

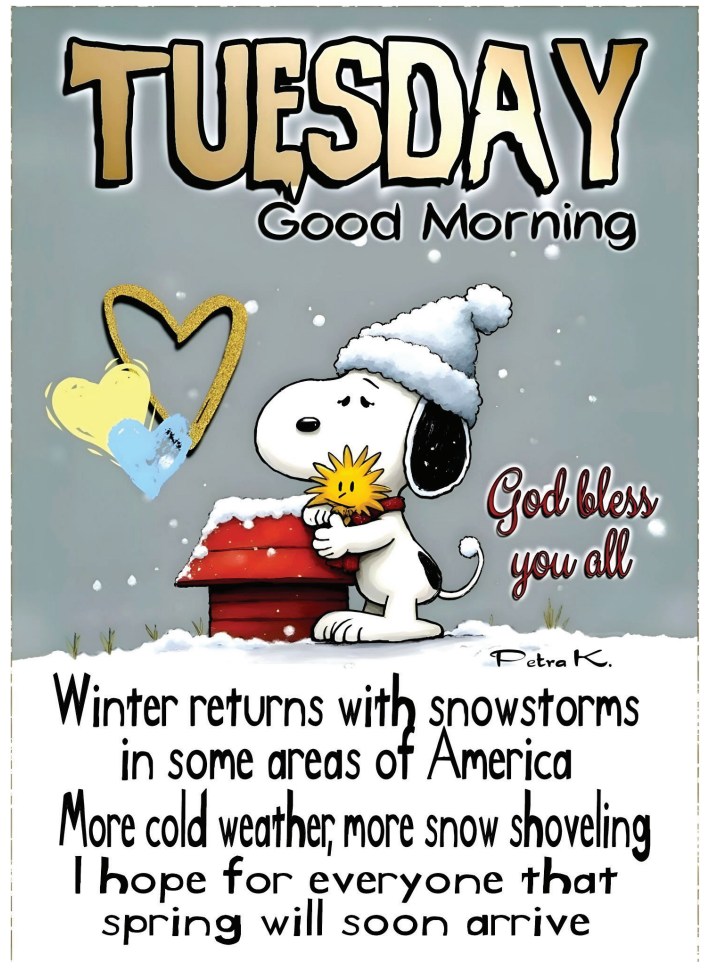
Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 1 of 78

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [3- Baby-sitter Ad](#)
- [4- Good Luck Lady Tigers](#)
- [5- City council agenda](#)
- [6- Brown County commission agenda](#)
- [6- Gov. Rhoden Signs Six Bills into Law](#)
- [7- GDI Fitness Center Ad](#)
- [8- SD SearchLight: Governor-backed plan advances as Legislature continues to cull property tax reduction ideas](#)
- [9- SD SearchLight: Legislation seeks to define South Dakota abortion ban's life-of-the-mother exception](#)
- [10- SD SearchLight: What it takes to reclaim unclaimed property in South Dakota: a journey of tenacity](#)
- [11- SD SearchLight: Interest rate amended from zero to 2% in bill allowing airport loans from housing fund](#)
- [12- SD SearchLight: South Dakota's Medical Marijuana Oversight Committee could be repealed by House-approved bill](#)
- [13- SD SearchLight: State House decides to retain automatic employer fees for governor-controlled economic fund](#)
- [14- SD SearchLight: Amid polling low, Trump centers pre-State of the Union message on immigration](#)
- [16- SD SearchLight: Mifepristone lawsuit could hinder telehealth abortion nationwide](#)
- [18- Weather Pages](#)
- [22- Daily Devotional](#)
- [23- Subscription Form](#)
- [24- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [25- News from the Associated Press](#)

Tuesday, Feb. 24

Senior Menu: Bean and ham soup, 1/2 chicken salad sandwich, fruit.
School Breakfast: Scones.
School Lunch: Tater tot hot dish, cooked carrots.
United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.
Biogirls, 3:45 p.m., Elementary gym
Pickleball, 6 p.m., elementary gym
Region 1A GBB



Wednesday, Feb 25

Senior Menu: Cheeseburger, tater tots, tomato spoon salad, fruit.
School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.
School Lunch Chicken alfredo, spudsters.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.; soup supper, 6 p.m. (Host Emmanuel Men; Lenten Service, 7 p.m.)
St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.; Lent Service at St. John's, 7 p.m.
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.
Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.

Thursday, Feb. 26

Senior Menu: Turkey, sweet potatoes, green beans, fruit, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Cereal.
School Lunch: Sloppy joes, fries.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 2 of 78

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.

Cartel Chaos Erupts

At least 73 people, including 25 members of Mexico's National Guard, have been killed in a wave of violence after Mexican authorities killed drug lord Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes—known as "El Mencho"—during a shootout Sunday.

Oseguera Cervantes was among the most-wanted fugitives in the US and Mexico for leading the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, one of Mexico's fastest-growing criminal networks and a major supplier of fentanyl, methamphetamine, and cocaine to the US. Authorities reportedly used American intelligence to narrow in on his location and followed one of his romantic partners to his hideout in Jalisco. Mexico's security chief said soldiers also killed at least another 34 suspected criminals across Jalisco and neighboring Michoacan Sunday. The cartel responded by setting fire to vehicles and blocking roads across Mexico, prompting airlines to cancel flights, ride shares to suspend services, and schools to close yesterday.

As of this writing, the US State Department continues to advise Americans in Puerto Vallarta and surrounding areas to remain in place.

State of the Union

President Donald Trump will deliver his State of the Union address tonight; the annual speech has traditionally been used to outline the president's agenda and recap accomplishments. The speech comes against the backdrop of last week's Supreme Court decision to eliminate much of his tariff policy as well as tensions with Iran and a crackdown on migration.

Trump is expected to acknowledge the high court's tariff ruling and his subsequent decision to impose a blanket 15% tariff on goods entering the US. That policy goes into effect today and is scheduled to last for 150 days. Trump may also discuss immigration and foreign policy, following last month's capture of Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro and a US military buildup in the Middle East amid nuclear negotiations with Iran.

The address will be aired on major networks beginning at 9 pm ET. Virginia Gov. Abigail Spanberger will provide the Democratic response.

Weight-Loss Drug Race

Shares of Novo Nordisk dropped roughly 16% yesterday after its experimental obesity drug CagriSema fell short of efficacy expectations in a late-stage clinical trial, underperforming against Eli Lilly's Zepbound in weight-loss results. Patients taking CagriSema lost an average of 23% of their body weight over 84 weeks, compared with a 25.5% reduction observed with Zepbound.

Novo Nordisk is the maker of Ozempic, a diabetes medication that helped catalyze growth in the obesity drug market. Ozempic and CagriSema contain semaglutide that mimics a gut hormone called GLP-1 to help control appetite, slow digestion, and manage blood sugar. CagriSema adds another hormone, cagrilintide, to further curb hunger. In contrast, Eli Lilly's Zepbound contains tirzepatide, which mimics both GLP-1 and GIP to affect appetite and metabolism.

Separately, Eli Lilly announced yesterday Zepbound is now available in a single pen with four doses, or about a month's supply.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 3 of 78

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

"Fashion is Art" announced as 2026 Met Gala theme.

AMC Theatres attendance drops nearly 10% year-over-year in last quarter of 2025, despite release of blockbusters such as "Avatar: Fire & Ash" and "Wicked: For Good".

Nick Reiner pleads not guilty to two counts of first-degree murder in December stabbing death of his parents, director Rob Reiner and Michele Singer Reiner.

American skier Lindsey Vonn says surgery saved her from leg amputation after Olympic accident.

Two-time WNBA champion Kara Braxton dies at age 43 in a solo car crash.

Science & Technology

Anthropic unveils the AI Fluency Index, detailing 11 traits capturing how people interact with AI; metrics can be used to track adoption and uptake over time.

Supreme Court agrees to review whether federal law blocks Boulder County, Colorado, from pursuing state-law climate lawsuit against oil companies after the Colorado Supreme Court allowed the case to proceed.

Iron Age grave site discovered in northern Serbia reveals evidence of a 2,800-year-old mass killing; 40 of more than 77 victims were younger than 12 years old.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close lower (S&P 500 -1.0%, Dow -1.7%, Nasdaq -1.1%) amid AI and trade uncertainty.

European Parliament halts ratification process of sweeping trade deal with the US after President Donald Trump threatens 15% global tariffs.

FedEx sues Trump administration for tariff refund after Supreme Court's Friday ruling.

US average 30-year fixed mortgage rate falls to 5.99%, matching the lowest level since 2022.

Politics & World Affairs

Ukraine and Russia mark four years of large-scale war today after peace talks ended last week without a breakthrough.

London police arrest former UK ambassador to the US Peter Mandelson on suspicion of misconduct in office; Mandelson has been the subject of an investigation into his ties to late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Federal judge permanently blocks the release of special counsel Jack Smith's report into President Donald Trump's handling of classified information.

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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 a stack of colorful blocks on the left, and a yellow bucket with cleaning supplies (spray bottles, gloves, a broom) on the right. The background is a bright blue sky with white clouds. At the bottom, there is a small yellow house with a red roof and a red car driving on a road that curves through a green field with yellow and blue flowers.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 4 of 78



Groton Area Lady Tigers

Standing: Head Coach Matt Locke, Assistant Coach Trent Traphagen, Kella Tracy, Rylee Dunker, Taryn Traphagen, Tevan Hanson, Jaedyn Penning, Mia Crank, Assistant Coach Justin Hanson, Manager Becky Erickson

Sitting: Ashlynn Warrington, Makenna Krause, Jerica Locke, Sydney Locke, Talli Wright, McKenna Tietz. (J.Simon Photography)

Good Luck Lady Tigers from these GDILIVE.COM sponsors!

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John Sieh Agency
Jungle Lanes & Cafe
Ken's Food Fair
Krueger Brothers
Lori's Pharmacy
Poet
Spanier Harvesting & Trucking
Sperry Tree Service
Sun & Sea Travel
The MeatHouse
Weismantel Insurance Agency

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 5 of 78

Groton City Council Meeting Agenda

February 24, 2026 – 7:00pm
City Hall – 120 N Main Street

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

1. Approval of Agenda
2. Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1
(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)
3. Review Bids for Exterior Painting of City Hall/Wage Memorial Library and Award
4. Second Reading of Ordinance No. 796 – Sewer Rates
5. Surplus Old Baseball Scoreboard and Allow Baseball Foundation to Sell/Auction to Offset Cost of New Scoreboard
6. Surplus Old Computers from City Hall
7. Main Street Parking
8. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Update
9. Approval of Special Event Alcoholic Beverage License – Fireman’s Fun Night on April 18, 2026
10. Authorization to Bid 2026 Street Resurfacing Project
11. Authorization to Begin Accepting 2026 Gravel Quotes
12. January Finance Report
13. Minutes
14. Bills
15. Reminder: Applications for Remaining Summer Recreational Positions – Due by March 3 at 5:00pm:
 - Public Works Laborer/Park Caretaker
 - Cemetery Caretaker
 - Assistant Part-Time Swimming Pool Manager
 - Swimming Pool Lifeguards
 - Baseball Groundskeepers
 - Baseball Gatekeepers
16. Reminder: Nominating Petitions for Municipal Election – Due by March 24 at 5:00pm
17. Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
18. Hire First Round of Applicants for Summer Employment
19. Adjournment

Broton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 6 of 78



**BROWN COUNTY COMMISSION AGENDA
GENERAL MEETING
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 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. Discuss Load Limits / Resolution #2026-14
5. Approve & Authorize Chairman to sign Annual Compliance Certification Report for Br. Co. Landfill
6. Approve & Authorize Chairman to sign Operational Report - Air Emission Inventory
7. Consent Calendar
 - a. Approval of the General Meeting Minutes of February 17, 2026
 - b. Claims/Payroll
 - c. HR Report
 - d. Rental Agreement for Richmond Lake House
 - e. Abatements
 - f. Zoning Ordinance – Set Hearing Date/Authorize Advertising
 - g. Final Plat
 - i. Keatts Tenth Subdivision to Richmond Lake
8. Other Business
9. Executive Session (if requested per SDCL 1-25-2)
10. 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](#)

Gov. Rhoden Signs Six Bills into Law

PIERRE, S.D. – Yesterday, Governor Larry Rhoden signed the following six bills into law:
[SB 54](#) revises the conditions for in-service distributions from the South Dakota deferred compensation plan;
[SB 91](#) clarifies the procedure for petitioning a board of county commissioners for a change to the comprehensive plan or zoning ordinances;
[HB 1020](#) increases the maximum amount allowable for the livestock ownership inspection fee and declares an emergency;
[HB 1030](#) amends provisions pertaining to the timing of municipal elections;
[HB 1034](#) increases fees for decals and license plates mailed to vehicle owners; and
[HB 1080](#) allows a business owner who is a veteran to display military specialty plates on a noncommercial vehicle registered to the veteran's business and limits personal liability to the business owner and veteran.

Governor Rhoden has signed 51 bills into law and vetoed one this legislative session.

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SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Governor-backed plan advances as Legislature continues to cull property tax reduction ideas

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER

The South Dakota Senate endorsed a proposal on Monday that would allow counties to implement a half-percent sales tax to reduce property taxes for homeowners.

The bill passed the chamber with a 20-14 vote and now goes to a House committee.

The plan is from Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden. It would let counties levy up to a half-percent sales tax and use the money to offset the county's portion of property taxes on owner-occupied homes, in the form of credits to property owners.

Counties are not currently allowed to impose a sales tax. They rely on property taxes, as do public schools. Cities receive revenue from property taxes and sales taxes. The state is reliant on sales taxes. In addition to the state's 4.2% sales tax, cities can charge up to 2%, and cities can charge another 1% on alcohol, restaurants, lodging and event tickets.

The bill says a decision by county commissioners to impose a sales tax could be petitioned to an election. If sales tax collections exceed what's needed to offset owner-occupied property taxes, the remaining money would be used to reduce property taxes for agricultural and commercial property.

Sen. Randy Deibert, R-Spearfish, told lawmakers the plan would benefit his constituents. The Black Hills generates some of the highest sales tax revenue in the state.

"We need many, many tools for tax relief, and this is just one of them," Deibert said.

Sen. Tamara Grove, R-Lower Brule, raised concerns about how new sales taxes, such as in the Black Hills or Sioux Falls area, would affect rural South Dakotans who regularly travel to larger cities for shopping and entertainment.

"My little communities, we're already struggling now because we don't have an option but to come to your big cities," Grove said. "We are going to be helping pay your taxes, and although I think we are very generous people in the middle of South Dakota, I don't know if we want to be that generous."

More action on other tax bills

In other action Monday, Senate Bill 199, which would divert 25% of annual state general fund revenue growth toward property tax relief, failed 16-17 in the Senate.

Two property tax-related bills were recommended for approval by the Senate Taxation Committee.

House Bill 1260 would allow more cities to create their own local property tax refund programs in addition to state programs. Sioux Falls offers up to \$500 refunds for city residents who participate in the state's assessment freeze program for the elderly and disabled. The city is able to do so because it operates under a home rule charter, which means it can exercise its own legislative power in issues that are not explicitly prohibited by the state constitution or law.

Senate Bill 196, also approved by the committee, would increase the income limit for multi-member households applying for the state's property tax assessment freeze program for elderly and disabled adults from \$65,000 to \$85,000.

The House Appropriations Committee rejected a bill that would have given South Dakota homeowners a property tax credit if they paid tuition at a private school.

The Senate State Affairs Committee rejected a resolution that would ask South Dakota voters to approve a constitutional amendment that would limit the assessed value of properties and a resolution that would

ask voters to increase the state sales tax for property tax relief.

Other proposals are still pending to raise the statewide sales tax rate and devote the proceeds to property tax reduction.

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

Legislation seeks to define South Dakota abortion ban's life-of-the-mother exception

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

PIERRE — An attempt to define what's allowed by the sole exception in South Dakota's abortion ban advanced 10-2 on Monday in a legislative committee.

South Dakota lawmakers adopted a trigger ban in 2005 that took effect in 2022, after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*. Abortions are prohibited in the state, the law says, "unless there is appropriate and reasonable medical judgment that performance of an abortion is necessary to preserve the life of the pregnant female."

Since the ban took effect, there's been debate about what the exception allows. Some abortion-rights advocates have said the wording of the exception could discourage doctors from administering necessary care for pregnancy complications.

Supporters of the new bill, including the Governor's Office, the South Dakota Catholic Conference, and South Dakota Right to Life, testified Monday that the bill is a response to "misinformation" about the state's abortion ban lacking clarity.

"We should still take that lie off the table and make it resoundingly clear that in the future, abortion does not include ectopic pregnancy management, miscarriage management and the like," Ian Fury said, testifying on behalf of Gov. Larry Rhoden's office.

The bill would spell out that several pregnancy-related treatments are not abortions, including treatment to resolve a miscarriage, treatment or removal of an ectopic pregnancy, removal of a deceased unborn child, and medical treatment that unintentionally results in the loss of the pregnancy.

The two votes against the bill came from the committee's two Democrats. Opponent testimony came from the South Dakota chapter of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and the South Dakota State Medical Association. They warned that defining what's not an abortion could unintentionally classify some other pregnancy-related procedures as abortion care, creating more confusion.

The American Civil Liberties Union of South Dakota also opposes the bill.

"In order for our laws to address all the possible circumstances that someone who is pregnant might face, we need to repeal the total abortion ban and make access to medical care the rule, not the exception," said Samantha Chapman, the organization's advocacy manager.

The South Dakota Legislature and former Gov. Kristi Noem adopted a law during the 2024 legislative session requiring the state Department of Health to create a video clarifying the state's abortion ban exception and how it should be applied. That video did little to quell concerns from abortion-rights advocates, who described it as ambiguous and non-legally binding.

Supporters of the new bill described it as putting the video's guidance into law.

Another pending bill this legislative session is aimed at stopping abortion pills and other abortion-related items from being advertised and distributed in the state. The bill would make it a felony to knowingly dispense, distribute, sell or advertise abortion pills and any other "article" or "instrument" intended to be used for an abortion. It would also allow the state attorney general to seek civil penalties of up to \$10,000 per violation, with payments deposited into the "life protection subfund," used to defend the state's anti-abortion laws.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 10 of 78

That bill has passed a committee and awaits action by the House of Representatives.

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.

COMMENTARY

What it takes to reclaim unclaimed property in South Dakota: a journey of tenacity

Proving they're owed money is no small task for people with limited time and means
by Mary Garrigan

The Unclaimed Property Division of the South Dakota Treasurer's Office wants to reunite more than \$1 billion with its rightful owners. A little over \$3,000 of it belonged to my daughter.

She knew that some of her old paychecks, refunds or other payments were floating around in the financial netherworld that is created when people, banks, government agencies and the U.S. Postal Service don't communicate well with each other. Friends and family had often told her that hers was among the thousands of names included in the Unclaimed Property Division's data banks.

The state treasurer likes to say that it only takes about 30 seconds to find out if your name is on the list. That's true, but proving that the money belongs to you? Well, that can be a much more time-consuming task, particularly if your life looks anything like my daughter's does.

As a woman of color, she was not born into white privilege or generational wealth. She wasn't even born into a stable, loving family. The first half of her childhood was spent in the foster care system. The second half we spent dealing with the results of that. She has made plenty of bad choices in her life, but she has also survived traumas too numerous to count and deficits that would defeat less resilient people.

For many reasons, much of her adult life has been spent moving from one bad housing situation to another. Safe, affordable housing has always been a challenge for her to find or to afford. If you are couch-surfing at a friend's house for a few weeks, subletting a spare bedroom for a few months, living in a domestic violence shelter, sleeping in your mother's basement, or renting a motel room from week to week, it is almost impossible, many years later, to provide the South Dakota state treasurer with physical proof that you were ever at that location. Americans have become an increasingly mobile population, but people who live at or near the poverty line are often forced to be incredibly mobile, changing housing quickly and traumatically. In these situations, remembering to have your mail forwarded is simply not top of mind.

Today, my daughter is a single mother of two school-aged children. Their housing situation is stable for now, but the ill-maintained, crime-riddled Rapid City apartment complex where they live is neither safe nor, at more than \$1,000 per month, especially affordable for her.

She works hard at a low-wage, physically demanding job. Her monthly income is just enough to make her ineligible for most government assistance, such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits or rent subsidies, but too little to not need the help. Any injury, illness, child care emergency or unexpected expense can create a financial crisis and chaos in her monthly budget. There is rarely enough money to cover all basic needs, and never enough left over to get the things that she and her kids want. I am often amazed at her resilience in the face of so many obstacles.

She is, in other words, someone for whom an extra \$3,000 in the bank is a really big deal. But her history with federal, state and tribal government programs has given her extremely low expectations when it comes to dealing with those agencies. Whatever the reasons she lost track of more than \$3,000, it is safe to say that she never expected to see it again.

And that's where I got involved. Between the two of us, my daughter and I contacted the owners of

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 11 of 78

closed restaurants; we visited with accountants for bankrupted businesses; we called, texted and emailed former landlords and friends about rent agreements. We sifted through old paperwork for possible address connections.

Most of our attempts at reconstructing a paperwork trail of very old address connections went nowhere. One of her recovered paychecks was 10 years old, after all. Eventually, the kind people at the Unclaimed Property Division must have decided that we had connected enough dots and they took pity on us. Her check for \$3,264.83 arrived last month.

It was not easy, and it took way more than 30 seconds of my time, but South Dakota Treasurer Josh Haeder's staff was helpful and understanding of the situation. They all deserve our thanks for their patience.

But hardworking South Dakotans like my daughter deserve their funds, too, so here's hoping that the state finds ways to make proving it easier for everyone — even those without a meddling mother like me with the time and tenacity to do it.

Mary Garrigan is a retired newspaper reporter and current member of the South Dakota chapter of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America. She lives in Rapid City, where she served on the Rapid City Public Library's board of directors from 2019 through 2024.

Interest rate amended from zero to 2% in bill allowing airport loans from housing fund

BY: MEGHAN O'BRIEN

PIERRE — The South Dakota Senate approved a bill Monday that would allow a state housing infrastructure fund to be used for large airport project loans, but at 2% interest instead of the previously proposed 0%.

The Senate also approved a bill that would loosen the terms of housing infrastructure loans from the fund. Both are now headed to a House committee.

The bills seek to alter the Housing Infrastructure Financing Program, which legislators and former Gov. Kristi Noem created in 2023. It was originally a \$200 million fund, made up of state and federal dollars.

The program can award funds to help cover up to a third of a housing developer's qualifying costs. That includes things like roads, water and sewer lines, and sidewalks. The fund has supported 85 projects across the state, helping create 7,421 single-family housing lots and 5,754 apartment or other multi-family units.

One-half of the fund was sent out as grants. The other half, for loans, had about \$65 million remaining as of late last year.

In October, Gov. Larry Rhoden suggested moving the \$65 million from the housing infrastructure fund to the state's Revolving Economic Development and Initiative Fund, or the REDI Fund, which offers low-interest loans to startup firms, businesses that are expanding or relocating, and local economic development corporations.

He also proposed using \$30 million of that transferred money to offer interest-free loans of up to \$15 million each for expansion projects at the Sioux Falls and Rapid City airports.

The state Senate backed an amended version of the legislation proposed by Sen. Casey Crabtree, R-Madison. His plan would allow the housing infrastructure fund to make loans for airports in areas with populations of more than 125,000. The loans would be limited to \$15 million per recipient at 2% interest over a 20-year payback period.

When it was approved by a Senate committee, the bill had a 0% interest rate. Crabtree said after negotiations with other lawmakers, the interest rate rose to 2% to mimic the interest rate in the state's housing fund.

"Two-percent money in today's market is pretty good," he said. "I asked some of my fellow businessmen or even a few of our ag folks if they're getting 2% loans to do any of their projects. 'Probably not' is going to be the answer."

Some lawmakers worried about moving funding from the housing bucket to finance airport infrastructure.

"We have a very serious situation regarding property tax," said Sen. Tamara Grove, R-Lower Brule. "I think that it would be better spent on South Dakotans, putting money in their hands, so they can keep their homes."

The state Senate approved the bill on a 22-11 vote.

The second bill expands the definition of "public infrastructure" for housing projects to include "necessary site work." The bill would increase the maximum amount of a loan from one-third to one-half of the project's size.

"These funds are being used," Crabtree said. "They're making a difference in all of your communities, across all of our districts."

The Senate passed the bill on a 20-13 vote.

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

South Dakota's Medical Marijuana Oversight Committee could be repealed by House-approved bill

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

PIERRE — The controversial committee that oversees South Dakota's medical marijuana program could come to an end.

A bill sponsored by Rep. Tim Goodwin, R-Rapid City, that passed the House 41-26 on Monday would repeal the sections of state law that established the Medical Marijuana Oversight Committee. The bill goes to a Senate panel next.

The medical marijuana program itself would continue, under the regulation of the state Department of Health.

Current law requires the Legislature's Executive Board to appoint an 11-member committee made up of two senators, two representatives, and seven non-legislative stakeholders from an array of backgrounds, including medicine, law enforcement, counseling, and at least one patient.

The panel must meet at least twice a year and make recommendations to the Legislature and the Department of Health.

Goodwin said the committee made sense when the state was setting up the program after voters approved it in 2020, but he said the committee has since become an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy. He said the Department of Health and the Legislature are equipped to manage the program going forward.

The legislation comes amid friction between the oversight committee and the medical marijuana industry. In November, the committee approved 11 motions, primarily calling for tighter regulations, without publishing them in advance or taking public comment on each motion.

The state has 18,168 medical marijuana patient cardholders.

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.

State House decides to retain automatic employer fees for governor-controlled economic fund

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

PIERRE — A proposal to change how the state collects the fee used to finance South Dakota's governor-controlled economic development fund failed on a 31-36 vote Monday in the state House of Representatives.

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 quick responses when economic opportunities arise. Republican former Gov. Kristi Noem incited bipartisan backlash with her uses of the fund, which included paying for a fireworks show at Mount Rushmore, a Rapid City-area shooting range that legislators refused to fund, a Sioux Falls rodeo, and a workforce recruitment campaign in which Noem starred.

South Dakota employers contribute fees to the fund when they remit payroll taxes for unemployment benefits. The bill would shift the "employer's investment in South Dakota's future fee" from automatic collection to a voluntary system by requiring employers to opt in. Employers who do not opt in would be treated as having opted out and would not have to pay the fee. It would also require the Department of Labor and Regulation to create an opt-in/opt-out form and post it online.

Rep. Karla Lems, R-Canton, told lawmakers that some small employers don't realize they're paying the fee with their unemployment remittances.

"It's about transparency and choice for our South Dakota employers," Lems said.

Rep. Eric Muckey, D-Sioux Falls, voted against Lems' legislation. He previously voted for a separate bill to put more guardrails on how the governor can award Future Fund dollars.

That bill, which passed the House and awaits action by a Senate committee, would clarify the definition of "purposes related to research and economic development," which is the only current limitation on Future Fund awards under state law. The new definition would include monetary awards for industry research and equipment; scholarships, apprenticeships and career training; recruitment of out-of-state companies and workers; and development of infrastructure and projects aimed at business retention and expansion.

Muckey said that bill will fix the poorly defined parameters that enabled abuses in prior years.

