone.

Moustafa Al-Kaddour, a local resident, returned after eight years. Touring the ruins with family members he brought from Quneitra, he reflected on childhood memories.

"This is where we went to school," he said, pointing in the distance. "In the middle of class, we used to leave and come here to see the ruins."

"My feelings are indescribable," al-Kaddour, who also saw his father for the first time in years, told the AP. "My brain still cannot comprehend that after eight years, by God's will, we made it back home."

He said the Assad forces had established a military position in the village, subjecting the ruins to heavy shelling and gunfire. The area was then controlled by rebels, who made the area off-limits to most Syrians and international tourists, unlike Palmyra, which still saw some visitors during the war.

The Dead Cities were added to UNESCO's World Heritage List in 2011 as an open-air museum, said Nabu. Idlib province alone hosts "over 1,000 heritage sites spanning different time periods — about a third of Syria's total ruins," he added.

Beyond the bombings and air raids, looting and unauthorized digging have caused significant damage,

Nabu said, adding that new construction near the ruins lacks planning and threatens preservation.

"Tens of thousands" of looted artifacts remain undocumented, he said. For those documented, authorities are compiling case files for international circulation in coordination with the Directorate of Antiquities and Museums to locate them and hopefully retrieve them.

William Byron avoids late wrecks to win 2nd straight Daytona 500 for Hendrick Motorsports

By DAN GELSTON AP Sports Writer

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla (AP) — William Byron fortuitously missed the ferocious wrecks down the stretch at the Daytona 500 that knocked out contenders racing for the checkered flag and left him with a repeat victory in sight.

Still, sitting ninth with one lap left in an overtime finish, the odds seemed against the driver of the No. 24 Chevrolet to escape the rest of the race unscathed, or even have enough time to pull off the comeback win.

Thanks to one more crash, Byron used a clean ride on his final lap to escape the chaos and race to his second straight Daytona 500 victory. He dodged a string of late-race wreckage that knocked out a chunk of contenders and sent the Hendrick Motorsports driver into victory lane Sunday night at Daytona International Speedway.

"It's not all luck to win twice in a row," Byron said.

Maybe not. But Byron certainly was in the right place by racing near the outside wall in overtime to become the first back-to-back winner since Denny Hamlin in 2019-20.

Byron took advantage of another major mess on the final lap — NASCAR did not drop the caution and let the field race to the finish — and took another, familiar burnout in Daytona International Speedway.

"It's obviously really special," Byron said. "It's an amazing race, and obviously a lot of crazy racing out there tonight and just a lot of pushing and shoving."

The 27-year-old Byron held on to win after two weather delays totaling more than 3 1/2 hours, and with President Donald Trump set to watch the rest of the race in Florida, after he earlier led drivers on two laps around the track in his heavily armored presidential limousine known in Washington as "The Beast."

Hendrick Motorsports won its 10th Daytona 500 to break a tie with Petty Enterprises for the record.

"Just obviously fortunate it worked out in our favor," Byron said. "Crazy? Yeah. I can't honestly believe that but we're here."

Byron became the youngest driver to win multiple Daytona 500s, breaking the record held by Jeff Gordon, also in the No. 24. Gordon, a Hall of Famer and four-time NASCAR champion, is now Byron's boss as vice chairman of Hendrick Motorsports.

Gordon flashed a thumbs up when told Byron broke his record for youngest two-time winner by four months.

"I hope he breaks them all," Gordon said. "I'm in full support of that."

Austin Cindric held the lead headed to the white flag when he was wiped out in crash that took out a slew of drivers that included Chase Briscoe, Denny Hamlin and Alex Bowman. It was sixth time in the last eight Daytona 500s the race spilled into overtime, setting up Byron to become the fifth driver to win it in consecutive years.

Byron won for the 14th time in his Cup career, and already set his sights on the championship race in Phoenix after finishing third in the standings in each of the last two years.

"We plan on trying to win a lot of races this year, so we're not going to stop here," Byron said. "We're going to continue to push forward and try to get to Phoenix."

It wouldn't be Daytona without all the flips, slams and skids down the stretch that inevitably send the race into overtime.

With four laps left, Ryan Preece turned upside-down and essentially did a wheelie in his No. 60 Ford. His car flipped onto its roof and turned back onto its tires before hitting the outside wall. Preece dropped his safety net to signal to crews he was OK.

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Bubba Wallace, Kyle Larson, Daniel Suarez and Brad Keselowski all had their shots at victory lane spoiled, and the race was red-flagged, just 11 laps after another big one shuffled the field and knocked four former Cup Series champions out of contention.

Reigning NASCAR champion Joey Logano and Ricky Stenhouse started the multi-car melee when Logano moved to the middle and Stenhouse moved to block him. It stacked up Logano, and the accordion effect sent several cars — including ones belonging to former Cup champs Kyle Busch, Ryan Blaney and Chase Elliott — sliding in every direction.

Busch's car ended up on a wrecker, extending his skid to 0 for 20 in "The Great American Race."

Tyler Reddick was second and two-time Daytona 500 champion Jimmie Johnson was third. Chase Briscoe was fourth and John Hunter Nemechek fifth.

Xfinity Series champion Justin Allgaier finished ninth driving for team owner and two-time Daytona 500 champion Dale Earnhardt Jr. in JR Motorsports' Cup debut.

Not bad. Not good enough to beat Byron.

Byron, a self-taught racer who used computer equipment to hone his skills, was left standing one more time as a Daytona winner. Gordon was a three-time Daytona 500 winner and noted he still had the edge over Byron.

"Until next year," Gordon said.

Leave a legacy

Johnson and Nemechek gave Legacy Motor Club two top-five finishes. A Hall of Fame driver and seven-time NASCAR champion, Johnson is now the majority owner under an offseason restructuring. It was his highest finish in the race since he won it in 2013.

"I have emotions that I didn't expect to have. I've never been in this position as an owner, and it's really opened up a different set of emotions," Johnson said after his highest finish in the race since winning in 2013.

