

Groton Daily Independent

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Sun., Dec. 28

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; No Sunday School.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m.; at Zion, 11 a.m.

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

4th Grade BB Practice, 2 p.m.

6th Grade Boys Basketball, 6 p.m.

Mon, Dec. 29

Senior Menu: Sweet and sour pork, steamed rice, carrot and broccoli medley, corn, fruit.

No School

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

Floyd Farrand Tournament Girls Wrestling at SF Lincoln, 9 a.m.

5th/6th Volleyball Practice, 6 p.m.



Tues., Dec. 30

Senior Menu: Meat loaf, baked potato, mixed vegetables, fruit, whole wheat bread.

No School

GBB NSU Showcase, Groton vs. Lemmon, 3 p.m.
Boys BB hosts Webster (JV at 6 p.m., Varsity to follow)

7th Grade Girls Soccer Practice, 6 p.m.

Groton Daily Independent
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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

George Washington's Character Integral to Constitutional Presidency

Two centuries have elapsed since George Washington died on December 14, 1799, but the central importance of his character to the American Presidency, including his commitment to the Constitution and the rule of law, as well as his assumption of personal responsibility for the success of the entire enterprise of republicanism, invite deep reflection as we contemplate restoration of a constitutional presidency.

Washington was keenly aware of the consequences of his historic status as the nation's "first president." At the outset of his presidency, Washington observed, "I walk on untrodden ground." Everything he did would establish norms and precedents and shape the Constitution. He was the only president to write on a blank constitutional canvass. Soon after Washington arrived in New York to take his oath of office on April 30, 1789, he told James Madison: "As the first of everything, in our situation, will serve to establish a precedent, it is devoutly wished on my part, that these precedents may be fixed on true principles." Days later, Washington emphasized this theme in a letter to his advisors about the importance of attention to constitutional purposes and procedures. "Many things which appear to be of little importance in themselves and at the beginning," he wrote, "may have great and durable consequences from their having been established at the commencement of a new general government."

Washington behaved as if his every move was being closely scrutinized as, indeed, it was. By dint of conscience, he was scrupulous to the end of his presidency. Congress, following the Constitution's mandate for "fixed compensation" for the president, provided by law that the salary should be \$25,000 a year. At the end of his eight years in office, Washington's service amounted to \$200,000, but he drew only \$196,121, because he determined that his first administration fell 56 days short of being four full years.

Though not without personal flaws, Washington's character was such that offers of extralegal power did not turn his head. Students of American history are familiar with the fact that Washington was offered the scepter on more than one occasion. In the dark days of the Revolutionary War, his own soldiers, under-equipped by the Continental Congress, appealed to him to seize the reins of power. He refused, both because he had taken an oath as the nation's first Commander in Chief, "to punctually respond" to directions and orders from Congress, but also because his commitment to the principles of republicanism would not abide the exercise of monarchical powers. He knew then, and throughout his life, that the personal appeal and traits that might make one man rule attractive to the masses would, without restraint, eventually, destroy the republic and the constitution.

A Cincinnatus-like figure, Washington was the nation's hero in the American Revolution. He spurned personal, military control at the end of the war and relinquished, as commander in chief, his command to Congress and returned to Mount Vernon. Enormously popular, he was unanimously elected to the presidency by the Electoral College.

Washington's commitment to republican principles and the rule of law, a function of his belief that they formed the pillars of liberty, reflected a depth of character that had been formed well before the beginning of the Revolutionary War. With his contemporaries—John and Samuel Adams, James Wilson and Alexander Hamilton, among others—he defended the revolution in constitutional terms. It was not a war against lawful authority, but one seeking to "restore the rights" of colonists that had been violated by the unconstitutional actions of the English government. It was a "redress of grievances in a constitutional way."

Washington's embrace of the rule of law, republican principles and government by consent of the governed, informed his presidency. In fact, he spoke to it at his first inauguration. "The destiny of the Republican

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model of government, was deeply, perhaps finally staked, on the experiment entrusted to the hands of the American people." His sense of personal responsibility to ensure the success of the republic that he helped to create, may be glimpsed in his letters to friends, indicating his greatest fear was to be labeled a usurper of power, for that would deny the right of the people to create a government of their choice. Indeed, he believed that "the permanent interests and happiness" of the people required the president to "faithfully" execute the laws, surely a defining element of a constitutional presidency.

David Adler is president of The Alturas Institute, a non-profit organization created to promote the Constitution, gender equality and civic education. This column is made possible with the support of the South Dakota Humanities Council, South Dakota NewsMedia Association and this newspaper.

NFL Scores — Saturday, December 27, 2025

Texans 20, Chargers 16 — Houston clinches a playoff berth with this win.

Highlight: QB C.J. Stroud threw two long touchdown passes early to set the tone and help Houston earn the postseason spot.

Ravens 41, Packers 24 — Derrick Henry rushed for 216 yards and 4 TDs, a huge individual performance.

NFL Schedule — Sunday, December 28, 2025

(Week 17 regular season — kickoff times ET & where you can watch)

Early & Mid-Afternoon Games (1:00 PM ET)

Buccaneers @ Dolphins FOX (local markets & FOX Sports app)

Patriots @ Jets FOX (local markets & FOX Sports app)

Steelers @ Browns CBS (+ Paramount+, NFL+)

Jaguars @ Colts FOX (+ streaming on NFL+)

Saints @ Titans CBS (+ streaming on Paramount+, NFL+)

Seahawks @ Panthers CBS (+ streaming on Paramount+, NFL+)

Cardinals @ Bengals FOX (+ NFL+)

Afternoon Game (4:05/4:25 PM ET)

Giants @ Raiders (~4:05 PM ET) CBS (+ Paramount+, NFL+)

Eagles @ Bills (~4:25 PM ET) FOX (+ FOX Sports app & NFL+)

Primetime

Bears @ 49ers (~8:20 PM ET) NBC & Peacock (+NFL+)

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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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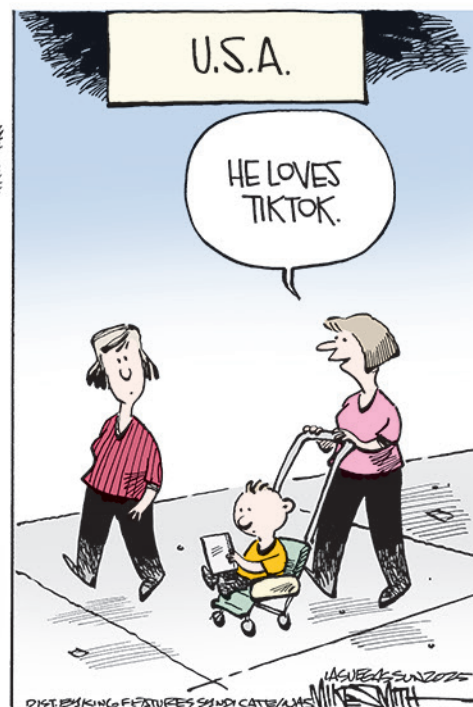
THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE

So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations.

MATTHEW 1:17



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BIBLE

TRIVIA

by Wilson Casey

1. For possible New Year's resolutions, Proverbs 16:3 says, "Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be ____." *Resolved, Established, Directed, Bountiful*

2. Likewise, Psalm 37:5 instructs us to "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to ____." *Nurture, Pass, Action, Light*

3. From which book's 29:11 does the Lord declare plans to prosper you, thoughts of peace to give you hope and a future? *Leviticus, Ezra, Nehemiah, Jeremiah*

4. 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 2:20 are among the verses to focus on what in a new year? *Blessings, Moving forward, Grace, Church attendance*

5. In which month of the religious calendar did the new year begin in the Bible? *3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th*

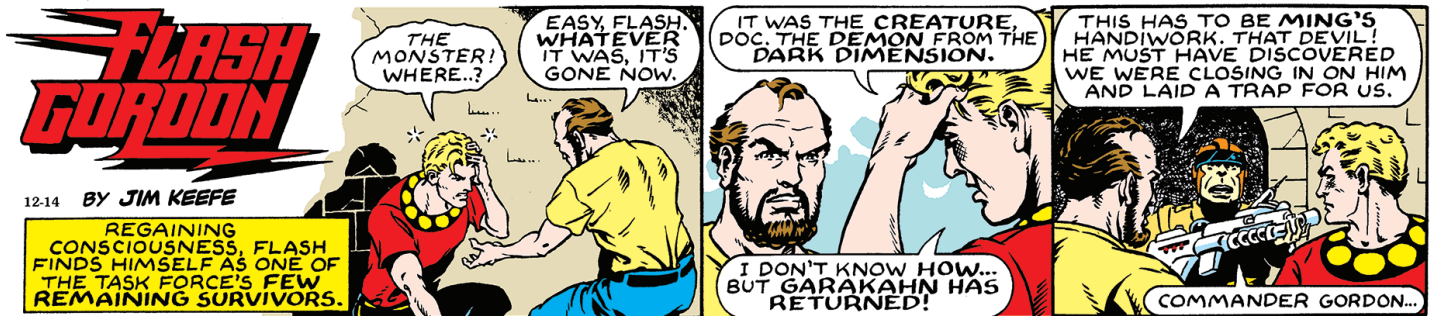
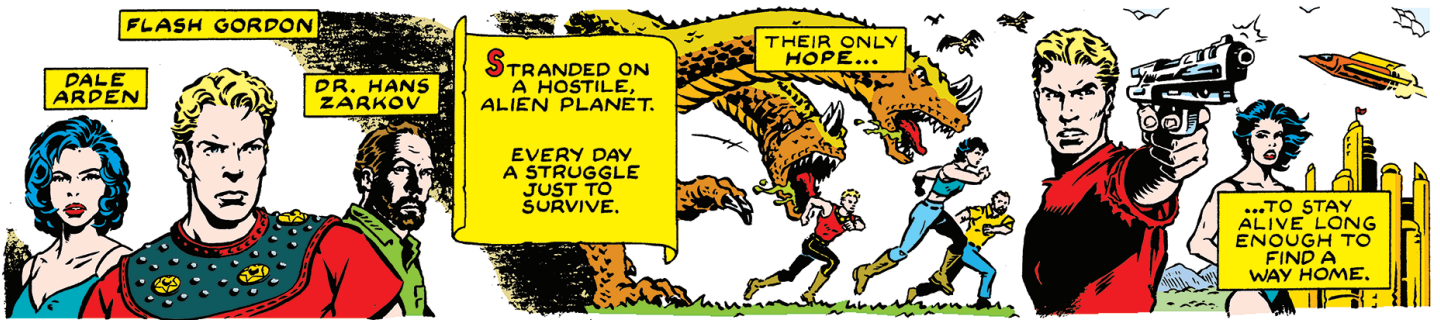
6. From James 1:5, what may one lack, and if they ask God, it shall be given? *Love, Wisdom, Truth, Goals*

ANSWERS: 1) Established, 2) Pass, 3) Jeremiah, 4) Moving forward, 5) 7th, 6) Wisdom

Hardcore trivia fan? Visit Wilson Casey's subscribersite at www.patreon.com/triviaguy.

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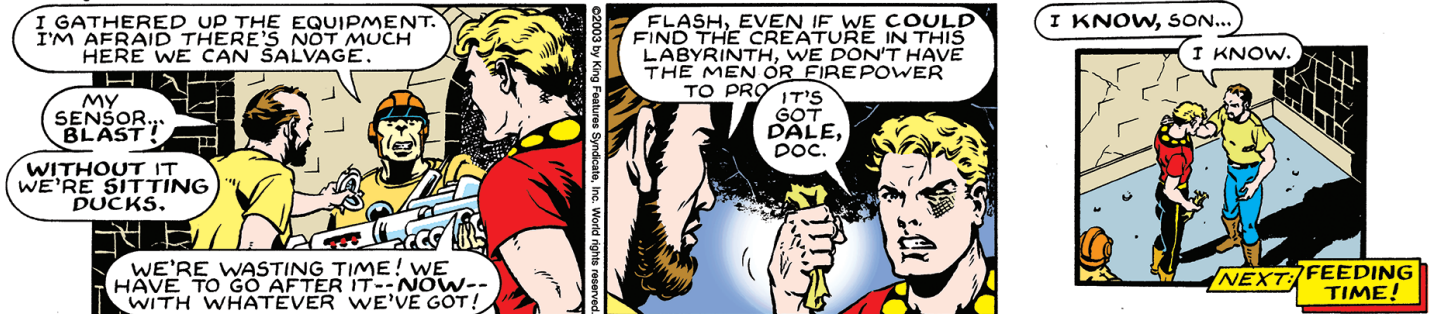
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12-14 BY JIM KEEFE

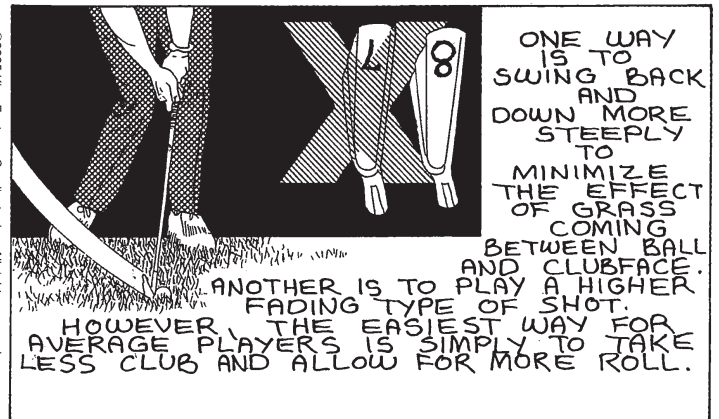
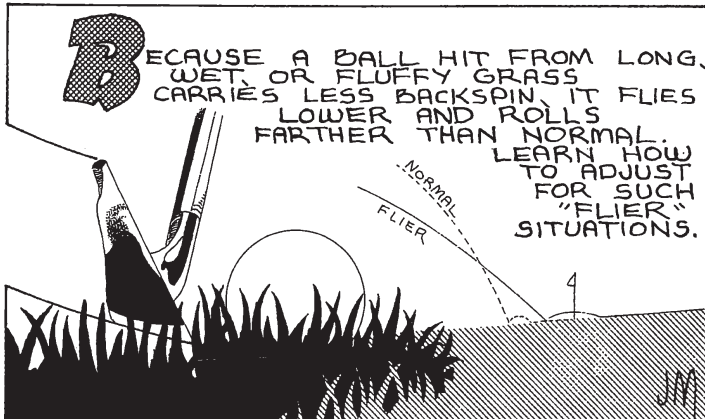
REGAINING CONSCIOUSNESS, FLASH FINDS HIMSELF AS ONE OF THE TASK FORCE'S FEW REMAINING SURVIVORS.

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NEXT: FEEDING TIME!

Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS





Pulmonary Nodules Appear, Leading To Concern About **CANCER**

DEAR DR. ROACH: I am a 76-year-old woman in what I thought was excellent health. On a recent coronary calcium CT scan that was ordered because of my age and slightly elevated cholesterol, an incidental finding was described in the report as "innumerable, tiny noncalcified pulmonary nodules bilaterally." The largest of these is in the "left lower lobe with multiple additional 2- to 4-mm nodules," and they recommended "clinical correlation and a consideration of a dedicated chest CT."

I found the report quite scary, especially considering my mother and grandfather died of lung cancer (although they were smokers and I never smoked). My primary physician has ordered the chest CT but wants to wait

four weeks. She says that the nodules could be caused by inflammation or infection and might resolve on their own.

My fear is that they're actually lung cancer and waiting four weeks might be problematic, not to mention extremely anxiety-producing. I would appreciate your input. -- M.S.

ANSWER: I certainly understand why you are concerned about lung cancer given your family history, but primary lung cancer is very unlikely. Since there are so many of these tiny nodules, I agree with your doctor that these are highly unlikely to be lung cancer, which is generally only a single nodule.

Your doctor is correct that there are inflammatory and infectious conditions that can cause a similar appearance on a chest CT. Some of these infections are serious (including tuberculosis), but people generally have symptoms. So, I think this is unlikely. Exposure to lung toxins, especially silicosis and asbestosis, are generally occupational, but they are another potential cause.

Some cancers can spread to the lungs. While the appearance of nodules on a CT scan in a person with no known cancer would be unusual, if the CT scan in four weeks shows that the nodules are enlarging, then this would be concerning. Getting another scan in less than four weeks might not be enough time to see a change.

I am sorry about the unavoidable anxiety in waiting for the scan, but it's likely that the scan won't show a change and you will be able to stop worrying.

DEAR DR. ROACH: I was experiencing hoarseness while taking ibuprofen. A friend got intestinal bleeding due to taking it. My doctor gave me 7.5 mg of meloxicam daily, but I'm not sure it's OK for long periods of time. I'm 73 with osteoarthritis and osteopenia. I exercise daily and eat a healthy diet, and I have high blood pressure that is controlled with losartan and amlodipine. -- T.M.H.

ANSWER: Ibuprofen is generally a safe drug, but it does have the potential for side effects -- some of them being serious. Gastrointestinal bleeding is a serious one, and it is most common in older women. I would not try a second nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) like meloxicam in a person who has a history of serious bleeding with any other similar drug.

Hoarseness could be due to an allergy, due to direct irritation of ibuprofen on the throat, or from the worsening of acid reflux, which can cause hoarseness if acid gets all the way into the throat.

Meloxicam is also an NSAID but is chemically in a different class from ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil and others) or naproxen (Aleve and others), which are closely related. It's reasonable to give it a try, but if it causes hoarseness again, then an NSAID probably isn't a good choice for your arthritis. You could consider acetaminophen (Tylenol) or topical NSAIDs, which do not get absorbed enough to cause an increased bleeding risk.

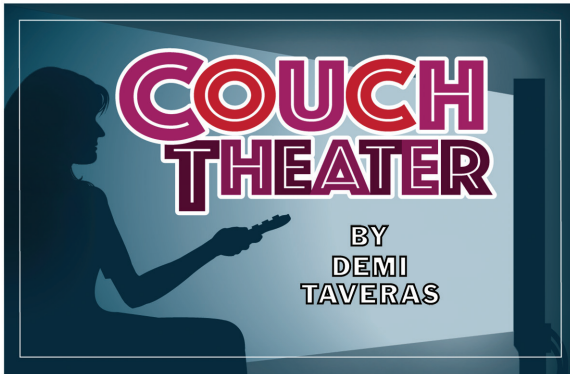
Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu.

