

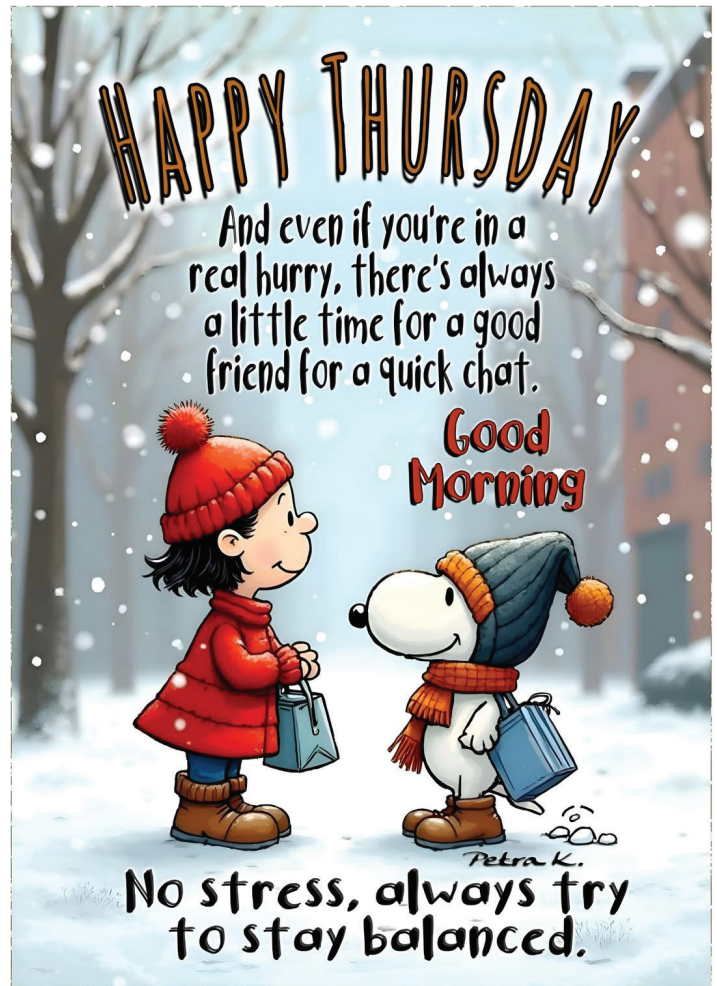
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School Breakfast: Biscuits.
School Lunch: Sloppy joes, tri taters.
Basketball: Milbank at Groton: (Gym: BC-4, GC-5, Arena: JVGBB-4, JVBBB-5, VGBB-6:15, VBBB-7:30)
2nd Grade BBB Practice, 5 p.m.
4th Grade BBB Practice, 6 p.m.



Friday, Jan. 23, 2026

School Breakfast: Doughnuts.
School Lunch: Chicken ala king, biscuit.
Girls Wrestling at Pierre Invitational, 4 p.m.
Boys Wrestling vs. Deuel/Deubrook Area at Deuel, 6 p.m.
MS BBB at Redfield, 6 p.m.

Saturday, Jan. 24, 2026

Groton Ford "C" Team Classic at Groton, 10 a.m.
Boys Wrestling at Kingsbury County Invitational (Arlington), 10 a.m.

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.

Clinton Contempt Vote

The House Oversight Committee voted to advance resolutions holding former President Bill Clinton and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in contempt of Congress yesterday. The move pushes the measures to the full House for a vote as soon as Monday, Feb. 2.

The Clintons have for months rebuffed a subpoena to answer questions related to their interactions with the late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Their lawyer argues the subpoena is illegal and does not serve a legislative purpose. The Clintons have instead offered to submit written statements, and this week proposed the committee's chair, Rep. James Comer (R, KY-1), interview Bill Clinton and his staff in New York. If the House votes to hold the Clintons in contempt, it could pave the way for a Justice Department indictment.

Bill Clinton has been documented taking four international trips on Epstein's Boeing 727 jet in 2002 and 2003. Stops on those trips included Bangkok, Brunei, Rwanda, Russia, and China.

World's Oldest Art

The world's oldest cave painting has been discovered in Indonesia, a Nature study revealed yesterday. The image—a stenciled outline of a hand—dates back at least 67,800 years, predating Neanderthal cave art discovered in Europe.

The art was discovered on Muna Island, near Sulawesi, and dated by analyzing uranium isotopes. Researchers say the creator, a Homo sapiens, moved their hand while blowing or spitting a mouthful of red pigment on the limestone cave to create a negative, claw-like image. The approach indicates symbolic imagination—the same skill needed to understand language, religion, and science. The finding suggests our species reached the Australia-New Guinea landmass 15,000 years earlier than previously thought.

The discovery also further undermines a Eurocentric theory of cultural innovation; researchers once believed creativity exploded in France and Spain, where paintings, engravings, and stone tools were made shortly after Homo sapiens arrived in Europe roughly 40,000 years ago.

Centuries of Love Letters

Love letters spanning five centuries of British history go on display at Britain's National Archives this weekend.

One of the most anticipated letters was written to Queen Elizabeth I by her suitor, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, days before he died. The note was found by the unmarried queen's bedside when she died nearly 15 years later. The exhibit also strays from the traditional love letter, featuring a 20th-century ad seeking same-sex relationships as well as Jane Austen's 1817 handwritten will, which left nearly everything to her sister. Visitors can also read a never-before-displayed 1944 note revealing a softer side to an infamous British intelligence officer turned Soviet spy. Other documents show love's power to steer history, like King Edward VIII's formal abdication of the throne in 1936 to marry twice-divorced American Wallis Simpson.

The exhibit runs through April 12 in Richmond, about 30 minutes southwest of central London.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Taylor Swift, 36, becomes the youngest female Songwriters Hall of Fame honoree; others include Kiss' Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley and Christopher "Tricky" Stewart, who wrote Beyoncé's "Single Ladies" and Rihanna's "Umbrella"

Prince Harry testifies in London court against Daily Mail tabloid publisher Associated Newspapers, alleging the company invaded his privacy to publish stories that caused him and his family distress.

Sundance Film Festival begins today, marking its last run in Park City, Utah, and first without founder Robert Redford.

James Beard Foundation releases restaurant and chef semifinalists; award ceremony on June 15.

Science & Technology

Marine microbes help each other more than they compete or eat each other, according to a six-year analysis; warming waters that cause stress result in more beneficial interactions.

Jeff Bezos-backed Blue Origin to deploy 5,408-satellite internet network by late 2027; the service, called TeraWave, will compete with SpaceX's Starlink and Amazon's Leo.

Physicists create largest-ever superposition—a state where objects behave as particles and waves—in an effort to determine the physical limit of quantum physics.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +1.2%, Dow +1.2%, Nasdaq +1.2%) as President Donald Trump calls off tariffs on eight European nations, says framework on Greenland has been reached.

Trump's comments come after the EU suspended last summer's US trade deal amid Greenland tensions.

Intel shares rise over 11% to highest level since January 2022, ahead of the chipmaker's quarterly earnings report scheduled for after close today.

Nathan's Famous, iconic Coney Island hot dog maker, to be acquired by Smithfield Foods for \$450M in an all-cash deal.

Politics & World Affairs

Supreme Court hears two hours of oral arguments over the White House's firing of Federal Reserve board member Lisa Cook; justices appear to express concern the firing could undermine Fed's independence.

Department of Homeland Security launches immigration enforcement operation in Maine, following similar crackdowns in cities including Minneapolis, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

Former police officer found not guilty of endangering students during 2022 school shooting in Uvalde, Texas.

Seven countries join the US' planned Board of Peace to oversee rebuilding of Gaza; signing ceremony involving more than 20 countries could take place today in Davos.

Groton Ford 'C'lassic Set for January 24 at Groton High School

GROTON, S.D. — Groton High School will play host to a full day of basketball action on Saturday, January 24, 2026, as Groton Ford presents the 2026 Groton Ford 'C'lassic.

The annual tournament will feature teams from Groton Area, Warner, Sisseton, Mobridge-Pollock, and Lisbon in a five-game schedule running throughout the day.

Action tips off at 11:00 a.m. with Warner taking on Sisseton. At 12:30 p.m., Mobridge-Pollock faces Lisbon. The host Groton Area Tigers will make their first appearance at 2:00 p.m. against Sisseton. Warner returns to the floor at 3:30 p.m. to meet Mobridge-Pollock, and the day concludes with Groton Area battling Lisbon at 5:00 p.m.

Home teams will wear white, while visiting teams will wear dark uniforms.

2025 Shows Continued Strength for South Dakota's Tourism Industry

PIERRE, S.D. – New numbers show South Dakota's tourism industry remained a powerful economic driver in 2025, delivering steady visitation, consistent visitor spending, and continued tax relief for residents across the state.

According to results of an annual study conducted by Tourism Economics, 14.97 million visitors traveled to and within South Dakota in 2025, an increase of 0.38 percent from 2024. Those visitors spent \$5.16 billion, representing a 1.1% increase over 2024 and reinforcing tourism's role as a stable contributor to the state's economy. Both figures represent all-time highs for South Dakota's tourism industry.

James Hagen, Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Tourism, announced the results today during the South Dakota Governor's Conference on Tourism in Pierre, with more than 500 industry members in attendance.

"Tourism's impact extends far beyond visitor spending," said Governor Larry Rhoden. "This industry supports jobs, strengthens local communities, and provides meaningful tax relief for South Dakota families. These results highlight tourism's essential role in sustaining one of the strongest state economies in the nation."

"The tourism industry faced real challenges in 2025, from economic uncertainty to evolving travel behaviors, yet South Dakota continued to be resilient," said Hagen. "That resilience speaks to the appeal of our destinations, the dedication of our tourism partners, and the incredible experiences our state offers visitors year-round."

Tourism remains a critical contributor to South Dakota's economy. In 2025, the industry accounted for 4.7% of the state's total economy. Visitor activity generated \$2.3 billion in household income for South Dakotans, supporting 59,145 jobs statewide.

Tourism activity also generated \$406.1 million in state and local tax revenue, representing 16.5% of all state sales tax collections. Without the tourism industry, each South Dakota household would have paid an additional \$1,121 in taxes.

As one of South Dakota's leading industries, tourism continues to fuel local businesses while showcasing the state's iconic landscapes, outdoor recreation, cultural heritage, and welcoming communities.

Travel South Dakota credits consistent domestic travel demand, an increase in day-trip visitors, and continued interest in South Dakota's outdoor and cultural experiences as key contributors to the industry's success in 2025. This is further supported by recreation leading spending growth, increasing 4.0% year-over-year.

To view the full 2025 Tourism Economics report, visit SDVisit.com.

The South Dakota Department of Tourism is comprised of Travel South Dakota and the South Dakota Arts Council. The department is led by Secretary James D. Hagen.

Key Stats – 2025 Tourism Economic Impact in South Dakota

14.97 million visitors traveled to and within South Dakota

\$5.16 billion in visitor spending, up 1.1% from 2024

\$2.3 billion in household income for South Dakotans employed in the tourism industry

Tourism accounted for 4.7% of the state's economy

59,145 jobs supported by tourism activity

\$406.1 million generated in state and local tax revenue

16.5% of all state sales tax collections generated by tourism

\$1,121 in additional taxes avoided per household due to tourism

Source: Tourism Economics



What \$189M in rural healthcare funding may mean for SD

By Molly Wetsch, South Dakota News Watch

Rural South Dakotans may see incremental changes to their health care coverage in the next year after \$189 million in funding was awarded to the state, but the most significant improvements will likely take more time, industry leaders said.

In his State of the State address Jan. 13, Gov. Larry Rhoden said that the bill authorizing federal funds for the Rural Health Transformation Program should be prioritized by Congress.

"We could be the first state in the nation to authorize this funding, so I would love it if this was the first bill that reaches my desk," Rhoden said during the speech.

The dollars will fund the Department of Health's proposed rural health transformation projects for 2026, which span a range of categories. The amount, which averages \$379 per rural resident in the state, was about \$4 million less than requested and less than the average award of \$200 million per state.

Rhoden indicated during the address that future funding awards may depend on the speed of implementation, saying "the federal government will reward states that move quickly."

The Rural Health Transformation Program will distribute funds to states over the next five years, with 50% of the \$50 billion total distributed equally across all 50 states and 50% as discretionary funding allocated by factors like rural population and the condition of rural health care facilities.

Tech improvements, maternal care take center stage

The DOH's presentation to the Joint Appropriations Committee on Jan. 15 outlined four strategic pillars of the project:

- Connect technology and data for a healthier South Dakota

- Advance the rural workforce

- Keep health care access local and strong

- Transform systems for sustainability

Some of the most significant funding dollars will be dedicated to technology installations and improvements, which the DOH said would cost about \$500 million over the five-year funding cycle.

Those tech improvements could include cybersecurity updates, health management platforms and robotic surgical or diagnostic systems, among others.

South Dakota Association of Health Organizations CEO Tim Rave told News Watch that those improvements would likely be some of the first to reach South Dakotans.

"That's going to get ramped up pretty fast. I mean, people are already doing it. If we can just bolster what we're doing, that one I see as a real short-term with a real quick impact on people to have access," Rave said.

One major proposal from the project is to establish three regional obstetrics hubs as well as "spoke sites," which would utilize community support networks, though the DOH did not specify where those hubs or spoke sites would be established.

Maternal health gaps in the state has long been a topic of concern as labor and delivery units close in rural areas.

Behavioral health is also a focus.

In 2023, the American Psychological Association said that South Dakota had some of the worst "mental health deserts" in the country – 47% of its counties without mental health services. Advancements in telehealth may also improve behavioral health outcomes, Rave said. Collaborative care programs, which connect primary care providers with psychiatrists in hubs like Sioux Falls and Rapid City, will also aim to ensure rural South Dakotans have access to psychiatric care.

Initial proposals from the DOH indicated that grants to facilities would be awarded based on "facility readiness, community impact and alignment with state health priorities."

The Great Plains Tribal Leaders' Health Board, which Rhoden mentioned in his address as a key col-

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laborator with the project, said that application programs should consider the circumstances of providers in tribal communities, some of which have poor access to health care and lack sufficient care providers.

"This investment creates a real opportunity to expand services and address long standing workforce shortages in rural Tribal communities," Leah Belgarde, intergovernmental affairs liaison for the Great Plains Tribal Leaders' Health Board said in a statement to News Watch.

"As implementation moves forward, success depends on execution. Tribes need a fair and realistic path to access these funds. The application process must reflect the conditions Tribal providers face on the ground."

Other programs, like workforce recruitment and retention programs and improving quality of Medicaid care were other large allocations. Health care workforce recruitment has long been a concern in the state.

SDAHO's own workforce grant program, which is slated to run until 2027, is one of several existing efforts to fortify health care employee numbers in rural areas.

"One of the easy, low-hanging fruit is maybe bolstering the current rural recruitment programs we have today. If you supercharge them with some funding, we get more people going to school for those health sciences and professions. And I think those really work in harmony together," Rave said.

Future sustainability of programs, collaboration a key component

While the funding may be a start to filling health care gaps in the state – which are some of the most pronounced in the country – there must be a focus on building sustainable programs that will last beyond the five years of federal funding.

Some of the most crucial long-term goals, like rebuilding the state's rural maternal health network, will likely take a significant chunk of the funding cycle to complete in full, Rave said.

"You've just got to make sure we can prove that there'll be self-sustaining going forward once those one-time dollars are gone. So that to me is probably one of the biggest hurdles that we all have to get over. I'm confident that we will do that, but it's not as easy as it seems to just (say), 'Oh, here's dollars.' It's going to take some effort," he said.

Lawmakers in the joint appropriations committee questioned the DOH especially about sustainability planning. Sen. Taffy Howard, a Republican from Rapid City, asked the DOH how they would ensure both that taxes and fees for patients do not rise after the five-year period, and how to ensure that implemented programs stay active after the funding finishes.

"How do you incentivize somebody with an incentive that goes away in a few years, and expect them to keep providing the same services," she said in the meeting.

Rave said that the program, while a step in the right direction, is not a fix-all for some of the state's biggest issues and that other community interventions will need to continue to support further success.

Issues like housing and community development, while outside the scope of funding dollars, remain a major hurdle for health care employees in rural areas. Statewide, housing programs have been spearheaded by rural communities looking to attract residents.

"That is probably one of the biggest things that people are pivoting to right now," Rave said.

"There's plenty of grants and incentives, and the state and the communities and the providers have worked really well together on our rural recruitment programs, so everybody has some skin in that game financially. There's great ways to get young people or providers into these small communities, but if they don't have places to live, they ain't going," he said.

The conversations about the funding, its allocation and how it will be executed will likely have to be dynamic, Rave said, and continuously analyzed.

"I'm not concerned, but it is just certainly on the top of our mind about getting creative on getting those programs stood up and then making sure they are self-sustainable," Rave said. "Our members stand by to help some of these programs along if they're, one, doing what they were intended to do and, two, mostly self-sustaining. We're here to give care to people where they're at and make sure that rural hospitals stay strong."

This story was produced by South Dakota News Watch, an independent, nonprofit organization. Read more stories and donate at sdnewswatch.org and sign up for an email for statewide stories. Investigative reporter Molly Wetsch is a Report for America corps member covering rural and Indigenous issues. Contact her at molly.wetsch@sdnewswatch.org.

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**Thurs., Jan. 22, 2026 - Milbank
Basketball in Groton
Girls Varsity: 6:15, Boys Varsity follows**

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High School Basketball Doubleheader

Milbank @ Groton Area

Thursday, January 22nd, 2026

Game Times:

Main Court in Arena <ul style="list-style-type: none">- 4:00 PM CT → Girls JV- 5:00 PM CT → Boys JV○ Halftime Entertainment: FCCLA Shoot-for-a-Pop- 6:15 PM CT → Girls Varsity○ Halftime Entertainment: GHS Pep Band- 7:30 PM CT → Boys Varsity○ Halftime Entertainment: Groton Dynamics Dance Team	Main Court in Old Gym <ul style="list-style-type: none">- 4:00 PM CT → Boys C- 5:00 PM CT → Girls C	Ticket Takers - Report @ 3:30pm: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Landon Brown- Lindsey Vanderwal- Anne Zoellner Report @ 6pm: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Landon Brown- Lindsey Vanderwal- Sue Fjeldheim Admin on Duty: Becky Hubsch
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Prior to the Girls Varsity game, the National Anthem will be first, with Varsity Introductions/Lineups to follow.

Split Pot Fundraiser – Groton Spring Baseball
Groton Chamber – Sponsoring Free Popcorn Night

LOCKER ROOMS: Milbank will use the two locker rooms down the JH hallway (two doors on the left). Boys Team will be in the first. The Girls' Team will be in the second.

TEAM BENCHES: South Bench- Groton Area | North Bench- Milbank

ATHLETIC TRAINER: There will be an athletic trainer on site.

AED – one is with the trainer, and one is also located near the ticket booth.

ADMISSION & SPECTATORS: Adults: \$6.00 Students: \$4.00.

CONCESSIONS: Will be available

Varsity Officials: Tanner Jondahl, Daren Lorenz, Spencer Aberle

JV Officials: Chris Frost, Shaun Wanner, Kristi Zoellner

JV/V Scoreboard: Alexa Sperry

JV/V Official Book: Kristi Zoellner (V), Joe Schwan (JV)

JV/V Shot Clock Operator: Sean Schuring

C Officials: Kasey Kurtz, Quintin Biermann, Megan Kusler

C Scoreboard: Brett Schwan

C Scorebook: Krissi Zak

Announcer: Joe Schwan

National Anthem: Groton High School Pep Band, under the direction of Mrs. Sharon Schwan

Livestream:

- www.GDlive.com
- Groton High School | High School Sports | Home | Hudl
(fan.hudl.com/usa/sd/groton/organization/12097/groton-high-school)
- KMSD Radio/Livestream: <https://www.youtube.com/@KMSDRadio>

Thank you,

Alexa Sperry, Athletic Director / Alexa.Sperry@k12.sd.us / 605-380-7887

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Annual Membership Rates

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

Month-to-Month Rates

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

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



From left to right: Shane Phillips, General Manager; Lori Goldade, Board Secretary; Les Hinds, Board Treasurer; R. Craig Oberle, Board Chair; Allen Walth, Board Vice-Chair; Clayton Larson, Water Treatment Plant Manager; Tim Van Hatten, Board Director; Jeff Stoecker, Board Director; Bob Whitmyre, Board Director; Eric Hansen, Construction Manager; Eric Hagen, Construction Laborer Lead; Jonathan Keller Jr, Water Treatment Plant Operator (Courtesy Photo)

WEB Water Wins State's Best Tasting Drinking Water Award; Supplies Groton and Region

PIERRE, S.D. — WEB Water Development Association, the rural water system that supplies drinking water to Groton and numerous communities across northeastern South Dakota, has been named the winner of the Best Tasting Drinking Water in South Dakota contest.

The award was presented during the South Dakota Association of Rural Water Systems (SDARWS) Annual Technical Conference on January 14 in Pierre. WEB Water's entry was selected as the top sample among 17 submissions from rural and municipal water systems statewide. Samples were judged on clarity, bouquet, and taste.

Judges included South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley, South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources Secretary Hunter Roberts, and Michael Sims, Source Water Protection Specialist for the California Rural Water Association.

As the state champion, WEB Water will represent South Dakota at the National Rural Water Association's Great American Water Taste Test in Washington, D.C., in February 2027.

Headquartered in Aberdeen, WEB Water Development Association provides treated drinking water to Groton and many surrounding towns, rural users, and regional systems. The association has previously earned the state's Best Tasting Drinking Water honor in 2012 and 2024, underscoring its continued commitment to delivering high-quality water to its customers.

The SDARWS Annual Technical Conference is the largest rural water gathering in South Dakota, bringing together more than 650 water operators, managers, and exhibitors for three days of training and technical sessions.

SDHSAA board hears school classification appeals

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. NewsMedia Association

PIERRE — Every two years, the South Dakota High School Activities Association approves school enrollment numbers that determine sports and fine arts classifications. Prior to that approval, the board may hear appeals from member schools. On Wednesday, Jan. 21, the board heard nine appeals, approving six of them.

An appeal from Parkston High School was approved to discount one Hutterite student whose religious beliefs don't allow him to participate in sports. Subtracting that one student allowed Parkston to stay in Class B.

An appeal to discount two students was approved for the Eureka/Edmunds Central cooperative. School officials explained that one student was not allowed in the building because of violence and safety reasons, another student had lost his eligibility to play high school sports.

Sisseton had two appeals approved. One was to discount students who had lost eligibility. The other appeal was to allow the school to go from 11-man football to 9AA. Sisseton Superintendent Tammy Meyer said she realized that moving down in classification would mean that the Sisseton football team could not compete in the playoffs.

"Our intention would be to go back to 11-man in the next cycle," Meyer said, referring to the two-year classification system.

An appeal from the Flandreau Indian School, which has 10 students who have lost eligibility, was approved.

The board had a lengthy discussion about the appeal from Hamlin High School which traditionally asks for an exemption for students who are members of the Apostolic Church. Those students are prohibited by their church affiliation from taking part in extracurricular activities.

Board member Billy Clanton of Harding County School District questioned the procedure for determining which students belong to the Apostolic religion and then allowing them to be exempted from the school's enrollment count. Superintendent Jim Hulscher said the school relies on information from board members and staffers who are members of the Apostolic religion.

Clanton made a motion to deny the appeal. That failed on a vote of 1-8. A motion to approve the appeal succeeded on an 8-1 vote.

The board also approved an appeal from DeSmet High School, allowing the school to discount four students of the Apostolic religion.

The board denied a request from Mount Vernon/Plankinton cooperative. School officials representing the cooperative said their enrollment fluctuated as students dropped out of school during the year to go to work. The board denied the request as there was no precedent in association policy.

A request from Douglas High School was also denied. High school principal Beau Voegeli said the school had a tough time competing at its current classification in football because of the transient nature of families living on the nearby Air Force base.

The school asked to go from 11AA football to 11A and retain its ability to compete in the postseason.

SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos said there are plenty of teams that could make the same argument about not being competitive. He said the association has a committee looking at a way to determine classifications based on a success factor.

Sioux Falls Lutheran High School used its appeal to seek a move down in a football classification. Activities director James Stubkjaer said the high school football program was built from scratch and that the players suffered since they didn't have the background in the sport that would come from having middle school and junior varsity programs.

The appeal was denied by the board.

Later in the meeting, the board approved each school's enrollment or average daily membership. Here are the ways that the classifications break down for sports and fine arts.

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Basketball – Cross-country – Track & Field – Volleyball

- Class AA – 450.000 and above
- Class A – 90.000 to 449.999
- Class B – 89.999 and below

Football (Football classifications use the male only average daily membership.)

- 11AAA – Eight largest schools, plus O’Gorman
- 11AA – Next 11 largest schools
- 11A – Next 14 largest schools
- 11B – All remaining schools with ADM of 56.001 and above

• 9AA – The top one-third of all schools with ADM of 56 and below

• 9A – The middle one-third of all schools with ADM of 56.000 and below

• 9B – The bottom one-third of all schools with ADM of 56.000 and below

Gymnastics – Competitive Cheer and Dance – Soccer

- Class AA – 450 and above
- Class A – 449.999 and below

Golf – Softball

- Class AA – 450 and above
- Class A – 140 to 449.999
- Class B – 139.999 and below

Tennis

• Divide the total number of teams competing based on

ADM equally, with the odd number moving up to Class

AA

Boys’ Wrestling

- Class A – 225.000 and above
- Class B – 224.999 and below

Girls’ Wrestling

- One class

Schools petitioning to go up in class in sports for 2026-27 and 2027-28 school years include:

- Football – O’Gorman (11AA to 11AAA)
- Golf – Aberdeen Roncalli (Boys’), Groton Area, Parkston, Redfield, Tiospa Zina (B to A)
- Soccer – Sioux Falls Christian (Boys’) (A to AA)
- Tennis – Sioux Falls Christian (A to AA)
- Wrestling – Chamberlain, Milbank (B to A)

Fine arts

Journalism/ One-Act Play/Oral Interp/Visual Arts

- Class AA – 450 and above
- Class A – 90 to 449.999

- Class B – 89.999 and below

All-State Chorus

- 725 Students and above- five quartets
- 575 to 724.999 students- four quartets
- 425 to 574.999 students- three quartets
- 125 to 424.999 students- two quartets

Debate/Individual Events

- Class AA – Top 14 teams, plus those opting up
- Class A – All remaining schools

ESports

- One Class

Schools petitioning up in fine arts activities for 2026-27 and 2027-28 include:

- Debate- Huron, O’Gorman (A to AA)

Listed below are the enrollments of South Dakota high schools after they have been run through the association’s free and reduced lunch formula.

Using that formula, enrollments are reduced by a factor of their free and reduced lunch percentage of students in grades nine through 11 with a maximum reduction of 30%. As an example, a 100% free and reduced lunch rate would result in a 30% reduction in the enrollment number, 50% would result in a 15% reduction and 25% would result in a 7.5% reduction. Because of the use of the formula, the enrollments listed below often end in a decimal.

Note: The numbers listed below do not take into account the changes approved by the SDHSAA board for six schools that appealed their enrollment numbers and had new numbers approved.