Early exit

Four-time Indianapolis 500 winner Helio Castroneves and 2017 NASCAR champion Martin Truex Jr. were among the drivers whose race ended after they were collected in a wreck before the halfway point.

Castroneves made the Daytona 500 under a new rule that allows for a "world-class driver" to receive a provisional spot. He landed a NASCAR ride as part of Trackhouse's "Project 91," designed to give renowned racers from outside of the series a shot in a stock car.

Truex, who retired from full-time racing at the end of last season, failed to win the Daytona 500 in 21 tries.

Truex finished 38th and Castroneves 39th.

Up next

The series shifts to Atlanta Motor Speedway, where Daniel Suarez is the defending race winner.

Ukraine's President Zelenskyy travels to United Arab Emirates as momentum grows for war peace talks

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

ABU DHABI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy traveled to the United Arab Emirates late Sunday as momentum grows for potential peace talks ending Moscow's war on the country.

U.S. President Donald Trump last week suggested he would be meeting Russian President Vladimir Putin in Saudi Arabia. The UAE, home to Abu Dhabi and Dubai, long has been floated as a possible site for peace talks as well given the large population of Russian and Ukrainian expatriates who have flooded the country since the war began, and due to the Emirates' work on prisoner exchanges in the past.

Zelenskyy arrived in Abu Dhabi after attending the Munich Security Conference in Germany. Footage released by his office showed him and his wife, Olena Zelenska, being greeted by an Emirati official and honor guard at the airport late Sunday night.

Zelenska has traveled to the UAE since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, but this trip is Zelenskyy's

first to the UAE since the war began.

"Our top priority is bringing even more of our people home from captivity," Zelenskyy's office said in messages online. "We will also focus on investments and economic partnership, as well as a large-scale humanitarian program."

The United Arab Emirates' state-run WAM news agency did not immediately report on Zelenskyy's arrival, which was unusual.

It wasn't immediately clear what his agenda would be while he was in the country, though Abu Dhabi is hosting its biennial International Defense Exhibition and Conference arms show this week, where both Ukraine and Russia have displayed arms — even as Moscow faces Western sanctions over the war.

Russian money continues to flood into Dubai's red-hot real estate market. Daily flights between the Emirates and Moscow provide a lifeline for both those fleeing conscription and the Russian elite. The U.S. Treasury under former President Joe Biden also expressed concerns about the amount of Russian cash flowing into the Arabian Peninsula country.

Zelenskyy's visit comes as Denis Manturov, Russia's first deputy prime minister, visited earlier Sunday with UAE leader Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the country's president and ruler of Abu Dhabi. A readout from WAM described the talks as focusing on "growing UAE-Russia ties and ways to advance shared interests, benefiting both nations and their peoples."

Meanwhile, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio will lead a delegation to Saudi Arabia this week for direct talks with Russian officials over the war. The outreach and Trump's direct call with Putin have upended years of U.S. policy under Biden that isolated Moscow over its Feb. 24, 2022, full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

At least 9 people are dead, including 8 in Kentucky, in latest blast of winter weather

By DYLAN LOVAN Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — At least nine people have died in the most recent round of harsh weather to pummel the U.S., including eight people in Kentucky who died as creeks swelled from heavy rain and water covered roads.

Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear said Sunday that hundreds of people stranded by flooding had to be rescued. President Donald Trump approved the state's request for a disaster declaration, authorizing the Federal Emergency Management Agency to coordinate relief efforts throughout the state.

Beshear said most of the deaths, including a mother and 7-year-old child, were caused by cars getting stuck in high water.

"So folks, stay off the roads right now and stay alive," he said. "This is the search and rescue phase, and I am very proud of all the Kentuckians that are out there responding, putting their lives on the line."

Beshear said there have been 1,000 rescues across the state since the storms began Saturday. The storms knocked out power to about 39,000 homes, but Beshear warned that harsh winds in some areas could increase outages.

Parts of Kentucky and Tennessee received up to 6 inches (15 centimeters) of rain, said Bob Oravec, a senior forecaster with the National Weather Service.

"The effects will continue for awhile, a lot of swollen streams and a lot of flooding going on," Oravec said Sunday.

In Alabama, the weather service in Birmingham said it had confirmed an EF-1 tornado touched down overnight in Hale County. Storms there and elsewhere in the state destroyed or damaged a handful of mobile homes, downed trees and toppled power lines, but no injuries were immediately reported. Extensive damage to downtown roofs and buildings was reported in the northern city of Tusculumbia, with authorities asking people to avoid the area, according to WAFF-TV and other local media.

A state of emergency was declared for parts of Obion County, Tennessee, after a levee failed on Saturday, flooding the small community of Rives, home to around 300 people in the western part of the state. "There will be mandatory evacuations in effect for the residents in Rives due to the rising water, no electricity, and

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freezing temperatures creating a life-threatening situation," Mayor Steve Carr said in a statement Sunday.

In Atlanta, a person was killed when a large tree fell on a home early Sunday, according to Atlanta Fire Rescue Capt. Scott Powell.

Dangerously cold wind chill temperatures as low as 50 degrees below zero (minus 45.6) were expected in most of North Dakota, which remained under an "extreme cold warning" along with parts of Montana and large swaths of South Dakota and Minnesota, according to the National Weather Service.

Kentucky faces severe flooding

Water submerged cars and buildings in Kentucky and mudslides blocked roads in Virginia late Saturday into Sunday. Both states were under flood warnings, along with Tennessee and Arkansas.

The mother and child were swept away Saturday night in Kentucky's Bonnieville community, Hart County Coroner Tony Roberts said. In southeastern Kentucky, a 73-year-old man was found dead in floodwaters in Clay County, county Emergency Management Deputy Director Revelle Berry said. There were a total of four deaths in Hart County, Beshear said.

The Kentucky River Medical Center in the city of Jackson said it had closed its emergency department and transferred all patients to two other hospitals in the region due to a nearby river flooding.

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.

High winds brought down trees and power poles across Albermarle County, Virginia. The Charlottesville Police Department said Sunday on social media that officers' response times could be delayed due to "an overwhelming number of weather-related calls for service." Police urged residents to stay off the roads.

