

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 1 of 71

[1- Upcoming Events](#)

[2- 1440 News Headlines](#)

[4- Schwan steps in to direct GHS Band](#)

[5- Today's Basketball DH Information](#)

[6 - Today on GDILIVE.COM](#)

[7- GDI Fitness Center Ad](#)

[8-10: Tina's Baskets](#)

[11- Gov. Rhoden Signs Open Government Bills](#)

[12- Pennington County Fatal Crash](#)

[13- SD News Watch: Grassroots effort in Redfield turning old bank into day care](#)

[15- Babysitter/House Cleaning Ad](#)

[16- SD SearchLight: Soda ban for food stamp recipients would cost South Dakota \\$248,000 annually, report says](#)

[18- SD SearchLight: South Dakota regulators approve wind farm that will be the largest in the state](#)

[19- SD SearchLight: Department of Homeland Security enters shutdown, amid dispute over funding](#)

[21- SD SearchLight: 'Not the same town anymore:' ICE surge hit businesses in Worthington, where 1 in 3 are immigrants](#)

[24- SD SearchLight: End of enhanced Obamacare subsidies puts tribal health lifeline at risk](#)

[27- Weather Pages](#)

[31- Daily Devotional](#)

[32- Subscription Form](#)

[33- Lottery Numbers](#)

[34- News from the Associated Press](#)

## Friday, Feb 13

NO SCHOOL

Senior Menu: Calico casserole, fruit, whole wheat bread.

3rd Grade Boys Basketball, 3:30 p.m., Elementary Gym

## Saturday, Feb. 14

Pickleball, 9:30 a.m., elementary gym

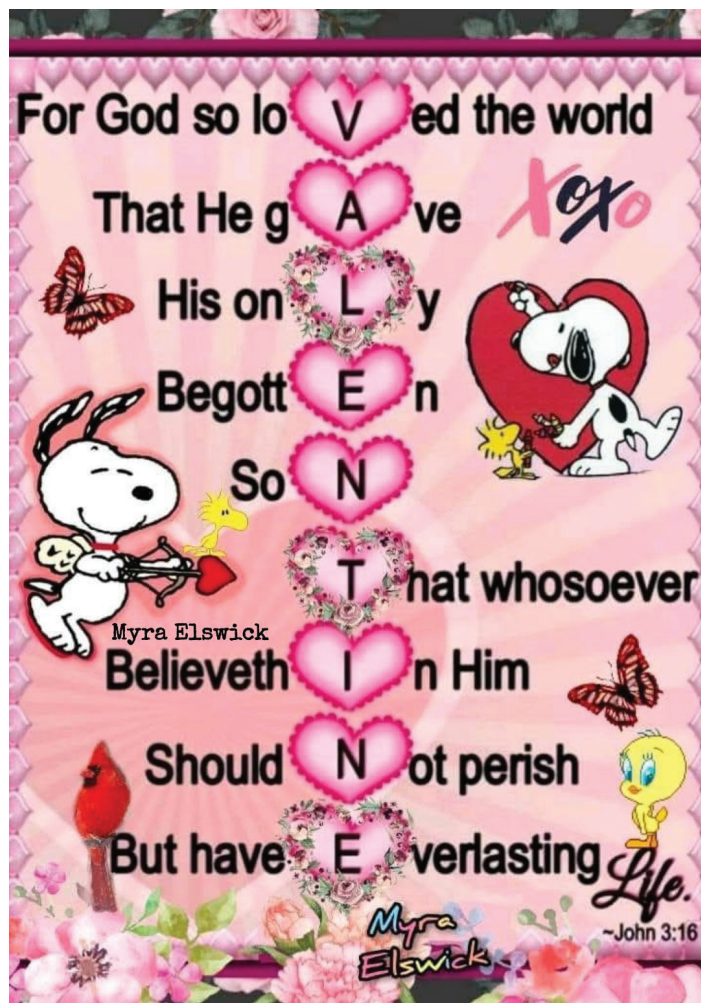
SDHSAA Class B State Boys Wrestling Duals in Pierre

Basketball Double Header: Mobridge-Pollock at Groton Area (Gym: B7th-12, B8th-1, GC-2, Arena: BC-12, JVGBB-1, JVBBB-2, VGGBB-3:30, VBBB-5:00)

## Sunday, Feb. 15

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

St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion at



St. John's, 9 a.m.; at Zion, 11 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.

United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; NO Sunday School; Coffee Hour, 10:30 a.m.

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

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

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

Groton Soccer Association Clinics, 11:30 a.m., Arena.

Soccer Open Gym, 2:30 - 4 p.m. elementary gym.

4th grade BB Practice, 2 p.m., Gym

6th grade BB Practice, 6 pm., Arena

Dance Team, 5 p.m., Arena

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 2 of 71

# 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.**

## **Troubles at the Louvre**

French police investigating an \$11.8M fraud scheme at the Louvre detained nine people this week, including two museum employees and several tour guides.

Officials began investigating the alleged scheme after the Louvre filed a complaint in December 2024 about two Chinese tour guides suspected of reusing tickets to bring Chinese tourists into the museum. Investigators used surveillance and wiretaps to confirm that some guides were reusing tickets, strategically splitting tour groups to avoid guide fees, and paying employees in cash to evade ticket checks. The network is suspected of bringing in up to 20 tour groups a day over the past decade and investing profits in real estate in France and Dubai. French prosecutors suggested that a similar fraud scheme may have also occurred at the Palace of Versailles.

Separately, a water pipe burst overnight Thursday, damaging a 19th-century ceiling painted by Charles Meynier. A water leak in November damaged several hundred works in the library of the Department of Egyptian Antiquities.

## **Partial government shutdown begins over DHS funding.**

Funding for the Department of Homeland Security expired at midnight after talks about immigration enforcement reforms reached an impasse. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Patrol—two DHS agencies at the center of the debate—are expected to tap into roughly \$140B allocated in another spending bill passed last year. Meanwhile, many employees of other DHS agencies, including the Transportation Security Administration, will have to work without pay.

## **Federal authorities investigating ICE officers for lying under oath.**

The federal government yesterday opened a criminal probe into statements made by two immigration officers about the nonfatal shooting of Venezuelan national Julio Cesar Sosa-Celis in Minneapolis last month. The news comes as a judge yesterday also dismissed charges against Sosa-Celis and another Venezuelan man involved in the incident. The officers, who were put on administrative leave, risk termination and criminal prosecution.

## **Inflation eases more than expected, hits nearly five-year low.**

The Bureau of Labor Statistics yesterday reported the consumer price index rose 2.4% year-over-year in January—down 0.3% from December and the lowest since May. The core consumer price index, which excludes volatile food and energy costs, was up 2.5% last month—its most gradual increase since April 2021. The data suggests inflation is cooling, but prices are still about 25% higher than five years ago.

Relatedly, surveyed Americans plan to spend \$87 on their partner, on average, this Valentine's Day, down roughly 44% from last year.

## **US to send advanced aircraft carrier to Middle East as Iran tensions mount.**

The US military yesterday said it is sending the USS Gerald R. Ford—the world's largest aircraft carrier—to the Middle East to reinforce another carrier sent last month. The move comes after indirect nuclear arms talks between the US and Iran in Oman stalled. Earlier this week, President Donald Trump said he intends to continue talks with Iran but warned he may take action if a nuclear deal is not reached.

## **Bangladesh Nationalist Party to win first election since 2024 uprising.**

The party secured over two-thirds of the seats in parliament, 18 months after student-led protests ousted the country's longest-serving prime minister, Sheikh Hasina. Her Awami League party was barred from the election. Meanwhile, Prime Minister-elect Tarique Rahman returned to Bangladesh in December after 17 years of self-imposed exile in London. He was fleeing charges filed by Hasina's government, including corruption and alleged involvement in grenade attacks.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 3 of 71

## **US figure skater Ilia Malinin fails to medal in Olympic men's free skate.**

The 21-year-old figure skater, widely known as "Quad God," placed eighth in yesterday's competition after a slew of mistakes, including two falls. The Virginia native entered the rink as the favorite, holding a five-point lead over Japan's Yuma Kagiyama, who went on to earn silver. Ultimately, Mikhail Shaidorov outperformed them both to win Kazakhstan's second-ever Winter Olympic gold medal.

## **New crew expected to reach the International Space Station today.**

The two American astronauts, one French astronaut, and one Russian cosmonaut launched into orbit early yesterday morning. They will meet two Russian cosmonauts and one American astronaut—a slimmer crew than usual due to a first-of-its-kind medical evacuation last month. As of this writing, the new arrivals are expected to dock today at roughly 3:15 pm ET and remain on the ISS for about eight months, conducting experiments on food production in space, among other topics.

## **Humankind(ness), Love Story Edition**

Dear readers— This month, we're pausing our usual act of kindness stories to share a sampling of your love stories. This week's theme is tending to the flame.

"I've learned that love speaks in different languages. For years, my wife would come home from shopping for something she needed and surprise me with a gift: sneakers, a work shirt, even a nose-hair trimmer. I'm frugal and not very materialistic, so I'd say, 'Thanks, but I don't need another one,' or, 'Why spend money on me?' Then it clicked. While shopping for herself, she was thinking of me. She took time to choose something, just because. Gift-giving is her love language, and it's beautiful. Now I accept each gift with genuine, excited gratitude."

— Phill L. in Huntington, New York

"When my wife says 'I love you,' sometimes I'll ask, 'How do you know?' I've done this throughout our relationship, not because I don't believe her, but because I want her to be mindful. It's easy to say 'I love you.' But it's not words—it's actions, behaviors, and things we do without thinking that mean the most. The answer to this question is sometimes a small gesture and sometimes a grand one. And sometimes, I'll tell her how I know she loves me right when she does something. It's something we do that keeps us both mindful of how we treat each other and brings about thoughts and conversations that go deeper than 'What's for dinner?'"

— Crystal A. in Dallas, Georgia

"In 9th grade algebra class, I looked up to see the new boy enter the room. An absolute knowing washed over me that he would be my husband. We started dating that week and never stopped. We've been married for 57 loving, happy years because we say I love you with meaning every day. We laugh every day, and humor has also helped us cope with dark days. Disagreements are always focused outward on the issue, not toward each other. Our solid foundation isn't made of big things. It's a tight web constructed over years by small, daily kindnesses; respect; random touching; unexpected love notes; holding hands; and putting each other first when it counts. We are still best friends."

— Terry M. in Boynton Beach, Florida

Humankind(ness) is a reader-built corner of joy. So, what kinds of experiences would you like to read about next? [Tell us here.](#)



**Sharon Schwan**

## Schwan steps in to direct GHS Band

by Dorene Nelson

With a friendly smile and a willing heart, Sharon Schwan agreed to help her son, Groton's superintendent Joe Schwan, by teaching junior and senior high school band for the remainder of the 2025-2026 school year.

Sharon taught band at both Conde and Warner. After thirty-six years at Warner, she retired from teaching and band directing. Under her direction, guidance, and support, the Warner High School was frequently invited to perform at the State B Boys Basketball tournament held annually in Aberdeen, SD. The band's outstanding performance was so popular that they were invited six or seven years in row!

Sharon has been retired for seven years but willingly substitutes in varying band rooms in the area. Her teaching in Groton is her third long term work. Sharon started working in the Groton right after Christmas break.

"Kids are all about the same," Sharon explains. "They are good kids who want to have fun. I use music and band as a fun activity which brings out the best in each of them. I have really enjoyed my time here in Groton."

"I do admit that this is a bit unique since I have the opportunity of teaching my grandchildren! And yes, they are allowed to call me 'Grandma!'" she smiled. "There is no favoritism in my classroom; we all work hard, enjoy what we do, and make some amazing music!"

"I have three children, Joe and his twin sister Jackie followed by Austin as well as five grandchildren and one great grandson." Sharon said. "My daughter Jackie is also an educator, and Austin is a mechanical engineer."

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 5 of 71



## High School Basketball Doubleheader

Mobridge/Pollock @ Groton Area  
Saturday, February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2026

### Game Times:

<p><b>Main Court in Arena</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 12:00 PM CT → Boys C</li> <li>- 1:00 PM CT → Girls JV</li> <li>- 2:00 PM CT → Boys JV             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <i>Halftime Entertainment: Boys Basketball Shoot for a Tshirt</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>- 3:30 PM CT → Girls Varsity             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <i>Halftime Entertainment: Boys Basketball Shoot for a Tshirt</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>- 5:00 PM CT → Boys Varsity             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <i>Halftime Entertainment: FCS Hot Shots Shooting Game</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>Main Court in Old Gym</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 12:00 PM CT → 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Boys</li> <li>- 1:00 PM CT → 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Boys</li> <li>- 2:00 PM CT → Girls C</li> </ul>	<p><b>Ticket Takers –</b></p> <p><b>Report @ 11:00am:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sarah Hanten</li> <li>- Chantel Duerre</li> <li>- Alison Tvinnereim</li> </ul> <p><b>Report @ 2:00pm:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sue Fjeldheim</li> <li>- Chantel Duerre</li> <li>- Travis Kurth</li> </ul> <p><b>Admin on Duty:</b> Brett/Joe</p>
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Prior to the Girls Varsity game, the National Anthem will be first, with Varsity Introductions/Lineups to follow.

**Today is Senior Parents Day for our basketball players and cheerleaders.**

**Girls Seniors and Cheerleaders will be honored with their parents prior to the Girls Varsity Warm-ups.**

**Boys Seniors will be honored with their parents prior to the Boys Varsity Warm-ups.**

**Split Pot Fundraiser – Softball**  
**HOSA Fundraiser**

**LOCKER ROOMS:** Mobridge/Pollock BOYS (JH and HS) will use the last locker rooms down the JH hallway. GIRLS will use the locker room in the old gym (JH Girls Locker Room).

**TEAM BENCHES:** South Bench- Groton Area | North Bench- Mobridge/Pollock

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

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

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

**CONCESSIONS:** Will be available

	Old Gym			Arena		
	12:00PM – 7 <sup>th</sup> Grade	1:00PM – 8 <sup>th</sup> Grade	2:00PM – C Girls	12:00PM – C Boys	1:00PM - Girls JV 2:00PM – Boys JV	3:30pm – Girls V 5:00pm – Boys V
<b>Scoreboard</b>	Brett Schwan	Brett Schwan	Chelsea Hanson	Kristen Swartz	Kristen Swartz	Kristen Swartz
<b>Shot Clock</b>				Sean Schuring	Sean Schuring	Sean Schuring
<b>Official Book</b>			Krissi Zak	Krissi Zak	Alexa Sperry	Kristi Zoellner
<b>Officials</b>	Kasey Kurtz, Kristi Zoellner, Nicole Porch			Gabe Kjellsen, Kerry Wenbourne, Steph Daly		Spencer Aberle, Brendan Roth, Dustin Pitz

**Announcer:** Mike Imrie

**National Anthem:** Recording

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 6 of 71



Coming Up on  
GDILIVE.COM

Groton  
Area  
Tigers  
Groton, SD

# GDILIVE



A production of the

**Groton Daily Independent**

For more info: [GDILIVE.COM](http://GDILIVE.COM)



**Sat., Feb. 14, 2026 - at Groton**

**Double-Header vs.**

**Mobridge-Pollock**

**Noon: Boys C Game - Arena\***

**1:00: Girls JV - Arena**

**2:00: Boys JV - Arena\***

**2:00: Girls C - HS Gym**

**3:30: Girls Varsity**

**5:00: Boys Varsity**

**\* If a sponsor is available**



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 7 of 71

What can **\$20**  
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CITIZENS**

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**GDI Living**



**Fitness**

or anyone using physical therapy

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RATES  
AROUND!**

### ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

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

### MONTH-TO-MONTH

Student: \$35.15 per month  
Single: \$40.48 per month  
2-Person: \$59.78 per month  
Family: \$72.43 per month  
Senior/PT: \$20 per month



Call or Text Paul at 605/397-7460  
Call or Text Tina at 605/397-7285

**Same rates for several years!**

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 8 of 71

**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**

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 9 of 71



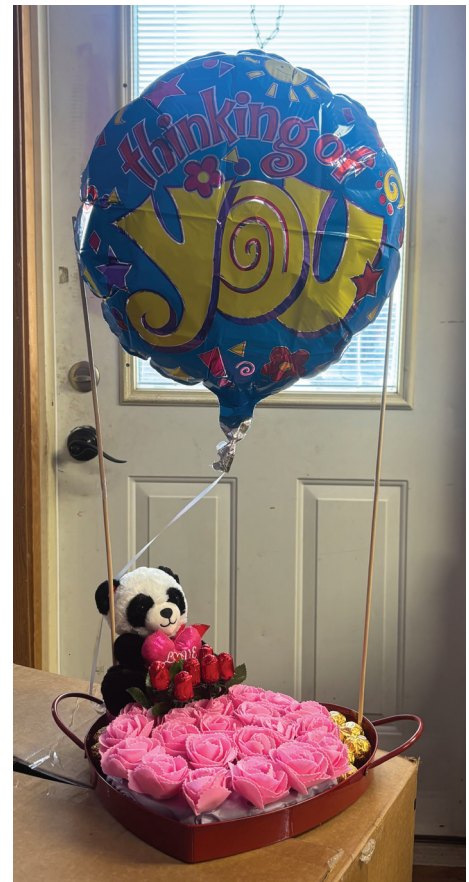
**Hersheys cake with strawberry drops and mini Hersheys on top  
\$40.00**



**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**

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 10 of 71



Tonka truck basket \$50.00



Just because or thinking of you Basket \$40.00

## Gov. Rhoden Signs Open Government Bills

### Signs Nine other Bills

PIERRE, S.D. – Governor Larry Rhoden signed 12 bills into law, including three bills introduced by Attorney General Marty Jackley to promote open government.

“Openness and responsiveness are key pillars of my Administration. South Dakotans deserve transparency so they can have confidence in their government,” said Governor Larry Rhoden. “These bills strengthen transparency, ensure timely public notices, and reinforce our commitment to openness for the people of South Dakota.”

The following three open government bills were signed at a signing ceremony with Attorney General Jackley: (You can click on the bill number to see more information)

[SB 46](#) modifies the requirements for open meeting agendas and provides a penalty therefor;  
[SB 47](#) revises the requirements for executive sessions and closed meetings; and  
[SB 48](#) clarifies that an official open meeting agenda must be posted online at least seventy-two hours before the scheduled start of the meeting.

“Government transparency is at the heart of these bills,” said Attorney General Marty Jackley. “Thank you to Governor Rhoden, the media, the Open Government Task Force, and our Legislators for their unanimous support of these important bills.”

Governor Rhoden also signed the following nine bills:

[SB 10](#) revises a provision related to the adoption of federal motor carrier regulations;  
[SB 11](#) increases reinstatement fees and abstract driver record fees;  
[SB 18](#) repeals income modifications for the bank franchise tax pertaining to bad debts;  
[SB 19](#) revises certain references to the Internal Revenue Code;  
[SB 23](#) includes certain types of vehicles in the unpaid repair bill titling process;  
[HB 1002](#) revises the daily meal allowance for wildland fire employees and fire suppression forces in certain circumstances;  
[HB 1011](#) modifies fees charged by the clerk of courts for certain copies of court records;  
[HB 1028](#) establishes a criminal background check requirement for multistate licensure under the social work licensure compact; and  
[HB 1029](#) revises provisions related to the practice of addiction counseling and prevention services.

Governor Rhoden has signed 35 bills into law and vetoed one this legislative session.

## Pennington County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle fatal crash  
Where: North Cherry Avenue and East North Street, Rapid City, SD  
When: 7:15 a.m. MT, Thursday, February 5, 2026

Vehicle 1: 2012 Jeep Liberty  
Driver: 30-year-old male from Rapid City, SD, serious, non-life-threatening injuries  
Seat belt Used: No  
Charges Pending: Yes  
Passenger 1a: 43-year-old female from Pine Ridge, SD, minor injuries  
Seat belt Used: No  
Charges Pending: Yes  
Passenger 1b: 22-year-old female, fatal injuries  
Seat belt Used: Yes  
Passenger 1c: 35-year-old female from Rapid City, SD, serious, non-life-threatening injuries  
Seat belt Used: Under investigation  
Passenger 1d: 20-year-old male from Box Elder, SD, serious, non-life-threatening injuries  
Seat belt Used: No

Vehicle 2: 2022 Ford F-350  
Driver 2: 31-year-old male from Rapid City, SD, minor injuries  
Seat belt Used: Yes

Pennington County, S.D.- A routine traffic stop led to a pursuit and two-vehicle crash injuring five people and one fatally Thursday, February 5 in Rapid City, SD.

The names of the persons involved have not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary information indicates during an attempted traffic stop for not having any license plates, the driver of a 2012 Jeep Liberty failed to pull over and a pursuit was initiated. At one point, the driver failed to stop at a stop sign, entering the intersection of North Cherry Avenue and East North Street and was struck by a 2022 Ford F350 traveling eastbound on East North Street.

Four occupants of the Jeep sustained serious injuries and were transported to a local hospital. One of the occupants died yesterday from her injuries. The driver of the Ford sustained minor injuries and was also transported to the hospital.

Charges are pending on two occupants of the Jeep.

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.



## Grassroots effort in Redfield turning old bank into day care

Bart Pfankuch

South Dakota News Watch

REDFIELD, S.D. – Gianna Schieffer doesn't need data or stories from other parents to prove the point that this central South Dakota city has a worrisome shortage of day care options.

Schieffer, the director of the Redfield Area Development Corp., has for the past couple years led an effort to obtain grants and loans, solicit donations and host fundraising events to get the money to convert a former bank building into a large child care in downtown Redfield.

As a working mother of two, including an energetic toddler, Schieffer can point to her own situation as evidence of the shortage and the stress it can cause. On a recent day in February, the in-home child care provider Schieffer relies on

came down with the flu, leaving her and several other parents with nowhere to drop off their children.

Schieffer's husband runs a ranch supply store located well out of town. But fortunately, Schieffer works alone in a downtown office and was able to bring 2-year-old Maya with her to work.

"This is exactly the kind of situation we're hoping to avoid with the new day care, where we could offer a drop-in service for parents on a daily or emergency basis," Schieffer said. "If you want to work as a parent, you have to take your kids somewhere."

### Response: Finding funding from many sources

The lack of child care is a common problem in cities both large and small across South Dakota and creates ripple effects beyond the immediate uncertainty for working parents.

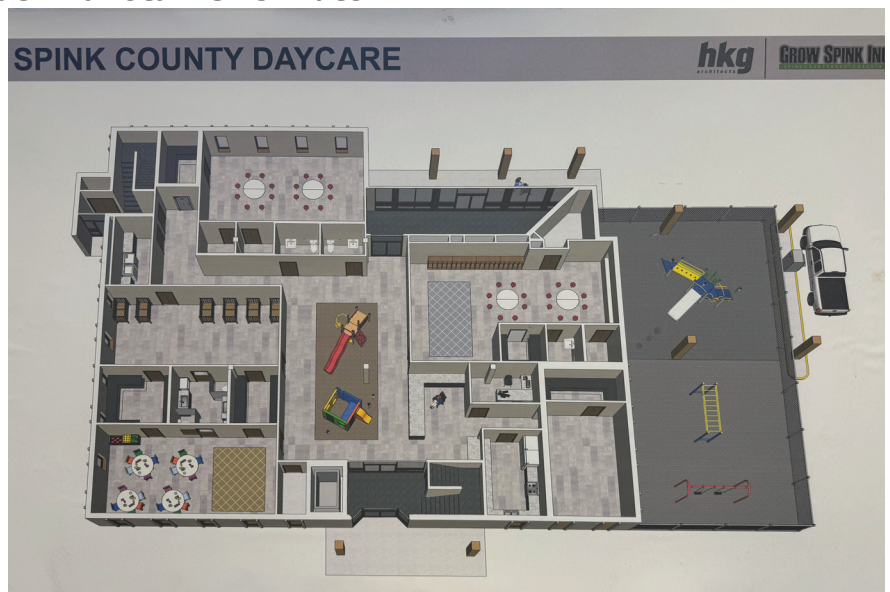
Combined with a shortage of affordable housing, the dearth of day care is stunting potential economic and population growth as schools, government agencies and businesses are in some cases unable to hire employees because workers cannot find care for their children.

