

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Monday, Feb. 2, 2026

- School Breakfast: Eggs.
- School Lunch: Burrito bowl, Santa FE corn.
- Senior Menu: Lasagna bake, broccoli, fruit, breadstick.
- Emmanuel Lutheran Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.
- MS Boys Basketball at Milbank: 7th at 4 p.m.; 8th at 5 p.m.
- 1st Grade Boys Basketball Practice, 4:30 p.m., Elementary Gym
- Boys JV Wrestling at Britton-Hecla, 5 p.m.
- Girls Basketball hosts Florence/Henry; C at 5 p.m.; JV at 6 p.m.; varsity to follow.
- Kindergarten boys basketball practice, 6 p.m., elementary gym.
- 5th grade boys basketball practice, 6 p.m., gym

## Tuesday, February 3

- Senior Menu: Baked turkey crunch, peas, fruit, whole wheat bread.
- School Breakfast: Scones.
- School Lunch: Pizza burgers, Fries.
- City Council meeting, 7 p.m.
- St. John's Lutheran: Ladies Aid LWML, 1 p.m.
- United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.
- Boys Basketball hosts Roncalli: Gym: 8th at 4 p.m., 7th at 5 p.m., 6th at 6 p.m.; Arena: C at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m., varsity to follow.



## Wednesday, February. 4

- Senior Menu: Ham, roasted potatoes, fruit, pineapple, whole wheat bread.
- School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.
- School Lunch: Mac and cheese, peas.
- Groton Chamber meeting, noon, City Hall
- Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.; Sarah Circle, 5 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m.
- St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.
- United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.
- Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.
- Pickleball at Elementary Gym, 5:30 p.m.
- Sixth grade BBB practice, 6 p.m., gym
- 3rd/4th grade volleyball practice, 6 p.m., Arena

## Thursday, Feb. 5

- Senior Menu: Salisbury steak, mashed potatoes, carrots, fruit, whole wheat bread.
- School Breakfast: Cereal
- School Lunch: Corn dogs, baked beans.
- Emmanuel Lutheran: Nigeria Circle, 2 p.m.
- Basketball Doubleheader at Deuel: (JV girls at 4 p.m.; JV boys at 5 p.m., Varsity girls at 6 p.m., varsity boys to follow.
- 2nd Grade BB practice, 5 p.m., elementary gym.
- Boys Wrestling at Deuel, 5 p.m.
- 4th grade BB practice, 6 p.m., gym.
- High School Softball practice, 6 p.m., gym

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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.**

## Rafah Reopens

Gaza's border crossing with Egypt formally reopens today to limited crossings after almost two years of near-complete closure. The move allows some Palestinians who fled the Israel-Hamas war to begin returning home.

The reopening of Rafah is part of the second phase of the Israel-Hamas ceasefire, which began in October and was threatened by ceasefire violations. Israel, which controls the Gaza side of the border, says it will allow 50 patients (and up to two relatives each) to leave daily for medical evacuation. Roughly 50 Palestinians will be allowed to reenter daily, with Israel and Egypt vetting people upon exit and entry. European Union border patrol agents will assist with supervision. Israel says it will ramp up travel as the system succeeds.

Tens of thousands of Palestinians fled Gaza amid the war (Israel puts the figure at 42,000; Palestinians put the figure at over 100,000). Palestinian officials say roughly 20,000 Palestinians seek to exit the enclave for medical care.

## Grammy Awards

The 68th annual Grammy Awards were held last night, with Bad Bunny taking home album of the year for "Debí Tirar Más Fotos" ("I Should Have Taken More Photos"). The win makes the 31-year-old Puerto Rican rapper and singer—whose real name is Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio—the first Latin artist to win the event's top prize.

Kendrick Lamar won five awards, surpassing Jay-Z to become the most-awarded rapper in Grammy history. His wins included best rap album for "GNX" and record of the year alongside SZA for "Luther." Other winners included Lady Gaga, who won best pop vocal album ("Mayhem"); Billie Eilish, who won song of the year ("Wildflower"), and Olivia Dean, who won best new artist.

The awards were hosted by former "Daily Show" comedian Trevor Noah for the sixth year in a row.

## Punxsutawney Prophecy

The nation's attention turns to western Pennsylvania this morning to watch the country's most famous groundhog, Punxsutawney Phil, determine whether 2026 will bring an early spring or a longer winter. The prescient land-beaver will pick one of two scrolls (just past 7 am ET), each containing separate wintry prophecies.

As is tradition, the slumberous whistle-pig will join his top-hatted crew to see whether he'll spot his shadow (foretelling six more weeks of winter) or relax a bit with his admiring fans (predicting an early spring). Phil is right about 35% of the time—or an impressive 65% if you flip the somewhat arbitrary rules.

The ceremony was originally conceived by a local newspaper editor in 1886, but has its roots in Eastern European celebrations of the midway between the winter solstice and spring equinox—and also falls on the lesser-known Christian holiday, Candlemas.

Historical accounts suggest farmers used the appearance of hibernating mammals to signal spring. In reality, science suggests the salacious marmot likely appears to check for mates.

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## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Carlos Alcaraz defeats Novak Djokovic to win Australian Open, becoming ninth man in history—and youngest player ever—to complete career Grand Slam.

NFL regulators approve ESPN's multibillion-dollar purchase of NFL Network, other core NFL media assets; deal gives NFL 10% stake in Disney-owned network.

"Melania" documentary earns over \$7M at the domestic box office, biggest nonmusic documentary debut in over a decade; comes after Amazon spent \$75M to buy and promote the film.

## Science & Technology

Recently launched Moltbook, a social network exclusively for AI agents, passes 150,000 active agents interacting with each other after one week; site largely populated by OpenClaw—previously known as Clawdbot and then Moltbot—agents.

Jeff Bezos-owned Blue Origin pauses its New Shepard space tourism program for at least two years, citing a need to focus on its New Glenn program for lunar exploration.

New nasal vaccine shows efficacy in protecting rodents against H5N1 bird flu; treatment may help prevent an eventual jump of the virus from animals to humans.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close Friday down (S&P 500 -0.4%, Dow -0.4%, Nasdaq -0.9%), with the S&P 500 ending January on three-day losing streak.

Gold and silver prices plunge after monthslong surge; gold drops 9%, silver falls 25%.

Elon Musk reportedly considering merging SpaceX with either xAI or Tesla ahead of planned SpaceX initial public offering this year; Tesla and SpaceX have both invested \$2B in xAI already.

OPEC+ to continue pause on raising oil production levels in March as tensions between the US and Iran push oil futures above \$68 per barrel; 22-member group accounts for about 40% of global oil output.

## Politics & World Affairs

House reconvenes today after recess, could vote on Senate bill to end partial government shutdown impacting Homeland Security, Transportation, Defense departments, among others.

Democrat Christian Menefee wins special election for House seat in Texas.

Five-year-old Liam Conejo Ramos and his father are released from immigration detention in Texas, board plane to Minnesota.

Federal judge declines temporary block of immigration crackdown in Minnesota.

Bomb cyclone hits the Carolinas, delivering roughly 1 foot of snow in some parts.



**Pictured are Lincoln Krause, Brittany Hubbard, Talli Wright and Jaedyn Penning.** (Courtesy photo)

## Groton Area Students Gain Hands-On Experience Through Athletic Training Capstone

GROTON — Seniors at Groton Area High School spent the weekend gaining real-world experience in sports medicine as part of the school's Athletic Training Capstone course, taught by Brittany Hubbard.

The capstone class is available to seniors who have completed Introduction to Sports Medicine and have an interest in pursuing a career in health care. A key component of the course requires students to complete 30 observation hours, allowing them to move beyond the classroom and into live athletic settings.

That requirement brought students to a weekend wrestling event, where Hubbard—who also serves as the athletic trainer for Groton Area—guided them through the realities of injury care in one of the most physically demanding high school sports.

"Wrestling is a sport that tends to have a higher number of injuries because of how physical it is," Hubbard said. "We see everything from basic wound care to more significant injuries that need to be evaluated by a physician."

While the students were not responsible for making medical decisions, they played an active role within their scope of training. They assisted with basic wound care and closely observed injury assessments, learning how trainers evaluate athletes and determine next steps for care.

The experience, Hubbard explained, is designed to build confidence and familiarity long before students step into professional roles of their own.

"The goal is that by seeing these situations now, they feel more comfortable in the future when they are the ones responsible for assessment and/or treatment," she said.

By combining coursework with hands-on observation, the Athletic Training Capstone gives Groton Area students a clearer picture of what a future in sports medicine or health care may hold—preparing them not just academically, but practically, for the demands of the field.

## 88th Carnival of Silver Skates



**McKenna Tietz was named the 2026 Carnival of Silver Skates queen. She is being pulled around the rink by the rest of the candidates and the 2025 Queen Rylee Dunker.** (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



**National Showcase Team Trio 1 Abigail Reeves, Elin Gossen, and Audrey Mack perform, "Chipmunk Mashup."** (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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## Snowflakes "Ghostbusters"

**Waylon Anderson, Wrenley Giedt, Ivy Hughes, Oscar Jetto, Luke Johnson, Scarlett Pigors-Laughery, and Cole Swisher**

**Instructors: Katie Anderson and Coralea Wolter** (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



## 3rd grade "Gotta Be Me"

**Brielle Dunbar, Mya Flihs, Kinsey Frost, Amara Graff, Laker Hanson, Kodi Hinman, Liv Huber, Ellie Lassle, Jorie Locken, Aria Shellenberger, and River Wipf**

**Instructors: Teagan Hanten and Alexis Stange** (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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## 7th grade "Day-O"

**Gracie Borg, Brynlee Dunker, Ambrielle Feist, Kierea Jetto, Libby Johnson, Mya Moody, Maycee Moody, Kinley Sandness, and Tori Schuster**

**Instructors: Rylee Dunker and Tasha Dunker** (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



## Specialty Act

**"Everywhere, Everything"**  
**Avery Crank and Emerlee Jones**

(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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**Kindergarten "L-O-V-E"**  
River Anderson, Elowen Cutler, Collyns Dunbar, Alandra Graff, Faith Johnson, Sawyer Kappes, Blake Locke, Hadlee Ronning, Makenna Sternhagen, and Beau Traphagen  
Instructors: Katie Anderson and Coralea Wolter (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

**1st grade "Welcome to New York"**  
Huntley Frost, Hazel Giedt, Graham Locken, and Ava Wiseman

Instructor: Katelyn Giedt (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



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## Specialty Act "Dancing Queen" Teagan Hanten and McKenna Tietz

(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



## 6th grade "Set it Off"

Taylor Flihs, Shealee Gilchrist, Ryan Hanson, Avery Huber, and Devan Locke  
Instructor: Avery Crank and Claire Schuelke (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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**9th and 10th grade "You're the One That I Want"**  
**Libby Cole, Tenley Frost, Tevan Hanson, Abby Fjeldheim, and Suri Jetto**  
**Instructor: Anna Fjeldheim** (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



**Specialty Act Claire Schuelke**  
**"The Greatest Show"** (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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## 8th grade "Can't Stop the Feeling"

Rachel Dobbins, Andi Gauer, GraceLynn Hubbs, and Chloe Witchey

Instructor: Emerlee Jones

(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



## 4th and 5th grade "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing"

Haley Erickson, Preslee Giedt, Reagen Harry, Hazel Hill, Nori Hinman, Raziah Jetto, Railey Mulder, Presley

Olson, and Calli Wilkinson

Instructor: Katelyn Giedt (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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## Specialty Act "Dancing in the Dark" Tevan Hanson and Abby Fjeldheim

(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



## 2nd grade "Space Jam"

Maya Anderson, Kylie Borg, Ivy Cole, Layla Feist, Emme Flihs, Emersyn Giedt, Kayleigh Raba, Molly Swisher, Aubrie Traphagen, and Collins Traphagen

Instructors: Katie Anderson and Coralea Wolter (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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**11th grade "Dance the Night"**  
**Avery Crank, Teagan Hanten, Addison Hoffman, Emerlee Jones, Claire Schuelke, and McKenna Tietz**  
**Instructors: Lindsey Tietz and Alexis Stange** (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



**12th grade "Hold On"**  
**Mia Crank, Emma Davies, and Rylee Dunker**  
**Instructors: Shonna Harry and Aubray Miller** (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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Each year the Carnival of Silver Skates committee recognizes an organization, business or individual who have been instrumental with their support of the carnival. This year, Coralea Wolter was recognized as a Friend of the Carnival. (Photo lifted from GDILIVE.COM video)



**National Showcase Team Trio 2 "These Boots are Made for Walkin'"  
Dorothy Peterson, Brooklyn Bloom, and Madison Johnson**

(Photo lifted from GDILIVE.COM video)

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The stage is set for Super Bowl LX. 32 teams entered the 2025 season with hopes of hoisting the Lombardi Trophy, and only two remain: the Seattle Seahawks and the New England Patriots.

Usually, the weekend in between the Conference Championship games and the Super Bowl is when the best players from around the league converge for the Pro Bowl. There are usually a handful of Vikings players that I keep an eye on, and then write about how they did in the various events. Unfortunately, there aren't any Vikings in this year's Pro Bowl. Not even replacement players who fill in for those who are either injured or about to play in the Super Bowl. This has only happened one other time

in the last 40 years (the 2014 Pro Bowl). And so, this leads us directly into the subject of today's article...

The Vikings have fired General Manager Kwesi Adofo-Mensah.

It was a surprise announcement by the Vikings' ownership group, headed by Mark and Zygi Wilf. Not surprising in the "I can't believe they fired him" way, but more so in the "if they were going to fire him, why wait until now to do it" way. Two other General Managers were fired this season, and both were relieved of their duties as quickly as possible in order to give the team a better chance of finding a replacement. Chris Grier "stepped down" from the Miami Dolphins in October, and Terry Fontenot was fired shortly after the season ended and the Atlanta Falcons didn't make the playoffs. But the Vikings, who had just given Kwesi Adofo-Mensah (KAM) a contract extension less than a year ago, allowed him to continue doing his duties as GM, including end-of-season press conferences and a trip to Mobile, Alabama to scout the Senior Bowl.

While the timing is questionable, the reasons behind KAM getting fired are not.

KAM was brought in to be an analytics guy. The former stock trader turned NFL GM. But the NFL is not the stock market. KAM presided over four draft cycles, the one area where being an analytics guy should give an advantage, and the Vikings have very little to show for it. His first draft in 2022 was one of the worst in franchise history. He traded the 12th pick to the Detroit Lions, bypassing a generational player at a position of need (safety Kyle Hamilton), only to later take a safety with the 32nd pick (Lewis Cine). The Vikings then traded with the Green Bay Packers, allowing them to draft Christian Watson. The Vikings ended up with Andrew Booth Jr. instead. Neither of those players is in the NFL anymore. In total, KAM drafted 28 players in Minnesota, and all we have to show for it is a WR3 (Jalen Nailor), a WR2 (Jordan Addison), a kicker (Will Reichard), and a pass rusher (Dallas Turner). Four solid picks in 28 attempts is unacceptable.

And the final nail in the coffin? Watching Sam Darnold lead the Seattle Seahawks to the Super Bowl, one year after winning 14 games for the Vikings. At the time, the move made sense. Darnold had just melted down in the two most important games of the season, a week 18 matchup against the Lions for the top spot in the NFC, and then the following week against the Rams in the first round of the playoffs. The Vikings also had a rookie first-round QB on the roster who they wanted to give every opportunity to. Unfortunately for the Vikings, J.J. McCarthy had a disastrous 2025 season, they were eliminated from the playoffs mid-season, and their former QB is one win away from doing something the Vikings have never done in their illustrious history – hoisting the Lombardi Trophy.

## "Insomnia"

Difficulty sleeping is a common concern we hear about in primary care. Many of us will have trouble sleeping on occasion, but when that is a persistent pattern causing distress or functional impairment, we call it insomnia. Insomnia can mean difficulty falling asleep, difficulty maintaining sleep, or waking early unable to fall back asleep.

First and foremost, is the difficulty sleeping causing problems? If it is not resulting in problems with daily functioning, we may need to manage expectations around sleep. Not every person needs 8 hours per night, and if your imperfect sleep is perfectly tolerable, it is probably best to leave it alone. As we age, we need less hours of nighttime sleep; again, as long as you feel well during the day, that is just fine.

For those whose poor sleep is resulting in intolerable drowsiness or difficulty functioning at work or home, I have more questions. Is an acute illness or stressor contributing? Might there be another sleep disorder like sleep apnea or restless leg syndrome? Is pain, an urge to urinate, or some other physical symptom causing your awakenings? Is there underlying depression, anxiety, or other mental health concerns? Are you taking any medications or substances that might cause sleep disruption? Addressing any of these may significantly improve sleep. Alcohol is a common culprit; often assumed to help people fall asleep, alcohol actually yields poor quality rest.

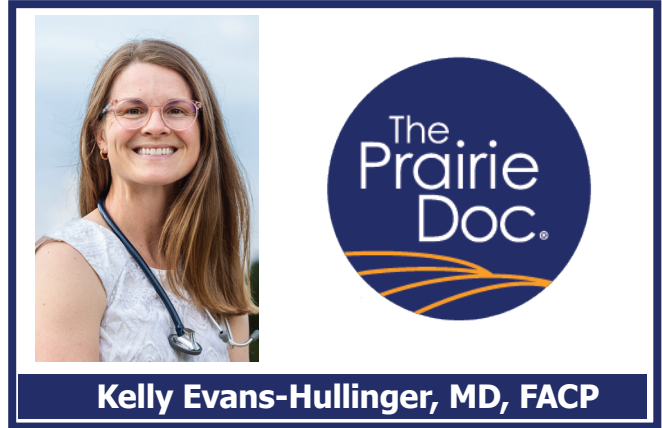
Most patients with insomnia can be helped with behavior changes alone, or "sleep hygiene." There are a few basic tenets, some more intuitive than others. First, optimize the sleep environment; ideally this means a dark, cool, quiet bedroom. Second, a consistent bedtime and wake time are very important, even on the weekends. This is particularly difficult for our patients who have jobs requiring rotating shifts. Next, find a bedtime routine which helps your brain wind down; think less screen time, and more reading, meditating, or listening to calming music.

Finally, and less intuitive to most, if you do find yourself lying in bed for 20 minutes without falling asleep, get out of bed, try a calming routine over again, then get back into bed. More time spent not sleeping in your bed is more time your brain spends learning the bed is a place to be awake. Furthermore, it fuels anxiousness when we lie awake yearning for sleep, so it is best to break that cycle.

I see a lot of people tracking sleep with their smartwatch or other wearable device, and my advice is to be aware of potential pitfalls. We don't have good evidence that the information all devices provide on sleep is accurate, and for most people tracking those statistics actually tends to increase anxiety around sleep which may worsen the problem.

