

Groton Daily Independent

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The Silver Skates annual meeting has been rescheduled for Sunday, March 19 at 12:30 p.m. at the warming house. Please consider joining us as we will have a couple assistant/shared positions to fill!

Groton Community Calendar

Sunday, March 12

DAYLIGHT SAVINGS TIME BEGINS

Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.

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

Open Gym: Grades JK-8; 2:00 PM to 3:30 PM, Grades 6-12; 3:30 PM to 5:00 PM

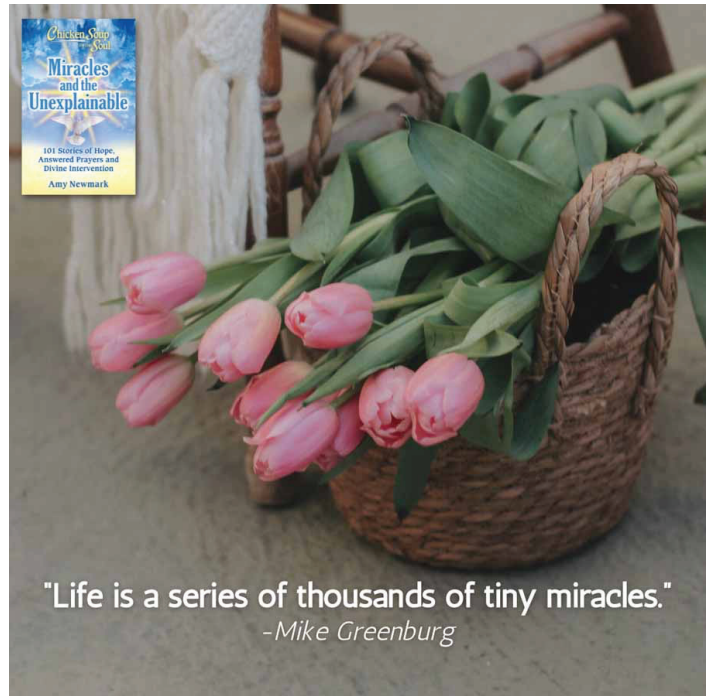
St. John's Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; Sunday school, 9:45 a.m.; Zion Lutheran worship, 11 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; Sunday school, 10:15 a.m.; Choir, 7 p.m.

United Methodist: Confirmation Sunday. Conde worship, 8:30 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Sunday school and sing in church at 10:30 a.m.; Groton worship, 10:30 a.m.

Groton Daily Independent
PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445
Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.



Monday, March 13

Senior Menu: Goulash, corn, baked apples, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Egg bake.

School Lunch: Chicken nuggets, waffle fries.

The Pantry, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

United Methodist: Lent Bible Study with Pastor Brandon, 7 p.m.; PEO Meeting, 7 p.m. (outside group)

1 p.m.: Senior Citizens Meet at the Groton Community Center.

Tuesday, March 14

Senior Menu: Ham, sweet potatoes, mixed vegetables, tropical fruit, dinner roll.

School Breakfast: Egg omelets.

School Lunch: Enchiladas, Spanish rice.

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

The Pantry, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Middle School Talent Show, GHS Gym.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Council, 7 p.m.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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NSU Men's Basketball

(RV) Hornets Conclude No. 18 Wolves Post Season Run

Maryville, Mo. – The No. 18 Northern State University men's basketball fell to (RV) Emporia State in the quarterfinal round of the NCAA Central Region Tournament Saturday afternoon. The Wolves struggled to get things going offensively, shooting 30.0% from the floor and 22.9% from the 3-point line.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 51, ESU 72

Records: NSU 24-7, 23-8

Attendance: 651

HOW IT HAPPENED

It was a slow start for the Wolves who trailed 43-23 at the half

Northern held Emporia State to 29 points in the second however was unable to overcome the first half deficit

The Wolves tallied 18 points in the paint, six points off turnovers, and five second chance points; while the Hornets recorded 40 points in the paint, 19 points off turnovers, and 22 points off the bench

NSU tallied 35 rebounds, ten assists, eight made 3-pointers, seven steals, and two blocks

Sam Masten and Augustin Reede led the team in double figures, scoring 18 and 12 points respectively

With his eighth points of the game, Masten scored his 1000th point as a Wolf and concluded his collegiate career with 1,465 points; he is the 60th member of the Northern State 1000 point club

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Sam Masten: 18 points, 8 rebounds, 4 assists

Augustin Reede: 12 points, 2 assists

Jordan Belka: 8 points, 7 rebounds, 2 assists, 2 steals, 1 block

2022-23 ROUND UP

Northern State closes out the season as the NSIC Overall and North Division Champions, qualifying for their 15th NCAA Tournament in program history

Saul Phillips reached the 300 career milestone this season and holds an 89-27 record overall at Northern State; he was named the NSIC Coach of the Year

Sam Masten tallied NSIC North Division Player of the Year, first team NSIC All-Conference, CSC Academic All-District, and D2CCA All-District first team honors

Jordan Belka was named the NSIC Bob Olson Outstanding Senior of the Year and honored on the NSIC All-Conference second team and CSC Academic All-District team

Jackson Moni landed on the NSIC All-Conference first team

Masten and Belka (1,314) reached the 1000 career milestone and became the 59th and 60th members of the Northern State 1000 point club

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NSU Wrestling

Wyatt Turnquist Brings Home Third Place Finish from NCAA National Championships

Cedar Rapids, Iowa – The Northern State University wrestling team was led by Wyatt Turnquist on Saturday from the NCAA National Championships, securing his highest possible finish on day two. The 149-pounder went 3-0 on the day, taking third. Huss was unable to complete his championships run following his Friday All-American finish, medically forfeiting his matches to an eighth-place finish.

DAY 1 STORYLINES

Turnquist tallied 15.0 team points for the Wolves, leaving Northern tied for 20th heading into tonight's championship session

The Winner native opened his day with a comeback decision victory over No. 3 Nick Young of Gannon (8-6)

Following a short break, Turnquist was back in action against top-seeded Jacob Ealy of Pitt-Johnstown in the consolation semifinals

He took control of the match in the third, scoring four points en route to an 8-4 decision win

The third place match slated Turnquist against No. 6 Jalen Spuhler of Wisconsin Parkside for the fourth time this season

Turnquist tallied a dual win over Spuhler on the road, however fell in both open and Super Region V action Spuhler scored first in the bout, however the two were knotted up at 4-all heading into the second

Turnquist chose bottom and got to work, scoring three points on an escape and takedown, closing out the period with a 7-4 lead

It was all Turnquist in the third, as the Wolves junior added another takedown and riding time point to secure the 5-point victory

Huss and Turnquist are the 46th and 47th Northern State wrestling All-Americans in program history

FULL RESULTS

149 - Wyatt Turnquist (25-4) placed 3rd and scored 15.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - #7 Wyatt Turnquist (NSU) 22-4 won by tech fall over Dallas Wilson (Mount Olive) 27-6 (TF 21-2 (3:56))

Quarterfinal - #2 Josiah Rider (Adams State) 25-3 won by decision over #7 Wyatt Turnquist (NSU) 22-4 (Dec 8-3)

Cons. Round 2 - #7 Wyatt Turnquist (NSU) 22-4 won by major decision over Jacob Simpson (West Liberty) 25-9 (MD 9-0)

Cons. Round 3 - #7 Wyatt Turnquist (NSU) 25-4 won by decision over #3 Nick Young (Gannon) 29-7 (Dec 8-6)

Cons. Semi - #7 Wyatt Turnquist (NSU) 25-4 won by decision over #1 Jacob Ealy (Pitt-Johnstown) 30-2 (Dec 8-4)

3rd Place Match - #7 Wyatt Turnquist (NSU) 25-4 won by decision over #6 Jalen Spuhler (Wis.-Parkside) 31-9 (Dec 10-5)

157 - Devin Bahr (8-6) place is unknown and scored 0.5 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - #6 Nathan Smith (Pitt-Johnstown) 22-4 won by decision over Devin Bahr (NSU) 8-6 (Dec 4-3)

Prelim Wrestle-back - Devin Bahr (NSU) 8-6 won in sudden victory - 1 over Eric Faught (Upper Iowa) 23-8 (SV-1 5-3)

Cons. Round 1 - #3 Gabe Johnson (Central Oklahoma) 32-6 won by decision over Devin Bahr (NSU) 8-6 (Dec 6-3)

197 - Cole Huss (15-7) placed 8th and scored 6.5 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - #5 Cole Huss (NSU) 15-5 won by fall over Bryce Walker (UNC Pembroke) 12-5 (Fall 7:26)

Quarterfinal - #4 Dominic Murphy (St. Cloud) 28-3 won in sudden victory - 1 over #5 Cole Huss (NSU) 15-5 (SV-1 3-1)

Cons. Round 2 - #5 Cole Huss (NSU) 15-5 won by decision over Anthony Yacovetti (Lander) 27-6 (Dec 8-2)

Cons. Round 3 - Matt Kaylor (Mary) 28-12 won by medical forfeit over #5 Cole Huss (NSU) 15-7 (M. For.)

7th Place Match - Kash Anderson (Colorado Mesa) 22-11 won by medical forfeit over #5 Cole Huss (NSU) 15-7 (M. For.)

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The Prismatic Sensations took first place in their division at Center Stage held at Aberdeen Central on Saturday. The last competition is next weekend in Mitchell.

(Photos by Jeslyn Kosel)



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THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE

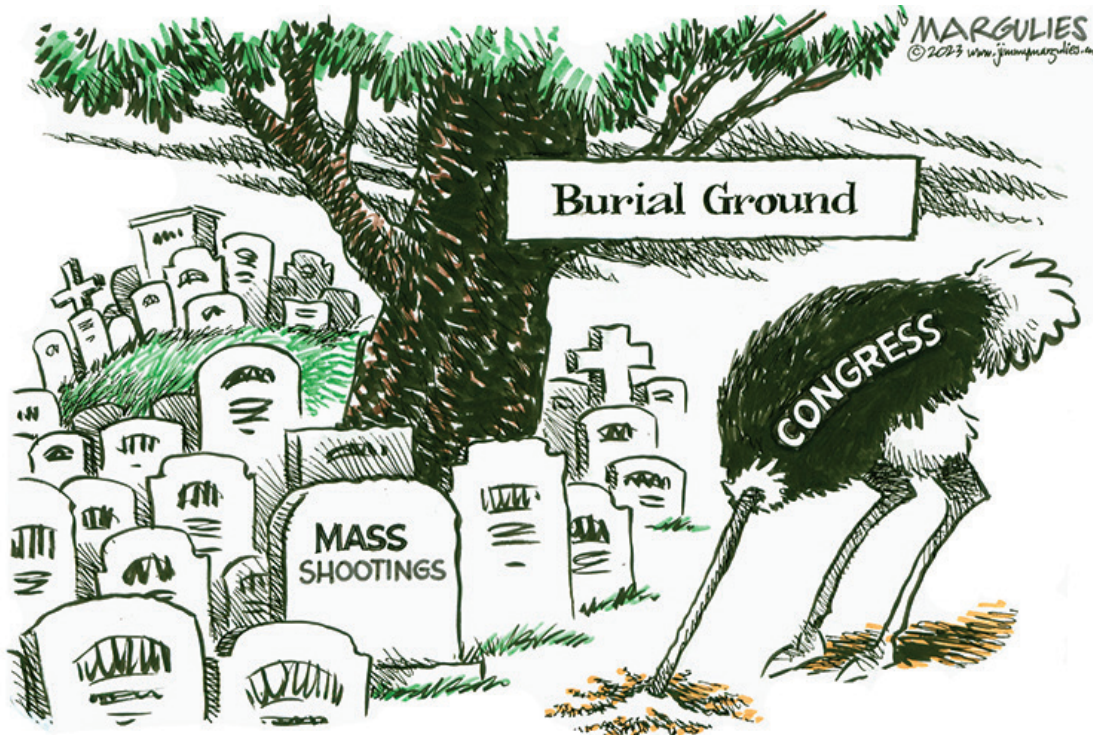
...A servant girl came to him, saying, "You also were with Jesus of Galilee." But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you are saying." ...Another girl saw him and said... "This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth." But again he denied with an oath, "I do not know the Man!" ...Those who stood by... said to Peter, "Surely you also are one of them..." Then he began to curse and swear, saying, "I do not know the Man!" Immediately a rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus... "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." So he went out and wept bitterly.

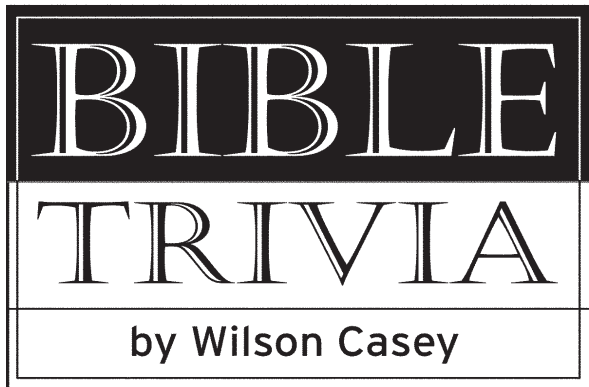
MATTHEW 26: 69-75

Detail of "A rooster"
by Pablo Picasso (1938)



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1. Is the book of Galatians (KJV) in the Old or New Testament or neither?

2. In how many verses is the specific name of Satan used in the Old Testament (KJV)? *0, 1, 15, 174*

3. From Genesis 36, which city was Esau's home base? *Petra, Tyre, Gilgal, Perga*

4. Which of these persons hid in a cave while God passed by? *Noah, Moses, Abraham, Jonah*

5. From Esther 5, who/what was Zeresh? *King of Persia, Mountain, Wife of Haman, River*

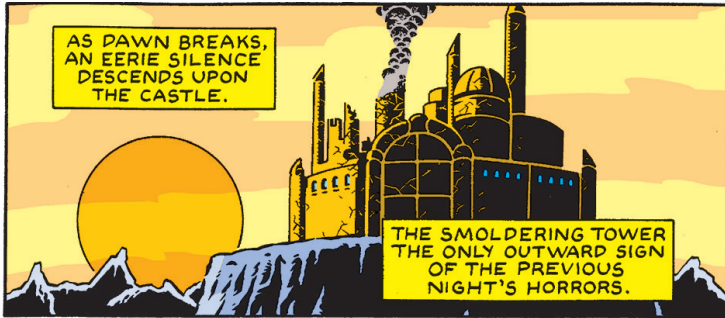
6. In 1 Peter, to what animal is Satan compared? *Serpent, Wolf, Rat, Lion*

ANSWERS: 1) New, 2) 15, 3) Petra, 4) Moses, 5) Wife of Haman, 6) Lion

Hardcore trivia fan? Visit Wilson Casey's subscriber site at www.patreon.com/triviaguy.

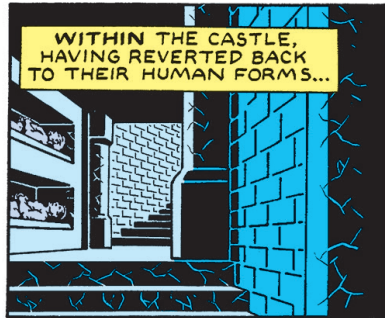
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AS DAWN BREAKS, AN EERIE SILENCE DESCENDS UPON THE CASTLE.

THE SMOLDERING TOWER THE ONLY OUTWARD SIGN OF THE PREVIOUS NIGHT'S HORRORS.



WITHIN THE CASTLE, HAVING REVERTED BACK TO THEIR HUMAN FORMS...

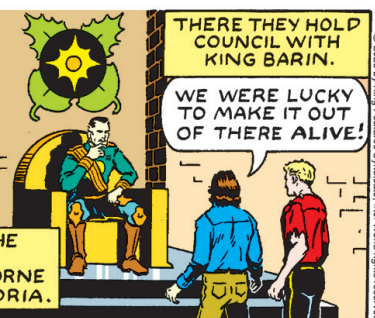


... THE INHABITANTS SLEEP DEEPLY.

FLASH GORDON

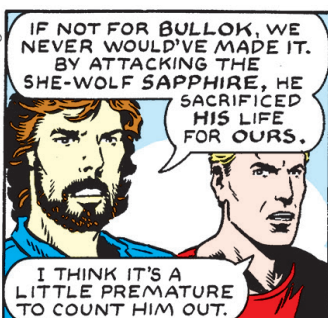
BY JIM KEEFE

AIRLIFTED FROM ATOP THE CASTLE OF THE NIGHT CREATURES, FLASH AND THORNE ARE TRANSPORTED TO ARBORIA.



THERE THEY HOLD COUNCIL WITH KING BARIN.

WE WERE LUCKY TO MAKE IT OUT OF THERE ALIVE!

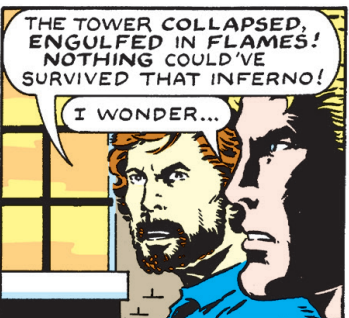


IF NOT FOR BULLOK, WE NEVER WOULD'VE MADE IT. BY ATTACKING THE SHE-WOLF SAPHIRE, HE SACRIFICED HIS LIFE FOR OURS.

I THINK IT'S A LITTLE PREMATURE TO COUNT HIM OUT.

WHO KNOWS HOW STRONG BULLOK HAD BECOME AFTER BEING TRANSFORMED INTO A WEREWOLF.

HE MAY STILL BE ALIVE!



THE TOWER COLLAPSED, ENGULFED IN FLAMES! NOTHING COULD'VE SURVIVED THAT INFERNO!

I WONDER...



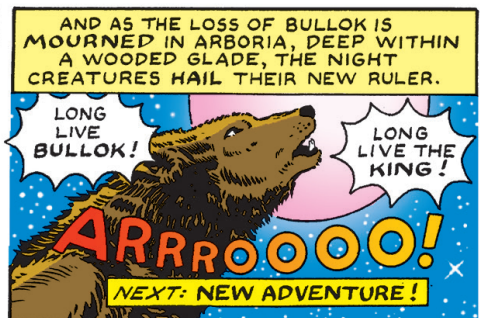
LATER THAT NIGHT, IN A DISTANT VALLEY...

TONIGHT WE OBSERVE OUR MOST SACRED RITE.

OUR QUEEN, SAPHIRE, IS DEAD, BESTED BY THE NEWCOMER.



TO THE VICTOR WE PROCLAIM OUR ALLEGIANCE!



AND AS THE LOSS OF BULLOK IS MOURNED IN ARBORIA, DEEP WITHIN A WOODED GLADE, THE NIGHT CREATURES HAIL THEIR NEW RULER.

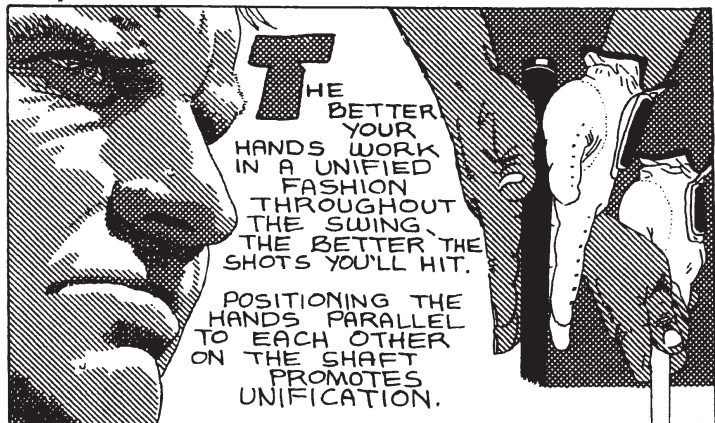
LONG LIVE BULLOK!

LONG LIVE THE KING!

ARRROOOO!

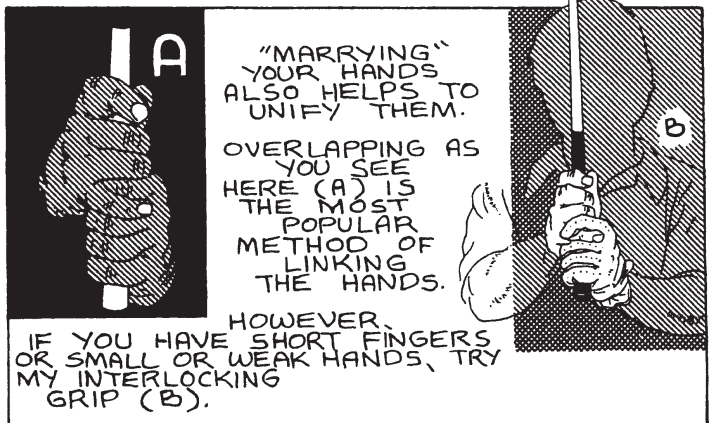
NEXT: NEW ADVENTURE!

Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS



THE BETTER YOUR HANDS WORK IN A UNIFIED FASHION THROUGHOUT THE SWING, THE BETTER THE SHOTS YOU'LL HIT.

POSITIONING THE HANDS PARALLEL TO EACH OTHER ON THE SHAFT PROMOTES UNIFICATION.



"MARRYING" YOUR HANDS ALSO HELPS TO UNIFY THEM.

OVERLAPPING AS YOU SEE HERE (A) IS THE MOST POPULAR METHOD OF LINKING THE HANDS.

HOWEVER, IF YOU HAVE SHORT FINGERS OR SMALL OR WEAK HANDS, TRY MY INTERLOCKING GRIP (B).

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NAC Supplement Helps Curb Cravings to Smoke

DEAR DR. ROACH: I'd like to have your thoughts on what value the NAC supplement may have in reducing cravings for marijuana or nicotine?

I'm 73 and have been smoking marijuana daily since I was 21. Now I'm quitting for health reasons. I've been taking 1,000 mg of NAC every morning, as I've read it helps with smoking cravings. It also seems to be used for anxiety and other mental health issues, lung and heart problems ... the list goes on.

I'm not going to smoke anymore, but I'm just wondering what your take is on this, as I'm thinking of sending it to my 38-year-old son who's been addicted to vaping/cigarettes since he was a young man. He has ADD, anxiety and problems with breath capacity, and he may have heart problems as well. He's smoking to relieve his ADD and anxiety. And, of course, he'd like to quit, but it's so hard to do so.

Can the NAC supplement help me with the urge to smoke? I think it has reduced the cravings, but how would I even know? — *M.M.*

ANSWER: N-acetyl cysteine, a precursor to the amino acid cysteine, has several roles in medicine, as you say. When inhaled, it breaks up mucous, which helps people cough out thick sputum. When used intravenously, it's a specific antidote to acetaminophen

these capacities for years and is safe and well-tolerated.

But, in addition, there is data that shows oral NAC (sold as a dietary supplement) may have a role in helping people overcome addictions to tobacco, with small trials showing a reduction in smoking as well as the relapse rate in people using NAC compared with a placebo.

In people who want to reduce their cannabis use, most of the data on NAC has been on younger people (adolescents and young adults), but also shows some benefit. More stringent trials are ongoing.

It is very difficult for a single person (patient or physician) to tell whether it's a "real" effect or a "placebo" effect that is causing the reduction in cravings. Only large-scale, placebo-controlled trials can show with confidence whether the treatment is more effective than a placebo. But, since the supplement is inexpensive and highly safe, and since a third-party lab found that the brands of NAC sold at reputable stores are what they say they are, I say it might be helpful.

However, there are many other products that are proven to be safe and effective to help with quitting smoking, ranging from group tobacco cessation classes, to nicotine replacement therapy, to prescription medications like varenicline and bupropion — all of which have many years of proven clinical efficacy.

Finally, there are a lot of people with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder who are not getting appropriate treatment as adults. Getting treatment by an expert in ADD might make quitting smoking easier and may also improve many other areas of functioning for your son.

Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu.

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"The 95th Academy Awards" (NR) -- Almost one year after that unforgettable slap heard 'round the world, the Oscars are back to honor this year's greatest film moments (this time with a crisis team in place, just in case anyone gets a bit too handsy). "Everything Everywhere All at Once" leads with 11 nominations, including the Best Picture category, followed by the films "All Quiet on the Western Front," "The Banshees of Inisherin" and "Elvis." Austin Butler, Colin Farrell and Brendan Fraser are in the running to bring

home Best Actor, while Cate Blanchett, Ana de Armas and Michelle Yeoh are in the running for Best Actress. The award ceremony, hosted by Jimmy Kimmell, is available to stream now. (Hulu)

"Extrapolations" (TV-MA) -- This new drama series tells the stories of several individuals over the span of 33 years, as they experience the life-altering effects of climate change on Earth from the years 2037 to 2070. As an anthology series, each episode will focus on different characters, but there will be the occasional interconnection between storylines, since each major event bounces off the previous one. The cast of "Extrapolations" is star-studded to say the least, with Kit Harington, Meryl Streep, Sienna Miller, Edward Norton, Diane Lane, David Schwimmer, Forest Whitaker, Marion Cotillard, Tobey Maguire and Yara Shahidi starring, among many others. The first three episodes release March 17. You don't want to miss it. (AppleTV+)

"House Party" (R) -- In this comedy film, a remake of the 1990 cult classic "House Party," two aspiring club promoters, Kevin and Damon, try to support themselves by working as house cleaners at a mansion. When the pair of friends realize that the owner of the mansion is LeBron James, they come up with the ingenious idea to host a party there, in order to gain access to James' celebrity contacts and earn a quick profit. What unfolds as the party gets underway is pure tomfoolery and leaves Kevin and Damon just as desperate as they started. Only grossing \$9 million, this film did receive negative reviews, but if you're looking for something entertaining to put on late at night, something filled with goofy humor and lots of celebrity cameos, why not give it a shot? (HBO Max)

"Swarm" (NR) -- The latest creation by Donald Glover ("Atlanta") is a new horror thriller series starring Dominique Fishback ("Judas and the Black Messiah"), Chloe Bailey from the musical duo Chloe x Halle, and internet personality Ricky Thompson. Fishback portrays a young woman named Dre, who has a dangerous obsession with a fictional pop star named Ni'jah. Dre's obsession with Ni'jah rules over her entire life, affecting her relationships and mental health, even how she speaks to others. Since she refuses to accept any slander against her beloved idol, Dre inches further and further down a rabbit hole, until it ultimately drives her to make insane and fatal choices. A bold critique on fan/stan culture, all seven episodes of "Swarm" premiere March 17. (Prime Video)



Tobey Maguire, left and Eiza Gonzalez star in "Extrapolations."

Courtesy of AppleTV+

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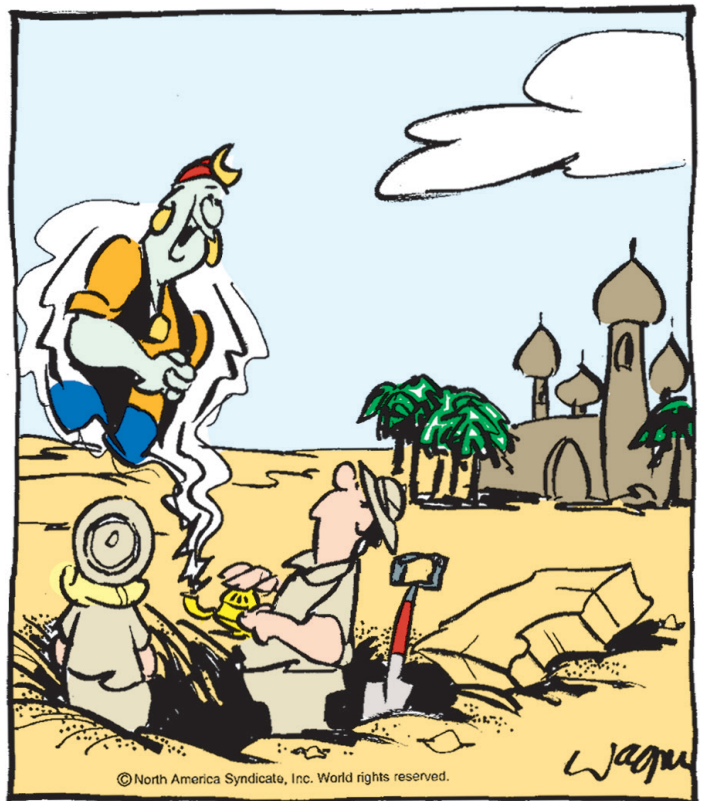
1. Name the debut album of Curiosity Killed the Cat.
2. Who was Tom Dooley (of Kingston Trio 1958 song fame) and what did he do?
3. Name the '50s artist who wrote and released "Island in the Sun."
4. How do you know if you're a Parrothead?
5. Name the song that contains these lyrics: "The scales are sometimes unbalanced, And you bear the weight of all that has to be."