The problem is worse in dozens of small, rural communities that are often isolated from large population centers with more options.

The child care shortage in particular restricts the ability of employers to hire young adults with children who are often seen as critical to the future of the state's small communities, many of which are losing population and experiencing declining public school enrollment.

Just as they have on development of new housing, leaders in government, nonprofits and the business community in Redfield have not waited for private industry or the state or federal government to solve its child care problem.

Instead, the community has embarked on a three-year campaign to raise the roughly \$1 million needed to buy a former Wells Fargo bank building in town and convert it to large child care able to hold 51 children



Schematic of the Spink County Daycare.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 14 of 71



**Work on the interior of the new daycare.**

upon launch and eventually more than 90 children.

Schieffer has tried to put some "fun" into the fundraising campaign. Donation levels are categorized by types of diapers, and the fundraising goals are measured on a large vertical baby bottle drawn on poster board in her office.

So far, the community has responded well to an unusual lineup of fundraisers. The raffle of a Ford Mustang raised \$60,000 for the project, a dueling pianos event brought in \$16,000 and a "grocery grab" lottery and hunting blind raffle took in about \$10,000 combined.

Schieffer has applied for and received about \$300,000 in state grants, and community members and businesses have chipped in about \$120,000.

As the project has evolved, the initial estimate has fallen to about \$750,000, bringing the organizers within \$100,000 of their goal of opening the day

care center before school starts in the fall.

## **Insights: A wide-ranging, statewide problem**

South Dakota has about 6,000 children enrolled in Head Start or other federally funded early learning programs for low-income families but does not have state-funded pre-K education options for working parents who don't qualify for assistance.

According to the First Five Years Fund, a national nonprofit promoting child welfare, the average annual cost of child care in South Dakota is about \$8,600 for center-based care and about \$6,800 for at-home care. The group estimates the inability of parents to obtain child care and therefore become unable to work full time costs the state at least \$750 million in lost productivity each year.

South Dakota communities like Redfield, population 2,200, are typically not targets for development by private day care operators who can build large centers that create opportunities for profits based on economies of scale.

Redfield does not have a center-based day care operation and has seen the number of small, at-home providers fall from 10 in 2023 to seven in 2026. Some of those remaining providers are nearing retirement age and are likely to stop providing the service in the coming years, Schieffer said.

A 2023 child care survey conducted by the countywide development group Grow Spink showed there were more than 550 children under age 9 in potential need of child care within a 20-mile radius of Redfield, the county seat.

The study also found that half of all South Dakota residents – including those in Spink County – live within "child care deserts" where there are three or more children in need of day care for every available spot.

The nearest large city, Aberdeen, is about 45 miles north of Redfield.

## **Evidence: Targeting child care to spur growth**

Jake Dawson is a father to two pre-school age children and feels lucky that he and his wife are able to drop their children off at an in-home day care in Redfield while he works the farm and his wife works in town.

Dawson used to run a John Deere dealership in Redfield and said he often heard from employees or prospective employees that obtaining child care was a challenge. Dawson said he knew of at least two parents who had to drive 50 miles each way either to Miller or Aberdeen in order to drop off their children during the workday.

Dawson, who serves on the board of the Redfield development group, said it is clear that a dwindling number of child care openings is holding the city back.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 15 of 71

"From an economic development standpoint, having day care available is a huge asset," he said. "In today's world, I think young families are looking for smaller towns to start a family. And having day care allows a community to grow by attracting talented young people to town."

## Limitations: Some pieces need to fall together

Schieffer said Redfield was fortunate to have a suitable building available at a reasonable price that unexpectedly came available after Wells Fargo began shuttering more than 2,000 U.S. locations over the past decade. It sold for \$240,000 at auction.

The building is downtown and only a couple blocks from the city's school, library and municipal pool.

Pulling off such a large community funded project also takes leadership and vision that may not be present in every community.

Even in Redfield, where support for housing and child care projects has been strong, economic development efforts can be at risk of funding cuts. Grow Spink, for example, recently shuttered after losing funding, leaving the Redfield Area Development Corp. as the region's only agency focused on economic growth.

Schieffer said there is also probably a limit on how often a community can turn to its residents and businesses to make donations, even through unique fundraising efforts. State and federal funding are also harder to come by in the post-COVID era and as competition for grants increases.

Dawson said he has been impressed with how the city has pulled together to raise the money to support development of the community child care center. He said that once the first-floor day care is established, the second floor of the bank building could be turned into a community center or some other hub of activity for local children.

"I'm really happy that the city's stepped up and made this a priority," he said. "I'm hoping the community continues to rally behind this project to expand this into something more for kids of all ages."

*South Dakota News Watch is an independent non-profit. Read, donate and subscribe for free at [sdnews-watch.org](http://sdnews-watch.org). Contact content director Bart Pfankuch: [605-937-9398/bart.pfankuch@sdnews-watch.org](mailto:605-937-9398/bart.pfankuch@sdnews-watch.org).*

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!



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Soda ban for food stamp recipients would cost South Dakota \$248,000 annually, report says

BY: JOHN HULT

Barring the use of food stamp benefits for soda purchases would cost South Dakota taxpayers \$310,000 in the first two years, according to a fiscal impact statement released Thursday evening by the South Dakota Legislative Research Council.

The new restriction would cost the state about \$248,000 a year after that — less than half what an adviser to Gov. Larry Rhoden said it might on Wednesday.

House Bill 1056, which earned the support of a Senate panel this week and the full House of Representatives the week before, would require the state to request a federal waiver allowing it to implement such a ban.

Opponents representing retailers, grocers, soda bottlers and Rhoden's office testified against the bill in committees on both the House and Senate side.

Grocers and other retailers are concerned about the complexity of sorting sellable from unsellable items in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, a program commonly referred to as food stamps that lets income-eligible people buy most food items using dollars loaded monthly onto cards that function like debit cards.

Nathan Sanderson of the South Dakota Retailers Association said the definition would be a constantly moving target, as thousands of new drink products are released every year, each carrying a unique UPC code used by retailers for inventory and tracking purposes.

In order for retailers to comply, Sanderson said, the state — and retailers — would need to have a complete exclusion list that adds new beverages as they come on the market.

"This is not like flipping a switch," Sanderson said.

#### Dispute over potential price tag

Rhoden's office is concerned about the administrative costs associated with creating and maintaining those classes of unsellable items for use as guidance by retailers.

Rhoden adviser Laura Ringling said the waiver requirement would cost too much, particularly in tight budget years.

"Implementing a waiver like this in South Dakota would cost nearly half a million dollars every single year," Ringling said Wednesday during a hearing on the bill in the Senate Health and Human Services Committee.

The bill's sponsor, Sioux Falls Republican Rep. Taylor Rehfeldt, responded that the state would save Medicaid dollars by reducing the need for medical care associated with soda consumption-related problems



**The website of the South Dakota Department of Social Services displays a sample EBT card, which is what participants in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program use to buy food.** (Screenshot by South

Dakota Searchlight)

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 17 of 71

like diabetes, obesity and tooth decay.

Rehfeldt also disputed the assertion of a heavy budget impact.

"States pursuing similar waivers that have had no or minimal cost include Nebraska, Oklahoma, Iowa, West Virginia, Texas and Idaho," Rehfeldt told the committee.

Sen. Kevin Jensen, R- Canton, chairs the Senate's health committee. He was in the majority when the committee voted 5-2 Wednesday to recommend Senate passage of HB 1056, but said a vote on the Senate floor would need to wait for a fiscal impact statement.

## Initial, ongoing costs

That fiscal statement was posted Thursday.

It says the Department of Social Services would need to decide which drinks are or aren't banned, and if HB 1056 becomes law, that the department "would field questions from retailers as to exceptions and ensure state exclusions are enforced."

The bill defines a soft drink as "a nonalcoholic beverage that contains natural or artificial sweeteners." Milk or milk products, rice, soy or similar milk substitutes and juices approved by the Department of Health are exempt from that definition.

Six social services employees administer the SNAP program now, the fiscal impact statement says. A seventh would be needed to deal with the waiver, at a cost of \$80,600 a year including benefits. That employee would also be charged with the duty to track sales and report purchasing patterns, medical services needed, and other economic and health outcomes for SNAP recipients.

The state would need an ongoing contract with a software vendor to meet reporting obligations, the statement says, and a similar contract in Nebraska costs \$250,000 a year. As with the new state employee, the federal government would cover a quarter of the cost of a vendor contract.

The program likely wouldn't be fully up and running until state fiscal year 2028, which will begin on July 1, 2027. The first fiscal year cost, the statement said, would only include the price of the new state employee as a result.

The full ongoing annual cost for the soda ban would be \$330,600, the statement says, with the state's share being \$247,950.

On Friday, Rhoden spokeswoman Josie Harms said the administration's higher cost estimates are based on an assumption that the state would need three additional employees to coordinate with retailers and are "informed by conversations with neighboring states."

With its fiscal note complete, HB 1056 now awaits a vote in the full state Senate. If it passes, it would be up to Gov. Larry Rhoden to sign the bill or veto it.

Rhoden said that he has "no issues with redefining whether or not soft drinks should be part of the SNAP program" during his weekly legislative press conference last week. But he said the state should not have to shoulder the costs.

"Why would we as a state take on responsibility that costs hundreds of thousands of dollars to the state to administer a federal program?" Rhoden said.

Congress should enact a nationwide policy, he added, rather than forcing states to request individual waivers.

If the bill passes the Senate and Rhoden vetoes it, a two-thirds majority vote in both chambers would be needed to override him.

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

## South Dakota regulators approve wind farm that will be the largest in the state

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

South Dakota regulators approved a permit Thursday for a \$750 million, 333-megawatt wind farm spread across approximately 110 square miles of private land.

The site selected by Philip Wind Partners, a subsidiary of Chicago-based Invenergy, is north of Philip and about 85 miles east of Rapid City. Plans call for up to 87 turbines and 5.5 miles of electrical transmission line, creating enough capacity to power hundreds of thousands of homes.

According to the application, the project will create about 200 construction jobs and 12 long-term jobs. Over the next 30 years, the

company anticipates paying about \$85 million to landowners, \$50 million in property taxes, and \$10 million in other state and local sales taxes.

The South Dakota Public Utilities Commission voted to accept a settlement agreement between the commission's legal staff and the project that outlines requirements the company must follow during construction and operation.

"The applicant has proven they are entitled to this permit under the criteria established in state law," said Commissioner Chris Nelson in a statement. "When constructed, this wind facility will be the largest in the state, reinforcing our state's electricity generation capacity."

The company filed its application with the commission on Aug. 15, triggering a nine-month review period. It is expected to start construction in June. A commission public meeting notice says the company plans to reach commercial operation in December 2027.

According to tracking by the website Choose Energy, South Dakota ranks ninth nationally in wind energy production. About 58% of electrical generation in the state is from wind, which is a higher percentage than all other states except Iowa and Kansas.

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

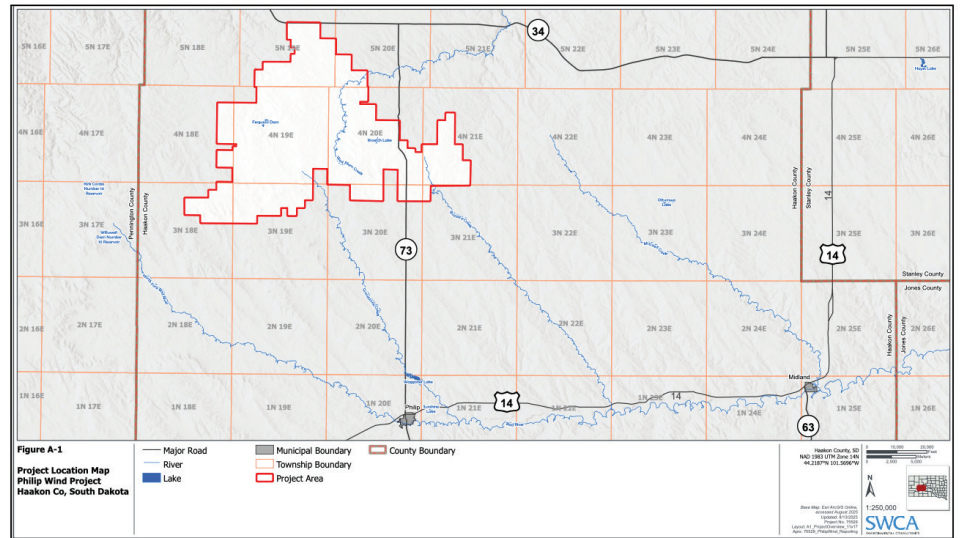


Figure A-1  
Project Location Map  
Philip Wind Project  
Haakon Co, South Dakota

The Philip Wind Partners project map. (Courtesy of Public Utilities Commission)

## Department of Homeland Security enters shutdown, amid dispute over funding

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA

WASHINGTON — The second partial government shutdown in 2026 began at 12:01 a.m. Saturday, after lawmakers left the nation's capital without reaching a deal on changes to immigration enforcement tactics at the Department of Homeland Security.

The department's shutdown is also likely to go on for some time. With Congress out next week for the Presidents Day recess, lawmakers are not expected back on Capitol Hill for votes until Feb. 23.

A procedural vote to approve funding for the Homeland Security bill for fiscal year 2026 failed Thursday to gain support from Senate Democrats because constraints to immigration enforcement were not included, such as an end to agents wearing face coverings.

Even with the president's border czar Tom Homan announcing Thursday the withdrawal of the thousands of federal immigration officers from Minneapolis, Democrats argued it's not enough.

"Without legislation, what Tom Homan says today could be reversed tomorrow on a whim from (President) Donald Trump," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said on the Senate floor Thursday.

Asked by the press pool Friday about cutting a deal on the shutdown, Trump said, "We'll see what happens. We always have to protect our law enforcement."

After the Senate vote failed 52-47, members of Congress emptied out of Washington for the recess. Some were off to Munich, Germany for a major security conference.

### ICE still has cash at hand

While the agency Trump tasked with carrying out his mass deportation campaign of immigrants will shut down, enforcement will continue because Congress allocated a separate stream of money, about \$75 billion for U.S. Immigration and Enforcement Services.

During last fall's government shutdown, which lasted a record-breaking 43 days, immigration enforcement continued.

The other agencies within DHS that will be shut down but continue to operate because they include essential workers include the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Secret Service, the Coast Guard and the Transportation Security Administration, and Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, among others.

In general, any employees who focus on national security issues or the protection of life and property would continue to work through a shutdown, while federal workers who don't are supposed to be furloughed.

Neither category of employees will receive their paychecks during the funding lapse, though federal law requires they receive back pay once Congress approves some sort of spending bill.



**A security officer stands outside Immigration and Customs Enforcement headquarters during a protest on Feb. 3, 2026 in Washington, D.C.** (Photo by Heather Diehl/Getty Images)

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 20 of 71

## Democratic mayors call for GOP to accept proposals

Democrats have pushed for policy changes after federal immigration officers killed two U.S. citizens in Minneapolis, where a deportation drive is set to wind down after the city faced more than two months of aggressive immigration enforcement.

Renee Good was shot and killed by an immigration officer on Jan. 7, which prompted a bipartisan agreement to enact some guardrails, such as \$20 million in funding for immigration agents to wear body cameras.

But a second killing by federal immigration officers, that of Alex Pretti on Jan. 24, prompted the Senate to decouple the Homeland Security measure from a package of spending bills, as Democrats floated proposals meant to rein in enforcement tactics, and prompted a four-day partial shutdown. A two-week funding patch was set for negotiations and it expires at midnight Friday.

Democratic mayors hailing from the major cities of Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, New Orleans and Portland, Oregon, Friday issued a letter that called on the top Republicans in Congress, Senate Majority Leader John Thune of South Dakota and House Speaker Mike Johnson of Louisiana, to accept the proposals before DHS entered a shutdown.

"When federal agents operate in our streets without identification, without warrants, and without accountability, that trust is shattered," they wrote. "All of us agree that for so long as the agency exists, new funding for the Department of Homeland Security must be conditioned on the comprehensive 10-point framework released last week."

Those policy suggestions include requiring immigration officers to not wear masks and identify themselves, which has drawn strong opposition from Republicans and the leaders of ICE and Customs and Border Protection who argue the face coverings prevent their agents from being doxxed.

Schumer and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., sent the proposals over to the White House, but said the Trump administration's response was "incomplete and insufficient in terms of addressing the concerns Americans have about ICE's lawless conduct."

According to the contingency plan for DHS, the agency expects about 20,000 employees out of 271,000 to be furloughed in the event of a government shutdown.

*Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include immigration, congressional policy and legal challenges with a focus on how those policies impact the lives of immigrants and migrants coming to the U.S.*

## 'Not the same town anymore:' ICE surge hit businesses in Worthington, where 1 in 3 are immigrants

Restaurants and stores lock doors and customers stay home as many fear lasting economic impacts

BY: ALEX BAUMHARDT

WORTHINGTON — Typically about 10 to 15 cars and their new owners drive off the lot each month at Los Partners Auto Sales in Worthington, a small city in southwest Minnesota where roughly 1 in 3 residents is an immigrant.

But since early January, when the Trump administration ramped up its federal immigration operation to 3,000 agents, Larry Trovino has sold just three.

"People got scared to be on the street," said Trovino, Los Partners' manager. He's lived in Worthington for 18 years.

"You can feel it, the sadness from town. There's no people walking around. You go to the stores, and they lock the doors now. You've got to wait until they open the door for you. It's not normal," he explained on a quiet Wednesday afternoon at the shop.

The surge of federal immigration officials ordered by President Donald Trump in December primarily targeted the Twin Cities metro, but other parts of the state — including southwest Minnesota and Worthington — have not been spared. At least three men were arrested by federal immigration agents in Worthington since late December, according to local news reports, and neighborhood watch group pages on Facebook show near daily posts of presumed sightings of agents around the area.

Officials at the Department of Homeland Security did not respond to a request for a county-by-county breakdown of immigration arrests in Minnesota over the past year. Department spokeswoman Tricia McLaughlin said in an emailed statement that in the past nine weeks, Homeland Security has arrested 4,000 "criminal illegal aliens including vicious murderers, rapists, child pedophiles and incredibly dangerous individuals."

On Thursday, Trump's Border Czar Tom Homan announced many of those immigration agents would be sent home in the coming week.

It can't happen soon enough for Worthington, where foot traffic downtown has quieted to a patter since the beginning of the year, and businesses are suffering economic losses some owners said they might not survive even now that the feds say they are winding down Operation Metro Surge.

"It's definitely not the same town anymore," Trovino said.



**President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown hit the hardest on the Twin Cities, but it has also been felt in other parts of Minnesota, including in the small city of Worthington. Los Partners Auto Sales, shown here on Feb. 11, 2026, is one of the businesses in Worthington that has seen a dip in sales since January, when 3,000 immigration officers started descending on the state.** (Photo by Alex Baumhardt/Minnesota Reformer)

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 22 of 71

## Economic engine

Worthington, about 60 miles from the state's border with South Dakota, is the seat of Nobles County, which has the highest proportion of foreign-born residents of any county in the state, according to U.S. Census data. One in five residents in the county of roughly 22,000 is an immigrant, and roughly 70% of those immigrants are Hispanic or Latino. Most newcomers arrived from Mexico, followed by Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, within the last decade-and-a-half.

Many came to work on area farms and at the JBS meatpacking plant, the town's largest employer with roughly 2,100 employees.

From 2010 to 2020, the total immigrant population in the 23-counties of southwest Minnesota grew 40%, according to a 2022 analysis from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development.

Although the influx of people has led to some racist backlash, the growth has undoubtedly revived towns like Worthington, where businesses that had shuttered in the '80s and '90s were reopened and renovated to support Mexican and Asian grocery stores and restaurants, churches and other places of worship.

"I have often brought folks into the narrative by inviting them to come to Willmar. Come to Worthington. Stand with me on this street corner. Spin your head around. Look at all of the businesses that are owned by entrepreneurs of color," said Scott Marquardt, president of the nonprofit economic development group Southwest Initiative Foundation. The group provides grants to businesses to help update old buildings for new commercial projects.

"I am worried about survivability now," he said. "As you get out into these smaller communities, that entrepreneur may be the only source of groceries; the only auto repair shop. So is somebody going to come in behind? I'm worried about the long-term, sustainable impact. I'm concerned about what it means for succession."

## 'No one is leaving the house'

On Wednesday afternoon, several Latino grocery stores and Mexican restaurants downtown were open, but with doors locked. Patrons had to be let in by an employee at the door, meant to ensure no one is a federal agent. Joyce Heywroth was the lone customer at the downtown laundromat, where she said typically there would be other customers, but she assumed many were avoiding the place out of fear that ICE agents would be in town.

At Tienda Tacana #2, a corner store downtown, cashier Laura Hernandez said business almost entirely depends on what's been posted on social media that day related to ICE sightings.

"On the days that a lot of stuff is online, and around those days specifically, that's when people just won't come out," she said.

Jamie Salinas, CEO of the Worthington Chamber of Commerce, said he and other city officials have had to spend time dispelling unfounded rumors about specific spots in town in recent months. A local college baseball training inadvertently sparked fear when people reported to online networks an unusually high number of out-of-state plates in a city parking lot.

"Everybody is just trying to stay ahead of everything, trying to keep an eye out for everybody around here," he said.

At the Top Asian Food and Deli down the street, cashier Cristian Roche said the Saturday that Alex Pretti was killed by Border Patrol agents in Minneapolis, very few people came through downtown. When he drove past the Walmart, he said, the parking lot was nearly empty.

Ana Cuadros, owner of downtown bakery Panaderia Mi Tierra, said business is down roughly 50% since the beginning of the year. Sales are down about 70% at RG Music store, owner Maria Agorra said.

The high concentration of Latino bakeries, markets and clothing stores typically brings customers — including many other immigrants — from St. James and surrounding communities to Worthington, Agorra said.

"Now, no one is leaving the house or leaving their neighborhoods," she said in Spanish.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 23 of 71

## Not the first time

There was fear in Worthington during the first Trump administration, and even before that. Worthington was the target of one of the state's largest federal immigration raids in 2006, when the JBS meat packing plant — the largest employer in the city — was targeted by federal immigration agents as part of a six-state operation that resulted in 1,300 arrests, with more than 200 in Worthington.

Rena Wong, president of the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 663, which represents about 1,900 JBS workers, said the two-decade old incident had a lasting impact.

"That memory still lives in the community. Folks see ICE agents driving around and walking around in the community — they're at the Walmart. They're at the local stores and restaurants — and so of course people are scared and worried."