Have you followed all the above advice but still suffer from insomnia? The gold standard treatment is cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia (CBT-I) provided by a mental health professional. Beyond that we do have pharmacologic options, but medications for sleep can be fraught with potential problems, especially for our patients over age 65. Even some over-the-counter sleep medications can have significant risks in older patients, so please use caution and talk to your primary care provider.

*Dr. Kelly Evans Hullinger practices internal medicine at Avera Medical Group in Brookings, SD. She serves as one of the Prairie Doc Volunteer Hosts during its 24th Season providing Health Education Based on Science, Built on Trust. Follow The Prairie Doc® at [www.prairiedoc.org](http://www.prairiedoc.org), Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Tik Tok. Prairie Doc Programming includes On Call with the Prairie Doc®, a medical Q&A show (most Thursdays at 7pm, SDPB, YouTube and streaming on Facebook), 2 podcasts, and a Radio program (on SDPB, Sundays at 6am and 1pm).*



Kelly Evans-Hullinger, MD, FACP

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## Charles Mix County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash  
Where: SD Highway 1804, 10 miles southwest of Platte, SD  
When: 11:22 p.m., Saturday, January 31, 2026

Driver 1: 21-year-old male from Belle Fourche, SD, fatal injuries  
Vehicle 1: 2023 GMC Sierra K1500 Denali  
Seat belt Used: Under investigation

Charles Mix County, S.D.- A Belle Fourche man died in a single vehicle crash Saturday evening 10 miles southwest of Platte, SD.

The name of the person involved has not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2023 GMC Sierra was traveling southbound on SD Highway 1804 when it left the roadway, entering the ditch off the right shoulder. The vehicle hit an approach, went airborne and flipped onto its roof. The driver was pronounced deceased at the scene.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is only preliminary.

The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.

Need a **Babysitter** or  
**House Cleaner?**

♥ **Babysitting Available!**

**House Cleaning Offered!**

**Text Jeslyn Kosel at (605)-290-7821**

*I'm in Groton but am willing to drive to nearby towns!*

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### ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

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Single: \$35.15 per month or \$319.50 per year  
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Family: \$67.10 per month or \$702.26 per year

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Senior/PT: \$20 per month



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Call or Text Tina at 605/397-7285

**Same rates for several years!**

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## Tina's Baskets

605-397-7285



Reese's cake with mini Reese's on top  
\$35.00



Mix candy cake with mini mix on top with  
lights on the bottom  
\$20.00



White heart shape with red roses and Fer-  
rero chocolate candy with a bear with it  
\$25.00



Bear sucker cake with life savers and dum  
dum suckers in it  
\$15.00

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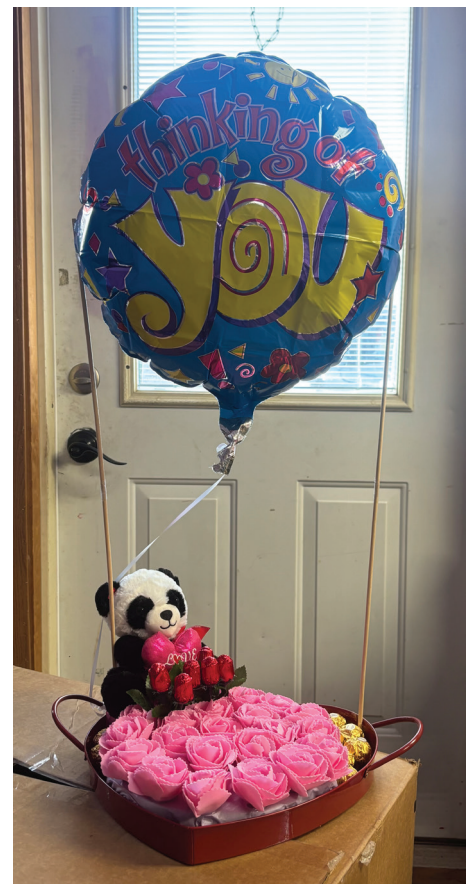
**Hersheys cake with strawberry drops and mini Hersheys on top  
\$40.00**



**Laffy Taffy Octopus cake  
\$ 15.00**



**Relax and Unwind basket with two wine bottles, blanket, adult coloring books and word finds with crayons and pens and some different chocolates as shown here  
\$50.00**



**Thinking of you balloon with bear, red chocolate roses with pink roses and Ferrero Rocher chocolate candy  
\$25.00**

## EARTHTALK

### Like Money? Tequila? Help Bats Keep Helping Us by Isabel Eddy

Dear EarthTalk: How are bat species doing these days?

-- Gregg Visconti, Butte, MT

If you enjoy money, tequila and saving the planet, you should also be asking this question. Concerningly, the most recent answer from the International Union for Conservation of Nature is that 85 of the world's 1,500 or so bat species are endangered, and 23 critically so. Furthermore, over half of all bat species are facing severe population declines according to the North American Bat Conservation Alliance's 2023 report.

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) estimates that bats contribute over \$3.7 billion annually to the U.S. economy. In fact, the actual number is likely much higher. "[3.7 billion] does not take into account the volume of insects eaten by bats in forest ecosystems and the degree to which that benefits industries like lumber," says USGS.

In addition to insect consumption, fruit-eating and nectar-feeding bats are important pollinators, and the only known pollinators of the agave plant (from which tequila is made). Moreover, while many species contribute to the regeneration of rainforests after clear cutting, the seeds dropped by fruit bats after nightly foraging can account for up to 95 percent of the first new growth.

Rising temperatures, habitat destruction and pathogens pose a significant risk to bats. Urban sprawl has contributed to growing habitat destruction during reproduction and hibernation seasons, leading bats to waste critical energy resources. LaRoy Brandt, a Professor of Biology at Lincoln Memorial University in Tennessee, notes that "...as the climate changes, warmer winters could [also] disturb their hibernation."

Sudden heat waves associated with climate change can also lead to severe heat stress in bats, particularly when temperatures rise above 105°. Water easily evaporates through their skin's large surface area, putting bats at risk of fatal dehydration. Wind turbines, which can potentially combat climate change, have also proven to be a threat. Numerous studies including a 2018 report by the American Wind Wildlife Institute have linked wind turbines to between 90,000 and 400,000 bat deaths.

In addition to anthropogenic risk factors, bats are affected by pests and pathogens like pseudogymnascus destructans (or white-nose syndrome), which has claimed the lives of more than five million bats since 2006 by causing rapid loss of body fat and eventual starvation.

However, hope is not lost. USGS has developed several strategies to address many risk factors, including acoustic bat detectors and wind turbine databases. Readers can play an important role by participating in the North American Bat Monitoring Program, turning off unnecessary lights at night, and promoting natural habitats where possible.



**Over half of all bat species are facing severe population declines, with 85 bat species listed as endangered and 23 of those near extinction.**

Credit: Pexels.com.



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### 'Tough to get things exactly right': Legislature considers flood of property tax reduction proposals

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER

South Dakota lawmakers have introduced at least 28 bills directly addressing property taxes so far this legislative session, with more expected to be filed. Several have been considered by lawmakers already.

The session started earlier this month and continues until March. Before the session began, the Legislature's Comprehensive Property Tax Task Force recommended 19 proposals in October, some of which haven't been introduced yet.

Gov. Larry Rhoden is supporting a bill, filed at his request, to allow counties to implement a half-percent sales tax to use for property tax relief.

Democratic legislative leaders told members of the media on Thursday that their members plan to introduce their own property tax relief proposal soon.

Senate Assistant Majority Leader Carl Perry, R-Aberdeen, compared past efforts to reduce property tax burdens to a game of Whack-A-Mole, adding that dozens of ideas will challenge lawmakers to find consensus.

"It's going to be tough to get things exactly right, but we're going to work at it," Perry said.

State government does not receive property tax revenue. It relies primarily on sales taxes, as do cities, although cities also receive some property tax revenue. Counties and schools are reliant on property taxes. Property taxes paid by homeowners in the state have grown nearly 70% in the past 10 years, putting pressure on elected officials to stem the tide.

Some ideas — including one from U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, one of four Republican candidates for governor — would capture money from next year's scheduled increase in the state sales tax rate to reduce property taxes. The Legislature and then-Gov. Kristi Noem reduced the rate from 4.5% to 4.2% in 2023, but scheduled the reduction to sunset in 2027.

Senate President Pro Tempore Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, proposed a bill this week that would keep the state sales tax rate at 4.2%. Karr said a higher sales tax rate would further harm taxpayers already complaining of property tax burdens.

He compared using sales taxes to fund property tax relief — which would involve everyone paying more sales taxes to reduce property taxes, even if they don't own property — to feudalism. The medieval system relied on peasants working for landowners, or lords.

"No matter how bad we want property tax relief, no matter how bad it's needed, that's not right," Karr said. "The ends don't justify the means."

#### Addressing the effects of last year's adopted legislation

Lawmakers and Rhoden adopted a multifaceted piece of property tax relief legislation last year. It capped countywide residential assessment growth for five years, exempted some home improvements from affecting assessments, expanded eligibility among disabled and elderly people for relief programs, and capped the extent to which local governments can utilize new construction and growth to increase tax collections.

Sen. Randy Deibert, R-Spearfish, introduced a bill this year to raise the cap on new construction and growth from 3% to 5%.

Heath VonEye, deputy city administrator for Harrisburg, told lawmakers during the bill's Senate Taxation Committee hearing that the law restricts communities growing at rates higher than the cap, limiting their ability to "let that new growth fund itself." Those communities include cities in the Sioux Falls metropolitan

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area — including Tea and Harrisburg — and cities in the Black Hills area, such as Custer.

VonEye told lawmakers that the collective loss in revenue between 2027 and 2031 in Harrisburg due to the current cap would be nearly \$3 million, assuming the city would continue growing at 10%.

That loss of revenue means the costs of paying for infrastructure, water and sewer, fire stations or more police officers patrolling the city “get pushed onto” and “inadvertently hurt” existing homeowners, VonEye said.

The city would be able to recoup about \$800,000 if the cap was raised to 5%.

Other supporters of the bill said too stringent caps could lead local governments to exercise their right to “op out” of state limits on property tax growth, or cut services. Lobbyists with schools, cities and counties warned lawmakers of the “unintended consequence” last year.

The bill passed with a 6-1 vote, though some lawmakers on the committee questioned why they signed off on a new growth cap last year at all.

“I don’t know that there should be a cap,” said Sen. Tamara Grove, R-Lower Brule. “I don’t know what we accomplished in that part.”

The bill now goes to the Senate.

## **Bills working their way through the system**

Some of the property tax bills that are still alive include the following:

Senate Bill 85 would require elections for schools to exceed property tax limits.

House Bill 1168 would provide a property tax credit to pay for private school or homeschool expenses.

House Bill 1172 would terminate excess property tax levies approved by school districts older than 2002.

House Bill 1218 would create a new commercial property category for taxation.

House Bill 1241 would increase the property valuation limit for a property tax relief program for veterans and surviving spouses.

Senate Bill 12 would provide missed property tax refunds from years prior for veterans and surviving spouses.

Senate Bill 20 would appropriate \$425,000 to provide property and sales tax refunds to low-income South Dakota residents who are elderly or disabled.

Senate Bill 96, recommended by Gov. Larry Rhoden, would allow counties to implement a half-percent sales tax and use the revenue for property tax relief.

Senate Bill 118 would put at least \$100 million a year of state sales tax revenue toward a homeowner tax rebate program, and Senate Bill 125 would create the “homeowner tax reduction fund” to provide the rebates.

Senate Bill 126 would increase the valuation limit for a property tax relief program for disabled veterans and surviving spouses.

Senate Bill 144 would create a new property tax assessment freeze for older South Dakota residents.

Senate Bill 161 would repeal property tax exemptions for health care facilities.

Senate Bill 196 would increase the income limits for the state’s property tax assessment freeze program.

Senate Bill 199 would create a new property tax relief fund and transfer 25% of the annual increase in general fund revenue to the fund.

Senate Joint Resolution 504 would put a constitutional amendment on November’s general election ballot to allow mobile sports betting, with 90% of tax revenue be used for property tax relief.

Senate Joint Resolution 505 would put a constitutional amendment on November’s general election ballot to limit the annual assessed valuation increase of property to 2% and cap property taxes at 1% of a property’s assessed value.

Senate Joint Resolution 506 would put a constitutional amendment on November’s general election ballot to reset and limit property taxes to a flat rate until the sale of a property.

## **Failed bills**

Senate Majority Leader Jim Mehlhaff, R-Pierre, introduced Senate Bill 99, which would transition public

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education funding from property taxes to sales taxes. The bill would have raised the state sales tax rate from 4.2% to 6.8% and removed the sales tax on food, but it failed in a committee on a 6-1 vote.

Representatives with the state Bureau of Finance and Management, South Dakota Retailers Association and South Dakota Farm Bureau Federation spoke against the bill.

Sen. Susan Peterson, R-Sioux Falls, said the bill tried to accomplish "too much all at once."

"We might find ourselves in a bit of a conundrum in how we implement this," Peterson said.

### Other bills that have failed or stalled include:

House Bill 1032, which would have eliminated the three-year limit to implement unused property tax increase requests for local governments.

House Bill 1036, which has been tabled, would limit annual valuation increases for owner-occupied and nonagricultural properties.

Senate Bill 58, which would have set property tax mill levies to zero.

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

**GT** on **C Game GBB**  
Florence/Henry at Groton  
Monday, Feb. 2, 2026  
5:00 p.m.

Groton Area Tigers Groton, SD

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**GT** on **JV GBB**  
Florence/Henry at Groton  
Monday, Feb. 2, 2026  
6:00 p.m.

Groton Area Tigers Groton, SD

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**GT** on **Varsity GBB**  
Florence/Henry at Groton  
Monday, Feb. 2, 2026  
7:15 p.m.

Groton Area Tigers Groton, SD

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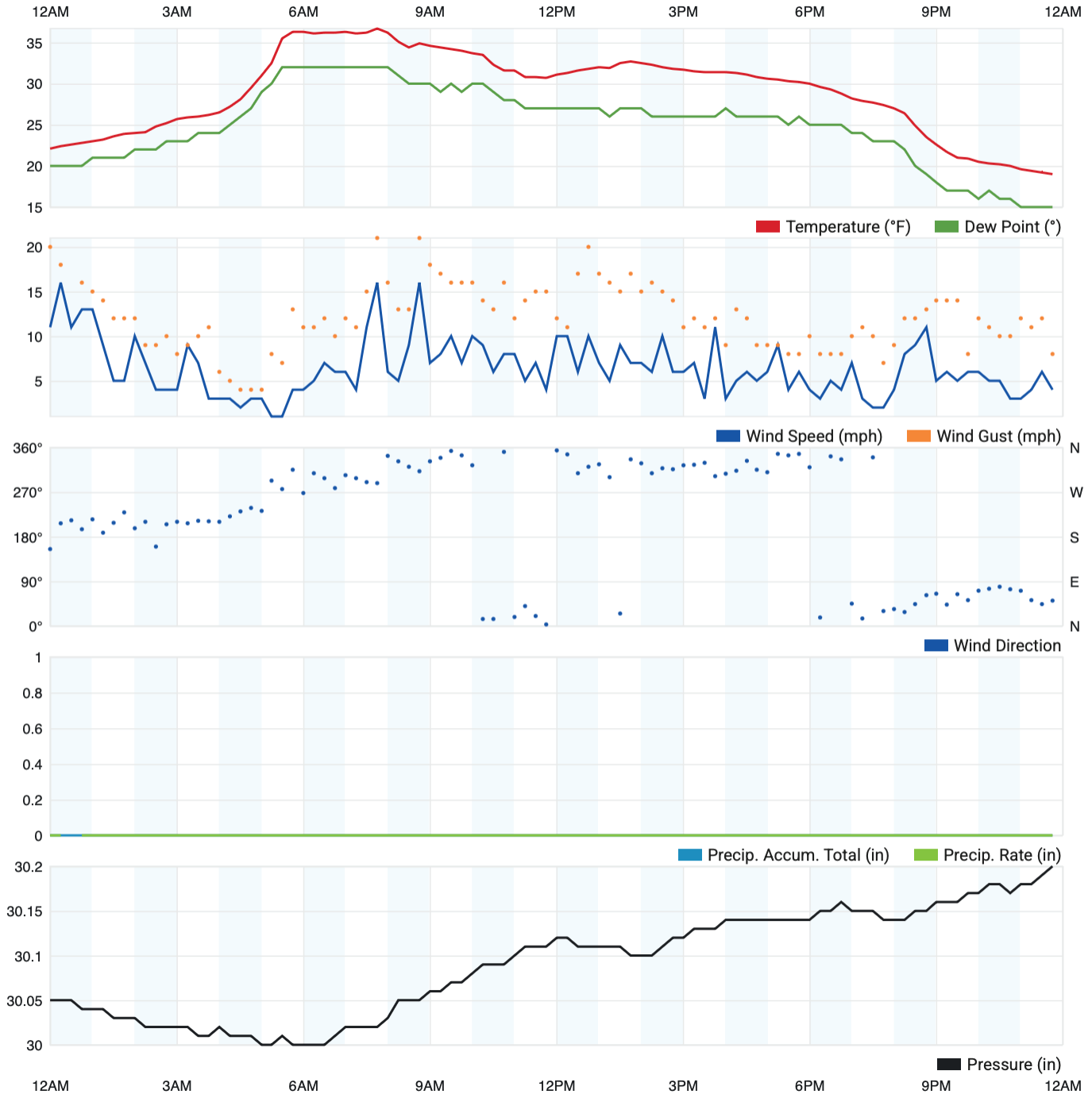


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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

February 1, 2026



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Today



20% → 70%

High: 21 °F

Slight Chance  
Snow then  
Snow Likely

Tonight



70% → 10%

Low: 5 °F

Snow Likely  
then Slight  
Chance  
Freezing Rain

Tuesday



High: 24 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Tuesday Night



20%

Low: 17 °F

Slight Chance  
Snow then  
Mostly Cloudy

Wednesday



High: 31 °F

Partly Sunny



## Precipitation Type & Timing

February 2, 2026  
3:21 AM CST



Around a 40-60% chance of mainly snow or light rain this afternoon, primarily across north central SD through the James River Valley. A 15% chance of light freezing drizzle tonight.

Snow accumulations around 1" or less, along with a light glaze from any freezing drizzle.

