

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Saturday, Jan. 3, 2026

4th Grade Boys Basketball Doubleheader: Clark at Groton, 8 a.m.

## Sunday, Jan. 4, 2026

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship 9 a.m.; League Movie Night, 6 p.m.

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

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

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

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

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

4th Grade BBB Practice, 2 p.m.

6th Grade BBB Practice, 6 p.m.

## Monday, Jan. 5, 2026

No School

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

Boys Wrestling at Oakes, 4:30 p.m.

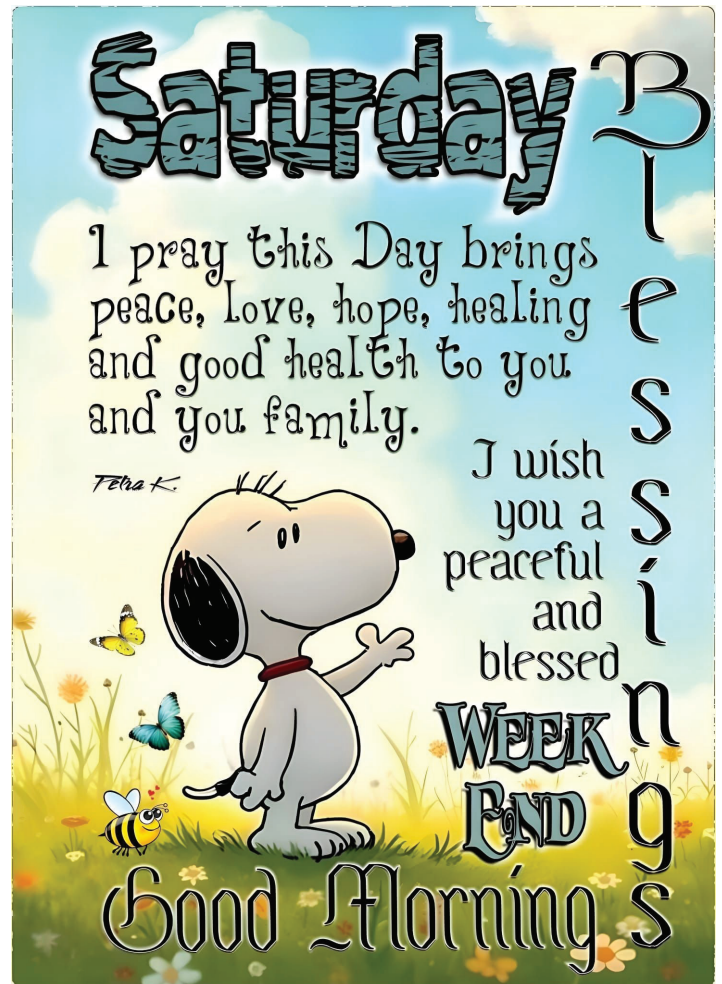
1st Grade BBB Practice, 4:30 p.m.

MS Boys Wrestling Jamboree at Milbank, 5 p.m.

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

5th Grade BBB Practice, 6 p.m.

Kindergarten BBB Practice, 6 p.m.



## Tuesday, Jan. 6, 2026

School Breakfast: Muffins.

School Lunch: Chicken nuggets, mashed potatoes.

City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.

4th Grade GBB Practice, 5 p.m.

Basketball at Warner: (Welke: BJV-5, Arena: GJV-5, VGGB-6:30, VBBB-8:00)

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

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# 1440

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

## **A New EV King**

China's BYD has overtaken Tesla as the world's top electric vehicle seller. Elon Musk's Austin-based company yesterday reported selling 1.64 million EVs last year, roughly 9% fewer than in 2024. BYD, meanwhile, delivered approximately 2.26 million EVs in 2025, a nearly 28% year-over-year increase.

BYD, which began as a rechargeable battery manufacturer in the 1990s, surpassed Volkswagen as China's bestselling car brand in 2023. The Shenzhen-based automaker has recently expanded its sales outside China as well; the UK is its largest international market, with year-over-year sales surging 880% in September. Tariffs exceeding 100% effectively bar BYD cars from the US, where overall EV sales in November fell over 40% from a year earlier. Tesla, which remains America's largest EV maker, reported a 16% year-over-year decline in fourth-quarter sales.

The US sales slowdown follows the Sept. 30 expiration of federal EV tax credits. Tesla's third-quarter sales rose 29% from the prior quarter as consumers rushed to beat the deadline. Tesla shares fell 2.6% yesterday, after rising 18.6% in 2025.

## **Swiss bar fire likely started by sparklers on champagne bottles.**

Investigators say they assume a deadly New Year's Eve blaze at Le Constellation bar in the Crans-Montana ski resort in Switzerland likely began when sparklers attached to champagne bottles burned too close to the ceiling. Investigators are looking into whether foam on the ceiling—designed to muffle sound—complied with regulations. The fire killed 40 people and injured 119 others. See our previous write-up here.

## **Saudi forces strike UAE-backed separatists in southern Yemen.**

Saudi warplanes struck Southern Transitional Council forces in an effort to take over the separatist party's camp in the Hadhramaut governorate. The STC, which advocates for southern Yemen's succession from the rest of the nation, moved into Yemen's Hadramout and Mahra governorates last month, pushing out Saudi-affiliated forces and seizing an oil-rich region. The strike reportedly killed 20 STC fighters.

## **Zelenskyy appoints new chief of staff following corruption scandal.**

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has named Gen. Kyrylo Budanov as his new chief of staff. Budanov, 39, had led Ukraine's military intelligence agency since 2020. The appointment comes after Zelenskyy dismissed his previous chief of staff, Andrii Yermak, following a raid on his house by anti-corruption officials as part of an investigation into a \$100M energy sector corruption scandal.

Separately, Russia said a Ukrainian drone strike on a café and hotel in a Russian-occupied village killed 27 people on New Year's Eve. Kyiv denies attacking civilians.

## **Researchers recreate lung with single stem cell, advancing personalized medicine.**

Scientists recreated a human lung on a plastic chip using stem cells from a single human donor for the first time. Unlike earlier lung-on-chip models that mixed cell sources, this model can better mirror an individual's lung function and disease progression. Researchers could develop patient-specific chips to study how infections such as tuberculosis interact with genetic mutations and evaluate potential treatments.

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## **Saturn-sized free-floating planet first to have its mass measured.**

Astronomers have confirmed the existence of a rare free-floating planet about 9,950 light-years from Earth that does not orbit a star, also known as a rogue planet. Using a technique called gravitational microlensing, scientists were, for the first time, able to directly measure the mass of such a planet, finding it to be roughly Saturn-sized and about 70 times larger than Earth.

## **Venus Williams, 45, to play in Australian Open for first time in 5 years.**

The seven-time Grand Slam singles champion is set to be the oldest female to play in the Australian Open main draw after receiving a wild-card entry yesterday. Williams first starred in the tournament in 1998 at age 17, defeating her younger sister, Serena, in the second round before losing in the quarterfinals. Venus finished as a runner-up at the Australian Open in 2003 and 2017, losing to Serena in the finals both times.

## **Humankind(ness)**

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Dawn G. in El Paso, Texas.

"My dog passed away and I was in a waiting room at a vet clinic. I was sad and crying, and I knew I was making others uncomfortable. A beautiful lady walked in with her daughter's dog; she was dropping it off at doggie day care. She made eye contact with me and said, 'Are you OK?' I started crying even more. She walked up to me and put her arms around me and said, 'You're not OK.' It was so kind and unconditionally loving. I felt her genuine kindness. She left and I was still there crying.

"Twenty minutes later, she came back in and handed me a dog paw charm that said, 'No longer by my side, but always in my heart.' She said she had been carrying it for 20 years since her dog passed and she knew I needed it now. I told her I would cherish it until I saw someone who needed it more than me."

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

**Month-to-Month Rates**

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

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

## Lady Tigers Grind Out Win Over Vermilion



**Taryn Traphagen eyes the basket for a three-point shot attempt. She made four three-pointers on the night.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

GROTON- The Groton Area Lady Tigers used relentless defense and dominance on the offensive glass to secure a 41-34 win over the Vermilion Tanagers in girls basketball action Friday night in Groton.

Groton scored the opening basket of the game, but Vermilion quickly responded and took control early, building an 11-6 lead by the end of the first quarter. The Tanagers pushed the margin to 13-6 early in the second quarter before the Lady Tigers responded with a key run that swung momentum.

After the game was tied at 13-13, Groton rattled off 11 straight points to grab the lead. "We weren't going to let their best player beat us if we could help it," said head coach Matt Locke, crediting a total team effort on the defensive end. "That girl's got handles, she's smooth, and she's a really good basketball player. It took everybody."

Groton carried a 20-16 lead into halftime and continued to control the pace in the second half, extending the advantage to 30-25 after three quarters before closing out the seven-point win.

Taryn Traphagen led the Lady Tigers with 12 points, eight rebounds, and one block, including four timely three-pointers. "Taryn's got all the ability in the world," Locke said. "We run a lot of stuff for her to get open looks, and she came through big tonight."

Jerica Locke added 10 points, eight rebounds, and six assists, while Rylee Dunker finished with nine points and a game-high 13 rebounds. Jaedyn Penning chipped in seven points, five rebounds, and two assists. Sydney Locke scored three points with four rebounds, and McKenna Tietz and Kella Tracy each pulled down four rebounds. Mia Crank added one rebound.

Groton's physical play on the boards was a major factor, as the Lady Tigers finished with 47 total rebounds, including 19 offensive rebounds. "Possessions are possessions, and we needed them," Locke said. "If we make a few more shots, maybe we don't need that many rebounds—but we'll take it."

Groton shot 35 percent from the field, 24 percent from three-point range, and 71 percent from the free-throw line, finishing with 10 assists, 23 turnovers, 14 fouls, and one block.

Vermilion was led by Lexi Hanson with 14 points and Taylor Reuvers with 11. Locke noted that fatigue played a role late. "A lot of her shots were contested," he said. "I think fatigue had something to do with it."

Groton Area also picked up a 41-12 junior varsity win. The Lady Tigers led 9-5 after the first quarter, 19-7 at halftime, and 30-11 after three quarters, highlighted by scoring runs of 12 points in the first half and 14 in the second.

Makenna Krause led the JV Tigers with 13 points, followed by Sydney Locke with eight. Ashlynn Warrington and Tevan Hanson each scored six, while Ryelle Gilbert, Teagan Hatton, Avery Crank, and Andi Iverson each added two points.

The Lady Tigers completed a clean sweep with a 25-15 win in the C game. Taylynn Traphagen scored seven points, followed by Brynlee Dunker and Teagan with with five each, Andi Iverson added four, and Ryelle Gilbert and Kinsley Rowen finished with two points apiece.

With the win, Groton Area improved to 4-2 on the season and will travel to Warner on Tuesday. Vermilion dropped to 2-3.

**Both varsity games were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Avantara - Groton, Agtegra, Bierman Farm Service, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Full Circle Ag, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Heartland Energy and The MeatHouse in Andover. Rich Bosma did the commentary, Jeslyn Kosel ran the camera and Paul Kosel did the stats and technology. Both junior varsity games were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM sponsored by grandparents.**

## Vermilion rallies past Groton Area boys, 66-57

GROTON — The Groton Area Tigers put together one of their best halves of the season Friday night, but a second-half rally by the Vermilion Tanagers proved to be the difference as Vermilion pulled away for a 66-57 win in Groton.

Groton scored the opening basket and the game was tied at 5 early. The Tigers briefly held the upper hand, building a four-point lead before Vermilion answered to tie the score at 16. Groton closed the first quarter with an 18-16 advantage.

The Tigers continued to control the tempo in the second quarter. After the game was tied at 20, Groton went on a 12-2 run to open up a 32-22 lead, highlighted by a dunk from Gage Sippel. Groton carried a 34-28 lead into halftime.

"We talked at halftime about two things — getting on the boards and limiting them to one shot, and not settling for threes," said Groton head coach Greg Kjellsen. "When threes go in, they look great, but when they don't, you've got to be able to get the ball inside and play through that."

Vermilion came out aggressive in the third quarter, scoring five straight points to close within one before eventually taking a 44-43 lead. The period featured four lead changes and one tie before the Tanagers edged ahead 50-47 heading into the fourth quarter.

Several of Vermilion's key baskets came on second-chance opportunities, an area Kjellsen pointed to as a turning point.

"Rebounding is effort and attitude, and we didn't have it in the second half," he said. "Some of their late threes came off offensive rebounds. If you want to beat good teams, you've got to do those little things."

Vermilion maintained the upper hand in the fourth quarter and closed out the 66-57 victory.

Ryder Johnson led Groton with 21 points, adding three rebounds, one assist and one steal. Sippel recorded his first double-double of the season with 16 points and 10 rebounds, along with two assists and three blocked shots. Keegen Tracy finished with 12 points, while Karson Zak added four points and four assists. Becker Bosma contributed two points, six rebounds and four assists, and Easton Weber scored two points with five rebounds.

Kjellsen credited his team's interior play, particularly in the first half, but said the Tigers need to continue to look inside offensively.

"I thought Gage had a great game inside and we didn't get him the ball enough," Kjellsen said. "He did a really nice job, and that opens things up for us when we play through him."

Groton shot 21-of-28 (75%) on two-point attempts but struggled from beyond the arc at 4-of-18 (22%). Johnson attempted all seven free throws for the Tigers, making three. Groton finished with 28 rebounds, 12 assists, 16 turnovers, two steals, four blocked shots and 18 team fouls.

Vermilion was led by Trey Hansen with 22 points, followed by Trenton Thomas with 16. Luke Jensen added 10 points, while Spencer Blanchett scored eight. The Tanagers shot 23-of-62 (37%) from the field and 10-of-19 (52%) from the free-throw line.

Despite the loss, Kjellsen emphasized the importance of moving forward during a challenging stretch of the schedule.

"It's a long season," he said. "We told the kids the sun's going to shine tomorrow. You get better every game, and hopefully by the end of the year we're playing our best basketball."

Groton falls to 4-2 on the season and will travel to Warner on Tuesday as part of a doubleheader. Vermilion improves to 3-1.

**Junior Varsity:** Groton appeared to be in control late, but Vermilion closed the game on a 10-0 run to claim a 42-36 JV win. Vermillion led 10-8 after the first quarter before Groton took a 25-18 halftime lead. The Tigers led 33-30 after three and 36-32 late before going scoreless the rest of the way. Asher Johnson paced Groton with 10 points, followed by Jace Johnson with eight. Anthony Tracy scored five, Ethan Kroll and J.J. Muller had four each, Ryder Schelle scored three, and Jordan Schwan added two. Vermilion was led by Daxton Christiansen with 11 points and Tyson Hovden with 10.

**C-Team:** Groton's C team posted a 49-41 win. Trayce Schelle led the Tigers with 10 points, while Trey Tietz scored 17. Ryder Schwan, Zach Fliehs and Briggs Conn each scored two points.



**Gage Sippel worked his way inside for one of his eight baskets. He had a double-double on the night with 16 points and 10 rebounds.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Alternative instruction grows in SD as public school enrollment declines, report says

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER

Alternative instruction enrollment continues to rise in South Dakota, breaking 12,000 students enrolled in 2025, according to data released recently by the state Education Department. The growth comes as private and public school enrollment is declining in the state.

Across the state, 12,433 school-aged children are enrolled in alternative instruction, which includes homeschooling and some private schools — such as online, hybrid and microschoools — that are unaccredited, or accredited by an entity other than the state. Students notify the state when they enroll in alternative instruction.

Enrollment in alternative instruction has nearly tripled since 2015 — now making up 7.6% of children receiving an education in the state.

The growth comes as public education enrollment decreases in the state for a second consecutive year. Public education peaked in South Dakota in 2023, with 137,759 students enrolled. This year, 135,577 students are enrolled in public schools.

South Dakota Gov. Larry Rhoden told lawmakers during his budget address earlier this month that his administration expects public school enrollment to continue to decrease next year, due to growing alternative instruction enrollment and lower birth rates.