Wong said they've partnered with other area unions to create a legal defense and support fund for members and their families, including several in Worthington.

At the school district, the second largest employer in the city, Superintendent Joel Heitkamp said they've struggled with a few days of large absences among school support staff, which are predominantly employees of color, he said.

School staff were at trainings at Worthington schools on Martin Luther King Jr. Day when they heard that ICE agents were in town and had taken two men.

"So a small group of us went to every building for about an hour on that day and just held a question and answer," he said. The next day, there were many staff absences, and student attendance dropped by about 20%, though the numbers recovered within a few days, Heitkamp said.

He said COVID-19 provided a good training ground for dealing with the insecurity and uncertainty families and staff feel during this time.

"I've tried to approach it in that same manner, knowing that every day as school leaders, we don't know what's going to pop up, but we do know that we have to respond," he said.

That means getting school supplies and other materials to kids staying at home, making sure they reach families that have fallen out of contact with teachers, and ensuring kids know they are safe when they're at school or on the bus.

Heitkamp hasn't seen any major exodus of kids or families from the district. But Trovino, at the car dealership, said he's heard from friends who manage apartment buildings in town who have seen an unusually high number of tenants abruptly leaving. Trovino also owns and rents out a home in town.

He said his tenant left a few weeks ago. He didn't tell Trovino where he was going.

"He just said he doesn't feel safe in Worthington any more," Trovino said.

*This story was originally produced by Minnesota Reformer, which is part of States Newsroom, a nonprofit news network which includes South Dakota Searchlight, and is supported by grants and a coalition of donors as a 501c(3) public charity.*

*Senior reporter Alex Baumhardt covers education and the environment for the Oregon Capital Chronicle. Before coming to Oregon, she was a national radio producer and reporter covering education for American Public Media's documentaries and investigations unit, APM Reports. She earned a master's degree in digital and visual media as a U.S. Fulbright scholar in Spain, and has reported from the Arctic to the Antarctic for national and international media and from Minnesota and Oregon for The Washington Post.*

## End of enhanced Obamacare subsidies puts tribal health lifeline at risk

BY: KATHERYN HOUGHTON, KFF HEALTH NEWS AND  
JAZMIN OROZCO RODRIGUEZ, KFF HEALTH NEWS

Leonard Bighorn said his mother tried for two years to get help for severe stomach pain through the limited health services available near her home on the Fort Peck Reservation in north-eastern Montana.

After his mom finally saw a specialist in Glasgow, about an hour away, she was diagnosed with stage 4 colon cancer, Bighorn said.

Now, 16 years after his mother's death, Bighorn has access to regular screenings for cancer and other specialty care that she didn't have, through a health insurance program the Fort Peck Tribes created in 2016. The program, which covers most of the costs for the roughly 1,000 tribal citizens enrolled, is among a growing number of tribally sponsored health insurance programs.

Such programs vary by tribe, but they essentially screen and enroll people living within tribal boundaries in Affordable Care Act marketplace plans. They allow participating Native Americans flexibility to go to outside doctors and clinics when care through the Indian Health Service is unavailable.

"I'd be in a bind otherwise," said Bighorn, a 65-year-old tribal game warden and member of the Dakota community.

But the Fort Peck Tribes now limit who has access to that coverage. Nearly 400 miles to the west, the Blackfeet Nation recently stopped enrolling people in a similar program, warning that funding will run out before the end of the year. Other tribal organizations that offer Native Americans similar coverage are struggling with rising costs, too.

The financial crunch began when congressional lawmakers allowed enhanced subsidies under the Affordable Care Act to expire on Dec. 31. Those tax credits, created under the Biden administration during the covid-19 pandemic, expanded subsidized health coverage for millions of people. By late 2025, ACA plans saw about 24 million enrollees, more than twice the number of pre-pandemic annual sign-ups. The cost of coverage shot up for most of those people as the expanded subsidies expired, and enrollment so far has dropped by more than 1 million people, according to federal health officials.

The subsidies had also boosted tribal health insurance programs, like the one Bighorn is enrolled in. The programs pay the price of each person's share of premiums after subsidies, and the coverage lowers patients' treatment costs. Now that premium prices have ballooned, so have tribes' costs.



**The Oyate Health Center in Rapid City on April 24, 2024. The center serves patients eligible for care through the Indian Health Service.** (Photo by Seth Tupper/South Dakota Searchlight)

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 25 of 71

Rae Jean Belgarde, who directs Fort Peck Tribes' program, said the higher costs leave the tribes with one option at this point: "Start limiting who gets help."

The tribes are helping people shift to other insurance options and, in some cases, find state programs to cover their premiums. Tribal leaders also sent a letter to Montana's all-Republican congressional delegation asking them to support extending the subsidies.

"Our program is saving lives," the letter read. Belgarde said she didn't know whether the lawmakers responded.

## Scrambling for Solutions

U.S. House members approved a temporary extension of the enhanced subsidies in January. But that measure stalled in the Senate. Lawmakers are scrambling for an alternative after President Donald Trump threatened to veto an extension if a bill reaches his desk. On Jan. 15, the president released an outline of a health care proposal that includes creating savings accounts for people to pay their health costs — an idea Senate Republicans previously floated as an alternative to the subsidies.

A.C. Locklear, CEO of the National Indian Health Board, a nonprofit that works to improve health in Native communities, said tribes are "looking at ways to cut back just as much as everyone else."

Native Americans as a group continue to face disproportionately high rates of chronic diseases. Their median age at death is 14 years younger than that of white Americans.

"Reducing access to even just general primary care has a significant impact on those disparities," Locklear said.

Tribal leaders have said letting the subsidies expire further undermines the federal government's duty to ensure adequate care for Native Americans.

In exchange for taking tribal land through colonization, the U.S. government made long-standing promises to provide for the health and well-being of tribes. Native Americans are guaranteed free health care at clinics and hospitals operated or funded by the Indian Health Service. But that agency's chronic underfunding has created massive blackouts in care. It sometimes pays for patients' outside care through its Purchased/Referred Care program, but that's limited too. Due to funding shortfalls, the agency prioritizes which treatments it will pay for.

To help fill the coverage gaps, some tribal nations have built their own health insurance programs. When tribes pay health premiums, clinics and hospitals in their areas can bill for services that might otherwise go unpaid. Some tribes have leveraged that money to expand services.

"I don't see tribes getting rid of these programs," Locklear said. "But it will drastically shift how much tribes can really put back in their community."

For example, Tuba City Regional Health Care Corp., in northern Arizona within the Navajo Nation, is unique in providing comprehensive cancer treatment on a reservation, Locklear said. The corporation, he said, estimates its costs to cover patients this year are increasing by roughly 170% to nearly \$38,000 per month without the enhanced subsidies.

One of the newer programs is on the Blackfeet reservation in northwestern Montana, where basic health services can be hard to find. Medical visits are often offered on a first-come, first-served basis, and services vanish when staff positions go unfilled, said Lyle Rutherford, a Blackfeet Nation council member.

"Some of it is just getting a regular eye appointment, or a primary care appointment," Rutherford said.

The tribe has been slowly building its health insurance program since launching it in 2024. Rutherford said the enhanced subsidies made that possible. Fewer than 400 people are enrolled out of an estimated 3,000 who qualify. The tribe halted new enrollments about two months ago because of the pending expiration of subsidies and shifted its healthier members to lower-cost plans.

"At this point in time, we just have to hold off," Rutherford said. "Premiums have increased by 100-plus percent."

He said tribal leaders are seeking extra funding to keep the program afloat, and he hopes Congress finds a solution.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 26 of 71

## Lives on the Line

The impact goes beyond tribes' insurance programs. The Urban Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based economic and social policy research nonprofit, estimates that 125,000 Native Americans will become uninsured in 2026 due to the higher costs.

Patients at the Oyate Health Center in Rapid City, South Dakota, are already reporting sky-high premium increases for ACA plans. CEO Jerilyn Church said it's too soon to know how many will forgo coverage. But she said more uninsured patients would further strain the IHS Purchased/Referred Care program — with officials raising the bar for how sick patients must be to cover care outside of tribal health sites.

"There will be people that will not be able to get the care they need," Church said, adding that could translate to "people losing their lives."

Bighorn, the game warden on the Fort Peck Reservation, is among those still covered by the tribes' insurance program. He has put it to use.

Soon after enrolling, Bighorn needed two hip replacements, surgeries that require off-reservation care and are ranked as low-priority procedures by the Indian Health Service. Bighorn said that in pre-surgery tests, specialists found the cause for his long-standing, dangerously high blood pressure. The diagnosis: untreated lifelong asthma and sleep apnea.

"I was a miserable man, tired all the time," he said.

Without the tribe's coverage, Bighorn may have eventually gotten those diagnoses but said it would have likely taken years to get help through the Indian Health Service. That would have meant getting much sicker before receiving care.

*KFF Health News correspondent Arielle Zionts contributed to this report.*

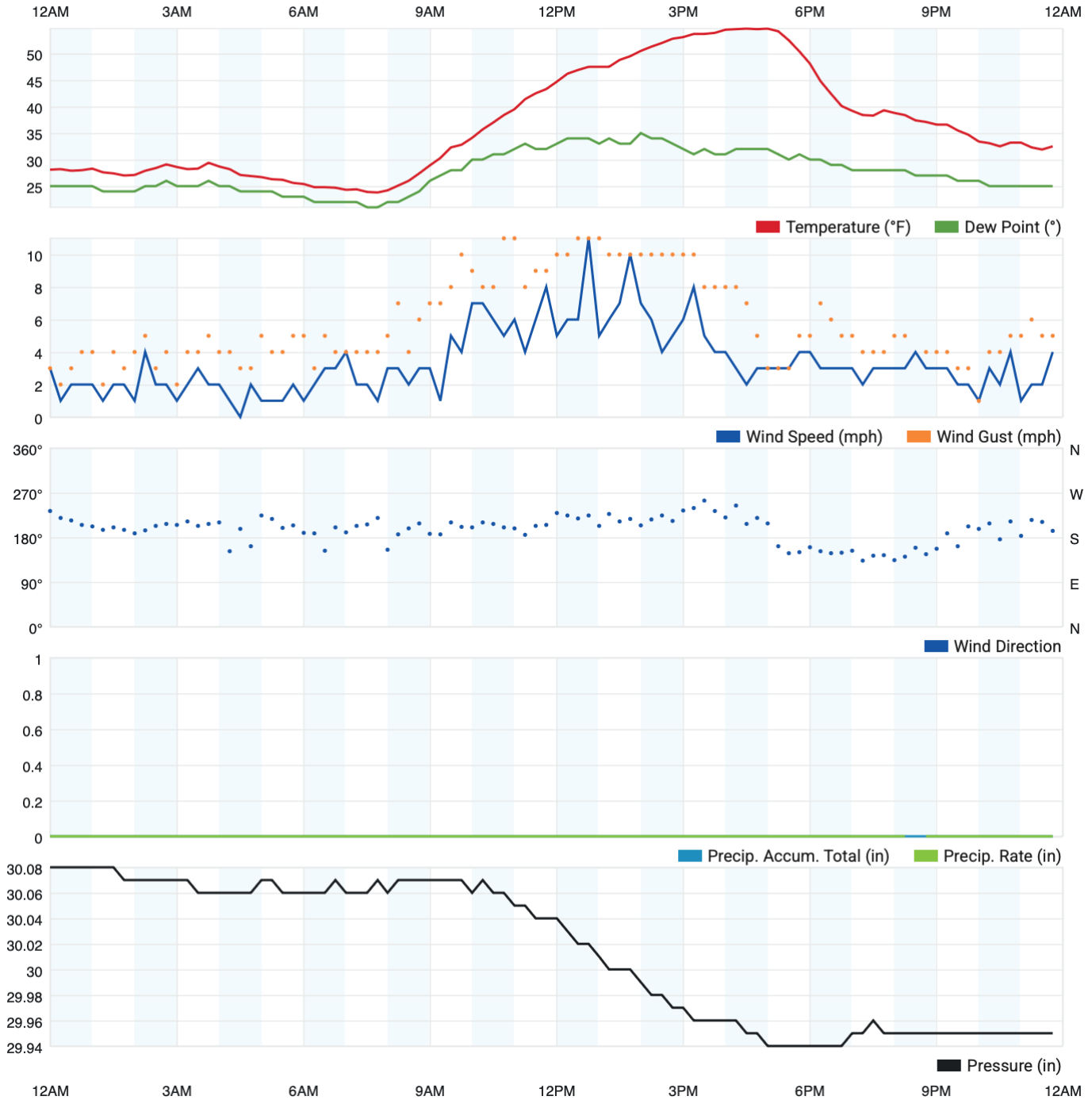
*Katheryn Houghton, Montana correspondent for KFF Health News, covers health policy and politics, access to treatment, and the business of health care in that state. Previously, she reported on health care issues for newspapers including the Bozeman Daily Chronicle and the Daily Inter Lake. Katheryn was an Association of Health Care Journalists fellow. She is a graduate of the University of Montana.*

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 27 of 71

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

February 13, 2026



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 28 of 71

Today



High: 54 °F

Increasing  
Clouds

Tonight



Low: 29 °F

Partly Cloudy

Sunday



High: 54 °F

Partly Sunny

Sunday Night



Low: 28 °F

Partly Cloudy

Washington's  
Birthday



High: 52 °F

Sunny



## Valentine's Day Forecast

Climate Site	Forecast High Temperature (°F)	Normal High Temperature (°F)	Record High Temperature (°F)
<i>Aberdeen</i>	56	28	57 (1934)
<i>Pierre</i>	58	33	72 (1954)
<i>Mobridge</i>	54	31	66 (1954)
<i>Watertown</i>	57	25	58 (1999)
<i>Sisseton</i>	56	27	54 (1999)

The weather will show us some love this Valentine's Day with seriously above average high temperatures. Aberdeen, Sisseton, and Watertown could all tie or set new record high temperatures!

# Groton Daily Independent

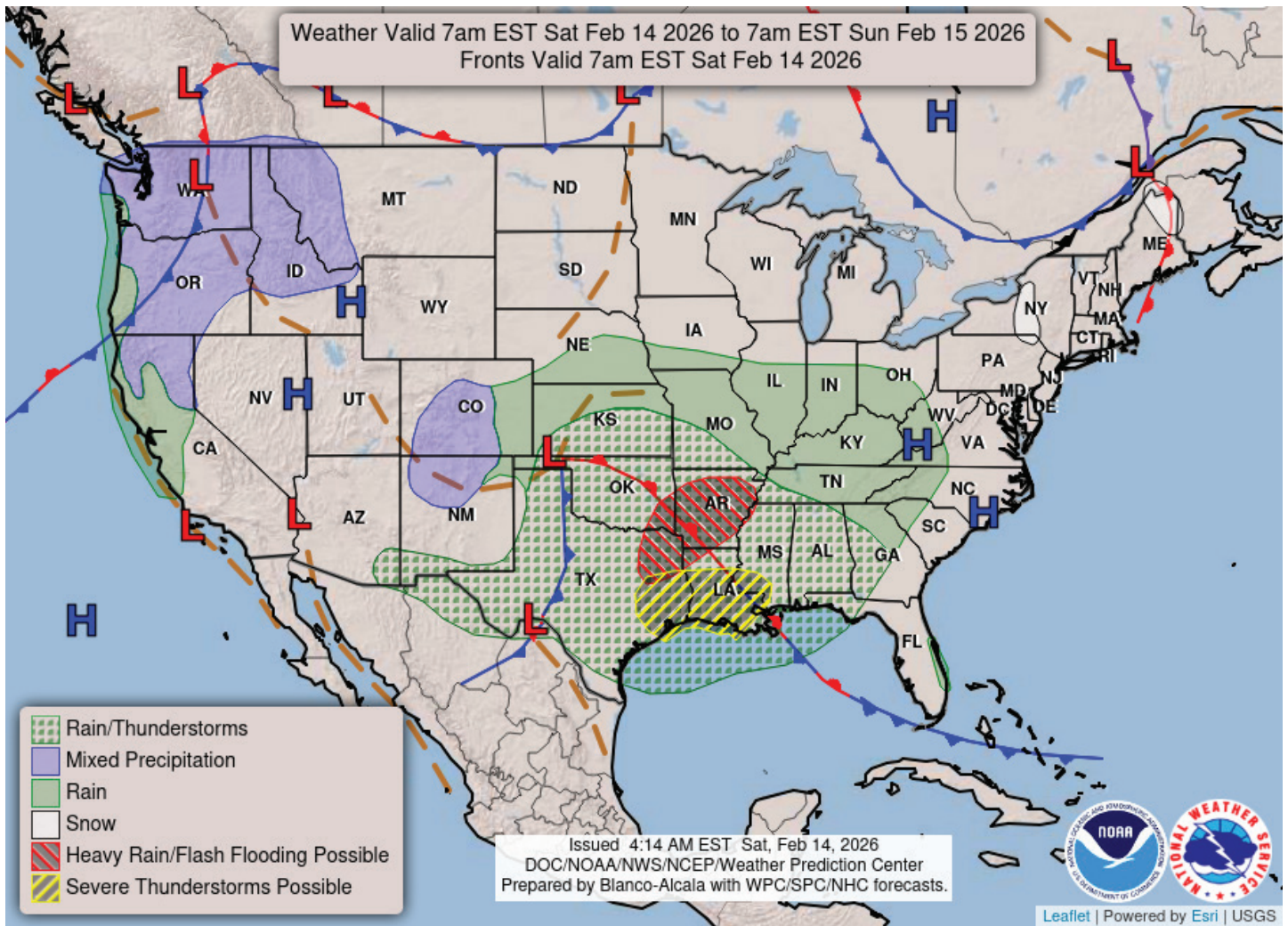
Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 29 of 71

## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 55 °F at 4:37 PM**  
**Low Temp: 24 °F at 7:29 AM**  
**Wind: 12 mph at 12:46 PM**  
**Precip: : 0.00**

## Today's Info

Record High: 57 in 1934  
Record Low: -30 in 1936  
Average High: 28  
Average Low: 6  
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.28  
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00  
Average Precip to date: 0.83  
Precip Year to Date: 0.00  
Sunset Tonight: 5:57 pm  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:34 am



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 30 of 71

## Today in Weather History

February 14th, 1967: The heaviest snow fell in the central part of the state, with Pierre receiving 10 inches with 14 inches reported near Harrold. Elsewhere, 1 to 4 inches of snow was typical. Winds of 20 to 30 mph with gusts over 40 mph caused extensive drifting and blowing snow reducing visibilities to near zero. As a result, many schools were closed, and other activities were canceled. Temperatures of 5 to 15 degrees below zero were typical on the morning of the 15th. A farmer died in the storm near Yale, where his car stalled, and he attempted to walk.

February 14th, 1979: High winds of 50 mph or greater and snow from a half-inch to more than 14 inches moved through the state late on the 14th, with winds slowly subsiding on the 16th. Visibility was reduced to near zero at the height of the storm, and no travel was advised. Temperatures fell to 25 degrees below zero, with wind chills to 80 to 90 below on the 15th. One man suffered frostbite after being stranded in his truck for seventeen hours. In addition, power was lost at Wall due to high winds snapping power lines together.

1895: The most significant snowfall in the history of Houston, Texas, occurred on the 14th and 15th. The Houston area saw 20 inches of snow.

1899 — A great blizzard struck the eastern U.S. Washington D.C. received 20.5 inches of snow to bring their total snow depth to nearly three feet. The storm produced 36 inches of snow at Cape May NJ. (David Ludlum)

1940 — A "Saint Valentine's Day Blizzard" hit the northeastern U.S. Up to a foot and a half of snow blanketed southern New England, and whole gales accompanied the heavy snow stranding many in downtown Boston. (David Ludlum)

1982: A "meteorological bomb" exploded in the Atlantic southeast of Newfoundland. The term is used to describe a storm that rapidly intensifies. The intense cyclone off the Atlantic coast capsized a drilling rig killing 84 persons and sank a Soviet freighter resulting in 33 more deaths. The cyclone produced 80 mph winds that whipped the water into waves fifty feet high.

1987 — A powerful storm spawned severe thunderstorms in Texas and Oklahoma, and produced heavy snow in the Rocky Mountain Region. Snowfall totals in Colorado ranged up to 27 inches at Telluride. Straight line winds gusting to 104 mph howled through Guadalupe Pass in West Texas. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — Strong northerly winds ushered arctic air into the north central U.S. Snow and high winds created blizzard conditions in Minnesota and the Dakotas. Winds gusted to 56 mph at Rapid City SD, and reached 65 mph at Cody WY. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — While "Valentine's Day" was a soggy one in the Ohio Valley and the Tennessee Valley, unseasonably warm weather prevailed in the southeastern U.S. Seventeen cities reported record high temperatures for the date as readings warmed into the 70s and 80s. (The National Weather Summary)

1990: Valentine's Day was a snowy one for many parts of Iowa and Illinois. Five to ten inches of snow fell across Iowa. Six to 12 inches of snow blanketed northern Illinois, and strong northeasterly winds accompanied the heavy snow. Air traffic came to a halt during the evening at O'Hare Airport in Chicago, where 9.7 inches of snow was reported. More than 250 traffic accidents were reported around Des Moines, Iowa, during the evening rush hour. In addition, an ice storm glazed east central sections of Illinois, causing twelve million dollars damage in Champaign County alone.

2004 — Dallas receives 3 inches of snow, wreaking havoc with Valentine's Day flower deliveries. The greatest snowfall since 1978 caused numerous traffic accidents, power outages and flight cancellations at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport.

2007: Light snow fell on Nepal's capital, Kathmandu, for the first time in over 60 years. They also saw light snow on February 28th, 2019.

## Showing Agape Love

**Divine love enables us to forgive, serve generously, and restore those who have fallen.**

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 : 1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

2 If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

3 And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

4 Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant,

5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered,

6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;

7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

8 Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.

9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part;

10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.

11 When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.

12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

13 But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Yesterday, we saw that agape, or unconditional love, empowers us to respond calmly to difficulties, show patience while waiting, and sacrifice without complaint. We demonstrate agape when we ...

Forgive. Once the prodigal son returned, love made it possible for his father to let go of past hurts and forgive the young man (1 Peter 4:8). We can do the same for people who hurt us, though that doesn't mean we should allow the harm to continue.

Act generously. The son came home with few expectations. His father greeted him and dressed him in the finest garments. Godly love, which keeps no record of wrongs, made it possible to show such generosity.

Serve joyfully. Upon receiving back what "was lost and has been found" (Luke 15:32), the father hosted a celebration. He expressed his love by letting joy overflow in service to others.

Restore those who fall. The one who both abandoned his father and squandered his inheritance was again given the rights of a son.

When we sin, our heavenly Father patiently waits for us to turn back to Him. He accepts our repentance, rejoices in our return, and restores intimacy with Him. And we're meant to extend agape to others. With whom could you share this love?

