

Groton Daily Independent

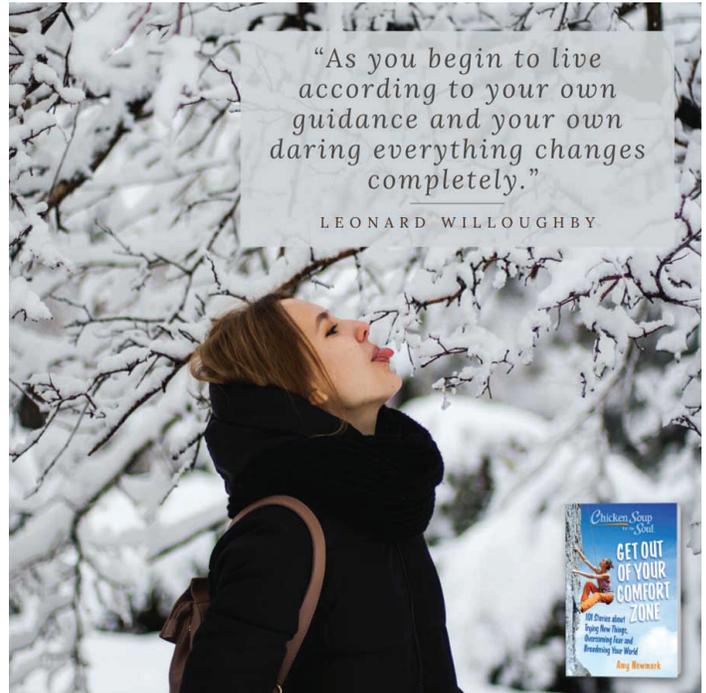
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Sunday, Jan. 28

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 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.

Groton Daily Independent
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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.

Tuesday, Jan. 30

Senior Menu: New England ham dinner, fruit, cookie, dinner roll.
School Breakfast: Biscuits.
School Lunch: Oriental chicken, rice.
Boys JH Games hosts Aberdeen Roncalli: 7th at 4 p.m., 8th at 5 p.m.
Thrift Store open 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.
Food Pantry open 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.
United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

Wednesday, Jan. 31

Senior Menu: Salisbury steak, mashed potatoes and gravy, peas, apricots, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: French toast.

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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Frosty Morning

Several days of fog finally gave way to a sunny Saturday. The morning frost decorated the area in the morning. (Photos by Paul Kosel)

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GHS Boys' Basketball

Dakota Valley stops Groton Area at DAK XII-NEC Clash

Three players hit double figures for both Groton Area and Dakota Valley, but the Panthers got key offensive rebounds to edge out the Tigers, 62-57. The game was part of the DAK XII - NEC Clash held Saturday in Madison.

Groton Area came out commanding the first quarter as the Tiger defense forced five first quarter Dakota Valley turnovers. Jacob Zak powered in two three-pointers, a two-pointer and two free throws as he led Groton Area to a 16-13 first quarter lead.

Dakota Valley lit the nets on fire in the second quarter with three three-pointers and six two-pointers while the Tigers cooled down to making two of 11 field goals as Dakota Valley took a 36-24 lead at half time.

Ryder Johnson and Lane Tietz carried the Tigers in the third quarter with each making a three-pointer to spark the Tigers and to cut the lead down to nine at the end of the third quarter, 49-40.

Groton Area closed to within three points, 49-46, with seven minutes left in the game. The Tigers had the chance to either tie or come to within one, but Dakota Valley foiled those plans and the Panthers quickly jumped out to a nine-point lead and extended it to 11 at 61-50 to go on for the win.

Jacob Zak finished with 16 points, two rebounds, one assist, one steal and one block. Ryder Johnson had 14 points, eight rebounds, two assists and one steal. Lane Tietz had 13 points, two rebounds, six assists and four steals. Logan Ringgenberg had six points and five rebounds. Gage Sippel had five points and six rebounds. Colby Dunker had one rebound and one steal.

Groton Area made 11 of 29 two-pointers for 38 percent, six of 20 three-pointers for 30 percent, 17 of 21 free throws for 81 percent, had 24 rebounds, 10 turnovers, 10 assists, 10 steals, 16 team fouls and one block shot.

Three-Pointers: Zak - 2, Tietz - 2, Johnson - 2.

Jaxson Wingert led Dakota Valley with 23 points while Luke Bruns had 14 points, Logan Collette 11, Charlie Margeas five, Grant VanDenHul four, Tyler Cornelsen three and Drew Lukken two.

Dakota Valley made 23 of 39 field goals for 59 percent, nine of 16 free throws for 56 percent, had 16 turnovers and 14 team fouls.

Three-Pointers: Margeas - 1, Bruns - 1, Cornelsen - 1, Collette - 3, Wingert - 1

Groton Area, now 9-3 on the season, will travel to Deuel on Thursday for part of a double header. Dakota Valley is 10-2.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM and the audio piped into the Madison livestream. Game sponsors were 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.

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GHS Wrestling

Wrestling Squad take team title, place eight in the finals; Krueger, Little are winners in the girls' division

Groton Area's wrestling squad placed eight wrestlers in the top four and won the team title in action held in Groton on Saturday. Groton Area finished with 190 points to win the team title with Warner/Northwestern coming in second with 146 points.

Christian Ehresmann, Korbin Kucker and Walker Zoellner all took first place, Gavin England took third and Wyatt Hagen, Lincoln Krause and Easten Ekern placed fourth. In the girls' division, Liza Krueger and Maddie Little both took first place.

Team Points: 1, Groton Area, 190.0; 2, Warner/Northwestern, 146.0; 3, Clark/Willow Lake, 142.0; 4, Watertown JV, 133.0; 5, Britton/Hecla, 128.0; 6, Sioux Falls O`Gorman JV, 119.5; 7, Potter County, 113.5; 8, Huron JV, 104.0; 9, Webster Area, 90.0; 10, Canton JV, 86.5; 11, Sioux Valley, 79.5; 12, Ipswich/Leola/Bowdle, 66.0; 13, McLaughlin, 39.0; 14, Sully Buttes, 35.0; 15, Viborg/Hurley, 33.0; 16, Milbank JV, 31.0; 17, Canistota, 26.0; 18, Wessington Spings/Woonsocket/Wolsey/Wessington, 21.0; 19, Sanborn Central, 13.0; 20, Lemmon/McIntosh, 7.0; 21, Ortonville, 0.0

90-98: Luke Gauer (2-8).

Champ. Round 1 - Easton Rausch (Potter County) 18-16 won by fall over Luke Gauer (Groton Area) 2-8 (Fall 0:00)

Cons. Round 1 - Luke Gauer (Groton Area) 2-8 received a bye () (Bye)

Cons. Round 2 - Noah Scepaniak (Groton Area) 5-8 won by decision over Luke Gauer (Groton Area) 2-8 (Dec 8-6)

90-98: Noah Scepaniak (5-8).

Champ. Round 1 - Noah Scepaniak (Groton Area) 5-8 won by fall over Aksel Gjerde (Clark/Willow Lake) 1-8 (Fall 1:54)

Quarterfinal - Braylon Schell (Watertown JV) 8-3 won by fall over Noah Scepaniak (Groton Area) 5-8 (Fall 0:30)

Cons. Round 2 - Noah Scepaniak (Groton Area) 5-8 won by decision over Luke Gauer (Groton Area) 2-8 (Dec 8-6)

Cons. Round 3 - Bode Walker (Canton JV) 13-5 won by fall over Noah Scepaniak (Groton Area) 5-8 (Fall 1:28)

90-98: Jackson Furman (5-4) placed 6th.

Champ. Round 1 - Jackson Furman (Groton Area) 5-4 received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Jackson Furman (Groton Area) 5-4 won by fall over Karstyn Schlechter (Webster Area) 5-8 (Fall 1:37)

Semifinal - Braylon Schell (Watertown JV) 8-3 won by fall over Jackson Furman (Groton Area) 5-4 (Fall 0:34)

Cons. Semi - Hayden Sealey (Sioux Falls O`Gorman JV) 5-1 won by fall over Jackson Furman (Groton Area) 5-4 (Fall 3:30)

5th Place Match - Tanner Urdahl (Watertown JV) 2-2 won by fall over Jackson Furman (Groton Area) 5-4 (Fall 4:04)

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106: Aiden Strom (3-6).

Champ. Round 1 - William O`Connor (Sioux Falls O`Gorman JV) 12-8 won by tech fall over Aiden Strom (Groton Area) 3-6 (TF-1.5 2:09 (15-0))

Cons. Round 1 - Aiden Strom (Groton Area) 3-6 won by fall over Blaise Bentz (Canton JV) 16-4 (Fall 1:51)

Cons. Round 2 - Koda Popkes (Canistota) 8-15 won by fall over Aiden Strom (Groton Area) 3-6 (Fall 2:34)

106: Wyatt Hagen (23-12) placed 4th and scored 14.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Wyatt Hagen (Groton Area) 23-12 won by major decision over Jack Stuwe (Potter County) 11-17 (MD 16-3)

Quarterfinal - Wyatt Hagen (Groton Area) 23-12 won by major decision over Chase Dunsmore (Wessington Spings/Woonsocket/Wolsey/Wessington) 13-14 (MD 12-4)

Semifinal - Tayten Kurkowski (Webster Area) 23-12 won by decision over Wyatt Hagen (Groton Area) 23-12 (Dec 6-2)

Cons. Semi - Wyatt Hagen (Groton Area) 23-12 won by decision over Evan Mack (Watertown JV) 6-5 (Dec 4-1)

3rd Place Match - William O`Connor (Sioux Falls O`Gorman JV) 12-8 won by decision over Wyatt Hagen (Groton Area) 23-12 (Dec 6-1)

113: Lincoln Krause (18-8) placed 4th and scored 18.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Lincoln Krause (Groton Area) 18-8 won by fall over Wambli White Tail (McLaughlin) 0-2 (Fall 1:10)

Quarterfinal - Lincoln Krause (Groton Area) 18-8 won by fall over Avery Williams (Sully Buttes) 0-11 (Fall 1:34)

Semifinal - Shane Sehr (Canton JV) 14-5 won by fall over Lincoln Krause (Groton Area) 18-8 (Fall 1:17)

Cons. Semi - Lincoln Krause (Groton Area) 18-8 won by fall over Grason Finn (Wessington Spings/Woonsocket/Wolsey/Wessington) 4-2 (Fall 0:36)

3rd Place Match - Ryder Siedschlag (Huron JV`) 12-11 won by fall over Lincoln Krause (Groton Area) 18-8 (Fall 1:43)

120: John Bisbee (2-14).

Champ. Round 1 - John Bisbee (Groton Area) 2-14 received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Kutler Swenson (Watertown JV) 15-5 won by fall over John Bisbee (Groton Area) 2-14 (Fall 1:25)

Cons. Round 2 - Ryley Sprinkel (Sully Buttes) 2-6 won by decision over John Bisbee (Groton Area) 2-14 (Dec 16-10)

120: Donavon Block (10-8) placed 4th and scored 16.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Donavon Block (Groton Area) 10-8 received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Donavon Block (Groton Area) 10-8 won by fall over Mason Severson (Clark/Willow Lake) 3-9 (Fall 2:35)

Semifinal - Lane Stuwe (Potter County) 19-12 won by decision over Donavon Block (Groton Area) 10-8 (Dec 11-5)

Cons. Semi - Donavon Block (Groton Area) 10-8 won by fall over Andrew Folk (Milbank JV) 3-7 (Fall 1:25)

3rd Place Match - Tanner Atkinson (Britton/Hecla) 8-8 won by fall over Donavon Block (Groton Area) 10-8 (Fall 2:48)

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126: Walker Zoellner (25-10) placed 1st and scored 30.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Walker Zoellner (Groton Area) 25-10 won by fall over Damian Severson (Clark/Willow Lake) 20-16 (Fall 1:31)

Quarterfinal - Walker Zoellner (Groton Area) 25-10 won by fall over Dubhlainn Vermeulen (Sioux Valley) 9-22 (Fall 0:45)

Semifinal - Walker Zoellner (Groton Area) 25-10 won by fall over Gavon Larson (Webster Area) 10-19 (Fall 2:37)

1st Place Match - Walker Zoellner (Groton Area) 25-10 won by fall over zach Schuler (Sioux Falls O`Gorman JV) 9-5 (Fall 0:46)

144: Christian Ehresmann (27-3) placed 1st and scored 30.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 27-3 won by fall over Tucker DuDuBois (Viborg/Hurley) 2-12 (Fall 0:19)

Quarterfinal - Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 27-3 won by fall over Tanner Vander Vorst (Potter County) 8-11 (Fall 1:07)

Semifinal - Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 27-3 won by fall over Owen Petersen (Watertown JV) 6-7 (Fall 0:55)

1st Place Match - Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 27-3 won by fall over Bryce Hawkinson (Britton/Hecla) 28-8 (Fall 5:42)

157: Easten Ekern (9-12) placed 4th and scored 16.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Easten Ekern (Groton Area) 9-12 received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Easten Ekern (Groton Area) 9-12 won by fall over Griffin Storm (Huron JV`) 2-17 (Fall 3:24)

Semifinal - Wyatt Hardt (Sioux Valley) 23-18 won by fall over Easten Ekern (Groton Area) 9-12 (Fall 0:50)

Cons. Semi - Easten Ekern (Groton Area) 9-12 won by fall over Ayden Forgey (Potter County) 7-7 (Fall 1:36)

3rd Place Match - TJ Lien (Huron JV`) 6-1 won by fall over Easten Ekern (Groton Area) 9-12 (Fall 2:57)

165: Korbin Kucker (16-5) placed 1st and scored 27.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) 16-5 won by fall over Bryson Heuertz (Sully Buttes) 9-14 (Fall 3:10)

Quarterfinal - Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) 16-5 won by fall over Lane Johnson (Milbank JV) 4-10 (Fall 2:53)

Semifinal - Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) 16-5 won by decision over Cade Kuemper (Watertown JV) 5-4 (Dec 9-6)

1st Place Match - Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) 16-5 won by major decision over Dustin Dirksen (Warner/Northwestern) 17-9 (MD 11-3)

175: Ben Hoeft (10-14) placed 5th and scored 11.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Ben Hoeft (Groton Area) 10-14 received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Dashed Davidson (Britton/Hecla) 15-15 won by fall over Ben Hoeft (Groton Area) 10-14 (Fall 1:28)

Cons. Round 2 - Ben Hoeft (Groton Area) 10-14 received a bye () (Bye)

Cons. Round 3 - Ben Hoeft (Groton Area) 10-14 won by fall over Isaiah Scepaniak (Groton Area) 1-14 (Fall 1:58)

Cons. Semi - Micah Decker (Canton JV) 8-5 won by decision over Ben Hoeft (Groton Area) 10-14 (Dec 4-1)

5th Place Match - Ben Hoeft (Groton Area) 10-14 won by forfeit over Lucas Chaparro (Huron JV`) 7-5 (For.)

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175: Isaiah Scepaniak (1-14).

Champ. Round 1 - Justin Rorhbach (Ipswich/Leola/Bowdle) 18-12 won by fall over Isaiah Scepaniak (Groton Area) 1-14 (Fall 1:35)

Cons. Round 1 - Isaiah Scepaniak (Groton Area) 1-14 received a bye () (Bye)

Cons. Round 2 - Isaiah Scepaniak (Groton Area) 1-14 won by fall over Luke Johnson (Sioux Valley) 2-20 (Fall 4:35)

Cons. Round 3 - Ben Hoeft (Groton Area) 10-14 won by fall over Isaiah Scepaniak (Groton Area) 1-14 (Fall 1:58)

190: Layne Johnson (2-4).

Champ. Round 1 - Caleb Kneen (Sanborn Central) 3-3 won by fall over Layne Johnson (Groton Area) 2-4 (Fall 0:58)

Cons. Round 1 - Riley Popp (Clark/Willow Lake) 13-19 won by forfeit over Layne Johnson (Groton Area) 2-4 (For.)

190: Drew Thurston (6-10).

Champ. Round 1 - Sage Watson (Britton/Hecla) 3-7 won by fall over Drew Thurston (Groton Area) 6-10 (Fall 4:32)

Cons. Round 1 - Drew Thurston (Groton Area) 6-10 received a bye () (Bye)

Cons. Round 2 - Caleb Kneen (Sanborn Central) 3-3 won by fall over Drew Thurston (Groton Area) 6-10 (Fall 2:13)

215: Charlie Frost (9-11) placed 6th and scored 9.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Charlie Frost (Groton Area) 9-11 received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Charlie Frost (Groton Area) 9-11 won by fall over Reese Simonsen (Viborg/Hurley) 12-15 (Fall 4:49)

Semifinal - Kadyne Weisser (Ipswich/Leola/Bowdle) 23-10 won by fall over Charlie Frost (Groton Area) 9-11 (Fall 4:47)

Cons. Semi - Hunter Reede (Milbank JV) 11-11 won by fall over Charlie Frost (Groton Area) 9-11 (Fall 1:38)

5th Place Match - Collin Gaikowski (Clark/Willow Lake) 14-18 won by fall over Charlie Frost (Groton Area) 9-11 (Fall 0:58)

285: Karter Moody (12-9) placed 5th.

Champ. Round 1 - Karter Moody (Groton Area) 12-9 received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Tucker Hardy (Britton/Hecla) 22-11 won by fall over Karter Moody (Groton Area) 12-9 (Fall 0:41)

Cons. Round 2 - Karter Moody (Groton Area) 12-9 received a bye () (Bye)

Cons. Round 3 - Karter Moody (Groton Area) 12-9 won by fall over Brayden Satter (Warner/Northwestern) 7-12 (Fall 1:46)

Cons. Semi - Gaviin Englund (Groton Area) 23-12 won by fall over Karter Moody (Groton Area) 12-9 (Fall 0:07)

5th Place Match - Karter Moody (Groton Area) 12-9 won by fall over Quentin White Mountain (McLaughlin) 8-10 (Fall 4:32)

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285: Gavin Englund (23-12) placed 3rd and scored 19.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Gavin Englund (Groton Area) 23-12 won by major decision over Lawson Novy (Milbank JV) 8-13 (MD 11-1)

Quarterfinal - Gavin Englund (Groton Area) 23-12 won by fall over Quentin White Mountain (McLaughlin) 8-10 (Fall 5:03)

Semifinal - Owen Vandeweerd (Sioux Valley) 34-4 won by decision over Gavin Englund (Groton Area) 23-12 (Dec 5-2)

Cons. Semi - Gavin Englund (Groton Area) 23-12 won by fall over Karter Moody (Groton Area) 12-9 (Fall 0:07)

3rd Place Match - Gavin Englund (Groton Area) 23-12 won by decision over Jacob Johnson (Viborg/Hurley) 17-15 (Dec 8-1)

100: Liza Krueger (22-3) placed 1st and scored 9.0 team points.

Round 2 - Liza Krueger (Groton Area) 22-3 won by fall over Claire O`Leary (McLaughlin) 1-8 (Fall 1:45)

Round 3 - Liza Krueger (Groton Area) 22-3 won by fall over Lola Conn (Canistota) 4-9 (Fall 2:51)

107: Maddie Little (4-8) placed 1st and scored 4.0 team points.

Round 1 - Maddie Little (Groton Area) 4-8 won by fall over Alyvia Hjermstad (Canistota) 1-9 (Fall 3:59)

Round 2 - Maddie Little (Groton Area) 4-8 won by decision over Alyvia Hjermstad (Canistota) 1-9 (Dec 6-1)



**Free Viewing of the 86th
Annual Carnival of Silver
Skates!**
Sunday, Jan. 28th
2 p.m. & 6:30 p.m.
Sponsored by the Carnival
of Silver Skates
Internet provided by Midco

GDILIVE.COM

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NSU Women's Basketball

Wolves Suffer Loss to Mustangs to Close Out the Weekend

Marshall, Minn. – The Northern State women's basketball team fell to Southwest Minnesota State, 53-73 Saturday evening. An early lead by the Mustangs kept the win out of reach for the Wolves. SMSU offense was strong from beyond the 3-point arc with eight made.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 53, SMSU 73

Records: NSU 15-5 (11-3 NSIC), SMSU 13-7 (11-3 NSIC)

Attendance: 1632

HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern State notched ten points in the first quarter, 14 in the second, 14 in the third, and 15 in the fourth

They notched 35 rebounds, 34 points in the paint, 13 second chance points, nine points off of turnovers, and six bench points

The Wolves shot 33.9 % from the floor, 6.7 % from the 3-point arc, and 52.2 % from the foul line

Brynn Alfson was first on the team with 18 points for a new career-high, with 11 rebounds for her second double-double of the season

Rianna Fillipi dished out a team lead of four steals along with points, four rebounds, and three assists

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Brynn Alfson: 18 points (Career-high), 11 rebounds, 63.6 FG %

Rianna Fillipi: 10 Points, 4 rebounds, 4 steals, 3 assists

Madelyn Bragg: 9 points, 6 rebounds

UP NEXT

Northern State returns home to host the University of Mary on Thursday, February 1st at 5:30 p.m. from Wachs Arena. The Wolves hit the road on Saturday, February 3rd to take on St. Cloud State from St. Cloud, Minn. to end the weekend.

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NSU Men's Basketball

Wolves Men Drop Saturday Game to Southwest Minnesota State

Marshall, Minn. – The Northern State University men's basketball team was unable to bounce back Saturday evening, falling to Southwest Minnesota State. The Wolves scored a season low 46 points in the loss.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 46, SMSU 80

Records: NSU 7-13 (5-9 NSIC), SMSU 12-8 (9-5 NSIC)

Attendance: 1806

HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern scored 26 points in the first and 20 in the second, while Southwest recorded 43 in the first and 37 in the second

The Wolves tallied 30 rebounds, eight steals, six assists, and two blocks in the contest; scoring 19 points off the bench, 18 points in the paint, seven second chance points, and seven points off turnovers

They had opportunities, however the ball couldn't find the hoop as NSU shot just 29.6% from the floor, 20.0% from the 3-point line, and 66.7% from the foul line

Josh Dilling was the lone Wolf in double figures, with ten points, while Jacksen Moni led the team with six rebounds

Tobi Obiora led the team off the bench with seven points, going a perfect 3-for-3 from the floor with three rebounds

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL LEADERS

Josh Dilling: 10 points, 2 rebounds, 2 assists

Augustin Reede: 8 points

Jacksen Moni: 6 points, 6 rebounds, 3 steals

UP NEXT

Northern returns to Wachs Arena on Thursday hosting the University of Mary. Tip-off time is set for 7:30 p.m. against the Marauders. Thursday's contest is throwback night with special pricing on game admission and concession items. NSU will then close out their week at St. Cloud State at 3 p.m. on Saturday, February 3. For full game promotions visit nsuwolves.com/promotions.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

COMMENTARY

From sleepwalking to sprinting: Faster start to legislative session is a welcome change

DANA HESS

JANUARY 27, 2024 10:00 AM

After retiring from a career in writing and journalism, one of the freelance assignments I took was covering the Legislature in Pierre for Community News Service. Sponsored by the South Dakota Newspaper Association (now known as the South Dakota NewsMedia Association), CNS was legislative coverage designed for weekly newspapers, though some dailies did subscribe as well.