Answers

1. "Keep Your Distance," released in 1987. The album topped the charts in the U.K., but the individual songs didn't do as well.
2. Tom Dula was a North Carolina soldier in the Civil War who'd killed his girlfriend. A politician lured Dula to his farm for work and Dula was captured and hanged.
3. Harry Belafonte, in 1957. The song was also used in the film by the same name, which was taken from the 1956 novel of the same name.
4. If you wear Hawaiian shirts and parrot hats to Jimmy Buffet concerts, you're a Parrothead.
5. "Giving You the Best That I Got," by Anita Baker in 1988. It got four nominations and netted two Grammy awards: Best R&B Song and Best Female R&B Vocal Performance.

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GRIN and BEAR IT *Wagner*



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"Who wants to be a millionaire?"

Just Like Cats & Dogs by Dave T. Phipps



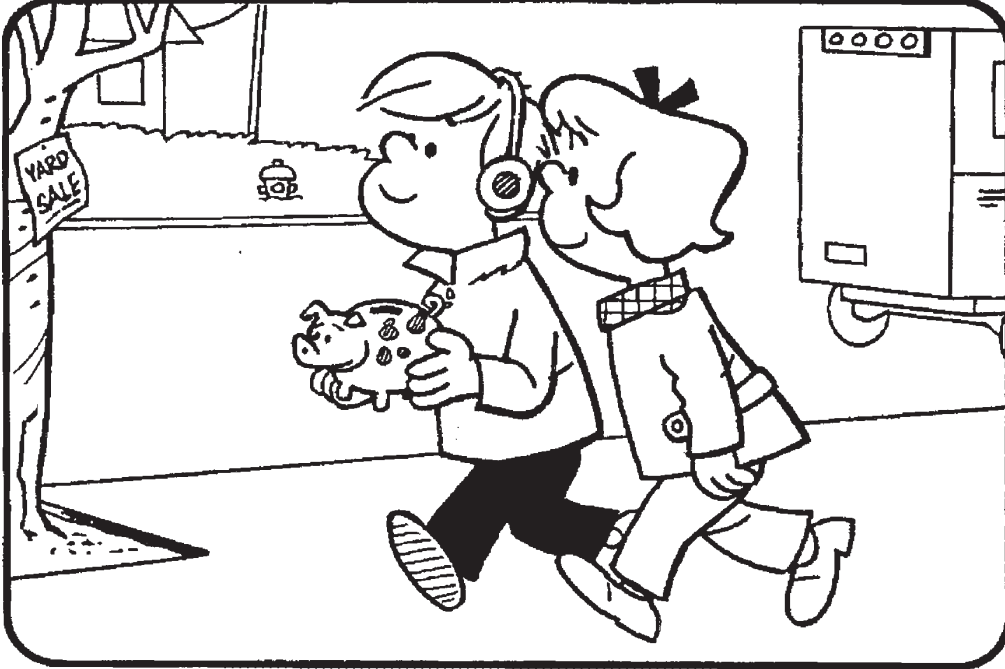
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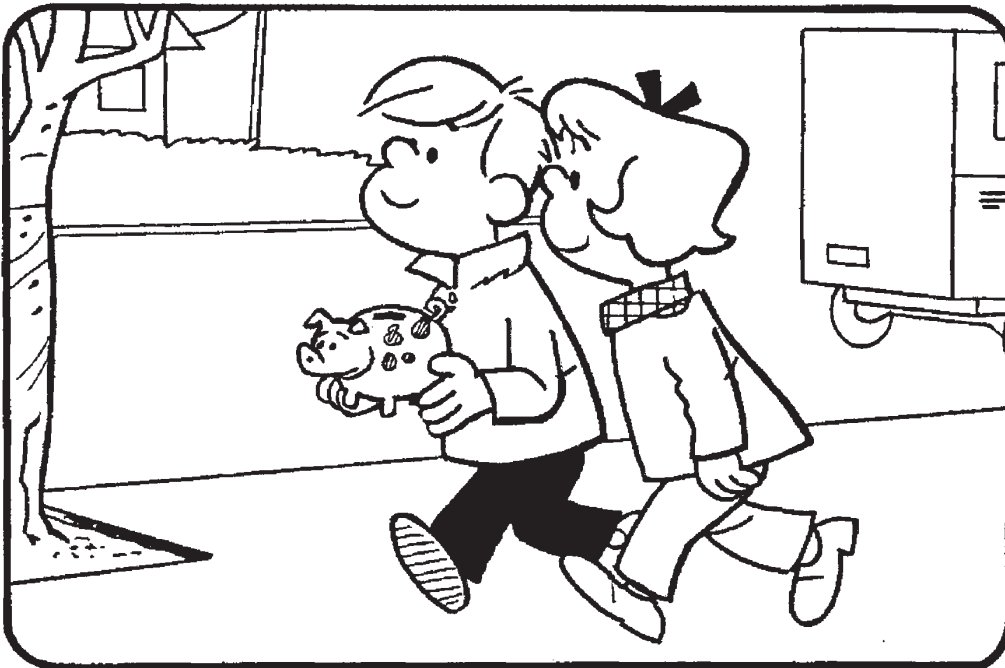
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HOCUS-FOCUS

BY
HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



Differences: 1. Poster is missing. 2. Fireplug is missing. 3. Arm is missing. 4. Headset is missing. 5. Belt is missing. 6. Light strip is missing.

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* Check your local newspaper or city/county government for programs that provide free or near free water barrels or trees. Many areas have a program, and they really do help keep your water costs down if you have flowers or vegetable gardens.

* To keep the edges of lettuce from browning, tear it or use a plastic knife sold just for this purpose. Metal will make the edges brown.

* "If you want same-size cookies, roll and freeze your dough for 10-15 minutes. Most doughs will harden enough to slice into perfectly uniform slices, and the freezing doesn't really affect cooking time too much. (Watch your first batch, though.)" -- R.L. in Missouri

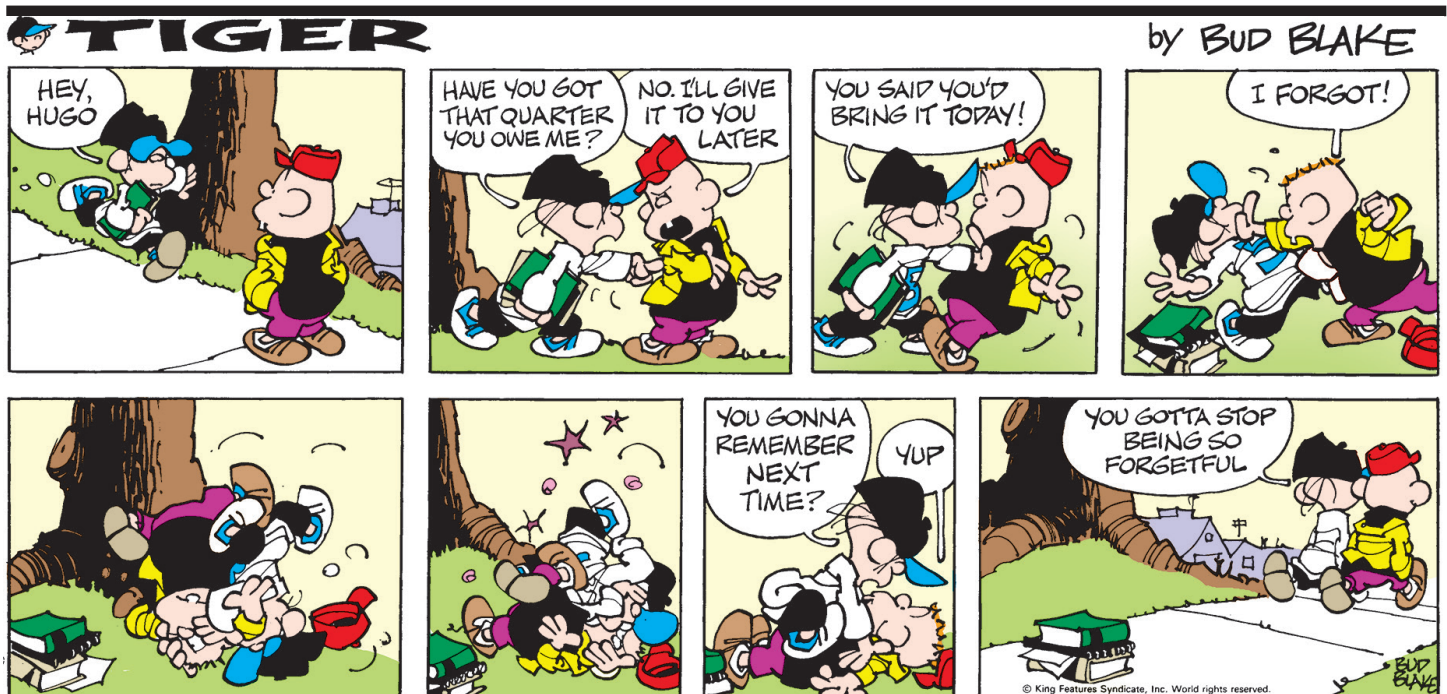
* If you are reattaching a button to shorts or pants, try using dental floss, the unwaxed kind. It's much stronger and can hold the button better than regular thread. Use a marker to darken it if the color is an issue.

* "Shaving cream can be used as a spot remover for many carpets. Use only a small amount, and follow up with a damp cloth." -- D.L. in New Brunswick, Canada

* "To prevent a skin from forming on the top of a can of leftover paint, you can inflate a balloon and stick it in the can, cut a piece of wax paper to fit or store the can inverted, so that the skin will form on the bottom and stay there when you flip it." -- W.B. in Alabama

Send your tips to Now Here's a Tip, 628 Virginia Drive, Orlando, FL 32803.

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King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Release money
- 5 Officer
- 8 Wife of Zeus
- 12 "Born Free" lioness
- 13 Billboards
- 14 Elliptical
- 15 Region of northern Italy
- 17 Breathing (Abbr.)
- 18 Start a round
- 19 Aviary noises
- 21 Irish actor Stephen
- 22 Visibility hindrance
- 23 Arced tennis shot
- 26 Like some humor
- 28 Avoids work
- 31 Gumbo or bisque, e.g.
- 33 Work unit
- 35 Minn. neighbor
- 36 Writer Lessing
- 38 Pouch
- 40 "Rah!"
- 41 Metric measure
- 43 — Alamos
- 45 Big lizard
- 47 Of the lower back
- 51 Gasp for air

1	2	3	4		5	6	7		8	9	10	11	
12					13				14				
15				16					17				
18								19	20				
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23	24	25		26		27		28			29	30	
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		41			42		43		44				
45	46							47			48	49	50
51					52	53							
54					55				56				
57					58				59				

- 52 Show hosted by Alex Trebek
- 54 Shoppe description
- 55 "Alley —"
- 56 Faction
- 57 Calendar squares
- 58 ICU workers
- 59 Pianist Myra
- 6 Quirky
- 7 Intimidate, with "out"
- 8 Where earth meets sky
- 9 Battery brand
- 10 Grate
- 11 Swiss peaks
- 16 Not many
- 20 Actor Holbrook
- 23 "Acid"
- 24 Tic-tac-toe win
- 25 French red wine
- 27 Decade parts (Abbr.)
- 29 Air safety org.
- 30 Firmament
- 32 Pittsburgh team
- 34 Runs like a horse
- 37 — Salvador
- 39 Brilliant stroke
- 42 College study
- 44 Big hit
- 45 Apple product
- 46 Big bash
- 48 Party cheese
- 49 Tosses in
- 50 Deli loaves
- 53 Long time

DOWN

- 1 Karate level
- 2 Skin soother
- 3 "Woe —!"
- 4 Hard work
- 5 Commuter's cash-on-hand

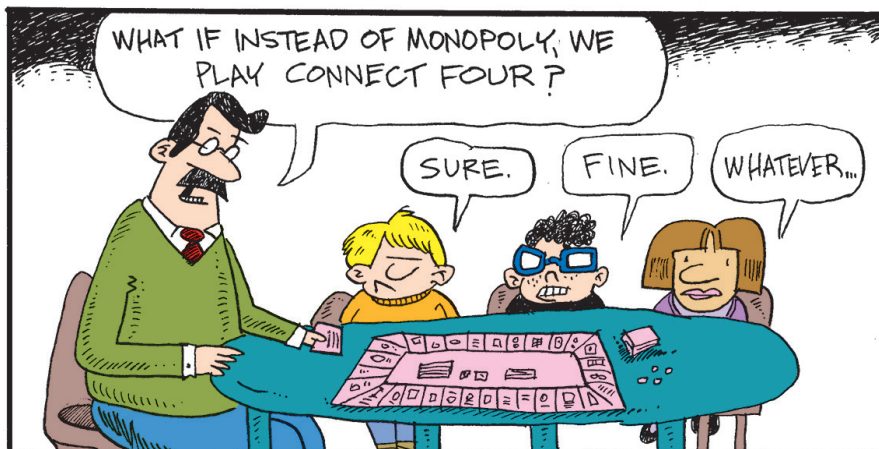
— King Crossword —

Answers

Solution time: 24 mins.

B	A	I	L		C	O	P		H	E	R	A
E	L	S	A		A	D	S		O	V	A	L
L	O	M	B	A	R	D	Y		R	E	S	P
T	E	E	O	F	F		C	H	I	R	P	S
			R	E	A		H	A	Z	E		
L	O	B		W	R	Y		L	O	A	F	S
S	O	U	P		E	R	G		N	D	A	K
D	O	R	I	S		S	A	C		Y	A	Y
		G	R	A	M		L	O	S			
I	G	U	A	N	A		L	U	M	B	A	R
P	A	N	T		J	E	O	P	A	R	D	Y
O	L	D	E		O	O	P		S	I	D	E
D	A	Y	S		R	N	S		H	E	S	S

Out on a Limb



by Gary Kopervas



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THIMBLE THEATRE PRESENTS
POPEYE
 BY RANDY MILHOLLAND

OLIVE, DO YOU WANNA BORROW SOMETHING GREEN FOR ST. PATRICK'S DAY?

I KNOW HOW MAD YOU GET WHEN PEOPLE TRY TO PINCH YOU.

NAW, I GOT IT COVERED!

YOU'RE S'POSED TO WEAR SOMETHING GREEN, NOT CARRY IT.

THAT'S WHAT THE SHEATH IS FOR!

C'MON, BRUTUS! WE'RE CATCHIN' A LEPRECHAUN!

YOU CANT SAY STUFF LIKE THAT AND STILL MAKE FUN OF ME.

I HEARD POPEYE SAY HE'S GOT ONE CORNERED!

HE REALLY SAID IT WAS A LEPRECHAUN?

WELL, HE CALLED IT A "LEPPARD-CON," BUT YOU KNOW HOW HE TALKS.

THERE'S THE RUNT, ABOUT TO CLAIM MY LEPRECHAUN GOLD!

IT'S DEFINITELY IN THERE. NOW HOW DOES I GITSK IT OUT?

YOU DONT! I DO!

YA DONTSK WANNA DO THIS.

GIMME YER GOLD YA—

OH, "LEOPARD-CON," NOW I GET IT.

WHEN DO YOU GET YOUR GOLD?

BRUTUS, IF YOU WERE ANYMORE WITLESS, YOU'D BE ONE OF YOUR BROTHER'S SCHEMES.

BARNEY GOOGLE AND
SNUFFY SMITH

THEY TOLD ME IT'S TOO OLD TO GIT AN EXTENDED WARRANTY !!

AN' I SHOULD GIT IT SOME FUNERAL INSHORANCE INSTEAD !!

CHUGGA-CHUGGA-WHEEZE-CHUGGA

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JOHN ROSE

CHUGGA-CHUGGA-WHEEZE-CHUGGA

zoom!!

comickingdom.com/barney-google-and-snuffy-smith

CHUGGA-CHUGGA-WHEEZE-CHUGGA

zoom!!

3-20

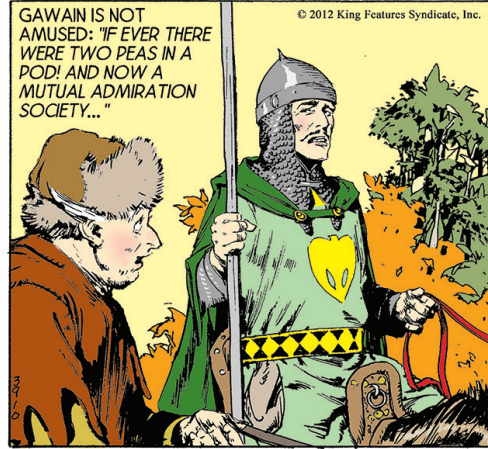
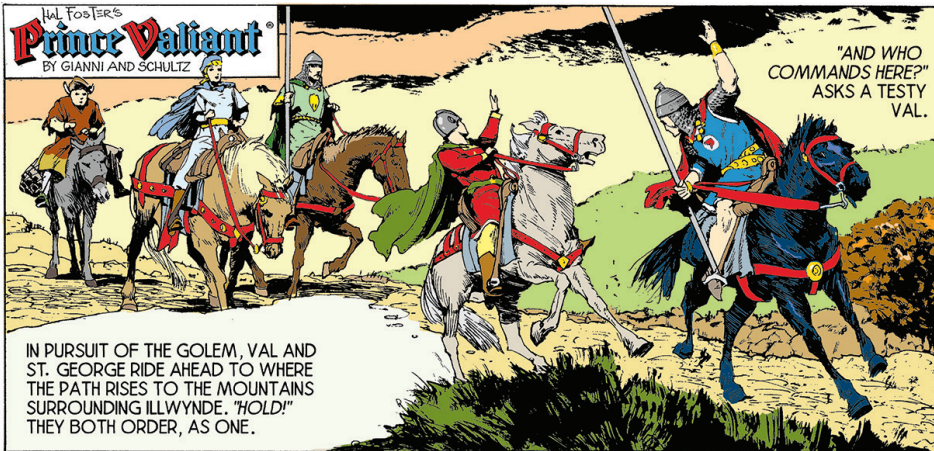
I REEALLY GOTTA GIT A TUNEUP !!

CHUGGA-CHUGGA-WHEEZE-CHUGGA

zoom!!

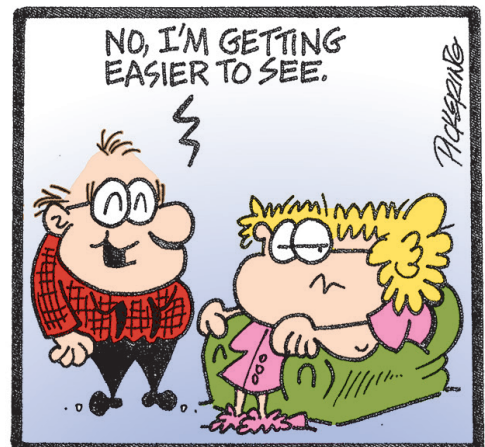
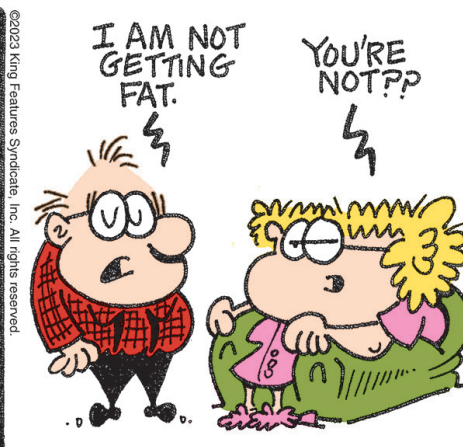
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The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



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PICKERING

SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

The Covid Numbers

How does it feel when you're the only one in the whole grocery store who's wearing a mask? Or when you get three phone calls from the senior center asking if you're interested in signing up for the monthly ladies lunch, after you've already said no?

Do you feel tempted to explain to the young person who gives you the eye in the dairy aisle? Or worse, apologize to the senior center staffer who no doubt voted to dispense with all masks months ago?

Don't. Don't explain. Don't apologize. Just keep doing what you've been doing for three years now, which is taking care of yourself as best you can.

Depending what source you read, you might be tempted to believe that Covid is no longer a problem, that it's safe to go to lunches where everyone is sitting inches from each other, that it's perfectly fine to go without the mask in stores.

However, if you look at graphs and charts and follow the progress of Covid, you'll see that it's still very much among us. Data taken from The New York Times Covid stats indicates that for a two-week period in February, there were in excess of a half million positive Covid cases in the U.S.

Individual states are doing better or worse than the average. In my state, the 14-day change has gone up 50%, and we're not even in first place.

Those positive Covid numbers are from people who were tested at a facility that reports their statistics. How many millions of people are using those at-home test kits and never see the inside of a doctor's office and therefore don't have their results reported?

TITLE: None of us has a crystal ball to see when Covid might leave us for good. While it's still here, take care of yourself. And yes, keep washing your hands.

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1. What NFL team was George Seifert head coach of following his eight-season tenure with the San Francisco 49ers?

2. Barber Motorsports Park is a racetrack located in what U.S. city?

3. What member of the Chicago Bulls was suspended for 11 games without pay for kicking cameraman Eugene Amos Jr. in 1997?

4. Who succeeded Bryan Murray as head coach of the NHL's Washington Capitals when he was fired midway through the 1989-90 season?

5. Who had more career home runs in Major League Baseball: Cecil Fielder or his son, Prince?

6. What full-contact, intercollegiate version of football requires that all players weigh 178 pounds or less?

7. Who scored the final penalty versus France to clinch the 2022 FIFA World Cup championship for Argentina?



by Ryan A. Berenz

Answers

1. The Carolina Panthers (1999-2001).

2. Birmingham, Alabama.

3. Dennis Rodman.

4. His brother, Terry Murray.

5. Neither: They tied with 319.

6. Sprint Football.

7. Gonzalo Montiel.

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Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps





In Cats, Ear Infection Can Have Subtle Symptoms

DEAR PAW'S CORNER: My cat Chester seemed perfectly healthy, but when I brought him in for his annual checkup, the veterinarian said that he has an ear infection. I didn't notice any behavior or odd symptoms previously. I gave Chester the expensive eardrops he was prescribed, and he seems just fine. Was the vet just making up the infection? -- Jeanine C., Buffalo, New York

DEAR JEANINE: Cats are really good at hiding the symptoms of an illness. I'm glad you brought Chester in for his regular checkup, because those are very

helpful in determining hidden acute problems like an ear infection, and noting potential problems (for example, if his weight is getting higher than normal, or he's developing arthritis).

Now that Chester has been treated, keep an eye out for signs of the infection recurring. Look, listen and smell (yes, smell!) around his ears periodically and note certain behaviors. Hold Chester on your lap and shine a little flashlight into each ear.

A healthy ear is pale pink, with little to no earwax visible and no debris.

Trouble signs include: A strong odor from the ear; lots of earwax buildup; debris or discharge that looks like coffee grounds; or discharge that is yellow or black. You (or the vet) may see redness or swelling of the ear flap or in the ear canal.

Ear infections cause behavioral changes, too. Some of them are subtle: Chester may shake his head after you scratch around his ears, or he may tilt his head more in one direction than another. More serious symptoms include loss of balance, disorientation, hearing loss or even facial paralysis.

Send your tips, comments or questions to ask@pawscorner.com.

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Strange BUT TRUE

By Lucie Winborne

* What's in a gut bacterium? Possibly more than you might expect: Studies have shown that the types and amounts of such bacteria might influence your appetite, your food preferences and even the way nutrients are processed and stored in your body.

* While fish can cough, they don't sneeze.

* Michael Jordan was nicknamed "Magic" in high school after Los Angeles Lakers icon Magic Johnson.

* In June 2022, the New York Public Library donated half a million books to kids under 18 so they could start their own personal book collections. Collecting

and reading books has been found beneficial to learning, stress relief and even future success.

* And speaking of libraries, they're not always just for books: The Buffalo Tool Library in Buffalo, New York, allows members to take out tools for home improvement, gardening and repair projects.

* Provincial law in Quebec prohibits a woman from taking her husband's surname after marriage.

* Actor Morgan Freeman, after serving in the U.S. Air Force, got his first paid job in show business as a dancer at the 1964 World's Fair.

* After having a double mastectomy in her senior years, the ever-outspoken Alice Lee Roosevelt Longworth, eldest child of President Theodore Roosevelt, took to referring to herself as "Washington's only topless octogenarian."

* Dolbear's Law, which states the connection between air temperature and the rate at which crickets chirp, is accurate to within about one degree Fahrenheit for the field cricket.

* The Chinese video sharing and streaming site Bilibili used 1,500 drones to create a light show celebrating the first anniversary of the release of mobile game Princess Connect! Re:Dive, which was followed by a huge QR code to download the game.

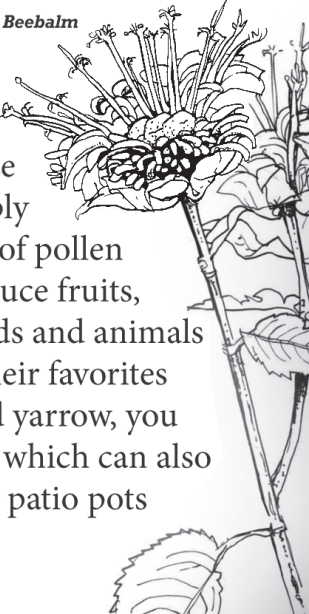
Thought for the Day: "A champion is afraid of losing. Everyone else is afraid of winning." -- Billie Jean King
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The Garden Bug

Attracting pollinators

Plants provide food, stabilize our soils, clean our air, supply oxygen and support wildlife. The transfer of pollen must occur for plants to fertilize and produce fruits, seeds and young plants. Many insects, birds and animals transfer pollen as they feed; by growing their favorites such as beebalm, marigolds, pyweed, and yarrow, you can attract many pollinators to your yard, which can also benefit your fruit trees, vegetable gardens, patio pots and flowering vines. - Brenda Weaver

Sources: homeguides.sfgate.com, www.nps.gov



Beebalm



by Freddy Groves

VA Cemetery Association Ranks High

On the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) the Department of Veterans Affairs' National Cemetery Association was given the highest score ever received by any goods and services organization that ACSI covers. And not for the first time. This recent rating marks the seventh time in a row that the cemetery association has come in first in a survey covering over 400 U.S. corporations providing everything from utilities, health care and insurance to

restaurants, travel and manufacturing ... and cemetery services.

That's saying a lot. Given the nature of cemeteries in general and what they provide, for a cemetery association to be listed at the top of satisfaction surveys so many times is amazing, because there are many possible areas for unhappiness.

The VA's National Cemetery Administration provides services to the families of veterans at 121 locations. These services include burial, headstones and markers, medallions, military honors and more. In one year alone, last year, the NCA buried over 145,000 veterans and family members.

To determine if a veteran is eligible for VA burial benefits, go to www.cem.va.gov. Look for information on types of discharge, applying for a burial allowance and services provided.