*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*

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 32 of 71

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Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 33 of 71



## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:  
02.13.26

34 40 49 59 68 1

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$395,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
02.11.26

2 14 28 41 51 2

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$15,450,000**

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 26 Mins 3  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
02.13.26

6 18 21 35 39 12

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

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 41 Mins 2  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
02.11.26

3 6 8 17 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$274,000**

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 41 Mins 2  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
02.11.26

5 6 19 27 57 23

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

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 10 Mins 2  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
02.11.26

6 20 33 40 48 5

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$146,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 10 Mins 2  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 34 of 71

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

### GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Roncalli 56, Miller 43  
Arlington 47, Howard 20  
Beresford 51, Elk Point-Jefferson 44  
Brandon Valley 69, Marshall, Minn. 68  
Bridgewater-Emery 56, Kadoka 44  
Burke 54, Kimball-White Lake 41  
Chester 59, Canistota 21  
Colman-Egan 66, Deubrook 56  
Corsica/Stickney 54, Dell Rapids St Mary's 50  
De Smet 64, Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 26  
Dell Rapids 48, Dakota Valley 35  
Deuel 46, Redfield 24  
Edgemont 47, Banner County, Neb. 27  
Gregory 39, Scotland/Menno 19  
Harrisburg 47, Rapid City Central 27  
Herreid-Selby 52, North Central 43  
Highmore-Harrod 53, Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 48  
Ipswich 58, Sunshine Bible Academy 20  
Jones County 64, St. Francis Indian 41  
Langford 50, Faulkton 43  
Marty 58, Little Wound 24  
Platte-Geddes 57, Bon Homme 31  
Rapid City Stevens 68, Yankton 45  
Sioux Falls Jefferson 62, Brookings 37  
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 84, Sioux Falls Washington 58  
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 51, Watertown 49  
Sturgis Brown High School 55, Hot Springs 24  
Tea 62, S.C. East, Iowa 48  
Timber Lake 51, Newell 48  
Vermillion 45, Tri-Valley 33  
Wagner 66, Chamberlain 18  
Warner 43, Britton-Hecla 31  
Waubay/Summit 49, Waverly-South Shore 20  
Winner 75, McLaughlin 33  
Culvers Classic=  
Hamlin 74, Sioux Falls Christian 68  
DWU Classic=  
Clark-Willow Lake 44, St Thomas More 39  
Flandreau 55, Florence-Henry 42  
Freeman 57, Gettysburg 25  
Wall 51, Lemmon High School 37

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

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 35 of 71

## BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Banner County, Neb. 39, Edgemont 34  
Beresford 69, Elk Point-Jefferson 54  
Bon Homme 70, Platte-Geddes 66, 20T  
Chamberlain 66, Wagner 58  
Dakota Valley 77, Dell Rapids 71  
Deubrook 72, Colman-Egan 39  
Elkton-Lake Benton 65, Garretson 49  
Faulkton 64, Langford 48  
Harrisburg 62, Rapid City Central 52  
Hettinger-Scranton, N.D. 59, Harding County 51  
Ipswich 67, Sunshine Bible Academy 17  
Kadoka 73, Crazy Horse 49  
Lennox 58, Pine Ridge 28  
Little Wound 83, Marty 57  
Lower Brule 73, St. Francis Indian 68  
Miller 75, Aberdeen Roncalli 69  
North Central 66, Tiospaye Topa 42  
Redfield 73, Deuel 66  
Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 53, Highmore-Harrold 26  
Scotland/Menno 48, Gregory 45  
Sioux Falls Jefferson 76, Brookings 51  
Sioux Falls Lincoln 84, Brandon Valley 49  
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 68, Sioux Falls Washington 50  
Sisseton 33, Tiospa Zina 15  
Tea 56, S.C. East, Iowa 55  
Vermillion 60, Tri-Valley 27  
Warner 57, Florence-Henry 54  
Watertown 71, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 68  
Waubay/Summit 66, Waverly-South Shore 49  
West Central 76, Madison 31  
Winner 57, McLaughlin 29  
Yankton 65, Rapid City Stevens 32

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

## Iran's crown prince says ahead of protests that inaction against Tehran encourages bullies

MUNICH, Germany (AP) — Supporters of Iran's exiled Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi were looking Saturday to world leaders gathered in Munich, Germany, to ratchet up pressure for change on the Iranian government.

Pahlavi called for demonstrations in Munich, Los Angeles and Toronto on what he described as a "global day of action," urging supporters to take to streets to push for "urgent, practical steps in support of the Iranian people."

Iranian leaders are already under intense scrutiny, facing renewed threats of U.S. military action from President Donald Trump. Trump wants Iran to further scale back its nuclear program. He suggested Friday that regime change in Iran "would be the best thing that could happen."

Iran was also the focus of protests in Munich on Friday, the opening day of an annual security conference in the city gathering European leaders and global security figures. Supporters of the Iranian opposition group People's Mujahedeen Organization of Iran, also known as the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, demonstrated

against Iran's deadly crackdown on nationwide protests last month.

Pahlavi, the son of Iran's deposed shah who abandoned his throne and fled the country in 1979, has been in exile for nearly 50 years but is trying to position himself as a player in Iran's future.

At a news conference in Munich on Saturday, Pahlavi warned of the likelihood of more deaths in Iran if "democracies stand by and watch."

"We gather at an hour of profound peril to ask: Will the world stand with the people of Iran?" he asked.

He added that the Iranian government's continued survival "sends a clear signal to every bully: kill enough people and you stay in power."

The U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency says at least 7,005 people were killed in the protest, including 214 government forces. It has been accurate in counting deaths during previous rounds of unrest in Iran and relies on a network of activists in Iran to verify deaths.

Iran's government offered its only death toll on Jan. 21, saying 3,117 people were killed. Iran's theocracy in the past has undercounted or not reported fatalities from past unrest.

The Associated Press has been unable to independently assess the death toll, given authorities have disrupted internet access and international calls in Iran.

## Rubio's speech to European allies takes softer tone but sticks to Trump's firm stance

By MATTHEW LEE, EMMA BURROWS and GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

MUNICH (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio offered a reassuring message to America's allies on Saturday, striking a less aggressive but still firm tone about the administration's intent to reshape the trans-Atlantic alliance and push its priorities after more than a year of President Donald Trump's often-hostile rhetoric toward traditional allies.

Reminding his audience at the annual Munich Security Conference about America's centuries-long roots in Europe, Rubio said the United States would remain forever tied to the continent even as it pushes for changes in the relationship and the international institutions that have been the bulwark of the post-World War II world order.

Rubio addressed the conference a year after Vice President JD Vance stunned the same audience with a harsh critique of European values. A series of statements and moves from the Trump administration targeting allies followed, including Trump's short-lived threat last month to impose new tariffs on several European countries in a bid to secure U.S. control of Greenland, a semiautonomous territory of NATO ally Denmark.

On Friday, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz had opened this year's gathering by calling for the U.S. and Europe to "repair and revive trans-Atlantic trust together," saying that even the U.S. isn't powerful enough to go it alone in a world whose old order no longer exists. But he and other European officials made clear that they will stand by their values, including their approach to free speech, climate change and free trade.

'A child of Europe'

While offering a calmer and more reassuring tone than the one often heard over the past year, Rubio made clear that the Trump administration is sticking to its guns on policy. He denounced "a climate cult" and "an unprecedented wave of mass migration that threatens the cohesion of our societies."

Rubio argued that the "euphoria" of the Western victory in the Cold War led to a "dangerous delusion that we had entered 'the end of history,' that every nation would now be a liberal democracy, that the ties formed by trade and by commerce alone would now replace nationhood ... and that we would now live in a world without borders where everyone became a citizen of the world."

"We made these mistakes together and now together we owe it to our people to face those facts and to move forward to rebuild," Rubio said.

"This is why we Americans may sometimes come off as a little direct and urgent in our counsel," he said. "This is why President Trump demands seriousness and reciprocity from our friends here in Europe."

Rubio said that an end of the trans-Atlantic era "is neither our goal nor our wish," adding that "our home

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 37 of 71

may be in the Western hemisphere, but we will always be a child of Europe.”

He acknowledged that “we have bled and died side-by-side on battlefields from Kapyong to Kandahar,” a contrast with disparaging remarks by Trump about NATO allies’ troops in Afghanistan that drew an outcry. “And I’m here today to make it clear that America is charting the path for a new century of prosperity, and that once again, we want to do it together with you, our cherished allies and our oldest friends.”

U.S. officials accompanying Rubio said his message was much the same as Vance’s last year but was intended to have a softer landing on the audience, which they acknowledged had recoiled at much of Trump’s rhetoric over the past year.

Europeans reassured but not complacent

The president of the European Union’s executive commission, Ursula von der Leyen, said Rubio’s speech was “very reassuring” but noted that “in the administration, some have a harsher tone on these topics.”

In her speech to the conference, she stressed that “Europe must become more independent,” including on defense. She insisted on Europe’s “digital sovereignty” — its approach to hate speech on social media.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said that “we shouldn’t get in the warm bath of complacency. He said the U.K. must re-forged closer ties with Europe to help the continent “stand on our own two feet” in its own defense, and said there needs to be investment that “moves us from overdependence to interdependence.”

Hanno Pevkur, the defense minister of EU and NATO member Estonia, said it was “quite a bold statement to say that America is ‘a child of Europe.’”

“It was a good speech, needed here today, but that doesn’t mean that we can rest on pillows now,” he told The Associated Press. “So still a lot of work has to be done.”

The conference pointed to tensions beyond those in the trans-Atlantic alliance.

Speaking after Rubio, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said Beijing felt “gratified” that Trump respects President Xi Jinping and China, but warned that some voices in the U.S. are leery of China’s rise.

“We see that some forces and some people are still trying their best to suppress and contain China, and are still attacking and slandering China by any means,” Wang said.

He cautioned that “law of the jungle and unilateralism have taken hold” and said some countries “even revive the Cold War mentality.”

## Drone strikes kill 2 in Ukraine and Russia ahead of US-brokered peace talks in Geneva

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Drone strikes killed one person in Ukraine and another in Russia, officials said Saturday, ahead of fresh talks next week aimed at ending the war.

An elderly woman died when a Russian drone hit a residential building in the Black Sea port city of Odesa, Ukraine’s State Emergency Service said.

In Russia, a civilian was killed in a Ukrainian drone strike on a car in the border region of Bryansk, regional Gov. Alexander Bogomaz said.

The attacks came a day after a Ukrainian missile strike on the Russian border city of Belgorod killed two people and wounded five, according to regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov.

Meanwhile, another round of U.S.-brokered talks between envoys from Russia and Ukraine will take place next week in Geneva, days ahead of the fourth anniversary of the all-out Russian invasion of its neighbor, officials in Moscow and Kyiv said on Friday.

The discussions will be held on Tuesday and Wednesday, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said in a statement carried by Russian news agencies.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s communications adviser, Dmytro Lytvyn, confirmed the new round of negotiations.

The talks take place against a backdrop of continued fighting along the roughly 1,250-kilometer (750-mile) front line, relentless Russian bombardment of civilian areas of Ukraine and the country’s power grid, and Kyiv’s almost daily long-range drone attacks on war-related assets on Russian soil.

Previous U.S.-led efforts to find consensus on ending the war, most recently two rounds of talks in Abu

Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, have failed to resolve difficult issues, such as the future of Ukraine's Donbas industrial heartland that is largely occupied by Russian forces.

Zelenskyy said last week that the United States has given Ukraine and Russia a June deadline to reach a deal. Previous deadlines given by U.S. President Donald Trump have passed largely without consequence.

## Iranian security use dragnet spanning the entire country to arrest protesters

By AMIR-HUSSEIN RADJY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — The Iranian security agents came at 2 a.m., pulling up in a half-dozen cars outside the home of the Nakhii family. They woke up the sleeping sisters, Nyusha and Mona, and forced them to give the passwords for their phones. Then they took the two away.

The women were accused of participating in the nationwide protests that shook Iran a week earlier, a friend of the pair told The Associated Press, speaking on condition of anonymity for her security as she described the Jan. 16 arrests.

Such arrests have been happening for weeks following the government crackdown last month that crushed the protests calling for the end of the country's theocratic rule. Reports of raids on homes and workplaces have come from major cities and rural towns alike, revealing a dragnet that has touched large swaths of Iranian society. University students, doctors, lawyers, teachers, actors, business owners, athletes and filmmakers have been swept up, as well as reformist figures close to President Masoud Pezeshkian.

They are often held incommunicado for days or weeks and prevented from contacting family members or lawyers, according to activists monitoring the arrests. That has left desperate relatives searching for their loved ones.

The U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency has put the number of arrests at more than 50,000. The AP has been unable to verify the figure. Tracking the detainees has been difficult since Iranian authorities imposed an internet blackout, and reports leak out only with difficulty.

Other activist groups outside Iran have also been working to document the sweeps.

"Authorities continue to identify people and detain them," said Shiva Nazarahari, an organizer with one of those groups, the Committee for Monitoring the Status of Detained Protesters.

So far, the committee has verified the names of more than 2,200 people who were arrested, using direct reports from families and a network of contacts on the ground. The arrestees include 107 university students, 82 children as young as 13, as well as 19 lawyers and 106 doctors.

Nazarahari said authorities have been reviewing municipal street cameras, store surveillance cameras and drone footage to track people who participated in the protests to their homes or places of work, where they are arrested.

Held for weeks with no contact

The protests began in late December, triggered by anger over spiraling prices, and quickly spread across the country. They peaked on Jan. 8 and 9, when hundreds of thousands of people in more than 190 cities and towns across the country took to the streets.

Security forces responded by unleashing unprecedented violence. The Human Rights Activists News Agency has so far counted more than 7,000 dead and says the true number is far higher. Iran's government offered its only death toll on Jan. 21, saying 3,117 people were killed. The theocracy has undercounted or not reported fatalities from past unrest.

Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejeji, a hard-line cleric who heads Iran's judiciary, became the face of the crackdown, labeling protesters "terrorists" and calling for fast-tracked punishments.

Since then, "detentions have been very widespread because it's like a whole suffocation of society," said one protester, reached by the AP in Gohardasht, a middle-class area outside the Iranian capital. He said two of his relatives and three of his brother's friends were killed in the first days of the crackdown, as well as several neighbors. The protester spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of being targeted by authorities.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 39 of 71

The Nakhii sisters, 37-year-old Nyusha and 25-year-old Mona, were first taken to Tehran's notorious Evin prison, where they were allowed to contact their parents, their friend said. Later, she said, they were moved to Qarchak, a women's prison on the outskirts of Tehran where rights groups reported conditions that included overcrowding and lack of hygiene even before the crackdown.

Other people whose arrests were documented by the detainees committee have disappeared into the prisons. The family of Abolfazl Jazbi has not heard from him since his Jan. 15 arrest at a factory in the southern city of Isfahan. Jazbi suffers from a severe blood disorder that requires medication, according to the committee.

Atila Sultanpour, 45, has not been heard from since he was taken from his home in Tehran on Jan. 29 by security agents who beat him severely, according to Dadban, a group of Iranian lawyers based abroad who are also documenting detentions.

Authorities have also moved to suspend bank accounts, block SIM cards and confiscate the property of protesters' relatives or people who publicly express support for them, said Musa Barzin, an attorney with Dadban, citing reports from families.

In past crackdowns on protests, authorities sometimes adhered to a veneer of due process and rule of law, but not this time, Barzin said. Authorities are increasingly denying detainees access to legal counsel and often holding them for days or weeks before allowing any phone calls to family. Lawyers representing arrested protesters also have faced court summons and detention, according to Dadban.

"The following of the law is in the worst situation it has ever been," Barzin said.

Signs of defiance continue

Despite the crackdown, many civic groups continue to issue defiant statements.

The Writers' Association of Iran, an independent group with a long tradition of dissent, issued a statement describing the protests as an uprising against "47 years of systemic corruption and discrimination."

It also announced that two of its members had been detained, including a member of its secretariat.

A national council representing schoolteachers urged families to speak out about detained children and students. "Do not fear the threats of security forces. Refer to independent counsel. Make your children's names public," it said in a statement.

A spokesman for the council said Sunday that it has documented the deaths of at least 200 minors who were killed in the crackdown. That figure is up several dozen from the count just days before.

"Every day we tell ourselves this is the last list," Mohammad Habibi wrote on X. "But the next morning, new names arrive again."

Bar associations and medical groups have also spoken out, including Iran's state-sanctioned doctors council, which called on authorities to stop harassing medical staff.

Anger over the bloodshed now adds to the bitterness over the economy, which has been hollowed out by decades of sanctions, corruption and mismanagement. The value of the currency has plunged, and inflation has climbed to record levels.

The Iranian government has announced gestures such as launching a new coupon program for essential goods. Labor and trade groups, including a national retirees syndicate, have issued statements condemning the economic and political crisis.

Meanwhile, U.S. President Donald Trump has moved an aircraft carrier and other military assets to the Persian Gulf and suggested the U.S. could attack Iran over the killing of peaceful demonstrators or if Tehran launches mass executions over the protests. A second American aircraft carrier is on its way to the Mideast.

Iran's theocracy has faced down protests and U.S. threats in the past, and the crackdown showed the iron grip it holds over the country. This week, authorities organized pro-government rallies with hundreds of thousands of people to mark the anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Still, Barzin said, he sees the ferocity of the crackdown as a sign that Iran's leadership "for the first time is afraid of being overthrown."

## Behind the scenes sorting through tips in cases like the Nancy Guthrie disappearance

By ED WHITE and TY ONEIL Associated Press

TUCSON, Ariz. (AP) — An Arizona sheriff's department got more than 4,000 calls within 24 hours after the release of videos of a masked person on Nancy Guthrie's porch. Many tips will be worthless. Others could have merit. Experts say one thing's certain: They can't be ignored.

Tips can solve crimes — big or small — and eerie images of a mysterious male covered head to toe have been the most significant clues shared with the public during Guthrie's nearly two-week-old disappearance in the Tucson area.

Late Friday night, the investigation prompted officers to block off a road into a neighborhood about 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) from Guthrie's house. A parade of sheriff's and FBI vehicles were waved through the roadblock, including forensics vehicles. The Pima County Sheriff's Department said the activity is part of the Guthrie investigation.

Sorting through the tips is a tremendous amount of work, said Roberto Villaseñor, a former Tucson police chief.

"In a situation like this, you really cannot do what's been done without tips and public input," he said. "They have processed the scene. But once that's done and exhausted, it's hard to move forward without additional information coming in."

Tens of thousands of tips

The Pima County sheriff and the FBI announced phone numbers and a website to offer tips about the apparent kidnapping of Guthrie, the 84-year-old mother of NBC "Today" co-anchor Savannah Guthrie. Several hundred detectives and agents have been assigned to the case, the sheriff's department said.

The FBI said it has collected more than 13,000 tips since Feb. 1, the day Guthrie was reported missing. The sheriff's department, meanwhile, said it has taken at least 18,000 calls.

"Every tip is reviewed for credibility, relevance, and information that can be acted upon by law enforcement," the FBI said Thursday on X, adding that the effort is a 24-hour operation. It said it won't comment on the tips received.

Gloves and DNA

Law enforcement agencies are continuing to gather potential evidence. Investigators found several gloves, the nearest about 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) from Guthrie's home, and submitted them for lab analysis, the sheriff's department said.

They collected DNA from Guthrie's property which doesn't belong to Guthrie or those in close contact with her, the department said. Investigators are working to identify who it belongs to.

The sheriff released a statement that stressed how his department is working with the FBI. "The Pima County Sheriff's Department and the FBI continue to work jointly on this case. Our strong partnership is critical, and we remain fully committed to this collaborative investigation."

Evidence requiring forensic analysis is being sent to the same out-of-state lab that has been used since the beginning of the case, something local FBI leadership agreed to, the department said.

Meanwhile, many people stopped Friday at KVOA-TV in Tucson, an NBC affiliate, to sign a large outdoor banner with a photo of Nancy Guthrie and the message "Bring her home."

"They're like family, you know," said Sandy Bryant, referring to her yearslong enjoyment of the "Today" show and the Guthrie family's local ties. "It's painful. It's scary, very scary."

Tips have made a difference many times

Major U.S. crimes for years have been cracked with a tip. In 1995, the brother and sister-in-law of Ted Kaczynski recognized certain tones in an anonymous, widely published anti-technology manifesto. Known by the FBI as the "Unabomber," Kaczynski was found living in a shack in Montana and subsequently admitted to committing 16 bombings over 17 years, killing three people.

The 1989 murders of an Ohio woman and two teen daughters in Florida were solved three years later when St. Petersburg police asked the public if they recognized handwriting found in the victims' car. A

former neighbor led investigators to Oba Chandler.

Retired Detroit homicide investigator Ira Todd recalled how images from a gas station camera solved the disappearance and death of a 3-month-old baby — and stopped authorities from pursuing the wrong person in 2001. “A niece of this guy saw it on TV and says, ‘That’s my uncle,’” he said.

The murders of four University of Idaho students in 2022 generated nearly 40,000 tips to state and federal authorities. None had a direct role in the capture of Bryan Kohberger, but the public’s involvement nonetheless was “absolutely” important, said Lt. Darren Gilbertson of the Idaho State Police.

“That’s one of the things that kept us going for weeks,” he said, while authorities awaited DNA and other evidence.

Sorting the helpful from the odd

Gilbertson said much of the early vetting in the Idaho murders was done by the FBI. He said agents and analysts who were screening tips had a good grasp of what information could be spiked and what should be handed up to key investigators. Some tips arrived by regular mail.

“Aliens to bears to crazy conspiratorial ideas — don’t even pass that along,” Gilbertson said.

Nancy Guthrie was last seen Jan. 31 and was reported missing the following day. Hours before her family knew she was gone, a porch camera recorded video of a person with a backpack who was wearing a ski mask, long pants, jacket and gloves — images that were released by the FBI along with a public plea for help.

The FBI on Thursday said the person, now a suspect, is a man about 5 feet, 9 inches tall with a medium build. The agency also named the brand and model of the backpack.

Neighborhood resident Laura Gargano said she’s tried to be helpful. She recommended that authorities look at an underground tank at Guthrie’s home, which was checked last weekend. She also told them that a rental house, not typical for the neighborhood, had recently been vacated.

“I noticed the cars were gone,” she told The Associated Press. “It could have been nothing, it could have been coincidental, but it was a change.”

The sheriff’s department has not said whether any tips from the videos have advanced the investigation.

“I’m hopeful,” said Villaseñor, the former Tucson chief. “I have seen cases where simpler and less detailed information has helped bring somebody about. Maybe someone recognizes clothing, maybe the bag. You never know what someone will key on.”

## **TSA agents are working without pay at US airports due to another shutdown**

By RIO YAMAT AP Airlines and Travel Writer

A shutdown of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security that took effect early Saturday impacts the agency responsible for screening passengers and bags at airports across the country. Travelers with airline reservations may be nervously recalling a 43-day government shutdown that led to historic flight cancellations and long delays last year.

Transportation Security Administration officers are expected to work without pay while lawmakers remain without an agreement on Homeland Security’s annual funding. TSA officers also worked through the record shutdown that ended Nov. 12, but aviation experts say this one may play out differently.

Trade groups for the U.S. travel industry and major airlines nonetheless warned that the longer DHS appropriations are lapsed, the longer security lines at the nation’s commercial airports could get.

Here’s what to know about the latest shutdown and how to plan ahead.

What’s different about this shutdown?

Funding for Homeland Security expired at midnight. But the rest of the federal government is funded through Sept. 30. That means air traffic controllers employed by the Federal Aviation Administration will receive paychecks as usual, reducing the risk of widespread flight cancellations.

According to the department’s contingency plan, about 95% of TSA workers are deemed essential personnel and required to keep working. Democrats in the House and Senate say Homeland Security won’t

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 42 of 71

get funded until new restrictions are placed on federal immigration operations.

