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Death Notice: JoAnn Krueger

JoAnn Krueger, 82, of Aberdeen and formerly of Groton passed away February 3, 2024 at Avera Mother Joseph Manor in Aberdeen. Services are pending with Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.

Sunday, Feb. 4

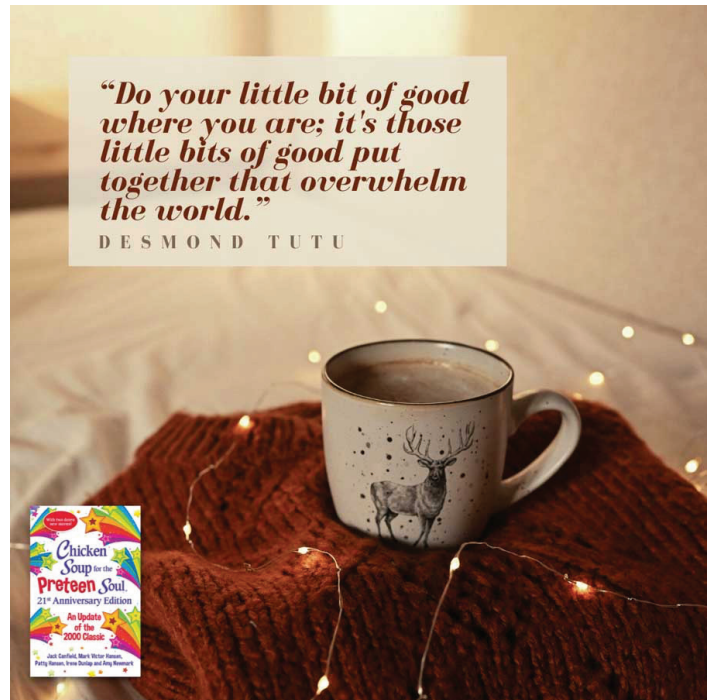
Open Gym: Grades JK-8 2:00-3:30 [Students accompanied by adults] Grades 6-12 3:30-5:00

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.

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



Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; 1st Communion Class, 1 p.m.; Choir, 6 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion at St. John's, 9 a.m.; and at Zion, 11 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.

United Methodist: Worship with communion at Conde, 8:30 a.m.; and at Groton, 10:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:30 a.m.

Monday, Feb. 5

School Breakfast: Pancake on stick.

School Lunch: Chicken nuggets, fries.

Senior Menu: Cranberry meatballs, mashed potatoes, mixed vegetables, fruit, whole wheat bread.

Pantry Open 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

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

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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GHS Boys Wrestling

Grapplers take fifth at Big Dakota Conference

Groton Area's wrestling team placed fifth at the Big Dakota Conference Tournament held Saturday at Stanley County. Groton Area gained 113 points as three wrestlers took second place and three took fifth place.

Taking second were Christian Ehresmann at 144 pounds, Korbin Kucker at 165 pounds and Gavin Englund at 285 pounds. Placing fifth were Donavon Block at 120 pounds, Walker Zoellner at 126 pounds and Charlie Frost at 215 pounds.

Team Points: 1 Winner Area 268.0, 2 Kimball/White Lake/Platte-Geddes 227.0, 3 Miller/Highmore-Harrold 179.5, 4 Chamberlain 123.5, 5 Groton Area 113.0, 6 Bennett County 111.0, 7 Marion/Freeman 96.5, 8 Lakota Tech 86.0, 8 Mobridge-Pollock 86.0, 10 Stanley County 74.0, 11 Harding County 32.0, 12 Todd County 25.0, 13 Sully Buttes 22.0, 13 Sunshine Bible Academy 22.0, 15 McLaughlin 20.0, 16 Cheyenne-Eagle Butte/Dupree/Tiospaye Topa 14.0, 17 Faith 4.0, 18 Canistota 3.0, 18 Little Wound 3.0, 20 Crow Creek 0.0, 20 Doland 0.0 ,

106: Wyatt Hagen (23-13).

Champ. Round 1 - Wyatt Hagen (Groton Area) 23-13 received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Brody Neilan (Chamberlain) 19-11 won by decision over Wyatt Hagen (Groton Area) 23-13 (Dec 4-3)

Cons. Round 2 - Taggen Paxton (McLaughlin) 14-15 won by medical forfeit over Wyatt Hagen (Groton Area) 23-13 (M. For.)

113: Lincoln Krause (19-11) placed 6th and scored 7.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Lincoln Krause (Groton Area) 19-11 received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Jaymin VanDerWerff (Miller/Highmore-Harrold) 31-16 won by fall over Lincoln Krause (Groton Area) 19-11 (Fall 0:36)

Cons. Round 2 - Lincoln Krause (Groton Area) 19-11 received a bye () (Bye)

Cons. Round 3 - Lincoln Krause (Groton Area) 19-11 won by fall over Avery Williams (Sully Buttes) 0-12 (Fall 2:01)

Cons. Semi - Roukyn Robbins (Winner Area) 29-13 won by fall over Lincoln Krause (Groton Area) 19-11 (Fall 3:29)

5th Place Match - Jaxson Turbiville (Harding County) 11-20 won by fall over Lincoln Krause (Groton Area) 19-11 (Fall 2:05)

120: Donavon Block (12-14) placed 5th and scored 13.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Donavon Block (Groton Area) 12-14 received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Donavon Block (Groton Area) 12-14 won by fall over Evan Hertel (McLaughlin) 10-15 (Fall 3:23)

Semifinal - Kasen Konstanz (Kimball/White Lake/Platte-Geddes) 33-2 won by fall over Donavon Block (Groton Area) 12-14 (Fall 0:10)

Cons. Semi - Sam Crago (Miller/Highmore-Harrold) 11-19 won by decision over Donavon Block (Groton Area) 12-14 (Dec 8-2)

5th Place Match - Donavon Block (Groton Area) 12-14 won by forfeit over Evan Hertel (McLaughlin) 10-15 (For.)

126: Walker Zoellner (27-12) placed 5th and scored 11.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Walker Zoellner (Groton Area) 27-12 received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Walker Zoellner (Groton Area) 27-12 won by decision over Landon Bame (Stanley County)

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25-16 (Dec 8-2)

Semifinal - Gavin Braun (Kimball/White Lake/Platte-Geddes) 36-2 won by decision over Walker Zoellner (Groton Area) 27-12 (Dec 9-2)

Cons. Semi - Lyle Noel (Bennett County) 22-15 won by major decision over Walker Zoellner (Groton Area) 27-12 (MD 9-0)

5th Place Match - Walker Zoellner (Groton Area) 27-12 won by fall over Landon Bame (Stanley County) 25-16 (Fall 2:38)

144: Christian Ehresmann (30-4) placed 2nd and scored 24.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 30-4 won by fall over Johnny Alpizar (Miller/Highmore-Harrold) 5-7 (Fall 1:22)

Quarterfinal - Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 30-4 won by fall over Cody Provost (Lakota Tech) 18-11 (Fall 0:58)

Semifinal - Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 30-4 won by fall over Tel Gropper (Bennett County) 23-16 (Fall 0:59)

1st Place Match - Iden Myers (Kimball/White Lake/Platte-Geddes) 34-1 won by decision over Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 30-4 (Dec 3-2)

157: Easten Ekern (10-18) scored 4.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Hayden Roggow (Stanley County) 21-6 won by fall over Easten Ekern (Groton Area) 10-18 (Fall 0:52)

Cons. Round 1 - Easten Ekern (Groton Area) 10-18 received a bye () (Bye)

Cons. Round 2 - Easten Ekern (Groton Area) 10-18 won by fall over Isaac Ramirez (Sully Buttes) 2-16 (Fall 3:38)

Cons. Round 3 - Talon Krolikowski (Bennett County) 22-10 won by fall over Easten Ekern (Groton Area) 10-18 (Fall 0:32)

165: Korbin Kucker (18-6) placed 2nd and scored 21.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) 18-6 received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) 18-6 won by fall over Deon Tenold (Harding County) 8-27 (Fall 2:34)

Semifinal - Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) 18-6 won by major decision over Chisum Blum (Chamberlain) 11-10 (MD 10-1)

1st Place Match - Lucas Lenz (Kimball/White Lake/Platte-Geddes) 33-3 won by fall over Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) 18-6 (Fall 1:27)

175: Ben Hoeft (10-22).

Champ. Round 1 - Ben Hoeft (Groton Area) 10-22 received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Jerrick Thompson (Lakota Tech) 12-9 won by fall over Ben Hoeft (Groton Area) 10-22 (Fall 3:44)

Cons. Round 2 - Ben Hoeft (Groton Area) 10-22 received a bye () (Bye)

Cons. Round 3 - Kady Westergren (Sully Buttes) 6-9 won by major decision over Ben Hoeft (Groton Area) 10-22 (MD 15-2)

190: Isaiah Scepaniak (1-16).

Champ. Round 1 - Isaiah Scepaniak (Groton Area) 1-16 received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Kolt Fox (Lakota Tech) 23-7 won by fall over Isaiah Scepaniak (Groton Area) 1-16 (Fall 0:49)

Cons. Round 2 - Carver Rahn (Todd County) 7-16 won by fall over Isaiah Scepaniak (Groton Area) 1-16 (Fall 0:19)

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215: Charlie Frost (11-13) placed 5th and scored 11.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Charlie Frost (Groton Area) 11-13 received a bye () (Bye)
Quarterfinal - Wyatt Zeigler (Mobridge-Pollock) 16-17 won by fall over Charlie Frost (Groton Area) 11-13 (Fall 4:10)
Cons. Round 2 - Charlie Frost (Groton Area) 11-13 received a bye () (Bye)
Cons. Round 3 - Charlie Frost (Groton Area) 11-13 won by fall over Raymond Arnold (Marion/Freeman) 2-13 (Fall 2:18)
Cons. Semi - Tayten Walker (Stanley County) 20-13 won by fall over Charlie Frost (Groton Area) 11-13 (Fall 1:44)
5th Place Match - Charlie Frost (Groton Area) 11-13 won by fall over Adrian Rowland (Lakota Tech) 5-12 (Fall 0:47)

285: Gavin Englund (25-13) placed 2nd and scored 22.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Gavin Englund (Groton Area) 25-13 received a bye () (Bye)
Quarterfinal - Gavin Englund (Groton Area) 25-13 won by fall over Quentin White Mountain (McLaughlin) 10-12 (Fall 4:51)
Semifinal - Gavin Englund (Groton Area) 25-13 won by fall over Carter Brave (Todd County) 19-17 (Fall 2:53)
1st Place Match - Stetson Shelbourn (Winner Area) 29-11 won by decision over Gavin Englund (Groton Area) 25-13 (Dec 7-2)

GHS Girls Wrestling

Krueger takes first, Little third at Big Dakota Conference

Liza Krueger took first place at the Big Dakota Conference Wrestling Tournament held Saturday at Stanley County. She won all three matches with a pin. Maddie Little took third for the Tigers. The two girls propelled Groton Area to a sixth place finish in the tournament.

1 Lakota Tech 145.0, 2 Miller/Highmore-Harrold 66.0, 3 Sully Buttes 60.0, 4 Chamberlain 52.0, 5 Doland 42.0, 6 Groton Area 38.0, 7 Todd County 36.0, 8 Bennett County 34.0, 9 Harding County 30.5, 10 Kimball/White Lake/Platte-Geddes 24.0, 10 Mobridge-Pollock 24.0, 12 Canistota 14.0, 12 Stanley County 14.0, 14 McLaughlin 10.0, 15 Wessington Springs/Woonsocket/Wolsey-Wessington 9.0, 16 Crow Creek 4.0, 17 Faith 3.0, 18 Cheyenne-Eagle Butte/Dupree/Tiospaye Topa 0.0, 18 Little Wound 0.0, 18 Marion/Freeman 0.0, 18 Sunshine Bible Academy 0.0, 18 Winner Area 0.0.

100: Liza Krueger (26-3) placed 1st and scored 26.0 team points.

Quarterfinal - Liza Krueger (Groton Area) 26-3 won by fall over Claire O`Leary (McLaughlin) 1-14 (Fall 1:08)
Semifinal - Liza Krueger (Groton Area) 26-3 won by fall over Lola Conn (Canistota) 5-10 (Fall 1:10)
1st Place Match - Liza Krueger (Groton Area) 26-3 won by fall over Jaynie Perkins (Lakota Tech) 19-13 (Fall 5:22)

107: Maddie Little (6-10) placed 3rd and scored 12.0 team points.

Quarterfinal - Maddie Little (Groton Area) 6-10 received a bye () (Bye)
Semifinal - Brandy Marshall (Lakota Tech) 18-5 won by fall over Maddie Little (Groton Area) 6-10 (Fall 1:11)
Cons. Semi - Maddie Little (Groton Area) 6-10 won by fall over Alexandra Schmiedt (Chamberlain) 2-22 (Fall 4:18)
3rd Place Match - Maddie Little (Groton Area) 6-10 won by decision over Paesyn Wilson (Bennett County) 4-9 (Dec 7-1)

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GHS Girl's Basketball

Elk Point-Jefferson beats Groton Area at DAK XII-NEC Clash

Groton Area's offense took a vacation Saturday as Elk Point-Jefferson defeated the Tigers, 44-23. It was part of the DAK XII-NEC Clash held in Madison.

Groton Area made just 18 percent of its field goals in the game, which included missing all 10 shots in the third quarter.

The Lady Tigers came out strong in the first quarter and held a 7-5 lead at the break. Groton Area made three of 11 field goals in the quarter while the Huskies also had a vacation from field goals, making two of 15 in the quarter for 13 percent.

Both teams struggled to find their footing in shooting in the second quarter as Groton Area was three of 12 and Elk Point-Jefferson was two of 10. Groton Area led at halftime, 14-10.

In the third quarter, Elk Point-Jefferson outscored Groton Area, 17-4 as the Tigers could not buy a field goal and made four of eight free throws. The Huskies took a 27-18 lead at the end of the third quarter.

Sydney Leicht hit a three-pointer to start the third quarter, but that would be the only field goal made as Elk Point-Jefferson made the next 15 points.

Jerica Locke led Groton Area with eight points, three rebounds and three steals. Sydney Leicht had four points, two rebounds, one assist and two steals. Rylee Dunker had three points, eight rebounds, one steal and one block. Taryn Traphagen had three points, five rebounds, one steal and one block. Brooklyn Hansen had two points, five rebounds, one assist and one steal. Faith Traphagen had two points, one rebound and one steal. Laila Roberts had one point, two rebounds and one steal.

Groton Area made six of 27 two-pointers for 22 percent, one of 10 three-pointers for 10 percent, eight of 14 free throws for 57 percent, had 29 rebounds, 20 turnovers, two assists, 11 steals, 17 fouls and two block shots.

Cera Schmitz led Elk Point-Jefferson with 12 points while Kaitlyn VanRoekel had nine, Courtney Brewer and Ashley Brewer each had seven, Bentley Kollbaum six, Grace Peed two and Hannah Norman one.

The Huskies made 16 of 47 field goals for 34 percent, eight of 10 free throws for 80 percent, had 14 turnovers and 13 team fouls.

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. Shane Clark did the play by play with Paul Kosel assisting and Jeslyn Kosel operating the camera.

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NSU Wrestling

No. 18 Wolves Fall to NSIC Leading and Fourth Ranked Rangers

Aberdeen, S.D. – The No. 18 Northern State University wrestling team returned to the mat Saturday afternoon against No. 4 Wisconsin Parkside, falling to the Rangers. Northern tallied three weight victories and gave up just one extra point loss.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 10, UWP 22

Records: NSU 7-11 (2-4 NSIC), UWP 9-0 (7-0 NSIC)

HOW IT HAPPENED

The Rangers jumped out 16-0 lead through the first five weights

Chase Bloomquist put the Wolves on the board with a 5-3 decision win over Brady Schuh

Seth Brossard continued his upset train in 2024, with a major decision win over against No. 6 Brody Hemauer by a score of 11-1

With three weights remaining Northern trailed 16-7 and Parkside quickly extended that lead with a decision at 184-pounds

Tyson Lien battled Tunde Oroye in the 197-pound match, taking the bout by decision with a score of 10-4

UWP closed out the dual with a win at heavyweight and took over first place in the NSIC standings with their seventh league victory of the year

Teagan Block tallied a 4-1 decision win over Joey Roti in the Wolves first exhibition match of the competition

FINAL RESULTS

Match Summary	NSU	UWP
125 #3 Shane Corrigan (Wisconsin-Parkside) over Landen Fischer (Northern State) (Dec 11-9)	0.0	3.0
133 #6 Matthew Chi (Wisconsin-Parkside) over Jason Henschel (Northern State) (SV-1 8-5)	0.0	3.0
141 #2 Cayden Henschel (Wisconsin-Parkside) over Braydon Mogle (Northern State) (Dec 4-2)	0.0	3.0
149 #12 Jalen Spuhler (Wisconsin-Parkside) over #2 Wyatt Turnquist (Northern State) (Dec 5-1)	0.0	3.0
157 Ben Durocher (Wisconsin-Parkside) over Cael Larson (Northern State) (MD 13-4)	0.0	4.0
165 Chase Bloomquist (Northern State) over Brady Schuh (Wisconsin-Parkside) (Dec 5-3)	3.0	0.0
174 Seth Brossard (Northern State) over #6 Brody Hemauer (Wisconsin-Parkside) (MD 11-1)	4.0	0.0
184 #8 Reece Worachek (Wisconsin-Parkside) over Sam Kruger (Northern State) (Dec 4-2)	0.0	3.0
197 Tyson Lien (Northern State) over Tunde Oroye (Wisconsin-Parkside) (Dec 10-4)	3.0	0.0
285 Lloyd Reynolds (Wisconsin-Parkside) over Nathan Schauer (Northern State) (Dec 9-5)	0.0	3.0
133E Teagan Block (Northern State) over Joey Roti (Wisconsin-Parkside) (Dec 4-1)	0.0	0.0
174E Crosby Schlosser (Wisconsin-Parkside) over Tyler Voorhees (Northern State) (Dec 7-1)	0.0	0.0
Dual Meet Score	10.0	22.0

UP NEXT

Northern remains at home next Friday, February 9 against (RV) Minot State. The match will begin at 7 p.m. from Wachs Arena and the Wolves will honor their seniors that evening.

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NSU Men's Basketball

Reede Hits 1000 and the Wolves Rally Past St. Cloud State

St. Cloud, Minn. – Despite trailing by six at the half, the Northern State University men's basketball team stormed back with 56 second half points to defeat St. Cloud State. Three Wolves scored in double figures, including Augustin Reede who surpassed the 1000 career point mark; dubbing him the 61st member of the Northern State 1000 point club.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 83, SCSU 76

Records: NSU 9-13 (7-9 NSIC), SCSU 9-13 (5-11 NSIC)

Attendance: 450

HOW IT HAPPENED

The Wolves began chipping away with 17 minutes remaining and grabbed the lead with just over three minutes to play

Northern shot 63.3% from the floor and 54.5% from the 3-point line in the final 20 minutes, finishing the contest with field goal percentages of 48.3% from the floor, 33.3% from beyond the arc, and 79.2% from the foul line

NSU recorded 30 rebounds, nine assists, eight made 3-pointers, five steals, and two blocks in the win

They scored 34 points in the paint, 17 points off turnovers, seven second chance points, and four points off the bench

Jacksen Moni led three in double figures with 31 points, hitting 10-of-14 from the floor

Reede knocked down 6-of-11 from beyond the arc, finishing the event with 22 points

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL LEADERS

Jacksen Moni: 31 points, 71.4 field goal%, 7 rebounds, 4 assists, 3 steals

Augustin Reede: 22 points, 54.5 3-point field goal%, 1 rebound

Michael Nhial: 10 points, 6 rebounds

UP NEXT

It is a quick turnaround for the Wolves as they travel to Bemidji State on Tuesday. Tip-off is set for 7:30 p.m. against the Beavers.

