

# Groton Daily Independent

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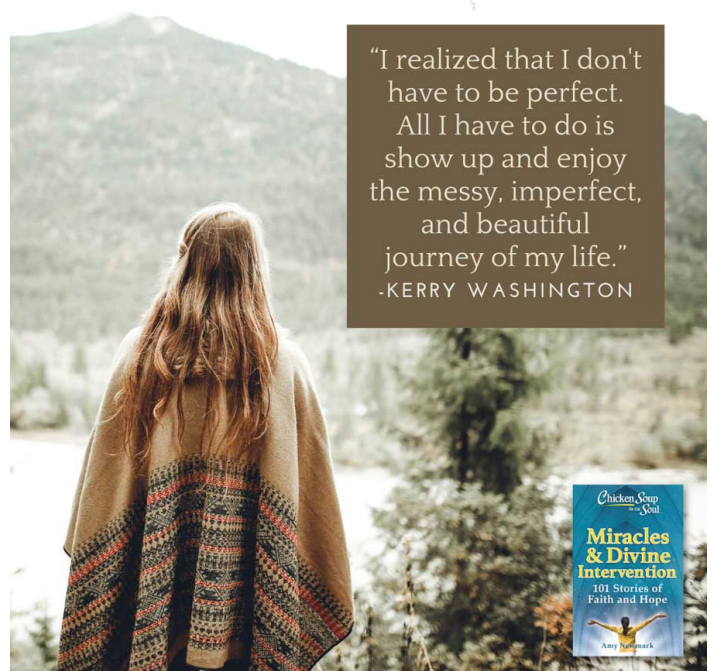
## Saturday, Jan. 27

Boys Basketball at NEC/DAK12 Clash in Madison (5:00: Groton Area vs. Dakota Valley)  
Boys and Girls Varsity Wrestling Tournament at Groton, 10 a.m.  
Thrift Store open 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.

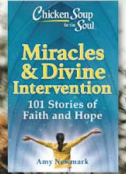
## Sunday, Jan. 28

Carnival of Silver Skates, 2 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.  
Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10 a.m., Groton Community Center  
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.  
First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.  
United Methodist: Worship: (Conde at 8:30 a.m.,

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



"I realized that I don't have to be perfect. All I have to do is show up and enjoy the messy, imperfect, and beautiful journey of my life."  
-KERRY WASHINGTON



Groton at 10:30 a.m.), Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's at 9 a.m. and at Zion at 11 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; Pastor at Bethesda, Aberdeen.

## Monday, Jan. 29

Senior Menu: Tater tot hot dish, green beans, grape juice, pineapple tidbits, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Oatmeal.  
School Lunch: French bread pizza, peas.  
Girls Basketball hosts Florence/Henry: (C game at 5 p.m., JV at 6:15 p.m. followed by Varsity)  
Pantry Open 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

## **OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.  
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# 1440

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## Court Issues Gaza Ruling

The International Court of Justice instructed Israel yesterday to limit casualties and increase humanitarian aid in the Gaza Strip, a highly anticipated ruling that stopped short of ordering a complete cease-fire. The case was brought by South Africa, which accuses Israel of committing acts of genocide against Palestinians in the territory.

The outcome of the decision is twofold: Israel must report back to the court on measures taken to implement the order within one month, and the court may continue to consider South Africa's claims of genocide—which it did not directly refute—in the future. See pages 22 to 24 of the ruling here.

The court, which is part of the United Nations, has no enforcement mechanism, though all member countries are expected to abide by its rulings. The genocide convention has its roots in World War II, after which international leaders felt existing legal frameworks inadequately addressed atrocities seen during the fighting, including the Holocaust.

## Trump ordered to pay \$83.3M in defamation lawsuit.

A jury delivered the penalty in a civil suit brought by writer E. Jean Carroll against former President Donald Trump, accusing him of making comments damaging to her reputation after she alleged he sexually abused her in the 1990s. Lawyers for Carroll had asked the jury for at least \$24M.

## NASA's Mars Ingenuity mission ends.

The groundbreaking effort marked the first aerial exploration of the red planet, with the Ingenuity helicopter being deployed from the larger Perseverance rover mission, which reached the Martian surface in 2020. The craft performed 72 flights over three years, covering 14 times more distance than planned.

## King Charles III enters hospital for planned procedure.

The newly crowned king will undergo corrective surgery for an enlarged prostate, according to royal officials. The operation comes one week after Catherine, the Princess of Wales, underwent an unspecified abdominal surgery.

## Kenyan court blocks Haitian support effort.

The country's High Court said the government does not have the authority to deploy police officers outside Kenyan borders, throwing into question the status of a multinational effort to help Haiti, which has been rocked by gang violence. See an overview of challenges in Haiti here.

## NFL conference championships in Baltimore, San Francisco.

The two teams playing in Super Bowl LVIII will be determined tomorrow, with the Baltimore Ravens (13-4) hosting the defending champion Kansas City Chiefs (11-6) (3 pm ET, CBS) and the Detroit Lions (12-5) traveling to play the San Francisco 49ers (12-5) (6:30 pm ET, FOX). The Super Bowl will take place Feb. 11 in Las Vegas.

## Twenty-five governors sign letter backing Texas in border fight.

The show of support comes as Texas Gov. Greg Abbott (R) has challenged the Biden administration over the use of barbed wire to deter migrants from crossing the US-Mexico border. The fencing is part of Texas' \$11B Operation Lone Star, which employs a variety of methods to stem migrant flows.

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# 1440

## Humankind

NFL star Travis Kelce teams up with breakfast company Kodiak to donate 25,000 hot meals to Kansas City children and their families.

In partnership with [smartasset™](#)

Texas second grader uses allowance funds to make 100 supply bags for homeless residents.

Pennsylvania woman crochets hundreds of scarves each winter, leaves them around town for people to stay warm.

Teen with cerebral palsy wins first place in bodybuilding competition.

Man honored for saving woman from alligator-infested pond after car crash.

## Humankind(ness)

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Matthew S. in Arizona.

"When I was a little boy, my grandfather, who has since passed, had the biggest heart you could possibly imagine. We were walking on the sidewalk in San Francisco one morning, and he noticed a young man on the verge of tears standing there all alone ... it turned out the man had just lost his mom to cancer, and didn't know where else to go and grieve. My grandfather obviously consoled him and ended up giving him a huge hug. It was the first time I had ever seen the kind of relief I saw on that poor guy's face. I don't think anyone had been there for him the whole time his mother was dying, and he obviously did not have anyone else."

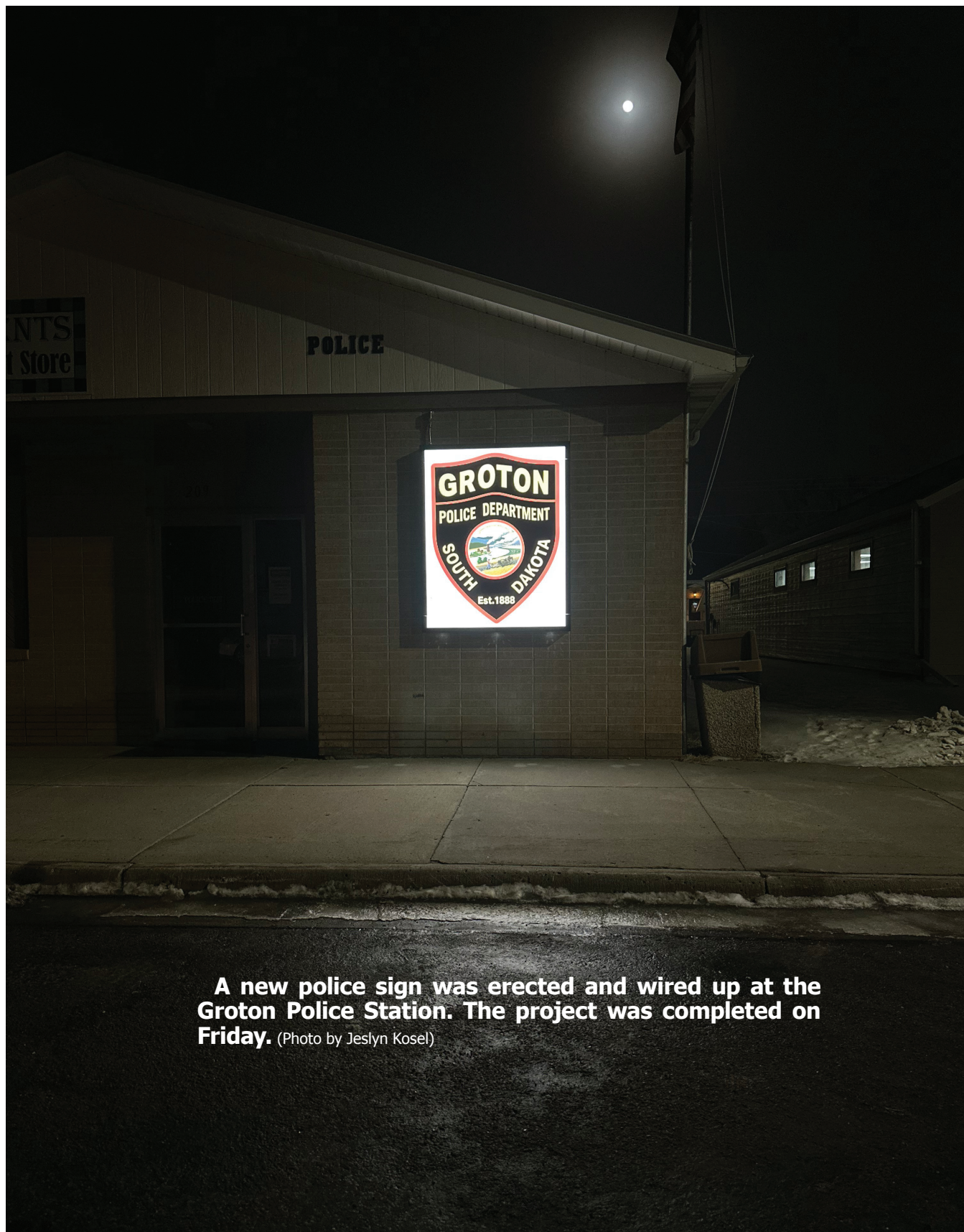
"There's nothing like a few kind words and a hug from someone who cares that can transform the darkest moments into the most beautiful ones. Always remember that when you see someone having a tough day."

I think we're living in a world full of more lonely people than ever before in history. I don't have a solution for society, but sometimes the best thing you can do for someone is to just listen to them and let them let go of all that stuff they've been building in their heart for a long time."



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**A new police sign was erected and wired up at the Groton Police Station. The project was completed on Friday.** (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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## NSU Men's Basketball

### **Northern State Falls to Sioux Falls in Friday Night Cap**

Sioux Falls, S.D. – A tight match through 40 minutes of play saw the Northern State University men's basketball team fall to the University of Sioux Falls on Friday. The game had ten lead changes and nine ties with neither team leading by double figures at any point.

#### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 76, USF 82

Records: NSU 7-12 (5-8 NSIC), USF 10-9 (7-6 NSIC)

Attendance: 842

#### HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern led by one at the half, 34-33, however Sioux Falls was efficient in the second shooting 51.7% from the floor with 49 points

The largest differences in the game was 41 USF rebounds to 29 NSU boards and 19 Cougar points off 15 Wolves turnovers

Northern State tallied just 29 rebounds in the loss and scored six points off six Sioux Falls Turnovers

NSU shot a game leading 46.0% from the floor, 40.0% from the 3-point line, and 76.9% from the foul line

Jackson Moni paced the Wolves offense hitting 10-of-13 from the field and 13-of-15 from the foul line, coming up just three points shy of his career high with 35 points

Moni was just shy of a double-double with nine rebounds and added two assists, one steal, and one block

Four of the Wolves starting five scored in double figures, however Northern recorded just two points off the bench, while Sioux Falls knocked down 29

#### NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Jackson Moni: 35 points, 76.9 field goal%, 9 rebounds

Michael Nhal: 11 points, 6 rebounds, 2 assists

Josh Dilling: 11 points, 3 rebounds, 3 assists

Augustin Reede: 10 points, 50.0 field goal%, 2 rebounds

#### UP NEXT

The Wolves travel to Southwest Minnesota State today for a 7 p.m. tip against the Mustangs.



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## **NSU Women's Basketball**

### **Northern State Takes Down Sioux Falls in Friday Night Action**

Sioux Falls, S.D. – The Northern State women's basketball team took down Sioux Falls, 72-58 to open the weekend. After being out-scored in the first quarter the Wolves responded back in the second and third quarter, out-scoring the Cougars by 23 points total.

#### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 72, USF 58

Records: NSU 15-4 (11-2 NSIC), USF 7-10 (5-8 NSIC)

Attendance: 732

#### HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern State notched 12 points in the first quarter, 20 in the second, 24 in the third, and 16 in the fourth; out-scoring USF by 12 in the third quarter

NSU notched 31 rebounds, 38 points in the paint, 23 bench points, and 31 points off of turnovers for a team season high

The Wolves shot well in the contest, shooting 47.6 % from the floor, 47.4 % from the 3-point arc, and 60.0 % from the foul line

Rianna Fillipi dished out a team lead of 18 points and five steals along with six rebounds in the win

Madelyn Bragg and Alayna Benike both notched double figures with ten points each along with both shooting 50.0% from the floor

In addition, Benike shot 40.0 % from beyond the 3-point arc

Decontee Smith was first off the bench with nine points, while shooting 66.7% from the floor

#### NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Rianna Fillipi: 18 points, 6 rebounds, 5 steals, 4 assists

Madelyn Bragg: 10 points, 3 steals, 50.0 FG %

Alayna Benike: 10 points, 5 rebounds, 3 assists

#### UP NEXT

Northern State returns to action to take on Southwest Minnesota State to close out the weekend. Tip-off time is set for 5 p.m. on Saturday, January 27 from Marshall, Minn. against the Mustangs.

## **Lane Closures Planned on Interstate 229 in Sioux Falls**

SIoux FALLS, S.D. – Starting Monday, Jan. 29, 2024, lane closures will be in place on northbound and southbound Interstate 229 near the Cliff Avenue exit. Lane closures will be placed as road conditions allow. The lane closures are planned from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. from Monday, Jan. 29 through Thursday, Feb. 1, 2024. Motorists should be prepared for delays. Drivers are asked to be aware of survey workers adjacent to the driving lanes and to slow down through the work zone.

The lane closures are necessary for utility relocations in advance of a 2024 construction project to install a temporary bridge over Cliff Avenue and widen I-229 northbound. The 2024 construction project is in preparation for the 2025 Cliff Avenue interchange reconstruction project.

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## Gov. Noem: From the Warzone at Southern Border

EAGLE PASS, T.X. – Yesterday, Governor Kristi Noem went to the warzone at the southern border. She conducted a boat tour with the Texas Department of Public Safety, met with the Texas National Guard and state troopers, and received a briefing from Border Patrol agents. Governor Noem conveyed to the Texas officials that South Dakota stands with them and that the nation is with them.

“Every time that I come to the southern border, it is clear that the situation has deteriorated more and more. Texas has carved out a small zone of security in the middle of this warzone,” said Governor Kristi Noem. “Now, the Biden Administration is undermining them. Not only is Joe Biden failing to secure the border – he is actively trying to stop Governor Abbott and Texas from the work that they are doing to secure the border. South Dakota stands with them, and we will continue to do everything we can to help secure the border.”

Governor Noem joined 24 Republican governors in supporting Governor Abbott’s efforts to secure the Southern Border.

“If we lose this country, where will we go? What other nation in the world is better or freer? We must do all that we can to defend the United States of America so that we can keep it safe for our kids and our grandkids,” continued Governor Noem.

Governor Noem was the first governor to send National Guard soldiers to help defend the Southern Border nearly three years ago. Last summer, she once again sent 50 South Dakota National Guard soldiers to Texas to help them secure the border.

This past August, Governor Noem also participated in a press conference at the Southern Border and viewed the warzone from the air in a helicopter.

**GDILIVE.COM**



**Text Paul at  
605-397-7460**

Any interest in any of  
these basketball games on  
GDILIVE.COM?  
They are \$25 each.

- ~~Webster Girls C~~
- ~~Webster Girls JV~~
- ~~Florence/Henry Girls JV~~
- ~~Deuel Girls JV~~
- ~~Vermillion Boys JV~~
- ~~Redfield Boys C~~
- ~~Redfield Girls JV~~
- ~~Mobridge-Pollock Boys C~~
- ~~Mobridge-Pollock Girls C~~
- Mobridge-Pollock Boys JV
- ~~Mobridge-Pollock Girls JV~~
- ~~Britton-Hecla Girls JV~~
- Britton-Hecla Boys JV
- Florence/Henry Boys C
- Florence/Henry Boys JV
- Aberdeen Christian JV

**END OF SEASON!**

# Broton Daily Independent

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**BROWN COUNTY  
BROWN COUNTY COMMISSION AGENDA  
REGULAR MEETING TUESDAY**

**January 30, 2024 8:45 A.M.**

**COMMISSIONER'S CHAMBERS, COURTHOUSE ANNEX - 25 MARKET STREET, ABERDEEN SD**

1. Call To Order - Pledge of Allegiance
2. Approval of Agenda
3. Opportunity of Public Comment
4. Second Reading and Possible Adoption Ordinance #265 - Rezone
5. Dirk Rogers – Highway Superintendent
  - a. Set Bid Dates for Gravel, Road Oil, Hot Mix and Rental Equipment
6. Resolution for Reconveyance of Real Property
7. Resolution for Brown County Local Control
8. Rachel Kippley – Fair/Fairgrounds/Parks Manager
  - a. Contract with SD Farmer's Union for Agriculture Education Center
9. Consent Calendar
  - a. Approval of General Meeting Minutes of January 23, 2024
  - b. Claims
  - c. HR Report
  - d. Travel Requests
  - e. Claim Assignments
  - f. Lottery Permit
  - g. Abatements
  - h. Transfer for Hwy Dept. & 24/7
10. Executive Session (if requested per SDCL 1-25-2)
11. Other Business
12. Adjourn

Brown County Commission Meeting

**Please join my meeting from your computer, tablet, or smartphone.**

<https://meet.goto.com/BrCoCommission>

**You can also dial in using your phone.** United States: [+1 \(872\) 240-3311](tel:+18722403311)

**Access Code:** 601-168-909 #

Get the app now and be ready when your first meeting starts: <https://meet.goto.com/install>

Public comment provides an opportunity for the public to address the county commission but may not exceed 3 minutes.

Public comment will be limited to 10 minutes (or at the discretion of the board).

Public comment will be accepted virtually when the virtual attendance option is available.

**Official Recordings of Commission Meetings along with the Minutes can be found at**

<https://www.brown.sd.us/node/454>



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## Reliable Energy is in Jeopardy

By: Steve Barnett & Jim Matheson

South Dakota's families and businesses rightfully expect their lights to stay on at a price they can afford. Our national energy policies should support our cooperative mission, which is to provide safe, reliable, and affordable electricity to our member-owners.

Unfortunately, our country is now confronted with a harsh reality – we are quickly approaching a point where there won't be enough electricity to go around.

The North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC) is the nation's grid watchdog. For years, the organization has issued a string of increasingly dire reports warning that threats to grid reliability are mounting and more frequent rolling blackouts could soon become the norm.

In fact, nine states experienced rolling blackouts at the end of 2022 as demand for electricity outstripped supply during a period of extreme cold. In its 2023-2024 Winter Reliability Assessment, NERC warned that half of the nation faces the same risk during extreme weather this winter.

Keeping the lights on is not a partisan issue. Yet, politics and energy policy have had an outsized impact on how we got here. The current state of our nation's energy policy related to electricity can be summed up simply: Do more with less.

That's just not sustainable. From data centers to EVs, from home heating and cooling to the way we run America's farms, our nation is increasingly reliant on electricity to power the economy. As technology and energy demands advance, a recipe for rolling brownouts and blackouts is brewing.

Opposite that increasing demand for electricity is an alarming reduction in supply as our country shutteres existing always available power plants to comply with various federal and state regulations.

South Dakota experiences extreme weather conditions throughout the year with temperatures rising above 100 degrees in the summer and falling far below zero in the winter. When the sun is not shining and when the wind is not blowing, renewable energy sources do not fit the bill for reliability. We simply cannot fully retire power plants that still have a useful life ahead of them.

The final challenge to meeting our nation's energy needs is the arcane set of rules and regulations required to build anything in this country. The process for siting, permitting and building infrastructure - everything from solar farms, to pipelines to transmission lines - is mired in red tape and years of litigation.

These trends are not going to get any better in the coming years.

The EPA recently proposed a rule to overhaul the way always-available power plants operate – requiring them to either deploy carbon capture technology or run on clean hydrogen in seven years. The proposal is unlawful and will lead directly to more blackouts, higher costs, and uncertainty for America. That's a dangerous approach to regulation.

We must have a serious conversation in this country about where we're going and what it will take to realistically get there. Policymakers cannot overlook the laws of physics or the reality of the current situation. Adding more renewable resources to the nation's energy portfolio can be part of the solution; however, since the wind doesn't always blow and the sun doesn't always shine, our country also needs a robust supply of readily available energy resources to call on at a moment's notice.

Any long-term solution requires policymakers to recognize the need for time, technology development and new transmission infrastructure. These are essential ingredients for an energy future that prioritizes reliable electricity for all consumers.

Electricity powers industries, businesses, and technology. It fosters economic development vital for medical facilities, ensuring the functioning of life-saving equipment. Reliable power is essential for emergency services, law enforcement, and disaster response efforts. It also fuels innovation by supporting research, development, and deployment of new technologies.

Keeping the lights on is vital to South Dakota's economy. The stakes are too high to get this wrong.

*Steve Barnett is General Manager of the South Dakota Rural Electric Association, a statewide association that represents 31 member-owned electric cooperatives. He previously served as Secretary of State for South Dakota.*

*Jim Matheson is CEO of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association that represents the nation's more than 900 not-for-profit, consumer owned electric cooperatives. He previously served seven terms as a U.S. representative from Utah.*

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## GHS Wrestling

### **Groton Area wins triangular wrestling**

Groton Area hosted a triangular wrestling match Friday night with Britton-Hecla and Canistota. Groton Area defeated Britton-Hecla, 53-30, with the Tigers winning nine matches. Groton Area defeated Canistota, 72-6, with only two matches wrestled and both won by Groton Area.

#### **Groton Area 53, Britton-Hecla 30**

- 106: Wyatt Hagen (Groton Area) over Lincoln Kilker (Britton-Hecla) (TF 15-0 4:08)
- 113: Lincoln Krause (Groton Area) wins by forfeit.
- 120: Tanner Atkinson (Britton-Hecla) over John Bisbee (Groton Area) (Fall 2:30)
- 126: Donavon Block (Groton Area) over Colt Hansen (Britton-Hecla) (Fall 0:43)
- 132: Max Suther (Britton-Hecla) wins by forfeit.
- 138: Walker Zoellner (Groton Area) over Max Suther (Britton-Hecla) (Fall 1:20)
- 144: Bryce Hawkinson (Britton-Hecla) wins by forfeit.
- 150: Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) wins by forfeit.
- 157: Easten Ekern (Groton Area) over Dustin Stabnow (Britton-Hecla) (Fall 3:49)
- 165: Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) over Ben Suther (Britton-Hecla) (Fall 3:30)
- 175: Dashed Davidson (Britton-Hecla) over Ben Hoeft (Groton Area) (Fall 1:32)
- 190: Drew Thurston (Groton Area) over Sage Watson (Britton-Hecla) (Fall 0:30)
- 215: Charlie Frost (Groton Area) over Liam Paxton (Britton-Hecla) (Fall 1:09)
- 285: Tucker Hardy (Britton-Hecla) over Gavin Englund (Groton Area) (Fall 1:32)

#### **Groton Area 72, Canistota 6**

- 106: Wyatt Hagen (Groton Area) over Koda Popkes (Canistota) (Fall 1:40)
- 113: Lincoln Krause (Groton Area) wins by forfeit.
- 120: John Bisbee (Groton Area) wins by forfeit.
- 126: Donavon Block (Groton Area) wins by forfeit.
- 132: Walker Zoellner (Groton Area) over Jack Conn (Canistota) (Fall 1:52)
- 138: Joshua Popkes Jr (Canistota) wins by forfeit.
- 144: Double Forfeit
- 150: Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) wins by forfeit.
- 157: Easten Ekern (Groton Area) wins by forfeit.
- 165: Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) wins by forfeit.
- 175: Ben Hoeft (Groton Area) wins by forfeit.
- 190: Drew Thurston (Groton Area) wins by forfeit.
- 215: Charlie Frost (Groton Area) wins by forfeit.
- 285: Gavin Englund (Groton Area) wins by forfeit.

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## GHS Girls' Basketball

### **Lady Tigers have clean sweep over Webster Area**

The Groton Area girls basketball teams all posted wins Friday night in Webster.

Groton Area had three big rallies as the Lady Tigers won the varsity game, 42-27. Webster Area jumped out to a 5-0 lead before Groton Area scored 10 straight points to take a 10-5 lead after the first quarter. Groton Area scored 14 straight points in the second quarter en route to a 26-13 lead at halftime. Groton Area scored 13 straight points that spanned the third and fourth quarters as Groton Area took a 33-19 lead into the fourth quarter.

Sydney Leicht led Groton Area with 11 points, one rebound and four steals. Jaedyn Penning had nine points, seven rebounds, three assists and four steals. Jerica Locke had eight points, five rebounds, two assists and seven steals. Laila Roberts had seven points, one rebound, two assists and three steals. Brooklyn Hanson had three points, one rebound and four steals. Faith Traphagen had three points, one rebound, one assist and three steals. Taryn Traphagen had one point, three rebounds, one assist and six steals.

