

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Sunday, Dec. 21

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; Choir, 6 p.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.

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

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

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

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

7th Grade Soccer, 1 p.m.

4th Grade BB Practice, 2 p.m.

Dance Team Practice, 5 p.m.

6th Grade Boys Basketball, 6 p.m.

7th Grade Boys BB, 6 p.m.

## Mon., Dec. 22

Senior Menu: Scalloped potatoes with ham, green beans, fruit, whole wheat bread.

No School

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

Basketball Double Header at Redfield: (GJV-1, BJV-2:15, GV-3:30, BV-5:00)

MS/JV WR @ Salem (MCM). Boys Wrestling, 3 p.m.  
5th/6th Volleyball Practice, 6 p.m.

## Tuesday, Dec. 23

Senior Menu: Spaghetti with meat sauce, catalina blend, fruit, garlic toast.

No School

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

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## We the People

The South Dakota Humanities Council is making available a weekly column -- "We the People" -- that focuses on the U.S. Constitution. It is written by David Adler, who is president of The Alturas Institute, a non-profit organization created to promote the Constitution, gender equality, and civic education.



By David Adler

### Presidential Character Matters When Leading a Nation in Mourning

The dark and dismal political weather afflicting the White House, punctuated by another missed opportunity for President Donald Trump to exert a degree of moral leadership by consoling a nation stricken with grief following yet another deadly school shooting and the murder of an iconic film director, as well as the horrific, antisemitic massacre of Jews celebrating the first day of Hannukah at Bondi Beach in Sydney, Australia, will not soon disappear. President Trump's hollow response to the grizzly murder of students at Brown University—"things happen"—and his decision to dance on the grave of Rob Reiner, who had previously criticized him, laid bare his failure to understand that the "Presidency is not merely an administrative office," as Franklin D. Roosevelt observed, "it is pre-eminently a place of moral leadership."

In a cruel and grotesque Truth Social post, Trump made the tragic murders of Rob and Michele Reiner about himself. Only Donald Trump, who refers to himself in the third person, would invent a disease in his own name. No, it is not Narcissism; an ancient poet, Ovid, and 19th Century psychiatrists beat him to it. In essence, Trump claimed that Reiner had invited his own murder, alleging that the beloved Hollywood icon suffered from "Trump Derangement Syndrome," which, impliedly, had caused some unknown person to exact revenge against Reiner for his criticisms of the president. Of course, no evidence exists to indicate that the murder was politically inspired; indeed, the tragedy is deepened by the double murder charges against the Reiners' troubled son, who has dealt with drug addiction for half his life.

Trump's tasteless, classless and mocking post is beneath the dignity of an American President. Sadly, it reflects his character, his lack of empathy and lack of humanity. Anyone who has criticized Trump automatically becomes an enemy, a target for retribution. Just ask Sen. John McCain, whom he refused to recognize as a war hero, despite five years in a Vietnamese prisoner of war camp, in which he was frequently tortured by his captors for his patriotic refusal to denounce the United States. And consider Trump's cold, callous and heartless response, upon learning that the insurrectionists who were attacking Congress on January 6, 2021, were trying to kill his own Vice President, Mike Pence, who refused to violate his constitutional duty in service of Trump's desire to illegally remain in power: "Who cares?"

At this moment in America, we are far removed from the leadership, spirit and soothing words of Abraham Lincoln, who guided the Union through the most traumatic time in our nation's history. As the Civil War wound to a close, Lincoln, in his Second Inaugural Address, delivered on March 4, 1865, finished with words that seem fleeting, remote and impossible to imagine in our time: "With malice toward none and charity for all..." Scholars and historians will never confuse Trump with Lincoln, but Americans of every political stripe and color deserve a president who can set aside his prejudices and, for a moment, think not of himself, but of the nation.

Frederick Douglas, the abolitionist and editor who had escaped slavery in Maryland, attended Lincoln's inaugural address and said it "sounded more like a sermon than a state paper." Douglas was right: "the conscience of the nation must be roused." It is incumbent upon the president to set a moral course for the nation. No other elected official has a comparable bully pulpit to "rouse the conscience of the nation," to stir the soul of America, to console the grieving and chart a course that will inspire behavior that can give meaning to our ancient creed, the words set forth in the Declaration of Independence, and hail the virtues of democracy. These are high responsibilities that we hope the president will embrace. Late in the afternoon, on March 4, President Lincoln asked Frederick Douglas what he had thought of his speech. "Mr. Lincoln," Douglas said, "that was a sacred effort." Americans don't expect their president to rise to every occasion, but there should be "a sacred effort" to do so. The presidency is a test of character. The moral force of the presidency affords abundant possibilities for leadership when the nation is grieving. It is in such a moment that we recall Woodrow Wilson's observation that the president can be "as big a man as he can." Not small and petty.

## Groton Area wrestlers place second in team standings with multiple finalists and placers

Groton Area wrestlers delivered a strong, top-to-bottom performance at Saturday's tournament at the Sioux Valley Cossack Invitational, finishing second overall in the team standings with 174.0 points, trailing only Kingsbury County (249.5) and edging Sioux Valley (169.5) in a tightly contested race near the top.

Groton Area accumulated points across nearly every weight class, sending multiple wrestlers to championship matches and placing several others in the top four to secure the runner-up team finish in a 13-team field.

At 106 pounds, Groton Area had two competitors in action. Preston Hinkelman opened the tournament with a quick pin of Sioux Valley's Fin Benson in just 45 seconds. After a quarterfinal loss to Watertown's Leo Walraven, Hinkelman fought back with another pin over Regan Ness of Sioux Valley before being eliminated in the consolation rounds. Bentley Ehresmann also picked up an early win at 106, pinning Kaiser Thiex of Sioux Valley in 1:08, before dropping his next two matches.

Groton Area produced one of the highlights of the tournament at 120 pounds, where teammates Wyatt Hagen and Keegan Kucker met in the championship match. Hagen advanced to the finals with a pin over Blair Davis of Kingsbury County and a technical fall against Mitchell's Brandon Wagner. Kucker reached the final with three straight pins, including a 57-second semifinal victory. Hagen secured first place with a 6-3 sudden-victory decision, while Kucker finished second.

Kyson Kucker also reached the championship bout at 126 pounds, recording back-to-back pins in the quarterfinals and semifinals before finishing runner-up.

At 132 pounds, Noah Scepaniak earned a pin in the quarterfinals and rebounded from a semifinal loss with a fall in the consolation semifinals. He finished fourth after dropping the third-place match. Teammate Xavier Ellenbecker also competed at 132, receiving a bye before being eliminated in consolation action.

Kason Oswald wrestled to a fourth-place finish at 150 pounds, earning a major decision in the quarterfinals and adding a pin in the consolation semifinals. Donavon Block followed a similar path at 157 pounds, opening with two pins, rebounding with another fall in the consolation semifinals, and finishing fourth.

Ben Hoeft advanced to the semifinals at 165 pounds with a technical fall and later picked up a consolation-round decision before placing fourth.

One of Groton Area's strongest finishes came at 175 pounds, where Walker Zoellner opened with a pin and a decision. After a semifinal setback, Zoellner responded with two more pins in the consolation rounds, including a fall in the third-place match, to earn third place.

Isaiah Scepaniak placed fourth at 190 pounds, recording three pins on the day, including a victory in the consolation semifinals. Layne Johnson reached the championship match at 215 pounds with three pins—two coming in under 90 seconds—before finishing runner-up after a narrow 3-1 decision in the finals.

At 285 pounds, Gavin Englund capped the day with a third-place finish, tallying four pins, including two in under a minute, as Groton Area closed the tournament with momentum.

Groton Area's depth across the lineup proved to be the difference, as the Tigers outpaced Sioux Valley, West Central JV, and Brookings JV to secure second place overall and continue building confidence heading deeper into the season.

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## President Trump Signs Rounds' Wounded Knee Bill into Law

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Mike Rounds (R-S.D.), a member of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, today issued the following statement after President Trump signed Rounds' bill, the Wounded Knee Massacre Memorial and Sacred Site Act, into law.

"President Trump has officially signed the Wounded Knee Massacre Memorial and Sacred Site Act into law," said Rounds. "The land at this symbolic and sacred site will now be held in possession of both the Oglala Sioux and Cheyenne River Sioux tribes to be preserved for future generations. I'm pleased that our work on this legislation over the past three years has paid off. We will continue to tell the story of Wounded Knee and the events that occurred at this location 135 years ago this month."

The Wounded Knee Massacre Memorial and Sacred Site Act would place 40 acres of land at the site of the Wounded Knee Massacre into restricted fee status, making certain that the land is held by both the Oglala Sioux and Cheyenne River Sioux tribes for generations to come.

### BACKGROUND:

Rounds first introduced the Wounded Knee Massacre Memorial and Sacred Site Act in June 2023. Ryman LeBeau, Chairman of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, and Frank Star Comes Out, President of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, testified on the legislation in a Senate Committee on Indian Affairs hearing. The committee later unanimously passed legislation, but was blocked from passing the full Senate.

Rounds later reintroduced the bill to the 119th Congress in January 2025. The Wounded Knee Massacre Memorial and Sacred Site Act unanimously passed the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs in March 2025, and unanimously passed the full Senate on December 11, 2025. This legislation is cosponsored by Majority Leader John Thune (R-S.D.). Representative Dusty Johnson (R-S.D.) introduced companion legislation in the House.

## Yesterday's NFL Scores (Saturday, Dec. 20)

Philadelphia Eagles 29, Washington Commanders 18 — Eagles clinch the NFC East with the win.  
Chicago Bears 22, Green Bay Packers 16 (OT) — Bears rallied to take the NFC North lead in a dramatic overtime finish.

(These were the two Week 16 games played on Saturday.)

## NFL Schedule — Sunday, December 21, 2025

(All times Eastern; matchups from league-wide Week 16 listings.)

The Big Lead

### 1:00 PM ET (FOX / CBS / NBC / Streaming)

Buffalo Bills @ Cleveland Browns — CBS

Los Angeles Chargers @ Dallas Cowboys — FOX

New York Jets @ New Orleans Saints — CBS

Tampa Bay Buccaneers @ Carolina Panthers — FOX

Minnesota Vikings @ New York Giants — FOX

Cincinnati Bengals @ Miami Dolphins — CBS

Kansas City Chiefs @ Tennessee Titans — CBS

### 4:05 PM ET (FOX / CBS)

Atlanta Falcons @ Arizona Cardinals — FOX

Jacksonville Jaguars @ Denver Broncos — FOX

Las Vegas Raiders @ Houston Texans — CBS

Pittsburgh Steelers @ Detroit Lions — CBS

### 8:20 PM ET (NBC — Sunday Night Football)

New England Patriots @ Baltimore Ravens — NBC Sunday Night Football (primetime)

## Northern State splits weekend at Crookston with men's win, women's setback

CROOKSTON, Minn. — The Northern State University basketball programs experienced contrasting outcomes Saturday at Minnesota Crookston, as the men's team completed a weekend sweep with a convincing road victory while the women's squad battled back from an early deficit but fell short in its contest.

The Northern State University men's basketball team closed the weekend on a high note, defeating Minnesota Crookston 86-67 to improve to 4-3 in the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference heading into the holiday break.

Northern took control midway through the first half and never relinquished the lead, scoring 38 points before halftime and adding 48 more in the second half. The Wolves shot 55.0 percent from the floor and dominated the interior, holding a 43-29 rebounding advantage while scoring 32 points in the paint. A season-high 43 bench points fueled the offensive outburst.

Marshawn Smith delivered a season-best performance, pouring in 31 points on an efficient 14-of-18 shooting while adding seven rebounds. Joshua Book followed with 13 points and four assists, while Ty Rogers and Nelson Reynolds added 11 and 10 points, respectively. Tobi Obiora matched his career high with 13 rebounds and chipped in nine points, and Simon Akena contributed seven points, seven rebounds, and a block.

Northern also received contributions from across the lineup, finishing with seven three-pointers, 11 assists, and nine points off turnovers in front of 305 fans at Lysaker Gymnasium.

Earlier in the weekend, the Northern State Wolves women's basketball team dropped a 65-58 road decision to Minnesota Crookston, falling to .500 through 12 games on the season.

Northern struggled early, scoring just nine points in the opening quarter, and entered halftime trailing 44-28 after Crookston erupted for 28 second-quarter points. The Wolves showed resilience after the break, outscoring the Golden Eagles 22-12 in the third quarter, but were unable to fully erase the deficit.

Lily Klein led Northern with a double-double, finishing with 14 points and 10 rebounds. Izzy Moore added a team-high 11 rebounds along with seven points, while Reagan Rus came off the bench to score 11 points. Carli Kuyper was efficient in limited touches, scoring eight points and pulling down six rebounds while shooting a perfect 100 percent from the field.

Minnesota Crookston was paced by Emma Miller, who scored a game-high 20 points and dished out four assists, with Riley Jenkins and Rayna Klejeski each adding 13 points.

The Northern men will return to action on New Year's Day, hosting Black Hills State at 1 p.m. inside Wachs Arena. The women will open the 2026 portion of their schedule on the road at University of Jamestown on Jan. 3, with tipoff set for 3 p.m.

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**Annual Membership Rates**

Student is \$29.82 per month or \$255.60 per year  
Single is \$35.15 per month or \$319.50 per year  
2-Person is \$55.45 per month or \$575.10 per year  
Family is \$67.10 per month or \$702.26 per year

**Month-to-Month Rates**

Student is \$35.15 per month  
Single is \$40.48 per month  
2-Person is \$59.78 per month  
Family is \$72.43 per month

**While many other rates have gone up, ours has not.  
Same rates for several years!**

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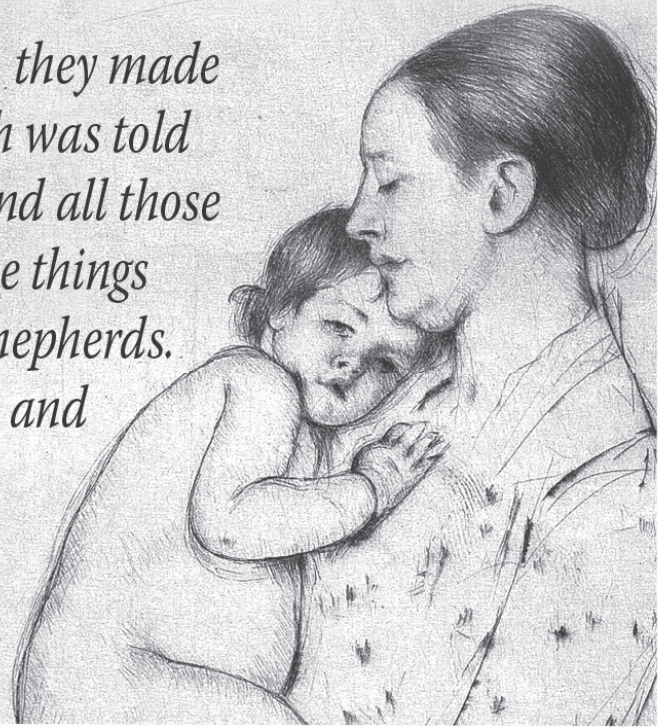


## THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE

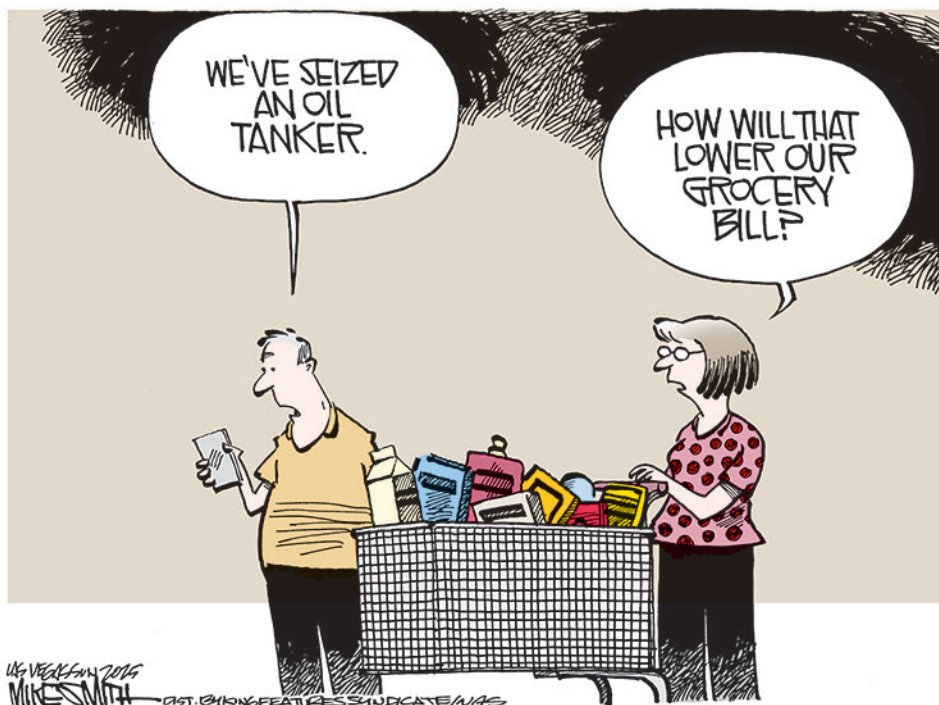
*Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.*

LUKE 2:17-19

Detail from "Quietude" by Mary Cassatt (1891)



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## BIBLE

## TRIVIA

by Wilson Casey

1. The main Christmas story is paraphrased from which two New Testament books (KJV)? *Mark/John, Acts/Romans, Matthew/Luke, Jude/Revelation*

2. Who visited Jesus on the night of His birth and found Mary, Joseph and the babe lying in a manger? *Innkeeper, Shepherds, Herod, Magi*

3. Where was the young child when the Magi came to visit Him to present gifts? *Manger, Under the stars, House, Temple*

4. How many times does the word "Christmas" appear in the Bible (KJV)? *Zero, 1, 2, 7*

5. Who was King of Judaea at the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem? *Solomon, Herod, Balak, Belshazzar*

6. What animals were present at Jesus' birth? *Lions and bears, Sheep and goats, Cows and donkeys, No mention in Bible*

ANSWERS: 1) Matthew/Luke, 2) Shepherds, 3) House, 4) Zero, 5) Herod, 6) No mention in Bible

*Sharpen your understanding of scripture with Wilson Casey's latest book, "Test Your Bible Knowledge," available in bookstores and online.*


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**FLASH GORDON**

Character Profile:

*Dale Arden*



**AN AIRPLANE IS TORN ASUNDER BY A FREAK METEOR SHOWER!**

THAT FATEFUL FLIGHT BRINGS RAVEN-HAIRED BEAUTY PALE ARDEN INTO THE ARMS OF WORLD-RENOUNDED ATHLETE FLASH GORDON.

SINCE THEN THEIR LIVES HAVE BEEN BOUND TOGETHER... FACING ADVENTURES UNDREAMED OF IN THE HOPES OF SAVING A WORLD ON THE BRINK OF DESTRUCTION!

**FLASH GORDON**

12-7 BY JIM KEEFE

FLASH'S SCOUTING PARTY IS ATTACKED ON ALL SIDES BY A TENTACLED TERROR!

OUT OF MY WAY!

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FLASH!

THUD!


AAAAA!

DALE...!


NEXT: IRREVOCABLE LOSSES!

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## Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS



**M**AKE YOUR FIRST RULE FOR HANDLING ALL TROUBLE SHOTS: STAY COOL. LOSING YOUR TEMPER MUDDIES YOUR THINKING ABOUT HOW TO MINIMIZE THE PENALTY, AS WELL AS BUILDING TENSION INTO YOUR SWING.



RECOGNIZING THAT GOLF NEVER HAS BEEN OR WILL BE AN ENTIRELY FAIR GAME, AND THAT UNLUCKY BREAKS ARE SIMPLY PART OF ITS CHALLENGE, HAS HELPED ME IN TOUGH SITUATIONS.

IT WILL HELP YOU, TOO.

JNJ

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## Lynch Syndrome Patient Is Unsure Whether To Stop Colonoscopy

DEAR DR. ROACH: I am a 79-year-old female who is currently on biannual infusions for osteoporosis and high cholesterol. In 2018, I was diagnosed with Lynch syndrome with an MSH6 deviation. The genetic testing was done after I had breast cancer, endometrial cancer, and a colectomy for three years in a row. Yearly colonoscopies have been included in my preventive care.

In 2022, during my colonoscopy, I experienced excessive vagal tone and needed atropine to restore my heart beat. Since this time, I have been given Robinul prior to the procedure, which has prevented another incident of bradycardia. My gastroenterologist isn't recommending any more colonoscopies due to this cardiac issue and my age.

I have always been told that colonoscopies are necessary to prevent cancerous polyps from occurring. Is the risk of a colonoscopy under these circumstances greater than the risk of my getting colon cancer due to Lynch syndrome? -- F.M.

ANSWER: People with Lynch syndrome are at an increased risk for a variety of cancers, especially of the colon but also other parts of the gastrointestinal tract (stomach, small intestine, pancreas and bile duct). People with Lynch syndrome are also at an increased risk for endometrial and ovarian cancer (in women), prostate cancer (in men), and other cancers including skin and brain cancer. Gastroenterologists know that cancer of the colon can arise without a polyp.

For people with Lynch syndrome, a genetic analysis is recommended. The exact gene may help determine the optimal beginning time and frequency of a colonoscopy. The decision of when to discontinue screening via a colonoscopy is not agreed upon by experts, but clearly when the risk of performing a colonoscopy is greater than the expected benefit, it's time to stop. This is less about reaching a certain age than it is about underlying medical conditions.

You have a slow heart rate during sedation for the colonoscopy, and it sounds as though your doctors have found a way to do the colonoscopy safely. Your lifetime risk of colon cancer, given your MSH carrier status, is estimated to be 20%, but at age 79, you have outlived much of your risk. Most cases of colon cancer in Lynch syndrome occur before age 80.

In my opinion, both the risks of a colonoscopy and the risk of developing colon cancer are low, which means that it is difficult to make a recommendation as to which way you should go. Stopping is reasonable, but if you feel strongly that you want to continue, this is also reasonable.

\*\*\*

DEAR DR. ROACH: I am an 80-year-old female who had shingles 30 years ago for six weeks. It subsequently came back permanently (herpetic neuralgia). I take 2,500 mg of gabapentin daily, which mostly controls the pain but does not help the tingling and numbness in the soles of my feet. Do you have any suggestions? -- P.S.V.

ANSWER: I am sorry that you had this complication, which is one of the most known painful conditions. Gabapentin is an effective treatment for many people with painful neuropathies of any kind. A dose of 2,500 mg is very high but is often needed to get control of the pain; however, many people cannot tolerate this dose due to the fatigue and sleepiness that it often causes.

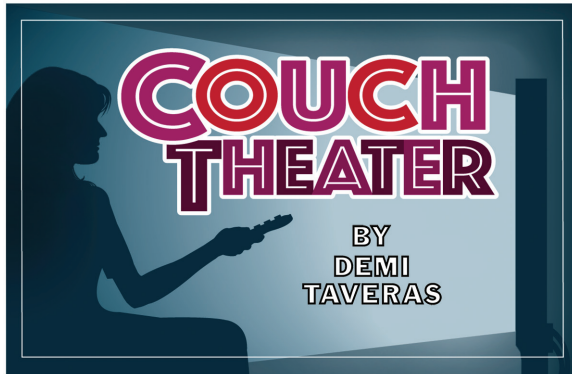
In my experience, some people can get pain relief from gabapentin without getting relief from the numbness and tingling. It is possible that even higher doses might help (the maximum dose is 3,600 mg), but before trying this, your doctor might consider a second type of treatment for neuropathy, such as a tricyclic agent or an SNRI.

These drugs were developed for depression but can be used for neuropathy symptoms. Sometimes, multiple medicines allow for better symptom relief with less side effects than very high doses of just one medicine.

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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**Josh Duhamel, left, and Jeremy Ray Taylor star in "London Calling."** (Courtesy of MovieStillsDB )

"Now You See Me, Now You Don't" (PG-13) -- The third installment in the "Now You See Me" franchise is now available to rent from the comfort of your home. You'll recognize a few familiar faces

from the previous two films, including Isla Fisher ("Jay Kelly"), who reprises her role as Henley from the first film. Her replacement in the second film, Lizzy Caplan ("Cobweb"), also made the cut to be one of the Horsemen magicians in this film, along with returning actors Jesse Eisenberg, Woody Harrelson and Dave Franco. The film kicks off 10 years after the Horsemen's last performance, and the Horsemen are pulled together by a mysterious tarot card from the Eye, a secret society for magicians. Expect a few twists and turns behind a backdrop of magical spectacles. (Amazon Prime Video)

"Him" (R) -- Jordan Peele has become known for being a respected filmmaker in the horror community with works such as "Us," "Nope" and "Get Out." He produced this new supernatural thriller, starring Marlon Wayans ("Air") and Tyriq Withers ("I Know What You Did Last Summer"), which is out now to stream. Withers plays aspiring football player Cam, who grows up idolizing San Antonio Savior football star Isaiah White (Wayans). When Cam gets the chance to train with Isaiah in a remote desert, he gladly accepts and is determined to become Isaiah's successor. Isaiah expects to put Cam through the wringer, but he shouldn't doubt the lengths that Cam is willing to go to be a superstar. (Peacock)

"The 48th Kennedy Center Honors" (TV-PG) -- The 48th Kennedy Center Honors ceremony premieres on Dec. 23 and will feature five honorees who have achieved a lifetime of artistic excellence. Kennedy Center president Richard Grenell stated that "for nearly half a century, this tradition has celebrated those whose voices and visions tell our nation's story and share it with the world." The five recipients this year are country music star George Strait, the four members of the rock band KISS, theatre icon Michael Crawford, disco queen Gloria Gaynor, and legendary actor Sylvester Stallone. Each of these honorees has artistically contributed to our society for over three decades or more and has earned a special place in our hearts through their music or acting performances. (Paramount+)

"London Calling" (R) -- Josh Duhamel ("Shotgun Wedding") leads this action-comedy film that is right up his alley; he plays a hitman named Tommy, who is suddenly down on his luck after mistakenly kissing a relative of London's biggest crime lord Freddy Darby (Aidan Gillen). Tommy bides his time in Los Angeles but ultimately must get back to his son in the United Kingdom, so he takes up an offer from his new employer in exchange for passage. The offer? To teach his employer's awkward young son Julian (Jeremy Ray Taylor) how to be a "man," as in, taking the kid with him along on his hitman escapades. With Julian's naivete, Tommy's lack of patience, and Freddy's ruthlessness, this is sure to be Tommy's most challenging mission yet -- and a very memorable first mission for Julian. Out now. (Hulu)

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1. Who wrote and released "Rebel Rebel"?
2. Which artist was born Yvette Marie Stevens?
3. Name the duo that was first to release "Ain't No Mountain High Enough."
4. Who released "Danger Zone" in 1986?
5. Name the song that contains this lyric: "Go on now, go, walk out the door, Just turn around now, 'cause you're not welcome anymore."

Answers

1. David Bowie, in 1974. There were two versions, the U.K. version (from Bowie's "Diamond Dogs" album) and the U.S.

version, which was shorter and had added background vocals.