One of the guiding principles of CNS was that since it was geared toward weekly newspapers, the price of the service had to stay low. That low price got CNS more than 50 subscribing newspapers per year, but generated only enough revenue to send me to Pierre for four weeks of the nine-week sessions.

My work with CNS lasted from 2016 to 2020. In 2021, CNS was one of many victims of the pandemic. Faced with a prolonged winter stay at home, I convinced the editor of the Rapid City Journal, a CNS subscriber in 2020, that I was familiar enough with the workings of the Legislature that I could cover the meetings remotely.

The South Dakota Legislature has a dedication to transparency. All committee meetings and floor action in the House and Senate are readily available online.

I was excited to try this new form of coverage but that excitement didn't shine through when the editor and I were discussing my coverage for the first week of the session. I told him that little went on in the first week except the three big speeches: the State of the State, the State of the Judiciary and the State of the Tribes.

I told him I would monitor the committee and chamber agendas in case anyone decided to do more than just listen to speeches the first week. Otherwise, it would be in his best interest to use the stories about the speeches that he would get from The Associated Press instead of paying for both of us to write about the same thing.

Here I was, after talking the editor into paying for eight weeks of remote news coverage, talking him out of using my services that first week. There's a reason why some of us aren't businessmen.

Working for CNS, the first week of the session was one that I always attended because of the speeches. The rest of the week was a struggle to find any news. Almost all of the morning committee meetings were canceled. Sometimes the chairman of an agriculture committee or a transportation committee would be organized enough to arrange for a first-week visit from the ag secretary or the transportation secretary for an overview of the projects in their departments. By Friday of that first week, there were finally a scattered few committees ready to deal with actual legislation.

I've gone through this long prelude to establish the fact that I'm familiar with the workings, or lack of work, during the first week of the legislative session. Aside from the speeches, there was plenty of chatter in the hallways. Lawmakers treated the first week like a social event, catching up on the happenings from the past year and speculating about pending legislation.

In 2024, all that seems to have changed.

This year, the State of the Judiciary and State of the Tribes speeches were both held on Wednesday. Thursday morning there were actual committee hearings on bills. Legislative leaders had warned that

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there would be a faster start to the session this year. The brisk pace took some reporters, and at least one columnist, by surprise.

This year's session of the Legislature got out of the blocks fast thanks to the guidance of Senate Majority Leader Casey Crabtree of Madison and House Majority Leader Will Mortenson of Fort Pierre.

"What we have been looking at is how can we get more days and time in to get the work done," Crabtree told *The Dakota Scout*. "We are up here to tackle the toughest challenges, and we only have 40 days to do that."

Actually it's 38 days this year. If this year's session is like sessions of the recent past, lawmakers will have more than 500 bills to consider. Successful bills travel a long road as they can be debated four times — in committee hearings and during floor action in both the House and Senate.

The Legislature's slow start in the past has led to an often frantic finish as agendas are clogged with bills and morning committee hearings spill over into the evening. Trying to do so much at once is not the hallmark of good government.

Party leaders should be commended for the fast start to this legislative session. Elected to do a job in Pierre, for far too long lawmakers have been allowed to sleepwalk through the first week. Let's hope this brisk pace at the start of the session becomes the new tradition for how work gets done at the Capitol.

Dana Hess spent more than 25 years in South Dakota journalism, editing newspapers in Redfield, Milbank and Pierre. He's retired and lives in Brookings, working occasionally as a freelance writer.

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THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE

Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps truth forever, who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry.

The Lord gives freedom to the prisoners.

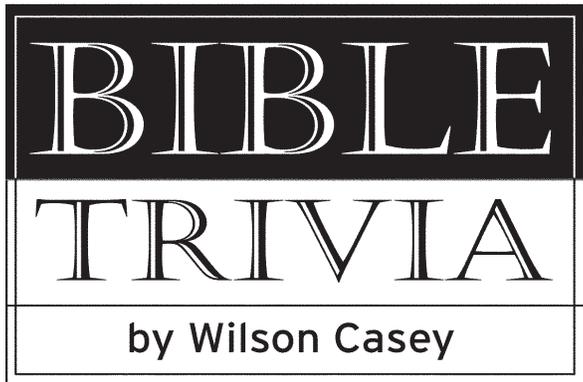
PSALM 146: 5-7 



Detail of "Nervous People at Dinner" by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1916)

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

2. What does Paul urge Christians to be of God, as found in Ephesians 5:1? *Lovers, Believers, Followers, Worshipers*

3. From Proverbs 3, we are not to lean on our own ...? *Riches, Understanding, Friends, Pity*

4. In 2 Chronicles, what godly priest had a wife named Jehosheba? *Jehoiada, Felix, Demetrius, Jeremiah*

5. What is the middle chapter of the Old Testament (KJV)? *2 Chronicles 3, Job 29, Psalms 34, Isaiah 41*

6. On which day did God make Adam and Eve? *Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth*

ANSWERS: 1) Old, 2) Followers, 3) Understanding, 4) Jehoiada, 5) Job 29, 6) Sixth

Sharpen your understanding of scripture with Wilson's Casey's latest book, "Test Your Bible Knowledge," available in bookstores and online.

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I REMEMBER A WORLD BEFORE EMPEROR MING.



FLASH GORDON

LAWLESS. CHAOTIC.

THEY CALLED HIM "MERCILESS," BUT MING'S LAW BROUGHT ORDER TO GENERATIONS.

AND MY JUDGMENTS CONVERTED HIS LAW INTO JUSTICE.



MING IS GONE, BUT I REMAIN-- LOGICAL, IMPARTIAL.

ENSURING JUSTICE WILL ENDURE.

I AM INQUISITOR AEGIA, AND IT FALLS ON ME TO DETERMINE IF FLASH GORDON -- SUPPOSED KILLER OF EMPEROR MING --



-- HAS ALSO KILLED MING'S SON.

HE CLAIMS MING II ACCOSTED HIM -- THAT THEY STRUGGLED IN THE DARK UNTIL THE VICTIM WAS STABBED BY AN UNSEEN PARTY.



DUBIOUS.



FACTS:

- FLASH IS A LONGTIME ALLY OF PRINCESS AURA, WHOSE ROYAL CLAIM THE VICTIM WAS CHALLENGING.
- HE PUBLICLY THREATENED THE VICTIM.
- THE MURDER WEAPON WAS A STEAK KNIFE FROM THE ROYAL RECEPTION, WHICH HE HAD JUST LEFT.

I GIVE RULERS AURA AND BARIN MY VERDICT:



THERE IS STRONG EVIDENCE OF FLASH GORDON'S GUILT, AND HE WILL BE PLACED IN THE TOMBS PENDING A FULL INVESTIGATION.

HIS FELLOW ALIENS TRY TO DENY MY VERDICT...



...BUT MONGO'S NEW RULERS CANNOT BE SEEN TO SUBVERT THE LAW TO HELP THEIR ALLY.

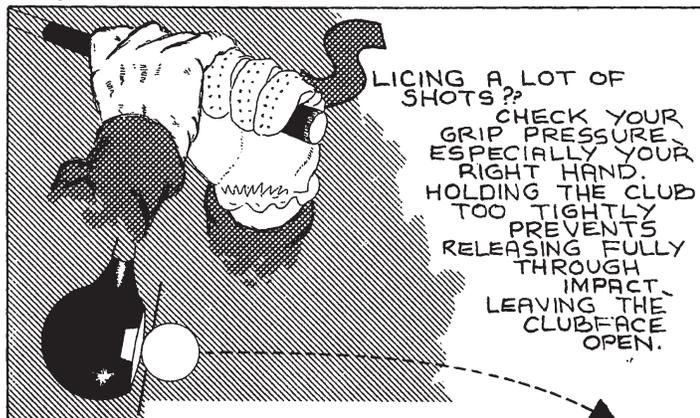
I RESPECT THIS. IN THE PURSUIT OF JUSTICE, ONE CANNOT BE SOFT. SENTIMENTAL. LIBERAL.



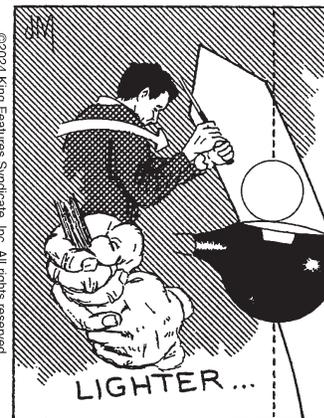
ONE MUST BE MERCILESS.

NEXT: THE TOMBS

Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS



...LICING A LOT OF SHOTS?? CHECK YOUR GRIP PRESSURE, ESPECIALLY YOUR RIGHT HAND. HOLDING THE CLUB TOO TIGHTLY PREVENTS RELEASING FULLY THROUGH IMPACT, LEAVING THE CLUBFACE OPEN.

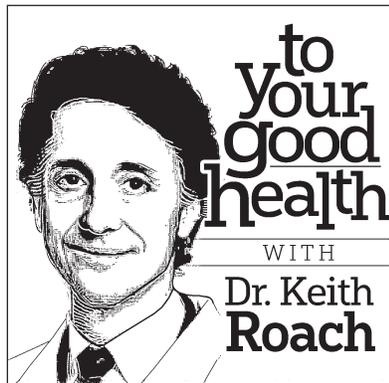


LIGHTER...

TOO TIGHT A GRIP ALSO PROMOTES OUT-AND-OVER SHOULDER ACTION AT THE START OF THE DOWNSWING, CAUSING AN OUT-TO-IN CLUBHEAD PATH AT IMPACT.

THUS HOLDING A LITTLE MORE EASILY CAN OFTEN ELIMINATE THOSE LEFT-TO-RIGHT FOUL BALLS.

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How to Take Precautions When a Family Member Has Mono

DEAR DR. ROACH: My daughter was exposed to infectious mononucleosis (“mono”) at college, and she is coming to spend a week at home. What precautions do we need to take to make sure that the rest of the family remains safe? How long does the virus stay active on surfaces?

Also, can she get her flu and COVID shots? — D.G.

ANSWER: Mono is classically caused by the Epstein-Barr virus (EBV), but very similar symptoms can be caused by other agents, viruses and even a parasite as well. The virus is transmitted through saliva.

The latency period (the time from exposure until the time of symptoms) is longer than you might expect; four to six weeks is typical. Not everybody develops symptoms. Younger children seldom develop symptoms at all when infected, yet they still receive immunity. Unfortunately, they may shed infectious virus particles for months, years or even decades.

It is likely that the adults in your family are immune, since 90% of adults have had an EBV infection before. EBV is not a particularly infectious disease, so transmission to family members is uncommon. Still, you should avoid sharing anything that saliva touches, like food, cups or toothbrushes. You don't need to take special precautions with surfaces.

She can get the flu and COVID vaccines as long as she feels well and doesn't have a fever.

DEAR DR. ROACH: I am an aging athlete (60 years old) with a history of minor injuries and wear and tear on my body that has resulted in minor arthritis. Also, I have recurring bouts of tendonitis, IBS and depression, so I avoid foods that cause inflammation.

Recently, I read that tart cherry juice is very good for reducing inflammation. However, in my efforts to avoid inflammatory foods, I also avoid sugar. A serving of tart cherry juice has a lot of fruit sugar. This is confusing to me. Does tart cherry juice reduce or increase inflammation? What is the difference between sucrose and fructose in terms of health? — P.G.

ANSWER: There is some evidence that tart cherry juice does have anti-inflammatory properties, and studies on athletes have shown through blood tests that the benefits of tart cherry juice include faster recovery, improved performance, enhanced muscle oxygenation and decreased inflammation. A glass of tart cherry juice (without added sugar) has 25 grams of sugar, about the same as a glass of orange juice.

The studies that show improvement included the effect of sugar, but I understand you want to reduce sugar, which means that you will need to be careful elsewhere in your diet if you do start drinking cherry juice.

As far as fructose (most fruit sugar) versus sucrose (table sugar), there is almost no difference in its effect on your health. Sucrose is rapidly broken down into fructose and glucose, and both fructose and glucose are used for energy. Too much of either sucrose or fructose isn't healthy, and there isn't a special benefit to “natural” sugar.

Keeping your simple sugar intake to less than 10% of your total calorie intake (roughly 36 grams for most men) is the healthiest option, so a glass of tart cherry juice would be a significant part of your sugar intake for the day.

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

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Aubrey Joseph stars as Quawntay Adams in "Bosco."
Courtesy of Peacock

"Expats" (TV-MA) -- Nicole Kidman ("Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom") leads this drama series adapted from the 2016 novel "The Expatriates" by Janice Y. K. Lee. The series centers on three women living in an affluent expatriate community in Hong Kong. Margaret (Kidman) is a mother and wife whose family enjoys the privilege of having

staff wait on them hand and foot. Twenty-four-year-old Mercy (Ji-young Yoo) is desperate to find a fresh start after moving to Hong Kong from Korea. Last but not least is Hilary (Sarayu Blue), a neighbor of Margaret's whose marriage is on the rocks. The series weaves in and out of these women's lives while exploring this elite community and the domestic workers providing services to them. The first two episodes are out now, with new episodes releasing every Friday. (Amazon Prime Video)

"Orion and the Dark" (TV-Y7) -- Elementary school student Orion is terrified of many things in this world, but above all, his biggest fear is easily the dark. One night, after he's tucked in his bed and surrounded by his soothing collection of nightlights, Orion is suddenly jolted awake to come face-to-face with his biggest fear personified! Dark, voiced by Emmy winner Paul Walter Hauser ("Black Bird"), brings Orion along for a night on the job of darkening the world. Joined by the other "night entities" for an evening full of adventure, Dark helps Orion see that his fears aren't so hard to overcome after all. Jacob Tremblay ("The Little Mermaid") lends his voice to Orion for this wholesome animated film out on Feb. 2. (Netflix)

"Bosco" (TV-MA) -- Based on a true story, this drama-thriller stars Aubrey Joseph ("Little Fires Everywhere") as Quawntay "Bosco" Adams, an inmate sentenced to 35 years for possession of marijuana. Once in prison, Bosco finds himself spiraling from the abusive treatment of the correctional officers and from knowing that his child is living without a father. After being threatened that he won't see the light of day outside of prison ever again, Bosco is left with no choice but to figure out a means to escape. With the help of Tammy (Nikki Blonsky), a woman he meets through a lonely-hearts ad, Bosco attempts an escape that will leave you hanging on the edge of your seat. Tyrese Gibson (the "Fast & Furious" franchise) and Theo Rossi ("Luke Cage") co-star. Out on Feb. 2. (Peacock)

In Case You Missed It

"Percy Jackson and the Olympians" (TV-PG) -- Thirteen years after the film adaptation of "Percy Jackson & the Olympians" was released, Disney developed an adaptation set for the small screen. This series has only received positive reviews from critics for its dedication to the source material and its worldbuilding. Walker Scobell ("The Adam Project") plays 12-year-old Percy as he learns he is the son of the Greek god Poseidon; Percy enters his father's world to join Camp Half-Blood, a camp for demigod teenagers. Leah Jeffries ("Empire") portrays Annabeth Chase, daughter of the Greek goddess Athena. All eight episodes are out now, and a second season looks quite promising! (Disney+)

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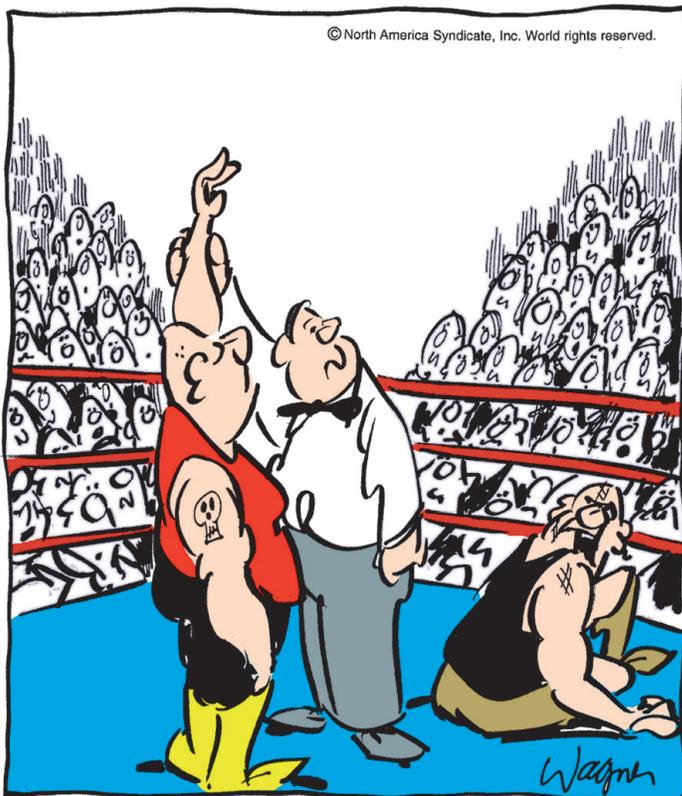
1. Who had the most popular version of "Proud Mary" -- Creedence Clearwater Revival or Ike & Tina Turner?
2. In Ray Stevens' 1962 "Ahab the Arab," what was the name of the camel?
3. How many No. 1 hits did the Beach Boys have? What are they?
4. Name the singer/actor who released "Tiger" in 1959.
5. Name the song that contains this lyric: "If you're gonna give me good kissin' like that, Honey, don'tcha know I'm gonna give 'em right back to you."

Answers

1. CCR's version hit No. 2 on the Hot 100 chart, and Ike & Tina Turner's version went to No. 4. However, the Turner's version took a Grammy in 1972. The Proud Mary was a real tow boat on the Mississippi River from 1928 to 1978. She was built in 1905 and was used at times to carry prisoners.
2. Clyde.
3. Of their 37 Top 40 hits, only four made it to No. 1: "Good Vibrations," "Help Me, Rhonda," "Kokomo" and "I Get Around."
4. Fabian, born Fabian Anthony Forte.
5. "Rockin' Good Way," by Brook Benton and Dinah Washington, in 1960. The song was the second chart topper for this duo. The other was "Baby (You've Got What It Takes)."

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GRIN and BEAR IT ^{by Wagner}



"Excuse me ... I believe that's MY arm!"

Just Like Cats & Dogs ^{by Dave T. Phipps}



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HOCUS-FOCUS

BY
HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



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Differences: 1. Newspaper is longer. 2. Hat is larger. 3. Label is missing. 4. File cabinet is taller. 5. Man is thinner. 6. Jacket sleeve is shorter.

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* "For nice, evenly sliced mushrooms, use an egg slicer for cutting. It's super-easy to use, since a boiled egg and a nice white mushroom are around the same size. I get good, uniform slices with the slicer." -- P.E. in Colorado

* Try auto polish on tough bathtub stains. There is a little more grit in it than usual bathroom cleaners. Be sure to rinse well, and don't rub too hard, as it may scratch the tub surface.

* "Tissue boxes can be used to hold plastic baggies under the sink in the bathroom. I use grocery-store bags to line my bathroom trash can. I choose a color-coordinated tissue box that has been emptied, and I fill it with the plastic liners, then set it under the toilet tank. It's still nice-looking, even though it's out of the way, and I have baggies at the

ready." -- E.R. in Mississippi

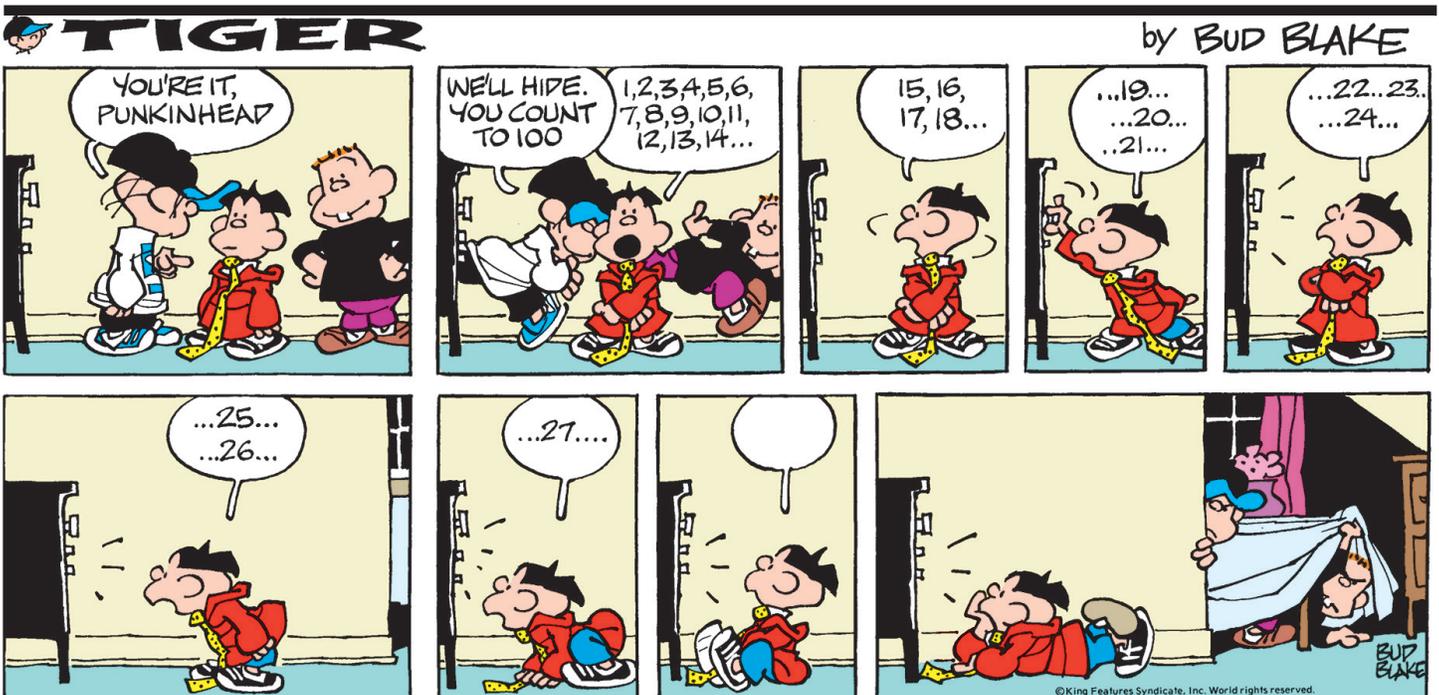
* "Return envelopes that come with junk mail can be saved and repurposed at coupon holders/grocery lists. I tuck my weekly coupons inside, and write my list on the back of the envelope, which is usually blank." -- C.G. in Oregon

* To keep track of takeout menus, use a three-prong notebook with an assortment of sheet protectors. Insert the menu into a sheet protector and file away. You can group menus by cuisine or by price.

* Tired of losing matched socks? Purchase a large delicates bag for each family member. Put dirty socks in the personal bag so they cannot be lost.

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

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King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 TV schedule abbr.
- 4 Rotate
- 8 Exerciser's target
- 12 Slithery fish
- 13 Layered cookie
- 14 Greek vowel
- 15 Selflessness
- 17 Seize
- 18 Chapeau
- 19 Slogan
- 21 Garden figurines
- 24 Use henna
- 25 Post-op area
- 26 Apply cream
- 28 College study
- 32 Close by
- 34 "Gee, ya think?"

