

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 1 of 66

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [4- Groton Area Pulls Away Late for 74-43 Win Over Florence-Henry](#)
- [5- Groton Prairie Mixed Bowling League Week #13 Results](#)
- [5- Revenue launches 605Drive System](#)
- [6- SD SearchLight:](#)
- [6- Mount Rushmore fireworks to return next year, mixing a spectacle with fire risks and other problems](#)
- [6- Billions of dollars at stake for farmers hit by Trump funding freeze, pause on foreign aid](#)
- [10- The simple solution for South Dakota's budget woes: Restore the sales tax rate](#)
- [11- Republicans worry GOP-led states will suffer from Trump's firings of federal workers](#)
- [13- Red states embrace Trump's crackdown on remote government work](#)
- [16- Weather Pages](#)
- [21- Daily Devotional](#)
- [22- Subscription Form](#)
- [23- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [24- Upcoming Groton Events](#)
- [25- News from the Associated Press](#)

## Tuesday, Feb. 18

### The Groton Area School District will be two hours late on Tuesday, February 18, 2025.

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 Suteday, 10 a.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Quilting, 9 a.m.

City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.

## 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.

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



**Today, I just want  
to thank God for the  
gift of life.  
No request, no  
complaints, just  
thankful to be alive.**

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.

Girls Region Wrestling in Clark (4:30pm)

## Friday, Feb. 21

Senior Menu: Taco salad, Mexican rice with beans,  
breadstick, fruit.

Basketball Double Header at Britton-Hecla: Girls  
C/Boys C at 4 p.m.; Girls JV/Boys JV at 5 p.m., fol-  
lowed by girls varsity and boys varsity.

## Saturday, Feb. 22

Boys Region Wrestling at Hamlin, 9:30 a.m.  
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m.  
to 1 p.m., 209 N Main

© 2025 Groton Daily Independent

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 2 of 66

# 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.**

## Delta Plane Flips

A Delta Air Lines plane, operated by its subsidiary, Endeavor Air, crashed and overturned upon landing at Toronto Pearson International Airport yesterday. All 76 passengers and four crew members aboard the flight were evacuated, and at least 18 people sustained non-life-threatening injuries.

Authorities, led by the Transportation Safety Board of Canada, are still investigating the cause of the incident. The aircraft was flying in from Minneapolis amid heavy winds, with gusts of up to 40 mph reported at the time of the crash. The temperature was around 18 degrees Fahrenheit. The Bombardier CRJ-900 aircraft is about 16 years old and can often operate for two or three decades with regular maintenance.

Yesterday's crash adds to a spate of aviation accidents around the world in the last few months, including when 179 people died in December after an airliner crashed on landing at a South Korean airport and when 67 people died last month after a US Army helicopter and an American Airlines regional jet collided in Washington, DC.

## Record Remission

A woman has remained in remission for more than 18 years after being diagnosed with advanced pediatric nerve cancer, doctors reported yesterday. Her remission is the longest observed success from an immunotherapy treatment known as CAR-T.

The patient first arrived at a Houston hospital in 2006 at just 4 years old, where doctors diagnosed her with neuroblastoma—a condition in which immature nerve cells become cancerous as they develop. After traditional treatments failed, she enrolled in an experimental trial to receive chimeric antigen receptor (CAR)-T cell therapy. The approach takes a person's own immune system T cells, equips them with a gene that helps target cancer cells, and reinjects them into the body.

While CAR-T has seen success in treating blood cancers like leukemia, the approach has been less effective in solid tumors like neuroblastoma. Of the 10 others enrolled in the original trial, nine passed away, while one survived for nine years before losing contact with researchers.

## Papal Health

Pope Francis will remain in a Rome hospital longer than expected due to a "complex clinical picture" from a respiratory tract infection, the Vatican announced yesterday.

The 88-year-old pontiff was admitted Friday after a weeklong bout of bronchitis, marking his fourth hospitalization since his 2013 election. Tests revealed a polymicrobial respiratory tract infection, meaning multiple pathogens are involved, requiring treatment adjustments. The Vatican says he remains stable but has not given a release timeline. Before his hospitalization, the pope maintained a busy schedule, including overseeing the commencement of the 2025 Jubilee.

The Argentina-born pope battled a severe respiratory infection in his youth, leading to partial lung removal. He spent 10 days in the hospital in July 2021 after colon surgery, was hospitalized for three nights in March 2023 for bronchitis, and underwent hernia surgery in June 2023. Officials say doctors are closely monitoring his treatment response and watching for signs of worsening, particularly pneumonia.

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 3 of 66

## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Kendrick Lamar becomes first hip-hop artist to land three albums at the same time in Top 10 of Billboard 200 albums chart.

Shakira resumes world tour after canceling concert over the weekend following hospitalization for a stomach illness.

Paquita la del Barrio, Grammy-nominated Mexican music icon, dies at age 77.

Matt Damon tapped as star of Christopher Nolan's upcoming film "The Odyssey," slated for a July 2026 release date.

"SNL" 50th anniversary special hauls in 14.8 million viewers.

## Science & Technology

Social media platform X blocks links to secure messaging app Signal; encrypted service has been used by terminated government workers to contact journalists.

Pancreatic cancer tumors reprogram adjacent nerve cells in ways that fuel tumor growth; study may lead to new ways to slow or halt the disease, which has a five-year survival rate of around 10%.

Paleontologists discover 30-million-year-old skull belonging to a new species of Hyaenodonta, a leopard-like apex predator that roamed what is now Egypt after dinosaurs went extinct.

## Business & Markets

Chinese President Xi Jinping holds meeting with top Chinese entrepreneurs, including Alibaba's Jack Ma and heads of electric carmaker BYD, Apple's Chinese rival Huawei, and gaming holding company Tencent.

Southwest Airlines to cut 15% of corporate jobs, or about 1,750 people, as part of cost-cutting measures; mass layoffs are first-ever in the carrier's history.

OpenAI cofounder Ilya Sutskever reportedly raising more than \$1B for his AI startup Safe Superintelligence at a valuation of over \$30B.

## Politics & World Affairs

Federal judge expected to rule by today in state attorneys general effort to bar Department of Government Efficiency from firing government employees or accessing data.

DOGE reportedly seeking access to IRS systems that store sensitive taxpayer data.

Four top deputies of New York City Mayor Eric Adams (D) resign in fallout from Adams' corruption case.

US and Russian officials kick off talks in Saudi Arabia about ending Ukraine war, while European leaders gather in Paris for Ukraine summit.

Israeli forces to remain in five locations in southern Lebanon even after deadline for full withdrawal under ceasefire deal.

At least 11 dead from Kentucky storm as the US faces a polar vortex this week, bringing extreme cold and snow that could set record-low temperatures.

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 4 of 66

## Groton Area Pulls Away Late for 74-43 Win Over Florence-Henry

GROTON - On a frigid Monday night, only the varsity game was played between the Groton Area Tigers and the Florence-Henry Falcons, and the home team delivered a dominant performance down the stretch to secure a 74-43 victory.

The game started as a defensive battle, tied at 2-2 in the early minutes. However, Groton found their rhythm, shooting a red-hot 73% (8-of-11) in the first quarter to take an 18-9 lead. Florence-Henry struggled offensively, making just 3-of-10 shots for 30%.

The Falcons found life in the second quarter, clawing their way back with improved shooting. Led by Carson Vavruska's nine-point effort, Florence-Henry connected on 7-of-12 shots (58%) and trimmed the deficit to just three points at 26-23. Groton cooled off to 40% shooting in the period but managed to take a 32-25 lead into halftime.

Florence-Henry kept the pressure on early in the third quarter, cutting the deficit to 34-29. But Groton responded with a decisive nine-point run late in the period, pushing their lead to 49-36 before finishing the quarter ahead 49-38. The Tigers shot 58% (7-of-12) in the third, while the Falcons managed 42% (5-of-12).

In the fourth quarter, Groton completely took control, closing the game on a dominant 14-0 run. Ryder Johnson led the charge, scoring eight of his game-high 22 points in the final period. By the final buzzer, the Tigers had secured a commanding 74-43 win.

Stat Leaders:

- Groton Area: Ryder Johnson led all scorers with 22 points and added a block. Becker Bosma had a stellar all-around performance, recording a double-double with 14 points, 12 rebounds, five assists, and three steals. Easton Weber knocked down three triples for nine points while adding five rebounds and two assists. Keegen Tracy contributed eight points and four assists, and Gage Sippel finished with six points, four rebounds, and two blocks.

- Florence-Henry: Carson Vavruska paced the Falcons with 15 points, while Ty Berg added 10. Carson Kelly had eight, Logan Koll chipped in six, and both Tucker Keller and Masyn Warne had two.

Groton shot an efficient 72% (26-of-36) on two-pointers and 35% (6-of-17) from beyond the arc while tallying 33 rebounds, 23 assists, and eight steals. Florence-Henry struggled from the field, shooting 34% (16-of-47), and finished with 12 turnovers.

With the victory, Groton improves to 13-5 on the season, while Florence-Henry falls to 11-7. The Tigers will be back in action Friday when they travel to Britton for a doubleheader.

- Story compiled by ChatGPT

Ryder Johnson 22 points, 3 rebounds, 3 assists, 1 foul, 1 block.

Becker Bosma 14 points, 12 rebounds, 5 assists, 3 steals, 1 foul.

Easton Webber 9 points, 5 rebounds, 2 assists, 1 steal, 1 foul.

Keegen Tracy 8 points, 1 rebound, 4 assists, 2 steals, 3 fouls.

Karson Zak 6 points, 2 rebounds, 2 assists, 2 fouls.

Gage Sippel 6 points, 4 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 foul, 2 blocks.

Jaden Schwann 4 points, 3 rebounds, 1 assist, 2 steals, 2 fouls.

Turner Thompson 3 points, 1 rebound, 3 assists, 2 fouls.

Logan Warrington 2 points, 1 rebound, 1 foul.

Blake Pauli 1 rebound, 2 assists.

Two Pointers 26 of 36 for 72 percent, Three Pointers 6 of 17 for 35 percent, Free throws 4 of 8 for 50 percent, 33 rebounds, 10 turnovers, 23 assists, 8 steals, 14 fouls, and 3 blocks.

Florence-Henry: Carson Vavruska 15, Ty Bergh 10, Carson Kelly 8, Logan Koll 6, Tucker Keller 2, Masyn Warne 2. Field Goals: 16-47 34%, Free Throws: 3-7, 10 fouls and 12 turnovers.

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

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 5 of 66

## Groton Prairie Mixed Bowling League Week #13 Results

Team Standings: Chipmunks 18, Cheetahs 15, Shihtzus 13, Jackelopes 12, Coyotes 9, Foxes 5

Men's High Games: Brad Waage 210 & 201, Vern Meyers 203, Butch Farmen 200

Women's High Games: Hayley Johnson 169 & 166, Nancy Radke 166, Sam Bahr 163

Men's High Series: Brad Waage 565, Vern Meyers 556, Butch Farmen 519

Women's High Series: Hayley Johnson 484, Nancy Radke 465, Vicki Walter 462

Week 13 Fun Game – Most Splits – Chipmunks with 15!

## Revenue launches 605Drive System

PIERRE, S.D. – The Department of Revenue's Motor Vehicle Division launches their new title and vehicle registration system, 605Drive, on Monday.

Vehicle registration renewals are once again available at DMVNow Kiosks, online, and through county treasurer offices. To access the online platform, visit the Department's website at [dor.sd.gov](http://dor.sd.gov) and select "Vehicle Registration and Plates" under Online Services. A new partner service platform will be available for licensed motor vehicle dealers and lenders.



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **Mount Rushmore fireworks to return next year, mixing a spectacle with fire risks and other problems**

**BY: SETH TUPPER - FEBRUARY 17, 2025 3:29 PM**

Mount Rushmore will host an Independence Day-themed fireworks display next year, bringing worldwide attention to the national memorial and South Dakota, but also bringing concerns about potential forest fires, water pollution, litter and other problems.

South Dakota Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden announced Monday that the state has reached an agreement with the federal government to host a fireworks display at the mountain carving next year in celebration of the nation's 250th birthday. Rhoden said in a news release that he struck the agreement with Doug Burgum, the former governor of North Dakota and new secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior, which includes the National Park Service.

"We are ready to throw the biggest birthday party ever for the United States of America," Rhoden said in the release.

Fireworks have a complicated history at Mount Rushmore. The National Park Service began allowing shows in 1998 but ended them after 2009. Debris from the exploded fireworks lingered on the 1,278-acre memorial site, a chemical in fireworks was believed to be polluting the memorial's water supply, and officials had grown tired of deploying dozens of firefighters in the forest around the memorial to put out fires started by falling fireworks embers.

There are also conflicting feelings about the fireworks in Keystone, the town at the base of the mountain. While some business owners welcome the fireworks displays and benefit from them, others have said the town is overwhelmed by the tens of thousands of visitors who converge all at once for the spectacle.

In 2020, then-Gov. Kristi Noem convinced the Trump administration to reauthorize fireworks at Mount Rushmore and also convinced President Donald Trump to attend. The show that year sparked controversy for gathering thousands of people together during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, and for a protest that turned into a physical altercation with law enforcement.

After that, the Biden administration ended the displays. Rhoden said he has invited Trump to next year's display.

Rhoden's announcement did not say how much the display will cost or how it will be funded. South Dakota Searchlight asked for an estimate and a funding source. Rhoden's spokeswoman, Josie Harms, said "those details will be confirmed at the proper time."

South Dakota spent \$1.5 million on the 2020 display. Tourism officials estimated that global media coverage of the event generated the equivalent of \$22 million in advertising for the state.

*Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.*

### **Billions of dollars at stake for farmers hit by Trump funding freeze, pause on foreign aid**

**BY: ALLISON WINTER - FEBRUARY 17, 2025 2:15 PM**

WASHINGTON — Farmers across the United States are finding themselves in precarious economic positions, as they attempt to navigate a strained farm economy and a barrage of executive orders from the Trump administration that put some farm programs in limbo.

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 7 of 66

In his first month in office, President Donald Trump has issued a flurry of executive orders to pause or cancel federal funding on a range of programs and grants — some of which go directly to farmers.

Even though the administration said it would not stop payments to individuals and courts have ordered the administration to resume the programs, many farmers are awaiting payments on their contracts and have not been told when or if they can expect to receive expected funding. Billions of dollars are at stake.

Missouri cattle producer Skylar Holden signed a \$240,000 cost-sharing contract with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to improve water systems on his 260-acre cattle operation. After getting approval in January for the next phase of the project and investing upwards of \$50,000 in pipes, equipment and labor, Holden says he got a call a week later from his field agent telling him the payments from USDA were on hold.

"I instantly asked ... what does that mean for all this money that I just spent, that I'm relying on these funds to come through?" Holden recounted in a TikTok live on Feb. 13.

He said he was told the money was frozen and that it was not clear when or if the payments would happen.

"Then to be honest with you, I just kind of zoned out. I just started running numbers in my head ... I was trying to figure out how I could make this work," Holden said.

He already works another job to try to make ends meet on the farm and cares for his cattle after work. He says the debt on this project could mean disaster for his farm.

When asked on a scale of 1 to 10 what his confidence was that the payment would come through eventually, Holden, who voted for Trump, rated the possibility a "one."

"I guess I have maybe a little bit of hope I will see the funding, but I am not too confident," Holden said in the TikTok live.

'Farmers are left wondering'

Representatives from farm advocacy groups and cooperatives say they are hearing similar stories from their members, but most are unwilling to speak publicly for fear of retribution. Many large farm organizations backed Trump's successful presidential campaign.

"We continue to hear from family farmers and ranchers about the federal funding freeze, which has created significant uncertainty," said Rob Larew, president of the National Farmers Union, an advocacy group that represents 220,000 farmers and ranchers in 33 states. "The interruption in funding raises concerns about whether USDA will disburse already obligated funds to farmers who have existing agreements with the department."

"The lack of clarity is leaving state and local agencies and partner organizations struggling to interpret and implement federal programs, while farmers are left wondering if they can rely on these programs as they make critical business decisions for the year ahead," Larew said.

The financial implications are huge in the administration's efforts to freeze or cancel funding. One of Trump's first executive orders called for a pause on all funding from the Inflation Reduction Act, enacted by Democrats during the Biden administration, which provided nearly \$20 billion for farmland conservation programs.

Another directive briefly paused all federal financial assistance. Other executive orders put a freeze on all foreign aid and dismantled the U.S. Agency for International Development, significant for American farmers because it purchases grains and goods for food programs and funds some agricultural research projects.

In limbo in Colorado

Roy Pfaltzgraff is trying to navigate the uncertainty on his 2,000-acre gluten-free grain farm in northeast Colorado.

He is struggling to get the farm refinanced, and a recent lender told him they would not calculate government payments — long considered a reliable backup for farmers — as part of his income, even if he has ongoing contracts. His federal contracts have not been canceled, as far as he knows, but he is afraid to spend money on them or pursue new projects.

"My concern is that if we get started and spend a bunch of money with the expectation that we will get some of it paid back, what if we don't? There are limits on what we can do," Pfaltzgraff said in an interview.

Pfaltzgraff is also concerned how the pause on USAID programs could affect his farm and others, po-

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 8 of 66

tentially causing a domino effect on crop prices.

USAID is one of the biggest purchasers of sorghum and other excess grains. Without their purchases, those grains could flood the market and drive down prices.

More than 450 producers around the country have contracts with USAID, according to an analysis by the Institute for Development Impact, and the agency's purchases at grain elevators benefit many more.

Food for Peace, one of USAID's programs, provided nearly 4 billion pounds of American-grown food to 58 million people globally in 2022, according to the U.N. World Food Programme.

### Interruption in research

The abrupt pause for USAID programs also interrupts agricultural research programs at 19 land-grant university-based innovation labs across 17 states — casting an uncertain future for those projects and the foreign grain markets they are attempting to cultivate.

The Soybean Innovation Lab at the University of Illinois announced last week it will close in April. The closure will have an immediate effect on the staff of 30 experts in tropical soybean and longer-term repercussions on their work to develop an emerging market for soybeans in Africa.

The lab's director, University of Illinois Professor Peter Goldsmith, said he had to make the hard decision to shutter the lab when they were suddenly no longer able to access any of their grant money or reimbursement systems. They are in the middle of work on a \$30 million USAID grant that was supposed to last until 2027.

"Where does the money come from to pay salaries, to pay people, to water the plants, I mean everything?" Goldsmith said in an interview. "We've run a very tight budget, but I never put into the scenario an act of God like this."

When Elon Musk's U.S. DOGE Service, known as the Department of Government Efficiency, dismantled USAID, it took down the agency's website and its procurement and payment systems — shutting down the ability for anyone with a contract to be paid for past or future work.

### 'A level of uncertainty that is unique to the moment'

For farmers, this comes at a time when they are already facing economic strain. Falling prices for corn, soybean and wheat over the last two years have led to declines in net farm income.

Jonathan Coppess, an agriculture economist at the University of Illinois, said farmers are facing compounding economic challenges: the underlying economic strain of volatile prices, high costs and inflationary pressures are being magnified by the uncharacteristic uncertainty about contracts, tariffs and trade.

"It's a level of uncertainty that is very unique to the moment," Coppess said in an interview. "Dealing with costs and crop prices is a common thing. Dealing with broken contracts, tariffs and possible retaliatory trade issues, those are not common things. There's almost two layers to the challenge."

Adding to that uncertainty: Congress is two years late to reauthorize the farm bill. And lawmakers on the House Budget Committee have called for billions of dollars in cuts to farm bill spending over the next 10 years.

Alisha Schwertner, a farmer and rancher in Miles, Texas, told the House Agriculture Committee at a hearing on Feb. 11 that weather disasters, inflation and supply chain disruptions have put a strain on her family operation.

Schwertner said the economic uncertainty has made it difficult for her to get credit for the farm and she fears what retaliatory tariffs could do to their bottom line.

"My husband and I have had some very challenging conversations with our banker, especially in the last three years, as we have had consecutively challenging years," Schwertner told the committee.

When Trump levied tariffs on steel and aluminum in 2018, trading partners retaliated with their own tariffs on soybeans and other U.S. agriculture exports, leading to a decline in some exports and prices paid to U.S. farmers. USDA gave \$28 billion in emergency aid to farmers the following year.

### A target on conservation programs

Among the Trump administration's targets are conservation programs funded by the Inflation Reduction Act, one of former President Joe Biden's signature achievements. The Trump administration has character-



# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 9 of 66

ized IRA as “green new deal social engineering policies.”

Among the many environmental programs IRA funded across the federal government was \$19.5 billion for farmland conservation programs at USDA.

Trump signed an executive order to freeze all IRA programs on his first day in office. A federal judge ordered the administration on Feb. 10 to unfreeze the funds, but farmers and conservation consultants say they have not yet seen changes.

When asked which programs are frozen and if they would release money in response to the order, a spokesperson for the Agriculture Department said the agency would respond after Brooke Rollins had a chance to analyze reviews. The Senate confirmed Rollins as Agriculture secretary Feb. 13.

“The Trump Administration rightfully has asked for a comprehensive review of all contracts, work, and personnel across all federal agencies. Anything that violates the President’s Executive Orders will be subject for review,” the USDA spokesperson said.

In Rollins’ first full day at the agency, Feb. 14, she announced the termination of 78 contracts worth \$138 million and said she is reviewing 1,000 more to look for opportunities to stop “wasteful spending” that does not align with administration priorities.

The canceled programs the agency announced were not direct payments to farmers, but included climate change adaptation research, forest carbon mentorship and subscriptions to news outlets.

Republicans have decried the partisan way Democrats pushed through the IRA bill. But much of its agriculture funding went to longstanding farm bill programs that previously gained bipartisan support.