2. Chaka Khan. She was lead singer for Rufus, best known for "Tell Me Something Good," written by Stevie Wonder and released in 1974. Rufus won a Grammy for Best R&B Vocal Performance for the song.

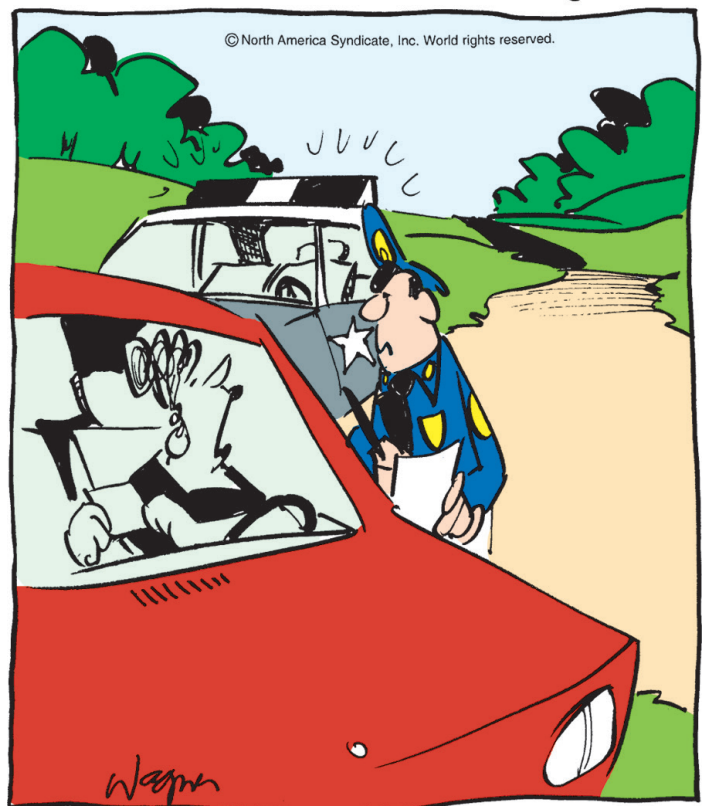
3. Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell, in 1967. The song was used in several films, including "Stepmom" in 1998 and "Remember the Titans" in 2000.

4. Kenny Loggins.

5. "I Will Survive," by Gloria Gaynor, in 1978. The disco song stayed at the top of the Hot 100 chart for three weeks and snagged a Grammy for Best Disco Recording. At the same time it received nominations for Best Female Pop Vocal and Record of the Year.

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## GRIN and BEAR IT <sup>Wagner</sup>



"Don't look at the picture, OK?"

## Just Like Cats & Dogs

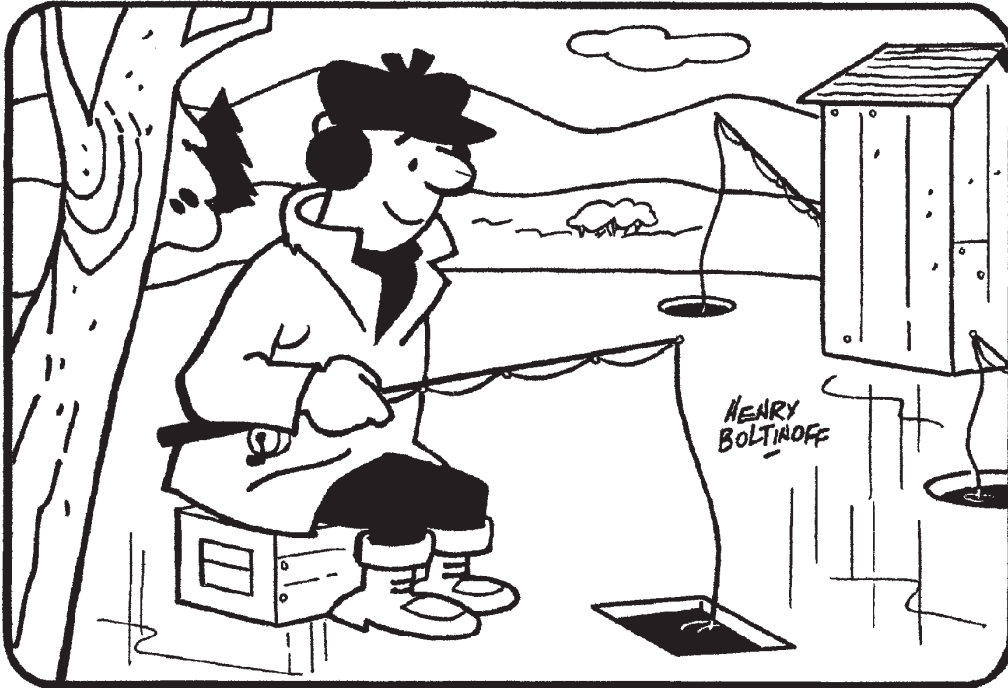
by Dave T. Phipps



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## HOCUS-FOCUS

BY  
HENRY BOLTINOFF



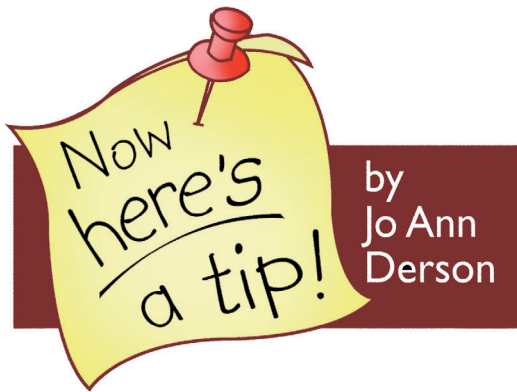
Find at least six differences in details between panels.



Differences: 1. Hut is taller. 2. Laces are missing. 3. Crate is different. 4. Cloud is lower. 5. Reel is moved. 6. Fishing line is

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\* Cookies are so fun to make (and to eat). To save some of your favorites for the new year, simply place dough balls on a cookie sheet and freeze. Pop into a freezer-safe bag, and you can have freshly baked cookies pretty much anytime!

\* Many people have heard of using applesauce in place of oil or fats, but here's one from T.L. in Georgia about a sugar replacement: "You can use pureed grapes in place of white sugar in some quick bread or muffin recipes. It's pretty easy to make in the blender, and all you need to do is adjust the dry ingredients a little bit so that your muffins are not too moist."

\* "Wine. Nobody I know is wasting it. But if you're done before the bottle is, you can pour the leftover wine into ice cube trays to save it. You can use it later in recipes, or (my favorite)

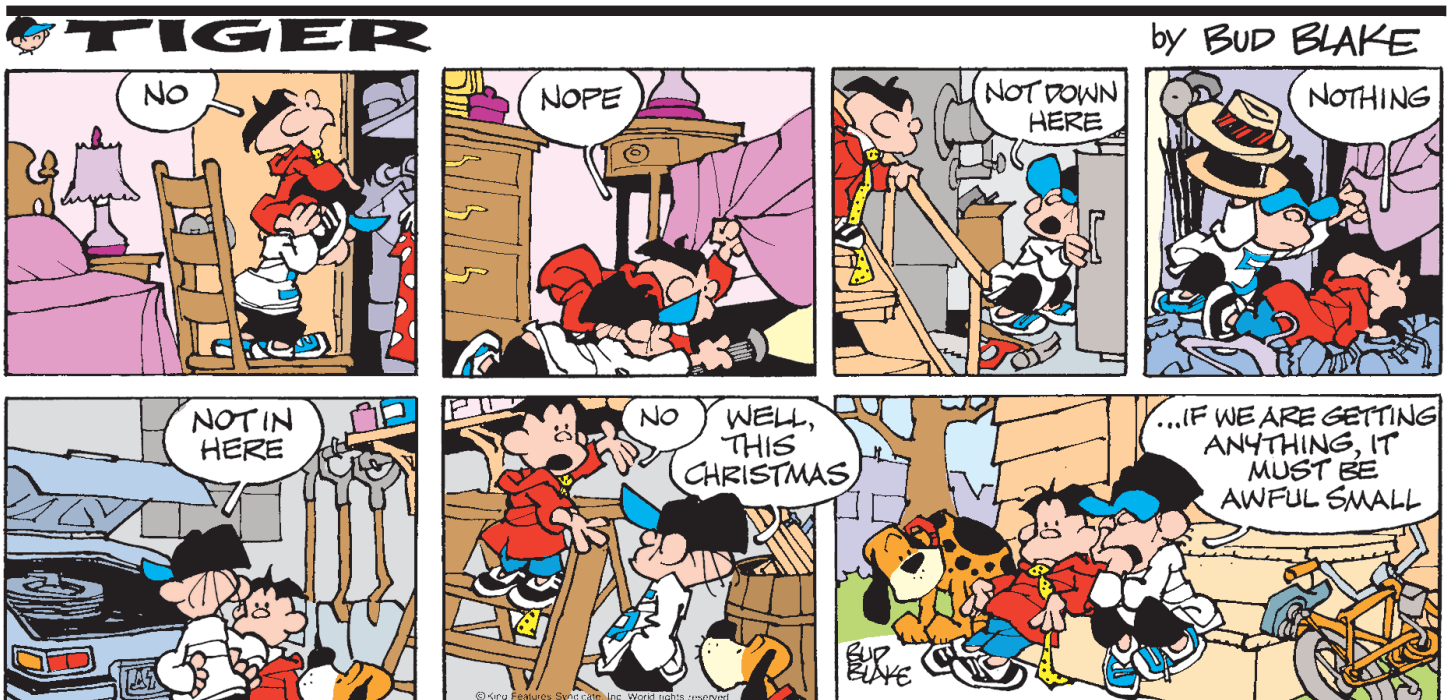
to chill a glass of wine!" -- E. in Florida

\* If you have a lot of overnight guests, here is a good trick so that everybody can hang up his or her towel: Grab some S hooks from the shop and hang them off the towel bar. Now everyone can have a towel hook.

\* I have two carafes that I use for my breakfast bar. In one I keep coffee and the other holds milk or cream. On holiday nights, I prep the cream carafe and put it in the fridge. In the morning, while the first pot of coffee is brewing, I fill the coffee carafe with hot water and let it sit. It keeps the coffee hot longer. Then guests may serve themselves some coffee while the next pot is brewing.

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

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## King Crossword

### ACROSS

- 1 Pundit's piece
- 5 "Kapow!"
- 8 Ancient mariner
- 12 Carousel, for one
- 13 Half of dos
- 14 German car name
- 15 Hgt.
- 16 Baseball's Hodges
- 17 \$ dispensers
- 18 Humble
- 20 Tolkien villains
- 22 Eye furtively
- 26 Plant firmly
- 29 Droop
- 30 Shelter
- 31 Librarian's advice
- 32 Enjoy Vail
- 33 Ink smudge
- 34 Fine, at NASA
- 35 Middling grade
- 36 '70s club
- 37 TV ratings period
- 40 Relaxing refuges
- 41 Fruity deserts
- 45 Spiced tea
- 47 Wedding words

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50					51				52			
53					54				55			

- 49 Yuletide tune
- 50 Body powder
- 51 Popeye's Olive
- 52 Concept
- 53 Canonized Fr. women
- 54 Born
- 55 Pretzel seasoning
- 6 Singer DiFranco
- 7 Hawaiian island
- 8 Civil rights org.
- 9 Moves more goods than
- 10 USN bigwig
- 11 That chap's
- 19 Moreover
- 21 Cleaning cloth
- 23 Cockeyed
- 24 Fair-hiring org.
- 25 Low-carb diet
- 26 Eventful periods
- 27 Calico's call
- 28 School fundraiser
- 32 Time with a therapist
- 33 Skimpy suits
- 35 IRS employee
- 36 Aachen article
- 38 Grand stories
- 39 Paris school
- 42 Pop
- 43 Rind
- 44 Blind part
- 45 Dol. fractions
- 46 Fez, e.g.
- 48 Coloring agent

### DOWN

- 1 Utah city
- 2 Heap
- 3 Idyllic place
- 4 Concocted
- 5 "Taps" instrument

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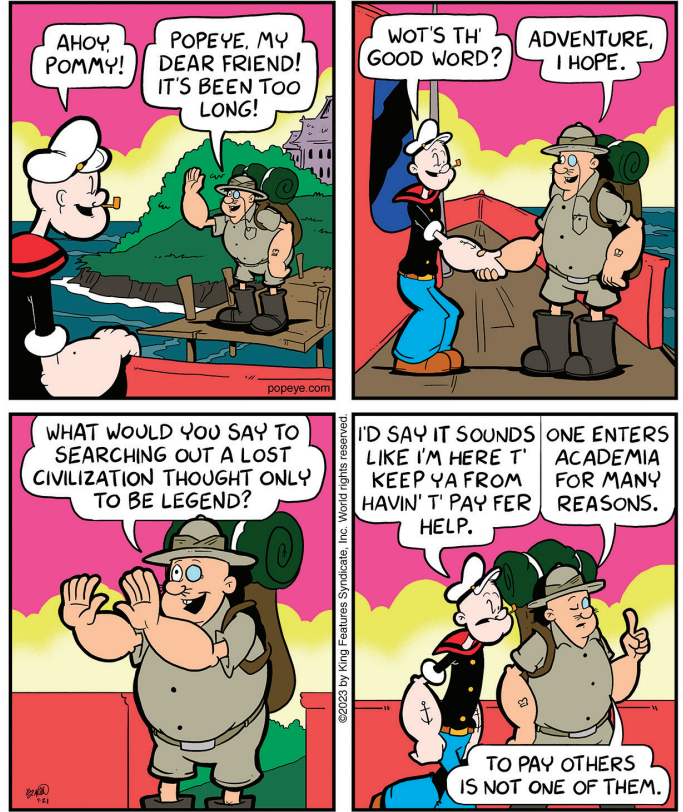
## King Crossword

Answers

Solution time: 25 mins.

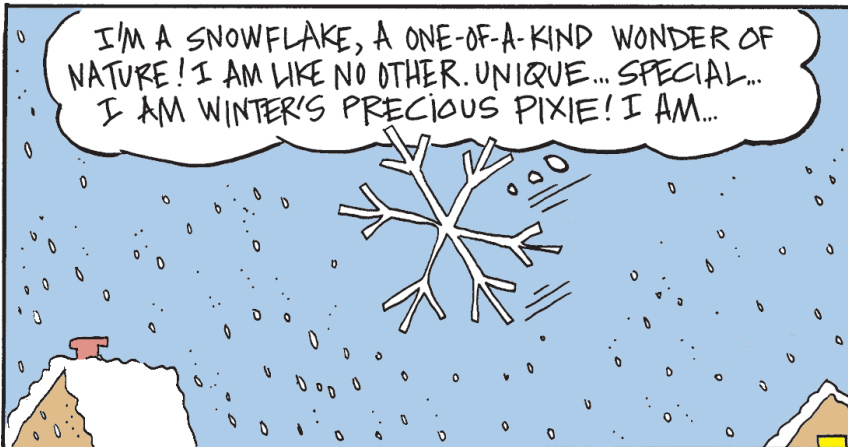
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## Olive



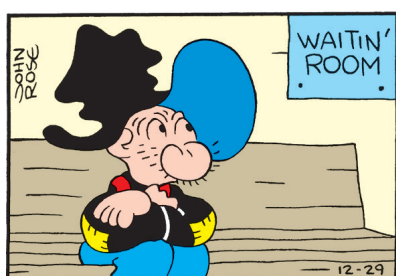
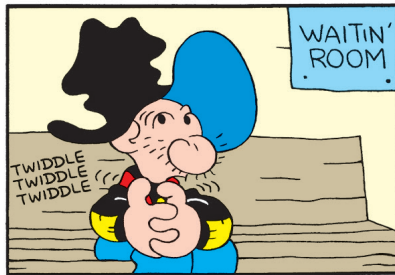
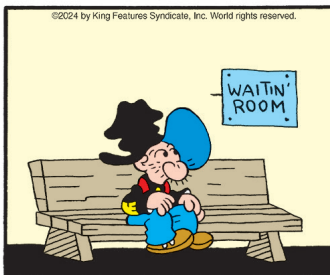
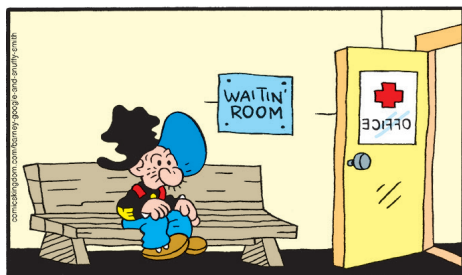
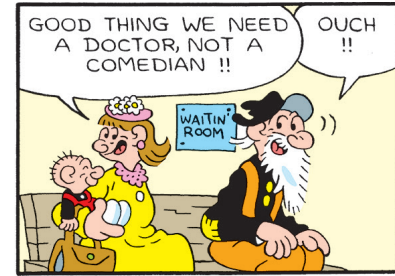
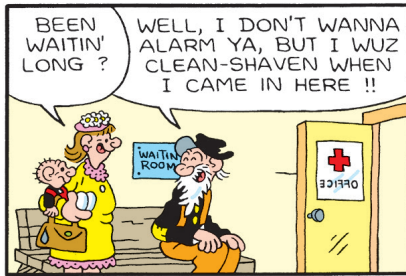
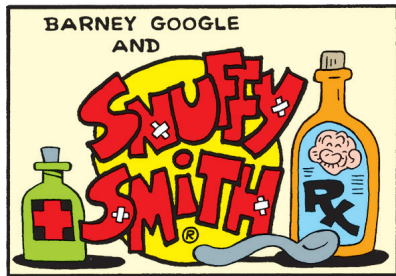
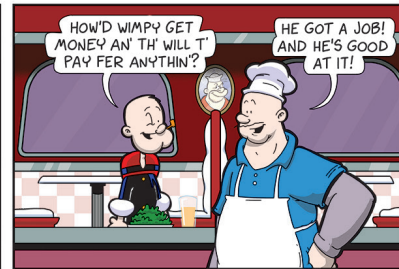
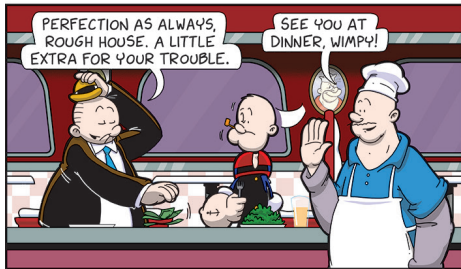
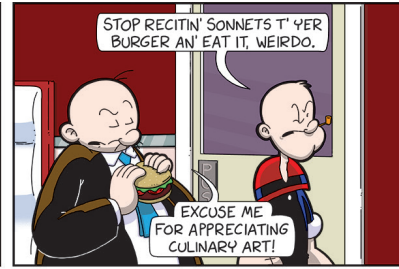
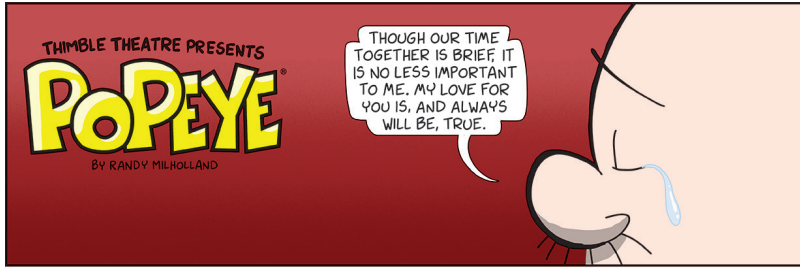
## Out on a Limb

by Gary Kopervas



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HAL FOSTER'S **Prince Valiant**  
 BY SCHULTZ AND YEATES

STRAKONUS ENDS HIS PALAVER WITH VAL AND ZULFA AND RETURNS TO HIS MEN. VAL CANNOT FIGURE THE PIRATE'S ANGLE, UNLESS IT IS THE HOPE OF DRIVING A WEDGE OF FEAR BETWEEN VAL AND THE IMAZIGHEN WOMEN. WHAT A WASTE, HE THINKS...

10/26/14 YEATES



...NOT UNDERSTANDING THAT, WHILE STRAKONUS BOUGHT TIME, A SMALL BAND OF HIS PIRATES HAS CROSSED THE ISLAND AND CAPTURED ALETA AND HER COMPANY! NOW, ONE OF THOSE MEN HERDS NATHAN BACK TO HIS LEADER.



STRAKONUS IS OVERJOYED BY THE CAPTIVE PRESENTED TO HIM. THIS IS BETTER THAN HE COULD HAVE HOPED - THE TIDE HAS FINALLY TURNED IN HIS FAVOR, AND HE IS QUICK TO EXPLOIT HIS ADVANTAGE.

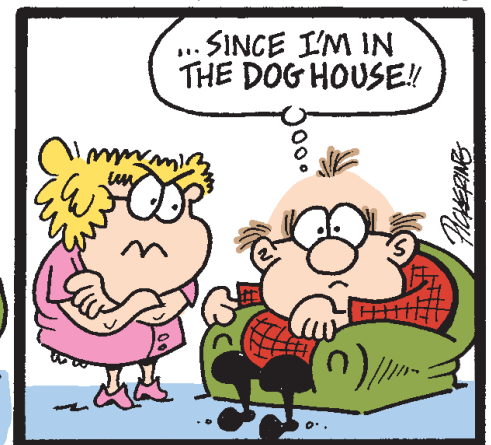
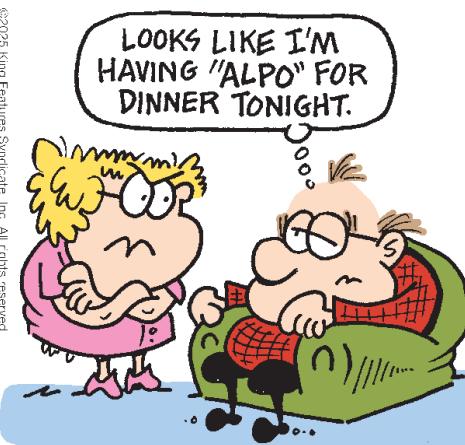
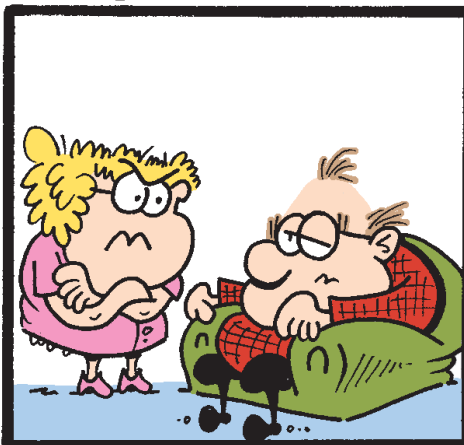


"LOOK, SIR VALIANT! I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU KNOW THIS FELLOW? AH, YOU DO? THEN YOU WOULD ALSO KNOW THE OTHERS WE HAVE CAPTURED ON THIS ISLE'S FAR SIDE? PERHAPS YOUR FAMILY? PERHAPS WE SHOULD NOW COME TO AN UNDERSTANDING?"

NEXT: Hal's answer

## The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



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PICKERING

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## SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

### AI-assisted scams against seniors

It's not that scammers are getting smarter, but they have a new tool now: AI, artificial intelligence. For our own protection, we need to learn about AI and how to avoid becoming a victim of fraud.

If you've posted any pictures on social media, take them down. Make it your task for January to remove any photos you've put up, especially if -- heaven forbid -- there are snaps of your children and grandchildren.

If you routinely attach photos in emails to friends and family, and if they tend to post those on their own social media, ask them to remove the pictures. If they don't comply, stop sending them photos. I know, that's harsh. But you have to protect yourself and those dear to you.

Photos are the tip of the iceberg, however. Consider what scammers can do with innocent information about a vacation you took. They can personalize their scam against you and pretend to have met you on that trip. If you've posted the names of family members, or even the name of your dog, they can pretend to actually know you. It will sound so innocent if they then ask for your home address or the correct spelling of your name so they can send you a souvenir.

It gets worse: Scammers can clone voice samples they find online. If you've posted a video of a teen grandchild, scammers can convert that into a fake video call wherein the child appears to be upset and asks for help, which is another version of the grandparent scam.

One of the best sites I've found to learn about AI scams is McAfee's Guide to Deepfake Scams and AI Voice Spoofing at [www.mcafee.com/learn/a-guide-to-deepfake-scams-and-ai-voice-spoofing](http://www.mcafee.com/learn/a-guide-to-deepfake-scams-and-ai-voice-spoofing). Also go online and search for "how scammers use AI against seniors."

If you suspect you've been a victim of fraud, report it to the FBI Internet Crime Complaint Center at [ic3.gov](http://ic3.gov).

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Senior Citizens 65+  
Physical Therapy. **\$20 a month**

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1. Forbes Field, John F. Kennedy Stadium, Three Rivers Stadium, Veterans Stadium and The Spectrum are all demolished sports venues that were located in what U.S. state?

2. Johnny Campbell is credited with being the first cheerleader when he rallied the crowd at what university's football stadium in 1898?

3. The Notre Dame Fighting Irish football team had a 43-game winning streak over what opponent from 1964-2006?

4. Name the Hockey Hall of Famer for the Montreal Canadiens who died of complications from a severely fractured leg he suffered in a 1937 game.

5. Pitcher John "The Count" Montefusco was named National League Rookie of the Year in 1975 as a member of what Major League Baseball team?

6. The Anderson Packers, Waterloo Hawks, Evansville Agogans and Louisville Alumnites were among the teams in what pro basketball league that played one season in 1950-51?

7. He was the American League Rookie of the Year in 1997 with the Boston Red Sox. She is considered one of the greatest female soccer players of all time. They married in 2003. Who are they?



by Ryan A. Berenz

## Answers

1. Pennsylvania.

2. The University of Minnesota.

3. The Navy Midshipmen.

4. Howie Morenz.

5. The San Francisco Giants.

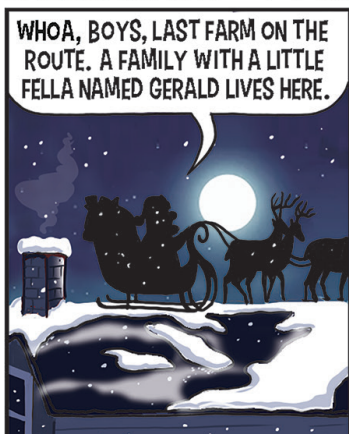
6. The National Professional Basketball League (NPBL).

7. Nomar Garciaparra and Mia Hamm.

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## Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps



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## Help your pets have a very merry -- and safe -- Christmas

DEAR PAW'S CORNER: This is the first Christmas for my puppy "Max," who is 5 months old. My mom always has a lot of activities and decorates the house all over, and I'm worried that Max will eat decorations or food. How can I keep him safe? -- Jayde S., Brooklyn

DEAR JAYDE: Excellent job keeping Max's safety first and foremost in your mind! The holidays can be a perilous time for curious puppies. Here are a few ways to maximize his safety while celebrating.

Talk to your family. Sit down with them and explain that decorations, food and treats need to be placed out of your dog's reach.

Reinforce basic obedience skills. Work with Max on recall commands and behavioral training.

Stay on schedule. The holidays are super busy, but it is important to keep Max on his regular daily schedule of walks, feeding and training.

Store dog food and treats securely. The pantry often sits open during holiday preparations. Make sure Max can't get into his dog food and overeat, causing serious complications like bloat.