Power outages were reported along much of the Eastern Seaboard, from New York south to Georgia.

In West Virginia, 13 southern counties were under a state of emergency for flooding and some areas were cut off to vehicle traffic Sunday. Several volunteer fire departments dealt with flooding in their own buildings while answering rescue and evacuation calls.

Rockies, Midwest, Northeast hit with snow storms, Polar Vortex on the way

Ice and snow made road travel treacherous in large swaths of Michigan, which remained under a winter weather advisory until Monday afternoon. Michigan State Police reported 114 crashes Sunday around the Detroit area since snow started falling Saturday.

"Fortunately, most were one-car spin outs and there were no serious injuries," Michigan State Police said on X. "A majority of them were caused by drivers just going too fast or following too close."

Authorities in Colorado reported eight people were killed in fatal vehicle crashes since Valentine's Day and warned drivers to be cautious as the weather made driving more difficult. The causes of the fatal crashes weren't immediately known.

Also in Colorado, three state patrol cruisers that had pulled over along roadsides were struck by other vehicles, including one on Sunday where a trooper had stopped as officials prepared to close a road because of ice. In each case the troopers were out of their cruisers at the time and were uninjured.

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.

The National Weather Service warned of "life-threatening cold" in the northern Plains on Monday and Tuesday mornings. It said northeastern Montana could see temperatures as low as 45 degrees below zero (-42.7 degrees Celsius) and wind chills down to 60 below (-51 degrees Celsius).

Avalanche warnings were issued for numerous areas of the Rocky Mountains stretching from Colorado to Washington state, with the danger rated highest in Utah.

Trump administration tries to bring back fired nuclear weapons workers in DOGE reversal

By TARA COPP and ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration has halted the firings of hundreds of federal employees who were tasked with working on the nation's nuclear weapons programs, in an about-face that has left workers confused and experts cautioning that DOGE's blind cost cutting will put communities at risk.

Three U.S. officials who spoke to The Associated Press said up to 350 employees at the National Nuclear Security Administration were abruptly laid off late Thursday, with some losing access to email before they'd learned they were fired, only to try to enter their offices on Friday morning to find they were locked out. The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation.

One of the hardest hit offices was the Pantex Plant near Amarillo, Texas, which saw about 30% of the cuts. Those employees work on reassembling warheads, one of the most sensitive jobs across the nuclear weapons enterprise, with the highest levels of clearance.

The hundreds let go at NNSA were part of a DOGE purge across the Department of Energy that targeted about 2,000 employees.

"The DOGE people are coming in with absolutely no knowledge of what these departments are responsible for," said Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, referencing Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency team. "They don't seem to realize that it's actually the department of nuclear weapons more than it is the Department of Energy."

By late Friday night, the agency's acting director, Teresa Robbins, issued a memo rescinding the firings for all but 28 of those hundreds of fired staff members.

"This letter serves as formal notification that the termination decision issued to you on Feb. 13, 2025 has been rescinded, effective immediately," said the memo, which was obtained by the AP.

The accounts from the three officials contradict an official statement from the Department of Energy, which said fewer than 50 National Nuclear Security Administration staffers were let go, calling them "probationary employees" who "held primarily administrative and clerical roles."

But that wasn't the case. The firings prompted one NNSA senior staffer to post a warning and call to action.

"This is a pivotal moment. We must decide whether we are truly committed to leading on the world stage or if we are content with undermining the very systems that secure our nation's future," deputy division director Rob Plonski posted to LinkedIn. "Cutting the federal workforce responsible for these functions may be seen as reckless at best and adversarially opportunistic at worst."

While some of the Energy Department employees who were fired dealt with energy efficiency and the effects of climate change, issues not seen as priorities by the Trump administration, many others dealt with nuclear issues, even if they didn't directly work on weapons programs. This included managing massive radioactive waste sites and ensuring the material there doesn't further contaminate nearby communities.

That includes the Savannah River National Laboratory in Jackson, South Carolina; the Hanford Nuclear Site in Washington state, where workers secure 177 high-level waste tanks from the site's previous work producing plutonium for the atomic bomb; and the Oak Ridge Reservation in Tennessee, a Superfund contamination site where much of the early work on the Manhattan Project was done, among others.

U.S. Rep. Marcy Kaptur of Ohio and U.S. Sen. Patty Murray of Washington, both Democrats, called the firings last week "utterly callous and dangerous."

The NNSA staff who had been reinstated could not all be reached after they were fired, and some were reconsidering whether to return to work, given the uncertainty created by DOGE.

Many federal employees who had worked on the nation's nuclear programs had spent their entire careers there, and there was a wave of retirements in recent years that cost the agency years of institutional knowledge.

But it's now in the midst of a major \$750 billion nuclear weapons modernization effort — including new land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles, new stealth bombers and new submarine-launched warheads.

In response, the labs have aggressively hired over the past few years: In 2023, 60% of the workforce had been there five years or less.

Edwin Lyman, director of nuclear power safety at the Union of Concerned Scientists, said the firings could disrupt the day-to-day workings of the agency and create a sense of instability over the nuclear program both at home and abroad.

"I think the signal to U.S. adversaries is pretty clear: throw a monkey wrench in the whole national security apparatus and cause disarray," he said. "That can only benefit the adversaries of this country."

Trump administration cuts reach FDA employees in food safety, medical devices and tobacco products

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration's effort to slash the size of the federal workforce reached the Food and Drug Administration this weekend, as recently hired employees who review the safety of food ingredients, medical devices and other products were fired.

Probationary employees across the FDA received notices Saturday evening that their jobs were being eliminated, according to three FDA staffers who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly.

The total number of positions eliminated was not clear Sunday, but the firings appeared to focus on employees in the agency's centers for food, medical devices and tobacco products — which includes oversight of electronic cigarettes. It was not clear whether FDA employees who review drugs were exempted.

On Friday, some officials expected the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to fire 5,200 probationary employees across its agencies, according to an audio recording of a National Institutes of Health department meeting. HHS oversees NIH, FDA and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, among other things.