- Harrisburg High School 1,374.89
- Sioux Falls Lincoln High School 1,353.64
- Rapid City Central High School 1,352.48
- Rapid City Stevens High School 1,276.06
- Sioux Falls Roosevelt High School 1,243.01
- Sioux Falls Jefferson High School 1,206.14
- Sioux Falls Washington High School 1,189.12
- Brandon Valley High School 1,022.07
- Aberdeen Central High School 848.11
- Brookings High School 696.54
- Yankton High School 603.33
- Pierre T.F. Riggs High School 598.38
- Mitchell High School 587.20
- Huron High School 562.52
- Sturgis Brown High School 559.52
- Douglas High School 537.90
- Tea Area High School 537.33
- Spearfish High School 516.94
- O’Gorman High School 468.48
- Sioux Falls Christian High School 346.85

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Dakota Valley High School 314.28	Clark High School 88.85
West Central High School 293.11	Crow Creek High School 87.97
Vermillion High School 282.13	Hanson High School 84.30
Belle Fourche High School 263.03	Castlewood High School 83.35
Lakota Tech High School 260.40	Viborg-Hurley High School 83.17
Lennox High School 259.76	Miller High School 82.82
Todd County High School 259.70	Bennett County High School 81.90
Madison High School 250.18	Philip High School 79.81
Milbank High School 223.12	De Smet High School 78.00
Tri-Valley High School 220.42	Florence High School 76.03
Dell Rapids High School 208.49	McCook Central High School 75.45
Sisseton High School 204.18	Tiospa Zina High School 74.20
Custer High School 202.30	Freeman High School 73.28
Canton High School 194.26	Sioux Falls Lutheran High School 73.00
Cheyenne- Eagle Butte High School 192.50	Ipswich High School 72.84
Chamberlain High School 162.35	Colman-Egan High School 71.40
Hot Springs High School 161.16	McLaughlin High School 70.70
Rapid City Christian High School 161.00	New Underwood High School 70.07
Hamlin High School 158.99	Deubrook Area High School 69.62
Sioux Valley High School 157.08	Warner High School 69.62
Beresford High School 150.88	Alcester-Hudson High School 69.62
Little Wound High School 150.50	Howard High School 68.23
Winner High School 146.46	Canistota High School 68.23
Mahpiya Luta High School 142.00	Gregory High School 68.10
Pine Ridge High School 140.70	Timber Lake High School 67.79
Elk Point-Jefferson High School 140.45	Lemmon High School 67.13
St. Francis High School 136.50	Waverly-South Shore High School 67.09
Wagner High School 134.40	Wolsey-Wessington High School 66.45
St. Thomas More High School 128.44	Chester High School 66.43
Flandreau High School 117.71	White River High School 65.10
Deuel High School 116.36	Centerville High School 64.39
Great Plains Lutheran High School 116.00	Lyman High School 64.18
Mobridge-Pollock High School 113.52	Wessington Springs High School 63.44
Lead-Deadwood High School 113.04	Bridgewater-Emery High School 63.10
Webster Area High School 110.92	Wall High School 62.58
Groton Area High School 108.93	Irene-Wakonda High School 61.84
Hill City High School 105.20	Northwestern High School 61.30
Baltic High School 105.08	Faulkton Area High School 60.91
Redfield High School 103.34	Burke High School 59.35
Aberdeen Roncalli Roncalli High School 100.70	Estelline High School 59.07
Parker High School 100.55	Gayville-Volin High School 58.84
Platte - Geddes High School 99.63	Kimball High School 58.05
Stanley County High School 97.14	Corsica-Stickney High School 56.98
Britton-Hecla High School 96.46	Lower Brule High School 56.00
Elkton-Lake Benton High School 95.77	Ethan High School 55.99
Flandreau Indian High School 95.20	St. Mary's High School 55.16
Garretson High School 94.94	Arlington High School 53.92
Bon Homme High School 94.04	Harding County High School 53.87
Parkston High School 90.36	Plankinton High School 53.07

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Sully Buttes High School 52.14	Andes Central High School 35.00
Dupree High School 51.10	James Valley Christian High School 35.00
Aberdeen Christian High School 51.00	Mitchell Christian High School 34.00
Avon High School 50.55	Henry High School 33.78
Highmore-Harrold High School 49.79	Jones County High School 32.64
Willow Lake High School 49.56	Summit High School 31.12
Edmunds Central High School 49.10	Oldham-Ramona-Rutland High School 31.01
Montrose High School 47.14	Iroquois High School 28.74
Crazy Horse High School 46.90	Herreid High School 28.20
Woonsocket High School 46.54	Bison High School 27.66
Rosholt High School 46.26	Lake Preston High School 27.03
Armour High School 45.80	Sunshine Bible High School 27.00
Kadoka Area High School 45.34	Sanborn Central High School 25.96
Mount Vernon High School 45.33	Tiospaye Topa High School 25.90
Gettysburg High School 44.98	Leola High School 23.89
Faith High School 44.74	Oelrichs High School 23.80
Eureka High School 42.69	Takini High School 23.80
Menno High School 42.50	White Lake High School 22.41
Scotland High School 40.62	Tripp-Delmont High School 22.22
Waubay High School 39.81	McIntosh High School 21.00
Wilmot High School 39.53	Wakpala High School 20.30
Marion High School 39.25	Doland High School 19.40
Selby Area High School 38.91	Edgemont High School 17.41
Langford Area High School 38.49	Colome High School 17.35
Newell High School 38.13	Hoven High School 16.22
Marty High School 37.10	Dakota Christian High School 16.00
McCrossan Boys Ranch High School 36.45	Freeman Academy High School 13.00
Hitchcock-Tulare High School 36.18	SD School for the BlindVisually Impaired 3.00
Frederick Area High School 35.80	Elk Mountain High School 2.00

—30—

School seeks another look at six-man football

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. NewsMedia Association

PIERRE — At its meeting on Wednesday, Jan. 21, the board of directors of the South Dakota High School Activities Association was asked to once again consider the feasibility of adding a six-man classification to high school football.

The request came from Faith High School.

"It would be beneficial for us," said Faith Superintendent Kelly Daughters, noting that the school is challenged by dropping enrollment but would still like to keep the excitement of "Friday night lights."

Faith Athletic Director Doug Schauer said three other schools have expressed an interest in six-man football. He said other schools were concerned about showing an interest because it might upset their partner schools in their football cooperative.

SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos said that eight years ago the board approved six-man football. The plan at the time was to go with two classes of nine-man football and one class of six-man. The four teams that ultimately signed up for six-man football were located in the four corners of the state.

"That was not enough at the time to replace an entire class of football," Swartos said. While the board took no action on the request from Faith, Swartos did tell the board that six-man football "deserves another look."

SDHSAA sets policy to keep fans from charging court

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. NewsMedia Association

PIERRE — After some tweaks and revisions, the board of directors of the South Dakota High School Activities Association has passed a second reading of a policy designed to keep fans from rushing the court or playing field at the end of a playoff or championship contest.

Fans who rush the court at the conclusion of a game pose a safety risk according to SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos. "We want to keep the focus on the kids on the court," Swartos said during a board meeting on Wednesday, Jan. 21.

The policy states that fans that rush the court will be removed from the facility immediately. Physical altercations will be referred to security or law enforcement. No awards or trophies will be presented until the floor is cleared. Fans will be allowed on the floor after the presentation of awards.

The policy also states that enforcement is the responsibility of the school hosting the event. The board reserves the right to issue penalties to schools that blatantly disregard the policy.

Swartos said the policy would be in effect during the basketball season.

—30—

Three legislative bills on activity association's radar

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. NewsMedia Association

PIERRE — The South Dakota High School Activities Association is tracking three bills that have surfaced during the 2026 legislative session. The SDHSAA board heard about the bills at its meeting on Wednesday, Jan. 21.

House Bill 1039 would provide requirements for the cardiac health evaluation of minors. SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos told the board that association policy requires that athletes get two physicals while in high school. HB 1039 asks that students get a physical every year.

Swartos said the requirement of yearly physicals for students could put a strain on the health system as well as be an added cost for families.

One of the reasons for the bill, Swartos said, was a concern about the thoroughness of physicals when schools offer them to students at a mass event. With so many more physicals needed every year, "this may lead to more of those" mass events, Swartos said.

Swartos said he would testify in "soft opposition" to the bill, explaining to legislators that many of the requirements of the bill are already covered by association policies.

House Bill 1073 would require every school to create a cardiac emergency plan. One of the requirements of the bill would be for schools to have an automated external defibrillator or AED at each athletic activity.

Swartos explained that in the fall, that would require schools to have an AED available for practices involving golf, tennis, football, soccer and cross-country.

"I don't know how many of our schools have six AEDs," Swartos said.

The board also learned that House Bill 1008 would allow schools to offer academic credit for extracurricular activities. He said the association would remain neutral on that bill, which was opposed by the state's Education Department and approved by the House Education Committee on a vote of 8-7.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

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Proposal to alter South Dakota's gold severance tax is defeated in committee

Opponents express concerns about disrupting mining in the Black Hills

BY: MEGHAN O'BRIEN

PIERRE — A South Dakota legislative committee defeated a proposal Wednesday at the Capitol that could have produced more revenue from the state's taxes on gold mining.

Tax revenue from gold extraction has stayed stagnant in recent years, even as gold prices increased. Sen. Mike Rohl, R-Aberdeen, proposed that the severance tax rate change from \$4 per ounce of extracted gold to a half percent of the market value of the gold extracted.

The current tax was set in 1994, when the price of gold was about \$400 per ounce. A separate law establishes a sliding scale up to an \$8 severance tax if the price of gold reaches \$800 per ounce, Rohl said, but the authors of that bill likely didn't imagine that the price of gold would go far past that.

The price of gold is now about \$4,800 per ounce. With Rohl's proposed tax, companies would effectively be paying about \$24 per ounce at current prices.

"I think this is actually a pretty modest increase," Rohl said. "It's following the actual framed intention of the tax on severance of gold in the state."

The current severance tax rate generated \$784,000 for the state's general fund last fiscal year, Rohl said. Another state tax of 10% on the net profits from the sale of precious metals mined in the state generated about \$9.8 million, he said.

The Wharf Mine near Lead is the only active, large-scale gold mine in the state. The mine is owned by Coeur Mining, which reported selling \$228 million worth of gold from the Wharf Mine in 2024.

The first million raised from Rohl's proposed tax would be added to the state's general fund. Beyond that, the money would be deposited into a proposed rural water infrastructure fund. Rohl said the state doesn't have a consistent source of funding for water projects.

"It's somewhat fitting to trade one resource that has value to the state for another resource that has value for the state," Rohl said. "I would argue that's water."

Opponents of Rohl's bill worry about disrupting a gold mine that provides jobs and contributes to local businesses and the community.

"Mining is not just a part of our community, but it's the reason we exist," said Robin Lucero, the city administrator of Lead. "They are our largest community partner."

The Senate Taxation Committee voted 7-0 to reject the bill.

The committee also voted 7-0 to defeat one of what will be many property tax proposals this legislative session. Sen. John Carley, R-Piedmont, introduced a bill that would have lowered property tax mill levies to zero.

"This bill is not serious public policy," Yvonne Taylor of the South Dakota Municipal League told the committee. "It is not worthy of your time."

Meghan O'Brien is the audio reporter for South Dakota Searchlight where she covers the state government and its impact on South Dakotans. She's previously reported in Nebraska with a focus on health care and rural communities across the state.

Panel sends bills to ban kratom and hemp-derived consumables to Senate floor

Senator says those who drop alcohol in favor of THC seltzers need friends, church, God 'or even ice cream or tea'

BY: JOHN HULT

A state Senate panel advanced — but did not endorse — bans on hemp-derived intoxicants and kratom on Wednesday at the Capitol in Pierre.

Both bills were sponsored by Sen. John Carley, R-Piedmont.

The Senate Health and Human Services Committee voted unanimously to put the two prohibition bills in front of the full state Senate with no recommendation. Committees generally give a “do pass” recommendation to the bills they send out for a floor vote.

The votes came one day after the Senate Judiciary Committee offered its unqualified support for a bill meant to restrict the sale of certain hemp-based products to people older than 21. That bill came from Attorney General Marty Jackley.

In testimony about Carley’s bills, business owners and consumers of products like hemp-derived THC seltzers and kratom said they helped people kick opioids or alcohol. They also mentioned sales taxes collected on consumable products and the value of hemp to South Dakota farmers. That led some committee members to oppose the bills and sparked failed attempts to block the proposals. Ultimately, however, the committee opted to let the state Senate weigh in.

“We need to have a conversation about this on the floor,” said Sen. Curt Voight, R-Rapid City. “I think it rises to the level of a legislative decision.”

Possession, sale or use of kratom or THC consumables under each proposal would be a class 2 misdemeanor, punishable by up to 30 days in jail and a \$500 fine.

Tighter rules on hemp products

The first bill, Senate Bill 61, aims to act as an outright ban on the possession, sale or use of any intoxicating hemp products in the state outside of licensed medical marijuana dispensaries.

Such products are typically produced by altering or distilling cannabidiol, or CBD, found in the hemp plant to produce forms of tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, which is the intoxicating compound found in greater abundance in the marijuana plant.

Many of the gummies, vape cartridges and other products made using hemp-derived THC variants like Delta-8, Delta-9 or Delta-10 are sold primarily in smoke shops, but THC seltzers are often available at bars, liquor stores or grocery stores.

The products essentially act as a workaround for the prohibition of marijuana in South Dakota by anyone who lacks a medical marijuana card, Carley said. The senator is also a member of the state’s Medical Marijuana Oversight Committee, which has taken testimony from medical cannabis providers about the impact the unregulated market has on their operations.

“This actually is harming the licensed marijuana businesses,” Carley said.

Carley had the support of the South Dakota Police Chiefs’ Association, South Dakota Sheriff’s Association and a group called Protecting South Dakota Kids.

Opponents included representatives for hemp retailers and hemp growers and a handful of business owners, who said the bill’s ban on any products with more than 0.4% THC by weight would remove many non-intoxicating products from store shelves, including topical creams.

“All this is a hemp and CBD ban,” said Matt Yde, who sells CBD in Sioux Falls but does not offer intoxicating products. “I would have to close my store, because I would have to remove 90% of my products.”

Steve Siegel of the South Dakota Trial Lawyers Association said he’s had many friends who’ve switched to THC seltzers from alcohol or pain killers. He said their popularity shows consumer demand, and getting a medical marijuana card can be expensive and onerous.

“These drinks should be regulated. But they’re selling like wildfire,” Siegel said. “They’re a phenomenal

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alternative to alcohol.”

Carley responded by saying the state shouldn't be encouraging people to switch from one mind-altering drug to another.

He was “sorry to hear” about people who'd been addicted to painkillers and alcohol, but said instead of switching to a THC alternative, “They need some friends there. They need some church. They need some God in their life, or even ice cream or tea.”

Enforcement question

State law already bans the sale and production, but not the use, of adulterated THC derived from hemp plants. Lawmakers passed that bill in 2024.

It's unclear how Carley's bill criminalizing possession and use would impact enforcement.

An official opinion on the matter came at the request of the city of Brookings, which operates a municipal liquor store and inquired about the possibility of selling Delta-9 THC drinks at the store.

Attorney General Marty Jackley wrote an official opinion in November that said THC drinks containing hemp-derived Delta-9 THC may be illegal if the intoxicating compounds were created by distilling CBD oil.

Without testing, the opinion says, the question of the legality of any particular hemp-derived drink “cannot be answered.”

Carley pointed to that letter in his testimony and said his bill would “help clean this up, so that both the public and the attorney general can have a better way of controlling this.”

Jackley's office did not testify for or against Carley's bill.

Later Wednesday, in an emailed statement, Jackley's office told South Dakota Searchlight that “we appreciate Sen. Carley bringing this issue to the forefront,” and that Jackley will “continue to work with all legislators on legislation that addresses age-appropriate restrictions and guardrails around these products.”

The issue of testing remains, however.

“Generally speaking questions about whether a specific product is ‘intoxicating’ or otherwise prohibited often still come down to what the product actually contains, which is typically established through reputable laboratory testing,” the statement says.

In an interview after the hearing, Carley said he understands that the products are likely being sold illegally already. Adjusting the current law's verbiage to specify that hemp-derived THC is meant for medical marijuana users will clarify its intent for law enforcement and the business community, he said.

“This just simplifies it for everyone,” Carley said. “If you want to sell this, it needs to be in a dispensary.”

Kratom ban

As with hemp-derived THC, lawmakers in South Dakota have whittled around the regulatory edges of kratom for several years.

Lawmakers passed a bill to ban the sale of kratom to people younger than 21 in 2021. They voted to set potency limits and require safety and dosing labels, and to ban adulterated derivatives of the drug, in 2025.

Kratom products, most forms of which are legal in South Dakota, are made from the leaves of the kratom tree, which is native to Southeast Asia. Sold as powders, pills or in shot-sized drinks sometimes mixed with other ingredients, kratom products can have stimulant or intoxicating effects, depending on the dosage and plant variety used. Kratom can be found in smoke shops, but is also sold in convenience stores across South Dakota.

It can be used to alleviate pain, anxiety or to treat opiate addiction, Carley said, but it can also be abused, lead to addiction and kill people if used improperly.

The Department of Health has tallied at least six deaths from kratom use, Carley said. Health department spokeswoman Tia Kafka told South Dakota Searchlight after the hearing that those deaths came in 2024. Lawmakers passed their latest round of kratom restrictions the following year.

Pointing to a fact sheet from the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and a list of states that have banned kratom outright — including, this month, the state of California, whose health department declared its sale illegal — Carley said it's time for South Dakota to pull the product from shelves. His bill to do that

is Senate Bill 77.

"This is an emerging drug issue in the United States," Carley said.

Michigan resident Susan Eppard testified that she'd lost a son to kratom leaf powder, not to the adulterated versions of kratom lawmakers in South Dakota have already banned.

"Kratom caused him to have a seizure, go into cardiac arrest, and die a violent death on his kitchen floor in front of his girlfriend," Eppard said.

Matthew Lowe, executive director of the Global Kratom Coalition, said most of the issues associated with kratom use have been tied to the adulterated product. He also said that 18 clinical trials have shown natural leaf kratom to be safe, and that South Dakota's move to regulate the products' labeling may well be enough to mitigate any harms that might come from abuse.

"I think we need to focus on what has been passed and create a safe marketplace before we walk down the path of prohibiting natural kratom leaf entirely," Lowe said.

Debate focuses on business impact, uncertainty

Sen. Jamie Smith, D-Sioux Falls, supported moves to block both bills in the committee, in part based on concerns about impacts to businesses. Worries about the loss of access to CBD products was a particular concern, he said, given the Carley bill's THC per container dosage limits.

"We're doing something per container, and we don't define the size of the container," Smith said. "That's bad legislation."

Sen. Tim Reed, R-Brookings, meanwhile, said it may be too soon to move on kratom, given testimony about how people can use it to replace opioids or treat pain.

"I'd hate to take a product away from people who are using it responsibly," Reed said.

Sen. Kevin Jensen, R-Canton, represented the majority on both bills, opposing moves to stop the bill in committee. Kratom specifically has become a problem drug for young people in South Dakota, he said, because "it's so easy to get" in spite of the age limits.

The impact on business and sales tax collections from users of kratom or THC products, he argued, shouldn't carry weight in debates on drug abuse.

"When we're looking at public safety, I don't want to hear about sales tax revenue," Jensen said.

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

Committee supports longer wait for state workers turning big contracts into private-sector jobs

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

State Sen. Tim Reed opened a bill hearing Wednesday by saying a former state economic development commissioner "complied with the statute as it exists today" when the ex-commissioner waited one year before becoming an executive of a company he helped recruit while working for state government.

But Reed said the law needs to change, and a committee of South Dakota lawmakers at the Capitol in Pierre agreed.

Under current law, state officers and employees involved in a state contract with a company have to wait one year to take a job with that company after leaving state government. The bill would extend the waiting period to two years when a contract exceeds \$1 million.

"What this bill is about," said Reed, a Republican from Brookings, is whether the current law "adequately protects public trust."

Reed was referring to South Dakota Searchlight reporting about a former state economic development commissioner, Steve Westra. A year after leaving state government, Westra took a job with CJ Schwan's.

While working for the state, Westra had signed the first pledge of state aid benefiting construction of the company's \$550 million, 650-employee food production plant in northern Sioux Falls. State aid benefiting the project now totals \$69 million worth of tax rebates, loans and grants.

Without opposition, the Senate State Affairs Committee advanced Reed's bill to the Senate.

No one besides Reed testified for or against the bill. Reed expressed support for the CJ Schwan's project. "This bill is not about the CJ Schwan's economic development project, and it is not intended to slow, discourage or second-guess economic development efforts in South Dakota," Reed said.

After the committee vote, the bill was placed on the Senate's consent calendar — a list of broadly supported bills the Senate can pass in a single vote without debate unless a senator asks to withdraw a bill from the list.

Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.

US House panel says Clintons should be held in contempt of Congress over Epstein subpoena

BY: JACOB FISCHLER

The U.S. House Oversight and Government Reform Committee advanced resolutions Wednesday to recommend former President Bill Clinton and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton be held in contempt of Congress for failing to comply with a subpoena the panel issued related to the investigation of late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

The votes on both resolutions were bipartisan, though Democrats argued over several points during the nearly day-long meeting. The next step would be consideration by the full House. If approved on the House floor, the matter would be referred to the federal prosecutor's office in Washington, D.C., and could potentially lead to a fine of up to \$100,000 or even prison time of up to one year.

The resolution on Bill Clinton passed 34-8, with all Republicans and nine Democrats voting in favor.

The Democrats who voted to approve the resolution were Maxwell Frost of Florida, Raja Krishnamoorthi of Illinois, Summer Lee of Pennsylvania, Stephen Lynch and Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts, Emily Randall of Washington, Lateefah Simon of California, Melanie Stansbury of New Mexico and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan.

Yassamin Ansari of Arizona and Dave Min of California voted present. Greg Casar and Jasmine Crockett of Texas did not vote.

The resolution covering Hillary Clinton was narrower, 28-15, with only three Democrats, Lee, Stansbury and Tlaib, voting in favor.

Subpoenas defied by Clintons, others

Republicans on the committee, including Chairman James Comer of Kentucky, said the Clintons defied subpoenas to provide depositions about Epstein's long-running record of sexual abuse of young girls.

"No witness, not a former president or a private citizen, may willfully defy a duly issued congressional subpoena without consequence," Comer said. "But that is what the Clintons did."

Democrats said they, too, wanted to hear testimony from the Clintons, whose depositions were ordered by bipartisan subpoenas last year, but that the committee Republicans were singling out the couple because of their partisan affiliation.

Various other officials, of both parties, who'd received subpoenas also did not comply. Neither did Epstein's co-conspirator, Ghislane Maxwell.

In addition, the U.S. Department of Justice under President Donald Trump has not turned over docu-

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ments related to the investigation, despite a November law requiring their full release, Democrats on the panel said.

Yet only the Clintons, influential Democrats, were being prosecuted for defying the committee, Democrats said.

"It's interesting that it's this subpoena only that Republicans and the chairman have been obsessed about putting all their energy behind," ranking Democrat Robert Garcia, of California, said.

Comer responded that the other examples were different. Other officials had less personal knowledge of Epstein than the Clintons; Maxwell had said she would invoke her Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination, obviating the need for testimony; and the Justice Department was working, however slowly, on releasing the millions of documents required under the law, he said.

"As I've stated many times publicly, we wish this process was going quicker," he said. "There's a lot of documents, a lot of redactions. A lot of eyes have to be put on this. The Department of Justice is complying."

In an open letter to Comer last week, the Clintons said they were working to assist in the investigation, but complained they were being treated more harshly than other witnesses, while also criticizing Comer's handling of the case.

"Despite everything that needs to be done to help our country, you are on the cusp of bringing Congress to a halt to pursue a rarely used process literally designed to result in our imprisonment," they wrote. "This is not the way out of America's ills, and we will forcefully defend ourselves."

Negotiations or stalling?

Members of each party argued over various issues the panel members had been negotiating with the Clintons, such as the location of the interview, whether notes or a transcript would be allowed and whether the Clintons could provide written testimony only, as other witnesses had.

Democrats on the panel said the Clintons and their lawyers had been working with the committee in good faith to iron out those issues. But Comer said they were stalling the panel in the hopes that Democrats would retake the House in November.

"We have been negotiating for five months," Comer said. "This is clearly a stall tactic, hoping that the time clock runs out and the House flips and you all let them off the hook."

Contrary to Democrats' argument, not every witness was allowed to offer written testimony, Comer added, including Republican former U.S. Attorney General Bill Barr.

Hillary Clinton inclusion questioned

Bill Clinton had a well-documented personal relationship with Epstein, including travel on the billionaire's private plane. Photos of the two were among the documents released in the initial tranche the Justice Department provided under the November law.

But Garcia objected to the inclusion of Hillary Clinton in the committee's resolution Wednesday, saying the available evidence appeared to confirm her public account that she had no knowledge of Epstein's activities.

"No one who is serious about justice for Epstein's survivors believes that Hillary Clinton has somehow been involved in Jeffrey Epstein's crimes," Garcia said.

He added that Trump pledged to prosecute Hillary Clinton after he won the 2016 presidential campaign against her. Garcia said it appeared Trump was weaponizing the federal government against a political opponent.

Other Democrats said the committee was enforcing Trump's political prosecution.

Comer said Hillary Clinton had a personal relationship with Maxwell and a financial one with Epstein.

Trump also had a personal relationship with Epstein for years. Democrats on the panel repeated Wednesday the widely made assertion that Trump's Justice Department was shielding the president by resisting the production of documents.

Jacob covers federal policy and helps direct national coverage as deputy Washington bureau chief for States Newsroom. Based in Oregon, he focuses on Western issues. His coverage areas include climate, energy development, public lands and infrastructure.

Trump announces 'framework of a future deal' on Greenland, relents on 8-nation tariffs

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump announced in a social media post Wednesday that he and NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte brokered a possible agreement on Greenland, though Trump provided few details or a timeline.

Trump's comments came just hours after he took his case for acquiring the Arctic island to the World Economic Forum in Switzerland, urging European leaders to begin negotiations while appearing to rule out a military takeover.

A few hours later, Trump wrote after meeting one-on-one with Rutte that the two "have formed the framework of a future deal with respect to Greenland and, in fact, the entire Arctic Region."

"This solution, if consummated, will be a great one for the United States of America, and all NATO Nations," Trump wrote. "Based upon this understanding, I will not be imposing the Tariffs that were scheduled to go into effect on February 1st."

Trump threatened over the weekend to place a 10% tariff on goods coming into the United States from Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom if they continued to oppose his attempts to acquire Greenland. Trump wrote he would increase the tariffs to 25% in June if a deal hadn't been brokered before then.

Trump wrote in his most recent social media post that further negotiations about Greenland will be handled by Vice President JD Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Special Envoy Steve Witkoff and several other officials.

"Additional discussions are being held concerning The Golden Dome as it pertains to Greenland," Trump wrote, referring to a possible missile defense system. "Further information will be made available as discussions progress."

Asked by reporters if the framework includes U.S. ownership of Greenland, Trump declined to say directly. "It's a long-term deal. It's the ultimate long-term deal. And I think it puts everybody in a really good position, especially as it pertains to security and minerals and everything else," Trump said, later adding it would last "forever."

White House spokeswoman Anna Kelly wrote in a statement that if the "deal goes through, and President Trump is very hopeful it will, the United States will be achieving all of its strategic goals with respect to Greenland, at very little cost, forever."

"President Trump is proving once again he's the Dealmaker in Chief," Kelly added. "As details are finalized by all parties involved, they will be released accordingly."

'I don't have to use force'

Trump insisted during the 75-minute, wide-ranging speech he gave a few hours before his announcement that Greenland represents "a core national security interest" that "would greatly enhance the security of the entire" NATO alliance if it were fully controlled by the United States.

"I'm seeking immediate negotiations to once again discuss the acquisition of Greenland by the United States," Trump said. "Just as we have acquired many other territories throughout our history, as many of the European nations have ... there's nothing wrong with it."

Trump signaled he will likely not use the U.S. military to take over Greenland, saying, "I don't have to use force. I don't want to use force. I won't use force."

But he indicated any European country that objects to the U.S. making Greenland part of the country will face repercussions.

"You can say 'yes,' and we will be very appreciative, or you can say 'no' and we will remember," Trump said.

