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## Friday, Feb. 28

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

Groton FFA CDE

Girls and boys state wrestling at Rapid City

Boys Basketball vs. Aberdeen Christian at the Aberdeen Civic Arena: 8th at 4 p.m., 7th at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m., varsity to follow.

## Saturday, March 1

Girls and boys state wrestling at Rapid City  
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., 209 N Main

**Groton Daily Independent**  
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**Faith doesn't always  
take you out of the problem,  
Faith takes you through the  
problem.**

**Faith doesn't always take away  
the pain, Faith gives you the  
ability to handle the pain.**

**Faith doesn't always take you  
out of the storm, Faith calms  
you in the midst of the  
storm.**

## Sunday, March 2

Open Gym, 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Pancake Sunday, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Groton Community Center

United Methodist: Worship with communion at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 10:30 a.m.

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

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.; No Sunday School; Meeting with Pastor Renee from Synod following worship; Choir, 6 p.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.

Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.

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# 1440

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

## USAID Shutters

Thousands of workers at the Washington, DC, headquarters of the US Agency for International Development cleared out their offices yesterday, as the shutdown of the agency by the Trump administration continued to advance. The terminations follow the cancellation of roughly 90% of USAID-funded work around the globe.

Created six decades ago as a means to consolidate the US government's foreign aid efforts, USAID is appropriated roughly \$40B from Congress each year. The future of the organization and its operations remains unclear—while it is authorized and funded by Congress and requires an act of Congress to dissolve, some analysts say its programs could be legally folded into the State Department.

Of the roughly 6,000 USAID employees affected, some have been placed on leave, while others have been permanently fired. The numbers of each have been difficult to determine, though recent reports suggest around two-thirds will remain on leave while legal challenges proceed.

In related news, a federal judge late yesterday ruled that large-scale firings of probationary workers may have been unlawful. The issue is expected to be appealed.

## Congo Mystery Illness

At least 60 people have died and more than 1,000 have been infected by an unknown illness in northwestern Democratic Republic of Congo, according to the World Health Organization. Symptoms of uncontrolled bleeding, vomiting, and diarrhea resemble the highly contagious Ebola and Marburg viruses, though lab tests have ruled them out.

The outbreak began in January in the village of Boloko, where three small children died within two days of eating a dead bat; four others died within days. A second outbreak began two weeks later in Bomate, a village more than 100 miles away, killing 45 and infecting more than 400. No link has been discovered between the two villages. The WHO is reportedly testing patients for a variety of potential causes, including food poisoning and typhoid.

The country saw dozens killed by a similar unknown illness—later confirmed as severe malaria—in December and is dealing with a wave of mpox cases, which have killed 1,200 people since early 2024. Rwanda-backed rebels known as the M23 have captured several cities in the country's east, leading to the deaths of thousands and displacing hundreds of thousands.

## Gene Hackman Dies

Oscar-winning actor Gene Hackman, 95, and his wife, classical pianist Betsy Arakawa, 64, were found dead along with one of their dogs in their New Mexico home Wednesday. The cause of death remains unknown as of this writing—authorities initially said there was no suspicion of foul play, but later reports suggested the pair had been deceased for multiple days, with a scattered prescription bottle found near Arakawa. The fire department found no carbon monoxide or gas leak, though official autopsy and toxicology results are pending.

Hackman, born Jan. 30, 1930, in California, had a challenging childhood before enlisting in the Marine Corps at age 16. After his service, he briefly studied journalism before pursuing acting in New York. His career spanned over five decades, with more than 100 screen credits and five Oscar nominations—winning twice for his roles in "The French Connection" and "Unforgiven." He also won four Golden Globes and the Cecil B. DeMille Award.

Hackman was known for portraying complex characters in films such as "Bonnie and Clyde," "Superman," and "Hoosiers," and he excelled at playing memorable villains. He retired from acting in 2004 and settled in New Mexico, where he wrote historical fiction novels.

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## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Social media influencer Andrew Tate and his brother, who face rape and human trafficking charges in Romania, return to the US after Romanian authorities lifted travel restrictions on the duo.

Katy Perry, Gayle King, and Lauren Sánchez among six women tapped for first-ever all-woman space crew aboard Blue Origin's New Shepard spacecraft.

NFL considering rule changes including changes to regular season overtime rules and electronic measurements for first downs.

Kansas City Chiefs star Travis Kelce confirms he'll return for 2025 season amid retirement speculation.

## Science & Technology

Amazon unveils quantum computing chip, available for Amazon Web Services customers; device brings the company in line with competitors Google and Microsoft.

New AI algorithm helps doctors analyze and predict health outcomes based on a series of medical images; approach may have use in diagnosing diseases ranging from cancer to Alzheimer's.

Intuitive Machines successfully launches second lunar lander; payload includes a Nokia-built 4G wireless system, which would establish the first Wi-Fi network on the moon.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets fall (S&P 500 -1.6%, Dow -0.5%, Nasdaq -2.8%) as tech stocks slide following Nvidia's (-8.5%) earnings report and President Donald Trump affirms coming tariffs.

YouTube influencer MrBeast planning investment round that could value his company at \$5B.

Payments giant Stripe's valuation rises to nearly \$92B in latest tender offer.

US pending home sales index falls to record low of 4.6% year over year in January, likely due to high mortgage rates, record-high home prices.

US jobless claims rise to 242,000 for week ending Feb. 22, the year's highest level.

## Politics & World Affairs

President Donald Trump says 25% tariffs on Mexico and Canada to go into effect Tuesday, plans to double existing 10% tariffs on China.

Mexico begins releasing nearly 30 drug cartel operatives into US custody.

Justice Department releases flight logs and names of people related to deceased sex criminal Jeffrey Epstein.

US military services have 30 days to develop plan to identify transgender members and another 30 days to remove them from the force.

>Israeli military releases first report from investigation into the military and intelligence failures surrounding Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack; findings include officers underestimating Hamas' capabilities, misinterpreting early warnings.

## Sisseton Outlasts Groton in Overtime Thriller to Advance in Region 1A Tournament

GROTON – The second round of the Region 1A girls basketball tournament delivered a game for the ages Thursday night, as Sisseton and Groton battled through four grueling quarters and an overtime period before the Redmen emerged victorious, 52-44.

It was a contest defined by momentum swings, defensive intensity, and clutch performances, with seven lead changes and five ties in the third quarter alone. The Tigers came out strong, jumping to a 7-2 lead before Sisseton settled in. By the end of the first quarter, Groton held a slim 9-8 advantage.

The second quarter saw both teams struggle at times offensively, but Sisseton's more efficient shooting (56% compared to Groton's 27%) helped them gain an 18-17 lead at halftime. The back-and-forth battle continued into the third quarter, with neither team able to maintain control for long. The Tigers clung to a 33-30 lead heading into the final period, but Sisseton remained within striking distance.

The fourth quarter saw both teams dig deep, with defensive pressure ramping up. Groton shot just 15% from the field, but Sisseton also struggled, making only 2 of 7 shots. However, free throws proved to be a major factor, as Sisseton capitalized on Groton's foul trouble, making 7 of 12 attempts from the line.

With Sisseton leading by one with just 6.9 seconds left in regulation, Groton's Rylee Dunker had ice in her veins, hitting one of two free throws to send the game into overtime.

Once the extra period began, Sisseton quickly seized control. Elliott Hortness buried a clutch three-pointer, followed by a Krista Langager basket, giving the Redmen a lead they would never relinquish. Groton struggled offensively in overtime, making just one of six shots, while Sisseton shot 50% from the field and continued to find success at the free-throw line to seal the victory.

Krista Langager led all scorers with 20 points for Sisseton, while Ruby Rice added 11 points, including nine crucial free throws. Saylor Langager also contributed 11 points, helping push the Redmen to the win.

For Groton, Kennedy Hansen led the way with 12 points before fouling out with 38 seconds left in regulation. Taryn Traphagen had a strong all-around game with 10 points and seven rebounds. Chesney Weber came off the bench to provide eight points, while Dunker finished with six points and five rebounds.

Defensively, Groton was relentless, recording 18 steals—six of them from Jerica Locke, who fouled out with 2:07 left in the fourth quarter. However, the Tigers' aggressive style led to 27 team fouls, which Sisseton capitalized on by converting 21 of 33 free throws.

With the win, Sisseton (15-7) punches its ticket to the SoDak 16, while Groton (15-7) sees its season come to a heartbreaking end. Despite the loss, the Tigers showcased resilience, defensive tenacity, and a never-quit attitude that defined their season.

### Groton Area

Jerica Locke: 3 points, 2 rebounds, 3 assists, 6 steals, 5 fouls.

Jaedyn Penning: 3 points, 4 rebounds, 2 steals, 4 fouls.

Kennedy Hansen: 12 points, 1 rebound, 1 assist, 2 steals, 5 fouls.

Brooklyn Hansen: 1 assist.

Rylee Dunker: 6 points, 5 rebounds, 2 steals, 3 fouls.

Faith Traphagen: 2 points, 3 rebounds, 1 assist, 2 steals, 2 fouls.

Laila Roberts: 3 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 steal, 3 fouls, 1 block.

Taryn Traphagen: 10 points, 7 rebounds, 2 assists, 2 steals, 2 fouls.

Chesney Weber: 8 points, 4 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 steal, 3 fouls.

2-Pointers: 11-30 37%, 3-Pointers: 4-22 18%, Free throws: 10-15 67%, 29 rebounds, 21 turnovers, 10 assists, 18 steals, 27 fouls, 1 block.

Sisseton: Krista Langager 20, Saylor Langager 11, Ruby Rice 11, Elliot Hortness 5, Piper Langager 2, Tara Nelson 2, Fallon Hawkins 1. Field Goals: 15-38 39%, Free Throws: 21-33 64%, 17 fouls, 22 turnovers.

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Record: Groton area 15-7. Sisseton: 15-7.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Bary Keith of Harr Motors, Bierman Farm service, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Farmers Union Coop of Ferney and Conde, Greg Johnson Construction of Bristol, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Dairy Queen, Groton Ford, Hanlon Brothers, John Sieh Agency, Ken's Food Fair, Lori's Pharmacy, Olive Grove Golf Course, Rix Farms/R&M Farms, S & S Lumber, Spanier Harvesting, Sun & Sea Travel, The MeatHouse of Andover and the Weismantel Agency of Columbia. Shane Clark provided the play-by-play, Jeslyn Kosel ran the camera Paper Paul kept the stats and did the technology.

## Groton Prairie Mixed Bowling League Week #15 Results

Team Standings: Jackelopes 3, Cheetahs 3, Coyotes 3, Shihtzus 1, Chipmunks 1, Foxes 1

Men's High Games: Brad Larson 217, Lance Frohling 203, Tony Waage 199

Women's High Games: Vicki Walter 181, Darci Spanier & Sue Stanley 170, Hayley Johnson 163, 161

Men's High Series: Tony Waage 545, Lance Frohling 533, Butch Farmen 528

Women's High Series: Vicki Walter 482, Hayley Johnson 457, Darci Spanier 449

Week 15 Fun Game – Low Series – Foxes with 1617!

## Queen of Hearts

The Queen of Hearts drawing was Thursday night at the Groton American Legion. The jackpot is \$16,519. Ticket sales for the week was \$1,185 with 10% (\$118) going to the consolation winner. The name of Lori Herron was drawn. She had card number 27 and the card was the Ten of Clubs. The Queen of Hearts will now continue into week number 20.

## Service Notice: Jerry Bonn

Services for Jerry Bonn of Conde will be 10:30 a.m., Monday, March 3rd at the United Methodist Church, Groton. Rev. Rob Moorlach will officiate. Burial will follow in Bates-Scotland Cemetery, rural Verdon under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton. Services will be live streamed at GDILIVE.com.

Visitation will be held on Sunday from 5-7 p.m. with a prayer service at 7:00 p.m. at the funeral chapel.

A lifelong farmer, dedicated family man, and beloved member of the community, passed away peacefully at the age of 84 on February 26, 2025.

## Notice of Garbage Pickup- Effective the week of March 3rd

To help preserve our streets, Groton residents are asked to bring their garbage to the following locations until further notice:

Railroad Avenue, Main Street, Sixth Street, & Highway 37

Residents of the Broadway Mobile Home Park need to take their garbage to Highway 37.

Residents north of 13th Avenue (Olson and Jacobson Developments) need to bring their garbage to the Bus Barns.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated during the spring thaw.

Please bring your garbage bags and/or cans to these locations for Tuesday pickup!



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Lawmakers approve rollback of South Dakota's uniquely severe drug ingestion penalties

**State House sends bill to governor that would change first and second offenses from felonies to misdemeanors**

**BY: JOHN HULT - FEBRUARY 27, 2025 6:13 PM**

The future of South Dakota's drug ingestion law — often described as the most severe in the nation — is in the hands of Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden.

The House of Representatives voted 37-33 on Thursday at the Capitol in Pierre to pass a bill that would, with Rhoden's signature, reduce the use of controlled substances from a felony to a misdemeanor for the first two offenses.

The state is the only one in the nation with a law that allows a failed drug test for a felony-level narcotic to serve as the basis for a prison sentence. Marijuana ingestion is always a misdemeanor. Under Senate Bill 83, all other forms of ingestion would become a misdemeanor until the third offense.

A Rhoden spokeswoman told South Dakota Searchlight that he will consider the bill "once it reaches his desk."

The governor previously signaled a willingness to consider alternative approaches to criminal justice. "My philosophy is that the best way to fight crime is to hire more officers, not to increase penalties," Rhoden told a joint session of the state House and Senate last month. "Increasing penalties just means we have to build even more prisons."

The latter point hearkens to a yearslong debate over how best to deal with overcrowding in the state's correctional facilities.

A bill to fund construction of a 1,500-bed, \$825 million men's prison in Lincoln County has failed to earn lawmaker support in the face of opposition from its neighbors, its hefty price tag and concerns about its size.

On the day the House opted to send him the ingestion change proposal, Rhoden inked an executive order to create a working group he hopes will find "a path forward" for a prison or prisons.

Critics of the state's ingestion law, who've tried to repeal or otherwise adjust its severity nearly every year since 2019, argue that the law stigmatizes addiction and makes the problem worse. Ingestion also contributes to the state's prison population, they say, and saddles users with felonies that make it harder to find jobs, get housing and stay sober.

"If you have ever loved somebody who has been trapped in that cycle of substance use, you can understand how them being charged with a felony is not going to help them get better," said Rep. Kady Wittman, D-Sioux Falls. "It is not going to help them find rehabilitation. If anything, it leads to further shame and demonization."

Rep. Brian Mulder, R-Sioux Falls, was the bill's prime sponsor in the House. Sen. Tamara Grove, R-Lower Brule, introduced the bill in the Senate.

Mulder has pushed for restrictions on marijuana-like products made from delta-8 THC, as well as on an intoxicating substance called kratom and on foreign-made nicotine vape products. He talked about his passion for those issues during the debate on ingestion, but said "I work in addiction treatment," and "what we are doing is not working." Mulder is the managing director of Volunteers of America-Dakotas.

"We cannot continue to do the same thing and expect different results," Mulder said.

The existing law's backers argue that drugs in the hand and drugs in the system are one in the same

and ought to be treated as such.

"We need to make a powerful statement today from the South Dakota House of Representatives that drugs are dangerous to the public, to their health and to their safety," said Rep. Mary Fitzgerald, R-Spearfish. "Voting for this bill and decriminalizing drug use will send a mixed message to our children."

Those charged with ingestion typically get several chances to complete treatment and probation before they go to prison, the existing law's backers say. The law can also help prosecutors secure convictions via plea deal in cases where a user has more serious charges.

But Rep. Liz May, R-Kyle, was among several lawmakers to say that the current approach has done little to move the needle toward rehabilitation. Lawmakers have created nine new felonies this session alone, she said, instead of spending money on rehabilitation.

"If you keep putting felonies on the books, we're going to have to build another prison," May said. "So I would strongly encourage everybody: Get this off the books. Let's try something different."

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

## Governor relents, appoints task force to reset prison talks after legislative loss

**More than \$54 million already spent or obligated on controversial Lincoln County site**

**BY: JOHN HULT - FEBRUARY 27, 2025 4:18 PM**

The fight to secure legislative approval for an \$825 million men's prison is lost for now, South Dakota Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden conceded on Thursday.

Instead of continuing to push for the 1,500-bed Lincoln County facility he hoped would earn support from South Dakota lawmakers, the governor has created a working group to study the state's options and return conclusions in a midsummer special legislative session.

"We received the message that our current prison plan does not have the buy-in this legislative session," Rhoden said during a press conference at the Capitol. "I've also heard agreement from pretty much everyone that we need a new prison. So I'd like to discuss what comes next."

News of the task force follows a rough and unsuccessful ride for House Bill 1025, which would have unlocked funding and sparked construction of the prison about 15 miles south of Sioux Falls. The proposed facility was designed to replace the oldest parts of the state penitentiary in that city, but the \$825 million price tag – which did not include ongoing operating costs or the cost to build roads in the rural location – and fierce opposition from its neighbors were among the factors that put support out of reach.

The news of a reset was welcome for Doug Weber, a former chief warden with the state Department of Corrections. He spent weeks meeting with, talking to and sending letters to lawmakers questioning the state's plan.

"Still have a little work to do, but the heavy lift is done," Weber told Searchlight via text on Thursday. "I'm very, very happy."

### Working group to study options

Lt. Gov. Tony Venhuizen will chair the working group, dubbed "Project Prison Reset" in Rhoden's executive order. Its aims are to assess and determine the need for a new facility, working with a consultant, to decide on the facility's size and location, and to report its findings to a special session of the Legislature on July 22. The group will meet four times between April 2 and that date.

The order makes multiple references to "a" prison, but Rhoden said "all options are on the table."

A prior consultant's report offered up a 1,300-bed men's prison as its top recommendation, but also listed multiple options for smaller prison projects across the state, in places like Yankton, Rapid City and

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Springfield. It also suggested that a site called West Farm, located west of Sioux Falls and currently used for juvenile inmates, could serve as a smaller-than-ideal but workable area for a men's prison.

A special session might allow the state to resume work at the Lincoln County site, at the initially planned-for size or smaller, or to begin work at any other site, during the 2025 construction season.

The state's \$825 million guaranteed maximum price for the 1,500-bed prison plan expires March 31, and Rhoden's team repeatedly warned legislators that delay would push up the price.

"Time is money on a project like this," Ryan Brunner, a senior policy adviser for Rhoden, said during Thursday's press conference. "And so I think the reason you keep all options on the table is to try and look at all those options, but we want to be the best steward of the taxpayer money that we can."

## Money spent, money to spare

Rhoden's task force may be focused on all options or potential sites, but leaving behind the Lincoln County site would also come with a cost unrelated to inflation.

Lawmakers allocated \$62 million for design and prep work on the 1,500-bed prison site in previous sessions. Almost all of that money had been spent or obligated as of Thursday.

Some of the cash, \$10.5 million, came from the federal American Rescue Plan Act. The city of Lennox collected that for agreeing to accept the proposed prison's wastewater.

At the press conference, Brunner said the state has also inked deals with a rural electric co-op and water system for a stake in infrastructure upgrades. Those contracts, worth a total of \$7.1 million, are meant to serve the proposed prison, he said, but also to service other customers in the area.

After the press conference, Brunner sent South Dakota Searchlight a rough breakdown of where the \$62 million has gone or is set to go.

The state's paid \$44.4 million in bills, inclusive of the \$10.5 million to Lennox. It also has \$4.7 million in outstanding bills for work that's already been done, and \$5 million left to pay for its stake in the utility upgrades.

"The remainder of the \$62 million," Brunner said, around \$7.9 million, "is under contract for services that we are pausing at this time."

There's another pool of funding to consider in the face of the men's prison's failure in the 2025 session: \$182 million. That's the amount of money that HB 1025 would have committed to the prison project.

Lawmakers speculated last week that those funds could be used to help launch an interest-bearing fund for the state's unclaimed property. Assets left behind for three years revert to the state. The money is a perpetual liability, but much is never collected. Lawmakers are considering proposals to put the money into a fund to earn interest, and to ask voters to let the state's investment council manage the money in hopes of using it to earn more interest by way of the council's management.

