

Groton Daily Independent

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Tuesday, Feb. 17

Senior Menu: Scalloped potatoes with ham, carrots, fruit, dinner roll.
School Breakfast: Muffins.
School Lunch: Chicken breast, baby bakers.
St. John's Lutheran: Quilting, 9 a.m.
City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.
United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.
Pickleball, elementary gym, 5:30 p.m.
3/4VB, HS Gym, 6 p.m.
6th Grade BBB hosts Warner, Arena, 6:15 p.m.

Wednesday, Feb. 18

ASH WEDNESDAY
Senior Menu: Chicken noodle soup, cold cut sandwich, fruit.
School Breakfast: Oatmeal.
School Lunch: Cheese quesadilla, refried beans.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.; soup supper, 6 p.m. (Host executive board); League, 6:30 p.m.; Lenten Service, 7 p.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.; Ash Wednesday Service at St. John's, 7 p.m.
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton Service, 6 p.m.; Groton Ad Council, 7



p.m.

Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.
HOSA Teddy Bear Clinic, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., HS Gym
Pickleball, Elementary Gym, 5:30 p.m.
6th Grade Boys Basketball, HS gym, 6 p.m.
3rd/4th Volleyball Practice, 6 p.m., Arena
5th Grade BBB, HS gym, 6 p.m.

Thursday, Feb. 19

Senior Menu: Meatloaf, baked potato, broccoli, fruit, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Maple French Toast Bake.
School Lunch: Lasagna bake, corn.
Region 1 Girls Wrestling Tournament, 3:30 p.m., at De Smet
2nd Grade BB, 5 p.m., Elementary Gym
4th Grade BB, 6 p.m., HS Gym
HS Softball, 6 p.m., HS Gym
JH Boys Basketball hosts Warner (7th at 6 p.m., 8th at 7 p.m.)

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1440

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

Apalachee Trial Begins

Opening statements began yesterday in the trial of Colin Gray, the father of Apalachee High School shooting suspect Colt Gray. The elder Gray has pleaded not guilty to 29 charges, including second-degree murder and involuntary manslaughter.

In September 2024, then-14-year-old Colt allegedly killed four people and wounded nine others at his high school in Winder, Georgia. Colt's father had purchased the AR-15-style rifle for Colt as a Christmas gift and had also purchased a larger magazine for extra rounds. The gift came despite a visit from police over threats Colt allegedly made to carry out a school shooting (no charges were filed). Colt had also allegedly kept a shrine to a school shooter in his bedroom. Prosecutors say the elder Gray's actions indicate "criminal negligence."

The trial follows a relatively new approach by prosecutors to charge parents of school shooters. The first instance came in 2021, with charges against the Crumbley parents, whose son killed four students in Oxford, Michigan.

Fat Tuesday Arrives

Cities around the world celebrate Mardi Gras today, the final day before the Christian fasting and religious observance period of Lent begins. French for "Fat Tuesday," Mardi Gras caps Carnival, which starts annually Jan. 6—the 12th day after Christmas—and ends the day before Ash Wednesday. Celebrations include weeks of parades, masked balls, and king cake-filled gatherings.

New Orleans is considered the US epicenter for festivities, drawing roughly 1 million visitors and generating around \$900M in economic impact (although Mobile, Alabama, claims the first American Mardi Gras in 1703). Social clubs known as krewes, like Rex and Zulu, roll through the city in elaborate floats, tossing beads and doubloons. Roughly 2.5 million pounds of trash are produced each year, including nearly 100,000 pounds of beads, prompting the development of new biodegradable throws.

Mardi Gras evolved from ancient Roman festivals into a global event, from Rio de Janeiro's samba parades to Venice's masked balls.

Lost Ship Discovered

Researchers have found the Lac La Belle, a luxury passenger ship that sank in Lake Michigan more than 150 years ago. The 217-foot steamer was discovered 20 miles offshore between Racine and Kenosha, Wisconsin.

The Lac La Belle was built in Cleveland in 1864. The ship sank twice—the first time in 1866 after a collision on the St. Clair River. After being restored in 1869, the ship was purchased by a Milwaukee-based company. On Oct. 13, 1872, the ship left the city with 53 passengers and crew, as well as goods, including barley, flour, pork, and whiskey. After two hours, it began leaking uncontrollably and encountered a storm, forcing passengers to escape by lifeboat. Eight people died.

Eighty-year-old shipwreck hunter Paul Ehorn discovered the hull via sonar in October 2022 and waited to announce its discovery until he created a 3D model of the ship.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Oscar-winning actor Robert Duvall dies at age 95 after decadeslong film career, including roles in "The Godfather" franchise, "Apocalypse Now," and "Lonesome Dove," among others.

US women's ice hockey team advances to gold medal game after 5-0 win over Sweden, will play Canada Thursday.

Japan wins pairs figure skating champion; US pairs come in seventh and ninth.

Anthony Edwards named NBA All-Star Most Valuable Player after Team USA Stars win championship game in new USA vs. World format.

Science & Technology

OpenAI hires Peter Steinberger, creator of the AI agent social network OpenClaw, to focus on development of personalized agents.

Martian soil analysis suggests the planet was warm and wet during its Noachian era, roughly 4 billion years ago; findings provide support for scenario countering the theory early Mars was icy and cold.

Researchers develop "liquid battery" that stores energy from the sun for later use; light causes the substance's molecular structure to change, releasing energy as heat.

Business & Markets

Anthropic reports 11% boost in daily active users following Super Bowl commercial criticizing OpenAI for integrating ads into ChatGPT.

Defense officials consider cutting ties with Anthropic over its terms of use banning monitoring of Americans and autonomous weaponry.

Tom Pritzker, executive chairman of Hyatt Hotels, resigns from position over ties to late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Early IRS data suggests the average tax refund is nearly \$2,300, up almost 11% from last year; filing deadline is April 15.

Politics & World Affairs

Second round of US-Iran nuclear talks begins today in Geneva after Iran launches second round of naval drills, the US deploys second aircraft carrier to the region.

The US and Hungary sign agreement to cooperate on civilian nuclear energy, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio signals support for Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in the lead-up to April election.

Minnesota authorities say FBI will not share information with state authorities on the agency's investigation into the death of protester Alex Pretti.

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

♥ **Babysitting Available!**

House Cleaning Offered!

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

The advertisement features a colorful illustration of a teddy bear, a baby bottle, and stacking toys on the left, and a yellow bucket with cleaning supplies on the right. At the bottom, a red car is driving on a road towards a house in a green landscape.

Tigers run past Florence-Henry



Gage Sippel

(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

The Groton Area Tigers made the trip to Florence Monday night and came home with a clean sweep, winning the C, junior varsity, and varsity contests over the Florence-Henry Falcons.

Groton's varsity squad turned the game into a running-clock affair early, cruising to a 76-38 victory to improve to 14-4 on the season. Florence-Henry dropped to 3-14.

Varsity: Groton 76, Florence-Henry 38

The Tigers wasted little time asserting control, putting together a 16-point run in the first half. Groton led 22-4 after one quarter and stretched the margin to 44-17 at halftime. The 30-point continuous clock began at the 7:02 mark of the third quarter when Groton built a 48-17 lead.

The Tigers carried a 66-29 advantage into the fourth and closed out the 76-38 win.

Groton shot an efficient 66% from two-point range (27-of-41) and 43% from beyond the arc (6-of-14). The Tigers were 4-of-10 from the free throw line. They finished with 31 rebounds, 18 assists, nine steals, and three blocked shots while committing just 10 turnovers.

Gage Sippel led the way, knocking down 8-of-9 two-point attempts for 17 points to go with eight rebounds, one assist, and two blocks.

Karson Zac added 16 points, three rebounds, three assists, two steals, and a block.

Ryder Johnson chipped in 12 points, three rebounds, two assists, and two steals.

Anthony Tracy scored seven points. Keegen Tracy finished with eight points, three rebounds, five assists, and two steals. Easton Weber had six points, Becker Bosma totaled three points and five assists, Jayden Schwan scored two, Logan Warrington had two points and three rebounds, Asher Johnson added two points, while J.J. Muller and Jordan Schwan contributed on the boards.

For Florence-Henry, Carson Kelly led with 15 points. Dawson Hlavacek added eight, Karson Rossow scored six, Tucker Mumm had five, and Zachary Schroeder finished with two. The Falcons shot 32% from the field (15-of-47), went 6-of-10 from the line, committed 16 fouls, and turned the ball over 12 times.

Coach Kjellsen: Focus and Fast Break Key

Following the win, head coach Greg Kjellsen said the challenge was keeping his team focused in a potential trap game.

"We talked about it," Kjellsen said. "You can't lie to them and tell them these guys are really good. But I watched two of their games, and they're a team that probably should have won eight or nine games."

Groton mixed in some different defensive looks, including a 1-3-1 and some half-court trapping.

"We tried some things different defensively... just for a different look," Kjellsen said. "But when it came down to it, it probably didn't matter."

Kjellsen was pleased with how the Tigers ran the floor, particularly off rebounds.



Ethan Kroll

(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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Keegen Tracy
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



JJ Muller
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

"We work on that every day," he said. "We get out and make them get down the floor in under four seconds. Even Becker as a trailer. But I still think we can do a better job with it."

The Tigers emphasized paint touches and attacking the zone.

"We're so much better when the ball goes into the paint first," Kjellsen said. "Whether it gets to Gage or Becker inside and then out, or we get penetration inside and then out."

Looking ahead to Friday's match-up with Britton-Hecla, Kjellsen acknowledged the playoff seeding scenarios but kept things in perspective.

"You pull your hair out trying to figure it out," he said. "You just play your own game and we'll find out in a couple weeks."

Junior Varsity: Groton 59, Florence-Henry 22

The Tigers also dominated the JV contest, building an 11-3 lead after one quarter, 33-11 at halftime, and 50-17 after three in a 59-22 victory.

Anthony Tracy paced Groton with 17 points. J.J. Mueller and Jordan Schwan each added 10. Jace Johnson had eight, Ethan Kroll and Briggs Conn scored five apiece, Asher Johnson had two, and Connor Kroll added one.

Florence-Henry was led by Braeden Schep (7), Tucker Mumm (5), Austin Keller (4), Cole Muller (2), and Colby Robinson (2).

C Game: Groton 71, Florence-Henry 24

Groton completed the sweep with a 71-24 win in the C game, leading 19-3 after one quarter, 35-9 at halftime, and 56-18 after three.

Major Dolan poured in 23 points, while Trey Tietz added 19 and Ryder Schwan scored 14. Connor Kroll, Trayce Schelle, and Zach Flihs each had four points, Briggs Conn scored two, and Wesley Borg added one.

For the Falcons, Jackson Schackert led with seven points. Cole Moller-Mueller had six, Broden Borns five, Derek Flisrand three, Kaiden Rossow two, and Jagger Johnson one.

Groton returns home Friday night to host Britton-Hecla in a double-header as the Tigers continue their push toward postseason play.

The varsity game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Avantara - Groton, Agtegra, Bierman Farm Service, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Dan Richardt at Groton

Ford, Full Circle Ag, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Heartland Energy and The MeatHouse in Andover. Rich Bosma did the commentary, Jeslyn Kosel ran the camera and Paul Kosel did the stats and technology. The junior varsity and C games were sponsored by Tiger Fans.



Logan Warrington
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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BROWN COUNTY COMMISSION AGENDA
GENERAL MEETING
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2026, 8:45 A.M.
COMMISSIONER'S CHAMBERS
COURTHOUSE ANNEX - 25 MARKET STREET, ABERDEEN SD

1. Call To Order - Pledge of Allegiance
2. Approval of the Agenda
3. Opportunity for Public Comment
 - ❖ *Public comment will be limited to 10 minutes or at Boards Discretion. Presentations will be limited to 3 minutes.*
4. Dirk Rogers, Highway Superintendent
 - a. Bid Opening for Hot In-Place Recycling Project
 - b. Discuss Load Limits / Resolution #2026-14
 - c. Department Update
5. First Reading of Ordinance #321 – Rezone for Kyler & Lia Dinger
6. Second Reading/Possible Adoption of Ord. #302 – Wind Energy Systems
7. Approve & Authorize Chairman to sign the NCOG Agreement for Pre Disaster Mitigation Plan Assistance
8. Approve & Authorize Chairman to sign the Local Emergency Management Performance Grant (LEMPG) Agreement
9. Approve & Authorize Chairman to sign the following Fair Contracts:
 - a. Ashley E Productions, LLC
 - b. Lizzy Hofer Band
 - c. Groton HOSA Chapter for Cleaning the Grandstands
 - d. T & K Rentals
10. Approve & Authorize Chairman to sign Department of Health-Community Health Services Contract for 2026
11. Consent Calendar
 - a. Approval of the General Meeting Minutes of February 10, 2026
 - b. Claims
 - c. Travel Requests
 - d. Lease Agreements
 - e. Approve Advertising for Bids for Cell 5 at the Landfill
12. Other Business
13. Executive Session (if requested per SDCL 1-25-2)
14. Adjourn

You can join the Brown County Commission Meeting via **your computer, tablet, or smartphone** at <https://meet.goto.com/BrCoCommission>
You can also dial in using your phone. United States: [+1 \(872\) 240-3311](tel:+18722403311) - Access Code: **601-168-909 #**
Get the app now and be ready when your first meeting starts: <https://meet.goto.com/install>

Official Recordings of Commission Meetings along with the Minutes can be found at [Commission Meetings | Brown County](#)

AGENDA

BROWN COUNTY PLANNING/ZONING COMMISSION REGULAR SCHEDULED MEETINGS

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2026 – 7:00 PM
BROWN COUNTY COURTHOUSE ANNEX in the BASEMENT
(STAIRWAY AND ELEVATOR ACCESS TO BASEMENT)

- I. **Call to Order:** for Brown County Planning/Zoning Commission
- II. **Roll Call:** Stan Beckler, David North, Dale Kurth, James Meyers, Carrie Weisenburger, Paul Johnson, County Commissioner Mike Gage.
- III. **Opportunity for Public Comment if any.**
- IV. **Approval of February 17, 2026, Agenda:** Motion: 1st _____ 2nd _____
- V. **Approval of January 20, 2026, Minutes:** Motion: 1st _____ 2nd _____

ZONING BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT

- VI. **Old Business:**
 - 1) **Sign-up sheet:** On the table by the door entrance, there is a Sign-up Sheet. Please legibly sign in and mark **YES** or **NO** if you want to speak to the Board on any Agenda Item.
 - 2) **Permits:** Anyone that has submitted a Variance Petition (VP) or a Conditional Use Petition (CUP) to the Zoning Board of Adjustment (BOA) is still required to get their required PERMITS from the Zoning Office before starting their project if their Petition gets approved. Penalties may be assessed per Ordinance when starting projects without proper permits in place.
- VII. **New Business:** *Brown County Planning/Zoning Commission as Zoning Board of Adjustment (BOA).*
 - 1) **Variance to Setbacks** in Mini-Agriculture District (M-AG) described as Lot 1, “Keatts Eighth Subdivision to Richmond Lake” in the W1/2 of the NW1/4 of Section 23-T124N-R65W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (12705 Camdon Court; Ravinia Twp.).
 - 2) **Conditional Use Petition (CUP)** in a Mini Agriculture District (M-AG) described as Lot 1, “Beving-Webb Addition” in the SE1/4 of Section 13-T123N-R65W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (13291 382nd Avenue; Ravinia Twp.).
 - 3) **Conditional Use Petition (CUP)** in a Municipal District (M) described as the SW1/4 of Section 1-T123N-R64W and highway plat B and Lot A & AB railroad R.O.W., except “Fairgrounds Outlot 1” of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (400 24th Avenue NW; Aberdeen Twp.).
- VIII. **Other Business:**

Completed as Zoning Board of Adjustment (BOA) & going to Planning Commission

AGENDA

BROWN COUNTY PLANNING/ZONING COMMISSION REGULAR SCHEDULED MEETINGS

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2026 – 7:00 PM
BROWN COUNTY COURTHOUSE ANNEX in the BASEMENT
(STAIRWAY AND ELEVATOR ACCESS TO BASEMENT)

PLANNING COMMISSION

- I. **Old Business: Discussion on Amendments to Brown County Ordinance Title 4 for Chapters 4.22 through Chapter 4.29 on Administrative Rules and Enforcement are still postponed until further notice, by Ross Aldentaler, Deputy States Attorney. We are not continuing to put this on the Agenda or Minutes until something is presented to the Planning/Zoning Commission for proposed changes.**

- II. **New Business: *Brown County Planning/Zoning Commission as Planning Commission.***
 10. **Rezone Petition** for a property described as proposed Lot 1, “Keatts Tenth Subdivision to Richmond Lake” in the W1/2 of the NW1/4 of Section 23-T124N-R65W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (37838 Richmond Drive; Ravinia Twp.).

 11. **Preliminary & Final Plat** for conveyance purposes on a property described as “Keatts Tenth Subdivision to Richmond Lake” in the W1/2 of the NW1/4 of Section 23-T124N-R65W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (37838 Richmond Drive; Ravinia Twp.).

- III. **Other Business:**
 1. Executive Session if requested.

- IV. **Motion to Adjourn: 1st _____ 2nd _____**

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The flags were put on on Groton's Main Street for President's Day. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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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!

Names Released in 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: Torry Ray Ghost Bear, 30-year-old male from Rapid City, SD, serious, non-life-threatening injuries

Seat belt Used: No

Charges Pending: Yes

Passenger 1a: Misty Kay RedNest, 43-year-old female from Pine Ridge, SD, minor injuries

Seat belt Used: No

Charges Pending: Yes

Passenger 1b: Mia Lane Carpio, 22-year-old female, fatal injuries

Seat belt Used: Yes

Passenger 1c: Feather Leann Cottier, 35-year-old female from Rapid City, SD, serious, non-life-threatening injuries

Seat belt Used: Under investigation

Passenger 1d: Kameron RedNest, 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: Jorge Armando Mata Diaz, 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.

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, Torry Ray Ghost Bear, 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 driven by Jorge Armando Mata Diaz, 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, Mia Lane Carpio, died Thursday, February 12 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.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Deal to move pork plant from downtown to northern Sioux Falls includes \$50 million Sanford gift

State also providing \$12 million of Future Fund grants, and city is planning a tax increment financing district

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

SIOUX FALLS — Smithfield Foods plans to move its pork processing facility from downtown Sioux Falls to a new plant on the northern edge of the city that will be built by the end of 2028, according to a Monday announcement of a deal that includes a \$50 million gift from philanthropist T. Denny Sanford to help make it happen.

Sanford is the owner of First Premier Bank and Premier Bankcard, both headquartered in Sioux Falls. His donation will go to the Sioux Falls Development Foundation so it can acquire and demolish structures on the existing, 120-acre Smithfield site for future redevelopment.

Smithfield, meanwhile, plans to build a \$1.3 billion plant in Foundation Park, an area developed by the Sioux Falls Development Foundation near the intersection of Interstates 29 and 90 that is home to an Amazon distribution center and a \$550 million frozen-food production plant that's under construction by CJ Foods. Smithfield's project will include a new wastewater treatment operation.