People who spoke with the AP on condition of anonymity on Friday said the number of probationary employees to be laid off at the CDC would total nearly 1,300. But as of early Sunday afternoon, about 700 people had received notices, according to three people who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly. They said none of the CDC layoffs affected the young doctors and researchers who track diseases in what's known as the Epidemic Intelligence Service.

The FDA is headquartered in the Maryland suburbs outside Washington and employs nearly 20,000 people. It's long been a target of newly sworn-in health secretary Robert Kennedy Jr., who last year accused the agency of waging a "war on public health" for not approving unproven treatments such as psychedelics, stem cells and chelation therapy.

Kennedy also has called for eliminating thousands of chemicals and colorings from U.S. foods. But the cuts at FDA include staffers responsible for reviewing the safety of new food additives and ingredients, according to an FDA staffer familiar with the firings.

An HHS spokesperson did not immediately respond to a request for comment Sunday afternoon.

Nearly half of the FDA's \$6.9 billion budget comes from fees paid by companies the agency regulates, including drug and medical device makers, which allows the agency to hire extra scientists to swiftly review products. Eliminating those positions will not reduce government spending.

A former FDA official said cutting recent hires could backfire, eliminating staffers who tend to be younger and have more up-to-date technical skills. The FDA's workforce skews toward older workers who have spent one or two decades at the agency, and the Government Accountability Office noted in 2022 that the FDA "has historically faced challenges in recruiting and retaining" staff due to better money in the private sector.

"You want to bring in new blood," said Peter Pitts, a former FDA associate commissioner under President George W. Bush. "You want people with new ideas, greater enthusiasm and the latest thinking in terms of technology."

Mitch Zeller, former FDA director for tobacco, said the firings are a way to “demoralize and undermine the spirit of the federal workforce.”

“The combined effect of what they’re trying to do is going to destroy the ability to recruit and retain talent,” Zeller said.

The FDA’s inspection force has been particularly strained in recent years after a wave of departures during the COVID-19 pandemic, and many of the agency’s current inspectors are recent hires. It was not immediately clear whether those employees were exempted.

FDA inspectors are responsible for overseeing thousands of food, drug, tobacco and medical device facilities worldwide, though the AP reported last year that the agency faced a backlog of roughly 2,000 uninspected drug facilities that hadn’t been visited since before the pandemic.

The agency’s inspection force have also been criticized for not moving faster to catch recent problems involving infant formula, baby food and eyedrops.

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

By EMMA BURROWS Associated Press

MUNICH (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 Bassent 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."

Ukraine and Europe worry about being sidelined as Trump pushes direct talks with Russia on war's end

By AAMER MADHANI and MEG KINNARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's approach to ending Russia's war against Ukraine has left European allies and Ukrainian officials worried they are being largely sidelined by the new U.S. administration as Washington and Moscow plan direct negotiations.

With the three-year war grinding on, Trump is sending Secretary of State Marco Rubio, national security adviser Mike Waltz and special envoy Steve Witkoff to Saudi Arabia for talks with Russian counterparts, according to a U.S. official who was not authorized to publicly discuss the upcoming diplomatic efforts and spoke on condition of anonymity.

It is unclear to what extent Ukrainian or European officials will be represented in discussions expected to take place in Riyadh in the coming days. The official said the United States sees negotiations as early-stage and fluid, and who ultimately ends up at the table could change.

In an exchange with reporters Sunday, Trump said Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy "will be involved" in the negotiations. Trump offered no further explanation.

The outreach comes after comments by top Trump advisers this past week, including Vice President JD Vance, raised new concerns in Kyiv and other European capitals that the Republican administration is intent on quick resolution to the conflict with minimum input from Europe.

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"Decades of the old relationship between Europe and America are ending," Zelenskyy said in an address Saturday at the Munich Security Conference. "From now on, things will be different, and Europe needs to adjust to that."

White House officials on Sunday pushed back against the notion that Europe has been left out of the conversation. Trump spoke by phone in recent days with French President Emmanuel Macron and is expected to consult with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer this week.

During his visit to Munich and Paris, Vance held talks with Macron, British Foreign Secretary David Lammy, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte as well as Zelenskyy.

"Now they may not like some of this sequencing that is going on in these negotiations but I have to push back on this ... notion that they aren't being consulted," Waltz told "Fox News Sunday."

"They absolutely are and at the end of the day, though, this is going to be under President Trump's leadership that we get this war to an end," Waltz said.

Rubio, who was in Israel on Sunday before heading to Saudi Arabia, said the U.S. is taking a careful approach as it reengages with Moscow after the Biden administration's clampdown on contacts with the Kremlin following the February 2022 invasion.

Trump spoke by phone with Russian President Vladimir Putin last week and the two leaders agreed to begin high-level talks on ending the war. They were initially presented as two-way, but Trump later affirmed that Ukraine would have a seat — though he did not say at what stage.

It was not immediately clear whether any Ukrainians would take part in the upcoming Riyadh talks. A Ukrainian delegation was in Saudi Arabia on Sunday to pave the way for a possible visit by Zelenskyy, according to Ukraine's economy minister.

Starmer, the U.K. premier, wrote in an op-ed for Monday's Daily Telegraph that Ukraine must be involved in any negotiations on its future "because anything less would accept Putin's position that Ukraine is not a real nation."

Starmer also recalled the U.S. disastrous troop withdrawal from Afghanistan under President Joe Biden. "We cannot have another situation like Afghanistan, where the U.S. negotiated directly with the Taliban and cut out the Afghan government," Starmer said. "I feel sure that President Trump will want to avoid this too."

Trump on Sunday said he believed Putin is eager for a deal, while also noting that Russia has historically impressed on the battlefield.

"I think he wants to stop fighting," Trump said. "They have a big powerful machine, you understand that. They defeated Hitler and they defeated Napoleon. They've been fighting a long time."

Heather Conley, a deputy assistant secretary of state for Central Europe during Republican President George W. Bush's administration, said that with Trump's current approach to Moscow, the U.S. appears to be "seeking to create a new international approach based on a modern-day concert of great powers."