Create a "safe room" for Max during holiday events. Parties, dinners and the fun of unwrapping gifts can all overstimulate a young dog. During the height of festivities, place Max in a quiet room with his favorite toys and bedding. When the wrapping paper is cleaned up, bring Max out to greet everyone.

Note behavioral patterns for later. Keep an eye on how Max behaves during this strange, exciting time of year. Is he reactive toward strangers or shiny, unfamiliar things? Do you have a difficult time getting him to obey commands? Resolve to work with Max on these issues after the holidays.

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

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## Strange BUT TRUE

\* In 1997, a woman from Louisville, Kentucky, left actor Charles Bronson all of her money, a total of about \$300,000, in a handwritten will. She didn't know him, but it can be deduced that she was a fan.

\* The Woolsey Hall auditorium at Yale contains an extra-wide seat built to fit alumnus and former professor William Howard Taft.

\* The corpse flower was the official flower of the Bronx for 60 years.

\* Adults typically produce about 2 pints of gas each day, in an average of 14 farts. However, it's apparently quite normal to pass gas up to 21 times per day.

\* At his inauguration, Teddy Roosevelt wore a ring with a lock of Abraham Lincoln's hair.

\* In 1866, Cathay Williams became the first African American woman to serve in the U.S. Army. Women were barred from joining the military at the time, so she enlisted as a man under the pseudonym William Cathay.

\* Crime novelist James Patterson co-wrote the famous "I'm a Toys 'R' Us Kid" jingle.

\* The American Psychiatric Association's DSM-5 handbook classifies caffeine withdrawal as a mental disorder.

\* Because Lancaster, Pennsylvania, is home to a large Amish population, Costco constructed a livestock parking stall for customers arriving via horse and buggy, with a rail for the animals and a roof to shield them from bad weather.

\* When that "inner voice" speaks in your head, it triggers small muscle movements in your larynx.

\* Michelangelo may have accidentally left a thumbprint on a wax sculpture's butt.

\* Sometimes it snows on Mars, but the snowflakes are made out of carbon dioxide rather than water. The flakes don't fall, but create a fog-like effect.

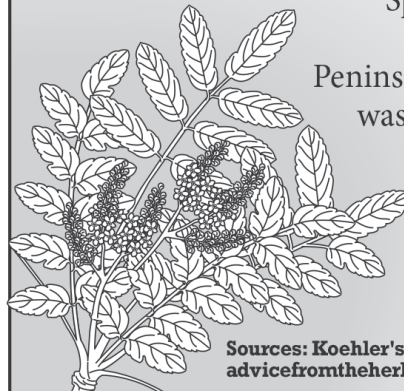
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Thought for the Day: "The aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance." -- Aristotle

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### The Garden Bug

#### Frankincense



The English name for this tree derives from the old French *franc encens*, which means "pure light." The aromatic compounds made within its tissues resist fungus and insects, and resin leaks out to solidify around wounds in its bark.

Sparse forests of these trees grow in the dry ground of the southern Arabian Peninsula. It is there that the "Incense Road" was formed, bringing trade and wealth to this area for centuries. To grow a frankincense tree of your own, it is best to purchase it as a potted plant, rather than growing seeds.

- Brenda Weaver

Sources: Koehler's Medicinal Plants (1887), [laphamsquarterly.org](http://laphamsquarterly.org), [advicefromtheherblady.com](http://advicefromtheherblady.com)

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by Freddy Groves

## Raising puppies

If you're looking for a project for the new year that will provide big benefits to a disabled veteran, you can do no better than to raise a puppy.

Yes, a puppy. A small, young dog.

Puppies who end up as service dogs for disabled veterans aren't born that way. They need a solid first year of socializing and basic obedience, and that's where you come in, should you want to take on this worthwhile project.

Take a look at [www.guidedog.org/puppy](http://www.guidedog.org/puppy) for an explanation of what is expected. If accepted as a puppy raiser, you would receive a very young puppy and spend the next year getting it socialized and used to different environments, with good house manners and basic obedience, and exposed to various situations to give it confidence.

If you're not sure you can commit to such a long project, see the link above for other possibilities: short-term fostering to provide socialization opportunities for the puppy, co-raising with another individual or family, and in some states there is a prison puppy program that has inmates raise and train the dogs during the week before handing them over to weekend volunteers who provide experiences outside of the prison walls.

Your next step is to go online to search for groups near you that provide trained dogs to veterans in need. Contact them to ask about becoming a puppy raiser. (For more incentive, see [www.vetdogs.org](http://www.vetdogs.org) for the list of states where weekend volunteers are needed now.)

If you love dogs, perhaps the hardest part of the whole project will be to give up the dog at the end of its time with you when it goes on to its official training to be a service dog for a specific veteran in need. But you'll console yourself knowing just how valuable your efforts have been in giving a good start to a dog that will be a life-changer for a veteran.

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## Wishing Well®

7	3	5	3	2	7	8	3	5	7	2	7	5
A	S	C	K	B	G	S	I	H	R	E	E	A
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4	5	4	2	6	5	8	4	6	5	6	5	5
D	R	A	S	I	T	H	Y	N	U	G	N	E

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. HISTORY: What city is considered the birthplace of democracy?
2. U.S. PRESIDENTS: Which president had a pet raccoon named Rebecca?
3. MOVIES: What is the 2007 documentary "The 11th Hour" about?
4. GEOGRAPHY: How many countries lie along the equator?
5. ANATOMY: Which part of the eye controls how much light enters it?
6. TELEVISION: What is the name of the Tanners' cat on the sitcom "ALF"?
7. LITERATURE: What are the names of the two families in Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet"?
8. CHEMISTRY: What kind of reaction produces heat?
9. U.S. STATES: Which state was the first to join the Union?
10. ASTRONOMY: Which is the only planet in our solar system that rotates on its side?

### Answers

1. Athens, Greece.
2. Calvin Coolidge.
3. The critical state of the Earth's environment.
4. 13.
5. Iris.
6. Lucky.
7. Capulet and Montague.
8. Exothermic.
9. Delaware.
10. Uranus.

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South Dakota Governor



## Larry Rhoden



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

### The Spirit of Christmas

Growing up on our family ranch near Union Center, the holiday season was always a time of simple joys. The ornaments might not have been the fanciest, but they were ours – and they reflected the true meaning of Christmas. At the heart of it all was the story of Christ’s birth, a reminder of hope, humility, and sacrifice. That celebration and connection kept us grounded through the long winter ahead.

Similar celebrations are taking place in homes across South Dakota. And we also recognize the traditions of all who call South Dakota home. We recently lit a menorah in the Rotunda of the State Capitol alongside our Christmas trees. It was a great opportunity to honor our Jewish neighbors and the religious freedoms that allow all faiths to flourish in South Dakota.

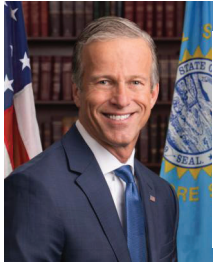
South Dakota is a place where faith, family, and freedom aren’t just words – they’re the foundation of our way of life. We’ve worked hard to protect those values, ensuring that families can celebrate Christmas without the burdens of overreaching government or economic uncertainty. Our low taxes and balanced budget have kept more money in your pockets. This allows you to focus on what matters: gathering with loved ones, giving to those in need, and building brighter futures for our kids.

Take our economy, for instance. South Dakota has the lowest unemployment rate in the nation – our people are thriving. Whether you’re a rancher checking cattle in the crisp morning air or a small business owner in Sioux Falls preparing holiday shipments, our pro-growth policies have created opportunities that echo the generosity of the season.

Education is another area where we’re celebrating hope and opportunity. We want every child in South Dakota to have access to quality learning, whether in public schools, homeschooling, or innovative programs that prepare them for trades or higher education. We’re giving our children the gift of the tools they need to succeed. And let’s not forget public safety – our commitment to law enforcement means safer communities where families can enjoy the holidays without fear.

Amid these achievements, Christmas calls us to humility. The King of Kings humbled Himself and came to us as a baby, reminding us what true servant leadership looks like. In a world that often seems divided, South Dakota stands as a beacon of civility and common sense. We recognize that the season’s true gift is caring for one another, so we give that gift in abundance.

This Christmas, let’s embrace that South Dakota grit and heart of service – the kind that gets us through blizzards and builds strong communities. To our farmers, teachers, first responders, and families: thank you for making this state special. From my family to yours, Merry Christmas. May the peace of the season fill your homes, and may God bless South Dakota.



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

## Christmas Old and New

The Christmas season is here, and with it come the familiar sights, sounds, and smells of yuletide. To this day, the smell of lutefisk and lefse still brings me back to Christmas Eve at my grandmother's house. While the Thune family has since replaced my grandmother's Norwegian fare with clam chowder on Christmas Eve, the warm feeling of gathering with family to celebrate the birth of our Savior is still the same as it was all those years ago.

When I was growing up in Murdo, Christmas was always a special time of year. We were a caroling family in a caroling church, and we would go to our neighbors' houses to sing and spread Christmas cheer. And on Christmas Eve, we would all pile into the car to go to Grandma's before we continued on to the Christmas Eve service in Okaton.

This time of year, we could usually count on there being snow on the ground, and we were ever eager to sled down Jackson Avenue. Hopefully, a new and faster sled would appear under the tree, too. These days, I'm not-so-eager for snow since it means multiple rounds of snow-shoveling. I'd rather be sledding. Or doing anything else, for that matter.

Our grandchildren bring us plenty of joy on Christmas. This year, Kimberley and I welcomed our sixth grandchild to the family, and we're looking forward to celebrating his first Christmas. For us, Christmas Eve is still the main event, with the Christmas Eve service and gathering with family. We read the Christmas story to the kids, and we gather around the tree for presents.

In the entire year, there may be nothing I cherish more than opening the Bible and having the grand-kids piling on to hear the story of God's greatest gift to humanity: His Son. "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people," the angel tells the shepherds. This story, however familiar, never grows tired. This good news is never old news. It touches the heart, and it reminds us of what truly matters.

From my family to yours, we wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

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## PROTECTING AMERICAN TRADE

### **BIG Update**

Ocean shipping is the backbone of international trade, allowing American products to be sold in other countries while giving American businesses and consumers access to goods we don't make. Even in America's heartland, ocean shipping is an integral part of our economy.

My bill to reauthorize the Federal Maritime Commission (FMC) passed the House unanimously this week. My bill will ensure the FMC can continue doing its job to protect American businesses, producers, and consumers from China's abuse of America's ocean shipping laws.

This legislation establishes a formal process to report complaints against shipping exchanges and requires the FMC to report on anticompetitive business practices. It also eliminates redundancies in FMC's reporting requirements.

### **BIG Idea**

It's clear the health care system in America is broken. The Affordable Care Act made health care unaffordable for the American family with many paying more for their health insurance than they pay for their mortgage or rent. The answer to this crisis is not to write more checks to big insurance companies.

I voted for the Lower Health Care Premiums for All Americans Act which would lower premium costs by 11%. This plan also brings transparency to pharmacy benefit managers and removes hidden costs for prescription drugs.

This plan also allows small business owners and independent workers to form associate health plans and provides more choices for employees to customize their health care plans.

### **BIG News**

The Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act passed the House this week and now heads to the president's desk. This bill allows schools to serve whole and 2% milk during lunch in addition to reduced fat options.

It's important that our kids have healthy options in the lunchroom. Whole milk is filled with essential nutrients that help kids succeed in school. I drink milk every day for lunch and am excited that our kids will now have the same option.

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**DECEMBER 7-14, 2025**

Welcome back to another Weekly Round[s] Up. Starting off with some exciting news: my legislation, the Wounded Knee Massacre Memorial and Sacred Site Act, passed the Senate unanimously on Thursday afternoon. This bill will place the 40 acres of land at the site of the Wounded Knee Massacre into restricted fee status, meaning it's held

in trust by the Oglala Sioux and the Cheyenne River Sioux tribes to be preserved for the next generation. It now heads to President Trump's desk to be signed into law. We also announced my nominees for the 2025 Angels for Adoption award, Emily and Riley Krause from Brandt. The Krauses have opened their home to several foster children and are the adoptive parents of Livia.

On top of these highlights, I kept busy with many meetings, briefings and votes. It was a productive week in D.C. and I was fortunate to end it by visiting with folks in Sioux Falls. More on the rest of my week in my Weekly Round[s] Up:

South Dakota groups I visited with: Stephen Williamson, Associate Vice President at Southeast Technical College Foundation; Marcus Warnke, South Dakota State Forester; South Dakotans with New York Life; and Lorraine Polak, South Dakota State Director of USDA Rural Development. Lorraine was previously on my team as a Housing Policy Specialist. It was nice visiting with her this past week and exciting to hear about the good work she is continuing to do for South Dakota.

Met with South Dakotans from: Pierre, Rapid City, Sioux Falls and Watertown.

Other meetings: Members of Parliament of Latvia, Ainars Latkovskis and Janis Dombrova; Directors of the Department of Energy National Laboratories; the Honorable Thomas Silberhorn, German Member of Parliament; Builders for Tomorrow Fund; Dr. Torsten Kroeger, Chief Science Officer and Jennifer Wall, General Counsel at Intrinsic Innovation; Charlie Scharf, CEO and President, Wells Fargo; and two members of the Finnish Parliament.

Briefings: I attended multiple briefings this week including two closed Senate Select Committee on Intelligence briefings, one on the 2026 National Defense Authorization Act, and another on U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission.

Hearing: This week I attended a hearing with the Senate Committee on Armed Services where we received testimony on the Administration's deployment of the National Guard across the United States. You can watch me question Mr. Charles L. Young III, Mr. Mark R. Ditlevson and General Gregory M. Guillot here.

Passed Legislation: On Thursday evening, my bill to preserve the Wounded Knee Massacre grounds unanimously passed the Senate and is now on track to be signed into law by President Trump. My bill, the Wounded Knee Massacre Memorial and Sacred Site Act would place 40 acres of land at the site of the Wounded Knee Massacre into restricted fee status, making certain that the land is held by both the Oglala Sioux and Cheyenne River Sioux tribes for generations to come. Read more on it here.

Announced my Nomination for Angels in Adoption Award: This past week, I announced that I nominated Riley and Emily Krause of Brandt for the 2025 Angels in Adoption award, presented by the Congressional Coalition on Adoption (CCAI). Emily and Riley Krause fostered eight children before adopting Livia and are currently working toward their second adoption. Read more about the nomination here.

Senate Prayer Breakfast: On Wednesday, Senator Cassidy spoke at our weekly Senate Prayer Breakfast.

Votes taken: 12 – This past week I voted on nominees Robert Chamberlin, to be U.S. District Judge for the Northern District of Mississippi, William Crain, to be U.S. District Judge for the Eastern District of Louisiana, James Maxwell II, to be U.S. District Judge for the Northern District of Mississippi (Yeas). I

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also voted on authorizing the en bloc consideration of nominees (Yea) and on the motion to proceed on the 2026 National Defense Authorization Act. I voted against Senator King's Health and Human Services Administrative Procedure Act CRA and Senator Schumer's Biden-Covid Era Subsidy Extension (Nays). To close the week, I voted for the Health Care Freedom for Patients Act of 2025 (Yea).

Democrats do not have a feasible plan to lower health care costs. They would rather continue to use the same broken policies that have made health care unaffordable. Extending COVID-era Obamacare subsidies for 3 years without Hyde amendment protections, which prohibit federal funding for abortions, is a nonstarter for Republicans. Senate Democrats have known this all along. I look forward to continued discussions with my colleagues on how to address the high cost of health care.

My staff in South Dakota visited: Aberdeen, Brookings, Deadwood, Lead, Spearfish and Sturgis.  
Steps taken: 65,748 steps or 30.05 miles.

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Dr. James L. Snyder Ministries

PO Box 831313 - Ocala, FL 34483

1-352-216-3025

## Another Christmas Down the Chimney

If I have counted correctly, this is my 74th Christmas. Believe me, I do not remember all of them. The only thing is how much money I spent on all of those Christmases.

I know Christmas is filled with rituals. As a young person, I grew up on rituals. Our best ritual was on Christmas.

For instance, the day before Christmas, my father would get a real Christmas tree. On Christmas Eve, we would all gather to decorate it. Then, on New Year's Day, we would take down the decorations, and my father would move the tree outside to the backyard. Our backyard was filled with Christmas trees.

The day before Christmas, my mother and I would go Christmas shopping from early morning until late afternoon. She knew every shop and exactly what to buy in each. She worked on that list for months and was excited to receive all the gifts on it.

I remember one Christmas, after a full day of shopping, our car was packed with presents. I don't know how much my mother spent, but it must've been a lot.

On our way home, my mother remembered something she had forgotten.

She turned around and went back to a store for Christmas cards she had forgotten. We both went in, and my mother bought about 20 cards. As we left, she sighed and said, "Son, it's been a busy day—I'm glad it's over. I can't wait to get home." I agreed.

We would take these Christmas presents home, and when my siblings and I went to bed, my dad and mom would wrap all the gifts and put them under the tree.

As we approached the car, I noticed one of the back doors was not fully closed.

"Mom," I said, "did we leave the back car door open?"

Mother looked and said, "We sure did not leave any door open."

When we went into the store for the Christmas cards, the car was filled with all kinds of Christmas presents we spent all day collecting.

When we got to the car and opened the door, the inside was empty. All our Christmas shopping for the day had disappeared. My mother looked inside the car and could not believe what she saw. Or, maybe I should say she couldn't believe what she wasn't seeing.

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Suddenly, my mother sighed, and tears ran down her cheeks. She looked at me and said, "Oh, what are we going to do?" It was too late to shop again, the stores closed early, and shopping time was over.

My mother stood just staring into that car for what felt like forever. I could feel her grief hanging heavily between us. I didn't know what to do. I felt helpless, wishing I could comfort her, but no words seemed right. Someone broke into our car and stole all our Christmas presents, leaving us with nothing but shock and a deep, hollow ache.

On our way home, my mother was relatively quiet. Usually, she's quite the chatterer, but today she hardly spoke at all.

We got home, walked into the living room, and saw the Christmas tree waiting to be decorated. Dad greeted us and said, "Where's all the Christmas presents?"

Without saying anything, my mother walked in and sat down, and was quiet for a few moments. Then she looked at my father and said, "Someone stole all our Christmas presents while we were in the last store."

My father just stared at her, shook his head, and said quietly, "What are we to do now?"

After a relatively quiet dinner that night, we went into the living room and began decorating the Christmas tree. No one talked as usual; we just put together all the decorations.

That Christmas really stands out in my mind because it was the only one with no presents under the tree. On Christmas morning, we woke up and sat around the tree as usual, but there were no Christmas presents under the tree.

That was the strangest Christmas our family ever had.

I thought it was strange that no one in our family ever mentioned that Christmas over the years. I guess I'm the only one who actually mentioned it. We all think of it, I'm sure. But it was one of the worst Christmas days we ever had as a family.

We celebrated Christmas as usual, and Mother had a wonderful Christmas dinner for us. We sat around the table trying to sing Christmas carols. It was hard, but we decided to move forward and celebrate our family rather than dwell on our missing Christmas gifts.

No matter how difficult the Christmases have been since that time, none of them has equaled the sadness of that Christmas.

Reflecting on that Christmas recently, an encouraging verse of scripture came to my mind.

"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God" (Psalms 42:11).

Not everything turns out the way we plan. I haven't had a Christmas like this, but there have been times when I thought everything was going the wrong way. It's times like this that I need to focus not on what's going wrong but on God. My faith in God gets me through every problem no matter how difficult.

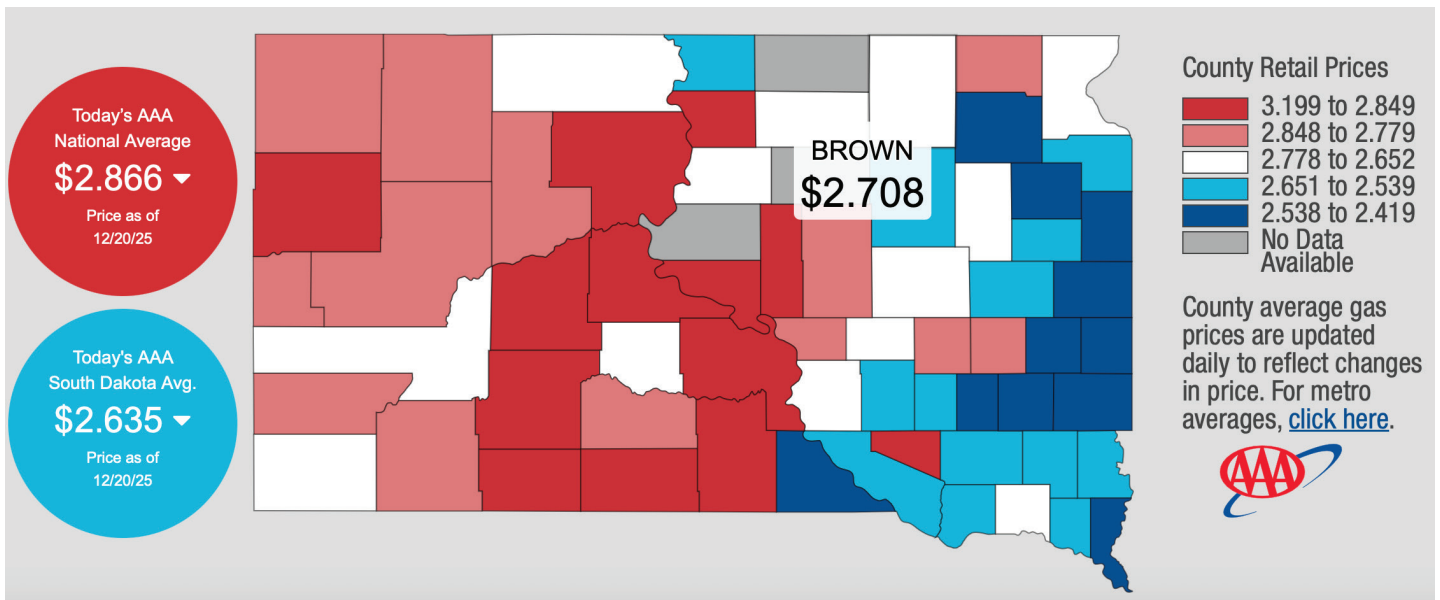
# Broton Daily Independent

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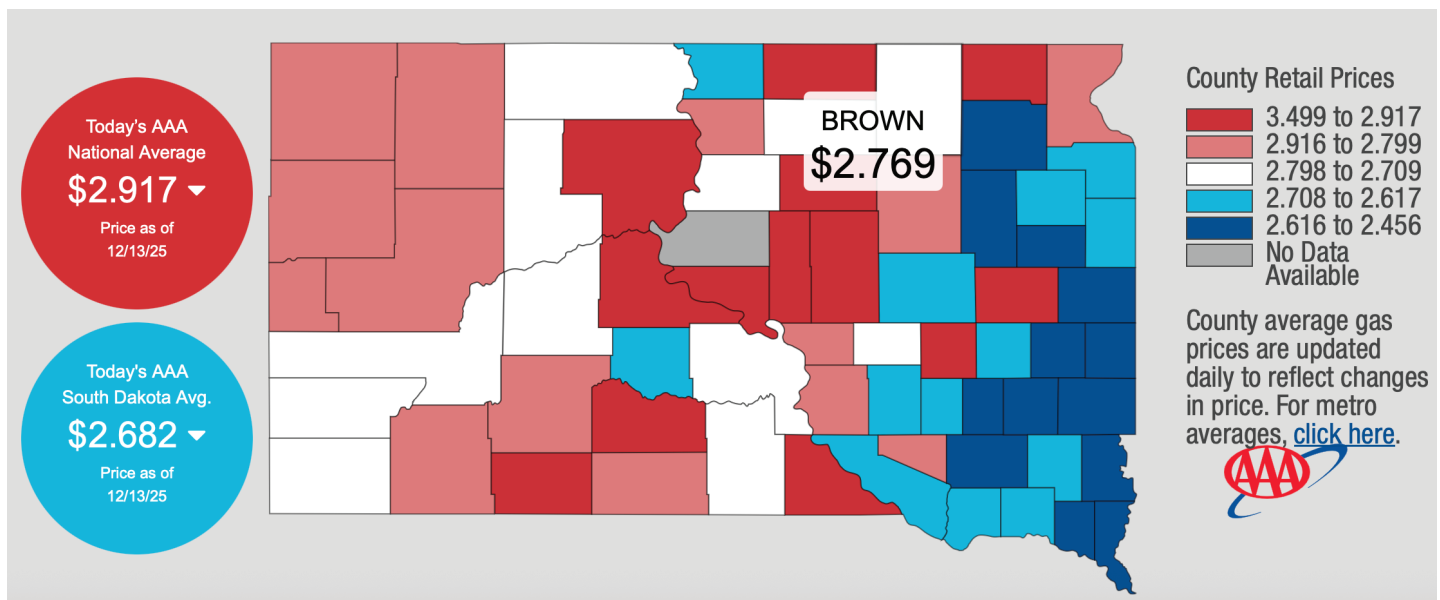
## South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$2.635	\$2.807	\$3.272	\$3.375
Yesterday Avg.	\$2.648	\$2.828	\$3.280	\$3.397
Week Ago Avg.	\$2.682	\$2.857	\$3.303	\$3.467
Month Ago Avg.	\$2.840	\$2.996	\$3.470	\$3.504
Year Ago Avg.	\$2.829	\$3.001	\$3.454	\$3.242

### This Week



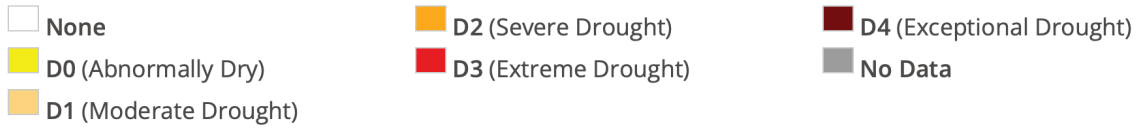
### Last Week



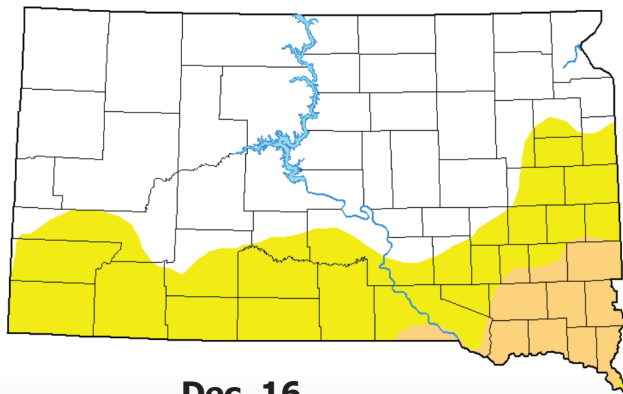
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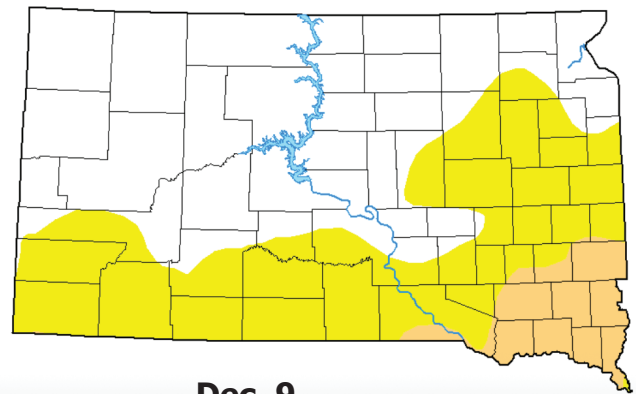
## Drought Classification



## Drought Monitor



Dec. 16



Dec. 9

The High Plains remained largely unchanged this week. Areas of less than one inch of precipitation fell across some areas of the Dakotas and northeastern Wyoming. In east-central South Dakota, this precipitation led to minor improvements with the removal of some abnormal dryness (D0). Nebraska, Colorado, and most of Kansas remained unchanged. In southeastern Kansas along the Kansas-Missouri border, hydrologic deficits led to further deterioration and the expansion of moderate drought (D1). In southeastern Wyoming, frequent strong winds and above-normal temperatures combined with continued lack of precipitation contributed to further degradation and the expansion of moderate drought (D1).