### Weather Forecast

	2/2 Mon					2/3 Tue	
	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am
McIntosh	15%	30%	35%	35%	25%	10%	10%
Eagle Butte	0%	15%	20%	25%	20%	10%	10%
Murdo	0%	5%	10%	25%	20%	15%	15%
Mobridge	10%	25%	40%	45%	35%	15%	15%
Pierre	5%	10%	20%	35%	25%	15%	10%
Gettysburg	10%	15%	45%	55%	40%	15%	15%
Eureka	20%	40%	55%	55%	35%	15%	15%
Chamberlain	10%	10%	15%	25%	25%	15%	15%
Miller	15%	15%	35%	50%	60%	15%	15%
Redfield	15%	25%	50%	65%	50%	15%	15%
Aberdeen	20%	35%	70%	65%	30%	15%	15%
Britton	35%	50%	60%	45%	15%	10%	10%
Clark	15%	20%	45%	60%	40%	15%	15%
Webster	15%	30%	55%	60%	20%	15%	10%
Watertown	15%	20%	35%	55%	30%	15%	10%
Sisseton	15%	40%	50%	40%	15%	5%	5%
Milbank	10%	25%	30%	35%	20%	10%	5%
Wheaton	10%	30%	30%	25%	10%	5%	5%

- Rain + - Freezing Drizzle + - Wintry Mix + - Snow + - Fog +



A weak weather system will bring light snow through mainly north central South Dakota and the James River Valley this afternoon and evening. At times with the system, there could be spotty areas of light rain/freezing rain or drizzle/freezing drizzle. Overall snowfall accumulations will range from a dusting to around an inch, along with a light glaze of ice. Winds are expected to remain light as the system moves across the area.

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## Maximum Temperature Forecast (°F)

	2/2 Mon	2/3 Tue	2/4 Wed	2/5 Thu	2/6 Fri
McIntosh	35	36	37	51	39
Eagle Butte	40	37	39	54	41
Murdo	45	39	42	56	46
Mobridge	30	32	34	49	39
Pierre	38	37	40	54	42
Gettysburg	29	30	33	47	36
Eureka	22	29	32	45	33
Chamberlain	36	34	37	52	41
Miller	30	29	34	49	38
Redfield	28	25	32	47	33
Aberdeen	22	26	32	46	35
Britton	17	22	28	41	33
Clark	22	21	27	41	33
Webster	18	21	27	40	34
Watertown	20	21	26	41	33
Sisseton	15	22	29	43	35
Milbank	17	20	27	44	35
Wheaton	14	16	24	41	33



NWS Aberdeen, SD  
weather.gov/abr



## Warmer Week Ahead

Warmest day Thursday, with  
highs in the 40s to low 50s  
around 20 degrees above normal for this time of year

Temperatures will be well above normal Wednesday through at least Monday of next week. The warmest day will be Thursday, with highs mainly in the 40s. Low 50s are expected near and west of the Missouri River.

# Groton Daily Independent

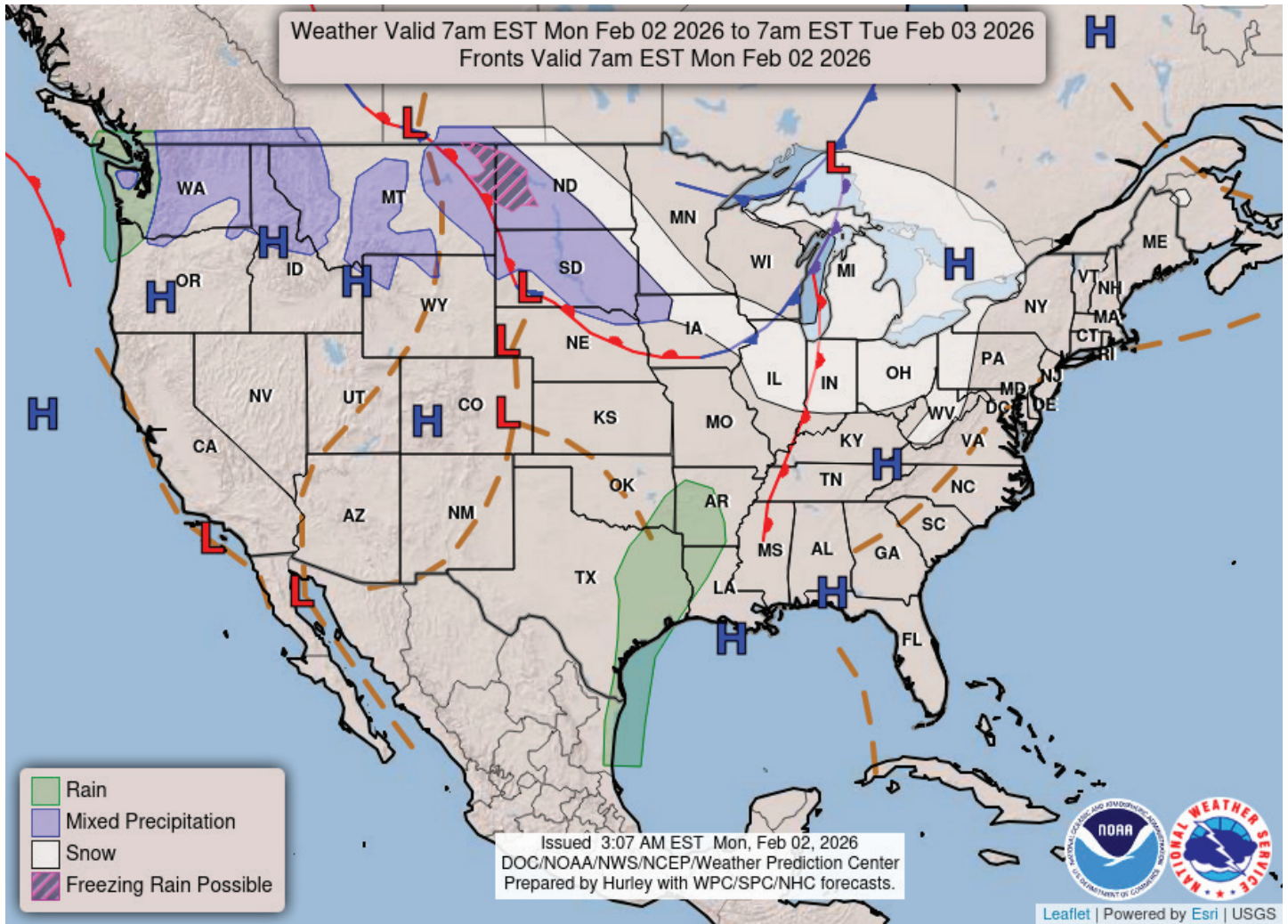
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 37 °F at 7:43 AM**  
**Low Temp: 19 °F at 11:27 PM**  
**Wind: 22 mph at 8:46 AM**  
**Precip: : 0.00**

## Today's Info

Record High: 60 in 1991  
Record Low: -39 in 1917  
Average High: 25  
Average Low: 2  
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.04  
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00  
Average Precip to date: 0.59  
Precip Year to Date: 0.00  
Sunset Tonight: 5:40 pm  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:50 am



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## Today in Weather History

February 2, 1960: Heavy icing from freezing rain accumulations from the afternoon of the 2nd to the afternoon of the 3rd occurred mainly across the eastern half of the state. Severe damage to power lines and telephone service happened in the Watertown and Wessington Springs area. Ice coatings of up to 3 inches thick and has an estimated weight of nine pounds per foot of wire formed around the telephone and some power lines over a wide area of the eastern counties. A 300-foot tower high collapsed at Wessington Springs, and in some areas, utility wires were entirely down for stretches of 2 to 3 miles. Some 170 long-distance telephone circuits were knocked out in larger cities, and 19 towns from Bonesteel to Watertown on the north were without phone service for two to three days after the storm. Many highways were treacherous, and numerous vehicles collided or slid off the road into the ditch. Many schools were also closed.

February 2, 2003: Widespread freezing rain developed across parts of central and into northeast South Dakota through the late-night hours producing significant icing of a quarter to a half-inch by the late morning hours. No significant tree damage or power outages occurred. However, travel was significantly disrupted with many accidents and vehicles sliding off the road. The freezing rain changed over to snow during the mid-morning hours and became heavy, with 6 to 9 inches of snow accumulating before it ended in the late evening. Some snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Ree Heights, Miller, and Faulkton, 7 inches at Clear Lake, 8 inches at Bryant, and 9 inches at Milbank.

February 2, 2011: Blizzard conditions developed along and east of the Sisseton Hills late on February 2nd and continued into the mid-morning hours of February 3rd. Strong southwest winds of 30 to 40 mph, gusting to around 55 mph, picked up the existing snow cover causing blizzard conditions wreaked havoc along Interstate-29. Whiteout conditions and massive drifting brought traffic to a halt along a stretch of Interstate-29 from north of Wilmot to Sisseton. One-hundred fifty to two-hundred vehicles were stranded along this stretch. A full-scale rescue operation ensued during the night and continued into the next day. Interstate-29 was closed from Watertown to the North Dakota border as it took most of the day to clean up all of the stalled vehicles. There were also many accidents along the stretch of the interstate, with people stranded for up to twelve hours. No injuries occurred as a result of this incident. The Roberts County Emergency Manager was stranded and conducted emergency operations from his vehicle. Interstate-29 reopened the evening of the 3rd.

1870: Congressman Halbert Paine, who represented Wisconsin's Second District, introduced a joint resolution in the House of Representatives "to authorize the Secretary of War to provide for taking meteorological observations at the military stations and other points in the interior of the continent, and for giving notice on the Northern Lakes and seaboard of the approach and force of storms."

The House adopted the resolution by unanimous consent and, two days later, it passed the Senate. Five days later, on Feb. 9, President Ulysses S. Grant signed the joint resolution into law, officially creating the nation's first weather service.

1893 — Thunder and lightning accompanied sleet and snow at Saint Louis MO during the evening hours, even though the temperature was just 13 degrees above zero. (The Weather Channel)

1898: The naming of hurricanes after women was always the center of controversy. In the Southern Hemisphere near Australia, tropical cyclones were once called Willy-Willies. An Australian Meteorologist, Clement Wragge, is credited for giving girls names to tropical cyclones by the end of the 19th Century. On this date, Wragge's weather journal showed a Willy Willy named "Eline."

1951 — The greatest ice storm of record in the U.S. produced glaze up to four inches thick from Texas to Pennsylvania causing twenty-five deaths, 500 serious injuries, and 100 million dollars damage. Tennessee was hardest hit by the storm. Communications and utilities were interrupted for a week to ten days. (David Ludlum)

1952: An area of low pressure moved out of the Gulf of America and across southern Florida during the evening and late-night hours on February 2, 1952. It produced 60 mph winds and two to four inches of rain on February 2 and 3. The low pressure remains the only tropical storm to impact the United States in February.

## Abraham's Greatest Test

### Obedience to God often collides with reason.

Genesis 22:1-24 1 Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 2 He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you." 3 So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. 4 On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance. 5 Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you." 6 Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. 7 Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" 8 Abraham said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together. 9 Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 12 He said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." 13 Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son. 14 Abraham called the name of that place The LORD Will Provide, as it is said to this day, "In the mount of the LORD it will be provided." 15 Then the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, 16 and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. 18 "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." 19 So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham lived at Beersheba. 20 Now it came about after these things, that it was told Abraham, saying, "Behold, Milcah also has borne children to your brother Nahor: 21 Uz his firstborn and Buz his brother and Kemuel the father of Aram 22 and Chesed and Hazo and Pildash and Jidlaph and Bethuel." 23 Bethuel became the father of Rebekah; these eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother. 24 His concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore Tebah and Gaham and Tahash and Maacah.

Abraham faced one of the greatest tests of obedience recorded in Scripture: God asked him to sacrifice his son. It's hard to imagine the confusion and pain this must have caused. However, Abraham set out to comply. His response teaches us some important lessons about trusting our heavenly Father:

Obedience often collides with reason. After telling Abraham he'd have descendants too numerous to count, God asked him to sacrifice Isaac, the boy who was to be the father of the promised line. Though the instruction seemed illogical, Abraham trusted God to keep His word (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Obedience means leaving the consequences to God. Abraham's words and actions indicate he believed in divine sovereignty. On taking Isaac to Mount Moriah, he told his servants, "I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you" (Gen. 22:5). He didn't say, "I will return" but expressed the sure hope that both would come back. He fully expected that the Lord would somehow restore the boy in order to keep His pledge (Gen. 22:13-14).

Have you faced any tests of obedience in your life? Pray for help to trust God, no matter what the outcome may be.

*We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him*

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

01.30.26

11 34 36 43 63 13

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$323,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 28 Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

01.31.26

7 21 47 48 49 3

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$14,450,000**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 43 Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.01.26

2 6 10 22 47 17

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 58 Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

01.31.26

16 19 20 34 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$242,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 58 Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

01.31.26

14 18 19 31 59 13

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 27 Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

01.31.26

2 8 14 40 63 23

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$65,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 27 Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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

### **Gaza's border crossing to Egypt reopens in a key step for truce but only few Palestinians can cross**

By SAMY MAGDY and JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Gaza's Rafah border crossing with Egypt reopened on Monday for limited traffic, a key step in the Israel-Hamas ceasefire but a mostly symbolic development on the ground as few people will be allowed to travel in either direction and no goods will pass through it.

Within the first few hours of the opening, however, no one was seen crossing in or out of Gaza. An Egyptian official said 50 Palestinians were expected to cross in each direction on the first day of Rafah's operation. About 20,000 Palestinian children and adults needing medical care hope to leave the devastated Gaza via the crossing, according to Gaza health officials.

Thousands of other Palestinians outside the territory hope to enter and return home.

State-run Egyptian media and an Israeli security official also confirmed the reopening. The officials spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the media.

Before the war, Rafah was the main crossing for people moving in and out of Gaza. The territory's handful of other crossings are all shared with Israel. Under the terms of the ceasefire, which went into effect in October, Israel's military controls the area between the Rafah crossing and the zone where most Palestinians live.

Violence still continued across the coastal territory Monday, and Gaza hospital officials said an Israeli navy ship had fired on a tent camp, killing a 3-year-old Palestinian boy. Israel's military said it was looking into the incident.

Egypt prepares to receive the war-wounded

Rajaa Abu Mustafa stood Monday outside a Gaza hospital where her 17-year-old son Mohamed was awaiting evacuation. He was blinded by a shot to the eye last year as he joined desperate Palestinians seeking food from aid trucks east of the city of Khan Younis.

"We have been waiting for the crossing to open," she said. "Now it's opened and the health ministry called and told us that we will travel to Egypt for (his) treatment."

About 150 hospitals across Egypt are ready to receive Palestinian patients evacuated from Gaza through Rafah, authorities said. Also, the Egyptian Red Crescent said it has readied "safe spaces" on the Egyptian side of the crossing to support those evacuated from the Gaza Strip.

Israel has banned sending patients to hospitals in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem since the war began — a move that cut off what was previously the main outlet for Palestinians needing medical treatment unavailable in Gaza.

Israel has said it and Egypt will vet people for exit and entry through the Rafah crossing, which will be supervised by European Union border patrol agents with a small Palestinian presence. The numbers of travelers are expected to increase over time, if the system is successful.

Fearing that Israel could use the crossing to push Palestinians out of the enclave, Egypt has repeatedly said it must be open for them to enter and exit Gaza. Historically, Israel and Egypt have vetted Palestinians applying to cross.

Palestinian toddler killed by Israeli fire

A 3-year-old Palestinian was killed Monday when Israel navy hit tents sheltering displaced people on the coast of Gaza's southern city of Khan Younis, Palestinian hospital authorities said.

According to the Nasser hospital, which received the body, the attack happened in Muwasi, a tent camp area on the Gaza Strip's coast. The boy was the latest among Palestinians in Gaza since the October ceasefire in Gaza.

More than 520 Palestinians were killed by Israeli fire since the ceasefire went into effect on Oct. 10, according to Gaza's health ministry. The casualties since the ceasefire, which UNICEF said include more than

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100 children, are among the over 71,700 Palestinians killed since the start of Israel's offensive, according to ministry, which does not say how many were fighters or civilians.

The ministry, which is part of Gaza's Hamas-led government, keeps detailed casualty records that are seen as generally reliable by U.N. agencies and independent experts.

Rafah's opening represents ceasefire progress

Israeli troops seized the Rafah crossing in May 2024, calling it part of efforts to combat arms-smuggling for the militant Hamas group. The crossing was briefly opened for the evacuation of medical patients during a ceasefire in early 2025.

Israel had resisted reopening the Rafah crossing, but the recovery of the remains of the last hostage in Gaza cleared the way to move forward.

The reopening is seen as a key step as the U.S.-brokered ceasefire agreement moves into its second phase. In time, Rafah is expected to ramp up operations if the ceasefire holds.

The truce halted more than two years of war between Israel and Hamas that began with the Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023. Its first phase called for the exchange of all hostages held in Gaza for hundreds of Palestinians held by Israel, an increase in badly needed humanitarian aid and a partial pullback of Israeli troops.

The second phase of the ceasefire deal is more complicated. It calls for installing the new Palestinian committee to govern Gaza, deploying an international security force, disarming Hamas and taking steps to begin rebuilding.

## US futures and world shares slip as worries over Trump's Fed chief pick and AI weigh on markets

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

U.S. futures and world shares skidded on Monday as worries over President Donald Trump's nominee to be the next Federal Reserve chair amplified jitters over a possible bubble in the artificial intelligence boom.

South Korea's exchange, which is heavily influenced by tech-related developments, briefly suspended trading as its benchmark Kospi bounced, closing 5.3% lower at 4,949.67. Samsung Electronics gave up 6.3%, while chip maker SK Hynix sank 8.7%.

The Kospi has been forging records for weeks as big tech companies piggybacked on the AI craze with deals with major players like chip maker Nvidia and OpenAI.

In early European trading, Germany's DAX edged less than 0.1% lower to 24,528.57. The CAC 40 in Paris shed 0.2% to 8,108.56, while Britain's FTSE 100 declined 0.3% to 10,195.88.

The future for the S&P 500 sank 0.7%, while that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 0.4%.

Markets took a hit as investors considered how Kevin Warsh, Trump's nominee to lead the Federal Reserve after Fed Chair Jerome Powell's term ends in May might handle interest rates.

Warsh's nomination requires Senate approval. But financial markets fear the Fed may lose some of its independence because of Trump, who has pushed hard for more and faster rate cuts. That fear has helped catapult skyward the price of gold and weaken the U.S. dollar's value over the last year.

"People do not get handed the keys to the most powerful central bank on earth because they plan to drive in the opposite direction of the people who gave them the keys," Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management said in a commentary.

Early Monday, the price of gold fell 1.9%, while silver bounced back slightly, gaining 0.2%. Both plunged Friday as record runs in precious metals markets ground to a halt.

On Friday, the price of gold dropped 11.4%, suddenly losing momentum after a tremendous rally where it roughly doubled over 12 months. It topped \$5,000 for the first time on Jan. 26 and was around \$5,600 at one point on Thursday.

Silver, which had been on a similar, jaw-dropping tear, plunged 31.4%.

U.S. benchmark crude oil lost \$3.46 to \$61.75 per barrel, while Brent crude, the international standard, fell \$3.47 to \$65.85 per barrel.

Speaking to reporters during the weekend, Trump said Iran should negotiate a "satisfactory" deal to prevent the Middle Eastern country from getting any nuclear weapons.

"I don't know that they will. But they are talking to us. Seriously talking to us," he said.