Greenland would become the site of a missile defense system that Trump refers to as the Golden Dome, which he said could "keep our very energetic and dangerous potential enemies at bay" if the island be-

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comes part of the United States.

Trump bashes NATO

Trump repeatedly criticized the other NATO countries during his speech, falsely claiming more than once the United States has never benefited from the military alliance formed following World War II.

"What we have gotten out of NATO is nothing, except to protect Europe from the Soviet Union and now Russia," Trump said. "I mean, we've helped them for so many years."

The United States is the only country in the history of the alliance to invoke Article 5, which says that an attack against one is an attack against all.

That led NATO countries to send their military members to fight alongside U.S. troops in Afghanistan following the 2001 terrorist attacks. More than 1,000 of those NATO troops died, according to the 9/11 Memorial and Museum.

NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte sought to reassure Trump of NATO's security commitment to all of its member countries later in the day, when the two met one-on-one during the forum.

"Let me tell you, they will. And they did in Afghanistan, as you know," Rutte said, according to audio of the exchange shared by the White House pool.

Rutte noted that for "every two Americans who paid the ultimate price, there was one soldier from another NATO country" or Australia.

"So you can be assured, absolutely, if ever the U.S. will be under attack, your allies will be with you. Absolutely. There's an absolute guarantee," Rutte said. "I really want to tell you this, because this is important. It pains me if you think it is not."

Trump told reporters ahead of his meeting with Rutte that he "could see" paying a price for Greenland, though he did not elaborate. He said he had "no idea" when he might speak directly with leaders of Denmark about trying to acquire Greenland. He said he believes Rutte is "frankly more important."

Investors and single-family homes

Trump focused some of his speech in Davos on domestic issues, talking briefly about an executive order he signed this week focused on the availability of housing within the United States.

"I have signed an executive order banning large institutional investors from buying single-family homes. It's just not fair to the public. They're not able to buy a house," Trump said. "And I'm calling on Congress to pass that ban into permanent law, and I think they will."

Trump said he wanted to take steps to help Americans afford homes, but that he didn't want those actions to reduce the value of homes people already own. He didn't elaborate on how that would work.

"I am very protective of people that already own a house, of which we have millions and millions and millions. And because we have had such a good run, the house values have gone up tremendously, and these people have become wealthy. They weren't wealthy. They become wealthy because of their house," he said. "And every time you make it more and more and more affordable for somebody to buy a house cheaply, you're actually hurting the value of those houses, obviously, because the one thing works in tandem with the other."

Trump said if he wanted to, he could "really crush the housing market" and decrease housing prices, though he didn't say how exactly he would go about doing that if he wanted to.

Trump said he's ordered "government-backed institutions to purchase up to \$200 billion in mortgage bonds," and that he expects to announce a new Federal Reserve chairman "in the not-too-distant future," who he believes will decrease interest rates. Trump has been feuding over interest rates with Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell, whose term as chair ends in May although Powell can remain as a governor.

Trump also called on Congress to approve legislation that would prevent credit card companies from hiking their interest rates above 10% for one year, saying that would help people save some money that they could use for buying a house.

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

Donations to SD campaigns from foreign nationals would be banned by bill sent to state Senate

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

South Dakota lawmakers advanced a bill 7-0 on Wednesday at the Capitol in Pierre that would bar candidates and political committees from taking campaign contributions or loans from a foreign national.

The bill adds "foreign national," as defined in federal law, to an existing state list of prohibited sources that includes state and local governments, foreign governments and the federal government. It also increases penalties. Under the draft, accepting a contribution from any of the listed entities would be moved to a more severe class of misdemeanor, and a subsequent offense within a calendar year would change from a misdemeanor to a felony.

The bill was introduced to the Senate State Affairs Committee by Attorney General Marty Jackley, a Republican candidate for the U.S. House. No opponents testified.

Asked how enforcement would work, Jackley said cases would likely come to the Attorney General's Office through referrals from the secretary of state or complaints from political opponents reviewing campaign reports.

Jackley said prosecution would require proof the candidate or committee acted "knowingly and intentionally," saying accidental acceptance would not be prosecutable.

The bill includes an emergency clause, which would make it effective immediately upon passage through both legislative chambers and the governor's signature, and before the primary election in June. For that, it will require a two-thirds vote in the Senate and House.

Jackley told the committee that the change aligns state law with federal restrictions and a March 2025 presidential executive order that he said helps address foreign-national influence. A section of that order calls on the U.S. attorney general to prioritize the enforcement of laws preventing "foreign nationals from contributing or donating in United States elections."

Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.

Trump heading to Iowa, Vance to Ohio and Minnesota in coming days

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump is scheduled to travel to Iowa on Jan. 27 to deliver a speech focused on the economy and energy, White House Chief of Staff Susie Wiles told reporters Wednesday.

The president is expected to begin weekly travel ahead of the midterm elections — in which the GOP is aiming to improve its razor-thin majority in the U.S. House and maintain its lead in the U.S. Senate.

The anticipated travel will also come as Trump seeks to boost his affordability policy blitz and as the cost of living marks a focal point of the midterm elections. On Tuesday, stocks plunged after Trump doubled down on threats to acquire Greenland and pledged tariffs on eight European countries that opposed his plans.

While traveling to Davos, Switzerland, with Trump for the World Economic Forum, Wiles told the traveling press that officials in Trump's Cabinet would also be increasing their domestic travel.

The timing and location of the Iowa event have yet to be announced. Trump last visited the Hawkeye State in July 2025, which marked the beginning of a yearlong celebration heading into the 250th anniversary of the country.

Meanwhile, Vice President JD Vance is slated to be in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on Thursday for a roundtable with local leaders and community members, according to his office Wednesday.

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The vice president will also give remarks centered on "restoring law and order in Minnesota."

Thousands of Minnesotans have been protesting the Immigration and Customs Enforcement presence there following the Jan. 7 fatal shooting of 37-year-old Renee Good by a federal agent.

Vance is also set to make a visit to an industrial shipping facility, in Toledo, Ohio, on Thursday, according to his office.

Vance is set to deliver remarks there focused on the administration's "commitment to lower prices, bigger paychecks, and creating more good-paying jobs in Ohio and across the Midwest," per his office.

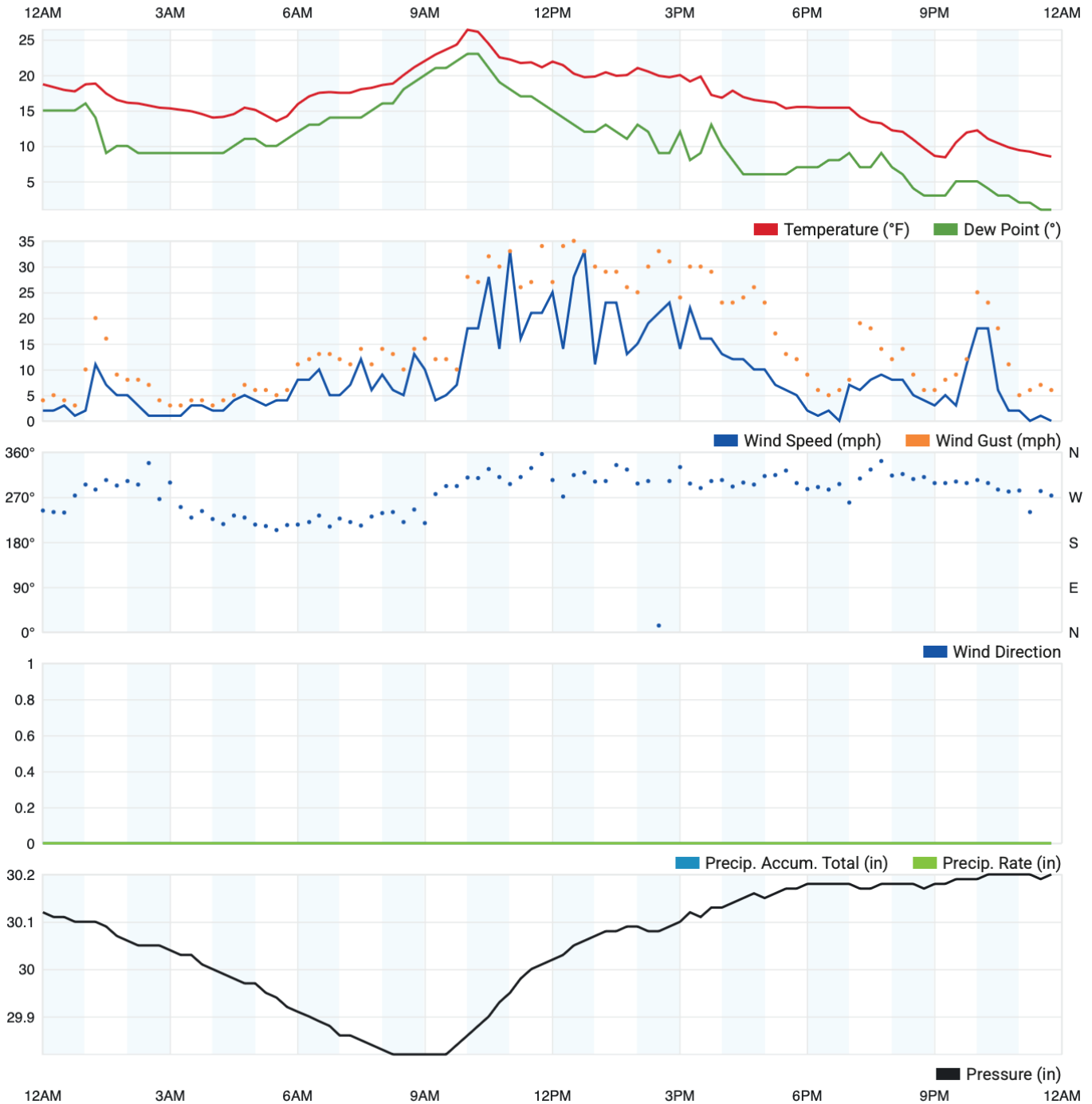
Shauneen Miranda is a reporter for States Newsroom's Washington bureau. An alumna of the University of Maryland, she previously covered breaking news for Axios.

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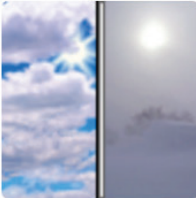
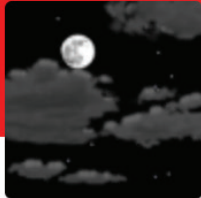



Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

January 21, 2026



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Thursday	Extreme Cold Warning		Friday Night	Saturday
				
High: 7 °F ↓	Low: -19 °F	High: -8 °F	Low: -13 °F	High: 4 °F
Partly Sunny then Patchy Blowing Snow and Blustery	Partly Cloudy	Cold	Mostly Cloudy	Cold

Extreme Cold Tonight Through Friday

January 22, 2026 4:29 AM CST

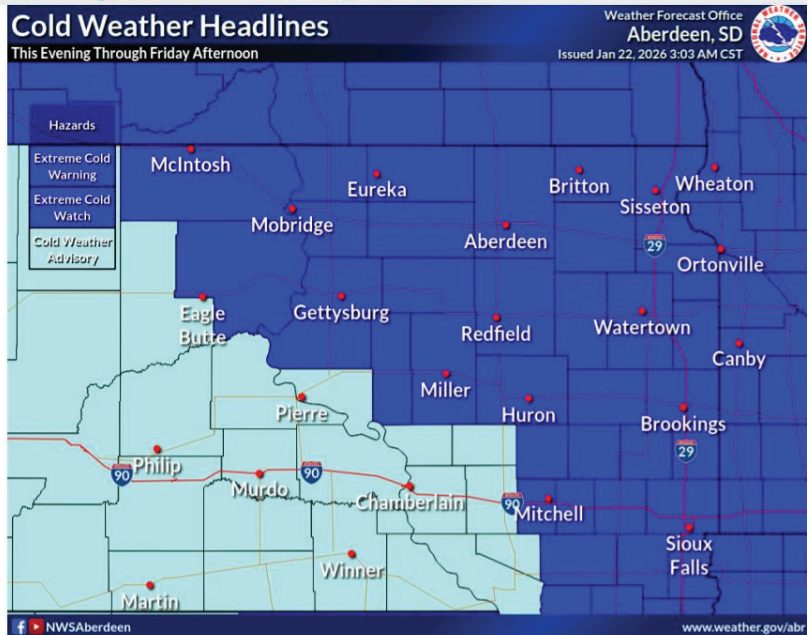
Dangerously cold wind chills Friday morning, as low as -45° expected.

Key Messages

- An **Extreme Cold Warning** is in effect for portions of central, north central, and northeastern SD through western MN this evening through Friday afternoon.
 - Dangerously cold wind chills as low as -45° expected.**
- A **Cold Weather Advisory** remains in effect for south central SD this evening through Friday afternoon.
 - Dangerously cold wind chills as low as -35° expected.**
- At these temperatures, frostbite can occur on exposed skin in as little as 10 minutes.
 - Please bring in your pets!**

What Has Changed NEW

- Upgraded the Extreme Cold Watch to an Extreme Cold Warning.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

An Extreme Cold Warning is in effect for portions of north central, central, and northeastern SD into west central MN while a Cold Weather Advisory remains in effect for south central SD. Both are valid from 6 PM CST this evening through 3 PM CST Friday afternoon.

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Arctic Air Incoming

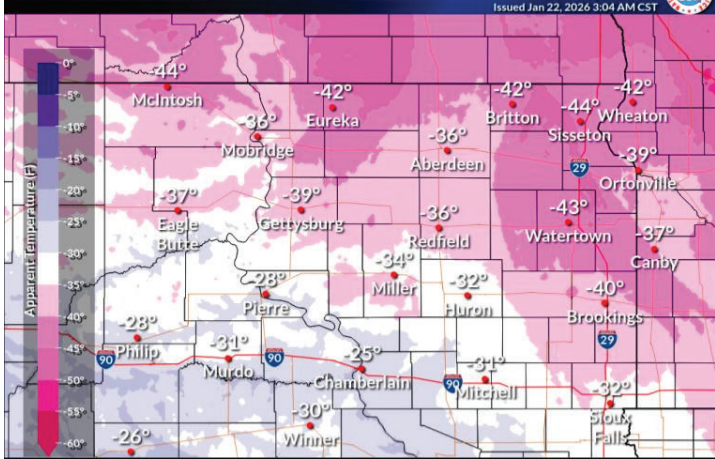
January 22, 2026
4:33 AM CST

High temperatures Friday struggle to break 0° while wind chills of 30 to 45 below zero in the morning.

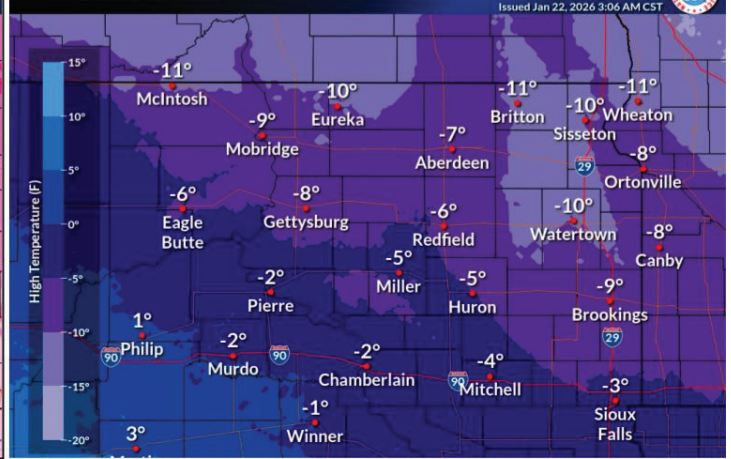
- Wind chills as low as -45° expected tonight through Friday morning.
- At these wind chills, **frostbite can occur in as little as 10 minutes.**

- Air temperatures Friday will not reach above 0° for most locations.
- Daytime wind chills will still be in the **twenties and thirties below zero.**

Wind Chills Friday Morning



Friday's High Temperature



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD



Timing of Wind Chills This Evening Through Friday

January 22, 2026
4:36 AM CST

Timing

- Arctic air will plunge southward this evening with the **coldest wind chill readings expected tonight through Friday morning.**
 - **Highlighted in red box**
- Wind chills during the day Friday will only range in the **twenties and thirties below zero for most locations.**

Potential Impacts

- Avoid going outdoors whenever possible. **If you must go outside, dress in layers, including a hat, face mask, and gloves.**
 - **Frostbite can occur in as little as 10 minutes.**

Minimum Wind Chill Forecast (°F)

	1/22 Thu		1/23 Fri							
	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm
Aberdeen	-33	-35	-36	-35	-35	-32	-23	-17	-10	-22
Britton	-39	-41	-42	-41	-39	-36	-28	-25	-16	-29
Chamberlain	-17	-20	-24	-25	-25	-25	-21	-15	-15	-17
Clark	-36	-38	-40	-41	-40	-38	-31	-25	-25	-27
Eagle Butte	-28	-34	-36	-37	-37	-35	-26	-23	-24	-21
Eureka	-39	-42	-42	-42	-44	-40	-32	-25	-25	-26
Gettysburg	-34	-35	-37	-39	-39	-37	-28	-22	-25	-26
McIntosh	-37	-43	-43	-44	-42	-39	-32	-26	-25	-25
Milbank	-37	-39	-40	-41	-40	-37	-26	-19	-13	-15
Miller	-28	-32	-33	-34	-34	-32	-25	-17	-22	-23
Mobridge	-32	-34	-36	-36	-35	-31	-24	-18	-22	-22
Murdo	-18	-24	-29	-31	-32	-30	-23	-19	-21	-23
Pierre	-19	-22	-25	-25	-27	-24	-18	-14	-16	-16
Redfield	-30	-34	-36	-36	-36	-32	-26	-19	-23	-26
Sisseton	-40	-44	-44	-43	-44	-42	-31	-25	-26	-27
Watertown	-37	-38	-41	-41	-41	-38	-31	-25	-17	-17
Webster	-40	-42	-44	-44	-43	-39	-33	-27	-17	-27
Wheaton	-42	-42	-42	-41	-42	-41	-34	-25	-17	-18



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NO WIND

98.6°F

Average temperature of the human body

Under calm conditions, the body radiates heat, creating a layer of warmth between our skin and the cold surroundings.



The Science of Wind Chill



WINDY

95°F

Hypothermia begins when our body temperature drops two to four degrees

But when it's windy, the moving air breaks up this insulating layer. It speeds up heat loss by whisking away the warmth from our skin.



Heat is moved away from our bodies.



weather.gov/winter

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 26 °F at 9:59 AM

Low Temp: 8 °F at 9:08 PM

Wind: 36 mph at 12:05 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 58 in 1942

Record Low: -30 in 1937

Average High: 24

Average Low: 1

Average Precip in Jan.: 0.41

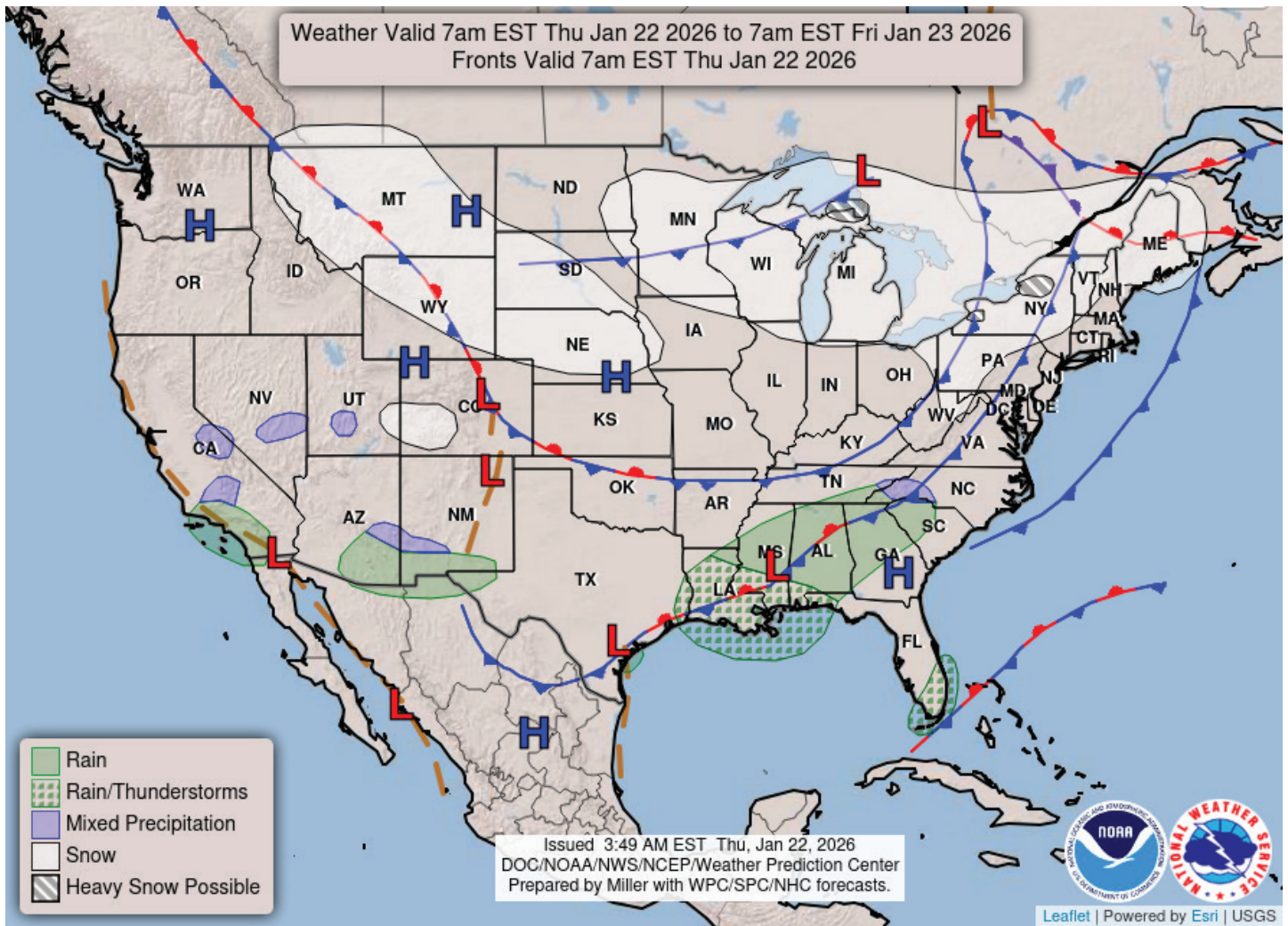
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.41

Precip Year to Date: 0.00

Sunset Tonight: 5:24 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:02 am



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Today in Weather History

January 21-22, 1952: A significant winter storm impacted South Dakota, bringing snow, bitter cold temperatures, snow with snowdrifts of 10 to 15 feet. The cold temperatures and drifting snow claimed eight lives. At least 2,500 cattle were lost. Many roads were blocked for three to five days.

January 22, 1973: During the early morning hours, Chinook winds caused the temperature at Spearfish, South Dakota, to rise from 4 below zero to 45 above in just two minutes, the most dramatic temperature rise in the world. An hour and a half later, the mercury plunged from 54 above to 4 below zero in 27 minutes.

January 22, 1982: A winter storm lasting three days from the 22nd to the 24th virtually paralyzed South Dakota with snowfall of 6 to 20 inches. Subzero temperatures statewide coupled with strong winds of 30 to 50 mph brought wind chills of 50 to 70 below zero. One woman died of exposure near her home in Aurora County. Snow drifted as high as 15 feet. Blowing snow caused a reduction in visibility to near zero for most of the duration of the storm. Hundreds of motorists were stranded. Numerous traffic accidents occurred due to near zero visibilities. Some power outages occurred. Major highways, interstates, and airports were closed. Multiple businesses and schools were closed for several days.

January 22, 2010: A powerful mid-season winter storm moved northeast out of the four corners region of the United States and into the Northern Plains. Ahead of this system, warm and moist air streamed northward, creating widespread fog and freezing fog conditions during the days leading up to the event. Heavy rime frost began to accumulate on power lines and tower guide wires, placing a heavy strain on them when the freezing rain arrived in the late morning and afternoon hours on Friday, January 22nd. Along with the freezing rain, southeast winds gusting to 30 mph also strain sagging power lines. Scattered power outages were reported as early as Tuesday, January 19th, due to the frost-covered lines. Still, most of the power lines and power pole damage occurred during the evening of the 22nd and the morning of the 23rd. The freezing rain that arrived during the afternoon and evening of the 22nd was the proverbial "straw that broke the camel's back." By the time the rain, freezing rain, and snow ended Saturday morning, January 23rd, nearly every power cooperative across central and northeast South Dakota suffered large power pole and power line damage. Also, several radio and television towers were downed by the icing and strong winds. The heavy icing and strong winds downed over 5000 power poles and 21,000 miles of power lines across South Dakota, leaving thousands of households without power. Several homes sustained substantial damage caused by broken water pipes. Power was still not restored for many customers until several weeks after the event. Power line crews from Minnesota, Kansas, and Oklahoma were called upon to help restore power. Several counties, along with the state emergency operations center, opened emergency shelters for people to stay. Forty-one National Guard members were on active duty across the state, helping to restore power. Many flights were delayed or canceled at several airports. The ice and the wind also helped topple a canopy at a truck stop at Highway 20 and 212. On January 23rd, a radio and television transmission tower northwest of South Shore was downed along with a tower north of Reliance and a radio tower southwest of Marvin. The hardest-hit area with this storm was the Cheyenne River and Standing Rock Sioux reservations in central and north-central South Dakota. With no electricity, residents depended on donations of food, bottled water, blankets, heat and light sources, toiletries, and cots. The rural water system serving the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe was shut down, resulting in the state EOC shipping water to the reservation. The Governor asked for a presidential disaster declaration for most of the counties and three reservations. The request was for both public and individual assistance for total damages estimated over 20 million dollars for the state.

1904: An unusual estimated F4 tornado leveled the northern part of Moundville, Alabama, just after midnight, killing 37 people. The tornado reportedly had a phosphorescent glow. An engineer on a northbound Great Southern train saw the destruction right after it occurred and backed his train 12 miles in reverse to the town of Akron, where he sent a telegram for help.

1937: Low of 9 degrees above zero in Las Vegas froze many pipes. Schools had trouble keeping warm, and coal was in short supply in the city. January 1937 was the coldest month on record for Las Vegas, with an average temperature of 31.2 degrees, 17.5 degrees below normal.



God's Pathway to Success

The Lord's definition of success may not be what you expect.

Joshua 1:7: 7 ``Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go.

To most people, the word success means "wealth" or "power." If you stopped the average person on the street and asked whether he is successful, there's a good chance he might mention his career or investments. Many people simply have no other frame of reference for the concept. But material wealth has nothing to do with spiritual success.

The Lord calls His children to live triumphantly. If the pursuit of success were sinful, how could the Lord have made the promise found in Joshua 1:7? Was He promising money or fame? No. The Lord was promising success as He defined it for His servant.

For Joshua, this meant military victory, steadfast faith, and the fulfillment of God's promise to Moses (Exodus 6:7-8). Joshua wasn't concerned with money or fame; rather, he was intensely focused on accomplishing the Lord's goals for him. Armed with the power of the Word, Joshua followed God's marching orders, which is why he is seen as a success.

Don't be confused. Wealth, fame, security, and power have nothing to do with succeeding spiritually. Family, relationships, integrity, faithfulness—these are the things that matter. They are the ways our heavenly Father wants us to succeed.

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

01.20.26

8 47 50 56 70 12

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$266,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 19 Mins 45 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

01.21.26

11 30 39 48 51 4

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$13,560,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 34 Mins 45 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

01.21.26

3 10 22 32 38 11

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 49 Mins 45 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

01.21.26

11 15 25 27 32

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$214,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 49 Mins 45 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

01.21.26

16 20 28 36 52 12

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 18 Mins 45 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

01.21.26

11 26 27 53 55 12

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 18 Mins 45 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Crawford scores 27 as South Dakota takes down Omaha 68-64

By The Associated Press undefined

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Jordan Crawford's 27 points helped South Dakota defeat Omaha 68-64 on Wednesday night.