## EARTHTALK

### Rivers Turning Orange In The Arctic

by Vicky Zhang

Dear EarthTalk: Why are Arctic rivers and streams turning orange?

– Will Mortimer, Largo, FL

Over the past decade, an increasing number of orange rivers and streams have been found in Arctic Alaska's Brooks Range. These waters tend to be more acidic, turbid, and have higher concentrations of iron than their clearwater counterparts. As the Brooks Range is one of the least populated regions of North America, the typical cause of coloration of these water sources, namely excessive mining, is not probable.

More broadly, these orange rivers and streams are part of the Arctic Network, a larger regional area containing 19.3 million acres of land. In 2018, the National Park Service received reports of one of the first orange streams in the Brooks Range. By utilizing crowd-sourced observations from bush pilots, wilderness guides, other scientists, and rural and Indigenous communities, they found that over 75 streams had become orange in the Arctic Network.

The findings of such an extensive number of orange rivers and streams led to growing research into the cause of the issue.

After extensive research using what scientists call the Redness Index, researchers determined that the coloration of the rivers and streams was caused by the thawing of permafrost, which is ground that has remained frozen for extended periods of time, due to global warming. As a result, water and oxygen are able to easily enter the soil, breaking down sulfide-rich rocks to create excessive amounts of sulfuric acid that leaches naturally occurring metals into water sources. In particular, researchers found that oxidized iron was what turned the river streams, not unoxidized iron, nickel, zinc, cadmium or copper.

The most obvious effect of orange streams and lakes is the lack of habitat for subsistence fish, such as Dolly Varden, chum salmon and whitefish. In addition, the change in color of these water sources also reduces the amount of light that reaches the bottom, lowering insect larvae numbers. As fewer fish and insects are available, there is an increased amount of stress placed on organisms directly above and below in food chains. Another potential impact of orange streams and lakes are the contamination of drinking sources in the surrounding areas, as there are higher levels of dangerous chemicals.

"There's no fixing [permafrost melting] once it starts...It's another irreversible shift driven by a warming planet," reports Timothy Lyons, a biogeochemistry researcher at the University of California, Riverside. But ordinary people can help by changing small, everyday actions to protect the planet. From using more eco-friendly transportation options to conserving electricity, people can take on multiple approaches to reducing global warming to eliminate the root of the issue..

While this was Goodall's most well-known work, it was not her last. After receiving her Ph.d, Goodall continued to advocate for wildlife protection and conservation of endangered habitats. As a researcher, Goodall left her legacy on challenging the idea of human uniqueness. Her youth empowerment, reforestation and activism also inspired multiple generations to come together for conservation.



**A tributary of the Kugororuk River in Alaska's Brooks Range runs orange due to iron leaching out of melting permafrost combined with toxic concentrations of heavy metals.**

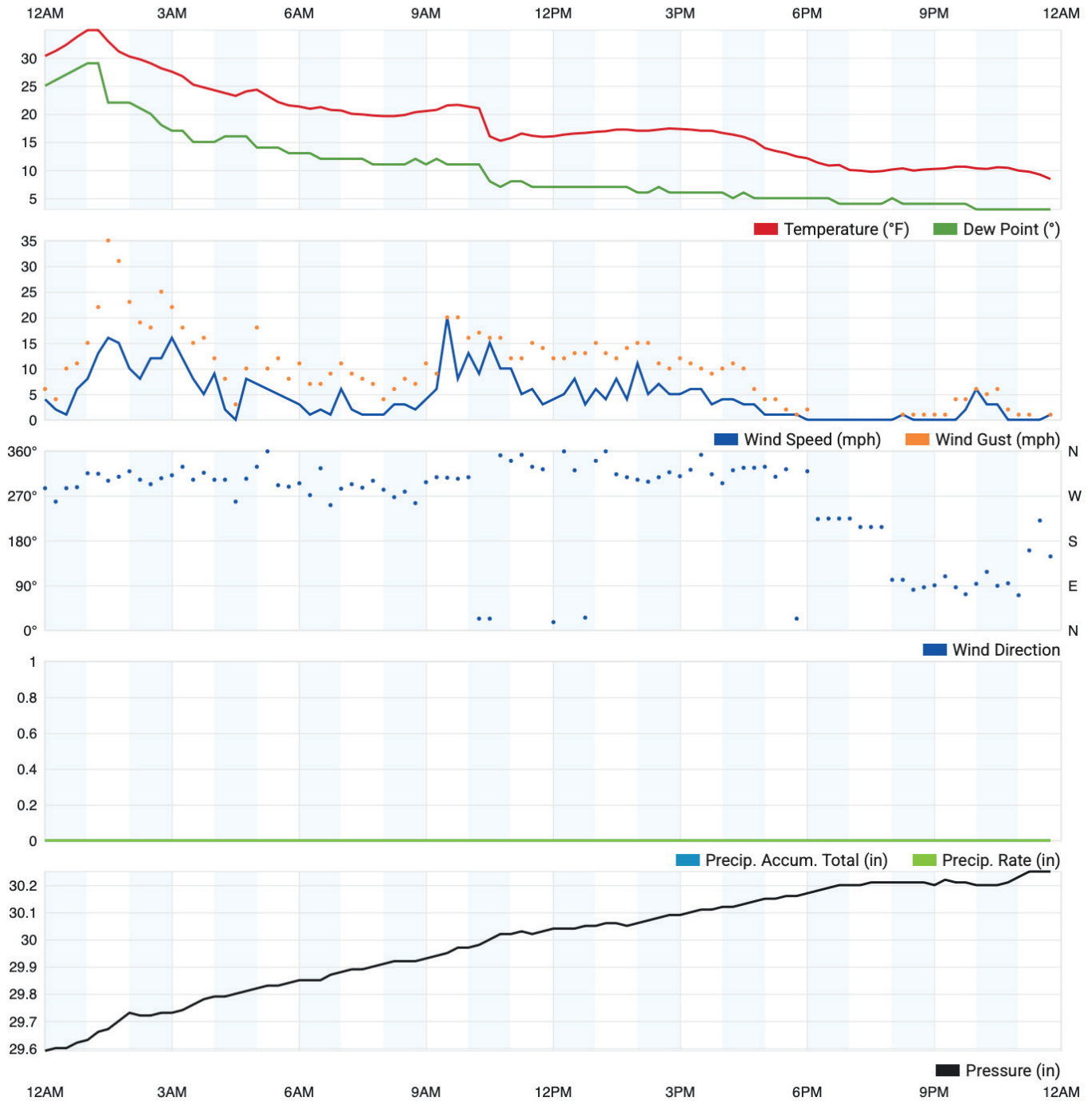
Credit: U.S. Geological Survey / Josh Koch

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

December 20, 2025



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Today



High: 32 °F

Mostly Sunny

Tonight



Low: 19 °F

Mostly Cloudy  
then Patchy  
Fog

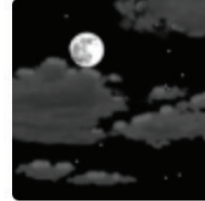
Monday



High: 32 °F

Patchy Fog

Monday Night



Low: 19 °F

Partly Cloudy

Tuesday



High: 29 °F

Mostly Cloudy

## What's Ahead -

- Coldest in West Central Minnesota
- Warmest in Central South Dakota



**Sunday**

Increasing Clouds

Highs: 30-45°



**Monday**

Partly Cloudy Skies

Highs: 32-58°



**Tuesday**

Mostly Cloudy

Highs: 25-48°



**Wednesday**

Partly Cloudy Skies

Highs: 32-55°



NWS Aberdeen, SD  
Sun Dec 21, 2025 2:19 AM

The forecast through Christmas will feature mainly dry conditions with seasonally mild temperatures in the 30s and 40s. Highs in the 50s can be expected for central and south central South Dakota on Monday.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 35 °F at 1:07 AM

Low Temp: 9 °F at 11:29 PM

Wind: 36 mph at 1:26 AM

Precip: : 0.00

## Today's Info

Record High: 50 in 1979

Record Low: -31 in 1916

Average High: 27

Average Low: 6

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.40

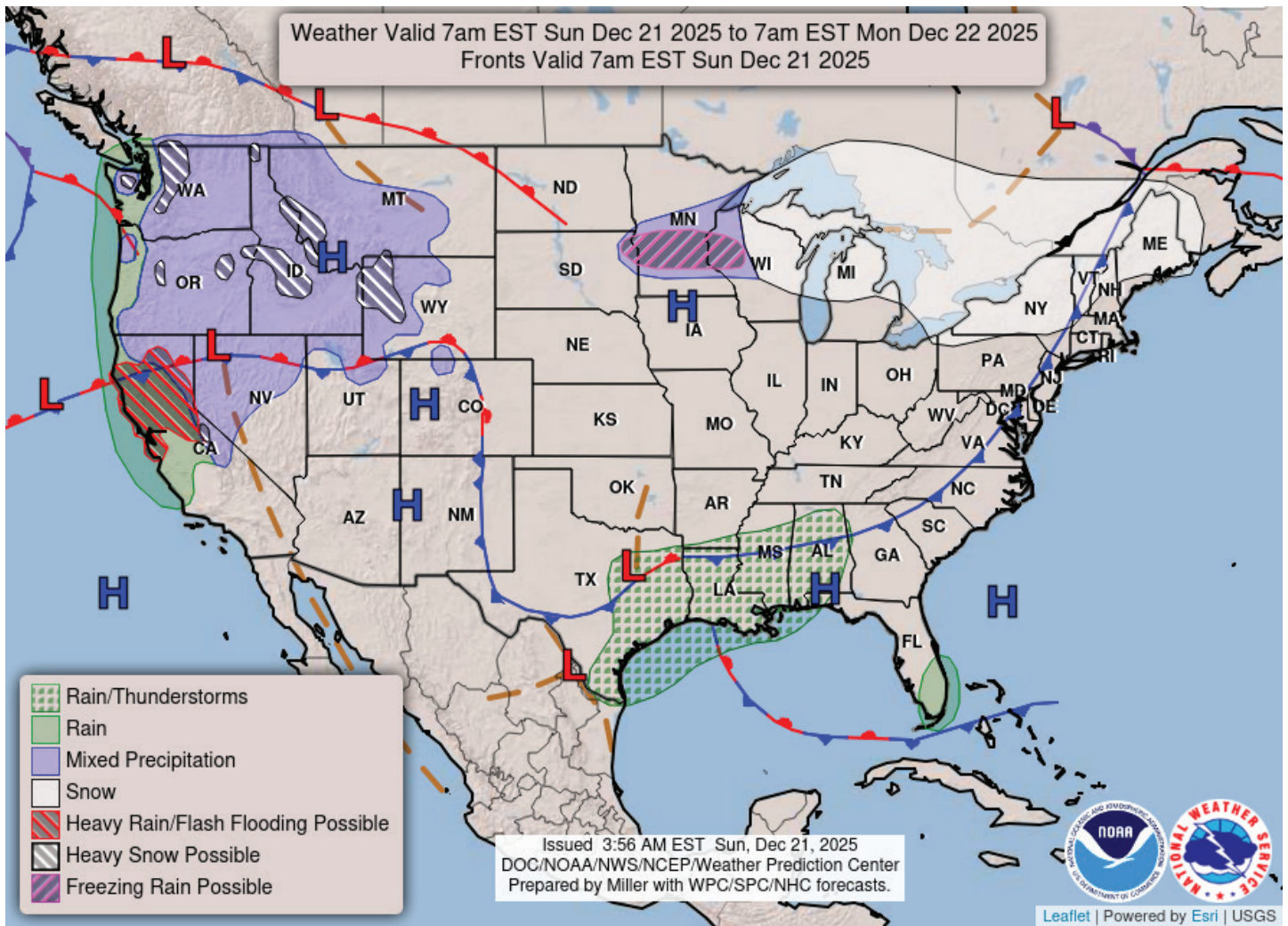
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.67

Average Precip to date: 21.61

Precip Year to Date: 25.48

Sunset Tonight: 4:51 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:09 am



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## Today in Weather History

December 21, 1968: A blizzard visited South Dakota and Minnesota on the 21st and 22nd. Snowfall during the storm was generally 1 to 2 inches in the western part of South Dakota, to 5 to 10 inches in Minnesota. More than 12 inches of snow was reported from Artichoke Lake in Big Stone County to the southeast in Minnesota and up to 18 inches in east-central and southeast South Dakota. The snowfall, on top of an already-existing deep snowpack, was whipped by 30-50 mph winds causing reduced visibility to near zero, created snowdrifts up to 10 feet or more. Almost all forms of traffic were blocked on highways for Sunday and blocked most of the secondary roads as well as some other roads for nearly a week.

Early blizzard warnings and the fact that the blizzard occurred late Saturday through Sunday, the highway patrol reported a minimum of accidents and stranded travelers. Most schools were closed, and other activities were curtailed. Many utility lines were down. Record December snowfall amounts were recorded for more than 40 locations in Minnesota. Artichoke Lake in Big Stone County received 16 inches of snow from this storm, by far its largest daily snowfall on record for any month of the year. Clear Lake, in Deuel County, measured 18 inches of snow, which also remains the most substantial daily snowfall on record for any month in that location. Watertown and Bryant received nine inches from this blizzard, while Castlewood reported seven inches.

1892 — Portland, OR, was buried under a record 27.5 inches of snow. (21st-24th) (The Weather Channel)

1929 — An exceptional storm produced snow from the Middle Rio Grande Valley of Texas to southern Arkansas. The storm produced 26 inches of snow at Hillsboro TX, 18 inches at El Dorado AR, and 14 inches at Bossier LA. (21st-22nd) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1964 — A great warm surge from the Pacific Ocean across Oregon and northern California brought torrential rains on a deep snow cover resulting in record floods. (David Ludlum)

1967 — An F4 tornado traveled 33 miles across Iron and Washington Counties in Missouri during an unusual time of day, 12:45 to 1:20 am. The tornado killed 3 and injured 52 others. Most of the intense damage occurred in the town of Potosi, about 55 miles southwest of St. Louis. The tornado swept through the business district, destroying City Hall, library, a large supermarket, and a shopping center complex. Northeast of town, two people were killed when their home was swept from its foundation. The Red Cross reported 24 homes and trailers, along with 14 businesses destroyed. 81 other houses and trailers were damaged.

1987 — High winds continued along the eastern slopes of the Rockies. During the morning hours winds gusted to 64 mph at Cheyenne WY, and reached 97 mph near Boulder CO. Gale force winds prevailed across the Great Lakes Region. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — Seven cities in the eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, including Charleston SC with a reading of 78 degrees. A storm in the northwestern U.S. produced 22 inches of snow at Idaho City ID in two days, and up to two feet of snow at Happy Camp CA. Ski resorts in Idaho reported three to six feet of snow on the ground. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — Forty cities in the north central U.S., including thirteen in Iowa, reported record low temperatures for the date. Havre and Jordan, MT, tied for honors as the cold spot in the nation with morning lows of 43 degrees below zero, and the temperature remained close to 40 degrees below zero through the daylight hours. Dickinson ND reported a morning low of 33 degrees below zero and a wind chill reading of 86 degrees below zero. The high for the date of 16 degrees below zero at Sioux Falls SD was December record for that location. (The National Weather Summary)

1998 — Cold air spread into the southern San Joaquin Valley of California. For the next four nights, temperatures in the agricultural portions of Fresno, Tulare, and Kern counties dropped below 28 degrees for several hours at a time. In some locations, temperatures dipped into the teens. The California citrus industry suffered more than \$600 million in damages due to the extreme cold.

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 In Touch Ministries

Daily Devotion

## A Mighty Work

**Jesus came to earth as a baby, lived without sin, died in our place, and rose again to reconcile us to God.**

Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 9:2-7

14 "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.

2 The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them.

3 You shall multiply the nation, You shall increase their gladness; They will be glad in Your presence As with the gladness of harvest, As men rejoice when they divide the spoil.

4 For You shall break the yoke of their burden and the staff on their shoulders, The rod of their oppressor, as at the battle of Midian.

5 For every boot of the booted warrior in the battle tumult, And cloak rolled in blood, will be for burning, fuel for the fire.

6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

7 There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

God came to earth in the person of Jesus. His humble birth was the beginning of a mighty work the Father accomplished on our behalf—work that included ...

The incarnation. From the moment of His physical birth, Jesus was both fully God and fully man (Colossians 2:9). He chose to submit to His Father's will and live as one of us. Throughout His earthly life, He remained the eternal Son of God but simultaneously possessed a human nature unblemished by sin.

Revelation of God. The Son came into this world so we could understand what the Father is like. Jesus said, "He who sees Me sees the One who sent Me" (John 12:45).

Identification with man. By calling Himself the Son of Man (Matthew 8:20; Mark 10:33; Mark 10:45), Jesus was fully identifying Himself with us. He walked among us, experiencing suffering and death. During the crucifixion, He knew the consequences of sin, as He took all our iniquities upon Himself (2 Corinthians 5:21).

As wonderful as the birth of a baby is, what occurred at Christmas was far greater. God became man and dwelt among us so we might become reconciled to Him—all because of His great love for us. On this last Sunday of Advent, may we remember all that He has done—and rejoice!

*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:  
12.19.25

1 11 27 39 59 18

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$100,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.20.25

9 12 34 45 50 1

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$10,180,000**

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.20.25

8 21 30 41 47 15

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 40 Mins  
42 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.20.25

4 15 17 23 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$136,000**

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.20.25

5 8 19 23 43 6

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.20.25

4 5 28 52 69 20

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$1,600,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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

### **BOYS PREP BASKETBALL**

Aberdeen Central 62, Sturgis Brown High School 60  
Aberdeen Christian 65, Dell Rapids 62  
Aberdeen Roncalli 65, Mobridge-Pollock 59  
Clark-Willow Lake 77, Florence-Henry 41  
Faith 51, Philip 48  
Gering, Neb. 65, Douglas 54  
Gettysburg 47, Warner 46  
Grant County/Mott-Regent, N.D. 46, Lemmon High School 38  
Gregory 32, North Central, Neb. 29  
Hill City 50, Hot Springs 33  
Hitchcock-Tulare 55, Langford 41  
Huron 67, Rapid City Stevens 44  
Ipswich 65, Webster 62  
Irene-Wakonda 70, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 37  
Jones County 64, Bison 48  
Kearney, Neb. 74, St Thomas More 70  
Lead-Deadwood 57, Sundance, Wyo. 41  
Lower Brule 51, McLaughlin 49  
Mitchell 53, Rapid City Central 42  
Omaha Nation, Neb. 70, White River 50  
Parker/Marion 60, Alcester-Hudson 39  
Santee, Neb. 48, Oelrichs 38  
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 67, Brandon Valley 50  
Spearfish 60, T F Riggs High School 35  
Sully Buttes 70, Winner 53  
Tea 65, Watertown 61  
Timber Lake 81, New Underwood 72  
Vermillion 69, Crofton, Neb. 26  
Wessington Springs 64, Howard 58  
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=  
Belle Fourche vs. Newcastle, Wyo., ppd.

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

### **GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL**

Aberdeen Central 57, Sturgis Brown High School 30  
Aberdeen Roncalli 48, Waubay/Summit 43  
Alcester-Hudson 43, Parker/Marion 37  
Castlewood 54, Baltic 36  
Chester 56, DeSmet 53  
Clark-Willow Lake 55, Florence-Henry 42  
Colman-Egan 39, Flandreau 30  
Crofton, Neb. 55, Centerville 46  
Dell Rapids 57, Arlington 54  
Deuel 55, Estelline-Hendricks 33

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Garretson 57, Elkton-Lake Benton 37  
Gering, Neb. 54, Douglas 35  
Gregory 54, North Central, Neb. 32  
Hamlin 61, Deubrook 38  
Highmore-Harrold 50, Faulkton 45  
Huron 46, Rapid City Stevens 41  
Ipswich 48, Webster 40  
Iroquois-Lake Preston 56, Madison 46  
Jones County 58, Bison 26  
Kearney, Neb. 48, St Thomas More 39  
Langford 58, Hitchcock-Tulare 53, OT  
Lemmon High School 68, Grant County/Mott-Regent, N.D. 38  
Lennox 56, Wagner 38  
McIntosh High School 52, Strasburg, N.D. 23  
New Underwood 53, Timber Lake 47, OT  
Omaha Nation, Neb. 59, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 42  
Rapid City Central 49, Mitchell 45  
Redfield 44, Aberdeen Christian 16  
Santee, Neb. 48, St. Francis Indian 42  
Sioux Falls Christian 78, Winner 22  
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 68, S.C. East, Iowa 46  
Sioux Valley 74, Dell Rapids St Mary's 41  
Spearfish 47, T F Riggs High School 42  
Tea 58, Sioux Falls Lincoln 26  
Vermillion 56, Sergeant Bluff-Luton, Iowa 38  
Warner 69, Gettysburg 44  
Waverly-South Shore 57, Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 40  
Wessington Springs 50, Howard 44  
Stateline Shootout=  
Sundance, Wyo. 49, Lead-Deadwood 16  
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=  
Belle Fourche vs. Newcastle, Wyo., ppd.

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

## South Dakota hotel owner found liable for discrimination against Native Americans

By SARAH RAZA Associated Press

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The owner of a South Dakota hotel who said Native Americans were banned from the establishment was found liable for discrimination against Native Americans on Friday.

A federal jury decided the owner of the Grand Gateway Hotel in Rapid City will pay tens of thousands of dollars in damages to various plaintiffs who were denied service at the hotel. The jury awarded \$1 to the NDN Collective, the Indigenous advocacy group that filed the lawsuit.

The group brought the class-action civil rights lawsuit against Retsel Corporation, the company that owns the hotel, in 2022. The case was delayed when the company filed for bankruptcy in September 2024. The head of the company, Connie Uhre, passed away this September.

"This was never about money. We sued for one dollar," said Wizipan Garriott, president of NDN Collective and an enrolled member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe. "It was about being on record for the discrimination that happened, and using this as an opportunity to be able to really call out racism."

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Uhre posted on social media in March 2022 that she would ban Native Americans from the property after a fatal shooting at the hotel involving two teenagers whom police identified as Native American. She wrote in a Facebook post that she cannot "allow a Native American to enter our business including Cheers," the hotel's bar and casino.

When Native American members of the NDN Collective tried to book a room at the hotel after her social media posts, they were turned away. The incident drew protests in Rapid City and condemnation from the mayor as well as tribes in the state.

In Friday's decision, the jury also ruled in Retsel's countersuit against NDN Collective that the group had acted as a nuisance in its protests against the hotel, awarding \$812 to the company.

Following a consent decree with the U.S. Justice Department in November 2023, Uhre had to publicly apologize and was banned from managing the establishment for four years.

The Associated Press reached out to the defense attorneys for comment.

Rapid City, a gateway to Mount Rushmore, has long seen racial tensions. At least 8% of the city's population of about 80,000 identifies as American Indian or Alaska Native, according to census data.

## Haggerty scores 24 points, Kansas State dumps South Dakota 106-76

MANHATTAN, Kan. (AP) — PJ Haggerty scored 24 points, leading five in double figures, and Kansas State rolled past South Dakota 106-76 on Saturday.

The Wildcats (8-4) shot 68% in the first half and scored 57 points with Haggerty making all eight of his shots for 16 points before halftime. He finished 10-for-12 from the field to go with six rebounds and three assists.

K-State spotted South Dakota the first basket but the Wildcats were soon up 19-7. Their largest lead of the half was 44-20 near the six-minute mark and they led 57-34 at halftime.

A 10-0 run early in the second half pushed the lead to 31 points and K-State led 87-51 with 9 1/2 minutes remaining.

David Castillo scored 16 points, Nate Johnson and Abdi Bashir Jr. 15 each and Khamari McGriff 10 for the Wildcats. Johnson had five steals and McGriff blocked four shots.

Isaac Bruns scored 19 points, Cameron Fens 17 and Jesse McIntosh 15 for the Coyotes (7-7). Uzziah Buntyn contributed nine assists.

K-State has won all 11 games in the series.

Up next

Kansas State: The Wildcats host Louisiana-Monroe on Dec. 28.

South Dakota: Mount Marty visits on Dec. 28. \_\_\_\_

Get poll alerts and updates on the AP Top 25 throughout the season. Sign up here and here (AP News mobile app). AP college basketball: <https://apnews.com/hub/ap-top-25-college-basketball-poll> and <https://apnews.com/hub/college-basketball>

## Prince William brings his son to the same homeless shelter he first visited with Princess Diana

LONDON (AP) — Prince William and his eldest son, Prince George, put on aprons to help make Christmas lunch at a homeless shelter, a charity that the Prince of Wales first visited as a child with his mother, the late Princess Diana.

The royal father and son were seen decorating a Christmas tree and helping with meal preparations in the kitchen at The Passage in central London, in a video posted to William's YouTube account on Saturday.

"Proud to join volunteers and staff at The Passage in preparing Christmas lunch – this year with another pair of helping hands," read a post on the social media account of William and his wife, Princess Catherine.

William is the royal patron of The Passage, which he first visited when he was 11 with his mother, Di-

ana. The heir to the throne has visited the charity in recent years, but this was the first time George, 12, joined him.

The young royal signed his name in a book on the same page that Diana and William had written their names 32 years ago, in December 1993.

William was shown pouring Brussels sprouts onto an oven tray, while George helped set out Yorkshire puddings and set a long table for dozens of attendees.

William launched his Homewards project in 2023 to tackle homelessness.

## **Israeli Cabinet approves 19 new Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank**

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israel's Cabinet approved a proposal for 19 new settlements in the occupied West Bank, the far-right finance minister said on Sunday.

The settlements include two that were previously evacuated during a 2005 disengagement plan, according to Finance Minister Betzalel Smotrich, who has pushed a settlement expansion agenda in the West Bank.

It brings the total number of new settlements over the past two years to 69, Smotrich wrote on X.

The approval increases the number of settlements in the West Bank by nearly 50% during the current government's tenure, from 141 in 2022 to 210 after the current approval, according to Peace Now, an anti-settlement watchdog group. Settlements are widely considered illegal under international law.

The approval comes as the U.S. is pushing Israel and Hamas to move ahead with the new phase of the Gaza ceasefire, which took effect Oct. 10. The U.S.-brokered plan calls for a possible "pathway" to a Palestinian state — something the settlements are aimed at preventing.