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Aaron Paul, left, and Eiza Gonzalez star in "Ash." (Courtesy of MovieStillsDB)

"If I Had Legs, I'd Kick You" (R) -- Rose Byrne leads this psychological drama that is out now to rent. Her performance has already earned her a Golden Globe nomination for Best Actress in a Motion Picture (Musical or Comedy). With an unexpected supporting cast consisting of Conan O'Brien, A\$AP Rocky and Christian Slater, it's a twisty case study of a woman at her wits' end with comedic elements that keep viewers wanting more. Byrne plays a psychotherapist named Linda, whose life is collapsing around her. (Literally, as the ceiling of her apartment collapses and floods her entire home.) She cares for her daughter, who suffers from a feeding disorder, while her husband is away for weeks at a time for work. Add to this a tumultuous relationship with her own therapist and one of her clients disappearing, and it'd be enough to drive anyone insane! (Apple TV+)

"The Copenhagen Test" (TV-MA) -- This sci-fi spy thriller series premiered its first season recently, and it consists of eight episodes that are all available to stream now. Led by Simu Liu ("Last Breath"), the series takes place in the "near future" and follows Alexander Hale (Liu), an intelligence agent for the United States government whose brain gets hacked for the purpose of committing treason against the U.S. He's faced with the choice of taking the hacking signal out of his brain or using it to trace the hackers and end them, and with his agency breathing down his neck, Alexander's only option is to choose the latter. As he lets the agency infiltrate his entire life, he must toe a careful line between being the key to finding the hackers and being used as collateral. Melissa Barrera ("Abigail") co-stars. (Peacock)

"A GRAMMY Celebration of Latin Music" (TV-PG) -- Out now to stream, this musical event presented by the GRAMMY Awards showcases the legacy of Latin music and features performances and tributes from Latin celebrities. Hosted by Wilmer Valderrama ("Encanto") and Roselyn Sanchez ("Wallbanger"), the event includes special appearances from Daddy Yankee, Lin-Manuel Miranda, Rita Moreno and Carlos Santana. Performers include musicians such as Luis Fonsi, Prince Royce, Gloria Estefan and Andrea Bocelli. Whether you're a fan of Latin music or not, this special is a great opportunity to learn about the impact Latin music has made in America. (Paramount+)

"Ash" (R) -- Directed by Flying Lotus, this sci-fi horror film stars Eiza Gonzalez ("Fountain of Youth") and Aaron Paul ("Invincible"). Gonzalez plays astronaut Riya, who wakes up with amnesia on an unknown planet and is completely unaware of her purpose of being there. She discovers the bodies of several crew members and subsequently encounters Brion (Paul), another astronaut who received a distress call from her before she lost consciousness. As Riya and Brion put the pieces together of her mission gone awry, Riya experiences traumatic flashbacks of the mission, and the pair figure out that there's still one crew member missing. They're left with no choice but to leave the planet and go back to their headquarters, but even this won't be an easy feat. Nothing is as it seems in this movie, which is also Flying Lotus' first feature-length film. Premieres Jan. 2. (Hulu)

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1. Which singer-songwriter released "Don't Expect Me to Be Your Friend"?
2. In "American Pie," Don McLean sings of "the three men I admire most." Who were they?
3. Who was Magill (who called herself Lil), but everyone knew her as Nancy.
4. What is the name of Eric Clapton's first solo single?
5. Name the song that contains this lyric: "Remember when the days were long and rolled beneath a deep blue sky, Didn't have a care in the world."

Answers

1. Lobo, born Kent LaVoie, in 1972. Wayne Wade released a reggae version of the song in 1991 but renamed it "I Love You Too Much."
2. The Father, Son and the Holy Ghost. At the time it was the longest song (8 minutes 42 seconds) to ever reach the top of the U.S. charts. It kept that record for 50 years.
3. Rocky Raccoon's girlfriend in the Beatles 1968 song.
4. "After Midnight," in 1970.
5. "The End of the Innocence," by Don Henley in 1989. Although it didn't top the Hot 100 chart (coming in at No. 8), in 1990 the song netted Grammy nominations for both Song of the Year and Record of the Year before winning the Grammy for Best Rock Vocal Performance by a male.

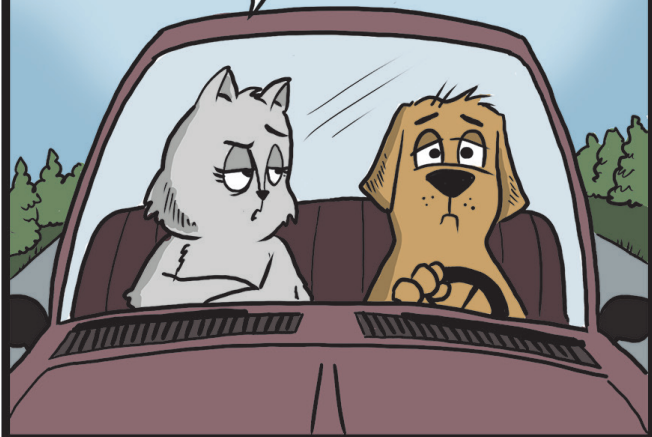
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GRIN and BEAR IT ^{by Wagner}

Just Like Cats & Dogs

by Dave T. Phipps

WHY ARE YOU SO WORRIED ABOUT MY FAMILY REUNION? JUST ACT NATURAL, BE YOURSELF AND STICK TO THE CUE CARDS I MADE YOU.



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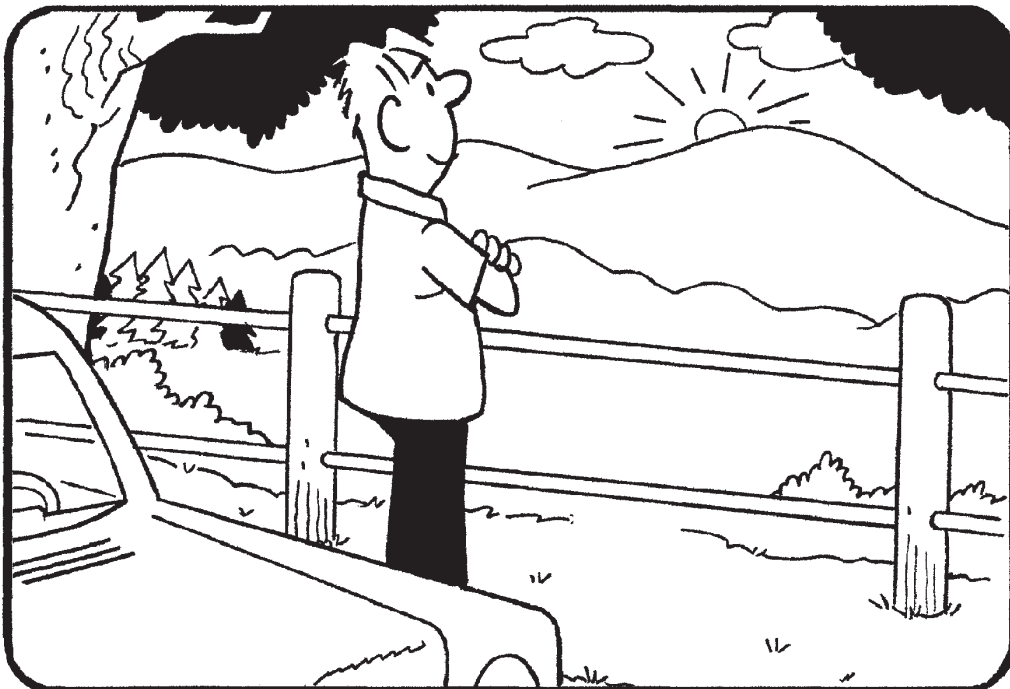
"He has the hangover virus."

HOCUS-FOCUS

BY
HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



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Differences: 1. Sun is smaller. 2. Fence post is taller. 3. Headlight is different. 4. Side mirror is missing. 5. Bottom of shirt is different. 6. Tree branch is missing.

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* "Want to keep your pants from creasing on the hanger? Grab an empty paper towel tube, and slit it down the side. When you slip it over the bottom of the hanger, it creates a curve for the pants to lie across, and no more crease!" -- M.U. in Colorado

* To prevent candle wax from sticking to a candleholder, swipe the inside with a little olive oil. It'll do the trick!

* Just in time for soup season (and my new year's resolutions), here's a great fat swap: Drain and rinse two cups of white beans and puree with a cup of no-sodium vegetable broth. You can use this as a thickener in place of heavy cream for soups and stews.

* Experts say that those who write down or journal their nutrition and exercise are more likely to keep it up. This can

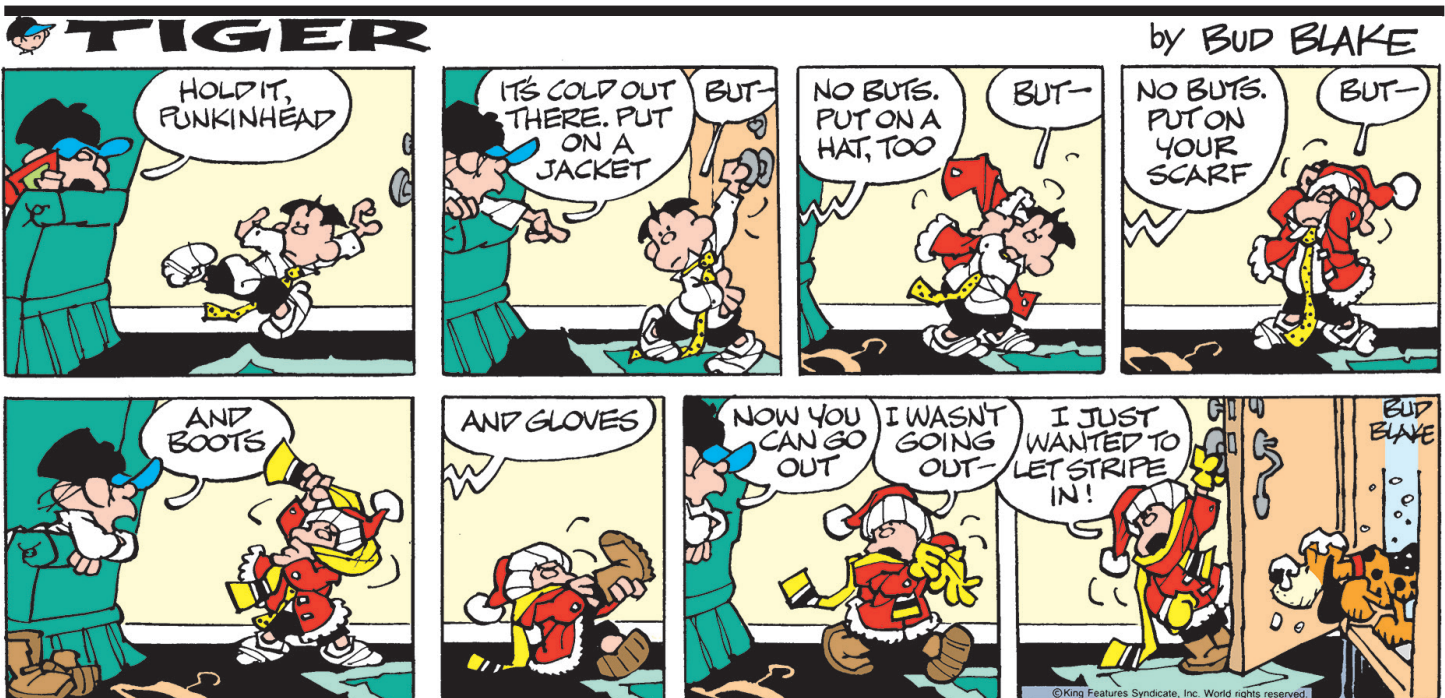
be as simple as a pencil and notebook paired with a calorie guidebook or one of the many great apps for your smartphone. In any case, set yourself up for success this year. You deserve it!

* "Cutting corn off the kernel can be tricky business, but you only need to recruit the right equipment. The next time you're making corn for dinner, grab a Bundt pan. The corn gets set upright in the center and you cut down. The corn falls right into the pan on all sides." -- A.S. in Texas

* A can opener's crevices can be cleaned by "opening" a length of waxed paper. Kitchen scissors can be sharpened by folding a piece of aluminum foil and cutting it with the scissors.

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

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King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Ship's sail
- 4 Some TVs
- 8 Corned beef recipe
- 12 Terre Haute sch.
- 13 Greek vowel
- 14 Iso-
- 15 Flop
- 17 Pop's sister
- 18 Coated with gold
- 19 Is boastful
- 20 Forest clearing
- 22 Siate
- 24 Partially mine
- 25 Screwdriver type
- 29 — Lanka
- 30 Warning

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- 31 Compass dir.
- 32 Sailing challenge
- 34 Wound cover
- 35 Breaks down
- 36 Piles
- 37 Pink hue
- 40 Seniors' org.
- 41 Each
- 42 Unexpected gain
- 46 Story
- 47 Shoppe descriptor
- 48 24 horas
- 49 Building wings

- 50 Yale students
- 51 Conclude
- DOWN**
- 1 Skippy rival
- 2 "This — stick-up!"
- 3 Sofia's land
- 4 Rummage (through)
- 5 Stallion-to-be
- 6 — standstill
- 7 Popped down
- 8 Fireplace part
- 9 Water color?
- 10 Crooned
- 11 Chart toppers
- 16 Pot covers
- 19 Cigar remnant
- 20 "Holy cow!"
- 21 Entice
- 22 Secluded spots
- 23 Cooking fat
- 25 Move like a butterfly
- 26 Adventure
- 27 Now, in a memo
- 28 Society newbies
- 30 Missing GI
- 33 Curtains
- 34 Lowly worker
- 36 Devil's domain
- 37 Blanchett of "The Aviator"
- 38 Milky gem
- 39 Sandwich bread
- 40 "The King —"
- 42 Misery
- 43 Under the weather
- 44 Architect Maya
- 45 Young fellow

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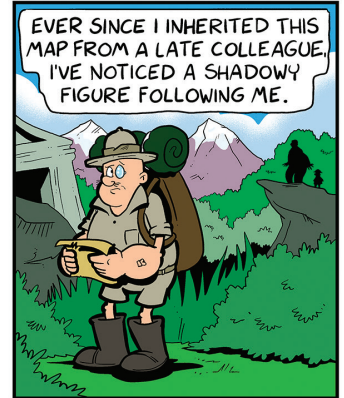
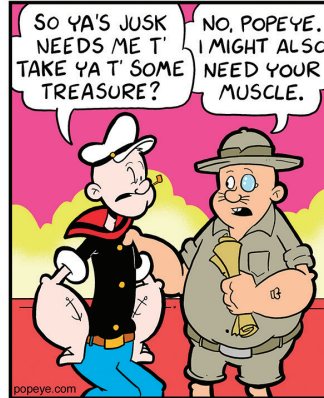
King Crossword

Answers

Solution time: 26 mins.

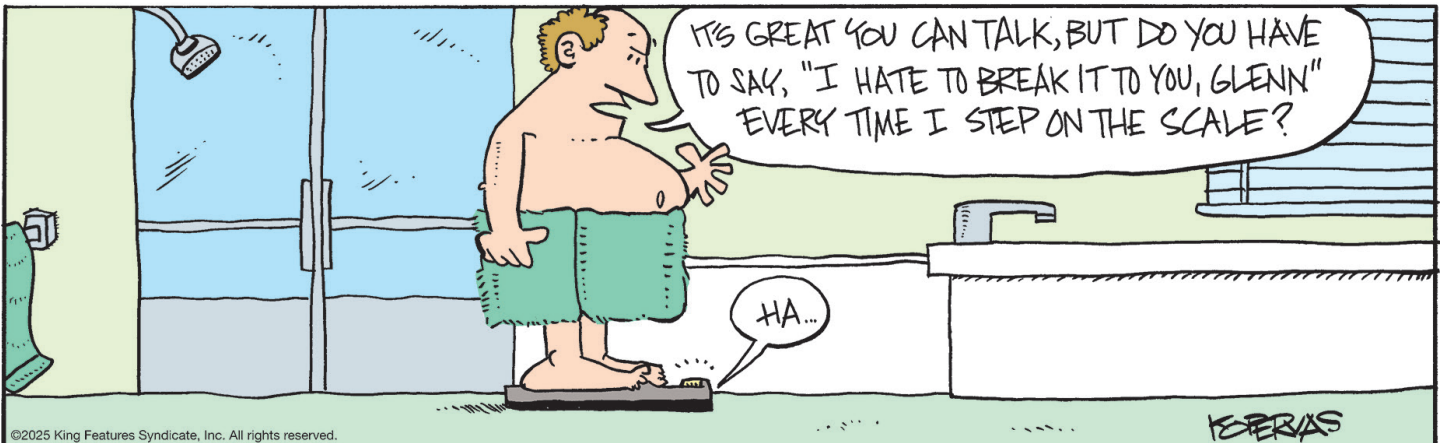
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Olive



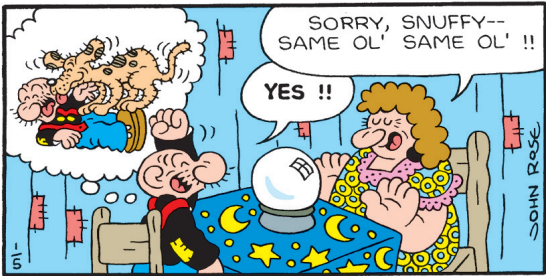
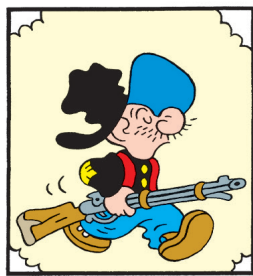
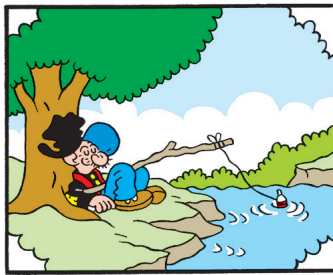
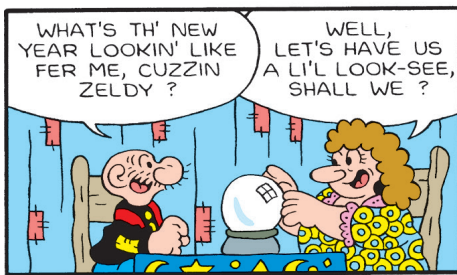
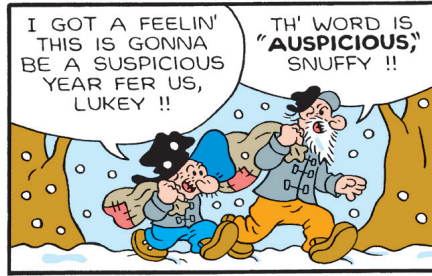
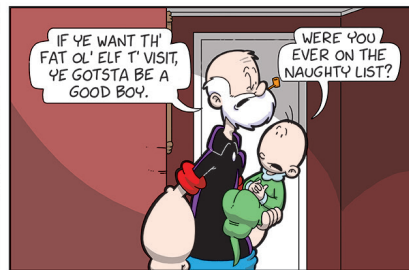
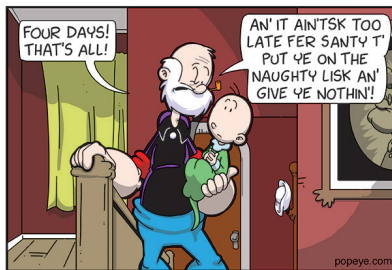
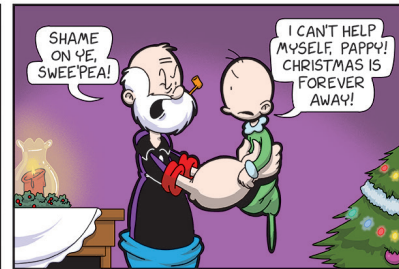
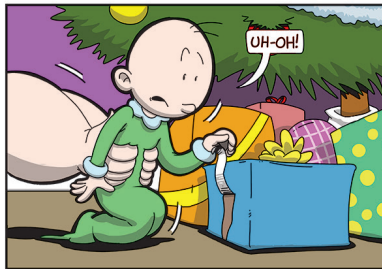
Out on a Limb

by Gary Kopervas



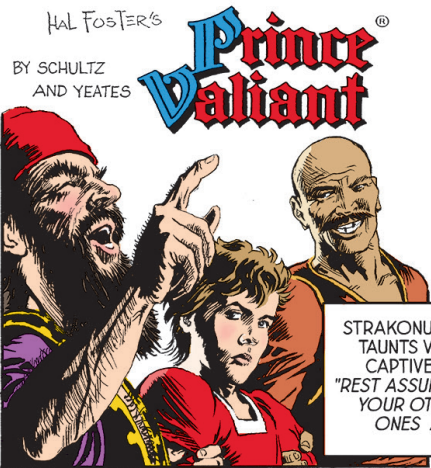
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STRAKONUS THE PIRATE TAUNTS VAL WITH HIS CAPTIVE-NATHAN!
"REST ASSURED, WE HAVE YOUR OTHER LOVED ONES AS WELL!"