Opponents of Lems' bill also warned the change could reduce funding for economic development and various programs supported by the Future Fund, such as the Build Dakota Scholarship Fund. That was created for scholars entering high-demand programs at technical colleges in the state.

Earlier this legislative session, lawmakers rejected a bill that would have required Future Fund awards to be approved by the Board of Economic Development, instead of the governor alone.

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.

State House decides to retain automatic employer fees for governor-controlled economic fund

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

PIERRE — A proposal to change how the state collects the fee used to finance South Dakota's governor-controlled economic development fund failed on a 31-36 vote Monday in the state House of Representatives.

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 quick responses when economic opportunities arise. Republican former Gov. Kristi Noem incited bipartisan backlash with her uses of the fund, which included paying for a fireworks show at Mount Rushmore, a Rapid City-area shooting range that legislators refused to fund, a Sioux Falls rodeo, and a workforce recruitment campaign in which Noem starred.

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Amid polling low, Trump centers pre-State of the Union message on immigration

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump signed a proclamation Monday to honor families whose loved ones were killed by noncitizens, but spent most of the event complaining about his approval ratings and amplifying the falsehood that the 2020 presidential election was stolen from him.

While signed Monday, the proclamation designated the day earlier as one to honor such families, coinciding with the anniversary of the killing of Georgia nursing student Laken Riley on Feb. 22, 2024, by a Venezuelan immigrant. The man was found guilty and sentenced to life in prison for her murder.

The White House event came on the eve of Trump's State of the Union, where he is expected to not only address immigration policy — as the Department of Homeland Security has been shut down since Feb. 14 — but also last week's Supreme Court decision that found he exceeded his authority for tariffs.

Congress is gridlocked on approving annual funding for DHS after an immigration enforcement surge in Minneapolis resulted in the deaths of two U.S. citizens last month.

Trump criticized Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey on Monday for calling for an end to the immigration enforcement operation in his city after Renee Good was shot and killed by a federal immigration officer on Jan. 7.

"I watched these people saying, 'we want to protect murderers,'" Trump said, mischaracterizing state and local officials' positions against aggressive immigration enforcement. "I don't get it, there's something sick. They're sick. Can't have a country like that."

After the second killing, of Alex Pretti on Jan. 24, congressional Democrats withheld support for DHS funding unless constraints could be placed on immigration enforcement tactics.

The proclamation reaffirms the Trump administration's commitment to its mass deportation campaign, citing the need due to crime committed by noncitizens. Multiple studies have shown that immigrants in the U.S. commit crimes at a lower rate than the U.S. born population, according to the Migration Policy Institute, a think tank that studies migration.

Trump largely blamed former President Joe Biden's immigration policy for creating a crisis.

"They let in everybody," he said. "They didn't check anybody."

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 15 of 78

Questioning polls

Trump also expressed anger at various polls on his approval rating. Some, such as one by CNN, have shown Trump's disapproval at more than 60% with approval ratings below 40%, marking the worst numbers of his second term.

"Fake polls," Trump said, without offering evidence. "They were fake polls, because polls are tough. I saw one today that I'm at 40%. I'm not at 40%. I'm at much higher than that. The real polls say 'you kill everybody.' It wouldn't even be close. But you go through the fake polls, you go through the fake stories."

Trump also falsely stated that the 2020 presidential election was stolen from him, despite then-Attorney General William Barr stating the election was secure and there was no widespread voter fraud. Trump also lost dozens of court cases attempting to challenge the election results.

Trump goaded a mob of his supporters to attack the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, in an effort to stop Congress from certifying Biden's election.

"It was a rigged election by millions and millions of votes, a guy that never left his basement," Trump said of Biden, who won the election at the height of the coronavirus pandemic. "Covid was a little bit of a shield. We had a lot of things going on, but it was rigged by millions of votes. We did great in that election. If that election wasn't rigged, every single one of the people in this room right now would not be here. You'd be home with your son, daughter, family. We had a strong border."

Trump also falsely stated that he was a victim of voter fraud in the 2024 presidential election, but that he still won because "it was too big to rig."

"They cheated like hell," he said of Democrats.

He criticized mail-in ballots and said it benefited Democrats. Trump said because of that, a national voter ID law is needed, and he pushed for Congress to pass the SAVE Act, which requires proof of citizenship, among other things.

"They won't approve voter ID," he said of Democrats. "They won't approve proof of citizenship. They won't approve no mail-in ballots, even though they know it's crooked as hell."

Support for Trump immigration agenda

The families, referred to as angel families, have had various loved ones killed by a person who was not a U.S. citizen. In response, they have lobbied for immigration restrictions.

"I'm sick and tired of hearing these Democratic politicians stand up on these podiums and say how sorry they are for seeing these criminal illegal aliens being ripped apart from their families," said Jody Jones, whose brother was shot and killed by an immigrant. "What about us? What about the American family?"

Several other family members spoke, including Riley's mother, Allyson Phillips. One of the first bills that Trump signed in his second term was a mandatory detention bill for immigrants charged and arrested on petty crimes that was named for Riley.

Her murder set off a national debate about immigration during the 2024 presidential campaign because the man charged with her murder, came into the country in 2022, during Biden's term.

"Laken was the most responsible, hard-working, kind, selfless, beautiful Christian, and she wasn't somebody that put herself in bad positions," Phillips said.

Some of the family members who spoke also expressed their belief that the 2020 presidential election was stolen.

Marie Vega, whose son was shot and killed by an immigrant, said she was excited when the 2024 presidential election results came in. She said she fully supports the president and repeated an abbreviation for Trump's political movement known as Make America Great Again.

"Although you were cheated out of the second term — by the way, you won that election as well, and we know it — I knew the third term was going to be epic," she said. "And here we are. MAGA."

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

Mifepristone lawsuit could hinder telehealth abortion nationwide

BY: ELISHA BROWN

A hearing is set for Tuesday in a federal lawsuit led by Louisiana seeking to further restrict access to mifepristone by asking the courts to stop abortion pills from being mailed across the country.

The Department of Justice has argued plaintiffs lack standing to bring the case and asked the judge to halt legal proceedings until the Food and Drug Administration wraps up a review of the medication.

Hundreds of studies have concluded that the drug is safe and effective for abortions early in pregnancy, but a paper released by a conservative think tank last year compelled Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to order a reevaluation of mifepristone.

The state of Louisiana and a woman who said her ex-boyfriend made her take abortion medication sued the FDA in October and asked for a preliminary injunction against a 2023 rule that allows abortion pills to be prescribed through telehealth or mailed to patients, and pharmacies to apply for certification to dispense mifepristone.

Julie Kay, the founder and CEO of legal advocacy group Reproductive Futures, told States Newsroom the lawsuits in Louisiana and elsewhere are “thinly veiled attempts” to block access to telehealth medication abortion.

“We’ve seen that telemedicine abortion has become incredibly popular in all 50 states and particularly vital for women in under-resourced areas,” Kay said.

Missouri, Idaho, Kansas, Texas and Florida are also suing the FDA over mifepristone’s regulations and asking the courts to restrict or rescind approval of the drug altogether.

Nearly 30% of abortions provided in the first half of 2025 were through telehealth, according to the Society of Family Planning’s latest #WeCount report.

By June 2025, about 15,000 abortions per month were provided by physicians shielded by state laws, allowing them to prescribe abortion medication remotely to people living in states where abortion is banned or restricted, the report found. Shield laws protecting health care professionals from out-of-state investigations have held up in court so far, despite efforts from prosecutors in Texas and Louisiana.

Republican Louisiana Attorney General Liz Murrill vowed to defend anti-abortion laws in her state, which has had a ban with no exceptions for rape or incest since August 2022. She indicted a California doctor in January, accusing him of mailing abortion pills to Rosalie Markezich, a plaintiff in the lawsuit before federal courts.

Lawyers for Louisiana argue that the Biden administration’s decision to nix the in-person dispensation requirement for mifepristone is an affront to states that ban abortion.

Alliance Defending Freedom Senior Counsel Erik Baptist framed the lawsuit as an intimate partner violence issue, saying Markezich’s former boyfriend ordered abortion pills online from Dr. Rémy Coeytaux in California without any in-person interaction.

“So what this lawsuit would do is protect women across the country, in particular in Louisiana, from this mail-order abortion scheme that enables and emboldens people in coercive situations, such as men and abusers who can now obtain these drugs through remote means,” Baptist said.

Reproductive coercion — when an abusive partner controls a person’s bodily autonomy — has been brought up in recent legal challenges to abortion pill access by other GOP attorneys general in bids to restrict mifepristone, according to Rachel Rebouché, a University of Texas at Austin law professor who specializes in reproductive rights.

“There’s really not evidence that people are being coerced or forced into taking pills. It’s, of course, awful if someone has felt coerced, but I’m not sure it changes the argument of what the FDA should do as an agency committed to reviewing evidence,” Rebouché said.

For their part, DOJ attorneys have said an injunction would interfere with the FDA review and Risk Evaluation and Mitigation Strategies, setting off an avalanche of other lawsuits.

“Plaintiffs now threaten to short circuit the agency’s orderly review and study of the safety risks of mife-

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 17 of 78

pristone by asking this Court for an immediate stay of the 2023 REMS Modification approved three years ago," they wrote in a memo filed on Jan. 27 in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Louisiana.

Kay said she views the Trump administration's motion to pause the case as a legal delay tactic that is more about politics than science, because most Americans believe abortion should be accessible. A Pew Research Center poll from June 2025 showed 63% of respondents said abortion should be legal in all or most cases.

"This federal administration is very aware of that popularity, and I think they're saying they want to wait until after the midterms," Kay said.

Baptist said the FDA can conduct their review while the in-person requirement is restored.

Mifepristone's manufacturers intervened in the case earlier this month, Louisiana Illuminator reported. But unlike the federal government, GenBioPro and Danco, the companies behind the generic and name brand versions of the drug, asked the court to dismiss Louisiana's lawsuit entirely.

In a memo filed on Tuesday, Feb. 17, lawyers for the plaintiffs argued that the 2023 regulatory change "was intended to authorize a direct attack" on anti-abortion states.

The filing also rejects arguments that Louisiana and Markezich lack standing in the same way that a group of anti-abortion doctors did in a lawsuit against the FDA over mifepristone's previous regulations, according to a 2024 U.S. Supreme Court ruling. Justices rebuffed the Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine's requests but did not rule on the merits of the case.

Baptist also said judicial panels on the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Louisiana — a conservative-leaning court where this lawsuit could go next — have twice ruled that it was "arbitrary and capricious" for the FDA to allow abortion medication without an in-person doctor visit.

In Louisiana's corner are major anti-abortion players: Students for Life of America, 60 Republican members of Congress, 21 GOP attorneys general and the Ethics and Public Policy Center filed briefs backing the state.

Rebouché, the University of Texas professor, said there would be conflict between the federal courts if the district court judge rules in favor of Louisiana. There are nearly a dozen lawsuits over abortion pills seeking to restrict and deregulate mifepristone, States Newsroom reported.

Gutmacher Institute Principal Federal Policy Adviser Anna Bernstein said in a statement Friday that reinstating the in-person dispensation requirement for mifepristone would hinder abortion access.

"If access to telehealth and mifepristone by mail is curtailed, more patients would be pushed toward in-clinic care, straining provider capacity and increasing wait times in an already chaotic landscape," she said. "Given that travel is out of reach for many people, the result would likely be increased delays and more people unable to get the abortion care they need and deserve."

Kelcie Moseley-Morris contributed to this report.

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

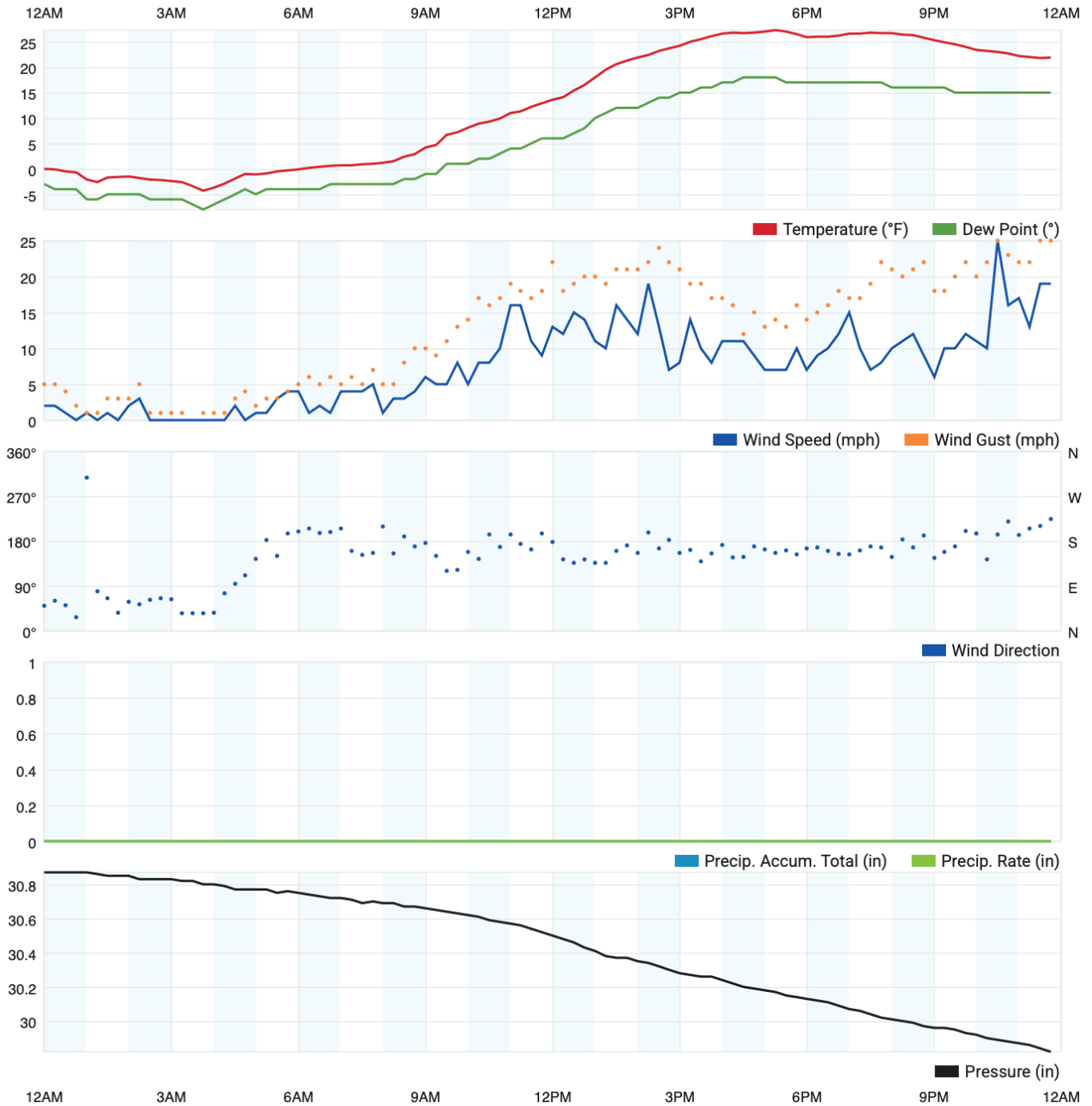
Elisha Brown is the Reproductive Rights Today newsletter author at States Newsroom. She is based in Durham, North Carolina, where she previously worked as a reporter covering reproductive rights, policy, and inequality for Facing South. Her work has appeared in The New York Times, The Daily Beast, The Atlantic, and Vox. She attended American University in Washington, D.C. and was raised in South Carolina.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 18 of 78

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

February 23, 2026



Broton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 19 of 78

Today



High: 37 °F

Patchy
Blowing Snow
and Breezy

Tonight



Low: 7 °F

Mostly Clear

Wednesday

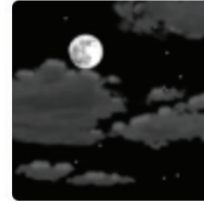


20% → 50%

High: 26 °F

Slight Chance
Snow then
Chance Snow

Wednesday
Night



Low: 17 °F

Partly Cloudy

Thursday



High: 45 °F

Sunny



Wednesday's Winter Weather Update

February 23, 2026
2:30 PM CST

"Banded" Snow Event Expected, High Variability in Snowfall Amounts Possible.

What We Know:

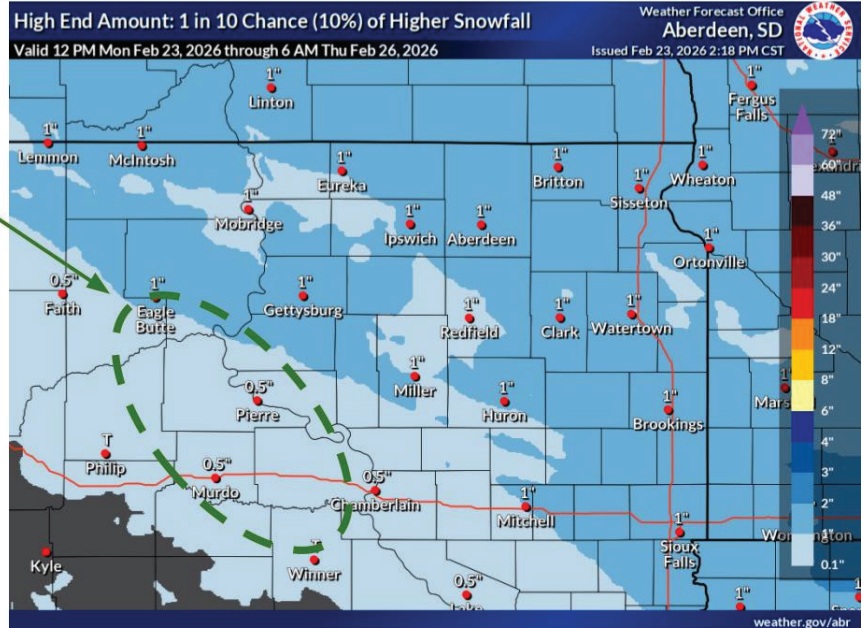
- Snow is expected on Wednesday.
- A transition to rain will likely occur in the afternoon over central South Dakota.

What We Still Don't Know:

- Where exactly the rain/snow line will be.
- Total snow amounts:
 - Map shows the "high end" potential for this system.

Actions You Can Take:

- Keep an eye on the forecast from a reliable/reputable source, especially if you have travel plans.
 - Go to weather.gov/abr for our latest forecast for your area.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Snow remains part of the forecast for Wednesday. However, we are still uncertain where the highest accumulations will be or where the rain/snow transition will set up (note: the map shows the current 'high end' potential for the system but this is still highly subject to change). Keep an eye on the forecast and stay flexible if you have travel plans.

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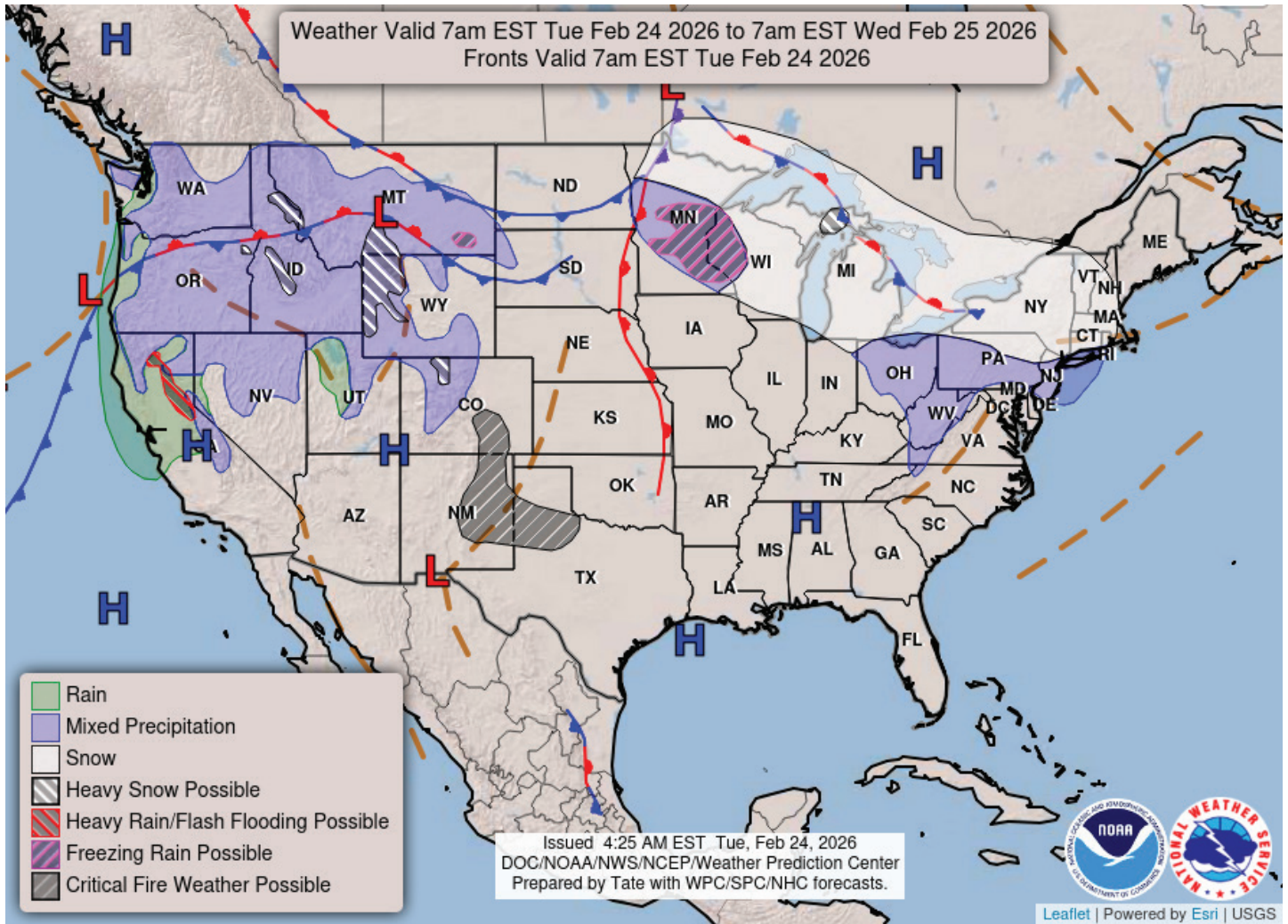
Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 20 of 78

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 27 °F at 5:13 PM
Low Temp: -4 °F at 3:44 AM
Wind: 25 mph at 10:32 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 62 in 1976
Record Low: -26 in 1940
Average High: 32
Average Low: 10
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.52
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.96
Average Precip to date: 1.07
Precip Year to Date: 0.96
Sunset Tonight: 6.11 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:17 am



Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 21 of 78

Today in Weather History

February 24, 2001: Heavy snow of 6 to 14 inches fell across central and northeast South Dakota and west-central Minnesota. Along with the heavy snow came blizzard conditions across northeastern South Dakota and west-central Minnesota during the morning hours of the 25th as northwest winds increased to 25 to 45 mph. As a result of the heavy snow and blizzard conditions, travel became difficult, if not impossible, resulting in some accidents and stranded motorists. Some snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Waubay, Onida, Murdo, and Artas, 7 inches at Aberdeen, Faulkton, Ipswich, Kennebec, and Clark, and 8 inches at Miller, Castlewood, 23 N Highmore, and Pierre. In addition, nine inches of snow fell at Browns Valley, Wheaton, Clinton, Graceville, Dumont, Roy Lake, Mellette, Blunt, and Watertown. Other snowfall amounts included 10 inches near Summit, 11 inches at Webster, Ortonville, and Artichoke Lake, and 14 inches at Milbank.

1969: The famous "100-Hour Storm" began in Boston, MA. Snow often fell between early on the 25th and noon on the 28th. The 26.3 inches at Logan Airport is the 2nd most significant snowstorm in Boston's history. In addition, 77 inches fell at Pinkham Notch Base Station in New Hampshire, bringing their February total to 130 inches. Their snow cover on the 27th was 164 inches. Mt. Washington, NH, received 172.8 inches of snow in the month.

1852 — The Susquehanna River ice bridge at Havre de Grace, MD, commenced to break up after forty days of use. A total of 1738 loaded freight cars were hauled along rails laid on the ice. (David Ludlum)

1936 — Vermont and New Hampshire received brown snow due to dust from storms in the Great Plains Region. A muddy rain fell across parts of northern New York State. (24th-25th) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 — A massive winter storm began to overspread the western U.S. In southern California, Big Bear was blanketed with 17 inches of snow, and Lake Hughes reported four inches of snow in just one hour. Snow pellets whitened coastal areas of Orange County and San Diego County, with three inches at Huntington Beach. The storm also produced thunderstorms with hail and waterspouts. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — A total of thirty-three cities in the eastern U.S. reported new record low temperatures for the date, and an Atlantic coast storm spread heavy snow from Georgia to southern New England. Snowfall totals in New Jersey ranged up to 24 inches in May County, with 19 inches reported at Atlantic City. Totals in North Carolina ranged up to 18 inches in Gates County, and winds along the coast of North Carolina gusted to 70 mph at Duck Pier. Strong winds gusting to 52 mph created blizzard conditions at Chatham MA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 — Strong northerly winds prevailed from Illinois to the Southern and Central Appalachians. Winds gusted to 68 mph at Sewickley Heights PA. High winds caused considerable blowing and drifting of snow across northern and central Indiana through the day. Wind gusts to 47 mph and 6 to 8 inches of snow created white-out conditions around South Bend IN. Traffic accidents resulted in two deaths and 130 injuries. Sixty-five persons were injured in one accident along Interstate 69 in Huntington County. Wind gusts to 60 mph and 4 to 8 inches of snow created blizzard conditions in eastern and northern Ohio. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2001: Over a dozen tornadoes spawned in central and eastern Arkansas. The strongest tornado (F3) was in Desha County, with parts of a farm shop found six miles away from where it was blown apart. An 18-month-old was killed in Fulton County by an F2 tornado.

2004 — Heavy snows blanket wide areas of northern New Mexico, closing schools and highways. The mountains east of Santa Fe receive 20 inches. Sandia Park, east of Albuquerque, measures 11 inches. 8 inches falls at Los Alamos.

2007: An EF3 tornado struck Dumas, Arkansas, injuring 28. Seven other tornadoes hit southeast Arkansas on this day, but no fatalities.

2016: A strong area of low pressure along with a cold front produced a severe weather outbreak from North Carolina to Pennsylvania. Not one but two rare February tornadoes occurred in central Virginia. The strongest tornado caused EF3 damage in Appomattox County. This is the first EF3 tornado ever in Appomattox County.

Learning Contentment

By resting in God's faithfulness, we can be content—no matter what we face.

Philippians 4:10-13: 10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity.

11 Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.

12 I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.

13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

We usually associate contentment with good times—and if something goes wrong, our satisfaction vanishes. But that's not what today's passage is talking about. Paul learned to be content regardless of his conditions. This is wonderful news for us because it means we aren't at the mercy of our circumstances. We, too, can learn to be content no matter what. We should remember:

Paul was content because he rested in God's faithfulness. He knew the Lord was in full control and promised to work all things for His children's good (Psalm 103:19; Romans 8:28). Paul had come to recognize that there was always security in God's sovereign, loving hand.

