

Groton Daily Independent

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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.

Friday., Feb. 27

Senior Menu: Chicken pot pie casserole, mashed potatoes, broccoli, fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Egg wraps.

School Lunch: Cheese bread stick with marinara, cooked carrots.

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1440

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

DNA Construction Site

A newly fertilized egg builds a 3D scaffold of DNA long before the genome turns on, research on fruit flies revealed yesterday. A companion study on human cells suggests failure of that structure can lead to diseases, including cancer.

Researchers studied a fruit fly (*Drosophila*) in the hours after fertilization using a new, highly detailed 3D imaging technology. The goal was to discover what happens before zygotic genome activation, when a genome awakens and the embryo reads its genetic instructions. Until now, the prevailing view has been that the embryo holds a disorderly tangle of DNA. Instead, researchers have learned that the scaffold for DNA—including the assembly of what's known as chromatin loops—is already happening.

The study was released alongside companion research studying what happens when that scaffolding collapses in humans. Using that same approach, researchers found human cells perceive scaffolding failure as a viral infection, which can trigger changes in gene expression and lead to inflammation, developmental disorders, and cancer.

Winter Weather Whirlwind

Over half a million homes and businesses remain without power after Winter Storm Hernando dumped over 2 feet of snow in the northeastern United States earlier this week. More winter weather is expected from the Great Lakes to the mid-Atlantic and Northeast in the coming days.

Roads, mass transportation, and schools began reopening yesterday as shovelers and snowplows work to get ahead of the incoming storm. In New York, Mayor Zohran Mamdani (D) raised the starting hourly rate for emergency shovelers from \$19.14 to \$30. About 20 inches of snow fell in Central Park—its ninth-highest total on record. Meanwhile, Providence, Rhode Island, received 32.8 inches in roughly one day, breaking the previous record of 28.6 inches that fell over two days in 1978.

Hernando was a "bomb cyclone," a storm system that intensifies over 24 hours as cold air clashes with warm air, causing pressure to drop rapidly.

'Survivor' Survives 50 Seasons

The 50th season of "Survivor" premieres tonight on CBS with longtime host Jeff Probst, featuring 24 contestants—the largest cast in the show's history—competing for the \$1M prize. The "golden" season brings back original players and fan favorites to Fiji's Mamanuca Islands.

"Survivor" first aired in 2000, with contestants stranded on a remote island competing in challenges while voting each other off to become the sole survivor. The show quickly became a cultural phenomenon, paving the way for reality TV programs like "The Amazing Race," "Big Brother," and "The Bachelor." The show has since become gamified, with players trying to outwit and blindside their opponents. Over 50 million people tuned in to watch Richard Hatch claim the title of sole survivor in the first season finale (season 49 finale drew 4.45 million viewers).

Since its debut, "Survivor" has aired 714 episodes and specials across about 15 countries and crowned 49 winners.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Guthrie family increases reward for Nancy Guthrie's return to \$1M; the mother of "Today" cohost Savannah Guthrie was reported missing Feb. 1.

Milan-Cortina Olympics are the most-watched Winter Games since the 2014 Sochi Games, with viewership up 96% from the 2022 Beijing Games.

Taylor Sheridan, cocreator of TV series "Yellowstone," to publish first book June 23.

Robert Carradine, the youngest of a legacy Hollywood family and lead in the "Revenge of the Nerds" franchise, dies by suicide at age 71 after living with bipolar disorder for two decades.

Science & Technology

Waymo expands self-driving rideshare services to Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, and Orlando; now available in 10 cities.

Scientists develop technique to isolate rare form of HIV-infected cells known as authentic reservoir clones; cells are responsible for latent HIV infections that can persist for years undetected.

Immune system cells known as monocytes behave differently in men versus women after injury, producing less of the protein that turns pain signals off; may explain why acute pain sometimes lasts longer in women.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +0.8%, Dow +0.8%, Nasdaq +1.0%).

The US imposes new 10% global tariffs.

Meta inks multiyear deal with AMD for up to 6 gigawatts of the chipmaker's GPUs for AI data centers and a performance-based agreement to acquire 160 million AMD shares, or roughly 10% of the company.

Spirit Airlines reaches deal with lenders to exit Chapter 11 bankruptcy by summer, expected to slash flights and fleet.

Politics & World Affairs

President Donald Trump delivers record-setting State of the Union address at roughly an hour and 48 minutes, covering topics including immigration enforcement and the economy; Trump awards Medal of Honor to 100-year-old military veteran.

Virginia Gov. Abigail Spanberger (D) delivers rebuttal; see recap.

US military announces it has seized three ships in the Indian Ocean linked to sanctioned oil from Venezuela.

Louvre museum director resigns after \$102M jewel heist in October, discovery of a decade-long ticket fraud scheme costing the museum \$12M.

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House Cleaning Offered!

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

The advertisement features a colorful illustration of a teddy bear, a baby bottle, and a stack of colorful blocks on the left, and a yellow bucket with cleaning supplies on the right. At the bottom, there is a small house and a red car on a road.

Groton Area Rolls Past Britton-Hecla in Region 1A Opener



Rylee Dunker
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

The Groton Area girls basketball team advanced in the Region 1A tournament Tuesday night with a 45-19 victory over Britton-Hecla in Groton.

The Braves scored first with a three-pointer, but the Tigers answered quickly. An offensive rebound by Jerica Locke led to an early response that helped Groton settle in, and the Tigers pushed ahead to a 16-5 lead after the first quarter. Groton carried a 24-7 advantage into halftime and led 32-12 after three quarters.

"That was a huge play because they start out with momentum," Groton head coach Matt Locke said. "That's how upsets happen, when you let things get rolling and let teams stick around that probably shouldn't."

Groton's defense controlled the game, forcing 24 Britton-Hecla turnovers and holding the Braves to seven points well into the third quarter.

"I thought we were really disciplined in our gaps, seeing the ball and had our hands active," Locke said. "A few too many fouls, but when you're amped up a little bit, that's part of region basketball."

Groton finished 10-of-27 on two-point shots (37%), 5-of-23 from three-point range (22%) and 10-of-14 at the free-throw line (71%). The Tigers totaled 27 rebounds, 21 steals and eight assists, with 18 turnovers and 15 fouls.

Rylee Dunker led Groton Area with 12 points, four rebounds and four steals. Taryn Traphagen scored 10 points with two rebounds and two steals. Jayden Penning added eight points, four rebounds, three assists and three steals. Jerica Locke finished with seven points, eight rebounds, four assists and five steals.

Other Groton scorers included McKenna Tietz with two points, two rebounds, one assist and one steal; Kella Tracy with two points, three rebounds

and three steals; Talli Wright with two points and one rebound; and Tevan Hanson with two points, one rebound and one steal. Sydney Locke had two rebounds and two steals. Ashlynn Warrington and Mia Crank also saw action for Groton.

Locke credited his team's focus—especially the upperclassmen—for helping Groton handle the pressure of



Jerica Locke
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



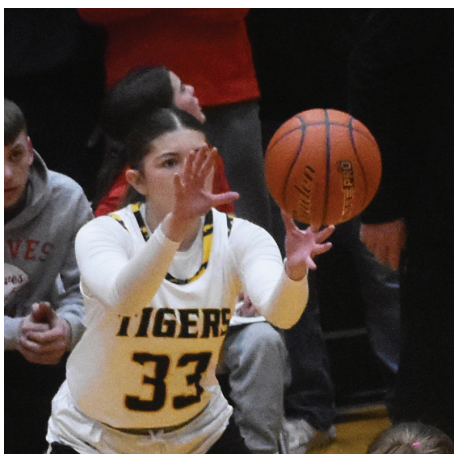
McKenna Tietz is being guarded by Britton-Hecla's Skylar Bender. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

postseason play.

"Those seniors are doing a good job of keeping everybody focused, realizing that the next loss, they're done," Locke said. "They need to be on point, and I thought they were tonight. It's not easy playing the same team you just saw

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Talli Wright
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

a few days ago.”

Britton-Hecla was led by Karlie Zuehlke, Madelynn Micko and Chellon Pruitt with five points each, while Daynike Zuehlke added four. The Braves shot 5-of-27 from the field (18%) and 7-of-14 from the free-throw line (50%) and finished with 15 team fouls and 24 turnovers.

Groton Area will host Milbank on Thursday night in the next round of Region 1A play. Tipoff is scheduled for 7 p.m.

“We’ll give them the plan tomorrow,” Locke said. “We have to be physical, know where

their scorers are at and follow our assignments.”

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by BaseKamp Lodge, Bierman Farm Service, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Farmers Union Coop, Groton Ag Partners, Groton American Legion, Groton Chamber, Groton Dairy Queen, Groton Ford, Hanlon Brothers, 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. Jeslyn Kosel ran the camera, Rich Bosma the commentary and Paul Kosel the stats and technology



Sydney Locke
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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Shaydon Wood, Isaiah Scepaniak and Nathan Unzen.



Jayden Schwan

The National Anthem was played by the Groton Pep Band under the direction of Sharon Schwan.



Xavior Ellenbecker.



Director Sharon Schwan



Addison Hoffman and Kason Oswald.

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4th grade are champions in the Hub City Hoops Tournament

The Hub City elementary basketball tournament was held Saturday with the fourth graders taking first in the tournament. Pictured in back, left to right, are Coach Matt Severson, Bo Flihs, Jagger Penning, Mavrik Severson, Nolan Rose, Dawson Kampa, Freddy Cole, Lincoln Heilman and Coach Jordan Helms; in front, left to right, are Quinton Ronning, Dayton Gonsoir, Saylor Gilchrist, Paxton Eichler (Photo by Maddy Helms)



5th grade takes third in the Hub City Hoops Tournament

The Hub City elementary basketball tournament was held Saturday with the fifth graders taking third in the tournament. Pictured left to right are Bo Flihs, Rae Flihs, Dayton Gonsoir, Coach Eric Moody, Mac Merkel, Kaleb Hofer, Coach Mike Imrie, Henry Paulson, Jase Bahr, Quinton Ronning. (Photo by Paula Johnson)

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

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Student: \$35.15 per month
Single: \$40.48 per month
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Senior/PT: \$20 per month



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Council rejects City Hall painting bids; reviews scoreboard surplus By Elizabeth Varin

The City Council on Tuesday night rejected both bids submitted to paint the exterior of City Hall/Wage Memorial Library after proposals came in at nearly double the amount budgeted for the project.

The council reviewed the two bids originally opened at the Feb. 3 meeting. The bid from C. Eagle Construction of Woonsocket totaled \$48,117 and included painting the exterior of the building on the corner of North Main Street and East Second Avenue, replacing cedar shakes on the building and repairing exterior insulation and finish systems on the building. An updated bid from Custer Custom Homes and Renovations was presented to the council, which totaled \$44,200 and included prepping and painting the exterior of the building, as well as minor repairs.

A quote to repaint the exterior of the building totaled \$19,500 two years ago, said city Finance Officer Douglas Heinrich. The recent bids are a big increase from that.

"We budgeted \$20,000 for this, so if we move forward with this, we have to supplement funding," he said.

Council members said the higher-than-expected costs prompted them to decline the bids and revisit the scope and timing of the work.

"I think we have to reject it because it's just so far over," said Councilman Brian Bahr.

In other business, the council approved the hiring of the first three summer recreation employees ahead of the busy season.

Matt Locke was hired as baseball coordinator with nine years of experience. Jaclyn Iverson was hired as softball coordinator with three years of experience. And Rebecca Padfield was hired as baseball concessions manager with 10 years of experience.

Additional hires were tabled pending interviews with other applicants.

Applications for some other summer recreational position are due by 5 p.m. March 3. Those positions include public works laborer/park caretaker, cemetery caretaker, assistant part-time swimming pool manager, swimming pool lifeguards, baseball groundskeepers and baseball gateskeepers.

The council also opted to hold off on declaring the city's old baseball scoreboard as surplus property.

The Groton Baseball/Softball Foundation representatives have requested permission to sell or auction the scoreboard to help offset the cost of a new one. Before moving forward, however, city staff and the city attorney will review whether an appraisal is required and address other legal and procedural questions related to the potential sale.

- The council approved the second reading of an ordinance to add a \$35.40 sewer system surcharge to utility bills for customers who receives or benefits from the new wastewater force main and lagoon expansion.

- The council approved declaring some old computers from City Hall as surplus, allowing the city to dispose of the old equipment.

- The council gave the OK to go out to bid for 2026 street resurfacing work, which includes approximately 33,000 square yards of bituminous seal coat.

- The city will begin accepting gravel quotes for 2026 after authorization from the council Tuesday evening.

- A special event alcoholic beverage license was approved for the Groton Area Fire Department for its Fireman's Fun Nigh, scheduled for April 18 at the Groton Fire Hall. The special event license is in effect until 2 a.m. April 19.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

South Dakota senators endorse resolution asking voters to rein in lieutenant governor's authority

Support for ballot question follows tie-vote controversies in wake of senator's long-term absence

BY: JOHN HULT

Voters would get to decide if South Dakota's lieutenant governor retains the right to preside over the state Senate under the terms of a resolution passed Tuesday at the Capitol in Pierre.

The state Senate voted 19-14 to pass Senate Joint Resolution 508. The resolution now moves to a House of Representatives committee for consideration.

The resolution is an outgrowth of an issue that's emerged during the 2026 legislative session in the long-term, health-related absence of Sen. Arch Beal, R-Sioux Falls.

In order for a bill to pass the Senate, the state constitution requires a yes vote from the majority of elected senators – 18 of the 35 – not a majority of the senators in the chamber when a vote takes place.

The constitution also says the lieutenant governor, as presiding officer of the Senate, only gets a vote when members are equally divided.

When 35 members are present and vote, however, no tie is possible.

Earlier this year, when Lt. Gov. Tony Venhuizen resolved a 17-17 tie with a vote to pass a bill about energy transmission line permitting, Sioux Falls Republican Sen. Chris Karr challenged Venhuizen's authority to break ties.

Karr is the Senate president pro tempore, who presides if the lieutenant governor is absent. The position of president pro tempore would be elevated to Senate president if voters take that responsibility away from the lieutenant governor.

The constitution requires a bill to have the support of a majority of senators, Karr said, and the lieutenant governor isn't one. The Senate supported Karr.

Gov. Larry Rhoden asked the state Supreme Court to decide if the lieutenant governor can indeed break a tie. The answer, issued in an opinion released last week, was yes.

On Tuesday, Karr argued that the decision stripped the constitution's requirement for a majority vote from all senators of any meaning.

The majority vote provision, Karr said, is meant to ensure no bill becomes law without the support of enough lawmakers to collectively represent a majority of South Dakota citizens.

"When a member is absent, the lieutenant governor's not merely breaking a tie, they're essentially exercising a proxy vote for that absent member's constituents," Karr said.

Unlike senators, Karr said, the lieutenant governor isn't obligated to vote on bills. In the event of a tie, they can choose which ties to break, and Karr said any lieutenant governor will "likely" vote in line with the position of the governor.

"Should an executive officer, potentially at political odds with a specific district, be the one to decide a district's will on the Senate floor?" Karr said. "That is the current reality of the Senate."

Asking voters to change the constitution is too rash a response to the oddity of 2026's functionally 34-member Senate, though, Mitchell Republican Sen. Paul Miskimins said.

He praised Venhuizen's work as the chamber's presiding officer and questioned the wisdom of putting questions on Senate operations in the hands of the electorate.

"Just reading my emails over the last few days, I really question the judgment of our public at this mo-

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ment," Miskimins said. "I think our founders and our constitution put a lot of thought into this process." But Sen. Kevin Jensen, R-Canton, returned to the issue of representation. Until a change that passed the Legislature in 2023, the lieutenant governor was chosen by parties at the state convention. Now, candidates for governor choose their running mate.

"Yes, they will have to be on the ballot with the governor," Jensen said. "But in most cases, people don't vote for the lieutenant governor. They vote for the governor. So in essence, the lieutenant governor is appointed or hand picked, and the people really have no say."

Neither of South Dakota's current chief executives were elected to their respective posts.

Rhoden was lieutenant governor to former Gov. Kristi Noem, who left her post in 2025 to serve in the Cabinet of President Donald Trump. Venhuizen was serving in the state House of Representatives when Rhoden selected him for the lieutenant's post.

Rhoden is one of four men seeking the Republican nomination for governor in 2026.

Sen. Steve Kolbeck, R-Brandon, was the lead sponsor of the resolution. The resolution is not an indictment of Venhuizen, he said, but rather a matter of addressing the constitutional issue.

With at least four candidates, he said, it's unclear who might preside over the Senate during the next legislative session in the absence of a constitutional change.

Kolbeck also pointed out that he is not running for reelection. If voters opt to change the constitution through his resolution, he said, "a new Senate, one I will not be a part of, will get to choose who they want the president to be."

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

State Senate moves South Dakota Capitol restoration bill ahead as debate continues on amount

Vote keeps discussion alive on what state can afford for project

BY: JOHN HULT

The South Dakota Senate dialed back a bill meant to pay for a Capitol restoration on Tuesday in a move meant to keep discussions on the project alive as lawmakers wrestle with the state budget.

The Senate Appropriations Committee voted 5-3 on Monday to endorse a version of Senate Bill 199 that set aside \$25 million for a project that could cost far more than that.

In the Senate on Tuesday, Tea Republican Ernie Otten asked the body to amend the bill to instead put \$101 into the Capitol Restoration Fund the bill would create.

"It will give us time to find out what money we actually want to stick in it," said Otten.

Lawmakers typically pass the next fiscal year's budget near the end of the legislative session.

The Capitol restoration bill's sponsor is Sioux Falls Republican Chris Karr, who compared the Capitol in Pierre to the Milan Cathedral, the 600-year-old Italian church that served as a backdrop for coverage of the 2026 Winter Olympics.

"This is our duomo," Karr said, using the Italian term for cathedral. "This is our building in South Dakota that I think people look at. It can't be replaced."

Karr did not resist Otten's motion to amend the bill.

"It's part of the process," Karr said. "The \$25 million was put in there so everybody can understand the magnitude of what we're talking about and the seriousness."

Price tag could reach nine figures

The state official in charge of maintaining the Capitol and its grounds guessed last year that a full restoration could cost \$150 million to \$200 million. The 116-year-old Capitol was last restored nearly 40 years

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ago, ahead of the state's 1989 centennial.

SB 119's text doesn't spell out what the money would be used for, the committee didn't discuss the details and the Bureau of Human Resources and Administration — the agency leading the restoration efforts — did not elaborate in response to questions from South Dakota Searchlight.

"At this time, no specific plan has been developed," bureau spokesman Jesse Merkel said in an email to South Dakota Searchlight. "Any planning would occur only after the bill is passed and funding for future restoration is authorized."

Lawmakers put aside \$3 million during last year's legislative session to study the Capitol's needs and begin plaster and painting work in water-damaged areas. That money was part of a broader \$12 million since 2019 devoted to studying problems afflicting the Capitol complex, and making temporary repairs while planning for a broader restoration.

In the budget committee on Monday, Sen. Taffy Howard, R-Rapid City, called SB 119 "a fiscally responsible step in the right direction" for a long-term project with a hefty price tag.

Opponents say state should prioritize citizens

Two senators voiced opposition in committee. Republican Glen Vilhauer of Watertown said the project specifics and the amount of the funding request should've come earlier.

"There are many other projects in the wind out there that are going to die for lack of funding" this year, said Vilhauer, a nod to a tight state budget in which Gov. Larry Rhoden initially requested no increases for education, state employee salaries or Medicaid providers.

Newer revenue estimates have since opened a door to small increases in those areas, commonly referred to as "the big three" of the state budget.

Vilhauer, Mitchell Republican Paul Miskimins and Republican John Carley of Piedmont voted against the bill in committee.

On the Senate floor Tuesday, Aberdeen Republican Mike Rohl said the restoration fund signals that lawmakers are out of touch with constituents, who struggle to pay property taxes and make ends meet.

"A lot of them have real issues. I don't think we should be setting aside money to make our Capitol nicer," Rohl said.

The Senate passed the bill 21-12. Its next stop is a House committee.

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

County sales tax emerges as last major property tax reduction proposal standing in Legislature

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER

Rapid City Republican Sen. Taffy Howard stood in the South Dakota Senate on Monday, saying she'd begrudgingly vote for authorizing counties to charge sales taxes.

"I'm not happy that we're going to go back to our citizens and say, 'Probably the only way we're going to get property tax relief this year is through a new tax,'" Howard said. "I find that abhorrent."

Yet she voted for the bill, which passed the Senate 20-14 and is now headed to a House committee.

That legislation is arguably the only major property tax relief proposal still officially alive this legislative session, after the failure of other plans Tuesday. The bill 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.

Two other bills failed Tuesday that would have captured revenue for property tax relief from raising the statewide sales tax rate.

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One bill would have captured the revenue from a scheduled increase in the state sales tax rate from 4.2% to 4.5% next year; the Senate vote on the proposal was 16-17, with two members gone, which was two votes short of the 18-vote majority needed for passage.

The 2023 Legislature adopted a sales tax rate reduction from 4.5% to 4.2% and scheduled the reduction to expire next year. Rep. Tim Czmowski, R-Sioux Falls, told House members Tuesday that the reduction was "the wrong move."

"We haven't really been able to fund and balance," he said. "We've balanced the budget, but I think we've compromised on some of the things we hold as priority."

His bill would have increased the state sales tax rate to 5% over a two-year period and used the revenue for property tax relief and funding increases for schools, state employees and Medicaid providers; the House of Representatives vote on that proposal Tuesday was 24-42.

Also Tuesday, the Senate rejected Senate Bill 196, which 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 vote to approve the bill failed 15-18.

The county sales tax bill was recommended by Gov. Larry Rhoden, and it stands apart from other proposals because, rather than a statewide approach, it is targeted to specific counties facing property tax issues that choose to implement the sales tax. Rhoden has said that could include fast-growing counties in the Black Hills and in the Sioux Falls metro area, where property tax increases have been especially severe.

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.

Lawmakers have introduced and considered more than 50 proposals addressing property taxes since they convened last month, including rejected proposals to divert 25% of the state's annual general fund revenue growth toward property tax relief, resolutions to ask South Dakota voters to approve various property tax relief plans, and other proposals.

With a little more than two weeks left in the session, some of the failed ideas could still come back as amendments to other bills.

One of the other property tax bills that's still alive, Senate Joint Resolution 504, would ask South Dakota voters to authorize statewide online sports betting (it's currently allowed only in Deadwood) and capture tax revenue from it to reduce property taxes. But some supporters of the bill have said the impact on property taxes would be less than other major proposals.

Gov. Larry Rhoden signed Senate Bill 12 into law earlier this session, which adds to an existing law that exempts from property taxes the homes of veterans who've lost both legs or the use of both legs. The new law lets those veterans or their surviving, unmarried spouses apply for four years' worth of refunds if they missed prior application deadlines for the program, or missed deadlines to have their home classified as owner-occupied.

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

South Dakota Searchlight's Meghan O'Brien contributed to this report.

Other property tax bills

Other bills that would address property taxes in some way are still working their way through the legislative process, including:

House Bill 1193, which would require local boards of equalization to give up to four years' worth of refunds to otherwise qualifying vets and their spouses who failed to qualify for the property tax exemption for veterans rated as permanently and totally disabled from a service-connected disability while they were awaiting a decision on a permanent and total disability claim from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

House Bill 1253, which would change how owner-occupied and commercial property is valued, requiring counties to use an eight-year market average to set taxable values for individual properties.

House Bill 1258, which would require property tax bills sent from counties to homeowners to include a QR code that could be scanned by smartphones to view a state Department of Revenue website with information on property taxes and tax relief programs.

House Bill 1260, which would allow cities to create their own local property tax refund programs in addition to state programs.

Senate Bill 20, which puts aside \$425,000 to pay property tax refunds to qualifying disabled veterans and elderly people.

Senate Bill 21, which boosts the annual income eligibility level for both categories of refund in Senate Bill 20, both of which have been available since the 1970s.

Senate Bill 125, which would establish a "homeowner tax reduction fund" at the state level, without specifying a revenue or funding source.

Senate Bill 183, which would expand taxpayer notice requirements before a local government's vote to exceed state-imposed property tax limits by requiring notification be sent to all property owners by mail or electronically at least 21 days before a public hearing on the matter.

Senate Bill 223, which would reduce the number of petition signatures needed to refer a school district's decision to "opt out" of property tax limitations to an election and lengthen the time petitioners have to gather signatures.

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.

School choice programs grow in popularity — and cost

States are scrambling to meet rising demand for newly expanded school choice initiatives

BY: ROBBIE SEQUEIRA

States are scrambling to meet rising demand for newly expanded school choice initiatives, pouring more money into the programs as waiting lists — and budget concerns — grow.

A further boost is expected next year, when the federal government rolls out a new policy allowing taxpayers to claim a tax credit for up to \$1,700 in donations to nonprofits that award private school scholarships to K-12 students.

Supporters tout such programs as a lifeline for parents desperate to get their kids out of failing public schools, while opponents have long warned that they drain resources from public education as students move from public schools to private ones.

For years, voucher and scholarship programs providing taxpayer dollars for private school tuition were limited to low-income or special needs students. In 2022, however, Arizona became the first state to allow all students to use public money for private school tuition. By next school year, at least 17 states are expected to have universal programs — making roughly half of U.S. students eligible to receive money, according to FutureEd, a think tank at Georgetown University.

As both universal and limited programs spread across the country, many families are eager to participate.

In Alabama, more than 36,000 students last spring applied for 14,000 spots in the state's new program, prompting Republican Gov. Kay Ivey to propose increasing its funding from \$180 million to \$250 million for the 2027-28 school year, when income limits will be eliminated.

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In Oklahoma, Republican Gov. Kevin Stitt has proposed removing the budget cap on a scholarship program that turned away 5,600 students a couple of years ago because it ran out of money. And in Tennessee, Republican Gov. Bill Lee has proposed doubling the funding for a scholarship program that has a waitlist of about 34,000 students.

"Last year, we gave families school choice with the Education Freedom Scholarship program, because parents know best," Lee said in his State of the State address last month. "Growing the program would open the doors of opportunity for thousands more children statewide."

South Carolina Republican Gov. Henry McMaster and Missouri Republican Gov. Mike Kehoe also are seeking more money for school choice programs.

"So far what we've really seen is legislatures looking to expand the programs," said Andrew Handel, director of education and workforce development at the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a membership group for conservative state lawmakers that has pushed for choice programs nationwide.

"The ESA [education savings account] is the gold standard. It's the one that gives parents the most flexibility," he said, referring to programs that allow parents to use the money for other education-related expenses in addition to tuition. "The best states are where the funding for those school choice programs is tied directly to their state education formula. That ensures that no matter how many families apply, you're always going to have the money there."

But in Arizona, the first state with a universal program, Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs has become an outspoken critic.