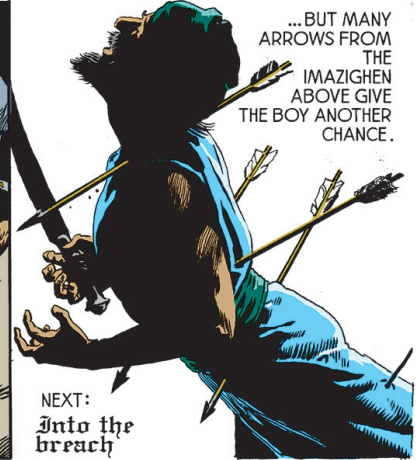
VAL FIGHTS PANIC, AND RESPONDS WITH A DESPERATE PLOY TO PROTECT HIS SON:
"YOU FOOLS! THOSE POOR SOULS ARE QUARANTINED!"



"THEY CARRY THE AWFUL THULE SPOTTED FEVER! IF SO MUCH AS A DROP OF THE BOY'S BLOOD IS SPILLED, YOU YOURSELVES WILL BE AFFLICTED WITH THE MIASMA!" STRAKONUS, NEVER EXPECTING SUCH A TERRIFYING RESPONSE, FLINCHES...

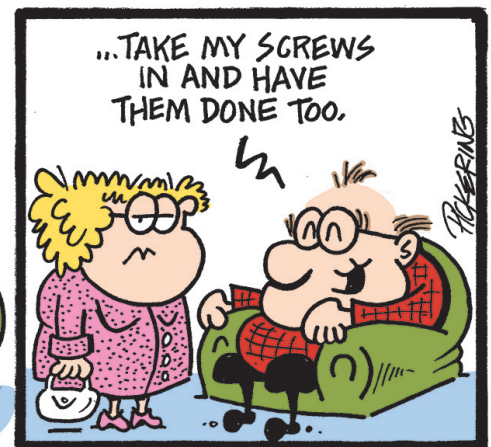
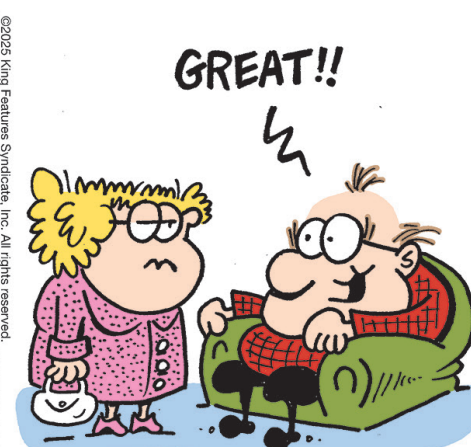
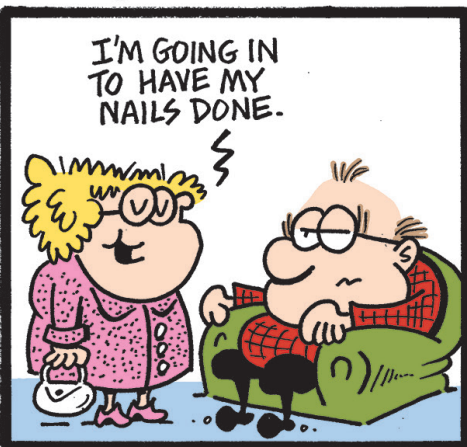


... ALLOWING NATHAN TO TEAR FREE AND DASH FOR THE CLIFF ROCKS! STRAKONUS IMMEDIATELY SEES THE RUSE: "THE KNIGHT LIES! STOP THE WHELP! WITHOUT HIM AS HOSTAGE, WE'LL NEVER GET OFF THIS ISLAND!"



The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

Avoiding Medicare fraud

Medicare is a pot of gold for scammers. There is a lot of money to be made by those who successfully commit fraud against seniors. You, however, can stop them in their tracks by not falling for the scams.

Here are just a few of the scams:

Genetic testing is a hot topic for those who want to be screened for a variety of potential illnesses. If you get a call offering genetic testing (or even at a booth at a senior fair), don't believe the scammer who says that Medicare will pay for it, and that all you need to do is provide your Medicare number. Never give that number out! The only legitimate way Medicare will pay for genetic testing is if your doctor thinks it's medically necessary and orders it.

Even your medical provider shouldn't be completely trusted. When you receive your Medicare Summary Notice showing what was billed and what Medicare paid, look closely at it. Check the dates and services to be sure that you really did receive those services. While errors could be honest mistakes, maybe they're not. Call your provider and ask them to send you an itemized bill so you can see how they came up with their numbers and to send a corrected bill to Medicare. If they don't, or if you suspect fraud, report it. Call Medicare at 800-MEDICARE (800-633-4227).

To learn more, see the Senior Medicare Patrol (877-808-2468) whose job is to ferret out Medicare fraud. Look for them at smpresource.org. Don't miss the Consequences to Beneficiaries section of the website. The health impacts of fraud are scary: misinformation in our files, incorrect lab results and more. If you want to talk to a Senior Medicare Patrol representative, see the "Find Help in Your State" button.

For an overview of the types of fraud against seniors, see elderaffairs.org/wp-content/uploads/Fraud-Materials.pdf. You'll be surprised how many there are!

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Downtown Groton

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Call/Text Tina: 605-397-7285



Open 24/7

Living Heart Fitness Center

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

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1. In November 1994, George Foreman won the heavyweight championship at age 45 by knocking out what 26-year-old boxer?

2. Basketball Hall of Famer Jerry Sloan became the first NBA head coach to win 1,000 games for one team when he accomplished the feat in 2008. With which club did Sloan reach the milestone?

3. Sister Jean, a member of the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary religious order, became famous as the chaplain of which men's college basketball team that reached the NCAA Final Four in 2018?

4. Between NASCAR drivers Ned Jarrett and his son Dale, who has more season championships in the sport's top series?

5. The 2015-16 Golden State Warriors set a new NBA record for highest regular season winning percentage with .890. What was the team's record that year?

6. In 2017, who became the first American woman since Miki Gorman in 1977 to win the New York City Marathon?

7. Baseball Hall of Famer Reggie Jackson played one season as a member of which Major League Baseball club in 1976?



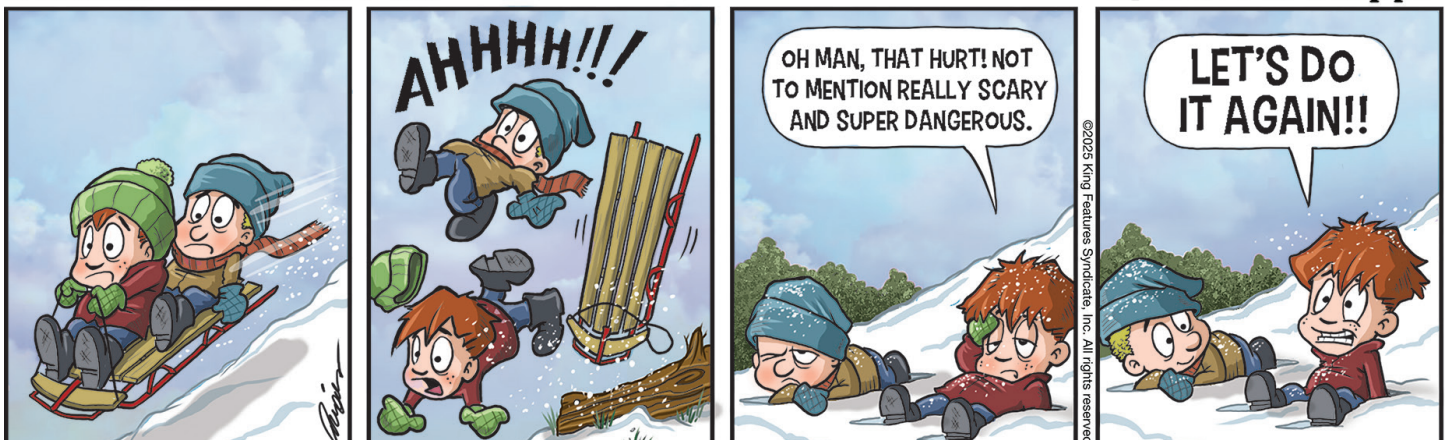
Answers

1. Michael Moorer.
2. The Utah Jazz.
3. The Loyola Ramblers.
4. Ned, with two (1961, 1965). Dale has one (1999).
5. 73-9.
6. Shalane Flanagan.
7. The Baltimore Orioles.

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Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps





A focus on pets' weight for the New Year

DEAR PAW'S CORNER: I've made a resolution that I hope will resonate with many of your readers. My cat, "Gerard," is 6 years old and has become very overweight. I can barely pick him up! Since October, I have been working with Gerard's veterinarian to manage his weight, and things are turning around. I hope that this year, readers will focus on their pets' whole health. Not just checkups, but everyday choices that will give their pets, like my cat, a longer, healthier life. -- Carly B. in Youngstown, Ohio

DEAR CARLY: That is a fantastic resolution. Focusing on our pets' well-being not only benefits them, but positively affects our lives as well.

Weight management alone has so many pluses. Keeping dogs and cats at a healthy weight reduces their risks for diabetes, heart disease, arthritis and some cancers. It also helps them move faster and play more because their energy levels leap up. It can lead to an overall longer lifespan -- so they're part of your family for many years to come.

Working with a vet is ideal. They can offer impactful advice on ways to help your pet lose weight, and set a target weight for the type and size of pet. They can prescribe medications to help with anxiety and other issues that might be causing a cat or dog to eat more than they should. And they have a ton of information on keeping your pet healthy and safe, beyond weight management.

With more than half of dogs and cats in the U.S. now classified as overweight, making a resolution to get your pet to a healthy weight is one of the best things a pet owner can do right now.

Send your tips, comments or questions to ask@pawscorner.com.

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Strange BUT TRUE

* Shortly before auditioning for the part of Stanley Kowalski in Tennessee Williams' "A Streetcar Named Desire" at the playwright's rented cottage, Marlon Brando repaired a clogged toilet and blown light fuse for him.

* A single day on Mercury lasts 59 Earth days.

* The goblin shark has a jaw that shoots outward to grab prey in what scientists have called "slingshot feeding." It can deploy that jaw at 10.1 feet per second.

* There's a five-story, blood-red waterfall in Antarctica.

* On average, people in India spend 10 hours and 42 minutes a week reading, the most time of any country on Earth.

* The German word "kummerspeck" refers to excess weight gained from emotional overeating. Its literal translation is "grief bacon."

* Ben Franklin's formal education ended at 10 years old.

* Astronauts on Mars won't just make plans based on temperature, they'll also need to consider tau, the level of particulate matter in the atmosphere. High tau levels will block sunlight to solar-powered rovers.

* Bedding was such a luxury in the Middle Ages that blankets and sheets were written into people's wills.

* Brazil's prisons reduce inmates' sentences for reading books and writing reviews.

* In many skating competitions, judges can deduct a point if they consider a skater's costume to be overly garish or provocative.


* Orlande de Lassus, one of the greatest musicians and composers of the Renaissance, was kidnapped three times during his childhood. The reason behind those abductions? His beautiful singing voice.

* Thomas Jefferson hated banks and believed they were more dangerous than armies.

* One study claimed that men who kiss their wives every morning before leaving for work live five years longer than those who don't.

Thought for the Day: "Let not a man guard his dignity, but let his dignity guard him." -- Ralph Waldo Emerson

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The Garden Bug

This plant is a parasitic perennial; its white or translucent berries grow on the trunks and branches of deciduous trees. American mistletoe (*P. serotinum*) is widespread across the U.S., while its European cousin (*V. album*) can only sometimes be found in California. Often used as a winter holiday adornment in the home, these plants are potentially deadly for children and pets, as they contain phoratoxin, a toxic protein. It is best to avoid real mistletoe in favor of artificial versions - Brenda Weaver

Mistletoe

Sources: pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov, onlinelibrary.wiley.com



by Freddy Groves

Changes to community medical care

Veterans who get their medical care from civilian facilities need to keep an eye on what's coming. In 2026 the contracts (originally signed in 2018) between the VA and community health plan networks are expiring. An RFP (request for proposal) has gone out to solicit new contracts.

Some changes are coming:

The five regions of VA health care are being reduced to two.

The new contracts will require the community providers to follow industry standards, which is shocking. Is that not already included in any contract to provide medical care to veterans?

At this point, 40% of veterans get their care from civilian providers. That will likely increase, as the new plan contracts will open the door for more providers.

Veterans who want to pursue getting medical care at a non-VA facility need to meet eligibility requirements:

- Must be enrolled in VA health care.
- Live in a state with no full-service VA facility.
- The care needed isn't available through the VA.
- The VA can't meet quality standards.
- Qualifies under the old Choice Program: a 30-minute drive (or 20-day wait) for VA primary care or 60-minute drive (or 28-day wait) for specialty care.

Remember that the two-step rule changed in 2025, and if your doctor agrees you need to see a civilian doctor, a second doctor doesn't need to approve it. Depending on the care you need (there are 30 categories of medical care, such as cardiology and dermatology), you'll likely be approved for one year.

Here's where you come in, should you choose to do so. If you're getting civilian care, will their network administrators be putting in a proposal for the next round of contracts? In other words, will you be able to continue getting care there? Do they know the deadline for their proposal is March 16? I would ask. This is part of being proactive in your own care ... asking questions.

To learn more about community care, see www.va.gov/communitycare.

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Wishing Well®

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| C | U | N | R | E | E | M | G | I | E | E | D | S |

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. GEOGRAPHY: What body of water lies between Ukraine and Russia?
2. SLOGANS: Which company uses the advertising slogan "Think Different"?
3. MOVIES: Which actor plays himself in the movie "Zombieland"?
4. HISTORY: Which U.S. president authorized the Indian Removal Act, which forcibly relocated Native Americans?
5. BIOLOGY: How do plants take in oxygen and carbon dioxide?
6. TELEVISION: What's the name of the bar in "The Simpsons"?
7. MUSIC: Which pop singer refers to her fans as "little monsters"?
8. ANATOMY: Where is the deltoid muscle in the human body?
9. FOOD & DRINK: What is the primary ingredient in the Greek dish moussaka?
10. LITERATURE: Who wrote the children's book "Where the Wild Things Are"?

Answers

1. Sea of Azov.
2. Apple.
3. Bill Murray.
4. Andrew Jackson.
5. Tiny pores on the underside of leaves called stomata.
6. Moe's Tavern.
7. Lady Gaga.
8. Shoulder.
9. Eggplant.
10. Maurice Sendak.

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South Dakota Governor



Larry Rhoden



South Dakota: *Under God, the People Rule*

Looking Forward

I hope you had a Merry Christmas making memories with loved ones! The holidays are a special opportunity to take stock and reflect. The calendar turns pretty quickly to New Year's, which is often an opportunity for us to peek in the rearview mirror while also looking forward out the windshield.

One year ago, Governor Noem asked me to guest write her weekly column looking forward to 2025. At that time, we knew that she had been appointed to serve as Secretary of Homeland Security and would almost certainly be taking that job in the near future. One month later, I was sworn in as the 34th Governor of South Dakota.

At the time, I wrote the following:

"Our people have built a state that I am proud to call home. I have been honored to serve them in a position of leadership alongside Governor Noem. I am blessed with the opportunity to continue serving South Dakotans in this new year. If you ever have any ideas for how we can make South Dakota even stronger in the days and years to come, please do not hesitate to reach out."

Those words remain true today. I once again find myself looking ahead to a year of serving the people of South Dakota – and I still would love to hear your ideas for how we can keep South Dakota strong, safe, and free.

Just a couple of weeks into new year, legislative session will kick off, and it will start with me giving my first ever State of the State Address. In that address, I'll lay out my vision to keep our state the greatest and freest in the nation. And I'll remind my friends and colleagues in the Legislature that everything we do is on behalf of the people of South Dakota.

As Benjamin Franklin once said, "Let every new year find you a better man." 2025 was a great year for South Dakota. We continued to grow, to thrive, and to set an example of freedom for the nation. 2026 is an opportunity for even better things – for each of us, for our families, for our communities, and for all of South Dakota. Improving ourselves and our state takes work. I'm committed to putting in the work, and I'm sure that the hard-working people of South Dakota are ready to, as well.

God bless you all, and Happy New Year!



Dr. James L. Snyder Ministries

PO Box 831313 - Ocala, FL 34483

1-352-216-3025

Can You Eat Too Many Cookies at Christmas

Christmas was over, and the house began to quiet down in a good way. Don't get me wrong, I love the noise when all the family is together. It is a good feeling to be with your family during this wonderful holiday season. I love the energy!

I enjoy the presents and watching the family opening theirs, but I especially love the holiday feasts prepared by The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage.

There was only one time when she really messed up. That was when she had broccoli at the holiday feast. Nothing is more disgusting to me than seeing broccoli on the table. She only did it once, for which I am most grateful.

Someone might ask what my favorite item on the table was. I would reply by saying, the item that is in my mouth at the time.

This Christmas season, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage baked a truckload of cookies and shared them with friends and neighbors, who greatly appreciated them.

The only problem with The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage baking cookies is that I'm in the same house, and the smell infiltrates every room.

I can be in my office, busy on a project, when suddenly the most fascinating aroma fills the room: cookies baking in the kitchen.

There is a very strict rule in our house about cookies: I can have only one, and only if The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage gives it to me. Otherwise, it is a forbidden fruit.

Every so often, she will slip me a second cookie, and I'm so appreciative of that small gesture.

The great thing about our family coming together for Christmas dinner is that there are so many of us. With the little ones always very noisy, I try to stir up that noise as much as possible—after all, isn't that a grandfather's job?

Amid all the holiday noise, I sneak a cookie. If The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage doesn't catch me, it's okay—or so I think.

I must confess that eating these cookies is not my fault. After all, if the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage did not make so many delicious cookies, I wouldn't be tempted. In short, my eating cookies is not my fault but hers.

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I've tried several times to explain this to her, but she still doesn't buy it. Her idea is that I can only have a cookie if she hands it to me.

During the holiday festivities, with all the noise, I can sneak cookies whenever I want. The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage is so focused on the family, especially the great-grandchildren, that I can get away with it. So, if I get away with it, it's all right. Right?

As our family festivities began, I noticed the stash of cookies the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage had baked. The grandchildren love her cookies.

As the festivities begin, I asked The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage if I could give some cookies to the grandchildren. After all, I explained, she was too busy to do this.

I must say I caught her by surprise, and because she was busy with something else, she just said, "Okay, but remember, no cookies for you."

With a big smile on my face, I picked up a plate of cookies and took them around to the grandchildren. There was so much activity that I began eating a cookie now and then. I made sure the plate was in front of one of the grandchildren before I picked up a cookie. I think I covered my tracks pretty well.

The first grandchild I took the cookie plate to looked at me and said, "Papaw, do you want one of my cookies?" Now, how can you refuse your grandchild? I thought it was my grandparental duty to respond to my grandchild by saying, "Oh, my dear, thank you so much I appreciate that." And the cookie disappeared from the plate into my adoring mouth.

I was very cautious because when I went to one of my grandchildren, I often made sure to check where The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage was and whether she was looking and in my direction. When she wasn't, it was a signal for me to get another cookie.

My only question during this festive time was: How many cookies are too many?

After the family activities were over, I relaxed with some coffee and The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage came in and sat down. She looked at me and asked, "So, how many cookies did you eat today?"