It increased investments for the chronically oversubscribed Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Conservation Stewardship Program. In recent years, those programs were only able to fund about 30 percent of applications, according to an analysis of government data by the Environmental Working Group.

“The IRA funding for USDA conservation programs allowed a lot of farmers and ranchers to access conservation funding who weren’t able to before, but now halfway through, their payments are frozen, and it is unclear what will happen next,” said Aviva Glaser, senior director of agriculture policy for the National Wildlife Federation.

If the funds remain frozen, it could affect thousands of contracts nationwide. The Natural Resources Conservation Service, the branch of USDA that oversees most conservation programs, has 4,162 contracts obligated in 2025 for \$358 million.

In many cases, farmers have already taken on the financial burden. USDA agrees to cost-share practices like planting trees or native plants, protecting a stream from cattle or installing solar panels or other energy-efficient systems.

The landowner pays for the improvements and then submits documentation for the government to pay out its cost-share. So for Holden, the Missouri cattle producer, and other producers awaiting payment, they are already shouldering tens of thousands of dollars of debt for the programs.

The IRA pause is also creating some confusion, since it funds many of the same practices and programs that are also funded by the farm bill. Farmers sign contracts to commit to certain practices but may not know what underlying legislation funded the program, so they don’t know if their contract might be on the hit list.

“There is a lot of confusion and uncertainty about USDA funding and farmers are feeling it. The longer this funding freeze is in place, the more uncertainty and panic will grow amongst producers,” Glaser said.

*Allison Winter is a Washington D.C. correspondent for States Newsroom, a network of state-based nonprofit news outlets that includes South Dakota Searchlight.*

## COMMENTARY

### **The simple solution for South Dakota's budget woes: Restore the sales tax rate**

by **SETH TUPPER**

South Dakota legislators are suffering from all sorts of angst this winter over a seemingly complicated budget situation that many believe can only be solved by cuts.

In reality, the solution isn't complicated at all. It's incredibly simple: Just move the state sales tax rate back to 4.5%. That would wipe out all of the budget problems with money left to spare.

Confused? Don't be. There's an easy explanation for how we got here.

In the fall of 2022, then-Gov. Kristi Noem, a Republican, sensed the slight chance that her Democratic opponent, Jamie Smith, might pose a challenge to her reelection. She overreacted and abruptly hijacked a long-held Democratic position in favor of eliminating state sales taxes on groceries.

As it turned out, she was in no danger of losing to a Democrat in Republican-dominated South Dakota. But she relentlessly pushed her sales tax plan anyway, to the point that Republican lawmakers felt politically compelled to do something about it when they convened for their annual lawmaking session two months after her reelection.

Many Republicans did not want to eliminate sales taxes on groceries. Without a state income tax and with property tax revenue dedicated to counties, schools and cities, South Dakota depends on a broad application of sales taxes to fund state government.

So lawmakers argued through the early months of 2023 and settled on an alternative plan: They'd offer South Dakotans sales tax relief, but not by eliminating the tax on groceries. Instead, they decided to reduce the overall state sales tax rate from 4.5% to 4.2%, but only temporarily, until June 30, 2027.

That was a bad decision for many reasons. First of all, Noem didn't care about South Dakota taxpayers and only wanted a political win for herself. Legislators should've ignored her.

Furthermore, there was no great clamor among South Dakotans to save a few pennies on their purchases (they didn't want a grocery tax repeal, either, as they proved by rejecting the idea when it was petitioned to the ballot last year).

There was, meanwhile, a great clamor for something else: property tax relief. Noem and legislators inexplicably did nothing about that, leaving the situation to fester to the point that action seems politically unavoidable this year, when lawmakers have little money to work with — except for an attractive pile of \$182 million that Noem proposed using to top off the construction fund for an \$825 million men's prison near Sioux Falls, which lawmakers are currently fighting over.

The reason there's no other extra money is because of the reduction in the sales tax rate (although some lawmakers have amnesia about that, and are blaming the tight budget solely on rising Medicaid costs). The sales tax cut cost the state an estimated \$104 million in annual revenue at the time of its enactment.

Lawmakers and Noem felt comfortable surrendering that revenue two years ago, because the state was riding a tidal wave of pandemic-era federal stimulus funding.

Now Noem is gone, having capitalized on her ceaseless political posturing by getting a job as secretary of the Department of Homeland Security in the new Trump administration. She left behind a sinking state budget, doomed by the depletion of federal pandemic stimulus funding and by the Legislature's decision — at Noem's prodding — to willingly flush more than \$100 million of annual revenue down the toilet. That's more than the state needs to cover the hole in its next budget.

In December, before Noem left for D.C., she proposed drastic cuts to many state departments and programs to deal with a roughly \$50 million shortfall in ongoing revenue compared to ongoing expenses in the budget she was preparing for 2026. ("Ongoing" revenue comes mostly from the sales tax and is what state government uses to fund its daily operations, as opposed to "one-time" revenue — from sources like federal stimulus funds and unclaimed property — that legislators typically use for expenses like new buildings or paying off bonds.)

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 11 of 66

Updated revenue estimates have not changed the budget situation much, leaving Noem's successor, Gov. Larry Rhoden, and many lawmakers to glumly conclude that some of the proposed cuts are unavoidable. Some of the worst pain could fall on the State Library, South Dakota Public Broadcasting, tobacco-use prevention efforts, repair and maintenance of state buildings, dual-credit college courses for high school students, and a host of other departments and programs.

So here we are, all caught up on the backstory. And now you can see how simple it could be to close the budget gap: Just raise the state sales tax rate from 4.2% back up to 4.5%.

Politically impossible, you say? Hardly. The rate was 4% nine years ago, when a Republican-controlled Legislature and a Republican governor, Dennis Daugaard, increased it to 4.5% (to help fund an increase in teacher pay, although South Dakota now ranks 49th in average teacher salaries, which is another diatribe for another day).

With the sales tax reduction already set to expire in 2027, the only action required is moving that date up to this year.

Or, legislators could continue compounding the politically misguided policy blunders of the past few years by refusing to take the obvious and available course of action.

It's their choice, and it should be an easy one.

*Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.*

## Republicans worry GOP-led states will suffer from Trump's firings of federal workers

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - FEBRUARY 17, 2025 5:42 PM

WASHINGTON — Some Republicans are raising concerns about how reducing the federal workforce by potentially hundreds of thousands of people and canceling spending approved by Congress will affect the country — especially the regions filled with loyal GOP voters.

Members of Congress are urging the Trump administration not to fire federal workers they view as essential to their regions, pressing back on plans from the U.S. DOGE Service to slash jobs and funding.

Alaska Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski posted on social media that the more than 100 workers in her home state could be swept up in the dismissals.

"Many of these abrupt terminations will do more harm than good, stunting opportunities in Alaska and leaving holes in our communities," Murkowski wrote. "We can't realize our potential for responsible energy and mineral development if we can't permit projects. We will be less prepared to manage summer wildfires if we can't support those on the front lines. Our tourism economy will be damaged if we don't maintain our world-class national parks and forests."

Murkowski wrote that she supported President Donald Trump's efforts to reduce the federal government, but added the current "approach is bringing confusion, anxiety, and now trauma to our civil servants—some of whom moved their families and packed up their whole lives to come here."

"Indiscriminate workforce cuts aren't efficient and won't fix the federal budget, but they will hurt good people who have answered the call to public service to do important work for our nation," Murkowski added.

Kevin R. Kosar, senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank, wrote in a social media post "the DOGE push to downsize government employees will hit the coalition that elected Trump."

He linked to an article from the Wall Street Journal that used maps to show how many federal workers are housed in each congressional district, many of which are represented by Republicans. The GOP controls the House by a slim 218-215 majority, with two vacancies.

Kosar wrote in a separate post that efficiency means "achieving maximum productivity with minimum wasted effort or expense."

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 12 of 66

"Done right, cost-cutting can increase efficiency," he wrote. "But cost-cutting done sloppily can decrease productivity and effectiveness."

## More workers than Walmart

Most of the federal government's 2.3 million employees aren't based in and around Washington, D.C. They are spread throughout the country and often make up core parts of the economy in rural areas and sections of the nation that regularly swing between voting for Democrats and Republicans.

For example, Georgia hosts about 80,000, Michigan holds 30,000 and Pennsylvania has 66,000, according to data from the Office of Personnel Management. All three swing states backed Trump in 2024, but have also elected Democrats in statewide races, like governor or U.S. senator.

The Pew Research Center writes in an explainer on the federal workforce that less "than a fifth of the workers in OPM's database – about 449,500 – work in the District of Columbia or the adjoining states of Maryland and Virginia."

OPM's total number of federal workers, Pew writes, doesn't include 600,000 U.S. Postal Service workers or 1.3 million active duty military personnel.

Even with those two workforces set aside, the 2.3 million federal employees covered by OPM's data make the federal government "the nation's single largest employer, with even more workers than Walmart, Amazon or McDonald's."

"In fact, the Postal Service by itself would, if it were a private business, rank among the 10 largest private-sector employers, ahead of industry rivals UPS and FedEx," Pew writes.

## Shipyard defended in Maine

Firing a large percentage of federal workers, especially those at the Department of Defense, has lawmakers concerned for local economies and national security.

Maine Republican Sen. Susan Collins, chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, and New Hampshire Democratic Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, a senior member of the Senate Armed Services Committee and co-chair of the Senate Navy Caucus, sent a letter to the acting Navy Secretary asking for an exemption for Maine's Portsmouth Naval Shipyard employees to the deferred resignation program.

"In our states, Portsmouth Naval Shipyard (PNSY) has nearly eight thousand civilian employees, creating more than \$1.5 billion in annual economic impact in surrounding communities," Collins and Shaheen wrote.

They added the submarines built at the shipyard are a central part of the country's national security strategy, especially when it comes to China.

"As our military's 'pacing threat,' the People's Republic of China, is rapidly expanding its nuclear weapons programs, the role that our own submarines play in the survivability of our nuclear triad cannot be overstated," Collins and Shaheen wrote.

## FBI and Louisiana

Louisiana Republican Sen. Bill Cassidy raised concerns about the impact firing employees at the Federal Bureau of Investigation would have on the state.

"I am all for efficiency and ultimately downsizing the federal government, but firing large numbers of new FBI agents is not the way to achieve this," Cassidy wrote in a social media post. "Louisiana specifically benefits from newly hired FBI agents. We need to add to our law enforcement, not take away."

Lawmakers from throughout the country are also learning how funding cuts, like a proposal from the National Institutes of Health to cap Facilities and Administrative costs at 15%, would affect employment, medical research and universities in their states.

While that specific proposal is currently halted by a federal court order, university leaders throughout the country, including those in deeply red states like Oklahoma, are talking with their members of Congress about the negative repercussions.

OU President Joseph Harroz Jr. told Oklahoma Voice the university is talking with federal lawmakers

about how the cap would affect the school and "proactively considering next steps."

"As we know, this change would severely impact institutions' abilities to fund medical breakthroughs and novel therapies, as well as fulfill our educational mission of training and preparing the next generation of graduate students and student researchers," Harroz said in a statement. "... The OU enterprise across our campuses is assessing budget implications and continues to be engaged and thoughtful about best ways forward. We are also working in collaboration with OU Health, as its patients' access to our life-altering clinical trials may also be affected."

### **Kansans rally to protect Food for Peace program**

Members of Congress are also introducing legislation to curb impacts of spending cuts on programs they view as essential to Americans.

U.S. Rep. Tracey Mann and U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran, both Republicans from Kansas, plan to introduce a bill that would move management of the Food for Peace program from the U.S. Agency for International Development to the Agriculture Department.

Moran said during a floor speech last week that the Food for Peace program purchased \$713 million of U.S.-grown commodities during fiscal year 2023, "putting money back into the hands of farmers."

"In rural America, food assistance programs like Food for Peace put American-grown products in the hands of the hungry, and this food is a tangible extension of the hard work and dedication of farmers and ranchers," Moran said.

### **Federal workers in toss-up districts**

There are also thousands of federal employees spread throughout the 18 House districts identified as toss-up races by The Cook Political Report with Amy Walter, according to a report from the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service.

The eight GOP-held House seats that could swing to Democrats following the 2026 midterms include Arizona's 6th Congressional District, currently represented by Rep. Juan Ciscomani and home to about 15,000 federal workers.

Iowa Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks, elected by voters in Iowa's 1st Congressional District, has about 11,000 federal employees.

Pennsylvania's 10th Congressional District, home to roughly 13,000 federal employees, is represented by Rep. Scott Perry.

*Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.*

## **Red states embrace Trump's crackdown on remote government work**

### **The Republican return-to-office trend may be a way to reduce government staffing**

**BY: KEVIN HARDY, STATELINE - FEBRUARY 17, 2025 9:03 AM**

A yearslong conflict over whether Nebraska's governor can unilaterally force state workers back to the office will ultimately be sorted out by the state's highest court.

The Nebraska Association of Public Employees, which represents more than 8,000 state employees, challenged Republican Gov. Jim Pillen's November 2023 order requiring workers in offices full time. The group argues that Pillen cannot do so without labor contract negotiations.

Justin Hubly, executive director of the union, said most of Nebraska's state employees would continue working from physical offices, as they did before the pandemic. But he said many state jobs could be performed remotely.

"Who cares where our IT application developers are working, what time of the day they're working, as long as their assignments are done in a timely matter?" he said.

Hubly said the issue has become needlessly politicized in Nebraska and across the country. In recent

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 14 of 66

weeks, Republicans in states nationwide have echoed President Donald Trump's skepticism that government work can be effectively done remotely.

"It seems that everything in America today has to become a political issue and then immediately has to be chosen to be a conservative red-state issue or a liberal blue-state issue," Hubly said.

Last week in the Oval Office, Trump repeated his rationale for requiring federal workers to be in the office, part of his push to shrink the workforce. He claimed without evidence that many of them are balancing two jobs and only devoting 10% to 20% of their government time to working.

"Nobody's going to work from home, they're going to be going out, they're gonna play tennis, they're gonna play golf," Trump told reporters.

Experts say the president's push has turned the work-from-home debate into a partisan fight.

"I would analogize it to many states launching their own DOGE commissions, to sort of signal affinity with what's happening in Washington," said Peter Morrissey, senior director of talent and strategy at the Volcker Alliance, a nonprofit that works to support public sector workers.

Earlier this month, Ohio Republican Gov. Mike DeWine ordered state employees back to their offices starting March 17. Similarly, Oklahoma GOP Gov. Kevin Stitt signed an order in December that requires employees to work full time from offices as of this month. And Republicans who control Wisconsin's legislature are pushing legislation and pressuring the state's Democratic governor over the issue.

In Nebraska, a labor court last July ruled against the public employees union, though the union has appealed the decision to the Nebraska Supreme Court. The July decision came down on a Thursday, and Pillen said he expected state workers to be back in offices the next Monday.

"The COVID-19 pandemic is long over, and it is likewise long overdue that our full workforce is physically back," he said at the time.

Before Pillen's executive order, 2,250 employees in Nebraska's 25 largest agencies were working remote or hybrid, said Pillen spokesperson Laura Strimple. She said 1,100 — or 8% of those agencies' workers — are now working remotely or hybrid and that the state is "still evaluating available space in the future to return even more public servants."

## **The politicization of remote work**

Like private employers, states have been grappling with the complications of remote work since the COVID-19 pandemic. But nearly five years later, the issue is as political as ever.

Trump is requiring a return to office in part to have federal employees quit as his administration seeks to shrink the government workforce, according to a November Wall Street Journal opinion piece by Department of Government Efficiency task force head Elon Musk and his then-DOGE partner, Vivek Ramaswamy.

Morrissey noted that state, local and federal governments compete with the private sector for workers. And with less competitive pay in many government roles, a lack of flexible work arrangements could prove a competitive disadvantage — particularly for some of the most specialized workers.

He added that legitimate debate over worker productivity and taxpayer savings related to remote work should not be an excuse to use "the public workforce as a culture war item or a punching bag."

Morrissey expects state political leaders will leave flexibility for agency directors and department management to craft hybrid or remote work arrangements.

Even the White House's order allowed agency leaders to "make exemptions they deem necessary."

Research has found slight productivity dips from remote work, though it can help with employee recruitment and retention, said Nicholas Bloom, an economics professor at Stanford University who researches remote work.

Fully remote workers also can deliver employers significant cost savings through reduced office expenses and less employee turnover. But evaluating the performance of remote employees is tricky, particularly so in government work. Bloom said hybrid arrangements — such as requiring workers to come into the office three days a week — might make the most sense for governments to maximize productivity, employee satisfaction and office savings.

"This is why 80% of Fortune 500 companies have managers and professionals on a hybrid schedule,"

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 15 of 66

he said.

But Bloom views the Republican return-to-office trend in government as a way to reduce staffing. Employees often prefer to work remotely and view hybrid schedules as providing the equivalent benefit of an 8% pay increase.

"This is clearly all about reducing headcount," Bloom said. "By making work more unpleasant, the hope is employees quit."

## Republicans rethinking remote shift

Long before the pandemic, the Utah government embraced remote work as a way to cut costs.

Then-Lt. Gov. Spencer Cox, a Republican, called himself a "televangelist for telework" in 2019, after a successful pilot program. As governor, Cox in 2021 signed an executive order requiring state agencies to review whether work could be performed remotely. The order said remote work saved taxpayers millions, improved Utah's air quality by cutting commutes and improved employee satisfaction.

But last month, Cox said the state is reevaluating its framework.

He said remote work could lead to increased productivity — if it's accompanied with specific oversight and training. But those guardrails weren't always implemented when the pandemic suddenly sent state workers home, he said.

"You don't just send people home with a computer. It's much more detailed than that," Cox told reporters.

Cox said the state had been bringing more workers back into offices over the past few years as the administration weighs both employee productivity and taxpayer savings.

"Remote work has its place, but so does being together," he said.

In Wisconsin, the remote work debate has split state leaders along partisan lines.

In November, Republican House Speaker Robin Vos proposed as part of the budget requiring all state workers to return to offices three or four days per week.

"A lot of employees aren't working or they're working only from home and not doing it very well with very little supervision," he told a local television station.

Democratic Gov. Tony Evers pledged to veto any such requirement. He noted that Wisconsin in recent years made significant efforts to hire workers across the state outside the major population centers of Madison and Milwaukee.

More than a dozen state agencies have already consolidated office space as the administration sought to develop a work environment better suited to help with employee recruitment and retention, Evers' office said in a statement to Stateline. In recent years, Wisconsin's government has shed 230,000 square feet of office space with nearly 400,000 more planned, according to a January report.

The governor's office said reversing course now would drive up costs and negate millions of expected taxpayer savings. Implementing in-office work arrangements would require more private lease arrangements or reopening buildings that are slated for closure and sale.

Aside from ongoing budget negotiations, Republican lawmakers introduced stand-alone legislation that would require employees who worked in offices before the pandemic to return by July 1.

State Republican Rep. Amanda Nedweski, who leads the state Assembly's new committee on Government Operations, Accountability, and Transparency, or GOAT — mirrored after Trump's DOGE effort — testified last week in favor of a Senate return-to-work bill. But she said the majority caucus isn't against remote work entirely.

In an interview, Nedweski pointed to a 2023 legislative audit on remote work that found the state lacked data on the extent of remote work and recommended more detailed monitoring.

Nedweski said there may be potential efficiencies from telework, but said the state needs "to get a handle on who's doing what and from where and why."

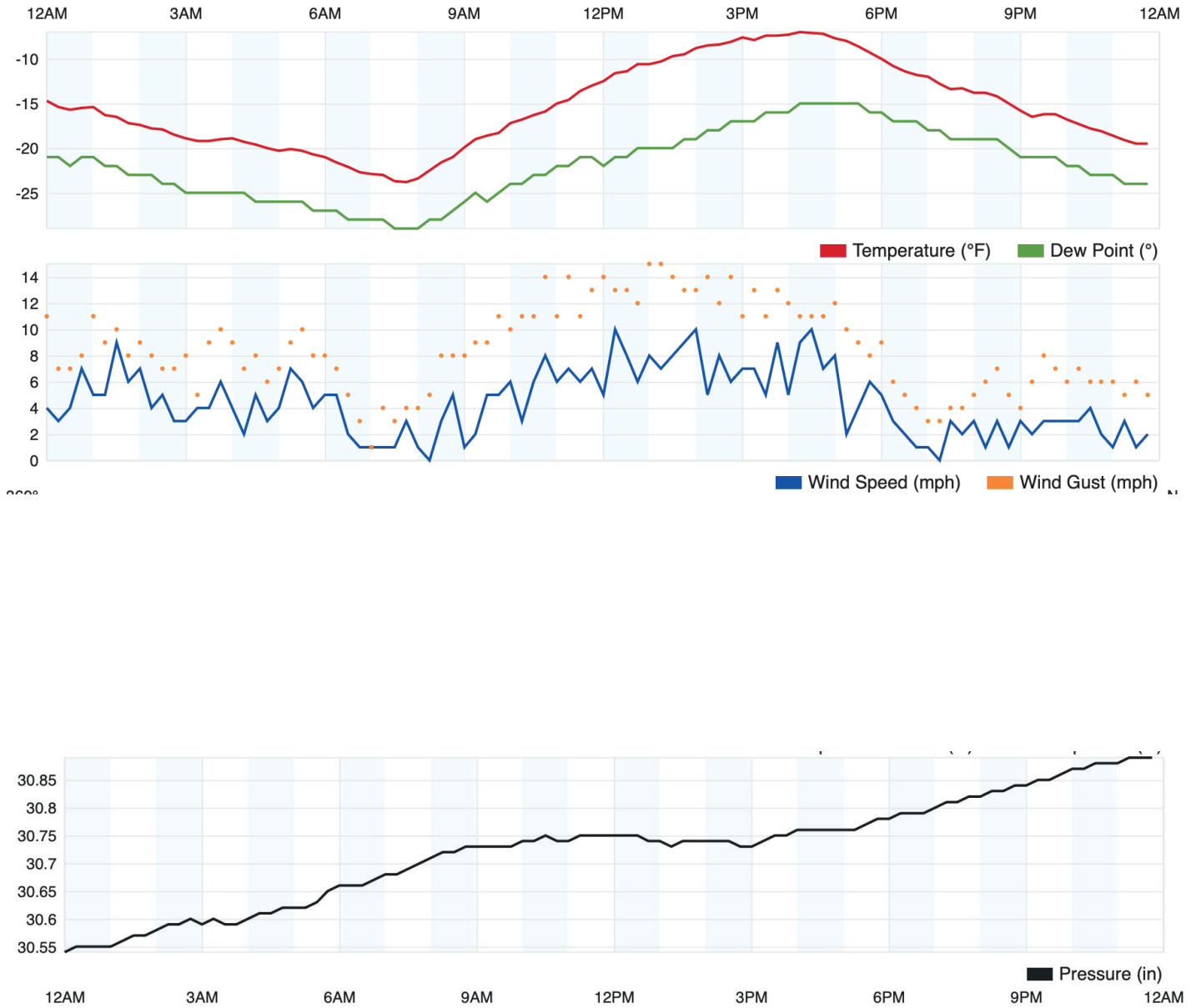
"And what are they missing out on by not having that opportunity to collaborate with co-workers on a regular basis?" she said in an interview. "We miss out on the opportunities to innovate when people are isolated and not working together."