If you've lost a veteran, are you familiar with the Veterans Legacy Memorial? It's a digital platform with over 4.5 million veterans listed where friends and families can post biographies, documents and photos of their veteran. Each individual bio includes branch of service, dates of birth and death, war period, rank and more. The profiles can also be emailed and posted to Facebook and Twitter. (Unfortunately, Arlington National Cemetery is not included in this memorial.) To find the memorial, go to www.vlm.cem.va.gov.

If you are a veteran who might be eligible for burial in a national cemetery, consider planning in advance. Search for "Pre-need eligibility" on the www.cem.va.gov website.

An amusing note: While the NCA received a satisfaction score of 97%, the overall rate for all government agencies was 66%. The Department of the Treasury, of course, came in last.

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Wishing Well®

5	8	2	4	3	6	7	5	7	4	8	7	8
Y	E	K	Y	B	D	B	O	I	O	X	G	P
5	3	6	7	5	6	7	8	4	5	3	8	4
U	U	E	G	B	E	E	E	U	E	S	C	W
8	7	6	2	8	6	4	6	5	7	6	5	8
T	R	P	E	A	E	I	N	A	P	E	T	T
2	6	7	6	2	5	7	2	5	4	3	5	7
E	D	A	D	P	T	Y	P	H	L	Y	E	C
4	2	4	7	3	8	2	6	8	4	7	8	5
L	R	E	H	D	I	O	E	O	X	E	N	O
7	3	8	2	8	2	8	2	6	8	5	6	3
C	A	S	M	G	I	R	S	S	O	D	I	Y
2	3	4	8	4	2	7	5	6	5	6	4	6
E	S	C	W	E	S	K	D	R	S	E	L	S

HERE IS A PLEASANT LITTLE GAME that will give you a message every day. It's a numerical puzzle designed to spell out your fortune. Count the letters in your first name. If the number of letters is 6 or more, subtract 4. If the number is less than 6, add 3. The result is your key number. Start at the upper left-hand corner and check one of your key numbers, left to right. Then read the message the letters under the checked figures give you.

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1. MOVIES: What is the name of Scarlett and Rhett's daughter in "Gone with the Wind"?
2. GEOGRAPHY: What body of water lies between Australia and New Zealand?
3. TELEVISION: Eric Camden is a minister on which TV dramedy?
4. CHEMISTRY: Which element has the Latin name stannum (Sn)?
5. LITERATURE: Which book is first written in C.S. Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia series?
6. GENERAL KNOWLEDGE: What is the name of the bird logo on Twitter?
7. ANIMAL KINGDOM: How long does it take a sloth to digest food?
8. PSYCHOLOGY: What is the irrational fear represented by coulrophobia?
9. MYTHOLOGY: Which Greek god stared at his own reflection until he died?
10. INVENTIONS: What did Alessandro Volta invent?

Answers

1. Bonnie Blue Butler.
2. Tasman Sea.
3. "7th Heaven."
4. Tin.
5. "The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe."
6. Larry.
7. An average of 16 days, and up to 30 days.
8. Fear of clowns.
9. Narcissus.
10. The electric battery.

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South Dakota Governor

Kristi Noem



South Dakota: *Under God, the People Rule*

For the People

There's a perception that South Dakota's future is charted in Pierre. That's where big decisions get made; where Governors have taken historic actions; where legislators go every winter to represent the people and vote. But that perception misses our state's foundational principle, our beautiful slogan: "Under God, the People Rule." As elected leaders, when we make those decisions and cast those votes, we must do it on behalf of the people.

The wonderful men and women across the state of South Dakota are the ones who actually chart our future. They each take actions every day for the sake of their family, their small business, or their community. They get up, drive the kids to school, go to work, buy their groceries, put food on the table, and lay their heads down at night. And in the process, they are each individually building the greatest state in America.

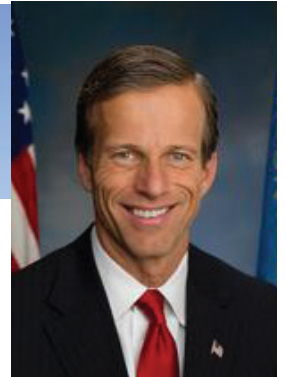
When I make decisions, I don't pretend to be smarter or wiser than our people. I don't see myself as making decisions that they cannot. Instead, my job is to make it easier for South Dakotans to make decisions for themselves. As elected leaders, we must create a level playing field that provides Freedom and Opportunity for each and every South Dakotan. And every winter in Pierre, one of the most important decisions we make is how we will lay out the state's budget.

When we pass that budget, we have to deliver on our responsibilities to take care of people. But we must also have respect for money that does not belong to us. It belongs to the people. When opportunity comes to return some of that money to the people, we should do so. When the option presents itself to spend less of the people's money, we should pursue that option, too. After all, the people know better than we do what their own needs are. They understand how best their own money can be spent to take care of their loved-ones and their communities.

This year, some elected leaders in Pierre made different decisions. They chose to spend more of the people's money than I recommended, including on new programs. And they decided to deliver a temporary tax holiday to the people, rather than a permanent tax cut. I still believe that the best budget option for our state's future is the one that I presented in December, including the elimination of the sales tax on groceries. And in the coming weeks, I will have to decide whether the budget that has been presented to me is worthy of my signature.

In making that decision, I will be weighing what is best for our people. This decision is not about me, and it's not about the elected representatives in Pierre. It's about the folks who we serve, the folks who rule: the people of the great state of South Dakota.

John Thune
U.S. SENATOR - SOUTH DAKOTA



Agriculture Keeps Moving into the Future

Agriculture may well be among the world's oldest ways of life, but it's never been stagnant. Farmers and ranchers have always sought new and better ways to grow more and use less, and innovative practices, more resilient crops, and new technologies have helped make it possible. Today, data, advanced technology, and connectivity are helping our agricultural producers feed America and the world.

Before adopting a new conservation or production practice, farmers and ranchers want to be sure it's effective. Access to reliable data would help agricultural producers determine whether a certain practice is right for them. Although the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) collects a lot of data, little has been done to analyze and organize it so it's useful to producers. To address this issue, I introduced the Agriculture Innovation Act to improve USDA's secure and confidential data collection procedures. My bill would make it easier for farmers, ranchers, and trusted researchers to use this data to assess the impact of various conservation and production practices so producers can make an informed decision about the right option for their farm or ranch.

While the macro-level data that USDA collects can provide valuable insight, many farmers and ranchers are already looking to the next frontier: collecting real-time, micro-level data from their own fields. Precision agriculture technology puts real-time information about land and livestock at a farmer's fingertips – whether it's soil, plant, or livestock health, input needs, or field maps. It represents a quantum leap for farmers and ranchers, enabling greater efficiency, increased profitability, and broader use of conservation practices that will keep farm land productive for generations to come.

There's more work that needs to be done for Americans to be able to reap the full benefit of precision agriculture. I recently introduced the Promoting Precision Agriculture Act to help facilitate widespread adoption of this technology. My bill establishes a partnership between government and the private sector to develop voluntary, consensus-based, interconnectivity standards and to prioritize the cybersecurity needs for these technologies. These standards will help enhance uptake of precision agriculture technologies and ensure reliability, usability, and security for producers and their data.

I'm also continuing to work to connect unserved areas to reliable broadband because without a reliable internet connection, precision agriculture just doesn't work. We've made a good deal of progress, but we still have a lot to do. My priority is ensuring federal broadband funding goes toward expanding access to areas that currently lack it. I've introduced legislation to streamline USDA's broadband authorities and direct funding to areas that are truly unserved. And, last year, I launched a nationwide broadband oversight initiative to ensure \$79 billion in recent federal broadband funding actually delivers broadband to Americans who need it the most.

Agriculture is the lifeblood of South Dakota and anything we can do to make agriculture more efficient and more productive is not only good for our nation's food supply, it's good for South Dakota farmers and ranchers, and their families. Better data, precision agriculture, and reliable connectivity are among the advancements that will define the next era in agriculture. I'll continue to work hard to ensure South Dakota farmers and ranchers have the resources they need to keep agriculture moving forward.

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CONGRESSMAN

DUSTY JOHNSON

Representing **SOUTH DAKOTA** at large



Why a Republican Majority Matters

We are three months into the Republican House majority, and House Republicans are fulfilling promises we made to the American people. We have seen win after win, pushing back on the far-left agenda and blocking unnecessary, unchecked spending.

Here are a few of our wins so far:

We started with opening the People's House. The Capitol and House Office Buildings had been closed to the public for nearly three years. Once again, constituents can come talk to their Representatives in person and watch the business happening on the House Floor from the Galleries.

One priority of House Republicans is keeping America safe. We established the Select Committee on the Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) which has already begun important work analyzing the threat posed to America's national security by the CCP. We also addressed rising crime rates and successfully reversed the D.C. Council's bill to ease penalties for violent crimes like carjacking. After House Republicans voted to reverse the soft-on-crime D.C. proposal in the House, the Biden Administration back-tracked on previous comments and agreed they had no choice but to pass our bill given the drastic crime increase in our nation's capital. This marks the first time in 30 years that Congress has rolled back a D.C. regulation.

Restoring energy security and increasing domestic production has been top-of-mind the past couple of years due to President Biden's policies that severely limit domestic energy production and increased energy prices. We've passed bills to prevent any Strategic Petroleum Reserve oil sales to China and the CCP, and require President Biden to put forward a plan to increase our domestic energy production should he conduct a non-emergency drawdown of the SPR.

President Biden's policies stretch the letter of the law, which we have seen in his policies to allow retirement savings managers to make financial decisions on the basis of climate change and social justice standards. House Republicans passed a bill to block this rule. We also passed a bill to block the President's Waters of the United States (WOTUS) overly burdensome rule which allows the Environmental Protection Agency to regulate the waters of streams, small creeks, and puddles.

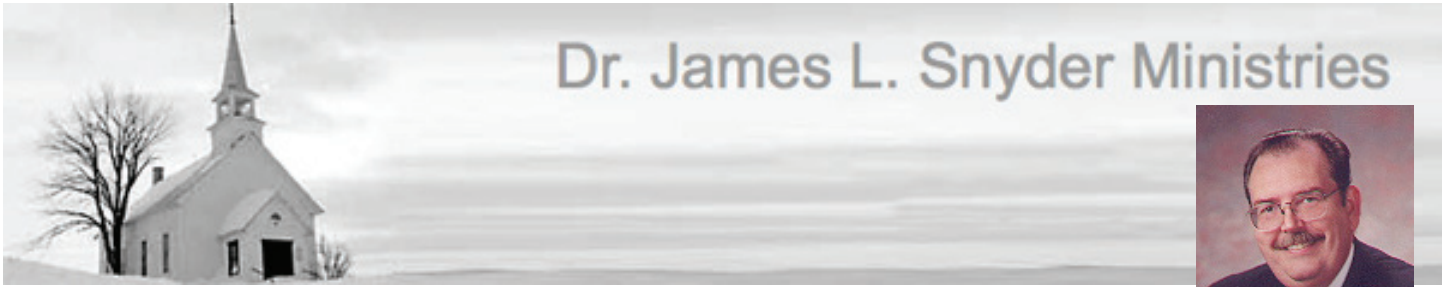
President Biden continued to extend the COVID-19 national emergency for months after he stated, "the pandemic is over." Several bills have been passed to end the national emergency declarations, end COVID-19 vaccine mandates, and make sure Americans are getting back to work.

The House Republican majority is an important check to fighting inflation. We passed the REIN IN Inflation Act and our voting block will work hard to prevent President Biden's reckless spending from continuing.

The House Republican majority is righting the ship and pushing government to do what it should always strive to do: work for the American people.

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Dr. James L. Snyder Ministries



Nothing Like A Mystery To Calm My Nerves

Nothing calms me down more than a mystery when I have a busy week.

The other afternoon I got caught up and faced some rather stressful situations. The remedy to all of this would be to watch one of those mystery movies.

One was playing that afternoon, so I decided to rearrange my schedule, enjoy the afternoon watching that mystery movie with a nice hot cup of coffee, and maybe adding an Apple Fritter to it makes it even more restful.

As I began watching this mystery, the first part is always the murder. So who was it that committed this murder? That is the detective's job to find out the murderer.

As these mystery movies begin, I like to guess who the real murderer is. I am usually wrong but don't tell anybody, especially The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage.

Getting involved in the story, the detectives brought in one suspect they believed committed the crime.

I was getting involved when I heard someone walk into the living room; it was The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage. She looked at the TV, then back at me and said very firmly, "He is not the murderer. The wife is the one who murdered her husband."

Then she turned around and returned to her kitchen work.

I chuckled a little because how would she know who the murderer was at this point in the movie?

Watching this, the detectives finally concluded that the subject they were interviewing was not the one who did the murder.

Then they came up with another suspect, and as they were interviewing him, a head popped into the living room; it was The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage. "He's not the guilty one; the wife killed her husband; trust me on this."

Of course, if anybody knows what wives are capable of, it would be her.

I knew she was wrong about the wife killing her husband. They had interviewed this wife, who had a good alibi; the detectives crossed her off the suspect list.

They brought in several more suspects, and they were all cleared as far as the crime. Finally, they got to the place where no other suspects were in view.

Suddenly, someone appeared as a suspect that they did not see before.

That's the way a good mystery goes. The one they had seemed like a very good prospect. He had no credible alibi at the time of the murder.

The more they interviewed him, the more it seemed like he was the murderer.

Watching it, I began to agree that they finally got their murderer. All they had to do was collect the evidence needed to convict him.

Just then, a head popped into the living room. "He did not do the killing," she said very emphatically. "As I said before, the wife killed her husband."

I did not know how she came up with that because she was working in the kitchen, and I was watching the television. So how could she know things about the mystery I didn't know?

"You're wrong," I said to her, "all the evidence points to this one they just arrested. No other person has his evidence."

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She poked her head back in, and I said, "The wife is not in the picture right now. She could not have done the crime."

With one of her smiles, she replied, "Trust me. The wife did it. If I'm right, I'll bet you lunch at my favorite restaurant tomorrow."

Could I pass up something like that? All the evidence pointed to that person, and none to the wife.

"I will take you up on that bet, and I can't wait to have lunch at my favorite restaurant tomorrow."

Walking back into the kitchen, I could hear her chuckling. I had never known her to be wrong like this, and I was preparing myself for a grand celebration at my favorite restaurant tomorrow for lunch. This will be the first time I have ever won a bet against her. I must jot this down and record it because it may never happen again.

Returning to the mystery movie, suddenly, everything began to change. The man they thought did the crime had an airtight alibi, then the unthinkable happened.

The wife's alibi began to break down as the detectives re-examined the evidence; they saw it differently, to their surprise.

As it turned out, all the evidence revealed the wife killed her husband, and she was the murderer.

I heard some chuckling from the kitchen area and wasn't going to ask what was happening. I knew exactly what was going on.

At lunch, the next day, all The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage could do was smile as she read through the menu and placed her order with the waitress.

I've never known her to order so much for lunch.

Driving home from the restaurant, I happen to think of a verse of Scripture found in Matthew 11:28-30. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

If I want real rest from my labors, it will only come from my relationship with Jesus Christ. Nothing can compromise that rest.

EARTHTALK ™

Dear EarthTalk: What's new with the de-extinction movement that's trying to bring back extinct wildlife species?
-- P.L., Danbury, CT

De-extinction, the concept of resurrecting extinct species, has long been a topic of debate among scientists and the general public. In recent years, scientific advances have made it more feasible to bring back extinct species, leading to a renewed interest in doing so. The non-profit Revive & Restore was created in 2012 by Stewart Brand (founder of the Whole Earth Catalog) and Ryan Phelan to help usher in a new age of conservation based on the implementation of de-extinction strategies.

One of the most significant developments has been the successful cloning of extinct species, such as the Pyrenean ibex and the bucardo, both wild goat species. In 2009, scientists successfully cloned a Pyrenean ibex, but the newborn goat died shortly after birth due to respiratory failure. In 2021, researchers successfully cloned a black-footed ferret, an endangered species that was declared extinct in 1979. The cloned ferret, named Elizabeth Ann, was born in a lab and has since been released into the wild to help boost the population of the species.

Another development has been the use of genetic engineering to recreate extinct species. Scientists can extract DNA from fossils, museum specimens or frozen tissue samples and use it to create an embryo of the extinct species. In 2013, scientists successfully created a hybrid elephant-mammoth embryo using DNA from a woolly mammoth and an Asian elephant. The embryo was not brought to term, but the research demonstrates the possibility of using genetic engineering to create extinct species.

The de-extinction movement is not without its critics, however. Many argue that the focus on de-extinction takes resources and attention away from conservation efforts aimed at protecting and preserving endangered species. Others worry about the ecological implications of reintroducing extinct species to the environment. The ecosystem may have changed since the species went extinct, and reintroducing them could have unintended consequences, such as disrupting existing relationships between organisms and the environment or spreading disease.

Despite these concerns, the de-extinction movement continues to move forward. The for-profit Colossal Biosciences has raised \$225 million over four rounds of venture capital investment to fund its efforts to bring back Dodo birds, Tasmanian tigers and woolly mammoths, among other extinct species, using genetic engineering. In the case of the mammoth, the company is working on the creation of an elephant-mammoth hybrid embryo that could be carried to term by an elephant surrogate. The researchers hope to release these Frankenstein mammoths into the wild in the Arctic tundra, where they would help restore the ecosystem by grazing on the grasslands and helping to prevent permafrost from melting.

There are many challenges that must be overcome before extinct species can be successfully brought back. In numbers. However, advances in genetic engineering and cloning technologies have made it increasingly feasible to resurrect extinct species, and the possibility of bringing back species such as the woolly mammoth has captured the public's imagination. As the de-extinction movement continues to evolve, it will be important to balance the potential benefits with the ecological and ethical considerations involved.

EarthTalk® is produced by Roddy Scheer & Doug Moss for the 501(c)3 nonprofit EarthTalk. See more at <https://emagazine.com>. To donate, visit <https://earthtalk.org>. Send questions to: question@earthtalk.org.



The birth of this black-footed ferret named Elizabeth Ann on December 10, 2020 marked the first time a U.S. endangered species has been successfully cloned. Credit: Revive & Restore..



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Ag Department launches cattle contracts library urged by Johnson **Biden administration implements pilot program, distributes grants that align with SD congressman's legislation**

BY: JOHN HULT - MARCH 11, 2023 7:00 AM

A recently launched program championed by South Dakota's lone congressional representative aims to aid livestock producers in price negotiations with slaughterhouses.

The Cattle Contracts Library is meant to log basic information on the prices paid for cattle by the nation's four major processing conglomerates: Cargill, JBS USA, National Beef Packing and Tyson Foods.

The idea is to create a pool of data to empower smaller producers who sell to the companies, known as the "big four" in livestock circles, who control around 80% of the market for cattle. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) already has a Swine Contracts Library to serve the same purpose.

Republican Rep. Dusty Johnson introduced a bill in 2021 to create a cattle version of the library. For too long, Johnson said, producers have gone into price talks with the dominant slaughterhouses without a sense of what the companies pay to producers with larger inventories.

Johnson's bill earned support from 410 members of the U.S. House of Representatives, but the Senate has yet to act. Instead of waiting, the USDA chose to launch the library as a pilot program. The first set of numbers went live in February.

"I don't think anyone would allege that the cattle contract library is a silver bullet," Johnson told South Dakota Searchlight, but he said the library is a step in the right direction.

Pandemic put attention on livestock

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed weaknesses in the food supply chain and put additional pressure on producers who'd struggled for years to draw attention to their troubles, Johnson said.

When Johnson first arrived in Washington, D.C. in 2019, few of his fellow representatives were aware of – or especially interested in – the woes of cattle producers. That year, however, a fire at a Tyson cattle processor in Holcomb, Kansas, cut processing capacity by 6,000 head a day.

The pandemic exacerbated the situation less than a year later, as multiple plants shut down due to outbreaks or slowed production. At one point in the pandemic, 10% of the nation's slaughterhouse capacity was shut down. Prices spiked, and have remained high as inflation took hold in the years that followed.

Now, Johnson said, lawmakers from urban areas are paying closer attention.

"That's when we started to get a lot of momentum," Johnson said of the pandemic. "When I was talking cattle issues, I was having a lot more people pay attention. And it helped us get legislation passed."

The successful House vote for the library didn't translate to an easy path to implementation, for that program or Johnson's other livestock-related priorities: the Butcher Block Act and a-PLUS Act. That first bill would offer loans to smaller processors through the USDA Office of Rural Development; the second would make it easier for auction owners to invest in small meat packing operations.

The legislation authorizing the library passed the House but hasn't moved in the Senate. The other two pieces of legislation have yet to see a vote in either chamber.

Ultimately, the USDA chose to bypass Congress and implement the cattle contracts library as a pilot program.

The Biden administration, meanwhile, has pumped dollars from the American Rescue Plan Act into processing projects.

In late February, the USDA announced a series of awards, including a \$3.3 million grant for a 4,000-head-

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a-year processing facility in New Underwood, South Dakota.

Rural Development spent \$12 million in three meat processing projects last month, and sent \$75 million to 22 meat processing projects in November 2022.

Earlier this month, USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack announced another \$89 million in guaranteed loans for meat processing, including nearly \$20 million for South Dakota loan programs.

GROW South Dakota, for example, will use its \$8.1 million in guaranteed loan funding to aid about 16 meat and poultry processors, with each receiving about half a million dollars for capital.

Johnson wants to encourage an increase in slaughterhouse capacity through an "all hands on deck" strategy.

"If we can have regional packers move from 300 head a day to 600 a day, good on them," Johnson said. "If we can have mom and pop butchers move from five head a week to 10 head a week ... that also helps. We want to build capacity really across the processing environment."

Stumbling blocks for slaughterhouses, cattle producers

Like Johnson, South Dakota Cattlemen's Association President Eric Jennings hopes to see a Senate stamp of approval to make the library permanent. Some cattle ranchers say a lack of transparency is among the reasons they earn just 39 cents of every dollar spent on beef by U.S. consumers.

The contracts library aren't expected to move markets, but the data will give smaller producers a better vantage point on pricing.

"There's a substantial number of cattle being sold without price transparency," Jennings said.

On the capacity side, Jennings said, there are three troubles prospective small to medium slaughterhouses contend with: the cost of a facility, a workforce shortage, and the opinions of slaughterhouse neighbors.

The starting point for land acquisition, brick and mortar, coolers and the like for a slaughterhouse can run around half a million dollars, Jennings said. It can cost \$100,000 in additional capital up front for each animal the facility would hope to process each day.

If a company can muscle past opposition from neighbors to earn building permits and licenses, the same staffing struggles facing businesses nationwide – and particularly in South Dakota – become an ongoing difficulty.

Doug Sombke, president of the South Dakota Farmers Union, said this week that the full-court press of federal programming and funding is welcome news for producers. As far as the cattle contracts library, Sombke said it's a welcome but marginal piece of producers' overall needs.

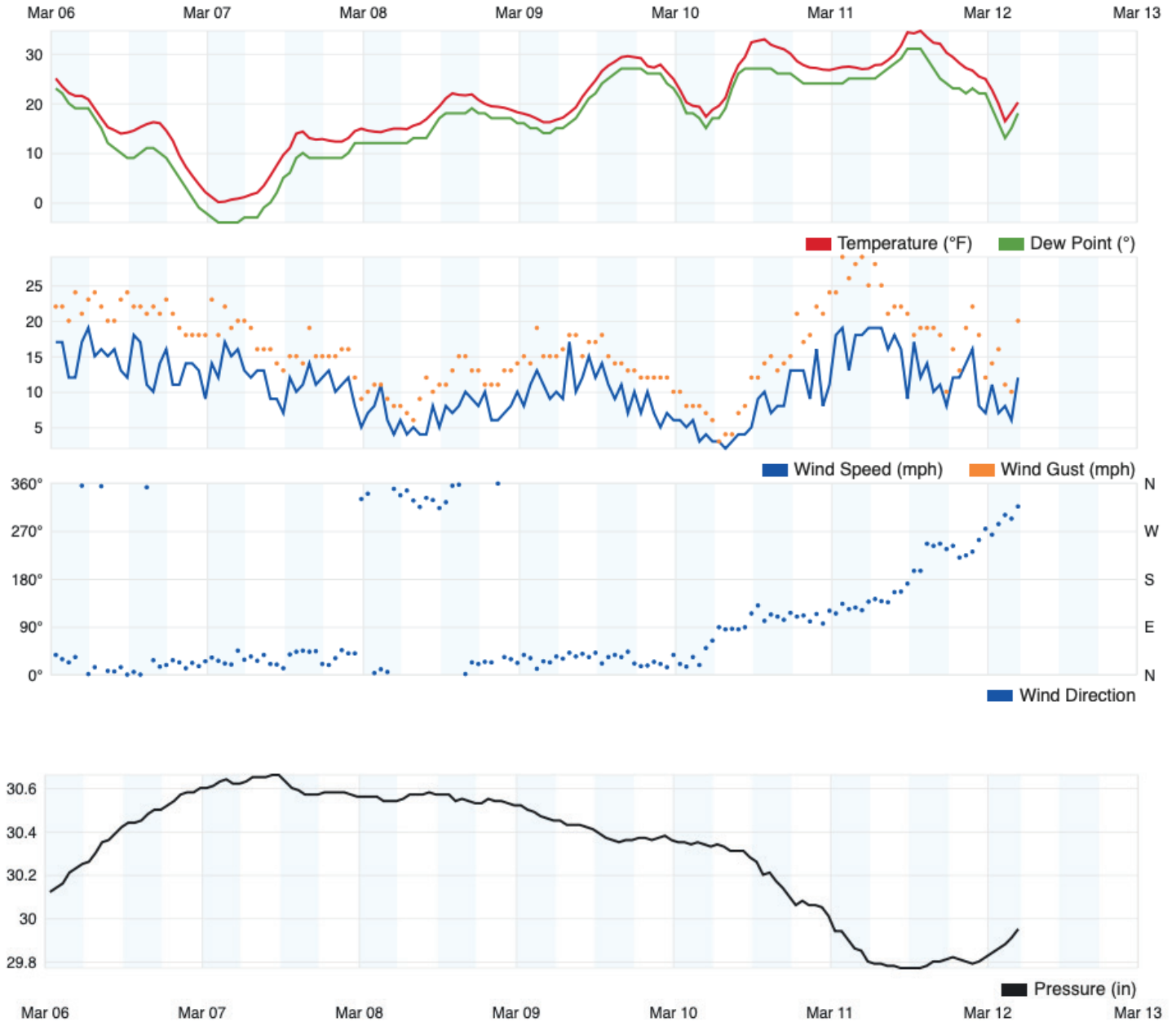
"There's just so few of the small- and medium-sized farmers that I know that really utilize it," Sombke said. "It's a good thing to have, but I really don't think it's going to have a lot of upside potential to help farmers in their marketing ability."

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.

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Past Week's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Monday	Monday Night	Tuesday	Tuesday Night	Wednesday
						
Slight Chance Snow and Patchy Blowing Snow	Patchy Blowing Snow and Blustery then Mostly Cloudy	Partly Sunny	Partly Cloudy then Patchy Blowing Snow and Breezy	Patchy Blowing Snow and Windy	Patchy Blowing Snow and Breezy	Partly Sunny
High: 24 °F	Low: 5 °F	High: 19 °F	Low: 8 °F	High: 35 °F	Low: 25 °F	High: 37 °F

Cold Today & Monday, Warmer Tuesday

Today	Monday	Tuesday
		
20 to 25°	20 to 30°	35 to 55°

Breezy/windy today with areas of blowing/drifted snow.

Staying cold with temperatures well below normal.

Warming trend in store for mid-week, with highs ranging from the 30s to 50s.

Another storm system Wednesday/Thursday?