His contentment also flowed from a focus on Christ. Though writing from prison, Paul wasn't wallowing in self-pity. Throughout the letter to the Philippians, he talked about Jesus. In fact, his greatest pursuit in life was to know Christ, His power, and the divine joy that came by sharing in His sufferings (Philippians 3:10). Every situation was a chance to know his Savior more intimately.

Circumstances can't produce lasting contentment, but it can be found in Jesus. Surrendering our life to Him may not change the situation, but it will change us. Then, no matter what difficulties arise, we can be truly content.

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

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 23 of 78

The Groton Independent

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Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 24 of 78

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.23.26

11 18 21 25 55 1

TOP PRIZE:
\$1,000,000/year

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 43 Mins 42 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.20.26

15 40 48 58 63 2

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$438,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 28 Mins 42 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.23.26

2 13 43 46 49 8

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$16,270,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 43 Mins 42 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.20.26

10 24 30 36 42 11

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 58 Mins 42 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.21.26

8 12 22 25 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 58 Mins 43 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.23.26

15 20 27 31 58 14

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 27 Mins 42 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.23.26

5 11 23 29 47 6

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$218,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 27 Mins 42 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Baltic 50, Tri-Valley 39
Beresford 63, Wagner 48
Centerville 62, Mitchell Christian 27
Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 95, Lakota Tech 32
Dell Rapids 74, Garretson 61
Faulkton 67, Herried-Selby 51
Flandreau 52, Deubrook 51
Hamlin 77, Redfield 34
Hill City 76, Custer 46
Ipswich 58, Langford 49
Kimball-White Lake 50, Colome 14
Madison 58, Milbank 44
Mahpiya Lúta Red Cloud 62, St. Francis Indian 56
McCook Central-Montrose 62, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 43
Parkston 65, Corsica/Stickney 28
St Thomas More 65, Sturgis Brown High School 57
Stanley County 53, Lyman 43
Todd County 75, Platte-Geddes 63
Vermillion 96, Canton 40
Wall 92, Kadoka 69
Warner 53, Aberdeen Roncalli 40
West Central 74, Elk Point-Jefferson 35
Winner 55, Crow Creek Tribal School 44

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

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

SDHSAA Playoffs=
Regional First Round=
Class B=
Alcester-Hudson 50, Viborg-Hurley 27
Edgemont 51, Oelrichs 41
Faith 79, Takini 11
Flandreau Indian 43, Canistota 42
Howard 43, Sioux Falls Lutheran 28
Iroquois-Lake Preston 46, James Valley Christian School 35
Leola-Frederick High School 54, Aberdeen Christian 20
McLaughlin 49, Bison 40
New Underwood 56, Crazy Horse 14
Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 54, Estelline-Hendricks 49
Sully Buttes 77, Tiospaye Topa 13
Sunshine Bible Academy 60, Wakpala 49
Tiospa Zina 56, Wilmot 38

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

The Latest: Ukraine marks 4 years since Russia's full-scale invasion

By The Associated Press undefined

It has been exactly four years since Russia launched its large-scale invasion of Ukraine, attacking the country from multiple directions. On Feb. 24, 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced a "special operation," a campaign that many expected to be brief and to end with Kyiv's capitulation.

Instead, European officials are traveling to the Ukrainian capital on Tuesday to show their support for President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the Ukrainian people, who are fighting on.

While Putin did not get the quick and overwhelming victory he had hoped for, the cost has been high on both sides. And as Europe's biggest conflict enters its fifth year, there is no sign of any peace deal despite U.S. diplomatic efforts over the past year.

Here's the latest:

European officials visit Kyiv in a show of solidarity

More than a dozen senior European officials arrived in Kyiv on Tuesday in a show of support. But they also come without two new deals they had hoped to present to Kyiv — a new package of sanctions on Russia and a 90 billion euro loan to fund Ukraine's defense for the next two years.

Hungary, seen as most pro-Russian country in the European Union, blocked them both. It's a sign of how difficult it has been sometimes to maintain solidarity as the war drags on.

'We have defended our independence'

Zelenskyy said his country has withstood the onslaught by Russia's bigger and better equipped army, which over the past year of fighting captured just 0.79% of Ukraine's territory, according to the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank.

"Looking back at the beginning of the invasion and reflecting on today, we have every right to say: we have defended our independence, we have not lost our statehood; Putin has not achieved his goals," Zelenskyy said on social media.

"He has not broken Ukrainians; he has not won this war," Zelenskyy said.

France's Macron says the war exposes the 'fragility' of imperialism

French President Emmanuel Macron said in a post on the social platform X that "this war is a triple failure for Russia: military, economic, and strategic."

"It has strengthened NATO — the very expansion Russia sought to prevent — galvanized Europeans it hoped to weaken, and laid bare the fragility of an imperialism from another age," Macron said.

Macron also urged the EU to issue the 90 billion euro (\$106 billion) loan to Ukraine, a plan that requires the unanimity of the 27 member states.

"There is no justification for calling this into question. We must now deliver on it," he wrote.

Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer were to join a meeting of Western leaders supporting Ukraine, the so-called Coalition of the Willing, via videoconference on Tuesday.

A 'revolution' in warfare

Britain's Armed Forces Minister Al Carns says the war has been "the most defining conflict" in decades due to the way it has revolutionized warfare and upended Europe's security.

"I would never have guessed in my lifetime I would see North Korean troops fighting on the border of Europe," Carns told reporters on Monday. "Which I think is a significant warning signal to all of us."

Carns said the conflict had brought a "revolution in military affairs," especially through the rapid development of drone technology. Drones now account for the vast majority of battlefield casualties in the war.

Western officials say that in the last three months, Russia has lost more casualties than the number of troops it recruits, a potential tipping point.

"The cost on Russia has been almost unimaginable," Carns said, calling a Western estimate of 1.25 million Russian personnel killed and wounded since 2022 likely an underestimate.

Ukraine's European allies see Ukraine's defense as a larger fight for freedom

European leaders visiting Kyiv hailed the Ukrainian struggle.

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said the Ukrainians are "standing up for the freedom of us all. Their courage and strength shine in the fight against Putin's darkness. And they give hope to those of us

who want a Europe at peace.”

Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson, said: “We don’t yet know when the war will end, but how it ends will affect Sweden’s security for at least a generation to come. And that’s why our continued support is so crucial.”

Poland’s Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski vowed from Kyiv that his country would remain “steadfast in its support for the Ukrainian people and in its pursuit of a just and lasting peace.”

“A victory parade was supposed to take place here after a few days,” Sikorski said in an address from Kyiv referring to Russia’s initial plans of a quick takeover of Ukraine. “Instead, four years later, Kyiv is still defending itself.”

NATO vows its support to ensure a lasting peace

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte said Ukraine’s allies will continue to militarily support the war-ravaged nation to end the war and ensure a lasting peace.

“Ukraine needs ammunition today and every day, until the bloodshed stops. Ukraine continues to blunt Russia’s aggression, and despite Putin’s posturing, Russia has failed to meet their ambitions on the battlefield,” he said during a ceremony at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

“There cannot be true peace in Europe without real peace in Ukraine. When the fighting eventually stops, the peace has to hold with strong Ukrainian forces ready to deter and defend and effective security guarantees from Ukraine’s partners: Europe, Canada, and the United States.”

China says it hopes for peace in Ukraine

A Chinese government spokesperson noted that the door to dialogue had recently opened in what she called the Ukraine crisis, avoiding describing the conflict as a war.

“We hope all parties will seize the opportunity to reach a comprehensive, lasting and binding peace agreement,” Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said when asked about the fourth anniversary of the outbreak of the war.

China has been accused of not doing enough to pressure Russia to end the fighting. It has maintained ties and trade with Russia, relieving some of the pressure of economic sanctions. China says its position is impartial and objective.

“China never fans the flames or seeks to profit from the situation, and of course we do not accept any attempts to shift blame onto China,” Mao said.

UN estimates the cost of Ukraine’s recovery

Matthias Schmale, the U.N. humanitarian coordinator in Ukraine, noted that the costs for the country’s recovery from the war are now estimated at \$590 billion over a decade — three times Ukraine’s GDP last year.

Schmale said by video link to a U.N. briefing in Geneva on Tuesday that over 10.8 million people, roughly a quarter of Ukraine’s population, remain in need of humanitarian assistance – including up to 1 million in Russian-occupied territory.

He also noted that that Ukraine is one of the world’s most-mined countries, with almost a quarter of its territory “potentially contaminated.”

France ups the ante in the spat with US ambassador, says ministers will no longer meet him

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — France’s spat with the U.S. ambassador to Paris took another turn Tuesday with the French foreign minister saying the top U.S. diplomat in France must respond to a summons and won’t have access to French government officials until he complies.

French authorities had summoned Ambassador Charles Kushner — the father of U.S. President Donald Trump’s son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner — for a meeting on Monday evening over comments from the Trump administration that France objected to. French diplomats said Kushner did not show up.

Speaking Tuesday, French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot described the failure to attend the meeting

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 28 of 78

as "a surprise" that flew in the face of diplomatic protocol and will dent Charles Kushner's ability to serve as an ambassador.

"It will, naturally, affect his capacity to exercise his mission in our country," Barrot said, speaking to public broadcaster France Info.

He said that Kushner "is bringing difficulties on himself. Because for an ambassador to be able to do his job he needs access to members of the government. That's the basics."

"When these explanations have taken place, then the U.S. ambassador in France will, naturally, regain access to members of the French government," the minister said.

The U.S. Embassy did not respond to an Associated Press request for comment on Monday and a follow-up request on Tuesday morning also got no immediate reply.

France's foreign ministry had summoned Kushner over Trump administration tweets relating to the beating death in France of a far-right activist, Quentin Deranque. The 23-year-old student, described as a fervent nationalist, was beaten by a group of people earlier this month in the city of Lyon, in fighting that erupted between far-left and far-right activists. He later died of brain injuries.

In a post last week on X, the State Department's Counterterrorism Bureau said "violent radical leftism is on the rise and its role in Quentin Deranque's death demonstrates the threat it poses to public safety."

The U.S. Embassy in Paris posted the same statement, in French.

Barrot said France needs to discuss the comments with Kushner.

"We must have an explanation with him," Barrot said. "We don't accept that foreign countries can come and interfere, invite themselves, into the national political debate."

Zelenskyy says Putin has 'not broken' Ukrainians as country marks 4 years of Russia's all-out war

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — More than a dozen senior European officials were in the Ukrainian capital on Tuesday in a show of support on the fourth anniversary of Russia's all-out invasion of Ukraine — a grim milestone in a war that has killed tens of thousands of people and put European leaders on edge about the scale of Moscow's ambitions on the continent.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was defiant despite the devastating toll — insisting that Russia has not "broken Ukrainians" nor triumphed in the war.

Zelenskyy said his country has withstood the onslaught by Russia's bigger and better equipped army, which over the past year of fighting captured just 0.79% of Ukraine's territory, according to the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank.

"Looking back at the beginning of the invasion and reflecting on today, we have every right to say: we have defended our independence, we have not lost our statehood," Zelenskyy said on social media, adding that Russian President Vladimir Putin has "not achieved his goals."

"He has not broken Ukrainians; he has not won this war," Zelenskyy said.

Talks are no closer to peace

However, as the corrosive war of attrition enters its fifth year, a U.S.-led diplomatic push to end Europe's biggest armed conflict since World War II appears no closer to finding compromises that might make a peace deal possible.

Negotiations are stuck on what happens to the Donbas, eastern Ukraine's industrial heartland which Russian forces mostly occupy but have failed to seize completely, and the terms of a postwar security arrangement that Kyiv is demanding to deter any future Russian invasion.

The number of soldiers killed, injured or missing on both sides could reach 2 million by spring, with Russia sustaining the largest number of troop deaths for any major power in any conflict since World War II, a report last month from the Center for Strategic and International Studies estimated.

European leaders see their countries' own security at stake in Ukraine amid concerns about Putin's wider goals and has demanded its leaders be consulted in the ongoing U.S.-brokered talks.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 29 of 78

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz wrote on X that “for four years, every day and every night has been a nightmare for the Ukrainians — and not just for them, but for us all. Because war is back in Europe.”

“We will only end it by being strong together, because the fate of Ukraine is our fate,” he added.

Putin’s dangerous gamble

Putin believes that time is on the side of his bigger army, Western officials and analysts say — and that Western support will trail off and that Ukraine’s military resistance will eventually crumble.

But French President Emmanuel Macron described the war was “a triple failure for Russia: military, economic, and strategic.”

The war “has strengthened NATO—the very expansion Russia sought to prevent—galvanized Europeans it hoped to weaken, and laid bare the fragility of an imperialism from another age,” Macron said on X.

The war has brought widespread hardship for Ukrainian civilians. Russia’s aerial attacks have devastated families and denied civilians power and running water.

It has drawn in countries far beyond Ukraine, giving the conflict a global dimension, and threatened to worsen shortages, hunger and political instability in developing countries.

While NATO countries have come to Ukraine’s aid, Russia has been helped by North Korea, which has sent thousands of troops and artillery shells; Iran, which has provided drone technology; and China, which the United States and analysts say has provided machine tools and chips.

A war with global dimensions

Among the European officials visiting Kyiv on Tuesday were the President of the European Council, Antonio Costa, the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen and Finnish President Alexander Stubb, as well as seven prime ministers and four foreign ministers.

The only American listed among the official guests in Kyiv ceremonies was Lt. Gen. Curtis Buzzard, a U.S. officer who represents NATO in Ukraine.

With Ukraine unable to sustain its fight against Russia without foreign help, NATO countries are now providing military help, purchasing American weapons after the Trump administration broke with earlier Washington policy and stopped giving arms to Kyiv.

The European Union has also sent financial aid, but has sometimes met with reluctance from members Hungary and Slovakia.

British Armed Forces Minister Al Carns said Russia’s war on Ukraine was “the most defining conflict” in decades.

“I don’t think anyone of us would be able to guess (when the war started) the scale and size of what has taken place,” he said.

The war has brought a “revolution in military affairs,” especially through the rapid development of drone technology by both sides, according to Carns. Drones now account for the vast majority of battlefield casualties, he said.

The United Kingdom on Tuesday announced a new package of military and humanitarian support for Ukraine, including sending teams of British military medics conducting medical mentoring inside Ukraine, drawing on battlefield experience from Iraq and Afghanistan.

The cost of rebuilding war-battered Ukraine would amount to almost \$588 billion over the next decade, according to World Bank, the European Commission, the United Nations and the Ukrainian government.

That is nearly three times the estimated nominal GDP of Ukraine for last year, they said in a report Monday.

Mexican cartel clashes fuel worries in lead up to FIFA World Cup

By MEGAN JANETSKY Associated Press

TAPALPA, Mexico (AP) — Maria Dolores Aguirre’s family corner store has lived off tourism that has flowed into her charming cobblestoned town of Tapalpa, tucked away in the mountains of Jalisco state.

That was until gunshots erupted and helicopters flew overhead as the Mexican army killed the country’s most powerful drug lord, just a few kilometers (miles) from her home.

Now, the 50-year-old Aguirre worries that the bloodshed will deal a blow to her livelihood and change

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 30 of 78

towns like hers. It is something many in the western Mexican state are grappling with, from its Pacific Ocean beaches to its capital Guadalajara that will host matches in June for the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

"It's going to affect us. It's collateral damage," Aguirre said. "The government is going to have to have a lot of security. ... The entire world just saw what happened and, of course, people are going to think twice about coming."

Fighting between the Jalisco New Generation Cartel and Mexican security forces raged on in a number of states Monday, fueling fears among many like Aguirre that there will be more violence to come.

More than 70 people died in the attempt to capture Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes and its aftermath, authorities said Monday. Known as "El Mencho," he was the notorious leader of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, one of the fastest-growing criminal networks in Mexico, known for trafficking fentanyl, methamphetamine and cocaine to the United States and staging brazen attacks against Mexican government officials.

The White House confirmed that the U.S. provided intelligence support to the operation to capture the cartel leader and applauded Mexico's army for taking down a man who was one of the most wanted criminals in both countries. The U.S. State Department had offered a reward of up to \$15 million for information leading to the arrest of "El Mencho."

The death of Oseguera Cervantes came as Mexico's government has stepped up its offensive against cartels in an effort to meet demands by U.S. President Donald Trump to crack down on criminal groups, threatening to impose more tariffs or take unilateral military action if the country does not show results.

Mexico hoped the death of one of the world's biggest fentanyl traffickers would ease that pressure, but many people were anxious as they waited to see the powerful cartel's reaction.

Oseguera Cervantes died after a shootout with the Mexican military on Sunday. Mexican Defense Secretary Gen. Ricardo Trevilla said Monday that authorities had tracked one of his romantic partners to his hideout in Tapalpa. The cartel leader and two bodyguards fled into a wooded area where they were seriously wounded in a firefight. They were taken into custody and died on the way to Mexico City, Trevilla said.

In the aftermath, a sense of unease simmered in tourist towns.

The Pacific Ocean resort city of Puerto Vallarta also was hard hit by cartel reprisals, frightening tourists.

Steve Perkins, 57, was visiting Puerto Vallarta with his wife Gayle and some friends. They were on their hotel room's terrace when explosions and black smoke started appearing around the city Sunday morning.

Their return to Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, was delayed when their flight was canceled Monday and they were rebooked for March 1.

Perkins and his wife have been taking annual trips to Puerto Vallarta since 2012 and have always felt safe, until now. He said they don't plan on returning to Mexico.

"There's a lot of Americans trapped here," Perkins said.

Back in Tapalpa, Aguirre worked next to her son from the small neighborhood shop her family has owned for 50 years. The 15-year-old's classes were canceled due to the violence.

Aguirre said it was unclear who exactly was in control of the area surrounding her: the military or the cartel. The other question on her mind was if this was just a one-off, or if there was more violence to come.

"We don't know if these people (cartel leaders) are permanently here or not," she said. "If they really did kill this leader, it could be that they fight between each other to win control or see who will lead it."

World shares are mixed after heavy selling of potential AI losers hits Wall Street

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

BANGKOK (AP) — World shares were mixed Tuesday after U.S. stocks slumped on heavy selling of shares in companies that could be losers in the artificial-intelligence boom.

A report by Citrini Research, a New York-based financial services company, that outlined a future scenario in which AI's dominance caused the "human-centric consumer economy," to wither away with dire consequences for employment, was the latest hit to confidence for companies that might be displaced by fast expanding use of the technology.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 31 of 78

"Policy response has always lagged economic reality, but lack of a comprehensive plan is now threatening to accelerate a deflationary spiral," the report says.

Still, Tuesday brought gains for computer-chip makers and other companies that profit from development of AI.

In early European trading, Germany's DAX edged 0.2% lower to 24,952.11 and in Paris the CAC 40 was down less than 0.1% at 8,491.94. Britain's FTSE 100 also lost less than 0.1%, to 10,673.99.

The futures for the S&P 500 and Dow Jones Industrial Average were up less than 0.1%.

In Asian trading, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 index surged 0.9% to 57,321.09. Chip testing equipment maker Advantest rose 4.5%, while machinery maker Disco Corp. added 2.1%.

Markets in mainland China advanced as they reopened following a weeklong holiday, but Hong Kong's Hang Seng fell as traders locked in profits from recent gains, slipping 1.8% to 26,590.32.

The Shanghai Composite index rose 0.9% to 4,117.41.

In South Korea, the Kospi picked up 2.1% to 5,969.64, setting fresh records on gains for memory chip-maker Samsung Electronics, which jumped 3.6%. SK Hynix, another chipmaker, closed 5.7% higher.

In Australia, the S&P/ASX 200 edged less than 0.1% lower, ending at 9,022.30, while Taiwan's Taiex gained 2.8%.

India's Sensex fell 1.3%.

Tuesday will bring President Donald Trump's State of the Union address.

On Monday, U.S. stocks slumped after Trump ramped up his newest tariffs.

The S&P 500 fell 1% to 6,837.75 after the president said he would place temporary 15% tariffs on other countries following a Supreme Court ruling that struck down his sweeping "reciprocal" taxes on imports from around the world.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 1.7% to 48,804.06. The Nasdaq composite sank 1.1% to 22,627.27.

Trump's quick shift toward more aggressive tariffs shows how much uncertainty still hangs over the global economy, even after the Supreme Court said the president lacked the legal authority to institute his sweeping "reciprocal" tariffs.

Investors may be sensing it will take a long time, as well as more court battles, before more clarity comes about how global trade will look.

On Wall Street, big losses hit companies under suspicion of getting undercut by AI-powered rivals.

CrowdStrike fell 9.8% to widen its loss for the young year so far to 25.3%. A new tool from Anthropic that scans codebases for security vulnerabilities and suggests targeted software patches for human review has been hitting stocks across the cybersecurity industry.

AppLovin sank 9.1% and took its loss for the year to date to 43.5%. It's among the software companies hurt by worries that AI competition will steal customers and fundamentally reset their industries.

A profit report from Nvidia is due on Wednesday. Worries are rising that companies like Alphabet and Amazon may be spending so much on Nvidia's chips that they'll never be able to recoup their investments through higher productivity and future profits.

In other dealings early Tuesday, U.S. benchmark crude oil gained 31 cents to \$66.62 per barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, was up 30 cents at \$71.41 per barrel.

Crude prices have been gaining on worries that President Donald Trump might take military action against Iran.

The U.S. dollar rose to 155.86 Japanese yen from 154.66 yen. The euro fell to \$1.1783 from \$1.1786.

The price of bitcoin fell 4.3% to \$63,180.

Former UK ambassador Mandelson released on bail after arrest in Epstein probe

By PAN PYLAS and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Police in Britain said Peter Mandelson, the former U.K. ambassador to the United States,

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 32 of 78

has been released on bail after he was arrested in a misconduct probe stemming from his ties to the late Jeffrey Epstein. It came days after a friendship with Epstein landed the former Prince Andrew in police custody.

A Metropolitan Police spokesperson said in a statement issued just after 2 a.m. Tuesday: "A 72-year-old man arrested on suspicion of misconduct in public office has been released on bail pending further investigation.

The man was not named, in keeping with British police practice, but the suspect in the case previously was identified as the former diplomat, who is 72. Mandelson was filmed being led from his London home to a car by plainclothes officers on Monday afternoon.

Both Mandelson and Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, the former Prince Andrew, are suspected of improperly passing U.K. government information to the disgraced U.S. financier, and the high-profile British arrests are some of the most dramatic fallout from the trove of more than 3 million pages of Epstein-related documents released last month by the U.S. Justice Department.

Claims of leaked government information

Police are investigating Mandelson over claims he passed sensitive government information to Epstein a decade and a half ago. He does not face allegations of sexual misconduct.

His arrest came four days after Mountbatten-Windsor was arrested in a separate case on suspicion of a similar offense related to his friendship with Epstein. He was released after 11 hours in custody while the police investigation continues.

Mandelson served in senior government roles under previous Labour governments and was U.K. ambassador to Washington until Prime Minister Keir Starmer fired him in September after emails were published showing that he maintained a friendship with Epstein after the financier's 2008 conviction for sex offenses involving a minor.

The files released in January contained more explosive revelations about Mandelson's ties to Epstein, whom he once called "my best pal."

Messages suggest that Mandelson passed on sensitive — and potentially market-moving — government information to Epstein in 2009, when Mandelson was a senior minister in the British government. That includes an internal government report discussing ways the U.K. could raise money after the 2008 global financial crisis, including by selling off government assets. Mandelson also appears to have told Epstein he would lobby other members of the government to reduce a tax on bankers' bonuses.

British police launched a criminal probe earlier this month and searched Mandelson's two houses in London and western England.

The decision to appoint Mandelson nearly cost Starmer his job earlier this month, as questions swirled around his judgment about someone who has flirted with controversy during a decades-long political career.

Though he acknowledged he made a mistake and apologized to victims of Epstein, Starmer's position remains precarious. His future may rest on the release of files connected to Mandelson's appointment. The government has pledged to begin releasing those documents in early March, though the timeline may be complicated by his arrest.

Mandelson a contentious figure

Mandelson has been a major, if contentious, figure in the center-left Labour Party for decades. He is a skilled — critics say ruthless — political operator whose mastery of political intrigue earned him the nickname "Prince of Darkness."

The grandson of former Labour Cabinet minister Herbert Morrison, he was an architect of the party's return to power in 1997 as centrist, modernizing "New Labour" under Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Mandelson served in senior government posts under Blair between 1997 and 2001, and under Prime Minister Gordon Brown from 2008 to 2010. In between, he was the European Union's trade commissioner. Brown has been particularly angered by the revelations and has been helping police with their inquiries.

Mandelson twice had to resign from government during the Blair administration over allegations of financial or ethical impropriety, acknowledging mistakes but denying wrongdoing.

He later returned to government and was back on the political front line when Starmer named him

ambassador to Washington at the start of U.S. President Donald Trump's second term. Mandelson's trade expertise and comfort around the ultra-rich were considered major assets. He helped secure a trade deal in May that spared Britain some of the tariffs Trump has imposed on countries around the world.

The status of the deal is now up in the air after Trump announced a new set of global tariffs in the wake of a U.S. Supreme Court decision quashing his previous import tax order.

Earlier this month Mandelson resigned from the House of Lords, Parliament's upper chamber, to which he was appointed for life in 2008. But he still has the title — Lord Mandelson — that went with it.

Edward Hoagland, nature and travel writer with a personal and poetic style, dies at 93

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Edward Hoagland, a prize-winning nature and travel writer who overcame badly impaired eyesight to explore the world and hone a conversational and digressive style that mirrored the spontaneous paths of his journeys, has died at age 93.

Hoagland's daughter, Molly Magid Hoagland, said that he died Feb. 17 at an assisted living facility in Manhattan. She did not give a cause of death.

With influences ranging from John Muir to Michel de Montaigne, Hoagland published dozens of books and magazine pieces and took in the most remote settings and extreme climates. Reading him was like being invited to come along. He might begin an essay with some thoughts on the personality of bears — "their piggishness and sleepiness and unsociability with each other" — move on to the daily routines of game wardens, detour through the history of animal tracking devices and come back around to bears' nesting habits.

"We watched a female preparing a small basket-shaped sanctum under the upturned roots of a white pine, from which she sneaked, like a hurrying, portly child, cycling downwind to identify us before clearing out," he wrote in "Bears, Bears, Bears," one of his more popular pieces.

He hiked the southern edge of Yellowstone National Park, watched penguins fight for space near the Antarctic Peninsula and traced the evolution of hippies in the rural Vermont community where he spent half the year. His most acclaimed essay was likely "The Courage of Turtles," in which he found in his subjects a multidimensional system of communications and rituals: "Turtles cough, burp, whistle, grunt, and hiss, and produce social judgments, They put their heads together amicably enough, but then one drives the other back with the suddenness of two dogs who have been conversing in tones too low for an onlooker to hear."

His honors included National Book Award and National Book Critics Circle nominations, a Lannan Literary Award and membership in the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Open about his physical and other personal troubles, he was admired by Philip Roth, Joyce Carol Oates and Annie Proulx among others and was praised at length by Francine Prose in a 2017 essay in *The New York Review of Books*.

"Among the striking aspects of Hoagland's work," Prose wrote, "have been the honesty and fearlessness with which he has discussed his own heartbreaks, mistakes, and failures, the clarity with which he has argued his nuanced, complex opinions, and the apparent effortless with which he has portrayed creatures and habitats for which a less observant writer or less gifted stylist might have trouble finding language.