Groton Area made 13 of 42 two-pointers for 31 percent, three of 16 three-pointers (Leicht, Locke, Hansen 1 each) for 19 percent, seven of 12 free throws for 58 percent, had 19 rebounds, 17 turnovers, nine assists, 31 steals, 11 team fouls and one block by Taryn Traphagen.

Harley Johnson and Erin Sannes each had seven points to lead the Bearcats while Bailee Ninke had six, Lydia Vogl three and Carrington Hanson had one point.

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 34-28. Webster held a 9-4 lead after the first quarter and a 13-11 lead at halftime. Groton Area led, 25-20, after the third quarter. McKenna Tietz had 10 points, Taryn Traphagen eight, Chesney Weber six, Laila Roberts and Faith Traphagen each had five points.

Katie Braun led Webster Area with 10 points while Carrington Hansen had seven, Bailee Nine five, Karii Cannes four and Chloe Mammenga added two points.

Groton Area won the C game, 41-11, leading at the quarterstops at 6-4, 19-7 and 28-11.

Kella Tracy led Groton Area with 14 points followed by Chesney Weber with 10, Avery Crank had seven, Ashlynn Warrington four and McKenna Tietz, Emerlee Jones and Sydney Locke each had two points.

Cartney Hanson led Webster Area with four points, Kinsey Kuecker had three and Brallynn BReske and Callie Shoemaker each had two points.

All three games were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM. The C game was sponsored by Bary & Tricia Keith. The junior varsity game was sponsored by Ed & Connie Stauch. The varsity game was sponsored by Agtegra, Avantara Groton, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, BK Custom Ts & More, Bierman Farm Service, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Full Circle Ag, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Krueger Brothers, Locke Electric, The MeatHouse of Andover, Rix Farms/R&M Farms and Spanier Harvesting and Trucking. Paul Kosel did the play-by-play and Jeslyn Kosel ran the camera.



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Staking claims on unclaimed property: \$175 million haul sparks budget battle

**Some legislators resist treasurer's plan to spend more seeking rightful owners**

**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JANUARY 26, 2024 1:27 PM**

Governor Kristi Noem said during her recent budget address that she wants the state to return more unclaimed property to its rightful owners.

She could start by claiming her own.

She's one of more than 2 million people with unclaimed money or property held by the state of South Dakota, according to the state's searchable online database. Noem's unclaimed property is described as "over \$250" worth of mutual fund shares. Other recognizable names with unclaimed money include Lt. Gov. Larry Rhoden's wife, Sandy (\$10), state House Majority Leader Will Mortenson (\$87.95) and state Senate Majority Leader Casey Crabtree (\$20).

In her December budget speech, Noem said the value of unclaimed property remitted to the state had "dramatically increased" and was \$76 million over estimates. She pledged to work with the state treasurer "to create a plan that ensures South Dakotans know that their own money can be returned to them."

A spokesman for Noem did not respond to South Dakota Searchlight questions about whether she knows about her own unclaimed property or plans to claim it.

That the governor is among the people owed money by the state is symbolic of several problems: Some people don't know they have unclaimed property, some dismiss official notices about it as spam, and some who want to claim their property give up when they discover it's a multi-step process. The process includes filling out an online form and an emailed form, and providing copies of photo identification along with documentation of a Social Security number.

Unclaimed property consists of an array of abandoned or forgotten private assets, including money from bank accounts, stocks, life insurance payouts, uncashed checks, and even the contents of safe deposit boxes.

"Everything from false teeth to gold bars," said state Treasurer Josh Haeder, referring to the contents of those boxes. "Even love letters from World War II."

The holder of the money or items, such as a bank, tries to find the owners. But after three years of dormancy, the property reverts to the state.

Physical items are held in safes at the Treasurer's Office in Pierre. Haeder said the office tries to return those items, but after a year, most of the items go to a state auction; however, certain items – like love letters – remain in the state's possession.

The calendar year-to-date value of unclaimed property flowing to the state as of Noem's budget address was \$143.64 million. As she mentioned, that was far above the projection of \$67.41 million. For the 2023 calendar year, unclaimed property remitted to South Dakota was a state-record \$175 million. During the 2023 fiscal year, which ran from July 2022 to June 2023, the state took in about \$115 million in unclaimed property.

In response, Noem and Haeder plan to use a bigger portion of that money on advertising to reach people and encourage them to claim their property.

But some leading lawmakers are skeptical. They're not convinced the effort is necessary or would be effective, and they have concerns about the Treasurer's Office increasing its own budget without approval



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from lawmakers.

## How unclaimed property becomes state revenue

The state is obligated to pay anyone who claims their unclaimed property, whenever they claim it, even if the state has already spent the money. Even after people die, their unclaimed property can be claimed by heirs.

State law requires a portion of unclaimed property income to be set aside for those payouts. The remainder goes into the state's budget as revenue.

The state projected \$57.2 million in unclaimed property revenue for the current fiscal year. That projection is now \$106.9 million after more unclaimed property flooded in. The current fiscal year ends in June.

The bigger-than-expected haul is largely due to an increase in unclaimed property audits at banks, and a cleanup of their old records. Those tasks piled up during the COVID-19 pandemic as many bank employees worked from home, according to the Treasurer's Office.

Since 1954 when the federal Unclaimed Property Act was passed, the state has taken in about 2.5 million pieces of unclaimed property worth about \$1.1 billion. The vast majority of that — about 2.2 million properties — has yet to be claimed.

South Dakotans are owed about 877,000 of the unclaimed properties, worth about \$100 million. About 1 million unclaimed properties are owned by people outside South Dakota, and 271,000 are owned by people outside the U.S. That can happen when people move away and leave property behind, or when a bank is headquartered in South Dakota with customers in other states. South Dakota became a haven for banks decades ago when then-Gov. Bill Janklow and legislators uncapped interest rates on credit cards.

The single largest unclaimed property that came into the state's possession last year was \$2.64 million from "the West Indies," according to Deputy State Treasurer Jason Williams. He said the largest unclaimed property from a South Dakotan last year was \$214,431 from Sioux Falls.

Williams declined to disclose further information, saying he does not want to encourage impostors to make fraudulent claims. He said both of the examples are on the state's unclaimed property website as "more than \$250."

The first three years after the state receives unclaimed property is "when you have the highest likelihood of properties being returned," Haeder said.

## Big plans for ad spending

To get more properties back to their rightful owners, the Treasurer's Office plans to increase its budget for the activity. Current state law does not require the office to request approval of state lawmakers for that.

Haeder said the plan is to adjust the annual advertising and outreach budget from a flat \$125,000 to 1% of the value of unclaimed property remitted to the state each year. Based on the current record amounts, that 1% would be more than \$1 million.

Haeder said the budget allocates, and will continue to allocate, 26% to in-person events, 25% to social media marketing, 18% to print media advertising, 16% to television advertising, 5% to event sponsorships, 5% to educational material, and the remaining 5% to research and promotional efforts targeting financial institutions.

The Treasurer's Office paid back \$28 million worth of unclaimed property to its rightful owners in fiscal year 2023, a record amount for the state.

"At the end of the day, it's not the state's money," Haeder said. "We have to do a better job of creating awareness."

Haeder, a Republican who took office in January 2019, said some people are skeptical when they receive a letter or call from the government telling them they have unclaimed property.

"We've got to be able to build trust with people," he said.

That's why Haeder is appearing in ads encouraging people to visit a website where they can see if some of the state's \$924 million in unclaimed property belongs to them. The ads show Haeder with a pile of

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cash, informing people that the state has their money and wants them to get it back.

Treasurers appearing in ads isn't new. Former Treasurer Rich Sattgast, now serving as state auditor, starred in a similar campaign.

## Legislators push back on spending plan

Haeder recently told a legislative budget committee the increased advertising and outreach budget would help keep South Dakota competitive in the banking sector. He said other states are recruiting banks to relocate to their state.

"States recognize the immense value that unclaimed property brings to the budgeting process," he said.

Haeder said banks want states to return property. He pointed the committee to a letter from Wells Fargo asking the state to make a good-faith effort.

"We have to remain competitive," Haeder told the committee. "We know what the potential could be. Banks can pack up and leave with a 30-day notice."

Haeder said favorable taxes, no "anti-banking" laws and "good faith efforts to promote and return unclaimed property to rightful owners" are some of the factors banks look for when deciding where to set up headquarters.

Haeder shared a chart showing that Illinois, Massachusetts, Oklahoma and Indiana all spend 1% or more of the value of unclaimed property they take in on getting the property back to its rightful owners — suggesting South Dakota should follow suit.

Noem's former chief of staff, Tony Venhuizen, now a Republican legislator from Sioux Falls, questioned the usefulness of comparing South Dakota to those states, all of which have larger populations.

"I might suggest we compare ourselves to other states on a per capita basis," Venhuizen said.

He asked if the Treasurer's Office would spend any of its higher advertising budget beyond South Dakota, since the majority of people owed unclaimed property are outside the state.

Haeder said he advertises only in South Dakota while sending letters and emails to people outside the state.

"I could ask you for \$10 million and that's not going to cover a national ad campaign," Haeder said. "There's no intent to do that."

Venhuizen has since introduced a bill that would require the Treasurer's Office to go through the legislative budget committee to increase its budget for advertising and outreach.

"This is really a process bill," Venhuizen told South Dakota Searchlight. "This bill just makes sure that the budget for this office is handled like any other state agency."

Sen. Lee Schoenbeck, R-Watertown, the president pro tempore of the Senate, said he supports the bill.

Haeder told South Dakota Searchlight the bill would impede the office's "ability to make good faith efforts to return people their property." Returning more unclaimed property could require more time and staff, Haeder said, so the office should have discretion to adjust its spending.

## Questions about effectiveness, process

At a recent budget committee hearing, Rep. Lance Koth, R-Mitchell, a retired banker, said banks work hard to identify the owners of unclaimed property prior to handing it over to the state.

"So, in my mind, the unclaimed property, when it hits the state, there's a lot of vetting that's already been done and other than encouraging people to look at that website, I don't know what else you can do," Koth said.

Rep. Chris Kassin, R-Vermillion, said he has unclaimed property, but getting the money back has been a hassle.

"Now it's to the point where it's asking me to print a form out, sign it, upload it or mail it and send it back," Kassin said. "Is there a process improvement or something, just curious, where you could electronically sign it? It just seems pretty onerous what we're asking people to do."

Haeder said system improvements have "been the biggest headache" since he took office. He said mak-

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ing the entire process an online process is the goal.

"By the time I leave this building, by God, that's going to happen," Haeder said. "We are continuing to make this process easier."

Deputy Treasurer Williams later told South Dakota Searchlight in an email that treasurers have made multiple improvements to the unclaimed property system since 2011. Those include updates to the website, allowing claimants to search and start claims on the site, and a secure portal for document uploads.

Additionally, the current administration rolled out a new phone app and the "Cash It!" program, which involves the state initiating claims for properties under \$2,000 when there's enough information to verify who owns the property. After validation and address verification through multiple databases, checks are sent to property owners.

## A \$1 billion liability

Of the \$1.1 billion ever taken in by the state as unclaimed property, the state has paid about \$175 million to claimants and spent about \$900 million as part of the annual state budgeting process.

Legally, all of the money spent by the state could still be claimed by its rightful owners or their heirs.

Thirteen other states have addressed that problem by allocating unclaimed property to a trust fund and spending only the interest gained on the fund. They include nearby states Colorado, Nebraska, North Dakota and Wyoming.

In 2021, Haeder testified to the Legislature in favor of creating a trust fund for unclaimed property.

"Spending it absolutely creates a liability," he said.

Bill sponsor Rep. Taffy Howard, R-Rapid City, testified that the banks responsible for the vast majority of unclaimed property could leave at any time, pulling the rug out from under the revenue stream.

"So, imagine the revenue completely drying up," Howard said. "We'd still have hundreds of millions in claims we're liable for."

Mark Quasney, with the Bureau of Finance and Management at the time, opposed the measure, arguing that unclaimed property older than five years is extremely unlikely to be claimed.

The bill passed a committee but was defeated in the House of Representatives. Current House Speaker Hugh Bartels, R-Watertown, argued against the bill.

"It takes a lot of one-time money away from us," he said, noting that the state has used the money to fix infrastructure, build university projects and more.

"A lot of this money will never be given back," Bartels said.

But times are changing, according to Jeremy Dawson, the director of the National Association of State Treasurers.

Dawson said "technology is making it easier and easier" to connect people with their property, pointing to data-matching tools that can help states identify rightful owners with less information. He said that in 2023, states returned over \$5 billion in unclaimed property nationwide, a record.

The South Dakota Treasurer's Office has not yet invested in those tools. Deputy State Treasurer Williams said the office is working with its voluminous datasets to make sure they're compatible with the new technology.

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

## Native American communities have the highest suicide rates, yet interventions are scarce

**BY: CHERYL PLATZMAN WEINSTOCK, KFF HEALTH NEWS - JANUARY 26, 2024 7:00 AM**

If you or someone you know may be experiencing a mental health crisis, contact the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline by dialing or texting "988." To reach the Native and Strong Lifeline, call "988" and press 4.

Amanda MorningStar has watched her children struggle with mental health issues, including suicidal thoughts. She often wonders why.

"We're family-oriented and we do stuff together. I had healthy pregnancies. We're very protective of our kids," said MorningStar, who lives in Heart Butte, Montana, a town of about 600 residents on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation.

Yet despite her best efforts, MorningStar said, her family faces a grim reality that touches Native American communities nationwide. About a year ago, her 15-year-old son, Ben, was so grief-stricken over his cousin's suicide and two classmates' suicides that he tried to kill himself.

"Their deaths made me feel like part of me was not here. I was gone. I was lost," said Ben MorningStar. He spent more than a week in an inpatient mental health unit, but once home, he was offered sparse mental health resources.

Non-Hispanic Indigenous people in the United States die by suicide at higher rates than any other racial or ethnic group, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The suicide rate among Montana's Native American youth is more than five times the statewide rate for the same age group, according to the Montana Budget and Policy Center. Montana ranked third-worst among states for suicide deaths in 2020, and 25% of all suicides in the state from 2017 through 2021 were among Native Americans, even though they represent only 6.5% of the state's population.

Despite decades of research into suicide prevention, suicide rates among Indigenous people have remained stubbornly high, especially among Indigenous people ages 10 to 24, according to the CDC. Experts say that's because the national strategy for suicide prevention isn't culturally relevant or sensitive to Native American communities' unique values.

Suicide rates have increased among other racial and ethnic minorities, too, but to lesser degrees.

Systemic issues and structural inequities, including underfunded and under-resourced services from the federal Indian Health Service, also hamper suicide prevention in Indigenous communities. "I worried who was going to keep my son safe. Who could he call or reach out to? There are really no resources in Heart Butte," said Amanda MorningStar.

Ben MorningStar said he is doing better. He now knows not to isolate himself when problems occur and that "it is OK to cry, and I got friends I can go to when I have a bad day. Friends are better than anything," he said.

His twice-a-month, 15-minute virtual telehealth behavioral therapy visits from IHS were recently reduced to once a month.

Mary Cwik, a psychologist and senior scientist at the Center for Indigenous Health at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore, said the systemic shortcomings MorningStar has witnessed are symptoms of a national strategy that isn't compatible with Indigenous value systems.

"It is not clear that the creation of the national strategy had Indigenous voices informing the priorities," Cwik said.

The cause of high suicide rates in Indigenous communities is complex. Native Americans often live with the weight of more adverse childhood experiences than other populations — things such as emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, intimate partner violence, substance misuse, mental illness, parental separation or divorce, incarceration, and poverty.

Those adverse experiences stack upon intergenerational trauma caused by racial discrimination, colonization, forced relocation, and government-sanctioned abduction to boarding schools that persisted until the 1970s.



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"There's no way that communities shaped by these forces for so long will get rid of their problems fast by medical services. A lot of people in Indian Country struggle to retain hope. It's easy to conclude that nothing can fix it," said Joseph P. Gone, a professor of anthropology and global health and social medicine at Harvard University and member of the Gros Ventre (Aaniiih) tribal nation of Montana.

Most tribal nations are interested in collaborative research, but funding for such work is hard to come by, said Gone. So is funding for additional programs and services.

Stephen O'Connor, who leads the suicide prevention research program at the Division of Services and Intervention Research at the National Institute of Mental Health, said, "Given the crisis of suicide in Native American populations, we need more funding and continued sustained funding for research in this area."

Getting grants for scientific research from NIMH, which is part of the National Institutes of Health, can be challenging, especially for smaller tribes, he said.

Officials at the NIMH and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration said that they continue to build research partnerships with tribal nations and that they recently launched new grants and multiple programs that are culturally informed and evidence-based to reduce suicide in tribal communities.

NIMH researchers are even adjusting a commonly used suicide screening tool to incorporate more culturally appropriate language for Indigenous people.

Teresa Brockie, an associate professor at Johns Hopkins School of Nursing, is one of a small but growing number of researchers, many of whom are Indigenous, who study suicide prevention and intervention strategies that respect Indigenous beliefs and customs. Those strategies include smudging — the practice of burning medicinal plants to cleanse and connect people with their creator.

Without this understanding, research is hampered because people in tribal communities have "universal mistrust of health care and other colonized systems that have not been helpful to our people or proven to be supportive," said Brockie, a member of Fort Belknap reservation's Aaniiih Tribe.

Brockie is leading one of the first randomized controlled trials studying Indigenous people at Fort Peck. The project aims to reduce suicide risk by helping parents and caregivers deal with their own stress and trauma and develop positive coping skills. It's also working to strengthen children's tribal identity, connectivity, and spirituality.

In 2015, she reported on a study she led in 2011 to collect suicide data at the Fort Peck reservation in northeastern Montana. She found that adverse childhood experiences have a cumulative effect on suicide risk and also that tribal identity, strong connections with friends and family, and staying in school were protective against suicide.

In Arizona, Cwik is collaborating with the White Mountain Apache Tribe to help leaders there evaluate the impact of a comprehensive suicide surveillance system they created. So far, the program has reduced the overall Apache suicide rate by 38.3 % and the rate among young people ages 15 to 24 by 23%, according to the American Public Health Association.

Several tribal communities are attempting to implement a similar system in their communities, said Cwik.

Still, many tribal communities rely on limited mental health resources available through the Indian Health Service. One person at IHS is tasked with addressing suicide across almost 600 tribal nations.

Pamela End of Horn, a social worker and national suicide prevention consultant at IHS, said the Department of Veterans Affairs "has a suicide coordinator in every medical center across the U.S., plus case managers, and they have an entire office dedicated to suicide prevention. In Indian Health Service it is just me and that's it."

End of Horn, a member of the Oglala Lakota Sioux Tribe of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota, blames politics for the discrepancy.

"Tribal leaders are pushing for more suicide prevention programs but lack political investment. The VA has strong proactive activities related to suicide and the backing of political leaders and veterans' groups," she said.

It is also hard to get mental health professionals to work on remote reservations, while VA centers tend to be in larger cities.

Even if more mental health services were available, they can be stigmatizing, re-traumatizing, and cultur-

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ally incongruent for Indigenous people.

Many states are using creative strategies to stop suicide. A pilot project by the Rural Behavioral Health Institute screened more than 1,000 students in 10 Montana schools from 2020 to 2022. The governor of Montana is hoping to use state money to expand mental health screening for all schools.

Experts say the kinds of strategies best suited to prevent suicide among Native Americans should deliver services that reflect their diversity, traditions, and cultural and language needs.

That's what Robert Coberly, 44, was searching for when he needed help.

Coberly began having suicidal thoughts at 10 years old.

"I was scared to live and scared to die. I just didn't care," said Coberly, who is a member of the Tulalip Tribes.

He suffered in private for nearly a decade until he almost died in a car crash while driving drunk. After a stay at a rehabilitation center, Coberly remained stable. Years later, though, his suicidal thoughts came rushing back when one of his children died. He sought treatment at a behavioral health center where some of the therapists were Indigenous. They blended Western methodologies with Indigenous customs, which, he said, "I was craving and what I needed."

Part of his therapy included going to a sweat lodge for ritual steam baths as a means of purification and prayer.

Coberly was a counselor for the Native and Strong Lifeline, the first 988 crisis line for Indigenous people. He is now one of the crisis line tribal resource specialists connecting Indigenous people from Washington state with the resources they need.

"It's about time we had this line. To be able to connect people with resources and listen to them is something I can't explain except that I was in a situation where I wanted someone to hear me and talk to," said Coberly.

Amanda MorningStar said she still worries about her son night and day, but he tries to reassure her.

"I go to sleep and wake up the next day to keep it going," Ben MorningStar said. "I only get one chance. I might as well make the best of it."

## Noem makes another visit to Texas-Mexico border

**BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - JANUARY 26, 2024 5:17 PM**

Governor Kristi Noem made another visit to the Texas-Mexico border Friday, which she described as a "warzone."

Noem's office did not respond to South Dakota Searchlight questions about how she got to Texas and who paid for the trip. South Dakota's capital city, Pierre, is 1,200 miles from the Texas-Mexico border.

The trip came on the heels of a statement Noem signed earlier in the week with 24 other Republican governors. The statement expressed support for actions taken at the border by Texas Gov. Greg Abbott.

The trigger for the letter was a U.S. Supreme Court decision earlier in the week, when the court sided with the Biden administration. The court ruled that federal Border Patrol agents may cut the Texas National Guard's concertina wire, which blocks federal agents from accessing a portion of the border.

Noem discussed the decision and the governors' statement this week on Fox News.

"Governor Abbott has done the exact right thing, and I'll drive him more razor wire from South Dakota if I have to, for him to do his job," Noem said.

In the statement, the governors said they "stand in solidarity with our fellow Governor, Greg Abbott, and the State of Texas in utilizing every tool and strategy, including razor wire fences, to secure the border."

Noem also visited the Texas-Mexico border last year, when she spent \$850,000 from South Dakota's Emergency and Disaster Fund to send 50 South Dakota National Guard soldiers to support Texas border-control efforts.

In 2021, she accepted a \$1 million donation from Tennessee billionaire Willis Johnson to pay most of the cost for deploying 48 South Dakota National Guard troops to the border. That deployment cost a total of \$1.45 million, according to records obtained by Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington through

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a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit. The \$1 million donation was routed through South Dakota's Emergency and Disaster Fund, and the fund itself covered the portion of the deployment's cost not covered by the donation.

Meanwhile this week, Noem's fellow Republican and South Dakotan, U.S. Sen. John Thune, was trying to negotiate an immigration policy deal in Washington, D.C.

Thune, the No. 2 Senate Republican, and other top Senate negotiators said Thursday that final details remained under debate, despite outside pressure from GOP presidential front-runner Donald Trump to sink any agreement as he makes immigration one of his central campaign messages.

Thune said negotiations on an immigration deal tied to the passage of a multi-billion-dollar global securities supplemental package are at "a critical moment, and we've got to drive hard to get this done."

"If we can't get there, then we'll go to Plan B," Thune said.

He did not go into details on what a "Plan B" would look like or if a deal on immigration would be removed from the supplemental, which would provide critical aid to Ukraine that some Republican and Democratic senators are advocating as that country runs low on ammunition in its war with Russia.

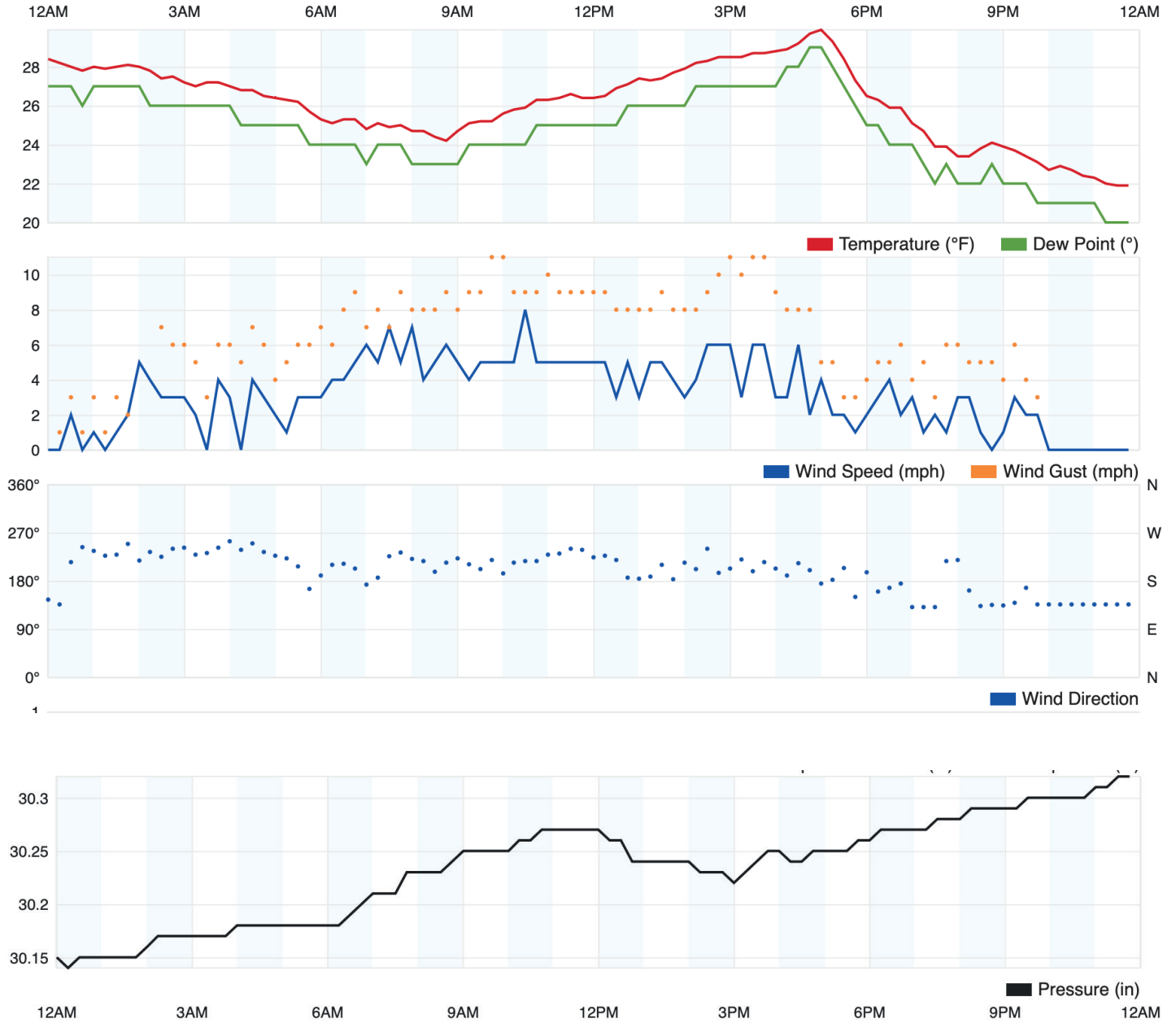
While no framework or bill text of a Senate deal has been released, some of the proposals put forth would curb the Biden administration's use of parole authority, which the administration has heavily relied on to grant temporary protections to migrants by allowing them to live and work in the United States without visas.