The Smithfield plant in downtown Sioux Falls, formerly known as Morrell's, has been a mainstay of the city since 1909. Many people know the plant by its odor, which regularly wafts over scenic Falls Park. The relocation of Smithfield, coupled with the impending move of the state penitentiary — which is also near Falls Park — to a new prison planned in northeast Sioux Falls represents what city and state leaders described in the lead-up to Monday's announcement as a "once-in-a-generation opportunity."

Sioux Falls Mayor Paul TenHaken, who is not seeking reelection this year, said the impact of Smithfield's move away from central Sioux Falls will be far-reaching.

"This is going to carry on long after I'm in office, and I look forward to dreaming with our residents, even though I won't be in the chair, on what this could be, and what this extension of our downtown could be," TenHaken said during a Monday announcement at the Canopy by Hilton hotel.

The rest of the package facilitating Smithfield's move involves state and city incentives.

The incentive package

Bill Even, commissioner of the Governor's Office of Economic Development, said the state is committing \$12 million in grants from its Future Fund to the Sioux Falls Development Foundation to help with the project. The money will help reimburse the foundation for the land where the new plant will be located, and for costs associated with preparing it for construction.

Even said discussions about the move started shortly after Gov. Larry Rhoden appointed Even in April. Even's pork-industry background includes farming, leading the state Department of Agriculture, and serving as the CEO of the National Pork Board.

The Future Fund was created in 1987 at the request of then-Gov. George Mickelson. It was placed under the governor's exclusive control, enabling the governor to respond quickly when economic opportunities arise. South Dakota employers contribute a fee to the Future Fund when they remit payroll taxes for unemployment benefits.

Some state lawmakers want more oversight and control of the Future Fund after former Gov. Kristi

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Noem used it for a fireworks show at Mount Rushmore, a Rapid City-area shooting range that legislators refused to pay for, a Governor's Cup rodeo in Sioux Falls, and a workforce recruitment campaign that Noem starred in.

South Dakota lawmakers have introduced a slate of bills this legislative session seeking greater transparency and accountability for the fund, although none of the bills have yet earned final passage. Earlier this year, Rhoden — who is a candidate this year to keep his job — sought to preempt those efforts with an executive order outlining his procedures for handling Future Fund awards.

TenHaken said the city plans also to create a tax increment financing district for the project, but he provided no further details. The districts, known as TIFs, capture revenue from the new and higher property taxes generated by development projects to pay off the financing that helps the projects get started — often involving infrastructure such as streets and connections to water and sewer lines.

Move comes amid anti-China political rhetoric

Smithfield, which is part of the publicly traded WH Group based in Hong Kong, has 3,200 employees in Sioux Falls earning \$200 million in wages annually.

TenHaken told the crowd at Monday's event about a study from the University of Nebraska estimating the closure of a Tyson Foods beef processing plant in Lexington, Nebraska, will have a \$3.3 billion negative annual impact on that state. He said the economic pain for South Dakota would be similar if Smithfield closed or moved out of state.

"So, the fact that they're staying here in this state, we just cannot thank you enough for continuing this partnership here in South Dakota," TenHaken said.

Smithfield sells pork products under numerous brands and has facilities in multiple states. It was acquired in 2013 in a multi-billion-dollar deal by WH Group, based in Hong Kong, which is a special administrative region of China. Smithfield recently announced a \$450 million merger deal to absorb Nathan's Famous, known primarily for its hot dogs.

For years, Republican South Dakota lawmakers and governors have framed foreign ownership of agricultural land and areas near military bases, especially by entities from nations deemed "hostile" such as China, as a national security risk. The state's secretary of agriculture has even said that China sent spies to agricultural operations in South Dakota several years ago.

That rhetoric has produced new laws to ban certain agricultural land purchases by foreign entities, tighten reporting around land ownership, and add enforcement penalties.

Shane Smith is the president and CEO of Smithfield. In response to South Dakota Searchlight questions, he said Smithfield's management team and workforce are American, and 99% of its products are consumed in the country.

"So, I would argue with anyone, we're more American today than we were in 2012," he said.

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.

'Gaining back our identity': Standing Rock Sioux Tribe looks to expand buffalo herd

Reaching a goal of 1,000 buffalo will require more land and fencing; an alliance of tribal nations may help

BY: GABRIELLE NELSON

STANDING ROCK SIOUX RESERVATION, N.D. — Driving a pickup truck to one of the two buffalo pastures on the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Reservation, William Thompson spots a group of about a hundred buffalo grazing at one of the herd's typical spots near the pasture's entrance. Though the wind is biting and

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the temperature is below freezing, the herd seems unfazed.

As the tribe's buffalo herd ranger, Thompson checks on the herd every other day. His second stop on Friday, Jan. 9, is at the larger of the two parks, about a 20-minute drive from his office at the Standing Rock Game and Fish Department in Fort Yates, North Dakota. On the 12,350 acres of arid badlands, Thompson has seen the buffalo run down the steep sides of buttes and jump 10-foot ruts — but the terrain is impossible for large vehicles to traverse. So to get to "all four corners" of the pasture, Thompson exits his truck, starts up a side-by-side vehicle and drives out to meet the herd.

"I think our big bull is out there," he says, singling out one buffalo in a sea of brown fur. "That's him. Even laying down he's bigger than the rest."

Unit is the tribe's biggest male buffalo, weighing around 2,700 pounds. Most weigh around 2,000 pounds, twice the typical weight of females. He was transferred to Standing Rock from Yellowstone National Park in the 1990s, when the tribe reintroduced buffalo to the reservation, says Thompson. For 30 years, the herd's population has been stable. It currently sits at 324 — 276 cows (female buffalo) and 48 bulls (male buffalo).

Now Thompson wants to expand the herd, which he said will revitalize the tribe's economy, land and Native culture. The Game and Fish Department's goal is to have more than a thousand buffalo.

But the department doesn't have enough funds to lease more land or install more fencing, and the tribal government isn't providing more funding. So Thompson is turning to tribal organizations for grant funding, including the Buffalo Nations Grasslands Alliance, which provides technical and financial assistance to support environment programs of the Northern Great Plains tribal nations.

"There are a lot of costs with raising buffalo," the alliance's CEO, Shaun Grassel, told Buffalo's Fire. "And when those herds are managed for the community, quite often there's not a lot of revenue to be made. ... So if they want to do more with their buffalo, that's just added costs that they have to source from somewhere."

The Game and Fish Department is currently trying to acquire land abutting the existing buffalo pastures. Thompson says the alliance can provide funding for land acquisition and cover some fencing costs. A specific grant aims to help tribal environment departments cover the cost of leasing croplands for grassland restoration — a process buffalo are essential to.

With the current herd size, yearly buffalo auctions pay for Thompson's salary, equipment (like tractors and corral gates) and material to repair fencing.

This past year, Standing Rock auctioned off 81 buffalo, mostly calves and yearlings, to private buyers, bringing in \$148,400, says Thompson.

With a larger herd, he says, the tribe could make a profit at its auctions, plus the department could start holding buffalo hunting auctions. But increasing the herd would require more land, fencing and staff. Thompson says it's "a gamble" that some tribal council members are hesitant to invest in.

"Buffalo are assets of the tribe," he says. "If we get more support from them, it'll actually help in the long run, creating better job opportunities, creating more surplus of funds."

Bringing buffalo home

Buffalo are a keystone species of grasslands. They helped shape the Northern Great Plains, and their presence supports the overall health and stability of the ecosystem.

Their hooves help aerate the soil. They spread seeds that get trapped in their thick fur as they roam, and their poop has essential nutrients to fertilize the soil.

As a testament to their ties with the land, Thompson says he's seen sick buffalo cure themselves by finding natural medicine in the pasture, like bear root and bitterroot. And unlike cattle, they don't require supplemental hay, grain or soy meal. They can get all the nutrients they need from grazing. He says a couple private buffalo ranchers in the area have gone the last four winters without feeding their herds, which lowers operation costs.

"They've been here way longer than us," he says, adding that millions of buffalo used to roam from

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Canada all the way to Texas. Their population fell to less than a thousand in the late 19th century when the U.S. Army, American settlers and fur traders hunted buffalo to near extinction for sport and as a way to weaken Native American communities that relied on the species.

Recently buffalo populations have been growing due to restoration projects.

Yet, in the last few decades, grasslands — buffalos' native ecosystem — are declining. Over half the world's temperate grassland, 62%, has been lost to agriculture, urban development and climate change. Indigenous grassland species, including pronghorns, elk and porcupine, are in danger, says Grassel, who, before starting the Buffalo Nations Grasslands Alliance, worked for 25 years as a wildlife biologist for the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe, where he's a citizen.

"I got to experience seeing those animals, hunting those animals, but my grandkids might not," he says, honoring the Native value of "looking seven generations ahead."

In 1975, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act recognized tribes' right to self-governance and granted authority to tribes to manage their own fish and game programs, including the management of buffalo herds in the Northern Great Plains.

Less than two decades later, 19 tribes created the InterTribal Buffalo Council to support the restoration of tribal buffalo herds. Today, the council consists of 86 member tribes in 22 states and has returned 20,000 buffalo to tribal lands.

Standing Rock Game and Fish Department Director Jeff Kelly started working for the tribe in the early years of its program 20 years ago.

"It's part of our past and our ancestry that we were close with the buffalo," he says. "They provided us with everything — shelter, food, anything we could have needed to survive." He says that while working with them he "learned to appreciate them as our relatives."

And as people drive past the herd, which can be seen from the highway, Kelly says he hopes they are reminded of the relationship between Native communities and buffalo: "Our relatives are still here. We're still here."

Restoring land, reviving Native culture

Back at the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Reservation, wildlife is thriving, particularly on the largest pasture, called Unit 41.

The land is now home to 80 elk, which the Buffalo Nations Grasslands Alliance helped reintroduce, as well as a mountain lion and her three cubs, mule deer, coyote, beaver, porcupine, raptors and prairie dogs, in addition to buffalo.

Together, the two pastures span roughly 17,000 acres with 58 miles of fencing, which Thompson checks every week in case there's a need for repairs. But the setup can support only 300 more buffalo, he says.

As they return buffalo herds to tribal lands and restore native ecosystems, Thompson says Native communities are "gaining back our identity." He has worked with buffalo for 15 years. About a year ago, he started managing the herd at Standing Rock, where he's an enrolled citizen.

Thompson says he's come to know the herd and their personalities in the past year. Some of them are curious, getting so close you can feed them by hand, while others are mean and rowdy and will challenge your vehicle, he says.

"It's the bulls you have to get to know," he says, driving the side-by-side vehicle up to a particularly "mischievous" group of young bulls tussling apart from the herd. "They're smart. They're powerful. But I know where they'll be and where they're trying to get out."

The bulls butt heads and leap across crevices in the rocky, grassy landscape as they chase one another. Wary of the sound of the engine, they separate and run back to the herd. Thompson points out a cow with a red tag affixed to her ear. She's marked for harvest.

The Game and Fish Department typically harvests one buffalo a month to distribute the meat to community members. The hides and skulls, he says, are gifted to tribal members for sundance ceremonies.

The department keeps its freezers stocked with 500 to 1,500 pounds of meat, which is processed at

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Wozu Inc., a Native community-focused organization on the Standing Rock Reservation, and West Side Meats, a meat market in South Dakota run by the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe.

Any tribal member is welcome to the free buffalo meat, including hamburger, roast, steaks and stew meat. "All they have to do is call," Thompson says.

During the government shutdown and SNAP benefit delays in November, the tribe harvested an additional 10 buffalo to distribute to community members. They donated 500 pounds to United Tribes Technical College and Native Inc. in Bismarck. Increasing the herd would help with that response, says Kelly.

"If something like that ever happens, we'll always have that supply, a good supply, of buffalo," he says.

Finishing his rounds, Thompson stops at the top of the highest butte in the pasture and is greeted by two bulls who also made the trek to graze on a small patch of grass. The younger bull is likely following the old bull around to learn from his elder, he says.

Thompson braces himself against the wind and says he sometimes gets caught up in the office work and grant writing. But looking over the tribal land he grew up on, he says he feels grateful to work so closely to the land, the buffalo herd and his culture.

Gabrielle Nelson covers environment, agriculture and energy along the Missouri River. Before joining Buffalo's Fire, she worked as an environmental reporting intern at the nonprofit publication Bridge Michigan, covering climate change, renewable energy and the Great Lakes. Gabrielle received a journalism degree from Michigan State University, where she worked as an entertainment editorial assistant and DJ for the college radio station Impact 89FM.

Small business owners squeezed by Trump tariffs await Supreme Court decision

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — Aluminum cans rolling off Virginia cider maker Tristan Wright's production line cost more because of increased tariffs on aluminum.

Minnesota baby product inventor and seller Beth Benike ran out of inventory and lost income for months last year when President Donald Trump sparked a trade war with China.

Maryland dog apparel producer Barton O'Brien pulled the plug on a new line of Irish-style fisherman sweaters. Importing from his manufacturers in India became unfeasible.

Pennsylvania glass and ceramic decorator Walt Rowen worries about his tariff bill each time he replenishes stock.

"If there's one thing that's universal in business, no matter what you're doing, it's that stability and calmness create a positive market," said Rowen, a third-generation owner of Susquehanna Glass Company in eastern Pennsylvania.

But many small business owners feel anything but calm since Trump began his whiplash trade policy shortly upon starting his second term. And now they are waiting on the U.S. Supreme Court, which has been mulling since November what was supposed to be an expedited opinion on whether large shares of the president's unilateral emergency tariffs are legal.

The Supreme Court is not scheduled to release opinions again until Feb. 20.

In a tariff impact survey to roughly 3,000 small business members from June to November 2025, the advocacy group Main Street Alliance found that 81.5% indicated they may raise prices to offset tariff costs, 41.7% reported they would delay business expansion and 31.5% said employee layoffs were likely if tariff rates remained unchanged.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce estimated as of August that Trump's tariff policies will cost America's roughly 236,000 small businesses about \$200 billion annually.

Tariffs are taxes paid by U.S. importers to U.S. Customs and Border Protection on goods purchased from abroad.

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Trump tariffs pass one-year mark

Trump began using the novel approach of imposing tariffs under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, or IEEPA, just over a year ago.

As the first president to use the 1970s emergency statute to trigger import taxes, Trump slapped duties in February 2025 on products from Canada, Mexico and China, pointing to a crisis of illicit fentanyl smuggling.

He next targeted global imports in April with a universal 10% import tax, adding varying "reciprocal" tariffs on goods from numerous trading partners — all due to his declared emergency on trade deficits.

A handful of small business owners, led by a New York-based wine and spirits importer, sued and won in two lower courts.

Trump appealed to the Supreme Court and was granted an expedited case.

The justices grilled the government and lawyers for the small businesses in early November on whether the president legally used the statute — which does not include the word tariffs — and if his presidential power extends to unilaterally upending trade policy.

The arguments attracted rare appearances in the courtroom from Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and other Cabinet members.

The case outcome will only apply to the import taxes the president imposed under his declared emergencies. Sectoral tariffs on imports on metals, critical minerals and pharmaceuticals, put in place by Trump because of national security concerns or unfair trade practices, will remain.

"We've been waiting on it. Nobody's sure what really is going to happen — are they going to decide one way or another, and then what will happen?" Rowen said.

Rowen's company, among other things, sandblasts and laser engraves glassware, mugs and tumblers found in winery tasting rooms, on restaurant tables and in university gift shops.

"If they decide that the president's policies are legal, then we're stuck where we're at. Potentially, he might become emboldened to do even more. If they decide that (he) can't then what happens? What happens to all the money that's already been set aside?" Rowen asked.

Trump promises on tariffs

The Trump administration hails the tariffs as a windfall for the country. He's promised the customs duties collected from U.S. businesses and other importers will, in part, help the country crawl out of its nearly \$39 trillion debt.

Trump has also said tariffs will bring factories back to U.S. soil, provide for \$2,000 dividend checks to taxpayers and even offset the cost of child care.

The import taxes pulled in \$195 billion in 2025, up from \$77 billion in 2024.

So far for fiscal year 2026, which began Oct. 1, the government has earned about \$118 billion in tariffs, according to the U.S. Treasury monthly statement through Jan 31, though the report does not delineate between emergency and sectoral tariffs.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates roughly 41% of tariffs collected last year were due to those imposed under IEEPA. The office projects if tariffs are left in place, revenue will jump to \$418 billion in 2026 — exceeding corporate income tax receipts for the first time since the 1930s, a high-water mark for levies on imports.

Wright, founder and president of Lost Boy Cider in Alexandria, Virginia, said the administration is "literally banking the future of the country on the tariffs."

"They don't have another way of getting us out of this debt situation (and) you can point all the fingers you want over the last couple of decades," he said.

While Wright has not had to directly pay tariffs, he's shelled out more and more money for the aluminum cans that hold his specialty cider. China is, by far, the world's largest aluminum producer.

"We work with a lot of people that purchase internationally because they can't get the products here. And I understand it. You know, some point in five, 10,15 years from now, maybe we have 16 aluminum plants in the country. But you don't just snap your fingers and, like, create an aluminum plant," Wright

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told States Newsroom during an interview at his cidery.

Costs to households

Economists argue that while tariffs have raised revenue, they hurt the economy by shrinking business growth and reducing consumers' purchasing power.

"You can't do partial accounting. How much additional income growth and business income growth did you not get because of the tariffs?" Wayne Weingarden, an economist with the pro-growth Pacific Research Institute, told States Newsroom.

"If you wanted to raise taxes, there are ways of doing it that would be less obstructive to the economy than imposing tariffs," he said.

The Tax Foundation estimates the president's tariffs will cost households roughly \$1,300 in 2026.

"If you have \$100 to spend on groceries every week and the price of coffee goes up by like \$5, your grocery budget doesn't magically increase to \$105 to pay for the higher coffee price. Instead, you're forced to make trade-offs. If I want to buy the coffee, then that means I have \$5 less to spend," said Erica York, vice president of federal tax policy for the think tank, which advocates for business growth.

O'Brien, owner of the Annapolis, Maryland-based Baydog company, said he boosted his inventory of woven collars manufactured in India and dog harnesses from China to get ahead of the tariff costs.

"I have been forced, as a business owner, to borrow money and tie up all that cash in product," he said.

"If I look at other dog harness manufacturers, the prices have gone up everywhere. We have chosen not to raise prices, but to take that money out of our own pocket. So instead of everybody paying five bucks more for a dog harness, basically everyone at Baydog makes less money, myself included," he said in an interview with States Newsroom.

Benike, who owns 15 patents for specialty baby products including silicone dining trays with attachments for toys and sippy cups, said she had to lay off her brother and forfeit her own paycheck last year.

The owner of Busy Baby told States Newsroom in an early February interview that she delayed a shipping container of her product from China's Guangdong province, in case the Supreme Court ruled Trump's emergency tariffs were illegal.

"I was holding off on shipping it until that decision was made, because the difference would have been \$40,000 for me," she said.

She had to pull the trigger in mid-January as the Supreme Court continued deliberating and she began running out of product.