1	2	3		4	5	6	7		8	9	10	11
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37				38		39		40		41		
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46	47	48				49		50				
51					52		53				54	55
56					57					58		
59					60					61		

- 36 Golfer's cry
- 60 French perfume brand
- 10 — impasse
- 35 "Tell —" (Streisand/Dion song)
- 37 Campfire leftovers
- 61 Prom rental
- 11 Innocent one
- 38 Fr. holy woman
- 39 Clothing protector
- 20 Workout venue
- 40 Monopoly job
- 41 Sandwich meat
- 21 Actress Gershon
- 43 Seafood selection
- 42 "— been real"
- 22 Mark Harmon TV series
- 45 Cyclades island
- 44 By and large
- 23 Melancholy
- 46 Stated
- 46 Opposite of candor
- 27 Fella
- 47 Lighten
- 50 Eggy quaff
- 29 "Atlas Shrugged" hero
- 48 Baby's bed
- 51 Bern's river
- 6 Take it easy
- 49 Boo-Boo's buddy
- 52 Halite
- 7 Wanderer
- 30 Exam format
- 53 — -Magnon
- 56 Egyptian deity
- 8 Biblical cover-up?
- 31 "Ratatouille" rat
- 54 Lucy of "Elementary"
- 57 Shrek, for one
- 9 Petty of "Tank Girl"
- 33 Patty Hearst, for one
- 55 Box office buys, slangily
- 58 Half of CIV

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— King Crossword —

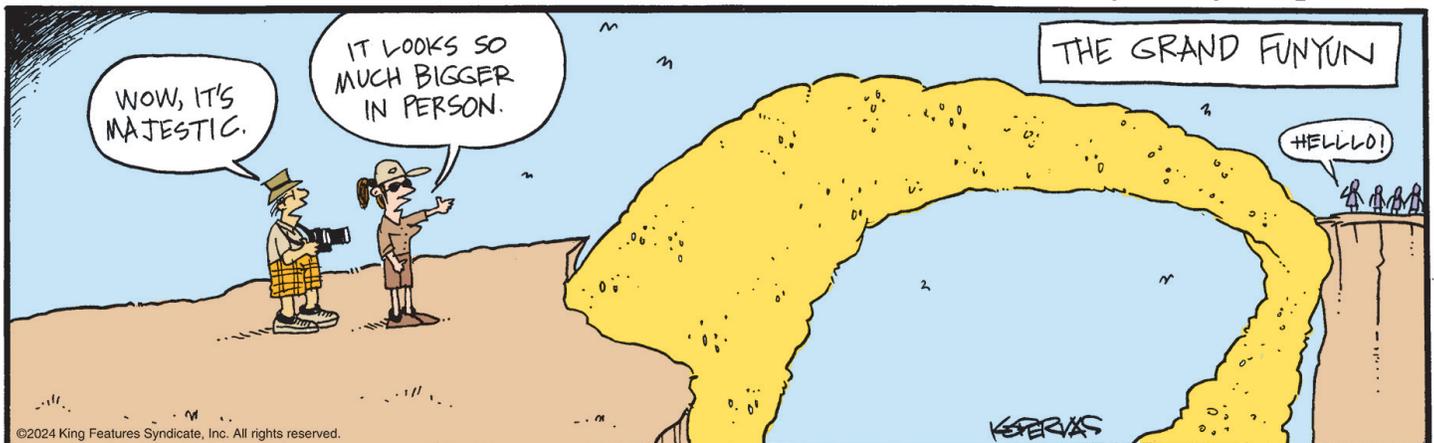
Answers

Solution time: 25 mins.

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		H	A	T		T	A	G	L	I	N	E
G	N	O	M	E	S		D	Y	E			
I	C	U		D	A	B		M	A	J	O	R
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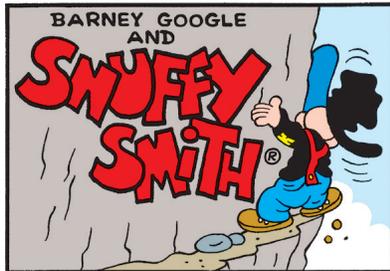
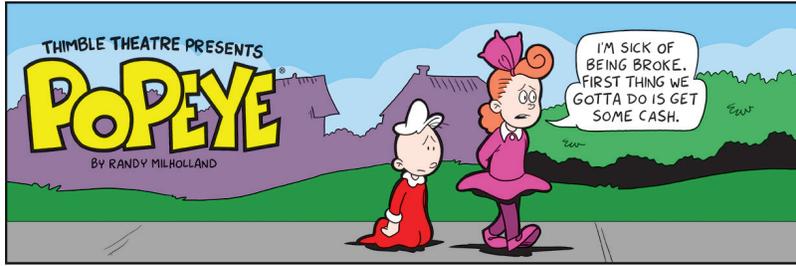
Out on a Limb

by Gary Kopervas



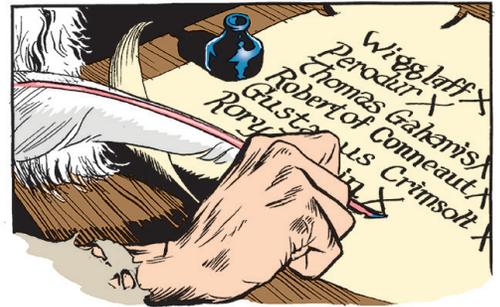
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"...RORY WAS A FRIEND OF LORD GRUNYARD BEFORE SIR ROGER. IN HIS WISDOM, CLOSED LOCKBRAMBLE'S GAME TO ALL BUT ROGER AND HIS CHOSEN!" VAL WINCES, THINKING THAT GAWAIN MAY BE LAYING IT ON A BIT THICK...

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...BUT NONE SEEM TO NOTE THE SLIGHT TO SIR ROGER. RORY IS SOON MADE A RECOGNIZED CONTESTANT IN THE GOVERNOR'S ARCHERY TOURNAMENT AND THEY ARE ON THEIR WAY. "AND WHERE, MY SPONSORS," ASKS RORY IN AN ODDLY HIGH VOICE, "AM I TO SLEEP TONIGHT?"



RORY IS UNEASY WITH GAWAIN'S INFORMALITY: "DO NOT THINK TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF AN 'OLD MAN'..."

NEXT:
Waiting the trap



The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



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PICKERING

SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

It's still here

Uh oh. It appears that in my ZIP code the number of Covid cases has doubled in the past week. Not only that, but two close neighbors are sick.

One neighbor tested positive and, within two days (without benefit of a negative test), went back to work while still feeling ill. The other neighbor caught "something" from a co-worker who had tested positive for Covid. But she didn't take a test to find out what that something was and went to work anyway.

We're all so tired of this; tired of testing for the least little sniffle. But we do test, because we need to know. Many others are so fed up that they're ignoring the reality: They don't test when ill so they can say they haven't tested positive, and they go to work, possibly passing the illness to colleagues and customers.

I've charted the weekly stats for four years now and can quote the approximate number of positive Covid cases in my Zip code. Since we have the free at-home tests, all of the results don't get reported, which skews the real numbers. A university think tank, however, came up with a multiplier number -- 14.2 -- as the number to use.

If your local number is 15 cases (as reported by doctors or officials), multiply that by 14.2 to get a more accurate number of how many cases are really in your area.

While Covid has gone through numerous variants, some things haven't changed. Symptoms might not show up for several days. Someone who has Covid can be contagious for five days or more. If you think you (or someone around you) have a cold, take a Covid test. If you think you have Covid, call your doctor to let them know your symptoms. As always, wash your hands.

Remember: If someone around you has a mild case of Covid and gives it to you, your case might not be mild at all.

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1. What U.S. Olympic gymnast retired from the sport in 1972 and went on to a successful career on the stage, most notably playing the title character in "Peter Pan"?

2. George Balabushka was considered to be the finest craftsman of what wooden sports equipment?

3. Jon Bon Jovi, Richie Sambora and Ron Jaworski were in the ownership group of what Arena Football League team that began play in 2004?

4. What member of the 1908 Chicago Cubs is the only player to have thrown four strikeouts in a single inning in a World Series game?

5. How many games did Marty Mornhinweg win in his two seasons as head coach of the Detroit Lions from 2001-02?

6. What American cyclist recovered from near-fatal wounds suffered in a 1987 hunting accident to win his second and third Tour de France titles in 1989-90?

7. Name the Swiss businessman who was elected president of FIFA in 1998 and was ousted in 2015 after a corruption and bribery scandal.



by Ryan A. Berenz

Answers

1. Cathy Rigby.
2. Pool cues.
3. The Philadelphia Soul.
4. Orval Overall.
5. Five.
6. Greg LeMond.
7. Sepp Blatter.

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Amber Waves





Are dogs really happy in freezing weather?

DEAR PAW'S CORNER: While walking along the local riverway this frosty weekend, I noticed at least three people whose dogs were under-equipped for the cold. One dog wore an insulated vest but no booties; the other two dogs wore no cold protection at all. Why do so many owners ignore their dogs' comfort and safety this way? -- Harold in New Hampshire

DEAR HAROLD: Unfortunately, not every dog owner knows that it's up to them to protect their pets from cold-weather hazards. Most dogs won't ask for a sweater vest, and I've yet to meet one that didn't

hate booties. I know quite a few dogs that just won't tolerate booties.

Many owners do know their dogs' limits in the cold, however. They check the temperature before going outside and survey the sidewalk or trail they're on for hazards like ice chunks, salt or glazing. They limit the time spent outdoors so their dog's core temperature doesn't drop. They monitor their dogs to make sure they're not shivering or in pain, and that their paws aren't getting frostbitten. And they carefully wipe and check their dogs' paws as soon as they get back indoors.

How do you, an observer, make sure that an owner is following these guidelines? Confronting owners is not advisable. You may be able to strike up a casual conversation on the path, and ask how their dog tolerates the cold weather. But don't preach at them. In my experience, owners who take the time to walk their dogs on a leash in freezing weather do care about their health and keep an eye on them in the cold.

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

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Strange BUT TRUE

By Lucie Winborne

bronze and were prized possessions of rich households in Egypt, Greece, Rome, China and Japan.

* The Statue of Liberty's full name is Liberty Enlightening the World.

* A study conducted at the University of Montreal showed that young people who played the 1996 game Super Mario 64 for only two months increased their spatial and episodic memory, which improves brain capacity and helps to ward off dementia.

* More than 20% of all the world's freshwater is in the Great Lakes.

* While humans and giraffes obviously have vastly different neck lengths, they still have the exact same number (seven) of neck vertebrae.

* Ever wonder why some cocktails are shaken while others are stirred? Chalk it up to the level of dilution and texture required: The longer the shake or stir, the more diluted and cold the beverage gets. Hence cocktails made with spirits, tonics and bitters should be stirred, while those featuring fruit juices, egg whites, cream or cream-based liqueurs should be shaken.

* Folks used to say "prunes" rather than "cheese" when having their pictures taken.

Thought for the Day: "It is not by muscle, speed or physical dexterity that great things are achieved, but by reflection, force of character and judgment, and in these qualities old age is usually not only not poorer, but is even richer." -- Cicero

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* In 2012, a 90-year-old Baltimore woman named Venus Green locked a police officer in her basement when he tried searching her home without a warrant. Afterward, she brought a civil rights lawsuit and won a \$95,000 settlement.

* "Jeopardy!" contestants stand on adjustable platforms so that they all appear to be the same height on camera.

* Chess is a required school subject in Armenia.

* Before the modern glass versions we use today became commonplace, mirrors were made from

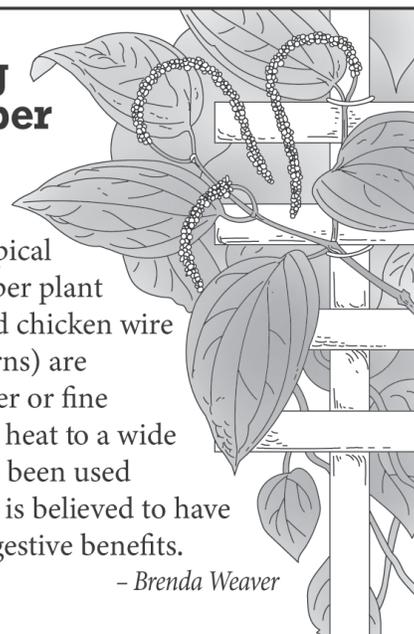
The Garden Bug

Growing black pepper

This plant is native to South India and is widely cultivated in tropical regions around the world. A black pepper plant needs support such as a trellis or staked chicken wire as they grow. Its fruit (called peppercorns) are collected, dried and ground into powder or fine flakes which are used to add flavor and heat to a wide variety of dishes. Black pepper has also been used medicinally for thousands of years and is believed to have antioxidant, anti-inflammatory and digestive benefits.

Sources: balconygardenweb.com, wikipedia

- Brenda Weaver





by Freddy Groves

A New Life Insurance Program

The Department of Veterans Affairs has started a new life insurance program for the first time in 50 years, and the details are worth noting. Called VALife, it's different from (and much better than) the previous insurance program. In fact, within the first year, over 30,000 veterans have signed up.

With the old program, S-DVI, veterans with service-connected disabilities only had two years to sign up from the time of receiving a disability rating. VALife has no such limitation.

With the old program, you had to be in good health (except for the disability) before you could apply. The new program has no limit, and no medical exam is required.

The old program limited veterans to \$10,000 in coverage. The new program, VALife, offers up to \$40,000 in whole life insurance.

The policy starts to build cash value after two years. If there's a death in the first two years, the payment to the beneficiary would be the premiums that had been paid plus interest. (If you currently have a policy under the old program, you can keep that coverage while you wait for the two-year benefit of the new policy to kick in -- that's if you apply before Dec. 31, 2025.)

You can apply online and get an immediate response. Additionally, you can make payments and changes to beneficiaries online.

Premiums will never change and depend on your age.

If you're a veteran age 80 or under, and if you have any level of service-connected disability (that means 0-100%), your acceptance is guaranteed. If you're over the age of 80, there are eligibility points that still might allow you to buy coverage. See the URL below for those eligibility requirements.

To read the details about VALife, go online to www.va.gov/life-insurance/options-eligibility/valife to see if you're eligible and how to sign up. The cost of the policy is noted in the drop-down chart of premium rates by age. (There is a discount if you pay yearly.)

If you have questions, call the VA Life Insurance Center at 800-669-8477.

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Wishing Well®

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

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

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1. ANIMAL KINGDOM: What is a beaver's home called?
2. U.S. STATES: In which state would you find Crater Lake?
3. TELEVISION: Which animated cartoon character says, "What's up, Doc?"
4. LITERATURE: Who is the author of "The Exorcist"?
5. MATH: In Roman numerals, what is XVIII times V?
6. ANATOMY: How many vertebrae are in the human spine?
7. GEOGRAPHY: Which nation is home to Europe's largest glacier?
8. MOVIES: In which film does Doris Day sing "Que Sera, Sera"?
9. SCIENCE: What is anemophily?
10. MUSIC: Who sang the hit "Girls Just Want to Have Fun"?

Answers

1. A lodge.
2. Oregon.
3. Bugs Bunny.
4. William Peter Blatty.
5. XC (90).
6. 33.
7. Iceland.
8. "The Man Who Knew Too Much."
9. Pollination by the wind.
10. Cyndi Lauper.

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South Dakota Governor

Kristi Noem



South Dakota: *Under God, the People Rule*

Keeping and Bearing Arms for Generations

Growing up in rural South Dakota, shooting sports and hunting were a big part of how I was raised. Some of my favorite memories with my family are of our time hunting and shooting guns. And one of my earliest memories is pheasant hunting with my Grandma Dorris.

Many South Dakotans have the same kind of experiences with their own families and had similar up-bringsings. We are all very proud of our small-town way of life and our rural values – and that has led us to become the most Second Amendment-friendly state in the nation.

In South Dakota, we encourage our people to exercise their Second Amendment rights. Constitutional Carry was the very first bill that I signed into law as Governor. Two years ago, we became the first state in America to waive all fees for concealed carry permits. We even pay for people's federal background checks. So it doesn't cost South Dakotans a penny to exercise their Second Amendment rights. And last year, I signed an Executive Order which says that the state will not do business with any financial institution that infringes on people's Second Amendment Rights.

We have marketed our state as a Second Amendment haven. Last year, California became the first state in the nation to levy a special tax on guns and ammunition. I immediately invited California gun manufacturers to move here to South Dakota, and my Office of Economic Development is continuing to recruit firearms business from state that infringe on the Second Amendment. Freedom Works Here for gun sellers and manufacturers, and we are welcoming businesses that are looking for a state that supports their industry.

I am determined to uphold South Dakota's reputation as the most Second Amendment-friendly state in America for generations to come. That is where the South Dakota Shooting Sports Complex comes in. The Department of Game, Fish & Parks (GFP) has already started to move dirt on this world-class shooting range in the Black Hills.

Originally, this was going to be a federally funded project, but the Biden Administration is undermining it by changing the rules after they had already signed off. The good news is South Dakota has never relied on the federal government. I We do things better on our own, anyways. That's why we're just going to raise the money and build this shooting range ourselves.

I am working with GFP to continue to build this range which will host world class events and positively impact our economy in the long term. We went to the National Shooting Sports Foundation's Shot Show to fundraise for this range. We met with leading firearms businesses from around the country who pledged their support – and some of them may even be interested in moving their companies to South Dakota.

This will be the premier firearms range in the Midwest. It will give our residents and our visitors access to quality shooting ranges where they can learn safe and responsible use of firearms. The South Dakota Shooting Sports Complex will provide opportunities so that generations to come can learn to love shooting sports just as I did.

To learn more about the South Dakota Shooting Sports Complex, and to donate to help us complete the project, visit GunRange.SD.Gov.

John Thune
U.S. SENATOR - SOUTH DAKOTA



A Solution in Search of a Problem

An internet connection is something we increasingly depend on in just about every area of our life these days. There remains work to be done to get a reliable connection to more Americans, especially in rural areas like South Dakota. But thanks in large part to the light-tough regulatory approach we have taken in the past, the internet in the United States continues to advance, delivering greater benefits for Americans online.

Given the success of this light-tough approach, one has to wonder why the Biden Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is now pushing for a return to heavy-handed net neutrality rules last attempted under the Obama administration. The basic premise of net neutrality – that internet service providers shouldn't prioritize certain internet traffic at the expense of other traffic – has strong bipartisan support. The issue is that the Biden FCC aims to go much further and, under the guise of net neutrality, assert broad new government powers over the internet using rules designed for telephone monopolies during the Great Depression. Like the Obama-era rules before it, the latest net neutrality proposal threatens to decrease investment in broadband and subject the internet to more government interference, like regulating prices.

In 2017, a new Republican majority on the FCC repealed the Obama-era net neutrality rules. The prospect was met with near-hysteria as Democrats warned that the internet as we knew it would disappear, that speeds would slow to a crawl, and that we would get the internet one word at a time. But anyone who's been online in the last seven years knows none of this came to pass. In fact, the internet hasn't just survived, it's thrived since then. Innovation has flourished. Competition has increased. And internet speeds have gotten faster and faster.

It's unclear what the Biden FCC's so-called net neutrality proposal is trying to achieve besides more government control. As FCC Commissioner Carr has pointed out, there's reason to fear this proposal could drive up Americans' internet costs and open the door to new taxes and fees on your internet bill. This proposal could also decrease investment in broadband expansion, which would be devastating for rural areas like South Dakota where investment is critically needed.

More red tape is not the solution to bridging the digital divide. Reducing the burdensome regulations that stifle broadband expansion has long been a priority of mine. The permitting process is just one example of this. While my MOBILE NOW Act helped move the federal government in the right direction, there continues to be unnecessary delays and costs associated with permitting that get in the way of expanding internet access. I will continue to work for accountability and efficiency in federal broadband programs to ensure more South Dakotans have access to a reliable internet connection.

Plans for increased government interference, like the FCC's net neutrality proposal, are often a solution in search of a problem. America has played a leading role in the digital age in large part because we've adopted a light-tough approach to internet regulation. There is absolutely no reason for heavy-handed interference in a free, open, and thriving sector of our economy, and I will continue my work to remove unnecessary regulations that cause Americans to lose out on the benefits of internet innovation.

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CONGRESSMAN
DUSTY JOHNSON
Representing **SOUTH DAKOTA** at large



See you soon, Stock Show!

This weekend marks the start of the 65th annual Black Hills Stock Show. The Stock Show is one of my favorite events each year, giving me the opportunity to connect with producers from across our state and region. This year's event runs from January 26 to February 3 and has events for everyone to enjoy like the rodeo, concerts, vendors and more.

As I walk around and talk with folks, they share the challenges they face and the opportunities they see as they provide food and goods for our nation. Supporting these producers has been a top priority for me since I took office. I want to ensure South Dakotans are heard and I want legislation to support their efforts, especially in the upcoming Farm Bill.

I've heard concerns from our farmers and ranchers about our adversaries like China buying up American farmland. As a member of the Ag Committee and the Select Committee on China, I've supported bills aimed at preventing the Chinese Communist Party from purchasing our valuable ag land. Our producers know the importance of our land better than anyone else. Protecting this land, our food supply, and our national security is crucial.

A couple months ago, I was honored to be presented with the American Farm Bureau Federation's Golden Plow Award. This award is only given to one House Republican each year and recognizes members who exemplify agricultural policy leadership. It is the highest honor AFBF bestows to sitting members of Congress. I am glad our team's hard work delivers real results to agriculture, and we don't plan on stopping.

I am proud to be a leader in agricultural policy, and I am proud to represent our ag producers across South Dakota. If you're headed out to the Stock Show this weekend, be sure to say hi!

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The Key To Life Is Forgetting The Right Things

The thing that has concerned me as I have aged was about forgetting things. How could I remember everything when I was crowding my brain with all kinds of new things?

In this regard, there is no comparison between The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage and myself. I have a problem remembering, and her problem is forgetting. She can't forget anything. She remembers things that I don't think ever happened. How she does that is above my pay scale.

My concern has always been that I would forget things I needed to remember and it would cause a lot of difficulty in my relationships. My biggest concern is forgetting the names of people, especially relatives. I can never figure out why some people have such weird names, hard to remember.

Thinking about this, something came to mind. When I was younger, I forgot a lot of things but all that forgetting did not keep me from growing older. In fact, I forgot some stuff on purpose just to get out of some jam. My aging had nothing to do with my forgetting.

I began to think that forgetting may result from something other than getting old. Maybe forgetting is a way of dealing with some of the issues of life.

In thinking about this, I have concluded that the key to a good life is knowing what to forget and what to remember. If I can master this, I will not have any problems.

I've been trying to develop the art of forgetting in my life. If I know what to forget, my life will be better.

Number one on my list of not forgetting is The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage. That is the hard one. I must remember all of the right things regarding her and forget all the other things.

When we started our matrimonial journey, I had no idea about this. My idea was to get along, just go along. That works with some people, but it doesn't seem to work with me.

I have to make a list of things to forget and then a list of things to remember.

The list of things to remember is pretty long, including her birthday, our anniversary, our children's birthdays and their anniversaries, and our grandchildren's birthdays. Along with that list are the names of all of those people.