That comment apparently assuaged some worries over potential disruptions to oil supplies that had pushed prices higher, analysts said.

In Tokyo, the Nikkei 225 gave up early gains, sinking 1.3% to 52,655.18.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng dropped 2.2% to 26,775.57, while the Shanghai Composite index sank 2.5% to 4,015.75.

In Australia, the S&P/ASX 200 fell 1% to 8,778.60.

Taiwan's TaieX lost 1.4%.

On Friday, the S&P 500 dropped 0.4% and the Dow lost 0.4%. The Nasdaq composite lost 0.9%.

The Fed chair has a big influence on the economy and markets worldwide by helping to dictate where the U.S. central bank moves interest rates. That affects prices for all kinds of investments, as the Fed tries to keep the U.S. job market humming without letting inflation get out of control.

A report released Friday showed U.S. inflation at the wholesale level was hotter last month than economists expected. That could put pressure on the Fed to keep interest rates steady for a while instead of cutting them, as it did late last year.

The longtime assumption has been that the Fed should operate separately from the rest of Washington so that it can make moves that are painful in the short term but necessary for the long term. To get inflation down to the Fed's goal of 2%, for example, may require the unpopular choice to keep interest rates high and grind down on the economy for a while.

In other action early Monday, the dollar fell to 154.88 Japanese yen from 154.94 yen. The euro was unchanged at \$1.1853.

## **Iran summons EU ambassadors to protest Revolutionary Guard being listed as terror group**

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran said Monday it had summoned all of the European Union ambassadors in the Islamic Republic to protest the bloc's listing of the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard as a terror group.

The move comes as Iran faces the threat of U.S. military action in response to the killing of peaceful demonstrators and over possible mass executions. The American military has moved the USS Abraham Lincoln and several guided-missile destroyers into the Mideast. It remains unclear whether President Donald Trump will decide to use force, though regional countries have engaged in diplomacy in an effort to halt a new Mideast war breaking out.

"Trump is trying to calibrate a response to Iran's mass killing of protesters that punishes Iranian leaders without also embroiling the United States in a new, open-ended conflict in the region," the New York-based Soufan Center think tank said Monday.

"Some Trump aides seek to exploit Tehran's weakness to secure major concessions from the regime, but Trump has set conditions for a diplomatic resolution that Tehran cannot accept."

EU sanctions draw Iran's anger

The EU agreed to list the Guard as a terror group last week over its part in the bloody crackdown on nationwide protests in January that killed thousands and saw tens of thousands detained.

Other countries, including the U.S. and Canada, have previously designated the Guard as a terrorist organization. While the move is largely symbolic, it does add to the economic pressure squeezing Iran, particularly as the Guard has a major influence on the country's economy.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei told journalists that the ambassadors had begun to be summoned on Sunday and that process went into Monday as well.

"A series of actions were reviewed, various options are being prepared and were sent to the related

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decision-making bodies," Baghaei said. "We think that in coming days, a decision will be made about a reciprocal action by the Islamic Republic of Iran toward the illegal, unreasonable and very wrong move by the EU."

Also Sunday, Iran's parliament speaker said that the Islamic Republic now considers all European Union militaries to be terrorist groups, citing a 2019 law.

The Guard emerged from Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution as a force meant to protect the Shiite cleric-overseen government and was later enshrined in its constitution. Operating in parallel with the country's regular armed forces, it grew in prominence and power during a long and ruinous war with Iraq in the 1980s. Though it faced possible disbandment after the war, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei granted it powers to expand into private enterprise, allowing it to thrive.

The Guard's Basij force likely was key in putting down the demonstrations, starting in earnest from Jan. 8, when authorities cut off the internet and international telephone calls for the nation of 85 million people. Videos that have come out of Iran via Starlink satellite dishes and other means show men likely belonging to its forces shooting and beating protesters.

Guard drill in Strait of Hormuz 'ongoing'

Meanwhile, Baghaei also said a drill by the Guard in the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which a fifth of all oil traded passes, was "ongoing based on its timetable." Iran warned ships last week that a drill would be carried out on Sunday and Monday, but prior to Baghaei's comments had not not acknowledged it taking place. The U.S. military's Central Command issued a strong warning to Iran not to harass its warships and aircraft, or impede commercial vessels moving through the strait.

Satellite photos taken Sunday by Planet Labs PBC and analyzed by The Associated Press showed small vessels moving at speed in the strait between Iran's Qeshm and Hengam islands, some distance away from the corridor commercial vessels take. The Guard relies on a fleet of small, fast-attack ships in the strait.

Asked about whether Iran could face a war, Baghaei told the public "don't worry at all." He declined, however, to discuss whether Trump set a deadline for Iran to respond to America's demands.

## Bad Bunny wins album of the year at the 2026 Grammy Awards, a first for a Spanish-language album

By MARIA SHERMAN AP Music Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Bad Bunny won album of the year at the 2026 Grammy Awards for his critically-acclaimed "Debí Tirar Más Fotos," closing out a surprising and history-making night. It is the first time a Spanish-language album has taken home the top prize.

"Puerto Rico, believe me when I tell you that we are much bigger than 100 by 35," he said in his acceptance speech in Spanish, referring to a Puerto Rican colloquialism about the island's small size. "And there is nothing we can't achieve. Thank God, thank you to the Academy, thank you to all the people who have believed in me throughout my career.

"To all the people who worked on this album, thank you mami for giving birth to me in Puerto Rico, I love you," he continued.

Then he switched to English: "I want to dedicate this award to all the people who had to leave their homeland to follow their dreams."

Harry Styles presented the award — the English singer previously took home the top prize in 2023 for "Harry's House." He beat Bad Bunny that year, who was nominated for "Un Verano Sin Ti" -- the first Spanish-language album to be up in the category.

Anti-ICE messages from the stage

Billie Eilish won song of the year for "Wildflower" and used the moment to add her voice to the chorus of musicians criticizing immigration authorities Sunday.

"No one is illegal on stolen land," she said while accepting the award for the song from her 2024 album "Hit Me Hard and Soft." "(Expletive) ICE is all I want to say."

Immigration was a central theme of the night. The first time Bad Bunny was on stage — after winning

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the award for música urbana album — he used his speech to share an anti-ICE message, highlighting the humanity of all people.

"Before I say thanks to God, I'm going to say ICE out," he said, starting out his speech in English to huge applause. "We're not savage, we're not animals, we're not aliens. We are humans and we are Americans."

Before that, Olivia Dean was named best new artist.

"I never really imagined that I would be up here," she said, receiving her first Grammy while wiping away tears. "I'm up here as a granddaughter of an immigrant. I wouldn't be here ... I am a product of bravery, and I think that those people deserve to be celebrated."

Those statements all aired live on the CBS telecast. Earlier in the day, at the Premiere Ceremony where 86 Grammys are handed out, artists were equally as pointed about ICE and immigration enforcement.

Shaboozey accepted the award for country duo/group performance with tears in his eyes. "I want to thank my mother, who as of today, has retired from her job of 30 years ... working as a registered nurse in a psych ward ... as an immigrant in this country. Thank you, mom.

"Immigrants built this country, literally, actually. So, this for them," he concluded. "Thank you for bring your culture, your music and your stories."

Kehlani, after winning her first Grammy, ended her acceptance speech with "Imma leave this and say, (expletive) ICE."

"I'm scared," Gloria Estefan said of the current political moment backstage at the Grammys. "There are hundreds of children in detention centers. ... I don't recognize my country in this moment right now."

Kendrick Lamar, Lady Gaga, Jelly Roll and more win big

Kendrick Lamar and SZA won record of the year at an electric 2026 Grammy Awards Sunday night for "Luther."

Cher presented the award and mistakenly said it goes to "Luther Vandross" instead of Kendrick Lamar and SZA.

One of the song's producers, Sounwave, began the acceptance speech by saying, "Let's give a shoutout to the late and great Luther Vandross."

Lamar also won the first televised award of the night, rap album for "GNX," accepting the trophy from Queen Latifah and DoeChii.

"It's an honor to be here," he said in his acceptance speech. "Hip-hop is always going to be right here ... We're gonna be having the culture with us."

The victory means Lamar broke Jay-Z's record to become the rapper with the most career Grammys. Jay-Z has 25; after he took home rap album and record of the year, Lamar's total is 27.

Pop vocal album went to Lady Gaga for "Mayhem," while pop solo performance went to Lola Young for "Messy," whose speech playfully lived up to the song's spirit.

"I don't know what to say," she joked about "obviously" not having a speech prepared. "I'm very, very grateful for this."

The inaugural contemporary country album category went to Jelly Roll for "Beautifully Broken."

This year, the Grammys renamed country album to contemporary country album and added a traditional country album category, a distinction that exists in other genres. But the news arrived right after Beyoncé's "Cowboy Carter" won best country album, inspiring backlash online.

"I believe music had the power to change my life," Jelly Roll said in his acceptance speech, which he spent the majority of thanking God.

Pharrell Williams received the Dr. Dre Global Impact Award.

"To everyone in this room who believes in the power of Black music," he said, "thank you so much."

A live concert experience

A powerful Grammy Awards in memoriam segment celebrated the legacies of the late D'Angelo and Roberta Flack at the 68th annual ceremony Sunday night.

Ms. Lauryn Hill appeared on the Grammy stage for the first time since 1999, when she became the first hip-hop artist to win album of the year for her "The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill."

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The D'Angelo tribute was first: A medley of several songs, among them "Brown Sugar" with Lucky Daye, "Lady" with Raphael Saadiq and Anthony Hamilton and "Devil's Pie" with Leon Thomas.

Then, Hill focused her attention on Roberta Flack: "First Time Ever I Saw Your Face" with Jon Batiste, "Where Is The Love" with John Legend and Chaka Khan, and a mesh of "Feel Like Makin' Love" and "Killing Me Softly with His Song" with her Fugees bandmate Wyclef Jean.

If there was one set that felt like an avant-garde artistic performance piece on Sunday night, it was Tyler, the Creator's medley of "Thought I Was Dead," "Like Him," (in which he was joined by Regina King) and "Sugar On My Tongue." It played out like theater: others would be wise to take note.

All eight nominees in the best new artist category participated in a medley at the award show across multiple stages, the back halls of the arena and even the venue's loading dock. It was an interesting and impressive mod-podge of different styles, from the British soul of Young and Dean to Addison Rae and Katseye's hypnotic pop. The Marias kicked things off with their dreamy indie rock; sombr and Alex Warren offered their radio hits — "12 to 12" and "Ordinary" respectively. Leon Thomas reminded the audience why he's the only nominee also up for album of the year with his fully formed R&B.

The hits arrived fast and furious in the show's first hour. Rosé and Bruno Mars' opened Grammys with an electric rendition of their multicultural pop smash, "APT."; the Blackpink singer channeled a pop-punk Gwen Stefani in her tie and platinum blond hair. Sabrina Carpenter with her "Manchild" kiss-off. Justin Bieber slowed things down with "Yukon" from his comeback record "Swag." Lady Gaga reimaged her hit "Abracadabra" as an electro-rock song.

First-time winners were abundant — even before the show started

During the Premiere Ceremony, the Dalai Lama won his first Grammy for audio book, narration and storytelling recording, beating out Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson. You read that correctly.

"Golden" from "KPop Demon Hunters" won song written for visual media at the Premiere Ceremony, marking the first time a K-pop act has won a Grammy. Songwriters delivered their acceptance speech in both English and Korean, highlighting the song's bilingual appeal.

Music film went to "Music for John Williams," which means director Steven Spielberg has officially won his first Grammy. That makes him an EGOT winner — an artist with an Emmy, Grammy, Tony and Oscar.

## Did artificial intelligence really drive layoffs at Amazon and other firms? It can be hard to tell

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

The one thing N. Lee Plumb knows for sure about being laid off from Amazon last week is that it wasn't a failure to get on board with the company's artificial intelligence plans.

Plumb, his team's head of "AI enablement," says he was so prolific in his use of Amazon's new AI coding tool that the company flagged him as one of its top users.

Many assumed Amazon's 16,000 corporate layoffs announced last week reflected CEO Andy Jassy's push to "reduce our total corporate workforce as we get efficiency gains from using AI extensively across the company."

But like other companies that have tied workforce changes to AI — including Expedia, Pinterest and Dow last week — it can be hard for economists, or individual employees like Plumb, to know if AI is the real reason behind the layoffs or if it's the message a company wants to tell Wall Street.

"AI has to drive a return on investment," said Plumb, who worked at Amazon for eight years. "When you reduce head count, you've demonstrated efficiency, you attract more capital, the share price goes up."

"So you could potentially have just been bloated in the first place, reduce head count, attribute it to AI, and now you've got a value story," he said.

Plumb is atypical for an Amazon worker in that he's also running what he describes as a "long shot" bid for Congress in Texas, on a platform focused on stopping the tech industry's reliance on work visas to "replace American workers with cheaper foreign labor."

But whatever it was that cost Plumb his job, his skepticism about AI-driven job replacement is one shared

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by many economists.

"We just don't know," said Karan Girotra, a professor of management at Cornell University's business school. "Not because AI isn't great, but because it requires a lot of adjustment and most of the gains accrue to individual employees rather than to the organization. People save time and they get their work done earlier."

If an employer works faster because of AI, Girotra said it takes time to adjust a company's management structure in a way that would enable a smaller workforce. He's not convinced that's happening at Amazon, which he said is still scaling back from a glut of hiring during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A report by Goldman Sachs said AI's overall impact on the labor market remains limited, though some effects might be felt in "specific occupations like marketing, graphic design, customer service, and especially tech." Those are fields involving tasks that correlate with the strengths of the current crop of generative AI chatbots that can write emails and marketing pitches, produce synthetic images, answer questions and help write code.

But the bank's economic research division said in its most recent monthly AI adoption tracker that, since December, "very few employees were affected by corporate layoffs attributed to AI," though the report was published Jan. 16, before Amazon, Dow and Pinterest announced their layoffs.

San Francisco-based Pinterest was the most explicit in asserting that AI drove it to cut up to 15% of its workforce. The social media company said it was "making organizational changes to further deliver on our AI-forward strategy, which includes hiring AI-proficient talent. As a result, we've made the difficult decision to say goodbye to some of our team members."

Pinterest echoed that message in a regulatory disclosure that said the company was "reallocating resources to AI-focused roles and teams that drive AI adoption and execution."

Expedia has voiced a similar message but the 162 tech workers the travel website cut from its Seattle headquarters last week included several AI-specific roles, such as machine-learning scientists.

Dow's regulatory disclosures tied its 4,500 layoffs to a new plan "utilizing AI and automation" to increase productivity and improve shareholder returns.

Amazon's 16,000 corporate job cuts were part of a broader reduction of employees at the ecommerce giant. At the same time as those cuts, all believed to be office jobs, Amazon said it would cut about 5,000 retail workers, according to notices it sent to state workforce agencies in California, Maryland and Washington, resulting from its decision to close almost all of its Amazon Go and Amazon Fresh stores.

That's on top of a round of 14,000 job cuts in October, bringing the total to well over 30,000 since Jassy first signaled a push for AI-driven organizational changes.

Like many companies, in technology and otherwise, but particularly those that make and sell AI tools and services, Amazon has been pushing its workforce to find more efficiencies with AI.

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg said last week that 2026 will be when "AI starts to dramatically change the way that we work."

"We're investing in AI-native tooling so individuals at Meta can get more done, we're elevating individual contributors, and flattening teams," he said on an earnings call. "We're starting to see projects that used to require big teams now be accomplished by a single very talented person."

So far, Meta's layoffs this year have focused on cutting jobs from its virtual reality and metaverse divisions. Also driving job impacts is the industry shifting resources to AI development, which requires huge spending on computer chips, energy-hungry data centers and talent.

Jassy told Amazon employees last June to be "curious about AI, educate yourself, attend workshops and take trainings, use and experiment with AI whenever you can, participate in your team's brainstorms to figure out how to invent for our customers more quickly and expansively, and how to get more done with scrappier teams."

Plumb was fully on board with that and said he demonstrated his proficiency in using Amazon's AI coding tool, Kiro, to "solve massive problems" in the company's compensation system.

"If you weren't using them, your manager would get a report and they would talk to you about using it,"

he said. "There were only five people in the entire company that were a higher user of Kiro than I was, or had achieved more milestones."

Now he's shifting gears to his candidacy among a field of Republicans in the Houston area looking to unseat U.S. Rep. Dan Crenshaw in the March primary.

Cornell's Girotra said it's possible that increasing AI productivity is leading companies to cut middle management, but he said the reality is that those making layoff decisions "just need to cut costs and make it happen. That's it. I don't think they care what the reason for that is."

Not all companies are signaling AI as a reason for cuts. Home Depot confirmed on Thursday that it was eliminating 800 roles tied to its corporate headquarters in Atlanta, though most of the affected employees worked remotely.

Home Depot's spokesman George Lane said that Home Depot's cuts were not driven by AI or automation but "truly about speed, agility" and serving the needs of its customers and front-line workers.

And exercise equipment maker Peloton confirmed on Friday that it is reducing its workforce by 11% as part of a broader cost-cutting move under its CEO Peter Stern to pare down operating expenses.

## Speaker Johnson faces tough choices as partial government shutdown drags and debate over ICE deepens

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Speaker Mike Johnson faces tough days ahead trying to muscle a federal funding package to passage and prevent a prolonged partial government shutdown as debate intensifies over the Trump administration's sweeping immigration enforcement operations.

Johnson signaled he is relying on help from President Donald Trump to ensure passage. Trump struck a deal with senators to separate funding for the Department of Homeland Security from a broader package after public outrage over two shooting deaths during protests in Minneapolis against Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Under the plan approved by the Senate, DHS would be funded temporarily to Feb. 13, setting up a deadline for Congress to try to find consensus on new restrictions on ICE operations.

"The president is leading this," Johnson, R-La., told "Fox News Sunday."

"It's his play call to do it this way," the speaker said, adding that the Republican president has "already conceded that he wants to turn down the volume" on federal immigration sweeps and raids.

A first test will come Monday afternoon during a committee meeting when Johnson will need his own GOP majority to advance the package after Democrats refused to provide the votes for speedy consideration. Johnson said he is hopeful work can wrap up for a full House vote, at least by Tuesday.

Democrats dig in on ICE changes

Democrats are demanding restraints on ICE that go beyond \$20 million for body cameras that already is in the bill and want to require that federal immigration agents unmask and identify themselves and are pressing for an end to roving patrols, amid other changes.

"What is clear is that the Department of Homeland Security needs to be dramatically reformed," said House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York on ABC's "This Week."

Jeffries said the administration needs to begin negotiations now, not over the next two weeks, on changes to immigration enforcement operations.

"Masks should come off," he said. "Judicial warrants should absolutely be required consistent with the Constitution, in our view, before DHS agents or ICE agents are breaking into the homes of the American people or ripping people out of their cars."