"I have a container that should be sitting at the port. It should be clearing customs, hopefully, like as we speak, so I'll have a tariff bill to pay," Benike said.

The following day she emailed to say she didn't realize Trump had lowered the fentanyl emergency tariff on China last year during negotiations.

"So my final tariff ended up being 10% less than I expected. YAY!" she wrote.

The big 'what if'

Shawn Phetteplace, national campaigns director for Main Street Alliance, said the advocacy organization is preparing to help its network of small business members if the Supreme Court strikes down the emergency tariffs.

"My understanding is that the things that can be done to get people's money back is either some type of class action lawsuit, so that it forces customs and government to essentially refund the dollars," Phetteplace said in an interview with States Newsroom. "But that process will take quite a bit of time. The other option is for individual businesses to sue the government and to recoup those costs."

O'Brien said of the delay, "The Supreme Court has proven they can issue decisions very quickly when they want to. Every day that goes by, they're making the mess bigger."

In a response to States Newsroom, White House spokesperson Taylor Rogers said in an emailed statement, "President Trump promised to bring prosperity back to Main Street with an America First agenda

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that benefits every small business, just as he did in his first term.”

“In addition to slashing regulations and lowering energy costs, the Trump administration signed the largest Working Families Tax Cut in history to unleash unprecedented growth for small businesses with a permanent 20% tax deduction and full expensing of equipment investments,” according to Rogers’ statement.

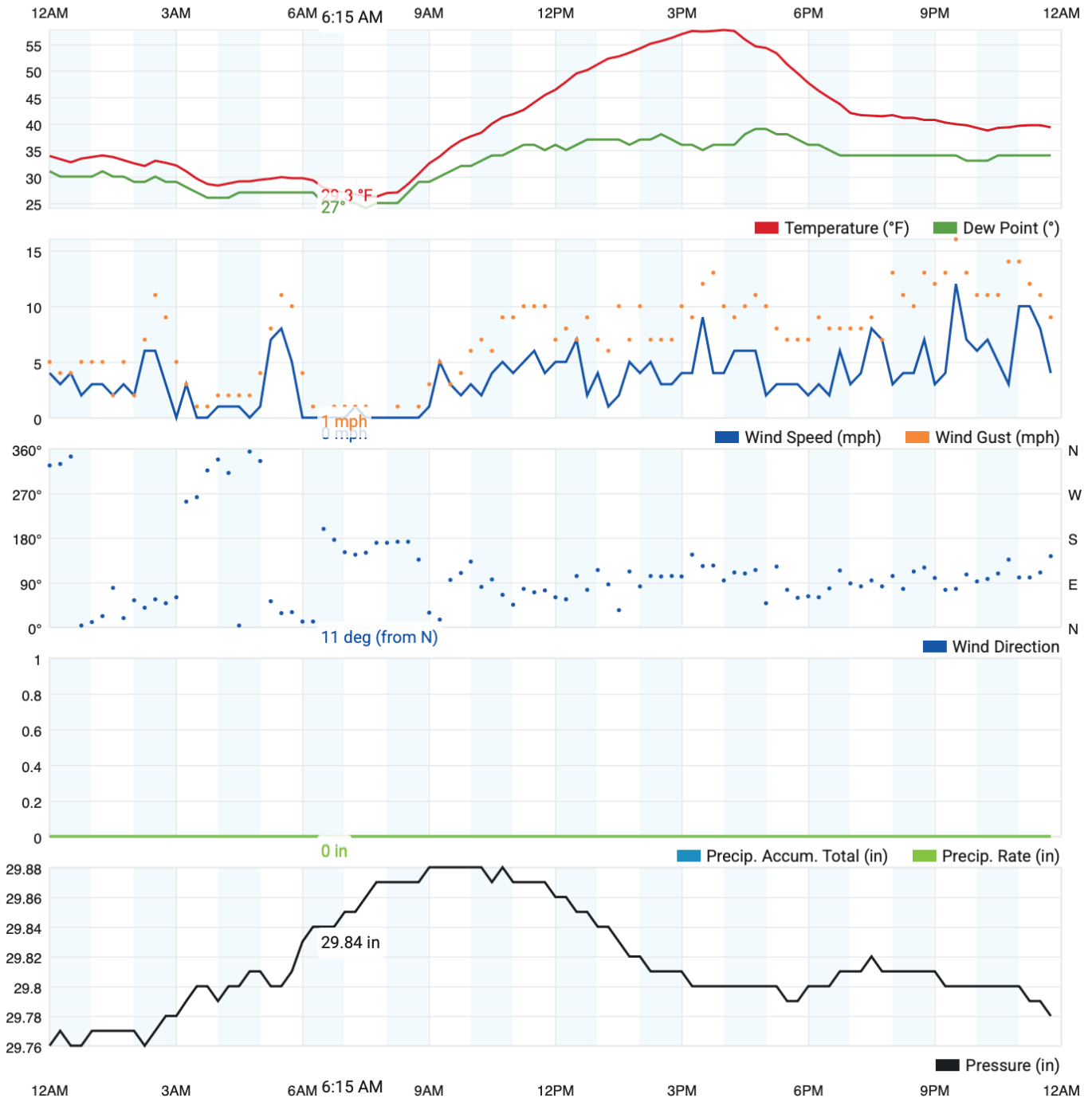
Ashley Murray covers the nation’s capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

February 16, 2026



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Today	Tonight	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday
				
60 %	60 % / 50 %	40 %		40 %
High: 52 °F	Low: 31 °F	High: 39 °F	Low: 20 °F	High: 26 °F
Breezy. Mostly Cloudy then Rain Likely	Breezy. Rain Likely then Chance Rain/Snow	Chance Rain/Snow and Breezy	Mostly Cloudy	Chance Snow and Blustery

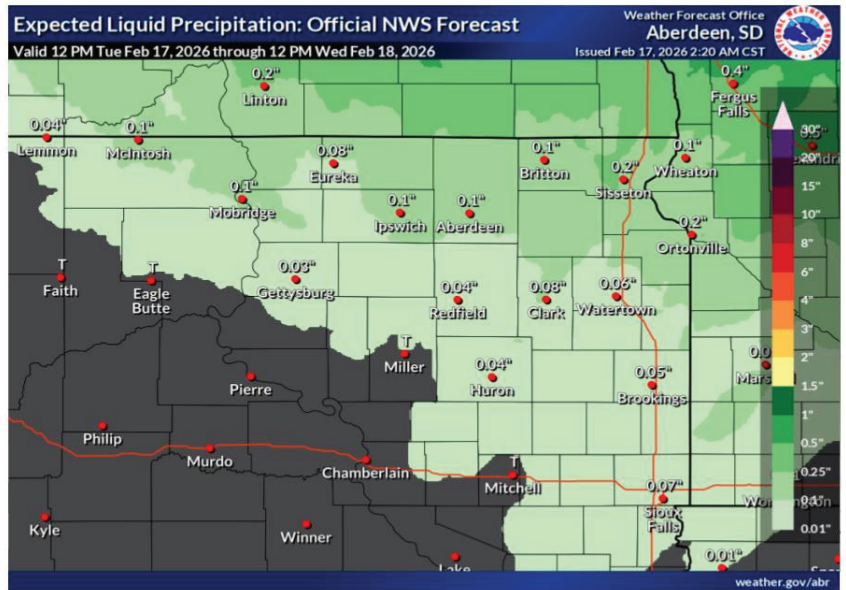


Mainly Rain Today and Tonight

February 17, 2026
4:00 AM

Highest chances for 0.10" of rainfall is across northeastern SD/western MN

- **Rain expected by late this afternoon through early Wednesday morning mainly over north central through northeastern SD and west central MN.**
- There is a **55 to 90%** chance of a tenth of an inch or more of rain over northeastern SD through west central MN through early Wednesday morning.
 - ◆ **40 to 75%** chance of a quarter of an inch or more near the ND/SD/MN border area.
- **Rain will transition to light snow late tonight into Wednesday morning.**
 - ◆ Generally a **light dusting to less than an inch of snow** is expected for northeastern SD into western MN.
 - ◆ 25 to 45% chance of 1" or more of snow on the northern tip of the Prairie Coteau and within the ND/SD/MN border area.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Rain will move into the area this afternoon through late tonight. There is a 50 to 85% chance of a tenth of an inch of rain over northeastern SD through west central MN during this time with a 25 to 45% chance of a quarter of an inch near the ND/SD/MN border area. Rain will transition to light snow from late tonight through early Wednesday morning. Generally snow amounts of a half inch or less are expected with a 15 to 25% chance of 1" or more of snow near the ND/SD/MN border.

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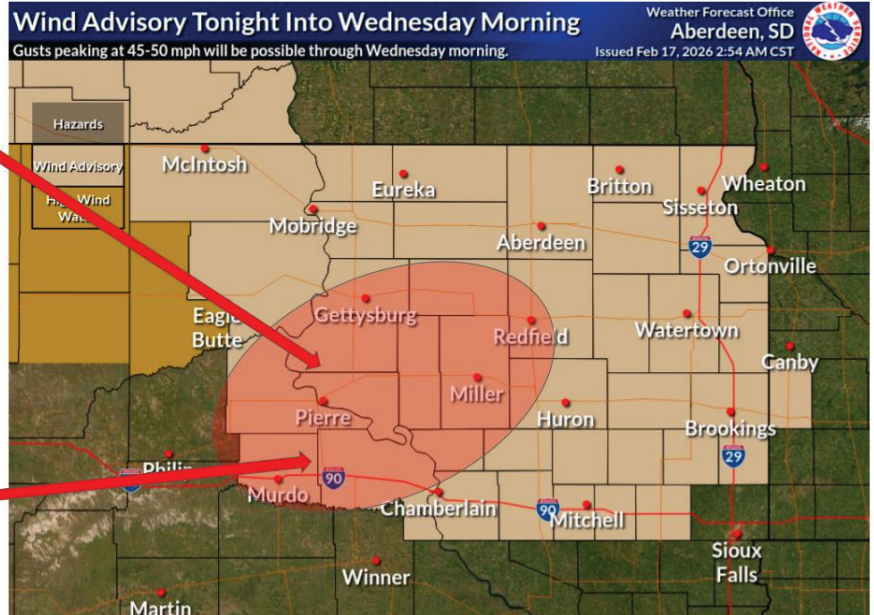


Wind Advisory Tonight Through Wednesday

February 17, 2026
4:20 AM

Key Messages

- **Today:** southeast winds increase and **gust between 20-35 mph.**
 - **High to Very High Grassland Fire Danger in Central SD:** Due to the combination of dry grasses, limited expected rainfall, low relative humidity values, and gusty winds.
- **Tonight/Wednesday:** winds will shift to the west-northwest and **gust from 40 to 50 mph**, and a **Wind Advisory has been issued for tonight through Wednesday.**
 - There may be a brief period of higher gusts as winds initially shift around to the west-northwest.
- **Wednesday:** **High to Very High Grassland Fire Danger in Central SD:** Due to the combination of dry grasses, no precipitation, low relative humidity values, and gusty winds.



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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 58 °F at 3:23 PM

Low Temp: 26 °F at 7:32 AM

Wind: 16 mph at 9:36 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 58 in 1930

Record Low: -39 in 1903

Average High: 29

Average Low: 7

Average Precip in Feb.: 0.39

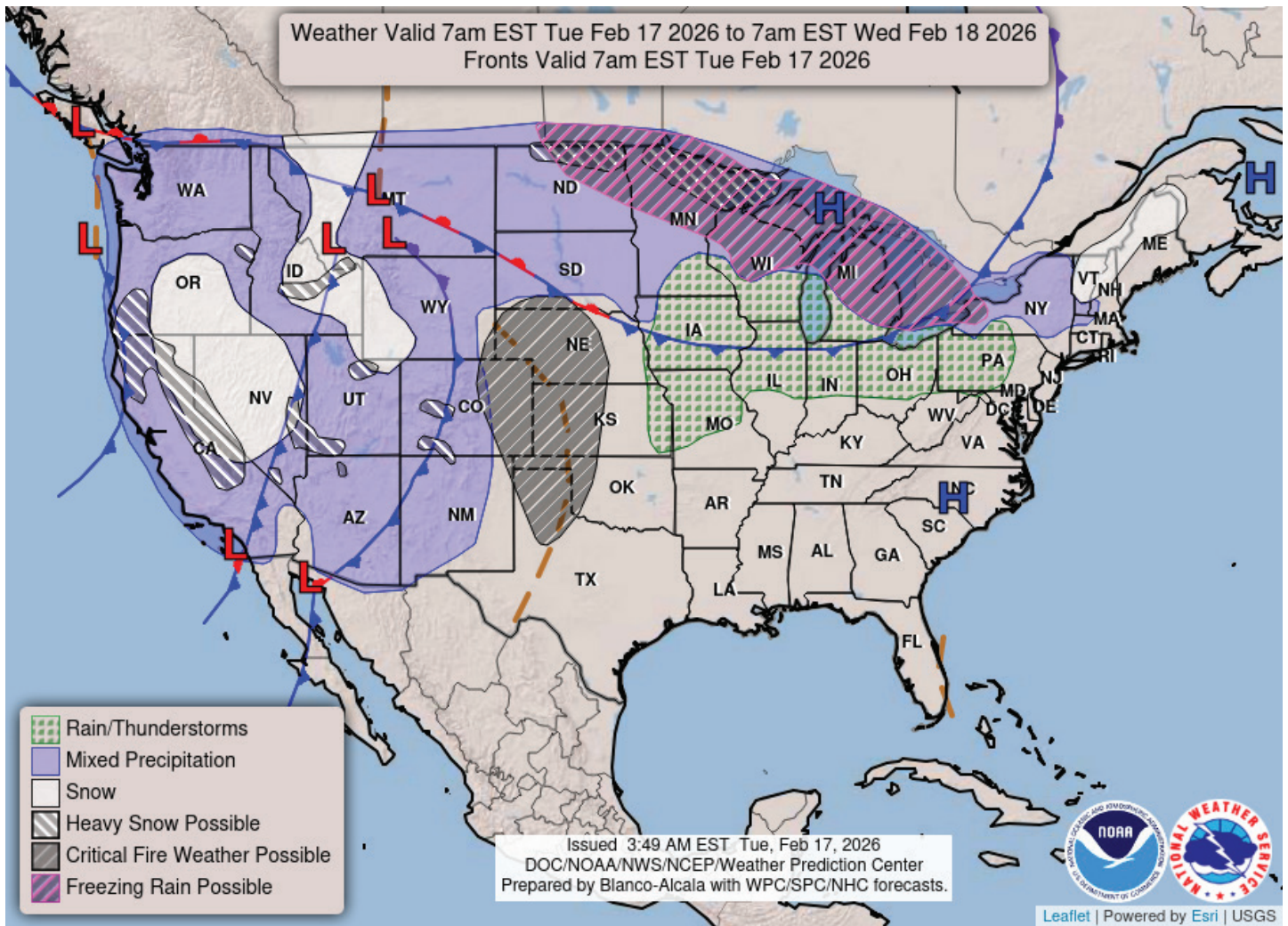
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.90

Precip Year to Date: 0.00

Sunset Tonight: 6:01 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:29 am



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Today in Weather History

February 17th, 1962: Very heavy snow of 20 to 30 inches fell across the southeastern half of South Dakota. One location had 44 inches of snowfall from the storm. Everything was shut down due to the storm, including roads, schools, and businesses. Some snowfall amounts included 10 inches at Bryant, 11 inches at Miller, 20 inches at Mitchell, 21 inches at Redfield, 23 inches at Huron, and 32 inches at Sioux Falls.

February 17th, 1972: In Minnesota, high winds of 30 to 50 mph across southern and central Minnesota reduced visibilities to zero at times from blowing snow. Wind gusts of 90 mph were reported at Worthington and Fairmont. Snow of 2 to 6 inches fell across the state. The blizzard stopped almost all traffic from west-central through the south-central part of the state. Most schools in the area were closed. Dozens to hundreds of people were stranded in nearly every town. Many communities stopped all traffic from leaving town. The snow derailed a train at Butterfield. In South Dakota, freezing rain followed by snow accompanied by winds of over 60 mph produced hazardous driving conditions in the area. Traffic was brought to a standstill in many areas resulting in cancellations of school and other activities. Some accidents occurred due to the icy roads. Although the snowfall was light, strong winds caused drifting with visibilities to near zero at times.

February 17th, 1991: On February 17th, a significant snowstorm dumped massive amounts of snow on most of the state from the Black Hills, southwest, central, east-central, and the northeast. At the storm's end, parts of the black hills received up to 2 feet of snow while the rest of the affected area had between 8 and 15 inches. The heavy snow caused most of Interstate 90 west of the Missouri River to close and many other highways in the central part of the state. In addition, many cars and trucks skidded off the roads, causing many minor injuries. The only serious injury was a man rolled his vehicle over after losing control near Belvidere.

1894: According to Grazulis, an estimated F2 tornado hits 5 miles south of Warren, Arkansas. An older woman was killed in one of the small homes that were destroyed. In addition, fruit trees were ripped out and carried a half-mile. Another tornado, estimated F3, killed two people in Claiborne County, Louisiana.

1926: A deadly avalanche, Utah's worst, demolishes 14 miner's cottages and a three-story boarding house in Bingham Canyon. Thirty-six were killed and 13 injured.

1930 — Eureka, CA, reported an all-time record high of 85 degrees, a record which lasted until September of 1983. (The Weather Channel)

1936 — The temperature at McIntosh SD plunged to 58 degrees below zero to establish a state record. (David Ludlum)

1958 — The greatest snowstorm of the mid 20th century struck the northeastern U.S. The storm produced 30 inches of snow in interior New England, including more than 19 inches in 24 hours at the Boston Airport. The same storm produced up to three feet of snow in the Middle Atlantic Coast Region, with 14 inches at Washington D.C., and 15.5 inches at Baltimore MD. The storm resulted in 43 deaths and 500 million dollars damage over the Middle Atlantic Coast States. (David Ludlum)

1973: Snow showers moved across southeast Texas, with most locations only reporting snow flurries. However, the Houston Intercontinental Airport measured 1.4 inches of snow.

1987 — A couple of winter storms, one off the Atlantic coast and another over the south central U.S., produced snow and ice from the Mississippi Valley to the Mid Atlantic Coast Region. Freezing rain produced a coat of ice three inches thick in northern South Carolina, and 30,000 homes around Pee Dee were left without electricity. Parts of south central Kentucky were without electricity for three days following the storm, which was their worst in 35 years. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — Santa Ana winds in southern California gusted to 63 mph at Ontario. Heavy snow blanketed parts of Colorado, with 11 inches reported at Strontia. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 — The biggest winter storm of the season hit the Pacific Coast Region. In northern California, snow fell along the coast, and two day totals in the mountains ranged up to 67 inches at Echo Summit. Snowfall totals in the mountains of southern California ranged up to 48 inches at Green Valley, with 46 inches reported at Big Bear. Up to two feet of snow blanketed the southern Cascade Mountains of Oregon, and 20 to 35 inches were reported in the northern Cascades of Oregon. Up to ten inches of snow blanketed Seattle WA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

From Emptiness to Fulfillment

Jesus can satisfy the yearnings of your heart.