"As in the 19th and early 20th centuries, it is only for the great powers to decide the fate of nations and to take — either by purchase or force — that which strengthens the great powers' economic and security interests," Conley said. "Each of these powers posit claims or coerce countries in their respective regional spheres of influence."

There is some debate inside the administration about its developing approach to Moscow, with some more in favor of a rapid rapprochement and others wary that Putin is looking to fray the Euro-Atlantic alliance as he aims to reclaim Russian status and wield greater influence on the continent, according to the U.S. official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Trump said last week that he would like to see Russia rejoin what is now the Group of Seven major economies. Russia was suspended from the G8 after Moscow's 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimea region.

"I'd like to have them back. I think it was a mistake to throw them out. Look, it's not a question of liking Russia or not liking Russia," Trump told reporters. "I think Putin would love to be back."

The anticipated Saudi talks also come amid tension over Trump's push to get the Ukrainians to agree to give the U.S. access to Ukraine's deposits of rare earth minerals in exchange for some \$66 billion in military aid that Washington has provided Kyiv since the start of the war, as well as future defense assistance.

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Zelenskyy, who met on Friday with Vance and other senior U.S. officials in Munich, said he had directed Ukraine's minister to not sign off, at least for now. He said in an interview that the deal as presented by the U.S. was too focused on American interests and did not include security guarantees for Ukraine.

The White House called Zelenskyy's decision "short-sighted," and argued that a rare-earth's deal would tie Ukraine closer to the United States — something that Moscow doesn't want to see.

European officials were also left unsettled by some of Vance's remarks during his five-day visit to Paris and Munich last week in which he lectured them on free speech and illegal migration on the continent. He warned that they risk losing public support if they don't quickly change course.

Vance also met while in Munich with Alice Weidel, the co-leader and candidate for chancellor of the far-right and anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany party in this month's election.

Throughout Europe, officials are now looking to recalibrate their approach in the face of the Trump administration's unfolding Ukraine strategy.

Macron will convene top European countries in Paris on Monday for an emergency "working meeting" to discuss next steps for Ukraine, French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot said Sunday.

"A wind of unity is blowing over Europe, as we perhaps have not felt since the COVID period," Barrot told public broadcaster France-Info.

The 7 most memorable moments from the BAFTAs, from Zoe Saldaña to Mikey Madison

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

The British Academy Film Awards, or BAFTAs, have given audiences some great moments in recent years. Remember Ariana DeBose's "Angela Basset did the thing," that awkward performance that had a joyful second life as a joke? Or Ryan Gosling's wink at Emma Stone last year that had internet shippers in a tizzy?

The worst part is that for some parts of the world, including the U.S., they're also not the easiest to watch — or at least a little harder than just turning on ABC (and soon Hulu) to watch the Oscars.

The Associated Press is here to help those without a BritBox subscription with a rundown of the best and most memorable moments of the night, where "Anora" did not sweep (though Mikey Madison did triumph over best actress front-runner Demi Moore), "Conclave" won big and "Emilia Pérez" proved it's still a contender.

'(500 Miles)' singalong with Brian Cox

Host David Tennant got the ceremony off to an amusing start with a pre-recorded bit where various actors give him a little pep talk, appearing in his dressing room mirror — including fellow Scot Brian Cox, who kicked off a rousing rendition of The Proclaimers song "I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles)." Tennant took over and brought the anthem into the room, where Selena Gomez seemed genuinely surprised when he tapped her shoulder and inserted her name into the song. There were the celebrity participants of course, James McAvoy, Camila Cabello and Colman Domingo among them. But even some not "in the show" sang along happily as well, Saoirse Ronan and Jack Lowden included. Others, like Adrien Brody and Demi Moore, did not seem to be part of the chorus.

Selena Gomez narrowly avoids a presenting gaffe

No presenter wants a John Travolta "Adele Dazeem" moment or, worse, a Faye Dunaway "La La Land" flap, and you could see the wheels turning in Gomez's head as she looked at the card for the debut by a British writer, director or producer award. "I don't know how to say," she said quietly from stage, looking at her co-star and co-presenter, Zoe Saldaña, before looking further down on the card. "Oh, 'Kneecap,'" she said, quietly adding, "Rich" and simply avoiding the writer-director's last name, Peppiatt.

Jesse Eisenberg's sweet, funny tribute to his wife

Jesse Eisenberg started off his best screenplay win for "A Real Pain" with some signature, self-deprecating jokes about how neither he, his wife nor the person who sat him thought he was going to win. The audience laughed loudly when he said that's why his wife didn't attend the ceremony. But he quickly turned sincere, offering a touching tribute to his wife, Anna Strout, whom he credited with helping him learn

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about the world around him. "You've put every worthwhile thought into my head over the last 20 years," Eisenberg said. "I love you so much."

Zoe Saldaña's teary, fierce speech

Perhaps Saldaña was feeling the pressure of "Emilia Pérez's" diminished Oscar dreams two days before voting closes. Or maybe she was just really overwhelmed to win the best supporting actress BAFTA. Regardless, she let her emotions show in a teary and intense speech, in which she poked fun at her own inability to do a good British accent, shouted out her makeup artist as her closest confidant and made a case for the film.

"Films are supposed to change hearts and challenge minds, and I hope, I hope that 'Emilia Pérez' did something like this," she said. "Voices need to be heard, just not my English accent. Bye, guys."

Jeff Goldblum, piano man

In memoriam segments don't need to be flashy. All you need is a thoughtful reel, Jeff Goldblum and a piano, it turns out. He played "As Time Goes By."

Warwick Davis "keeps it short," and sincere

Warwick Davis joked that he'd keep his BAFTA Fellowship acceptance speech "short," telling the audience that it's OK, they can laugh. "This is probably the best thing that has ever happened to me, and I've been in 'Star Wars,'" he said. Davis also got emotional, speaking about his wife who died last year.