Hobbs last month criticized the program, approved under her Republican predecessor, as an "entitlement program" that "continues to operate unchecked, squandering taxpayer dollars with no accountability." She has proposed scaling back the program to its original scope, when it was limited to children with disabilities and military families.

The program serves more than 100,000 students — about 1 in 10 K-12 students — and cost the state about \$872 million in fiscal 2025, according to the Grand Canyon Institute, a nonpartisan think tank. In addition to offering vouchers to pay private school tuition, it allows money to be spent on certain school supplies.

A recent audit by the Arizona Department of Education found that about 20% of Empowerment Scholarship Account dollars were used for unauthorized purchases, including iPhones, lingerie, jewelry and other luxury items, according to documents obtained earlier this month by the television station 12News in Arizona.

At least 45% of the kids receiving aid in Arizona were never enrolled in public schools, 12News recently reported. In some states, the percentage is even higher: In the 2023-24 school year, about two-thirds of the students participating in scholarship programs in Arkansas and Iowa were already attending private schools.

Those numbers have handed ammunition to critics who argue that universal programs are creating two parallel education systems, both funded by taxpayers.

"Every state that's passed a voucher system has had to slow down its per-pupil funding for public schools," said Joshua Cowen, a professor of education policy at Michigan State University. "Whether they take it directly out of school aid or fund it from another pot, it's all the same budget.

"States can't afford to run two systems."

The waiting lists prove that many families would like to send their children to private schools, but it's difficult to determine whether they get a better education there: Unlike public schools, private schools can turn away students, and in many states private school students don't take the same standardized tests, so comparing academic performance is difficult.

Patrick Wolf, a professor at the University of Arkansas who studies school choice programs, noted that in his state, students with disabilities made up 48% of first-year participants. The percentage declined to 36% the second year, but that was still nearly three times the rate of disability in the general population.

Wolf argued that choice programs can help public schools by providing competition, forcing them to adapt. "The traditional public schools can lose students who didn't really want to be there, and that can be a

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pressure release valve," he said. "What we've seen when private school choice programs launch is that public school test scores often go up slightly.

"The competitive effects are either neutral or positive," he said. "They communicate more effectively with parents. They offer new programs targeted to the kinds of students they're afraid might leave."

Going big in Texas

Earlier this month, Texas launched what is likely to be the nation's largest school choice program.

The new pre-K to 12th grade scholarship program is open to any U.S. citizen or immigrant in the country legally (public schools are open to everybody), but funding will be capped at \$1 billion for the 2026-2027 school year. If state lawmakers choose to spend more in future years, the cost could rise to nearly \$5 billion by 2030, according to a legislative fiscal note. The state's current biennial budget is close to \$340 billion.

Most participating students who want to attend a private school will be eligible for about \$10,470 per year, while students with disabilities can receive up to \$30,000. Families who want to homeschool their child can get \$2,000.

This year, Texas will give priority to students with disabilities, families with lower incomes, and children enrolled in public and charter schools. Starting next year, the guidelines will be adjusted to favor the siblings of current students and new applicants.

Strongly backed by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott, the program drew more than 42,000 applications when it opened on Feb. 4, according to state officials. As of Feb. 18, the state had received a total of 111,000 applications. Texans can apply through March 17.

Travis Pillow, a senior official overseeing implementation, said the state partnered with Odyssey, a vendor that has administered similar programs in other states, to automate eligibility verification using state IDs and federal tax returns, since Texas does not have a state income tax.

Officials say more than three-quarters of applicants were verified the same day they applied, a benchmark they argue is critical to maintaining momentum and public confidence.

Pillow said Texas lawmakers are required to consider waitlist numbers in future appropriations decisions, and early demand could shape whether the program expands beyond its initial \$1 billion allocation.

Federal tax credit

Meanwhile, a provision of the broad tax and spending measure President Donald Trump signed in July could create a significant new source of funding for families who want to send their kids to private school — but only in states that choose to participate.

The measure creates a new federal tax credit for people who contribute to nonprofits that award private school scholarships to K-12 students. Taxpayers in any state can get the tax credits, but only by donating to organizations in participating states.

Last month, federal officials announced that 23 states had opted in to the program; all of them, except for Virginia, are led by Republicans. However, the federal list did not include Colorado, where Democratic Gov. Jared Polis said in December that his state also would participate. North Carolina Democratic Gov. Josh Stein also has said he will opt in. The Democratic governors of New Mexico, Oregon and Wisconsin have said their states will not participate.

In Pennsylvania, where one of the nation's largest state-level tax credit scholarship programs already operates, scholarship granting organizations say that the state needs to opt in to the federal program to meet the growing demand. Democratic Gov. Josh Shapiro has been a supporter of vouchers generally, but he has not said whether Pennsylvania will opt into the program.

Keisha Jordan, president and CEO of the Children's Scholarship Fund Philadelphia, said that more than 200,000 Pennsylvania children live in neighborhoods where the local public schools are low performing.

Despite serving thousands of students, she said, "every year scholarship organizations like Children's Scholarship Fund Philadelphia still have to turn students down because we don't have enough funding to meet the demand."

Jordan argues the new federal tax credit could help close that gap. "The demand is here," she said.

"Pennsylvania taxpayers will participate, but their money could go to another state. Why not keep it here?"

Stateline reporter Robbie Sequeira can be reached at rsequeira@stateline.org.

This story was originally produced by Stateline, 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.

Robbie Sequeira is a staff writer covering housing and social services for Stateline.

A missing senator, a failed search and two dead data center bills: The SD Senate's chaotic day

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR AND SETH TUPPER

PIERRE — A member's unexplained absence and an unsuccessful search for him contributed to the defeat of two bills intended to incentivize data centers Tuesday during a chaotic afternoon for South Dakota state senators.

"It's not a good look for the Senate," said Sen. Tim Reed, R-Brookings.

The absent senator was John Carley, a Republican from Piedmont and an opponent of both bills. As the fate of the data center legislation hung in the balance due to a close margin of support and opposition, senators invoked rules pausing proceedings and launched an effort to find and return Carley to the chamber.

After a break of about 40 minutes, the Senate's sergeant-at-arms returned with a report noting that Carley was not answering his phone — not even for the governor, who was enlisted to attempt a call — and could not be found. The search included reviewing footage from Capitol security cameras that showed Carley in the building earlier in the day, and looking for but not finding Carley's vehicle in the parking lot.

Some senators interpreted Carley's absence as a deliberate attempt to tank the bills. Based on prior close votes that were up for reconsideration, supporters of the bills had been hoping for at least a 17-17 tie vote that the lieutenant governor — presiding as president of the Senate — could break in favor of the legislation. Tie votes have been frequent this legislative session due to the health-related absence of Sen. Arch Beal, R-Sioux Falls, which has effectively reduced the number of senators from 35 to 34.

With Carley absent, there was no possibility of a 17-17 vote, and the chance that the bills would fail increased.

Tension began with Monday votes

Both of the bills were from Sen. Casey Crabtree, R-Madison. One would have altered a sales tax rebate program to accommodate data centers, and the other would have exempted backup generators — a common feature of large data centers — from permitting by the state Public Utilities Commission as long as the backup generators are not connected to the grid.

Data centers have been a controversial issue this legislative session as lawmakers have been split over whether to incentivize or discourage the construction of large data centers in the state. While some lawmakers have promoted the economic opportunities of data centers, others have expressed concern about data centers' extreme electrical power demands and other potential impacts.

On Monday, Crabtree's bill to provide sales tax rebates for data centers failed 17-16, one vote short of the 18 votes needed for passage, with Beal excused and an unexplained absence by Sen. Tom Pischke, R-Dell Rapids.

Pischke returned to the Senate chamber after Sen. Michael Rohl, R-Aberdeen, invoked a rule requiring Pischke to be brought back. Crabtree's bill regarding backup generators then failed on a 17-17 tie vote that Republican Gov. Tony Venhuizen opted not to break.

Rohl later told South Dakota Searchlight that he had invoked the rules to ensure "all members were on the floor voting and not hiding in back offices."

Pischke told Searchlight that when the Senate is split 17-17, allowing the lieutenant governor to cast the deciding vote effectively lets the executive branch determine the outcome of legislation in the Senate.

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"The more opposition that you have to a piece of legislation, the more likely it is that the executive branch gets its way," Pischke said. "That is wrong."

After the failed votes Monday, Crabtree announced his intent to seek reconsideration of both bills, setting up a showdown for Tuesday. That was the last day for bills to pass their chamber of origin.

Struggle continues Tuesday

On Tuesday, Crabtree moved for reconsideration of the backup generation bill, but Senate President Pro Tempore Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, challenged the motion. Karr said the bill had already been reconsidered once and wasn't eligible for another reconsideration. Venhuizen said the bill was eligible because it had been amended.

Karr appealed that ruling, and his appeal was supported 20-13 with Beal excused and Carley absent. That effectively defeated the backup generation bill.

Before the Senate moved on to the tax rebate bill, Rohl invoked the rules again in an attempt to force Carley back to the chamber, leading to the sergeant-at-arms' fruitless search for Carley while other senators waited.

After the sergeant-at-arms returned, Karr moved to proceed without Carley, and the Senate voted to do so, 19-14.

Senators then took up Crabtree's motion to reconsider the sales tax rebate bill. Rohl unsuccessfully tried to have the bill moved later on the agenda. That effort failed 16-17. Crabtree's motion to reconsider the sales tax rebate bill then failed by the same vote tally.

Both data center bills are dead for now but could be resurrected as amendments to other bills between now and the end of the legislative session next month.

The chaotic scene Tuesday played out in front of Republican former Gov. Dennis Daugaard, who is also a former lieutenant governor and former state senator. Daugaard, the father-in-law of Lt. Gov. Venhuizen, was visiting and watched the Senate from the gallery.

Daugaard disapproved of the actions of Pischke and Carley.

"Both were, I believe, intentionally absent from their seats to avoid voting," Daugaard said in response to Searchlight questions. "This was a parliamentary maneuver on their part, so that they could avoid voting. And I really think that's a discredit to the citizens of their districts, who elected them."

Pischke, in comments to Searchlight, drew a distinction between his own brief absence Monday and Carley's "missing the whole day" Tuesday, which Pischke said he does not condone.

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.

Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.

Trump in State of the Union speech touts US 'turnaround for the ages,' attacks Democrats

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump used his State of the Union address Tuesday to lambaste Democrats and the Biden administration, while pitching the Republican Party to voters ahead of this year's crucial midterm elections.

"Tonight, after just one year, I can say with dignity and pride that we have achieved a transformation like no one has ever seen before," Trump said. "A turnaround for the ages. It is indeed a turnaround for the ages."

The nearly two-hour speech included considerable back-and-forth between Democrats and Republicans

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in the chamber, especially when Trump brought up his immigration enforcement activities or GOP efforts to require proof of citizenship to register to vote.

Trump's disdain for Democrats was on full display throughout the speech, when he alleged they wanted to "cheat" in elections and said Democrats pressing for lower costs and affordability was a "dirty, rotten lie."

"Their policies created the high prices. Our policies are rapidly ending them," he said. "We are doing really well. Those prices are plummeting down."

But there were several moments of bipartisanship, including when Trump recognized U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Andrew Wolfe and his parents as well as the parents of the late U.S. Army Spc. Sarah Beckstrom, both of the West Virginia National Guard.

Beckstrom and Wolfe were shot just blocks from the White House the day before Thanksgiving while on duty in the District of Columbia. Beckstrom died as a result of her injuries the next day and Wolfe was badly injured. Both Beckstrom and Wolfe were awarded the Purple Heart by Major General James D. Seward, Adjutant General of the state of West Virginia, to the applause of lawmakers.

The U.S. men's Olympic hockey team was also able to briefly unite Republicans and Democrats when players appeared in the gallery overlooking the chamber, wearing their gold medals.

Members of both political parties gave the group a standing ovation and chanted "USA, USA, USA!" before the players left after a few minutes. They had met with Trump at the White House earlier in the day.

Sign held by Rep. Al Green

But there were reminders of deep divisions throughout the speech of historic length — the previous record for a State of the Union speech that was recorded was held by former President Bill Clinton.

Texas Democratic Rep. Al Green held up a sign at the beginning of Trump's remarks that read "BLACK PEOPLE AREN'T APES!" in reference to a racist meme in a video Trump shared on social media that depicted former President Barack Obama and first lady Michelle Obama as primates.

A Sergeant at Arms employee escorted Green from the chamber a few minutes later as Republicans again chanted "USA!" Green last year was removed from the chamber during Trump's joint address to Congress.

Trump didn't just criticize Democrats during his speech, but also the Supreme Court justices who have ruled against his actions, most recently deciding that he overstepped by using the International Economic Emergency Powers Act to implement tariffs. Four of the nine justices were seated in the chamber: Chief Justice John Roberts and Associate Justices Amy Coney Barrett, Elena Kagan and Brett Kavanaugh.

Trump said the tariffs decision was "unfortunate" and that the six justices who ruled against him "got it really wrong."

Trump reiterated he would use other powers he believes he holds to keep the tariffs in place, arguing he thinks they are "saving the country."

"They're a little more complex, but they're actually probably better, leading to a solution that will be even stronger than before," he said. "Congressional action will not be necessary."

Trump claimed that if tariffs remain they could replace income taxes, though Congress would need to approve legislation to eliminate that part of the tax code.

Homeland Security shutdown

Trump spoke at length about immigration and border security during his speech before calling on Congress to end the shutdown at the Department of Homeland Security, which began on Feb. 14 when stopgap funding expired. Democrats have insisted on immigration enforcement reforms.

"Tonight, I'm demanding the full and immediate restoration of all funding for the border security, homeland security of the United States," he said.

Trump told lawmakers in the chamber to stand if they believed "the first duty of the American government is to protect American citizens, not illegal aliens."

Republicans stood and cheered loudly while Democrats stayed seated, with several of their members calling out their opposition to that part of the speech as well as Trump's approach to immigration enforce-

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ment and deportation.

Minnesota Democratic Rep. Ilhan Omar said repeatedly "you have killed Americans" as Trump spoke about the DHS shutdown.

Michigan Democratic Rep. Rashida Tlaib yelled "Alex wasn't a criminal," referring to Alex Pretti, who was shot and killed by immigration agents in Minneapolis in January, just weeks after federal immigration officers shot and killed Renee Nicole Good.

Tlaib later called out that Trump should release all of the Epstein files, referring to documents within the Department of Justice about the criminal investigation into child sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

SAVE Act

Trump also called on Congress to pass legislation that would require proof of U.S. citizenship to register to vote in federal elections.

He said that Americans should only be able to vote by mail if they are ill, disabled, in the military or traveling, though that provision isn't included in the SAVE Act.

"Congress should unite and enact this common sense, country-saving legislation right now," he said. "And it should be before anything else happens."

The House voted mostly along party lines earlier this month to send the bill to the Senate, where it is unlikely to get the Democratic support needed to move past that chamber's 60-vote legislative filibuster.

Trump alleged the only reason Democrats won't help Republicans approve the legislation is because "they want to cheat."

Boycotts of the speech

Some Democrats opted to attend other events or skip Trump's speech entirely, citing the president's immigration enforcement tactics, disregard for constitutional norms and record of false and misleading claims.

Connecticut Democratic Sen. Chris Murphy, ranking member on the Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee, said he decided not to go because Trump has "made a mockery of the State of the Union."

"I have no obligation to be a backdrop to a partisan speech full of lies and vitriol," Murphy said. "I'm heartbroken that I'm not going to be there. But he's turned his speech into a joke."

Many of those boycotting will attend counter-programming.

"The American people already know what the state of our union is," said Indiana Democratic Rep. André Carson. "It is marked by frustration, rising costs, and deep exhaustion. Families are stretched thin by higher prices. Communities are disturbed by fatal immigration enforcement tactics. And working people are watching the wealthiest Americans benefit while the middle class is left behind."

Virginia Gov. Abigail Spanberger gave the Democratic response following Trump's remarks, asking three questions in her 12-minute speech.

"Is the president working to make life more affordable for you and your family? Is the president working to keep Americans safe — both at home and abroad? Is the president working for you? We all know the answer is no," she said.

California Sen. Alex Padilla gave the Spanish-language response.

"This country has always been shaped by people who were told they did not belong, but who persevered and kept moving forward," he said in Spanish.

Shauneen Miranda and Ariana Figueroa contributed to this report.

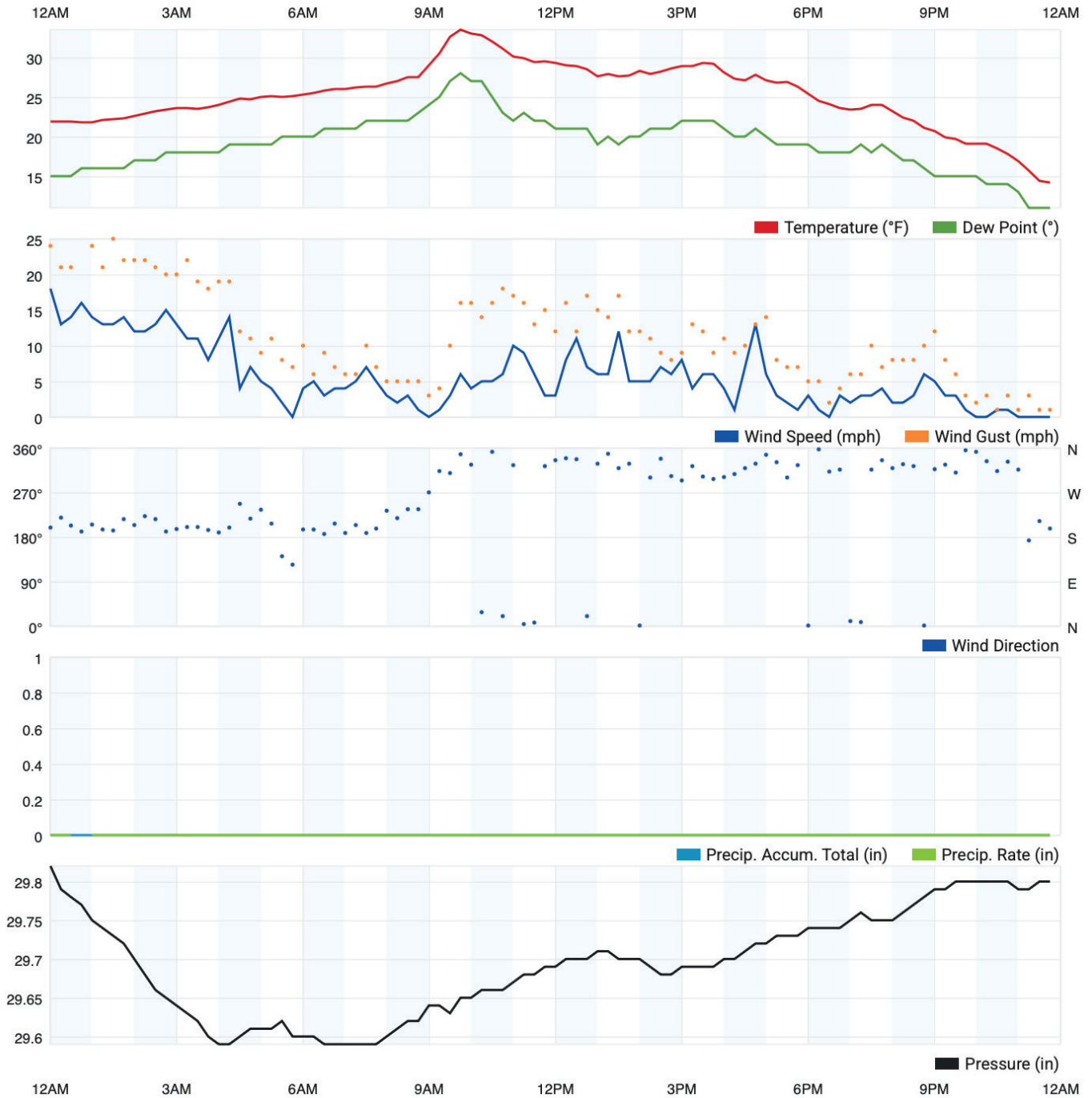
Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

February 24, 2026



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Today



High: 27 °F

Mostly Sunny
then Chance
Snow

Tonight



Low: 19 °F

Partly Cloudy

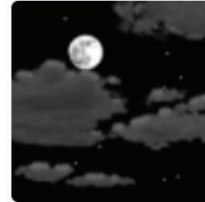
Thursday



High: 46 °F

Sunny

Thursday
Night



Low: 30 °F

Partly Cloudy

Friday



High: 47 °F

Mostly Sunny
and Breezy



Snowfall Today

February 25, 2026
3:26 AM CST

Generally around an inch or less of accumulation is expected.

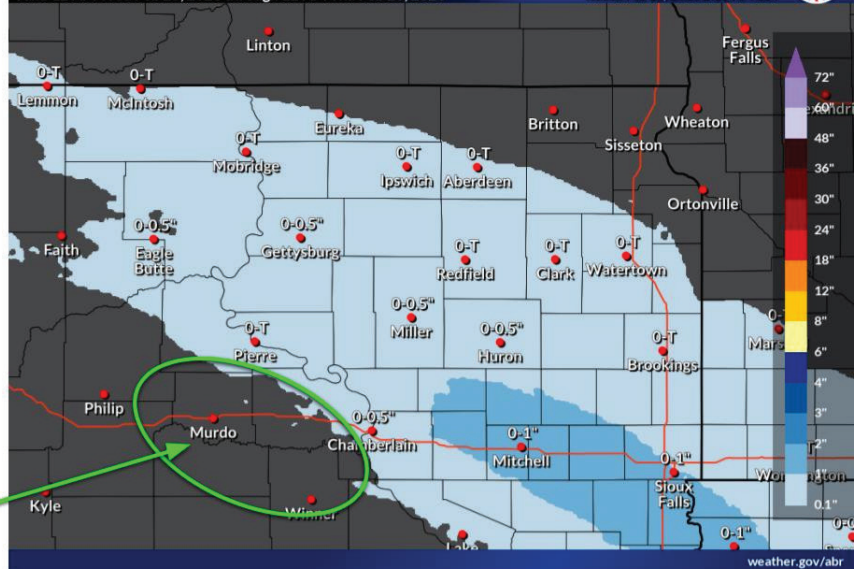
Key Messages

- Light snow will spread south and east across parts of central and northeast SD today
- Minor accumulations south and west of a line from McIntosh to Watertown
- Locally higher amounts of 1-3+ inches are possible where any narrow band(s) set up
- Temps warm enough for rain or a rain/snow mix

Expected Snowfall: Official NWS Forecast

Valid 12 AM Wed Feb 25, 2026 through 12 AM Thu Feb 26, 2026

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD
Issued Feb 25, 2026 2:18 AM CST



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

A weak disturbance will track southeast across the region today and spread light snow into central and northeast sections of South Dakota. Overall, this system looks to be more of a nuisance with generally less than an inch of accumulation. However, there still remains the possibility that a narrow band(s) of snow will set up. Within these areas, locally higher amounts of up to 1-3+ inches will be possible. Temperatures across parts of south central South Dakota will be warm enough for rain or a rain/snow mixture. This system will depart and take most of the snow with it by this evening.

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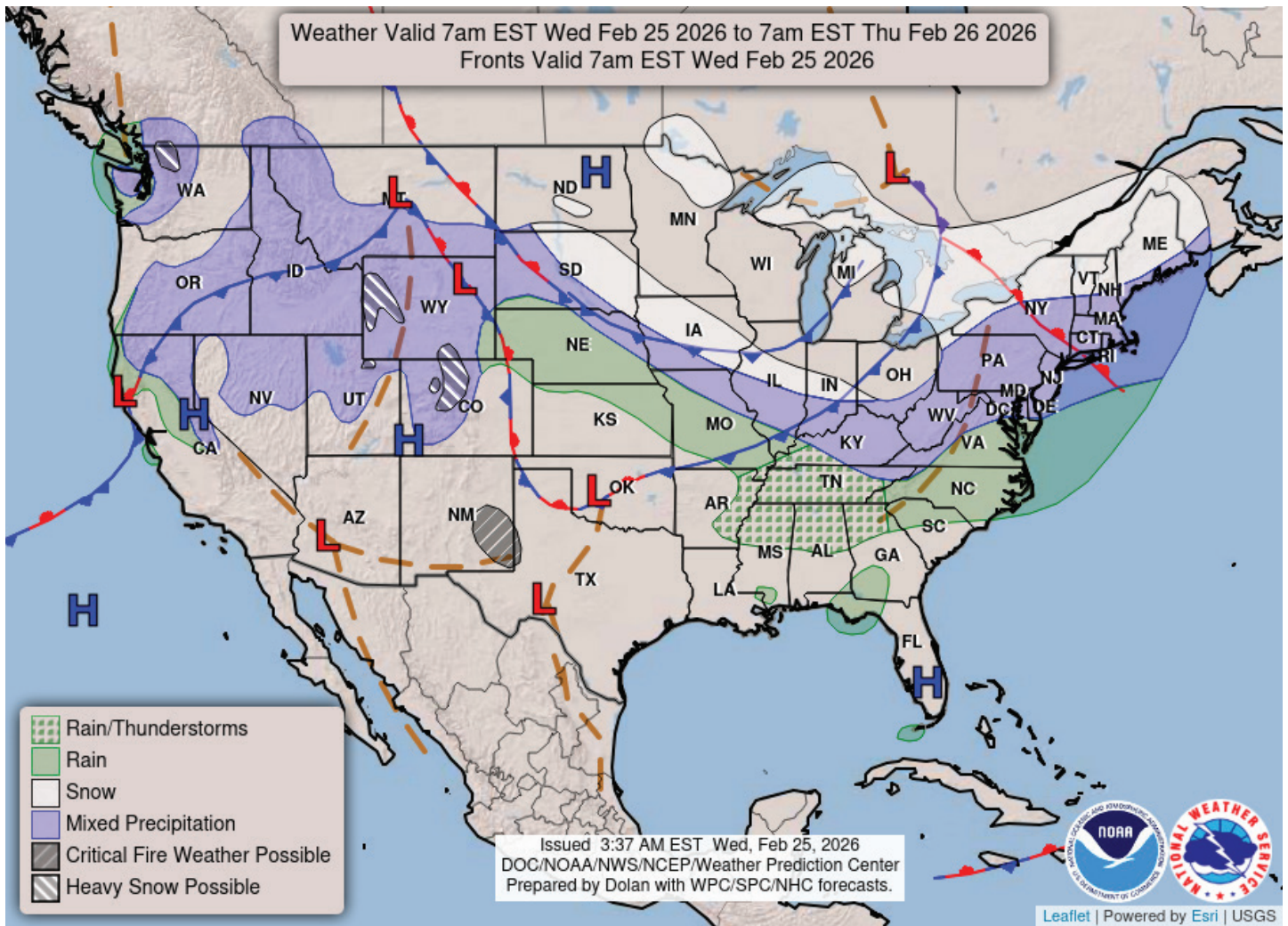
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 34 °F at 9:44 AM
Low Temp: 14 °F at 11:26 PM
Wind: 25 mph at 1:27 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 70 in 1958
Record Low: -29 in 1919
Average High: 32
Average Low: 10
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.54
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.96
Average Precip to date: 1.09
Precip Year to Date: 0.96
Sunset Tonight: 6.13 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:16 am



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Today in Weather History

February 25, 1987: Six to thirty inches of snow fell on this date in 1987 across much of western and central South Dakota. Three to six inches of snow fell in the northeast part of South Dakota. Some of the most significant snowfall amounts reported were 30 inches at Phillip, 26 inches at Murdo, and Timber Lake, with 15 inches at Rapid City. Numerous accidents occurred in the western and central sections of the state. Many roads were closed, including Interstate 90, for most of the 27th. Slippery roads were a significant factor in the vehicle injuries of three women on Highway 12, six and one-half miles east of Ipswich, in the late afternoon of the 27th. The storm began on the 24th and lasted until the 28th.