During past shutdowns, disruptions to air travel tended to build over time, not overnight. About a month into last year's shutdown, for example, TSA temporarily closed two checkpoints at Philadelphia International Airport. That same day, the government took the extraordinary step of ordering all commercial airlines to reduce their domestic flight schedules.

John Rose, chief risk officer for global travel management company Altour, said strains could surface at airports more quickly this time because the TSA workforce also will be remembering the last shutdown.

"It's still fresh in their minds and potentially their pocketbooks," Rose said.

What is the impact on travelers?

It's hard to predict whether, when or where security screening snags might pop up. Even a handful of unscheduled TSA absences could quickly lead to longer wait times at smaller airports, for example, if there's just a single security checkpoint.

That's why travelers should plan to arrive early and allow extra time to get through security.

"I tell people to do this even in good times," Rose said.

Experts say flight delays also are a possibility even though air traffic controllers are not affected by the DHS shutdown.

Airlines might decide to delay departures in some cases to wait for passengers to clear screening, said Rich Davis, senior security advisor at risk mitigation company International SOS. Shortages of TSA officers also could slow the screening of checked luggage behind the scenes.

What travelers can do to prepare

Most airports display security line wait times on their websites, but don't wait until the day of a flight to check them, Rose advised.

"You may look online and it says two-and-a-half hours," he said. "Now it's two-and-a-half hours before your flight and you haven't left for the airport yet."

Passengers should also pay close attention while packing since prohibited items are likely to prolong the screening process. For carry-on bags, avoid bringing full-size shampoo or other liquids, large gels or aerosols and items like pocketknives in carry-on bags.

TSA has a full list on its website of what is and isn't allowed in carry-on and checked luggage.

At the airport, Rose said, remember to "practice patience and empathy."

"Not only are they not getting paid," he said of TSA agents, "they're probably working with reduced staff and dealing with angry travelers."

Will the shutdown drag on?

The White House has been negotiating with Democratic lawmakers, but the two sides failed to reach a deal by the end of the week before senators and members of Congress were set to leave Washington for a 10-day break.

Lawmakers in both chambers were on notice, however, to return if a deal to end the shutdown is struck.

Democrats have said they won't help approve more funding for Homeland Security until new restrictions are placed on federal immigration operations after the fatal shooting of Alex Pretti and Renee Good in Minneapolis last month.

In a joint statement, U.S. Travel, Airlines for America and the American Hotel & Lodging Association warned that the shutdown threatens to disrupt air travel as the busy spring break travel season approaches.

"Travelers and the U.S. economy cannot afford to have essential TSA personnel working without pay, which increases the risk of unscheduled absences and call outs, and ultimately can lead to higher wait times and missed or delayed flights," the statement said.

## Minneapolis left to decide future of streetside memorials to 2 people killed by federal officers

By JACK BROOK Associated Press/Report for America

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — As the Trump administration's immigration crackdown in Minnesota winds down, Minneapolis will need to decide how to manage makeshift memorial sites for two U.S. citizens killed by federal agents last month.

Piles of flowers, signs and artwork swiftly formed to commemorate the lives of Renee Good and Alex Pretti at the locations where they were fatally shot. The memorials are the site of candlelight vigils and musical performances and draw a regular stream of visitors.

The public grieving spots echo the community-driven memorial to George Floyd, who was murdered in 2020 by a police officer less than one mile (1.61 kilometers) from Good's killing. It took the city more than five years to figure out how to officially memorialize the site of George Floyd Square, and construction is set to begin this year.

Now, the city has two more high-profile memorials to manage.

A memorial for Good sprung up within hours of her Jan. 7 killing on a Minneapolis street.

And before the smell of tear gas used by federal agents had dissipated on the day of Pretti's killing on Jan. 24, Minneapolis protesters were already using branches, police tape and candles to mark the space. Later, people placed crosses, stuffed animals, American flags and images of Pretti.

Minnesota resident Karel Hoffmann said that while she remained outraged with Good and Pretti's killings, the memorials represented community solidarity.

"This is so unfair, the trauma, for everyone, is too much," Hoffmann said as she visited Pretti's memorial recently. "We're all in this together. And I'm really glad they have this here so everybody can come and be together."

Lynn Elrod, a nurse, visited Pretti's memorial last month and added her own offering: a plastic evergreen tree with red hearts and portraits of him and Good.

"I printed both of their pictures and put those on there again, just to signify the love that we have for both of them, really, and their contributions to the community and supporting their neighbors," Elrod said.

The residential street where Good died remains open, but orange traffic cones offer a narrow walkway for those paying their respects, and a small band of volunteers watches over the mound of flowers, artwork and handwritten signs that has amassed between the sidewalk and the street.

Around the Pretti memorial along a commercial district known as "Eat Street," traffic lanes have been temporarily shifted and parking is closed off, said Jess Olstad, a spokesperson for the city of Minneapolis.

"The City's top priority is to give our community space to grieve and heal," Olstad said. "This both ensures emergency vehicles can get through the area and protects those who gather or visit the memorial."

Olstad added that the city is "actively working on next steps, including continued community engagement regarding both memorials."

Ally Peters, a spokesperson for Mayor Jacob Frey, said last week that it was "too early" to comment on whether the memorials would be made permanent.

## Minnesota shooting of Venezuelan man is the latest where video evidence contradicts ICE accounts

By HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

Federal authorities announced an investigation Friday into two immigration officers who appeared to have made untruthful statements under oath about a shooting in Minneapolis last month.

It is among at least five shootings in which initial descriptions by the immigration officials were later contradicted by video evidence. Those included the fatal Minneapolis shootings of Renee Good and Alex Pretti, where bystander video quickly raised questions about how they were initially described.

The probe Friday came hours after a federal judge dismissed felony assault charges against two Venezu-

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 44 of 71

elan men who were accused of beating an Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer with a broom handle and a snow shovel on Jan. 14. The officer, who is not named in court filings, fired a single shot from a handgun that struck one of the men, Julio Cesar Sosa-Celis, in the thigh.

In an unusual reversal, prosecutors asked to dismiss the cases because they said new video evidence contradicted allegations made against the men in a criminal complaint and at a hearing last month.

Here is a look at how the five shootings were initially described and what was later learned:

Julio Cesar Sosa-Celis non-fatal shooting

Date and location: Jan. 14, 2026, in Minneapolis

What federal officials said initially: Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said the immigration officer was "ambushed" by Sosa-Celis and others, and fired a "defensive shot" out of fear for his life. "What we saw last night in Minneapolis was an attempted murder of federal law enforcement," she said.

What came out later: Investigators have not released the new evidence that led charges to be dropped, but cracks were already apparent in a Jan. 21 court hearing. The immigration officer's testimony recounting the moments before the shooting differed significantly from that of the defendants and three eyewitnesses. Available video evidence did not support the officer's account of being assaulted with a broom and shovel.

Renee Good fatal shooting

Date and location: Jan. 7, 2026, in Minneapolis

What federal officials said initially: Noem described the incident as an "act of domestic terrorism" carried out against ICE officers by a woman who "attempted to run them over and rammed them with her vehicle." She said the immigration agent shot "defensively" to protect himself and the people around him. Good died of gunshot wounds to the head.

What came out later: Videos filmed from multiple angles challenged the administration's narrative. Shortly before the shooting Good is seen at the wheel of her SUV that is parked diagonally on a street. She tells an immigration officer, "I'm not mad at you."

Seconds later, another immigration officer grabs at the driver's side door while Good's wife urges her to "drive, baby, drive." It's unclear in the videos if the SUV makes contact with ICE officer Jonathan Ross, who shoots while standing in front of the vehicle and then twice more while quickly moving to the driver's side of the SUV as it pulls forward.

Alex Pretti fatal shooting

Date and location: Jan. 24, 2026, in Minneapolis

What federal officials said initially: Homeland Security spokesperson Tricia McLaughlin said Pretti approached Border Patrol officers with a handgun and he "violently resisted" when they tried to disarm him. An agent feared for his life and fired defensive shots, she said. Pretti was pronounced dead at the scene. Border Patrol senior official Greg Bovino claimed Pretti intended to "massacre law enforcement," and Deputy White House chief of staff Stephen Miller described him as "a would-be assassin."

What came out later: None of the half-dozen bystander videos collected by investigators showed Pretti brandishing his gun, which he had a permit to carry. The videos showed Pretti was holding his mobile phone as a masked Border Patrol officer opened fire.

In a tense hearing Thursday in Washington, Republican U.S. Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky made leaders tasked with carrying out Trump's mass deportation agenda watch a video of the shooting while he repeatedly scrutinized the forceful tactics used by immigration agents. Paul argued that Pretti posed no threat to the agents and said it was clear from the video that he was "retreating at every moment."

Silverio Villegas González fatal shooting

Date and location: Sept. 12, 2025, in suburban Chicago

What federal officials said initially: Homeland Security officials said federal agents were pursuing a man with a history of reckless driving who entered the country illegally. They alleged Silverio Villegas González drove at officers and dragged one with his car. DHS said the officer fired because he feared for his life and was hospitalized with "serious injuries."

What came out later: Body camera videos from local police contradicted the Trump administration's ac-

count. Footage showed the agent who shot Villegas González walking around afterward and dismissing his own injuries as “nothing major.”

An autopsy made public in November declared Villegas González’s death a homicide. The report showed he was shot at “close range,” with wounds to his neck and fingers.

Marimar Martinez non-fatal shooting

Date and location: Oct. 14, 2025, in Chicago

What federal officials said initially: A DHS news release asserted that Martinez and the driver of another car involved in a crash with a Border Patrol officer were “domestic terrorists.” An FBI agent said in court documents that she was chasing the Border Patrol vehicle and drove at one of the officers after they got out of the vehicle. The officer was forced to open fire, the FBI agent alleged, striking Martinez seven times. She was treated at a hospital and arrested on felony assault charges.

What came out later: Videos emerged that her attorneys said showed agent Charles Exum steering his SUV into her truck.

In a text message presented during a Nov. 5 hearing, Exum appeared to brag about his marksmanship. “I fired 5 rounds and she had 7 holes. Put that in your book boys,” the text read.

The case against her was dismissed.

## Prime Minister Carney and Canada’s main opposition leader hold hands during school shooting vigil

By JIM MORRIS and ROB GILLIES Associated Press

VANCOUVER, British Columbia (AP) — Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney and the country’s main opposition leader held hands Friday as they paid tribute to the victims of one of the worst mass shootings in the country’s history at a vigil in a devastated British Columbia town.

Carney and Opposition Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre joined hands as an Indigenous leader sang a prayer outside the town hall in Tumbler Ridge.

Carney and Poilievre also spoke. The prime minister named each of the six people killed at Tumbler Ridge Secondary School and said the mother and brother of the shooter who were killed also “deserve to be mourned.”

Authorities said the 18-year-old alleged shooter, identified as Jesse Van Rootselaar, killed her 39-year-old mother, Jennifer Jacobs, and 11-year-old stepbrother, Emmett Jacobs, in their home on Tuesday before heading to the nearby Tumbler Ridge Secondary School and opening fire, killing five children and an educator before killing herself.

Carney said he sat with people who are “living through something no one should ever have to endure.” “When you wake up tomorrow, and the world feels impossible, know that millions of Canadians are with you. When the cameras leave and the quiet sets in — know that we will still be here,” Carney said.

A crowd of hundreds attended the vigil. Some held photos of loved ones they lost.

Carney said the community has always been defined by people caring for each other.

“And when the unimaginable happened on Tuesday, you were there again. First responders at the school within two minutes. Teachers shielding their children,” he said.

Poilievre commended Carney for his “tremendous grace.” Canada’s political leaders flew from Ottawa together.

British Columbia Premier David Eby said the students of the school won’t ever have to return to the building if they don’t want to.

“I will promise that not one of you will ever be forced to go back to that school. We will provide a safe place for you to go back to school,” Eby said.

Authorities on Thursday identified those killed at the school as Kylie Smith, Abel Mwansa, Zoey Benoit and Ticaria Lampert, all age 12, as well as 13-year-old Ezekiel Schofield and assistant teacher Shannda Aviugana-Durand, 39.

Maya Gebala, 12, who was wounded in the head and neck, and Paige Hoekstra, 19, who also suffered

bullet wounds, remain hospitalized in Vancouver.

Dwayne McDonald, the deputy commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in British Columbia, said earlier Friday that the alleged shooter did not appear to be searching for a specific target at the school.

"This suspect was, for lack of a better term, hunting," McDonald said. "They were prepared and engaging anybody and everybody they could come in contact with."

McDonald described a "chaotic" scene at the school when police arrived, with fire alarms sounding and a person yelling out a window that the suspect was upstairs.

"They entered the school, proceeded to go up the stairwell, and were met with gunfire," he said. "It was a matter of seconds after that there was more gunfire, not as we know now, having reviewed video, directed at any persons. Then the suspect took their life."

McDonald said from the time the suspect encountered police there were no further injuries to students at the school.

Four guns were seized, two from the family home and two from the school, he said.

The attack was Canada's deadliest since 2020, when a gunman in Nova Scotia killed 13 people and set fires that left another nine dead.

School shootings are rare in Canada, which has strict gun-control laws. The government has responded to previous mass shootings with gun-control measures, including a recently broadened ban on all guns it considers assault weapons.

## US military strikes another alleged drug boat in Caribbean, killing

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WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. military said Friday that it has carried out another deadly strike on a vessel accused of trafficking drugs in the Caribbean Sea.

U.S. Southern Command said on social media that the boat "was transiting along known narco-trafficking routes in the Caribbean and was engaged in narco-trafficking operations." It said the strike killed three people. A video linked to the post shows a boat moving through the water before exploding in flames.

Friday's attack raises the death toll from the Trump administration's strikes on alleged drug boats to 133 people in at least 38 attacks carried out since early September in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean.

U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth declared last week that "some top cartel drug-traffickers" in the region "have decided to cease all narcotics operations INDEFINITELY due to recent (highly effective) kinetic strikes in the Caribbean." However, Hegseth did not provide any details or information to back up this claim, made in a post on his personal account on social media.

President Donald Trump has said the U.S. is in "armed conflict" with cartels in Latin America and has justified the attacks as a necessary escalation to stem the flow of drugs. But his administration has offered little evidence to support its claims of killing "narcoterrorists."

## Feds open a perjury probe into ICE officers' testimony about the shooting of a Venezuelan man

By MICHAEL BIESECKER, JIM MUSTIAN and JACK BROOK Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Federal authorities have opened a criminal probe into whether two immigration officers lied under oath about a shooting in Minneapolis last month, as all charges were dropped against two Venezuelan men.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement Director Todd Lyons said Friday that his agency opened a joint probe with the Justice Department after video evidence revealed "sworn testimony provided by two separate officers appears to have made untruthful statements" about the shooting of one of the Venezuelan men during the Trump administration's immigration crackdown across the Minneapolis-St. Paul area.

The officers, whose names were not disclosed, are on administrative leave while the investigation is car-

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 47 of 71

ried out, he said. Lyons said the two ICE officers could be fired and face criminal prosecution.

"Lying under oath is a serious federal offense," said Lyons, adding that the U.S. attorney's office is actively investigating.

"The men and women of ICE are entrusted with upholding the rule of law and are held to the highest standards of professionalism, integrity, and ethical conduct," Lyons said. "Violations of this sacred sworn oath will not be tolerated. ICE remains fully committed to transparency, accountability, and the fair enforcement of our nation's immigration laws."

Earlier Friday, U.S. District Court Judge Paul A. Magnuson dismissed felony assault charges against Alfredo Alejandro Aljorna and Julio Cesar Sosa-Celis, who were accused of beating an ICE officer with a broom handle and a snow shovel during a Jan. 14 fracas. The officer fired a single shot from his handgun, striking Sosa-Celis in his right thigh.

The cases were dropped after a highly unusual motion to dismiss from U.S. Attorney for the District of Minnesota Daniel N. Rosen, who said "newly discovered evidence" was "materially inconsistent with the allegations" made against the two men in a criminal complaint and at a hearing last month.

The reversal follows a string of high-profile shootings involving federal immigration agents in which eyewitness statements and video evidence have called into question claims made to justify using deadly force. Dozens of felony cases against protesters accused of assaulting or impeding federal officers have also crumbled.

The immigration lawyer representing Aljorna and Sosa-Celis said they are "overjoyed" that all charges have been dismissed. Had they been convicted, the two immigrants would have faced years in federal prison.

"The charges against them were based on lies by an ICE agent who recklessly shot into their home through a closed door," said attorney Brian D. Clark. "They are so happy justice is being served."

It is unclear whether the men could still be deported.

A chase, claims of an attack and a shot fired

Last month, an FBI investigator said in a now-discredited court affidavit that ICE officers attempted to conduct a traffic stop on a vehicle driven by Aljorna on Jan. 14. He crashed the vehicle and fled on foot toward the apartment duplex where he lived. An immigration officer chased Aljorna who — according to the government — violently resisted arrest.

The complaint alleged Sosa-Celis and another man attacked the officer with a snow shovel and a broom handle as the officer and Aljorna struggled on the ground. The officer, who is not named in court filings, fired his handgun, striking Sosa-Celis. The men ran into an apartment and eventually were arrested.

After the shooting, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem attacked Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz and Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey, accusing the Democrats of "encouraging impeding and assault against our law enforcement which is a federal crime, a felony."

"What we saw last night in Minneapolis was an attempted murder of federal law enforcement," Noem said in a Jan. 15 statement. "Our officer was ambushed and attacked by three individuals who beat him with snow shovels and the handles of brooms. Fearing for his life, the officer fired a defensive shot."

The Department of Homeland Security did not respond Friday to questions about whether Noem stands by those statements, which ICE — part of DHS — says are now under investigation.

Robin M. Wolpert, a defense attorney for Sosa-Celis in the criminal case, said she was pleased ICE and the Justice Department are publicly acknowledging and investigating apparent untruthful statements by the two ICE officers.

"These untruthful statements had serious consequences for my client and his family," Wolpert said. "My client is a crime victim."

Clark, the immigration lawyer for Aljorna and Sosa-Celis, urged the government to release the name of the ICE officer who shot his client and charge him.

Court filings show state authorities have opened their own criminal investigation into the shooting, though the FBI has thus far refused to share evidence, provide the name of the ICE officer who fired his weapon or make him available for an interview.

Holes already apparent in prosecution case

Rosen's motion seeking to drop the charges did not detail what new evidence had emerged or what falsehoods had been in the government's prior filings, but cracks began to appear in the government's case during a Jan. 21 court hearing to determine whether the accused men could be released pending trial.

In court, the ICE officer's account of the moments before the shooting differed significantly from testimony from the two defendants and three eyewitnesses. Available video evidence did not support the ICE officer's account of being assaulted with a broom and snow shovel.

Aljorna and Sosa-Celis denied assaulting the officer. Testimony from a neighbor and the men's romantic partners also did not support the agent's account that he had been attacked with a broom or shovel or that a third person was involved.

Frederick Goetz, a lawyer representing Aljorna, said his client had a broomstick in his hand and threw it at the agent as he ran toward the house. Wolpert, representing Sosa-Celis, said he had been holding a shovel but was retreating into the home when the officer fired, wounding him. The men's attorneys said the prosecution's case relied wholly on testimony from the agent who fired the gun.

Neither Aljorna and Sosa-Celis had violent criminal records. Both had been working as DoorDash delivery drivers at night in an attempt to avoid encounters with federal agents, their attorneys said.

Aljorna and Sosa-Celis retreated into their upstairs apartment and barricaded the door, so federal officers used tear gas to try to force the men out, the FBI agent said. Concerned about the safety of two children under 2 inside the home, Aljorna and Sosa-Celis surrendered.

A third Venezuelan man, Gabriel Alejandro Hernandez Ledezma, who lived in the apartment downstairs was also arrested.

Though he was never federally charged, a Jan. 30 court petition seeking his release says Hernandez Ledezma was detained without a warrant and within hours flown to an ICE detention facility in Texas. He alleges his removal was to prevent him becoming a material eyewitness who could undercut the federal government's case and help the Minnesota state investigation.

Hernandez Ledezma was returned to Minnesota and discharged from ICE custody on Monday after a federal judge ordered his release.

## **Brazilian au pair gets 10-year sentence for killing Joseph Ryan in murder plot against lover's wife**

By OLIVIA DIAZ Associated Press/Report for America

FAIRFAX, Va. (AP) — An au pair who schemed with her employer-turned-lover to kill his wife and another man received a 10-year prison sentence on Friday.

Prosecutors had recommended Juliana Peres Magalhães walk free after she pleaded guilty to a downgraded manslaughter charge in the February 2023 killing of Joseph Ryan. Instead of being tried for second-degree murder, she became their star witness, testifying that she had fatally shot Ryan as Brendan Banfield was fatally stabbing his wife, Christine, in the couple's bedroom.

Brendan Banfield was convicted by a jury this month of aggravated murder in the deaths of his wife and Ryan.

"I know my remorse cannot bring you peace," Magalhães told the victims' families on Friday, wiping away tears and muffling sobs. "I hope you can someday understand that I really did not believe his plan would actually happen."

Instead of sentencing her to time served, Judge Penney Azcarate delivered the maximum possible sentence to the woman from Brazil.

"Let's get it straight: You do not deserve anything other than incarceration and a life of reflection on what you have done to the victim and his family. May it weigh heavily on your soul," the judge said.

At Banfield's trial, Magalhães testified that she and the IRS agent created an account in the name of his wife, a pediatric intensive care nurse, on a social media platform for people interested in sexual fetishes. Ryan connected with the account and agreed to meet for a sexual encounter involving a knife.

Magalhães, then 22, said she and Brendan Banfield took the couple's 4-year-old child to the basement, and then found Ryan surprising Christine Banfield with a knife in the couple's bedroom. She said Brendan Banfield shot Ryan and then began stabbing his wife in the neck. When she saw Ryan moving, Magalhães said, she fired the second shot that killed him.

The au pair wasn't arrested until eight months later, and hasn't left jail since. Prosecutors raised concerns that if she were to be allowed bail, she would flee to Brazil or be deported by immigration officials before they could finish their case. She didn't talk with investigators for more than a year, until she changed her mind as her trial date approached.

"I lost myself in a relationship, and left my morals and values behind," Magalhães told the judge.

"You were texting and speaking to Joseph Ryan, encouraging him to bring a knife and ultimately, through the phone conversation, getting his consent, knowing all along you were bringing him to his death," the judge responded.

Ryan's mother, Deirdre Fisher, told the court that her son, born days before Christmas, was her "greatest gift." Three years after his killing, she can't bear taking down their Christmas tree. An urn with Ryan's ashes sits in front of the decoration.

"I say good morning to him each day when I turn on the tree's lights," she said. "But of course that's not Joe sitting there. He can't say 'I love you' back."

Sangeeta Ryan described her nephew as "inquisitive, curious, smart, charming and so dang talkative." She said he loved martial arts and role-playing with his friends. She also noted that he had moved in with his octogenarian grandmother to care for her.

"His sudden murder devastated his grandma — she could no longer live in the family home without Joe," his aunt said. The woman quietly moved away, hoping to avoid her memories and the reporters knocking at the door.

Christine Banfield's relatives attended Friday's hearing. A judge has said Banfield will be sentenced in May.

## Gifts and soup from 'Uncle Jeffrey': The Epstein ties that ended Kathy Ruemmler's run at Goldman

By KEN SWEET AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Goldman Sachs general counsel Kathy Ruemmler has had a storied legal career. As a federal prosecutor, she helped successfully prosecute Enron executives including Ken Lay and Jeffrey Skilling. She was part of President Barack Obama's administration, working in various roles for much of his two terms in office, including as White House Counsel.