Rhoden, however, would still like to see the money committed to prison funding.

"He does not believe that it should be spent on anything else," spokeswoman Josie Harms told Searchlight.

Lawmakers created an incarceration construction fund years ago in hopes of paying for a prison in cash. With the interest it's earned, that fund sits at more than \$600 million.

## Plan earns praise from prison critics

One of the lawmakers most critical of Rhoden's preferred plan was Rep. Karla Lems, R-Canton, who represents some of the landowners surrounding the site. There is still a pending lawsuit from some of those landowners, which seeks to force the state to get a county zoning permit for the project. That case awaits a hearing with the state Supreme Court.

Lems is one of the eight House members on the Project Prison Reset task force.

"This is a way forward," Lems told Searchlight. "I am more than willing to be part of a solution, moving ahead to discuss alternatives."

Rep. Erin Healy, D-Sioux Falls, will also be part of the task force, one of two Democratic lawmakers in the group. The other is Sen. Jamie Smith, also of Sioux Falls.



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In a press release on the Democrats' priorities, Healy said the pair will work to guide the conversation toward rehabilitation efforts.

Smith is the sponsor of a bill to rename the DOC the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, which earned unanimous support in the Senate and awaits action by the House.

The task force includes largely Sioux Falls-area lawmakers, as well as law enforcement leaders, legislative leadership and a representative, Howard Republican Tim Reisch, who formerly served as Department of Corrections secretary.

In addition to Venhuizen, Lems, Reisch, Smith and Healy, the task force will also include the following people:

House Speaker Jon Hansen, R-Dell Rapids.

House Majority Leader Scott Odenbach, R-Spearfish.

Rep. Greg Jamison, R-Sioux Falls.

Rep. Brian Mulder, R-Sioux Falls.

Rep. Jack Kolbeck, R-Sioux Falls.

Senate President Pro Tempore Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls.

Senate Majority Leader Jim Mehlhaff, R-Pierre.

Sen. Ernie Otten, R-Tea.

Sen. Mark Lapka, R-Leola.

Sen. Joy Hohn, R-Hartford.

Sen. Steve Kolbeck, R-Sioux Falls.

Minnehaha County Sheriff Mike Milstead.

Former Circuit Court Judge Jane Wipf-Pfeifle (retired).

Former Division of Behavioral Health Director Tiffany Wolfgang.

Yankton Police Chief Jason Foote.

Minnehaha County State's Attorney Daniel Haggard.

Attorney General Marty Jackley.

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

## Legislative committee softens budget blow to SD State Library, but concerns remain

**BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - FEBRUARY 27, 2025 2:32 PM**

South Dakota's main legislative budget committee softened the proposed cuts to the State Library on Thursday at the Capitol in Pierre, but library advocates still have concerns.

The Joint Committee on Appropriations endorsed House Bill 1041 in a 16-2 vote, with the two votes against it coming from Reps. Erik Muckey, D-Sioux Falls, and Scott Moore, R-Ipswich.

The original proposal would have cut \$1 million in state funds from the State Library, cut the state Department of Education's ability to seek \$1.4 million in federal funding for the library and laid off a dozen employees. Former Gov. Kristi Noem proposed the budget cuts during her December budget address in response to lower-than-anticipated revenues and rising Medicaid costs.

The changes made Thursday would rescue most of the programs that were proposed to be cut, said South Dakota Department of Education Secretary Joseph Graves, including most databases, access to interlibrary loans and "adequate personnel to provide for the training and the promotion of the summer reading programs."

The department's ability to seek \$1.4 million in federal funding would also be reinstated to help "make the difference" in cuts at the state level, Graves said. The actual budget cuts are not in HB 1041, since they're embedded in the state's general appropriations bill.

The legislation dissolves the South Dakota State Library Board with plans to cut about \$825,000 in the

library's budget and three-and-a-half full time positions. The library would retain "standard oversight" by the library director and the Education Department, Graves said. He told lawmakers earlier in the week the changes would cut four databases made available through the State Library to public libraries across the state, including Ancestry Library, Fold3, HeritageQuest and Swank.

The library will be able to keep a total of 17 full time positions, said Rep. Terri Jorgenson, R-Rapid City. The library currently has 21 employees.

Jorgenson, who worked on the changes with the state Department of Education, said the changes are a "wuy for us to save our State Library."

Muckey said that statement is "half true" in an interview with South Dakota Searchlight after the meeting. "I simply just want the bill dead so we can restore all the funding back," he said.

Elizabeth Fox, president of the South Dakota Library Association, told South Dakota Searchlight that the association can work with the changes, adding that the adjustments spurred a reevaluation of the State Library's services.

The association is still concerned about the staff and database cuts.

"With the budget revenue predictions and the data we have now, it's unreasonable to expect nobody will get budget cuts," Fox said. "These are much more reasonable cuts."

South Dakota Searchlight's Joshua Haiar contributed to this report.

*Makenzie Huber is a lifelong South Dakotan who regularly reports on the intersection of politics and policy with health, education, social services and Indigenous affairs. Her work with South Dakota Searchlight earned her the title of South Dakota's Outstanding Young Journalist in 2024, and she was a 2024 finalist for the national Livingston Awards.*

## Eyeing a friendly Supreme Court, Republicans push for the Ten Commandments in schools

**It's just one of the ways lawmakers are trying to insert Judeo-Christian doctrine into public education**

**BY: MATT VASILOGAMBROS, STATELINE - FEBRUARY 27, 2025 9:19 AM**

Testing constitutional limits, Republicans in at least 15 states, including South Dakota, have introduced legislation this year that would require the Ten Commandments be displayed in public school classrooms.

GOP lawmakers are attempting to follow Louisiana, which last year became the first state in the country to have such a requirement in the modern era. That law is currently blocked in five public school districts as a lawsuit makes its way through the courts; other districts are expected to comply with the law.

The federal lawsuit argues that the law violates the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which states, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." The case is likely heading to the U.S. Supreme Court. In December, 18 Republican state attorneys general filed a brief supporting Louisiana's law to the U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals, which is currently hearing the case.

Republican state lawmakers also have introduced bills that would require prayer, Bible reading or chaplains in public schools.

The Ten Commandments are the basis of Judeo-Christian doctrine. In Jewish and Christian theology, God gave the commandments directly to the Prophet Moses, as described in the Book of Exodus in the Old Testament of the Bible.

Supportive state legislators say the commandments are a historical example of law and not purely religious in nature. But while there are commandments that prohibit murder and stealing, some declare that there are no other gods above God, and that people must observe the Sabbath.

So far this year, no state has enacted legislation requiring that the Ten Commandments be posted in public schools. Measures in Mississippi and Oklahoma died in committee. In Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota, they failed after passing out of one legislative chamber. Arizona Democratic Gov. Katie

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Hobbs vetoed similar GOP-led legislation last year.

Although Republicans dominate the legislature in each of those states, the bills have been a hard sell for Christian lawmakers who say they also value the Constitution.

"So, if we put the Ten Commandments up, which are Christian commandments, then we're actually violating the plain language of our Constitution in our First Amendment," Montana state Sen. Jason Ellsworth, a Republican, said earlier this month, as reported in the Daily Montanan.

Eight Republicans joined every Democrat in the Montana Senate to defeat the measure.

## 'A new day for religious freedom'

In 1980, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Kentucky's law requiring the display of the Ten Commandments in public schools was unconstitutional.

However, 45 years later, supporters of these measures believe there's a new legal pathway considering the makeup of the nation's high court. The Supreme Court now has a 6-3 conservative majority, with three of its members appointed by President Donald Trump in his first term.

"It is now a new day for religious freedom in America," Republican state Sen. Bob Phalen, who sponsored the Montana bill, said during a committee hearing last month. "The Supreme Court's approach on religious displays has evolved over time."

Indeed, in 2022, the Supreme Court's conservative majority ruled in favor of a Washington state public school football coach who prayed with his team on the 50-yard line. Images of Moses and the Ten Commandments also appear in many U.S. government buildings, including the Supreme Court and the Capitol.

Bills requiring the display of the Ten Commandments are just one example of Republican state lawmakers attempting to insert religious doctrine into the school day.

On Tuesday, the Republican majority in the Kentucky Senate passed a bill that would require schools to have a moment of silence at the beginning of each day, lasting at least one minute. It now heads to the state House. School staff would be prohibited from telling students how to use the time, but critics — including the ACLU and some members of the state's Jewish community — say students might feel pressure to pray.

In Texas, Republican senators this session introduced legislation that would allow school districts to require every campus "to provide students and employees with an opportunity to participate in a period of prayer and reading of the Bible or other religious text" each day. That bill is sitting in committee.

In Idaho, a bill that would require Bible readings in schools is also in committee.

In Oklahoma, the state's top education official last year announced that the Bible would be incorporated into school curricula. The ACLU in October sued Oklahoma over the proposal. The suit is ongoing.

And in Nebraska, legislation that would allow local public school boards to hire chaplains is sitting in committee.

The U.S. Supreme Court banned school-sponsored prayer and Bible readings in 1963.

## How it looks in Louisiana

Meanwhile, in Louisiana, Republican Attorney General Liz Murrill last month issued guidance to public schools, colleges and universities for how to comply with the novel law, which took effect in the new year.

The guidance came with four example posters — one including images of Moses and Republican U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson, who represents a Louisiana district.

Requirements include that the posters of the Ten Commandments must be at least 11 inches by 14 inches and must be donated to schools; there is no legal penalty for not displaying the canonical edict.

Murrill also advised that the posters be included next to other historical documents, such as the Declaration of Independence.

Murrill said the law was "plainly constitutional." A federal district court judge disagreed last year when he blocked the law, which he called "unconstitutional on its face" and "overtly religious." It seems likely the U.S. Supreme Court will decide which side prevails.

*Matt Vasilogambros covers voting rights, gun laws and Western climate policy for Stateline. He lives in San Diego, California.*

## ICE awards \$1B contract to private prison firm for major immigrant detention center

**BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - FEBRUARY 27, 2025 2:59 PM**

WASHINGTON — U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement has awarded a private prison company a 15-year contract worth \$1 billion to detain up to 1,000 immigrants in New Jersey, the first expansion of an immigrant detention center amid the Trump administration's plans for mass deportations.

"This detention center is the first to open under the new administration," ICE Acting Director Caleb Vitello said in a late Wednesday statement. "The location near an international airport streamlines logistics, and helps facilitate the timely processing of individuals in our custody as we pursue President (Donald) Trump's mandate to arrest, detain and remove illegal aliens from our communities."

On a Thursday earnings call, executives for one of the largest private prisons, GEO Group Inc., told investors they expect "unprecedented opportunities" under the Trump administration's immigration crackdown by providing detention bed capacity and increasing electronic monitoring services of immigrants.

The Newark detention center, Delaney Hall, will be the largest ICE processing facility and detention center on the East Coast, said George Zoley, the founder and executive chairman of GEO.

GEO has pushed for a contract with ICE to reopen that facility as a detention center and even sued New Jersey over its state law that bars private and public companies from contracting with ICE to detain immigrants.

### Increase in bed capacity

Zoley said that GEO plans to increase its bed space capacity from 15,000 to 32,000. He said those additional 17,000 beds "could generate between \$500 million and \$600 million in incremental, annualized revenues."

He added that the company is expected to activate all of its idle facilities across the country by the end of the year to meet Trump's mission of mass deportation of people in the United States without legal authorization. An idle facility means it's currently unused, but it can be up and running within 60 to 90 days, Zoley said.

Zoley said some idle GEO facilities are located in Georgia, Michigan and North Carolina. GEO currently operates ICE facilities in California, Colorado, Louisiana, Florida, Georgia, Texas and Washington state.

He said the federal government has expressed interest in those facilities, especially after Congress passed a bill that would require mandatory detention of immigrants charged or accused with property theft, known as the Laken Riley Act.

Based on that law, Zoley said, it's estimated that ICE would need up to 60,000 detention beds. ICE currently has bed space capacity of 41,500 across the country.

Immigration attorneys and experts warned the bill would aid Trump's campaign promise to enact mass deportations by requiring the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to detain a noncitizen on an arrest, charge or conviction of petty theft — a response to the murder of the 22-year-old Georgia nursing student for whom the measure is named.

As Trump signed the bill, which was his first during his second term, he announced his plans to direct the Department of Defense to use the naval base in Guantanamo Bay to house up to 30,000 migrants.

There are roughly 13.7 million people in the U.S. without legal authorization, according to a new analysis by the nonprofit think tank Migration Policy Institute.

Zoley said he expects an opportunity for GEO to be able to bid for more government contracts about halfway through the year after Congress passes a massive package through reconciliation that could pro-

vide billions for border security and immigration enforcement.

The House and Senate first have to adopt a budget resolution before unlocking the reconciliation process to move forward with those policy goals.

The Senate last week voted to approve its budget resolution after a marathon session of amendment voting. The House narrowly passed its own version Tuesday.

### **GEO investments**

Zoley said for the year, the company expects to invest roughly \$38 million to renovate existing GEO facilities. He added that the company also plans to invest \$16 million for additional GPS tracking devices for immigrants on the non-detained docket.

A non-detained docket is an alternative to detention and allows an immigrant to be electronically monitored while awaiting court proceedings.

The main ICE program that is an alternative to detention is known as the Intensive Supervision Appearance Program, or ISAP. There are about 184,000 people under ISAP, but Zoley told investors that the number of people in that program could easily double under the Trump administration's focus on immigration enforcement within the country.

He said returning to levels of more than 300,000 people monitored under ISAP could bring in a revenue of around \$250 million.

For fiscal year 2024, there are roughly 7.6 million people on the non-detained docket, according to ICE. "Given the size of this population, our view is that in addition to increased detention capacity, the requirements of the federal immigration law in the Laken Riley Act will require significant ramp-up in the electronic monitoring to ensure proper tracking of persons on the non-detained docket and their compliance with the requirements of their immigration court proceedings," Zoley said.

*Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her areas of coverage include politics and policy, lobbying, elections and campaign finance.*

## **Energy Transfer, Greenpeace outline arguments as \$300M trial starts in North Dakota**

**BY: MARY STEURER - FEBRUARY 27, 2025 11:32 AM**

MANDAN, N.D. — An attorney representing the developer of the Dakota Access Pipeline told a jury of Morton County residents on Wednesday morning that Greenpeace was secretly behind the protests that halted its construction back in 2016.

"They didn't think that there would ever be a day of reckoning, but that day of reckoning starts today," Trey Cox said in opening arguments for Energy Transfer's case against the environmental group.

Energy Transfer is expected to spend the next two weeks presenting its case. The full trial is scheduled for five weeks, not including jury deliberation.

The company says that Greenpeace backed unlawful, destructive behavior by Dakota Access Pipeline protesters who camped near the Standing Rock Reservation in 2016 and 2017. It also says that Greenpeace launched a misinformation campaign to undermine the project, causing a six-month construction delay and inflating the pipeline's financing costs.

Energy Transfer seeks roughly \$300 million from Greenpeace.

In his opening, Cox said Energy Transfer will show the protests started out peaceful but took a turn after Greenpeace arrived on the scene. He said Greenpeace harmed Energy Transfer's reputation by falsely claiming that Energy Transfer was careless in its management of the project, and that the energy company's security contractors used extreme violence against peaceful demonstrators.

The demonstrations were in solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, which says the pipeline violates tribal sovereignty, disrupts sacred sites and endangers its water supply.

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Cox also said he will present evidence that Greenpeace paid for six of its employees to embed within the protest camps and to train protesters.

That includes communication records in which Greenpeace employees say the organization successfully put public pressure on federal regulators to delay an easement to cross Lake Oahe, a reservoir on the Missouri River near the Standing Rock Reservation, Cox said.

Cox claimed Greenpeace falsely claimed that the pipeline crossed into the Standing Rock Reservation and that the pipeline bulldozed numerous archeological zones.

Energy Transfer alleges Greenpeace's statements about the Dakota Access Pipeline caused eight banks to back out of financing the pipeline's construction.

Greenpeace denies all of Energy Transfer's claims, and says Energy Transfer is unfairly targeting the environmental group to intimidate activists. Attorneys provided three separate opening statements for Greenpeace — one for the organization's U.S. branch, one for its international branch and a third for a nonprofit called Greenpeace Fund.

Everett Jack, lead attorney representing the U.S. arm of Greenpeace, said Energy Transfer will not be able to provide evidence that Greenpeace was responsible for any of the financial harms the company suffered due to the protests.

He said that the demonstrations gained momentum well before Greenpeace got involved. The alleged destruction of Native sacred sites, confrontations between security and protesters and significant developments in the pipelines' permitting process all caused the protests to swell independent of any action by the environmental group, Jack said.

He added it is Greenpeace's policy not to get involved in Indigenous rights matters unless tribal communities ask them to.

"Why did Greenpeace get involved? Because it was asked, and only because it was asked," he said.

Jack said that despite this, Energy Transfer is attempting to blame all of its unbudgeted expenses related to the pipeline on Greenpeace.

He also said that Greenpeace never claimed the pipeline crossed through the Standing Rock Reservation. Greenpeace stated that the pipeline crosses unceded land recognized as belonging to the Sioux Nation in an 1851 treaty with the U.S. government, Jack said.

Jack said that the delayed construction and additional financing costs stemmed from the federal government's decision to delay an easement, as well as a lawsuit brought by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe against the Army Corps of Engineers.

Attorneys for Greenpeace International and Greenpeace Fund said their respective organizations never had any employees go to the protests and did not support the demonstrations financially.

Many members of the jury pool on Monday disclosed that they have negative memories of how the protests affect their community. Some also said they worked in the energy industry.

Energy Transfer in 2019 donated \$3 million to the city of Mandan, where the trial is being held, for improvements to the library and downtown plaza.

Greenpeace on Tuesday made another plea to Gion to move the lawsuit to a different court. Gion denied the request, according to Deepa Padmanabha, Greenpeace senior legal advisor.

The plaintiffs and defendants are represented by teams of lawyers from elite law firms, including some who are monitoring the trial from a remote livestream.

The livestream is not open to the public.

Gion remained in opposition to recording, photography or the use of electronic devices in the courtroom. He warned Wednesday morning that any attorneys found in violation of these restrictions could face sanctions.

The court needs to "have control of what goes out there so we don't have a problem with sequestration of witnesses," he said.

A group of attorneys monitoring the trial on Wednesday afternoon asked the North Dakota Supreme Court to review Gion's decision to deny live streaming access to the public.

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A ruling against Greenpeace could hurt First Amendment rights and the climate movement, the group said in a press conference outside the courthouse.

"The law that can come down in this case can affect any demonstration," said Marty Garbus, who has represented civil rights figures in several high-profile cases, including Leonard Peltier, Nelson Mandela and Daniel Ellsberg.

In a separate lawsuit over the pipeline, the state of North Dakota seeks \$38 million from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Army Corps has jurisdiction over the portion of the pipeline that passes underneath Lake Oahe, and owns the land that became site of the largest protest camp during the demonstrations.

North Dakota alleges that by allowing protesters to use its land, the Army Corps caused the protests to spiral out of control, causing the state to incur \$38 million in damages. A judge has yet to rule on the case.

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in October filed another lawsuit against the Army Corps for allowing the pipeline to continue operating without an easement.