State-accredited private school enrollment — including religious and tribal schools — decreased slightly to 15,043 this year. Enrollment is still higher than 2023, when it was 14,741.

The Sioux Falls School District reported the largest increase in alternative instruction this year, with 131 more students enrolled. Harrisburg (78), Brandon Valley (67) and Rapid City (64) were also among the highest increases in alternative instruction enrollment in the state.

McLaughlin and Burke school districts reported some of the highest percentage increases of students enrolling in alternative instruction since last year.

In McLaughlin, 18 students enrolled in alternative instruction in 2025, a 157% increase from seven registered the year before. In Burke, 41 students enrolled in alternative instruction in 2025, a 156% increase from 16 in 2024.

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

Area Schools with Alternative Instructions:  
Aberdeen 289, Britton-Hecla 38, Clark 28, Deuel 33, Doland 7, Frederick Area 12, Groton Area 45, Hamlin 82, Ipswich 3, Langford Area 14, Milbank 103, Mobridge-Pollock 51, Northwestern Area 6, Redfield 10, Sisseton 96, Warner 4, Webster Area 32. In the Groton Area School District, three are in kindergarten, one in first grade, three in second grade, two in third grade, five in fourth grade, five in fifth grade, five in sixth grade, three in seventh grade, three in eighth grade, six freshmen, two sophomores, five juniors and two seniors.

## COMMENTARY

### **Banning a 99-cent soda purchase won't help families**

**by Leslie Gerrish**

On Dec. 1, Sen. Sydney Davis, R-Burbank, and Rep. Taylor Rehfeldt, R-Sioux Falls, announced legislation to reform the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program by restricting the purchase of sugary drinks with SNAP benefits. Their release stated that "currently, a growing number of both Republican and Democratic-led states are stepping up to reform SNAP."

Some may think the government shouldn't pay for sugary drinks. I understand that initial reaction. But let's dig a little deeper.

Elon Musk has received over \$38 billion in contracts, subsidies, tax credits and loans from the U.S. government — our tax dollars. Emphasis on subsidies and tax credits.

From 1995 to 2024, South Dakota ranked eighth in the nation for reliance on farm subsidies. Of the \$25 billion that came to South Dakota, former Gov. Kristi Noem's family collected \$4.9 million.

Meanwhile, some legislators say a single mom of three working two jobs and receiving \$109 a month in SNAP benefits shouldn't be able to buy a diet Coke.

And yes, of course we might wish her cart was filled with fresh fruits and vegetables. But let's be honest — I hope you're not judging my shopping list today, either.

What also stood out to me was the claim that "many states are reforming SNAP," with no detail about how. For example, Michigan's "Double Up" program allows government food benefits to double in value when healthier choices are made. Studies show that bans will only increase administrative costs and create more stigma around poverty while not making any behavioral changes.

Restricting items doesn't help families. The path to meaningful assistance is through incentives and support, not punishment. I shared Michigan's program with Davis, who is my state senator. Perhaps the political optics mattered more than what would actually help her constituents.

This type of legislation helps no one. It adds stigma. It won't reduce poverty, it won't improve educational outcomes, and it won't improve health, because the people being targeted still won't be able to afford health insurance. But that 99-cent soda? That's what we're controlling.

Considering both Davis and Rehfeldt are health care providers and moms, what about legislation to expand free and reduced school lunch, lower health care costs or make women's health more accessible for rural communities?

We're angry at the wrong people.

We're restricting the wrong things.

We're catering to the wrong individuals.

And in 2026, we need to start changing that.

*Leslie Gerrish lives in Vermillion. She is a mother, event planner and small business owner. She also serves on the Board of Directors for United Way Vermillion.*

### **New book details the fight to close the beer stores in Whiteclay**

**Before he died, attorney and activist John Maisch detailed journey to end beer flow to Pine Ridge Reservation**

**BY: PAUL HAMMEL**

LINCOLN — Beginning in 2013, Oklahoma attorney and college instructor John Maisch made dozens of 700-mile trips over four years to visit the alcohol-soaked village of Whiteclay, Nebraska.

Maisch, who grew up in Grand Island, had earned a reputation as a tough prosecutor of liquor violations in Oklahoma.

When he stumbled almost accidentally onto the story of Whiteclay — an unincorporated village on the South Dakota border where beer stores sold more than 3 million cans a year to the adjacent and officially

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dry Pine Ridge Indian Reservation – he knew he had to do something. The more he learned, the more he became outraged.

## Fact finder

His trips became fact-finding missions, building a case against what he saw as violations of liquor laws. Without any background in movie making, Maisch produced a documentary on the “wounds” caused by Whiteclay – an epidemic of alcoholism, fetal alcohol syndrome and alcohol-related assaults on the reservation, where alcohol possession and sales were outlawed.

Maisch’s crusade, which culminated in the closing of the Whiteclay beer stores in 2017, is now detailed in a book, “Whiteclay: An American Tragedy,” written by Maisch before his death in 2022.

Maisch’s widow, Julia, took up the task of getting the book published, because she knew her husband wanted people to know about the long-ignored injustice delivered by the beer sales in Whiteclay, especially to the babies born on the reservation with lifelong disabilities due to drinking by their mothers.

“When you have an opportunity to speak up, to help the voiceless, the children who can’t rely on adults to care for them, it’s our responsibility to do something about it,” Julia Maisch told the Nebraska Examiner.

The closings were an historic accomplishment, one that few thought would happen.

The 186-page book details the ups and downs of the campaign to close the beer stores, from fiery exchanges with liquor regulators and cordial meetings with then-Gov. Pete Ricketts and his wife, Susanne, to a disappointing lack of action by Sheridan County officials.

Alcohol had flowed from Whiteclay to the reservation for decades, but the remote village was far from the media spotlight, and in the northwest corner of Nebraska, it had become accepted that in Whiteclay you’d find drunken men and women, urinating, defecating and passing out on the highway through town.

In the book, he wondered if attitudes would change, given the large haul of taxes paid by the beer stores.

## Focus on the law

But Maisch knew that legally, alcohol could not be sold in places where there was inadequate law enforcement, and Whiteclay had no local police and the county sheriff’s office was 23 miles away. He eventually began researching the economic cost to Sheridan County and the state of jailing vagrants and those who committed assaults in Whiteclay and treating the children scarred by fetal alcohol syndrome.

His documentary, “Sober Indian/Dangerous Indian,” introduced many to the lives of four men who lived, panhandled and drank on the streets of Whiteclay. The book provided more detail about their struggles with alcoholism and flirts with sobriety, and of the toll it took on their families.

Along with Native American activist Frank LaMere – a longtime advocate to close the beer stores – Maisch criss-crossed the state and nation, screening the documentary and exposing the misery of Whiteclay. It led to testimony at legislative hearings and those of the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission, and the appointment of task forces. Like an investigator, he dug up data and personal stories of those damaged by the flood of beer coming from a village of less than 20 residents.

“Although most public officials I encountered may disagree, my objective was always to engage – not enrage – those who were involved in the Whiteclay issue,” Maisch wrote. “But more times than not, I found myself getting into verbal spats with elected and appointed officials because, in my opinion, they lacked the moral courage to do what their oaths required them to do.”

The misery of Whiteclay hit the national radar in 1999, when two Native American men who frequented the beer-soaked village were found dead a few yards from the beer stores.

LaMere, a member of the Winnebago tribe who lived across Nebraska from Whiteclay, began calls for change at the village. Nebraskans for Peace, as well as activists from the American Indian Movement took up the call, organizing protest walks and seeking legislative changes. A documentary, “The Battle for Whiteclay,” detailed the sordid history of alcohol sales from the village.

But bills in the Nebraska Legislature died in legislative committees, and attention to Whiteclay often fell from the radar, to be reignited, sporadically, by a protest march or discovery of a death on the streets.

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## Concerned citizens gather

Maisch began assembling a group of other concerned citizens, like Dennis Carlson, a retired attorney who investigated cases of legal malpractice for the Nebraska Supreme Court, and Alan Jacobson, a Lincoln business owner appalled by what he saw in Whiteclay.

There also were people involved in the fight against fetal alcohol syndrome, caused when a pregnant woman consumed alcohol. A key ally was Nora Boesem, a former pediatric nurse from Newell, South Dakota, whose family had become foster parents for dozens of kids from the reservation who suffered from fetal alcohol-related impacts.

Through Maisch, reporters learned about, and published stories about, one of Boesem's foster children, Arianna, who was born prematurely, with damage to almost every internal organ due to fetal alcohol syndrome. She required several taxpayer-funded surgeries, daily pain medications and required almost constant care.

## Lasting impacts

The book includes other heart-wrenching stories about those scarred by alcohol-fueled domestic abuse, women sexually assaulted and left on Whiteclay streets, and men seeking sobriety and later relapsing to the beer stores.

More than once in the book, Maisch expresses surprise at how forthcoming those impacted by Whiteclay's alcohol were about the sordid impact on their lives.

"As a Christian, I was convinced that God was with us every step of the way as we battled to close Whiteclay's beer stores," he said.

In the end, Maisch saw signs of hope in Whiteclay. Ambulance and law enforcement calls fell, and the village was no longer a contributor to the woes of the reservation, and new programs involving children and providing a "maker's space" for Native artists and crafters were established.

"Nothing changes if we protect our own comfort at the expense of others' pain," he wrote. "Nothing changes when we refuse to be unsettled, But when we are willing to feel that discomfort and step across the line and stay with it, something begins to shift."

"That is where the healing begins. That is where justice takes root."

*Editor's note: The author of this story, Paul Hammel, wrote the foreward for Maisch's book at the request of his widow. Hammel covered the Whiteclay story for decades.*

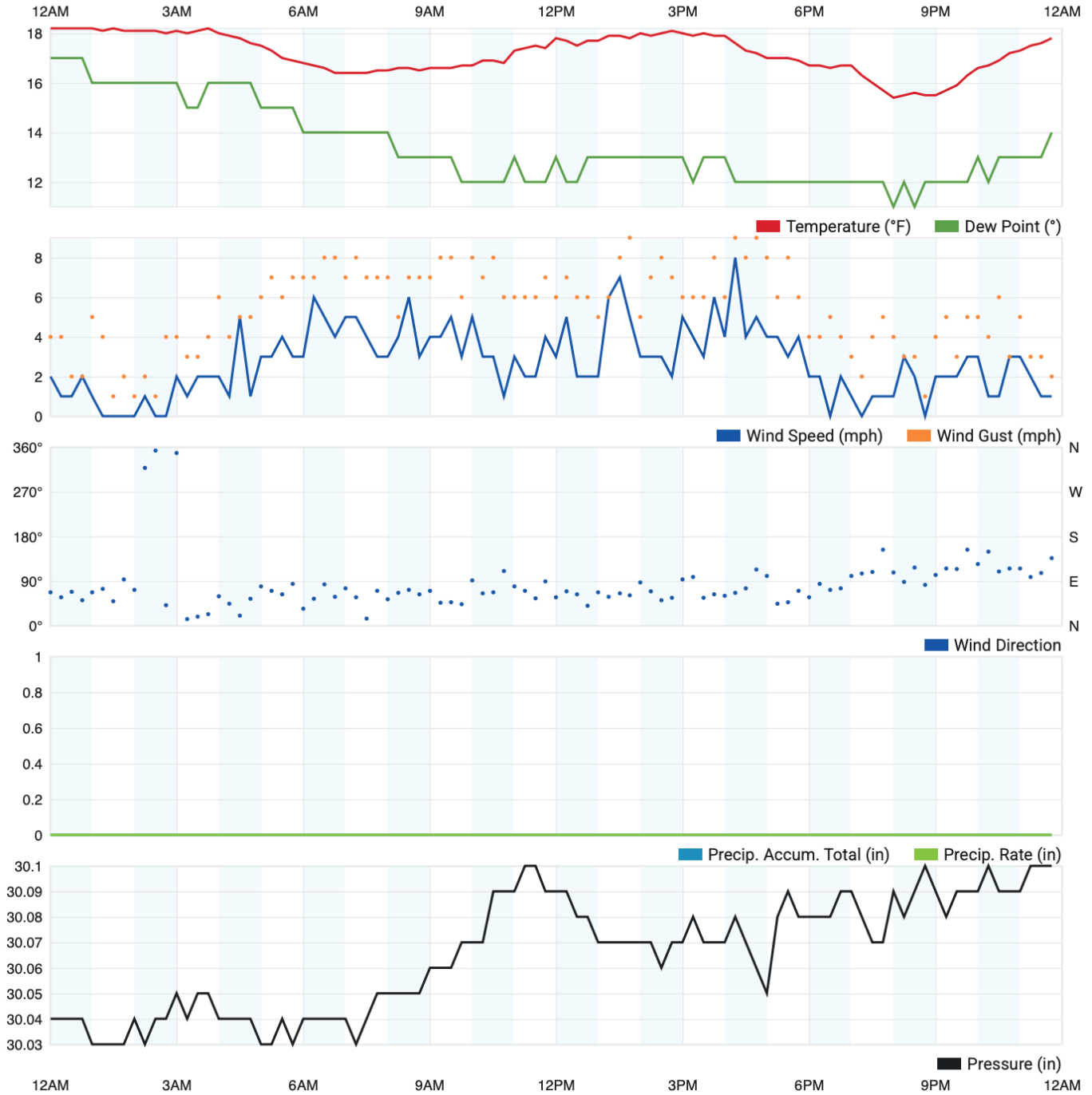
*Senior Contributor Paul Hammel covered the Nebraska state government and the state for decades. Previously with the Omaha World-Herald, Lincoln Journal Star and Omaha Sun, he is a member of the Omaha Press Club's Hall of Fame. He grows hops, brews homemade beer, plays bass guitar and basically loves traveling and writing about the state. A native of Ralston, Nebraska, he is vice president of the John G. Neihardt Foundation. Hammel retired in April but continues to contribute to the Nebraska Examiner.*

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

January 2, 2026



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Today



High: 21 °F

Cloudy

Tonight



Low: 12 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Sunday



High: 32 °F

Patchy Fog  
then Partly  
Sunny

Sunday Night



Low: 19 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Monday



High: 34 °F

Partly Sunny

## Warming Trend Next Few Days



Saturday



Highs: 18-36°

Patchy Fog

Sunday



Highs: 28-53°

Lows: 5-22°

Light Mix  
(20-30%)  
NE SD & WC MN

Monday



Highs: 32-53°

Lows: 19-33°

Tuesday



Highs: 30-49°

Lows: 21-29°

Light Rain  
(10-20%)

Wednesday



Highs: 35-51°

Lows: 19-28°

Warmest Central SD Coldest Northeast SD/Western MN

We continue to be stuck in the cold air, but over the next few days look for above normal temperatures. There are a few weak systems that pass through, mainly with isolated pockets of very light precipitation, some of which may be ice which we'll need to watch out for.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 18 °F at 12:00 AM