*Kevin Hardy covers business, labor and rural issues for Stateline from the Midwest.*

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 16 of 66

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs


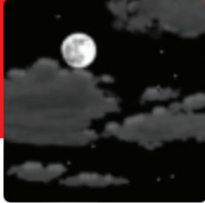







# Groton Daily Independent

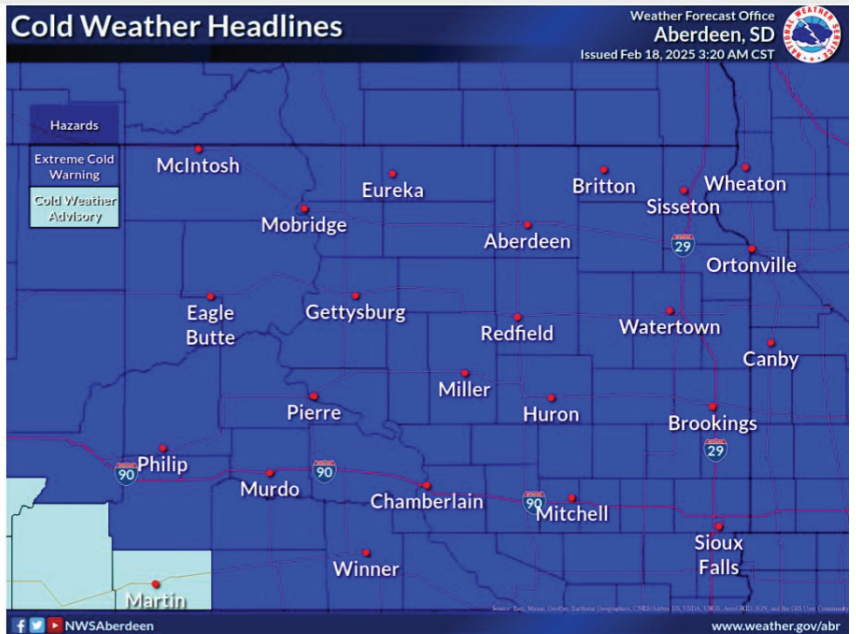
Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 17 of 66

**Extreme Cold Warning**

Today	Tonight	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday
				
<b>High: -7 °F</b>	<b>Low: -28 °F</b>	<b>High: 0 °F</b>	<b>Low: -24 °F</b>	<b>High: 9 °F</b>
Cold	Partly Cloudy	Cold	Clear	Cold

## Dangerously Cold Through Wednesday February 18, 2025 3:55 AM

- **Extreme Cold Warning** in effect for much of the area through Wednesday morning.
- Wind chills and temperatures moderating slightly over south central SD this afternoon, with an additional **Cold Weather Advisory** in effect for Tonight.
- Wind chills as low as **-35° to -50°** are expected during these times.
  - ***These wind chills could cause frostbite in as little as 10 minutes.***



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

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

An Extreme Cold Warning is in effect for central and eastern SD through much of the day. Wind chills between -35 to -50 degrees are possible during these times.

# Broton Daily Independent

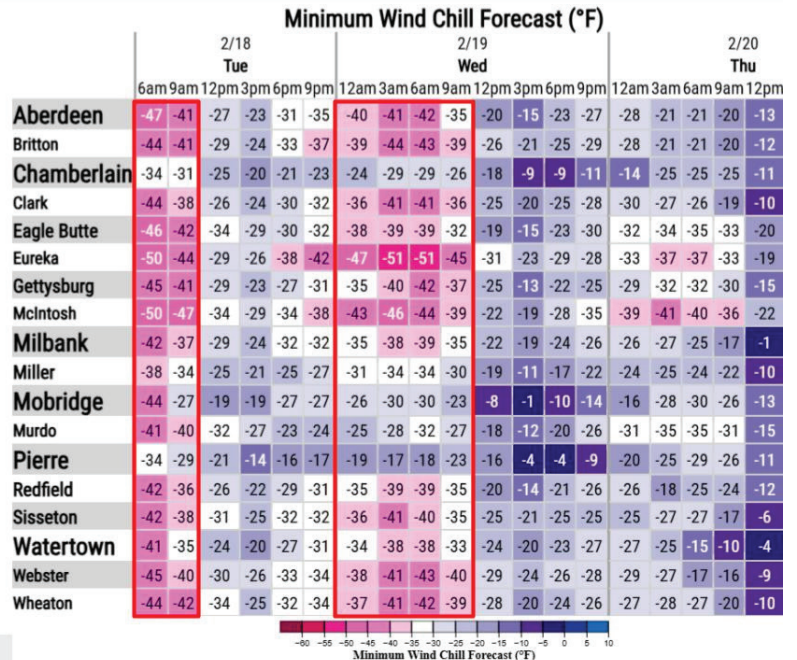
Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 18 of 66



## Timing of the Coldest Wind Chills

February 18, 2025  
3:55 AM

- Very cold wind chills through Wednesday morning.
  - Coldest wind chills of -35° to -50° expected this morning and Wednesday morning (in red box)
  - Wind chills of -20 to -30° expected during the daytime hours today.
- Stay inside if possible, and use caution when heading outside. Dress in several layers covering all exposed skin.
- Remember to bring your pets inside!



Wind chills as low as -35° to -50° are possible through Wednesday morning. Many places will stay below -20° to -30° even during the daytime. Stay inside if possible, and bundle up when going outside!

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 19 of 66

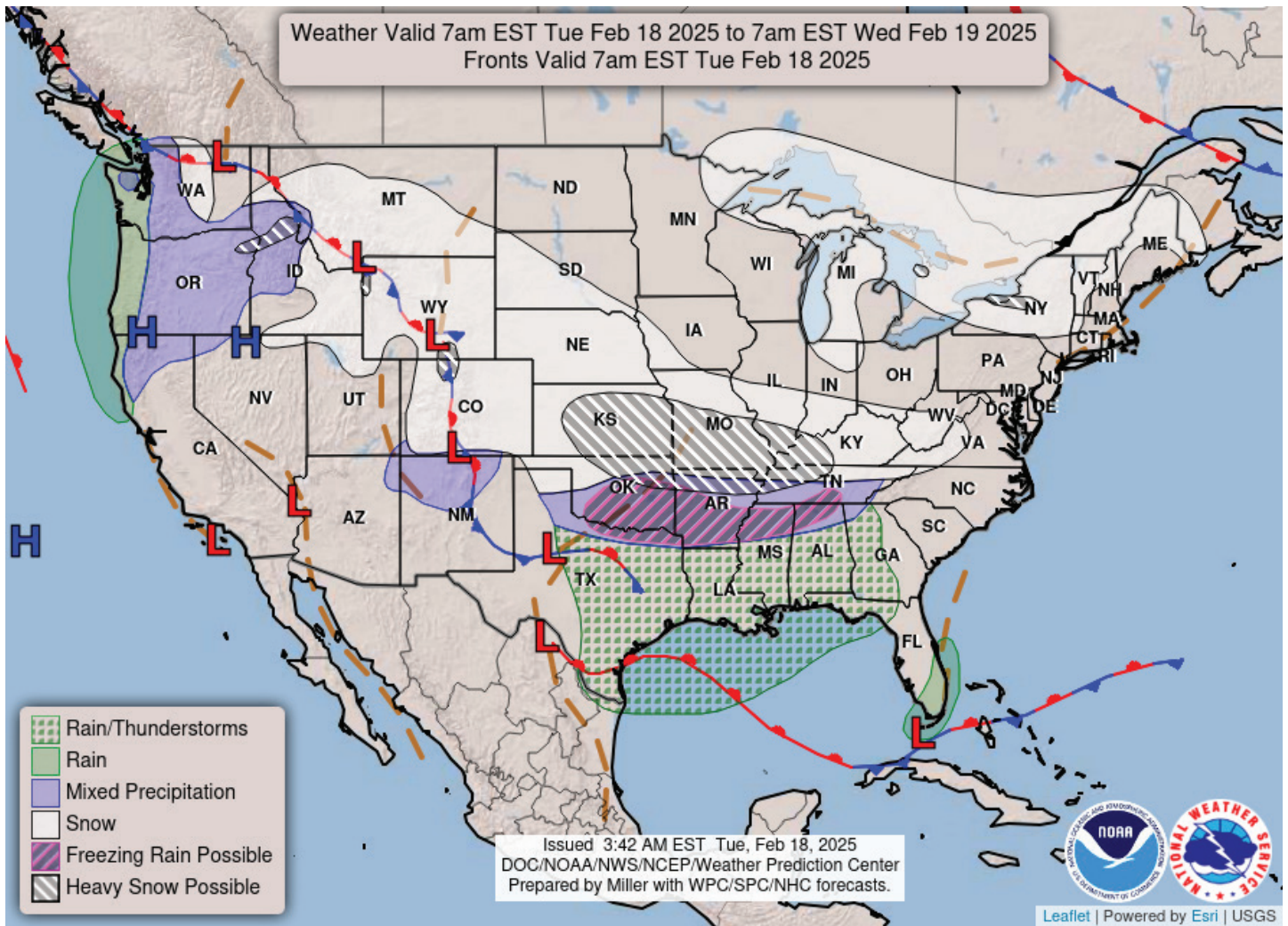
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: -7 °F at 4:14 PM**  
**Low Temp: -24 °F at 7:36 AM**  
**Wind: 15 mph at 12:58 PM**  
**Precip: : 0.00**

Day length: 10 hours, 39 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 67 in 1913  
Record Low: -32 in 1903  
Average High: 29  
Average Low: 7  
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.37  
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.20  
Average Precip to date: 0.92  
Precip Year to Date: 0.20  
Sunset Tonight: 6:05:44 pm  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:25:06 am



## Today in Weather History

February 18th, 1962: It started raining during the afternoon of the 18th, and by evening temperatures dropped below freezing resulting in a glaze up to three-quarters of an inch on trees and power lines. Many utility lines were downed by the ice or by falling trees and branches. Temperatures continued to drop during the night, changing the rain to snow by the 19th. Strong winds accompanied this snow causing local blizzard conditions.

1899 - While much of the central and eastern U.S. was recovering from the most severe cold wave of modern history, the temperature at San Francisco soared to 80 degrees to establish a record for month of February. (David Ludlum)

1959 - Some of the higher elevations of California were in the midst of a five day storm which produced 189 inches of snow, a single storm record for North America. (13th-19th) (David Ludlum)

1965: A massive avalanche kills 26 men at the Granduc Copper Mine in British Columbia on this day.

1987 - A small but intense low pressure system combined with northerly upslope winds to produce eight inches of snow in five hours at Meeteetsie WY, located southeast of Cody. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms soaked the Central Gulf Coast Region with heavy rain. Totals in southern Louisiana ranged up to 8.50 inches near the town of Ridge, with 6.55 inches at Plaquemine. Thunderstorms in northern Florida drenched Apalachicola with 5.41 inches of rain in 24 hours, and produced wind gusts to 75 mph at Mayo. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Low pressure off the coast of North Carolina brought freezing rain and heavy snow to Virginia and the Carolinas. Snowfall totals in Virginia ranged up to 18 inches at Franklin. Freezing rain reached a thickness of two inches around Charlotte NC. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - An intense but slow moving Pacific storm worked its way across Utah over a two day period. The storm blanketed the valleys with 4 to 12 inches of snow, and produced up to 42 inches of snow in the mountains. Heavy snow also fell across northern Arizona. Williams received 22 inches of snow, and 12 inches was reported along the south rim of the Grand Canyon. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1992: A thunderstorm spawned a powerful F4 tornado for so far north for the time of the year in southern Van Wert County in Ohio. The tornado touched down just west of US Route 127 and traveled northeastward for about 3 miles. One house was completely leveled, and nine others experienced severe damage. Six people were injured.



## NOW OR NEVER

A soldier was assigned the responsibility of driving a senator from the airport to a military installation. Between the baggage claim area and the vehicle he noticed an elderly lady struggling to pull her suitcase behind her. He immediately went to her rescue and pulled the suitcase until they met her waiting family. He then paused to help a young mother secure her child in a stroller. After that he helped a man who was having a difficult time opening the door to the restroom.

Impressed, the senator asked, "How is it that you see so many people who need help and immediately go to their rescue?"

After a moment of silence, he replied quietly, "During my tour of duty in Vietnam it was my job to clear minefields. I never knew if my next step would be my last. It was there that I learned to get the most out of every moment because, in life, it's now or never."

Paul summed it up this way: "Share each other's troubles and problems because if you do so you will obey the law of Christ." We, as Christians, have a responsibility to God and to anyone we know who is faced with a difficult situation that is beyond their ability to manage. It can be as simple as opening a door or as complex as helping them through the loss of a loved one.

The size of the problem does not matter to God. It is the willingness of His children to help those in need.

Prayer: We pray, Lord, for eyes that see the needs of others, ears that hear the cries of others, a heart that is open to others and hands that are willing to help others. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2

*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*

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 22 of 66

## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

- Black & White.....\$48.99/year
- Colored.....\$79.88/year
- Colored.....\$42.60/6 months
- E-Weekly\*.....\$31.95/year

\* The E-Weekly is a PDF file emailed to you each week. It does not grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State, Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Mail Completed Form to:

Groton Independent

P.O. Box 34

Groton, SD 57445-0034

or scan and email to [paperpaul@grotonsd.net](mailto:paperpaul@grotonsd.net)

## Groton Daily Independent [www.397news.com](http://www.397news.com) Subscription Form

This option will grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

- 1 Month.....\$15.98
- 3 Months.....\$26.63
- 6 Months.....\$31.95
- 9 Months.....\$42.60
- 12 Months.....\$53.25

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State, Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

The following will be used for your log-in information.

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Password \_\_\_\_\_

Pay with Paypal. Type the following into your browser window:

[paypal.me/paperpaul](https://paypal.me/paperpaul)

Pay with Venmo: [@paperpaul](https://venmo.com/paperpaul) Phone Number to Confirm: 7460

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 23 of 66



## 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: 16 Hrs 37 Mins 16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.17.25

20 22 24 37 48 5

All Star Bonus: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$24,190,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 52 Mins 16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.17.25

2 7 42 43 47 6

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 7 Mins 16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.15.25

19 25 30 32 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$38,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 7 Mins 16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.17.25

17 18 49 56 59 8

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 36 Mins 17 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.17.25

4 44 47 52 57 9

Power Play: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$195,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 36 Mins 17 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 24 of 66

## 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



# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 25 of 66

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

### Monday's Scores

The Associated Press

#### **GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL**

Centerville 53, Elk Point-Jefferson 41

DeSmet 51, Canistota 24

Deuel 39, Redfield 31

Gregory 48, Colome 13

Hitchcock-Tulare 45, Aberdeen Christian 20

Parkston 63, Parker 27

Tri-Valley 71, McCook Central-Montrose 60

POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=

Bison vs. Harding County, ccd.

Britton-Hecla vs. Waverly-South Shore, ppd. to Feb 20th.

Great Plains Lutheran vs. Clark-Willow Lake, ppd.

Mobridge-Pollock vs. Todd County, ccd.

#### **BOYS PREP BASKETBALL**

Aberdeen Christian 66, Hitchcock-Tulare 38

Alcester-Hudson 71, Sioux Falls Lutheran 58

Bowman County, N.D. 56, Harding County 47

Bridgewater-Emery 75, Scotland/Menno 65, OT

Centerville 58, Elk Point-Jefferson 42

Colman-Egan 77, Iroquois-Lake Preston 60

Deuel 56, Redfield 26

Groton 72, Florence-Henry 43

Parkston 64, Parker 45

POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=

Aberdeen Roncalli vs. Tiospa Zina, ppd.

Mobridge-Pollock vs. Todd County, ccd.

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

## **Leonard Peltier to be released from prison following sentence commutation in FBI killings**

By GRAHAM LEE BREWER Associated Press

Indigenous activist Leonard Peltier is set to be released from a Florida prison Tuesday based on former President Joe Biden having commuted his life sentence for the 1975 killings of two FBI agents, a decision that elated Peltier's supporters while angering law enforcement officials who believe in his guilt.

For nearly half a century, Peltier's imprisonment has symbolized systemic injustice for Native Americans across the country who believe in his innocence. The decision to release the 80-year-old to home confinement was celebrated by supporters.

"He represents every person who's been roughed up by a cop, profiled, had their children harassed at school," said Nick Estes, a professor of American Indian Studies at the University of Minnesota and a member of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe who has advocated for Peltier's release.

But the last-minute move as Biden was leaving office also prompted criticism from those who say Peltier

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 26 of 66

is guilty, including former FBI Director Christopher Wray, who called him "a remorseless killer" in a private letter to Biden that was obtained by The Associated Press.

"Granting Peltier any relief from his conviction or sentence is wholly unjustified and would be an affront to the rule of law," Wray wrote.

The commutation was not a pardon for crimes committed, something that Peltier's advocates have hoped for since he has always maintained his innocence.

Peltier, an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa in North Dakota, was active in the American Indian Movement, which beginning in the 1960s fought for Native American treaty rights and tribal self-determination.

The group grabbed headlines in 1969, when activists occupied the former prison island of Alcatraz in the San Francisco Bay, and again in 1972, when they presented presidential candidates with a list of demands including the restoration of tribal land. After they were ignored, they seized the headquarters of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

From then on the group was subject to FBI surveillance and harassment under a covert program that sought to disrupt activism and was exposed in 1975.

Peltier's conviction stemmed from a confrontation that same year on the Oglala Sioux Indian Reservation in Pine Ridge, South Dakota, in which FBI agents Jack Coler and Ronald Williams were killed. According to the FBI, the agents were there to serve arrest warrants for robbery and assault with a dangerous weapon.

Prosecutors maintained at trial that Peltier shot both agents in the head at point-blank range. Peltier acknowledged being present and firing a gun at a distance, but said he fired in self-defense. A woman who claimed to have seen Peltier shoot the agents later recanted her testimony, saying it had been coerced.

He was convicted of two counts of first-degree murder and given two consecutive life sentences.

Two other movement members, co-defendants Robert Robideau and Dino Butler, were acquitted on the grounds of self-defense.

Peltier was denied parole as recently as July and was not eligible to be considered for it again until 2026.

"Leonard Peltier's release is the right thing to do given the serious and ongoing human rights concerns about the fairness of his trial, his nearly 50 years behind bars, his health and his age," said Paul O'Brien, executive director with Amnesty International USA in a statement. "While we welcome his release from prison, he should not be restricted to home confinement."

Prominent Native American groups like the National Congress of the American Indian have called for Peltier's release for decades, and Amnesty International considered him a political prisoner. Prominent supporters included South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, civil rights icon Coretta Scott King, actor and director Robert Redford and musicians Pete Seeger, Harry Belafonte and Jackson Browne.

Generations of Indigenous activists and leaders lobbied multiple presidents to pardon Peltier. Former Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, a member of the Pueblo of Laguna and the first Native American to hold the secretary's position, praised Biden's decision.

"I am grateful that Leonard can now go home to his family," she said Jan. 20 in a post on the social platform X. "I applaud President Biden for this action and understanding what this means to Indian Country."

As a young child, Peltier was taken from his family and sent to a boarding school. Thousands of Indigenous children over decades faced the same fate, and were in many cases subjected to systemic physical, psychological and sexual abuse.

"He hasn't really had a home since he was taken away to boarding school," said Nick Tilsen, who has been advocating for Peltier's release since he was a teen and is CEO of NDN Collective, an Indigenous-led advocacy group based in South Dakota. "So he is excited to be at home and paint and have grandkids running around."

## Vatican cancels more Holy Year events as pope remains hospitalized with respiratory infection

ROME (AP) — The Vatican on Tuesday canceled papal audiences through the weekend and delegated others to cover for Pope Francis as the 88-year-old pope remained hospitalized with a multi-pronged respiratory infection.

The cancellations put a damper on upcoming events of the Vatican's big Holy Year, the once-every-quarter-century celebration of Catholicism that is aimed at encouraging pilgrims to come to Rome to participate in special Jubilee activities. Expected to draw some 30 million people to Rome, the Holy Year is packed with special papal audiences and Masses throughout 2025, some of which have now been put into question given Francis' illness.