*Mary Steurer is a reporter based in Bismarck for the North Dakota Monitor. A native of St. Louis, Steurer previously worked as the local government reporter for the Casper Star-Tribune newspaper in Wyoming.*

**Coming up on GDILIVE.COM**

**GT**  
Groton Area  
Tigers



**Friday, Feb. 28**

**Boys Basketball  
Aberdeen Christian**

**at the  
Aberdeen Civic Center**

**6:00 JV Game**  
Sponsored by Hefty Seed

**Followed by Boys Varsity**

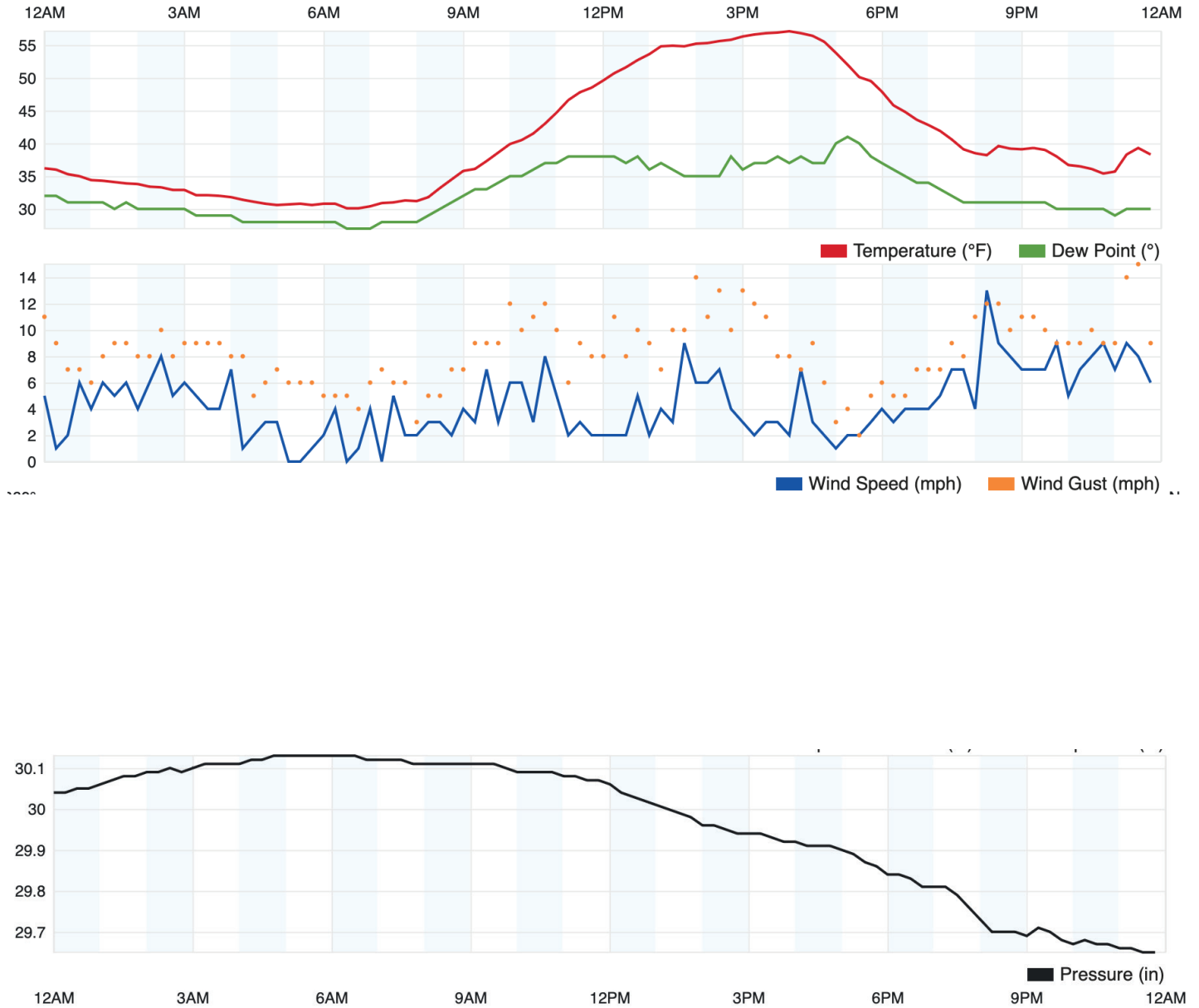
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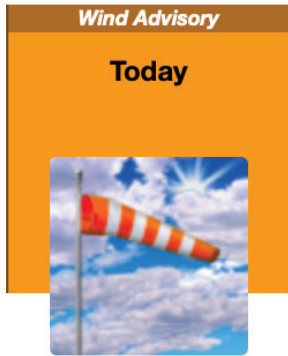
## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs





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**High: 44 °F** ↓

Partly Sunny and Windy



**Low: 14 °F**

Partly Cloudy and Blustery then Mostly Clear



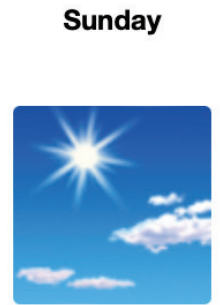
**High: 34 °F**

Mostly Sunny



**Low: 20 °F**

Mostly Clear



**High: 54 °F**

Sunny



## Gusty Northwest Winds Today

February 28, 2025  
4:37 AM

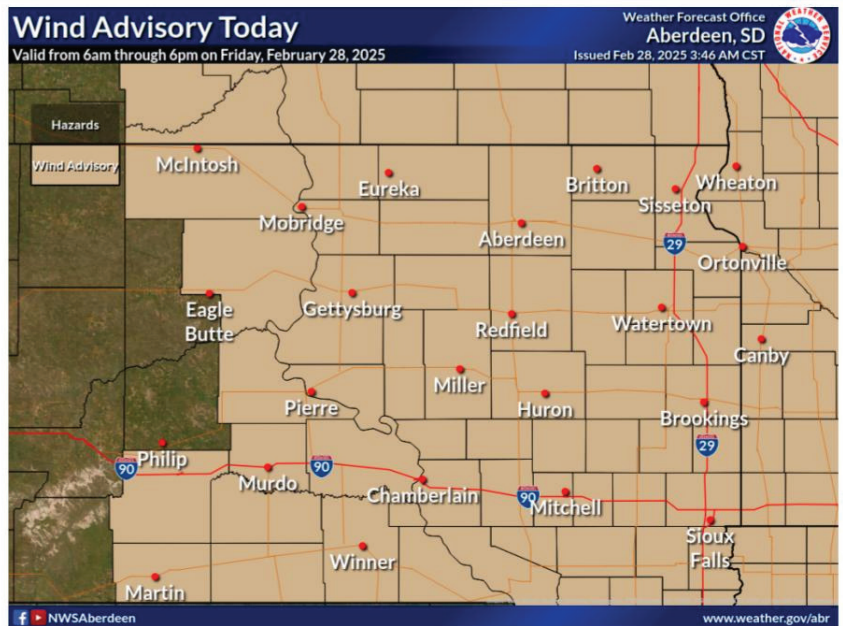
Wind Advisory until 6pm CST Today

### Key Messages

- Northwest wind gusts of 40-55 mph, peaking during late morning through mid afternoon (red box)
- Gusty winds will blow around unsecured objects and a few power outages may result.

#### Maximum Wind Gust Forecast (mph)

	2/28										3/1	
	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	Sat	Sun
Aberdeen	31	39	53	49	44	31	24	20	17	14		
Miller	21	36	46	47	39	30	21	16	13	12		
Mobridge	22	36	44	43	38	29	20	13	10	9		
Murdo	16	33	39	43	40	28	17	12	9	12		
Ortonville	26	38	49	49	38	31	24	22	20	15		
Pierre	15	32	39	40	38	25	14	8	7	8		
Sisseton	55	48	52	51	40	31	25	22	20	15		
Watertown	29	39	52	51	43	32	24	20	17	15		



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Northwest winds will increase this morning and gust to 40 to 55 mph through mid afternoon. A wind advisory remains in effect through 6 PM CST, with winds quickly diminishing this evening. Make sure to secure any outdoor furniture or objects you may have put out.

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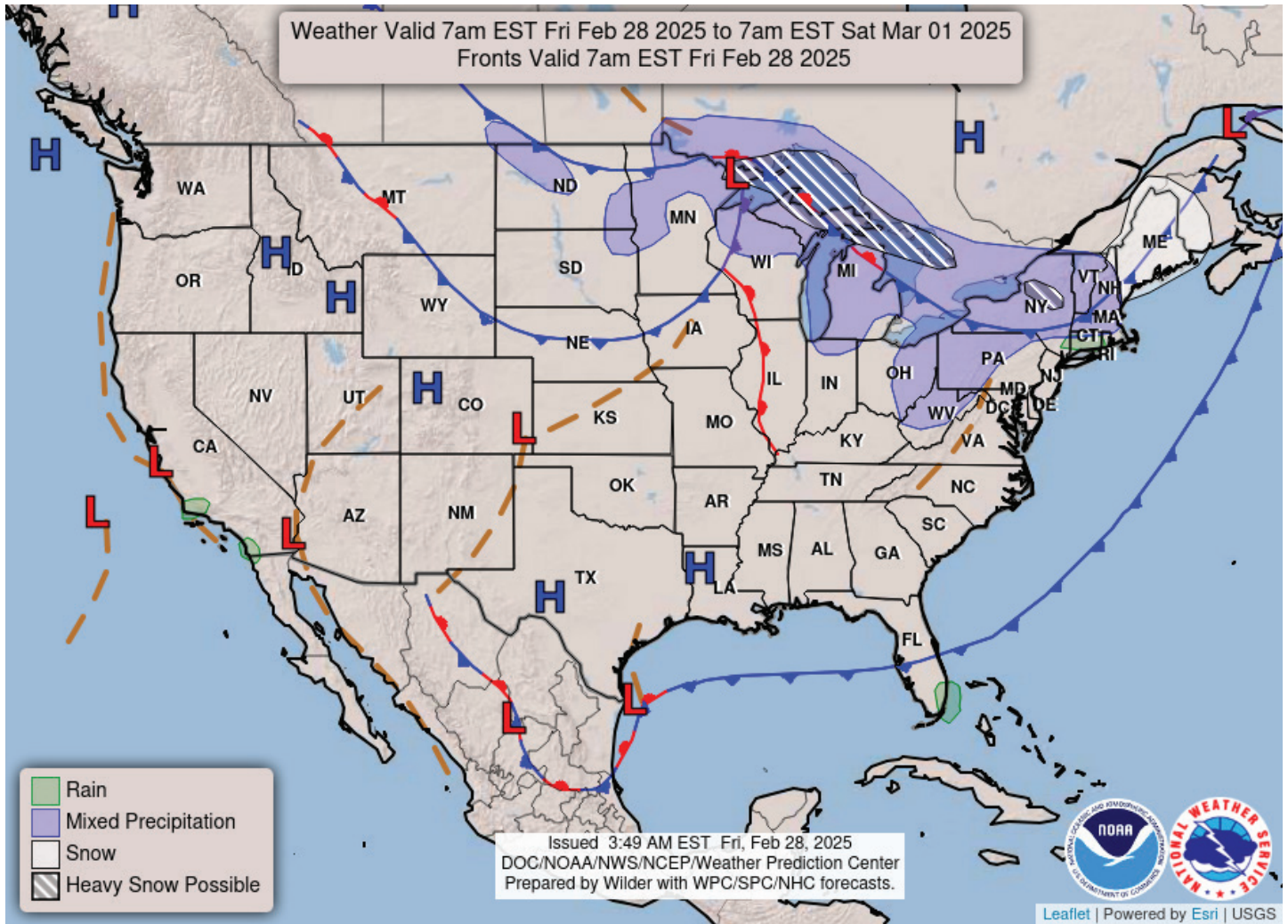
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 57 °F at 3:54 PM**  
**Low Temp: 30 °F at 6:34 AM**  
**Wind: 14 mph at 1:51 PM**  
**Precip: : 0.00**

## Today's Info

Record High: 59 in 1934  
Record Low: -27 in 1962  
Average High: 33  
Average Low: 12  
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.62  
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.45  
Average Precip to date: 1.17  
Precip Year to Date: 0.45  
Sunset Tonight: 6:19:47 pm  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:08:01 am

Day length: 11 hours, 10 minutes



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## Today in Weather History

February 28, 2007: Another late February low-pressure system crossed the central plains and spread heavy snow 6 to 11 inches across northeast South Dakota and west-central Minnesota. As a result, many schools and college classes were canceled, and many events were postponed. In addition, road conditions became deplorable, with some accidents occurring along with ditched vehicles. The snow continued into the first day of March and ended in the morning. Snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Aberdeen, 7 inches at Wilmot and Artichoke Lake, 8 inches at Conde, Watertown, Milbank, 9 inches at Browns Valley and Wheaton, and 11 inches at Clark. This heavy snow event was followed by more snowfall and blizzard conditions that developed across the area during the afternoon and evening of March 01.

1846: William S. Forrest, in "Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Norfolk and Vicinity" in 1853, recorded the Great Gust of 1846. The Great Gust was a severe coastal storm that produced 5 feet waves in Norfolk.

1900: A massive storm produced record snow from Kansas to northwest Ohio and southern Michigan from February 27 to March 01. The observation at the University of Kansas in Lawrence reported 15 inches of snow on the 27th was "phenomenal; only one heavier snowfall has been recorded for any month, a depth of 16 inches on February 11th and 12th, 1894." (CD). The Coop near Wamego, KS, in the northeast part of Kansas, a record-breaking 24 inches fell in just 12 hours! Other snowfall amounts in Kansas include 19.0" in Abilene, 18.7" in Topeka, 18.0" in McPherson, and 18.0" in Ellinwood. Topeka saw 17.3" on February 27, the most recorded in 24 hours.

In Missouri, heavy snow fell over a considerable portion of the state on the 27th and 28th. From Bates, Cass, Jackson, and Platte counties in the west, to St. Charles, Lincoln, Pike, Ralls, Marion, Lewis, and Clark counties to the east, snowfall ranged from 10 to over 20 inches. The snow drifted severely in many places, and where the fall of snow exceeded 10 inches, railroads were blocked, and county roads rendered impassable for several days. A Coop in Darksville, in northern Randolph County, reported drifts from 6 to 8 feet deep in many places. Houstonia Pettis County's drifts were the worst for more than 30 years. Snowfall amounts in Missouri include 22" in Miami, 20" in Richmond, 13.9" in Columbia, and 13" in Kansas City and Jefferson City.

The storm probably gave central and northern parts of Illinois some of the highest snowfall totals since 1830-1831. (CD) The Coop in Astoria measured an astonishing 37.8 inches with this storm! Coatsburg saw 26 inches. Other snowfall amounts include 21" near Normal, 17.5" in Springfield, and 13" near Jacksonville.

Heavy snow, freezing rain, and sleet occurred in Indiana from February 28 to March 01. In South Bend, 16" of snow fell, prompting street-car employees to work all night to keep the tracks open. As a result, railroad traffic was delayed on all lines. Fairmount and Greensburg reported ice and sleet covered the ground on the 28th. Marion, in Grant County, observed the heaviest sleet storm in many years. Some snowfall amounts include 21" at Valparaiso Waterworks, 18" in Syracuse, Angola, and Fort Wayne, and 16" in South Bend and Huntington.

Northwestern Ohio and southern Michigan saw heavy snowfall from February 27 to March 01. The Coop in Wauseon Water Plant recorded 20.5" of snow. Toledo received 20.2 inches. Grape, Michigan, west-northwest of Monroe, said the heavy snow made all roads impassable. Mail could not be delivered from Grape to Monroe due to badly drifted snow. Some snowfall amounts from southern Michigan include 18" in Hillsdale, Grape, and Somerset, 14" in Detroit, 13" in Lansing, and 12" in Kalamazoo.

1952: A powerful Nor'easter hit Cape Cod with winds of 70-80 mph and snowfall amounts of 12-20 inches. These conditions created 12 feet drifts.

1959: In early December 1958, temperatures fell below freezing and remained there until late February. Over 49 inches of snow fell in that time, with very little in the way of melting. The snow absorbed some rain in February and added to the weight on the roof of the Listowel Arena in Ontario, Canada. As a result, the roof collapsed on February 28, 1959, during a hockey game. Seven young players, a referee, and a recreation director (Reginald Kenneth McLeod) were killed in the tragic collapse.

1962: Wilmington, North Carolina, reached a high temperature of 85 degrees. This is the warmest temperature on record during February.



## WHAT TO ADMIRE IN SOMEONE

Alan was sitting at the table in the kitchen looking out of the window. His mother noticed that he was in deep thought by the puzzled look on his face. Finally she said, "Son, is there something I can help you with?"

After a moment's thought he said, "Please, Mom. My teacher asked us to write a paper on 'The Person I Admire Most' and I'm writing about you. So I have to think about it for a while."

Peter told us about the person he most admired. "Christ," he wrote, "is our example. Follow His steps. He never sinned and He never deceived anyone. He did not retaliate when He was insulted. When He suffered He did not threaten to get even. He left His case in the hands of God Who always judges fairly... He carried away our sins...in His own body... and He is the Shepherd whom we can follow."

Not only is Christ someone for us to admire, but as Peter said, "someone whose example we can follow." Yet, even a casual look at the list of the qualities of Jesus is enough to cause us to feel as though He set the bar too high. It is more than we can handle.

And, humanly speaking that is true. Fortunately, however, the power of Christ is available to us so that if we choose to do so, we can live life as He did. Paul said, "... do all things through Christ." That includes no retaliation, no threats, no judging and being a shepherd to those around us who need Someone to follow.

Prayer: Admiring You, Heavenly Father, is not enough. If we are truly Your disciples, we must not only admire You, but serve You faithfully every day. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. 1 Peter 2:21-25

*We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him*

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.25.25

4 8 11 32 52 13

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$197,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 7 Mins 43 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.26.25

8 11 21 27 39 5

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$25,410,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 22 Mins 43 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.27.25

2 18 24 26 45 12

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 37 Mins 43 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.26.25

7 10 13 17 28

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$48,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 37 Mins 43 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.26.25

21 26 45 46 64 11

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 6 Mins 42 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.26.25

28 48 55 60 62 20

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$272,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 6 Mins 42 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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## Upcoming Groton Events

- 01/05/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 01/26/2025 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed at the Community Center 10am-1pm
- 01/26/2025 87th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm
- 02/02/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 02/05/2025 FB Live Electronic Hwy 12 Sign Drawing City Hall 12pm
- 03/02/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 03/22/2025 Spring Vendor Fair at the GHS Gym 10am-2pm
- 04/05/2025 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39, 6-11:30pm
- 04/06/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 04/12/2025 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt at the City Park 10am Sharp
- 05/03/2025 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 05/12/2025 High School Girls Golf Meet at Olive Grove
- 05/26/2025 Memorial Day Services Groton Union Cemetery with lunch at Legion Post #39, 12pm
- 06/07/2025 Day of Play
- 06/13/2025 SDSU 4 Person Scramble at Olive Grove
- 06/21/2025 Groton Triathlon
- 06/23/2025 Ladies 2 Person Scramble at Olive Grove
- 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
- 07/16/2025 Men's Pro Am Golf at Olive Grove
- 07/25/2025 Ferney Open Scramble Golf at Olive Grove
- 08/01/2025 Wine on Nine Fundraiser at Olive Grove
- 08/09/2025 2nd Annual Celebration in the Park/Rib Cook-Off 1-9:30pm
- 08/23/2025 Glacial Tournament at Olive Grove
- 09/06/2025 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 09/07/2025 Sunflower Classic Couples Scramble at Olive Grove
- 10/31/2025 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
- 11/27/2025 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1:30pm
- 12/06/2025 Olive Grove Holiday Party and Silent Live Auction Fundraiser

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

### Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press

#### **GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL**

Harrisburg 53, Watertown 35

#### **Class A Region 1 SoDak Qualifier**

Aberdeen Roncalli 46, Milbank 16

Sisseton 52, Groton 44, OT

#### **Class A Region 2 SoDak Qualifier**

Hamlin 60, Clark-Willow Lake 41

Sioux Valley 65, Great Plains Lutheran 24

#### **Class A Region 3 SoDak Qualifier**

Flandreau 58, Dell Rapids 44

West Central 50, Tri-Valley 44

#### **Class A Region 4 SoDak Qualifier**

Dakota Valley 62, Vermillion 54

Sioux Falls Christian 49, Lennox 33

#### **Class A Region 5 SoDak Qualifier**

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 50, Scotland/Menno 18

Wagner 55, McCook Central-Montrose 38

#### **Class A Region 6 SoDak Qualifier**

Miller 60, Chamberlain 27

Mobridge-Pollock 84, Crow Creek Tribal School 41

#### **Class A Region 7 SoDak Qualifier**

Lakota Tech 61, Winner 34

Mahpiya Lúta Red Cloud 81, Pine Ridge 17

#### **Class A Region 8 SoDak Qualifier**

Rapid City Christian 60, Belle Fourche 39

St Thomas More 52, Hill City 26

#### **Class B Region 1 SoDak Qualifier**

Northwestern 49, Wilmot 31

Warner 47, Waubay/Summit 31

#### **Class B Region 2 SoDak Qualifier**

De Smet 64, Arlington 49

Deubrook 65, Wessington Springs 49

#### **Class B Region 3 SoDak Qualifier**

Dell Rapids St Mary 54, Ethan 44

Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 57, Colman-Egan 48

#### **Class B Region 4 SoDak Qualifier**

Gayville-Volin High School 58, Centerville 38

Parkston 55, Avon 32

#### **Class B Region 5 SoDak Qualifier**

Corsica/Stickney 50, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 22

Lyman 61, Burke 37

#### **Class B Region 6 SoDak Qualifier**

Faulkton 53, Tiospaye Topa 46

Highmore-Harrold 47, Herreid-Selby 35



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## **Class B Region 7 SoDak Qualifier**

Bennett County 67, White River 45  
Kadoka 51, Wall 35

## **Class B Region 8 SoDak Qualifier**

Harding County 61, Faith 28  
Lemmon High School 41, McLaughlin 34

## **BOYS PREP BASKETBALL**

Beresford 74, Freeman Academy-Marion 53  
Harrisburg 66, Watertown 37  
Sunshine Bible Academy 66, Mitchell Christian 45

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

## **Cluff scores 22 as South Dakota State beats Oral Roberts 77-69**

By The Associated Press undefined

TULSA, Okla. (AP) — Oscar Cluff had 22 points, 12 rebounds and five assists to lead South Dakota State over Oral Roberts 77-69 on Thursday night.