NSU Women's Basketball

Wolves Drop in NSIC Match-Up Against Huskies

St. Cloud, Minn. – The Northern State women's basketball team fell to St. Cloud State in mid-day action, 75-55. Costly turnovers led the Huskies to an early lead that kept the win out of reach from the Wolves.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 55, SCSU 75

Records: NSU 15-7 (11-4 NSIC), SCSU 12-7 (9-6 NSIC)

Attendance: 375

HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern State racked up 12 points in the first quarter, eight in the second, 24 in the third, and 11 in the fourth

NSU drained 40.0 % from the floor, 38.1 % from the 3-point arc, and 70.0 % from the foul line

They notched 28 rebounds, 22 points in the paint, 13 assists, and eight second chance points

Madelyn Bragg was first on the team with 17 points and five rebounds along with two blocks and two steals

Alayna Benike drained 50.0 % of shots from the floor and from the 3-point line

In addition, Benike tallied 15 points and four rebounds

Morgan Fiedler made 4-of-7 shots from the floor along with four assists in the contest

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Madelyn Bragg: 17 points, 5 rebounds, 2 blocks, 2 steals

Alayna Benike: 15 points, 4 rebounds, 50.0 3-point %

Morgan Fiedler: 11 points, 4 assists, 3 rebounds

UP NEXT

Northern State returns to action against Bemidji State and Minnesota Crookston. Tip-off time is set for 6 p.m. on Tuesday, February 6th from Bemidji, Minn. against the Beavers and Saturday, February 10th from Wachs Arena against the Golden Eagles.

Senate Joint Resolution 505A to be heard in tax committee on Wednesday, Feb. 7

On Wednesday, February 7, at 10:00 AM CST, the Senate Taxation Committee will be hearing Senate Joint Resolution 505A (SJR505A). This Constitutional Amendment would take the assessment of our properties back to 2020 values for those who have owned the same property since the end of 2020. The extreme rise in property taxes is the number one complaint from our citizens who are the taxpayers.

Numerous attempts at property tax relief for our citizens have been introduced throughout the years, but have been killed by the legislature. That will continue until we take this issue to "We The People" to hold our elected officials accountable to us. Our voices need to be respected and this resolution would put this on the November 2024 ballot for us to let them know that the state and counties need to live within OUR budget. The wasteful spending that we have seen here in Pierre and at the county level has to stop.

Property taxes affect all property owners. Even if you are a renter it negatively affects you as well, as your landlord's property taxes have risen. We have senior citizens who have bought their homes decades ago and now are being taxed out of their homes. We have families that work hard and live within their budgets and yet government still wants more. While we welcome people who have moved here in search of freedom, there is no doubt this has caused inflated property values leading to the crisis we are in now.

The long term benefit for all of us is that assessments can only be raised 1% per year. I am asking all of you to encourage Senate Taxation Committee members to pass SJR505A and all legislators to support this for the people who we are supposed to represent.

Sadly, I have already been approached by the Department of Revenue that they will be opposing this resolution. To my fellow legislators, we are the branch of government that represents the citizens of our state. I am respectfully asking for support of this resolution and let's get this on the ballot this November!

Sincerely,

Sen. Julie Frye-Mueller
District 30

Charles Mix County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle fatal crash
Where: SD Hwy 44, Mile marker 310, 2 miles east of Platte, SD
When: 3:50 p.m., Friday, February 2, 2024
Driver 1: Male, 34, Minor injuries
Vehicle 1: 1994 Peterbilt 379
Driver 2: Male, 97, Fatal injuries
Vehicle 2: 2002 Chevrolet Avalanche

Charles Mix County, S.D.- One person died Friday afternoon in a two-vehicle crash in Charles Mix County. The names of the persons involved have not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates the 97-year-old driver of a 2002 Chevrolet Avalanche was traveling eastbound on SD Hwy 44 about 2 miles east of Platte, SD. For unknown reasons the driver crossed the center line and collided with an oncoming 1994 Peterbilt tractor/trailer.

The semi entered the north ditch where it overturned onto its side and came to rest. The Chevrolet Avalanche came to rest in the middle of the highway facing a northerly direction. The driver of the Avalanche was pronounced deceased at the scene. He was not wearing a seatbelt. The driver of the Peterbilt was transported to a nearby hospital with minor injuries. He was wearing a seatbelt.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is only preliminary.

The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.

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Good Neighbors

By House Majority Leader Will Mortenson and Senate Majority Leader Casey Crabtree

South Dakota is a special place. We are blessed with natural wonders, fertile soil, room to roam, and freedoms that most people in the world envy. What makes South Dakota exceptional are the people and how we treat one another. Here in South Dakota, we embody the value of being a good neighbor. From helping with ranch chores, harvest, child care, or an emergency, South Dakotans are always stepping up to help others.

Just like any family, there are times we may disagree. Today, we are faced with strong feelings on both sides of the land use debate related to carbon dioxide pipelines. The proposed project has led to emotional conversations in the Legislature, at county commission meetings, and around dining room tables.

Going into the 2024 Session, both of us as Republican Majority Leaders are committed to finding a path forward that benefits landowners and sets clear expectations of regulatory and procedural requirements for those who want to do business in South Dakota. For those who want to become our neighbors and do business here, they will need to do so the South Dakota way, as good neighbors.

We know this is a contentious issue, but we also know South Dakotans can come together to enact good public policy. Both of us have talked to landowners opposed to the project as well as landowners willing to work on easements. Based on those conversations, it is clear that the time is now for impactful change related to the planning, siting, surveying, permitting, and safety mitigation regarding CO2 infrastructure projects while also reaffirming protections to landowners.

Last year, the two of us and our respective chambers were on the opposite side of this issue, and we left Pierre in a stalemate. After lengthy discussions with landowners, ag producers, landowner-rights groups, county commissioners, and our colleagues in the Legislature, it became clear that we all agreed far more than we disagreed. Together, we have worked on proposals that focus on a project development process; one that promotes respect, fairness, and certainty for everyone involved.

There is widespread agreement that South Dakota needs to be forward thinking. As a state dependent upon agriculture, our prosperity depends on national and global markets, and we must embrace emerging industries that leverage our commodities. Doing so creates jobs, feeds families, pays off loans, puts dollars into local economies, and, most importantly, helps create a brighter future for our state and its next generation. This is another way we are focused on helping people because a rising tide lifts all boats. A strong ag economy in South Dakota helps everyone.

Policy reform is needed, and that will require good-faith discussions based on facts among everyone willing to have a serious discussion on protecting property rights while also setting in place a process for projects with tremendous public benefit. With that as our starting point, we have introduced legislation to keep our state open for business while reaffirming our commitment to protecting the people of South Dakota.

We have introduced three bills this year that we are asking our fellow legislators to support—HB 1185, HB 1186, and SB 201. As a package, these bills address many of the concerns we have heard since the CO2 pipeline projects began. These landowner protections include:

1. Additional compensation to landowners when building for-profit infrastructure projects.
2. Safety enhancements, including additional minimum depth to 4 feet and required release of all dis-

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persion and impact models.

3. Liability protection, including lifetime repair of drain tile, indemnification for harm done to land, livestock, and residents.

4. Improved land surveying process. For survey and siting, planners must provide a description of the area, anticipated date(s) and time(s), length of time needed, work description, and contact information for the company. Landowners may challenge the request within 30 days.

5. Project planners must provide additional safety and land-use studies to justify the project need, their ability to protect landowners, and ability to follow through on their commitments.

6. Land agents for CO2 pipeline projects must be South Dakota-based.

7. Easements for CO2 pipeline projects expire after five years if the developer is unable to construct the project.

This is truly a consequential year for lawmakers in Pierre. We can come together and support common sense reforms that protect landowners, we can fight to squander economic development that benefits the state as a whole, or we can leave session in a stalemate once again.

Together, we're committed to continuing the South Dakota tradition of being good neighbors and right-sizing the issues that have emerged to forge a path forward that respects landowners, creates fairness for landowners and developers, and provides certainty for all parties on the process to be followed for infrastructure projects in our state.

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THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE

*I will praise You, O Lord, among the peoples;
I will sing to You among the nations.
For Your mercy reaches unto the heavens,
And Your truth unto the clouds.
Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;
Let Your glory be above all the earth.*

PSALM 57:9-11

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

2. In Joshua 10, which people were killed by great stones cast down from heaven? *Amorites, Samaritans, Canaanites, Nazarenes*

3. From Genesis 2:24, what phrase describes the marriage of a man and a woman? *Holy matrimony, God's reward, One flesh, Today forever*

4. Which insect is mentioned in the book of James as an eater of garments? *Gnat, Hornet, Ant, Moth*

5. What king of Bashan had an iron bed thirteen and a half feet long? *Edrei, Og, Argob, Senir*

6. On which day of creation was the sun made? *First, Second, Third, Fourth*

ANSWERS: 1) Neither, 2) Amorites, 3) One flesh, 4) Moth, 5) Og, 6) Fourth

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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IMPERIAL FLAGMEN ARE HAULING ME AWAY FOR A MURDER I DIDN'T DO. DALE SLIPS PAST THEM, JUST FOR A SECOND -- HER FINGERTIPS BRUSH AGAINST MY CHEST -- I TELL HER EVERYTHING'S GONNA BE ALL RIGHT--



THEY'RE DRAGGING ME NOW.



I'M BROUGHT BEFORE A SINISTER OLD REPTILE CALLED JAILMASTER RACHUS.



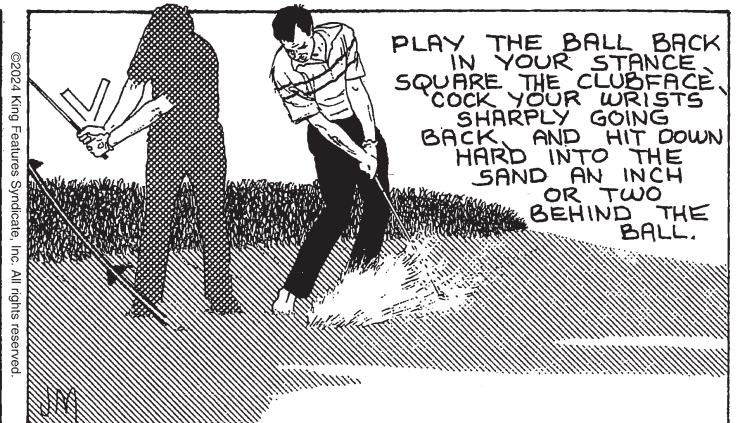
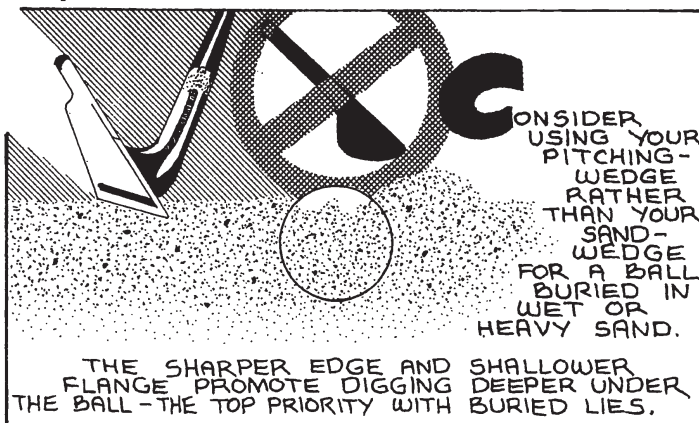
BUT RACHUS IS OLD-SCHOOL, APPOINTED BY MING HIMSELF.

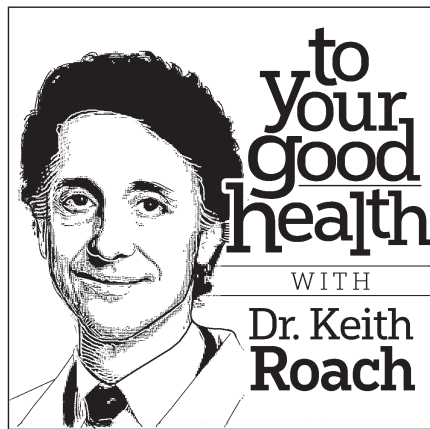


A CAVE PRISON, MILES DEEP, WHERE MING PUT THE ONES HE WANTED MONGO TO FORGET.



Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS





Ablation Is Only Recommended If Meds Are Intolerable

DEAR DR. ROACH: I'm a 67-year-old man who developed typical atrial flutter two years ago, but I haven't had any symptoms that I am aware of. I don't have a history of heart problems. My heart rate was 117 bpm while experiencing atrial flutter.

My cardiologist recommended an ablation, as that can be curative. He specializes in electrophysiology. The ablation was successful, and my heart rate was in the low 60s afterward.

Six months ago, atrial fibrillation (AFib) showed up, but again, there weren't any real symptoms for me. My heart rate is nice and low, and I never really feel any problems ... perhaps some fatigue. But at 67, I can't always distinguish this from the feeling of getting older. I'm on Xarelto and a low dose of carvedilol. My blood pressure is good.

Is it worth having an ablation of the pulmonary veins to try and stop AFib? Or is it better to just live with an irregular heartbeat? Apparently, it's best to have an ablation sooner rather than later, so I'll need to decide as soon as possible. — D.S.

ANSWER: Atrial flutter is an abnormally fast heart rhythm that starts in one of the top chambers of the heart, usually the right atrium. The heart rate in

the atria is very fast, typically 240-300 bpm, which is faster than any adult heart can beat. It is common that every other impulse in the atria gets transmitted to the ventricle, so a pulse rate in the range of 120-150 bpm would be typical.

Catheter ablation prevents the progression of the fast impulse to the rest of the heart, and it is successful 65% to 100% of the time in various studies. Unfortunately, studies have also shown that somewhere between 7% and 44% of those who had a successful catheter ablation for atrial flutter will later have a recurrence — or more commonly develop AFib.

This is called a chaotic arrhythmia and can cause a fast heart rate, but more importantly, the lack of coordinated heart contractions in the atria can predispose people to the development of a clot in the atrium. The clot can then float downstream where it can lodge and cause damage, specifically a stroke. Each year, a percentage of 5% of people with AFib will develop a stroke without treatment.

Treatment is designed to relieve symptoms and reduce stroke risk — your cardiologist has already achieved both of these aims pretty well. The carvedilol is a beta blocker that helps keep the heart rate under control, and Xarelto is effective at reducing stroke risk.

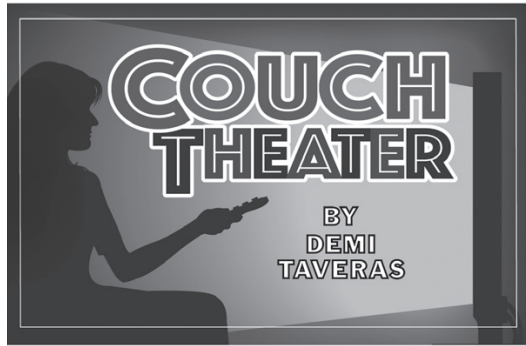
In my opinion, there isn't a need to consider another treatment like an ablation, which has a small but real potential for serious side effects. In fact, it is not 100% effective; about 70% to 75% of patients are symptom-free a year after the procedure. Many people need to continue anticoagulants like Xarelto even after a successful catheter ablation.

I recommend ablation for people who cannot tolerate medication treatment for their symptoms.

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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Colin Farrell, left and Barry Keoghan star in "The Killing of a Sacred Deer." Courtesy of MovieStillsDB

"Feud: Capote vs. The Swans" (TV-MA) -- Producer Ryan Murphy never seems to run out of ideas! After garnering great success with acclaimed anthology shows like "American Horror Story" and "American Crime Story," he continues to outdo himself. This time, he assembled a superstar cast for the second season of yet another

anthology series called "Feud." Naomi Watts, Diane Lane, Chloe Sevigny, Calista Flockhart, Demi Moore and Molly Ringwald team up to portray high-society, New York socialites, whose trust author Truman Capote (Tom Hollander) betrays for his novel "Answered Prayers." Although fictionalized, Capote's novel uses these women's real-life experiences to tell a scandalous story, and these six women are dead set on getting revenge. The first two episodes are out now, with subsequent episodes releasing every Wednesday until March 13. (Hulu)

"My Demon" (TV-14) -- This South Korean series is perfect for those who enjoy fantasy and romance all packed into one. Kim Yoo-jung and Song Kang respectively lead the series as Do-hee, the CEO of a conglomerate, and Gu-won -- a 200-year-old demon living in the form of a youthful human man. They get set up on a horribly matched blind date, and their date goes even more awry when Gu-won's tattoo, the source of his superhuman powers, is unexpectedly transferred to Do-hee. Now to regain access to his powers, Gu-won must keep Do-hee close by. All the while, the threat of losing her position in the company looms over Do-hee if she doesn't marry within her first year as CEO. So, the two plan a contracted marriage that provides them with a temporary solution to their issues ... unless budding feelings make it permanent. This bingeable 16-episode series is out now. (Netflix)

In Case You Missed It

"The Killing of a Sacred Deer" (R) -- Long before director Yorgos Lanthimos would be nominated for the 2024 Academy Awards for his film "Poor Things," there was his psychological thriller film starring Colin Farrell and Barry Keoghan. Farrell plays Dr. Steven Murphy, a surgeon who befriends the teenage son of one of his deceased patients. The teenager, an oddball named Martin (Keoghan), gets closer to Steven and his family, while mysterious and paralyzing symptoms start presenting themselves in Steven's children. Finally, when Steven has no choice but to hospitalize his son, Martin divulges that the only way to save the rest of his family from this terrifying illness is if Steven chooses just one of his family members to kill. The rest will live, and justice will then be served for the death of Martin's father. Disturbing and explicit in its storytelling, Lanthimos' sixth directorial film is one that won't leave your mind. Out now. (Tubi)

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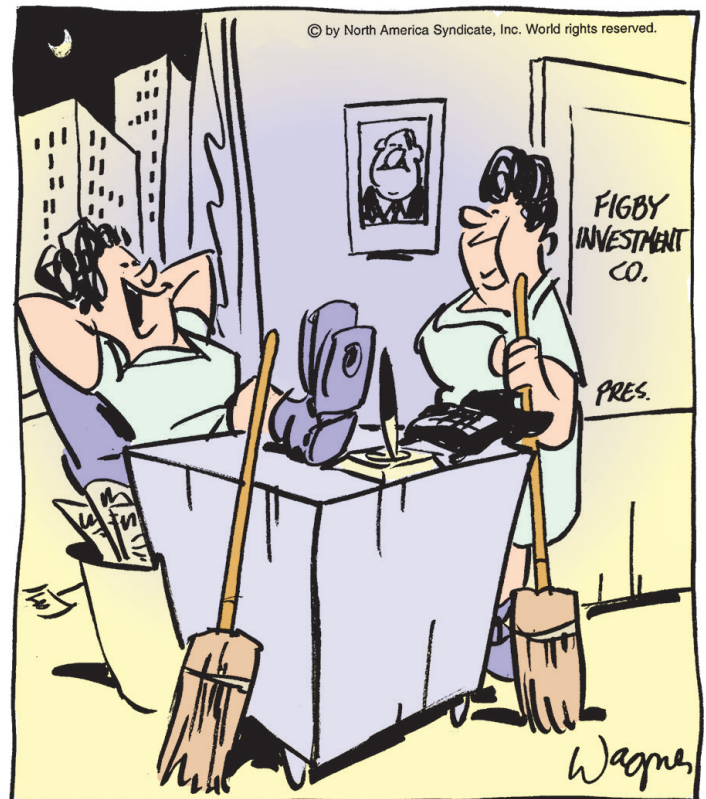
1. Name the Frank Mills chart-topping instrumental that received extra attention later when the Ray Conniff Singers added lyrics to it.
2. "Here Comes the Sun" was released on which Beatles album?
3. Name the amusement park dedicated to rock that existed for a short time near Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.
4. What was the name of Del Shannon's only No. 1 hit?
5. Name the song that contains this lyric: "While she lays sleeping, I stay out late at night and play my songs."