To answer that question would get me in deep trouble. Instead, I replied, "Wasn't our great-granddaughter so cute?" That was enough to distract her and get her talking about our great-granddaughter. I ducked an arrow with that.

While the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage went on and on about our great-granddaughter, I remembered a Bible verse I read in my devotions.

"Give thanks unto the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the people. Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him, talk ye of all his wondrous works Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord" (1 Chronicles 16:8-10).

No amount of trouble can rob me of rejoicing in the Lord. Everything I have is a gift from the Lord, and I'm going to appreciate it the rest of my life.

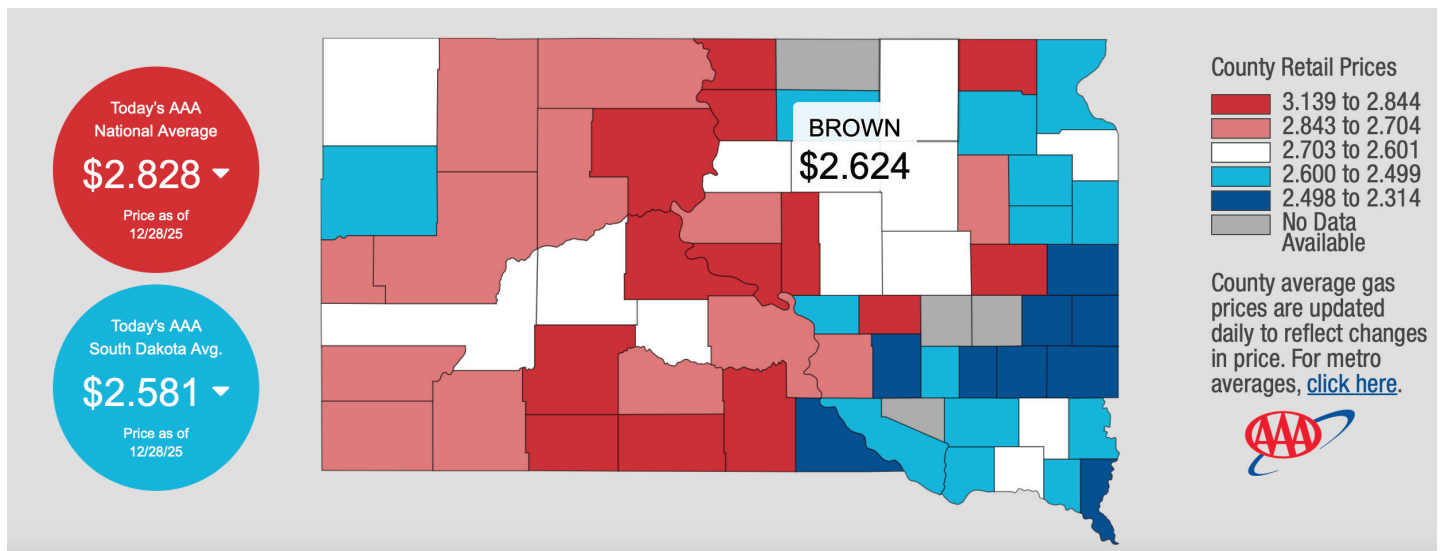
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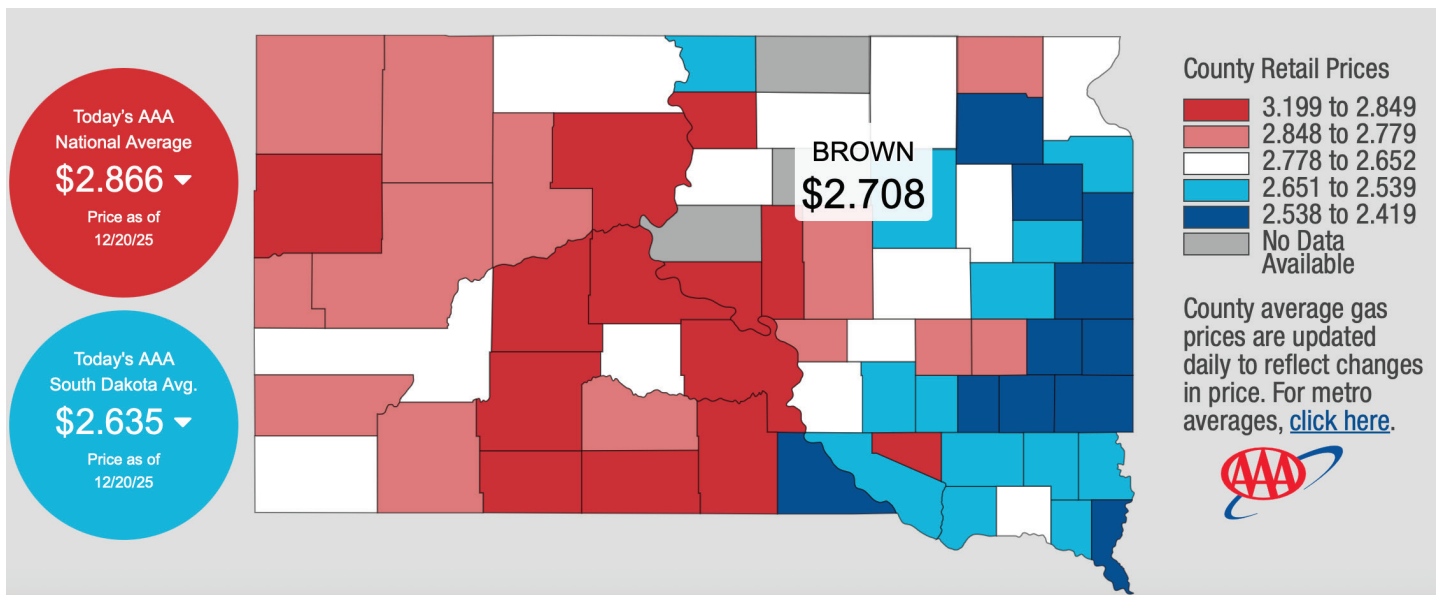
South Dakota Average Gas Prices

| | Regular | Mid-Grade | Premium | Diesel |
|----------------|---------|-----------|---------|---------|
| Current Avg. | \$2.581 | \$2.764 | \$3.275 | \$3.207 |
| Yesterday Avg. | \$2.582 | \$2.788 | \$3.269 | \$3.204 |
| Week Ago Avg. | \$2.625 | \$2.798 | \$3.284 | \$3.342 |
| Month Ago Avg. | \$2.747 | \$2.961 | \$3.407 | \$3.526 |
| Year Ago Avg. | \$2.785 | \$3.000 | \$3.443 | \$3.201 |

This Week



Last Week



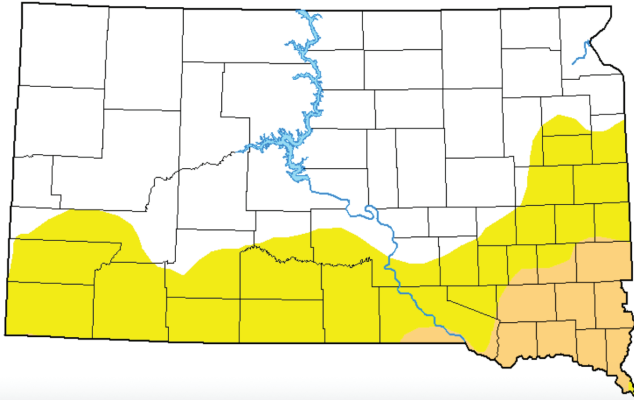
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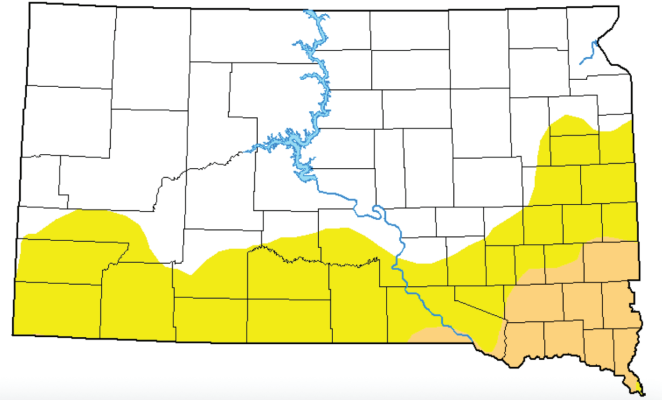
Drought Classification

- None
- D0 (Abnormally Dry)
- D1 (Moderate Drought)
- D2 (Severe Drought)
- D3 (Extreme Drought)
- D4 (Exceptional Drought)
- No Data

Drought Monitor



Dec. 23



Dec. 16

A lack of snow cover, much above-normal temperatures, and periods of strong winds led to an unusual amount of winter degradation across the High Plains region. D2 expanded across western Nebraska, with expansions of both D1 and D0 occurring across central and eastern parts of the state, where precipitation was generally less than 0.2 inch equivalent, and high temperatures soared as high as the 70s. A small area of D1 expanded across southeastern Kansas, and across Colorado, D4 was introduced to Eagle and Pitkin Counties. D0 expanded across the Plains of Wyoming, where warm temperatures, strong winds, and a record lack of snow cover promoted worsening impacts. Drought depictions remained unchanged across the Dakotas, where soils and streams have largely frozen for the winter.

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SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

COMMENTARY

Campaign season brings decisions about news and propaganda

by Dana Hess

I don't have a good track record with political predictions. In 1986, I thought George Mickelson was just a tall lawyer from Brookings. I had no idea he would be South Dakota's next governor.

In 1996, I covered John Thune's stop in Pierre on his tour announcing that he was running for the U.S. House. I remember thinking that it was a waste of time because there was no way he could win the primary against Lt. Gov. Carol Hillard. Obviously I was in for another surprise.

During the evening of the last three presidential Election Days, I went to bed believing that my country could never elect Donald Trump. One out of three is pretty bad for a prognosticator.

Despite that woeful record for political predictions, I have one for June's Republican gubernatorial primary. Here goes (drum roll). The candidate who makes the best use of newspaper advertising will do better than expected.

That means a front-runner like Gov. Larry Rhoden or U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, by using newspaper advertising wisely, could win by a surprising margin. That means the other candidates who have yet to poll as well — Aberdeen businessman Toby Doeden and state Speaker of the House Jon Hansen — with the right newspaper ad campaign, could punch above their weight class, make the race interesting and perhaps lay the groundwork for their next campaign.

Anyone who reads knows that in the last few elections political advertising in newspapers has been little more than an afterthought. Candidates still like to see their name in the paper, but they prefer not to invest in it. They have their minions write glowing letters to the editor, but they would rather spend their money elsewhere. They clog up the airwaves on TV or throw their money into the ether, buying ads on social media.

Honest, this isn't just the ramblings of a cranky retired newspaperman. The benefits of newspaper advertising are real because of the readers.

By virtue of the fact that they have purchased a subscription to their local newspaper, readers prove that they have money. Money is something that every candidate, even the rich ones, needs. I'm surprised that all the candidates aren't running small ads already, asking for money or at least steering readers to their websites where they can gather contact information and then really put the bite on them for donations.

Much more important than their wallets is the fact that newspaper readers are voters. Many studies have shown that people who subscribe to their local newspaper take an interest in their community, their state and their nation. Using Susquehanna Polling and Research Inc., the National Newspaper Association Foundation found that 96% of newspaper readers are voters.

Closer to home, research from the South Dakota NewsMedia Association shows that 83% of adults in the state read newspapers online or in print. Of those readers, 85% vote in state, national and local elections. A candidate looking for success in the next election should consider investing in advertising where the voters are, in newspapers.

Candidates often tell us how smart they are, how much they love innovation, how they know how to govern. Well, watch your local newspaper to see which one of them knows how to get elected by spending some of that hard-earned campaign cash where voters are likely to congregate.

Just as candidates are forced to make some decisions in an election year, so are newspaper editors. Some have innovated in recent years. As they saw political advertising dry up, they decided not to be used

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by political campaigns. Some had the foresight and guts to start charging for letters to the editor that include the endorsement of a candidate. That's a smart decision. Those letters on the opinion page are nothing more than free political advertising, often cranked out by the very campaigns that have forsaken newspaper advertising.

Another decision facing newspaper editors is what to do with Rhoden's weekly column. Now that he's a declared candidate for governor, it's unfair to his competitors that he should get free space in the newspaper every week.

There may be some editors who argue that a column from the governor of the state is newsworthy. If that's the case, it's likely those editors have been too lazy to read what they're putting in their newspapers.

Since declaring his candidacy, the topics of Rhoden's columns have included how thankful he is to be the governor; how hard he's working on the next budget — with a bit of his legislative background thrown in; and how his budget supports student success. That last one is a bit of a stretch given that the budget he worked so hard on didn't include a funding increase for education.

The governor's column isn't news; it's a way for him to polish his resume in public. Editors should consider putting the column on hiatus until Rhoden is no longer a candidate for office.

Election years are always interesting and this one is shaping up to hold voters' attention, at least through the primary. Up until then, watch your newspaper to see which of the GOP candidates for governor has the smarts to advertise directly to voters and which editors are actually reading what they put in their newspaper.

Dana Hess spent more than 25 years in South Dakota journalism, editing newspapers in Redfield, Milbank and Pierre. He's retired and lives in Brookings, working occasionally as a freelance writer.

Deportations, tariffs, court clashes, record shutdown mark a historic year in Washington, D.C.

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — This year produced a seemingly endless array of history-making events and nearly constant change to immigration policy, tariffs, the Education Department and federal health care programs.

President Donald Trump came back into office emboldened by a decisive 2024 election victory and empowered by Republican majorities in both chambers of Congress. The unified GOP government enacted a major tax cuts and domestic spending law in July, but hit a roadblock in late September when the federal government shut down for a record-breaking six weeks.

Here's a look back at some of the biggest news stories from Washington, D.C.

January

The U.S. House began the year reelecting Louisiana Republican Mike Johnson as speaker and pushing through a series of GOP-favored bills focused on immigration and transgender student athletes.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., officially took over the role from Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., pledging to protect the legislative filibuster, the 60-vote procedural hurdle that requires at least some bipartisanship for major legislation to advance. Meanwhile, several committees began the confirmation process for Trump's nominees.

Just days ahead of his second inauguration, a judge sentenced Trump in the New York hush money case for paying off an adult film star in the leadup to the 2016 election.

Trump, who moved his inauguration indoors amid arctic weather, marked the first day of his second term by signing a series of executive orders addressing immigration and birthright citizenship, as well as climate change and LGBTQ rights. He also pardoned 1,500 people who were convicted of various crimes related to the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

Just before the end of the month, Trump signed the first bill approved by the Republican-controlled Congress, the Laken Riley Act. And he announced plans to implement tariffs on Canada, Mexico and China,

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the start of one of his signature economic policies.

February

Lawsuits against Trump's actions began piling up within weeks as Democratic attorneys general, immigrant rights organizations and civil liberties groups accused the administration of overstepping its authority.

Trump and other administration officials sought to reduce the size and scope of the federal government by firing thousands of probationary workers and called on the heads of all federal agencies to submit reorganization plans by mid-March. He also fired 20 immigration judges.

Republicans in Congress started working through the several complicated steps of the budget reconciliation process that would eventually lead to the "big, beautiful bill."

March

Trump's efforts to dismantle the Department of Education began advancing shortly after the Senate voted to confirm Linda McMahon as secretary. In one of her first acts leading the department, she wrote in a memo its "final mission" would be to "to send education back to the states and empower all parents to choose an excellent education for their children."

Trump signed an executive order later in the month directing McMahon to "take all necessary steps to facilitate the closure" of the Education Department, though much of that authority rests with Congress.

Supreme Court Chief Justice John G. Roberts issued a rare public statement defending the judicial branch against criticism from Trump.

The Republican chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee asked the Defense Department inspector general to look into the use of the Signal messaging app by high-ranking officials to discuss an imminent bombing in Yemen. A journalist at The Atlantic was inadvertently added to the chat and later published a series of articles about the experience.

April

The Trump administration admitted in court filings that officials mistakenly deported Kilmar Abrego Garcia of Maryland to a notorious mega-prison in El Salvador.

The Supreme Court became more involved in the national debate about Trump's policies toward immigrants, first ruling that the administration didn't need to bring Abrego Garcia back before reversing course and ruling officials must "facilitate" his return to the United States.

El Salvador President Nayib Bukele, sitting alongside Trump in the Oval Office, later said he wouldn't send Abrego Garcia back.

Separately, Trump's tariff policies were the focus of a Senate hearing. Republicans in Congress settled on an outline for their "big, beautiful bill" and later began advancing different parts of that package out of House committees.

Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said he would refocus autism research funding on environmental factors. And Trump signed a series of executive orders addressing education policy.

May

The Supreme Court ruled that a ban on transgender people serving in the military could remain in place while the case continued at a lower level, that the Trump administration violated due process rights when it tried to deport some Venezuelans under the Alien Enemies Act of 1798, that the administration could end temporary protected status for 350,000 Venezuelans, and that the Trump administration could proceed with deportations for 500,000 people from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela who had been granted temporary protected status.

Republicans in the House voted to approve a 1,116-page package that combined 11 bills into what would eventually become the "big, beautiful bill," sending the measure to the Senate.

Former President Joe Biden was diagnosed with "a more aggressive form" of prostate cancer.

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June

Trump doubled tariffs on steel and aluminum, from 25% to 50%, saying during a trip to a U.S. Steel plant in Pennsylvania that he would increase them even further if he thought it would be necessary to "secure the steel industry in the United States." The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office reported later in the month that his tariff policies would reduce the country's deficit but likely slow the economy.

Immigration continued to be a central part of the news cycle with Abrego Garcia returning to the U.S., California Democratic Sen. Alex Padilla being forcibly removed and handcuffed while attempting to ask Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem a question during a press conference in Los Angeles and the Supreme Court weighing in on lower courts issuing nationwide injunctions.

Trump said the U.S. military had bombed "three key nuclear facilities" in Iran before calling for peace.

July

The Senate approved the final, much reworked version of the "big, beautiful bill," sending it back to the House, which voted along party lines to clear the sweeping tax and health care package for Trump, who signed it on the Fourth of July.

The legislation included several policy goals for the GOP, including on Medicaid, immigration and deportations and a national private school voucher program. The Congressional Budget Office expects the law will increase the federal deficit by \$3.394 trillion during the next decade and lead 10 million people to lose access to health insurance.

The Supreme Court ruled the Trump administration could continue with its plans for mass layoffs and downsizing at the Education Department.

Trump was diagnosed with chronic venous insufficiency, a "benign and common" condition for people over the age of 70, according to U.S. Navy Capt. Sean Barbabella, the president's physician.

Senators from both parties expressed frustration that Department of Agriculture officials didn't consult with Congress before proposing to move thousands of jobs out of the Washington, D.C., area.

Trump announced a deal with European Union leaders that would result in a 15% tariff on most goods coming into the U.S. from those 27 countries.

August

President Donald Trump holds up a chart while speaking during a "Make America Wealthy Again" trade announcement event in the Rose Garden at the White House on April 2, 2025 in Washington, D.C. (Photo by Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images).jpeg

President Donald Trump holds up a chart while speaking during an event announcing broad global tariffs in the Rose Garden of the White House on April 2, 2025. (Photo by Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)

Trump started off the month instituting a 15% tariff on goods brought into the U.S. from about three dozen countries, though he raised that amount for several nations, including 18% on products from Nicaragua, 30% on imports from South Africa and 50% on goods from Brazil.

A New York State appeals court ruled the \$465 million civil penalty against Trump in the case where he was found liable for financial fraud for inflating the worth of some of his real estate holdings was excessive.

