

# Groton Daily Independent

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## **Sunday, March 16**

Open Gym: 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.  
United Methodist: Worship 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.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; 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.

## **Monday, March 17**

### **St. PATRICK'S DAY**

Senior Menu: Corned beef cabbage, mashed potatoes, pistachio pudding salad, corn muffin.

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



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

St. John's Lutheran: Christian Literature Circle, 7:30 p.m.

School Breakfast: French toast.

School Lunch: Turkey gravy over mashed potatoes.

Groton Senior Citizens Meet, 1 p.m., Groton Community Center

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

## **Tuesday, March 18**

Senior Menu: Parmesan chicken breast, wild rice, italian blend, cinnamon apple sauce, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Scones.

School Lunch: Pasta with meat sauce.

Middle School Talent Show, 7 p.m., GHS Gym

City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.

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

United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

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## *Groton Area March Students of the Month*



**Brooklyn Hansen**  
Senior



**Mia Crank**  
Junior



**McKenna Tietz**  
Sophomore



**Braydn Wipf**  
Freshman



**Jordan Schwan**  
Eighth Grade



**Sophia Fliehs**  
Seventh Grade



**Rylee Stoltenburg**  
Sixth Grade

Groton Area School works to ensure that all levels of academic instruction also include the necessary life skills teaching, practicing, and modeling that encourages essential personal life habits that are universally understood to facilitate helping our students become good human beings and citizens.

It is learning with our heads, hearts, and hands to be caring and civil, to make healthy decisions, to effectively problem solve, to be respectful and responsible, to be good citizens, and to be empathetic and ethical individuals.

Students are selected based on individual student growth in the areas of: positive behavior, citizenship, good attendance, a thirst for knowledge, and high academic standards.

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Bates Township Board of Supervisors reminds all landowners and tenants that the road right-of-way extends 33 feet from the center of the township road. This ditch is to be maintained and mowed. Any crops planted in the road right-of-way will be mowed and expenses charged to the landowner.

Landowner is responsible for spraying all noxious weeds.

Bates Township Board of Supervisors

Betty Geist

Township Clerk

Published March 5 and 12, 2025 at the total approximate cost of \$11.59 and may be viewed free of charge at [www.sdpublicnotices.com](http://www.sdpublicnotices.com). 25322



Bates Township Equalization Meeting Notice:

The Bates Township Board of Equalization will meet at the Clerk's home on Tuesday, March 18th, 2025 at 6:30 pm.

All persons disputing their assessments are requested to notify the clerk prior to the meeting.

Betty Geist

Bates Township Clerk

14523 409th Ave

Conde, SD 57434

Published March 5 and 12, 2025 at the total approximate cost of \$10.49 and may be viewed free of charge at [www.sdpublicnotices.com](http://www.sdpublicnotices.com). 25321



Groton Township will be having its equalization meeting on March 19, 2025 at 7 p.m. at Love to Travel, 8 E. US Hwy 12, Groton. Prior notification required.

Layne Howard, Clerk



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### COMMENTARY

## The process that could allow concealed guns in bars was a joke, but the bill isn't

by Mary Garrigan

Two guys walk into a bar in South Dakota.

Come July 1, the punchline is that they could legally bring concealed pistols with them, unless Gov. Larry Rhoden vetoes HB 1218.

On March 12, the South Dakota Legislature voted to repeal a current state law that says "a person may not carry a concealed pistol in any licensed on-sale malt beverage or alcoholic beverage establishment that derives over one-half of its total income from the sale of malt or alcoholic beverages."

This legislation is bad for many reasons, the most obvious being that alcohol and firearms do not mix.

We know that alcohol lowers inhibitions and reduces

impulse control. We know that easy access to a gun in those situations increases the likelihood that it will be misused during a confrontation. And we know that whenever a gun is involved in an impulsive mistake it raises the chances that injury or death will be the result.

That's why Rep. Steve Duffy, R-Rapid City, voted against HB 1218. "This is crazy. When you mix booze and guns I don't know how you can expect anything good to happen. Sooner or later, there's going to be trouble," Duffy said.

Duffy grew up in a family that owned the Chateau bar and restaurant, a well-known Fort Pierre hospitality spot where the drinks were strong and the steaks were tender. He's seen tempers flare and altercations ensue in bars over something as small as an eyebrow raised in the wrong direction. Some of the people involved, he said on the House floor, are "only not dead because there wasn't a gun or a knife in the room."

Rep. Erin Healy, D-Sioux Falls, co-owns a bar with her husband. They want the law that prohibits concealed carry in bars to remain in effect. Instead, it was struck down by a late-in-the-session amendment in a process that didn't give Healy's husband, or other bar owners, a chance to comment.



**A bartender at DaDa Gastropub mixes a drink on Nov. 5, 2024, in Sioux Falls.** (Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

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HB 1218 began life on Feb. 4 as a bill to prevent cities and counties from imposing firearm restrictions on their employees and volunteers while on or in city or county property (so much for that all-important conservative talking point about local control).

In that form, the bill passed the House of Representatives and a Senate committee. On March 10, during the legislative session's final week, the Senate amended the legislation to include the repeal of the ban on concealed pistols in bars. The amendment came from Sen. Mykala Voita, R-Bonesteel, who also sponsored a separate bill sent to the governor's desk that would allow concealed handguns on college campuses.

The timing of the amendment shielded it from the regular legislative process. That lack of transparency is another reason the legislation is bad, said Nathan Sanderson, executive director of the South Dakota Retailers Association.

"The last-minute amendment that ended the current ban on concealed pistols in bars should have had a committee hearing," Sanderson said. "Small business owners deserved the right to share how this change would impact them."

Proponents of the bill say other laws will protect the public from problems that may arise from guns in bars. In theory, yes. In practice, not so much.

While intoxicated people can't legally carry a gun, what bar employee wants to be the person tasked with telling them that, or disarming them? And the laws against murder or manslaughter are cold comfort to the bar patron who is already dead, perhaps caught in the crossfire of two hot-headed people with guns.

Proponents also note that bar owners currently have the right to post a sign forbidding guns in their establishments, and they will still have that right if HB 1218 becomes law. But in the reality of our current gun culture, where more guns are seen as the answer to every public safety issue, the Second Amendment extremists who rule the Legislature have so normalized the idea that guns belong everywhere — from college classrooms to cocktail hour — that we have all become desensitized to it.

Justin Henrichsen, owner of the Windsor Block bar in Rapid City and two other alcohol establishments, believes alcohol and guns are a bad mix, but said he probably won't bother to post a sign saying "No Guns Allowed." His clientele isn't prone to rowdy over-consumption in any case, and he doubts a sign would stop people who conceal-carry.

Henrichsen's attitude is understandable, of course, given the glorification of guns in this state. But I suspect there are plenty of alcohol retailers who hate this bill, and I'm hoping they contact Gov. Rhoden.

Rhoden is no doubt a strong supporter of the Second Amendment, but he can be that and still veto this bill.

First of all, the 2019 Legislature and then-Gov. Kristi Noem kept the ban on concealed pistols in bars when they struck down the requirement to get a permit for a concealed handgun. All conservative Republicans must agree that was a fine law, right?

Secondly, the bar legislation was passed without proper public input. If allowing guns in bars is a good idea this year, what's the harm in postponing it until next year and subjecting it to an open process?

The people most affected — bar owners and patrons, like me, who want the right to enjoy a cocktail without worrying about loaded guns in pockets and purses around us — should be heard. And that's no joke.

*Mary Garrigan is a retired newspaper reporter and current member of the South Dakota chapter of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America. She lives in Rapid City, where she served on the Rapid City Public Library's board of directors from 2019 through 2024.*

## Testimony wraps up in Greenpeace trial with jury expected to get case early next week

BY: MARY STEURER - MARCH 15, 2025 9:57 AM

MANDAN, N.D. — A jury of nine early next week will decide the \$300 million case accusing Greenpeace of concocting a scheme to undermine the Dakota Access Pipeline.

The environmental group is on trial in Morton County District Court over claims that it incited illegal acts by protesters in North Dakota that cost the developer of the pipeline millions in alleged property damages, lost revenue and other unexpected costs. Energy Transfer also claims Greenpeace waged a misinformation campaign against the company in an effort to stop the project.

Greenpeace was one of many activist groups involved in the demonstrations, which took place in 2016 and 2017 near Cannon Ball, North Dakota, and drew thousands of attendees. The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe started the protests in opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline, which it sees as an affront to tribal sovereignty and a pollution threat.

Greenpeace denies all of Energy Transfer's claims and has called the lawsuit an underhanded effort to hurt the environmental movement.

The environmental group wrapped up its testimony on Thursday in the trial that began Feb. 24. Closing arguments are expected to take place Monday. After that, the jury will have to weigh several claims.

For one, jurors will decide if Greenpeace is liable for trespassing, nuisance and depriving Energy Transfer of its property. They'll also have to make a decision as to whether the organization aided and abetted others to do the same.

Six employees of Greenpeace's U.S. affiliate went to the protests, according to evidence shown in court. Energy Transfer claims Greenpeace personnel trespassed on its land, vandalized its equipment and deliberately blocked construction crews from working.

The environmental group also provided supplies, training and intel to Dakota Access Pipeline protesters, witnesses testified during the trial. Energy Transfer attorneys say their evidence suggests that protesters used these resources to engage in criminal behavior against the pipeline.

Greenpeace has countered that Energy Transfer has presented no proof directly linking it to any illegal acts by demonstrators, and that its involvement in the protests was peripheral.

Greenpeace USA isn't the only Greenpeace organization named in the lawsuit. Two others — Greenpeace International and Greenpeace Fund — are also defendants. Both say they never had any employees visit the protests, nor provided any money to the cause.

Energy Transfer says that the three groups are inextricably linked and are all responsible for the alleged damages.



**Opponents of the Dakota Access Pipeline camp near the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation on Nov. 30, 2016.** (Scott Olson/Getty Images)

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The company also accuses Greenpeace of publishing nine defamatory statements about the Dakota Access Pipeline.

These statements fall into three categories:

That the Dakota Access Pipeline goes through tribal land;

That Energy Transfer deliberately destroyed sacred cultural sites during the pipeline's construction; and

That protesters faced violence by law enforcement and private security hired by Energy Transfer.

The jury will consider whether the statements are false and whether they were published by Greenpeace. If they decide yes, the jurors would also have to weigh whether Greenpeace knew the statements were false or showed reckless disregard for the truth in publishing them. The jury would also have to conclude that Energy Transfer suffered an injury from the statements.

Over the course of the trial, Energy Transfer attorneys underlined that many Greenpeace employees did not reach out to company representatives or law enforcement to get their perspectives before making the statements.

Current and former employees for Greenpeace who testified in the case maintained that the statements originated with Standing Rock leaders and people on the ground at the protests, and that they had no reason to doubt the claims at the time they wrote about them. Many said they still stand by the statements.

Greenpeace has also argued that countless other organizations — including media outlets and other activist groups — circulated the claims well before the environmental group did.

Most of the statements were issued or co-signed by Greenpeace USA. Greenpeace International was only involved in two of the nine statements, both of which came from an open letter published on Nov. 30, 2016 urging banks to divest from the Dakota Access Pipeline. Greenpeace Fund says it had nothing to do with any of the nine statements.

Energy Transfer also says the on-the-ground damages it claims resulted from the Dakota Access Pipeline protests, as well as the alleged defamatory statements, hurt its business relationships.

The company alleges that Greenpeace's actions delayed the completion of the pipeline, forcing it to lose out on revenue. It also claims that Greenpeace caused banks to pull their support for Energy Transfer, causing it to incur unexpected financing costs.

Energy Transfer accuses all three Greenpeace defendants of coordinating with one another in order to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline.

*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.*

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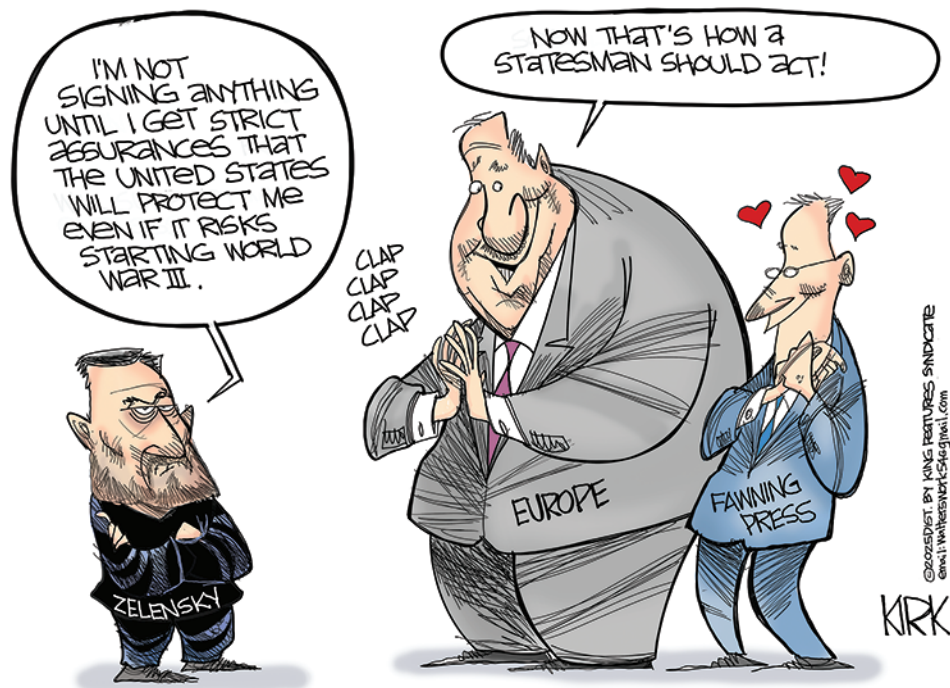


## THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE

*Behold, a whirlwind  
of the Lord is gone  
forth in fury,  
even a grievous  
whirlwind:  
it shall fall  
grievously upon  
the head of  
the wicked. JEREMIAH 23:19* 🌀



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## BIBLE

## TRIVIA

by Wilson Casey

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

2. From what book does a woman call on the north and south wind to blow on her garden? *Proverbs, Daniel, Hebrews, Song of Solomon*

3. What was Herod's last name who had John the Baptist beheaded? *Pilate, Laban, Herod, Antipas*

4. Who said in Deuteronomy 6, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord"? *Moses, Joshua, David, Jacob*

5. From Exodus 16, what bird served as food for the Israelites in the wilderness? *Dove, Quail, Duck, Robin*

6. In Revelation 9, what sort of creatures had tails like snakes? *Sheep, Oxen, Horses, Fish*

ANSWERS: 1) Neither, 2) Song of Solomon, 3) Antipas, 4) Moses, 5) Quail, 6) Horses

*Hardcore trivia fan? Visit Wilson Casey's subscribersite at [www.patreon.com/triviaguy](http://www.patreon.com/triviaguy).*

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## LOWLAND STATION.

A STORM HAS TRAPPED A GROUP OF TRAVELERS IN THE KOMOK'S BRIDE PUB...

...WHERE SIX STRANGERS SHARE THEIR ENCOUNTERS WITH THE ALIEN WARRIOR

# FLASH GORDON

DOCTOR TYR IS AN ALCHEMIST, AN OCCULT SCIENTIST...

...FROM THE INFERNAL CAVE NATION OF KIRA.

WHERE THE ONLY OUTLET FOR HER BRILLIANCE WAS THE CRAFTING OF HORROR.

DAN SCHKADE  
ART TED  
BY NAIFEH  
3-16-25



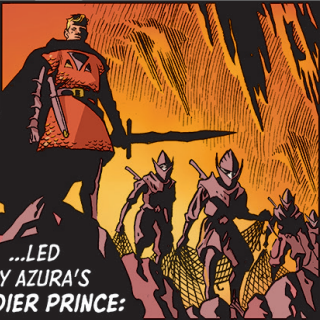
AFTER YEARS OF SERVING THE WITCH-QUEEN AZURA, SHE WAS APPROACHED BY A PEER FROM ANOTHER WORLD -- DOCTOR HANS ZARKOV.



HE OFFERED THE KIRAN ALCHEMISTS THE CHANCE TO DEFECT TO THE REVOLUTION AGAINST MING.

IN SECRET, THEY CLEFT OFF THROUGH THE CAVERNS...

...ONLY TO BE CAUGHT BY A SQUAD OF SKELS...



...LED BY AZURA'S SOLDIER PRINCE:

A BRAINWASHED FLASH GORDON.



BUT FLASH REFUSED TO LET HIS MEN KILL THEIR PRISONERS...



...ALLOWING TYR AND ZARKOV TO ESCAPE.

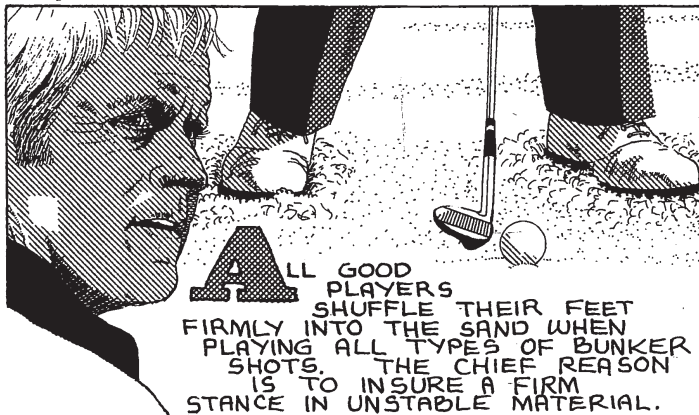


ZARKOV WENT BACK FOR FLASH...

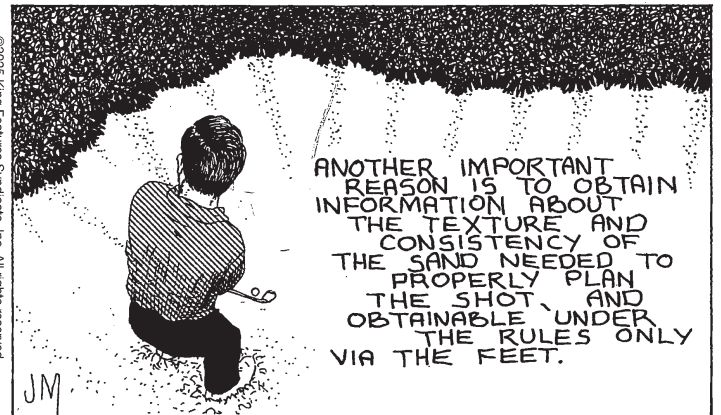
...A MAN TYR FEARS TO THIS DAY.

NEXT: THE FLAGMAN

## Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS



ALL GOOD PLAYERS SHUFFLE THEIR FEET FIRMLY INTO THE SAND WHEN PLAYING ALL TYPES OF BUNKER SHOTS. THE CHIEF REASON IS TO INSURE A FIRM STANCE IN UNSTABLE MATERIAL.



ANOTHER IMPORTANT REASON IS TO OBTAIN INFORMATION ABOUT THE TEXTURE AND CONSISTENCY OF THE SAND NEEDED TO PROPERLY PLAN THE SHOT, AND OBTAINABLE UNDER THE RULES ONLY VIA THE FEET.



## Anesthesia Required for Colonoscopy Has a Very Low Risk of Delirium

DEAR DR. ROACH: My husband, who is 71, has been having some short-term memory problems over the past two years. We recently saw his primary care doctor, who asked him some questions and had him do a few tasks. He did fail a few of them. She agreed that there was something going on, and now we have to wait to see a neurologist.

He has an appointment for a colonoscopy next month, and I'm concerned about how the anesthesia will affect his already compromised short-term memory. I saw the same thing happen with my father; he was having the same issues and broke his leg, which required surgery. He was never the same afterward. He couldn't live on his own anymore and required memory

care right away. I have been told by medical staff at the hospital that this sometimes happens after a surgery because of anesthesia.

What are your thoughts about my husband's upcoming colonoscopy? Should I be worried about what this will do to his memory issues? -- S.L.

ANSWER: There are many kinds of memory issues that can affect older adults, and while Alzheimer's disease is the most common, this does not mean that your husband has it. Getting an evaluation by a neurologist is an excellent idea.

Anesthesia does not cause dementia. However, some people, like your father, do develop a complication called postoperative delirium. Delirium is different from dementia because it comes on quickly. The cause is almost always identifiable, whether it's due to medical illness, surgery, infection, low oxygen, metabolic abnormalities (such as sodium levels), etc. Delirium can last for a very long time and often unmask dementia that had been previously well-controlled.

The risk of delirium after the usual medication for a colonoscopy is small. The inhalation agents given in general anesthesia are much more likely to cause delirium. While a colonoscopy can be performed without sedation, in my opinion, the risk of delirium after a colonoscopy with the usual sedation is so low that it is not necessary to forgo it.

\*\*\*

DEAR DR. ROACH: My son is being tested for mixed connective tissue disease (MCTD) and rheumatoid arthritis (RA) due to joint pain. Can you tell me more about this disease, and can he recover from it or live with it? -- D.D.

ANSWER: Both RA and MCTD are rheumatologic diseases that affect many systems of the body. MCTD is often considered an overlap syndrome as it has features that resemble lupus, systemic sclerosis (scleroderma), RA, and polymyositis. Disease of the blood vessels can be a major problem with MCTD, including pulmonary artery hypertension.

Both RA and MCTD are serious diseases. Joint pain is a hallmark symptom of both diseases, but they commonly affect the skin and may also affect the lungs, heart and kidneys, as well as various parts of the nervous, hematologic and gastrointestinal systems.

Treatment for MCTD for many years was steroids, but hydroxychloroquine has become a useful part of the treatment regimen and has less toxicity than long-term steroids. Unfortunately, the strong effectiveness of biological agents in people with RA is not seen in people with MCTD.

I can't emphasize enough how important it is to have an expert rheumatologist as the diagnosis is not always straightforward. Interpreting the laboratory and clinical findings requires judgment and experience. A referral to a specialty hospital may be worthwhile.

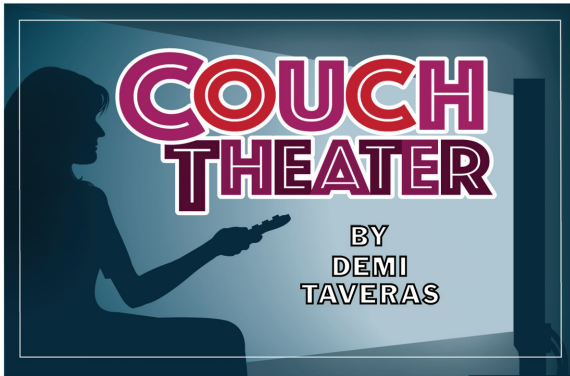
Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to [ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu](mailto:ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu).

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"The Residence" (TV-MA) -- This whodunnit series hails from the production company Shondaland, which is run by television guru Shonda Rhimes ("Scandal," "How to Get Away with Murder," and many more). Led by the charming Uzo Aduba ("Orange Is the New Black"), the eight-



**Edwina Findley, left, and Uzo Aduba star in "The Residence."** Courtesy of Netflix

episode show follows detective Cordelia Cupp as she's tasked with a murder that occurred during a state dinner in the White House. With the victim being the White House Chief Usher A.B. Wynter (Giancarlo Esposito), Cordelia must inspect 157 suspects, investigate about 132 rooms, and keep the White House from falling into complete disarray. Sounds easy enough, right? All eight episodes premiere March 20. (Netflix)

"Good American Family" (TV-MA) -- This limited drama series has two heavy hitters in television -- Ellen Pompeo of "Grey's Anatomy" fame and Mark Duplass from shows like "The Mindy Project" and "The Morning Show." The two leads were great picks to take on the controversial subject matter in this story. A dramatized version of Natalia Grace's real life, this series follows 7-year-old Natalia (Imogen Faith Reid), a girl with dwarfism who gets adopted by Michael and Kristine Barnett. As the Barnetts welcome her into their family, they notice certain oddities with her, which lead them to think that she isn't actually a young girl but a full-fledged adult pretending to be a child, a la "Orphan" (2009). The first two episodes will be released on March 19. (Hulu)

"Happy Face" (TV-MA) -- This true-crime drama series was adapted from Melissa Moore's real-life story as the daughter of the "Happy Face" killer Keith Hunter Jespersen. Using excerpts from her podcast of the same name, as well as her autobiography "Shattered Silence," this eight-episode series recounts how Melissa (played by Annaleigh Ashford) is forced to reconnect with her serial killer father who is in jail for his heinous crimes. Ready to go public about the reasons behind his crimes, Happy Face claims that he will only speak to Melissa about the crimes he committed. But Melissa must be careful not to let his wickedness and their bond as father and daughter eclipse her judgment. Dennis Quaid, who's been thriving in villainous roles lately, stars as the Happy Face killer in this series premiering March 20. (Paramount+)

"Picture This" (PG-13) -- For their latest original film out now, Amazon Prime enlisted the help of two actors who were sure to bring this rom-com to life: "Bridgerton's" Simone Ashley and "After's" Hero Fiennes Tiffin. Ashley stars as photographer Pia, who receives a prediction from a spiritual guru that she will meet her true love within her next five dates. Her newly engaged sister runs to set up Pia on dates so that Pia can meet her new love in time to bring him to the wedding. But when Pia's ex Charlie (Fiennes Tiffin) reappears out of the blue, Pia becomes laser-focused on what could have been with the one who got away. (Amazon Prime Video)

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1. Who had a hit with "Swing Your Daddy"?
2. Name the group that released "How Does It Feel."
3. Which group released "Here Comes My Baby"?
4. Name the artist who wrote and released "You'll Lose a Good Thing."
5. Name the song that contains this lyric: "Tried to amend my carnivorous habits, Made it nearly seventy days."

#### Answers

1. Jim Gilstrap, in 1975. Gilstrap was known as a session musician and background singer for numerous artists, including Aaron Neville, Elton John and Art Garfunkel.
2. Slade, in 1975. While the song stayed on the charts for seven weeks, it never did climb above No. 15. It's only in later years that the song was truly appreciated.
3. The Tremeloes, in 1967. It was written by Cat Stevens, who later released his own version. While the Stevens version was used in the film "Rushmore," the Tremeloes version charted around the globe.
4. Barbara Lynn, 1962.
5. "Cheeseburger in Paradise," by Jimmy Buffett in 1978. The song was written after Buffett was stuck on a boat with limited food. Once he hit land, he immediately went to find a cheeseburger. The song was a crowd favorite among the Parrot Heads who attended his concerts.

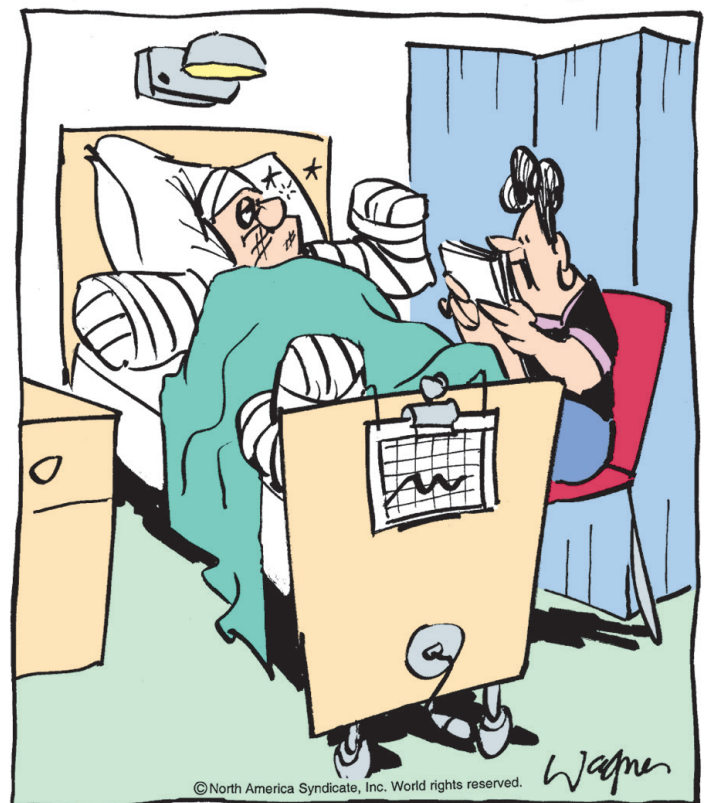
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## Just Like Cats & Dogs

by Dave T. Phipps



## GRIN and BEAR IT



"Here it is in the fine print: Do not try this at home."