Low Temp: 15 °F at 7:55 PM

Wind: 10 mph at 4:16 PM

Precip: : 0.00

## Today's Info

Record High: 51 in 1962

Record Low: -34 in 1912

Average High: 24

Average Low: 3

Average Precip in Jan.: 0.06

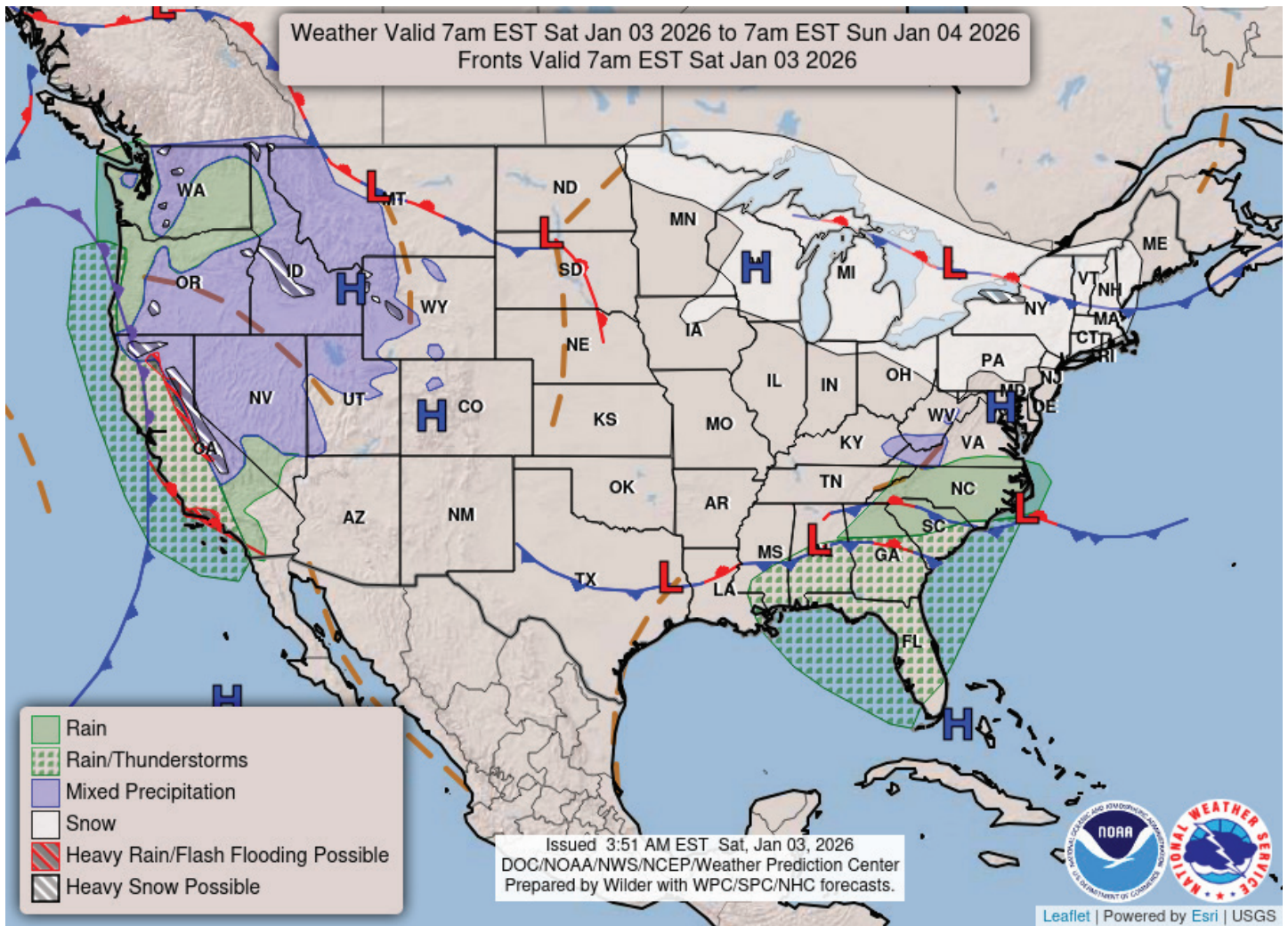
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.06

Precip Year to Date: 0.00

Sunset Tonight: 5:01 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:12 am



# Groton Daily Independent

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## Today in Weather History

January 3, 1997: A powerful area of low pressure and deep Arctic high pressure brought almost all winter elements to central and northeast South Dakota and west-central Minnesota from the afternoon of the 3rd to the morning of the 5th. The storm began with widespread freezing rain, mainly over northeast South Dakota and west-central Minnesota, where significant accumulations of ice occurred on roads, trees, and power lines. Late in the evening of the 3rd, the freezing rain changed to sleet and then snow, with substantial snowfall accumulations of 6 to as much as 27 inches by late on the 4th. As the Arctic high pressure pushed in through the morning and afternoon of the 4th, northwest winds increased to 25 to 45 mph gusting to 55 mph, creating widespread blizzard conditions, drifts up to 20 feet, and wind chills from 40 to 70 below. The massive accumulation of ice and snow across parts of central and mainly across northeast South Dakota resulted in the roof collapse of over 150 rural buildings. The roofs collapsed onto farm machinery and livestock with a lot of the machinery damaged and a lot of animals injured or killed. The collapse of so many buildings from snow and ice was believed to be the first in this area. On most other buildings, the snow had to be shoveled or blown off. One man was killed in west-central Minnesota as he was trying to shovel snow off the roof of a building. One roof collapse near Lake Poinsett, seven west of Estelline, killed four horses, damaged a boat, and flattened a car. The significant snow drifts buried a few homes during the storm. Many power outages also occurred across parts of central and northeast South Dakota as power lines and poles were downed from the heavy ice accumulation. Some people were without power for several days in the extreme cold conditions. The cities of Miranda, Rockham, Zell, Garden City, Bryant, Vienna, Glenham, Hazel, and other cities were without power for many hours. Some of the communities were out of power for up to 2 days.

In Aberdeen, heavy snow blocking a furnace exhaust vent sent three family members to the hospital for carbon monoxide poisoning. Also, in Aberdeen, the snowmobile club, the drift busters, were called upon for the first time in several years to deliver medicine, take patients to the hospital, and carry essential workers to work and home. Emergencies were challenging to respond to, making many hours to short distances. Throughout central and northeast South Dakota, many businesses and grocery stores were closed. Interstates 29 and 90 were both closed for a few days, along with most state highways. The rest of the roads were either blocked by huge drifts or had one-lane traffic. Snowplows were called off the streets until conditions improved, and when they did start to clear the roads, they worked 12 to 18 hour days. Many vehicles went into the ditch, with mainly minor injuries. Some people had to be rescued. Travelers and truckers were stranded for several days until the roads opened. When Interstate-29 re-opened, there was a logjam of vehicles for 3 miles. One Watertown policeman said he has never seen an impasse as bad as this in 28 years. Area airports were closed, or flights were canceled or delayed. The mail was delayed for several days, most activities were canceled or postponed, and many schools closed on the 6th. The heavy snowfall from this storm brought the widespread snowpack up to 2 to 5 feet. For the winter season so far, the area had record snowfall and recorded cold. Some of the snowfall amounts include 6 inches at McLaughlin, 8 inches 22 SSW Keldron and 4 NW Onida, 9 inches at Pollock, Timber Lake, Highmore, Mobridge, and Kennebec, 10 inches at Castlewood, Clear Lake, Miller, Fort Thompson, and Clark. Snowfall amounts of 1 to over 2 feet include 12 inches at Eureka, and Redfield, 13 inches at Selby and Aberdeen, 14 inches at Pierre and Roscoe, 15 inches at Ortonville MN, 16 inches at Mellette and Browns Valley, MN 18 inches at Faulkton and 1 ENE Stephan, 20 inches at Webster, 22 inches at Britton, 24 inches at Sisseton, 26 inches 10 NW Britton, and 27 inches at Wheaton.

1824: The oldest known weather information in Oklahoma begins on this today at Fort Gibson in 1824. Now known as Muskogee County.

1883: A remarkably brilliant meteor display occurred on the night of January 3rd. The phenomenon was observed at stations in Wisconsin, Michigan, Missouri, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. This meteor was described as having resembled a large, bright ball of fire. The information is from the Monthly Weather Review.

2018: The first time in 28 years, light snowfalls in Tallahassee, Florida. The NWS Office in Tallahassee measured 0.1" of snow/sleet at 8:30 am. Click [HERE](#) for a tweet by Mike Seidel. Snow also fell in Charleston, South Carolina.

## The Source of Second Chances

**God's grace is immeasurably greater than our failings.**

Romans 3:10-18: 10 as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;  
11 THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;  
12 ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES  
GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."  
13 "THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING," "THE  
POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS";  
14 "WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS";  
15 "THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD,  
16 DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS,  
17 AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN."  
18 "THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES."

God desires what is best for us. Scripture describes Him as patient toward mankind because He wants "all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Many believers can testify that our gracious Father gave them multiple chances before they trusted in His Son.

If you think that the Lord takes second chances lightly, read today's passage—it is a look at humanity through divine eyes. On our own, no matter how much we try to be good, we will fall short. Thankfully, God's grace is immeasurably greater than our failings (Romans 5:20).

Of course, the heavenly Father is a righteous judge who cannot ignore transgressions. If He did, He would not be the holy and just deity described in the Scriptures. God considers grace an action word. As a result, He implemented a plan for each person on earth: Whoever believes in Jesus Christ as Savior is forgiven. We are justified by faith and at peace with God (Romans 5:1). Our rebellion against Him is over. In fact, from the Father's perspective, His children look as if they have never done anything wrong.

Jesus is our second chance. Apart from Him, there is no salvation, no justification, and no grace. Psalm 63:3 says, "Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips will praise You." Take a moment today to thank the Lord for this amazing gift.

*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

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:  
01.02.26

6 13 34 43 52 4

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

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.31.25

12 13 37 43 51 8

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$11,350,000**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 27 Mins 52 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
01.02.26

9 15 20 21 25 2

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 42 Mins 52 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.31.25

19 20 24 32 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$165,000**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 42 Mins 52 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.31.25

24 35 42 46 68 14

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

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 11 Mins 52 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.31.25

11 18 21 24 38 26

Power Play: 10x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$64,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 11 Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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

### **BOYS PREP BASKETBALL**

Baltic 56, Colman-Egan 21  
Brandon Valley 59, Marshall, Minn. 58  
Britton-Hecla 51, Deuel 34  
Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 81, Todd County 59  
Deubrook 67, Chester 34  
Estelline-Hendricks 70, Canton 49  
Ethan 67, Scotland/Menno 41  
Hamlin 53, Castlewood 37  
Hills-Beaver Creek, Minn. 83, Garretson 57  
Hot Springs 39, Upton, Wyo. 29  
Ipswich 59, Wilmot 58  
Irene-Wakonda 67, Hanson 46  
Iroquois-Lake Preston 62, Highmore-Harrold 48  
Madison 51, Belle Fourche 29  
McCook Central-Montrose 72, Kimball-White Lake 31  
Milbank 42, Aberdeen Christian 36  
Parker/Marion 66, Beresford 60, OT  
Parkston 58, Winner 57, OT  
Philip 71, Edgemont 25  
Shiloh, N.D. 58, Rapid City Christian 42  
Sioux Falls Lutheran 70, Dell Rapids St Mary's 39  
St Thomas More 76, Little Wound 38  
Stanley County 75, Herried-Selby 45  
Tea 62, Douglas 40  
Tri-State, N.D. 53, Florence-Henry 52  
Vermillion 66, Groton 57  
Warner 43, North Central 37  
Watertown 69, Sturgis Brown High School 42  
Webster 55, Aberdeen Roncalli 52  
West Central 53, Hill City 41

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

### **GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL**

Belle Fourche 48, Madison 34  
Beresford 64, Parker/Marion 32  
Canton 60, Estelline-Hendricks 42  
Chester 58, Deubrook 48  
Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 71, Todd County 42  
Colman-Egan 63, Baltic 33  
Dakota Valley 53, Hartington Cedar Catholic, Neb. 36  
Dell Rapids 49, Flandreau 46  
Dell Rapids St Mary's 60, Sioux Falls Lutheran 25  
Deuel 38, Britton-Hecla 33  
Ethan 70, Scotland/Menno 21

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Groton 41, Vermillion 34  
Hamlin 59, Castlewood 32  
Harding County 72, Belfield, N.D. 27  
Herried-Selby 65, Stanley County 23  
Highmore-Harrold 39, Iroquois-Lake Preston 28  
Hills-Beaver Creek, Minn. 85, Garretson 22  
Irene-Wakonda 46, Hanson 41  
Lakota Tech 67, Hot Springs 15  
Lennox 56, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 22  
Mitchell 42, Harrisburg 33  
North Central 58, Warner 50  
Parkston 69, Winner 12  
Philip 58, Edgemont 13  
Rapid City Christian 65, Shiloh, N.D. 42  
Rapid City Stevens 64, Rapid City Central 52  
Sioux Falls Christian 57, West Central 34  
Sturgis Brown High School 57, Watertown 47  
Tea 58, Douglas 27  
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=  
Brandon Valley vs. Marshall, Minn., ppd.

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

## Iran's leader says rioters 'must be put in their place' as death toll reaches at least 10

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran's supreme leader on Saturday addressed the protests rattling his nation, insisting that "rioters must be put in their place."

The comments by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei may be a green light to authorities to pursue a more aggressive approach to the demonstrations, which have been going on for a week.

The protests take their root in the country's ailing economy as Iran's rial currency now trades at around 1.4 million to \$1.

"We talk to protesters, the officials must talk to them," Khamenei told an audience in Tehran, Iran's capital. "But there is no benefit to talking to rioters. Rioters must be put in their place."

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. AP's earlier story follows below.

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Violence surrounding protests in Iran sparked by the Islamic Republic's ailing economy killed two other people, authorities said Saturday, raising the death toll in the demonstrations to at least 10 as they showed no signs of stopping.

The new deaths follow U.S. President Donald Trump warning Iran on Friday that if Tehran "violently kills peaceful protesters," the United States "will come to their rescue." While it remains unclear how and if Trump will intervene, his comments sparked an immediate, angry response from officials within the theocracy threatening to target American troops in the Mideast.

The weeklong protests, have become the biggest in Iran since 2022, when the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in police custody triggered nationwide demonstrations. However, the protests have yet to be as widespread and intense as those surrounding the death of Amini, who was detained over not wearing her hijab, or headscarf, to the liking of authorities.

The deaths overnight into Saturday involved a new level of violence. In Qom, home to the country's major Shiite seminaries, a grenade exploded, killing a man there, the state-owned IRAN newspaper reported. It quoted security officials alleging the man carried the grenade to attack people in the city, some 130

kilometers (80 miles) south of the capital, Tehran.

Online videos from Qom purportedly showed fires in the street overnight.

The second death happened in the town of Harsin, some 370 kilometers (230 miles) southwest of Tehran. There, the newspaper said a member of the Basij, the all-volunteer arm of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, died in a gun and knife attack in the town in Kermanshah province.

Demonstrations have reached over 100 locations in 22 of Iran's 31 provinces, the U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency reported.

Iran's civilian government under reformist President Masoud Pezeshkian has been trying to signal it wants to negotiate with protesters. However, Pezeshkian has acknowledged there is not much he can do as Iran's rial has rapidly depreciated, with \$1 now costing some 1.4 million rials. That sparked the initial protests.

The protests, taking root in economic issues, have heard demonstrators chant against Iran's theocracy as well. Tehran has had little luck in propping up its economy in the months since its June war with Israel in which the U.S. also bombed Iranian nuclear sites in Iran.

Iran recently said it was no longer enriching uranium at any site in the country, trying to signal to the West that it remains open to potential negotiations over its atomic program to ease sanctions. However, those talks have yet to happen as Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have warned Tehran against reconstituting its atomic program.

## **US strikes Venezuela and says its leader, Maduro, has been captured and flown out of the country**

By REGINA GARCIA CANO and KONSTANTIN TOROPIN Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — The United States hit Venezuela with a "large-scale strike" early Saturday and said its president, Nicolás Maduro, had been captured and flown out of the country after months of stepped-up pressure by Washington — an extraordinary nighttime operation announced by President Donald Trump on social media hours after the attack.

Multiple explosions rang out and low-flying aircraft swept through Caracas, the capital, as Maduro's government immediately accused the United States of attacking civilian and military installations. The Venezuelan government called it an "imperialist attack" and urged citizens to take to the streets.

It was not immediately clear who was running the country, and Maduro's whereabouts were not immediately known. Trump announced the developments on Truth Social shortly after 4:30 a.m. ET. Under Venezuelan law the vice president, Delcy Rodríguez, would take power. There was no confirmation that had happened, though she did issue a statement after the strike.