Answers

1. "Music Box Dancer," first released in 1978. Ray Conniff added it to his "I Will Survive" album in 1979.
2. "Abbey Road," in 1969. George Harrison wrote the song while hiding out at Eric Clapton's house to avoid a meeting.
3. Hard Rock Park. It opened ... and closed ... in 2008. The 50-acre site had a Hang Ten roller coaster, a Moody Blues theme ride and more. When it folded, the new owners reopened but only managed to keep it going for one season.
4. "Runaway," in 1961.
5. "She Believes In Me," by Kenny Rogers, in 1979. The song has been covered by several others, including Johnny Mathis and Welsh singer Tom Jones in 1981.

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GRIN and BEAR IT ^{by Wagner}



"I cleaned up in stocks today!"

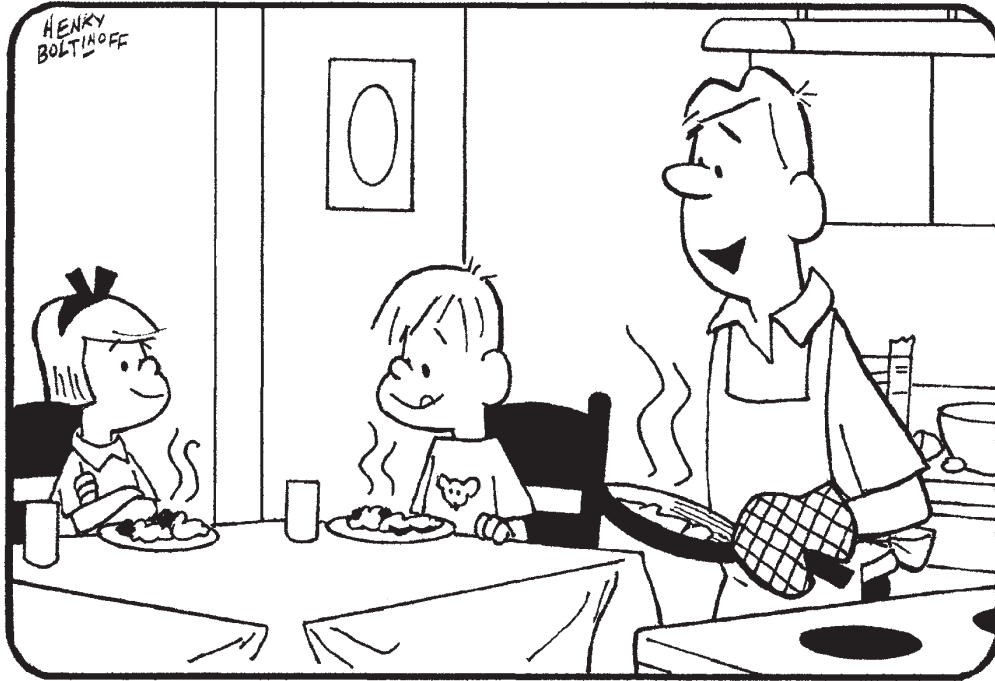
Just Like Cats & Dogs ^{by Dave T. Phipps}



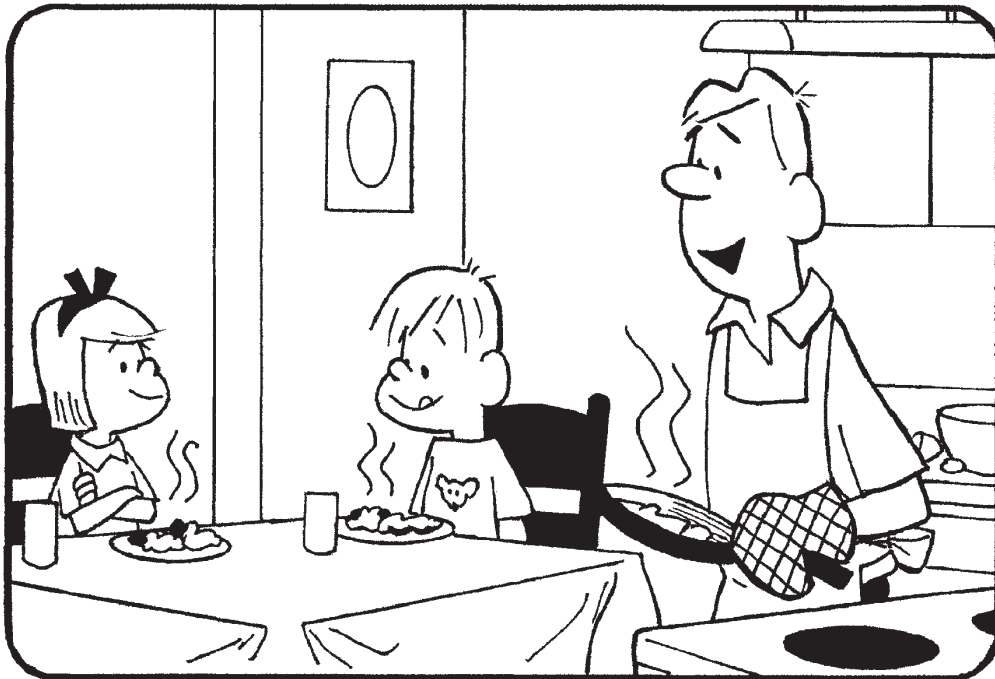
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HOCUS - FOCUS

BY
HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



Differences: 1. Burner is larger. 2. Hand is not showing. 3. Plate is moved. 4. Glass is moved. 5. Box is moved. 6. Hair is longer.

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* To get a really good shine on your windows, try using newspaper instead of a paper towel. Spray the window with your cleaner and just use the paper like a towel. Practically no lint!

* "We save the bread ends and any too-hard or mold-ing bread in our freezer until we can get down to the lake and feed the birds and fish. The ducks especially love it." -- E.F. in Wisconsin

* Drop a couple of crackers (saltines) in your sugar can-ister if you have problems with clumping. The crackers will keep it from clumping. Just remember they are there if you dip a measuring cup in the canister. You don't want a bunch of cracker crumbs in your sweet recipe!

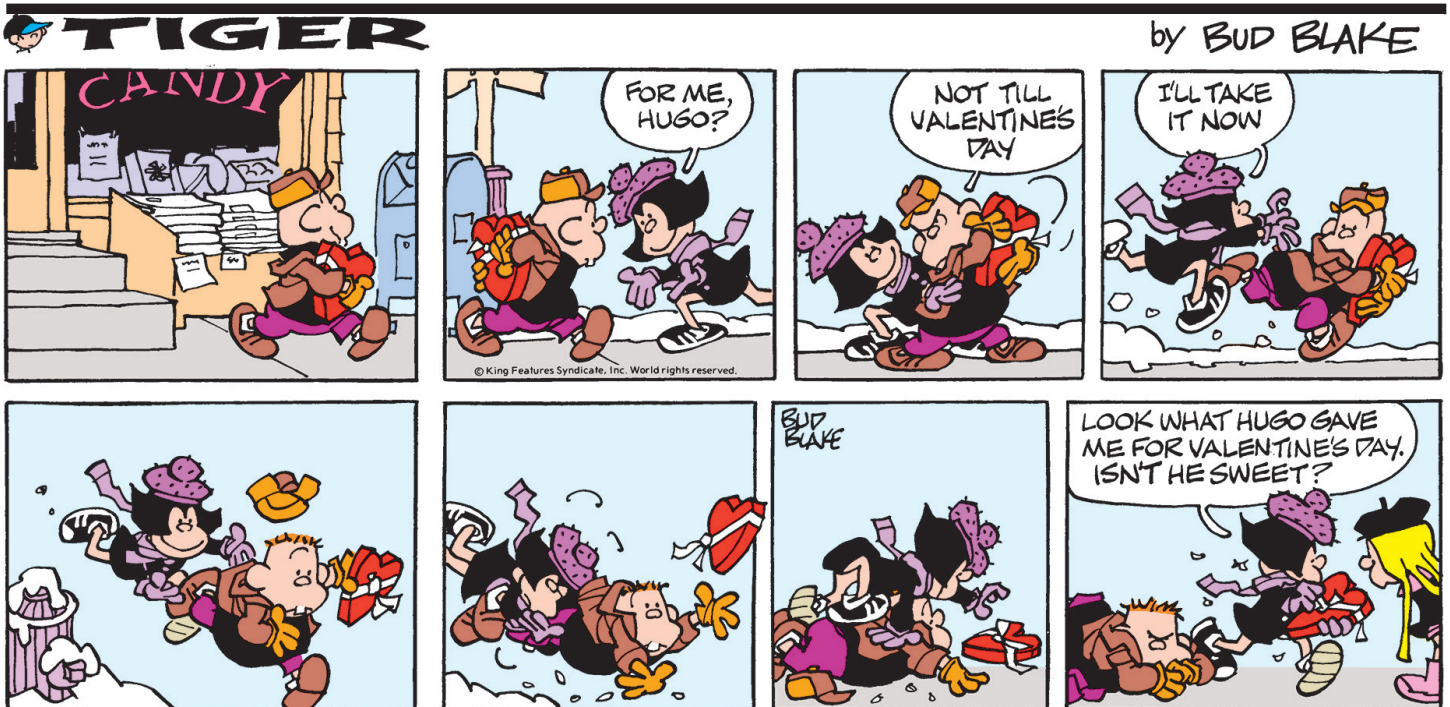
* To stretch your gravy, add a spoonful (or two) of bouillon mix to a glass of hot water. Add enough cold water to a tablespoon of cornstarch to make a loose paste, and add both the bouillon and the cornstarch to your regular gravy. Mix well.

* If you have a hard time skinning fish that comes "skin-on," like salmon, try freezing it just long enough to firm up the flesh in order to easily peel it off or trim it.

* "Keep a container or baggie of wet wipes with your shoes so it's easy to give them a quick wipe-down either before you put them on or before you put them away. They will always stay nice and clean." -- E.W. and V.O.

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

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King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Pt. of a sentence
- 5 Skirt edge
- 8 Some Gls
- 12 Nest setting
- 13 Commotion
- 14 Inter —
- 15 Admin. aide
- 16 Prepared
- 18 Fake fireplace fixture
- 20 Baker Street sleuth
- 21 Competent
- 23 Roman 151
- 24 Started
- 28 Editor Wintour
- 31 Prior night
- 32 Wrap up by
- 34 Martini ingredient
- 35 Painter Chagall
- 37 Coexisted
- 39 Chinese chairman
- 41 "Not so fast!"
- 42 Pub game fodder
- 45 Honor
- 49 Matured
- 51 Jazzy James
- 52 Robert of "The Sopranos"
- 53 Census stat
- 54 Winter fall
- 55 Suffix with song or gab

1	2	3	4		5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12					13				14			
15					16			17				
18				19			20					
			21			22		23				
24	25	26					27		28		29	30
31				32				33		34		
35			36		37				38			
		39		40		41						
42	43				44		45			46	47	48
49						50			51			
52					53				54			
55					56				57			

- 56 Chic, to Austin Powers
- 57 Catches some rays
- DOWN**
- 1 Men-only
- 2 — Major
- 3 Porgy's love
- 4 Air travel fatigue
- 5 Negotiating a price
- 6 Tokyo, once
- 7 Closet invader
- 8 Spanish dish
- 9 Pink wading bird
- 10 Funny — (2003 Derby winner)
- 11 Utters
- 17 Sinbad's bird
- 19 Slender woodwind
- 22 Fund
- 24 Jewel
- 25 Eggs
- 26 Little home wreckers?
- 27 Amassed
- 29 Diarist Anais
- 30 "Life of Pi" director Lee
- 33 New Mexico resort
- 36 Frolic
- 38 Most recent
- 40 Tin Man's need
- 42 Pre-weekend yell
- 43 Actor's quest
- 44 Driver of "Logan Lucky"
- 46 Sicilian peak
- 47 Thames town
- 48 Gulleets
- 50 Conceit

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— King Crossword —

Answers

Solution time: 22 mins.

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

Out on a Limb

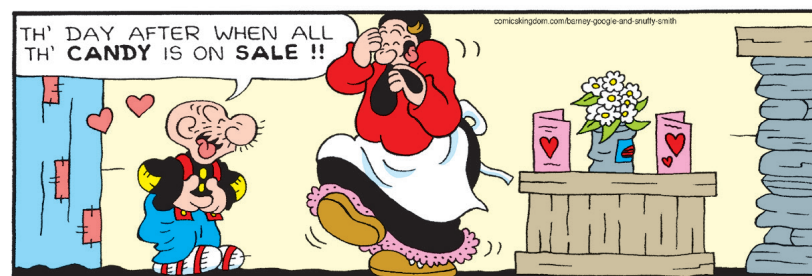
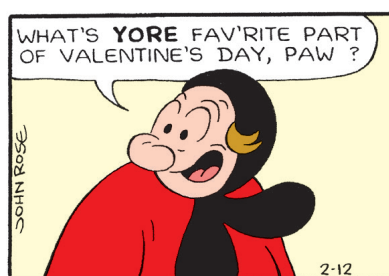
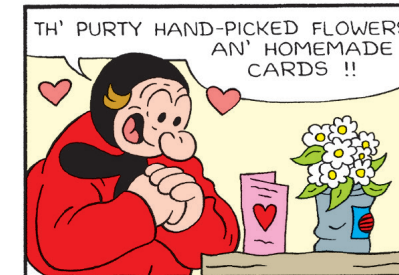
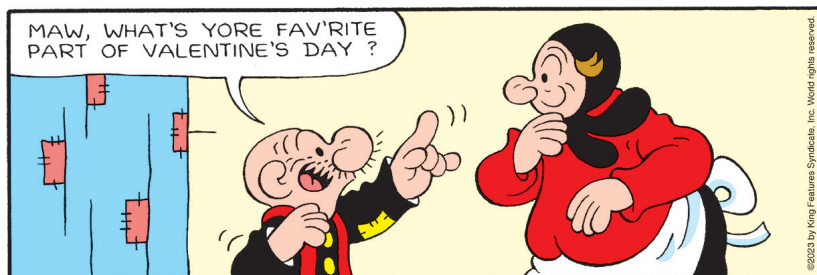
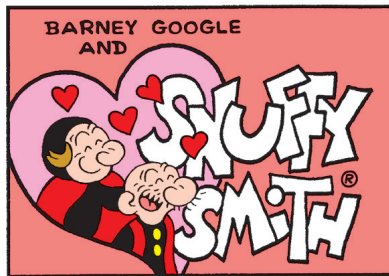
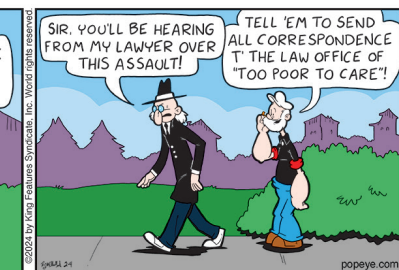
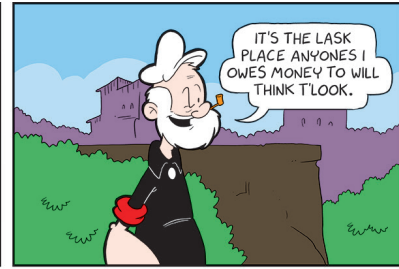
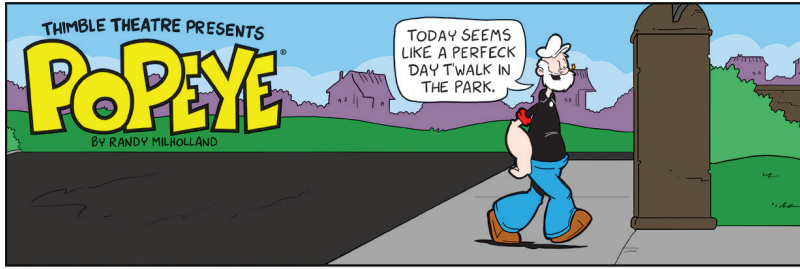
by Gary Kopervas

COFFEE TALK
SING ALONGS
(CONVERSATIONS OVER COFFEE MADE OF LYRICS FROM POPULAR SONGS)



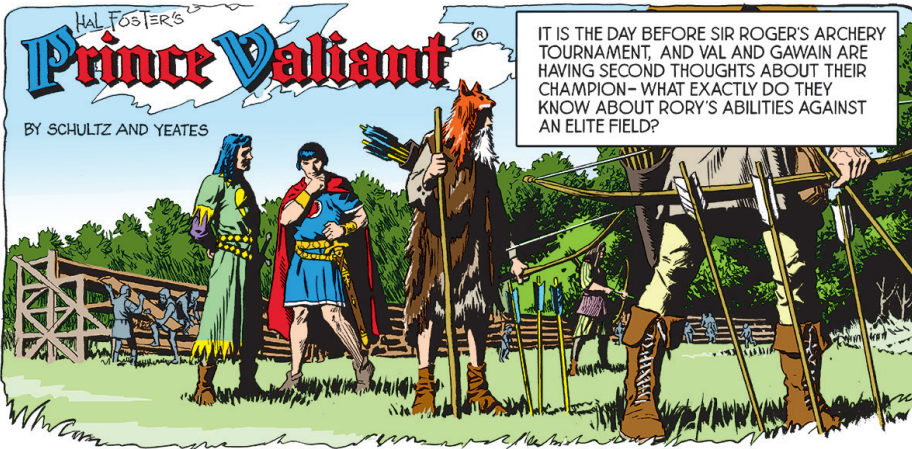
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Hal Foster's
Prince Valiant

BY SCHULTZ AND YEATES

IT IS THE DAY BEFORE SIR ROGER'S ARCHERY TOURNAMENT, AND VAL AND GAWAIN ARE HAVING SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT THEIR CHAMPION - WHAT EXACTLY DO THEY KNOW ABOUT RORY'S ABILITIES AGAINST AN ELITE FIELD?

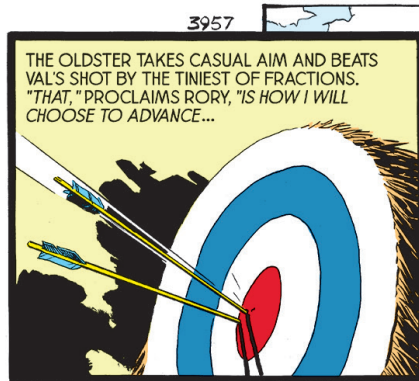


"HOW DO YOU PROPOSE TO MOVE THROUGH THE MANY ROUNDS OF ELIMINATION?" ASKS VAL. RORY GIVES HIM A SOUR LOOK BEFORE POINTING TO A PRACTICE TARGET: "FEATHER THAT WITH YOUR BEST SHOT."



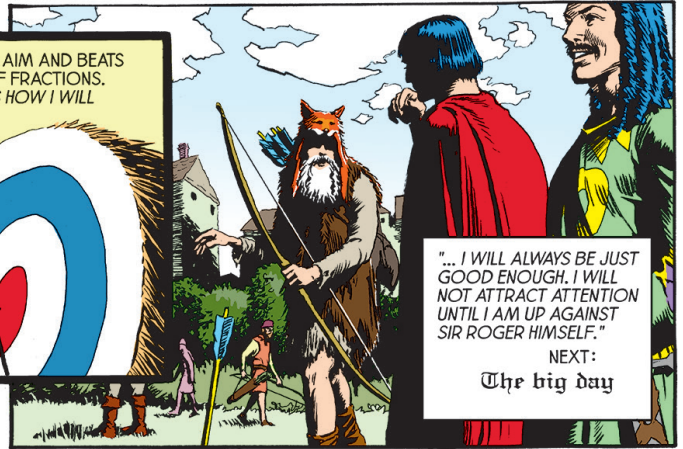
VAL DOES AS RORY BIDS, AND PRESENTS HIMSELF WELL. "FAIR ENOUGH SHOT," SAYS RORY, "AND NOW I WILL SHOW YOU MY STRATEGY."