Republicans make their own demands

At the same time, House Republicans, with some allies in the Senate, are making their own demands, as they work to support Trump's clamp down on immigrants in the U.S.

The House Freedom Caucus has insisted on fuller funding for Homeland Security while certain Republicans are pushing to include other measures, including the SAVE Act, a longshot Trump priority that would require proof of citizenship before Americans are eligible to participate in elections and vote.

Johnson said he would be talking to lawmakers over the day ahead to see what it will take to win over support.

Partial government shutdown drags on

Meanwhile, a number of federal agencies are snared in the funding standoff as the government went into a partial shutdown over the weekend.

Defense, health, transportation and housing are among those that were given shutdown guidance by the administration, though many operations are deemed essential and services are not necessarily interrupted. Workers could go without pay if the impasse drags on. Some could be furloughed.

Lawmakers from both parties are increasingly concerned the closure will disrupt the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which they rely on to help constituents in the states after storms and other disasters.

This is the second time in a matter of months that federal government operations have been disrupted as Congress is using the annual funding process as leverage to extract policy changes. Last fall, Democrats sparked what became the longest federal shutdown in history, 43 days, as they protested the expiration of health insurance tax breaks.

That shutdown ended with a promise to vote on proposals to extend the Affordable Care Act tax credits. But with GOP opposition, Democrats were unable to achieve their goal of keeping the subsidies in place. Insurance premiums spiked in the new year for millions of people.

Trump wants quick end to shutdown

This time, the administration has signaled its interest in more quickly resolving the shutdown.

Johnson said he was in the Oval Office last week when Trump, along with border czar Tom Homan, spoke with Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York to work out a deal on immigration enforcement changes.

"I think we're on the path to get agreement," Johnson said on NBC's "Meet the Press."

Body cameras, which are already provided for in the package, and an end to the roving patrols by immigration agents are areas of potential agreement, Johnson said.

But he said taking the masks off and putting names on agents' uniforms could lead to problems for law enforcement officers as they are being targeted by the protesters and their personal information is posted online.

"I don't think the president would approve it — and he shouldn't," Johnson said on Fox.

Democrats, however, said the immigration operations are out of control, and must end in Minneapolis and other cities.

Growing numbers of lawmakers are calling for Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem to be fired or impeached.

"What is happening in Minnesota right now is a dystopia," said Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., who led efforts to hold the line for more changes.

"ICE is making this country less safe, not more safe today," Murphy said on "Fox News Sunday."

"Our focus over the next two weeks has to be reining in a lawless and immoral immigration agency."

## **Kennedy Center to close for 2 years for renovations in July, Trump says, after performers' backlash**

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Sunday he will move to close Washington's Kennedy Center performing arts center for two years starting in July for construction, his latest proposal to upturn the storied venue since returning to the White House.

Trump's announcement on social media follows a wave of cancellations by leading performers, musicians and groups since the president ousted the previous leadership and added his name to the building. Trump made no mention in his post of the recent cancellations.

His proposal, announced days after the premiere of "Melania," a documentary of the first lady was

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shown at the center, he said was subject to approval by the board of the Kennedy Center, which has been stocked with his hand-picked allies. Trump himself chairs the center's board of trustees.

"This important decision, based on input from many Highly Respected Experts, will take a tired, broken, and dilapidated Center, one that has been in bad condition, both financially and structurally for many years, and turn it into a World Class Bastion of Arts, Music, and Entertainment," Trump wrote in his post.

Neither Trump nor Kennedy Center President Ric Grenell, a Trump ally, have provided evidence to back up their claims about the building being in disrepair, and last October, Trump had pledged the center would remain open during renovations. In Sunday's announcement, Trump said the center will close on July 4th, when he said the construction would begin.

"Our goal has always been to not only save and permanently preserve the Center, but to make it the finest Arts Institution in the world," Grenell said in a post, citing funds Congress approved for repairs.

"This will be a brief closure," Grenell said. "It desperately needs this renovation and temporarily closing the Center just makes sense - it will enable us to better invest our resources, think bigger and make the historic renovations more comprehensive. It also means we will be finished faster."

The sudden decision to shutter and reconstruct the Kennedy Center is sparking blowback as Trump disrupts the popular venue, which began as a national cultural center but Congress renamed as a "living memorial" to President John F. Kennedy in 1964, in the aftermath of the slain president's death. Opened in 1971, it is open year-round as a public showcase for the arts, including the National Symphony Orchestra.

Since Trump returned to the White House, the Kennedy Center is one of many Washington landmarks that he has sought to overhaul in his second term. He demolished the East Wing of the White House and launched a massive \$400 million ballroom project, is actively pursuing building a triumphal arch on the other side the Arlington Bridge from the the Lincoln Memorial, and has plans for Washington Dulles International Airport.

Leading performing arts groups have pulled out of appearances at the Kennedy Center, most recently, composer Philip Glass, who announced his decision to withdraw his Symphony No. 15 "Lincoln" because he said the values of the center today are in "direct conflict" with the message of the piece.

Last month, the Washington National Opera announced that it will move performances away from the Kennedy Center in another high-profile departure following Trump's takeover of the U.S. capital's leading performing arts venue.

The head of artistic programming for the center abruptly left his post last week, less than two weeks after being named to the job.

A spokesperson for the Kennedy Center could not immediately be reached and did not respond to an emailed request for comment.

Late last year, as Trump announced his plan to rename the building — erecting his name on the building's main front ahead of that of Kennedy — he drew sharp opposition from members of Congress, and some Kennedy family members.

Kerry Kennedy, a niece of John F. Kennedy, said in a social post on X at the time that she will remove Trump's name herself with a pickax when his term ends.

Another family member, Maria Shriver, said at the time that it is "beyond comprehension that this sitting president has sought to rename this great memorial dedicated to President Kennedy," her uncle. "It is beyond wild that he would think adding his name in front of President Kennedy's name is acceptable. It is not."

Late Sunday evening, Shriver posted a new comment mimicking Trump's own voice and style, and suggesting the closure of the venue was meant to deflect from the cancellations.

She said that "entertainers are canceling left and right" and the president has determined that "since the name change no one wants to perform there any longer."

Trump has decided, she said, it's best "to close this center down and rebuild a new center" that will bear his name. She asked, "right?"

One lawmaker, Rep. Joyce Beatty, the Ohio Democrat and ex-officio trustee of the center's board, sued in December, arguing that "only Congress has the authority to rename the Kennedy Center."

On Sunday, Beatty said that once again Trump "has acted with total disregard for Congress," which allocates funds to the center.

She questioned what comes next for the artists — and the building itself. "Let's be clear: remodeling the premises will not restore the Kennedy Center to what it was. A return to artistic independence will," she said. "America's artists are rejecting this attempted takeover, and the administration knows it."

## **5-year-old Liam Conejo Ramos and father return to Minnesota from ICE facility in Texas**

By JACK DURA Associated Press

Five-year-old Liam Conejo Ramos and his father, who were detained by immigration officers in Minnesota and held at an ICE facility in Texas, were released following a judge's order and returned to Minnesota on Sunday, according to Texas Rep. Joaquin Castro.

The boy and his dad, Adrian Conejo Arias, who originally is from Ecuador, were detained in a Minneapolis suburb on Jan. 20. They were taken to a detention facility in Dilley, Texas.

Katherine Schneider, a spokesperson for the Democratic congressman, confirmed the two had arrived home. She said Castro picked them up from Dilley on Saturday night and escorted them home on Sunday to Minnesota.

Images of immigration officers surrounding the young boy in a blue bunny hat and Spider-Man backpack drew outrage about the Trump administration's crackdown in Minneapolis.

U.S. Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin said in a statement that Immigration and Customs Enforcement did not target or arrest the boy, and repeated assertions that his mother refused to take him after his father's apprehension. His father told officers he wanted Liam to be with him, she said.

Neighbors and school officials have accused federal immigration officers of using the preschooler as "bait" by telling him to knock on the door to his house so that his mother would come outside. DHS has called that description of events an "object lie." It said the father fled on foot and left the boy in a running vehicle in their driveway.

The government said the boy's father entered the U.S. illegally from Ecuador in December 2024. The family's lawyer said he has an asylum claim pending that allows him to stay in the U.S.

The Justice Department's Executive Office for Immigration Review's online court docket shows no future hearings for Liam's father.

The vast majority of asylum-seekers are released in the United States, with adults having eligibility for work permits, while their cases wind through a backlogged court system. Ecuadorians, who left in droves in recent years as their country spiraled into violence, have fared poorly in immigration court, with judges granting asylum in 12.5% of decisions in the 12-month period through September, according to the Trans-Actional Records Access Clearinghouse.

In ordering the release of Liam and his father, U.S. District Judge Fred Biery blasted the administration, writing, "The case has its genesis in the ill-conceived and incompetently-implemented government pursuit of daily deportation quotas, apparently even if it requires traumatizing children."

Residents celebrate release

On Sunday afternoon, residents of Columbia Heights, Minnesota, gathered outside the house where Liam was detained to celebrate his release and call attention to others from the community who remained in ICE detention.

"We cried so much when we heard that he was coming back," said Lourdes Sanchez, the owner of a cleaning business. "My son is also named Liam, and he is five years old, so it felt personal for us."

Nearby, Luis Zuna held up photographs of his 10-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, who he said had been detained, along with her mother, Rosa, while driving to school on Jan. 6. He said they both remained in custody at the same facility where Liam and his father were held.

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"It's the same situation as Liam, but there were no pictures," said Carolina Gutierrez, who works as a secretary at the school that Elizabeth attended. "Seeing Liam released, it gives us faith."

Inquiries to DHS about that case were not immediately returned.

Brenda Marquez, another nearby resident, said she had driven with her husband and two young children to the house immediately upon hearing news of Liam's release, stopping on the way to pick up Spiderman balloons. "We wanted something that would bring a little happiness," she said. "Being away from my son and not knowing what's going on with him, I just can't imagine it."

Congressman writes letter to Liam

Castro wrote a letter to Liam while they were on the plane to Minnesota, in which he told the young boy he has "moved the world."

"Your family, school and many strangers said prayers for you and offered whatever they could do to see you back home," Castro wrote. A photo of the letter was posted on the congressman's social media accounts. "Don't let anyone tell you this isn't your home. America became the most powerful, prosperous nation on earth because of immigrants not in spite of them."

Photos on Castro's accounts showed Liam wearing his blue bunny hat and a Pikachu backpack.

U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar, a Democrat from Minnesota, welcomed the boy back to Minnesota, saying in a social media post that he "should be in school and with family — not in detention." The senator added: "Now ICE needs to leave."

U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar, also a Democrat from Minnesota, posted a photo to social media of her with Liam, his father and Castro in which she is holding Liam's Spider-Man backpack. "Welcome home Liam," she posted with two hearts.

In a statement, Columbia Heights Public Schools called Liam's release "an important development," one that school officials hope will have positive developments for four other Columbia Heights students held at the same facility in Texas.

## More frigid temperatures expected in much of US after a weekend of heavy snow

By ADRIAN SAINZ Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — Forecasters warned that dangerous extra-cold conditions will persist into Monday morning for a huge swath of the U.S. from the Gulf Coast into New England that was cleaning up after a weekend bomb cyclone brought heavy snow and flight cancellations to North Carolina and flurries and falling iguanas in Florida.

Temperatures will begin inching up throughout the day but more misery was expected for thousands who were still without power from the ice storm last month in the South.

About 150 million people were under cold weather advisories and extreme cold warnings Sunday in the eastern portion of the U.S., with single-digit temperatures in southern states and the coldest air mass in South Florida since December 1989, said Peter Mullinax, a National Weather Service meteorologist in College Park, Maryland.

Heavy snowfall in North Carolina

The National Weather Service office for Raleigh, North Carolina, warned that wind chills will drop early Monday to near zero Fahrenheit (-17 Celsius). "Snow and ice will linger, with refreezing tonight making travel hazardous," the office said Sunday on social media. "Use caution on roads and dress in warm layers."

In eastern North Carolina, James City recorded 18 inches (45 centimeters) of snow, while Swansboro recorded 17 inches (43 centimeters), the weather service reported.

The bomb cyclone, known to meteorologists as an intense, rapidly strengthening weather system, contributed to nearly a foot (30 centimeters) of snow in and around Charlotte, North Carolina's largest city. The snowfall represented a top-five snow event all time there, Mullinax said.

Flight cancellations exceeded 2,800 in the U.S. on Saturday, with at least another 1,800 on Sunday, according to FlightAware, a flight tracking and data company. More than 800 of those Sunday cancellations

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were for flights departing from or arriving at Charlotte Douglas International Airport.

The storm caused an hourslong mess on Interstate 85 northeast of the city, after a crash left dozens of semitractors and other vehicles backed up into Saturday evening, according to the State Highway Patrol. More than 1,000 traffic collisions and two road deaths were reported, North Carolina Gov. Josh Stein said Sunday.

"It's an impressive cold shot, for sure, and there are daily records that are being seen down in the South," Mullinax said.

### Freezing temperatures in the Sunshine State

The Tampa-St. Petersburg area in Florida saw snow flurries, while temperatures dropped to the 20s in the Panhandle and 30s in South Florida on Sunday. That left cold-stunned iguanas lying motionless on the ground. Iguanas in South Florida go dormant in the cold and though they usually wake when temperatures warm, the reptiles can die after more than a day of extreme cold.

The cold also left ice on strawberries and oranges in the state. Farmers in Florida sometimes spray water on fruit trees and berry plants to protect them from the cold.

More than 110 deaths connected to the wintry weather and storms have been reported around the U.S. since late January. In Tennessee and Mississippi, two states struck by a previous storm carrying snow and ice, more than 81,000 customers were still without electricity by Sunday evening, according to the outage tracking website [poweroutage.us](http://poweroutage.us).

Nashville Electric Service said it expects 90% of its customers to have power restored Tuesday, with 99% getting electricity back by next Sunday, two weeks after the earlier storm hit. Gov. Bill Lee said he shared "strong concerns" with leadership of the utility, which has defended its response and said the storm was unprecedented.

Mississippi officials said it was the state's worst winter storm since 1994. About 80 warming centers were opened and National Guard troops delivered supplies by truck and helicopter.

Jamita Washington, a resident of Vicksburg, Mississippi, said she lost power in the previous storm and spent a three nights at a hotel with her son before her electricity was restored Thursday.

However, one of her two furnaces froze over and she has taken up sleeping on the living room sofa since returning home to freezing temperatures at night.

"It's been frustrating, but I look at it like this: There's people in a worse position than we are," she said. "I know a few homeless people, so I just look at it like we're technically blessed."

### One house shook and another collapsed

In Kitty Hawk on North Carolina's Outer Banks, Susan Sawin said her house got a "whopping" amount of snow and strong winds that reminded her of a nor'easter.

"It was blowing around like crazy," said Sawin, 63. "It was a roaring wind ... The house shook."

She has a snow drift about 2 feet (.6 meters) high outside her house, but she did not lose power. Sawin said she was thankful there was sufficient warning from officials ahead of the "bomb cyclone."

"That is what it felt like, with the wind and driving snow last night," she said. "That's an accurate description."

An owner of three book stores, she closed her businesses over the weekend and plans to remain shut Monday as well.

"We rarely close for a whole day," she said. "This past August, we had a hurricane brush by, and I think we opened late one day. It's pretty unusual to close for three days in a row."

Also in North Carolina, officials said an unoccupied beachfront house in the Buxton community on Hatteras Island collapsed in heavy surf Sunday.

Mullinax said parts of the Carolinas are going to be "digging out" for several days as they contend with gusty winds and bitterly cold wind chills. Heading into Tuesday and Wednesday, light snow could fall in the Ohio Valley and the mid-Atlantic, from Washington and possibly into New York City, he said.

## Top Justice Department official plays down chance for charges arising from Epstein files revelations

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A top Justice Department official played down the possibility of additional criminal charges arising from the Jeffrey Epstein files, saying Sunday that the existence of “horrible photographs” and troubling email correspondence does not “allow us necessarily to prosecute somebody.”

Department officials said over the summer that a review of Epstein-related records did not establish a basis for new criminal investigations, and Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche said that position remains unchanged even as a massive document dump since Friday has focused fresh attention on Epstein’s links to powerful individuals around the world and revived questions about what, if any, knowledge the wealthy financier’s associates had about his crimes.

“There’s a lot of correspondence. There’s a lot of emails. There’s a lot of photographs. There’s a lot of horrible photographs that appear to be taken by Mr. Epstein or people around him,” Blanche said Sunday on CNN’s “State of the Union.” “But that doesn’t allow us necessarily to prosecute somebody.”

He said victims of Epstein’s sex abuse “want to be made whole,” but that “doesn’t mean we can just create evidence or that we can just kind of come up with a case that isn’t there.”

President Donald Trump’s Justice Department said Friday that it would be releasing more than 3 million pages of documents and more than 2,000 videos and 180,000 images under a law intended to reveal most of the material it collected during long-running investigations into Epstein.

The fallout from the release of the files has been swift.

In the United Kingdom, Lord Peter Mandelson announced his resignation from the governing Labour Party on Sunday following further revelations about his relationship with Epstein. He said he was stepping aside to avoid causing “further embarrassment,” even as he denied allegations he had received payments from Epstein two decades ago.

A top official in Slovakia, meanwhile, left his position after photos and emails revealed he had met with Epstein in the years after Epstein was released from jail. And British Prime Minister Keir Starmer suggested that longtime Epstein friend Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, formerly known as Prince Andrew, should tell U.S. investigators whatever he knows about Epstein’s activities.

The revelations continue

The files posted to the department’s website included documents involving Epstein’s friendship with Mountbatten-Windsor, along with Epstein’s email correspondence with onetime Trump adviser Steve Bannon, New York Giants co-owner Steve Tisch and other prominent contacts with people in political, business and philanthropic circles, such as billionaires Bill Gates and Elon Musk.

The Epstein saga has long fueled public fascination in part because of his past friendships with Trump and former President Bill Clinton. Both men have said they had no knowledge Epstein was abusing underage girls.

Among the records was a spreadsheet created last August that summarized calls made to the FBI’s National Threat Operation Center or to a hotline set up by prosecutors from people claiming to have some knowledge of wrongdoing by Trump. That document included a range of uncorroborated stories involving different celebrities, and somewhat fantastical scenarios, occasionally with notations indicating what follow-up, if any, was done by agents.

Blanche said Sunday that there were a “ton of people” named in the files besides Trump and that the FBI had fielded “hundreds of calls” about prominent individuals where the allegations were “quickly determined to not be credible.”

Some of Epstein’s personal email correspondence contained candid discussions with others about his penchant for paying women for sex, even after he served jail time for soliciting an underage prostitute. Epstein killed himself in a New York jail in August 2019, a month after being indicted on federal sex trafficking charges.

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In one 2013 email, a person whose name was blacked out wrote to Epstein about his choice "to surround yourself with these young women in a capacity that bleeds — perhaps, somewhat arbitrarily — from the professional into the personal and back."