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## HOCUS-FOCUS

BY  
HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



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Differences: 1. ID tag is reversed. 2. Clip is added to lunch box. 3. Leg is moved. 4. Stair railing is different. 5. Foot is moved. 6. Windowpanes are different.

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\* Protect your broom by storing it handle side down. You can purchase wall clips at your local hardware store, and then it'll be off the floor, ready when you are!

\* The Vision Council offers tips to minimize digital eye strain: Use the 20-20-20 rule: every 20 minutes, take a 20-second break and look at something 20 feet away.

\* Use a strip of hook and loop tape to secure game controllers to their consoles. This way, you'll never have to go looking for one when you're ready to play.

\* "Fill your sink with soapy hot water as you are cooking dinner. Your dirty pans and bowls can go right in the sink to soak. After dinner, they will be easy to wash." -- E.D. in South Carolina

\* Make your stainless-steel sink sparkle by buffing it with a few drops of mineral oil and a soft rag, after a good cleaning, of course.

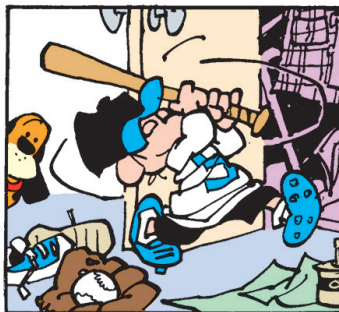
\* "If a pocket or two on an over-the-door shoe rack has busted, it's not done being useful. You can cut remaining pockets to fit inside your bathroom cabinet. Secure at the top with screws. Place cups in a few pockets to hold cotton swabs or balls, etc." -- W.L. in Washington

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

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**TIGER**

by BUD BLAKE



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## King Crossword

### ACROSS

- 1 Huck's raft-mate  
4 Peeve  
8 "Phooey!"  
12 Docs' bloc  
13 List-ending abbr.  
14 Bassoon's kin  
15 Dyeing vessel  
16 Video-streaming brand  
17 Radiate  
18 Vulnerable spots  
21 Physique  
22 Youngster  
23 "Taste!"  
26 Chaps  
27 Brit. sports cars

- 30 Stretches (out)  
31 Polite address  
32 Hawaiian coast  
33 Speck  
34 Aunt, in Mexico  
35 Nodded off  
36 Cyndi Lauper's "— Bop"  
37 Tennis feat  
38 Spinning disks used by ceramic artists  
45 Latin love  
46 Authentic

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- 47 Tic-tac-toe loser  
48 Hindu royal  
49 Bern's river  
50 — carte  
51 Journey  
52 Dance move  
53 Tourist's chart

### DOWN

- 1 Coffee, slangily  
2 Apple since 1998  
3 Calc. or trig  
4 Red wine  
5 "— you so!"  
6 Bogus  
7 Befuddle

- 8 Thesaurus compiler  
9 Competent  
10 Hammer or sickle  
11 Gives a darn?  
19 Nile wader  
20 Sweetie  
23 "Dilbert" engineer  
24 MGM rival  
25 Still  
26 Soccer's Hamm  
27 "The Simpsons" barkeep  
28 Econ. statistic  
29 Plopped down

- 31 Western ranges  
32 Swiss artist Paul  
34 "That'll be — day!"  
35 Drag  
36 Vegas area  
37 Cognizant  
38 Fraction  
39 Sharif of film  
40 Author Morrison  
41 Pants part  
42 Physical  
43 Classic Kinks song  
44 Bath bar

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## — King Crossword — Answers

Solution time: 21 mins.

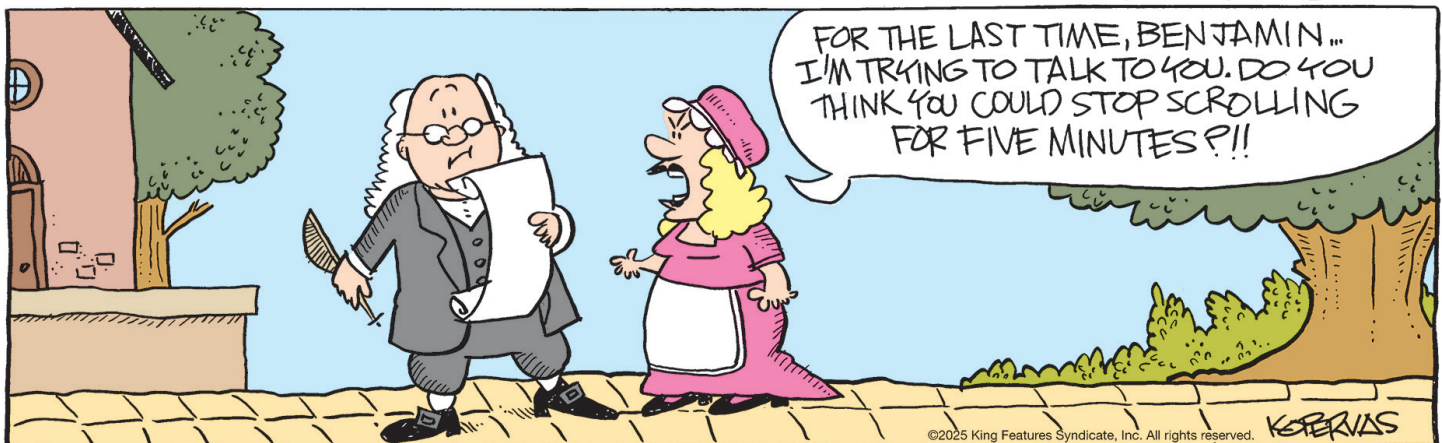
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## Olive



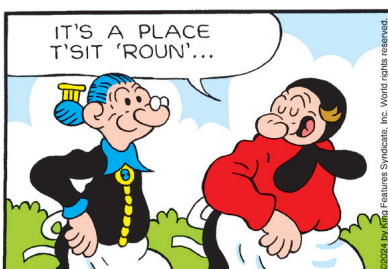
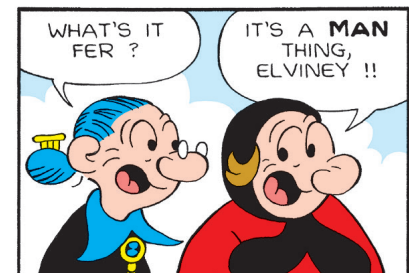
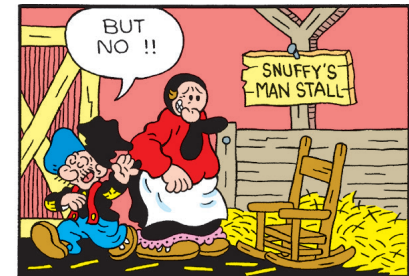
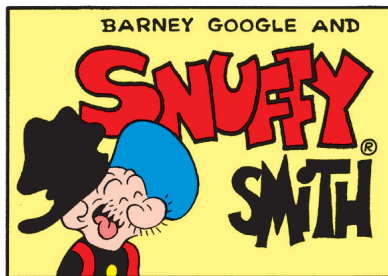
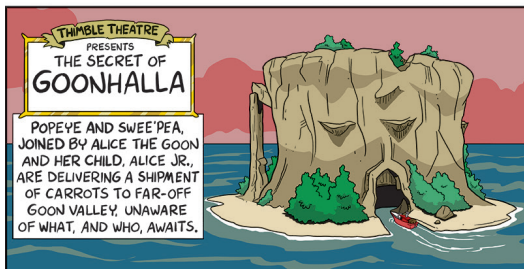
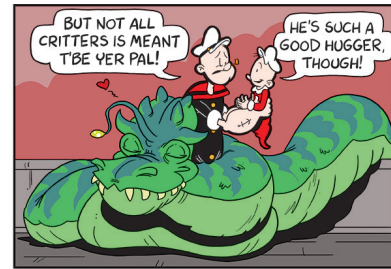
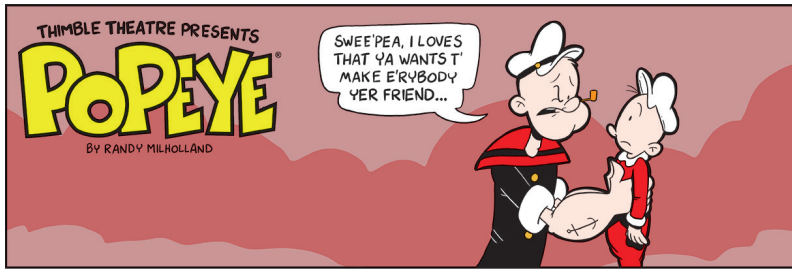
## Out on a Limb

by Gary Kopervas



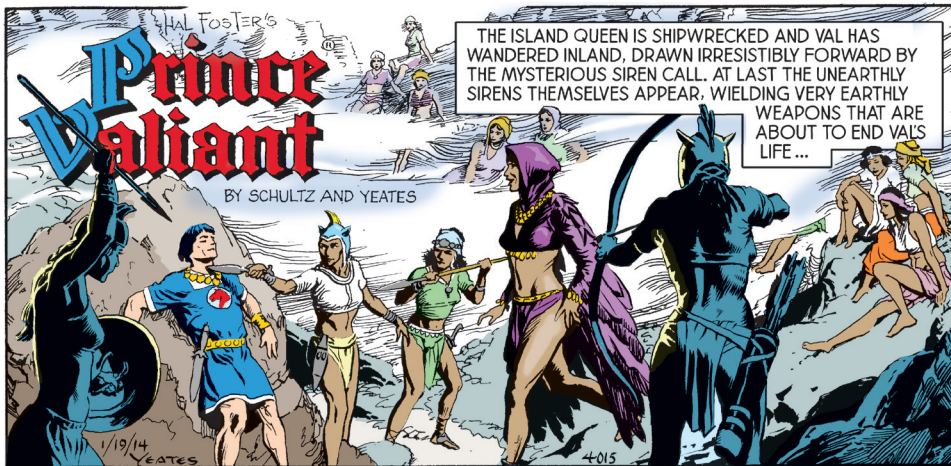
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## The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



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## SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

### Scams against seniors are getting worse

Data breaches and financial scams against seniors are at all-time highs. What was bad before is apparently even worse now.

Why do scammers target seniors? Here are the top reasons:

-- They perceive that we have a lot of money. After all, we worked all those years ... we saved a lot of cash, they assume. And now we have huge pension and Social Security income that surely puts us in a high income bracket, they assume.

-- Many of us grew up in an era when we were polite to people on the phone. Scammers take advantage of that and coax us into divulging private information.

-- Many of us aren't especially skilled with technology. We press buttons on our phone that we shouldn't, or click links in strange email, not realizing that we've just enabled the download of a virus or made a connection to the scammers.

Here are a few suggestions for staying safe in the war with the scammers:

Order your credit report from TransUnion, Equifax and Experian and go over them line by line. Be sure there isn't anything you don't recognize, that no extra loans show up and no additional names are listed. To do this, go online to [annualcreditreport.com](https://annualcreditreport.com) and order your free credit reports. If you spot something wrong, report it at [IdentityTheft.gov](https://IdentityTheft.gov) or call the National Elder Fraud Hotline at 833-372-8311.

Lock down your credit at all three credit bureaus. This will keep anyone from opening credit in your name.

To learn safety on your electronic devices, ask your senior center, library or even your bank for a class on how to avoid falling for an online scam.

And perhaps most valuable of all: Don't feel the need to be polite if a stranger calls you on the phone and starts asking questions. Just hang up. Better yet, don't answer if you don't recognize the number.

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1. What two NHL teams combined for 18 major penalties for fighting and 144 total penalty minutes in a March 1997 game dubbed "Fight Night at the Joe"?

2. Outfielder Bake McBride won National League Rookie of the Year honors in 1974 playing for what Major League Baseball team?

3. Gymnast George Nissen invented what piece of sports equipment in the 1930s?

4. What boxer died 10 days after being knocked out by Emile Griffith in the 12th round of their welterweight championship bout in March 1962?

5. Name the World Golf Hall of Famer from South Africa who won the U.S. Open in 2001 and 2004.

6. The Helvetic Mercenaries, Nordic Storm, Madrid Bravos and Panthers Wroclaw are among the teams in what European-based American football league that played its inaugural season in 2021?

7. Tight end Pete Metzelaars played in four Super Bowls with the Buffalo Bills but didn't earn a championship ring until he was on the coaching staff of what team?



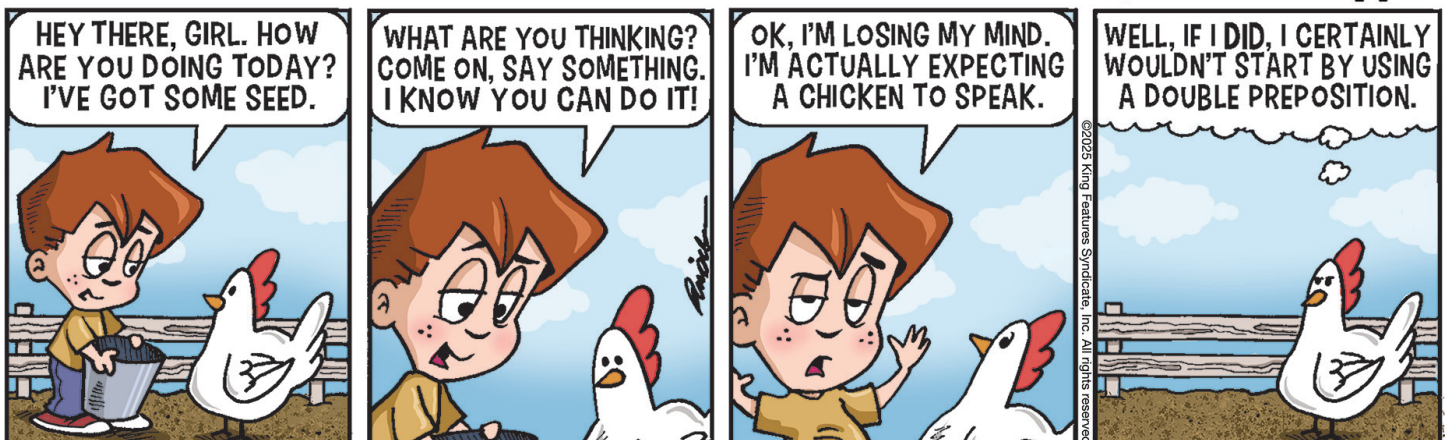
## Answers

1. The Colorado Avalanche and the Detroit Red Wings.
2. The St. Louis Cardinals.
3. The modern trampoline.
4. Benny Paret.
5. Retief Goosen.
6. The European League of Football (ELF).
7. The Indianapolis Colts, Super Bowl XLI champions.

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## Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps





## My dog has cancer. What next?

DEAR PAW'S CORNER: My Golden Retriever, "Jasmine," was recently diagnosed with lymphoma. I'm devastated. She seemed to tire easily, so I took her to the vet for a checkup, where they said her lymph nodes were enlarged. They did a biopsy to confirm that it was cancer. My question is, what now? The vet said she needs more tests, but I'm not sure what happens after. -- Grace T., Hartford, Connecticut

DEAR GRACE: I'm glad you took Jasmine right to the vet, because even though the diagnosis is a serious one, she can start getting treatment that much sooner.

According to the Purdue University College of Veterinary Medicine, lymphoma is sadly common in Golden

Retrievers and other dog breeds. However, it can be treated, with chemotherapy as the primary therapy. Surgery might be recommended depending on the type of cancer.

Now that lymphoma has been confirmed through the biopsy, the next step is to determine how far the cancer has spread through Jasmine's body. Several tests are done: blood tests, urinalysis, a bone marrow test, X-rays and sonograms. Some veterinary offices are equipped for these tests, but you may be referred to specialist care for more advanced testing. These tests are essential for developing an appropriate treatment plan for your dog.

If the vet has not yet followed up with next steps since the diagnosis was made, call and ask for more details and their recommendation. Most vets provide this information along with the diagnosis, so it's worrisome that you don't have a path forward. You can always select a different vet if you aren't confident in the current one.

Has your pet been treated for cancer? Tell me about the experience at [ask@pawscorner.com](mailto:ask@pawscorner.com).

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## Strange BUT TRUE

\* A rainbow on Venus is called a “glory.”

\* LEGO bricks withstand compression better than concrete! An ordinary plastic LEGO brick can support the weight of 375,000 other bricks before it fails, which would theoretically allow you to build a tower nearing 3.5 km in height, but scaling that up to house-size bricks would prove too cost prohibitive.

\* Giraffes are 30 times more likely to get hit by lightning than people are.

\* Your brain is constantly eating itself, in a process called phagocytosis, where cells envelop and consume smaller cells or molecules to remove them from the system. Luckily, phagocytosis isn't painful or harmful, but helps preserve gray matter.

\* Identical twins don't have the same fingerprints.

\* The sun makes a sound in the form of pressure waves, but it's far beyond the range of human hearing.

\* A comet smells like rotten eggs, urine, burning matches and almonds.

\* One in 18 people have a third nipple. Known as polythelia, it's caused by a mutation in inactive genes.

\* Starfish don't have bodies. Along with other echinoderms such as sea urchins and sand dollars, their entire “bodies” are technically classed as heads.

\* There are roughly three ginger male cats to one ginger female. The ginger gene is found on the X chromosome, meaning female cats would require two copies of the gene to become ginger while males need just one.

\* Martial artists who smile before the start of a match are more likely to lose.

\* At a temperature of 54,000 F, a lightning bolt is five times hotter than the surface of the sun.

\* In the U.S., murder rates reportedly rise by 2.7% over the summer.

\*\*\*

Thought for the Day: “All the art of living lies in a fine mingling of letting go and holding on.” -- Have-lock Ellis

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Used coffee grounds are relatively high in nitrogen and also contain potassium and phosphorus. They are acidic, so plants like blueberries and roses will love them.

They improve soil structure and water-holding capacity, and are a great additive for compost containers or worm bins.

Applying coffee grounds directly onto the soil around most plants is usually fine, but if too much is dumped together in one spot, the fine particles may form a clump that prevents water and air from reaching plant roots. – Brenda Weaver

Source: [www.gardenersworld.com](http://www.gardenersworld.com)

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by Freddy Groves

## VA by the numbers

According to a recent headline, the Department of Veterans Affairs processed one million disability claims two weeks faster than they did in the last fiscal year.

The VA has been averaging 10,000 claims processed each week. Recently on one day alone they processed 12,000 claims, the highest number they've ever reached. By January they'd processed benefit payments totaling \$62 billion and saw their

accuracy rate go up to 92%.

Which is all good news for those who are waiting for their claims to be processed.

While it's all over the news that the VA fired 1,400 probationary employees in the latest round of forced dismissals, what you might not see touted anywhere is that the VA is still hiring for the 300,000 mission-critical slots it needs to fill.

Those 1,400 employees were "probationary," which means they'd been on the job less than a year in non-mission-critical jobs or were in a different employment category for less than two years. The savings from that opens up \$98 million to be put into health care benefits.

Those 300,000 mission-critical positions they need to fill are exempt from the hiring freeze and include 94,000 nurses, 3,000 physical therapists and 12,000 pharmacists -- all necessary for health care services.

Additionally, per the blog put out by VA Secretary Doug Collins, the elimination of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in the VA frees up \$14 million for health care services. Halting the contracts for DEI training and materials adds another \$6 million to the kitty.

And while it doesn't add any dollars to the health care budget, the new VA flag policy does have value. Specifically, it limits the types of flags that can be on display at VA facilities. The U.S. flag, Prisoner of War (POW) flag and Missing in Action (MIA) flag are on the very short list of flags that may be displayed at the VA.

If you'd like to keep an eye on what Secretary Collins is doing and saying, go to Secretary's Blog at [news.va.gov/category/secretarys-blog](https://news.va.gov/category/secretarys-blog) and watch the videos.

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## Wishing Well®

5	7	4	6	8	2	5	3	6	5	3	8	3
E	Y	S	A	B	A	X	K	G	E	E	E	E
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2	6	4	3	6	4	2	4	6	4	5	2	7
L	V	T	G	E	I	L	O	S	N	E	S	Y

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

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1. GENERAL KNOWLEDGE: Who was Time Magazine's First Man of the Year in 1927?

2. MOVIES: Who was the male lead in the film "Risky Business"?

3. LITERATURE: In which novel does the character of Emma Woodhouse appear?

4. LANGUAGE: What does the acronym "sonar" stand for?

5. TELEVISION: What was the name of the Dukes' car on the show "The Dukes of Hazzard"?

6. HISTORY: The first atomic submarine was built in which decade?

7. GEOGRAPHY: What modern-day country is in the area known in ancient times as Lusitania?

8. MEDICINE: What disease is caused by a deficiency of Vitamin A?

9. U.S. PRESIDENTS: Which U.S. president's image appeared on a dollar coin in 1971?

10. MATH: What does the symbol "r" stand for in geometry?

### Answers

1. Aviator Charles Lindbergh.
2. Tom Cruise.
3. "Emma" by Jane Austen.
4. Sound navigation and ranging.
5. The General Lee.
6. 1950s.
7. Portugal.
8. Night blindness.
9. Dwight D. Eisenhower.
10. Radius.

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South Dakota Governor



**Larry Rhoden**



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

## A Historic Session – and a Path Forward

We just wrapped up the 2025 legislative session – our 100th in South Dakota’s history. It’s been quite a ride. Not only did we celebrate this history of our state in this Capitol, but we also navigated a historic succession of power. I stepped into the role of governor mid-session, and that’s never happened in South Dakota history. I’m proud to say we didn’t just keep the ship afloat – we made real progress to keep South Dakota strong, safe, and free.

This session, we got things done. The first bill I signed banned sanctuary cities in South Dakota. That’s a clear statement that we support President Trump and Secretary Noem in their work to keep our communities safe from cartels and human traffickers. We also passed pro-life and pro-Second Amendment bills that reflect who we are as a state.

The House and Senate passed SB 216, my bill to address the rising burden of property taxes on homeowners. I signed it in the Capitol Rotunda to highlight the importance of this issue for our people. That’s a win for homeowners, but there’s more work to do.

We delivered South Dakota’s 136th consecutive balanced budget. That took some tough calls, including over \$70 million in cuts to executive branch agencies, all proposed by the Governor’s Office. I’ve heard plenty of folks in Pierre say we need to trim spending to ease property taxes. I’ve wrestled with property taxes and spending for years in the legislature; so I figured it’s time to break it down for you plain and simple.

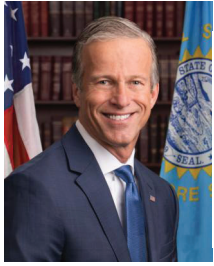
Here’s the truth: the state collects \$0 in property taxes – we don’t collect a penny. I told that to the leader of a South Dakota trade organization the other day, and he said – and I’m just the messenger here – “bullsh!t.” But it’s fact!

So if the state doesn’t collect property taxes, where does the money go? 56% funds our schools. Counties get 27%, cities 13%, and townships and special districts split the rest.

Then how do we cut property taxes? We’ve got three options: cut spending, shift the burden, or find new revenue. Cutting spending means slashing school budgets or county roads and public safety – there’s not the will for that. Shifting it – like we’ve seen unintentionally with rising home values – won’t fly either.

I’m taking a deeper look at option three: find new revenue to provide direct property tax relief. And when we do so, we’ll make it optional for counties. No mandates – each county will decide for themselves, either through their county commission or by a vote of the people.

This won’t be some top-down fix. It will be real tax relief for property owners, tailored to local needs. I will share this proposal with the legislature’s Property Tax Relief Task Force prior to their first meeting, and they will be able to chew on this over the summer. I’m open to more ideas, more imagination, more creative problem-solving – we need to focus on solutions, not excuses. Together, we’ll keep South Dakota the best place to live, work, and raise a family.



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

## Men Don't Belong in Women's Sports

More than 50 years ago, Congress passed landmark legislation to create equal spaces and opportunities in education for women. Title IX is particularly notable for its effect on women's sports. By requiring that recipients of federal funding create equal athletic opportunities for women and girls, Title IX paved the way for the women's and girls' athletic programs that exist today at K-12 schools, colleges, and universities around the country.

But today the gains made possible by Title IX are under attack. We've seen biological men identifying as women take spots on teams, medals, and opportunities from women. It's happening in a range of sports. A female runner acknowledged that first place was not within reach because she knew there would be no winning a race against a biological male who finished a full minute and 22 seconds ahead of the second-place, female finisher. A male pole vaulter won the high school women's competition with a vault that exceeded the second-place vaulter by six inches. A high school girls' basketball team had nearly half of its season's points scored by a male. And that's just a sampling of the stories.

The United Nations reported last year, "The replacement of the female sports category with a mixed-sex category has resulted in an increasing number of female athletes losing opportunities, including medals, when competing against males." The U.N. estimated that more than 600 female athletes had lost almost 900 medals to biological men in 29 sports.

The problems here are obvious. First of all, there is the physical danger that can be posed by men participating in women's and girls' sports. But there's also fairness, equality, and opportunity. Title IX was created to give women opportunities that had been denied them. But allowing biological men to compete against women means robbing female athletes of not just medals and trophies, but also scholarships, spots on a team, and opportunities to compete in front of college scouts.

This isn't fair. Both of my daughters are former athletes, and I know how much competing in sports matters to young women and how hard they work to win. My dad was a Division I athlete who came home to Murdo and coached girls' basketball and track. It would have been unthinkable to him that biological men could compete against the young women he coached.

I'm proud that President Trump took action to protect the original meaning of Title IX and ensure that federal funding would not go to schools that allow men to compete as women. This executive order is an important step, but executive orders can be rescinded. So the U.S. Senate recently attempted to take the next step and make this the law. Unfortunately, every single Democrat in the Senate voted to prevent us from even debating the bill.

I had a professor who used to say that some things are just intuitively obvious. This is one of those things. Generations of American women have benefited from Title IX's promise of fair competition and equal opportunity in sports. Keeping biological men out of women's sports is about keeping that promise alive for the next generation of female athletes.

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## Serving South Dakota

### BIG Update

This week, I re-introduced my Traveler's Gun Rights Act to protect the Second Amendment rights of law-abiding RV-ers, active-duty military, military spouses, and others who rely on P.O. Boxes as their mailing address. Currently, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) does not recognize alternative addresses – like a P.O. Box – for firearms paperwork, although these types of addresses are allowable for a driver's license.

You shouldn't be prevented from practicing your Second Amendment rights simply because you rely on a P.O. Box. I'll continue to lead efforts like this to ensure the right to bear arms is accessible for all law-abiding Americans..

### BIG Idea

Chinese-made fentanyl has been flooding the U.S. for years. In fact, China is the number one producer of this lethal drug that makes its way across our borders.