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3957
THE OLDSTER TAKES CASUAL AIM AND BEATS VAL'S SHOT BY THE TINIEST OF FRACTIONS. "THAT," PROCLAIMS RORY, "IS HOW I WILL CHOOSE TO ADVANCE..."

YEATES 12/9/12

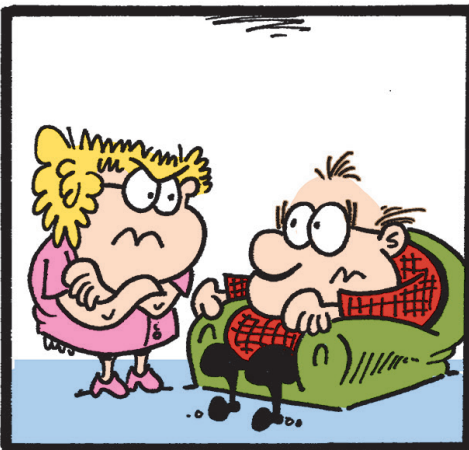


"... I WILL ALWAYS BE JUST GOOD ENOUGH. I WILL NOT ATTRACT ATTENTION UNTIL I AM UP AGAINST SIR ROGER HIMSELF."

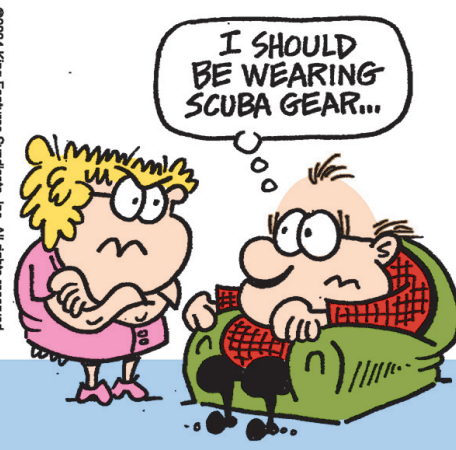
NEXT:
The big day

The Spats

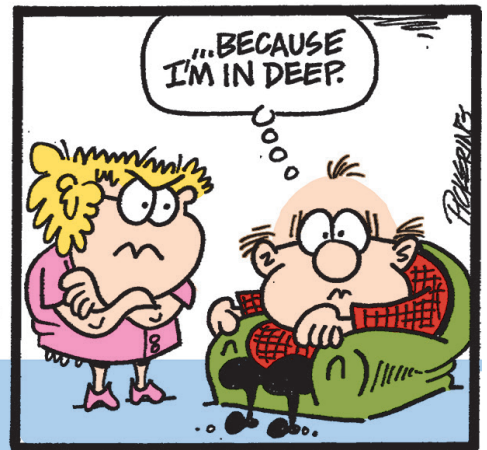
by Jeff Pickering



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I SHOULD BE WEARING SCUBA GEAR...



"... BECAUSE I'M IN DEEP."

PICKERING

SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

Stay ready for the next storm

In many areas of the country it's been a harsh winter. Snow, ice, wind, flooding ... we've seen it all, sometimes several of those at the same time. We need to be prepared for whatever Mother Nature throws at us.

The first step is to know what's coming, and when. While the local news and weather can be your trusted source, having other options can't hurt. I like Wunderground (also known as Weather Underground) for the way it can target my area and provide a wide variety of information. Keep www.wunderground.com as one of the bookmarks in your computer or get the app for your phone at the App store or Google Play.

Keep your devices charged up. A neighbor loaned me a handy charging gadget that stores enough battery "juice" to charge up a phone. I've since purchased one of my own.

Keep an eye on your prescriptions and know when you'll run out. Ask your pharmacist if you can get your refill a bit early, ahead of the next storm. How early you can do this will vary by state.

Have a list of contact numbers, written and taped to the inside of a kitchen cabinet door. Don't trust important numbers to only your phone.

Have at least three days of water and food on hand, things that don't need to be cooked if your power goes out. The same goes for your pets: Make sure you have enough of their food.

Don't wait until the last minute to put gas in your car.

Invest in a small battery-operated radio and little camp lights. Have enough batteries on hand.

And perhaps most importantly, arrange to stay in communication with a few others if you have a nasty storm.

For more ideas, go to the AARP disaster preparation page at AARP.org/disasterprep.

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1. What Hockey Hall of Famer won four consecutive Selke Trophies for best defensive forward as a member of the Montreal Canadiens from 1978-81?

2. Bill Vukovich, winner of the Indianapolis 500 in 1953 and 1954, died in a crash while leading what race in 1955?

3. Name the 1990 sports comedy/drama film that starred C. Thomas Howell and Peter Horton as beach volleyball players.

4. What British swimmer, born with cerebral palsy, won 13 medals in six Summer Paralympic Games?

5. Who was interim head coach of the Nebraska Cornhuskers football team when they beat the Michigan State Spartans 17-3 in the 2003 MasterCard Alamo Bowl? (Hint: He was Nebraska's head coach from 2008-14.)

6. On July 5, 1947, Larry Doby became the first Black player in the American League as a member of what MLB team?

7. Scott Zolak was the backup quarterback for what NFL team from 1991-98?



by Ryan A. Berenz

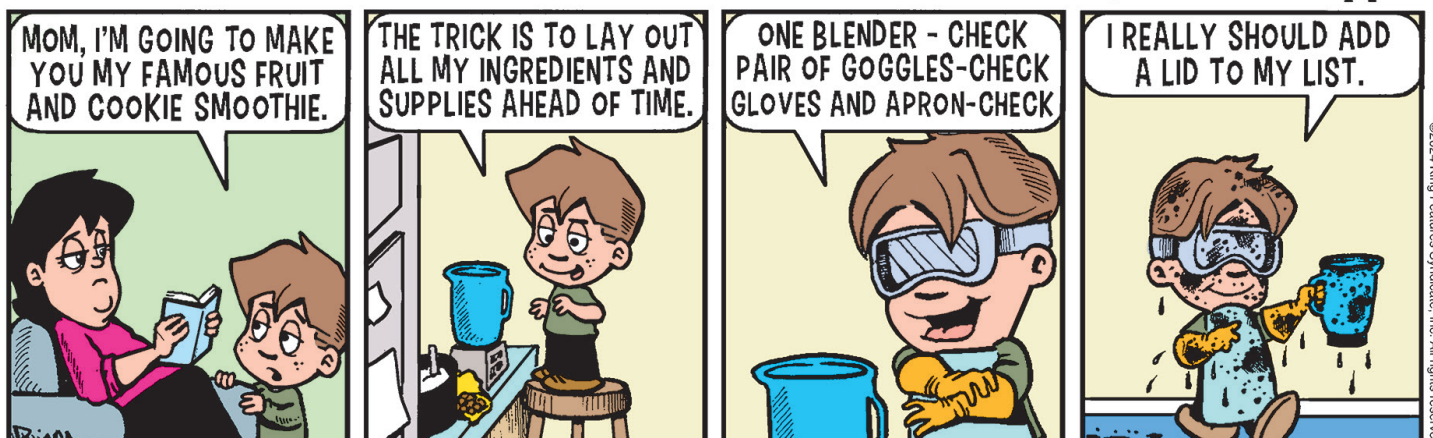
Answers

1. Bob Gainey.
2. The Indianapolis 500.
3. "Side Out."
4. Sascha Kindred.
5. Bo Pelini.
6. The Cleveland Indians.
7. The New England Patriots.

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Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps





Cat's scratching may be allergies, or something more

DEAR PAW'S CORNER: My cat, Buster, has been scratching under his chin for days, and the skin underneath the fur there is getting raw. What is causing this, and how do I stop the scratching and treat the injured skin? -- David G., Buffalo, New York

DEAR DAVID: It's clear that something is aggravating your cat and causing him to scratch in just one spot. The problem could be dry skin -- not unusual for pets or humans in the middle of winter -- or allergies. It may also be an infection, a parasite (mites or ringworm) or an allergic reaction to fleas.

If the area that Buster is scratching is not infected, you can try a few home remedies to try to relieve the itching. Oatmeal, cooked and then cooled, is one option. Plain yogurt is another. And coconut oil may help moisturize and protect the skin. Dab one of these gently onto the itchy area. (Just a very thin coat; don't pile it on.) Repeat as needed.

If fleas are an issue, treat both your cat and your home to reduce and eliminate these little pests. Vacuum carpets thoroughly. Sweep all the corners and underneath furniture to remove dust bunnies, where fleas and their eggs can hide.

If these remedies don't work within a couple of days, or if your cat exhibits signs of infection or illness, contact the veterinarian. They need to take a look and see what exactly is causing the itching. They'll also have medication on hand to combat the itch (hydrocortisone, for one) and treat infection. If Buster is scratching compulsively, they may put him into an E-collar (aka the "Cone of Shame") for a few days to let the spot heal fully.

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

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Strange BUT TRUE

By Lucie Winborne

* A study of over 10 million births revealed that children are 4.6% more likely to be born in the same month as their mothers.

* When Kentucky Fried Chicken expanded its operations to China in the 1980s, the food chain's iconic slogan -- "It's finger-lickin' good!" -- was mistakenly, if amusingly, translated in Mandarin to "Eat your fingers off."

* King Charles III was the first British royal to go to a traditional school.

* During the Napoleonic campaigns in the early 19th century, French soldiers observed an odd condition among many local Egyptian men, who reported blood in their urine, leading to the misnomer label "the land of the menstruating men." The actual cause was the parasitic disease schistosomiasis.

* Some scientists make a habit of consuming the organisms they study, a practice that dates to Charles Darwin's sampling of exotic animals such as pumas and iguanas during his voyages.

* The word "gymnastics" comes from the ancient Greek "gymnazein," meaning "to exercise naked."

* Are you a fan of Cheetos? If so, you might want to visit the town of Cheadle in Alberta, Canada, which is the proud possessor of a 20-foot statue of a ... Cheeto. Bonus: It even lights up at night!

Thought for the Day: "It's no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then." -- Lewis Carroll

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The Garden Bug

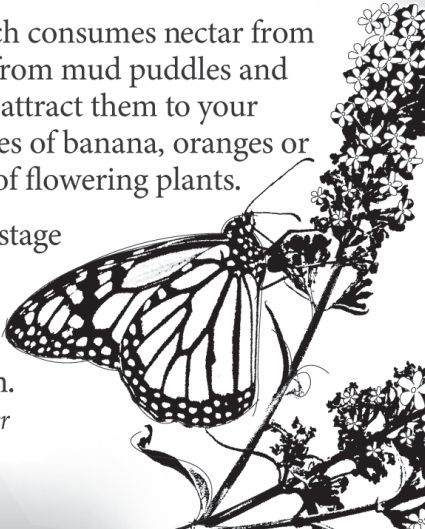
Feeding monarchs

The adult monarch consumes nectar from flowers, minerals from mud puddles and liquids from fruits. To attract them to your backyard, leave out slices of banana, oranges or watermelon, and plant a variety of flowering plants.

The monarch caterpillar (the larvae stage of the monarch butterfly) feeds *only* on the leaves of milkweed plants. From these it gains all the nutrition needed to change into the adult form.

— Brenda Weaver

Source: www.monarch-butterfly.com





by Freddy Groves

The records center has caught up

The National Personnel Records Center, part of the National Archives and Records Administration, has finally cleared up a huge, four-year backlog of work. Caused by the Covid pandemic, at one time they had a list of 600,000 requests for records.

From what we hear, it was a crazy time, with only a certain number of emergency personnel allowed to work in the building at once to take care of must-have requests for things like documents for funerals and medical emergencies.

Now allowed back to work, they've dealt with longer hours for staff, working weekends, additional staff and shifts, new technology and much more. At this point they've caught up, and ideally any normal requests for separation records should be handled within a week or so, with other types of records taking approximately 20 days. Meanwhile, they receive over 4,000 new requests each day. That's over a million per year.

The vast majority of the records at the record center are paper copies that must be found by hand. They've been busy digitizing all the files they can find, including asking the VA to digitize all the military service records they hold. In addition, the eVetRecs portal has been upgraded to handle requests for files online, and there is now a phone line to check the status of orders.

The fire of 1973 continues to impact efforts to produce records. With 16-18 million files reduced to ash, it's been necessary over the years to reconstruct information from various sources and locations to produce the requested files, such as DD Form 214. Some of the alternate records they can search are final pay vouchers and medical/hospital records.

Staff at the records center should be applauded for their work under less than ideal conditions. I personally wondered if they would ever catch up, even with their plan of action and status report one year ago, but they have.

If you need to request service records, go to vetrecs.archives.gov/VeteranRequest/home.html and file your order online.

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Wishing Well®

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

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

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1. MOVIES: Which movie has the tagline, "May the odds be ever in your favor"?
2. GEOGRAPHY: Which country possesses Baffin Island?
3. AD SLOGANS: Which company's slogan is, "You're in good hands"?
4. LANGUAGE: What is a common saying for the Latin phrase "lapsus linguae"?
5. MUSIC: What country was home to reggae singer Bob Marley?
6. ANIMAL KINGDOM: What is an example of a macropod?
7. TELEVISION: Gordon, Percy, James, Toby and Emily are characters on which children's show?
8. MATH: What is 1/60 of a degree?
9. LITERATURE: Who wrote the book series "The Chronicles of Narnia"?
10. ACRONYMS: What does the acronym SPF stand for?

Answers

1. "The Hunger Games."
2. Canada.
3. Allstate.
4. A slip of the tongue.
5. Jamaica.
6. Kangaroo.
7. "Thomas the Tank Engine."
8. A minute.
9. C.S. Lewis.
10. Sun Protection Factor.

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South Dakota Governor

Kristi Noem



South Dakota: *Under God, the People Rule*

Matters of State: Why the Invasion at the Southern Border is a Threat to States' Rights

For almost 250 years America has been the standard of a government of, by, and for the people. But today, the American people are not secure. We have a national security crisis at our Southern Border because the federal government is facilitating the violation of federal law.

A nation without borders is not a nation at all. A government that does not value the security of its people is not only negligent but inhumane.

When the federal government fails to uphold its duty to the people, the responsibility falls to the states. But Democrat politicians are urging President Biden to federalize the Texas National Guard. If he were to do that, it would be the first time in American history that a president activated American armed forces explicitly to stand down, to make us less safe, to not protect the United States of America. And if President Biden can do that to Texas, he can do it to South Dakota – or any other state.

Governors are Commanders in Chief of our National Guards. These soldiers report to us, not the federal government. We understand our unique situations better than a distant federal authority can. I trust Governor Abbott to make the best decisions for his National Guard, just as I make the best decisions for ours here in South Dakota.

South Dakota is directly affected by this invasion. We are affected by cartel presence on our tribal reservations; by the spread of drugs and human trafficking throughout our communities; and by the drain on our resources at the local, state, and federal level.

South Dakota was the first state in the nation to send National Guard soldiers to help. We later deployed our Lakota helicopters on a federal mission when the Biden Administration needed help with surveillance of drug traffickers. Last summer, when Governor Abbott again asked for assistance, we sent more troops.

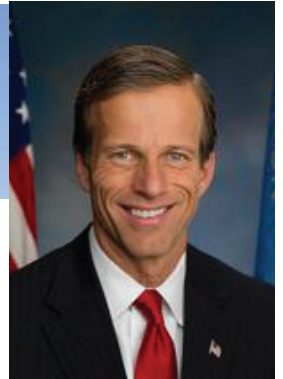
And now, the sheer number of illegal migrants coming into the country has made it so that every state is now a border state. This isn't just an issue for Texas and other states along the border. This is an issue for every American. And this issue is about preserving this great nation for our kids and our grandkids.

This war is primarily being fought at the southern border, but it affects us here in South Dakota, too. We might see the effects differently than Texas, but make no mistake – the open border affects everyone. It is South Dakota's duty to protect our people.

We need to be prepared to stand united to protect our state's constitutional right to defend ourselves. I am proud to support what Texas is doing to defend itself because I realize the consequences of what will happen if they don't. The cartels are here in South Dakota, and they are perpetuating violence and criminal activity daily on South Dakota families. They are killing our children with their drugs and trafficking. These cartels are being fed from over the open southern border where more dangerous individuals are entering the country to destroy America from within.

It's time to stand strong together.

John Thune
U.S. SENATOR - SOUTH DAKOTA



No Time to Waste: Let's Get the Farm Bill Done and Done Right

America needs farmers and ranchers. That's a given in South Dakota, where agriculture is part of our way of life. South Dakotans know farming and ranching involve a lot of risk. For almost 100 years Congress has regularly passed a farm bill to back producers with programs and policies to mitigate that risk and to help them continue operating through tough times.

With the 2018 farm bill expiring last year, I'm glad we passed an extension of farm bill programs through 2024. But this is no substitute for a full and updated farm bill that equips farmers and ranchers with the improved tools they will need in the coming years. So Congress needs to focus on this important task.

One thing I consistently hear from farmers and ranchers around South Dakota is the importance of the farm safety net and the critical role that crop insurance, commodity, and livestock programs play in helping producers manage risk in their operations. As we consider the next farm bill, I'm working to improve safety net programs to make sure they meet the current needs of producers and provide adequate assistance in a timely manner.

Since the last farm bill passed in 2018, farmers and ranchers have faced a number of serious challenges. Inflation has driven up farm production expenses by \$100 billion. Last year we saw the largest decline in net cash farm income ever recorded, and farm input costs are projected to remain at a record high this year. The Biden administration's failure to promote trade and market access opportunities will also negatively impact American agriculture, as the United States is on track to post a record agricultural trade deficit this year. And recent disruptions to shipping in the Middle East may also roil markets that impact American farms and ranches.

With American agriculture set to face serious challenges in the coming years, passing a farm bill that supports farmers and ranchers can't come a moment too soon. Unfortunately, my Democrat colleagues on the Agriculture Committee don't seem to share this sense of urgency, as evidenced by their apparent focus on including their Green New Deal priorities and other unrelated measures in the farm bill. I disagree – we need more farm in the farm bill, and we need to get it done sooner rather than later.

America's farmers and ranchers can't afford unnecessary delays or partisan exercises. It's time to get the farm bill done, and get it done right. That means passing a bill that helps farmers and ranchers deal with the challenges they may face in the next few years. I will continue working to get a farm bill done in a timely manner that provides the support South Dakota's farmers and ranchers need.

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



Supporting American Families

BIG Update

The Houthi attacks in the Red Sea are disrupting global shipping routes, threatening supply chains, and endangering human life. Twenty percent of all container shipping passes through the Red Sea and Suez Canal, but due to the conflict they must be rerouted. The detour is costly, to the tune of an additional \$1 million in fuel costs and an additional ten days of travel time. Shipping rates from Asia to Europe have nearly doubled and freight rates for U.S.-bound cargo have also spiked.

This week, I urged the Biden Administration to secure the Red Sea and restore the safe passage of trade in the region. We may not be able to part the Red Sea like Moses, but if we can't restore the normal flow of trade, Americans and consumers around the world will pay the cost.

BIG Idea

School nurses are often the first in line to care for our kids when they are at school. Carrie has been a school nurse for 25 years and is well aware of the needs of students and staff. As the South Dakota Director for the National Association of School Nurses, she advocates for school nurses and works to equip them with the tools and skills to keep our students safe and healthy.