February 25-March 1, 1998: An incredible amount of snow falls on Lead, South Dakota, from February 25 through March 01, 1998. The official storm total was 114 inches for the five days. Click [HERE](#) for more information from the National Weather Service Office in Rapid City, South Dakota.

February 25, 2000: Unusual February severe thunderstorms produced nickel to quarter size hail in Lyman and Hand counties on this date in 2000.

1914: Heavy snow fell over a good portion of South Carolina and North Carolina on February 24-26, 1914. Snowfall amounts include 18 inches near Society Hill, SC, 14 inches in Fayetteville, NC, 13 inches at Darlington, SC, 11.7 inches at Columbia, SC, 8.1 inches at Charlotte, SC, and 7.2 inches at Greensboro, NC, and 7.0 inches at Raleigh, NC.

1934: An outbreak of six tornadoes killed nineteen in Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. The hardest-hit areas were Bowden, GA, and Shady Grove, AL. An estimated F4 tornado damaged or destroyed 90 homes, many in the Shady Grove community. One home in Lauderdale County, Mississippi, was picked up, thrown 400 feet, and blown to bits. Six family members were killed in the house. Three deaths occurred in two homes, and one preacher was killed during services.

1991: Black rain fell over southeastern Turkey for 10-hours, causing panic among people. The black rain resulted from soot from burning oil fields in Kuwait.

2010: A powerful nor'easter spread significant snow and windy conditions across the Middle Atlantic region from Thursday, February 25 into Friday, February 26. An area of low pressure developed off the Carolina coast late Wednesday night, February 24, and then strengthened as it tracked northward to near Long Island, New York, by Thursday evening. As low pressure aloft deepened over the Mid-Atlantic coast Thursday night into Friday, the surface low retrograded and moved westward into northern New Jersey and southern New York. By February 27, the low pushed into southern New England and gradually weakened over the weekend. Strong wind gusts were measured throughout the Middle Atlantic region due to this coastal storm. Some of the highest wind gusts recorded include 62 mph measured at Cape May, New Jersey; 52 mph at the Atlantic City Marina; 51 mph at the Mount Pocono Airport and Lewes, Delaware; and 50 mph at Dover Air Force Base. In addition, wind gusts of 40 mph or higher were recorded in Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Allentown. Considerable blowing and drifting snow resulted, especially from the Poconos eastward into northern New Jersey. Snow drifts as high as 3 to 5 feet were seen across portions of Warren and Sussex counties in New Jersey. Total accumulations of 20 inches or more were recorded from Morris and Sussex counties in New Jersey, westward into Monroe County, Pennsylvania. In addition, a band of 12 to 18 inches of snow accumulation was measured from Warren and Morris counties in New Jersey westward to Lehigh County, Pennsylvania. In addition to snow that accumulated during the daytime on Thursday, many locations across the region experienced a heavier burst of snow with gusty winds Thursday night into early Friday, thanks to additional moisture wrapped around the low-pressure system. Some areas saw snowfall rates of 1 to 2 inches per hour, mainly from northern New Jersey and into the Poconos. Central Park ended the month with 36.9 inches of snow, making this the snowiest month since records began in 1869.

2017: An EF1 tornado was confirmed in Goshen and Conway County, MA. This tornado was the first-ever recorded in February for M.A. since records began. The graphic below is from a tweet by the N.W.S. Office in Boston, MA.



Daily Devotion

Finding Clear Guidance

How does a believer hear God's voice?

Psalm 25:12: 12 Who is the man who fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way he should choose.

How can you know you're making the right decision? Sometimes it may feel as if God is keeping things from us when we're trying to know His will, but that's not how He operates. He wants to give us clear direction. So what must we do to hear His voice?

Clear the pathway. To receive the Lord's guidance, we must repent of all known sin and make our desires secondary to His.

Exercise patience. Sometimes it takes great strength to stand still when everything within you is shouting, "Hurry! Time's running out!" But if you rush ahead of God, you may miss His will.

Persist in prayer. The Bible instructs us to keep bringing our concerns to the Lord (Luke 18:1-8; 1 Thesalonians 5:17). As we continue to pray, He will gradually weed out anything confusing until we come to understand His thoughts about the matter.

Search the Scriptures. The Word of God provides wisdom for all of life's challenges (Psalm 119:105), and the Holy Spirit points us in the right direction.

So often when we're faced with a critical choice, all we want from the Lord is a quick answer. But He desires something so much greater—to deepen our relationship with Him. Don't let the urgency of your need keep you from enjoying the intimacy of God's presence as you seek His will.

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

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The Groton Independent

Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.24.26

12 15 33 46 53 5

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

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 41 Mins 37 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.24.26

12 39 43 49 55 23

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$458,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 26 Mins 37 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: 16 Hrs 41 Mins 37 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.20.26

10 24 30 36 42 11

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 56 Mins 37 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.21.26

8 12 22 25 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 56 Mins 37 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.23.26

15 20 27 31 58 14

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 25 Mins 37 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: 17 Hrs 25 Mins 37 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the **AP** Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Central 79, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 53
Brandon Valley 55, Mitchell 39
Huron 61, Sioux Falls O'Gorman 57
Sioux Falls Christian 94, Marshall, Minn. 63
Sioux Falls Jefferson 66, T F Riggs High School 47
Sioux Falls Washington 66, Tea 58
Sturgis Brown High School 59, Douglas 53
Yankton 64, Brookings 28

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

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Brandon Valley 54, Mitchell 34
Sioux Falls Jefferson 63, T F Riggs High School 31
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 59, Huron 36
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 46, Aberdeen Central 45
Sioux Falls Washington 65, Tea 39
Sturgis Brown High School 63, Douglas 34
Yankton 56, Brookings 24
SDHSAA Playoffs=
Regional Quarterfinal=
Class A Region 1=
Groton 45, Britton-Hecla 19
Milbank 32, Redfield 14
Class A Region 2 =
Florence-Henry 54, Great Plains Lutheran 53
Class A Region 2=
Clark-Willow Lake 60, Elkton-Lake Benton 30
Sioux Valley 72, Deuel 22
Class A Region 3=
Tri-Valley 34, Garretson 16
Class A Region 4=
Canton 66, Beresford 52
Sioux Falls Christian 69, Elk Point-Jefferson 32
Vermillion 54, Dakota Valley 32
Class A Region 5=
Hanson 33, Bon Homme 26
McCook Central-Montrose 53, Parker/Marion 35
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 44, Scotland/Menno 41
Class A Region 6=
Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 85, Crow Creek Tribal School 34
Miller 63, Stanley County 22
Platte-Geddes 51, Chamberlain 48
Class A Region 7=
Lakota Tech 88, Little Wound 23

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St. Francis Indian 52, Todd County 47
Winner 69, Pine Ridge 43
Class A Region 8=
Belle Fourche 48, Custer 42
Hill City 64, Hot Springs 16
St Thomas More 68, Lead-Deadwood 15
Class A=
Dell Rapids 77, Madison 40
Flandreau 56, Baltic 33
Class B Region 1=
Waubay/Summit 58, Leola-Frederick High School 27
Class B Region 1A=
Warner 45, Waverly-South Shore 22
Class B Region 2=
Arlington 75, Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 42
Castlewood 56, Iroquois-Lake Preston 35
DeSmet 58, Wessington Springs 51
Deubrook 50, Wolsey-Wessington 33
Class B Region 3=
Chester 50, Bridgewater-Emery 33
Colman-Egan 53, Howard 33
Ethan 69, Flandreau Indian 23
Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 48, Dell Rapids St Mary's 39
Class B Region 4=
Centerville 58, Tripp-Delmont-Armour 46
Freeman 64, Irene-Wakonda 40
Gayville-Volin High School 55, Avon 50
Parkston 65, Alcester-Hudson 31
Class B Region 5=
Burke 61, Marty 47
Corsica/Stickney 68, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 22
Gregory 64, Lower Brule 52
Lyman 69, Kimball-White Lake 14
Class B Region 6=
Herreid-Selby 63, Sunshine Bible Academy 27
Highmore-Harrold 60, Sully Buttes 31
Ipswich 52, Gettysburg 34
North Central 44, Faulkton 39
Class B Region 7=
Bennett County 84, Edgemont 26
Jones County 50, White River 37
Wall 61, New Underwood 27
Class B Region 8=
Faith 44, Lemmon High School 39
Harding County 86, McLaughlin 22
McIntosh High School 59, Dupree 43
Timber Lake 60, Newell 50
Class B=
Hitchcock-Tulare 60, Langford 40
Kadoka 48, Philip 39

Northwestern 49, Tiospa Zina 18
Region 1 Class A=
Sisseton 70, Webster 35

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

German leader presses China for fair trade and help ending Ukraine war

By KEN MORITSUGU and GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — German Chancellor Friedrich Merz called Wednesday for deepening ties with China, while pushing for fairer trade rules between the two countries and seeking Chinese help on Ukraine.

Merz, who arrived in Beijing late morning for a whirlwind two-day visit, acknowledged differences during meetings with the country's top leaders and called for collaboration "wherever possible."

"We have a few issues that we need to talk about today in the course of my visit," he told Chinese Premier Li Qiang. "But I think there is also great potential for further growth of both our economies."

Both Europe and China have been buffeted by U.S. President Donald Trump's tariffs, and Europe further by his demands that it take more responsibility for its own security and cede control of Greenland to the U.S.

Shifting geopolitics

Merz, on his first trip to China since taking office last May, has championed building a stronger Europe both economically and militarily to assert itself in an emerging new world order.

Before landing in the Chinese capital, Merz indicated he would press for a fair economic playing field for German companies and China's assistance in bringing about an end to Russia's four-year-old war in Ukraine.

He stressed that for all the differences Europe has with China, "the big global political problems can no longer be tackled today without involving Beijing." Cooperation is needed to resolve crises and wars, including that in Ukraine, he said, noting that "Beijing's voice is heard, including in Moscow."

Many European governments have been frustrated that China hasn't done more to pressure Russia to end the fighting. It has maintained trade and close diplomatic ties with Russia and said its position on the conflict is impartial and objective.

"We hope all parties will seize the opportunity to reach a comprehensive, lasting and binding peace agreement," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said earlier this week.

Pushing against Trump's tariffs

Merz is the latest in a parade of world leaders to visit Beijing as China seeks support from other nations to push back against Trump's use of tariffs to demand concessions from trading partners, and his challenges to the United Nations and the global order that has governed international and economic relations in the post-World War II era.

In his predeparture remarks, Merz also emphasized the importance of placing Germany's China policy in a European context, saying it was no coincidence that he is visiting not long after French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and ahead of a planned trip by U.S. President Donald Trump in early April.

"Our message from a European point of view is the same: We want a balanced, reliable, regulated and fair partnership with China," Merz said. "This is our offer. At the same time, it is what we also hope for and expect from the Chinese side."

"At a time when the world is experiencing turbulence and transformation, China and Germany, as major economies and advocates of multilateralism, share the responsibility to uphold the stability of global industrial and supply chains and oppose protectionism and economic coercion," China's official Xinhua News Agency said in a commentary.

Economically, a flood of Chinese exports is threatening factory jobs in Europe. Germany's imports from China rose 8.8% to 170.6 billion euros (\$201 billion) last year, while its exports to China fell 9.7% to 81.3 billion euros (\$96 billion).

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European leaders want Chinese companies to build factories in their countries. They also want China to reduce manufacturing overcapacity that is driving down prices in industries such as electric vehicles and solar panels, and to remove barriers faced by foreign companies in what is the world's second-largest economy.

"We also want to discuss how we can find a remedy, for example, where systemic overcapacities have arisen, where there are export restrictions and where there are access restrictions ... that distort and prevent competition," Merz said.

Moulson reported from Berlin.

A new director is being appointed to lead the Louvre Museum after jewel heist, sources say

By SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — The home of the 'Mona Lisa' is getting a new boss. Two French officials told The Associated Press that art historian Christophe Leribault, a veteran museum director, is taking over at the Louvre. He will shoulder the challenge of getting the world's largest museum out of crisis after the brazen heist in October of the French crown jewels. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the appointment expected to be approved at a Cabinet meeting and announced later Wednesday.

The challenges that Leribault will inherit are formidable.

The daylight robbery — among the highest-profile museum thefts in living memory — exposed alarming security holes at the Paris landmark.

The former royal palace has also suffered a broad array of other problems that have presented a picture of a treasured national institution spiraling out of control.

They include a burst pipe near the "Mona Lisa" and water leaks that damaged priceless books, aging buildings, and staff walkouts over overcrowding, understaffing and ticket price-hikes for most non-European visitors.

Pressure for new leadership deepened in recent weeks when authorities revealed a suspected decade-long ticket fraud operation linked to the museum that investigators say may have cost the Louvre 10 million euros (\$11.8 million).

Iran pushes back against Trump ahead of Geneva talks in face of major US military deployment

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran pushed back Wednesday against U.S. President Donald Trump's pressure tactics ahead of critical talks in Geneva over Tehran's nuclear program, alternating between calling his remarks "big lies" to saying negotiations may yield an agreement through "honorable diplomacy."

The remarks by two Iranian officials ahead of Thursday's talks come as America has assembled its biggest deployment of aircraft and warships into the Middle East in decades, part of Trump's efforts to get a deal while Iran struggles at home with growing dissent following nationwide protests last month.

If the negotiations fails, Trump repeatedly has threatened to attack Iran — something Mideast nations fear could spiral into a new regional war as the embers of the yearslong Israel-Hamas war still smolder. Already, Iran has said all U.S. military bases in the Mideast would be considered legitimate targets, putting at risk the tens of thousands of American service members in the region. U.S. warships typically docked in Bahrain appear to have been sent to sea, satellite photos analyzed by The Associated Press show.

Iran responds to Trump's State of the Union speech

Trump on Tuesday night in the U.S. gave his annual State of the Union speech, touching on Iran and the nuclear negotiations.

"They've already developed missiles that can threaten Europe and our bases overseas, and they're work-

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ing to build missiles that will soon reach the United States of America," Trump said. "They were warned to make no future attempts to rebuild their weapons program, and in particular nuclear weapons, yet they continue. They're starting it all over."

Satellite photos earlier analyzed by the AP showed Iran beginning to rebuild its missile production sites and doing some work at the three nuclear sites attacked by the U.S. in June. Iran long has maintained its nuclear program is peaceful. The West and the International Atomic Energy Agency say Iran had a nuclear weapons program until 2003. It had been enriching uranium up to 60% purity before the June attack — a short, technical step away from weapons-grade levels of 90%.

Responding to Trump, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei sought to compare him to Joseph Goebbels, Adolf Hitler's propaganda minister. He accused Trump and his administration of conducting a "disinformation & misinformation campaign" against Iran.

"Whatever they're alleging in regards to Iran's nuclear program, Iran's ballistic missiles, and the number of casualties during January's unrest is simply the repetition of 'big lies,'" Baghaei wrote on X.

Trump said in his speech at least 32,000 people were killed in the protests, which is at the further end of estimates offered by activists for the death toll. The U.S.-based Human Rights Activist News Agency has so far counted more than 7,000 dead and believes the death toll is far higher. Iran's government, which long has downplayed death tolls in other unrest, offered its only toll on Jan. 21, saying 3,117 people were killed.

Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, Iran's parliament speaker, separately said the U.S. could either try diplomacy or face Iran's wrath.

"If you choose the table of diplomacy — a diplomacy in which the dignity of the Iranian nation and mutual interests are respected — we will also be at that table," Qalibaf said, according to the semiofficial Student News Network, a media outlet believed to be close to the all-volunteer Basij force of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard.

"But if you decide to repeat past experiences through deception, lies, flawed analysis and false information, and launch an attack in the midst of negotiations, you will undoubtedly taste the firm blow of the Iranian nation and the country's defensive forces."

Talks hang in balance

Iran and the U.S. are due to meet Thursday in Geneva, their third round of talks under the mediation of Oman, long an interlocutor between Tehran and the West.

If the talks fail, uncertainty hangs over the timing of any possible attack, as well as its mission and goals.

The U.S. has not made clear the aims of possible military action. If the goal is to pressure Iran to make concessions in nuclear negotiations, it's not clear whether limited strikes will work. If the goal is to remove Iran's leaders, that will likely commit the U.S. to a more massive, longer military campaign. There has been no public sign of planning for what would come next, including the potential for chaos in Iran.

The status of Iran's nuclear program is another mystery. Trump earlier said American strikes "obliterated" it. Now, dismantling whatever remains of the program appears to be back on the administration's agenda. IAEA inspectors have not been allowed to inspect those sites and verify what remains.

There is also uncertainty about what any military action could mean for the wider region. Tehran could retaliate against the American-allied nations of the Persian Gulf or Israel. Oil prices have risen in recent days in part due to those concerns.

Satellite photos shot Tuesday by Planet Labs PBC and analyzed by the AP appeared to show American vessels typically docked in Bahrain, the home of the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet, all out at sea. The 5th Fleet referred questions to the U.S. military's Central Command, which did not immediately respond. Before Iran's attack on Qatar in June, the 5th Fleet similarly scattered its ships at sea to protect against a potential attack.

US futures are flat and global stocks gain after optimism about AI sends Wall Street higher

By YURI KAGEYAMA AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — U.S. futures were flat Wednesday after President Donald Trump's State of the Union speech, while global shares were mostly higher.

In Europe, France's CAC 40 edged up 0.3% in early trading to 8,542.30, while the German DAX added 0.2% to 25,024.38. Britain's FTSE 100 jumped 0.8% to 10,763.15.

The future for the S&P 500 was up 0.1%, while that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 0.1%.

Japan's benchmark briefly hit a record high as investors were cheered by an overnight Wall Street rally driven by optimism about the artificial-intelligence boom. Tokyo's Nikkei 225 surged 2.2% to finish at 58,583.12.

Shares also rose in China. Hong Kong's Hang Seng gained 0.7% to 26,765.72, while the Shanghai Composite added 0.7% to 4,147.23. South Korea's Kospi surged 1.9% to 6,083.86, as the benchmark continued to benefit from the global demand for computer chips.

In Taiwan, the Taiex jumped 2.1% as shares in TSMC, the world's largest contract manufacturer of computer chips, surged 2.5%. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 jumped 1.2% to 9,128.30.

In his speech, Trump focused on jobs, manufacturing and an economy he says is stronger than many Americans believe. He didn't dwell on efforts to lower the cost of living — despite polling showing that his handling of the economy and kitchen-table issues has increasingly become a liability.

On Tuesday, before the speech, the S&P 500 climbed 0.8% and the Dow industrials added 0.8%. The Nasdaq composite climbed 1%.

Investors are closely watching for an earnings report due later in the day from chipmaking giant Nvidia. The quarterly report is likely to sway a jittery stock market as investors weigh whether the massive bets riding on technology's latest craze will pay off.

As has been the case since Nvidia's chipsets emerged as AI's best building blocks, the expectations are sky high for the results covering the company's fiscal quarter, covering November through January.

In other dealings early Wednesday, benchmark U.S. crude oil added 40 cents to \$66.03 a barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, rose 42 cents to \$71.00 a barrel.

The U.S. dollar recovered to 156.42 Japanese yen from 155.91 yen. The euro cost \$1.1792, up from \$1.1774.

Japan demands the swift release of a Japanese national detained in Iran

TOKYO (AP) — Japan's government said Wednesday that a Japanese national has been detained in Tehran since January and demanded the Iranian authorities release them swiftly.

Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Masanao Ozaki, asked about foreign media reports on the case, confirmed only that the Japanese citizen was taken into custody on Jan. 20 but gave no further details, citing privacy issues.

Ozaki said the government is in contact with the detainee and their family members, while providing necessary support.

Foreign Ministry officials said the detainee is believed to be in good health, although Japanese officials have not been granted a meeting in person.

The ministry declined to comment when or on what charges the detainee was arrested.

About 200 Japanese nationals are in Iran, 150 of them in Tehran, according to the Foreign Ministry.

Indonesia frees and deports American who spent 11 years in prison for Bali 'suitcase murder'

By EDNA TARIGAN Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Indonesia freed and deported an American man Tuesday after he spent 11 years in prison for the premeditated murder of his then-girlfriend's mother on the tourist island of Bali.

Tommy Schaefer was sentenced to 18 years in prison for the 2014 murder of Sheila von Wiese-Mack, the mother of Heather Mack, during a luxury vacation in a case also known as the Bali "suitcase murder."

Schaefer was deported back to the United States from Bali International Airport on Tuesday evening after serving his sentence and receiving a number of remissions for good behavior, said Felucia Sengky Ratna, head of the Bali Regional Office of the Directorate General of Immigration, in a statement.

The badly battered body of the 62-year-old von Wiese-Mack, a wealthy Chicago socialite, was found inside the trunk of a taxi parked at the upscale St. Regis Bali Resort in August 2014.

Heather Mack, who was almost 19 and a few weeks pregnant at the time of the killing, and her then-21-year-old boyfriend, Schaefer, were arrested on the island a day after the body was found.

Mack served seven years of a 10-year prison sentence in Bali for helping to kill her mother and was deported in October 2021.

She was also sentenced to 26 years in prison in Chicago in January 2024, after she pleaded guilty to helping kill her mother and stuffing the body in a suitcase during their vacation.

Takeaways from Trump's address: Sales mode on economy, heavy on patriotism, dark turn on Democrats

By STEVEN SLOAN and STEVE PEOPLES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump started in sales mode, using his State of the Union address to deliver an upbeat vision of the U.S. economy.

But that portrayal collides with the sentiment of Americans who remain anxious about their finances and feel they haven't benefited from Trump's policies. He took the high road to honor the gold medal-winning U.S. men's Olympic hockey team and a war hero before pivoting abruptly to a darker tone as he ridiculed Democrats.

Here are takeaways from the speech.

Trump's 'roaring' economy is at odds with sour public sentiment

Much of the nation is worried about the direction of the economy, but Trump says the good times are here, insisting repeatedly that rising costs are no longer a problem.

"The roaring economy is roaring like never before," he said. He cheered the lower cost of gasoline, mortgage rates, prescription drug prices and the rising stock market: "Millions and millions of Americans are all gaining."

Such optimism, as so many Americans are feeling economic strains, risks painting Trump as out of touch. Just 39% of U.S. adults approved of Trump's handling of the economy in February, according to AP-NORC polling.

Still, the president focused much of the first hour of his speech on the economy, something Republicans had urged him to do as they head into the midterm elections.

Trump wraps himself in the flag

For a president who always seems to be spoiling for a fight, Trump also tried to summon Americans' innate patriotic impulses. In addition to the hockey team, he singled out war heroes and those who had taken brave stands in other countries, using the moment to bestow numerous presidential medals in an effort to give the address a more positive gloss.

It underscored the president's media savvy and understanding that even if a moment isn't appreciated completely in real time, it can have an afterlife in the days following speech, especially on social media.

Yet in one revealing moment, Trump lamented why he couldn't give a congressional medal to himself.

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Taking aim at Democrats

Tributes to the Olympic hockey team and a World War II veteran didn't unify the room for long.

The Republican president soon took aim at Democrats and blamed them for many of the nation's ills.

Trump said rising health care premiums are "caused by you," suggested Democrats "are not protecting" Social Security and blamed them for the nation's affordability crunch. "You caused that problem. You caused that problem," Trump said as he glared at the Democratic side of the room.

He seemed to get angrier as the speech progressed.

"These people are crazy, I'm telling you, they're crazy," he said. "Democrats are destroying this country."

Trump's MAGA base loves such aggression. It's unclear, however, if the rest of the country feels the same.

The Supreme Court's 'unfortunate' decision

By Trump's standards, he held his tongue when it came to the Supreme Court.

After the court struck down his tariff policy last week, Trump said the justices who voted against one of his signature issues were an "embarrassment to their families." By Tuesday, he simply called the ruling "unfortunate."

Trump sought to treat the ruling with indifference, insisting that tariff revenues were "saving" the U.S., ignoring the fact that the levies haven't made a significant dent in government debt. He said the tariffs were paid by foreign countries even as virtually every study concludes that costs have been paid by U.S. firms and consumers.

At one point, he seemed to take the long view that history would ultimately vindicate him even if the Supreme Court would not.

"As time goes by, I believe the tariffs paid by foreign countries will, like in the past, substantially replace the modern day system of income tax, taking a great burden off the people that I love," he said.

That is unlikely. The federal income tax is authorized by the 16th Amendment to the Constitution and the power to collect revenue is ultimately defined by Congress, not the president.

Trump vows action on election 'cheating'

The president also used the speech to reprise his attack on the integrity of U.S. elections.

"Cheating is rampant in our elections," Trump said.

Trump has made such claims for years, focused on his 2020 election loss, claims rejected by dozens of courts and his own attorney general at the time.

But the timing of Tuesday's prime-time claims, less than nine months before voters across America are scheduled to decide control of Congress, was noteworthy. So, too, was Trump's suggestion that he would take action to address a problem that doesn't appear to exist.

"They want to cheat. They have cheated, and their policy is so bad that the only way they can get elected is to cheat," Trump said of Democrats. "And we're going to stop it. We have to stop it."

Trump is calling on Congress to pass a bill requiring voters to show a photo ID before casting ballots. But he also recently vowed to enact an executive order to address the issue, although the White House has not clarified what it might entail.

No mention of Minneapolis

Sometimes what's not said is as notable as what is.

Trump has highlighted immigration since the very first speech in which he announced his 2016 presidential campaign. And on Tuesday night, he revived much of the same language he's used throughout the past decade, blasting "criminal aliens" and warning of "drug lords, murderers all over our country."

What he didn't mention: the most aggressive immigration enforcement tactics that threatened to bring the U.S. to the brink earlier this year. He didn't mention the deaths of two U.S. citizens in Minneapolis last month at the hands of federal agents.