I've joined my colleagues in the House and Senate to introduce legislation to combat this deadly epidemic. We are leading the Joint Task Force to Counter Illicit Synthetic Narcotics Act to stop the flow of synthetic narcotics across our borders. The bill would bring federal agencies together to disrupt trafficking networks and enforce sanctions. This includes addressing the role of the People's Republic of China in the opioid crisis.

The Chinese Communist Party is the leading force behind America's fentanyl crisis, and while securing the borders have made a positive impact, Congress and federal agencies must take decisive action and end the flow of drugs into our country. .

### BIG News

On Tuesday, I voted to pass the House Republicans' Continuing Resolution (CR) to keep the government open through the end of the fiscal year. I know a CR is not the ideal way to fund the government, but it is a necessary path forward to keep our borders secure, ensure troops are paid, provide support for needy families, and keep government services running.

The CR also reduces federal spending compared to the prior year's levels. America's \$37 trillion of debt will not disappear overnight, but incremental progress is important if we ever want to meaningfully tackle our debt.

This CR allows House Republicans to focus on advancing President Trump's reconciliation goals and root out waste, fraud, and abuse to ensure your tax dollars are being used in the most effective manner.

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**FEBRUARY 24 -  
MARCH 9, 2025**

Welcome back to another Weekly Round[s] Up after a couple of busy weeks in Washington. This past week, we heard from President Trump in his first joint address to Congress since beginning his second term. I'm looking forward to

working with the president and my colleagues in the Senate to implement his agenda and deliver results for the American people to unleash American energy, lower inflation, secure the border and put America first. We continue to work in the Senate toward confirming all of President Trump's cabinet nominees, with just one left to go before everyone at the cabinet level is confirmed. In addition, I've been glad to see so many friendly faces from South Dakota out in DC to talk about issues that are important to them over the past couple of weeks. Read more about all of this in my Weekly Round[s] Up:

South Dakotans I met with: Leaders from Heartland Energy; Chris Huber, President & CEO of the Black Hills Area Community Foundation; a group of leaders from South Dakota State University; the American Legion Department of South Dakota; Disabled American Veterans Department of South Dakota; Missouri River Energy Services; leaders from the South Dakota Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR); Hunter Roberts, Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources; Larissa Luther with Breakthrough T1D; Jim Speirs, Executive Director of Arts South Dakota; representatives from the Brookings County Commission; South Dakota members of Ducks Unlimited; Becky Dewitz, CEO of the Great Plains Zoo; the South Dakota Broadcasters Association; South Dakota Manufacturing and Technology Solutions; the Dakota Credit Union Association; Brian Tande, President of the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology; South Dakota Veterans of Foreign Wars; Champ Baumgarten and Sheridan Voorhees, South Dakota's representatives to the U.S. Senate Youth Program; South Dakota representatives of the Boys & Girls Club; and South Dakota members of One Voice Against Cancer.

South Dakota towns represented: Aberdeen, Beresford, Brookings, Canton, Fort Pierre, Garretson, Hazel, Huron, Madison, Miller, Onida, Parker, Piedmont, Pierre, Plankinton, Rapid City, Sioux Falls, Sisseton, Spearfish, Summerset, Tulare, Vermillion, Watertown, Wentworth and Yankton.

Other meetings: Tim Fist with the Center for a New American Security; Jonathan Levin, President of Stanford University and Fei-Fei Li, Director of Stanford University's Artificial Intelligence Lab; Jeff Kessler, nominee to serve as Under Secretary of Commerce for Industry and Security; Paul Alivisatos, President of the University of Chicago; Eric Pan, President and CEO of the Investment Company Institute; leaders from Marmen; a group of Canadian Members of Parliament; Gen. Randall Reed, Commander of U.S. Transportation Command; Michael Kratsios, nominee to serve as Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy; Joe Kent, Nominee for Director of the National Counterterrorism Center; Eric Andersen, President of Aon; Anthony Tata, nominee to serve as Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness; Oliver McPherson, Special Assistant to the President for Economic Policy; Lori Chavez-DeRemer, nominee to serve as Secretary of the Department of Labor; John Hurley, nominee to serve as Under Secretary of Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Crimes; Metin Hakverdi, German member of Parliament; and Chuck MacFarlane, President and CEO of Otter Tail Corporation.

I attended my Senate Bible Study and Senate Prayer Breakfast, where Senator Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee was our speaker.

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Hearings: I attended eight hearings. Three hearings were closed in the Select Committee on Intelligence. I had four hearings in the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC): one with Stephen Feinberg, nominee to serve as Deputy Secretary of Defense; one with John Phelan, nominee to be Secretary of the Navy; one with Elbridge Colby, nominee for Under Secretary of Defense for Policy; and one hearing to discuss defense mobilization. We had one hearing in the Senate Banking Committee to hear from four different nominees to serve in the executive branch, which you can watch a clip of [here](#).

Classified briefings: I had one classified briefing related to my work on SASC's Subcommittee on Strategic Forces.

Votes taken: 23 – we confirmed five more of President Trump's nominees, including two cabinet nominees: Jamieson Greer as U.S. Trade Representative and Linda McMahon as Secretary of the Department of Education.

In addition, we took a procedural vote on the nomination of Lori Chavez-DeRemer to be Secretary of the Department of Labor.

Legislation introduced:

The Purchased and Referred Care Improvement Act, legislation to require the Indian Health Service (IHS) to reimburse tribal members for care sought outside of IHS in a timely manner. Read more about this bill [here](#).

The Farmers Freedom Act of 2025, legislation which would provide a permanent definition of prior converted cropland under the Clean Water Act. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has used this authority to issue Waters of the United States rulemakings, which regulates navigable waterways in the United States. Read more [here](#).

The Avian Influenza Vaccination Strategy Act, legislation which would require the U.S. Trade Representative and the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture to negotiate with trade partners on a strategy for HPAI poultry vaccine. Read more about this [here](#).

The Promoting Agriculture Safeguards and Security (PASS) Act, legislation which would ban individuals and entities controlled by China, Russia, Iran and North Korea from purchasing agricultural land and businesses located near U.S. military installations or sensitive sites. Read more [here](#).

My staff in South Dakota visited: Aberdeen, Gettysburg, Hoven, Huron, Spearfish, Wall and Webster.

Steps taken: 91,877 steps or 46.03 miles over a two week period.

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Dr. James L. Snyder Ministries

PO Box 831313 - Ocala, FL 34483

1-352-216-3025

## There's No Place Like Home

Finishing my morning work, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage appeared at my office and asked, "Do you know what day it is?"

I didn't know if this was a trick question because she always puts a trick question before me.

"I think," my dear, "that it is Tuesday."

She looked at me, giggled, and said, "Yes, it is Tuesday, but it is also something else."

I had to think about that for a moment. At first, I wasn't sure it really was Tuesday, but I got that right. However, I didn't get her question right. I had to figure out what she was talking about because she would not stop until I got it right.

"Is it somebody's birthday today?"

She shook her head and said, "Keep on guessing."

I knew I was never going to get it right. So, finally, I confessed and said, "I give up. What day is it?"

Looking in my direction, she flashed a smile and said, "Today is the third anniversary of your retirement." Then she laughed.

Looking at her, not quite understanding, I said, "What retirement are you talking about?"

"You don't remember that three years ago you retired from the church? I know you've been busy with ministry projects but I would think you would remember moving away from the church."

Thinking about that for a moment, it finally came to me. According to The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage, I have been retired for three years. I can't believe it's been that long. It just seemed like yesterday that I retired.

I remember a friend of mine years ago saying that his idea of retirement was retiring to bed at night but getting up in the morning. I had that thought in my mind throughout my life.

I have been officially retired for three years now. Where did all those years go? I guess I had so much fun and involved with so many things that they just passed by.

For the rest of the day I was thinking about those three years in retirement.

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One thing I did just before retiring was to add a room to our house. That room was my office, and to tell the truth, it was a little bigger than the office I had at the church. But in the middle of that office, I am surrounded by all kinds of books, about 10,000.

Sitting at my desk is a delightful experience looking at those books.

I didn't think moving out of the church into my home office would be a satisfying move.

Back in the church office, I could do things and hide things that The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage would not know of. She was the church secretary, so her office was right next to mine.

But in my office, I had opportunities to eat Apple fritters. At that time, McDonald's carried Apple fritters, and I would stop there on my way to my office after lunch and get a coffee and an Apple Fritter. That was one of my secrets in the old church office.

After three years in my home office, I have yet to discover how I can sneak an Apple Fritter into my office. In order to do that, I would have to bypass The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage, and no matter where I put that Apple Fritter, she knew I had it. She can smell an Apple Fritter two days before I purchase it. How she does that is beyond my understanding.

I didn't know I would really get used to being in my home office, but after three years, I looked back and discovered that I had gotten used to my new dynamics.

I have discovered working at home is a lot better. I can work for an hour and then take a break, sit in my easy chair, and drink some hot coffee. I can even watch the news on TV. Then, when I'm ready, I can shuffle off into my office and get back to work.

Something struck me as I thought about this. When I was at my church office, whenever the phone rang, I had to answer it. You never know who's calling, and they might need some help, so I needed to answer the phone.

Now that my office is at home, when the phone rings, I can let it ring and ring and ring. I don't need to answer it if I don't want to. Do you know how refreshing it is to sit there and listen to the phone ring and not answer it? Sometimes, that really makes my day.

At my home office, I don't have to follow a stringent schedule. I can come to and leave my office whenever I want to. However, I still have plenty of work to do because my ministry has not downsized yet.

I never knew how wonderful it would be to work at home. Some days, don't let this get around, I work in my pajamas all day. Who's going to know?

There is no place like home.

Jesus said something along these lines in John 14:2, "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."

I can't imagine how wonderful that home in heaven is going to be, and I'm sure I'm not going to miss my home here on earth.

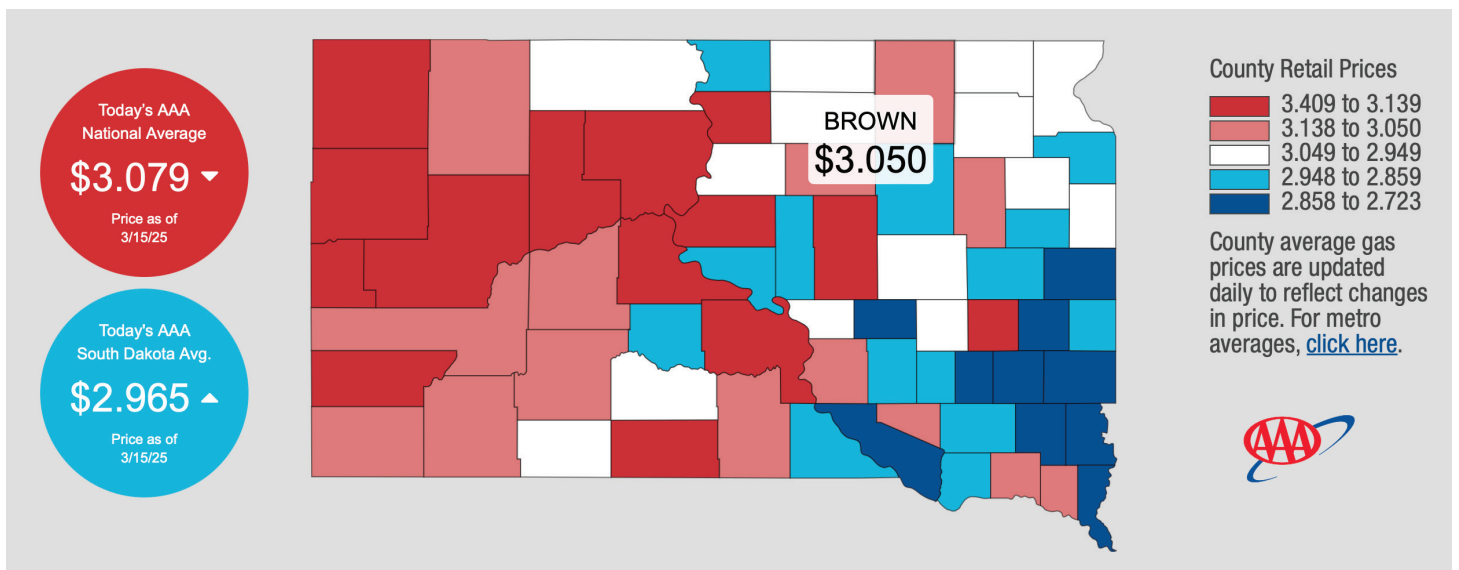
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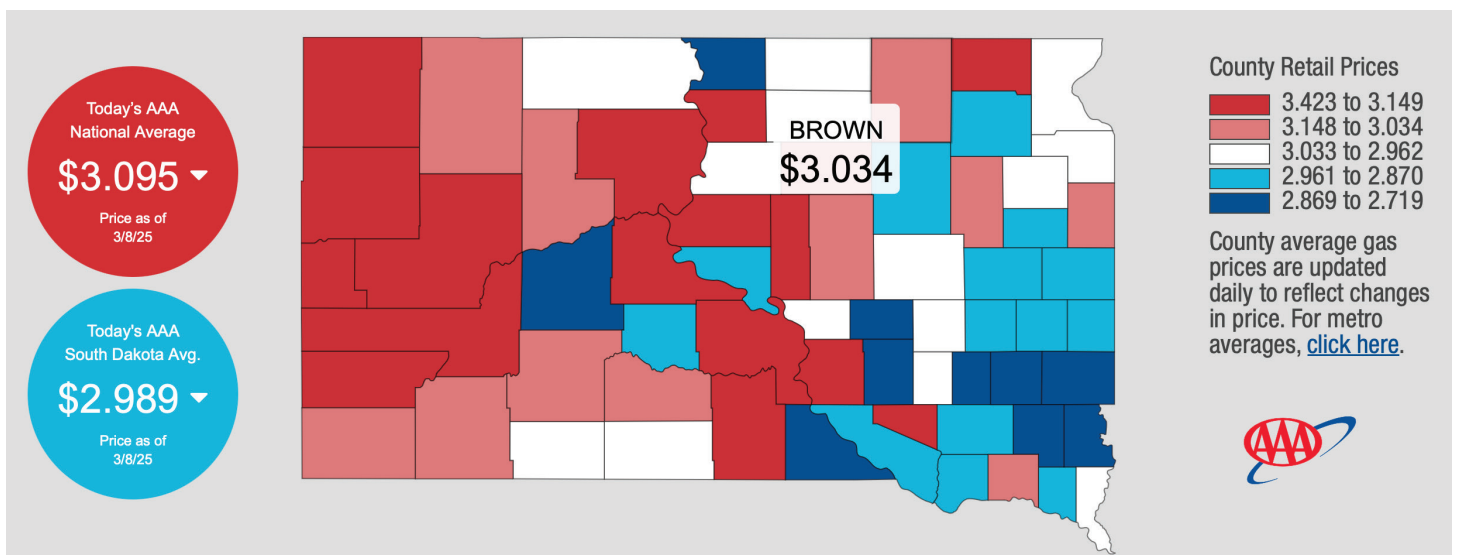
## South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$2.965	\$3.149	\$3.585	\$3.276
Yesterday Avg.	\$2.962	\$3.151	\$3.573	\$3.272
Week Ago Avg.	\$2.989	\$3.191	\$3.618	\$3.310
Month Ago Avg.	\$3.035	\$3.199	\$3.628	\$3.428
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.203	\$3.368	\$3.793	\$3.707

### This Week



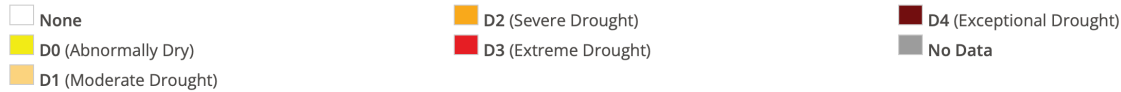
### Last Week



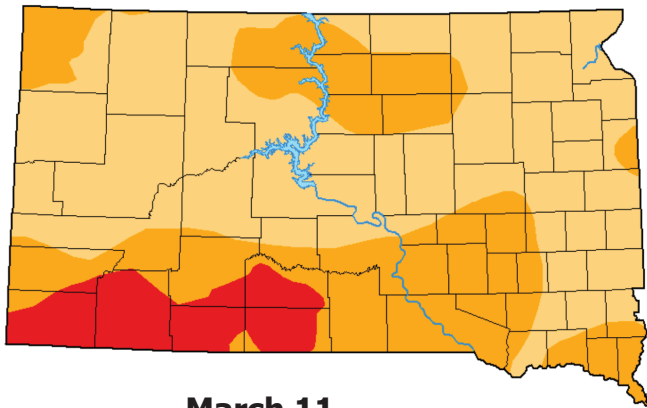
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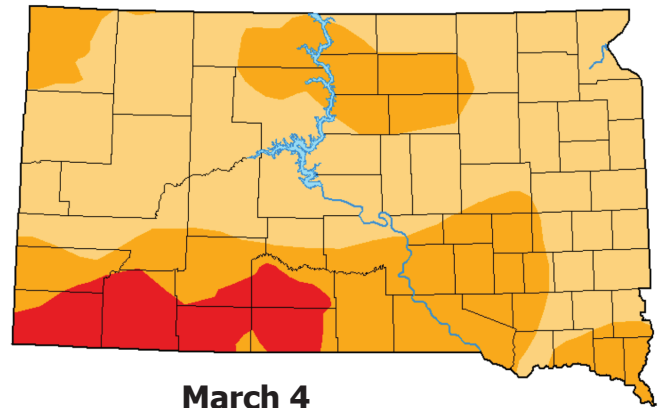
## Drought Classification



## Drought Monitor



**March 11**



**March 4**

Light to moderate precipitation fell on parts of the High Plains Region last week, reducing dryness and drought severity in the middle of the Region across several patches in Wyoming, adjacent northern Colorado, part of north-central Nebraska, and a small area in northwestern Kansas and adjacent areas. Farther south, continued subnormal precipitation induced a broad area of deterioration in central and western Kansas and smaller portions of southern Colorado, but heavier amounts eased conditions in eastern Kansas. The depiction across the Dakotas did not change. During the last 90 days, less than half of normal precipitation was measured across south-central and southwestern Kansas, southeastern Colorado, and a few patches across the Dakotas. At the same time, much of Wyoming, central and northeastern Colorado, and a few swaths from northern Kansas through Nebraska and southwestern South Dakota recorded above-normal amounts. Southwestern Kansas and southeastern Colorado were particularly dry during the last 90 days, receiving less than 25 percent of normal.

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## EARTHTALK

Dear EarthTalk: What is the Net Zero Banking Alliance (NZBA) and why is it in jeopardy with Trump taking office for a second term?

-- B. Jackson, Washington, DC

NZBA is a partnership of banks dedicated to reaching net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. The Alliance was assembled in 2021 by the U.N. Environment Programme (UNEP) and plays an important role in discouraging the use of fossil fuels, especially throughout the financial sector. Recently, six major U.S. banks have left the NZBA: Morgan Stanley, J.P. Morgan, Bank of America, Goldman Sachs, Citigroup and Wells Fargo. The future of the NZBA is now in question.



**J.P. Morgan is one of the major U.S. banks to recently pull out of the Net Zero Banking Alliance.** Credit:

Gideon Benari, SolvencyIIWire, FlickrCC.

Over the past few years, American involvement in the NZBA has been targeted by right-wing politicians. In 2022, antitrust court cases led by Republican attorneys general demanded that some U.S. banks leave NZBA. In November of 2024, a group of states led by Texas sued BlackRock, State Street and Vanguard for embracing pro-climate policies, leading the banks to withdraw from the Alliance.

Trump's re-election seemingly influenced the banks' decisions. His policies are anti-climate, and many experts believe the banks caved under pressure from the White House. Patrick McCully, a senior analyst at Reclaim Finance, a French non-profit, says that the banks "don't want to be the subject of social media rants, and their CEOs don't want to be yelled at in congressional committees."

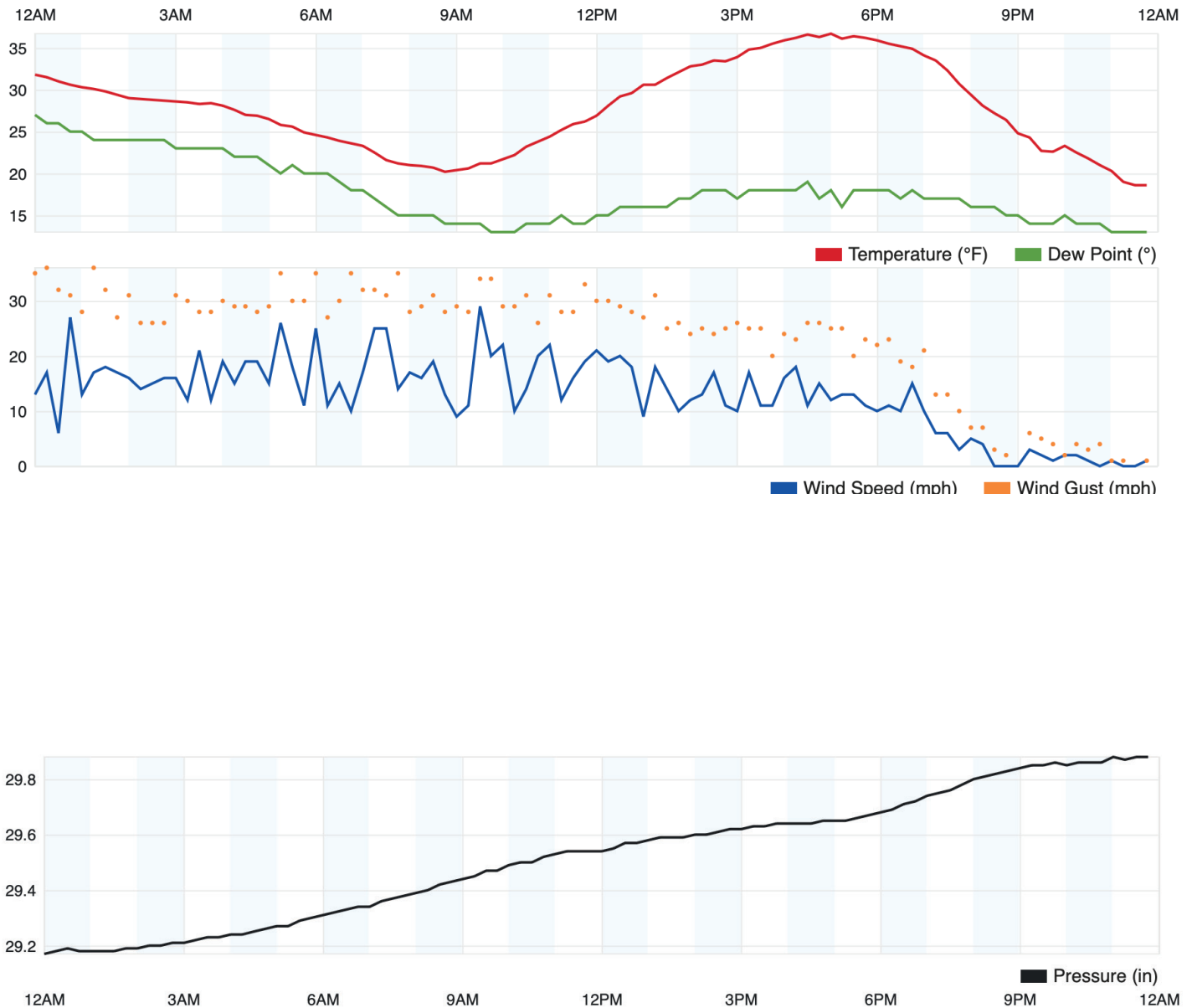
The Alliance is certainly weakened without the major American banks. That said, the NZBA still has a strong global influence with 141 members. Experts are hoping that the European banks, which make-up a majority of the Alliance, will coordinate global climate-friendly initiatives. "If recalcitrant actors are no longer in the cohort, I would hope the initiative could be more ambitious and ensure its membership will do what is required by bringing all financing activities into line with climate goals," says Will van de Pol, the CEO of the Australian company Market Forces.

Although no longer a part of the alliance, some U.S. banks have announced that they remain dedicated to climate-friendly initiatives. "We remain committed to reaching net zero and continue to be transparent about our progress," commented a spokesperson from Citigroup. Although the NZBA is weaker without the six major American banks, there is hope that efforts to reach net-zero emissions will remain a priority worldwide. The best way to promote the goals of the NZBA during its uncertain future is by choosing to use banks that have chosen to remain part of the Alliance.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



**High: 50 °F**

Increasing  
Clouds

Tonight



**Low: 27 °F**

Partly Cloudy

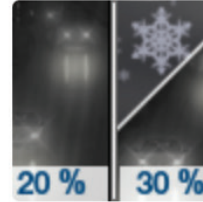
Monday



**High: 63 °F**

Sunny

Monday Night



**Low: 29 °F**

Slight Chance  
Rain then  
Chance  
Rain/Snow

Tuesday



**High: 42 °F**

Chance Snow  
then  
Rain/Snow  
Likely and  
Breezy

## Sunday



**Highs: 33 to 58°F**  
**Lows: 12 to 21°F**

Dry

## Looking Ahead

Monday



**Highs: 51 to 70°F**  
**Lows: 27 to 32°F**

Evening rain  
becoming  
rain/snow mix

Tuesday



**Highs: 37 to 42°F**  
**Lows: 18 to 23°F**

45-60% chance  
light snow

The rest of the weekend will feature highs in the high 40s to close to 60 for areas west of the James River, temperatures will be slightly cooler east. Monday night, some rain moves in that will transition to rain/snow during the overnight hours, becoming mostly snow for Tuesday. Accumulations are low, less than 2 inches currently forecast.

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## High Temperatures Today

March 16, 2025

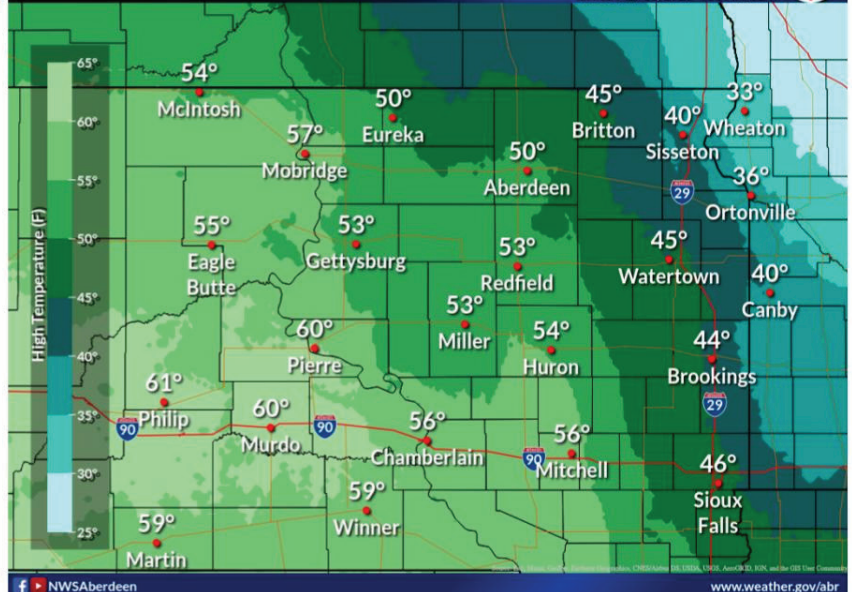
4:33 AM

- A slow moving warm front will cause large differences in high temperatures today.
  - Northeastern South Dakota and western Minnesota will barely reach above freezing, while central South Dakota will see as high as 60°!
- Winds will increase through the day today, reaching 20 miles per hour sustained and gusting to 25 miles per hour.
- Overall conditions are expected to stay dry, but a few flurries may be possible across north central South Dakota.