If I had charge of things, which I don't, I would tattoo the names of our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren on their foreheads along with their birthday. That sure would help me a lot.

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Another thing on the list to remember was everything she said to me. I can't tell you how many times she has asked, "Don't you remember what I said yesterday?"

Now, the problem with that question is that she said so much yesterday it is tough for me to remember anything she said yesterday.

My list of things to remember gets longer every year.

But the things to forget could be even longer. I sometimes get the two lists confused, and boy, do I get into trouble.

It boils down to this. I must always remember every time she is right. But then I also must forget every time she is wrong.

I must keep alert when we are with some friends because somewhere along the conversation, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage will say, "My dear, do you remember...?" When that happens, I know that my sanity is on the line.

Or, another question would be, "My dear, remember our vacation last year?" Sometimes, I do have a little bit of a memory, but not often. With a great smile, I will respond by saying, "Oh yes I do. It was the best planned vacation we ever had."

I'm all right for the rest of the evening if I can get away with that. Because she really doesn't want me to tell about the vacation just to go along with her idea of that vacation. If I could remember something about our vacation last year, it would be an unusual episode of whose clock is ticking.

The biggest challenge I have is to forget every time she is wrong. I don't know what it is about me, but these things I can never forget. She's not wrong often, but when she is, I take great delight in that. I can't reveal my delight to her in any fashion, but it's there.

Maybe I cannot forget them, but I am developing the discipline not to bring them up in any conversation. Sometimes, I want to bring one up just to take advantage of a situation, but thinking of that, I really do love living.

Knowing what to forget and what to remember has been an important key in my life. The big problem here is that I have a hard time choosing what to remember and what to forget.

I couldn't help but think of what the Apostle Paul said in Philippians 3:13-15,
"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Forgetting the right things makes room for me to remember the right things. If I'm going to press forward in my life I must forget some things in the past.

EARTHTALK ™

Dear EarthTalk: What ever became of the Biosphere 2 project in Arizona and what did we learn from it?

-- B.C., Tampa, FL

Biosphere 2 project began in 1984, led by John Allen who called it "The Human Experiment." The project sent eight explorers, or "biospherians," to live in a sealed ecosystem for two years. The facility they would be living in came complete with an intensive agriculture unit and five separate biomes including a tropical rainforest and a savanna grassland. Early on, Biosphere 2 was the world's first mini biosphere and became a landmark in the fields of biospherics and closed ecological systems. Many wondered why was it called Biosphere 2 if it was a first. That's because Biosphere 1 is planet Earth.

The Biosphere 2 experiment was meant to explore the possibility of using closed ecological systems to support and maintain human life in outer space as an alternative to Earth's biosphere. The three main goals of the experiment were education, eco-technology development, and to learn how well their eco-laboratory worked. The project also hoped to help NASA and other space agencies learn more about life-support systems for long-term space missions.

In 1991, the eight biospherians began what would be their two-year stay in Biosphere 2. The group consisted of four men and four women—five Americans, two Britons and one Belgian. Their plan would be to spend two years studying how a mini-biosphere would work with as few outside inputs as possible. As a fairly new concept, there were many challenges that came with living in an enclosed biome. The facility had to replicate many of Earth's innate services, such as ocean waves. Each biome had to have the correct temperature and rainfall amounts. The biospherians also had to grow their own food and slaughter their own livestock. Growing their own food was such an endeavor that it required each crew member to work on farming three to four hours a day, five days a week.

Biosphere 2 dramatically expanded scientists' visualization of what living off-planet would entail. It revolutionized the field of experimental ecology and proved that a sealed ecosystem could work for years, a lesson that the Mars colony planners can build off of. The experiment also provided lessons on how to maintain nature in the grasps of global warming. The biospherians learned how to keep stressed reefs alive, how to protect rainforests, and how to work with plants to keep carbon dioxide levels down.

Since 2006, the Biosphere 2 facilities have been owned and managed by the University of Arizona. It is no longer a closed ecological system, but a facility where ecological systems similar to Earth's biomes are experimentally researched. These experiments allow scientists to learn more about the effects of global warming out in the real world. In 2023 the University of Arizona launched SAM, a Space Analog for the Moon and Mars. Built around the original Biosphere 2 facility, SAM serves as a controlled environment or greenhouse for visiting research teams to live while conducting individual research projects.

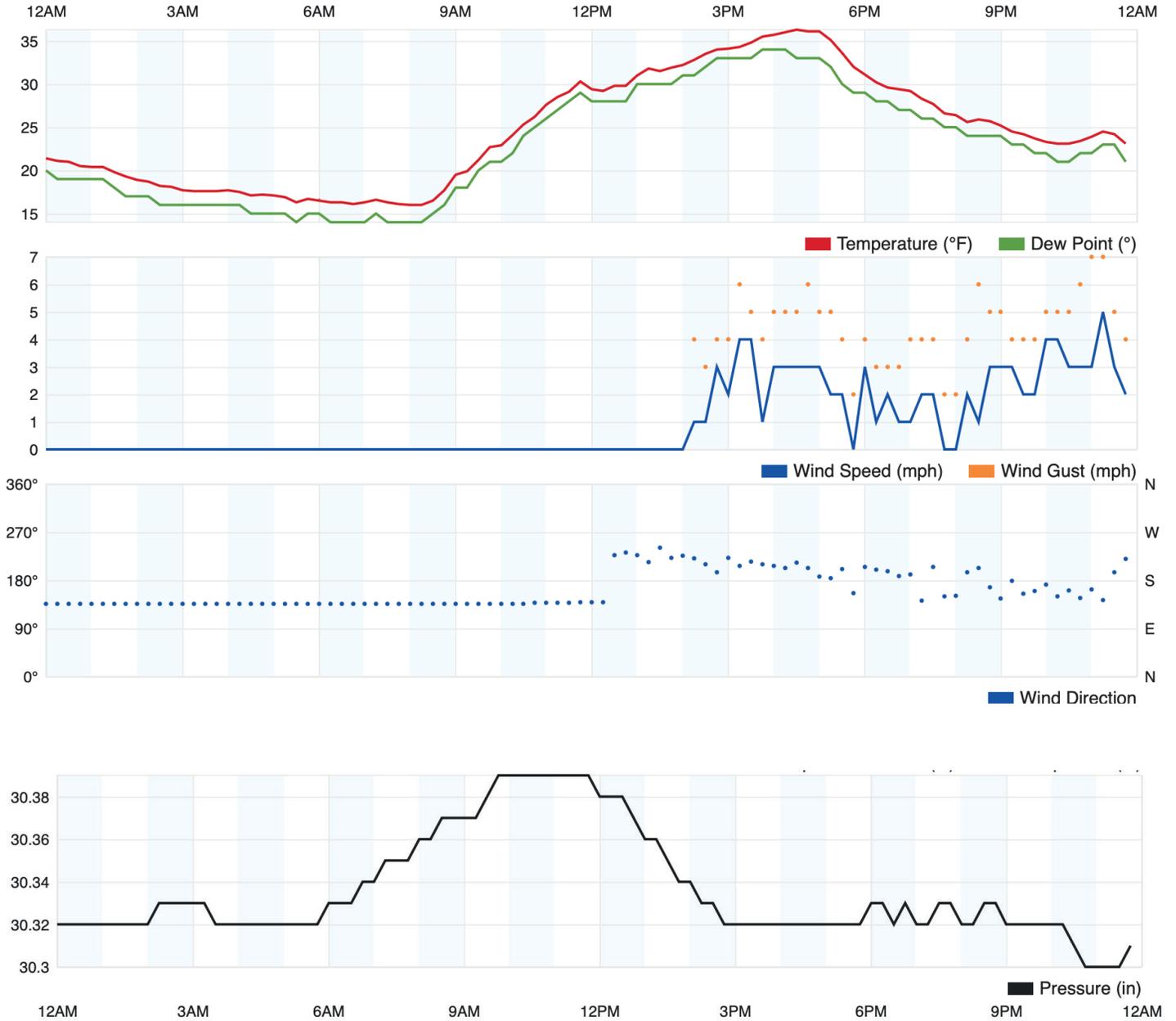


It's been more than two decades since the launch of Biosphere 2 and we are still learning from the project. Credit: John de Dios, CC

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



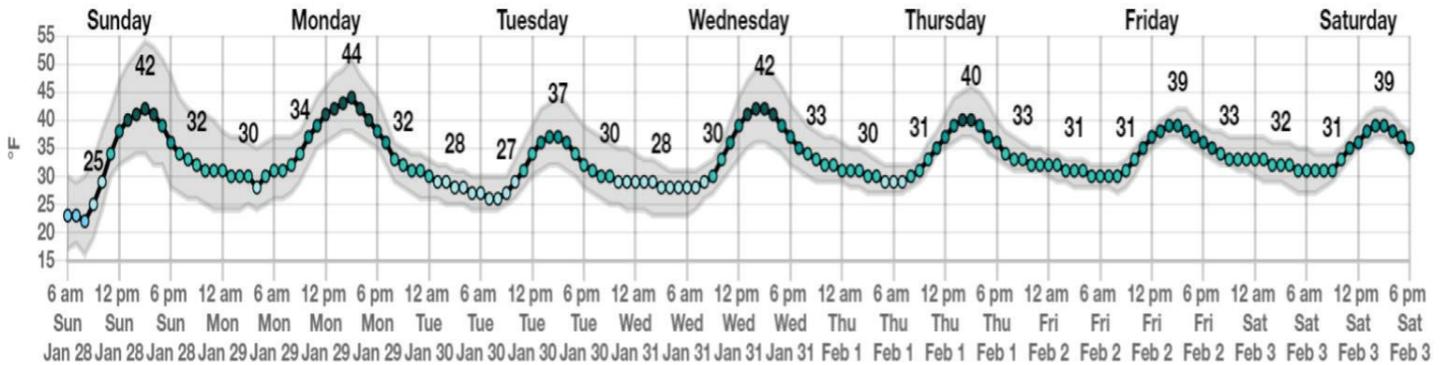
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Sun Jan 28	Mon Jan 29	Tue Jan 30	Wed Jan 31	Thu Feb 1	Fri Feb 2	Sat Feb 3
40°F	43°F	37°F	42°F	44°F	44°F	43°F
25°F	25°F	27°F	30°F	33°F	33°F	26°F
S	SW	NW	SSW	S	SE	ESE
12 MPH	13 MPH	7 MPH	11 MPH	11 MPH	15 MPH	16 MPH
						30%

 **Temperatures Across The Forecast Area** January 28, 2024
4:48 AM
Highs & Lows Through Saturday, February 3rd

Regional Temperature Forecast



(Warmest = Central SD/Colest = Northeast SD/western MN)



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Temperatures will be above average for the next several days which will help melt the snow we've got on the ground (some more than others).

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 36 °F at 4:31 PM

Low Temp: 16 °F at 8:02 AM

Wind: 7 mph at 10:52 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 38 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 53 in 1931

Record Low: -31 in 1915

Average High: 24

Average Low: 2

Average Precip in Jan.: 0.50

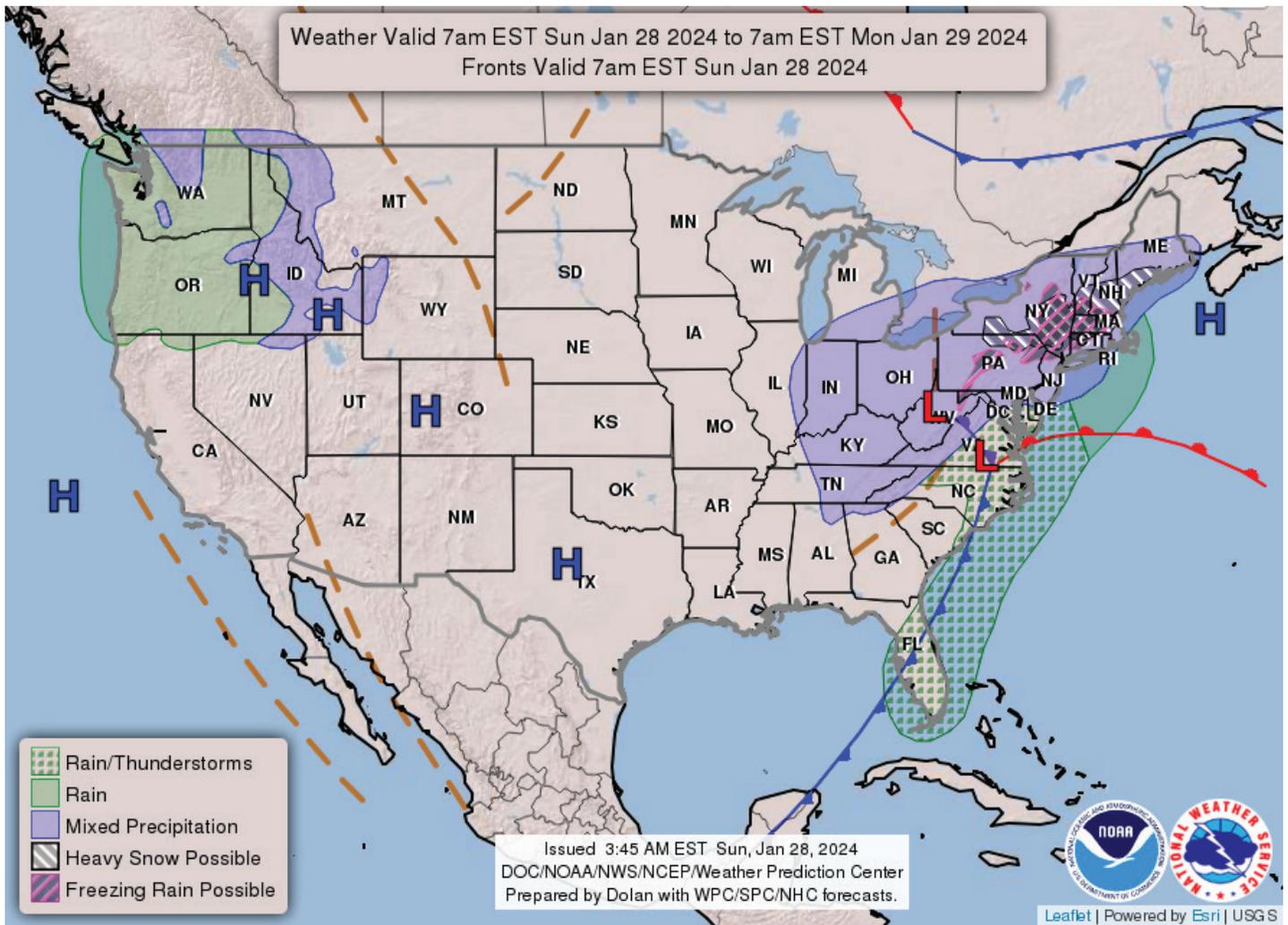
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.50

Precip Year to Date: 0.00

Sunset Tonight: 5:34:19 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:55:09 am



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Today in Weather History

January 28, 1983: Freezing rain coated much of eastern South Dakota with up to a half-inch accumulation before it changed over to light snow from the late evening of the 28th to the late evening of the 29th. The combination of ice, light snow, and powerful winds made travel extremely difficult. Numerous accidents and stranded vehicles resulted. Visibilities were near zero at times.

January 28, 1996: Extreme wind chills developed across central, north-central, and northeast South Dakota, and west-central Minnesota as cold arctic air moved in behind an area of low pressure. With temperatures falling well below zero and northwest winds increasing to 20 to 35 mph, wind chills dropped to 40 to 70 below throughout the night of the 28th and into the evening of the 29th. Two to five inches of snow had fallen across the area. The strong northwest winds caused areas of blowing snow, significantly reducing visibilities. Big Stone and Traverse counties experienced a blizzard for about six hours on the 29th.

January 28, 2013: A low-pressure system moving slowly across the region produced a moderate to a heavy band of snow across much of central and northeastern South Dakota. Snowfall rates exceeded one inch per hour in some locations. Several area schools and businesses were either closed or opened late on the 29th.

1887: Snowflakes "as large as milk pans" fell at Fort Keogh of Montana. The flakes, which were said to measure 15 inches across and 8 inches thick, hold the unofficial size record!

Jan 28, 1887 - Milk Pan size snowflakes

Jan 28, 1887 - Milk Pan size snowflakes Tue, Feb 15, 1887 – 1 · St. Albans Daily Messenger (Saint Albans, Vermont) · Newspapers.com

1922 - The "Knickerbocker" storm immobilized the city of Washington D.C. The storm produced 28 inches of snow in 32 hours, and the heavy snow caused the roof of the Knickerbocker movie theatre to collapse killing 96 persons. (David Ludlum)

1963 - The low of -34 degrees at Cynthiana, KY, equalled the state record established just four days earlier at Bonnieville. (The Weather Channel)

1969: Heavy rains of tropical origin that began on 1/18 ended on this day. As much as 50 inches of rain fell at 7,700 feet. 31 inches of rain fell on the south slopes of Mt. San Geronimo, 15.5 inches at San Jacinto Peak, around ten inches at Banning, less than one inch from Indio southeast. 91 were reported dead from flooding and mudslides all over California and state-wide.

1977: The Blizzard of '77 was one of the worst winter storms to hit southern Ontario and upstate New York. With the rapid onset of the storm, about 2,000 students in the Niagara region were stranded overnight in schools.

1986: The Space Shuttle Challenger broke apart at 11:39 am EST, 73 seconds after liftoff from the Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral, Florida, on a frigid morning. Starting in the 20s, the ground temperature at liftoff was 36 degrees. Morton Thiokol recommended not launching if the liftoff temperature was below 53 degrees. The cold was blamed for causing the O-rings on the Shuttle's external booster to fail, leading to the explosion. Low-level wind shear also played a factor.

1987 - A storm moving out of the Central Rockies into the Northern Plains Region produced up to a foot of snow in the Colorado Rockies, and wind gusts to 99 mph at Boulder CO. High winds in Colorado caused 5.6 million dollars damage. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Barometric pressure readings of 30.55 inches at Miami FL, 30.66 inches at Tampa FL, and 30.72 inches at Apalachicola FL were all-time record high readings for those locations. (National Weather Summary)

1989 - Nome, AK, reported an all-time record low reading of 54 degrees below zero, and the temperature at Fairwell AK dipped to 69 degrees below zero. Deadhorse AK reported a morning low of 49 degrees below zero, and with a wind chill reading of 114 degrees below zero. In the Lower Forty-eight States, a winter storm over Colorado produced up to 15 inches of snow around Denver. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Strong and gusty winds prevailed across the northwestern U.S., and heavy snow continued over the mountains of Washington State and Oregon. In Idaho, Mullan received seven inches of snow, and winds gusted to 65 mph southeast of Burley. Heavy rain soaked coastal

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

GUARD YOUR HEART!

She was over eighty years old and went to work every day. Though old in years, she was young at heart. She made her way through life in a wheelchair and was very successful in several different business ventures. She was also well-known for being involved in doing kind things for others who were going through difficult times.

"What caused you to end up in a wheelchair?" asked a friend one day.

"Infantile paralysis," she replied.

"My goodness! How do you cope?" the friend wondered, "and why do you do so many kind things for so many people?"

"Well," she said with a gracious smile, "the paralysis never touched my head or my heart."

Our head is the door to our hearts. What we see, think, and dwell upon shapes our feelings and is expressed in what we do and the way we act.

It was the writer of Proverbs who expressed this truth so well. "Keep and guard your heart with all vigilance," he wrote, "for out of it flow the springs of life."

Our hearts, the source of our feelings of love and desire, dictate the things that we do and say. How we live and what we find time to do and enjoy all come from "the inside" – our heart. Wisely, Solomon advises us to concentrate on those things that will reflect God's love to others. We must make sure that what matters most to us leads us in the right direction and demonstrates our concern for others. We can only do this if we focus on putting God first.

Prayer: Help us, Heavenly Father, to look straight ahead and keep our eyes focused on You. Keep us from becoming sidetracked by things that would destroy us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Keep and guard your heart with all vigilance for out of it flow the springs of life. Proverbs 4:23



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: 01.27.24

13 22 46 47 51 4

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$2,650,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.27.24

9 34 36 39 45 13

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 36 Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.27.24

3 6 15 22 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$33,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.27.24

4 28 34 50 61 16

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.27.24

7 38 65 66 68 21

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$174,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

Saturday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Christian 37, Waverly-South Shore 35
Avon 49, Kimball-White Lake 41
Beresford 58, Garretson 35
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Edgemont 51, Hemingford, Neb. 36
Elk Point-Jefferson 62, Kadoka 33
Elkton-Lake Benton 48, Great Plains Lutheran 43
Faulkton 52, Hitchcock-Tulare 31
Flandreau 55, Sioux Valley 29
Florence-Henry 49, Wagner 40
Harding County 59, New Underwood 10
James Valley Christian 73, Iroquois-Lake Preston 33
Jones County 51, Bennett County 38
Lemmon High School 49, Herreid-Selby 33
Leola-Frederick High School 60, Timber Lake 31
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Northwestern 59, Potter County 48
Parker 51, Baltic 35
Philip 58, Newell 49
Sioux Falls Jefferson 63, Sioux Falls Washington 47
Stanley County 31, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 17
Vermillion 56, Milbank 29
Wall 61, Lyman 58
Warner 52, Sully Buttes 35
Wessington Springs 61, Miller 52
Winner 42, Tri-Valley 34
Yankton 56, Douglas 35
Dakota Oyate Challenge=
Championship=
Omaha Nation, Neb. 60, Lower Brule 50
Consolation Final=
Tiospaye Topa 49, Flandreau Indian 32
Seventh Place=
Crazy Horse 46, Takini 19
Third Place=
Marty 69, Wakpala 54

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Crow Creek Tribal School 74, Dupree 71
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Dell Rapids 56, Milbank 48
Deubrook 69, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 57
Elk Point-Jefferson 62, Sisseton 47
Elkton-Lake Benton 46, Great Plains Lutheran 42, OT
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Rapid City Stevens 57, Rapid City Central 51
Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 63, Freeman 54
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 57, Pierre 46
Sioux Falls Washington 58, Sioux Falls Jefferson 55
Stanley County 69, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 59
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Tea 61, Clark-Willow Lake 35
Tri-Valley 87, Redfield 42
Vermillion 57, Parkston 38
Wall 72, Lyman 46
Wessington Springs 56, Miller 46
West Central 72, Webster 38
West Sioux, Iowa 54, Irene-Wakonda 53
Wolsey-Wessington 68, Hill City 66
Yankton 56, Douglas 43
Dakota Oyate Challenge=
Championship=
Lower Brule 53, Crazy Horse 49
Consolation Final=
Wakpala 83, Takini 57
Seventh Place=
Tiospaye Topa 44, Flandreau Indian 17
Third Place=
Marty 85, Omaha Nation, Neb. 71

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

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Weaver's 32 lead Oral Roberts over South Dakota State 87-82

By The Associated Press undefined

TULSA, Okla. (AP) — DeShang Weaver's 32 points led Oral Roberts over South Dakota State 87-82 on Saturday night.