Indeed, it was Rep. Rashida Tlaib, D-Mich., who shouted that "Alex wasn't a criminal," referring to Alex Pretti, one of the U.S. citizens killed in Minneapolis.

During her Democratic rebuttal, Virginia Gov. Abigail Spanberger said law enforcement must work to build trust in communities and said Trump "every minute spent sowing fear is a minute not investigating murders."

Trump said nothing of his administration's shift in tactics, including a drawdown of agents in the Twin Cities. And he made no acknowledgment of the broad concerns in the U.S. about Trump's approach on immigration, as demonstrated by the 60% of U.S. adults who disapproved of his handling of the issue in February, according to AP-NORC polling.

Drumbeat for war gets louder

Trump has already built up the largest U.S. military presence in the Middle East in decades. And in his speech, he outlined a rationale for using those forces to launch a major military strike against Iran.

The president said that Iran and its proxies have "spread nothing but terrorism, death and hate," adding that its leaders killed at least 32,000 protesters in recent weeks, which is at the further end of estimates over the death toll. The U.S.-based Human Rights Activist News Agency has so far counted more than 7,000 dead and believes the death toll is far higher. Iran's government offered its only death toll on Jan. 21, saying 3,117 people were killed.

Trump also warned that the nation has developed missiles that can threaten Europe and is working on missiles "that will soon reach" the U.S.

"My preference is to solve this problem through diplomacy. But one thing is certain, I will never allow the world's number one sponsor of terror, which they are, by far to have a nuclear weapon. Can't let that happen."

On brand, the speech was the longest SOTU ever

The president, ever mindful of records that allow him to say he was the first, the best or had done the most, succeeded clearly on one thing: he beat his own record for the longest, clocking in at just under 1 hour, 48 minutes.

Hungary's Orbán stakes his reelection on anti-Ukraine message

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — Facing tough odds in an upcoming election, Hungary's pro-Russian prime minister is trying to convince voters that the greatest threat to the country is not economic stagnation — the focus of his top opponent — but neighboring Ukraine.

Viktor Orbán is running an aggressive media campaign replete with disinformation whose central message is that Hungarians should refuse to align with the rest of Europe in supporting Ukraine against Russia's invasion. That path, he argues, risks bankrupting the country and getting its youth killed on the front lines.

Billboards erected across the country show AI-generated images of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy flanked by European officials, holding out his hand as if demanding money. It's a not-so-subtle reference to the European Union's efforts to help Ukraine financially and bolster its defenses as the war enters its fifth year.

"Our message to Brussels: We won't pay!" the publicly funded billboards read.

If there had been any doubt, it became clear on Monday why the outcome of Hungary's upcoming election will reverberate beyond its borders. Hungary blocked a new package of EU sanctions on Russia in response to interruptions in Russian oil supplies that pass through Ukraine, and vowed to veto any further pro-Ukraine policies until oil flows resume.

Orbán is widely seen as the Kremlin's strongest ally in the EU. While almost all of the bloc's other 26 nations have distanced themselves from Russia since it launched the war on Feb. 24, 2022, Hungary has deepened cooperation.

The prime minister has cast his relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin as pragmatic, stemming from Hungary's access to reliable supplies of Russian oil and gas. But Orbán's anti-LGBTQ+ policies, crackdowns on the media and nongovernmental organizations, and his labeling of critics as "foreign agents" have led to accusations that he's reading from Putin's authoritarian playbook.

Campaign of fear

Orbán, who retook office in 2010, faces the strongest challenge to his power in an election set for April

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12. The EU's longest-serving leader and his right-wing Fidesz party are trailing in most independent polls to an upstart center-right challenger, Péter Magyar.

A 44-year-old lawyer and former Fidesz insider who broke with the party in 2024, Magyar has focused his campaign on stemming the rising costs of living, improving social services and reining in corruption. He also promises to restore Hungary's Western orientation and bolster democratic institutions which have eroded during Orbán's 16 years in power.

His rise was aided by political scandals that have damaged the credibility of Orbán's party; a presidential pardon given to an accomplice in a child sexual abuse case led to a public outcry, prompting the president and justice minister to resign.

Losing ground to Magyar and his Tisza party, Orbán and Fidesz have sought to change the conversation. They have blanketed the country with taxpayer-funded billboards, as well as advertisements on radio, television and social media. A petition mailed to every Hungarian of voting age claimed the EU's plans to help Ukraine financially would bring economic ruin.

Other ads, paid for by a shadowy pro-government organization with Fidesz ties, depict Magyar as a puppet of Zelenskyy and the EU who would sell out the country to foreign interests and draw Hungary into the war.

Hungary's public media, along with many private news outlets loyal to Orbán's government, faithfully mimic the claims. They say Ukraine wants to prolong the bloody conflict that has killed tens of thousands of its citizens — and is conspiring with the EU to do it.

Disinformation is fueled by artificial intelligence

Orbán has recently claimed that the EU — not Russia — poses the greatest threat to Hungary. He says rising defense spending across Europe — driven by Russia's war and pressure from the U.S. to increase NATO contributions — is evidence that the EU is preparing for conflict with Moscow and plans to forcibly conscript Hungarians to fight.

In an AI-generated video Fidesz released on social media last week, a little girl asks her forlorn mother in Hungarian: "Mommy, when is daddy coming home?"

In the next frame, the fictional father — bound, blindfolded and kneeling on a muddy battlefield — is approached by a soldier, and shot in the head. "We won't allow others to decide on the fates of our families," a narrator says. "Let's not take a risk. Fidesz is the safe choice."

Although some EU countries have proposed sending troops to Ukraine to monitor any future ceasefire, they are not intended to engage in combat, and participation would be voluntary, said András Rácz, a Russia expert at the German Council on Foreign Relations.

Rácz notes that, despite the false premise behind many of Orbán's claims, Fidesz has won two previous elections after raising fears that its political opponent would drag the country into the war.

"They are trying to max this out. They have nothing else," Rácz said. "Populists often try to define an enemy, often an imaginary one, and then offer protection to the society from that enemy. Ukraine has been ideal from this perspective."

Escalating tensions

For years, Orbán has sought to stymie EU efforts to provide financial and military support to Ukraine, and he has vigorously opposed sanctions targeting Russian oil and officials.

Tensions with Ukraine grew recently after Russian oil shipments to Hungary were interrupted; Ukraine blamed the disruption on a Russian drone strike in late January that damaged a pipeline. Orbán called it blackmail.

Last week, his government retaliated by halting diesel shipments to Ukraine and threatening to veto a 90-billion-euro (\$106-billion) EU loan destined for Kyiv. On Monday, it blocked the 20th round of EU sanctions against Russia.

The anti-Ukraine campaign has resonated with many Hungarians loyal to Fidesz. Despite Tisza's advantage in the polls, its victory is far from assured.

Still, many Hungarians are dubious of Orbán's anti-Ukraine messaging. On Sunday, hundreds of Hungarians and Ukrainians, many of them refugees, gathered in central Budapest to commemorate the four-year

anniversary of Russia's invasion. Marching toward a demonstration outside the Russian embassy, participants held Ukrainian and Hungarian flags, and chanted, "Stop Putin, stop the war!"

Budapest's liberal mayor, Gergely Karácsony, told The Associated Press that Orbán's messaging and policies are "a betrayal not only of Ukraine, but of Hungary's national interest."

"I hope that this will go into history as a failed policy, but that history will also remember that there were some who stood up for what is right," he said.

One of the marchers was Ester Zhivatovska, a 19-year-old veterinary medicine student who came from the Ukrainian port city of Odesa to study in Budapest. She said the billboards depicting her country's president are laughable.

"The main message of these billboards is that Ukraine will steal Hungarian money," she said. "But come on, you're using these AI images from the Hungarian budget to do what? To win elections."

India's Modi is making his second official visit to Israel to meet with Netanyahu

JERUSALEM (AP) — Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was expected in Israel on Wednesday for a two-day visit focusing on strengthening security, economic and technological cooperation between the two countries.

Modi has said he would hold talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Isaac Herzog and would speak to Israeli parliament on Wednesday evening.

"Our nations share a robust and multifaceted Strategic Partnership," Modi wrote on X. "Ties have significantly strengthened in the last few years."

Netanyahu referred to himself and Modi as "personal friends" when he announced the visit earlier this week and the visit is likely to give Israel a boost of international support after seeing relations with many of its allies deteriorate since the war in Gaza began in October 2023.

In addition to being a powerful ally, India is also Israel's No. 2 trading partner in Asia. Total trade between India and Israel was valued at \$3.62 billion in the 2025 fiscal year, according to India's Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Modi became India's first prime minister to travel to Israel in 2017, and Netanyahu reciprocated with a trip to India the following year.

Netanyahu told a Cabinet meeting Sunday that economic and security issues will be high on the leaders' agenda, as will sharing technology, including artificial intelligence and quantum computing.

"We are partners in innovation, security, and a shared strategic vision," Netanyahu said on the social platform X ahead of Modi's arrival. "Together, we are building an axis of nations committed to stability and progress."

Modi's embrace of Israel has marked a shift in India's foreign policy. India has historically supported the Palestinians, and did not establish full diplomatic ties with Israel until 1992.

A staunch Hindu nationalist, Modi was one of the first global leaders to swiftly express solidarity with Israel following the Oct. 7, 2023 attack by the Palestinian militant Hamas group.

India was also among more than 100 countries earlier this month to condemn Israel's newly approved measures to deepen its control over the occupied West Bank and weaken the already limited powers of the Palestinian Authority.

Read the complete transcript of Trump's 2026 State of the Union

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's State of the Union address, delivered on Tuesday, Feb. 24, 2026, as transcribed by The Associated Press:

Speaker Johnson, Vice President Vance, first lady of the United States, second lady of the United States, members of Congress and my fellow Americans, our nation is back: Bigger, better, richer and stronger

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than ever before.

Less than five months from now, our country will celebrate an epic milestone in American history, the 250th anniversary of our glorious American independence. This July 4th, we will mark two and a half centuries of liberty and triumph, progress and freedom in the most incredible and exceptional nation ever to exist on the face of the earth. And we've seen nothing yet. We're going to do better and better and better. This is the golden age of America.

When I spoke in this chamber 12 months ago, I had just inherited a nation in crisis, with a stagnant economy, inflation at record levels, a wide-open border, horrendous recruitment for military and police, rampant crime at home and wars and chaos all over the world. But tonight, after just one year, I can say with dignity and pride that we have achieved a transformation like no one has ever seen before and a turnaround for the ages. It is, indeed, a turnaround for the ages. And we will never go back to where we were just a very short time ago. We're not going back.

Today our border is secure. Today our border is secure, our spirit is restored, inflation is plummeting, incomes are rising fast, the roaring economy is roaring like never before, our enemies are scared, our military and police are stacked, and America is respected again, perhaps like never before. After four years in which millions and millions of illegal aliens poured across our borders totally unfettered and unchecked, we now have the strongest and most secure border in American history, by far. In the past nine months, zero illegal aliens have been admitted to the United States. But we will always allow people to come in legally, people that will love our country and will work hard to maintain our country. Deadly fentanyl across our border is down by a record 56% in one year. In the last year, the murder rate saw its single largest decline in recorded history. This is the biggest decline, think of it, in recorded history, the lowest number in over 125 years. In 1900, in fact, substantially before my wonderful father — I had a wonderful father, Fred — before he was born, substantially before he was born, that's a long time ago, he wouldn't like me to say that, but that's a long time ago.

The Biden administration and its allies in Congress gave us the worst inflation in the history of our country. But in 12 months, my administration has driven core inflation down to the lowest level in more than five years. And in the last three months of 2025, it was down to 1.7%. Gasoline, which reached a peak of over \$6 a gallon in some states under my predecessor and was, quite honestly, a disaster, is now below \$2.30 a gallon in most states, and in some places \$1.99 a gallon. And when I visited the great state of Iowa just a few weeks ago, I even saw \$1.85 a gallon for gasoline, the lowest in four years, and falling fast.

And the annual cost of a typical new mortgage is down almost \$5,000 just since I took office, one year. And lower interest rates will solve the Biden-created housing problem, while at the same time protecting the values of those people who already own a house that really feel rich for the first time in their lives. We want to protect those values. We want to keep those values up. We're going to do both — and keep it that way. The stock market has set 53 all-time record highs since the election. Think of that, one year, boosting pensions, 401Ks and retirement accounts for the millions and the millions of Americans, they're all gaining. Everybody is up, way up. In four long years, the last administration got less than \$1 trillion in new investment in the United States. And when I say less, substantially less. In 12 months, I secured commitments for more than \$18 trillion pouring in from all over the globe.

Think of it - much less than \$1 trillion for four years, versus much more than \$18 trillion for one year. What a difference a president makes. A short time ago, we were a dead country. Now we are the hottest country anywhere in the world. The hottest. As thousands of new businesses are forming and factories, plants and laboratories are being built, we have added 70,000 new construction jobs in just a very short period of time. Getting bigger and bigger and stronger. Nobody can believe what they're watching. American oil production is up by more than 600,000 barrels a day. And we just received from our new friend and partner, Venezuela, more than 80 million barrels of oil. American natural gas production is at an all-time high. Because I kept my promise to drill, baby, drill.

More Americans are working today than at any time in the history of our country. Think about that. Any time in the history of our country. More working today, and 100% of all jobs created under my administration have been in the private sector. We ended DEI in America. We cut a record number of job-killing

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regulations, and in one year we have lifted 2.4 million Americans - a record - off of food stamps. And for all of these reasons, I say tonight, members of Congress, the state of our Union is strong. Our country is winning again. In fact, we're winning so much that we really don't know what to do about it. People are asking me, please, please, please, Mr. President, we're winning too much. We can't take it anymore. We're not used to winning in our country until you came along, we're just always losing. But now we're winning too much. And I say, no, no, no, you're going to win again. You're going to win big. You're going to win bigger than ever. And to prove that point, to prove that point, here with us tonight is a group of winners who just made the entire nation proud. The men's gold medal Olympic hockey team. Come on in.

Go ahead. It's the first time I've ever seen them get up. And actually, not all of them did get up. But they beat a fantastic Canadian team in overtime, as everybody saw, as did the American women who will soon be coming to the White House. They were in the Oval Office before, and I just want to say a second, very big congratulations to Team USA. But I have to say that - and I told them this and we took a vote of the team. I said, anybody votes no, I'm not doing it.

So they stood there. They weren't about to say no because I've never seen a goaltender play as well as goalie Connor Hellebuyck. Think of it, 46 shots on goal. And I asked him - one shot, the one where you put your stick in the back and it hit the neck of your stick and bounced off - you practice that? Or was that a little lucky? He refused to answer that question. But I just want to tell you that the members of this great hockey squad will be very happy to hear, based on their vote and my vote. And in this case, my vote was more important, that I will soon be presenting Connor with our highest civilian honor, which we will be given and which has been given to many athletes over the years. But when I say many, not too many, like 12, it's called the highest civilian honor in our country. The Presidential Medal of Freedom. Great athletes have gotten that. Very great, the best. And I thought he deserved it. And I did take a vote. Every single one of them. I said, I'm not giving it if anybody goes no, and every single one of them rapidly put up their hand. So I want to thank you all. What a special job you did. What special champions you are. Thank you very much.

I'm also pleased to say that the next time the Olympic torch is lit, it will be here in America for the 2028 Olympics. And it's the summer version, right? In Los Angeles. We're going to do a good job in Los Angeles. And Los Angeles is going to be safe, just like Washington, D.C. is now one of the safest cities in the country. And this year, and I must say, I got them both. I got them in the first term. And I was disappointed because I didn't think I'd be the president when this happened. But strange things took place, and now I've got them because I got the Olympics. And I've got the 2026 FIFA World Cup, and I wanted to claim the 250th, but I didn't get away with that one. I couldn't claim that one for myself. But we're getting the World Cup, so we have the World Cup and the Olympics coming and that is exciting news.

So this will be a year to celebrate our country and the heroes who have kept it free. Men like Buddy Taggart. At age 17, Buddy volunteered to defend America in World War II, serving in the Pacific under the great General Douglas MacArthur. He fought bravely in the famous Battle of Manila. He worked so hard he was badly wounded and almost killed by enemy machine guns at Luzon. And 81 years ago this month, he liberated the largest internment camp in the Philippines, one of the largest anywhere in the world. But he earned many honors, including a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star, came home, started a family, and tonight he is in the gallery, looking forward to July 4th, 2026, his 100th birthday. So Buddy, you're a brave man and we salute you.

Even in times of challenge, setback and immense heartache, the spirit of 1776 has always shone through very brightly. It was July 4th of last year when floodwaters tore through a girls summer camp in central Texas. One of the worst things I've ever seen. I was there, rising 26ft in the matter of minutes, tragically claiming many, many lives. You all remember that one. As the waters threatened to sweep her away, 11-year-old Milly Cate McClymond closed her eyes and prayed to God she thought she was going to die. Those prayers were answered when Coast Guard rescue swimmer Scott Ruskin descended from a helicopter above. Nobody knew where he came from. It was Scott's first ever rescue mission - young guy, but very brave, very, very top. Always top in his class. And he lifted not just Milly Cate, but 164 others to safety.

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People watched Scott from a distance and they couldn't believe what they were seeing. The winds were blowing, the rain was pouring, everything was going. And that rapid water, nobody's ever seen anything like it. They said, wow, that's something. Tonight, Scott and Milly Cate are here together, reunited for the very first time. Thank you, Scott. Milly Cate. And Petty Officer Ruskan, I'm pleased to inform you that I am now awarding you the Legion of Merit for extraordinary heroism. Which is what it was, extraordinary heroism. Thank you. And I'd like to have the military aide to please come down and take care of this service. Military aide, thank you very much. Take care of that very important service. Thank you very much.

From 1776 to today, every generation of Americans has step forward to defend life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. And they were doing it for the next generation. But now it's our turn. Together we're building a nation where every child has the chance to reach higher and go further. Where government answers to the people, not the powerful, and where the interests of hardworking American citizens are always our first and ultimate concern. That is the debt we owe to the heroes who came before us. And that is the promise we must keep to America for our 250th year.

Last year, I urged this Congress to begin the mission by passing the largest tax cuts in American history, and our Republican majorities delivered so beautifully. Thank you Republicans. All Democrats, every single one of them voted against these really important and very necessary massive tax cuts. They wanted large-scale tax increases to hurt the people instead. But we held strong. And with the great Big Beautiful Bill, we gave you no tax on tips, no tax on overtime and no tax on Social Security for our great seniors. And we also made interest on auto loans tax deductible the first time, but only if the car is made in America.

Recently in Pennsylvania, I met Megan Hemhauser, a devoted mom who homeschools her children. Beautiful two children during the day while waiting tables at night as her husband works overtime operating very heavy equipment. Megan is here this evening and she's happy to tell you that she is so, so much richer because with no tax on tips, no tax on overtime, and our expanded child tax credit done again by Republicans, Megan and her husband will take home more than \$5,000 extra just for the year, cutting her tax bill in more than half. Megan, please stand up. We're fighting for you, Megan. Thank you Megan. Thank you, Megan, we're fighting for you Megan.

Under our bill, parents like Megan can also activate their children's brand new Trump Accounts. And I didn't name it. I did not. I did not name them. Nobody believes me, but I did not name it. It was named by a very tall man standing right there in the third row. Nice man, a good man. Tax free investment accounts for every American child. This is something that's so special. Has taken off and gone through the roof. Millions will be refunded courtesy of the U.S. Treasury and private individuals like Michael and Susan Dell, who have donated 6 billion, 250 million dollars to fund the Trump accounts for 25 million American children. They're great people.

When I asked Michael Dell, "How do you make all that money? He said, "Well, I just sat in my dorm in school, and I made computers and I'd sell them to people. And I just kept selling and selling and selling and ..." Pretty amazing story. That's called the American Dream. He sold a lot of computers, a lot of those laptops. So I congratulate him on that. But I really thank him and Susan, as well as others like Brad Gerstner, a very tremendous guy. He was behind it right from the beginning. Brad Gerstner thank you, Brad.

So with modest additional contributions, these young people's accounts could grow to over \$100,000 or more by the time they turn 18. Think of it. How much money is that for somebody that started with nothing, over \$100,000, could be much more than that. To make this investment in our children's future, go to trumpaccounts.gov, trumpaccounts.gov. And a lot of people are doing it. They're setting every record in the book. It's popular. They knew what was going to, what it was going to take. So proud of them. I'm so proud of the people that got it started. And now it's just taken off.

One of the primary reasons for our country's stunning economic turnaround, the biggest in history, where the Dow Jones broke 50,000, four years ahead of schedule, and the S&P hit 7000 where it wasn't supposed to do it for many years, were tariffs. I used these tariffs, took in hundreds of billions of dollars to make great deals for our country, both economically and on a national security basis. Everything was working well. Countries that were ripping us off for decades are now paying us hundreds of billions

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of dollars. They were ripping us so badly. You all know that. Everybody knows it. Even the Democrats know it. They just don't want to say it. And yet these countries are now happy and so are we. We made deals -- the deals are all done and they're happy. They're not making money like they used to. But we're making a lot of money. There was no inflation, tremendous growth. And the big story was how Donald Trump called the economy correctly. And 22 Nobel Prize winners in economics, didn't. They got it totally wrong. They got it really wrong. And then just four days ago, an unfortunate ruling from the United States Supreme Court, it just came down, came down. Very unfortunate ruling.

But the good news is that almost all countries and corporations want to keep the deal that they already made — right, Scott? — knowing that the legal power that I, as president, have to make a new deal could be far worse for them, and, therefore, they will continue to work along the same successful path that we had negotiated before the Supreme Court's unfortunate involvement. So, despite the disappointing ruling, these powerful countries saving, is saving our country the kind of money we're taking in, peace protecting — many of the wars I've settled was because of the threat of tariffs, I wouldn't have been able to settle them without — will remain in place under fully approved and tested alternative legal statutes. And they have been tested for a long time. They're a little more complex, but they're actually probably better — leading to a solution that will be even stronger than before. Congressional action will not be necessary. It's already time-tested and approved. And as time goes by, I believe the tariffs, paid for by foreign countries, will, like in the past, substantially replace the modern-day system of income tax, taking a great financial burden off the people that I love.

Moving forward, factories, jobs, investment and trillions and trillions of dollars will continue pouring into the United States of America because we finally have a president who puts America first. I put America first. I love America. For decades before I came along, we had the exact opposite. From trade to health care, from energy to immigration, everything was stolen and rigged in order to drain the wealth out of the productive, hardworking people who make our country great, who make our country run. Under Biden and his corrupt partners in Congress and beyond, it reached a breaking point with the Green New Scam, open borders for everyone — they poured in by the millions and millions from prisons, from mental institutions, they were murderers — 11,888 murders — they came into our country, you allowed that to happen. And record-setting inflation that cost the typical family \$34,000 in just a speck of time.

Now, the same people in this chamber who voted for those disasters suddenly used the word affordability, a word, they just used it because somebody gave it to them, knowing full well that they caused and created the increased prices that all of our citizens had to endure. You caused that problem. You caused that problem. They knew their statements were a lie, they knew it, they knew their statements were a dirty, rotten lie. Their policies created the high prices. Our policies are rapidly ending them. We are doing really well. Those prices are plummeting downward. The price of eggs is down 60%, Madam Secretary, thank you. The cost of chicken, butter, fruit, hotels, automobiles, rent is lower today than when I took office by a lot. And even beef, which was very high, is starting to come down significantly. Just hold on a little while. We'll get that down. And soon you will see numbers that few people would think were possible to achieve just a short time ago.

Nobody can believe when they see the kind of numbers, and especially energy, when they see energy going down to numbers like that, they cannot believe it. It's like another big tax cut. I'm also confronting one of the biggest rip-offs of our times, the crushing cost of health care, caused by you. Since the passage of the "Unaffordable Care Act," sometimes referred to as Obamacare, big insurance companies have gotten rich. It was meant for the insurance companies, not for the people. With our government giving them hundreds and hundreds of billions of dollars a year, as their stock prices soared 1,000, 1,200, 1,400 and even 1,700%, like nothing else. That's why I introduced the great health care plan. I want to stop all payments to big insurance companies and instead give that money directly to the people, so they can buy their own health care, which will be better health care at a much lower cost. In addition, my plan requires maximum price transparency. That's a big deal. Sounds so simple, so big. And I did that in my first term and the Democrats immediately terminated it, with the full knowledge that they were doing a very bad thing for the people. Costs were going to go way up and that's what happened, and now I'm

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bringing them way down on health care and everything else.

I'm also ending the wildly inflated cost of prescription drugs like has never happened before. Other presidents tried to do it, but they never could. They tried, most didn't try, actually, but they tried, they said they tried. They couldn't do it. They didn't even come close. They were all talk and no action. But I got it done, under my just-enacted most-favored nation agreements, Americans who have for decades paid by far the highest prices of any nation anywhere in the world for prescription drugs will now pay the lowest price anywhere in the world for drugs, anywhere, the lowest price.

So, in my first year of my second term — should be my third term, but strange things happen — I took prescription drugs. a very big part of health care, from the highest price in the entire world to the lowest. That's a big achievement. The result is price differences of 300, 400, 500, 600% and more, all available right now at a new website called trumprx.gov — and I didn't name that one, either, by the way. And here tonight is the very first customer ever to get that big discount, and it is big, Catherine Rayner. For five years, she and her husband have struggled with infertility and they turned to IVF. One drug has been costing Catherine \$4,000 to purchase, but a few weeks ago she logged onto the TrumpRX website and got that same drug that cost \$4,000, got it for under \$500, a reduction of much more, actually, than \$3,500. Catherine, we are all praying for you and you're going to be a great mom.

So now I'm calling on Congress to codify my most-favored nation program into law. Now, the one thing I'm not sure it matters, because it's going to be very hard for somebody that comes along after me to say, let's raise drug prices by 700 or 800%. But, John and Mike, if you don't mind, codify it anyway, they may do it. Codify it anyway. Thank you. And many Americans are also concerned that energy demand from AI data centers could unfairly drive up their electric utility bills. Tonight, I'm pleased to announce that I have negotiated the new ratepayer protection pledge. You know what that is? We're telling the major tech companies that they have the obligation to provide for their own power needs. They can build their own power plants as part of their factory, so that no one's prices will go up and in many cases, prices of electricity will go down for the community, and very substantially then.

This is a unique strategy never used in this country before. We have an old grid. It could never handle the kind of numbers, the amount of electricity that's needed. So I'm telling them they can build their own plant, they're going to produce their own electricity. It will ensure the company's ability to get electricity, while at the same time lowering prices of electricity for you and could be very substantial. For all of these cities and towns, you're going to see some good things happen over the next number of years.