"Though these women are young, they are not too young to know that they are making a very particular choice in taking on this role with you," the person wrote. "Especially in the aftermath of your trial which, after all, was public and could be — indeed was — interpreted as a powerful man taking advantage of powerless young women, instead of the other way around."

In a 2009 email, not long after Epstein had finished serving jail time for his Florida sex crime, another woman, whose name was redacted, excoriated him for breaking a promise that they would spend time alone together and try to conceive a baby.

"I find myself having to question every agreement we have made (no prostitutes staying in the house, in our bed, movies, naps, two weeks Alone, baby...)," She wrote. "Your last minute suggestion to spend THIS weekend with prostitutes is just too much for me to handle. I can't live like this anymore."

'This review is over'

Blanche said in a separate appearance on ABC's "This Week" that though there are a "small number of documents" the Justice Department was waiting for a judge's approval before it can release, when it comes to the department's own scouring of documents, "this review is over."

"We reviewed over six million pieces of paper, thousands of videos, tens of thousands of images," Blanche said.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., told NBC's "Meet the Press" on Sunday that he believed the Justice Department was complying with the law requiring disclosure of the files.

But Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., a co-sponsor of the law, said he did not believe the department had fully complied. He said survivors were upset some of their names had inadvertently come out without redactions.

Blanche said each time the department has learned a victim's name was not properly redacted, it has moved quickly to fix the problem and that those mistakes account for a tiny fraction of the overall materials.

## Gaza's crucial Rafah crossing prepares for limited travel to resume Monday

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Palestinians in Gaza watched with hope and impatience Sunday as workers laid the groundwork to reopen the territory's Rafah border crossing with Egypt, its lifeline to the world. Israel says the crossing is scheduled to resume Monday as its ceasefire with Hamas moves ahead.

"Opening the crossing is a good step, but they set a limit on the number of people allowed to cross, and this is a problem," said Ghalia Abu Mustafa, a woman from Khan Younis.

Israel said the crossing had opened in a test, and the Israeli military agency that controls aid to Gaza said residents could begin crossing Monday. But only a small number of people can cross at first.

"We want a large number of people to leave, for it to be open so that sick people can go and return," said Suhaila Al-Astal, a woman displaced from the city of Rafah who said her sick daughter needed help abroad. "We want the crossing to be open permanently."

Israel's announcement came a day after Israeli strikes killed at least 30 Palestinians including several children, according to hospital officials — one of the highest death tolls since the ceasefire began on Oct. 10. Israel had accused Hamas of new truce violations.

Nicolay Mladenov, director-general of U.S. President Donald Trump's new board of peace in Gaza, urged the parties to "exercise restraint" and said his office was working with the new Palestinian committee chosen to oversee Gaza to find ways that prevent future incidents.

Dozens will enter and leave Gaza daily at first

The Rafah crossing has been largely shut since Israel seized it in May 2024. About 20,000 Palestinian children and adults needing medical care are hoping to leave war-devastated Gaza via the crossing, and thousands of other Palestinians outside the territory hope to return home.

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Few people, and no cargo, will be allowed to cross at first. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said Israel will allow 50 patients needing medical evacuation to leave daily. An official involved in the discussions, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss diplomatic talks, said each patient can travel with two relatives, while 50 people who left Gaza during the war can return each day.

Zaher al-Wahidi, head of the Gaza Health Ministry's documentation department, told The Associated Press the ministry hadn't been notified about the start of medical evacuations.

Israel has said it and Egypt will vet people for exit and entry through the crossing, which will be supervised by European Union border patrol agents. The number of travelers is expected to increase over time if the system is successful.

Israel will stop Doctors Without Borders' work in Gaza

Also Sunday, Israel's Diaspora Ministry said it was "moving to terminate" the operations of Doctors Without Borders in Gaza by Feb. 28.

Israel in December suspended the group's operations there because it refused to comply with new registration requirements for organizations to submit lists of local employees. The medical charity said the regulations could endanger Palestinian staff.

Doctors Without Borders had no immediate comment. It has said Israel's decision will have a catastrophic impact on its work in Gaza, where it provides funding and international staff for six hospitals and runs two field hospitals and eight primary health centers, clinics and medical points. It also runs two of Gaza's five stabilization centers helping children with severe malnutrition.

Israel has suspended over two dozen humanitarian organizations from operating in Gaza because of failure or refusal to comply with the new requirements.

The Diaspora Ministry, which proposed them, says they are aimed at preventing Hamas and other militant groups from infiltrating aid groups. The organizations call the rules arbitrary and warn that the bans harm a civilian population desperately in need of aid.

Gaza's health sector has been devastated by two years of Israeli bombardment and restrictions on supplies.

Rafah has been Gaza's main crossing

Palestinian security officers on Sunday passed through the Rafah crossing's Egyptian gate and headed toward the Palestinian gate to join an EU mission that will supervise exit and entry, said an Egyptian official who spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to speak to the media. Ambulances also crossed through the Egyptian gate, the official said.

Before the war, Rafah was the main crossing for people moving in and out of Gaza. The territory has four other border crossings with Israel.

Israel called its 2024 seizure of the Rafah crossing part of efforts to combat Hamas arms smuggling. The crossing briefly opened for the evacuation of medical patients during a ceasefire in early 2025. Israel had resisted reopening the Rafah crossing again, but the recovery of the remains of the last hostage in Gaza last week cleared the way to move forward.

Under the ceasefire terms, Israel's military controls the area between the Rafah crossing and the zone where most Palestinians live.

Fearing that Israel could use the crossing to push Palestinians out of the enclave, Egypt has repeatedly said it must be open for crossing in both directions. Historically, Israel and Egypt have vetted Palestinians applying to cross.

The ceasefire halted more than two years of war between Israel and Hamas that began with a Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, that killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took 251 hostages.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed 71,795 Palestinians, including 523 since this ceasefire started, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. The ministry doesn't distinguish between civilians and combatants in its figures. It maintains detailed casualty records that are seen as generally reliable by U.N. agencies and independent experts.

The ceasefire's first phase called for the exchange of all hostages held in Gaza for hundreds of Palestin-

ians held by Israel, a surge in humanitarian aid and a partial pullback of Israeli troops.

The second phase is more complicated. It calls for installing a new Palestinian committee to govern Gaza, deploying an international security force, disarming Hamas, and taking steps to begin rebuilding.

## Misconduct complaint dismissed against judge who handled El Salvador prison deportation case

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal appeals court judge has dismissed a misconduct complaint filed by the Justice Department against a judge who clashed with President Donald Trump's administration over deportations to a notorious prison in El Salvador.

The complaint against U.S. District Judge James E. Boasberg was dismissed on Dec. 19 by Jeffrey S. Sutton, chief judge of the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals but the order only came to light this weekend.

The complaint stemmed from remarks that Boasberg, the chief judge in the district court in the nation's capital, allegedly made in March 2025 to Chief Justice John Roberts and other federal judges at a judicial conference saying the administration would trigger a constitutional crisis by disregarding federal court rulings. The meeting took place days before Boasberg issued an order blocking deportation flights that Trump was carrying out by invoking wartime authorities from an 18th century law.

In the dismissal order, Sutton said the Justice Department never provided a listed attachment to provide proof of what Boasberg said or the context of the alleged statement at the closed-door conference.

"A recycling of unadorned allegations with no reference to a source does not corroborate them. And a repetition of uncorroborated statements rarely supplies a basis for a valid misconduct complaint," said Sutton, who was appointed by President George W. Bush to the appeals court circuit that covers Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee.

Spokespeople for the Justice Department and for Boasberg's court did not immediately return messages seeking comment.

Even if Boasberg had made the comments, Sutton said it would not be "so far afield" from topics discussed at the gathering and would not violate ethics rules. Sutton noted that Roberts' 2024 year-end report raised general concerns about threats to judicial independence, security concerns for judges and respect for court orders throughout the nation's history.

The misconduct complaint was filed with Judge Sri Srinivasan, chief judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, but Srinivasan asked Roberts to transfer it to another appeals court circuit because it was still considering appeals related to the deportation case, according to the dismissal order. Roberts transferred it to the 6th Circuit, it said.

## Black History Month centennial channels angst over anti-DEI climate into education, free resources

By TERRY TANG Associated Press

For academics, historians and activists, the past year has been tumultuous in advocating the teaching of Black history in the United States.

Despite last year proclaiming February as National Black History Month, President Donald Trump started his second term by claiming some African American history lessons are meant to indoctrinate people into hating the country. The administration has dismantled Black history at national parks, most recently removing an exhibit on slavery in Philadelphia last month. Black history advocates see these acts and their chilling effect as scary and unprecedented.

"States and cities are nervous about retribution from the White House," said DeRay Mckesson, a longtime activist and executive director of Campaign Zero, an organization focused on police reform. "So even the good people are just quieter now."

In the 100th year since the nation's earliest observances of Black History Month — which began when scholar Carter G. Woodson pioneered the first Negro History Week — celebrations will go on. The current

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political climate has energized civil rights organizations, artists and academics to engage young people on a full telling of America's story. There are hundreds of lectures, teach-ins and even new books — from nonfiction to a graphic novel — to mark the milestone.

"This is why we are working with more than 150 teachers around the country on a Black History Month curriculum to just ensure that young people continue to learn about Black history in a way that is intentional and thoughtful," Mckesson said about a campaign his organization has launched with the Afro Charities organization and leading Black scholars to expand access to educational materials.

New graphic novel highlights history of Juneteenth

About three years ago, Angélique Roché, a journalist and adjunct professor at Xavier University of Louisiana, accepted a "once-in-a-lifetime" invitation to be the writer for a graphic novel retelling of the story of Opal Lee, "grandmother of Juneteenth."

Lee, who will also turn 100 this year, is largely credited for getting federal recognition of the June 19 holiday commemorating the day when enslaved people in Texas learned they were emancipated. Under Trump, however, Juneteenth is no longer a free-admission day at national parks.

Juneteenth helped usher in the first generation of Black Americans who, like Woodson, was born free. "First Freedom: The Story of Opal Lee and Juneteenth," the graphic novel, comes out Feb. 10. It is the culmination of Roché's assiduous archival research, phone chats and visits to Texas to see Lee and her granddaughter, Dione Sims.

"There is nothing 'indoctrinating' about facts that are based on primary sources that are highly researched," said Roché, who hopes the book makes it into libraries and classrooms. "At the end of the day, what the story should actually tell people is that we're far more alike than we are different."

While Lee is the main character, Roché used the novel as a chance to put attention on lesser known historical figures like William "Gooseneck Bill" McDonald, Texas' first Black millionaire, and Opal Lee's mother, Mattie Broadous Flake.

She hopes this format will inspire young people to follow Lee and her mantra — "make yourself a committee of one."

"It doesn't mean don't work with other people," Roché said. "Don't wait for other people to make the changes you wanna see."

Campaign aims to train new generation of Black historians

When Trump's anti-DEI executive orders were issued last year, Jarvis Givens, a professor of African and African American Studies at Harvard, was thousands of miles away teaching in London, where Black History Month is celebrated in October. He had already been contemplating writing a book for the centennial.

Watching Trump's "attack" cemented the idea, Givens said.

"I wanted to kind of devote my time while on leave to writing a book that would honor the legacy that gave us Black History Month," Givens said.

The result is "I'll Make Me a World: The 100-Year Journey of Black History Month," a book with four in-depth essays that comes out Tuesday. The title is a line from the 1920s poem "The Creation" by James Weldon Johnson, whose most famous poem, "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing," is known as the "Black National Anthem."

Givens examines important themes in Black history and clarifies misconceptions around them.

The book and the research Givens dug up will tie into a "living history campaign" with Campaign Zero and Afro Charities, Mckesson said. The goal is to teach what Woodson believed — younger generations can become historians who can discern fact from fiction.

"When I grew up, the preservation of history was a historian's job," Mckesson said, adding his group's campaign will teach young students how to record history.

How the 'father of Black history' might feel today

Born in 1875 to formerly enslaved parents, Woodson was among the first generation of Black Americans not assigned to bondage at birth. He grew up believing that education was a way to self-empowerment, said Robert Trent Vinson, director of the Carter G. Woodson Institute at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Virginia.

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The second Black man to earn a doctorate at Harvard University — W.E.B. Du Bois was the first — Woodson was disillusioned by how Black history was dismissed. He saw that the memories and culture of less educated Black people were no less valuable, Vinson said.

When Woodson established Negro History Week in 1926, he was in an era where popular stereotypes like blackface and minstrelsy were filling in for actual knowledge of the Black experience, according to Vinson. This sparked the creation of Black history clubs and Woodson began inserting historical lessons “on the sly” in publications like the “Journal of Negro History” and the “Negro History Bulletin.”

“Outside the formal school structure, they’re having a separate school like in churches or in study groups,” Vinson said. “Or they’re sharing it with parents and saying, ‘you teach your young people this history.’ So, Woodson is creating a whole educational space outside the formal university.”

In 1976, for the week’s 50th anniversary, President Gerald Ford issued a message recognizing it as an entire month. There was pushback then over the gains the Civil Rights Movement had made, Givens said.

As for today’s backlash over Black and African American studies, Vinson believes Woodson would not be surprised. But, he would see it as a sign “you’re on the right track.”

“There’s a level of what he called ‘fugitivity,’ of sharing this knowledge and being strategic about it,” Vinson said. “There are other times like in this moment, Black History Month, where you can be more out and assertive, but be strategic about how you spread the information.”

Resistance to teaching Black history is something that seems to occur every generation, Mckesson said.

“We will go back to normalcy. We’ve seen these backlashes before,” Mckesson said. “And when I think about the informal networks of Black people who have always resisted, I think that is happening today.”

## **Texas stunner: Democrat Taylor Rehmet flips Republican state Senate district Trump won by 17 points**

By JOHN HANNA and JULIE CARR SMYTH AP Political Writers

Democrat Taylor Rehmet flipped a reliably Republican state Senate district in Texas in Saturday’s special election, continuing a string of surprise victories for Democrats across the U.S. in the year since Donald Trump returned to the White House.

The Republican president immediately distanced himself from the loss in a district he’d won by 17 points in 2024.

“I’m not involved in that. That’s a local Texas race,” Trump told reporters Sunday at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida.

Yet just a day before the race, Trump had heaped praise on Republican contender Leigh Wambsganss, a conservative activist and entrepreneur, on his social media platform, declaring that she would be “a GREAT Candidate and has my Complete and Total Endorsement.” A longer post came later, in which he urged Texans to get out and vote, describing Wambsganss as a successful entrepreneur and “an incredible supporter” of his Make America Great Again movement.

Despite the plugs, Wambsganss was easily trounced in the Fort Worth-area district by Rehmet, a labor union leader and veteran, for a partial term ending in early January. With almost all votes counted, Rehmet was leading by more than 14 percentage points.

“This win goes to everyday working people,” Rehmet told supporters.

Republican Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick called the outcome “a wake-up call for Republicans across Texas,” where the GOP controls every statewide office.

“Our voters cannot take anything for granted,” Patrick wrote on X, while noting low-turnout special elections are always unpredictable. “I know the energy and strength the Republican grassroots in Texas possess. We will come out fighting with a new resolve, and we will take this seat back in November.”

Rehmet’s victory added to the Democrats’ record of overperforming in special elections so far this cycle, beginning in March — when they prevailed in a Pennsylvania legislative district made up of suburbanites and farmers that Democrats hadn’t held in a century — and continuing through to November, when they dominated candidate and ballot contests from Maine to California.

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And Zohran Mamdani, an unapologetic Democratic Socialist, was elected mayor of New York City, a Democratic stronghold that saw the highest voter turnout in a mayor's race in 50 years.

The showings come as Trump's approval ratings with the public hold steady at around 40%. A January AP-NORC poll found that a majority of U.S. adults disapprove of the way he's handling foreign policy, trade negotiations and immigration, as well as the economy.

Democrats said Saturday's results in Texas were further evidence that voters under the second Trump administration are motivated to reject GOP candidates and their policies.

Texas Democratic Party Chair Kendall Scudder said Rehmet won by standing with working people and talking to Texans about the future.

"This win shows what is possible in Texas with strong organizing, great candidates and strategic investments," he said in a statement. "People are noticing that Democrats have the workers' backs and are delivering results."

Democrats' other state victories since 2025 included wins for governor in Virginia and New Jersey and in special elections in Kentucky and Iowa. And, while Republican Matt Van Epps won a Tennessee special election for a U.S. House seat, the relatively slim margin of victory gave Democrats hope for this fall's midterms.

With that backdrop in mind, Trump and Vice President JD Vance have pushed states to redraw their political maps to Republicans' advantage headed into those contests, which will determine partisan control in Washington. Some Democratic states — most notably California — have pushed back with their own redistricting efforts.

The Texas Senate seat was open because the four-term GOP incumbent, Kelly Hancock, resigned to take a statewide office. Hancock easily won election each time he ran for the office, and Republicans have held the seat for decades.

The district is redder than its home, Tarrant County. Trump won the county by 5 points in 2024, but Democratic President Joe Biden carried it in 2020 by about 1,800 votes out of more than 834,000 cast.

But Rehmet had support from national organizations, including the DNC and VoteVets, a veterans group that said it spent \$500,000 on ads. Rehmet, who served in the Air Force and works as a machinist, focused on lowering costs, supporting public education and protecting jobs.

Wambsganss called Saturday's result "a wakeup call for Republicans in Tarrant County, Texas, and the nation" and warned her party not to be complacent.

"The Democrats were energized," she said in a statement. "Too many Republicans stayed home."

Rehmet's victory allows him to serve only until early January. He will face Wambsganss again in the November general election to decide who occupies the seat for a full four-year term. The Texas Legislature is not set to reconvene until 2027, and the GOP still will have a comfortable majority.

## Johnson says no quick House vote to end partial shutdown and blames Democrats for their ICE demands

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Speaker Mike Johnson said Sunday it will be a few days before a government funding package comes up for a vote, all but ensuring the partial federal shutdown will drag into the week as Democrats and Republicans debate reining in the Trump administration's sweeping immigration enforcement operations.

Johnson signaled he is relying on help from President Donald Trump to ensure passage. Trump struck a deal with senators to separate funding for the Department of Homeland Security from a broader package after public outrage over two shooting deaths during protests in Minneapolis against Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The measure approved Friday by the Senate would fund DHS temporarily, for two weeks, setting up a deadline for Congress to debate and vote on new restrictions on ICE operations.

"The president is leading this," Johnson, R-La., told "Fox News Sunday."

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"It's his play call to do it this way," the speaker said, adding that the Republican president has "already conceded that he wants to turn down the volume" on federal immigration operations.

Johnson faces a daunting challenge ahead, trying to muscle the funding legislation through the House while Democrats are refusing to provide the votes for speedy passage. They are demanding restraints on ICE that go beyond \$20 million for body cameras that already is in the bill. They want to require that federal immigration agents unmask and identify themselves and are pressing for an end to roving patrols, amid other changes.