A world viewed through hazy eyes

Hoagland's renown as an observer was notable in part because for much of his adult life he had a hazy sense of what he was seeing. Damaged cataracts left him with poor vision until his sight was corrected, at least temporarily, by eye surgery in his 50s.

"When the doctor took off my bandage there was no 'Eureka, I can see,' because I'd never been stone-blind," he wrote in the memoir "Compass Points," published in 2001. "Instead, just an abrupt, astounding discovery of how bright light actually is. Not at first the beauty of the world, but the brightness of the

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 34 of 78

world, as my eye squinted and winced, shutting out most of the sights now hammering at the door."

His work appeared in such publications as the Village Voice and The New York Times, and he contributed the introduction to a Library of America edition of Henry David Thoreau's "Walden." His own books included the essay collections "Walking the Dead Diamond River" and "Heart's Desire," the novels "Cat Man" and "The Peacock's Tail" and the travel work "African Calliope: A Journey to the Sudan." Despite a stutter that left him terrified of social interactions, he taught at several schools and was on the faculty of Bennington College from 1963 to 2005.

He was married twice, including for 25 years to Commentary magazine editor Marion Magid, with whom he had daughter Molly. The relationship ended in divorce; Hoagland confided his many infidelities in a highly personal 1995 Esquire essay, two years after Magid's death.

Hoagland nearly lost his job at Bennington in the early '90s because of an Esquire article in which he cited the "icy promiscuity" of gays. After Bennington initially decided not to rehire him, he appealed the decision to a faculty personnel committee, which ruled in his favor.

In recent years, he lived with his partner Trudy Carter, a social worker who died in 2025.

'Life after disappointment'

A New York City native who spent much of his childhood in New Canaan, Connecticut, he preferred nature and animal life to fellow humans and remembered hurrying from the school bus to the woods at the end of the day. Trips to the circus at Madison Square Garden so inspired him that he found a summer job at age 18 in the "Animal Department" of Ringling Bros.

He also enjoyed books and writing, a form of communication not inhibited by a stutter. At Harvard University, academic mentors included the poets Archibald MacLeish and John Berryman, and classmates included John Updike. He drew upon his time in the circus for his debut novel, "Cat Man," which brought him a literary fellowship from publisher Houghton Mifflin and came out in 1956.

But the fiction that followed, "The Circle Home" and "The Peacock's Tail," failed to catch on and he would acknowledge he lacked the imaginative power to be a "glamorous poet or high-flying novelist." Hoagland instead made the most of what he called the "accommodation to defeat" by turning to nonfiction and discovering there was "life after disappointment."

"Essayists are foot soldiers, solo explorers blazing the trees as they go along, but they can gain height as though jumping on a trampoline and multiply themselves if they can clarify for other people what they, too, have been feeling," he wrote in his memoir. "Essays are not panoramic like large-scope fiction, but seek analogies, as a short story does, a deft loop-around that lets you look perhaps at your own tracks."

A Utah mom who wrote kids' book on grief after husband died killed him for money, prosecutors say

By HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

PARK CITY, Utah (AP) — Prosecutors portrayed a Utah mother and children's book author as a money-hungry killer Monday on the first day of a murder trial in her husband's death, while her defense team urged jurors not to make judgments before hearing her side.

Kouri Richins, 35, faces a slew of felony charges for allegedly killing her husband, Eric Richins, with fentanyl in March 2022 at their home just outside the ski town of Park City. She has vehemently denied the allegations.

Prosecutors say she slipped five times the lethal dose of the synthetic opioid into a cocktail that he drank. She is also accused of trying to poison him a month earlier on Valentine's Day with a fentanyl-laced sandwich that made him break out in hives and black out, according to court documents.

After her husband's death, Kouri Richins self-published a children's book about grief to help her sons and other kids cope with the loss of a parent.

As arguments in the case got underway Monday, Richins sat next to her attorneys, taking notes and passing some to them. Her legal team has not said whether she will take the stand in her defense.

Summit County prosecutor Brad Bloodworth told jurors that Richins was \$4.5 million in debt and wrongly

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 35 of 78

believed that if her husband died she would inherit his estate worth more than \$4 million. Prosecutors have argued she was planning a future with another man she was seeing on the side.

"The evidence will prove that Kouri Richins murdered Eric for his money and to get a fresh start at life," Bloodworth said. "More than anything, she wanted his money to perpetuate her facade of privilege, affluence and success."

No history of illicit drug use

Defense attorney Kathryn Nester started her opening statement by playing the recording of Richins' 911 call from the night of her husband's death. Richins was sobbing on the call and seemed barely able to answer the dispatcher's questions.

"Those were the sounds of a wife becoming a widow," Nester said.

Eric Richins had Lyme disease and was addicted to painkillers, Nester argued. She suggested he may have overdosed.

However, in body camera footage shown later Monday, Richins tells police her husband had no history of illicit drug use.

Eric Richins' sister, Katie Richins-Benson, also testified that their mother was a drug and alcohol counselor who had instilled in the siblings from an early age the dangers of drug use.

The trial is slated to run through March 26. A few dozen people hoping to watch camped outside the courthouse in lawn chairs starting at 4 a.m., four and a half hours before the trial began.

Richins faces nearly three dozen counts, including aggravated murder, attempted murder, forgery, mortgage fraud and insurance fraud. The murder charge alone carries a sentence of 25 years to life in prison.

In the months before her arrest in May 2023, Richins self-published the children's book "Are You with Me?" about a father with angel wings watching over his young son after passing away. The book could play a key role for prosecutors in framing Eric Richins' death as a calculated killing with an attempted cover-up. Bloodworth told jurors Monday about how Richins promoted it on local TV and radio stations.

Almost \$2 million in life insurance policies

Years before her husband's death, Richins opened numerous life insurance policies on Eric Richins without his knowledge, with benefits totaling nearly \$2 million, prosecutors alleged. Court documents also indicate she had a negative bank account balance and was being sued by a creditor.

Bloodworth showed the jury text messages between Kouri Richins and Robert Josh Grossman, the man with whom she was allegedly having an affair. She had texted Grossman about her dream of leaving her husband, gaining millions in the divorce and one day marrying Grossman.

Bloodworth also showed Richins' internet search history, which included "luxury prisons for the rich America" and "Can cops force you to do a lie detector test?"

Body camera footage shows night of husband's death

The body camera video shown in court from Summit County Sheriff's Deputy Vincent Nguyen showed Richins distraught as she told police that her husband had chest pain before he went to sleep and may have taken a THC gummy.

"My husband's active. He didn't just die in his sleep. This is insane," she said in the video.

Richins appeared to be in pajamas as paramedics worked to resuscitate her husband in a nearby room, the video showed. She held her head in her hands at times and paced around while talking to a deputy and family members who later arrived.

Richins-Benson testified that she entered the house that night to find Richins looking "well-put together" with her hair "all done up."

Empty pill bottles and marijuana gummies

Among the key witnesses expected to be called later in the trial is the family's housekeeper, Carmen Lauber, who claims to have sold fentanyl to Kouri Richins on multiple occasions.

Defense attorneys argued Monday that Lauber did not give Richins fentanyl and was motivated to lie for legal protection. Lauber is not charged in connection with the case, and detectives have said she was granted immunity.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 36 of 78

No fentanyl was found in Richins' house, and the housekeeper's dealer has said he was in jail and detoxing from drug use when he told detectives in 2023 that he sold fentanyl to Lauber. He later said in a sworn affidavit that he sold her only the opioid OxyContin.

Nester showed jurors photos of an empty pain pill bottle sitting on Eric Richins' bedside table the night of his death and bags of gummies he was known to use regularly. She said he had asked his wife to procure opioids for him.

Northeast US digs out from brutal storm that disrupted flights and canceled school

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE, CLAIRE RUSH, JULIE WALKER and ADAM GELLER Associated Press
NEW YORK (AP) — Neighbors, government workers and a powerful railroad snow-clearing machine nicknamed "Darth Vader" scrambled to dig out much of the northeastern United States from a brutal and — in some areas — record-breaking storm that blanketed the region with snow and resulted in thousands of flight cancellations.

But as the snow moved northward and tapered off in other areas Tuesday, forecasters warned that another storm could be right around the corner.

Monday's storm that meteorologists are calling the strongest in a decade dumped more than 2 feet (61 centimeters) of snow in parts of the Northeast. By Tuesday, roads were beginning to reopen, mass transportation was coming back online in some cities and power had returned for some of the hundreds of thousands who had lost electricity in Massachusetts, New Jersey, Delaware and Rhode Island.

In New York City, which canceled classes Monday, Mayor Zohran Mamdani announced that schools would reopen for in person learning on Tuesday, raising questions about how feasible that is with snow still piled along sidewalks.

Staten Island Borough President Vito Fossella said school should remain closed, while Michael Mulgrew, president of the United Federation of Teachers, described the situation as "a big mess."

"There's going to be low attendance of students. You're going to have low attendance of staff because people don't know if they can travel, if they can get to schools," he said.

Spokespersons for Mamdani didn't respond to an email seeking comment but his schools chief, Chancellor Kamar Samuels, said in a post on X, that they were "confident in our decision to reopen."

Philadelphia switched to online learning Monday and Tuesday. Districts on Long Island and elsewhere in the New York suburbs said they would cancel school again Tuesday.

The National Weather Service said it's tracking another storm that could bring more snow to the region later this week.

While the new storm is not expected to be as strong, even a few extra inches of snow on top of hard-hit areas could make cleanup more difficult, said Frank Pereira, meteorologist for the National Weather Service in College Park, Maryland.

"Any additional snow at this point is probably not going to be welcome," he said.

The weather service referred to Monday's storm as a "classic bomb cyclone/nor'easter off the Northeast coast." A bomb cyclone happens when a storm's pressure falls by a certain amount within a 24-hour period, occurring mainly in the fall and winter when frigid Arctic air can reach the south and clash with warmer temperatures.

More than 2,000 flights in and out of the United States were canceled Tuesday, according to the flight tracking website FlightAware. Most of the cancellations involved airports in New York, New Jersey and Boston.

Rhode Island's T.F. Green International Airport paused its airport operations Monday as it dealt with nearly 38 inches (97 centimeters) of snow, according to the Weather Service, breaking a record set in 1978.

Central Park in New York City recorded 19 inches (48 centimeters) of snow. Warwick, Rhode Island, exceeded 3 feet (91 centimeters), topping the nation so far. The highest wind gust of 83 mph (134 kph) was recorded in Nantucket, with hurricane-force gusts seen all over Cape Cod.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 37 of 78

New York, Philadelphia and other cities, as well as several states, declared emergencies.

The Boston Globe management called off printing its daily newspaper for the first time in its more than 150-year history because snow and winds kept staff from safely getting to its printing plant, the newspaper said in an article on its website.

In the New York City-area, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority said Monday evening that subway lines are mostly operational after earlier delays, with the exception of the hard-hit borough of Staten Island, where rail service remained suspended.

Commuter rail service to suburbs to the north and east of the city were expected to resume limited service ahead of the Tuesday morning commute, the MTA said.

Christa Prince and two others were out in Brooklyn on Monday afternoon with shovels and an electric snowblower.

"We're just making a path for this car," Prince said. "It's not our car but you know, we're just doing our neighbor a kind deed."

FACT FOCUS: A look at Trump's false and misleading claims ahead of the State of the Union

By MELISSA GOLDIN Associated Press

President Donald Trump will deliver the first State of the Union address of his second term on Tuesday. Priorities for the Republican's administration have centered largely on the economy, immigration, crime, energy and national security.

Trump has spent the last year touting his accomplishments while mocking the record of his predecessor, former President Joe Biden. But much of this bluster is based on false and misleading claims — many of which are likely to be a part of the president's address to the nation.

Here's a look at some of the false and misleading statements Trump has made at recent public appearances.

Economy

Trump often says the U.S. is now "the hottest country anywhere in the world" after years as a "dead country." The U.S. economy was hardly "dead" when Trump returned to office last year. But in his second term, it's generally performed strongly — after getting off to a bumpy start.

In 2024, the last year of Biden's presidency, U.S. gross domestic product grew 2.8%, adjusted for inflation, faster than any wealthy country in the world except Spain. It also expanded at a healthy rate from 2021 through 2023.

GDP shrank for the first time in three years during the first quarter of 2025. Growth rebounded in the second half of the year, but slowed again in the fourth quarter. Annual GDP growth in 2025 was 2.2%.

A key measure of inflation fell to nearly a five-year low in January. However, according to the Federal Reserve's preferred measure, it remains elevated as the cost of goods such as furniture, clothes and groceries increase.

Companies have also sharply reduced hiring. Employers added just 181,000 jobs in 2025, the fewest — outside a recession — since 2002. Economists blame a range of factors: Uncertainty created by tariffs and artificial intelligence likely caused many firms to hold back on adding workers. And many companies hired like gangbusters in the aftermath of the pandemic and have since decided to forgo creating any new positions.

The U.S. stock market did well last year and yet it underperformed many foreign stock markets. The benchmark S&P 500 index climbed 17% — a nice gain but short of a 71% surge in South Korea, 29% in Hong Kong, 26% in Japan, 22% in Germany and 21% in the United Kingdom.

Investments

Trump has repeatedly claimed that the U.S. has secured up to \$18 trillion in investments, but has presented no evidence of such a high number. The figure appears to be exaggerated, highly speculative or both.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 38 of 78

The White House website offers a far lower number, \$9.6 trillion, and that figure appears to include some investment commitments made during the Biden administration.

A study published in January raised doubts about whether more than \$5 trillion in investment commitments made last year by many of America's biggest trading partners will actually materialize and questions how it would be spent if it did.

Immigration

A key aspect of the Trump administration's agenda is curbing illegal immigration, though the president often uses falsehoods to support his arguments.

For example, Trump has repeatedly claimed that an influx of immigrants has led to a massive increase in crime. While FBI statistics do not separate out crimes by the immigration status of the assailant, there is no evidence of a spike in crime perpetrated by migrants, either along the U.S.-Mexico border or in cities seeing the greatest influx of migrants, like New York. Studies have found that people living in the U.S. illegally are less likely than native-born Americans to have been arrested for violent, drug and property crimes.

The president also frequently references upward of 300,000 migrant children who are allegedly missing. This misrepresents information in an August 2024 report published by the Department of Homeland Security's Office of the Inspector General, which faulted Immigration and Customs Enforcement for failing to consistently "monitor the location and status of unaccompanied migrant children" once they are released from federal government custody.

Energy

Trump consistently lauds coal as the ideal energy source, calling it "beautiful, clean coal." The production of coal is cleaner now than it has been historically, but that doesn't mean it's clean.

Planet-warming carbon dioxide emissions from the coal industry have decreased over the past 30 years, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. And yet United Nations-backed research has found that coal production worldwide still needs to be reduced sharply to address climate change.

Along with carbon dioxide, burning coal emits sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides that contribute to acid rain, smog and respiratory illnesses, according to the EIA.

The president also regularly denigrates wind power, claiming that it is expensive and that windmills kill birds.

Onshore wind is one of the cheapest sources of electricity generation, with new wind farms expected to produce energy costing around \$30 per megawatt hour, according to July estimates from the Energy Information Administration.

Wind turbines, like all infrastructure, can pose a risk to birds. However, the National Audubon Society, which is dedicated to the conservation of birds, thinks developers can manage these risks and climate change is a greater threat.

Elections

In the lead-up to the 2026 midterms, Trump has taken to repeating the claim that he won the 2020 presidential election.

This is a blatant falsehood that has been disproven many times over — the 2020 election was not stolen.

Biden's win has been affirmed through recounts, audits and reviews in the battleground states where Trump disputed his 2020 loss. He and his allies lost dozens of court challenges related to the election, and his own attorney general at the time said there was no widespread fraud that would have altered the results.

Biden earned 306 electoral votes to Trump's 232. He also won over 7 million more popular votes than Trump.

Additionally, the president brags that his 2024 win was a "landslide." But Trump's margin of victory was not as large as he makes it seem.

He won the electoral vote 312 to 226, including all seven swing states, according to the Federal Election Commission. The popular vote, however, was far closer, with Trump receiving 49.8% of the vote with

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 39 of 78

77,302,580 votes cast to Democrat Kamala Harris' 75,017,613 votes (48.32%).

Crime

Trump takes credit for a significant decrease in violent crime during 2025, claiming the murder rate in the U.S. dropped to its lowest in 125 years. But this is misleading. Crime had already been trending down in recent years.

A study released in January by the Independent Council on Criminal Justice, which collected data from 35 U.S. cities on homicides, showed a 21% decrease in the homicide rate from 2024 to 2025.

The report noted that when nationwide data for jurisdictions of all sizes is reported by the FBI later this year, there is a strong possibility that homicides in 2025 will drop to about 4.0 per 100,000 residents. That would be the lowest rate ever recorded in law enforcement or public health data going back to 1900.

FBI reports for 2023 and 2024 show significant reductions in violent crimes.

Crime surged during the coronavirus pandemic, with homicides increasing nearly 30% in 2020 over the previous year, the largest one-year jump since the FBI began keeping records. But violent crime dropped to near pre-pandemic levels around 2022 when Biden was president.

The increase in violent crime during the pandemic defied easy explanation, and experts similarly said the historic drop in violence last year defies easy explanation despite elected officials at all levels — both Democrats and Republicans — rushing to claim credit.

Foreign policy

One of Trump's most frequent talking points is he has "solved" eight wars, a statistic that is highly exaggerated. Although he has helped mediate relations among many nations, his impact isn't as clear-cut as he makes it seem.

The conflicts Trump counts among those that he has solved are between Israel and Hamas, Israel and Iran, Egypt and Ethiopia, India and Pakistan, Serbia and Kosovo, Rwanda and Congo, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and Cambodia and Thailand.

Trump's State of the Union will seek to calm voters' economic concerns ahead of midterm elections

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump will use Tuesday's State of the Union to champion his immigration crackdowns, his slashing of the federal government, his push to preserve widespread tariffs that the Supreme Court just struck down and his ability to direct quick-hit military actions around the world, including in Iran and Venezuela.

The Republican hopes he can convince increasingly wary Americans that his policies have improved their lives while ensuring that the U.S. economy is stronger than many believe — and that they should vote for more of the same in November.

The balancing act of celebrating his whirlwind first year back in the White House while making a convincing case for his party in midterm races where he personally won't be on the ballot is a tall order for any president. But it could prove especially delicate for Trump, given how happy he is to veer off script and ignore carefully crafted messaging.

A main theme will be that the country is booming with a rise in domestic manufacturing and new jobs, despite many Americans not feeling that way. "It's going to be a long speech because we have so much to talk about," said Trump, who promised a heavy dose of talk about the economy.

The president is also expected to decry the Supreme Court ruling against his signature tariff policies and talk about his attempts to maneuver around that decision without depending on Congress or spooking financial markets. He's also likely to urge lawmakers to increase military funding and tighten voter identification requirements, while defending immigration operations that have drawn bipartisan criticism following the shooting deaths of two American citizens.

Jeff Shesol, a former speechwriter for Democratic President Bill Clinton, said Trump has typically used State of the Union addresses to offer more conventional tones than his usual bombast — but he's still

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 40 of 78

apt to exaggerate repeatedly.

"His job, for the sake of his party, is to show the silver lining," Shesol said. "But if he's going to insist that the silver lining is gold, no one's buying it. And it will be a very difficult position on the campaign trail for Republicans to defend."

Michael Waldman, Clinton's former chief speechwriter, said second-term presidents "have a tough job because what they all want to say is, 'Hey, look what a great job I've been doing — why don't you love me?'"

Affordability questions loom large

No matter what his prepared remarks say, Trump relishes deviating into personal grievances, meaning Tuesday will probably feature topics like denying that he lost the 2020 presidential election.

His lack of messaging discipline has been on display after concerns about high costs of living helped propel Democratic wins around the country on Election Day last November. The White House subsequently promised that the president would travel the country nearly every week to reassure Americans he was taking affordability seriously. But Trump has spent more time blaming Democrats and scoffing at the notion that kitchen-table issues demand attention.

Trump instead boasts of having tamed inflation and says he has the economy humming given that the Dow Jones Industrial Average recently exceeded 50,000 points for the first time.

Such gains don't feel tangible to those without stock portfolios, however. There also are persistent fears that tariffs stoked higher prices, which could eventually hurt the economy and job creation. Economic growth slowed the last three months of last year.

Waldman, now president of the Brennan Center for Justice, which advocates for democracy, civil liberties and fair elections, said previous presidents faced similar instances of "economic disquiet."

That created a question of "how much do you sell vs. feeling the pain of the electorate," he said.

Shesol noted that Trump has "always believed — going back to his real estate days — that he can sell anyone on anything."

"He's still doing that. But the problem is, you can't tell somebody who has lost their job and can't get a new one that things are going great," Shesol said. "He can't sell people on a reality that for them, and frankly for most Americans, does not exist."

It is potentially politically perilous ahead of November elections that could deliver congressional wins to Democrats, just as 2018's "blue wave" created a strong check to his administration during his first term.

Several Democrats in Congress, meanwhile, plan to skip Tuesday's speech in protest, instead attending a rally known as the "People's State of the Union" on Washington's National Mall.

Foreign policy in focus

Trump's address comes as two U.S. aircraft carriers have been dispatched to the Middle East amid tensions with Iran.

The president will recount how U.S. airstrikes last summer pounded Tehran's nuclear capabilities, and laud the raid that ousted Venezuelan President Nicolas Nicolás Maduro, as well as his administration's brokering of a ceasefire in Israel's war with Hamas in Gaza.

But he also strained U.S. military alliances with NATO, thanks to his push to seize Greenland from Denmark and his failure to take a harder line with Russian President Vladimir Putin in seeking an end to its war in Ukraine.

Making any foreign policy feel relevant to Americans back home is never easy.

Jennifer Anju Grossman, a former speechwriter for Republican President George H.W. Bush and current CEO of the Atlas Society, which promotes the ideas of author and philosopher Ayn Rand, said Trump can make clear that Maduro's socialist policies wrecked Venezuela's economy to the point where one of the world's richest oil countries struggled to meet its own energy needs.

Now, oil from that country will help lower American gas prices.

Still, when it comes to overseas developments, she said, "I think it's going to be a bit of a challenge to make clear why this is relevant to the domestic situation."

Hegseth and Anthropic CEO set to meet as debate intensifies over the military's use of AI

By DAVID KLEPPER, MATT O'BRIEN and KONSTANTIN TOROPIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth plans to meet Tuesday with the CEO of Anthropic, with the artificial intelligence company the only one of its peers to not supply its technology to a new U.S. military internal network.

Anthropic, maker of the chatbot Claude, declined to comment on the meeting but CEO Dario Amodei has made clear his ethical concerns about unchecked government use of AI, including the dangers of fully autonomous armed drones and of AI-assisted mass surveillance that could track dissent.

The meeting between Hegseth and Amodei was confirmed by a defense official who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

It underscores the debate over AI's role in national security and concerns about how the technology could be used in high-stakes situations involving lethal force, sensitive information or government surveillance. It also comes as Hegseth has vowed to root out what he calls a "woke culture" in the armed forces.

"A powerful AI looking across billions of conversations from millions of people could gauge public sentiment, detect pockets of disloyalty forming, and stamp them out before they grow," Amodei wrote in an essay last month.

Anthropic is the only AI company approved for classified military networks

The Pentagon announced last summer that it was awarding defense contracts to four AI companies — Anthropic, Google, OpenAI and Elon Musk's xAI. Each contract is worth up to \$200 million.

Anthropic was the first AI company to get approved for classified military networks, where it works with partners like Palantir. The other three companies, for now, are only operating in unclassified environments.

By early this year, Hegseth was highlighting only two of them: xAI and Google.

The defense secretary said in a January speech at Musk's space flight company, SpaceX, in South Texas that he was shrugging off any AI models "that won't allow you to fight wars."

Hegseth said his vision for military AI systems means that they operate "without ideological constraints that limit lawful military applications," before adding that the Pentagon's "AI will not be woke."

In January, Hegseth said Musk's artificial intelligence chatbot Grok would join the Pentagon network, called GenAI.mil. The announcement came days after Grok — which is embedded into X, the social media network owned by Musk — drew global scrutiny for generating highly sexualized deepfake images of people without their consent.

OpenAI announced in early February that it, too, would join the military's secure AI platform, enabling service members to use a custom version of ChatGPT for unclassified tasks.

Anthropic calls itself more safety-minded

Anthropic has long pitched itself as the more responsible and safety-minded of the leading AI companies, ever since its founders quit OpenAI to form the startup in 2021.

The uncertainty with the Pentagon is putting those intentions to the test, according to Owen Daniels, associate director of analysis and fellow at Georgetown University's Center for Security and Emerging Technology.

"Anthropic's peers, including Meta, Google and xAI, have been willing to comply with the department's policy on using models for all lawful applications," Owens said. "So the company's bargaining power here is limited, and it risks losing influence in the department's push to adopt AI."

In the AI craze that followed the release of ChatGPT, Anthropic closely aligned with President Joe Biden's administration in volunteering to subject its AI systems to third-party scrutiny to guard against national security risks.

Amodei, the CEO, has warned of AI's potentially catastrophic dangers while rejecting the label that he's an AI "doomer." He argued in the January essay that "we are considerably closer to real danger in 2026 than we were in 2023" but that those risks should be managed in a "realistic, pragmatic manner."

Anthropic has been at odds with the Trump administration

This would not be the first time Anthropic's advocacy for stricter AI safeguards has put it at odds with the Trump administration. Anthropic needled chipmaker Nvidia publicly, criticizing Trump's proposals to loosen export controls to enable some AI computer chips to be sold in China. The AI company, however, remains a close partner with Nvidia.

The Trump administration and Anthropic also have been on opposite sides of a lobbying push to regulate AI in U.S. states.

Trump's top AI adviser, David Sacks, accused Anthropic in October of "running a sophisticated regulatory capture strategy based on fear-mongering."

Sacks made the remarks on X in response to an Anthropic co-founder, Jack Clark, writing about his attempt to balance technological optimism with "appropriate fear" about the steady march toward more capable AI systems.

Anthropic hired a number of ex-Biden officials soon after Trump's return to the White House, but it's also tried to signal a bipartisan approach. The company recently added Chris Liddell, a former White House official from Trump's first term, to its board of directors.

The Pentagon-Anthropic debate is reminiscent of an uproar several years ago when some tech workers objected to their companies' participation in Project Maven, a Pentagon drone surveillance program. While some workers quit over the project and Google itself dropped out, the Pentagon's reliance on drone surveillance has only increased.

Similarly, "the use of AI in military contexts is already a reality and it is not going away," Owens said.

"Some contexts are lower stakes, including for back-office work, but battlefield deployments of AI entail different, higher-stakes risks," he said, referring to the use of lethal force or weapons like nuclear arms. "Military users are aware of these risks and have been thinking about mitigation for almost a decade."

Supreme Court ruling against Trump's tariffs is unlikely to mean an end to trade policy chaos

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court's stunning rebuke of President Donald Trump's most sweeping tariffs means he can't conjure up new import taxes on a whim anymore.

But the justices' ruling on Friday is nonetheless unlikely to ease the uncertainty over Trump's trade policy that has paralyzed businesses over the past year. "It's only gotten more complicated for everybody," said trade lawyer Ryan Majerus, partner at King & Spalding and a former U.S. trade official.