Another pillar of the American dream that has been under attack has been home ownership. With us tonight is Rachel Wiggins, a mom of two from Houston. She placed bids on 20 homes and lost all of those bids to gigantic investment firms that bypassed inspection, paid all cash and turned all those houses into rentals, stealing away her American dream. She was devastated. Stories like this are why last month I signed executive order to ban large Wall Street investment firms are buying up in the thousands single family homes.

And now I'm asking Congress to make that ban permanent, because all this for, people, really, that's what we want. We want homes for people, not for corporations. Corporations are doing just fine. Rachel thank you very much. Good luck with your home. You'll get one soon.

We're also working to make it easier for Americans to save for retirement. And under this administration, we will always protect Social Security and Medicare. They are not protecting it for our seniors. We will always protect Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid. Since I took office, the typical 401(k) balance is up by at least \$30,000. That's a lot of money. We have millions and millions of people. Because the stock market has done so well, setting all those records. Your 401(k)s are way up. Yet half of all of working Americans still do not have access to a retirement plan with matching contributions from an employer. To remedy this gross disparity, I'm announcing that next year my administration will give these oft-forgotten American workers, great people, the people that built our country, access to the same type of retirement plan offered to every federal worker. We will match your contribution with up to \$1,000 each year, as we ensure that all Americans can profit from a rising stock market. Let's also ensure that members of Congress cannot corruptly profit from using insider information.

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They stood up for that. I can't believe it. I can't believe it. Did Nancy Pelosi stand up, if she's here? Doubt it. Pass the Stop Insider Trading Act without delay. I wasn't sure if anybody even on this side was going to applaud for that. I'm very impressed. Thank you. I'm very impressed. But when it comes to the corruption that is plundering, really, it's plundering America, there's been no more stunning example than Minnesota, where members of the Somali community have pillaged an estimated \$19 billion from the American taxpayer. We have all the information. And in actuality, the number is much higher than that. And California, Massachusetts, Maine and many other states are even worse.

This is the kind of corruption that shreds the fabric of a nation, and we are working on it like you wouldn't believe. So tonight, although started four months ago, I am officially announcing the war on fraud to be led by our great Vice President JD Vance. He'll get it done. And we're able to find enough of that fraud, we will actually have a balanced budget overnight. It'll go very quickly. That's the kind of money you're talking about. We'll balance our budget. The Somali pirates who ransacked Minnesota remind us that there are large parts of the world where bribery, corruption, and lawlessness are the norm, not the exception. Importing these cultures through unrestricted immigration and open borders brings us problems right here to the USA. And it is the American people who pay the price in higher medical bills, car insurance rates, rent, taxes, and perhaps most importantly, crime. We will take care of this problem. We're going to take care of this problem. We are not playing games.

Dalilah. Dalilah Coleman was only five years old in June 2024, when a 18-wheel tractor trailer plowed into her stopped car, traveling at 60 miles an hour or more. The driver was an illegal alien, let in by Joe Biden and given a commercial driver's license by open borders, politicians and California. Doctors said Dalilah would never be able to walk or talk, have a good life. She wouldn't even be able to eat again. But against all odds, she is now in the first grade, learning to walk. And she's here this evening with her dad, Marcus, a fantastic man. Dalilah, please. You are a great inspiration. Please stand up. Thank you. Dalilah. Many, if not most, illegal aliens do not speak English and cannot read even the most basic road signs as to direction, speed, danger or location. That's why tonight I'm calling on Congress to pass what we will call the Dalilah law - barring any state from granting commercial driver's licenses to illegal aliens.

And yesterday, as you probably saw at the White House, I hosted a ceremony with Americans who lost their treasured loved ones to the scourge of illegal immigration. People came into our country. How we allowed this to happen with our open borders. These are the angel moms and families that for decades our government betrayed and our media totally ignored. Totally. It was terrible. Hard to believe, actually. In 2023, a 16-year-old high school cheerleader named Lizbeth Medina was supposed to perform in her town's Christmas parade, but she never arrived. Her mother, Jacqueline, went home to look for her, and she found her lying dead in a bathtub, bleeding profusely after being stabbed 25 times. Lizbeth's killer was a previously arrested illegal alien who had broken in and brutally, just brutally extinguished the brightest light in her family's life. Violently and viciously. Her heartbroken mother is in the gallery to remind everyone in this chamber exactly why we are deporting illegal alien criminals are - our country at record numbers, and we're getting them the hell out of here fast. We don't want 'em. Thank you very much, Jacqueline. Thank you.

We can never forget that many in this room not only allowed the border invasion to happen before I got involved, but indeed, they would do it all over again if they ever had the chance. If they ever got elected, they would open up those borders to some of the worst criminals anywhere in the world. The only thing standing between Americans and a wide-open border right now is President Donald J. Trump and our great Republican patriots in Congress. Thank you. As we speak, Democrats in this chamber have cut off all funding for the Department of Homeland Security. It's all cut off, all cut off. They have instituted another Democrat shutdown, the first one costing us two points on GDP. Two points we lost on GDP, which probably made them quite happy actually. Now they have closed the agency responsible for protecting Americans from terrorists and murderers. Tonight, I'm demanding the full and immediate restoration of all funding for the border security, homeland security of the United States, and also for helping people clean up their snow. We have no money because of the Democrats, and it would be nice. We'd love to

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give you a hand at cleaning it up, but you gave no money. Nobody's getting paid. It's a shame. So you have to think about it. We have, in case you didn't know, a pretty large snowstorm out there. One of the great things about the State of the Union is how it gives Americans the chance to see clearly what their representatives really believe. So tonight, I'm inviting every legislator to join with my administration and reaffirming a fundamental principle. If you agree with this statement, then stand up and show your support: The first duty of the American government is to protect American citizens, not illegal aliens.

Isn't that a shame? You should be ashamed of yourself not standing up. You should be ashamed of yourself. That is why I'm also asking you to end deadly sanctuary cities that protect the criminals and enact serious penalties for public officials who block the removal of criminal aliens. In many cases, drug lords, murderers all over our country. They're blocking the removal of these people out of our country. And you should be ashamed of yourself.

And perhaps most importantly, I'm asking you to approve the Safe America Act, to stop illegal aliens and others who are unpermitted persons from voting in our sacred American elections, the cheating is rampant in our elections. It's rampant. It's very simple. All voters must show voter ID. All voters must show proof of citizenship in order to vote. And no more crooked mail-in ballots except for illness, disability, military or travel. None. And this should be an easy one. And by the way, is polling at 89%, including Democrats, 89%. And even the new communist mayor of New York City. I think he's a nice guy, actually speak to him a lot. Bad policy, but nice guy. Just said they want people to shovel snow. They got hit hard. Wants them to shovel snow. But if you apply for that job, you need to show two original forms of ID and a Social Security card.

Yet they don't want identification for the greatest privilege of them all: voting in America. No, it's no good, no good. Both Republicans and Democrats overwhelmingly agree on the policy that we just enunciated, and Congress should unite and enact this common sense, country saving legislation right now. And it should be before anything else happens.

And the reason they don't want to do it, why would anybody not want voter ID? One reason, because they want to cheat. There's only one reason. They make up all excuses. They say it's racist. They come up with things. You almost say what imagination they have. They want to cheat, they have cheated, and their policy is so bad that the only way they can get elected is to cheat. And we're going to stop it. We have to stop it, John.

And here is one more opportunity to show common sense in government.

In the gallery tonight are Sage Blair and her mother, Michele. In 2021, Sage was 14 when school officials in Virginia sought to socially transition her to a new gender, treating her as a boy and hiding it from her parents. Hard to believe, isn't it? Before long, a confused Sage ran away from home. After she was found in a horrific situation in Maryland, a left wing judge refused to return Sage to her parents because they did not immediately state that their daughter was their son. Sage was thrown into an all boys state home and suffered terribly for a long time. But today, all of that is behind them. Because Sage is a proud and wonderful young woman with a full ride scholarship to Liberty University. Sage and Rachele, please stand up. And thank you for your great bravery.

And who can believe that we're even speaking about things like this? 15 years ago, if somebody was up here and said that, they'd say, "what's wrong with him?" But now we have to say it because it's going on all over numerous states. They're not even telling the parents. But surely we can all agree no state can be allowed to rip children from their parents' arms and transition them to a new gender against the parents' will. Who would believe that we're even talking about it? We must ban it, and we must ban it immediately.

Nobody stands up, these people are crazy. I'm telling them they're crazy.

Amazing. Boy oh boy.

We're lucky we have a country. With people like this -- democrats are destroying our country. But we've stopped it just in the nick of time, didn't we?

No one cares more about protecting America's youth than our wonderful First Lady. Now a movie star, a movie star. Who would have believed that?

Over the past year, she has had an incredible impact championing AI legislation, advancing a landmark

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executive order on foster care, and helping secure \$30 million to launch the Melania Trump Foster Youth to independence initiative. It's a tremendous, really a tremendous thing that happened and had a lot of bipartisan support. She gets much better bipartisan support than I do. I get none, she gets a lot. Someday you're gonna have to tell me how you did that. And students and educators in every state have joined the First Lady's efforts in the presidential. I challenge keeping America's next generation position to succeed and strongly succeed in the future. Tonight, we welcome two young people whose lives reflect the first Lady's impact. Sierra Burns and Everest Nevraumont. Thank you both. And Melania, thank you. I know how hard you worked on it.

Thank you very. I'm very proud to say that during my time in office, both the first four years and in particular this last year, there has been a tremendous renewal in religion, faith, Christianity and belief in God. This is especially true among young people, and a big part of that had to do with my great friend Charlie Kirk. Great guy. Great guy.

So last year, Charlie was violently murdered by an assassin. And martyred, really, martyred for his beliefs. His wonderful wife, Erika is with us tonight. Erika. Please stand.

Thank you. Erika, thank you a lot. In Charlie's memory, we must all come together to reaffirm that America is one nation under God. And we must totally reject political violence of any kind. We love religion, and we love bringing it back. And it's coming back at levels that nobody actually thought possible. It's really a beautiful thing to see, above all, unleashing America's promise requires keeping our communities safe. We have made incredible strides, yet dangerous repeat offenders continue to be released by pro crime Democrat politicians again and again.

We are honored to be joined tonight by a woman who's been through hell, Anya Zarutka. In 2022, she and her beautiful daughter. So beautiful. What a beautiful young woman Iryna fled war-torn, war-torn Ukraine to live with relatives near Charlotte, North Carolina. And by the way, what's going on with Charlotte? Last summer, 23-year-old Irina was riding home on the train when a deranged monster who had been arrested over a dozen times and was released through no cash bail, stood up and viciously slashed a knife through her neck and body. No one will ever forget. There were people on that train. No one will ever forget the expression of terror on Irene, his face as she looked up at her attacker in the last seconds of her life. She died instantly. She had escaped a brutal war, only to be slain by a hardened criminal set free to kill in America came in through open borders. Mrs. Zarutka, tonight, I promise you, we will ensure justice for your magnificent daughter, Iryna.

How do you not stand, how do you not stand? I'm asking this Congress to pass tough legislation to ensure that violent and dangerous repeat offenders are put behind bars, and, importantly, that they stay there.

Starting last summer, I deployed our National Guard and federal law enforcement to restore law and order to our most dangerous cities, including Memphis, Tennessee -- big success. New Orleans, Louisiana. A big success in our nation's capital itself. Washington, D.C., where we have almost no crime anymore in Washington, D.C. How did that happen?

In fact, crime in Washington is now at the lowest level ever recorded, and murders in D.C. this January were down close to 100% from a year ago.

They don't like to hear that.

One of the brave service members who helped achieve this stunning turnaround was 20-year-old West Virginia Army National Guard Specialist Sarah Beckstrom. After a four month deployment, she voluntarily extended her service. Her rank was going to be lifted and she was doing so well and was so proud of her. But the very next day, she was on patrol in the White House when she was ambushed and shot in the head by a terrorist monster from Afghanistan. Shouldn't have been in our country. And all because she wore the uniform of our nation. She was shot. He traveled here because he didn't like people wearing our uniform. He was sick, and deranged. Shouldn't have been in our country. Sarah Beckstrom died in order to defend our Capitol, and we are honored to be joined by her wonderful parents, Gary and Evalea.

Your daughter was a true American patriot and she will be greatly missed. She was a great person. I saw reports on her, they've never seen anything like it.

So sorry. Thank you very much. A great young lady. I saw reports they were like, perfect, she's perfect.

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Serving alongside Sarah that day was Staff Sgt. Andrew Wolfe. The terrorist shot Andrew in the head, and no one thought he could possibly make it. The two of them, Sarah and Andrew shot violently in the head. Neither was expected to make it. They weren't even given any chance. Except his wonderful mother, named Melanie, who I spoke to the same night, and she was so positive. The doctors thought that Andrew was gone, but his mother said, "no, no, Mr. President, he's going to be fine" and no before he's going to make it. I've never seen anything like it. I mean, he was given almost no chance. She said, "I have no doubt, Sir, he's going to be okay." This was the conversation that I had with her that night, with the son laying in bed, blood all over. Everybody is praying. She said, "Sir, he will be okay." The doctors didn't understand what she was saying and after looking at the results of the damage done, neither did I. She was so strong and conclusive that even Andrew's great father felt she didn't really understand the gravity of the situation, but she turned out to be right. Right, Melanie? She turned out to be right.

Amazing actually. I said "where does this woman come from, she's the most positive person I've ever met?" With God's help, Andrew has battled back from the edge of death. And we're talking about the edge of death, on his way to a miraculous recovery. He's got a little work to do, but he's doing great. Nice to see you -- he's a good-looking guy. Nice to see you. Thanks, Andrew. Thank you very much.

So Andrew now you're up, I'm going to ask a highly respected Gen. James Seward to present staff sergeant Andrew Wolfe and the great family of Sarah Beckstrom with the award created by our late, great president, George Washington himself. It's called the Purple Heart.

We love you all. Love you.

We're proudly restoring safety for Americans at home, and we are also restoring security for Americans abroad. Our country has never been stronger. My first 10 months, I ended eight wars, including Cambodia.

Isn't it funny? You sick people.

Cambodia and Thailand. Pakistan and India would have been a nuclear war. 35 million people said the Prime Minister of Pakistan would have died if it were not for my involvement. Kosovo and Serbia, Israel and Iran, Egypt and Ethiopia. Armenia and Azerbaijan, the Congo and Rwanda. And of course, the war in Gaza, which proceeds at a very low level. It's just about there. And I want to thank Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner for your help. Thank you Steve. Thank you Jared. And I also want to thank the man they report to Secretary of State. Marco Rubio.

Thank you. Thank. People like you. You know, Marco got 100% of the votes when he was in confirmation -- I think our next one was about 54%. And some of the Democrats are now saying, I can't believe we approved that guy. And he said, it's an honor that they feel that way. Right, Marco? You have done a great job, great Secretary of state. I think he'll go down as the best ever. Under the cease fire, I negotiated every single hostage, both living and dead, has been returned home. Can you believe that?

Nobody thought it was possible. Nobody thought that was possible.

Both living and dead. And those parents who had a dead son, their boy, they'd always tell me their boy. They wanted him as much as though he were living. That was an amazing period of time. And they came back. And when we got all of the living hostages back and many, many before them. But I always said those last 20 are going to be very tough. But we got many, many more hundreds. But I said those last 20 are going to be tough. We got them back, but we only got back 14 or 15 of the dead of the 28

And believe it or not, Hamas worked along with Israel and they dug and they dug and they dug. It's a tough -- it's a tough thing to do, going through bodies all over, passing up 100 bodies sometimes for each one that they found.

Tough job and they finally got it back to 27 and then Steve and Jared they got it back to 28. They found all 28 nobody thought that was possible but we did it and I remember the family of the 28th they were so grieved but they were so happy as happy as it's possible to be they had their boy back. The mother said 'sir we have our boy back.' What a period of time that was, but we got them all back, so thank you both very much.

And we're working very hard to end the ninth war, the killing and slaughter between Russia and Ukraine, where 25,000 soldiers are dying each and every month — think of that, 25,000 soldiers are dying a month.

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A war which would have never happened if I were president. Would have never happened.

As president, I will make peace wherever I can, but I will never hesitate to confront threats to America wherever we must. That's why in a breakthrough operation last June, the United States military obliterated Iran's nuclear weapons program with an attack on Iranian soil known as Operation Midnight Hammer. For decades, it has been the policy of the United States never to allow Iran to obtain a nuclear weapon. Many decades. Since they seized control of that proud nation 47 years ago, the regime and its murderous proxies have spread nothing but terrorism and death and hate. They've killed and maimed thousands of American service members and hundreds of thousands and even millions of people. With what's called roadside bombs. They were the kings of the roadside bomb. And we took out Soleimani. I did that during my first term. Had a huge impact. He was the father of the roadside bomb. And just over the last couple of months with the protests, they've killed at least, it looks like, 32,000 protesters — 32,000 protesters in their own country. They shot them and hung them. We stopped them from hanging a lot of them with the threat of serious violence.

But this is some terrible people. They've already developed missiles that can threaten Europe and our bases overseas, and they're working to build missiles that will soon reach the United States of America. After Midnight Hammer, they were warned to make no future attempts to rebuild their weapons program, and in particular nuclear weapons, yet they continue. They're starting it all over. We wiped it out and they want to start it all over again and are at this moment again pursuing their sinister ambitions. We are in negotiations with them. They want to make a deal, but we haven't heard those secret words, "We will never have a nuclear weapon." My preference, my preference is to solve this problem through diplomacy. But one thing is certain, I will never allow the world's No. 1 sponsor of terror, which they are by far, to have a nuclear weapon. Can't let that happen.

And no nation should ever doubt America's resolve. We have the most powerful military on earth. I rebuilt the military in my first term. We're going to continue to do so also, which is to prove a trillion-dollar budget. We have no choice. We have to be strong, because hopefully we will seldom have to use this great power that we built together. It's really called peace through strength, that has been very, very effective.

So thanks to Republicans in Congress, we're investing that record number of dollars — we have no choice — in the United States Armed Forces, also creating a lot of jobs, but we're not even doing it for that reason. Because as I said, we have more jobs, more people working today than ever before in the history of our country. And NATO countries, our friends and allies — they are, they're our friends and they're our allies — have just agreed, at my very strong request, to pay 5% of GDP for military defense rather than the 2%, which they weren't paying, we were paying for almost all of that. Now they're paying 5, as opposed to not paying 2. And getting that 5% was something which everyone said would never be done, could not happen. We got it really easily with one meeting. And a big difference between 2% that's not paid, we were paying the freight of many of them, very few were paid up, now 5% then they're paid. And everything we send over to Ukraine is sent through NATO and they pay us in full. They pay us totally in full, every branch of our Armed Forces is setting records for recruitment. This is so exciting.

And every service member. And every service member recently received a warrior dividend of \$1,776. You know, they cleared up my desk, we got the money from tariffs and other things, a lot of money we have with, much more money than people understand, have to rebuild that program a little bit but it won't take long. But we got all the money and it was \$1,775 and they wanted my approval. And I said, what's the number? \$1,775. I said, wait a minute, for one more dollar, we can have \$1,776. I said, we're going to figure that out. I never asked anybody if we could afford it. One more dollar. I said \$1,776. And I said that's good. And I'll tell you what, our military, that was four months ago, I never see a person in the military that doesn't thank me for it. So we're honored to do it. They deserve it. And we call it "1776." It was great. And we love our military. We love our law enforcement. We love a fireman. The firemen don't get mentioned enough. We love firemen.

We're also restoring American security and dominance in the Western Hemisphere, acting to secure our national interests and defend our country from violence, drugs, terrorism, and foreign interference for

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years. Large swaths of territory in our region, including large parts of Mexico, really large parts of Mexico, have been controlled by murderous drug cartels. That's why I designated these cartels as foreign terrorist organizations and I declared illicit fentanyl as a weapon of mass destruction. And with our new military campaign, we have stopped record amounts of drugs coming into our country and virtually stopped it completely coming in by water or sea, you probably noticed that. You've very seriously damaged their fishing industry, also. Nobody wants to go fishing anymore. We've also taken down one of the most sinister cartel kingpins of all. You saw that yesterday.

In January, in January, elite American warriors carried out one of the most complex, spectacular feats of military competence and power in world history. No one's seen anything like it. Foreign leaders, I won't tell you who, called me and they said, very impressive, very impressive. They couldn't believe, they all watched, they saw what happened. This is a different fighting force than we had years ago when we fought to tie. You know, it's a great fighting force. I'm so proud of it. Look at Space Force. Space Force is my baby. As we did that, my baby is becoming so important. And America's Armed Forces overwhelmed all defenses and utterly defeated an enemy — good fighters — to end the reign of outlawed dictator Nicolas Maduro and bring him to face American justice. And this was an absolutely a colossal victory for the security of the United States. A bright new beginning for the people of Venezuela. We're working closely with the new president of Venezuela, Delcy Rodríguez, to unleash extraordinary economic gains for both of our countries and to bring new hope to those who have suffered so terribly. They really did suffer.

With us tonight is Alejandro Gonzalez. She grew up in a tight-knit Venezuelan family and was especially close to her beloved Uncle Enrique. But after Enrique ran for office and opposed Maduro, he was kidnapped by Maduro's security forces and thrown into the regime's really infamous prison in Caracas. Alejandro feared she would never see her uncle again. She feared for her own life, also. But since the raid, we have worked with the new leadership, and they have ordered the closure of that vile prison and released hundreds of political prisoners already with more to come.

Alejandro, I'm pleased to inform you that not only has your uncle been released, but he is here tonight. We brought him over to celebrate his freedom with you in person. Enrique, please come down. Thank you, Enrique. Have a good time. Nice to have you back, Enrique.

There were many heroes on that January raid to capture Maduro. Really great heroes. It was very dangerous. They knew we were coming. They were all set. But the deeds of one warrior that night will live forever in the eternal chronicles of military valor. Chief Warrant Officer 5 Eric Slover planned the mission and was the flight lead in the cockpit of the first helicopter. A big, beautiful, powerful helicopter. Was a massive Chinook carrying, as you can imagine, many, many American warfighters wearing the dog tags his wife Amy had blessed with holy water before he left. She knew it was going to be a rough one. Eric steered the Chinook under the cover of night and descended swiftly upon Maduro's heavily protected military fortress. This was a major military installation, protected by thousands of soldiers and guarded by Russian and Chinese military technology. How did that work out? Not too good.

While preparing to land, enemy machine guns fired from every angle. And Eric was hit, very badly, in the leg and hip, one bullet after another. He absorbed four agonizing shots, shredding his leg into numerous pieces. And yet, despite the fact that the use of his legs was vital to successful helicopter flight, Mike said the most important part of flying a helicopter to deliver the many commanders who would capture and detain Maduro was the only thing Eric was thinking about. And even as he was gushing blood, which was flowing back down the aisle - helicopter lands at a steep angle. The machine guns stood right in front of him. They were right in front of him. Two machine-gunners who escaped the wrath of the previous planes. Eric maneuvered his helicopter with all of those lives and souls to face the enemy, and let his gunners eliminate the threat, turn the helicopter around so the gunners could take care of business, saving the lives of his fellow warriors from what could have been a catastrophic crash deep in enemy territory.

Only after safely landing the helicopter with all the warriors aboard in the exact right spot, which was vital to the mission, probably would have happened. Maybe cancel the mission if that didn't happen. Eric told his copilot, also wounded, but not as gravely, to take over. I'm about ready to pass out. The success

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of the entire mission, and the lives of his fellow warriors hinge on Eric's ability to take searing pain. It was unbelievable what's happened to his legs. Of the bullets and keep on flying and landing. People knew what was happening. Everybody in the back of the helicopter knew because they saw the blood pouring down the aisle. Chief Warrant Officer Slover is still recovering from his serious wounds, but I'm thrilled to say that he is here tonight with his wife, Amy. Eric and Amy, come on in. So we have a surprise, Eric and Amy. In recognition of Eric's actions above and beyond the call of duty, I would now like to ask General Jonathan Braga to present Chief Warrant Officer Slover with our nation's highest military award, the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Well, thank you very much, Eric and Amy. Great to get to know you. I met with them and with a lot of their fellow warriors at Fort Bragg recently. You notice the name Fort Bragg. We have it back. We brought it back. We won the First World War with it, the Second World War with it, and then they decided to change the name. But we changed it back. Everybody wanted it changed back too. And 10 of Eric's fellow warriors from that incredible night of victory will also be receiving medals at a private ceremony that will soon be held at the White House. And it will be the.

Thank you, Eric. That's a big one. Tonight we've celebrated many truly extraordinary American patriots. But there is one last living legend to honor before we go. He is one more heroic American aviator, Navy fighter pilot Royce Williams served in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, flying more than 220 missions in the skies over Korea. In 1952, Royce was in the dogfight of a lifetime. Legendary dogfight. Flying through blizzard conditions, his squadron was ambushed by seven Soviet fighter planes. It was his first aerial combat of the war, and despite being massively outnumbered and outgunned, Royce led the takedown of four enemy jets and almost destroyed the others, vanquishing his adversaries while taking 263 bullets to his own plane and being seriously hurt. His story was secret for over 50 years. He didn't even want to tell his wife, but the legend grew and grew. But tonight, at 100 years old, his brave Navy captain is finally getting the recognition he deserves. He was a legend long before this evening. Royce, please stand up and I will ask the first lady of the United States to present Captain Royce Williams with his Congressional Medal of Honor.

Thank you Eric. I've always wanted the Congressional Medal of Honor, but I was informed I'm not allowed to give it to myself, and I wouldn't know why I'd be taking it. But if they ever opened up that law I will be there with you someday. But you know, that's our highest honor, the Congressional Medal of Honor. And that's a big thing. And it's an honor to be in the same room with you. Thank you both very much. Thank you.

Thank you. Two-hundred fifty years is a long time in the life of a nation. But in another sense, it's really a mere moment in the eye of history. Two of the gentlemen we met in the gallery this evening took their first breaths one century ago. One hundred years before that, on July 4th, 1826, the author of the Declaration of Independence, brilliant Thomas Jefferson, drew his last breath. Just a single long human life span separates the giants who declared and won our independence from the heroes who stand among us tonight.

Everything our nation has done, everything we have achieved, has been the work of those few great lifetimes. In those brief chapters, Americans built this nation from 13 humble colonies into the pinnacle of human civilization and human freedom. The strongest, wealthiest, most powerful, most successful nation in all of history. Americans ventured out across the daunting and dangerous continent. We carved pass through an unforgiving wilderness, settled a boundless frontier, and tamed the beautiful but very, very dangerous wild west. From empty marshes and wide-open plains, we raised up the world's greatest cities. Together we mastered the world's mightiest industries, shattered history's monstrous tyrannies. And we liberated millions from the chains of fascism, communism, oppression and terror.