"She was always so supportive of my career, encouraging me to grab every opportunity with both hands," he said. "Since then, life has been pretty tough for me. Thanks to the support of our wonderful children, I've been able to continue working and engaging in life."

Mikey Madison gets her moment

Moore has been sweeping many of the best actress prizes, but "Anora" star Madison got a great, big moment and win. Though she said she didn't expect it, and said she should have "listened to my publicist and written a speech," Madison gave a notably thoughtful speech, paying tribute to her director, producer, co-stars, mother (her favorite scene partner) and the sex worker community.

"I just want to say: I see you. You deserve respect and human decency," she said. "I will always be a friend and an ally, and I implore others to do the same."

Rubio leading US delegation to Saudi Arabia for talks with Russia on Ukraine, according to AP source

By AAMER MADHANI and MEG KINNARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio is leading a delegation to Saudi Arabia for direct talks with Russian officials in the coming days to seek an end to Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, a U.S. official said Sunday.

Also expected to take part in the talks in Riyadh about Russia's February 2022 invasion is national security adviser Michael Waltz and special envoy Steve Witkoff, according to the official, who was not authorized to discuss the talks and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The official added that what the administration sees as early-stage negotiations remain fluid and who ultimately ends up at the table for the anticipated talks could change.

The trip follows last week's telephone call between President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin in which Trump said they "agreed to have our respective teams start negotiations immediately." The call upended years of U.S. policy, ending the isolation of Moscow over the Feb. 24, 2022, invasion. Trump also spoke separately with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

It wasn't immediately clear if any Ukrainians would take part in the talks. A Ukrainian delegation is in Saudi Arabia to pave the way for a possible visit by Zelenskyy, a Ukrainian official said.

Trump on Sunday told reporters Zelenskyy "will be involved," but did not elaborate on the role he'd play in the talks.

Zelenskyy has said he wouldn't accept any negotiations about Ukraine that don't include his country. European governments have also demanded a role.

Speaking to Fox News Channel's "Sunday Morning Futures" program, Witkoff said he and Waltz will be "having meetings at the direction of the president," and hope to make "some really good progress with regard to Russia-Ukraine."

Ukrainian Economy Minister Yulia Svyrydenko, a first deputy prime minister, didn't clarify whether there is a link between Zelenskyy's possible trip and previously announced U.S.-Russia talks. In a Facebook post, she said the Ukrainian delegation's focus is on strengthening economic ties as Kyiv "prepares to sign important economic agreements with countries in the region."

She didn't say anything about when Zelenskyy might go to Saudi Arabia and with whom he might meet. Andriy Yermak, a top Zelenskyy adviser, said earlier Sunday there was no possibility of Ukrainian and Russian representatives meeting directly in the immediate future. In a Telegram post, Yermak said the Ukrainians weren't planning to do so "until we develop a plan" to end the war and bring about a "just peace."

Mykhailo Podolyak, another Zelenskyy adviser, on Saturday denied that Ukraine will participate in any planned U.S.-Russia meetings in Saudi Arabia. "There is nothing on the negotiating table that would be worth discussing," he told Ukrainian television.

Svyrydenko's remarks came within hours of Witkoff's statement that high-level meetings were imminent in Saudi Arabia.

Witkoff didn't specify with whom they would be meeting and what they would discuss, but he said that he was leaving for Saudi Arabia on Sunday evening.

Russian officials and state media took a triumphant tone after Trump jettisoned three years of U.S. policy and announced that he would likely meet soon with Putin to negotiate a peace deal in the war in Ukraine.

Trump's announcement created a major diplomatic upheaval that could herald a watershed moment for Ukraine and Europe.

Putin has been ostracized by the West since the war began. In 2023, the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for the Russian leader.

In his TV interview, Witkoff didn't directly respond to a question about whether Ukraine would have to give up a "significant portion" of its territory as part of any negotiated settlement.

"Those are details, and I'm not dismissive of the details, they're important. But I think the beginning here is trust-building. It's getting everybody to understand that this war does not belong continuing, that it should end. That's what the president has directed us to do," he said.

Israel's Netanyahu signals he's moving ahead with Trump's idea to transfer Palestinians from Gaza

By MATTHEW LEE and NATALIE MELZER Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday signaled that he was moving ahead with U.S. President Donald Trump's proposal to transfer the Palestinian population out of Gaza, calling it "the only viable plan to enable a different future" for the region.

Netanyahu discussed the plan with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who kicked off a Middle East visit by endorsing Israel's war aims in Gaza, saying Hamas "must be eradicated." That created further doubt around the shaky ceasefire as talks on its second phase are yet to begin.

Rubio, in his upcoming stops in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, is likely to face more push-back from Arab leaders over Trump's proposal, which includes redeveloping Gaza under U.S. ownership. Netanyahu has said all emigration from Gaza should be "voluntary," but rights groups and other critics say that the plan amounts to coercion given the territory's vast destruction.

Netanyahu said he and Trump have a "common strategy" for Gaza. Echoing Trump, he said "the gates of hell would be open" if Hamas doesn't release dozens of remaining hostages abducted in the militant group's attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, that triggered the 16-month war.

The ceasefire's first phase ends in two weeks. Negotiations were meant to begin two weeks ago on the second phase, in which Hamas would release dozens of remaining hostages in exchange for more Palestinian prisoners, a lasting truce and the withdrawal of Israeli forces

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Trump's special Middle East envoy, Steve Witkoff, told Fox News that "phase two is absolutely going to begin" and he had "very productive" calls Sunday with Netanyahu and officials from Egypt and Qatar, which serve as mediators, about continuing talks this week. He also said hostages to be released include 19 Israeli soldiers and "we believe all of them are alive."

Netanyahu's office said Israel's security Cabinet would meet Monday to discuss the second phase.

Trump later told journalists it is "up to Israel what the next step is, in consultation with me."

In another sign of 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 paused a shipment of such bombs last year over concerns about civilian casualties in Gaza.

Resuming the war could doom hostages

This week marks 500 days of the war. Netanyahu has signaled readiness to resume the fighting after the ceasefire's current phase, though it could be a death sentence for remaining hostages.