John 4:3-29: 3 He left Judea and went away again into Galilee.

4 And He had to pass through Samaria.

5 So He came to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph;

6 and Jacob's well was there. So Jesus, being wearied from His journey, was sitting thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

7 There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink."

8 For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

9 Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

10 Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

11 She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water?"

12 "You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?"

13 Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again;

14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

15 The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw."

16 He said to her, "Go, call your husband and come here."

17 The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have correctly said, 'I have no husband';

18 for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly."

19 The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.

20 "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.

22 "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

23 "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.

24 "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

25 The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us."

26 Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He."

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

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27 At this point His disciples came, and they were amazed that He had been speaking with a woman, yet no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why do You speak with her?"

28 So the woman left her waterpot, and went into the city and said to the men,

29 "Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?"

As we saw yesterday, many people experience feelings of emptiness. How can we prevent this from happening? The account of the Samaritan woman in John 4 is a wonderful place to start. Through the story, we learn that ...

Filling our emptiness is important to the Lord. In the first century, Jewish people bypassed Samaria because of their hatred for its inhabitants. Yet Jesus chose to travel there because He knew a hurting woman was ready to hear about the Father's love.

Our attempts at happiness often fall short. The woman at the well had been wed five times, but her marriages hadn't provided what she truly needed.

God knows our pain. When the woman said she didn't have a husband, Jesus revealed that He already knew. By demonstrating His awareness of both her hurt and her longing, He helped the woman recognize her greater need: a Savior.

Jesus can satisfy our yearnings. Jesus revealed the way to experience a full life: "Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst" (vv. 13-14).

Do you ever feel like the Samaritan woman—tossed aside and craving love and fulfillment? Surrender to your loving heavenly Father, and life as you know it will change for the better.

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.13.26

34 40 49 59 68 1

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$395,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 22 Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.16.26

1 7 18 36 40 3

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$15,550,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 37 Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.16.26

6 29 36 43 46 17

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 52 Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.14.26

4 14 15 17 23

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 52 Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.16.26

14 24 32 37 49 7

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 21 Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.16.26

16 18 19 56 58 6

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$169,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 21 Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Alcester-Hudson 52, Sioux Falls Lutheran 18
Centerville 57, Elk Point-Jefferson 43
Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 78, Pine Ridge 57
Clark-Willow Lake 57, Deuel 22
Emery 55, Kimball-White Lake 33
Ethan 41, Parkston 31
Hamlin 52, Redfield 19
Hitchcock-Tulare 64, Aberdeen Christian 32
Jones County 48, Kadoka 44
Lower Brule 58, Marty 50
Sioux Valley 67, Dell Rapids 52
Tri-Valley 41, McCook Central-Montrose 34
Waverly-South Shore 47, Britton-Hecla 46
Webster 55, Wilmot 38

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

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Christian 65, Hitchcock-Tulare 58, OT
Centerville 50, Elk Point-Jefferson 48
Clark-Willow Lake 61, Deuel 21
DeSmet 62, Wolsey-Wessington 45
Ethan 68, Leola-Frederick High School 62
Groton 75, Florence-Henry 38
Highmore-Harrold 41, Herreid-Selby 40
Iroquois-Lake Preston 62, Colman-Egan 42
Kadoka 73, Jones County 42
Lower Brule 87, Marty 67
Sioux Falls Lutheran 77, Alcester-Hudson 55
Wakpala 78, North Central 72
Webster 75, Wilmot 57

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

The Rev. Jesse Jackson, who led the Civil Rights Movement for decades after King, has died at 84

By SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — The Rev. Jesse L. Jackson, a protege of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and two-time presidential candidate who led the Civil Rights Movement for decades after the revered leader's assassination, died Tuesday. He was 84.

His daughter, Santita Jackson, confirmed that Jackson died at home, surrounded by family.

As a young organizer in Chicago, Jackson was called to meet with King at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis shortly before King was killed and he publicly positioned himself thereafter as King's successor.

Jackson led a lifetime of crusades in the United States and abroad, advocating for the poor and under-

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represented on issues from voting rights and job opportunities to education and health care. He scored diplomatic victories with world leaders, and through his Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, he channeled cries for Black pride and self-determination into corporate boardrooms, pressuring executives to make America a more open and equitable society.

And when he declared, "I am Somebody," in a poem he often repeated, he sought to reach people of all colors. "I may be poor, but I am Somebody; I may be young; but I am Somebody; I may be on welfare, but I am Somebody," Jackson intoned.

It was a message he took literally and personally, having risen from obscurity in the segregated South to become America's best-known civil rights activist since King.

"Our father was a servant leader — not only to our family, but to the oppressed, the voiceless, and the overlooked around the world," the Jackson family said in a statement posted online. "We shared him with the world, and in return, the world became part of our extended family. His unwavering belief in justice, equality, and love uplifted millions, and we ask you to honor his memory by continuing the fight for the values he lived by."

Despite profound health challenges in his final years including a rare brain disorder that affected his ability to move and speak, Jackson continued protesting against racial injustice into the era of Black Lives Matter. In 2024, he appeared at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago and at a City Council meeting to show support for a resolution backing a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war.

"Even if we win," he told marchers in Minneapolis before the officer whose knee kept George Floyd from breathing was convicted of murder, "it's relief, not victory. They're still killing our people. Stop the violence, save the children. Keep hope alive."

Calls to action, delivered in a memorable voice

Jackson's voice, infused with the stirring cadences and powerful insistence of the Black church, demanded attention. On the campaign trail and elsewhere, he used rhyming and slogans such as: "Hope not dope" and "If my mind can conceive it and my heart can believe it then I can achieve it," to deliver his messages.

Jackson had his share of critics, both within and outside of the Black community. Some considered him a grandstander, too eager to seek out the spotlight. Looking back on his life and legacy, Jackson told The Associated Press in 2011 that he felt blessed to be able to continue the service of other leaders before him and to lay a foundation for those to come.

"A part of our life's work was to tear down walls and build bridges, and in a half century of work, we've basically torn down walls," Jackson said. "Sometimes when you tear down walls, you're scarred by falling debris, but your mission is to open up holes so others behind you can run through."

In his final months, as he received 24-hour care, he lost his ability to speak, communicating with family and visitors by holding their hands and squeezing.

"I get very emotional knowing that these speeches belong to the ages now," his son, Jesse Jackson Jr., told the AP in October.

A student athlete drawn to the Civil Rights Movement

Jesse Louis Jackson was born on Oct. 8, 1941, in Greenville, South Carolina, the son of high school student Helen Burns and Noah Louis Robinson, a married man who lived next door. Jackson was later adopted by Charles Henry Jackson, who married his mother.

Jackson was a star quarterback on the football team at Sterling High School in Greenville, and accepted a football scholarship from the University of Illinois. But after he reportedly was told Black people couldn't play quarterback, he transferred to North Carolina A&T in Greensboro, where he became the first-string quarterback, an honor student in sociology and economics, and student body president.

Arriving on the historically Black campus in 1960 just months after students there launched sit-ins at a whites-only diner, Jackson immersed himself in the blossoming Civil Rights Movement.

By 1965, he joined the voting rights march King led from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. King dispatched him to Chicago to launch Operation Breadbasket, a Southern Christian Leadership Conference effort to pressure companies to hire Black workers.

Jackson called his time with King "a phenomenal four years of work."

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Jackson was with King on April 4, 1968, when the civil rights leader was slain at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. Jackson's account of the assassination was that King died in his arms.

With his flair for the dramatic, Jackson wore a turtleneck he said was soaked with King's blood for two days, including at a King memorial service held by the Chicago City Council, where he said: "I come here with a heavy heart because on my chest is the stain of blood from Dr. King's head."

However, several King aides, including speechwriter Alfred Duckett, questioned whether Jackson could have gotten King's blood on his clothing. There are no images of Jackson in pictures taken shortly after the assassination.

In 1971, Jackson broke with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to form Operation PUSH, originally named People United to Save Humanity. The organization based on Chicago's South Side declared a sweeping mission, from diversifying workforces to registering voters in communities of color nationwide. Using lawsuits and threats of boycotts, Jackson pressured top corporations to spend millions and publicly commit to diversifying their workforces.

The constant campaigns often left his wife, Jacqueline Lavinia Brown, the college sweetheart he married in 1963, taking the lead in raising their five children: Santita Jackson, Yusef DuBois Jackson, Jacqueline Lavinia Jackson Jr., and two future members of Congress, U.S. Rep. Jonathan Luther Jackson and Jesse L. Jackson Jr., who resigned in 2012 but is seeking reelection in the 2026 midterms.

The elder Jackson, who was ordained as a Baptist minister in 1968 and earned his Master of Divinity in 2000, also acknowledged fathering a child, Ashley Jackson, with one of his employees at Rainbow/PUSH, Karen L. Stanford. He said he understood what it means to be born out of wedlock and supported her emotionally and financially.

Presidential aspirations fall short but help 'keep hope alive'

Despite once telling a Black audience he would not run for president "because white people are incapable of appreciating me," Jackson ran twice and did better than any Black politician had before President Barack Obama, winning 13 primaries and caucuses for the Democratic nomination in 1988, four years after his first failed attempt.

His successes left supporters chanting another Jackson slogan, "Keep Hope Alive."

"I was able to run for the presidency twice and redefine what was possible; it raised the lid for women and other people of color," he told the AP. "Part of my job was to sow seeds of the possibilities."

U.S. Rep. John Lewis said during a 1988 C-SPAN interview that Jackson's two runs for the Democratic nomination "opened some doors that some minority person will be able to walk through and become president."

Jackson also pushed for cultural change, joining calls by NAACP members and other movement leaders in the late 1980s to identify Black people in the United States as African Americans.

"To be called African Americans has cultural integrity — it puts us in our proper historical context," Jackson said at the time. "Every ethnic group in this country has a reference to some base, some historical cultural base. African Americans have hit that level of cultural maturity."

Jackson's words sometimes got him in trouble.

In 1984, he apologized for what he thought were private comments to a reporter, calling New York City "Hymietown," a derogatory reference to its large Jewish population. And in 2008, he made headlines when he complained that Obama was "talking down to Black people" in comments captured by a microphone he didn't know was on during a break in a television taping.

Still, when Jackson joined the jubilant crowd in Chicago's Grant Park to greet Obama that election night, he had tears streaming down his face.

"I wish for a moment that Dr. King or (slain civil rights leader) Medgar Evers ... could've just been there for 30 seconds to see the fruits of their labor," he told the AP years later. "I became overwhelmed. It was the joy and the journey."

Exerting influence on events at home and abroad

Jackson also had influence abroad, meeting world leaders and scoring diplomatic victories, including the

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release of Navy Lt. Robert Goodman from Syria in 1984, as well as the 1990 release of more than 700 foreign women and children held after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. In 1999, he won the freedom of three Americans imprisoned by Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic.

In 2000, President Bill Clinton awarded Jackson the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the country's highest civilian honor.

"Citizens have the right to do something or do nothing," Jackson said, before heading to Syria. "We choose to do something."

In 2021, Jackson joined the parents of Ahmaud Arbery inside the Georgia courtroom where three white men were convicted of killing the young Black jogger. In 2022, he hand-delivered a letter to the U.S. Attorney's Office in Chicago, calling for federal charges against former Chicago Police Officer Jason Van Dyke in the 2014 killing of Black teenager Laquan McDonald.

Jackson, who stepped down as president of Rainbow/PUSH in July 2023, disclosed in 2017 that he had sought treatment for Parkinson's, but he continued to make public appearances even as the disease made it more difficult for listeners to understand him. Earlier this year doctors confirmed a diagnosis of progressive supranuclear palsy, a life-threatening neurological disorder. He was admitted to a hospital in November.

During the coronavirus pandemic, he and his wife survived being hospitalized with COVID-19. Jackson was vaccinated early, urging Black people in particular to get protected, given their higher risks for bad outcomes.

"It's America's unfinished business — we're free, but not equal," Jackson told the AP. "There's a reality check that has been brought by the coronavirus, that exposes the weakness and the opportunity."

Iran fires live missiles into Strait of Hormuz in drill as a new round of nuclear talks begins

By JAMEY KEATEN and STEPHANIE LIECHTENSTEIN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — The U.S. and Iran are holding their second round of talks about Iran's nuclear program Tuesday in Geneva as the United States ramps up its military presence in the Middle East and Iran holds large-scale maritime exercises.

As the talks began, Iranian media announced that Iran had fired live missiles towards the Strait of Hormuz. Iran had announced a maritime military exercise on Monday in waterways that are crucial international trade routes through which 20% of the world's oil passes.

The semi-official Tasnim news agency, which is close to the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, said missiles launched inside Iran and along its coast had struck their targets in the Strait of Hormuz.

Iranian state TV reported Tuesday that the negotiations with the U.S. will be indirect and will focus only on Iran's nuclear program, not domestic policies including its bloody crackdown on protesters last month.

U.S. President Donald Trump has repeatedly threatened to use force to compel Iran to agree to constrain its nuclear program. Iran has said it would respond with an attack of its own. Trump has also threatened Iran over its deadly crackdown on recent nationwide protests.

The first round of talks Feb. 6 were held in Oman, a sultanate on the eastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula, and were indirect, with SUVs flying the American flag entering the palace venue only after it appeared the Iranian officials had left. The arrangements for Tuesday's round of negotiations were not clear.

Trump's envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner were traveling for the new round of talks. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, visiting Budapest, Hungary, said Monday that the U.S. hopes to achieve a deal with Iran, despite the difficulties. "I'm not going to prejudge these talks," Rubio said. "The president always prefers peaceful outcomes and negotiated outcomes to things."

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who is leading the talks for Iran, met with the head of the U.N. nuclear watchdog agency Monday in Geneva.

"I am in Geneva with real ideas to achieve a fair and equitable deal," Araghchi wrote on X. "What is not on the table: submission before threats."

Talking to reporters Monday night aboard Air Force One on his way to Washington, U.S. President Donald

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Trump said of the U.S.-Iran talks, "I'll be involved in those talks -- indirectly -- and they'll be very important, and we'll see what can happen."

"Typically, Iran's a very tough negotiator," he said, first describing Iran as "good negotiators" before correcting himself. "I would say they're bad negotiators, because we could have had a deal instead of sending the B2s in to knock out their nuclear potential, and we had to send the B2s. I hope they're going to be more reasonable."

Trump added: "I think they want to make a deal. I don't think they want the consequences of not making a deal."

The U.S. is also hosting talks between envoys from Russia and Ukraine in Geneva on Tuesday and Wednesday, days ahead of the fourth anniversary of the all-out Russian invasion of its neighbor.

Iran marks 40 days since deadliest part of protest crackdowns

Iran is marking 40 days, the traditional Muslim mourning period, since one of the deadliest days in the crackdown on protests that swept the country last month. Activists say at least 7,015 people have been killed, many in a bloody crackdown overnight between Jan. 8 and 9.

The U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency, which offered the latest figures, has been accurate in counting deaths during previous rounds of unrest in Iran and relies on a network of activists in the country to verify deaths.

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

Iran's state news agency said the government would hold a memorial marking 40 days at the Grand Mosalla mosque in Tehran, and blamed the demonstrations on "violent actions by armed groups allegedly directed by foreign intelligence agencies."

Iran holds naval drills against the US military buildup

Iran announced that its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard started a drill early Monday morning in the Strait of Hormuz, the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, waterways that are crucial international trade routes through which 20% of the world's oil passes.

Separately, EOS Risk Group said sailors passing through the region received a radio warning that the northern lane of the Strait of Hormuz, in Iranian territorial waters, likely would see a live-fire drill Tuesday. Iranian state TV did not mention the live-fire drill.

It was Iran's second warning in recent weeks about a live-fire drill.

Last week, Trump said the USS Gerald R. Ford, the world's largest aircraft carrier, was 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.

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.

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.

Iran says any deal must include easing of punishing sanctions

The Trump administration is seeking a deal to limit Iran's nuclear program and ensure it does not develop nuclear weapons. Iran says it is not pursuing weapons and has so far resisted demands that it halt uranium enrichment or hand over its supply of uranium.

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi signaled that Tehran could be open to compromise on the nuclear issue, but is looking for an easing of international sanctions led by the United States.

"The ball is in America's court. They have to prove they want to have a deal with us," Takht-Ravanchi told the BBC on Sunday. "If we see a sincerity on their part, I am sure that we will be on a road to have an agreement."

"We are ready to discuss this and other issues related to our program provided that they are also ready to talk about the sanctions," he added.

The U.S. and Iran were in the middle of months of meetings when Israel's launch of a 12-day war against Iran back in June instantly halted the talks. The U.S. bombed Iranian nuclear sites during that war, likely destroying many of the centrifuges that spun uranium to near weapons-grade purity. Israel's attacks decimated Iran's air defenses and targeted its ballistic missile arsenal as well.

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.

Suicide bomber and gunmen kill 11 soldiers and a child in northwestern Pakistan

By MUNIR AHMED Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — A suicide bomber backed by a group of gunmen rammed an explosives-laden vehicle into the wall of a security post after troops signaled for it to stop in a former Pakistani Taliban stronghold in northwestern Pakistan, causing part of the compound to collapse and killing 11 soldiers and a child, the military and police said Tuesday.

The military said in a statement that the attackers overnight had sought to breach the checkpoint but were thwarted by security forces. It said troops later pursued and killed 12 "khawarij," a term authorities use for the Pakistani Taliban, or TTP.

It said the attack occurred Monday night in Bajaur, a district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province along the Afghan border. The military said nearby civilian homes were also heavily damaged in the blast, killing a young girl and wounding seven other civilians, including women and children.

Local police official Zafar Khan said shortly after the suicide bombing, a group of militants tried to sneak into the security post. That triggered a shootout that killed 12 militants were killed, he said, adding that a search was underway in Bajaur.

Tension has persisted in Bajaur since August 2025, when security forces launched a "targeted operation" against militants there, displacing tens of thousands of residents who later returned home, and intelligence-based operations have been ongoing there since then.

No group immediately claimed responsibility, but suspicion is likely to fall on the Pakistani Taliban, who often target security forces and civilians across the country.

Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in separate statements condemned the attack. They expressed sorrow over the "martyrdom" of security personnel and a civilian, and offered condolences to their families. Sharif reaffirmed the government's resolve to eliminate terrorism and said the nation stands with its armed forces in the fight.

Pakistan has witnessed a surge in violence in recent years, most blamed on TTP. The group is separate from but closely allied with Afghanistan's Taliban, who returned to power in 2021. The increase in attacks has strained relations between Islamabad and Kabul, as Pakistan accuses the TTP of operating freely inside Afghanistan, a charge both the TTP and Kabul deny.

In December, 2025, Pakistan's army chief Asim Munir called on Afghanistan's Taliban government to choose between maintaining ties with Islamabad or supporting the Pakistani Taliban, the militant group blamed for a surge in deadly attacks in recent years.

Gen. Asim Munir made his remarks at his headquarters in the garrison city of Rawalpindi, where he received a guard of honor from all three branches of the military, marking the launch of Pakistan's new joint military command.