Kalen Garry's 3-pointer stretched South Dakota State's lead to 72-67 with 2:18 left before the Jackrabbits sealed it from the foul line.

Joe Sayler added 12 points and Jaden Jackson had 11 for the Jackrabbits (20-10, 11-4 Summit League), who remains tied with St. Thomas-Minnesota and a game back of league leading Omaha.

Issac McBride led the way for the Golden Eagles (7-21, 3-12) with 23 points. Sam Alajiki added 18 points and eight rebounds for Oral Roberts. Jalen Miller had 11 points.

There were 14 lead changes and nine ties.

NEXT UP

South Dakota State visits Denver and Oral Roberts visits Omaha on Saturday in regular-season finales.

## **Israel's army admits failures on Oct. 7. Its probe of the attack could put pressure on Netanyahu**

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — An investigation by the Israeli military has determined that Hamas was able to carry out the deadliest attack in Israeli history on Oct. 7, 2023, because the much more powerful Israeli army misjudged the militant group's intentions and underestimated its capabilities.

The findings, released Thursday, could pressure Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to launch a widely demanded broader inquiry to examine the political decision-making that preceded the attack, which triggered the war in Gaza.

Many Israelis believe the mistakes of Oct. 7 extend beyond the military, and they blame Netanyahu for what they view as a failed strategy of deterrence and containment in the years leading up to the attack. That strategy included allowing Qatar to send suitcases of cash into Gaza and sidelining Hamas' rival, the internationally recognized Palestinian Authority.

The prime minister has not taken responsibility, saying he will answer tough questions only after the war, which has been paused for nearly six weeks by a tenuous ceasefire. Despite public pressure, including from the families of the roughly 1,200 people killed in the Oct. 7 attack and the 251 taken as hostages into Gaza, Netanyahu has resisted calls for a commission of inquiry.

The military's main findings were that the region's most powerful and sophisticated military misread Hamas' intentions, underestimated its capabilities and was wholly unprepared for the surprise attack by thousands of heavily armed militants in the early morning hours of a major Jewish holiday.

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In comments made to military commanders Monday, and shared with the media on Thursday, the army's chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi, said he took responsibility for the army's failures.

"I was the commander of the military on October 7th, and I have my own responsibility. I also carry the weight of all your responsibility — that, too, I see as mine," said Halevi, who announced his resignation in January and is set to step down next week.

The military's findings are in line with past conclusions reached by officials and analysts. The military released only a summary of the report and military officials outlined its findings.

"Oct. 7 was a complete failure," said one military official, who spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

A central misconception was that Hamas, which seized control of Gaza from the Palestinian Authority in 2007, was more interested in governing the territory than fighting Israel, the inquiry found.

The military also misjudged the militant group's capabilities. Military planners had envisioned that, at worst, Hamas could stage a ground invasion from up to eight border points, the official said. In fact, Hamas had more than 60 attack routes.

Intelligence assessed in the aftermath of the attack has shown Hamas came close to staging the offensive on three earlier occasions but delayed it for unknown reasons, the official said.

The official said that in the hours before the attack, there were signs that something was amiss, including when Hamas fighters switched their phones over to the Israeli network.

The perception that Hamas did not want war guided decision makers away from taking action that night that might have thwarted the attack. The Israeli military official said intelligence shows that Yahya Sinwar, a mastermind of the Oct. 7 attack who was killed last October, had begun planning it as early as 2017.

With the military off guard on a holiday weekend, Hamas launched a heavy wave of rockets that allowed thousands of fighters to burst through the security fence or fly over it on hang gliders. They knocked out surveillance cameras and quickly overwhelmed hundreds of soldiers stationed along the border.

From there they advanced to key highway intersections and attacked troops dispatched to the area, including some senior officers, disrupting the military's command and control, according to a second military official, who also spoke on condition of anonymity.

For the first three hours after the attack, Hamas fighters marauded through border communities and a music festival with little resistance. That was when most of the 251 hostages were taken and most people were killed, the official said. The official said the chaos led to friendly fire incidents, although he said there were not many, without disclosing a figure.

It took hours for the military to regain control and days until the area was fully cleared of militants.

According to the first official, the report blamed the military for being overconfident in its knowledge and not showing enough doubt in its core concepts and beliefs. The summary said a key lesson was that Israel could not let a threat develop on its border.

It spelled out several recommendations, including creating special units meant to prepare for such surprise and large-scale events, as well as reform in the military intelligence department that would foster "openness, skepticism, listening, learning."

It did not place blame on any individual soldiers or officers, but is likely to pave the way for a reckoning in the military and eventual dismissals.

Some high-ranking officers other than Halevi have also resigned, including the former head of military intelligence.

## Judge finds mass firings of federal probationary workers were likely unlawful

By JANIE HAR Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — A federal judge in San Francisco on Thursday found that the mass firings of probationary employees were likely unlawful, granting temporary relief to a coalition of labor unions and organizations that has sued to stop the Trump administration's massive dismantling of the federal workforce.

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U.S. District Judge William Alsup ordered the Office of Personnel Management to inform certain federal agencies that it had no authority to order the firings of probationary employees, including at the Department of Defense.

"OPM does not have any authority whatsoever, under any statute in the history of the universe," to hire or fire any employees but its own, Alsup said.

The complaint filed by five labor unions and five nonprofit organizations is among multiple lawsuits pushing back on the administration's efforts to shrink a workforce that Trump has called bloated and sloppy. Thousands of probationary employees have already been fired, and his administration is now aiming at career officials with civil service protection.

Lawyers for the government agree that the office has no authority to hire or fire employees in other agencies.

But they said the Office of Personnel Management asked agencies to review and determine whether employees on probation were fit for continued employment. They also said that probationary employees are not guaranteed employment and that only the highest performing and mission-critical employees should be hired.

"I think plaintiffs are conflating a request by OPM with an order by OPM," said Kelsey Helland, an assistant U.S. attorney in court Thursday.

Attorneys for the coalition cheered the order, although it does not mean that fired employees will automatically be rehired or that future firings will not occur.

"What it means in practical effects is the agencies of the federal government should hear the court's warning that that order was unlawful," said Danielle Leonard, an attorney for the coalition, after the hearing.

"This ruling by Judge Alsup is an important initial victory for patriotic Americans across this country who were illegally fired from their jobs by an agency that had no authority to do so," said Everett Kelley, national president of the American Federation of Government Employees.

"These are rank-and-file workers who joined the federal government to make a difference in their communities, only to be suddenly terminated due to this administration's disdain for federal employees and desire to privatize their work."

An email seeking comment from the Office of Personnel Management was not immediately returned Thursday. Michelle Lo, an assistant U.S. attorney with the Department of Justice, declined to comment.

Alsup ordered the personnel office to inform a limited number of federal agencies represented by the five nonprofits that are plaintiffs in the lawsuit, which include veterans, parks, small businesses and defense. He seemed particularly troubled by firings expected at the Department of Defense.

He also ordered the acting head of the personnel office, Charles Ezell, to testify in court about the nature of a Feb. 13 phone call in which agency heads were told to fire probationary employees.

"The agencies could thumb their noses at OPM if they wanted to if it's guidance, but if it's an order, or cast as an order, the agencies may think they have to comply," he said.

Probationary employees say they received a template email

There are an estimated 200,000 probationary workers — generally employees who have less than a year on the job — across federal agencies. About 15,000 are employed in California, providing services ranging from fire prevention to veterans' care, the complaint says.

Elon Musk has led the purge through the newly created Department of Government Efficiency, roiling the workforce with demands including a Saturday email sent through the personnel office ordering workers to list five things they did last week or risk getting fired. The Office of Personnel Management later said that the edict was voluntary, although workers could face similar requests in the future.

The plaintiffs said in their complaint that numerous agencies informed workers that the personnel office had ordered the terminations, with an order to use a template e-mail informing workers their firing was for performance reasons.

Probationary employees of the National Science Foundation, for example, were told by the foundation that it had decided to retain its workers but was overruled by the Office of Personnel Management, ac-

ording to the complaint.

Unions have recently struck out with two other federal judges.

A judge in Washington, D.C., last week denied a motion from unions to temporarily block layoffs because he found their complaint should be heard in federal labor court. Earlier this month, a judge in Massachusetts said unions suing over a deferred resignation offer weren't directly affected and so lacked legal standing to challenge it.

Alsup said labor unions likely lack legal standing to sue, but the nonprofit organizations likely have cause because their members will be denied government services resulting from the loss of workers, such as the enjoyment of parks, mental health services for veterans and loans for small businesses.

Judge calls probationary employees 'the lifeblood of our government'

He was appalled that probationary employees were fired with a mark against them for poor performance. "Probationary employees are the lifeblood of our government," he said, adding that they are younger employees who work their way up.

Alsup, who was appointed by President Bill Clinton, a Democrat, has presided over many high-profile cases and is known for his blunt talk. He oversaw the criminal probation of Pacific Gas & Electric, which he called a "continuing menace to California."

The judge plans to issue a written order. An evidentiary hearing is set for March 13.

## Iowa gives final approval to a bill removing gender identity protections despite protests

By HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Iowa lawmakers became the first in the nation to approve legislation removing gender identity protections from the state's civil rights code Thursday, despite massive protests by opponents who say it could expose transgender people to discrimination in numerous areas of life.

The measure raced through the legislative process after first being introduced last week. The state Senate was first to approve the bill on Thursday, on party lines, followed by the House less than an hour later. Five House Republicans joined all Democrats in voting against it.

The bill would remove gender identity as a protected class from the state's civil rights law and explicitly define female and male, as well as gender, which would be considered a synonym for sex and "shall not be considered a synonym or shorthand expression for gender identity, experienced gender, gender expression, or gender role."

The measure would be the first legislative action in the U.S. to remove nondiscrimination protections based on gender identity, said Logan Casey, director of policy research at the Movement Advancement Project, an LGBTQ+ rights think tank.

The bill now goes to Republican Gov. Kim Reynolds, who signed earlier policies banning sports participation and public bathroom access for transgender students. A spokesperson for Reynolds declined to comment on whether she would sign the bill. If she does, it will go into effect on July 1.

Hundreds of LGBTQ+ advocates streamed into the Capitol rotunda on Thursday waving signs reading "Trans rights are human rights" and chanting slogans including "No hate in our state!" There was a heavy police presence, with state troopers stationed around the rotunda. Of the 167 people who signed up to testify at a 90-minute public hearing before a House committee, all but 24 were opposed to the bill.

Protesters who watched the vote from the House gallery loudly booed and shouted "Shame!" as the chamber adjourned. Many admonished Iowa state Rep. Steven Holt, who floor managed the bill and delivered a fierce defense of it before it passed.

Supporters of the change say the current law incorrectly codified the idea that people can transition to another gender and granted transgender women access to spaces such as bathrooms, locker rooms and sports teams that should be protected for people who were assigned female at birth. Holt said the inclusion of gender identity in the civil rights codes threatens recent "commonsense" laws to ban transgender

participation in sports and access to bathrooms.

"The legislature of Iowa for the future of our children and our culture has a vested interest and solemn responsibility to stand up for immutable truth," Holt said.

The Iowa lawmakers' actions came as the Georgia House backed away from removing gender protections from the state's hate crimes law, which was passed in 2020 after the death of Ahmaud Arbery.

Iowa's current civil rights law protects against discrimination based on race, color, creed, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, religion, national origin or disability status.

Sexual orientation and gender identity were not originally included in the state's Civil Rights Act of 1965. They were added by the Democratic-controlled Legislature in 2007, also with the support of about a dozen Republicans across the two chambers.

Iowa state Rep. Aime Wichtendahl was the last Democrat to speak out Thursday against the bill removing those protections, becoming emotional as she offered her personal story as a transgender woman, saying: "I transitioned to save my life."

"The purpose of this bill and the purpose of every anti-trans bill is to further erase us from public life and to stigmatize our existence," Wichtendahl said. "The sum total of every anti-trans and anti-LGBTQ bill is to make our existence illegal."

About half of U.S. states include gender identity in their civil rights code to protect against discrimination in housing and public places, such as stores or restaurants, according to the Movement Advancement Project. Some additional states do not explicitly protect against such discrimination but it is included in legal interpretations of statutes.

Iowa's Supreme Court has expressly rejected the argument that discrimination based on sex includes discrimination based on gender identity.

Several Republican-led legislatures are pushing to enact more laws this year creating legal definitions of male and female based on the reproductive organs at birth following an executive order from President Donald Trump.

Trump also signed orders laying the groundwork for banning transgender people from military service and keeping transgender girls and women out of girls and women's sports competitions, among other things. Most of the policies are being challenged in court.

On Thursday night, Trump wrote on his Truth Social site: "Iowa, a beautiful State that I have won BIG every time, has a Bill to remove Radical Gender Ideology from their Laws. Iowa should follow the lead of my Executive Order, saying there are only two genders, and pass this Bill – AS FAST AS POSSIBLE. Thank you Iowa!"

## **Israel and Hamas have begun negotiating next phase of Gaza ceasefire, Egypt says**

By MOHAMMAD JAHJOUH, WAFAA SHURAFU and NATALIE MELZER Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — Negotiations between Israel and Hamas on the next phase of the Gaza ceasefire began Thursday, Egypt said, averting a collapse ahead of Saturday's expiration of the agreement's first phase.

Officials from Israel, Qatar and the United States started "intensive discussions" on the ceasefire's second phase in Cairo, Egypt's state information service said.

"The mediators are also discussing ways to enhance the delivery of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, as part of efforts to alleviate the suffering of the population and support stability in the region," its statement said.

Phase 2 talks are meant to negotiate an end to the war, including the return of all remaining hostages in Gaza who are alive, and the withdrawal of all Israeli troops from the territory. Return of remaining deceased hostages would happen in Phase 3.

According to Israel, there are 59 remaining hostages — 24 of whom are still believed to be alive.

It will be difficult to reconcile a deal with the war objectives of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu,

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who has called for dismantling Hamas' governing and military capabilities. After suffering heavy losses in the war, Hamas has nonetheless emerged intact during the ceasefire, and the group says it will not give up its weapons.

Hours before talks began, an Israeli official said the country would not withdraw from a strategic corridor in the Gaza Strip as called for under the ceasefire, a refusal that could severely complicate negotiations with Hamas and key mediator Egypt at a sensitive moment for the fragile truce.

Overnight, Hamas released the remains of four hostages in exchange for over 600 Palestinian prisoners, the last planned swap of the ceasefire's first phase.

U.S. President Donald Trump's Mideast envoy, Steve Witkoff, was expected in the region in the coming days.

## 'Blatant violation'

An Israeli official, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with regulations, said the army needed to remain in the so-called Philadelphi corridor, on the Gaza side of the border with Egypt, to prevent weapons smuggling.

Separately, Defense Minister Israel Katz said at a meeting with local leaders that he had seen tunnels penetrating the border on a recent visit to the corridor, without providing evidence or elaborating on Israel's plans. Egypt says it destroyed the smuggling tunnels from its side years ago and set up a military buffer zone to halt smuggling.

Hamas said any Israeli attempt to maintain a buffer zone in the corridor would be a "blatant violation" of the ceasefire agreement. The militant group says that sticking to the agreement is the only way for Israel to secure the release of dozens of hostages still held in Gaza.

Israel was supposed to begin withdrawing from the Philadelphi corridor on Saturday, the last day of the first phase, and complete it within eight days. There was no immediate comment about the corridor from Egypt, which is opposed to any Israeli presence on the Gaza side of its border.

## Remains of 4 hostages identified

The remains released Thursday were confirmed to be those of Ohad Yahalomi, Itzhak Elgarat, Shlomo Mantzur and Tsachi Idan, according to the Hostages and Missing Families Forum, which represents families of the captives.

Mantzur, 85, was killed in Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack that triggered the war, and his body was taken into the territory. Israel said the other three were killed in captivity, without elaborating.

"Our hearts ache upon receiving the bitter news," Israeli President Isaac Herzog said. "In this painful moment, there is some solace in knowing that they will be laid to rest in dignity in Israel."

French President Emmanuel Macron said he shared the "immense pain" of the family and loved ones of Yahalomi, who had French citizenship.

Hamas confirmed that over 600 prisoners had been released overnight. Most were detainees returned to Gaza, where they had been rounded up after the Oct. 7 attack and held without charge on security suspicions.

## Israel releases dozens of women and teenagers

Dozens of Palestinian teenagers as well as women detained by Israel in Gaza were released Thursday back to hugs and tears from their loved ones.

The teenagers looked gaunt and skinny as they disembarked from Red Cross buses in the southern town of Khan Younis. Many fell into the arms of relatives, who spent days waiting for them after Israel held up their release last weekend to protest what it called cruel treatment of hostages by Hamas during their releases. Women cried and hugged the boys.

The Palestinian prisoners club, a group representing current and former prisoners, said those released into Gaza Thursday were 44 male teenagers aged 15-19 and two women.

In a separate prisoner release overnight, some fell to their knees in gratitude after disembarking in Khan Younis. In the West Bank town of Beitunia, dozens of prisoners were welcomed by crowds of relatives and well-wishers.

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Israel had delayed the release of the prisoners on Saturday over Hamas' practice of parading hostages before crowds and cameras during their release. Israel, along with the Red Cross and U.N. officials, have called the ceremonies humiliating for the hostages.

Hamas released the four bodies to the Red Cross in Gaza overnight without a public ceremony.

The prisoners released Thursday included 445 men, 21 teenagers and one woman, according to lists shared by Palestinian officials that did not specify their ages. Only around 50 Palestinians were released into the occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem in this round, while dozens sentenced to life over deadly attacks against Israelis were exiled.

Truce in peril

The latest handover was the final one planned under the ceasefire's first six-week phase, which expires this weekend. Hamas has returned 33 hostages, including eight bodies, in exchange for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to return all the hostages and destroy the military and governing capabilities of Hamas, which remains in control of Gaza. The Trump administration has endorsed both goals.

But it's unclear how Israel would destroy Hamas without resuming the war, and Hamas is unlikely to release the remaining hostages — its main bargaining chips — without a lasting ceasefire.

The ceasefire, brokered by the United States, Egypt and Qatar, ended 15 months of war that erupted after Hamas' 2023 attack on southern Israel that killed about 1,200 people. About 250 people were taken hostage.

Israel's military offensive has killed more than 48,000 Palestinians, according to Palestinian health officials, who don't differentiate between civilian and combatant deaths but say over half the dead have been women and children.

The fighting displaced an estimated 90% of Gaza's population and decimated the territory's infrastructure and health system.

At least 8 wounded in suspected car attack in Israel

In northern Israel, police said a driver rammed his car into people at a highway bus stop, wounding at least eight Thursday in what authorities believe was a militant attack.

Police said they had "neutralized" the suspect, who they described as a 53-year-old Palestinian from the northern West Bank who lived in Israel and was married to an Israeli citizen.