We'll still be dealing with areas of blowing and drifting snow today as conditions stay breezy/windy, especially across eastern portions of the area. The Glacial Lakes region may also see periodic light snowfall through the morning hours. Otherwise, expect a break from precipitation finally for a few days, although cold conditions will remain in place through Monday. Another potential storm system is in line for Wednesday/Thursday, but details remain uncertain. Light to moderate accumulations are possible, but the storm track remains in question.

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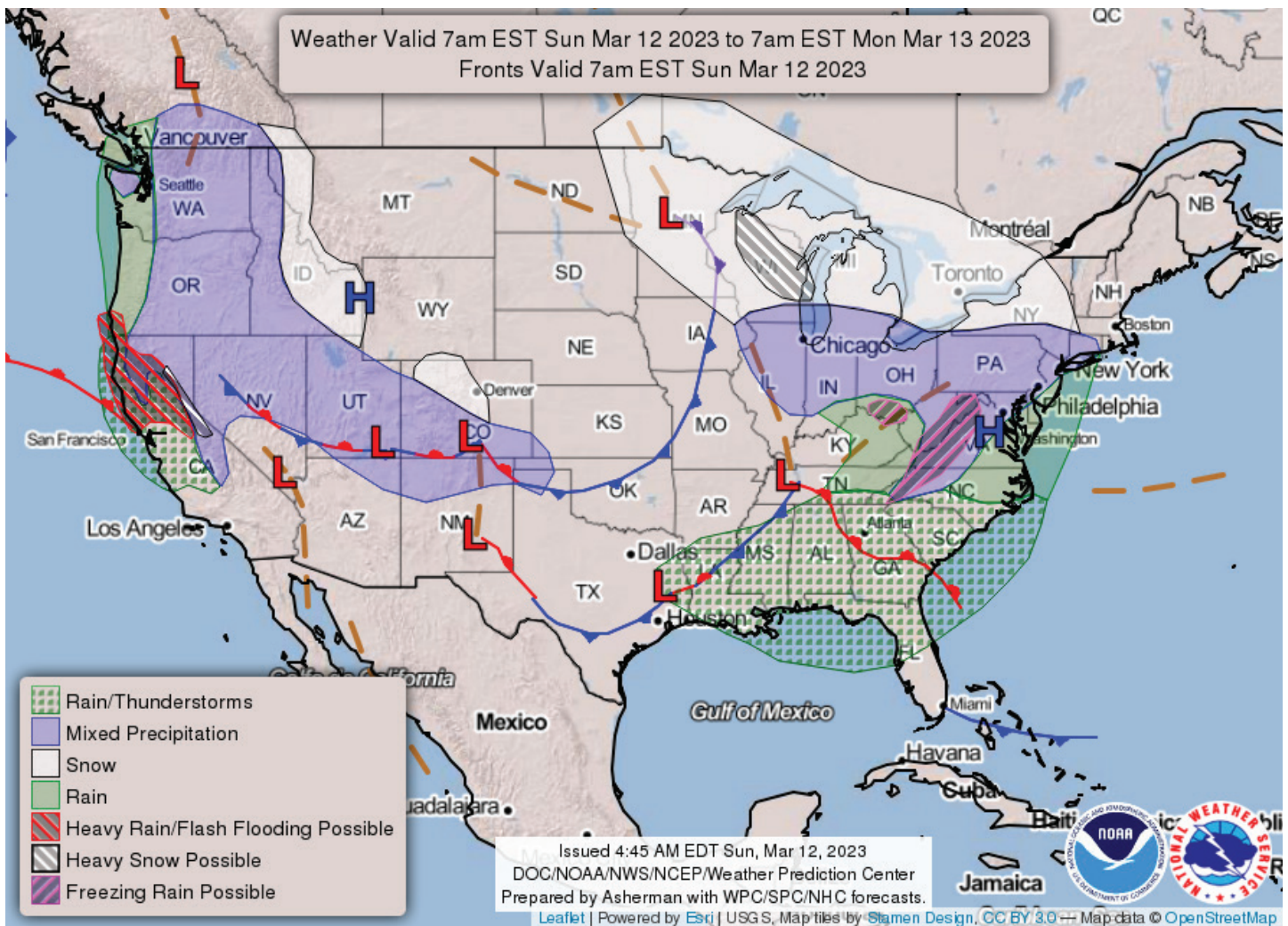
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 22 °F at 4:33 PM
Low Temp: -7 °F at 12:15 AM
Wind: 19 mph at 8:54 AM
Precip: : 0.20

Day length: 11 hours, 46 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 72 in 2016
Record Low: -20 in 1897
Average High: 39
Average Low: 18
Average Precip in March.: 0.29
Precip to date in March.: 1.20
Average Precip to date: 1.46
Precip Year to Date: 2.78
Sunset Tonight: 7:35:23 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:46:58 AM



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Today in Weather History

March 12, 1995: Rapid snowmelt, due to warm temperatures, caused widespread flooding of streams, low areas, and farmland. Many roads were covered with water, and some were washed out. Some utility poles and lines were damaged. High water levels destroyed some schools, houses, and other buildings. Day County was especially stricken, with damage to roads alone estimated at \$75,000. Ice jams exacerbated the flooding on some culverts and streams.

1888 - A blizzard paralyzed southeastern New York State and western New England. The storm produced 58 inches of snow at Saratoga NY, and 50 inches at Middletown CT. The blizzard was followed by record cold temperatures, and the cold and snow claimed 400 lives. New York City received 20.9 inches of snow, Albany NY reported 46.7 inches. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1928: The St. Frances dam near Santa Paula, California, burst before midnight, sending 138,000 acres of water rushing down the San Francisquito Canyon, killing 450 people. The dam was designed and built between 1924 and 1926 by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, then named the Bureau of Water Works and Supply.

1954 - A blizzard raged from eastern Wyoming into the Black Hills of western South Dakota, while a severe ice storm was in progress from northeastern Nebraska to central Iowa. The ice storm isolated 153 towns in Iowa. Dust from the Great Plains caused brown snow, and hail and muddy rain over parts of Wisconsin and Michigan. (11th-13th) (The Weather Channel)

1967 - A tremendous four day storm raged across California. Winds of 90 mph closed mountain passes, heavy rains flooded the lowlands, and in sixty hours Squaw Valley CA was buried under 96 inches (eight feet) of snow. (David Ludlum)

1976: A massive tornado outbreak spawned tornadoes in the Great Lakes and Midwest, including 9 in northern Indiana and extreme southern Michigan. A tornado missed President Ford's motorcade by a quarter-mile near O'Hare. The next morning, he got out of his vehicle to view the damage.

1993: An incredible blizzard known as "The Superstorm" struck the eastern United States on this date through the 15th. The storm was described as the most costly non-tropical storm ever to hit the U.S., doing an estimated \$6 billion in damage. The storm was as strong as a hurricane regarding winds and low pressure. The pressure dropped to an incredible 28.35 inches of mercury or 960 millibars when then the storm was located over the Chesapeake Bay. Boston, Massachusetts, recorded a wind gust to 81 mph, the most substantial wind they had recorded since Hurricane Edna in 1954. Also, as the storm was intensifying over the Gulf of Mexico, a wind gust to 99 mph was recorded by an offshore oil rig. It dumped incredible amounts of snow from Alabama to New England. The snow amounts were significant everywhere, but for places like Birmingham, Alabama, the 17 inches recorded brought the city to a standstill for three days. Mount Leconte, North Carolina, recorded 60 inches of snow. Practically every weather station in West Virginia established a new 24-hour snowfall record during the event. Syracuse, New York was buried under 43 inches of snow. The storm killed 220 people, and another 48 lost at sea. The storm also brought a 12-foot storm surge and 15 tornadoes to Florida, where 51 people were killed. Air travel was brought to a halt as every major airport from Atlanta north was closed during the height of the storm. During the late evening into the early morning hours of the 13th, a vicious squall line swept through Florida and spawned 11 tornadoes resulting in five fatalities. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 110 mph at Alligator Point and 109 mph at Dry Tortugas. Exceptionally high tides occurred along the western Florida coast. A 13-foot storm surge occurred in Taylor County, Florida, resulting in 10 deaths with 57 residences destroyed. A 5 to 8-foot storm surge moved ashore in Dixie County. Over 500 homes were destroyed, with major damage to another 700 structures.

2006 - High school senior Matt Suter survives being blown 1,307 feet by a tornado. (The exact distance is determined by NWS GPS.) The twister rips open his grandmother's mobile home and tosses Suter into the night, launching him over a barbed wire fence and eventually depositing him on the soft grass in an open field. He suffers only a head wound from being hit by a lamp. The Weather Doctor's Diary

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

THE GREAT COMMISSION

A salesman was known for keeping his hat on while he worked at his desk in his office. One day a new employee asked, "Why do you keep your hat on when you work in the building? Are you hairless?"

"No," came the reply. "I wear it to remind myself that I ought to be out selling and -here less."

Would it be a good idea if we, as Christians, would wear hats when we watch TV, read newspapers, visit with friends, work in the yard, or go shopping? Could wearing a hat remind us that there is a world waiting to hear the message of the Gospel? Might it remind us not to get too comfortable? Would it keep us from forgetting or ignoring the Great Commission?

We place great value on the "last will and testament" of individuals. It gives exact directions for what is to be done with whatever they leave at the end of their time on earth. Jesus did this in the Great Commission. And, He did it with God's authority behind Him.

He said, "Go and make disciples." They were not to be satisfied because they had a relationship with Him. Nor were they to be satisfied with the teachings He left in their heads, hearts, and hands. Life with Him on earth had ended. But His life in them was just beginning.

The command "to go" did not end with the disciples. Rather, that is where it began. His voice still echoes across the centuries to those of us today who are His disciples. We are to "go and make disciples" wherever we are, whenever we can.

Prayer: We often fail, Lord, in doing what You have commanded us to do. Forgive us for failing to be obedient to Your command. May we begin today to honor You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20



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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2023 Community Events

- 01/29/2023 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 01/29/2023 85th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
- 01/31/2023-02/03/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Drop Off 6-9pm, Community Center
- 02/04/2023-02/05/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Sale 1-5pm, Community Center
- 02/25/2023 Littles and Me, Art Making 10-11:30am, Wage Memorial Library
- 03/25/2023 Spring Vendor Fair, 10am-3pm, Community Center
- 04/01/2023 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
- 04/01/2023 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
- 04/06/2023 Groton Career Development Event
- 04/22/2023 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
- 04/23/2023 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)
- 05/06/2023 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
- 05/29/2023 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
- 06/16/2023 SDSU Alumni and Friends Golf Tournament
- 07/04/2023 Couples Firecracker Golf Tournament
- 07/09/2023 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
- 07/26/2023 GGA Burger Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 08/04/2023 Wine on Nine 6pm
- 08/11/2023 GHS Basketball Golf Tournament
- 09/09/2023 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
- 09/10/2023 Couples Sunflower Golf Tournament
- 10/14/2023 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
- 10/31/2023 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
- 10/31/2023 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
- 11/23/2023 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
- 12/02/2023 Tour of Homes & Holiday Party
- 12/09/2023 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9-11am

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.10.23

9 20 59 60 63 5

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$229,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.11.23

33 39 41 45 48 8

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$39,630,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.11.23

3 7 10 28 35 17

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 22 Mins 26 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.11.23

6 15 17 28 32

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$88,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.11.23

7 16 22 36 58 5

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.11.23

11 20 33 43 58 24

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$52,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the **AP** Associated Press

Saturday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Class AA State

Championship=Sioux Falls Washington 54, Pierre T F Riggs High School 36

Consolation Championship=Sioux Falls O'Gorman 70, Mitchell 33

Seventh Place=Rapid City Stevens 53, Watertown 51

Third Place=Sioux Falls Jefferson 55, Harrisburg 34

Class A State

Championship=Hamlin 58, Wagner 55

Consolation Championship=Sioux Falls Christian 46, Flandreau 43

Seventh Place=Rapid City Christian 66, Lakota Tech 52

Third Place=Sisseton 55, Red Cloud 47

Class B State

Championship=Viborg-Hurley 34, Wall 27

Consolation Championship=Castlewood 48, Jones County 43

Seventh Place=Howard 54, Sully Buttes 44

Third Place=Wolsey-Wessington 60, Ethan 55

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

Winter storm shuts down interstates, blamed in fatal wreck

By The Associated Press undefined

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A late-winter blizzard settled over the upper Midwest on Saturday, shutting down roads and adding to one of the snowiest seasons in recent decades.

Bismarck, North Dakota, received nearly 6 inches of snow from Friday night into Saturday morning, and more was predicted. Bismarck's 92.5 inches of snow this season is the third-most in the 148 years records have been kept, according to the National Weather Service.

Several roads were closed, including sections of Interstate 94 and U.S. 52 in North Dakota. Authorities in South Dakota and Minnesota also urged drivers to be cautious due to snowfall and wind blowing the snow back onto paved roadways.

The North Dakota Highway Patrol said a 29-year-old man died Friday night when his pickup truck slid on an icy highway and struck a commercial truck. The driver of the larger truck was hospitalized with serious injuries.

The National Weather Service said some areas of the Upper Midwest could see more than 12 inches of snow through Sunday, while other areas could see rain and freezing rain.

The storm is expected to move into the Upper Great Lakes region on Sunday.

Oil giant Saudi Aramco makes a historic \$161B profit in 2022

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Oil giant Saudi Aramco reported Sunday earning \$161 billion last year, claiming the highest-ever recorded annual profit by a publicly listed company and drawing immediate criticism from activists.

The monster profit by the firm, known formally as the Saudi Arabian Oil Co., came off the back of energy prices rising after Russia launched its war on Ukraine in February 2022, with sanctions limiting the sale of

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Moscow's oil and natural gas in Western markets.

Aramco also hopes to increase its production to take advantage of market demand as China reenters the global market after lifting its coronavirus restrictions. That could raise the billions needed to pay for Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's plans to develop futuristic cityscapes to pivot Saudi Arabia away from oil.

However, those plans come despite growing international concerns over the burning of fossil fuels accelerating climate change. Meanwhile, higher energy prices already have strained relations between Riyadh and Washington, as well as driven up inflation worldwide.

"Given that we anticipate oil and gas will remain essential for the foreseeable future, the risks of underinvestment in our industry are real — including contributing to higher energy prices," Saudi Aramco CEO and President Amin H. Nasser said in a statement.

Profits rose 46.5% when compared to the company's 2021 results of \$110 billion. It earned \$49 billion in 2020 when the world faced the worst of the coronavirus pandemic lockdown, travel disruptions and oil prices briefly going negative.

Aramco put its crude production at around 11.5 million barrels a day in 2022 and said it hoped to reach 13 million barrels a day by 2027.

To boost that production, it plans to spend as much as \$55 billion this year on capital projects.

Aramco also declared a dividend of \$19.5 billion for the fourth quarter of 2022, to be paid in the first quarter of this year.

Aramco's results, viewed as a bellwether for the global energy market, mirror the huge profits seen at those of U.K. energy giant BP, America's Exxon Mobil, Shell and others in 2022. But the sheer size of the \$116 billion profit overshadowed even its own previous results, as well as records by Apple, Vodafone and the U.S. Federal National Mortgage Association, or Fannie Mae.

Benchmark Brent crude oil now trades around \$82 a barrel, though prices had reached over \$120 a barrel back in June. Aramco, whose fortunes hinge on global energy prices, announced a record \$42.4 billion profit in the third quarter of 2022 off the back of that price spike.

Those high prices have further strained ties between the kingdom and the United States, traditionally a security guarantor among the Gulf Arab states amid tensions with Iran. Before the midterm elections in November, the kingdom said the Biden administration sought to delay a decision by OPEC and allies including Russia to cut production that could have kept gasoline prices lower for voters — making public the typically behind-the-scenes negotiations common in the region.

President Joe Biden had warned the kingdom that "there's going to be some consequences for what they've done" in terms of oil prices. However, those consequences have yet to be seen as Saudi Arabia and Iran went to China to strike a diplomatic deal Friday. U.S. gasoline prices now stand on average at \$3.47 a gallon, down just about a dollar from last year.

For the kingdom, higher crude oil prices can help fuel the dreams of Prince Mohammed, including his planned \$500 billion futuristic desert city project called Neom. However, they also run against the fears of activists over climate change, particularly as the United Nations' COP28 climate talks will begin this November in the neighboring United Arab Emirates.

Saudi Arabia has pledged to have net-zero carbon emissions by 2060, like China and Russia, though its plans to reach that goal remain unclear. Aramco's earnings report noted it started a \$1.5 billion Sustainability Fund in October and plans a carbon-capture-and-storage facility as well.

Amnesty International's secretary-general, Agnès Callamard, criticized Aramco's annual profit coming amid global concerns about climate change.

"It is shocking for a company to make a profit of more than \$161 billion in a single year through the sale of fossil fuel — the single largest driver of the climate crisis," she said in a statement. "It is all the more shocking because this surplus was amassed during a global cost-of-living crisis and aided by the increase in energy prices resulting from Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine."

Callamard also noted that Saudi Arabia remains one of the world's top executioners while also remaining locked in a yearslong war in Yemen and cracking down on dissent.

"These extraordinary profits, and any future income derived from Aramco, should not be deployed to

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finance human rights abuses, cover them up, or try and gloss over them," she said.

Saudi Arabia's vast oil resources, located close to the surface of its desert expanse, make it one of the world's least expensive places to produce crude. For every \$10 rise in the price of a barrel of oil, Saudi Arabia stands to make an additional \$40 billion a year, according to the Institute of International Finance.

Shares in Aramco stood at \$8.74 on Riyadh's Tadawul stock exchange before it opened Sunday. That's down from a high of \$11.55 a share in the last year. However, that current price still gives Aramco a valuation of \$1.9 trillion — making it the world's second most valuable company behind only Apple.

The Saudi government still owns the vast majority of the firm's shares. Saudi Aramco publicly listed a sliver of its worth back in late 2019.

Aramco will release a comprehensive earnings report Monday.

Favoring continuity, China reappoints central bank governor

BEIJING (AP) — China on Sunday reappointed Yi Gang as head of the central bank in an effort to reassure entrepreneurs and financial markets by showing continuity at the top while other economic officials change during a period of uncertainty in the world's second-largest economy.

Yi, whose official title is governor of the People's Bank of China, plays no role in making monetary policy, unlike his counterparts in other major economies. His official duties lie in "implementing monetary policy," or carrying out decisions made by a policymaking body whose membership is a secret.

But the central bank governor acts as spokesperson for monetary policy, is the most prominent Chinese figure in global finance and is in charge of reassuring bankers and investors at a time when China's economy is emerging from drastically slower growth.

At the March 5 opening of the annual session of China's rubber-stamp parliament, the National People's Congress, China announced plans for a consumer-led revival of the struggling economy, setting this year's growth target at "around 5%."

Last year's growth fell to 3%, the second-weakest level since at least the 1970s, putting president and head of the ruling Communist Party Xi Jinping under exceptional pressure to revitalize the economy.

A longtime veteran of monetary policy departments, Yi was first appointed governor of the People's Bank of China in March 2018, taking over from the highly regarded Zhou Xiaochuan.

Before becoming governor, Yi spent 20 years at the central bank after getting his Ph.D. from the University of Illinois and working as a professor of economics at Indiana University from 1986 to 1994.

He is also a co-founder and professor at Peking University's China Center for Economic Research.

The party made a similar decision to opt for continuity in 2013, when then-PBOC governor Zhou, who already had been in the job for a decade, stayed on as governor while all other economic regulators changed.

Yi's reappointment came on the congress's penultimate day, which also saw Xi loyalists appointed as finance minister and head of the Cabinet planning agency to carry out a program to tighten control over entrepreneurs, reduce debt risks and promote state-led technology development. Incumbent Wang Wentao was reappointed minister of commerce.

The congress also named four vice premiers, individuals who may be in line for higher office. They include sixth-ranking member of the party's all-powerful Politburo Standing Committee, Ding Xuexiang, as vice premier overseeing administrative matters. Veteran bureaucrats He Lifeng, Zhang Guoqing and Liu Guozhong were also named to the post. Liu and Zhang were incumbents.

Foreign Minister Qin Gang was also appointed to the position of state councilor, a position also held by Wang Yi, his predecessor and current superior as director of the party's Office of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission.

Defense Minister Li Shangfu, an aerospace engineer by training, was also named one of the five state councilors, along with Minister of Public Security Wang Xiaohong and Secretary General of China's Cabinet, known as the State Council, Wu Zhenglong. Shen Yiqin was the only woman named to the position and is China's highest-ranking female politician.

No women sit on the 24-member Politburo or its standing Committee, and the party's more-than-

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200-member Central Committee is 95% male.

A priority for finance officials will be to manage corporate and household debt that Beijing worries has risen to dangerous levels. Tighter debt controls triggered a slump in China's vast real estate industry in 2021, adding to the COVID-19 pandemic's downward pressure on the economy.

At the same time, the ruling party is trying to shift money into technology development and other strategic plans. That has prompted warnings too much political control over emerging industries could waste money and hamper growth.

Xi has favored promoting officials who sometimes lack the experience of their predecessors and exposure to global industry and finance markets. That reflects Xi's effort to purge the Chinese system of Western influence and promote homegrown strategies.

Russian advance stalls in Ukraine's Bakhmut, think tank says

By KARL RITTER Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia's advance seems to have stalled in Moscow's campaign to capture the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut, a leading think tank said in an assessment of the longest ground battle of the war.

The Washington-based Institute for the Study of War said there were no confirmed advances by Russian forces in Bakhmut. Russian forces and units from the Kremlin-controlled paramilitary Wagner Group continued to launch ground attacks in the city, but there was no evidence that they were able to make any progress, ISW said late Saturday.

The report cited the spokesperson of the Ukrainian Armed Forces' Eastern Group, Serhii Cherevaty, who said that fighting in the Bakhmut area had been more intense this week than the previous one. According to Cherevaty, there were 23 clashes in the city over the previous 24 hours.

The ISW's report comes following claims of Russian progress earlier this week. The U.K. Defense Ministry said Saturday that paramilitary units from the Kremlin-controlled Wagner Group had seized most of eastern Bakhmut, with a river flowing through the city now marking the front line of the fighting. The assessment highlighted that Russia's assault will be difficult to sustain without more significant personnel losses.

The mining city of Bakhmut is located in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk province, one of four regions of Ukraine that Russian President Vladimir Putin illegally annexed last year. Russia's military opened the campaign to take control of Bakhmut in August, and both sides have experienced staggering casualties. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has vowed not to retreat.

In its latest report Sunday, the U.K. Defense Ministry said Sunday that the impact of the heavy casualties Russia is continuing to suffer in Ukraine varies dramatically across the country. The ministry's intelligence update said that the major cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg remain "relatively unscathed," particularly among members of Russia's elite. In contrast, in many of Russia's eastern regions, the death rate as a percentage of the population is "30-40 times higher than in Moscow."

The report highlighted that ethnic minorities often take the biggest hit. In the southern Astrakhan region, for example, about "75% of casualties come from the minority Kazakh and Tartar populations."

Russia's mounting casualties are reflected in a loss of government control over the country's information sphere, ISW said. The think tank said that Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova confirmed "infighting in the Kremlin inner circle" and that the Kremlin has effectively ceded control over the country's information space, with Putin unable to readily regain control.

The ISW sees Zakharova's comments, made at a forum on the "practical and technological aspects of information and cognitive warfare in modern realities" in Moscow, as "noteworthy" and in line with the think tank's long standing assessments about the "deteriorating Kremlin regime and information space control dynamics."

Elsewhere in Ukraine, Russian attacks over the previous day killed at least five people and wounded another seven across Ukraine's Donetsk and Kherson regions, local Ukrainian authorities reported on Sunday morning.

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Donetsk Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko said that two people were killed in the region, one in the city of Kostyantynivka and one in the village of Tonenke. Four further civilians were wounded.

Local officials in the southern Kherson province confirmed that Russian forces fired 29 times on Ukrainian-controlled territory in the region on Saturday, with residential areas of the regional capital, Kherson, coming under fire three times. Three people died in the province and a further three were wounded.

In Ukraine's northeastern Kharkiv province, the Kharkiv, Chuhuiv and Kupiansk districts came under fire, but no civilian casualties were reported.

The head of Ukraine's southern Mykolaiv province Gov. Vitali Kim said Sunday morning that the town of Ochakiv, set at the mouth of the Dnieper River, came under artillery fire in the early hours of Sunday. Cars were set ablaze, while private houses and high-rise buildings sustained damage. No casualties were reported.

Israeli forces kill 3 Palestinian militants in West Bank

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli forces shot and killed three Palestinian militants Sunday who opened fire on troops in the occupied West Bank, the military said, the latest bloodshed in a year-long wave of violence in the region.

The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, an armed offshoot of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah party, claimed the men killed as members.

The Palestinian Health Ministry said the men were killed by Israeli fire near the city of Nablus and identified them as Jihad Mohammed al-Shami, 24, Uday Othman al-Shami, 22 and Mohammed Raed Dabeek, 18.

The military said it confiscated three M16 rifles from the militants after the shootout and that one gunman turned himself in and was arrested.

The deaths Sunday bring to 80 the number of Palestinians killed since the start of the year, as Israel has stepped up arrest raids in the West Bank. A spasm of Palestinian attacks against Israelis has killed 14 people in 2023.

The fresh violence follows an Israeli military raid last week on the West Bank village of Jaba, where three Palestinian militants were killed. Hours later, a Palestinian gunman opened fire on a busy Tel Aviv thoroughfare at the start of the Israeli weekend, wounding three people before being shot and killed.

The current round of violence is one of the worst between Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank in years. It began last spring after a series of Palestinian attacks against Israelis that triggered near-nightly Israeli raids in the West Bank.

Nearly 150 Palestinians were killed in the West Bank and east Jerusalem in 2022, making it the deadliest year in those areas since 2004, according to the leading Israeli rights group B'Tselem. Palestinian attacks against Israelis during that same time killed 30 people.

The military says most of the Palestinians killed were militants. But stone-throwing youths protesting the incursions and others not involved in confrontations have also been killed.

Israel says the raids are essential to dismantle militant networks and prevent future attacks. But attacks appear to be intensifying rather than slowing down.

The Palestinians view the raids as a tightening by Israel of its 55-year, open-ended occupation of lands they seek for their future state.

Israel captured the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians seek those territories for their future independent state.

Hollywood stars spend Oscars eve at annual Chanel dinner

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The night before the Oscars many of Hollywood's biggest stars were not early to bed before the show. They were instead chatting the night away, martinis and champagne in hand, at the storied Polo Lounge in The Beverly Hills Hotel for the annual Chanel and Charles Finch dinner, an invite

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that's even harder to get than a seat at the Academy Awards.

The patio where the likes of Clark Gable and Darryl Zanuck once dined was filled with the industry's brightest talents, many of whom were dressed head to toe in Chanel, including Kristen Stewart, Marion Cotillard, Nicole Kidman and Camila Morrone.

On the red carpet, Kidman and Stewart ran to one another to catch up, hugging and posing for photographers.

"It's been so long," Kidman said.

Cotillard would join in moments later. Later on the patio, Kidman, emerging from a conversation with Idris Elba, could be seen embracing Ariana DeBose as Tessa Thompson spoke with best actress nominee Andrea Riseborough.

"I'm sure you must be tired," Thompson said.

Elsewhere there was a meeting of Spider-Mans as Andrew Garfield approached Tobey Maguire, who was sipping one of the spot's iconic martinis.

"You! You!" Maguire said, as Garfield went in for a hug. They then turned to speak to "The Whale" director Darren Aronofsky.

Several feet behind them, Jonathan Majors was deep in conversation with Riz Ahmed, while best supporting actress nominee Kerry Condon tried and failed to get a drink from the bar that had closed down in an attempt to coax the chatty celebrities into the dining room.

Inside, they were treated to a surprise performance by "The White Lotus" actor Beatrice Grannò.