### High Temperature Sunday

Weather Forecast Office  
Aberdeen, SD

Issued Mar 16, 2025 4:06 AM CDT



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

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

A slow moving warm front causes a large east to west difference in high temperatures today. Winds out of the south will increase through the day, reaching 20 miles per hour gusting to 25. Conditions are expected to be dry through the day today.

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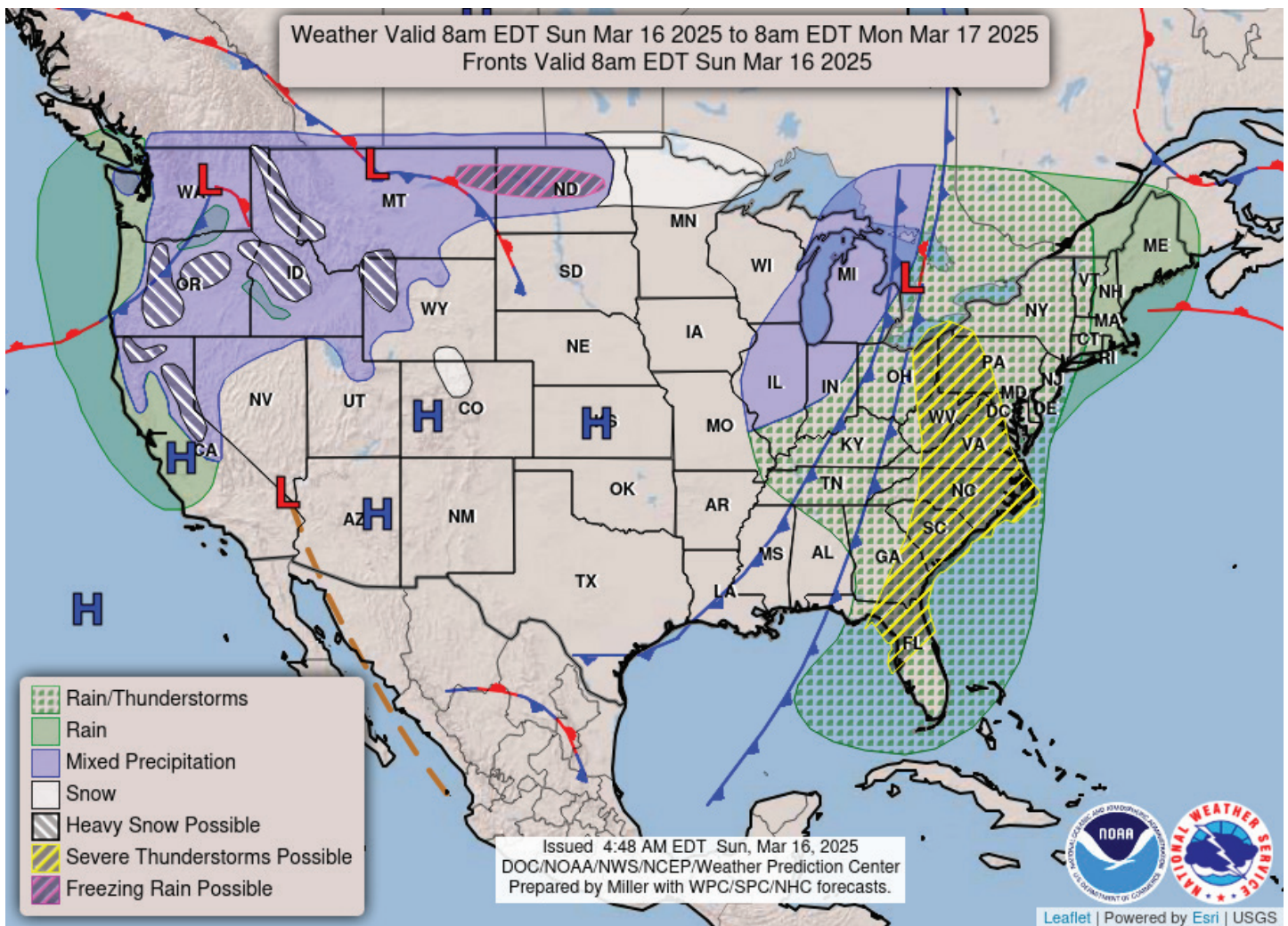
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 37 °F at 4:28 PM**  
**Low Temp: 18 °F at 11:06 PM**  
**Wind: 36 mph at 12:08 AM**  
**Precip: : 0.00**

Day length: 12 hours, 01 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 81 in 2012  
Record Low: -17 in 1906  
Average High: 42  
Average Low: 20  
Average Precip in March.: 0.40  
Precip to date in March.: 0.00  
Average Precip to date: 1.57  
Precip Year to Date: 0.45  
Sunset Tonight: 7:41:22 pm  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:38:27 am



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## **Today in Weather History**

March 16, 2012: Temperatures reaching eighty degrees or higher in March across central and northeast South Dakota is a rare occurrence, and for this to occur in mid-March is exceedingly rare. On March 16th, several locations across the area set record highs by topping the 80-degree mark, including Aberdeen, Mobridge, and Pierre. Sisseton and Watertown also set records for March 16th. Aberdeen topped out at 81 degrees, Mobridge reached 83 degrees, with 86 degrees at Pierre.

1885: On this date through the 21st, Pointe-des-Monts, Quebec Canada, received 98 inches of snowfall.

1942: A deadly tornado outbreak occurred over the Central and Southern US on March 16-17th. The tornado outbreak killed 153 people and injured at least 1,284. The best estimate indicates this event contained 13 F3 tornadoes, 6 F4s, and one F5. The F5 tornado occurred north of Peoria, Illinois, in the towns of Alta, Chillicothe, before crossing the Illinois River and striking the town of Lacon. A quarter of the homes in Lacon were destroyed, and debris was carried for 25 miles.

1975 - A single storm brought 119 inches of snow to Crater Lake, O,R establishing a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1986 - A small but rare tornado touched down perilously close to Disneyland in Anaheim CA. (Storm Data)

1987 - Softball size hail caused millions of dollars damage to automobiles at Del Rio TX. Three persons were injured when hailstones crashed through a shopping mall skylight. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data) (The Weather Channel)

1988 - A winter storm produced heavy snow in the Central Rockies. Winds gusted to 80 mph at Centerville UT. Eighteen cities in the southeastern U.S. reported new record low temperatures for the date, including Tallahassee FL with a reading of 24 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - A winter storm brought heavy snow and high winds to the southwestern U.S. Winds gusted to 60 mph at Lovelock NV, Salt Lake City UT, and Fort Carson CO. Snow fell at a rate of three inches per hour in the Lake Tahoe area of Nevada. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front produced large hail and damaging winds from northwest Florida to western South Carolina. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 75 mph at Floridatown FL. Sixteen cities across the northeastern quarter of the nation reported record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 78 degrees at Burlington VT smashed their previous record for the date by 23 degrees. New York City reported a record high of 82 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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## WHERE DOES YOUR LIGHT COME FROM?

Little Sara came home from school and proudly said to her mother, "I learned a new song today!"

"Sing it to me," came the request.

"God bless America, land that I love: Stand beside her, and guide her through the night with the light from a bulb," sang Sara.

There is a great difference between "light from a bulb" and "light from above." As we look at our nation today, we find that much "light" has come from education, information, training, and knowledge that enables individuals to earn a living. However, the "light" that comes from wisdom - the ability to judge what is true or right or something with lasting value or worth - appears to be in short supply.

James reminds us that if we want to have the ability to make wise decisions in troubling times we can always pray and ask God for guidance and wisdom.

We do not have to stumble in the darkness hoping to find good answers while looking for a "bulb" to light our path. We can ask God for His directions and He will gladly tell us what to do.

God's wisdom always leads us to the right decision and guarantees us good results. But we must have God-centered goals that come from knowing, accepting, and living our lives according to His Word if we expect to receive His wisdom.

Prayer: Lord, fill our minds with wisdom that can only come from Your Word. May we always look to You for guidance to guard us and live lives worthy of You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. James 1:5

*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: 03.14.25

3 17 39 42 70 1

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$301,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.15.25

16 39 41 44 51 7

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$26,560,000**

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.15.25

9 12 30 39 41 12

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 6 Mins 45 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.15.25

4 5 15 29 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$67,000**

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.15.25

35 36 47 50 58 11

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.15.25

12 28 33 36 54 5

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$398,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

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## **Upcoming Groton Events**

01/05/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center  
01/26/2025 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed at the Community Center 10am-1pm  
01/26/2025 87th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm  
02/02/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center  
02/05/2025 FB Live Electronic Hwy 12 Sign Drawing City Hall 12pm  
03/02/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center  
03/22/2025 Spring Vendor Fair at the GHS Gym 10am-2pm  
04/05/2025 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39, 6-11:30pm  
04/06/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center  
04/12/2025 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt at the City Park 10am Sharp  
05/03/2025 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm  
05/12/2025 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

### Saturday's Scores

The Associated Press

#### **GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL**

##### **SDHSAA Class AA State**

Seventh Place: Sioux Falls Jefferson 52, T F Riggs High School 51

Consolation Champion: Mitchell 49, Spearfish 38

Third Place: Sioux Falls Washington 67, Rapid City Stevens 64

Champion: Sioux Falls O'Gorman 47, Brandon Valley 46

##### **SDHSAA Class A State**

Seventh Place: Wagner 59, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 47

Consolation Champion: Sioux Valley 74, Mobridge-Pollock 59

Third Place: Hamlin 60, Dakota Valley 45

Champion: Sioux Falls Christian 57, Mahpiya Luta Red Cloud 56

##### **SDHSAA Class B State**

Seventh Place: Harding County 48, Deubrook 39

Consolation Champion: Parkston 38, Lyman 35

Third Place: Centerville 65, Dell Rapids St Mary 50

Champion: Bennett County 71, Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 61

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

## **Tornadoes, wildfires and blinding dust sweep across US as massive storm leaves at least 32 dead**

By JEFF ROBERSON, REBECCA REYNOLDS and JULIE WALKER Associated Press

PIEDMONT, Mo. (AP) — Violent tornadoes and high winds decimated homes, wiped out schools and toppled semitractor-trailers as a monster storm that killed at least 32 people ripped its way across the central and southern U.S.

Missouri resident Dakota Henderson said he and others rescuing trapped neighbors found five bodies scattered in the debris Friday night outside what remained of his aunt's house in hard-hit Wayne County. Scattered twisters killed at least a dozen people in the state, authorities said.

"It was a very rough deal last night," Henderson said Saturday not far from the splintered home from which he said they rescued his aunt through a window of the only room left standing. "It's really disturbing for what happened to the people, the casualties last night."

Coroner Jim Akers of nearby Butler County described the "unrecognizable home" where one man was killed as "just a debris field."

"The floor was upside down," he said. "We were walking on walls."

Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves announced six people died in three counties and three more people were missing late Saturday as storms moved further east into Alabama, where damaged homes and impassable roads were reported. Officials confirmed three deaths in Arkansas, where Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders declared a state of emergency.

Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp also declared an emergency in anticipation of the storm's shift eastward. Early Sunday morning, the Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency used its social media accounts to repost a National Weather Service tornado watch for parts of southeast Georgia.

In response to the watch, which warns of isolated tornadoes and hail and gusts of 50 to 70 mph (80 to 112 kph), Kemp posted a note saying his family was "praying for all those impacted by this storm system

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and those still in its path.”

“We will continue to work closely with state and local officials to respond to damage and assess any needs following this weather event,” Kemp wrote.

Dust storms spurred by the system’s early high winds claimed almost a dozen lives on Friday. Eight people died in a Kansas highway pileup involving at least 50 vehicles, according to the state highway patrol. Authorities said three people also were killed in car crashes during a dust storm in Amarillo, in the Texas Panhandle.

Extreme weather encompasses a zone of 100 million people

The extreme weather conditions were forecast to impact an area that is home to more than 100 million people, with winds threatening blizzard conditions in colder northern areas and fanning the wildfire risk in warmer, drier places to the south.

Evacuations were ordered in some Oklahoma communities as more than 130 fires were reported across the state and nearly 300 homes were damaged or destroyed. Gov. Kevin Stitt said at a Saturday news conference that some 266 square miles (689 square kilometers) had burned, sharing that he lost a home of his own on a ranch northeast of Oklahoma City.

To the north, the National Weather Service issued blizzard warnings for parts of far western Minnesota and far eastern South Dakota starting early Saturday. Snow accumulations of 3 to 6 inches (7.6 to 15.2 centimeters) were expected, with up to a foot (30 centimeters) possible. Winds were expected to cause whiteout conditions.

Still, experts said it’s not unusual to see such weather extremes in March.

Tornadoes have been widespread

Significant tornadoes continued late Saturday, with the region at highest risk stretching from eastern Louisiana and Mississippi through Alabama, western Georgia and the Florida panhandle, the Storm Prediction Center said.

Bailey Dillon, 24, and her fiance, Caleb Barnes, watched from their front porch in Tylertown, Mississippi, as a massive twister struck an area about half a mile (0.8 kilometer) away near Paradise Ranch RV Park.

They drove over afterward to see if anyone needed help and recorded video of snapped trees, leveled buildings and overturned vehicles.

“The amount of damage was catastrophic,” Dillon said. “It was a large amount of cabins, RVs, campers that were just flipped over. Everything was destroyed.”

Paradise Ranch said via Facebook that all staff and guests were safe and accounted for, but Dillon said the damage extended beyond the RV park itself.

“Homes and everything were destroyed all around it,” she said. “Schools and buildings are just completely gone.”

Some images from the extreme weather went viral online.

Tad Peters and his father, Richard Peters, had pulled over to fuel up their pickup truck in Rolla, Missouri, on Friday night when they heard tornado sirens and saw other motorists fleeing the interstate to park.

“Whoa, is this coming? Oh, it’s here. It’s here,” Tad Peters can be heard saying on a video. “Look at all that debris. Ohhh. My God, we are in a torn ...”

His father then rolled up the window.

The two were headed to Indiana for a weightlifting competition but decided to return home to Norman, Oklahoma, about six hours away, where they then encountered wildfire.

## **Suicide car bomber hits buses carrying security forces, killing 5 in southwestern Pakistan**

QUETTA, Pakistan (AP) — A suicide car bomber targeted a convoy of buses carrying security forces in restive southwestern Pakistan on Sunday, killing at least five officers and wounding 10 others, police said.

The attack occurred in Naushki, a district in Balochistan, said Zafar Zamanani, a local police chief. The dead and wounded, some of whom in critical condition, were transported to a hospital.

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Authorities said separatist rebels opened fire on the buses after the car bombing.

The outlawed Baloch Liberation Army claimed responsibility for the attack. Last week, the rebels attacked a train and took about 400 people hostage. Twenty-six died before security forces launched an operation that killed all the 33 attackers.

Sarfraz Bugti, the chief minister of Balochistan, said security forces returned fire on Sunday and killed at least four of the attackers.

Oil- and mineral-rich Balochistan is Pakistan's largest and least populated province. Ethnic Baloch residents have long accused the central government of discrimination, a charge Islamabad denies. The Baloch Liberation Army has been demanding independence from the central government.

## **51 dead and more than 100 injured in nightclub fire in North Macedonia**

By KONSTANTIN TESTORIDES Associated Press

SKOPJE, North Macedonia (AP) — A massive fire tore through a nightclub in North Macedonia's eastern town of Kocani early Sunday, killing 51 people and injuring more than 100, authorities said.

The blaze broke out around 2:35 a.m. during a concert by a local pop group at the Pulse nightclub, Interior Minister Panche Toshkovski told reporters.

He said pyrotechnics caused the roof to catch fire. Videos showed chaos inside the club, with young people running through the smoke as the musicians urged people to escape as quickly as possible.

Officials said the injured have been taken to hospitals around the country, including the capital, Skopje, many with severe burns. The effort was being assisted by multiple volunteer organizations.

Health Minister Arben Taravari said 118 people have been hospitalized, adding that he had received offers of assistance from neighboring countries, including Albania, Bulgaria and Greece.

"All our capabilities have been put to use, in a maximum effort to save as many lives as possible of the young people involved in this tragedy," Taravari told reporters, at times looking visibly shaken.

This is the worst tragedy in recent memory to befall the landlocked nation, whose population is less than 2 million.

"This is a difficult and very sad day for Macedonia. The loss of so many young lives is irreparable, and the pain of the families, loved ones and friends is immeasurable," Prime Minister Hristijan Mickoski wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

"The people and the government will do everything in their power to at least slightly alleviate their pain and help them in these most difficult moments."

Family members gathered in front of hospitals and Kocani's city offices begging authorities for more information.

The club was in an old building that was previously a carpet warehouse and has been running for several years, according to local media MKD.

The fire caused the roof of the single-story building to partially collapse, revealing the charred remains of wooden beams and debris. Police cordoned off the site and sent in evidence gathering teams in an operation also involving state prosecutors.

Toshkovski said authorities would investigate the venue's licensing and safety provisions, adding that the government had a "moral responsibility" to help prosecute anyone responsible. Police have arrested one man already, but he didn't provide details on the person's involvement.

As they awoke to news of the overnight tragedy, the country's immediate neighbors and leaders from further afield in Europe sent condolences.

The European Union's foreign policy chief, Kaja Kallas, posted on X that she was "deeply saddened" and said the 27-nation bloc "shares the grief and pain of the people of North Macedonia." North Macedonia is a candidate for EU membership.

Condolences also poured in from politicians across the region, including Albania's Prime Minister Edi Rama, the European Commissioner for Enlargement, Marta Kos, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

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"I wish those who were injured a speedy recovery. Ukraine mourns alongside our (North) Macedonian friends on this sad day," Zelenskyy wrote on X.

## **March Madness arrives with a waiting game for Tar Heels, Texas on Selection Sunday**

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

For bubble teams North Carolina and Texas, Selection Sunday will feel like the longest day of the year. For top seeds in waiting like Duke and Auburn, making it into the NCAA Tournament isn't a matter of if, only when and where.

The March Madness bracket will be revealed Sunday evening, setting the schedule for more than two weeks of competition in a season that saw the Southeastern Conference dominate the rankings. The tournament opens Tuesday and Wednesday with play-in games and the first round opens Thursday and Friday, featuring 32 games at eight sites around the country. The Final Four is in San Antonio on April 5 and 7.

Auburn is a slight favorite over Duke to win the national championship, with Florida and Houston not far behind, according to BetMGM Sportsbook. UConn will make the tournament and try for a threepeat as national champ, something that hasn't been done since the early 1970s, while Big East champion St. John's is back as one of the top teams in the country under veteran coach Rick Pitino.

Bubble watch

Beyond the matchups, most of the drama will revolve around the Tar Heels and Longhorns, who are on the bubble and saw their chances of making the field of 68 shrink thanks to Colorado State's run through the Mountain West Conference tournament.

The Rams' win positions the Mountain West to grab at least three, and possibly four bids if runner-up Boise State makes it.

North Carolina and Texas each won two games in their conference tournaments, and for about a day, they looked securely in. Now, though, they wait. What the NCAA selection committee decides with those teams will play a role on the history their respective conferences are making — or trying to avoid — this season.

If the Longhorns make it, the Southeastern Conference could place 14 teams in the bracket — which would account for about 1 in 5 of all the March Madness spots and set a record. The old one for a single conference was 11, set by the Big East in 2011.

If the Tar Heels get left out, the 18-team Atlantic Coast Conference would likely only place three teams in the tournament. The last time the ACC put that few teams in was 2000, back when it was a nine-team league.

Texas and North Carolina will be paying attention to Sunday's games between Memphis and UAB for the American Athletic Conference title and VCU vs. UAB in the Atlantic 10. If Memphis or VCU lose, another at-large spot could get gobbled up.

Who will be the overall No. 1 seed?

One of the ACC's tourney teams will be Duke, which on Saturday reassured the NCAA that its best player, Cooper Flagg, would be available for the tournament after sitting out the last two games of the ACC Tournament with an injured ankle. Even without Flagg, Duke defeated Louisville 73-62 to win the title.

In picking the top overall seed, the selection committee will have to choose between Duke, with the uncertainty surrounding Flagg and its weaker strength of schedule, and Auburn, a semifinal loser in the SEC Tournament that, nevertheless, is helped by playing in the nation's toughest conference.

Big 12 champion Houston could also squeeze into the very top spot. The winner of the SEC title game Sunday between Florida and Tennessee was a good bet to get the final No. 1 seed.

## **Iran denies aiding Yemen's Houthi rebels after US strikes and threat from Trump**

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By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Iran on Sunday once again denied aiding Yemen's Houthi rebels after the United States launched a wave of airstrikes against them and President Donald Trump warned that Tehran would be held "fully accountable" for their actions.

The Houthi-run Health Ministry said the strikes killed at least 31 people, including women and children, and wounded over 100. The rebels said one strike hit two homes in northern Saada province, killing four children and a woman. The rebel-run Al-Masirah TV showed images of what it said were the bodies.

The Houthis have repeatedly targeted international shipping in the Red Sea and launched missiles and drones at Israel in what the rebels said were acts of solidarity with the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, where Israel has been at war with Hamas, another Iranian ally.

The attacks stopped when a fragile Israel-Hamas ceasefire took hold in Gaza in January, but the Houthis had threatened to renew them after Israel cut off the flow of humanitarian aid to Gaza this month.

The U.S. and others have long accused Iran of providing military aid to the Houthis and the U.S. Navy has seized Iranian-made missile parts and other weaponry it said were bound for the militant group, which controls Yemen's capital, Sanaa, and the country's north.

Gen. Hossein Salami, head of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, denied his country was involved in the Houthis' attacks, saying it "plays no role in setting the national or operational policies" of the militant groups it is allied with across the region, according to state-run TV.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, in a post on X, urged the U.S. to halt the strikes and said Washington cannot dictate Iran's foreign policy.

Trump on Saturday had vowed to use "overwhelming lethal force" until the Houthis cease their attacks on shipping along the vital maritime corridor.

The airstrikes come a few days after the Houthis said they would resume attacks on Israeli vessels sailing off Yemen in response to Israel's latest blockade on Gaza. There have been no Houthi attacks reported since then.

The Houthis had targeted over 100 merchant vessels with missiles and drones, sinking two and killing four sailors, during their campaign targeting military and civilian ships between the start of the Israel-Hamas war in October 2023 and January of this year, when the ceasefire in Gaza took effect.

The United States, Israel and Britain have previously hit Houthi-held areas in Yemen, but Saturday's operation was conducted solely by the U.S. It was the first strike on the Houthis under the second Trump administration.

## **Pope to miss Angelus delivery at St. Peter's Square for 5th Sunday since hospitalization**

By COLLEEN BARRY The Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis continues his recovery from double pneumonia at Rome's Gemelli hospital with the Vatican expected to issue the traditional Sunday Angelus prayer as a written text for the fifth straight week.

The pope typically delivers the Angelus from a window overlooking St. Peter's Square to the gathered faithful, who have grown more numerous due to the Jubilee year that Francis inaugurated in December.

Along with a stop at St. Peter's to seek indulgences by walking through the basilica's Holy Door, pilgrims are now also adding a stop at Gemelli, a 15-minute train ride from the Vatican.

Doctors this week said the 88-year-old pontiff was no longer in critical, life-threatening condition, but have continued to emphasize that his condition remained complex due to his age, lack of mobility and the loss of part of a lung as a young man.

Still, they are issuing fewer medical bulletins as the pontiff has been on an upward trajectory. An X-ray this week confirmed that the infection was clearing.

Francis has not been seen publicly since he was admitted to the hospital Feb. 14 after a bout of bron-

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chitis that made it difficult for him to speak. Doctors soon added a diagnosis of double pneumonia and a polymicrobial (bacterial, viral and fungal) infection.

The first three weeks of his hospitalization were marked by a rollercoaster of setbacks, including respiratory crises, mild kidney failure and a severe coughing fit.

Doctors in the most recent medical update on Saturday said they were working to reduce the pope's nighttime reliance on the non-invasive ventilation mask, which will allow his lungs to work more.

Doctors underlined that while the pope's condition is stable, he still requires hospitalization for both physical and respiratory therapy, which are "showing further gradual improvements," the Vatican said Saturday in the first medical update in three days.

The next update won't be issued until the middle of next week, the Vatican said.

## **Ordnance from Syria's 13-year conflict explodes in port city, killing at least 16 people**

DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) — Ordnance from Syria's 13-year conflict exploded in the coastal city of Lattakia, collapsing a building and killing more than a dozen people, the Syrian Civil Defense said Sunday.

The paramedic group, known as the White Helmets, said it worked overnight, searching through debris and recovered 16 bodies, including five women and five children, and that 18 others were injured. The group and residents said the explosion occurred in a metal scrap storage space on the ground floor of the four-story building.

The United Nations said in February that about a hundred have been killed from exploding ordnance during the last 13 years, adding that since the ouster of Bashar Assad in December, over 1,400 unexploded devices across Syria have been safely disposed of and 138 minefields and contaminated areas identified in Idleb, Aleppo, Hama, Deir-ez-Zor and Lattakia.

Lattakia, a key port city, and Syria's coastal province recently witnessed a surge in violence, after gunmen loyal to Assad ambushed a security patrol. While the government's counter-offensive, alongside allied factions, crushed the insurgency, it led to widespread destruction and numerous cases of retaliatory attacks against members of the Alawite community, which the Assad family is part of.

The clashes and revenge killings led to the deaths of more than 1,000 people.

## **Trump orders strikes on Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen and issues new warning**

By MICHELLE L. PRICE, SAMY MAGDY and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — President Donald Trump said he ordered a series of airstrikes on the Houthi-held areas in Yemen on Saturday, promising to use "overwhelming lethal force" until the Iran-backed rebels cease their attacks on shipping along a vital maritime corridor. The Houthis said at least 31 people were killed.

"Our brave Warfighters are right now carrying out aerial attacks on the terrorists' bases, leaders, and missile defenses to protect American shipping, air, and naval assets, and to restore Navigational Freedom," Trump said in a social media post. "No terrorist force will stop American commercial and naval vessels from freely sailing the Waterways of the World."

He also warned Iran to stop supporting the rebel group, promising to hold the country "fully accountable" for the actions of its proxy. It comes two weeks after the U.S. leader sent a letter to Iranian leaders offering a path to restarting bilateral talks between the countries on Iran's advancing nuclear program. Trump has said he will not allow it to become operational.

The Houthis reported explosions in their territory Saturday evening, in the capital of Sanaa and the northern province of Saada, the rebels' stronghold on the border with Saudi Arabia, with more airstrikes reported in those areas early Sunday. Images online showed plumes of black smoke over the area of the Sanaa airport complex, which includes a sprawling military facility. The Houthis also reported airstrikes

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early Sunday on the provinces of Hodeida, Bayda, and Marib.

The Houthi-run Health Ministry said early Sunday that the death toll had climbed to 31, including women and children. Anees al-Asbahi, a spokesperson for the ministry, said Sunday that another 101 people were wounded.

A U.S. official said this was the beginning of air strikes on Houthi targets that are expected to continue. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the press.

Nasruddin Amer, deputy head of the Houthi media office, said the airstrikes won't deter them and they would retaliate against the U.S. "Sanaa will remain Gaza's shield and support and will not abandon it no matter the challenges," he added on social media.