— *States Newsroom's D.C. Bureau contributed to this report.*

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs





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Sat Jan 27	Sun Jan 28	Mon Jan 29	Tue Jan 30	Wed Jan 31	Thu Feb 1	Fri Feb 2
33°F	35°F	42°F	39°F	42°F	43°F	44°F
19°F	25°F	25°F	27°F	30°F	33°F	34°F
SW	SSW	WSW	NW	SSW	SSE	ESE
5 MPH	11 MPH	13 MPH	6 MPH	9 MPH	7 MPH	9 MPH



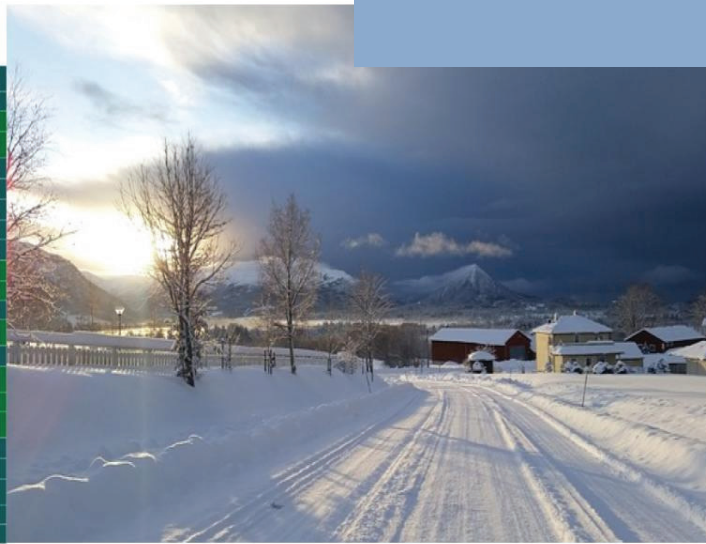
## Mostly Warm For The Next 5 Days

After Today, Sunshine Is Forecast To Be More Frequent

January 27, 2024

Maximum Temperature Forecast (°F)

	1/27 Sat	1/28 Sun	1/29 Mon	1/30 Tue	1/31 Wed	2/1 Thu	2/2 Fri
Aberdeen	35	36	42	40	41	42	44
Britton	31	35	39	37	41	43	44
Brookings	33	36	40	39	41	43	45
Chamberlain	36	38	42	40	44	46	48
Clark	30	33	38	35	39	41	43
Eagle Butte	40	47	47	47	50	46	44
Ellendale	35	36	41	40	42	41	42
Eureka	34	39	41	40	44	42	42
Gettysburg	34	38	42	40	45	44	43
Huron	32	36	42	39	41	42	45
Kennebec	36	39	43	42	46	47	48
McIntosh	41	47	47	46	49	46	44
Milbank	37	41	43	40	45	46	45
Miller	33	36	39	37	41	40	42
Mobridge	38	45	43	42	45	43	45
Murdo	36	42	45	46	51	51	49
Pierre	38	44	47	41	45	48	48
Redfield	32	35	40	38	40	40	42
Sisseton	36	40	41	40	44	45	44
Watertown	33	36	39	37	41	43	44
Webster	31	35	37	35	39	42	42
Wheaton	34	39	41	38	43	44	44



	1/27 Sat	1/28 Sun	1/29 Mon	1/30 Tue	1/31 Wed	2/1 Thu	2/2 Fri
Aberdeen	99	52	23	49	43	47	43
Britton	100	60	33	41	34	42	52
Brookings	82	46	39	25	35	32	39
Chamberlain	96	49	37	29	37	34	42
Clark	4	36	13	21	26	33	28
Eagle Butte	46	45	22	32	39	46	48
Ellendale	23	58	19	26	29	36	36
Eureka	36	55	20	26	32	37	33
Gettysburg	17	60	38	25	38	33	48
Huron	30	55	34	26	30	30	37
Kennebec	12	47	13	20	18	33	25
McIntosh	26	24	46	47	33	35	39
Milbank	27	25	24	18	27	30	34
Miller	19	61	16	27	31	42	35
Mobridge	16	33	13	20	21	25	28
Murdo	25	56	15	25	28	33	32
Pierre	68	53	23	27	35	39	47
Redfield	23	23	37	46	38	36	34
Sisseton	98	56	47	37	34	38	47
Watertown	99	39	33	37	37	37	35
Webster	59	56	52	62	36	38	33
Wheaton							

Sky Cover Forecast (%)  
Created: 4 am CST Sat 1/27/2024 |



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Warmer air in the area this weekend will allow for the continued slow snow melt. One more night of fog potential appears possible, mainly across far northeast South Dakota into west central Minnesota.

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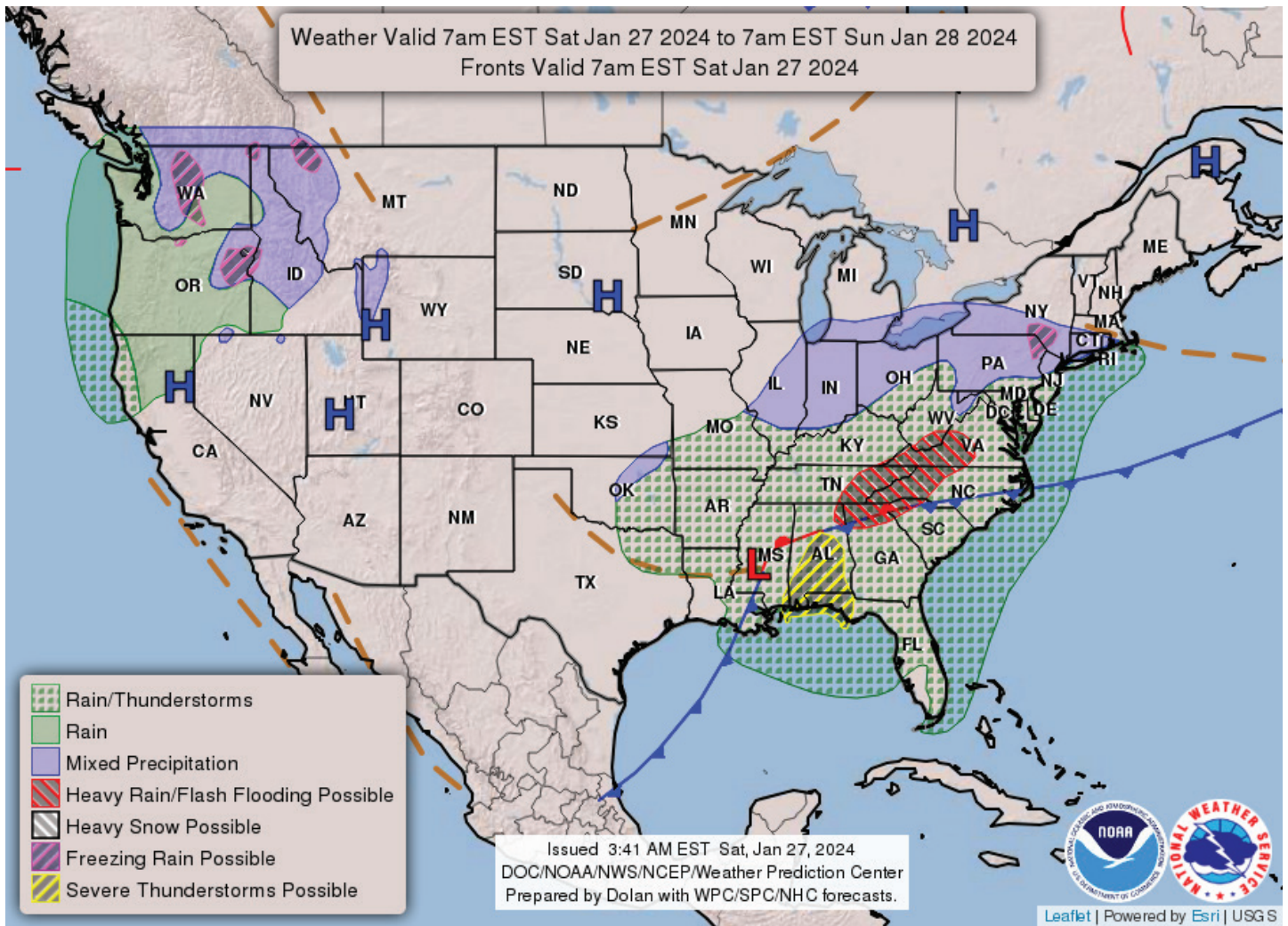
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 30 °F at 4:53 PM**  
**Low Temp: 22 °F at 11:28 PM**  
**Wind: 13 mph at 2:50 PM**  
**Precip: : 0.00**

Day length: 9 hours, 35 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 53 in 1934  
Record Low: -34 in 1915  
Average High: 24  
Average Low: 2  
Average Precip in Jan.: 0.49  
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00  
Average Precip to date: 0.49  
Precip Year to Date: 0.00  
Sunset Tonight: 5:32:54 pm  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:56:13 am



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## Today in Weather History

January 27th, 1969: Snowfall of 7 to 10 inches combined with winds of 15 to 30 mph caused widespread low visibilities and heavy drifting from the 27th to the 29th across Minnesota. Many roads were blocked or remained blocked. Many schools were closed with many accidents.

1922: On this date through the 29th, a significant snowstorm struck the East Coast from South Carolina to southeastern Massachusetts. Washington, DC, reported 28 inches of snow. The heavy snow on the Knickerbocker Theater's flat roof put a significant strain on the structure. On the evening of the 28th, during a showing of the silent comedy "Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford," the building collapsed, killing 98 people and injuring 130 others.

1772 - The "Washington and Jefferson Snowstorm" occurred. George Washington reported three feet of snow at Mount Vernon, and Thomas Jefferson recorded about three feet at Monticello. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1966 - Oswego, NY, was in the midst of a five day lake effect storm which left the town buried under 102 inches of snow. (David Ludlum)

1967 - Residents of Chicago, IL, began to dig out from a storm which produced 23 inches of snow in 29 hours. The snow paralyzed the city and suburbs for days, and business losses were enormous. (David Ludlum)

1987 - A powerful storm moving into the western U.S. produced 13 inches of snow at Daggett Pass NV, and 16 inches in the Cascade Mountains of Oregon. Winds gusted to 63 mph at Reno NV, and wind gusts in Oregon exceeded 80 mph. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - The nation got a breather from winter storms, however, cold arctic air settled into the southeastern U.S. Hollywood FL reported a record low reading of 39 degrees. (National Weather Summary)

1989 - The last half of January was bitterly cold over most of Alaska. Nearly thirty stations established all-time record low temperatures. On this date Tanana reported a low of -76 degrees. Daily highs of -66 degrees were reported at Chandalar Lake on the 22nd, and at Ambler on the 26th. (The Weather Channel)

1989 - Low pressure in north central Alaska continued to direct air across northern Siberia and the edges of the Arctic Circle into the state. The temperature at Fairbanks remained colder than 40 degrees below zero for the eighth day in a row. Lows of 68 below at Galena, 74 below at McGrath, and 76 below at Tanana, were new records for the date. Wind chill readings were colder than 100 degrees below zero. (National Weather Summary)

1990 - Another in a series of cold fronts brought high winds to the northwestern U.S., and more heavy snow to some of the higher elevations. The series of vigorous cold fronts crossing the area between the 23rd and the 27th of the month produced up to 60 inches of snow in the Cascade Mountains of Washington State. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2005 - Month-to-date snowfall at Boston Logan International Airport totaled 43.1 inches, making January the snowiest month on record.



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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### WHAT WE HAVE IN CHRIST

Looking at a gallon of water in a plastic container hardly suggests that it has any power. If, however, the water seeps into the crack of a rock or space in a cement road and turns into ice, the rock and the road will split into pieces. If, on the other hand, the water is turned into steam, it can drive the pistons of a large engine and turn into a massive amount of power. Water has the potential to do many great things.

So do we.

When we become Christians, God empowers us to change our lives into something wholly different and unique. Paul, in our Scripture for today, teaches us that there are four things that Christ can do for us:

1. He gives us wisdom. By walking with Him and listening to Him, we can hear and learn the truth because He is the expert in living.
2. He is righteousness. Righteousness in Paul's writings always means a right relationship with God. We can never achieve a right relationship with God through ourselves or what we try to do. We can only accomplish this "right" relationship with God through Christ.
3. He is holy. It is only through the presence of Christ in our lives that we can be or become all that God intends or expects us to be or become.
4. He is deliverance. Only Christ can forgive us and free us from our past sins, and Only He can deliver us from being enslaved to sin and then set us free from self-destruction.

Prayer: Lord, help us to understand the goodness of Your grace and the power of Your presence in our lives. With You, all things are possible - most importantly salvation. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin. 1 Corinthians 1:26-31



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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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.26.24

14 31 34 50 61 13

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$311,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.24.24

10 13 15 29 47 7

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$2,600,000**

NEXT DRAW: 13 Hrs 11 Mins 34 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.26.24

2 4 13 30 37 7

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 13 Hrs 26 Mins 34 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.24.24

6 17 27 30 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$30,000**

NEXT DRAW: 13 Hrs 26 Mins 34 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.24.24

7 28 46 47 58 18

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 13 Hrs 55 Mins 34 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.24.24

1 5 32 50 64 8

Power Play: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$164,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 13 Hrs 55 Mins 34 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

## Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

### **GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL**

Aberdeen Roncalli 60, Britton-Hecla 21  
Arlington 57, Estelline-Hendricks 40  
Brandon Valley 68, Yankton 29  
Castlewood 66, Iroquois-Lake Preston 54  
Chester 75, Baltic 47  
Colman-Egan 46, DeSmet 38  
Corsica/Stickney 42, Menno 29  
Custer 50, Hill City 49  
Dupree 67, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 59  
Ethan 65, Howard 29  
Faith 58, Newell 46  
Groton 42, Webster 27  
Hanson 74, Bridgewater-Emery 25  
Hay Springs, Neb. 52, Edgemont 42  
Herreid-Selby 49, Ipswich 21  
Jones County 43, Gregory 34  
Kadoka 60, Bison 24  
McCook Central-Montrose 47, Parker 36  
Mitchell 55, Sioux Falls Lincoln 24  
Mobridge-Pollock 43, Chamberlain 30  
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 51, Winner 37  
Northwestern 53, Langford 43  
Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 62, Elkton-Lake Benton 40  
Platte-Geddes 56, Colome 26  
Rapid City Central 42, Rapid City Stevens 36  
Red Cloud 52, Sturgis Brown 25  
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 52, Pierre 25  
Sioux Valley 68, Beresford 46  
Strasburg, N.D. 43, North Central 36  
Tripp-Delmont-Armour 53, Burke 49  
Warner 53, Waubay/Summit 40  
Dakota Oyate Challenge=  
Consolation Semifinal=  
Flandreau Indian 47, Crazy Horse 28  
Tiospaye Topa 79, Takini 21  
Semifinal=  
Lower Brule 55, Marty 51  
Omaha Nation, Neb. 74, Wakpala 44

### **BOYS PREP BASKETBALL**

Brandon Valley 64, Yankton 42  
Bridgewater-Emery 48, Hanson 45  
Castlewood 80, Iroquois-Lake Preston 36

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Centerville 63, Scotland 42  
Clark-Willow Lake 57, Redfield 27  
Corsica/Stickney 59, Menno 33  
DeSmet 70, Colman-Egan 30  
Freeman 78, Avon 62  
Gregory 44, Jones County 37, OT  
Harrisburg 65, Pierre 29  
Hay Springs, Neb. 67, Edgemont 18  
Howard 55, Ethan 44  
Mobridge-Pollock 71, Chamberlain 55  
North Central 59, Strasburg, N.D. 26  
Northwestern 65, Langford 48  
Platte-Geddes 69, Colome 48  
Rapid City Christian 61, St Thomas More 50  
Sturgis Brown 48, Red Cloud 39  
Tripp-Delmont-Armour 65, Burke 39  
Viborg 66, Alcester-Hudson 33  
Waubay/Summit 53, Warner 41  
Winner 58, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 29  
Wolsey-Wessington 62, Kimball-White Lake 44  
Dakota Oyate Challenge=  
Consolation Semifinal=  
Takini 65, Tiospaye Topa 55  
Wakpala 63, Flandreau Indian 30  
Semifinal=  
Crazy Horse 62, Omaha Nation, Neb. 53  
Lower Brule 66, Marty 54

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

## Will other states replicate Alabama's nitrogen execution?

By KIM CHANDLER and SEAN MURPHY Associated Press Writers

ATMORE, Ala. (AP) — Alabama's first-ever use of nitrogen gas for an execution could gain traction among other states and change how the death penalty is carried out in the United States, much like lethal injection did more than 40 years ago, according to experts on capital punishment.

Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall said Friday that the execution of Kenneth Eugene Smith, a 58-year-old convicted of a 1988 murder-for-hire, went off as planned and his office is ready to help other states if they want to begin nitrogen executions.

"Alabama has done it, and now so can you," Marshall said at a news conference.

At least some prison officials in other states say they hope to closely analyze how the process worked in Alabama and whether to replicate it in their states. Oklahoma and Mississippi already have laws authorizing the use of nitrogen gas for executions, and some other states, including Nebraska, have introduced measures this year to add it as an option.

"Our intentions are if this works and it's humane and we can, absolutely we'll want to use it," said Steven Harpe, director of Oklahoma's prison system.

After being outfitted with a face mask that forced him to breathe pure nitrogen and deprived him of oxygen, Smith shook and writhed on the gurney for at least two minutes during Thursday night's execution at an Alabama prison before his breathing stopped and he was declared dead.

Alabama Corrections Commissioner John Q. Hamm described Smith's shaking as involuntary movements



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and said nothing was out of the ordinary during the procedure.

"That was all expected and was in the side effects that we've seen or researched on nitrogen hypoxia," Hamm said.

Harpe and his chief of staff, Justin Farris, who rewrote Oklahoma's lethal injection protocols after a botched execution in 2014, already have traveled to Alabama to see the equipment corrections officials obtained for the nitrogen execution and to study its protocols.

"We want to see how well it works, how fast it works and how efficient it is," Farris said. "I think the nation, as far as correctional entities, is watching this to see how it's done."

The United States has a long history of developing methods of execution that quickly become widely adopted, starting with electrocution in the early 1900s to replace hangings, followed by the gas chamber and ultimately lethal injection, which was developed by an Oklahoma doctor in the 1970s. The switch to nitrogen gas could be the next method to gain popularity, said Austin Sarat, a law professor at Amherst College who has written extensively about botched executions and the death penalty.

"This is a chapter in a long-running story in the United States," Sarat said. "Since the late 1900s, the United States has been on a quest to find a method of execution that would be a kind of technological magic bullet and would ensure that executions would be safe, reliable and humane.

"Why are we on that quest? Because we want to have the death penalty, but we want to be able to say the death penalty is not cruel."

Oklahoma was the first state to contemplate the use of nitrogen gas nearly a decade ago after the 2014 botched execution of Clayton Lockett who clenched his teeth, moaned and writhed on the gurney before a doctor noticed a problem with the intravenous line and the execution was called off before Lockett died, 43 minutes after the procedure began. A later investigation revealed the IV had become dislodged and the lethal chemicals were pumped into the tissue surrounding the injection site instead of into his bloodstream.

Numerous other states, including Alabama, have had problems for years administering lethal injection or obtaining the deadly drugs, particularly as manufacturers, many of them based in Europe, have objected to their drugs being used to kill people and prohibited their sale to corrections departments or stopped manufacturing them altogether.

Even as some death penalty states remain committed to pursuing the executions, capital punishment is undergoing a yearslong decline of use and support, and more Americans now believe the death penalty is being administered unfairly, according to a recent annual report.

A majority of states, 29, have either abolished the death penalty or paused executions, and there were just 24 executions carried out in five U.S. states in 2023, according to Washington, D.C.-based Death Penalty Information Center.

"More states have abolished the death penalty since 2007 than in any other comparable 17-year period in American history," Sarat noted. "This national consideration is not just being driven by moral qualms, it's being driven by the sense that it's a broken system."

Ryan Kiesel, a former Oklahoma legislator and civil rights attorney who fought against Oklahoma's efforts to approve nitrogen gas as then-director of the state chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, said the continued push for a new method is a futile attempt by states to sanitize a violent act.

"Perhaps instead of trying to move to more and more palatable ways of killing someone, if a state wants to have a death penalty, they should have a method that reflects the violent act that execution is," Kiesel said. "If we can't stomach it, we shouldn't do it."

## How Taiwan beat back disinformation and preserved the integrity of its election

By DAVID KLEPPER and HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The rumors about vote fraud started swirling as the ballots in Taiwan's closely watched presidential election were tallied on Jan. 13. There were baseless claims that people had fabricated votes and that officials had miscounted and skewed the results.

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In a widely shared video, a woman recording votes mistakenly enters one in the column for the wrong candidate. The message was clear: The election could not be trusted. The results were faked.

It could have been Taiwan's Jan. 6 moment. But it wasn't.

Worries that China would use disinformation to undermine the integrity of Taiwan's vote dogged the recent election, a key moment in the young democracy's development that highlighted tensions with its much larger neighbor.

In repelling disinformation, Chinese and domestic, Taiwan offers an example to other democracies holding elections this year.

This year, more than 50 countries that are home to half the planet's population are due to hold national elections. From India to Mexico, the U.K. to Russia, the outcomes of the elections will test the strengths of democracies and countries with authoritarian leaders.

In Taiwan, the response to disinformation was swift. Fact-checking groups debunked the rumors, while the Central Election Commission held a news conference to push back on claims of electoral discrepancies. Influencers like @FroggyChiu with more than 600,000 subscribers also put out explainers on YouTube explaining how votes are tallied.

The video showing the election worker miscounting votes had been selectively edited, fact-checkers found. Voters at the voting station spotted the woman's error and election workers quickly corrected the count, according to MyGoPen, an independent Taiwanese fact-checking chatbot.

It was just one of dozens of videos that fact checkers had to debunk.

"I believe some people genuinely believed this. And when the election results came out, they thought something was up," said Eve Chiu, the editor-in-chief of Taiwan's FactCheck Center, a nonprofit journalism organization.

Lai Ching-te of the incumbent Democratic Progressive Party won the election on Jan. 13 against Ko Wen-je of the Taiwan People's Party and Hou Yu-ih of the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang), in an election that was seen as a referendum on the island's relationship with China.

Supporters of the Taiwan People's Party presidential candidate, many of whom are young, had shared the videos widely on TikTok, which were then shared on Facebook. Prior to the election results, many thought there was a chance of a Ko upset in the race given the candidate had drawn a lot of online attention. Taiwan's FactCheck Center debunked multiple videos of alleged voter fraud, including another one in which voting officials make a human error caught on camera. The source of these videos is unclear.

Notably, Taiwan has resisted calls for tougher laws that would require social media platforms to police their sites; a proposal to institute such rules was withdrawn in 2022 after free speech concerns were raised.

China, which claims Taiwan as its own, targeted the island with a stream of disinformation ahead of its election, according to research from DoubleThink Lab.

Much of it sought to undermine faith in the incumbent Democratic Progressive Party and cast it as belligerent and likely to start a war that Taiwan can't win. Other narratives targeted U.S. support for Taiwan, arguing that America was an untrustworthy partner only interested in Taiwan's semiconductor exports that wouldn't support the island if it came to war with China.

Messages left with the Chinese embassy in Washington were not immediately returned Saturday.

Taiwan has been able to effectively respond to Chinese disinformation in part because of how seriously the threat is perceived there, according to Kenton Thibaut, a senior resident fellow and expert on Chinese disinformation at the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab. Instead of a piecemeal approach — focusing solely on media literacy, for instance, or relying only on the government to fact-check false rumors — Taiwan adopted a multifaceted approach, what Thibaut called a "whole of society response" that relied on government, independent fact-check groups and even private citizens to call out disinformation and propaganda.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Alexander Tah-Ray Yui, Taipei's economic and cultural representative to the U.S., said the government has learned it must identify and debunk false information as quickly as possible in order to counter false narratives. Yui is Taiwan's de facto ambassador to the U.S.

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"Find it early, like a tumor or cancer. Cut it before it spreads," Yui said of foreign disinformation.

Taiwan's civil society groups like MyGoPen and the Taiwan FactCheck Center, which received \$1 million in funding from Google, have focused on raising public awareness through debunking individual rumors that members of the public report.

The island has a strong civil society. Many of the fact-checker groups were founded by dedicated individuals, such as MyGoPen, whose founder Charles Yeh started the chatbot service because he found his relatives would get confused by online rumors. Others like, Taiwan FactCheck Center, are careful to not take government money so as to preserve their independence, said Chiu.