She was even briefly considered by President Obama as a candidate for attorney general.

On Thursday, Ruemmler, 54, announced that she plans to resign from the top legal post at Goldman after a trove of emails and correspondence between her and disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein showed the two individuals were especially close, years after Epstein's 2008 conviction on sex crimes charges, when he became a registered sex offender.

Ruemmler previously downplayed her relationship with Epstein. She called him a "monster" and said she regretted ever knowing him. Ruemmler has repeatedly described their relationship as professional, citing her job as a private defense attorney before she ever joined Goldman Sachs.

But documents released in recent weeks and reviewed by The Associated Press depict a deeper relationship than had previously been characterized by Ruemmler and Goldman Sachs. These included intimate email exchanges, social plans and gifts that went beyond formal legal work.

Roughly 8,400 documents involved Ruemmler or referenced her. Some correspondence shows that Ruemmler was aware of the extent of the allegations that Epstein had faced involving underage girls in Florida. In some instances, she advised Epstein on how he might go about trying to repair his image and defend himself publicly against new claims of misconduct.

The gifts Epstein gave to Ruemmler have been documented in news reports: the spa treatments, the handbags from Hermes, an Apple Watch, a Fendi coat, among many others. But some of the interactions

between Epstein and Ruemmler described throughout their correspondence indicates that Epstein and Ruemmler did not simply have a lawyer-client transactional relationship, as Ruemmler previously attested to.

"It makes him happy to see you happy," Epstein's assistant wrote to Ruemmler in 2016, after Epstein prepaid for a spa treatment for her.

In October 2018, Epstein directed one of his assistants to send flowers and chicken soup to Ruemmler because she has "not been feeling well." It would not be the first time that Epstein would send her a small token of appreciation when she was sick. They talked about dating issues, made jokes about both the wealthy and everyday people, and shared laments about their careers and dating lives.

They would message each other about mundane things like their mutual distaste for seeing babies in business class on flights and would repeatedly plan to have dinner or drinks in various places. Epstein even had Ruemmler as a backup executor of his will at one point.

Setting aside the immense wealth and privilege and Epstein's legal troubles, many of the emails between the two would look no different from the banter that many Americans would share to in their own text messages, emails or group chats.

"Well, I adore him. It's like having another older brother!" she wrote in an email in 2015.

During her time in private practice after she left the White House in 2014, Ruemmler received several expensive gifts from Epstein, including luxury handbags and a fur coat. The gifts were given after Epstein had already been convicted of sex crimes in 2008 and was registered as a sex offender. Ruemmler was also involved in Epstein's legal defense efforts after he was arrested a second time for sex crimes in 2019 and later killed himself in a Manhattan jail.

"So lovely and thoughtful! Thank you to Uncle Jeffrey!!!" Ruemmler wrote to Epstein in 2018.

She later joined Goldman Sachs in 2020 and became the investment bank's top lawyer in 2021.

The firm's leadership backed her publicly amid the revelations. But the embarrassing emails raised questions about Ruemmler's judgment. Historically, Wall Street frowns on gift-giving between clients and bankers or Wall Street lawyers, particularly high-end gifts that could pose a conflict of interest. Goldman Sachs requires its employees to get pre-approval before receiving gifts from or giving them to clients, according to the company's code of conduct, partly in order to not run afoul of anti-bribery laws.

Bloomberg News, The Wall Street Journal and other media outlets reported that Goldman's partners, who are the firm's most senior and well-regarded members going back to when the investment bank was privately held, had begun to question why the firm was holding Ruemmler in such high regard when other lawyers were just as qualified to hold the top legal job.

In her statement Thursday, Ruemmler said: "Since I joined Goldman Sachs six years ago, it has been my privilege to help oversee the firm's legal, reputational, and regulatory matters; to enhance our strong risk management processes; and to ensure that we live by our core value of integrity in everything we do. My responsibility is to put Goldman Sachs' interests first."

Goldman CEO David Solomon he respected Ruemmler's decision to resign. The firm isn't rushing Ruemmler out the door, saying in a statement that she would wind down her work at the bank "to ensure a smooth transition," before her last day on June 30.

## **Memo says White House was 'excellently preserved' during East Wing demolition for Trump's ballroom**

By JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

The White House mansion's eastern facade appears to have been "excellently preserved" when demolition crews tore down the East Wing to make way for President Donald Trump's planned ballroom, an administration official said in a memo made public Friday.

Contractors took pains to protect the White House residence during demolition, keeping heavy equipment at a safe distance and removing some pieces by hand, Joshua Fisher, director of the White House Office of Administration, wrote to the commission charged with approving plans for Trump's ballroom. Some sections of the building were stabilized ahead of time, and vibration and crack movement were

monitored, he wrote.

The National Capital Planning Commission, which is led by a top Trump aide, had requested more details about the demolition that began with little advance notice last fall. The agency has jurisdiction over construction and major renovations to government buildings in the region.

The East Wing demolition prompted a public outcry when it began without the independent reviews, congressional approval and public comment that are typical for even relatively minor modifications to historic buildings in Washington. The National Trust for Historic Preservation has sued to halt construction of the ballroom.

The memo documents the history of the East Wing dating back to Thomas Jefferson's presidency and lays out the White House's justification for tearing it down, saying it was not feasible to preserve it while meeting Trump's goals for the project. The completed ballroom will include an improved visitors center for security screening and will lessen the need for road closures during major events, Fisher wrote.

Curators documented and preserved artwork, furniture and other items of historical significance, including "the East Wing cornerstone and plaque, movie theater furniture, the East Colonnade columns, the Portecochere columns, interior wood paneling, chandeliers, historic windows and doors, and other hardware and fixtures," he wrote.

"Our goal is to ensure that some of these items will be integrated into the new structure," Fisher added.

Engineers are studying whether the West Colonnade, which connects the White House residence to the West Wing offices, can support a second story that would make it more visually symmetrical with plans for a larger East Colonnade connecting to the ballroom, the memo said. No decisions have been made.

The White House also submitted the most detailed renderings of the ballroom published to date. It shows a massive new building that dwarfs the size of the demolished East Wing and matches the height of the historic White House mansion.

The project is scheduled for discussion during a March 5 meeting of the National Capital Planning Commission.

## **Journalist Don Lemon pleads not guilty to civil rights charges in Minnesota church protest**

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — Former CNN host turned independent journalist Don Lemon pleaded not guilty to federal civil rights charges Friday, following a protest at a Minnesota church where an Immigration and Customs Enforcement official is a pastor. Four others also pleaded not guilty in the case.

Lemon insists he was at the Cities Church in St. Paul to chronicle the Jan. 18 protest but was not a participant. The veteran journalist vowed to fight what he called "baseless charges" and protect his free speech rights.

"For more than 30 years, I've been a journalist, and the power and protection of the First Amendment has been the underpinning of my work. The First Amendment, the freedom of the press, are the bedrock of our democracy," Lemon said outside the courthouse after his arraignment. "And like all of you here in Minnesota, the great people of Minnesota, I will not be intimidated, I will not back down."

Dozens of supporters gathered outside the courthouse, chanting "Pam Bondi has got to go" and "Protect the press."

'We the people have to stand for our rights'

Civil rights attorney Nekima Levy Armstrong was among the other defendants who pleaded not guilty Friday. The prominent local activist was the subject of a doctored photo posted on official White House social media that falsely showed her crying during her arrest. The picture is part of a deluge of AI-altered imagery that has circulated since the fatal shootings of Renee Good and Alex Pretti by federal officers in Minneapolis amid President Donald Trump's administration's immigration crackdown.

Levy Armstrong echoed Lemon's defiant words after the hearing.

"We the people have to stand for our rights. We have to stand for the Constitution. We have to stand

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 52 of 71

for our First Amendment rights to freedom of the speech, some freedom of assembly, and freedom of the press," she said.

"Today we have the federal government trying to weaponize the Department of Justice in order to silence us, in order to prevent us from speaking the truth," Levy Armstrong said. "They are trying to prevent us from calling out a manifest injustice."

All of the defendants have been charged under the FACE Act

Protesters interrupted a service at the Southern Baptist church last month, chanting "ICE out" and "Justice for Renee Good," referring to the 37-year-old mother of three who was fatally shot by an ICE officer in Minneapolis.

In total, nine people have been charged under the 1994 Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act in relation to the church protest. The FACE Act prohibits interference or intimidation of "any person by force, threat of force, or physical obstruction exercising or seeking to exercise the First Amendment right of religious freedom at a place of religious worship."

Two more defendants accused in the protest are scheduled for arraignment next week, including another independent journalist, Georgia Fort.

Penalties can range up to a year in prison and up to a \$10,000 fine.

Attorneys for journalists seek to pierce veil of grand jury secrecy

Lawyers for Lemon and Fort filed a joint motion with the court Friday seeking transcripts of the normally secret grand jury proceedings that resulted in the indictments against the nine defendants. They maintained that Lemon and Fort were at the church protest in their capacity as journalists covering the story.

The defense attorneys noted that several judges — including the chief federal judge for Minnesota — found no probable cause to support the complaints that prosecutors first tried to file against the two journalists, so they refused to sign arrest warrants for Lemon or Fort before the government turned to the grand jury.

They said those refusals raise serious concerns about whether the government made misleading or inaccurate statements of law and/or facts to the grand jury. And they expressed concern that President Donald Trump, Attorney General Pam Bondi and other Justice Department officials put undue pressure on prosecutors to charge them.

"In the United States of America, we do not prosecute journalists for doing their job. That happens in Russia, China, Iran and other authoritarian regimes. And yet the government sold this unconstitutional mess to the grand jury," they wrote. "Disclosure of the grand jury proceedings is necessary to ensure the government did not mislead or mis-instruct it."

The attorneys also said prosecutors told them they will oppose the motion.

Protest provoked conservative religious backlash

Renee Carlson, an attorney with True North Legal, which is representing Cities Church, said in a statement that by pleading not guilty Lemon and others are "doubling down on their claim that the press can do whatever they want under the auspices of journalism."

"The First Amendment does not protect premeditated schemes to violate the sanctity of a sanctuary, disrupt worship services, or intimidate children," Carlson said. "There is no 'press pass' to trespass on church property or conspire to invade religious worship."

The church protest drew sharp complaints from conservative religious and political leaders. White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt warned in a social media post at the time: "President Trump will not tolerate the intimidation and harassment of Christians in their sacred places of worship." Even clergy who oppose the administration's immigration enforcement tactics expressed discomfort.

Former federal prosecutor is part of Lemon's legal team

One of Lemon's attorneys who was in court Friday is Joe Thompson, one of several former prosecutors who have left the Minnesota U.S. Attorney's Office in recent weeks citing frustration with the Trump administration's immigration enforcement crackdown in the state and the Justice Department's response to the killing of Good and Pretti.

Thompson had led the sprawling investigation of major public program fraud cases for the prosecutors

office until he resigned last month. The Trump administration has cited the fraud cases, in which most defendants have come from the state's large Somali community, as justification for its immigration crackdown.

## Trump says change in power in Iran 'would be the best thing that could happen'

By KONSTANTIN TOROPIN, AAMER MADHANI and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Friday that a change in power in Iran "would be the best thing that could happen" as the U.S. administration weighs whether to take military action against Tehran.

Trump made the comments shortly after visiting with troops at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, and after he confirmed earlier in the day that he's deploying a second aircraft carrier group to the Mideast.

"It seems like that would be the best thing that could happen," Trump said in an exchange with reporters when asked about pressing for the ouster of the Islamic clerical rule in Iran. "For 47 years, they've been talking and talking and talking."

The president has suggested in recent weeks that his top priority is for Iran to further scale back its nuclear program, but on Friday he suggested that's only one aspect of concessions the U.S. needs Iran to make.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who traveled to Washington this week for talks with Trump, has been pressing for any deal to include steps to neutralize Iran's ballistic missile program and end its funding for proxy groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah.

"If we do it, that would be the least of the mission," Trump said of targeting Tehran's nuclear program, which suffered significant setbacks in U.S. military strikes last year.

Iran has insisted its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes. Before the June war, Iran had been enriching uranium up to 60% purity, a short, technical step away from weapons-grade levels.

Trump's comments advocating for a potential end to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's rule come just weeks after Secretary of State Marco Rubio said a potential change in power in Iran would be "far more complex" than the administration's recent effort to oust Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro from power.

Rubio, during a Senate hearing last month, noted that with Iran "you're talking about a regime that's in place for a very long time."

"So that's going to require a lot of careful thinking, if that eventuality ever presents itself," Rubio said.

Trump said the USS Gerald R. Ford, the world's largest aircraft carrier, is being sent from the Caribbean Sea to the Mideast to join other warships and military assets the U.S. has built up in the region.

Trump had suggested another round of talks with the Iranians was planned for this week, but those negotiations didn't materialize as one of Tehran's top security officials visited Oman and Qatar and exchanged messages with U.S. intermediaries.

"In case we don't make a deal, we'll need it," Trump told reporters about the second carrier. He added, "It'll be leaving very soon."

Already, Gulf Arab nations have warned any attack could spiral into another regional conflict in a Mideast still reeling from the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip. Meanwhile, Iranians are beginning to hold 40-day mourning ceremonies for the thousands killed in Tehran's bloody crackdown on nationwide protests last month, adding to the internal pressure faced by the sanctions-battered Islamic Republic.

The Ford, whose new deployment was first reported by The New York Times, will join the USS Abraham Lincoln and its accompanying guided-missile destroyers, which have been in the region for over two weeks. U.S. forces already have shot down an Iranian drone that approached the Lincoln on the same day last week that Iran tried to stop a U.S.-flagged ship in the Strait of Hormuz.

Trump in exchanges with reporters on Friday still offered measured hope that a deal can be struck with Iran.

"Give us the deal that they should have given us the first time," Trump said about how U.S. military ac-

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 54 of 71

tion can be avoided. "If they give us the right deal, we won't do that."

Ford had been part of Venezuela strike force

It would be a quick turnaround for the Ford, which Trump sent from the Mediterranean Sea to the Caribbean last October as the administration built up a huge military presence in the lead-up to the surprise raid last month that captured Maduro.

It also appears to be at odds with the Trump administration's national security and defense strategies, which put an emphasis on the Western Hemisphere over other parts of the world.

In response to questions about the movement of the Ford, U.S. Southern Command said U.S. forces in Latin America will continue to "counter illicit activities and malign actors in the Western Hemisphere."

"While force posture evolves, our operational capability does not," Col. Emanuel Ortiz, spokesperson for Southern Command, said in a statement. U.S. "forces remain fully ready to project power, defend themselves, and protect U.S. interests in the region."

The Ford strike group will bring more than 5,000 additional troops to the Middle East but few capabilities or weapons that don't already exist within the Lincoln group. Having two carriers will double the number of aircraft and munitions that are available to military planners and Trump.

Given the Ford's current position in the Caribbean, it will likely be weeks before it is off the coast of Iran.

Trump has repeatedly threatened to use force to compel Iran to agree to constrain its nuclear program and earlier over Tehran's bloody crackdown on nationwide protests.

Iran and the United States held indirect talks in Oman a week ago, and Trump later warned Tehran that failure to reach an agreement with his administration would be "very traumatic." Similar talks last year ultimately broke down in June as Israel launched what became a 12-day war on Iran that included the U.S. bombing Iranian nuclear sites.

Long carrier deployments affect crews and ships

The USS Ford, meanwhile, first set sail in late June 2025, which means the crew will soon have been deployed for eight months. While it is unclear how long the ship will remain in the Middle East, the move sets the crew up for an unusually long deployment.

The Navy's top officer, Adm. Daryl Caudle, told reporters last month that keeping the Ford longer at sea would be "highly disruptive" and that he was "a big non-fan of extensions."

Carriers are typically deployed for six or seven months. "When it goes past that, that disrupts lives, it disrupts things ... funerals that were planned, marriages that were planned, babies that were planned," Caudle said.

He said extending the Ford would complicate its maintenance and upkeep by throwing off the schedule of repairs, adding more wear and tear, and increasing the equipment that will need attention.

For comparison, the aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower had a nine-month deployment to the Middle East in 2023 and 2024, when it spent much of its time engaged with the Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen. The ship entered maintenance in early 2025 as scheduled, but it blew past its planned completion date of July and remains in the shipyard to this day.

Caudle told The Associated Press in a recent interview that his vision is to deploy smaller, newer ships when possible instead of consistently turning to huge aircraft carriers.

## Minnesotans welcome the immigration surge drawdown but remain vigilant

By MARK VANCLEAVE and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The Trump administration's drawdown of its immigration enforcement surge in the Twin Cities area has been met with relief, but state and city officials say small businesses and immigrant communities are still reeling.

Thousands of officers were sent to the Minneapolis and St. Paul area for Operation Metro Surge. The Department of Homeland Security said it was its largest immigration enforcement operation ever and dubbed it a success, but the crackdown came under increasing criticism as the situation grew more volatile.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 55 of 71

The shooting deaths of U.S. citizens Renee Good and Alex Pretti by federal officers drew condemnation and raised questions over officers' conduct, prompting changes to the operation.

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz and Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey, both Democrats, said the damage would be lasting and called on the federal government to help pay the costs.

"This unprecedented federal escalation has upended daily life, it has eroded trust and inflicted a whole lot of harm on the operation that we need to provide as a city," Frey said Friday. "Minneapolis taxpayers should not be left to foot the bill of this situation that has been created by the federal government."

The mayor and other Minneapolis officials outlined the ways the crackdown has strained the finances of residents, businesses and the city itself. Expenses such as staff overtime and street cleanups cost the city an extra \$6 million in January, they said.

The city estimates that small businesses have lost tens of millions of dollars in revenue, and thousands of hotel room were cancelled, Frey said. Furthermore, an estimated tens of thousands of people, including school-age children, are in need of support services such as rent and food assistance.

It's the federal government's responsibility in any emergency to assist in the recovery, Frey said, noting it was "all the more important" when federal agencies caused the damage.

The operation leaves a mark

Following Thursday's announcement, some residents held a vigil at a makeshift shrine that went up where Good was shot in Minneapolis.

Mark Foresman, an attendee from the suburb of St. Louis Park, said he is skeptical that the agents will leave.

"The Trump administration has created an atmosphere of distrust for government in general," he said, suggesting the Trump administration's tactics seemed designed to sow fear. "They've repeatedly been caught in lies."

John Schnickel, a local who attended the vigil, disputed Trump officials' claims that Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers or the operation had made Minnesota safer.

"I don't even want one ICE person here, if they act the way they've been acting," said Schnickel. "They talk about how the murder rate is down, and yet they've added two people to it," he said.

Most U.S. adults say they think Trump's immigration policies have gone too far, according to a recent AP-NORC poll.

Homan credits improved coordination

Border czar Tom Homan told reporters Thursday that "extensive engagement" with state and local officials allowed for a formal end to the operation. The White House had long accused Minnesota of protecting criminals from deportation with so-called sanctuary laws.

President Donald Trump softened his tone and dispatched Homan to reduce tensions after the Jan. 24 killing of Pretti, saying that he and Walz were on a "similar wavelength" after weeks of barbs between the two leaders.

Homan on Thursday highlighted examples of newfound cooperation with state and local entities, including law enforcement being increasingly responsive to requests for assistance and agreements on how jails handle deportable inmates.

Minnesota's state prison system and many of its county jails have long shared information with federal immigration authorities so they can take custody of arrested immigrants.

The major exception is the Hennepin County Jail, which serves Minneapolis and doesn't work with immigration authorities unless an arrest warrant has been signed by a judge. Hennepin County Sheriff Dawanna Witt, who oversees the jail, insisted Friday that no policies had changed.

Frey, meanwhile, emphasized Friday that his position hasn't changed despite Homan's indication that agreements with state and city leaders had been made.

"We do not enforce federal immigration law, period. We do not cooperate with ICE or any agency around enforcement of federal immigration law, period," Frey said.

Immigration enforcement will continue on a smaller scale

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 56 of 71

Homan announced last week that 700 federal officers would leave Minnesota immediately, but that still left more than 2,000 in the state. He said Thursday that a "significant drawdown" was already underway and would continue through next week.

He didn't specify how many officers would remain, but he said enforcement would continue in the Twin Cities. Todd Lyons, ICE's acting director, said during a congressional hearing Thursday that the agency was still searching for about 16,840 people in Minnesota who have final orders of removal.

Homan also said mass deportations will continue across the country, and that officers leaving Minnesota will report back to their stations or be assigned elsewhere.

The focus on the Twin Cities, which Trump had pushed for partly because of fraud allegations involving Somali residents, followed increased deployments in big cities and small towns run by Democrats, including Los Angeles, Chicago, Charlotte and New Orleans.

#### Fallout in Congress and the courts

Even though the Twin Cities operation is ending, the fallout will continue.

The Trump administration is trying to secure votes in Congress to prevent Department of Homeland Security funding from expiring at the end of the week, with Democratic lawmakers demanding restraints on immigration officers following Good and Pretti's killings.

And there are ongoing federal investigations into the shooting of Pretti.

The effects of the Minnesota crackdown are also still playing out in court, as federal prosecutors pursue high-profile cases against protesters and deportation cases slowly proceed.

A federal judge issued a temporary emergency order Thursday, finding that immigrants detained at a federal building in Minnesota have too many barriers to legal counsel.

Former CNN host turned independent journalist Don Lemon pleaded not guilty to federal civil rights charges Friday, accused in a protest at a Minnesota church where an ICE official is a pastor.

## What to know about the Homeland Security shutdown starting this weekend

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

Another shutdown for parts of the federal government is expected this weekend as lawmakers debate new restrictions on President Donald Trump's immigration enforcement agenda.

Funding for the Department of Homeland Security is set to expire Saturday. Democrats say they won't help approve more funding until new restrictions are placed on federal immigration operations after the fatal shooting of Alex Pretti and Renee Good in Minneapolis last month.

The White House has been negotiating with the Democrats, but the two sides failed to reach a deal by the end of the week, guaranteeing that funding for the department will lapse.

Unlike the record 43-day shutdown last fall, the closures will be narrowly confined, as only agencies under the DHS umbrella — like Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Protection — will be affected. Still, depending on how long the shutdown lasts, some federal workers could begin to miss paychecks.

Services like airport screening could also suffer if the shutdown drags on for weeks.

At the Transportation Security Administration, about 95% of employees are deemed essential. They will continue to scan passengers and their bags at the nation's commercial airports. But they will work without pay until the funding lapse is resolved, raising the possibility that workers will be calling out or taking unscheduled leave. Many TSA workers already faced financial stress last year.

"Some are just now recovering from the financial impact of the 43-day shutdown" said Ha Nguyen McNeill, a senior official performing the duties of TSA administrator. "Many are still reeling from it."

#### Why is a Homeland Security shutdown happening?

Essentially, it's because Trump acquiesced to Democrats' request that Homeland Security funding be stripped from a broader spending package to allow more time for negotiation over demands for changes to immigration enforcement, like a code of conduct for federal agents and a requirement that officers

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 57 of 71

show identification. Homeland Security was temporarily funded only through Feb. 13.

The rest of the federal government is funded through Sept. 30. That means most federal programs are unaffected by the latest shutdown, including food assistance, and pay for most federal workers and for service members will continue uninterrupted.

What agencies are impacted?