Republican and Democratic state legislatures, urged on by the president and members of Congress, sought to begin the November 2026 midterm elections early by redrawing maps for U.S. House seats to give their party a baked-in advantage.

Federal Reserve governor Lisa Cook sued Trump after he attempted to fire her, arguing in court documents his actions were an "unprecedented and illegal attempt" that would erode the board's independence.

September

A federal appeals court ruled that Trump did need to pay an \$83 million penalty for defaming writer E. Jean Carroll.

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The Supreme Court ruled that federal immigration agents could racially profile Latinos in Southern California as a lawsuit over the issue continued through the federal courts.

Former Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Susan Monarez testified before a Senate committee that she was fired from that role after less than a month because she refused to pre-approve vaccine recommendations.

Trump and several other high-ranking Republicans spoke at the memorial service for conservative political activist Charlie Kirk, who was assassinated during an event at Utah Valley University.

Kirk's death was one of several instances of political violence this year that also included the killing of Minnesota House Speaker Melissa Hortman and her husband, the arson at the official home of Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro and the shooting at the CDC's headquarters in Atlanta.

A group of U.S. investors reached an agreement to take over TikTok, the immensely popular social media app, avoiding the need for it to go offline in the United States.

October

Congress failed to approve the dozen full-year government funding bills before the start of the new fiscal year, leaving an opening for a government shutdown. Democrats tried to bring attention to health care costs and other issues throughout the weeks-long debacle.

The funding stalemate impacted nearly every corner of the federal government, including pay for federal employees like air traffic controllers, food aid for lower-income families, Head Start and public lands.

The No Kings day protests highlighted some Americans' discontent with Trump and Republican policies a little more than a year before the 2026 midterm elections will measure that frustration at the ballot box.

Trump demolished the East Wing of the White House to make way for construction of a ballroom that will be nearly double the size of the 55,000-square-foot residence and workplace.

November

The shutdown stalemate ended after Senate Majority Leader Thune promised Democrats a vote on a health care bill of their choosing before the end of the year.

The funding bill approved by Congress and signed by Trump included three full-year funding bills but a stopgap for the rest of government, setting up the possibility of a partial government shutdown beginning in February if lawmakers don't broker a deal before then.

The final days of the shutdown included a tug-of-war between the judicial branch and the Trump administration over whether they needed to pay full benefits for the 42 million people enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP.

The Supreme Court heard oral arguments in the case that will determine whether Trump overstepped when he instituted tariffs using the International Emergency Economic Powers Act.

Separately, the justices allowed the Trump administration to continue issuing male or female passports based on a person's assigned sex at birth.

Congress approved a bill forcing the Trump administration to release the Epstein files.

A gunman opened fire on two National Guard members from West Virginia who were just blocks from the White House. U.S. Army Spc. Sarah Beckstrom, 20, died the next day as a result of her injuries.

December

The man charged with shooting the two National Guard members pleaded not guilty during an arraignment hearing and was denied bond in the case, which was later moved to federal court as prosecutors contemplated whether to seek the death penalty.

The Trump administration moved to limit legal immigration and pressed for mass deportations, raising concerns about the shooter, an Afghan national who worked alongside allied troops and was granted asylum in the United States.

Separately, the FBI charged a 30-year-old Virginia man with placing pipe bombs outside the Democratic

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National Committee and the Republican National Committee offices ahead of the 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol.

A federal judge ordered immigration officials to release Abrego Garcia.

The House and Senate were unable to come up with a bipartisan agreement to avoid a spike in health insurance premiums for the 22 million Americans enrolled in the Affordable Care Act marketplace who have benefited from an enhanced tax credit created during the coronavirus pandemic to make coverage less expensive. But a discharge petition in the House will force a floor vote early in the new year to extend the subsidies for three more years.

The Department of Justice released tens of thousands of documents linked to the investigation into deceased sex offender Jeffrey Epstein before announcing officials had received a million more pages that will be published in the coming weeks.

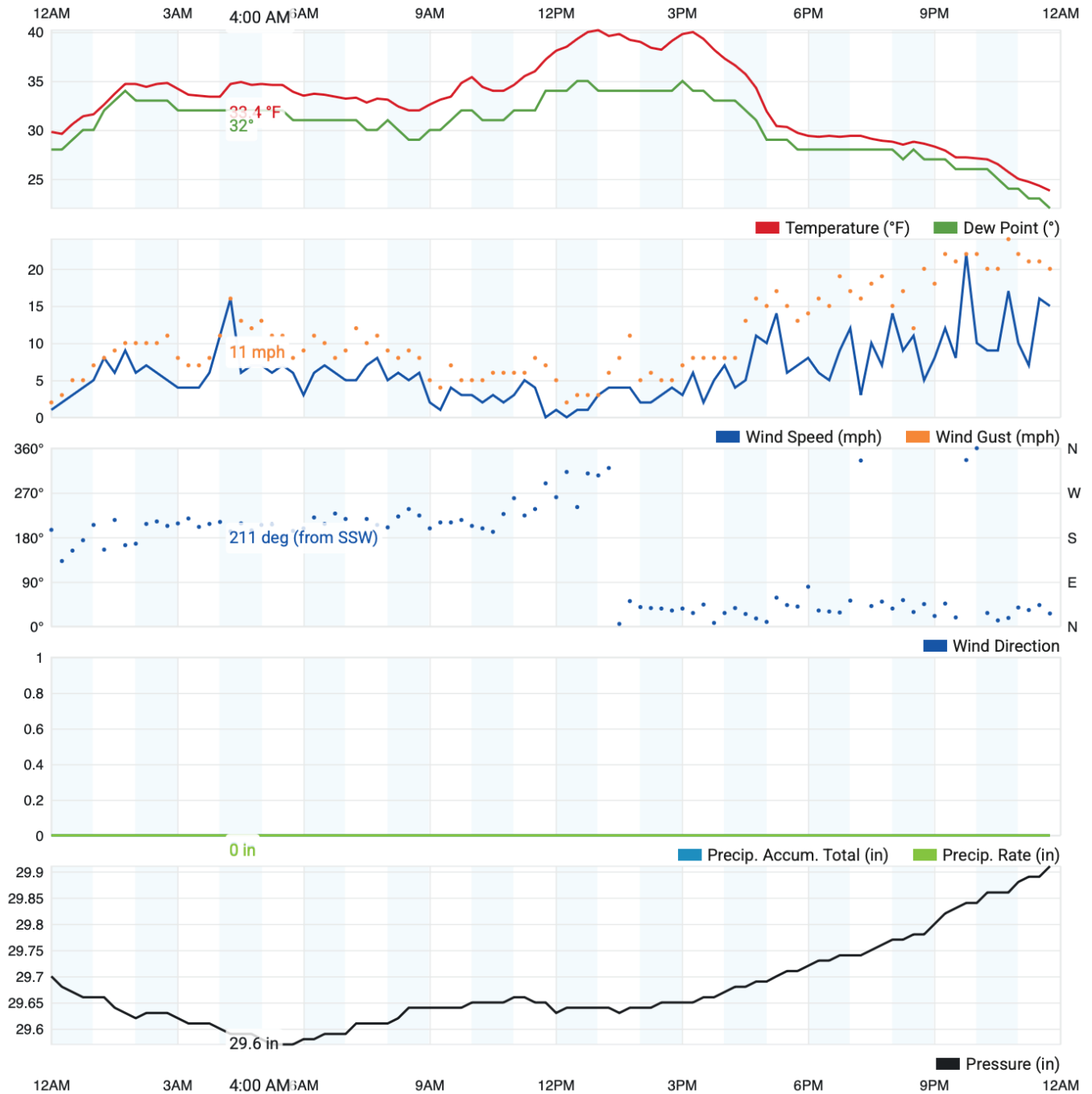
Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

December 27, 2025



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Wind Advisory

advisory

Sunday

Sunday Night

Monday

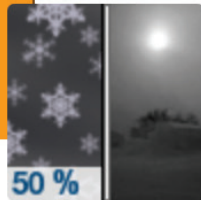
Monday Night

Tuesday



High: 13 °F ↓

Snow and Blowing Snow



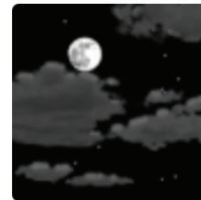
Low: -1 °F

Chance Snow and Areas Blowing Snow



High: 13 °F

Sunny



Low: 7 °F

Partly Cloudy



High: 34 °F

Partly Sunny



Light Snow Today

Trace to two inches

December 28, 2025
5:16 AM

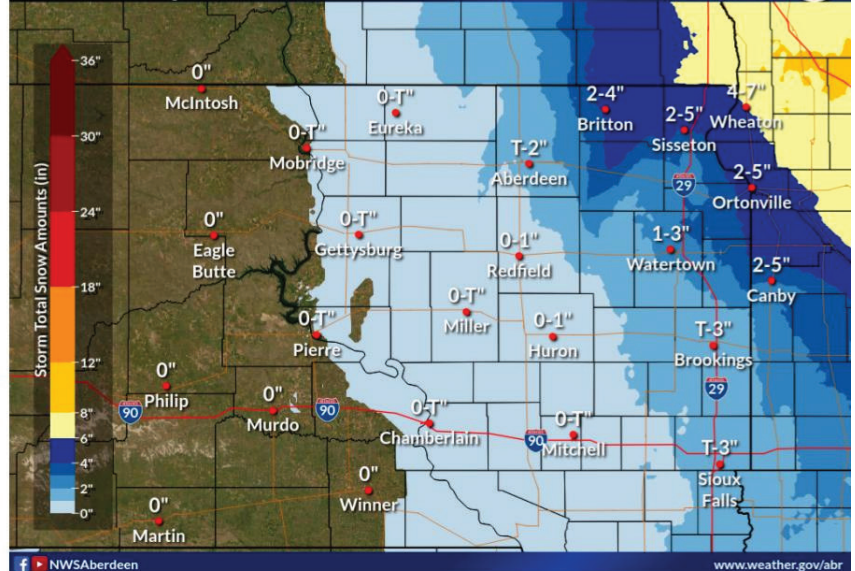
Key Messages

- **Snow will continue moving** through central and northeastern SD and west central MN this morning
 - Snow will wrap back around the initial line into northeastern SD this afternoon
- Snow accumulations 2 to 7 inches east of the James River, highest over Marshall, Traverse, and west central MN
 - Trace to 2 inches possible between the Missouri and James Rivers
- Falling snow and gusty winds over northeastern SD into west central MN **will lead to blowing snow, reducing visibility at times.**

Expected Snowfall - Official NWS Forecast

Valid Sun 6:00AM through Wed 6:00AM CST

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD
Issued Dec 28, 2025 4:16 AM CST



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Snow will continue moving through central and northeastern SD and west central MN this morning, with some more snow wrapping back around into northeastern SD and west central MN this afternoon after the initial line of snow moves through. Snow accumulations of 2 to 7 inches are possible east of the James River, with the highest amounts over Marshall, northern Roberts, and west central MN counties. This snow and the gusty winds will lead to blowing snow, which will reduce visibilities at times.

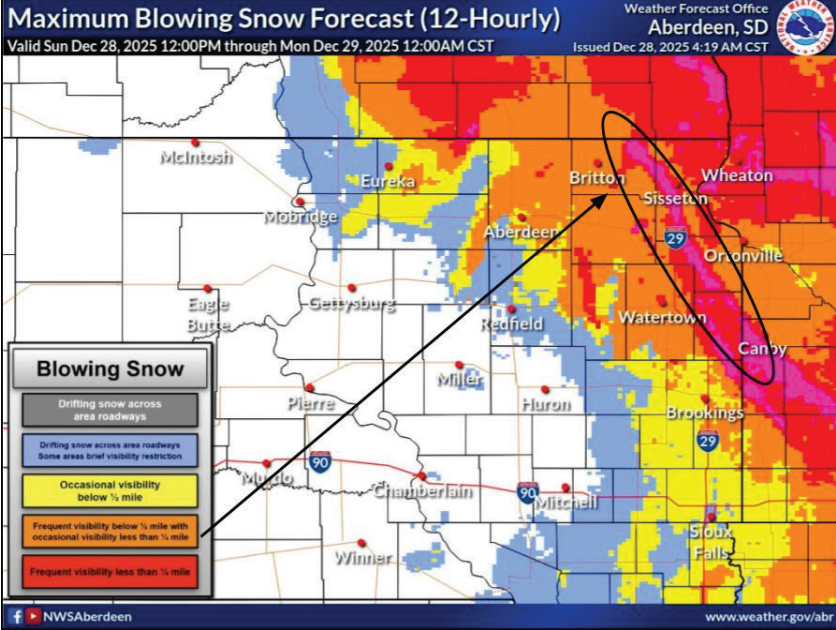
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Blowing Snow Potential/Gusty Winds

December 28, 2025
5:16 AM



- Northwest winds will gust 40 to 55 mph through this evening. Wind Advisories in effect.
- Expect **Blowing and drifting snow** with visibilities down to around a 1/2 mile at times east of the James River through tonight. **Blizzard conditions expected over portions of west central MN.**
- Areas along the eastern slopes of the Prairie Coteau may also briefly experience blizzard-like conditions during the mid afternoon and evening hours, with visibilities briefly below 1/4 mile at times (black oval in the above image).

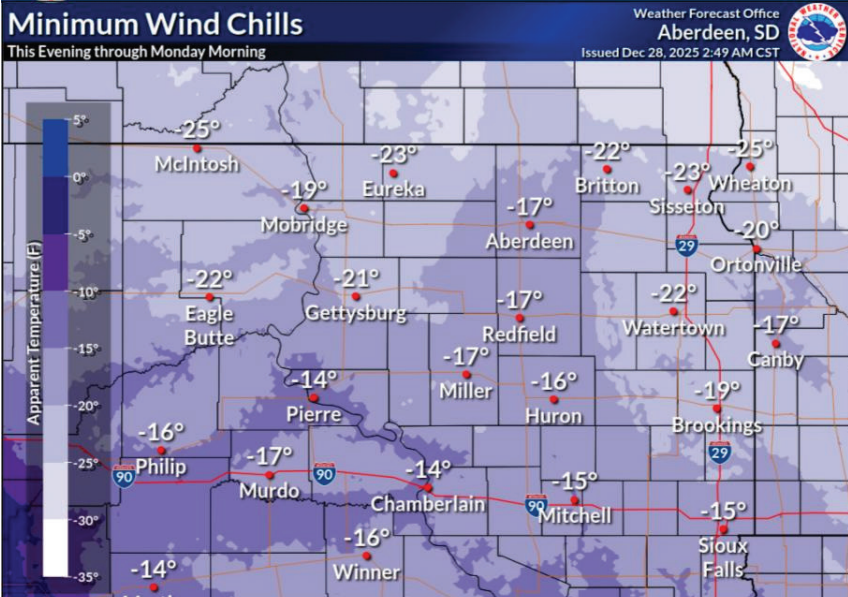


National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD



Much Colder through Monday

December 28, 2025
5:16 AM



- Temperatures will continue to fall through the day with the coldest temps and wind chills tonight through Monday morning.
 - Minimum wind chills in the **teens to 20s below zero**, with temperatures in the **single digits above and below 0**

Minimum Wind Chill Forecast (°F)

| | 12/28 Sun | | | 12/29 Mon | | | | |
|--------------------|-----------|------|-----|-----------|-----|------|-----|------|
| | 6am | 12pm | 6pm | 12am | 6am | 12pm | 6pm | 12am |
| Aberdeen | -14 | -16 | -17 | -17 | -15 | -6 | -1 | 0 |
| Britton | -13 | -18 | -21 | -22 | -22 | -11 | -7 | -6 |
| Chamberlain | -10 | -10 | -12 | -11 | -13 | 0 | 5 | 5 |
| Clark | -17 | -19 | -20 | -21 | -20 | -12 | -2 | -1 |
| Eagle Butte | -23 | -22 | -21 | -20 | -17 | 1 | 7 | 7 |
| Eureka | -23 | -23 | -23 | -23 | -22 | -10 | -3 | -1 |
| Gettysburg | -21 | -21 | -21 | -20 | -18 | -4 | 1 | 2 |
| McIntosh | -27 | -25 | -22 | -21 | -17 | 0 | 6 | 6 |
| Milbank | -11 | -16 | -20 | -21 | -21 | -12 | -2 | -1 |
| Miller | -15 | -17 | -17 | -17 | -15 | -1 | 4 | 6 |
| Mobridge | -20 | -19 | -18 | -17 | -15 | 2 | 4 | 4 |
| Murdo | -18 | -15 | -17 | -17 | -14 | 4 | 7 | 7 |
| Pierre | -14 | -12 | -12 | -12 | -10 | 5 | 10 | 10 |
| Redfield | -15 | -16 | -17 | -16 | -17 | -5 | 1 | 1 |
| Sisseton | -13 | -16 | -21 | -22 | -23 | -12 | -3 | -2 |
| Watertown | -13 | -17 | -20 | -21 | -21 | -11 | -3 | -2 |
| Webster | -15 | -18 | -20 | -21 | -22 | -14 | -3 | -2 |
| Wheaton | -14 | -16 | -22 | -25 | -25 | -18 | -6 | -5 |

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 41 °F at 12:56 PM

Low Temp: 24 °F at 11:29 PM

Wind: 24 mph at 11:02 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 57 in 1898

Record Low: -24 in 1924

Average High: 25

Average Low: 4

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.54

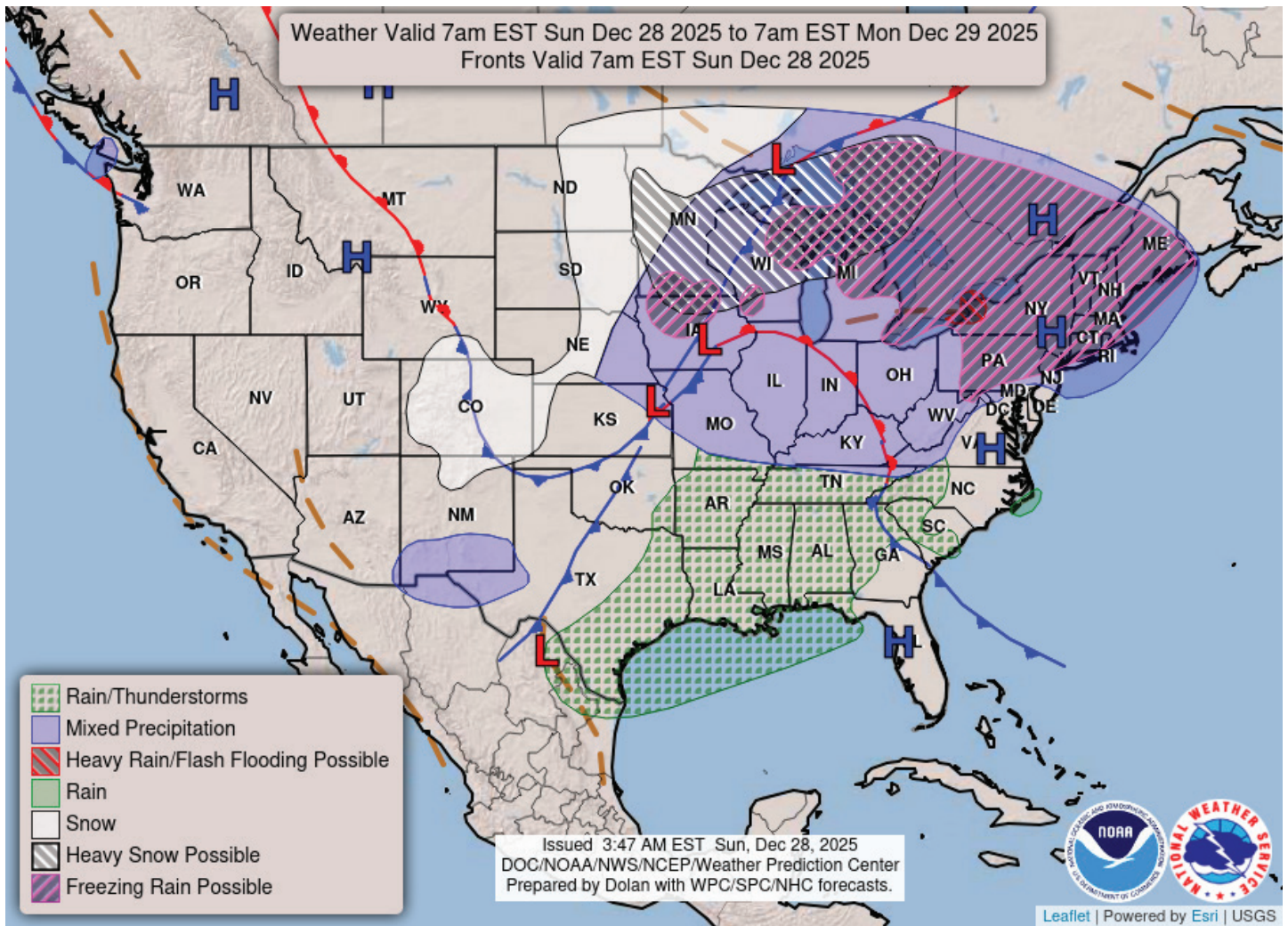
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.67

Average Precip to date: 21.75

Precip Year to Date: 25.48

Sunset Tonight: 4:56 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:12 am



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Today in Weather History

December 28, 2000: Northwest winds of 35 to 50 mph, gusting to around 65 mph, occurred across central and north central South Dakota in the morning. The high winds resulted in blizzard conditions at some locations just east of the Missouri River. Further east, in northeast South Dakota, northwest winds of 30 to 50 mph combined with newly fallen snow to generate blizzard conditions from the morning into the early afternoon hours. Travel was terrible in many places, and many motorists found themselves in ditches. There were also several non-injury accidents.