Another spokesman, Mohamed Abdulsalam, on X, called Trump's claims that the Houthis threaten international shipping routes "false and misleading."

The airstrikes come a few days after the Houthis said they would resume attacks on Israeli vessels sailing off Yemen in response to Israel's latest blockade on Gaza. They described the warning as affecting the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and the Arabian Sea.

There have been no Houthi attacks reported since then.

Earlier this month, Israel halted all aid coming into Gaza and warned of "additional consequences" for Hamas if their fragile ceasefire in the war isn't extended as negotiations continue over starting a second phase.

The Houthis had targeted over 100 merchant vessels with missiles and drones, sinking two vessels and killing four sailors, during their campaign targeting military and civilian ships between the start of the war between Israel and Hamas in late 2023 and January of this year, when this ceasefire in Gaza took effect.

The attacks raised the Houthis' profile as they faced economic and other problems at home amid Yemen's decade-long stalemated war that's torn apart the Arab world's poorest nation.

The Houthi media office said the U.S. strikes hit a residential neighborhood in Sanaa's northern district of Shouab. Residents said at least four airstrikes rocked the Eastern Geraf neighborhood there, terrifying women and children.

"The explosions were very strong," said Abdallah al-Alffi. "It was like an earthquake."

The Eastern Geraf is home to Houthi-held military facilities and a headquarters for the rebels' political bureau, located in a densely populated area.

The Houthis reported fresh strikes on the southwestern Dhamar province late Saturday. They said the strikes hit the outskirts of the provincial capital, also named Dhamar, and the district of Abs.

The United States, Israel and Britain have previously hit Houthi-held areas in Yemen. Israel's military declined to comment.

However, Saturday's operation was conducted solely by the U.S., according to a U.S. official. It was the first strike on the Yemen-based Houthis under the second Trump administration.

Such broad-based missile strikes against the Houthis were carried out multiple times by the Biden administration in response to frequent attacks by the Houthis against commercial and military vessels in the region.

The USS Harry S. Truman carrier strike group, which includes the carrier, three Navy destroyers and one cruiser, are in the Red Sea and were part of Saturday's mission. The USS Georgia cruise missile submarine has also been operating in the region.

Trump announced the strikes as he spent the day at his Trump International Golf Club in West Palm Beach, Florida.

"These relentless assaults have cost the U.S. and World Economy many BILLIONS of Dollars while, at the same time, putting innocent lives at risk," Trump said.

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## **NASA's stuck astronauts welcome their newly arrived replacements to the space station**

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Just over a day after blasting off, a SpaceX crew capsule arrived at the International Space Station on Sunday, delivering the replacements for NASA's two stuck astronauts.

The four newcomers — representing the U.S., Japan and Russia — will spend the next few days learning the station's ins and outs from Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams. Then the two will strap into their own SpaceX capsule later this week, one that has been up there since last year, to close out an unexpected extended mission that began last June.

Wilmore and Williams expected to be gone just a week when they launched on Boeing's first astronaut flight. They hit the nine-month mark earlier this month.

The Boeing Starliner capsule encountered so many problems that NASA insisted it come back empty, leaving its test pilots behind to wait for a SpaceX lift.

Wilmore swung open the space station's hatch and then rang the ship's bell as the new arrivals floated in one by one and were greeted with hugs and handshakes.

"It was a wonderful day. Great to see our friends arrive," Williams told Mission Control.

Wilmore's and Williams' ride arrived back in late September with a downsized crew of two and two empty seats reserved for the leg back. But more delays resulted when their replacements' brand new capsule needed extensive battery repairs. An older capsule took its place, pushing up their return by a couple weeks to mid-March.

Weather permitting, the SpaceX capsule carrying Wilmore, Williams and two other astronauts will undock from the space station no earlier than Wednesday and splash down off Florida's coast.

Until then, there will be 11 aboard the orbiting lab, representing the U.S., Russia and Japan.

## **Hamas says it will only release American-Israeli hostage if ceasefire deal is implemented**

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Hamas said Saturday it will only release an American-Israeli and the bodies of four other hostages if Israel implements their ceasefire agreement, calling it an "exceptional deal" aimed at getting the truce back on track.

Israeli airstrikes meanwhile killed nine people in the Gaza Strip who the military identified as militants, allegations denied by a U.K.-based aid group that said eight of its workers were killed.

A senior Hamas official said long-delayed talks over the ceasefire's second phase would need to begin the day of the release and last no longer than 50 days. Israel also would need to stop barring the entry of humanitarian aid and withdraw from a strategic corridor along Gaza's border with Egypt. Israel has said it won't pull out from the corridor, citing the need to combat weapons smuggling.

Hamas would also demand the release of more Palestinian prisoners in exchange for hostages, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the closed-door talks.

Edan Alexander, 21, who grew up in New Jersey, was abducted from his military base during Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack that ignited the war. He is the last living U.S. citizen held in Gaza. Hamas still has 59 hostages, 35 believed to be dead.

Speaking at a protest camp set up last week outside Israeli military headquarters in Tel Aviv, relatives of hostages said Netanyahu was "violating the agreement he signed and abandoning the hostages in Gaza."

"You want to sacrifice our children for the pleasures of power," said Itzik Horn, father of hostage Eitan and freed hostage Iair.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu late Saturday told negotiators to prepare for the continuation of talks regarding the release of hostages, his office said.

Airstrikes kill nine

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Two Israeli airstrikes in the northern town of Beit Lahiya near the border killed at least nine people, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

The Palestinian Journalists' Protection Center, a local watchdog, said the dead included three Palestinian journalists who were documenting aid distribution. Local health official Fares Awad identified one as Mahmoud Islim, who was operating a drone.

The Israeli military said it struck two people operating a drone that it said posed a threat to soldiers in the area. It said it launched another strike at a group of people who came to collect the drone equipment, identifying all those targeted as militants.

The army later released the names of six people it said were militants killed in the strikes, including one accused of taking part in the Oct. 7 attack and another who it said had been released as part of the ceasefire. The military said two others, including Islim, were militants posing as journalists.

The UK-based Al Khair Foundation said that eight of its workers were killed in the strikes. It denied the Israeli military's allegations that those killed were militants or had connections to Hamas.

Hamas in a statement called the attack a "serious escalation" showing Israel's attempts to "sabotage any opportunity" to implement the ceasefire agreement.

Also Saturday, Israel's military said it removed a platoon of soldiers from Gaza who were seen in a video on social media opening fire during a celebration of the Jewish holiday of Purim. The video shows soldiers shooting, apparently randomly, while another performs the customary reading of the Book of Esther. The military said the soldiers "will face disciplinary measures."

No major fighting has occurred in Gaza since the ceasefire took hold on Jan. 19, but Israeli strikes have killed dozens of Palestinians who the military said had entered unauthorized areas, engaged in militant activities or otherwise violated the truce.

Israel has cast doubt on Hamas' offer

The United States said it presented on Wednesday a proposal to extend the ceasefire a few weeks as the sides negotiate a permanent truce. It said Hamas was claiming flexibility in public while privately making "entirely impractical" demands.

Talks continued in Egypt, which along with Qatar has served as mediators with Hamas in the indirect talks with Israel.

Israel and Hamas were to begin negotiations on the ceasefire's second phase in early February, but only preparatory talks have been held. In Phase Two, Hamas would release all remaining hostages in exchange for a lasting truce.

The first phase saw the release of 25 Israeli hostages and the bodies of eight others in exchange for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners. Israeli forces pulled back to a buffer zone along Gaza's border and allowed a surge of humanitarian aid.

After the first phase ended early this month, Israel said it had agreed to a new U.S. proposal in which Hamas would release half the remaining hostages in return for a vague commitment to negotiate a lasting ceasefire. Hamas rejected that offer.

Netanyahu's office said in a statement that he held in-depth discussions with the negotiating team and security officials on Saturday evening. Afterward, he told the negotiating team to prepare for continued talks as per the mediator's response to U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff's proposal, the statement said.

Palestinian official says no fuel left for wells

For two weeks, Israel has barred the delivery of food, fuel and other supplies to Gaza's roughly 2 million Palestinians, and cut electricity to the territory a week ago, to pressure Hamas to accept the new proposal.

The southern city of Rafah, on the Gaza-Egypt border, said it could no longer provide fuel needed to pump water from dozens of wells.

Ahmed al-Sufi, head of the municipality, said fuel shortages caused by the Israeli siege have forced it to "suspend essential services, threatening the lives of thousands."

The war has destroyed vast areas of Gaza, displaced most of the population and left nearly everyone dependent on international aid.

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The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking 251 hostage. Most have been released in deals, while Israel rescued eight living hostages and recovered the bodies of dozens more.

Israel's military offensive has killed over 48,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not say how many were combatants. Israel says it has killed around 20,000 militants, without providing evidence.

## **Ivory Coast is losing US aid as al-Qaida and other extremist groups are approaching**

By MONIKA PRONCZUK Associated Press

KIMBIRILA-NORD, Ivory Coast (AP) — With its tomato patches and grazing cattle, the Ivory Coast village of Kimbirila-Nord hardly looks like a front line of the global fight against extremism. But after jihadis attacked a nearby community in Mali five years ago and set up a base in a forest straddling the border, the U.S. committed to spending \$20 million to counter the spread of al-Qaida and the Islamic State group here and in dozens of other villages.

The Trump administration's sweeping foreign aid cuts mean that support is now gone, even as violence in Mali and other countries in the Sahel region south of the Sahara has reached record levels and sent tens of thousands refugees streaming into northern Ivory Coast.

Locals worry they have been abandoned. Diplomats and aid officials said the termination of aid jeopardizes counterterrorism efforts and weakens U.S. influence in a part of the world where some countries have turned to Russian mercenaries for help.

In Kimbirila-Nord, U.S. funding, among other things, helped young people get job training, built parks for cattle to graze so they are no longer stolen by jihadis on Malian territory, and helped establish an information-sharing system so residents can flag violent encounters to each other and state services.

"What attracts young people to extremists is poverty and hunger," said Yacouba Doumbia, 78-year-old chief of Kimbirila-Nord. "There was a very dangerous moment in 2020. The project came at the right time, and allowed us to protect ourselves."

"Seize a narrow prevention window"

Over the last decade, West Africa has been shaken by extremist uprisings and military coups. Groups linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group have conquered large areas and killed thousands in the Sahel and have been spreading into wealthier West African coastal states, such as Ivory Coast, Benin and Togo.

In 2019, President Donald Trump signed the Global Fragility Act that led to the initiatives in northern Ivory Coast. The U.S. goal in this area was to "seize a narrowing prevention window," according to this year's congressional report about the implementation of the bipartisan legislation.

Experts say local concerns help drive the popularity of extremist groups: competition for land and resources, exclusion, marginalization and lack of economic opportunities. Across the region, Islamic extremists have recruited among groups marginalized and neglected by central governments.

"Ivory Coast is one of the few countries that still resist the terrorist threat in the Sahel," said a U.N. official working in the country who was not authorized to speak on the matter publicly. "If we do not continue to support border communities, a minor issue could send them into the arms of extremists."

Trump issued an executive order in January directing a freeze on foreign assistance and a review of all U.S. aid and development work abroad. He charged that much of foreign aid was wasteful and advanced a liberal agenda.

"Everyone was just looking out for themselves"

In 2020, when the jihadis struck a Malian village 10 kilometers (6 miles) away, Kimbirila-Nord in many ways fit the description of a community susceptible to extremism.

The lives of Malians and Ivorians were intertwined. People crossed the border freely, making it easy for extremists, who like residents spoke Bambara, to access Kimbirila-Nord. Many residents did not have identity cards and few spoke French, leaving them with no access to states services or official information.

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Different ethnic groups lived next to each other but were divided by conflicts over scarce natural resources and suspicions toward the state. And young people did not have opportunities to make money.

"We were very scared" when the extremists attacked, said Aminata Doumbia, the head of the village's female farmers cooperative. "Everyone was just looking out for themselves."

The Ivorian government runs a program that provides professional training, grants and microloans. But access is difficult in villages such as Kimbirila-Nord.

Kimbirila-Nord is home to refugees from Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea. Sifata Berte, 23, fled there with his family two years ago from Mali. He is not eligible for the government-run program, but got training through the project funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development and now works as an apprentice in an iron workshop.

Other things the USAID-funded project set up included a network of community radios in local languages, so people could get access to information. It also used mobile government trucks to help tens of thousands of people across the region get their identity documents. And it brought people together with microcredit cooperatives and with a special committee of ranchers and farmers that helps resolve tensions over land.

"It's thanks to the project that we can sleep at night," Doumbia, the village chief, said. "We learned how to be together."

Equal Access International, an international nonprofit, designed and implemented the U.S.-funded project.

The USAID project also has been the only direct source of information on the ground in northern Ivory Coast on violent events for the U.S.-based Armed Conflict and Location & Event Data Project, the main provider of data on violence in the Sahel.

The village had big plans

Ivory Coast became known as a target for extremists in 2016, when an attack on the seaside resort of Grand Bassam killed tourists. In 2021, a string of attacks occurred near the country's northern border, but the violence has been largely contained after Ivorian authorities, Western governments and aid groups rushed into this impoverished and isolated part of the country with military build up and development projects.

In 2024, the U.S. Africa Command provided over \$65 million to projects in Ivory Coast, most of which "focused on counterterrorism and border security" in the northern part of the country, according to the group's website. The Pentagon said in a statement that it was "not aware of any budget cuts that have undermined counterterrorism training or partnership programs in Africa."

Ivory Coast has the second-highest GDP per capita in West Africa, but according to the U.N. it remains one of the world's least developed countries. Many in remote villages like Kimbirila-Nord do not have access to running water.

"At first we thought that we only had to solve these problems with a military solution," Famy Rene, the prefect of Korhogo, the region's capital, said. "But we saw that this was not enough. We had to put in place programs that strengthen the resilience of the population."

Residents of Kimbirila-Nord had big plans before the U.S. froze aid. The U.S. was supposed to finance the first well in the village, help create a collective farm, and expand vocational training,

Now they fear they have been left alone to deal with extremists.

"If you forget, they will come back," said Doumbia, the village chief. "As long as there is war on the other side of the border, we must remain on a high alert."

## Young scientists see career pathways vanish as schools adapt to federal funding cuts

By CAROLYN THOMPSON, HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH and MAKIYA SEMINERA Associated Press

As an infant, Connor Phillips was born three months premature with cerebral palsy. The science that saved his life was the inspiration that led to his role studying brain processes as a research fellow at the National Institutes of Health.

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He had hopes of continuing his work at NIH through a partnership with Brown University, where he was invited to interview for a program that would lead to a doctorate in neuroscience. But training programs at the NIH have been suspended, a casualty of funding cuts by the Trump administration.

He is applying to other programs — and hoping policies putting strains on science might be reversed.

"You don't take these jobs that pay worse and have insane hours and are really stressful unless you care about helping others and taking our love for science and translating that into something that can improve people's lives," Phillips said.

Reductions to federal support for research at universities and other institutions under President Donald Trump are dimming young scientists' prospects, cutting off pathways to career-building projects and graduate programs.

Universities are cutting back offers of admission for graduate students due to the uncertainty. Many also are freezing hiring as the Trump administration threatens to take away federal money over their handling of a wide range of issues from antisemitism complaints to diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives.

Students are pivoting from carefully laid plans

Mira Polishook, a Duke University research technician, recently heard from one of the programs she applied to that "government decisions" had left it unable to offer her admission. She applied to the National Science Foundation's Graduate Research Fellowship which would guarantee three years of graduate school funding, but lately NSF has been silent on timing for awards. She's uncertain the agency will have funding at all.

"It's beyond frustrating," she said. "It's made me feel like I am in limbo."

Cuts to NIH funding have been delayed by a legal challenge from a group of 22 states plus organizations representing universities, hospitals and research institutions. But the uncertainty already has put some projects on hold as universities deal also with delays or cuts in grants from other agencies including USAID and NSF.

Admissions in some graduate programs have been cut in half or paused altogether, said Emilyya Ventriglia, president of UAW 2750, the union representing around 5,000 early career researchers at NIH facilities in Bethesda, Maryland, and elsewhere.

"At this rate, with the hiring freeze, there may be no Ph.D. students next year if it's not lifted soon, because usually people make their decisions by April," Ventriglia said.

Ventriglia's research focuses on how the brain responds to anti-depressants. But now she is unable to continue recruiting another researcher she planned to mentor this spring. She said she also is worried that new purchasing restrictions, and firings of employees who processed those purchases, mean she will be unable to acquire reagents she needs for experiments.

"We're expecting this to play out for generations," said Levin Kim, the president of a union that represents 8,000 academic workers at the University of Washington.

The financial and emotional toll on those navigating the uncertainty is mounting.

"I love the work that I do. It's all I want to do," said Natalie Antenucci, a first-year graduate student at the University of North Carolina. Her work at a lab researching the ways social experiences can impact health is funded by an NIH grant. "I'm not in a financial position where I could continue to do it if there wasn't funding available for this sort of work."

Scholars see impact for the U.S. as a destination for researchers

Some American students are looking to institutions overseas.

Marleigh Hutchinson, who will graduate from Kansas State University in May with an undergraduate degree in environmental engineering, said getting hired in the U.S. as a graduate teaching assistant or researcher seems unlikely because of the uncertainty.

"I've always told people I do want to work in the international development space. I want to work on food security and water security issues," she said, "and if that's something that the United States is no longer going to value, then I would like to go somewhere else."

Hutchinson was notified last month that funding was slashed to a USAID-funded lab where she was working. Its focus was making crops more resistant to drought in places like Africa as the world grows warmer.

At the University of Nebraska, an institute that works to improve water management for agriculture offered to host a doctoral candidate in hydrology from Ghana and was talking to three other international students. But it had to rescind the offer after it lost USAID funding, said Nicole Lefore, associate director of the school's Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute.

She now worries about the diplomatic fallout, noting she has met with agriculture ministers in other countries who were educated at land grant universities in the U.S. through USAID programs.

"The university you go to, people have a loyalty to it. And so bringing in generations of students for education and agriculture in the U.S. helped to create those personal connections and then later scientific and diplomatic connections. That's really important to the soft diplomacy side of what the innovation labs were doing."

She said she is barraged with emails asking what this will mean.

"The only winner out of this is China, she said. "Because the countries that are being cut off there, I think they will turn to someone."

## **Education Department staff cuts could limit options for families of kids with disabilities**

By ANNIE MA AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — For parents of kids with disabilities, advocating for their child can be complicated, time-consuming — and expensive.

Changes at the Education Department are likely to make the process even more difficult, advocates for kids with disabilities say.

When a parent believes their child is not receiving proper services or school accommodations for a disability, they can seek remedies from their district. They can file complaints with their state, arguing the child's rights have been taken away without due process of law, or even pursue litigation in state or federal courts.

Those processes often involve multiple sessions with hearing officers who are not required to be experts in disability law. Legal fees can cost tens of thousands of dollars for a single case. Legal aid and other advocacy organizations that can provide free assistance often have more demand for their services than they can meet.

But filing a complaint with the Education Department has long been an option for families who can't afford a lawyer. They begin by filling out the Office for Civil Rights' online form, documenting the alleged instances of discrimination. From there, the agency's staff is supposed to investigate the complaint, often interviewing school district employees and examining district policies for broader possible violations.

"It's known and has the weight of the federal government behind it," said Dan Stewart, managing attorney for education and employment at the National Disability Rights Network. "The process, the complaint portal, as well as the processing manual are all in public, and it does not require or typically involve lawyers."

That option seems increasingly out of reach, advocates say.

Under President Donald Trump, the Education Department's staff has been cut approximately in half — including in the Office for Civil Rights, whose attorneys are charged with investigating complaints of discrimination against kids with disabilities. The staff has been directed to prioritize antisemitism cases. More than 20,000 pending cases — including those related to kids with disabilities, historically the largest share of the office's work — largely sat idle for weeks after Trump took office. A freeze on processing the cases was lifted early this month, but advocates question whether the department can make progress on them with a smaller staff.

"The reduction in force is simply an evisceration of the Office for Civil Rights' investigatory authority and responsibility," Stewart said. "There's no way that I can see that OCR can keep up with the backlog or with the incoming complaints."

A federal lawsuit filed Friday challenges the layoffs at the Office for Civil Rights, saying they decimated

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the office's ability to process and investigate complaints.

While the OCR process was not perfect, reducing the office's investigative staff will only worsen the challenges families face when seeking support for their kids, said Nikki Carter, an advocate for kids with disabilities and one of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit.

"It makes them feel hopeless and helpless," Carter said. "By reducing the number of employees to handle cases, by putting stipulations on certain cases, it only makes it feel intensified."

Education Department officials insist the staff reductions will not affect civil rights investigations and the layoffs were "strategic decisions."

In her state of Alabama, Carter said families face an uphill battle to finding legal representation.

"They don't have the money for an attorney," she said. "Or the representation they're getting is not the representation they feel like will be best for their child."

Even if families can afford the high costs, a limited number of attorneys have the expertise to take on disability discrimination cases. Programs that offer free representation often have limited capacity.

If the backlog of cases increases at the federal Office for Civil Rights, families may lose faith in how quickly the department will investigate their complaints, Stewart said. That may drive them to alternate pathways, such as filing state complaints.

But state and local agencies haven't always had the capacity or understanding to handle education disability complaints, Stewart said, since those cases so often went to the U.S. Education Department.

"They might not have the infrastructure or the knowledge or the staffing to take on the influx of cases," Stewart said.

In a separate federal lawsuit filed Thursday, Democratic attorneys general argued the staff reductions at the Education Department may embolden school districts to ignore complaints of discrimination or harassment.

"Students with current complaints will likely see no meaningful resolution, with cases backlogged due to the shortage of employees to resolve them," the lawsuit said. "Students facing discrimination, sexual harassment or sexual assault will lose a critical avenue to report their case."

## Facts, not fear: Inside Mexico's pioneering drug harm reduction programs

By CATERINA MORBIATO Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Under warm strobe lights and pulsing house beats, a recent festival in Mexico City offered more than music, food and booze. Amidst the usual festival fare, a booth provided free, anonymous drug testing.

The initiative, known as "Checa tu Sustancia" (Check Your Substance), is one of several recent efforts by Mexican civil society to reduce risk among people taking drugs. Spearheaded by the Instituto RIA, a Mexico-based drug policy research and advocacy organization, it aims to address drug use from a public health and social justice perspective, rather than a security one.

In a well-lit corner of the festival, members of the Instituto RIA used reagents and laboratory porcelain plates to test substances that some of the partygoers planned to use and recorded the data. Their analysis uses color changes to indicate what's in the drug: It can reveal the presence of adulterants but not their exact proportion.

They also offered test strips that can detect the presence of fentanyl and nasal sprays of naloxone, a medication designed to rapidly reverse opioid overdose.

Also available were informational flyers detailing the effects of various psychoactive substances and what to do to reduce the risks associated with using them, including simple but critical measures like staying hydrated and eating well.

While some partygoers seemed wary of the initiative, others approached it with curiosity.

"(There is) amazement, but also a little bit of fear, because there is a whole context of criminalization,"

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said social psychology student Jessica Reyes Moreno, 27, a volunteer with Checa tu Sustancia.

When unexpected substances are detected, users receive detailed information on what they are, about their risks, potential interactions with other substances and dosage adjustments, empowering them to make informed choices.

Harm reduction vs. abstinence

When people understand that the focus is not on prohibiting but on offering information and safe, non-judgmental spaces where they can be heard, trust is built, said Reyes Moreno.

"I think it's information we should have. Because (drug use) is taboo, and if we're uninformed, we can overdose," said a 34-year-old Mexican partygoer, who requested anonymity due to his use of illicit substances.

He said he feels there isn't enough information about illegal drugs in Mexico, and when there is, it's either confusing or all stigma. "It's just 'Don't do it,' but there's no such thing as 'If you do it, take this precaution.'"

The "don't do it" approach sees abstinence as the solution. In contrast, harm reduction, as defined by Harm Reduction International, aims to minimize the negative health, social and legal effects of substance use by working with people without judgment or requiring them to stop using drugs.

The approach focuses more on people — and their communities— than on the substance.

"We never say, 'you shouldn't consume this,'" said Zara Snapp, a political scientist and director of the Instituto RIA. "The best way to reduce your risks is not to consume at all. But if you have made the decision to consume, we want you to have as much information as possible so you can take care of yourself."

'Choose to be happy'

The prohibitionist, hardline approach of the war on drugs in Mexico has led to the perception of the user as someone who is necessarily associated with drug trafficking or criminal activities.

Earlier this year, Mexico President Claudia Sheinbaum unveiled her government's latest anti-drug campaign, "Stay away from drugs. Fentanyl kills," which centers on the synthetic opioid responsible in its deadliest year for more than 70,000 overdose deaths each year in the U.S. — now down to an estimated 52,000 deaths a year.

Aimed at young Mexicans, the campaign frames drug use as a public health issue, but some of the videos and glowing neon billboards show scenarios in which death and loneliness (drug use) are contrasted with life and family (not using drugs). They read, "Choose to be happy."

"It's not that if I use drugs I won't be happy, or if I stop using drugs I'll be happy," said Lilia Pacheco, operational director of PrevenCasa A.C., a Tijuana-based organization that runs harm-reduction initiatives for opioid users, mostly deportees from the United States who report that they started using in that country.

"How can we say that to someone who is using because they are cold, hungry or in withdrawal?" she said.

Mexico's health department did not immediately respond to inquiries regarding concerns that its latest campaign stigmatizes drug use.

Dr. Carlos Magis, a professor at Mexico's National Autonomous University's medical school and member of a working group on opioids, said that stigma poses serious challenges. He cited examples of health workers refusing treatment without abstinence, limited access to naloxone or the scarcity of public methadone clinics.

Breaking down fear and social isolation

A recent report by the Mexican Observatory of Mental Health and Drug Use, found that between 2013 and 2024, 5,901 people in Mexico were treated for emergencies related to opioid use, with it trending up.

PrevenCasa reduces harm not by asking users to stop using, but by showing that their lives matter by providing them with safe injection equipment, showers, toiletries and social events like Friday movie nights.

"These interventions improve quality of life, unlike a sign that says 'fentanyl kills you,'" said Pacheco. "The right to health should be universal."

Both Pacheco and Snapp emphasized that collective care is at the heart of harm reduction efforts. Whether practiced in the facilities of organizations working on the border or at electronic music festivals, the goal is to break down social isolation and fear in concrete ways.

"This is a service that will save lives...it's very forward-thinking," said a 43-year-old man, who requested anonymity because he is a user of illicit substances, after members of Instituto RIA tested his ecstasy at a recent festival.

He said that drug testing kits are available in the United States, where he's from, but that in his experience so far, it's something people mostly do on their own or behind closed doors.

The visibility and organization of Checa tu Sustancia was a surprise to him.

"I feel good that I'm not doing anything wrong. I'm just here to have fun, but now with peace of mind," he said with a smile. He then rejoined his friends and disappeared into the dancing crowd.

## **Can technology help more survivors of sexual assault in South Sudan?**

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

JUBA, South Sudan (AP) — After being gang-raped by armed men while collecting firewood, the 28-year-old tried in vain to get help. Some clinics were closed, others told her to return later and she had no money to access a hospital.

Five months after the assault, she lay on a mat in a displacement camp in South Sudan's capital, rubbing her swollen belly. "I felt like I wasn't heard ... and now I'm pregnant," she said. The Associated Press does not identify people who have been raped.

Sexual assault is a constant risk for many women in South Sudan. Now one aid group is trying to bridge the gap with technology, to find and help survivors more quickly. But it's not easy in a country with low connectivity, high illiteracy and wariness about how information is used.