The funding lapse affects the Department of Homeland Security and its constellation of agencies, including U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the Secret Service and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The vast majority of employees at the Secret Service and U.S. Coast Guard will continue their work, though they could also miss a paycheck depending upon the shutdown's length.

At the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the shutdown will disrupt the agency's ability to reimburse states for disaster relief costs. Some workers will be furloughed, limiting the agency's ability to coordinate with state and local partners, and training for first responders at the National Disaster and Emergency Management University in Maryland will be disrupted.

Republicans have pointed out that the work of ICE and CBP will mostly continue unabated during a shutdown, despite Democratic demands for changes at those agencies.

That's because Trump's tax and spending cut bill passed by Republicans last year provided ICE with about \$75 billion and CBP with about \$65 billion, money those agencies can continue to tap for Trump's deportation operations.

What is the impact on workers?

It's up to each federal agency to designate which of its employees are "essential" or "excepted," both of which mean the same thing in this case. They keep working during a shutdown, typically without getting paid until government funding is back in place.

Some examples of "essential" employees are military personnel, security screeners at airports and law enforcement officers. There can be a wide range, from positions deemed critical for public safety to those authorized by law to continue even without new funding.

Most of the more than 270,000 people employed by Homeland Security are deemed essential, meaning that they stay on the job even during a shutdown. For the fall 2025 shutdown, more than 258,000 DHS employees were in that category, and about 22,000 — or 5% of the agency's total employee base — were furloughed.

Lawmakers have been particularly concerned about the potential impact on the TSA and airports.

Senate Republican Leader John Thune has warned that "there's a very good chance we could see more travel problems" similar to last year's shutdown. As staffing shortages grow, airports may reduce the number of open security lanes or close checkpoints altogether to relieve pressure on an already strained workforce.

During last year's lapse in funding, unpaid TSA workers increasingly called in sick or stayed home as missed paychecks made it harder for workers to cover basic expenses. The strain was visible on the ground: About a month into the shutdown, TSA closed two checkpoints at Philadelphia International Airport.

"The longer the shutdown goes on, the more severe the impact on our TSA workforce," the agency said at the time.

## **At Fort Bragg, Trump says Maduro raid showed 'full military might' of US and means 'we are feared'**

By WILL WEISSERT and ALLEN G. BREED Associated Press

FORT BRAGG, N.C. (AP) — President Donald Trump celebrated the special forces members who ousted Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, saying last month's audacious raid means "the entire world saw what the full military might" of the U.S. can do and ensured "we are feared" by potential enemies around the world.

Addressing soldiers and their families at Fort Bragg, one of the world's largest military bases, Trump

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 58 of 71

declared, "Your commander in chief supports you totally." Then, drawing on one of his own campaign slogans, he implored them, "When needed, you're going to fight, fight, fight. You're going to win, win, win."

The president and first lady Melania Trump also met privately with military families. Trump said after the meeting that "we saw a lot of heroes" and "these are great patriots." He said he planned to give a Medal of Honor to "one person" for participating in the Venezuelan operation.

But the visit often felt more like a political rally than an official visit to celebrate the U.S. armed forces. Trump's lauding of the raid that toppled Maduro came only after he called to the stage Michael Whatley, a former Republican National Committee chair who has the president's endorsement as he now runs for Senate in North Carolina.

Whatley thanked Trump and suggested that the president "is giving me an opportunity to represent you" — even though the election isn't until November.

Later, Trump said of the Jan. 3 raid that whisked away Maduro to face U.S. drug smuggling charges, "It was a matter of minutes before he was on a helicopter being taken out." He called the forces involved "some of our greatest soldiers to ever live, frankly," while dismissing Maduro as an "outlaw dictator."

"That night, the entire world saw what the full military might (of) the U.S. military is capable" of, the president said. "It was so precise, so incredible."

Trump also vowed, "As long as I'm president, we will be the best led, the best trained, the best equipped, the most disciplined and the most elite fighting force the world has ever seen" and noted of would-be U.S. adversaries, "Everybody knows it."

"They know exactly what they would be up against. Hopefully, we'll never have to test them and, because of our strength, and because of what we do, we probably won't have to be tested," Trump said.

Even still, the president mentioned sending a second aircraft carrier group to the Middle East amid rising tensions with Iran and said, "America's respected again. And, perhaps most importantly, we are feared by the enemies all over the globe."

"I don't like to say fear," he said. "But, sometimes, you have to have fear because that's the only thing that really will get the situation taken care of."

Trump lately has traveled more frequently to states that could play key roles in November's midterm congressional elections, including a stop before Christmas in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. The White House has been trying to promote Trump's economic policies, including attempts to bring down the cost of living at a time when many people are growing frustrated with his efforts to improve affordability.

The president didn't spend a lot of time on his economic policies on Friday, though he did mention how a White House-backed tax and spending package is increasing funding for military housing.

As he left the White House to make the trip, meanwhile, Trump cheered data released Friday showing that inflation fell to nearly a five-year low last month.

"The numbers were surprising, except to me they weren't surprising," Trump said. "We have very modest inflation, which is what you want to have."

The president also spoke at Fort Bragg in June at an event meant to recognize the 250th anniversary of the Army. But that celebration was overshadowed by his partisan remarks describing protesters in Los Angeles as "animals" and his defense of deploying the military there.

This time, Trump evoked the fatal stabbing of a Ukrainian refugee on a North Carolina commuter train and called the man accused of committing it a "monster."

Also Friday, Trump praised Maduro's replacement, acting Venezuelan President Delcy Rodriguez. Rather than push for elections in Venezuela, Trump says his administration is inviting top oil companies there to rebuild its energy industry. U.S. officials also have seized tankers as part of their broad oversight of the country's oil industry.

"The relationship is strong, the oil is coming out," Trump told reporters before flying to North Carolina. He added: "We have our big oil companies going in, they're going to be pumping out the oil and selling the oil for a lot of money."

## Imprisoned Iranian Nobel Peace Prize winner Narges Mohammadi is in worsening health, husband says

By ALEX TURNBULL and AMIR-HUSSEIN RADJY Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — The health of Iran's imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi is worsening, in part because of a beating she endured during her arrest two months ago, her husband told The Associated Press on Friday.

Speaking at his home in Paris, Taghi Rahmani said he has not been able to speak with his wife since she was arrested on Dec. 12 during a visit to the eastern Iranian city of Mashhad. She was allowed a single brief phone call to her brother and has only spoken to her lawyer once — after she was handed a new prison sentence earlier this week, he said.

Mohammadi was arrested several weeks before nationwide protests began to spread around Iran, culminating in marches by hundreds of thousands on Jan. 8 to Jan. 9, until they were crushed by a heavy government crackdown. Rights groups have so far counted more than 7,000 dead and say the true number is likely far higher; the government has put the toll at more than 3,100 dead.

The 53-year-old Mohammadi started a hunger strike in prison on Feb. 2, and several days later a court sentenced her to more than seven additional years in prison, her lawyer in Iran posted on X over the weekend. Authorities did not immediately acknowledge the sentence. She was already serving a sentence of 13 years and nine months on charges of collusion against state security and propaganda against Iran's government, but had been released on furlough since late 2024 over medical concerns.

It was not clear if Mohammadi has ended her hunger strike since her sentencing, her husband said.

Rahmani, who has lived in exile since 2012, said he last spoke to his wife, who lives in Tehran, the night before she left for Mashhad. She was attending a memorial there for a human rights lawyer who had died the previous week under unclear circumstances. At the memorial, plainclothes members of the security forces began to assault Mohammadi before she had finished her speech, according to her husband.

He said multiple men hit and kicked her in her side, head and neck.

Details of her deteriorating condition have come from released detainees who had been held alongside Mohammadi in Mashhad, Rahmani said.

"Collectively this information shows her physical condition is very severe because of the hits she got, her bruised body," he said, adding that her heart condition had worsened.

Mohammadi suffered multiple heart attacks while imprisoned before undergoing emergency surgery in 2022, her supporters say. Her lawyer in late 2024 revealed doctors found a bone lesion they feared could be cancerous, which later was removed.

"Our main concern about Narges is her illnesses," Rahmani said. He said three of her four coronary arteries are constricted and she has pulmonary problems. "These illnesses she has gotten from being in prison. When she is in prison it isn't possible to take care of her health," he said.

The Nobel committee condemned the "ongoing life-threatening mistreatment" of Mohammadi, in a statement issued Wednesday.

Sentenced without a lawyer

Mohammadi, a human rights activist, has been imprisoned multiple times over her vocal criticisms of Iran's theocratic rule. She was awarded the Nobel in 2023 while in prison. Even during her medical furlough, she kept up her activism with public protests and international media appearances, including demonstrating in front of Tehran's notorious Evin prison, where she had been held.

Mohammadi's new sentence was handed down Saturday by a Revolutionary Court in Mashhad, her lawyer, Mostafa Nili, said on X. Such courts typically issue verdicts with little or no opportunity for defendants to contest their charges.

Nili was not allowed to attend the court sentencing, but Mohammadi was able to contact him afterward — her first contact with her lawyer since her arrest, Rahmani said.

"In the court, she didn't defend herself because she has the belief that the Islamic Republic's court has made its ruling already, from before, and 100% this verdict will be confirmed," he said.

"We want Narges' release," he said. "A human rights activist – a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize – whom they have arrested has no permission for access to a lawyer."

"A flagrant crime"

A writer, Rahmani was a political prisoner in Iran multiple times himself, for a total of more than 14 years. Abuses during his imprisonment caused him to lose much of his hearing.

Rahmani said conditions for political prisoners in Iran have continued to deteriorate amid the suppression of the latest protests. The crackdown is the deadliest since the Islamic Republic was created in 1979. The U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency has put the number of arrests at more than 50,000. The AP has been unable to verify that figure.

"In these 47 years, the Islamic Republic hadn't killed people to this extent. This is a flagrant crime. People very clearly want to put the Islamic Republic behind them," Rahmani said. "They want a republic, they want democracy."

U.S. President Donald Trump has moved an aircraft carrier and other military assets to the Persian Gulf and suggested the U.S. could attack Iran over the killing of peaceful demonstrators or if Tehran launches mass executions over the protests. A second American aircraft carrier is on its way to the Mideast. Trump has also opened negotiations with Iran.

Rahmani said he opposed any attack by an outside country on Iran and said he doesn't believe Trump wants to help protesters.

"Donald Trump won't bring democracy for us. Donald Trump is after a series of issues he wants to get to — like the nuclear issue, like the missile issue, and then Israel," he said. Israel and the U.S. both struck Iran heavily during last year's 12-day war.

"For this reason, in my opinion, they are not credible as far as democracy for Iran goes," he said.

He said he believed any political transition to democracy must come from within the country.

"We want Iran to be a free country, with a democracy, and that we can ourselves return to our own country. Every person loves the land where he or she was born, and tries to help it blossom," he said.

## **Chris Paul, the 'Point God,' retires as All-Star weekend begins, ending a 21-season NBA run**

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

Chris Paul, the "Point God" who was a 12-time All-Star selection and two-time Olympic gold medalist, announced his retirement on Friday in the capper of a 21-season career that will surely merit induction into the Basketball Hall of Fame.

Paul made the announcement on the first day of the NBA's All-Star weekend at the home of the Los Angeles Clippers in Inglewood, California. Paul spent his final season — an abbreviated one — with the Clippers, who sent him home in December and wound up trading him to Toronto earlier this month.

The Raptors knew Paul would never play in Toronto, and that begged the question about whether the Wake Forest legend would try to finish the season with another team in pursuit of the thing he never got — an NBA title.

The answer came Friday. He's done. He said last summer that he has hated missing events with his children over the last few years, and now he can devote himself much more to his family and other interests.

"It's time for me to show up for others and in other ways," Paul wrote on a social media post, announcing the decision.

He strongly hinted earlier this season that this year was going to be his last. Paul was a four-time All-NBA first team selection, and he ranks second in NBA history with 12,552 assists and 2,728 steals. He was the first player to score at least 20,000 points while recording at least 10,000 assists; LeBron James and Russell Westbrook have both since done that as well.

"It feels really good knowing that I played and treated this game with the utmost respect since the day my dad introduced me to it," Paul wrote. "It was the very first relationship I ever knew."

Paul played for New Orleans, Houston, Oklahoma City, Phoenix, Golden State, San Antonio and the Clip-

pers during his career, spending the last four years with four different teams.

He also was a past president of the National Basketball Players Association — instrumental in getting the league through the bubble season when the pandemic struck in 2020 — and championed the NBA establishing better ties with Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

“From the moment he entered the league, Chris distinguished himself with his savvy playmaking skills, elite competitiveness and intense work ethic,” NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said in a statement, in which he called Paul “one of the greatest point guards in NBA history.”

Paul is 15th all-time in regular-season games played and 36th in points, was a six-time steals champion, five-time assists champion, a nine-time All-Defensive team pick, 11-time All-NBA selection and was part of the NBA’s 75th anniversary team.

He’s one of six players in NBA history to have reached \$400 million in career earnings.

“I’ve been playing basketball since I was 4 years old, and there’s nothing other than my family that brings me more joy than the hard work and all that stuff that goes into it,” he said in 2024. “Yeah, that’s why we get to play a child’s game and say it’s my way of life.”

Paul became arguably the most accomplished player in Clippers franchise history while leading the team to six winning seasons from 2011-17, including the Clippers’ first two Pacific Division titles and three playoff series victories. Paul returned to Los Angeles as a free agent last July, rejoining a franchise where he is loved by fans — but it went bad quickly, and Paul’s last game with the Clippers was Dec. 1.

It turned out to be his last NBA game, period.

“While this chapter of being an ‘NBA player’ is done, the game of basketball will forever be engrained in the DNA of my life, spanning three decades,” Paul wrote. “It’s crazy even saying that!! Playing basketball for a living has been an unbelievable blessing that also came with lost of responsibility. I embraced it all.”

Paul is one of seven players to have an NBA career span at least 21 seasons. And he’s already in the Hall of Fame: the 2008 Olympic ‘Redeem Team’ was enshrined as part of the 2025 class. It won’t be long before he goes in on his own as well.

## Chilling images from Nancy Guthrie’s porch could hold valuable clues about the masked suspect

By JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

The chilling videos of a masked man outside Nancy Guthrie’s home in Arizona before she vanished show just glimpses of the suspect, but for investigators they hold a mountain of clues.

And those images — from the suspect’s gloves to his flashlight — could be what’s needed to break the case.

“There’s a tremendous amount of information that this guy left,” said former FBI profiler Clint Van Zandt.

The FBI already has analyzed the videos from Guthrie’s doorbell camera to identify the suspect’s backpack, posting an alert on Thursday with a photo of the brand and model in hopes of narrowing down tips flooding the agency.

It has been nearly two weeks since the mother of “Today” show host Savannah Guthrie was believed to have been abducted.

Former criminal investigators say it’s almost certain that authorities are building a physical and psychological profile of the suspect, using the footage released publicly on Tuesday that totals less than a minute.

Whether authorities recovered more footage isn’t known, but technology will allow them to see more than meets the eye.

“Every single thing that is in the video is being digitally enhanced. Everything from the mask to backpack to the jacket,” said Ed Davis, the former Boston police commissioner during the marathon bombing and manhunt in 2013.

Here’s what was captured in the footage and what clues each might yield:

The backpack

It probably didn’t take long to pinpoint the type of backpack the suspect was wearing, Davis said.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 62 of 71

Technology available today allows investigators to break down photos and videos to the pixel, he said, giving them images of the stitching and maybe the manufacturer or brand name.

The FBI described the backpack as a black, 25-liter "Ozark Trail Hiker Pack."

The holster

The FBI says the man on Nancy Guthrie's porch was armed.

But the video shows he had an unusual holster setup, hanging over the middle of his waist and not on the side. It might be an indication that whoever it was has little experience with firearms.

"I've never seen anything like that," Davis said.

The gloves

The footage gives a close-up view of the suspect trying to cover Guthrie's doorbell camera, first with a gloved hand and then with part of a plant ripped from the yard.

The black gloves appear to be thicker than most and shimmered in the light.

"I spend a lot of time in Home Depot, and I've never seen those gloves," Davis said. "They're not very common."

The clothes

The suspect's zip-up jacket, pants, shoes and mask don't immediately stand out. But identifying one or more of those items could be a key.

Because once that happens, investigators can start looking at where those items are sold and combing through receipts and store surveillance cameras, starting with stores in the Tucson area closest to Guthrie's home, said Van Zandt, who spent 25 years with the FBI.

Going through mounds of receipts and footage will take time and isn't something that would be done on most cases, but there's no shortage of people assigned to this one, he said. The Pima County Sheriff's Department earlier this week said several hundred detective and agents have been assigned to the case.

"If all of the stars line up properly — and they rarely do — I find someone who was in there two weeks prior who bought the jacket, the shoes, the backpack all at the same time," Van Zandt said.

The flashlight

In one of the videos, the suspect appeared to be holding a small flashlight in his mouth while in front of Guthrie's door.

Figuring out the type of flashlight might be difficult, but there's something else to look at there, said David Lyons, a former homicide detective and police commander in Lexington, Kentucky.

Not many people instinctively hold a flashlight in their mouth, but those who work in the trades might — such as an electrician or a plumber, he said.

"That's a small thing," he said. "But at the same time, down the road, it could be something."

The movements

Every step and movement the suspect made on the porch is worth a close look — from the way he walked, to how he seemed unhurried and how he grabbed the plant from the yard, Lyons said.

All of that will likely be used by behavioral analysts to create a profile of the suspect, he said.

"That's what this will come down to," Lyons said. "Those small aspects added all together."

## Trump's push for Greenland reveals a political weak spot, new AP-NORC poll finds

By STEVE PEOPLES and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans may be willing to stick with President Donald Trump through almost anything, but his recent push to seize control of Greenland has turned off many in his own party, according to a new AP-NORC poll.

The survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research finds that about 7 in 10 U.S. adults disapprove of how Trump is handling the issue of Greenland, a semiautonomous territory of NATO ally Denmark. That's higher than the share who dislike how he's handling foreign policy generally, suggesting that Trump's Greenland approach has created a weak spot for the administration. About 24%

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 63 of 71

of American adults approve of Trump's Greenland approach.

Even Republicans aren't thrilled. About half disapprove of his attempt to turn the icebound landmass into American territory, something that Trump has insisted is critical for national security in the Arctic, while about half approve.

The poll was conducted Feb. 5-8, which is after Trump had made the decision to scrap tariffs designed to pressure European countries into supporting U.S. control of Greenland, but after his weeklong push for American intervention over the island.

About half of Republicans disapprove of Trump on Greenland

Trump's base is normally unwavering behind him, so Greenland stands out as an exception.

The marks represent Trump's lowest ratings among Republicans on a list of key issues in the poll, including the economy and immigration — where about 8 in 10 approve — and foreign policy generally. About 7 in 10 Republicans approve of his overall foreign policy approach.

Trump has argued that the U.S. needs Greenland to counter threats from Russia and China in the Arctic region, despite America already having a military presence there.

Other recent polls, including a Pew Research Center survey conducted in January, found that Republicans were largely divided on whether the U.S. should take over Greenland, while Americans overall were opposed.

Ayman Amir, a 46-year-old Trump supporter from Houston, Texas, said he agrees that Greenland holds strategic importance for the United States' military. But that doesn't mean he thinks Trump should claim it.

"We can't take it by force. We don't have a right to do that," Amir said. "You can't blame Russia for what they do in Ukraine and then do the same thing. You can't do this."

Trump's overall foreign policy approval remains steady

The president dropped his threats to seize the territory by force late last month after saying a framework for a deal over access to Greenland was reached with help from NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte.

The clash represents just one of the moves Trump has made to strain relationships with key allies over the last year. Western leaders are focusing on trans-Atlantic tensions this week at the Munich Security Conference.

On Greenland, Trump has few vocal supporters at home or abroad.

Even as Trump made significant moves to obtain control of Greenland, his overall approval on the issue of foreign policy has remained steady. About 4 in 10 U.S. adults approve of Trump's approach to foreign policy, a measure that's been unchanged in recent months.

Young Republicans especially disapprove of Greenland approach

Younger Republicans are especially likely to disapprove of how Trump is handling the situation.

About 6 in 10 Republicans under 45 say they disapprove of his leadership on Greenland, compared to about 4 in 10 older Republicans.

That 4 in 10 who approve of Trump's Greenland actions is much lower than young Republicans' approval on issues of foreign policy, the economy, or immigration.

Independent voter Aaron Gunnoe, 29, an engineer from Marion, Ohio, was baffled by Trump's aggressive posture on the NATO ally.

"It's the stupidest thing I've ever heard," he said. "It's owned by somebody else. That should be the end of it."

## **Inflation measure falls to nearly five-year low as gas prices fall and housing costs cool**

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A key measure of inflation fell to nearly a five-year low last month as apartment rental price growth slowed and gas prices fell, offering some relief to Americans grappling with the sharp cost increases of the past five years.

Inflation dropped to 2.4% in January compared with a year earlier, down from 2.7% in December and not too far from the Federal Reserve's 2% target. Core prices, which exclude the volatile food and energy

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 64 of 71

categories, rose just 2.5% in January from a year ago, down from 2.6% the previous month and the smallest increase since March 2021.

Friday's report suggests inflation is cooling, but the cost of food, gas, and apartment rents have soared after the pandemic, with consumer prices still about 25% higher than they were five years ago. The increase in such a broad range of costs has kept "affordability," a topic that helped shape the most recent U.S. presidential election, front and center as a dominant political issue.

And on a monthly basis, consumer prices rose 0.2% in January from December, while core prices rose 0.3%. Core inflation was held down by a sharp drop in the price of used cars, which fell 1.8% just in January from December.

"Inflation continues to decelerate and is not threatening to move back up, and that will enable more rate cuts by the Fed," said Luke Tilley, chief economist at Wilmington Trust.

There were signs in the report that retailers are passing on more of the costs of President Donald Trump's tariffs to consumers for goods such as furniture, appliances, and clothes. But those increases were offset by falling prices elsewhere. In other areas, Trump has delayed, scrapped, or provided exemptions to his duties.

Furniture prices jumped 0.7% in January from the previous month and are up 4% from a year ago. Appliances rose 1.3% in January though are only slightly more expensive than a year earlier. Clothing price rose 0.3% in January from December and have increased 1.7% in the past year.

Some services prices also rose: Airline fares soared 6.5% just in January, after a 3.8% jump in November, though they rose only 2.2% from a year earlier. Music streaming subscriptions increased 4.5% in January and are 7.8% higher than a year ago.

Yet those increases were largely offset by price declines, or much slower price growth, in other areas, including many that make up a greater share of Americans' spending.

The cost of used cars, for example, plunged 1.8% in January, the biggest decline in two years. Gas prices fell 3.2% last month, the third drop in the past four months, and are down 7.5% from a year earlier. Grocery prices rose just 0.2% in January, after a big 0.6% rise in December, and are up 2.1% from a year ago. Hotel prices ticked down 0.1% in January and have fallen 2% from last year.

Rental prices and the cost of owning a home, which make up a third of the inflation index, both rose just 0.2% in December, while rents increased only 2.8% from a year earlier. That is much lower than during the pandemic: Rents rose by more than 8% in 2022.

The tariffs have increased some costs and many economists forecast companies will pass through more of those increases to consumers in the coming months. A study released Thursday by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York found that U.S. companies and consumers are paying nearly 90% of the tariffs' costs, echoing similar findings in studies by Harvard and other economists.