Vexing questions remain: How will the president use other laws to reconstruct the tariffs the Supreme Court knocked down, and will those attempts withstand legal challenges? What does the decision mean for the trade deals Trump strong-armed other countries into accepting, using his now-defunct tariffs as leverage? Can importers collect refunds for the tariffs they paid last year, and if so, how?

Then there's Trump's own unpredictability. Even though he had weeks to prepare for an unfavorable Supreme Court ruling, his response was still chaotic: On Friday, he said he'd use other legal authority to impose 10% levies on imports from other countries. Saturday, he ratcheted it up to 15%.

Normally, lower tariffs arising from the Supreme Court's decision might be expected to give the economy a little lift. But "any benefit you would get from that is more than offset to a modest negative from the uncertainty front," said Mike Skordeles, head of U.S. economics at Truist, a bank.

Trump looks for new import taxes

Gone for good are the sweeping tariffs Trump justified under the 1977 International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), mainly to combat America's persistent trade deficits. But that doesn't mean the president can't invoke other laws to rebuild much of his tariff wall around the U.S. economy.

"Tariff revenues will be unchanged this year and will be unchanged in the future," Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said in a Fox News interview Sunday.

Trump reached for a stop-gap option immediately after his defeat Friday at the Supreme Court: Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974 allows the president to impose tariffs of up to 15% for up to 150 days. But

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 43 of 78

any extension beyond 150 days must be approved by a Congress likely to balk at passing a tax increase as November's midterm elections loom.

Section 122 has never been invoked before, and some critics say the president can't use it as a stand-in for the IEEPA tariffs to combat the trade deficit.

Bryan Riley of National Taxpayers Union, for example, argues that Section 122 is meant to give the president a tool to fight what it calls "fundamental international payments problems," not the trade deficit.

The provision arose from the financial crises that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s when the U.S. dollar was tied to gold. Other countries were dumping dollars in exchange for gold at a set rate, putting alarming downward pressure on the dollar. But the U.S. currency is no longer linked to gold, so Section 122 has been "effectively rendered obsolete," Riley wrote in a commentary.

"Given the amount of money at issue for U.S. businesses, it is not hard to imagine a new wave of litigation attacking Section 122, and again seeking refunds of Section 122 duties collected," said trade lawyer Dave Townsend, a partner at Dorsey & Whitney.

A sturdier alternative is Section 301 of the same 1974 trade act, which gives the United States a handy cudgel with which to smack countries it accuses of engaging in "unjustifiable," "unreasonable" or "discriminatory" trade practices. In a statement Friday, in fact, U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer said the administration was launching a series of 301 investigations after the loss at the Supreme Court.

Trump invoked Section 301 in his first term to impose sweeping tariffs on Chinese imports in a dispute over the sharp-elbowed tactics that Beijing was using to challenge America's technological dominance. Those tariffs were upheld in court and kept by the Biden administration.

"We're eight years in, and those China tariffs are still here," King & Spalding's Majerus said. "They're sticky tariffs."

Confusion surrounds Trump's trade deals

The Supreme Court's decision also raises questions about the lopsided trade agreements Trump negotiated last year, using the threat of potentially unlimited IEEPA tariffs to squeeze concessions out of U.S. trading partners from the European Union to Japan.

Will countries try to back out of their commitments, now that the IEEPA tariff threat is gone?

The European Union's trade deal with Trump is already on hold amid confusion following the Supreme Court's ruling — and Trump's decision to respond to it with the 15% Section 122 global tariff.

European lawmakers on Monday delayed a vote on ratifying the pact to seek clarification. They are worried that Trump's new import tax will stack on top of the "most favored nation" tariffs the United States charges under pre-existing World Trade Organization rules — and lift U.S. tariffs on EU imports above the 15% the Europeans had agreed to last year.

"A deal is a deal," said commission spokesman Olof Gill. "So now we are simply saying to the US, it is up to you to clearly show to us what path you are taking to honor the agreement."

Then there's the United Kingdom, which had reached a deal with Trump last year for 10% tariffs on its exports to the United States. Will they really go to 15%?

Still, trade analysts largely expect U.S. trade partners to stick by the deals they reached with Trump last year. For one thing, the United States could wallop them with hefty Section 301 tariffs, which are potentially unlimited, for violating trade agreements.

"They're going to pretty leery of rocking the boat on their deals," Majerus said. "Violations of trade agreements can be a basis for taking 301 action. So you could see Section 301 become an enforcement mechanism" for the United States.

"We are confident that all trade agreements negotiated by President Trump will remain in effect," U.S. Trade Representative Greer said in his statement.

A messy refund process

In its ruling, the Supreme Court didn't bother to say what would happen to all the money collected from the IEEPA tariffs, \$133 billion as of mid-December. It left the messy issue of refunds to importers — but likely not to consumers — to lower courts and the Customs and Border Protection agency, which collects import taxes. But they're likely to be overwhelmed — hundreds of companies are already lined up to get

their money back — and the refunds could take months or years to be paid.

“The whole thing’s going to be a mess,” Majerus said.

It’s possible that Congress will order Customs to take an “easy ‘one-click’ approach to refunds,” wrote strategists Thierry Wizman and Gareth Berry at the investment bank Macquarie. Otherwise, they warned, the Trump administration could “make the refund process as burdensome as possible, requiring every importer to file stacks of paperwork, if not file a lawsuit, to get its money back. That would be costly for businesses.”

Soldiers keep up clash with cartel gunmen a day after Mexico’s military killed top drug lord

By MEGAN JANETSKY and MARÍA VERZA Associated Press

TAPALPA, Mexico (AP) — A day after the Mexican army killed the country’s most powerful drug lord, the picturesque town where it happened was a study in contrasts.

Children whose classes had been suspended by the outbreak of violence played in cobblestone streets and tourist shops were open on Tapalpa’s main plaza Monday. But gunshots also rang out, and just outside the town a dead man lay on the road next to a Jeep sprayed with bullets.

Meanwhile, heavily armed Mexican security forces kept up their battle with cartel gunmen following the killing that sparked a surge in violence and put the country on edge. Cartel fighters continued to block roads as smoke rose on the outskirts of the town in the state of Jalisco.

More than 70 people died in the attempt to capture Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes and the aftermath, authorities said Monday. Known as “El Mencho,” he was the notorious leader of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, one of the most powerful criminal organizations in Mexico.

The body count taken by security officials included security forces, suspected cartel members and others. Officials did not offer details, and the circumstances of most of the deaths were unclear.

Fast-growing cartel

Oseguera Cervantes was the boss of one of the fastest-growing criminal networks in Mexico, known for trafficking fentanyl, methamphetamine and cocaine to the United States and staging brazen attacks against Mexican government officials. The organization responded to his death with widespread violence, including erecting more than 250 roadblocks across 20 states and setting fire to vehicles.

The capo died after a shootout with the Mexican military on Sunday. Mexican Defense Secretary Gen. Ricardo Trevilla said Monday that authorities had tracked one of his romantic partners to his hideout in Tapalpa.

The cartel leader and two bodyguards fled into a wooded area where they were seriously wounded in a firefight. They were taken into custody and died on the way to Mexico City, Trevilla said.

In a different location in Jalisco, soldiers killed another high-ranking cartel member who Trevilla said was coordinating violence and offering more than \$1,000 for every soldier killed.

Mexican authorities reported that 25 members of the Mexican National Guard were killed in six separate attacks, while some 30 criminal suspects were killed in Jalisco, and four others in the neighboring state of Michoacan. Also killed were a prison guard and an agent from the state prosecutor’s office.

The White House confirmed that the U.S. provided intelligence support to the operation to capture the cartel leader and applauded Mexico’s army for taking down a man who was one of the most wanted criminals in both countries.

Violence surges in Jalisco

Mexico hoped the death of the world’s biggest fentanyl traffickers would ease Trump administration pressure to do more against the cartels, but many people were anxious as they waited to see the powerful cartel’s reaction.

As the threat of more violence loomed, several Mexican states canceled school Monday, while local and foreign governments warned their citizens to stay inside.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 45 of 78

Steve Perkins, 57, had been visiting Puerto Vallarta with his wife and friends. The couple was scheduled to return to Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, on Monday when their flight was canceled.

Perkins said he and his wife were having coffee on the terrace of their hotel room in downtown when they heard rounds of explosions and gunshots, and saw smoke billowing over the city around 8:30 a.m.

"The entire downtown in the bay was just covered in thick black smoke, pretty scary," Perkins said. "And then at one point, we heard screams. We heard a lot of screams ... So then we started getting really worried."

Perkins and his wife traded out their flip-flops for running shoes in case "we needed to make a run for it."

"My wife called our kids to tell them goodbye if we were never gonna see them again," Perkins said.

The U.S. Embassy said via X that its personnel in eight cities and in the state of Michoacan would shelter in place and work remotely Monday. It warned U.S. citizens in many parts of Mexico to do the same.

Many fear what comes next

In Guadalajara, the state capital, some ventured out into the streets to work and buy supplies, a notable change from Sunday, when Mexico's second-largest city was almost completely shut down as fearful residents stayed home.

More than 1,000 people were stuck overnight in Guadalajara's zoo, where they slept in buses. Families were left stranded, unable to return home to nearby states like Zacatecas and Michoacan, said Luis Soto Rendón, the zoo's director.

"We decided to let people stay inside the zoo for their safety," Soto said. "We have everyone from small children to senior citizens."

José Luis Ramírez, a 54-year-old therapist, was in a long line of people waiting outside a pharmacy, one of the few businesses that were open Monday in Guadalajara. Families were buying food, medicine, water, diapers and baby formula, from pharmacists through a chained door.

It was Ramírez's first time leaving the house since the violence erupted.

"We have to not think scared, but be cool-headed, like they say, and take things as they come," he said.

Those who had to work carefully made their way across the city.

Irma Hernández, a 43-year-old hotel security guard in Guadalajara, normally takes public transportation to her job, but buses were not running, and she had no way to cross the city. Her bosses organized a private car to pick her up. Her family, she said, was staying at home, too scared to leave.

"I am worried because I don't know how to get home if something happens," she said.

Trump has pressed Mexico to fight fentanyl

U.S. President Donald Trump has demanded Mexico do more to fight the smuggling of fentanyl, threatening to impose more tariffs or take unilateral military action if the country does not show results.

The U.S. State Department had offered a reward of up to \$15 million for information leading to the arrest of El Mencho. The Jalisco New Generation Cartel began operating around 2009.

In February 2025, the Trump administration designated the cartel as a foreign terrorist organization. It has been one of the most aggressive cartels in its attacks on the military — including on helicopters — and is a pioneer in launching explosives from drones and installing mines.

At a blockade Monday on the outskirts of Tapalpa, 25-year-old Joel Ramírez and two friends were waiting for soldiers to clear a blockade of tree limbs. He hauls things in his pickup for a living and had not been able to get home since Sunday's violence.

"Everything seems calmer, but we were almost there and got stuck," he said. "We're scared."

More than 30,000 Kaiser Permanente health care workers to end strike in California and Hawaii

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — An estimated 31,000 registered nurses and other front-line Kaiser Permanente health care workers will return to work on Tuesday after a four-week strike in California and Hawaii to demand better wages and staffing.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 46 of 78

The United Nurses Associations of California/Union of Health Care Professionals said in a statement Monday that "significant movement at the bargaining table" prompted an end to the walkout. The statement didn't offer more specifics.

"According to the union, returning members to their patients and their livelihoods is the clearest path to securing a final agreement and building on the progress achieved during the strike," the statement said.

Kathleen Campini Chambers, a spokesperson for Kaiser, said the two sides had come to an agreement on wage increases based on an offer the company first made in October.

"We are working with our teams to schedule returning employees over the coming days, in an orderly way that protects patient safety and minimizes any disruption," she said in a statement.

The picketing that began Jan. 27 marked the second major strike in recent months by employees represented by the union. A five-day strike in October ended with negotiations resuming, but talks broke down in December.

Those on picket lines, including pharmacists, midwives and rehab therapists, said salaries have not kept pace with inflation and there is not enough staffing to keep up with patient demand.

They asked for a 25% wage increase over four years to make up for wages they say are at least 7% behind their peers.

Kaiser Permanente had countered with a 21.5% increase over four years. The company maintained that its union employees earn, on average, 16% more than their peers, and that it would have to charge customers more to meet strikers' pay demands. Chambers said Monday that union leadership informed Kaiser they would accept the 21.5% offer.

Clinics and hospitals remained open during the strike, with some in-person appointments shifted to virtual, and some elective surgeries and procedures rescheduled.

Kaiser Permanente operates one of the nation's largest not-for-profit health systems, serving 12.6 million members at 600 medical offices and 40 hospitals in largely western U.S. states. It is based in Oakland, California.

In New York City, nurses in the privately run NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital system approved a new contract Saturday, voting to end a major strike there after more than a month.

Two other big private hospital systems in New York, Montefiore and Mount Sinai, ended their nurses' walkout earlier this month by inking contract agreements with the same union.

Volunteers scour the desert for Nancy Guthrie despite authorities urging them to stop

By JACQUES BILLEAUD and FELICIA FONSECA Associated Press

TUCSON, Ariz. (AP) — The disappearance of "Today" show host Savannah Guthrie's mother three weeks ago has inspired a small number of volunteers to launch their own searches in the dense desert near her home in hopes of cracking the case.

The Pima County Sheriff's Department said while it appreciates the concern for Nancy Guthrie, it asked people inquiring about volunteering to give investigators space to do their jobs.

"We all want to find Nancy, but this work is best left to professionals," the agency said in a statement over the weekend.

Nancy Guthrie's disappearance

Nancy Guthrie, 84, was last seen at her home just outside Tucson on Jan. 31 and was reported missing the following day. Authorities believe she was kidnapped, abducted or otherwise taken against her will. Drops of her blood were found on the front porch, but authorities haven't publicly revealed much evidence.

Despite the sheriff's request for people not to search on their own, volunteers have continued to look. A small group reported finding a black backpack on Sunday, but it wasn't the same brand as one identified in video surveillance that the FBI released of a masked person at Guthrie's home the night she disappeared.

A sheriff's spokesperson told Tucson television station KOLD that the bag and its contents didn't appear to be viable leads. The Associated Press reached out to the sheriff's department for comment on Monday.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 47 of 78

Volunteers begin to search

Two women from the group Madres Buscadoras de Sonora, or "Searching Mothers of Sonora," who were carrying digging tools Sunday outside of Guthrie's home, said they, too, would join the search. They posted fliers on Guthrie's mailbox with her picture and their contact information.

Lupita Tello, who joined the group after her son disappeared in Mexico in 2020, said Monday she and two other volunteers will continue to post flyers on bus stops and utility poles near Nancy Guthrie's home. Members of the group plan to do the same in Nogales, Mexico.

She said the group was contacted by a friend of one of Nancy Guthrie's daughters who asked them for help because of their experience. The group has found the remains of more than 5,000 people in Mexico since it was started 10 years ago by mothers with missing children.

"We know the soil. We know when someone has dug deep or when there is a shallow grave," Tello said. "We hope we can help because we understand the pain of having a missing relative."

She said group members have received training by Mexican forensic experts on how to conduct their searches.

The sheriff's department said in a statement late Monday that it's aware of differences in the masked person's clothing depicted in various images that were released, namely with and without a backpack.

"There is no date or time stamp associated with these images," the department said. "Therefore, any suggestion that the photographs were taken on different days is purely speculative."

Authorities say search parties need to coordinate

Tony Estrada, the former long-time sheriff in neighboring Santa Cruz County, said volunteer searchers have good intentions in wanting to help and can serve as a force multiplier, but it's crucial that their efforts be coordinated with law enforcement.

"You can't have people all over the place looking for something and not reporting to anybody or letting them know that they're going to be in that area," Estrada said. "They may be trampling into things that may come out to be helpful in the future."

Nearly all search operations for U.S. law enforcement agencies are staffed with volunteers, said Chris Boyer, executive director of the National Association for Search and Rescue.

Untrained volunteers who show up to help in a search may mean well, but experts say they could end up contaminating a crime scene.

"It's painful for law enforcement when that happens," Boyer said.

Volunteers should undergo background checks, be trained in things like administering first aid and preserving crime scenes, and work under the direction of law enforcement authorities, said Boyer, whose group provides education, certification and advocacy for search and rescue efforts across the United States and other countries.

Hundreds are working on the investigation

Several hundred people are working the Guthrie investigation, and more than 20,000 tips have been received, the sheriff's office has said. The FBI and other agencies are assisting.

The sheriff's office has watched around the clock lately at Guthrie's house. It also enacted a temporary one-way flow on the road so that emergency vehicles and trash collection trucks could get through. The constant presence of news crews, bloggers and curious onlookers has drawn mixed reaction from neighbors.

Some appreciated the attention the case has been getting. Others have placed traffic cones and signs on their properties to keep people off.

Meanwhile, the tribute to Nancy Guthrie outside her home keeps growing, with flowers, yellow ribbons, crosses, prayers and patron saints for older adults and in desperate situations.

Aran Aleamoni and his daughter Ariana picked out a bouquet of red, pink and white flowers and placed them at the edge of Guthrie's yard, alongside a sign that read "Let Nancy Come Home" and a statuette of an angel.

"My heart goes out to the entire family," said Aran Aleamoni, who has known the Guthrie family for a long time. "We are all pulling for you. We're with you in your corner."

Huge snowstorm in the Northeast forces millions to stay home, disrupts flights and closes schools

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE, CLAIRE RUSH, JULIE WALKER and ADAM GELLER Associated Press
NEW YORK (AP) — A massive snowstorm pummeled the northeastern United States from Maryland to Maine on Monday, forcing millions of people to stay home amid strong wind and blizzard warnings, transportation shutdowns, and school and business closures.

Meteorologists said the storm is the strongest in a decade, dumping more than 2 feet (60 centimeters) of snow in parts of the metropolitan Northeast, shattering accumulation records in places, immobilizing transit and even leading the United Nations to postpone a Security Council meeting. Officials declared emergencies, schools closed, including in New York City, which had its first "old-school" snow day in six years, and people grappled with power failures.

Even as the snow moved northward and tapered off in other areas, the National Weather Service said it is tracking another storm that could bring more snow to the region later this week.

The weather service referred to Monday's storm as a "classic bomb cyclone/nor'easter off the Northeast coast." A bomb cyclone happens when a storm's pressure falls by a certain amount within a 24-hour period, occurring mainly in the fall and winter when frigid Arctic air can reach the south and clash with warmer temperatures.

While it was paralyzing and potentially dangerous for millions along the Eastern Seaboard, meteorologists found themselves rhapsodizing over the combination of power and beauty.

The storm hit the "Goldilocks situation" of just the right temperature for wet, heavy snow: Any warmer and its precipitation wouldn't have fallen as snow, any colder and there wouldn't have been as much moisture in the air to feed that snowfall, said Owen Shieh, warning coordination meteorologist at the National Weather Service's Weather Prediction Center in Maryland.

People begin digging out even as snowfall continues

In Lower Manhattan, snow shovelers appeared to outnumber commuting office workers, and pedestrians walked freely in streets normally blocked by morning traffic.

"It's very quiet, except for the howling winds," said Luis Valez, a concierge at a residential tower just off Wall Street, as he cleared the sidewalk. "A couple of residents have gone out to get their essentials. Other than that, there's nothing."

Matthew Wojtkowiak, 57, an attorney, was also shoveling in his Brooklyn neighborhood.

"I'm from the Midwest, so this is in the zone," he said. "Not too bad, not too easy, either."

Schools were closed, and he said he hoped people would get out and enjoy the snow.

"We have sleds at the ready," he said.

Karen Smith and Adele Bawden are tourists visiting New York from the United Kingdom.

"We've been dancing in Times Square this morning in the middle of the road in rush hour," Bawden said. "We've just been dancing and not believing we could do it."

Ingrid Devita said she liked to patrol the Lower East Side on skis, checking on people who might need help.

"I find people fall in the snow and they can't get up," she said.

Central Park in New York City recorded 19 inches (48 centimeters) of snow. Warwick, Rhode Island, exceeded 3 feet (91 centimeters), topping the nation so far. The highest wind gust of 83 mph (133 kph) was recorded in Nantucket, with hurricane-force gusts seen all over Cape Cod.

In Connecticut, crews at the Mystic Seaport Museum prepared to clear snow from a fleet of historic ships, including the 113-foot-long Charles W. Morgan, a wooden whaling ship from the 19th century American merchant fleet.

Shannon McKenzie, vice president of watercraft operations and preservation, said shipyard staff will clear the snow by hand using rubber or plastic shovels because machinery or metal shovels could damage the boats.

Storm fuels power outages and disrupts flights

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 49 of 78

New York, Philadelphia and other cities, as well as several states, declared emergencies.

More than 5,600 flights in and out of the United States were canceled Monday, and a further 2,000 flights scheduled for Tuesday were grounded, according to the flight tracking website FlightAware. Most of the cancellations involved airports in New York, New Jersey and Boston. Almost 2,500 flights were delayed.

Rhode Island's T.F. Green International Airport announced Monday that it was temporarily ending all airport operations. The Weather Service reported that the facility got nearly 38 inches (96.5 centimeters) of snow, breaking a record set in 1978.

Public transit ground to a halt in some areas, while DoorDash suspended deliveries in New York City overnight into Monday.

Meteorologists said strong winds and heavy, wet snow are a recipe for damaged trees and prolonged power outages.

More than 450,000 utility customers nationwide remained in darkness Monday evening, according to PowerOutage.us, which tracks outages nationwide.

Snow slows commuter transport and forces snow days

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority said Monday evening that subway lines are mostly operational after earlier delays, with the exception of the hard-hit borough of Staten Island, where rail service remained suspended. Delays would likely continue on lines that run outdoors.

Commuter rail service to suburbs to the north and east of the city were expected to resume limited service ahead of the Tuesday morning commute, the MTA said. Bus commuters should also expect long wait times.

Outreach workers meanwhile tried to coax homeless New Yorkers into shelters and warming centers.

Various landmarks and cultural institutions were closed Monday, including New York's Museum of Modern Art and the Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C. Broadway shows were canceled Sunday evening.

New York City and Boston canceled public school classes for Monday, while Philadelphia switched to online learning. Districts on Long Island and elsewhere in the New York suburbs said they would cancel school for a second day on Tuesday.

But New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani said class would be back in person.

Officials in one of the city's Republican strongholds criticized the Democratic mayor's move. Staten Island Borough President Vito Fossella said schools should remain closed because roads are impassable and sidewalks are blocked. The teacher's union, the United Federation of Teachers, advised its members to be cautious and put their safety first when deciding whether to report to work.

Spokespersons for Mamdani didn't respond to an email seeking comment but his schools chief defended the decision on social media.

Chancellor Kamar Samuels said the district "couldn't be 100% certain" that every student would have access to the devices they needed for remote learning, despite school officials' "best efforts" to distribute them ahead of the storm.

"We are confident in our decision to reopen," he wrote on X. "Our schools and city are ready to welcome students and staff back tomorrow."

Trump's big speech will be delivered to a changed nation and a Congress he has sidelined

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump will stand before Congress on Tuesday to deliver the annual State of the Union address to a suddenly transformed nation.

One year back in office, Trump has emerged as a president defying conventional expectations. He has executed a head-spinning agenda, upending priorities at home, shattering alliances abroad and challenging the nation's foundational system of checks and balances. Two Americans were killed by federal agents while protesting the Trump administration's immigration raids and mass deportations.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 50 of 78

As the lawmakers sit in the House chamber listening to Trump's agenda for the year ahead, the moment is an existential one for the Congress, which has essentially become sidelined by his expansive reach, the Republican president bypassing his slim GOP majority to amass enormous power for himself.

"It's crazy," said Nancy Henderson Korpi, a retiree in northern Minnesota who joined an Indivisible protest group and plans to watch the speech from home. "But what is disturbing more to me is that Congress has essentially just handed over their power."

She said, "We could make some sound decisions and changes if Congress would do their job."

The state of the union is upheaval

The country is at a crossroads, celebrating its 250th anniversary while experiencing some of the most significant changes to its politics, policies and general mood in many Americans' lifetimes.

The president muscled his agenda through Congress when he needed to — often pressuring lawmakers with a phone call during cliffhanger votes — but more often avoided the messy give-and-take of the legislative process to power past his own party and the often unified Democratic opposition.

Trump's signature legislative accomplishment so far is the GOP's big tax cuts bill, with its new savings accounts for babies, no taxes on tips and other specialty deductions, and steep cuts to Medicaid and SNAP food aid. It also fueled more than \$170 billion to Homeland Security for his immigration deportations.

But the GOP-led Congress has largely stood by as Trump dramatically seized power through hundreds of executive actions, many being challenged in court, and a willingness to do whatever it takes to impose his agenda.

"Retrieving a lost power is no easy business in our constitutional order," wrote Justice Neil Gorsuch in the Supreme Court's landmark rebuke of Trump's tariffs policy on Friday.

Gorsuch said that without the court stepping in on major questions, "Our system of separated powers and checks-and-balances threatens to give way to the continual and permanent accretion of power in the hands of one man."

Trump goes it alone, with or without Congress

From slashing the federal workforce to upending the childhood vaccine schedule to attacking Venezuela and capturing that country's president, Trump's reach appeared to know no bounds.

His administration launched investigations of would-be political foes, imposed his name on historic buildings, including the storied John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and perhaps most visibly has been rounding up people and converting warehouses into detention holding centers for deportations.

At almost every step of the way, there were moments when Congress could have intervened but did not.

Democrats, in the minority, often tried to push back, including by halting routine Homeland Security funds unless there are restraints on the immigration actions.

But Republicans believe the country elected the president and gave their party control of Congress to align with his agenda, according to one senior GOP leadership aide who insisted on anonymity to discuss the dynamic.

House Speaker Mike Johnson of Louisiana has said Trump will be the "most consequential" president of the modern era.

Democrats plan to either boycott the speech or sit in stony silence.

"The state of the union is falling apart," said House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York.

Congress asserts itself, at times

There have been times when Congress held its own against the White House, but they have been rare — as in the high-profile bipartisan push from Reps. Thomas Massie, R-Ky., and Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Ca., to force the release of the Jeffrey Epstein files, over the objections of Johnson and GOP leadership.

The flex of congressional power has more often come from a few renegade Republicans joining with most Democrats to put a check on the president, as when the House voted to block Trump's tariffs on Canada. The Senate advanced a war powers resolution to prevent military action in Venezuela without congressional approval, but backed off after Trump intervened.

Those have been mostly symbolic votes, because Congress would not have the numbers to overcome any expected Trump veto.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 51 of 78

More often, the Congress has accommodated Trump, by rolling back already approved bipartisan funding for USAID foreign aid or public broadcasting or failing to stop the U.S. military strikes on alleged drug-smuggling boats that killed two survivors in the Caribbean. When Trump issued a Day One pardon of some 1,500 people charged in the Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol, the Republicans in Congress did not object.

And as Trump's Department of Government Efficiency with billionaire Elon Musk started firing federal workers, GOP lawmakers signaled approval by forming their own DOGE caucus on Capitol Hill.

"The central question for us is does the public understand what's at stake" said Max Stier, CEO of the Partnership for Public Service, a nonprofit organization focused on government management and democracy. "We are in the midst of the most significant transformation of our government and our public servants in our history as a country."