Weaver also had three blocks for the Golden Eagles (10-11, 4-4 Summit League). Issac McBride scored 19 points while shooting 4 for 12 (0 for 3 from 3-point range) and 11 of 11 from the free-throw line, and added five rebounds and six assists. Jailen Bedford had 12 points and was 4-of-10 shooting (4 for 6 from 3-point range).

Zeke Mayo led the Jackrabbits (12-10, 5-2) in scoring, finishing with 23 points, six rebounds and seven assists. William Kyle III added 16 points and nine rebounds for South Dakota State. In addition, Kalen Garry had 15 points.

Petty scores 21 to lead Kansas City over South Dakota 81-57

By The Associated Press undefined

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Jayson Petty's 21 points helped UMKC defeat South Dakota 81-57 on Saturday night.

Petty also added five rebounds for the Kangaroos (9-13, 3-4 Summit League). Khristion Courseault was 4 of 8 shooting and 8 of 13 from the free throw line to add 17 points. Jamar Brown had 14 points and was 5 of 10 shooting, including 1 for 5 from 3-point range, and went 3 for 4 from the line.

The Coyotes (9-13, 2-5) were led by Lahat Thioune, who posted 20 points, nine rebounds and two steals. South Dakota also got 14 points from Kaleb Stewart.

Finns go to the polls to elect a new president at an unprecedented time for the NATO newcomer

HELSINKI (AP) — Voters in Finland were electing a new president Sunday at an unprecedented time for the Nordic nation that is now a NATO member with its eastern border with Russia closed — two things almost unthinkable a few years ago.

Polls across the country opened at 9 a.m. (0700 GMT) and will close at 8 p.m. (1800 GMT).

Unlike in most European countries, the president of Finland holds executive power in formulating foreign and security policy, particularly when dealing with countries outside the European Union like the United States, Russia and China.

The president also acts as the supreme commander of the Finnish military, a particularly important duty in Europe's current security environment.

Some 4.5 million citizens are eligible to vote for Finland's new head of state from an array of nine candidates — six men and three women. They are picking a successor to hugely popular President Sauli Niinistö, whose second six-year term expires in March. He is not eligible for re-election.

No candidate is expected get more than 50% of the vote in Sunday's first round of voting, pushing the race into a runoff in February.

Recent polls suggest that former Prime Minister Alexander Stubb, 55, and ex-Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto, 65, are the leading contenders.

Stubb, who represents the conservative National Coalition Party and headed the Finnish government in 2014-2015, and veteran politician Haavisto, an ex-United Nations diplomat running for the post for the third time, are each estimated to garner 23%-27% of the votes.

They are followed by Parliament speaker and former leader of the far-right Finns Party Jussi Halla-aho with around 18%. Bank of Finland governor and former EU Commissioner Olli Rehn is expected to receive about a 14% share of the votes.

Finland's new head of state will start a six-year term in March in a markedly different geopolitical and security situation in Europe than did incumbent Niinistö after the 2018 election.

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Abandoning decades of military non-alignment in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Finland became NATO's 31st member in April, much to the annoyance of President Vladimir Putin of Russia, which shares a 1,340-kilometer (832-mile) border with the Nordic nation.

NATO membership, which has made Finland the Western military alliance's front-line country toward Russia, and the war raging in Ukraine a mere 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) away from Finland's border have boosted the president's status as a security policy leader.

In line with consensus-prone Finnish politics, months of campaigning have proceeded smoothly among the candidates. They all agree on major foreign policy issues like Finland's future policies toward Russia, enhancing security cooperation with the United States and the need to continue helping Ukraine both militarily and with humanitarian assistance.

"I think (campaigning) has been done in a civilized mode because of the security situation," Pekka Haavisto told The Associated Press during his last campaign event at a music bar just outside the capital, Helsinki, late Saturday.

"We (candidates) don't disagree on basic questions. But it's a question of the credibility of the new president and his previous experience in foreign and security policy," said Haavisto, who as foreign minister signed Finland's historic accession treaty to NATO last year and played a key role in the membership process.

Advance vote results will be confirmed soon after polls close and initial results from Sunday's voting are expected by around midnight (2200 GMT). The first round results will be officially confirmed on Tuesday.

The likely second round of voting between the two candidates with the most votes is set for Feb. 11.

Ukraine says corrupt officials stole \$40 million meant to buy arms for the war with Russia

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Employees from a Ukrainian arms firm conspired with defense ministry officials to embezzle almost \$40 million earmarked to buy 100,000 mortar shells for the war with Russia, Ukraine's security service reported.

The SBU said late Saturday that five people have been charged, with one person detained while trying to cross the Ukrainian border. If found guilty, they face up to 12 years in prison.

The investigation comes as Kyiv attempts to clamp down on corruption in a bid to speed up its membership in the European Union and NATO. Officials from both blocs have demanded widespread anti-graft reforms before Kyiv can join them.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was elected on an anti-corruption platform in 2019, long before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Both the president and his aides have portrayed the recent firings of top officials, notably that of Ivan Bakanov, former head of the State Security Service, in July 2022, as proof of their efforts to crack down on graft.

Security officials say that the current investigation dates back to August 2022, when officials signed a contract for artillery shells worth 1.5 billion hryvnias (\$39.6 million) with arms firm Lviv Arsenal.

After receiving payment, company employees were supposed to transfer the funds to a business registered abroad, which would then deliver the ammunition to Ukraine.

However, the goods were never delivered and the money was instead sent to various accounts in Ukraine and the Balkans, investigators said. Ukraine's prosecutor general says that the funds have since been seized and will be returned to the country's defense budget.

Iran launches 3 satellites into space that are part of a Western-criticized program as tensions rise

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Iran said Sunday it successfully launched three satellites into space with a rocket that had multiple failures in the past, the latest for a program that the West says improves Tehran's ballistic missiles.

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The launch comes as heightened tensions grip the wider Middle East over Israel's continued war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip, sparking fears of a regional conflict.

While Iran has not intervened militarily in the conflict, it has faced increased pressure within its theocracy for action after a deadly Islamic State suicide bombing earlier this month and as proxy groups like Yemen's Houthi rebels conduct attacks linked to the war. Meanwhile, Western nations remain worried about Iran's rapidly expanding nuclear program.

Footage released by Iranian state television showed a nighttime launch for the Simorgh rocket. An Associated Press analysis of the footage showed that it took place at the Imam Khomeini Spaceport in Iran's rural Semnan province.

"The roar of the Simorgh (rocket) resonated in our country's sky and infinite space," said Abbas Rasooli, a state TV reporter, in the footage.

State TV named the launched satellites Mahda, Kayhan-2 and Hatef-1. It described the Mahda as a research satellite, while the Kayhan and the Hatef were nanosatellites focused on global positioning and communication respectively. Iran's Information and Communications Technology Minister Isa Zarepour said the Mahda had already sent signals back to Earth.

There have been five failed launches in a row for the Simorgh program, a satellite-carrying rocket. The Simorgh, or "Phoenix," rocket failures have been part of a series of setbacks in recent years for Iran's civilian space program, including fatal fires and a launchpad rocket explosion that drew the attention of former U.S. President Donald Trump.

The footage showed the rocket launched Sunday bore the slogan "We Can" in Farsi, likely referring to the previous failures.

The Simorgh is a two-stage, liquid-fueled rocket the Iranians described as being designed to place satellites into a low Earth orbit.

However, the U.S. intelligence community's 2023 worldwide threat assessment said the development of satellite launch vehicles "shortens the timeline" for Iran to develop an intercontinental ballistic missile because it uses similar technology. That report specifically cites the Simorgh as a possible dual-use rocket.

The United States has previously said Iran's satellite launches defy a U.N. Security Council resolution and called on Tehran to undertake no activity involving ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons. U.N. sanctions related to Iran's ballistic missile program expired last October.

Under Iran's relatively moderate former President Hassan Rouhani, the Islamic Republic slowed its space program for fear of raising tensions with the West. However, in the time since, the 2015 nuclear deal Rouhani shepherded with world powers has collapsed and tensions have been boiling for years with the U.S.

Hard-line President Ebrahim Raisi, a protégé of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei who came to power in 2021, has pushed the program forward. Meanwhile, Iran enriches uranium closer than ever to weapons-grade levels and enough material for several atomic bombs, though U.S. intelligence agencies and others assess Tehran has not begun actively seeking a nuclear weapon.

On Friday, France, Germany and the United Kingdom condemned an Iranian satellite launch on Jan. 20, similarly calling it capable of helping Iran develop long-range ballistic missiles.

"We have longstanding concerns over Iran's activity related to ballistic missile technologies that are capable of delivering nuclear weapons," the countries said. "These concerns are reinforced by Iran's continued nuclear escalation beyond all credible civilian justification."

Tehran maintains the largest arsenal of ballistic missiles in the Mideast, in part due to decades of sanctions following its 1979 Islamic Revolution and the U.S. Embassy hostage crisis blocking it from advanced fighter jets and other weapon systems.

The U.S. military and the State Department did not immediately respond to requests for comment Sunday. However, the U.S. military has quietly acknowledged the Jan. 20 launch conducted by the country's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard was successful.

James outduels Curry with a triple-double as Lakers take double-OT thriller vs. Warriors 145-144

By JANIE McCAULEY AP Sports Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Back and forth they went, one-upping the other, two of the greatest to ever play each believing he could will his team to win. Stepback 3s, fadeaway jumpers, drives and dishes. Two overtimes.

LeBron James vs. Stephen Curry. At their finest.

And at the very end, James made a pair of free throws with 1.2 seconds left to cap his triple-double of 36 points, career-high 20 rebounds and 12 assists, outdueling Curry as the Los Angeles Lakers held off the Golden State Warriors 145-144 on Saturday night.

"It's something I'll be able to talk about with my grandkids, talk about me being able to compete with one of the greatest players to ever play the game," James said. "So hopefully I can be cool with my grandkids at that point, for sure."

Curry danced through the paint for a layup that sent the game to overtime. He knocked down a 3-pointer high over Anthony Davis in the second overtime for a lead.

James scored the first points of a second extra session and found D'Angelo Russell the next time down for a 3.

"Every year we get to do this, the back-and-forth battles, all the Finals runs, to the playoffs last year, after the horn sounded tonight there was a little laugh of we can't like imagine a scenario where a game like tonight happens, his year, what, 21, and my year 15," Curry said. "All the other guys in the league who have been doing it 15-plus years, KD (Kevin Durant), CP (Chris Paul), it's insane.

"You look forward to the battles, but you also appreciate the mutual respect of what it takes to keep doing what you're doing at this level because only a few people know how hard it is. I'm happy to be in that group."

Lakers coach Darvin Ham had to stay focused as he sat close-up to witness the greatness.

"Oh, man," he exhaled afterward.

"Just trying to control myself first and foremost as a basketball fan," he said. "They should be real happy in New York, this was a hell of a basketball game, a high-level basketball game. Two legends going back and forth, two great organizations. It was fun to be a part of. It's just one of those wins where it showed our character. Our group is really coming together."

Curry hit a go-ahead 3-pointer with 4.7 seconds left in the second OT and sunk the one over Davis with 1:22 to go on the way to 46 points with a season-high nine 3s.

Russell connected from deep with 53 seconds left in the second OT and also hit another earlier in the period after also making two 3-pointers late in regulation on the way to 28 points.

James scored 12 points in the two OT periods and recorded his third triple-double of the season and 110th of his career. Davis added 29 points and 13 rebounds.

Klay Thompson hit a tying 3 with 5.9 seconds remaining in the initial overtime and another late in the second extra period before fouling out with 1:14 left in Golden State's first double-OT game since a 143-141 victory against Atlanta on Jan. 2, 2023.

Davis returned after an injury scare in the third. He made a pair of free throws with 29 seconds to go in regulation, then missed the first of two with 14.7 seconds left — giving Golden State the ball down 118-116. Curry drove through the paint for a tying layup with just under 6 seconds left to force overtime.

These star-studded teams played another thrilling game after the Lakers beat the Warriors in a six-game Western Conference semifinals last year.

Los Angeles hit 38 of 43 free throws, while the Warriors attempted only 16 — and they didn't like that.

"I might comment on the free throws that they shot, but my mom is here right now and I want to be on my best behavior so I'm not going to comment on their 43 free throws to our 16," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. "I'm not going to comment on Steph shooting three free throws in 43 minutes."

Curry notched his second straight game with six or more 3s and third in five and also his fifth consecutive

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game with 25 or more points. It was his third 40-point performance this season and 65th of his career. James and Davis combined to shoot 14 for 19 in the first half and wound up 25 of 49 for the night and contributed to a 55-50 rebounding edge.

The Warriors scored a season high points and their 23 3-pointers were a season best. Golden State used its 15th starting lineup — with Draymond Green and Jonathan Kuminga on the floor for the opening tip together for the first time this season.

This was a second straight heartbreaking defeat for the Warriors after losing 134-133 to Sacramento on Thursday night in another 2023 playoff rematch. The Warriors eliminated the Kings in Game 7 of their first-round matchup.

Kuminga followed up his career-best 31-point performance Thursday with 22 points and has scored 20 or more points in a career-best six straight games.

UP NEXT

Lakers: At Houston on Monday night to start a back-to-back on the road with a game at Atlanta on Tuesday.

Warriors: Host the 76ers on Tuesday night.

UN chief calls on countries to resume funding Gaza aid agency after allegations of militant ties

By NAJIB JOBAIN and WAFAA SHURAFU Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — The secretary-general of the United Nations on Sunday called on countries to continue funding the main agency providing aid in Gaza after several of its employees were accused of taking part in the Hamas attack on Israel that ignited the war four months ago.

The dispute engulfing the biggest provider of vital aid to Palestinians came as U.S. officials said negotiators were closing in on a cease-fire agreement. The emerging deal would bring a two-month halt to the deadliest-ever Israeli-Palestinian violence, which has stoked instability across the Middle East.

Antonio Guterres warned that the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, known as UNRWA, would be forced to scale back aid to more than 2 million Palestinians as soon as February. The coastal enclave is in the grip of a severe humanitarian crisis, with a quarter of the population facing starvation.

"The abhorrent alleged acts of these staff members must have consequences," Guterres said in a statement.

"But the tens of thousands of men and women who work for UNRWA, many in some of the most dangerous situations for humanitarian workers, should not be penalized. The dire needs of the desperate populations they serve must be met," he added.

He said that of the 12 employees accused of taking part in the attack, nine had been immediately terminated, one was confirmed dead and "the identity of the two others is being clarified." He said all would be held accountable, including through criminal prosecution.

UNRWA has 13,000 staffers in Gaza, nearly all of them Palestinians. It provides basic services, from medical care to education, for Palestinians families who fled or were driven out of what is now Israel during the 1948 war surrounding its creation — a majority of Gaza's population. It has expanded operations during the war, running shelters housing hundreds of thousands of newly displaced people.

More than 2 million of the territory's 2.3 million people depend on it for "sheer survival," including food and shelter, UNRWA director Philippe Lazzarini said, warning this lifeline can "collapse any time now."

The United States, which is the largest donor to the agency, immediately suspended funding over the weekend, followed by several other countries, including Britain, Germany and Italy.

The Israel-Hamas war has killed more than 26,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, destroyed vast swaths of Gaza and displaced nearly 85% of the territory's people. The Hamas attack in southern Israel killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and about 250 hostages were taken.

PROGRESS IN CEASE-FIRE TALKS

Two senior Biden administration officials said U.S. negotiators were making progress on a potential agree-

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ment under which Israel would pause military operations against Hamas for two months in exchange for the release of more than 100 hostages.

The officials, who requested anonymity to discuss the sensitive negotiations, said that emerging terms of the yet-to-be sealed deal would play out over two phases, with the remaining women, elderly and wounded hostages to be released by Hamas in a first 30-day phase. The emerging deal also calls for Israel to allow more humanitarian aid into Gaza.

More than 100 hostages, mainly women and children, were released in November in exchange for a weeklong cease-fire and the release of 240 Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

CIA Director Bill Burns is expected to discuss the contours of the emerging agreement when he meets Sunday in France with David Barnea, the head of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency, Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, and Egyptian intelligence chief Abbas Kamel for talks centered on the hostage negotiations.

Despite the apparent progress, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reiterated in a televised news conference late Saturday that the war would continue until "complete victory," including crushing Hamas.

ISRAEL UNDER SCRUTINY AFTER UN COURT RULING

The dispute over UNRWA came as the International Court of Justice ruled Friday that Israel must do its utmost to limit death and destruction in its Gaza offensive.

The top United Nations court has asked Israel for a compliance report in a month, placing added scrutiny on Israel's military. The court's binding ruling stopped short of ordering a cease-fire, but its orders were in part a rebuke of Israel's conduct in its nearly 4-month war against Gaza's Hamas rulers.

The case brought by South Africa to the U.N. court alleged Israel is committing genocide, which Israel vehemently denies. A final ruling is expected to take years.

The court also ordered Israel to urgently get aid to Gaza. The amount of aid entering the territory remains well below the daily average of 500 trucks before the war, and U.N. agencies say distribution within Gaza has been severely hampered by the fighting and delays at Israeli checkpoints.

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

The offensive caused vast destruction in northern Gaza, where Israel says it has largely dismantled Hamas. The fighting is now focused on the southern city of Khan Younis and a cluster of built-up refugee camps in central Gaza dating back to 1948.

The World Health Organization and the medical charity MSF have issued urgent warnings about the largest health facility in Khan Younis, Nasser Hospital, saying remaining staff could barely function with supplies running out and intense fighting nearby.

WHO footage showed people in the crowded facility being treated on blood-smearred floors as frantic loved ones shouted and jostled. Cats scavenged on a mound of medical waste.

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

US sees signs of progress on deal to release hostages, bring temporary pause to Israel-Hamas war

By AAMER MADHANI and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. negotiators are making progress on a potential agreement under which Israel would pause military operations against Hamas in Gaza for two months in exchange for the release of more than 100 hostages who were captured in the Oct. 7 attack on Israel, according to two senior administration officials.

The officials, who requested anonymity to discuss the sensitive negotiations, said Saturday that emerging terms of the yet-to-be sealed deal would play out over two phases.

In the first phase, fighting would stop to allow for the remaining women, elderly and wounded hostages to be released by Hamas.

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Israel and Hamas would then aim to work out details during the first 30 days of the pause for a second phase in which Israeli soldiers and civilian men would be released. The emerging deal also calls for Israel to allow more humanitarian aid into Gaza.

While the proposed deal would not end the war, U.S. officials are hopeful that such an agreement could lay the groundwork for a durable resolution to the conflict.

The New York Times first reported on Saturday that progress has been made towards an agreement for a pause in fighting in exchange for the remaining hostages.

CIA director Bill Burns is expected to discuss the contours of the emerging agreement when he meets on Sunday in France with David Barnea, the head of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency, Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, and Egyptian intelligence chief Abbas Kamel for talks centered on the hostage negotiations, according to three people familiar with the scheduled meeting who were not authorized to comment publicly.

President Joe Biden on Friday spoke by phone with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi and Qatar's ruling emir, Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani. Calls with both leaders focused on the hostage situation.

"Both leaders affirmed that a hostage deal is central to establishing a prolonged humanitarian pause in the fighting and ensure additional life-saving humanitarian assistance reaches civilians in need throughout Gaza," the White House said in a statement about Biden's call with the Qatari leader. "They underscored the urgency of the situation, and welcomed the close cooperation among their teams to advance recent discussions."

Burns heads to France for the high-level talks after White House senior adviser Brett McGurk traveled to the Mideast this week for talks on the hostage situation.

If Burns sees progress in his talks in France, Biden may dispatch McGurk back to the Mideast quickly to try to complete an agreement. McGurk during his talks this week was also laying the groundwork for another trip to the region by Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who next week could make his fifth trip to the Middle East since the start of the Israel-Hamas war in October.

The White House and CIA have yet to publicly confirm Burns' meeting in France and administration officials have been guarded that a deal can quickly be brokered.

"We should not expect any imminent developments," National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters on Friday.

Biden and his aides are keenly aware that the mounting Palestinian death toll, and widespread suffering in Gaza, is frustrating some in his Democratic base, who want to see him put more pressure on Israel to end the war. Democrats in Michigan have warned the White House that Biden's handling of the Israel-Hamas conflict could cost him enough support within the state's sizable Arab American community to sway the outcome of the 2024 election in a state that could be key to whether he wins a second term.

Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly vowed to continue the offensive until complete victory over Hamas is achieved.

Netanyahu has faced increasing pressure from the families of many hostages who are demanding a deal to win their loved ones' release.

The Oct. 7 attack killed some 1,200 people in Israel, and Hamas and other militants abducted around 250 people.

Around 100 hostages were freed under a weeklong cease-fire deal in November in exchange for the release of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. Around 130 remain captive, but a number have since been confirmed dead.

Hamas has previously said it will free more captives only in exchange for an end to the war and the release of thousands of Palestinian prisoners.

Michigan case offers an example of how public trust suffers when police officers lie

By COREY WILLIAMS Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — A Black man who was detained by police during an early morning walk in a quiet community northwest of Detroit says the white officer who threw him against a squad car, cuffed him and accused him of planning to break into a car also told a significant lie.

Brian Chaney says he asked for a supervisor during his arrest in Keego Harbor, Michigan, and Police Officer Richard Lindquist told him that another officer present was in charge. The problem: That second officer was not a supervisor or even a member of the Keego Harbor Police Department.

Lindquist was never disciplined and his chief says that while a suspect has the right to request a supervisor, what the officer did was OK.

"An officer can lie in the field when he's not under oath," Keego Harbor Police Chief John Fitzgerald said in a deposition in Chaney's \$10 million wrongful detention lawsuit.

But with American trust in police plummeting, buttressed by cellphone and bodycam videos that can expose untruths, a profession once broadly considered above reproach has seen its reputation suffer.

"It's well accepted that the weakest and most vulnerable members of society are the biggest victims of coercive practices, like police being dishonest and deceptive practices in interrogations," said James Craven, a legal associate with Cato Institute's Project on Criminal Justice and a former criminal defense attorney.

In a Gallup poll last year, 43% of respondents said they have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the police, down from 51% in 2021 and 64% in 2004. Gallup says 43% is an all-time low.

"We need police we can trust," Craven said. "We need to start envisioning a police force that's built with integrity at the center."

Several recent cases underscore that need.

In May, a Washington, D.C., police officer was arrested on charges that he obstructed an investigation and lied about leaking confidential information to Proud Boys extremist group leader Enrique Tarrio.

A white police officer and union leader in Portland, Oregon, was fired in 2022 for leaking a false report from a 911 caller who claimed a Black city commissioner had been involved in a hit-and-run. The department later reinstated him.

A former officer in Louisville, Kentucky, admitted in court that she and another officer falsified information in a search warrant that led to the 2020 fatal police shooting of Breonna Taylor, a Black woman.

Police are allowed to use deception and present false evidence during interrogations and investigations to get suspects to admit guilt, according to a 1969 U.S. Supreme Court ruling.

New York State has considered legislation that would ban police from lying to suspects during interrogations, while Illinois, Colorado and Oregon prohibit police from lying when interrogating juveniles.