Francis was admitted to Rome's Gemelli hospital in a "fair" condition on Friday after a weeklong bout of bronchitis worsened. On Monday, medical personnel determined that he was suffering from a polymicrobial respiratory tract infection, meaning a mix of viruses, bacteria and possibly other organisms had colonized in his respiratory tract. The Vatican has given no indication of how long he might remain hospitalized, only saying that the treatment of such a "complex clinical picture" would require an "adequate" stay.

This Holy Year weekend was dedicated to deacons, the ministry that is a necessary step for men who are preparing to become priests. Francis was supposed to have presided over a special audience with them on Saturday and ordained them during a Mass on Sunday. The Vatican on Tuesday announced the audience was canceled and that the archbishop who is organizing the Jubilee would celebrate the Mass. It's a similar arrangement that the Vatican announced last weekend, when artists in town had to settle for a cardinal presiding over their special Mass.

The next Jubilee events on the calendar that would typically involve the pope are the March 8-9 weekend dedicated to volunteers.

Francis had part of one lung removed after a pulmonary infection as a young man and is prone to bouts of bronchitis in winter. He has admitted in the past that he is a non-compliant patient, and even his close Vatican aides have said he pushed himself too far even once his bronchitis was diagnosed.

He refused to let up on his busy schedule and ignored medical advice to stay indoors during Rome's chilly winter, insisting on sitting through an outdoor Jubilee Mass for the armed forces on Feb. 9 even though he was having trouble breathing.

Francis' hospital admission this year has already sidelined him for longer than a 2023 hospitalization for pneumonia.

## Top Russian and US officials are discussing improving ties and ending the Ukraine war — without Kyiv

By MATTHEW LEE, BARAA ANWER and DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia (AP) — The top diplomats from Russia and the U.S. met Tuesday in Saudi Arabia to discuss improving ties and negotiating an end to the war in Ukraine — talks that represented a rapid and major change in American foreign policy under President Donald Trump.

No Ukrainian officials were present at the meeting, which comes as the beleaguered country is slowly but steadily losing ground against more numerous Russian troops in a grinding war that began nearly three years ago. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said his country won't accept any outcome from this week's talks if Kyiv doesn't take part. European allies have also expressed concerns they are being sidelined.

Beyond Ukraine, the meeting — attended by U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and other senior officials — is expected to focus on thawing relations between the two countries, whose ties have fallen to their lowest level in decades. It is meant to pave the way for a meeting between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Concerns from allies they are being sidelined

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on Monday that the talks will be primarily focused on

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 28 of 66

"restoring the entire range of U.S.-Russian relations, as well as preparing possible talks on the Ukrainian settlement and organizing a meeting of the two presidents." U.S. State Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce said the meeting is aimed at determining how serious the Russians are about wanting peace and whether detailed negotiations can be started.

The recent U.S. diplomatic blitz on the war has sent Ukraine and key allies scrambling to ensure a seat at the table amid concerns that Washington and Moscow could press ahead with a deal that won't be favorable to them.

Kyiv's absence at Tuesday's talks has rankled many Ukrainians, and France called an emergency meeting of European Union countries and the U.K. on Monday to discuss the war.

Bruce has said that even though Ukraine will not be at the table Tuesday, any actual peace negotiations will include the country. Kyiv's participation in such talks was a bedrock of U.S. policy under Trump's predecessor, Joe Biden, whose administration also led international efforts to isolate Russia over the war.

White House officials have also pushed back against the notion that Europe has been left out of the conversation, noting that administration officials have spoken to several leaders.

French President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday said he spoke by phone to Trump and Zelenskyy following the meeting he called in Paris.

"We seek a strong and lasting peace in Ukraine," Macron wrote on social media platform X. "To achieve this, Russia must end its aggression, and this must be accompanied by strong and credible security guarantees for the Ukrainians," he said and vowed to "work on this together with all Europeans, Americans, and Ukrainians."

Peskov on Tuesday said that Putin has repeatedly expressed readiness for peace talks, and noted that a "a comprehensive settlement, a long-term settlement, a viable settlement" of the conflict in Ukraine is impossible without "a comprehensive consideration of security issues" in Europe.

## Saudi Arabia's role

The meeting at the Diriyah Palace in the Saudi capital of Riyadh also highlights de facto leader Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's efforts to be a major diplomatic player, burnishing a reputation severely tarnished by the 2018 killing of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Saudi state media described the talks as happening at the prince's direction. Like the neighboring United Arab Emirates, the prince has maintained close relations to Russia throughout its war on Ukraine, both through the OPEC+ oil cartel and diplomatically as well.

Saudi Arabia has also helped in prisoner negotiations and hosted Zelenskyy for an Arab League summit in 2023. Zelenskyy said he would travel to the kingdom later this week.

Rubio was accompanied by U.S. national security adviser Mike Waltz and special envoy Steve Witkoff, while Lavrov sat next to the Kremlin's foreign affairs adviser, Yuri Ushakov. Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan and national security adviser Musaed al Alban joined Rubio, Lavrov and others for the start of the meeting but were expected to leave early in the talks.

Ahead of the talks, Kirill Dmitriev, the head of Russia's sovereign wealth fund who the Kremlin said might join, underscored the importance of the meeting.

"Good U.S.-Russia relations are very important for the whole world. Only jointly can Russia and the U.S. address lots of world problems, resolve for global conflicts and offer solutions," Dmitriev, who said he and his team would focus on economic issues at the talks, told The Associated Press.

The Saudi-owned satellite channel Al Arabiya, citing the Russian delegation, described Moscow's priority as "real normalization with Washington."

The meeting marks the most extensive contact between the two countries since Moscow's Feb. 24, 2022, invasion. 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, and in the fall of 2022, U.S. and Russian spymasters met in Turkey amid Washington's concerns that Moscow could resort to nuclear weapons amid battlefield setbacks.

## War continues

Meanwhile, Russia continued to pummel Ukraine with drones, according to Kyiv's military. The Ukrainian

air force said Russian troops launched a barrage of 176 drones at Ukraine overnight, most of which were destroyed or disabled by jamming.

One Russian drone struck a residential building in Dolynska in the Kirovohrad region, wounding a mother and her two children and prompting an evacuation of 38 apartments, the regional administration reported. Four more residential buildings were damaged by drone debris in the Cherkasy region of Ukraine, according to local officials.

## Researchers link a gene to the emergence of spoken language

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

Why did humans start speaking? Scientists suggest genetics played a big role – and they say the evolution of this singular ability was key to our survival.

A new study links a particular gene to the ancient origins of spoken language, proposing that a protein variant found only in humans may have helped us communicate in a novel way. Speech allowed us to share information, coordinate activities and pass down knowledge, giving us an edge over extinct cousins like Neanderthals and Denisovans.

The new study is “a good first step to start looking at the specific genes” that may affect speech and language development, said Liza Finestack at the University of Minnesota, who was not involved with the research.

What scientists learn may someday even help people with speech problems.

The genetic variant researchers were looking at was one of a variety of genes “that contributed to the emergence of Homo sapiens as the dominant species, which we are today” said Dr. Robert Darnell, an author of the study published Tuesday in the journal Nature Communications.

Darnell has been studying the protein – called NOVA1 and known to be crucial to brain development – since the early 1990s. For the latest research, scientists in his lab at New York’s Rockefeller University used CRISPR gene editing to replace the NOVA1 protein found in mice with the exclusively human type to test the real-life effects of the genetic variant. To their surprise, it changed the way the animals vocalized when they called out to each other.

Baby mice with the human variant squeaked differently than normal littermates when their mom came around. Adult male mice with the variant chirped differently than their normal counterparts when they saw a female in heat.

Both are settings where mice are motivated to speak, Darnell said, “and they spoke differently” with the human variant, illustrating its role in speech.

This isn’t the first time a gene has been linked to speech. In 2001, British scientists said they had discovered the first gene tied to a language and speech disorder.

Called FOXP2, it was referred to as the human language gene. But though FOXP2 is involved in human language, it turned out that the variant in modern humans wasn’t unique to us. Later research found it was shared with Neanderthals. The NOVA1 variant in modern humans, on the other hand, is found exclusively in our species, Darnell said.

The presence of a gene variant isn’t the only reason people can speak. The ability also depends on things like anatomical features in the human throat and areas of the brain that work together to allow people to speak and understand language.

Darnell hopes the recent work not only helps people better understand their origins but also eventually leads to new ways to treat speech-related problems.

University of Minnesota’s Finestack said it’s more likely the genetic findings might someday allow scientists to detect, very early in life, who might need speech and language interventions.

“That’s certainly a possibility,” she said.

## Takeaways from AP's investigation into dozens of deaths of police recruits

By RYAN J. FOLEY Associated Press

When a sheriff's deputy died at a police academy in Evansville, Indiana, two years ago, law enforcement leaders said he had collapsed during routine training.

The Associated Press set out to learn whether such deaths were routine and why were they happening. Drawing on public records and news reports, AP's investigation found that at least 29 recruits have died nationwide over the past decade while participating in basic training to become law enforcement officers.

The findings surprised some experts because no group or government agency comprehensively tracks recruit deaths. Here are some takeaways from AP's investigation.

Most of the deaths involved exertion and heat, rather than force

The investigation found that most of those who died had collapsed after intense physical exertion during training exercises and tests.

Those included lengthy obstacle courses, grueling sets of calisthenics and timed runs that recruits must pass or face potential expulsion. Sometimes, these activities were completed on extremely hot days or without access to water.

Many of the deaths happened on the first day of physical training, which is famously intense at some academies. Others happened much later during the monthlong programs.

A handful of the deaths involved boxing or simulated training fights that inflicted trauma, as was the case of Deputy Asson Hacker in Evansville.

Heat stroke, dehydration, excessive physical exertion and related conditions were often cited by medical examiners as causing or contributing to the deaths.

Most of the recruits who died were Black men

Black men made up nearly 60% of recruits who died, even though Black officers comprise about 12 percent of local police forces nationwide.

Some experts say a genetic condition helps explain this disparity. Sickle cell trait is most prevalent among Black Americans. It involves an abnormal gene in red blood cells.

Sickle cell trait usually does not affect their daily lives or their lifespan. But in rare cases, carriers are more likely to experience complications such as heat stroke and muscle breakdown when doing intense physical and athletic training, especially during conditions such as high temperatures.

Medical examiners cited the condition as contributing to the deaths of several recruits, such as 33-year-old Edgar Ordonez, who died of exertional heat stroke while training last summer for the New York City Police Department.

Unlike the military and the NCAA, many police departments do not screen recruits for the condition before hiring them. And many adults do not know whether they carry the trait.

The Centers for Disease Control recommends remaining hydrated, building in rest breaks and taking other steps to cool body temperatures for carriers who are in training.

Deaths seem to be on the rise, at a time of officer shortages

The deaths appear to be on the rise in recent years, as police departments have turned to an older and more diverse pool of applicants to fill openings.

The majority of the deaths happened since 2020, when the pandemic and protests against police brutality exacerbated the number of vacancies. Many of those who died were in their 30s and 40s.

Alarmed by a string of such deaths, one researcher warned in a medical journal in 2023 that they were preventable with the right precautions and that police chiefs should take action.

But they have continued to mount since then. At least 5 recruits died in 2024, from Tennessee to Massachusetts.

Deaths don't always trigger recognition, benefits or investigations

Because many deceased recruits were not yet sworn officers, their names are ineligible to be added to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington.

Sometimes their names do not qualify for similar state memorials, and their families cannot access state death benefits for officers killed in the line of duty.

Similarly, national organizations track closely the circumstances of deaths of sworn officers. But no group is dedicated to police recruits, and that means any trends in their deaths can go unnoticed.

Workplace safety regulators have the jurisdiction to investigate police academy deaths in some states, but lack it in many others.

The extent of any death investigations is often left to the discretion of the individual police departments who run the academies and the prosecutors and medical examiners who work closely with them.

## **Dying to serve: Dozens of recruits have died nationwide while training to become police officers**

By RYAN J. FOLEY Associated Press

Ronald Donat's longtime dream of becoming a police officer was in jeopardy.

The 41-year-old struggled to stand after completing a flurry of pushups, sprints and pullups in the notoriously grueling start of physical training that recruits call "Hell Day."

"You are dead!" classmates recall a sergeant berating Donat, ordering him to sit on concrete at the suburban Atlanta police academy.

Donat, a Haitian immigrant on his third attempt to land a law enforcement job, assured instructors he wasn't giving up. He managed to get off the ground and rejoin recruits in a bear crawl exercise. But he soon went limp.

One hundred minutes after training began that October 2021 morning, he was dead, according to records obtained by The Associated Press.

Donat is among at least 29 recruits who died during basic training at law enforcement academies around the country in the last decade, an AP investigation found. Most died of exertion, dehydration, heat stroke and other conditions tied to intense exercise — often on the first day of training, like Donat. Others died several weeks in, sometimes after suffering trauma during boxing or use-of-force drills or collapsing during high-stakes timed runs on hot days.

Experts and police advocates were surprised by AP's findings — based on an extensive review of lists of law enforcement deaths in every state, workplace safety records and news reports — and said many of the deaths were preventable. No federal agency or outside organization comprehensively tracks recruit deaths, unlike officers who die in the line of duty.

"Training shouldn't have one death, much less 29," said David Jude, a retired Kentucky State Police academy commander and instructor. "To hear that number, it is shocking."

Black recruits represented nearly 60% of those who died, a striking disparity given that federal data show Black officers make up 12% of local police forces. Many carried sickle cell trait, a condition most prevalent among Black Americans that increases the risk of serious injury following extreme exertion.

Overall, the deaths amount to a tiny percentage of the nation's 800,000 sworn officers but highlight another hazard in a profession where shootings, car accidents and other dangers are part of the job.

AP's tally shows the deaths have grown at a time when departments are tapping an older and more diverse pool of applicants to address officer shortages. More than two-thirds of the deaths occurred since 2020.

A 'heartbreaking' string of deaths

A Texas recruit collapsed minutes after instructors denied his request for water, saying: "You can't get water in a fight," video obtained by AP shows.

An Arkansas cadet died after he was forced to run wearing long pants in the scorching midday sun. A North Carolina trainee's temperature was 106 degrees an hour after his death, when he had no water breaks during an hourlong obstacle course.

Citing similar cases, one expert warned in a medical journal in mid-2023 of a "troubling spate of exertional collapse and death" of police trainees.

"This sad tragedy is preventable, but will not become so until our police chiefs begin to heed the mes-

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 32 of 66

sage," wrote Dr. Randy Eichner, a retired University of Oklahoma professor who has long studied exertion-related deaths.

But deaths have only continued to mount. At least five were recorded in 2024, including a New York City recruit who died of heat stroke, a Kentucky man who exerted himself during water-based survival training and a Massachusetts cadet who became unresponsive during defensive tactics training.

Police leaders say some deaths can be prevented through improved awareness and practices, acknowledging that the field needs to better screen for and accommodate health conditions that put recruits at risk and to rein in unnecessarily harsh drills.

"Not only are we potentially putting students in danger, but we're also putting instructors in precarious situations where they may not know about the risks," said Jude, an expert witness in the 2022 death of 38-year-old Jonesboro, Arkansas, recruit Vincent Parks.

Jude cited a law passed in Arkansas, amid outrage over video showing Parks collapsing while training on a hot afternoon, as a positive step. It requires trainers be educated on heat exhaustion, dehydration and symptoms of sudden cardiac arrest, and mandates that instructors remove cadets from physical activities if they faint or lose consciousness.

AP's investigation found instances in which recruits who were in serious medical distress were pushed to continue training before they died. In addition to calling off drills in such cases, academy leaders must ensure adequate hydration and breaks and limit training when heat makes it unsafe, experts said.

Bill Alexander, CEO of the National Law Enforcement Memorial in Washington, said the number of deaths could be reduced but probably not eliminated given the nature of policing, which can require chasing and arresting combative suspects.

"If you're training people physically and if you're training them hard, you're going to have these very rare medical events," said Alexander, who previously led an academy in Maryland.

Still, some leaders say the field needs urgent action to better protect recruits.

"It was just heartbreaking. I'll never forget it. And I'll do anything at all to get this message out," said Sheriff Charmaine McGuffey of Hamilton County, Ohio, who witnessed the 2023 death of 36-year-old Marcus Zeigler after he collapsed during a training run. "We're talking about life or death."

An eager recruit for a department in need

When Ronald Donat arrived at the Gwinnett County Police Department Academy in Lawrenceville, Georgia, he thought he'd finally found his place in law enforcement.

He always wanted to become an officer, but his wife, Sharline Volcy, said she initially discouraged him due to safety concerns when their children were young. Both immigrated from Haiti in the 1990s to New Jersey, where they met at church.

Donat earned a college degree and worked various jobs, including installing satellites and cable, but longed for the responsibility and community service that policing would bring.

He finally applied but was initially passed over. When Gwinnett County recruited applicants from New Jersey, Donat applied because he already had a sister living in Georgia, Volcy said.

Georgia's second-largest police agency, Gwinnett County has held hiring events around the country as it struggles to fill hundreds of vacancies. It's offered bonuses to combat the officer shortage, which grew during the coronavirus pandemic and 2020 protests against police brutality.

A physician who evaluated Donat for the department concluded he was healthy, with no concerning conditions, according to a form the doctor submitted to the state's police standards agency. Following the normal process for the county and most U.S. police departments, the doctor didn't screen Donat for sickle cell trait.

Donat began working out with other recruits, passed a state-mandated physical fitness test and was given badge 2423. He smiled for a selfie in a squad car. He shared advice with a classmate: "Never give up."

Most departments lack policies on sickle cell trait

Up to 3 million Black citizens in the U.S. have sickle cell trait, yet many adults with the genetic condition don't know their status, researchers say. Unlike people with sickle cell disease, they carry only one gene for sickle cell, and one normal gene.



# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 33 of 66

The condition, which is diagnosed through a blood test, doesn't usually affect their daily lives. But it can cause decreased blood flow and muscle breakdown after intense exertion, dehydration or high body temperatures. In very rare cases, that can result in collapse and death.

The NCAA and U.S. military now screen recruits for the condition, which has contributed to some deaths during football practices and boot camps. Researchers say exertional deaths among college athletes plummeted after NCAA-mandated testing and precautions went into effect in 2010, while the impact of the military programs is under review. Slowly building intensity, resting between drills, remaining hydrated during workouts and responding quickly to signs of distress are recommended.

Most police departments have no such screening programs. Many longtime law enforcement trainers say they've never heard of the condition, which AP found was cited as a contributing factor in several deaths and serious injuries of recruits.

McGuffey, the Ohio sheriff, said the cause of Marcus Zeigler's death was initially a mystery. Before his collapse in May 2023, Zeigler was in peak condition and a top recruit, she said.

The sheriff said she learned about sickle cell trait afterward from another employee, who himself had been seriously injured during academy training. She asked the coroner to investigate whether Zeigler had the condition. After ruling that Zeigler died of exertional heatstroke, the coroner's office added sickle cell trait as a contributing factor.

Since the death, Hamilton County has started screening recruits for the condition, which costs \$75 per test.

A physical and mental test

For Donat and his 27 classmates, academy staffers planned an intense hourlong workout -- a first-day ritual designed to test physical and mental fitness.

Pushups. Flutter kicks. More pushups. Hill sprints. Burpees. Pullups. Bear crawls.

Trainers say the exercises set the tone for the monthslong academy, which seeks to instill a never-quit mindset and prepare recruits for the most dangerous aspects of policing. But the military-style drills have long led to allegations of harsh treatment that cross the line into hazing.

The risks were so well-known that an ambulance usually sat nearby on the first day at the Gwinnett County academy. But that year, a major declined the staff's request, saying an ambulance would create the perception of danger, according to statements in an internal investigation report.

Donat kept up with classmates for 45 minutes but became exhausted during a set of pullups and couldn't complete the next exercise, air squats.

An instructor ordered Donat to sit: "You are dead!" six recruits recalled him screaming, according to the investigation.

The instructor insisted that he told Donat "You are done!" Either way, it was intended as a reminder, the investigation found, that giving up on police work could lead to death.

Donat didn't want to quit. Three minutes later, he got up with the help of another recruit and got in formation for a 25-foot bear crawl. "Everything is all right, Donat," a recruit assured him. But Donat collapsed and stopped breathing.

A paramedic on scene quickly treated Donat with oxygen and chest compressions. An ambulance arrived 10 minutes later.

After Donat was pronounced dead at a hospital, instructors wondered whether his life could have been saved with an ambulance on site.

Changes but no discipline after a Georgia death

Hours after Donat died, Gwinnett County released a statement saying Donat had been "instructed by supervising staff to rest" after becoming lethargic.

A fellow recruit who saw that statement on the news questioned the claim, texting classmates, "as far as I know I never heard that or saw that." One responded that Donat was last seen in the planking position before his collapse.

A county medical examiner ruled Donat died of natural causes, saying he had an enlarged heart prone

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 34 of 66

to abnormal rhythms. That shocked his wife, Volcy, who said her husband was a fit soccer player with no known heart issues.

The autopsy report didn't mention sickle cell trait. Volcy believes her husband had it – she's learned their daughters do, she said, and she has tested negative. Today, Gwinnett County still doesn't screen recruits for the condition, spokesperson Sgt. Collin Flynn said.

The department's investigation, completed weeks after Donat's death, found no policy violations and resulted in no disciplinary action. A major who led the investigation concluded, "I cannot imagine a scenario, had different actions been taken, that would have changed the tragic death of Recruit Donat."

Still, the department now requires an ambulance with emergency responders on scene during the first day of physical training, Flynn said. Changes to the workout allow instructors to keep a closer eye on those who are struggling, he said.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration didn't investigate because local government agencies aren't under its jurisdiction. That's the case in many states, which have not extended workplace safety protections to municipal employees such as police officers.

Families of deceased recruits face obstacles to recognition, benefits

Because most of the recruits in AP's investigation hadn't been sworn in as officers before they died, their names don't appear on the national memorial for deceased officers or some state memorials. And many of their families can't qualify for death benefits.