Media literacy on fake news and the digital environment is growing, those on the front lines say, but slowly.

"It's like in the past when everyone dumped bottles and cans in the garbage and now they sort them, that was done through a period of societal education," said Chiu. "Everyone needs to slowly develop this awareness, and this needs time."

In the U.S., government efforts to call out disinformation have themselves become politicized and criticized as government censorship or thought control.

With a population more than 10 times the size of Taiwan and years of growing polarization, the U.S. has deep, internal political and social fault lines that create good conditions for disinformation to take root — and make it harder for the government to push back without being accused of censoring legitimate political views.

In the United States, many of the narratives spread by Russia, for instance, are eagerly adopted by domestic groups that distrust the government. Donald Trump, the former president, and other Republicans have repeatedly made similar claims about the U.S. as those carried by Russian state media, for example.

"We have a dynamic in American politics where if you're Russia, China or Iran, you don't have to inject divisive topics, because they're already here," said Jim Ludes, a former national defense analyst who now leads the Pell Center for International Relations at Salve Regina University.

"The call is coming from inside the house," he said, using a popular horror film metaphor.

That dynamic can also be seen in Taiwan. Although Ko, the presidential candidate, said publicly he didn't believe there was election fraud, legislators from the TPP held a conference Wednesday in which they shared videos of miscounting that had spread online, which had already been debunked, to call for greater adherence to voting regulations.

Though the election passed without a major crisis, the challenge continues to evolve. Chinese efforts at disinformation have become increasingly localized and sophisticated, according to DoubleThink Lab's post-election analysis.

In one example, a Chinese-run Facebook page called C GaChuDao made a video describing an affair that it said a DPP legislator had with a woman from China. Unlike in years past, where Chinese disinformation was easily recognized and mocked for its use of simplified characters and vocabulary from China, this video featured a man speaking with a Taiwanese accent and in a way that appeared completely local.

"In picking topics, they'd pick something that exists in your society, and then it's relatively more convincing," said Wu.

## **Nazi death camp survivors mark 79th anniversary of Auschwitz liberation on Holocaust Remembrance Day**

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — A group of survivors of Nazi death camps will mark the 79th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp during World War II in a modest ceremony Saturday in southern Poland.

About 20 survivors from various camps set up by Nazi Germany around Europe were to lay wreaths at the Death Wall in Auschwitz and hold prayers at the monument in Birkenau. They will memorialize around 1.1 million camp victims, mostly Jews. The attentively preserved memorial site and museum are located near the city of Oswiecim.

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Nearly 6 million European Jews were killed by the Nazis during the Holocaust — the mass murder of Jews and other groups before and during World War II.

Marking International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the survivors will be accompanied by Polish Senate Speaker Malgorzata Kidawa-Blonska, Culture Minister Bartlomiej Sienkiewicz and Israeli Ambassador Yacov Livne.

The theme of the observances is the human being, symbolized in simple, hand-drawn portraits. They are meant to stress that the horror of Auschwitz-Birkenau lies in the suffering of people held and killed there.

Holocaust victims were commemorated across Europe.

In Germany, where people put down flowers and lit candles at memorials for the victims of the Nazi terror, Chancellor Olaf Scholz said that his country would continue to carry the responsibility for this "crime against humanity."

He called on all citizens to defend Germany's democracy and fight antisemitism., as the country marked the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.

"Never again' is every day," Scholz said in his weekly video podcast. "Jan. 27 calls out to us: Stay visible! Stay audible! Against antisemitism, against racism, against misanthropy — and for our democracy."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, whose country is fighting to repel Russia's full-scale invasion, posted an image of a Jewish menorah on X, formerly known as Twitter, to mark the remembrance day.

"Every new generation must learn the truth about the Holocaust. Human life must remain the highest value for all nations in the world," said Zelenskyy, who is Jewish and has lost relatives in the Holocaust.

"Eternal memory to all Holocaust victims!" Zelenskyy tweeted.

Italian President Sergio Mattarella on Friday denounced rising antisemitism and delivered a powerful speech in support of the Jewish people.

Mattarella called the Holocaust "the most abominable of crimes," and recalled the complicity of Italians under Fascism in the deportation of Jews.

Also Friday, Rome's police chief ordered pro-Palestinian activists to postpone a rally that had been scheduled for Saturday. Israel's Jewish community has complained that such protests have become occasions for the memory of the Holocaust to be co-opted by anti-Israel forces and used against Jews.

In Poland, a memorial ceremony with prayers was held Friday in Warsaw at the foot of the Monument to the Heroes of the Ghetto, who fell fighting the Nazis in 1943.

Earlier in the week, the countries of the former Yugoslavia signed an agreement in Paris to jointly renovate Block 17 in the red-brick Auschwitz camp and install a permanent exhibition there in memory of around 20,000 people who were deported from their territories and brought to the block. Participating in the project will be Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia.

Preserving the camp, a notorious symbol of the horrors of the Holocaust, with its cruelly misleading "Arbeit Macht Frei" ("Work Makes One Free") gate, requires constant effort by historians and experts, and substantial funds.

The Nazis, who occupied Poland from 1939-1945, at first used old Austrian military barracks at Auschwitz as a concentration and death camp for Poland's resistance fighters. In 1942, the wooden barracks, gas chambers and crematoria of Birkenau were added for the extermination of Europe's Jews, Roma and other nationals, as well as Russian prisoners of war.

Soviet Red Army troops liberated Auschwitz-Birkenau on Jan. 27, 1945, with about 7,000 prisoners there, children and those who were too weak to walk. The Germans had evacuated tens of thousands of other inmates on foot days earlier in what is now called the Death March, because many inmates died of exhaustion and cold in the sub-freezing temperatures.

Since 1979, the Auschwitz-Birkenau site has been on the UNESCO list of World Heritage.



## Aryna Sabalenka clinches back-to-back Australian Open titles with a victory over Zheng Qinwen

By JOHN PYE AP Sports Writer

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — In the back of her mind Aryna Sabalenka didn't want to be, in her words, that player who wins a major title and disappears.

Winning her first Grand Slam crown in Australia a year ago gave Sabalenka the confidence she could do it again. Losing the U.S. Open final last September gave her the extra motivation.

Sabalenka ensured she wasn't a one-hit wonder by clinching back-to-back Australian Open titles with a 6-3, 6-2 win over Zheng Qinwen on Saturday in a one-sided women's final that contrasted sharply with her comeback three-set victory here over Elena Rybakina last year.

"I just wanted to show that I'm able to be consistently there and I'm able to win another one," she said. "So compared to last year, it's a completely different me. Compared to the U.S. Open, once again, it's a different me; I'm more controlled and kind of like don't let the rest of the things come to my mind."

In 2022, Sabalenka struggled so badly with her serve in tense moments that she doubted she could win a major. Now she's relying on it to break down opponents. She didn't serve a double-fault in the final, and she didn't face a break point.

No. 2-seeded Sabalenka set the tone with big, deep forehands and converted service breaks early in each set against the 21-year-old Zheng, who was making her debut in a Grand Slam final.

The journey and the destination were equally important for Sabalenka.

In the semifinals, she avenged her U.S. Open final loss to No. 4-ranked Coco Gauff with a straight-set win. That followed straight-sets wins over 2021 French Open winner Barbora Krejčíková in the quarterfinals and Amanda Anisimova in the fourth round.

"I'm definitely a different person and a player and I have more experience playing the last stages of the Grand Slams," Sabalenka said, reflecting on the last 13 months. "There was some tough moments for me losing the U.S. Open final — that loss actually motivated me so much to work even harder."

And that, she said, gave her more confidence in her game and more self-belief.

"The first one is always special because I feel like it's more emotional," she said. "For the second time, it's just such a relief."

Only two things slowed down Sabalenka's progress Saturday to her second Grand Slam singles title.

In the third game of the second set, with Zheng serving, the match was interrupted after an activist started yelling out. The match continued after the man was escorted out by security.

Then, when she was serving for the match, Sabalenka had three championship points at 40-0 but missed two with unforced forehands errors and another with Zheng's clever drop shot.

After giving Zheng a breakpoint chance, she bounced the ball away behind her in disgust. But she recovered her composure to win the next three points.

Sabalenka is the first woman since Victoria Azarenka in 2012 and '13 to win back-to-back Australian Open titles, and the fifth since 2000 to win the championship here without dropping a set — a group that includes Serena Williams.

She credited her support team for keeping her on track, and making sure she enjoyed the moment. Sabalenka made a habit of slapping and autographing the bald head of her fitness trainer, Jason Stacy, before each match in Australia.

After the final, Stacy, wearing a shirt with the message "Simplicity is the key to brilliance" printed on the back, held the trophy on the court as Sabalenka huddled with her team in a victory celebration.

A decade after Li Na held the Australian Open trophy aloft, Zheng made her best run in nine majors to date. She said during the tournament that she felt well-supported in Melbourne because of the big Chinese community. And that played out for the final, where the flags waved and she had the crowd behind her.

But she was playing an opponent ranked in the top 50 for the first time in this tournament.

It was the second time in as many majors their paths had met in the second week; Sabalenka beat Zheng in the U.S. Open quarterfinals last year.

Zheng's push to the final was two rounds better than her previous best run to the quarterfinals in New York last September.

She was the first player in four decades to advance through six rounds without playing anyone ranked in the top 50 — and was only the third in the Open era to reach a major final without facing a seeded player.

The step up against No. 2-ranked Sabalenka proved too much.

"I didn't perform my best. That's really pity for me, because I really want to show better than that," Zheng said. "I think I can learn more with the loss today. And then I just hope next time I can come back as a better tennis player and come back, yeah, stronger."

## **Crew extinguish fire on tanker hit by Houthi missile off Yemen after US targets rebels in airstrike**

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The crew aboard a Marshall Islands-flagged tanker hit by a missile launched by Yemen's Houthi rebels extinguished an hourslong fire onboard the stricken vessel Saturday sparked by the strike, authorities said.

The attack on the Marlin Luanda further complicated the Red Sea crisis caused by the Iranian-backed rebels' attacks over Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The tanker carried Russian-produced naphtha, a flammable oil, drawing Moscow further into a conflict that so far it had blamed on the U.S.

Early Saturday, U.S. forces conducted a strike against a Houthi anti-ship missile that was aimed at the Red Sea and prepared to launch, the U.S. military's Central Command said. That attack came after the USS Carney, an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, had to shoot down a Houthi missile targeting it.

The Marlin Luanda burned for hours in the Gulf of Aden until being extinguished Saturday, said Trafigura, a Singapore-based trading firm. Its crew of 25 Indian nationals and two Sri Lankans were still trying to battle the blaze sparked by the missile strike, it said. No one was injured by the blast, it added.

"We are pleased to confirm that all crew on board the Marlin Luanda are safe and the fire in the cargo tank has been fully extinguished," Trafigura said. "The vessel is now sailing towards a safe harbor."

The Indian navy said its guided missile destroyer INS Visakhapatnam was assisting the Marlin Luanda's crew in fighting the fire. It posted images showing the blaze still raging Saturday, likely fueled by the naphtha on board.

The ship, managed by a British firm, is carrying the Russian naphtha bound for Singapore, the company said. It described the flammable oil as being purchased below the price caps set by G7 sanctions placed on Russia over its ongoing war on Ukraine. It wasn't clear what environmental impact the attack had caused.

Houthi military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree claimed the attack on the Marlin Luanda in a prerecorded statement late Friday, describing it as a "British oil ship." He insisted such attacks would continue.

Since November, the rebels have repeatedly targeted ships in the Red Sea over Israel's offensive in Gaza against Hamas. But they have frequently targeted vessels with tenuous or no clear links to Israel, imperiling shipping in a key route for global trade between Asia, the Mideast and Europe.

Since the airstrike campaign began, the rebels now say they'll target American and British ships as well. On Wednesday, two American-flagged ships carrying cargo for the U.S. Defense and State departments came under attack by the Houthis, forcing an escorting U.S. Navy warship to shoot some of the projectiles down.

China, which relies on the seaborne trade through the area, has called for calm. The U.S. had sought to get China to apply pressure on Iran, as Beijing remains a major buyer of Western-sanctioned Iranian oil.

But Russia so far has condemned the U.S. and the United Kingdom for carrying out its strikes targeting the Houthis, while also meeting with the rebel group in Moscow in recent days.

The U.S. Navy's top Mideast commander told the AP on Monday that the Houthi attacks were the worst since the so-called Tanker War of the 1980s. It culminated in a one-day naval battle between Washington and Tehran and also saw the U.S. Navy accidentally shoot down an Iranian passenger jet, killing 290 people in 1988.

Meanwhile Saturday, authorities reported a separate incident in which a vessel in the Arabian Sea reported seeing people armed with assault rifles and a rocket-propelled grenade off their vessel.

"The small craft approached within 300 meters (about 985 feet)," the British military's United Kingdom Trade Operations agency said. "The onboard security team fired warning shots and post an exchange of fire, the small craft then retreated."

It said all those onboard were safe. The private security firm Ambrey described the incident as involving a "Somali-style" small boat aided by a larger mothership. As the Houthi attacks have escalated, there's been an increase in suspected Somali pirate activity as well.

## Community health centers serve 1 in 11 Americans. They're a safety net that's under stress

By DEVI SHASTRI AP Health Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Elisa Reyes has come to Plaza del Sol Family Health Center for doctor's appointments for more than a decade. She moved away a while ago but keeps returning — even if it means a two-hour roundtrip bus ride.

That's because her two children see the same doctor she does. Because when she's sick, she can walk in without an appointment. Because the staff at the Queens clinic helped her apply for health insurance and food stamps.

"I feel at home. They also speak my language," Reyes, 33, said in Spanish. "I feel comfortable."

Plaza del Sol is one of two dozen sites run by Urban Health Plan Inc., which is one of nearly 1,400 federally designated community health centers. One in 11 Americans rely on these to get routine medical care, social services and, in some cases, fresh food.

The clinics serve as a critical safety net in every state and U.S. territory for low-income people of all ages. But it's a safety net under stress.

Since 2012, community health centers have seen a 45% increase in the number of people seeking care — and they've opened more and more service sites to expand their footprint to more than 15,000 locations.

Many centers are short-staffed and struggling to compete for doctors, mental health professionals, nurses and dentists. Leaders also told The Associated Press that funding is an ever-present concern, with the months-long debate over the federal budget making it all but impossible for them to plan and hire for the long term.

Community health centers have been around in some form for decades, and are largely what remains when urban and rural hospitals close or cut back on services.

Dr. Matthew Kusher, Plaza del Sol's clinical director, said there are things that prescriptions can't change, like stopping the spread of flu and COVID-19 when people live in apartments with one family per room and it's impossible to quarantine.

"What we provide here is only 20% of what goes toward somebody's health," Kusher said. "Their health is more driven by the other factors, more driven by the poverty, and the lack of access to food or clean water or healthy air."

Nine in 10 health center patients live at or below 200% of the federal poverty line, according to the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration. Beyond that:

- In 2022, nearly 1.4 million health center patients were homeless.
- One in five was uninsured.
- Half were on Medicaid.
- One in four was best served in a language other than English; about 63% were racial or ethnic minorities.

Dr. Acklema Mohammad started 50 years ago as a medical assistant in Urban Health Plan's first clinic, San Juan Health Center. She has cared for some families across three generations.

"It's so gratifying to work in this community. I'm walking through the door, or I'm walking down the

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street, and I'm getting hugs," she said. "All along, 'Oh, Dr. Mo! You're still here!'"

Staffing is Mohammad's biggest worry. Many pediatricians retired or left for other jobs after the worst of the pandemic. It's not just about money, either: She said job applicants tell her they want quality of life and flexibility.

"It's a big job and it's a big issue because we have so many sick children and so many sick patients," Mohammad said, "but we don't have enough providers to take care of them."

Former pediatricians are sometimes picking up virtual visits to provide relief, she said, and telehealth helps, too. But when telehealth is not a possibility, El Nuevo San Juan Health Center tries to bring care to people instead.

About 150 elders get at-home visits, said Dr. Manuel Vazquez, Urban Health Plan's vice president of medical affairs who oversees the program. There are times when the care isn't covered, but the team does it without pay.

"We said, 'No. We need to do this,'" he said.

Building community trust

One of the nation's first community health centers opened in the rural Mississippi delta in 1967, in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement's Freedom Summer.

Today, Delta Health Center in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, has 17 locations in five counties, including free-standing clinics and some in schools.

Access to preventive care is critical as area hospitals cut back on neonatal services and other specialty care, said Temika Simmons, Delta Health Center's chief public affairs officer.

"If you're in the middle of a heart attack, you're going to have to be airlifted to Jackson or Memphis where they have the equipment to save your life, and so you might die along the way," she said. "So, what we've been doing in terms of primary care is trying to keep people away from that part."

Another key to the centers' ability to improve health disparities is understanding and being part of their communities. Plaza del Sol is located in the heavily immigrant, mostly Latino neighborhood of Corona, which was the epicenter of New York City's COVID-19 spread. Staff are required to speak Spanish.

The Mississippi Delta staffers are trained to spot signs of abuse, Simmons said, or know that the patient "fussing and fighting" about filling out a form likely can't read.

To continue to serve the communities in the way they want to, center leaders say they're stretching dollars as far as they can — but need more.

Based on the rising number of patients and inflation in the health care sector, federal funding for centers would need to increase by \$2.1 billion to match 2015 funding levels, according to an analysis sponsored by the National Association of Community Health Centers.

"You can't be overwhelmed with the problem," Simmons said. "You've got to just simply take it one day at a time, one patient at a time."

## Airstrike kills 3 Palestinians in southern Gaza as Israel presses on with its war against Hamas

By NAJIB JOBAIN and WAFAA SHURAFU Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Two women and a man were killed early Saturday in what witnesses said was an Israeli airstrike on a home in the southernmost part of Gaza, as Israel pursued its military offensive against the Palestinian enclave.

The strike came less than a day after the International Court of Justice ordered Israel to do all it can to prevent death, destruction and any acts of genocide in Gaza. As part of its binding ruling, the top United Nations court asked Israel for a compliance report in a month, meaning the military's conduct will be under increasing scrutiny.

The court stopped short of ordering a cease-fire, but the orders its judges issued were in part a stinging rebuke of the army's conduct so far in Israel's nearly 4-month-long war against Gaza's Hamas rulers. Friday's decision came in a case brought by South Africa, which alleged Israel is committing genocide



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against the Palestinian territory's people, a charge Israel vehemently denies.

The war has killed more than 26,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, destroyed vast swaths of Gaza and displaced nearly 85% of a population of 2.3 million people. It was triggered by an unprecedented Hamas attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7 in which militants killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took about 250 hostages.

The overall Palestinian death toll in the war rose to 26,257 as of Saturday, with 174 deaths over the past day, the Health Ministry in Gaza said. The ministry does not distinguish between combatants and civilians in its count, but has said about two-thirds are women and children. It said the total number of wounded surpassed 64,000.

Israel holds Hamas responsible for civilian casualties, saying the militants embed themselves in buildings used by civilians. Israel says its air and ground offensive in Gaza has killed more than 9,000 militants.

Bilal al-Siksik, who lost his wife, a son and a daughter in Saturday's strike in Rafah, a town on Gaza's border with Egypt, said the decision by the world court meant little since it did not stop the war.

"No one can speak in front of them (Israel). America with all its greatness and strength can do nothing," he said as he stood beside the pile of rubble and twisted metal that was once his home. "What can people do, who have no power or anything?" He said his family was asleep when their residence was struck.

Rafah and its surrounding areas are crammed with more than 1 million people after the Israeli military ordered civilians to seek refuge there from the fighting elsewhere in the territory. Despite those orders, the designated evacuation areas have repeatedly come under airstrikes, with Israel saying it would go after militants as needed.

Some Gaza residents expressed dismay that the U.N. court based in The Hague, Netherlands, did not order an immediate end to the fighting as South Africa had requested.

"The court's decisions were disappointing to us," Yahya Saadat, who was displaced from the northern city of Beit Hanoun and now lives in the central town of Deir al-Balah, said late Friday. "We were waiting for the International Court of Justice to issue stricter decisions than that, such as a cease-fire, our return to our homes in the north, and stopping the bloodshed in the Gaza Strip."

Others saw Friday's rulings from a 17-judge panel as a significant, if symbolic, step.

"The measures approved by the court are mostly in the interest of the Palestinian people regarding human suffering, violation of international law, and many other issues," said Mazen Muhaisen, who also was sheltering in Deir al-Balah.

The court ruled that Israel must refrain from harming or killing Palestinian civilians while doing all it can to prevent genocide, including punishing anyone who incites others to support the destruction of Gaza's people. The judges also ordered Israel to urgently get basic aid to Gaza.

The interim orders did not address the substance of the case — the genocide allegations — and a final ruling is expected to take years.

Although the provisional measures issued Friday are legally binding, it is unclear if Israel will comply. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to move ahead with the war, saying the fact that the court did throw out the genocide charges was a "mark of shame that will not be erased for generations."

The Israeli military said Saturday it had conducted several "targeted raids on terror targets" in the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis, killing "numerous terrorists." It did not mention Rafah.

The United States, Israel's closest ally, has strongly supported the offensive but has increasingly called for restraint and for more humanitarian aid to be allowed into Gaza.

Almost four months after the Hamas attack in southern Israel, dozens of hostages remain captive in Gaza. More than a 100 were released in a swap for Palestinian prisoners during a week-long cease-fire in November, and an unspecified number of the remaining 136 hostages are believed to have been killed.

U.S. President Joe Biden spoke with his Egyptian and Qatari counterparts Friday ahead of a trip by his CIA director that is intended to seek progress toward a deal to secure the release of more hostages in exchange for a pause in the fighting.

CIA Director Bill Burns is slated to meet in Europe soon with the head of the intelligence agencies of

Israel and Egypt and with the the prime minister of Qatar, according to three people familiar with the matter who insisted on anonymity to discuss the sensitive talks.

Hamas has said it will only release the hostages in exchange for an end to the war and the release of large numbers of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

## Who was St. Brigid and why is she inspiring many 1,500 years after her death?

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

Devotees of St. Brigid plan to celebrate her Sunday with the scheduled return of a relic associated with the so-called matron saint of Ireland. The festivities come about a millennium after her remains were removed from the town of Kildare, where she founded a prestigious abbey and inspired a host of colorful, miracle-filled legends.

The celebration in her hometown, southwest of Dublin, is part of Brigid 1500 — a series of observances across the world centered around the saint's feast day of Feb. 1, marking the 1,500th anniversary of her death around the year 524.

In a sense, Brigid is on a roll. The commemorations come a year after Ireland began honoring her with an annual public holiday — the first Irish woman to be recognized with one.

While St. Patrick has long been the saint most identified with Ireland, Brigid has gained a growing following in the 21st century. Devotees draw inspiration from Brigid the saint — and from Brigid the ancient pagan goddess, whose name and attributes she shares — as emblematic of feminine spirituality and empowerment. This comes amid growing disenchantment with the patriarchal and historically dominant Catholic Church.

### WHO WAS BRIGID?

First question: which Brigid?

Brigid was the name of a prominent goddess worshipped by ancient pagan Celts — the namesake of the saint who lived in the fifth and sixth centuries.

Brigid the goddess was associated with everything from poetry, healing and metal crafting to nature, fertility and fire. She was honored on the mid-winter holy day of Imbolc, still commemorated on Feb. 1, which also became St. Brigid's Day.

St. Brigid's father is said to have been a ruler, her mother enslaved. Though Brigid's life story has been embellished by legends, she is believed to have been the abbess of a monastic settlement of men and women that became a center of arts and learning and that gave the town its name, Irish for "church of the oak." One legend says that when the local king agreed to give her only enough land for her monastery that could fit under her cloak, she miraculously spread it across the surrounding countryside.

St. Brigid traveled, preached and healed. She's often depicted with images of fire and light and is associated with fertility, care for living things and peacemaking.

According to another legend, Brigid gave her father's jeweled sword to a needy man for him to barter for food.

### WHAT RELIC IS BEING RETURNED TO KILDARE?

Brigid was believed to have been buried at her monastic church in Kildare. Around the ninth century, her remains were moved to the northern town of Downpatrick in hopes of avoiding the pillages of Vikings and others. That shrine was later destroyed by English troops during the Protestant Reformation.

Various churches on the European continent claim to have relics of St. Brigid. This includes a bone fragment from Brigid's skull, which tradition says was brought to a church in Portugal by three Irish knights. A fragment of that relic was returned in the 1930s to Brigidine Sisters elsewhere in Ireland and is stored in a small metal reliquary, shaped like an oak tree, an image associated with Brigid. That's the relic being returned to Kildare.

The relic's new resting place will be the Catholic parish church named for St. Brigid, which plans to display it permanently.

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## WHAT IS A RELIC, AND WHY DO CATHOLICS VENERATE THEM?

Catholic canon law says the church “promotes the true and authentic veneration” of saints because of their pious examples. This can involve veneration of relics — which can include fragments of bodies of saints, as well as their clothing and other items associated with them.

“Veneration must be clearly distinguished from adoration and worship, which are due God alone,” says the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

## WHAT IS ST. BRIGID’S DAY?

St. Brigid’s Day and Imbolc, a pagan holy day associated with the goddess Brigid and heralding the coming of spring, both fall on Feb. 1, although Ireland is observing the public holiday on the following Monday.

## WHY IS BRIGID GAINING A 21ST-CENTURY FOLLOWING?

Brigid’s moment is happening as many Irish are disillusioned with traditional Roman Catholicism and its patriarchal leadership amid a secularizing culture. Even many devout Catholics are dismayed over scandals including the cover-ups of sexual abuse.

Whether devotees honor Brigid primarily as a saint, a goddess or some combination of both, they see Brigid as emblematic of feminine spirituality, environmental care and artistic creation.