Bangladesh's new prime minister is sworn in after his party's landslide election win

By JULHAS ALAM Associated Press

DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP) — Bangladesh's new prime minister was sworn in on Tuesday after his party's landslide win in last week's parliamentary elections, the country's first since the massive 2024 uprising.

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The vote was billed as key to Bangladesh's future political landscape after years of intense rivalry and disputed polls.

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, whose term will last the next five years, is the son of former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and former President Ziaur Rahman. He is also Bangladesh's first male prime minister in 35 years.

The country's figurehead President Mohammed Shahabuddin administered the oath of office for Rahman. Dozens of Cabinet members and members of the new government were also being sworn in.

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party and its partners won 212 seats in the 350-member Parliament while an 11-party alliance led by the Jamaat-e-Islami party, the country's largest Islamist party, won 77 seats to be the opposition.

In Bangladesh, voters elect 300 members of Parliament directly while the remaining 50 posts are reserved for women and distributed proportionately among the winning parties.

Rahman, 60, who returned to the country in December — after 17 years in self-exile in London and shortly before his mother's death — has promised to work for democracy in Bangladesh, country of 170 million people.

An interim government led by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus oversaw the election, largely peaceful and widely acceptable by international observers.

Rahman's main rival Bangladesh Awami League party headed by former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina — who was ousted in the 2024 mass uprising — was banned from the race. The Yunus-led administration had also banned all activities of Hasina's party, which had ruled the country for 15 years.

From her exile in India, where she has lived since Aug. 5, 2024, Hasina slammed the vote as unfair to her party, which still remains a major political force. At home, Hasina was sentenced to death on charges of crimes against humanity because of hundreds of deaths involving the uprising.

She denied the allegation and termed the court as a "kangaroo court."

Russian and Ukrainian officials are in Geneva for US-brokered talks after almost 4 years of war

By EMMA BURROWS and JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — Delegations from Moscow and Kyiv were in Geneva on Tuesday for another round of U.S.-brokered peace talks, a week before the fourth anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of its neighbor.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said his government's delegation was in Switzerland and Russian state news agency Tass said the Russian delegation had also arrived. Talks, to be held over two days, were expected to start later in the day.

"Tough" discussions about the future of Russian-occupied Ukrainian territory are expected as U.S. President Donald Trump's envoy, Steve Witkoff, and son-in-law Jared Kushner, sit down with the delegations, according to a person familiar with the talks who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter. That's because Russian officials are still insisting that Ukraine cede control of its eastern Donbas region.

In Geneva, military leaders from the three countries will discuss how ceasefire monitoring will work, and what's needed to implement it, the person said. During previous talks in Abu Dhabi, military leaders looked at how a demilitarized zone could be arranged and how everyone's militaries could talk to one another, they said.

But expectations for any breakthrough in the latest negotiations are low, with neither side apparently ready to budge from their positions on key territorial issues, despite the United States setting a June deadline for a settlement.

Ukraine's short-handed army is locked in a war of attrition with Russia's bigger forces along the roughly 1,250-kilometer (750-mile) front line. Ukrainian civilians are enduring Russian aerial barrages that repeatedly knock out power and destroy homes.

The future of the almost 20% of Ukrainian land that Russia occupies or still covets is a central question

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in the talks, as are Kyiv's demands for postwar security guarantees with a U.S. backstop to deter Moscow from invading again.

Trump described the Geneva meeting as "big talks."

"Ukraine better come to the table fast," he told reporters late Monday as he flew back to Washington from his home in Florida.

It wasn't immediately clear what Trump was referring to in his comment about Ukraine, which has committed to and taken part in negotiations in the hope of ending Russia's devastating onslaught.

The commander of the U.S. military — and NATO forces — in Europe, Gen. Alexis Grynkeiwich, and Secretary of the U.S. Army Dan Driscoll will attend the meeting in Geneva on behalf of the U.S. military and meet with their Russian and Ukrainian counterparts, Col. Martin O'Donnell, a spokesman for the U.S. commander said.

Overnight, Russia used almost 400 long-range drones and 29 missiles of various types to strike 12 regions of Ukraine, injuring nine people, including children, according to the Ukrainian president.

Zelenskyy said tens of thousands of residents were left without heating and running water in the southern port city of Odesa.

Zelenskyy said Moscow should be "held accountable" for the relentless attacks, which he said undermine the U.S. push for peace.

"The more this evil comes from Russia, the harder it will be for everyone to reach any agreements with them. Partners must understand this. First and foremost, this concerns the United States," the Ukrainian leader said on social media late Monday.

"We agreed to all realistic proposals from the United States, starting with the proposal for an unconditional and long-term ceasefire," Zelenskyy noted.

American, Russian and Ukrainian military chiefs will discuss how ceasefire monitoring might work after any peace deal, the AP source said.

Talks earlier this year in Abu Dhabi focused on issues such as how a demilitarized zone might be set up in disputed areas and how all the sides' militaries could remain in contact, the source said.

The talks in Geneva took place as U.S. officials also held indirect talks with Iran in the Swiss city.

Lunar New Year prayers, robots and festivities usher in the Year of the Horse

By KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Traditional prayers, fireworks and fairs marked the Lunar New Year on Tuesday — alongside 21st-century humanoid robots.

The activities ushered in the Year of the Horse, one of 12 animals in the Chinese zodiac, succeeding the Year of the Snake.

Thousands of people in Beijing jammed into the former Temple of Earth to buy snacks, toys and trinkets from stalls. Sun Jing, who brought her parents to the capital for the holiday, said the atmosphere was as lively as in her childhood.

"I haven't felt such a strong sense of Lunar New Year festivity in a very, very long time," she said.

Crowds descended on popular temples to burn incense and pray for happiness and success in the coming year. The Lunar New Year is the most important annual holiday in China and some other East Asian nations and is celebrated outside the region, too.

Robots take the stage of an annual TV show in China

As every year, China celebrated the Lunar New Year with a TV show and once again the humanoid robots were a central part of the performance Monday night.

One of the highlights of the CCTV Spring Festival gala was a martial arts performance by children and robots. For several minutes, humanoids from Unitree Robotics showed different sequences and even brandished swords.

The performance showed China's push to develop more advanced robots powered by improved AI ca-

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pabilities.

Viewers applauded the robots, with one saying they give good guidance and direction for young people. One man, though, said that while China's advances in robotics are great, they detracted from his experience.

"It lacks a bit of the New Year atmosphere," Li Bo said. "It's not as enjoyable as when I was little watching the gala."

Temple crowds at midnight in Hong Kong

Incense smoke wafted into the air at a temple in Hong Kong where people line up every year to make wishes for the new year at midnight.

Holding up a cluster of incense sticks, many bowed their heads several times before planting the sticks in containers placed in front of a temple hall.

Fireworks light up skies in Vietnam

Entertainers in Vietnam sang at an outdoor countdown event before multiple fireworks shows at several cities in the Southeast Asian nation, where the festival is called Tet.

Light shows lit up bridges and skyscrapers as the fireworks went off and crowds clapped in rhythm to live pop music performances.

Chinese street fairs in Moscow

People sampled Chinese cuisine from stalls and strolled along snowy streets decorated with red lanterns and dragons as two weeks of events got underway Monday at various venues in the Russian capital.

The third annual Lunar New Year celebration comes at time of warming relations between China and Russia — ties that have frustrated many European governments because of the war in Ukraine.

A temple bell rings 108 times in Taiwan

The solemn peal of a temple bell rang out 108 times — an auspicious number — as people flocked to the Baoan Temple in Taipei on Tuesday morning.

They lit incense sticks, bowed their heads and left offerings of colorful flower bouquets on outdoor tables on the temple grounds in Taiwan's capital city.

Argentines join celebrations in Buenos Aires

Thousands of Argentines gathered in Buenos Aires' Chinatown to celebrate the Lunar New Year and enjoyed dragon and lion dances on the main stage, alongside martial arts demonstrations.

The Chinese immigrant community is among Argentina's most dynamic, accounting for more than 180,000 people in the South American country.

Texas Republican Paxton steps up his Senate bid against GOP Sen. Cornyn ahead of early voting

By THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

TYLER, Texas (AP) — It was an unfamiliar setting for Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton Monday night: walking out to the applause of supporters at his first campaign rally since the Republican announced his candidacy for the U.S. Senate 10 months ago.

Paxton's appearance before about 100 supporters in a bar in east Texas is part of his stepped-up campaign to unseat four-term Republican Sen. John Cornyn and add a "Make America Great Again" devotee to the Senate, a bid that has set up one of this year's most contentious GOP primaries.

Until Monday, Paxton had waged a lower-wattage campaign, spent relatively little money and drew attention primarily by pursuing conservative causes as the state attorney general. But with early voting starting Tuesday for the March 3 primary, Paxton is scheduled to make stops across Texas this week. He also has begun airing ads linking himself with President Donald Trump as he takes on Cornyn and Rep. Wesley Hunt.

Despite being the target of millions of dollars in attack ads from Cornyn and his allies, and opposition from Senate Republican leaders who say Cornyn is the stronger candidate in a general election, Paxton is heading into the GOP primary with the look of his party's front-runner.

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"His money is coming from the D.C. establishment," Paxton said of Cornyn as he spoke from the bar's bandstand. "That's how he can afford these commercials and that's how they always try to convince us from Washington with their money that we should select their person. Well, I'm not their person and I'm never going to be their person."

The comment sparked a round of applause.

Paxton's political survival would appear to defy convention, much like Trump's did. Paxton beat impeachment on fraud charges in 2023, and today is shadowed by claims of marital infidelity made by his wife, state Sen. Angela Paxton.

The three-term attorney general is betting that his defiance of his own party's leaders and aggressive litigation for conservative priorities will help him overcome ethical and personal questions that voters in the Republican-leaning state have, at least until now, forgiven.

"They see him as a threat," said Jennifer Seppi, a 57-year-old homeschool teacher from Tyler, who attended the event and supports Paxton. "He's definitely a threat to the old-boy system. The impeachment proved that."

Stepped up campaigning as early voting begins

Paxton kicked off a four-day series of rallies put on by Lone Star Liberty PAC, a super PAC supporting him, to remind people that early voting in Texas begins Tuesday.

His previous campaign stops have been lower-profile events, including county GOP gatherings with other candidates. He traveled to five Texas college campuses in the fall to speak with Turning Point USA chapters after the conservative Christian group's national founder, Charlie Kirk, was assassinated.

But until this week, that's essentially been it for Paxton's public campaign efforts, outside of a handful of podcasts with friendly hosts.

Until Friday, the only television ad on Paxton's behalf in Texas was one that cost \$674,000 to air, according to the ad-tracking service AdImpact.

That spot attacked Hunt, a two-term House member from the Houston area, not Cornyn. Like Paxton, Hunt is trying to appeal to primary voters looking for an alternative to Cornyn. By criticizing Hunt, Paxton allies are trying to peel off some of his voters in hopes of winning at least 50% of the primary vote — the threshold needed to win the GOP nomination outright. If no candidate receives 50%, the top two finishers would advance to a May 26 runoff.

Paxton's campaign began airing an ad Friday that features video clips of Trump praising Paxton and images of them together. Trump as of Monday has not endorsed any of the three Republicans in the race.

Retired businessman Vincent Coglin said Paxton reminds him of Trump, someone he views as persecuted by powerful interests but willing to do what he believes is right.

"I like him for the same reasons I like Trump. Paxton says what he's going to do and he does it," said Coglin, from Marshall in east Texas. "None of us is perfect. Neither are they. But you know what you're getting."

Trump declined to weigh in on the race when asked about it on Air Force One Monday. "I haven't made a decision on that race yet," he said. "I like all three of them."

Paxton's office promotes conservative goals

Paxton has relied on his office in Austin to remain at the center of conservative efforts.

Last year, he sued Texas physicians over claims they violated the state's ban on gender-affirming care for minors, affirming a key priority for social conservatives in their opposition to what they call gender ideology.

In October, just weeks after Trump implored pregnant women repeatedly, "Don't take Tylenol," Paxton sued companies behind the pain reliever, accusing them of deceptively marketing it specifically to expectant women, asserting unproven claims that early exposure to its active ingredient increased risks of autism.

Most notably, Paxton led numerous legal challenges against the previous Joe Biden administration over immigration and border policies, often succeeding and burnishing his credentials as a conservative crusader. Paxton, who was first elected attorney general in 2014, also sued Barack Obama's administration regularly in the final two years of the two-term Democrat's administration.

"He's just a strong advocate for our values," said Perry Seppi, the 60-year-old husband of the homeschool

teacher Jennifer. "It seems he works pretty hard to keep Texas on the straight path."

Cornyn, allies spending more than \$50 million

The steady stream of litigation has kept Paxton in the headlines as Cornyn and his allies have spent heavily to try to bloody his image among Republican primary voters.

As of Friday, Cornyn's campaign and allied super PACs had spent more than \$54 million on television advertising since last year, according to AdImpact. Much of it was reminding voters of Paxton's impeachment and his wife's divorce claim on "biblical grounds," alleging extramarital affairs. The groups have spent millions more on digital ads, text messaging and direct mail, also attacking Paxton.

In one ad, sponsored by Texans for a Conservative Majority, a narrator says at the outset: "Ken Paxton isn't just corrupt. He's weird."

Republican strategists unaffiliated with any of the campaigns say the spending and months of warnings haven't significantly hurt Paxton, who projects confidence. No senator in Texas' storied political history has served more than four terms. And Paxton believes he is better known than almost any statewide elected Republican in Texas, including Cornyn.

Speaking on a December podcast, Paxton said the "only other people with name ID" in the state are Gov. Greg Abbott and Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, who are seeking reelection, and Sen. Ted Cruz.

Senate GOP leaders are worried

Republican Senate leaders in Washington say Paxton as the GOP nominee would require hundreds of millions of dollars more to defend in a general election, given expected attacks, than Cornyn would. And they say that's money the party shouldn't have to spend in Texas, a state Trump carried by over 13 percentage points.

Democrats must net a total of four seats to overtake Republicans' Senate majority in November. The minority party is expressing renewed confidence in vying for Republican-held seats in Alaska, Maine, North Carolina and Ohio.

In Texas, U.S. Rep. Jasmine Crockett and state Rep. James Talarico are seeking the Democratic nomination. Paxton would perform worse than Cornyn in the November election against either Democrat, strategists for the National Republican Senatorial Committee, the campaign group led by Senate Majority Leader John Thune, said in an early February memo obtained by The Associated Press.

"Cornyn wins the general election," the memo states. "Paxton puts the seat at risk."

Trump administration ordered to restore George Washington slavery exhibit it removed in Philadelphia

By HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

An exhibit about nine people enslaved by George Washington must be restored at his former home in Philadelphia after President Donald Trump's administration took it down last month, a federal judge ruled on Presidents Day, the federal holiday honoring Washington's legacy.

The city of Philadelphia sued in January after the National Park Service removed the explanatory panels from Independence National Historical Park, the site where George and Martha Washington lived with nine of their slaves in the 1790s, when Philadelphia was briefly the nation's capital.

The removal came in response to a Trump executive order "restoring truth and sanity to American history" at the nation's museums, parks and landmarks. It directed the Interior Department to ensure those sites do not display elements that "inappropriately disparage Americans past or living."

U.S. District Judge Cynthia Rufe ruled Monday that all materials must be restored in their original condition while a lawsuit challenging the removal's legality plays out. She prohibited Trump officials from installing replacements that explain the history differently.

Rufe, an appointee of Republican President George W. Bush, began her written order with a quote from George Orwell's dystopian novel "1984" and compared the Trump administration to the book's totalitarian regime called the Ministry of Truth, which revised historical records to align with its own narrative.

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"As if the Ministry of Truth in George Orwell's 1984 now existed, with its motto 'Ignorance is Strength,' this Court is now asked to determine whether the federal government has the power it claims — to dissemble and disassemble historical truths when it has some domain over historical facts," Rufe wrote. "It does not."

She had warned Justice Department lawyers during a January hearing that they were making "dangerous" and "horrifying" statements when they said Trump officials can choose which parts of U.S. history to display at National Park Service sites.

The Interior Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the ruling, which came while government offices were closed for the federal holiday.

The judge did not provide a timeline for when the exhibit must be restored. Federal officials can appeal the ruling.

The historical site is among several where the administration has quietly removed content about the history of enslaved people, LGBTQ+ people and Native Americans.

Signage that has disappeared from Grand Canyon National Park said settlers pushed Native American tribes "off their land" for the park to be established and "exploited" the landscape for mining and grazing.

Last week, a rainbow flag was taken down at the Stonewall National Monument, where bar patrons rebelled against a police raid and catalyzed the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement. The administration has also removed references to transgender people from its webpage about the monument, despite several trans women of color being key figures in the uprising.

The Philadelphia exhibit, created two decades ago in a partnership between the city and federal officials, included biographical details about each of the nine people enslaved by the Washingtons at the home, including two who escaped.

Among them was Oney Judge, who was born into slavery at the family's plantation in Mount Vernon, Virginia, and later escaped from their Philadelphia house in 1796. Judge fled north to New Hampshire, a free state, while Washington had her declared a fugitive and published advertisements seeking her return.

Because Judge had escaped from the Philadelphia house, the National Park Service in 2022 added it to a national network of Underground Railroad sites where the agency pledged to "honor, preserve and promote the history of resistance to enslavement through escape and flight."

Rufe said the removal of materials about Judge "conceals crucial information linking the site" to the network.

Only the names of Judge and the other eight enslaved people — Austin, Paris, Hercules, Richmond, Giles, Moll and Joe, who each had a single name, and Christopher Sheels — remained engraved in a cement wall after federal employees took a crowbar to the plaques on Jan. 22.

Hercules also escaped in 1797 after he was brought to Mount Vernon, where the Washingtons had many other slaves. He reached New York City despite being declared a fugitive slave and lived under the name Hercules Posey.

Several local politicians and Black community leaders celebrated the ruling, which came while many were out rallying at the site for its restoration.

State Rep. Malcolm Kenyatta, a Philadelphia Democrat, said the community prevailed against an attempt by the Trump administration to "whitewash our history."

"Philadelphians fought back, and I could not be more proud of how we stood together," he said.

Expectations are low for the latest US-brokered talks between Russia and Ukraine

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A Ukrainian delegation was heading to Geneva on Monday for another round of U.S.-brokered talks with Russian officials, ahead of next week's fourth anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of its neighbor.

There was no anticipation of any significant progress on ending the war at the Tuesday-Wednesday meeting in Switzerland as both sides appear to be sticking to their negotiating positions on key issues,

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despite the United States setting a June deadline to reach a settlement. The future of Ukrainian land that Russia occupies or still covets is a central issue.

Ukrainian defenders remain locked in a war of attrition with Russia's bigger army along the roughly 1,250-kilometer (750-mile) front line. Ukrainian civilians endure Russian aerial barrages that repeatedly knock out power and smash homes, while Ukraine has developed drones that can fly deep into Russian territory and strike oil refineries and arms depots.