The Cabinet decision included a retroactive legalization of some previously established settlement outposts or neighborhoods of existing settlements, and the creation of settlements on land where Palestinians were evacuated, Peace Now said.

Israel captured the West Bank, east Jerusalem and Gaza — areas claimed by the Palestinians for a future state — in the 1967 war. It has settled over 500,000 Jews in the West Bank, in addition to over 200,000 more in contested east Jerusalem.

Israel's government is dominated by far-right proponents of the settler movement, including Smotrich and Cabinet Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, who oversees the nation's police force.

Settler expansion has been compounded by a surge of attacks against Palestinians in the West Bank in recent months.

During October's olive harvest, settlers across the territory launched an average of eight attacks daily, according to the United Nations humanitarian office, the most since it began collecting data in 2006. The attacks continued in November, with the U.N. recording at least 136 more by Nov. 24.

Settlers burned cars, desecrated mosques, ransacked industrial plants and destroyed cropland. Israeli authorities have done little beyond issuing occasional condemnations of the violence.

## **PHOTO ESSAY: Tibetans depart Nepal, a former safe haven transformed under Chinese pressure**

By MANISH SWARUP, DAVID GOLDMAN and ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL Associated Press

DHARAMSHALA, India (AP) — Sonam Tashi refuses to let his son inherit the same fear.

Once active in the Free Tibet movement in Kathmandu, he found himself silenced. Unable to secure identity papers for his son, he left for the Tibetan capital in exile in India this year where his son will begin an education he can't have at home.

There he joined a rare protest in a city so reminiscent of what Kathmandu once was — where monks walk freely and the Dalai Lama's portrait is not a risk.

An investigation by The Associated Press found that much of the Chinese technology used to surveil Tibetans in Nepal originally came from American companies. Despite warnings that Chinese firms were

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copying or outright stealing their designs, these firms built, customized, and expanded China's surveillance apparatus over the past quarter-century.

Born in Nepal to Tibetan refugees, Tashi spent years on the frontlines of protest, a regular presence outside the Chinese embassy in Kathmandu. In the early days, arrests were brief — just a day or two — but by 2015, police were holding protesters for weeks. The crowds thinned. Eventually, Tashi was one of the last still showing up.

Surveillance trailed them beyond the protests.

Police began showing up hours before any gathering could start, demanding answers to questions they shouldn't have known to ask: What are you doing tomorrow? Where are you going?

Cameras multiplied — around Tibetan settlements, in temples, even near private homes. In Boudha, the comfort of lingering beneath the stupa's all-seeing eyes curdled.

Now 49, Tashi is focused on his 10-year-old son. Once an organizer, he's now just a father trying to get his son out — before the net pulls tighter. On a winding bus ride toward the Indian border, Sonam stared out the window as terraced hills gave way to forest, thinking about what comes next.

"There are cameras everywhere," he said. "There is no future."

This surveillance has helped silence Nepal's once-vibrant "Free Tibet" movement. Thousands of Tibetans once fled to Nepal every year, but last year, the number was down to the single digits, according to Tibetan officials in Nepal.

Across the world, in Washington, D.C., Namkyi's eyes hold the loneliness that haunts Tibetans in exile.

Arrested at 15 and sentenced to three years in prison for protesting Chinese rule, Namkyi traveled to the U.S. to recount her story of what it means to lose a home.

Dressed in black, with two small pins — Tibetan and American — on her coat, she recounts how under withering surveillance, silence has become survival for Nepal's dwindling Tibetan community.

"They know they are being watched," she said.

Her eyes shine, not with certainty, but with the fragile hope that being heard might one day matter.

## Russia says talks on US peace plan for Ukraine 'are proceeding constructively'

By The Associated Press undefined

A Kremlin envoy said peace talks on a U.S.-proposed plan to end the nearly four-year war in Ukraine were pressing on "constructively" in Florida, while the Ukrainian president said they were moving "quickly."

The talks are part of the Trump administration's monthslong push for peace that also included meetings with Ukrainian and European officials in Berlin earlier this week.

Florida talks press on

"The discussions are proceeding constructively. They began earlier and will continue today, and will also continue tomorrow," Kirill Dmitriev told reporters in Miami on Saturday.

Dmitriev met with U.S. President Donald Trump's envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, Russian state news agency RIA Novosti reported.

Zelenskyy wrote on Telegram Sunday that diplomatic efforts were "moving forward quite quickly, and our team in Florida has been working with the American side." This came after Ukraine's chief negotiator said Friday his delegation had completed separate meetings in the United States with American and European partners.

Trump has unleashed an extensive diplomatic push to end the war, but his efforts have run into sharply conflicting demands by Moscow and Kyiv. Russian President Vladimir Putin has recently signaled he is digging in on his maximalist demands on Ukraine, as Moscow's troops inch forward on the battlefield despite huge losses.

On Friday, Putin expressed confidence that the Kremlin would achieve its military goals if Kyiv didn't agree to Russia's conditions in peace talks.

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Possible French-Russian talks

The French presidency on Sunday welcomed Putin's willingness to speak with President Emmanuel Macron, saying it would decide how to proceed "in the coming days."

"As soon as the prospect of a ceasefire and peace negotiations becomes clearer, it becomes useful again to speak with Putin," Macron's office said in a statement. "It is welcome that the Kremlin publicly agrees to this approach."

The statement came after reports that Putin was open to holding talks with the French president if there was mutual political will.

Macron's office said any dialogue would aim "to contribute to a solid and lasting peace for Ukraine and Europe, in full transparency with President Zelenskyy and our European partners."

European Union leaders agreed on Friday to provide 90 billion euros (\$106 billion) to Ukraine to meet its military and economic needs for the next two years, although they failed to bridge differences with Belgium that would have allowed them to use frozen Russian assets to raise the funds. Instead, they were borrowed from capital markets.

Ukrainian civilians moved to Russia

In Ukraine, the country's human rights ombudsman, Dmytro Lubinets, accused Sunday Russian forces of forcibly removing about 50 Ukrainian civilians from the Ukrainian Sumy border region to Russian territory.

Writing on Telegram, he said that Russian forces illegally detained the residents in the village of Hrabovske on Thursday, before moving them to Russia on Saturday.

Lubinets said he contacted Russia's human rights commissioner, requesting information on the civilians' whereabouts and conditions, and demanding their immediate return to Ukraine.

## Multiple gunmen open fire at a South African pub, killing 9 and wounding 10

By MICHELLE GUMEDE and ALFONSO NQUNJANA Associated Press

BEKKERSDAL, South Africa (AP) — Nine people have died and at least 10 others were wounded after a group of gunmen carried out a shooting at a South African pub during the early hours of Sunday, authorities said.

The incident occurred just before 1 a.m. in the township of Bekkersdal which is located 46 kilometers (28 miles) west of Johannesburg. It is the second mass shooting to happen in South Africa in three weeks.

About 12 unknown suspects in a white mini-bus and a silver sedan opened fire at pub patrons at KwaN-oxolo tavern, in the Tambo section of Bekkersdal and continued to shoot randomly as they fled the scene, according to police.

"Some victims were randomly shot in the streets by unknown gunmen," the police said of the incident that left nine people dead and 10 hospitalized.

Maj. Gen. Fred Kekana, the acting provincial commissioner of Gauteng, told the AP at the scene that the gunmen, some of whom wore balaclavas, had one AK-47 rifle and several nine-millimeter pistols.

Police did not release information about the victims, but police spokesperson Brigadier Brenda Muridili confirmed that an e-hailing driver was among those who were caught in the crossfire. She said the driver had just dropped off a client.

"He was shot and killed," she told The Associated Press.

A manhunt for the suspects in the multiple gunshot event has been initiated by Gauteng Serious and Violent Crime Investigations in collaboration with the Crime Detection Tracing Unit.

There have been several mass shootings at bars — sometimes called shebeens or taverns in South Africa — in recent years, including a mass shooting carried out by multiple suspects in an unlicensed bar near the South African capital that left at least 12 people dead and 13 injured earlier this month.

Another shooting killed 16 people in the Johannesburg township of Soweto in 2022. On the same day, four people were killed in a mass shooting at a bar in another province.

With almost 26,000 homicides in 2024, or more than 70 per day on average, South Africa has one of the

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highest homicide rates in the world. Firearms are by far the leading cause of death in homicides. Although the nation of 62 million has comparatively stringent gun control laws, officials say many murders are carried out using illegal firearms.

## Sofia Goggia gets overdue World Cup win in super-G and Lindsey Vonn is third

VAL D'ISERE, France (AP) — Sofia Goggia finally got the win her fast skiing this season deserved in a World Cup super-G on Sunday and Lindsey Vonn was third for the second straight day.

The two former Olympic downhill champions were split on a high-class podium by runner-up Alice Robinson, who is already a two-time winner this season on the World Cup circuit.

Goggia finished 0.15 seconds ahead of Robinson who started before strong gusts delayed the race for 10 minutes.

The 41-year-old Vonn then hit a high speed of 115 kph (71 mph) — among the fastest on the day — but the ideal racing line was elusive and she finished 0.36 behind Goggia.

The result was unofficial with low-ranked racers yet to start.

Vonn's back-to-back podium finish — after an impressive third in Saturday's downhill — was the 142nd of her storied World Cup career. It resumed exactly one year ago after a five-season retirement to target the Milan Cortina Olympics that start on Feb. 6.

Vonn's intense start to her World Cup season now reads one win, four podiums and a fourth place in five races across 10 days. The downhill win at Swiss resort St. Moritz last weekend was the 83rd of her World Cup career that started in November 2000, before the 24-year-old Robinson was born.

Vonn now takes a three-week break from racing until a Jan. 10 downhill at Altenmarkt, Austria.

Goggia has skied fast this season but her best results had been a pair of third places at St. Moritz, in downhill and a super-G won by Robinson in a tight race where Vonn was fourth.

The 33-year-old Italian's 27th career World Cup win was her eighth in super-G.

## Thousands gather at Bondi Beach to mourn victims of antisemitic attack

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Thousands of mourners gathered under tight police security at Sydney's iconic Bondi Beach on Sunday evening to mark a week since two gunmen targeting a Jewish festival killed 15 people. Since then, Australian governments have been galvanized into action on countering antisemitism and tightening already strict national gun controls.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, his predecessors John Howard and Scott Morrison, and Governor-General Sam Mostyn, who represents Australia's head of state King Charles III, were among the dignitaries at the commemoration that drew more than 10,000 people.

"This has to be the nadir of antisemitism in our country," New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies President David Ossip told the crowd. "This has to be the moment when light starts to eclipse the darkness."

The crowd booed Albanese when Ossip acknowledged his presence. Opposition leader Sussan Ley, who had said that a conservative government led by her would reverse a decision made by Albanese's center-left Labor Party government this year to recognize a Palestinian state, was cheered.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has lashed out at Albanese over the attack on the Hannukah celebration, saying "your call for a Palestinian state pours fuel on the antisemitic fire." Netanyahu has repeatedly sought to link widespread calls for a Palestinian state, and criticism of Israel's military offensive in Gaza following Hamas' 2023 attack, to growing incidents of antisemitism worldwide.

A national Day of Reflection to honor the victims

Images of the victims, aged 10 to 87, were projected at the commemoration. "Waltzing Matilda" was sung in honor of the youngest victim, whose Ukrainian parents gave their Australian-born daughter what

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they described as the most Australian name they knew.

A widely acclaimed hero of the massacre, Ahmed al Ahmed, sent a message of support from his hospital bed. The Syrian-born immigrant was shot after wrestling a shotgun from one of the gunmen.

"The Lord is close to the broken-hearted. Today I stand with you, my brothers and sisters," he wrote.

His father, Mohamed Fateh al Ahmed, was invited to light a candle on the Jewish candelabrum known as a menorah on the final night of Hannukah.

Beyond the famous beach, people around Australia united with Sydney's stricken Jewish community by lighting candles and observing one minute of silence at their homes at 6:47 p.m. to remember the moment the massacre unfolded. Television and radio networks across Australia also fell silent.

The federal and New South Wales state governments declared Sunday a national Day of Reflection to mark Australia's worst mass shooting since 35 died in Tasmania state in 1996.

Albanese had earlier announced a review of federal law enforcement and intelligence agencies following last week's attack, which was inspired by the Islamic State group.

Indigenous leaders held a traditional smoking ceremony on Sunday morning at the waterfront Bondi Pavilion, where an impromptu memorial has grown as flowers and heartfelt messages have accumulated. The memorial is to be cleared on Monday.

Mostyn, the governor-general, accepted an invitation from the National Council of Jewish Women for women of all faiths to lay a flower at the memorial on Sunday morning. Hundreds of women and girls dressed in white joined her in making the gesture.

She later delivered a message from the British monarch saying he and Queen Camilla were "appalled and saddened by the most dreadful antisemitic attack on Jewish people the Hannukah celebration on Bondi Beach."

Tight security at Bondi Beach

One of the suspects, Naveed Akram, 24, was shot by police. He has been charged with 15 counts of murder and 40 counts of causing harm with intent to murder in relation to those wounded. His father, Sajid Akram, 50, was shot dead by police at the scene.

The Health Department said 13 of those wounded at Bondi remained in Sydney hospitals on Sunday.

Police bolstered security around Bondi on Sunday, including officers armed with rifles. There was criticism that the first police responders last week were armed only with Glock pistols, which did not have the lethal range of the assailants' shotguns and rifles. Two police officers were critically wounded.

Flags flew at half-staff on the Sydney Harbor Bridge and government buildings, which were lit in yellow on Sunday night in a show of solidarity with the Jewish community.

Executive Council of Australian Jewry co-chief Alex Ryvchin said the victims' families felt "tragically, unforgivably let down" by government failures to combat a growth in antisemitism in Australia since the war between Israel and Hamas began in 2023.

A day after the attack, an emergency meeting of federal and state leaders committed to tightening national gun laws with measures including limiting the number of guns an individual can own. Sajid Akram legally owned six guns, including the two shotguns and two bolt-action rifles used at Bondi.

The New South Wales state parliament will sit on Monday to debate new hate speech and gun draft laws.

## Schwarz leads first run in World Cup giant slalom with Odermatt outside top 10

ALTA BADIA, Italy (AP) — Marco Schwarz took a big lead in the first run of a World Cup giant slalom Sunday with Marco Odermatt far from contention after a tough three-day program of speed races.

Maybe only fatigue can stop Swiss star Odermatt at Alta Badia where he won five of the past six giant slaloms on the classic Gran Risa course.

Odermatt was 1.51 seconds behind Schwarz's leading time having come from nearby Val Gardena where since Thursday he won a downhill and was runner-up in a downhill and a super-G.

The other giant slalom contenders do not race downhill though Schwarz did compete Friday in the super-

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G at Val Gardena. Wearing the No. 1 bib Sunday, Schwarz found a fast and direct line to be 0.64 faster than River Radamus of the United States.

Stefan Brennsteiner was third with 0.67 to make up on his Austria teammate Schwarz in the afternoon run.

A course set by a U.S. team coach seemed to mystify the usual favorites in giant slalom.

Olympic champion Odermatt and former world champion Henrik Kristoffersen, who trailed by 1.52, looked bemused in the finish area seeing how much slower they were than Schwarz. Both placed outside the top-10 times.

The race included the first Russian skier in a men's World Cup event for nearly four years since the easing of a ban imposed during the war on Ukraine by the International Ski and Snowboard Federation.

The 35-year-old Aleksander Andrienko was given approved neutral status this month by FIS to resume competing so he could try to qualify for the Milan Cortina Olympics in February.

Given the No. 39 start bib Sunday, Andrienko was 52nd-fastest and more than one second outside the top-30 times that qualify for a second run. Neutral athletes from Russia and Belarus must compete without their national identity of team colors and flag.

Missing from the lineup was Alexander Steen Olsen who opted this week for season-ending knee surgery because of a persistent injury.

Steen Olsen was a two-time winner in giant slalom on the World Cup circuit last season and shaped as a medal contender at the Olympics.

## **Élysée Palace silver steward arrested for stealing thousands of euros' worth of silverware**

PARIS (AP) — Three men will stand trial next year after a silver steward employed at the official residence of the French president was arrested this week for the theft of items of silverware and table service worth thousands of euros, the Paris prosecutor's office said.

The Élysée Palace's head steward reported the disappearance, with the estimated loss ranging between 15,000 and 40,000 euros ((\$17,500-\$47,000)).

The Sèvres Manufactory — which supplied most of the furnishings — identified several of the missing items on online auction websites. Questioning of Élysée staff led investigators to suspect one of the silver stewards, whose inventory records gave the impression he was planning future thefts.

Investigators established that the man was in a relationship with the manager of a company specializing in the online sale of objects, notably tableware. Investigators discovered on his Vinted account a plate stamped "French Air Force" and "Sèvres Manufactory" ashtrays that are not available to the general public.

Around 100 objects were found in the silver steward's personal locker, his vehicle and their home. Among the items recovered were copper saucepans, Sèvres porcelain, a René Lalique statuette and Baccarat champagne coupes.

The two were arrested Tuesday. Investigators also identified a single receiver of the stolen goods. The recovered items were returned to the Élysée Palace.

The three suspects appeared in court Thursday on charges of jointly stealing movable property listed as part of the national heritage — an offense punishable by up to 10 years in prison and a 150,000-euro fine, as well as aggravated handling of stolen goods.

The trial was postponed to Feb. 26. The defendants were placed under judicial supervision, banned from contacting one another, prohibited from appearing at auction venues and barred from their professional activities.

## Bazball revolution falters for England in the Ashes, but it's not the end of the system

By JOHN PYE AP Sports Writer

The architects of the Bazball revolution that England aimed to use to summit test cricket have conceded the preparation wasn't quite right for the Ashes. That's not to say the strategy will be shelved.

After arriving on Australian shores with great expectations, coach Brendon McCullum and captain Ben Stokes were intent on imposing the attack-at-all-costs strategy on the contest for the oldest trophy in cricket.

After just one warmup game — an internal trial against the second-string England lineup — it quickly backfired.

Relying on a pragmatic, conventional approach to the game and long experience of the conditions, Australia retained the Ashes on Sunday with two matches remaining.

"Retrospectively, we lost 3-0 so you would probably say there was room for change there," McCullum told British broadcaster TNT Sport in terms of the preparations. "You put your hand up as a coach and say you might not have got that right."

After England lost the first two tests by eight wickets, McCullum decided the squad had overdone it in training between the outings in Perth and Brisbane and decided to give the players a break at Noosa, one of Australia's premier beach resort villages.

The rest and relaxation did improve one statistic — in Adelaide England made it to Day 5 of a test for the first time on tour.

McCullum had been building for the Ashes series for years but hasn't yet been able to break the long drought in Australia extending back to 2011.

"We came here with high hopes, high ambitions and lofty goals," he said. "And we've been outplayed across three test matches."

The Bazball strategy was suspended late in Brisbane when Stokes played a conservative hand in trying to save the day-night test. In the last two days in Adelaide, with some glaring expectations, the batters at least tried to grit it out at the crease rather than hit the ball out of the ground every over.

"The last two days have been our best cricket, and that's because we've just played," McCullum said. "The previous nine days, we were so caught up and so driven to achieve something and succeed that we've almost got in our own way and we've stymied our talent and our skill and our ability."

McCullum said there were lessons to be taken from the differences in the contest in the third test.

"There's a lesson not just for the players. There's a lesson for the coach and the coaching staff," he said. "Preparation, that'll be something that's questioned."

"But we do have a great opportunity in the next two tests. We need to find something out of this tour. We need to play for pride."

England's bowling attack hasn't so far got its line and length right consistently on the hard, bouncy Australian wickets. Top-order batters have given away their wickets with poor shot selection — often attacking when conditions called for defense. There were too many catches put down, whereas Australia's catching has at times been exceptional.

Persisting with it

Under Stokes and McCullum, whose nickname is "Baz," England played an entertaining brand of cricket that earned the label "Bazball" that turned around the fortunes of England's test team. But it has divided critics.

McCullum said some players had gone off script in the heat of the moment.

"I did think we were rock hard in our belief of the style we were going to play when we came down here, knowing that we were going to be challenged," he said, "but I do think we got a little bit stuck."

Stokes said there'd be no "restricting people's mindset" in terms of how they believe they can succeed for the team.

"You never want to take away their ability to go out and score their runs in the way they feel is best going to suit them," the England skipper said. "But then, marrying the skills and the ability that they have

with the mentality that it takes to be successful as an international sportsman.

"You put those two together and I know that we've got a very, very exciting test team."

## **Iraq's political future in limbo as factions vie for power**

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — Political factions in Iraq have been maneuvering since the parliamentary election more than a month ago to form alliances that will shape the next government.

The November election didn't produce a bloc with a decisive majority, opening the door to a prolonged period of negotiations.

The government that eventually emerges will be inheriting a security situation that has stabilized in recent years, but it will also face a fragmented parliament, growing political influence by armed factions, a fragile economy, and often conflicting international and regional pressures, including the future of Iran-backed armed groups.

Uncertain prospects

Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani's party took the largest number of seats in the election. Al-Sudani positioned himself in his first term as a pragmatist focused on improving public services and managed to keep Iraq on the sidelines of regional conflicts.

While his party is nominally part of the Coordination Framework, a coalition of Iran-backed Shiite parties that became the largest parliamentary bloc, observers say it's unlikely that the Coordination Framework will support al-Sudani's reelection bid.

"The choice for prime minister has to be someone the Framework believes they can control and doesn't have his own political ambitions," said Sajad Jiyad, an Iraqi political analyst and fellow at The Century Foundation think tank.

Al-Sudani came to power in 2022 with the backing of the Framework, but Jiyad said that he believes now the coalition "will not give al-Sudani a second term as he has become a powerful competitor."

The only Iraqi prime minister to serve a second term since 2003 was Nouri al-Maliki, first elected in 2006. His bid for a third term failed after being criticized for monopolizing power and alienating Sunnis and Kurds.

Jiyad said that the Coordination Framework drew a lesson from Maliki "that an ambitious prime minister will seek to consolidate power at the expense of others."

He said that the figure selected as Iraq's prime minister must generally be seen as acceptable to Iran and the United States — two countries with huge influence over Iraq — and to Iraq's top Shiite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani.

Al-Sudani in a bind

In the election, Shiite alliances and lists — dominated by the Coordination Framework parties — secured 187 seats, Sunni groups 77 seats, Kurdish groups 56 seats, in addition to nine seats reserved for members of minority groups.

The Reconstruction and Development Coalition, led by al-Sudani, dominated in Baghdad and in several other provinces, winning 46 seats.

Al-Sudani's results, while strong, don't allow him to form a government without the support of a coalition, forcing him to align the Coordination Framework to preserve his political prospects.

Some saw this dynamic at play earlier this month when al-Sudani's government retracted a terror designation that Iraq had imposed on the Lebanese Hezbollah militant group and Yemen's Houthi rebels — Iran-aligned groups that are allied with Iraqi armed factions — just weeks after imposing the measure, saying it was a mistake.

The Coalition Framework saw its hand strengthened by the absence from the election of the powerful Sadrist movement led by Shiite cleric Muqtada Sadr, which has been boycotting the political system since being unable to form a government after winning the most seats in the 2021 election.

Hamed Al-Sayed, a political activist and official with the National Line Movement, an independent party that boycotted the election, said that Sadr's absence had a "central impact."

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"It reduced participation in areas that were traditionally within his sphere of influence, such as Baghdad and the southern governorates, leaving an electoral vacuum that was exploited by rival militia groups," he said, referring to several parties within the Coordination Framework that also have armed wings.

Groups with affiliated armed wings won more than 100 parliamentary seats, the largest showing since 2003.

Other political actors

Sunni forces, meanwhile, sought to reorganize under a new coalition called the National Political Council, aiming to regain influence lost since the 2018 and 2021 elections.

The Kurdish political scene remained dominated by the traditional split between the Kurdistan Democratic Party and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan parties, with ongoing negotiations between the two over the presidency.

By convention, Iraq's president is always a Kurd, while the more powerful prime minister is Shiite and the parliamentary speaker Sunni.

Parliament is required to elect a speaker within 15 days of the Federal Supreme Court's ratification of the election result, which occurred on Dec. 14.

The parliament should elect a president within 30 days of its first session, and the prime minister should be appointed within 15 days of the president's election, with 30 days allotted to form the new government.

Washington steps in

The incoming government will face major economic and political challenges.

They include a high level of public debt — more than 90 trillion Iraqi dinars (\$69 billion) — and a state budget that remains reliant on oil for about 90% of revenues, despite attempts to diversify, as well as entrenched corruption.

But perhaps the most delicate question will be the future of the Popular Mobilization Forces, a coalition of militias that formed to fight the Islamic State group as it rampaged across Iraq more than a decade ago.

It was formally placed under the control of the Iraqi military in 2016, but in practice still operates with significant autonomy. After the Hamas-led attack in southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023 sparked the devastating war in Gaza, some armed groups within the PMF launched attacks on U.S. bases in the region in retaliation for Washington's backing of Israel.

The U.S. has been pushing for Iraq to disarm Iran-backed groups — a difficult proposition, given the political power that many of them hold and Iran's likely opposition to such a step.

Two senior Iraqi political officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to comment publicly, said that the United States had warned against selecting any candidate for prime minister who controls an armed faction and also cautioned against letting figures associated with militias control key ministries or hold significant security posts.

"The biggest issue will be how to deal with the pro-Iran parties with armed wings, particularly those... which have been designated by the United States as terrorist entities," Jiyad said.

Kataib Hezbollah, one of the most powerful militias in Iraq, designated by the U.S. as a terrorist organization, issued a statement Saturday rejecting the possibility of giving up its weapons.

The statement said the group's "weapons will remain in the hands of its fighters, and no discussions with the government can take place before the departure of all occupation forces, NATO troops, and Turkish forces, and before ensuring the protection of the people and the sacred sites from extremist groups."

## Saudi Arabia quietly expands access to its only alcohol store for non-Muslim residents

By BARAA ANWER Associated Press

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia (AP) — Saudi Arabia has quietly expanded access to its only store that sells alcohol, allowing wealthy foreign residents to buy booze in the latest step in the once-ultraconservative kingdom's experiment in liberalization.

There's been no official announcement of the decision, but word has gotten out, and long lines of cars

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and people can now be seen at the discreet, unmarked store in the Diplomatic Quarter of the Saudi capital, Riyadh.

The store opened in January 2024 for non-Muslim diplomats. The new rules allow non-Muslim foreigners who hold Premium Residency to buy. The residency permit goes to foreigners with specialized skills, investors and entrepreneurs.

Saudi Arabia, home to the holiest sites in Islam, has banned alcohol since the early 1950s. The store is widely seen as a way to cautiously test the controlled sale of alcohol.

Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and his father, King Salman, have pursued a dramatic liberalization policy in the kingdom, aiming to attract tourism, boost international business and reduce economic dependence on crude oil.

The kingdom, which adheres to Islamic Sharia law, has opened movie theaters, allowed women to drive and hosted major music festivals. But political speech and dissent remain strictly criminalized, potentially at the penalty of death.

Alcohol remains banned for the general public.

The unmarked store resembles a duty-free shop. Its ownership remains officially undisclosed.