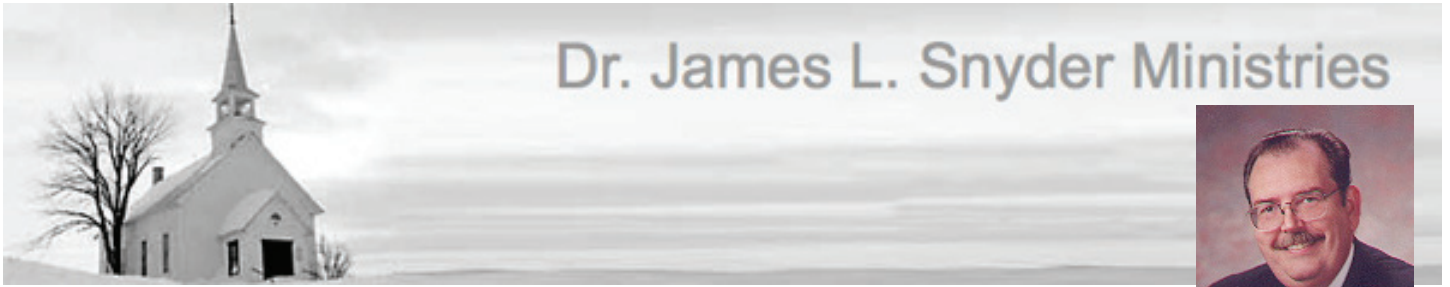
We discussed fentanyl use among teens and the necessity to equip school nurses with Narcan to prevent overdose deaths. It's unfortunate, but fentanyl is leading cause of death for teens. One pill can kill.

BIG News

The House passed the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act this week to restore many Trump-era tax cuts. This pro-growth, pro-family, pro-small business tax policy will boost U.S. competitiveness on the global stage. Should the bill be signed into law, the Child Tax Credit will be increased to keep up with inflation and the penalty for large families would be eliminated to ensure child tax credit work incentives apply equally to all families. I was proud to support the bill to bring relief to American families and Main Street businesses who have struggled to keep up with inflation.

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Making Decisions Is The Hardest Part Of My Life

If it were not for decisions, my life would be perfect. After all these years, I still wrestle with decision-making. I admit that I often don't make good decision.

I'm not sure, so don't repeat this, but I think The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage knows this and uses it to her advantage. How? I don't know. She is the primary source behind my decision-making.

I hate choosing one thing over another when both things are good. That's a bad part of life if you ask me. Why can't everything be easy?

Driving across town, I must decide whether to turn right or left. That's not much of a decision-making process because I know where I'm going. If I make the right decisions while driving, I will get to where I need to be.

So, making decisions can be a real challenge for me.

For example, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage in the morning will ask me what I want for supper. I have not even had lunch yet, and now I am backed into a corner and have to make a decision about supper.

Usually, I respond by saying, "Whatever you would like to make for supper will be okay with me." Then I smile because I don't know what I am getting into. She has been making supper for me for over 53 years, and I have no complaints as of today. Her decision about supper is always okay with me.

Of course, there are those times when she asks me that question, and sometimes I will respond by saying, "Anything but broccoli."

I need to be careful in this area because she is a vegetable aficionado in the strictest sense of the word. If it's a vegetable, it's on her menu, and it's not even open for a decision.

I always wrestle with decisions, and by now, I should have perfected my decision-making skills. Just when I think I have, some decision comes before me that I have difficulty dealing with.

The other day, for example, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage was baking pies for some family get-together. I could smell them all the way back to my office.

She came to my office, looked in, and asked, "Would you like a piece of pie?"

That's not even in the decision category. So I answered, "Of course I do."

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"Okay," she said, "which pie would you like? You can only have one piece."

I asked her about the pies she was baking, and she said, "I have Apple pie, lemon meringue pie, peach pie, coconut cream pie, and chocolate pie. You can only have one piece, so which one?"

That is not a decision-making venue. There is no way I can decide on one pie over five pieces of pie. No matter which pie I pick, I'm gonna love it, but I'm also going to wonder about the other pies that she has.

After all these years, I can't deal with that kind of decision-making process.

Pondering on that decision-making process, I looked at her and said, "I'm not sure which one I want; what would you recommend?"

Looking at me with a sly little grin, she said, "I'm not sure which one I would pick. They're all very delicious and so it doesn't matter which one you pick."

That's the problem with making a decision. When you make a decision, you eliminate everything else. If I decide on the pie that I'm going to eat at the time, it eliminates all the other pies that are on the table. How can anybody handle that kind of decision-making process?

As she was ready to leave my office, I stopped her and said, "I'll take any pie you choose for me and bring it here." Then I smiled.

I waited. And waited. And waited. She never came back with any pie for me. I had no idea what was wrong.

Finally, my nerves got the best of me, and I walked into the kitchen to find out what was happening.

There she was, sitting down at the table, eating a nice piece of pie. I looked at her. She looked back and smiled. Then I asked her, "So, where's my pie?"

She looked at me, laughed, and said, "Since you could not make up your mind when I asked you, I just thought you didn't want any pie." Then she laughed some more.

I did not think that was funny, I walked over to the pies and carefully looked at them. Each one had its own aroma and I loved each one. Looking at them, I was trying to figure out which pie I would choose to eat.

Making decisions is very hard to do, at least for me especially when it comes to choosing my pie. No matter which pie I choose, I would love it, but then I would wonder about the pies I did not choose.

Life has its ups and downs.

When I have to make a decision about anything, a Bible verse comes to mind.

Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

When I trust my understanding, I always fail in some degree. When I accept the fact that I don't know everything, I then turn my trust to the Lord.

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EARTHTALK ™

Dear EarthTalk: What is so-called New Denialism all about?
-- Paul C., Baltimore, MD

For years, human-induced climate change has been a controversial topic, despite heaps of scientific evidence proving its existence. In the past, climate change deniers have used the rhetoric of simply denying that climate change was happening. New denialism is different because instead of focusing on the existence of climate change, it attacks the policies meant to combat global warming, denies the benefits of clean energy, and targets scientists and advocates pushing for change.

Early in 2024, the Center for Countering Digital Hate, or the CCDH, published on YouTube an analysis of online discourse studying the frequency of different types of climate denial. The CCDH is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to “protect human rights and civil liberties.” They do this by holding social media companies accountable for the content they publish. The CCDH’s study, *The New Climate Denial*, found evidence suggesting that the outright dismissal of climate change is no longer convincing, so deniers are instead shifting the argument away from blatantly denying climate change to denigrating solutions like the transition to clean energy.

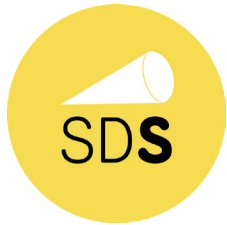
The CCDH study found that new denial content now makes up 70 percent of all climate denial claims that are posted on YouTube, a significant rise from the 35 percent in 2018. Claims that climate solutions won’t work have also risen a significant amount over the same time frame, from 9 percent to 30 percent. YouTube as a host for this new denialism is especially worrying as it targets younger ages who could impact climate action decisions for the future.

Google, YouTube’s parent company, has policies in place which are supposed to block advertising money from content that rejects scientific certainties about the existent and causes of climate change. This should prevent YouTube creators spreading disinformation from monetizing on their content. The CCDH report claims that these policies are ineffective and that YouTube is potentially making up to \$13.4 million per year from ads on videos containing climate denial. This is an issue of company PR, because it’s doubtful that many companies would want their advertising linked to climate denialism.

The fact is, scientists who study Earth systems have agreed for decades that the burning of fossil fuels creates an imbalance of heat-trapping gasses in the atmosphere that are continually warming the world. The warming causes melting ice, which in turn causes sea levels to rise. It also creates a host of other problems. New denialism has only started to become prominent because of the overwhelming evidence of climate change. Instead of fighting against well-known evidence, new denialism turns to discredit lesser-known solutions. By picking at clean energy solutions that are less established, new denialism continues to create doubt and delay the decisive actions that need to be taken to combat climate change.



A recent report from the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) found evidence suggesting that climate deniers are shifting the argument away from blatantly denying climate change to denigrating solutions like the transition to clean energy.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Calls for better teacher pay coalesce into legislation

Proposals include minimum educator salary, accountability benchmarks

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - FEBRUARY 3, 2024 8:46 AM

South Dakota lawmakers haven't made major changes to education funding and teacher pay in eight years.

But that could change this legislative session.

The last time the Legislature made major reforms was a half-percent sales tax increase in 2016 to boost the state's last-in-the-nation ranking for average teacher pay. That infusion raised average teacher pay by nearly 12%, and bumped South Dakota from last to 47th in the nation.

Since then, South Dakota has fallen back to 49th in average teacher salaries (out of 51 states, due to the inclusion of Washington, D.C.).

Rep. Tony Venhuizen, R-Sioux Falls, served on the Blue Ribbon Task Force in 2016 that proposed the sales tax increase when he was chief of staff for then-Gov. Dennis Daugaard. He's introduced one of three bills this session that address teacher pay and education funding. His bill would set a minimum teacher salary.

"My intention is really to just cut to the chase of the conversation," Venhuizen said. "We really want to get the teacher salaries up. Is it time for the Legislature to just be more direct and say, 'This is the standard we're going to set?'"

The state Department of Education introduced a bill that would tie average teacher salaries to legislative increases in funding, and Sioux Falls Democratic Rep. Kameron Nelson introduced a bill that aimed to help school districts boost teacher pay by changing the way enrollment is counted in the state funding formula.

Only Nelson's bill has had a hearing so far this session, and the House Education Committee unanimously rejected it.



A Sioux Falls School District educator works with students. (Courtesy of Sioux Falls School District)

Setting a minimum teacher salary to lift state average

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds asked her Legislature earlier this year to invest \$96 million in new money to



State Rep. Tony Venhuizen, R-Sioux Falls, participates in a hearing Jan. 12, 2024, at the Capitol in Pierre.

(Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

increase starting teacher pay to \$50,000 and set a minimum salary of \$62,000 for teachers with at least 12 years of experience.

As part of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future Act, which increases state funding for education by \$3.8 billion over 10 years, that state will set a minimum salary for teachers at \$60,000 by 2026.

Both states are infusing millions of dollars into teacher salaries to help school districts reach those requirements. Neither Venhuizen nor the Department of Education's bills propose new funding.

Venhuizen's bill sets a minimum teacher salary at \$45,000 for the next school year, though he said he's open to other amounts. That minimum would increase each year based on the educational state aid increases to the "target teacher salary" approved by the Legislature.

The "target teacher salary" isn't actually the state's goal for average teacher pay. In reality, it's a basis for the state's public education funding formula.

Funding determined by the "target teacher salary" formula update goes not just toward teacher salaries, but also toward overhead costs and salaries for other school workers — bus

drivers, preschool teachers, librarians, administrators, custodians, food service workers and counselors. Schools also receive funding from their own local property taxes.

If a district doesn't meet the minimum salary in Venhuizen's bill, then the district's state funding would be reduced.

Venhuizen said the bill would increase salaries for starting teachers, thereby increasing South Dakota's average teacher pay. More experienced teachers would still receive raises, but the minimum would encourage districts to spread state aid dollars more evenly across its teacher payroll.

Venhuizen and other Blue Ribbon Task Force members intended that when older teachers retire, school districts would reinvest the money from retiree salaries into younger teacher salaries. But that hasn't happened at all school districts.

Some school districts have been using state funding increases to cover expenses due to enrollment declines instead of teacher pay increases, Venhuizen said.

"What you're doing then is shorting the teachers and the raise they should be getting because you're not making yourself efficient and right-sizing to the student count," Venhuizen said.

School board member calls minimum pay an 'unfunded mandate'

But it's not that easy, especially for larger districts in the state, said Coy Sasse, chief financial officer and business manager for Rapid City Area Schools.

"That's a very simplified idea that just doesn't work in reality," Sasse said.

The district's enrollment has dropped by more than 1,300 students since 2017. A decline in enrollment doesn't mean all those lost seats are on the same bus route or in the same building or classroom, making it more difficult to cut staff or building space than some might assume, Sasse said. District contracts are also typically locked in before the school year starts and enrollment is collected.

Largely because of its enrollment decline, Rapid City has seen a \$3.2 million reduction in state aid since 2019, despite the Legislature increasing overall state aid by about 14% during that time.

Local property taxpayers in the area are picking up those costs, paying \$9.36 million more toward the school district than in 2019, according to school finance data from the Department of Education.

The funding formula for public education has four major components:

Enrollment, which has the greatest impact on state funding to school districts.

An overhead factor, which is the state's share for non-teacher expenses.

Target teacher salary, which is determined by the Legislature each year.

Local property tax contributions.

Increased local tax contributions would typically mean increased enrollment and therefore increased state aid for a school district, but since that's not the case for Rapid City, the funding formula "works against us and our unique situation," Sasse said.

Sasse added that the funding formula favors districts with lower property tax increases and increased enrollment, since less local property tax contributions mean the state is covering more expenses and therefore contributing more to potential salary increases for teachers.

Despite the factors working against Rapid City, Sasse said the school district increased its average teacher salary by 4% in the last school year, and expects a similar increase this school year. The district has had the slowest growth in teacher salaries in South Dakota since the Blue Ribbon legislation – growing 2.5% between 2017 and 2023.

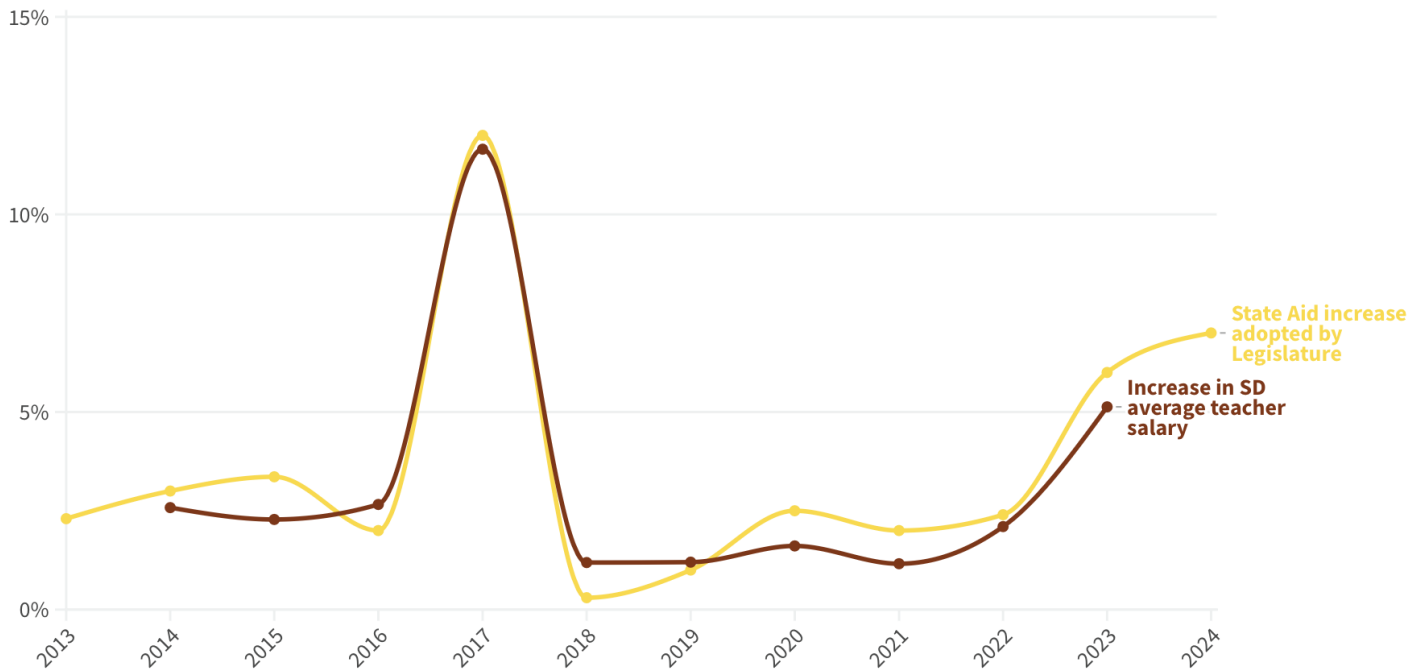
Setting a mandatory minimum salary for teachers would threaten the district's financial future, said Christine Stephenson, a member of the Rapid City Area Schools Board of Education.

"Setting a basement salary for teachers only, and then requiring that percentage to increase yearly, is an unfunded mandate that will harm our district," Stephenson said, adding that she is supportive of other ways of raising teacher pay. "It will remove any ability we have to negotiate with teachers and other work groups in good faith."

SD increase in average teacher pay (2013-2024)



The year-over-year increase in average teacher pay in South Dakota trails slightly behind what the state Legislature adopts for state aid to K-12 public education each fiscal year. The Legislature approved increases in state aid of less than 3% from 2018-2022, resulting in minimal increases in average teacher pay across the state.



Source: [DOE school funding snapshot](#), [DOE statistical digests](#) • Years correlate with the state fiscal year calendar: fiscal year 2024 runs from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024.

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Teacher pay accountability bill would cost SD districts \$16M

The Rapid City Area Schools similarly opposes a bill introduced by the state Department of Education. The bill would encourage school districts to make headway in teacher salary by setting up a benchmark system identifying what districts should have paid in 2017, and then multiplying that number by the percent increases passed by the Legislature in the last eight years, roughly 26% overall.

Of the 149 school districts in South Dakota, 52 are currently paying their teachers at or above what the benchmark salary would be for 2023. But the remaining school districts would have to find nearly \$16 million to reach those 2023 targets.

All school districts would have to reach 100% of their average teacher salary benchmark by 2028, meaning that school districts would have to find more than the \$16 million estimate to comply with the bill's requirements by its deadline.

Rapid City schools would have to find the most money to reach its 2023 target, about \$5.14 million. Sioux Falls would need \$2.94 million and Watertown would need \$882,073.'

Because the accountability bill wouldn't provide new revenue for school districts to improve teacher salaries, that would mean school districts would have to make budget adjustments to reach that target – potentially drastic cuts, said Rob Monson, executive director of School Administrators of South Dakota, which is supportive of Venhuizen's bill, but opposes the accountability bill as introduced.

That could include cutting benefits for teachers to improve salaries, cutting programs in schools, dipping into a district's capital outlay fund (which is intended for costs such as construction expenses, not salary increases) or trying to opt out of state-imposed limits on property tax increases, which can be challenged and rejected by voters.

"That would buy you time as a district to figure things out," Monson said.

The bill specifically works against school districts with declining enrollment, Monson added, saying that it "compounds the problem over time." Only two school districts in western South Dakota reported an increase in student enrollment this year, according to Rapid City Superintendent Nicole Swigart.

In Rapid City's case, the salary base for instructors is \$54 million, so a 4% increase to salaries, mirroring the 4% increase in state aid as Gov. Kristi Noem has proposed, would cost the school district about \$2.16 million. Factoring in benefits, that'd cost about \$2.46 million, Sasse said.

On top of that, the district is expected to lose another \$63,000 in state aid based on estimates for projected fall enrollment and local tax contributions for next year.

"Anybody can see why that's an issue," Sasse said.

South Dakota Secretary of Education Joseph Graves told lawmakers during a Joint Appropriations Committee meeting recently that the state's lagging teacher pay was exacerbated during the pandemic, when many teachers retired or left the profession and school districts didn't roll that money into boosting teacher salaries.

"We had a historically significant, historically unprecedented teacher shortage in South Dakota and across the nation and yet the classified staff — the custodians and the paraprofessionals and the rest — got commensurate increases. Administrators got increases over and above the increases," Graves said. "The only group that didn't get the commensurate increases were the teachers, and I find that curious."

He hopes the accountability system would move South Dakota from 49th in average teacher pay to, perhaps, 45th in the nation.