The governor of western Russia's Bryansk region said Monday that air defenses had shot down 229 Ukrainian drones in the previous 24 hours. No other Russian region has come under as many simultaneous drone attacks in a single day, Gov. Alexander Bogomaz said.

Ukraine's Air Force, meanwhile, said Russia launched 62 long-range strike drones and six missiles of various types at Ukraine overnight.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Monday that the talks in Geneva will deal with a "broader range of issues related to the territories and other issues connected to the demands that we have." He didn't elaborate on the issues.

A year of peace efforts by U.S. President Donald Trump's administration has failed to stop the fighting. Trump, as he flew back to Washington from his home in Florida on Monday evening, told reporters the Russia-Ukraine negotiations on Tuesday in Geneva are going to "big talks." He added, "Ukraine better come to the table fast."

Western officials and analysts say Russian President Vladimir Putin believes that time is on his side, that Western support for Ukraine will peter out and that Ukraine's resistance will eventually collapse under pressure.

Gen. Kyrylo Budanov, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's chief of staff, posted a photograph on Telegram showing himself standing next to a train with other members of the negotiating team, which is due to be led in Geneva by Rustem Umerov, Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council chief.

Entering or leaving Ukraine entails a long overland journey, even for VIPs, as the country's airspace is closed because of the war.

Putin's adviser Vladimir Medinsky, who headed Moscow's team of negotiators in the first direct peace talks with Ukraine in Istanbul in March 2022 and who has forcefully pushed Putin's war goals, is returning to lead Moscow's delegation. Medinsky has written several history books that focus on exposing purported Western plots against Russia and denigrate Ukraine.

Igor Kostyukov, the head of Russian military intelligence, and Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Galuzin, along with other officials, will also be in the delegation, Kremlin spokesman Peskov said.

Putin's envoy Kirill Dmitriev will also travel to Geneva for separate talks with the U.S. on economic cooperation, according to Peskov. Moscow and Kyiv are keen to offer future business opportunities to Washington.

It was not clear which American officials would be in Geneva. At recent talks in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, the Trump administration was represented by envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner.

The Russian and Ukrainian delegations were to report back to their leaders before any possible compromises discussed in Geneva could be accepted.

Rubio plugs Orbán's bid for another term in Hungary's elections

By MATTHEW LEE and JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Monday enthusiastically endorsed Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's bid to serve a fifth straight term after the April elections, emphasizing during a visit to Budapest the strong personal relationship between the nationalist leader and U.S. President Donald Trump.

Orbán, who has led Hungary since 2010, is one of Trump's most vocal supporters in the European Union, and has actively carried the U.S. president's favor leading up to the April 12 vote in which he will face the toughest challenge of his last 16 years in power.

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Rubio was in the Hungarian capital for meetings with Orbán and his government where he signed an agreement on U.S.-Hungarian civilian nuclear cooperation that includes the possible purchase of compact nuclear reactors — known as small modular reactors or SMRs — as well as U.S.-supplied nuclear fuel and spent fuel storage technology.

At a news conference, Rubio said U.S.-Hungary relations — which both he and Orbán described as experiencing a “golden age” under Trump — go beyond mere diplomatic cooperation.

“I’m going to be very blunt with you,” Rubio said. “The prime minister and the president have a very, very close personal relationship and working relationship, and I think it has been beneficial to our two countries.”

“That person-to-person connection that you’ve established with the president has made all the difference in the world in building this relationship,” Rubio continued, addressing Orbán. “President Trump is deeply committed to your success because your success is our success.”

Rubio on friendly territory in Central Europe

Rubio’s stop in Hungary followed a visit to Slovakia on Sunday after he previously attended the Munich Security Conference in Germany.

Led by euroskeptic populists who oppose support for Ukraine and vocally back Trump, Slovakia and Hungary are both friendly territory for Rubio in his push to shore up energy agreements with both Central European countries.

Widely considered Russian President Vladimir Putin’s most reliable advocate in the EU, Orbán has maintained warm relations with the Kremlin despite its war against Ukraine while building ties with Trump and his MAGA — short for the 2016 Trump campaign slogan “Make America Great Again” — movement.

Orbán has remained firmly committed to purchasing Russian energy despite efforts by the EU to wean off such supplies, and received an exemption from U.S. sanctions on Russian energy after a November meeting in the White House with Trump.

Rubio would not specify on Monday how long that exemption would last as the EU plans to phase out Russian fossil fuels entirely by the end of 2027.

Apparently trusting that his political and personal affinity with Trump could pay even greater dividends, Orbán and his government have sought to woo the U.S. leader to Hungary before the pivotal April elections — hoping such a high-profile visit and endorsement would push Orbán, who is trailing in most polls, over the finish line.

On Monday, Orbán told Rubio that his government is ready to host any future trilateral peace summit among the United States, Russia and Ukraine, and that Trump has an “open invitation” to Budapest.

He also claimed that Ukraine and its president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, were seeking to interfere in Hungary’s elections by criticizing Orbán’s opposition to providing weapons or financial aid to Kyiv and threats to block Ukraine’s eventual membership in the EU.

Make Europe Great Again

Many in MAGA and the broader conservative world view Hungary as a shining example of successful conservative nationalism, despite the erosion of its democratic institutions and its status as one of the EU’s poorest countries.

Orbán has riffed on Trump’s popular slogan and declared that he and his movement seek to “Make Europe Great Again.”

In turn, Trump has praised Orbán’s firm opposition to immigration, exemplified by a fence his government erected on Hungary’s southern border in 2015 as hundreds of thousands of refugees fled Syria and other countries in the Middle East and Africa.

Other U.S. conservatives admire Orbán’s hostility to LGBTQ+ rights. His government last year banned the popular Budapest Pride celebration and allowed facial recognition technology to be used to identify anyone participating despite the ban. It has also effectively banned same-sex adoption and same-sex marriage, and disallowed transgender individuals from changing their sex in official documents.

Budapest has hosted several annual iterations of the Conservative Political Action Conference, or CPAC,

and another was hastily rescheduled this year to fall in March, just before Hungary's elections.

Iran meets UN nuclear watchdog in Geneva ahead of more US talks

By JAMEY KEATEN and STEPHANIE LIECHTENSTEIN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — Iran's top diplomat met with the head of the U.N. nuclear watchdog agency Monday, ahead of a second round of negotiations with the United States over Tehran's nuclear program.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi met with Rafael Grossi, director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, and said he would also meet with Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi of Oman, which is hosting the U.S.-Iran talks in Geneva on Tuesday.

"I am in Geneva with real ideas to achieve a fair and equitable deal," Araghchi wrote on X. "What is not on the table: submission before threats."

As U.S. President Donald Trump ordered an additional aircraft carrier to the region, Iran on Monday held another naval drill, state TV reported. It said the drill would test Iran's intelligence and operational capabilities in the Strait of Hormuz, the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman.

Iran's drills take place against the US military buildup

Just before the talks, Iran announced its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard started the drill early Monday morning in the waterways that are crucial international trade routes through which 20% of the world's oil passes.

Separately, EOS Risk Group said sailors passing through the region received by radio a warning that the northern lane of the Strait of Hormuz, in Iranian territorial waters, likely would see a live-fire drill Tuesday. Iranian state TV did not mention the live fire drill.

This is the second time in recent weeks sailors have received warning about an Iranian live fire drill. During the previous exercise, announced at the end of January, the U.S. military's Central Command issued a strongly worded warning to Iran and the Revolutionary Guard. While acknowledging Iran's "right to operate professionally in international airspace and waters," it warned against interfering or threatening American warships or passing commercial vessels.

On Feb. 4, tensions between the Iranian and U.S. navies rose further after a U.S. Navy fighter jet shot down an Iranian drone that was approaching the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln in the Arabian Sea. Iran also harassed a U.S.-flagged and U.S.-crewed merchant vessel that was sailing in the Strait of Hormuz, the U.S. military reported.

Iran open to compromise in exchange for sanctions relief

The Trump administration is seeking a deal to limit Iran's nuclear program and ensure it does not develop nuclear weapons. On Sunday, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi signaled that Tehran could be open to compromise on the nuclear issue, but is looking for an easing of international sanctions led by the United States.

"The ball is in America's court. They have to prove they want to have a deal with us," Takht-Ravanchi told the BBC. "If we see a sincerity on their part, I am sure that we will be on a road to have an agreement."

"We are ready to discuss this and other issues related to our program provided that they are also ready to talk about the sanctions," he added.

Talking to reporters Monday night aboard Air Force One on his way to Washington, U.S. President Donald Trump said of the U.S.-Iran talks, "I'll be involved in those talks -- indirectly -- and they'll be very important, and we'll see what can happen."

"Typically, Iran's a very tough negotiator," he said, first describing Iran as "good negotiators" before correcting himself. "I would say they're bad negotiators, because we could have had a deal instead of sending the B2s in to knock out their nuclear potential, and we had to send the B2s. I hope they're going to be more reasonable."

Trump added: "I think they want to make a deal. I don't think they want the consequences of not making a deal."

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Oman hosted a first round of indirect talks between the U.S. and Iran on Feb. 6.

Similar talks last year between the U.S. and Iran about Iran's nuclear program broke down after Israel launched what became a 12-day war on Iran, that included the U.S. bombing Iranian nuclear sites.

The U.S. is also hosting talks between envoys from Russia and Ukraine in Geneva on Tuesday and Wednesday, days ahead of the fourth anniversary of the all-out Russian invasion of its neighbor.

US keeps military pressure high

Trump initially threatened to take military action over Iran's bloody crackdown on nationwide protests last month, but then shifted to a pressure campaign in recent weeks to try to get Tehran to make a deal over its nuclear program.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio, visiting Budapest, reiterated on Monday that the U.S. hopes to achieve a deal with Iran, despite the difficulties. "I'm not going to prejudge these talks," Rubio said. "The president always prefers peaceful outcomes and negotiated outcomes to things."

Trump said Friday the USS Gerald R. Ford, the world's largest aircraft carrier, was being sent from the Caribbean to the Mideast to join other military assets the U.S. has built up in the region. He also said a change in power in Iran "would be the best thing that could happen."

Iran has said if the U.S. attacks, it will respond with an attack of its own.

The Trump administration has maintained that Iran can have no uranium enrichment under any deal. Tehran says it won't agree to that.

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

The direct meeting with Grossi is a significant step after Iran suspended all cooperation with the IAEA following the June war with Israel. The two also met briefly on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly in September. The IAEA said it has been unable to verify the status of Iran's near weapons-grade uranium stockpile since the war. Iran has allowed IAEA some access to sites that were not damaged, but has not allowed inspectors to visit other sites.

Iran's stockpile of uranium enriched to 60% could allow Iran to build as many as 10 nuclear bombs, should it decide to weaponize its program, Grossi previously told The Associated Press. He added that it doesn't mean that Iran has such a weapon.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rushed to Washington last week to urge Trump to ensure that any deal to include steps to neutralize Iran's ballistic missile program and end its funding for proxy groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah.

California walloped by winter storm with high winds and heavy rain and snow

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI Associated Press

California was walloped Monday by a powerful winter storm carrying treacherous thunderstorms, high winds and heavy snow in mountain areas.

Millions of Los Angeles County residents faced flash flood warnings as rain pounded the region and people in some areas scarred by last year's devastating wildfires were under an evacuation warning through Tuesday because of the potential for mud and debris flows.

Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass ordered emergency crews and city departments to be ready to respond to any problems.

The storm wreaked havoc on roadways spanning from Sonoma County to the Sierra Nevada. Traffic was halted temporarily in both directions on I-80 near the Nevada state line due to spinouts and crashes, the California Department of Transportation reported. In Santa Barbara County, a large tree toppled onto US-101, shutting down southbound lanes.

Forecasters said the western slope of the Sierra Nevada, northern Shasta County — including portions of Interstate 5 — and parts of the state's Coast Range could see up to 8 feet (2.4 meters) of snow before

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the storm moves through late Wednesday. The heavy snow, wind and low visibility could also make travel conditions dangerous to near impossible, forecasters added.

"It has seemed 'springlike' for a large part of 2026, but winter is set to show it's not quite done yet," the Shasta County Sheriff's Office said in a social media post urging residents to stay aware of the storm.

California's Office of Emergency Services said it was placing fire and rescue personnel and resources in areas most at risk for flooding, mud and debris flows.

In Southern California, Six Flags Magic Mountain was closed Monday due to the storm, and Knotts Berry Farm amusement park shut its doors early. But the winter weather was celebrated by local ski resorts that have waited weeks for snow.

Other states on Monday braced for different threatening weather events. Residents in parts of eastern Colorado received warnings that they could be in fire danger due to a combination of abnormally high temperatures, gusty winds and dry conditions. The risks were expected to continue further into the week as gusts up to 60 mph (96 kph) are likely to hit the Colorado eastern plains on Tuesday. Parts of Texas, New Mexico and Kansas were also under red flag warnings.

The latest storm comes amid a snow drought across much of the American West, with snow cover and depth measuring at the lowest levels scientists have seen in decades. Most states saw half their average precipitation or less in January, though California fared better others due to heavy rains in December.

It was the first of several days of stormy weather forecast for California. A coastal flood advisory was in effect for San Francisco until Tuesday afternoon, with cooler showers and a chance of hail on Tuesday, while nearby mountains were expecting snow, the National Weather Service in Monterey reported.

Kashawna McInerny, a Realtor in the mountain community of Wrightwood, about 80 miles (130 kilometers) northeast of Los Angeles, on Monday said she was still dealing with several tons of rock and debris on her property from Christmas and New Year's storms that pummeled the community. After the last one, she said she got help trenching part of her side yard to direct stormwater down the street and placed a barrier of metal and wood by a door in hopes of keeping out mud and debris.

"We're not panicking yet. At least I'm not," she said with a laugh.

US troops arrive in Nigeria to help train its military, Nigerian military says

By DYEPKAZAH SHIBAYAN Associated Press

ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) — About 100 U.S. troops plus equipment have arrived in Nigeria to help train soldiers in the West African country as the government fights against Islamic militants and other armed groups, the Nigerian military announced Monday.

The arrival followed a request by the Nigerian government to the U.S. government for help with training, technical support and intelligence-sharing, the military said in a statement.

The deployment follows an easing of tensions that flared between the U.S. and Nigeria when U.S. President Donald Trump said the country wasn't protecting Christians from an alleged genocide. The Nigerian government has rejected the accusation, and analysts say it simplifies a very complicated situation in which people are often targeted regardless of their faith.

Maj. Gen. Samaila Uba, spokesman for Nigeria's Defense Headquarters, previously has said that the U.S. troops won't engage in combat or have a direct operational role, and that Nigerian forces will have complete command authority.

In December, U.S. forces launched airstrikes on Islamic State group-affiliated militants in northwestern Nigeria. Last month, following discussions with Nigerian authorities in Abuja, the head of U.S. Africa Command confirmed a small team of U.S. military officers were in Nigeria, focused on intelligence support.

Nigeria is facing a protracted fight with dozens of local armed groups increasingly battling for turf, including Islamic sects like the homegrown Boko Haram and its breakaway faction Islamic State West Africa Province. There is also the IS-linked Lakurawa, as well as other "bandit" groups that specialize in kidnapping for ransom and illegal mining.

Recently, the crisis has worsened to include other militants from the neighboring Sahel region, including the Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Musulimin, which claimed its first attack on Nigerian soil last year. Several thousand people in Nigeria have been killed, according to data from the United Nations. Analysts say not enough is being done by the government to protect its citizens.

While Christians have been among those targeted, analysts and residents say the majority of victims of the armed groups are Muslims in Nigeria's Muslim-dominated north, where most attacks occur.

Opening statements held in the trial of a Georgia high school shooting suspect's father

By JOHN RABY Associated Press

A man whose teenage son is accused of killing two students and two teachers at a Georgia high school should be held responsible for providing the weapon despite warnings about alleged threats his son made, a prosecutor said Monday.

The trial of Colin Gray began Monday in one of several cases around the country where prosecutors are trying to hold parents responsible after their children are accused in fatal shootings.

Gray faces 29 counts, including two counts of second-degree murder, two counts of involuntary manslaughter and numerous counts of second-degree cruelty to children related to the September 2024 shooting at Apalachee High School in Winder.

"This is not a case about holding parents accountable for what their children do," Barrow County District Attorney Brad Smith said in his opening statement. "This case is about this defendant and his actions in allowing a child that he has custody over access to a firearm and ammunition after being warned that that child was going to harm others."

Prosecutors argue that amounts to cruelty to children, and second-degree murder is defined in Georgia law as causing the death of a child by committing the crime of cruelty to children.

Investigators have said Colt Gray, who was 14 at the time, carefully planned the Sept. 4, 2024, shooting at the school northeast of Atlanta that is attended by 1,900 students.

But Brian Hobbs, an attorney for Colin Gray, said the shooting's planning and timing "were hidden by Colt Gray from his father. That's the difference between tragedy and criminal liability. You cannot hold someone criminally responsible for failing to predict what was intentionally hidden from them."

With a semiautomatic rifle in his book bag, the barrel sticking out and wrapped in poster board, Colt Gray boarded the school bus, investigators said. He left his second-period class and emerged from a bathroom with the gun and then shot people in a classroom and hallways, they said.

Smith told the jury that Colin Gray's daughter was in lockdown at her middle school and texted her father that there had been a shooting at the high school. When law enforcement arrived at Gray's home, he met them in the garage and "without any prompting, he blurts out, 'I knew it,'" Smith said.

Smith said that in September 2021, Colt Gray used a school computer to search the phrase, "how to kill your dad." School resource officers were then sent to the home, but it was determined to be a "misunderstanding," Smith said.

Sixteen months before the shooting, in May 2023, law enforcement acted on a tip from the FBI after a shooting threat was made online concerning an elementary school. The threat was traced to a computer at Gray's home, Smith said.

Colin Gray was told about the threat and was asked whether his son had access to guns. Gray replied that he and his son "take this school shooting stuff very seriously," according to Smith. Colt Gray denied that he made the threat and said that his online account had been hacked, Smith said.

That Christmas, Colin Gray gave his son the gun as a gift and continued to buy accessories after that, including "a lot of ammunition," Smith said.

Colin Gray knew his son was obsessed with school shooters, even having a shrine in his bedroom to Nikolas Cruz, the shooter in the 2018 massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, prosecutors have said. A Georgia Bureau of Investigation agent had testified that the teen's par-

ents had discussed their son's fascination with school shooters but decided that it was in a joking context and not a serious issue.

Three weeks before the shooting, Gray received a chilling text from his son: "Whenever something happens, just know the blood is on your hands," according to Smith.

Colin Gray was also aware his son's mental health had deteriorated and had sought help from a counseling service weeks before the shooting, an investigator testified.

"We have had a very difficult past couple of years and he needs help. Anger, anxiety, quick to be volatile. I don't know what to do," Colin Gray wrote about his son.

But Smith said Colin Gray never followed through on concerns about getting his son admitted to an inpatient facility.

The trial is being held in Winder, in Barrow County, where the shooting happened. The defense asked for a change of venue because of pretrial publicity, and prosecutors agreed. The judge kept the trial in Winder but decided to bring in jurors from nearby Hall County to hear the case. Jurors were selected last week.