Five months ago, an Israel-based organization in South Sudan piloted a chatbot it created on WhatsApp. It prompts questions for its staff to ask survivors of sexual assault to anonymously share their experiences. The information is put into the phone while speaking to the person and the bot immediately notifies a social worker there's a case, providing help to the person within hours.

IsraAID said the technology improves communication. Papers can get misplaced and information can go missing, said Rodah Nyaduel, a psychologist with the group. When colleagues document an incident, she's notified by phone and told what type of case it is.

Tech experts said technology can reduce human error and manual file keeping, but organizations need to ensure data privacy.

"How do they intend to utilize that information, does it get circulated to law enforcement, does that information cross borders. Groups need to do certain things to guarantee how to safeguard that information and demonstrate that," said Gerardo Rodriguez Phillip, an AI and technology innovation consultant in Britain.

IsraAID said its data is encrypted and anonymized. It automatically deletes from staffers' phones. In the chatbot's first three months in late 2024, it was used to report 135 cases.

When the 28-year-old was raped, she knew she had just a few days to take medicine to help prevent disease and pregnancy, she said.

One aid group she approached scribbled her information on a piece of paper and told her to return later to speak with a social worker. When she did, they said they were busy. After 72 hours, she assumed it was pointless. Weeks later, she found she was pregnant.

IsraAID found her while doing door-to-door visits in her area. At first, she was afraid to let them put her information into their phone, worried it would be broadcast on social media. But she felt more comfortable knowing the phones were not personal devices, thinking she could hold the organization accountable if there were problems.

She's one of tens of thousands of people still living in displacement sites in the capital, Juba, despite a peace deal ending civil war in 2018. Some are afraid to leave or have no homes to return to.

The fear of rape remains for women who leave the camps for firewood or other needs. Some told the AP about being sexually assaulted. They said there are few services in the camp because of reduced assistance by international aid groups and scant government investment in health. Many can't afford taxis

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to a hospital in town.

U.S. President Donald Trump's recent executive order to freeze USAID funding during a 90-day review period is exacerbating the challenges. Aid groups have closed some services including psychological support for women, affecting tens of thousands of people.

Technology isn't widely used by aid groups focused on gender-based violence in South Sudan. Some organizations say that, based on survivors' feedback, the ideal app would allow people to get help remotely.

Stigma surrounding sexual assault further complicates efforts to get help in South Sudan. It's especially hard for young girls who need to get permission to leave their homes, said Mercy Lwambi, gender-based violence lead at the International Rescue Committee.

"They want to talk to someone faster than a physical meeting," she said.

But South Sudan has one of the lowest rates of mobile access and connectivity in the world, with less than 25% of market penetration, according to a report by GSMA, a global network of mobile operators. People with phones don't always have internet access, and many are illiterate.

"You have to be thinking, will this work in a low-tech environment? What are the literacy rates? Do they have access to devices? If so, what kind? Will they find it engaging, will they trust it, is it safe?" said Kirsten Pontalti, a senior associate at Proteknon Foundation for Innovation and Learning, an international organization focused on advancing child protection.

Pontalti has piloted two chatbots, one to help youth and parents better access information about sexual reproductive health and the other for frontline workers focused on child protection during COVID.

She said technology focused on reporting abuse should include an audio component for people with low literacy and be as low-tech as possible.

Some survivors of sexual assault say they just want to be heard, whether by phone or in person.

One 45-year-old man, a father of 11, said it took years to seek help after being raped by his wife after he refused to have sex and said he didn't want more children they couldn't afford to support.

It took multiple visits by aid workers to his displacement site in Juba before he felt comfortable speaking out.

"Organizations need to engage more with the community," he said. "If they hadn't shown up, I wouldn't have come in."

## **St. Patrick's Day parade celebrates Boston heritage in America's most Irish big city**

By PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

It's that time of year again when more than a million green-clad revelers fill the streets of America's most Irish big city for the South Boston St. Patrick's Day parade, celebrating the heritage and contributions of all those who hail from the Emerald Isle.

Sunday's parade dates back to the turn of the 20th century and marks both St. Patrick's Day and Evacuation Day, which commemorates the day in 1776 when British troops left Boston after a protracted siege during the Revolutionary War.

The 3.5-mile (5.6-kilometer) parade rolls through the neighborhood South Boston, a center of Irish-American heritage in a city where more than 1 in every 5 people are of Irish descent. The South Boston Allied War Veterans Council organizes the parade and this year's chief marshal is retired Navy Lt. Cmdr. Alanna Devlin Ball, who grew up in the neighborhood and represented the U.S. at the 2023 Invictus Games in Germany where she took home gold in powerlifting.

"Lt. Cdr. Devlin Ball's 12 years career in the Navy serves as an inspiration to young women who seek to serve in today's military. We are grateful for her service, sacrifice and power of example," said U.S. Rep. Stephen Lynch, a South Boston native.

The parade is scheduled to kick off slightly earlier in the morning than normal. Last year's events were marred by violence and public intoxication that officials say they hope to curb on Sunday.

The goal of the parade is "keeping alive the tradition of honoring heritage and service," the war veterans

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council said in a statement.

The parade also has been a source of political controversy in years past. The South Boston Allied War Veterans Council banned gay rights groups from marching in the parade up until a decade ago and a U.S. Supreme Court ruling upheld that right in the 1990s.

Two gay and lesbian groups joined the parade in 2015. Organizers for one of the groups, Boston Pride, heralded the move as a point of progress at the time.

Chicago held its St. Patrick's Day parade on Saturday. Philadelphia also celebrates on Sunday and New York City holds its parade Monday.

## **US prepares to deport about 300 alleged gang members to El Salvador**

By MATTHEW LEE and REGINA GARCIA CANO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's administration will pay El Salvador \$6 million to imprison for one year about 300 alleged members of the Venezuelan Tren de Aragua gang, in one of the first instances of the Central American country taking migrants from the United States.

The agreement follows discussions between El Salvador's President, Nayib Bukele, and Secretary of State Marco Rubio about housing migrants in El Salvador's notorious prison. Bukele's government has arrested more than 84,000 people, sometimes without due process, since 2022 as part of his crackdown on gang violence in the small country.

It came as the American Civil Liberties Union and Democracy Forward preemptively sued Trump late Friday in federal court in Washington, D.C., saying five Venezuelan men being held at an immigration detention center in Raymondville, Texas, were at "imminent risk of removal" under the Alien Enemies Act.

The agreement may have been put on hold, however.

U.S. District Judge James E. Boasberg on Saturday blocked anyone from being deported under Trump's proclamation for two weeks and scheduled a Friday hearing to consider arguments. ACLU attorney Lee Gelernt said two flights Saturday may have carried people deported under Trump's proclamation, one to El Salvador and one possibly to Honduras. Boasberg said any such flights would have to be returned midair to the United States.

Memos detailing the transfer did not disclose how the Trump administration identified the roughly 300 people as members of Tren de Aragua, a gang Trump repeatedly highlighted in the campaign and declared to be a terrorist organization.

"The Republic of El Salvador confirms it will house these individuals for one (1) year, pending the United States' decision on their long term disposition," wrote El Salvador's ministry of foreign affairs in a memo obtained by The Associated Press.

The Central American nation and Trump administration last month struck a deal to house migrants detained in the United States. The Trump administration contended that El Salvador could even house American citizens, though the U.S. cannot deport citizens to another country.

Rubio and Bukele discussed the specifics of the new transfer, which include a cost of about \$20,000 to house each prisoner for the year. A State Department document also suggests that it may set aside \$15 million to send to El Salvador to house additional members of the gang.

The Salvadoran memo also confirmed the country would take two men it said were members of the MS-13 gang, an organization that was initially comprised of Salvadoran migrants to the U.S. and had gained an increasing foothold in El Salvador prior to Bukele's crackdown.

One man, Cesar Eliseo Sorto Amaya, was convicted of double homicide in El Salvador before he was caught illegally entering the United States, according to the U.S. Justice Department. The other was charged under President Joe Biden's administration with being a high-ranking leader of the MS-13 gang.

Bukele's government did not immediately respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press.

The Tren de Aragua gang originated in a prison in the South American country and accompanied an exodus of millions of Venezuelans, the overwhelming majority of whom were seeking better living condi-

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tions after their nation's economy came undone last decade.

Trump and his allies have turned the gang into the face of the alleged threat posed by immigrants living in the U.S. illegally and formally designated it a "foreign terrorist organization" last month.

Authorities in several countries have reported arrests of Tren de Aragua members, even as Venezuela's government claims to have eliminated the criminal organization.

The government of President Nicolás Maduro has not taken back immigrants deported from the U.S., except on a few occasions. Over the past few weeks, about 350 people were deported to Venezuela, including some 180 who spent up to 16 days at the U.S. naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Trump's government has alleged Venezuelans sent to the naval base are Tren de Aragua members, but it has offered little evidence to back that up.

On Saturday, the government's centralized press office in Caracas did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the agreement between the U.S. and Salvadoran governments.

## **Cuba suffers major power outage after substation failure leaves millions without electricity**

HAVANA (AP) — Millions of people in Cuba remained without power Saturday after a failure of the nation's electric grid left the island in the dark the previous night.

The massive blackout is the fourth in the last six months as a severe economic crisis plagues the Caribbean country. The Ministry of Energy and Mines, in a statement on social media, attributed the latest outage to a failure at a substation in the suburbs of Havana, the capital.

Internet and telephone service were intermittent about Saturday evening after power went out around 8 p.m. local time Friday.

Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel said on his X account that authorities are "working intensely to restore stability" to the power system.

Lázaro Guerra, director of electricity at the ministry, said on national television that power was already being generated to support vital services such as hospitals.

A statement from the Cuban Electricity Union released Saturday said the strategy was to create "microsystems" that will connect to each other to gradually restore electricity across the country. Several of these were already operating in the provinces of Guantánamo, Santiago, Las Tunas and Pinar del Río.

In Sancti Spiritus, the provincial energy company reported on its Telegram channel that more than 200,000 customers in that area had electricity thanks to these microsystems.

Many Cuban families use electric equipment to prepare their meals. The outage could cause food to thaw in refrigerators and possibly spoil due to the island's tropical climate.

"When I was about to start cooking and making some spaghetti, the power went out. 'And now what?'" Cecilia Duquense, a 79-year-old housewife who lives in the working-class neighborhood of Central Havana, said Saturday.

In Havana, people were shopping for food Saturday. Businesses were open, although some were operating using batteries or small home generators.

"We are very worried that the food will go bad" in the refrigerator if the blackout lasts much longer, said Frank García, a 26-year-old marker worker in Havana.

Gas stations were also open, but the tunnel that runs under Havana Bay and connects the city to the outskirts was dark.

Cuba suffered similar blackouts in October, November and December. The latest was the first of 2025 but in mid-February authorities suspended classes and work activities for two days due to a shortage of electricity generation that exceeded 50% in the country.

Experts have said the electricity disruptions are a result of fuel shortages at power plants and aging infrastructure. Most plants have been in operation for more than 30 years.

The outages come as Cubans are experiencing a severe economic crisis that analysts have blamed on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, a program of domestic measures that triggered inflation and, above

all, the tightening of sanctions by the United States.

## Kashmir's Sufi music lovers are sticking with the audio cassette

By DAR YASIN and AIJAZ HUSSAIN Associated Press

SRINAGAR, India (AP) — Farooq Ahmad Shaksaaz presses a button on his 1970 Sharp cassette player, and with a hefty clack the machine whirrs to life. As the Kashmiri tailor stitches, the machine crackles for a moment before Ghulam Ahmad Sofi's otherworldly voice fills his shop with verses about divine love and the pain of separation from the beloved creator of the universe.

Shaksaaz, a tailor in the Kashmiri city of Srinagar, inherited his passion for local Sufi music from his grandfather along with a meticulously preserved collection of audio cassette tapes from the 1970s, which he often listens to as he works.

He's part of a small, dedicated community that believes cassette tapes are the best way to listen to and archive the Sufi music of Indian-controlled Kashmir, where music inspired by local and central Asian Muslim saints has long been a deep expression of spirituality and emotion. Many people turn to the music for spiritual guidance, or seeking an escape from the region's long periods of street battles, shutdowns and security clampdowns.

For decades, cassette players have carried the soul-stirring poetry of Sufi saints and the mystical melodies of Kashmiri instruments like the sarangi and santoor, and it's long been a local ritual for families to gather around the warm hum of a tape player. Even today, the region's traditional Sufi music gatherings are often recorded only on the disappearing audio format, which was widely used from the 1970s to the 1990s.

While the music is increasingly available on digital formats, many Kashmiris say that it's best heard on cassette tapes.

"There is something unique about this machine that for me plays recordings of spiritual guides," said Abdul Ahad, a carpet weaver. "It is a sacred ritual in itself to press the play button of a cassette player to listen to a song on spiritual moorings."

Many of the most beloved albums were released by local record labels during the heyday of the audio cassette, but dedicated devotees of the genre are still bringing tape recorders to gatherings. Digital recorders are often unwelcome at these nightly music sessions, as Sufi music lovers say they blur together the distinct sounds of the different instruments.

"It is a different experience to listen to music on a tape recorder," said Abdul Hamid Khan. "Tapes are smooth and you can feel the sound of every instrument, you don't get that feel in these new players."

Still, as tapes wear out and more music moves to digital streaming platforms and smartphones, the tactile and deeply personal listening experience of cassettes is becoming harder to keep going.

Many families have been forced to part with their players due to mechanical failures, while others struggle to preserve their cherished cassette collections, some of which hold rare and irreplaceable recordings passed down through generations. Some collectors have turned to digitizing their old recordings to safeguard them for future generations.

Only a few shops in Srinagar, the region's main city, sell tape recorders or blank tapes, and the availability of spare parts and skilled repair technicians has drastically dwindled.

A handful of mechanics in the Kashmir Valley still cater to a dedicated population of Sufi music lovers, painstakingly restoring machines made by beloved Japanese brands like Sharp and Kenwood in the last century.

Mohammad Ashraf Matoo, a self-taught mechanic, has spent years keeping decades-old cassette players running even as spare parts become increasingly scarce. He purchases non-functional recorders to extract usable components, and manufactures some parts himself to keep his customers' devices going. Once repaired, a well-functioning tape recorder is sold for a price between \$150 and \$850, depending on its brand and condition.

Shaksaaz, a lifelong Sufi music devotee, called it a "personal mission" to preserve the legacy of cassette tapes.

"It is a bridge to the past, a way to remain connected to our spiritual and cultural roots in this ever modernizing and digital world," he said.

## Trump invokes 18th century law to speed deportations, judge stalls it hours later

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal judge barred the Trump administration Saturday from carrying out deportations under a sweeping 18th century law that the president invoked hours earlier to speed removal of Venezuelan gang members from the United States.

U.S. District Judge James E. Boasberg said he needed to issue his order immediately because the government already was flying migrants it claimed were newly deportable under President Donald Trump's proclamation to be incarcerated in El Salvador and Honduras. El Salvador already agreed this week to take up to 300 migrants that the Trump administration designated as gang members.

"I do not believe I can wait any longer and am required to act," Boasberg said during a Saturday evening hearing in a lawsuit brought by the ACLU and Democracy Forward. "A brief delay in their removal does not cause the government any harm," he added, noting they remain in government custody but ordering that any planes in the air be turned around.

The ruling came hours after Trump claimed the Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua was invading the United States and invoked the Alien Enemies Act of 1798, a wartime authority that allows the president broader leeway on policy and executive action to speed up mass deportations.

The act has only ever been used three times before, all during wars. Its most recent application was during World War II, when it was used to incarcerate Germans and Italians as well as for the mass internment of Japanese-American civilians.

In a proclamation released just over an hour before Boasberg's hearing, Trump contended that Tren de Aragua was effectively at war with the United States.

"Over the years, Venezuelan national and local authorities have ceded ever-greater control over their territories to transnational criminal organizations, including TdA," Trump's statement reads. "The result is a hybrid criminal state that is perpetrating an invasion of and predatory incursion into the United States, and which poses a substantial danger to the United States."

The order could let the administration deport any migrant it identifies as a member of the gang without going through regular immigration proceedings, and also could remove other protections under criminal law for people the government targeted.

In a statement Saturday night, Attorney General Pam Bondi slammed Boasberg's stay on deportations. "This order disregards well-established authority regarding President Trump's power, and it puts the public and law enforcement at risk," Bondi said.

The Tren de Aragua gang originated in a prison in the South American country and accompanied an exodus of millions of Venezuelans, the overwhelming majority of whom were seeking better living conditions after their nation's economy came undone last decade. Trump and his allies have turned the gang into the face of the alleged threat posed by immigrants living in the U.S. illegally and formally designated it a "foreign terrorist organization" last month.

Authorities in several countries have reported arrests of Tren de Aragua members, even as Venezuela's government claims to have eliminated the criminal organization.

The government said Trump actually signed the proclamation on Friday night. Immigration lawyers noticed the federal government suddenly moving to deport Venezuelans who they would not otherwise have the legal right to expel from the country, and scrambled to file lawsuits to block what they believed was a pending proclamation.

Boasberg issued an initial order at 9:20 a.m. Saturday blocking the Trump administration from deporting five Venezuelans named as plaintiffs in the ACLU suit who were being detained by the government and believed they were about to be deported. The Trump administration appealed that order, contending that

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halting a presidential act before it has been announced would cripple the executive branch.

If the order were allowed to stand, "district courts would have license to enjoin virtually any urgent national-security action just upon receipt of a complaint," the Justice Department wrote in its appeal.

Boasberg then scheduled the afternoon hearing on whether to expand his order to all people who could be targeted under Trump's declaration.

Deputy Assistant Attorney General Drew Ensign contended that the president had broad latitude to identify threats to the country and act under the 1798 law. He noted the U.S. Supreme Court allowed President Harry Truman to continue to hold a German citizen in 1948, three years after World War II ended, under the measure.

"This would cut very deeply into the prerogatives of the president," Ensign said of an injunction.

But Lee Gelernt of the ACLU contended that Trump didn't have the authority to use the law against a criminal gang rather than a recognized state. Boasberg said precedent on that question seemed tricky but that the ACLU had a reasonable chance of success on those arguments, and so the order was merited.

Boasberg halted deportations for those in custody for up to 14 days, and scheduled a Friday hearing in the case.

The flurry of litigation shows the significance of Trump's declaration, the latest step by the administration to expand presidential power. Ensign argued that, as part of its reaction to the Sept. 11, 2001 attack, Congress had given the president power to delegate "transnational" organizations threats on the level of recognized states. And Gelernt warned that the Trump administration could simply issue a new proclamation to use the Alien Enemies Act against another migrant gang, like MS-13, which has long been one of Trump's favorite targets.

## At least 32 dead in massive US storm after new fatalities reported in Kansas and Mississippi

By JEFF ROBERSON, REBECCA REYNOLDS and JULIE WALKER Associated Press

PIEDMONT, Mo. (AP) — Violent tornadoes ripped through parts of the U.S., wiping out schools and toppling semitractor-trailers in several states, part of a monster storm that has killed at least 32 people as more severe weather was expected late Saturday.

The number of fatalities increased after the Kansas Highway Patrol reported eight people died in a highway pileup caused by a dust storm in Sherman County on Friday. At least 50 vehicles were involved.

In Mississippi, Gov. Tate Reeves announced that six people died in three counties and three more people were missing. There were 29 injuries across the state, he added in a nighttime post on the social platform X.

Missouri recorded more fatalities than any other state as scattered twisters overnight killed at least 12, authorities said. The deaths included a man whose home was ripped apart by a tornado.

"It was unrecognizable as a home. Just a debris field," said Coroner Jim Akers of Butler County, describing the scene that confronted rescuers. "The floor was upside down. We were walking on walls."

Dakota Henderson said he and others rescuing people trapped in their homes Friday night found five bodies scattered in the debris outside what remained of his aunt's house in hard-hit Wayne County, Missouri.

"It was a very rough deal last night," he said the following day, surrounded by uprooted trees and splintered homes. "It's really disturbing for what happened to the people, the casualties last night."

Henderson said they rescued his aunt from a bedroom that was the only one left standing, taking her out through a window. They also carried out a man who had a broken arm and leg.

Officials in Arkansas said three people died in Independence County and 29 others were injured across eight counties.

"We have teams out surveying the damage from last night's tornadoes and have first responders on the ground to assist," Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders said on X.

She, Reeves and Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp declared states of emergency. Kemp said he was doing so in anticipation of severe weather moving in later in the day.

On Friday, meanwhile, authorities said three people were killed in car crashes during a dust storm in

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Amarillo, in the Texas Panhandle.

Extreme weather encompasses a zone of 100 million people

The deaths came as the massive storm system unleashed winds that triggered deadly dust storms and fanned more than 100 wildfires.

Extreme weather conditions were forecast to affect an area that is home to more than 100 million people. Winds gusting up to 80 mph (130 kph) were predicted from the Canadian border to Texas, threatening blizzard conditions in colder northern areas and wildfire risk in warmer, drier places to the south.

The National Weather Service issued blizzard warnings for parts of far western Minnesota and far eastern South Dakota starting early Saturday. Snow accumulations of 3 to 6 inches (7.6 to 15.2 centimeters) were expected, with up to a foot (30 centimeters) possible.

Winds gusting to 60 mph (97 kph) were expected to cause whiteout conditions.

Evacuations were ordered in some Oklahoma communities as more than 130 fires were reported across the state, and nearly 300 homes were damaged or destroyed. Gov. Kevin Stitt said at a Saturday news conference that some 266 square miles (689 square kilometers) burned in the state.

The State Patrol said winds were so strong that they toppled several tractor-trailers.

Experts said it's not unusual to see such weather extremes in March.

Tornadoes hit amid storm outbreak

Significant tornadoes continued to hit Saturday, with the region at highest risk stretching from eastern Louisiana and Mississippi through Alabama, western Georgia and the Florida panhandle, the Storm Prediction Center said.

Bailey Dillon, 24, and her fiance, Caleb Barnes, watched a massive twister from their front porch in Tylertown, Mississippi, away as it struck an area about half a mile (0.8 km) near Paradise Ranch RV Park.

They drove over afterward to see if anyone needed help and recorded video of snapped trees, leveled buildings and overturned vehicles.

"The amount of damage was catastrophic," Dillon said. "It was a large amount of cabins, RVs, campers that were just flipped over — everything was destroyed."

Paradise Ranch said via Facebook that all staff and guests were safe and accounted for, but Dillon said the damage extended beyond the RV park itself.

"Homes and everything were destroyed all around it," she said. "Schools and buildings are just completely gone."

Some imagery from the extreme weather went viral online.

Tad Peters and his father, Richard Peters, had pulled over to fuel up their pickup truck in Rolla, Missouri, on Friday night when they heard tornado sirens and saw other motorists fleeing the interstate to park.

"Whoa, is this coming? Oh, it's here. It's here," Tad Peters can be heard saying on a video. "Look at all that debris. Ohhh. My God, we are in a torn ..."

His father then rolled up the window.

The two were headed to Indiana for a weightlifting competition but decided to head back home to Norman, Oklahoma, about six hours away, where they encountered wildfires.

Wildfires elsewhere in the Southern Plains threatened to spread rapidly amid warm, dry weather and strong winds in Texas, Kansas, Missouri and New Mexico.

## **Trump has ordered airstrikes against rebels in Yemen. Here's why**

The Associated Press undefined

U.S. President Donald Trump says he has ordered airstrikes against Iran-backed rebels in Yemen, and issued a warning to Tehran.

Here's why.

Threat to global shipping

The Houthi rebels started attacking military and commercial ships on one of the world's busiest shipping corridors shortly after the war in Gaza began between Hamas and Israel in October 2023.

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The Houthis said they were targeting vessels on the Red Sea with links to Israel or its allies — the United States and the U.K. — in solidarity with Palestinians, but some vessels had little or no link to the war.

The Houthis targeted over 100 merchant vessels with missiles and drones, sinking two vessels and killing four sailors, until the current ceasefire in Gaza took effect in mid-January. Other missiles and drones were intercepted or failed to reach their targets, which included Western military ones.

The attacks paused during the ceasefire, but the Houthis on Wednesday said they would resume against “any Israeli vessel” after Israel cut off all aid supplies to Gaza to pressure Hamas during talks on extending their truce. The rebels said the warning also affects the Gulf of Aden, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and the Arabian Sea.

No Houthi attacks have been reported since then.

“These relentless assaults have cost the U.S. and World Economy many BILLIONS of Dollars while, at the same time, putting innocent lives at risk,” Trump said Saturday while announcing the airstrikes in a social media post.

Threat to the U.S.

The earlier Houthi campaign saw U.S. and other Western warships repeatedly targeted, sparking the most serious combat the U.S. Navy had seen since World War II.

The United States under the Biden administration, as well as Israel and Britain, previously struck Houthi-held areas in Yemen. But a U.S. official said Saturday’s operation was conducted solely by the U.S.

The USS Harry S. Truman carrier strike group, which includes the carrier, three Navy destroyers and one cruiser, are in the Red Sea and were part of Saturday’s mission. The USS Georgia cruise missile submarine has also been operating in the region.

Trump said the strikes were to “protect American shipping, air, and naval assets, and to restore Navigational Freedom.”

The focus on the Houthis and their attacks have raised their profile as they face economic and other pressures at home amid Yemen’s decadelong stalemated war, which has torn apart the Arab world’s poorest nation.

Pressure on Iran

Saturday’s strikes also were meant to pressure Iran, which has backed the Houthis just as it has supported Hamas and other proxies in the Middle East.

Trump vowed to hold Iran “fully accountable” for the Houthis’ actions.

The State Department earlier this month reinstated the “foreign terrorist organization” designation for the Houthis, which carries sanctions and penalties for anyone providing “material support” for the group.

The Trump administration also has been pressing Iran to restart bilateral talks on Iran’s advancing nuclear program, with Trump writing a letter to the country’s supreme leader. Trump, who unilaterally withdrew America from Iran’s 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, has said he will not allow the program to become operational.

Trump has also levied new sanctions on Iran as part of his “maximum pressure” campaign against the country and has suggested that military action remains a possibility, while emphasizing he still believes a new nuclear deal can be reached.

## Indonesia’s cocoa farmers work with businesses to fight the bitter impact of climate change

By VICTORIA MILKO and DITA ALANGKARA Associated Press

TANJUNG REJO, Indonesia (AP) — The loud whirr of a chainsaw sounds through the forest as a small group of farmers gathers around a tree filled with red seed pods. With one slow stroke, a severed knobby branch hits the ground.

“Now it will help the tree grow new fruit,” farmer Tari Santoso says with a smile.

Thousands of cocoa farmers across Indonesia like Santoso are working with businesses and other organizations to protect their crops from the bitter impacts of climate change and underinvestment that have

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pushed cocoa prices to record levels.

Cocoa trees are high maintenance: Grown only near the equator, they require a precise combination of steady temperatures, humidity and sunlight. It takes five years for a tree to start producing the seeds that are processed into cocoa used to make chocolate and other delectable foods.

Climate change raises the risks for farmers: Hotter weather hurts yields and longer rainy seasons trigger the spread of fungus and deadly pests. Increasingly unpredictable weather patterns have made it harder for farmers to deal with those challenges.

So farmers are switching to other crops, further reducing cocoa supplies and pushing prices higher: In 2024, prices nearly tripled, reaching about US\$12,000 per ton, driving up chocolate costs and leading some chocolate makers to try growing cocoa in laboratories.