Medical workers said the ramming injured at least eight people, two in serious condition, who they evacuated to the hospital.

## Refugee aid groups say Trump administration is trying to circumvent court order

By GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — Refugee aid groups said in a federal court filing Thursday that President Donald Trump's administration appears to be trying to circumvent a ruling this week that blocked his efforts to suspend the nation's refugee admissions program.

U.S. District Judge Jamal Whitehead in Seattle had determined on Tuesday that while the president has broad authority over who comes into the country, he cannot nullify the law passed by Congress establishing the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.

Whitehead, a 2023 appointee of former President Joe Biden, said Trump's actions amounted to an "effective nullification of congressional will," and from the bench, he granted the aid groups' request for a preliminary injunction blocking Trump's executive order suspending the refugee resettlement program. He promised a written ruling in the next few days.

But Wednesday, aid groups, including Church World Service and the Jewish refugee resettlement organization HIAS, received notifications that their "cooperative agreements" with the State Department had been canceled.

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The groups on Thursday asked Whitehead for an emergency hearing to discuss the impact of the termination notices, or to make clear that his ruling also applies to those newly issued notices. The groups called the administration's actions a "flagrant attempt" to evade the court's ruling.

"Defendants are continuing to implement their defunding of the USRAP, and an emergency hearing is necessary to ensure that Defendants are not permitted to evade this Court's bench ruling and the forthcoming written order with antics designed to confuse the state of play," the motion said.

Whitehead set a hearing for Monday.

The State Department acknowledged receipt of an email from The Associated Press about the plaintiffs' motion, but did not otherwise respond to questions about it. The notices indicated the cooperative agreements with the resettlement agencies were being terminated "for the convenience of the U.S. Government pursuant to a directive from U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, for alignment with Agency priorities and national interest."

The refugee program, created by Congress in 1980, is a form of legal migration to the U.S. for people displaced by war, natural disaster or persecution — a process that often takes years and involves significant vetting. It is different from asylum, by which people newly arrived in the U.S. can seek permission to remain because they fear persecution in their home country.

Despite longstanding support from both parties for accepting refugees, the program has become politicized in recent years. Trump also temporarily halted it during his first term, and then dramatically decreased the number of refugees who could enter the U.S. each year.

There are 600,000 people being processed to come to the U.S. as refugees around the world, according to the administration.

Trump's order and the administration's subsequent withholding of funds stranded refugees who had already been approved to come to the U.S., forced the refugee aid groups to lay off staff, and cut off short-term assistance, such as rent, for those who had recently resettled here, the organizations said in the lawsuit challenging the actions.

Thursday's filing came the day after the Trump administration asked the Supreme Court to block another court order requiring it to release billions in suspended foreign aid. The administration also outlined plans to cancel more than 90% of the U.S. Agency for International Development's foreign aid contracts and \$60 billion in overall U.S. assistance around the world.

Shawn VanDiver, a Navy veteran and head of #AfghanEvac, a coalition supporting Afghan resettlement efforts, said the termination of the contracts would hurt Afghans who worked closely with the U.S. during its more than two-decade-long war in Afghanistan and are now at risk. They have been resettling in the U.S. via the refugee program as well as the special immigrant visa program.

While the special immigrant visa program is still operational, the contract terminations strip away funding that went to helping those who qualified come to America and start new lives here.

"Now Afghans are on their own to get here," he said.

"Make no mistake about it, this is a betrayal on par with what we all felt in August of 2021," he said, referring to the chaotic American withdrawal from Kabul under the Biden administration.

## **Mexico sends drug lord Caro Quintero and 28 others to the US as officials meet with Trump team**

By FABIOLA SÁNCHEZ and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexico has sent 29 drug cartel figures, including drug lord Rafael Caro Quintero, who was behind the killing of a U.S. DEA agent in 1985, to the United States as the Trump administration turns up the pressure on drug trafficking organizations.

The unprecedented show of security cooperation comes as top Mexican officials are in Washington trying to head off the Trump administration's threat of imposing 25% tariffs on all Mexican imports starting Tuesday.



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Those sent to the U.S. Thursday were brought from prisons across Mexico to board planes at an airport north of Mexico City that took them to eight U.S. cities, according to the Mexican government.

Among them were members of five of the six Mexican organized crime groups designated earlier this month by U.S. President Donald Trump's administration as "foreign terrorist organizations."

A who's who of Mexican cartels

Besides Caro Quintero were cartel leaders, security chiefs from both factions of the Sinaloa cartel, cartel finance operatives and a man wanted in connection with the killing of a North Carolina sheriff's deputy in 2022.

Vicente Carrillo Fuentes, a former leader of the Juarez drug cartel, based in the border city of Ciudad Juarez, across from El Paso, Texas, and brother of drug lord Amado Carrillo Fuentes, known as "The Lord of The Skies," who died in a botched plastic surgery in 1997, was among those turned over to the U.S.

According to prosecutors in both countries, the prisoners sent to the U.S. Thursday faced charges related to drug trafficking and in some cases homicide among other crimes.

"We will prosecute these criminals to the fullest extent of the law in honor of the brave law enforcement agents who have dedicated their careers — and in some cases, given their lives — to protect innocent people from the scourge of violent cartels," U.S. Attorney General Pamela Bondi said in a statement.

Tariffs on Mexican imports looming

The removal of the drug cartel figures coincided with a visit to Washington by Mexico's Foreign Affairs Secretary Juan Ramón de la Fuente and other top economic and military officials, who met with their counterparts, including U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

In exchange for delaying tariffs, Trump had insisted that Mexico crack down on cartels, illegal immigration and fentanyl production, despite significant dips in migration and overdoses over the past year.

"This is historical, this has really never happened in the history of Mexico," said Mike Vigil, former DEA chief of international operations. "This is a huge celebratory thing for the Drug Enforcement Administration."

A long-time DEA target

Mexico's surprise handover of one of the FBI's Ten Most Wanted Fugitives was weeks in the making.

Caro Quintero had walked free in 2013 after 28 years in prison when a court overturned his 40-year sentence for the 1985 kidnapping and killing of U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agent Enrique "Kiki" Camarena. The brutal murder marked a low point in U.S.-Mexico relations.

Caro Quintero, the former leader of the Guadalajara cartel, had since returned to drug trafficking and unleashed bloody turf battles in the northern Mexico border state of Sonora until he was arrested by Mexican forces in 2022.

In January, a nonprofit group representing the Camarena family sent a letter to the White House urging the Trump administration to renew longstanding U.S. requests for Mexico to extradite Caro Quintero, according to a copy of the letter provided to The Associated Press by a person familiar with the family's outreach.

"His return to the U.S. would give the family much needed closure and serve the best interests of justice," the letter states.

Pressure increased after Trump threatened imposing stiff trade tariffs on Mexico and designated several Mexican cartels as foreign terrorist organizations, according to a person on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive diplomacy that went into Caro Quintero's removal.

The acting head of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, Derek Maltz, provided the White House with a list of nearly 30 Mexican targets wanted in the U.S. on criminal charges, according to the person. Caro Quintero, for whose arrest the U.S. had offered a \$20 million reward, was number one on that list, according to the person.

"This moment is extremely personal for the men and women of DEA who believe Caro Quintero is responsible for the brutal torture and murder of DEA Special Agent Enrique "Kiki" Camarena," Maltz said Thursday.

The person said President Claudia Sheinbaum's government, in a rush to seek favor with the Trump administration and show itself a strong ally in the fight against the cartels, bypassed the formalities of the

U.S.-Mexico extradition treaty to remove Caro Quintero and the other defendants.

That means it could potentially allow prosecutors in the U.S. to try him for Camarena's murder — something not contemplated in the existing extradition request to face separate drug trafficking charges in a Brooklyn federal court.

"If he's being sent to the U.S. outside of a formal extradition, and if Mexico didn't place any restrictions, then he can be prosecuted for whatever the U.S. wants," according to Bonnie Klapper, a former federal narcotics prosecutor in Brooklyn who is familiar with the case.

The U.S. had sought the extradition of Caro Quintero shortly after his arrest in 2022. But the request remained stuck at Mexico's foreign ministry for unknown reasons as Sheinbaum's predecessor and political mentor, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, severely curtailed Mexican cooperation with DEA to protest undercover U.S. law enforcement operations in Mexico targeting senior political and military officials.

Cartels could respond

Also among those removed were two leaders of the now defunct Los Zetas cartel, Mexicans Miguel Treviño Morales and his brother Omar Treviño Morales, known as Z-40 and Z-42. The brothers have been accused by American authorities of running the successor Northeast Cartel from prison.

The removal of the Treviño Morales brothers marks the end of a long process that began after the capture in 2013 of Miguel and two years later of his brother, Omar. Mexico's Attorney General Alejandro Gertz Manero had described the delay as "truly shameful."

Mexican security analyst David Saucedo said that since negotiations with the Trump administration began, he had expected the U.S. government to demand three things: an increase in drug seizures, arrests of high-profile drug trafficking suspects and the handing over of drug traffickers long targeted by the U.S. for extradition.

He called Thursday's removals "an important concession" by Mexico's government to the United States.

The decision also threatens to upend an unwritten understanding — with notable exceptions — that Mexican drug lords would serve sentences in Mexican prisons where they were often able to continue to run their illicit businesses, Saucedo said.

"There will surely be a furious reaction by drug trafficking groups against the Mexican state," he said.

## **Boris Spassky, Soviet chess champion who lost famed Cold War-era match to Bobby Fischer, dies at 88**

MOSCOW (AP) — Boris Spassky, a Soviet-era world chess champion who lost his title to American Bobby Fischer in a legendary 1972 match that became a proxy for Cold War rivalries, died Thursday in Moscow. He was 88.

The death of the one-time chess prodigy was announced by the International Chess Federation, the game's governing body. No cause was given.

Spassky was "one of the greatest players of all time," the group said on the social platform X. He "left an indelible mark on the game."

The televised 1972 match with Fischer, at the height of the Cold War, became an international sensation and was known as the "Match of the Century."

When Fischer won the international chess crown in Reykjavik, Iceland, the then-29-year-old chess genius from Brooklyn, New York, brought the U.S. its first world chess title.

Fischer, known to be testy and difficult, died in 2008. After his victory of Spassky, he later forfeited the title by refusing to defend it.

Former world champion Garry Kasparov wrote on X that Spassky "was never above befriending and mentoring the next generation, especially those of us who, like him, didn't fit comfortably into the Soviet machine."

Spassky emigrated to France in 1976.

On its website, the chess federation called Spassky's match with Fischer "one of the most iconic" in the

history of the game.

Yugoslav grandmaster Svetozar Gligoric said that Spassky's secret strength "lay in his colossal skill in adapting himself to the different styles of his opponents," the Washington Post reported.

The chess federation called Spassky "the first genuinely universal player" who "was not an opening specialist, but he excelled in complex and dynamic middlegame positions where he was in his element."

At the time of their famous match, the Soviet Union had compiled an unbroken streak of world chess championships that stretched back decades.

After his loss, Spassky went home to a cold reception in the Soviet Union, where he had become a national disappointment, the Post said. He said he was not allowed to leave the country, and his marriage, his second, fell apart.

"I feel at home at the chessboard," he was quoted as saying in a recollection of the Reykjavik match published by the World Chess Hall of Fame in 2022, the Post said. "Our chess kingdom does not have borders."

## **With flattery and frank talk, Starmer urges Trump not to abandon Ukraine in press to end Russian war**

By JILL LAWLESS and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — British Prime Minister Keir Starmer used a visit to Washington on Thursday to press President Donald Trump not to abandon Ukraine as he looks to find a quick endgame to Russia's bloody invasion of its neighbor.

With a mix of flattery and frank talk, the center-left Starmer made the case to the Republican president to remain cautious as he goes about ending the biggest conflict in Europe since World War II. The British premier started the visit by delivering an invitation from King Charles III to come to Scotland for a "historic" state visit — noting it was an "unprecedented" honor since Trump already had been given the royal treatment by Queen Elizabeth II during his first term.

"You've created a moment of tremendous opportunity to reach a historic peace deal — a deal that I think would be celebrated in Ukraine and around the world," Starmer told Trump. "That is the prize. But we have to get it right."

Trump said that talks to end the grinding war are "very well advanced" but also cautioned that there is only a narrow window to get a deal done.

"If it doesn't happen quickly, it may not happen at all," Trump warned.

Starmer's visit came after French President Emmanuel Macron was in Washington earlier this week to make a similar case to Trump, and a day before Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is scheduled to visit the White House. The British leader leaned into the idea that Trump was the glue to maintaining the peace in Ukraine should the three-year war end.

The press by Starmer and Macron this week reflects the mounting concern felt by much of Europe that Trump's aggressive push to find an end to the war signals his willingness to concede too much to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Some of Trump's comments during Starmer's visit may only add to Europe's anxiety. The American leader expressed confidence that Putin won't press to restart the war if a truce can be reached.

"I think he'll keep his word," Trump said of Putin. "I've spoken to him, I've known him for a long time now, we had to go through the Russian hoax together."

The mention of "Russia hoax" is a reference to the FBI and Justice Department special counsel investigation that examined whether Trump's 2016 presidential campaign illegally coordinated with Russia to sway the outcome of the U.S. election.

Special counsel Robert Mueller found that although the Trump campaign welcomed Russia's help in the form of the release of hacked emails stolen from Democrats, there was insufficient evidence to prove that the campaign had colluded with Moscow.

After the joint new conference, Starmer was asked during an interview with Fox News Channel if he was

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worried about Putin not living up to any eventual agreement and responded, "I'm concerned about that because, historically, that's been the case."

He said Putin's history of reneging on agreements means that Britain and the rest of Europe will have to join with the United States to make sure the Russian president follows through this time.

"We all need to come together to defend the deal if there is a deal," Starmer said.

Trump's rapprochement with Russia has nonetheless unsettled America's historic allies in Europe. They have found themselves on their heels with Trump returning to the White House with a determination to dramatically make over U.S. foreign policy to correspond with his "America First" world view.

The Trump administration held talks last week with Russia without Ukrainian or other European allies represented. And this week, the U.S. refused to sign on to resolutions at the United Nations blaming Russia for the war. The drifting White House view of Ukraine under Trump is leading to a tectonic shift in transatlantic relations.

Starmer applauded Trump's push to end Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but also urged that "it can't be peace that rewards the aggressor."

"History must be on the side of the peacemaker, not the invader," Starmer said.

At their White House meeting, Trump and Zelenskyy are expected to sign off on a contentious agreement that would give the U.S. access to Ukraine's critical minerals, which are used in the aerospace, defense and nuclear industries. Zelenskyy had chafed at a deal without specific security guarantees from Washington.

Trump remains noncommittal about any coming American security guarantees, and insists that Russia would think twice about attacking again should the U.S. build an economic footprint in Ukraine to extract critical minerals.

"We are a backstop because we'll be over there, we'll be working in the country," Trump said.

If a truce can be reached, Starmer and Macron have agreed to send troops for a potential peacekeeping mission to Ukraine to ensure that fighting between Ukraine and Russia doesn't flare up again.

But White House officials are skeptical that Britain and France can assemble enough troops from across Europe, at least at this moment, to deploy a credible peacekeeping mission to Kyiv.

Zelenskyy, while en route to Washington, met on Thursday with Ireland's prime minister, Micheál Martin, who said he told Zelenskyy that Ireland is open to helping, including sending peacekeepers to Ukraine.

Zelenskyy and European officials have no illusions about U.S. troops taking part in such a mission. But Starmer and others are trying to make the case that the plan can only work with a U.S. backstop for European forces on the ground — through U.S. aerial intelligence, surveillance and support, as well as rapid-response cover in case of breaches of a truce.

Trump is also looking at the moment as an opportunity to potentially reopen economic relations with Russia after three years of U.S.-led sanctions to punish Moscow for the invasion.

Starmer is hosting a Sunday meeting in the United Kingdom of international leaders that will focus on Ukraine, and Zelenskyy is expected to attend. The prime minister also announced plans this week for the U.K. to bolster defense spending, something that should sit well with Trump, who has been critical that European allies are spending too little on defense.

Starmer's government will increase military spending to 2.5% of gross domestic product by 2027, years earlier than expected, and aim to reach 3% by 2035. The U.S. spends about 3.3% of its GDP on defense.

"The disaster in Ukraine shows exactly why it's so important for the United Kingdom and other NATO partners to make large investments in their defense capabilities," Trump said. "You're raising it quite a bit, which is a great thing to do for your country. It's a great thing to do. It's sad that we need that, but probably need that."

## Harsh flu season has health officials worried about brain complications in children

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — This year's harsh flu season — the most intense in 15 years — has federal health officials trying to understand if it sparked an increase in a rare but life-threatening brain complication in children.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates 19,000 people have died from the flu so far this winter, including 86 children. Thursday, the CDC reported at least nine of those children experienced brain complications, and it has asked state health departments to help investigate if there are more such cases.

There is some good news: The CDC also reported that this year's flu shots do a pretty good job preventing hospitalization from the flu — among the 45% of Americans who got vaccinated. But it comes a day after the Trump administration added to the uncertainty roiling government health agencies by canceling a meeting of experts who are supposed to help choose the recipe for next winter's flu vaccine.

Still, it's not too late to get vaccinated this year: "If you haven't gotten your flu shot yet, get it because we're still seeing high flu circulation in most of the country," said Dr. Sean O'Leary of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Flu shot effectiveness varies from year to year. While not great at blocking infections, the vaccine's main role "is to keep you out of the hospital and to keep you alive," said Vanderbilt University vaccine expert Dr. William Schaffner.

Preliminary CDC data released Thursday found children who got this year's vaccine were between 64% and 78% less likely to be hospitalized than their unvaccinated counterparts, and adults were 41% to 55% less likely to be hospitalized.

What about those brain complications? Earlier this month, state health departments and hospitals warned doctors to watch for child flu patients with seizures, hallucinations or other signs of "influenza-associated encephalopathy or encephalitis" -- and a more severe subtype called "acute necrotizing encephalopathy." Encephalitis is brain inflammation.

Thursday, the CDC released an analysis of 1,840 child flu deaths since 2010, finding 166 with those neurologic complications. Most were unvaccinated. But the agency concluded it's unclear if this year's nine deaths with those complications — four of whom had the worse subtype — mark an uptick.

There's no regular tracking of those neurologic complications, making it hard to find the answers. In California, Dr. Keith Van Haren of Stanford Medicine Children's Health said earlier this month that he'd learned of about 15 flu-related cases of that severe subtype from doctors around the country and "we are aware of more cases that may also meet the criteria." He did not say how many died.

O'Leary, with the pediatricians' academy, said parents should remember this complication is rare — the advice remains to seek medical advice anytime a child with flu has unusual or concerning symptoms, such as labored breathing.

Doctors see more neurologic complications during severe flu seasons — they may be linked to particular influenza strains -- and survivors can have ongoing seizures or other lingering problems, he said.

Meanwhile, vaccine makers already are gearing up for the months-long process of brewing next winter's flu shots. A Food and Drug Administration advisory committee was supposed to meet on March 13 to help choose which flu strains to include but with that meeting's cancellation, it's unclear if the government will decide on its own.

"We have historically worked really hard to get transparency around all of these vaccine discussions," said O'Leary, who said it's important for the public to understand what goes into making decisions about the flu vaccine composition and other vaccine recommendations.

"The FDA will make public its recommendations to manufacturers in time for updated vaccines to be available for the 2025-2026 influenza season," Andrew Nixon, communications director for the Department of Health and Human Services, said in an email.

## Economic Blackout: Will a 24-hour boycott make a difference?

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO and HALELUYA HADERO AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — A grassroots organization is encouraging U.S. residents not to spend any money Friday as an act of “economic resistance” to protest what the group’s founder sees as the malign influence of billionaires, big corporations and both major political parties on the lives of working Americans.

The People’s Union USA calls the 24 hours of spending abstinence set to start at midnight an “economic blackout,” a term that has since been shared and debated on social media. The activist movement said it also plans to promote weeklong consumer boycotts of particular companies, including Walmart and Amazon.

Other activists, faith-based leaders and consumers already are organizing boycotts to protest companies that have scaled back their diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, and to oppose President Donald Trump’s moves to abolish all federal DEI programs and policies. Some faith leaders are encouraging their congregations to refrain from shopping at Target, one of the companies backing off DEI efforts, during the 40 days of Lent that begin Wednesday.