Other attendees included Michael B. Jordan, Danielle Deadwyler, Hugh Grant, Brie Larson, Sigourney Weaver, Vicky Krieps, Minnie Driver, Patty Jenkins, Sarah Polley, Lily James, David O. Russell, Jerry Bruckheimer, Sofia Boutella and Ted Sarandos.

Morrone, star of "Daisy Jones & The Six," has been going to the event for several years and said it's one of her favorites.

"It's like a really glamorous sleepover," Morrone said. "I just love it here. I love to see all of the people who work in the entertainment industry who are being honored tomorrow. You're in a room with like really artistic and incredible humans, so you just soak it all in. And I've won some pretty incredible Chanel pieces over the past few years here."

For actor Whitney Peak, who is the new new face of Chanel's Coco Mademoiselle fragrance, the event was a chance to speak to some of her favorite filmmakers.

"There's been such great movies this year and so many people who are responsible for making those films are in the room today," Peak said. "Daniel Kwan is going to be here and I'm like, how do I tell him that I've been a fan of him since the Lil Jon music video?"

Chanel and cinema have been intertwined since the fashion house's earliest days. In 1930, Samuel Goldwyn invited Gabrielle Chanel to Hollywood to dress film stars including Gloria Swanson. On her arrival back in Paris, Chanel collaborated with French filmmakers like Jean Renoir and dressed many of the new wave actresses such as Jeanne Moreau and Romy Schneider.

More recently, Chanel has supported independent productions including Leos Carax's "Annette" and Mia Hansen-Løve's "Bergman Island." Chanel provided the funding for Olivier Assayas's 35mm camera for "The Clouds of Sils Maria" and has for more than a decade supported programs for emerging filmmakers and cinematic preservation and restorations.

Not every attendee planned to make the trek down the champagne carpet at the Oscars Sunday, but one person who will certainly be there is filmmaker Ava DuVernay, who is on the Academy's Board of Governors.

"I'm looking forward to seeing a calm, normal Oscars," DuVernay said. "I was there last year and it was a little traumatizing. I just want it to be chill and uneventful. That would be nice."

Argentina's initial fervor for Pope Francis has faded

By ALMUDENA CALATRAVA and DÉBORA REY Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — When Jorge Bergoglio of Argentina became Pope Francis, much of his

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home country celebrated as if it had just won a soccer World Cup championship. A decade later, the first Latin American leader of the Catholic Church generates divided opinions and much less fervor.

Francis, who still likes to listen to tango, left Argentina in February 2013 to attend the conclave that elected him as the successor to Benedict XVI on March 13. He never returned.

"It's clear, there are people who are angry at him," said Argentine journalist Sergio Rubin, who recently co-wrote a book about Francis, "El Pastor," with Francesca Ambrogetti. It includes interviews with the pope.

Rubin and some other analysts agree that the pope is keeping his home country at arm's length to avoid being drawn into the political polarization that has divided Argentines over the past two decades.

"Ninety percent of the reason he doesn't come is because of the divide," said Rubin, who writes for Argentina's Clarín newspaper.

Rubin says there are reports from the Holy See's Secretariat of State that advise Francis not to step foot in his home country because anything he does could "be a reason for conflict."

Even without coming to Argentina, Francis has found himself at the center of the constant fighting between those who support the populist policies of Kirchnerism — the center-left current of Peronism, led by Vice President and former President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007-2015) — and those who back center-right former President Mauricio Macri (2015-2019).

In 2016, a photo seemed to show Francis with a blank, almost angry, expression when he met with then-President Macri, which some read as a sign that he wasn't happy with how he was running Argentina. The photo, which quickly went viral, negatively affected Francis' popularity in his home country, according to analysts.

Francis is "a controversial figure, especially among the most conservative sectors of Argentina," political consultant Sergio Berenzstein said.

Berenzstein said those segments of society never "fully understood the change in attitude" of the pope when in 2013 he took on a decidedly friendly tune toward left-leaning then-President Fernández. That was a marked contrast from the at-times hostile relationship he had maintained with her government when he was archbishop of Buenos Aires.

The pope's relationship with Argentine political leaders has shifted over the years. "He doesn't speak to some, he still speaks to others," Berenzstein said.

Berenzstein said the legalization of abortion at the end of 2020 under President Alberto Fernández was a turning point after which Francis cooled toward the left-leaning president, the most recent Peronist leader.

The pope's message against the accumulation of wealth that leaves many behind, including criticism of an "economic system that continues to discard lives in the name of the god of money," has been read by some in Argentina as an endorsement of Peronism, the movement founded by three-time president Juan Domingo Perón that has social justice as a rallying cry.

Miguel Angel Pichetto, from the Macri-allied opposition coalition, recently said the pope's social views "are absurd for Argentina," claiming the pontiff is "against neoliberalism" and in favor of "schemes that make merit unimportant, that say private property is a secondary right."

Far-right lawmaker Javier Milei, who is polling well for this year's presidential contest and who has accused the pope of promoting communism, recently criticized Francis for saying people must pay taxes to protect the dignity of the poor.

Milei tweeted at the pontiff that he was, "always standing on the side of evil."

A 2019 national poll on religious beliefs in Argentina displayed the lack of fervor for Francis when only 27% described the pope as a global leader who denounces injustices. Some 40% said they are indifferent to the pontiff and 27% said he is too involved in politics, according to the poll by the publicly funded CONICET institute.

When Bergoglio was announced as the new pope in 2013, drivers in Buenos Aires honked their horns in celebration and people packed the city's Cathedral for a celebratory Mass.

Roberto Bacman, director of the Center for Public Opinion Studies, said Francis' image has declined from a positive rating of 85% in the early years of his tenure as pope to 72% two years ago.

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"I was disappointed," said María de los Ángeles López, a practicing Catholic who believed an Argentine pope would have a positive impact on the country. "There is more poverty, more crime, and the division is worse than ever. I thought he could help reconcile us as a society, but on the contrary, he deepened it."

Those close to Francis said he doesn't come to Argentina because he has other priorities. "We must understand the pope's mission goes beyond the Argentines' own ego," his nephew, José Bergoglio, said.

Journalist Alicia Barrios, a friend of Francis, said the pope is particularly worried about Russia's invasion of Ukraine. "You can imagine he doesn't have much time for Argentina," Barrios said. "There are countries that need him more."

In, "El Pastor," the pope said "it's unfair to say that I don't want to go" to Argentina.

It's also clear Francis keeps tabs on his home country. In an interview this year with the AP, with Alberto Fernández in power, Francis blamed "bad management, bad policies" for Argentina's annual inflation rate of almost 100%, and the poverty rate of around 40 percent.

Francis also has contact with priests in impoverished neighborhoods, including Father José "Pepe" Di Paola. Francis "is not distant," Di Paola said, adding he enjoys "a very good image" in poor neighborhoods, where he is "beloved."

Di Paola is among several religious leaders planning an event Saturday to mark the decade of Francis as pope.

This anniversary should "be celebrated with Argentine flags, not political ones, like the World Cup," Di Paola said, recalling how Argentines united in joy after winning the soccer championship in Qatar last year. "We went out to celebrate, we hugged anyone regardless of their religion, political party or beliefs. Now it must be the same, a celebration with the same spirit."

Curry, Warriors rally past NBA-best Bucks 125-116 in OT

By JANIE McCAULEY AP Sports Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Stephen Curry knocked down all the dazzling shots everybody has come to expect from him in crunch time night after night — and then a surprising block at the rim that mattered just as much or maybe even more.

Curry scored 36 points with 22 of those in the fourth quarter and overtime, shining in his first home game back from a long injury absence and leading the Golden State Warriors past the NBA-best Milwaukee Bucks 125-116 on Saturday night.

Curry hit a tying 3-pointer with 19 seconds left in regulation, then blocked a layup attempt by Jrue Holiday in the closing moments.

"He came out of nowhere. Jrue had a straight line drive to the rim," Draymond Green said.

The Warriors got the ball back with 1.9 seconds remaining and Curry inbounded to Green, who missed from deep though he thought for sure it was "cash."

Holiday had put Milwaukee up on a 3 with 32.7 seconds to play and wound up with 18 points, nine rebounds and eight assists. But the Bucks (48-19), playing without star Giannis Antetokounmpo, had their three-game winning streak snapped with just their second defeat in 21 games since Jan. 21.

"I loved this game. I thought we competed the entire time," coach Steve Kerr said. "I thought we were really solid for most of the night."

Curry's 3 with 1:08 remaining in regulation got Golden State within 108-106. A steal by Klay Thompson on the other end moments later led to a tying layup by Curry before Holiday delivered.

"Overtime and fourth quarter, he got away from us a little bit," Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said of Curry. "Some of them were high level."

Thompson added 22 points, Donte DiVincenzo had 20 points and 10 rebounds and the Warriors won at home for the seventh in a row and 11th in 12.

Curry loved making a difference on the defensive end.

"To hit a couple big shots down the stretch and then find yourself in a position where you can make a play on the other side, it gives everybody a good boost because it's shocking," Curry said. "I think I got

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more about that in the locker room than any shot I made tonight, which speaks for itself.”

Khris Middleton had 19 points and five assists, Bobby Portis contributed 15 points and 13 rebounds and Brook Lopez 19 points, seven boards and five blocks.

Bucks leading scorer and rebounder Antetokounmpo missed his second straight game with right hand soreness and third overall after sitting out March 7 with a non-COVID illness.

Golden State used a 16-4 burst out of halftime to go ahead 66-53 but the Bucks fought back to get within 80-77 heading into the fourth.

Green went down hard and limped to the locker room midway through the third quarter before returning with 38.7 seconds left. While cutting through the key, Green’s left foot got tangled with Holiday’s right leg and Green tripped and rolled his ankle.

While sore, “I will 100% expect to play,” Green said of Monday’s game with Phoenix.

Green finished with five points, 13 rebounds and nine assists and Golden State shot better from beyond the arc (41.8%) than it did inside (40.4%).

Curry returned March 5 at the Lakers from a left leg injury suffered Feb. 4 that sidelined him for 11 games. He played on the team’s three-game road trip.

DiVincenzo has learned that anything Curry lets fly has a chance.

“It’s super fun to watch,” he said. “Sometimes when it leaves his hand I’m like, ‘No way.’”

KLAY’S GIFT

Thompson presented soon-to-be 16-year-old Braulio Noriega with a birthday surprise: a custom-basketball wheelchair. Noriega had his left leg amputated from above the knee because of cancer as a 6-year-old.

The teen hopes to compete playing wheelchair basketball in college and eventually in his home country of Mexico.

“I can’t even describe how I felt,” an overjoyed Noriega said. “... There’s so much emotional energy from him.”

TIP-INS

Bucks: Milwaukee shot just 9 of 25 on 3s in the first half to 10 for 24 by the Warriors. Allen missed his initial five and shot 2 of 9 overall. ... The Bucks managed just seven offensive rebounds to the Warriors’ 18.

Warriors: JaMychal Green scored 11 of his 18 points in the first quarter for Golden State making three 3-pointers. ... Golden State had 33 assists — its 35th game with 30 or more to tie the Nuggets for most in the NBA. ... G Moses Moody was recalled from the G League Santa Cruz Warriors and grabbed four rebounds in six minutes as the Warriors held a 65-48 advantage on the boards.

UP NEXT

Bucks: Visit Sacramento on Monday night riding a 13-game winning streak against the Kings.

Warriors: Host the Suns on Monday night having lost the last two in the series at home.

Oscars look to snap back a year after The Slap

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — It’s almost time to give the Academy Awards a big hand.

OK, maybe we should rephrase that.

A year after Will Smith strode on stage at the Dolby Theatre and slapped Chris Rock in the face, the Oscars will reconvene Sunday for a ceremony that will try to move past one of the most infamous moments in Academy Awards history.

The telecast from the Dolby in Los Angeles begins at 8 p.m. EDT on ABC. The broadcast can be streamed with a subscription to Hulu Live TV, YouTubeTV, AT&T TV and Fubo TV. You can also stream the show on ABC.com and on the ABC app by authenticating your provider.

Jimmy Kimmel, the show’s first solo emcee in five years, is hosting for the third time. The late-night comedian has promised to make some jokes about The Slap; it would be “ridiculous” not to, he said.

Bill Kramer, chief executive of the film academy, has said that it was important, given what happened

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last year, to have "a host in place who can really pivot and manage those moments."

"Nobody got hit when I hosted the show," Kimmel bragged tongue in cheek Thursday on "Good Morning America." "Everybody was well-behaved at my Oscars."

Kimmel will preside over a ceremony that could see big wins for the best-picture favorite, "Everything Everywhere All at Once." Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert's action-comedy indie hit comes in with a leading 11 nominations, including nods for Michelle Yeoh and Ke Huy Quan.

Producers are giving some aspects of the Oscars a makeover. The carpet is champagne-colored, not red. The broadcast has been planned to be more interactive than ever.

But the academy, still trying to find its footing after several years of pandemic and ratings struggles, is also hoping for a smoother ride than last year. A crisis management team has been created to help better respond to surprises. The academy has called its response to Smith's actions last year "inadequate." Neither Rock, who recently made his most forceful statement about the incident in a live special, nor Smith, who's been banned by the academy for 10 years, are expected to attend.

The Academy Awards will instead attempt to recapture some of its old luster. One thing working in its favor: This year's best picture field is stacked with blockbusters. Ratings usually go up when the nominees are more popular, which certainly goes for "Top Gun: Maverick," "Avatar: The Way of Water" and, to a lesser extent, "Elvis" and "Everything Everywhere All at Once."

But the late-breaking contender that may fare well in the technical categories — where bigger movies often reign — is Netflix's top nominee this year: the German WWI epic "All Quiet on the Western Front." It's up for nine awards, tied for second most with the Irish dark comedy "The Banshees of Inisherin." Netflix's "Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio" also looks like a shoo-in for best animated film.

The awards will also have some star wattage in the musical performances. Fresh off her Super Bowl performance, Rihanna will perform her Oscar-nominated song, "Lift Me Up," from "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever." "This Is Life," from "Everything Everywhere All at Once" will be sung by David Byrne and supporting actress nominee Stephanie Hsu with the band Son Lux. Rahul Sipligunj and Kaala Bhairava will perform "Naatu Naatu" from the Indian action epic "RRR." Lenny Kravitz will perform during the In Memoriam tribute. (Lady Gaga, currently in production on a film, will not perform her nominated song "Hold My Hand" from "Top Gun: Maverick.")

Last year, Apple TV's "CODA" became the first streaming movie to win best picture. But this year, nine of the 10 best picture nominees were theatrical releases. After the movie business cratered during the pandemic, moviegoing recovered to about 67% of pre-pandemic levels. But it was an up and down year, full of smash hits and anxiety-inducing lulls in theaters.

At the same time, the rush to streaming encountered new setbacks as studios questioned long-term profitability and reexamined their release strategies. This year, ticket sales have been strong thanks to releases like "Creed III" and "Cocaine Bear." But there remain storm clouds on the horizon. The Writers Guild and the major studios are set to begin contract negotiations March 20, a looming battle that has much of the industry girding for the possibility of a work stoppage throughout film and television.

The Oscars, meanwhile, are trying to reestablish their position as the premier award show. Last year's telecast drew 16.6 million viewers, a 58% increase from the scaled-down 2021 edition, watched by a record low 10.5 million.

Usually, the previous year's acting winners present the awards for best actor and best actress. But that won't be the case this time. Who'll replace Smith in presenting best actress is just one of the questions heading into the ceremony.

Four astronauts fly SpaceX back home, end 5-month mission

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Four space station astronauts returned to Earth late Saturday after a quick SpaceX flight home.

Their capsule splashed down in the Gulf of Mexico just off the Florida coast near Tampa.

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The U.S.-Russian-Japanese crew spent five months at the International Space Station, arriving last October. Besides dodging space junk, the astronauts had to deal with a pair of leaking Russian capsules docked to the orbiting outpost and the urgent delivery of a replacement craft for the station's other crew members.

Led by NASA's Nicole Mann, the first Native American woman to fly in space, the astronauts checked out of the station early Saturday morning. Less than 19 hours later, their Dragon capsule was bobbing in the sea as they awaited pickup.

Earlier in the week, high wind and waves in the splashdown zones kept them at the station a few extra days. Their replacements arrived more than a week ago.

"That was one heck of a ride," Mann radioed moments after splashdown. "We're happy to be home."

Mann, a member of Northern California's Wailacki of the Round Valley Indian Tribes, said she couldn't wait to feel the wind on her face, smell fresh grass and enjoy some delicious Earth food.

Japanese astronaut Koichi Wakata craved sushi, while Russian cosmonaut Anna Kikina yearned to drink hot tea "from real cup, not from plastic bag."

NASA astronaut Josh Cassada's to-do list included getting a rescue dog for his family. "Please don't tell our two cats," he joked before departing the space station.

Remaining behind at the space station are three Americans, three Russians and one from the United Arab Emirates.

Wakata, Japan's spaceflight champion, now has logged more than 500 days in space over five missions dating back to NASA's shuttle era.

From wine country to London, bank's failure shakes worldwide

By STAN CHOE and BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — It was called Silicon Valley Bank, but its collapse is causing shockwaves around the world.

From winemakers in California to startups across the Atlantic Ocean, companies are scrambling to figure out how to manage their finances after their bank suddenly shut down Friday. The meltdown means distress not only for businesses but also for all their workers whose paychecks may get tied up in the chaos.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom said Saturday that he's talking with the White House to help "stabilize the situation as quickly as possible, to protect jobs, people's livelihoods, and the entire innovation ecosystem that has served as a tent pole for our economy."

U.S. customers with less than \$250,000 in the bank can count on insurance provided by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. Regulators are trying to find a buyer for the bank in hopes customers with more than that can be made whole.

That includes customers like Circle, a big player in the cryptocurrency industry. It said it has about \$3.3 billion of the roughly \$40 billion in reserves for its USDC coin at SVB. That caused USD Coin's value, which tries to stay firmly at \$1, to briefly plunge below 87 cents Saturday. It later rose back above 97 cents, according to CoinDesk.

Across the Atlantic, startup companies woke up Saturday to find SVB's U.K. business will stop making payments or accepting deposits. The Bank of England said late Friday that it will put Silicon Valley Bank UK in its insolvency procedure, which will pay out eligible depositors up to 170,000 British pounds (\$204,544) for joint accounts "as quickly as possible."

"We know that there are a large number of startups and investors in the ecosystem who have significant exposure to SVB UK and will be very concerned," Dom Hallas, executive director of Coade, which represents British startups, said on Twitter. He cited "concern and panic."

The Bank of England said SVB UK's assets would be sold to pay creditors.

It's not just startups feeling the pain. The bank's collapse is having an effect on another important California industry: fine wines. It's been an influential lender to vineyards since the 1990s.

"This is a huge disappointment," said winemaker Jasmine Hirsch, the general manager of Hirsch Vineyards in California's Sonoma County.

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Hirsch said she expects her business will be fine. But she's worried about the broader effects for smaller vintners looking for lines of credit to plant new vines.

"They really understand the wine business," Hirsch said. "The disappearance of this bank, as one of the most important lenders, is absolutely going to have an effect on the wine industry, especially in an environment where interest rates have gone up."

In Seattle, Shelf Engine CEO Stefan Kalb found himself immersed in emergency meetings devoted to figuring how to meet payroll instead of focusing on his startup company's business of helping grocers manage their food orders.

"It's been a brutal day. We literally have every single penny in Silicon Valley Bank," Kalb said Friday, pegging the deposit amount that's now tied up at millions of dollars.

He is filing a claim for the \$250,000 limit, but that won't be enough to keep paying Shelf Engine's 40 employees for long. That could force him into a decision about whether to begin furloughing employees until the mess is cleaned up.

"I'm just hoping the bank gets sold during the weekend," Kalb said.

Tara Fung, co-founder and CEO of tech startup Co:Create that helps launch digital loyalty and rewards programs, said her firm uses multiple banks besides Silicon Valley Bank so was able switch over its payroll and vendor payments to another bank Friday.

Fung said her firm chose the bank as a partner because it is the "gold standard for tech firms and banking partnerships," and she was upset that some people seemed to be gloating about its failure and unfairly tying it to doubts about cryptocurrency ventures.

San Francisco-based employee performance management company Confirm.com was among the Silicon Valley Bank depositors that rushed to pull their money out before regulators seized the bank.

Co-founder David Murray credits an email from one of Confirm's venture capital investors, which urged the company to withdraw its funds "immediately," citing signs of a run on the bank. Such actions accelerated the flight of cash, which led to the bank's collapse.

"I think a lot of founders were sharing the logic that, you know, there's no downside to pulling up the money to be safe," Murray said. "And so we all did that, hence the bank run."

The U.S. government needs to act more quickly to stanch further damage, said Martín Varsavsky, an Argentinian entrepreneur who has investments across the tech industry and Silicon Valley.

One of his companies, Overture Life, which employs about 50 people, had some \$1.5 million in deposits in the financially embattled bank but can rely on other holdings elsewhere to meet payroll.

But other companies have high percentages of their cash in Silicon Valley Bank, and they need access to more than the amount protected by the FDIC.

"If the government allows people to take at least half of the money they have in Silicon Valley Bank next week, I think everything will be fine," Varsavsky said Saturday. "But if they stick to the \$250,000, it will be an absolute disaster in which so many companies won't be able to meet payroll."

Andrew Alexander, a calculus teacher at a private San Francisco high school that uses Silicon Valley Bank, wasn't overly worried. His next paycheck isn't scheduled for another two weeks, and he's confident many of the issues can be resolved by then.

But he worries for friends whose livelihoods are more deeply intertwined with the tech industry and Silicon Valley.

"I have a lot of friends in the startup world who are just like terrified," Alexander said, "and I really feel for them. It's pretty scary for them."

Pence says Trump 'endangered my family' on Jan. 6

By ZEKE MILLER and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former Vice President Mike Pence on Saturday harshly criticized former President Donald Trump for his role in the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol, widening the rift between the two men as they prepare to battle over the Republican nomination in next year's election.

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"President Trump was wrong," Pence said during remarks at the annual white-tie Gridiron Dinner attended by politicians and journalists. "I had no right to overturn the election. And his reckless words endangered my family and everyone at the Capitol that day, and I know history will hold Donald Trump accountable."

Pence's remarks were the sharpest condemnation yet from the once-loyal lieutenant who has often shied away from confronting his former boss. Trump has already declared his candidacy. Pence has not, but he's been laying the groundwork to run.

In the days leading up to Jan. 6, 2021, Trump pressured Pence to overturn President Joe Biden's election victory as he presided over the ceremonial certification of the results. Pence refused, and when rioters stormed the Capitol, some chanted that they wanted to "hang Mike Pence."

The House committee that investigated the attack said in its final report that "the President of the United States had riled up a mob that hunted his own Vice President."

With his remarks, Pence solidified his place in a broader debate within the Republican Party over how to view the attack. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, for example, recently provided Tucker Carlson with an archive of security camera footage from Jan. 6, which the Fox News host has used to downplay the day's events and promote conspiracy theories.

"Make no mistake about it, what happened that day was a disgrace," Pence said in his Gridiron Dinner remarks. "And it mocks decency to portray it any other way."

Trump, meanwhile, has continued to spread lies about his election loss. He's even spoken in support of the rioters and said he would consider pardoning them if he was reelected.

Speeches at the Gridiron Dinner are usually humorous affairs, where politicians poke fun at each other, and Pence did plenty of that as well.

He joked that Trump's ego was so fragile, he wanted his vice president to sing "Wind Beneath My Wings" — one of the lines is "did you ever know that you're my hero?" — during their weekly lunches.

He took another shot at Trump over classified documents.

"I read that some of those classified documents they found at Mar-a-Lago were actually stuck in the president's Bible," Pence said. "Which proves he had absolutely no idea they were there."

Even before the dinner was over, Pence was facing criticism for his jokes about Transportation Secretary Buttigieg, the first openly gay Cabinet member in U.S. history.

Pence mentioned that, despite travel problems that were plaguing Americans, Buttigieg took "maternity leave" after he and his husband adopted newborn twins.

"Pete is the only person in human history to have a child and everyone else gets post-partum depression," Pence said. ____

Megerian reported from Wilmington, Delaware.

Storm breaches California river's levee, thousands evacuate

By NIC COURY and STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

WATSONVILLE, Calif. (AP) — A Northern California agricultural community famous for its strawberry crop was forced to evacuate early Saturday after the Pajaro River's levee was breached by flooding from a new atmospheric river that pummeled the state.

Across the Central Coast's Monterey County, more than 8,500 people were under evacuation orders and warnings Saturday, including roughly 1,700 residents — many of them Latino farmworkers — from the unincorporated community of Pajaro.

Officials said the Pajaro River's levee breach is about 100 feet (30.48 meters) wide. Crews had gone door to door Friday afternoon to urge residents to leave before the rains came but some stayed and had to be pulled from floodwaters early Saturday.

First responders and the California National Guard rescued more than 50 people overnight. One video showed a member of the Guard helping a driver out of a car trapped by water up to their waists.

"We were hoping to avoid and prevent this situation, but the worst case scenario has arrived with the Pajaro River overtopping and levee breaching at about midnight," wrote Luis Alejo, chair of the Monterey

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County Board of Supervisors, on Twitter.

Alejo called the flooding "massive," saying the damage will take months to repair.

The Pajaro River separates the counties of Santa Cruz and Monterey in the area that flooded Saturday. Floodwaters that got into the region's wells might be contaminated with chemicals, officials said, and residents were told not to drink or cook with tap water for fear of illness.

Officials had been working along the levee in the hopes of shoring it up when it was breached around midnight Friday into Saturday. Crews began working to fix the levee around daybreak Saturday as residents slept in evacuation centers.

Oliver Gonzalez, 12, told The Associated Press that he, his mother and his aunt were rescued around 5 a.m. Saturday in Parajo. He grabbed his laptop, cellphone and some important documents but so much was left behind in their rush to leave.

"I'm kinda scared," he said several hours later from an evacuation center in nearby Watsonville. "My mom's car was left in the water."

Anais Rodriguez, 37, said first responders knocked on her home's door shortly after midnight. Her family packed about four days' worth of clothing and drove out to safety. She and her two children, her husband and her parents — along with their dog, Mila — arrived at the shelter about an hour later with few answers about what this would mean for their community going forward.

Weather-related power outages affected more than 17,000 customers in Monterey County late Saturday, according to the Governor's Office of Emergency Services.

Gov. Gavin Newsom's office on Saturday said it was monitoring the situation in Pajaro.

"Our thoughts are with everyone impacted and the state has mobilized to support the community," the governor's office wrote on Twitter.

The Pajaro Valley is a coastal agricultural area known for growing strawberries, apples, cauliflower, broccoli and artichokes. National brands like Driscoll's Strawberries and Martinelli's are headquartered in the region.

In 1995, the Pajaro River's levees broke, submerging 2,500 acres (1,011 hectares) of farmland and the community of Pajaro. Two people died and the flooding caused nearly \$100 million in damage. A state law, passed last year, advanced state funds for a levee project. It was scheduled to start construction in 2024.

State Sen. John Laird, who spearheaded the law and represents the area, said the project is fully funded now but it just came down to bad timing with this year's rains.

"It's tragic, we were so close to getting this done before any storms," he said.

This week's storm marked the state's 10th atmospheric river of the winter, storms that have brought enormous amounts of rain and snow to the state and helped lessen the drought conditions that had dragged on for three years. State reservoirs that had dipped to strikingly low levels are now well above the average for this time of year, prompting state officials to release water from dams to assist with flood control and make room for even more rain.

Across the state on Saturday, Californians contended with drenching rains and rising water levels in the atmospheric river's aftermath. In Tulare County, the sheriff ordered residents who live near the Tule River to evacuate, while people near the Poso Creek in Kern County were under an evacuation warning. The National Weather Service's meteorologists issued flood warnings and advisories, begging motorists to stay off deluged roadways.