Americans lifted humanity into the skies on the wings of aluminum and steel. And then we launched mankind into the stars on rockets powered by sheer American will and unyielding American pride. We wired the globe with our ingenuity. We captivated the planet with American culture and now we are pioneering the next great American breakthroughs that will change the entire world. All of this, and so much more, is the enduring legacy, unmatched glory of the hard-working patriots who built and defended this country

and who still carry the hopes and freedoms on all of humanity's backs. For years, they were forgotten, betrayed, and cast aside. But that great betrayal is over, and they will never be forgotten again. Because when the world needs courage, daring, vision and inspiration, it is still turning to America.

And when God needs a nation to work his miracles, he knows exactly who to ask. There is no challenge Americans cannot overcome, no frontier too vast for us to conquer, no dream too bold for us to chase, no horizon too distant for us to claim. For our destiny is written by the hand of Providence. And these first 250 years were just the beginning. From the rugged border towns of Texas to the heartland villages of Michigan, from the sun-kissed shores of Florida to the endless hills of the Dakotas, and from the historic streets of Philadelphia to right here in our nation's capital, Washington, D.C., the golden age of America is upon us.

The revolution that began in 1776 has not ended. It still continues because the flame of liberty and independence still burns in the heart of every American patriot, and our future will be bigger, better, brighter, bolder, and more glorious than ever before. Thank you. God bless you and God bless America.

Trump uses longest-ever State of the Union to try to convince voters that US is 'winning so much'

By WILL WEISSERT, MICHELLE L. PRICE and MATT BROWN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump declared during a marathon State of the Union on Tuesday that "we're winning so much" — insisting he'd sparked an economic boom at home and imposed a new world order abroad in hopes it can counter his sliding approval ratings.

Trump's main objective was convincing increasingly wary Americans that the economy is stronger than many believe, and that they should vote for more of the same by backing Republicans during November's midterm elections. In all, Trump spoke for a record 108 minutes, breaking — by eight minutes — the previous time mark from his address before a joint session of Congress last year.

The president largely avoided his usual bombast, only occasionally veering off-script — mostly to slam Democrats. As he did during such addresses in his first term, Trump relied on a series of surprise special guests to dramatically punctuate his message. They included U.S. military heroes and a former political prisoner released after U.S. forces toppled Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

Trump drew some of the loudest applause of the night when he invited the Olympic gold medal-winning U.S. men's hockey team into the House chamber.

"Our country is winning again. In fact, we're winning so much that we really don't know what to do about it. People are asking me, 'Please, please, please, Mister President, we're winning too much. We can't take it anymore,'" Trump said before introducing the team.

The hockey players, wearing their medals and "USA" sweaters, drew a bipartisan standing ovation. Trump pointed to the Democratic side of the chamber and quipped, "That's the first time I ever I've ever seen them get up."

In a made-for-TV moment, the president announced he would be awarding the Presidential Medal of Freedom, America's highest civilian honor, to the hockey team's goaltender, Connor Hellebuyck. He also bestowed the Purple Heart on Andrew Wolfe — a National Guard member who was shot while deployed on the streets of the nation's capital. Wolfe made his first public appearance since then during the speech.

That scene recalled a similar surprise announcement in 2020, when Trump gave the Medal of Freedom to conservative radio host Rush Limbaugh during his State of the Union speech.

Trump decries tariff decision as justices look on

The president championed his immigration crackdowns and his push to preserve widespread tariffs that the Supreme Court just struck down. He drew applause only from Democrats while describing the high court's decision, which he called "an unfortunate ruling."

Trump vowed to plow ahead, using "alternative" laws to impose the taxes on imports and telling lawmakers, "Congressional action will not be necessary." Trump argued that the tariffs are paid by foreign countries, despite evidence that the costs are borne by American consumers and businesses. "It's saving

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our country," he said.

The only Supreme Court justices attending were Chief Justice John Roberts, as well as Justices Brett Kavanaugh, Amy Coney Barrett and Elena Kagan. Trump greeted them personally before the speech, despite last week slamming Coney Barrett — who he appointed to the high court in his first term — for siding with the majority against his tariffs.

Democrats also stood for Trump vowing to halt insider trading by members of Congress. But Rep. Mark Takano, a California Democrat, yelled, "How about you first!" Rep. Rashida Tlaib, a Michigan Democrat, called out, "You're the most corrupt president!"

When some heckling continued, Trump proclaimed, "You should be ashamed of yourselves." Later, he pointed at Democrats and proclaimed, "These people are crazy."

Democratic Rep. Al Green was escorted from the chamber early in the speech, after he unfurled a sign of protest that read "Black People Aren't Apes!" That was an apparent reference to a racist video the president posted that depicted former President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama as primates in a jungle. Green was also removed during Trump's address last year.

The president, meanwhile, was mostly optimistic and patriotic, but Trump struck a darker tone in large swaths of his speech to warn about the dangers posed by immigrants. He invited lawmakers from both parties to "protect American citizens, not illegal aliens" and championed proposals to limit mail-in ballots and tighten voter identification rules.

Affordability gets relatively little time

Trump didn't dwell on efforts to lower the cost of living — despite polling showing that his handling of the economy and kitchen-table issues has increasingly become a liability. Such concerns about the high costs of living helped propel Democratic wins around the country on Election Day last November.

There also are persistent fears that tariffs stoking higher prices could eventually hurt the economy and job creation. Economic growth slowed in the last three months of last year.

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.

On Tuesday, Trump blamed his predecessor, former President Joe Biden, along with Democratic lawmakers in the chamber, saying they were responsible for rising prices and health care costs, two issues his political opponents have repeatedly raised against him.

"You caused that problem," Trump said of affordability concerns. He added a moment later, "They knew their statements were a dirty, rotten lie."

Trump also said he'd press tech companies involved in artificial intelligence to pay higher electricity rates in areas where their data centers are located. Such data centers tend to use large volumes of electricity, potentially increasing the cost of power to other consumers in the area.

Another notable off-script moment came as Trump was referencing prescription drug prices, saying, "So in my first year of the second term — should be my third term — but strange things happen," prompting at least one chant in the chamber of "Four more years!"

Virginia Gov. Abigail Spanberger, who delivered the Democratic response to Trump's speech, slammed the president's aggressive immigration policies, his widespread cuts to the federal government and his tariffs.

"Even though the Supreme Court struck these tariffs down four days ago, the damage to us, the American people, has already been done. Meanwhile, the president is planning for new tariffs," she said. "Another massive tax hike on you and your family."

A warning to Iran

Trump's address came as two U.S. aircraft carriers have been dispatched to the Middle East amid tensions with Iran. Trump said, "My preference is to solve this problem through diplomacy."

"But one thing is certain, I will never allow the world's number one sponsor of terror — which they are, by far — to have a nuclear weapon," he added.

The president also recounted U.S. airstrikes last summer that pounded Tehran's nuclear capabilities, and lauded the raid that ousted Maduro in Venezuela — as well as his administration's brokering of a ceasefire

in Israel's war with Hamas in Gaza.

"As president, I will make peace wherever I can," Trump said. "But I will never hesitate to confront threats to America, wherever we must."

Northeast US scrambles to clear piles of snow as new storm descends on the region

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ, REBECCA BOONE and HALLIE GOLDEN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Snowplows cleared the way for ambulances and fire trucks in Rhode Island. New York City workers geared up to dump massive basins of warm water on piles of snow and ice. And in Boston, officials tried to clear sidewalks coated in packed snow that cut off access for people using wheelchairs.

The gigantic snowstorm this week across the Northeast U.S. dropped piles of powder from Maryland to Maine and left cities on Wednesday scrambling to clear towering heaps that were not showing signs of melting anytime soon.

By Tuesday evening, New York City had spread 143 million pounds (65 million kilograms) of salt, according to Mayor Zohran Mamdani, and signed up at least 3,500 people as emergency shovelers. The \$30-per-hour shifts involve clearing snow across public streets and bus stops.

But with another storm expected Wednesday, there was plenty more work left to do, especially for the many people with disabilities.

Jeff Peters, spokesperson for the Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York, described parts of the city as impassable islands.

"You'll find a portion of a sidewalk that is clear, and then there's maybe a 6-inch (15-cm) pathway that can only be walked with one foot in front of the other and no room for a stroller, rollator, walker or crutches," Peters said. "Then you get to the corner and not only is it unshoveled, but you have basically a glacier at the end of it."

Tina Guenette, who uses a motorized wheelchair, had to shovel out her yard this week after more than 33 inches (84 centimeters) fell in Harrisville, Rhode Island, a town about 17 miles (27 kilometers) north-west of Providence.

"I really have no choice if my service dog wants to go outside," Guenette said Tuesday. Harrisville has a volunteer snow-shoveling program, but it hasn't had volunteers for the last few years, she said.

The National Weather Service warned another storm originating in the Great Lakes could push into the Northeast on Wednesday. The clipper storm brings the prospect of a combination of rain and some snow, though it's not forecast to be nearly as severe.

NYC Emergency Management warned Wednesday morning commuters that the forecast light snow and freezing temperatures could bring slick roads and sidewalks as well as black ice.

Monday's storm blanketed the region with snow, canceled flights, disrupted transit, downed power lines and killed at least one person. More than 3 feet (0.9 meters) fell in Rhode Island — surpassing snow totals from the historic Blizzard of 1978 that struck the Northeast, the National Weather Service said.

Meteorologist Ryan Maue, former chief scientist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, said if all of the snow that fell from Maryland to Maine fell just on Manhattan, the snow would tower over a mile high.

In Newport, Rhode Island, Joseph Boutros, 21, was found unconscious inside a vehicle covered in snow Monday night, the city's police department said in a statement. The Salve Regina University student was taken to a hospital and pronounced dead due to carbon monoxide poisoning, police said.

Some large school districts moved back to in-person classes on Wednesday, including Philadelphia, which had switched to online learning during the first two days of the week.

In New York City, more than 900,000 students in the nation's largest public school system had a regular day Tuesday. Many students and their caregivers scrambled over mountainous snow banks and dodged salt spreaders during the morning drop-off.

Power had returned for many of the hundreds of thousands who had lost electricity in Massachusetts,

New Jersey, Delaware and Rhode Island. But about 173,000 customers in Massachusetts were still without power early Wednesday.

Thousands of flights in and out of the U.S. have been canceled in recent days. By Wednesday, the disruptions seemed to be subsiding, with only around 150 grounded, according to the flight tracking website FlightAware.

When Jamie Meyers' flight landed in New York from Buenos Aires, Argentina, Tuesday evening, the cabin full of relieved passengers burst into applause. The Manhattan resident was supposed to arrive home Sunday but faced a cancellation and significant delay.

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.

Cartel violence fuels doubts about FIFA World Cup games in Mexico

By MEGAN JANETSKY Associated Press

GUADALAJARA, Mexico (AP) — Hugo Alejandro Pérez was in his house a few miles from the Mexican stadium that is slated to host FIFA World Cup games when gunfire and explosions erupted just outside his door.

The 53-year-old restaurant owner was already skeptical about his city, Guadalajara, hosting the international sporting event.

He saw a government that failed to fix basic things, like water service to his home, along with cartel violence in the surrounding state of Jalisco and shook his head. The surge of bloodshed this week following the Mexican military's killing of the country's most powerful cartel boss offered more confirmation of his doubts.

"I don't think they should host the World Cup here," Pérez said. "We have so many problems, and they want to invest in the World Cup? With all the violence, it's not a good idea."

Pérez joined other people Tuesday in questioning Guadalajara's capacity to be a host city for the summer soccer competition, even as the Mexican government vowed that the international event — hosted jointly by Mexico, the United States and Canada — will not be affected.

President offers 'every guarantee' for World Cup

President Claudia Sheinbaum was asked at her daily news briefing what guarantees there are that World Cup matches will be held in Jalisco. "Every guarantee," she said, adding that there was "no risk" for fans coming to the tournament.

Jalisco Gov. Jesús Pablo Lemus said he had spoken with local FIFA officials, who have "absolutely no intention of removing any venues from Mexico. The three venues remain completely unchanged."

The same day, the Portuguese soccer federation said it was "closely monitoring the delicate situation" in Mexico. Its national team was scheduled to play Mexico's team in a friendly on March 28 at the newly renovated Azteca Stadium in Mexico City, which is scheduled to host the opening World Cup match on June 11.

Jalisco, in western Mexico, was already facing scrutiny. The state has been plagued by some of the starkest examples of cartel violence in recent years, including the discovery of a cartel killing site at a ranch last March and a crisis of disappearances.

The state, with Guadalajara as its capital, is the central hub for the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, whose leader Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes, or "El Mencho," was killed Sunday in a capture attempt by the military.

The operation and waves of violence killed 70 people. Cartel gunmen set fire to cars to block streets in states across the country, namely Jalisco, and fought with Mexican forces into Monday as the government said the conflict was under control.

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. The cartel, also known as CJNG, is one of the fastest-growing criminal networks in Mexico.

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The White House confirmed that the U.S. provided intelligence support 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. On Tuesday night, U.S. President Donald Trump appeared to briefly reference the operation during his State of the Union address, saying "We've also taken down one of the most sinister cartel kingpins of all. You saw that yesterday."

Drug lord's death could lead to more violence

Peréz, the restaurant owner, also commended Sheinbaum's efforts to go after cartels, saying the government has taken cartel violence more seriously than her predecessors. At the same time, he said, local authorities in Jalisco have fallen short in protecting civilians.

The root concern for many is that the death of "El Mencho" could pave the way for more violence. Killing capos, in what's become known as the "kingpin strategy," has been criticized by Sheinbaum herself because it can often spark internal conflict between cartel factions and push rival cartels to make territorial grabs.

Vanda Felbab-Brown, an academic at the Brookings Institution, said she doesn't see more acts of "revenge" by the cartel as likely, but the future remains uncertain, especially after leading figures in both CJNG and the Sinaloa Cartel have been knocked out in recent years.

"If there is no clear line of succession (in CJNG), we might see a lot of fighting within the cartel, its breakup, and there are a lot of scenarios," she said.

On Sunday, when firefights broke out between the cartel and soldiers, and gunmen began to burn a car just feet in front of Pérez's house, he let people on the street scramble inside his home to seek cover. The fighting raged for an hour.

Now he says he doesn't see the point of holding the games, adding that he doubts any of the money from the games will trickle down to businesses in working-class neighborhoods like his, even if they are just a 10-minute drive from the stadium. Similar tensions have simmered in Mexico City.

The World Cup is expected to be a \$3 billion economic engine in Mexico, according to the Mexican Soccer Federation.

"It doesn't help us residents at all, honestly. They should move it to Monterrey or Mexico City. But right now here, we're not convinced," he said. "Things aren't in good enough shape for foreigners to be coming to Jalisco for an event like this."

On Monday, some foreign tourists trapped in the violence in the city of Puerto Vallarta took to social media to warn of the violence, with a few remarking that they didn't plan to return.

Hope of snapping back to normal

Despite that, Guadalajara was snapping back to its normal rhythm Tuesday. Many businesses opened their doors for the first time in two days, and streets were packed with traffic.

Workers were busy fixing up the exterior of the soccer stadium that will host World Cup matches. Cyclists zipped around outside the stadium, and parents played with children in parks.

Heavily armed police officers and National Guard members roamed the city, a sign for some that the government had the situation under control.

Juan Carlos Pila, a 55-year-old taxi driver, rolled his eyes at the reports of violence after spending two days waiting with his family for things to calm down. He said social media and local news outlets were overplaying the extent of the violence.

"People should come, man. Everyone is welcome," he said.

Others, like Maria Dolores Aguirre, simply hoped for the best. Aguirre runs a small corner store in the cobblestoned tourist town of Tapalpa tucked away in Jalisco's mountains, where Mexico's military killed "El Mencho."

Aguirre's family business of over 50 years depends on the flow of tourists to the normally sleepy town. Now she worries bloodshed will deal a blow to her livelihood and change towns like hers.

"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."

Man fatally stabs 4 people in Washington state as deputies head to serve him a restraining order

By GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — A man fatally stabbed four people in Washington state on Tuesday morning as sheriff's deputies were on their way to hand him a domestic violence protection order, authorities said. The suspect died after being shot by an arriving deputy.

The Pierce County Sheriff's Office said deputies initially responded at 8:40 a.m. to reports that a 32-year-old man was violating a no-contact order at a home on the Key Peninsula, northwest of Tacoma. They obtained a copy of the order, learned it was not valid because it had not been served on the man and headed to the address to provide it to him.

While they were en route, at about 9:30 a.m., additional reports came in that the man was stabbing people outside the home, the sheriff's office said. The first deputy arrived within about three minutes and shot the suspect, who was pronounced dead at the scene, according to Officer Shelbie Boyd, a spokesperson for the Pierce County Force Investigation Team.

Three of the stabbing victims were dead at the scene and another died while being taken to a hospital.

Pierce County court records show that a woman who lived at the address last May obtained a one-year protection order against her 32-year-old son. She wrote that he had mental health and substance abuse issues, had previously pushed her, and more recently had threatened her by saying that her "grave has been already dug up."

The son had been "threatening me, abusing me both mentally and emotionally. Doing witchcraft/occult behavior and doing rituals in my home," the woman wrote. "Damaging personal belongings. Hurting my cat. ... I am an elderly disabled woman and he is taking advantage of me and my health."

The records show that the son had notice of a hearing before the issuance of the restraining order but did not appear for it. The protective order required him not to possess dangerous weapons; to stay 1,000 feet (305 meters) from his mother, her vehicle and her address, which they had shared; and to comply with a previously prescribed mental health treatment plan, including medication.

It was not immediately clear why the attacker had not previously been served with the protection order. Typically in Washington state, someone who obtains such an order can request that law enforcement deliver it to the subject of the order or hire a private investigator or "process server" to do so. Not knowing the location of the subject of the restraining order can delay that.

Chris Cardenas, who lives just a couple minutes driving from the street where the stabbings occurred, said he was washing his truck in his driveway when he heard the gunfire.

"All of a sudden I just heard like a series of gunshots," he said. "You could really hear it echoing through the trees."

Sirens then sounded nonstop for about 40 minutes, he said.

"I immediately knew something was up because I've never heard gunshots out here," he said.

He went over to the cordoned-off scene and saw ambulances, a forensics bus and dozens of police vehicles, he said, adding that he couldn't have braced himself "for how tragic the news would be."

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

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ and MIKE CATALINI Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Millions across the northeastern United States on Tuesday contended with treks to school and work as they dug out from a major — and in some areas record-breaking — storm that blanketed the region with snow, canceled flights, disrupted transit and killed at least one person.

Even as the snow moved north Tuesday, giving way to sunshine in parts of the region, the National Weather Service warned another storm originating in the Great Lakes was right around the corner, though it's not forecast to be nearly as severe.

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Many large school districts remained closed, including in Boston and Hartford, Connecticut. But in New York City, more than 900,000 students in the nation's largest public school system had a regular day, Mayor Zohran Mamdani declared, inviting kids to pelt him with snowballs over his decision.

Many students and their caregivers seemed open to taking the mayor up on that idea, as they scrambled over mountainous snow banks and dodged salt spreaders during the morning drop-off.

"We're walking on thin ice here. One more day would've been fine," said Danielle Obloj, the parent of a Brooklyn fifth grader. "They should never have let these kids come back to school."

Nearly 1 in 6 teachers called out sick Tuesday, the first day back after the blizzard and a midwinter break, prompting officials to call in more than 5,000 substitutes.

Mamdani, a Democrat, and Schools Chancellor Kamar Samuels noted that families rely on in-person school for education and many other things, including parents' ability to go to work. The officials also maintained that it would have been complicated to roll out remote learning at the end of a midwinter break.

Others hailed the city's efforts at snow-clearing.

"It was much better than last time — an easy commute, no problems whatsoever," said Raul Garcia, as he exited a cab with his three school-age children.

Preliminary attendance data shows 63% of the roughly 900,000 students came in, Samuels said. City data show the average attendance rate for the last school year was about 90%.

Philadelphia switched to online learning Monday and Tuesday, while districts on Long Island and elsewhere in the New York suburbs canceled school again Tuesday.

Roads are reopening and mass transit is coming back online

Monday's storm that meteorologists are calling the strongest in a decade dumped more than 2 feet (0.6 meters) of snow in parts of the Northeast. More than 3 feet (0.9 meters) fell in Rhode Island — surpassing snow totals from the historic Blizzard of 1978 that struck the Northeast, the National Weather Service said.

In Newport, Rhode Island, Joseph Boutros, 21, was found unconscious inside a vehicle covered in snow Monday night, the city's police department said in a statement. The Salve Regina University student was taken to a hospital and pronounced dead due to carbon monoxide poisoning, according to police.

Meteorologist Ryan Maue, former chief scientist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, calculated the amount of snow that fell from Maryland to Maine using mapping tools and artificial intelligence. If it all fell just on Manhattan, the snow would tower over a mile high, he said.

When the snow melts, it holds 2.5 trillion gallons of water, Maue calculated. That's enough to fill the Empire State Building with water more than 9,000 times.

By Tuesday morning, roads began to reopen, mass transportation came 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. More than 100,000 remained without power in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, which operates essentially on a single circuit, according to Douglas Foley, president of electric operations for the utility Eversource.

Amtrak canceled some trains between Boston and New York and between New York and Philadelphia on Tuesday morning.

But other railroads were open, including New Jersey Transit, and the Long Island Railroad "unleashed" a snow-clearing train car known as "Darth Vader" to clear snow drifts.

Another storm is on the way

The weather service said it's tracking another storm that could bring snow to the Great Lakes on Tuesday before pushing into the Northeast on Wednesday. The clipper storm brings the prospect of a combination of rain and some snow.

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

Canceled flights and a snowball fight

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.

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Roughly 2,200 flights in and out of the U.S. 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 halted all flights Monday as it dealt with nearly 38 inches (97 centimeters) of snow, according to the weather service.

Along with the disruptions, the storm led to the creation of armies of snowmen and other sculptures as well as snowball fights.

A massive snowball fight erupted Monday in New York City's Washington Square Park, but video showed two outnumbered police officers being pelted by snowballs. City police commissioner Jessica Tisch called the behavior "disgraceful" and "criminal."

Plans for snow removal

In New York City, city workers will soon deploy snow melters — massive basins of warm water where large amounts of snow and ice will be dumped, acting Sanitation Commissioner Javier Lojan said Tuesday. They helped melt 23 million pounds (11.5 metric tons) of snow during last month's storm.

In snowbound Providence, Rhode Island, the city is taking snow to five locations, according to Josh Estrella, communications director for the city government. The challenge is so great that additional dumping grounds may be added, Estrella said.

State Rep. David Morales has criticized the city for hauling snow to a vacant lot slated for redevelopment in South Providence.

Morales called that part of Providence "the most polluted part of the city" and home to a dense population of people of color.

Estrella said the five dumping locations are scattered around Providence.

Storm strands juror as sex trafficking trial resumes

Storm-related travel disruptions even impacted the resumption of a high-profile criminal case in Manhattan federal court.

A juror in the sex trafficking trial of wealthy brothers Alon, Oren and Tal Alexander was "trapped in Miami" and wasn't scheduled for a return flight until Friday, prompting Judge Valerie Caproni to dismiss the stranded juror from the case Tuesday.

The trial wasn't held last week to accommodate jurors whose children were on a school break.

"I am loath to lose another juror, but I am also loath to lose another week of trial," Caproni said.

Government penalizes businesses over 6 deaths at Colorado dairy

By MORGAN LEE Associated Press

Federal workplace safety regulators penalized three businesses Tuesday over their failure to protect six Colorado dairy workers who were killed by exposure to highly toxic hydrogen sulfide gas after a manure pipe disconnected in an enclosed space.

The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration announced proposed fines totaling \$246,609 against the dairy owner and two contractors working on a manure management system. The deaths of five men and a teenager on Aug. 20, 2025, shocked the rural communities in and around Keenesburg, 35 miles (55 kilometers) northeast of Denver.

Dairy owner Prospect Ranch LLC, which did not immediately respond to a request for comment, faces the largest fine at \$132,406 for serious violations, including failures in training, planning and protecting workers from "atmospheric hazards."

The proposed fines are large by OSHA standards in agriculture but not unprecedented, said William Field, a professor at Purdue University who compiles annual reports on deaths in confined spaces at farms. He said occupational safety fines often are reduced upon appeal, or partially waived in exchange for investments in safety improvements.

"That part of it quite frankly is peanuts compared to the civil liability" potential in situations where private lawsuits are allowed, he said.

Regulators also announced proposed fines against Colorado-based Fiske Inc. and another contractor

hired to work on the system that released manure water and the hydrogen sulfide gas that led to the deaths, the government said Tuesday in a news release.

Fiske Inc.'s business High Plains Robotics services dairy equipment and employed four of those who died. Fiske faces \$99,306 in penalties for failing to protect employees and provide hydrogen sulfide detection training.

"A Fiske employee and a Prospect Ranch employee attempted to stop the flow but were overcome by the gas," OSHA said in the statement. "Subsequently, three more Fiske employees and one Prospect Ranch employee entered the pump room, which led to the loss of a total of six workers."

The Weld County coroner's office determined from autopsies and toxicology tests that the people who died were exposed to hydrogen sulfide gas, but provided little indication of the circumstances of the deaths, describing only an industrial accident in a confined space at a dairy farm.

Contractor HD Builders was cited for failing to have a written hazard communication program and provide training on detecting hydrogen sulfide, with a proposed \$14,897 penalty. Company employees were present but unharmed after the pipe disconnected.

The companies have 15 days to comply with proposed penalties, request an informal conference with safety regulators or challenge the findings before an occupation safety review commission.

Fiske Inc. and company owner Kevin Fiske said in a statement Tuesday that "our hearts are heavy as we review OSHA's citations."

"We have cooperated with the investigation proceedings to date," Fiske said. "While we disagree with the findings and are reviewing our options to determine next steps, we are focused on doing what is in our power to ensure that a tragedy like this never happens again."

A representative for HD Builders said Tuesday that the company had no comment.

The hazards of confined spaces on farms and dairies are a well-known and persistent cause of death in agriculture across the U.S. — often from exposure to odorless and colorless noxious gases, or due to asphyxiation in closed spaces where oxygen has been depleted.

First responders from a rural fire district in Weld County were dispatched around 6 p.m. on Aug. 20 to Prospect Ranch and took their own safety precautions as they entered a confined space.

All those who died in Colorado were Latino, ranging in age from 17 to 50. Four of them, including the teenage high school student, were from the same extended family and worked for Fiske Inc.'s High Plains Robotics.

Alejandro Espinoza Cruz, of Nunn, was found dead along with his 17-year-old son Oscar Espinoza Leos and a second son, 29-year-old Carlos Espinoza Prado.

The Espinozas are related by marriage to a 36-year-old from Greeley who died — Jorge Sanchez Pena, according to the Weld County coroner's office.