Winter Olympics recap: Meyers Taylor finally gets gold for US and Eileen Gu wins second silver

By JAMES ELLINGWORTH AP Sports Writer

MILAN (AP) — Small margins decided gold medals at the Milan Cortina Olympics as Eileen Gu had to settle for another silver in defense of her big air ski freestyle title and Elana Meyers Taylor of the U.S. finally won bobsled gold in her fifth Olympics.

Also on Day 10 of the Winter Games, a Norwegian contender's emotional reaction overshadowed the last men's Alpine ski event, and the U.S. and Canada advanced to another gold medal showdown in women's hockey after winning their semifinal games.

Silver again for Gu in big air

Gu came to Italy to fight for gold medals in three different freestyle ski events. She has two silvers and still has her best event, the halfpipe, to go.

After a long delay because of heavy snow, it was Canada's Megan Oldham who soared to victory with a combined score of 180.75 to Gu's 179.

It was still a remarkable performance from Gu, the San Francisco-born skier for China who hadn't competed in big air in the four years since winning gold at the 2022 Olympics.

The athlete who beat Gu to the gold in slopestyle last week, Switzerland's Mathilde Gremaud, was ruled out of the big air final when she injured her hip in practice hours before.

The wait is over for Meyers Taylor

Vancouver, Sochi, Pyeongchang, Beijing. Meyers Taylor won at least one medal at each of her first four Olympics, but the gold always eluded her.

No longer.

The 41-year-old American won that long-awaited medal by just four hundredths of a second in women's monobob when the last competitor, Germany's Laura Nolte, made a small but costly mistake on her final run.

Meyers Taylor's sixth career medal extends her record as the most decorated Black athlete at the Winter Olympics. She's also the oldest American woman to win gold at the Winter Games.

Meyers Taylor's U.S. teammate Kaillie Armbruster Humphries was third, 0.08 off Nolte's time.

McGrath's moment alone in the forest

The men's slalom race had a finish like no other.

Norway's Atle Lie McGrath was leading the race and skiing last on the second run but straddled a gate and was out. He stopped, threw his ski poles over a fence and then started walking through deep snow to the forest for some time alone.

"I thought that I would get some peace and quiet, which I didn't," said McGrath, who said photographers and police tracked him down.

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The dramatic finish overshadowed Loic Meillard of Switzerland winning gold, and an earlier fall for giant slalom winner and South American history maker Lucas Pinheiro Braathen.

It's been an especially tough Olympics for McGrath, whose grandfather died on the day of the opening ceremony. McGrath was racing with an armband as a tribute.

US-Canada again for women's hockey gold

The U.S. and Canada will play for the gold medal on Thursday after the U.S. routed Sweden 5-0 and Canada struggled past Switzerland 2-1 in Monday's semifinal games.

U.S. goaltender Aerin Frankel preserved a shutout streak which now stands at 331 minutes. The U.S. team is unbeaten and has allowed just one goal all tournament as it seeks a first gold medal since 2018.

Captain Marie-Philip Poulin broke the all-time Olympic scoring record with two goals in an unusually narrow win for Canada.

World record gives Japan a figure skating win

Riku Miura and Ryuichi Kihara needed something special after placing fifth in the pairs figure skating short program. They delivered.

Miura and Kihara produced a world record score in the free skate to win Japan's first-ever pairs gold.

Georgia got its first medal in any Winter Olympic sport with Anastasiia Metelkina and Luka Berulava in second. Short-program leaders Minerva Fabienne Hase and Nikita Volodin of Germany dropped to the bronze medal position.

Xandra Velzeboer won her second gold medal of the Olympics in the women's 1,000-meter short track speedskating to match her Dutch teammate Jens van 't Wout with two gold medals for the games. Italy's Arianna Fontana was chasing what would have been her 14th career Olympic medal but placed fourth.

Austria won the first-ever Olympic gold in men's super team ski jumping. The Austrians were leading when the competition was cut short due to heavy snow and wind.

Nancy Guthrie kidnapping investigators work with Walmart after identifying suspect's backpack

By SCOTT BAUER Associated Press

Investigators working on the disappearance of "Today" show host Savannah Guthrie's mother are consulting with Walmart management to develop leads because a backpack the suspect was wearing is sold exclusively at the stores, the Pima County, Arizona, sheriff said Monday.

Nancy Guthrie, 84, was last seen at her Arizona home on Jan. 31 and was reported missing the following day. Authorities say her blood was found on the front porch. Purported ransom notes were sent to news outlets, but two deadlines for paying have passed.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation released surveillance videos of a masked person wearing a handgun holster outside Guthrie's front door in Tucson the night she vanished. A porch camera recorded video of a person with a backpack who was wearing a ski mask, long pants, a jacket and gloves.

Pima County Sheriff Chris Nanos said in a text message to The Associated Press on Monday that the 25-liter "Ozark Trail Hiker Pack" backpack was the only clothing item that has been "definitively identified."

"This backpack is exclusive to Walmart and we are working with Walmart management to develop further leads," Nanos said.

The suspect's clothing "may have been purchased from Walmart but is not exclusively available at Walmart," the Pima County Sheriff's Department said in a statement Monday. "This remains a possibility only."

Investigators on Sunday announced that a glove discovered near the Guthrie home has been sent for DNA testing. The FBI said that it received preliminary results Saturday and was awaiting official confirmation. The development comes as law enforcement gathers more potential evidence and as the search for Guthrie's mother heads into its third week. Authorities previously said they had not identified a suspect.

The FBI said the suspect in the surveillance footage is a man about 5 feet, 9 inches tall with a medium

build.

Nanos said on Monday that members of Guthrie's family, including siblings and spouses, are not suspects. "The family has been nothing but cooperative and gracious and are victims in this case," Nanos said in a statement.

Authorities have expressed concern about Nancy Guthrie's health because she needs vital daily medicine. She is said to have a pacemaker and have dealt with high blood pressure and heart issues, according to sheriff's dispatcher audio on broadcastify.com.

Robert Duvall, Oscar-winning actor and 'Godfather' mainstay, dead at 95

By BOB THOMAS Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Robert Duvall, the Oscar-winning actor of matchless versatility and dedication whose classic roles included the intrepid consigliere of the first two "Godfather" movies and the over-the-hill country music singer in "Tender Mercies," has died at age 95.

Duvall died "peacefully" at his home Sunday in Middleburg, Virginia, according to an announcement from his publicist and from a statement posted on his Facebook page by his wife, Luciana Duvall.

"To the world, he was an Academy Award-winning actor, a director, a storyteller. To me, he was simply everything," Luciana Duvall wrote. "His passion for his craft was matched only by his deep love for characters, a great meal, and holding court. For each of his many roles, Bob gave everything to his characters and to the truth of the human spirit they represented."

The bald, wiry Duvall didn't have leading man looks, but few "character actors" enjoyed such a long, rewarding and unpredictable career, in leading and supporting roles, from an itinerant preacher to Josef Stalin. Beginning with his 1962 film debut as Boo Radley, the reclusive neighbor in "To Kill a Mockingbird," Duvall created a gallery of unforgettable portrayals. They earned him seven Academy Award nominations and the best actor prize for "Tender Mercies," which came out in 1983. He also won four Golden Globes, including one for playing the philosophical cattle-drive boss in the 1989 miniseries "Lonesome Dove," a role he often cited as his favorite.

In 2005, Duvall was awarded a National Medal of Arts.

He had been acting for some 20 years when "The Godfather," released in 1972, established him as one of the most in-demand performers of Hollywood. He had made a previous film, "The Rain People," with Francis Coppola, and the director chose him to play Tom Hagen in the mafia epic that featured Al Pacino and Marlon Brando among others. Duvall was a master of subtlety as an Irishman among Italians, rarely at the center of a scene, but often listening and advising in the background, an irreplaceable thread through the saga of the Corleone crime family.

"Stars and Italians alike depend on his efficiency, his tidying up around their grand gestures, his being the perfect shortstop on a team of personality sluggers," wrote the critic David Thomson. "Was there ever a role better designed for its actor than that of Tom Hagen in both parts of 'The Godfather?'"

In another Coppola film, "Apocalypse Now," Duvall was wildly out front, the embodiment of deranged masculinity as Lieutenant Colonel Bill Kilgore, who with equal vigor enjoyed surfing and bombing raids on the Viet Cong. Duvall required few takes for one of the most famous passages in movie history, barked out on the battlefield by a bare-chested, cavalry-hatted Kilgore: "I love the smell of napalm in the morning. You know, one time we had a hill bombed, for 12 hours. When it was all over, I walked up. We didn't find one of 'em, not one stinkin' dink body."

"The smell, you know that gasoline smell, the whole hill. Smelled like — victory."

Coppola once commented about Duvall: "Actors click into character at different times — the first week, third week. Bobby's hot after one or two takes."

Honored, but still hungry

He was Oscar-nominated as supporting actor for "The Godfather" and "Apocalypse Now," but a dispute over money led him to turn down the third Godfather epic, a loss deeply felt by critics, fans and "Godfa-

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ther" colleagues. Duvall would complain publicly about being offered less than his co-stars.

Fellow actors marveled at Duvall's studious research and planning, and his coiled energy. Michael Caine, who co-starred with him in the 2003 "Secondhand Lions," once told The Associated Press: "Before a big scene, Bobby just sits there, absolutely quiet; you know when not to talk to him." Anyone who disturbed him would suffer the well-known Duvall temper, famously on display during the filming of the John Wayne Western "True Grit," when Duvall seethed at director Henry Hathaway's advice to "tense up" before a scene.

Duvall was awarded an Oscar in 1984 for his leading role as the troubled singer and songwriter Mac Sledge in "Tender Mercies," a prize he accepted while clad in a cowboy tuxedo with Western tie. In 1998, he was nominated for best actor in "The Apostle," a drama about a wayward Southern evangelist which he wrote, directed, starred in, produced and largely financed. With customary thoroughness, he visited dozens of country churches and spent 12 years writing the script and trying to get it made.

Among other notable roles: the outlaw gang leader who gets ambushed by John Wayne in "True Grit"; Jesse James in "The Great Northfield Minnesota Raid"; the pious and beleaguered Frank Burns in "M-A-S-H"; the TV hatchet man in "Network"; Dr. Watson in "The Seven-Per-Cent Solution"; and the sadistic father in "The Great Santini."

"When I was doing 'Colors' in 1988 with Sean Penn, someone asked me how I do it all these years, keep it fresh. Well, if you don't overwork, have some hobbies, you can do it and stay hungry even if you're not really hungry," Duvall told The Associated Press in 1990.

In his mid-80s, he received a supporting Oscar nomination as the title character of the 2014 release "The Judge," in which he is accused of causing a death in a hit-and-run accident. More recent films included "Widows" and "12 Mighty Orphans."

Ungifted in school, gifted on stage

Robert Selden Duvall grew up in the Navy towns of Annapolis and the San Diego area, where he was born in 1931. He spent time in other cities as his father, who rose to be an admiral, was assigned to various duties.

The boy's experience helped in his adult profession as he learned the nuances of regional speech and observed the psyche of military men, which he would portray in several films.

Duvall reportedly used his Navy officer father as the basis for his portrayal of the explosive militarist in "The Great Santini," based on the Pat Conroy novel. He commented in 2003: "My dad was a gentleman but a seether, a stern, blustery guy, and away a lot of the time." Bobby took after his mother, an amateur actress, in playing a guitar and performing. He was a wrestler like his father and enjoyed besting kids older than himself.

He lacked the concentration for schoolwork and nearly flunked out of Principia College in Elmhurst, Illinois. His despairing parents decided he needed something to keep him in college so he wouldn't be drafted for the Korean War. "They recommended acting as an expedient thing to get through," he recalled. "I'm glad they did." He flourished in drama classes.

"Way back when I was in college," Duvall told the AP in 1990, "there was a wonderful man named Frank Parker, who had been a dancer in World War I. We did a full-length mime play and I played a Harlequin clown. I really liked that.

"Then, I played an older guy in 'All My Sons,' and at one point I had this emotional moment, where this emotion was pouring out. Parker said at that moment he didn't think acting can be carried any further than that. And this guy was a very critical guy. So I thought, at that moment at least, this is what I wanted to do."

After two years in the Army, he used the G.I. Bill to finance his studies at the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York, hanging out with such other young hopefuls as Robert Morse, Gene Hackman and Dustin Hoffman. After a one-night performance in "A View From the Bridge," Duvall began getting offers for work in TV series, among them "The Naked City" and "The Defenders."

Between his high-paying jobs in major productions, Duvall devoted himself to directing personal projects: a documentary about a prairie family, "We're Not the Jet Set"; a film about gypsies, "Angelo, My Love";

and "Assassination Tango," in which he also starred.

Duvall had been a tango dancer since seeing the musical "Tango Argentina" in the 1980s and visited in Argentina dozens of times to study the dance and the culture. The result was the 2003 release about a hit man with a passion for tango.

His co-star was Luciana Pedraza, 42 years his junior, whom he married in 2005. Duvall's three previous marriages — to Barbara Benjamin, Gail Youngs and Sharon Brophy — ended in divorce.

Prosecutors plan to charge an Israeli settler with killing a Palestinian activist in the West Bank

By SAM METZ Associated Press

RAMALLAH, West Bank (AP) — Israeli prosecutors said Monday that they plan to charge a settler in the killing of a Palestinian activist during a confrontation that was caught on video, opening a rare prosecution of violence by Jewish settlers in the occupied West Bank.

Attacks from settlers and home demolitions by authorities have spiked dramatically over the past two years, but the death in July of Awdah Hathaleen has drawn particular attention due to his involvement in the 2025 Oscar-winning film "No Other Land," which chronicled Palestinian villagers' fight to stay on their land. The case also stands out because the confrontation between Palestinians and Yinon Levi, an internationally sanctioned settler, was captured on video from multiple vantage points.

In a video that family members say was taken by Hathaleen himself, Levi could be seen firing toward the person holding the camera. Another showed Levi firing two shots without showing where the bullets struck.

An Israeli judge released Levi from custody six months ago, citing a lack of evidence that he fired the shots that killed Hathaleen.

Israel's State Attorney General's office confirmed in a statement Monday that it had initiated proceedings to indict Levi. It did not specify the charges.

Eitan Peleg, an attorney for Hathaleen's family, said the office had informed them it planned to indict Levi for reckless homicide, triggering a process that allows Levi to contest charges before they're formally filed.

"Enforcement of the law in cases like this involving Palestinians in the West Bank is very rare, so this is unique," Peleg told The Associated Press on Monday.

Israel's military referred questions on the indictment to police, who have not yet responded. Both bodies enforce laws in the area.

More than 3.4 million Palestinians and 700,000 Israelis live in the occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem, territories captured by Israel in 1967 and sought by Palestinians for a future state. The international community overwhelmingly considers Israeli settlement construction in these areas to be illegal and an obstacle to peace.

Palestinians and rights groups say authorities routinely fail to prosecute settlers or hold them accountable for violence. Under National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, investigations into settler attacks have plummeted, according to the Israeli rights group Yesh Din.

Khalil Hathaleen, Awdah's brother, said the family was glad some measure of justice was being pursued but felt the charge of "reckless homicide" was insufficient.

"It was an intentional killing in broad daylight, with prior intent and premeditation," he said.

Levi's attorney, Avichai Hajbi, declined Monday to comment on the coming indictment, which he said he hadn't received. After the shooting, he told The Associated Press that Levi acted in self-defense, without elaborating. Levi did not answer phone calls Monday.

Parts of the confrontation were filmed

Video released last year by B'Tselem, an Israeli human rights group showed Levi firing a gun toward the person filming. At the moment that B'Tselem says Hathaleen collapsed, the visuals are jostled but moans of pain can be heard. The group said it obtained the video from the family of Hathaleen, who said he filmed it.

Additional footage obtained by the AP last year showed Levi waving a pistol during the standoff in Umm

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al-Khair that was with a group of Palestinians over an excavator that had rolled down from a nearby settlement and damaged Palestinian property earlier in the day.

Alaa Hathaleen, a cousin who filmed the encounter, told AP at the time that he had approached Levi to tell him the group was unarmed and to stop the bulldozing.

In the video, one Palestinian insults Levi and another challenges him to shoot. Levi shoves someone just out of the frame, demands to know who threw stones, and later fires a shot, seemingly away from the crowd. He then fires again and yells toward the crowd to get away from the excavator.

The footage did not show where bullets struck, though other relatives said they saw Awdah Hathaleen fall immediately after shots were fired.

Levi was detained before being released to house arrest. That condition was eventually lifted, too.

Levi was among the Israeli settlers sanctioned by the United States and other Western countries over allegations of violence toward Palestinians in 2024. U.S. President Donald Trump lifted the U.S. sanctions after taking office the following year.

Attacks spike as spotlight grows

Activists and crew members on the film "No Other Land" have said settler attacks have intensified on the village portrayed since the movie won the Oscar.

Hamdan Ballal, one of the film's directors, said his family home in Umm al-Khair was subject to another attack on Sunday. Four relatives were arrested during the confrontation, he said.

Ballal said a soldier, who came to their home accompanied by another soldier and a settler-herder, grabbed his brother by the neck and tried to choke him. Neither the army nor the police responded to requests for comment on the incident.

"The year after I won the Oscar, the assaults increased significantly. On a daily basis, settlers come and destroy the fields, destroy the trees, destroy the crops around the house," he said.

Israeli proof-of-ownership rules spark anger

As prosecutors move to indict Levi and violence persists across the West Bank, Israel is moving ahead with measures to deepen its control over land in the occupied territory.

On Sunday, it announced it would resume a land registration process across the West Bank to require anyone with a claim to land to submit documents proving ownership. Rights groups say the process could strip Palestinians of land they've lived on and farmed for generations and transfer vast swaths of land to Israeli state control.

Israel's Foreign Ministry said the steps countered Palestinian Authority land registration efforts in areas where Israel maintains civil and military control.

The measures follow years of accusations by Palestinians that actions by settlers and the military — campaigns of violence, harassment and demolitions — have pushed them from their land.

The decisions have drawn widespread condemnation as violations of international law, including from countries involved in the ceasefire process in the Gaza Strip and Trump's Board of Peace.

Saudi Arabia's Foreign Ministry in a statement on Monday said the measures were part of Israel's effort to impose a "new legal and administrative reality" that undermines prospects for peace and stability. Egypt's Foreign Ministry called the move a "flagrant violation" of international law, warning it would escalate tensions in the Palestinian territories and across the region.

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres condemned Israel's decision, calling it not only destabilizing but unlawful according to the International Court of Justice, the U.N.'s highest tribunal, his spokesman Stéphane Dujarric said.

Michigan rises to No. 1 in AP Top 25 men's hoops poll for 1st time since January 2013

By AARON BEARD AP Basketball Writer

Michigan is No. 1 in The Associated Press men's college basketball poll for the first time in 13 years, ending Arizona's nine-week reign.

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The Wolverines (24-1) claimed 60 of 61 first-place votes in Monday's poll to climb one spot and supplant the Wildcats, who were unbeaten entering last week before falling at Kansas and at home to Texas Tech.