Brigid’s Day is “an invitation to stop the pointless millennia old war of Christianity versus paganism” and see “the wisdom and beauty in both lineages,” wrote Melanie Lynch, founder of Herstory, which campaigned in support of the new national holiday.

## HOW IS ST. BRIGID’S DAY BEING COMMEMORATED?

The most dramatic event is the scheduled return of the relic to Brigid’s hometown, with a short procession to St. Brigid’s Parish Church from Solas Bhríde — a Christian spirituality center led by Brigidine Sisters in Kildare with a mission of welcoming “people of all faiths and of no faith.” The procession is to be led by three girls riding ponies and dressed as the medieval Irish knights who, one tradition says, accompanied the relic to Portugal centuries earlier.

“What amazes me is, 1,500 years later, she’s still remembered with love in Kildare and Ireland,” said David Mongey, chair of Into Kildare, the local tourism board. “Her words, her wisdom and her actions mean more today than they ever did, when you think about how we treat our land, how we treat our environment, how we treat our animals, how we treat each other and how we treat ourselves.”

Several events are being organized by Solas Bhríde, Irish for “Light of Brigid,” including a noontime “Pause for Peace.” Thousands of students plan to mark the pause on the nearby Curragh Plains by making a human formation of a large St. Brigid’s Cross, shaped by a square with four symmetrical arms.

Others around the world are joining in the pause — a minute’s silence at noon local time — said Brigidine Sister Rita Minehan, one of the founders of Solas Bhríde.

“We are sending out a message that we actively oppose warfare in our world and the proliferation of arms,” she said. “It’s rather frightening what’s happening in our world. It’s sorely in need of peace, and Brigid was renowned as a peacemaker.”

Other Kildare locations are hosting music, ecumenical worship and other activities.

The group Herstory, which uses arts and education to promote female role models, plans events around Ireland on the holiday and days afterward. These include dramatic lightshows in which artistic depictions of Brigid are projected onto historic landmarks.

Elsewhere worldwide, Irish-heritage groups plan to mark the day with concerts and cultural events. Churches plan Masses in honor of the saint, while Wiccan and other pagan groups plan meditations and other ceremonies in honor of the goddess and in observance of Imbolc.

## Haitians suffering gang violence are desperate after Kenyan court blocks police force deployment

By DÁNICA COTO and EVENS SANON Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Radio stations across Haiti got jammed with calls just hours after a court in Kenya blocked the deployment of a U.N.-backed police force to help fight gangs in the troubled Caribbean country.

Many callers wondered and demanded: What's next?

Few know.

Uncertainty and fear have been spreading since Friday's ruling, with violence reaching new records as gangs tighten their grip on Haiti's capital and beyond.

"Absent a robust external mission that would be deployed very soon, we are facing quite a tragic scenario in Haiti," warned Diego Da Rin with International Crisis Group.

Gangs that control an estimated 80% of Haiti's capital have in recent weeks attacked and seized power of previously peaceful communities, killing and injuring dozens, leading to widespread concerns that they will soon control all of Port-au-Prince.

The number of people reported killed last year in Haiti more than doubled to nearly 4,500, and the number of reported kidnappings surged by more than 80% to nearly 2,500 cases, according to the most recent U.N. statistics.

Meanwhile, Haiti's National Police is losing officers at "an alarming rate," while those still in service continue to be overwhelmed by gangs, according to a U.N. report released this week. More than 1,600 officers left the department last year, and another 48 were reported killed.

In addition, equipment sent by the international community to help bolster an underfunded police department has crumpled beneath heavy fights with gangs. Only 21 of 47 armored vehicles were operational as of mid-November, with 19 "severely damaged during anti-gang operations or broken down," according to the U.N. report. The remaining seven vehicles "are permanently disabled," it stated.

"The situation has gone overboard. Enough is enough," said a man who identified himself as Pastor Malory Laurent when he called Radio Caraibes to vent about Friday's ruling. "Every day, you feel there is no hope."

Kenya's government said it would appeal the ruling. Still, it's unclear how long that might take and whether other countries who pledged to send smaller forces to boost the multi-national mission would consider going at it alone.

Among those who planned to send forces were the Bahamas, Jamaica, Belize, Burundi, Chad and Senegal.

"All I will say at this time is that this is a major setback for the people of Haiti who yearn to have a stable country to live in," said Roosevelt Skerrit, Dominica prime minister and former head of a Caribbean trade bloc known as Caricom that has sent recent delegations to Haiti to help resolve the unrest. "The decision of the Kenyan court warrants an emergency meeting of the friends of Haiti to determine with the Haitian people the plan B."

Bahamian Prime Minister Philip Davis did not return messages for comment, nor did the office of Jamaican Prime Minister Andrew Holness.

Hugh Todd, Guyana's foreign minister, told The Associated Press that the trade bloc will likely meet soon to discuss the implications of the ruling as it awaits word from Jamaica.

"We will have to see if there is any legal space for us to operate," he said, referring to whether there are any other legal options that might allow Kenya and other countries to move forward.

U.N. officials have not commented since the court ruling.

Edwin Paraison, a former Haitian diplomat and executive director of a foundation that seeks to strengthen ties between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, said he would be surprised if international leaders didn't have a plan B.

He said the ruling, however, would allow Haiti to implement its own solutions to gang violence, and that



he believes it has enough resources to do so.

"One entity that has never been mentioned, and we don't understand why it's never been mentioned, is Haiti's military, even if it's at an embryonic stage," he said.

Paraison noted that more than 600 soldiers who recently received training in Mexico could work alongside with police.

"We have to look at the resources we have at the local level to deal with this situation," he said.

But such resources might not be enough, said André Joseph, 50, who owns a small convenience store in downtown Port-au-Prince, one of the more dangerous areas of the capital.

The people who live and work around his store are very protective of him and his business, he said.

"I hope that someone can fight for them also," Joseph said. "The international force would be the best thing for these people to have here, and for me, too."

But in the absence of one, he would like to see the money set aside for the multinational mission go to Haiti instead so it can rebuild its own forces and fight gangs.

Many Haitians grumbled about Friday's ruling, including Marjorie Lamour, a 39-year-old mother of two who sells women's lingerie out of a small container she carries with her. She is forced to keep her load light in case she must run from gangs.

"Some days I'm here all day, and then there's a shooting and I'm running, and I come back home without a cent," said Lamour, who called the ruling "a major crime" against Haitians.

She noted that she and her family have been forced to flee two different homes already because of gang violence, which has left more than 310,000 Haitians homeless.

"I don't want to have to run a third time," she said, adding that she doesn't make enough money to properly care for her children. "Feeding my kids a meal once a day is hard enough. I hope God can do something for us because no one is doing anything."

Da Rin, with International Crisis Group, noted that one silver lining is how the mission backed by the U.N. Security Council did not specify that Kenya would be the one to lead it. He said it opens the possibility that another country could take the reins without additional meetings and approval from the council.

As Haiti awaits the possibility of a plan B, Da Rin said he worries that the situation could only worsen, especially given the recent arrival of former Haitian rebel leader Guy Philippe, who has not supported the Kenyan-led mission.

"With this news, the desperation of Haitians to see a way out of the security crisis increases," he said. "They may make some slightly radical decisions."

## Israeli Holocaust survivor says the Oct. 7 Hamas attack revived childhood trauma

By ALON BERNSTEIN and JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

ASHKELON, Israel (AP) — Gad Partok was 10 years old in 1942 when Nazis stormed his street in the coastal Tunisian town of Nabeul. He saw them going door to door, hauling out his neighbors, shooting them and burning down their homes.

Like so many Jews who moved to Israel after the war, Partok believed Israel would be a place where he would finally be free from persecution.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been a steady reminder through the decades that safety is not absolute, and security comes at a cost. But Oct. 7, 2023 — the day Hamas committed the largest massacre of Jews since the Holocaust — shattered his belief in Israel as a haven.

The 93-year-old watched from his living room as TV news played videos of Hamas militants tearing through communities just a few kilometers (miles) from where he lives in the southern Israeli city of Ashkelon. As rockets fired from Gaza boomed overhead, Partok saw footage of the militants killing, pillaging, and rounding up hostages.

"I thought — what, is this the same period of those Nazis? It can't be," Partok said, clenching his fists as he spoke.

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Saturday is International Holocaust Remembrance Day, which commemorates the killing of 6 million Jews and many other groups by the Nazis and their collaborators. In Israel — a country with roughly half of the world's Holocaust survivors — the day carries extra weight because of the recent trauma of Oct. 7.

Hamas militants blew past Israel's vaunted security defenses that day, killing roughly 1,200 people and dragging some 250 hostages to Gaza. For many, that rampage revived memories of the horrors of the Nazis.

Partok was shocked by the militants' brazen trail through the farming cooperatives and small towns of his adopted country. As he watched the onslaught, he wondered where the country's defenses had gone.

"Where is the army? Where is the government? Our people?" he recalled. The feeling of abandonment brought back the disturbing memories of his youth.

"The dragging of the people of Be'eri, Nir Oz, Kfar Aza, Kissufim, Holit, it's the same thing. It reminded me of the same thing," he said, ticking off the names of affected communities. "I was very, very unwell. I even felt a feeling, it's hard to explain, of disgust, of fear, of terrible memories."

The plight of Tunisia's small Jewish community is a lesser-known chapter of the Holocaust.

Over six months of occupation, the Nazis sent nearly 5,000 Tunisian Jews to labor camps, where dozens died from labor, disease and Allied bombing campaigns, according to Israel's Yad Vashem museum. Allied forces liberated Tunisia in 1943, but it was too late to save many of Partok's neighbors.

Partok said his family was only able to escape because his father, a fabric dealer who spoke Arabic, disguised the family's Jewish identity. The family left Tunisia and moved to what would become Israel in 1947, a year before the country gained independence.

As an adult, he taught photography and owned a photo shop in Ashkelon. His home is full of yellowing photographs; pictures of his late wife and parents adorn the walls. He has grandchildren and great-grandchildren living throughout Israel.

Partok's home is less than 24 kilometers (15 miles) from the Gaza border, and so he lives with the sounds of the war all around him — Israel's relentless bombing campaign in Gaza, as well as Hamas rockets launched into Israel.

Israel's war against Hamas has claimed more than 26,000 Palestinian lives, according to health officials in Gaza. It has prompted international criticism, widespread calls for a cease-fire, and even charges of genocide by South Africa at the International Court of Justice.

Despite the scope of death and destruction in Gaza, many Israelis remain focused on Oct. 7.

News channels rarely air footage of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, instead oscillating between stories of tragedy and heroism on Oct. 7 and the plight of more than 100 hostages still being held by Hamas.

Warning sirens blare regularly in Ashkelon when rockets are fired into Israel. Partok keeps the television on, tuned in to news about the war. Stories continue to emerge — a hostage pronounced dead, a child without parents, a survivor's story newly told.

"I'm sitting here in my armchair, and I'm looking, and my eyes are staring, and I can't believe it," he said. "Is it true? Is it so?"

## Avian flu is devastating farms in California's 'Egg Basket' as outbreaks roil poultry industry

By TERRY CHEA Associated Press

PETALUMA, Calif. (AP) — Last month, Mike Weber got the news every poultry farmer fears: His chickens tested positive for avian flu.

Following government rules, Weber's company, Sunrise Farms, had to slaughter its entire flock of egg-laying hens — 550,000 birds — to prevent the disease from infecting other farms in Sonoma County north of San Francisco.

"It's a trauma. We're all going through grief as a result of it," said Weber, standing in an empty hen house. "Petaluma is known as the Egg Basket of the World. It's devastating to see that egg basket go up in flames."

A year after the bird flu led to record egg prices and widespread shortages, the disease known as highly

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pathogenic avian influenza is wreaking havoc in California, which escaped the earlier wave of outbreaks that devastated poultry farms in the Midwest.

The highly contagious virus has ravaged Sonoma County, where officials have declared a state of emergency. During the past two months, nearly a dozen commercial farms have had to destroy more than 1 million birds to control the outbreak, dealing an economic blow to farmers, workers and their customers.

Merced County in Central California also has been hit hard, with outbreaks at several large commercial egg-producing farms in recent weeks.

Experts say bird flu is spread by ducks, geese and other migratory birds. The waterfowl can carry the virus without getting sick and easily spread it through their droppings to chicken and turkey farms and backyard flocks through droppings and nasal discharges.

California poultry farms are implementing strict biosecurity measures to curb the spread of the disease. State Veterinarian Annette Jones urged farmers to keep their flocks indoors until June, including organic chickens that are required to have outdoor access.

"We still have migration going for another couple of months. So we've got to be as vigilant as possible to protect our birds," said Bill Mattos, president of the California Poultry Federation.

The loss of local hens led to a spike in egg prices in the San Francisco Bay Area over the holidays before supermarkets and restaurants found suppliers from outside the region.

While bird flu has been around for decades, the current outbreak of the virus that began in early 2022 has prompted officials to slaughter nearly 82 million birds, mostly egg-laying chickens, in 47 U.S. states, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Whenever the disease is found the entire flock is slaughtered to help limit the spread of the virus.

The price of a dozen eggs more than doubled to \$4.82 at its peak in January 2023. Egg prices returned to their normal range as egg producers built up their flocks and outbreaks were controlled. Turkey and chicken prices also spiked, partly due to the virus.

"I think this is an existential issue for the commercial poultry industry. The virus is on every continent, except for Australia at this point," said Maurice Pitesky, a poultry expert at the University of California, Davis.

Climate change is increasing the risk of outbreaks as changing weather patterns disrupt the migratory patterns of wild birds, Pitesky said. For example, exceptional rainfall last year created new waterfowl habitat throughout California, including areas close to poultry farms.

In California, the outbreak has impacted more than 7 million chickens in about 40 commercial flocks and 24 backyard flocks, with most of the outbreaks occurring over the past two months on the North Coast and Central Valley, according to the USDA.

Industry officials are worried about the growing number of backyard chickens that could become infected and spread avian flu to commercial farms.

"We have wild birds that are full of virus. And if you expose your birds to these wild birds, they might get infected and ill," said Rodrigo Gallardo, a UC Davis researcher who studies avian influenza.

Gallardo advises the owners of backyard chickens to wear clean clothes and shoes to protect their flocks from getting infected. If an unusual number of chickens die, they should be tested for avian flu.

Ettamarie Peterson, a retired teacher in Petaluma, has a flock of about 50 chickens that produce eggs she sells from her backyard barn for 50 cents each.

"I'm very concerned because this avian flu is transmitted by wild birds, and there's no way I can stop the wild birds from coming through and leaving the disease behind," Peterson said. "If your flock has any cases of it, you have to destroy the whole flock."

Sunrise Farms, which was started by Weber's great-grandparents more than a century ago, was infected despite putting in place strict biosecurity measures to protect the flock.

"The virus got to the birds so bad and so quickly you walked in and the birds were just dead," Weber said. "Heartbreaking doesn't describe how you feel when you walk in and perfectly healthy young birds have been just laid out."

After euthanizing more than half a million chickens at Sunrise Farms, Weber and his employees spent

the Christmas holiday discarding the carcasses. Since then, they've been cleaning out and disinfecting the hen houses.

Weber hopes the farm will get approval from federal regulators to bring chicks back to the farm this spring. Then it would take another five months before the hens are mature enough to lay eggs.

He feels lucky that two farms his company co-owns have not been infected and are still producing eggs for his customers. But recovering from the outbreak won't be easy.

"We have a long road ahead," Weber said. "We're going to make another run of it and try to keep this family of employees together because they've worked so hard to build this into the company that it is."

## **Yemen Houthi rebels fire a missile at a US warship, escalating worst Mideast sea conflict in decades**

By JON GAMBRELL and TARA COPP Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Yemen's Houthi rebels launched a missile Friday at a United States warship patrolling the Gulf of Aden, forcing it to shoot down the projectile, and struck a British vessel as their aggressive attacks on maritime traffic continue.

The attack on the U.S. warship, the destroyer USS Carney, marked a further escalation in the biggest confrontation at sea the U.S. Navy has seen in the Middle East in decades, as Houthi missile fire set another commercial vessel ablaze Friday night.

Early Saturday local time, U.S. forces conducted a strike against a Houthi anti-ship missile that was aimed into the Red Sea and prepared to launch, the U.S. military's Central Command said.

The Houthis' Al-Masirah satellite news channel said the strikes happened near the port city of Hodeida, but offered no assessment of their damage.

The Carney attack represents the first time the Houthis directly targeted a U.S. warship since the rebels began their assaults on shipping in October, a U.S. official said on condition of anonymity because no authorization had been given to discuss the incident.

Later Friday, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Operations, which oversees Mideast waterways, acknowledged a vessel had been struck by a missile and was on fire in the Gulf of Aden.

Houthi military spokesperson Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree did not acknowledge the Carney attack, but claimed the missile attack on the commercial vessel that set it ablaze. He identified the vessel as the Marshall Islands-flagged tanker Marlin Luanda.

Central Command late Friday confirmed the Marlin Luanda was struck by a single anti-ship ballistic missile fired from Houthi-controlled Yemen. The Carney and other coalition ships responded and were rendering assistance toward the stricken ship. Central Command said no injuries were reported.

The Houthis' now direct attacks on U.S. warships are the most aggressive escalation of its campaign in the Red Sea since the Israel-Hamas war broke out. The U.S. has tried to temper its descriptions of the Houthis' strikes, and said it is difficult to determine what exactly the Houthis are trying to hit in part try to prevent the conflict from becoming a wider regional war.

The U.S. and allies had also held off for weeks on striking Houthi weapons sites in Yemen, but they are now taking regular action, often destroying launch sites that are armed but have not fired, and are deemed an imminent threat.

Despite the Carney being directly targeted, Central Command said the Houthis fired "toward" the Carney. The Carney shot down the anti-ship ballistic missile, it said.

Acknowledging Friday's assault as a direct attack on a U.S. warship is important, said Brad Bowman, a senior director at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies.

"They're now finally calling a spade a spade, and saying that, yeah, they're trying to attack our forces, they're trying to kill us," he said.

Tempering the language and response, while aimed at preventing a wider war, has had the opposite effect of further emboldening the Houthis, Bowman said.

The attacks were the latest assaults by the rebels in their campaign against ships traveling through the



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Red Sea and surrounding waters, which has disrupted global trade amid Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The U.S. and Britain have launched multiple rounds of airstrikes since the Houthi attacks began targeting Houthi missile depots and launcher sites in Yemen, a country that's been wracked by conflict since the rebels seized the capital, Sanaa, in 2014.

Since November, the rebels have repeatedly targeted ships in the Red Sea, saying they were avenging Israel's offensive in Gaza against Hamas. But they have frequently targeted vessels with tenuous or no clear links to Israel, imperiling shipping in a key route for global trade between Asia, the Mideast and Europe.

Since the airstrike campaign began, the rebels now say they'll target American and British ships as well. On Wednesday, two American-flagged ships carrying cargo for the U.S. Defense and State departments came under attack by the Houthis, forcing an escorting U.S. Navy warship to shoot some of the projectiles down.

The U.S. Navy's top Mideast commander told the AP on Monday that the Houthi attacks were the worst since the so-called Tanker War of the 1980s. It culminated in a one-day naval battle between Washington and Tehran, and also saw the U.S. Navy accidentally shoot down an Iranian passenger jet, killing 290 people in 1988.

## **Biden returns to South Carolina to show his determination to win back Black voters in 2024**

By MEG KINNARD and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Joe Biden doesn't need to worry about his prospects in South Carolina's Democratic primary next week. He's got that locked up.

He also knows he's not likely to win the solidly red state come November. It hasn't voted for a Democrat since 1976.

He's spending this weekend in the state nonetheless, intent on driving home two messages: He's loyal to the state that saved his campaign in 2020 and he's determined to win back Black voters here and elsewhere who were central to his election last time but are less enthused this go-round.

Biden will be the keynote speaker Saturday night at the state party's fundraising dinner ahead of its first ever "first-in-the-nation" Democratic primary on Feb. 3. He'll stick around to attend a political event at St. John Baptist Church on Sunday, in a state where politics and faith are intertwined.

Deputy campaign manager Quentin Fulks said of the primary that Biden's team was working to "blow this out of the water" by running up the score against longshot challengers. The Biden campaign also wants to learn lessons about activating Black voters — the backbone of the party — ahead of an expected 2024 rematch with GOP front-runner Donald Trump.

The president has been getting mixed reviews from some Black voters in the state that came through for him in 2020, including discontent over his failure to deliver on voting rights legislation and other issues.

Last year, at the outset of Biden's reelection bid, conflicting views among the same South Carolina Democratic voters whose support had been so crucial to his nomination provided an early warning sign of the challenges he faces as he tries to revive his diverse winning coalition from 2020.

Overall, just 50% of Black adults said they approved of Biden in a December poll by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs. That is compared with 86% in July 2021, a shift that is generating concern about the president's reelection prospects.

APVoteCast, an extensive national survey of the electorate, also found that support for Republican candidates ticked up slightly among Black voters during the 2022 midterm elections, although Black voters overwhelmingly supported Democrats.

The Biden campaign is running TV ads in South Carolina highlighting Biden initiatives that it hopes will boost enthusiasm among Black voters.

"On his first day in office with a country in crisis, President Biden got to work — for us," the ad states. "Cutting Black child poverty in half, more money for Black entrepreneurs, millions of new good-paying

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jobs and he lowered the cost of prescription drugs.”

The campaign is spending more than \$270,000 on the ads through the primary, according to tracking data. The Democratic National Committee also launched a six-figure ad campaign across South Carolina and Nevada, which is next on Democratic primary calendar, to boost enthusiasm for Biden among Black and Latino voters. And first lady Jill Biden was in the state on Friday evening to rally voters.

Biden’s campaign has also hired staff in South Carolina to organize ahead of the primary and through the general election, although for nearly 50 years the state has picked a Republican for president.

Meanwhile, a pro-Biden super PAC, Unite the Country, is airing an ad featuring Democratic Rep. Jim Clyburn of South Carolina ticking through what he says are major Biden accomplishments such as reducing student loan debt and cutting insulin costs for older people.

It was Clyburn’s 2020 endorsement of his longtime friend Biden that helped the then-candidate score a thundering win in South Carolina’s presidential primary,

In the new ad, Clyburn references his late wife, Emily, who influenced his 2020 endorsement of Biden. She said “that if we wanted to win the presidency, we better nominate Joe Biden,” Clyburn says in the ad. “She was right then, and she’s still right today.”

While Trump has seen slightly improving levels of support among Black and Latino voters, Biden’s team is more concerned that a lack of enthusiasm for Biden will depress turnout among voters who are pivotal to the Democratic coalition.

Biden’s team is using South Carolina as a proving ground, tracking what messages and platforms break through with voters.

South Carolina, where Black voters make up a majority of the Democratic electorate, is now the first meaningful contest in the Democratic presidential race after the party reworked the party’s nominating calendar at Biden’s call. Leading off with Iowa and New Hampshire had long drawn criticism because the states are less diverse than the rest of the country.

Moving up the South Carolina vote was also a political payback to the state and Clyburn for their role in sending Biden to the White House.

A co-chairman of Biden’s reelection campaign, Clyburn has remained one of the president’s most stalwart advocates in Congress, as well as in his home state. Frequently, he reminds people of the same message he delivered in his 2020 endorsement: “We know Joe, and Joe knows us.”

Biden’s decision to campaign in the state “helps solidify South Carolina’s place as the first in the nation primary moving forward,” said Biden campaign communications director Michael Tyler.

It also provides Biden an opportunity to re-engage with Black voters who have connections that extend well beyond South Carolina.

“Obviously the diaspora is strong, familial ties are strong with other key swing states in the area like Georgia and North Carolina,” Tyler said.

This is Biden’s second trip to South Carolina this month. He spoke earlier in the month at the pulpit of Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, where nine Black parishioners were shot to death in 2015 by a white stranger they had invited to join their Bible study. In his speech, Biden denounced the “poison” of white supremacy in America and said such ideology has no place in America, “not today, tomorrow or ever.”

It was meant as a direct contrast with Trump, whom Biden accused of “glorifying” rather than condemning political violence.

## Top UN court orders Israel to prevent genocide in Gaza but stops short of ordering cease-fire

By MIKE CORDER and RAF CASERT Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — The United Nations’ top court on Friday ordered Israel to do all it can to prevent death, destruction and any acts of genocide in Gaza, but the panel stopped short of ordering an end to the military offensive that has laid waste to the Palestinian enclave.

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In a ruling that will keep Israel under the legal lens for years to come, the court offered little other comfort to Israeli leaders in a genocide case brought by South Africa that goes to the core of one of the world's most intractable conflicts. The court's half-dozen orders will be difficult to achieve without some sort of cease-fire or pause in the fighting.

"The court is acutely aware of the extent of the human tragedy that is unfolding in the region and is deeply concerned about the continuing loss of life and human suffering," court President Joan E. Donoghue said.

The ruling amounted to an overwhelming rebuke of Israel's wartime conduct and added to mounting international pressure to halt the nearly 4-month-old offensive that has killed more than 26,000 Palestinians, decimated vast swaths of Gaza and driven nearly 85% of its 2.3 million people from their homes.

Allowing the accusations to stand stung the government of Israel, which was founded as a Jewish state after the Nazi slaughter of 6 million Jews during World War II.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the fact that the court was willing to discuss the genocide charges was a "mark of shame that will not be erased for generations." He vowed to press ahead with the war.

The power of the ruling was magnified by its timing, coming on the eve of International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Later Friday, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stressed that the top court's rulings are legally binding and "trusts" that Israel will comply with its orders, including "to take all measures within its power" to prevent acts that would bring about the destruction of the Palestinian people.

"Those truly needing to stand trial are those that murdered and kidnapped children, women and the elderly," former Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz said, referring to Hamas militants who stormed through Israeli communities on Oct. 7 in the attack that set off the war. The assault killed some 1,200 people and resulted in another 250 being kidnapped.