There is no financial penalty in the bill if school districts don't meet the benchmark teacher salary, though the department would check annually for noncompliance, which would result in an accreditation review and potentially losing accreditation status. Graves told lawmakers the department would be willing to work with districts that struggle.

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Averaged enrollment: offsets decline, but funds 'more kids than there are'

The one bill Rapid City Area Schools did support would have amended the enrollment portion of the state aid formula, allowing school districts to use either their three-year average or the current enrollment number – whichever is higher.

Nelson, prime sponsor of the bill, said the switch to averaged enrollment would allow for a discussion about funding and teacher pay “without tying the hands of local administrators.” He added that he believes the funding formula needs “considerable reworking.”

“If we want to have a conversation about increasing funding to public education, making sure that our students are supported, and school districts are receiving the necessary resources to keep the lights on and to have qualified, brilliant staff teach the future of our state, then I think that’s a reasonable place to start the conversation,” Nelson said.

But Venhuizen said he’s opposed to an averaged enrollment formula because “you end up funding more kids than there are.” Graves echoed the sentiment during his opposition testimony during the bill’s hearing Friday in the House Education Committee.

“A lot of times when people talk about the formula, what they’re really talking about is how much money we spend and they want to spend more,” Venhuizen added. “But the formula is not about how much we spend. It’s about how we spread the money around.”

Meanwhile, the School Finance Accountability Board, which was created to track if state aid increases went toward teacher salaries, expires this year. The only legislation introduced that would reauthorize it is the Department of Education’s accountability bill.

Monson is optimistic about discussions this session and believes lawmakers, school organizations and the Department of Education can put a plan together.

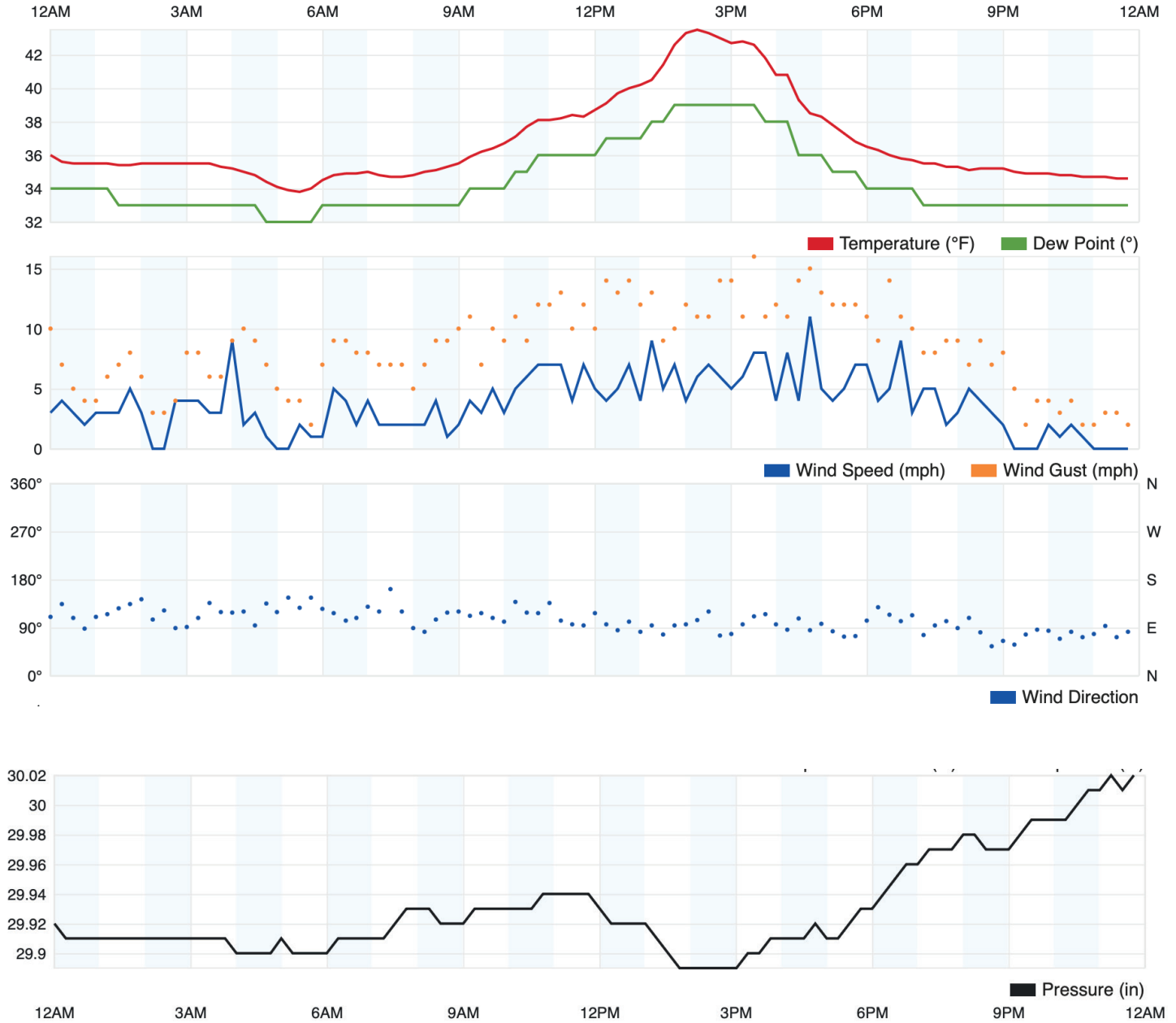
“We’ve got a really good group of people continuing to work on this,” Monson said. “We can come to some sort of agreement this legislative session.”

Makenzie Huber is a lifelong South Dakotan whose work has won national and regional awards. She's spent five years as a journalist with experience reporting on workforce, development and business issues within the state.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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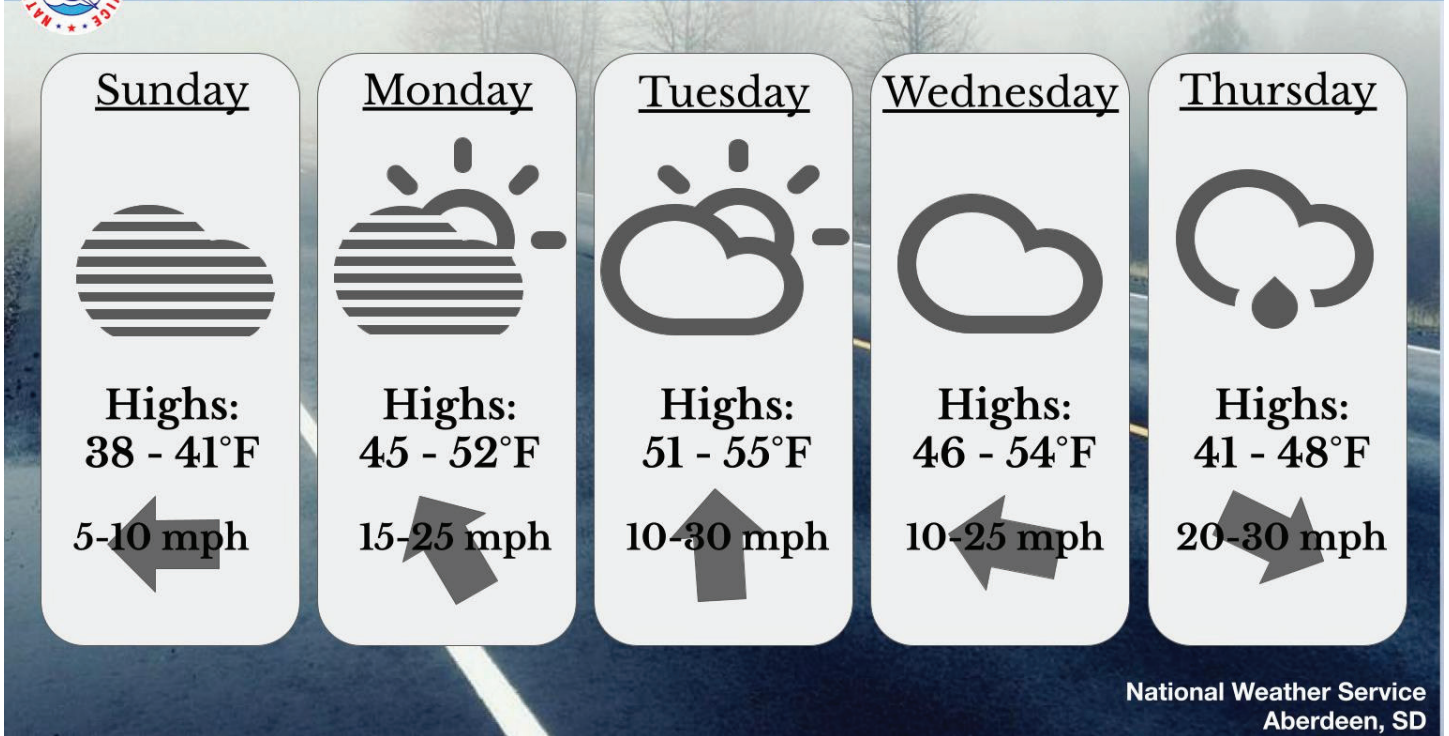
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Sun Feb 4	Mon Feb 5	Tue Feb 6	Wed Feb 7	Thu Feb 8	Fri Feb 9	Sat Feb 10
39°F 32°F	46°F 37°F	53°F 39°F	53°F 37°F	43°F 29°F	37°F 23°F	35°F 22°F
ENE 6 MPH	S 18 MPH	S 16 MPH	ESE 12 MPH 20%	NNW 13 MPH 50%	NNW 15 MPH 40%	NNW 11 MPH 10%



More Fog & Drizzle Today & Monday ... Milder Mid-Week

February 4, 2024
3:35 AM



We will continue to see fog, low clouds and some drizzle today and into Monday before we actually see some clearing. Temperatures will top out near records for Tuesday before a system brings clouds and showers to the region for late in the week.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 44 °F at 2:08 PM

Low Temp: 34 °F at 5:13 AM

Wind: 17 mph at 5:04 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 56 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 55 in 2005

Record Low: -36 in 1893

Average High: 26

Average Low: 3

Average Precip in Feb.: 0.08

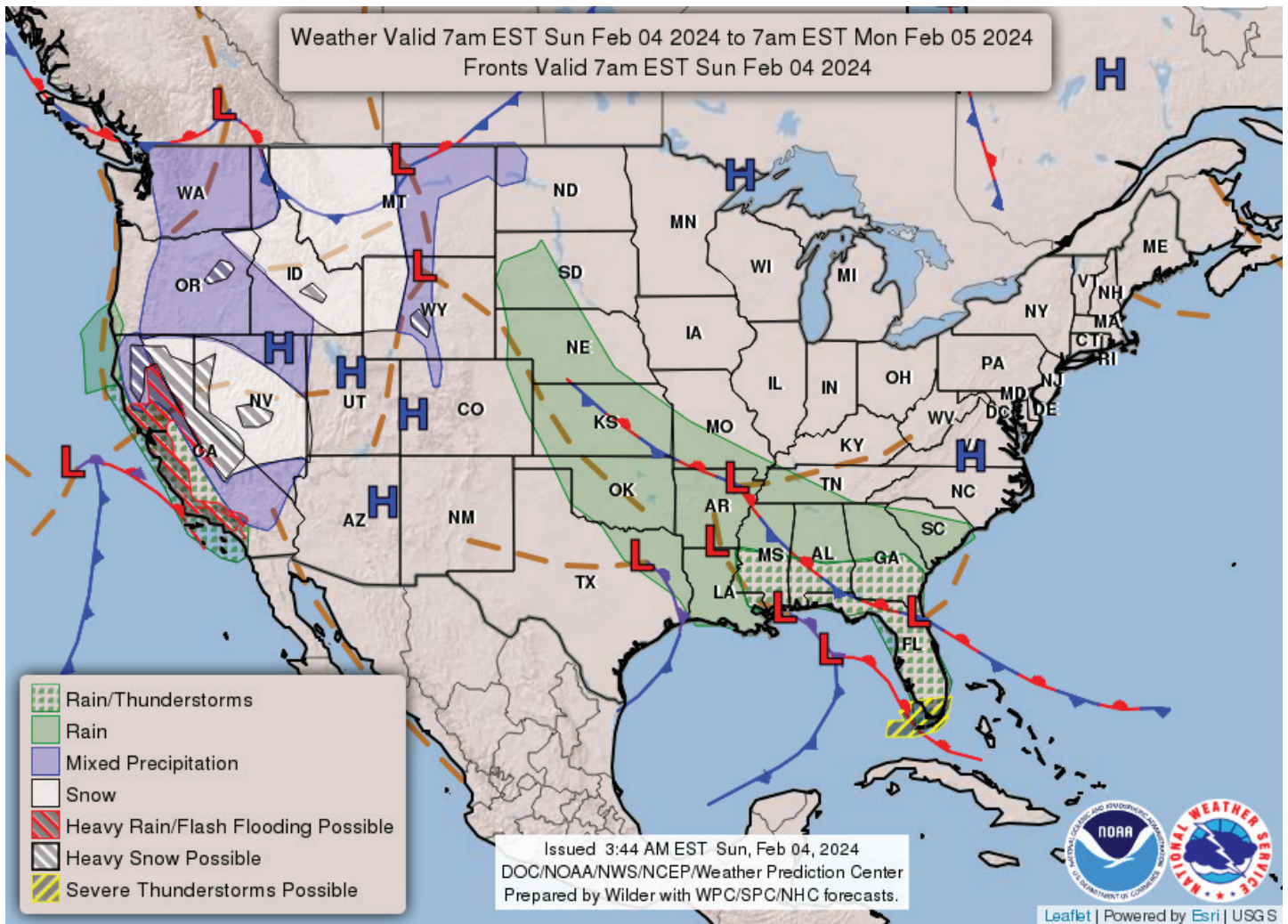
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.63

Precip Year to Date: 0.00

Sunset Tonight: 5:44:24 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:46:50 am



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Today in Weather History

February 4, 1984: A fast-moving blizzard pounded the northeast and east-central with light snow and raging winds. Snow amounts were less than 2 inches region-wide. As the storm progressed, temperatures dropped thirty degrees in three hours as winds gusted to 70 mph. Fierce winds struck quickly, plummeting visibilities to zero, and made travel difficult in a matter of minutes. No travel was advised across much of the area. Hundreds of travelers became stranded in the white-out, and the highway crews were pulled off the road to wait for decreasing winds. There were also some spotty power outages.

1842: A dreadful tornado passed over Mayfield, Kirkland, and other Cuyahoga and Lake Counties in Ohio. According to the Cleveland Herald, no less than 30 houses, barns, and buildings were entirely demolished or very much shattered. A "report from Kirtland says that one man and one child are dead."

1924: In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 20.3 inches of snow fell in 24 hours. This ranks as the most snowfall in 24 hours since 1884. This storm caused over \$1 million in damage. Streetcar and train service crippled. Snowdrifts of 8 to 10 feet high were common, along with much ice on trees and wires. Schools were closed, and several plate glass windows were broken.

1961 - The third great snowstorm of the winter season struck the northeastern U.S. Cortland NY received 40 inches of snow. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Gales lashed the northern Pacific coast and the coast of northern New England. A storm in the central U.S. produced five inches of snow at Rapid City SD. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - A winter storm produced heavy snow from the Upper Ohio Valley to New England, with up to 12 inches reported in Vermont and New Hampshire. Strong northerly winds in the Upper Midwest produced wind chill readings as cold as 60 degrees below zero. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Two dozen cities in the south central and northwestern U.S. reported new record low temperatures for the date. The low of 14 below zero at Boise ID was a February record. A winter storm continued in the southwestern U.S. Alta UT reported 49 inches of snow in four days, Wolf Creek CO reported 66 inches in six days, including 28 inches in 24 hours, and up to 84 inches buried the ski resorts of northern New Mexico in three days. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - A winter storm produced heavy snow in the northeastern U.S. Snowfall totals in Maine ranged up to 13 inches at Gorham, with 11 inches reported at Portland. Totals in New Hampshire ranged up to 14 inches at Franconia, with 13 inches reported at Portsmouth. A mixture of snow, sleet and freezing rain caused numerous traffic accidents in eastern New York State resulting in three deaths and fourteen injuries. Subzero cold also gripped parts of the northeastern U.S. Caribou ME and Houlton ME reported morning lows of 15 degrees below zero. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1995: A massive nor'easter pounded areas from the southern Mid-Atlantic to northern New England. It would be the only significant storm in the 94-95 winter season. Over 20 inches of snow buried parts of upstate New York. Wind chills dropped as cold as 40 degrees below zero. Behind the storm, arctic air crossing the relatively warm waters of the Great Lakes produced intense lake effect squalls for nearly two weeks from the 4th through the 14th. Snowfall totals for the storm ranged from near two to seven feet. During the storm east of Lake Ontario, snow was falling at the incredible rate of five inches an hour! The heavy snow combined with strong winds produced whiteouts and hazardous driving. Actual storm totals downwind of Lake Erie included: Erie County: West Seneca 39 inches, Orchard Park 36 inches, Cheektowaga 36 inches, Colden 32 inches, and Buffalo Airport 31 inches; Genesee County: Corfu 38 inches; Chautauqua County: Sinclairville 27 inches and Jamestown 15 inches. Downwind of Lake Ontario, storm totals included: Oswego County: Palermo 85 inches, Fulton 60 inches, and Oswego 46 inches; Lewis County: Montague 66 inches, Highmarket 48 inches, and Lowville 36 inches; Cayuga County: Fairhaven 36 inches, Wayne County: Wolcott 22 inches; and Jefferson County: Adams 47 inches.

2011: A winter storm settled four to six inches of snow over northern Texas, including Dallas, just days before the Super Bowl between the Pittsburgh Steelers and the Green Bay Packers.

2004 - 7.15 inches of rain deluges Pinson, AL, setting an all-time record rainfall over 24 hours for the town. The Weather Doctor

2011 - A winter storm settled four to six inches of snow over northern Texas, including Dallas, just days before the Super Bowl between the Pittsburgh Steelers and the Green Bay Packers.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

THAT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE ME!

A young mother went to Mr. Duffy, asking him to do a portrait of her so that her children would know what she looked like as a young lady. Mr. Duffy was known for his "idealized" paintings - painting his clients as they could be if they were "ideal," not real.

When she returned after several months of waiting, she was shocked by what she saw. Angrily she said, "That doesn't look like me."

"I know," he replied graciously, "but try your best to look as lovely as it does."

Mr. Duffy saw in the mother what she could become. So, when he painted her portrait, he brought out the best in her, the "ideal." His goal? He wanted to help her achieve her best.

One day after Andrew met and accepted Jesus as the Messiah, he brought Simon to meet Him. As Jesus looked intently at him, He saw an "ideal" disciple and said, "You are Simon, the son of John - but you will from now on be called Cephas (which means Rock)."

Jesus saw not only who Simon was at that moment in time, but who he could and would one day become. That is the reason He gave him a new name. Peter was not always a "solid rock" during his days with Jesus. But, that is what he became: "rock-solid" as he grew in Christ.

Fortunately, Christ always sees more in us than we see in ourselves. He sees us as we can be - rock-solid - in our witness for and work with Him. Come. Follow Me! The future awaits.