The other two men — Ricardo Gomez Galvan, 40, and Noe Montañez Casañas, 32 — lived in Keenesburg.

The remains of Montañez Casañas, a veterinarian who was employed under a U.S. visa, were repatriated to the central Mexican state of Hidalgo, according to the Mexican consulate in Denver.

Justice Department lawsuit says UCLA failed to protect Jewish employees from hostility

By COLLIN BINKLEY and JOCELYN GECKER AP Education Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department is suing the University of California over allegations that UCLA failed to protect Jewish employees from antisemitic harassment amid pro-Palestinian protests that roiled the campus in 2023 and 2024.

The lawsuit, filed Tuesday in California, is the latest escalation in the Trump administration's campaign to punish top universities that it says have been soft on antisemitism. The suit accuses the University of California, Los Angeles of failing to discipline those who were involved in protests, including dozens who were arrested in 2024 for failing to leave a campus encampment.

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Trump officials previously determined that UCLA failed to protect Jewish students, and last year UCLA reached a \$6 million settlement with three Jewish students and a Jewish professor who sued the university. The new lawsuit alleges the harm to Jewish and Israeli employees "goes much deeper" than the situations that settlement addressed.

"The United States will now do what UC has thus far failed to do: protect Jewish and Israeli employees" from antisemitic harassment, said the lawsuit, which was filed against the University of California, which consists of 10 campuses, but focuses on allegations against UCLA.

The University of California referred a request for comment to UCLA, which said Tuesday it has taken "concrete and significant steps" to strengthen campus security, enforce policies and combat antisemitism. It did not mention the federal government's lawsuit.

"Antisemitism is abhorrent and has no place at UCLA or elsewhere," Mary Osako, UCLA's vice chancellor for strategic communications, said in the statement.

Much of the federal complaint focuses on the 2024 protest encampment that federal officials say blocked Jewish employees and students from parts of campus and included antisemitic signs and chants. One night, counterprotesters attacked the encampment, throwing traffic cones and firing pepper spray, with fighting that continued for hours, injuring more than a dozen people, before police stepped in. The next day, after hundreds defied orders to leave, more than 200 people were arrested.

The 81-page lawsuit alleges UCLA violated its own policies by tolerating the encampment and accuses the university of failing to discipline any students, faculty or staff over antisemitic behavior.

"UCLA's administration turned a blind eye to — and at times facilitated — grossly antisemitic acts and systematically ignored cries for help from its own terrified Jewish and Israeli employees," the Justice Department alleges in the lawsuit.

The suit asks a judge to force UCLA to enforce its own anti-discrimination policies and to "award damages," without specifying an amount, to Jewish employees at UCLA who faced a hostile work environment.

The university has said it has taken numerous steps toward improving campus safety and inclusivity, including the creation of an Office of Campus and Community Safety and new policies to manage protests on campus. UCLA Chancellor Julio Frenk, whose Jewish father and grandparents fled to Mexico to escape Nazi Germany and whose wife is the daughter of a Holocaust survivor, launched an initiative to combat antisemitism and anti-Israeli bias.

"We stand firmly by the decisive actions we have taken to combat antisemitism in all its forms, and we will vigorously defend our efforts and our unwavering commitment to providing a safe, inclusive environment for all members of our community," Osako said in the university's statement.

The Trump administration has primarily focused on elite private universities in its campaign to win obedience from campuses it accuses of liberal and antisemitic bias. UCLA is one of the few public universities targeted in that effort.

Last summer, the Trump administration said it was seeking \$1 billion from UCLA as part of a settlement to end federal scrutiny. Trump officials had cut hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funding from the university, though a federal judge ordered the money to be restored in September. In November, that same judge barred the federal government from fining UCLA.

House rejects bill requiring aircraft locator systems to prevent midair collisions like last year's

By JOSH FUNK AP Transportation Writer

The House failed to approve a bill Tuesday that was crafted after last year's tragic midair collision near Washington, D.C., to require all aircraft flying around busy airports to have key locator systems to prevent such crashes. The collision of an airliner and an Army helicopter killed 67 people in January 2025.

The National Transportation Safety Board has been recommending such Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast systems to be installed since 2008. The bill that already passed the Senate would have

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required aircraft to be equipped with a system that can receive data about the locations of other aircraft. The complementary ADS-B Out system that broadcasts an aircraft's location is already required.

The families of the victims who died when an American Airlines jet collided with an Army Black Hawk helicopter strongly supported the measure, and a number of them watched the vote from the House gallery. But the Airlines for American trade group, the military and the major general aviation groups that represent business jets and small plane owners backed a competing and more comprehensive House bill that was just introduced last week.

Tim Lilley, whose son Sam was the first officer on the airliner, said he's really disappointed, but he and the other families will continue to press for meaningful reforms. And he hopes that will happen before the next tragedy.

"We're going to end up back here having the same conversation because of another midair (collision) is what's going to happen. Hopefully — fingers crossed — that doesn't," Lilley said.

Under the special process that was used to fast-track the bill, the ROTOR Act needed to receive more than two-thirds support to pass the House. It received 264 votes, but 133 other representatives voted against it. ROTOR stands for "Rotorcraft Operations Transparency and Oversight Reform."

House Speaker Mike Johnson told The Associated Press that the Senate and the House will work together to get an aviation safety bill done. "We're committed to it," he said.

And House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee Chairman Sam Graves said the House bill could be marked up in committee as soon as next week. That bill is designed to address all 50 of the recommendations the NTSB made, not just the locator technology, but NTSB Chairwoman Jennifer Homendy has said the House bill falls short of accomplishing that.

But Lilley said the bill Graves helped write needs to be strengthened.

"They've had 18 years to get it right. He's talking about getting it right and he's not even close on the collision avoidance piece," he said.

The cost of the ADS-B In mandate has been a concern. It's not clear exactly how much it would cost partly because the systems haven't yet been designed and certified for every aircraft, but Homendy testified in Congress that American Airlines was able to equip more than 300 of its Airbus a321s for \$50,000 apiece, and general aviation pilots have the option of using a portable receiver that costs about \$400 and works with an iPad.

One of the key researchers who helped develop these locator systems, Fabrice Kunzi, said a plane's dashboard shouldn't have to be overhauled to add a new display because the system is designed to give pilots an audible warning about nearby traffic with details of their locations if there is a risk of a collision.

House and Senate bills took a different approach

The key difference between the bills is that the House version would not require both kinds of the proven Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast systems to be installed. Instead, the House bill would require the Federal Aviation Administration to investigate what technology might be best as part of a lengthy rule-making process before requiring a solution. The House bill also covers many more aspects of the systemic failures the NTSB identified as causing the crash on the evening of Jan. 29, 2025.

The bipartisan group of Senate leaders behind the ROTOR Act — led by Republican Ted Cruz and Democrat Maria Cantwell — had argued their bill would be a good first step before drafting additional legislation.

Cruz pledged to keep working to pass his bill, which earned bipartisan support Tuesday, because it would require all aircraft to play by the same set of rules. "We will succeed, and ROTOR Act will become the law of the land," he said. "The families and the flying public deserve nothing less."

The main Families of Flight 5342 group had said that while the House bill includes a number of good reforms that should be considered, they can't support it as written because it doesn't clearly require ADS-B In equipment. Everyone aboard the helicopter and the American Airlines jet flying from Wichita, Kansas, including the parents of Olympic figure skater Maxim Naumov and 26 other members of the figure skating community, died when the aircraft collided and plummeted into the icy Potomac River.

Sara Nelson, who is the president of the Association of Flight Attendants, said her union will keep pushing for changes because bill that failed "was the clearest and most direct way to avoid midair collisions."

Doug Lane said that as he learned more about the crash that killed his wife and 16-year-old figure-skating son, he couldn't understand why airplanes aren't already equipped with technology that was first recommended before his son was born, and he's angry the bill failed Tuesday. He said the House bill is a poor substitute because too many of its provisions just call for a study or rulemaking without requiring actual change and there are loopholes.

Lane said the House bill is "a clear effort to just punt ADS-B In into a place where it can just go and die. It was not a good-faith effort to come up with a better way to do collision avoidance technology."

Improving the collision warning system

Any plane flying around a major airport is already required to have an ADS-B Out system that continually broadcasts an aircraft's location and speed installed. ADS-B In systems that can receive those signals and be used to create a display showing pilots where all air traffic is located around them are not standard on airliners, though many general aviation pilots already use a portable receiver to display that information on an iPad.

The NTSB investigation showed that system would have provided significantly more warning to the pilots involved in the crash and would have allowed them to avoid the collision. A plane equipped with ADS-B In can give the pilot a detailed description of where other aircraft are, whereas the current technology can only warn that traffic is in the area.

Cantwell, the Washington Democrat, said most House Republicans "voted to protect loopholes that helped cause the DCA (Reagan Airport) midair collision rather than acting with urgency to prevent crashes like this from happening again. The families deserve better."

Rep. Nick Langworthy, R-N.Y., who is chairman of an aviation safety caucus, voted for the bill. He said he was puzzled by the Pentagon's last-minute shift on the bill. He also noted there were many absences among House members due to weather, which also affected the outcome.

He said he is sure that the families of the crash victims are disappointed after the vote.

"But I don't think they should be completely dejected. I do think there are avenues to bring it back," Langworthy said. "There's will to solve this problem."

Louvre Museum director resigns in the wake of October's brazen French crown jewels heist

By THOMAS ADAMSON and JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — The Louvre Museum's director resigned Tuesday after months of pressure following the October theft of the French crown jewels, as the world's most visited museum faced widening scrutiny over security failures, labor unrest and a suspected ticket fraud scheme.

Laurence des Cars quit after a punishing year for the former royal palace — the high-profile jewels heist from the Apollo Gallery, a mid-February burst pipe near the "Mona Lisa," water leaks damaging priceless books, staff walkouts and a wildcat strike over overcrowding and understaffing.

The landmark has faced a narrative of an institution spiraling out of control.

And that pressure deepened in recent weeks when French authorities revealed a suspected decadelong ticket fraud operation linked to the museum that investigators say may have cost the Louvre 10 million euros (\$11.8 million).

President Emmanuel Macron accepted des Cars' resignation as "an act of responsibility" at a moment when the Louvre needs "calm" and new momentum for security upgrades, modernization and other major projects, according to a statement from his office.

Macron wants to give des Cars a new mission during France's presidency of the Group of Seven leading industrialized nations, focused on cooperation among major museums, the statement said.

For many in France's cultural world, the resignation answers months of head-scratching over why no top official had fallen after the heist: a daylight robbery that many in the country saw as the most humiliating breach of French heritage security in living memory.

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It also came as lawmakers and cultural officials widened scrutiny of the museum's leadership and security practices in the months since the breach.

Brazen theft

Thieves took less than eight minutes in October to steal crown jewels valued at 88 million euros (\$102 million) from the Louvre, in a weekend operation that stunned visitors, exposed glaring vulnerabilities and left one of France's most symbolically charged collections in criminal hands.

Several suspects were later arrested, but the stolen pieces remain missing.

Des Cars, one of the most prominent museum directors in Europe, had offered to resign on the day of the robbery, but it was initially refused by the culture minister.

In remarks after the theft, she described the moment as a "tragic, brutal, violent reality" for the Louvre and said that, as the person in charge, it had felt right to offer her resignation.

Lightning rod

In an interview published on Tuesday by daily newspaper Le Figaro, des Cars said that she had tried to steer the Louvre through the fallout from the heist, but had concluded that she could no longer carry out the museum's transformation in the current institutional climate.

Staying on, she said, would have meant managing the status quo when the museum still needs deep reform.

"I was there to take the lightning" as museum director, she said.

Des Cars also said that the October break-in exposed problems that she had been warning about since taking office, including aging infrastructure, obsolete technical systems and severe congestion.

She had led the Louvre since 2021, taking over one of the museum world's most prestigious jobs as the institution emerged from the coronavirus pandemic and mass tourism returned.

Multifaceted crisis

In June, a wildcat strike by front-of-house staff and security workers forced the Louvre to halt operations, stranding thousands of visitors outside the glass pyramid and underscoring the depth of anger among employees over overcrowding, understaffing and what unions called untenable working conditions.

Workers said that the pressure of daily visitor flows — particularly around the "Mona Lisa" — had become unmanageable and that promised reforms were arriving too slowly. There were growing complaints that the infrastructure and staffing of the crumbling medieval structure haven't kept pace with the crowds pouring through its galleries.

The resignation came at an especially punishing moment, less than two weeks after French authorities revealed the separate ticket fraud scheme.

That case widened scrutiny beyond the jewels robbery and toward the museum's day-to-day controls.

Fraud scheme

Prosecutors say tour guides are suspected of — up to 20 times a day — reusing the same tickets to bring in different visitor groups, at times allegedly with the help of Louvre employees, in a system investigators believe operated for a decade.

In a rare interview just days ago with The Associated Press after the fraud case was made public, the Louvre's No. 2, general administrator Kim Pham, said that fraud at an institution the size of the Louvre was "statistically inevitable."

He argued that the museum's sheer scale — millions of visitors, multiple checkpoints and a sprawling historic complex — makes it uniquely exposed.

But he also acknowledged shortcomings, and said that the museum had tightened validation checks and increased controls.

New Renaissance

The succession of crises has put new political weight on a project Macron has heavily championed: the Louvre's sweeping overhaul plan, branded the "Louvre New Renaissance."

Unveiled by Macron in January 2025, the renovation, which could take up to a decades, aims to modernize a museum widely seen as overstretched and physically worn down by mass tourism.

The plan includes a new entrance near the Seine River to ease pressure on I.M. Pei's pyramid, new un-

derground spaces and a dedicated room for the "Mona Lisa" with timed access — all intended to improve crowd flow and reduce the daily crush that has become a symbol of the Louvre's success and its dysfunction.

The project is expected to cost roughly 700 million-800 million euros (\$826 million-\$944 million), with funding from ticket revenue, state support, donations and Louvre Abu Dhabi-related income.

The scale and cost of that plan now loom over the search for des Cars' successor.

Macron has framed the overhaul as a national priority, comparing its ambition to other landmark French restoration efforts and casting it as part of a broader defense of French cultural prestige.

Warner Bros gets a higher offer from Paramount in heated fight for the storied Hollywood studio

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Warner Bros. Discovery said that Paramount has raised the price of its takeover offer to \$31 per share, potentially setting the stage for a fresh bidding war with Netflix over the future of the Hollywood giant.

Paramount's offer had previously stood at \$30 per share since December — when the Skydance owned company launched its hostile bid to challenge a deal Warner struck with Netflix to sell its studio and streaming business for \$27.75 per share.

A Warner Bros. Discovery buyout would reshape Hollywood and the wider media landscape — bringing HBO Max, cult-favorite titles like "Harry Potter" and, depending on who wins the Netflix v. Paramount tug-of-war, potentially even CNN under a new roof.

Unlike Netflix, Paramount wants to acquire Warner Bros. in its entirety — including networks like CNN and Discovery. The companies have spent the last couple of months in a heated, public back and forth over who has a stronger deal. And Paramount upping its offer only adds to the pressure.

Beyond the new \$31 per share price, Warner said Tuesday afternoon that Paramount had increased its regulatory termination fee to \$7 billion. Paramount also agreed to move up a previously-promised "ticking fee." The company previously said it would pay 25 cents per share for every quarter the deal drags on past the end of the year. Now it's agreed to pay that amount if the deal doesn't go through by the end of September, Warner said.

Warner added that Paramount's latest bid "could reasonably be expected to lead to" a superior offer as defined under its current agreement with Netflix — but the company's board has still not actually determined whether Paramount's offer is better than Netflix's.

A Netflix spokesperson declined to comment when reached by The Associated Press Tuesday afternoon. Paramount did not immediately respond to a request for further comment — but the company confirmed the submission of its revised offer earlier in the day.

Warner's board has repeatedly backed its deal with Netflix, and on Tuesday maintained that their agreement still stands. But if it later deems Paramount's offer to be the better deal, Netflix would then have four days to match or revise its proposal. It could also choose to walk away.

Lawmakers and entertainment trade groups have sounded the alarm about the prospect of both deals — warning that a buyout of all or parts of Warner's business would only further consolidate power in an industry already run by just a few major players. Critics say that could result in job losses, less diversity in filmmaking and potentially more headaches for consumers who are facing rising costs of streaming subscriptions as is.

Combined, that raises tremendous antitrust concerns — and a Warner sale could come down to who gets the regulatory green light. The U.S. Department of Justice has already initiated reviews, and other countries are expected to do so.

Both Paramount and Netflix have argued that their proposals are good for consumers and the wider industry. And the companies have taken aim at each other publicly with regulatory arguments.

Paramount has pointed to Netflix's much larger market value. And it's argued that if the streaming giant acquires Warner, it would only give it more dominance in the subscription video on demand space. But

Netflix is trying to convince regulators that it's up against broader video libraries, particularly Google's YouTube. Netflix has also said that since it doesn't currently have the same studios and film distribution that Warner does, it would preserve and grow those operations — whereas a Warner-Paramount merger would combine two of Hollywood's last five major studios, as well as theatrical channels and news networks.

Politics could also come into play. President Donald Trump previously made unprecedented suggestions about his involvement in seeing a deal through, before walking back those statements and maintaining that regulatory approval will be up to the Justice Department.

Trump has a close relationship with the billionaire Oracle founder Larry Ellison (the father of Paramount Skydance CEO David Ellison) who is heavily backing Paramount's bid to buy Warner. And the push to acquire Warner arrives just months after Skydance closed its own buyout of Paramount — in a contentious merger approved just weeks after the company agreed to pay the president \$16 million to settle a lawsuit over editing at Paramount's "60 Minutes" program on CBS. Under new ownership, CBS has seen significant editorial shifts, notably with the installation of Free Press founder Bari Weiss as editor-in-chief of CBS News. Critics say similar changes could happen at Warner's CNN if Paramount's bid is successful.

But Trump has continued to publicly lash out at Paramount over editorial decisions at CBS' "60 Minutes." The president also previously met with Netflix co-CEO Ted Sarandos, who he called a "fantastic man." Still, he's taken aim at Netflix in other ways — including demanding that the company fire former U.N. ambassador Susan Rice, who held top roles under both the Biden and Obama administrations, from Netflix's board in a social media post over the weekend.

Rice was reappointed to Netflix's board in 2023, after previously serving between 2018 and 2020. Trump's calls for her firing arrived after comments she made on a podcast hosted by former federal prosecutor Preet Bharara. Rice said that things were "not going to end well" for corporations and others who decided to "take a knee to Trump," arguing that Democrats would push for accountability if they regain power in coming elections.

Hegseth warns Anthropic to let the military use the company's AI tech as it sees fit, AP sources say

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

WASHINGTON (AP) — Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth gave Anthropic's CEO a Friday deadline to open the company's artificial intelligence technology for unrestricted military use or risk losing its government contract, according to a person familiar with their meeting Tuesday.

Anthropic makes the chatbot Claude and is the last of its peers to not supply its technology to a new U.S. military internal network. CEO Dario Amodei repeatedly 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.

Defense officials warned they could designate Anthropic a supply chain risk or use the Defense Production Act to essentially give the military more authority to use its products even if it doesn't approve of how they are used, according to the person familiar with the meeting and a senior Pentagon official, who both were not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The development, which was reported earlier by Axios, 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.

The person familiar called the tone of the meeting cordial but said Amodei didn't budge on two areas he has established as lines Anthropic won't cross — fully autonomous military targeting operations and domestic surveillance of U.S. citizens.

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The Pentagon objects to Anthropic's ethical restrictions because military operations need tools that don't come with built-in limitations, the senior Pentagon official said. The official argued that the Pentagon has only issued lawful orders and stressed that using Anthropic's tools legally would be the military's responsibility.

Anthropic will no longer be 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. Musk's xAI company, which operates the Grok chatbot, says Grok also is ready to be used in classified settings, according to the senior Pentagon official.

The official noted that the other AI companies were "close" to that milestone. SpaceX, Musk's space flight company that recently merged with xAI, didn't immediately return a request for comment Tuesday.

Hegseth said in a January speech at 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."

The defense secretary said that Grok would join the secure but unclassified Pentagon AI 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 GenAI.mil, enabling service members to use a custom version of ChatGPT for unclassified tasks.

Anthropic calls itself more safety-minded

Anthropic said in a statement after Tuesday's meeting that it "continued good-faith conversations about our usage policy to ensure Anthropic can continue to support the government's national security mission in line with what our models can reliably and responsibly do."

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," Daniels 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 Democratic 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 President Donald Trump's 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.

Trump's Republican 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 was responding on X to 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's "breakneck" adoption of AI shows the need for greater AI oversight or regulation by Congress, particularly if AI is being used to surveil Americans, said Amos Toh, senior counsel at the Brennan Center's Liberty and National Security Program at New York University.

"The law is not keeping up with how quickly the technology is evolving," Toh wrote in a post on Bluesky. "But that doesn't mean DoD has a blank check."

US stocks rise after getting a reminder of AI's potential upsides

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. stocks rose Tuesday after getting a reminder that the artificial-intelligence boom may also have an upside.

The S&P 500 climbed 0.8% and recovered nearly three-quarters of its sharp drop from the day before. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 370 points, or 0.8%, and the Nasdaq composite gained 1%.

Advanced Micro Devices helped lead the market and rallied 8.8% after announcing a multiyear deal where it will supply chips to Meta Platforms to help power its AI ambitions. Under the agreement, Meta also got the right to buy up to 160 million shares of AMD stock for 1 cent each, depending in part on how many chips Meta ultimately buys.

It's a reminder of the excitement that built in recent years about the billions of dollars pouring into AI, which could remake the world and create a more productive economy.

It also helped produce a sharp turnaround from the prior day, when worries about the potential downsides of AI shook Wall Street, particularly companies and industries that investors fear could be made obsolete. Industries as far flung as software, trucking logistics and financial services have recently seen investors suddenly and aggressively punish them for potentially being under threat.

IBM rose 2.7% to recover some of its 13.1% drop from Monday, which was its worst since 2000.

The pain has also filtered out to the private-equity industry, with fears building that loans it made to software companies dependent on recurring revenue may have less of a chance of getting repaid. Blue Owl Capital rose 2.8% to trim its loss for the young year so far to 28.2%.

On Tuesday, Anthropic unveiled new tools for businesses to use with its Claude AI assistant. They covered everything from human-resources work to engineering to investment banking.

The event suggested that fears about AI supplanting existing software, rather than merely making it easier to use, may be overblown, according to Dan Ives, an analyst at Wedbush. "While these use cases are impressive, the reality is that these new AI tools will not rip and replace existing software ecosystems and data environments with these AI tools only as useful as the data it can reach."

One of the tools allows users to bring data on financial markets from FactSet into Claude. FactSet Research Systems' stock jumped 5.9% for one of the biggest gains in the S&P 500, though it's still down 30.6% for the year so far.

Other companies hit hard by worries about AI competition also trimmed their losses for the year. Salesforce climbed 4.1%, and AppLovin rose 3.3%.

Outside of AI worries, big U.S. companies continued to report mostly better profits for the end of 2025 than analysts expected.

Keysight Technologies rallied 23.1% for the biggest gain in the S&P 500 after topping analysts' expectations for profit and revenue in the latest quarter. It also said revenue in the current quarter could rise by roughly 30% from a year earlier.

Home Depot rose 2% after likewise delivering stronger profit and revenue than analysts expected. That was even with what CEO Ted Decker called "ongoing consumer uncertainty."

All told, the S&P 500 rose 52.32 points to 6,890.07. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 370.44 to 49,174.50, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 236.41 to 22,863.68.

In stock markets abroad, indexes were mixed in Europe amid mostly modest movements. The swings were larger in Asia. South Korea's Kospi jumped 2.1%, while Hong Kong's Hang Seng dropped 1.8%. Stocks in Shanghai rose 0.9% after reopening following a holiday of more than a week. In the bond market, Treasury yields held relatively steady after a report said that confidence among U.S. consumers improved by more than economists expected. The yield on the 10-year Treasury held at 4.03%, where it was late Monday.

Zelenskyy says Putin has 'not broken' Ukrainians as he marks 4 years since Russia's all-out invasion

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy declared Tuesday that Russia has not "broken Ukrainians" nor triumphed in its war, four years after an invasion that has severely tested the resolve of Kyiv and its allies and fueled European fears about the scale of Moscow's ambitions.

In a show of support, more than a dozen senior European officials headed to the Ukrainian capital to mark the grim anniversary of the conflict, which has killed tens of thousands of people, upended life for millions of Ukrainians, and created instability far beyond its borders.

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. Russia now holds nearly 20% of Ukraine.

"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.

Despite the show of defiance, Ukraine has struggled to hold off Russia's onslaught, and the war has brought widespread hardship for Ukrainian civilians. Russia's aerial attacks have devastated families and denied civilians power and running water.

Putin made no mention of the anniversary nor did he say how the war was going when he spoke at a meeting in Moscow of top officials of the Federal Security Service, or FSB, on Tuesday.

However, he told them that the threat of Ukrainian attacks on Russian soil has grown. Ukraine has increasingly deployed long-range drones that it has developed to strike oil refineries, fuel depots and military logistics hubs more than 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) inside Russia.

UN calls for an immediate ceasefire

As the war of attrition enters its fifth year, a U.S.-led diplomatic push to end the largest conflict on the continent since World War II appears no closer to a peace deal.

Negotiations are stuck on what happens to the Donbas, eastern Ukraine's industrial heartland that 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 U.N. General Assembly called Tuesday for an immediate ceasefire and a comprehensive peace in Ukraine, rejecting a U.S. attempt to eliminate language stressing the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Washington supports an immediate ceasefire, U.S. Deputy Ambassador Tammy Bruce said before the vote, but opposed language stressing Ukraine's territorial unity because it would "distract" from the peace talks.

The 193-member General Assembly approved the original wording 107-12, with the United States among the 51 countries abstaining.

Zelenskyy urges Trump to visit

At a makeshift memorial in Kyiv's central square, where thousands of small flags and portraits show photos of fallen soldiers, Zelenskyy said he would like U.S. President Donald Trump to visit and witness for himself Ukrainian suffering.

"Only then can one truly understand what this war is really about," Zelenskyy said. When later asked

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how four years of war had changed him, Zelenskyy said, "I don't have time for friends or friendships."

Trump, who once vowed to end the war in a day, has repeatedly changed his tone toward Putin and Zelenskyy over the past year: sometimes criticizing the Ukrainian leader's negotiating position while reaching out to the Russian leader and at others lashing out at Putin for heavy barrages and appearing more sympathetic to the Ukrainian predicament.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said that the invasion would continue in pursuit of Moscow's goals. They include a demand that Ukraine renounce its bid to join NATO, sharply cut its army, and cede vast swaths of territory.

Zelenskyy said he expected a fresh round of U.S.-brokered talks with Russia within the next 10 days.