Aware of those stakes last year, the police chief in Knoxville, Tennessee, summoned a judge to the hospital room of unconscious recruit Wisbens Antoine.

On that February night, a fellow recruit took the oath on behalf of Antoine, who'd collapsed during training a week before graduation.

Hours later, Officer Antoine, 32, died.

Like Donat, he was a Haitian immigrant who left behind a wife and two daughters.

In Gwinnett County, officials honored Donat by adding his name to its Fallen Heroes Memorial in 2022. But his name isn't on federal or state memorials. Donat's family was ineligible for state death benefits because he hadn't graduated.

Congress in 2021 passed a law allowing trainees' relatives to be eligible for the same federal death benefits as those of sworn officers. The program includes a payment of nearly \$450,000, plus college assistance.

But three years later, Volcy said, she's still awaiting a ruling from the Department of Justice on her application for benefits, which she said she desperately needs to afford college tuition and other expenses.

Volcy was unaware of the investigation into her husband's death until AP gave her the report last year. She said the department put recruits like Donat – and their families – at risk.

"It is disappointing to know that excessive strain and physical activities brought an end to his life," Volcy said. "What was supposed to be a new beginning, a lifetime achievement, a dream come true turned children into orphans, a wife into a widow and a lifetime of grief."

## 4 candidates want to be Germany's next chancellor. Who are they?

BERLIN (AP) — Four candidates are bidding to be Germany's next leader in Sunday's election. The would-be chancellors are the incumbent, the opposition leader, the current vice chancellor and — for the first time — a leader of a far-right party.

Olaf Scholz

The 66-year-old has been Germany's chancellor since December 2021. The center-left Social Democrat has a wealth of government experience, having previously served as Hamburg's mayor and as German labor and finance minister. As chancellor, he quickly found himself dealing with unexpected crises. He launched an effort to modernize Germany's military after Russia's invasion of Ukraine and made Germany Ukraine's second-biggest weapons supplier. His government prevented an energy crunch and tried to counter high inflation. But his three-party coalition became notorious for infighting and collapsed in November as it argued over how to revitalize the economy — Europe's biggest, which has shrunk for the past two years.

Friedrich Merz

Germany's 69-year-old opposition leader has been the front-runner in the election campaign, with his center-right Union bloc leading polls. He became the leader of his Christian Democratic Union party after longtime Chancellor Angela Merkel — a former rival — stepped down in 2021. Merz has taken his party in a more conservative direction. In the election campaign, he has made curbing irregular migration a central issue. Merz lacks experience in government. He joined the European Parliament in 1989 before becoming a lawmaker in Germany five years later. He took a break from active politics for several years after 2009, practicing as a lawyer and heading the supervisory board of investment manager BlackRock's German branch.

Robert Habeck

The 55-year-old is the candidate of the environmentalist Greens. He's also Germany's current vice chancellor and the economy and climate minister, with responsibility for energy issues. As co-leader of the Greens from 2018 to 2022, he presided over a rise in the party's popularity, but in 2021 he stepped aside to let Annalena Baerbock — now Germany's foreign minister — make the party's first run for the chancellor's job. Habeck's record as a minister has drawn mixed reviews, particularly a plan his ministry drew up to replace fossil-fuel heating systems with greener alternatives that deepened divisions in the government.

Alice Weidel

The 46-year-old is making the first bid of the far-right, anti-immigration Alternative for Germany, or AfD, for the country's top job. An economist by training, Weidel joined the party shortly after it was founded in 2013. She has been co-leader of her party's parliamentary group since the party first won seats in the national legislature in 2017. She has been a co-leader of the party itself since 2022, along with Tino Chrupalla. In December, she was nominated as the candidate for chancellor — though other parties say they won't work with the AfD, so she has no realistic path to the top job at present.

## **Delta jet flips upside down on a snowy Toronto runway and all 80 aboard survive**

By JOHN WAWROW and MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — A Delta Air Lines jet flipped on its roof while landing Monday at Toronto's Pearson Airport, but all 80 people on board survived and those hurt had relatively minor injuries, the airport's chief executive said.

Snow blown by winds gusting to 40 mph (65 kph) swirled when the flight from Minneapolis carrying 76 passengers and four crew attempted to land at around 2:15 p.m. Communications between the tower and pilot were normal on approach and it's not clear what went so drastically wrong when the plane touched down.

Peter Carlson, a passenger traveling to Toronto for a paramedics conference, said the landing was "very forceful."

"All the sudden everything just kind of went sideways and then next thing I know it's kind of a blink and I'm upside down still strapped in," he told CBC News.

Canadian authorities held two brief news conferences but provided no details on the crash. Video posted to social media showed the aftermath with the Mitsubishi CRJ-900LR overturned, the fuselage seemingly intact and firefighters dousing what was left of the fire as passengers climbed out and walked across the tarmac.

"We are very grateful there was no loss of life and relatively minor injuries," Deborah Flint, CEO of Greater Toronto Airports Authority, told reporters.

Delta CEO Ed Bastian said in a statement that "the hearts of the entire global Delta family are with those affected."

Toronto Pearson Fire Chief Todd Aitken said 18 passengers were taken to the hospital. Earlier in the day, Ornge air ambulance said it was transporting one pediatric patient to Toronto's SickKids hospital and two

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 36 of 66

injured adults to other hospitals in the city.

Emergency personnel reached the plane within a few minutes and Aitken said the response "went as planned." He said "the runway was dry and there was no cross-wind conditions."

The crash was the fourth major aviation accident in North America in the past three weeks. A commercial jetliner and an Army helicopter collided near Reagan National Airport in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 29, killing 67 people. A medical transportation plane crashed in Philadelphia on Jan. 31, killing the six people on board and another person on the ground. And on Feb. 6, 10 people were killed in a plane crash in Alaska.

The last major crash at Pearson was on Aug. 2, 2005, when an Airbus A340 landing from Paris skidded off the runway and burst into flames amid stormy weather. All 309 passengers and crew aboard Air France Flight 358 survived the crash.

On Monday, Pearson was experiencing blowing snow and winds of 32 mph (51 kph) gusting to 40 mph (65 kph), according to the Meteorological Service of Canada. The temperature was about 16.5 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 8.6 degrees Celsius).

The Delta flight was cleared to land at about 2:10 p.m. Audio recordings show the control tower warned the pilots of a possible air flow "bump" on the approach.

"It sounds to me like a controller trying to be helpful, meaning the wind is going to give you a bumpy ride coming down, that you're going to be up and down through the glide path," said John Cox, CEO of aviation safety consulting firm Safety Operating Systems in St. Petersburg, Florida.

"So it was windy. But the airplanes are designed and certified to handle that," Cox said. "The pilots are trained and experienced to handle that."

The plane came to a rest at the intersection of Runways 23 and 15L, not far from the start of the runway. Just after the crash, tower controllers spoke with the crew of a medical helicopter that had just left Pearson and was returning to help.

"Just so you're aware, there's people outside walking around the aircraft there," a controller said.

"Yeah, we've got it. The aircraft is upside down and burning," the medical helicopter pilot responded.

Carlson was among those outside the aircraft. He said when he took off his seat belt he crashed onto the ceiling, which had become the floor. He smelled gas, saw aviation fuel cascading down the cabin windows and knew he needed to get out but said his fatherly intuition and paramedic skills kicked in. He looked for those he could help.

Carlson and another man assisted a mother and her young son out of the plane and then Carlson dropped onto the tarmac. Snow was blowing and it "felt like I was stepping onto tundra."

"I didn't care how cold it was, didn't care how far I had to walk, how long I had to stand — all of us just wanted to be out of the aircraft," he said.

Cox, who flew for U.S. Air for 25 years and has worked on U.S. National Transportation Safety Board investigations, said the CRJ-900 aircraft is a proven aircraft that's been in service for decades and does a good job of handling inclement weather.

He said it's unusual for a plane to end up on its roof.

"We've seen a couple of cases of takeoffs where airplanes have ended up inverted, but it's pretty rare," Cox said.

Among the questions that need to be answered, Cox said, is why the crashed plane was missing its right wing.

"If one wing is missing, it's going to have a tendency to roll over," he said. "Those are going to be central questions as to what happened to the wing and the flight data recorder and cockpit voice recorder. They will be found, if not today, tomorrow, and the Transportation Safety Board of Canada will read them out and they will have a very good understanding of what actually occurred here."

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration said in a statement that the Transportation Safety Board of Canada would head up the investigation and provide any updates. The NTSB in the U.S. said it was sending a team to assist in the Canadian investigation.

Endeavor Air, based in Minneapolis, is a subsidiary of Delta Air Lines and the world's largest operator of CRJ-900 aircraft. The airline operates 130 regional jets on 700 daily flights to over 126 cities in the U.S.,

Canada and the Caribbean, according to the company's website.

The CRJ-900, a popular regional jet, was developed by Canadian aerospace company Bombardier. It's in the same family of aircraft as the CRJ-700, the type of plane involved in the midair collision near Reagan National Airport on Jan. 29.

## Death of South Korean actor at 24 sparks discussion about social media and internet culture

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korean actor Kim Sae-ron's death this week has triggered an outpouring of grief and calls for changes to the way the country's celebrities are treated in the public arena and on social media, which critics say can foster a culture of harassment.

The 24-year-old, who began her career as a child actor and earned acclaim for her roles in several domestic films, including the 2010 crime noir "The Man from Nowhere," was found dead by a friend at her home in the country's capital, Seoul, on Sunday. The National Police Agency has said that officers are not suspecting foul play and that Kim left no note.

Once among the brightest stars on South Korea's vibrant movie and television scene, Kim struggled to find work after a 2022 drunk driving incident, for which she was later fined in court.

Online posts in South Korea are notoriously harsh toward celebrities who make missteps, especially women, and Kim faced constant negative coverage from news organizations that capitalized on public sentiment.

Newspapers and websites criticized her whenever she was seen partying with friends, or when she complained about her lack of work and nasty comments on social media. She was even criticized for smiling while filming an independent movie last year.

Following Kim's death, several of the country's major newspapers on Tuesday published editorials and opinion pieces lambasting the toxic online comments about the actor. Some invoked the 2019 deaths of K-Pop singers Seol-li and Goo Hara and the 2023 death of "Squid Games" actor Lee Sun-kyun while calling for a change in the "harsh, zero-tolerance" culture toward celebrities.

The Hankook Ilbo newspaper said the country's media outlets were part of the problem, lamenting that some outlets continued to exploit Kim for clicks even after her death, using provocative headlines that highlighted her past struggles.

The watchdog Citizens' Coalition for Democratic Media on Tuesday criticized news organizations for blaming social media without considering their own "sensational and provocative reporting."

Born in 2000, Kim began her acting career at age 9, with the 2009 film "A Brand New Life," portraying a girl's struggles to adjust to a new life after being left at an orphanage by her father. She rose to stardom with "The Man from Nowhere," which was one of the biggest hits in the South Korean movie scene that year and won her a domestic acting award.

She starred in various movies and TV shows before the 2022 drunk driving incident.

Gold Medalist, Kim's former management agency, did not immediately answer calls for comment.

## Schools around the US confront anxiety over Trump's actions on immigration

By MORIAH BALINGIT, BIANCA VÁZQUEZ TONESS and JOCELYN GECKER AP Education Writers

In Fresno, California, social media rumors about impending immigration raids at the city's schools left some parents panicking — even though the raids were all hoaxes. In Denver, a real immigration raid at an apartment complex led to scores of students staying home from school, according to a lawsuit. And in Alice, Texas, a school official incorrectly told parents that Border Patrol agents might board school buses to check immigration papers.

President Donald Trump's immigration policies already are affecting schools across the country, as officials

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 38 of 66

find themselves responding to rising anxiety among parents and their children, including those who are here legally. Trump's executive actions vastly expanded who is eligible for deportation and lifted a ban on immigration enforcement in schools.

While many public and school officials have been working to encourage immigrants to send their children to school, some have done the opposite. Meanwhile, Republicans in Oklahoma and Tennessee have put forward proposals that would make it difficult — or even impossible — for children in the country illegally and U.S.-born children of parents without documentation to attend school at all.

As they weigh the risks, many families have struggled with separating facts from rumor.

In the Alice Independent School District in Texas, school officials told parents that the district "received information" that U.S. Border Patrol agents could ask students about their citizenship status during field trips on school buses that pass through checkpoints about 60 miles from the Texas-Mexico border. The information ended up being false.

Angelib Hernandez of Aurora, Colorado, began keeping her children home from their schools a few days a week after Trump's inauguration. Now she doesn't send them at all.

She's worried immigration agents will visit her children's schools, detain them and separate her family.

"They've told me, 'Hopefully we won't ever be detained by ourselves,'" she said. "That would terrify them."

Hernandez and her children arrived about a year ago and applied for asylum. She was working through the proper legal channels to remain in the U.S., but changes in immigration policies have made her status tenuous.

In the past week, her fears have intensified. Now, she says, her perception is "everyone" — from Spanish-language media to social media to other students and parents — is giving the impression that immigration agents plan to enter Denver-area schools. The school tells parents that kids are safe. "But we don't trust it."

Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents are not known to have entered schools anywhere. But the possibility has alarmed families enough that some districts are pushing for a change in the policy allowing agents to operate in schools.

Denver Public Schools last week sued the Department of Homeland Security, accusing the Trump administration of interfering with the education of young people in its care. Denver took in 43,000 migrants from the southern border last year, including children who ended up in the city's public schools. Attendance at schools where migrant kids are concentrated has fallen in recent weeks, the district said in the lawsuit, saying the immigration raid at a local apartment complex was a factor.

The support Denver schools have given to students and families to help through the uncertainty involves "tasks that distract and divert resources from DPS's core and essential educational mission," lawyers for the district said in the lawsuit.

Around the country, conservatives have been questioning whether immigrants without legal status should even have the right to a public education.

Oklahoma's Republican state superintendent, Ryan Walters, pushed a rule that would have required parents to show proof of citizenship — a birth certificate or passport — to enroll their children in school. The rule would have allowed parents to register their children even if they could not provide proof, but advocates say it would have strongly discouraged them from doing so. Even the state's Republican governor, Kevin Stitt, thought the rule went too far — and vetoed it.

In Tennessee, Republican lawmakers have put forward a bill that would allow school districts to decide whether to admit students without papers. They say they hope to invite legal challenges, which would give them a chance to overturn a four-decade-old precedent protecting the right of every child in the country to get an education.

The implications of immigration policy for U.S. schools are enormous. Fwd.us, a group advocating for criminal justice and immigration reform, estimated in 2021 that 600,000 K-12 students in the U.S. lacked legal status. Nearly 4 million students — many of them born in the U.S. — have a parent living in the country illegally.

Immigration raids have been shown to impact academic performance for students — even those who are native-born. In North Carolina and California, researchers have found lower attendance and a drop in enrollment among Hispanic students when local police participate in a program that deputizes them to enforce immigration law. Another study found test scores of Hispanic students dropped in schools near the sites of workplace raids.

In Fresno, attendance has dropped since Trump took office by anywhere from 700 to 1,000 students a day. Officials in the central California district have received countless panicked calls from parents about rumored immigration raids — including about raids at schools, said Carlos Castillo, chief of diversity, equity and inclusion at the Fresno Unified School District. The feared school raids have all been hoaxes.

“It goes beyond just the students who ... have citizenship status or legal status,” Castillo said. Students are afraid for their parents, relatives and friends, and they’re terrified that immigration agents might raid their schools or homes, he said.

A school principal recently called Castillo in tears after a family reached out to say they were too afraid to go buy groceries. The principal went shopping for the family and delivered \$100 in groceries to their home — and then sat with the family and cried, Castillo said.

The district has been working with families to inform them of their rights and advise them on things like liquidating assets or planning for the custody of children if the parents leave the U.S. The district has partnered with local organizations that can give legal advice to families and has held almost a dozen meetings, including some on Zoom.

## **‘Life-threatening cold’ hits parts of US following deadly weekend flooding**

By JACK DURA and MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — Harsh cold descended on the nation’s midsection Monday as a polar vortex gripped the Rockies and Northern Plains on the heels of weekend storms that pummeled the Eastern U.S. with floods, killing at least 14 people.

The National Weather Service warned of “life-threatening cold” as wind chills dropped to minus 60 Fahrenheit (minus 51 Celsius) in parts of North Dakota on Monday and minus 50 F (minus 46 C) in parts of Montana. Tuesday morning was forecast to be even colder.

Extreme cold warnings were issued for an 11-state swath of the U.S. stretching from the Canadian border to Oklahoma and central Texas, where the Arctic front was expected to bring near-record cold temperatures and wind chills in the single digits by midweek.

Meteorologists had predicted that parts of the U.S. would experience the 10th and coldest polar vortex event this season. Weather forces in the Arctic are pushing chilly air that usually stays near the North Pole into the U.S. and Europe.

Kentucky, Appalachia battered by flooding with at least 13 dead

The death toll in flood-battered Kentucky rose to 12, Gov. Andy Beshear said Monday night. Two fatal vehicle crashes were connected to the severe weather, he said, and at least 1,000 people stranded by floods had to be rescued.

Parts of Kentucky and Tennessee received up to 6 inches (15 centimeters) of rain as severe storms swept across the South. Water submerged cars and buildings in Kentucky and mudslides blocked roads in Virginia.

In West Virginia, where there was one confirmed fatality with several people still missing, Gov. Patrick Morrisey asked President Donald Trump to issue a disaster declaration for a 13-county region ravaged by flooding.

Near Logan, West Virginia, authorities responded Monday night to the spill of acidic water from an abandoned coal mine. The mine blowout damaged a road, making it impassable, fire officials said.

In Atlanta, a person was killed when a large tree fell on a home early Sunday.

Flood warnings were extended Monday across most of Kentucky and portions of Arkansas, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, West Virginia, Virginia and Ohio.

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 40 of 66

Rockies, Midwest, Northeast hit with snow storms

In Nebraska, where much of the state was under a winter weather advisory, a state trooper was killed Monday morning while responding to a crash on Interstate 80 near the town of Greenwood. The trooper's name and further circumstances of the fatality were not immediately released.

Ice and snow made travel treacherous in large swaths of Michigan, which remained under a winter weather advisory until Monday afternoon.

Authorities in Colorado reported eight people were killed in fatal vehicle crashes since Valentine's Day and warned drivers to be cautious.

Avalanche warnings were issued for numerous areas of the Rocky Mountains, with the danger rated high in portions of Colorado, Utah, Idaho and Wyoming.

The Mount Washington Avalanche Center issued an avalanche warning Monday for areas of the White Mountains in New Hampshire. Two ice climbers were rescued in the White Mountains on Sunday after triggering an avalanche that partially buried one of them, officials said.

Part of Detroit is submerged in water after pipe burst

Parts of a southwest Detroit neighborhood were submerged after a nearly century-old water main burst Monday, flooding streets, sidewalks and yards under several feet of water.

Firefighters used a ladder to help one person from the roof of a car in waist-deep water and a bulldozer was used to navigate a flooded street and help people leave a home, according to the fire department.

The 54-inch (137-centimeter) transmission main was built in 1930, according to the Great Lakes Water Authority.

Crews were attempting to isolate the break. It was not clear what caused it, but overnight temperatures had been well below freezing. No injuries have been reported.

Mayor Mike Duggan says people impacted by the flooding can shelter in place if they have power and feel safe. Those who want to leave can call 911 and fire crews will help them from their homes and take them to a temporary shelter.

Extreme cold gives the U.S. a taste of the Arctic

This is the coldest month of the year for many locations, and air temperatures may approach record lows in some areas, said National Weather Service meteorologist Jason Anglin in Bismarck.

People should cover exposed skin and limit time outside to avoid frostbite, which can happen in minutes in such low temperatures, Anglin said. Neighbors should check on each other and those who are vulnerable and monitor heater vents to make sure they don't ice up.

Due to the frigid conditions and a "lack of adequate heating fuel," North Dakota Gov. Kelly Armstrong on Monday waived hours-of-service requirements for commercial-vehicle drivers hauling propane and petroleum products. The waiver is for 30 days.

The cold snap in North Dakota was expected to reduce oil production by about 5%, or about 50,000 to 80,000 barrels a day — pretty typical for such conditions, North Dakota Pipeline Authority Director Justin Kringstad said. It takes about a week once temperatures warm up for volumes to rebound, he said.

Death can happen in minutes for animals in such cold, said Julie Schirado, a founder of the Bismarck-based Furry Friends Rockin' Rescue animal shelter. The shelter works with other rescues, and uses floor kennels, heated garages and basements to house animals, she said.

"We see death a lot but when the cold temperatures hit, then it's jumped up some more. We lose kittens, puppies that are out in this weather ... Frostbite can be wicked," Schirado said. People should bring their pets indoors in extreme cold.

At the Dakota Zoo in Bismarck, which closed last weekend due to cold, critters such as bison, elk and bighorn sheep don't mind the temperatures as they munch food to stay warm and have shelters to enter, Director Terry Lincoln said. And staff are still out, breaking through ice for their water, he said.

Lincoln, who lives at the zoo, said he walked to his office on Monday morning "and I had an ice-cream headache halfway there. You know it's cold when you have an ice cream headache without eating ice cream."



## Governor weighs removing NYC Mayor Adams after his top deputies quit amid criminal case turmoil

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — New York Gov. Kathy Hochul said Monday she is weighing removing New York City Mayor Eric Adams from office after four of his top deputies announced their resignations in the latest fallout from the Justice Department's push to end his corruption case.

Hochul, a Democrat, said she will convene a meeting of key leaders Tuesday in Manhattan "for a conversation about the path forward." She said the departures of First Deputy Mayor Maria Torres-Springer and other top officials raise "serious questions about the long-term future" of Adams' administration.