Here are some details about the various events and experts’ thoughts on whether having consumers keep their wallets closed is an effective tool for influencing the positions corporations take.

Who’s behind the ‘24-hour Economic Blackout?’

The People’s Union USA, which takes credit for initiating the no-spend day, was founded by John Schwarz, a meditation teacher who lives near the Chicago area, according to his social media accounts.

The organization’s website said it’s not tied to a political party but stands for all people. Requests for comment sent to the group’s email address this week did not receive a reply.

The planned blackout is scheduled to run from 12 a.m. EST through 11:59 p.m. EST on Friday. The activist group advised customers to abstain from making any purchases, whether in store or online, but particularly not from big retailers or chains. It wants participants to avoid fast food and filling their car gas tanks, and says shoppers with emergencies or in need of essentials should support a local small business and try not to use a credit or debit card.

People’s Union plans another broad-based economic blackout on March 28, but it’s also organizing boycotts targeting specific retailers — Walmart and Amazon — as well as global food giants Nestle and General Mills. For the boycott against Amazon, the organization is encouraging people to refrain from buying anything from Whole Foods, which the e-commerce company owns.

What other boycotts are being planned?

There are a number of boycotts being planned, particularly aimed at Target. The discounter, which has backed diversity and inclusion efforts aimed at uplifting Black and LGBTQ+ people in the past, announced in January it was rolling back its DEI initiatives.

A labor advocacy group called We Are Somebody, led by Nina Turner, launched a boycott of Target on February 1 to coincide with Black History Month.

Meanwhile, an Atlanta-area pastor, the Rev. Jamal Bryant, organized a website called targetfast.org to recruit Christians for a 40-day Target boycott starting March 5, which marks Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. Other faith leaders have endorsed the protest.

The Rev. Al Sharpton, founder and president of the National Action Network, a civil rights organization, announced in late January it would identify two companies in the next 90 days that will be boycotted for abandoning their diversity, equity and inclusion pledges. The organization formed a commission to identify potential candidates.

“Donald Trump can cut federal DEI programs to the bone, he can claw back federal money to expand diversity, but he cannot tell us what grocery store we shop at,” Sharpton said in a statement posted on the National Action Network’s website.

Will the events have any impact?

Some retailers may feel a slight pinch from Friday’s broad “blackout,” which is taking place in a tough economic environment, experts said. Renewed inflation worries and Trump’s threat of tariffs on imported goods already have had an effect on consumer sentiment.

“The (market share) pie is just so big,” Marshal Cohen, chief retail advisor at market research firm Circana,

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said. "You can't afford to have your slices get smaller. Consumers are spending more money on food. And that means there's more pressure on general merchandise or discretionary products."

Still, Cohen thinks the overall impact may be limited, with any meaningful sales declines more likely to surface in liberal-leaning coastal regions and big cities.

Anna Tuchman, a marketing professor at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management, said she thinks the economic blackout will likely make a dent in daily retail sales but won't be sustainable.

"I think this is an opportunity for consumers to show that they have a voice on a single day," she said. "I think it's unlikely that we would see long-run sustained decreases in economic activity supported by this boycott."

Other boycotts have produced different results.

Target saw a drop in sales in the spring and summer quarter of 2023 that the discounter attributed in part to customer backlash over a collection honoring LGBTQ+ communities for Pride Month. As a result, Target didn't carry Pride merchandise in all of its stores the following year.

Tuchman studied the impact of a boycott against Goya Foods during the summer of 2020 after the company's CEO praised Trump. But her study, based on sales from research firm Numerator, found the brand saw a sales increase driven by first-time Goya buyers who were disproportionately from heavily Republican areas.

However, the revenue bump proved temporary; Goya had no detectable sales increase after three weeks, Tuchman said.

It was a different story for Bud Light, which spent decades as America's bestselling beer. Sales plummeted in 2023 after the brand sent a commemorative can to a transgender influencer. Bud Light's sales still haven't fully recovered, according to alcohol consulting company Bump Williams.

Tuchman thinks a reason is because there were plenty of other beers that the brand's mostly conservative customer base could buy to replace Bud Light.

Afya Evans, a political and image consultant in Atlanta, said she would make a point of shopping on Friday but will focus on small businesses and Black-owned brands.

Evans is aware of other boycotts but she said she liked this one because she believes it could have some effect on sales.

"It's a broader thing," she said. "We want to see what the impact is. Let everybody participate. And plan from there."

## **Trump plans tariffs on Mexico and Canada for Tuesday, while doubling existing 10% tariffs on China**

By JOSH BOAK and FABIOLA SANCHEZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump plans to impose tariffs on Canada and Mexico starting Tuesday, in addition to doubling the 10% universal tariff charged on imports from China.

In a Truth Social post Thursday, Trump said illicit drugs such as fentanyl are being smuggled into the United States at "unacceptable levels" and that import taxes would force other countries to crack down on the trafficking.

"We cannot allow this scourge to continue to harm the USA, and therefore, until it stops, or is seriously limited, the proposed TARIFFS scheduled to go into effect on MARCH FOURTH will, indeed, go into effect, as scheduled," the Republican president wrote. "China will likewise be charged an additional 10% Tariff on that date."

The prospect of escalating tariffs has already thrown the global economy into turmoil, with consumers expressing fears about inflation worsening and the auto sector and other domestic manufacturers suffering if Trump raises import taxes. But Trump has also at times engaged in aggressive posturing only to give last-minute reprieves, previously agreeing to a 30-day suspension of the Canada and Mexico tariffs that were initially supposed to start in February.

The threat of tariffs frightened the stock market with the S&P 500 index falling 1.6% on Thursday. The

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S&P 500 is now just 1.4% higher than it was after Trump won the election in November, giving up almost all of the gains that the president once cited as evidence of an economic revival.

Asked Thursday about the fact that tariffs are largely paid for consumers and importing companies, Trump dismissed any concerns by saying: "It's a myth." It's possible for a stronger U.S. dollar to offset some of the costs of tariffs, but Trump's statement goes against most economic modeling given the breadth of his planned taxes.

Trump intends to put 25% tariffs on imports from Mexico and Canada, with a lower 10% tax on Canadian energy products such as oil and electricity. The move, ostensibly about drug trafficking and immigration, led Mexico and Canada to respond by emphasizing their existing efforts to address these issues. Canada created a fentanyl czar, and Mexico sent 10,000 members of its National Guard to its border with the United States.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said Thursday that she hoped to speak with Trump after the Cabinet-level meetings occurring in Washington this week. Mexico's Foreign Affairs Secretary Juan Ramón de la Fuente was scheduled to meet with Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Thursday afternoon.

Trump, "as you know, has his way of communicating," Sheinbaum said. But she said that her government would stay "cool-headed" and optimistic about an agreement coming together to avoid the tariffs.

"I hope we are able to reach an agreement and on March 4 we can announce something else," she said.

She said Mexico's security chiefs were discussing intelligence sharing with their American counterparts that would allow for important arrests in the U.S. On the economic front, she said Mexico's goal is to protect the free trade pact that was negotiated during the first Trump administration between Mexico and the United States. That 2020 deal, which included Canada, was an update of the North American Free Trade Agreement from 1994.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said his country has invested more than 1 billion Canadian dollars to improve border security, adding that his government's ministers and officials are also in Washington this week.

"There is no emergency for the United States at the border with Canada when it comes to fentanyl, and that is exactly what we are demonstrating at this time," Trudeau said in Montreal. "If the United States goes ahead and imposes tariffs, we already shared the details of our plan. We have \$30 billion worth of U.S. products that will be subject to tariffs. And \$125 billion of tariffs that will be applied three weeks later. But we don't want to be in that position."

Trump did impose a 10% tariff on China for its role in the manufacturing of chemicals used to make fentanyl, and that tax would now be doubled, according to his social media post.

On Thursday, China's Commerce Minister Wang Wentao wrote to Jamieson Greer, the newly confirmed U.S. trade representative, that differences on trade should be resolved through dialogues and negotiations.

The 25% tariffs on Mexico and Canada would amount to a total tax increase on the U.S. public of somewhere between \$120 billion to \$225 billion annually, according to Jacob Jensen, a trade policy analyst at the American Action Forum, a center-right think tank. The additional China tariffs could cost consumers up to \$25 billion.

The potential for higher prices and slower growth could create political blowback for Trump, who promised voters in last year's presidential election that he could quickly lower the inflation rate, which jumped during Democratic President Joe Biden's term. But Trump also campaigned on imposing broad tariffs, which he plans to launch on April 2 by resetting them to match the taxes that he determines are charged by other countries on American goods.

"The April Second Reciprocal Tariff date will remain in full force and effect," Trump said as part of his new social media post.

In an interview with News Nation, Kevin Hassett, the director of the White House National Economic Council, said progress by Mexico and Canada on fentanyl "was not as impressive as the president had hoped." There are significant differences between Canada and Mexico on the scale of drug smuggling. U.S. customs agents seized 43 pounds (19.5 kilograms) of fentanyl at the Canadian border during the last



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budget year, compared with 21,100 pounds (9,570 kilograms) at the Mexican border.

Hassett stressed that the reciprocal tariffs would be in addition to the ones being placed on Canada and Mexico.

Trump indicated Wednesday that European countries would also face a 25% tariff as part of his reciprocal tariffs. He also wants separate tariffs on autos, computer chips and pharmaceutical drugs that would be levied in addition to the reciprocal tariffs.

The president already announced that he's removing the exemptions on his 2018 steel and aluminum tariffs, in addition to planning taxes on copper imports.

The prospect of a broader trade conflict should other nations follow through with their own retaliatory tariffs is already spooking U.S. consumers, potentially undermining Trump's promise to unleash stronger economic growth.

The Conference Board reported on Tuesday that its consumer confidence index had dropped 7 points to a reading of 98.3. It was the largest monthly decline since August 2021, when inflationary pressures began to reverberate across the United States as the economy recovered from the coronavirus pandemic. Average 12-month inflation expectations jumped from 5.2% to 6% in February, the Conference Board noted.

"There was a sharp increase in the mentions of trade and tariffs, back to a level unseen since 2019," said Stephanie Guichard, a senior economist at the Conference Board. "Most notably, comments on the current administration and its policies dominated the responses."

## **USAID workers clear their desks in Trump's final push to dismantle the agency**

By GARY FIELDS and ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. Agency for International Development workers — many in tears — carted away belongings through cheering crowds in a final visit to their now-closed headquarters Thursday as the Trump administration's rapid dismantling of the congressionally authorized agency moved into its final stages.

Notices sent out in mass mailings this week are terminating over 90% of USAID's contracts for humanitarian and development work around the world, and the Supreme Court has temporarily blocked a judge's order requiring the administration to release billions of dollars in foreign aid.

The administration notified most USAID staffers in recent days that they were on leave or being fired, then gave thousands of those who worked in the Washington headquarters 15-minute time slots to clear out their desks under the escort of federal officers.

Some staffers wept as they carried out grocery bags and suitcases with what was left from their life's work.

"Heartbreaking," 25-year-old Juliane Alfen said, carrying a small bag with a stuffed rabbit sticking out. Like hundreds of colleagues, Alfen received a form notice Monday that her firing "was in the best interest of government."

"I felt like we made a difference," Alfen said. "To see everything disappearing before our eyes in a matter of weeks is very scary."

Supporters shouted encouragement and waved signs outside or drove by tapping their car horns. A little girl stood next to her mother holding a handwritten sign saying, "I am proud of you Daddy." A woman who left the building loaded down with bags burst into tears at the cheers greeting her. A small crowd enveloped her in hugs.

USAID has been one of the biggest targets of a broad campaign by President Donald Trump and cost-cutting chief Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, to slash the size of the federal government.

Their actions have left only a small fraction of USAID employees on the job, slashed \$60 billion in assistance overseas and upended decades of U.S. policy that foreign aid helps American interests abroad by stabilizing other countries and building alliances.

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Trump and Musk have called USAID programs out of line with the Republican president's agenda and asserted without evidence that its work is wasteful. In addition to its scope, the effort is extraordinary because it has not involved Congress, which authorized the agency and has provided its funding.

Already, organizations reported that thousands of USAID contracts for HIV programs in South Africa were permanently canceled. And despite an assertion from Musk that funding to fight Ebola outbreaks had been restored, The Associated Press obtained a termination notice for a project by the Baylor College of Medicine Children's Foundation that was poised to respond to Ebola cases in Uganda.

Others warned of profound strategic implications from USAID's shutdown.

"The American people deserve a transparent accounting of what will be lost — on counterterrorism, global health, food security, and competition," Liz Schroyer, head of the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition, a non-profit that promotes U.S. diplomatic and humanitarian efforts, said in a statement.

Devon Behrer, a USAID worker hired just three months ago, said helping carry out that work had always been her dream.

"My plan was to come here and go into development work. My plan went up in smoke Monday," she said.

The way people's lives were being swept away was "incredibly disrespectful," Behrer, 34, added. "There seems to be a lack of acknowledgment that we're human."

Staffers had pressed for weeks for permission to reenter the building to collect work shoes, family photos and other belongings. Some took flowers from a bucket on their way inside to place at a memorial wall honoring 99 USAID workers killed in the line of duty over the agency's six decades. Staffers said security stopped them from placing the flowers.

Randy Chester, vice president of the American Foreign Service Association, a union representing USAID staffers, said he and others gathered outside "to say thank you for your service. We appreciate everything you've done and all the sacrifices you've made in service to your country."

His is among several groups suing the Trump administration over the staff cuts and more than monthlong freeze on foreign assistance. While the administration's efforts to slash the size of the federal government are embroiled in various lawsuits, court challenges to halt the shutdown of USAID have been unsuccessful so far.

Late Wednesday, the Supreme Court temporarily blocked a judge's order that had given the Trump administration a deadline this week to release billions of dollars in foreign aid. Chief Justice John Roberts said that order will remain on hold until the high court has a chance to weigh in more fully.

The court's late-night intervention is a temporary step as the justices consider the case, but their eventual determination could be pivotal in the increasingly fraught legal battles playing out nationwide.

It halted a decision from a federal judge who said the administration had given no sign of complying with his nearly two-week-old order to pause the funding freeze. Trump paused foreign aid in an executive order on his first day in office.

A report from the Congressional Research Service this month said congressional authorization is required "to abolish, move, or consolidate USAID." Republicans, who hold slim majorities in the House and the Senate, have made no pushback against the administration's actions.

That includes placing 4,080 staffers who work across the globe on leave Monday. That was joined by a "reduction in force" affecting an additional 1,600 employees, a State Department spokesman said.

It's unclear how many of the more than 5,600 USAID employees who have been fired or placed on leave work in Washington. A notice on the agency's website said staff at other locations will have the chance to collect their personal belongings at a later date.

Virginia Democratic Rep. Gerald Connolly said in a statement that targeting USAID employees was "unwarranted and unprecedented."

Connolly, whose district includes a sizable federal workforce, said they're part of the "world's premier development and foreign assistance agency" who save "millions of lives every year."

## What to know about the Tate brothers, social media influencers who face trafficking charges

By FREIDA FRISARO and CURT ANDERSON Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — A travel ban was lifted on influencer brothers Andrew and Tristan Tate, who are both charged with human trafficking in Romania, and they are headed to the United States, officials said Thursday.

The brothers are avid supporters of President Donald Trump and have millions of online followers. It wasn't clear under what conditions the Tates were allowed to leave Romania, or where in the United States they were headed.

Here are some things to know about the Tate Brothers:

Who are the Tate Brothers?

Andrew Tate, 38, and Tristan Tate, 36 are dual U.S.-British citizens.

Andrew Tate is a former professional kickboxer and self-described misogynist who has amassed more than 10 million followers on X. He also runs an online academy where he says he teaches young men how to get rich and attract women. Tristan Tate is also a former kickboxer.

What are they charged with in Romania?

The Tate brothers and two Romanian women were arrested in Bucharest in late 2022.

The Directorate for Investigating Organized Crime and Terrorism alleged the four defendants formed a criminal group in 2021 "in order to commit the crime of human trafficking" in Romania as well as the United States and Britain.

They were initially formally indicted last year. In April, the Bucharest Tribunal ruled that a trial could start but didn't set a date.

In December, a court in Bucharest ruled that the case against the Tates and the two Romanian women couldn't go to trial because of multiple legal and procedural irregularities on the part of the prosecutors.

The case hasn't been closed, and there is also a separate legal case against the brothers in Romania.

Andrew Tate has repeatedly claimed that prosecutors in Romania have no evidence against him and that there is a political conspiracy to silence him. But they were charged with forming a criminal gang to sexually exploit women, among other charges.

What led to the travel ban being lifted?

DIICOT, Romania's anti-organized crime agency, said in a statement Thursday that prosecutors approved a "request to modify the obligation preventing the defendants from leaving Romania," but that judicial control measures remained in place. The agency didn't say who had made the request.

The control measures include the requirement to "appear before judicial authorities whenever summoned," the statement read.

The agency said the Tates were "warned that deliberately violating these obligations may result in judicial control being replaced with a stricter deprivation of liberty measure."

Their departure came after Foreign Minister Emil Hurezeanu said this month that a U.S. official in the current Trump administration had expressed interest in the brothers' legal case in Romania at the Munich Security Conference. The minister insisted it didn't amount to pressure.

Why were the Tates allowed to leave Romania?

Criminal cases in Romania can often drag on for 5 to 10 years and the accused can, in some cases, leave the country during that time unless judicial restrictions stipulate otherwise, said former Romanian Judge Cristi Danilet.

But it's unclear whether it is rare that someone accused of serious allegations such as human trafficking or rape is allowed to leave the country while a case is still ongoing.

What about Tate brothers' defamation case in Florida?

A hearing was held Thursday in West Palm Beach, Florida, in a defamation lawsuit brought by the Tate brothers in July 2023 against a woman who accused them of imprisoning her in Romania.

The hearing in Palm Beach County Circuit Court concerns a motion by the woman, identified as Jane

Doe, seeking an indefinite delay in the lawsuit so that proceedings in Romania can continue.

The Tates' lawyers say there is no reason to delay the defamation case. "The Romanian process is expected to take several more years," their lawyer said in a court filing. There was no immediate ruling.

Meanwhile, the Tate brothers claimed in a court filing they fear "imminent harm" from a defendant in their lawsuit, known only as Jane Doe. They asked a judge Thursday for a temporary restraining order preventing her from coming within 500 feet (152 meters) of them and that she be prevented from "contacting, threatening, stalking, harming or harassing" either Tate brother.

The motion asks for a hearing before a judge "at the earliest possible date."

## **Measles is one of the world's most contagious viruses. Here's what to know and how to avoid it**

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

Measles is rarely seen in the United States, but Americans are growing more concerned about the preventable virus as cases continue to rise in rural West Texas.

This week, an unvaccinated child died in the West Texas outbreak, which involves more than 120 cases. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said the last confirmed measles death in the United States was in 2015.

There are also nine measles cases in eastern New Mexico, but the state health department said there is no direct connection to the outbreak in Texas.

Here's what to know about the measles and how to protect yourself.

What is measles?

It's a respiratory disease caused by one of the world's most contagious viruses. The virus is airborne and spreads easily when an infected person breathes, sneezes or coughs. It most commonly affects kids.

"On average, one infected person may infect about 15 other people," said Scott Weaver, a center of excellence director for the Global Virus Network, an international coalition. "There's only a few viruses that even come close to that."

Measles first infects the respiratory tract, then spreads throughout the body, causing a high fever, runny nose, cough, red, watery eyes and a rash.

The rash generally appears three to five days after the first symptoms, beginning as flat red spots on the face and then spreading downward to the neck, trunk, arms, legs and feet. When the rash appears, the fever may spike over 104 degrees Fahrenheit, according to the CDC.

There's no specific treatment for measles, so doctors generally try to alleviate symptoms, prevent complications and keep patients comfortable.

People who have had measles once can't get it again, health officials say.

Can measles be fatal?

It usually doesn't kill people, but it can.

Common complications include ear infections and diarrhea. But about 1 in 5 unvaccinated Americans who get measles are hospitalized, the CDC said. Pregnant women who haven't gotten the vaccine may give birth prematurely or have a low-birthweight baby.