Rubio said peace becomes impossible as long as Hamas "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," adding, "It must be eradicated."

Hamas reasserted control over Gaza when the ceasefire began last month, despite suffering heavy losses.

Netanyahu has offered Hamas a chance to surrender and send top leaders into exile. Hamas has rejected that scenario and insists on Palestinian rule. Spokesman Abdul Latif al-Qanou told The Associated Press the group accepts a Palestinian unity government or a technocratic committee to run Gaza.

Netanyahu instructed negotiators to leave for Cairo on Monday to discuss further implementation of the ceasefire's first phase, as issues over delivery of shelter materials continue.

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

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

In an interview last week, Rubio indicated that Trump's Gaza proposal was in part aimed at pressuring Arab states to make their own postwar plan that would be acceptable to Israel.

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

"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 wasn't scheduled to meet with Palestinians on his 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 hosts an Arab summit on Feb. 27 and is working with other countries on a counterproposal that would allow for Gaza's rebuilding 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 UAE and Saudi Arabia also have rejected any mass displacement of Palestinians.

The UAE was the driving force behind the 2020 Abraham Accords in which four Arab states — Bahrain, the UAE, Morocco and Sudan — 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 won't normalize relations with Israel without a pathway to a Palestinian state.

Rubio won't 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 if they don't comply, which could be devastating for their economies.

Rubio is also skipping Qatar.

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 that 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.

Colombian superstar Shakira cancels her concert in Lima after being hospitalized

LIMA, Peru (AP) — Colombian superstar Shakira canceled her Sunday concert in Lima after being hospitalized with an abdominal condition, the singer said.

Shakira shared a statement on her Instagram and X accounts Sunday afternoon, saying she is currently hospitalized and that doctors informed her she was not in condition to perform.

"I am very sad that I will not be able to take the stage today. I have been deeply emotional and excited about reuniting with my beloved Peruvian audience," she said.

The singer arrived in Peru Friday evening, where she was scheduled to perform Sunday and Monday. The country is the second stop on her Latin American tour, *Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran*, following two nights in Brazil last week.

Latin fans have given Shakira a warm welcome, with crowds gathering at airports to greet her. "Thank you for such an emotional welcome, Lima!" she posted Saturday on Instagram.

In her statement, Shakira said she hopes to recover soon. "My plan is to perform this show as soon as possible. My team and the promoter are already working on a new date," she said.

The singer is touring in support of her latest album, *Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran*, in which she channels her highly publicized divorce into music. The record includes the global hit "Shakira: Bzrp Music Sessions, Vol. 53" and won Best Latin Pop Album at the 2024 Grammy Awards earlier this month.

Shakira's tour continues across Latin America before heading to Canada and the U.S. in May for a series of concerts through June.

Trump administration wants the Supreme Court to let the firing of whistleblower agency head proceed

By MARK SHERMAN and LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration wants the Supreme Court to permit the firing of the head of the federal agency dedicated to protecting whistleblowers, according to documents obtained Sunday that would mark the first appeal to the justices since President Donald Trump took office.

The emergency appeal is the start of what probably will be a steady stream from lawyers for the Republican president and his administration seeking to undo lower court rulings that have slowed his second term agenda.

The Justice Department's filing obtained by The Associated Press asks the conservative-majority court to lift a judge's court order temporarily reinstating Hampton Dellinger as the leader of the Office of Special Counsel.

Dellinger has argued that the law says he can only be dismissed for problems with the performance of his job, none of which were cited in the email dismissing him.

The petition came hours after a divided appeals court panel refused on procedural grounds to lift the order, which was filed Wednesday and expires on Feb. 26.

The case is not expected to be docketed until after the Supreme Court returns from the Presidents Day holiday weekend. The justices would not act until Tuesday at the earliest.

It's not clear what reception Trump will get from the conservative-dominated court that includes three justices he nominated in his first term.

The case began last week when Dellinger sued over his removal as head of the Office of Special Counsel, which is responsible for guarding the federal workforce from illegal personnel actions, such as retaliation for whistleblowing. He was appointed by Democratic President Joe Biden and confirmed by the Senate to a five-year term in 2024.

Dellinger said the office's work "needed now more than ever," noting the "unprecedented" number of firings, without cause, of federal employees with civil service protections in recent weeks by the Trump administration.

The administration argues that the order reinstating Dellinger for two weeks wrongly restricts what the president can do. The brief cites the Supreme Court decision that gave Trump immunity from criminal prosecution and reflected a muscular view of executive power.

"Until now, as far as we are aware, no court in American history has wielded an injunction to force the president to retain an agency head," acting Solicitor General Sarah M. Harris wrote.

The brief references some of the dozen or more cases where judges have slowed Trump's agenda, including by ordering the temporary lifting of a foreign aid funding freeze and blocking workers with Elon Musk's so-called Department of Government Efficiency team from accessing Treasury Department data for now.

The executive branch has argued since the Carter administration that the Office of Special Counsel is the kind of job where the president should have the power to hire and fire, and letting the order in Dellinger's case stand could "embolden" judges to issue additional blocks in the roughly 70 lawsuits the Trump administration is facing so far, the Justice Department argues.

Dellinger's firing was the latest move in Trump's sweeping effort to shrink and reshape the federal government, testing the limits of well-established civil service protections by moving to dismantle federal agencies and push out staffers.

The independent Office of Special Counsel is separate from Justice Department special counsels such as Jack Smith, who are appointed by the attorney general for specific investigations, such as Smith's criminal investigation of Trump before he returned to the White House.

Europe tries to muscle up as US plots mediation to help end Russia's war in Ukraine

By EMMA BURROWS Associated Press

MUNICH (AP) — European leaders took steps Sunday to answer assertive U.S. efforts to end Russia's war against Ukraine, as France announced a meeting of continental leaders and Baltic countries called for new steps to strengthen Kyiv's hand in any future talks.