"We do not know the whereabouts of President Nicolás Maduro and First Lady Cilia Flores," Rodríguez said. "We demand proof of life."

Maduro, Trump said, "has been, along with his wife, captured and flown out of the Country. This operation was done in conjunction with U.S. Law Enforcement. Details to follow." He set a news conference for later Saturday morning.

The legal implications of the strike under U.S. law were not immediately clear. Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, posted on X that he had spoken with Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who briefed him on the strike. Rubio told Lee that Maduro "has been arrested by U.S. personnel to stand trial on criminal charges in the United States."

The White House did not immediately respond to queries on where Maduro and his wife were being flown to. Maduro was indicted in March 2020 on "narco-terrorism" conspiracy charges in the Southern District of New York.

Maduro last appeared on state television Friday while meeting with a delegation of Chinese officials in Caracas.

The explosions in Caracas, Venezuela's capital, early on the third day of 2026 — at least seven blasts — sent people rushing into the streets, while others took to social media to report hearing and seeing the explosions. It was not immediately clear if there were casualties on either side. The attack itself lasted

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less than 30 minutes and it was unclear if more actions lay ahead, though Trump said in his post that the strikes were carried out "successfully."

The Federal Aviation Administration issued a ban on U.S. commercial flights in Venezuelan airspace because of "ongoing military activity" ahead of the explosions.

The strike came after the Trump administration spent months escalating pressure on Maduro. The CIA was behind a drone strike last week at a docking area believed to have been used by Venezuelan drug cartels — the first known direct operation on Venezuelan soil since the U.S. began strikes in September.

For months, Trump had threatened that he could soon order strikes on targets on Venezuelan land following months of attacks on boats accused of carrying drugs. Maduro has decried the U.S. military operations as a thinly veiled effort to oust him from power.

Some streets in Caracas fill up

Armed individuals and uniformed members of a civilian militia took to the streets of a Caracas neighborhood long considered a stronghold of the ruling party. But in other areas of the city, the streets remained empty hours after the attack. Parts of the city remained without power, but vehicles moved freely.

Video obtained from Caracas and an unidentified coastal city showed tracers and smoke clouding the landscape sky as repeated muted explosions illuminated the night sky. Other footage showed an urban landscape with cars passing on a highway as blasts illuminated the hills behind them. Unintelligible conversation could be heard in the background. The videos were verified by The Associated Press.

Smoke could be seen rising from the hangar of a military base in Caracas, while another military installation in the capital was without power.

"The whole ground shook. This is horrible. We heard explosions and planes," said Carmen Hidalgo, a 21-year-old office worker, her voice trembling. She was walking briskly with two relatives, returning from a birthday party. "We felt like the air was hitting us."

Venezuela's government responded to the attack with a call to action. "People to the streets!" it said in a statement. "The Bolivarian Government calls on all social and political forces in the country to activate mobilization plans and repudiate this imperialist attack."

The statement added that Maduro had "ordered all national defense plans to be implemented" and declared "a state of external disturbance." That state of emergency gives him the power to suspend people's rights and expand the role of the armed forces.

The website of the U.S. Embassy in Venezuela, a post that has been closed since 2019, issued a warning to American citizens in the country, saying it was "aware of reports of explosions in and around Caracas."

"U.S. citizens in Venezuela should shelter in place," the warning said.

Reaction emerges slowly

Inquiries to the Pentagon and U.S. Southern Command since Trump's social media post went unanswered. The FAA warned all commercial and private U.S. pilots that the airspace over Venezuela and the small island nation of Curacao, just off the coast of the country to the north, was off limits "due to safety-of-flight risks associated with ongoing military activity."

U.S. Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, posted his potential concerns, reflecting a view from the right flank in the Congress. "I look forward to learning what, if anything, might constitutionally justify this action in the absence of a declaration of war or authorization for the use of military force," Lee said on X.

It was not clear if the U.S. Congress had been officially notified of the strikes.

The Armed Services committees in both houses of Congress, which have jurisdiction over military matters, have not been notified by the administration of any actions, according to a person familiar with the matter and granted anonymity to discuss it.

Lawmakers from both political parties in Congress have raised deep reservations and flat out objections to the U.S. attacks on boats suspected of drug smuggling on boats near the Venezuelan coast and the Congress has not specifically approved an authorization for the use of military force for such operations in the region.

Regional reaction was not immediately forthcoming in the early hours of Saturday. Cuba, however, a sup-

porter of the Maduro government and a longtime adversary of the United States, called for the international community to respond to what president Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez called “the criminal attack.” “Our zone of peace is being brutally assaulted,” he said on X. Iran’s Foreign Ministry also condemned the strikes.

President Javier Milei of Argentina praised the claim by his close ally, Trump, that Maduro had been captured with a political slogan he often deploys to celebrate right-wing advances: “Long live freedom, dammit!”

The U.S. military has been attacking boats in the Caribbean Sea and the eastern Pacific Ocean since early September. As of Friday, the number of known boat strikes is 35 and the number of people killed is at least 115, according to numbers announced by the Trump administration.

They followed a major buildup of American forces in the waters off South America, including the arrival in November of the nation’s most advanced aircraft carrier, which added thousands more troops to what was already the largest military presence in the region in generations.

Trump has justified the boat strikes as a necessary escalation to stem the flow of drugs into the U.S. and asserted that the U.S. is engaged in an “armed conflict” with drug cartels.

## **In their words: Survivors and others talk about fatal Swiss Alpine bar fire**

CRANS-MONTANA, Switzerland (AP) — In the aftermath of a fire inside a Swiss Alpine bar that killed 40 people celebrating the new year, survivors, friends and family members, the region’s top authorities and even Pope Leo have spoken to the public in remarks in French, Italian, German and English, reflecting the tradition of Swiss multilingualism.

Another 119 people were injured in the blaze early Thursday as it ripped through the busy Le Constellation bar at the ski resort of Crans-Montana, authorities said. It was one of the deadliest tragedies in Switzerland’s history.

Investigators said Friday that they believe sparkling candles atop Champagne bottles ignited the fatal fire when they came too close to the ceiling of the crowded bar.

Here’s a look at what people said in the wake of the disaster:

— “I’m looking everywhere. The body of my son is somewhere,” Laetitia Brodard told reporters Friday in Crans-Montana as she searched for her son, 16-year-old Arthur. “I want to know, where is my child, and be by his side. Wherever that may be, be it in the intensive care unit or the morgue.”

— “We were bringing people out, people were collapsing. We were doing everything we could to save them, we helped as many as we could. We saw people screaming, running,” Marc-Antoine Chavanon, 14, told The Associated Press in Crans-Montana on Friday, recounting how he rushed to the bar to help the injured. “There was one of our friends: She was struggling to get out, she was all burned. You can’t imagine the pain I saw.”

— “It was hard to live through for everyone. Also probably because everyone was asking themselves, ‘Was my child, my cousin, someone from the region at this party?’” Eric Bonvin, general director of the regional hospital in Sion that took in dozens of injured people, told AP on Friday. “This place was very well known as somewhere to celebrate the new year,” Bonvin said. “Also, seeing young people arrive — that’s always traumatic.”

— “I have seen horror, and I don’t know what else would be worse than this,” Gianni Campolo, a Swiss 19-year-old who was in Crans-Montana on vacation and rushed to the bar to help first responders, told France’s TF1 television.

— “You will understand that the priority today is truly placed on identification, in order to allow the families to begin their mourning,” Beatrice Pilloud, the Valais region’s attorney general, told reporters Friday during a news conference in Sion.

Pope Leo said in a telegram Friday to the bishop of Sion that he “wishes to express his compassion and concern to the relatives of the victims. He prays that the Lord will welcome the deceased into His abode of peace and light, and will sustain the courage of those who suffer in their hearts or in their bodies.”

— “We have numerous accounts of heroic actions, one could say of very strong solidarity in the moment,” Cantonal head of government Mathias Reynard told RTS radio Friday. “In the first minutes it was citizens — and in large part young people — who saved lives with their courage.”

— “Switzerland is a strong country not because it is sheltered from drama, but because it knows how to face them with courage and a spirit of mutual help,” Swiss President Guy Parmelin, speaking on his first day in the position that changes hands annually, told reporters Thursday.

## **In their words: Survivors and others talk about fatal Swiss Alpine bar fire**

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## Six people injured in the fatal fire at a Swiss bar remain unidentified. It's an unbearable wait

By JOHN LEICESTER, JAMEY KEATEN and STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

CRANS-MONTANA, Switzerland (AP) — Sixteen-year-old Arthur Brodard went to the Le Constellation bar with friends to celebrate the New Year. Nearly 48 hours after a devastating fire, his mother still held out hope he might be one of the six injured people who remained unidentified after one of Switzerland's worst tragedies.

Those half-dozen people gave a glimmer of hope for families whose loved ones were missing in the aftermath of the fire at the Alpine ski resort of Crans-Montana that killed 40 people and injured 119 others, 113 of whom have been formally identified.

"I'm looking everywhere. The body of my son is somewhere," Laetitia Brodard, from Lausanne, Switzerland, told reporters. "I want to know, where is my child, and be by his side. Wherever that may be, be it in the intensive care unit or the morgue."

The severity of the burns has made it difficult to identify both the injured and deceased, requiring families to supply authorities with DNA samples. In some cases, wallets and any identification documents inside turned to ash in the flames. An Instagram account has filled up with photos of people who were unaccounted for, and friends and relatives begged for tips about their whereabouts.

Officials in the Valais regional government acknowledged the prolonged heartache.

"You will understand that the priority today is truly placed on identification, in order to allow the families to begin their mourning," Beatrice Pilloud, the Valais region's attorney general, told reporters Friday during a news conference.

Mathias Reynard, head of the regional government, added: "We are aware of the particularly difficult hours, of the unbearable side of every minute that passes without answers."

'You can't imagine the pain I saw'

Investigators said Friday that they believe sparkling candles atop Champagne bottles ignited the fatal fire when they came too close to the ceiling of the bar crowded with New Year's Eve revelers, two hours after midnight Thursday.

"We were bringing people out, people were collapsing. We were doing everything we could to save them, we helped as many as we could, we saw people screaming, running," Marc-Antoine Chavanon, 14, told The Associated Press in Crans-Montana on Friday, recounting how he rushed to the bar to help the injured. "There was one of our friends: She was struggling to get out, she was all burned. You can't imagine the pain I saw."

Many of the injured were in their teens to mid-20s, police said. Authorities planned to look into whether sound-dampening material on the ceiling conformed with regulations and whether the candles were permitted for use in the bar.

Officials said they would also look at other safety measures on the premises, including fire extinguishers and escape routes. The region's top prosecutor warned of possible prosecutions if any criminal liability is found.

Injured hailed from across Europe

The injured included 71 Swiss nationals, 14 French and 11 Italians, along with citizens of Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Luxembourg, Belgium, Portugal and Poland, according to Frédéric Gisler, police commander of the Valais region. The nationalities of 14 people were still unclear.

Emanuele Galeppini, a promising teenage Italian golfer who competed internationally, was officially listed as one of Italy's missing nationals. His uncle, Sebastiano Galeppini, told Italian news agency ANSA that their family is awaiting the DNA checks, though the Italian Golf Federation on its website announced that he had died.

## FBI says it disrupted a New Year's Eve attack plan inspired by Islamic State group

By GARY D. ROBERTSON and ERIK VERDUZCO Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — The FBI said Friday it disrupted a New Year's Eve attack plot targeting a grocery store and fast-food restaurant in North Carolina, arresting an 18-year-old man who authorities say pledged loyalty to the Islamic State group.

Christian Sturdivant was charged with attempting to provide material support to a foreign terrorist organization. Investigators said he told an undercover FBI employee posing as a supportive confidant about his plans to attack people. Their online messages, along with a recent search of his home, indicated attacks would occur with knives and hammers, according to prosecutors and records.

Worried Sturdivant might attempt violence before New Year's Eve, the FBI placed him under constant surveillance for days, including on Christmas, U.S. Attorney for Western North Carolina Russ Ferguson said.

Agents were prepared to arrest him earlier if he left his home with weapons, Ferguson said at a news conference in Charlotte. "At no point was the public in harm's way."

Sturdivant was arrested Wednesday and remained in custody after a federal court appearance Friday. An attorney representing him did not immediately respond to an email or phone message seeking comment. Another hearing was scheduled for Jan. 7.

The alleged attack would have taken place one year after 14 people were killed in New Orleans by a U.S. citizen and Army veteran who proclaimed support for IS on social media.

The FBI has foiled several alleged attacks through sting operations in which agents posed as terror supporters, supplying advice or equipment. Critics say the strategy can amount to entrapment of mentally vulnerable people who wouldn't have the wherewithal to act alone.

Searches of Sturdivant's home and phone uncovered what investigators described as a manifesto detailing plans for the attack, FBI Special Agent in Charge James Barnacle told reporters.

Sturdivant "was willing to sacrifice himself," Barnacle said.

A handwritten note found in a trash can at Sturdivant's home listed details of the planned attacks and the number of intended victims at a Burger King restaurant and unnamed grocery store, according to an FBI affidavit.

The note also said he would attack arriving officers and "hoped to die by the hands of police." Ferguson said the attack was to take place in Mint Hill, a bedroom community of Charlotte.

The affidavit said a database check indicated Sturdivant worked at Burger King in Mint Hill. It wasn't clear if that was the same restaurant cited in the note. Ferguson declined to identify the specific targeted businesses, citing the ongoing investigation.

If convicted, Sturdivant faces up to 20 years in prison, according to court documents.

The fact that Sturdivant encountered two undercover officers while allegedly planning the attack should reassure the public, Ferguson said.

The affidavit says the investigation began last month after authorities linked Sturdivant to a social media account that posted content supportive of IS, including imagery that appeared to promote violence. The account's display name referenced Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the former leader of the extremist group.

Some experts argue that IS is powerful today partly as a brand, inspiring both militant groups and individuals in attacks that the group itself may have no real role in.

The affidavit says Sturdivant had been on the FBI's radar in January 2022, when he was a minor, after officials learned he'd been in contact with a suspected IS member in Europe, and received instructions to dress in black, knock on people's doors and commit attacks with a hammer.

At that time, Sturdivant set out for a neighbor's house armed with a hammer and a knife but was restrained by his grandfather, the affidavit says.

No charges were filed at that time, but Sturdivant underwent psychological treatment and the FBI was told he no longer had access to social media, Barnacle said. But the FBI found out weeks ago that he was back on it, he added.

The FBI in Los Angeles last month announced the disruption of a separate New Year's Eve plot, arresting members of an extremist anti-capitalist and anti-government group who federal officials said planned to bomb multiple sites in southern California.

Other IS-inspired attacks over the past decade include a 2015 shooting rampage by a husband-and-wife team who killed 14 people in San Bernardino, California, and a 2016 massacre at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, by a gunman who fatally shot 49 people.

## What to know about Trump administration freezing federal child care funds

By CHARLOTTE KRAMON and SARAH BRUMFIELD Associated Press/Report for America

The Trump administration has said it is freezing child care funds to all states until they provide more verification about the programs in a move fueled by a series of alleged fraud schemes at Minnesota day care centers run by Somali residents.

All 50 states will be impacted by the review, but the Republican administration is focusing most of its ire on the blue state of Minnesota and is calling for an audit of some of its centers.

Minnesota Democratic Attorney General Keith Ellison said in a statement Wednesday that he was "exploring all our legal options to ensure that critical childcare services do not get abruptly slashed based on pretext and grandstanding."

It is unclear how much more robust the verification process for states will be than it already has been.

Deputy Secretary of Health and Human Services Jim O'Neill called the decision a response to "blatant fraud that appears to be rampant in Minnesota and across the country" in a social media post announcing the change on Tuesday.

Here are some things to know about these moves:

More verification needed for all states to get child care funds

All 50 states will have to provide additional levels of verification and administrative data before they receive more funding from the Child Care and Development Fund, according to a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services spokesperson. However, Minnesota will have to provide even more verification for child care centers that are suspected of fraud, such as attendance and licensing records, past enforcement actions and inspection reports.