Chaney, a licensed therapist and certified hypnotherapist from suburban Detroit, says in his lawsuit that in July 2021 he dropped his two teenage sons off at a gym. He was walking for exercise along a commercial street in Keego Harbor, about 30 miles (50 kilometers) northwest of Detroit, when Lindquist drove up behind and shouted: "Get your hands out of your pocket!"

According to the lawsuit, Lindquist told Chaney, "I'm going to frisk you because you look like you have a weapon and were going to break into cars."

Lindquist called him a "dog," shoved him in the back and pushed him against the squad car, injuring his groin. His wrist was hurt from the handcuffs in the ordeal lasting more than 20 minutes, Chaney's complaint says.

Chaney said Lindquist only released him after he asked, "What are you going to do next, put your knee into my neck?" referencing the killing of George Floyd by a white Minneapolis police officer.

Fitzgerald said in his deposition on July 18, 2022, that Lindquist wasn't disciplined over the lie about the supervisor, characterizing it as "an attempted de-escalation, momentary speculation." He insisted lying is not policy in his department but that "it's what they're allowed to do."

Citizens who have been detained can ask for a supervisor — in this case, Fitzgerald — and officers should

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call him. Lindquist didn't call and he didn't think the officer gave Chaney his phone number, Fitzgerald said.

The chief declined to comment to The Associated Press, citing the pending litigation, and several national and international organizations advocating on behalf of law enforcement did not respond to messages from the AP.

Lindquist no longer works for the Keego Harbor police and the AP was unable to reach him. Attorneys representing Lindquist in Chaney's case did not respond to requests for comment.

"You should not have the right to lie," said Leonard Mungo, Chaney's attorney. "That's something that we're writing into the moral fabric of the most powerful institution of our society that has the authority to put you in jail."

Detroit-area attorney David A. Robinson said the lies are a disappointment.

"People hold police in high esteem," said Robinson, who spent 13 years as a Detroit police officer. "A cop's fall from grace is higher than that of a regular person when he is caught in a lie, simply because of this perception."

Robinson is Black and most of his clients are Black people alleging civil rights violations by police.

"My experience with the profession reveals police officers seem often to take liberties in reports in order to justify force or buttress an arrest," Robinson said. "It is therefore foolish to take an officer's word at face value."

Once someone realizes an officer has lied to them, trust is difficult to restore, according to Robert Feldman, professor of Psychological and Brain Science at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

"Basically, I think police officers lie because they can," Feldman said. "Most of the time they are not caught lying, and even if they are, they get away with it. If you come to an understanding the police are not credible and they use deceit, it makes you suspicious of everything they are saying."

Houthi attacks in the Red Sea are idling car factories and delaying new fashion. Will it get worse?

By PAUL WISEMAN and MAE ANDERSON AP Business Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — Car factories have idled in Belgium and Germany. Spring fashion lines are delayed at a popular British department store. A Maryland company that makes hospital supplies doesn't know when to expect parts from Asia.

Attacks on ships in the Red Sea are delivering another shock to global trade, coming on top of pandemic-related logjams at ports and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Houthi rebels in Yemen, seeking to stop Israel's offensive against Hamas in Gaza, are attacking cargo ships plying the waters connecting Asia with Europe and the United States, forcing traffic away from the Suez Canal and around the tip of Africa. The disruption is causing delays and driving up costs — at a time when the world has yet to vanquish a resurgence of inflation.

"What's happened right now is short-term chaos, and chaos leads to increased costs," said Ryan Petersen, CEO of the supply chain management company Flexport. "Every ship that gets rerouted has 10,000 containers on it. It's a lot of emails and phone calls getting made to replan each of those container journeys."

Adding to the bedlam in global shipping is what Petersen calls a "double whammy": Passage through another crucial trade corridor — the Panama Canal — is restricted by low water levels caused by drought. And shippers are in a rush to move goods before Chinese factories shut down for the Feb. 10-17 Lunar New Year holiday.

The threat grows considerably the longer the war in Gaza drags on. Disruption to Red Sea trade lasting a year could surge goods inflation by up to 2%, Petersen says, piling on pain while the world already struggles with higher prices for groceries, rent and more. That also could mean even higher interest rates, which have weakened economies.

For now, Man & Machine in Greater Landover, Maryland, is awaiting a shipment from Taiwan and greater China. It's been one setback after another for the company, which makes washable keyboards and acces-

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sories for hospitals and other customers.

Founder and CEO Clifton Broumand usually gets a shipment of components about once a month, but the latest delivery, which departed Asia four weeks ago, is delayed. The normal route — three weeks via the Suez Canal — has been shut down by the Houthis attacks.

Rerouting to the Panama Canal didn't work either — the shipment was stymied there by the drought-related mess. Now, it might have to cross the Pacific to Los Angeles and come by truck or train to Maryland. Broumand has no idea when the products will arrive.

"It's annoying, and it's interesting. I think our customers, everybody understands. This is not like, 'Why didn't you plan this?' — who knew?" he said. "We call our customers and say, 'Hey, it's going to be delayed. This is why it is.' Nobody likes it, but it's not going to kill anybody, it's just another frustration."

Other industries are seeing similar hassles.

Electric carmaker Tesla has to shut down its factory near Berlin from Monday to Feb. 11 because of shipment delays. The Chinese-owned Swedish car brand Volvo idled its assembly line in Ghent, Belgium, where it makes station wagons and SUVs, for three days this month while waiting for a key part for transmissions.

Production at a Suzuki Motor Corp. plant in Hungary stopped for a week because of a delay in getting engines and other parts from Japan.

The British retail chain Marks & Spencer warned that the turmoil would delay new spring clothing and home goods collections that were due in February and March. Chief executive Stuart Machin said the Red Sea trouble was "impacting everyone and something we're very focused on."

Roughly 20% of the clothes and shoes imported into the U.S. arrive via the Suez Canal, said Steve Lamar, CEO of the American Apparel & Footwear Association. For Europe, the impact is even bigger: 40% of clothes and 50% of shoes traverse the Red Sea.

"This is a crisis that has global implications for the maritime shipping industry," Lamar said.

As of Jan. 19, Flexport says, almost 25% of global shipping capacity is being or will be diverted from the Red Sea, adding thousands of miles and a week or two to trips.

The cost of shipping a standard 40-foot container from Asia to northern Europe has surged from less than \$1,500 in mid-December to nearly \$5,500. Getting Asian cargoes to the Mediterranean is even costlier: almost \$6,800, up from \$2,400 in mid-December, according to the freight booking platform Freightos.

But things could be worse. At the height of supply chain backups two years ago, it cost \$15,000 to ship a container from Asia to northern Europe and nearly \$14,200 to take one from Asia to the Mediterranean.

"In terms of supply chain disruptions, we're not even close to what was happening during the pandemic," said Katheryn Russ, a University of California, Davis, economist.

In 2021 and 2022, American consumers, stir-crazy from COVID-19 lockdowns and armed with government relief checks, went on a spending spree, ordering furniture, sports equipment and other goods. Their orders overwhelmed factories, ports and freight yards, leading to delays, shortages and higher prices.

Things are different now. After that supply chain mess, shipping companies expanded their fleets. They have more ships to cope with shocks.

"The market is in a state of overcapacity," said Judah Levine, Freightos' head of research, "which happens to be a good thing. There should be enough capacity to accommodate this disruption."

Global demand also has cooled off — partly because the U.S. Federal Reserve and other central banks have raised interest rates to combat inflation and partly because China's powerhouse economy is sputtering. Inflation has come down over the past year and a half, though it's still higher than central banks would like.

"There are really big forces bringing down inflation," said Russ, who was a White House economic adviser in the Obama administration. "It's hard to see (the Red Sea disruption) would substantially muck up the declines in inflation that we've been seeing beyond a tenth of a percentage point here and there."

Many companies say they have yet to see meaningful impact. Retailer Target, for instance, said most of its products don't pass through the Suez Canal and was "confident in our ability to get guests the products they want and need."

BMW said: "All lights are green... our factory supplies are secure." Norwegian fertilizer giant Yara said it was "only mildly impacted by the transit challenges in the Red Sea."

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Carlos Tavares, CEO of automaker Stellantis, has said: "So far, it's OK. Things are moving well."

The respite may not last. If shippers avoid the Suez Canal for a year, Flexport CEO Petersen warned, "it's a really big deal." The higher costs would lead to "goods inflation of 1 to 2%."

Jan Hoffmann, a U.N. shipping expert, warned Thursday that Red Sea shipping snags posed a risk to global food security by slowing the distribution of grain to parts of Africa and Asia, which depend on wheat from Europe and the Black Sea area.

It would be even worse if the Middle East conflict widens and drives up oil prices, which are now lower than they were the day before Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7.

For now, companies are muddling through.

Retailer Urban Outfitters' Free People subsidiary imports clothing from India and is shipping "a lot of that through air," co-president Frank Conforti said at an investors' conference this month. But it's too costly to put furniture and household goods on planes.

At least home goods aren't as "fashion-sensitive" as clothing, Conforti said, so losing 15 days "sailing down the tip of Africa isn't the end of the world."

Embattled UN agency warns its aid operation in Gaza is 'collapsing' over a wave of funding cuts

By NAJIB JOBAIN and WAFAA SHURAFU Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — The head of the main U.N. aid agency in the war-battered Gaza Strip warned late Saturday that its work is collapsing after nine countries decided to suspend funding over allegations that several agency employees participated in the deadly Hamas attack on Israel four months ago.

Philippe Lazzarini, head of the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, said he was shocked such decisions were taken as "famine looms" in the Israel-Hamas war. "Palestinians in Gaza did not need this additional collective punishment," he wrote on X. "This stains all of us."

His warning came a day after he announced he had fired and was investigating several agency employees over allegations that they participated in the Oct. 7 attack on Israel that sparked the war. The United States, which said 12 agency employees were under investigation, immediately suspended funding, followed by several other countries, including Britain, Germany and Italy.

The agency, with its 13,000 employees in Gaza, most of them Palestinians, is the main organization aiding Gaza's population amid the humanitarian disaster. More than 2 million of the territory's 2.3 million people depend on it for "sheer survival," including food and shelter, Lazzarini said, warning this lifeline can "collapse any time now."

The Israel-Hamas war has killed more than 26,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, destroyed vast swaths of Gaza and displaced nearly 85% of the territory's people. The Hamas attack in southern Israel killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and about 250 hostages were taken.

Meanwhile, two senior Biden administration officials said U.S. negotiators were making progress on a potential agreement under which Israel would pause military operations against Hamas for two months in exchange for the release of more than 100 hostages.

The officials, who requested anonymity to discuss the sensitive negotiations, said that emerging terms of the yet-to-be sealed deal would play out over two phases, with the remaining women, elderly and wounded hostages to be released by Hamas in a first 30-day phase. The emerging deal also calls for Israel to allow more humanitarian aid into Gaza.

CIA director Bill Burns is expected to discuss the contours of the emerging agreement when he meets Sunday in France with David Barnea, the head of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency, Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, and Egyptian intelligence chief Abbas Kamel for talks centered on the hostage negotiations.

Despite the apparent progress, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reiterated in a televised news conference late Saturday that the war would continue until "complete victory," including crushing Hamas.

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He also doubled down on his previous criticism of Qatar, again accusing it of hosting Hamas leaders and funding the group. "If they position themselves as a mediator, so please, let them prove it and bring back the hostages, and in the meantime deliver the medicines to them," he said.

Netanyahu also pushed back after the International Court of Justice ruled Friday that Israel must do its utmost to limit death and destruction in its Gaza offensive, declaring that "we decide and act according to what is required for our security."

Among the first deaths reported since the ruling, three Palestinians were killed in an airstrike that Israel said targeted a Hamas commander.

Israel's military is under increasing scrutiny now that the top United Nations court has asked Israel for a compliance report in a month. The court's binding ruling stopped short of ordering a cease-fire, but its orders were in part a rebuke of Israel's conduct in its nearly 4-month war against Gaza's Hamas rulers.

At least 174 Palestinians were killed over the past day, the Health Ministry in Gaza said. It does not distinguish between combatants and civilians in its tolls, but has said about two-thirds are women and children.

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

Israel's military said it had conducted several "targeted raids on terror targets" in the southern city of Khan Younis in addition to the airstrike in nearby Rafah targeting a Hamas commander.

Bilal al-Siksik said his wife, a son and a daughter were killed in the Rafah strike, which came as they slept. He said the U.N. court ruling 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, standing beside the rubble and twisted metal of his home.

More than 1 million people have crammed into Rafah and the surrounding areas after Israel ordered civilians to seek refuge there. Designated evacuation areas have repeatedly come under airstrikes, with Israel saying it would go after militants as needed.

In Muwasi, a narrow coastal strip once designated as a safe zone but struck in recent days, displaced Palestinians tiptoed on sandaled feet through garbage-lined puddles in damp and chilly weather. Walls of sheets and tarps billowed in the wind. A mother wept after rain leaked in and soaked the blankets.

"This is our life. We have nothing and we left (our homes) with nothing," said Bassam Bolbol, whose family ended up in Muwasi after leaving Khan Younis and finding no shelter in Rafah.

Frustration with the uncertainty grows. As thousands of Gazans fled Khan Younis toward Muwasi, Israel shared video showing a crowd appearing to call for bringing down Hamas.

The case brought by South Africa to the U.N. court alleged Israel is committing genocide against Gaza's people, which Israel vehemently denies. A final ruling is expected to take years.

The court ordered Israel to urgently get aid to Gaza, where the U.N. has said aid entering the territory remains well below the daily average of 500 trucks before the war. The U.N. also says access to central and northern Gaza has been decreasing because of "excessive delays" at checkpoints and heightened military activity.

The World Health Organization and the medical charity MSF issued urgent warnings about the largest health facility in Khan Younis, Nasser Hospital, saying remaining staff could barely function with supplies running out and intense fighting nearby.

WHO footage showed people in the crowded facility being treated on blood-smearred floors as frantic loved ones shouted and jostled. Cats scavenged on a mound of medical waste.

"These are the only painkillers left we have. If you want to count them, they are only for maybe five or four patients," Dr. Muhammad Harara said.

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

In Israel, protesters gathered in Tel Aviv and outside Netanyahu's residence in Jerusalem to call for new elections, frustrated with the government's failure to bring all hostages home. Israel also was marking International Holocaust Remembrance Day, alongside other countries around the world.

South Korea says North Korea fired several cruise missiles, adding to provocative weapons tests

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's military said Sunday that North Korea fired several cruise missiles that flew over waters near a major military shipyard on the country's eastern coast, extending a streak in weapons tests that are worsening tensions with the United States, South Korea and Japan.

The launches followed a separate round of North Korean cruise missile tests last week and a Jan. 14 test-firing of the country's first solid-fuel intermediate-range ballistic missile. Those tests reflect North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's efforts to expand his arsenal of weapons designed to overwhelm missile defenses in South Korea and Japan and remote U.S. targets in the Pacific, including Guam.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said they detected the missiles over waters near the North Korean port of Sinpo, where the North has a major shipyard building key naval vessels, including missile-firing submarines.

The South's military didn't immediately provide specific launch details, including the number of missiles fired, how far they flew and whether they were launched from land or naval assets.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula have increased in recent months as Kim continues to accelerate his weapons development and issue provocative threats of nuclear conflict with the U.S. and its Asian allies.

The U.S., South Korea and Japan in response have been expanding their combined military exercises, which Kim portrays as invasion rehearsals, and sharpening their deterrence strategies built around nuclear-capable U.S. assets.

North Korea said its launches last week involved a new cruise missile called Pulhwasal-3-31 and described the test as part of regular efforts to develop its military. The North described that missile as "strategic," implying a possible intent to arm it with nuclear weapons.

North Korea's cruise missiles supplement the country's huge lineup of ballistic missiles, including inter-continental ballistic missiles designed to reach the U.S. mainland.

While North Korean cruise missile activities aren't directly banned under U.N. sanctions, experts say those weapons potentially pose a serious threat to South Korea and Japan. They are designed fly like small airplanes and fly along landscapes where they could be harder to detect by radar.

Since 2021, North Korea has conducted at least 10 rounds of tests of what it described as long-range cruise missiles fired from both land and sea. The country claims its weapons are nuclear-capable and their range is up to 2,000 kilometers (1,242 miles), a distance that would include U.S. military bases in Japan.

Revelers in festive dress fill downtown Tampa, Florida, for the annual Gasparilla Pirate Fest

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — Revelers clad in pirate finery packed Tampa's waterfront Saturday as a flotilla of boats arrived for the city's annual Gasparilla Pirate Fest.

Led by Ye Mystic Krewe of Gasparilla, the invading pirates docked to make a final demand for the key to the city. Once ashore, the festivities celebrating their annual invasion included an afternoon parade through downtown and live music.

A fixture nearly every year since 1904, the Gasparilla Pirate Fest is named for the mythical pirate Jose Gaspar. There's not much evidence he actually existed, but according to legend he plundered ships and captured hostages in the Gulf of Mexico from the 1780s until around 1821.

The colorful account of his supposed life first surfaced in the early 1900s in an advertising brochure for the Gasparilla Inn, which was located south of Tampa in Boca Grande at the end of a rail line and in need of an exciting promotion.

Called the "Last of the Buccaneers," Gaspar's memory lives on in the name of Tampa Bay's NFL team.

Jokic, Nuggets fend off gritty 76ers 111-105 as Embiid sits out for 4th consecutive time in Denver

By ARNIE STAPLETON AP Sports Writer

DENVER (AP) — This matinee was no marquee, not with one of its co-stars missing again.

The Denver Nuggets fended off the gritty, short-handed Philadelphia 76ers 111-105 on Saturday behind 26 points and 16 rebounds from Nikole Jokic, who was again denied his rematch with fellow MVP contender Joel Embiid.

Philadelphia's star center missed the Sixers' game at Denver for a fourth consecutive season after the team's medical staff determined he shouldn't play on his balky left knee.

Denying hoops fans another marquee matchup between the last two NBA MVPs, the Sixers scratched Embiid minutes before tipoff after he grimaced through his warmups.

"He really wanted to play, and the medical team did not deem him fit to play today," Sixers coach Nick Nurse said. "That's too bad for those fans. That's too bad."

Nuggets coach Michael Malone was miffed by the late nature of Embiid's scratch.

"We found out very late and again, I don't know how you go from being active/available to out," Malone said. "And I'm sure the league will do their due diligence because that's frowned upon. We've had situations this year where we've talked to the league and they told us if a player goes from being active to out, there's going to be an investigation."

Embiid tweaked his troublesome left knee against the Pacers on Thursday night, but he wasn't listed on the injury report Saturday.

"I'm sure he is hurt," Malone said. "But it's just really tough on the (opponent) preparing for them and then all of a sudden, last minute, he's out."

"But, we have to do a better job of handling those situations."

Embiid was preparing to play without much of his supporting cast as Tyrese Maxey (ankle), Tobias Harris (illness) and Mo Bamba (knee) were all ruled out well before he was.

Counting Embiid, that's 84 points of scoring averages that the Sixers were missing. But the tired Nuggets, coming off a season-long 12-day East Coast swing, couldn't shake the Sixers until the closing minutes.

Jamal Murray scored 23 points for Denver and Michael Porter Jr. had 20. Paul Reed led Philadelphia with a career-best 30 points and Kelly Oubre Jr. had 25.

Jokic didn't want to dwell on Embiid's latest absence on the Ball Arena court, saying Reed deserved the airtime instead for his spectacular performance.

Besides, Jokic said, what Embiid is doing this season is absolutely breathtaking.

"He's putting history right now in front of our eyes, and he's making it look so easy," Jokic said.

Embiid is averaging 36 points and 11.4 rebounds, and Malone said 90 minutes before the game that the Sixers' All-Star center has become "really unguardable."

That is, when he's not unavailable -- which is sometimes the case, especially in Denver, where he hasn't played since Nov. 8, 2019.

Embiid has missed 11 games this season and because of the NBA's new rules he can only miss six more to remain eligible for the league's awards. That includes MVP, which he won last year for the first time while denying Jokic a third consecutive such honor.

Embiid and Jokic have jockeyed for MVP front-runner status each of the last four seasons, including this one. Each has been runner-up when the other won the award.

In the Sixers' 126-121 win over the Nuggets on Jan. 16, Embiid had 41 points and 10 assists to Jokic's 25 points and 19 rebounds but complimented Jokic afterward as the game's best player and congratulated him on leading Denver to its first NBA title last summer.

Embiid was mocked last year with "Missing Person" signs in the stands at Ball Arena after he sat out the Sixers' game in Denver with a sore right calf, leading to accusations he was ducking Jokic. When the crowd realized he wasn't playing Saturday, chants of "Where's Embiid?" broke out as the Nuggets jumped out to a 13-4 lead.

"I think everybody was like, 'Oh, yeah, this is going to be a cakewalk today,'" Malone said. "Well, it wasn't a cakewalk. This was a tough, tough win."

Embiid was street clothes and cheering on his teammates courtside by game's end, but he wasn't around afterward in the locker room to talk about his latest absence.

UP NEXT

76ers: Visit the Portland Trail Blazers on Monday night.

Nuggets: Host the Bucks in Doc Rivers' Milwaukee coaching debut Monday night.

Mystery deaths of 3 Chiefs fans fuels speculation but police say there's still no sign of foul play

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

It has been three weeks since three Kansas City fans joined friends to watch the Chiefs play the Los Angeles Chargers in the final game of the regular season. Their bodies were found in a friend's backyard two days later. Police still haven't said how the men died, but affirmed Saturday amid intense public speculation that they still have no evidence of foul play.

It's common for police to decline to comment much on an investigation before it's complete. So here's a look at what's known and not known in a mystery that has gained widespread attention on social media and the internet despite — or perhaps because of — the lack of solid information.

WHAT HAPPENED?

Police accounts say Ricky Johnson, 38; Clayton McGeeney, 36; and David Harrington, 37; went to the home of a friend in Kansas City, Missouri, to watch the Chiefs game Jan. 7. None of them made it home. Two nights later, McGeeney's fiancé went to the home looking for him.

"When there was no answer at the door, she broke into the basement of the residence and located an unknown dead body on the back porch. Officers responded to the back porch and confirmed there was a dead body. Upon further investigation, officers located two other dead bodies in the back yard," an initial police report on the incident said. "There were no obvious signs of foul play observed at or near the crime scene."

Police say there are still no signs that any crime was committed.

"This still remains a death investigation and nothing more," Officer Alayna Gonzalez, a spokeswoman for the Kansas City Police Department, said in an email Saturday to The Associated Press. "We still have no evidence or indication of foul play, no one is in police custody,"

HOW DID THEY DIE?

Investigators say they don't know yet. They have not said publicly whether they believe drugs or alcohol were involved in what might have been three relatively sudden and simultaneous deaths, though it's clear that that's a possibility they are considering. Weather records indicate the low temperature that night was around 33 degrees (1 degree Celsius).

"This incident has been gathering a significant amount of media attention and we (KCPD) would like answers on the cause of death just as much as everyone else does," Gonzalez wrote.

The department is still waiting on a ruling on the cause of death from Frontier Forensics, Gonzalez said. It's a private company that provides autopsy services for numerous counties across Kansas and Missouri. Once police get the cause of death back, she said, they will be able to provide additional updates on the investigation.