In San Francisco, an 85-foot (25.91 meter) eucalyptus tree fell onto the Trocadero Clubhouse early Saturday morning. The 1892 clubhouse, a San Francisco historical landmark, was left severely damaged, with part of the roof crushed and the inside flooded.

Funnel clouds were spotted in the Jamestown area — the heart of California's Gold Rush — on Saturday afternoon and the weather service issued a tornado warning — later canceled — for the Sierra Nevada foothills as severe thunderstorms, hail and high winds blanketed the region. Another set of tornado warnings were briefly issued in Fresno County, nearly 100 miles (160.93 kilometers) south of Gold Country. Flash flooding warnings were in effect late Saturday in Tuolumne County, with roads submerged around Sonora and neighboring communities.

There were no immediate reports of injuries or damage.

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Newsom has declared emergencies in 34 counties in recent weeks, and the Biden administration approved a presidential disaster declaration for some on Friday morning, a move that will bring more federal assistance. President Biden spoke with Newsom on Saturday to pledge the federal government's support in California's response to the emergency, the White House said.

The atmospheric river, known as a "Pineapple Express" because it brought warm subtropical moisture across the Pacific from near Hawaii, was melting lower parts of the huge snowpack built in California's mountains.

Yet another atmospheric river is already in the forecast for early next week. State climatologist Michael Anderson said a third appeared to be taking shape over the Pacific and possibly a fourth.

California appeared to be "well on its way to a fourth year of drought" before the early winter series of storms, Anderson said Friday. "We're in a very different condition now," he added.

The National Weather Service on Saturday forecasted an intensified bout of rain and snow Monday through Wednesday, with considerable flooding possible along the state's central coast, San Joaquin and Sacramento valleys and the southern Sierra Nevada foothills into midweek.

Another round of heavy, wet snow is expected to hit the Sierras and areas of high elevation mid-week, the weather service said. Officials reported about 32 inches (81 centimeters) of snow had fallen by Saturday morning at the Mount Rose ski resort on the edge of Reno, Nevada.

No. 1 Houston in AAC tourney final again, but Sasser's hurt

By STEPHEN HAWKINS AP Sports Writer

FORT WORTH, Texas (AP) — When Marcus Sasser crumbled awkwardly to the court after his feet slipped from under him while dribbling past midcourt, Houston coach Kelvin Sampson knew something was wrong even without really seeing what had happened.

"Marcus goes down, it means he's hurt," Sampson said. "We always say pain is an opinion. Some kids have a high opinion. Some kids have a low opinion. But Marcus doesn't go down. He never misses practice, never misses a rep. He's always there."

Sasser, the American Athletic Conference player of the year, suffered an apparent groin injury with about 6 1/2 minutes left in the first half of the top-ranked Cougars' 69-48 win over Cincinnati in their AAC tournament semifinal game Saturday.

Houston (31-2), which led throughout, was up by eight when Sasser got hurt and expanded that to 15 by halftime.

Sampson said Sasser would be re-evaluated, but indicated that the senior guard might not play when the two-time reigning regular-season champion Cougars try to win their third consecutive AAC tournament title against Memphis on Sunday.

"I would probably err on the side of holding him out because of how important next week is," Sampson said. "But the most important thing is Marcus ... his healthy going forward is the most important thing here."

Jamal Sheard had 16 points and nine assists for the Cougars in the AAC semifinal, which matched two teams that are moving to the Big 12 next season. J'Wan Roberts had two second-chance layups in the game's first minute to put Houston ahead to stay. He finished with 16 points and eight rebounds, while Jarace Walker had 13 points.

"Just knowing that Marcus came out of the game and we still have teammates that we know that come off the bench and come with that same energy, it just shows a lot about our team," Roberts said. "It just shows everybody has each other's back and we never get away from what we're doing, just staying together."

Houston is a sure bet to be a No. 1 seed when the NCAA Tournament bracket comes out Sunday, no matter what happens in its fifth straight AAC Tournament championship game.

Landers Nolley II had 14 points for Cincinnati (21-12), which shot a season-worst 25.5% (13 of 51) from the field.

After 30 points for the Cougars on Friday, Sasser had four points in nine minutes against Cincinnati

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before the non-contact injury. He was dribbling between the conference logo and the 3-point line when his right foot appeared to slip, throwing him off-balance before his left foot slipped as well, sending him into an awkward split.

Sasser was a starter on the Cougars' 2021 Final Four team but missed their run to the NCAA Elite Eight last year because of a broken bone in his left foot before Christmas. He didn't talk to the media after the game.

Cincinnati was within 44-35 on a 3-point by Nolley with about 15 minutes left — the only time after half-time the Bearcats were within single digits. Shead then started a 17-3 run with a jumper, and had seven points in the spurt that pushed Houston's lead to 61-38.

"Obviously, they're the No. 1-ranked team in the country for a reason, and they're a difficult team to score on," Bearcats coach Wes Miller said. "It was a tough night for us, because we didn't score and we didn't defend well. So that's how you get that kind of a lopsided margin."

BIG PICTURE

Cincinnati: The Bearcats will miss the NCAA Tournament again, their last appearance being 2019, which was their ninth in a row. ... For the second straight day, Cincinnati was down 10 points less than seven minutes into the game. But there would be no comeback like Friday's 84-54 victory over Temple for the Bearcats' largest-ever winning margin in a conference tournament game. Instead, they lost by more than 20 points for only the second time this season.

Houston: The Cougars bounced back from Friday's season-worst shooting game (28.1% overall, 16 of 57). They nearly doubled that in the semifinal game, shooting 50.9% (29 of 57). ... Houston is 11-0 in Dickies Arena, and still hasn't lost away from home this season.

UP NEXT

Houston plays Memphis (25-8) in the tournament championship game Sunday. The winner gets the league's automatic NCAA Tournament berth, but both will be make the 68-team NCAA field — like last year, when the Cougars beat the Tigers 71-53 for the AAC tournament title.

One of Silicon Valley's top banks fails; assets are seized

By KEN SWEET AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Regulators rushed Friday to seize the assets of one of Silicon Valley's top banks, marking the largest failure of a U.S. financial institution since the height of the financial crisis almost 15 years ago.

Silicon Valley Bank, the nation's 16th-largest bank, failed after depositors hurried to withdraw money this week amid anxiety over the bank's health. It was the second biggest bank failure in U.S. history after the collapse of Washington Mutual in 2008.

The bank served mostly technology workers and venture capital-backed companies, including some of the industry's best-known brands.

"This is an extinction-level event for startups," said Garry Tan, CEO of Y Combinator, a startup incubator that launched Airbnb, DoorDash and Dropbox and has referred hundreds of entrepreneurs to the bank.

"I literally have been hearing from hundreds of our founders asking for help on how they can get through this. They are asking, 'Do I have to furlough my workers?'"

There appeared to be little chance of the chaos spreading in the broader banking sector, as it did in the months leading up to the Great Recession. The biggest banks — those most likely to cause an economic meltdown — have healthy balance sheets and plenty of capital.

Nearly half of the U.S. technology and health care companies that went public last year after getting early funding from venture capital firms were Silicon Valley Bank customers, according to the bank's website.

The bank also boasted of its connections to leading tech companies such as Shopify, ZipRecruiter and one of the top venture capital firms, Andreessen Horowitz.

Tan estimated that nearly one-third of Y Combinator's startups will not be able to make payroll at some point in the next month if they cannot access their money.

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Internet TV provider Roku was among casualties of the bank collapse. It said in a regulatory filing Friday that about 26% of its cash — \$487 million — was deposited at Silicon Valley Bank.

Roku said its deposits with SVB were largely uninsured and it didn't know "to what extent" it would be able to recover them.

As part of the seizure, California bank regulators and the FDIC transferred the bank's assets to a newly created institution — the Deposit Insurance Bank of Santa Clara. The new bank will start paying out insured deposits on Monday. Then the FDIC and California regulators plan to sell off the rest of the assets to make other depositors whole.

There was unease in the banking sector all week, with shares tumbling by double digits. Then news of Silicon Valley Bank's distress pushed shares of almost all financial institutions even lower Friday.

The failure arrived with incredible speed. Some industry analysts suggested Friday that the bank was still a good company and a wise investment. Meanwhile, Silicon Valley Bank executives were trying to raise capital and find additional investors. However, trading in the bank's shares was halted before stock market's opening bell due to extreme volatility.

Shortly before noon, the FDIC moved to shutter the bank. Notably, the agency did not wait until the close of business, which is the typical approach. The FDIC could not immediately find a buyer for the bank's assets, signaling how fast depositors cashed out.

The White House said Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen was "watching closely." The administration sought to reassure the public that the banking system is much healthier than during the Great Recession.

"Our banking system is in a fundamentally different place than it was, you know, a decade ago," said Cecilia Rouse, chair of the White House Council of Economic Advisers. "The reforms that were put in place back then really provide the kind of resilience that we'd like to see."

In 2007, the biggest financial crisis since the Great Depression rippled across the globe after mortgage-backed securities tied to ill-advised housing loans collapsed in value. The panic on Wall Street led to the demise of Lehman Brothers, a firm founded in 1847. Because major banks had extensive exposure to one another, the crisis led to a cascading breakdown in the global financial system, putting millions out of work.

At the time of its failure, Silicon Valley Bank, which is based in Santa Clara, California, had \$209 billion in total assets, the FDIC said. It was unclear how many of its deposits were above the \$250,000 insurance limit, but previous regulatory reports showed that lots of accounts exceeded that amount.

The bank announced plans Thursday to raise up to \$1.75 billion in order to strengthen its capital position. That sent investors scurrying and shares plunged 60%. They tumbled lower still Friday before the opening of the Nasdaq, where the bank's shares were traded.

As its name implied, Silicon Valley Bank was a major financial conduit between the technology sector, startups and tech workers. It was seen as good business sense to develop a relationship with the bank if a startup founder wanted to find new investors or go public.

Conceived in 1983 by co-founders Bill Biggerstaff and Robert Medearis during a poker game, the bank leveraged its Silicon Valley roots to become a financial cornerstone in the tech industry.

Bill Tyler, director of operations for TWG Supply in Grapevine, Texas, said he first realized something was wrong when his employees texted him at 6:30 a.m. Friday to complain that they did not receive their paychecks.

TWG, which has just 18 employees, had already sent the money for the checks to a payroll services provider that used Silicon Valley Bank. Tyler was scrambling to figure out how to pay his workers.

"We're waiting on roughly \$27,000," he said. "It's already not a timely payment. It's already an uncomfortable position. I don't want to ask any employees, to say, 'Hey, can you wait until mid-next week to get paid?'"

Silicon Valley Bank's ties to the tech sector added to its troubles. Technology stocks have been hit hard in the past 18 months after a growth surge during the pandemic, and layoffs have spread throughout the industry. Venture capital funding has also been declining.

At the same time, the bank was hit hard by the Federal Reserve's fight against inflation and an aggressive series of interest rate hikes to cool the economy.

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As the Fed raises its benchmark interest rate, the value of generally stable bonds starts to fall. That is not typically a problem, but when depositors grow anxious and begin withdrawing their money, banks sometimes have to sell those bonds before they mature to cover the exodus.

That is exactly what happened to Silicon Valley Bank, which had to sell \$21 billion in highly liquid assets to cover the sudden withdrawals. It took a \$1.8 billion loss on that sale.

Ashley Tyrner, CEO of FarmboxRx, said she had spoken to several friends whose businesses are backed by venture capital. She described them as being "beside themselves" over the bank's failure. Tyrner's chief operating officer tried to withdraw her company's funds on Thursday but failed to do so in time.

"One friend said they couldn't make payroll today and cried when they had to inform 200 employees because of this issue," Tyrner said.

Glimpse into Oscars rehearsals shows stars at Dolby Theatre

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — On Oscars Sunday, audiences can expect to see stars reunited from some of their favorite films.

"Four Weddings and a Funeral" co-stars Hugh Grant and Andie MacDowell will stand beside one another to present an award at the show, as will Harrison Ford and Glenn Close, the President and Vice President of the United States in "Air Force One," and "Creed III" frenemies Michael B. Jordan and Jonathan Majors.

The Associated Press got to take a peek inside Oscars rehearsals at the Dolby Theatre Saturday morning. A two-hour power outage in Hollywood did not affect work inside the Dolby but forced shops and restaurants at the Ovation Hollywood complex to close and stopped elevators at an adjacent hotel.

Saturday morning, Oscar presenters made the trek to the theater as a light, chilly rain fell outside, to run through their lines and practice handing out awards. It's one of several rehearsals in the leadup to the show, culminating with a full run through that stretches late into the night.

The theater, populated by a few dozen people from Janet Yang, the President of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, to the stagehands and camera operators practicing their movements, had an air of calm and anticipation.

"I hope I say everything correctly," MacDowell said while opening the envelope. "I hope I pronounce everything correctly. I wish Hugh was doing this part."

The awards are fake and so are the winners — working actors are hired to play nominees, sit in their seats, take the stage and give acceptance speeches. The same person might be playing everyone from "Tár" director Todd Field to composer John Williams. And all are ready to go with well-researched, and very brief, remarks.

The presenters all have different approaches. Some are one and done — others have questions and tweaks. Jordan discussed the font size on the teleprompter with show producer Glenn Weiss. Mindy Kaling had her director's hat on, rewriting and reworking some of her and John Cho's remarks on the spot.

"Sorry I was asking so many questions," Kaling said.

"No, thank God you did," Cho responded.

Florence Pugh and Andrew Garfield had the giggles running through their lines. Garfield got up to the mic and cleared his throat.

"Maybe don't do that," Pugh said.

Halle Berry practiced with a small brunette woman playing Jessica Chastain and Kate Hudson made a dramatic entrance, theatrically extending her arms as if to say "I've arrived."

Though all will be dressed to the nines in 24 hours, rehearsals are a decidedly more casual affair — at least for the men. Jordan was dressed in a matching black sweatsuit, while Grant opted for a more professorial look with a blazer, sweater, Oxford shirt combination. The women all wore their show heels with their jeans and daywear. Not only do the camera operators need to know just how tall the stars are going to be on the night, but it's also a long walk across the storied stage with millions watching.

Most of what goes on in the theater is strictly off the record, however — from the look of the stage to

who is handing out which award and what they're scripted to say. Those behind the show, which airs live Sunday on ABC at 8 p.m. Eastern, want to preserve some surprises after all.

Colorado GOP selects combative, election-denying new leader

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

LOVELAND, Colo. (AP) — The Colorado Republican Party on Saturday selected a combative former state representative who promised to be a "wartime" leader as its new chairman, joining several other state GOPs this year that have elected far-right figures and election conspiracy theorists to their top posts.

The move in Colorado comes as the party totters on the brink of political irrelevance in a state moving swiftly to the left.

Former State Rep. Dave Williams, who unsuccessfully tried to insert the phrase "Let's Go Brandon" into his name on the party's primary ballot last year and insists — incorrectly — that former President Donald Trump won the 2020 election, was selected by the party's executive committee out of a seven-person field.

Williams crossed the required 50% threshold on the third ballot after being endorsed by one of his competitors, indicted former Mesa County Clerk Tina Peters, who had failed to surpass 10%. Peters faces seven felony charges for her alleged role in illegally accessing voting machines in her county. She has denied the allegations while becoming a prominent national figure in the election conspiracy movement.

A three-term state representative from a conservative district in the city of Colorado Springs, Williams unsuccessfully challenged Rep. Doug Lamborn in the Republican primary last year. The Colorado Secretary of State's office rejected his effort to include a popular conservative phrase denigrating President Joe Biden in his name on the ballot. A judge agreed Williams could not be known as Dave "Let's Go Brandon" Williams.

In his speech to nearly 400 hardcore Republican activists and party leaders, Williams reprised the themes he hit during his campaign — that the party's recent poor performance in Colorado is simply due to it not fighting hard enough, not any disconnect between its activists and the majority of the state's voters.

"Our party doesn't have a brand problem," Williams told the group. "Our party has a problem with feckless leaders. ... We need a wartime leader."

Election deniers have won three other state party chair positions recently — in Idaho, Kansas and Michigan — and as his party is reeling from a brutal 2022 election year.

Republicans lost every statewide election last year by double digits and are down to their lowest share of the state Legislature in Colorado history. They have not won a major statewide race since 2014 and lag well behind Democrats and unaffiliated voters in registration.

Like six of the seven candidates who ran, Williams advocated trying to overturn a ballot measure that requires the party to allow unaffiliated voters to cast ballots in its primary. All of the candidates except Kevin McCarney, a former Mesa County party chairman, expressed skepticism that Biden legitimately won the 2020 election.

Williams' main rival ended up being Erik Aadland, a combat veteran and political novice who ran an unsuccessful race for a congressional swing seat in the Denver suburbs last year. Although he's also questioned the 2020 election results, he advocated for discussing elections in less aggressive language and based his speech Saturday around the theme of how "love trumps hate."

Still, he also spoke in combative terms about how the party should move forward after Williams' selection.

"We are besought by a radical left that wants to destroy this country, and we need to come together and win elections," Aadland told the crowd.

Prostate cancer treatment can wait for most men, study finds

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

Researchers have found long-term evidence that actively monitoring localized prostate cancer is a safe alternative to immediate surgery or radiation.

The results, released Saturday, are encouraging for men who want to avoid treatment-related sexual

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and incontinence problems, said Dr. Stacy Loeb, a prostate cancer specialist at NYU Langone Health who was not involved in the research.

The study directly compared the three approaches — surgery to remove tumors, radiation treatment and monitoring. Most prostate cancer grows slowly, so it takes many years to look at the disease's outcomes.

"There was no difference in prostate cancer mortality at 15 years between the groups," Loeb said. And prostate cancer survival for all three groups was high — 97% regardless of treatment approach. "That's also very good news."

The results were published Saturday in the *New England Journal of Medicine* and presented at a European Association of Urology conference in Milan, Italy. Britain's National Institute for Health and Care Research paid for the research.

Men diagnosed with localized prostate cancer shouldn't panic or rush treatment decisions, said lead author Dr. Freddie Hamdy of the University of Oxford. Instead, they should "consider carefully the possible benefits and harms caused by the treatment options."

A small number of men with high-risk or more advanced disease do need urgent treatments, he added.

Researchers followed more than 1,600 U.K. men who agreed to be randomly assigned to get surgery, radiation or active monitoring. The patients' cancer was confined to the prostate, a walnut-sized gland that's part of the reproductive system. Men in the monitoring group had regular blood tests and some went on to have surgery or radiation.

Death from prostate cancer occurred in 3.1% of the active-monitoring group, 2.2% in the surgery group, and 2.9% in the radiation group, differences considered statistically insignificant.

At 15 years, cancer had spread in 9.4% of the active-monitoring group, 4.7% of the surgery group and 5% of the radiation group. The study was started in 1999, and experts said today's monitoring practices are better, with MRI imaging and gene tests guiding decisions.

"We have more ways now to help catch that the disease is progressing before it spreads," Loeb said. In the U.S., about 60% of low-risk patients choose monitoring, now called active surveillance.

Hamdy said the researchers had seen the difference in cancer spread at 10 years and expected it to make a difference in survival at 15 years, "but it did not." He said spread alone doesn't predict prostate cancer death.

"This is a new and interesting finding, useful for men when they make decisions about treatments," he said.

Tropical Cyclone Freddy hammers Mozambique for second time

By WANJOHI KABUKURU Associated Press

MOMBASA, Kenya (AP) — Record-breaking Cyclone Freddy made its second landfall in Mozambique Saturday night, pounding the southern African nation with heavy rains and disrupting transport and telecommunications services.

French weather agency Météo-France warned of "destructive and devastating" winds and "dangerous seas and heavy rains" that could lead to landslides. It said Freddy will go further inland through the weekend, generating heavy rains in Mozambique and southern Malawi, with rain also likely in Zimbabwe and Zambia.

It's the second time Freddy has hit the country, with the cyclone originally making landfall late last month.

Météo-France also raised concerns that Freddy is unlikely to weaken over land in the coming week and has a high probability of exiting back into the sea. Freddy made landfall with maximum wind speeds at sea measuring 155 kilometers (around 100 miles) an hour and sea gusts averaging 220 kilometers (around 140 miles) an hour, the agency said.

Freddy was initially on course to make landfall in the country Friday night but stalled over the Mozambique channel. The cyclone then intensified on Saturday and regained strength as it barrelled toward land, Mozambique's National Institute of Meteorology said.

The cyclone's second punch is showering a low-lying, vast land teeming with rivers and "almost all of them have no dam" to ease flooding, said Salomao Bandeira, a scientist at Mozambique's Universidade Eduardo

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Mondlane. Flooding in the country earlier this year slammed regions where major rivers are controlled by dams, allowing some degree of control, Bandeira said, raising fears this hit could lead to more destruction.

The projected deluge is already worrying health and disaster agencies in both Mozambique and Malawi, who have recently been battling cholera cases and other water-borne ailments. The U.N. and EU-led disaster alert system has already issued a red alert projecting that some 2.3 million people will be impacted. Mozambique's disaster institute has moved thousands of people to storm shelters in anticipation.

"More lives are being saved in Mozambique today" due to early preparedness, Bandeira said.

In a statement released Saturday, Malawi Red Cross said it had activated its early response teams in southern Malawi to prepare for the cyclone.

Earlier in the week, Freddy's longevity and baffling trajectories caused the U.N. weather agency to set up a committee to determine whether it has broken the record as the longest-lasting tropical cyclone in recorded history after traversing more than 8,000 kilometres (5,000 miles) in the southern Indian Ocean.

The U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said Freddy has already catapulted into the record books for the second-ever highest accumulated cyclone energy, or ACE, a measurement of a cyclone's energy over time.

Freddy is also the third storm on record to last more than 22 days, said NOAA's Carl Schreck. Hurricane John in 1994 and an unnamed Atlantic hurricane in 1899 are the other two. The natural weather event La Nina and a negative Indian Ocean Dipole, or a change of temperatures over the ocean, "may have produced ocean temperatures and atmospheric circulations that made an event like this more likely," Schreck added.

Any storm that can remain at such a "strong intensity for so long and make two landfalls is important in terms of human impacts and in terms of science," said Kristen Corbosiero, professor of atmospheric and environmental sciences at the University of Albany.

"Intense storms generally go through a series of eyewall replacement cycles and intensity fluctuations," where the cyclone begins to develop a new eye, Corbosiero said. "But Freddy didn't have these cycles for most of its life cycle. Trying to understand why, will be a good research topic."

Bud Grant, stoic coach of powerful Vikings teams, dies at 95

By DAVE CAMPBELL AP Pro Football Writer

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Bud Grant, the stoic and demanding Hall of Fame coach who took the Minnesota Vikings and their mighty Purple People Eaters defense to four Super Bowls in eight years and lost all of them, died Saturday. He was 95.

The Vikings announced Grant's death on social media.

"No single individual more defined the Minnesota Vikings than Bud Grant. A once-in-a-lifetime man, Bud will forever be synonymous with success, toughness, the North and the Vikings," owners Zygi Wilf and Mark Wilf said in a joint statement distributed by the team. "In short, he was the Vikings."

Wearing his trademark purple Vikings cap and a stone-faced demeanor, Grant displayed a steely sideline gaze that became synonymous with his teams. He was a mainstay among coaches of his era, a decorated group that included Don Shula, Tom Landry, Chuck Noll, John Madden and Hank Stram. Grant, however, had little interest in accolades.

"The only reason I can see for a head coach getting credit for something good is that he gets so much blame when something is bad," Grant once said. "The whole secret, I think, is to not react to either the good or the bad."

He guided the Vikings from 1967-85, with a one-year hiatus in 1984, on his way to a 158-96-5 record with 11 division championships in 18 seasons. He went 10-12 in the playoffs. When he retired, Grant was eighth on the NFL's all-time victory list.

"There are so many adjectives appropriate to describe Coach Bud Grant: legendary, determined, successful. Underneath his outwardly stoic demeanor that some misunderstood as a coldness laid the warm heart of a man who truly loved his players and the sport of football," Pro Football Hall of Fame president Jim Porter said.

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After replacing another Hall of Famer, Norm Van Brocklin, Grant assembled the revered defensive line dubbed the Purple People Eaters. The line — whose motto was “Meet at the quarterback” — was joined by a powerful offense that helped Minnesota reach the Super Bowl in 1970, the final edition of the big game before the AFL-NFL merger.

The heavily favored Vikings fell 23-7 to Kansas City, setting a tone for the infamous run of title game losses to Miami, Pittsburgh and Oakland from the perceived lesser conference following the 1973, 1974 and 1976 seasons.

“If you’re going to succeed, survive is maybe a better word,” Grant said during his Pro Football Hall of Fame induction speech in 1994 in Canton, Ohio. “You’ve got to handle losing. You die every time you lose, but you’ve got to get over it.”

An avid outdoorsman who spent many an offseason on fishing trips in Alaska or hunting expeditions in Arizona, Grant also was a successful coach in the Canadian Football League who became the first person elected to the Hall of Fame in both the CFL and NFL. He won four league championships during his 10 years in Canada.

Harry Peter Grant Jr. was born on May 20, 1927, in Superior, Wisconsin, and given the nickname Bud by his mother. He overcame a bout with polio as a child and became a three-sport high school star. He learned early about the coaching business after enlisting in 1945, and played on a team at the Great Lakes naval station outside Chicago run by Paul Brown, who would go on to a Hall of Fame career as an NFL coach, executive and owner.

From there, Grant played football, basketball and baseball at the University of Minnesota, a nine-time letterman who was drafted by both the NBA and NFL. He pursued basketball first, playing two seasons for the Minneapolis Lakers and winning a title with them in 1950.

But it was football where Grant truly excelled, first for the Philadelphia Eagles. He was second in the NFL with 56 receptions and 997 yards in 1952, before a contract dispute steered him to Winnipeg in the CFL. After starring as a two-way player for the Blue Bombers, once snagging five interceptions in a playoff game, he became their coach and took them to six Grey Cup games — winning the title in 1958, 1959, 1961 and 1962. Grant won 102 games as a CFL coach.

That sparked interest from the Vikings, who lured him back across the border in 1967. With such stars as Fran Tarkenton, Carl Eller, Alan Page, Paul Krause and Ron Yary — all Pro Football Hall of Famers — Grant led the Vikings to 10 Central Division crowns in 11 seasons.

Minnesota U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar’s late father, Jim Klobuchar, was a newspaper reporter who closely covered those Vikings teams. She said in a statement released by her office that “no name loomed larger” in her house growing up than Grant’s.

“I remember answering the phone as a young kid to silence on the other line, save for maybe the grunted word ‘Jim,’” Klobuchar said. “That meant it was Bud calling my dad back for the postgame story, regardless of the outcome.”

Disciplined to the core and insisting on sharp mental focus, Grant went so far as to have his players practice standing at attention during the national anthem. He infamously took the Vikings outdoors in the frigid winter for workouts and banned sideline heaters during games at Metropolitan Stadium.

On Jan. 10, 2016, when the Vikings staged the coldest game in franchise history in the first round of the playoffs against Seattle, at the university’s outdoor stadium while their building was being built, Grant served as an honorary captain. He strolled out for the pregame coin flip in a Vikings cap and a purple short-sleeved polo shirt, looking ready for a round of golf in defiance of temperatures of minus 6 degrees Fahrenheit and minus 25 with the wind chill.

Grant retired after the 1983 season, replaced by Les Steckel, whose fiery approach was the opposite of his calm predecessor and went 3-13. Grant returned for one season, a 7-9 finish, before longtime offensive coordinator Jerry Burns was promoted to the top job.

Though Grant was done with coaching then, his influence on his team and city remained. Grant continued living in the same suburban home he bought upon his 1967 arrival, in Bloomington less than 10 miles from Metropolitan Stadium. He became an ambassador of sorts for the Vikings in the community, sometimes

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lending his voice in the lobbying effort to replace the Metrodome, where the team played from 1982-2013.