In his social media post on Tuesday, O'Neill said all Administration for Children and Families payments nationwide would require "justification and a receipt or photo evidence" before money is sent, but the HHS spokesperson said Wednesday that the additional verifications only apply to CCDF payments.

Walz says Trump is politicizing the issue

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, the 2024 Democratic vice presidential nominee, said in a social media post that fraudsters are a serious issue that the state has spent years cracking down on but that this is a political move that is part of "Trump's long game."

State Senate Majority Leader Erin Murphy condemned the move in a statement Wednesday.

"Republicans are playing sick games and winning devastating prizes," Murphy said. "And now, tens of thousands of Minnesota families will pay the price as Donald's Trump's agents strip away crucial funding."

Fraud investigations could stretch to other programs, states

The administration launched efforts in recent weeks to track down fraud in other programs in Minnesota and is looking at fraud in blue states such as California and New York, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said in an interview with "Fox & Friends" on Wednesday.

The administration will continue to send officers to investigate "potential fraud sites" in Minnesota and deport undocumented immigrants, Leavitt said, adding that the Department of Homeland Security is considering plans to denaturalize citizens.

The Department of Labor is also investigating the state's unemployment insurance program, Leavitt said. The administration this month threatened to withhold SNAP food aid funding from Democratic-controlled

states, including Minnesota, unless they provide information about people receiving assistance.

Attention focused on Minnesota

The announcement came a day after U.S. Homeland Security officials conducted a fraud investigation in Minneapolis, questioning workers at unidentified businesses. Trump has criticized Walz's administration over the cases, capitalizing on them to target the Somali diaspora in the state, which has the largest Somali population in the U.S.

In his post Tuesday, O'Neill, who is serving as acting director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, referenced a right-wing influencer who posted a video last week claiming he found that day care centers operated by Somali residents in Minneapolis had committed up to \$100 million in fraud.

Meanwhile, there are concerns about harassment that home-based day care providers and members of the Somali community nationwide might face amid the vitriol, including Trump's comments earlier this month referring to Somali immigrants as "garbage." Washington state Attorney General Nick Brown released a statement saying, "Showing up on someone's porch, threatening, or harassing them isn't an investigation. Neither is filming minors who may be in the home."

Minnesota child care centers are alarmed

Maria Snider, director of the Rainbow Child Development Center and vice president of advocacy group Minnesota Child Care Association, said fear is rising among both families — many of which are living paycheck to paycheck — and child care centers that rely on the federal funding. Without child care system tuition, centers may have to lay off teachers and shut down classrooms, she said.

The Administration for Children and Families provides \$185 million in child care funds annually to Minnesota, according to Assistant Secretary Alex Adams.

In Minnesota, the application process for the funding is complex and multilayered, Snider said. Her own child care center has been subjected to random audits, she said, and all centers are required to submit to licensing visits by officials.

"I don't know what else I would provide," she said.

Ahmed Hasan, director of the ABC Learning Center that was one of those featured in the video by the right-wing influencer, said on Wednesday that there were 56 children enrolled at the center. Since the video was posted, Hasan, who is Somali, said his center has received harassing phone calls making staff members and parents feel unsafe.

He said the center is routinely subject to checks by state regulators to ensure they remain in compliance with their license.

"There's no fraud happening here," Hasan told The Associated Press. "We are open every day, and we have our records to show that this place is open."

## Trump and top Iranian officials exchange threats over protests roiling Iran

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — U.S. President Donald Trump and top Iranian officials exchanged dueling threats Friday as widening protests swept across parts of the Islamic Republic, further escalating tensions between the countries after America bombed Iranian nuclear sites in June.

At least eight people have been killed so far in violence surrounding the demonstrations, which were sparked in part by the collapse of Iran's rial currency but have increasingly seen crowds chanting anti-government slogans.

The protests, now in their sixth day, have become the biggest in Iran since 2022, when the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in police custody triggered nationwide demonstrations. However, the protests have yet to be as widespread and intense as those surrounding the death of Amini, who was detained over not wearing her hijab, or headscarf, to the liking of authorities.

Trump post sparks quick Iranian response

Trump initially wrote on his Truth Social platform, warning Iran that if it "violently kills peaceful protest-

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ers," the United States "will come to their rescue."

"We are locked and loaded and ready to go," Trump wrote, without elaborating.

Ali Larijani, a former parliament speaker who serves as the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, alleged that Israel and the U.S. were stoking the demonstrations. He offered no evidence to support the allegation, which Iranian officials have repeatedly made during years of protests sweeping the country.

"Trump should know that intervention by the U.S. in the domestic problem corresponds to chaos in the entire region and the destruction of the U.S. interests," Larijani wrote on X, which the Iranian government blocks. "The people of the U.S. should know that Trump began the adventurism. They should take care of their own soldiers."

Larijani's remarks likely referenced America's wide military footprint in the region. Iran in June attacked Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar after the U.S. strikes on three nuclear sites during Israel's 12-day war on the Islamic Republic. No one was injured, though a missile did hit a structure there.

As of Friday, no major changes had been made to U.S. troop levels in the Middle East or their preparations following Trump's social media posts, said a U.S. official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive military plans.

In a letter late Friday to United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres and the U.N. Security Council, Iran's envoy asked the world body to condemn the rhetoric and reaffirm the country's "inherent right to defend its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national security, and to protect its people against any foreign interference."

"The United States of America bears full responsibility for any consequences arising from these unlawful threats and any ensuing escalation," said Amir Saeid Irvani, Iranian ambassador to the U.N.

Ali Shamkhani, an adviser to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei who previously was the council's secretary for years, separately warned that "any interventionist hand that gets too close to the security of Iran will be cut."

### US signals support for protesters

Trump's online message marked a direct sign of support for the demonstrators, something other American presidents have avoided out of concern that activists would be accused of working with the West. During Iran's 2009 Green Movement demonstrations, President Barack Obama held back from publicly backing the protests — something he said in 2022 "was a mistake."

But such White House support still carries a risk.

"Though the grievances that fuel these and past protests are due to the Iranian government's own policies, they are likely to use President Trump's statement as proof that the unrest is driven by external actors," said Naysan Rafati, an analyst at the International Crisis Group.

"But using that as a justification to crack down more violently risks inviting the very U.S. involvement Trump has hinted at," he added.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei recently cited a list of Tehran's longtime grievances regarding U.S. intervention, including a CIA-backed coup in 1953, the downing of a passenger jet in 1988 and the strikes in June.

### Protests continue Friday

Protests continued Friday in various cities in the country, even as life largely continued unaffected in the capital, Tehran. Demonstrations have reached over 100 locations in 22 of Iran's 31 provinces, the U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency reported. It said the death toll in the demonstrations rose to eight with the death of a demonstrator in Marvdasht in Iran's Fars province.

Demonstrators took to the streets in Zahedan in Iran's restive Sistan and Baluchestan province on the border with Pakistan. The burials of several demonstrators killed in the protests also took place Friday, sparking marches.

Videos purported to show mourners chasing off security force members who attended the funeral of 21-year-old Amirhessam Khodayari. He was killed Wednesday in Kouhdasht, over 400 kilometers (250 miles) southwest of Tehran in Iran's Lorestan province.

Footage also showed Khodayari's father denying his son served in the all-volunteer Basij force of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, as authorities claimed. The semiofficial Fars news agency later reported that there were now questions about the government's claims that he served.

Iran's civilian government under reformist President Masoud Pezeshkian has been trying to signal it wants to negotiate with protesters. However, Pezeshkian has acknowledged there is not much he can do as Iran's rial has rapidly depreciated, with \$1 now costing some 1.4 million rials. That sparked the initial protests.

The protests, taking root in economic issues, have heard demonstrators chant against Iran's theocracy as well. Tehran has had little luck in propping up its economy in the months since the June war.

Iran recently said it was no longer enriching uranium at any site in the country, trying to signal to the West that it remains open to potential negotiations over its atomic program to ease sanctions. However, those talks have yet to happen as Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have warned Tehran against reconstituting its atomic program.

## **Minnesota must provide documents to US government in child care fraud probe by next week**

By CHARLOTTE KRAMON Associated Press/Report for America

Minnesota officials have until next week to hand over information on providers and parents who receive federal child care funds that the Trump administration contends have been used fraudulently or risk losing federal funding. State officials said Friday recent inspections showed several childcare centers accused of fraud by a right-wing influencer were "operating as expected."

In an email sent Friday to child care providers and shared with The Associated Press by multiple providers, Minnesota's Department of Children, Youth, and Families said it has until Jan. 9 to provide information about recipients of the funds.

The announcement earlier this week by the Trump administration that it would freeze child care funds to Minnesota and the rest of the states comes after a series of fraud cases involving government programs in which many defendants were Somali, as were many of those running spotlighted childcare centers.

Allegations of fraud at the child care centers went viral recently when a right-wing influencer posted a video claiming there was fraud taking place, putting Minnesota and some other states in the crosshairs of the Trump administration.

State officials said investigators did spot checks and reviews of nine centers this week in response to the influencer's video posted last week, and found no operational issues. One center was not yet open at the time, and there are ongoing investigations at four of them.

The email sent Friday instructed providers and families who rely on the frozen federal child care program to continue the program's "licensing and certification requirements and practices as usual." It does not say that recipients themselves need to take any action or provide any information.

"We recognize the alarm and questions this has raised," the email said. "We found out about the freezing of funds at the same time everyone else did on social media."

The state agency added that it "did not receive a formal communication from the federal government until late Tuesday night," which was after Health and Human Services Deputy Secretary Jim O'Neill posted about the freeze on X. All 50 states will have to provide additional levels of verification and administrative data before they receive more funding from the Child Care and Development Fund, which is designed to make child care affordable for low-income families.

Minnesota is a target

The U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform will hold a hearing Wednesday to discuss the allegations of fraudulent use of federal funds in Minnesota. An HHS spokesperson said that the child care fraud hotline put up by the federal agency earlier this week has received more than 200 tips.

Minnesota has drawn ire from Republicans and the Trump administration over other fraud accusations.

Administration for Children and Families Assistant Secretary Alex Adams told Fox News on Friday that his agency sent Minnesota a letter last month asking for information on the child care program and other

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welfare programs by Dec. 26, but didn't get a response. The state did not immediately respond to a request for comment. President Donald Trump has also targeted the state's large Somali community with immigration enforcement actions and called them "garbage."

Minnesota Democrats say the Trump administration is playing politics and hurting families and children as a result. Minnesota's Department of Children, Youth and Families said in a press release Friday that inspectors conduct regular oversight activities for the child care program, noting that there are 55 related open investigations involving providers.

"DCYF remains committed to fact-based reviews that stop fraud, protect children, support families, and minimize disruption to communities that rely on these essential services," the department said. "Distribution of unvetted or deceptive claims and misuse of tip lines can interfere with investigations, create safety risks for families, providers, and employers, and has contributed to harmful discourse about Minnesota's immigrant communities."

It is unclear how recipients will be impacted

Maria Snider, director of a child care center in St. Paul and vice president of advocacy group Minnesota Child Care Association, said providers currently get paid at least three weeks after services are provided. Some 23,000 children and 12,000 families receive funding from the targeted child care program each month on average, according to the state.

"For a lot of centers, we're already running on a thin margin," she said. "Even centers where 10 to 15% of their kids are on childcare assistance, that's a dip in your income."

Any child who attends a child care center with attendees who receive federal funding could be impacted, Snider said.

The Administration for Children and Families, a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, provides \$185 million in child care funds annually to Minnesota, federal officials have said.

According to the Friday email from Minnesota's Department of Children, Youth, and Families, HHS sent a letter to Minnesota asking for data from 2022 to 2025, including identifying information of all recipients of the child care funds, a list of all providers who receive the funds, how much they receive and "information related to alleged fraud networks and oversight failures." It's unclear whether Minnesota already has the data the administration is asking for.

HHS said five child care centers that receive funds from the child care program or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families would have to provide "specific documentation" such as attendance, inspections and assessments, according to the email.

HHS said it would provide Minnesota with more information by Jan. 5, but the state agency wrote that it's unclear what kinds of funding restrictions it faces.

"Our teams are working hard to analyze the legal, fiscal, and other aspects of this federal action," the email says. "We do not know the full impact."

## Yemen's separatists announce a constitution for an independent south

By AHMED AL-HAJ AND FATMA KHALED Associated Press

ADEN, Yemen (AP) — Yemen's separatist movement on Friday announced a constitution for an independent nation in the south and demanded other factions in the war-torn country accept the move in an escalation of a confrontation that has pitted Gulf powerhouses Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates against each other.

The UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council depicted the announcement as a declaration of independence for the south. But it was not immediately clear if the move could be implemented or was largely symbolic. Last month, STC-linked fighters seized control of two southern provinces from Saudi-backed forces and took over the Presidential Palace in the south's main city, Aden. Members of the internationally recognized government — which had been based in Aden — fled to the Saudi-capital Riyadh.

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On Friday, Saudi warplanes bombed camps and military positions held by the STC in Hadramout province as Saudi-backed fighters tried to seize the facilities, a separatist official said. It was the latest direct intervention by Saudi Arabia, which in recent weeks has bombed STC forces and struck what is said was a shipment of Emirati weapons destined for the separatists.

Meanwhile, the UAE announced early Saturday it had completely withdrawn all its troops from Yemen, something it pledged to do after the confrontation.

Ostensibly, Saudi Arabia and the UAE and their allies on the ground in Yemen have all been part of a Saudi-led coalition fighting Iranian-backed Houthi rebels who control the north in the country's decade-long civil war. The coalition's professed goal has long been to restore the internationally recognized government, which was driven out of the north by the Houthis. But tensions between the factions and the two Gulf nations appear to be unraveling the coalition, threatening to throw them into outright conflict and further tear apart the Arab world's poorest country.

## Southern separatists' declaration

The head of the STC, Aidarous al-Zubaid, issued a video statement Friday saying that the constitution his group issued would be in effect for two years, after which a referendum would be held on "exercising the right to self-determination for the people of the South." During those two years, he said, the "relevant parties" in north and south Yemen should hold a dialogue on "a path and mechanisms that guarantee the right of the people of the South."

He said that if the other factions don't agree to his call or if they take military action, "all options remain open."

The 30-article "constitution" proclaimed the creation of "the State of South Arabia," covering the same territory of the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, the independent southern state that existed from 1967-1990.

It seemed to be the most overt move yet by the STC toward its long-proclaimed goal of independence. In the confusion that has reigned in the south in recent weeks, it was not clear what practical impact it would have. But the declaration could set back efforts to avert an outright conflict between the separatists and the rest of the Saudi-led coalition.

The UAE's Foreign Ministry said in a statement Friday that the country was dealing with the situation "with restraint, coordination, and a deliberate commitment to de-escalation, guided by a foreign policy that consistently prioritizes regional stability over impulsive action."

The UAE Defense Ministry early Saturday said its withdrawal of troops from Yemen was complete. It provided no details on the number of soldiers and equipment moved, but there had been multiple Emirati military cargo flights heading in and out of Yemen in the last few days.

"The UAE forces follows the implementation of a previously announced decision to conclude the remaining missions of counterterrorism units," a Defense Ministry statement said. "The process has been conducted in a manner that ensured the safety of all personnel and carried out in coordination with all relevant partners."

## Saudi warplanes strike as fighting continues in the south

The Saudi-led coalition in Yemen demands the withdrawal of the STC-linked Southern Shield forces from the two governorates they seized, Hadramout and Mahra, as part of de-escalation efforts. The STC has so far refused to hand over its weapons and camps.

Saudi-backed fighters, known as the National Shield Forces, advanced on two STC-camps in Hadramout, said a senior STC official, Ahmed bin Breik, a former governor of the province. The separatist forces refused to withdraw and in response, Saudi planes struck the camps, he said.