The jockeying for position by Europe, Ukraine's top military and financial backer along with the U.S., comes as the Trump administration has quickly sought to mediate an end to the fighting three years after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

With Moscow's forces making some territorial gains in eastern Ukraine in recent months, Finnish President Alexander Stubb on the last day of the Munich Security Conference called for "maximum pressure on Russia" through sanctions and asset freezes in the lead-up to any talks.

He laid out three phases: "pre-negotiation," ceasefire and long-term peace talks.

"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," Stubb said.

Macron mobilizes European leaders

French President Emmanuel Macron is rallying European leaders, with his foreign minister announcing an emergency "working meeting" on Ukraine's next steps after recent U.S. announcements.

Speaking to France-Info on Sunday, Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot sought to project a united front: "A wind of unity is blowing over Europe, as we perhaps have not felt since the COVID period."

Macron had called for "consultations between European leaders on the situation in Ukraine and the security challenges in Europe."

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He will host an informal afternoon meeting Monday with the leaders of Germany, the U.K., Italy, Poland, Spain, the Netherlands and Denmark, as well as European Council President Antonio Costa, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, and NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte.

The discussions could continue in other formats, according to the French statement, with the goal of "bringing together all partners interested in peace and security in Europe."

News reports said British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk were among those expected in Paris.

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 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 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 de-

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nied 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.

Throngs 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.

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

By STEPHANIE LIECHTENSTEIN Associated Press

VIENNA (AP) — Austrian authorities said Sunday 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.

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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.

Migration front and center in Austrian politics

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 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.

Migration was a prominent topic leading up to the election, which resulted in Kickl's party securing its first national election victory since World War II. The topic has taken center stage in many European countries, with far-right parties making inroads in elections.

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.

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 the attacker's 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

The Villach attack 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.

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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.

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.

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.

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."

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

Today in History: February 17

House elects Thomas Jefferson president over Aaron Burr

Today is Monday, Feb. 17, the 48th day of 2025. There are 317 days left in the year.

On Feb. 17, 1801, the U.S. House of Representatives broke an electoral tie between Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr, electing Jefferson president; Burr became vice president.

Also on this date:

In 1863, five appointees of the Public Welfare Society of Geneva announced the formation of an "International Committee for the Relief of Wounded Combatants," which would later be renamed the International Committee of the Red Cross.

In 1864, during the Civil War, the Union ship USS Housatonic was rammed and sank in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina, by the Confederate hand-cranked submarine HL Hunley, in the first naval attack of its kind; the Hunley also sank.

In 1897, the National Congress of Mothers, the forerunner of the National PTA, convened its first meeting in Washington with over 2,000 attendees.

In 1964, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Wesberry v. Sanders*, ruled that congressional districts within each state must be roughly equal in population.

In 1992, serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer was sentenced to life imprisonment after being found guilty of 15 counts of first-degree murder.

In 1995, Colin Ferguson was convicted of six counts of murder in the December 1993 Long Island Rail Road shootings; he was later sentenced to 315 years in prison.

In 2008, Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia.

In 2013, Danica Patrick won the Daytona 500 pole, becoming the first woman to secure the top spot for any Sprint Cup race.

In 2014, Jimmy Fallon made his debut as host of NBC's "Tonight Show."

Today's Birthdays: Actor Brenda Fricker is 80. Actor Rene Russo is 71. Actor Richard Karn is 69. Olympic swimming gold medalist and commentator Rowdy Gaines is 66. Actor Lou Diamond Phillips is 63. Basketball Hall of Famer Michael Jordan is 62. Film director Michael Bay is 60. Hockey Hall of Famer Luc Robitaille is 59. Olympic skiing gold medalist Tommy Moe is 55. Actor Denise Richards is 54. Musician Billie Joe Armstrong (Green Day) is 53. Actor Jerry O'Connell is 51. Actor Jason Ritter is 45. Media personality Paris Hilton is 44. Actor Joseph Gordon-Levitt is 44. Singer-songwriter Ed Sheeran is 34. Actor Jeremy Allen White is 34. Tennis player Madison Keys is 30.

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GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT 06-6

MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL

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502 North 2nd Street
Groton, SD 57445
Fax: (605) 397-8453

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

P.O. Box 410
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Fax: (605) 397-2344

Groton Area School

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Nick Strom, VP
Debra Gengerke
Martin Weismantel
Tigh Flieds
Travis Harder
Dr. Heather Lerseth-Flieds,
DVM

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Technology Coordinator

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HS Boys Basketball Game

Florence/Henry @ Groton Area
Monday, February 17th, 2025

Game Times/Locations:

Main Court in Arena

- 5:00 PM CT → Boys C
- 6:00 PM CT → Boys JV
- 7:30 PM CT → Boys Varsity
 - o *Halftime Entertainment: Sugar Babes and Sweet Sensations Little Dancers*

Main Court in Old Gym

- 4:00 PM CT → 8th Grade
- 5:00 PM CT → 7th Grade

Prior to the Boys Varsity game, the National Anthem will be first, with Varsity Introductions/Lineups to follow.

ADMISSION & SPECTATORS: Adults: \$5.00 Students: \$4.00.

CONCESSIONS: Will be available

LOCKER ROOM: Florence/Henry HS Team will use the far back locker room down the JH Locker Room Hallway. Florence/Henry JH Team will use the JH Girls locker room in the Old Gym.

**Team Benches – Groton: South Bench
Florence/Henry: North Bench**

ATHLETIC TRAINER: There will be an athletic trainer on site. AED is located near the ticket booth.

Livestream: www.GDIlive.com or Groton High School | High School Sports | Home | Hudl

JH Officials: Layton Holmstrom, Quinton Biermann, Rachel Guthmiller

JH Scoreboard: Kristen Dolan

C Officials: Marty Weismantel, Kasey Kurtz, Chris Frost

C Scoreboard: Joe Schwan

JV/Varsity Officials: Eric Donat, Scott Witlock, Justin Deutsch

JV/V Scoreboard: Kristen Dolan

C/JV/V Official Book: Alexa Schuring

C/JV/V Shot Clock Operator: Kristi Zoellner

Announcer: Mike Imrie

National Anthem: TBD

Thank you,
Alexa Schuring, Athletic Director