Prayer: Lord, may we walk with You, in faith, believing that You have great plans for our lives. May we trust You completely and become "rock-solid" disciples. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: You are Simon, the son of John - but you will from now on be called Cephas (which means Rock). John 1:42



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

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.02.24

11 22 42 64 69 18

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$358,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.03.24

10 34 40 47 48 1

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,800,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.03.24

8 9 18 31 38 9

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 47 Mins 3 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.03.24

17 20 26 27 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$40,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.03.24

23 26 30 35 39 13

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.03.24

9 11 27 59 66 19

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$214,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

Saturday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Beresford 52, Alcester-Hudson 51
Brandon Valley 55, Rapid City Stevens 49
Burke 57, Herreid-Selby 56
Custer 62, Belle Fourche 38
Flandreau 54, Elkton-Lake Benton 38
Freeman 65, Bon Homme 33
Freeman Academy-Marion 63, Flandreau Indian 14
Great Plains Lutheran 54, Arlington 45
Hanson 57, Parker 37
Hay Springs, Neb. 68, Bennett County 66
Huron 65, Sturgis Brown 60
James Valley Christian 66, Estelline-Hendricks 52
Lakota Tech 92, Hill City 80
Leola-Frederick High School 64, Jones County 52
Miller 61, Platte-Geddes 59
Mitchell 59, Spearfish 45
North Central 57, Lyman 50, OT
Philip 64, Highmore-Harrold 57
Pine Ridge 65, Crow Creek Tribal School 53
Rapid City Christian 79, Alliance, Neb. 49
Red Cloud 79, Lead-Deadwood 66
Sioux Falls Jefferson 65, Tea 52
Sioux Falls Lincoln 61, Sioux Falls Christian 23
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 60, Rapid City Central 38
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 56, Marshall, Minn. 38
St Thomas More 63, Worthington, Minn. 50
Timber Lake 67, Harding County 56
Wagner 62, Irene-Wakonda 27
Waubay/Summit 63, Northwestern 39
Waverly-South Shore 44, Warner 40
Wessington Springs 65, Tripp-Delmont-Armour 53
Wilmot 58, Langford 28
Winner 64, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 46
Wolsey-Wessington 74, Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 35
Heritage Classic=
Aberdeen Christian 50, McLaughlin 35
DeSmet 50, Sioux Valley 44
Lennox 55, Viborg-Hurley 39

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Arlington 69, Great Plains Lutheran 45
Belle Fourche 54, Custer 34
Bennett County 49, Hay Springs, Neb. 48

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Beresford 62, Alcester-Hudson 26
Bon Homme 52, Freeman 48
Brandon Valley 51, Rapid City Stevens 38
Canton 56, Deuel 30
Clark-Willow Lake 46, Dell Rapids 32
Crow Creek Tribal School 64, Pine Ridge 32
Dakota Valley 53, Milbank 31
Dell Rapids St Mary 61, Elkton-Lake Benton 47
Elk Point-Jefferson 44, Groton 23
Flandreau 58, Centerville 43
Florence-Henry 47, Hanson 45
Freeman Academy-Marion 34, Flandreau Indian 18
Harding County 56, Lemmon High School 22
Hill City 39, Lakota Tech 33
Huron 60, Sturgis Brown 54
James Valley Christian 49, Estelline-Hendricks 36
Jones County 43, North Central 27
Lennox 45, Hamlin 37
Leola-Frederick High School 49, Philip 41
Lyman 42, Herreid-Selby 25
Madison 61, Tiospa Zina 49
Marshall, Minn. 65, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 42
Miller 51, Platte-Geddes 32
Mitchell 52, Spearfish 43
Northwestern 54, Waubay/Summit 47
Rapid City Christian 40, Alliance, Neb. 30
Red Cloud 94, Lead-Deadwood 25
Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 53, Wolsey-Wessington 39
Sioux Center, Iowa 49, Sioux Falls Lincoln 30
Sioux Falls Christian 70, Sisseton 62
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 67, Rapid City Central 55
St Thomas More 48, Worthington, Minn. 16
Tea 79, Parkston 60
Tri-Valley 49, Redfield 26
Vermillion 75, Aberdeen Roncalli 41
Wagner 67, Irene-Wakonda 28
Wakpala 71, Oelrichs 30
Warner 58, Waverly-South Shore 15
Wessington Springs 57, Tripp-Delmont-Armour 28
West Central 66, Webster 23
White River 52, New Underwood 21
Wilmot 47, Langford 45
Winner 71, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 18

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

South Dakota tribe bans governor from reservation over US-Mexico border remarks

By TRISHA AHMED Associated Press/Report for America

A South Dakota tribe has banned Republican Gov. Kristi Noem from the Pine Ridge Reservation after she spoke this week about wanting to send razor wire and security personnel to Texas to help deter immigration at the U.S.-Mexico border and also said cartels are infiltrating the state's reservations.

"Due to the safety of the Oyate, effective immediately, you are hereby Banished from the homelands of the Oglala Sioux Tribe!" Tribe President Frank Star Comes Out said in a Friday statement addressed to Noem. "Oyate" is a word for people or nation.

Star Comes Out accused Noem of trying to use the border issue to help get former U.S. President Donald Trump re-elected and boost her chances of becoming his running mate.

Many of those arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border are Indigenous people from places like El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico who come "in search of jobs and a better life," the tribal leader added.

"They don't need to be put in cages, separated from their children like during the Trump Administration, or be cut up by razor wire furnished by, of all places, South Dakota," he said.

Star Comes Out also addressed Noem's remarks in the speech to lawmakers Wednesday in which she said a gang calling itself the Ghost Dancers is murdering people on the Pine Ridge Reservation and is affiliated with border-crossing cartels that use South Dakota reservations to spread drugs throughout the Midwest.

Star Comes Out said he took deep offense at her reference, saying the Ghost Dance is one of the Oglala Sioux's "most sacred ceremonies," "was used with blatant disrespect and is insulting to our Oyate."

He added that the tribe is a sovereign nation and does not belong to the state of South Dakota.

Noem responded Saturday in a statement, saying, "It is unfortunate that President (Star) Comes Out chose to bring politics into a discussion regarding the effects of our federal government's failure to enforce federal laws at the southern border and on tribal lands. My focus continues to be on working together to solve those problems."

"As I told bipartisan Native American legislators earlier this week, 'I am not the one with a stiff arm, here. You can't build relationships if you don't spend time together,'" she added. "I stand ready to work with any of our state's Native American tribes to build such a relationship."

In November, Star Comes Out declared a state of emergency on the Pine Ridge Reservation due to increasing crime. A judge ruled last year that the federal government has a treaty duty to support law enforcement on the reservation, but he declined to rule on the funding level the tribe sought.

Noem has deployed National Guard troops to the Mexican border three times, as have some other Republican governors.

In 2021 she drew criticism for accepting a \$1 million donation from a Republican donor to help cover the cost of a two-month deployment of 48 troops there.

Shrinking international aid and enduring conflict compound earthquake misery for Syrians one year on

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB and OMAR ALBAM Associated Press

JINDERIS, Syria (AP) — A year ago, Sido Naji woke to his house shaking in northwest Syria. He was used to the sounds of shelling and airstrikes after more than a decade of war, but this time the assailant was a force of nature: a massive earthquake.

The 16-year-old and his father managed to flee before the house collapsed. As they zig-zagged through a crowded street in Jinderis in Aleppo province, a stone wall crashed onto them, crushing the teen's leg and breaking his arm.

The devastating 7.8 magnitude earthquake on Feb. 6, 2023, killed more than 59,000 people in Syria and Turkey.

For its survivors in Syria, the massive temblor compounded already rampant poverty, destroyed hospitals

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and electrical and water systems, and forced many Syrians already displaced by war to move into tented settlements.

In Jinderis, as in many of Syria's earthquake-hit areas, there has been nearly no reconstruction and whole blocks still lie in rubble. Naji, whose leg was amputated, lives in a muddy tent.

"It's cold at night and there is no lumber (for heating) or anything," he said.

Syria has been wracked by an uprising-turned-civil war since 2011, and the conflict in the opposition-held northwestern enclave is at its worst in years. Syrian and Russian military shelling and strikes have killed dozens of people and displaced more than 100,000 others there since August.

The earthquake killed at least 6,000 people in Syria, mainly in the northwest, where most of the 4.5 million people rely on humanitarian aid to survive. Some 800,000 people living in tents need to be rehoused.

The World Bank estimates the quake caused more than \$5 billion in damage across northern Syria.

Nonetheless, an initial outpouring of international assistance quickly subsided.

United Nations agencies and other humanitarian organizations have been struggling to fund programs that provide a lifeline in Syria, blaming donor fatigue, the COVID-19 pandemic, and conflicts elsewhere that have erupted in recent years.

The U.N.'s World Food Program, which estimates that over 12 million Syrians lack regular access to food, announced in December that it would stop its main assistance program in Syria in 2024.

Tanya Evans, the International Rescue Committee's Syria Country Director says needs on both sides of Syria's frontline have never been higher.

"Families are facing rampant inflation coupled with loss of jobs, and having to make heartbreaking decisions about getting food on the table or going hungry," Evans told The Associated Press.

Yasmine al-Ali at the Salah ad-Din camp in the Idlib countryside shivers as she tries to tie her ragged tent together and digs a ditch in the mud to stop water from flooding her makeshift home.

Patting a drenched mat inside the tent, she says: "Look, it's just water and mud. ... We need new tents."

Yasine al-Ahmad, who manages the camp of more than 500 families, says wood for heating is far too expensive, so most people burn plastic instead, filling the camps with toxic smoke as they do whatever they can to get through the winter. Many have to skip meals due to food insecurity and rationing.

"There's also been difficulties in supporting water stations, education services, medical support in hospitals," U.N. Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis David Carden told the AP during a visit to northwestern Syria in late January. While the needs are growing, he said, "We cannot do more with less."

The U.N. was only able to secure 37% of the \$5.3 billion needed for its 2023 humanitarian response in Syria, which Carden said was one of the lowest funding targets since the conflict started.

And with a political solution nowhere in sight, Syria's conflict has become a major obstacle for humanitarian organizations.

It is "hard to convince donors to build for longer term, for development," said Rosa Cresanti, the head of the World Health Organization office in Gaziantep, Turkey. "We are still in a humanitarian situation because of the ongoing conflict. This is the main reason why there are no long-term plans."

Ahmed Koteich, a construction worker, said people have stopped waiting for aid and are trying to cobble together whatever resources they can to restore and restock their shops and farms.

"The international community said it stood with the residents, with their thoughts and rhetoric," Koteich said. "But this talk won't help the people here."

US, Britain strike Yemen's Houthis in a new wave, retaliating for attacks by Iran-backed militants

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States and Britain struck 36 Houthi targets in Yemen on Saturday in a second wave of assaults meant to further disable Iran-backed groups that have relentlessly attacked American and international interests in the wake of the Israel-Hamas war. But Washington once more did

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not directly target Iran as it tries to find a balance between a forceful response and intensifying the conflict.

U.S. Central Command said its forces conducted an additional strike on Sunday "in self-defense against a Houthi anti-ship cruise missile prepared to launch against ships in the Red Sea," according to a post on X, formerly Twitter.

"U.S. forces identified the cruise missile in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen and determined it presented an imminent threat to U.S. Navy ships and merchant vessels in the region. This action will protect freedom of navigation and make international waters safer and more secure for U.S. Navy vessels and merchant vessels," the post added.

The strikes on Saturday against the Houthis were launched by U.S. warships and American and British fighter jets. The strikes followed an air assault in Iraq and Syria on Friday that targeted other Iranian-backed militias and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard in retaliation for the drone strike that killed three U.S. troops in Jordan last weekend.

The Houthi targets on Saturday were in 13 different locations and were struck by U.S. F/A-18 fighter jets from the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower aircraft carrier, by British Typhoon FGR4 fighter aircraft and by the Navy destroyers USS Gravelly and the USS Carney firing Tomahawk missiles from the Red Sea, according to U.S. officials and the U.K. Defense Ministry. The U.S. officials were not authorized to publicly discuss the military operation and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The U.S. warned its response after the soldiers' deaths at the Tower 22 base in Jordan last Sunday would not be limited to one night, one target or one group. While there has been no suggestion the Houthis were directly responsible, they have been one of the prime U.S. adversaries since Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7, killing more than 1,200 people and taking about 250 hostages. The Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza said that more than 26,000 people have been killed and more than 64,400 wounded in the Israeli military operation since the war began.

The Houthis have been conducting almost daily missile or drone attacks against commercial and military ships transiting the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden and they have made clear that they have no intention of scaling back their campaign despite pressure from the American and British campaign.

Mohammed al-Bukhaiti, a Houthi official, said "military operations against Israel will continue until the crimes of genocide in Gaza are stopped and the siege on its residents is lifted, no matter the sacrifices it costs us." He wrote online that the "American-British aggression against Yemen will not go unanswered, and we will meet escalation with escalation."

The Biden administration has indicated that this is likely not the last of its strikes. The U.S. has blamed the Jordan attack on the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, a coalition of Iranian-backed militias. Iran has tried to distance itself from the drone strike, saying the militias act independently of its direction.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in a statement that the military action, with support from Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, and New Zealand, "sends a clear message to the Houthis that they will continue to bear further consequences if they do not end their illegal attacks on international shipping and naval vessels."

He added: "We will not hesitate to defend lives and the free flow of commerce in one of the world's most critical waterways."

The Defense Department said the strikes targeted sites associated with the Houthis' deeply buried weapons storage facilities, missile systems and launchers, air defense systems, radars and helicopters. The British military said it struck a ground control station west of Yemen's capital, Sanaa, that has been used to control Houthi drones that have launched against vessels in the Red Sea.

President Joe Biden was briefed on the strikes before he left Delaware on Saturday for a West Coast campaign trip, according to an administration official.

The latest strikes marked the third time the U.S. and Britain had conducted a large joint operation to strike Houthi weapon launchers, radar sites and drones. The strikes in Yemen are meant to underscore the broader message to Iran that Washington holds Tehran responsible for arming, funding and training the array of militias — from Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza, the Islamic Resistance in Iraq and the

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Houthis in Yemen — who are behind attacks across the Mideast against U.S. and international interests. Video shared online by people in Sanaa included the sound of explosions and at least one blast was seen lighting up the night sky. Residents described the blasts as happening around buildings associated with the Yemeni presidential compound. The Houthi-controlled state-run news agency, SABA, reported strikes in al-Bayda, Dhamar, Hajjah, Hodeida, Taiz and Sanaa provinces.

Hours before the latest joint operation, the U.S. took another self-defense strike on a site in Yemen, destroying six anti-ship cruise missiles, as it has repeatedly when it has detected a missile or drone ready to launch. The day before the strikes the U.S. destroyer Laboon and F/A-18s from the Eisenhower shot down seven drones fired from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen into the Red Sea and the destroyer Carney shot down a drone fired in the Gulf of Aden and U.S. forces took out four more drones that were prepared to launch.

The Houthis' attacks have led shipping companies to reroute their vessels from the Red Sea, sending them around Africa through the Cape of Good Hope — a much longer, costlier and less efficient passage. The threats also have led the U.S. and its allies to set up a joint mission where warships from participating nations provide a protective umbrella of air defense for ships as they travel the critical waterway that runs from the Suez Canal down to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

During normal operations, about 400 commercial vessels transit the southern Red Sea at any given time.

In the wake of the strikes Friday in Iraq and Syria, Hussein al-Mosawi, spokesperson for Harkat al-Nujaba, one of the main Iranian-backed militias in Iraq, said Washington "must understand that every action elicits a reaction." But in an AP interview in Baghdad, he also struck a more conciliatory tone. "We do not wish to escalate or widen regional tensions," he said.

Iraqi officials have attempted to rein in the militias, while also condemning U.S. retaliatory strikes as a violation of Iraqi sovereignty and calling for an exit of the 2,500 U.S. troops who are in the country as part of an international coalition to fight the Islamic State group. Last month, Iraqi and U.S. military officials launched formal talks to wind down the coalition's presence, a process that will likely take years.

At least 46 reported dead in Chile as forest fires move into densely populated central areas

By ALEXANDRE PLAZA and PATRICIA LUNA Associated Press

VIÑA DEL MAR, Chile (AP) — Intense forest fires burning around a densely populated area of central Chile have caused at least 46 deaths, Chile's president said Saturday evening, and officials said at least 1,100 homes had been destroyed.

In a nationally televised address, President Gabriel Boric warned that the death toll could worsen as four large fires burn in the region of Valparaíso, where firefighters have struggled to reach the most threatened neighborhoods.

Boric urged Chileans to cooperate with rescue workers.

"If you are told to evacuate don't hesitate to do it," he said. "The fires are advancing fast and climatic conditions have made them difficult to control. There are high temperatures, strong winds and low humidity."

Interior Minister Carolina Tohá said earlier Saturday that 92 forest fires were burning in the center and south of the country, where temperatures have been unusually high this week.

The deadliest of the fires were in the Valparaíso region, where authorities urged thousands of people to evacuate their homes.

Meanwhile, residents in areas farther away from the fires were told to stay at home so that fire engines, ambulances and other emergency vehicles can get about on the roads with greater ease.

Tohá said two fires near the towns of Quilpué and Villa Alemana had burned through at least 8,000 hectares (19,770 acres) since Friday. One of the fires was threatening the coastal resort town of Viña del Mar, where some neighborhoods had already been hit hard.

In Villa Independencia, a hillside neighborhood on the eastern edge of the town, several blocks of homes and businesses were destroyed. Burned cars with broken windows lined the streets, which were covered

in ash.

"I've been here 32 years, and never imagined this would happen," said Rolando Fernández, one of the residents who lost his home.

He said he first saw the fire burning on a nearby hill Friday afternoon and within 15 minutes the area was engulfed in flames and smoke, forcing everyone to run for their lives.

"I've worked my whole life, and now I'm left with nothing," Fernández said.

Three shelters were set up in the Valparaíso region, and 19 helicopters and more than 450 firefighters were brought into the area to help battle the blazes, Tohá said.

The fires were burning on mountains that are hard to reach, such as neighborhoods built precariously on the edge of Viña del Mar.

Officials reported power blackouts as a result of the fire, and Tohá said that in the Valparaíso region, four hospitals and three nursing homes for the elderly had to be evacuated. The fire also destroyed two bus terminals, the interior minister said.

The El Niño weather pattern has caused droughts and hotter-than-usual temperatures along the west of South America this year, increasing the risk of forest fires. In January, more than 17,000 hectares (42,000 acres) of forests were destroyed in Colombia by fires that followed several weeks of dry weather.

El Salvador votes in presidential election that the 'world's coolest dictator' has clear path to win

By MEGAN JANETSKY Associated Press

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador (AP) — Salvadorans are headed out to vote Sunday in a presidential and legislative elections that's largely about the tradeoff between security and democracy.

With soaring approval ratings and virtually no competition, Nayib Bukele is almost certainly headed for a second term as president.

El Salvador's constitution prohibits reelection. Nonetheless, about eight out of 10 of voters support Bukele, according to a January poll from the University of Central America. That's despite Bukele taking steps throughout his first term that lawyers and critics say chip away at the country's system of checks and balances.

But El Salvador's traditional parties from the left and right that created the vacuum that Bukele first filled in 2019 remain a shambles. Alternating in power for some three decades, the conservative Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) and leftist Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) were thoroughly discredited by their own corruption and inefficacy. Their presidential candidates this year are polling in the low single digits.

Bukele, the self-described "world's coolest dictator," has gained fame for his brutal crackdown on gangs, in which more than 1% of the country's population has been arrested.

While his administration is accused of committing widespread human rights abuses, violence has also plummeted, in a country known just a few years ago as one of the most dangerous in the world.

Because of that, voters like 55-year-old businesswoman Marleny Mena are willing to overlook concerns that Bukele has taken undemocratic steps to concentrate power.

Formerly a street vendor in San Salvador's once gang-controlled downtown, Mena said she used to be scared to walk around the city, fearful she could accidentally cross from one gang's territory to another, with potentially serious consequences. Since Bukele began his crackdown, that fear has dissipated.

"He just needs a little bit more time, the time he needs to keep improving the country," Mena said.