Mohamed al-Nakib, spokesperson for the STC-backed forces, said the strikes caused fatalities, without providing details. The Associated Press couldn't independently verify that claim.

He told the AP later Friday that "intense clashes" erupted between his forces and the National Shield forces across several areas of Hadramout.

It was not clear if the Saudi-backed forces succeeded in retaking the camps.

Salem al-Khanbashi, the governor of Hadramout who was chosen Friday by Yemen's internationally recognized government to command the Saudi-led forces in the governorate, said the move to reclaim the camps was "not a declaration of war and is not seeking an escalation." He said it was a "pre-emptive measure to remove weapons."

Escalating tensions

In a post on X, the Saudi ambassador to Yemen, Mohammed al-Jaber, said the kingdom had tried "all efforts with STC" for weeks "to stop the escalation" and to urge the separatists to leave Hadramout and Mahra, only to be faced with "continued intransigence and rejection from Aidarous al-Zubaidi."

Al-Jaber said the STC had not permitted a Saudi delegation's jet to land in Aden, despite having agreed on its arrival with some STC leaders to find a solution that serves "everyone and the public interest."

Yemen's Transportation Ministry, aligned with STC, said Saudi Arabia on Thursday imposed requirements mandating that flights to and from Aden International Airport undergo inspection in Jeddah. The ministry denounced the decision. There was no confirmation from Saudi authorities.

A spokesperson with the transport ministry told the AP late Thursday that all flights from and to the UAE were suspended until Saudi Arabia reverses these reported measures.

## Swiss investigators believe sparkling candles atop wine bottles ignited fatal bar fire

By JOHN LEICESTER, JAMEY KEATEN and STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

CRANS-MONTANA, Switzerland (AP) — Investigators said Friday that they believe sparkling candles atop Champagne bottles ignited a fatal fire at a Swiss ski resort when they came too close to the ceiling of a bar crowded with New Year's Eve revelers.

Authorities planned to look into whether sound-dampening material on the ceiling conformed with regulations and whether the candles, which give off a stream of upward-shooting sparks, were permitted for use in the bar.

Forty people were killed and another 119 injured in the blaze early Thursday as it ripped through the busy Le Constellation bar at the ski resort of Crans-Montana, authorities said. It was one of the deadliest tragedies in Switzerland's history.

Officials said they would also look at other safety measures on the premises, including fire extinguishers and escape routes. The attorney general for the Valais region warned of possible prosecutions if any criminal liability is found.

Arthur Brodard, 16, from the Swiss city of Lausanne, was among the missing. His mother, Laetitia, was in Crans-Montana on Friday and frantic to find him. She held out "a glimmer of hope" that he might be one of the six injured people who had yet to be identified.

"I'm looking everywhere. The body of my son is somewhere," she told reporters. "I want to know, where is my child, and be by his side, wherever that may be — be it in the intensive care unit or the morgue."

The injured included 71 people from Switzerland, 14 from France and 11 from Italy, along with citizens of Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Luxembourg, Belgium, Portugal and Poland, according to Frédéric Gisler, police commander of the Valais region. The nationalities of 14 people were unclear.

An evening of celebration turns tragic

Among the crowd was Axel Clavier, a 16-year-old from Paris, who said he felt as if he was suffocating inside the Swiss Alpine bar where moments before he had been ringing in the new year.

The teenager escaped the inferno by forcing a window open with a table. The dead included one of Clavier's friends, and he told The Associated Press that two or three other friends were still missing hours after the disaster.

An impromptu memorial took shape near the bar, where mourners left candles and flowers. Hundreds of others prayed for the victims at the nearby Church of Montana-Station.

A French teenager on Friday brought a bouquet of tulips to the regional hospital in Sion for her best friend, a fellow 17-year-old girl who was badly burned and in intensive care. The two attend school together

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in Lausanne, said the girl, who was in distress and did not give her full name to the AP.

But when she arrived at the hospital, her friend had been heavily sedated for a dressing change and could not see visitors. It was the latest in hours of heartbreak for the teen, who had intended to join a dozen schoolmates at the bar but ultimately decided against it.

She said she has since learned that two of the 12 are in a Zurich hospital. She did not know if the others survived.

On Instagram, an account filled up with photos of people who were unaccounted for, and friends and relatives begged for tips about their whereabouts.

Valais regional government head Mathias Reynard told RTS radio Friday that officials have "numerous accounts of heroic actions, one could say, of very strong solidarity in the moment."

He lauded the work of emergency officials on the day after the fire but added "in the first minutes it was citizens — and in large part young people — who saved lives with their courage."

Servers arrived with burning sparklers

Clavier, the Parisian teenager, said he did not see the fire start, but he saw servers arrive with Champagne bottles topped with the burning sparklers.

Two women told French broadcaster BFMTV they were inside when they saw a male bartender lifting a female bartender on his shoulders as she held a lit candle in a bottle. The flames spread, collapsing the wooden ceiling, they told the broadcaster.

One of the women described a crowd surge as people frantically tried to escape from the basement nightclub up a flight of stairs and through a narrow door.

Another witness speaking to BFMTV described people smashing windows to escape the blaze, some gravely injured, and panicked parents rushing to the scene in cars to see whether their children were trapped inside.

Gianni Campolo, a Swiss 19-year-old who was in Crans-Montana on vacation, raced to the bar to help first responders after receiving a call from a friend who escaped the inferno. He described people on the ground suffering from terrible burns.

"I have seen horror, and I don't know what else would be worse than this," Campolo told French television network TF1.

Marc-Antoine Chavanon, 14, joined the effort to get people out of the tavern.

"People were collapsing. We were doing everything we could to save them," he said. "There was one of our friends: She was struggling to get out. She was all burnt. You can't imagine the pain I saw."

The severity of the burns made it difficult to identify bodies, requiring families to supply authorities with DNA samples. In some cases, wallets and any identification documents inside turned to ash in the flames.

Emanuele Galeppini, a promising teenage Italian golfer who competed internationally, was officially listed as missing. His uncle Sebastiano Galeppini told Italian news agency ANSA that their family is awaiting the results of DNA tests, though the Italian Golf Federation on its website announced that he had died.

With high-altitude ski runs rising around 3,000 meters (nearly 9,850 feet) in the heart of the Valais region's snowy peaks and pine forests, Crans-Montana is a major destination for international alpine skiing competitions. It's also home to the European Masters each August.

## Wall Street edges higher in a wobbly start to 2026

By DAMIAN J. TROISE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. stocks eked out small gains on Wall Street Friday in a wobbly day of trading to kick off the new year.

Markets were mostly quiet on the first trading day of 2026, with the influential technology sector driving much of the up-and-down action. The mostly minor moves also cap off a tepid and holiday-shortened week. Markets were closed on Thursday for New Year's day.

The S&P 500 rose 12.97 points, or 0.2%, to 6,858.47. The benchmark index is coming off a gain of more than 16% in 2025.

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The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 319.10 points, or 0.7%, to 48,382.39.

The Nasdaq composite fell 6.36 points, or less than 0.1%, to 23,235.63. The index was weighed down by losses for Microsoft and Tesla.

Foreign markets fared better and benchmarks in Britain and South Korea hit records.

Technology stocks steered the market, especially companies with a focus on artificial intelligence, continuing the trend that pushed the broader market to records in 2025.

Nvidia jumped 1.3% and was the biggest force trying to push the market higher. But a 2.2% fall for Microsoft helped to check those gains.

Tesla also weighed on markets with a 2.6% drop after after reporting falling sales for a second year in a row.

Nvidia, Microsoft and Tesla are among the most valuable companies in the world and their outsized valuations give them more influence on the stock market's direction. That includes sometimes pushing the market up and down from hour to hour.

Technology companies have been a major focus because of advancements in artificial intelligence technology and the potential for growth within the sector. Wall Street has been betting that demand for computer chips and other items needed for data centers will help justify the big investments from technology companies and their pricey stock values.

Furniture companies gained ground following President Donald Trump's move to delay increased tariffs on upholstered furniture. RH rose 8% and Wayfair rose 6.1%.

E-commerce giant Alibaba climbed 4.3% and Baidu, maker of the Ernie chatbot, jumped 9.4% in Hong Kong after it said it plans to spin off its AI computer chip unit Kunlunxin, which would list shares in Hong Kong early in 2027. The plan is subject to regulatory approvals.

Crude oil prices were mostly stable. Prices for U.S. crude oil fell 0.2% to \$57.32 per barrel. The price of Brent crude, the international standard, fell 0.2% to \$60.75 per barrel.

The price of gold fell 0.3%.

Treasury yields held steady in the bond market. The yield on the 10-year Treasury rose to 4.19% from 4.17% late Wednesday. The yield on the two-year Treasury, which moves more closely with expectations for what the Federal Reserve will do, held at 3.48% from late Wednesday.

Wall Street will move past the mostly quiet holiday season starting Monday. The first full week of the new year will include several closely watched economic updates. They will also be some of the last big updates the Fed sees before its next meeting at the end of January.

Next week will feature private reports on the status of the services sector, which is the largest part of the U.S. economy, along with consumer sentiment. Government reports on the job market will also be released. The hope is they'll help paint a clearer picture of how various parts of the U.S. economy closed out 2025 and where it might be headed in 2026.

The Fed has had a more difficult task because of the complex shifts within the economy. It cut interest rates three times toward the end of 2025, partly to help counter a weakening jobs market. But inflation remains above its target rate of 2% and cutting interest rates could add more fuel to rising prices. Consumers have already expressed more caution amid the squeeze from stubborn inflation and the U.S. trade war with much of the world has added more uncertainty.

The Fed has already signaled concern and caution. Wall Street is betting that the central bank will hold its benchmark interest rate steady at its January meeting.

## **What to know about Carnival season, Louisiana's biggest celebration**

By SARA CLINE Associated Press

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — As residents across much of the country take down their holiday decorations, sobered by New Year's resolutions and a return to business as usual, in Louisiana people are ramping up for the biggest celebration of the year.

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Throughout the state residents are preparing for Carnival season, a pre-Lenten and weeks-long bash that includes feasting on savory dishes, opulent balls and a stream of massive parades rolling through city streets.

The bucket-list worthy period of festivities promises indulgence, costumed revelry and literal pounds of glimmery plastic beads to carry around one's neck. Here's what to know about Carnival.

What is Carnival?

Carnival in Louisiana and around the world is rooted in Christian and Roman Catholic traditions. It's marked by feasting, drinking and revelry before Ash Wednesday and the fasting associated with Lent, the Christian season of preparation for Easter.

Each year, along with Louisiana residents, more than a million visitors travel to New Orleans to partake in the city's world-famous celebration.

However, the festivities are not limited to the Big Easy. Similar celebrations stretch across Louisiana and into other Gulf Coast states, including Alabama, where Mobile lays claim to the nation's oldest Mardi Gras celebration. Additionally, there are world-renowned celebrations in Brazil and Europe.

Is Carnival the same as Mardi Gras?

Although some people use the terms "Carnival" and "Mardi Gras" interchangeably, they are actually different things.

Carnival is the entire pre-Lenten period. Mardi Gras, also known as Fat Tuesday, is one day.

Mardi Gras marks the grand conclusion to Carnival Season. It falls on the day before Ash Wednesday, making it the final moments of indulgence before the solemnity of Lent.

How long is Carnival season?

Carnival always begins Jan. 6, which in the Catholic world is called Epiphany or Twelfth Night since it's twelve days after Christmas. And the season always ends with Mardi Gras.

But, because it's linked to Easter — which does not have a fixed date — Mardi Gras can fall anywhere between Feb. 3 and March 9. This year Fat Tuesday is on Feb. 17, making Carnival 43 days long.

What is King Cake?

The beginning of Carnival also marks the start of when it is socially acceptable — and encouraged — to eat king cake. Lines will snake around the block at popular bakeries known for the seasonal staple.

The brioche-style pastry, which some bakers say traces back to an ancient Roman holiday, has become one of the iconic and most-delicious symbols of Carnival.

The traditional ring-shaped and sweet-dough cake is streaked with cinnamon and adorned with decadent icing colored purple, green and gold. The cake is often filled with fruits, pecans or different flavors of cream cheese frosting.

Also in the treat is a tiny plastic baby. Whoever has the slice with the little figurine hidden inside is supposed to buy the next cake or throw the next party, lending an unending excuse for another festive gathering.

The traditional cake has evolved over the years with restaurants launching their own unique versions, including one that is filled with boudin — a Cajun-style sausage — and another that is made out of sushi rolls.

What about the parades?

Carnival is best known for elaborate and massive parades. This season there will be more than 80 parades in and surrounding New Orleans — many of which last hours.

Energetic marching bands, costumed dancers and multi-level floats laden with fantastical hand-built figures, will wind through communities.

The parades embody their own identity. They include an all-female parade, one that pokes fun at politics, a Sci-Fi themed parade with revelers dressed as Chewbacca. The largest parade hosts 3,200 riders and more than 80 floats, and one of the smallest, in the literal sense, features floats made out of shoe boxes.

Float riders and walking members of Carnival clubs — known as krewes — pour much time and money into preparations for the extravaganza. But all that work pays off as celebrants, many donning homemade costumes, line streets and sidewalks to watch.

Most spectators will have their hands raised in hopes of catching "throws" — trinkets tossed to the crowd

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by float riders. While throws include plastic beads, candy, doubloons, stuffed animals, cups and toys, there are also the more coveted items such as painted coconuts, highly sought-after hand-decorated shoes and even bedazzled toilet plungers.

The krewe for the largest parade in New Orleans, Endymion, estimates that they toss more than 15 million throws along the parade route. The krewe's motto is, "Throw 'til it Hurts."

Are there other ways Carnival is celebrated?

Although Carnival is often known for fancy balls and boisterous parades, other areas and groups have their own traditions.

In central Louisiana people will take part in the Cajun French tradition of the Courir de Mardi Gras, or Fat Tuesday Run. These rural processions feature masked and costumed participants who will perform and beg for ingredients, and even chase after live chickens, to use for a communal gumbo at the end of the day.

In New Orleans, some African Americans mask in elaborate beaded and feathered Mardi Gras Indian suits, roving the city to sing, dance, drum and perform. The tradition, a central part of the Black Carnival experience in New Orleans since at least the late 1800s, is believed to have started in part as a way to pay homage to area Native Americans for their assistance to Black people and runaway slaves. It also developed at a time when segregation barred Black residents from taking part in whites-only parades.

## **Tesla loses title as world's biggest electric vehicle maker as sales fall for second year in a row**

By PAUL HARLOFF and BERNARD CONDON undefined

NEW YORK (AP) — Tesla lost its crown as the world's bestselling electric vehicle maker on Friday as a customer revolt over Elon Musk's right-wing politics, expiring U.S. tax breaks for buyers and stiff overseas competition pushed sales down for a second year in a row.

Tesla said that it delivered 1.64 million vehicles in 2025, down 9% from a year earlier.

Chinese rival BYD, which sold 2.26 million vehicles last year, is now the biggest EV maker.

It's a stunning reversal for a car company whose rise once seemed unstoppable as it overtook traditional automakers with far more resources and helped make Musk the world's richest man. The sales drop came despite President Donald Trump's marketing effort early last year when he called a press conference to praise Musk as a "patriot" in front of Teslas lined up on the White House driveway, then announced he would be buying one, bucking presidential precedent to not endorse private company products.

For the fourth quarter, Tesla sales totaled 418,227, falling short of even the much reduced 440,000 target that analysts recently polled by FactSet had expected. Sales were hit hard by the expiration of a \$7,500 tax credit for electric vehicle purchases that was phased out by the Trump administration at the end of September.

Tesla stock fell 2.6% to \$438.07 on Friday.

Even with multiple issues buffeting the company, investors are betting that Tesla CEO Musk can deliver on his ambitions to make Tesla a leader in robotaxi services and get consumers to embrace humanoid robots that can perform basic tasks in homes and offices. Reflecting that optimism, the stock finished 2025 with a gain of approximately 11%.