"They are an entirely separate entity from the police department, so we have zero impact on the timeline of their medical findings," Gonzalez wrote. "We have been notified it could be as much as an additional six or more weeks to receive the toxicology reports."

IS THE HOMEOWNER UNDER INVESTIGATION?

One factor fueling the speculation has been that the homeowner says he didn't know the bodies of his three longtime friends were on his back porch and in his backyard for the two days before they were found.

But Gonzalez affirmed that the homeowner has cooperated with the investigation, an assertion that his

lawyer, John Picerno, also has been making.

Picerno didn't immediately return a call from the AP on Saturday. He said in a statement to Kansas City media earlier this month that his client was devastated by the deaths of his friends and that he didn't know that they were still in his backyard — or that they needed medical attention — until police showed up. Picerno said the last time that the homeowner saw them was when they left and he went to bed, and that he didn't know how they died.

The attorney said his client was "anxiously awaiting the results of the autopsy and toxicology report," and that they both wanted "to express our deepest sympathies to the friends and family members of these young men, and our thoughts and prayers are with them."

THE REACTION

Among the questions raging on social media are: "Why hasn't the owner been named a suspect?" and "What's taking so long to determine a cause of death?" The mystery has gone viral on TikTok and other social platforms for its true-crime overtones. And family members of the three men have taken their frustrations to Kansas City-area media.

"My son and these other men were wonderful people. They deserve justice," Jennifer Marquez, Harrington's mother, told WDAF-TV. "The story, the whole story needs to come out."

But the statements from police indicate that it could still be weeks before they can provide definitive answers.

Trump praises Texas governor as border state clashes with Biden administration over immigration

By JONATHAN J. COOPER and ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Former President Donald Trump lavished praise Saturday on Texas Gov. Greg Abbott for not allowing the Biden administration entry to remove razor wire in a popular corridor for migrants illegally entering the U.S. in an escalating feud over immigration.

In a speech focused overwhelmingly on border security, Trump said Texas should be given full support in its measures to deter migrants along the U.S.-Mexico border. The state is restricting the U.S. Border Patrol after the Supreme Court cleared the way for these federal agents to cut or remove the sharp metal barrier.

"When I'm president, instead of trying to send Texas a restraining order, I will send them reinforcements," Trump told a crowd of supporters in Las Vegas, where he rallied on an indoor soccer field in a largely Latino neighborhood. "Instead of fighting border states, I will use every resource tool and authority of the U.S. president to defend the United States of America from this horrible invasion that is taking place right now."

Trump largely avoided talking about a verdict delivered by a jury in a defamation case Friday, ordering him to pay an additional \$83.3 million to columnist E. Jean Carroll, who he called a liar for accusing him of sexual assault.

The former president, who is getting closer to securing the Republican presidential nomination, said he was the victim of the Biden administration weaponizing law enforcement against him as he 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.

"What they're doing with elections and election interference as an example of what they do with me," he said. "Look at yesterday, look at all this crap that's going on, but we keep marching forward, we just keep going and somehow it all works out."

Annabelle Weislocher, 51, a nurse who retired from the Navy and the Air Force Reserve, said she felt the cases against Trump are attempts to weaken him and drain him from his resources.

"They know he's leading. They know he's strong. And they're doing everything just to lower him," she said. "That's what they're trying to do, take his money thinking he won't have enough funds to campaign. That's the goal."

Trump's support among Hispanics has grown since he first ran in 2016. And on Saturday, he drove that point, drawing loud cheers when he claimed he was doing very well in that voter demographic.

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The Republican candidate said Hispanic and Black families hurt the most from the arrival of migrants into the country and said President Joe Biden should not have ended restrictions implemented during the Trump administration to deter migration.

"I'll get it solved and I'll get it solved and start the process on day one — on day one, we will start that process," he said. "That's why we're going to win the record share of Latino votes."

The historic number of migrants arriving at the U.S. border with Mexico during Biden's term is one of the main challenges of his reelection campaign.

Immigration was a top issue during Iowa's Republican caucuses earlier this month, when Trump won. An AP VoteCast survey found about 9 in 10 caucusgoers backed building a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, with about 7 in 10 expressing strong support for the idea.

Rob Williams, a 25-year-old voter who attended the Las Vegas rally, said he was glad Texas was defying the Biden administration over immigration.

"The good Texan people are stepping up to the plate, other states as well," he said. "They're going to show the fight over there in Texas."

Trump is running without any major opposition in Nevada after the state GOP decided to award delegates in a party-run caucus on Dec. 8 instead of a state-run primary a day earlier.

The decision, which was pressed by Trump's allies in the party to help him amass as many delegates as possible, has caused confusion for some voters, who are receiving mail ballots without Trump's name on them.

Trump repeatedly pressed voters to caucus for him and ignore the primary.

"Your primary vote doesn't mean anything," he said. "Don't worry about the primary, just do the caucus"

Trump's only remaining major GOP rival, former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, is competing in the primary but not the caucus, which makes her ineligible for delegates who will formally select a nominee at the Republican National Convention. ____

Gomez Licon reported from Miami.

Biden offers fresh assurances he would shut down border 'right now' if Congress sends him a deal

By ZEKE MILLER, COLLEEN LONG and MEG KINNARD Associated Press

COLUMBIA, South Carolina (AP) — Bidding to salvage a border deal in Congress that also would unlock money for Ukraine, President Joe Biden offered fresh assurances Saturday night that he would be willing to close the U.S.-Mexico border if lawmakers would only send him a bill to sign.

Biden — also eager to disarm GOP criticism of his handling of migration at the border — said at a political event in South Carolina that he would shut down the border "right now" if Congress passed the proposed deal. The framework hasn't been formally agreed to by Senate Democrats and Republicans and would face an uncertain future in the GOP-controlled House.

"A bipartisan bill would be good for America and help fix our broken immigration system and allow speedy access for those who deserve to be here, and Congress needs to get it done," Biden said. "It'll also give me as president, the emergency authority to shut down the border until it could get back under control. If that bill were the law today, I'd shut down the border right now and fix it quickly."

The deal being negotiated in Congress would require the U.S. to shutter the border if roughly 5,000 migrants cross illegally on any given day. Some one-day totals last year exceeded 10,000.

Former President Donald Trump has been pressuring Republicans for weeks to kill the negotiations. He's loathe to give a win to Biden on an issue that animated the Republican's successful 2016 campaign and that he wants to use as he seeks to return to the White House. Negotiators had appeared to be closing in on a deal, but it started to fray after Trump's admonitions to conservative lawmakers grew stronger.

In a written statement on Friday evening, Biden said the deal would allow him "a new emergency authority" to close the border. He added: "And if given that authority, I would use it the day I sign the bill into law."

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It was a stark claim from a Democratic president that was met with astonishment and shock from immigrant advocates who have said his policies do not reflect the progressive approach they had expected.

"Voters want to see our elected leaders do the hard work to fix our frayed immigration system," said Deirdre Schifeling, chief political and advocacy officer at the American Civil Liberties Union. "President Biden and Congress must abandon these proposals and heed voters' demands for fair and effective immigration policies that manage the border and treat people seeking safety with dignity."

But Biden is struggling across multiple fronts, dealing with an influx of asylum seekers even as he cracks down on those who cross into the U.S. illegally. Democrats are increasingly frustrated because asylum seekers are streaming into cities that lack the resources to care for them.

In a letter Saturday responding to Biden's comments, House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., insisted that Biden doesn't need congressional action to close the border and called on him to "take executive action immediately to reverse the catastrophe he has created."

Immigration remains a major concern for voters in the 2024 election. An AP-NORC poll earlier this month found that those voicing concerns about immigration climbed to 35% from 27% last year. Most Republicans, 55%, say the government needs to focus on immigration in 2024, while 22% of Democrats listed immigration as a priority. That's up from 45% and 14%, respectively, in December 2022.

Arrests for illegal border crossings from Mexico reached an all-time high in December since monthly numbers have been released.

The Border Patrol tallied 249,785 arrests on the Mexican border in December, up 31% from 191,112 in November and up 13% from 222,018 in December 2022, the previous all-time high.

Mexicans accounted for 56,236 arrests in December, while Venezuelans were second with 46,937, erasing much of the decline that followed the start of deportation flights to Venezuela in October. Arrests of Guatemalans surged, with Hondurans and Colombians rounding out the top five nationalities.

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 spent the 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.

"You're the reason I am president," Biden told attendees at the state party's fundraising dinner ahead of its first ever "first-in-the-nation" Democratic primary on Feb. 3. "You're the reason Kamala Harris is a historic vice president. And you're the reason Donald Trump is a defeated former president. You're the reason Donald Trump is a loser. And you're the reason we're going to win and beat him again."

Biden received raved applause and chants of "four more years" from attendees at the dinner, as he criticized his predecessor's policies and highlighted his efforts to support Black Americans. He was set to spend Sunday in the state where politics and faith are intertwined at a political event at St. John Baptist Church.

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.

Biden also reiterated his willingness to take extreme measures to curtail immigration on the U.S.-Mexico border, as lawmakers continue talks on a reform of the country's immigration policies, saying that he would

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shut down the border "right now" if such a bill were to pass.

Calling border security "one of the most important issues we're facing," Biden said a "bipartisan bill" would give him "the emergency authority to shut down the border until it could get back under control," noting that it would fund additional border security agents, immigration judges and asylum officers. "If that bill were the law today, I'd shut down the border right now and fix it quickly," he said.

Saturday was the first time Biden shared a stage with Rep. Dean Phillips, a longshot challenger for the Democratic nomination, who called on the president, 81, to step aside for a younger generation of leaders to take on Trump.

"The numbers do not say things are looking good," Phillips said of Biden's poll numbers, at times struggling to hold the attention of the crowd, many of whom were holding Biden campaign signs ahead of the president's appearance.

"My invitation to president Biden is to pass the torch," Phillips said. Struggling to hold the attention of the crowd, many of whom were holding Biden campaign signs ahead of the president's appearance, Phillips repeatedly asked the audience to quiet down and listen to him.

He told The Associated Press he did not interact with Biden at the event, saying of Biden's staff, "No. I don't think they want him to see me."

Ahead of the dinner, Biden stopped into Regal Lounge Men's Barber & Spa in Columbia, greeting, owners, employees and customers mid-haircut at the barbershop.

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 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 the 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."

Clyburn greeted Biden at the airport and accompanied him throughout his visit.

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.

"It's important for us to show up and to show out," said Shivani Dahya, 22, a fellow with the state Democratic party from Rock Hill, asked about the import of Biden performing well with South Carolina's non-white Democratic voters. "I think being first in the nation, we've set the example so other states can look at us and say, look at them, they're voting, they're getting out there, so let's do the same."

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.

A snowboarder spent 15 hours trapped in a ski gondola. She rubbed her hands and feet to keep warm

SOUTH LAKE TAHOE, Calif. (AP) — A snowboarder spent 15 hours trapped overnight inside a ski lift gondola amid freezing temperatures at a Lake Tahoe resort, according to officials and media reports.

Monica Laso boarded the gondola around 5 p.m. Thursday at Heavenly Ski Resort to ride down the mountain because she was too tired to snowboard. But it stopped just minutes later while she was still in the sky, she told KCRA, which first reported the news.

Laso yelled for help, but no one on the ground heard her, the TV station reported. She didn't have her cellphone, so she couldn't call for help either.

"I screamed desperately until I lost my voice," Laso told KCRA in an interview in Spanish.

She spent the night rubbing her hands and feet together to fight off the cold. The overnight low temperature was 23 degrees, according to the National Weather Service.

Laso's friends reported her missing to the El Dorado County Sheriff's Office on Thursday, but she wasn't found until Friday morning when the gondola started up again for the day and crews realized she'd been there overnight, the TV station reported.

The ski resort, located on the southeastern side of the lake near the California-Nevada border, is investigating "with the utmost seriousness" how Laso got trapped.

"The safety and wellbeing of our guests is our top priority at Heavenly Mountain Resort," said Tom For-

tune, the resort's vice president and chief operating officer, in a statement.

The sheriff's office did not respond to a request for comment Saturday.

Kim George, a battalion chief and spokesperson for South Lake Tahoe Fire Rescue, told The Associated Press that sheriff's deputies requested their paramedics around 8:30 a.m. Friday after Laso was discovered.

She was responsive and alert and declined to be transported to the hospital, George said.

In her 23 years with the fire department, "we've never responded to anything like that," George said. "I'm very curious to hear the story."

Aryna Sabalenka wins second straight Australian Open title, beating Zheng Qinwen 6-3, 6-2

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," the 25-year-old from Belarus 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."

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

By CZAREK SOKOLOWSKI Associated Press

OSWIECIM, Poland (AP) — A group of survivors of Nazi death camps marked 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 laid wreaths and flowers and lit candles at the Death Wall in Auschwitz, where the Nazis executed thousands of inmates, mostly Polish resistance members and others.

Later the group, along with state officials and other participants, gathered for a ceremony by a brick women's barrack at Birkenau that has recently undergone conservation. Next, they prayed and lit candles at the monument in Birkenau, near the crematoria ruins. They were memorializing around 1.1 million camp victims, mostly Jews. The memorial site and museum are located near the city of Oswiecim.

Observances were also held in many other countries Saturday. 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.

Soviet Red Army troops liberated Auschwitz-Birkenau on Jan. 27, 1945.

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

Halina Birenbaum, a 94-year-old survivor, was moved to speak beside barrack 27, where she spent part of August 1943 until the forced evacuation of camp inmates on foot on Jan. 18, 1945.

She said the suffering and tragedy of people in contemporary wars and from the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on Israel was "painful" for her and an extension of her Auschwitz experience.

Livne, the ambassador, defended Israel's massive retaliation in Gaza.

"We hoped that the lessons of the Holocaust have been learnt. Yet, today we are astonished by accusations of genocide against the Jewish state while we fight for our existence," he said.

The theme of the observances was the suffering of the individual human being, symbolized in simple, hand-drawn portraits of the camp's inmates that were beamed on a screen during the observances in Birkenau.

In Germany, where people laid flowers and lit candles at memorials for the victims of the Nazis, Chan-

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cellor Olaf Scholz said his country would continue to bear responsibility for this "crime against humanity." He called on 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 had family members who were lost in the Holocaust.

In Italy, Holocaust commemorations included a torchlit procession and official statements from top political leaders.

Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni said her conservative nationalist government was committed to eradicating antisemitism that she said had been "reinvigorated" by the Israel-Hamas war. Meloni's critics have long accused her and her Brothers of Italy party, which has neofascist roots, of failing to sufficiently atone for its past.

Pro-Palestinian activists went ahead with rallies, ignoring a police order to postpone the marches to another day. There were brief clashes with police in Milan and activists at a sit-in in Rome insisted they weren't protesting Jews, just what they called the "genocide" in Gaza.

Italy's Jewish community has complained that such protests have co-opted the memory of the Holocaust and been used against Jews.

In Rome, Italian-Palestinian student Amr Shahin said it was appropriate to protest what he called "the genocide" in Gaza on Holocaust Remembrance Day.

"Unfortunately it is happening again, in Palestine, so precisely because it happened before we must learn from our mistakes, and reinforcing this concept today is even more important," he said.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, Jews and Muslims from the country and from abroad gathered in Srebrenica to jointly observe Holocaust Remembrance Day, and to promote compassion and dialogue amid the Israel-Hamas war.

It was organized by the center preserving the memory of Europe's only acknowledged genocide since the Holocaust — the massacre in 1995 of more than 8,000 Muslim Bosniaks in Srebrenica in Bosnia's interethnic war.

The event underscored the message that the two communities share the experience of persecution and must stay united in their commitment to peace.

Menachem Rosensaft, a lecturer in law at Columbia Law School in New York, told The Associated Press on the eve of his participation in the Srebrenica commemoration that this year's observances were especially important. He said that's because the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas on Israel was the largest massacre of Jews since the Holocaust.

"We need to bring people together and find common ground," said Rosensaft, the son of Holocaust survivors. "To make sure it doesn't happen again, this has to become the conscience of the world."

He said the international commemoration day, created by the United Nations in 2005, is important to ensure the world remembers the Holocaust long after the survivors and their forbears are gone.

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 Auschwitz to hold and kill 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.

Since 1979, the camp site has been on the UNESCO list of World Heritage sites.

Donald Trump is on the hook for \$88.3 million in defamation damages. What happens next?

By DAVID B. CARUSO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — For years, Donald Trump hurled insults at E. Jean Carroll, saying the advice columnist fabricated a sexual assault allegation against him to sell a book.

Will Trump keep that up, now that he's been hit with a \$83.3 million defamation judgment?

A jury on Friday found that Trump had maliciously damaged Carroll's reputation in 2019 after she went public with her accusations. Jurors awarded her \$18 million to compensate for the personal harm she experienced, then added \$65 million more to punish Trump — and maybe prevent him from continuing to go after her on social media.

A different jury concluded last May that Trump was responsible for sexually abusing Carroll in a Manhattan department store dressing room in 1996. Those jurors awarded Carroll \$5 million. If both judgments stand, Trump would owe her a total of \$88.3 million.

Trump and his lawyers have promised to appeal.

A look at the verdict and where the case might go from here:

THE ACCUSATION

Carroll said she was shopping at the Bergdorf Goodman store on Fifth Avenue in 1996 when she bumped into Trump, who lived nearby. She said they recognized each other. At the time, Carroll had a column in Elle magazine and was the host of a cable TV talk show called "Ask E. Jean."

In court testimony and in her memoir, Carroll said she and Trump went to the store's lingerie section and then into a dressing room as each tried to persuade the other to try on a lacy item. When they moved into the dressing room, she said, Trump pushed her into a wall, pulled down her tights and sexually assaulted her. Carroll said she broke free and ran.

After she wrote about the alleged encounter in 2019, Trump, who by then has been elected president, told reporters he had no idea who Carroll was, that her accusation was "totally false" and that she motivated by a desire to sell books.

THE FIRST TRIAL

Carroll sued Trump for defamation in 2019, saying his statements about her were false and damaged her reputation. That claim wound up being bogged down for years over the legal question of whether, in denying the allegations, Trump had been fulfilling his duties as president. Trump claimed that the presidency shield him from liability against the defamation lawsuit.

In the meantime, New York changed its law to give sexual abuse survivors a fresh chance to sue civilly over attacks that happened in the distant past. Carroll was one of the first people to take advantage, filing a new legal claim against Trump alleging that he had raped her. She also sued over things he had said about her after leaving the White House.

Trump was not criminally charged. The civil verdict, however, has led many to mistakenly believe he was convicted of sexually assaulting Carroll. Under state law, too much time had passed since the alleged assault in 1996 for a criminal case to be considered against Trump.

A jury heard testimony in that lawsuit last year and found that while Carroll had not proved she had been raped, under New York's definition of that crime, Trump had sexually abused her.

The jury awarded Carroll \$2 million for the abuse and nearly \$3 million for Trump's public comments about her, which it said were defamatory — and therefore not protected free speech.

THE SECOND TRIAL

With the main legal issues resolved, one matter remained: Had Carroll also been damaged by Trump's comments while he was still in the White House.

U.S. District Judge Lewis A. Kaplan ruled that there would need to be a new trial to decide that claim, but that trial did not need to revisit the issue of whether Trump had assaulted Carroll or whether the things he had said about her were defamatory. This trial would decide how much more, if anything, Trump owed Carroll for things he had said about her on June 21-22, 2019.

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Trump and his lawyers have been outraged that they did not get a chance to make a new argument that he was innocent, but Kaplan said they had already lost that fight.

"It is a very well-established legal principle in this country that prevents do-overs by disappointed litigants," Kaplan told the lawyers on the day Trump testified in the second trial. "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."

WHAT'S NEXT?

Trump's legal team is appealing the verdict in the first case and has promised an appeal of the second one, too.

"It will not deter us. We will keep fighting. And I assure you, we didn't win today, but we will win," said Trump's lawyer, Alina Habba.

Among other things, his team wants higher courts to rule that Trump was within his rights to forcefully deny Carroll's allegations and suggest she had ulterior motives.

"Everyone has a right to defend themselves," Habba said.

Trump's lawyers also are contesting Kaplan's ruling that the jury in the second trial did not need to revisit whether Trump was liable for sexual assault, and that the judge unfairly limited what Trump's lawyers could say in front of the jury.

Appeals will go to a panel of judges in New York. The appeals eventually could reach the U.S. Supreme Court for the justices to consider.

In the meantime, Trump has put more than \$5.5 million in an escrow account to potentially cover the cost of the first verdict while the appeals play out.

WHAT IF TRUMP KEEPS SAYING PUBLICLY THAT CARROLL MADE IT UP?

Carroll could bring a new lawsuit over each new comment. Potentially, new trials would have to be held at which juries could pile on additional damages.

The \$88.3 million in judgments against Trump are actually less than what some of his supporters have faced in recent defamation cases.

A jury last year decided that Rudy Giuliani, the former New York City mayor and Trump ally who tried to keep the-then president in power after he lost the 2020 election, owed \$148 million to two former Georgia election workers for spreading a conspiracy theory about them. Juries in Texas and Connecticut have hit Infowars host Alex Jones with \$1.5 billion in defamation judgments for promoting a false claim that the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting was a hoax.

Unlike Giuliani and Jones, Trump might have the financial resources to pay a huge judgment. 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. That's in addition to the value of his real estate assets, which Trump has claimed are worth billions of dollars.

Still, Trump faces other potential financial liabilities. He is awaiting a verdict in a civil fraud trial, where New York state has asked that he forfeit \$370 million in what officials say were ill-gotten gains from loans and deals made using financial statements that exaggerated his wealth.

Mexico confirms some Mayan ruin sites are unreachable because of gang violence and land conflicts

By MARK STEVENSON Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexico's government has acknowledged that at least two well-known Mayan ruin sites are unreachable by visitors because of a toxic mix of cartel violence and land disputes.

But two tourist guides in the southern state of Chiapas, near the border with Guatemala, say two other sites that the government claims are still open to visitors can only be reached by passing through drug gang checkpoints.

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The explosion of drug cartel violence in Chiapas since last year has left the Yaxchilán ruin site completely cut off, the government conceded Friday.

The tour guides, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they must still work in the area, said that gunmen and checkpoints are often seen on the road to another site, Bonampak, famous for its murals.

They say that to get to yet another archaeological site, Lagartero, travelers are forced to hand over identification and cellphones at cartel checkpoints.

Meanwhile, officials concede that visitors also can't go to the imposing, towering pyramids at Tonina, because a landowner has shut off access to his land while seeking payment from the government for granting the right of way.

The cartel-related dangers are the most problematic. The two cartels warring over the area's lucrative drug and migrant smuggling routes set up the checkpoints to detect any movement by their rivals.

Though no tourist has been harmed so far, and the government claims the sites are safe, many guides no longer take tour groups there.

"It's as if you told me to go to the Gaza Strip, right?" said one of the guides.

"They demand your identification, to see if you're a local resident," he said, describing an almost permanent gang checkpoint on the road to Lagartero, a Mayan pyramid complex that is surrounded by pristine, turquoise jungle lagoons.

"They take your cellphone and demand your sign-in code, and then they look through your conversations to see if you belong to some other gang," he said. "At any given time, a rival group could show up and start a gunbattle."