1839 — The third storm in two weeks hit the northeastern U.S. It brought two more feet of snow to Hartford, CT, and Worcester, MA. Whole gales swept the coast causing many wrecks. (David Ludlum)

1879: Tay Bridge is the main-line railway across the Tay River in Scotland, between the city of Dundee and the suburb of Wormit in Fife. During the evening hours of December 28, 1879, winds were said to blow at right angles to the bridge. Witnesses said the storm was as severe as they had seen in 20 to 30 years. The winds at Glasgow and Aberdeen were measured at 71 mph. Winds were estimated to be 80 mph in Dundee. A passenger train departed at 7:13 pm was said to disappear three minutes later. The train was found at the bottom of the river, along with the high rafters and much of the ironwork of their supporting piers. There were no survivors. The Court of Inquiry report concluded that "The fall of the bridge was occasioned by the insufficiency of the cross bracing and its fastenings to sustain the force of the gale."

1897 — The temperature at Dayville, OR, hit 81 degrees to establish a state record for December. (The Weather Channel)

1924 — Iowa experienced its coldest December morning of record. Morning lows averaged 25 degrees below zero for the 104 weather stations across the state.

1955 — Anchorage, AK, was buried under 17.7 inches of snow in 24 hours, a record for that location. (28th-29th) (The Weather Channel)

1958 — Albuquerque, NM, received 14.2 inches of snow to establish a 24 hour record. (28th-29th) (The Weather Channel)

1987 — A winter storm produced heavy snow in the Upper Mississippi Valley and the Upper Great Lakes Region. Up to twenty inches of snow buried southern Minnesota, and 20 to 40 mph northwesterly winds produced snow drifts six feet high, and reduced visibilities to near zero at times in blowing snow. There were a thousand traffic accidents in Michigan during the storm, resulting in thirty-five injuries. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — Strong winds behind a cold front claimed three lives in eastern Pennsylvania, and injured a dozen others in eastern Pennsylvania, southern New Jersey and Maryland. Winds gusted to 87 mph at Hammonton NJ and in the Washington D.C. area. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — Squalls continued to bring snow to the Great Lakes Region, with heavy snow reported near Lake Superior and Lake Ontario. Syracuse NY received 8.5 inches of snow to push the total for the month past their previous December record of 57 inches. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2003 — A severe snow storm hit northern California and southern Oregon. As much as 2 feet of snow fell along Interstate 5 closing a 150-mile stretch of the interstate, stranding hundreds of travelers. Winds from the storm caused power outages to more than 200,000 customers in California and Oregon. One man died of a heart attack after helping other drivers. (CNN)

2004 — Los Angeles (downtown) broke a daily rainfall record for the month of December (5.55 inches). This was the third wettest calendar day in Los Angeles since records began in 1877.

2005 — An outbreak of severe thunderstorms across portions of the southeast United States on the 28th produced hail, high winds and a few tornadoes. The states of Georgia and Tennessee were the most affected. (NCDC)



Daily Devotion

Eternally Secure

Mistakes don't jeopardize our salvation because Christ, not our works, made us right with God.

Colossians 2:13-14 : 13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,

14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

Have you ever questioned your eternal security? Examining what happened when you trusted Jesus as Savior will bring reassurance of how secure you are in Him.

Prior to salvation, we all had a spiritual problem. We were born with a nature inclined to sin. Because of this, we were spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1). No amount of good works or repentance could have changed our condition. Our problem required a divine solution. Knowing this, God the Father provided what we needed through His Son Jesus (Hebrews 9:11-14).

The day we trusted in Christ, we were delivered from death into life (John 5:24). We received a new nature—one that wants to please God—and were adopted into His family (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 1:5). His gift of salvation made us spiritually alive and gave us a blessed eternal future with God in heaven. Our new status as God's children is permanent because it is based on what Jesus has done.

While our behavior may not always reflect our new nature, the mistakes we make don't jeopardize our salvation. Remember, it's not our actions but Christ's work on the cross that changed everything. And nothing can undo a spiritual rebirth that came about through faith in Him (John 6:37).

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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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition Subscription Form

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Groton Independent

P.O. Box 34

Groton, SD 57445-0034

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paypal.me/paperpaul

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.26.25

9 19 31 63 64 7

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$138,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.27.25

8 10 20 47 50 4

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$10,800,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.27.25

8 12 24 26 42 17

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 14 Mins 46 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.27.25

8 14 15 20 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$156,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.27.25

13 22 33 61 62 20

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.27.25

5 20 34 39 62 1

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$33,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Gayville-Volin High School 66, Canistota 14
Capital City Classic at United Tribes=
McLaughlin 68, Parshall, N.D. 58

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

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Gayville-Volin High School 53, Canistota 28
Capital City Shootout at United Tribes=
Parshall, N.D. 71, McLaughlin 38

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

Brigitte Bardot, 1960s sultry sex symbol turned militant animal rights activist dies at 91

By THOMAS ADAMSON and ELAINE GANLEY Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Brigitte Bardot, the French 1960s sex symbol who became one of the greatest screen sirens of the 20th century and later a militant animal rights activist and far-right supporter, has died. She was 91.

Bardot died Sunday at her home in southern France, according to Bruno Jacquelin, of the Brigitte Bardot Foundation for the protection of animals. Speaking to The Associated Press, he gave no cause of death, and said no arrangements have yet been made for funeral or memorial services. She had been hospitalized last month.

Bardot became an international celebrity as a sexualized teen bride in the 1956 movie "And God Created Woman." Directed by her then-husband, Roger Vadim, it triggered a scandal with scenes of the long-legged beauty dancing on tables naked.

At the height of a cinema career that spanned some 28 films and three marriages, Bardot came to symbolize a nation bursting out of bourgeois respectability. Her tousled, blond hair, voluptuous figure and pouty irreverence made her one of France's best-known stars.

Such was her widespread appeal that in 1969 her features were chosen to be the model for "Marianne," the national emblem of France and the official Gallic seal. Bardot's face appeared on statues, postage stamps and even on coins.

"We are mourning a legend," French President Emmanuel Macron wrote Sunday on X.

Bardot's second career as an animal rights activist was equally sensational. She traveled to the Arctic to blow the whistle on the slaughter of baby seals; she condemned the use of animals in laboratory experiments; and she opposed Muslim slaughter rituals.

"Man is an insatiable predator," Bardot told The Associated Press on her 73rd birthday, in 2007. "I don't care about my past glory. That means nothing in the face of an animal that suffers, since it has no power, no words to defend itself."

Her activism earned her compatriots' respect and, in 1985, she was awarded the Legion of Honor, the nation's highest recognition.

A turn to the far right

Later, however, she fell from public grace as her animal protection diatribes took on a decidedly extremist tone. She frequently decried the influx of immigrants into France, especially Muslims.

She was convicted and fined five times in French courts of inciting racial hatred, in incidents inspired by

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her opposition to the Muslim practice of slaughtering sheep during annual religious holidays.

Bardot's 1992 marriage to fourth husband Bernard d'Ormale, a onetime adviser to National Front leader Jean-Marie Le Pen, contributed to her political shift. She described Le Pen, an outspoken nationalist with multiple racism convictions of his own, as a "lovely, intelligent man."

In 2012, she wrote a letter in support of the presidential bid of Marine Le Pen, who now leads her father's renamed National Rally party. Le Pen paid homage Sunday to an "exceptional woman" who was "incredibly French."

In 2018, at the height of the #MeToo movement, Bardot said in an interview that most actors protesting sexual harassment in the film industry were "hypocritical" and "ridiculous" because many played "the teases" with producers to land parts.

She said she had never had been a victim of sexual harassment and found it "charming to be told that I was beautiful or that I had a nice little ass."

A privileged, but 'difficult' upbringing

Brigitte Anne-Marie Bardot was born Sept. 28, 1934, to a wealthy industrialist. A shy, secretive child, she studied classical ballet and was discovered by a family friend who put her on the cover of Elle magazine at age 14.

Bardot once described her childhood as "difficult" and said her father was a strict disciplinarian who would sometimes punish her with a horse whip.

But it was French movie producer Vadim, whom she married in 1952, who saw her potential and wrote "And God Created Woman" to showcase her provocative sensuality, an explosive cocktail of childlike innocence and raw sexuality.

The film, which portrayed Bardot as a bored newlywed who beds her brother-in-law, had a decisive influence on New Wave directors Jean-Luc Godard and Francois Truffaut, and came to embody the hedonism and sexual freedom of the 1960s.

The film was a box-office hit, and it made Bardot a superstar. Her girlish pout, tiny waist and generous bust were often more appreciated than her talent.

"It's an embarrassment to have acted so badly," Bardot said of her early films. "I suffered a lot in the beginning. I was really treated like someone less than nothing."

Bardot's unabashed, off-screen love affair with co-star Jean-Louis Trintignant further shocked the nation. It eradicated the boundaries between her public and private life and turned her into a hot prize for paparazzi.

Bardot never adjusted to the limelight. She blamed the constant press attention for the suicide attempt that followed 10 months after the birth of her only child, Nicolas. Photographers had broken into her house two weeks before she gave birth to snap a picture of her pregnant.

Nicolas' father was Jacques Charrier, a French actor whom she married in 1959 but who never felt comfortable in his role as Monsieur Bardot. Bardot soon gave up her son to his father, and later said she had been chronically depressed and unready for the duties of being a mother.

"I was looking for roots then," she said in an interview. "I had none to offer."

In her 1996 autobiography "Initiales B.B.," she likened her pregnancy to "a tumor growing inside me," and described Charrier as "temperamental and abusive."

Bardot married her third husband, West German millionaire playboy Gunther Sachs, in 1966, but the relationship again ended in divorce three years later.

Among her films were "A Parisian" (1957); "In Case of Misfortune," in which she starred in 1958 with screen legend Jean Gabin; "The Truth" (1960); "Private Life" (1962); "A Ravishing Idiot" (1964); "Shalako" (1968); "Women" (1969); "The Bear And The Doll" (1970); "Rum Boulevard" (1971); and "Don Juan" (1973).

With the exception of 1963's critically acclaimed "Contempt," directed by Godard, Bardot's films were rarely complicated by plots. Often they were vehicles to display Bardot in scanty dresses or frolicking nude in the sun.

"It was never a great passion of mine," she said of filmmaking. "And it can be deadly sometimes. Marilyn (Monroe) perished because of it."

Bardot retired to her Riviera villa in St. Tropez at the age of 39 in 1973 after "The Woman Grabber."

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Reinventing herself in middle age

She emerged a decade later with a new persona: An animal rights lobbyist, her face was wrinkled and her voice was deep following years of heavy smoking. She abandoned her jet-set life and sold off movie memorabilia and jewelry to create a foundation devoted exclusively to the prevention of animal cruelty.

Her activism knew no borders. She urged South Korea to ban the sale of dog meat and once wrote to U.S. President Bill Clinton asking why the U.S. Navy recaptured two dolphins it had released into the wild.

She attacked centuries-old French and Italian sporting traditions including the Palio, a free-for-all horse race, and campaigned on behalf of wolves, rabbits, kittens and turtle doves.

"It's true that sometimes I get carried away, but when I see how slowly things move forward ... my distress takes over," Bardot told the AP when asked about her racial hatred convictions and opposition to Muslim ritual slaughter,

In 1997, several towns removed Bardot-inspired statues of Marianne after the actress voiced anti-immigrant sentiment. Also that year, she received death threats after calling for a ban on the sale of horse meat.

Bardot once said that she identified with the animals that she was trying to save.

"I can understand hunted animals because of the way I was treated," Bardot said. "What happened to me was inhuman. I was constantly surrounded by the world press."

Polls open for Myanmar's first election since military seized power

By TIAN MACLEOD JI and GRANT PECK Associated Press

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Voters went to the polls Sunday for the initial phase of Myanmar's first general election in five years, held under the supervision of its military government while a civil war rages throughout much of the country.

Final results will not be known until after two more rounds of voting are completed later in January. It is widely expected that Min Aung Hlaing, the general who has ruled the country with an iron hand since an army takeover in 2021, will then assume the presidency.

The military government has presented the vote as a return to electoral democracy, but its bid for legitimacy is marred by bans on formerly popular opposition parties and reports that soldiers have used threats to force voters to participate.

While more than 4,800 candidates from 57 parties are competing for seats in national and regional legislatures, only six are competing nationwide with the possibility to gain political clout in Parliament. The well-organized and funded Union Solidarity and Development Party, with its support from the military, is by far the strongest contender.

Voting is taking place in three phases, with Sunday's first round being held in 102 of Myanmar's 330 townships. The second phase will take place Jan. 11, and the third on Jan. 25. Final results are expected to be announced by February.

Critics call the election a sham to keep the army in power

Critics charge that the election is designed to add a facade of legitimacy to military rule that began when the military ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021. It blocked her National League for Democracy party from serving a second term despite winning a landslide victory in the 2020 election.

They argue that the results will lack legitimacy due to the exclusion of major parties and limits on freedom of speech and an atmosphere of repression.

The expected victory of the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party makes the nominal transition to civilian rule a chimera, say opponents of military rule and independent analysts.

"An election organized by a junta that continues to bomb civilians, jail political leaders, and criminalize all forms of dissent is not an election — it is a theater of the absurd performed at gunpoint," Tom Andrews, the U.N.-appointed human rights expert for Myanmar, posted on X.

However, holding the election may provide an excuse for neighbors like China, India and Thailand to continue their support, claiming the election promotes stability. Western nations have maintained sanc-

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tions against Myanmar's ruling generals due to their anti-democratic actions and the brutal war against their opponents.

Voters on Saturday expressed mixed feelings.

Khin Marlar, 51, who voted at a polling station in Yangon's Kyauktada township, said she felt she needed to vote because she hoped that peace would follow afterward. She explained that she had fled her village in the town of Thaingta in the central Mandalay region due to the fighting.

"I am voting with the feeling that I will go back to my village when it is peaceful," she told The Associated Press.

Some voters feel pressured by the army

A resident of southern Mon state, who asked to be identified only by her first name, Khin, for fear of arrest by the military, told The Associated Press she felt compelled to go to a polling station because of pressure from local authorities.

"I have to go and vote even though I don't want to, because soldiers showed up with guns to our village to pressure us yesterday," Khin said. There were reports ahead of the voting from independent media and rights groups that officials and the military used such threats to compel people to vote.

Suu Kyi, Myanmar's 80-year-old former leader, and her party are not participating in the polls. She is serving a 27-year prison term on charges widely viewed as spurious and politically motivated. Her party, the National League for Democracy, was dissolved in 2023 after refusing to register under new military rules.

Other parties also refused to register or declined to run under conditions they deem unfair, and opposition groups have called for a voter boycott.

Amael Vier, an analyst for the Asian Network for Free Elections, noted a lack of genuine choice, pointing out that 73% of voters in 2020 cast ballots for parties that no longer exist.

War and repression shape the vote

Mobilizing opposition is difficult under the military's repression. According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, more than 22,000 people are currently detained for political offenses, and over 7,600 civilians have been killed by security forces since they seized power in 2021.

Armed resistance arose after the army used lethal force to crush non-violent protests against its 2021 takeover. The ensuing civil war has left more than 3.6 million people displaced, according to the U.N.

A new Election Protection Law imposes harsh penalties and restrictions for virtually all public criticism of the polls.

In these circumstances, both the military and its opponents believe power is likely to remain with Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, who led the 2021 seizure of power.

Zelenskyy to meet with Trump as efforts to end Russia-Ukraine war remain elusive

By WILL WEISSERT, SEUNG MIN KIM and ELISE MORTON Associated press

WEST PALM BEACH, Florida (AP) — President Donald Trump will host his Ukrainian counterpart, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, on Sunday to try to close out a peace agreement that would end nearly four years of war that began with Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

The two will meet at Mar-a-Lago, Trump's private club in Palm Beach, Florida, where the U.S. president is spending the holidays and has an agenda mostly filled with daily rounds of golf. Zelenskyy said the two planned to discuss security and economic agreements and he will raise "territorial issues" as Moscow and Kyiv remain fiercely at odds over the fate of the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine.

In the days before the meeting, Russia has intensified its attacks on Ukraine's capital, using missiles and drones to attack Kyiv and try to increase the pressure on Zelenskyy.

"Ukraine is willing to do whatever it takes to stop this war," Zelenskyy posted Saturday on X. "We need to be strong at the negotiating table."

In response to the attacks, he wrote: "We want peace, and Russia demonstrates a desire to continue the war. If the whole world — Europe and America — is on our side, together we will stop" Russian President

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Vladimir Putin.

In a meeting with Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney in Halifax, Nova Scotia, on Saturday, Zelenskyy said the key to peace is "pressure on Russia and sufficient, strong support for Ukraine." To that end, Carney announced \$2.5 billion Canadian (US\$1.8 billion) more in economic assistance from his government to help Ukraine rebuild.

Denouncing the "barbarism" of Russia's latest attacks on Kyiv, Carney credited both Zelenskyy and Trump with creating the conditions for a "just and lasting peace" at a crucial moment.

Trump and Zelenskyy sitting down face-to-face also underscored the apparent progress made by Trump's top negotiators in recent weeks as the sides traded draft peace plans and continued to shape a proposal to end the fighting. Zelenskyy told reporters Friday that the 20-point draft proposal negotiators have discussed is "about 90% ready" — echoing a figure, and the optimism, that U.S. officials conveyed when Trump's chief negotiators met with Zelenskyy in Berlin earlier this month.