Democrats dig in on ICE changes

"What is clear is that the Department of Homeland Security needs to be dramatically reformed," said House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York said on ABC's "This Week."

Jeffries said the administration needs to begin negotiations now, not over the next two weeks, on changes to immigration enforcement operations.

"Masks should come off," he said. "Judicial warrants should absolutely be required consistent with the Constitution, in our view, before DHS agents or ICE agents are breaking into the homes of the American people or ripping people out of their cars."

It's all forcing Johnson to rely on his slim House GOP majority in a series of procedural votes, starting in committee on Monday and pushing a potential House floor vote on the package until at least Tuesday, he said.

House Democrats planned a private caucus call Sunday evening to assess the next steps.

Partial government shutdown drags on

Meanwhile, a number of other federal agencies are snared in the funding standoff as the government went into a partial shutdown over the weekend.

Defense, health, transportation and housing are among those that were given shutdown guidance by the administration, though many operations are deemed essential and services are not necessarily interrupted. Workers could go without pay if the impasse drags on. Some could be furloughed.

This is the second time in a matter of months that federal operations have been disrupted as Congress digs in, using the annual funding process as leverage to extract policy changes. Last fall, Democrats sparked what became the longest federal shutdown in history, 43 days, as they protested the expiration of health insurance tax breaks.

That shutdown ended with a promise to vote on proposals to extend the Affordable Care Act tax credits. But the legislation did not advance and Democrats were unable to achieve their goal of keeping the subsidies in place. Insurance premiums spiked in the new year for millions of people.

Trump wants quick end to shutdown

This time, the administration has signaled its interest in more quickly resolving the shutdown.

Johnson said he was in the Oval Office last week when Trump, along with border czar Tom Homan, spoke with Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York to work out the deal.

"I think we're on the path to get agreement," Johnson said on NBC's "Meet the Press."

Body cameras, which are already provided for in the package, and an end to the roving patrols by immigration agents are areas of potential agreement, Johnson said.

But he said taking the masks off and putting names on agents' uniforms could lead to problems for law enforcement officers as they are being targeted by the protesters and their personal information is posted online.

"I don't think the president would approve it — and he shouldn't," Johnson said on Fox.

Democrats, however, said the immigration operations are out of control, and it is an emergency situation that must end in Minneapolis and other cities.

Growing numbers of lawmakers are calling for Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem to be fired or impeached.

"What is happening in Minnesota right now is a dystopia," said Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., who led efforts to hold the line for more changes.

"ICE is making this country less safe, not more safe today," Murphy said on "Fox News Sunday."  
"Our focus over the next two weeks has to be reining in a lawless and immoral immigration agency."

## What to know about the partial government shutdown

By MEG KINNARD and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The partial government shutdown is vastly different from the record closure in the fall.

That is mostly because this shutdown, which started Saturday, does not include the whole of government and may not last long, even as it now drags into the new week.

The House had hoped to pass funding legislation quickly when lawmakers return Monday evening, and that would have ended the shutdown. But House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., now says he is hoping to have the package considered "at least by Tuesday" as he scrambles to round up votes and Democrats hold out for deeper changes to immigration enforcement.

Congress already has passed half this year's funding bills, ensuring that several important federal agencies and programs continue to operate through September. Nutrition assistance programs, for example, should be unaffected.

Funding is lapsing, at least temporarily, for the Pentagon and agencies such as the departments of Homeland Security and Transportation. Essential functions are continuing, but workers could go without pay if the impasse drags on. Some could be furloughed.

Why is there another shutdown?

The government funding process had been going smoothly, with key lawmakers in the House and Senate finding bipartisan agreement. But the shooting deaths this month of two U.S. citizens, Alex Pretti and Renée Good, by federal agents in Minneapolis, changed the dynamic.

Democrats were incensed after Pretti's killing and demanded that one of the six remaining funding bills, for DHS and its associated agencies, be stripped from the package passed by the House. They said the bill must include changes to immigration enforcement, including a code of conduct for federal agents and a requirement that officers show identification.

Eager to avoid another shutdown, President Donald Trump's White House struck a deal with Democrats to temporarily fund DHS at current levels for two weeks while the negotiations play out.

The Senate passed the five-bill funding package Friday, but it must pass the House again before becoming law. The House is not returning until Monday, ensuring funding will lapse for parts of the government, at least temporarily.

"I'm confident that we'll do it at least by Tuesday," Johnson told NBC's "Meet the Press" on Sunday.

Have there been previous brief or weekend shutdowns?

Yes, and typically the effects were not very visible to anyone hoping to use government services.

There were a couple of these in Trump's first administration.

In January 2018, a dispute over immigration protections resulted in a weekend shutdown. Some federal workers were furloughed or worked without pay. Benefits such as Social Security and Medicare were uninterrupted, many people did not notice the shutdown and federal offices reopened the following Monday after a deal was in place.

In February 2018, the shortest shutdown in U.S. history lasted about nine hours, overnight, and most people did not notice any impact. While agencies technically shut down after funding lapsed, it was so brief that furlough notices were not all sent out, and nothing was closed during business hours.

What funding is impacted?

The funding lapse affects the Pentagon and agencies such as the Transportation Department and DHS, which includes the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Experts have said FEMA should have enough money to respond to the massive winter storm still affecting large swaths of the country. FEMA would have about \$7 billion to \$8 billion in a fund for disaster response and recovery efforts and the staff who work on them. An extended shutdown could put more

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pressure on that fund, especially if FEMA must respond to new disasters.

Other FEMA operations, such as the ability to write or renew National Flood Insurance Program policies, would pause, as they did during last year's 43-day shutdown.

That shutdown took a toll on the traveling public as delays and cancellations mounted, and there is now a risk of air travel disruptions again: One of the spending bills awaiting House passage covers the Department of Transportation, which is responsible for the air traffic control system and its workforce.

Air traffic controllers would still report for duty, but would be doing so without pay until a funding bill is passed.

At the State Department, the shutdown will not have a significant effect for the general public, in the United States or abroad.

Department employees were sent a 73-page memo late Friday that said passport and visa services and processing will continue and that embassies and consulates will remain open. Some functions, including nonemergency consular notifications and website updates, may be affected. But the memo said that 18,946 of the department's 27,206 direct hire American employees are exempted from potential furloughs if the shutdown continues.

Will SNAP and other food assistance programs be affected?

No. That is a major change from the fall shutdown, when many people had to do with little-to-no assistance from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program during the final weeks of the government closure. The bill to end that shutdown funded the Department of Agriculture and the programs that it administers through the remainder of the budget year, which ends Sept. 30.

That means full SNAP benefits will continue now. The federal food program serves about 42 million people, about 1 in 8 Americans, in lower-income households. They receive an average of around \$190 monthly per person.

Another key program fully funded for the year is the federal supplemental nutrition program for women, infants and children, known as WIC. It provides pregnant women and young children with healthy food and nutrition counseling.

## Russian drones kill at least 12 in Dnipro as Zelenskyy says more Russia-Ukraine talks next week

By VOLODYMYR YURCHUK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A Russian drone strike on the Ukrainian city of Dnipro hit a bus carrying mineworkers and killed at least a dozen people, Ukrainian authorities said Sunday, hours after President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced that the next round of peace talks between Russian and Ukrainian delegations will take place on Wednesday and Thursday.

The strike injured several more people and sparked a fire that was subsequently put out, according to the emergency services.

DTEK, Ukraine's largest private energy company, said it owned the bus and accused Russia of carrying out "a large-scale terrorist attack on DTEK mines in the Dnipropetrovsk region," whose capital is Dnipro.

"The epicenter of one of the attacks was a company bus transporting miners from the enterprise after a shift in the Dnipropetrovsk region," the company said in a Telegram post.

The strike came days after U.S. President Donald Trump said the Kremlin had agreed to temporarily halt the targeting of the Ukrainian capital and other cities, as the region suffers under freezing temperatures that have brought widespread hardship to Ukrainians.

Ukrainian Energy Minister Denys Shmyhal on Sunday called the strike in Dnipro "a cynical and targeted attack on energy sector workers," and said it occurred near the Ternivska mine east of the city.

Hours earlier, Ukraine's emergency services reported that Russian attack drones injured six people at a maternity hospital in Zaporizhzhia, southern Ukraine, on Sunday morning.

No peace talks on Sunday

Meanwhile, envoys from Russia, Ukraine and the U.S. had been expected to meet Sunday in Abu Dhabi

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to continue negotiations aimed at ending Moscow's all-out invasion of its neighbor. But on Sunday morning, Zelenskyy announced that they would take place next week instead.

"We have just had a report from our negotiating team. The dates for the next trilateral meetings have been set: Feb. 4 and 5 in Abu Dhabi. Ukraine is ready for substantive talks, and we are interested in an outcome that will bring us closer to a real and dignified end to the war," Zelenskyy said in a Telegram post.

There was no immediate comment from U.S. or Russian officials.

On Saturday afternoon, top Russian envoy Kirill Dmitriev said he had held a "constructive meeting with the U.S. peacemaking delegation" in Florida.

Officials have so far revealed few details of the talks in Abu Dhabi, which are part of a yearlong effort by the Trump administration to steer the sides toward a peace deal and end almost four years of all-out war.

While Ukrainian and Russian officials have agreed in principle with Washington's calls for a compromise, Moscow and Kyiv differ deeply over what an agreement should look like.

A central issue is whether Russia should keep or withdraw from areas of Ukraine its forces have occupied, especially Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland called the Donbas, and whether it should get land there that it hasn't yet captured.

Drones strike Ukrainian maternity hospital

Earlier on Sunday, Russian attack drones struck a maternity hospital in southern Ukraine, the Ukrainian emergency service reported.

In a Telegram post, it said the strike wounded three women in the hospital in Zaporizhzhia, and also sparked a fire in the gynecology reception area that was later extinguished. Regional administration head Ivan Fedorov later said the number of injured had risen to six.

The Kremlin confirmed Friday it agreed to hold off striking Kyiv until Sunday, but refused to reveal any details, making it difficult for an independent assessment of whether the conciliatory step had indeed taken place.

In the past week, Russia has struck energy assets in the southern Ukrainian city of Odesa and in Kharkiv in the northeast. It also hit the Kyiv region on Wednesday, killing two people and injuring four.

Overnight into Sunday, Russia launched 90 attack drones, with 14 striking nine locations, Ukraine's air force said in a Telegram post. A woman and a man were killed in an overnight drone strike in Dnipro, according to local administration head Oleksandr Hanzha.

Russian shelling also hit central Kherson, a city in southern Ukraine, soon after 7 a.m., seriously wounding a 59-year-old woman, according to a Facebook post by the municipal military administration.

Russia's Defense Ministry on Sunday morning said its forces had used operational-tactical aviation, attack drones, missile forces and artillery to strike transport infrastructure used by Ukrainian forces.

In a separate post Sunday, it said that Russian air defenses shot down 21 Ukrainian drones flying over southwestern and western Russia. It did not mention any casualties or damage.

## Iran's supreme leader warns any US attack would spark 'regional war'

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran's supreme leader warned Sunday that any attack by the United States would spark a "regional war" in the Mideast, further escalating tensions as President Donald Trump has threatened to militarily strike the Islamic Republic over its crackdown on recent nationwide protests.

The comments from the 86-year-old Ayatollah Ali Khamenei are the most-direct threat he's made so far as the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln and associated American warships are in the Arabian Sea, sent by Trump there after Tehran's bloody crackdown on nationwide protests.

It remains unclear whether Trump will use force. He's repeatedly said Iran wants to negotiate and has brought up Tehran's nuclear program as another issue he wants to see resolved.

But Khamenei also referred to the nationwide protests as "a coup," hardening the government's position as tens of thousands of people reportedly have been detained since the start of the demonstrations.

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Sedition charges in Iran can carry the death penalty, which again renews concerns about Tehran carrying out mass executions for those arrested — a red line for Trump.

Iran had also planned a live-fire military drill for Sunday and Monday in the strategic Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which a fifth of all oil traded passes. The U.S. military's Central Command had warned against threatening American warships or aircraft during the drill or disrupting commercial traffic.

Khamenei warns US

Khamenei spoke to a crowd at his compound in Tehran as Iran marked the start of a dayslong commemoration of the country's 1979 Islamic Revolution. He, at one point, described the U.S. as being interested in its oil, natural gas and other mineral resources, saying that they wanted to "seize this country, just as they controlled it before."

"The Americans must be aware that if they wage a war this time, it will be a regional war," he said.

The supreme leader added that: "We are not the instigators, we are not going to be unfair to anyone, we don't plan to attack any country. But if anyone shows greed and wants to attack or harass, the Iranian nation will deal a heavy blow to them."

Asked about the warning, Trump on Sunday told reporters that the U.S. "has the biggest, most powerful ships in the world over there, very close, a couple of days, and hopefully we'll make a deal. If we don't make a deal, then we'll find out whether or not he was right."

Khamenei also hardened his position on the demonstrations after earlier acknowledging some people had legitimate economic grievances that sparked their protests. The demonstrations began Dec. 28, initially over the collapse of Iran's rial currency. It soon grew into a direct challenge to Khamenei's rule.

"The recent sedition was similar to a coup. Of course, the coup was suppressed," he said. "Their goal was to destroy sensitive and effective centers involved in running the country, and for this reason they attacked the police, government centers, (Revolutionary Guard) facilities, banks and mosques — and burned copies of the Quran. They targeted centers that run the country."

The U.S.-based Human Rights Activists New Agency, which relies on a network inside Iran to verify its information, reports that over 49,500 people have been detained in the crackdown. It says the violence killed at least 6,713 people, the vast majority of them demonstrators. The Associated Press has been unable to independently assess the death toll and arrest figures, given authorities have cut Iran's internet off from the rest of the world.

As of Jan. 21, Iran's government put the death toll at a far lower 3,117, saying 2,427 were civilians and security forces, labeling the rest "terrorists." In the past, Iran's theocracy has undercounted or not reported fatalities from unrest.

That death toll exceeds that of any other round of protest or unrest in Iran in decades and recalls the chaos surrounding the 1979 revolution.

Parliament speaker says EU militaries considered terrorist groups.

The speaker of Iran's parliament, meanwhile, said that the Islamic Republic now considers all European Union militaries to be terrorist groups, lashing out after the bloc declared the country's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard a terror group over taking part in the bloody crackdown.

Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, a former Guard commander, announced the terror designation, which will likely be mostly symbolic. Iran has used a 2019 law to reciprocally declare other nations' militaries terror groups following the United States declaration of the Guard a terror group that year.

Qalibaf made the announcement as he and others in parliament wore Guard uniforms in support of the force. The Guard, which also controls Iran's ballistic missile arsenal and has vast economic interests in Iran, answers only to Khamenei.

"By seeking to strike at the (Guard), which itself has been the greatest barrier to the spread of terrorism to Europe, Europeans have in fact shot themselves in the foot and, once again, through blind obedience to the Americans, decided against the interests of their own people," Qalibaf said.

Lawmakers at the session later chanted: "Death to America!" and "Death to Israel!" at the session.

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Trump says Iran is 'seriously talking' to US

Trump has laid out two red lines for military action: the killing of peaceful protesters or the possible mass execution of those detained in a major crackdown over the demonstrations. He's increasingly begun discussing Iran's nuclear program as well, which the U.S. negotiated over with Tehran in multiple sessions before Israel launched a 12-day war with Iran back in June.

The U.S. bombed three Iranian nuclear sites during the war. Activity at two of the sites suggests Iran may be trying to obscure the view of satellites as it tries to salvage what remains there.

Trump on Saturday night declined to say whether he'd made a decision on what he wanted to do regarding Iran.

Speaking to reporters, Trump sidestepped a question about whether Tehran would be emboldened if the U.S. backed away from launching strikes on Iran, saying, "Some people think that. Some people don't."

Trump said Iran should negotiate a "satisfactory" deal to prevent the Middle Eastern country from getting any nuclear weapons, but said, "I don't know that they will. But they are talking to us. Seriously talking to us."

## 'Melania,' panned by some film critics, opens with strong ticket sales for a documentary

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Promoted by President Donald Trump as "a must watch," the Melania Trump documentary "Melania" debuted with a better-than-expected \$7 million in ticket sales, according to studio estimates Sunday.

The release of "Melania" was unlike any seen before. Amazon MGM Studios paid \$40 million for the rights, plus some \$35 million to market it, making it the most expensive documentary ever. Directed by Brett Ratner, who had been exiled from Hollywood since 2017, the film about the first lady debuted in 1,778 theaters in the midst of Trump's turbulent second term.

While the result would be a flop for most films with such high costs, "Melania" was a success by documentary standards. It's the best opening weekend for a documentary, outside of concert films, in 14 years. Going into the weekend, estimates ranged from \$3 million to \$5 million.

But there was little to compare "Melania" to, given that presidential families typically eschew in-office memoir or documentary releases to avoid the appearance of capitalizing on the White House. The film chronicles Melania Trump over 20 days last January, leading up to Trump's second inauguration.

On Thursday, Trump hosted a premiere of the film at the Kennedy Center, with attendees including Cabinet members and members of Congress. There, Ratner downplayed its box-office potential, noting: "You can't expect a documentary to play in theaters."

The No. 1 movie of the weekend was Sam Raimi's "Send Help," a critically acclaimed survival thriller starring Rachel McAdams and Dylan O'Brien. The Walt Disney Co. release debuted with \$20 million. The film, with a \$40 million budget, was an in-between kind of release for Raimi, whose hits have typically ranged from low-budget cult ("Army of Darkness") to big-budget blockbuster (2002's "Spider-Man").

The microbudget sci-fi horror film "Iron Lung," directed by YouTuber and filmmaker Markiplier, came in second with \$17.9 million, far exceeding expectations. The Jason Statham action thriller "Shelter" debuted with \$5.5 million.

But most of the curiosity was on how "Melania" would perform. A week earlier, the White House hosted a black-tie preview attended by Amazon chief executive Andy Jassy, Apple chief executive Tim Cook and former boxer Mike Tyson.

The film arrived in a week dominated by coverage of federal immigration tactics in Minnesota after a U.S. Border Patrol agent fatally shot 37-year-old Alex Pretti in Minneapolis.

"Melania" didn't screen in advance for critics, but reviews that rolled out Friday, once the film was in theaters, weren't good. Xan Brooks of The Guardian compared the film to a "medieval tribute to placate the greedy king on his throne." Owen Gleiberman of Variety called it a "cheese ball infomercial of stag-

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gering inertia." Frank Scheck of The Hollywood Reporter wrote: "To say that 'Melania' is a hagiography would be an insult to hagiographies."

But among those who bought tickets over the weekend, the response was far more positive. "Melania" landed an "A" CinemaScore. Audiences were overwhelmingly 55 and older (72% of ticket buyers), female (72%) and white (75%). As expected, the movie played best in the South, with top states including Florida and Texas.

David A. Gross, who runs the movie consulting firm FranchiseRe called it "an excellent opening for a political documentary."