The latest quarter was the first with sales of stripped-down versions of the Model Y and Model 3 that Musk unveiled in early October as part of an effort to revive sales. The new Model Y costs just under \$40,000 while customers can buy the cheaper Model 3 for under \$37,000. Those versions are expected to help Tesla compete with Chinese models in Europe and Asia.

For fourth-quarter earnings coming out in late January, analysts are expecting the company to post a 3% drop in sales and a nearly 40% drop in earnings per share, according to FactSet. Analysts expect the downward trend in sales and profits to eventually reverse itself as 2026 rolls along.

Musk said earlier last year that a "major rebound" in sales was underway, but investors were unruffled when that didn't pan out, choosing instead to focus on Musk's pivot to different parts of business. He has been saying the future of the company lies with its driverless robotaxis service, its energy storage

business and building robots for the home and factory — and much less with car sales.

Tesla started rolling out its robotaxi service in Austin in June, first with safety monitors in the cars to take over in case of trouble, then testing without them. The company hopes to roll out the service in several cities this year.

To do that successfully, it needs to take on rival Waymo, which has been operating autonomous taxis for years and has far more customers. It also will also have to contend with regulatory challenges. The company is under several federal safety investigations and other probes. In California, Tesla is at risk of temporarily losing its license to sell cars in the state after a judge there ruled it had misled customers about their safety.

“Regulatory is going to be a big issue,” said Wedbush Securities analyst Dan Ives, a well-known bull on the stock. “We’re dealing with people’s lives.”

Still, Ives said he expects Tesla’s autonomous offerings will soon overcome any setbacks.

Musk has said he hopes software updates to his cars will enable hundreds of thousands of Tesla vehicles to operate autonomously with zero human intervention by the end of this year. The company is also planning to begin production of its AI-powered Cybercab with no steering wheel or pedals in 2026.

To keep Musk focused on the company, Tesla’s directors awarded Musk a potentially enormous new pay package that shareholders backed at the annual meeting in November.

Musk scored another huge windfall two weeks ago when the Delaware Supreme Court reversed a decision that deprived him of a \$55 billion pay package that Tesla doled out in 2018.

Musk could become the world’s first trillionaire later this year when he sells shares of his rocket company SpaceX to the public for the first time in what analysts expect would be a blockbuster initial public offering.

## Earthquake with 6.5 magnitude rattles southern and central Mexico killing 2

MEXICO CITY (AP) — A strong earthquake rattled southern and central Mexico on Friday, interrupting President Claudia Sheinbaum’s first press briefing of the new year as seismic alarms sounded and leaving at least two people dead.

The earthquake had a magnitude of 6.5 and its epicenter was near the town of San Marcos in the southern state of Guerrero near the Pacific coast resort of Acapulco, according to Mexico’s national seismological agency. There were more than 500 aftershocks.

The state’s civil defense agency reported various landslides around Acapulco and on other highways in the state.

Guerrero Gov. Evelyn Salgado said that a 50-year-old woman living in a small community near the epicenter died when her home collapsed. Authorities also said that a hospital in Chilpancingo, Guerrero’s capital, suffered major structural damage and various patients were evacuated.

Residents and tourists in Mexico City and Acapulco rushed into the streets when the shaking began. Mexico City Mayor Clara Brugada said that one person died after suffering an apparent medical emergency followed by a fall while evacuating a building.

The U.S. Geological Survey said the earthquake occurred at a depth of 21.7 miles (35 kilometers), 2.5 miles north-northwest of Rancho Viejo, Guerrero, which is in the mountains about 57 miles northeast of Acapulco.

Sheinbaum resumed her press briefing a short time after the quake.

José Raymundo Díaz Taboada, a doctor and human rights defender who lives on one of the peaks ringing Acapulco, said he heard a strong rumble noise and all the neighborhood dogs began barking.

“In that moment the seismic alert went off on my cellphone,” he said, “and then the shaking began to feel strong with a lot of noise.”

He said the shaking was lighter than in some previous quakes and he had prepared a backpack of essentials to be ready to leave as the aftershocks continued.

He said he had been unable to reach some friends who live along the Costa Chica southeast of Acapulco because communications were cut.

## Zelenskyy names Ukraine's head of military intelligence as his new chief of staff

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Friday appointed the head of Ukraine's military intelligence as his new chief of staff, a move that comes as the U.S. leads a diplomatic push to end Russia's nearly 4-year-old invasion.

Announcing the appointment of Gen. Kyrylo Budanov, Zelenskyy said Ukraine needs to focus on security issues, developing its defense and security forces, and peace talks — areas that are overseen by the office of the president.

Zelenskyy had dismissed his previous chief of staff, Andrii Yermak, after anti-corruption officials began investigating alleged graft in the energy sector.

The president framed Budanov's appointment as part of a broader effort to sharpen the focus on security, defense development and diplomacy.

"Kyrylo has specialized experience in these areas and sufficient strength to achieve results," Zelenskyy said.

Budanov, 39, said on Telegram his new position is "both an honor and a responsibility — at a historic time for Ukraine — to focus on the critically important issues of the state's strategic security."

In his evening address, Zelenskyy announced further changes to his team, saying he had proposed Mykhailo Fedorov, the current minister for digital transformation, as the new minister of defense.

Fedorov, 34, is credited with spearheading the introduction of drone technology in Ukraine's army and introducing several successful e-government platforms in his current role.

He replaces Denys Shmyhal who took up the post last July in a major government shake-up. Zelenskyy thanked Shmyhal and said he would be taking up another role in government. He also credited the ministry for reaching a target production of more than 1,000 interceptor drones per day in December.

Earlier, Zelenskyy appointed Foreign Intelligence Service head Oleh Ivashchenko to replace Budanov as intelligence chief.

'Prominent face of Kyiv's intelligence effort'

Budanov is one of the country's most recognizable and popular wartime figures. He has led Ukraine's military intelligence agency, known by its acronym GUR, since 2020.

A career military intelligence officer, he rose through the defense establishment after Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014. He also took part in special operations and intelligence missions linked to the fighting with Moscow-backed separatist forces in eastern Ukraine before the full-scale invasion of February 2022. He reportedly was wounded during one such operation.

Since the full-scale invasion, Budanov has become a prominent face of Kyiv's intelligence effort, regularly appearing in interviews and briefings that mix strategic signaling with psychological pressure on Moscow. He has frequently warned of Russia's long-term intentions toward Ukraine and the region, while portraying the war as an existential struggle for the country's statehood.

Under Budanov, the GUR expanded its operational footprint, coordinating intelligence, sabotage and special operations aimed at degrading Russian military capabilities far beyond the front lines. Ukrainian officials have credited military intelligence with operations targeting Russian command structures, logistics hubs, energy infrastructure and naval assets, including strikes deep inside Russian territory and occupied areas.

His appointment to lead the office of the president marks an unusual shift, placing an intelligence chief at the center of Ukraine's political and diplomatic coordination.

Ihor Reiterovych, a Kyiv-based independent political expert, noted that Budanov had participated in the talks with the U.S. and "will fit much more naturally into the overall context" of the negotiations.

"Unlike Yermak, he has both experience in this field and has worked in a relevant position," Reiterovych

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said, adding that the GUR also has had certain contacts with Russia on issues such as prisoner exchanges.

Russia reports a higher death toll from a strike

Russian authorities said Friday the death toll from what they called a Ukrainian drone strike on a cafe and hotel in a Russian-occupied village in Ukraine's Kherson region rose to 28. Kyiv strongly denied attacking civilian targets.

Svetlana Petrenko, spokeswoman of Russia's main criminal investigation agency, the Investigative Committee, said those killed in the village of Khorly, where at least 100 civilians were celebrating New Year's Eve, included two minors, while 31 people were hospitalized.

A spokesman for Ukraine's General Staff, Dmytro Lykhovii, denied attacking civilians. He told Ukraine's public broadcaster Suspilne on Thursday that Ukrainian forces "adhere to the norms of international humanitarian law" and "carry out strikes exclusively against Russian military targets, facilities of the Russian fuel and energy sector, and other lawful targets."

He noted that Russia has repeatedly used disinformation and false statements to disrupt the ongoing peace negotiations.

The Associated Press could not independently verify claims made about the attack.

Washington praises progress in negotiations

U.S. President Donald Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff said Wednesday that he, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Trump's son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner had a "productive call" with the national security advisers of Britain, France, Germany and Ukraine "to discuss advancing the next steps in the European peace process."

The U.S. efforts has faced a new obstacle earlier this week, when Moscow said it would toughen its negotiating stand after what it said was a long-range drone attack against a residence of Russian President Vladimir Putin in northwestern Russia early Monday.

Kyiv has denied attacking Putin's residence, saying the Russian claim was a ruse to derail the negotiations.

In his New Year's address, Zelenskyy said a peace deal was "90% ready" but warned that the remaining 10% — believed to include key sticking points such as territory — would "determine the fate of peace, the fate of Ukraine and Europe, how people will live."

Overnight attacks

Elsewhere in Ukraine, Russia struck a residential area of Kharkiv with two missiles Friday, Zelenskyy wrote on his Telegram page, adding that Moscow's forces "continue the killings, despite all the efforts of the world, and above all the United States, in the diplomatic process."

At least 19 people in the eastern city were injured, including a 6-month-old, said regional administration head Oleh Syniehubov.

The Russian Defense Ministry denied launching any strikes with missiles or other airborne weapons on Kharkiv on Friday and suggested, without offering evidence, that the damage could have been caused by the detonation of ammunition at a weapons depot.

Earlier Friday, Russia conducted what local authorities called "one of the most massive" drone attacks at Zaporizhzhia. At least nine drones struck the city, damaging dozens of residential buildings and other civilian infrastructure but causing no casualties, according to Ivan Fedorov, head of the regional administration.

Overall, Russia fired 116 long-range drones at Ukraine, according to Ukraine's air force, with 86 intercepted and 27 striking their targets.

The Russian ministry said its air defenses intercepted 64 Ukrainian drones overnight in multiple Russian regions.

The Russian city of Belgorod was hit by a Ukrainian missile, according to regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov. Two women were hospitalized after the strike, which shattered windows and damaged an unspecified commercial facility and a number of cars in the region that borders Ukraine, he said.

## Grandmother and grandson burn to death in Gaza tent while cooking; Jolie visits Rafah crossing

By WAFSA SHURAFSA Associated Press

DEIR AL BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — A grandmother and her 5-year-old grandson burned to death in Gaza when their tent caught fire while cooking, as thousands of Palestinians endure colder weather in makeshift housing.

The nylon tent in Yarmouk caught fire Thursday night while a meal was being prepared, a neighbor said. A hospital official said that two Palestinian men were killed by Israeli gunfire on Friday in Gaza.

The shaky 12-week-old ceasefire between Israel and the Hamas militant group has largely ended large-scale Israeli bombardment of Gaza. But Palestinians are still being killed by Israeli forces, especially along the so-called Yellow Line that delineates areas under Israeli control.

On Friday, American actor and film producer Angelina Jolie visited the Rafah border crossing between Egypt and the Gaza Strip.

Wintry weather hits tent cities

Over the past few weeks, cold winter rains have repeatedly lashed the sprawling tent cities, causing flooding, turning Gaza's dirt roads into mud and causing damaged buildings to collapse.

Aid groups say not enough shelter materials are getting into Gaza during the truce. Figures recently released by Israel's military suggest it hasn't met the ceasefire stipulation of allowing 600 trucks of aid into Gaza a day, though Israel disputes that finding.

Israel has said throughout the war that Hamas was siphoning off aid supplies, preventing the population in Gaza from receiving them. Last month, the World Food Program said that there have been "notable improvements" in food security in Gaza since the ceasefire.

Palestinians have long called for mobile homes and caravans to be allowed in to protect them against living in impractical and worn out tents.

Actor visits Rafah crossing

Jolie met with members of the Red Crescent on the Egyptian side of the Rafah border crossing and then visited a hospital in the nearby city of Arish to speak with Palestinian patients on Friday, according to Egyptian officials.

Her visit sought to raise support for the displaced and humanitarian workers in the crises in Gaza as well as in Sudan, Jolie's team told The Associated Press in a statement.

"What needs to happen is clear: the ceasefire must hold, and access must be sustained, safe and urgently scaled up so that aid, fuel and critical medical supplies can move quickly and consistently, at the volume required," Jolie said about Gaza.

Reopening the crossing, which would allow Palestinians to leave Gaza — especially the ill and wounded who could get specialized care unavailable in the territory — has been contentious. Israel has said that it will only allow Palestinians to exit Gaza, not enter, until militants in Gaza return all the hostages they took in the attack on Oct. 7, 2023, which triggered the war. The remains of one hostage are still in Gaza.

Israel also says Palestinians wanting to leave Gaza will have to get Israeli and Egyptian security approval. Egypt, meanwhile, says it wants the crossing immediately opened in both directions, so Palestinians in Egypt can enter Gaza. That's a position rooted in Egypt's vehement opposition to Palestinian refugees permanently resettling in the country.

For more than two decades until 2022, Jolie worked with the U.N. refugee agency, including as a special envoy.

Gaza's humanitarian situation

On Friday, the foreign ministers of Arab and Muslim countries, including Egypt, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, expressed concern about Gaza's humanitarian situation.

The situation has been "compounded by the continued lack of sufficient humanitarian access, acute shortages of essential life-saving supplies, and the slow pace of the entry of essential materials," according to the joint statement.

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The Palestinian death toll from the war is at least 71,271, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't distinguish between militants and civilians in its count. The Israel-Hamas war began with the Hamas-led Oct. 7 attack in southern Israel that killed about 1,200 people and saw 251 taken hostage.

On Friday, two Palestinian men were killed in separate incidents by Israeli gunfire in the Khan Younis area of southern Gaza, a hospital official said. Israel's military said troops operating in the southern Gaza Strip killed a person who "crossed the Yellow Line and approached the troops, posing an immediate threat to them."

West Bank raids

Meanwhile, Israel continues operating in the occupied West Bank.

On Friday, the Palestinian Prisoners media office said that Israel carried out numerous raids across the territory, including the major cities of Ramallah and Hebron. Nearly 50 people were detained, following the arrest of at least 50 other Palestinians on Thursday, most of those in the Ramallah area.

Israel's military said there were arrests made of people "involved in terrorist activity." Last week, a Palestinian attacker rammed his car into a man and then stabbed a young woman in northern Israel, killing both of them, police said.

The Palestinian Prisoner's Society says that Israel has arrested 7,000 Palestinians in the West Bank and Jerusalem this year, and 21,000 since the war began. The number arrested from Gaza isn't made public by Israel.

## How one Swiss hospital coped with the injured from the Alpine bar fire

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

SION, Switzerland (AP) — The hospital that initially took in the majority of injured victims from a fire at a Swiss bar is no stranger to emergencies: In the heart of the Alps, it is used to treating winter sports enthusiasts who have accidents on the slopes.

But the flood of young and severely burned survivors from the blaze that tore through Le Constellation in Crans-Montana during New Year's Eve revelry was something else.

Eric Bonvin, general director of the regional hospital in Sion that took in several dozen injured people, said those with severe burns face months of treatment but expressed hope that their youth will speed their recovery.

The injured were teenagers and young adults, roughly 20 years old on average, he told The Associated Press inside the hospital, which is about 10 kilometers (6 miles) from the resort by air. Survivors have described seeing their fellow revelers struggling to escape the inferno, some with severe burns.

Bonvin recounted how hospital staff scrambled to determine the extent of people's injuries — aided by colleagues who had not been scheduled to work but rushed in to lend a hand.

"It's a very particular situation because at the beginning burns are not necessarily apparent, the nerve endings are burnt so feelings are lost and the person is most of all in a state of shock," he said. "At those moments, every minute counts."

Injured survivors suffered burns to varying degrees, not just to their skin but also to their airways.