He went on hunting and fishing trips with friends and family as often as possible. On one particularly harrowing visit to hunt in Canada in 2015, Grant's pilot safely belly-flopped a twin-engine plane after the landing gear and dashboard instruments failed.

Grant showed more of his softer side, too. At the university's return to on-campus football, at TCF Bank Stadium in 2009, the Gophers named him and eight other former players an honorary captain. His face shook and his eyes welled as fans cheered his name in the pregame ceremony.

There were also Grant's famous garage sales, where he gave autographs to those who bought at least \$25 worth of his items, including memorabilia from his playing and coaching days and even used outdoors equipment. For the 2017 three-day event, there were custom-made bobblehead dolls in his likeness available for purchase. Grant would sit in a chair outside his home and sign for a nonstop line of admirers, some coming from overseas to look through the old coach's stuff.

The Vikings maintained a spacious office for him at their suburban headquarters, continuing to list him as a consultant on all team directories. Whenever a new coach or executive was hired, Grant was usually one of the first people the Vikings made sure to introduce.

"Bud was one of the first people to warmly greet me when I walked through the doors of this facility. I didn't realize at the time I would be so blessed to build a close friendship with him over the next year," current Vikings coach Kevin O'Connell said. "Bud was gracious with his time, meeting in his office weekly to discuss football and life. I will forever cherish those conversations because they made me a better coach, a better husband and father and a better person."

When he turned 95 on May 20, 2022, the team organized a Zoom call for him and several of his former players. Jim Marshall led the group in the virtual "Happy Birthday" singalong.

He is survived by his partner, Pat Smith, six children, 19 grandchildren and, as of 2021, 13 great grandchildren. His wife of 59 years, Pat, died in 2009. One son, Mike Grant, built a powerhouse football program at Eden Prairie High School, a 15-minute drive from his father's house, winning 11 state championships in a 22-year span from 1996-2017.

Relentless winter brings pros, cons for Tahoe ski resorts

By SCOTT SONNER Associated Press

RENO, Nev. (AP) — Last winter, most ski resorts at Lake Tahoe had to postpone their usual November openings because there wasn't enough snow.

This season, several have been forced to close at times because there's been too much.

A relentless winter has dumped more than 50 feet (15 meters) of snow on mountain resorts around the lake over the past three months, along the California-Nevada line.

The latest Sierra storm, packing more heavy snow, winds gusting in excess of 100 mph (160 kph) and even some flooding, forced about a half-dozen to shut down on Friday. At least three remained closed Saturday.

Even when the resorts have been open for business, storms have prompted frequent closures of mountain highways and the main U.S. Interstate connecting San Francisco and Reno to Lake Tahoe atop the Sierra Nevada, making it nearly impossible at times for out-of-towners to make their way to the slopes.

But locals who've been skiing at Tahoe for decades say any disruptions are offset by the premium, powdery snow conditions and the real prize: skiing through the end of May and possibly longer.

"It's heaven sent for a skier because I can ski until Memorial Day," said Dan Lavelly, 66, a Reno resident who's been skiing for about 40 years.

"The conditions have been fantastic. It's the best I've had in eons," he said.

The resorts who cater to folks like him agree.

"The storms have a little bit of a financial impact, but the snowstorms also drive visitation and we are able to stay open longer, so they counter balance each other," said Patrick Lacey, a spokesman for Palisades Tahoe, a resort forced to close on Friday when one gust of wind reached 139 mph (224 kph).

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"We're right up there with the biggest snowfall totals of the past 75 years," he said.

Another 32 inch (81 centimeters) of snow had fallen by Saturday at the Mt. Rose ski resort on the edge of Reno.

The tail end of the storm was still wreaking havoc Saturday on California's central coast, where more than 8,500 people were under evacuation orders and warnings after a levee was breached by flooding from the latest atmospheric river to pummel the state.

Friday and Saturday marked the third closure this year due to weather at three popular Tahoe resorts owned by Colorado-based Vail Resorts — Heavenly, Northstar California and Kirkwood.

"If anything, here in Tahoe, we expect the unexpected," Vail Resorts spokesperson Sara Roston said in an email to The Associated Press on Friday.

During the 2021-22 season, "we delayed opening because we didn't have enough snow," Roston said.

"Then in early December, we were hit with a ton of snow and saw some closures as a result," she said. "It has been one wild winter this year; that is for sure."

The last storm, a week ago, forced the cancellation of the final day of the Nevada state high school ski championships at Mount Rose, which is halfway between Reno and Lake Tahoe.

Chadd Bunker, of Sparks, Nevada, who frequents Mount Rose, said he's heard some people grumbling about the series of storms that have sometimes kept them off the slopes.

"Yeah, you can't get there when it's nasty, but that just means it's going to be even better when you can get there," said Bunker, 56, who's been skiing since he was 5 years old.

The University of California, Berkeley's Central Sierra Snow Lab at Donner Pass, north of Lake Tahoe, reported earlier this month it had recorded the snowiest October-February period since 1970. The snowiest winter season there was 1951-52, with nearly 68 feet (812 inches, 21 meters).

Palisades Tahoe, which averages 400 inches (10 meters) a year and registered 350 inches (9 meters) last year, had recorded 607 inches (15 meters) before the latest storm moved in on Friday. That's still below the season record set in 2016-17.

Lavelly has a season pass at Palisades, the site of the 1960 Winter Olympics, so he's able to work around the storms to still get his runs in.

But he sympathizes with those making the trip from Sacramento or the Bay Area, who are at the mercy of woeful weather, including blizzard conditions that have shut down Interstate 80 for days at a time since Jan. 1.

He said he's spent as much time this year monitoring web cams of highways as he has the ones at individual resorts to check the slope conditions.

"I-80 was closed three times last week. Another day, the traffic was so bad you couldn't get there," Lavelly said, reflecting on the day it took him two hours to travel just 15 miles (24 kilometers) on the way out of Reno before he "finally gave up."

Todd Cummings, who started skiing in the 1980s in New England and now lives in Santa Cruz, California, has managed three trips to Tahoe resorts this winter despite the storms.

"You can never be happy — too much, too little," said Cummings, who grew up in Rhode Island.

He doesn't mind the travel challenges if they pay off in piles of fluffy snow on the mountain and quieter slopes.

"I'll deal with that any time," he said. "You just need to be capable of driving in the snow, be used to four-wheel drive, chains."

UK: Russian advance in Bakhmut could come with heavy losses

By KARL RITTER Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian forces have made progress in their campaign to capture the city of Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine, the focus of the war's longest ground battle, but their assault will be difficult to sustain without more significant personnel losses, British military officials said Saturday.

The U.K. Defense Ministry said in its latest assessment that paramilitary units from the Kremlin-controlled Wagner Group have seized most of eastern Bakhmut, with a river flowing through the city now marking

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the front line of the fighting.

The mining city is located in Donetsk province, one of four regions of Ukraine that Russian President Vladimir Putin illegally annexed last year. Russia's military opened the campaign to take control of Bakhmut in August, and both sides have experienced staggering casualties.

Ukrainian troops and supply lines remain vulnerable to "continued Russian attempts to outflank the defenders from the north and south" as the Wagner Group's forces try to close in on them in a pincer movement, the U.K. ministry said.

However, the ministry added, it will be "highly challenging" for Wagner's soldiers to push ahead because Ukraine has destroyed key bridges over the river, while Ukrainian sniper fire from fortified buildings further west has made the thin strip of open ground in the city's center "a killing zone."

Russian military bloggers and other pro-Kremlin Telegram accounts claimed Friday that Russian forces had entered a metal processing plant in northwestern Bakhmut. The Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank, also referenced geolocated footage showing Russian forces within 800 meters of the AZOM plant, a heavily built-up and fortified complex.

The institute reported in its Friday night assessment that Moscow's apparent focus on capturing the plant, rather than opting for a "wider encirclement of western Bakhmut" by attempting to take nearby villages, was likely to bring a further wave of Russian casualties.

Ukraine's ground forces on Saturday signaled their intention to hold out in Bakhmut, announcing on Facebook that their top officer, Col. Oleksandr Syrskyi, was personally overseeing "the most important sectors of the front" to deny Moscow a long-awaited battlefield victory.

"Our military is standing. This is our fortress. And what they are doing now, we cannot even imagine how useful it will be for the country, for our army in the near future," National Security and Defense Council Secretary Oleksii Danilov said on Ukrainian state TV.

Quoting Syrskyi, he said the alleys and territory around Bakhmut were "littered with the corpses of Russians and 'Wagnerians.'"

Elsewhere in Ukraine, repair work continued Saturday following a massive Russian missile and drone strike two days earlier that killed six people and left hundreds of thousands without heat or electricity.

Ukraine's state grid operator said power supply issues persisted across four provinces following the barrage, in which 80 Russian missiles and a smaller number of exploding drones hit residential buildings and critical infrastructure across the country.

In a Facebook post, Ukrenergo said scheduled blackouts remain in place in Kharkiv and Zhytomyr, as well as parts of the Dnipropetrovsk and Mykolaiv regions. The company added that the situation in Zhytomyr was especially challenging, with some customers still without power.

The General Staff of the Ukrainian armed forces reported that Russia launched 34 attacks from multiple rocket launchers Saturday on various parts of the country. They included southern Ukraine's Kherson province, where three people "who simply went to a store to buy groceries" were killed, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said.

Russian shelling between Friday morning and Saturday morning also killed at least five people and wounded another 19 across Kherson and Donetsk provinces, Ukrainian authorities reported.

Donetsk, where Bakhmut is located, has been the epicenter of the fighting in recent months, while Ukrainian-held parts of Kherson have seen daily shelling from Russian troops stationed across the Dnieper River.

On Saturday, Russian forces also launched 12 air strikes and two missile strikes on the city of Zaporizhzhia, the capital of the southeastern Ukrainian province of the same name, according to Ukraine's military. A strike by an S-300 missile hit a civilian infrastructure facility, but no casualties were reported.

Norwegian Defense Minister Ukrainian defense chief Oleksiy Reznikov welcomed his Norwegian counterpart to Kyiv on Saturday. Defense Minister Bjørn Arild Gram announced Norway's decision to earmark \$7.5 billion over the next five years for weapons and other aid for Ukraine.

According to a readout of the meeting published by Ukraine's Defense Ministry, Gram said the arms Norway planned to send included missile launchers and ammunition for NASAMS anti-aircraft systems.

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Reznikov said that Ukrainian troops successfully operated some of the same weapons to shoot down the drones and missiles that Russia rained on Ukraine on Thursday.

"We know for sure that every 10 uses of the NASAMS system (...) mean downing 10 of the aggressor's missiles, saving 10 buildings and infrastructure facilities, as well as hundreds of human lives," he said. ____
Follow AP's coverage of the war in Ukraine: <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine>

Jehovah's Witnesses shocked by Hamburg attack, thank police

BERLIN (AP) — The Jehovah's Witnesses expressed shock Saturday over the deadly shooting at one of the group's halls in Hamburg, Germany, but thanked German authorities for preventing more bloodshed through their swift intervention during the attack.

A gunman shot dead six members of the Hamburg congregation and wounded eight others, including a woman who lost her unborn child, before killing himself late Thursday. The shooting drew widespread condemnation and calls for a tightening of Germany's firearms laws.

In a statement, the Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany confirmed that the man police identified as the gunman was a former member who left the church voluntarily two years ago.

"We do not know the motive for this terrible crime," it said. "Like the rest of the world, we were shocked and bewildered when we read (...) that the gunman reportedly bore 'particular anger' not just toward the Jehovah's Witnesses but also toward other religious groups and his former employer."

Officials identified the shooter only as 35-year-old Philipp F., in line with German privacy laws, and said that his departure from the church was "apparently not on good terms." The investigation into his motives was ongoing.

A website registered in the man's name stated that he grew up in "a strict religious evangelical household" the Bavaria state town of Kempten.

Police said Philipp F. had only legally acquired a gun in December and was visited by officers two months later after an anonymous tip suggested that he might be psychologically unfit to own the weapon and was angry at the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Officers found the man to be cooperative and decided there were no grounds to take away his weapon, police said.

In its statement, The Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany expressed its deep sympathy for the families of the victims and the survivors, and said its focus was on providing pastoral care to everyone affected by the tragedy.

"At the same time, our sincere thanks go to the police, who undoubtedly prevented even more deaths and injuries due to their quick intervention," it said.

The Hamburg congregation that was holding a service when the attack happened currently has about 60 members and is one of 47 in the port city, which is home to almost 4,000 denomination members, according to the statement.

The Jehovah's Witnesses claim a worldwide membership of about 8.7 million, with about 170,000 in Germany. The religious movement was founded in the United States in the 19th century and is headquartered in Warwick, New York.

Members are known for their evangelistic efforts that include knocking on doors and distributing literature in public squares. The denomination's practices include a refusal to bear arms, receive blood transfusions, salute a national flag or participate in secular government.

Burning eyes, dead fish; red tide flares up on Florida coast

SARASOTA, Fla. (AP) — Residents are complaining about burning eyes and breathing problems. Dead fish have washed up on beaches. A beachside festival has been canceled, even though it wasn't scheduled for another month.

Florida's southwest coast experienced a flare-up of the toxic red tide algae this week, setting off concerns

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that it could continue to stick around for a while. The current bloom started in October.

The annual BeachFest in Indian Rocks Beach, Florida, sponsored by a homeowners' association, was canceled after it determined, with help from the city and the Pinellas County Health Department, that red tide likely would continue through the middle of next month when the festival was scheduled.

"Red Tide is currently present on the beach and is forecasted to remain in the area in the weeks to come," the Indian Rocks Beach Homeowners Association said in a letter to the public. "It is unfortunate that it had to be canceled but it is the best decision in the interest of public health."

Nearly two tons of debris, mainly dead fish, were cleared from Pinellas County beaches and brought to the landfill, county spokesperson Tony Fabrizio told the Tampa Bay Times. About 1,000 pounds (454 kilograms) of fish have been cleared from beaches in St. Pete Beach since the start of the month, Mandy Edmunds, a parks supervisor with the city, told the newspaper.

Red tide, a toxic algae bloom that occurs naturally in the Gulf of Mexico, is worsened by the presence of nutrients such as nitrogen in the water. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission warns people to not swim in or around red tide waters over the possibility of skin irritation, rashes and burning and sore eyes. People with asthma or lung disease should avoid beaches affected by the toxic algae.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission on Friday reported that it had found red tide in 157 samples along Florida's Gulf Coast, with the strongest concentrations along Pinellas and Sarasota counties.

Records in Fox defamation case show pressures on reporters

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — It wasn't critics, political foes or their bosses that united Fox News stars Tucker Carlson, Sean Hannity and Laura Ingraham when they gathered via text message for a gripe session shortly after the 2020 election.

It was their own network's news division.

"They're pathetic," Carlson wrote.

"THEY AREN'T SMART," Ingraham emphasized.

"What news have they broken the last four years?" Hannity asked.

The Nov. 13, 2020, conversation was included among thousands of pages of recently released documents related to Dominion Voting Systems' \$1.6 billion defamation lawsuit against Fox for its post-election reporting. Like much of what was uncovered, the exchange ultimately may have little bearing on whether Fox will be judged guilty of libel.

Instead, the material offers insight into how Fox's stars and leadership responded at a time of high anxiety and how giving its audience what it wanted to hear took precedence over reporting uncomfortable truths.

The revelations have bolstered critics who say Fox News Channel should be considered a propaganda network rather than a news outlet.

Yet while Fox's news side has seen the prominent defections of Shepard Smith and Chris Wallace in recent years, it still employs many respected journalists — such as Jennifer Griffin, Greg Palkot, John Roberts, Shannon Bream, Bryan Llenas, Jacqui Heinrich and Chad Pergram.

They're left to wonder whether the raft of recent stories about Fox — from the Dominion documents and from Carlson's use of U.S. Capitol security video to craft his own narrative of the Jan. 6, 2021, attack — will make their jobs more difficult. Will fewer people want to work with them because of the dominance of Fox's opinion side?

Fox says it has increased its investment in journalism by more than 50% under Suzanne Scott, Fox News Media CEO, and usually leads its rivals in ratings during major breaking news stories.

"We are incredibly proud of our team of journalists who continue to deliver breaking news from around the world and will continue to fight for the preservation of the First Amendment," the network said in a statement.

The post-election period in 2020 offered a stern test. The network's election night declaration that Joe Biden had won in Arizona, ahead of any other news organization, infuriated its viewers. Many were sym-

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pathetic to former President Donald Trump's claims of significant voter fraud even if, then as now, there has been no evidence of that.

After she covered a Nov. 19 news conference with Trump lawyer Rudolph Giuliani, then-Fox reporter Kristin Fisher said her boss in Washington, Bryan Boughton, called to say he was unhappy with her report. She said she was told she needed to do a better job of "respecting our audience," according to documents released in the case.

"I believed that I was respecting our audience by telling them the truth," Fisher, who now works at CNN, testified in a deposition on the Dominion case.

She later claimed that airtime was taken away from her in retaliation.

Heinrich drew the ire of Fox opinion hosts by tweeting a fact-check on some of Trump's claims. In a text message, Carlson profanely said she should be fired; Fox said she was later promoted to White House correspondent.

"She has serious nerve doing this," Fox publicity chief Irena Briganti said in an internal memo released among the court papers, "and if this gets picked up, viewers are going to be further disgusted. Her job is to report, not to taunt the president of the United States."

During a Nov. 14 text conversation, Scott and Lachlan Murdoch, the executive chairman and CEO of Fox Corp., talked about how a Trump rally should be covered on the network.

"News guys have to be careful how they cover this rally," Murdoch said. "So far some of the side comments have been slightly anti, and they shouldn't be. The narrative should be this huge celebration of the president."

In another message, he called Fox correspondent Leland Vittert "smug and obnoxious." Vittert now works at NewsNation.

A week after the election, a Fox Corp. senior executive, Raj Shah, said in a memo that "bold, clear and decisive action is needed for us to begin to regain the trust that we're losing with our core audience."

Dominion argues, as part of its lawsuit, that nervousness about what its viewers wanted led Fox to air allegations that the voting machine company was complicit in fraud that hurt Trump, even though many people at the network didn't believe them. In his own deposition, Fox founder Rupert Murdoch agreed the election had been fair and it "was not stolen."

Fox counters that it was airing newsworthy charges made by the president and his followers.

Concern over the Arizona backlash spread to the news division, according to court documents. Fox News anchor Bret Baier said defending the call made him uncomfortable and suggested instead awarding the state to Trump. Roberts also sent a memo saying he'd been getting "major heat" over the decision.

In 2012, Fox stood strongly behind its decision desk when network commentator and veteran GOP aide Karl Rove questioned its correct call that Barack Obama had won in Ohio, essentially assuring him of re-election against Republican Mitt Romney.

In a memorable television moment, Megyn Kelly marched down the hall to hear the decision desk's explanation for why the call was made.

Eight years later, signs of timidity at Fox appeared in the days after its Arizona call. When other news organizations ultimately declared Biden the president-elect on the Saturday morning after the election, Fox waited about 15 minutes.

On Nov. 20, 2020, Rupert Murdoch discussed with Scott in a private memo whether two Washington executives key to the Arizona race call should be fired, saying it would send a "big message" to Trump allies. The executives, Bill Sammon and Chris Stirewalt, lost their jobs two months later.

A Fox spokeswoman characterized the discussions about the Arizona call as part of a typical postmortem that happens after big news events. Despite "intense scrutiny," Fox stood by its call. Even though Sammon and Stirewalt were forced out, Fox kept consultant Arnon Mishkin, who has run its decisions desk, for the 2024 election.

Scott, answerable to corporate bosses, noted in her deposition that she considered herself a television producer.

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"I don't consider myself a journalist," said the head of Fox News Media. "I consider myself a TV executive. I hire journalists. I hire news people."

Longtime Fox News Channel chief Roger Ailes wasn't a journalist, either — his background was in politics. To some longtime Fox watchers, though, Ailes recognized that Fox's opinion side drew strength from a solid news side, and he kept stronger barriers between the two.

Some of the information revealed in recent weeks illustrates how, in many ways, Fox has become less of an agenda-setter than an outlet that follows its audience, said Nicole Hemmer, a Vanderbilt University professor and author of "Partisans: The Conservative Revolutionaries Who Remade American Politics in the 1990s."

To date, no one in Fox management has talked about the Dominion case to its journalists, leaving some wondering whether there is anyone standing up for them, said one Fox journalist, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of professional retribution.

In a brief filed Friday, Fox said that many of the exhibits that Dominion has introduced were internal communications, "often inflammatory and headline-grabbing, but irrelevant to any issue in dispute."

"There is some fine journalism still being done at Fox News today," said Kathleen Hall Jamieson, director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania. She cited the transition of "Fox News Sunday" from Wallace to Bream.

The fallout from the Dominion case, however, leaves open the question of whether Fox journalists will be allowed to do their jobs unconstrained by other forces, she said.

"It would be useful for Fox News, at this point, to make a clear statement that the news division has complete and total autonomy and that a clear line is drawn between it and the rest of Fox," Jamieson said.

Oregon eyes mandate for climate change lessons in schools

By CLAIRE RUSH Associated Press/Report for America

SALEM, Ore. (AP) — Oregon lawmakers are aiming to make the state the second in the nation to mandate climate change lessons for K-12 public school students, further fueling U.S. culture wars in education.

Dozens of Oregon high schoolers submitted support of the bill, saying they care about climate change deeply. Some teachers and parents say teaching climate change could help the next generation better confront it, but others want schools to focus on reading, writing and math after test scores plummeted post-pandemic.

Schools across the U.S. have found themselves at the center of a politically charged battle over curriculum and how matters such as gender, sex education and race should be taught — or whether they should be taught at all.

One of the bill's chief sponsors, Democratic Sen. James Manning, said even elementary students have told him climate change is important to them.

"We're talking about third and fourth graders having a vision to understand how this world is changing rapidly," he said at a Thursday state Capitol hearing in Salem.

Connecticut has the only U.S. state law requiring climate change instruction, and it's possibly the first time such a bill has been introduced in Oregon, according to legislative researchers. Lawmakers in California and New York are considering similar bills.

Manning's bill requires every Oregon school district to develop climate change curriculum within three years, addressing ecological, societal, cultural, political and mental health aspects of climate change.

It's unclear how Oregon would enforce the law. Manning told The Associated Press that he is going to scrap an unpopular proposal for financial penalties against districts that don't comply, but didn't say whether another plan was coming.

For now, the bill doesn't say how many hours of instruction are needed for the state's education department to approve a district's curriculum.

Most states have learning standards — largely set by state education boards — that include climate change, although their extent varies by state. Twenty states and Washington, D.C., have specifically ad-

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opted what are known as the Next Generation Science Standards, which call for middle schoolers to learn about climate science and high schoolers to receive lessons on how human activity affects the climate.

New Jersey's education standards are believed to be the most wide-ranging. For the first time this school year, climate change is not just part of science instruction, but all subjects, like art, English and even PE.

Several teens testified at the state Capitol in favor of the bill. No students have submitted opposition testimony.

"In 100 years are we going to have to teach our children what trees are because there aren't any left? It's a thought that horrifies me," said high school sophomore Gabriel Burke. "My generation needs to learn about climate change from a young age for our survival."

Some teachers testified in support of the bill. But others say they're already struggling to address pandemic learning losses. Adding climate change on top of reading, writing, math, science and social studies is "a heavy lift that will end up coming down on the backs of teachers," said Kyler Pace, a grade school teacher in Sherwood, Oregon.

Recent surveys conducted by Columbia University's Teachers College and the Yale Program on Climate Communication suggest that a majority of Americans think that climate change and global warming should be taught in school. But climate change is still seen by some as a politically divisive issue, and Pace said that mandating its instruction could inject more tension into schools.

Nicole De Graff, a self-described parents' rights advocate and former GOP legislative candidate, testified that her children, ages 9, 15, and 16, are "done being overwhelmed with things that are fear-based, like COVID."

In Pennington, New Jersey, wellness teacher Suzanne Horsley aims for age-appropriate lessons on what can be a daunting topic. In her K-2 physical education classes at Toll Gate Grammar School, she plays a game with pretend trees, using bean bags representing carbon to show students that fewer trees leads to higher levels of atmospheric carbon.

In Horsley's lesson plan for teens, students learn how climate change disproportionately impacts low-income communities. They look at air quality maps in areas with higher industrial activity or car traffic.

There is a push for students to feel as though they have some ability to influence their world, Horsley said. "Whether it's conserving water or finding ways to plant more trees or take care of the trees that already exist ... they want to feel empowered."

Oscars race: Clock ticks for buffs to binge nominated films

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A film buff from Oklahoma City, Elyssa Mann has scant time to waste, needing to cross just four more movies off her Oscars list before Sunday's Academy Awards broadcast: Two animated films, one for cinematography and another for costume design.

In the San Francisco Bay Area, Steve Tornello has just one left — the latest "Avatar" — before he can fairly judge all 10 of the best picture nominees.

In the perfect multiverse, time would bend to allow movie fans to watch anything anywhere, all at once. But in the real world, not the googly eyed one, time keeps ticking and that makes things difficult for die-hard film enthusiasts hoping to fill every bracket in their personal Oscars scoresheets.

"I have four Oscars movies left in my quest to watch all the ones nominated for picture/acting/craft etc," Mann wrote in a tweet, "and this somehow feels insurmountable."

As it is, Sunday morning's time change (don't forget to spring forward) will mean an hour less to binge.

"I am a person who thrives under pressure, like I need the deadline. So it's good that it's here," Mann, a 31-year-old marketer, said during a phone call. "Now I have to watch them."

She'll watch two or three Saturday, and save whatever's left for Sunday before the ceremony. Since the New Year, she's watched nearly 30 of the nominated films, escalating her project when the nominations were announced in late January. She acknowledged there isn't enough time to view nominees in a handful of categories, including documentaries.

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It would take days without sleep to watch every one of the more than 50 movies that received at least one nomination in any of the roughly two dozen categories being awarded.

Theoretically, academy voters are supposed to watch every film. But even for the pros, that apparently doesn't happen. After all, does anyone really have the time?

Tornello, a fledgling screenwriter and creative director for a tech company, is trying to make time this weekend to finally trudge out to the movie theater to watch "Avatar: The Way of Water," the final movie on his list.

"I have a lot on my plate right now," he said. "That's a movie I know I need to see in the theater to get the full experience."

Most of the rest he's watched at home through a streaming service.

Drawn by all the buzz, he saw "Everything Everywhere All at Once" shortly after it was released last spring. He watched "Women Talking" earlier this month.

"I try to see as many movies as I possibly can, the ones I think are going to be a nominee, before Oscar nominations come out," Tornello said. "I just want to get them all in so I can really enjoy the show."

Like Mann, James Bramble has already seen all of the best picture nominees and more.

"So I've seen every picture nominated for best international film, best documentary, best animated and before Sunday night, I will finish," he said, saying he has a few more in the short film categories which shouldn't require much time to watch.

Every year, there are bound to be nominated films that he thinks were a waste of his time. Not this year, he said.

"I really liked, so far, everything that I've seen. Yeah, it's a good year," said Bramble, an attorney from Salt Lake City.

Mann hopes to beat the clock.

On her watch list this weekend: The animated features "Puss in Boots: The Last Wish" and "Turning Red," as well as "Mrs. Harris Goes to Paris" for costume design and "Bardo, False Chronicle of a Handful of Truths" for cinematography.

She should have started sooner, she confessed.

"It's something that I've always kind of considered doing, but seemed like too big of a project," she said. But with the deep winter doldrums, she needed an outlet. "I love movies. And so I thought this would be a fun one."