Among children with measles, about 1 in every 20 develops pneumonia, the CDC said, and about one in every 1,000 suffers swelling of the brain called encephalitis — which can lead to convulsions, deafness or intellectual disability.

It's deadly "in a little less than 1% of cases, mainly in children," said Weaver, who works at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston. "Children develop the most severe illness. The cause of death in these kinds of cases is usually pneumonia and complications from pneumonia."

How can you prevent measles?

The best way to avoid measles is to get the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine. The first shot is recommended for children between 12 and 15 months old and the second between 4 and 6 years old.

"Before a vaccine was developed in the 1960s, everybody got" measles, Weaver said. "But then when

the vaccine came along, that was a complete game-changer and one of the most successful vaccines in the history of medicine.”

There is “great data” on the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine, he said, because it’s been around for decades.

“Any of these outbreaks we’re seeing can easily be prevented by increasing the rate of vaccination in the community,” he said. “If we can maintain 95% of people vaccinated, we’re not going to see this happening in the future. And we’ve slipped well below that level in many parts of the country.”

Vaccination rates have declined nationwide since the COVID-19 pandemic, and most states are below the 95% vaccination threshold for kindergartners — the level needed to protect communities against measles outbreaks.

Do you need a booster if you got the MMR vaccine a while ago?

Health care professionals are sometimes tested for antibodies to measles and given boosters if necessary, Weaver said — even if they’ve already had the standard two doses as a child.

He said people at high risk for infection who got the shots many years ago may also want to consider getting a booster if they live in an area with an outbreak. Those may include family members living with someone who has measles or those especially vulnerable to respiratory diseases because of underlying medical conditions.

“But I don’t think everyone needs to go and run out to their doctor right now if they did receive two doses as a child,” he said. “If people would just get the standard vaccination, none of this would be happening.”

## **Popovich says he will not return to the Spurs this season, has hope of coaching in the future**

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

Gregg Popovich will not coach this season. He is not ruling out a comeback in the future.

Popovich met with the San Antonio Spurs on Thursday, releasing a statement afterward to make his decision on this season — and hope for next season — public. The 76-year-old Popovich, the NBA’s all-time coaching wins leader, had a stroke at the team’s arena in San Antonio on Nov. 2 and has been away from the team since.

“I’ve decided not to return to the sidelines this season,” Popovich said in a statement distributed by the team. “(Acting coach) Mitch Johnson and his staff have done a wonderful job and the resolve and professionalism the players have shown, sticking together during a challenging season, has been outstanding.”

Popovich has been in regular contact with Johnson, some team officials and has talked with some players at times during his absence — but he has not been seen at games or been known to be at any practices since the stroke happened.

“I will continue to focus on my health with the hope that I can return to coaching in the future,” Popovich said.

Popovich’s visit to the team came a week after the Spurs announced that All-Star center Victor Wembanyama — the defensive player of the year favorite at the time and someone who was a serious candidate to make the All-NBA team — will not play again this season after deep vein thrombosis, or a blood clot, was found in his right shoulder.

Wembanyama, who came to San Antonio as the No. 1 pick in the 2023 draft after playing as a pro in France, has called Popovich his biggest basketball influence.

“Pop isn’t just a coach or a boss,” the 21-year-old Wembanyama said earlier this month. “Pop is a leader.”

The Spurs have not updated Popovich’s rehabilitation process in some time, other than saying that he is expected to make a full recovery. The team has not revealed what, if any, issues Popovich has been dealing with since the stroke.

Popovich agreed to a five-year contract extension with the team in 2023, one that would have him signed to be on the sideline through the 2027-28 season. His only public comment prior to Thursday about his health and his future came in mid-December, when he said he and his family were overwhelmed by “the

outpouring of support we've received during this time."

Popovich mentioned returning to coaching in that statement, but did not reveal any timetable in a self-deprecating quip. "No one is more excited to see me return to the bench than the talented individuals who have been leading my rehabilitation process," Popovich said in the December statement. "They've quickly learned that I'm less than coachable."

Popovich's record was 1,388-824 when he had the stroke, and the Spurs' record since — 22-30, all with Johnson serving as the active coach — also goes toward his career numbers by league rule, since he is still listed as the team's head coach.

No coach has been with one team for more games than Popovich, who has led the Spurs to five NBA championships and guided USA Basketball to an Olympic gold medal at the Tokyo Games in 2021.

Popovich is one of only three coaches to win the NBA coach of the year award three times, Don Nelson and Pat Riley being the others. He's one of five coaches with at least five NBA titles; Phil Jackson (11), Red Auerbach (nine), John Kundla (five) and Riley (five) are the others.

Popovich has been part of the Spurs for 35 years. He was an assistant coach from 1988-92, then returned to the club on May 31, 1994, as its executive vice president for basketball operations and general manager. He fired coach Bob Hill and appointed himself coach on Dec. 10, 1996.

Popovich has led the Spurs ever since.

"I've been blessed to be able to grow in my voice and be empowered by him in many ways," Johnson said when the Spurs were in Paris for a pair of games against the Indiana Pacers last month. "And we are in contact constantly. He is watching games, still as opinionated as he's ever been, and competitive, and what you would think — giving praise and cussing me out, all at the same time."

## **CDC report adds to evidence that HPV vaccine is preventing cervical cancer in US women**

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

A new government report adds to evidence that the HPV vaccine, once called dangerous by Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., is preventing cervical cancer in young women.

The report comes after Kennedy pledged to give a family member any fees he might earn from HPV vaccine litigation. In a 2019 video posted on the anti-vaccine nonprofit Children's Health Defense website, Kennedy called Gardasil "the most dangerous vaccine ever invented."

The new report found that from 2008 to 2022, rates for precancerous lesions decreased about 80% among 20- to 24-year-old women who were screened for cervical cancer. The estimates were published Thursday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

HPV, or human papillomavirus, is very common and is spread through sex. Most HPV infections cause no symptoms and clear up without treatment. Others develop into cancer, about 37,000 cases a year, according to the CDC.

Women in their 20s are the group most likely to have been given the HPV vaccine, which has been recommended in the U.S. since 2006 for girls at age 11 or 12 and since 2011 for boys the same age. Catch-up shots are recommended for anyone through age 26 who hasn't been vaccinated.

Jane Montealegre of MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, who was not involved in the study, called the decline dramatic and said it can be attributed to the increasing use of the safe and effective HPV vaccine.

"This should reassure parents that they're doing the right thing in getting their children vaccinated against HPV," said Montealegre, a cancer-prevention researcher.

Other countries also have reported declining rates of cervical precancer in younger and more vaccinated cohorts, she said. The U.S. doesn't have a national registry but estimates what's happening across the country by monitoring five sites.

Kennedy's financial relationship with litigation against the maker of the HPV vaccine came under scrutiny during his confirmation hearings. The health secretary has since told lawmakers that he has referred hundreds of clients to the law firm suing vaccine-maker Merck in an arrangement where he would be entitled

to 10% of contingency fees awarded.

One of Kennedy's sons, Conor, is an attorney at that law firm, WisnerBaum. In an amended ethics agreement, Kennedy said he will give any fees he earns from litigation over the HPV vaccine to "a nondependent adult family member."

## Gene Hackman was more than an everyman: An Appreciation

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — One of the greatest American actors of the 20th century was voted "least likely to succeed" by his first theater school, wasn't a star until he was 40 and possessed a face he once described as "your everyday mineworker."

Gene Hackman, a 6-foot-2 ex-Marine from Danville, Illinois, and a self-described "big lummoX kind of person," was as hard to define an actor as he was an unlikely star. "Everyman" was the most common label for Hackman, but even that seems to fall short for a performer capable of such volcanic intensity, such danger.

"He's one of the ones who are willing to plunge their arm into the fire as far as it can go," said Arthur Penn, who directed him in three films, including the one that earned Hackman his first Oscar nomination, "Bonnie and Clyde."

Hackman was found dead alongside his wife, Betsy Arakawa, and their dog in their Santa Fe, New Mexico, home, authorities said Thursday. He was 95.

Hackman's death, mourned across the film industry, renewed an old conundrum: How do you describe Gene Hackman? It was never one, easy-to-pinpoint thing that epitomized the actor. It was the totality of his live-wire screen presence. His characters were so real, you could have sworn they walked in right off the street.

Like Jimmy "Popeye" Doyle. Though one of Hackman's defining roles, in William Friedkin's "The French Connection," Hackman initially recoiled from the character's violence and racism. But in Hackman's hands, Popeye Doyle was a gritty artifact of real life. Guys like this exist. Whether a character was sympathetic or not didn't enter into it.

"That's not important to me," Hackman once said. "I want to make you believe this could be a human being."

Across an incredible array of movies — "The Conversation," "Night Moves," "The Poseidon Adventure," "Mississippi Burning," "Hoosiers," "The Birdcage," "The Royal Tenenbaums" — Hackman was, unfailingly, real. At the time of his death, it had been more than two decades since Hackman retired from acting. But time has done nothing to diminish the pugnacious rage, or the sweet sensitivity, of Hackman's finest performances.

"American movies have always had certain kinds of self-styled actors who shouldn't be stars but are," Penn said. "Gene is in the company of Bogart, Tracy, and Cagney."

That he seemed so comfortable far away from Hollywood only furthered the mythology of Hackman, who never showed even a little bit of interest in celebrity. In 2001, Hackman told The Los Angeles Times he wasn't sure where his Oscar statues were. "Maybe they're packed somewhere," he said.

"If you look at yourself as a star you've already lost something in the portrayal of any human being," Hackman told The New York Times in 1989. "I need to wear that hair shirt. I need to keep myself on the edge and keep as pure as possible."

The nature of that edge propelled Hackman through a blazing career that compressed movie star and character actor into one. Hackman sometimes spoke about the source of his drive. His father left when he was 13, departing with only a wave to his son who watched him go from a friend's yard.

"It was a real adios," Hackman told Vanity Fair. "It was so precise. Maybe that's why I became an actor. I doubt I would have become so sensitive to human behavior if that hadn't happened to me as a child — if I hadn't realized how much one small gesture can mean."

Hackman's youth was spent drifting. He quit high school after a blow-up with his basketball coach — an

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ironic beginning for an actor whose Norman Dale in "Hoosiers" is probably the quintessential hardwood mentor in movies. He joined the Marines at 16. He was a poor Marine, he said, who chafed at authority.

Years later when he was a doorman in New York, Hackman's old drill instructor walked by and muttered that he was "a sorry son of a bitch." Hackman resolved to redouble his efforts to make it as an actor. Maybe more than anything, he was fueled by an "I'll show you" attitude.

"It was like me against them," Hackman later said, "and in some way, unfortunately, I still feel that way."

Together with Robert Duvall and Dustin Hoffman (a friend from the Pasadena Playhouse, where their classmates named them both "least likely to succeed"), Hackman spent years working day jobs in New York while hustling for acting gigs.

"Our affectation was anti-establishment," Hoffman said. "Making it" meant staying pure, not selling out. "Making it" meant doing the work."

All of that living, coupled with Hackman's resistance to anything peripheral, led to one of the great acting runs of the 1970s.

Foremost in that streak was Francis Ford Coppola's "The Conversation" (1974). The role of surveillance expert Harry Caul, who overhears a murder, is unique in Hackman's filmography. Coppola had first wanted Marlon Brando for the part, and you can understand why Hackman wouldn't be your first instinct.

Hackman called Caul "a constipated character" — everything in him is churning below the surface and never comes out in any kind of release beyond melancholy saxophone playing while sitting in an apartment torn apart by paranoia. It's a straightjacket of a role for a loose-cannon actor, and it showed how Hackman can simmer without coming to a boil.

After 1973's "The Scarecrow," one of Hackman's personal favorites, he reteamed with Penn for 1975's "Night Moves," which, like "The Conversation," remains definitive of '70s New Hollywood. Hackman plays a classic archetype, a Los Angeles gumshoe, filtered through a different time and mood. Hackman's private eye, Harry Moseby, finds little moral clarity in a missing-persons case where any heroism, including his own, is hard to find. Malaise reigns.

Hackman wasn't just a 1970s leading man, though, and some of his less typical performances highlight his limitless range.

For an actor bristling head to toe with defiance to authority, he could be brilliant at embodying it. That's true of his stubborn submarine captain Frank Ramsey in "Crimson Tide" (1995) — a performance that, like Hackman's in "The French Connection," is shaded with racism. It's also true of his close-minded Republican Senator Kevin Keeley in "The Birdcage" (1996), who enters the movie an up-tight homophobe and leaves it, bewildered, dressed in drag and singing "We Are Family."

But one of Hackman's most all-encompassing roles was also his last major one. In Wes Anderson's "The Royal Tenenbaums" (2001) Hackman gave arguably the finest comedic performance of the 21st century. His Royal Tenenbaum is an absent father, an unrepentant liar, a jealous scoundrel and a total delight. It's the liveliest swan song you've ever seen.

In the glint of Royal's eye, Hackman's own zest for life comes through. (Outside of acting, Hackman wrote novels, raced cars and restored homes.) Before taking them on a city-wide escape scored to Paul Simon's "Me and Julio (Down by the Schoolyard)," he tells his grandchildren to worry less and go have some fun: "I'm talking about taking it out and chopping it up."

You couldn't memorialize Hackman anymore than you could Royal. The Tenenbaum patriarch's very fictitious, self-penned gravestone read: "Died tragically saving his family from the wreckage of a destroyed sinking battleship." Accurate? No. But close enough.

## **Malaria endures in northwest Congo as officials seek cause of illnesses that have sickened hundreds**

By CHINEDU ASADU, GUY MASELE SANGANGA and JEAN-YVES KAMALE Associated Press  
BASANKUSU, Congo (AP) — Hundreds of people have tested positive for malaria in northwest Congo as health officials try to understand what may be behind a surge of illnesses that has surpassed 1,000 cases



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and killed at least 60 people.

The World Health Organization said that while malaria — a mosquito-borne disease — is prevalent in Congo's Equateur province, it has not yet ruled out other causes. It is unclear if the outbreaks are related, the U.N. health agency said in an update Thursday.

"Detailed epidemiological and clinical investigations, as well as further laboratory testing, are (still) needed," WHO's Africa office said.

It said nearly 1,100 cases have been reported since the first outbreaks were discovered in two villages more than 100 miles apart in late January.

Africa's top public health agency said infections have been detected in at five villages and that the agency is investigating whether water or food could be the cause of the infections, along with flu and typhoid.

However, tests are "pointing toward malaria," Dr. Ngashi Ngongo of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in an online briefing Thursday.

The first infections

The first outbreak was detected in the village of Boloko after three children ate a bat and died within 48 hours. WHO has recorded 12 cases and eight deaths in Boloko. Nearly half of the people who died did so within hours of the onset of symptoms, health officials said this week.

The village of Bomate, which is around 200 kilometers (125 miles) from Boloko, has been hardest hit: 98% of the cases and 86% of deaths have been recorded in Bomate in the Basankusu health zone, WHO said. Of 571 patients in Basankusu who were tested for malaria, 309 — 54.1% — tested positive, it said.

Patients have shown common malaria symptoms such as fever and body aches. Other symptoms include chills, sweating, stiff neck, runny or bleeding nose, cough, vomiting and diarrhea.

Sickness breeds fear among residents

Eddy Djobokey said he and his family fled Bomate because they were afraid of falling sick. After they left, one of his children complained his neck and stomach hurt, suggesting he may have been infected before they fled.

"We were asked to have tests done and we are waiting for what happens next," Djobokey said.

Marthe Biyombe, said her child became infected in Bomate and was suffering from body aches and fever. She said the hospital struggled to treat her child because of a lack of medication, but that she was able to buy drugs privately and WHO doctors eventually arrived with more supplies.

"When we arrived at the hospital, we went two weeks without medicine. There were no medicines and we bought the medicines elsewhere (before) the WHO doctors came and started giving us the medicines," Biyombe said. She did not describe the drugs given to her child.

Experts say access to the sick has been hindered by the remote locations of the affected villages and that several people died before medical teams were able to reach them.

## Vatican says Pope Francis continues to improve but his prognosis remains guarded

By NICOLE WINFIELD and SILVIA STELLACCI Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis continued to improve from double pneumonia Thursday, the Vatican said, working from his hospital room and going to his private chapel to pray, though doctors said he needs more days of "clinical stability" before they revise their guarded prognosis.

The 88-year-old pope, who had part of one lung removed as a young man, was able to begin alternating high-flow supplemental oxygen, delivered by a nasal tube, with a mask in a sign of his improved respiratory condition, the Vatican said in a late update.

For the second day in a row, doctors avoided saying Francis was in critical condition. But they said that given the complexity of his lung infection, "further days of clinical stability are needed" before they revise their prognosis and decide he is out of danger.

Francis has been in Rome's Gemelli hospital since Feb. 14 after a bout of bronchitis worsened.

He has shown steady, albeit slight improvements since a respiratory crisis and kidney trouble over the

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weekend sparked fears for his life. The improvements, as he nears the two-week mark on Friday, beat back speculation of an imminent death, resignation or conclave and signaled that he was still very much in charge.

Upcoming calendar in question

Nevertheless, his near-term upcoming calendar of events was being changed: The Vatican cancelled a Holy Year audience scheduled for Saturday, and it remained to be seen if Francis would skip his Sunday noon blessing for the third week in a row. Longer term, Ash Wednesday loomed on the horizon March 5, the start of the church's Lenten season leading up to Holy Week and Easter, which this year falls on April 20.

In past years, when Francis has battled bronchitis and influenza in winter, he has had to cut back his participation in Ash Wednesday and Holy Week events, which call for the pope to be outdoors in the cold leading services, participating in processions and presiding over prayers in the solemn period in which the faithful commemorate Christ's crucifixion and resurrection.

Beyond that, Francis has a few major events coming up that he presumably would hope to keep if well enough. On April 27, he is due to canonize Carlo Acutis, considered to be the first millennial and digital-era saint. The Vatican considers the Italian teenager, who died of leukemia in 2006 at the age of 15, as an inspiring role model for today's young Catholics.

Another important appointment is the May 24 commemoration of the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicea, Christianity's first ecumenical council. The spiritual leader of the world's Orthodox Christians, Patriarch Bartholomew I, has invited Francis to join him in what is today's Iznik, Turkey to commemorate the anniversary, which he has called an important sign of reconciliation between the Catholic and Orthodox churches. Before he got sick, Francis said he hoped to go, though the Vatican hasn't confirmed the trip.

Prayers nevertheless continue

Prayers for his health continued to pour in from near and far, with a group of Mexican pilgrims in Rome for the Holy Year taking a detour to pray for Francis outside the Gemelli hospital.

Lili Iparea Fernandez, from La Cruz, Mexico, had come to Rome with plans to attend Francis' Wednesday general audience this week, but it was cancelled.

"However, we firmly believe that the pope will recover because he is a very strong man," she said Thursday outside Gemelli. "So I invite everyone to believe firmly, with certainty, with confidence, with hope that the pope is going to be well."

Francis keeps governing while being treated

By now a certain rhythm appears to have emerged from the Vatican's updates: The pope receives treatments in the morning, including respiratory physiotherapy, receives the Eucharist and resumes work in the afternoon from his hospital room. On Thursday, the Vatican said he had gone to the chapel located down the hall in the papal suite on the 10th floor of Gemelli to pray.

It was the first time since Feb. 21, before Francis' weekend respiratory crisis, that he is known to have gone to the chapel.

The Vatican said Wednesday that he had appointed four new bishops and approved the creation of a new fundraising initiative to encourage donations to the Holy See, which has been enduring a financial crisis for years.

Francis likely approved the bishop appointments a while back and the new norms for the fundraising entity were approved Feb. 11, before he was hospitalized. But the announcements made them official and suggested Francis was still very much in charge and governing.

## **At least 11 dead and scores injured in Congo after blasts at M23 rebel leaders' rally, rebels say**

By JANVIER BARHAHIGA and MONIKA PRONCZUK Associated Press

BUKAVU, Congo (AP) — At least 11 people were killed and scores injured Thursday when explosions in the eastern Congo city of Bukavu struck a rally held by leaders of the M23 rebel group, which took control of the city earlier this month.