Adams, also a Democrat, has been under increasing scrutiny since the Justice Department's second-in-command ordered federal prosecutors in Manhattan last week to drop his corruption case to ensure his cooperation in Republican President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown — raising questions about the mayor's political independence and ability to lead the city.

Acting Deputy Attorney General Emil Bove wrote that the case had "unduly restricted Mayor Adams' ability to devote full attention and resources to the illegal immigration and violent crime."

"I recognize the immense responsibility I hold as governor and the constitutional powers granted to this office," Hochul said in a statement. "In the 235 years of New York State history, these powers have never been utilized to remove a duly-elected mayor; overturning the will of the voters is a serious step that should not be taken lightly. That said, the alleged conduct at City Hall that has been reported over the past two weeks is troubling and cannot be ignored."

The city's charter lays out a court-like process by which the governor must first serve the mayor with a copy of charges she feels warrant his removal, then provide him with "an opportunity to be heard in his defense." But there is little precedent or blueprint for how that would work. As Hochul noted in her statement, the removal powers have never once been used against a sitting mayor in New York's history.

Earlier Monday, Adams confirmed the departures of Torres-Springer, Deputy Mayor for Operations Meera Joshi, Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services Anne Williams-Isom and Deputy Mayor for Public Safety Chauncey Parker.

"I am disappointed to see them go, but given the current challenges, I understand their decision and wish them nothing but success in the future," said Adams, who faces several challengers in June's Democratic primary. "But let me be crystal clear: New York City will keep moving forward, just as it does every day."

Torres-Springer, Joshi and Williams-Isom told agency heads and staff in a memo that they were exiting because of "the extraordinary events of the last few weeks." They did not give a date for their departures, but Adams said they and Parker will remain "for the time being to ensure a seamless transition."

Bove's directive for prosecutors to drop Adams' case touched off firestorms within the Justice Department and New York political circles, with seven federal prosecutors quitting in protest — including the interim U.S. attorney for Manhattan — and fellow Democrats calling on Adams to resign.

On Friday, after a week of recriminations and resignations, Bove and a pair of Justice Department officials from Washington stepped in and filed paperwork asking Manhattan federal Judge Dale E. Ho to dismiss the case. Ho has yet to take action on the request.

Adams, a former police captain, pleaded not guilty last September to charges that he accepted more than \$100,000 in illegal campaign contributions and lavish travel perks from foreign nationals looking to buy his influence while he was Brooklyn borough president campaigning to be mayor.

The Justice Department said in its filing Friday that it was seeking to dismiss Adams' charges with the option of refiling them later, which critics see as a carrot to ensure his compliance on the Republican president's objectives. In his memo ordering prosecutors to ditch the case, Bove said the new, permanent U.S. attorney would review the matter after the November election.

"It certainly sounds like President Trump is holding the mayor hostage," Rev. Al Sharpton, an Adams ally, said Tuesday. "I have supported the mayor, but he has been put in an unfair position — even for him — of essentially political blackmail."

City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams became the latest Democrat to call on the mayor to resign, saying that with the deputy mayor resignations it's clear he "has now lost the confidence and trust of his own staff, his colleagues in government, and New Yorkers." Speaker Adams is not related to the mayor.

Other leaders, including Democratic Reps. Alexandria Ocasio Cortez and Nydia Velázquez, and Lt. Gov. Antonio Delgado, have called on Adams to step down.

The drama over Adams' legal case played out as the mayor met with Trump's border czar in New York on Thursday and announced increased cooperation on the Trump administration's efforts to remove immigrants, including reestablishing an office for immigration authorities at the city's notorious Rikers Island jail.

In their memo to staff announcing their exits, Torres-Springer, Joshi and Williams-Isom wrote: "Due to the extraordinary events of the last few weeks and to stay faithful to the oaths we swore to New Yorkers and our families, we have come to the difficult decision to step down from our roles."

## **Social Security head steps down over DOGE access of recipient information: AP sources**

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Social Security Administration's acting commissioner has stepped down from her role at the agency over Department of Government Efficiency requests to access Social Security recipient information, according to two people familiar with the official's departure who were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly.

Acting Commissioner Michelle King's departure from the agency over the weekend — after more than 30 years of service — was initiated after King refused to provide DOGE staffers at the SSA with access to sensitive information, the people said Monday.

The White House has replaced her as acting commissioner with Leland Dudek, who currently works at the SSA, the people said.

White House spokesperson Harrison Fields released a statement Monday night saying: "President Trump has nominated the highly qualified and talented Frank Bisignano to lead the Social Security Administration, and we expect him to be swiftly confirmed in the coming weeks. In the meantime, the agency will be led by a career Social Security anti-fraud expert as the acting commissioner."

Fields added, "President Trump is committed to appointing the best and most qualified individuals who are dedicated to working on behalf of the American people, not to appease the bureaucracy that has failed them for far too long."

King's exit from the administration is one of several departures of high-ranking officials concerned about DOGE staffers' potential unlawful access to private taxpayer information.

DOGE has accessed Treasury payment systems and is attempting to access Internal Revenue Service databases.

Since Republican President Donald Trump has retaken the White House, his billionaire adviser Elon Musk has rapidly burrowed deep into federal agencies while avoiding public scrutiny of his work through the DOGE group.

Nancy Altman, president of Social Security Works, an advocacy group for the preservation of Social Security benefits, said of DOGE's efforts that "there is no way to overstate how serious a breach this is. And my understanding is that it has already occurred."

"The information collected and securely held by the Social Security Administration is highly sensitive," she said. "SSA has data on everyone who has a Social Security number, which is virtually all Americans, everyone who has Medicare, and every low-income American who has applied for Social Security's means-tested companion program, Supplemental Security Income."

"If there is an evil intent to punish perceived enemies, someone could erase your earnings record, making it impossible to collect the Social Security and Medicare benefits you have earned."

The future of Social Security has become a top political issue and was a major point of contention in the 2024 election. About 72.5 million people, including retirees, disabled people and children, receive Social

Security benefits.

## Mexican musical legend Paquita la del Barrio dies at 77

By BERENICE BAUTISTA Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexican musical legend Paquita la del Barrio, known for her powerful voice and fierce defense of women, died at her home in Veracruz early Monday at the age of 77.

Her passing was announced on her official social media accounts and confirmed by her representatives to The Associated Press. The state capital of Veracruz will mourn the loss of the iconic singer, who had faced a number of recent health problems.

"With deep pain and sadness we confirm the sensitive passing of our beloved 'Paquita la del Barrio' at her home in Veracruz," the statement said. "She was a unique and unrepeatable artist who will leave an indelible mark in the hearts of all of us who knew her and enjoyed her music."

Born Francisca Viveros Barradas, Paquita la del Barrio captivated audiences with songs of heartbreak and betrayal, including anthems like "Rata de dos patas" and "Tres veces te enga  ." While her fan base was predominantly women, her powerful performances also drew men to her concerts.

"At the beginning, many men said 'Why would I go, to get shamed? ... Now they join the concerts. They go with their girlfriend, their wife and they love it,'" Paquita said in a 2016 interview with the AP.

A two-time Grammy and Latin Grammy nominee, Paquita la del Barrio received recognition from across the industry, including the Billboard Latin Music Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2021, which was presented to her by Puerto Rican superstar Bad Bunny.

News of her death sparked an outpouring of grief on social media. The Latin Grammys and Apple Music were among the many who took to social media to mourn her passing.

"RIP Paquita la del Barrio, the feminist icon from Mexico who sang what others were afraid to say," wrote Apple Music on the social platform X.

## Egypt is developing a plan to rebuild Gaza, countering Trump's call to depopulate the territory

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Egypt is developing a plan to rebuild Gaza without forcing Palestinians out of the strip in a counter to President Donald Trump's proposal to depopulate the territory so the U.S. can take it over.

Egypt's state-run Al-Ahram newspaper said the proposal calls for establishing "secure areas" within Gaza where Palestinians can live initially while Egyptian and international construction firms remove and rehabilitate the strip's infrastructure.

Egyptian officials have been discussing the plan with European diplomats as well as with Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, according to two Egyptian officials and Arab and Western diplomats. They are also discussing ways to fund the reconstruction, including an international conference on Gaza reconstruction, said one of the Egyptian officials and an Arab diplomat.

The officials and diplomats spoke on condition of anonymity because the proposal is still being negotiated.

The proposal comes after an international uproar over Trump's call for the removal of Gaza's population of some 2 million Palestinians. Trump said the United States would take over the Gaza Strip and rebuild it into a "Riviera of the Middle East," though Palestinians would not be allowed back.

Palestinians have widely said they will not leave their homeland, while Egypt, Jordan – backed by Saudi Arabia – have refused Trump's calls for them to take in Gaza's population. Rights groups have widely said the plan amounts to forced expulsion, a potential war crime. European countries have also largely denounced Trump's plan. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has praised the idea and says Israel is preparing to implement it.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who was in Saudi Arabia on Monday in a tour of the region, has said the United States was up to hearing alternative proposals. "If the Arab countries have a better plan, then that's great," Rubio said Thursday on the U.S. radio program "Clay and Buck Show."

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 44 of 66

Egypt's Al-Ahram newspaper said the proposal is designed to "refute American President Trump's logic" and counter "any other visions or plans that aim to change the geographic and demographic structure of Gaza Strip."

Gaza is nearing a critical juncture with the first phase of a ceasefire due to run out in early March. Israel and Hamas must still negotiate a second phase meant to bring a release of all remaining hostages held by the militants, a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and a long-term halt to the war.

Any reconstruction plan will be impossible to implement without a deal on the second phase, including an agreement on who will govern Gaza in the long term. Israel demands the elimination of Hamas as a political or military force in the territory, and international donors are unlikely to contribute to any rebuilding if Hamas is in charge.

Central in Egypt's proposal is the establishment of a Palestinian administration that is not aligned with either Hamas or the Palestinian Authority to run the strip and oversee the reconstruction efforts, according to the two Egyptian officials involved in the efforts.

It also calls for a Palestinian police force mainly made up of former Palestinian Authority policemen who remained in Gaza after Hamas took over the enclave in 2007, with reinforcement from Egyptian- and Western-trained forces.

Asked about the possibility of deploying an Arab force in Gaza one Egyptian official and the Arab diplomat said Arab countries would only agree if there were a "clear path" for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has rejected any Palestinian state as well as any role for Hamas or the Western-backed Palestinian Authority in governing Gaza, though he has not put forward any clear alternative.

Hamas has said it is willing to give up power in Gaza. Hamas spokesman Abdul Latif al-Qanou told The Associated Press on Sunday that the group has accepted either a Palestinian unity government without Hamas' participation or a committee of technocrats to run the territory. The Palestinian Authority, which governs pockets of the West Bank, has so far opposed any plans for Gaza that exclude it.

The Western diplomat said France and Germany have backed the idea of Arab countries developing a counterproposal to Trump's plan, and that Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi discussed his government's efforts with the French president in a phone call earlier this month.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty also briefed the German foreign minister and other EU officials on the sidelines of last week's Munich security conference, one of the Egyptian officials said.

Officials from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan will discuss Egypt's proposal at a gathering in Riyadh this week, before introducing it to the Arab summit later this month, according to the two Egyptian officials and the Arab diplomat.

Israel's 16-month campaign in Gaza, triggered by Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023 attack, devastated the territory. Around a quarter million housing units have been destroyed or damaged, according to U.N. estimates. More than 90% of the roads and more than 80% of health facilities have been damaged or destroyed. Damage to infrastructure has been estimated at some \$30 billion, along with an estimated \$16 billion in damaged to housing.

Egypt's plan calls for a three-phase reconstruction process that will take up to five years without removing Palestinians from Gaza, the Egyptian officials said.

It designates three "safe zones" within Gaza to relocate Palestinians during an initial six-month "early recovery period." The zones will be equipped with mobile houses and shelters, with humanitarian aid streaming in.

More than two dozen Egyptian and international firms would take part in removing the rubble and rebuilding the strip's infrastructure. The reconstruction would provide tens of thousands of jobs to Gaza's population, the officials said.

## Trump begins firings of FAA staff just weeks after fatal DC plane crash

By TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration has begun firing several hundred Federal Aviation Administration employees, upending staff on a busy air travel weekend and just weeks after a January fatal midair collision at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport.

Probationary workers were targeted in late-night emails Friday notifying them they had been fired, David Spero, president of the Professional Aviation Safety Specialists union, said in a statement.

The impacted workers include personnel hired for FAA radar, landing and navigational aid maintenance, one air traffic controller told The Associated Press. The air traffic controller was not authorized to talk to the media and spoke on condition of anonymity.

In a message posted to X late Monday, Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy said fewer than 400 FAA employees were fired and "Zero air traffic controllers and critical safety personnel were let go."

A Transportation Department official told the AP earlier Monday that the agency has "retained employees who perform critical safety functions." In a follow-up query the agency said they would have to look into whether the radar, landing and navigational aid workers affected were considered to handle critical safety functions.

The National Air Traffic Controllers Association said in a brief statement Monday it was "analyzing the effect of the reported federal employee terminations on aviation safety, the national airspace system and our members."

Other FAA employees who were fired were working on an urgent and classified early warning radar system the Air Force had announced in 2023 for Hawaii to detect incoming cruise missiles, through a program that was in part funded by the Defense Department. It's one of several programs that the FAA's National Airspace System Defense Program manages that involve radars providing longer-range detection around the country's borders.

Due to the nature of their work, staff in that office typically provide an extensive knowledge transfer before retiring to make sure no institutional knowledge is lost, said Charles Spitzer-Stadtlander, one of the employees in that branch who was terminated.

The Hawaii radar and the FAA defense program office working on it are "about protecting national security," Spitzer-Stadtlander said. "I don't think they even knew what NDP does, they just thought, oh no big deal, he just works for the FAA."

"This is about protecting national security, and I'm scared to death," Spitzer-Stadtlander said. "And the American public should be scared too."

Spero said messages began arriving after 7 p.m. Friday and continued late into the night. More might be notified over the long weekend or barred from entering FAA buildings Tuesday, he said.

The employees were fired "without cause nor based on performance or conduct," Spero said, and the emails were "from an 'exec order' Microsoft email address" — not a government email address. A copy of the termination email that was provided to the AP shows the sending address "ASK\_AHR\_EXEC\_Orders@usfaa.mail.outlook.com."

The firings hit the FAA as it is facing a shortfall in controllers. Federal officials have been raising concerns about an overtaxed and understaffed air traffic control system for years, especially after a series of close calls between planes at U.S. airports. Among the reasons they have cited for staffing shortages are uncompetitive pay, long shifts, intensive training and mandatory retirements.

In the Jan. 29 fatal crash between a U.S. Army Black Hawk helicopter and American Airlines passenger jet, which is still under investigation, one controller was handling both commercial airline and helicopter traffic at the busy airport.

Just days before the collision, President Donald Trump had already fired all the members of the Aviation Security Advisory Committee, a panel mandated by Congress after the 1988 PanAm 103 bombing over Lockerbie, Scotland. The committee is charged with examining safety issues at airlines and airports.

Spitzer-Stadtlander suggested he was targeted for firing for his views on Tesla and X, formerly Twitter, not as part of a general probationary-level sweep. Both companies are owned by Elon Musk, whose Department of Government Efficiency is leading Trump's effort to cut the federal government.

Spitzer-Stadtlander is Jewish and was angered by Musk's straight-arm gesture at Trump's inauguration. On his personal Facebook page he urged friends to get rid of their Teslas and X accounts in response.

Spitzer-Stadtlander said that post drew the attention of a Facebook account labeled "Department of Government Efficiency," which reacted with a laughing emoji. Soon after, he saw the same account reacting to much older posts through his personal Facebook feed.

There are at least a half-dozen Facebook accounts labeled "Department of Government Efficiency," and it's unclear who operates any of them. White House spokesperson Karoline Leavitt wrote Monday on X, "DOGE doesn't even have a Facebook page."

Spitzer-Stadtlander said he was supposed to be exempted from the probationary firings because the FAA office he worked in focused on national security threats such as attacks on the national airspace by drones.

"Less than a week later, I was fired, despite my position allegedly being exempted due to national security," Spitzer-Stadtlander wrote in a post over the weekend on LinkedIn.

He added, "When DOGE fired me, they turned off my computer and wiped all of my files without warning." DOGE did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The firings were first reported by CNN.

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

By MATTHEW LEE, JUSTIN SPIKE and BARRY HATTON Associated Press

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia (AP) — 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, officials said Monday, in what would be the most significant meeting between the sides since Moscow's full-scale invasion of its neighbor nearly three years ago.

The talks scheduled for Tuesday in Saudi Arabia mark another pivotal 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 recent U.S. diplomatic blitz on the war has sent Kyiv and key allies scrambling to ensure a seat at the table amid concerns that Washington and Moscow could press ahead with a deal that won't be favorable to them. France called an emergency meeting of European Union countries and the U.K. on Monday to decide how to respond.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Putin's foreign affairs adviser Yuri Ushakov arrived in the Saudi capital on Monday, according to Russian state TV. Ushakov said the talks would be "purely bilateral" and would not include Ukrainian officials.

The U.S. delegation, he said, is made up of "serious people" but said Russia "came with a serious approach too." It is important, Ushakov said, "to start the real normalization of relations" between Russia and the U.S.

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.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the talks will be primarily focused on "restoring the entire range of U.S.-Russian relations, as well as preparing possible talks on the Ukrainian settlement and organizing a meeting of the two presidents." Bruce said the meeting is aimed at determining how serious the Russians are about wanting peace and whether detailed negotiations can be started.

"I think the goal, obviously, for everyone is to determine if this is something that can move forward," she told reporters traveling with Rubio in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Bruce said that even though Ukraine would not be at the table for Tuesday's talks, actual peace negotiations would only take place with Ukraine's involvement. Kyiv's participation in any peace talks was a bedrock of U.S. policy under Trump's predecessor, Joe Biden.

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 47 of 66

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."

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.

The talks would mark a significant expansion of U.S.-Russian contacts, nearly three years into a war that has seen ties fall to the lowest level in decades. 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 10-minute conversation didn't ease tensions, and in fact they increased in the months that followed. In the fall of 2022, U.S. and Russian spymasters met in Turkey amid Washington's concerns that Moscow could resort to nuclear weapons amid battlefield setbacks.

Tuesday's talks follow a telephone call between Trump and Putin in which the American president 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. The Ukrainian president said Monday his country had not been invited to the upcoming talks and won't accept the outcome if Kyiv doesn't take part.

The U.S.-Russia talks would "yield no results," given the absence of any Ukrainian officials, Zelenskyy said on a conference call with journalists from the United Arab Emirates.

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 the U.S.-Russia talks.

EU officials have pushed for the bloc — which along with the U.S. has staunchly supported Kyiv — 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."

Asked about expectations from the talks in Riyadh, he said that Trump and Putin in their call "agreed to leave behind that absolutely abnormal period in relations between our great powers when they effectively halted any contacts except for some technical and humanitarian issues."

"The presidents agreed that it's necessary to resume a dialogue on all issues that can be solved with Russian and U.S. participation," Lavrov said. "They mentioned the Ukrainian settlement along with the situation in the Middle East and some other regions of the world which aren't quite calm at the moment."

Lavrov bluntly ruled out the possibility that Moscow would cede any of its territorial gains as part of a potential settlement, saying that "there is not even a thought" about it.

Putin has demanded that Ukraine withdraw its troops from the four regions that Russia illegally annexed in September 2022 but never fully captured and renounce its bid to join NATO as part of any prospective peace deal — demands Kyiv has rejected.

Ushakov, Putin's foreign affairs aide, said the Riyadh talks will focus on "the restoration of normal ties, the possible start of Ukraine talks and the prospects of contacts on the top level."

He said that Kirill Dmitriev, the head of the Russian Direct Investment Fund, could join the Russian delegation. Dmitriev reportedly helped broker last week's release of American Marc Fogel, who was freed in exchange for Alexander Vinnik, a Russian cryptocurrency expert who faced Bitcoin fraud charges in the United States.

Zelenskyy also confirmed that Trump's special envoy for Russia and Ukraine, retired Gen. Keith Kellogg, would arrive in Kyiv on Feb. 20 for "broad conversations about security guarantees."

Zelenskyy said he wanted to bring Kellogg to the front line and hoped the American would take what he learned from his Ukraine trip back to the White House, adding: "I think after he goes back to the United

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 48 of 66

States we will have an understanding on when I will have a meeting with President Trump.”

Zelenskyy said the possibility of opening up his country’s mineral resources to the U.S., as Trump has suggested, would need to come with a written agreement on security guarantees for Ukraine. Ukraine and several European countries have insisted that without security guarantees, Russia could invade the country again, even if a settlement is reached.

Those guarantees could include NATO membership, which Hegseth poured cold water on, weapons and economic support, Zelenskyy said.

Ukraine has also expressed hopes of joining the EU, but that is complicated and could take years.

## Israel’s ceasefires with Hezbollah and Hamas are both in doubt again

By MELANIE LIDMAN and SALLY ABOU ALJOUND Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel’s military says its forces will remain in five strategic locations in southern Lebanon after Tuesday’s deadline for their withdrawal under a ceasefire with the Hezbollah militant group, as Lebanon’s government expressed frustration over another delay.

A separate ceasefire in Gaza was also in doubt as the region marked 500 days of Israel’s war with Hamas, while Israel and the United States sent conflicting signals over whether they want the truce to continue. Talks on the ceasefire’s second phase are yet to start.

Military spokesperson Lt. Col. Nadav Shoshani said the five locations in Lebanon provide vantage points or are located across from communities in northern Israel, where about 60,000 Israelis are still displaced. He said the “temporary measure” was approved by the U.S.-led body monitoring the truce, which earlier was extended by three weeks.

Under the agreement, Israeli forces should withdraw from a buffer zone in southern Lebanon to be patrolled by the Lebanese army and U.N. peacekeepers. The ceasefire has held since taking effect in November.