Security is strict. Every visitor is subject to eligibility checks and frisking before entry. Phones and cameras are banned inside, and staff even inspect eyewear for smart glasses.

The Associated Press spoke to several customers leaving the store. They spoke on condition of anonymity because of the stigma around alcohol.

Prices are sharply elevated, they said. Diplomats are exempt from taxes on their purchases, but Premium Residency holders are not.

The customers described the store as relatively well-stocked, though some said the selection of beer and wine was limited.

The Premium Residency permit was created as part of the kingdom's drive to attract global expertise. Unlike other residencies, it doesn't require a Saudi sponsor, and it offers benefits including the right to own property, start a business and sponsor family. It requires high incomes or large investments to qualify.

Saudis and other residents who want a drink often travel to the neighboring island of Bahrain, where alcohol is legally available to Muslims and non-Muslims. On weekends and holidays, the island sees an influx of visitors from Saudi Arabia and across the Gulf, making it a popular getaway. The more expensive option is to go to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates.

Others resort to smuggled alcohol, which can be extremely expensive, or to bootleg booze — often homemade and risky, using unsafe materials.

Some people in Saudi Arabia enjoy alcohol-free beverages as a substitute for the real thing or to capture the aesthetic of drinking, often snapping photos for social media. At major events and festivals, it's not uncommon to see long lines forming at alcohol-free beer stands, especially among young Saudis and visitors looking to partake in the vibe.

King Abdulaziz, Saudi Arabia's founding monarch, banned the sale after a 1951 incident in which one of his sons, Prince Mishari, became intoxicated and used a shotgun to kill British vice consul Cyril Ousman in Jeddah.

## San Francisco outages leaves 130,000 without power

By JAIMIE DING Associated Press

A massive outage knocked out power to 130,000 homes and businesses in San Francisco on Saturday, Pacific Gas and Electric Co. said.

The power failure left a large swath of the northern part of the city in the dark, beginning with the Richmond and Presidio neighborhoods and areas around Golden Gate Park in the early afternoon and growing in size.

PG&E did not immediately respond to requests for comment on the cause of the blackouts. The outage represents roughly one-third of the utility company's customers in the city.

Social media posts and local media reported mass closures of restaurants and shops and darkened street lights and Christmas decorations.

The San Francisco Department of Emergency Management said on X there were "significant transit disruptions" happening citywide and urged residents to avoid nonessential travel and treat down traffic signals as four-way stops.

The city's transportation agencies said they were bypassing some Muni bus and BART train stations because of the power outages.

At least some of the blackouts were caused by a fire that broke out inside a PG&E substation at 8th and Mission streets, fire officials posted on X at about 3:15 p.m.

At about 4 p.m., PG&E posted on X that it had stabilized the power grid and was not expecting additional customer outages. The company said it was unable to confirm if power would be restored by later Saturday.

## At least 16 files have disappeared from the DOJ webpage for documents related to Jeffrey Epstein

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and DAVID B. CARUSO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — At least 16 files disappeared from the Justice Department's public webpage for documents related to Jeffrey Epstein — including a photograph showing President Donald Trump — less than a day after they were posted, with no explanation from the government and no notice to the public.

The missing files, which were available Friday and no longer accessible by Saturday, included images of paintings depicting nude women, and one showing a series of photographs along a credenza and in drawers. In that image, inside a drawer among other photos, was a photograph of Trump, alongside Epstein, Melania Trump and Epstein's longtime associate Ghislaine Maxwell.

The Justice Department didn't answer questions Saturday about why the files disappeared but said in a post on X that "photos and other materials will continue being reviewed and redacted consistent with the law in an abundance of caution as we receive additional information."

Online, the unexplained missing files fueled speculation about what was taken down and why the public was not notified, compounding long-standing intrigue about Epstein and the powerful figures who surrounded him. Democrats on the House Oversight Committee pointed to the missing image featuring a Trump photo in a post on X, writing: "What else is being covered up? We need transparency for the American public."

The episode deepened concerns that had already emerged from the Justice Department's much-anticipated document release. The tens of thousands of pages made public offered little new insight into Epstein's crimes or the prosecutorial decisions that allowed him to avoid serious federal charges for years, while omitting some of the most closely watched materials, including FBI interviews with victims and internal Justice Department memos on charging decisions.

Scant new insight in the initial disclosures

Some of the most consequential records expected about Epstein are nowhere to be found in the Justice Department's initial disclosures, which span tens of thousands of pages.

Missing are FBI interviews with survivors and internal Justice Department memos examining charging decisions — records that could have helped explain how investigators viewed the case and why Epstein was allowed in 2008 to plead guilty to a relatively minor state-level prostitution charge.

The gaps go further.

The records, required to be released under a recent law passed by Congress, hardly reference several powerful figures long associated with Epstein, including Britain's former Prince Andrew, renewing questions about who was scrutinized, who was not, and how much the disclosures truly advance public accountability.

Among the fresh nuggets: insight into the Justice Department's decision to abandon an investigation into Epstein in the 2000s, which enabled him to plead guilty to that state-level charge, and a previously unseen 1996 complaint accusing Epstein of stealing photographs of children.

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The releases so far have been heavy on images of Epstein's homes in New York City and the U.S. Virgin Islands, with some photos of celebrities and politicians.

There was a series of never-before-seen photos of former President Bill Clinton but fleetingly few of Trump. Both have been associated with Epstein, but both have since disowned those friendships. Neither has been accused of any wrongdoing in connection with Epstein and there was no indication the photos played a role in the criminal cases brought against him.

Despite a Friday deadline set by Congress to make everything public, the Justice Department said it plans to release records on a rolling basis. It blamed the delay on the time-consuming process of obscuring survivors' names and other identifying information. The department has not given any notice when more records might arrive.

That approach angered some Epstein accusers and members of Congress who fought to pass the law forced the department to act. Instead of marking the end of a yearslong battle for transparency, the document release Friday was merely the beginning of an indefinite wait for a complete picture of Epstein's crimes and the steps taken to investigate them.

"I feel like again the DOJ, the justice system is failing us," said Marina Lacerda, who alleges Epstein started sexually abusing her at his New York City mansion when she was 14.

Many of the long-anticipated records were redacted or lacked context

Federal prosecutors in New York brought sex trafficking charges against Epstein in 2019, but he killed himself in jail after his arrest.

The documents just made public were a sliver of potentially millions of pages records in the department's possession. In one example, Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche said Manhattan federal prosecutors had more than 3.6 million records from sex trafficking investigations into Epstein and Maxwell, though many duplicated material already turned over by the FBI.

Many of the records released so far had been made public in court filings, congressional releases or freedom of information requests, though, for the first time, they were all in one place and available for the public to search for free.

Ones that were new were often lacking necessary context or heavily blacked out. A 119-page document marked "Grand Jury-NY," likely from one of the federal sex trafficking investigations that led to the charges against Epstein in 2019 or Maxwell in 2021, was entirely blacked out.

Trump's Republican allies seized on the Clinton images, including photos of the Democrat with singers Michael Jackson and Diana Ross. There were also photos of Epstein with actors Chris Tucker and Kevin Spacey, and even Epstein with TV newscaster Walter Cronkite. But none of the photos had captions and was no explanation given for why any of them were together.

The meatiest records released so far showed that federal prosecutors had what appeared to be a strong case against Epstein in 2007 yet never charged him.

Transcripts of grand jury proceedings, released publicly for the first time, included testimony from FBI agents who described interviews they had with several girls and young women who described being paid to perform sex acts for Epstein. The youngest was 14 and in ninth grade.

One had told investigators about being sexually assaulted by Epstein when she initially resisted his advances during a massage.

Another, then 21, testified before the grand jury about how Epstein had hired her when she was 16 to perform a sexual massage and how she had gone on to recruit other girls to do the same.

"For every girl that I brought to the table he would give me \$200," she said. They were mostly people she knew from high school, she said. "I also told them that if they are under age, just lie about it and tell him that you are 18."

The documents also contain a transcript of an interview Justice Department lawyers did more than a decade later with the U.S. attorney who oversaw the case, Alexander Acosta, about his ultimate decision not to bring federal charges.

Acosta, who was labor secretary during Trump's first term, cited concerns about whether a jury would believe Epstein's accusers.

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He also said the Justice Department might have been more reluctant to make a federal prosecution out of a case that straddled the legal border between sex trafficking and soliciting prostitution, something more commonly handled by state prosecutors.

"I'm not saying it was the right view," Acosta added. He also said that the public today would likely view the survivors differently.

"There's been a lot of changes in victim shaming," Acosta said.

Jennifer Freeman, an attorney representing Epstein accuser Maria Farmer and other survivors, said Saturday that her client feels vindicated after the document release. Farmer sought for years documents backing up her claim that Epstein and Maxwell were in possession of child sexual abuse images.

"It's a triumph and a tragedy," she said. "It looks like the government did absolutely nothing. Horrible things have happened and if they investigated in even the smallest way, they could have stopped him."

## Jalen Hurts and the Eagles win their second NFC East title in a row by beating the Commanders 29-18

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP National Writer

LANDOVER, Md. (AP) — As the percussive horns of Steve Wonder's "Sir Duke" filled the air, Philadelphia Eagles coach Nick Sirianni — wearing a black T-shirt bearing the words, "Been there, won that" — made the rounds in the locker room, offering hand clasps and back slaps to his players after they accomplished something that hadn't happened in two decades: win a second consecutive NFC East title.

"Gets better and better," running back Saquon Barkley said as he walked through the scene Saturday night, "each time."

This was not a terrific performance by the reigning Super Bowl champions, from a fumble on the opening kickoff to a pair of penalties on the tush push to three wide-left field-goal tries to a halftime deficit. Still, Barkley, Jalen Hurts and the Eagles eventually got going in the right direction and clinched their division yet again by beating the Washington Commanders 29-18.

"I'm just happy," Hurts said, "we were able to check that off."

The game included a late brawl when Barkley tacked on a 2-point conversion that increased the Eagles' lead to 19 points before the Commanders scored a meaningless TD.

Starting plays under center far more frequently than he did earlier in the season, Hurts completed 22 of 30 throws — with 15 of those caught by A.J. Brown or DeVonta Smith — for 185 yards, two touchdowns and no turnovers. He connected with Smith from 5 yards out in the first half and with Dallas Goedert from 15 in the third quarter to cap a 17-play, 83-yard, 10 1/2-minute drive.

"We've slowly been playing better and better on the offensive side of the ball," said Goedert, whose 10th TD reception this season tied a record for Philadelphia tight ends that was first set in the 1960s.

Hurts also did plenty of damage on the ground, gaining 40 yards on seven carries for the Eagles (10-5), who have followed a three-game losing streak by winning two in a row. They are the first team to top the NFC East in back-to-back seasons since Philadelphia did it every year from 2001 to 2004; the gap since then was the longest drought without a repeat champ for any division in NFL history.

Barkley added a 12-yard TD run for the Eagles, part of his 21-carry, 132-yard performance that raised his season rushing total above 1,000 yards.

A year after going 12-5, the Commanders have lost nine of 10 to fall to 4-11.

"It certainly feels terrible," coach Dan Quinn said, "to hear that record."

Chants of "E-A-G-L-E-S, Eagles!" frequently rang out in the Commanders' stadium, and cries of "Cooooop!" greeted Cooper DeJean's interception of Josh Johnson, Washington's third-string quarterback, who came in when Marcus Mariota went out after the opening drive in the third quarter with an injured right hand while Washington led 10-7.

Mariota started Saturday in place of Jayden Daniels, the reigning AP NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year who led the Commanders to the NFC title game last season — where they lost 55-23 to Philadelphia — but has been shut down in 2025 after dealing with a series of injuries and appearing in only seven games.

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The chilly evening started inauspiciously for Philadelphia. Will Shipley coughed up the opening kickoff when he was hit by Mike Sainristil. But just as they have over the course of the season, the Eagles got through what wasn't working and ended up in the right place.

"This division's had so much parity throughout the years," Sirianni said. "Obviously our goals are much higher. We've raised the expectations."

Jake Elliott, leaning left

The Eagles' Jake Elliott managed to send three field-goal attempts wide left in the first half. Elliott hadn't missed more than one in a game this season. But he was off on a 43-yarder in the first quarter, couldn't get a 57-yarder to go through the uprights in the second — and after that was wiped out by a penalty on Washington, Elliot went wide left once more, from 52. "I have the utmost confidence in Jake," Sirianni said.

Brandon Graham, again

DE Brandon Graham, 37, whose two sacks last week made him the oldest Eagles player to record one, added another Saturday.

Injuries

Eagles: LB Nakobe Dean (hamstring) exited in the first quarter.

Commanders: Mariota was evaluated for a concussion and cleared, but his hand sidelined him. ... WR Jaylin Lane (ankle) left in the first quarter. ... RG Sam Cosmi and DT Johnny Newton were evaluated for concussions. ... OT Brandon Coleman hurt his shin.

Up next

Eagles: At the Bills on Dec. 28.

Commanders: Host the Cowboys on Thursday night.

## US forces stop oil tanker off the coast of Venezuela as Trump follows up on promise to seize tankers

By KONSTANTIN TOROPIN and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. forces on Saturday stopped an oil tanker off the coast of Venezuela for the second time in less than two weeks as President Donald Trump continues to ramp up pressure on Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

The pre-dawn operation comes days after Trump announced a "blockade" of all sanctioned oil tankers coming in and out of the South American country and follows the Dec. 10 seizure by American forces of an oil tanker off Venezuela's coast.

Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem confirmed that the U.S. Coast Guard with help from the Defense Department stopped the oil tanker that was last docked in Venezuela. She also posted on social media an unclassified video of a U.S. helicopter landing personnel on a vessel called Centuries.

A crude oil tanker flying under the flag of Panama operates under the name and was recently spotted near the Venezuelan coast, according to MarineTraffic, a project that tracks the movement of vessels around the globe using publicly available data. It was not immediately clear if the vessel was under U.S. sanctions.

"The United States will continue to pursue the illicit movement of sanctioned oil that is used to fund narco terrorism in the region," Noem wrote on X. "We will find you, and we will stop you."

The action was a "consented boarding," with the tanker stopping voluntarily and allowing U.S. forces to board it, according to a U.S. official who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The reasoning for the seizure of the Centuries is far less clear than it was with the first tanker, the Skipper, which was known to be part of a shadow fleet of tankers that operates on the fringes of the law to move sanctioned cargo and was not even flying a nation's flag when it was seized by the U.S. Coast Guard.

White House Deputy Press Secretary Anna Kelly claimed in an online post Saturday that the Centuries was a similarly "falsely flagged vessel operating as part of the Venezuelan shadow fleet to traffic stolen oil" and that the oil it was carrying was sanctioned.

However, Dr. Salvatore Mercogliano, a maritime historian and merchant shipping expert at Campbell

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University, said that according to several shipping industry databases, the Centuries appeared to be operating legally.

"Everything indicates that she is a properly registered vessel," Mercogliano said, though he did note that it's almost certain that the Centuries took on a load of sanctioned oil.

To Mercogliano, even despite the fact that the Centuries was carrying oil that was subject to sanctions, the seizure is "a big escalation."

"This one is meant to scare other tankers away," he added.

Venezuela's government in a statement Saturday characterized the U.S. forces' actions as "criminal" and vowed to not let them "go unpunished" by pursuing various legal avenues, including by filing complaints with the United Nations Security Council.

"The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela categorically denounces and rejects the theft and hijacking of another private vessel transporting Venezuelan oil, as well as the enforced disappearance of its crew, perpetrated by United States military personnel in international waters," according to the statement.

Trump following the first tanker seizure, of a vessel named the Skipper, this month vowed that the U.S. would carry out a blockade of Venezuela. It all comes as Trump has ratcheted up his rhetoric toward Maduro and warned that the longtime Venezuelan leader's days in power are numbered.

And the president this week demanded that Venezuela return assets that it seized from U.S. oil companies years ago, justifying anew his announcement of a "blockade" against oil tankers traveling to or from the South American country that face American sanctions.

Trump cited the lost U.S. investments in Venezuela when asked about his newest tactic in a pressure campaign against Maduro, suggesting the Republican administration's moves are at least somewhat motivated by disputes over oil investments, along with accusations of drug trafficking. Some sanctioned tankers already are diverting away from Venezuela.

"We're not going to be letting anybody going through who shouldn't be going through," Trump told reporters earlier this week. "You remember they took all of our energy rights. They took all of our oil not that long ago. And we want it back. They took it — they illegally took it."

U.S. oil companies dominated Venezuela's petroleum industry until the country's leaders moved to nationalize the sector, first in the 1970s and again in the 21st century under Maduro and his predecessor, Hugo Chávez. Compensation offered by Venezuela was deemed insufficient, and in 2014, an international arbitration panel ordered the country's socialist government to pay \$1.6 billion to ExxonMobil.

The targeting of tankers comes as Trump has ordered the Defense Department to carry out a series of attacks on vessels in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific Ocean that his administration alleges are smuggling fentanyl and other illegal drugs into the United States and beyond.

At least 104 people have been killed in 28 known strikes since early September.

The strikes have faced scrutiny from U.S. lawmakers and human rights activists, who say the administration has offered scant evidence that its targets are indeed drug smugglers and that the fatal strikes amount to extrajudicial killings.

The Coast Guard, sometimes with help from the Navy, had typically interdicted boats suspected of smuggling drugs in the Caribbean Sea, searched for illicit cargo, and arrested the people aboard for prosecution.

The administration has justified the strikes as necessary, asserting it is in "armed conflict" with drug cartels aimed at halting the flow of narcotics into the United States. Maduro faces federal charges of narco-terrorism in the U.S.

The U.S. in recent months has sent a fleet of warships to the region, the largest buildup of forces in generations, and Trump has stated repeatedly that land attacks are coming soon.

Maduro has insisted the real purpose of the U.S. military operations is to force him from power.

White House chief of staff Susie Wiles said in an interview with Vanity Fair published this week that Trump "wants to keep on blowing boats up until Maduro cries uncle."

## WWII Navy veteran Ira 'Ike' Schab, one of last remaining Pearl Harbor survivors, dies at 105

By JENNIFER PELTZ and JAIMIE DING Associated Press

World War II Navy veteran Ira "Ike" Schab, one of the dwindling number of survivors of the 1941 Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, has died. He was 105.

Daughter Kimberlee Heinrichs told The Associated Press that Schab died at home early Saturday in the presence of her and her husband.

With his passing, there remain only about a dozen survivors of the surprise attack, which killed just over 2,400 troops and propelled the United States into the war.

Schab was a sailor of just 21 at the time of the attack, and for decades he rarely spoke about the experience.

But in recent years, aware that the corps of survivors was dwindling, the centenarian made a point of traveling from his home in Beaverton, Oregon, to the annual observance at the Hawaii military base.

"To pay honor to the guys that didn't make it," he said in 2023.

For last year's commemoration, Schab spent weeks building up the strength to be able to stand and salute.

But this year he did not feel well enough to attend, and less than three weeks later, he passed away.

Born on Independence Day in 1920 in Chicago, Schab was the eldest of three brothers.

He joined the Navy at 18, following in the footsteps of his father, he said in a February interview for Pacific Historic Parks.

On what began as a peaceful Sunday, Dec. 7, 1941, Schab, who played the tuba in the USS Dobbin's band, was expecting a visit from his brother, a fellow service member assigned to a nearby naval radio station. Schab had just showered and donned a clean uniform when he heard a call for fire rescue.

He went topside and saw another ship, the USS Utah, capsizing. Japanese planes roared through the air.

"We were pretty startled. Startled and scared to death," Schab recalled in 2023. "We didn't know what to expect, and we knew that if anything happened to us, that would be it."

He scurried back below deck to grab boxes of ammunition and joined a daisy chain of sailors feeding shells to an anti-aircraft gun above.

His ship lost three sailors, according to Navy records. One was killed in action, and two died later of fragment wounds from a bomb that struck the stern. All had been manning an anti-aircraft gun.

Schab spent most of the war with the Navy in the Pacific, going to the New Hebrides, now known as Vanuatu, and then the Mariana Islands and Okinawa, Japan.

After the war he studied aerospace engineering and worked on the Apollo spaceflight program as an electrical engineer for General Dynamics, helping send astronauts to the moon.

Schab's son also joined the Navy and is a retired commander.

Speaking at a 2022 ceremony, Schab asked people to honor those who served at Pearl Harbor.

"Remember what they're here for. Remember and honor those that are left. They did a hell of a job," he said. "Those who are still here, dead or alive."

## Russian strike on Odesa kills 8 as US hosts a Kremlin envoy for talks on peace plan

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A Russian missile strike on port infrastructure in Odesa in southern Ukraine killed eight people and wounded 27, Ukraine's emergency service said Saturday, as a Kremlin envoy was set to travel to Florida for talks on a U.S.-proposed plan to end the nearly four-year war,

The discussions are part of the Trump administration's monthslong push for peace that also included meetings with Ukrainian and European officials in Berlin earlier this week. Ukraine's chief negotiator said late Friday that his delegation had completed separate meetings in the U.S. with American and European partners.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said much will depend on the U.S. posture after discussions

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with the Russians.

Speaking at a news conference in Kyiv with Portuguese Prime Minister Luís Montenegro, Zelenskyy said that "the key question remains how the United States responds after consultations with the Russians. At this point, I honestly don't know, but I will know later today."

Ukraine and Portugal signed an agreement to establish joint production of maritime drones, Zelenskyy said. "This is one of the most promising areas of defense cooperation. What matters now is delivering results, and all parts of Europe must have sufficient capabilities to counter any threats," he said.

Ukraine targets a Russian oil rig and a patrol ship

Some of those wounded in Odesa were on a bus at the center of the strike late Friday, the emergency service said in a Telegram post. Trucks caught fire in the parking lot and cars were also damaged.

The port was struck with ballistic missiles, said Oleh Kiper, the head of the Odesa region.

Moscow did not immediately acknowledge reports of the attack. The Russian Defense Ministry said Saturday that over the previous day, it had struck unspecified "transport and storage infrastructure used by the Ukrainian armed forces," along with energy facilities and those supplying Kyiv's war effort.

Elsewhere, Ukrainian drones hit a Russian oil rig, the military patrol ship Okhotnik and other facilities, Ukraine's General Staff said in a statement Saturday. It said the ship was patrolling in the Caspian Sea near an oil and gas production platform. The extent of the damage was still being clarified, it said.

The drilling platform at the Filanovsky oil and gas field was also hit. The facility is operated by Russian oil giant Lukoil. Ukrainian drones also struck a radar system in the Krasnosilke area of Crimea, which Russia illegally annexed from Ukraine in 2014.

There was no immediate comment from the Russian government or Lukoil. The company is one of two Russian oil majors — alongside state-owned Gazprom — targeted by recent U.S. sanctions that aim to deprive Moscow of oil export revenue that helps it sustain the war.

Kyiv has used similar arguments to justify months of long-range strikes on Russian oil infrastructure, which it says both funds and directly fuels the Kremlin's all-out invasion, soon to enter its fifth year.

Trump's peace push set to continue Saturday

U.S. President Donald Trump has unleashed an extensive diplomatic push to end the war, but his efforts have run into sharply conflicting demands by Moscow and Kyiv.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has recently signaled he is digging in on his maximalist demands on Ukraine, as Moscow's troops inch forward on the battlefield despite huge losses.

On Friday, Putin voiced confidence that the Kremlin would achieve its goals militarily if Kyiv doesn't agree to Russia's conditions in peace talks.

European Union leaders on Friday agreed to provide 90 billion euros (\$106 billion) to Ukraine to meet its military and economic needs for the next two years, although they failed to bridge differences with Belgium that would have allowed them to use frozen Russian assets to raise the funds. Instead, they were borrowed on capital markets.

After almost four years of war, the International Monetary Fund estimates that Ukraine will need 137 billion euros (\$161 billion) in 2026 and 2027. The government in Kyiv is on the verge of bankruptcy, and desperately needs the money by spring.

Meanwhile, Kirill Dmitriev, the Kremlin's envoy, is set to meet with Trump's envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner in Miami on Saturday, according to a U.S. official. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to preview a meeting that hasn't yet been publicly announced.

The official said Witkoff and Kushner will sit down with Dmitriev, after meetings with Ukrainian and European officials in Berlin for talks on U.S. security guarantees for Kyiv, territorial concessions and other aspects of the American-authored plan.

Ukraine's chief negotiator Rustem Umerov said late Friday that a Ukrainian delegation had met with American and European partners in the U.S. He gave few details, but said they agreed to continue "joint work in the near future."

Asked about the meeting in Miami, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Thursday that Moscow was

preparing for contacts with the U.S. to learn about the results of the meetings in Berlin, but he didn't give details.

## US tech enabled China's surveillance empire. Now Tibetan refugees in Nepal are paying the price

By ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL and DAKE KANG Associated Press

KATHMANDU, Nepal (AP) — The white dome of Boudhanath rises like a silent guardian over the chaotic sprawl of Nepal's capital, Kathmandu, crowned by a golden spire that pierces the sky. Painted on each of the spire's four sides are the benevolent eyes of the Buddha — wide, calm, and unblinking — said to see all that unfolds below.

Those eyes have served as a symbol of sanctuary for generations of Tibetans fleeing the Chinese crackdown in their homeland. But today, Tibetan refugees are also watched by far more malevolent eyes: Thousands of CCTV cameras from China, perched on street corners and rooftops to monitor every movement below. This intense surveillance has stifled the once-vibrant Free Tibet movement that had resonated around the world.

Nepal is just one of at least 150 countries to which Chinese companies are supplying surveillance technology, from cameras in Vietnam to censorship firewalls in Pakistan to citywide monitoring systems in Kenya. This technology is now a key part of China's push for global influence, as it provides cash-strapped governments cost-effective, if invasive, forms of policing — turning algorithms and data into a force multiplier for control.

The irony at the heart of this digital authoritarianism is that the surveillance tools China exports are based on technology developed in its greatest rival, the United States, despite warnings that Chinese firms would buy, copy or outright steal American designs, an investigation by The Associated Press has found.

For decades, Silicon Valley firms often yielded to Beijing's demands: Give us your technology and we will give you access to our market. Although tensions fester between Washington and Beijing, the links between American tech and Chinese surveillance continue today.

For example, Amazon Web Services offers cloud services to Chinese tech giants like Hikvision and Dahua, assisting them in their overseas push. Both are on the U.S. Commerce Department's Entity List for national security and human-rights concerns, which means transactions with them are not illegal but subject to strict restrictions.

AWS told AP it adheres to ethical codes of conduct, complies with U.S. law, and does not itself offer surveillance infrastructure. Dahua said they conduct due diligence to prevent abuse of their products. Hikvision said the same, and that they "categorically reject any suggestion that the company is involved in or complicit in repression."

Chinese technology firms now offer a complete suite of telecommunications, surveillance, and digital infrastructure, with few restrictions on who they sell to or how they're used.

China pitches itself as a global security model with low crime rates, contrasting its record with the United States, said Sheena Greitens, a political scientist at the University of Texas at Austin.

"It's got a set of solutions that it's happy to share with the world that nobody else can offer," she said. "(But) they're certainly exporting the tools and techniques that are very important to authoritarian rule."

The AP investigation was based on thousands of Nepali government procurement documents, corporate marketing material, leaked government and corporate documents, and interviews with more than 40 people, including Tibetan refugees and Nepali, American and Chinese engineers, executives, experts and officials.