A 'nightmare' for Ukrainians

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 that Putin may target them next.

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. Already Trump has ended new military aid to Ukraine — though other NATO countries now buy American weapons and give them to Kyiv.

But French President Emmanuel Macron described the war as "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 European Union has also sent financial aid, but has sometimes met with reluctance from members Hungary and Slovakia.

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 defining conflict

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

Zelenskyy later said von der Leyen assured him that Ukraine would receive the first tranche of a 90 billion euro loan by the spring despite Hungary's attempts to block it.

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.

British Armed Forces Minister Al Carns said Russia's war on Ukraine was "the most defining conflict" in decades, bringing a "revolution in military affairs," especially through the rapid development of drone technology. Drones now cause the vast majority of battlefield casualties, he said.

Both sides face challenges in finding enough troops and are increasingly turning to uncrewed aerial drones that can attack far from the front lines, the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies said in its annual report on the global military situation.

"Given both sides' reliance on external support for materiel, decisions taken in foreign capitals will play an important role in shaping the war's trajectory," the think tank added.

The United Kingdom on Tuesday announced a new package of military and humanitarian support for Ukraine, including sending teams of British military medics to instruct their Ukrainian counterparts.

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.

What to know about the charge that former Prince Andrew and Peter Mandelson could face

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The former Prince Andrew and Peter Mandelson, the U.K.'s former ambassador to Washington, were arrested within days of each other for their ties to the late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, and both are under investigation for the same offense: misconduct in public office.

Neither of them has been charged, yet, but their high-profile arrests have shone a spotlight on an ancient law that experts say is ill-defined, too broad and direly in need of reform.

Police have not disclosed details of how they questioned the former prince, now known as Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, and Mandelson. But documents recently released by the U.S. government suggest both of them were close to Epstein and may have leaked sensitive information to him.

The trove of files suggest Mountbatten-Windsor passed confidential trade reports, among other documents, to Epstein when he was serving as the U.K.'s trade envoy from 2001 to 2011.

In the case of Mandelson, the documents suggest the veteran Labour Party politician may have shared an internal government report with Epstein and told the financier that he would lobby for a cut on tax on bankers' bonuses when he held the title of Business Secretary around 15 years ago.

Both men previously denied wrongdoing and have not commented on the most recent allegations.

A difficult offense to prove

The Crown Prosecution Service — which conducts criminal investigations in England and Wales — defines misconduct in public office as "serious willful abuse or neglect of the power or responsibilities of the public office held." There must be a direct link between the misconduct and an abuse of those responsibilities, it said.

The offense carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

Prosecutors must investigate all the evidence gathered on the men to consider if it is enough to prove misconduct in each case.

Experts say proving the offense, which can be traced back to medieval times, is notoriously difficult.

There is no simple definition of what constitutes a "public officer." It may be particularly difficult to prove Mountbatten-Windsor was the holder of a public office when he was the U.K.'s special representative for international trade and investment — an unsalaried role with paid travel expenses.

Prosecutors must next establish if the suspects willfully neglected to perform their duties or willfully committed misconduct.

The neglect or misconduct must also be so serious that it amounts to an abuse of public trust.

Finally, the actions must be deemed to be "without reasonable excuse of justification," according to the prosecution service.

'The law is in need of reform'

The Law Commission, an independent legal body that makes reform recommendations to the government, says the wording of the offense is unhelpfully vague. The commission has called for years for it to be repealed and replaced by more specific offenses.

"The law is in need of reform, in order to ensure that public officials are appropriately held to account for misconduct committed in connection with their official duties," the Law Commission said on its website.

Another of the commission's concerns is that most prosecutions of the offense have been directed at low- to mid-ranking officials and staff such as police and prison officers, rather than senior managers or politicians.

Both Mountbatten-Windsor and Mandelson were released after police questioning.

Marcus Johnstone, managing director of PCD Solicitors, a law firm that is not involved in the cases, said

the bar is "extremely high" to reach a conviction, and that he does not expect to see any conviction against either man. He said if either was convicted, the sentences would probably be from one to 10 years in prison.

"It must be noted that cases involving government ministers or trade envoys charged with misconduct in public office are extremely rare, and there is no real guidance as to the expected sentence," Johnstone said.

"Although an investigation is now taking place," he added, "we are still a long way away from a potential prosecution."

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 Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his country's 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:

Latvia says more pressure on Russia 'is needed'

Latvia's Foreign Minister Baiba Braže called on Tuesday for more international pressure to stop "the butcher in the Kremlin" and bring peace to Ukraine

Braže said there is no indication Russian President Vladimir Putin wants to stop the war and there would be no immediate peace without additional sanctions or restrictions on the Russian economy and efforts to degrade Moscow's military capability.

"So, peace efforts, great. U.S. leadership, great. But then, also, pressure is needed," she said after addressing the U.N. General Assembly.

Braže stressed: "Without China, Russia would have lost the war already."

She said Latvia has told China that its dual-use supplies including chips, machinery and items for missile production are "what has enabled the war."

UN calls for immediate ceasefire in Ukraine

The U.N. General Assembly called Tuesday for an immediate, full and unconditional ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine on the fourth anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion, after rejecting a U.S. attempt to eliminate references to Ukraine's territorial integrity.

U.S. Deputy Ambassador Tammy Bruce said the Trump administration supports an immediate ceasefire but language on Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity would "distract" from ongoing peace negotiations.

After rejecting the U.S. effort to drop that language, the 193-member assembly approved the original Ukraine-drafted resolution by a vote of 107-12 with 51 abstentions. The United States abstained on the vote.

The resolution welcomes efforts by the United States, European countries and others aimed at ending the war. It expresses "grave concern" at intensified Russian military action against civilians and infrastructure, especially critical energy infrastructure.

General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding but they are an important reflection of global opinion.

Italy expresses its solidarity with Ukraine

The government of Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni praised the Ukrainian people's "struggle to defend their freedom and independence," and said Rome stands ready to support U.S.-led peace talks.

In a statement, the government also condemned what it described as Russia's "unjustified and brutal aggression."

It said resolving the conflict is essential to the security of Europe and of Italy.

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Putin meets with officers of counterintelligence agency

Russian President Vladimir Putin held a meeting with officials of Russia's top counterintelligence agency on Tuesday without mentioning the anniversary.

Putin told the officials of Federal Security Service, or FSB, that the threat of attacks against Russia had increased, including those carried out by Ukraine's special forces. He said greater protection would be needed for energy and transport infrastructure, as well as for leading defense industry officials.

He also said that Russia's adversaries were attempting to derail peace negotiations with Ukraine.

"They want to attack, They can't live without it," Putin said during his speech. "They absolutely must have the defeat of Russia. They are looking for any way." He also held a minute's silence in honor of FSB officers killed in service.

Western allies vow commitment to a lasting peace

Ukraine's Western allies offered Ukraine their "full and sustained support" on the four-year anniversary since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion, French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said in a joint statement.

Over 30 leaders of the so-called Coalition of the Willing held talks Tuesday via videoconference and in-person in Kyiv with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the statement said. The group co-chaired by France and the U.K. is aimed at providing Ukraine with security guarantees once a peace deal is achieved.

They "reiterated their unwavering commitment to working together to achieve a just and lasting peace," it said.

Leaders "urged Russia to engage in the discussions in a meaningful way, and to agree to a full, unconditional ceasefire." They reaffirmed their commitment to ramp up economic pressure on Russia including through additional sanctions, the statement said.

South Africans who fought for Russia to return home

South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa said Tuesday that a group of 11 South African men allegedly lured to fight alongside Russian soldiers in the war against Ukraine are expected to return home soon.

South Africa's government said in December that it had received distress calls from the men who were trapped in Ukraine's war-torn eastern Donbas region. The men had joined mercenary forces under the pretext of lucrative employment contracts, the government said.

Their travel to Russia appears consistent with other reports of African men who have been recruited to fight in the war against Ukraine, including over 1,000 from Kenya, according to an intelligence report presented to the Kenyan parliament last week. Four other South Africans returned home last week.

Independent media count the Russian war dead

At least 200,000 Russian troops have died during Russia's four-year invasion of Ukraine, independent media outlets reported Tuesday.

Russian news outlet Mediazona, together with the BBC and a team of volunteers, has collected the names of 200,186 troops killed in the war by scouring news reports, social media and government websites.

Neither Moscow nor Kyiv gives timely data on military losses, and each is at pains to amplify the other side's casualties. Russia has publicly acknowledged the deaths of just over 6,000 soldiers.

Europe's parliament hails Zelenskyy

European lawmakers cheered Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy who met with them on a video-conference during an extraordinary session of the European Parliament commemorating the anniversary of the war's start.

Lawmakers from Portugal to Finland praised Ukraine and blasted Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, whose last minute objection sank new efforts to help Ukraine and raise the costs on Russia for prosecuting the war.

"He has become Putin's cheap servant — Viktor Orbán — in the last years, and also today has not only betrayed Ukraine, he has betrayed all of us. He has betrayed Europe," said German member of parliament Terry Reintke.

While a few criticized Ukraine, an overwhelming majority of lawmakers lauded Ukrainian resolve, wore

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blue and yellow flower pins, blasted Putin and pledged continued support for the war-ravaged nation many see as a future EU member.

British says Russia is suffering terrible costs and is not winning

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer has paid tribute to the resilience of Ukrainians as he told his Cabinet that Kyiv's allies "must defeat the falsehood that Russia is winning."

"When this conflict broke out four years ago, it was assumed it would be a matter of weeks before Putin took the whole of Ukraine. That's what everybody believed," Starmer said.

"Four years later, the Ukrainians are holding out against that aggression, holding out on the front line where the circumstances are extremely challenging, but also holding out in civilian life where every day Ukrainians get up and go to work as a sign of resilience and defiance.

Starmer said that over the last year alone, "Russia took 0.8% of land in Ukraine at a terrible cost to themselves, half a million losses."

Kremlin says Russia will keep fighting

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said Russia has not achieved all of its goals in its war on Ukraine, but that Russia's operation would continue and that Russian interests would be secured.

When asked how Russia had changed over the last four years, Peskov said that Russian society had rallied around Putin. He also said that Russian society had matured in "understanding our roots" and "understanding what is good and what is bad in international affairs around the world."

He said the past four years have been very important in Russia's history and that the country will move forward.

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 came 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'

Ukrainian President Volodymyr 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."

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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.

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 Ukraine is one of the world's most-mined countries, with almost a quarter of its territory "potentially contaminated."

What to know about UK politician Peter Mandelson's ties to his 'best pal,' the late Jeffrey Epstein

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Former U.K. ambassador to the United States Peter Mandelson, an influential British political figure, is under investigation for alleged misconduct in public office linked to his relationship with the convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Mandelson's ties to Epstein have threatened the leadership of Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who appointed the veteran statesman to the diplomatic post despite warnings about his friendship with the disgraced financier.

Mandelson's arrest came four days after the former Prince Andrew was taken into custody on similar suspicions, and their arrests are among the most dramatic consequences of the more than 3 million pages of Epstein-related documents released last month by the U.S. Justice Department.

Mandelson arrest

Mandelson was arrested Monday at his London home in a wealthy area next to Regent's Park.

He appears to have sent Epstein, whom he referred to as his "best pal," sensitive government information that could potentially influence markets when he was a senior minister in the British government in 2009.

One internal government report discussed possibly selling government assets to raise money for the U.K. after the 2008 global financial crisis. He also appeared to tell Epstein — who died by suicide in a New York prison in 2019 — he would lobby other members of the government to reduce a tax on bankers' bonuses.

Payment records suggest Epstein gave Mandelson or his husband, Reinaldo Avila da Silva, \$75,000 in 2003 and 2004. Mandelson said he had no recollection of receiving that money, questioned the authenticity of bank statements and believed the allegations were false.

Mandelson was released early Tuesday morning after more than nine hours of questioning. He has previously denied wrongdoing and hasn't been charged, though the investigation is continuing.

Mandelson's lawyers said Tuesday that he had voluntarily agreed to speak with police next month and that his arrest was the result of a "baseless suggestion" that he planned to flee the country.

"There is absolutely no truth whatsoever in any such suggestion," the Mishcon De Reya law firm said in a statement. "Peter Mandelson's overriding priority is to cooperate with the police investigation, as he has done throughout this process, and to clear his name."

'Prince of darkness'

Mandelson has been a major player for decades in the center-left Labour Party, known as a skilled political operative dubbed the "Prince of Darkness" for his cunning and ruthlessness.

He helped the party return to power in 1997 as "New Labour" under Prime Minister Tony Blair and served in senior positions until 2001. He served again, under Prime Minister Gordon Brown, from 2008 to 2010. In between, he was the European Union's trade commissioner.

Financial or ethical allegations led him to resign twice from Blair's government. He acknowledged mistakes but denied wrongdoing.

Starmer tapped him as ambassador to Washington last year for his trade expertise and he helped reach a deal in May that spared Britain some of President Donald Trump's tariffs.

Other fallout

Starmer fired Mandelson in September when his email exchanges indicated he maintained a friendship with Epstein after Epstein's 2008 conviction for sex offenses involving a minor.

The latest trove of documents led Mandelson to quit the Labour Party earlier this month to avoid causing "further embarrassment." Days later, he resigned his seat in the House of Lords.

Although he stepped down from the House of Lords, he keeps his title as Lord Mandelson.

It would require legislation to remove his title, something that hasn't been done since the First World War when several lords were stripped of their titles for siding with Germany.

Global Counsel, the lobbying firm he co-founded, collapsed into a form of bankruptcy Friday after many customers cut ties because of his connection to Epstein.

Some have called on Starmer to resign over his judgment in appointing Mandelson. Starmer narrowly avoided being toppled two weeks ago and has apologized, saying Mandelson lied about his ties to Epstein.

US military boards third oil tanker in the Indian Ocean after tracking it from the Caribbean

By BEN FINLEY and KONSTANTIN TOROPIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. military forces boarded a third sanctioned oil tanker in the Indian Ocean after tracking it from the Caribbean Sea in an effort to target illicit oil connected to Venezuela, the Pentagon said Tuesday.

An organization that tracks ship movements said the vessel was the only tanker left to pursue after more than a dozen fled the coast of Venezuela following the capture of the South American country's authoritarian then-president, Nicolás Maduro.

The boarding is the 10th interdiction of an oil tanker conducted by the Trump administration since it began targeting vessels connected to Venezuela in early December. The others were seized in the Caribbean or North Atlantic.

U.S. Southern Command said in a post on X that U.S. forces boarded the Bertha overnight, conducting "a right-of-visit, maritime interdiction and boarding."

"The vessel was operating in defiance of President Trump's established quarantine of sanctioned vessels in the Caribbean and attempted to evade," the post said. "From the Caribbean to the Indian Ocean, we tracked it and stopped it."

A U.S. official, who spoke on condition of anonymity in order to discuss an ongoing operation, noted that as with the previous two boardings conducted in the Indian Ocean, the Bertha was not formally seized but rather placed under U.S. control. The official said the Bertha's fate will be determined by the Department of Homeland Security and the State Department.

Video posted by the Pentagon shows U.S. Navy helicopters taking off from an identified ship and flying toward the tanker.

Venezuela had faced U.S. sanctions on its oil for several years and relied on a shadow fleet of falsely flagged tankers to smuggle crude into global supply chains.

President Donald Trump ordered a quarantine of sanctioned tankers in December to pressure Maduro before he was apprehended in early January during a U.S. military operation. The seizing of the tankers is part of the Republican administration's broader efforts to take control of Venezuela's oil.

The Bertha was flagged to the Cook Islands when it was placed under U.S. sanctions related to Iran, according to the website of the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control. However, the vessel was more recently listed under a false flag of the Caribbean island of Curacao and managed by a company in China, according to Equasis, a shipping information system.

Following Maduro's capture, at least 16 tankers fled the Venezuelan coast, according to Samir Madani, co-founder of TankerTrackers.com, who said his organization used satellite imagery and surface-level photos to document the ships' movements.

The Bertha was the only tanker left to pursue from the original 16, TankerTrackers.com said in a Feb. 15 post on X. Madani said in a message to The Associated Press on Tuesday that the Bertha was laden with 1.9 million barrels of Merey 16 crude, which is a grade of Venezuelan oil.

Over the past few years, the ship has received Iranian crude from other vessels via hoses for deliveries to China, Madani said.

The Pentagon said in an email that it didn't have more to add beyond Southern Command's post on X. Maduro was brought to the U.S. to face charges of working with drug cartels to facilitate the shipment of thousands of tons of cocaine into the U.S. and has pleaded not guilty.

Savannah Guthrie says her family is offering a \$1 million reward for her mother's return

By JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

"Today" show host Savannah Guthrie said her family is now offering a \$1 million reward for information leading to the recovery of her mother, Nancy Guthrie, who went missing from her Arizona home more than three weeks ago.

Savannah Guthrie said Tuesday that her family is still holding out for a miracle and hopes her mother will be found alive, but she also acknowledged that they realize it might be too late.

"She may already be gone," Savannah Guthrie said in an Instagram post. "She may already have gone home to the Lord that she loves and is dancing in heaven."

Nancy Guthrie, 84, was last seen at her home just outside Tucson, Arizona, on Jan. 31 and was reported missing the next day. Authorities believe she was kidnapped, and the FBI released surveillance videos of a masked man who was outside Guthrie's front door on the night she vanished.

Drops of her blood were found on the front porch, but authorities haven't publicly revealed much evidence. Since the first days of her disappearance, authorities have expressed concern about Nancy Guthrie's health because she needs vital daily medicine.

Savannah Guthrie said her family needs to know where her mother is no matter what happened.

"Someone out there knows something that can bring her home," she said.

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

The porch camera footage released two weeks ago, which showed a man wearing a backpack and gloves outside Nancy Guthrie's house, gave investigators their first major break. But it also has fueled intense speculation.

The sheriff's department said 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."

Sheriff Chris Nanos said a week ago that members of Guthrie's family, including siblings and spouses, are not suspects.

Savannah Guthrie said Tuesday that her family also will donate \$500,000 to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

"We are hoping that the attention that has been given to our mom and our family will extend to all the families like ours," she said.

Robert Carradine, 'Revenge of the Nerds' and 'Lizzie McGuire' star, dies at 71

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

Robert Carradine, the youngest of his prolific Hollywood family and whose biggest hit was the 1984 comedy "Revenge of the Nerds," has died at 71.

In a Tuesday statement, his family said he lived with bipolar disorder for two decades. His brother told Deadline that Carradine died by suicide.

"We want people to know it, and there is no shame in it," Keith Carradine told Deadline. "It is an illness that got the best of him, and I want to celebrate him for his struggle with it, and celebrate his beautiful soul. He was profoundly gifted, and we will miss him every day."

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story includes discussion of suicide. If you or someone you know needs help, the national suicide and crisis lifeline in the U.S. is available by calling or texting 988.

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Known for both his film and television work, Robert Carradine worked steadily in the industry for over 40 years. Though he collaborated with some of the most respected directors of the day, he never gained the worldwide recognition of his more famous siblings Keith Carradine (also the father of Martha Plimpton) and half-brother David Carradine, who died in 2009.

Robert Carradine, a Los Angeles native and son to character actor John Carradine, was introduced to audiences with roles on the television series "Bonanza" in 1971 and in the John Wayne Western "The Cowboys" in 1972.

Despite his family background, acting wasn't his first calling, though.

"I always had a passion to be a race car driver, and that's what I thought I was going to do, and at some penultimate moment ... I think I was sitting with my brother David when 'The Cowboys' was being cast, and they were interested in David as the bad guy, and he didn't want to be the guy that shot John Wayne in the back," Carradine recalled in a 2013 interview with Popdose. "But he said, 'You know, it is called The Cowboys, and they're meeting all these young guys. Why don't you go in?'"

In addition to starring in a short-lived television spinoff of "The Cowboys," and appearing alongside David Carradine in his popular ABC series "Kung Fu," he would go on to nab roles in Martin Scorsese's "Mean Streets," Hal Ashby's Vietnam drama "Coming Home," and Samuel Fuller's World War II film "The Big Red One."

The heights of his brother David's success eluded Robert Carradine, but the two could often be seen in the same projects, including in Walter Hill's "The Long Riders" and Paul Bartel's "Cannonball."

Robert Carradine's biggest hit would come in 1984 with the off-color comedy "Revenge of the Nerds," in which he played head nerd Lewis Skolnick, with his abrupt, infectious and guttural laugh. He reprised the role for the big-screen sequel and two made-for-television follow-ups, and continued to pay homage to the beloved character with a guest role on the series "Robot Chicken" and as a co-host (with "Revenge of the Nerds" co-star Curtis Armstrong) of the pop culture competition show "King of the Nerds," which aired for three seasons.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, according to the family statement, Carradine realized his racing ambitions and was a driver for Lotus. In the 2000s, Carradine gained small-screen success in The Disney Channel's "Lizzie McGuire" as the eponymous character's father.

"It's really hard to face this reality about an old friend," Hilary Duff, who played Lizzie McGuire, wrote on Instagram. "There was so much warmth in the McGuire family and I always felt so cared for by my on-screen parents. I'll be forever grateful for that. I'm deeply sad to learn Bobby was suffering."

Work remained consistent even if the projects diminished in prestige and quality. Then Quentin Tarantino, ever the champion of fading character actors, cast Carradine in "Django Unchained" as one of the trackers in the 2012 film after seeing a "very furry" photograph, as Carradine told Popdose.

In 2015, Carradine was cited for a Colorado crash that injured him and his wife, Edith Mani. They later divorced, after more than 25 years of marriage.

Carradine's survivors include his three children, actor Ever Carradine, Marika Reed Carradine and Ian Alexander Carradine.

"Whenever anyone asks me how I turned out so normal, I always tell them it's because of my dad. I knew my dad loved me, I knew it deep in my bones, and I always knew he had my back," Ever Carradine wrote on Instagram. "I think it's partly because we basically grew up together. Twenty years age difference really isn't that much, and while I never ever thought of him as a sibling, I did always think of him as my partner. We were in it together."

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 Savyolovsky railway 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 top investigative agency later said the assailant was a 22-year-old man from Russia's Udmurt Republic, more than 1,100 kilometers east of Moscow. It said that a probe was ongoing into the motives behind the attack.

Speaking at a meeting with top officials from Russia's Federal Security Service, or FSB, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that the man had been recruited online and given the explosive device unknowingly. It was then detonated remotely, he said.

The attack came four years after Russia sent troops into Ukraine.

Facebook owner Meta to buy AI chips from AMD in deal worth up to \$100 billion

By MICHELLE CHAPMAN AP Business Writer

Facebook owner Meta Platforms will buy artificial intelligence chips from Advanced Micro Devices in a deal that will also give it the opportunity to buy up to a 10% stake of the chip company.

News of the AMD deal comes just days after Meta announced a long-term partnership where it will use millions of chips and other equipment from Nvidia for its artificial-intelligence data centers.

Meta will buy AMD's latest chips, the MI450, to help power data centers. The 6-gigawatt agreement will see shipments supporting the first gigawatt deployment set to start during the second half of this year. The agreement could potentially be worth more than \$100 billion.

AMD is looking to keep pace with Nvidia in the AI craze that's widely viewed as the biggest tectonic shift in technology since Apple co-founder Steve Jobs unveiled the first iPhone.

Nvidia carved out an early lead in tailoring its chipsets known as graphics processing units, or GPUs, from use in powering video games to helping to train powerful AI systems, like the technology behind ChatGPT and image generators. Demand skyrocketed as more people began using AI chatbots. Tech companies scrambled for more chips to build and run them.

While the appetite for AI chips is still large, there are some concerns about how much companies like Meta are spending on AI and whether they can make back their huge investments through higher profits and productivity in the future.

For Meta, the company has been pushing to revive its commercial AI efforts as the company faces tough competition from rivals such as Google and OpenAI, maker of ChatGPT. In June, the company made a \$14.3 billion investment in AI data company Scale and recruited its CEO Alexandr Wang to help lead a team developing "superintelligence" at the tech giant. And in December, Meta bought artificial intelligence startup Manus, as the owner of Instagram continues an aggressive push to amp up AI offerings across its platforms.

AMD issued Meta a performance-based warrant for up to 160 million shares of its common stock at \$0.01 a piece, structured to vest as long as certain milestones are achieved.

The first tranche vests with the initial 1-gigawatt of shipments, with additional tranches vesting as Meta's purchases scale to 6 gigawatts.

Shares of AMD jumped more than 9% before the market open on Tuesday.

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

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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.

Today in History: February 25 Muhammad Ali wins heavyweight title

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Wednesday, Feb. 25, the 56th day of 2026. There are 309 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Feb. 25, 1964, Muhammad Ali (then Cassius Clay) became world heavyweight boxing champion for the first time as he defeated Sonny Liston in Miami Beach.

Also on this date:

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In 1870, Republican Hiram R. Revels of Mississippi was sworn in as a U.S. senator, becoming the first African American member of either house of Congress.

In 1913, the 16th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, giving Congress the power to levy and collect income taxes, was declared in effect by Secretary of State Philander Chase Knox.

In 1956, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev railed for hours against the brutality and "cult of personality" of his late predecessor, dictator Josef Stalin, in a speech to a Communist Party congress.

In 1986, President Ferdinand Marcos fled the Philippines after 20 years of rule in the wake of a tainted election; opposition leader Corazon Aquino — the first woman to lead the country — assumed the presidency.

In 1991, during the Persian Gulf War, 28 American soldiers were killed when an Iraqi Scud missile hit a U.S. barracks in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

In 1994, American-born Jewish settler Baruch Goldstein opened fire with an automatic rifle inside the Tomb of the Patriarchs in the West Bank during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, killing 29 Muslims before he was beaten to death by worshippers.

In 1997, a jury in Media, Pennsylvania, convicted chemical fortune heir John E. du Pont of third-degree murder, deciding he was mentally ill when he shot and killed world-class wrestler David Schultz. (Du Pont died in prison in December 2010 while serving a 13- to 30-year sentence; he was 72.)

In 2024, the U.S. and Britain struck 18 Houthi targets in Yemen, answering a recent surge in attacks by the Iran-backed militia group on ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, including a missile strike that set fire to a cargo vessel.

Today's birthdays: Former talk show host Sally Jessy Raphael is 91. Actor Tom Courtenay is 89. Film director Neil Jordan is 76. Rock musician-actor John Doe (punk band X) is 73. Comedian Carrot Top is 61. Actor Tea Leoni is 60. Actor Sean Astin is 55. Singer Daniel Powter is 55. Comedian-actor Chelsea Handler is 51. Actor Rashida Jones is 50. FBI Director Kash Patel is 46. Actor Jameela Jamil is 40. Golfer Hideki Matsuyama is 34. Actor Isabelle Fuhrman is 29. Denver Broncos quarterback Bo Nix is 26.