Israel is committed to a withdrawal in “the right way, in a gradual way, and in a way that the security of our civilians is kept,” Shoshani told reporters.

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun told reporters the ceasefire “must be respected,” saying “the Israeli enemy cannot be trusted.” He said Lebanese officials were working diplomatically for the withdrawal. Hezbollah leader Naim Kassem said Sunday “there can be no excuses” for any delay past Tuesday.

Hezbollah began firing rockets, drones and missiles into Israel the day after Hamas’ Oct. 7, 2023, attack out of Gaza ignited the war there. The Israel-Hezbollah conflict boiled over into all-out war in September as Israel carried out massive waves of airstrikes and killed most of the militant group’s senior leaders.

Earlier on Monday, Israel’s military said its drone strike killed Muhammad Shaheen, head of Hamas’ operations in Lebanon. The strike in the port city of Sidon was the deepest inside Lebanese territory since the ceasefire took effect. Associated Press video footage showed a charred vehicle.

“Now the fear has come back to people,” said Ahmed Sleim, a Sidon resident, who worried about a return to war.

### 500 days of war in Gaza

Israelis held protests calling for the Gaza ceasefire to be extended so that more hostages abducted in the Oct. 7 attack can be freed.

An Israeli official said four bodies are expected to be returned to Israel on Thursday. The official gave no further details and spoke on condition of anonymity because details were being arranged. So far, no bodies have been handed over during the ceasefire’s current phase. There was no immediate comment from Hamas.

Israeli officials have said they believe eight of the 33 people to be returned in the ceasefire’s first phase are dead. Hamas is gradually releasing the 33 in exchange for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners. Israeli forces have pulled back from most parts of Gaza and allowed a surge of humanitarian aid.

This first phase ends in less than two weeks. Negotiations on the more difficult second phase — which



# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 49 of 66

would release more hostages and see the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza — should have started two weeks ago.

"All I care about, all I want, is for my friends to return. There were six of us living in unbearable conditions" Ohad Ben Ami, released a week and a half ago, told Israeli President Isaac Herzog. Families have described loved ones barefoot or in chains.

"It's just not within the realm of possibility that they're still there," said protester Eleanor Satlow in Jerusalem. Others rallied in Tel Aviv, where newly released hostage Iair Horn told them: "I'm telling you, the hostages don't have time, we don't have time." His brother Eitan is still in Gaza.

In the second phase, Hamas would release over 70 remaining hostages — around half believed to be dead — in exchange for more Palestinian prisoners and a lasting ceasefire.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and U.S. President Donald Trump's administration say they are committed to the eradication of Hamas and the return of all hostages. Those goals are widely seen as incompatible.

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

Israel welcomes Trump's proposal

Trump calls for Gaza's population of over 2 million to be permanently relocated to other countries and for the United States to take ownership of the territory. Israel welcomes the plan, while Palestinians and Arab nations have rejected it. Rights groups say implementation would likely violate international law.

Egypt is working on a counter-plan to rebuild Gaza without removing Palestinians.

Hamas-led militants in their Oct. 7 attack killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250. More than half of the hostages have been returned. Eight have been rescued in military operations.

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.

"Everything is destroyed, nothing is left in Gaza, Gaza is not fit for life," said one resident, Mohammed Barash, reflecting on 500 days of war.

Settlement expansion is set to accelerate

A watchdog opposed to Jewish settlements on Palestinian territory said Israel has issued a tender for the construction of nearly 1,000 additional settler homes in the occupied West Bank.

Peace Now said the 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.

There was no immediate Israeli government comment.

Israel has built over 100 settlements across the West Bank, ranging from hilltop outposts to fully developed communities. Over 500,000 settlers live in the West Bank, home to about 3 million Palestinians.

The settlers have Israeli citizenship. Palestinians live under military rule, with the Western-backed Palestinian Authority administering population centers.

Israel captured the West Bank, along with the Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem, in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians want them for their future state.

## **Elon Musk's DOGE seeks access to taxpayer data at IRS: AP sources**

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency is seeking access to troves of sensitive taxpayer data at the IRS, two people familiar with the inner workings of the plan who were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly told The Associated Press on Monday.

If successful, Musk and his group would have access to millions of tightly controlled files that include taxpayer information, bank records and other sensitive records. The people who spoke to the AP and requested anonymity said DOGE is specifically seeking to access the IRS' Integrated Data Retrieval System, which enables employees "to have instantaneous visual access to certain taxpayer accounts," according

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 50 of 66

to the IRS website.

Advocates fear that the potential unlawful release of taxpayer records could be used to maliciously target Americans, violate their privacy and create other ramifications.

Harrison Fields, a White House spokesman, said in an emailed statement that "waste, fraud, and abuse have been deeply entrenched in our broken system for far too long. It takes direct access to the system to identify and fix it."

"DOGE will continue to shine a light on the fraud they uncover as the American people deserve to know what their government has been spending their hard earned tax dollars on," he said.

Democratic lawmakers are trying to fight against DOGE plans to access IRS data. Sens. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., and Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., sent a letter Monday to acting IRS Commissioner Douglas O'Donnell, demanding copies of any memos that would grant IRS system access to Musk or DOGE. The senators are also seeking justifications for DOGE efforts to inspect tax returns and private bank records.

Along with fears that DOGE access to taxpayer data may not be legal, "we are also extremely concerned that DOGE personnel meddling with IRS systems in the middle of tax filing season could, inadvertently or otherwise, cause breakdowns that may delay the issuance of tax refunds indefinitely," the letter reads.

"Any delay in refunds could be financially devastating to millions of Americans who plan their budgets around timely refunds every spring."

Jan. 27 was the official start date of the 2025 tax season, and the IRS expects more than 140 million tax returns to be filed by the April 15 deadline.

The Washington Post on Sunday first reported on DOGE's plans to access taxpayer data.

The news comes as the IRS plans to lay off thousands of probationary workers in the middle of tax season, according to two sources familiar with the agency's plans who were unauthorized to discuss them publicly. Cuts could happen as soon as this week.

Previously, IRS employees involved in the 2025 tax season were told they will not be allowed to accept a buyout offer from the Trump administration until after the taxpayer filing deadline, according to a letter sent recently to IRS employees.

Additionally, attorneys general from 14 states challenged the authority of DOGE to access sensitive government data housed at Treasury and exercise "virtually unchecked power" in a lawsuit filed Thursday.

The lawsuit, filed in federal court in Washington, says the actions taken by Musk at the helm of DOGE can only be taken by a nominated and Senate-confirmed official. It cites constitutional provisions that delineate the powers of Congress and the president.

A new account on Musk's social media site X, called DOGE IRS, says, "DOGE is seeking help from the public!" The account asks users to reach out "with insights on finding and fixing waste, fraud and abuse relating to the Internal Revenue Service."

## What is a polar vortex? US gets a taste of the Arctic this week

The Associated Press undefined

The term "polar vortex" usually refers to the gigantic circular upper air weather pattern in the Arctic region. It is a normal pattern that is stronger in the winter and keeps some of the coldest weather bottled up near the North Pole.

But at times some of the vortex can break off or move south, bringing unusually cold weather south and permitting warmer weather to creep up north.

This week, parts of the U.S. are experiencing the 10th and coldest polar vortex event this season. Weather forces in the Arctic are combining to push the chilly air into the U.S. and Europe.

With record snow in New Orleans last month and drought and destructive wildfires in Southern California, this winter has not been normal.

The latest projected cold outbreak will bring bone-chilling temperatures to the Northern and Central Plains for several days, starting Sunday.

Wind chills dropped to minus 60 Fahrenheit (minus 51 Celsius) in parts of North Dakota Monday and mi-

nus 50 F (minus 46 C) in parts of Montana. Wind chills were expected to dip even lower Tuesday morning. "Frostbite and hypothermia will occur if unprotected skin is exposed to these temperatures. An extended period of freezing temperatures could cause ruptured water pipes," the NWS warned Monday.

Meteorologists expect strong winds to make the cold feel even worse. Every U.S. state but Hawaii, California and Florida have some or all parts forecast to have a good chance of windchills of 20 degrees or below sometime next week, the National Weather Service predicted.

Some experts say disruptions to polar vortexes are happening more frequently because of a warming world. A warmer Arctic gives more energy to atmospheric waves that can drive weather patterns, making the waves more likely to disrupt the vortex and move colder air south into lower latitudes.

Despite the unusually cold winter across the U.S., the world remains in an overall warming pattern. Earth's average overall temperature set yet another monthly heat record in January. It was the 18th month of the last 19 that the world hit or passed the internationally agreed upon warming limit of 1.5 C (2.7 F) above pre-industrial times.

## Vatican says the pope has a 'polymicrobial respiratory tract infection.' What is that?

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

LONDON (AP) — Vatican authorities said Monday that Pope Francis has a complex infection in his respiratory system and will require more targeted drug treatment. Officials said the 88-year-old pope is suffering from a "polymicrobial respiratory tract infection," but gave no further details on the severity of his illness or what would change in his treatment.

Here's a look at the Pope's latest diagnosis and what his treatment could involve.

What is a polymicrobial respiratory tract infection?

Essentially, it means there's a mix of bacteria, viruses, fungi or parasites growing in someone's lungs.

"Often times, people will get a bronchitis or an airway infection and that can often start a cascade of multiple problems, including infections in the lungs," said Dr. Maor Sauler, who specializes in adult pulmonary and critical care medicine at Yale University's School of Medicine. He said such issues were common in older people whose immune systems might be weaker or had complex health issues.

"It likely means he has more than one organism in his lungs," Sauler said, explaining that the pope's doctors might have to adjust his treatment to make sure the antibiotics attack all the various organisms.

How serious is this?

For someone with the pope's medical history — he lost part of his right lung decades ago and has previously had pneumonia — it's worrying that he's been hospitalized.

Dr. Nick Hopkinson, medical director of Asthma + Lung UK, said most healthy people would likely recover quickly from bronchitis.

But in people whose lungs are already damaged, "bacteria can come and colonize the airways ... and you start to see infections which makes it more difficult to treat." In people with lungs that have been previously compromised, they might need help breathing, including oxygen support or chest physiotherapy to help them clear fluids building up in their lungs.

Still, Hopkinson said that getting the pope on the right medications should help.

"If they've identified particular things to treat, they can treat those and he'll start to recover."

How long might this take?

That depends. Antibiotic treatments typically take from a few days up to about two weeks. Hopkinson said the pope might be given various medicines, including ones that people typically take for asthma or conditions like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, in addition to getting physiotherapy to help keep his chest as clear as possible.

"Some infections require prolonged treatment because they're just harder to clear from the system," Hopkinson said. "It sounds like they've identified the bugs that are responsible and they'll be able to treat those...but we'll just have to wait and see."

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 52 of 66

Dr. Peter Openshaw, a lung expert at Imperial College London, said the presence of multiple organisms wasn't unusual in people with complex medical histories but could be hard to manage.

Are there other issues doctors might be concerned about?

Pneumonia is a likely worry.

"Even though we can treat pneumonias with antibiotics, pneumonias are also one of the leading causes of death," said Sauler of Yale University. He said antibiotics don't work in isolation and that a person's immune system is also critical to fighting off pneumonia, pointing out that the immune systems in older people aren't usually as resilient.

"When you're 88 years old, the age of the pope, then all of a sudden you have risk factors that make the situation tougher than just a routine pneumonia."

What will doctors be monitoring next?

Sauler said the biggest thing to watch out for in the coming days is any sign that the pope is getting worse.

"I'd be most interested in making sure he's not worsening despite the best efforts (of his doctors). That's usually a bad prognostic sign," he said, adding that they would likely review his condition in a few days to see whether or not the prescribed drugs are working.

"I have optimism and hope that he can pull through with the right antibiotic."

## **Auburn stays at No. 1 in AP Top 25 for 6th straight week, Florida up to No. 2; Louisville returns**

By AARON BEARD AP Basketball Writer

Auburn's win at Alabama assured the Tigers would keep the No. 1 ranking in The Associated Press Top 25 men's college basketball poll for a sixth consecutive week.

The Tigers (23-2) received 59 of 60 first-place votes in Monday's poll, reclaiming nearly all the support lost when they fell at home to Florida on Feb. 8. Auburn had been the unanimous No. 1 for three straight weeks before that loss, but remained at the top last week despite seeing nearly half of those first-place votes go primarily to Alabama, with a few to Florida and Tennessee.

But the Tigers won Saturday in a 1-vs.-2 road matchup against the rival Crimson Tide, hours after the committee that will choose the 68-team field for the NCAA Tournament put Auburn as its No. 1 overall seed in its preliminary rankings.

The top tier

The two teams to beat the Tigers sit right behind them. Florida and Duke were tied for third last week, and the Gators inched past the Blue Devils to break that tie and take the No. 2 spot while claiming the remaining first-place vote.

Alabama fell to No. 4, followed by Houston, Tennessee, Texas A&M — with its highest ranking since December 2017 — Iowa State, Texas Tech and St. John's to round out the top 10.

Of that group, the Red Raiders represented the only change from last week's set of teams, climbing three spots to replace Purdue for their first top-10 appearance in three years. Grant McCasland's squad, which has lost just twice since the start of 2025, was unranked until cracking the poll at No. 22 on Jan. 27.

Rising

Michigan had the week's biggest jump among ranked teams, climbing eight spots to No. 12 after beating Purdue last week and pushing its win streak to six games.

No. 15 Missouri jumped six spots, while No. 11 Wisconsin, No. 18 Clemson and No. 20 Maryland each rose five spots.

In all, 12 teams moved up from their position last week.

Sliding

Memphis took the biggest tumble of the week, falling eight spots to No. 22 after its overtime loss at Wichita State ended an eight-game winning streak.

No. 13 Purdue, No. 19 Arizona and No. 23 Kansas — the preseason No. 1-ranked team — all fell six

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 53 of 66

spots, while No. 24 Mississippi tumbled five.

Ten teams fell from last week's poll.

Welcome back

No. 25 Louisville was the week's lone new addition, returning to the poll for the second time after a two-week stint in January. First-year coach Pat Kelsey has guided the program to its first 20-win season since 2019-20, with the Cardinals having lost just once since mid-December.

Farewell (for now)

Creighton (No. 24) fell out of the rankings for the second time this season. The Bluejays were ranked for the first four weeks, then returned last week for what turned out to be a one-week stay.

Conference watch

The Southeastern Conference had a national-best nine teams, including three of the top four and five of the top 10. The Big 12 and Big Ten each had five teams, though the Big 12 had three in the top 10 while the highest-ranked Big Ten team checked in at 11th.

The Atlantic Coast Conference had three, followed by the Big East with two and the American Athletic Conference with one.

## Many weary Ukrainians long for an end to the war but now fear it will come on unfavorable terms

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — After nearly three years of living under constant threat of Russian airstrikes while their troops fight a grinding campaign against Russia's invasion, many Ukrainians long for an end to the war — but now fear it could come on unfavorable terms.

Top U.S. and Russian officials plan to meet Tuesday in Saudi Arabia to discuss an end to the war — without Kyiv's participation — rankling some Ukrainians who worry they will be sidelined.

"We are being destroyed, Ukraine is suffering, Ukraine is fighting. And our president does not participate?" Lidiia Odyntsova, 71, said with disbelief of the upcoming talks. "We are the victims. We should play first fiddle in these talks."

Standing with tears in her eyes beside a snow-covered memorial to fallen Ukrainian soldiers in central Kyiv, she said: "I will not forgive them! I will never forgive!"

While Ukraine will not take part in Tuesday's talks, U.S. State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce said any actual peace negotiations would only take place with Ukraine's involvement.

Still, many Ukrainians are watching a barrage of developments from the United States with apprehension. Ukrainian social media has been flooded with posts reflecting deep unease, and many remain anxiously glued to their phones for updates.

U.S. President Donald Trump last week sent shockwaves across both sides of the Atlantic after he agreed by phone with Russian President Vladimir Putin to begin negotiations — abruptly upending a longstanding U.S.-led effort to isolate Moscow over its invasion. That came the same day that U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said NATO membership for Ukraine was unrealistic and suggested Kyiv should abandon hopes of winning all its territory back from Russia, signaling a view of a potential settlement that is remarkably close to Moscow's.

Ukraine, which has been slowly losing ground to Russia's larger army, was already facing a difficult negotiating position, and Hegseth's comments poured cold water on two key Ukrainian aspirations. While support for an end to the fighting among the country's war-weary population is widespread, there remains broad agreement that it must not come at the expense of those living in territories occupied by Russia or at the risk of future incursions by Moscow.

Speaking to Fox News Channel's "Sunday Morning Futures" program, U.S. Special Envoy Steve Witkoff didn't directly respond to a question about whether Ukraine would have to give up a "significant portion" of its territory. "Those are details, and I'm not dismissive of the details, they're important. But I think the beginning here is trust-building," he said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has dismissed the upcoming talks, saying they would “yield no results” given the absence of Ukrainian officials.

Valerii Semeni, a 59-year-old fighting with Ukraine’s armed forces, meanwhile, said he feared the worst. “Trump is marching towards a world war, because the aggressor cannot be pacified,” Semeni said. “He does not know history, because maybe today you will pacify (Putin), but tomorrow it will provoke a world war. There is nothing else I can say about these negotiations.”

That sentiment reflected fears by many in Ukraine’s government and population that bringing an end to the fighting without building a lasting security infrastructure to prevent any future Russian aggression would allow Moscow time to regroup and launch future attacks, both in Ukraine and the wider region.

“We have to understand that Russia is a danger not only for Ukraine,” said Oleksandr Shyrshyn, a battalion commander fighting in the Russian region of Kursk, where Ukrainians troops have occupied some territory but suffered heavy losses. European countries “have to have a part in this negotiation as well because, as we see, all Europe is afraid of Russia and they don’t want the same scenario that we have.”

Shyrshyn said he thought both of Ukraine’s major goals — the restoration of its Russian-occupied territories and membership in the NATO military alliance — would be attainable if the Trump administration “would support us with all their power.”

“If the USA is not willing to support us, we will have more deaths, more losses,” he said, “but we will continue to fight, because it’s a question of our existence.”

## Zelenskyy travels to UAE as momentum grows for talks to end Russia’s war in Ukraine

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

ABU DHABI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met with the leader of the United Arab Emirates on Monday as momentum grows for potential peace talks ending Russia’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, has long 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 late Sunday 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. The 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.”

Zelenskyy’s office posted video of him meeting UAE leader Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. Zelenskyy said the meeting included officials signing a deal that “maximally liberalizes access to the UAE market for almost all Ukrainian goods.”

In a Facebook post, Ukraine’s Economy Minister Yuliia Svyrydenko called the deal with the UAE a “truly a historic event” as it was the country’s first with a Gulf Arab state. Officials also agreed to create a Ukraine-UAE Investment Council.

“I am confident that this agreement will provide a strong boost to our economies, strengthen cooperation in key sectors, and lay the foundation for long-term, stable engagement between our countries,” Svyrydenko wrote.

‘Ukraine is the defender of Europe’

The UAE’s state-run WAM news agency later acknowledged the visit, saying the two leaders “discussed various aspects of relations, especially economic, investment and developmental relations, in addition to renewable energy, food security and other areas.”

Sheikh Mohammed expressed “the UAE’s keenness to support everything that would lead to a peaceful

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 55 of 66

settlement of the Ukrainian crisis and continue working to mitigate its humanitarian repercussions," WAM said.

Zelenskyy's visit to Abu Dhabi came as it hosts 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.

While Ukraine wasn't selling any of the weapons, its presence at the fair was crucial, said Ivan Sybyriakov, senior manager of the Unmanned Systems Center at the SPETS Techno Export. "It is very important to show that Ukraine is not a victim of the war," he said. "Ukraine is the defender of Europe."

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha visited Ukraine's stands Monday afternoon, even as Russian tried to sell helicopters and other weaponry at the fair.

"Our capacity now we could produce 4 million drones per year despite the war," Sybiha told journalists. "We could test the drones or our products immediately on the battlefield. That's why they are really of the high quality. So I'm really proud, as a minister of a country in war, to visit the exposition."

Direct talks with Russia over the war

Russian money continues to flood into Dubai's booming 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, met on Sunday with Sheikh Mohammed. The WAM news agency 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 is leading a delegation to Saudi Arabia this week for direct talks with Russia over the war. He will meet his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, and other officials in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday. Ukraine will not be present at the talks.

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, invasion of Ukraine.

Sybiha declined to answer a question from a journalist about what he would say to his American counterpart ahead of the meeting.

## **To these Black retirees, the federal civil service now under attack was a path to the middle class**

By GARY FIELDS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Evelyn Seabrook was able to buy a home even though she had only a high school diploma. Glenn Flood worked his way up the career ladder to become a public affairs officer for former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. And Calvin Stevens had a dual military and federal service career that took him to high levels in both.

Now in their late 70s and early 80s, the three retirees are part of a generation of Black Americans who used the military and federal civil service to pursue the American dream. They acknowledge there were challenges. But they believe they received more opportunities in the military and as government employees than they would have in a private sector where racial discrimination and patronage were common at the time they were ready to enter the workforce.

"I am glad I chose to be in federal service," Seabrook said. "Even with all the drawbacks, my personal life was enhanced by my federal job."

Seabrook, Flood and Stevens have more than 120 years of combined military and federal service. As leaders in various capacities in the National Active and Retired Employees Association, they are plugged into the siege federal employees are under during the opening weeks of President Donald Trump's second term. It started with the elimination of programs promoting diversity, equity and inclusion and has expanded to a culling of the federal workforce under Elon Musk, a special adviser to the Republican president. Musk also seeks to eliminate agencies as head of the Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE.

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 56 of 66

They say one thing being lost in the attacks on the federal workforce is its important history as a stepping stone into the middle class for minorities when paths were limited, in particular for Black Americans.