Crawford added five rebounds for the Coyotes (11-10, 3-3 Summit League). Uzziah Buntyn scored 17 points while going 3 of 11 from the floor and 9 for 11 from the line. Cameron Fens shot 6 of 10 from the field and 4 of 6 from the free-throw line to finish with 16 points.

Paul Djobet finished with 22 points and seven rebounds for the Mavericks (9-12, 2-4).

Trump is rolling out his Board of Peace at Davos at a time when US leadership is being questioned

By JOSH BOAK, AAMER MADHANI and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

DAVOS, Switzerland (AP) — President Donald Trump wants to spotlight his proposed "Board of Peace" at the World Economic Forum on Thursday, looking to create momentum for a project that has been overshadowed this week first by his threats to seize Greenland, and then by a dramatic retreat from that push.

The new board was initially envisioned as a small group of world leaders overseeing the Gaza ceasefire, but has morphed into something far more ambitious — and skepticism about its membership and mandate has led some traditional U.S. allies to so far take a pass.

Trump expressed confidence in his idea ahead of what the White House said would be a "charter announcement" on the sidelines of the forum in the Swiss alps, featuring opening remarks by Trump and a collection of administration officials and leaders from various countries.

"We have a lot of great people that want to join," Trump said with Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi by his side during a Wednesday meeting. Egypt is among the countries that has announced it will join the board. Trump added, "It's going to be the most prestigious board ever formed."

Attending are Secretary of State Marco Rubio, U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, the president's son-in-law and a key overseas negotiator for his administration on several fronts.

Also on-hand will be leaders or top diplomats from several countries, including Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan; Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev; Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Paraguayan President Santiago Peña; and President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev of Kazakhstan.

The list also includes Argentina President Javier Milei and Indonesia President Prabowo Subianto, both Trump allies, and the heads of several state-run sovereign wealth funds.

Some 35 countries had agreed to sign on to the project, a senior administration official told reporters, and 60 nations had been invited to join. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity under ground rules set by the White House.

Trump, who has spoken about the board replacing some of the functions of the United Nations and perhaps even making it eventually obsolete, said some countries' leaders have indicated that they plan to join but still require approval from their parliaments, and said his administration is also receiving queries about membership from countries that hadn't been invited to join.

Some key US allies are skipping the event

Big questions remain, though. Russian President Vladimir Putin said his country is still consulting with Moscow's "strategic partners" before deciding to commit. The Russian president on Thursday is due to host Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas for talks in Moscow.

Others are asking why Putin and other authoritarian leaders had even been invited to join. Trump said he wanted "everybody" who was powerful. "I have some controversial people. But these are people that get the job done. These are people that have tremendous influence."

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Britain's foreign secretary said Thursday that the U.K. plans to skip the ceremony.

"We won't be one of the signatories today," Yvette Cooper told the BBC. "Because this is about a legal treaty that raises much broader issues, and we do also have concerns about President Putin being part of something which is talking about peace, when we have still not seen any signs from Putin that there will be a commitment to peace in Ukraine."

Other European nations have similarly declined their invitations.

Norway and Sweden have indicated that they won't participate, after France also said no. French officials stressed that while they support the Gaza peace plan, they were concerned the board could seek to replace the U.N. as the main venue for resolving conflicts.

Slovenian Prime Minister Robert Golob said "the time has not yet come to accept the invitation," according to the STA news agency, with the main concern being the board's mandate may be too broad and could undermine international order based on the U.N. Charter.

Canada, Russia, Ukraine, China and the executive arm of the European Union also have not yet indicated their response to Trump's invitations. Trump calling off the steep tariffs he threatened over Greenland could ease some allies' reluctance — but the issue is still far from settled.

The Kremlin said Putin will meet late Thursday with Witkoff and Kushner. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Putin "highly values peacemaking efforts by President Donald Trump and his team."

Putin plans to discuss his proposal to send \$1 billion to the Board of Peace and use it for humanitarian purposes during his talks with Abbas, Peskov said. But he noted that the use of those assets will require the U.S. action to unblock them.

Board grew out of ceasefire proposal

The idea for the Board of Peace was first laid out in Trump's 20-point Gaza ceasefire plan and even was endorsed by the U.N. Security Council.

Invitation letters to world leaders ahead of Davos indicated that the panel may not confine their work to Gaza.

When asked by a reporter earlier this week if the board should replace the U.N., Trump replied that "it might." He asserted that the world body "hasn't been very helpful" and "has never lived up to its potential" but also said the U.N. should continue "because the potential is so great."

Trump's hopes for the board received some good news on Wednesday, when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced he's agreed to join, after his office has earlier criticized the makeup of the board's committee tasked with overseeing Gaza.

Months into the ceasefire, Gaza's more than 2 million Palestinians continue to suffer the humanitarian crisis unleashed by over two years of war. And violence in Gaza, while not at the same level as before the October ceasefire and hostage deal was agreed on, continues.

Key to the truce in Gaza continuing to hold is the disarming of Hamas, something the militant group that has controlled the Palestinian territory since 2007 has refused to do and that Israel sees as non-negotiable.

Trump on Wednesday said his administration should know in the next few weeks whether Hamas would come to terms on laying down their weapons.

"If they don't do it," Trump said, "they'll be blown away. Very quickly."

Iran protests loom in background

Trump's push for peace also comes after he threatened military action this month against Iran as it carried out a violent crackdown against some of the largest street protests in years, killing thousands.

Trump, for the time being, has signaled he won't carry out any new strikes on Iran after he said he received assurances that the Islamic government would not carry out the planned hangings of more than 800 protesters.

But even as he prepared to unveil his Board of Peace, Trump also made the case that his tough approach to Tehran — including strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities in June last year — was critical to the Israel-Hamas ceasefire deal coalescing. Iran was Hamas' most important patron, providing the group hundreds of millions of dollars in military aid, weapons, training and financial support over the years.

"If we didn't do that, there was no chance of making peace," Trump said of Iran.

Meeting with Zelenskyy

Trump also expects to speak with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who arrived in Davos on Thursday morning for a meeting expected after the morning's Board of Peace announcement.

But Trump, who continues to struggle to get Zelenskyy and Putin to agree to terms to end their nearly four-year old war, again expressed frustration with both on Wednesday.

"I believe they're at a point now where they can come together and get a deal done," Trump said. "And if they don't, they're stupid — that goes for both of them."

Gunman at large in Australia after leaving 3 dead and 1 wounded

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — A gunman was at large after a shooting in a town in Australia's New South Wales state on Thursday left three people dead and another wounded, police said.

Emergency services were called to two locations at Lake Cargelligo, a town of around 1,500 people, after 4 p.m. Two couples, a man and woman, had been shot in each location within minutes, Police Assistant Commissioner Andy Holland said.

Both women and a man died. Another man was taken to hospital in serious but stable condition, he said.

Police knew the identity of a suspect, but did not know his relationship with the victims, who were all Lake Cargelligo locals, Holland said. The suspect's name has not been released.

State police were working to locate the suspect and had sent resources from neighboring districts to the town, including heavily armed tactical police, Holland said. The town had been cordoned off to prevent the suspect's escape.

Police used geo-targeted text messages to urge the public to avoid the area and for local residents to stay inside. The Commercial Hotel, a local pub, was closed by 6 p.m.

"The offender is believed to have fled in a vehicle," Holland told reporters. "The offender is mobile, hence ... we're asking people in those areas to remain inside their premises for their own safety."

Local resident Manisha, who did not want to give her family name, told Sydney's The Daily Telegraph newspaper there were police cars and ambulances "all over town."

"The town is made of just two main streets. We can hear the sounds" of sirens, she told the newspaper.

Local state parliament lawmaker Roy Butler, described the shooting as "tragic news" for the town, which is a 600-kilometer (370-mile) drive west of Sydney.

"It's a terrible situation, and it's still live, so we don't have much information. My thoughts are with the victims and their families," Butler told Australian Broadcasting Corp.

The shooting came on a National Day of Mourning as Australia remembers the 15 people shot dead in Sydney at a Hannukah celebration on Dec. 14.

Authorities say the two alleged Sydney gunmen were inspired by the Islamic State group to carry out Australia's worst mass shooting since 1996.

The Australian Parliament on Tuesday passed new gun restrictions in response to the tragedy.

Danish leader says kingdom can't negotiate sovereignty after Trump's Greenland about-turn

By GEIR MOULSON and JAMES BROOKS Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — Denmark's prime minister insisted that her country can't negotiate on its sovereignty on Thursday after U.S. President Donald Trump said he agreed a "framework of a future deal" on Arctic security with the head of NATO, and said she has been "informed that this has not been the case."

Trump on Wednesday abruptly scrapped the tariffs he had threatened to impose on eight European nations to press for U.S. control over Greenland, a semiautonomous territory of NATO ally Denmark. It was a dramatic reversal hours after he insisted he wanted to get the island "including right, title and owner-

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ship" — though he also said he would not use force.

He said "additional discussions" on Greenland were being held concerning the Golden Dome missile defense program, a multilayered, \$175 billion system that for the first time will put U.S. weapons in space. Trump offered few details, saying they were still being worked out.

Denmark insists on territorial integrity

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said in a statement Thursday that security in the Arctic is a matter for all of NATO, and it is "good and natural" that it be discussed between the U.S. president and NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte. She said that she had spoken with Rutte "on an ongoing basis," including before and after he met Trump in Davos.

She wrote that NATO is fully aware of the kingdom of Denmark's position that anything political can be negotiated on, including security, investment and economic issues — "but we cannot negotiate on our sovereignty."

"I have been informed that this has not been the case," she said, adding that only Denmark and Greenland can make decisions on issues concerning Denmark and Greenland.

Frederiksen said that Denmark wants to continue engaging in constructive dialogue with allies on how to strengthen security in the Arctic, including the U.S. Golden Dome program, "provided that this is done with respect for our territorial integrity."

Asked in an interview with Fox News whether Greenland would remain part of the kingdom of Denmark under the framework deal Trump announced, Rutte replied that "that issue did not come up any more in my conversations tonight with the president."

"He's very much focused on what do we need to do to make sure that that huge Arctic region, where change is taking place at the moment, where the Chinese and Russians are more and more active, how we can protect it," he said. "That was really the focus of our discussions."

Welcome and skepticism over Trump's switch

On the streets of Copenhagen, some were skeptical about Trump's switch.

"I think the man has said many things and done a lot of different things to what he says," said Louise Pedersen, 22, who works with a startup company. "I have a hard time believing it. I think it's terrifying that we stand here in 2026."

She said it's for Greenlanders to decide what happens with their land — "not Donald Trump."

"I don't really trust anything Mr. Trump is saying," said Poul Bjoern Strand, 70, an advertising worker.

On the possibility of ceding territory, he said: "That's not what the Greenlanders want, that's not what the Danish people want, and ... I cannot believe that Danes are going to follow that."

Chancellor Friedrich Merz of Germany, one of the European countries that had faced Trump's threat of tariffs over Greenland, underlined the need for European NATO allies to do more to secure the Arctic region and stressed that it is "a common trans-Atlantic interest."

"We will protect Denmark, Greenland, the north from the threat posed by Russia," he said at the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos, Switzerland. "We will uphold the principles on which the trans-Atlantic partnership is founded, namely sovereignty and territorial integrity."

"We support talks between Denmark, Greenland (and) the United States on the basis of these principles," aiming for closer cooperation, Merz said. "It is good news that we are making steps into that right direction. I welcome President Trump's remarks from last night — this is the right way to go."

What to know about two fatal train crashes in Spain

By SUMAN NAISHADHAM Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — Two fatal train crashes in two days have rocked Spain and the tragedies have led to questions about safety on the country's railway system.

The first crash involved a high-speed train in southern Spain that derailed on Sunday evening, colliding with another fast train, killing at least 43 people and injuring more than 150.

The crash was the deadliest in Spain since a 2013 crash that killed 80 people when a commuter train in

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the northern region of Galicia hurtled off the rails as it came around a bend going too fast.

On Tuesday night, another train crash happened in northeastern Spain on a commuter line near Barcelona. One person was killed.

Here's what to know about the two crashes.

Derailment and collision

The Sunday derailment happened at 7:45 p.m. when the tail end of a train carrying 289 passengers from Malaga to the capital, Madrid, went off the rails and slammed into an oncoming train traveling from Madrid to Huelva with around 200 people, according to rail operator Adif.

The head of the second train took the brunt of the impact, Transport Minister Óscar Puente said. That collision knocked its first two carriages off the track and sent them plummeting down a four-meter (13-foot) slope. The collision took place near Adamuz, a town in the province of Cordoba, about 370 kilometers (about 230 miles) south of Madrid.

"The impact was so incredibly violent that we have found bodies hundreds of meters away," Andalusia's regional President Juan Manuel Moreno said.

Authorities said Wednesday they had identified almost all the victims from Sunday's crash.

Cause under investigation

Explanations about what caused the crash were scant, with an official investigation underway.

Alvaro Fernández, the president of national railway company Renfe, told Spanish public radio RNE that both trains were traveling well under the speed limit of 250 kph (155 mph) and "human error could be ruled out."

Transport Minister Puente called the crash "truly strange" since it happened on a flat stretch of track that had been renovated in May. But Puente said late Monday that officials had found a broken section of track.

"Now we have to determine if that is a cause or a consequence (of the derailment)," Puente told Spanish radio station Cadena Ser.

The train that jumped the track belonged to the private company Iryo, while the second train, which took the brunt of the impact, belonged to Renfe.

Iryo said in a statement Monday that its train was manufactured in 2022 and passed its latest safety check on Jan. 15.

The Spanish Union of Railway Drivers sent a letter last August asking Spain's rail operator to investigate flaws on high-speed train lines across the country caused by increased traffic.

It warned of potholes, bumps and imbalances in overhead power lines, as well as frequent breakdowns and damage to trains, according to a copy of the letter seen by The Associated Press.

The union called for a general strike in the coming weeks to demand more safety assurances.

High-speed expansion

Spain has spent decades investing heavily in high-speed trains. It currently has the largest rail network in Europe for trains traveling more than 250 kph (155 mph), with more than 3,900 kilometers (2,400 miles) of track, according to the International Union of Railways.

The network is a popular, competitively priced and safe mode of transport. Officials said that Sunday's collision was the first with deaths on Spain's high-speed rail network since it opened its first line in 1992.

Commuter line crash

A Barcelona commuter train crashed Tuesday after a retaining wall fell onto the tracks, Spanish regional authorities said, killing one person and injuring at least 37 others.

While Spain's high-speed rail network generally runs smoothly, the commuter rail service is plagued by reliability issues. However, crashes causing injury or death are not common.

Rescue efforts underway after landslides hit New Zealand campground and house with 2 confirmed dead

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Landslides hit a house and a campground in New Zealand on Thursday, leaving at least two dead while emergency crews were trying to rescue others buried in rubble, officials said.

The first hit a house in the community of Welcome Bay on New Zealand's North Island at 4:50 a.m., police said. Two people escaped the house, and the bodies of two who were trapped inside were recovered hours later, Emergency Management Minister Mark Mitchell said.

Later the same morning, emergency services were called to a second slide at the base of nearby Mount Maunganui. The rubble hit Beachside Holiday Park in a town named after the extinct volcano. Images showed vehicles, travel trailers and an amenities block crushed by debris.

Police Superintendent Tim Anderson said the number of people missing was in the "single figures."

No survivors or bodies had been recovered by late Thursday from the Mount Maunganui rubble, where dogs were being used to sniff for human victims, Mitchell said.

"There was a shower block and a, sort of, combined shower block-kitchen block and there were people using that at the time the slide came through and they are some of the ones that we're working hard to try and recover now," Mitchell told Australian Broadcasting Corp.

Further north near Warkworth, a man was missing after floodwaters swept him from a road Wednesday morning as heavy rain lashed large swathes of the North Island, a police statement said.

New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon urged residents in affected areas to heed local authorities' safety advice during the extreme conditions.

"Extreme weather continues to cause dangerous conditions across the North Island. Right now, the government is doing everything we can to support those impacted," Luxon posted on social media.

Fire and Emergency NZ commander William Pike said there were some signs of life immediately after the Mount Maunganui slide.

"Members of the public ... tried to get into the rubble and did hear some voices," Pike told reporters. "Our initial fire crew arrived and ... were able to hear the same. Shortly after our initial crew arrived, we withdrew everyone from the site due to possible movement and slip."

Mayor Mahe Drysdale said those unaccounted earlier had included people who had left the campground without notifying authorities. The campground was closed after the disaster.

Australian tourist Sonny Worrall said he was lazing in a hot pool within the campground when he heard then saw the landslide.

"I looked behind me and there's a huge landslide coming down. And I'm still shaking from it now," Worrall told New Zealand's 1News news service. "I turned around and I had to jump out from my seat as fast as I could and just run."

He looked back to see the rubble carrying a travel trailer behind him.

"It was like the scariest thing I've ever experienced in my life," Worrall said.

Sundance kicks off in Utah with powerful premieres and emotional tributes to Robert Redford

By LINDSEY BAHR and HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

PARK CITY, Utah (AP) — Robert Redford liked to say that everybody has a story. He's not the only person who said it, but he is one of the few who did something to celebrate it, his daughter, Amy Redford, said Wednesday evening ahead of the Sundance Film Festival's opening day.

Thanks to her father's vision, the Sundance Institute he founded and its year-round programs have helped shape and nurture American independent film for the past 40 years. This year's Sundance Film Festival is a grand goodbye party: It's the first without Redford following his death in September, and the last in Utah before the festival relocates to Boulder, Colorado.

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"This is a festival of new beginnings and endings," his daughter said in an interview with The Associated Press. "I'm going to look around and drink it up and enjoy it and just not take anything for granted."

Robert Redford's legacy and Sundance's decades-long history in Utah are key themes of the 2026 festival, which officially begins Thursday morning with over a dozen films premiering throughout the day.

By the time the dust has settled from Oscar nominations, the festival will already be in full swing with the world premieres of Amir Bar-Lev's documentary "The Last First: Winter K2" about the changing culture of extreme mountain climbing, Rachel Lambert's tender drama "Carousel," starring Chris Pine and Jenny Slate, and Judd Apatow's portrait of comedian Maria Bamford's mental health journey on the opening day list.

Also upcoming is David Alvarado's "American Pachuco: The Legend of Luis Valdez" about the legacy of the playwright and director, and Joanna Natasegara's "The Disciple," which delves into the stranger-than-fiction story of how Dutch-Moroccan record producer Cilvaringz found his way into the inner circle of the Wu-Tang Clan. "Too Many Cooks" creator Casper Kelly will also debut his midnight movie "Buddy," starring Cristin Milioti, about escaping a children's television show.

The Sundance Film Festival runs through Feb. 1.

Trump's European threats could make it harder for future US leaders to repair ties

By STEVEN SLOAN and MATT BROWN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Barely a month into his presidency, Joe Biden had a message for Europe.

"America is back," Biden told the Munich Security Conference in 2021. "The transatlantic alliance is back."

It was a promise Biden delivered often as he sought to cast the disruptions of his predecessor, Donald Trump, as an anomaly. But nearly five years later, Biden's assurances have proven short-lived.

In his second term, Trump has cast aside alliances forged over seven decades with Europe that helped lead to the reunification of Germany and the collapse of the Soviet Union. He has hectored leaders, making demands and leveling accusations more commonly associated with enemies. In the process, he has rocked the stability that has sustained the relationships and left countries to chart a course without U.S. leadership.

The most stark example of this shift has been Trump's threat to take over Greenland, dismissing the nation as a large "piece of ice" as he demanded that Denmark cede control to the U.S., a move that could have caused NATO to rupture.

He called Denmark, which had the highest per capita death toll among coalition forces in Afghanistan, "ungrateful" for U.S. protection during World War II. He posted private text messages that showed European leaders trying to court him. Trump shared images of him planting the U.S. flag in Greenland and, in an extraordinary speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos, said Europe was "not heading in the right direction." At one point, he said that "sometimes you need a dictator."

Then, hours later, he announced a "framework of a future deal" on Arctic security. Following a long pattern, however, he offered scant details.

An uncertain standing for the US in the world

Though Trump has for now backed away from his most potent threats to obtain Greenland, the episode has left America's standing in the world uncertain.

NATO leaders already were responding to Trump's threats by signaling strategies that don't include the U.S. That could make it much harder for the next president — whether they are a Democrat or Republican — to attempt the same type of reputational repair that Biden sought.

"To an extent, things can be improved," said Jon Finan, who was Biden's deputy national security adviser and is now a distinguished senior fellow at the Center for American Progress. "But they will never be the same in large part because I think any country that is behaving rationally in terms of its relationship with the United States will realize that we can only be counted on in four year increments, if at all."

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, who parried Trump's gambit to make Canada the 51st state, has already set out on a more independent path. In Davos, Carney was candid that the notion of the long-

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standing rules-based order was an "illusion."

"Let me be direct: We are in the midst of a rupture, not a transition," Carney said as he called on so-called middle powers to "act together."

Unable to reach a deal with Trump to cut tariffs, Carney was in Beijing last week meeting with President Xi Jinping and brokering a deal that cut levies on Chinese electric cars in return for lower tariffs on certain agricultural and food products including Canadian canola, lobsters and crab. While there, he said ties between Ottawa and Washington were "much more multifaceted" than with Beijing, but added "the way our relationship has progressed in recent months with China, it is more predictable."

Over the weekend, the European Union and the Mercosur bloc of South American countries formally signed a long-sought free trade agreement, which European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen portrayed as a bulwark against the Trump administration. EU lawmakers narrowly voted on Wednesday to hold up the deal for now.

European leaders were unsparing

Ahead of Trump's appearance in Davos, European leaders were unsparing, using language that until recently would have been unthinkable in relation to a dispute with the U.S. French President Emmanuel Macron cautioned against colonial adventures, warning of "a shift towards a world without rules."

Belgian Prime Minister Bart De Wever said "so many red lines have been crossed," adding, "being a happy vassal is one thing. Being a miserable slave is something else. If you back down now, you're going to lose your dignity."

This moment was also notable for the criticism of Trump from longtime allies on the right. In the UK, Nigel Farage said in an interview with U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson that he understood the security issues Trump was raising in the Arctic. But he added that Trump's approach amounted to the "biggest fracture" in the transatlantic relationship in decades.

"To have a U.S. president threatening tariffs unless we agree that he can take over Greenland, by some means, without it seems even getting the consent of the people of Greenland, I mean, this is a very hostile act," Farage told Johnson.

Jordan Bardella, president of Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally party in France and a European Parliament lawmaker, posted that the EU should suspend last year's tariff deal with the U.S., describing Trump's threats as "commercial blackmail."

Trump mostly has support from GOP in Congress

Congressional Republicans so far have largely supported Trump — or stayed silent.

House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Brian Mast likened the dispute to "a hard conversation" and questioned the long-term consequences. Trump used his 2025 State of the Union address to express a desire to reclaim the Panama Canal.

"If you went back exactly one year, you might say, 'man the tensions with Panama were the worst they'd ever been,'" said Mast, a Florida Republican. "Panama came in last week, things were the best that they'd ever been because we had some really tough conversations with each other that we needed to have."

The most pointed concerns from inside the GOP have largely come from those who aren't running for reelection this year, including Rep. Don Bacon of Nebraska, who said on Wednesday that "all of this has been totally unnecessary."

"Threatening Greenland with force was absurd," he said.

For their part, Democrats have encouraged a more robust response — both from Europe and in the U.S.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom, a potential Democratic presidential candidate in 2028, was in Davos this week and blasted Europeans for focusing on diplomatic efforts ahead of Trump's appearance.

"Diplomacy with Donald Trump?" he said. "He's a T-Rex. You mate with him or he devours you."

In an interview, Rep. Gregory Meeks, the top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said it "may take some time" for a future president to rebuild trust with allies. But he argued a full recovery in global relationships may require a more lasting shift in U.S. politics.

Allies will "continue to hold their breath until you have two consecutive elections when we know we have a president that is going to stick by our institutions," he said. "Everybody's just looking at us now as

a nation and trying to see where we will be.”

Oscar nominations are this morning. ‘Sinners’ could make history

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

Horror films have traditionally been left out of the Oscars, but when nominations for the 98th Academy Awards are announced Thursday, Ryan Coogler’s vampire tale “Sinners” could make history.

Nominations will read at 8:30 a.m. Eastern by presenters Danielle Brooks and Lewis Pullman. Viewers can tune in live to Oscar.com, Oscars.org, the academy’s digital platforms and ABC’s “Good Morning America.”

No movie has ever landed more than 14 nominations — something achieved only by “All About Eve,” “Titanic” and “La La Land.” But “Sinners” could top that mark with a heap of nods for its lush craft, Coogler’s writing and direction, and Michael B. Jordan’s acting (it would be his first nomination).

Right with it will likely be Paul Thomas Anderson’s “One Battle After Another,” which has coasted through awards season as the clear frontrunner. The father-daughter revolutionary comedy could land 14 nominations of its own, including five or even six acting nominations.

Whatever the final tally is, Warner Bros. is poised for its best Oscar showing in the 102-year-old studio’s history. Both “One Battle After Another” and “Sinners” should lead Warner Bros. to a record haul even as the studio prepares for its sale to Netflix. Earlier this week, Netflix amended its \$72 billion acquisition of Warner Bros. Discovery to an all-cash offer, sweetening its offer over that of Paramount Skydance.

This year, the Oscars are introducing a new category for casting. That new honor will help “Sinners” and “One Battle After Another” pad their already impressive stats.

Ten films will be nominated for best picture. Along with the two favorites, movies such as the Norwegian family drama “Sentimental Value,” the Shakespeare drama “Hamnet” and the table tennis odyssey “Marty Supreme” are expected to be in the mix.

The 98th Academy Awards will take place on March 15 at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles and will be televised live on ABC and Hulu. YouTube’s new deal to exclusively air won’t take effect until 2029. This year, Conan O’Brien will return as host.

Millions of Americans brace for potentially catastrophic ice storm.

What to know, by the numbers

By JEFF MARTIN Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Millions of Americans from New Mexico to the Carolinas are bracing for a potentially catastrophic ice storm that could crush trees and power lines and knock out power for days, while many northern states all the way to New England could see enough snow to make travel nearly impossible, forecasters say.

An estimated 100 million people were under some type of winter weather watch, warning or advisory on Wednesday ahead of the storm, the National Weather Service said.

The storm, expected to begin Friday and continue through the weekend, is also projected to bring heavy snow and all types of wintry precipitation, including freezing rain and sleet. An atmospheric river of moisture could be in place by the weekend, pulling precipitation across Texas and other states along the Gulf Coast and continuing across Georgia and the Carolinas, forecasters said.

Here’s a look at the approaching storm and how people are preparing for it, by the numbers:

0

The number of snowplows owned by the city of Jackson, Mississippi, where a mix of ice and sleet is possible this weekend. The city uses other heavy machinery like skid steers and small excavators to clear roads, said James Caldwell, deputy director of public works. Jackson also has three trucks that carry salt and sand to spread across roads before freezing weather.

0.5

The amount of ice — half an inch, or 1.27 centimeters — that can lead to a crippling ice storm, toppling

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trees and power lines to create widespread and long-lasting power outages. The latest forecasts from the National Weather Service warn of the potential for a half-inch of ice or more for many areas, including parts of Arkansas, Louisiana, Alabama, and Tennessee.

1

The number of Nashville snowplows named after country music legend and Tennessee native Dolly Parton (Dolly Plowton). Another snowplow in East Tennessee was named Snowlene after her classic hit song "Jolene" as part of a 2022 naming contest.

3

The number of layers needed to keep warm in extreme cold. AP video journalist Mark Vancleave in Minnesota explains the benefits of all three — a base layer, a middle layer and an outer shell — in this video.