Indonesia is the third-largest producer of cocoa in the world, behind Cote D'Ivoire and Ghana, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, farmers are joining with businesses and nongovernmental organizations to develop better growing practices and improve their livelihoods.

Sitting in the shade of his forest farm in south Sumatra, 3 miles (5 kilometers) from a national park where Sumatran tigers and rhinos roam, farmer Santoso is working with Indonesian chocolate maker Krakakoa.

After he began working with the company in 2016, Santoso starting using practices that helped his cocoa trees flourish, regularly pruning and grafting new branches onto older trees to promote growth and prevent the spread of disease. He is using organic fertilizer and has adopted agroforestry techniques, integrating other crops and trees such as bananas, dragon fruit, coffee and pepper, into his farm to foster a healthier ecosystem and invest in other income sources.

"It wasn't very successful before we met Krakakoa," Santoso said. "But then, we received training ... things are much better."

Krakakoa has trained more than 1,000 cocoa farmers in Indonesia according to its founder and CEO, Sabrina Mustopo. The company also provides financial support.

Santoso and other farmers in Sumatra said the partnership helped them to form a cooperative provides low-interest loans to farmers, with interest paid back into the cooperative rather than to banks outside of the community.

Cocoa farmers who need bigger loans from government-owned banks also benefit from partnering with businesses, as the guaranteed buyer agreements can provide collateral needed to get loans approved, said Armin Hari, a communications manager at the Cocoa Sustainability Partnership, a forum for public-private collaboration for cocoa development in Indonesia.

Dozens of other businesses, the government and nongovernmental organizations and cooperatives are also working with cocoa farmers to better cope with climate change, benefiting thousands, Hari said. He pointed to a collaboration between Indonesia's National Research and Innovation Agency and the local division of international chocolate maker Mars, which have released a new variant of cocoa that produces more pods per tree.

Challenges still remain, said Rajendra Aryal, the FAO's country director for Indonesia. Fewer people see cocoa farming as a lucrative business and instead are planting other crops such as palm oil. And many small-scale farmers still cannot get loans, he said.

But Aryal said he hopes that continued collaboration between farmers and others will help.

"If we can look at the major issues these (farmers) are facing ... I think this sector could be, again, very attractive to the farmers," he said. "Despite the challenges in Indonesia, I see that there are opportunities."

## Russia and Ukraine trade overnight aerial attacks after Putin sets out conditions for ceasefire

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia and Ukraine traded heavy aerial blows overnight, with both sides on Saturday reporting more than 100 enemy drones over their respective territories.

The attacks comes less than 24 hours after Russian President Vladimir Putin met with U.S. envoy Steve

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Witkoff to discuss details of the American proposal for a 30-day ceasefire in the war with Ukraine.

Putin told a press conference on Thursday that he supported a truce in principle but set out a host of details that need to be clarified before it is agreed. Kyiv has already endorsed the truce proposal, although Ukrainian officials have publicly raised doubts as to whether Moscow will commit to such a deal.

Speaking to reporters in Kyiv on Saturday, after virtual talks between Western allies hosted by U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer, Zelenskyy voiced Ukraine's support for the 30-day full ceasefire proposal to discuss a longer-term peace plan, but said Russia would attempt to derail talks with conditions and "buts".

Starmer has told allies to "keep the pressure" on Putin to back a ceasefire in Ukraine, hailing Ukraine as the "party of peace." Starmer said Putin will "sooner or later" have to "come to the table."

In a statement earlier on Saturday, Zelenskyy had accused Moscow of building up forces along the border.

"The build up of Russian forces indicates that Moscow intends to keep ignoring diplomacy. It is clear that Russia is prolonging the war," he said.

However, Zelenskyy stressed that if Russia did not agree with the U.S. proposal there would be "specific, harsh and straightforward" response from the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump.

He also said that Kyiv's troops were maintaining their presence in Russia's Kursk region after Trump said Friday that "thousands" of Ukrainian troops had been surrounded by the Russian military.

"The operation of our forces in the designated areas of the Kursk region continues," Zelenskyy said. "Our troops continue to hold back Russian and North Korean groupings in the Kursk region. There is no encirclement of our troops."

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio spoke Saturday with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. In the call, they discussed next steps to follow up on recent meetings in Saudi Arabia and agreed to continue working towards restoring communication between the United States and Russia, State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce said in a statement.

Ukraine's air force said Saturday that Russia had launched a barrage of 178 drones and two ballistic missiles over the country overnight. The attack was a mixture of Shahed-type drones and imitation drones designed to confuse air defenses. Some 130 drones were shot down, while 38 more failed to reach their targets.

Russia attacked energy facilities, causing significant damage, striking energy infrastructure in the Dnipropetrovsk and Odesa regions, Ukraine's private energy company DTEK said in a statement on Saturday. Some residents were left without electricity.

"The damage is significant. Energy workers are already working on the ground. We are doing everything possible to restore power to homes as soon as possible," the energy firm said.

Falling drone debris in Russia's Volgograd region sparked a fire in the Krasnoarmeysky district of the city, close to a Lukoil oil refinery, according to Gov. Andrei Bocharov, who provided no further details. Nearby airports temporarily halted flights, local media outlets reported. No casualties were reported.

The Volgograd refinery has been targeted by Kyiv's forces on several occasions since Moscow launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine more than three years ago, most recently in a drone attack on Feb. 15.

## The Alien Enemies Act: What to know about a 1798 law that Trump has invoked for deportations

By TIM SULLIVAN AND ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

President Donald Trump on Saturday invoked the Alien Enemies Act for the first time since World War II, granting himself sweeping powers under a centuries-old law to deport people associated with a Venezuelan gang. Hours later, a federal judge halted deportations under Trump's order.

The act is a sweeping wartime authority that allows non-citizens to be deported without being given the opportunity to go before an immigration or federal court judge.

Trump repeatedly hinted during his campaign that he would declare extraordinary powers to confront illegal immigration and laid additional groundwork in a slew of executive orders on Jan. 20.

His proclamation on Saturday identified Venezuela's Tren de Aragua gang as an invading force. U.S.

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District Judge James E. Boasberg, who was appointed by President Barack Obama, blocked anyone from being deported under Trump's proclamation for two weeks and scheduled a Friday hearing to consider arguments.

What is the Alien Enemies Act?

In 1798, with the U.S. preparing for what it believed would be a war with France, Congress passed a series of laws that increased the federal government's reach. Worried that immigrants could sympathize with the French, the Alien Enemies Act was created to give the president wide powers to imprison and deport non-citizens in time of war.

Since then, the act has been used just three times: during the War of 1812, World War I and World War II.

During World War II, with anti-foreigner fears sweeping the country, it was part of the legal rationale for mass internment in the U.S. of people of German, Italian and especially Japanese ancestry. An estimated 120,000 people with Japanese heritage, including those with U.S. citizenship, were incarcerated during the war.

What brought this to a head on a Saturday?

The American Civil Liberties Union and Democracy Forward preemptively sued Trump late Friday in federal court in Washington, D.C., saying five Venezuelan men being held at an immigration detention center in Raymondville, Texas, were at "imminent risk of removal" under the Alien Enemies Act. Boasberg blocked their deportation, prompting an immediate appeal from the Justice Department.

Almost simultaneously, the Trump administration agreed to pay El Salvador \$6 million to imprison about 300 alleged members of the Tren de Aragua gang for one year.

The agreement with El Salvador followed discussions between that country's president, Nayib Bukele, and U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio about housing migrants in El Salvador's notorious prisons. Bukele's government has arrested more than 84,000 people, sometimes without due process, since 2022 in a crackdown on gang violence.

ACLU attorney Lee Gelernt said two flights Saturday may have carried people deported under Trump's proclamation, one to El Salvador and one possibly to Honduras. Boasberg said any such flights would have to be returned midair to the United States.

The US isn't at war, is it?

For years, Trump and his allies have argued that America is facing an "invasion" of people arriving illegally. Arrests on the U.S. border with Mexico topped 2 million a year for two straight years for the first time under President Joe Biden, with many released into the U.S. to pursue asylum. After hitting an all-time monthly high of 250,000 in December 2023, they plunged to less than 8,400 this February — the lowest levels since the 1960s.

The act, Trump said in his inaugural address, would be a key tool in his immigration crackdown.

"By invoking the Alien Enemies Act of 1798, I will direct our government to use the full and immense power of federal and state law enforcement to eliminate the presence of all foreign gangs and criminal networks bringing devastating crime to U.S. soil," he said. "As commander in chief, I have no higher responsibility than to defend our country from threats and invasions."

Critics say Trump is wrongly using the act to target non-state actors, not foreign governments.

"Invoking it in peacetime to bypass conventional immigration law would be a staggering abuse," the Brennan Center for Justice wrote, calling it "at odds with centuries of legislative, presidential, and judicial practice."

"Summary detentions and deportations under the law conflict with contemporary understandings of equal protection and due process," the Brennan Center said.

Does illegal immigration constitute an invasion?

It's a new and untested argument. Trump has warned of the power of Latin American criminal gangs in the U.S., but only a tiny percentage of the people living illegally in the U.S. are criminals.

Trump, in his wartime declaration on Saturday, said Tren de Aragua "is perpetrating, attempting, and threatening an invasion of predatory incursion against the territory of the United States." He said the gang

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was engaged in "irregular warfare" against the United States at the direction of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

Tren de Aragua originated in an infamously lawless prison in the central state of Aragua and accompanied an exodus of millions of Venezuelans, the overwhelming majority of whom were seeking better living conditions after their nation's economy came undone last decade.

Last month, the Trump administration designated Tren de Aragua and seven other Latin American crime organizations as "foreign terrorist organizations," upping pressure on cartels operating in the U.S. and on anyone aiding them.

Congress' research arm said in a report last month officials may use the foreign terrorist designations to argue the gang's activities in the U.S. amount to a limited invasion. "This theory appears to be unprecedented and has not been subject to judicial review," the Congressional Research Service said.

The Venezuelan government has not typically taken its people back from the U.S., except on a few occasions. Over the past few weeks, about 350 people were deported to Venezuela, including some 180 who spent up to 16 days at the U.S. naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

## **Here's what you need to know about St. Patrick's Day**

By DEEPTI HAJELA Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — If it's March, and it's green, it must be St. Patrick's Day.

The day honoring the patron saint of Ireland is a global celebration of Irish heritage. And nowhere is that more so than in the United States, where parades take place in cities around the country and all kinds of foods and drinks are given an emerald hue.

In fact, it was among Irish American communities that the day became the celebration it is, from its roots as a more solemn day with a religious observance in Ireland.

But even in America, it was about more than a chance to dye a river green (looking at you, Chicago) or just bust out a favorite piece of green clothing, it was about putting down roots and claiming a piece of the country's calendar.

Who is St. Patrick and why does he even have a day?

Patrick was not actually Irish, according to experts. Born in the late fourth century, he was captured as an adolescent and ended up enslaved in Ireland. He escaped to another part of Europe where he was trained as a priest and returned to Ireland in the fifth century to promote the spread of Christianity.

Several centuries later, he was made a saint by the Catholic Church and like other saints had a day dedicated to him, which was March 17. He became Ireland's patron saint, and even when religious strife broke out between Catholics and Protestants, was claimed by both, says Mike Cronin, historian and academic director of Boston College Dublin.

How did an Irish saint's day become an American thing?

The short answer: Irish people came to America and brought their culture with them. St. Patrick's Day observances date back to before the founding of the U.S., in places like Boston and New York City. The first parade was held in Manhattan in 1762.

While the day was marked with more of a religious framing and solemnity in Ireland until well into the 20th century, in America it became the cultural and boisterous celebration it is today, marked by plenty of people without a trace of Irish heritage.

It was because people in Ireland started seeing how the day was marked in the U.S. that it became more of a festival in the country of its origin rather than strictly a religious observance, Cronin says, pointing to the parades, parties and other festivities that are held.

Oh, and by the way, for those who like to shorten names: Use St. Paddy's Day, not St. Patty's Day. Paddy is a nickname for Pádraig, which is the Irish spelling of Patrick.

Why is it such a big deal?

Holidays aren't simply days to watch bands go by, or wear a specific outfit or costume.

Being able to mark a holiday, and have others mark it, is a way of "putting down roots, showing that

you've made it in American culture," says Leigh Schmidt, professor in the Danforth Center on Religion and Politics at Washington University. "You've made your claim on that American calendar, in American civic life, by having these holidays widely recognized."

The spread of St. Patrick's Day celebrations in the U.S. was a way for Irish immigrant communities, who in the 19th century faced discrimination and opposition, to stake that ground, he says: "It's a kind of immigrant Irish way of combating nativist antagonism against them."

What's with four-leaf clovers, anyway?

A popular sight around the holiday is the shamrock, or three-leaf clover, linked to Ireland and St. Patrick.

The lucky ones, though, come across something that's harder to find: a four-leaf clover. That's because it takes a recessive trait or traits in the clover's genetics for there to be more than the normal 3 leaves, says Vincent Pennetti, who has been fascinated by the plants since high school.

Four-leaf clovers "are real. They are rare," he says.

That doesn't mean they can't be found. People just have to keep their eyes open and "get really good at noticing patterns and breaks in the patterns, and they just start jumping out at you," he says.

Katie Glerum finds them. She says it's not unheard of for her to be somewhere like out in a park and see one. She usually scoops it up and often gives it to someone else, to a positive response.

"If it happened every day, then I probably would be less excited about it," she says. "But yeah, when it happens, it is exciting."

## **American influencer who caused outrage after snatching a baby wombat in Australia issues apology**

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — An American influencer who sparked outrage after posting a video of her snatching a baby wombat from its mother while in Australia apologized on Saturday, saying she had acted out of concern for the young animal's welfare.

Australian authorities had threatened Sam Jones with deportation after she posted a video on her Instagram account of her running with a wombat joey in her hands from its mother on a roadside at night.

"I ran, not to rip the joey away from its mother, but from fear she might attack me," Jones, who also uses the name Samantha Strable, posted on social media.

"The snap judgement I made in these moments was never from a place of harm or stealing a joey," she added.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said the video of the young wombat being grabbed was "just an outrage."

Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke said his department was investigating whether Jones had breached the terms of her visa before she left the country on Friday.

"There's never been a better day to be a baby wombat in Australia," Burke said after she left Australia voluntarily.

Burke said he did not expect Jones would apply for an Australian visa again.

The animal appears to be a common wombat, also known as a bare-nosed wombat. It is a protected marsupial found only in Australia.

Montana-based Jones claimed she became "extremely concerned" when she found the two wombats on a road not moving.

"As wombats are so often hit on Australian roads, I stopped to ensure they got off the road safely and didn't get hit," Jones said.

"However, as is seen from the video, when I walked up to them, the joey did not move or run off. I was concerned it may have been sick or injured, and made a snap judgement to pick up the joey and see if that was the case," she added.

An unidentified man laughs as he films Jones saying: "I caught a baby wombat." They both note the mother's sounds of aggression.

Animal welfare experts said Jones could have harmed the joey by dangling it by its two forelegs.

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Jones said she returned the joey to its mother and ensured they both left the road.

"I have done a great deal of reflection on this situation and have realized that I did not handle this situation as best as I should have," she said.

"I have learned from this situation, and am truly sorry for the distress I have caused," she added.

Jones did not immediately respond Saturday to The Associated Press's questions, including where and when the baby wombat was captured.

A wombat expert said the video revealed the joey had the skin disease mange and would die without treatment.

Jones declined to reveal her current whereabouts to the AP.

## **Over 100,000 people join protest rally in Belgrade against Serbia's president and government**

By JOVANA GEC and DUSAN STOJANOVIC Associated Press

BELGRADE, Serbia (AP) — At least 100,000 people descended on Belgrade on Saturday for a mass rally seen as a culmination of months-long protests against Serbia's populist President Aleksandar Vucic and his government.

Large crowds of flag-waving protesters clogged the downtown area of the capital despite occasional rain, with people hardly able to move and many stuck hundreds of meters away from the planned protest venue.

Following apparent sporadic incidents between protesters and the police, university students — who have been leading the peaceful protests for the past four months — abruptly called for an end to the demonstration Saturday, saying they no longer can guarantee safety at the rally.

Most of the protesters dispersed, but thousands remained on the streets as tensions surged.

Police said the crowd reached 107,000 people at the peak of the protest. Serbian independent media described the rally as the biggest ever in the country, saying the numbers were much higher. All public transport in Belgrade was canceled as protesters streamed into the city from various directions.

The rally was part of a nationwide anti-corruption movement that erupted after a concrete canopy collapsed at a train station in Serbia's north in November, killing 15 people.

Almost daily demonstrations that started in response to the tragedy have shaken Vucic's firm grip on power in Serbia like never before in the past 13 years in charge. Many in Serbia blamed the crash on rampant government corruption, negligence and disrespect of construction safety regulations, demanding accountability for the victims.

Saturday's rally was dubbed "15 for 15," referring to the date of the protest and the number of people killed in the city of Novi Sad on Nov. 1. The crowds fell silent for 15 minutes in the evening to honor the victims.

Ahead of the demonstration, Vucic repeatedly warned of alleged plans for unrest while threatening arrests and harsh sentences for any incidents.

A deafening sound of whistles, drums and vuvuzelas filled the air on Saturday. Some protesters carried banners that read, "He's Finished!" Crowds chanted "Pump it Up," a slogan adopted during past four months of student-led protests.

"I expect that this will shake his authority and that Vucic will realize that people are no longer for him," Milenko Kovacevic, a protester, said.

The massive rally is not the endgame in a struggle for a more democratic Serbia, Dejan Simic, another protester, said. "This is just the beginning of the end, a process which I hope will end soon," he said.

Protesting university students have been a key force of the anti-graft movement with their call for justice. Students' determination has struck a chord among the citizens who are disillusioned with politicians and have lost faith in the state institutions.

Hundreds of police deployed in city

On Friday evening, tens of thousands of people staged a joyous welcome for the students who have been marching or cycling for days from across Serbia toward Belgrade.

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Interior Minister Ivica Dacic told state RTS broadcaster that 13 people were detained overnight. He said police detained six opposition activists for allegedly plotting to stage a coup and stir unrest.

By Saturday morning people were assembling in various parts of the city as they marched toward the center. The entire downtown zone was flooded with people hours before the scheduled start of the gathering.

Reflecting the tensions, police said they arrested a man who rammed his car into protesters in a Belgrade suburb, injuring three people. Hundreds of police officers were deployed inside and around government buildings and in front of the presidential palace.

Many railway and bus links toward Belgrade have been canceled, in an apparent effort to prevent people from attending the rally. The transport company said the cancellation was made "for security reasons."

Several reporters from neighboring Croatia as well as Slovenia have been turned back from Serbia's border under explanation that their presence at the rally "represents a security risk."

Vucic claims West is backing protests

Vucic has rejected earlier proposals for a transitional government that would prepare an early election. Fueling fears of clashes, Vucic's supporters have been camping in central Belgrade in front of his headquarters. They include ex-members of a dreaded paramilitary unit involved in the assassination in 2003 of Serbia's first democratic Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic, as well as soccer hooligans who are known for causing violence.

Private N1 television on Saturday broadcast footage of dozens of young men with baseball caps going into the pro-Vucic camp.

Vucic has been claiming that Western intelligence services were behind almost daily student-led protests with an aim to oust him from power. He has presented no evidence for the claims.

Previous student-led rallies in other Serbian cities have been peaceful while drawing huge crowds.

## **Romania's election body rejects far-right Diana Sosoaca's presidential bid, approves George Simion**

By STEPHEN McGRATH and ANDREEA ALEXANDRU Associated Press

BUCHAREST, Romania (AP) — Romania's electoral body Saturday rejected the candidacy of a controversial far-right politician in the presidential election rerun in May, but approved George Simion, the leader of the country's most popular far-right party.

The Central Election Bureau, or BEC, rejected Diana Sosoaca's bid, which was filed on Thursday in the capital, Bucharest. She said she will appeal the bureau's decision, which has to be submitted to the Constitutional Court within 24 hours.

The bureau said in its decision that it barred the pro-Russia Sosoaca, a former lawyer and leader of the far-right nationalist S.O.S. Romania party, from entering the race on the same grounds that she was excluded from last year's annulled election. The CCR argued that her public discourse, including opposition to Romania's European Union and NATO memberships, made her unfit to uphold the constitutional obligations of the presidency.

In a public letter posted online and addressed to U.S. President Donald Trump after the bureau's decision, Sosoaca, 49, claimed that "the democratic system has been destroyed and that the elections have already been rigged."

The court's decision to bar her from last year's race drew strong criticism from some civil rights groups and politicians, who denounced it as undermining democracy or politically motivated.

However, on Saturday, the election bureau validated the candidacy of Simion, who leads the far-right Alliance for the Unity of Romanians, which is Romania's second biggest party in the legislature.

'Return to democracy'

Simion, 38, who is under criminal investigation for inciting violence after last year's first-round winner Calin Georgescu was barred this week from entering the May rerun, has expressed concerns that he could also be excluded from the upcoming race.

"Now let's see if we can pass the CCR and return to democracy," he wrote on Facebook. Simion — who

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came fourth in the first round of last year's race with 13.8% of the vote — has denied any wrongdoing and claimed the investigation is politically motivated.

"I risk being subjected to the same abusive treatment ... If they eliminated two, they think they can eliminate a third," he told a news conference Friday after filing his candidacy.

Simion has stirred controversy on occasion. He campaigned for reunification with neighboring Moldova, which has barred him from entering the country. He is also banned from neighboring Ukraine, where authorities cited security concerns.

The Constitutional Court annulled last year's election two days before the Dec. 8 runoff, after allegations emerged that Russia had run a coordinated online campaign to promote far-right Georgescu, who ran as an independent. Moscow has denied meddling in the election.

The court's unprecedented decision last year plunged the European Union and NATO member country into a protracted political crisis and has drawn criticism from U.S. Vice President JD Vance, Elon Musk and Moscow.

Presidential rerun scheduled for May 4

Like other countries in Europe, the far-right vote has gained momentum in Romania in recent years.

In 2020, Simion's AUR party — which proclaims to stand for "family, nation, faith, and freedom" — doubled its support in a parliamentary election on Dec. 1 with 18.2%, up from 9% four years earlier.

On Saturday, thousands of demonstrators gathered in central Bucharest waved European Union and Romanian flags at a pro-EU rally to counter what the organizers described as a "wave of sovereignty and ultranationalism" that "threatens our unity."

"We are here to encourage each other because it is a very troubled period in Europe, the extremes are on the rise, especially the far right," Mihai Calin, an actor at the National Theatre Bucharest, told The Associated Press. "The impairment of Europe is underway. ... People are in danger of discouragement, disappointment. So we need to gather together to reunite."

The BEC also approved the candidacy of pro-Western Elena Lasconi, leader of the Save Romania Union party, who was set to face Georgescu in the scheduled runoff last year.

The first round of the presidential rerun is scheduled for May 4. If no candidate wins more than 50% of the ballots, a runoff will be held May 18. The deadline for presidential candidacy bids closes at midnight on Saturday.

Factoring in potential candidacy rejections and subsequent appeals, the final list of confirmed candidates will be known on March 19.

## **Tens of thousands join pro-Europe rally in Rome, amid worries over European Union's plan to rearm**

By GIADA ZAMPANO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Tens of thousands of Italians joined a pro-Europe rally in Rome's city center Saturday, waving blue European Union flags in a sign of support and unity as a European push for rearmament divides the country.

The initiative, supported by most of the center-left opposition parties, despite their different positions, was launched by Italian journalist Michele Serra at the end of February, with an editorial in the Italian daily La Repubblica titled: "Let's say something European."

"I wanted to organize a large demonstration of citizens supporting Europe, its unity and its freedom, with no party flags, only European flags," Serra said, launching the slogan: "Here we make Europe, or we die."

The initiative was born in response to U.S. President Donald Trump's destabilizing policies, which created an unprecedented rift between Europe and the U.S., strained over the war in Ukraine and an ongoing tariff battle.

Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni has reluctantly backed an EU plan to rearm Europe over concerns that the proposal by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen might weigh on Italy's giant debt,

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diverting much-needed funds to weapons spending.

The EU plan aims to generate around 800 billion euros over the next four years, the bulk of which will come from member states increasing their national spending on defense and security.

Internally, Meloni openly criticized the project, rejecting the term "rearm" as misleading and encouraged European partners to focus instead on common defense and security.

Organizers said Saturday that the pro-Europe rally, which filled Rome's central Piazza del Popolo with at least 30,000 people, reunited Italians on different sides and voting for opposite parties "in the name of democracy."

"We are here to defend freedom and democracy," said Daniela Condotta, one of the demonstrators. "These are concepts that we got used to over 80 years, but in reality they need to be defended, we cannot take them as a given."

Right-wing government parties snubbed the demonstration, standing behind Meloni, who has been struggling in her attempt to play a mediating role between Trump and the EU.

"There must be support for Europe, but with concrete reforms, not symbolic events," said Antonio Tajani, foreign minister and vice premier ahead of Saturday's rally.

Vice Premier Matteo Salvini, leader of the eurosceptic League's party, was openly critical. "While some people demonstrate with flags, we work to change this Europe, which crushes workers, farmers and entrepreneurs with its absurd rules," he said.

## **Pope works on signature reform from hospital as Vatican cuts back on updates on medical progress**

By COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis entered the fifth week of hospital treatment for double pneumonia Saturday very much looking ahead as he worked on a signature priority of his papacy and signs of his recovery remained on a positive trajectory.

Working from the Gemelli hospital, Francis has approved a three-year implementation and evaluation process for his reform project that aims to make the church a more welcoming and responsive place. The Vatican office for the synod, or gathering of bishops, released a timetable through 2028 to implement the reforms and said Francis had approved the calendar last week.

In a new medical update, the Vatican said that doctors were working to reduce the pope's nighttime reliance on the non-invasive ventilation mask, which will allow his lungs to work more.

Doctors underlined that while the pope's condition is stable, he still requires hospitalization for both physical and respiratory therapy, which are "showing further gradual improvements," the Vatican said Saturday in the first medical update in three days.

Besides treatment, the pontiff spent the day alternating between prayer, rest and some work.

The Vatican has announced that it would provide medical updates on the pope less frequently, in what it called a positive development. The next medical update will be made in the middle of next week, the Vatican said. It also has ceased issuing brief morning advisories that the pope had slept well and was starting his day.

Doctors this week said the 88-year-old pontiff was no longer in critical, life-threatening condition, but have continued to emphasize that his condition remained complex due to his age, lack of mobility and the loss of part of a lung as a young man.

Francis was admitted to the hospital on Feb. 14 after a bout of bronchitis that made it difficult for him to speak. Doctors soon added a diagnosis of double pneumonia and a polymicrobial (bacterial, viral and fungal) infection.

The first three weeks of his hospitalization were marked by a rollercoaster of setbacks, including respiratory crises, mild kidney failure and a severe coughing fit.

But medical updates this week have focused on his continued physical and respiratory therapy, as well

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as the rotation from high-flow oxygen through nostril tubes during the day and a non-invasive ventilation mask at night to help ensure his rest. An X-ray this week confirmed that the infection was clearing. Doctors have not indicated how much longer Francis will be hospitalized.

The pope this week participated in Lenten spiritual exercises from the hospital, which Vatican officials have said implied a lighter workload. He received a cake and hundreds of messages wishing him well on the 12th anniversary of his papacy Thursday.

The only public sign of life from the pope since his hospitalization was a recorded audio message thanking people for their prayers for his recovery in a weak and labored voice. It was played in St. Peter's Square for the faithful gathered for a nightly recitation of the rosary prayer earlier this month.