He said some 300,000 federal employees were fired or moved on, while 100,000 new hires or rehires have largely gone to Homeland Security.

Checks and balances are being challenged

In courtrooms across the country, cases are being filed against the administration at record levels, as Congress was "asleep at the wheel," said Skye Perryman, president of Democracy Forward, which has filed more than 150 cases against the administration, part of the largest legal effort against an executive branch in U.S. history.

But the judicial system has been under strain, and the White House has not always abided by court rulings. GOP lawmakers have joined Trump's criticism of the courts, displaying outside their offices posters of judges they want to impeach.

A next big test will be over a proof-of-citizenship voting bill that Trump wants ahead of the midterm elections.

The House has passed the SAVE America Act, which would require birth certificates or passports to register to vote in federal elections and a photo ID at the polls. Supporters say it's needed to crack down on fraud, while critics argue it will shut millions of Americans out of voting because they don't have citizenship documents readily available.

The Senate has a majority to pass the measure but not the necessary 60 votes to overcome an expected Democratic-led filibuster.

Trump has vowed executive actions if Congress fails to approve legislation.

'Abolish ICE' gets most votes in Chicago snowplow-naming contest; 'Stephen Colbert' also a winner

By JOHN O'CONNOR Associated Press

When it comes to putting a name to Chicago's annual battle against its infamously inclement weather, it turns out that the practical is also the political.

"Abolish ICE" was the top vote-getter in the city's "You Name a Snowplow" contest. Choosing the protest slogan with a double meaning proved a potent way for voters to jab at President Donald Trump after he sent Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers into the city and its suburbs last fall in a major immigration crackdown.

With a surge of ICE officers beginning in September, "Operation Midway Blitz" resulted in more than 4,000 arrests, a fatal shooting and a sour taste among Chicago's Democratic leaders and many of its residents, particularly in large immigrant populations. Despite mid-winter frigid cold, "ICE Out" protests in recent weeks have continued downtown, near ICE facilities and throughout the suburbs.

The snowplow-naming contest, in its fourth year, also produced winning names ranging from those paying tribute to the new pope, who hails from Chicago, to a homegrown horror purveyor and the popular quarterback of the city's NFL franchise. The top six winners will get a snowplow named in their honor.

In a statement, Mayor Brandon Johnson thanked Chicago voters "for their unmatched creativity, sense of humor, and civic pride."

When asked whether he was reticent about the potentially prickly response to the name, a spokesperson

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 52 of 78

said that "Abolish ICE" was the runaway winner, adding, "The people of Chicago clearly have no issue with the name of this snowplow."

Requests for comment were also emailed to ICE and its parent agency, the Department of Homeland Security.

Contests in many cities produce names of snowplows, but they rarely carry the edge of Chicago's top pick. In Nashville, "Dolly Plowton" pays homage to Tennessee native and country music legend Dolly Parton, while in Minnesota, pop superstar Taylor Swift is honored on a plow dubbed "Taylor Drift."

Chicagoans are capable of more anodyne names, too. Other winning contest names this year include "Stephen Colbert," for late-night talk show host Stephen Colbert. There's "Pope Frio XIV," with the Spanish word for "cold" rhyming with the Chicago-born pontiff's name, Leo.

Then there's the "Blizzard of Oz" and "Svengoolie," a play on the Chicago TV horror host, Svengoolie; and finally, "Caleb Chilliams" for the quarterback whose last name is Williams, and who led the Bears to the playoffs for the first time in 15 years.

Johnson said he and his Department of Streets and Sanitation, which maintains 300 trucks to clear 9,400 miles (15,000 kilometers) of streets, are "grateful and inspired by the record-breaking participation in the contest this year." There were 13,300 plow names submitted and 39,000 final votes were cast.

The contest was conducted the same way as it was in the past three years, said Ryan Gage, spokesperson for the Streets and Sanitation department. Submissions are made to the Chicago Shovels website. A survey app is used for both initial and final phases of the contest.

A group of Streets and Sanitation staff members then reviews all the submissions and chooses the finalists, which are then forwarded to the mayor's office for final approval, Gage said.

An attacker detonates an explosive device in Moscow, killing a police officer and himself

MOSCOW (AP) — An unidentified assailant detonated an explosive device next to a patrol vehicle in Moscow early Tuesday, killing himself and a police officer, and leaving two other officers injured, officials said.

The attack happened minutes after midnight near the Savyolovskiy Train Station in the Russian capital's downtown, according to Moscow's branch of the Interior Ministry.

It said the assailant approached a traffic police vehicle and detonated an explosive device, killing an officer on the spot and injuring two others, who were hospitalized.

Russia's Investigative Committee said it has launched a probe into the attack. It didn't name the assailant or give any information about his possible motives or any further details.

The attack came on the day marking the fourth anniversary of Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to send troops into Ukraine.

ICE officer training is 'deficient' and 'broken,' former agency lawyer tells congressional forum

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A former U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement lawyer who was responsible for training new deportation officers warned Monday that the agency's training program for new recruits is "deficient, defective and broken."

Ryan Schwank's comments during a forum held by congressional Democrats come at a time of intense scrutiny of the officers tasked with carrying out President Donald Trump's mass deportation agenda. Critics, including rights groups and Democratic politicians, have accused deportation officers of using excessive force when arresting immigrants, attacking bystanders who record their conduct and failing to follow constitutional protections of people's rights.

The Department of Homeland Security is rapidly scaling up the number of deportation officers, raising concerns that it will sacrifice proper screening and training of applicants in a rush to get them into the

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 53 of 78

field. The department denied it was cutting corners, saying new officers get trained on firearms, use-of-force policies and how to safely arrest people.

Schwank testified during a hearing hosted by Democratic Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut and Rep. Robert Garcia of California. Blumenthal's office said Schwank resigned from the agency on Feb. 13.

"I am here because I am duty-bound to report the legally required training program at the ICE academy is deficient, defective and broken," Schwank said.

He also accused the department of dismantling the training program for new deportation officers and lying about what they were doing.

"DHS told the public the new cadets receive all the training they need to perform their duties, that no critical material or standards have been cut," he said. "This is a lie. ICE made the program shorter, and they removed so many essential parts that what remains is a dangerous husk."

Monday's was the third public forum held by the two Democrats to examine how ICE is training thousands of new officers and the conduct of those officers once they're on the streets. Both have been vocal critics of how ICE officers conduct themselves. At the beginning of the hearing, Blumenthal thanked the witnesses, including Schwank, for their "courage and strength."

Blumenthal's office said Schwank was one of two anonymous whistleblowers who came forward earlier to disclose a new ICE policy authorizing deportation officers to forcibly enter an immigrant's home to remove them from the country even if they didn't have a warrant signed by a judge.

His office also released dozens of pages of documents related to the training of new deportation officers, noting the disclosure came from whistleblowers.

Blumenthal's office said the documents demonstrated "drastic cuts" to how new deportation officers are trained and tested. That includes changes to the number of exams new officers have to pass, the classes they have to take and the hours they train.

"The training has been truncated and reduced, both in numbers of courses and substantive policy," the senator said at the start of the hearing.

Homeland Security strongly denied that it has removed any training requirements or lessened requirements for officers. ICE recruits receive 56 days of training and 28 days on average of on-the-job training, the department said Monday in response to an inquiry about the allegations made during the forum.

"Despite false claims from the media and sanctuary politicians, no training hours have been cut. Our officers receive extensive firearm training, are taught de-escalation tactics, and receive Fourth and Fifth Amendment comprehensive instruction," department spokeswoman Lauren Bis said in an e-mailed statement.

She also said ICE recruits are monitored on the job after graduating from the academy.

The department has "streamlined training to cut redundancy and incorporate technology advancements, without sacrificing basic subject matter content," Bis said.

Schwank disputed that new officers are getting much in the way of on-the-job training, describing the supervision as minimal. Many graduates go to their home offices just long enough to "get their gun, their badge and their body armor," he said.

Schwank said he had taught cadets who were as young as 18, including one who celebrated her 19th birthday in his classroom. Previously, new recruits had to be at least 21, but Homeland Security announced last summer that it was removing age restrictions on who could join the agency. Schwank said the recruits wanted to do well but the agency wasn't giving them the training to do the job correctly.

At one point during Monday's forum, Schwank was asked whether he had ever seen recruits use disproportional force during training and replied that he had seen that happen multiple times. He cited examples of trainees accidentally drawing their firearms on each other, arresting people without cause or using excessive force. Even so, he said, they graduated from the academy.

The documents released by Blumenthal's office show that ICE is eliminating over a dozen "practical exams" that used to be necessary for deportation officers to pass, according to an analysis by Democratic Senate staff. ICE also appears to have cut a number of classes from the training, including "Use of Force

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 54 of 78

Simulation Training.”

Deportation officers appear to be getting fewer hours of training overall, according to the documents.

The two other people who spoke during the forum were Teyana Gibson Brown, whose husband was arrested by deportation officers who broke into their house without a warrant signed by a judge to take him away, and Stevan Bunnell, who was the general counsel for the Department of Homeland Security from 2013 to 2017.

US weather, Mexico security concerns and halt of Global Entry take a toll on air travel

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS and RIO YAMAT AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — Severe winter weather across the northeastern United States, a partial government shutdown and security concerns in parts of western Mexico converged to make Monday a challenging time for air travel.

Thousands of U.S. flights were canceled or delayed on the East Coast as a powerful snowstorm up-ended daily routines in Boston, New York, Philadelphia and other major cities. Airlines also suspended or adjusted service to destinations in and around Mexico’s Jalisco state as violence erupted in the aftermath of a senior cartel leader’s killing.

Travelers with Global Entry memberships faced potentially longer wait times upon arriving in the U.S. as well, after the Department of Homeland Security, which shut down on Feb. 14 because Congress did not reach an agreement on its continued funding, temporarily halted the program that gives pre-approved individuals an expedited way to clear immigration and customs.

The overlapping disruptions created cascading delays across interconnected airline networks, stranding some travelers and complicating airport operations, especially on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border.

Winter weather in the US

The winter storm that pounded the Northeast brought heavy snow, strong winds and blizzard warnings that slowed or halted transportation networks across the region.

Air traffic slowed dramatically. More than 5,600 flights into, out of or within the U.S. were canceled, according to flight-tracking service FlightAware. Over 3,000 others were delayed.

New York’s John F. Kennedy International Airport and LaGuardia Airport reported the highest numbers of cancellations Monday — followed by airports in Boston, Newark, New Jersey, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. Smaller airports, including Rhode Island’s T.F. Green International Airport, temporarily suspended operations.

Even after a storm passes, it takes time for airlines to get their planes and flight crews back where they need to be to restore full schedules, according to Michael McCormick, an associate professor of air traffic management at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University.

“This storm is so wide-ranging, it’s impacted major hubs along the Northeast. And those airports are the most vulnerable airports in terms of getting aircraft and air crews positioned to be able to fly their schedule,” McCormick said. As a result, there will continue to be cancellations that “gradually decrease daily,” he said.

More than 1,900 U.S. flights already were canceled for Tuesday.

Benjamin Lundell and Thomas Mehari were among the travelers who got stuck in New York on Monday. The network consultants are on a business trip from Sweden and had their flight to Texas canceled.

“We’re dressed for Houston currently,” said Lundell, as he trudged through knee-high snow in a thin jacket and jeans in search of a new hotel in Manhattan.

Ground travel

The National Weather Service called travel conditions “extremely treacherous” and “nearly impossible” in areas hit hardest by the storm.

Beyond air traffic, millions of people under blizzard warnings faced state or city-level bans on non-emergency ground transportation. Public transit systems were reduced or suspended in some areas.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 55 of 78

New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority said that it had "removed articulated buses from service during the storm" as of midday Monday and that there might be subway delays, especially along routes that run outdoors. The Long Island Rail Road temporarily suspended all services until further notice.

As for longer passenger train routes, Amtrak stopped all service between New York Moynihan Train Hall and Boston South Station through the end of the day Monday. Amtrak said its crews were working to restore service by Tuesday, but it still expected additional cancellations.

Mexico travel

While the winter storm accounted for the bulk of Monday's flight cancellations, it was not the only factor. After the killing Sunday of Mexico's most powerful cartel leader, Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes, in Jalisco state, local and foreign governments issued travel advisories and safety guidance.

A series of retaliatory attacks since the killing of Oseguera Cervantes have put much of Mexico on edge. Jalisco Gov. Pablo Lemus suspended public transportation on Sunday and urged residents to stay in their homes. Meanwhile, the U.S. State Department advised American citizens in parts of Jalisco and other states to shelter in place and avoid non-essential travel until the situation stabilized. Canadian authorities issued similar guidance.

Carriers including AeroMexico, Delta Air Lines, United Airlines, American Airlines and Air Canada canceled or scaled back flights to Puerto Vallarta and Guadalajara. Many offered customers flexible rebooking options. Some government agencies may implement more sweeping limitations on air travel if safety concerns persist or escalate further, aviation experts said.

Oklahoma resident Steve Perkins, 57, told The Associated Press in a video interview from Puerto Vallarta that he and his wife were stranded after their flight home Monday was canceled. Perkins said they were having coffee on their hotel's terrace Sunday morning when they heard an explosion and later saw plumes of black smoke surround the downtown.

"My wife called our kids to tell them goodbye if we were never gonna see them again, that kind of thing. It was fairly unsettling," Perkins said.

Perkins, who works as an IT consultant, said his vacation was only supposed to be for a week so he'll have to resume working from Puerto Vallarta until he can go home.

Global Entry

Adding to airport strain, the Department of Homeland Security said the suspension of its Global Entry program that started over the weekend would remain in place until the partial U.S. government shutdown ends.

Global Entry allows pre-approved travelers to use expedited kiosks when entering the U.S. from abroad. The suspension could mean longer wait times for some returning passengers at international airports.

Homeland Security initially planned to halt the Transportation Security Administration's PreCheck program as well but ended up not doing so. The department indicated it still might suspend PreCheck, however, saying it would adjust operations on a "case-by-case basis" as staffing constraints arise.

That's because TSA agents are working without pay during the lapse in funding, which could lead to staffing issues and long security lines if the shutdown drags on.

Tips for travelers

U.S. airlines are required to provide refunds for canceled flights. And when they expect severe disruptions, they also often give travelers a chance to postpone their trips by a few days without having to pay a fee.

Many carriers are offering rebooking options for customers impacted by the storm and the security challenges in Mexico. They include JetBlue, Delta Air Lines, American Airlines, United Airlines, Southwest Airlines, Alaska Airlines, Air Canada and AeroMexico.

McCormick suggested that travelers subscribe to text or email alerts from their airlines to receive the latest updates. Going online to look at alternate routes is also helpful. Be sure to check if cancellations or delays are impacting a connecting airport as well as the departure airport and final destination.

BAFTA and BBC apologize for racial slur during awards show

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The British Academy Film Awards and BBC apologized Monday for a racial slur that was broadcast during Sunday's show while two stars of the film "Sinners" were onstage.

The Tourette syndrome campaigner who shouted the slur said he was "deeply mortified" and what he said was "not a reflection of my personal beliefs."

The highly offensive word could be heard as "Sinners" stars Michael B. Jordan and Delroy Lindo, who are both Black, were presenting the award for best visual effects during Sunday's ceremony. Host Alan Cumming had earlier told the audience that Tourette syndrome advocate John Davidson was in attendance.

The incident prompted the British Academy of Film and Television Arts to apologize for "offensive language that carries incomparable trauma and pain for so many," adding "We would like to thank Michael and Delroy for their incredible dignity and professionalism."

Davidson, a Scottish campaigner for people with Tourette syndrome, who inspired the BAFTA-nominated film "I Swear," said in a statement Monday that he was "deeply mortified if anyone considers my involuntary tics to be intentional or to carry any meaning."

Tourettes Action — a Tourette syndrome charity — called for understanding of the condition.

"We deeply understand that these words can cause hurt but at the same time, it is vital that the public understands a fundamental truth about Tourette syndrome: tics are involuntary. They are not a reflection of a person's beliefs, intentions, or character," said Emma McNally, CEO of Tourettes Action.

Tourette syndrome, a neurodevelopmental disorder, is characterized by sudden, involuntary movements or sounds called tics that tend to wax and wane but can worsen with excitement or anxiety, according to the U.S. National Institutes of Health. They may appear to be purposeful but are not, and the NIH's National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke's Tourette information page says people trying to suppress them often report a buildup of tension before a tic erupts.

The Tourette Association of America says about 10-15% of people with the syndrome experience a kind of vocal tic called coprolalia — involuntary swearing, slurs or other socially unacceptable words or phrases.

Several shouts were audible during the first part of the ceremony, although what was said wasn't intelligible to an Associated Press reporter in the press room.

After the slur was shouted during Jordan and Lindo's presentation, Cumming apologized to the audience at London's Royal Festival Hall for the "strong and offensive language."

"Tourette syndrome is a disability and the tics you have heard tonight are involuntary, which means the person who has Tourette syndrome has no control over their language," Cumming said. "We apologize if you were offended."

Davidson said in his statement that "I chose to leave the auditorium early into the ceremony as I was aware of the distress my tics were causing."

The epithet could be heard when the BBC broadcast the ceremony about two hours after the live event. The broadcaster apologized for not editing it out before the broadcast, though the offensive word could still be heard on its iPlayer streaming service on Monday morning. The program was later removed, and the BBC said the slur would be edited out.

"Some viewers may have heard strong and offensive language during the Bafta Film Awards," the BBC said in a statement. "This arose from involuntary verbal tics associated with Tourette syndrome, and as explained during the ceremony it was not intentional.

"I Swear" won two BAFTAs, including best actor for Robert Aramayo, who plays Davidson.

Representatives for the film and for Jordan and Lindo did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

After Supreme Court rebuke, Democrats call for government to refund billions in Trump tariff money

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A trio of Senate Democrats is calling for the government to start refunding roughly \$175 billion in tariff revenues that the Supreme Court ruled were collected because of an illegal set of orders by President Donald Trump.

Sens. Ron Wyden of Oregon, Ed Markey of Massachusetts and Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire are unveiling a bill on Monday that would require U.S. Customs and Border Protection to issue refunds over the course of 180 days and pay interest on the refunded amount.

The measure would prioritize refunds to small businesses and encourages importers, wholesalers and large companies to pass the refunds on to their customers.

"Trump's illegal tax scheme has already done lasting damage to American families, small businesses and manufacturers who have been hammered by wave after wave of new Trump tariffs," said Wyden, stressing that the "crucial first step" to fixing the problem begins with "putting money back in the pockets of small businesses and manufacturers as soon as possible."

The bill is unlikely to become law, but it reveals how Democrats are starting to apply public pressure on a Trump administration that has shown little interest in trying to return tariff revenues after the Supreme Court announced its 6-3 ruling on Friday.

Because of the ruling, going into November's midterm elections for control of Congress, Democrats have begun telling the public that Trump illegally raised taxes and now refuses to repay the money back to the American people.

Shaheen said that repairing any of the damage caused by the tariffs in the form of higher prices starts with "President Trump refunding the illegally collected tariff taxes that Americans were forced to pay." Markey stressed that small business tend to have "little to no resources" and a "refund process can be extremely difficult and time consuming" for companies.

The Trump administration has asserted that its hands are tied, because any refunds should be the responsibility of further litigation in court.

Asked if Trump thought Congress should play a role in providing refunds, White House spokesman Kush Desai said: "President Trump used tariffs to actually deliver where Democrats could only talk, so naturally Democrats are rolling up their sleeves to undermine President Trump and the American people – pathetic but unsurprising."

The Democrats' message could put Republicans on the defensive as they try to explain why the government isn't proactively seeking to return the money. GOP lawmakers had planned to try to preserve their House and Senate majorities by running on the income tax cuts that Trump signed into law last year, saying that tax refunds this year would help families.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent told CNN on Sunday that it's "bad framing" to raise the question of refunds because the Supreme Court ruling did not address the issue. The administration's position is that any refunds will be decided by lawsuits winding their way through the legal system, rather than by a president who has repeatedly stressed to voters that he has the ability to act with speed and resolve.

"It is not up to the administration — it is up to the lower court," Bessent said, stressing that rather than offer any guidance he would "wait" for a court opinion on refunds.

Trump has defended his use of the 1977 International Emergency Economic Powers Act to impose broad tariffs on almost every U.S. trading partner, saying that his ability to levy taxes on imports had helped to end military conflicts, bring in new federal revenues and apply pressure for negotiating trade frameworks.

The University of Pennsylvania's Penn Wharton Budget Model released estimates that the refunds would total \$175 billion. That's the equivalent of an average of \$1,300 per U.S. household. But determining how to structure reimbursements would be tricky, as the costs of the tariffs flowed through the economy in the form of customers paying the taxes directly as well as importers passing along the cost either indirectly or absorbing them.

The president has previously claimed that refunds would drive up U.S. government debt and hurt the economy. On Friday, he told reporters at a briefing that the refund process could be finished after he leaves the White House.

"I guess it has to get litigated for the next two years," Trump said, later amending his timeline by saying: "We'll end up being in court for the next five years."

Federal court rejects GOP-led Utah Legislature's latest try to block House map that helps Democrats

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

New Utah voting districts that give Democrats an improved shot at winning a U.S. House seat can be used in this year's election, a federal court ruled Monday while turning aside a Republican request to block the new map.

The ruling marked the second setback in recent days for Republicans, who also lost an appeal at Utah's state Supreme Court.

A Utah judge imposed the new districts last November after striking down the congressional districts that the Republican-led Legislature had adopted after the 2020 census. The judge ruled that the Legislature had circumvented standards against partisan gerrymandering that were approved by voters in 2018.

The judge's ruling thrust Utah into a national redistricting battle being waged among states ahead of the midterm elections. President Donald Trump has pressed Republican-led states such as Texas, Missouri and North Carolina to redraw their districts to give the GOP an advantage in the November elections, prompting Democratic-led states such as California and Virginia to respond with their own redistricting plans.

Republicans currently hold all four of Utah's U.S. House seats.

The new map imposed last fall by Judge Dianna Gibson improves Democrats' chances of winning a seat by keeping Salt Lake County almost entirely within one district, instead of dividing the heavily Democratic population center among all four districts, as was previously the case. The map had been submitted to the court by the League of Women Voters of Utah and Mormon Women for Ethical Government — the plaintiffs who challenged the previous districts.

"We're pleased that the court protected the fair map," Katharine Biele, president of the League of Women Voters of Utah, said Monday. "We only wish that the future attempts to undermine this fair map would cease, so we could focus on what is important to Utahns."

Earlier this month, Republican U.S. Reps. Celeste Maloy and Burgess Owens joined with nearly a dozen local officials to file a federal lawsuit arguing that the state judge did not have legal authority to enact a map that wasn't approved by the Legislature.

But a panel of three district court judges denied their request for a preliminary injunction against using the new map in this year's election. The federal court said they weren't likely to prevail in their argument, and said it was too late for judges to intervene in the election.

The filing period for Utah's congressional candidates opens March 9, party caucuses are scheduled for March 17, and state party conventions are to be held April 25. Some candidates already are campaigning, the court noted.

"An active primary is ongoing, and the election has drawn too close for the court to get involved," the court wrote while adding: "The possibility of voter confusion is a considerable risk were the panel to enjoin the current election map."

The Congress members and local officials who sued issued a joint statement expressing "profound disappointment but respect for the court's careful review."

Republicans still are pursuing other means of undoing the new maps. A Republican-backed group recently submitted petition signatures to try to get a measure on the November ballot repealing an independent redistricting commission and the provision against partisan gerrymandering.

Armed man shot and killed at Mar-a-Lago was never interested in politics or guns, cousin says

By ALLEN G. BREED Associated Press

CAMERON, N.C. (AP) — The 21-year-old North Carolina man who entered a gate at President Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort with a shotgun before he was shot and killed worked as a golf course groundskeeper and liked to sketch.

Austin Tucker Martin rarely, if ever, talked about politics, seemed afraid of guns, and came from a family of Trump supporters, according to Braeden Fields, a cousin who said the two grew up together.

"I wouldn't believe he would do something like this. It's mind-blowing," Fields said. "He wouldn't even hurt an ant. He doesn't even know how to use a gun."

Martin walked up to the secure perimeter at Mar-a-Lago early Sunday and went through a gate when it opened for employees to leave, a U.S. Secret Service spokesperson said Monday. Martin dropped a gas can and raised a shotgun at two Secret Service agents and a Palm Beach County sheriff's deputy who then opened fire "to neutralize the threat," said Sheriff Ric Bradshaw.

Trump, who often spends weekends at the Palm Beach, Florida, resort, was at the White House at the time.

Investigators have not identified a motive. Trump faced two assassination attempts during the 2024 campaign, including one just a few miles (kilometers) from Mar-a-Lago when a man was spotted aiming a rifle through shrubbery while Trump was golfing.

Following Sunday's incident, Secret Service spokesperson Anthony Guglielmi said investigators believe Martin bought his shotgun while driving to Florida. Authorities said his family had recently reported him missing.

Martin was from central North Carolina, where guns and hunting are a part of life, his cousin said. But whenever they'd go hunting or target shooting, Martin would never pick up a gun, Fields told The Associated Press on Sunday.

He lived with his mother in a modest modular house down a rutted sandy road near the town of Cameron. No one answered the door Monday, and the large police presence from the day before was gone.

Martin's sister was just 21 when she was killed in a car accident in 2023, and he has an older brother who's in the military, Fields said.

For the past three years, Martin worked as a groundskeeper at Pine Needles Lodge & Golf Club.

"It's tragic. I feel for his family," said Kelly Miller, president of the course in nearby Southern Pines. "It's just unfortunate what transpired. It was totally unexpected."

Martin last year started a business to sell pen drawings he made, according to state records. A website matching the company name features illustrations of golf courses, buildings and ancient Roman architecture.

Politics didn't seem to be among his interests, his cousin said

"We are big Trump supporters, all of us. Everybody," Fields said, but his cousin was "real quiet, never really talked about anything."

Rob Reiner's son pleads not guilty to murder in the killing of his parents

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Nick Reiner, the 32-year-old son of Hollywood luminary Rob Reiner and Michele Singer Reiner, pleaded not guilty Monday to two counts of first-degree murder more than two months after their deaths, denying for the first time that he fatally stabbed his parents.

Reiner's attorney, Deputy Public Defender Kimberly Greene, entered the plea on his behalf as he stood behind glass in an enclosed custody area of the packed Los Angeles courtroom.

The third of Rob Reiner's four children, Nick Reiner has been held without bail since his arrest hours after beloved actor-director Reiner and photographer and producer Singer were found dead on Dec. 14 at their

home in the upscale Brentwood section of Los Angeles.

Reiner appeared in court with a shaved head and light facial hair, wearing brown jail clothes. He talked to his lawyer briefly through the glass before the judge began the hearing. At one point a low door in the enclosure was opened and they crouched down and spoke face-to-face. During the hearing, he spoke only to answer yes when the judge asked if he waived his right for next steps of the case to proceed speedily.

Reiner was not wearing the suicide prevention smock he wore in his first court appearance in December days after his parent's killings. It was the third time he had been set to enter a plea, but issues surrounding the high-stakes, closely watched case, including a surprising change in defense lawyers, kept it from happening until Monday.