4

The number of major U.S. hub airports in the path of the southern storm this weekend, when ice, sleet and snow could delay passengers and cargo: Dallas-Fort Worth; Atlanta; Memphis, Tennessee, and Charlotte, North Carolina. Still more major airports on the East Coast could see delays later, as the storm barrels east.

12

The number of inches of snow that could fall in parts of Oklahoma.

"You've got to be very weather aware, and real smart about what you're doing," said Charles Daniel, who drives a semitrailer across western Oklahoma.

"One mistake can literally kill somebody, so you have to use your head," he added.

15

The number of snow and ice removal trucks operated by Memphis, Tennessee's Division of Public Works. The city also has six trucks that spread brine, a mixture designed to melt wintry precipitation. Statewide, the Tennessee Department of Transportation has 851 salt trucks and 634 brine trucks, and most of the salt trucks double as plows.

19

Parts of at least 19 states in the storm's path were under winter storm watches by late Wednesday, with more watches and warnings expected as the system approaches. They include Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, Virginia and West Virginia. An estimated 55 million people are included in these winter storm watches, the weather service said.

32

The degree in Fahrenheit when water freezes, equivalent to 0 Celsius. This is a magic number when it comes to winter weather, said Eric Guillot, a scientist at the National Weather Service. If the temperature is slightly above 32, it will be mostly liquid. But the colder it is below the mark, the more efficiently precipitation will freeze.

45

The number of snowplow trucks at the ready in Nashville, Tennessee, according to the Nashville Department of Transportation and Multimodal Infrastructure.

50 Below Zero

The windchill value — how cold it feels to a person when winds are factored in — that is expected in parts of the Northern Plains, the weather service projects. That equates to minus 45.6 Celsius and is forecast for parts of northern Minnesota and North Dakota.

"When the weather forecast says, 'feels like negative 34,' it's just a matter of covering skin and being prepared for it," said Nils Anderson, who owns Duluth Gear Exchange, an outdoor equipment store in Duluth, Minnesota.

330

The number of snowplows in the city of Chicago, where annual snowfall averages 37 to 39 inches (0.94 to 0.99 meters). The city also has 40 4x4 vehicles, and about 12 beet juice-dispensing trucks, according to Cole Stallard, Chicago's commissioner of Streets and Sanitation. The natural sugars of beet juice lower the freezing point of water, allowing salt mixtures to work at much lower temperatures and preventing

refreezing, while also helping salt stick to the road longer.

600

The number of miles added last year to snowplow routes in Nashville, Tennessee. That was done "to get deeper into our neighborhoods — roads that had never been plowed before," said Alex Apple, a spokesperson for Nashville Mayor Freddie O'Connell.

1,000-plus

Texas has this number of pieces of winter weather equipment, including snowplows, motor graders and brine tankers, Texas Department of Transportation spokesperson Adam Hammons said. He said the agency also works with state partners and contractors to get more equipment when needed. In the Dallas area, "right now our main focus is treating our roadways in advance of the storm," agency spokesperson Tony Hartzel said Wednesday.

78,000

The number of cubic yards of salt on hand at the Arkansas Department of Transportation. The state has 121 salt houses around the Arkansas, plus 600 salt spreaders and 700 snowplows, said Dave Parker, an agency spokesperson.

Former Uvalde officer acquitted in trial over police response to Robb Elementary attack

By VALERIE GONZALEZ and JIM VERTUNO Associated Press

CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas (AP) — A former Uvalde schools police officer was acquitted Wednesday of charges that he failed in his duties to confront the gunman at Robb Elementary during the critical first minutes of one of the deadliest school shootings in U.S. history.

Jurors deliberated for more than seven hours before finding Adrian Gonzales, 52, not guilty in the first trial over the hesitant law enforcement response to the 2022 attack, in which a teenage gunman killed 19 fourth-graders and two teachers. Had he been convicted, he faced up to two years in prison on more than two dozen charges of child abandonment and endangerment.

Gonzales appeared to fight back tears and hugged his lawyers after the verdict was read in a courtroom in Corpus Christi, hundreds of miles from Uvalde, where his legal team said a fair trial would not have been possible.

"Thank you for the jury for considering all the evidence," Gonzales told reporters. Asked if he wanted to say anything to the families, he declined.

Several family members of the victims sat in silence in the courtroom, some crying or wiping away tears.

"Faith is fractured, but you never lose faith," said Jesse Rizo, whose 9-year-old niece Jackie Cazares was killed. He said he was frustrated by the verdict and hopes the state will press ahead with the trial of former Uvalde schools Police Chief Pete Arredondo, the only other officer who has been charged over the police response.

"Those children in the cemetery can't speak for themselves," Rizo said.

Jurors declined to speak to reporters while leaving.

Arredondo's trial has not yet been set. Paul Looney, his attorney, told The Associated Press that he believes the verdict will result in prosecutors dropping the case against his client.

"These people have been vilified, and it's horrible what's been done to them. These guys didn't do anything wrong," Looney said.

A rare trial ends in acquittal

The nearly three-week trial was an unusual case in the U.S. of an officer facing criminal charges on accusations of failing to stop a crime and protect lives.

The proceedings included emotional testimony from teachers who were shot and survived. Prosecutors argued that Gonzales abandoned his training and did nothing to stop or interrupt the teenage gunman before he entered the school.

"We're expected to act differently when talking about a child that can't defend themselves," special prosecutor Bill Turner said during closing arguments Wednesday. "If you have a duty to act, you can't stand by while a child is in imminent danger."

At least 370 law enforcement officers rushed to the school, where 77 minutes passed before a tactical team finally entered the classroom to confront and kill the gunman. Gonzales was one of just two officers indicted, angering some victim's relatives who said they wanted more to be held accountable.

Gonzales was charged with 29 counts of child abandonment and endangerment — each count representing the 19 students who were killed and 10 others who were injured.

Jurors talked about 'gaps' in case, lawyer says

During the trial jurors heard a medical examiner describe the fatal wounds to the children, some of whom were shot more than a dozen times. Several parents told of sending their children to school for an awards ceremony and the panic that ensued as the attack unfolded.

Gonzales' lawyers said he arrived upon a chaotic scene of rifle shots echoing on school grounds and never saw the gunman before the attacker went inside the school. They also insisted that three other officers who arrived seconds later had a better chance to stop the gunman.

"He was the lowest man on the totem pole. They thought he was easy pickings," Nico LaHood, one of Gonzales' attorneys, said of prosecutors after the acquittal.

LaHood said he briefly polled jurors on their decision after the verdict.

"They talked about gaps. They talked about perspective and what the government didn't prove about Adrian," LaHood said.

Families made the long trip to attend trial

Some victims' families made the long drive to watch Gonzales' trial. Early on the sister of one of the teachers killed was removed from the courtroom after an angry outburst following one officer's testimony.

Gonzales' trial was tightly focused on his actions in the early moments of the attack, but prosecutors also presented the graphic and emotional testimony as the result of police failures.

State and federal reviews of the shooting cited cascading problems in law enforcement training, communication, leadership and technology, and questioned why officers waited so long.

Looney, Arredondo's attorney, said he still wants his client to go trial so he can clear his name, saying, "Pete Arredondo deserves and needs a complete airing and public vindication. I hope he gets that chance."

Prosecutors faced a high bar to win a conviction. Juries are often reluctant to convict law enforcement officers for inaction, as seen after the 2018 school massacre in Parkland, Florida. A sheriff's deputy was acquitted after being charged with failing to confront the shooter in that attack — the first such prosecution in the U.S. for an on-campus shooting.

Iran offers first government-issued death toll from protest crackdown, one far lower than activists

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran offered its first government-issued death toll Wednesday following a crackdown on nationwide protests, giving a far lower figure than activists abroad as the country's theocracy tries to reassert control after unrest recalling the chaos surrounding its 1979 Islamic Revolution.

State television carried statements by the Interior Ministry and the Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs, an official body providing services to families of those killed in wars, saying 3,117 people were killed. It added that 2,427 of the dead in the demonstrations that began Dec. 28 were civilians and security forces. It did not elaborate on the rest. Iran's government in the past has undercounted or not reported fatalities from unrest.

The U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency said the death toll early Thursday was at least 4,902, with many more feared dead. The human rights group has been accurate throughout the years on demonstrations and unrest in Iran, relying on a network of activists inside the country that confirms all reported fatalities. Other groups similarly have offered higher numbers than the Iranian government tally.

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The Associated Press has been unable to independently assess the death toll, in part due to authorities cutting access to the internet and blocking international calls into the country. Iran also reportedly has limited journalists' ability locally to report on the aftermath, instead repeatedly airing claims on state television that refer to demonstrators as "rioters" motivated by America and Israel, without offering evidence to support the allegation.

Meanwhile, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi issued his most-direct threat yet to the United States, warning the Islamic Republic will be "firing back with everything we have if we come under renewed attack."

The comments came as Araghchi saw his invitation to the World Economic Forum in Davos rescinded over the killings, and as a U.S. aircraft carrier group moved west toward the Middle East from Asia. U.S. fighter jets and other equipment appeared to be moving in the Mideast after a major U.S. military deployment in the Caribbean saw troops seize Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro.

Protest death toll rises

The death toll exceeds that of any other round of protest or unrest in Iran in decades, and recalls the chaos surrounding the 1979 revolution that brought the Islamic Republic into being. Although there have been no protests for days, there are fears the toll could increase significantly as information gradually emerges from a country under a government-imposed shutdown of the internet since Jan. 8.

Nearly 26,500 people have also been arrested, according to the Human Rights Activists News Agency. Comments from officials have led to fears of some of those detained being put to death in Iran, one of the world's top executioners.

Mass executions and the killing of peaceful protesters have been two red lines laid down by U.S. President Donald Trump in the tensions.

Araghchi makes threat in column

Araghchi made the threat in an opinion article published by The Wall Street Journal. The foreign minister contended "the violent phase of the unrest lasted less than 72 hours" and sought again to blame armed demonstrators for the violence. Videos that made it out of Iran despite an internet shutdown appear to show security forces repeatedly using live fire to target apparently unarmed protesters, something unaddressed by Araghchi.

"Unlike the restraint Iran showed in June 2025, our powerful armed forces have no qualms about firing back with everything we have if we come under renewed attack," Araghchi wrote, referring to the 12-day war launched by Israel on Iran in June. "This isn't a threat, but a reality I feel I need to convey explicitly, because as a diplomat and a veteran, I abhor war."

He added: "An all-out confrontation will certainly be ferocious and drag on far, far longer than the fantasy timelines that Israel and its proxies are trying to peddle to the White House. It will certainly engulf the wider region and have an impact on ordinary people around the globe."

Araghchi's comments likely refer to Iran's short- and medium-range missiles. The Islamic Republic relied on ballistic missiles to target Israel in the war and left its stockpile of the shorter-range missiles unused, something that could be fired to target U.S. bases and interests in the Persian Gulf. Already, there have been some restrictions on U.S. diplomats traveling to bases in Kuwait and Qatar.

The USS Abraham Lincoln, which had been in the South China Sea in recent days, had passed through the Strait of Malacca, a key waterway connecting the sea and Indian Ocean, by Tuesday, ship-tracking data showed.

While naval and other defense officials stopped short of saying the carrier strike group was headed to the Middle East, its current heading and location in the Indian Ocean means it is only days away from moving into the region.

U.S. military images released in recent days also showed F-15E Strike Eagles arriving in the Mideast and forces in the region moving a HIMARS missile system, the type used with great success by Ukraine after Russia's full-scale invasion in the country in 2022.

Kurdish exiles claim Iranian attack in Iraq

The National Army of Kurdistan, the armed wing of the Kurdistan Freedom Party, or PAK, meanwhile

claimed Iran launched an attack Wednesday against one of its bases near Irbil, some 320 kilometers (200 miles) north of Baghdad. It said one fighter had been killed, and released mobile phone footage of a fire in the predawn darkness.

Iran did not immediately acknowledge the attack, which would be the first foreign operation Tehran has launched since the protests started.

A handful of Iranian Kurdish dissident or separatist groups — some with armed wings — have long found a safe haven in northern Iraq's semiautonomous Kurdish region, where their presence has been a point of friction between the central government in Baghdad and Tehran. The PAK has claimed it launched attacks in Iran as a crackdown on the demonstrations took place, something reported by semiofficial Iranian news agencies as well.

Autopsy finds Cuban immigrant in ICE custody died of homicide due to asphyxia

By MICHAEL BIESECKER and RYAN J. FOLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Cuban migrant held in solitary confinement at an immigration detention facility in Texas died after guards held him down and he stopped breathing, according to an autopsy report released Wednesday that ruled the death a homicide.

Geraldo Lunas Campos died Jan. 3 following an altercation with guards. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement said the 55-year-old father of four was attempting suicide and the staff tried to save him.

But a witness told The Associated Press last week that Lunas Campos was handcuffed as at least five guards held him down and one put an arm around his neck and squeezed until he was unconscious.

His death was one of at least three reported in little more than a month at Camp East Montana, a sprawling tent facility in the desert on the grounds of Fort Bliss, an Army base.

The autopsy report by the El Paso County Medical Examiner's Office found Lunas Campos' body showed signs of a struggle, including abrasions on his chest and knees. He also had hemorrhages on his neck. The deputy medical examiner, Dr. Adam Gonzalez, determined the cause of death was asphyxia due to neck and torso compression.

The report said witnesses saw Lunas Campos "become unresponsive while being physically restrained by law enforcement." It did not elaborate on what happened during the struggle but cited evidence of injuries to his neck, head and torso associated with physical restraint. The report also noted the presence of petechial hemorrhages — tiny blood spots from burst capillaries that can be associated with intense strain or injury — in the eyelids and skin of the neck.

Dr. Victor Weedn, a forensic pathologist who reviewed the autopsy report for AP, said the presence of petechiae in the eyes support the conclusion that asphyxia caused the death. Those injuries suggest pressure on the body and are often associated with such deaths, he said.

He said the contusions on Lunas Campos' body may reflect physical restraint and the neck injuries were consistent with a hand or knee on the neck.

The autopsy also found the presence of prescription antidepressant and antihistamine medications, adding that Lunas Campos had a history of bipolar disorder and anxiety. It made no mention of him attempting suicide.

Government provided changing accounts of what happened

ICE's initial account of the death, which included no mention of an altercation with guards, said Lunas Campos had become disruptive and staff moved him into a cellblock where detainees are held away from others.

"While in segregation, staff observed him in distress and contacted on-site medical personnel for assistance," the agency said in its Jan. 9 statement. "Medical staff responded, initiated lifesaving measures, and requested emergency medical services."

Lunas Campos was pronounced dead after paramedics arrived.

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Last Thursday, after Lunas Campos' family was first informed the death was likely to be ruled a homicide, Department of Homeland Security spokesperson Tricia McLaughlin amended the government's account, saying he had attempted suicide and guards tried to help him.

"Campos violently resisted the security staff and continued to attempt to take his life," she said. "During the ensuing struggle, Campos stopped breathing and lost consciousness."

After the final autopsy report was released Wednesday, McLaughlin issued a statement emphasizing that Lunas Campos was "a criminal illegal alien and convicted child sex predator."

New York court records show Lunas Campos was convicted in 2003 of sexual contact with a person under 11, a felony for which he was sentenced to one year in jail and placed on the state's sex offender registry. Lunas Campos was also sentenced to five years in prison and three years of supervision in 2009 after being convicted of attempting to sell a controlled substance, according to the New York corrections records. He completed the sentence in January 2017.

"ICE takes seriously the health and safety of all those detained in our custody," McLaughlin said Wednesday, adding that the agency was investigating the death. DHS has not responded to questions about whether any outside law enforcement agency was also investigating.

Deaths put a spotlight on Camp East Montana

The AP reported in August that the \$1.2 billion contract to build and operate Camp East Montana, expected to become the largest detention facility in the U.S., was awarded to a private contractor headquartered in a single-family home in Richmond, Virginia. The company, Acquisition Logistics LLC, had no prior experience running a corrections facility and has subcontracted with other companies to help operate the camp.

It was not immediately clear whether the guards present when Lunas Campos died were government employees or those of a private contractor.

A final determination of homicide by the medical examiner would typically be critical in determining whether any guards are held criminally or civilly liable. The fact that Lunas Campos died on an Army base could limit state and local officials' legal jurisdiction to investigate.

Lunas Campos was among the first detainees sent to Camp Montana East, arriving in September after ICE arrested him in Rochester, New York, where he lived for more than two decades. He was legally admitted to the U.S. in 1996, part of a wave of Cuban immigrants seeking to reach Florida by boat.

ICE said he was picked up in July as part of a planned immigration enforcement operation due to criminal convictions that made him eligible for removal.

In addition to Lunas Campos, ICE announced that on Dec. 3 an immigrant from Guatemala held in Camp East Montana died after being transferred to a El Paso hospital for care. While the cause of death was still pending, the agency said Francisco Gaspar-Andres, 48, was suspected to have died of liver and kidney failure.

On Sunday, ICE announced that Victor Manuel Diaz, a 36-year-old immigrant from Nicaragua, died at Camp East Montana on Jan. 14 of a "presumed suicide." The agency said Diaz was detained by ICE earlier this month during the immigration crackdown in Minneapolis.

Unlike with the two prior deaths, Diaz's body wasn't sent to the county medical examiner in El Paso. McLaughlin said Wednesday that the autopsy for Diaz is being performed at the Army medical center at Fort Bliss. DHS again did not respond to questions about whether any agency other than ICE will investigate the death.

Rep. Veronica Escobar, a Democrat whose district includes El Paso, called on DHS Secretary Kristi Noem and acting ICE Director Todd M. Lyons to brief Congress about the recent deaths.

"DHS must preserve all evidence — including halting their effort to deport the witnesses," Escobar said Wednesday. "I reiterate my call for Camp East Montana to be shut down and for the contract with the corporation running it to be terminated."

Army orders military police to get ready for a possible Minneapolis deployment, AP source says

By KONSTANTIN TOROPIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. Army has ordered several dozen additional active-duty soldiers to prepare for a possible deployment to Minneapolis if needed, a defense official said Wednesday, amid protests over the Trump administration's immigration enforcement crackdown.

The defense official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive plans, confirmed that members of an Army military police brigade who are stationed at Fort Bragg in North Carolina have been given prepare-to-deploy orders.

If deployed, the troops would likely offer support to civil authorities in Minneapolis, according to the official, who stressed that such standby orders are issued regularly and they do not necessarily mean that the troops would end up going.

About 1,500 active-duty soldiers from the Army's 11th Airborne Division based in Alaska also have received similar standby orders. President Donald Trump has threatened to invoke the Insurrection Act, a rarely used 19th century law that would allow him to use active-duty troops as law enforcement.

That threat followed protests that erupted in Minneapolis after a federal immigration officer killed resident Renee Good on Jan. 7. Trump quickly appeared to walk back the threat, telling reporters a day later that there wasn't a reason to use the act "right now."

"If I needed it, I'd use it," Trump said. "It's very powerful."

When asked about the latest orders, which were reported earlier by MS Now, the Pentagon said it didn't have information to provide at this time.

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, a Democrat and frequent target of Trump, has urged the president to refrain from sending in more troops and, in a statement Tuesday, invited him to visit Minnesota and "help restore calm and order and reaffirm that true public safety comes from shared purpose, trust, and respect."

In his second term, Trump has pushed traditional boundaries by using troops in American cities, often over the objections of local officials, amid federal operations targeting illegal immigration and crime.

Trump deployed federalized National Guard troops to Los Angeles last June after protesters took to the streets in response to a blitz of immigration arrests. Ultimately, he sent about 4,000 Guard members and 700 active-duty Marines to guard federal buildings and, later, to protect federal agents as they carried out immigration arrests.

He also mobilized Guard troops in places like Chicago and Portland, Oregon, but has faced a series of legal setbacks. Trump said in December that he was dropping that push for the time being.

A former flight attendant is accused of fooling airlines into giving him free flights. But how?

By JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — A former flight attendant accused of posing as a pilot and working airline employee fooled three U.S. carriers into giving him hundreds of free tickets over a span of four years, federal authorities say. But precisely how he is alleged to have done it — and why the airlines wouldn't have caught on sooner — has industry insiders scratching their heads.

Dallas Pokornik, 33, of Toronto, was arrested in Panama after being indicted on wire fraud charges in federal court in Hawaii last October. He pleaded not guilty Tuesday following his extradition to the United States. His federal public defender declined to discuss the case.

According to court documents, Pokornik was a flight attendant for a Toronto-based airline from 2017 to 2019, then used fraudulent employee identification from that carrier to obtain tickets reserved for pilots and flight attendants on three other airlines. Court documents contained no explanation of why, in an industry focused on flight and airport safety, the airlines didn't recognize the credentials as invalid.

The indictment did not identify any of the airlines involved but said the U.S. carriers are based in Honolulu,

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Chicago and Fort Worth, Texas. A spokesperson for Hawaiian Airlines said Wednesday the company does not comment on litigation. Representatives for United Airlines and American Airlines did not immediately respond to emails from The Associated Press.

One Canadian carrier based in Toronto, Porter Airlines, said in an emailed statement it was "unable to verify any information related to this story." Air Canada, which is based in Montreal but has a major hub in Toronto, said it had no record of Pokornik working there.

Allegations surprise industry experts

John Cox, a retired pilot who runs an aviation safety firm in St. Petersburg, Florida, called the allegations surprising, considering the cross-checking that airlines are able to do to verify the employment of a crew member seeking to fly on another airline.

Airlines generally rely on databases of active airline employees maintained on third-party websites to check whether someone is actually an employee.

"The only thing I can think is that they did not show him as no longer employed by the airline," Cox said in a phone interview Wednesday. "Consequently when the checks were made at the gate, he showed up as a valid employee."

Passenger airlines typically offer such free or steeply discounted standby seats, when available, to their own crew members or those of other carriers — a courtesy that makes the whole industry function better, by getting crew members where they need to go. Employees can also use the perk for their immediate families when flying for leisure. Sometimes employees might sit in one of the "jump seats" with shoulder harnesses in the cockpit or in the cabin, but federal rules prohibit the cockpit jump seats from being used for leisure travel.

How the screening usually works

Crew members who need to travel to another city for work go through airport security by scanning a "known crew member" card linked to a database that has their photo, said Bruce Rodger, an airline pilot who owns an aviation consulting firm. They also present an employee badge and government-issued identification.

Using the known crew member process for leisure travel isn't allowed, he said.

For leisure travel, crew members can purchase discounted standby tickets or request a jump seat. With a standby ticket, a crew member reaches the gates via normal airport security screening. It's possible to have a standby ticket but request a jump seat, which allows the employee to fly for free.

The plane's captain must approve who rides in the cockpit jump seats. Often that's a licensed pilot but Federal Aviation Administration regulations also allow for others with official reasons to be there like a Defense Department evaluator, an air traffic controller observing, a crew member or a representative of the manufacturer.

In 2023, an off-duty airline pilot riding in the cockpit of a Horizon Air flight said "I'm not OK" just before trying to cut the engines midflight. That pilot, Joseph Emerson, later told police he had been struggling with depression. A federal judge sentenced that man to time served last November.

Pokornik asked to ride in the cockpit, prosecutors say

U.S. prosecutors said Tuesday that Pokornik requested to sit in the cockpit's jump seat — typically reserved for off-duty pilots. It was not clear from court documents whether he ever actually rode in a plane's cockpit, and the U.S. Attorney's Office in Honolulu declined to say.

Years ago, the airline industry tightened up the standards for the flight benefits employees receive after the famous case of Frank Abagnale, whose exaggerated 1980 memoir, "Catch Me If You Can," described posing as a pilot to fly for free, among other cons. His story gained additional fame when Steven Spielberg made it into a movie starring Leonardo DiCaprio in 2002.

Additional restrictions on who can get aboard a plane and inside a cockpit were imposed by the airlines and FAA after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Immigration officers assert sweeping power to enter homes without a judge's warrant, memo says

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal immigration officers are asserting sweeping power to forcibly enter people's homes without a judge's warrant, according to an internal Immigration and Customs Enforcement memo obtained by The Associated Press, marking a sharp reversal of longstanding guidance meant to respect constitutional limits on government searches.

The memo authorizes ICE officers to use force to enter a residence based solely on a more narrow administrative warrant to arrest someone with a final order of removal, a move that advocates say collides with Fourth Amendment protections and upends years of advice given to immigrant communities.

The shift comes as the Trump administration dramatically expands immigration arrests nationwide, deploying thousands of officers under a mass deportation campaign that is already reshaping enforcement tactics in cities such as Minneapolis.

For years, immigrant advocates, legal aid groups and local governments have urged people not to open their doors to immigration agents unless they are shown a warrant signed by a judge. That guidance is rooted in Supreme Court rulings that generally prohibit law enforcement from entering a home without judicial approval. The ICE directive directly undercuts that advice at a time when arrests are accelerating under the administration's immigration crackdown.

The memo itself has not been widely shared within the agency, according to a whistleblower complaint, but its contents have been used to train new ICE officers who are being deployed into cities and towns to implement the president's immigration crackdown. New ICE hires and those still in training are being told to follow the memo's guidance instead of written training materials that actually contradict the memo, according to the whistleblower disclosure.

It is unclear how broadly the directive has been applied in immigration enforcement operations. The Associated Press witnessed ICE officers ramming through the front door of the home of a Liberian man, Garrison Gibson, with a deportation order from 2023 in Minneapolis on Jan. 11, wearing heavy tactical gear and with their rifles drawn.

Documents reviewed by The AP revealed that the agents only had an administrative warrant — meaning there was no judge who authorized the raid on private property.

The change is almost certain to meet legal challenges and stiff criticism from advocacy groups and immigrant-friendly state and local governments that have spent years successfully urging people not to open their doors unless ICE shows them a warrant signed by a judge.

The Associated Press obtained the memo and whistleblower complaint from an official in Congress, who shared it on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive documents. The AP verified the authenticity of the accounts in the complaint.

The memo, signed by the acting director of ICE, Todd Lyons, and dated May 12, 2025, says: "Although the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has not historically relied on administrative warrants alone to arrest aliens subject to final orders of removal in their place of residence, the DHS Office of the General Counsel has recently determined that the U.S. Constitution, the Immigration and Nationality Act, and the immigration regulations do not prohibit relying on administrative warrants for this purpose."

The memo does not detail how that determination was made nor what its legal repercussions might be. Homeland Security spokeswoman Tricia McLaughlin said in an e-mailed statement to the AP that everyone the department serves with an administrative warrant has already had "full due process and a final order of removal."

She said the officers issuing those warrants have also found probable cause for the person's arrest. She said the Supreme Court and Congress have "recognized the propriety of administrative warrants in cases of immigration enforcement," without elaborating. McLaughlin did not respond to questions about whether ICE officers entered a person's home since the memo was issued, relying solely on an administrative warrant and if so, how often.

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Recent arrests shine a light on tactics

Whistleblower Aid, a nonprofit legal organization that assists workers exposing wrongdoings, said in the whistleblower complaint obtained by The Associated Press that it represents two anonymous U.S. government officials "disclosing a secretive — and seemingly unconstitutional — policy directive."

A wave of recent high-profile arrests, many unfolding at private homes and businesses and captured on video, has placed a spotlight on immigration arrest tactics, including officers' use of proper warrants.

Most immigration arrests are carried out under administrative warrants, internal documents issued by immigration authorities that authorize the arrest of a specific individual but do not permit officers to forcibly enter private homes or other non-public spaces without consent. Only warrants signed by judges carry that authority.

All law enforcement operations — including those conducted by ICE and Customs and Border Protection — are governed by the Fourth Amendment of the Constitution, which protects all people in the country from unreasonable searches and seizures.

People can legally refuse federal immigration agents entry into private property if the agents only have an administrative warrant, with some limited exceptions.