"There were inhalations of both smoke and also of heat that for some probably led to internal burns. That's a really catastrophic situation, as you can imagine," Bonvin said.

The hospital was well staffed, despite the holiday, because the end of year festivities are so busy in the Alpine Valais region, attracting crowds to its mountains but also leading to ski accidents and other medical emergencies.

"Our population doubles in a week," he said. "Every year it's a period of intense stress for our emergency unit."

But "many people (staffers) came spontaneously, even those who were on holiday or having a night out," he said. "That worked well."

Still the hospital, which doesn't have a specialized burn unit, quickly hit full capacity, authorities said. As

the injured streamed in Thursday, all of the hospital's surgical operating rooms were opened and intensive care facilities became strained.

Bonvin said 55 gravely injured people were rushed to his hospital by medical transports. Others with injuries came of their own accord, some brought in by loved ones.

By Friday afternoon, most had been transferred to other hospitals, while others had been discharged, Bonvin said.

Some medical workers treated the injured without knowing whether their loved ones might be among them.

"It was hard to live through for everyone. Also probably because everyone was asking themselves, 'Was my child, my cousin, someone from the region at this party?' This place was very well known as somewhere to celebrate the new year," Bonvin said. "Also, seeing young people arrive — that's always traumatic."

The road to recovery for the gravely injured will likely be long and arduous, he cautioned.

"For those with serious burns, intensive care treatment lasts several months," he said.

"But it's not without hope," he added. "They are young and that means they still have a lot of vitality."

## Trump wants to overhaul the 'president's golf course.' He hasn't played there yet

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — President Donald Trump has spent much of his two-week vacation in Florida golfing. But when he gets back to the White House, there's a military golf course that he's never played that he's eyeing for a major construction project.

Long a favored getaway for presidents seeking a few hours' solace from the stress of running the free world, the Courses at Andrews — inside the secure confines of Joint Base Andrews in Maryland, about 15 miles (24 kilometers) from the White House — are known as the "president's golf course." Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Joe Biden have spent time there, and Barack Obama played it more frequently than any president, roughly 110 times in eight years.

Trump has always preferred the golf courses his family owns — spending about one of every four days of his second term at one of them. But he's now enlisted golf champion Jack Nicklaus as the architect to overhaul the Courses at Andrews.

"It's amazing that an individual has time to take a couple hours away from the world crises. And they're people like everybody else," said Michael Thomas, the former general manager of the course, who has golfed with many of the presidents visiting Andrews over the years.

Andrews, better known as the home of Air Force One, has two 18-hole courses and a 9-hole one. Its facilities have undergone renovations in the past, including in 2018, when Congress approved funding to replace aging presidential aircraft and to build a new hangar and support facilities. That project was close enough to the courses that they had to be altered then, too.

Trump toured the base by helicopter before Thanksgiving with Nicklaus, who has designed top courses the world over. The president called Andrews "a great place, that's been destroyed over the years, through lack of maintenance."

Other golfers, though, describe Andrews' grounds as in good shape, despite some dry patches. Online reviews praise the course's mature trees, tricky roughs, and ponds and streams that serve as water hazards. The courses are mostly flat, but afford views of the surrounding base.

'They all like to drive the cart'

The first president to golf at Andrews was Ford in 1974. Thomas began working there a couple years later, and was general manager from 1981 until he retired in 2019.

He said the Secret Service over the years used as many as 28 golf carts — as well as the president's usual 30-car motorcade — to keep the perimeter secure.

"It's a Cecil B. DeMille production every time," said Thomas, who had the opportunity to play rounds with four different presidents, and with Biden when he was vice president.

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He said the commanders in chief generally enjoyed their time out on the course in their own unique ways, but “they all like to drive the cart because they never get an opportunity to drive.”

“It’s like getting your driver’s license all over again,” Thomas laughed.

Trump golfs most weekends, and as of Friday, has spent an estimated 93 days of his second term doing so, according to an Associated Press analysis of his schedules.

That tally includes days when Trump was playing courses his family owns in Virginia, around 30 miles (48 kilometers) from the White House, and near his Florida estate Mar-a-Lago, where he’s spending the winter holidays. It also includes 10 days Trump spent staying at his golf club in Bedminster, New Jersey, where his schedule allowed time for rounds of golf.

Trump has visited Andrews in the past, but the White House and base have no record of him playing the courses.

Another of Trump construction projects

Andrews’ military history dates to the Civil War, when Union troops used a church near Camp Springs, Maryland, as sleeping quarters. Its golf course opened in 1960.

The White House said the renovation will be the most significant in the history of Andrews. The courses and clubhouse need improvements due to age and wear, it said, and there are discussions about including a multifunctional event center as part of the project.

“President Trump is a champion-level golfer with an extraordinary eye for detail and design,” White House spokesman Davis Ingle said in a statement. “His vision to renovate and beautify Joint Base Andrews’ golf courses will bring much-needed improvements that service members and their families will be able to enjoy for generations to come.”

Plans are in the very early stages, and the cost of — and funding for — the project haven’t been determined, the White House said. Trump has said only that it will require “very little money.”

The Andrews improvements join a bevy of Trump construction projects, including demolishing the White House’s East Wing for a sprawling ballroom now expected to cost \$400 million, redoing the bathroom attached to the Lincoln bedroom and replacing the Rose Garden’s lawn with a Mar-a-Lago-like patio area.

Outside the White House, Trump has led building projects at the Kennedy Center and wants to erect a Paris-style arch near the Lincoln Memorial, and has said he wants to rebuild Dulles International Airport in northern Virginia.

On Wednesday, meanwhile, the Trump administration ended a lease agreement with a non-profit for three public golf courses in Washington — which could allow the president to further shape golfing in the nation’s capital. The White House, however, said that move isn’t related to the plans for Andrews.

Presidential perks of golfing at Andrews

When the president is golfing, Andrews officials block off nine holes at a time so no one plays in front of him, allowing for extra security while also ensuring consistent speed-of-play, Thomas said.

That’s relatively easily done given that the courses aren’t open to the public. They’re usually reserved for active or retired members of the military and their families, as well as some Defense Department-linked federal employees.

Thomas remembers playing a round with the older President Bush, a World Golf Hall of Fame inductee known for fast play, while first lady Barbara Bush walked with Millie, the first couple’s English Springer Spaniel. George W. Bush also played fast, Thomas said, and got additional exercise by frequently riding his mountain bike before golfing.

When he wasn’t golfing at Andrews, Obama tried to recreate at least part of the experience back home. He had a White House golf simulator installed after then-first lady Michelle Obama asked Thomas how they might acquire a model that the president had seen advertised on the Golf Channel. Thomas gave her a contact at the network.

Obama famously cut short a round at Andrews after nine holes in 2011 to hustle back to the White House for what turned out to be a top-secret review of final preparations for a Navy SEAL raid on the compound of Osama bin Laden.

But, while Thomas was golfing with presidents, he said he never witnessed play interrupted by an im-

portant call or any major emergency that forced them off the course mid-hole. There also were never any rain-outs.

"If there was rain coming, they'd get the weather forecast before we would," Thomas said. "They would cancel quick on that."

## **Kim's daughter visits family mausoleum, promoting her potential status as heir in North Korea**

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — The teenage daughter of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un made her first known visit to a sacred family mausoleum, a step that experts say bolstered her status as her father's potential heir.

The visit, which occurred on New Year's Day on Thursday, even sparked speculation that the girl, reportedly named Kim Ju Ae and aged about 13, could be named a high-level official at the upcoming ruling Workers' Party congress.

Images carried by North Korea's state media on Friday showed Kim Ju Ae standing in the front row with her parents and deeply bowing at Pyongyang's Kumsusan Palace of the Sun in Pyongyang, where the embalmed bodies of her late grandfather and great-grandfather are on display.

The palace is "a place that symbolizes legitimacy of the North Korean regime" and her visit there ahead of the Workers' Party congress is a politically orchestrated move, said Cheong Seong-Chang, deputy head of the private Sejong Institute in South Korea.

Kim Jong Un, 41, is the third generation of his family to rule North Korea since the country's foundation in 1948. He often marks key state anniversaries by visiting the Kumsusan palace and paying respect to his father Kim Jong Il and grandfather Kim Il Sung.

Cheong predicted that Kim Jong Un could give his daughter the first secretary post at the Workers' Party, the party's No. 2 job, at the congress. Other experts say she is too young to accept such a high-profile post and might be provided with lower-level jobs.

The congress, the first of its kind in five years, is meant to establish new priorities in state policies and reshuffle officials. North Korea hasn't said when it will hold it, but the National Intelligence Service, South Korea's spy agency, said it likely will be held either in January or February.

Since first appearing in state media in November 2022, Kim Ju Ae has accompanied her father at a slew of events including military parades and missile launches. In September, Kim Jong Un brought her on his trip to Beijing. During New Year's Day celebrations this week, she kissed her father on the cheek, showing their closeness.

In January 2024, the NIS said it viewed Kim Ju Ae as her father's likely heir. Some outside experts disagree with that assessment, citing Kim Jong Un's relatively young age and the extremely male-dominated nature of North Korea's power hierarchy. The NIS told lawmakers in November that Kim appeared to have no major health problems.

Revealing the young Kim Ju Ae was a surprise to foreign experts because neither Kim Jong Un nor Kim Jong Il were mentioned in North Korean state media before they became adults. Some observers say Kim Jong Un likely aimed to shore up public support for his plan to extend the family's rule by repeatedly disclosing Kim Ju Ae in public events.

## **A look at some of the deadliest fires in bars, nightclubs and music venues**

By The Associated Press undefined

A fire at a bar in the Swiss ski resort of Crans-Montana in the early hours of New Year's Day has left about 40 people dead and over 100 injured, according to authorities.

Here is a look at some other nightclub, bar and music venue fires that have led to significant death tolls:

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— December 2025: A fire ripped through a popular nightclub in Arpora village, in India's Goa state, killing 25 people, including kitchen workers and tourists.

— March 2025: A fire and ensuing stampede at the crowded Pulse club in Kocani, North Macedonia, killed 63 people, most of them young revelers, and injured more than 200. It was set off by a pyrotechnic flame that engulfed the roof of the club.

— April 2024: A blaze at the Masquerade nightclub in Istanbul, Turkey, trapped workers and employees while the venue was closed for renovations, leaving 29 people dead. It was located on the ground and basement floors of a 16-story residential building.

— October 2023: A fire that started at a nightclub in the southeastern Spanish city of Murcia and spread to two other clubs left 13 people dead.

— January 2022: A nightclub in Sorong, in Indonesia's West Papua province, burned after two groups attacked each other inside the building. Nineteen people were killed.

— January 2022: A blaze at Liv's Nightclub Yaouba in Yaounde, the capital of Cameroon, set off explosions that killed 17 people. The government suggested that fireworks set the roof alight and the fire then spread to areas where cooking gas was stored.

— December 2016: Thirty-six people died in a fire at a warehouse in Oakland, California that had been converted into a residence and event space for artists dubbed the "Ghost Ship." The blaze, which broke out during an electronic music and dance party, moved so quickly that victims were trapped on the illegally constructed second floor.

— October 2015: A blaze that broke out during a rock band's pyrotechnics display at the Colectiv nightclub in the Romanian capital, Bucharest, killed 64 people and left some 190 injured.

— January 2013: A fire killed more than 200 people at the Kiss nightclub in the city of Santa Maria in southern Brazil. Investigators said soundproofing foam on the ceiling caught fire and released poisonous gases that quickly killed those attending a university party.

— December 2009: Some 152 people died when a blaze broke out at the Lame Horse nightclub in Perm, Russia. It started when an indoor fireworks display ignited a plastic ceiling decorated with branches.

— January 2009: An indoor fireworks display after a New Year's countdown ignited a blaze in the Santika club in Bangkok, Thailand, killing 67 people and injuring many more. Victims died from burns, smoke inhalation, and from being crushed.

— September 2008: A fire killed 44 people at the jammed King of Dancers nightclub in Shenzhen, China, when a stampede broke out after a fireworks show ignited the ceiling.

— December 2004: In Buenos Aires, Argentina, a fire killed 194 people at the crowded Cromagnon Republic club after a flare ignited ceiling foam. Club owner Omar Chaban was sentenced to 20 years in prison for causing the deadly fire and for bribery. Others received lighter sentences.

— February 2003: A fire at the Station nightclub in West Warwick, Rhode Island, in the United States, killed 100 people and injured more than 200 others. Fireworks being used by the band set fire to flammable foam inside the club.

— January 2001: A fire at a cafe in the Dutch town of Volendam where people were celebrating the New Year killed 14 people and injured more than 200.

— December 2000: A fire that was blamed on a welding accident killed 309 people at a disco in the central Chinese city of Luoyang.

— October 1998: An arson attack against an overcrowded youth disco in the Swedish city of Goteborg killed 63 people and left around 200 injured. Four people were later convicted for starting the fire.

— March 1996: A fire at the Ozone Disco Pub in Quezon City, Philippines, killed 162 people. A large proportion of the victims were students partying to mark the end of the academic year.

— March 1990: An arson attack at the Happy Land nightclub in the Bronx borough of New York City killed 87 people. It started when a man angry with his girlfriend threw gasoline on the club's only exit and set it on fire, then jammed down the metal front gate so people were trapped.

— December 1983: A fire at the Alcala dance hall in Madrid, Spain, left 78 people dead and more than 20 injured.

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— May 1977: A fire at the Beverly Hills Supper Club in Southgate, Kentucky, killed 165 people and injured more than 200.

— November 1942: The deadliest nightclub fire in U.S. history killed 492 people at Boston's Cocoanut Grove club. The fire at what had been one of Boston's foremost nightspots led to new requirements for sprinkler systems and accessible exits.

— April 1940: A fire ignited the decorative Spanish moss draping the ceiling of the Rhythm Night Club in Natchez, Mississippi, killing 209 people. The windows had been boarded up to prevent people from sneaking in.

## **Today in History: January 3, the 'Curse of the Bambino' begins**

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Saturday, Jan. 3, the third day of 2026. There are 362 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Jan. 3, 1920, Boston Red Sox owner Harry Frazee sold the contract of Babe Ruth to the New York Yankees, beginning a championship era for the Yankees and decades of heartache for Red Sox fans. (The Red Sox would ultimately break the "curse" in 2004, winning their first World Series in 86 years.)

Also on this date:

In 1777, Gen. George Washington's army routed British troops in the Battle of Princeton, New Jersey, a key turning point in the Revolutionary War.

In 1861, more than two weeks before Georgia seceded from the Union, the state militia seized Fort Pulaski, in the coastal area east of Savannah, at the order of Gov. Joseph E. Brown.

In 1959, Alaska was officially admitted as the 49th U.S. state.

In 1977, Apple Computer, months after its founding, was incorporated in Cupertino, California, by Steve Jobs, Steve Wozniak and Mike Markkula (MAHR'-kuh-luh) Jr.

In 1990, ousted Panamanian leader Manuel Noriega surrendered to U.S. forces, 10 days after taking refuge in the Vatican's diplomatic mission.

In 2022, a jury in San Jose, California, convicted Elizabeth Holmes of duping investors into believing that her startup company Theranos had developed a revolutionary medical device that could detect diseases and conditions from a few drops of blood.

In 2025, two bombs exploded in the Iranian city of Kerman, killing at least 84 people and wounding hundreds during a commemoration for Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the head of the Revolutionary Guard's elite Quds Force who was killed in a U.S. drone strike four years earlier; the Islamic State would claim responsibility for the bombings.

Today's Birthdays: Musician Stephen Stills is 81. Musician John Paul Jones (Led Zeppelin) is 80. Actor and entrepreneur Victoria Principal is 76. Actor-director Mel Gibson is 70. Basketball Hall of Famer Cheryl Miller is 62. Singer and television personality Kimberley Locke is 48. Former NFL quarterback Eli Manning is 45. R&B singer Lloyd Polite Jr. is 40. Actor Florence Pugh is 30. Environmental activist Greta Thunberg is 23.