The court also called on Hamas to release the hostages who are still in captivity. Hamas urged the international community to make Israel carry out the court's orders.

Many of the measures were approved by an overwhelming majority of the judges. Of the six orders, an Israeli judge voted in favor of two — an order for humanitarian aid and another for the prevention of inflammatory speech.

Israeli Judge Aharon Barak said he supported those orders in the hope that they would "help to decrease tensions and discourage damaging rhetoric" while easing the "consequences of the armed conflict for the most vulnerable."

Such provisional measures issued by the world court are legally binding, but it is not clear if Israel will comply with them.

"We will continue to do what is necessary to defend our country and defend our people," said Netanyahu, who pushed back against the ruling in two languages. In a message aimed at his domestic audience, the tone was more defiant in Hebrew, and he stopped short of overtly criticizing the court in English.

The court ruled that Israel must do all it can to prevent genocide, including refraining from harming or killing Palestinians. It also ruled that Israel must urgently get basic aid to Gaza and that the country should punish any incitement to genocide, among other measures.

The panel told Israel to submit a report on steps taken within a month.

"That's a time that the court could come back and say, 'You have not met the orders. You have not complied. Now we find you are in the midst of committing genocide,'" said Mary Ellen O'Connell, a professor of law and international peace studies at Notre Dame University's Kroc Institute.

Friday's decision was an interim ruling. It could take years for the court to consider all aspects of South Africa's genocide allegations. The U.N. Security Council scheduled a meeting for Wednesday to follow up on the ruling.

In Israel, commentators said the decision not to order a cease-fire was received with some relief since it helped Israel avoid a collision with a top U.N. body.

Palestinians and their supporters said the court took an important step toward holding Israel accountable.

The Foreign Ministry of the internationally backed Palestinian self-rule government in the West Bank said the ruling "should serve as a wake-up call for Israel and actors who enabled its entrenched impunity," an apparent reference to the United States, Israel's chief ally.

The U.S. repeated its position that Israel must "take all possible steps" to minimize harm to civilians, increase humanitarian aid and curb "dehumanizing rhetoric."

"We continue to believe that allegations of genocide are unfounded," the State Department said in a statement.

The South African government said the ruling determined that "Israel's actions in Gaza are plausibly genocidal."

"There is no credible basis for Israel to continue to claim that its military actions are in full compliance with international law," the government said in a statement.

Israel often boycotts international tribunals and U.N. investigations, saying they are unfair and biased. But this time, it took the rare step of sending a high-level legal team — a sign of how seriously it regards the case.

The Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza does not differentiate between combatants and civilians in its death toll, but the agency has said about two-thirds of those killed have been women and children.

The Israeli military claims at least 9,000 of the more than 26,000 dead were Hamas militants.

U.N. officials have expressed fears that even more people could die from disease and malnutrition, with at least one-quarter of the Gaza population facing starvation.

Yuval Shany, a law professor at Hebrew University and senior fellow at the Israel Democracy Institute, said the court's decision was "not as bad as Israel feared it would be" and would not fundamentally alter the way the military conducts the war.

"The greatest fear was that the court would ask Israel to stop the war," Shany said, describing the decision as "something that Israel can live with."

## **Wrestling icon Vince McMahon resigns from WWE parent company after ex-employee files sex abuse suit**

STAMFORD, Conn. (AP) — Wrestling icon Vince McMahon resigned Friday from WWE's parent company the day after a former employee filed a federal lawsuit accusing him and another former executive of serious sexual misconduct, including offering her to a star wrestler for sex.

McMahon stepped down from his position as executive chairman of the board of directors at WWE's parent company, TKO Group Holdings, according to a statement released late Friday. He continued to deny wrongdoing following the lawsuit filed by Janel Grant, who worked in the company's legal and talent departments.

The suit includes allegations that McMahon, now 78, forced Grant into a sexual relationship in order for her to get and keep a job and passed around pornographic pictures and videos of her to other men, including other WWE employees.

The AP typically does not name accusers in sexual assault cases, but Grant's representatives said she wished to go public. Her lawyer declined to comment Friday.

McMahon's statement said that he was leaving the board "out of respect" for WWE and TKO Group.

"I stand by my prior statement that Ms. Grant's lawsuit is replete with lies, obscene made-up instances that never occurred, and is a vindictive distortion of the truth," he said in the statement. "I intend to vigorously defend myself against these baseless accusations, and look forward to clearing my name."

McMahon stepped down as WWE's CEO in 2022 amid an investigation into allegations that match those in the lawsuit, which was filed Thursday in U.S. District Court in Connecticut, where WWE is based.

McMahon was the leader and most recognizable face at WWE for decades. When he purchased what was then the World Wrestling Federation from his father in 1982, wrestling matches took place at small venues and appeared on local cable channels. WWE matches are now held in professional sports stadiums, and the organization has a sizable overseas following.



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WWE merged last April with the company that runs Ultimate Fighting Championship to create the \$21.4 billion sports entertainment company TKO Group Holdings, and McMahon served as that group's executive chairman of the board until Friday.

TKO Group's representative referred media inquiries about McMahon's resignation to his statement. Deadline first reported that he was stepping down.

"Mr. McMahon does not control TKO nor does he oversee the day-to-day operations of WWE," TKO Group said earlier this week. "While this matter pre-dates our TKO executive team's tenure at the company, we take Ms. Grant's horrific allegations very seriously and are addressing this matter internally."

Grant also names as defendants in the lawsuit the WWE and John Laurinaitis, an ex-pro wrestler and the company's former head of talent relations and general manager. WWE and Laurinaitis did not return requests for comment Friday.

According to the lawsuit, McMahon lived in the same building as Grant and in 2019 offered to get her a job at WWE after her parents died.

She alleges that he eventually made it clear that one of the requirements of the job was a physical relationship with him and later with Laurinaitis and others.

Over the next few years, McMahon lavished her with gifts including a luxury car, the suit says.

It also alleges that McMahon offered one of his star wrestlers — a person not named in the lawsuit — sex with Grant as a perk in 2021.

"WWE benefited financially from the commercial sex act venture orchestrated by McMahon, including by having wrestling talent, such as WWE Superstar, sign new contracts with WWE after McMahon presented Plaintiff as a sexual commodity for their use," the lawsuit states.

Grant is seeking unspecified monetary damages and to have the court void a \$3 million nondisclosure agreement, of which she alleges she received only \$1 million.

"Ms. Grant hopes that her lawsuit will prevent other women from being victimized," her attorney, Ann Callis, said in a statement Thursday. "The organization is well aware of Mr. McMahon's history of depraved behavior, and it's time that they take responsibility for the misconduct of its leadership."

## Donald Trump must pay an additional \$83.3 million to E. Jean Carroll in defamation case, jury says

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ, LARRY NEUMEISTER and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A jury awarded \$83.3 million to E. Jean Carroll on Friday in a stinging and expensive rebuke to former President Donald Trump for his continued social media attacks against the longtime advice columnist over her claims that he sexually assaulted her in a Manhattan department store.

The award, coupled with a \$5 million sexual assault and defamation verdict last year from another jury in a case brought by Carroll, raised to \$88.3 million what Trump must pay her. Protesting vigorously, he said he would appeal.

Carroll, 80, clutched her lawyers' hands and smiled as the seven-man, two-woman anonymous jury delivered its verdict. Minutes later, she shared a weepy three-way hug with her attorneys.

She declined comment as she left the Manhattan federal courthouse, but issued a statement later through a publicist, saying, "This is a great victory for every woman who stands up when she's been knocked down, and a huge defeat for every bully who has tried to keep a woman down."

Trump had attended the trial earlier in the day, but stormed out of the courtroom during closing arguments by Carroll's attorney. He returned for his own attorney's closing argument and for a portion of the deliberations, but left the courthouse a half hour before the verdict was read.

"Absolutely ridiculous!" he said in a statement shortly afterward. "Our Legal System is out of control, and being used as a Political Weapon."

His attorney, Alina Habba, said the verdict resulted because Trump's opponents were suing "in states where they know they will get juries like this."

"It will not deter us. We will keep fighting. And, I assure you, we didn't win today, but we will win," she

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said.

The trial reached its conclusion as Trump marches toward winning the Republican presidential nomination a third consecutive time. He has sought to turn his various trials and legal vulnerabilities into an advantage, portraying them as evidence of a weaponized political system.

Though there's no evidence that President Joe Biden or anyone in the White House has influenced any of the legal cases against him, Trump's line of argument has resonated with his most loyal supporters, who view the proceedings with skepticism.

Nikki Haley, his last major rival in the Republican primaries, said on social media Friday that the verdict meant that people were "talking about \$83 million in damages" rather than fixing the border or inflation.

With the Carroll civil case behind him, Trump still faces 91 criminal charges in four indictments accusing him of trying to overturn the 2020 presidential election, mishandling classified documents and arranging payoffs to a porn star.

It was the second time in nine months that a civil jury returned a verdict related to Carroll's claim that a flirtatious, chance encounter with Trump in 1996 at Bergdorf Goodman's Fifth Avenue store ended violently. She said Trump slammed her against a dressing room wall, pulled down her tights and forced himself on her.

In May, a different jury awarded Carroll \$5 million. It found Trump not liable for rape, but responsible for sexually abusing Carroll and then defaming her by claiming she made it up. He is appealing that award, too.

Trump is also awaiting a verdict in a New York civil fraud trial, where state lawyers are seeking the return of \$370 million in what they say were ill-gotten gains from loans and deals made using financial statements that exaggerated his wealth.

As for Trump's ability to pay, he reported having about \$294 million in cash or cash equivalents on his most recent annual financial statement, for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2021. Testifying at his civil fraud trial last November, Trump boasted, "I have very little debt, and I have a lot of cash."

Trump skipped the first Carroll trial. He later expressed regret for not attending and insisted on testifying in the second trial, though the judge limited what he could say, ruling he had missed his chance to argue that he didn't attack Carroll. He spent only a few minutes on the witness stand Thursday, during which he denied assaulting Carroll, then left court grumbling "this is not America."

This new jury was only asked how much Trump, 77, should pay Carroll for two statements he made as president when he answered reporters' questions after excerpts of Carroll's memoir were published in a magazine — damages that couldn't be decided earlier because of legal appeals. Jurors were not asked to re-decide the issue of whether the sex attack actually happened.

In her closing argument Friday, Carroll attorney Roberta Kaplan requested \$24 million in compensatory damages and "an unusually high punitive award." The jury awarded \$18.3 million in compensatory damages and another \$65 million in punitive damages — meant to deter future behavior.

Kaplan urged jurors to punish Trump enough that he would stop a steady stream of public statements smearing Carroll as a liar and a "whack job."

She noted that Trump had boasted of at least \$14 billion in assets and that his brand alone is worth \$10 billion.

"Donald Trump is prepared to use his wealth and power to defame people whenever he wants," she said. "He ignored the last verdict as if it had never happened."

Kaplan said he didn't show up at last year's trial when a jury determined he had sexually assaulted and defamed Carroll, but "he made sure" to attend most of this year's trial because it focused solely on damages.

"While Donald Trump may not care about the law, while he certainly doesn't care about the truth, he does care about money," the lawyer said.

Big punitive damages, she told jurors, was the only way "to give Ms. Carroll a chance at a normal life again where she is not regularly bullied and humiliated by one of the most powerful men on the planet."

Trump shook his head vigorously as Kaplan spoke early in her summation, then suddenly stood and walked out, taking Secret Service agents with him. His exit came only minutes after the judge, without the jury

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present, threatened to send his attorney to jail for continuing to talk when he told her she was finished. "You are on the verge of spending some time in the lockup. Now sit down," the judge told Habba, who immediately complied.

Carroll testified early in the trial that Trump's public statements had led to death threats.

"He shattered my reputation," she said. "I am here to get my reputation back and to stop him from telling lies about me."

She said she'd had an electronic fence installed around the cabin in upstate New York where she lives, warned neighbors of the threats and bought bullets for a gun she keeps by her bed.

"Previously, I was known simply as a journalist and had a column, and now I'm known as the liar, the fraud, and the whack job," Carroll testified.

Trump's lawyer, Habba, told jurors that Carroll had been enriched by her accusations against Trump and achieved fame she had craved. She said no damages were warranted after Trump's lawyers had established that Carroll didn't suffer emotionally from Trump's statements and "she certainly hasn't suffered professionally."

To support Carroll's request for millions in damages, Northwestern University sociologist Ashlee Humphreys had testified that Trump's 2019 statements had caused between \$7.2 million and \$12.1 million in harm to Carroll's reputation.

When Trump finally testified, Judge Lewis A. Kaplan gave him little room to maneuver after saying Trump was not permitted to revive issues settled in the first trial.

"It is a very well-established legal principle in this country that prevents do-overs by disappointed litigants," said Kaplan, who is unrelated to Roberta Kaplan.

"He lost it and he is bound. And the jury will be instructed that, regardless of what he says in court here today, he did it, as far as they're concerned. That is the law," Kaplan said shortly before Trump testified.

After he swore to tell the truth, Trump was asked if he stood by a deposition in which he called Carroll a "liar" and a "whack job." He answered: "100 percent. Yes."

Asked if he denied the allegation because Carroll made an accusation, he responded: "That's exactly right. She said something, I consider it a false accusation." Asked if he ever instructed anyone to hurt Carroll, he said: "No. I just wanted to defend myself, my family, and frankly, the presidency."

The judge ordered the jury to disregard the "false accusation" comment and everything Trump said after "No" to the last question.

Earlier in the trial, Trump tested the judge's tolerance. When he complained to his lawyers about a "witch hunt" and a "con job" within earshot of jurors, Kaplan threatened to eject him from the courtroom if it happened again. "I would love it," Trump said. Later that day, Trump told a news conference Kaplan was a "nasty judge."

## **Biden urges Congress to embrace border bill. But House speaker suggests it may be 'dead on arrival'**

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Friday pressed Congress to embrace a bipartisan Senate deal to pair border enforcement measures with Ukraine aid, but House Speaker Mike Johnson suggested the compromise on border and immigration policy could be "dead on arrival" in his chamber.

The Democratic president said in a statement late Friday that the policies proposed would "be the toughest and fairest set of reforms to secure the border we've ever had in our country." He also pledged to use a new emergency authority to "shut down the border" as soon as he could sign it into law.

Biden's embrace of the deal — and Republican resistance — could become an election-year shift on the politics of immigration. Yet the diminishing prospects for its passage in Congress may have far-reaching consequences for U.S. allies around the globe, especially Ukraine.

Senate Republicans had initially insisted that border policy changes be included in Biden's \$110 billion emergency request for funding for Ukraine, Israel, immigration enforcement and other national security

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needs. But the Senate deal faced collapse this week as it came under fire from Republicans, including Donald Trump, the likely presidential nominee, who eviscerated the deal as a political "gift" to Democrats.

Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, on Friday sent a letter to colleagues that aligns him with hardline conservatives determined to sink the compromise. The speaker said the legislation would have been "dead on arrival in the House" if leaked reports about it were true.

A core group of senators negotiating the deal were hoping to release text early next week, but conservatives already say the measures do not go far enough to limit immigration. The proposal would enact tougher standards on migrants seeking asylum as well as deny asylum applications at the border if daily migrant encounters grow to numbers that are unmanageable for authorities.

"Rather than accept accountability, President Biden is now trying to blame Congress for what HE himself intentionally created," Johnson said in the letter.

The speaker's message added to the headwinds facing the Senate deal, closing a week in which Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell acknowledged to his colleagues that the legislation faced tough opposition from Trump that could force them to pursue Ukraine aid another way. He later clarified that he was still supportive of pairing border measures with Ukraine aid.

If the deal collapses, it could leave congressional leaders with no clear path to approving tens of billions of dollars for Ukraine. Biden has made it a top priority to bolster Kyiv's defense against Russia, but his administration has run out of money to send ammunition and missiles. Ukraine supporters warn that the impasse in Congress is already being felt on battlefields and leaving Ukrainian soldiers outgunned.

Oklahoma Sen. James Lankford, the lead GOP negotiator in the border talks, has repeatedly urged lawmakers to refrain from passing final judgment on the bill until they receive legislative text and said some of the reports of its contents in conservative media are not accurate depictions of the bill.

The Republican speaker was already deeply skeptical of any bipartisan compromise on border policy. On Friday, he again pointed to a sweeping set of immigration measures that the House passed last year as being the answer to the nation's border challenges. But that bill failed to gain a single Democratic vote then and has virtually no chance of picking up Democratic support now, which would be necessary to clear the Senate.

As they enter an election year, Republicans are seeking to drive home the fact that historic numbers of migrants have come to the U.S. during Biden's presidency. His administration has countered that global unrest is driving the migration and has sought to implement humane policies on border enforcement.

"Securing the border through these negotiations is a win for America," Biden said in the statement. "For everyone who is demanding tougher border control, this is the way to do it."

Still, the speaker leaned into the Republican push on immigration, saying in his letter that the House would hold a vote on impeaching Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas "as soon as possible" after a committee advances articles of impeachment against him next week. Johnson also said he was standing with Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, who has refused to give federal Border Patrol agents access to a riverfront park that is a popular corridor for migrants illegally entering the U.S.

But Johnson is also under potential pressure himself.

If the Senate were to pass an immigration and Ukraine package, he would face a decision about whether to bring the measure to the floor. And while the speaker is skeptical of continued funding for Ukraine, he has also expressed support for halting Russian President Vladimir Putin's advance in Europe.

At the same time, hardline House conservatives have become vocal opponents of any compromise on immigration policy. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, a hard-right Republican of Georgia, has threatened to initiate an effort to oust Johnson if he put the Senate deal on the House floor.

"This bill represents Senate Republican leadership waging war on House Republican leadership," said Sen. Ted Cruz, a Republican of Texas, at a news conference this week.

Still, other Republicans have lamented that conservatives are throwing away an opportunity to gain a victory on an issue they have talked about far more than Democrats.

Opposition from the right has stymied efforts to reform immigration law in Congress for decades. Trump allies have argued that Congress does not need to act because presidents already have enough authority



to implement tough border measures.

Johnson echoed that sentiment in his letter, arguing that Biden could start to fix the border problems "with the stroke of a pen."

Sen. Markwayne Mullin, an Oklahoma Republican, said earlier this month that conservative reports on the bill had "ginned up a lot of the base" voters against the proposals, even as the policy represented meaningful changes to immigration enforcement.

"This is a national security issue," Mullin said. "And if you're waiting until another president gets in, you're playing politics with it."

## **US approves F-16 fighter jet sale to Turkey, F-35s to Greece after Turkey OKs Sweden's entry to NATO**

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration has approved the sale of F-16 fighter jets to Turkey following the Turkish government's ratification this week of Sweden's membership in NATO. The move is a significant development in the expansion of the alliance, which has taken on additional importance since Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The State Department notified Congress of its approval of the \$23 billion F-16 sale to Turkey, along with a companion \$8.6 billion sale of advanced F-35 fighter jets to Greece, late Friday. The move came just hours after Turkey deposited its "instrument of ratification" for Sweden's accession to NATO with Washington, which is the repository for alliance documents and after several key members of Congress lifted their objections.

The sale to Turkey includes 40 new F-16s and equipment to modernize 79 of its existing F-16 fleet. The sale to Greece includes 40 F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighters and related equipment.

NATO ally Turkey has long sought to upgrade its F-16 fleet and had made its ratification of Sweden's membership contingent on the approval of the sale of the new planes. The Biden administration had supported the sale, but several lawmakers had expressed objections due to human rights concerns.

Those objections, including from the chairman and ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Sens. Ben Cardin, D-Md., and Jim Risch, R-Idaho, have now been overcome, officials said.

Cardin said in statement Friday that he had still had concerns about Turkey's rights record, but had agreed to the sale based on commitments Turkey has made to improve it. "I look forward to beginning this new chapter in our relationship with Turkey, expanding the NATO alliance, and working with our global allies in standing up to ongoing Russian aggression against its peaceful neighbors," he said.

Turkey had delayed its approval of Sweden's NATO membership for more than a year, ostensibly because it believed Sweden did not take Turkey's national security concerns seriously enough, including its fight against Kurdish militants and other groups that Ankara considers to be security threats.

The delays had frustrated the U.S. and other NATO allies, almost all of whom had been swift to accept both Sweden and Finland into the alliance after the Nordic states dropped their longstanding military neutrality following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Sweden's formal accession to NATO now depends on Hungary, which is the last remaining NATO ally not to have approved its membership. US and NATO officials have said they expect Hungary to act quickly, especially after Turkey's decision.

## **Plea agreement may shorten further time at Guantanamo for 2 in connection with Bali bombings**

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A military panel at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, recommended 23 years in detention Friday for two Malaysian men in connection with deadly 2002 bombings in Bali, a spokesman for the military commission said.

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However, under a previously secret provision of the plea agreement disclosed after the panel's recommendation Friday, and a separate sentence reduction Friday by the presiding judge, both men may face a far shorter sentence: about five years.

Mohammed Farik Bin Amin and Mohammed Nazir Bin Lep already have spent about 17 years awaiting trial at Guantanamo.

The winding down of the case against them marks comparatively rare convictions in the two decades of proceedings by the U.S. military commission at Guantanamo.

The extremist group Jemaah Islamiyah killed 202 Indonesians, foreign tourists and others in two nearly simultaneous bombings at nightspots on the resort island of Bali in October 2002.

The two defendants denied any role or advance knowledge of the attacks but under the plea bargains admitted they had over the years conspired with the network of militants responsible. The sentence recommendation still requires approval by the senior military authority over Guantanamo.

The two are among a total of 780 detainees brought to military detention at Guantanamo under the George W. Bush administration's "war on terror" following the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the U.S. There have been only a handful of convictions over the years — eight, according to one advocacy group, Reprieve.

Defendants in some of the biggest attacks, including 9/11, remain in pretrial hearings. Prosecutors are seeking negotiated agreements to close that case and some others.

The prosecutions overall at Guantanamo have been plagued by logistical difficulties, frequent turnover of judges and others, and legal questions surrounding the torture of detainees during CIA custody in the first years of their detention.

The military's head of defense for the Guantanamo prosecutions on Friday blamed the Bush administration's early handling of the detainees — which included holding at secret "black sites" and torture in CIA custody — for the more than 20-year delay in the trial.

The slow pace "was extremely distressing and frustrated the desire of everyone for accountability and justice," Brig. Gen. Jackie Thompson said in a statement.

Thirty detainees remain at Guantanamo. Sixteen of them have been cleared and are eligible for transfer out if a stable country agrees to take them. "The time for repatriating or transferring the cleared men is now," Thompson said. He said the same for three others held at Guantanamo but never charged.

As part of their plea bargains, the two Malaysian men have agreed to provide testimony against a third Guantanamo detainee, an Indonesian man known as Hambali, in the Bali bombings.

Under military court rules, Bin Amin and Bin Lep normally would receive no credit for the roughly two decades they have already spent in detention. The pre-trial agreement disclosed Friday would spare them from serving the much longer recommended sentence on top of their years awaiting trial, the defense lawyers for the two men said.

Relatives of some of those killed in the Bali bombings testified Wednesday in a hearing in advance of sentencing, with the two accused in the courtroom and listening attentively.

"The reach of this atrocity knew no bounds, and has affected very many people," testified Matthew Arnold of Birmingham, England, who lost his brother in the attacks.

A panel of five military officers delivered the recommendation after listening to the sentencing testimony.

The U.S. and Malaysia may agree to transferring the two to their home country, said Brian Bouffard, the attorney for Bin Lep.

## **Deepfake explicit images of Taylor Swift spread on social media. Her fans are fighting back**

NEW YORK (AP) — Pornographic deepfake images of Taylor Swift are circulating online, making the singer the most famous victim of a scourge that tech platforms and anti-abuse groups have struggled to fix.

Sexually explicit and abusive fake images of Swift began circulating widely this week on the social media platform X.

Her ardent fanbase of "Swifties" quickly mobilized, launching a counteroffensive on the platform formerly

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known as Twitter and a #ProtectTaylorSwift hashtag to flood it with more positive images of the pop star. Some said they were reporting accounts that were sharing the deepfakes.

The deepfake-detecting group Reality Defender said it tracked a deluge of nonconsensual pornographic material depicting Swift, particularly on X. Some images also made their way to Meta-owned Facebook and other social media platforms.

"Unfortunately, they spread to millions and millions of users by the time that some of them were taken down," said Mason Allen, Reality Defender's head of growth.

The researchers found at least a couple dozen unique AI-generated images. The most widely shared were football-related, showing a painted or bloodied Swift that objectified her and in some cases inflicted violent harm on her deepfake persona.

Researchers have said the number of explicit deepfakes have grown in the past few years, as the technology used to produce such images has become more accessible and easier to use. In 2019, a report released by the AI firm DeepTrace Labs showed these images were overwhelmingly weaponized against women. Most of the victims, it said, were Hollywood actors and South Korean K-pop singers.

Brittany Spanos, a senior writer at Rolling Stone who teaches a course on Swift at New York University, says Swift's fans are quick to mobilize in support of their artist, especially those who take their fandom very seriously and in situations of wrongdoing.

"This could be a huge deal if she really does pursue it to court," she said.

Spanos says the deep fake pornography issue aligns with others Swift has had in the past, pointing to her 2017 lawsuit against a radio station DJ who allegedly groped her; jurors awarded Swift \$1 in damages, a sum her attorney, Douglas Baldrige, called "a single symbolic dollar, the value of which is immeasurable to all women in this situation" in the midst of the MeToo movement. (The \$1 lawsuit became a trend thereafter, like in Gwyneth Paltrow's 2023 countersuit against a skier.)

When reached for comment on the fake images of Swift, X directed the The Associated Press to a post from its safety account that said the company strictly prohibits the sharing of non-consensual nude images on its platform. The company has also sharply cut back its content-moderation teams since Elon Musk took over the platform in 2022.