Memo shown to 'select' officials

The memo says ICE officers can forcibly enter homes and arrest immigrants using just a signed administrative warrant known as an I-205 if they have a final order of removal issued by an immigration judge, the Board of Immigration Appeals or a district judge or magistrate judge.

The memo says officers must first knock on the door and share who they are and why they're at the residence. They're limited in the hours they can go into the home — after 6 a.m. and before 10 p.m. The people inside must be given a "reasonable chance to act lawfully." But if that doesn't work, the memo says, they can use force to go in.

"Should the alien refuse admittance, ICE officers and agents should use only a necessary and reasonable amount of force to enter the alien's residence, following proper notification of the officer or agent's authority and intent to enter," the memo reads.

The memo is addressed to all ICE personnel. But it has been shown only to "select DHS officials" who then shared it with some employees who were told to read it and return it, Whistleblower Aid wrote in the disclosure.

One of the two whistleblowers was allowed to view the memo only in the presence of a supervisor and then had to give it back. That person was not allowed to take notes. A whistleblower was able to access the document and lawfully disclose it to Congress, Whistleblower Aid said.

Although the memo was issued in May, David Kligerman, senior vice president and special counsel at Whistleblower Aid, said it took time for its clients to find a "safe and legal path to disclose it to lawmakers and the American people."

Memo says ICE officers are told to rely solely on administrative warrants

ICE has been rapidly hiring thousands of new deportation officers to carry out the president's mass deportation agenda. They're trained at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Brunswick, Georgia.

During a visit there by The Associated Press in August, ICE officials said repeatedly that new officers were being trained to follow the Fourth Amendment.

But according to the whistleblowers' account, newly hired ICE officers are being told they can rely solely on administrative warrants to enter homes to make arrests, even though that conflicts with written Homeland Security training materials.

Lindsay Nash, a law professor at Yeshiva University's Cardozo School of Law in New York, said the memo "flies in the face" of what the Fourth Amendment protects against and what ICE itself has historically said are its authorities.

She said there's an "enormous potential for overreach, for mistakes and we've seen that those can happen with very, very serious consequences."

Astronauts say space station's ultrasound machine was critical during medical crisis

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — The astronauts evacuated last week from the International Space Station say a portable ultrasound machine came in "super handy" during the medical crisis.

During their first public appearance since returning to Earth, the four astronauts refused Wednesday to say which one of them needed medical attention and for what reason. It was NASA's first medical evacuation in 65 years of human spaceflight.

NASA's Mike Fincke said the crew used the onboard ultrasound machine once the medical problem arose Jan. 7, the day before a planned spacewalk that was abruptly canceled. The astronauts had already used the device a lot for routine checks of their body changes while living in weightlessness, "so when we had this emergency, the ultrasound machine came in super handy."

It was so useful that Fincke said there should be one on all future spaceflights. "It really helped," he said. "Of course, we didn't have other big machines that we have here on planet Earth," he added. "We do try to make sure that everybody before we fly are really, really not prone to surprises. But sometimes things happen and surprises happen, and the team was ready ... preparation was super important."

The space station is set up as well as it can be for medical emergencies, said NASA's Zena Cardman, who commanded the crew's early return flight with SpaceX. She said NASA "made all the right decisions" in canceling the spacewalk, which would have been her first, and prioritizing the crew's well-being.

Japanese astronaut Kimiya Yui said he was surprised how well all the preflight training paid off in dealing with the health concerns.

"We can handle any kind of difficult situation," Yui said. "This is actually very, very good experience for the future of human spaceflight."

Joining them on what turned out to be a 5 1/2-month mission — more than a month shorter than planned — was Russia's Oleg Platonov. They launched last August from Florida and splashed down in the Pacific off the San Diego coast last week.

Welcoming them back to Houston were their replacements, who aren't due to launch until mid-February. NASA and SpaceX are working to move up the flight.

"We were hoping to give them hugs in space, but we gave them hugs on Earth," Fincke said.

Immigration enforcement arrives in Maine as a court freezes restrictions on tactics in Minnesota

By JACK BROOK and PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Maine became the latest target of the Trump administration's immigration enforcement crackdown, while a federal appeals court on Wednesday suspended a decision that prohibited federal officers from using tear gas or pepper spray against peaceful protesters in Minnesota.

The 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals was persuaded to freeze a judge's ruling that bars retaliation against the public in Minnesota, including detaining people who follow agents in cars, while the government pursues an appeal. Operation Metro Surge, an immigration enforcement operation in the Twin Cities, has been underway for weeks.

Attorney General Pam Bondi praised the appeals court on X, saying the Justice Department "will protect federal law enforcement agents from criminals in the streets AND activist judges in the courtroom."

After the stay was issued, Greg Bovino of U.S. Border Patrol, who has commanded the administration's big-city immigration campaign, was seen on video repeatedly warning protesters on a snowy Minneapolis street "Gas is coming!" before tossing a canister into the crowd that released green smoke.

Minnesota is a major focus of immigration sweeps by agencies under the Department of Homeland Security and is where Renee Good was fatally shot by an ICE officer on Jan. 7. State and local officials who oppose the campaign were served with federal grand jury subpoenas Tuesday for records that might

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suggest they were trying to stifle enforcement.

A political action committee founded by former Vice President Kamala Harris urged donors to contribute to a defense fund in aid of Gov. Tim Walz, her 2024 running mate.

"The Justice Department is going after Trump's enemies," Harris' email said, referring to President Donald Trump.

Feds turn to Maine as next target

In Maine, the Department of Homeland Security named the enforcement operation Catch of the Day in an apparent play on the state's seafood industry. Maine has relatively few residents who are in the United States illegally but has a notable presence of refugees in its largest cities, particularly from Africa.

Secretary of State Shenna Bellows, a Democrat, said she won't grant a request for confidential license plates sought by Customs and Border Protection, a decision that reflects her disgust over "abuses of power" by immigration enforcers.

"We have not revoked existing plates but have paused issuance of new plates. We want to be assured that Maine plates will not be used for lawless purposes," Bellows said.

A message seeking comment from CBP was not immediately returned.

Portland City Council member Pious Ali, a native of Ghana, said there's much anxiety about ICE's presence in Maine's largest city.

"There are immigrants who live here who work in our hospitals, they work in our schools, they work in our hotels, they are part of the economic engine of our community," Ali said.

Conflicts emerge in shooting incident

Bovino said more than 10,000 people in the U.S. illegally have been arrested in Minnesota in the past year, including 3,000 "of some of the most dangerous offenders" in the last six weeks during Operation Metro Surge.

Julia Decker, policy director at the Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota, said advocates have no way of knowing whether the government's arrest numbers and descriptions of the people in custody are accurate.

Separately, a federal judge said he's prepared to grant bond and release two men after hearing conflicting testimony about an alleged assault on an immigration officer. Prosecutors are appealing. One of the men was shot in the thigh by the officer during the encounter last week.

The officer said he was repeatedly struck with a broom and with snow shovels while trying to subdue and arrest Alfredo Alejandro Aljorna following a car crash and foot chase.

Aljorna and Julio Cesar Sosa-Celis denied assaulting the officer. Neither video evidence nor three eyewitnesses supported the officer's account about the broom and shovels or that there had been a third person involved.

Aljorna and Sosa-Celis do not have violent criminal records, their attorneys said, and both had been working as DoorDash drivers at night to avoid encounters with federal agents.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Douglas Micko said they still could be detained by ICE even if released from custody in the assault case.

City councils push for pause on evictions

The Minneapolis and Saint Paul city councils are pushing for Walz to implement a pause on evictions across the state so families can shelter in place safely.

"No worker should have to choose between keeping a roof over their head and risking being kidnapped by ICE on the way to work," Minneapolis City Council Minority Leader Robin Wonsley said in a statement.

Meanwhile, the grassroots Minnesota Immigrant Rights Action Committee called for the arrest of the officer who shot Good.

"We need our mayor, we need our elected officials to stand up to this violence," MIRAC spokesperson Erika Zurawski said at a news conference Wednesday. "On the federal level, we mean to make sure none of our U.S. representatives vote for any more funding for ICE."

Good was in her vehicle blocking a Minneapolis street where ICE officers were operating. Trump administration officials say the officer shot her in self-defense, although videos of the encounter show the

Honda Pilot slowly turning away from him.

ICE activity increases in Maine as anxiety grows in immigrant communities

By PATRICK WHITTLE and RODRIQUE NGOWI Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — The Trump administration is now targeting its mass deportation campaign on Maine, a state with relatively few residents in the United States illegally but notable African refugee communities in its largest cities.

The Department of Homeland Security named the operation "Catch of the Day," an apparent play on Maine's seafood industry, just as it has done for other enforcement surges, like "Patriot" in Massachusetts, "Metro Surge" in Minnesota and "Midway Blitz" in Chicago.

Reports of a surge in immigration arrests have struck fear in immigrant communities of Portland and Lewiston and prompted backlash from Gov. Janet Mills and other Democrats, including a refusal to help ICE agents obscure the identity of their vehicles by issuing undercover license plates.

Mills said Wednesday that if federal agents have warrants, they should show them, but if they are separating parents who have committed no crime from their children, they are "only sowing intimidation and fear and fostering division and suspicion among neighbors."

Citizens have formed networks to alert neighborhoods to the presence of ICE agents and bring food to immigrants in their homes. Portland's superintendent said the school district is developing an online learning plan for its students — more than half of whom aren't white. Many businesses have posted signs saying ICE agents aren't welcome.

"While we respect the law, we challenge the need for a paramilitary approach," Portland Mayor Mark Dion said at a news conference Wednesday where he was joined by other local officials. "This council doesn't stand apart from our immigrant communities, we stand with them."

Portland and Lewiston have thousands of residents of African descent. Somali immigration accelerated in the early 2000s, leaving Maine with one of the nation's highest Somali populations.

Now the presence of Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents is causing great anxiety in Portland, said city council member Pious Ali, a native of Ghana.

"Our schools have seen about a quarter of immigrants not showing up," Ali said, and many fear going to work as well: "There are immigrants who live here who work in our hospitals, they work in our schools, they work in our hotels, they are part of the economic engine of our community."

ICE agents don't need to spread trauma by smashing doors and windows, he said: "The federal government has the ability to contact these people without unleashing fear into our communities."

Portland Councilor Wes Pelletier said business owners, teachers and college students have shared information to alert neighborhoods to enforcement activity, while volunteers have delivered groceries and diapers to families too afraid to go outside.

"Every arrest feels like a wound to Portland," the councilor said.

Dozens of arrests

The enforcement action is arriving in Maine, a mostly rural state with about 1.4 million residents, as confrontations between ICE and demonstrators continue in Minnesota, where ICE is under scrutiny following an agent's fatal shooting of Renee Good.

ICE didn't respond to a request for comment Wednesday on the agency's plans for Maine, where the U.S. Department of Homeland Security said in a statement that increased enforcement began on Tuesday. "We have approximately 1,400 targets here in Maine," Patricia Hyde, the ICE deputy assistant director, told Fox News, adding that agents had made 50 arrests by Tuesday.

"We have launched Operation Catch of the Day to target the worst of the worst criminal illegal aliens in the state. On the first day of operations, we arrested illegal aliens convicted of aggravated assault, false imprisonment, and endangering the welfare of a child," said Homeland Security Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin in a statement.

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No new undercover license plates

Secretary of State Shenna Bellows said state officials received a request from U.S. Customs and Border Protection for confidential, undercover Maine license plates and decided against issuing them. The license plates are used on unmarked vehicles, and Bellows said she wants more assurance they will be used appropriately.

ICE's use of license plates in other states has raised concerns: Illinois Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulias, a Democrat, issued a warning to ICE agents last year that swapping or altering license plates is illegal.

"These requests in light of rumors of ICE deployment to Maine and abuses of power in Minnesota and elsewhere raise concerns. We have not revoked existing plates but have paused issuance of new plates. We want to be assured that Maine plates will not be used for lawless purposes," Bellows said.

Bellows, a Democrat who has repeatedly clashed with the Trump administration, cited accountability concerns.

Customs and Border Protection did not respond to a request seeking comment, but a top Maine Republican said withholding the undercover plates would jeopardize public safety.

"That really, one, puts us at odds as a state. Puts us at one end of an extreme that we really shouldn't be on," Senate Leader Trey Stewart said.

Maine's top federal prosecutor, U.S. Attorney Andrew Benson, joined Democrats in calling for any demonstrations in the state to remain peaceful and civil. Benson, a Trump appointee, warned people to stay out of the agents' way or be prosecuted.

Schools, Democrats call for caution

Portland Public Schools, the largest and most diverse school district in the state, said in a statement Wednesday that it conducted a "lockout" at two schools to prevent anyone from entering the building during the school day Tuesday because of concerns about ICE activity nearby.

"It was quickly determined that there was no threat to our school communities and the lockouts were lifted within minutes. This is an understandably tense time in our community, as reports and rumors of immigration enforcement actions grow," the district's statement said.

Maine Democrats have condemned the ICE activity.

"The Trump administration has deployed ICE agents to Portland, Lewiston, and possibly other Maine communities. This is not about public safety. It is about fear, control, and political theater," Devon Murphy-Anderson, executive director of the Maine Democratic Party, said in a statement Wednesday.

Republicans and some Democrats back contempt for the Clintons in House Epstein probe

By STEPHEN GROVES and MATT BROWN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A House committee advanced resolutions Wednesday to hold former President Bill Clinton and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in contempt of Congress over the Jeffrey Epstein investigation, opening the prospect of the House using one of its most powerful punishments against a former president for the first time.

In bipartisan votes, the Republican-controlled House Oversight Committee approved the contempt of Congress charges, setting up potential votes in the House early next month. In a rare departure from party lines, some Democrats supported the contempt measures against the Clintons, with several progressive lawmakers emphasizing the need for full transparency in the Epstein investigation.

The votes were the latest turn in the Epstein saga as Congress investigates how the late financier was able to sexually abuse dozens of teenage girls for years.

"No witness, not a former president or a private citizen, may willfully defy a congressional subpoena without consequence. But that is what the Clintons did and that is why we are here," Rep. James Comer, the chairman, said at the session on Wednesday.

The repercussions of contempt charges loomed large, given the possibility of a substantial fine and even incarceration. Still, there were signs of a potential thaw as the Clintons appeared to be searching

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for an off-ramp to testify. In addition, passage of contempt charges through the full House was far from guaranteed, requiring a majority vote — something Republicans increasingly struggle to achieve.

The Clintons have said they had nothing to do with Epstein for decades and are seeking a resolution to the dispute. This week, they offered to have the committee leadership and staff interview Bill Clinton in New York.

Comer rejected that offer Tuesday, insisting that any interview also have an official transcript.

What do lawmakers want to know from the Clintons?

The push in Washington for a reckoning over Epstein has shown details of the connections between the wealthy financier and both Bill Clinton and Trump, among many other high-powered men. Epstein killed himself in 2019 in a New York jail cell while awaiting trial.

Bill Clinton, President Donald Trump and many others connected to Epstein have not been accused of wrongdoing. Yet lawmakers are wrestling over who receives the most scrutiny.

A spokesman for the Clintons, Angel Ureña, said on social media that the Clintons are trying to help the Epstein investigation but that “both Clintons have been out of office for over a decade. Neither had anything to do with him for more than 20 years.”

Behind the scenes, longtime Clinton lawyer David Kendall has tried to negotiate an agreement with Comer for months. Kendall raised the prospect of having the Clintons testify on Christmas and Christmas Eve, according to the committee’s account of the negotiations.

The Clintons, who contend the subpoenas are invalid because they do not serve any legislative purpose, have also offered the committee written declarations about their interactions with Epstein.

How Democrats are approaching the issue

Democrats have largely been focused on advancing the investigation into Epstein rather than mounting a defense of the Clintons, who led their party for decades. They agreed that Bill Clinton should inform the committee if he has any pertinent information about Epstein’s abuses.

A wealthy financier, Epstein donated to Bill Clinton’s 1992 presidential campaign and Hillary Clinton’s joint fundraising committee ahead of her 2000 Senate campaign in New York.

“No president or former president is above the law,” the top Democrat on the House Oversight Committee, Rep. Robert Garcia, said at the hearing.

On Wednesday, Democrats tried to advance several changes to the contempt of Congress charges. Several argued that Hillary Clinton should be exempted because she has said she had very little personal interaction with Epstein. Democratic lawmakers also tried to downgrade the contempt of Congress resolution to a civil rather than criminal offense.

Democrats spent the hearing criticizing Comer for focusing on the Clintons when the Justice Department is running a month late on a congressionally-mandated deadline to publicly release its case files on Epstein. Comer has also allowed several former attorneys general to provide the committee with written statements attesting to their limited knowledge of the case.

The committee had also subpoenaed Ghislaine Maxwell, Epstein’s longtime confidant, who is serving a lengthy prison sentence for a conviction on sex trafficking charges. But Comer declined to press for the interview after Maxwell’s attorney indicated she would invoke Fifth Amendment rights in any deposition.

“It’s interesting that it’s this subpoena only that Republicans and the chairman have been obsessed about putting all their energy behind,” Garcia said.

Comer said the committee will interview Maxwell next month. Attorney General Pam Bondi will also appear before the House Judiciary Committee in February.

In the end, nine Democrats voted with all Republicans on the committee to advance contempt against Bill Clinton, and three Democrats — Reps. Summer Lee of Pennsylvania, Melanie Stansbury of New Mexico and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan — joined in the vote to advance the contempt resolution for Hillary Clinton.

Democrats embraced the call for full transparency on Epstein after Trump’s return to the White House, particularly after Bondi stumbled on her promise to release the entirety of the unredacted Epstein files to the public. The backlash scrambled traditional ideological lines, leading Republicans to side with Democrats

demanding further investigation.

The pressure eventually resulted in a bipartisan subpoena from the committee that ordered the Justice Department and Epstein's estate to release files related to Epstein. Republicans quickly moved to include the Clintons in the subpoena.

Comer has indicated that he will insist that the subpoena be fulfilled by nothing less than a transcribed deposition of Bill Clinton.

"They're going to have two weeks until this bill is on the floor," he said Wednesday

How contempt proceedings have been used

Contempt of Congress proceedings are rare, used historically as a last resort when lawmakers are trying to force testimony for high-profile investigations, such as the infamous inquiry during the 1940s into alleged Communist sympathizers in Hollywood or the impeachment proceedings of President Richard Nixon.

Most recently, Trump's advisers Peter Navarro and Steve Bannon were convicted of contempt charges for defying subpoenas from a House panel investigating the Jan. 6, 2021, riot by a mob of the Republican president's supporters at the Capitol. Both Navarro and Bannon spent months in prison.

The Jan. 6 committee also subpoenaed Trump in its inquiry. Trump's lawyers resisted the subpoena, citing decades of legal precedent they said shielded ex-presidents from being ordered to appear before Congress. The committee ultimately withdrew its subpoena.

No former president has ever been successfully forced to appear before Congress, although some have voluntarily appeared.

But some Republicans said they should face the same consequences for refusing to testify as Bannon and Navarro.

Rep. Andy Biggs, an Arizona Republican, said on social media that if the Clintons "aren't perp walked, we will have failed the American people."

US stocks recover half of the prior day's plunge after Trump calls off Greenland-related tariffs

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The U.S. stock market bounced back from its worst day since October on Wednesday after President Donald Trump said he reached the framework for a deal about Greenland, an island he's long coveted, and won't impose tariffs he had threatened on several European countries.

The S&P 500 rallied 1.2% after Trump said the deal, "if consummated, will be a great one for the United States of America" and its allies in the North Atlantic region. The announcement triggered an immediate move higher in the stock market, which found solace earlier in the day after Trump ratcheted down his rhetoric and told business and government leaders in Europe that he would not use force to take "the piece of ice."

The de-escalation in tensions helped the S&P 500 recover just over half of its 2.1% drop from the day before and pull closer to its all-time high set earlier this month. The Dow Jones Industrial Average jumped 588 points, or 1.2%, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 1.2%.

Treasury yields also eased in the bond market in another signal of reduced worries among investors. Besides the progress on Greenland, they also got help from a calming of yields in Japan's jumpy bond market. The value of the U.S. dollar, meanwhile, clawed back some of its declines against other currencies after sliding the day before.

Trump himself acknowledged how the U.S. stock market sold off on Tuesday because of his desire for Greenland, but he called it "peanuts compared to what it's gone up" in the first year of his second term and said it would go up further in the future.

Trump has a history of making big threats that send financial markets sliding, only to pull back later and reach deals that are seen as less bad for the economy or for inflation than his initial suggestion.

On one hand, the pattern has given rise to the "TACO" acronym suggesting "Trump Always Chickens Out" if financial markets react strongly enough. On the other, Trump has ultimately struck deals that outsid-

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ers may have earlier considered unlikely, ones that he's crowed about later. The most obvious example is Trump's announcement of high tariffs on "Liberation Day," which eventually led to trade deals with many of the world's major economies.

Helping to lead the U.S. stock market Wednesday was Halliburton. The oil field services company rose 4.1% after reporting a stronger profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected.

United Airlines climbed 2.2% after likewise reporting a better profit for the final three months of 2025 than analysts expected. CEO Scott Kirby said that the airline's strong momentum in revenue is continuing into 2026.

They helped offset a 2.2% drop for Netflix. The streamer sank even though it reported a stronger profit than expected. Investors focused instead on its slowing subscriber growth and its lower-than-expected forecast for profit in the current quarter.

Kraft Heinz sank 5.7% after Berkshire Hathaway warned investors that it may be interested in selling its 325 million shares in the food giant that former CEO Warren Buffett helped create in 2015.

Berkshire took a \$3.76 billion write-down on its Kraft-Heinz stake last summer. Buffett said last fall that he was disappointed in Kraft Heinz' plan to split the company in two, and Berkshire's two representatives resigned from the Kraft board last spring.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 78.76 points to 6,875.62. The Dow Jones Industrial Average climbed 588.64 to 49,077.23, and the Nasdaq composite gained 270.50 to 23,224.82.

In the bond market, the yield on the 10-year Treasury eased to 4.25% from 4.30% late Tuesday. That's almost all the way back to the 4.24% level where it was at on Friday.

That was before Trump threatened to impose 10% tariffs on Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Finland for opposing U.S. control of Greenland. That would have been on top of a 15% tariff specified by a trade agreement with the European Union that has yet to be ratified.

In stock markets abroad, indexes were mixed in mostly modest movements across Europe and Asia.

Japan's Nikkei 225 slipped 0.4%.

The country's prime minister, Sanae Takaichi, has called a snap election for Feb. 8, which had sent yields of long-term government bonds to record levels and raised worries across global financial markets. The expectation is that Takaichi, who is capitalizing on strong public support ratings, will cut taxes and boost spending and increase the government's already heavy load of debt.

After surging as high as 4.22% on Tuesday, the yield on the 40-year Japanese government bond pulled back to 4.05% Wednesday.

Trump backs down on Greenland and cancels tariff threat after NATO agrees to future Arctic deal

By JOSH BOAK, WILL WEISSERT and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

DAVOS, Switzerland (AP) — President Donald Trump on Wednesday scrapped the tariffs that he threatened to impose on eight European nations to press for U.S. control over Greenland, pulling a dramatic reversal shortly after insisting he wanted to get the island "including right, title and ownership."

In a post on his social media site, Trump said he had agreed with the head of NATO on a "framework of a future deal" on Arctic security, potentially defusing tension that had far-reaching geopolitical implications.

He said "additional discussions" on Greenland were being held concerning the Golden Dome missile defense program, a multilayered, \$175 billion system that for the first time will put U.S. weapons in space.

Trump offered few details, saying they were still being worked out. But one idea NATO members have discussed as part of a compromise with Trump was that Denmark and the alliance would work with the U.S. to build more U.S. military bases on Greenland.

That's according to a European official familiar with the matter but not authorized to comment publicly. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said it was not immediately clear if that idea was included in the framework Trump announced.

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Trump has backed off tariffs before

The president has threatened tariffs before only to back away. In April, after first saying he would slap massive import levies on nations from around the world, which prompted a sharp negative market reaction, Trump eased off.

But his change of heart this time came only after he used his speech at the World Economic Forum in the Swiss Alps to focus on Greenland and threatened to upend NATO, an alliance that has been among the globe's most unshakable since the early days of the Cold War.

In his address, Trump said he was asking for territory that was "cold and poorly located" and that the U.S. had effectively saved Europe during World War II while declaring of NATO: "It's a very small ask compared to what we have given them for many, many decades."

"We probably won't get anything unless I decide to use excessive strength and force, where we would be frankly unstoppable. But I won't do that, OK?" Trump said.

But Trump has also said repeatedly that, while the U.S. will defend NATO, he wasn't convinced the alliance will backup Washington, if needed, and suggested that was at least part of the reason for his aggressive stance toward Greenland. That prompted NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, in a post-speech event with Trump, to say that the alliance would stand with the U.S. if it is attacked.

"You can be assured, absolutely," Rutte said. A short time later came Trump's post canceling the tariffs.

Danish Foreign Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen said he welcomed Trump ruling out taking "Greenland by force" and pausing "the trade war with Europe."

"Now, let's sit down and find out how we can address the American security concerns in the Arctic while respecting the red lines of the Kingdom of Denmark," he said in a statement.

President cites national security

Trump argues that the U.S. needs Greenland for national security and to counter threats from Russia and China in the Arctic region, despite America already having a large military base there. He threatened to impose steep U.S. import taxes on Denmark and seven other allies unless they negotiate a transfer of the semi-autonomous territory.

The tariffs were to have started at 10% next month and climb to 25% in June.

Trump often tries to increase pressure on the other side when he believes it can lead to a favorable agreement. His threats at Davos appeared on the verge of rupturing NATO, which was founded by leading European nations, the U.S. and Canada to counter the Soviet Union.

The alliance's other members were steadfast in saying Greenland is not for sale and cannot be wrested from Denmark, while angrily rejecting Trump's promised tariffs.

A Danish government official told The Associated Press after Trump's speech that Copenhagen was ready to discuss U.S. security concerns. But the official, who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity, underscored the government's position that "red lines"—namely Denmark's sovereignty—must be respected.

It was not immediately clear how Trump's canceling of tariffs might change such calculations.

Greenland tells citizens to prepare

In the meantime, Greenland's government responded by telling its citizens to be prepared. It has published a handbook in English and Greenlandic on what to do in a crisis that urges residents to ensure they have sufficient food, water, fuel and supplies at home to survive for five days.

"We just went to the grocery store and bought the supplies," said Tony Jakobsen in Greenland's capital Nuuk said, showing off the contents of bags that included candles, snacks and toilet paper.

Jakobsen said he thought Trump's rhetoric towards Greenland was "just threats... but it's better to be ready than not ready."

Before backing down, Trump had urged Denmark and the rest of NATO to stand aside, adding an ominous warning.

"We want a piece of ice for world protection, and they won't give it," Trump said. "You can say yes, and we will be very appreciative. Or you can say no, and we will remember."

He also called for opening "immediate negotiations" for the U.S. to acquire Greenland. In subsequent comments to reporters, he declined to name a price that might be paid, saying only, "There's a bigger price, and that's the price of safety and security and national security and international security."

His arrival in Davos was delayed after a minor electrical problem on Air Force One forced a return to Washington to switch aircraft. As Trump's motorcade headed down a narrow road to the speech site, onlookers — including some skiers — lined the route, some making obscene gestures.

Financial markets that had fallen sharply on Trump's threatened tariffs bounced back Wednesday. Also breathing a sigh of relief were a number of U.S. officials who had also been concerned that Trump's hard-line stance and bellicose rhetoric toward Greenland, Denmark and other NATO allies could harm other foreign policy goals.

Trump's Davos speech was originally supposed to focus on how to lower U.S. housing prices — part of a larger effort to bring down the cost of living. Greenland instead carried the day, though Trump mistakenly referred to it as Iceland four times during his speech.

"This enormous unsecured island is actually part of North America," Trump said. "That's our territory."