During the recent talks, the U.S. agreed to offer certain security guarantees to Ukraine similar to those offered to other members of NATO. The proposal came as Zelenskyy said he was prepared to drop his country's bid to join the security alliance if Ukraine received NATO-like protection that would be designed to safeguard it against future Russian attacks.

'Intensive' weeks ahead

Zelenskyy also spoke on Christmas Day with U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law. The Ukrainian leader said in a post on X that they discussed "certain substantive details of the ongoing work" and cautioned in a subsequent post that "there is still work to be done on sensitive issues" and "the weeks ahead may also be intensive."

The U.S. president has been working to end the war in Ukraine for much of his first year back in office, showing irritation with both Zelenskyy and Putin while publicly acknowledging the difficulty of ending the conflict. Long gone are the days when, as a candidate in 2024, he boasted that he could resolve the fighting in a day.

After hosting Zelenskyy at the White House in October, Trump demanded that both Russia and Ukraine halt fighting and "stop at the battle line," implying that Moscow should be able to keep the territory it has seized from Ukraine.

Before Sunday's meeting, Zelenskyy said the key issues that remain unresolved between Ukraine and the U.S. include questions surrounding territory, the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant and funding for Ukraine's postwar recovery. He said there also are outstanding technical matters related to security guarantees and monitoring mechanisms.

Ukraine has conveyed its position to the U.S., Zelenskyy said, adding that Trump administration officials would relay that to Russia.

Zelenskyy also said last week that he would be willing to withdraw troops from Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland as part of a plan to end the war, if Russia also pulls back and the area becomes a demilitarized zone monitored by international forces.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters Friday that the Kremlin had already been in contact with U.S.

"It was agreed upon to continue the dialogue," he said.

Putin wants Russian gains kept, and more

Putin has publicly said he wants all the areas in four key regions that have been captured by his forces, as well as the Crimean Peninsula, illegally annexed in 2014, to be recognized as Russian territory. He also has insisted that Ukraine withdraw from some areas in eastern Ukraine that Moscow's forces haven't captured. Kyiv has publicly rejected all those demands.

The Kremlin also wants Ukraine to abandon its bid to join NATO. It warned that it wouldn't accept the deployment of any troops from members of the military alliance and would view them as a "legitimate target."

Putin also has said Ukraine must limit the size of its army and give official status to the Russian language,

demands he has made from the outset of the conflict.

Putin's foreign affairs adviser, Yuri Ushakov, told the business daily Kommersant this month that Russian police and national guard would stay in parts of Donetsk — one of the two major areas, along with Luhansk, that make up the Donbas region — even if they become a demilitarized zone under a prospective peace plan.

Ushakov cautioned that trying to reach a compromise could take a long time. He said U.S. proposals that took into account Russian demands had been "worsened" by alterations proposed by Ukraine and its European allies.

Trump has been somewhat receptive to Putin's demands, making the case that the Russian president can be persuaded to end the war if Kyiv agrees to cede Ukrainian land in the Donbas region and if Western powers offer economic incentives to bring Russia back into the global economy.

Thailand and Cambodia sign a new ceasefire agreement to end border fighting

By WASAMON AUDJARINT and SOPHENG CHEANG Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Thailand and Cambodia signed a ceasefire agreement on Saturday to end weeks of fighting along their border over competing territorial claims.

The agreement took effect at noon and calls for a halt in military movements and airspace violation for military purposes.

Only Thailand has carried out airstrikes, hitting sites in Cambodia as recently as Saturday morning, according to the Cambodian Defense Ministry.

The deal also calls for Thailand, after the ceasefire has held for 72 hours, to repatriate 18 Cambodian soldiers it has held as prisoners since earlier fighting in July. Their release has been a major demand of the Cambodian side.

Within hours of the signing, Thailand's Foreign Ministry protested to Cambodia that a Thai soldier sustained a permanent disability when he stepped on an anti-personnel land mine it charged had been laid by Cambodian forces.

Defense ministers met at the border to sign the agreement

The agreement was signed by the countries' defense ministers, Cambodia's Tea Seiha and Thailand's Nattaphon Narkphanit, at a border checkpoint. It followed three-day lower-level talks by military officials.

It declares that the sides are committed to an earlier ceasefire that ended five days of fighting in July and follow-up agreements.

The original July ceasefire was brokered by Malaysia and pushed through by pressure from U.S. President Donald Trump, who threatened to withhold trade privileges unless Thailand and Cambodia agreed. It was formalized in more detail in October at a regional meeting in Malaysia that Trump attended.

Despite those deals, the countries carried on a bitter propaganda war and minor cross-border violence continued, escalating in early December to widespread heavy fighting.

On Saturday, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio welcomed the ceasefire announcement and urged Cambodia and Thailand to fully honor it and the terms of the peace accord reached earlier in Malaysia.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called the ceasefire "a positive step towards alleviating the suffering of civilians, ending current hostilities, and creating an environment conducive to achieving lasting peace," his spokesman said.

The U.N. chief expressed appreciation to Malaysia, China and the United States for their efforts to peacefully resolve the conflict, U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said. "The United Nations stands ready to support efforts aimed at sustaining peace and stability in the region."

China's Foreign Ministry also hailed the agreement in a statement late Saturday.

Beijing is set to host trilateral talks on Sunday and Monday with the Thai and Cambodian foreign ministers in the southwestern province of Yunnan.

"China will play a constructive role in its own way for Cambodia and Thailand to consolidate the cease-

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fire, resume exchanges, rebuild political trust, achieve turnaround in bilateral relations and uphold regional peace," the Foreign Ministry statement read.

Civilians bore the brunt of the fighting

Thailand has lost 26 soldiers and one civilian as a direct result of the combat since Dec. 7, according to officials. Thailand has also reported 44 civilian deaths.

Cambodia hasn't issued an official figure on military casualties, but says that 30 civilians have been killed and 90 injured. Hundreds of thousands of people have been evacuated on both sides of the border.

"Today's ceasefire also paves the way for the displaced people who are living in the border areas to be able to return to their homes, work in the fields, and even allow their children to be able to return to schools and resume their studies," Cambodia's Defense Minister Tea Seiha told reporters after the signing.

Each side blamed the other for initiating the fighting and claimed to be acting in self-defense.

The agreement also calls on both sides to adhere to international agreements against deploying land mines, a major concern of Thailand.

Thai soldiers along the border have been wounded in at least 10 incidents this year by what Thailand says were newly planted Cambodian mines. Cambodia says the mines were left over from decades of civil war that ended in the late 1990s.

Following the latest injury on Saturday, Thailand's Foreign Ministry noted that the new agreement "includes key provisions on joint humanitarian demining operations to ensure the safety of military personnel and civilians in the border areas as soon as possible."

Another clause says the two sides "agree to refrain from disseminating false information or fake news."

The agreement calls for a resumption of previous measures to demarcate the border. The sides also agreed to cooperate in suppressing transnational crimes. That's primarily a reference to online scams perpetrated by organized crime that have bilked victims around the world of billions of dollars each year. Cambodia is a center for such criminal enterprises.

Malaysia's leader hails the agreement

Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, who was instrumental in putting together the original ceasefire, said the new agreement "reflects a shared recognition that restraint is required, above all in the interest of civilians."

Many clauses similar to those in Saturday's agreement were included in October's ceasefire document, and were open to various interpretations and generally honored only in part. These included provisions concerning land mines and the Cambodian prisoners.

The fragility of the new agreement was underlined by Thailand's Defense Ministry spokesperson Surasant Kongsiri in a news briefing after Saturday's signing. He said that the safe return of civilians to their homes would indicate the situation had stabilized enough to allow the repatriation of the captured Cambodian soldiers.

"However if the ceasefire does not materialize, this would indicate a lack of sincerity on the Cambodian side to create sure peace," he said. "Therefore, the 72-hour ceasefire beginning today is not an act of trust nor unconditional acceptance but a time frame to tangibly prove whether Cambodia can truly cease the use of weapons, provocations and threats in the area."

Texans clinch third consecutive playoff berth with 20-16 win over Chargers

By BETH HARRIS AP Sports Writer

INGLEWOOD, Calif. (AP) — The Houston Texans are riding a wave of momentum as the playoffs near. They're still alive in the race for the AFC South, a division they've won multiple times, and bolstered by the NFL's best defense, they're taking aim at earning their first berth in the AFC Championship Game.

C.J. Stroud threw for two long touchdowns on Houston's first two drives of the game, and the Texans went on to beat the Los Angeles Chargers 20-16 on Saturday to clinch a third consecutive playoff berth for the first time in franchise history.

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"It's what you fight for during the season, for an opportunity to be in the playoffs and go win it all," Houston coach DeMeco Ryans said. "We earned that. It wasn't given to us. Our guys went out and earned it."

The Texans (11-5) won their eighth in a row, their longest such streak since winning nine straight in 2018.

"To do something like that in this league is not easy," rookie wide receiver Jaylin Noel said. "Any time you can stack wins like this is special and we just want to keep it going. The coaches are pushing us to get better and everybody in the locker room is pushing to get better."

The Chargers (11-5) had their four-game winning streak snapped and handed the AFC West title to idle Denver. They beat the first-place Broncos in Week 3, but blew a chance to set up a winner-take-all showdown in Denver in Week 18.

"That's what hurts the most," linebacker Daiyan Henley said. "We just didn't do it. We didn't have enough, but we'll take the loss now and make sure it doesn't happen again."

The Chargers got knocked out of the playoffs in a wild-card loss to Houston last season.

Stroud's two explosive TDs stunned the Chargers and gave Houston a 14-0 lead. On his first pass of the game, he hit rookie Jayden Higgins for a 75-yard score against busted coverage. Stroud wasn't pressured when he threw a 43-yard TD to Noel, who wasn't covered.

"The big plays to start the game was really great execution starting with the O-line," Ryans said. "It starts with great protection, and the guys did a great job there. They were two plays that helped us be in position to win."

The Chargers had allowed just one TD pass of 40 or more yards in their last 15 games.

"You're not going to beat nobody in this league spotting them 14 (points)," safety Derwin James Jr. said.

Stroud completed his first six throws of the game. He finished 16 of 28 for 244 yards and two interceptions.

Houston's defense forced third-down sacks of Justin Herbert on the Chargers' first two possessions. They were three-and-out on three of their first four possessions, quieting the SoFi Stadium crowd.

The Chargers were just 2 of 5 in the red zone.

"Just have to execute," Herbert said. "We've got to be able to convert on those third downs down there and have to score points. We got our opportunities, but it's on us to be able to execute those plays we put in."

Playing his third game with a broken left (non-throwing) hand, Herbert was 21 for 32 for 236 yards, with one touchdown and one interception. He was sacked five times.

James intercepted Stroud in the second quarter, but the Chargers only managed a 27-yard field goal by Cameron Dicker on the turnover to trail 14-3. Another interception of Stroud failed to produce any points despite both miscues coming in Houston territory.

Herbert was intercepted by Azeez Al-Shaair at the Houston 1-yard line. The ball, intended for Oronde Gadsden, popped off his hands and Al-Shaair came down with it for his second interception of the season. Gadsden held his face in his hands on the bench.

Dicker missed a field goal from under 40 yards for the first time in his career just before halftime, leaving the Chargers trailing 14-3. He later was wide left to miss his first point after attempt of the season on the Chargers' final drive after Omarion Hampton's 5-yard TD run made it 20-16.

"Unforced errors on penalties, special teams, just everybody," James said. "We got to clean it up."

Ka'imi Fairbairn had field goals of 41 and 44 yards for Houston.

The Chargers closed to 17-10 after a wild drive in which Herbert was sacked twice and threw two incompletions before finding Gadsden in the back of the end zone for a 1-yard TD in the third.

Injuries

Texans: CB Kamari Lassiter (knee) left in the second quarter and later returned.

Chargers: RB Hassan Haskins was evaluated for a head injury in the fourth.

Up next

Texans: Play Indianapolis to end the regular season.

Chargers: Visit Denver to end the regular season.

Jeffrey R. Holland, next in line to lead Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, dies at 85

By HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Jeffrey R. Holland, a high-ranking official in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who was next in line to become the faith's president, has died. He was 85.

Holland died early Saturday morning from complications associated with kidney disease, the church announced on its website.

Holland, who died in Salt Lake City, led a governing body called the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, which helps set church policy while overseeing the many business interests of what is known widely as the Mormon church.

He was the longest-tenured member of the Quorum of the Twelve after President Dallin H. Oaks, making him next in line to lead the church under a long-established succession plan. Oaks, 93, became president of the church and its more than 17 million-strong global membership in October.

Henry B. Eyring, who is 92 and one of Oaks' two top counselors, is now next in line for the presidency.

Holland had been hospitalized during the Christmas holiday for ongoing health complications, the church said. Experts on the faith pointed to his declining health in October when Oaks did not select Holland as a counselor.

His death leaves a vacancy in the Quorum of the Twelve that Oaks will fill in coming months, likely by calling a new apostle from a lower-tier leadership council. Apostles are all men in accordance with the church's all-male priesthood.

Holland grew up in St. George, Utah, and worked for many years in education administration before his call to join the ranks of church leadership. He served as the ninth president of Brigham Young University, the Utah-based faith's flagship school, from 1980 to 1989 and was a commissioner of the church's global education system.

Under his leadership, the Provo university worked to improve interfaith relations and established a satellite campus in Jerusalem. The Anti-Defamation League later honored Holland with its "Torch of Liberty" award for helping foster greater understanding between Christian and Jewish communities.

Oaks, also a former BYU president, reflected Saturday on his more than 50 years of friendship and service with Holland, calling their relationship "long and loving."

"Over the last three decades as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, he lifted the weary, encouraged the faithful and bore a powerful witness of the Savior — even through seasons of significant personal trials," Oaks said.

Holland was known as a dynamic orator whose sermons combined scholarship with tenderness. In 2013 he spoke to church members about supporting loved ones with depression and other mental illnesses, sharing openly about times when he felt "like a broken vessel."

Holland is widely remembered for a 2021 speech in which he called on church members to take up metaphorical muskets in defense of the faith's teachings against same-sex marriage. The talk, known colloquially as "the musket fire speech," became required reading for BYU freshmen in 2024, raising concern among LGBTQ+ students and advocates.

Utah Gov. Spencer Cox, a Latter-day Saint, said no church leader has had a more profound impact on his faith than Holland.

"His words had a way of penetrating my soul like no other," Cox said. "In times of trial or darkness, I would return to them over and over again and feel the light and peace I needed."

Holland was preceded in death by his wife, Patricia Terry Holland. He is survived by their three children, 13 grandchildren and several great-grandchildren.

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Winter storm snarls holiday travel across US Northeast, Great Lakes

By LEAH WILLINGHAM and JULIE WALKER Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — More than a thousand flights were canceled or delayed across the Northeast and Great Lakes regions due to snow as thousands took to roads and airports during the busy travel period between Christmas and New Year's.

New York City received about 4 inches (10.2 centimeters) of snow Friday night into early Saturday — slightly under what some forecasts had predicted. At least 1,500 flights were canceled from Friday night, according to flight-tracking service FlightAware. But by the morning, both the roads and the skies were clearing.

"The storm is definitely winding down, a little bit of flurries across the Northeast this morning," said Bob Oravec, a Maryland-based forecaster at the National Weather Service.

Oravec said the storm was moving from the northwest toward the Southeast, with the largest snowfall in the New York City area reaching over 6 inches (15 centimeters) in central eastern Long Island. Farther north in the Catskills, communities saw as much as 10 inches (25 centimeters).

Newark Liberty International, John F. Kennedy International and LaGuardia airports posted snow warnings on the social media platform X on Friday cautioning that weather conditions could cause flight disruptions.

The National Weather Service warned of hazardous travel conditions from the Great Lakes through the northern mid-Atlantic and southern New England, with the potential for tree damage and power outages.

In Times Square, workers in red jumpsuits worked to clear the sludge- and powder-coated streets and sidewalks using shovels and snowblowers.

Jennifer Yokley, who was there on a holiday trip from North Carolina, said she was excited to see snow accumulating as it dusted buildings, trees and signs throughout the city.

"I think it was absolutely beautiful," she said.

Payton Baker and Kolby Gray, who were visiting from West Virginia, said the snow was a Christmas surprise for their third anniversary trip.

"Well, it's very cold, and it was very unexpected," Baker said, her breath visible in the winter air. "The city is working pretty well to get all the roads salted and everything, so it's all right."

Ahead of the storm, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul declared a state of emergency for more than half the state. Acting New Jersey Gov. Tahesha Way also declared a state of emergency for that state.

"This storm will cause dangerous road conditions and impact holiday travel," Way said in a statement. "We are urging travelers to avoid travel during the storm and allow crews to tend to the roads. Drivers should plan their travel accordingly, monitor conditions and road closures, and follow all safety protocols."

4 dead in California

On the other side of the country, California was experiencing a fairly dry weekend after powerful storms battered the state with heavy rains, flash flooding and mudslides. At least four people were killed including a man who was found dead Friday in a partially submerged car near Lancaster, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department reported.

Some mountainous areas received 10 to 18 inches (25 to 45 centimeters) of rain over three days, peaking on Christmas Eve, National Weather Service meteorologist Rose Schoenfeld said. There were varied amounts of rain in other populated areas, including up to 4 inches (10 centimeters) across the Los Angeles Basin and many coastal areas.

There was significant damage to homes and cars in Wrightwood, a 5,000-resident mountain town about 80 miles (130 kilometers) northeast of Los Angeles, as floods and mudslides turned roads into rivers and buried vehicles in rock and debris.

Before rain reappears in the forecast later next week, California was expected to experience Santa Ana winds with gusts of over 60 mph (96 kph) in mountainous areas from Sunday night through Tuesday. The winds could uproot saturated trees and cause power outages.

Russia strikes Ukraine's capital and kills at least 1 person a day before Zelenskyy-Trump meeting

By SAMYA KULLAB and VASILISA STEPANENKO Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia attacked Ukraine's capital with ballistic missiles and drones on Saturday, killing at least one person and wounding 27, a day before talks between the leaders of Ukraine and the United States, authorities said.

Explosions boomed across Kyiv as the attack began in early morning and continued for hours.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy prepared to meet with U.S. President Donald Trump in Florida on Sunday for further talks on ending the nearly four-year war. Zelenskyy told reporters that he and Trump plan to discuss several matters including security guarantees and territorial issues in the Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia regions.

"This attack is Russia's answer on our peace efforts. It really shows that (Russian President Vladimir) Putin doesn't want peace," Zelenskyy said after stopping in Canada to meet with Prime Minister Mark Carney in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Carney announced \$1.8 billion worth of economic assistance to Ukraine that helps unlock financing from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank for reconstruction and development.

"The barbarism that we saw overnight, the attack of Kyiv, shows just how important that we stand with Ukraine during this difficult time," Carney said.

Apartment buildings hit

The Russian Defense Ministry said that it carried out a "massive strike" overnight, using "long-range precision-guided weapons from land, air and sea, including Kinzhal hypersonic aeroballistic missiles" and drones. It said it targeted energy infrastructure facilities used by Ukraine's forces and military-industrial enterprises.

But several residential buildings were struck.

The ministry said the strike was in response to Ukraine's attacks on "civilian objects" in Russia.

Earlier on Saturday, the ministry said air defenses shot down seven Ukrainian drones over the Russian regions of Krasnodar and Adygeya overnight. On Saturday afternoon, the ministry said 147 more drones were shot down over a number of Russian regions.

Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin said air defenses intercepted more than 20 drones "flying towards" the Russian capital on Saturday. He didn't report any damage or casualties. It wasn't immediately clear whether those were included in the Defense Ministry's count.

Russia claims territorial gains

In what could be viewed as an effort to further ramp up pressure on Ukraine before the Zelenskyy-Trump talks, the Kremlin on Saturday night released a video of Putin in military fatigues receiving reports from top military officials in an unidentified military command post.