The judge told Reiner to return to court April 29 for the scheduling of a preliminary hearing where prosecutors will present evidence and a new judge will decide if it's enough for Reiner to go to trial.

The case will now be handled by longtime Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Sam Ohta. He has had many prominent murder, manslaughter and public corruption cases in his courtroom in recent years, but none have drawn the national media attention this case has.

District Attorney Nathan Hochman said outside court that his office still hasn't decided whether it will seek the death penalty for Reiner. Hochman said the death penalty decision "goes through a very rigorous process. We will be looking at all aggravating and mitigating circumstances."

Reiner's not guilty plea is common for criminal defendants at this stage of the case, whatever their longer-term plan might be.

Reiner's former attorney, the high-profile private lawyer Alan Jackson, had to quit the case at the previous hearing, citing reasons beyond his and his client's control that ethics wouldn't let him reveal. But in parting, he adamantly declared that "pursuant to the laws of California, Nick Reiner is not guilty of murder," a stance made official by Reiner's plea Monday.

Authorities have said nothing about possible motives, and leaks in the case have been virtually nonexistent on both sides, leaving some of the most basic questions about the killing unanswered publicly.

Rob Reiner, 78, and Michele Singer Reiner, 70, died from "multiple sharp force injuries," the LA County Medical Examiner said in initial findings. Authorities said they were killed hours before the bodies were discovered. A court order has prevented the public release of more details.

Deputy District Attorney Habib Balian said Monday that his office is still awaiting the full autopsy report from the Medical Examiner, but all other evidence has been turned over to the defense.

Rob Reiner was a prolific director whose work included some of the most memorable and endlessly watchable movies of the 1980s and '90s. His credits included "This is Spinal Tap," "Stand By Me," "A Few Good Men," and "When Harry Met Sally..." during the production of which he met photographer Michele Singer. They wed soon after and were married for 36 years.

Judge blocks release of special counsel Jack Smith's report on Trump classified documents case

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal judge on Monday permanently barred the release of a report by special counsel Jack Smith on his investigation into President Donald Trump's hoarding of classified documents, a prosecution that was once seen as the most perilous of the four criminal cases the Republican faced.

U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon, who was nominated to the bench by Trump, granted a request from the president to keep under wraps the report on an investigation alleging that Trump stored sensitive documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate after he left the White House following his first term and that he obstructed government efforts to get them back.

Smith and his team produced a two-volume report on the classified documents investigation and a separate probe into Trump's efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election after he lost to Democrat Joe Biden. Both investigations produced indictments that were abandoned by Smith's team after Trump's November 2024 election win in light of longstanding Justice Department legal opinions that say sitting

presidents cannot face federal prosecution.

Attorney General Pam Bondi had already determined that the report was “an internal deliberative communication that is privileged and confidential and should not be released” outside the Justice Department, according to court papers. The Trump administration has characterized Smith’s investigation as politically motivated and said in recent court papers that the report belongs in the “dustbin of history.”

Cannon’s order blocking the release also applies to Bondi’s successors at the Justice Department. Cannon, who in 2024 dismissed the case after concluding that Smith was unlawfully appointed after multiple other favorable rulings for Trump, said the release of the report would present a “manifest injustice” to the president and his two co-defendants.

“Special Counsel Smith, acting without lawful authority, obtained an indictment in this action and initiated proceedings that resulted in a final order of dismissal of all charges,” she wrote. “As a result, the former defendants in this case, like any other defendant in this situation, still enjoy the presumption of innocence held sacrosanct in our constitutional order.”

A First Amendment group and a watchdog organization have been pressing for the report’s release.

Chioma Chukwu, executive director of American Oversight, said it “will continue using every tool available to force this information into the open and to defend the public’s right to the truth through the release of this report.”

Scott Wilkens, senior counsel at The Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University — another group pushing for the report’s public release — said “there is no legitimate basis for its continued suppression.”

“Judge Cannon’s decision to permanently block the release of this extraordinarily significant report is impossible to square with the First Amendment and the common law,” Wilkens said in an emailed statement.

A lawyer for Trump, Kendra Wharton, praised Cannon’s ruling, saying in a statement that Smith was unconstitutionally appointed and that his report “should never see the light of day.”

Cannon wrote that though it is true that special counsels have historically released reports at the conclusion of their work, they have done so either after electing not to bring charges in a particular case or “after adjudications of guilt by plea or trial.” Though Cannon suggested that an adjudication of guilt typically precedes the release of a special counsel report, there have been instances in which defendants charged by a special counsel have been acquitted at trial and the allegations against them have nonetheless been subsequently rehashed in a publicly released report.

The classified documents case was once considered the most serious of the four criminal cases against him. It accused Trump of repeatedly enlisting aides and lawyers to help him hide records demanded by investigators and cavalierly showing off a Pentagon “plan of attack” and classified map.

The first volume of Smith’s report on Trump’s 2020 election interference case was released last year shortly before Trump returned to the White House. Smith has defended his decision to bring those charges, saying he believes they would have resulted in a conviction had voters not elected Trump in 2024.

Cannon last year granted a defense request to at least temporarily halt the release of the report dealing with the classified documents case. That edict meant that Smith could not discuss the substance of that investigation when he testified last month before the House Judiciary Committee.

Armed man shot and killed after entering secure perimeter of Mar-a-Lago, Secret Service says

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and ALLEN G. BREED The Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — An armed man entered the secure perimeter of Mar-a-Lago, President Donald Trump’s resort in Palm Beach, Florida, before being shot and killed early Sunday morning, according to a spokesman for the U.S. Secret Service.

Although Trump often spends weekends at his resort, he was at the White House when the breach occurred around 1:30 a.m.

The man had a gas can and a shotgun, authorities said. Investigators identified him as 21-year-old

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 62 of 78

Austin Tucker Martin of North Carolina, according to the FBI, and authorities said his family had recently reported him missing.

He's believed to have purchased his shotgun while driving south, Secret Service spokesman Anthony Guglielmi said, and a box for the weapon was later discovered in the man's vehicle.

Investigators have not identified a motive. However, Trump has faced threats to his life before, including two assassination attempts during the 2024 campaign.

The investigation is ongoing

The man entered the north gate of the property as a vehicle was exiting and was confronted by two Secret Service agents and a Palm Beach County sheriff's deputy, according to Palm Beach County Sheriff Ric Bradshaw. Martin was on foot and was spotted by the Secret Service entering the gate as it opened for employees to leave, a Secret Service spokesperson said.

"He was ordered to drop those two pieces of equipment that he had with him. At which time he put down the gas can, raised the shotgun to a shooting position," Bradshaw said at a brief press conference. The two agents and the deputy "fired their weapons to neutralize the threat."

The Moore County Sheriff's Department in North Carolina said a relative of Martin's reported him missing early Sunday morning.

Investigators are working to compile a psychological profile. Asked whether the man was previously known to law enforcement, Bradshaw said "not right now."

The FBI encouraged residents who live near Mar-a-Lago to check any security cameras they may have for footage that could help investigators.

In a post on X, FBI Director Kash Patel said the bureau would be "dedicating all necessary resources" to the investigation.

Martin was described by family as quiet and averse to guns

On Sunday afternoon, vehicles blocked the entrance to a property listed in public records as an address for Martin at the end of a private road in Cameron, North Carolina.

Braeden Fields, Martin's cousin, reacted with disbelief. He described Martin as quiet, afraid of guns and from a family of avid Trump supporters.

"He's a good kid," Fields, 19, said. He said they grew up together. "I wouldn't believe he would do something like this. It's mind-blowing," Fields said.

He said Martin worked at a local golf course and would send money from each paycheck to charity.

"He wouldn't even hurt an ant. He doesn't even know how to use a gun," Fields said.

He said his cousin didn't discuss politics.

"We are big Trump supporters, all of us. Everybody," Fields said, but his cousin was "real quiet, never really talked about anything."

Trump faced two assassination attempts during his last campaign

Sunday's incursion at Mar-a-Lago took place a few miles from Trump's West Palm Beach club where a man tried to assassinate him while he played golf during the 2024 campaign.

A Secret Service agent spotted that man, Ryan Routh, aiming a rifle through the shrubbery before Trump came into view. Officials said Routh aimed his rifle at the agent, who opened fire and caused Routh to drop his weapon.

Routh was found guilty last year and sentenced this month to life in prison.

Trump also survived an assassination attempt at a campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania. That gunman fired eight shots before being killed by a Secret Service counter sniper. One rally attendee was killed by the gunman.

White House brings in shutdown politics

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said in a post on X that "the United States Secret Service acted quickly and decisively to neutralize a crazy person, armed with a gun and a gas canister, who intruded President Trump's home."

Leavitt used her post to blame Democratic lawmakers in Congress for the partial government shutdown affecting the Homeland Security Department, which began Feb. 14 after Democrats demanded changes

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 63 of 78

to the president's deportation campaign.

The Secret Service is among the agencies where the vast majority of employees are continuing their work but missing a paycheck.

"Federal law enforcement are working 24/7 to keep our country safe and protect all Americans," Leavitt said. "It's shameful and reckless that Democrats have chosen to shut down their Department."

The White House referred all questions to the Secret Service and FBI. Both Trump and his wife posted statements on social media after the incident, but they were unrelated to the shooting.

Numerous recent acts of politically motivated violence

In the past year, there was the assassination of conservative activist Charlie Kirk; the assassination of the Democratic leader in the Minnesota state House and her husband and the shooting of another lawmaker and his wife; and an arson attack at the official residence of Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro.

Five days ago, a Georgia man armed with a shotgun was arrested as he sprinted toward the west side of the U.S. Capitol. Trump is scheduled to deliver his State of the Union address there on Tuesday night.

Duke rises to No. 1 in AP Top 25 men's hoops poll for record 148th time; Florida, Alabama make leaps

By AARON BEARD AP Basketball Writer

Duke's win against Michigan has propelled the Blue Devils to a familiar perch: No. 1 in The Associated Press men's college basketball poll.

The Blue Devils climbed two spots to top Monday's poll, marking the 148th appearance at No. 1 to add to what was already the record for any program. Duke (25-2) claimed 56 of 61 first-place votes to supplant Michigan (25-2) after Saturday's 68-63 win against the Wolverines in Washington.

That win came in a matchup of the top two teams in the NCAA men's selection committee's preliminary top 16 seeds for March Madness, released hours before the game. The Blue Devils enter this week with a national-best 12 Quadrant 1 wins, along with nine wins against AP Top 25 teams.

And now the latest such win has pushed the Blue Devils back to a No. 1 ranking for the second straight season under fourth-year coach Jon Scheyer. Last year's Final Four team sat atop the last two polls entering the NCAA Tournament, the first time Duke had reached No. 1 since Scheyer took over for retired Hall of Famer Mike Krzyzewski in 2022.

Arizona rose two spots to No. 2 after beating BYU and winning at Houston, and secured the other five first-place votes. Michigan fell to No. 3 as its first appearance at No. 1 since January 2013 turned into a one-week stay, followed by a pair of Big 12 teams in Iowa State and Houston.

The top tier

UConn fell one spot to No. 6 after a week that included a home loss to Creighton, while reigning national champion Florida leapt five spots to No. 7 to return to the top 10 for the first time since late November. The Gators were ranked No. 3 in the preseason and spent a week among the unranked in early January. They have won seven straight and 12 of 13.

Purdue, Gonzaga and Illinois rounded out the top 10.

NCAA selection committee vs. AP Top 25

The selection committee had Michigan, Duke, Arizona and Iowa State as the No. 1 seeds in Saturday's reveal of the preliminary top 16 seeds. The Cyclones edged UConn and Houston for the fourth 1-seed, with the Huskies' loss to Creighton and then Iowa State's head-to-head win against Houston to start last week swinging the vote to T.J. Otzelberger's squad.

Monday's poll largely aligns with the committee's reveal, starting with the same four teams at the top in a shuffled order — with Iowa State moving up two spots even after Saturday's loss at now-No. 19 BYU.

In addition, the AP Top 25 and committee align on 15 teams being ranked among those top 16 seeds. The outlier is St. John's at No. 15 in the AP poll, taking a slot that went to Vanderbilt — with the Commodores seeded 15th overall by the committee Saturday but sliding to No. 25 in Monday's poll.

Rising

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 64 of 78

Alabama had the week's biggest jump, rising eight spots to No. 17 after a thrilling double-overtime home win against Arkansas and a win at LSU pushed the Crimson Tide's win streak to six games.

Florida had the week's second-biggest gain, while BYU rose four spots after the Arizona loss and Iowa State win.

In all, 11 teams moved up from last week's ranking.

Sliding

No. 14 Kansas joined Vanderbilt with the week's biggest slide of six spots. The Jayhawks are coming off a 16-point home loss to a Cincinnati team that was reeling in early February but has won four straight.

The Commodores lost at Missouri and at home to Tennessee last week, falling to 5-6 since a 16-0 start that carried them to a No. 10 ranking as of mid-January.

Saint Louis tumbled five spots to No. 23 after last week's loss at Rhode Island ended an 18-game winning streak, while 11 teams fell from last week but remained in the poll.

Status quo

Illinois and No. 20 Arkansas were the only two teams to hold their position from last week.

Coming and going

Tennessee was the lone new addition at No. 22, with the Volunteers beating Oklahoma and Vanderbilt last week to push its winning streak to four games. This starts a third stint in the poll for Rick Barnes' Volunteers, who fell out for two weeks in mid-January, returned for a week at No. 25 to start February, then were unranked again for the past two weeks.

The Vols replaced Wisconsin, which fell out from No. 24 after last week's loss at Ohio State.

Conference watch

The Big 12 led all conferences with six ranked teams, while the Big Ten and Southeastern Conference each had five. The Atlantic Coast Conference was next with four, followed by the Big East with two.

The West Coast Conference, Mid-American Conference and Atlantic 10 each had one ranked team.

How the former Prince Andrew could be removed from Britain's line of succession

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — It's been 90 years since a British royal was removed from the line of succession. That might happen again now that Britain's government says it will consider introducing legal changes to formally remove Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor from the list of royals in line to the throne.

Despite being stripped of his status as prince in October over his close links with the late convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, the former Prince Andrew, King Charles III's younger brother, remains eighth in line to become monarch.

Experts say the process of removing him from the line of succession could be lengthy because it requires the involvement of about a dozen countries that also call the British monarch their head of state.

Nonetheless, momentum for change appears to be building after police last week arrested Mountbatten-Windsor on suspicion of misconduct in public office. Following the release of millions of pages of files last month related to Epstein by the U.S. Justice Department, the former prince was accused of sharing confidential trade information with the disgraced financier when he served as U.K. trade envoy from 2001 to 2011.

Mountbatten-Windsor, 66, was released without charge on Thursday after spending about 11 hours in custody, but he remains under investigation.

"The government is clear that we are not ruling out action in respect of the line of succession at this stage, and we will consider whether any further steps are required in due course," Darren Jones, Prime Minister Keir Starmer's chief secretary, told lawmakers on Monday.

Any such measure will only take place once the police investigation is finished, he added.

An act of Parliament is required

Under the current line of royal succession, Charles' son Prince William is heir to the throne and his three

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 65 of 78

children — Prince George, Princess Charlotte and Prince Louis — are next. Prince Harry is fifth, while his two children, Prince Archie and Princess Lilibet, are sixth and seventh in line.

Mountbatten-Windsor — who was second in line to the throne at his birth — currently follows them in eighth position. His daughters, Princesses Beatrice and Eugenie, are at ninth and 12th places respectively.

Removing him from the line of succession would require an act of Parliament, which needs lawmakers' approval.

One party, the Liberal Democrats, has been vocal about supporting such a move.

"I think it would be intolerable for Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor to succeed to the crown," party leader Ed Davey said last week. "It's not as remote as some people think."

Beyond Britain

Any change to the line of succession would also require backing from about a dozen Commonwealth countries where Charles is head of state.

Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said Monday he would back any U.K. government plan to exclude Mountbatten-Windsor.

"These are grave allegations and Australians take them seriously," he wrote in a letter to Starmer. "I agree with His Majesty that the law must now take its full course and there must be a full, fair and proper investigation."

Starmer's government is not believed to have received similar letters from 13 other countries that also have Charles as head of state, including Canada, New Zealand, Jamaica, the Bahamas and Tuvalu.

Robert Hazell, a politics professor who founded the Constitution Unit at University College London, said in some countries it requires a formal constitutional amendment, while in others it can be done by legislation. He expressed doubt that the U.K. or the other governments would want to spend time removing Mountbatten-Windsor from the succession line given he is only eighth in line.

"The last time this happened was for the Succession to the Crown Act 2013, which made the law of royal succession gender neutral," he said. "It took two years of protracted negotiations for all the different countries to amend their own laws or constitutions."

The status of Andrew's daughters

One question is whether excluding Mountbatten-Windsor would affect his daughters, who are not working royals, and their children.

"Not necessarily — it depends how the legislation is framed," Hazell said.

The last time a royal was removed from the line of succession was after King Edward VIII abdicated in December 1936 to marry American divorcee Wallis Simpson. At the time, the law was changed to strike him and any descendants from the list.

For his part, Charles has not publicly indicated whether he would support or oppose removing his brother from the line of succession. The monarch stressed that the law must take its course in the investigation, adding: "My family and I will continue in our duty and service to you all."

Reports in the British media, however, suggest the palace is not against a legal change to remove Mountbatten-Windsor from the line of succession. Citing an unnamed palace source, the Times of London reported on Saturday that the royal family said it would "never get in the way" of what Parliament decides.

EU fails to pass new sanctions targeting Russia after Hungary objects

By SAM McNEIL and SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Union failed to pass new sanctions on Russia on Monday after surprise objections from Hungary, the bloc's top diplomat said.

"This is a setback and a message we did not want to send today," said Kaja Kallas, the EU's foreign policy chief. Foreign ministers had scrambled to finalize the sanctions along with a massive new loan for Kyiv ahead of the fourth anniversary of a war that has left an estimated 1.8 million Russian and Ukrainian soldiers dead, wounded or missing.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 66 of 78

Monday's meeting sought to make Russia pay a greater economic price for the all-out war it launched against its neighbor on Feb. 24, 2022, and which shows no sign of ending.

Hungary, seen as the EU's most pro-Russian member, threatened over the weekend to hold up both the sanctions and the 90 billion euro (\$106 billion) loan meant to help Ukraine meet its military and economic needs for the next two years.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz marked what he called "four monstrous years of war" at a pro-Ukrainian event in Berlin on Monday.

"I appeal again to our European partners: Do not let up in your support, in our common support, for Ukraine," Merz said. "We are standing at a crossroads that could decide on the well-being of our whole continent."

In Paris, French President Emmanuel Macron declared that "our determination to continue supporting Ukraine is unwavering." He met with Finland's President Alexander Stubb, another staunch supporter of Kyiv who urged European allies to raise the costs on Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Grappling with Hungary's objections

Many EU leaders had hoped to move forward on the 20th package of sanctions targeting Russia's shadow fleet and energy revenues before Tuesday's anniversary of the war.

But Hungary said it would stand firm until Russian oil deliveries to Hungary resume. It had previously agreed to the loan to Ukraine. Kallas said reneging on that goes against EU treaties.

Russian oil shipments to Hungary and Slovakia have been interrupted since Jan. 27 after what Ukrainian officials say were Russian drone attacks damaged the Druzhba pipeline, which carries Russian crude across Ukrainian territory and into Central Europe.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán doubled down Monday on an unsubstantiated allegation that Ukraine is deliberately holding back shipments of Russian oil, and accused Kyiv of seeking to topple his government. He referred to the oil supply disruptions as a "Ukrainian oil blockade" led by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

"No one has the right to put our energy security at risk," Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó told journalists ahead of the meeting.

Raising the pressure on Russia

Some European leaders stressed that the most effective way to get Russia to agree to peace in Ukraine is to raise the cost to Moscow of continuing the war.

"This war will only end when Russia no longer sees any sense in continuing it, when Russia can no longer expect more territorial gains, when Russia's costs for this madness have simply become too high," Merz said. "We must dry up Moscow's war financing."

Finland's leader argued that Russia's war was a "strategic failure" as he made the case for ratcheting up pressure on Putin.

"It is also a military failure — he is now losing many soldiers — and, on top of that, it is an economic failure," Stubb said, speaking in French. "Putin is not winning this war, but he cannot make peace."

The EU already has sent Ukraine 194.9 billion euros (\$229.8 billion) in financial assistance while squeezing Russia's key energy exports.

Nearly every country in Europe has significantly reduced or ceased Russian energy imports since Moscow launched its full-scale war in Ukraine. Yet Hungary and Slovakia, both EU and NATO members, have maintained and even increased supplies of Russian oil and gas, and received a temporary exemption from an EU policy prohibiting imports of Russian oil.

Hungary's looming election

Facing a crucial election in less than two months, Orbán has launched an aggressive anti-Ukraine campaign and accused the opposition Tisza party, which leads in most polls, of conspiring with the EU and Ukraine to install what he called Monday a "pro-Ukraine government aligned with Brussels and Kyiv."

Poland's Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski said he believed Hungary's veto threat could really be about Orbán's fierce fight to hold onto power.

Orbán, the EU's longest-serving leader, will face the greatest challenge to his power since he took office

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 67 of 78

in 2010.

"I would have expected a much greater feeling of solidarity from Hungary for Ukraine," Sikorski said in Brussels. "The ruling party managed to create a climate of hostility towards the victim of aggression. And then it is now trying to exploit that in the general election. It's quite shocking."

Geno Auriemma's 655th AP Top 25 appearance moves him past Tara VanDerveer

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

Geno Auriemma broke a tie with Tara VanDerveer for most appearances by a coach in The Associated Press women's basketball Top 25 on Monday when UConn was again a unanimous No. 1.

Auriemma has the Huskies ranked for the 655th time. UConn was atop all 31 ballots from the national media panel. The Huskies (29-0) are the last unbeaten team in Division I basketball and have won 45 consecutive games dating to last season.

The top five teams remained unchanged in the rankings this week with UCLA, South Carolina, Texas and Vanderbilt following the Huskies.

The rest of the top 10 changed as Michigan, Louisville, Duke and Ohio State all lost games last week.

LSU moved up one spot to sixth with Oklahoma jumping up four places to seventh. Michigan dropped two spots to eighth and Iowa was ninth. The Hawkeyes moved up four places after beating the Wolverines on Sunday. Louisville was 10th.

Duke, which ended its 17-game winning streak Sunday in a loss to Clemson, dropped to 12th, and Ohio State was 13th.

Falling Lady Vols

Tennessee dropped out of the poll for the first time this season after losing last week to Ole Miss, Texas A&M and Oklahoma. The Lady Vols have dropped seven of nine games for the first time in school history. Tennessee had been ranked for the past 31 polls.

"We've had an incredibly tough stretch," coach Kim Caldwell said after Sunday's loss to Oklahoma. "You just (have to) be honest with your team, and they can handle it or they cannot. And sometimes the honesty is not good and sometimes the honesty is good."

The schedule doesn't get any easier for the Lady Vols with regular season games left against LSU and Vanderbilt.

Welcome back

Princeton re-entered the poll this week at No. 25. The Tigers (21-3) fell out last week after losing to Columbia on Feb. 13. The Lions have beaten the Tigers twice this season, and Princeton's other loss came to No. 14 Maryland.

Conference supremacy

The SEC remained the top conference with nine teams in the poll. The Big Ten is next with seven. The Big 12 has four teams, the Atlantic Coast Conference has three and the Ivy League and Big East each have one.

Games of the week

No. 8 Michigan at No. 13 Ohio State, Wednesday. The two rivals meet with Big Ten Conference seeding on the line. The Wolverines lost their last game, falling at then-No. 13 Iowa on Sunday. The Buckeyes have dropped two of their last three games.

No. 12 Duke at No. 21 North Carolina, Sunday. The Blue Devils beat the Tar Heels in the first meeting earlier this month and will look to wrap up the ACC regular season crown with another victory.

FDA proposes new system for approving customized drugs and therapies for rare diseases

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal health officials on Monday laid out a proposal to spur development of customized treatments for patients with hard-to-treat diseases, including for rare genetic conditions that the pharmaceutical industry has long considered unprofitable.

The preliminary Food and Drug Administration guidelines, if implemented, would create a new pathway for bespoke therapies that have only been tested in a handful of patients due to the challenges of conducting larger studies. The FDA announcement specifically mentions gene editing, although agency officials said the new approach could also be used by other drugs and therapies.

It's a shift long sought by patients, advocates and researchers focused on rare diseases, which often do not fit within the pharmaceutical industry's business model or the FDA's traditional drug-approval system.

"It is our priority to remove barriers and exercise regulatory flexibility to encourage scientific advances and deliver more cures and meaningful treatments for patients suffering from rare diseases," FDA Commissioner Marty Makary said in a release.

The announcement comes a week after Makary said the FDA would drop its decades-old standard of requiring two clinical trials for standard drug reviews. That was the latest in a series of changes to FDA norms and standards, many which have not gone through federal procedures traditionally used to update agency rules.

Senior FDA officials said the recent changes, including the pathway proposed Monday, don't constitute new FDA standards. The FDA will take comments on its draft guidance for 60 days, before beginning to finalize it.

In recent years, academic researchers have shown they can use emerging technology to correct individual defects in a patient's genetic code. Last year, a team at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and the University of Pennsylvania designed a therapy using CRISPR, the Nobel Prize-winning gene editing tool, to treat a baby born with a rare disease that causes ammonia to build up in the blood.

Traditionally, the FDA requires drugmakers to demonstrate the safety and effectiveness of their experimental treatments in clinical studies that compare a set of patients getting the therapy with others taking a sham treatment or an alternative intervention. The more patients enrolled, the stronger the evidence.

But for conditions that can affect a tiny fraction of people worldwide, drug companies often have little incentive to invest millions of dollars needed to complete a study and bring it through the FDA approval process, which can take a decade or longer.

The pathway announced Monday would create a standardized process for authorizing experimental treatments and, importantly, offering companies the possibility of commercializing them.

The FDA already authorizes the use of experimental drugs under what's called "compassionate use," for people with no other medical options. But the process is cumbersome to navigate and strictly prohibits companies or researchers from profiting from treatments that haven't been vetted by the FDA.

The new pathway's name — plausible mechanism — is a reference to criteria FDA regulators will require before greenlighting any experimental therapies.

FDA officials say the approach will be reserved for conditions that are well understood and where there is a plausible reason to think that the therapy will act on the underlying genetic or cellular biology of the disease. Researchers must also confirm that the therapy successfully targeted the patient's genetic or biological abnormality.

International Criminal Court opens hearings into former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte

By MOLLY QUELL Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — Prosecutors at the International Criminal Court told judges on Monday that former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte encouraged death squads to carry out extrajudicial killings using fear and financial rewards.

The court in The Hague is holding pretrial hearings for the ex-leader, who is facing three counts of crimes against humanity for deadly anti-drugs crackdowns he oversaw while in office.

According to prosecutors, police and hit squad members carried out dozens of murders at Duterte's behest, motivated by the promise of money or to avoid becoming targets themselves. "For some, killing reached the level of a perverse form of competition," deputy prosecutor Mame Mandiaye Niang said in his opening statement.

The charges date from Duterte's time as mayor of the southern Philippine city of Davao and later as president, and include dozens of killings as part of his so-called war on drugs.