When he finally did mention housing, Trump suggested he did not support a measure to encourage affordability. He said bringing down rising home prices hurts property values and makes homeowners who once felt wealthy because of the equity in their houses feel poorer.

'Now there's another threat'

Before Trump announced that he was abandoning the tariffs and potentially easing international pressure, his speech left people in Nuuk preparing for the worst.

Resident Johnny Hedemann said it was "insulting" that Trump "talks about the Greenlandic people and the Greenlandic nation as just an ice cube." He spoke while heading out to buy a camping stove and instant mashed potatoes.

"Living in this nature, you have to be prepared for almost anything. And now there's another threat — and that's Trump," Hedemann said.

Supreme Court seems inclined to keep Lisa Cook on Fed board despite Trump attempt to fire her

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Wednesday seemed inclined to keep Federal Reserve governor Lisa Cook in her job, casting doubt on President Donald Trump's bid to wrest control of the nation's central bank.

The justices heard arguments over Trump's effort to fire Cook based on allegations she committed mortgage fraud, which she denies. No president has fired a sitting governor in the 112-year history of the Fed, which was structured to be independent of day-to-day politics. The case presented the court with one of the more extraordinary efforts by Trump to expand presidential power. Though the court has frequently sided with him on emergency petitions, Cook's case could prove to be an exception.

Allowing Cook's firing to go forward "would weaken, if not shatter, the independence of the Federal Reserve," said Justice Brett Kavanaugh, one of three Trump appointees on the nation's highest court.

At least five other justices on the nine-member court also sounded skeptical about the effort to remove her from office.

Both Cook and Federal Reserve chairman Jerome Powell sat through nearly two hours of arguments in the packed courtroom.

"For as long as I serve at the Federal Reserve, I will uphold the principle of political independence in service to the American people," Cook said in a statement issued after the arguments.

Interest rates

The true motivation for trying to fire Cook, Trump's critics say, is the Republican president's desire to exert control over U.S. interest rate policy. If Trump succeeds in removing Cook, the first Black woman Federal Reserve governor, he could replace her with his own appointee and gain a majority on the Fed's

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board. The case is being closely watched by Wall Street investors and could have broad impacts on the financial markets and U.S. economy.

Trump has been dismissive of worries that cutting rates too quickly could trigger higher inflation. He wants dramatic reductions so the government can borrow more cheaply and Americans can pay lower borrowing costs for new homes, cars or other large purchases, as worries about high costs have soured some voters on his economic management.

During a speech earlier Wednesday in Davos, Switzerland, Trump reiterated his call for the Fed to sharply lower rates, arguing that the United States should pay "the lowest interest rate of any country in the world."

The board cut a key interest rate three times in a row in the last four months of 2025, but that's more slowly than Trump wants. The Fed also suggested it may leave rates unchanged in coming months over inflation worries.

The issue before the court is whether Cook can stay on the job while her challenge to the firing plays out in court. Judges on lower courts have allowed her to remain in her post as one of seven central bank governors. The justices could simply deny the emergency appeal Trump is seeking and allow the case to continue playing out in lower courts.

Chief Justice John Roberts, who also seemed skeptical of Trump's actions, suggested it may be pointless to return the case to lower courts rather than issue a more enduring ruling.

A decision is expected by early summer.

Taking on the Fed

With Cook's case under review at the high court, Trump dramatically escalated his confrontation with the Fed. The Justice Department has opened a criminal investigation of Powell and has served the central bank with subpoenas.

Powell himself took the rare step of responding to Trump, calling the threat of criminal charges "pretexts" that mask the real reason, Trump's frustration over interest rates. The Justice Department has said the dispute is ostensibly about Powell's testimony to Congress in June over the cost of a massive renovation of Fed buildings.

In Trump's first year of his second term, the justices generally, but not always, went along with Trump's pleas for emergency action to counteract lower-court rulings against him, including allowing the firings of the heads of other governmental agencies at the president's discretion, with no claim that they did anything wrong.

But the court has sent signals that it is approaching the independence of the nation's central bank more cautiously, calling the Fed "a uniquely structured, quasi-private entity."

In Cook's case, Trump is not asserting that he can fire Fed governors at will, Solicitor General D. John Sauer said. Cook is one of several people, along with Democratic New York Attorney General Letitia James and Democratic Sen. Adam Schiff of California, who have been accused of mortgage fraud by federal housing official Bill Pulte. They have denied the allegations against them.

Cook's properties

The case against Cook stems from allegations she claimed two properties, in Michigan and Georgia, as "primary residences" in June and July 2021, before she joined the Fed board. Such claims can lead to a lower mortgage rate and smaller down payment than if one of them was declared as a rental property or second home.

Those applications, Sauer said, are evidence of "gross negligence at best" and give Trump reason to fire her. In any event, he argued, courts shouldn't be reviewing his decision and Cook has no right to a hearing.

Giving Cook a chance to sit down with Trump and respond to the allegations her, Justice Amy Coney Barrett said, "just wouldn't be that big a deal, it seems."

Cook has denied any wrongdoing and has not been charged with a crime. "There is no fraud, no intent to deceive, nothing whatsoever criminal or remotely a basis to allege mortgage fraud," a Cook lawyer, Abbe Lowell, wrote to Attorney General Pam Bondi in November.

Cook specified that her Atlanta condo would be a "vacation home," according to a loan estimate she

obtained in May 2021. In a form seeking a security clearance, she described it as a "2nd home." Lowell wrote that the case against her largely rests on "one stray reference" in a 2021 mortgage document that was "plainly innocuous in light of the several other truthful and more specific disclosures" about the homes she has purchased.

Roberts and Justice Sonia Sotomayor, both owners of multiple residential properties, expressed some sympathy for Cook.

"I suppose we can debate that, how significant it is in a stack of papers you have to fill out when you're buying real estate," Roberts said, responding to Sauer's assertion that Cook had made a "quite a big mistake" in her mortgage application.

Sotomayor said there was something familiar to her in Cook's need to move to Washington after her appointment to the Fed and rent out her Michigan home.

"I had to move from New York when I got my job in Washington, and, frankly, I renovated my apartment the year before, thinking I would be in New York for the rest of my life," Sotomayor recalled, alluding to her Supreme Court appointment. "Things change."

Israeli fire strikes journalists and children on one of Gaza's deadliest days since ceasefire

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Israeli forces on Wednesday killed at least 11 Palestinians in Gaza, including two 13-year-old boys, three journalists and a woman, hospitals said, on one of the war-battered enclave's deadliest days since the ceasefire between Hamas and Israel took effect in October.

The United States is trying to push the deal forward and implement its challenging second phase.

Among the dead were three Palestinian journalists who were killed while filming near a displacement camp in central Gaza, a camp official said. Israel's military said it had spotted suspects who were operating a drone that posed a threat to its troops.

The two boys were killed in separate incidents. In one, a 13-year-old, his father and a 22-year old man were hit by Israeli drones on the eastern side of the Bureij refugee camp, according to officials from Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the central town of Deir al-Balah, which received the bodies.

It wasn't immediately clear whether the three had crossed into Israeli-controlled areas.

A mounting death toll

The other 13-year-old was shot by troops in the eastern town of Bani Suheila, Nasser Hospital said after receiving the body. In a video circulated online, the father of Moatsem al-Sharafy is seen weeping over it.

The boy's mother, Safaa al-Sharafy, told The Associated Press that he had left to gather firewood so she could cook.

"He went out in the morning, hungry," she said, tears running down her cheeks. "He told me he'd go quickly and come back."

Later Wednesday, an Israeli strike hit a vehicle carrying the three Palestinian journalists who were filming a new displacement camp managed by an Egyptian government committee in the Netzarim area, said Mohammed Mansour, the committee's spokesperson.

Mansour said the journalists were documenting the committee's work and that the strike occurred about 5 kilometers (3 miles) from the Israeli-controlled area. He said the vehicle was known to Israel's military as belonging to the committee. Video footage showed the charred and smoking vehicle by the roadside.

One journalist killed, Abdul Raouf Shaat, was a regular contributor to Agence France-Presse but he was not on assignment for it at the time, the news agency said.

"Abdul was much loved by the AFP team covering Gaza. They remember him as a kind-hearted colleague," the agency said in a statement that demanded a full investigation into his death.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, more than 200 Palestinian journalists and media workers have been killed in Gaza since the war began in 2023, including visual journalist Mariam Dagga, who worked for the AP and other news organizations.

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Nearly five months after the strikes on a hospital that killed Dagga and four other journalists, the Israeli military says it is continuing to investigate.

Aside from rare guided tours, Israel has barred international journalists from entering to cover the war. News organizations rely largely on Palestinian journalists in Gaza — as well as residents — to show what is happening.

Nasser Hospital officials also said Wednesday they received the body of a Palestinian woman shot by Israeli troops in the Muwasi area of the southern city of Khan Younis, which is not controlled by the military.

In a separate attack, three brothers were killed in a tank shelling in the Bureij camp, according to Al-Aqsa Martyrs hospital.

More than 470 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire since the ceasefire took effect on Oct. 10, according to Gaza's health ministry. At least 77 have been killed by Israeli gunfire near a ceasefire line that splits the territory between Israeli-held areas and most of Gaza's Palestinian population, the ministry says.

The ministry, which is part of the Hamas-led government, maintains detailed casualty records that are seen as generally reliable by U.N. agencies and independent experts.

A mother's plea

The first phase of the October ceasefire that paused two years of war between Israel and Hamas militants focused on the return of all remaining hostages in exchange for the release of hundreds of Palestinian detainees and a partial withdrawal of Israeli forces in Gaza.

All but one hostage, living or dead, have been returned to Israel. Ran Gvili, a 24-year-old police officer known as Rani, was killed while fighting Hamas militants during the Oct. 7, 2023 attack that started the war.

His relatives on Wednesday called again on Israel's government and U.S. President Donald Trump to ensure the release of his remains.

"We need to continue to amplify Rani's voice, explain about him, talk about him, and explain to the world that we, the people of Israel, will not give up on anyone," his mother, Talik Gvili, said. She told the AP the family doesn't "really know where he is."

Hamas said Wednesday it has provided "all information" it has on Gvili's body to the ceasefire mediators, and accused Israel of obstructing search efforts in areas it controls in Gaza.

Israel targets more sites in Lebanon

Israel's air force carried out multiple strikes Wednesday against sites in southern Lebanon that it said the militant Hezbollah group used to store weapons, and at sites along Lebanon's border with Syria where it said weapons were being smuggled.

The military said it struck four border crossings in Lebanon's northeastern region of Hermel.

Earlier, strikes in three villages in southern Lebanon targeted weapons storage facilities. Israel's military said it had issued warnings to evacuate. Lebanon's health ministry said 19 people, including journalists, were wounded in the southern village of Qennarit, south of the port city of Sidon.

Lebanese officials condemned the strikes in southern Lebanon, which President Joseph Aoun called "systematic aggression."

In addition, drone strikes on cars in the villages of Bazouriyeh and Zahrani killed two people, according to state-run National News Agency.

The strikes were the latest in near-daily Israeli military action since a ceasefire more than a year ago ended the 14-month Israel-Hezbollah war. The agreement included a Lebanese pledge to disarm militant groups, which Israel says has not been fulfilled.

Russia watches US-European tensions over Greenland with glee, gloating and wariness

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

As tensions simmered between the United States and Europe this week over President Donald Trump's push to acquire Greenland, Russian officials, state-backed media and pro-Kremlin bloggers responded with a mixture of glee, gloating and wariness.

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Some touted Trump's move as historic. Others said it weakens the European Union and NATO — something that Moscow would seem to welcome — and that it takes some of the West's attention away from Russia's war in Ukraine.

Commentators also noted that the possible U.S. acquisition of the self-governed, mineral-rich island from Denmark held security and economic concerns for Russia, which has sought to assert its influence over wide areas of the Arctic. Moscow has moved to boost its military presence in the region, home to its Northern Fleet and a site where the Soviet Union tested nuclear weapons.

In a speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, on Wednesday, Trump insisted he wants to "get Greenland" but said he would not use force to do so, while deriding European allies and vowing that NATO should not try to block U.S. expansionism.

Making 'world history'

The Kremlin has neither criticized nor supported Trump on the issue. Russian President Vladimir Putin said Wednesday that it "doesn't concern us at all," adding: "I think they'll figure it out among themselves."

His spokesman earlier this week pointed out the far-reaching impact if the U.S. took Greenland from Denmark.

"Regardless of whether it's good or bad and whether it complies with international law or not, there are international experts who believe that if Trump takes control of Greenland he will go down in history, and not only the U.S. history but world history," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Monday.

"Without discussing whether it's good or bad, it's hard not to agree with these experts," he added.

Such a cautious approach appears in line with Moscow's public rhetoric toward the current U.S. administration, as Russia tries to win concessions in the Trump-led effort to end its nearly four-year war in Ukraine and revive relations with Washington that had plunged to Cold War lows.

Putin said last year that Trump's push for control over Greenland wasn't surprising, given longtime U.S. interest in the territory. Putin noted that the United States first considered plans to win control over Greenland in the 19th century, and then offered to buy it from Denmark after World War II.

"It's obvious that the United States will continue to systematically advance its geostrategic, military-political and economic interests in the Arctic," Putin said.

The government newspaper Rossiyskaya Gazeta on Sunday compared it to "such 'planetary' events as Abraham Lincoln's abolition of slavery ... or the territorial conquests of the Napoleonic Wars."

"If Trump secures the annexation of Greenland by July 4, 2026, when America celebrates the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, he will undoubtedly join the ranks of historical figures who affirmed the greatness of the United States," the newspaper wrote.

A statement that appeared favorable to Trump came from Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who told a news conference Tuesday that Denmark's control over Greenland was a vestige of the colonial past.

"In principle, Greenland isn't a natural part of Denmark," he said.

Lavrov also drew parallels between Trump's bid for Greenland and Putin's annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula. The 2014 illegal seizure of the peninsula is not recognized by most of the world.

"Crimea isn't less important for the security of the Russian Federation than Greenland is for the United States," he said.

A blow for longtime allies

Others focused on the potential rift between the U.S. and its European allies in NATO, a bloc that has held firm since the dawn of the Cold War and that Russia has long viewed as an adversary.

"Transatlantic unity is over. Leftist, globalist EU/UK elites failed," wrote Kirill Dmitriev, a presidential envoy involved in talks with the U.S. on ending the war in Ukraine, in a post Saturday on X.

Lavrov echoed his sentiment, saying Trump's bid for Greenland heralds a "deep crisis" for NATO and raises questions about the alliance's preservation as a single military-political bloc.

In columns this week, Russian state news agency RIA Novosti touted Trump's push for Greenland as "opening the door to world history before our very eyes" and mocked European countries for sending small military contingents to Greenland in a show of support for Denmark.

"Europeans can only watch this in impotent rage — they have neither economic nor military leverage against Washington," one column said.

Another column said it was "amusing and didactical" that the World Economic Forum once "was at the pinnacle of power and might, a place everyone aspired to, and today they're burying 'Atlantic solidarity' here."

Pushing aside the war in Ukraine

Russian state and pro-Kremlin media also argued Greenland was diverting attention from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's effort to negotiate a favorable peace settlement to end Russia's invasion of his country, painting it as a positive for Moscow.

"The world seemed to have forgotten about Ukraine and Zelenskyy. And in this silence, U.S. negotiators (Steve) Witkoff and (Jared) Kushner were preparing to travel to Moscow," the pro-Kremlin tabloid Moskovsky Komsomolets said Sunday.

RIA Novosti echoed that Wednesday in a column titled "Greenland knocked out Zelenskyy," saying "this uproar stirred up by Donald Trump has knocked Zelenskyy out cold," and that "Ukraine's importance will never return to its previous levels."

But Trump said in Davos he would meet with Zelenskyy on Thursday. "I want to stop it," Trump said of the fighting. "It's a horrible war."

Seeking Arctic supremacy

Dmitry Medvedev, Russia's former president who is deputy chairman of the Security Council, argued that Greenland "was never directly connected to the States," and questioned what price Trump "is willing to pay to achieve this goal" and whether he is up to the task of "eliminating NATO."

Popular pro-Kremlin military blogger and correspondent Aleksander Kots said in a recent Telegram post that by taking Greenland, Trump "wants to seize the Russian Arctic" and get to the natural resources that Moscow covets there.

The Moskovsky Komsomolets tabloid on Sunday called Trump's bid for Greenland a "turning point," arguing that the Arctic "turns from a zone of cooperation into a zone of confrontation."

"The Northern Fleet will be under threat. The economic projects will face hurdles. The nuclear deterrence will lose effectiveness. Russia will end up in strategic isolation," its article said. "Greenland is not just Trump's coveted 2 million square kilometer island. It is an icy noose around Russia's throat. And Trump has already begun to tighten it."

These concerns stand somewhat in contrast with the Kremlin publicly touting the prospects of cooperating with Washington in the Arctic. Putin has said, however, that Russia is worried about NATO's activities in the polar region and will respond by strengthening its military capability there.

Trump to meet with Zelenskyy as Ukraine endures a bitter winter after Russian attacks

By KAMILA HRABCHUK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — About 4,000 buildings in Kyiv lacked heat Wednesday and nearly 60% of the Ukrainian capital was without power, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, after days of Russian bombardment of Ukraine's power grid and as U.S. President Donald Trump prepared to hold talks with the Ukrainian leader.

Trump's delegates also were expected in Moscow later this week for talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

With temperatures falling as low as minus 20 C (minus 4 F) in Kyiv, Ukraine is seeing one of the coldest winters in years, deepening the hardship of Ukrainians almost four years after Russia launched a full-scale invasion.

A yearlong push by the Trump administration to stop the fighting hasn't yielded any breakthrough, despite the American president issuing a series of deadlines, though efforts were set to continue.

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Trump said at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland that he would meet Thursday with Zelenskyy.

"I want to stop it," Trump said of the fighting. "It's a horrible war."

U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff told The Associated Press on Wednesday that he plans to discuss peace proposals with Putin as well as hold talks with a Ukrainian delegation.

"We need a peace," Witkoff said at Davos.

Putin confirmed late on Wednesday that Witkoff and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner are expected in Moscow on Thursday for talks. The Russian leader said that Moscow and Washington, among other things, are discussing the possibility of using Russian assets frozen in the U.S. for rebuilding "territories damaged by the hostilities" after a peace agreement is reached.

But with a dispute over Greenland's future largely eclipsing other transatlantic issues at Davos, discussions about Ukraine's defense looked likely to be sidelined.

Zelenskyy said last week his envoys would try to finalize with U.S. officials documents for a proposed peace settlement that relate to postwar security guarantees and economic recovery.

He added that the U.S. and Ukraine could sign the documents in Davos this week, but on Tuesday he said he wouldn't be traveling to Switzerland and would focus on restoring power in Ukraine.

Ukraine's Cabinet of Ministers is allocating 2.56 billion hryvnias (almost \$60 million) from a reserve fund to purchase generators, Prime Minister Yuliia Svyrydenko said Wednesday.

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte on Wednesday urged the 32-nation alliance's military chiefs to press their national governments to supply desperately needed air defense systems to Ukraine, helping it fend off Russia's aerial attacks.

"Please use your influence to help your political masters to do even more," Rutte said in a video message to top brass as they met at NATO's Brussels headquarters.

"Look deep into your stockpiles to see what more you can give to Ukraine, particularly air defense interceptors. The time really is now," he said.

Russia launched 97 drones and a ballistic missile at Ukraine overnight, the Ukrainian air force said.

In the central Dnipropetrovsk region, attacks killed a 77-year-old man and a 72-year-old woman, according to Oleksandr Hanzha, head of the regional military administration.

Russia's Defense Ministry said that air defenses downed 75 Ukrainian drones over several regions.

The international airports of Krasnodar, Sochi, Gelendzhik and Saratov briefly suspended flights overnight because of the drones.

In Adygea, more than 200 kilometers (120 miles) from the Ukrainian border, a Ukrainian drone caused a fire at an apartment building that injured 11 people, including two children, according to Gov. Murat Kumpilov.

Trump's Board of Peace is dividing countries in Europe and the Middle East

By JULIA FRANKEL and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Divisions emerged Wednesday over U.S. President Donald Trump's Board of Peace as its ambitions have grown beyond Gaza, with some Western European countries declining to join, others remaining noncommittal and a group of Muslim countries agreeing to sign on.

The developments underscored European concerns over the expanded and divisive scope of the project — which some say may seek to rival the U.N. Security Council's role in mediating global conflicts. Trump is looking to form the board officially this week on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos, Switzerland.

Norway and Sweden said they won't accept their invitations, after France also said no, while a bloc of Muslim-majority nations — Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates — said in a joint statement that their leaders would join.

It was not immediately clear how many countries would accept. A White House official said about 30

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countries were expected to join, and about 50 had been invited. Two other U.S. officials, who similarly spoke on condition of anonymity to describe internal plans not yet made public, said roughly 60 countries had been invited but only 18 had so far confirmed their participation.

Trump was sunny about the prospects ahead of an event Thursday tied to the board, saying of the countries that were invited that "some need parliamentary approval but for the most part, everybody wants to be on."

Later, Trump defended his choice of invitees, including some leaders considered to be autocratic. "I have some controversial people," he said. "But these are people that get the job done. These are people that have tremendous influence."

Chaired by Trump, the board was originally conceived as a small group of world leaders overseeing the Gaza ceasefire plan. But the Trump administration's ambitions have since expanded into a more sprawling concept, with Trump hinting at the board's role as mediator for other global conflicts.

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he's agreed to join the board — a departure from an earlier stance when his office criticized the makeup of another committee tasked with overseeing Gaza.

Norway and Sweden say no, following in France's footsteps

Norway's state secretary, Kristoffer Thoner, said the Scandinavian country would not join the board because it "raises a number of questions that requires further dialogue with the United States."

Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson said on the sidelines of Davos that his country wouldn't sign up for the board as the text currently stands, Swedish news agency TT reported, though the country hasn't formally responded.

Slovenian Prime Minister Robert Golob said that "the time has not yet come to accept the invitation," according to the STA news agency. The main concern is the board's mandate is too broad and could seriously undermine international order based on the U.N. Charter, Golob said.

France declined the invitation earlier in the week. French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said, "Yes to implementing the peace plan presented by the president of the United States, which we wholeheartedly support, but no to creating an organization as it has been presented, which would replace the United Nations."

The United Kingdom, the European Union's executive arm, Canada, Russia, Ukraine and China also have not yet indicated their response to Trump's invitations.

Several in the Middle East and beyond say they will join

Parties key to the Gaza ceasefire — Egypt and Israel — have said they would join the board, as have Argentina, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Belarus, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Morocco, Uzbekistan and Vietnam.

Netanyahu's decision was significant because his office had previously said the composition of a Gaza executive committee — which includes Turkey, Israel's key regional rival, and will work with those governing the territory day to day — was not coordinated with the Israeli government and ran "contrary to its policy," without clarifying its objections.

The move could now put Netanyahu in conflict with some of the far-right allies in his coalition, such as Israel's Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who has criticized the board and called for Israel to take unilateral responsibility for Gaza's future.

Many questions remain about the board. When asked by a reporter on Tuesday if the board would replace the U.N., Trump said: "It might."

Lawmakers can sue to ensure release of Epstein files, but not as part of Maxwell case, judge says

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Congressional cosponsors of a law forcing the Justice Department to release its files on Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell can file a lawsuit seeking a court-appointed observer to ensure

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compliance, but they lack the legal right to append their demand to her criminal case, a judge ruled Wednesday.

Judge Paul A. Engelmayer blocked U.S. Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., and Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky. from intervening in Maxwell's sex trafficking case. The lawmakers, whose Epstein Files Transparency Act was signed into law by President Donald Trump in November, petitioned the judge last week in a bid to speed the public disclosure of files related to investigations into the late financier and Maxwell, his longtime confidant.

Engelmayer largely agreed with the Justice Department's insistence that he, as the judge overseeing Maxwell's case, had no authority to grant Khanna and Massie's request for an independent monitor to ensure the immediate release of more than 2 million documents that the government has identified as investigative materials.

Khanna and Massie said the slow disclosure of the documents violated the law and had caused "serious trauma to survivors."

Aside from the possibility of filing a lawsuit, the lawmakers are at liberty to use their legislative tools to improve oversight of the Justice Department, Engelmayer wrote. The Epstein law, passed after months of public and political pressure, contains no mechanisms or penalties to ensure compliance.

"We appreciate Judge Engelmayer's timely response and attention to our request, and we respect his decision," Khanna said in a statement. "He said that we raised 'legitimate concerns' about whether DOJ is complying with the law. We will continue to use every legal option to ensure the files are released and the survivors see justice."

After missing a Dec. 19 deadline set by Congress to release all of the files, the Justice Department said it has had hundreds of lawyers reviewing yet-to-be-disclosed records to determine what needs to be redacted, or blacked out, to protect the identities of hundreds of sex abuse victims. So far, only about 12,000 documents have been made public.

Engelmayer said questions raised by Khanna and Massie raised about whether the department was complying with the law were "undeniably important and timely." But, he said, the way in which the members of Congress were trying to intervene was not permitted.

Engelmayer inherited Maxwell's case after the trial judge, Alison Nathan, was appointed to the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. He ruled that has no authority to supervise the department's compliance with the new law, and that Massie and Khanna have no standing, or legal right, to insinuate themselves into Maxwell's case.

Engelmayer said he has received letters and emails from Epstein abuse survivors in support of the lawmakers' request for appointment of a neutral overseer.

"These express concern that DOJ otherwise will not comply with the Act," wrote the judge, who was nominated by Democratic President Barack Obama.

The department has been "paying 'lip service' to the victims" and "failing to treat us 'with the solicitude' we deserve," survivors wrote, according to Engelmayer.

Maxwell is serving a 20-year prison sentence after her December 2021 sex trafficking conviction. She recently petitioned the federal court for her release, maintaining that new information has emerged that warrants her release. A jury found that she had helped to recruit girls for Epstein to abuse over the past quarter-century and had also participated in some of the abuse.

Epstein died in a federal jail in New York in August 2019 as he awaited trial on sex trafficking charges. The death was ruled a suicide.

Cody Bellinger stays with the Yankees, agrees to \$162.5 million, 5-year contract, AP source says

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

Cody Bellinger became the last of the top free-agent hitters to reach a deal, agreeing Wednesday to stay with the New York Yankees for a \$162.5 million, five-year contract, a person familiar with the negotiations told The Associated Press.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the agreement was subject to a successful physical. Bellinger gets a \$20 million signing bonus payable on April 1, \$32.5 million in the first two seasons, \$25.8 million in the next two and \$25.9 million in 2030. He also has a full no-trade provision.

Bellinger has the right to opt out after the 2027 or 2028 seasons to become a free agent again, but if there is a work stoppage that leads to no games being played in 2027, the agreement specifies the opt outs will shift to after the 2027 and 2028 seasons.

A two-time All-Star acquired by the Yankees from the Chicago Cubs in December 2024, Bellinger hit .272 with 29 homers and 98 RBIs last year — including .302 with 18 homers and 55 RBIs at Yankee Stadium. A left-handed hitter, he played in 149 games in the outfield and seven at first base in his first season since 2022 without a stint on the injured list.

He is a son of former Yankee Clay Bellinger.

Voted the 2017 National League Rookie of the Year and 2019 NL MVP, Bellinger has a .261 average with 225 homers and 695 RBIs in eight seasons with the Los Angeles Dodgers (2018-22), Cubs (2023-24) and the Yankees.

He earned \$57.5 million from the \$80 million, three-year contract he reached with the Cubs before the 2024 season. Bellinger declined a \$25 million option for 2026 in favor of a \$5 million buyout.

Second fatal train crash shocks Spain as death toll in the first collision rises to 43

By HERNÁN MUÑOZ and SUMAN NAISHADHAM Associated Press

GELIDA, Spain (AP) — Commuter rail service in Spain's northeastern Catalonia region was suspended Wednesday after a Barcelona commuter train crashed the night before, killing one person and injuring 37 others, authorities said.