"Our teams are actively removing all identified images and taking appropriate actions against the accounts responsible for posting them," the company wrote in the X post early Friday morning. "We're closely monitoring the situation to ensure that any further violations are immediately addressed, and the content is removed."

Meanwhile, Meta said in a statement that it strongly condemns "the content that has appeared across different internet services" and has worked to remove it.

"We continue to monitor our platforms for this violating content and will take appropriate action as needed," the company said.

A representative for Swift didn't immediately respond to a request for comment Friday.

Allen said the researchers are 90% confident that the images were created by diffusion models, which are a type of generative artificial intelligence model that can produce new and photorealistic images from written prompts. The most widely known are Stable Diffusion, Midjourney and OpenAI's DALL-E. Allen's group didn't try to determine the provenance.

OpenAI said it has safeguards in place to limit the generation of harmful content and "decline requests that ask for a public figure by name, including Taylor Swift."

Microsoft, which offers an image-generator based partly on DALL-E, said Friday it was in the process of investigating whether its tool was misused. Much like other commercial AI services, it said it doesn't allow "adult or non-consensual intimate content, and any repeated attempts to produce content that goes against our policies may result in loss of access to the service."

Asked about the Swift deepfakes on "NBC Nightly News," Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella told host Lester Holt in an interview airing Tuesday that there's a lot still to be done in setting AI safeguards and "it behooves us to move fast on this."

"Absolutely this is alarming and terrible, and so therefore yes, we have to act," Nadella said.

Midjourney, OpenAI and Stable Diffusion-maker Stability AI didn't immediately respond to requests for comment.

Federal lawmakers who've introduced bills to put more restrictions or criminalize deepfake porn indicated the incident shows why the U.S. needs to implement better protections.

"For years, women have been victims of non-consensual deepfakes, so what happened to Taylor Swift is more common than most people realize," said U.S. Rep. Yvette D. Clarke, a Democrat from New York who's introduced legislation would require creators to digitally watermark deepfake content.

"Generative-AI is helping create better deepfakes at a fraction of the cost," Clarke said.

U.S. Rep. Joe Morelle, another New York Democrat pushing a bill that would criminalize sharing deepfake porn online, said what happened to Swift was disturbing and has become more and more pervasive across the internet.

"The images may be fake, but their impacts are very real," Morelle said in a statement. "Deepfakes are happening every day to women everywhere in our increasingly digital world, and it's time to put a stop to them."

## **NFL reaches 'major milestone' with record 9 minority head coaches in place for the 2024 season**

By STEVE REED AP Sports Writer

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — The National Football League has urged teams for years to hire more minority head coaches.

That mission finally seems to be paying off.

Four minority head coaches have been hired this year — Atlanta's Raheem Morris, New England's Jerod Mayo, Las Vegas' Antonio Pierce and Carolina's Dave Canales — bringing the number of coaches of color entering the 2024 season to nine, the most in league history. Seattle and Washington have yet to fill their vacancies.

Richard Lapchick, founder of The Institute for Diversity and Ethics In Sport, called it a "major milestone" for the NFL.

"The league has been struggling to raise the percentage of head coaches of color, particularly Black head coaches," Lapchick told The Associated Press. "The NFL has worked hard to put programs in place to make this happen and the rewards have finally come home."

The NFL originally created the Rooney Rule in 2003 to promote the number of minority head coaches (and later general managers and executives) by requiring teams to interview at least one person of color before making a hire.

The league further expanded the rule in 2020, incentivizing teams to hire minority assistant coaches by awarding compensatory draft picks if they lose a minority coach or top football executive to another team. NFL rules stipulate teams receive third-round selections in each of the next two drafts — or each of the next three drafts if two minority employees are hired by another team — providing the candidates were with the team for at least two years.

So, while the Rams will receive two third-rounders for losing Morris to the Falcons, the Buccaneers will not get any since Canales was only with the organization for one season.

"I'm very pleased at what is happening around the league," said Ron Rivera, a former head coach in Carolina and Washington who is Latino. "I think when you have to put incentives into place to hire minorities, it probably tells you that something needs to change. But for me, this is really about making sure there are opportunities for minorities, and I think when you open your pool of candidates to give you more to draw from, it helps you find the best person, whoever that is."

Rivera interviewed eight times for head coaching jobs with various teams before landing his first gig in Carolina in 2011. He said at times he felt like he was a "token" minority candidate, which was frustrating.

Eventually, he sensed teams were truly interested in hiring him and that he became better in interviews



as time went on.

"When I finally realized there was real interest, that was a pretty cool feeling," Rivera said.

There is still work to be done to achieve equality.

According to the 2023 racial and gender report card from Lapchick's institute, two-thirds of players in the league (66.7%) are minorities, with 53.5% being Black. Those percentages don't reflect the percentage of minority and Black head coaches.

But progress is being made.

There are six Black head coaches entering 2024 — Morris, Mayo, Pierce, Pittsburgh's Mike Tomlin, Tampa Bay's Todd Bowles and Houston's DeMeco Ryans — which doubles the number from the 2023 season. The other minority coaches are Canales, who is Mexican American, Miami's biracial Mike McDaniel and Robert Saleh of the New York Jets, who is of Lebanese descent.

Rivera believes the success of minority head coaches in the 2023 season "absolutely" impacted the hires this year. Bowles, Ryans, Tomlin and McDaniel all led their teams to the playoffs.

Seahawks quarterback Geno Smith, who is Black, was asked if it is encouraging to hear about the hiring of more minority head coaches, such as his former quarterbacks coach Canales. He answered with a resounding no.

"It's 2024 and we are talking about minorities," Smith said. "So, it's not encouraging. I think we have to get away from that talk and let people be people. But that's another topic right there."

Rivera echoed that sentiment.

"What is happening is it is becoming more mainstream," Rivera said of the increasing number of minority hires. "There are enough good coaches now where we can start saying, 'Hey, let's just call everybody a head coach, not necessarily minority head coach.'"

## Justice Department finds Cuomo sexually harassed employees and settles with New York state

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — The U.S. Justice Department concluded former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo sexually harassed more than a dozen state employees, according to a settlement announced Friday that confirmed allegations from the damaging misconduct probe that led to the Democrat's resignation.

The settlement between New York and the Justice Department resolves the federal agency's sexual harassment investigation of Cuomo and outlines additional steps the state will take to change how it handles misconduct complaints.

Cuomo, once a rising star in the Democratic party, left office in 2021 after a report by Attorney General Letitia James concluded he sexually harassed at least 11 women. He has denied wrongdoing and argued James' report was driven by politics, intended to force him from office so she could run for governor.

The Justice Department investigation found a similar pattern of sexual misconduct by Cuomo and said he subjected at least 13 state employees to a sexually hostile work environment. It said Cuomo's staffers failed to adequately report allegations and retaliated against four women who raised complaints. The agency did not release a full report detailing its investigation but instead published a list of its findings.

The settlement undercut Cuomo's long-standing criticism of James' probe at a sensitive time, with the former governor rumored to be considering a political comeback.

"Today, the U.S. Department of Justice found that Andrew Cuomo sexually harassed multiple women and created a hostile work environment, confirming what the New York attorney general's independent report found over two years ago," a spokesperson for James said. "Andrew Cuomo can continue to deny the truth and attack these women, but the facts do not lie."

An attorney for Cuomo said in a statement that the former governor did not sexually harass anyone.

"The DOJ 'investigation' was based entirely on the NYS Attorney General's deeply flawed, inaccurate, biased, and misleading report. At no point did DOJ even contact Governor Cuomo concerning these matters. This is nothing more than a political settlement with no investigation," said Cuomo attorney Rita Glavin.

As part of the settlement, the state will set up a process for people to lodge complaints against senior officials to a third-party law firm and will provide additional training on how to report harassment and discrimination. In addition, the governor's office will establish a program dedicated to monitoring potential retaliation against people who file complaints.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, a Democrat who was lieutenant governor until Cuomo resigned, said she looks forward to continuing to reform the state's procedures for addressing and preventing sexual harassment and retaliation.

"The moment I took office, I knew I needed to root out the culture of harassment that had previously plagued the Executive Chamber and implement strong policies to promote a safe workplace for all employees, and took immediate action to do so," Hochul said.

## **US pauses funding to UN agency for Palestinians after claims staffers were involved in Hamas attack**

By WAFAA SHURAFI and JACK JEFFERY Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — The U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees fired a number of its staffers in Gaza suspected of taking part in the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas and other militants on southern Israel, its director said Friday, prompting the United States — the agency's biggest donor — to temporarily halt its funding.

The agency, known by its acronym UNRWA, has been the main agency providing aid for Gaza's population amid the humanitarian disaster caused by Israel's offensive against Hamas in Gaza triggered by the Oct. 7 attack. UNRWA officials did not comment on the impact that the U.S. halt in funding would have on its operations.

UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini said it terminated contracts with "several" employees and ordered an investigation after Israel provided information alleging they played a role in the attack. The U.S. State Department said there were allegations against 12 employees. UNRWA has 13,000 staffers in Gaza, almost all of them Palestinians, ranging from teachers in schools that the agency runs to doctors, medical staff and aid workers.

In a statement, Lazzarini called the allegations "shocking" and said any employee "involved in acts of terror will be held accountable, including through criminal prosecution."

He did not elaborate on what the staffers' alleged role was in the attacks. In the unprecedented surprise attack, Hamas fighters broke through the security fence surrounding Gaza and stormed nearby Israeli communities, killing around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and kidnapping some 250. Other militants joined the rampage.

"UNRWA reiterates its condemnation in the strongest possible terms of the abhorrent attacks of 7 October" and calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all Israeli hostages, Lazzarini said.

Since the war's start, Israel's assault has killed more than 26,000 Palestinians, most women and children, and wounded more than 64,400 others, Gaza's Health Ministry said Friday. The ministry does not differentiate between combatants and civilians in its death toll. More than 150 UNRWA employees are among those killed — the highest toll the world body has suffered in a conflict — and a number of U.N. shelters have been hit in the bombardment.

More than 1.7 million of Gaza's 2.3 million people have been driven from their homes by the war — with hundreds of thousands of them crowded into schools and other shelters run by UNRWA.

Israel's near-complete seal on Gaza has left almost the entire population reliant on a trickle of international aid able to enter the territory each day. U.N. officials say about a quarter of the population now faces starvation.

The U.S. State Department said it was "extremely troubled" by the allegations against the UNRWA staffers and has temporarily paused additional funding for the agency. The U.S. is the biggest donor to the agency, providing it with \$340 million in 2022 and several hundred million in 2023.

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Stéphane Dujarric, spokesman of U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres, said an “urgent and comprehensive” independent review of the agency would be conducted.

UNRWA was created to care for millions of Palestinians across the Middle East whose families fled or were forced from properties inside what is Israel during the war surrounding Israel’s creation in 1948. Israel rejects a return of the refugees to their former lands.

Israeli officials and their allies — including in the U.S. Congress — frequently allege that UNRWA allows anti-Israeli incitement to be taught in its hundreds of schools and that some of its staff collaborate with Hamas. The Trump administration suspended funding to the agency in 2018, but President Joe Biden restored it.

The agency’s supporters say the allegations aim to diminish the long-festering refugee issue. Last week, Lazzarini said he would appoint an independent entity to look into the claims — both “what is true or untrue” and “what is politically motivated.” He also said the accusations were hurting the agency’s already stretched operations.

Thousands of Palestinians fled the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis on Friday as fighting between Hamas militants and Israeli forces intensified. Families were seen traveling on foot down roads, carrying possessions as smoke filled the skies above them.

Also Friday, the Israeli military ordered residents of three Khan Younis neighborhoods and the refugee camp in the city to evacuate to a coastal area. The military said its troops were engaging in close urban combat with Hamas fighters around the city.

The Khan Younis camp, like others in Gaza, was initially settled by Palestinians who fled or were driven from their homes during the 1948 war surrounding Israel’s creation and has since been built up into an urbanized district. The leader of Hamas in Gaza, Yehya Sinwar, and the commander of the group’s military wing, Mohammed Deif, both grew up in the Khan Younis refugee camp.

In central Gaza, the other main focus of Israel’s offensive currently, Israeli airstrikes on the Nuseirat urban refugee camp overnight killed at least 15 people, including a 5-month-old baby, said a journalist with The Associated Press at the hospital where the casualties were taken.

The intense fighting came as the United Nations’ top court ordered Israel to do all it can to prevent death, destruction and any acts of genocide in Gaza. But the International Court of Justice stopped short Friday of ordering it to end the military offensive. South Africa has accused Israel of genocide in its offensive, and the court dismissed a request by Israel, which rejects the accusation, that the case be thrown out.

Aid groups have struggled to bring food, medicines and other supplies to northern Gaza, where Israel’s ground invasion first targeted and where Israel says it now largely has control.

Uday Samir, a 23-year old Gaza City native, said many of the basic foods such as flour, lentils and rice are now impossible to find across the city.

“Now, what is available is animal feed,” said Samir. “We grind it and bake it.”

All supplies enter Gaza in the south, either through the Egyptian-controlled Rafah border crossing or Israel’s Kerem Shalom crossing. Aid groups say fighting and Israeli restrictions have made deliveries to the north difficult. When convoys do travel north, supplies are often snatched by hungry Palestinian before the trucks reach their destination.

## **A British painting stolen by mobsters is returned to the owner’s son — 54 years later**

By MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

An 18th century British painting stolen by New Jersey mobsters in 1969 has been returned more than a half-century later to the family that bought it for \$7,500 during the Great Depression, the FBI’s Salt Lake City field office announced Friday.

The 40-inch-by-50-inch (102-cm-by-127-cm) John Opie painting — titled “The Schoolmistress” — is the sister painting of a similar work housed in the Tate Britain art gallery in London.

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Authorities believe the piece was stolen with the help of a former New Jersey lawmaker, then passed among organized crime members for years before it ended up in the southern Utah city of St. George. A Utah man had purchased a house in Florida in 1989 from Joseph Covello Sr. — a convicted mobster linked to the Gambino family — and the painting was included in the sale, the FBI said.

When the buyer died in 2020, a Utah accounting firm that was seeking to liquidate his property sought an appraisal for the painting and it was discovered to likely be the stolen piece, the FBI said.

The painting, which dates to about 1784, was taken into custody by the agency pending resolution of who owned it and returned on Jan. 11 to Dr. Francis Wood, 96, of Newark, the son of the painting's original owner, Dr. Earl Wood, who bought it during the 1930s, the FBI said.

"This piece of art, what a history it's had," said FBI Special Agent Gary France, who worked on the case. "It traveled all through the U.K. when it was first painted, and owned by quite a few families in the U.K. And then it travels overseas to the United States and is sold during the Great Depression and then stolen by the mob and recovered by the FBI decades later. It's quite amazing."

Opie, who came from the Cornwall region, was one of the most important British historical and portrait painters in his time, said Lucinda Lax, curator of paintings at the Yale Center for British Art in New Haven, Connecticut. His paintings have sold at major auction houses such as Sotheby's and Christie's, including one bought in 2007 for almost \$1 million.

Opie often portrayed British royals and other members of the elite. But he also depicted scenes from ordinary life, such as in "The Schoolmistress," which shows an older teacher sitting at a table with a book and surrounded by young students.

"It's such a compelling painting," Lax said. "It's a subject drawn from everyday life and he paints it in a very direct, straightforward way. He's not artificially elevating it."

According to the FBI, the painting was taken from Earl Wood's house by three men working at the direction of former New Jersey state Sen. Anthony Imperiale, who died in 1999. Imperiale, a political firebrand who also served as a Newark city councilman, was in the national spotlight in the 1960s as a spokesman for cracking down on crime. He was also divisive, organizing citizen patrols to keep Black protesters out of Italian neighborhoods during riots in Newark in the summer of 1967.

Authorities say the thieves broke into the house in July 1969 in a bid to steal a coin collection, but were foiled by a burglar alarm. Local police and Imperiale responded to the attempted burglary, and the home's caretaker told the lawmaker that the Opie painting in the home was "priceless," the FBI said.

The men returned to the house later that month and stole the painting, the FBI said.

One of the thieves, Gerald Festa, later confessed to the burglary, in the 1975 trial of an accomplice, and said the trio been acting under Imperiale. Festa said the thieves had visited Imperiale prior to the theft and were told by the lawmaker where to find the painting in Wood's home, the FBI said. Festa also testified that Imperiale had the painting.

The claims against the state lawmaker were not sufficiently corroborated and he was never charged, France said.

No charges have been filed by the FBI since the painting's recovery because all of those believed to have been involved are dead, France said. The three men who stole the painting were all convicted of other mob-related crimes before their deaths, he said.

Francis Wood's son, Tom, recalled on Friday how "The Schoolmistress" hung for decades in his grandparent's dining room, where it loomed over Sunday dinners and other family gatherings until its sudden disappearance. Francis Wood bought another, smaller Opie painting about 25 years ago as a placeholder for the lost piece and was "just thrilled" to get the stolen piece back, David Wood said.

It's now being cleaned and appraised, but remains in good condition with only a few flecks of paint missing from the piece, according to France.

"It has one or two minor blemishes, but for a painting that's 240 years old and has been on a roundabout journey, it's in pretty good shape," David Wood said. "Whoever has had their hands on it, I'm thankful they took care of the painting."



## Key takeaways from UN court's ruling on Israel's war in Gaza

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The U.N. world court on Friday came down hard on Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip, calling on Israel to "take all measures" to prevent a genocide of the Palestinians. But it stopped short of demanding an immediate cease-fire, as the South African sponsors of the case had hoped.

All sides tried to claim victory with the ruling, seizing on different elements that buttressed their positions. Israel celebrated the court's rejection of the cease-fire request and said it had endorsed the country's right to self-defense. Yet harsh criticism of Israel's campaign in Gaza could further dent its image in the court of public opinion.

The Palestinians welcomed what amounted to an overwhelming rebuke of Israel's wartime tactics by a lopsided majority of judges over the heavy death toll and humanitarian disaster in Gaza. The six measures in the ruling were approved by margins of 15-2 and 16-1, with even Israel's representative on the court joining the majority on two of the questions.

As Israel presses ahead with its offensive, Friday's ruling adds to the growing international criticism of Israel and could put more pressure on it to scale back or halt the operation altogether.

Here are some takeaways from Friday's ruling:

### NO RULING ON GENOCIDE

The court did not rule on the core issue of whether Israel's devastating military offensive against Hamas amounts to genocide. That question likely won't be answered by the court for years.

But it did not rule out the possibility that Israel is conducting genocidal acts. In imposing "provisional measures," the court found that concerns about possible genocide merit further review.

It called on Israel "to take all measures within its power" and "ensure with immediate effect" that its military does not commit genocidal acts, including those causing the unnecessary deaths of Palestinians or humanitarian suffering.

It also called on Israel to prevent "public incitement to commit genocide," pointing to a series of inflammatory statements by Israeli leaders. Israel was ordered to report back to the court within one month on steps it is taking to meet these demands.

The court said it was gravely concerned about the fate of the hostages and called for their immediate and unconditional release. But the decision focused almost entirely on the plight of Gaza's Palestinian civilians and urged Israel to do more to facilitate the entry of humanitarian aid.

Yuval Shany, an expert on international law at the Israel Democracy Institute think tank, said the ruling was "not great" but could have been worse.

"The finding that South Africa's claims are plausible is not good," he said. "But it's something that Israel can live with."

### THE WAR GOES ON

Nothing in the court's ruling requires Israel to halt the war from a legal standpoint.

Israeli leaders vowed Friday to press ahead with the offensive, insisting that they already are in compliance with international law and committed to allowing humanitarian supplies into the besieged territory.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu lashed out at the genocide allegation as "outrageous," noting that the ruling came on the eve of International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Netanyahu pointed out that Hamas, which killed 1,200 and kidnapped 250 on Oct. 7, seeks Israel's destruction.

Barak Medina, a human rights expert at Hebrew University's law school, said the effects of the ruling on the battlefield are "marginal."

He said calls to ramp up humanitarian aid and crack down on incitement might have some small effects on policies. "But in terms of the main aspect of the military operation, one would not expect any change on the ground," he said.

### INCREASED SCRUTINY

While Israel moves ahead on the battlefield, Friday's ruling shined an additional bright and critical spotlight on the Israeli offensive.

The war, launched in response to Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, has killed over 26,000 Palestinians and led to widespread destruction, displacement and disease, according to local health officials and international aid agencies.

The United States, Israel's closest and most important ally, has repeatedly voiced concerns about the civilian death toll and the broader international community has repeatedly called for an immediate cease-fire. The tough language adopted by the court, coupled with the requirement to report back to it, added to the global scrutiny and puts more pressure to scale back or stop the offensive.

Merav Michaeli, leader of Israel's opposition Labor Party, called the ruling a "yellow card" against a government that she said "is causing enormous international damage to the country."

A former head of the Israeli military's international law department said the decision would worsen Israel's global standing and undermine legitimacy for the war.

"It's a huge threat," said Pnina Sharvit Baruch, now a senior researcher at Israel's Institute for National Security Studies. "It eventually impacts also our national security. We need our allies. We cannot manage here on our own."

## PRESSURE ON THE US

Despite its concerns about harm to civilians, the United States has so far backed the Israeli war effort, shielding Israel from international criticism and continuing to deliver weapons to the military.

Friday's ruling draws unwelcome attention to the U.S. position — a stance that has put it at odds with allies and threatened to hurt President Joe Biden's standing with the Democratic Party's progressive wing as he seeks re-election.

"States now have clear legal obligations to stop Israel's genocidal war on the Palestinian people in Gaza and to make sure that they are not complicit," the Palestinian Foreign Ministry said.

It said the provisional ruling "should serve as a wakeup call for Israel and actors who enabled its entrenched impunity."

The ministry is part of the Palestinian Authority, the internationally recognized self-rule government in parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank. The U.S. has said it would like to see a revitalized authority, ousted by Hamas in 2007, return to power in Gaza after the war.

Balkees Jarrah, the associate international justice director at Human Rights Watch, a New York-based group that has accused Israel of committing war crimes in past rounds of fighting, said Friday's "landmark decision puts Israel and its allies on notice."

"The court's clear and binding order raises the stakes for Israel's allies to back up their stated commitment to a global rules-based order by helping ensure compliance with this watershed ruling," she said.

## **An unlikely challenger to Putin brings a rare show of defiance, creating a dilemma for the Kremlin**

By EMMA BURROWS Associated Press

They have lined up by the thousands across Russia in recent days, standing in the bitter cold for a chance to sign petitions to support an unlikely challenger to President Vladimir Putin.

Boris Nadezhdin has become a dilemma for the Kremlin as he seeks to run in the March 17 presidential election. The question now is whether Russian authorities will allow him on the ballot.

The stocky, bespectacled 60-year-old local legislator and academic has struck a chord with the public, openly calling for a halt to the conflict in Ukraine, the end of mobilizing Russian men for the military, and starting a dialogue with the West. He also has criticized the country's repression of LGBTQ+ activism.

"The collection of signatures has gone unexpectedly well for us," Nadezhdin told The Associated Press in an interview Wednesday in Moscow. "We didn't expect this, to be honest."

Nadezhdin's name is a form of the Russian word for "hope," and although he is highly unlikely to defeat the still-popular Putin, the lines are a rare sign of protest, defiance and optimism in a country that has seen a harsh crackdown on dissent since its troops rolled into Ukraine nearly two years ago.

Nadezhdin is running as a candidate for the Civic Initiative Party. Because the party is not represented

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in parliament, he's not guaranteed a spot on the ballot and must collect over 100,000 signatures, with a limit of 2,500 from each of the dozens of the vast country's regions, not just the biggest, more progressive cities.

Putin, who is running as an independent candidate rather than as the candidate of the United Russia ruling party, has collected over 3 million.

Waiting to sign a petition in St. Petersburg, Alexander Rakityansky told AP he went through a "period of apathy when I thought I couldn't do anything." Now, however, he sees Nadezhdin's campaign as a chance to exercise his civil rights.

Originally from Belgorod, the Russian border city hit by repeated Ukrainian attacks, Rakityansky said he backed Nadezhdin so his hometown "doesn't get bombed and people don't die on the streets."

Online videos have shown queues of supporters not just in Moscow and St. Petersburg but also in Krasnodar in the south, Saratov and Voronezh in the southwest and beyond the Ural Mountains in Yekaterinburg.

Even in the Far East city of Yakutsk, 450 kilometers (280 miles) south of the Arctic Circle, Nadezhdin's team said up to 400 people a day braved temperatures that plunged to minus 40 Celsius (minus 40 Fahrenheit) to sign petitions.

"Our weather conditions are not perfect and it's generally accepted that it's difficult to involve people in the north in some kind of activity, but people are coming every day," said Alexei Popov, the head of Nadezhdin's election team in Yakutsk. He said they had initially expected about 500 signatures in total for the entire region.

At a petition collection site in Moscow, Kirill Savenkov, 48, said he supported Nadezhdin because of his stand on Ukraine and peace negotiations.

Others said they wanted a real alternative to Putin, who they suggested had led the country into a dead end.

"The economy is really falling, people are getting poorer and prices are rising," said Anna, 21, of St. Petersburg, who refused to give her full name because she feared for her security. Putin, she said, has not done "anything good for the country."

Nadezhdin's campaign got a boost after opposition leaders abroad, including former tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky and supporters of imprisoned opposition politician Alexei Navalny, urged Russians to support any candidate who could deny Putin a share of the vote.

Exiled opposition activist Maxim Katz said on YouTube that whatever the outcome, Nadezhdin's candidacy shows "there is one thing we know right now: Conversations about civic apathy in Russia are very far from reality. What we have is not civic apathy but a civic famine — an enormous hidden potential."

Some analysts say the surge of support for Nadezhdin has surprised even the Kremlin, although Putin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Thursday that "we don't see him as a rival."