Russia's General Staff chief, Gen. Valery Gerasimov, reported to Putin that the Russian troops have taken full control of Myrnohrad in the Donetsk region — Russia uses the old Soviet name of the city, Dimitrov — the city of Huliaipole in the Zaporizhzhia region, and a few other settlements.

Putin said that "if Kyiv authorities are not willing to end the matter peacefully, we will achieve all the goals we have in the special military operation by military means."

Ukraine's General Staff rejected these claims as "not supported by facts." It said that the situation in Huliaipole is "difficult, but the defensive operation in the city is ongoing." In Myrnohrad, the situation remains "challenging."

"The senior political leadership of the aggressor state has once again resorted to spreading false claims about significant 'successes' by the Russian army on the battlefield," the General Staff said in an online statement.

Poland on alert

Poland scrambled fighter jets and closed airports in Lublin and Rzeszow near the border with Ukraine

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for several hours during the Russian attacks, the country's armed forces command said on social media. There was no violation of Polish airspace, it said.

Civil aviation authority Pansa later said the airports had resumed operations. It was unclear what caused the alert in Poland when the Russian attacks were focused on Kyiv, which is far from the border.

Russia targeted Ukraine with 519 drones and 40 missiles, Ukraine's air force said. The main target was energy and civilian infrastructure in Kyiv, Zelenskyy said. In some districts of the region there is no electricity or heating because of the attacks, he said.

Man burns to death

More than 10 residential buildings were damaged, Ukrainian Interior Minister Ihor Klymenko said on social media.

Olena Karpenko, 52, said she heard a man as he burned to death. "His scream is still in my ears. I can't believe it," she said, weeping.

Karpenko said they heard an explosion at the nearby thermal power plant, followed by a stronger blast that shook the windows of her home. Then came the strike on her building.

Two children were among those wounded in the attack, which hit seven locations across the capital, the head of the Kyiv Military Administration, Tymur Tkachenko, said on social media.

A body was found under the rubble of one damaged building, he said. It wasn't immediately clear if that person was the man who burned to death.

A fire broke out in an 18-story residential building in the Dnipro district, and emergency crews rushed to contain the flames. A 24-story residential building in the Darnytsia district was also hit, Tkachenko said, and more fires broke out in the Obolonskyi and Holiivskyi districts.

In the wider Kyiv region, the strikes hit industrial and residential buildings, according to Ukraine's Emergency Service. In the Vyshhorod area, emergency crews rescued one person found under the rubble of a destroyed house.

Ukraine's largest private energy company, DTEK, said on X on Saturday evening that the Russian attack caused "extensive power outages" in Kyiv, saying that hundreds of thousands of customers remained without power.

Security guarantees prioritized

Zelenskyy told reporters he would aim to ensure there were "as few unresolved issues as possible" in talks with Trump, while respecting Ukraine's red lines.

Speaking by audio note in a Whatsapp chat with journalists, Zelenskyy said he would prioritize discussing security guarantees for Ukraine. He has said that in the draft peace plan, the U.S. has committed to providing guarantees that mirror the NATO alliance's Article 5, which means an attack on Ukraine would trigger a collective military response from the U.S. and its allies.

But key details must be worked out in a bilateral agreement.

Territorial concessions are the most sensitive of issues the two leaders will discuss.

Chilly Gaza braces for more winter rain and word of any progress in ceasefire talks

By WAFSA SHURAFSA Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Barefoot children played on chilly sand as Gaza's thousands of displaced people prepared threadbare tents on Saturday for another round of winter rain.

Some families in the central town of Deir al-Balah said they had been living in tents for about two years, or for most of the war between Israel and Hamas that has devastated the territory.

Fathers braced fraying tents with old pieces of wood or inspected the ragged edges of holes torn in tarps. Inside the dim homes, daylight through tiny holes shone like stars.

Mothers battled the damp, slinging clothing over poles or cord to dry in the wind between the downpours that turn paths into puddles. One mother pulled a tiny child away from a mildewing patch of carpet.

"We have been living in this tent for two years. Every time it rains and the tent collapses over our heads,

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we try to put up new pieces of wood," said Shaima Wadi, a mother of four children who was displaced from Jabaliya in the north. "With how expensive everything has become, and without any income, we can barely afford clothes for our children or mattresses for them to sleep on."

Gaza's Health Ministry, part of the Hamas-run government, has said dozens of people, including a two-week-old infant, have died from hypothermia or after weather-related collapses of war-damaged homes. Aid organizations have called for more shelters and other humanitarian aid to be allowed into the territory.

Emergency workers have warned people not to stay in damaged buildings. But with so much of the territory reduced to rubble, there are few places to escape the rain.

"I collect nylon, cardboard and plastic from the streets to keep them warm," said Ahmad Wadi, who burns the materials or uses them as a kind of blanket for loved ones. "They don't have proper covers. It is freezing, the humidity is high, and water seeps in from everywhere. I don't know what to do."

Ceasefire talks

Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to visit Washington in the coming days as negotiators and others discuss the second stage of the ceasefire that took effect on Oct. 10.

Though the agreement has mostly held, its progress has slowed. The remains of the final hostage taken during the Hamas-led attack on Oct. 7, 2023, that sparked the war are still in Gaza. Challenges in the next phase of the ceasefire include the deployment of an international stabilization force, a technocratic governing body for Gaza, the disarmament of Hamas and further Israeli troop withdrawals from the territory.

Both Israel and Hamas have accused each other of truce violations.

Gaza's Health Ministry said that since the ceasefire went into effect, 414 Palestinians have been killed and 1,142 wounded. It said the bodies of 679 people were pulled from the rubble during the same period as the truce makes it safer to search for the remains of people killed earlier.

The ministry on Saturday said 29 bodies, including 25 that were recovered from under the rubble, had been brought to local hospitals over the past 48 hours.

The overall Palestinian death toll from the Israel-Hamas war has risen to at least 71,266, the ministry said, and another 171,219 have been wounded.

The ministry, which does not distinguish between militants and civilians in its count, is staffed by medical professionals and maintains detailed records viewed as generally reliable by the international community.

West Bank operation

Israel's defense minister, Israel Katz, said in a statement Saturday that a military operation continued in a town in the Israeli-occupied West Bank a day after police said a Palestinian attacker rammed his car into a man and then stabbed a young woman in northern Israel on Friday afternoon, killing both.

The statement said the army had surrounded the town of Qabatiya, where Katz said the attacker was from, and was operating "forcefully" there. Authorities on Friday said the attacker was shot and injured in Afula. He was taken to a hospital.

It's common practice for Israel to launch raids in the West Bank towns that attackers come from or demolish homes belonging to the assailants' families. Israel says that it helps to locate militant infrastructure and prevents future attacks. Rights watchdogs describe such actions as collective punishment.

AP video on Saturday showed Israeli bulldozers entering the town and soldiers patrolling.

"They announced a strict curfew," resident Bilal Hanash said, as he and others described main roads being closed with dirt barriers, a practice that has grown during the war in Gaza. "So basically, they're punishing 30,000 people."

Brazilian judge puts coup plot convicts under house arrest after former police commander flees

By GABRIELA SÁ PESSOA and MANUEL RUEDA Associated Press

SAO PAULO (AP) — A Brazilian judge on Saturday issued house arrest orders for 10 people who have been convicted and sentenced for participating in a plot to keep former President Jair Bolsonaro in power

after he lost the 2022 election.

The decision by Supreme Court Judge Alexandre de Moraes came just hours after authorities in neighboring Paraguay arrested a former police commander, who also had been convicted in the plot and returned him to Brazil.

Silvinei Vasques, the former director of Brazil's Federal Highway Police, was extradited to Brazil on Friday night, after he had secretly entered Paraguay and attempted to board a flight to El Salvador using Paraguayan documents. According to Brazilian police, Vasques tore off his ankle monitor on Thursday and drove to Paraguay in a rental car.

The 10 people subjected to house arrest orders Saturday had been facing cautionary measures, like the use of ankle monitors, or had been ordered to stay at the same location every night.

They include Filipe Martins, a former adviser to Bolsonaro. Martins' lawyer, Jeffrey Chiquini, said on X that they will file an appeal.

"There is no greater injustice than condemning a person for the actions of another," Chiquini said.

Bolsonaro was convicted and sentenced to 27 years in prison for attempting a coup to remain in office despite his 2022 electoral defeat.

The former president, who has been serving prison time since November, has been hospitalized since Wednesday. After undergoing double hernia surgery on Thursday, his wife, Michelle Bolsonaro, said Saturday that he's undergoing a procedure for persistent hiccups.

"It has been nine months of anguish and daily hiccups," she said on social media.

The trials against Bolsonaro and several generals and police officers accused of participating in the plot have been closely followed in Brazil, where democracy was reinstated in 1985, after decades of military rule.

U.S. President Donald Trump initially described the proceedings against ideological ally Bolsonaro as a "witch hunt" and raised tariffs on Brazilian imports over Bolsonaro's trial, which he described as an "international disgrace."

The Trump administration had also placed financial sanctions against de Moraes, the lead judge in Bolsonaro's trial. But the U.S. government appears to have softened its stance following Bolsonaro's conviction.

In November, Trump signed an executive order lowering tariffs on Brazilian beef and coffee, two of the country's largest exports to the United States.

Earlier this month, the U.S. Treasury lifted sanctions against de Moraes and his wife, as both nations continue to engage in trade negotiations.

Hundreds mourn in Syria's Homs after deadly mosque bombing

By OMAR SANADIKI Associated Press

HOMS, Syria (AP) — Hundreds of mourners gathered Saturday in the rain and cold outside of a mosque in the Syrian city of Homs for the funeral of eight people killed in a bombing, as an imam warned that the attack could spark more sectarian violence.

The crowd assembled next to the Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib Mosque, the target of Friday's attack that also wounded 18 others. The population of the Wadi al-Dhahab neighborhood, where the mosque is located, is predominantly from the Alawite minority. They later drove in convoys to bury the victims.

Officials have said the preliminary investigations indicate explosive devices were planted inside the mosque but have not yet publicly identified a suspect.

A little-known group calling itself Saraya Ansar al-Sunna claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement posted on its Telegram channel, in which it indicated that the attack intended to target members of the Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shiite Islam whom hard-line Islamists consider to be apostates.

The same group had previously claimed a suicide attack in June in which a gunman opened fire and then detonated an explosive vest inside a Greek Orthodox church in Dweil'a, on the outskirts of Damascus, killing 25 people as worshippers prayed on a Sunday.

A neighbor of the mosque, who asked to be identified only by the honorific Abu Ahmad ("father of Ahmad") out of security concerns, said he was at home when he heard the sound of a "very very strong

explosion.”

He and other neighbors went to the mosque and saw terrified people running out, he said. They entered and began trying to help the wounded.

Sheikh Mohieddin Salloum, the imam of the mosque, who was lightly injured in the explosion, said the mosque was Alawite but was open to Muslims of other sects to come and pray, and they often did so.

“This is God’s house — our Sunni neighbors come and pray here with us, but in small numbers. They might be five or 10” out of 300 attendees during Friday prayer, he said.

Salloum said he believes the attack was intended to set off a new round of sectarian strife as the country struggles to heal after a nearly 14-year civil war that ended with the ouster of former President Bashar Assad in December 2024.

Anger was palpable among Alawite residents who gathered for the funeral, but the imam called for calm.

“They set an explosion in an Alawite mosque to create emotions of hate and anger among the Alawites, and maybe a few days later someone will set off an explosion in a Sunni mosque and say that the Alawites took revenge,” Salloum said. “Then the idiots from both sides will come and start fighting, and we’ll all be dragged behind them if we don’t keep level heads.”

The country has experienced several waves of sectarian clashes since Assad’s fall. Assad, an Alawite, fled the country to Russia.

In March, an ambush carried out by Assad’s supporters against security forces triggered days of violence that left hundreds of people dead, most of them Alawites. Since then, although the situation has calmed, Alawites have been targeted sporadically in sectarian attacks.

Syrian government officials condemned Friday’s attack and pledged to hold the perpetrators accountable.

Mourners prayed outside because they were unable to enter the mosque as the crime scene remained cordoned off. Some marched through the streets chanting “Ya Ali,” a reference to the Prophet Muhammad’s cousin and son-in-law whom Shiite Muslims consider to be his rightful successor.

How TV shows like ‘Mo’ and ‘Muslim Matchmaker’ allow Arab and Muslim Americans to tell their stories

By PATRICK AFTOORA-ORSAGOS Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Whether it’s stand-up comedy specials or a dramedy series, when Muslim American Mo Amer sets out to create, he writes what he knows.

The comedian, writer and actor of Palestinian descent has received critical acclaim for it, too. The second season of Amer’s “Mo” documents Mo Najjar and his family’s tumultuous journey reaching asylum in the United States as Palestinian refugees.

Amer’s show is part of an ongoing wave of television from Arab American and Muslim American creators who are telling nuanced, complicated stories about identity without falling into stereotypes that Western media has historically portrayed.

“Whenever you want to make a grounded show that feels very real and authentic to the story and their cultural background, you write to that,” Amer told The Associated Press. “And once you do that, it just feels very natural, and when you accomplish that, other people can see themselves very easily.”

At the start of its second season, viewers find Najjar running a falafel taco stand in Mexico after he was locked in a van transporting stolen olive trees across the U.S.-Mexico border. Najjar was trying to retrieve the olive trees and return them to the farm where he, his mother and brother are attempting to build an olive oil business.

Both seasons of “Mo” were smash hits on Netflix. The first season was awarded a Peabody. His third comedy special on Netflix, “Mo Amer: Wild World,” premiered in October.

Narratively, the second season ends before the Hamas attack in Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, but the series itself doesn’t shy away from addressing Israeli-Palestinian relations, the ongoing conflict in Gaza or what it’s like for asylum seekers detained in U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention centers.

In addition to “Mo,” shows like “Muslim Matchmaker,” hosted by matchmakers Hoda Abraham and Yasmin

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Elhady, connect Muslim Americans from around the country with the goal of finding a spouse.

The animated series, “#1 Happy Family USA,” created by Ramy Youssef, who worked with Amer to create “Mo,” and Pam Brady, follows an Egyptian American Muslim family navigating life in New Jersey after the 9/11 terrorists attack in New York.

Current events have an influence

The key to understanding the ways in which Arab or Muslim Americans have been represented on screen is to be aware of the “historical, political, cultural and social contexts” in which the content was created, said Sahar Mohamed Khamis, a University of Maryland professor who studies Arab and Muslim representation in media.

After the 9/11 attacks, Arabs and Muslims became the villains in many American films and TV shows. The ethnic background of Arabs and the religion of Islam were portrayed as synonymous, too, Khamis said. The villain, Khamis said, is often a man with brown skin with an Arab-sounding name.

A show like “Muslim Matchmaker” flips this narrative on its head, Elhady said, by showing the ethnic diversity of Muslim Americans.

“It’s really important to have shows that show us as everyday Americans,” said Elhady, who is Egyptian and Libyan American, “but also as people that live in different places and have kind of sometimes dual realities and a foot in the East and a foot in the West and the reality of really negotiating that context.”

Before 9/11, people living in the Middle East were often portrayed to Western audiences as exotic beings, living in tents in the desert and riding camels. Women often had little to no agency in these media depictions and were “confined to the harem” — a secluded location for women in a traditional Muslim home.

This idea, Khamis said, harkens back to the term “orientalism,” which Palestinian American academic, political activist and literary critic Edward Said coined in his 1978 book of the same name.

Khamis said, pointing to countries like Britain and France, the portrayal in media of people from the region was “created and manufactured, not by the people themselves, but through the gaze of an outsider. The outsiders in this case, he said, were the colonial/imperialist powers that were actually controlling these lands for long periods of time.”

Among those who study the ways Arabs have been depicted on Western television, a common critique is that the characters are “bombers, billionaires or belly dancers,” she said.

The limits of representation

Sanaz Alesafar, executive director of Storyline Partners and an Iranian American, said she has seen some “wins” with regard to Arab representation in Hollywood, noting the success of “Mo,” “Muslim Matchmaker” and “#1 Happy Family USA.” Storyline Partners helps writers, showrunners, executives and creators check the historical and cultural backgrounds of their characters and narratives to assure they’re represented fairly and that one creator’s ideas don’t infringe upon another’s.

Alesafar argues there is still a need for diverse stories told about people living in the Middle East and the English-speaking diaspora, written and produced by people from those backgrounds.

“In the popular imagination and popular culture, we’re still siloed in really harmful ways,” she said. “Yes, we’re having these wins and these are incredible, but that decision-making and centers of power still are relegating us to these tropes and these stereotypes.”

Deana Nassar, an Egyptian American who is head of creative talent at film production company Alamiya Filmed Entertainment, said it’s important for her children to see themselves reflected on screen “for their own self image.” Nassar said she would like to see a diverse group of people in decision-making roles in Hollywood. Without that, it’s “a clear indication that representation is just not going to get us all the way there,” she said.

Representation can impact audiences’ opinions on public policy, too, according to a recent study by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding. Results showed that the participants who witnessed positive representation of Muslims were less likely to support anti-democratic and anti-Muslim policies compared to those who viewed negative representations.

For Amer, limitations to representation come from the decision-makers who greenlight projects, not from creators. He said the success of shows like his and others are a “start,” but he wants to see more

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industry recognition for his work and the work of others like him.

"That's the thing, like just keep writing, that's all it's about," he said. "Just keep creating and keep making and thankfully I have a really deep well for that, so I'm very excited about the next things," he said.

Today in History: December 28, U.S. Afghan war formally ends

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Sunday, Dec. 28, the 362nd day of 2025. There are three days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Dec. 28, 2014, the U.S. war in Afghanistan came to a formal end after 13 years with a quiet flag-lowering ceremony in Kabul, marking the transition of fighting from U.S.-led combat troops to the country's own security forces. More than 2,200 Americans had died in Afghanistan since the war began.

Also on this date:

In 1895, the Lumiere brothers, Auguste and Louis, held the first public showing of their films in Paris.

In 1908, a major earthquake followed by a tsunami devastated the Italian cities of Messina and Reggio Calabria, killing at least 70,000 people.

In 1912, San Francisco's Municipal Railway began operations with Mayor James Rolph Jr. at the controls of Streetcar No. 1 as 50,000 spectators looked on.

In 1945, Congress officially recognized the Pledge of Allegiance.

In 1972, Kim Il Sung, the premier of North Korea, was named the country's president under a new constitution.

In 1973, the Endangered Species Act was signed by President Richard Nixon, a law designed to protect plants and animals from extinction.

In 1981, Elizabeth Jordan Carr, the first American "test-tube" baby, was born in Norfolk, Virginia.

In 1991, nine people died in a crush of people trying to get into a celebrity charity basketball game at City College in New York that was headlined by hip-hop stars.

In 2015, a grand jury in Cleveland declined to indict two white police officers in the killing of 12-year-old Tamir Rice, who was Black. He was shot while carrying what turned out to be a toy pellet gun.

In 2019, a truck bomb exploded at a busy security checkpoint in Somalia's capital of Mogadishu, killing at least 78 people, including many students.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Denzel Washington is 71. TV personality Gayle King is 71. Hockey Hall of Famer Ray Bourque is 65. Linux creator Linus Torvalds is 56. Political commentator Ana Navarro is 54. TV host-comedian Seth Meyers is 52. Actor Joe Manganiello is 49. Musician John Legend is 47. Actor André Holland is 46. Actor Noomi Rapace is 46. Actor Sienna Miller is 44. Actor Jessie Buckley is 36. Singer and songwriter David Archuleta is 35.