While thousands of Tibetans once fled to Nepal every year, the number is now down to the single digits, according to Tibetan officials in Nepal. In a statement to AP, the Tibetan government in exile cited tight border controls, Nepal's warming ties with China and "unprecedented surveillance" as reasons for the drastic plunge.

A 2021 internal Nepali government report, obtained by AP, revealed that China has even built surveillance systems within Nepal and in some areas of the border buffer zone where construction is banned

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by bilateral agreements. In a statement to AP, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied coercing Western companies to hand over technology or working with Nepal to surveil Tibetans, calling it a "sheer fabrication driven by ulterior motives."

"Attempts to use Tibet-related issues to interfere in China's internal affairs, smear China's image, and poison the atmosphere of China-Nepal cooperation will never succeed," the statement said.

The Nepali government and the Chinese-controlled Tibetan authorities did not respond to requests for comment.

Under pressure, many Tibetans are responding the only way they can: Leaving. The Tibetan population in Nepal has plunged from over 20,000 to half that or less today.

Former activist Sonam Tashi gave up protesting years ago. Now 49, today he's just a father trying to get his 10-year-old son out — before the net pulls tighter. The boy was born in Nepal but has no document proving he is either a refugee or a citizen, a result of Chinese pressure.

Tashi described how those considered likely to protest are picked up in advance around key dates — like March 10, which marks the 1959 Tibetan uprising, or July 6, the Dalai Lama's birthday. In 2018, Nepal's police magazine confirmed that it was building predictive policing, which allows officers to watch people's movements, identify in advance who they think will protest and arrest them preemptively.

"There are cameras everywhere," Tashi said, sitting on a bus winding toward the Indian border. "There is no future."

'They gave us all the hardware'

After China crushed a Tibetan uprising in 1959, thousands fled across the Himalayas to Nepal, carrying only what they could: Religious paintings, prayer wheels and the weight of families left behind.

Their exodus, led by the charismatic Dalai Lama, captured the American imagination, with Hollywood films and actor Richard Gere's congressional appeals putting Tibet in the spotlight. Washington trod a careful line, defending the rights and religious freedom of Tibetans without recognizing independence.

Today, the future of the Free Tibet movement is in question. Without refugee cards that grant basic rights, Tibetans in Nepal can no longer open bank accounts, work legally or leave the country.

Cameras are now everywhere in Kathmandu, perched on traffic lights and swiveling from temple eaves. Most link back to a four-story brick building just a few blocks down from the Chinese embassy, where officers watch the country in real time.

The building hums with the low breath of cooling fans. Inside, a wall of monitors blinks with feeds from border towns, busy markets and clogged traffic crossings.

Officers in crisp blue uniforms and red caps sit in the glow, scanning scenes. Beneath the screens, a photo published in a Nepali daily shows, a sign in English and Chinese reads: "With the compliments of the Ministry of Public Security of China."

Their reach is vast.

Operators can track a motorbike weaving through the capital, follow a protest as it forms, or patch an alert directly to patrol radios. Many cameras are equipped with night vision facial recognition and AI tracking — able to pick a single face out of a festival crowd or lock onto a figure until it disappears indoors. The system not only sees but is learning to remember, storing patterns of movement, building a record of lives lived under its gaze.

A 34-year-old Tibetan cafe owner in the city watched the city change in quiet horror. "Now you can only be Tibetan in private," he said. He and other Tibetans in Nepal spoke to AP anonymously, fearing retaliation.

The first cameras in Boudhanath were installed in 2012, officially to deter crime. But after a Tibetan monk doused himself in petrol and set himself ablaze in front of the stupa in 2013, police added 35 night vision cameras around it.

The Chinese embassy in Kathmandu worked closely with the police, said Rupak Shrestha, a professor at Simon Fraser University in Canada who studied surveillance in Nepal. He said the police received special training to use the new cameras, identify potential symbols associated with the Free Tibet movement and anticipate dissent.

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In 2013, a team of Nepal Police officers crossed the northern border into Tibet for a seemingly straightforward mission: Collect police radios from Chinese authorities in Zhangmu, a remote border town, about 120 kilometers (75 miles) from Kathmandu. A truck was loaded with equipment and a few handshakes later, they were driving back to Kathmandu.

The radios — made by the partly state-owned Chinese firm Hytera — looked like walkie-talkies but ran on a digital trunking system, a scaled-down mobile network for police use. Officers could talk privately, coordinate across districts, even patch into public phone lines. The entire system — radios, relay towers, software — was a \$5.5 million gift from China.

"They didn't give us the money," recalled a retired Nepali officer who made the trip. "They gave all the hardware. All Chinese."

He remembered not the border guards but the tech — sleek, reliable, and far ahead of anything they'd used before. He spoke on condition of anonymity to describe sensitive internal discussions.

He said Nepal had initially considered buying the technology from the U.S. and only wanted to deploy the system in its two biggest cities. Hytera was a fraction of the cost and performed comparably, but China also wanted coverage near the border with Tibet. Nepal acquiesced.

They installed the technology in Sindhupalchowk, a border district with a key road to China used by Tibetan refugees. "We understood their mindset," the retired officer said. "A secure border."

A police envoy from the Chinese embassy began making regular visits to the Nepal Police headquarters. He'd chat over coffee, flip through brochures from Chinese companies. "He'd say, 'You want anything?'" the retired officer recalled.

China began donating tens of millions in police aid and surveillance equipment, including a new school for Nepal's Armed Police Force. Hundreds of Nepali police traveled to China for training on policing and border control, according to Chinese government posts.

Ahead of a summit of South Asian leaders in 2014, among the goods on offer were ones from Uniview, China's pitch for an all-seeing eye.

The company was the Chinese surveillance business of what was then Hewlett Packard, or HP, before it was spun off in a 2011 deal. Since 2012, Uniview has been selling mass surveillance solutions to the Tibetan police, such as a command center, and developed cameras that track ethnicities such as Uyghurs and Tibetans.

Uniview installed cameras in Kathmandu for Nepal's first "safe city" project in 2016. It started with the city's roads, then went up across the capital — in tourist areas, religious sites, high-security zones like Parliament and the prime minister's home.

The cameras didn't just record. Some could follow people automatically as they moved. Others were designed to use less data, making it easier to store and review footage.

Hewlett Packard Enterprise, or HPE, a successor company to HP that sells security solutions, has no ownership in Uniview and declined to comment. Hytera and Uniview did not respond to requests for comment.

Nearly all the cameras installed in Nepal are now made by Chinese companies like Hikvision, Dahua and Uniview, and many come bundled with facial recognition and AI tracking software.

Hikvision's website and marketing materials advertise camera systems in Nepal linked via Hik-Connect and HikCentral Connect, cloud products that rely on Amazon Web Services. Hikvision sells to the Nepali police and government, and a template for Nepali tenders indicates CCTV cameras procured for the government are required to support Hik-Connect.

In return for Beijing's support, top Nepali officials have thanked China repeatedly over the years, promising never to allow "anti-China activities" on Nepali territory.

The Nepali police head offices aren't far from the now-forslorn Tibetan reception center, which used to shelter tired, hungry Tibetans fleeing across the border.

The building is nearly empty. The gates are locked. Those who do escape, like Namkyi, arrested at 15 for protesting Chinese rule, often have to wait for weeks confined indoors until they're smuggled out again to the Tibetan capital in exile in India.

Silence has become survival.

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"They know they are being watched," she said. "Even though we are free, the surveillance cameras mean we're actually living in a big prison."

From clients to competitors

From the start, U.S. companies eager for China's vast markets exchanged technology for entry.

Many were required to start joint ventures and research operations in China as a precondition for being allowed in. Dozens, if not hundreds, complied, transferring valuable know-how and expertise — even in sensitive areas like encryption or policing.

Little by little, Chinese companies chipped away at the lead of American tech companies by luring talent, obtaining research, and sometimes plain copying their hardware and software. The flow of technology continued, even as U.S. officials openly accused China of economic espionage and pressuring American companies for their technology.

"China is by far the most egregious actor when it comes to forced technology transfer," Robert D. Atkinson, then-president of a think tank focused on innovation, warned Congress in a 2012 hearing.

American tech resistance came to a final, definitive end later that year with Edward Snowden's revelations that U.S. intelligence was exploiting American technology to spy on Beijing. Spooked, the Chinese government told Western firms they risked being kicked out unless they handed over their technology and provided security guarantees.

After companies like HP and IBM agreed, their former partners became their fiercest global competitors — and unlike American firms, they faced few questions about the way their technology was being used. Companies like Huawei, Hikvision and Dahua have now become global behemoths that sell surveillance systems and gear all over the world.

American technology was key to this:

- Uniview, the Chinese AI-powered CCTV camera supplier, supplied the first phase of Nepal's safe city project in 2016, installing cameras in Kathmandu. Uniview was carved out of California-based HP's China surveillance video business.

- Hytera provided data infrastructure for the Nepali police, such as walkie-talkies and digital trunking technology, which enables real-time communication. Earlier this year, Hytera acknowledged stealing technology from U.S. company Motorola in a plea agreement, and had acquired German, British, Spanish, and American tech businesses in their growth phase.

- Hikvision and Dahua, China's two largest surveillance camera suppliers, sell many of the cameras now in Nepal. They partnered with Intel and Nvidia to add AI capabilities to surveillance cameras. Those ties ended after U.S. sanctions in 2019, but AWS continues to sell cloud services to both companies, which remains legal under what some lawmakers call a loophole. AWS has advertised to Chinese companies expanding overseas, including at a policing expo in 2023.

- Chinese tech giant Huawei has become one of the world's leading sellers of surveillance systems, wiring more than 200 cities with sensors. In Nepal, they supplied telecom gear and high-capacity servers at an international airport. Over the years, the company benefited from partnerships with American companies like IBM, and has been dogged by allegations of theft — including copying code from Cisco routers wholesale, a case which Huawei settled out of court in 2004.

Huawei said it provides "general-purpose" products "based on recognized industry standards." Intel has said it adheres to all laws and regulations where it operates, and cannot control end use of its products. Nvidia has said it does not make surveillance systems or work with police in China at present.

IBM and Cisco declined comment. Policing gear maker Motorola Solutions, a successor company to Motorola after it split, did not respond to requests for comment.

U.S. technology transfer to Chinese firms has mostly stopped after growing controversy and a slew of sanctions in the past decade. But industry insiders say it's too late: China, once a tech backwater, is now among the biggest exporters of surveillance technologies on earth.

Few realized "the U.S. shouldn't be selling the software to China because they might copy it, they might use it for these types of surveillance and bad stuff," said Charles Mok, a Hong Kong IT entrepreneur and

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former lawmaker now living in exile as a research scholar at Stanford. "Nobody was quick enough to realize this could happen."

'The great big eye in the sky'

Inside a 15th-century monastery in Lo Manthang in Nepal's Mustang district, light slants through wooden slats, catching motes of dust and the faded faces of bodhisattvas.

Crumpled notes of Chinese currency lie at the feet of deities in the walled city along the Tibetan border. Here, shops stock Chinese instant noodles and cars with Chinese plates rumble down mountain roads.

A gleaming white observation dome just inside Chinese territory looms over the city. Visible from 15 kilometers (9 miles) away, it's trained on the district that has long been a refuge for Tibetans, including a guerrilla base in the 1960s.

The dome is just one node in China's vast 1,389-kilometer (863-mile) border network with Nepal — a "Great Wall of Steel" of fences, sensors and AI-powered drones.

Chinese forces have barred ethnic Tibetans from accessing traditional pastures and performing sacred rites. They have pressured residents of Lo Manthang to remove photos of the Dalai Lama from shops. And a "China-Nepal joint command mechanism" meets several times a month on border patrols and repatriations, according to a post by the Chinese-run Tibetan government.

The result is that the once-porous frontier is now effectively sealed, and China's digital dragnet reaches deep into the lives of those who live near it.

In April 2024, Rapke Lama was chatting with a friend across the border on WeChat when he received an invitation to meet. He set out from his village and crossed into Tibet — only to be arrested almost immediately.

Lama believes his WeChat exchange was monitored; Chinese police appeared with unsettling precision, as if they knew where to look. After accusing him — wrongly, he maintains — of helping Tibetans flee into Nepal, the police seized his phone, which had photos of the Dalai Lama and Tibetan music. Then came months in a Lhasa prison, where isolation and inadequate medical care hollowed him out.

Lama did not return to Nepal until May 2025, gaunt and shaken. He later said he entered Tibet to harvest caterpillar fungus, valued in traditional Chinese medicine. Another friend who crossed the border remains in custody.

"Even now, I'm scared," Lama says. He wears masks when wandering the streets, he says, "because of that lingering fear."

The Chinese observation dome is a giant symbol of the same fear, towering over the border.

"It's the great big eye in the sky," said a 73-year-old Tibetan hotel owner in Nepal, who spotted the installation during a trip near the border last year. "For Tibetan refugees, Nepal has become a second China."

## **Pope Leo summons world's cardinals for a key assembly to help him govern the church**

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Leo XIV has summoned the world's cardinals for two days of meetings to help him govern the church, the Vatican said Saturday, in the clearest sign yet that the new year will signal the unofficial start of his pontificate.

The consistory, as such gatherings are called, will be held Jan. 7-8, immediately following the Jan. 6 conclusion of the 2025 Holy Year, a once-every-quarter century celebration of Christianity.

Leo's first few months as pope have been dominated by fulfilling the weekly Holy Year obligations of meeting with pilgrimage groups and celebrating special Jubilee audiences and Masses. Additionally, much of his time has been spent wrapping up the outstanding matters of Pope Francis' pontificate.

As a result, the January consistory in many ways will mark the first time that Leo can look ahead to his own agenda following his May 8 election as the first American pope. It is significant that he has summoned all the world's cardinals to Rome.

Francis had largely eschewed the consistory tradition as a means of governance. He had instead relied on a small group of eight or nine hand-picked cardinal advisers to help him govern and make key decisions.

The Vatican said Saturday that Leo's first consistory "will be oriented toward fostering common discernment and offering support and advice to the Holy Father in the exercise of his high and grave responsibility in the government of the universal Church."

Other types of consistories include the formal installation of new cardinals. But no new cardinals will be made at this meeting, which is purely consultative.

## How a violent police academy drill has been tied to deaths and injuries across the country

By RYAN J. FOLEY Associated Press

When recruits were repeatedly punched and tackled during a role-playing exercise at the Texas game wardens academy last year, they were taking part in a longstanding police training tradition that critics say should be retired.

By the end of the day, at least 13 of the cadets reported injuries. At least two concussions. A torn knee. A bloody nose. A broken wrist. Two would need surgery. One would resign in protest. Another quit even before the drill.

A state investigation later found nothing wrong with the drill, which its supporters say is intended to teach recruits to make good decisions under intense physical and mental stress. The experience on Dec. 13, 2024, may have been traumatizing for some at the Texas Game Warden Training Center in Hamilton, Texas, but it was not unique.

Since 2005, drills intended to teach defensive tactics at law enforcement academies have been linked to at least a dozen deaths and hundreds of injuries, some resulting in disability, according to a review by The Associated Press.

The drills — frequently referred to as RedMan training for the brand and color of protective gear worn by participants — are intended to teach law enforcement recruits how to defend themselves against combative suspects. They're among the most challenging tests at police academies. Law enforcement experts say that when properly designed and supervised, they teach new officers critical skills.

But critics say they can put recruits at risk of physical and mental abuse that runs some promising officers out of the profession. Academies have wide latitude in running such exercises, given a lack of national standards governing police training.

Here are some takeaways from AP's report.

The drills have left a trail of deaths and injuries

A string of tragedies across the nation in recent years has brought new attention to the details of curricula at law enforcement academies.

In August, 30-year-old Jon-Marques Psalms died two days after a training exercise at the San Francisco Police Department Academy. He suffered a head injury while fighting an instructor in a padded suit.

An autopsy found his death was an accident caused by complications of muscle and organ damage "in the setting of a high-intensity training exercise." His family has filed a legal claim against the city and hired experts for a second autopsy.

In November 2024, a 24-year-old Kentucky game warden recruit died after fighting an instructor in a pool to the point of collapse, video obtained by AP shows. William Bailey's death was ruled an accidental drowning due to a "sudden cardiac dysrhythmia during physical exertion."

A year earlier, a Denver police recruit had both legs amputated after a training fight that his attorney called a "barbaric hazing ritual" left him hospitalized. An Indiana recruit died of exertion after he was pummeled by a larger instructor, and a classmate was disabled after fighting the same man.

The exercises take on many forms and are widely used at police academies

Academies have discretion to design training within state guidelines, and AP found the drills take many forms at local police, county sheriff and state departments. They're sometimes called "combat training," "Fight Day" or "stress reaction training."

Some recruits have to ward off several assailants at once. Others fight a series of instructors, one after

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another. Some academies intentionally use larger, more skilled instructors. The stated goals are generally the same: to use skills learned in the academy to fend off or subdue assailants and to never give up.

Recruits and instructors wear protective gear to cushion their heads from blows. But there are no uniform safety guidelines, including whether academies must have medical personnel on site.

Injured game warden recruit is speaking out to bring change

One of the recruits injured last year was Heather Sterling, a former Wyoming game warden who had moved back to her home state of Texas to continue her career.

Sterling had been a defensive tactics instructor in Wyoming before enrolling in the Texas academy, and she was concerned when she learned about the so-called four-on-one drill.

During the exercise, cadets faced a barrage of attacks from four instructors playing the role of violent assailants. Cadets would have to kick and punch a bag held by an instructor and try to fend off attacks for 90 seconds or more.

Sterling thought the scenario was unrealistic. She said she had never been ambushed on the job, and she would be able to use her firearm or other force if that happened in real life.

Video shows that Sterling was punched seven times in the head in less than two minutes, and the last blow knocked off her wrestling helmet. She was also thrown to the ground.

Sterling said she had a pounding headache, and later drove herself to get medical treatment. She was diagnosed with a concussion.

Sterling passed the drill but resigned from the academy in protest. Now she's speaking out in the hopes of bringing change to practices in Texas and elsewhere.

"I'm worried that someone is going to get killed," she said. "This is a poorly disguised assault."

## **Australian state plans tougher laws against displaying extremist flags after Bondi shooting**

SYDNEY (AP) — The Australian state of New South Wales is proposing to ban public displays of Islamic State group flags or extremist symbols after a mass shooting driven by antisemitism killed 15 people at Sydney's Bondi Beach.

Under draft laws to be debated by the state Parliament, publicly displaying the IS flag or symbols from other extremist groups will be offenses punishable by up to two years in prison and fines.

The state's premier, Chris Minns, also said chants of "globalize the intifada" will be banned and police would be given greater powers to demand protesters remove face coverings at demonstrations.

"Hate speech or incitement of hatred has no place in our society," Minns said Saturday.

The Arabic word intifada is generally translated as "uprising."

While pro-Palestinian demonstrators say the slogan describes the worldwide protests against the war in Gaza, Jewish leaders say it inflames tensions and encourages attacks on Jews.

"Horrific, recent events have shown that the chant 'globalize the intifada' is hate speech and encourages violence in our community," Minns told reporters. "You're running a very risky racket if you're thinking of using that phrase."

New South Wales politicians are expected to debate the reforms on Monday after the premier recalled parliament.

Police said Sunday's attack, targeting a Hanukkah celebration on Australia's most famous beach, was "a terrorist attack inspired by (the) Islamic State" group. Police said they found two homemade IS flags in the vehicle used by the two suspects.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has pledged to introduce measures to curb radicalization and hate, including broadening the definition of hate speech offenses for preachers and leaders who promote violence, and toughening punishments for such crimes. The proposals would also designate some groups as hateful, and allow judges to consider hate as an aggravating factor in cases of online threats and harassment.

Albanese has also announced plans to tighten Australia's already strict gun laws.

The prime minister, who joined the Jewish community at Sydney's Great Synagogue on Friday, said "the

spirit of our Jewish Australian community is completely unbreakable.”

“Australia will not allow these evil antisemitic terrorists to divide us,” he told reporters. “No matter how dark things were, and continue to be, light will triumph.”

Authorities said the country will hold a National Day of Reflection on Sunday, the final day of Hanukkah, in honor of the victims. Flags will be flown at half-mast from all official buildings, and Albanese will join others at Bondi on Sunday to observe a minute of silence at 6:47 p.m., the time when police received the first reports of gunfire.

Police said one of the suspects, Sajid Akram, was shot dead on Sunday. His son, Naveed Akram, 24, remains in custody in a New South Wales hospital. He has been charged with 59 offences, including murder and committing a terrorist act, and police are reviewing the evidence against him.

The attack has raised questions about whether Australian Jews are sufficiently protected from rising antisemitism.

Australia has 28 million people, including about 117,000 who are Jewish. Antisemitic incidents, including assaults, vandalism, threats and intimidation, surged more than threefold in the country during the year after Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, and Israel launched a war on Hamas in Gaza in response, the government’s Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism Jillian Segal reported in July.

## **Paraplegic engineer becomes the first wheelchair user to blast into space**

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

A paraplegic engineer from Germany blasted off on a dream-come-true rocket ride with five other passengers Saturday, leaving her wheelchair behind to float in space while beholding Earth from on high.

Severely injured in a mountain bike accident seven years ago, Michaela Benthaus became the first wheelchair user in space, launching from West Texas with Jeff Bezos’ company Blue Origin. She was accompanied by a retired SpaceX executive also born in Germany, Hans Koenigsmann, who helped organize and, along with Blue Origin, sponsored her trip. Their ticket prices were not divulged.

An ecstatic Benthaus said she laughed all the way up — the capsule soared more than 65 miles (105 kilometers) — and tried to turn upside down once in space.

“It was the coolest experience,” she said shortly after landing.

The 10-minute space-skimming flight required only minor adjustments to accommodate Benthaus, according to the company. That’s because the autonomous New Shepard capsule was designed with accessibility in mind, “making it more accessible to a wider range of people than traditional spaceflight,” said Blue Origin’s Jake Mills, an engineer who trained the crew and assisted them on launch day.

Among Blue Origin’s previous space tourists: those with limited mobility and impaired sight or hearing, and a pair of 90-year-olds.

For Benthaus, Blue Origin added a patient transfer board so she could scoot between the capsule’s hatch and her seat. The recovery team also unrolled a carpet on the desert floor following touchdown, providing immediate access to her wheelchair, which she left behind at liftoff. She practiced in advance, with Koenigsmann taking part with the design and testing. An elevator was already in place at the launch pad to ascend the seven stories to the capsule perched atop the rocket.

Benthaus, 33, part of the European Space Agency’s graduate trainee program in the Netherlands, experienced snippets of weightlessness during a parabolic airplane flight out of Houston in 2022. Less than two years later, she took part in a two-week simulated space mission in Poland.

“I never really thought that going on a spaceflight would be a real option for me because even as like a super healthy person, it’s like so competitive, right?” she told The Associated Press ahead of the flight.

Her accident dashed whatever hope she had. “There is like no history of people with disabilities flying to space,” she said.

When Koenigsmann approached her last year about the possibility of flying on Blue Origin and experiencing more than three minutes of weightlessness on a space hop, Benthaus thought there might be a

misunderstanding. But there wasn't, and she immediately signed on.

It's a private mission for Benthous with no involvement by ESA, which this year cleared reserve astronaut John McFall, an amputee, for a future flight to the International Space Station. The former British Paralympian lost his right leg in a motorcycle accident when he was a teenager.

An injured spinal cord means Benthous can't walk at all, unlike McFall who uses a prosthetic leg and could evacuate a space capsule in an emergency at touchdown by himself. Koenigsmann was designated before flight as her emergency helper; he and Mills lifted her out of the capsule and down the short flight of steps at flight's end.

"You should never give up on your dreams, right?" Benthous urged following touchdown.

Benthous was adamant about doing as much as she could by herself. Her goal is to make not only space accessible to the disabled, but to improve accessibility on Earth too.

While getting lots of positive feedback within "my space bubble," she said outsiders aren't always as inclusive.

"I really hope it's opening up for people like me, like I hope I'm only the start," she said.

Besides Koenigsmann, Benthous shared the ride with business executives and investors, and a computer scientist. They raised Blue Origin's list of space travelers to 86.

Bezos, the billionaire founder of Amazon, created Blue Origin in 2000 and launched on its first passenger spaceflight in 2021. The company has since delivered spacecraft to orbit from Cape Canaveral, Florida, using the bigger and more powerful New Glenn rocket, and is working to send landers to the moon.

## **Combat training is a rite of passage for police recruits. It's left a trail of deaths and injuries**

By RYAN J. FOLEY Associated Press

Heather Sterling stepped into the ring at the Texas Game Warden Training Center, ready to face an ambush by instructors acting as violent assailants.

The four-on-one drill is a rite of passage for those training to be game wardens, sworn officers who enforce state conservation laws. Nationwide, thousands of local and state police recruits are allowed into the profession only after passing similar drills – simulated fights for their lives.

The barrage of force against Sterling came rapidly, video obtained by The Associated Press shows. A surprise push from behind threw her to the floor. A right-handed punch to the back of the head knocked her down. Within two minutes, she was struck at least seven times in the head, the last blow knocking off her wrestling helmet.

"Protect yourself!" an instructor yelled.

Sterling completed the drill but suffered a concussion. A dozen of her classmates — a third in all — were injured that day as they were repeatedly punched, tackled on a gym floor and thrown against padded walls, records show.

While the drill was physically punishing, their experience was not unique. Since 2005, similar drills at law enforcement academies nationwide have been linked to at least a dozen deaths and hundreds of injuries, some resulting in disability, an AP investigation has found.

Editor's note: This is the third installment of AP's Dying to Serve series. Find the previous stories [here](#) and [here](#).

The drills — frequently referred to as RedMan training for the brand and color of protective gear worn by participants — are intended to teach law enforcement recruits how to defend themselves against combative suspects. They're among the most challenging tests at police academies. Law enforcement experts say that when properly designed and supervised, they teach new officers critical skills for handling high-stress situations.

But critics say they can put recruits at risk of physical and mental abuse that runs some promising officers

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out of the profession. Academies have wide latitude in running such exercises, given a lack of national standards governing police training.

Sterling quit the academy after her drill. She's now speaking out, hoping to spark change in training practices nationwide.

"I'm worried that someone is going to get killed," said Sterling, who'd previously worked as a senior game warden and defensive tactics instructor in Wyoming. "This is a poorly disguised assault."

An investigation by the agency that regulates law enforcement training found no wrongdoing in how the drill was conducted. An academy official told investigators the goal was to "overwhelm the cadet physically and mentally to force them to think while physically exhausted."

An expert who reviewed the case told AP injuries happen during volatile training environments nationwide, but the Texas drill stood out for its design — recruits could not use force to defend themselves against the onslaught of assailants. He said the number of injuries was concerning.

"To teach cadets how and when to defend themselves, only to put them in a doomsday scenario with the instruction that they're not allowed to fight back, does not match any training curriculum I've seen," said David Jude, a retired Kentucky State Police academy commander.

### A Wyoming game warden moves back to Texas

In October 2024, Sterling started the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's eight-month academy in rural central Texas, which boasts of producing "the best-trained conservation officers in the country."