Analysts say the election's outcome is a foregone conclusion and that Putin will stay in power for another six years, but some also suggest it's still a moment of genuine political risk for the Kremlin, which must project an aura of legitimacy for the balloting to be seen as a genuine contest.

For Putin to win a convincing victory, he needs his supporters to turn out and his critics must stay home with no "glimmer of hope," said Ekaterina Schulmann, a political scientist and nonresident scholar at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center in Berlin.

"This is why Nadezhdin is such a problem," she said in an interview. "He provides a shadow of hope."

Nadezhdin's supporters lining up in Moscow and St. Petersburg told AP it gave them the rare opportunity to be with like-minded people who want a different leader from Putin, 71, who has ruled Russia for 24 years.

"I understood that these are the people who want to change the current government and I want to be a part of this," said Margarita, a 28-year-old student who also declined to give her surname for fear of retribution.

So far, Russia's Central Election Commission has approved three candidates who were nominated by parties represented in parliament that largely support Kremlin policies: Nikolai Kharitonov of the Communist Party, Leonid Slutsky of the nationalist Liberal Democratic Party and Vladislav Davankov of the New People Party. Kharitonov ran against Putin in 2004, finishing a distant second.

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In December, authorities barred from the ballot Yekatarina Duntsova, a former regional lawmaker who had called for peace in Ukraine. The commission cited technical errors in her paperwork.

Duntsova was probably barred because authorities “don’t know her, and so in their terms she is unpredictable. And above all they dislike unpredictable things,” Schulmann said.

Although there have been claims that Nadezhdin secretly has the Kremlin’s approval to run and is seen as kind of a spoiler candidate, he still could be ruled ineligible.

He has appeared as a pundit on Russian television and even criticized the conflict in Ukraine during a talk show on state-controlled NTV in September 2022 — a rare level of visibility not enjoyed by other opposition politicians such as Navalny and Vladimir Kara-Murza, both now imprisoned.

In that appearance, Nadezhdin said Putin was misled by intelligence services that apparently told him Ukrainian resistance would be brief and ineffective.

In his AP interview, Nadezhdin said he believes he has been allowed to run because he is a known entity and has not specifically criticized Putin.

“I personally know Putin,” he said, saying he met him before he became president in 2000, adding that in the 1990s, he was an assistant to then-Prime Minister Sergey Kiriyenko, now Putin’s first deputy chief of staff.

Schulmann said that while authorities could allow Nadezhdin to run, it’s a “dangerous gamble.”

“I think they will cut him off at the next stage when he brings those signatures,” she said, suggesting the Central Election Commission could declare some of them invalid and bar him from the ballot. She suggested authorities could also threaten him and his team with prison if he later urged his supporters to protest.

The election is the first since Putin annexed four Ukrainian regions and the first in which online voting will be used nationwide. Critics suggest that both are opportunities to rig results in favor of Putin — something the Kremlin has denied it will do.

No matter what the actual outcome, some analysts and political opponents suggest that the sight of those lining up in the cold for Nadezhdin reveals more about Russia today than the vote itself.

Although Nadezhdin indicated he believes Putin’s team did not initially perceive him as a risk, he said “the Kremlin administrators are now in a difficult position.”

If he were in their shoes, he said, “I would now be thinking, ‘Why did we let him do this?’”

## Georgia Senate passes a panel with subpoena power to investigate District Attorney Fani Willis

By JEFF AMY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Georgia’s state Senate joined attempts to investigate Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis on Friday, voting 30-19 to create a special committee that Republican senators say is needed to determine whether the Democratic district attorney misspent state tax money in her prosecution of former President Donald Trump and others.

“This has to do with following state funds,” said Republican Sen Matt Brass of Newnan. “We want to know where is our money going.”

The committee, which doesn’t require approval by the state House or Gov. Brian Kemp, is tasked with making recommendations on state laws and spending based on its findings. But the committee can’t directly sanction Willis, and Democrats denounced it as a partisan attempt to try to play to Trump and his supporters.

“You’re talking about partisan politics. That’s all you’re talking about,” said Democratic Sen. David Lucas of Macon.

Trump on Thursday joined an effort by co-defendant Michael Roman to have Willis, special prosecutor Nathan Wade and their offices thrown off the case. Ashleigh Merchant, a lawyer for Roman, filed a motion Jan. 8 accusing Willis of having an inappropriate romantic relationship with Wade that resulted in a conflict of interest.

Willis has yet to respond publicly to the allegations of a romantic relationship between her and Wade.



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But she vigorously defended Wade and his qualifications in a speech during a service honoring the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. at a historic Black church in Atlanta on Jan. 14. She suggested during that address that the questioning of Wade's hiring was rooted in racism.

A filing in Wade's divorce case includes credit card statements that show Wade — after he had been hired as special prosecutor — bought plane tickets in October 2022 for him and Willis to travel to Miami and bought tickets in April to San Francisco in their names. Republican State Sen. Brandon Beach of Alpharetta said that Willis' employment of Wade is a "prosecution for personal profit scheme," contending that she has stretched out the Trump inquiry to keep paying Wade and derive personal benefit.

"I believe this scheme — prosecution for personal profit — was a fraud against the court and it was a fraud against you as a Georgia taxpayer," Beach said.

The new panel would be able to issue subpoenas and require people to testify under oath — powers that no other Georgia legislative committee routinely uses.

People can already be prosecuted for making false statements to Georgia lawmakers. Those are among the criminal charges that Rudy Giuliani and some others face for the false claims they made to Georgia lawmakers in late 2020. They claimed Georgia's election was marred by widespread fraud and that Trump and not Democrat Joe Biden was the rightful winner of the state's 16 electoral votes.

The action comes at the beginning of Georgia's 2024 legislative session, with all 56 Senate and 180 House seats up for election later this year. With few of the 56 Senate districts expected to be competitive between Republicans and Democrats, the most serious opposition that many lawmakers could face would be in their party primary in June. Attacks on Willis by Republicans and a defense of her by Democrats could deter primary challenges on both sides in advance of the March deadline for candidates to file for election.

Most of the top supporters are Republican lawmakers who also publicly backed Trump's efforts to overturn Georgia's 2020 election results, including Republican Lt. Gov. Burt Jones. Willis was barred from prosecuting Jones by a judge after she hosted a fundraiser for a Democratic opponent. Jones on Wednesday reaffirmed his support for Trump after the former president won the New Hampshire primary.

"I've never shied away from it," Jones told reporters. "I'm a Trump guy. I've been a Trump supporter since 2015."

Kemp, though, has said he favors a revived prosecutor oversight board looking into whether Willis did anything wrong, instead of a legislative committee.

Democratic Sen. Josh McLaurin accused Republicans of going down a "dangerous path" by catering to Republicans who have shown themselves willing to threaten violence against Georgia lawmakers seen as insufficiently supportive of Trump.

"If you guys think you can handle it — if you think you can inflame that base, and feed them more, feed them misinformation, or let them persist in their misinformation about the results of elections — and not face the consequences someday, I think you're mistaken," McLaurin said.

## King Charles III is doing well after scheduled prostate treatment

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — King Charles III is doing well after undergoing a "corrective procedure" for an enlarged prostate, Queen Camilla said Friday as she left the private hospital where he was being treated.

The 75-year-old monarch was admitted to the London Clinic, where the Princess of Wales, his daughter-in-law, is recovering from abdominal surgery, Buckingham Palace said Friday. The king, who entered the hospital with Camilla at his side, visited Kate at the clinic after he arrived.

"He's doing well, thank you," Camilla told people inside the hospital. She left the hospital at 3:10 p.m. and appeared to be in good spirits.

Charles, who ascended the throne 16 months ago, was diagnosed with the benign condition on Jan. 17 after he experienced undisclosed symptoms. He canceled engagements and was urged to rest ahead of the procedure, which had concluded by Friday afternoon.

"The King was this morning admitted to a London hospital for scheduled treatment," the palace said. "His Majesty would like to thank all those who have sent their good wishes over the past week."

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The king decided to announce the surgery in advance in an effort to encourage other men to have their prostates checked in line with public health advice.

The palace said the king was "delighted to learn that his diagnosis is having a positive impact on public health awareness."

The prostate is a small gland that surrounds the urethra — the tube that carries urine out of the body. An enlarged prostate can put pressure on the urethra and make it more difficult to urinate.

Britain's National Health Service recommends that men see their doctors if they notice any problems with, or changes in, their usual pattern of urination. Surgery is usually only recommended when a patient experiences moderate to severe symptoms that don't respond to medicine.

Benign prostate enlargement is common in men over age 50, and normally it isn't a serious health threat, the NHS says.

"The risk of prostate cancer is no greater for men with an enlarged prostate than it is for men without an enlarged prostate," the agency says on its website.

News of the king's treatment came amid a flurry of royal medical news over the past 10 days.

The Princess of Wales' office at Kensington Palace said the princess underwent planned abdominal surgery on Jan. 16 for an undisclosed condition. The palace didn't provide further details but said her condition wasn't cancerous.

The 42-year-old princess, formerly Kate Middleton, is the wife of Prince William, the heir to the throne. She is on day 11 of her hospital stay and is expected to remain in the hospital for up to two weeks, the palace says.

Though she is physically active and has generally experienced good health, Kate was hospitalized with severe morning sickness when she was pregnant.

Soon after Kate was hospitalized last week, the Duchess of York was diagnosed with a malignant skin cancer that was discovered during treatment for breast cancer. The melanoma was found after several moles were removed while she was undergoing reconstructive surgery after a mastectomy.

The duchess, 64, the ex-wife of Prince Andrew and the mother of Princesses Beatrice and Eugenie, was once a favorite target of Britain's tabloids. The former Sarah Ferguson, often called by her nickname, "Fergie," has written a number of children's books, as well as a historical romance for adults.

While it is somewhat unusual for members of the royal family to release details about their health, the announcements about Charles and Kate's conditions were seen as a way to avoid speculation because appearances would have to be postponed or canceled.

William also postponed a number of engagements to be able to support Kate and their three children during the time she's hospitalized and after.

Stories about the health of Britain's senior royals have been in the news repeatedly in recent years.

Speculation about the health of the late Queen Elizabeth II increased during the last months of her 70-year reign as undisclosed "mobility issues" limited her public appearances. After that, focus switched to Charles, who ascended the throne at an age when most of his contemporaries were long retired.

## Sinner ends 10-time champion Novak Djokovic's Australian Open streak, faces Medvedev for the title

By JOHN PYE AP Sports Writer

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Jannik Sinner ended one of Novak Djokovic's perfect streaks in an Australian Open upset and then got to relax while Daniil Medvedev rallied from two sets down to beat Alexander Zverev after midnight to secure the other place in the final.

Just about everything went the self-described tennis fan's way in the semifinals Friday.

The 22-year-old Italian broke Djokovic's serve twice in each of the first two sets in a surprisingly lopsided 6-1, 6-2, 6-7 (6), 6-3 victory that ended the 10-time champion's unbeaten streak in Australian Open semifinals.

Djokovic had won 33 consecutive matches at Melbourne Park since 2018, and never lost here after

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reaching the final four.

Almost an hour after saving a match point, that phenomenal sequence was over. Sinner converted his second match point to complete a third win in four head-to-heads since losing to Djokovic in last year's Wimbledon semifinals.

"I learned a lot from that," he said, noting the turning point in their rivalry. Sinner won two of the next three — all in November — at the ATP Finals in Turin and in the Davis Cup semifinals.

"It gives you a better feeling when you know that you can beat one player," he said. "The confidence from the end of last year has for sure kept the belief."

Third-seeded Medvedev appeared down and out after two sets, and was two points from losing in the fourth, but he rallied to beat Zverev 5-7, 3-6, 7-6 (4), 7-6 (5), 6-3 after 4 hours, 18 minutes.

"I was a little bit lost, but during the third set I started saying 'If I lose this match, I just want to be proud of myself,'" said Medvedev, who has lost two finals in Australia, including the 2022 decider from two sets up against Rafael Nadal. "I'm proud of myself."

Medvedev's shanked chip forehand service return that just dropped over the net to earn a set point in the fourth-set tiebreaker clearly frustrated Zverev.

"Tough luck for him, for sure, in this point," Medvedev said. "Managed to make an ace after, but that's what tennis is about."

Five games later, Zverev got a warning for a code violation for smacking the net just before another service break.

"It's more disappointing that at 5-4 in the tiebreak I didn't serve it out," he said. "The 5-all point was just purely unlucky." Zverev's run drew attention on and off the court after it emerged as the tournament started that a German court set a trial date in May over an assault allegation dating to 2020. The Olympic gold medalist has denied the accusations since last July when details of the case became public.

He said it wasn't a distraction. Zverev got within a couple of swings of the racket of making a second Grand Slam final, extra disappointing after he blew a two-set lead to lose the 2020 U.S. Open final to Dominic Thiem.

Instead it will be 2021 U.S. Open winner Medvedev contending for a second major title in his sixth final. His run here included a grueling second-round win that finished at almost 4 in the morning. It makes Medvedev the first player since Pete Sampras in 1995 to register two comebacks from 2-0 down on the way to an Australian Open final.

Sinner will be the youngest player to contest the men's final in Australia since 24-time major winner Djokovic took his first here in 2008.

"He's deservedly in the finals. He outplayed me completely," Djokovic said. "Look, I was shocked with my level — in a bad way. There was not much I was doing right in the first two sets.

"This is one of the worst Grand Slam matches I've ever played — at least that I remember."

Djokovic didn't get a look at a break point at all — the first time he's experienced that in a completed Grand Slam match.

"That stat says a lot," Djokovic said. "There's a lot of negative things that I've done on the court today in terms of my game. Everything ... was just subpar."

Sinner took the first two sets in under 1 1/4 hours, an astonishing start against a player who lost only one Grand Slam match last year — the Wimbledon final against Alcaraz.

Djokovic picked up his service percentage, cut down his unforced errors and upped the pressure in the third.

He was serving at 5-5 when play was interrupted briefly while a spectator received medical help in the stands. Djokovic then held serve and saved a match point before taking the set in a tiebreaker.

But he was immediately in trouble again in the fourth.

He fended off three break points to hold in the second game but Sinner got a decisive service break to lead 3-1, winning five straight points from 40-0 down.

Continuous chants of "Nole, Nole, Nole, Nole" echoed around Rod Laver Arena between big points but didn't get him across the line this time.

"I think you win the matches not only on that day, you win it because you feel prepared for a good fight," Sinner said. "After last year, especially end of the year, gave me confidence that I could potentially do some good results in Grand Slams."

## What are the symptoms of an enlarged prostate and how is it treated?

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

The announcement that King Charles III was admitted to a private hospital Friday to undergo a procedure for an enlarged prostate has sparked interest in what is an extremely common condition among older men.

The 75-year-old monarch is in good company. About half of men in their 50s have enlarged prostates and that prevalence climbs to more than 80% of men by the time they reach age 80.

It's a common result of aging, said Dr. Stephen Nakada, a University of Wisconsin urologist.

"It's like getting gray hair," Nakada said.

An enlarged prostate doesn't always cause symptoms, but when it does, they can be annoying. And some men have more trouble than others.

A look at the condition, also known as benign prostatic hyperplasia:

### WHAT IS THE PROSTATE GLAND?

The prostate is part of the reproductive system in men. It makes fluid for semen. It's located below the bladder and it wraps around the urethra, the tube that carries urine and semen out through the penis.

### WHAT CAUSES AN ENLARGED PROSTATE?

First, it's not cancer. The word "benign" in benign prostatic hyperplasia means the prostate isn't cancerous.

What causes the prostate to grow isn't completely clear, but it's possibly caused by hormonal changes as men age.

### WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF AN ENLARGED PROSTATE?

The symptoms of an enlarged prostate can include frequent urination and needing to get up many times in the night to pee. A man might have trouble getting started in the bathroom or dribbling when finished. The inability to completely empty the bladder is also a common symptom.

### WHAT MIGHT HELP SYMPTOMS?

Doctors may first advise patients to stop drinking fluids after dinner. Antihistamines can contribute to symptoms, as can alcohol and caffeine.

"A good initial intervention would be to decrease caffeine and alcohol intake, even decrease spicy food intake, because those can irritate the bladder," Nakada said.

### HOW IS AN ENLARGED PROSTATE DIAGNOSED?

Doctors will ask about symptoms and medications. They will perform a rectal exam to determine the size and shape of the prostate.

### ARE THERE MEDICATIONS THAT HELP?

Medicines are available that relax muscles and allow better flow of urine. Another type of medicine can be used to stop the prostate from growing. Erectile dysfunction drugs can help with urine flow too.

There's not strong evidence for herbal remedies such as saw palmetto.

"I usually tell patients the only thing saw palmetto does is hurt your wallet," Nakada said.

### WHAT ARE THE SURGICAL OPTIONS?

There are various procedures to remove prostate tissue or widen the urethra.

Some use the pulse of a laser beam, microwaves, ultrasound, electric current or heated water. Another procedure inserts a stent to prop up the prostate and make more room for urine flow.

There are also surgical techniques to cut away tissue.

### COULD THERE BE COMPLICATIONS FROM SURGERY?

All surgeries have potential complications such as bleeding and infections. Prostate surgery can cause urinary or sexual problems. Some of the less invasive procedures may need to be repeated if symptoms come back.



## As US brings home large numbers of jailed Americans, some families are still waiting for their turn

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — By any standard, the past 18 months have been remarkable for getting wrongfully detained Americans home. There were major swaps with adversaries like Iran and Russia, including one that secured the freedom of WNBA star Brittney Griner, and a large prisoner exchange just last month with Venezuela.

But Harrison Li has had little to celebrate. Despite the succession of high-profile releases, jubilant family reunions and triumphant photos on government airplanes, his father, Kai, remains detained in China on espionage-related charges his family says are bogus and politically motivated.

Li, a Stanford University doctoral student, says though he feels “so much joy and happiness” for the other families — many of whom he’s become friendly with over the years — “I’d be lying if I didn’t say that then the next thought is, you know, when’s it our turn?”

He added, “When you see so many folks come home but then you still see your loved one not, then, yeah, there’s definitely an element of frustration.”

Li is not alone. For all the releases of wrongly detained Americans, many more remain either locked up or missing in countries including Russia, Syria and Afghanistan — often held by a hostile foreign government. In some instances, there have been few signs of progress, and families have sometimes seen the countries that are holding their loved ones release other detainees but not yet their relatives.

Those sensitivities are not lost on Roger Carstens, the special presidential envoy for hostage affairs and the Biden administration’s public face for matters related to hostages and wrongful detainees — the label applied to Americans jailed in foreign countries for what the government considers legally specious allegations or for improper motivations.

He handles negotiations with foreign governments and once the deal is done flies out to bring the released American back, routinely telling them that on behalf of the U.S. government, “I’m here to take you home.”

“There’s always a very short-lived celebration because we still have a lot of work to do to bring other people home,” Carstens said in an interview.

The Biden administration has been notably aggressive in cutting deals, signing off on prisoner exchanges and other concessions that would once have been unthinkable and achieving releases at what advocates say is a historically high level. U.S. officials have called bringing home wrongfully detained Americans a core administration priority even when it collides with other foreign policy or law enforcement interests, though in all cases, the ability to achieve a deal depends on negotiators reaching mutually agreeable conditions — no small thing when countries otherwise have little they agree on.

Last month, Venezuela freed 10 Americans and returned to the U.S. for prosecution an indicted Navy contractor known as “Fat Leonard” in exchange for the U.S. releasing an ally of President Nicolas Maduro charged in a money-laundering conspiracy. In September, five Americans jailed for years in Iran walked free in a deal that saw the release of nearly \$6 billion in frozen Iranian assets. Months earlier, Rwanda freed Paul Rusesabagina, who inspired the film “Hotel Rwanda,” after a diplomatic intervention by the U.S.

And in 2022, the U.S. swapped an imprisoned Taliban drug lord for an American contractor in Afghanistan, and a notorious Russian arms trafficker for Griner.

As hostage diplomacy has generated front-page news and become a key area of focus — elevated in part by the October capture of scores of hostages in Israel by Hamas — families of detainees have jostled for attention from the U.S. government, including from President Joe Biden himself.

The president has met with some families — he had in-person and virtual conversations with families of American hostages held in Gaza — though some, like Li, are still seeking their first encounter.

Kai Li, a Chinese immigrant who started an export business in the U.S., was detained in September 2016 after flying into Shanghai. He was placed under surveillance, interrogated without a lawyer and accused of providing state secrets to the FBI. The U.S. government has designated him as wrongfully detained. A

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United Nations working group has called his 10-year prison sentence arbitrary.

Complicating the matter are diplomatic tensions between the U.S. and China, which view each other as strategic rivals. Harrison Li regards last November's summit between Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping as a missed opportunity to more forcefully move his father's case toward resolution, and wonders what additional steps can be taken.

"You think, OK, what else can you do? What is something that you're not doing properly or you could do better or you could do more of?" Li said.

Maryam Kamalmaz has had no trace of her father, Majd Kamalmaz, since the psychologist from Texas was stopped at a checkpoint in Syria in 2017 after traveling there to visit a family member. He remains one of several Americans missing in Syria, including journalist Austin Tice, despite a 2020 visit by Carstens to try to negotiate their release.

"Other families know their loved ones' condition. They know what's going on. In my father's case, there's been no trial, there's been no case. There's nothing against him. He's just basically disappeared into their system, disappeared completely," said Kamalmaz.

Part of Carstens' job involves regular communication with families. Sometimes the updates are cheerful, sometimes they're painful.

Just before Griner's release, a representative from his office visited the sister of Paul Whelan, a corporate security executive from Michigan detained in Russia since December 2018, to break the news in person that Griner would be coming home but that Moscow had refused to free Whelan as part of a swap.

Carstens said deals like that, in which a detainee from one country is released but another is not, are "no small thing" and weigh heavily on his team.

"Unless someone's coming off a plane, onto a tarmac, in the United States of America and into the arms of their loved ones, we're not getting a win," he said.

Whelan's brother, David, released a statement upon Griner's release trumpeting her freedom while noting the "public disappointment" of his brother's continued imprisonment.

In an interview, David Whelan said he feels elated when detainees return, though he acknowledged his feelings are more nuanced when it has come to deals with Russia that don't involve his brother. He laments that his brother is not home, but also doesn't believe that the U.S. government has diverted resources to other detainees.

At the end of the day, Whelan said: "I think the enemy is the Kremlin. And the people who can make the decision are in the Kremlin."

## Today in History: January 27

### 3 astronauts die in fire during test of Apollo spacecraft

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Jan. 27, the 27th day of 2024. There are 339 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 27, 1967, astronauts Virgil I. "Gus" Grissom, Edward H. White and Roger B. Chaffee died in a flash fire during a test aboard their Apollo spacecraft.

On this date:

In 1756, composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born in Salzburg, Austria.

In 1880, Thomas Edison received a patent for his electric incandescent lamp.

In 1888, the National Geographic Society was incorporated in Washington, D.C.

In 1944, during World War II, the Soviet Union announced the complete end of the deadly German siege of Leningrad, which had lasted for more than two years.

In 1945, during World War II, Soviet troops liberated the Nazi concentration camps Auschwitz and Birkenau in Poland.

In 1973, the Vietnam peace accords were signed in Paris.

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In 1981, President Ronald Reagan and his wife, Nancy, greeted at the White House the 52 former American hostages released by Iran.

In 1984, singer Michael Jackson suffered serious burns to his scalp when pyrotechnics set his hair on fire during the filming of a Pepsi-Cola TV commercial at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles.

In 2006, Western Union delivered its last telegram.

In 2010, Apple CEO Steve Jobs unveiled the iPad tablet during a presentation in San Francisco. and J.D. Salinger, the reclusive author of "The Catcher in the Rye," died in Cornish, New Hampshire, at age 91.

In 2013, Flames raced through a crowded nightclub in southern Brazil, killing 242 people.

In 2017, President Donald Trump barred all refugees from entering the United States for four months, declaring the ban necessary to prevent "radical Islamic terrorists" from entering the nation.

In 2018, comic strip artist Mort Walker, a World War II veteran who satirized the Army with the antics of the lazy private "Beetle Bailey," died in Connecticut at age 94.

In 2020, China confirmed more than 2,700 cases of the new coronavirus with more than 80 deaths in that country. U.S. health officials said they believed the risk to Americans remained low and that they had no evidence that the new virus was spreading in the United States.

In 2021, Cloris Leachman, who won an Oscar for the "The Last Picture Show" and Emmys for her comic work on "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" and other TV series, died at 94.

In 2022, Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer confirmed that he would step down from the court later in the year.

Today's birthdays: Actor James Cromwell is 84. Rock musician Nick Mason (Pink Floyd) is 80. R&B singer Nedra Talley (The Ronettes) is 78. Ballet star Mikhail Baryshnikov is 76. Latin singer-songwriter Djavan is 75. U.S. Chief Justice John Roberts is 69. Country singer Cheryl White is 69. Country singer-musician Richard Young (The Kentucky Headhunters) is 69. Actor Mimi Rogers is 68. Rock musician Janick Gers (Iron Maiden) is 67. Actor Susanna Thompson is 66. Political and sports commentator Keith Olbermann is 65. Rock singer Margo Timmins (Cowboy Junkies) is 63. Rock musician Gillian Gilbert is 63. Actor Tamlyn Tomita is 61. Actor Bridget Fonda is 60. Actor Alan Cumming is 59. Country singer Tracy Lawrence is 56. Rock singer Mike Patton is 56. Rapper Tricky is 56. Rock musician Michael Kulas (James) is 55. Actor-comedian Patton Oswalt is 55. Actor Josh Randall is 52. Country singer Kevin Denney is 46. Tennis player Marat Safin is 44. Rock musician Matt Sanchez (American Authors) is 38. Actor Braeden Lemasters is 28.