Americans' fun road trip to Mexico became days of horror

By JULIE WATSON, JAMES POLLARD, and ALFREDO PEÑA Associated Press/Report for America LAKE CITY, S.C. (AP) — It was supposed to be a fun road trip to Mexico, a post-pandemic adventure for a group of childhood friends.

One was treating herself to cosmetic surgery after having six children. It was a 34th birthday celebration for another.

They rented a white van in South Carolina and set out on the nearly 22-hour trip, shooting silly videos and driving straight through to Brownsville, on the tip of Texas.

"Good morning, America!" Eric Williams said into the camera in the early morning hours after the all-night drive. "Mexico, here we come."

But once they got to Mexico, the trip took a terrible turn. Two members of the group would never make it home, victims of the ruthless Gulf cartel, a drug gang tied to brutal killings and kidnappings in the violent border city of Matamoros, a city of a half-million people that has long been a stronghold of the powerful cartel.

There could hardly be a worse border town to pick for a fun adventure.

It all started when Latavia McGee booked the cosmetic surgery with a doctor she'd been to before, in 2021. Dr. Roberto Chavez Medina's advertisements on Facebook and TikTok have a strong following among American women.

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It's a common story — people often leave the U.S. for all sorts of medical treatment; costs in Mexico can be less than half what someone would pay in the United States.

McGee's appointment was within days of her cousin Shaeed Woodard's 34th birthday. Friends Zindell Brown and Cheryl Orange rounded out the group of five, most of whom had grown up together in Lake City, South Carolina, a town of fewer than 6,000 people.

Once they got to the border, they rented rooms at a Motel 6 off the highway in Brownsville, a lush town with a high poverty rate on the Rio Grande where parrots squawk from palm trees.

The friends set out early Friday to cross an international bridge that spans the two countries, thinking they were headed to see the doctor right on the other side. Orange stayed at the motel in Brownsville because she forgot to bring her ID to cross the border.

"They went to drop her off and was supposed to be back within 15 minutes," Orange said.

But the clinic had moved to a new location several blocks away.

It's not clear what happened next: perhaps the group got lost. The Mexican state of Tamaulipas is the subject of a U.S. State Department warning to avoid travel because of violent crime and kidnappings, but the friends may not have known — Williams' mother said she didn't think her son had ever been out of the U.S.

Hours passed, and on the U.S. side of the border, Orange contacted the Brownsville police, concerned something bad had happened.

Her worst fears would come to pass.

Just a few miles across the border, around midday, a vehicle crashed into the group's van. Several men with tactical vests and assault rifles arrived in another vehicle and surrounded them, according to Mexican police reports. Shots rang out.

Brown and Woodard were hit by bullets and appeared to have died immediately. Williams was shot in the leg.

Video on social media showed men forcing McGee into the bed of a pickup truck, then going back to drag a wounded Williams and the bodies of their two friends across the road and into the truck as onlookers in traffic sat in their cars eerily silent. One witness said no one wanted to draw the gunmen's attention.

The truck barreled off. A Mexican woman who had been hit by a stray bullet, 33-year-old Areli Pablo Servando, was left to die on the street.

When Mexican authorities arrived on the scene, they found Social Security cards and credit cards belonging to the group of friends inside the van, marked by a bullet hole in the driver's side window. The U.S. consulate, only blocks away, issued an alert, warning its employees to avoid the area until further notice because of a deadly shooting downtown.

The doctor at the clinic later told investigators he thought it was strange his patient hadn't shown up for the procedure, which can run up to \$3,000, but his office had only communicated with her electronically. The clinic was about a four-minute drive from where their van had crashed.

The crash would be the start of some of the most terrifying days of the surviving friends' lives.

The cartel members drove them from place to place around the city in a harrowing ride, stopping shortly after the shooting at a medical clinic.

A doctor told investigators that two men with assault rifles burst in through a back door and threatened to kill staff if they didn't treat a wounded person with them. The gunmen and their hostages stayed three hours at the clinic and then left, according to Mexican investigative documents viewed by The Associated Press.

Orange was worried, stuck on the other side of the border at the Motel 6 with no clue what had happened. On Saturday morning, she spoke to a Brownsville officer at the motel. Within an hour, a detective was assigned to the case and shortly after that Brownsville police handed it off to the FBI.

On Sunday, the FBI reported their disappearances and offered a \$50,000 reward for their return and the arrest of the kidnappers, and U.S. Ambassador Ken Salazar said U.S. officials contacted President Andrés Manuel López Obrador directly to ask for help in locating the missing Americans.

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Back home, their family and friends in the United States watched the video of their capture in horror and prayed. The wait, the silence, became unbearable.

"I just want them to come home," Zalandria Brown, Zindell Brown's older sister, said Monday night. "Dead or alive, just bring them home."

Jerry Wallace, Williams' cousin, couldn't eat or sleep.

"It's really something just trying to just wait and hear what's going on and not hearing nothing," Wallace said..

The next day, the agony of not knowing ended, but with the news came more heartache.

An anonymous tipster reported sighting armed men and people in blindfolds at a shabby, orange shack with blue trim and a corrugated metal roof in a tiny rural community known as Ejido Tecolote, on the outskirts of Matamoros. A white pickup parked outside matched the one the Americans had been loaded into March 3, according to the Mexican investigative documents.

The shack was near Playa Bagdad — or "Bagdad Beach," a remote strip of sand where the Rio Grande meets the Gulf of Mexico that has been known as a drop-off point for U.S.-bound smuggled goods since the U.S. Civil War.

Mexican authorities, following the lead, drove the dirt roads searching. Then they heard shouts and the word: "Help!" That led them to the shack, where they found McGee and Williams blindfolded inside. They were being held next to the bodies of their friends, who had been wrapped in blankets and plastic bags, according to the Mexican investigative documents.

A 24-year-old man in a tactical vest who was guarding them darted out the back door, only to be quickly apprehended.

The two Americans were rushed to a Brownsville hospital.

Robert Williams, Eric's brother, said he couldn't wait to tell him "how glad I am that he made it through and that I love him." His 11-year-old son was overjoyed.

On Thursday, as two of the friends' bodies were returned to the U.S. in hearses, calls grew for action to be taken to crush the Gulf cartel. The cartel's Scorpions faction apologized in a letter and announced it had handed over five members who were responsible for the abductions of innocent Americans. The letter was obtained by the AP through a Tamaulipas state law enforcement official.

Woodard's father said he was speechless.

"I've just been trying to make sense out of it for a whole week. Just restless, couldn't sleep, couldn't eat. It's just crazy to see your own child taken from you in such a way, in a violent way like that," James Woodard told reporters. "He didn't deserve it."

Orange was speechless too. She said Friday in a voice text to an AP reporter that she and her friends who survived the attack are not ready to talk about their ill-fated trip.

"We just want to begin to recover," she said.

Houston joins cities fighting potential state takeovers

By JUAN A. LOZANO and PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — In four years of Houston schools being under threat of one of the biggest state takeovers ever in the U.S., teacher Arnetta Murray says the district has come a long way.

As Houston braces for a decision from the state on whether it will seize control of public schools in Texas' largest city, Murray thinks the fight isn't just about failing grades.

"I think that we focus on changing the narrative and doing different and sharing that, 'Hey why is Gov. (Greg) Abbott attacking Houston?'" said Murray, 57, who teaches special education at a middle school where most students are classified as economically disadvantaged. "Why is it? Is it money? Is it politics?"

Classrooms are not the only place where Houston officials and residents are scrambling to hold the line against potential takeovers that the city's Democratic leaders see as driven by politics in a state where Republicans control the Statehouse and governor's office. Election fumbles and accusations that local leaders unlawfully reduced spending on law enforcement are also igniting potential interventions from

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Republicans, who have been losing ground around Houston over the last decade.

Intertwined in this are issues of race as Houston has a large Black and Hispanic population.

Houston is the largest city in the U.S. where potential takeovers of local institutions are roiling heavily minority communities, including St. Louis and Washington, D.C. It's also an extension of a broader fight in the U.S. of statehouses flexing control over municipalities.

What's different in Houston, local leaders say, is the range of efforts aimed at controlling how America's fourth-largest city — home to over 2 million people — runs classrooms, elections and budgets.

Republicans reject accusations of politics, saying they have a duty to act.

"What you're seeing is just specific fights about, quite frankly, what is the best public policy," said Republican state Sen. Paul Bettencourt of Houston, who is carrying a bill that would allow the state to take over a local elections office for cause.

"Do you want to have defunded police or not? Do you want to have competent elections administration or not? Do you want to have an uncorrupt school board of your largest district or not? That's really what the fights are about," he said.

Renée Cross, the senior executive director of the Hobby School of Public Affairs at the University of Houston, said it could be 10 to 20 years before the tension eases up between the GOP-run state government and Texas' Democratically run large metropolitan areas, including Houston.

"Until the Legislature is a little more diverse in terms of partisanship, I think we're going to continue to see these efforts," Cross said.

It is unclear when the state will make a decision about the Houston Independent School District, which with nearly 200,000 students is the eighth-largest in the U.S. Teachers and administrators have been on edge since Mayor Sylvester Turner said at a City Council meeting this month that a takeover could be imminent, citing conversations with Houston legislators.

The decision is up to the Texas Education Agency, which said in a statement that it was still determining next steps that "best support the students, teachers, parents, and school community." A spokesperson for Abbott, who appoints the state's education commissioner, did not return a message seeking comment.

A takeover of Houston schools would be one of the largest ever in the country, said Beth Schueler, an assistant professor of education and public policy at the University of Virginia.

The state began considering the move in 2019, following allegations of misconduct by school trustees, including inappropriate influencing of vendor contracts, and years of chronically low academic scores at one of its roughly 50 high schools. Since August 2016, the district has had three superintendents.

The district sued to block intervention, but changes in state law in response to the lawsuit and a ruling by the Texas Supreme Court in January cleared a path for the takeover.

When the district's board of trustees voted to officially end their lawsuit Thursday, one board member, Elizabeth Santos, tearfully said: "It is time for the community to come together and win by uniting our voices at the Legislature and our neighborhood schools and at the ballot box."

Local leaders acknowledge the district has had problems but say a takeover now would ignore recent improvements, including reducing the number of low-rated schools from 50 to 10.

But some Houston residents still have concerns.

Nikki Keyser, a local community activist, said she does not think the current superintendent, Millard House II, is right for the job, believing the interim superintendent he replaced was responsible in part for recent strides and should have been given the job.

"When you're held accountable for your behavior, these are the things that happens with our children's district and the only people that are suffering are our parents and our children," said Keyser, executive director of the Simply H.E.R. Movement, a nonprofit which helps provide food and housing to needy residents.

The takeover fight that has gotten the most attention in the U.S. is in Mississippi, where the state's predominately white legislative body is pushing for an expanded role for state police and appointed judges inside the majority-Black capital of Jackson.

Hispanics are the largest demographic group in Harris County, which is home to Houston. It also has a large Black population. When Republicans approved new voting restrictions in 2021 that outlawed ex-

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panded voting options that Houston had put in place, Democrats called it an attack on minority voters. Turner is finishing up his final term as mayor, and the leading contenders in the officially nonpartisan election to succeed him are all Democrats.

He took part in a recent rally for the district, where some said the recent confrontations with the state were at least partly due to partisanship.

"We are dealing with people functioning on the extremes and therefore they believe they can come in and take over the largest school district in the state of Texas ... and people are going to be all right with that?" Turner told The Associated Press. "No, I beg to differ."

Aches, rashes and fear: Trauma remains after Ohio derailment

By JOHN FLESHER AP Environmental Writer

EAST PALESTINE, Ohio (AP) — Heather Bable speaks rapidly, recalling the terror of the night when a train loaded with hazardous chemicals derailed less than a half-mile from her home in East Palestine, Ohio. She heard an earthshaking boom and, from her bathroom window, "all you saw was the flames."

Mind racing, she thought of the nearby filling station — its gasoline pumps, its diesel and propane tanks. "I kind of kept myself under control, told my kids, 'OK, guys, we have to leave,'" Bable says. "... The only thing I knew was I had to get my kids to safety. Take just the necessary things and get out of there."

Her voice catches, tears welling in weary eyes, as she describes the physical and emotional toll following the Feb. 3 disaster and subsequent chemical burn: eight days in a hotel and an uneasy return home; hoarseness, congestion, nausea and itchy rashes; inconclusive doctor visits; the "god-awful smell" that disturbs her at night; anger at train company Norfolk Southern over the crash and government agencies she thinks responded too slowly.

And constant fear — to breathe the air, drink the water, let her 8-year-old son play outdoors. Fear for East Palestine, where her family has lived for four generations. Now, at 45, Bable is eager to move. So is her mother, who has been here even longer.

"We don't feel safe anymore," Bable says at Sprinklz On Top, a cozy downtown diner. She pulls a bottle of water from her jacket pocket and takes a sip. She won't drink from the tap these days.

She glances at a smartphone application that reports local air quality. "Just a couple of days ago, when it was so beautiful, I didn't dare to open my windows, because I didn't want the air to come in," she said.

Bable took a leave from her factory job to find another place to live.

"He loves to be out in the yard," she says, gesturing toward her son, Ashton.

"Now, we can't do that. ... I'm even afraid to cut that grass, because what's still left in the soil? It's just not right."

Bable's plight mirrors many in this village of 4,700 near the Pennsylvania line a month after 38 train cars derailed. A preliminary National Transportation Safety Board report blamed an overheated wheel bearing.

Several tanker cars carried hazardous chemicals that ignited or spilled. Days later, after evacuating thousands of residents nearby, crews vented and burned toxic vinyl chloride from five cars to prevent an uncontrolled explosion, sending another black plume skyward.

Fear and mistrust still grip many in a community whipsawed by government assurances that the air and water are safe; warnings from activists like Erin Brockovich about coverups and danger for years to come; and social media misinformation.

"It's hard to know what the truth is," said Cory Hofmeister, 34, after Brockovich and attorneys seeking plaintiffs for litigation hosted a packed gathering at the high school that highlighted potential health risks.

Outrage against the railroad company, widely condemned for failing to prevent the disaster and doing too little afterward, is palpable. A married couple recently sold yard signs reading, "Together we stand against Norfolk Southern," from a sidewalk table to benefit the fire department. Business was brisk.

Norfolk Southern CEO Alan Shaw has expressed regret and pledged a thorough cleanup.

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Sherry Bable, 64, stands near the roadblock keeping gawkers from the derailment site. Her house is just down the street. Heather lives a couple blocks away with Ashton and her 25-year-old daughter, Paige.

"Every time I hear a train, all I keep thinking is, 'Oh my god, don't let nothing happen this time,'" Sherry says. "And I'm not the only one in town like that."

She gazes sadly at Sulphur Run, a creek near the railroad. Previously a popular wading spot, it's now among waterways getting "KEEP OUT" signs amid testing and cleanup.

Like her daughter, Sherry checks her phone for air quality data and images from a home camera trained on the street. It captures trucks, bulldozers and other vehicles entering and exiting the area. Nearly 4.85 million gallons (18.36 million litres) of liquid wastewater and 2,980 tons (2,703.41 metric tons) of soil have been hauled away, Gov. Mike DeWine's office says.

"That railroad company should buy all these houses, tear them down — get families that's got kids first, get the elderly ones out, and then work with everybody else," Bable says. "Because I still say this stuff is going to cause cancer."

Federal agencies say prolonged exposure to vinyl chloride — primarily through inhalation — is associated with increased risk of some cancers. But experts say living near a spill doesn't necessarily elevate risk. Proving links between individual cases and pollutants is hard.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says Norfolk Southern has yet to report exactly how much vinyl chloride was released. EPA is monitoring air at 29 outdoor stations and tested it inside more than 600 homes, finding no vinyl chloride or hydrogen chloride — an irritant to the skin, eyes and nose that can be generated when vinyl chloride is burned. It ordered Norfolk Southern to test for dioxins, which may have been released during the February incineration.

University researchers from Texas A&M and Carnegie Mellon say their own sampling from a mobile lab picked up chemicals including vinyl chloride and acrolein — a foul-smelling, probable carcinogen that can form during burning of fuels, wood and plastics.

Most readings fell below minimum-risk levels for people exposed less than a year. But acrolein levels were high enough in some places to raise long-term health concerns, said Albert Presto, a Carnegie Mellon mechanical engineering research professor.

EPA said its measurements temporarily registered slightly elevated acrolein concentrations but didn't consider them health risks.

Bruce Vanderhoff, Ohio's health director, said in February that foul odors and symptoms such as headaches can be triggered by air contaminants at levels well below what's unsafe.

State officials also say no contaminants associated with the derailment were found in the municipal water supply or in 136 private wells. Norfolk Southern plans soil sampling, with farmland a priority.

None of that reassures the Bables.

After more than a week in a hotel, Sherry returned home. The next morning, she had congestion, a hoarse throat and itchy eyes, she said.

Since then, she's had irritating red skin patches, headaches and a "goopy" substance in her eyes.

Heather, interviewed three weeks after the crash, showed selfies of red face and neck splotches. The previous night, a powerful "burned plastic" stench woke her. The odors are worse at night, as cleanup work continues, she says.

Both women — and Heather's children — have visited doctors. An X-ray showed Sherry's lungs were clear. Both await blood test results but say their doctors weren't sure what to look for.

"That's one thing I hate about this," Sherry says. "Nobody's really getting any answers."

Officials say they're trying to provide them.

The state opened a free clinic where residents get medical exams and meet with mental health specialists and a toxicologist. State and federal teams also have distributed more than 2,200 informational flyers, according to EPA, which has an information center in town.

Ted Larson, an epidemiologist with the U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, and Vidisha Parasram of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health were among federal and state

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teams knocking on doors in the area — leaving behind flyers inviting residents to take a health assessment. Larson and Parasram say they smelled chemicals near the railroad the day they arrived and don't doubt residents' health concerns.

"My daughter's 9," Parasram said. "I would want to fly her out of here and get her far, far away."

The Ohio Department of Health also is seeking health survey participants. Its questionnaire asks people about proximity to the crash and for how long, what kinds of odors they recalled, physical and mental symptoms and more.

With at least 320 surveys completed, officials said leading symptoms include headaches, anxiety, coughing, fatigue and skin irritation.

Heather wants to move outside the danger zone. But her search for another house or apartment is going nowhere. She says many places take advantage of the situation and "are charging double or triple what we're paying."

She recalls growing up in East Palestine, a blue-collar community in the Appalachian foothills an hour northwest of Pittsburgh. Before the derailment, she considered it perfect for a family.

"It was peaceful," she says. "You could go to the ballgames. You could leave the kids out to play and you'd be out at night and you'd be listening to the crickets, the frogs. People were friendly."

The local economy seemed to be recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Now, this happened ... and it just went back down," she says. "People are not wanting to come here. They're afraid."

Sherry and her husband are also considering leaving.

Her living room is piled with pallets of bottled water and she replaced her dogs' dishes, toys and bedding. She keeps them mostly indoors now.

But as long as she's around, she's determined to hold the railroad company and the government accountable. "They think we're ... little-town hicks," she says.

"They keep telling us that it's OK down here, the air quality. Now, I would like to see them come down here living in houses, especially right behind the crash site, see how they like it, and how safe they feel."

'It's hard to focus': Schools say American kids are hungry

By CHEYANNE MUMPHREY and ARLEIGH RODGERS Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — America's schools say kids are hungry — just as pandemic-era benefit programs have lapsed. There is growing concern about the effects on kids' ability to learn.

Congress temporarily made school meals free to all American schoolkids, but since that ended last fall, the need has only seemed to grow.

Soaring food prices are adding strains on families who are seeing reductions in multiple kinds of financial assistance. One federal program that ends this month had given nearly 30 million Americans extra food stamps during the pandemic.

School cafeterias typically don't turn away a hungry kid, but debts for unpaid school meals have been rising — showing the level of need, and raising questions about how schools will keep feeding everyone, without federal money to do it. The neediest kids are eligible for free or reduced-price meals, as before the pandemic, but qualifying for those benefits requires applications that haven't been necessary for several years.

"Programs that provide direct food assistance are hugely critical and we are going to see the effects of not having them over the next couple of months," said Megan Curran, policy director for Columbia University's Center on Poverty and Social Policy.

In the last academic year, with nearly all schools back operating in person, the number of school meals served to students jumped dramatically, and was slightly higher than pre-pandemic levels, according to a report Thursday from the Food Research & Action Center. Already, it said, states now are reporting drops in the number of meals served.

More than 34 million people, including 9 million children, in the United States are food insecure, accord-

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ing to the U. S. Department of Agriculture, meaning they lack consistent access to enough food for every person in their family to be healthy.

Children in such households are more likely to struggle academically and repeat grade levels, among other challenges, according to researchers.

For fourth-grader Fabian Aguirre, it's hard to think about math equations when he's sitting in class with a growling stomach.

When he arrives in the morning, Fabian eats breakfast served by the school in South Phoenix, but he can get hungry in the classes before lunch. On days he doesn't eat at home first, even the meals offered by the school aren't enough to keep him feeling full.

"It's hard to focus in class when I'm hungry. Food helps me pay attention to what I'm learning," said Fabian, 10.

At his school, V. H. Lassen Academy of Science and Nutrition, all students are eligible to receive free meals. The Roosevelt School District, where 80% of students are Hispanic and 12% are Black, covers the meals with aid from a federal program for low-income school communities.

To reach students who might be embarrassed about not having eaten at home, the school recently changed how it distributes free breakfast. Carts filled with prepackaged breakfast meals are rolled outside by the entrance to the school, instead of being kept in the cafeteria.

"We realized that a lot of our students were going straight to the playground and not going into the cafeteria to eat before school, from the 7 a.m. to 7:15 a.m. timeframe," said Jessica Padilla, a sixth-grade math and science teacher.

While they lasted, the universal free meals addressed several concerns about student hunger. There was no paperwork involved. And kids who needed them didn't have to worry about stigma because they were available to everyone. Some states including California are using state money to continue these programs, but most have gone back to charging all but the neediest kids for meals.

When the free meals for all came to an end, "families were left scrambling and confused," National PTA President Anna King said. They weren't prepared for the paperwork after two years without it — and many families with young kids had never filled them out.

It can be difficult for parents to ask for the help they need, said Jillien Meier, director of No Kid Hungry. Immigrant parents, she said, might also avoid filling out forms requesting free or reduced-price meals out of concern it could bring unwanted attention if they are in the U.S. illegally.

Teachers often are the ones to pick up on chronic hunger in students.

Martissa Moore, a teacher at Bainbridge Middle School in Bainbridge, Georgia, recalls a seventh-grade student who had his head on his desk during class, picked arguments with other students and struggled to keep up academically. Moore sensed he wasn't getting enough to eat.

Each day that year, she brought him whatever her daughter had for breakfast and slowly saw progress in his reading skills.

"You just do what you have to do for your students because you don't want them hungry," Moore said.

Hilary Seligman, senior medical advisor with Feeding America, said it shouldn't be up to teachers to address child hunger.

"Because we have so much food insecurity among children, we shift that responsibility to the schools," she said. "But normal childhood development is having access to food at home. That is part of creating for families in America a stable environment where kids are ready to learn when they arrive in school."

Today in History: March 12, Grant takes over Union armies

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Sunday, March 12, the 71st day of 2023. There are 294 days left in the year.

Today's highlight in history:

On March 12, 2009, disgraced financier Bernard Madoff pleaded guilty in New York to pulling off perhaps

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the biggest swindle in Wall Street history; he would be sentenced to 150 years behind bars. (Madoff died in prison in April 2021.)

On this date:

In 1864, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant assumed command as General-in-Chief of the Union armies in the Civil War.

In 1912, the Girl Scouts of the USA had its beginnings as Juliette Gordon Low of Savannah, Georgia, founded the first American troop of the Girl Guides.

In 1925, Chinese revolutionary leader Sun Yat-sen died in Beijing.

In 1947, President Harry S. Truman announced what became known as the "Truman Doctrine" to help Greece and Turkey resist Communism.

In 1955, legendary jazz musician Charlie "Bird" Parker died in New York at age 34.

In 1971, Hafez Assad was confirmed as president of Syria in a referendum.

In 1980, a Chicago jury found John Wayne Gacy Jr. guilty of the murders of 33 men and boys. (The next day, Gacy was sentenced to death; he was executed in May 1994.)

In 1987, the musical play "Les Miserables" opened on Broadway.

In 1994, the Church of England ordained its first women priests.

In 2003, Elizabeth Smart, the 15-year-old girl who vanished from her bedroom nine months earlier, was found alive in a Salt Lake City suburb with two drifters, Brian David Mitchell and Wanda Barzee. (Mitchell is serving a life sentence; Barzee was released from prison in September 2018.)

In 2011, fifteen passengers were killed when a tour bus returning from a Connecticut casino scraped along a guard rail on the outskirts of New York City, tipped on its side and slammed into a pole that sheared it nearly end to end. (Driver Ophadell Williams was later acquitted of manslaughter and negligent homicide.)

In 2020, the stock market had its biggest drop since the Black Monday crash of 1987 as fears of economic fallout from the coronavirus crisis deepened; the Dow industrials plunged more than 2,300 points, or 10%. The NCAA canceled its basketball tournaments because of the coronavirus, after earlier planning to play in empty arenas. The NHL joined the NBA in suspending play. Major League Baseball delayed the start of its season by at least two weeks. (An abbreviated 60-game season would begin in July.)

Ten years ago: Black smoke poured from the Sistine Chapel chimney, signaling that cardinals had failed on their first vote of the papal conclave to choose a new leader of the Catholic Church to succeed Benedict XVI. Mitch Seavey, a 53-year-old former champion, won the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race in nine days, 7 hours and 39 minutes to become the oldest winner of Alaska's grueling test of endurance.

Five years ago: Republicans on the House Intelligence Committee said they'd completed a draft report concluding that there was no collusion or coordination between Donald Trump's presidential campaign and Russia. British Prime Minister Theresa May said Russia was "highly likely" to blame for poisoning a former spy and his daughter in an English city with a military-grade nerve agent. Two package bomb blasts a few miles apart killed a teenager and wounded two women in Austin less than two weeks after a similar attack left a man dead in another part of the Texas capital.

One year ago: Russian forces pounding the Ukrainian port city of Mariupol shelled a mosque that was sheltering more than 80 people, including children, Ukrainian officials said. Fighting also raged in the outskirts of Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, and Russia kept up its bombardment of other resisting cities. Soccer's English Premier League banned Roman Abramovich from running Chelsea after the club owner was sanctioned by the British government over Russia's war on Ukraine. Saudi Arabia executed 81 people convicted of crimes ranging from killings to belonging to militant groups, the largest known mass execution carried out in the kingdom in its modern history.

Today's Birthdays: Politician, diplomat and civil rights activist Andrew Young is 91. Actor Barbara Feldon is 90. Actor-singer Liza Minnelli is 77. Sen. Mitt Romney, R-Utah, is 76. Singer-songwriter James Taylor is 75. Former Sen. Kent Conrad, D-N.D., is 75. Rock singer-musician Bill Payne (Little Feat) is 74. Actor Jon Provost (TV: "Lassie") is 73. Author Carl Hiaasen is 70. Rock musician Steve Harris (Iron Maiden) is 67. Actor Lesley Manville is 67. Actor Jerry Levine is 66. Singer Marlon Jackson (The Jackson Five) is 66. Actor

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Jason Beghe is 63. Actor Courtney B. Vance is 63. Actor Titus Welliver is 61. Former MLB All-Star Darryl Strawberry is 61. Actor Julia Campbell is 60. Actor Jake Weber is 60. Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., is 55. Actor Aaron Eckhart is 55. CNN reporter Jake Tapper is 54. Rock musician Graham Coxon is 54. Country musician Tommy Bales (Flynnville Train) is 50. Actor Rhys Coiro is 44. Country singer Holly Williams is 42. Actor Samm (cq) Levine is 40. Actor Jaimie Alexander is 39. Actor Tyler Patrick Jones is 29.