Speaking from their homes near Orlando, Florida, and in Decatur, Georgia, and Palm Springs, California, the retirees said when they came into the military and federal service decades ago, the push wasn't about diversifying the workforce. Rather, the opportunities were about ending the discrimination that left qualified people of color on the outside of many workplaces.

Then-President Lyndon Johnson addressed the problem of employment discrimination through law and executive order. That opened the door wider to the U.S. Postal Service, the military and many other federal jobs where Black professionals got their first chance to pursue executive-level jobs, said Marc Morial, president and CEO of the National Urban League.

"The progress in federal civilian employment was far faster and far greater than it was in the private sector," which was "far slower to create the opportunity to run nondiscriminatory hiring practices," he said.

The result was a rise in the Black middle class, especially in places like Washington, D.C., where workers entered the system in lower-level jobs but rose through the ranks based on performance, he said.

"At one point, DC had the highest median income for African Americans in any city in the country," Morial said.

For now, the federal government is the largest single employer in the U.S. with about 3 million workers, which includes 600,000 with the U.S. Postal Service but not the active duty military. While Black Americans are nearly 14% of the population overall, they make up nearly 19% of the federal workforce.

Proud of being hired and promoted on merit

Seabrook, 80, began her Social Security Administration career in New York City in 1966 and worked for the federal government for more than 39 years.

The irony of hearing and seeing DEI used as a signal for unworthiness is that there was no affirmative action or special programs to recruit people like her when she started working.

"The only initiatives I have seen was if you were a veteran" and points were added to your test score, she said from her home in Florida. "In terms of ethnicity, culture, race, that wasn't even part of the picture. We weren't thinking about it then."

Even the full impact of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 came years after she started working. She took tests and those scores led to interviews. Preferences weren't "part of my life or how I got promoted or not. I got promoted because I could understand the work. I never went in under incentive programs."

Her own career path was not entirely smooth and included complaints to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Nevertheless, she continued moving up in positions and even helped train new employees.

"It certainly was very helpful in me maintaining a level of living that I probably could not have done elsewhere," Seabrook said.

Middle-class life not something to take for granted

Flood, 78, was a Navy officer who also served in the reserves and at the Pentagon, where he was one of the regular briefers for former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. He said federal service was instrumental in helping people of color show their abilities.

Flood said the times now are "scary" because of the impact on the federal workforce and how departments and agencies are responding to the administration's moves to gut them: "There's important work out there, and not everything is in D.C.," he said from his home in the Southern California desert.

His old department, Defense, issued instructions saying it would no longer acknowledge Black History Month, Native American Heritage Month or similar commemorations of culture and history. But he said recognizing that history is important to show how far certain groups have come.

His father also was in the Navy but could serve only as a steward.

"I am very proud of my civil service and my Navy career" and its role in his "middle-class life," Flood said. "That was not something you could take lightly."

Saddened to see the civil service under attack



# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 57 of 66

Stevens, 77, spent 31 years in the Air Force and Air Force Reserves and more than three decades with the General Services Administration. He, like Flood and Seabrook, said his experience wasn't always smooth, but that he had mentors who helped.

As his career went forward, he would take it upon himself to get whatever training he needed, paying out of his own pocket so he could advance. One goal was to serve as a role model and mentor for others, and he suggested that recruitment efforts include Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the Atlanta area, where he was based and now lives. He recalls people of color coming into the service with degrees, often advanced ones.

He realizes that some might have viewed him merely as an affirmative action hire, "but I met the qualifications," he said. "I was educated and I was trying to advance, taking classes on my own" to train and prepare for each position he sought.

Stevens said his military and federal career gave him a blessed life, and that he is saddened to see the whole system under attack.

"A lot of people went to the federal sector because that was a middle-class opportunity," he said. "Some did have degrees and some did not, but they felt that the government, their positions, were secure. They had benefits and they feel that they had a fair opportunity for promotion."

## '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

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 58 of 66

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.

"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 ALJOUND 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

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 60 of 66

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

The U.N.’s scientific, educational and cultural organization UNESCO, said in a statement that 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.

It 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 bombed 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.

## **The anti-Musk protest movement is expected to ramp up with Congress on recess**

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump is the president, but billionaire Elon Musk is the focus for thousands of Democratic activists launching a protest campaign this week to fight the Trump administration’s push to gut federal health, education and human services agencies.

Hundreds of protests are scheduled outside congressional offices and Tesla dealerships, with organizers hoping to send a pointed message to members of Congress who are on recess this week.

The backlash still hasn’t approached the intensity of protests during and after Trump’s first inauguration eight years ago. But a loose coalition of Democrats and progressives is coalescing around Musk’s rise as Trump’s top lieutenant and his purge of the federal bureaucracy.

“He’s a major weak link in the MAGA coalition,” Ezra Levin, co-founder of the progressive group Indivisible, said of Musk. “I can’t think of something that polls worse than the richest man in the world is coming after your Social Security check or your Meals on Wheels or your Head Start.”

Indivisible, which claims more than 1,300 local chapters nationwide, is encouraging members to protest at the offices of their members of Congress, regardless of political party. The group also offered a step-by-step guide for protesting at dealerships for Tesla, Musk’s electric vehicle company.

The memo encourages protesters to stay on sidewalks and public spaces and to avoid any actions that might directly interfere with business operations, such as blocking entrances or trespassing on private property. It also calls for Tesla protesters to stay on message: “This is about Musk’s political takeover, not Tesla, SpaceX, or X as companies.”

Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders is launching what he’s calling “a national tour to fight oligarchy” with stops in working-class districts of Iowa and Nebraska this week.

Democratic National Committee Chair Ken Martin will hit the road for the first time as party leader as well. The newly elected DNC chair will travel to Pennsylvania, Texas, Illinois, Wisconsin and Missouri in the coming days to meet with local Democratic officials and labor leaders, spokesperson Hannah Muldavin said.

Like the protesters, Martin is expected to seize on Musk’s role. During a meeting with labor leaders in Pittsburgh, for example, he plans to highlight Musk’s recent focus on the Department of Labor, which could put “the integrity of data like the unemployment rate and inflation rate at risk, which is important for a stable U.S. economy and, by extension, working people,” Muldavin said.

Aware of the intense displeasure from their party’s base, many House Democrats plan to be proactive.

The House Democratic Policy and Communications Committee issued a memo ahead of the recess instructing Democrats to embrace “nine days of visibility” and said it was essential for members to host one town hall, in-person or via telephone, and at least one community event that highlights the “devastating

impacts” of Trump and Musk’s actions.

The wave of protests comes at a critical moment as fractured Democrats struggle to stop the Republican president’s purge of the federal bureaucracy, which features thousands of layoffs inside departments focused on public health, education, veterans affairs and human services, among others.

Firings in recent days at the Department of Veterans Affairs include researchers working on cancer treatment, opioid addiction, prosthetics and burn pit exposure, according to U.S. Sen. Patty Murray, a Democrat from Washington state. The cuts also include more than 5,000 employees at the Department of Health and Human Services and roughly one-tenth of the workforce at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In some cases, Musk’s team is trying — with Trump’s blessing but without congressional approval — to shutter entire agencies, including the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Department of Education and the U.S. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

Trump has defended the cuts as necessary to eliminate waste and fraud. And he has praised Musk’s work with his Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, saying it has found “shocking” evidence of wasteful spending. He signed an executive order expanding Musk’s influence.

Musk, meanwhile, has defended the swift and extensive cuts he’s pushing across the federal government while acknowledging there have been mistakes.

Democrats in Congress condemn the moves as dangerous, but without control of either chamber of Congress, there is little they can do to stop the Trump administration aside from turning to the courts. Still, three of the nation’s largest progressive groups — Indivisible, MoveOn and the Working Families Party — are coordinating this week’s protests to send a clear message to elected officials in both major political parties that they must do more.

Still, Democratic members of Congress may face their own voters’ fury.

MoveOn, which boasts a membership of nearly 10 million, is hosting dozens of rallies outside town halls and congressional offices for those members who do not host public events. The group will focus on “persuadable House Republicans whose votes will be crucial to opposing the Trump-Musk agenda,” according to a preview of its recess week plan. But there will also be rallies targeting House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries and Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer, both of New York, among other Democrats.

“We are seeing a true resurgence in energy opposing what Trump, Musk and Republicans are doing to our country,” MoveOn executive director Rahna Epting said, adding that “people are mad as hell.”

The Working Families Party is focusing protests in the districts of vulnerable Republicans in states such as California, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. The actions will feature people directly impacted by the Trump administration’s cuts, including special education teachers, nurses and Head Start workers, according to Working Families spokesman Ravi Mangla.

“A lot of Republicans,” Mangla said, “have not have had their feet held to the fire.”

## **More adults are wondering if they have autism. Here are tips to seek a diagnosis**

By KENYA HUNTER Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Natasha Nelson, a 35-year old entrepreneur in Stone Mountain, Georgia, didn’t have an innate sense of social norms. She didn’t know why people meeting for the first time would choose to engage in small talk instead of deep conversations, or why people like to make their beds.

Then, a few years ago, she was diagnosed with autism, just after her youngest daughter received the same.

“If your life has always felt like it was in chaos and you don’t feel comfortable and you don’t feel like you thrive and you just feel like you’re constantly surviving and going from one thing to the next, what you got to lose?” Nelson said, encouraging people to seek a diagnosis.

Common signs of autism include trouble with social communication and a fixation on certain routines

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 63 of 66

or topics — Nelson says “people have become my special interest now” — and may go unnoticed during someone’s childhood.

But it can be costly and difficult to obtain an autism diagnosis later in life due to a shortage of medical professionals trained to work specifically with adults. Here’s more information on what you should know about adult autism diagnoses.

What is autism and when is it usually diagnosed?

Autism spectrum disorder is a range of intellectual, language and social difficulties, like rigidly following routines, having fixed or obsessive interests and struggling to hold eye contact or understand nonverbal communication. Autism is typically diagnosed during childhood, and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends all children be screened as early as 18 months.

Why are more adults being diagnosed with autism?

More adults have sought insight on their own neurodiversity in the last decade — often after their children are diagnosed or after seeing social media posts. A study published last year in JAMA Network Open showed a 452% increase in autism diagnoses among adults age 26 to 34 from 2011 to 2022.

Some traits of autism can go unnoticed until adulthood, when there are new social demands. Others may have learned how to hide certain behaviors, known as masking.

“Adults have learned to compensate over time,” said Whitney Ence, a psychologist at the University of California San Francisco who works with autistic adults. “They may have learned like ‘I can’t display that in public, and so I do that in private.’”

There’s also an overlap of symptoms between various disorders like ADHD and OCD that can complicate an autism diagnosis due to difficulties with nonverbal social cues or executive functions like attention span, working memory and problem-solving.

What are the symptoms of autism in adults?

Symptoms present differently for everyone, and many of the traits are common for people without autism, like enjoying routines or enjoying going down rabbit holes of information.

But to meet the diagnostic definition of autism, the symptoms must cause significant impairment, said Dr. Arthur Westover, a psychiatrist who specializes in autism at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center.

“We’re human beings in general. We like routines ... just having a bit of pleasure and feeling better with routines does not mean you’re autistic,” Westover said. “It goes a little bit deeper than that.”

Russell Lehmann, 34, has lived with his autism diagnosis for more than 20 years. The motivational speaker has routines that he describes as both comfortable and stressful. Eating the same food and buying the same groceries, he said, brings him comfort. But if he skips going to the gym for an hour and a half every day, he becomes overwhelmed with feelings of depression and failure.

“It’s like no gym, no day,” he said. “... My routine is an incredibly existential burden, because every night I go to bed knowing I have to do a routine I do not like simply to function.”

How does a diagnosis work?

While there are various online screening tools, autism is a complex diagnosis, so experts recommend talking to your primary care physician for a psychiatry referral.

That psychiatrist might want to interview people who were present in your early childhood, like family and friends, who can attest to symptoms being present at that time.

Some psychiatrists may refer you to a psychologist, who can give you a standardized diagnostic autism test or will use their own clinical judgement. There is no brain scan or blood test for autism.

Getting an autism diagnosis as an adult can be costly and take some time. Westover said there’s a major shortage of specialists who work with autistic adults. Nelson’s diagnosis took three years and she paid more than \$3,000 out-of-pocket.

Ence also suggests that you ask yourself a few questions when considering getting a professional diagnosis, and to know that you may run into a waitlist: “What is leading me down this pathway to think that I need a professional diagnosis? Do I need access to services? Are there services I don’t have available to me?”

## Mike Pence emerges as one of the few Republicans willing to challenge Trump 2.0

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — His group spent nearly \$1 million on ads opposing Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Donald Trump's pick to lead the nation's health agencies. He's delivering speeches urging the president to stand with longstanding foreign allies and lobbying members of Congress while aides write letters and opinion columns.

This weekend, he posted an article he penned more than a decade ago on the limits of presidential power after Trump claimed that, "He who saves his Country does not violate any Law."

Mike Pence is emerging as one of the last Republicans in Washington willing to publicly criticize the new administration.

It's an especially jarring role for the former vice president, whose refusal to break with Trump defined their time together in office until the two had a falling out over Trump's refusal to accept the results of the 2020 election and his efforts to remain in power.

Pence and those who work with him at Advancing American Freedom, his political advocacy group, stress they are not looking to take on the "Never Trump" mantle. They intend to praise the administration when they agree with it, while raising concerns when they don't, advocating for longtime conservative principles that have fallen out of favor as Trump's "Make America Great Again" brand of populism has taken hold.

"We're calling balls and strikes here," Pence told The Associated Press.

Pence opposed Kennedy — who has since been confirmed as secretary of health and human services — due to Kennedy's past comments voicing support for abortion rights. His group is now lobbying against Lori Chavez-DeRemer, Trump's pick for labor secretary, accusing her of being pro-union, and plans to spend the coming months pushing to increase military spending, shrink the deficit, and make permanent 2017 tax cuts, as well as trying to convince Trump to stop slapping tariffs on allies.

The AP recently sat down with Pence to discuss his efforts and his relationship with Trump — including a closely watched handshake at the funeral of President Jimmy Carter and his wife's lack of reaction as the 45th and 47th president took his seat.

Here is a transcript of that conversation, which has been lightly edited for space and clarity:

Q: What do you see as your role and the role of AAF over the next four years?

Pence: "To be an anchor to windward ... I came across that line I think in a Herman Melville book a long time ago."

"The wind blows in the direction of more government. And I think it's a role of conservatives to anchor the party so that when the wind blows, you put the anchor to windward so you stay grounded and hopefully do some small part to hold, you know, hold the ship of state on the principles that really minted my career in this movement."

"A strong defense, to American leadership of the free world, limited government, fiscal responsibility, growth, the right to life, traditional values — those were the values that drew me to the Republican Party. And I still think that they are the timeless ideals of the party of Lincoln. And so I want to do my part, even as a former elected official, to use whatever remains of my bully pulpit to be a champion for those principles."

Q: How are you picking your battles?

Pence: "Well, for me, it's always principles first. It's not personal. I went to the inauguration last month and I was very moved in the outpouring of kind words and expressions of appreciation from former colleagues, including many members of the new administration who I encountered in hallways. And I saw Secretary of State (Marco) Rubio. I gave him a hug, told him how proud I was of him. We had praised him from here when he was selected. I must have seen about or interacted with about half the incoming Cabinet."

"We went to the Carter funeral. And the president and I had a very cordial exchange. You know, he was



# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 65 of 66

coming down the row in front of us at the National Cathedral and he said, 'Hi, Mike.' And I was standing up, extended my hand, and I said, 'Congratulations, Mr. President.' And I could see his countenance softened. And he said, 'Thanks.' And Melania reached out and I said, 'Congratulations, Melania.' And it was, you know, the people that know me know it's not personal. I've long since forgiven the president for any differences that we had at the end of our administration. We still have those differences as the president still holds the view that, to my knowledge, that I had some authority that I did not have under the Constitution or laws of the country. But from my heart, I've prayed often for the president."

"And so, to answer your question, I think that the way we want to approach this is with integrity to principle. And I'm very encouraged. I think the Trump administration is off to a great start ... I'm very pleased about the president undoing Biden's border policies and putting back into place the policies that we had negotiated and established that secured the border. But you know, with regard to the nomination of RFK ... for me, it would begin and end with the right to life ... I saw the nomination of an abortion rights supporter to be secretary of HHS to be a dramatic departure from 50 years of strong pro-life leadership at HHS under Republican administrations. So we thought it was important to speak out. And we got a lot of quiet encouragement about that."

Q: Quiet encouragement?

"Well, we got a lot of quiet encouragement from people that, for whatever reason, didn't feel compelled to join us in that chorus. But I thought it was an important point for us to make. And, you know, we'll continue to be a champion."

Q: Why are Republicans so reluctant to speak out publicly?

Pence: "I never speculate on motives. You know, I'm not new to town. I've waged lonely battles before."

"But you know, you have to be willing to step out and lead. And my hope is that even in the wake of this fight that, you know, the Senate has worked its will, the president will get his choice at HHS. My hope is that when the next issue of life comes up, that people will have been encouraged, emboldened to know that they're not alone."

Q: Is there support in the party for moving back in the direction that you'd like to see versus the populist, MAGA wing of the party that's ascendant?

Pence: "Well now you hit it. Now you're on it. I don't think — look, I think some of the prominent voices in the party have embraced a more populist thinking. I don't believe the overwhelming majority of people that ever vote Republican think any differently than they thought during our administration when we hewed to a conservative agenda or the years before or since."

"Let me give you one anecdote. So I'm at a town hall meeting when I'm running for president. And at the end of the town hall meeting — it was well-attended, it was in Iowa — a farmer walked up to me and he said, 'It was a great town hall meeting. I agree with everything you say.' You know, and I argued for — this was literally in the wake of the Oct. 7 attack. And I argued for strong American support for Israel, strong American leadership in the world, continued support for Ukraine in their fight and limited government and bringing about reforms to put our fiscal house in order and right to life.

And this farmer says to me, he said, 'I agree with absolutely everything you said.' So I said, 'Well, can I count on your vote?' And he said, 'No, I got to be for Trump this time.' And he goes, 'But I'll see you in four years. You're going to be a great president someday.' I said, 'Would you mind telling me, you know, why?' And he said words I never forgot, which was in effect: He lamented Biden's failed record. And I saw that he was drawn to the need for a rematch. And then he said, 'Plus, if they can do that to a former president, they can do that to me.' And the 'lawfare' stuff went into higher relief.

"So I didn't see in this last election a Republican Party that was embracing big government or a vision to pull back from America's commitments on the world stage or marginalizing the right to life. I didn't see that traveling all over the country and I still don't see it. I think there were other factors that gave the former president a decided advantage in the election. He'd earned it. He'd won it. And then he won it in the fall. But I don't think the party's changed."

Q: You mentioned the Carter funeral earlier. Tell me about your wife's reaction to the Trumps that day. (At the funeral, former second lady Karen Pence refused to acknowledge the then-president elect or

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 238 ~ 66 of 66

shake Melania Trump's hands — footage that ended up going viral online.)

Pence: "My wife loves her husband. And I love my wife and I have great respect for her. And so — but I've been really moved at how many people around the country have thanked us both for that day.

"But again, you know, I want to emphasize, we're eyes forward here. You know, I'd always thought the president was going to come around on the position he took on Jan. 6. If you read the end of my book, which I'd be flattered if you did, you'll read we actually parted on very amicable terms, very good terms. But in the spring, when he returned to the rhetoric about how I could have done something that neither the Constitution nor the law would ever permit any vice president to do, then I just decided it was important to go our separate ways. But hope springs eternal. And we want to be a constructive force for the conservative agenda. I think that's good for the administration. It's good for the Congress. More importantly, it's good for America."

## Today in History: February 18, Dale Earnhardt Sr. dies in Daytona crash

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Tuesday, Feb. 18, the 49th day of 2025. There are 316 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Feb. 18, 2001, auto racing star Dale Earnhardt Sr. died in a crash in the final lap of the Daytona 500; he was 49.

Also on this date:

In 1885, Mark Twain's "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" was published in the U.S. for the first time.

In 1930, the dwarf planet Pluto was discovered by American astronomer Clyde Tombaugh.

In 1970, the "Chicago Seven" defendants were found not guilty of conspiring to incite riots at the 1968 Democratic National Convention; five were convicted of violating the Anti-Riot Act of 1968 (those convictions were later reversed).

In 1983, 13 people were shot to death at a gambling club in Seattle's Chinatown in what became known as the Wah Mee Massacre. (Two men were convicted of the killings and were sentenced to life in prison; a third was found guilty of robbery and assault.)

In 1994, in the final race of his Olympic career at the Winter Olympic Games in Lillehammer, Norway, U.S. speedskater Dan Jansen broke the world record in the 1,000 meters, winning the gold medal.

In 2001, veteran FBI agent Robert Philip Hanssen was arrested, accused of spying for Russia. (Hanssen later pleaded guilty to espionage and attempted espionage and was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.)

In 2003, an arson attack involving two South Korean subway trains in the city of Daegu claimed nearly 200 lives.

In 2021, the rover Perseverance successfully landed on Mars, where it continues to explore the planet's surface today.

Today's Birthdays: Artist-singer Yoko Ono is 92. Restaurateur-TV host Prue Leith (TV: "The Great British Baking Show") is 85. Singer Irma Thomas is 84. Musician Dennis DeYoung is 78. Actor Cybill Shepherd is 75. Actor John Travolta is 71. TV personality Vanna White is 68. Actor Matt Dillon is 61. Rapper-music executive Dr. Dre is 60. Actor Molly Ringwald is 57. Actor Ike Barinholtz is 48. Football Hall of Famer Dwight Freeney is 45. Musician Regina Spektor is 45.