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Rebel leaders blamed the bombing on Congo's government and said attackers were among those killed in the blasts, with conflicting reports among rebels and local officials about the number of attackers and victims. Congo's president blamed the attack on unspecified "foreign" forces.

"The attack caused 11 deaths and verifications are underway. The author of the attack is among the victims," Corneille Nangaa, leader of the Congo River Alliance (AFC), which includes the M23, told reporters. "There are 65 injured, six of whom are seriously injured and are currently being treated in the operating room."

He said that "following today's unfortunate incident, we are obliged to react."

Leaders of the M23 rebel group, including Nangaa, were meeting residents when the explosions occurred in the central part of Bukavu. Video and photos shared on social media showed a crowd fleeing the mass rally in Bukavu and bloodied bodies on the ground.

M23 accused the Congolese authorities of orchestrating the attack.

"We are accusing and condemning vigorously the criminal regime of Kinshasa, which ... just implemented its plan of exterminating civilian populations," AFC said in a statement. "This attack caused several deaths, including a few terrorists from Kinshasa and some injured. Two of them were immediately apprehended by our services."

"This cowardly and barbaric act will not be without consequences," it added.

'Change and development'

Congo's President Felix Tshisekedi called the attack "a heinous terrorist act that was perpetrated by a foreign army illegally present on Congolese soil."

The rebels are supported by about 4,000 troops from neighboring Rwanda, according to U.N. experts, and at times have vowed to march as far as Congo's capital, Kinshasa, over 1,000 miles (1,600 kilometers) away.

Jean Samy, deputy president of the civil society Forces Vives of South Kivu, told The Associated Press that the attack was "a sabotage."

"Until now, we do not know where these grenades came from," he said by phone. "We have already recorded more than 13 deaths and serious injuries who will have to have their hands and legs amputated. The perpetrators of this act are still unknown."

Nangaa was among leaders leaving the podium when two blasts rocked the scene, according to a journalist present at the rally. Nangaa had earlier told the rally that M23 was bringing "change and development" to their city.

Three-week offensive

Rwandan-backed M23 rebels have swept through the region seizing key cities and killing some 3,000 people in the most significant escalation of conflict in over a decade.

In a lightning three-week offensive, the M23 took control of eastern Congo's main city Goma and seized the second largest city, Bukavu. The region is rich in gold and coltan, a key mineral for the production of capacitors used in most consumer electronics such as laptops and smartphones.

Rwanda has accused Congo of enlisting ethnic Hutu fighters responsible for the 1994 genocide in Rwanda of minority Tutsis and moderate Hutus.

M23 says it's fighting to protect Tutsis and Congolese of Rwandan origin from discrimination and wants to transform Congo from a failed state to a modern one. Analysts have called those pretexts for Rwanda's involvement.

'We stand at a crossroads'

On Thursday, Congo's authorities and the U.N. said \$2.54 billion was needed to fund humanitarian assistance in the country this year.

"This funding is crucial to deliver lifesaving assistance to 11 million people – including 7.8 million internally displaced persons, one of the highest displacement figures globally – out of 21.2 million Congolese affected by multiple crises: armed conflict, natural disasters, and epidemics," the U.N. said in a statement.

"All warning signals are flashing red," Bruno Lemarquis, the U.N. humanitarian coordinator for Congo said. "We stand at a crossroads. Without increased international mobilization, humanitarian needs will skyrocket, regional stability will be further jeopardized, and our capacity to respond will be severely compromised."

## Long champions of social justice, Black athletes say their voices are needed now more than ever

By ALANIS THAMES AP Sports Writer

For WNBA veteran Natasha Cloud, speaking up about social justice is just as important as winning basketball games.

Cloud has had a successful nine-year pro career that includes a WNBA championship and being the career-assists leader for her former Washington Mystics. She has also used her platform for social justice advocacy — from sitting out the 2020 WNBA season to focus on community reform efforts, to joining protests after the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police.

If winning “is all I do with my career, then I have failed,” said Cloud, who now plays for the Connecticut Sun. “Who would I be to not utilize practice time and camera time and all these things to create change within the communities that mean the most to me?”

Cloud believes it’s more imperative than ever for athletes across American professional sports to speak out against racial discrimination in the face of President Donald Trump’s sweeping orders to end government diversity, equity and inclusion programs, and as corporations and major institutions face pressure to roll back DEI policies aimed at creating opportunities for minority groups.

“The systems of power are working as they always were intended to work,” Cloud said. “And it’s time to break down a system that has only been about white men.”

Athletes have long used sports as a forum for civil rights activism, but today’s sports figures have a unique position of influence, with more money and celebrity status than ever, and social media to get their message to millions.

With that also comes the potential for backlash and retaliation. Speaking out could cost their reputations, their connections, their careers, experts say.

It’s a danger Black athletes have always faced, whether boxing great Muhammad Ali risking his freedom to take an anti-war stance in the 1960s, or more recently, NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick putting his job on the line to denounce police brutality in Black communities.

Black athletes who speak out for political or social change have often paid a price for their actions.

“One of the most definitive characteristics of pursuit of social justice, particularly by athletes today, is the idea of sacrifice,” said Len Elmore, a former NBA player and now a senior lecturer in sports management at Columbia University. “They have to be willing to sacrifice because the broad society for a period of time — as it did to those past heroes — is going to penalize you.”

A ‘fight for human dignity’

With his attempt to abolish diversity and inclusion programs, Trump has sought to ban transgender athletes from girls’ and women’s sports and has directed schools and universities to eliminate diversity initiatives or risk losing federal money. That includes no longer teaching material dealing with race and sexuality — part of his effort to end “wokeness” in schools.

Companies — including Target, Google, Walmart and McDonald’s — have scaled back or set aside diversity initiatives endorsed by much of corporate America during a 2020 nationwide reckoning on race to help root out systemic barriers that have hindered the advancement of marginalized groups.

“On a basic level, it’s just a fight for human dignity and human rights,” said Joseph N. Cooper, a professor of Counseling, School Psychology and Sport at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

While he doesn’t believe the weight of social justice reform should solely fall on the shoulders of Black athletes, Cooper said it’s important for sports stars to leverage their visibility to champion causes they’re passionate about.

Cloud, who used her social media to call for WNBA arenas to serve as polling places for the 2020 presidential election and helped with voter registration, believes the NBA and WNBA — where African American players are in the majority — should stand with the communities their players come from, as many feel the social and economic progress of Black Americans is in jeopardy.

“I understand the business aspect and I understand the human aspect,” Cloud said. “Too often this

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country has put the human aspect aside, and put profit and money over people.”

Both the NBA and WNBA featured the “Black Lives Matter” rallying cry on the courts in 2020 and partnered with players to find outlets for tangible social justice action. This included creating the NBA Foundation to spur economic growth in the Black community, with an initial contribution of \$300 million over the next decade.

Often individual players have taken the first bold steps in mixing sports and politics.

During Trump’s first administration, the NBA’s LeBron James and Stephen Curry were among athletes who declined visits to the White House normally given to championship-winning teams.

Curry and his wife Ayesha endorsed Joe Biden for president during the 2020 Democratic National Convention. James headlined the “More Than A Vote” Campaign, formed soon after police shot and killed Floyd and Breonna Taylor, to target systemic voter suppression and encourage Black people to vote.

“I’m not saying that their activism and decision to not go to the White House was a primary or even a major factor in the outcome of the 2020 election,” Cooper said. “But no doubt, those athletes and athletes who have similar profiles as them leveraging their platform to promote freedom, human rights ... it’s extremely powerful.”

‘It takes a special type of person’

Jaylen Brown of the NBA’s Boston Celtics has more than 4.7 million followers across Instagram and X and for years has used his social media accounts to draw attention to social justice causes and boost small businesses.

Brown marched with protesters in Minneapolis in the days after video was released of Floyd’s May 2020 death. He created a foundation that partners with social justice organizations to create opportunities for youth in traditionally underserved communities.

“I use my platform to try to bring light to a lot of different things and situations to get people to think differently,” Brown said. “But also to provide solutions.”

Elmore, who played in the American Basketball Association from 1974-1976 and with the NBA from 1976-1984 after the two leagues merged, said it’s not incumbent on any athlete to pursue social justice just because they have a platform.

“But, you know, it wasn’t incumbent upon Ali,” he said. “It wasn’t incumbent upon Colin Kaepernick. They did it because they recognized the righteousness of their actions. They recognized the need.”

Kaepernick, who led the San Francisco 49ers to the Super Bowl in 2012, sacrificed his career.

He has not played in the NFL since kneeling during the national anthem during the 2016 season, and became one of the most polarizing figures in modern sports. Fans urged boycotts of companies aligned with him. Trump denounced his actions and said he and any player who knelt during the anthem should be fired by the NFL.

“I think that’s not lost on athletes today who are making an awful lot of money, gain a great deal of celebrity and adulation,” Elmore said. “Who really wants to lose that? Who wants to put that in jeopardy?”

“It takes a special type of person — a special group of people to be able to do that,” he added. “Or it takes a desperation. And the question is, are we at that desperate moment?”

## Gene Hackman, found dead at 95, was one of Hollywood’s most respected actors

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

Gene Hackman, the prolific Oscar-winning actor whose studied portraits ranged from reluctant heroes to conniving villains and made him one of the industry’s most respected and honored performers, has been found dead along with his wife at their home. He was 95.

Hackman was a frequent and versatile presence on screen from the 1960s until his retirement. His dozens of films included the Academy Award favorites “The French Connection” and “Unforgiven,” a breakout performance in “Bonnie and Clyde,” a classic bit of farce in “Young Frankenstein,” a turn as the comic book villain Lex Luthor in “Superman” and the title character in Wes Anderson’s 2001 “The Royal Tenenbaums.”

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He seemed capable of any kind of role — whether an uptight buffoon in “Birdcage,” a college coach finding redemption in the sentimental favorite “Hoosiers” or a secretive surveillance expert in Francis Ford Coppola’s Watergate-era release “The Conversation.”

“Gene Hackman a great actor, inspiring and magnificent in his work and complexity,” Coppola said on Instagram. “I mourn his loss, and celebrate his existence and contribution.”

Although self-effacing and unfashionable, Hackman held special status within Hollywood — heir to Spencer Tracy as an everyman, actor’s actor, curmudgeon and reluctant celebrity. He embodied the ethos of doing his job, doing it very well, and letting others worry about his image. Beyond the obligatory appearances at awards ceremonies, he was rarely seen on the social circuit and made no secret of his disdain for the business side of show business.

“Actors tend to be shy people,” he told Film Comment in 1988. “There is perhaps a component of hostility in that shyness, and to reach a point where you don’t deal with others in a hostile or angry way, you choose this medium for yourself. ... Then you can express yourself and get this wonderful feedback.”

A late but promising start

He was an early retiree — essentially done, by choice, with movies by his mid-70s — and a late bloomer. Hackman was 35 when cast for “Bonnie and Clyde” and past 40 when he won his first Oscar, as the rule-bending New York City detective Jimmy “Popeye” Doyle in the 1971 thriller about tracking down Manhattan drug smugglers, “The French Connection.”

Jackie Gleason, Steve McQueen and Peter Boyle were among the actors considered for Doyle. Hackman was a minor star at the time, seemingly without the flamboyant personality that the role demanded, and in fear he was miscast. A couple of weeks of nighttime police patrols in Harlem helped reassure him.

One of the first scenes of “The French Connection” required Hackman to slap around a suspect. The actor realized he had failed to achieve the intensity that the scene required, and asked director William Friedkin for another chance. The scene was filmed at the end of the shooting, by which time Hackman had immersed himself in his loose-cannon character. Friedkin would recall needing 37 takes to get the scene right.

“I had to arouse an anger in Gene that was lying dormant, I felt, within him — that he was sort of ashamed of and didn’t really want to revisit,” Friedkin told the Los Angeles Review of Books in 2012.

The most famous sequence was dangerously realistic: A car chase in which Det. Doyle speeds under elevated subway tracks, his brown Pontiac (driven by a stuntman) screeching into areas that the filmmakers had not received permits for. When Doyle crashes into a white Ford, it wasn’t a stuntman driving the other car, but a New York City resident who didn’t know a movie was being made.

Reluctant role reaps reward

Hackman also resisted the role which brought him his second Oscar. When Clint Eastwood first offered him Little Bill Daggett, the corrupt town boss in “Unforgiven,” Hackman turned it down. But he realized that Eastwood was planning to make a different kind of Western, a critique, not a celebration of violence. The film won him the Academy Award as best supporting actor of 1992.

“To his credit, and my joy, he talked me into it,” Hackman said of Eastwood during an interview with the American Film Institute.

Eugene Allen Hackman was born in San Bernardino, California, and grew up in Danville, Illinois, where his father worked as a pressman for the Commercial-News. His parents fought repeatedly, and his father often used his fists on Gene to take out his rage. The boy found refuge in movie houses, identifying with such screen rebels as Errol Flynn and James Cagney as his role models.

When Gene was 13, his father waved goodbye and drove off, never to return. The abandonment left lasting scars. His mother had become an alcoholic and was constantly at odds with her mother, with whom the shattered family lived (Gene had a younger brother, actor Richard Hackman). At 16, he “suddenly got the itch to get out.” Lying about his age, he enlisted in the U.S. Marines.

“Dysfunctional families have sired a lot of pretty good actors,” he observed ironically during a 2001 interview with The New York Times.

Nomadic career path leads to stage

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His brawling and resistance to authority led to his being demoted from corporal three times. His taste for show business was whetted when he conquered his mic fright and became disc jockey and news announcer on his unit's radio station.

With a high school degree he earned during his time as a Marine, Hackman enrolled in journalism at the University of Illinois. He dropped out after six months to study radio announcing in New York. After working at stations in Florida and his hometown of Danville, he returned to New York to study painting at the Art Students League. Hackman switched again to enter an acting course at the Pasadena Playhouse.

Back in New York, he found work as a doorman and truck driver among other jobs waiting for a break as an actor, sweating it out with such fellow hopefuls as Robert Duvall and Dustin Hoffman. Summer work at a theater on Long Island led to roles off-Broadway and Hackman began attracting attention from Broadway producers. He received good notices in such plays as "Any Wednesday," with Sandy Dennis, and "Poor Richard," with Alan Bates.

During a tryout in New Haven for another play, Hackman was seen by film director Robert Rossen, who hired him for a brief role in "Lilith," which starred Warren Beatty and Jean Seberg. He played small roles in other films, including "Hawaii," and leads in television dramas of the early 1960s such as "The Defenders" and "Naked City, before Beatty helped change his career.

When Beatty began work on "Bonnie and Clyde," which he produced and starred in, he remembered Hackman and cast him as bank robber Clyde Barrow's outgoing brother. Pauline Kael in *The New Yorker* called Hackman's work "a beautifully controlled performance, the best in the film," and he was nominated for an Academy Award as supporting actor.

Near misses and a star-making turn

Hackman nearly appeared in another immortal film of 1967, "The Graduate." He was supposed to play the cuckolded husband of Mrs. Robinson (Anne Bancroft), but director Mike Nichols decided he was too young and replaced him with Murray Hamilton. Two years later, he was considered for what became one of television's most famous roles, patriarch Mike Brady of "The Brady Bunch." Producer Sherwood Schwartz wanted Hackman to audition, but network executives thought he was too obscure. (The part went to Robert Reed).

Hackman's first starring film role came in 1970 with "I Never Sang for My Father," as a man struggling to deal with a failed relationship with his dying father, Melvyn Douglas. Because of Hackman's distress over his own father, he resisted connecting to the role.

In his 2001 *Times* interview, he recalled: "Douglas told me, 'Gene, you'll never get what you want with the way you're acting.' And he didn't mean acting; he meant I was not behaving myself. He taught me not to use my reservations as an excuse for not doing the job." Even though he had the central part, Hackman was Oscar-nominated as supporting actor and Douglas as lead. The following year he won the Oscar as best actor for "The French Connection."

Through the years, Hackman kept working, in pictures good and bad. For a time he seemed to be in a contest with Michael Caine for the world's busiest Oscar winner. In 2001 alone, he appeared in "The Mexican," "Heartbreakers," "Heist," "The Royal Tenenbaums" and "Behind Enemy Lines." But by 2004, he was openly talking about retirement, telling Larry King he had no projects lined up. His only credit in recent years was narrating a Smithsonian Channel documentary, "The Unknown Flag Raiser of Iwo Jima."

In 1956, Hackman married Fay Maltese, a bank teller he had met at a YMCA dance in New York. They had a son, Christopher, and two daughters, Elizabeth and Leslie, but divorced in the mid-1980s. In 1991 he married Betsy Arakawa, a classical pianist.

When not on film locations, Hackman enjoyed painting, stunt flying, stock car racing and deep sea diving. In his latter years, he wrote novels and lived on his ranch in Santa Fe, New Mexico, on a hilltop looking out on the Colorado Rockies, a view he preferred to his films that popped up on television.

"I'll watch maybe five minutes of it," he once told *Time* magazine, "and I'll get this icky feeling, and I turn the channel."

## Katy Perry and Gayle King will join Jeff Bezos' fiancée Lauren Sanchez on Blue Origin spaceflight

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Katy Perry and Gayle King are headed to space with Jeff Bezos' fiancée Lauren Sanchez and three other women.

Bezos' rocket company Blue Origin announced the all-female celebrity crew on Thursday.

Sanchez, a helicopter pilot and former TV journalist, picked the crew who will join her on a 10-minute spaceflight from West Texas, the company said. They will blast off sometime this spring aboard a New Shepard rocket. No launch date was given.

Blue Origin has flown tourists on short hops to space since 2021. Some passengers have gotten free rides, while others have paid a hefty sum to experience weightlessness. It was not immediately known who's footing the bill for this upcoming flight.

Sanchez invited singer Perry and TV journalist King, as well as a former NASA rocket scientist who now heads an engineering firm Aisha Bowe, research scientist Amanda Nguyen and movie producer Kerianne Flynn.

This will be Blue Origin's 11th human spaceflight. Bezos climbed aboard with his brother for the inaugural flight.

## Today in History: February 28, the Waco Siege begins

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, Feb. 28, the 59th day of 2025. There are 306 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Feb. 28, 1993, a gun battle erupted at a religious compound near Waco, Texas, when Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agents tried to arrest Branch Davidian leader David Koresh on weapons charges; four agents and six Davidians were killed as a 51-day standoff began.

Also on this date:

In 1844, a 12-inch gun aboard the USS Princeton exploded as the ship was sailing on the Potomac River, killing Secretary of State Abel P. Upshur, Navy Secretary Thomas W. Gilmer and several others; President John Tyler, who also was aboard the ship, was uninjured.

In 1953, Francis H.C. Crick announced that he and fellow scientist James D. Watson had discovered the double-helix structure of DNA.

In 1975, 43 people were killed in London's Underground when a train failed to stop at Moorgate station, smashing into the end of a tunnel.

In 1983, the final episode of the television series "M(asterisk)A(asterisk)S(asterisk)H" aired; nearly 106 million viewers saw the finale, which remains the most-watched episode of any U.S. television series to date.

In 1986, Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme was assassinated while walking on a Stockholm street with his wife; his assailant was never captured and remains unidentified.

In 2013, Benedict XVI became the first pope in 600 years to resign, ending an eight-year pontificate. (Benedict was succeeded the following month by Pope Francis.)

In 2014, delivering a blunt warning to Moscow, President Barack Obama expressed deep concern over reported military activity inside Ukraine by Russia and warned "there will be costs" for any intervention.

Today's birthdays: Architect Frank Gehry is 96. Rock singer Sam the Sham (aka Domingo Samudio) is 88. Actor-director-choreographer Tommy Tune is 86. Hall of Fame auto racer Mario Andretti is 85. Actor Mercedes Ruehl is 77. Actor-singer Bernadette Peters is 77. Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Krugman is 72. Basketball Hall of Famer Adrian Dantley is 70. Actor John Turturro is 68. Actor Maxine Bahns is 55. Actor Robert Sean Leonard is 56. Musician Pat Monahan (Train) is 56. Actor Tasha Smith is 54. Hockey Hall of Famer Eric Lindros is 52. Actor Ali Larter is 49. Country musician Jason Aldean is 48. NBA guard Luka Dončić is 26.