The crash came two days after Spain's worst railway disaster since 2013, which left many Spaniards in disbelief. The death toll in that crash, in southern Spain, rose to 43.

The commuter train on Tuesday night hit a retaining wall that fell onto the tracks near the Catalan town of Gelida, about 37 kilometers (23 miles) outside Barcelona, officials said.

"It's very strange, all of this. It doesn't make sense," said Antonella Miranda, a barista in Madrid. "Let's see what explanations they provide after the second one."

The man who died from Tuesday's crash was a conductor in training, regional authorities said. Most of the injured rode in the first train carriage.

Rail disruptions on Wednesday caused significant traffic jams on roads leading into Barcelona. Catalonia's regional authorities asked people to reduce unnecessary travel and companies to allow remote work until service was resumed.

"This is very bad. If (the infrastructure) was already faulty and there were complaints, they should have done something earlier," Dolores Sogas said in a commuter town where hundreds of people were delayed or stranded on Wednesday.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez offered his condolences on X, writing: "All my affection and solidarity with the victims and their families."

While Spain's high-speed rail network generally runs smoothly, and at least until Sunday had been a source of confidence, commuter rail networks are plagued by reliability issues. However, crashes causing injury or death aren't common.

Spain's railway operator Adif said the containment wall likely collapsed because of heavy rainfall that swept across the northeastern Spanish region this week.

Tragedy in southern Spain

Sunday evening's crash happened when the tail end of a train carrying 289 passengers on the route from Malaga to the capital, Madrid, derailed and crashed into an incoming train traveling from Madrid to Huelva, another southern city, according to Adif. The collision took place near Adamuz, a town about 370 kilometers (roughly 230 miles) from Madrid.

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The front of the second train, which was carrying 184 people, took the brunt of the impact, which knocked its first two carriages off the track and down a 4-meter (13-foot) slope. Bodies were found hundreds of meters from the crash site, according to Andalusia regional President Juanma Moreno.

Authorities continued their search Wednesday, finding a 43rd victim. Another 37 people remained hospitalized while 86 people were treated and discharged, regional officials said.

Authorities on Wednesday said they had identified almost all the victims from Sunday's high-speed crash, but said they could still find more bodies.

Among the injured was Santiago Tavares, a Portuguese traveler who broke his leg.

"Minutes before the train crash I had a feeling that an accident would happen because the carriage was moving a lot," Tavares told Portuguese broadcaster TVI. "Ten minutes later the accident happens, I started to fly ... Then, I woke up and I realized I was alive."

'All hypotheses are open'

Officials are investigating what caused both train crashes. Transport Minister Óscar Puente called Sunday's collision "truly strange" since it occurred on a straight section of track and neither train was speeding.

Puente said that officials had found a broken section of track that could be related to the origin of the crash, but insisted that it's just a hypothesis, and that it would take weeks to reach any conclusions.

Rail operator Adif said Wednesday the tracks in Adamuz passed the "usual inspections."

"No fault has been detected that, a priori, shows a relationship with the accident," said Ángel García de la Bandera, Adif's director of traffic.

In August, the Spanish Union of Railway Drivers sent a letter asking Spain's rail operator to investigate flaws on high-speed train lines across the country due to increased traffic. It warned of potholes, bumps and imbalances in overhead power lines as well as frequent breakdowns and damage to trains, according to a copy of the letter seen by The Associated Press.

The union said Wednesday it would be calling a general strike in the coming weeks to demand more safety assurances.

Puente and Renfe president Álvaro Fernández said both trains in Sunday's accident were traveling well under the speed limit of 250 kph (155 mph) and "human error could be ruled out."

The crash shook a nation that leads Europe in high-speed train mileage with a cutting edge network of rail transport.

Indonesian handprints are the oldest cave art found yet

By ADITHI RAMAKRISHNAN AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Handprints on cave walls in a largely unexplored area of Indonesia may be the oldest rock art studied so far, dating back to at least 67,800 years ago.

The tan-colored prints analyzed by Indonesian and Australian researchers on the island of Sulawesi were made by blowing pigment over hands placed against the cave walls, leaving an outline. Some of the fingertips were also tweaked to look more pointed.

This prehistoric art form suggests the Indonesian island was home to a flourishing artistic culture. To figure out how old the paintings were, researchers dated mineral crusts that had formed on top of the art.

Upon seeing the new study, independent paleoanthropologist Genevieve von Petzinger said she "let out a little squeal of joy."

"It fits everything I'd been thinking," she said.

Indonesia is known to host some of the world's earliest cave drawings, and scientists have analyzed countless examples of ancient art across the globe — including simple marks on bones and stones that go back hundreds of thousands of years. Cross-hatched markings on a piece of rock in South Africa have been dated to about 73,000 years ago.

The new art from southeastern Sulawesi is the oldest to be found on cave walls. The stencils also represent a more complex tradition of rock art that could have been a shared cultural practice, said study author Maxime Aubert with Griffith University, who published the study Wednesday in the journal Nature.

Scientists are eager to understand when early humans learned to make art, moving from dots and lines to more meaningful representations of themselves and the world around them. These cave drawings help firm up a timeline for the dawn of human creativity.

It's not yet clear whose hands made the prints. They could be from an ancient human group called Denisovans who lived in the area and may have interacted with our Homo sapiens ancestors before eventually going extinct. Or they may belong to modern humans venturing away from Africa, who could have wandered through the Middle East and Australia around this time. Fine details on the cave art, including the intentionally modified fingertips, point to a human hand.

Other drawings discovered in the same area of the island, including a human figure, a bird and horselike animals, were found to be created much more recently, some of them about 4,000 years ago.

There's likely more art to be found on nearby islands that could be even older than the handprints. Future studies may help scientists understand how these artistic traditions spread across the globe and how they're woven into the fabric of humanity's early days.

"For us, this discovery is not the end of the story," Aubert said in an email. "It is an invitation to keep looking."

From the NFL sidelines to a US Senate race: Michele Tafoya's new play

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Former NFL sideline reporter Michele Tafoya launched her campaign for the U.S. Senate on Wednesday, hoping to win the Republican nomination for the Minnesota seat being vacated by retiring Democratic Sen. Tina Smith.

"For years, I covered the biggest football games in America," Tafoya said in a video posted on social media, in which she stands on a snowy football field. "I walked the sidelines when the pressure was mounting and the stakes were the highest. That job taught me about more than football. It taught me about how leadership really works. When leaders are prepared and accountable, teams succeed. When they aren't, people pay the price."

Tafoya alluded to the turmoil over the ongoing immigration crackdown in Minnesota, making clear that she stands with federal law enforcement. The video includes brief clips of federal officers clashing with protesters.

"As Minnesota's senator, I will clean up the system, fighting corruption, ending the fraud and protecting your tax dollars," she said. "I will protect what's fair and safe, standing with our law enforcement officers, deporting dangerous criminals, and keeping female sports for female athletes."

The video also takes shots at Democratic Gov. Tim Walz for the fraud cases that have dogged his administration and includes clips of Democratic U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar, a frequent target of the ire of President Donald Trump.

Tafoya, who's long been active in Minnesota Republican politics, is best known for her work from 2011-2022 as a sideline reporter for NBC's Sunday Night Football. She currently hosts a frequently political podcast. Other Republicans in the race include former NBA player Royce White, who lost to U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar in 2024, military veterans Adam Schwarze and Tom Weiler, and former Minnesota GOP Chair David Hann.

Top Republicans had long urged Tafoya to run. U.S. Sen. Tim Scott, of South Carolina, chairman of the National Republican Senatorial Committee, quickly endorsed her, posting on social media: "Change is coming, and Michele Tafoya will lead the way."

But she also faces potential hurdles among some Republican voters. She supported then-Sen. Marco Rubio, of Florida, for president in 2016 and in 2022 urged Trump not to run again. She has also supported abortion rights, with some exceptions.

On the Democratic side, U.S. Rep. Angie Craig and Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan are competing for their party's nomination to succeed Smith, who announced last February that she wouldn't seek another term.

"Trump's hand-picked candidate just jumped in the race for US Senate," Craig said in a social media

post. "Minnesota needs a Senator who will stand up and fight for our state — and we know it won't be MAGA Michele."

Tafoya is hoping to break a long losing streak for Republicans at the top of Minnesota's ballot. No GOP candidate was won statewide office in Minnesota since 2006, and the last Republican to win a Minnesota U.S. Senate seat was Norm Coleman, who was elected to a single term in 2002.

Everything you need to know about the 2026 Sundance Film Festival

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

PARK CITY, Utah (AP) — The 42nd Sundance Film Festival kicks off this week in Park City, Utah. It will be the last edition in its longtime home and the first without its founder Robert Redford, who died in September at age 89.

But even in this time of transition and change, the festival's main focus — the movies — remains as vibrant and fresh as ever with 90 features premiering through Feb. 1. And three of them feature pop star Charli xcx.

"It's a broad, eclectic and bold program," Sundance public programming director Eugene Hernandez told The Associated Press.

Hernandez said the lineup for the festival's final year in Park City has a "mixture of new, exciting voices paired with some really, really great familiar faces from Sundances past that I think will create a great alchemy for this really unique edition in Utah."

When is Sundance?

The festival runs from Thursday, Jan. 22 through Sunday, Feb. 1. There are 90 features premiering throughout, with screenings starting early in the morning and running through midnight. Award winners will be announced on Jan. 30.

What celebrities are expected?

Some big names who may make an appearance in the mountains include Natalie Portman, Ethan Hawke, Russell Crowe, Brittney Griner, Seth Rogen, O'Shea Jackson Jr., David Duchovny, Olivia Wilde, Daveed Diggs, Channing Tatum, Courtney Love, Chris Pine, Da'Vine Joy Randolph, Salman Rushdie, Alexander Skarsgård, Olivia Colman, John Turturro and Catherine Zeta-Jones.

How is Sundance honoring Robert Redford?

Redford's legacy will be a main spotlight at the festival, including at Friday night's annual fundraising gala where organizers will pay tribute to the Sundance founder. Later in the festival, there will also be a screening of his first truly independent film, the 1969 sports drama "Downhill Racer," and a series of legacy screenings of restored Sundance gems from "Little Miss Sunshine" to Barbara Kopple's documentary "American Dream."

What are the buzzy movies?

Wilde directed her third feature, "The Invite," in which she and Rogen play an unhappily married couple who host a dinner party for friends (Penélope Cruz and Edward Norton). Gregg Araki made a "sex-positive love letter to Gen Z" with "I Want Your Sex," also starring Wilde as a provocative artist who takes an interest in a younger intern played by Cooper Hoffman. Portman, sporting platinum blond hair, leads the big ensemble cast of Cathy Yan's art world satire "The Gallerist," alongside Zach Galifianakis, Jenna Ortega and Zeta-Jones.

Both "I Want Your Sex" and "The Gallerist" feature supporting turns from Charli xcx, but the pop star's big showcase is "The Moment," a self-referential mockumentary. Colman stars alongside Skarsgård in "Wicker," a whimsical tale of a fisherwoman who asks a basket weaver to weave her a husband. Crowe plays the warden of a work camp in 1930s Oregon where Hawke is toiling in "The Weight." And Gemma Chan and Tatum play parents to a child who witnesses a crime in "Josephine."

In the nonfiction space, "Navalny" director Daniel Roher co-directed a film about artificial intelligence. There are also documentaries about Love, the lead singer of "Hole" and widow of Kurt Cobain, and Griner,

the WNBA star who was detained for nearly 10 months in Russia.

Can you stream Sundance movies?

Yes, but not until Jan. 29. Access to the movies premiering at Sundance doesn't necessarily require an expensive trip to Park City anymore. The festival has fully embraced an online component for many of their films.

What started as a necessary COVID-19 adjustment has become a vital part of the program. From Jan. 29 through Feb. 1, audiences can watch the films in competition online. Prices start at \$35 for a single film ticket.

When will the Sundance movies be in theaters?

It depends. Some have distribution and will soon be in theaters, like "The Moment," which A24 is releasing on Jan. 30. Others that might secure distribution deals out of the festival can take anywhere from a few weeks to over a year to hit theaters or streaming services.

Is the festival still moving to Colorado?

Yes, this is the final edition in Park City, Utah. Next January, the festival is relocating to a new home in Boulder, Colorado.

Rome pays last respects to fashion 'emperor' Valentino in a two-day public viewing

By GIADA ZAMPANO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Rome was paying its last respects to the legendary Valentino on Wednesday at the start of a two-day public viewing for a fashion designer whose high-glamour gowns and trademark shade of red became an iconic symbol of Italian elegance.

Valentino Garavani, who died aged 93 at his Rome residence on Monday, is lying in state at his foundation in Piazza Mignanelli, just a few steps away from the world-known Spanish Steps.

The funeral for the jet-set Italian designer, who built his house in the Italian capital, will be held on Friday in the Basilica di Santa Maria degli Angeli e dei Martiri in central Rome.

Universally known by his first name, Valentino was adored by generations of royals, first ladies and movie stars, from Jackie Kennedy Onassis to Julia Roberts and Queen Rania of Jordan, who swore the designer always made them look and feel their best.

Hundreds of fashion celebrities, authorities and Roman citizens lined up to honor the "last emperor" of Italian fashion during the public viewing. He always maintained his atelier in Rome, while he mostly unveiled his collections in Paris.

Mourners waited in line to enter the headquarters of Valentino's foundation and stop for a few moments in front of his coffin, adorned with just one red rose and surrounded by white flowers.

Only his closest relatives and friends sat on both sides of the coffin, including his two beloved fawn-colored pugs.

"I worked for him for 14 years ... Those were the most beautiful years of my life, the ones with him," said hairdresser Alba Armillei. "Everything he touched became beautiful."

Hailing him as one of "Italy's most luminous and beloved figures," Rome's Mayor Roberto Gualtieri underlined the designer's strong links with the Italian capital.

Alba Verga, in her red Valentino coat, remembered Valentino as "the biggest, most immense forever."

"He made us dream. His dresses for me were sculptures, works of art, but above all dreams and through his dresses, I always dreamed," she said.

Alessandro Michele, the current creative director of the Valentino fashion house, said the Maestro would be irreplaceable, but left a sound heritage.

"He's been a great example of life," Michele told reporters before entering the foundation for his last salute. "He came from afar and built something immense."

Dancer Eleonora Abbagnato recalled "the first dress created by Valentino for the Vienna Opera when I danced for New Year's Eve with ostrich feathers, true elegance, the red, the emotions and effect that he

created.”

Windows of the central Valentino store were covered up with black with his famous quote: “I love beauty. It is not my fault.”

Never one for edginess or statement dressing, Valentino’s nearly half-century career stretched from his early days in Rome in the 1960s through to his retirement in 2008.

He founded the house of Valentino on Rome’s central Via Condotti in 1959.

Valentino’s fail-safe designs made him the king of the red carpet, the go-to man for A-listers’ awards ceremony needs.

His sumptuous gowns have graced countless Academy Awards, notably in 2001, when Roberts wore a vintage black and white column to accept her best actress statue. Cate Blanchett also wore Valentino — a one-shouldered number in butter-yellow silk — when she won the Oscar for best supporting actress in 2005.

Meteorologists blame a stretched polar vortex, moisture, lack of sea ice for dangerous winter blast

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Warm Arctic waters and cold continental land are combining to stretch the dreaded polar vortex in a way that will send much of the United States a devastating dose of winter weather later this week with swaths of painful subzero temperatures, heavy snow and powerline-toppling ice.

Meteorologists said the eastern two-thirds of the nation is threatened with a winter storm that could rival the damage of a major hurricane and has some origins in an Arctic that is warming from climate change. They warn that the frigid weather is likely to stick around through the rest of January and into early February, meaning the snow and ice that accumulates will take a long time to melt.

Forecasts have the storm, expected to hit starting Friday, stretching from New Mexico to New England and across the Deep South. About 230 million people face temperatures of 20 degrees (-7 degrees Celsius) or colder and around 150 million are likely to be hit by snow and ice, with many Americans getting both, according to the National Weather Service.

“I think people are underestimating just how bad it’s going to be,” said former National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration chief scientist Ryan Maue, now a private meteorologist.

The polar vortex, a patch of bitterly cold air that often stays penned up in northern Canada and Alaska, is being elongated by a wave in the upper atmosphere that goes back to a relatively ice-free part of the Arctic and snow-buried Siberia. As the bone-chilling temperatures sweep through the U.S., they’ll meet with moisture from off California and the Gulf of Mexico to set up crippling ice and snow in many areas.

Origins of the system in a warming Arctic

The origins of the system begin in the Arctic, where relatively warmer temperatures add energy to the polar vortex and help push its cold air south.

“The atmosphere is aligned perfectly that the pattern is locked into this warm Arctic, cold continent,” Maue said. “And it’s not just here for us in North America, but the landmass of Eastern Europe to Siberia is also exceptionally cold. The whole hemisphere has gone into the deep freeze.”

As far back as October 2025, changes in the Arctic and low sea ice were setting up conditions for the kind of stretched polar vortex that brings severe winter weather to the U.S., said winter weather expert Judah Cohen, an MIT research scientist. Heavy Siberian snowfall added to the push-and-pull of weather that warps the shape of the normally mostly circular air pattern. Those conditions “kind of loaded the dice a bit” for a stretching of the polar vortex, he said.

Cohen co-authored a July 2025 study that found more stretched polar vortex events linked to severe winter weather bursts in the central and eastern U.S. over the past decade. Cohen said part of the reason is that dramatically low sea ice in the Barents and Kara seas in the Arctic helps set up a pattern of waves that end up causing U.S. cold bursts. A warmer Arctic is causing sea ice in that region to shrink faster than other places, studies have found.

Arctic sea ice is at a record low extent for this time of year, according to the National Snow and Ice

Data Center.

Where the winter blast will strike

The center of the stretched polar vortex will be somewhere above Duluth, Minnesota, by Friday morning, ushering in "long-lasting brutal cold," Maue said. Temperatures in the North and Midwest will get about as cold as possible, even down to minus 25 or 30 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 32 to minus 34 degrees Celsius), Maue said. The average low temperature for the Lower 48 states will dance around 11 or 12 degrees (minus 12 to minus 11 degrees Celsius) on Saturday, Sunday and Monday, Maue said.

Two Great Lakes — Erie and Ontario — may freeze up, which would at least reduce the famed lake-effect snow a bit, Maue said.

National Weather Service meteorologist Zack Taylor of the national Weather Prediction Center said most areas east of the Rockies will be impacted by the bitter cold, snow or ice. Treacherous freezing rain could stretch from the southern plains through the mid-South and into the Carolinas, he said.

"We're looking at the potential for impactful ice accumulation. So the kind of ice accumulation that could cause significant or widespread power outages or potentially significant tree damage," he said.

And if you don't get ice, you could get "another significant swath of heavy snow," Taylor said. He said it was too early to predict how many inches will fall, but "significant snowfall accumulations" could hit "the Ozarks region, Tennessee and Ohio valleys, the central Appalachians, and then into the mid-Atlantic, and perhaps into the portions of the northeast."

Maue said in the mid-Atlantic around the nation's capital, there's a possibility that "you can get two blizzards on top of each other in the next 14 days."

EU lawmakers vote to hold up Mercosur trade agreement over legal concerns

By LORNE COOK undefined

BRUSSELS (AP) — European Union lawmakers on Wednesday voted to hold up ratification of a major free trade agreement with the Mercosur group of South American countries over concerns about the legality of the deal.

In a vote in Strasbourg, France, lawmakers narrowly approved sending the EU-Mercosur agreement to Europe's top court to rule on whether it is in line with the bloc's treaties. The result was 334 votes in favor to 324 against, with 11 abstentions.

The assembly cannot vote to approve the pact until the European Court of Justice has ruled, and this could take months.

The long sought-after free trade agreement was signed into effect on Saturday. Twenty-five years in the making, it aimed to strengthen commercial ties in the face of rising protectionism and trade tensions around the world.

The deal was seen as a central priority of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, who shepherded it through a key vote on Jan. 9 among the EU's 27 leaders. "The more trading partners we have world-wide, the more independent we are," von der Leyen said at the World Economic Forum in Davos, pointing to Mercosur and another trade deal in the works with India.

Supported by South America's cattle-raising countries and European industrial interests, the accord is aimed at gradually eliminating more than 90% of tariffs on goods ranging from Argentine beef to German cars, creating one of the world's largest free trade zones and making shopping cheaper for more than 700 million consumers.

France, Europe's major agricultural producer, wanted stronger protections for farmers and has sought to delay the pact. Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot welcomed the parliament's vote, saying in a social media post that the assembly "expressed itself in line with the position that we have defended. France takes responsibility for saying no when it has to, and history often proves it right. The fight continues."

The European Commission said that it "strongly regrets" the parliament's decision.

However, the EU's powerful executive branch can provisionally apply the deal until then. EU leaders are

expected to discuss the way ahead at an emergency summit focused on transatlantic relations on Thursday. In a post on social media, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz described the EU parliament's decision as "regrettable."

"It misjudges the geopolitical situation. We are convinced of the legality of the agreement. No further delays. The agreement must now be applied provisionally," Merz wrote.

Bernd Lange, head of the parliament's committee on trade, said the vote was "absolutely irresponsible" and "very harmful for our economic interests."

Opponents should simply vote against ratification "instead of using delaying tactics under the guise of legal review," he wrote on X.

Ratification is considered all but guaranteed in South America, where the agreement has broad support. Mercosur consists of the region's two biggest economies, Argentina and Brazil, as well as Paraguay and Uruguay. Bolivia, the bloc's newest member, is not included in the trade deal, but could join in the coming years. Venezuela has been suspended from the bloc and is not included in the agreement.

South Korea's former prime minister jailed for 23 years in martial law case

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press.

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — A South Korean court ruled Wednesday that the ill-fated imposition of martial law by the then President Yoon Suk Yeol constituted an act of rebellion, as it sentenced his prime minister to 23 years in prison for his involvement.

Ex-Prime Minister Han Duck-soo became the first Yoon administration official convicted of rebellion charges in relation to the martial law imposition in December 2024. The verdict is expected to set the stage for upcoming rulings involving Yoon and his other associates, who also face rebellion charges.

Han, who was appointed by Yoon, served as one of the three caretaker leaders during the martial law crisis that led to Yoon's impeachment and eventually his removal from office.

Rebellion is one of the gravest criminal charges in South Korea, with the independent counsel recently demanding the death penalty for Yoon, who was charged with masterminding a rebellion. The Seoul Central District Court is to rule on Yoon's rebellion charges on Feb. 19.

In a televised verdict, the Seoul court determined Yoon's martial law decree amounted to a rebellion, viewing his dispatch of troops and police officers to the National Assembly and election offices as "a riot" or "a self-coup" that was meant to undermine the constitutional order and was serious enough to disrupt stability in South Korea.

The court sentenced Han for playing a key role in the rebellion by trying to give procedural legitimacy to the martial law decree by getting it passed through a Cabinet Council meeting. The court also convicted Han of falsifying the martial law proclamation and destroying it and lying under oath.

Han, 76, who could appeal the ruling, has steadfastly maintained that he had told Yoon that he opposed his martial law plan. He has denied most of the other charges.

The court said Han neglected his responsibilities as prime minister — the No. 2 post in South Korea — to protect the constitution, choosing instead to take part in Yoon's rebellion in the belief that it might succeed.

"Because of the defendant's action, the Republic of Korea could have returned to a dark past when the basic rights of the people and the liberal democratic order were trampled upon, becoming trapped in the quagmire of dictatorships for an extended period," judge Lee Jin-gwan said.

Acting president during crisis

Han's lengthy sentence came as a surprise as the independent counsel earlier requested a 15-year prison term.

He is a career bureaucrat who served as prime minister twice during his 40 years of public service — first under liberal President Roh Moo-hyun from 2007 to 2008 and later under Yoon.

Han became acting president after Yoon was impeached by the opposition-controlled National Assembly later in December 2024. But he was also quickly impeached following wrangling with opposition lawmakers

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over his refusal to fill vacant seats at the Constitutional Court, which was deliberating whether to formally throw Yoon out of office. Observers said at the time that restoring a full court bench could increase prospects for Yoon's ouster.

The Constitutional Court later reinstated Han as acting president. But after the court formally dismissed Yoon as president in early April, Han resigned to run for the presidency in last June's snap election. He eventually withdrew from the race after failing to win the main conservative party's nomination.

Lee Jae Myung, a former leader of the main liberal opposition Democratic Party, won the election.

Short-lived martial law enforcement

Yoon, who has already been in jail for months, faces eight criminal trials including his rebellion case over the martial law decree and other allegations. Last Friday, Yoon received a five-year prison term at the Seoul court for defying attempts to detain him, fabricating the martial law proclamation and denying some Cabinet members their rights to deliberate on his martial law decree.

Yoon, a conservative, has steadfastly denied the charges of rebellion, saying he only aimed to draw public support of his fight against the Democratic Party which obstructed his agenda. Speaking at a court session last week, Yoon denounced the investigations of his charges as "frenzied," arguing that they involved "manipulation" and "distortion."

In his martial law declaration, Yoon called the opposition-controlled assembly "a den of criminals" and vowed to eliminate "shameless North Korea followers and anti-state forces."

But many of the troops and police officers he sent to the assembly didn't aggressively control the area as thousands of people gathered there to protest Yoon's decree. Enough lawmakers ultimately got in an assembly chamber and voted down Yoon's decree.

No major violence occurred, but Yoon's short-lived martial law enforcement harkened back to past dictatorships that South Koreans hadn't seen since the 1980s. The ensuing political turmoil and power vacuum in the country tarnished its international image and rattled its diplomacy and financial markets.

Besides Han, Yoon's defense, safety and justice ministers, spy and police chiefs as well as some of his top military commanders have been indicted on rebellion and other charges related to the martial law imposition.

Today in History: January 22, Supreme Court issues Roe v. Wade decision

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, Jan. 22, the 22nd day of 2026. There are 343 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Jan. 22, 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court, in its Roe v. Wade decision, declared a nationwide constitutional right to abortion. (The court would overturn Roe v. Wade in 2022, in the decision Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization.)

Also on this date:

In 1901, Britain's Queen Victoria died at age 81 after a reign of more than 63 years; she was succeeded by her eldest son, Edward VII.

In 1944, during World War II, Allied forces began landing at Anzio, Italy.

In 1947, America's first commercially licensed television station west of the Mississippi, KTLA-TV in Los Angeles, made its official debut.

In 1953, the Arthur Miller drama "The Crucible" opened at the Martin Beck Theatre in New York.

In 1973, former President Lyndon B. Johnson died at his Texas ranch at the age of 64.

In 1998, Theodore Kaczynski pleaded guilty in Sacramento, California, to being the "Unabomber" responsible for three deaths and 23 injuries in a mail-bombing campaign. In return for the pleas in federal court, he received a sentence of life in prison without parole.

In 2006, Kobe Bryant scored 81 points, the second-highest single-game point total in NBA history, in the

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Los Angeles Lakers' 122-104 victory over the Toronto Raptors. (Wilt Chamberlain set the record with 100 points in 1962 for the Philadelphia Warriors in a 169-147 win against the New York Knicks.

In 2017, an outbreak of tornadoes in the U.S. Southeast killed at least 16 people in Georgia after claiming four lives in Mississippi.

Today's birthdays: Celebrity chef Graham Kerr (TV: "The Galloping Gourmet") is 92. Singer Steve Perry is 77. Film director Jim Jarmusch is 73. Actor Linda Blair is 67. Actor Diane Lane is 61. DJ Jazzy Jeff is 61. Celebrity chef Guy Fieri is 58. Actor Olivia d'Abo is 57. Actor Gabriel Macht is 54. Actor Balthazar Getty is 51. Rapper Logic is 36. Actor Daryl McCormack is 33. Actor Sami Gayle is 30. R&B singer Ravyn Lenae Washington is 27. WNBA point guard Caitlin Clark is 24.