For the last four Sundays, the traditional blessing that the pope delivers from a window overlooking St. Peter's Square has been released as a text.

## **Trump signs a bill funding the government for 6 months, avoiding a shutdown**

Associated Press undefined

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump has signed into law legislation funding the government through the end of September, ending the threat of a partial government shutdown and capping off a struggle in Congress that deeply divided Democrats.

Harrison Fields, White House principal deputy press secretary, said in a post on X that Trump signed the continuing resolution Saturday.

The bill largely keeps government funding at levels set during Joe Biden's presidency, though with changes. It trims non-defense spending by about \$13 billion from the previous year and increases defense spending by about \$6 billion, which are marginal changes when talking about a topline spending level of nearly \$1.7 trillion.

The Senate cleared the legislation on Friday in a 54-46 party line vote, with 10 members of the Senate Democratic caucus helping the bill advance to passage despite opposition from within their party — most vocally from colleagues in the House, who exhorted them to reject the bill out of hand.

Senate Democrats argued for days over whether to force a shutdown, livid that Republicans in the House had drafted and passed the spending measure without their input. Democrats said the legislation shortchanges health care, housing and other priorities and gives Trump wide leeway to redirect federal spending even as his administration and the Department of Government Efficiency rapidly dismantle congressionally approved agencies and programs.

In the end, enough of the Democratic senators decided a government shutdown would be even worse than letting the funding bill pass.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said a shutdown would have given the Trump administration the ability to deem whole agencies, programs and personnel non-essential, furloughing staff with no promise they would ever be rehired.

"A shutdown will allow DOGE to shift into overdrive," Schumer said. "Donald Trump and Elon Musk would be free to destroy vital government services at a much faster rate."

Passage of the funding bill through the House earlier in the week was a victory for Trump and House Speaker Mike Johnson, who managed to hold Republicans together and muscle the bill to passage without support from Democrats — something they've rarely been able to achieve in the past.

## **Starmer challenges Putin to prove he is serious about peace by signing up to Ukraine ceasefire**

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Saturday challenged Russian President Vladimir Putin to sign up to a ceasefire in its war against Ukraine if he is serious about peace, and said allies will

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keep increasing the pressure on the Kremlin, including by moving planning for a peacekeeping force to an "operational phase."

Following a two-hour virtual meeting of what he has termed the "coalition of the willing," Starmer said the Kremlin's "dithering and delay" over U.S. President Donald Trump's ceasefire proposal, and Russia's "continued barbaric attacks" on Ukraine, "run entirely counter" to Putin's stated desire for peace.

"We agreed that now the ball was in Russia's court, and President Putin must prove he is serious about peace and sign up to a ceasefire on equal terms," the prime minister said.

Around 30 leaders were involved in the call, including European partners such as French President Emmanuel Macron and Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni. Also present were Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and leaders from Australia, Canada and New Zealand, as well as officials from NATO and the European Union's executive.

Starmer convened the meeting, the second in two weeks, as a means of helping Ukraine in the face of a change of approach by the U.S., following the return of President Donald Trump, as well as gauging support for any future possible peacekeeping mission. Many more countries were involved this time than the previous meeting on March 2.

He said there was a "stronger collective resolve and new commitments were put on the table," both in relation to defending the deal and also on the wider issue of the defense and security of Europe.

Troops in Ukraine to safeguard peace

Starmer said all those attending had reaffirmed their commitment to Ukraine's long-term security, and agreed that Ukraine "must be able to defend itself and deter future Russian aggression."

He added that "robust and credible security arrangements" are the best way to ensure lasting peace in Ukraine, and said military planners would convene again in the U.K. on Thursday to progress practical plans to support Ukraine's future security.

Without providing precise details, Starmer again said the allies were ready to put troops into Ukraine in order to safeguard the peace after any ceasefire. The U.K. and France have been working to get Ukraine's allies to provide troops, weapons or other aid to a European military force that could be deployed to reassure Ukraine and deter Russia from attacking again.

"We will build up Ukraine's own defenses and armed forces, and be ready to deploy as a 'coalition of the willing' in the event of a peace deal, to help secure Ukraine on the land, at sea, and in the sky," he added.

Ceasefire without conditions

The meeting took place in the wake of a U.S. proposal for a 30-day ceasefire in Ukraine, which Zelenskyy has backed. Putin has indicated that he supports a truce in principle but has set out a host of details that need to be clarified before agreeing to a ceasefire.

Starmer said Zelenskyy's backing for an unconditional ceasefire shows that Ukraine is the "party of peace," while Macron said it showed "courage."

In a statement, Macron said Russia "does not seem to be sincerely seeking peace" and that Putin was intensifying the fighting before negotiating.

"This is the moment when our strategy of peace through strength comes into play," he said. "If we want peace, Russia must respond clearly and the pressure — in coordination with the United States — to secure this ceasefire must be clear."

Zelenskyy emerged from the meeting calling for strengthened sanctions to pressure Russia into accepting a ceasefire without conditions that could pave the way for a peace deal. In a series of posts on X, he said "Moscow understands one language" and that a 30-day ceasefire "without killings" would create a window in which "it would truly be possible to negotiate all aspects of a real peace."

He also said it wasn't up to Putin who is stationed in Ukraine after any peace agreement as he gave his backing to a European contingent on the ground with an American "backstop."

"If Putin wants to bring some foreign contingent onto Russia's territory, that's his business. But it is not his business to decide anything about Ukraine's and Europe's security," Zelenskyy said.

A potential problem for the coalition and for Zelenskyy is that Trump has given little or no support for

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any security arrangements that will involve U.S. military backing.

'Good vibes coming out of Russia'

The United States has shifted its approach on the war since the return of Trump to the White House. The change of approach relative to that taken by President Joe Biden became particularly notable after Trump clashed with Zelenskyy on Feb. 28 in the Oval Office.

Starmer has taken the lead, along with Macron, in assembling the "coalition of the willing," in part to persuade Trump to maintain support for Kyiv. One outcome has already been a growing acceptance from European countries in particular that they need to do more to ensure their own security, including by increasing their defense spending.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz's office said the German leader welcomed Zelenskyy's readiness to enter an "unconditional" 30-day ceasefire and "stressed the significance of the American president's leadership role."

Trump voiced optimism Friday that Putin, who met with U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff earlier in the week, will back a ceasefire.

"I'm getting from the standpoint about a ceasefire and ultimately a deal some pretty good vibes coming out of Russia," he said.

Ukraine, under severe military pressure on parts of the front line three years after Russia's full-scale invasion, has already endorsed the truce proposal. Russia's army has gained battlefield momentum, and analysts say Putin likely will be reluctant to rush into a ceasefire while he feels he has an advantage.

"Sooner or later, Putin will have to come to the table," Starmer said. "So, this is the moment, let the guns fall silent, let the barbaric attacks on Ukraine, once and for all, stop and agree to a ceasefire now."

## At the Vatican switchboard, nuns soothe anxious callers about Pope Francis

By GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — How's Pope Francis doing? Can you give him my get-well wishes? Can I speak with him directly?

The nuns who operate the Vatican's switchboard are fielding a growing number of calls with questions like that as the pope remains hospitalized in Rome.

"They feel like children waiting to know about their father," said Sister Anthony, who runs the operation in a spartan office steps away from St. Peter's. Basilica. "We tell them to pray for him."

The Vatican's central number is public — and the sisters of the Pious Disciples of the Divine Master make sure all who call it get a real person, not the "press 1 for English, 2 for Latin" version of the automation that's become the norm at major institutions and businesses worldwide.

"It's the Vatican's voice — a voice that despite the digitalization of communications, the Vatican wants to preserve as a human voice," said Mother Micaela, the order's mother superior.

The Pious Disciples sisters are part of the 100-year-old Pauline orders, which are focused on communications, including landmark Catholic publishing operations around the world. In spring 1970, they were called to operate the Vatican switchboard and instructed by the then-mother superior to be "a voice that does good because through the phone wire it communicates Christ himself."

Today, often with headsets over their veils, the sisters cover the phones for 12 hours a day, seven days a week, in front of large monitors that show the incoming call's country of origin. Gendarmes, the Vatican's police, take the night shift.

About a dozen sisters hailing from Italy, the Philippines, Poland and elsewhere take calls from around the world, predominantly in Italian, English and Spanish.

Many callers just need to be directed to the right Vatican office or official, and the sisters oblige with the aid of massive yearbooks and directories, as well as a solid knowledge of protocols and a hefty dose of discretion, Sister Anthony said.

Those who call asking for financial help are put through to the Vatican almoner's office, which has provided aid recently to victims of war in Ukraine, floods in Brazil, and homelessness in Naples in southern Italy.

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On a recent afternoon, standing by her office chair decorated with a flower-embroidered pillow, Sister Gabriella took a call from a priest inquiring about jointly celebrating a Mass with other priests as part of his jubilee pilgrimage. Since 2025 is a Holy Year for the Catholic Church, with 32 million pilgrims projected to visit Rome, related calls make up a large part of the 50-70 queries the nuns answer daily.

But then there are callers with questions the sisters can't just look up or patch through — those in distress or angry or hopeless.

"We never get a call that's the same as the previous one," said Sister Simona, who's worked the switchboard for 15 years.

Counseling or comfort

Francis has built a reputation for eschewing formalities — from his way of dressing to his personal outreach to the poor and marginalized before his hospitalization — that projects more parish priest than head of state and leader of a global religion with 1.4 billion followers.

So some callers ask the nuns to just put him on the line.

"People of simple faith don't understand that the pope cannot speak with everyone," Sister Gabriella said.

Others need counseling or comfort. The sisters try to provide it within the boundaries of limited time and not being misconstrued as official Vatican spokespeople.

"But if I can give consolation or hope, I think that's OK," said Sister Anthony, who came to the Vatican a year ago from her native Philippines, where she was a provincial superior. "Some calls are very triggering."

Among those calling with concerns about the pope recently was a woman who told Sister Anthony that she is Muslim but likes Francis, and wanted to inquire about his health.

"That's very impressive for me," the sister recalled, while adding that some callers are far less friendly. "Others are angry with the church, so we listen respectfully."

'We feel very empowered'

Across the spectrum of callers, the sisters say they're particularly happy to provide a woman's touch.

"Pope Francis often reminds that the church is a mother," Mother Micaela said. "And to be this voice, this sensibility, this feminine approach gives a sense of reliability."

About 1,100 women, religious and lay, work at the Vatican. Francis has recently named a few to top posts, even though the priesthood and diaconate — and thus the majority of the church hierarchy — remain exclusively male.

The switchboard sisters find pride in both their unseen service and the increasing visibility of women at the Vatican.

"For me it's a blessing to be in one community with the pope and serving the universal church," Sister Anthony said. "Knowing there are more responsibilities for women, we feel very empowered."

## **Villanova fires coach Kyle Neptune after 3 years and no NCAA Tournament appearances**

By DAN GELSTON AP Sports Writer

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Villanova fired Kyle Neptune on Saturday after a three-year run where he succeeded Hall of Fame coach Jay Wright and failed to ever make the NCAA Tournament.

Neptune went 54-47 overall and 31-29 in the Big East in three seasons with the Wildcats, including a 19-14 record this season. The Wildcats — who won two national championships under Wright — lost to UConn on Thursday night in a Big East Conference Tournament quarterfinal at Madison Square Garden.

It was the first major decision made by Eric Roedl, a Villanova alumnus hired earlier this season as the athletic director.

"Since coming to Villanova, I have been struck by Kyle's tireless work ethic and his dedication to the student-athletes he served," Roedl said in a statement. "We are grateful to Kyle for his long service to Villanova and his mentorship to the many outstanding young men he has coached."

Neptune felt the heat this season as the Wildcats — once a perennial Big East winner and national title contender — slid into mediocrity and out of national prominence. Not even regular-season wins over St.

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John's and UConn could offset the overall lack of consistency in a season that also included losses to Columbia and Saint Joseph's.

The 40-year-old Neptune served under Wright on the Villanova coaching staff before accepting the head coaching position at Fordham in 2021. Neptune went 16-16 in his lone season at Fordham.

Wright, who was inducted into the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame in 2021, guided Villanova to titles in 2016 and 2018 and led the Wildcats to two other Final Four appearances. He went 520-197 in 21 seasons at the school and has remained a steady presence at Villanova games. He now works for CBS.

The Wildcats will miss the NCAA Tournament for a third straight season for the first time since Wright's first three seasons more than 20 years ago. Wright was given the grace period Neptune was not in large part because this was no rebuild on the Main Line — the program boasted healthy NIL coffers and had the nation's leading scorer this season in Eric Dixon.

Villanova could still play in the new College Basketball Crown tournament later this month in Las Vegas. Assistant Mike Nardi will serve as interim head coach.

The program that once anchored its success on the Villanova Way — a mini-dynasty built on NBA-ready upperclassmen — has become discombobulated under the roster chaos born of NIL money and the transfer portal. The yearly roster turnover has done little to build the culture — where senior stars once taught the new kids the concept of Villanova basketball — that was once a championship hallmark under Wright.

Well-liked and respected by all in the program, Neptune had downplayed criticism throughout his tenure, insisting over the last two seasons as fan unrest grew on the suburban campus that he didn't hear fans who booed him at times during pregame introductions or the horde that chanted "Fire Neptune!"

Wright floored Villanova when he retired at 60 years old just weeks after leading the Wildcats to a Final Four in 2022. Neptune was hired the same month. He first came to Villanova in 2008, serving two seasons as video coordinator. Neptune returned as an assistant coach in 2013 and worked under Wright as Villanova rose into a perennial Final Four contender.

That success as an assistant never carried over once Neptune got the top job. Villanova now will look to hire only its fifth coach since 1973.

The question is, will ties to Wright even matter as the search for a new coach ramps up or will Villanova look outside the program for a fresh start?

## **Voters flood town halls with fears of Social Security cuts, putting heat on GOP over Musk and DOGE**

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

HOLLAND, Mich. (AP) — One after another, callers on a telephone town hall with U.S. Rep. Bill Huizenga pressed the Michigan Republican about possible cuts to Social Security. Among them was a retired teacher and coach from West Michigan who said he and his wife, both with disabilities, have struggled to access their benefits.

The man, identified only as Michael from Allegan, said he feared that office closures and massive layoffs of federal workers — part of an effort by President Donald Trump and Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency to slash government spending — will make it even harder.

"We worked our entire life," he said. "But we can't get any help because we can't get through to anybody."

Huizenga pledged throughout the meeting: "Let me just reiterate, Social Security is not being touched."

Similar exchanges have played out across the political battleground of Michigan and elsewhere in the U.S. in recent days, as widespread cuts prompt fears among constituents about the popular program, which provides monthly benefits to retirees and some children. It's left Republicans scrambling to reassure voters and play down Musk's comments about Social Security and his ability to make cuts. The GOP also has accused Democrats of "fear-mongering" on the matter.

It's clear the issue has resonated. Of the 13 questions Huizenga took, nine were related to Social Security. In a nearby mid-Michigan district that was among the most competitive U.S. House races last year, a poll taken at the beginning of first-term GOP Rep. Tom Barrett's telephone town hall showed Social Security

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and Medicare as the top issue for attendees.

And at a fiery in-person town hall in Asheville, North Carolina, one of the first questions Rep. Chuck Edwards fielded was on how he would "ensure the protection of our Social Security benefits." After the question was read, the room of about 300 people erupted in applause.

While Trump has repeatedly said he "will not cut Social Security, Medicare or Medicaid benefits," the administration has begun layoffs affecting over 10% of the Social Security Administration workforce and the closure of dozens of offices nationwide.

Musk, the world's richest man and one of Trump's most influential advisers, has called Social Security "the biggest Ponzi scheme of all time." He hinted that it could be a primary target in his broader effort to downsize the federal government, saying in an interview on Fox Business Network that "most of the federal spending is entitlements" and "that's the big one to eliminate."

The White House insisted Musk was only referring to fraud.

Democrats, struggling for a unified message against Trump, see an opportunity. Polling indicates that cuts to Social Security would be unpopular, including within Trump's base. A solid majority of Republicans said the U.S. is spending "too little" on Social Security in a January AP-NORC poll, and only about 1 in 10 said "too much" is being spent on the program.

In her rebuttal to Trump's joint congressional address earlier this month, Democratic Sen. Elissa Slotkin warned that the president "could very well come after your retirement."

Potential cuts to critical government programs — such as Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security — brought Leslie Boyd out to listen to Edwards' town hall in North Carolina on Thursday. Those programs need to be improved instead of cut, Boyd said before the event, and she hoped Edwards had "the courage to stand up for that."

Boyd, 72, said she has some savings, but depends on Social Security.

"I paid into that my entire career," Boyd said. "I worked from the time I was 16. I paid into that, it's mine and I want it."

Asked about the program inside the packed meeting, Edwards began by saying "President Trump has made it clear" before he was interrupted by jeers. He then shifted to discuss his own viewpoint on the program instead.

"I'm not going to vote to dissolve your Social Security. I'm not looking to," Edwards started to say before being drowned out by shouting. He continued, "That's a promise that's been made to the American people. Those folks who have worked all their life and paid into that certainly deserve to reap the rewards."

Several attendees continued to yell at Edwards, demanding he stand up to Musk.

Barrett opened a telephone town hall in his mid-Michigan district Monday night by addressing the flood of concerns over DOGE he said his office had been receiving. Barrett stressed that Musk is merely an adviser and said programs are "temporarily paused and under review."

"I want to be very clear that this does not include Social Security, Medicare, or Medicaid," he said. "Again, this does not include Social Security, Medicare, or Medicaid. It's important to keep in mind that DOGE is only giving recommendations."

Republican leaders have cautioned lawmakers against in-person town halls, contending without offering evidence that paid activists were disrupting events.

Michigan Rep. Lisa McClain, a staunch Trump ally, claimed Democratic donors had "organized" the disruptions.

Yet even in tightly controlled telephone town halls, where questions are often screened in advance by congressional staffers, Social Security was a top concern.

During McClain's Monday call, a caller named Beverly, who said her handicapped son relies on Medicaid, expressed her fears: "I'm really concerned about that being cut, I guess."

"Let me put your mind at ease. Do not listen to the Democrats that are fearmongering," said McClain, who represents a heavily Republican district north of Detroit. "There are no cuts to Medicaid."

During the town hall with Huizenga, a caller named Val from Berrien County, Michigan, voiced her frustration, warning that office closures could cause some beneficiaries to "slip through the cracks."

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"Suddenly they're going to find themselves without the means to cover their housing, or the means to get the care they need or to be able to get food on the table," she said.

## **Rising to the occasion, Shohei Ohtani hits 2-run HR in return to Japan against Yomiuri Giants**

By DAVID BRANDT AP Baseball Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Japanese star Shohei Ohtani showed off some prodigious power in his return to the Tokyo Dome on Saturday night.

In an exhibition game against the Yomiuri Giants, the three-time MVP belted a two-run homer to right field in the third inning to give the Los Angeles Dodgers a 4-0 lead, setting off a roar from the roughly 42,000 fans in attendance.

"He always seems to rise to certain occasions, expectation to put on a performance," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said. "Once again, he delivered."

Ohtani led off the game with a walk and came to bat for a second time in the third inning. He didn't get his best swing on the ball, but the 6-foot-4, 210-pound slugger was still able to launch a slider from Yomiuri's Shosei Togo 391 feet, which was plenty of distance to get it over the fence.

The 30-year-old is just 4 1/2 months removed from surgery on his left (non-throwing) shoulder but has recovered remarkably fast. His big swing at the Tokyo Dome is another sign that he's feeling good heading into his eighth big league season, his second with the Dodgers.

"I was a bit out front on it, but it went out at a good angle and I thought it was going to be a home run," Ohtani said, through a translation.

The Dodgers put on quite a power display in the third with Michael Conforto, Ohtani and Teoscar Hernández all going deep to give Los Angeles a 5-0 advantage. Conforto said it was great to go deep in his first at-bat, but the conversation quickly switched to Ohtani.

"It's really amazing," Conforto said. "In every big moment, he seems to just do what the fans want him to do."

Los Angeles beat Yomiuri 5-1.

The Dodgers are playing in Japan as part of the Tokyo Series. The team is playing two exhibition games against Japanese teams before starting the regular season with two games against the Chicago Cubs on Tuesday and Wednesday.

In 2024, Ohtani became the first player in MLB history to have at least 50 homers and 50 stolen bases in one season. He played several seasons for the Nippon Ham Fighters in Japan before coming to the U.S. in 2018 with the Los Angeles Angels.

## **With Trump's zigzag actions on trade, March came in like a lion and won't be going out like a lamb**

By CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A gobsmacked planet is wondering what's next from President Donald Trump on the tariff spree he's set in zigzag motion.

In recent weeks, Trump has announced punishing tariffs against allies and adversaries alike, selectively paused and imposed them, doubled and then halved some, and warned late in the week that he'll tax European wine and spirits a stratospheric 200% if the European Union doesn't drop a 50% tariff on U.S. whiskey.

His ultimate stated goal is clear: to revive American manufacturing and win compromises along the way. But people and nations whose fortunes rise and fall on trade are trying to divine a method to his machinations. So far, he's spurred fears about slower growth and higher inflation that are dragging down the stock market and consumer confidence.

"His tariff policy is erratic, more erratic than April weather," Robert Halver, head of capital markets

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analysis at Germany's Baader Bank, said from the floor of the Frankfurt stock market. "So, there is no planning certainty at all."

The same goes for Exit 9 Wine & Liquor Warehouse in Clifton Park, New York, where owner Mark O'Callaghan is waiting to see if the prohibitive taxes on European wine — over a third of his business — really happen. He's mindful of Trump's seemingly whack-a-mole approach on which countries and goods to hit and how hard.

"It changes by the hour now, right?" O'Callaghan said. "You know, it's hard to navigate and manage, and everything changes so quickly."

In Canada, generations of political leaders took it as a point of pride that their country and the U.S. share the "world's longest undefended border," as they liked to say. No more.

Trump unifies Canada

Trump's sweeping taxes on Canadian imports come in the context of his wanting the U.S. to absorb its neighbor, an ambition that has united Canadians of the left and right in seething anger. A recent Nanos poll found that the vast majority of Canadians say their opinion of the United States has sunk from a year ago.

"The Americans want our resources, our water, our land, our country," Prime Minister Mark Carney said days before his swearing-in Friday. "Think about it. If they succeed, they will destroy our way of life."

Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly said: "If the U.S. can do this to us, their closest friend, then nobody is safe."

Trade wars sparked by retaliatory and escalating tariffs typically form in the grind of legislation, as happened with the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act nearly a century ago. This round comes from Trump's executive actions, with Congress passive, and can change like the weather, or perhaps even his moods.

That's how March came in like a lion.

Watch your manners

Personal pique is part of it all, suggests Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick. "If you make him unhappy, he responds unhappy," he told Bloomberg TV, explaining that Trump didn't like it when a variety of countries targeted with new U.S. tariffs retaliated with tariffs of their own.

Nor was Trump content when Canada did not show "immeasurable respect" for his trade grievances, Lutnick told CBS News. "Say, 'Thank you, I want to work it out with you,'" he added, as if advising Ottawa on how to be properly deferential. "I want you to be happy."

Trump himself said of Canada, "We don't need anything that they have." Canada is the largest foreign supplier of steel and aluminum to the U.S. and a key source of energy, cars and car parts via the integrated North American auto industry, food, critical minerals, fertilizer, lumber and more.

His stop-and-start tariffs have shaken the stock market, yielded some concessions and induced whiplash across industries and countries:

— Heavy taxes on Canadian and Mexican products were announced, shelved for a month — one day away from taking effect — imposed, then two days later adjusted to exempt, for now, a range of goods covered under the North American trade pact renegotiated in Trump's first term. Trump's aides say the reason for those tariffs is to end fentanyl smuggling and illegal immigration, though the president also wants to close the trade deficit with America's two largest trade partners.

— Trump stuck with his new tariffs on China, imposing a 10% penalty then doubling it, drawing retaliatory tariffs of 15% on U.S. farm goods this past week. The U.S. tariffs are also about fentanyl.

— The prevailing tensions between Canada and the U.S. flared when Ontario, the most populous province, retaliated against the U.S. duties with an announcement that it would add a 25% surcharge on electricity it exports to several states.

Trump, who now belittles Canadian sovereignty at every turn, immediately threatened to slam Canada with a 50% tax on steel and aluminum. He then pulled back to a still-hefty 25% when Ontario backed down, in a drama that played out over mere hours.

But Wednesday, the global U.S. tariffs on steel and aluminum kicked in, and Europe responded. The EU announced duties on U.S. textiles, home appliances, motorcycles, peanut butter, jeans and more. American whiskey, popular overseas, was marked for a 50% tariff.

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Trump's response: 200% on European wine and spirits and on Champagne.

"We want toasts, not tariffs," said Chris Swonger, president and CEO of the Distilled Spirits Council in the U.S.

But escalation appears to be the toast of the day. The U.S. has a new wave of reciprocal tariffs in line against Europe in early April, and exemptions for the auto industry and other industries are set to expire.

There's not much chance March will go out like a lamb.

## **Today in History: March 16, the My Lai massacre in Vietnam**

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Sunday, March 16, the 75th day of 2025. There are 290 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On March 16, 1968, during the Vietnam War, U.S. Army soldiers hunting for Viet Cong fighters and sympathizers killed as many as 500 unarmed villagers in two hamlets of Son My village, in what became known as the My Lai massacre.

Also on this date:

In 1802, President Thomas Jefferson signed a measure authorizing the establishment of the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York.

In 1935, Adolf Hitler broke the military terms set by the Treaty of Versailles by ordering the rearming of Germany and resuming military conscription.

In 1968, Sen. Robert F. Kennedy of New York announced his candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination.

In 1972, in a nationally broadcast address, President Richard Nixon called for a moratorium on court-ordered school busing to achieve racial desegregation.

In 1984, William Buckley, the CIA station chief in Beirut, was kidnapped by Hezbollah militants; he would be tortured by his captors and killed in 1985.

In 1985, Associated Press correspondent Terry Anderson was kidnapped in Beirut by Hezbollah militants; he would spend nearly seven years in captivity before being freed in December 1991.

In 1994, figure skater Tonya Harding pleaded guilty in Portland, Oregon, to conspiracy to hinder prosecution for covering up an attack on rival Nancy Kerrigan, avoiding jail but drawing a \$100,000 fine and three years of probation.

In 2016, President Barack Obama nominated Merrick Garland to take the seat of Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, who had died the previous month. Republicans who controlled the Senate would stick to their pledge to leave the seat empty until after the presidential election; they confirmed Trump nominee Neil Gorsuch in April 2017.

In 2020, global stocks plunged amid coronavirus concerns, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average falling 2,997 points (12.9%), the largest point drop and second-largest single-day percentage decline in history.

Today's Birthdays: Business executive Sanford Weill is 92. Actor Erik Estrada is 76. Football Hall of Famer Joe DeLamielleure is 74. Actor Isabelle Huppert is 72. Rock musician Nancy Wilson (Heart) is 71. Golf Hall of Famer Hollis Stacy is 71. Football Hall of Famer Ozzie Newsome is 69. Rapper-actor Flavor Flav is 66. Folk musician Patty Griffin is 61. Actor Lauren Graham is 58. Actor Judah Friedlander is 56. Actor Alan Tudyk is 54. Actor Alexandra Daddario is 39. R&B singer Jhené Aiko is 37. Rock musician Wolfgang Van Halen is 34. NBA center Joel Embiid is 31. MLB first baseman Vladimir Guerrero Jr. is 26.