Game wardens — called conservation officers or wildlife troopers in some states — enforce hunting and fishing laws. They carry firearms, have arrest powers, are often among the first to respond to emergencies and rescue missions.

Sterling said she loved serving as a game warden for nearly five years in Wyoming, where she sometimes shooed moose and mountain lions away from towns. Patrolling without backup, she said, she had some "very tense conversations" with suspects and had to restrain some in handcuffs.

She said almost everyone she encountered during hunting season was armed and potentially dangerous, but she prided herself on responding alertly and calmly. She never had to fight a suspect, and none of the 40 wardens she taught self-defense had been in a significant use-of-force incident.

Sterling applied in Texas to live closer to family, hoping for a similar law-enforcement role in her home state. She grew up as the daughter of a Dallas police officer and ran track and cross-country at Texas A&M.

The academy scheduled the four-on-one drill for Dec. 13, 2024, after five weeks of arrest and control training.

Instructors told cadets they couldn't defend themselves and were only to punch and kick a shield held by instructors, Sterling recalled. They discussed how some cadets had been seriously injured and terminated from previous academies for performing poorly.

Sterling told AP she was confused by the drill's purpose. She'd never been ambushed by one person, let alone four. If that happened, she'd be able to use a firearm or other force to defend herself. As an instructor, she said, she would have never approved such a scenario or allowed punches to the head and neck.

A female classmate who had previously worked as a police officer resigned rather than participate. She later told investigators she saw the drill as inappropriate and part of an academy culture of unprofessional training and hazing.

But Sterling felt she had no choice if she wanted to stay in her profession. She completed a cardio exercise, and the drill began.

### Combat drills take various forms nationwide

Academies have discretion to design training within state guidelines, and AP found the drills take many forms at local police, county sheriff and state departments. They're sometimes called "combat training," "Fight Day" or "stress reaction training."

Recruits like Sterling must ward off several assailants at once. Others fight a series of instructors, one after another. Some academies intentionally use larger, more skilled instructors. In Kentucky, one scenario requires fighting a combative suspect in a pool.

The stated goals are generally the same: to use skills learned in the academy to fend off or subdue as-

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sailants and to never give up.

Recruits and instructors wear protective gear to cushion their heads from blows. But there are no uniform safety guidelines, including whether academies must have medical personnel on site.

Lawyers for some Black and female former trainees have alleged that instructors targeted their clients with excessive force to try to run them out of the profession. Several of the deaths have been of Black men hoping to join disproportionately white police forces.

Amid the deaths and criticism, experts are encouraging academy directors to retire or modify any problematic drills.

The drills "can quickly devolve into abusive rites of passage" without appropriate focus and oversight, said Brian Baxter, who oversaw training at the Texas Department of Public Safety and now leads a group that studies the use of force. Some instructors want to win rather than allow recruits to practice their skills, he added.

"The idea that we're just punching each other to see who's toughest ... that's when it becomes inappropriate," said Baxter, whose former agency overhauled its practices after a trooper died in 2005 from getting hit several times in the head. "There needs to be a problem that's being solved by this training. And that problem needs to be directly related to public service."

For this Texas academy class, injuries were widespread

For Sterling, the drill came to an end when she simulated holding her assailants at gunpoint and put them in handcuffs.

Later that day, she had a pounding headache. Her knee swelled, and she'd skinned her elbow on the floor.

At least 13 of 37 cadets reported injuries: concussion symptoms; a fractured wrist; a torn MCL; sprained wrists and knees; a bruised nose, records show.

Two recruits needed surgery. Some were told the injuries were due to their lack of preparation and poor technique, and had to redo the drill.

Sterling said she wasn't offered medical care. She recalled vomiting while driving herself for emergency treatment. A doctor found she suffered a concussion that resulted from an assault, a medical record provided by Sterling shows.

Sterling had passed the drill, but turned in her resignation.

"I have a very high sense of what is right and what is wrong," she told AP. "I did not want to be part of what was happening at the academy anymore."

Deaths and injuries across the country

Nationwide, deaths and injuries have been blamed on a mix of trauma from punches and other force, overexertion, heat stroke, dehydration, and organ failure.

In August, 30-year-old Jon-Marques Psalms died two days after a training exercise at the San Francisco Police Academy. He suffered a head injury while fighting an instructor in a padded suit.

An autopsy found his death was an accident caused by complications of muscle and organ damage "in the setting of a high-intensity training exercise." His family has filed a legal claim against the city and hired experts for a second autopsy.

In November 2024, a 24-year-old Kentucky game warden recruit died after fighting an instructor in a pool to the point of collapse, video obtained by AP shows. William Bailey's death was ruled an accidental drowning due to a "sudden cardiac dysrhythmia during physical exertion."

A year earlier, a Denver police recruit had both legs amputated after a training fight that his attorney called a "barbaric hazing ritual." An Indiana recruit died of exertion after he was pummeled by a larger instructor, and a classmate was disabled after fighting the same man.

Investigations of Austin's police academy in Texas found that physical and psychological abuse from such exercises resulted in "a significant number" of cadets injured, ranging from dehydration to broken bones, and led to reforms. Black and female cadets represented a disproportionate number of those who were injured and quit.

Macho Products Inc., which sells RedMan Training Gear nationwide, cautions in its warranty that such training "always presents risks of accidental injury, disability, and death that must be assumed by all

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participants." The document says risks can be minimized through "carefully planned scenarios conducted at appropriate levels of force." A company spokesperson didn't respond to AP's request for comment on recent deaths and injuries.

Former cadet compares the drill to a gang initiation ritual

Alarmed by the injuries to Sterling and others, a state lawmaker's office contacted the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement to seek an investigation.

After reviewing videos, investigating the injuries, and interviewing instructors and some recruits, the investigation found the drill was conducted in a "control and organized manner, with safety measures in place and training objectives clearly communicated." The videos did not show instructors acting overly aggressive to Sterling, or any other "actions that were inappropriate or inconsistent with the established training guidelines," it found.

"While multiple cadets sustained minor to moderate injuries during the drill, the majority recovered without extended medical consequences or changes to their training status," the report said.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department declined to comment and refused to release records, citing the potential for litigation.

Sterling, who has returned to Wyoming and still works in law enforcement, was outraged by the state's defense of the drill, which she compared to a gang initiation ritual.

"New members are physically beaten down by the gang membership," she said, "which now considers you as its property."

## Jordan says its air force joined US strikes on Islamic State in Syria

DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) — Jordan confirmed Saturday that its air force took part in strikes launched by the United States on Islamic State group targets in Syria in retaliation for the killing of three U.S. citizens earlier this month.

The U.S. launched military strikes Friday on multiple sites in in Syria to "eliminate" Islamic State group fighters and weapons in retaliation for an attack by a Syrian gunman that killed two U.S. troops and an American civilian interpreter almost a week earlier.

The Jordanian military said in a statement that its air force "participated in precise airstrikes ... targeting several ISIS positions in southern Syria," using a different abbreviation for the Islamic State group. Jordan is one of 90 countries making up the global coalition against IS, which Syria recently joined.

The U.S. military did not say how many had been killed in Friday's strikes. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a U.K.-based war monitor, reported that at least five people were killed, including the leader and members of an IS cell.

The Jordanian statement said the operation aimed "to prevent extremist groups from exploiting these areas as launching pads to threaten the security of Syria's neighbors and the wider region, especially after ISIS regrouped and rebuilt its capabilities in southern Syria."

U.S. Central Command, which oversees the region, said in a statement that its forces "struck more than 70 targets at multiple locations across central Syria with fighter jets, attack helicopters, and artillery," with the Jordanian air force supporting with fighter aircraft.

It said that since the Dec. 13 attack in Syria, "U.S. and partner forces conducted 10 operations in Syria and Iraq resulting in the deaths or detention of 23 terrorist operatives," adding that the U.S. and partners have conducted more than 80 counterterrorism operation in Syria in the past six months.

President Donald Trump had pledged "very serious retaliation" after the shooting in the Syrian desert, for which he blamed IS. Those killed were among hundreds of U.S. troops deployed in eastern Syria as part of a coalition fighting the militant group. On Friday Trump reiterated his backing for Syrian interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa, who Trump said was "fully in support" of the U.S. strikes against IS.

IS has not taken responsibility for the attack on the U.S. service members, but the group has claimed two attacks on Syrian security forces since, one of which killed four Syrian soldiers in Idlib province. The group in its statements described al-Sharaa's government and army as "apostates." While al-Sharaa once

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led a group affiliated with al-Qaida, he has had a long-running enmity with IS.

As well as killing three U.S. citizens, the shooting near Palmyra also wounded three other U.S. troops as well as members of Syria's security forces, and the gunman was killed.

The assailant had joined Syria's internal security forces as a base security guard two months ago and recently was reassigned while he was under investigation on suspicions that he might be affiliated with IS, Syrian officials have said.

The man stormed a meeting between U.S. and Syrian security officials who were having lunch together and opened fire after clashing with Syrian guards.

## Trump's 'A+++++' economy collides with reality in a Pennsylvania city critical to the midterms

By STEVEN SLOAN Associated Press

ALLENTOWN, Pa. (AP) — When Idalia Bisbal moved to this Pennsylvania city synonymous with America's working class, she hoped for a cheaper, easier life than the one she was leaving behind in her hometown of New York City.

About three years later, she is deeply disappointed.

"It's worse than ever," the 67-year-old retiree, who relies on Social Security, said when asked about the economy. "The prices are high. Everything is going up. You can't afford food because you can't afford rent. Utilities are too high. Gas is too expensive. Everything is too expensive."

Bisbal was sipping an afternoon coffee at the Hamilton Family Restaurant not long after Vice President JD Vance rallied Republicans in a nearby suburb. In the Trump administration's second high-profile trip to Pennsylvania in a week, Vance acknowledged the affordability crisis, blamed it on the Biden administration and insisted better times were ahead. He later served food to men experiencing homelessness in Allentown.

The visit, on top of several recent speeches from President Donald Trump, reflects an increasingly urgent White House effort to respond to the economic anxiety that is gripping both parties. Those worries are a vulnerability for Republicans in competitive congressional districts like the one that includes Allentown, which could decide control of the U.S. House in next year's midterms.

But in confronting the challenge, there are risks of appearing out of touch.

Only 31% of U.S. adults now approve of how Trump is handling the economy, down from 40% in March, according to a poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Yet Trump has called affordability concerns a "hoax" and gave the economy under his administration a grade of "A+++++." Vance reiterated that assessment during his rally, prompting Bisbal to scoff.

"In his world," Bisbal, a self-described "straight-up Democrat," responded. "In the rich man's world. In our world, trust me, it's not an 'A.' To me, it's an 'F,' 'F,' 'F,' 'F,' 'F,' 'F.'"

Agreement that prices are too high

With a population of roughly 125,000 people, Allentown anchors the Lehigh Valley, which is Pennsylvania's third-largest metro area. In a dozen interviews this week with local officials, business leaders and residents of both parties, there was agreement on one thing: Prices are too high. Some pointed to gas prices while others said they felt the shock more at the grocery store or in their cost of health care or housing.

Few shared Trump's unbridled boosterism about the economy.

Tony Iannelli, the president and CEO of the Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce, called Trump's grade a "stretch," saying "we have a strong economy but I think it's not yet gone to the next stage of what I would call robust."

Tom Groves, who started a health and benefits consulting firm more than two decades ago, said the economy was at a "B+" as he blamed the Affordable Care Act, widely known as "Obamacare," for contributing to higher health costs and he noted stock and labor market volatility. Joe Vichot, the chairman of the Lehigh County Republican Committee, referred to Trump's grade as a "colloquialism."

Far removed from Washington's political theater, there was little consensus on who was responsible for

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the high prices or what should be done about it. There was, however, an acute sense of exhaustion at the seemingly endless political combat.

Pat Gallagher was finishing lunch a few booths down from Bisbal as she recalled meeting her late husband when they both worked at Bethlehem Steel, the manufacturing giant that closed in 2003. Now retired, she, too, relies on Social Security benefits and lives with her daughter, which helps keep costs down. She said she noticed the rising price of groceries and was becoming exasperated with the political climate.

"I get so frustrated with hearing about the politics," she said.

Allentown has a front-row seat to politics

That feeling is understandable in a place that often gets a front-row seat to the national debate, whether it wants the view or not. Singer Billy Joel's 1982 song "Allentown" helped elevate the city into the national consciousness, articulating simultaneous feelings of disillusionment and hope as factories shuttered.

In the decades since, Pennsylvania has become a must-win state in presidential politics and the backdrop for innumerable visits from candidates and the media. Trump and his Democratic rival in 2024, Kamala Harris, made several campaign swings through Allentown, with the then-vice president visiting the city on the eve of the election.

"Every race here, all the time," Allentown's mayor, Democrat Matt Tuerk, recalled of the frenzied race last year.

The pace of those visits — and the attention they garnered — has not faded from many minds. Some businesses and residents declined to talk this week when approached with questions about the economy or politics, recalling blowback from speaking in the past.

But as attention shifts to next year's midterms, Allentown cannot escape its place as a political battleground.

Trump's win last year helped lift other Republicans, like U.S. Rep. Ryan Mackenzie, to victory. Mackenzie, who unseated a three-term Democrat, is now one of the most vulnerable Republicans in Congress. To win again, he must turn out the Republicans who voted in 2024 — many of whom were likely more energized by Trump's candidacy — while appealing to independents.

Mackenzie's balancing act was on display when he spoke to the party faithful on Tuesday, bemoaning the "failures of Bidenomics" before Vance took the stage at the rally. A day later, the congressman was back in Washington, where he joined three other House Republicans to rebel against the party's leadership and force a vote on extending health care subsidies that expire at the end of the year.

Vichot, the local GOP chairman, called Mackenzie an "underdog" in his reelection bid and said the health care move was a signal to voters that he is "compassionate for the people who need those services."

A swing to Trump in 2024

Lehigh County, home to Allentown and the most populous county in the congressional district, swung toward Trump last year. Harris' nearly 2.7 percentage point win in the county was the tightest margin for a Democratic presidential candidate since 2004. But Democrats are feeling confident after a strong performance in this fall's elections when they handily won a race for county executive.

Retaking the congressional seat is now a top priority for Democrats. Gov. Josh Shapiro, who faces reelection next year and is a potential presidential contender in 2028, endorsed firefighter union head Bob Brooks this week for the May primary.

Democrats are just a few seats shy of regaining the House majority and the first midterm after a presidential election historically favors the party that's out of power. If the focus remains on the economy, Democrats are happy.

The Uline supplies distribution factory where Vance spoke, owned by a family that has made large donations to GOP causes, is a few miles from the Mack Trucks facility where staff was cut by about 200 employees this year. The company said that decision was driven in part by tariffs imposed by Trump. Shapiro eagerly pointed that out in responding to Vance's visit.

But the image of Allentown as a purely manufacturing town is outdated. The downtown core is dotted by row homes, trendy hotels and a modern arena that is home to the Lehigh Valley Phantoms hockey team and hosts concerts by major artists. In recent years, Latinos have become a majority of the city's

population, driven by gains in the Puerto Rican, Mexican and Dominican communities.

"This is a place of rapid change," said Tuerk, the city's first Latino mayor. "It's constantly changing and I think over the next three years until that next presidential election, we're going to see a lot more change. It's going to be an interesting ride."

## How surveillance technology and the 'Reddit Detective Agency' helped search for a killer

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — More than a decade ago, a frenzied 5-day search for the Boston Marathon bombers left some lessons in its aftermath.

One was that increasingly pervasive surveillance technology could help catch the culprits. Another was that amateur online sleuths on Reddit could not.

But the intense search this week for a suspect in a Brown University shooting that killed two students and wounded nine other people turned the tables on those expectations.

Sweeping surveillance, now found in doorbells, cars and a vast network of vehicle-tracking cameras, did eventually help track down the whereabouts of Claudio Neves Valente, the 48-year-old former Brown graduate student investigators believe was responsible for the Dec. 13 shooting and another killing two days later of an MIT professor in Brookline, Massachusetts.

But the latest artificial intelligence-powered surveillance was of little use in the early search for a gunman who walked away from the Brown campus after the shooting and slipped unnoticed into the surrounding neighborhoods of Providence, Rhode Island. He evaded detection for days, using a hard-to-trace phone, avoiding facial recognition software by obscuring his face with a medical-type mask and switching the license plates on his rental cars.

It wasn't until a local Reddit user "blew this case right open" with an old-fashioned tip first posted on the social media platform that police were able to connect a car to Neves Valente, said Rhode Island Attorney General Peter Neronha. They finally found the suspect dead Thursday in Salem, New Hampshire, days after he likely killed himself.

The Reddit tipster known only as John is "no less than a hero," Providence Mayor Brett Smiley wrote Friday to FBI Director Kash Patel, asking for John to get the entirety of the FBI's \$50,000 reward for information leading investigators to the suspect.

Strangers have invited him to Christmas dinner and suggested he get a "key to the city and free coffee and doughnuts for life," according to fellow contributors to Reddit's Providence forum.

It was a stark turn from 2013 when commentators on Reddit and other online discussion boards falsely smeared a Brown University student as a potential suspect in the deadly attack at Boston's famed marathon, just an hour north of Providence, because of a supposed resemblance to a grainy suspect image.

"Hey Reddit, enough Boston bombing vigilantism," declared a headline in *The Atlantic* at the time.

"It definitely went sideways in the Boston Marathon situation," said Liza Potts, a professor at Michigan State University and director of a digital humanities lab that studied the online response. "That's why folks will jokingly refer to the 'Reddit Detective Agency' or the 'Reddit Bureau of Investigations.'"

The mistaken connection between the 2013 bombers and a missing Brown student — who was later found dead of an apparent suicide — is still remembered by many at the Ivy League school and its surrounding community.

Brown officials this week sought to swiftly tamp down another smear campaign circulating on X and other social media platforms falsely tying a current Brown student to the campus shooting because of his ethnicity, perceived political views and supposed resemblance to a police video of a person of interest. The "unimaginable nightmare" of false accusations led to "non-stop death threats and hate speech," the student said in a statement.

Frustrated that tip lines could be jammed with nonsense, U.S. Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, a Rhode Island

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Democrat and former state attorney general, urged social media speculators to “just shut up.”

“There is simply no need from an investigative point of view for people who have no idea what they’re talking about to offer their stupid and ill-informed views about what happened all over the internet,” Whitehouse said from Congress on Wednesday.

But Potts said some social media has been working better than others, and “of all the spaces that I study, Reddit seems to be getting it right more than not.”

Harmful accusations were largely absent from Reddit’s Providence forum, in part because volunteer moderators who manage Reddit’s subject matter forums — known as subreddits — are largely responsible for keeping the peace.

Reddit’s chief moderator for the Providence subreddit said in an interview that he’s been on the platform for about 15 years and remembers the trauma that false Boston Marathon report caused.

“The Providence subreddit is very sensitive about (not) trying to go on a witch hunt or the mob mentality,” he said, speaking on condition of anonymity to avoid doxing and because of the platform’s culture of anonymity.

The Associated Press also reached out to the tipster on Tuesday, a day after he wrote on Reddit urging police to look into a Nissan sedan with Florida license plates. Fellow Redditors urged him to contact the FBI, and he said he did.

He didn’t respond to requests for comment and later posted that he doesn’t plan to talk with media. When he finally met with police on Wednesday — after approaching them on the street and identifying himself as the Reddit tipster — his information gave new life to a stalled investigation.

With a known vehicle, Providence police started looking through the footage from dozens of AI-powered cameras positioned around the city that can read license plates as well as other identifying details about a car, such as make, color, side damage or even bird droppings on the window.

The cameras, run by surveillance company Flock Safety, spotted his vehicle at least 14 times starting nearly two weeks before the shooting, according to a police affidavit. Providence police could then ask Flock-using police agencies in nearby cities and states to look for the same car, although New Hampshire — because of privacy restrictions on how long they can hold images — doesn’t have any.

It was a breakthrough Flock was happy to boast about, especially as wariness remains in Providence’s immigrant communities about more aggressive federal immigration enforcement. Flock says each of its customers decides when to share camera data, and the city doesn’t share it with federal immigration agents. Some still want more safeguards.

“Once you know what they are, you see them everywhere,” said Madalyn McGunagle, a policy associate at the ACLU of Rhode Island. “People notice because they’re distinct-looking — a solar panel on top with a little oval camera underneath.”

But unlike the residential doorbell cameras that spotted him walking around Providence, had Neves Valente walked by a Flock camera, it wouldn’t have detected him, said Flock Safety CEO Garrett Langley.

“It is a technical impossibility. The camera does not have an ability for a user to search for people,” Langley said in an interview Friday. “Our cameras are focused on vehicles because if you look at America, people drive. It is very hard to get anywhere on foot.”

“For the majority of our cities, they want to just know who is coming in and who is leaving,” he said.

Still, without John the tipster — whom local Redditors dubbed “Reddit Guy” — no one would have known how he left.

“Someone who is in the area and sees stuff all the time, they’re going to be better in a lot of ways than a random camera,” said the Providence subreddit’s moderator. “John saw this guy going back and forth, unlocking his car and all that, and he just thought it was kind of weird.”

## **You finally got a doctor's appointment. Here's how to get the most out of it**

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — It's not unusual for a 20-something to text Mom in a panic from the doctor's office, seeking help answering a question. And patients of any age can struggle to recall all their medicines — or forget to mention a concern.

Getting the most out of a doctor's visit requires some advance preparation. Even the professionals plan ahead.

"It is really hard — even for me as a doctor going to see my own family doctor — to remember the things that I wanted to bring up," said Dr. Sarah Nosal, president of the American Academy of Family Physicians. "The worst is when you've had that moment with your doctor" only to recall another problem after walking out, she said. "You've lost that time."

Her top tip: Bring a list of symptoms and questions to show at the start of the visit. The first item should be your top concern, but seeing the full list helps your doctor prioritize what's most medically urgent.

"I'm actually going to be able to see, is there a red flag?" explained Nosal, who has some advice about prepping for a typical primary care visit.

Your primary care doctor monitors your overall health

Some illnesses require specialists like a cardiologist or rheumatologist. But regardless of your age or how healthy you are, research has long shown that a relationship with a primary care provider is important for overall health. It might be a family physician like Nosal, who cares for all ages, or an internist. Some patients choose gynecologists, geriatricians, or have a primary care team that includes nurse practitioners or physician assistants.

Primary care is more than preventive checkups to help avoid illness, such as vaccinations, cancer screenings or health advice. It also includes detecting and treating common problems like high blood pressure, and helping to find and coordinate specialty care.

"That ongoing relationship also helps me know your 'normal,'" Nosal explained. "If something's different or changes or you feel off, when you tell me that information and I also have known you over time, we can really figure out together what's going on."

Quiz your family before the appointment

Young adults navigating health care on their own for the first time may need help filling out forms with their personal medical history. Have you ever had general anesthesia? Is your tetanus shot up to date?

If you still have access to the patient portal at your former pediatrician's office, you can see records of vaccinations and prior illnesses, or you may have to request them or quiz parents.

For all ages, family medical history is critical — and needs regular updating. Ask what diseases your close relatives have had and how they fared. For example, if Type 2 diabetes runs in the family, or Grandma had a stroke, or someone had cancer at a young age, that information could help tailor your preventive care, Nosal said.

Fill out your paperwork ahead of the visit

Filling out paperwork from home makes it easier to check medicine bottles for the name and dose. Include both prescription and over-the-counter medicines, pills or creams — and don't forget vitamins and supplements.

Why are the latter important? Some can interact with prescription medicines. Nosal cited some patients whose longtime treatments quit working after they started taking turmeric, a spice also sold as a supplement.

Also before your visit, check if the doctor received records of recent lab tests, hospitalizations or visits to other health providers, since electronic medical records aren't always automatically shared.

Keep a running list of questions before a doctor visit

Some symptoms are bad enough to prompt an urgent visit. But if you've got a checkup coming, whether it's routine or to follow up on health problems, start a list of questions in advance.

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Notice a pain when you move a certain way? Or chatting with a friend who just got a colonoscopy and wonder if you're due? Pop those on your list right away, before you forget — and be specific in describing symptoms.

Nosal keeps a running list on her phone and, ahead of visits with her own doctor, sends it as a heads-up through her patient portal. Patients also can include their list on visit check-in forms.

The idea is to address the most urgent questions first, rather than patients running out of time before raising a key concern. Nosal said questions about mental or sexual health and wellness especially tend to come up at the last minute.

Whatever the medium, "please bring that list," she said. "That's the most critical of all pieces."

It's OK to ask again

People may know to ask questions about treatments, such as how well they work and what side effects to expect. But it's also important to understand why a doctor makes a particular diagnosis or, conversely, isn't as worried about a symptom as you might be.

Don't hesitate to say, "Explain to me what else could be going on," Nosal advised. "What would be the next step? How would you evaluate that for me, to know if it's this or that?"

Most health advocacy groups also advise bringing along a friend or relative, especially if you have serious or multiple health problems. They can help ask questions and take notes.

"Whether you are 20 or you are 85, you will not remember everything from your medical visit," Nosal said.

## Today in History: December 21 Pan Am Flight 103 bombing over Lockerbie

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Sunday, Dec. 21, the 355th day of 2025. There are 10 days left in the year.

On Dec. 21, 1988, a terrorist bomb exploded aboard New York-bound Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, killing all 259 people aboard the Boeing 747 and 11 on the ground. The blast occurred about 40 minutes into the flight from London and claimed the lives of citizens from 21 countries, including 190 Americans.

In 1620, Pilgrims aboard the Mayflower went ashore at present-day Plymouth, Massachusetts, for the first time.

In 1864, during the Civil War, Union forces led by Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman concluded their "March to the Sea" when they captured Savannah, Georgia.

In 1891, the first basketball game, devised by James Naismith, is believed to have been played at the International YMCA Training School (now Springfield College) in Springfield, Massachusetts.

In 1913, the first newspaper crossword puzzle, billed as a "Word-Cross Puzzle," was published in the New York World.

In 1976, the oil tanker Argo Merchant broke apart near Nantucket Island off Massachusetts almost a week after running aground, spilling 7.7 million gallons of oil into the North Atlantic.

In 1991, 11 of the 12 former Soviet republics formally proclaimed the birth of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

In 2020, President-elect Joe Biden received his first dose of the coronavirus vaccine on live television as part of a growing effort early in the pandemic to convince the American public the inoculations were safe.

In 2023, a student opened fire at Charles University in Prague, killing at least 14 people and injuring more than 20 in the Czech Republic's worst mass shooting. Authorities said the 24-year-old student, who had a license to own eight guns and no criminal record, killed himself as police closed in.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Jane Fonda is 88. Singer Carla Thomas is 83. Conductor Michael Tilson Thomas is 81. Actor Samuel L. Jackson is 77. Film producer Jeffrey Katzenberg is 75. Tennis Hall of Famer Chris Evert is 71. Actor Jane Kaczmarek is 70. Country musician Lee Roy Parnell is 69. Actor-comedian Ray Romano is 68. Actor Kiefer Sutherland is 59. Actor-filmmaker Julie Delpy is 56. Golf Hall of Famer Karrie Webb is 51. French President Emmanuel Macron is 48. Actor Rutina Wesley is 47. Actor Steven Yeun is 42. Actor-producer-writer Quinta Brunson is 36. Actor Kaitlyn Dever is 29. Actor Madelyn Cline is 28.