Yet the increases haven't been as broad-based as many economists feared.

Tilley said that the higher tariffs have pulled some consumer spending away from other services, which has forced companies to keep those prices a bit lower as a result.

"We don't think consumers are in a place to take on price increases across the board, so you're not seeing those price increases," he said. Hiring was particularly weak last year, slowing wage growth, and many Americans remain gloomy about the economy.

Some economists note that the rental figures were distorted by October's six-week government shutdown, which interrupted the Labor Department's gathering of the data. The government plugged in estimated figures for October which economists say have artificially lowered some of the housing costs.

Companies are still grappling with the higher costs from Trump's duties, though some have benefited from tariffs being delayed or scrapped.

Arin Schultz, chief growth officer at Naturepedic, which makes organic mattresses in Cleveland, breathed a sigh of relief when Trump postponed import duties on upholstered furniture until 2027. They would have substantially pushed up the cost of the headboards the company imports.

Schultz welcomed the decision to lower tariffs on imports from India to 18%, from 50%. Naturepedic sources a lot of the cotton fabrics and bedding that it sells from India. When that reduction kicks in, he

said, the company could even cut some prices.

Still, Naturepedic's costs jumped because of duties on imports from Vietnam and Malaysia, where it sources its organic latex, which can't be grown in the United States. Naturepedic makes its mattresses in the United States at a factory in Cleveland and employs about 200 workers.

"We're paying more now for that," he said, and the company raised its prices about 7% last year as a result. "Tariffs are awful. We are less profitable now as a company because of tariffs."

If inflation gets closer to the Federal Reserve's target of 2%, it could allow the central bank to cut its key short-term interest rate further this year, as Trump has repeatedly demanded. High borrowing costs for things like mortgages and auto loans have also contributed to a perception that many big-ticket items remain out of reach for many Americans.

Inflation surged to 9.1% in 2022 as consumer spending soared as supply chains snarled after the pandemic. It began to fall in 2023 but leveled off around 3% in mid-2024 and remained elevated last year.

At the same time, measures of wage growth have declined as hiring has cratered. With companies reluctant to add jobs, workers don't have as much leverage to demand raises.

## **New astronauts launch to the International Space Station after medical evacuation**

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — A new crew rocketed toward the International Space Station on Friday to replace the astronauts who returned to Earth early in NASA's first medical evacuation.

SpaceX launched the replacements as soon as possible at NASA's request, sending the U.S., French and Russian astronauts on an expected eight- to nine-month mission stretching until fall. The four should arrive at the orbiting lab Saturday, filling the vacancies left by their evacuated colleagues last month and bringing the space station back to full staff.

"It turns out Friday the 13th is a very lucky day," SpaceX Launch Control radioed once the astronauts reached orbit. "That was quite a ride," replied the crew's commander, Jessica Meir.

NASA had to put spacewalks on hold and deferred other duties while awaiting the arrival of Americans Meir and Jack Hathaway, France's Sophie Adenot and Russia's Andrei Fedyayev. They'll join three other astronauts — one American and two Russians — who kept the space station running the past month.

Satisfied with medical procedures already in place, NASA ordered no extra checkups for the crew ahead of liftoff and no new diagnostic equipment was packed. An ultrasound machine already up there for research went into overdrive Jan. 7 when used on the ailing crew member. NASA has not revealed the ill astronaut's identity or health issue. All four returning astronauts went straight to the hospital after splashing down in the Pacific near San Diego.

It was the first time in 65 years of human spaceflight that NASA cut short a mission for medical reasons.

With missions becoming longer, NASA is constantly looking at upgrades to the space station's medical gear, said deputy program manager Dina Contella. "But there are a lot of things that are just not practical and so that's when you need to bring astronauts home from space," she said earlier this week.

In preparation for moon and Mars trips where health care will be even more challenging, the new arrivals will test a filter designed to turn drinking water into emergency IV fluid, try out an ultrasound system that relies on artificial intelligence and augmented reality instead of experts on the ground, and perform ultrasound scans on their jugular veins in a blood clot study.

They also will demonstrate their moon-landing skills in a simulated test drawing extra attention because of the impending launch of four astronauts to the moon on Artemis II, humanity's first lunar voyage in more than half a century.

Adenot is only the second French woman to launch to space. She was 14 when Claudie Haignere flew to Russia's space station Mir in 1996, inspiring her to become an astronaut. Haignere cheered her on from the Florida launch site, wishing her "Bon vol," French for "Have a good flight," and "Ad astra," Latin for

"To the stars."

Hathaway, like Adenot, is new to space, while Meir and Fedyaev are making their second station trip. On her first mission in 2019, Meir took part in the first all-female spacewalk. The other half of that spacewalk, Christina Koch, is among the four Artemis II astronauts waiting to fly around the moon as early as March. A ship-to-ship radio linkup is planned between the two crews.

Meir wasn't sure astronauts would return to the moon during her career. "Now we're right here on the precipice of the Artemis II mission," she said ahead of liftoff. "The fact that they will be in space at the same time as us ... it's so cool to be an astronaut now, it's so exciting."

SpaceX launched the latest crew from Cape Canaveral Space Force Station. Elon Musk's company is preparing its neighboring Kennedy Space Center launch pad for the supersized Starships, which NASA needs to land astronauts on the moon.

NASA's new administrator Jared Isaacman said following Friday's liftoff that testing continues at the Artemis pad, where the Space Launch System moon rocket awaits liftoff. A practice fueling last week unleashed hydrogen fuel leaks. Two seals have since been replaced and a mini fueling conducted.

Isaacman stressed that no launch date will be set until additional fueling tests — potentially a series of them — are completed. The earliest that Artemis II could launch is March 3, he noted.

## Logistics giant DP World replaces chairman named in Jeffrey Epstein documents

CAIRO (AP) — Dubai has announced a new chairman for DP World, one of the world's largest logistics companies, replacing the outgoing head who was named in the Jeffrey Epstein documents.

The announcement by the government's Dubai Media Office did not specifically name Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem. However, it said that Essa Kazim was named DP World's chairman and Yuvraj Narayan was named group CEO. Those were positions held by bin Sulayem.

DP World is a logistics giant that runs the Jebel Ali port in Dubai and operates terminals in other ports around the world. It has long been a pillar of the economy of the Middle Eastern city.

The announcement comes a day after financial groups in Canada and the United Kingdom said they've paused future ventures with DP World after newly released emails showed a yearslong friendship between bin Sulayem and Epstein.

The emails — some referencing porn, sexual massages and escorts — surfaced in the cache of Epstein-related documents recently released by the U.S. Department of Justice.

Epstein killed himself in jail in 2019 after he was charged with sex trafficking. The emails do not appear to implicate bin Sulayem in Epstein's alleged crimes. DP World did not respond to request for comment.

Bin Sulayem previously had a larger role as chairman of the Dubai World conglomerate, which at the time included the property developer Nakheel. That company was behind the creation of human-made islands in the shape of palm trees and a map of the world that helped cement Dubai's status as an up-and-coming global city.

The state-run WAM news agency also reported that Dubai's ruler, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, named a new head of the city-state's Ports Customs and Free Zone Corporation. That also was a position held by bin Sulayem.

The topics in the emails between Epstein and bin Sulayem range widely, including President Donald Trump, sex and theology. Some emails — like others in the Epstein files — contain typographical errors.

In one email from 2013, Epstein wrote to bin Sulayem that "you are one of my most trusted friends in very sense of the word, you have never let me down." In response, bin Sulayem said: "Thank you my friend I am off the sample a fresh 100% female Russian at my yacht."

That same year, bin Sulayem sent Epstein an email showing a menu for a massage business which included sexual offerings. Two years later, bin Sulayem texted Epstein a link to a porn site, and, in 2017, Epstein sent bin Sulayem a link to an escort website.

Epstein e-mailed with bin Sulayem about Steve Bannon, the Trump acolyte, in 2018, saying "you will like him." In another exchange, bin Sulayem asked Epstein about an event where it appeared Trump would be in attendance.

## High-profile resignations and replacements as Epstein case fallout spreads

By The Associated Press undefined

The fallout from the Jeffrey Epstein case is spreading around the world.

Politicians, diplomats, business leaders and royals have seen reputations tarnished, investigations launched and jobs lost after a trove of more than 3 million pages of Epstein-related documents released by the U.S. Justice Department revealed their ties to the American financier and convicted sex offender who died behind bars in 2019.

Apart from the former Prince Andrew, none of them face claims of sexual wrongdoing. They have been toppled for maintaining friendly relationships with Epstein after he became a convicted sex offender.

Here's a look at some of those caught up in the scandal:

Logistics giant replaces leader

One of the world's largest logistics companies has replaced its chairman, Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem, after newly released emails showed his yearslong friendship with Epstein.

DP World has long been a pillar of the economy of Dubai. It runs the Jebel Ali port in the Middle Eastern city and operates terminals in other ports around the world.

The cache of Epstein-related documents released by the U.S. Justice Department include emails between Epstein and bin Sulayem referencing pornography, sexual massages and escorts.

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In response, bin Sulayem said, "Thank you my friend I am off the sample a fresh 100% female Russian at my yacht."

Goldman Sachs' top lawyer to resign

Kathy Ruemmler, the chief legal officer at storied investment bank Goldman Sachs, said Thursday she will resign after the release of emails in which she described Epstein as an "older brother" and downplayed his sex crimes.

While Ruemmler has called Epstein a "monster" in recent statements, she had a much different relationship with Epstein before he was arrested a second time for sex crimes in 2019. She received several expensive gifts from him, including luxury handbags and a fur coat.

"So lovely and thoughtful! Thank you to Uncle Jeffrey!!!" Ruemmler wrote to Epstein in 2018.

Before joining Goldman in 2020, Ruemmler was White House counsel for President Barack Obama. She will step down from Goldman Sachs on June 30.

Prestigious law firm loses chairman

Brad Karp resigned as chairman of one of the most prestigious U.S. law firms on Feb. 4, saying news coverage of his exchanges with Epstein has "created a distraction."

Karp had served as chairman of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison since 2008. The New York firm has advanced the cause of civil rights, handled the legal affairs of corporate power brokers and grown into a multibillion-dollar global enterprise.

Among the newly released documents was a July 22, 2015, email in which Karp thanked Epstein for hosting an evening the lawyer said was "once in a lifetime" and one he would "never forget." Epstein responded that Karp was "always welcome," adding, "there are many many nights of unique talents. you will be invited often."

U.K. royal family

The former Prince Andrew, one of King Charles III's two brothers, is one of the most prominent names

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 68 of 71

linked to Epstein.

Headlines about the scandal forced the king last year to strip Andrew of his royal titles, including that of prince. He is now known as Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor. He has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing.

The recent document dump exposed the depth of ties between Mountbatten-Windsor and Epstein, revealing more unsavory details that have jolted the royal family, including an allegation that the former prince sent trade reports to Epstein in 2010.

Mountbatten-Windsor has been forced to move out of the royal estate that he occupied for more than two decades. Buckingham Palace says the king is ready to support police in the event of an inquiry into whether Mountbatten-Windsor gave confidential information to Epstein.

British politics

The U.K. government has been shaken by new revelations about Peter Mandelson, a longtime Labour party stalwart whom Prime Minister Keir Starmer brought out of the political wilderness as U.K. ambassador in Washington.

Mandelson was stripped of that plum post in September, after Epstein emails showed they had had closer ties than the ambassador had initially acknowledged.

While Starmer himself isn't implicated in the files, his position has come under threat over appointing Mandelson. He has faced calls from his opponents and from within his own Labour party to resign — which he has so far refused to do.

Mandelson is now facing a criminal investigation, after the new files suggested that he may have shared market-sensitive information with Epstein a decade and a half ago.

Mandelson has not commented on the investigation. He has previously apologized for his association with Epstein but said he was ignorant of the financier's crimes.

Norway's crown princess

The new documents showed, among other things, that Norwegian Crown Princess Mette-Marit, the 52-year-old wife of Crown Prince Haakon, borrowed an Epstein-owned property in Palm Beach, Florida, for several days in 2013.

And in an email exchange between Epstein and Mette-Marit in 2012, he noted how he was in Paris "on my wife hunt," but "i prefer Scandinavians."

She replied that the French capital was "good for adultery," but "Scandis" were "better wife material."

Mette-Marit apologized this month for "the situation I have put the royal family in," and said: "Some of the content of the messages between Epstein and me does not represent the person I want to be."

Norway's ex-prime minister

The head of the economic crime unit of Norwegian police said Thursday that former Prime Minister Thorbjørn Jagland has been charged with "aggravated corruption" in connection with an investigation linked to the release of the Epstein files.

Jagland's attorneys at the Elden law firm in Norway said he denies the charges and that he was questioned by the police unit Thursday.

Økokrim, as the police unit is known, said last week it would investigate whether gifts, travel and loans were received in connection with Jagland's position.

On Thursday, unit chief Pål K. Lønseth also said its teams conducted a search of Jagland's residence in Oslo, along with searches at two other properties in Risør, a coastal town to the south of the capital, and in Rauland to the west.

The searches were carried out after the Council of Europe, a human rights body that Jagland once led, said it was honoring a request from Norwegian authorities to waive the immunity from legal processes that he had enjoyed.

The council lifted the immunity, saying it was intended to protect activities linked to official duties, not "personal benefit." Jagland is also a former head of the Norwegian Nobel Committee.

Norwegian former ambassador

Mona Juul, Norway's ex-ambassador to Jordan, who was involved in Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts in

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 69 of 71

the 1990s, resigned over the weekend, after reports said Epstein left \$10 million to Juul's children in a will drawn up shortly before he died.

Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide said a ministry investigation into her knowledge of and contact with Epstein will continue, and Juul will continue discussions with Norwegian officials to clarify the situation.

French ex-culture minister

Jack Lang, 86, stepped down as head of the Arab World Institute in Paris over alleged past financial links to Epstein that prompted a tax investigation.

Lang was summoned to appear Sunday at the French Foreign Ministry, which oversees the institute, but submitted his resignation.

The former culture minister under President Francois Mitterrand is the highest-profile figure in France impacted by the U.S. Justice Department's release of files on Jan. 30.

Slovakian ex-foreign minister

Prime Minister Robert Fico's national security adviser, Miroslav Lajčák, resigned over past communications with Epstein — including text messages in which they discussed "gorgeous" girls.

"When I'm reading the messages today, I feel like an idiot," Lajčák told Slovak public radio.

Lajčák, a former foreign minister and former president of the U.N. General Assembly, has denied any wrongdoing. He said he considered Epstein a valuable contact who was accepted by the rich and powerful in the U.S.

"Those messages are nothing more than stupid male egos in action," Lajčák said. "Nothing more than words ever came of it."

## Norway's Klaebo makes history on skis, ties all-time Winter Olympics gold record

By DEREK GATOPOULOS and BRIAN MELLELY Associated Press

TESERO, Italy (AP) — Friday the 13th will be remembered as a lucky day for Johannes Hoesflot Klaebo. Norway's cross-country skiing star tied an all-time Winter Games record by winning his eighth gold medal Friday at the Milan Cortina Olympics. The 29-year-old claimed victory in the men's 10 kilometer interval-start race, for his third gold at the 2026 games.

With three races still ahead, he now shares the record with three other Norwegian athletes who have all retired: Marit Bjoergen and Bjoern Daehlie in cross-country skiing and Ole Einar Bjoerndalen in the biathlon.

Klaebo said he has tried to flip the script on superstition about the supposedly ill-fated day, having proposed last year to his girlfriend, Pernille Doesvik, on June 13th — also a Friday.

"I think I like Friday the 13th," he said. "It's a good day."

All the days in this Olympics, so far, have been good for Klaebo.

The win was particularly meaningful for Klaebo because he doesn't do as well in a race against the clock when he's not going head-to-head with rivals.

"This is the distance I've kind of struggled the most with so being able to do that means a lot," he said. "And then it's cool to be up there (in the records) with a lot of great athletes." Klaebo again gained vital ground in the final hill and clocked 20 minutes, 36.2 seconds, showing rare signs of fatigue as he collapsed at the finish line of the race considered to be his toughest challenge.

He was 4.9 seconds head of Frances's Mathis Desloges and 14 in front of his main challenger Einar Hegdardt also of Norway who lost momentum on the last hill.

"It's a special day," Klaebo said. "This one means a lot for sure ... I'm lost for words."

The Norwegian said he was happy with his tactics, racing the first half of the course with a controlled pace, saving energy for a burst up the last hill and home stretch — an ability that often sets him apart from others.

"It was really hard out there today so I'm very proud," he said.

Over at the French camp, athletes and team officials celebrated as if they had won the race, linking arms and dancing on the snow after underdog Desloges won his second silver medal in his Olympics debut. "I

trained incredibly hard for these races," Desloges said. "I told people I was at this level — and now we are delivering." The 23-year-old Frenchman, like many other top racers in the interval start, was mostly unaware of his position during the race.

"I don't really pay attention to what's being shouted from the sidelines," he said. "Honestly, I don't listen to them. I just focus on my race. I know what I have to do and I give it everything." On a blue-sky day in northern Italy, with the race track surrounded by the snow-capped Dolomite mountains, temperatures hovered around 5 degrees Celsius (41 Fahrenheit). A few racers chose to compete wearing only their race bibs.

Organizers had treated the course with salt Thursday to harden the surface but left it untouched Friday — a decision that favored Klaebo, who started early among the seeded skiers. Celebrations were led by Norwegian fans: national flags — red with a blue cross outlined in white — were draped over athletes and the railing on the spectators' area. Klaebo's grandfather, Kare Hoesflot, who helped launch his career traveled to northern Italy to watch the race, while messages of congratulations poured in from back home, where cross-country skiing is a prime time sport.

"Another show of strength from Johannes Hoesflot Klaebo. What a performance in a thriller of a race! Congratulations on gold number three in these Olympics!," Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Stoere wrote on social media. Finn Dahl, a retired marketing manager from Norway, was dressed in a white suit covered in Norwegian flags and the motto, "The Viking is back" emblazoned on the front pocket as he watched Klaebo win. He credited Klaebo's success to relentless hard work.

"He's so dedicated. He sacrificed everything in terms of training, how he eats, how he sleeps and calms down after races," he said.

"It's fantastic ... he's up to eight now," Dahl said. "I hope he'll be the biggest winner ever. " —

## **Goldman Sachs' top lawyer Kathy Ruemmler to resign after emails show close ties to Jeffrey Epstein**

By KEN SWEET AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Kathy Ruemmler, the top lawyer at storied investment bank Goldman Sachs and former White House counsel to President Barack Obama, announced her resignation Thursday, after emails between her and Jeffrey Epstein showed a close relationship where she described him as an "older brother" and downplayed his sex crimes.

Ruemmler said in a statement that she would "step down as Chief Legal Officer and General Counsel of Goldman Sachs as of June 30, 2026."

Up until her resignation, Ruemmler repeatedly tried to distance herself from the emails and other correspondence and had been defiant that she would not resign from Goldman's top legal post, which she had held since 2020.

While Ruemmler has called Epstein a "monster" in recent statements, she had a much different relationship with Epstein before he was arrested a second time for sex crimes in 2019 and later killed himself in a Manhattan jail. Ruemmler called Epstein "Uncle Jeffrey" in emails and said she adored him.

In a statement before her resignation, a Goldman Sachs spokesperson said Ruemmler "regrets ever knowing him."

In her statement Thursday, Ruemmler said: "Since I joined Goldman Sachs six years ago, it has been my privilege to help oversee the firm's legal, reputational, and regulatory matters; to enhance our strong risk management processes; and to ensure that we live by our core value of integrity in everything we do. My responsibility is to put Goldman Sachs' interests first."

Goldman CEO David Solomon said in a separate statement: "As one of the most accomplished professionals in her field, Kathy has also been a mentor and friend to many of our people, and she will be missed. I accepted her resignation, and I respect her decision."

During her time in private practice after she left the White House in 2014, Ruemmler received several expensive gifts from Epstein, including luxury handbags and a fur coat. The gifts were given after Epstein

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, February 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 254 ~ 71 of 71

had already been convicted of sex crimes in 2008 and was registered as a sex offender.

"So lovely and thoughtful! Thank you to Uncle Jeffrey!!!" Ruemmler wrote to Epstein in 2018.

Historically, Wall Street frowns on gift-giving between clients and bankers or Wall Street lawyers, particularly high-end gifts that could pose a conflict of interest. Goldman Sachs requires its employees to get preapproval before receiving gifts from or giving them to clients, according to the company's code of conduct, partly in order to not run afoul of anti-bribery laws.

As late as December, Goldman CEO David Solomon described Ruemmler as an "excellent lawyer" and said she had his full faith and backing.

## Today in History: February 14 17 killed in Parkland, Florida, high school shooting

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Saturday, Feb. 14, the 45th day of 2026. There are 320 days left in the year. This is Valentine's Day.

Today in history:

On Feb. 14, 2018, a former student opened fire with a semiautomatic rifle at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, killing 17 people in the nation's deadliest school shooting since the Sandy Hook Elementary School attack in Newtown, Connecticut, more than five years earlier. (Nikolas Cruz pleaded guilty to murder in October 2021 and was later sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.)

Also on this date:

In 1779, English explorer James Cook was killed on the island of Hawai'i during a confrontation after Cook's attempt to kidnap Hawaiian monarch Kalani'ōpu'u as leverage to recover a boat stolen from one of Cook's ships.

In 1876, inventors Alexander Graham Bell and Elisha Gray applied separately for patents related to the telephone. (The U.S. Supreme Court eventually ruled Bell the rightful inventor.)

In 1929, the "St. Valentine's Day Massacre" took place in a Chicago garage as seven rivals of Al Capone's gang were gunned down.

In 1984, 6-year-old Stormie Jones became the world's first heart-liver transplant recipient when the surgery was performed at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh. The girl died in 1990 at age 13.

In 1989, Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa calling on Muslims to kill Salman Rushdie, author of "The Satanic Verses," a novel the ayatollah condemned as blasphemous against Islam.

In 2013, double-amputee Olympic sprinter Oscar Pistorius shot and killed his girlfriend, Reeva Steenkamp, at his home in Pretoria, South Africa, saying he mistook her for an intruder; he was later convicted of murder and served nearly nine years of a sentence of 13 years and five months before being released from prison in January 2024.

In 2017, a former store clerk, Pedro Hernandez, was convicted in New York of murder in one of the nation's most haunting missing-child cases, nearly 38 years after 6-year-old Etan Patz (AY'tahn payts) disappeared while on the way to a school bus stop.

In 2023, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced that more than 35,000 people died in Turkey as a result of an earthquake on Feb. 6, making it the deadliest such disaster since the country's founding 100 years earlier. (The combined death toll in Turkey and neighboring Syria would surpass 50,000 people).

Today's birthdays: Former New York City mayor and businessman Michael Bloomberg is 84. Saxophonist Maceo Parker is 83. Journalist Carl Bernstein is 82. Magician Teller (Penn and Teller) is 78. Opera singer Renée Fleming is 67. Actor Meg Tilly is 66. Football Hall of Famer Jim Kelly is 66. Republican Sen. Bernie Moreno of Ohio is 59. Actor Simon Pegg is 56. Rock singer Rob Thomas (Matchbox Twenty) is 54. Former NFL quarterback Drew Bledsoe is 54. Actor Danai Gurira is 48. Actor Freddie Highmore is 34. Actor Madison Iseman is 29.