"Not much," coach Dusty May said when asked by the AP after Saturday's rout of UCLA about the significance of potentially topping the poll. "It means we haven't drank our own Kool-Aid. We've put ourselves in a position to be playing the types of games in mid-February that we want to be in, but we've got to continue to improve."

Michigan had been ranked No. 2 behind Arizona for six of Arizona's nine weeks at the top but was No. 1 in analytics rankings by KenPom, Evan Miyakawa and Bart Torvik last week.

Now the Wolverines have their first AP No. 1 ranking since January 2013.

Houston and Duke each moved up one spot to sit behind Michigan, with the second-ranked Cougars claiming the remaining first-place vote. The Wolverines and Blue Devils are set to meet this weekend in a marquee nonconference matchup in the nation's capital.

Arizona dropped three spots to No. 4. UConn was next at No. 5, followed by Iowa State, Purdue, Kansas, Nebraska and Illinois to round out the top 10.

Rising

The seventh-ranked Boilermakers jumped six spots for the week's biggest leap, coming after an overtime win at Nebraska and a win at Iowa. The preseason No. 1 has won four straight entering Tuesday's visit from Michigan.

No. 13 Texas Tech rose three spots after its home win against Colorado followed by the OT win at Arizona. As did No. 21 Louisville, with freshman Mikel Brown starring with an Atlantic Coast Conference freshman-record 45 points in a win against N.C. State and 29 more in a win against Baylor.

In all, 13 teams moved up from last week.

Sliding

No. 15 Michigan State and No. 16 North Carolina had the week's biggest tumbles of five spots. The Spartans lost at Wisconsin on Friday, while the Tar Heels lost at Miami while also learning that star freshman Caleb Wilson is out indefinitely with a fractured bone in his left hand.

Seven ranked teams fell from last week's position.

Quick turnaround for Badgers

Wisconsin returned to the poll, going from receiving no votes last week to No. 24 after back-to-back wins against top-10 opponents Illinois and Michigan State last week.

Wisconsin previously had fallen out of the poll after a Nov. 21 loss to BYU as the Badgers struggled through a 7-4 start. Last week's wins, along with being the only team to take down Michigan, has the Badgers alongside the Red Raiders as the only teams with victories against three top-10 teams this year.

"Early in the year we were soft mentally and physically," coach Greg Gard said after the 92-71 win against the Spartans. "We had to mature, had to grow up collectively and individually. You're not going to be able to compete in these types of games in the upper echelon of this league if you're not physically and mentally tough. This group has responded."

Comings and goings

No. 25 Alabama joined Wisconsin as the week's new additions after the Crimson Tide pushed to a four-game winning streak.

They replaced Clemson (No. 20) and Kentucky (No. 25) in the poll.

Conference watch

The Big 12 and Big Ten dominated the top of the poll while tying with a national-best six ranked teams. Those two leagues combined to have eight spots in the top 10.

The ACC and Southeastern Conference were next with four ranked teams each. The Big East had two, while the West Coast Conference, Atlantic 10 and Mid-American Conference each had one.

2 years on, Navalny's death still casts a shadow over Russia and wider Europe

By The Associated Press undefined

MOSCOW (AP) — Mourners gathered in Moscow Monday to mark two years since the death in custody of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, under the shadow of a Kremlin crackdown and just two days since a new analysis reinforced suspicions that he was killed by poisoning.

Navalny died in an Arctic penal colony on Feb. 16, 2024, while serving a 19-year sentence that many believed to be politically motivated. His death at the age of 47 left the Russian opposition leaderless and divided, struggling to build an effective or united front without one of its most visible and charismatic figures.

On the second anniversary of Navalny's death, we look at the latest investigation into its cause and the continuing political repercussions, both within Russia and beyond.

Across Russia, Navalny's supporters pay their respects

Navalny's mother, Lyudmila Navalnaya, and his mother-in-law, Alla Abrosimova, were among the mourners laying flowers on his grave. A mound of bouquets rose above the heavy drifts of snow that blanketed Moscow's Borisovsky Cemetery.

Representatives from several European embassies also paid their respects, watched by a conspicuously high security presence. Later, a small choir gathered to sing by Navalny's graveside.

Addressing the crowd, Lyudmila Navalnaya restated her belief that her son was killed by the Russian authorities, a scenario which has also been backed by several European countries in recent days. "We knew that our son did not simply die in prison," she said. "He was murdered."

The Kremlin has denied the allegations, saying that Navalny died of natural causes.

Flowers were also laid at the memorial to the victims of political repression in St Petersburg. Access to the site was later blocked with temporary fences, local news outlets reported.

European nations believe Navalny was poisoned

The anniversary coincides with the release of a joint statement by five European countries, which said that Navalny was poisoned by the Kremlin with a rare and lethal toxin found in the skin of poison dart frogs.

The foreign ministries of the U.K., France, Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands said on Saturday that analysis in European labs of samples taken from Navalny's body "conclusively confirmed the presence of epibatidine." The neurotoxin secreted by dart frogs in South America is not found naturally in Russia, they said.

A joint statement said: "Russia had the means, motive and opportunity to administer this poison."

In a written tribute to Navalny on Monday, French President Emmanuel Macron also linked the Kremlin with the opposition leader's death.

"Two years ago, the world learned of the death of Alexei Navalny. I pay tribute to his memory," Macron wrote on social media. "I said then that I believed his death said everything about the Kremlin's weakness and its fear of any opponent. It is now clear that this death was premeditated.

"Truth always prevails, while we await justice to do the same."

Moscow has vehemently denied its involvement in Navalny's death, saying that the politician had become unwell after going for a walk.

When asked about the allegations by journalists on Monday, presidential spokesperson said that the Kremlin does "not accept such accusations."

"We consider them biased and unfounded. In fact, we resolutely reject them," he said.

Saturday's announcement came as Navalny's widow, Yulia Navalnaya, attended the Munich Security Conference in Germany. She said she had been "certain from the first day" that her husband had been poisoned, "but now there is proof."

"Putin killed Alexei with a chemical weapon," she wrote on social media, describing the Russian leader as "a murderer" who "must be held accountable."

Navalny was the target of an earlier poisoning in 2020, with a nerve agent in an attack he blamed on the Kremlin, which always denied involvement. His family and allies fought to have him flown to Germany

for treatment and recovery. Five months later, he returned to Russia, where he was immediately arrested and imprisoned for the last three years of his life.

Russia's opposition is struggling to start a new chapter

Navalny's closest allies, as well as other key members of Russia's opposition, now continue their fight from exile.

Many have been handed lengthy prison sentences in absentia in Russia and are unable to return home. Some have been designated "terrorists and extremists" by the authorities, a designation that was also applied to Navalny in January 2022.

Yet Russia's opposition has failed to form a united front and a clear plan of action against the Kremlin. Instead, rival groups have traded accusations that some see as efforts to discredit each other and vie for influence.

In one small victory for opposition activists, Europe's leading human rights body, PACE, announced in late January the creation of a new body — the Platform for Dialogue with Russian Democratic Forces — tasked with giving opposition Russians a voice and a formal platform to engage European lawmakers.

It has been heralded as a victory for anti-war Russians, but also attracted criticism as the body was not elected democratically. Members of Navalny's anti-corruption organization are also absent from the group

In a statement to mark Navalny's death, Russian members of the Council of Europe's human rights body, PACE, said that Navalny's death was "an inevitable link in a chain of systemic crimes by the Kremlin regime against its own citizens and the citizens of foreign states."

"Alexei Navalny gave his life for a free Russia," the statement said. "We are obliged to ensure that his death was not in vain."

No, George Washington didn't have wooden teeth. Yes, he led the Siege of Boston

By MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — More than a decade before he became the country's first president, George Washington was leading a critical campaign in the early days of the American Revolution. The Siege of Boston was his first campaign as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army and, in many ways, set the stage for his military and political successes — celebrated on Presidents Day.

Following the Battles of Lexington and Concord, militias had pinned down the British in Boston in April 1775. The Continental Congress, recognizing the need for a more organized military effort, selected Washington to lead the newly formed army.

The Siege of Boston and its significance

On this day 250 years ago, Washington would have been nearing the end of an almost yearlong siege that bottled up as many as 11,000 British troops and hundreds more loyalists. The British were occupying Boston at the time, and the goal of the siege was to force them out.

A critical decision made by Washington was sending Henry Knox, a young bookseller, to Fort Ticonderoga in New York to retrieve dozens of cannons. The cannons, transported hundreds of miles in the dead of winter, were eventually used to fire on British positions. That contributed to the decision by the British, facing dwindling supplies, to abandon the city by boat on March 17, 1776.

Historians argue that the British abandoning their positions, celebrated in Boston as Evacuation Day, rid the city of loyalists at a critical time, denied the British access to an important port and gave patriots a huge morale boost.

"The success of the Siege of Boston gave new life and momentum to the Revolution," Chris Beagan, the site manager at Longfellow House in Cambridge, a National Historic Site that served as Washington's headquarters during the American Revolution. "Had it failed, royal control of New England would have continued, and the Continental Army likely would have dissolved."

How the siege shaped Washington

The siege was also a critical test for Washington. A surveyor and farmer, Washington had been out of

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the military for nearly 20 years after commanding troops for the British during the French and Indian War. His successful campaign ensured Washington remained the commander-in-chief for the remainder of the revolution.

Doug Bradburn, president of George Washington's Mount Vernon, said Washington took the first steps to creating a geographically diverse army that included militiamen from Massachusetts to Virginia and, by the end of the war, a fighting force with significant Black and Native American representation. It was the most integrated military until President Harry S. Truman's desegregated the armed forces in 1948, he said.

Washington, a slave owner who depended on hundreds of slaves on his Mount Vernon estate, was initially opposed to admitting formerly enslaved and free Black soldiers into the army. But short of men, Washington came to realize "there are free Blacks who want to enlist and he needs them to keep the British from breaking out" during the siege, Bradburn said.

Ridding Boston of the British also turned Washington into one of the country's most popular political figures.

"He comes to embody the cause in a time before you have a nation, before you have a Declaration of Independence, before you're really sure what is the goal of this struggle," Bradburn said. "He becomes the face of the revolutionary movement."

Commanding the military for more than eight years also prepared Washington for the presidency, Pulitzer Prize-winning military historian Rick Atkinson said. "Perhaps most important, it gave him a sense that Americans could and should be a single people, rather than denizens of thirteen different entities."

Myths of Washington

His rise to prominence also led to plenty of myths about Washington, many which persist to this day.

One of the most popular is the cherry tree myth. It was invented by one of Washington's first biographers, according to George Washington's Mount Vernon, who created the story after his death. Supposedly, a 6-year-old Washington took an ax to a cherry tree and admitted as much when caught by his father, famously saying "I cannot tell a lie ... I did cut it with my hatchet."

The second one is the wooden teeth myth. It was rumored that Washington had wooden dentures and scholars, well into the 20th century, were quoted as saying his false teeth were made from wood. Not true. He never wore wooden dentures, instead using those with ivory, gold and even human teeth.

More than a statesman

During his lifetime, Washington had myriad pursuits. He was known as an innovative farmer, according to the George Washington's Mount Vernon, and an advocate for Western expansion, buying up to 50,000 acres of land in several Mid-Atlantic states. After returning to Mount Vernon, he built a whiskey distillery that became one of the largest in the country.

His connection to slavery was complicated. He advocated for ending slavery, and his will called for freeing all the slaves he owned after the death of his wife, Martha Washington. But he didn't own all the slaves at Mount Vernon so he couldn't legally free all of them.

Celebrating Presidents Day

For fans of George Washington, Presidents Day is their Super Bowl. Originated to celebrate Washington's birthday, which falls on Feb. 22, the holiday has become associated with good deals at the mall. Still, there are plenty of places celebrating all things Washington on this day.

There will be a wreath-laying ceremony at Washington's tomb at Mount Vernon, and there will be a Continental Army encampment. There will be a parade honoring Washington in Alexandria, Virginia, and, in Laredo, Texas, a monthlong celebration features a carnival, pageants, an air show and jalapeno festival.

NAACP asks judge to protect against 'misuse' of voter data seized by FBI in Georgia's Fulton County

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — The NAACP and other organizations are asking a judge to protect personal voter information that was seized by the FBI from an elections warehouse just outside Atlanta.

Georgia residents entrusted the state with their "sensitive personal information" when they registered to vote, and the Jan. 28 seizure of ballots and other election documents from the Fulton County elections hub "breached that guarantee, infringed constitutional protections of privacy, and interfered with the right to vote," the organizations said in a motion filed late Sunday.

The motion asks the judge to "order reasonable limits on the government's use of the seized data" and to prohibit the government from using the data for purposes other than the criminal investigation cited in the search warrant affidavit. That includes prohibiting any efforts to use it for voter roll maintenance, election administration or immigration enforcement.

They also want the judge to order that the government disclose an inventory of all documents and records seized, the identity of anyone who has accessed the records outside of those involved in the criminal investigation, any copying of the records and all efforts to secure the information.

The Department of Justice did not immediately respond Monday to a request for comment on the motion.

FBI agents arrived at the elections hub just south of Atlanta with a search warrant seeking documents related to the 2020 election in Fulton County, including: all ballots, tabulator tapes from the scanners that tally the votes, electronic ballot images created when the ballots were counted and then recounted, and all voter rolls. The county has filed a motion seeking the return of the seized materials.

President Donald Trump has fixated on Fulton, a Democratic stronghold and the most populous county in the state, asserting without evidence that widespread voter fraud there cost him victory in Georgia in 2020.

An FBI agent's affidavit presented to a magistrate judge to obtain the search warrant says the criminal investigation began with a referral from Kurt Olsen, who advised Trump as he tried to overturn his 2020 election loss and now serves as Trump's "director of election security and integrity" with a mission to investigate Trump's loss.

The motion was filed by the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law on behalf of the NAACP, Georgia and Atlanta NAACP organizations, and the Georgia Coalition for the Peoples Agenda. It notes that the seizure happened as the Justice Department has been seeking unredacted state voter registration rolls.

The Justice Department has sued at least 23 states and the District of Columbia to try to get them to hand over detailed voter information. The agency has said it is seeking the data as part of an effort to ensure election security, but Democratic officials and other critics worry that federal officials want to use the sensitive data for other purposes. Federal courts in several states have rejected the Justice Department's attempts to get the records.

"These repeated efforts to access 2020 election records, including by the entity that now has custody of them, heightens concerns about the privacy and security of sensitive voter data and exacerbates the chill on voting rights," the motion says.

Suspect in mass shooting at Bondi Beach Jewish festival appears in court

SYDNEY (AP) — A man accused of killing 15 people in a mass shooting at a Jewish festival on Sydney's Bondi Beach appeared in court Monday for the first time since his release from the hospital.

Naveed Akram appeared in Sydney's Downing Center Local Court via a video link from the maximum security Goulburn Correctional Center 200 kilometers (120 miles) away.

He did not enter pleas to the charges against him, including murder and committing a terrorist act. The brief court appearance focused on extending a gag order that suppresses the identities of victims and survivors of the attack who have not chosen to identify themselves publicly.

Defense lawyer Ben Archbold told reporters outside court that Akram was doing as well as could be expected and it was too early to indicate any intention of pleas.

Akram, 24, was wounded and his father Sajid Akram, 50, was killed in a gunbattle with police after the attack on a Hanukkah celebration at the beach Dec. 14.

The younger Akram is next scheduled to appear in court April 9.

The police investigation is one of three official inquiries examining Australia's worst alleged terrorist at-

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tack and the nation's worst mass shooting in 29 years.

One involves the interactions between law enforcement and intelligence agencies before the attack that was allegedly inspired by the Islamic State group.

A royal commission, the highest form of public inquiry, will investigate the nature, prevalence and drivers of antisemitism generally as well as the circumstances of the Bondi shooting.

Presidents Day 2026: Here's what's open and closed on the holiday

The Associated Press undefined

Government offices, the stock market and schools are closed Monday in observance of Presidents Day, but most big retailers are open.

When in doubt, call ahead or look up more specific schedules online for stores in your neighborhood.

Here's a rundown of what's open and closed on Presidents Day 2026:

Government offices

Federal and state government offices are closed. Courts and most schools are also closed.

The official designation for the holiday is Washington's Birthday after first President George Washington, although it has come to be known informally as Presidents Day. Arguments have been made to honor President Abraham Lincoln as well because his birth date falls nearby, on Feb. 12.

Banks and the stock market

U.S. stock markets and banks are closed Monday but will reopen on Tuesday.

Retailers

Most big stores and other businesses are open.

National parks

National parks are open and free to U.S. residents on Presidents Day. Late last year, the National Park Service announced that admission would no longer be free on Martin Luther King Day and Juneteenth, but instead on June 14, which is Flag Day and President Donald Trump's birthday. But it is still free on other holidays including Presidents Day, Memorial Day and Independence Day weekend.

Today in History: February 17, House elects Thomas Jefferson president over Aaron Burr

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Tuesday, Feb. 17, the 48th day of 2026. There are 317 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Feb. 17, 1801, the U.S. House of Representatives broke an electoral tie between Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr, electing Jefferson president; Burr became vice president.

Also on this date:

In 1863, five appointees of the Public Welfare Society of Geneva announced the formation of an "International Committee for the Relief of Wounded Combatants," which would later be renamed the International Committee of the Red Cross.

In 1864, during the Civil War, the Union ship USS Housatonic was rammed and sank in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina, by the Confederate hand-cranked submarine HL Hunley, in the first naval attack of its kind; the Hunley also sank.

In 1897, the National Congress of Mothers, the forerunner of the National Parent Teacher Association, convened its first meeting in Washington with over 2,000 attendees.

In 1964, the U.S. Supreme Court, in Wesberry v. Sanders, ruled that congressional districts within each state must be roughly equal in population.

In 1992, serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer was sentenced to life imprisonment after being found guilty of 15 counts of first-degree murder.

In 1995, Colin Ferguson was convicted of six counts of murder in the December 1993 Long Island Rail

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Road shootings; he was later sentenced to 315 years in prison.

In 2008, Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia.

In 2013, Danica Patrick won the Daytona 500 pole, becoming the first woman to secure the top spot for any Sprint Cup race.

In 2014, Jimmy Fallon made his debut as host of NBC's "Tonight Show," taking over from Jay Leno.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Brenda Fricker is 81. Actor Rene Russo is 72. Actor Richard Karn is 70. Olympic swimming gold medalist and television commentator Rowdy Gaines is 67. Actor Lou Diamond Phillips is 64. Basketball Hall of Famer Michael Jordan is 63. Film director Michael Bay is 61. Hockey Hall of Famer Luc Robitaille is 60. Olympic skiing gold medalist Tommy Moe is 56. Actor Denise Richards is 55. Musician Billie Joe Armstrong (Green Day) is 54. Actor Jerry O'Connell is 52. Actor Jason Ritter is 46. Media personality Paris Hilton is 45. Actor Joseph Gordon-Levitt is 45. Singer-songwriter Ed Sheeran is 35. Actor Jeremy Allen White is 35. Tennis player Madison Keys is 31. Actor Sasha Pieterse is 30.