The hearing is not a trial, but allows prosecutors to outline their case in court. After weighing the evidence, judges have 60 days to decide whether it is strong enough to merit putting Duterte on trial.

Duterte "stands behind his legacy resolutely, and he maintains his innocence absolutely," lead defense lawyer Nick Kaufman told the three-judge panel.

According to Kaufman, the prosecution "cherry-picked" examples of Duterte "bombastic rhetoric," and his client's words were never intended to incite violence.

Duterte, 80, was not present in the courtroom, having waived his right to appear. Last month, judges found he was fit to stand trial, after postponing an earlier hearing over concerns about his health.

In the Philippines, dozens of activists with relatives of suspects killed in Duterte's anti-drugs crackdowns held a noisy protest in metropolitan Manila on Monday. More than 100 relatives gathered to watch the pretrial hearings on big TV screens in three venues organized by civic groups in the capital region.

"We're hoping that the ICC, even if it's thousands of miles away, will finally render justice to all these families," said Randy delos Santos, a volunteer in a charity shelter which was hosting one event.

The 17-year-old nephew of delos Santos was shot and killed by three police officers in a purported drug raid in August 2017. The killing sparked a public outcry. The officers were found guilty of murder in a rare conviction by a Manila court the following year.

Duterte supporters criticized the administration of current Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., Duterte's political rival, for arresting and surrendering the former leader to a court whose jurisdiction they dispute. Detractors include Duterte's daughter, current Philippine Vice President Sara Duterte who announced last week that she would seek the presidency in the 2028 elections.

ICC prosecutors said in February 2018 that they would open a preliminary investigation into the violent drug crackdowns. In a move that human rights activists say was aimed at escaping accountability, Duterte, who was president at the time, announced a month later that the Philippines would leave the court.

Judges rejected a request from Duterte's legal team to throw out the case on the grounds that the court did not have jurisdiction because of the Philippine withdrawal. Countries can't "abuse" their right to withdraw from the court's foundational Rome Statute "by shielding persons from justice in relation to alleged crimes that are already under consideration," the September decision says.

An appeal of that decision is still pending.

Estimates of the death toll during Duterte's presidential term vary, from the more than 6,000 that the national police have reported to up to 30,000 claimed by human rights groups.

What to know about the killing of the powerful cartel leader 'El Mencho' in Mexico

By MARÍA VERZA Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — The Mexican army killed the country's most powerful cartel leader and one of the United States' most wanted fugitives, notching a major victory while cartel members responded with a wave of violence across the country.

The killing Sunday of Jalisco New Generation Cartel leader Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes during an attempt to capture him in Jalisco state was the highest-profile blow against cartels since the recapture of former Sinaloa cartel boss Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán a decade ago.

Following Oseguera Cervantes' death, security forces were placed on alert throughout the country as gunmen unleashed violence. Cars torched by cartel members blocked roads in 20 Mexican states. People locked themselves in their homes in Guadalajara, Mexico's second-largest city and Jalisco's capital, and school was canceled Monday in several states.

The killing could give the government a leg up in its dealings with the Trump administration, which has been threatening tariffs or unilateral military action if Mexico does not show results in the fight against the cartels. But the long-term effect on Mexico's security landscape remains unclear.

Here's what to know:

'El Mencho' was the leader of a fast-growing criminal group

Oseguera Cervantes, better known as "El Mencho," was 59 years old and originally from the western state of Michoacan. His ties to organized crime went back at least three decades.

In 1994, he was tried for trafficking heroin in the U.S. and sent to prison for three years. Upon returning to Mexico, he quickly rose through Mexico's drug trafficking underworld.

Around 2009, he founded the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, which became Mexico's fastest-growing criminal organization, moving cocaine, methamphetamines, fentanyl and migrants to the United States, and using violence with the use of drones and improvised explosive devices.

The cartel earned a reputation for brazen attacks on Mexican security forces, including downing a military helicopter in Jalisco in 2015 and attempting a spectacular, but unsuccessful, assassination of Mexico City Police Chief Omar García Harfuch, who is now Mexico's federal security secretary.

It recruited aggressively, experimenting with new ways to reach potential members online, and generated revenue through fuel theft, extortion and timeshare fraud, among other activities.

Oseguera Cervantes died in a battle with troops sent to capture him

Oseguera Cervantes was killed during an attempt to capture him, as his followers attempted to fight off Mexican troops.

Mexico's Defense Secretary Ricardo Trevilla said Monday that the army and National Guard launched an operation in the southern part of Jalisco state to capture Oseguera Cervantes, involving the Mexican air force and special forces. Intelligence gathered about one of Oseguera Cervantes' romantic partners led them to his hideout, he said.

The cartel counterattacked, and in the ensuing confrontation, federal forces killed eight members of the criminal group. Oseguera Cervantes and two of his bodyguards were wounded and died later during transfer by air to Mexico City, Trevilla said.

Rocket launchers capable of shooting down aircraft and destroying armored vehicles were seized at the scene.

Mexico is keen to show Trump results in the fight against cartels

Oseguera Cervantes' death will help Mexico's government show results to the U.S., which is pressuring its neighbor to pursue drug cartels more aggressively. Both countries said intelligence cooperation helped lead to Sunday's operation.

Oseguera Cervantes was facing multiple indictments in the United States and the U.S. State Department had offered a \$15 million reward for information leading to his arrest. The Trump administration designated his cartel and others foreign terrorist organizations a year ago.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 71 of 78

U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau, who was U.S. ambassador to Mexico during the first Trump administration, applauded the operation via X, writing: "The good guys are stronger than the bad guys. Congratulations to the forces of law and order in the great Mexican nation."

Mike Vigil, former chief of international operations for the DEA, said Mexico had sent "a strong message to Donald Trump's administration that they are fighting aggressively and effectively" against the most powerful cartels. He added that "the majority of the information came from the Mexican armed forces and all credit goes to Mexico."

Cartel leader's death leaves a power vacuum

It's not clear who will succeed Oseguera Cervantes, or if any one person can.

The Jalisco cartel has a presence in at least 21 of Mexico's 32 states and is active in almost all of the United States, according to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. But it is also a global organization and the loss of its leader could be felt well beyond Mexico.

"El Mencho controlled everything, he was like a country's dictator," Vigil said.

His absence could slow the cartel's rapid growth and expansion and leave it initially weakened against the Sinaloa cartel on several fronts where they or their proxies are fighting. The Sinaloa is locked in its own internal power struggle, however, between the sons of "El Chapo" and the faction loyal to Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada, who is in U.S. custody.

Vigil said Mexico should seize the moment to launch "an effective frontal assault based on intelligence."

"This is a big opportunity for Mexico and the United States if they work together," he said.

Security analyst David Saucedo said that if relatives of Oseguera Cervantes take control of the cartel, the violence seen Sunday could continue. If others take power, they could be more willing to turn the page and continue operations.

The greatest fear would be that the cartel turns to indiscriminate violence. They could decide to "launch narcoterrorism attacks ... and generate a scenario similar to what Colombia lived in the 1990s," a full-on attack against the government "car bombs, assassinations and attacks on aircraft."

From bakeries to beauty shops, Russian businesses are feeling the pain from a new wartime tax policy

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

Denis Maksimov's bakery in suburban Moscow became famous overnight after he appeared on President Vladimir Putin's annual call-in show in December.

Standing in front of the bakery — called Mashenka, after his oldest daughter — he pleaded with Putin via video to look into new tax reforms that are significantly increasing the burden on small businesses like his.

"We understand very well that it's not an easy situation for the country. We understand that raising taxes is necessary," Maksimov said. "We're looking ahead without optimism, frankly speaking. Many (businesses) will close down."

As Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine marks four years, the mounting pressure on Russia's economy is starting to show. Oil revenues are dwindling, the budget deficit is up, and military spending that fueled robust growth has leveled off.

The Kremlin is now tapping consumers and small businesses for funds. The value-added tax has been raised by 2% and revenue thresholds for requiring businesses to pay it have been lowered drastically.

Ordinary Russians appear to be feeling the pain. Business owners interviewed by The Associated Press described a steady decline in demand for their goods and services, a sudden increase in costs as suppliers adjust to the tax reform, and a tax burden that's now tens of times higher. Some said they downsized to keep operating, while others closed.

A recent video on social media showed the economic fallout: Vacant commercial spaces on St. Petersburg's main street, Nevsky Prospekt, where shop after shop went out of business.

"I've never felt so scared as this year, so unprotected, so anxious," said Darya Demchenko, who owns

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 72 of 78

a chain of beauty salons in Russia's second largest city.

A failed plea

Maksimov's plea to Putin failed to reverse the tax reform, which lowered the threshold for requiring businesses to pay VAT from 60 million rubles, or \$783,000, in annual sales revenue, to 20 million rubles (\$261,000) this year and to 10 million rubles (\$130,500) by 2028.

The revenue threshold was similarly lowered for those using the "patent taxation system," in which small businesses made fixed annual payments — usually only tens of thousands of rubles — instead of a percentage of their revenues or profits. This year, those whose revenues exceed 20 million rubles would need to pay at least a 6% tax on their revenues, and at least a 5% VAT.

In their televised exchange, Maksimov said he had been using the patent system for eight years, and Putin responded by underscoring the need for tax reform to tackle "uncontrolled" illegal imports but promised to look at what can be done.

Maksimov's appearance attracted attention and new customers to Mashenka, which has three bakeries in the Moscow region. It had sent a basket of baked goods to the Kremlin and boasts on its website that Putin "tried our pies."

Russian media quoted Maksimov as saying sales rose for a while, but without a change in tax policy, he contemplated closing.

Putin raised Mashenka's case at a government meeting last month, and Economy Minister Maxim Reshetnikov proposed measures allowing Maksimov's business to be exempt from paying VAT and lower his other taxes. Shortly after, the owner said he wasn't considering closing down.

"I think we will grow, maybe slower than before, but no less confidently, I think," Maksimov told AP this month. He admitted, however, that he's still waiting for authorities to adopt the proposed measures. It's unclear when that will happen.

Others follow suit

Maksimov's case caused an outcry among other small and medium entrepreneurs. In an online campaign "We Are Mashenka," started by the Association of Beauty Industry Enterprises, business owners across Russia raised similar cases, noting that unlike Maksimov, who was lucky to get Putin's ear, they had no one to bail them out.

Demchenko, who supported the campaign, told AP that of four family-oriented beauty salons in her chain — three of her own and one opened through a franchise — she had to close one and sell another to stay afloat due to the dramatically increased taxes and other costs, as well as lagging demand.

The tax reforms meant she was no longer eligible for the patent system and was looking at paying much higher taxes, as well as having to hire a full-time accountant to handle the paperwork, she said. Her costs — such as rent, supplies, security and banking services — spiked 30%, she added, noting suppliers raised their prices well over the 2% VAT increase.

Demand for beauty services, meanwhile, has been falling for months.

Russia's restrictions on social media and messaging platforms deprived her of cheap advertising and easy ways to reach clients, Demchenko said.

The beauty industry weathered the COVID-19 pandemic, she said, with government support like tax breaks and deferments, as well as ways to negotiate with landlords to waive rent for a while.

"This year, we haven't felt any support at all. We feel like they want to shut us down," she said.

Shuttered businesses

Lyalya Sadykova, president of the Association of Beauty Industry Enterprises, said about 10% of beauty industry businesses in St. Petersburg closed and another 10% sold their companies in December and January. She anticipates more closures this spring.

"People will do the math. The first deadline for taxes is in April, and people will see that they have nothing to pay with, and that's when the collapse will begin," she said. "I think there will be bankruptcies, and mass exodus from the market, because now it seems to me that not everyone has done the math and understood it."

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 73 of 78

When the tax reforms were adopted last year, pastry shop owners Ilsiya Gizatullina and Railya Shayhieva decided to shut down their business in Kazan. Like Demchenko, they cited the massive tax increases, rising costs and falling demand.

It was an incredibly hard decision, "like cutting off a body part. Because we lived there, it was our life, 24/7," Gizatullina told AP.

They opened in 2020 and survived the pandemic, which Gizatullina noted was only temporary. The new tax system is here to stay.

"We understand very well that it won't be abolished the day after tomorrow, and there will likely be an even higher tax burden in the future," Gizatullina said.

As part of the reforms, more businesses will be paying increased taxes in 2027 and 2028, since changes will affect those with even lower revenues.

Growing pressure

Small and medium enterprises account for just over 20% of Russia's economy, but it's still significant, says Chris Weafer, CEO of Macro-Advisory Ltd. Consultancy. Increasing the application of VAT to those businesses will mean "a meaningful amount" of money for the state budget.

It is "a deliberate strategy by the Finance Ministry to create more stable, predictable sources of income" at a time when oil revenues are down and the budget deficit is up, Weafer said.

Small and medium enterprises have been under pressure since 2014, when Russia faced sanctions over its illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, and the government directed most of its support to big companies. The new tax regulations add to the pressure, Weafer said, and while that's unlikely to wreck the economy, it will impede growth when the war ends.

"The one engine of expansion and growth and innovation that you need in an economy is the sector that has suffered most in the last four years and is continuing to suffer today," he said.

How Trump will use his State of the Union address to sell skeptical midterm voters on his plans

By JOSH BOAK and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's State of the Union address on Tuesday is likely to be a test run of the message Republicans will give to voters in November's elections for control of the House and the Senate.

The president and his party appear vulnerable, with polls showing much of America distrusts how Trump has managed the government in his first year back in office. In addition, the Supreme Court last week struck down one of the chief levers of his economic and foreign policy by ruling he lacked the power to impose many of his sweeping tariffs.

Though Trump is expected to focus on domestic issues, his intensifying threats about launching military strikes on Iran over its nuclear program cast a shadow over the address.

Here are a few things to watch as Trump tries to make his case:

Economy and immigration are no longer strengths for Trump

Trump swept back into the White House on promises to bring down prices and restore order to immigration in America. But on both issues, public sentiment has turned against him.

Only 39% of U.S. adults approve of his economic leadership and just 38% support him on immigration, according to the latest Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research survey. Those low numbers show the country is still fretting about the costs of groceries, housing and utilities, a problem compounded by Trump's whipsawing use of tariffs. They also show how the public was disturbed by videos of violent clashes with protesters, including two U.S. citizens killed by federal agents.

Since his party passed a massive tax cut bill last year, Trump has yet to unveil major new policy ideas on the economy. In recent speeches, he has largely offered the public reruns about his tax cuts, plans to reduce mortgage rates and a new government website for buying prescription drugs.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 74 of 78

The Supreme Court ruling against many of Trump's far-reaching global tariffs on Friday and the president vowing to use other means to forge ahead with import taxes will only prolong the economic turmoil over trade and prices.

"I think it makes it even more important that the speech really focus on the economy," said Alex Conant, a Republican strategist.

Conant said between the tariff ruling and a Commerce Department report on Friday that showed U.S. economic growth slowed in the final three months of last year, "the president needs to bolster his economic message."

Blame everything on Biden

The administration is trying to make the case that despite Trump's rewiring of global trade and tax cuts, the economy is still struggling because of choices made in 2021 and 2022 by his Democratic predecessor Joe Biden. But Trump is also seeking to take credit for positive signs in the current economy, such as recent stock market gains.

"Watch the State of the Union. We're going to be talking about the economy. We inherited a mess," Trump said at the White House on Wednesday.

Of course, Trump made the same kind of argument in his address to a joint session of Congress last year, invoking the Biden name 13 times.

Trump's focus on foreign policy has yet to resonate politically

Despite Trump's America First credo, his aggressive approach abroad over the past year has sparked concerns among some of his supporters about whether he should spend more time focusing on voters at home.

Trump, who's made it clear he covets a Nobel Peace Prize, is likely to use the speech to remind Americans of his attempts to try to broker peace accords in global conflicts.

But in many respects, the president hasn't been extending olive branches. Within the past year, his administration has launched strikes in Yemen, Nigeria and Iran, along with an ongoing campaign of lethal military strikes on alleged drug-trafficking vessels near South America. Trump also shocked the world in January with a surprise raid to capture Venezuela's then-leader, Nicolás Maduro, and floated the idea of using force to seize Greenland.

In recent weeks, as he pressures Iran, Trump has bolstered the U.S. military's presence in the Middle East. But he has yet to make a clear case to voters about what his actions overseas mean for their lives.

He might even minimize foreign policy in his State of the Union despite his belief that it's been a major success.

"For as much as foreign policy has dominated his last year in office, this speech will mostly focus on the economy," Conant predicted.

Vice President JD Vance offered a similar prediction, saying in an interview Saturday on Fox News Channel that in the speech, "you're going to hear a lot about the importance of bringing jobs back into our country, of reshoring manufacturing, of all these great factories that are being built."

He said Trump would also speak about lowering energy costs.

Trump has made the State of the Union his own

The State of the Union used to be about recapping accomplishments and seeking to unite the country, but it increasingly reflects divisions in society.

"What you're going to expect is some version of a campaign speech in which the Democrats are the villains, the Republicans he likes are the heroes, and he is the savior not only of the nation but of the globe," said Kathleen Hall Jamieson, a communications professor at the University of Pennsylvania.

Trump supporters might cherish the moment in 2020 when the president midspeech reunited a military family. He also bestowed the Presidential Medal of Freedom on Rush Limbaugh, the conservative radio host and author who died in 2021. But that moment turned off Democrats who saw Limbaugh as a destructive figure in political media.

Reaction in the room could matter as much as Trump's words

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 75 of 78

Trump is delivering the speech, but his audience sitting in the House chamber has a big role, too. When Trump delivered his 2020 State of the Union, then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi theatrically ripped up a copy of the speech afterward, overshadowing much of what Trump said.

House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York has said in a letter to colleagues "it is important to have a strong, determined and dignified Democratic presence in the chamber," indicating some members might choose not to attend in protest to Trump. But there's also the possibility of Democrats razzing Trump as Rep. Al Green, D-Texas, did in 2025, leading him to be removed from the chamber.

If Trump in his speech lays out a fuller case for why he's using other mechanisms in federal law to continue his tariffs, Conant said it'll be interesting to see the reaction from lawmakers.

"I think that any House Republicans that don't applaud his tariffs are going to be featured prominently on the telecast," he said.

State of the Unions have short shelf lives

While some presidential phrases endure, much of the rhetoric in State of the Unions is forgettable. And with Trump — who's known for veering off-script — there's a good chance a stray comment or a social media post could step on his message.

Matt Latimer, a former Republican speechwriter for then-President George W. Bush, noted in an email that people hear the president talk all of the time, so the State of the Union has lost much of its luster.

A State of the Union "only matters in moments when the country is undergoing a great trauma — a war, an attack, a global crisis — and a president and Congress want to speak in a (mostly) united voice to the country," he said. "That's not what we are experiencing now."

4 years into Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, a look at the war by the numbers

By The Associated Press undefined

Russia's invasion of Ukraine four years ago launched Europe's biggest conflict since World War II, causing immense suffering for civilians and harrowing ordeals for soldiers while rewriting the post-Cold War security order.

The fighting enters its fifth year on Tuesday, and it shows no signs of stopping anytime soon.

The U.S. has brokered talks with delegations from Moscow and Kyiv as part of the Trump administration's yearlong push for peace. But reconciling key differences, such as the future of Russian-occupied Ukrainian land and postwar security for Ukraine, has thwarted progress.

Meanwhile, thousands of each countries' troops have died on the battlefield, and Ukrainian civilians have been battered by Russian aerial strikes that have brought years of power outages and water cuts.

Here's a look at the conflict, by the numbers, since the full-scale invasion on Feb. 24, 2022.

1.8 million

The upper end of the estimated number of soldiers killed, wounded or missing on both sides, according to a report last month by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a think tank.

It estimated that Russia suffered 1.2 million casualties, including up to 325,000 troop deaths, between February 2022 and December 2025 — what it said was the largest number of troop deaths for any major power in any conflict since World War II.

Russia has not released figures on battlefield deaths since January 2023, when it said more than 80 soldiers were killed in a Ukrainian strike, bringing the total military deaths Moscow has confirmed to just over 6,000.

CSIS estimated that Ukraine has seen 500,000 to 600,000 military casualties, including up to 140,000 deaths.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said earlier this month that 55,000 Ukrainian troops have died in the war. Many are missing, he said.

Neither Moscow nor Kyiv gives timely data on military losses. Independent verification is not possible.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 76 of 78

14,999

The U.N. Human Rights Monitoring Mission's count for civilian deaths in Ukraine since Russia's all-out invasion, though it says that is likely an underestimate. More than 40,600 civilians were injured over the same period, it said in a December report.

The war has killed at least 763 children, according to the U.N.

Last year was the deadliest for civilians in Ukraine since 2022. The conflict killed 2,514 civilians and injured 12,142 in the country in 2025 — a 31% increase in civilian casualties over 2024, it said.

19.4%

The percentage of Ukrainian land occupied by Russia, according to the Institute for the Study of War.

Over the past year, Russia has gained just 0.79% of Ukraine's territory in the grinding war of attrition, the Washington-based think tank said in calculations provided earlier this month to The Associated Press, underscoring the little progress Moscow's forces have made despite huge costs in troops and armor.

Before Russia's all-out invasion, it controlled nearly 7% of Ukraine, including Crimea and parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in the east, as Moscow-backed separatists fought the Ukrainian army, according to Ukrainian officials and Western analysts.

13%

The percentage drop in foreign military aid to Kyiv last year compared with the annual average between 2022 and 2024, according to Germany's Kiel Institute, which tracks assistance to Kyiv.

U.S. President Donald Trump stopped sending American weapons paid for by the U.S. to Ukraine after he took office just over a year ago. European countries, striving to make up the difference, increased their military aid last year by 67% compared with the 2022-2024 period, the institute said in a report this month.

Foreign humanitarian and financial aid to Ukraine fell by 5% last year in comparison with the average in the previous three years, it said.

5.9 million

The number of Ukrainian civilians who have left their country.

Some 5.3 million of those people have found refuge in Europe, according to a report this month from the U.N. office in Ukraine.

Additionally, around 3.7 million Ukrainians forced out of their homes have moved elsewhere within the country, the U.N. said in December.

Ukraine's prewar population was more than 40 million.

2,881

The number of Russian attacks that affected the provision of medical care in Ukraine since the full-scale invasion, according to a report from the World Health Organization on Monday.

There was a nearly 20% increase in such attacks last year compared with 2024, the U.N. agency said.

A report earlier in the month from the WHO documented at least 2,347 strikes on health care facilities, in addition to others that damaged vehicles and the storage of medical supplies.

Follow AP's coverage of the war in Ukraine at <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine>

Israeli settlers torch and deface a West Bank mosque during Ramadan

By AREF TUFHAH and MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

TELL, West Bank (AP) — Israeli settlers vandalized a mosque in the Israeli-occupied West Bank early Monday, spray-painting offensive phrases and setting a fire, according to the Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Worshippers arriving for the day's first prayers found the damage and a smoldering fire that spewed black smoke across the entrance of the Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq Mosque in the town of Tell, near Nablus, and stained the ornate doorway.

"I was shocked when I opened the door," said Munir Ramdan, who lives nearby. "The fire had been

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 77 of 78

burning here in the area, the glass was broken here and the door was broken.”

Security camera footage showed two people walking toward the mosque carrying gasoline and a can of spray paint, and running away a few minutes later, Ramdan said.

The attackers spray-painted graffiti denigrating the Prophet Muhammad, as well as the words “revenge” and “price tag.” In “price tag” attacks, hard-line Israeli nationalists attack Palestinians and vandalize their property in response to Palestinian militant attacks or perceived efforts by Israeli authorities to limit settlement activity.

The ministry said settlers vandalized or attacked 45 mosques in the West Bank last year.

The latest incident occurred as Muslims observe the holy month of Ramadan.

“The provocation is directed especially at the person who is fasting, because you are fasting and entering a month of mercy and forgiveness from God,” said Salem Ishtayeh, a resident of Tell. “So they like to provoke you with words. It’s not that they are attacking you personally, they are attacking your religion, the Islamic faith.”

The Israeli military and police said they responded to the incident and were searching for suspects. The military said it “strongly condemns” harm done to religious institutions.

Palestinians and rights groups say Israeli authorities routinely fail to prosecute settlers or hold them accountable for violence.

There has been a recent surge in violence by settlers against Palestinians in the West Bank. Last week, settlers killed a Palestinian-American man, Nasrallah Abu Siyam.

According to information released by Israel’s military last month, there were 867 attacks by settlers against Palestinians and security forces in 2025, an increase of 27% over 2024.

The number of serious settler attacks including shootings, arson and other violent crimes has increased sharply each year since far-right politician Itamar Ben-Gvir, who spent his law career defending Jews who attacked Palestinians, became national security minister. The number of serious attacks increased from 54 in 2023 to 83 in 2024 and 128 in 2025.

Today in History: February 24

President Andrew Johnson impeached by US House

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Tuesday, Feb. 24, the 55th day of 2026. There are 310 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Feb. 24, 1868, the U.S. House of Representatives impeached President Andrew Johnson by a vote of 126-47 following his attempted dismissal of Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton; Johnson was later acquitted by the Senate by a single vote.

Also on this date:

In 1803, in its landmark *Marbury v. Madison* decision, the U.S. Supreme Court established the foundational principle of judicial review of the constitutionality of laws and statutes.

In 1942, the SS *Struma*, a charter ship attempting to carry nearly 800 Jewish refugees from Romania to British-mandated Palestine, was torpedoed by a Soviet submarine in the Black Sea; all but one of the refugees died.

In 1981, a jury in White Plains, New York, found Jean Harris guilty of second-degree murder in the fatal shooting of “*Scarsdale Diet*” author Dr. Herman Tarnower. (Sentenced to 15 years to life in prison, Harris was granted clemency by New York Gov. Mario Cuomo in December 1992.)

In 1988, in a ruling that expanded legal protections for parody and satire, the Supreme Court unanimously overturned a \$200,000 award that the Rev. Jerry Falwell had won against *Hustler* magazine and its publisher, Larry Flynt.

In 1991, the United States began ground operations in the Gulf War by entering Iraqi-held Kuwait.

In 2008, Cuba’s parliament named Raul Castro president, ending nearly 50 years of rule by his brother, Fidel, who announced days earlier that he would not seek reelection. Raul Castro served as president

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 264 ~ 78 of 78

until April 2018.

In 2011, Discovery, the world's most traveled spaceship, thundered into orbit for the final time, heading toward the International Space Station on a journey marking the beginning of the end of the shuttle era.

In 2020, Hollywood movie mogul Harvey Weinstein was convicted of rape and sexual assault in New York and was led off to prison in handcuffs in a pivotal moment for the #MeToo movement. An appeals court later threw out the verdict and ordered a new trial, but Weinstein remained behind bars after other convictions.

In 2022, Russia began a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, launching airstrikes on cities and military bases and sending troops and tanks from multiple directions.

Today's birthdays: Actor Dominic Chianese is 95. Nike co-founder Phil Knight is 88. Actor Barry Bostwick is 81. Actor Edward James Olmos is 79. Musician George Thorogood is 76. Baseball Hall of Famer Eddie Murray is 70. Actor Billy Zane is 60. Boxing Hall of Famer Floyd Mayweather Jr. is 49. Tennis Hall of Famer Lleyton Hewitt is 45. Actor Daniel Kaluuya is 37. Singer-songwriter Domenic Innarella is 15.