"For any other film, with \$75 million in costs and limited foreign potential, it would be a problem," said Gross. "But this is a political investment, not a for-profit movie venture, and if it helps Amazon with a regulatory, taxation, tariff or other government issue, then it will pay back. \$75 million is insignificant to Amazon."

"Melania" is Ratner's first film since he was accused of sexual misconduct in 2017. Multiple women, including the actor Olivia Munn, accused Ratner of sexual harassment and misconduct. Ratner has denied the allegations. Last fall, after Trump's reported intervention, Paramount Pictures said it would distribute his "Rush Hour 4."

"Melania," which will stream on Prime Video following its theatrical run, was released globally. Shortly before its debut, South African distributor Filmfinity said it would no longer release it. The company said it changed course "based on recent developments."

International ticket sales for "Melania" were expected to be minuscule.

Top 10 movies by domestic box office

With final domestic figures being released Monday, this list factors in the estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Comscore:

1. "Send Help," \$20 million.
2. "Iron Lung," \$17.9 million.
3. "Melania," \$7 million.
4. "Zootopia 2," \$5.8 million.
5. "Shelter," \$5.5 million.
6. "Avatar: Fire and Ash," \$5.5 million.
7. "Mercy," \$4.7 million.
8. "The Housemaid," \$3.5 million.
9. "Marty Supreme," \$2.9 million.
10. "28 Years Later: The Bone Temple," \$1.5 million.

## Carlos Alcaraz beats Novak Djokovic to become the youngest man to complete a career Grand Slam

By JOHN PYE AP Sports Writer

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Carlos Alcaraz is 22, he's the youngest man ever to win all four of the major titles in tennis, and he had to achieve what no man previously has done to complete the career Grand Slam in Australia.

The top-ranked Alcaraz dropped the first set of the Australian Open final in 33 minutes Sunday as Novak Djokovic went out hard in pursuit of an unprecedented 25th major title, but the young Spaniard dug deep to win 2-6, 6-2, 6-3, 7-5.

"Means the world to me," Alcaraz said. "It is a dream come true for me."

Djokovic had won all 10 of his previous finals at Melbourne Park and, despite being 38, gave himself every chance of extending that streak to 11 when he needed only two sets to win.

Alcaraz rose to the challenge.

"Tennis can change on just one point. One point, one feeling, one shot can change the whole match completely," he said. "I played well the first set, but you know, in front of me I had a great and inspired Novak, who was playing great, great shots."

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A couple of unforced errors from Djokovic early in the second set gave Alcaraz the confidence. He scrambled to retrieve shots that usually would be winners for Djokovic, and he kept up intense pressure on the most decorated player in men's tennis history. There were extended rallies where each player hit enough brilliant shots to usually win a game.

Djokovic has made an artform of rallying from precarious positions. Despite trailing two sets to one, he went within the width of a ball in the fourth set's ninth game of turning this final around.

After fending off six break points in the set, he exhorted the crowd when he got to 30-30. The crowd responded with chants of "Nole, Nole, Nole!"

When Djokovic earned a breakpoint chance — his first since the second set — he whipped up his supporters again. But when Djokovic sent a forehand long on the next point, Alcaraz took it as a reprieve.

A short forehand winner, a mis-hit from Alcaraz, clipped the net and landed inside the line to give him game point. Then Djokovic hit another forehand long.

Alcaraz responded with a roar, and sealed victory by taking two of the next three games.

As he was leaving the court, Alcaraz signed the lens of the TV camera with a recognition: "Job finished. 4/4 Complete."

## Teamwork

After paying tribute at the trophy ceremony to Djokovic for being an inspiration, Alcaraz turned to his support team. He parted ways with longtime coach Juan Carlos Ferrero at the end of last season and Samuel Lopez stepped up to head the team.

"Nobody knows how hard I've been working to get this trophy. I just chased this moment so much," Alcaraz said. "The pre-season was a bit of a rollercoaster emotionally.

"You were pushing me every day to do all the right things," he added. "I'm just really grateful for everyone I have in my corner right now."

## Djokovic's praise

Djokovic joked about this showdown setting up a rivalry over the next 10 years with Alcaraz, but then said it was only right to hand the floor over to the new, 16 years his junior, champion.

"What you've been doing, the best word to describe is historic, legendary," he said. "So congratulations."

Both players were coming off grueling five-set semifinal wins — Alcaraz held off No. 3 Alexander Zverev on Friday; Djokovic's win over two-time defending Australian Open champion Jannik Sinner ended after 1:30 a.m. Saturday — yet showed phenomenal fitness, athleticism and stamina for just over three hours in pursuit of their own historic achievements.

Djokovic won the last of his 24 Grand Slam singles titles at the 2023 U.S. Open, his push for an unprecedented 25th has now been blocked by Alcaraz or Sinner for nine majors.

## Rafa in the house

Djokovic and Rafael Nadal played some epic matches, including the longest match ever at the Australian Open that lasted almost six hours in 2012.

Nadal was in the stands Sunday, and both players addressed the 22-time major winner.

"He's my idol, my role model," Alcaraz said. To complete the career Slam "in front of him, it made even more special."

Djokovic, addressing Nadal directly as the "legendary Rafa," joked that there were "too many Spanish legends" in Rod Laver.

"It felt like it was two against one tonight," he said.

## One for the ages

At 22 years and 272 days, Alcaraz is the youngest man to complete a set of all four major singles titles. He broke the mark set by Don Budge in the 1938 French championships, when he was 22 years and 363 days.

He's the ninth man to achieve the career Grand Slam, a list that also includes Djokovic, Nadal and Roger Federer.

Alcaraz now has seven major titles — his first in Australia along with two each at Wimbledon and the French and U.S. Opens.

## India's budget boosts infrastructure spending while vowing fiscal discipline

By RAJESH ROY Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government presented its annual budget to Parliament on Sunday, focusing on sustaining the country's economic growth despite volatile financial markets and trade uncertainty.

In a speech introducing the budget, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the government's plans to boost investments in infrastructure and domestic manufacturing while sticking to fiscal prudence.

The budget for the 2026-27 financial year, which starts April 1, comes as major economies grapple with high interest rates, geopolitical tensions and renewed protectionism that has weighed on global trade and capital flows.

India has so far withstood high tariffs imposed by the U.S., largely by frontloading some exports and diversifying shipments to new destinations.

The finance ministry's economic survey, which was released on Thursday ahead of the budget, forecast India's economy to grow between 6.8% and 7.2% in the next fiscal year buoyed by increasing domestic consumption.

Despite plans for higher spending in some areas, the government reiterated its commitment to fiscal consolidation, targeting a deficit of 4.3% of the GDP next year, down slightly from the 4.4% of GDP deficit the government is on track to achieve in the fiscal year ending in March.

Here are some key takeaways from the budget:

No populist giveaways, focus on structural reforms

Sitharaman offered no populist giveaways, saying New Delhi will focus on building resilience at home while positioning itself more firmly in the global supply chain.

Last year's budget wooed the salaried middle class with steep tax cuts after Modi secured a landslide victory in the national polls.

"India will continue to take confident steps towards Viksit Bharat (Developed India), balancing ambition with inclusion," Sitharaman said.

The focus will be on structural reforms, mainly in the manufacturing sector, while also stepping up investments in niche industries such as biopharma and artificial intelligence, she added.

Manufacturing and supply chain resilience

The budget call for the government's capital expenditure for the next fiscal year to reach 12.2 trillion rupees (\$133 billion), mainly on infrastructure, up from 11.2 trillion rupees last year.

This comes at a time when many advanced economies are cutting back public investments due to high debt and tightened monetary policy. India will use state spending to prop up growth.

Sitharaman said the government will scale up manufacturing in seven strategic sectors including biopharma, semiconductors, electronics components and rare earth magnets. To reduce import dependency, three chemical production parks will be set up.

Recognizing global concerns over slowing job creation, especially in manufacturing, the budget announced additional credit support and a growth fund for micro, small and medium enterprises.

Financial market reforms aim to attract capital

Sitharaman outlined steps to deepen India's financial markets, including measures to strengthen the corporate bond market and ease certain rules for foreign investors.

With global capital increasingly selective amid higher interest rates in the West, emerging markets are competing for stable and long-term investment.

"I propose a comprehensive review of the Foreign Exchange Management (Non-debt Instruments) Rules to create a more contemporary, user-friendly framework for foreign investments, consistent with India's evolving economic priorities," Sitharaman said.

Budget promises rail development

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Sitharaman said India plans to promote environmentally sustainable travel with seven high-speed rail corridors between key cities such as Mumbai-Pune, Hyderabad-Bengaluru, Pune-Hyderabad, and Chennai-Bengaluru.

For cargo movement, an unspecified number of new dedicated freight corridors will be set up and 20 new waterways operationalized over the next five years, she said.

Dedicated freight corridors will also be set up for rare earths to promote mining, processing, research and manufacturing.

In addition, she said that the government will develop ecologically sustainable mountain and coastal trails to promote ecological tourism.

## Trump says US is 'starting to talk to Cuba' as he moves to cut its oil supplies

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

ABOARD AIR FORCE ONE (AP) — President Donald Trump said the United States was beginning to talk with Cuban leaders as his administration puts greater pressure on the communist-run island and cuts off key oil supplies.

He made the comment to reporters on Saturday night as he was flying to Florida. It comes in the wake of his moves in recent weeks to cut off supplies of oil from Venezuela and Mexico, which he suggested Saturday would force Cuba to the negotiating table.

His goals with Cuba remain unclear, but Trump has turned more of his attention toward the island after his administration in early January captured Venezuela's then-President Nicolás Maduro and has been more aggressive in confronting nations that are adversaries of the U.S.

Trump has predicted that the Cuban government is ready to fall.

The Republican president did not offer any details on Saturday about what level of outreach his administration has had with Cuba recently or when, but simply said, "We're starting to talk to Cuba."

His recent moves to cut off its oil supplies have squeezed the island.

This past week, Trump signed an executive order to impose a tariff on any goods from countries that sell or provide oil to Cuba. The move put pressure on Mexico, which Cuba became dependent on for oil after Trump halted oil shipments from Venezuela in the wake of Maduro's ouster.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum warned that it could cause a humanitarian crisis. She said on Friday that she would seek alternatives to continue helping Cuba.

"It doesn't have to be a humanitarian crisis. I think they probably would come to us and want to make a deal," Trump said Saturday. "So Cuba would be free again."

He predicted they would make some sort of deal with Cuba and said, "I think, you know, we'll be kind."

## Demond Wilson, who played Lamont on 'Sanford and Son,' dies at 79

Demond Wilson, who found fame in the 1970s playing Lamont on "Sanford and Son" and went on to become a minister, has died. He was 79.

Mark Goldman, a publicist for Wilson, confirmed to The Associated Press that he died following complications from cancer on Friday.

"A devoted father, actor, author, and minister, Demond lived a life rooted in faith, service, and compassion. Through his work on screen, his writing, and his ministry, he sought to uplift others and leave a meaningful impact on the communities he served," Goldman said in an emailed statement.

Wilson was best known as the son of Redd Foxx's comically cantankerous Fred Sanford character in a sitcom that was among the first to feature a mostly Black cast when it began airing in 1972.

The thoughtful Lamont had to put up with his junkyard owner father's schemes, bigotry and insults — most famously, and repeatedly, "You big dummy!"

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The show was a hit for its six seasons on NBC but ended when ABC offered Foxx a variety show. Wilson was born in Valdosta, Georgia, and grew up in the Harlem section of Manhattan, according to the biography on his website.

He served in the U.S. Army in Vietnam and was wounded there, and he returned to New York and acted on stage before heading to Hollywood.

A guest appearance on "All in the Family" in 1971 led to his best-known role. Norman Lear produced both shows.

Wilson told AP in 2022 that he got the role over comedian Richard Pryor.

"I said, 'C'mon, you can't put a comedian with a comedian. You've got to have a straight man,'" he said he told the producers.

After "Sanford and Son" ended, Wilson starred in the shorter-lived comedies "Baby I'm Back" and "The New Odd Couple." He later appeared in four episodes of the show "Girlfriends" in the 2000s, along with a handful of movie roles.

Though he returned to the screen at times, he told the Los Angeles Times in 1986 that the acting life was not for him: "It wasn't challenging. And it was emotionally exhausting because I had to make it appear that I was excited about what I was doing."

Wilson became a minister in the 1980s.

He is survived by his wife, Cicely Wilson, and their six children.

## Trump's failed bid to elevate an Arab American ally shows cracks in his political coalition

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When Donald Trump won his comeback campaign, he credited the mayor of a small Detroit suburb with helping him make inroads with Michigan's Arab American community. As a reward, Trump nominated Amer Ghalib to serve as U.S. ambassador to Kuwait.

But Ghalib is not on his way to the oil-rich nation in the Persian Gulf. Instead, he is still in Hamtramck, population 30,000, after his nomination stalled because of opposition from Trump's fellow Republicans.

It's not clear whether the White House will submit Ghalib's name again, and he said it does not matter either way: "I'm not interested in it anymore."

The nomination's unraveling has exacerbated tensions between Republicans and an Arab American community that, dissatisfied with Democratic President Joe Biden's handling of the war in Gaza, helped send Trump back to the White House. Although Trump was successful in 2024, a key constituency may not be there for his party in the November midterm elections, when control of Congress is up for grabs.

"It's hard for me to try and convince the community to vote again Republican in 2026 and 2028 with this kind of an atmosphere," said Bishara Bahbah, who chaired Arab Americans for Trump.

Opposition on Capitol Hill

At the last rally of his campaign, in the predawn hours before polls opened, Trump embraced Ghalib on a Michigan stage. He called the mayor "one of the greatest men in your state." It was a long way from eight years earlier, when Trump campaigned on a promise to ban Muslims from entering the United States.

Not only did Trump win Michigan, he earned strong support from Arab Americans. He even won Dearborn, where nearly half the city's roughly 110,000 residents are of Arab descent.

But after Trump selected Ghalib for the diplomatic post, the reception on Capitol Hill was markedly colder. "Your long-standing views are directly contrary to the views and positions of President Trump and to the position of the United States," Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, said at a hearing last year. "I for one, I'm not going to be able to support your confirmation."

Cruz was joined by senators from both parties in questioning Ghalib about past comments and social media activity, including some that were labeled as antisemitic. Asked about "liking" a Facebook comment comparing Jewish people to monkeys, Ghalib said he had a "bad habit" of acknowledging nearly every response on his posts but stressed that he disagreed with the statement.

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Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., asked Ghalib about a previous comment that allegations of sexual violence during the Oct. 7, 2023, attack by Hamas against Israel were untrue. Ghalib said he condemned all abuses but claimed that he had not seen the evidence himself.

He drew further scrutiny for describing former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein as a martyr.

While no vote was taken after the hearing, the Republican opposition put Ghalib's nomination on a near-certain path to failure.

"President Trump has an incredible relationships with Arab leaders around the world," White House spokesperson Anna Kelly said in a statement. She added that he "continues to deliver on the promises he made to Arab Americans and all communities by cooling inflation, securing the border, and restoring peace through strength."

'Widespread disappointment'

Another former mayor who helped Trump with the Arab American community, Bill Bazzi of Dearborn Heights, had more luck than Ghalib. He was sworn in as U.S. ambassador to Tunisia in October.

To some critics, the administration is sidelining Arab American voices after highlighting them during the campaign.

Bahbah said he recently spent more than a week in Michigan absorbing a sense of "widespread disappointment."

"First of all, many of the promises that were made to the community have not been fulfilled. That's what I'm told," he said. "Secondly, the whole issue of immigration and visas is really rattling the community. ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) is rattling the community, even those with citizenships."

To top it off, Bahbah said, people feel that "grocery bills are much higher than they used to be."

Many leaders in Michigan's Arab American community emphasized that Trump's success had less to do with support for the Republican candidate than anger at Biden.

But the reality of Trump's second term has been more complicated than some expected. An agreement intended to stop the war in Gaza has brought mixed reactions because it "seems to be a one-sided cease-fire," said Bahbah. He also said immigration enforcement has taken a toll in Arab American communities.

"People are terrorized," Bahbah said. "They're afraid."

"This is not what the community voted for," he added.

A splintering coalition

Ghalib emphasized that he is not upset with the president, saying "he was loyal and supportive."

But he said "those who opposed me for nonsense reasons have made the community upset, and they will have to work hard to restore their relationship with the community."

Ghalib's criticism of Republicans reflects the fragility of the coalition Trump assembled in 2024. Not only did he improve his standing with Arab Americans, he also increased his share of Black and Latino voters.

But with dissatisfaction on the rise, sustaining that support is proving difficult.

Osama Siblani, editor of The Arab American News in Dearborn, said he does not believe that Trump's success in 2024 will be repeated.

"He has no support in this community with or without Ghalib," Siblani said.

## Today in History: February 2, 'American Sniper' Chris Kyle killed

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Monday, Feb. 2, the 33rd day of 2026. There are 332 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Feb. 2, 2013, former Navy SEAL and "American Sniper" author Chris Kyle was fatally shot along with a friend at a gun range west of Glen Rose, Texas; Eddie Ray Routh was later convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison without parole.

Also on this date:

In 1536, present-day Buenos Aires, Argentina, was founded by Spanish explorer Pedro de Mendoza.

In 1653, New Amsterdam — now New York City — was incorporated as a city.

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In 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed, officially ending the Mexican-American War.

In 1925, the legendary Alaska Serum Run ended as the last of a series of dog mushers brought life-saving medication to Nome, the scene of a diphtheria epidemic, traveling 674 miles (1,085 kilometers) in just six days.

In 1943, the remainder of Nazi forces at the Battle of Stalingrad surrendered in a major victory for the Soviets in World War II.

In 1990, in a dramatic concession to South Africa's Black majority, President F.W. de Klerk lifted a ban on the African National Congress and promised to free Nelson Mandela.

In 1992, Václav Havel, the dissident playwright who led an anti-communist revolution, became the first president of the independent Czech Republic, after Czechoslovakia's split. He previously served as the first democratically elected president of Czechoslovakia after the fall of communism.

In 2014, Oscar-winning actor Philip Seymour Hoffman, widely considered one of the greatest actors of his generation, was found dead in his New York apartment from an accidental drug overdose.

In 2022, four men were charged with being part of the drug distribution crew that supplied a deadly mix of narcotics to actor Michael K. Williams of "The Wire," who had overdosed five months earlier.

Today's birthdays: Rock singer-guitarist Graham Nash is 84. Television executive Barry Diller is 84. TV chef Ina Garten is 78. Actor Brent Spiner is 77. Football Hall of Famer Dave Casper is 74. Model Christie Brinkley is 72. Singer Shakira is 49. Republican Sen. Katie Britt of Alabama is 44. Actor Gemma Arterton is 40. Actor Zosia Mamet is 38. Actor Paul Mescal is 30. Actor Ellie Bamber is 29.