The government seems unconcerned, and there is even anger that anyone would suggest there is a problem, in line with President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's policy of playing down gang violence — even as the cartels take over more territory in Mexico.

"Bonampak and Lagartero are open to the public," the National Institute of Anthropology and History said in a statement Friday.

"It is false, biased and irresponsible to say that these archaeological sites are in danger from drug traffickers," added the agency, known as the INAH, which claimed it "retains control of the sites."

Both guides stressed that the best-known Mayan ruin site in Chiapas, the imposing temple complex at Palenque, is open and perfectly safe for visitors. But starting around December, tourists have canceled about 5% of trips booked to the area, and there are fears that could grow.

Things that some tourists once enjoyed — like the more adventurous trip to ruins buried deep in the jungle, like Yaxchilán, on the banks of the Usumacinta river and reachable only by boat — are either no longer possible, or so risky that several guides have publicly announced they won't take tourists there.

Residents of the town of Frontera Comalapa, where the boats once picked up tourists to take them to Yaxchilán, closed the road in October because of constant incursions by gunmen.

Even the INAH admits there is no access to Yaxchilán, noting that "the institute itself has recommended at certain points that tourists not go to the archaeological site, because they could have an unsuccessful visit." But it said that the problems there are "of a social nature" and are beyond its control.

Cartel battles started to get really bad in Chiapas in 2023, which coincides with the uptick in the number of migrants — now about a half-million annually — moving through the Darien Gap jungle from South America, through Central America and Mexico to the U.S. border.

Because many of the new wave of migrants are from Cuba, Asia and Africa, they can pay more than Central Americans, making the smuggling routes through Chiapas more valuable. The problem now seems to be beyond anyone's control.

The National Guard — the quasi-military force that López Obrador has made the centerpiece of law enforcement in Mexico — has been pelted with stones and sticks by local residents in several towns in that region of Chiapas in recent weeks.

The other tour guide said that was because the two warring drug cartels, Sinaloa and Jalisco, often recruit or force local people to act as foot soldiers and prevent National Guard troopers from entering their towns.

In Chiapas, residents are often members of Indigenous groups like the Choles or Lacandonés, both de-

scendants of the ancient Maya. The potential damage of using them as foot soldiers in cartel fights is grim, given that some groups have either very few remaining members or are already locked in land disputes.

The guide said the ruin sites have the added disadvantage of being in jungle areas where the cartels have carved out at least four clandestine landing strips to fly drugs in from South America.

But the damages are mounting for the Indigenous residents who have come to depend on tourism.

"There are communities that sell handicrafts, that provide places to stay, boat trips, craftspeople. It affects the economy a lot," said the first guide. "You have to remember that this is an agricultural state that has no industry, no factories, so tourism has become an economic lever, one of the few sources of work."

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 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

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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."

What happened at the nation's first nitrogen gas execution: An AP eyewitness account

By KIM CHANDLER Associated Press

ATMORE, Ala. (AP) — As witnesses including five news reporters watched through a window, Kenneth Eugene Smith, who was convicted and sentenced to die in the 1988 murder-for hire slaying of Elizabeth Sennett, convulsed on a gurney as Alabama carried out the nation's first execution using nitrogen gas.

Critics who had worried the new execution method would be cruel and experimental said Smith's final moments Thursday night proved they were right. Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall, however, characterized it on Friday as a "textbook" execution.

Here is an eyewitness account of how it unfolded. Times, unless otherwise noted, are according to a clock on the execution chamber wall at the William C. Holman Correctional Facility.

MASK CHECK

The curtains between the viewing room and the execution chamber opened at 7:53 p.m. Smith, wearing a tan prison uniform, was already strapped to the gurney and draped in a white sheet.

A blue-rimmed respirator mask covered his face from forehead to chin. It had a clear face shield and plastic tubing that appeared to connect through an opening to the adjoining control room.

FINAL WORDS

The prison warden entered the chamber, read the death warrant setting his execution date and held a microphone for Smith to speak any final words.

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"Tonight Alabama causes humanity to take a step backwards," Smith began. He moved his fingers to form an "I love you" sign to family members who were also present. "I'm leaving with love, peace and light. ... Love all of you."

The Sennett family watched from a viewing room that was separate from the one where members of the media and Smith's attorney were seated.

THE EXECUTION IS GREENLIGHTED

Marshall, the attorney general, gave prison officials the OK to begin the execution at 7:56 p.m. That was the final confirmation from his office that there were no court orders preventing it from going forward.

A corrections officer in the chamber approached Smith and checked the side of the mask.

The Rev. Jeff Hood, Smith's spiritual advisor took a few steps toward Smith, touched him on the leg and they appeared to pray.

The Department of Corrections had required Hood to sign a waiver agreeing to stay 3 feet (0.9 meters) away from Smith's gas mask in case the hose supplying the nitrogen came loose.

THRASHING AND GASPING BREATHS

Smith began to shake and writhe violently, in thrashing spasms and seizure-like movements, at about 7:58 p.m. The force of his movements caused the gurney to visibly move at least once. Smith's arms pulled against the straps holding him to the gurney. He lifted his head off the gurney and then fell back.

The shaking went on for at least two minutes. Hood repeatedly made the sign of the cross toward Smith. Smith's wife, who was watching, cried out.

Smith began to take a series of deep gasping breaths, his chest rising noticeably. His breathing was no longer visible at about 8:08 p.m. The corrections officer who had checked the mask before walked over to Smith and looked at him.

THE EXECUTION ENDS

The curtains were closed to the viewing room at about 8:15 p.m.

Alabama Corrections Commissioner John Q. Hamm told reporters afterward that the nitrogen gas flowed for approximately 15 minutes. The state attorney general's office declined Friday to discuss at what time the nitrogen gas began flowing, or at what time a monitor connected to Smith during the execution showed that his heart had stopped beating.

State officials said Smith was pronounced dead at 8:25 p.m.

Biden aide urges Beijing to press Iran over Houthi attacks. China warns US over Taiwan independence

By KANIS LEUNG and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan pressed Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi during talks in Thailand to use China's influence with Iran to ease tensions in the Middle East. The officials also agreed to work toward arranging a call between President Joe Biden and Chinese leader Xi Jinping.

The meetings Friday and Saturday in Bangkok, which followed up on the presidents' discussions in November in California, took place after a ruling-party candidate opposed by Beijing won Taiwan's recent presidential election and U.S. and Chinese military officials resumed a once-frozen dialogue. They played out as attacks by Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen continue to threaten global shipping in the Red Sea.

A senior U.S. official said Sullivan cited China's extensive economic leverage over Iran and emphasized that the destabilizing effect of the Houthi attacks on international commerce. The official noted that China has publicly called for lower tensions, but said it was too soon to tell whether Beijing was using its diplomatic muscle to press Tehran on the matter. The official was not authorized to publicly discuss the private conversations between Sullivan and Wang and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry said Wang said Washington should stand by a commitment not to support independence for Taiwan. Wang said Taiwan's election, won by Lai Ching-te, the current vice president, did not alter the Chinese position that the island is part of China and that the biggest challenge in U.S.-China relations is the issue of "Taiwan independence," according to a statement from the ministry.

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Biden has said he does not support independence, but U.S. law requires a credible defense for Taiwan and for the U.S. to treat all threats to the island as matters of "grave concern."

The U.S. official said it was not clear when the next Biden-Xi conversation would happen, but that the officials hoped it would take place in the coming months.

Wang and Sullivan previously met on the Mediterranean island nation of Malta and in Vienna last year before the Biden-Xi meeting in California.

In November, both sides showcased modest agreements to combat illegal fentanyl and reestablish military communications, keeping the relationship from growing any worse. The U.S.-China Counternarcotics Working Group is set to hold its first meeting on Tuesday. American officials say fentanyl and its precursors are largely manufactured in China.

China claims self-ruled Taiwan as its own territory and in recent years has shown its displeasure at political activities in Taiwan by sending military planes and ships. Earlier Saturday, Taiwan's defense ministry said China had sent more than 30 warplanes and a group of navy ships toward the island during a 24-hour period, including 13 warplanes that crossed the midline of the Taiwan Strait — an unofficial boundary that's considered a buffer between its territory and the mainland.

Wang also said China and the U.S. should use the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries this year as an opportunity to reflect on past experiences and treat each other as equals, rather than adopting a condescending attitude.

The countries should "be committed to mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and win-win cooperation, building a correct way for China and the U.S. to interact," the statement quoted Wang as saying.

Taiwan has said six Chinese balloons either flew over the island or through airspace just north of it, days after the self-governing island held its election. Lai's Democratic Progressive Party largely campaigned on self-determination, social justice and a rejection of China's threats.

Apart from cross-strait issues, Sullivan and Wang also discussed Russia's war against Ukraine, the Middle East, North Korea, the South China Sea, and Myanmar, the White House said. Sullivan and Wang talked about progress toward holding a dialog this spring between U.S. and Chinese officials on artificial intelligence.

Sullivan highlighted that although Washington and Beijing are in competition, both sides have to "prevent it from veering into conflict or confrontation," according to a White House summary of the meeting.

A COVID-era program is awash in fraud. Congress aims to wind it down and expand the child tax credit

By KEVIN FREKING and FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When IRS Commissioner Danny Werfel met privately with senators recently, the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee asked for his assessment of a startling report: A whistleblower estimated that 95% of claims now being made by businesses for a COVID-era tax break were fraudulent.

"He looked at his shoes and he basically said, 'Yeah,'" recalled the lawmaker who posed that question, Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore.

The answer explains why Congress is racing to wind down what is known as the employee retention tax credit. Congress established the program during the coronavirus pandemic as an incentive for businesses to keep workers on the payroll.

Demand for the credit soared as Congress extended the tax break and made it available to more companies. Aggressive marketers dangled the prospect of enormous refunds to business owners if they would just apply. As a result, what was expected to cost the federal government \$55 billion has instead ballooned to nearly five times that amount as of July. Meanwhile, new claims are still pouring into the IRS each week, ensuring a growing price tag that lawmakers are anxious to cap.

Lawmakers across the political spectrum who rarely agree on little else — from liberal Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., to conservative Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Wis. — agree it's time to close down the program.

"I don't have the exact number, but it's like almost universal fraud in the program. It should be ended,"

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Johnson said. "I don't see how anybody could support it."

Warren added: "The standards were too loose and the oversight was too thin."

The Joint Committee on Taxation estimates that winding down the program more quickly and increasing penalties for those companies promoting improper claims would generate about \$79 billion over 10 years.

Lawmakers aim to use the savings to offset the cost of three business tax breaks and a more generous child tax credit for many low-income families. Households benefiting from the changes in the child tax credit would see an average tax cut of \$680 in the first year, according to an estimate from the nonpartisan Tax Policy Center.

That tax credit is \$2,000 per child, but only \$1,600 is refundable, which makes it available to parents who owe little to nothing in federal income taxes. An agreement reached earlier this month by congressional tax-writers would increase the maximum refundable child tax credit to \$1,800 for 2023 tax returns, \$1,900 for the following year and \$2,000 for 2025 tax returns. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a liberal think tank and advocacy group, projected that about 16 million children in low-income families would benefit from the child tax credit expansion.

The package was overwhelmingly approved by a House committee last week, 40-3, showing it has broad, bipartisan support.

But passage through Congress is not assured because many key senators have concerns about aspects of the bill. Wyden said a strong vote in the House could spur the Senate into quicker action. Still, passing major legislation in an election year is generally a heavy lift.

Under current law, taxpayers have until April 15, 2025, to claim the employee retention credit. The bill would bars new claims after Jan. 31 of this year. It also would impose stiff penalties on those who are promoting the employer retention tax credit if they know or have reason to know their advice will lead to an underreporting of tax liabilities.

When Congress created the tax break for employers at the pandemic's onset, it proved so popular that lawmakers extended and amended the program three times. The credit, worth up to \$26,000 per employee, can be claimed on wages paid through 2021.

To qualify, generally businesses must show that a local or state government order related to the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in their business having to close or partially suspend operations. Or the businesses must show they experienced a significant decline in revenues.

Larry Gray, a certified public accountant from Rolla, Missouri, said he had concerns early on about how the program could be abused.

"There was no documentation really to speak" and the IRS just sent out the checks, Gray said. "They just started printing the checks and I believe Congress was wanting them to print the checks."

His hunch has proven correct, judging by the filings that he has reviewed. He has even lost clients who didn't want to hear that they did not qualify when others were telling them they did. Generally, he said, the businesses that don't qualify are failing to cite the government order that resulted in their closure or partial suspension. They are also routinely citing reasons for reimbursement that don't meet the program's criteria. For example, one company said it was struggling to find employees and had to raise wages as a justification for qualifying.

"If I go through the narratives on the filings that I'm looking at, every business in America qualifies," Gray said.

The IRS paused accepting claims for the tax credit in September last year, until 2024 due to rising concerns that an influx of applications are fraudulent. At that point, it had received 3.6 million claims.

Some fraud has been prolific. For instance, a New Jersey tax preparer was arrested in July on charges related to fraudulently seeking over \$124 million from the IRS when he filed more than 1,000 tax returns claiming the employment tax credits.

In an update issued Thursday about the program, the IRS said that it has thousands of audit in the pipeline and that as of Dec. 31, it has initiated 352 criminal investigations involving more than \$2.9 billion in potentially fraudulent claims. Separately, it has opened nine civil investigations of marketers that

potentially misled employers on eligibility to file claims.

Werfel briefed the Senate Finance Committee recently on the measures that have been put into place to address the fraud, including developing a special withdrawal program for those with unprocessed claims and a voluntary disclosure program for those who believed they were improperly paid. Since then, the IRS has seen an immediate 40% decline in average weekly claims, he said.

Lawmakers emphasize that cutting down on the fraudulent claims should also help the IRS more quickly resolve the legitimate claims that businesses have filed and are still awaiting resolution. In early December, the IRS had a backlog of about 1 million claims.

Congress routinely has difficulty finding offsets to pay for new spending or tax cuts. But in this case, the employee retention tax credit appears to have few friends left on Capitol Hill.

"Well-intentioned, but boy oh boy," said Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va., in summing up the program.

Iraq and US begin formal talks to end coalition mission formed to fight the Islamic State group

By ABBY SEWELL Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — The United States and Iraq held a first session of formal talks Saturday in Baghdad aimed at winding down the mission of a U.S.-led military coalition formed to fight the Islamic State group in Iraq.

Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani said in a statement that he had sponsored "the commencement of the first round of bilateral dialogue between Iraq and the United States of America to end the mission of the Coalition in Iraq."

A statement released by the coalition said that working groups made up of Iraqi and coalition military officials will assess "the threat of Daesh (IS), operational and environmental requirements and Iraqi Security Force capabilities" and a higher military commission will "work to set the conditions to transition the mission in Iraq."

The beginning of talks, announced by both countries on Thursday, comes as U.S. forces in Iraq and Syria have been regularly targeted by drone attacks launched by Iran-backed militias against the backdrop of the ongoing Israel-Hamas war.

The U.S. says plans to set up a committee to negotiate the terms of the mission's end were first discussed last year, and the timing isn't related to the attacks.

Washington has had a continuous presence in Iraq since its 2003 invasion. Although all U.S. combat forces left in 2011, thousands of troops returned in 2014 to help the government of Iraq defeat IS.

Since the extremist group lost its hold on the territory it once seized, Iraqi officials have periodically called for a withdrawal of coalition forces, particularly in the wake of a U.S. airstrike in January 2020 that killed Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi militia leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis outside the Baghdad airport.

The issue has surfaced again since Israel launched its major counteroffensive in Gaza following the Oct. 7 Hamas-led attack in southern Israel.

Since mid-October, a group of Iran-backed militias calling itself the Islamic Resistance in Iraq have launched regular attacks on U.S. forces in Iraq and Syria, which the group said are in retaliation for Washington's support for Israel in the war in Gaza.

Those estimated 2,500 U.S. troops and the bases they serve on have drawn more than 150 missile and drone attacks fired by the militias. Scores of U.S. personnel have been wounded, including some with traumatic brain injuries, during the attacks.

The U.S. has struck militia targets in return, including some linked to the Popular Mobilization Forces, a coalition of mainly Shiite, Iran-backed paramilitary groups that is officially under the control of the Iraqi military. But it largely operates on its own in practice. Iraqi officials have complained that the U.S. strikes are a violation of Iraq's sovereignty.

U.S. officials have said that talks about setting up a committee to decide on the framework for ending the coalition's mission were already underway before Oct. 7 and the decision is unrelated to the attacks.

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq nevertheless took credit for the decision in a statement, saying that it

"proves that the Americans only understand the language of force." It vowed to continue its attacks.

Muslims and Jews in Bosnia observe Holocaust Remembrance Day and call for peace and dialogue

By SABINA NIKSIC Associated Press

SREBRENICA, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AP) — Jews and Muslims from Bosnia and abroad gathered in Srebrenica on Saturday to jointly observe International Holocaust Remembrance Day and to promote compassion and dialogue amid the Israel-Hamas war.

The gathering was organized by the center preserving memory of Europe's only acknowledged genocide since the Holocaust — the massacre in the closing months of Bosnia's 1992-95 interethnic war of more than 8,000 Muslim Bosniaks in Srebrenica.

The event on Saturday underscored the message that the two communities share the experience of persecution and must stay united in their commitment to peace.

"Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Jews are one body, our ties are intricate, forged in hard times and times of prosperity and interaction," said Husein Kavazović, the head of Bosnia's Islamic Community, in his address to a group of survivors and descendants of victims of the Holocaust and the Srebrenica genocide who took part in the commemoration.

"Both our peoples have suffered and had experienced attempts to destroy and eradicate them (and) at the present moment, when the evils of antisemitism and Islamophobia are gaining ground around Europe and the world, we must renew our vow to be good neighbors and care for one another," he added.

Menachem Rosensaft, a child of Holocaust survivors and until last summer the general counsel for the World Jewish Congress, was also in attendance. Rosensaft had repeatedly led delegations of Jewish scholars and young diplomats at ceremonies to commemorate the Srebrenica massacre that are held every July in the eastern Bosnian town.

"Today, we remember. Today, we mourn. We join together in sorrow, and our tears become prayers — prayers of remembrance, but also prayers of hope," Rosensaft told the gathering.

"This commemoration is the place for us to jointly commit ourselves to doing everything in our power to prevent the horrors we remember here today from being repeated," he added.

Rosensaft recalled in his speech the stories of Bosnian Muslims who risked their lives to save their Jewish neighbors from the Nazis and, about 50 years later, Bosnian Jews saving and caring for their Muslim neighbors during the country's internecine war.

Jews settled in Bosnia in the 15th century after fleeing the Spanish Inquisition. Their thriving community was decimated by the Holocaust and today numbers around 1,000 people.

"We must do all in our collective power to change the future, to prevent further destruction and violence, and to reject all manifestations of antisemitism, of Islamophobia, of bigotry, of xenophobia, and of hatred. And we must do so together," Rosensaft said.

The commemoration was followed by the launch of the Srebrenica Muslim-Jewish Peace and Remembrance Initiative devised and signed by Rosensaft and Kavazović. The signing of the initiative was witnessed by a Srebrenica massacre survivor, Munira Subašić, and the leader of Bosnia's Jewish community, Jakob Finci, who was born in a concentration camp in 1943.

Kavazović and Rosensaft committed to collaborate in times of crisis, maintain consistent and compassionate channels of communication, remember and commemorate the victims of past genocides and repudiate all forms of bigotry.

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.

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tion 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 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,

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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."

Today in History: January 28, space shuttle Challenger explodes

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Sunday, Jan. 28, the 28th day of 2024. There are 338 days left in the year.

Today in History:

On Jan. 28, 1986, the space shuttle Challenger exploded 73 seconds after liftoff from Cape Canaveral, killing all seven crew members, including schoolteacher Christa McAuliffe.

On this date:

In 1547, England's King Henry VIII died; he was succeeded by his 9-year-old son, Edward VI.

In 1813, the novel "Pride and Prejudice" by Jane Austen was first published anonymously in London.

In 1915, the United States Coast Guard was created as President Woodrow Wilson signed a bill merging the Life-Saving Service and Revenue Cutter Service.

In 1916, Louis D. Brandeis was nominated by President Woodrow Wilson to the Supreme Court, becoming the court's first Jewish member.

In 1922, 98 people were killed when the roof of the Knickerbocker Theatre in Washington, D.C., collapsed under the weight of nearly two feet of snow.

In 1945, during World War II, Allied supplies began reaching China over the newly reopened Burma Road.

In 1956, Elvis Presley made his first national TV appearance on "Stage Show," a CBS program hosted by Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey.

In 1973, a cease-fire officially went into effect in the Vietnam War, a day after the signing of the Paris Peace Accords by the United States, North Vietnam and South Vietnam.

In 1980, six U.S. diplomats who had avoided being taken hostage at their embassy in Tehran flew out of Iran with the help of Canadian diplomats.

In 1982, Italian anti-terrorism forces rescued U.S. Brig. Gen. James L. Dozier, 42 days after he had been kidnapped by the Red Brigades.

In 2011, chaos engulfed Egypt as protesters seized the streets of Cairo, battling police, burning down the ruling party's headquarters and defying a military curfew.

In 2013, Lynyrd Skynyrd keyboard player Billy Powell, who survived the 1977 plane crash that killed three other band members, died in Orange Park, Fla., at age 56.

In 2017, Serena Williams won her record 23rd Grand Slam singles title, defeating her sister Venus for what would be her final major championship.

In 2018, Bruno Mars won all six Grammy awards for which he was nominated, including album of the year for "24K Magic."

In 2021, Cicely Tyson, the pioneering Black actor who gained an Oscar nomination for her role as the sharecropper's wife in "Sounder" and touched TV viewers' hearts in "The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman," died at age 96.

Today's birthdays: Actor Nicholas Pryor is 89. Actor Alan Alda is 88. Actor Susan Howard is 82. Actor Marthe (cq) Keller is 79. Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., is 77. Actor-singer Barbi Benton is 74. Evangelical pastor Rick Warren is 70. Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy (sahr-koh-ZEE') is 69. Actor Harley Jane Kozak is 67. Movie director Frank Darabont is 65. Rock musician Dave Sharp is 65. Rock singer Sam Phillips is 62. Rock musician Dan Spitz is 61. Gospel singer Marvin Sapp is 57. Singer Sarah McLachlan is 56.

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Rapper Rakim is 56. DJ Muggs (Cypress Hill) is 56. Actor Kathryn Morris is 55. Humorist Mo Rocca is 55. Rock/soul musician Jeremy Ruzumna (Fitz and the Tantrums) is 54. R&B singer Anthony Hamilton is 53. Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett is 52. Singer Monifah is 52. Actor Gillian Vigman is 52. Retired MLB All-Star Jermaine Dye is 50. Actor Terri Conn is 49. Singer Joey Fatone Jr. ('N Sync) is 47. Rapper Rick Ross is 47. Actor Rosamund Pike is 45. Actor Angelique Cabral is 45. Singer Nick Carter (Backstreet Boys) is 44. Actor Vinny Chhibber is 44. Actor Elijah Wood is 43. Rapper J. Cole is 39. Actor Alexandra Krosney is 36. Actor Yuri Sardarov is 36. Actor Ariel Winter is 26.