In the lead-up to Sunday's vote, Bukele made no public campaign appearances. Instead, the populist plastered his social media and television screens across the country with a simple message recorded from his couch: If he and his New Ideas party didn't win elections this year, the "war with the gangs would be put at risk."

"The opposition will be able to achieve its true and only plan, to free the gang members and use them to return to power," he said.

Still, the 42-year-old Bukele and his party are increasingly looked to as a case study for a wider global rise in authoritarianism.

"There's this growing rejection of the basic principles of democracy and human rights, and support for authoritarian populism among people who feel that, concepts like democracy and human rights and due process have failed them," said Tyler Mattiace, Americas researcher for Human Rights Watch.

Oklahoma's oldest Native American school, Bacone College, is threatened by debts and disrepair

By GRAHAM LEE BREWER AP National Writer

MUSKOGEE, Okla. (AP) — The hallways of Bacone College are cold and dark. In the main hall, there are no lectures to be heard, only the steady hum of the space heater keeping the administrative offices warm.

Students aren't attending classes here this semester, but work still needs to be done. In the college's historic buildings, there are leaks to plug, mold to purge and priceless works of Native American art to save from ruin. Not to mention devising a plan to keep the college from shuttering for good. It's a daunting task for the nine remaining employees.

But on this rainy December morning, the college's president is running a DoorDash order. "If we have the money, we can pay," Interim President Nicky Michael said regarding salaries. Even she has to find a way to make ends meet.

Founded in 1880 as a Baptist missionary college focused on assimilation, Bacone College transformed into an Indigenous-led institution that provided an intertribal community, as well as a degree. With the permission of the Muscogee Nation Tribal Council, Bacone's founders used a treaty right to establish the college at the confluence of three rivers, where tribal nations had been meeting for generations.

Throughout the 20th century, the center of this was Bacone's Native American art program, which produced some of the most important Indigenous artists of their time, including Woody Crumbo, Fred Beaver, Joan Hill and Ruthe Blalock Jones.

They and their contemporaries pushed the boundaries of what was considered "Native American art." During a period of intense hostility against tribal sovereignty by the U.S., Bacone became defined by the exchange of ideas its Native faculty and students created and represented a new opportunity for Indigenous education and academic thought.

"Bacone was the only place in the world where that could happen for Native people," said Robin Mayes, a Cherokee and Muscogee man who attended Bacone in the '70s and taught silversmithing there in the '90s. "It's a tragedy to think that it's going to be discontinued."

For decades, the college has been plagued by poor financial choices and inconsistent leadership, triggering flashpoints between administration, students and staff over the mission and cultural direction of the college.

Some have accused recent administrations of embezzlement, fraud and intimidation, resulting in multiple lawsuits. Students expressed frustration with a lack of resources and cultural competency among some school leaders. The college also has had trouble maintaining its accreditation.

Last year, a lawsuit crippled Bacone's finances. Ultimately, Michael made the decision to suspend classes for the spring semester. She hopes the deferment is temporary, but if the college can't muster up millions of dollars, Oklahoma's oldest continually operating college likely will close its doors.

"It has endured for over 140 years through terrible decisions," said Gerald Cournoyer, an instructor who was hired in 2019 to restart the college's art program.

"Providing oversight for Bacone has been a struggle because of the leadership or lack thereof," said Cournoyer, who also is a renowned Lakota artist. Some presidents focused time and money on athletic programs, others on Bacone's Baptist missionary roots. "When you put absolutely no money, nothing, not \$20, not \$10, into your fundraising efforts, this is what you get."

During the time Patti Jo King was the director of the Center for American Indians at Bacone from 2012 to 2018, leadership wanted to build a state-of-the-art museum to replace the 80-year-old building housing

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many priceless pieces of Native art.

"We didn't even have the money to keep it open seven days a week," said King, now a retired Cherokee professor, writer and academic.

Even when she first arrived on campus, King said Bacone's financial debts already had caught up to it. The student dorms didn't have hot water, staff were severely underpaid and graduation rates among the college's remaining students were low.

Still, she and other faculty endeavored to make it a place where Native students could find community, but Bacone's old problems never went away. Like Cournoyer, after years of working toward rebuilding, she left in frustration.

Today, the old museum is empty. Its artifacts were moved to another location so they wouldn't be exposed to extreme temperatures.

The remaining staff act as caretakers of the historic stone buildings that predate Oklahoma, themselves important pieces of the past. In the museum, Ataloa Lodge, the fireplace is made of stones sent to the college from Indigenous communities across the country: one from the birthplace of Sequoyah, one from the grave of Sitting Bull, another from the field where Custer died. Five hundred in all, each stone a memory.

Michael, the interim president, and others have been cleaning up buildings in hopes they might soon host graduation banquets and student gatherings. Other staff chase off looters. Rare paintings still hang across campus, including pieces by members of the Kiowa Six, who became internationally famous a century ago, and Johnnie Diacon, a Muskogee painter and alumnus whose work can be seen in the background of several episodes of the television show *Reservation Dogs*.

A few years ago, experts from a museum in Tulsa warned that many of the paintings are contaminated with mold, which will spread to other nearby works of art. Leslie Hannah, a Cherokee educator who sits on the college's board of trustees, said he's concerned, but the cost of restoring them falls far down the list, behind broken gas lines, flooded basements and a mountain of debt.

Bacone's current financial crisis stems partially from a lawsuit brought by Midgley-Huber Energy Concepts, a Utah-based heating and air company that sued the college over more than \$1 million in unpaid construction and service fees. Twice last year, the Muskogee County Sheriff's Office put Bacone's property up for sale to settle the debt. Both times the auction was called off, most recently in December.

MHEC owner Chris Oberle told KOSU last month that he intended to purchase the historic property. Attorneys for MHEC have not returned repeated requests for comment from the Associated Press.

Alumni have called the validity of any sale of the property into question, pointing to the treaty right that established the campus and its listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Attorneys for the college declined to comment, citing the ongoing litigation.

Michael said she doesn't know what stalled the auction, but she is grateful for more time to try to save Bacone.

Across the country, there are only a few dozen tribal colleges, according to the American Indian College Fund, a nonprofit that supports Native American access to higher education. Tribal colleges must be sponsored by a federally recognized tribe and have a majority Native student enrollment. But unlike most of those colleges, Bacone was built on its identity as an intertribal school, a quality that former staff and alumni say made it special.

Now a private institution, Bacone no longer receives state or federal assistance. Its finances have long relied heavily on student tuition, and now it has no students. Michael said judging from the finances, it's a miracle the college managed to keep its doors open this long.

"Now I'm looking back on this thinking this was set up for failure," she said.

A stolen digital memory card with gruesome recordings leads to a double murder trial in Alaska

By MARK THIESSEN Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — A woman with a lengthy criminal history including theft, assault and prostitution got into a truck with a man who had picked her up for a “date” near downtown Anchorage. When he left her alone in the vehicle, she stole a digital memory card from the center console.

Now, more than four years later, what she found on that card is key to a double murder trial set to begin this week: gruesome photos and videos of a woman being beaten and strangled at a Marriott hotel, her attacker speaking in a strong accent as he urged her to die, her blanket-covered body being snuck outside on a luggage cart.

“In my movies, everybody always dies,” the voice says on one video. “What are my followers going to think of me? People need to know when they are being serial-killed.”

About a week after she took the SD card, the woman turned it over to police, who said they recognized the voice as that of Brian Steven Smith, now 52, a South Africa native they knew from a prior investigation, court documents say.

Smith has pleaded not guilty to 14 charges, including first- and second-degree murder, sexual assault and tampering with evidence, in the deaths of Kathleen Henry, 30, and Veronica Abouchuk, who was 52 when her family reported her missing in February 2019, seven months after they last saw her.

Henry and Abouchuk were both Alaska Native women who had experienced homelessness. They were from small villages in western Alaska, Henry from Eek and Abouchuk from Stebbins.

Authorities say Henry was the victim whose death was recorded at the TownePlace Suites by Marriott, a hotel in midtown Anchorage. Smith was registered to stay there from Sept. 2 to Sept. 4, 2019; the first images showing her body were time-stamped at about 1 a.m. on Sept. 4, police said.

The last images on the card were taken early on Sept. 6 and showed Henry’s body in the back of a black pickup, according to charging documents. Location data showed that at the time the photo was taken, Smith’s phone was in the area of Rainbow Valley Road, along the Seward Highway south of Anchorage, the same area where Henry’s body was found several weeks later, police said.

As detectives interrogated Smith about the Marriott case, authorities said, he offered up more information to police who escorted him to a bathroom: He had killed another woman, and he went on to identify her — Abouchuk — from a photo and to provide the location of her remains, along the Old Glenn Highway north of Anchorage.

“With no prompting, he tells the troopers in the bathroom, ‘I’m going to make you famous,’” District Attorney Brittany Dunlop said during a court hearing last week. “He comes back in and says ... ‘You guys got some more time? You want to keep talking?’ And then discloses this other murder.”

Alaska State Troopers in 2018 incorrectly identified another body as that of Abouchuk, because Abouchuk’s ID had been discovered with it, for reasons that remain unclear. But with the information Smith provided, investigators re-examined the case and used dental records to confirm a skull with a bullet wound found in the area Smith identified was Abouchuk’s, authorities have said.

Smith’s attorney, Timothy Ayer, unsuccessfully sought to have the digital memory card’s evidence — or even mention of it — excluded at trial. The woman who turned in the card initially claimed she had simply found it on the street, and it wasn’t until a second interview that she confessed she had stolen the card from Smith’s truck while he tried to get money from an ATM and she had it for a week before giving it to police, he said.

For that reason, he argued, prosecutors would not be able to demonstrate the provenance of the 39 photos and 12 videos, establish whether they were originals or duplicates, or say for sure whether they had been tampered with.

“The state cannot produce a witness to testify that the video fairly and accurately depicts any act that actually happened,” Ayer wrote.

However, Third Judicial District Judge Kevin Saxby ruled late Friday that the woman can testify about

her possession of the card until she handed it over to police and that the recordings can be properly authenticated.

Henry's family has not spoken publicly about her death and efforts to reach relatives have not been successful. Abouchuk's family has not returned messages from The Associated Press.

"These were two Alaska Native women," Dunlop, then the assistant district attorney, said in 2019 after Smith was charged. "And I know that hits home here in Alaska, and we're cognizant of that. We treat them with dignity and respect."

Authorities said Smith, who is in custody at the Anchorage Correctional Facility, came to Alaska in 2014 and became a naturalized U.S. citizen the same month Henry was killed.

In a 2019 letter to the AP, he declined to discuss the case. He added that he was doing well: "I have lost weight, I have much less stress and I am sober."

His wife, Stephanie Bissland of Anchorage, and a sister acting as a family spokesperson in South Africa, both declined to comment until after the trial.

The trial, expected to last three to four weeks, was scheduled to begin Monday with jury selection.

Prosecutors had suggested the possibility of closing the courtroom to prevent the gruesome videos from being seen by the public. The Associated Press, the Anchorage Daily News, Alaska's News Source and Alaska Public Media objected to any such move in a letter to the court's presiding judge.

Afterward, Saxby said he has no intention of keeping the public from the courtroom, but safeguards will be in place to prevent those in the gallery or watching the trial's livestream from seeing them.

What to know about the US strikes in Iraq and Syria and its attacks with the UK in Yemen

By BASSEM MROUE, LOLITA C. BALDOR and TARA COPP Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — British forces on Saturday joined their American allies in new attacks against militia in Yemen. The U.S. military earlier launched strikes on dozens of sites manned by Iran-backed fighters in western Iraq and eastern Syria in retaliation for a drone strike in Jordan in late January that killed three U.S. service members and wounded dozens.

Tensions have been rising in the region since the Israel-Hamas war started on Oct. 7. A week later, Iran-backed fighters, who are loosely allied with Hamas, began carrying out drone and rocket attacks on bases housing U.S. troops in Iraq and Syria. A deadly strike on the desert outpost known as Tower 22 in Jordan near the Syrian border further increased tensions.

WHAT HAPPENED IN YEMEN?

The United States and Britain on Saturday launched a barrage of strikes against Houthi targets in Yemen from fighter jets and warships in the Red Sea, U.S. officials told The Associated Press.

The strikes hit 36 Houthi targets in 13 locations, the officials said on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly discuss the military operation. It is the third time in two weeks that the U.S. and Britain have conducted a large joint operation to strike Houthi weapon launchers, radar sites and drones.

The strikes came in response to almost daily missile or drone attacks against commercial and military ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, and New Zealand supported the latest wave of strikes intended to "defend lives and the free flow of commerce in one of the world's most critical waterways."

WHAT JETS WERE USED IN THE YEMEN STRIKES?

The Houthi targets were struck by U.S. F/A-18 fighter jets from the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower aircraft carrier, by British Typhoon FGR4 fighter aircraft and by the Navy destroyers USS Gravelly and the USS Carney firing Tomahawk missiles from the Red Sea, according to U.S. officials and the U.K. Defense Ministry.

WHO WAS TARGETED IN SYRIA AND IRAQ, AND WHY?

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The strikes on Friday came in retaliation for the drone strike that killed three U.S. troops in Jordan on Jan. 28.

U.S. forces struck 85 targets in seven locations in a strategic region where thousands of Iran-backed fighters are deployed to help expand Iran's influence from Tehran to the Mediterranean coast.

U.S. bases in Syria's eastern province of Deir el-Zour and the northeastern province of Hassakeh have come under attack for years. The Euphrates River cuts through Syria into Iraq, with U.S. troops and American-backed Kurdish-led fighters on the east bank and Iran-backed fighters and Syrian government forces to the west.

Bases for U.S. troops in Iraq have come under attack too.

Iran-backed militias control the Iraqi side of the border and move freely in and out of Syria, where they man posts with their allies from Lebanon's powerful Hezbollah and other Shiite armed groups.

WHAT WAS HIT IN IRAQ AND SYRIA? HOW MANY PEOPLE WERE KILLED?

The U.S. military said the barrage of strikes hit command and control headquarters; intelligence centers; rockets and missiles, drone and ammunition storage sites; and other facilities connected to the militias and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard's Quds Force, which handles Tehran's relationship with, and arming of, regional militias.

Syrian opposition activists said the strikes hit the Imam Ali base near the border Syrian town of Boukamal, the Ein Ali base in Quriya, just south of the strategic town of Mayadeen, and a radar center on a mountain near the provincial capital that is also called Deir el-Zour.

Rami Abdurrahman, who heads the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said 29 rank-and-file fighters were killed in those strikes.

The attacks also hit a border crossing known as Humaydiya, where militia cross back and forth between Iraq and Syria, according to Omar Abu Layla, a Europe-based activist who heads the Deir Ezzor 24 media outlet. He said the strikes also hit an area inside the town of Mayadeen known as "the security quarter."

Iraqi government spokesperson Bassim al-Awadi said the border strikes killed 16 people and caused "significant damage" to homes and private properties.

The Popular Mobilization Force, a coalition of Iran-backed militia that is nominally under the control of the Iraqi military, said the strikes in western Iraq hit a logistical support post, a tanks battalion, an artillery post and a hospital. The PMF said 16 people were killed and 36 wounded, and that authorities were searching for other missing people.

WILL IRAN-BACKED FIGHTERS RETALIATE?

Iran and groups it backs in the region aim to put pressure on Washington to force Israel to end its crushing offensive in Gaza, but do not appear to want all-out war. The defeat of Hamas would be a major setback for Tehran, which considers itself and its allies the main defenders of the Palestinian cause.

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq, an umbrella group for Iran-backed groups, said it carried out two explosive drone attacks Saturday on bases housing U.S. troops in the northern Iraqi city of Irbil and a post in northeast Syria near the Iraqi border.

The only Iran-backed faction that has been escalating are the Houthi rebels in Yemen, and they have made clear that they have no intention of scaling back their campaign.

President Joe Biden wins South Carolina's Democratic primary as he gears up for his reelection bid

By WILL WEISSERT and MEG KINNARD Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — President Joe Biden easily won South Carolina's Democratic primary on Saturday, clinching a state he pushed to lead off his party's nominating process after it revived his then-struggling White House bid four years ago.

Biden defeated the other long-shot Democrats on South Carolina's ballot, including Minnesota Rep. Dean Phillips and author Marianne Williamson. His reelection campaign invested heavily in driving up turnout in what it saw as a test drive of its efforts to mobilize Black voters, a key Democratic bloc central to Biden's

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chances in a likely November rematch against former President Donald Trump.

"In 2020, it was the voters of South Carolina who proved the pundits wrong, breathed new life into our campaign, and set us on the path to winning the presidency," Biden said in a statement. "Now in 2024, the people of South Carolina have spoken again and I have no doubt that you have set us on the path to winning the Presidency again — and making Donald Trump a loser — again."

The Associated Press declared Biden the winner at 7:23 p.m. based on an analysis of initial vote results showing him with a decisive lead in key locations throughout the state. He won all 55 of the state's Democratic delegates.

The victory comes following the president leading a Democratic National Committee effort to have South Carolina go first in the party's primary, citing the state's more racially diverse population compared to the traditional first-in-the-nation states of Iowa and New Hampshire, which are overwhelmingly white.

South Carolina is reliably Republican, but 26% of its residents are Black. In the 2020 general election, Black voters made up 11% of the national electorate, and 9 in 10 of them supported Biden, according to AP VoteCast, an expansive survey of that election's voters.

Biden pushed for a revamped primary calendar that will see Nevada go second, holding its primary on Tuesday. The new order also moves the Democratic primary in Michigan, a large and diverse swing state, to Feb. 27, before the expansive field of states voting on March 5, known as Super Tuesday.

New Hampshire rejected the DNC's plan and held a leadoff primary last month anyway. Biden didn't campaign and his name wasn't on the ballot, but still won by a sizable margin after supporters mounted a write-in campaign on his behalf.

South Carolina, where Biden has long held deep relationships with supporters and donors, also played a pivotal role in his 2020 campaign, where a big win revived a flagging effort in other early-voting states and propelled him to the nomination.

Biden was aided by longtime South Carolina Rep. Jim Clyburn whose 2020 endorsement served as a long-awaited signal to the state's Black voters that Biden would be the right candidate to advocate for their interests. Clyburn remains a close Biden ally and said Saturday night that he believed New Hampshire's delegates should be seated at the party's convention this summer and that Democrats should avoid any further infighting.

Both Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, the first Black woman and Asian American to serve in the role, have consistently thanked South Carolina's Democrats for their support. Biden was traveling this weekend in California and Nevada but called into a series of Black radio stations across South Carolina and told WWDM in Sumter, "The only reason I'm talking to you today as president of the United States of America is because of South Carolina. That is not hyperbole. That's a fact."

Campaigning in the state last week, the president said South Carolina was "the reason Donald Trump is a loser. And you're the reason we're going to win and beat him again," framing the likely general election matchup with the GOP's current front-runner.

Earlier in the day, Democratic National Committee Chairman Jaime Harrison said, "We all know that we, because of the color of this, we, our great grandparents, our grandparents, could not always vote here." Harrison is a South Carolina native who is Black.

"For this president to say, 'Jaime, for the entirety of your life, we have started this process in Iowa and New Hampshire, and now, we're going to start it in South Carolina' — no other president before ever decided to touch that issue," he added. "But Joe Biden did, and I will always be grateful to the president for giving us a chance, for seeing us, and understanding how much we matter."

Black voters interviewed during the recent early voting period listed a range of reasons for supporting Biden, from his administration's defense of abortion rights to appointing Black jurists and other minorities to the federal courts. Some echoed Biden's warnings that Trump would threaten democracy as he continues to push lies that the 2020 vote was stolen.

"We can't live with a leader that will make this into a dictatorship. We can't live in a place that is not a democracy. That will be a fall for America," said LaJoia Broughton, a 42-year-old small business owner in

Columbia. "So my vote is with Biden. It has been with Biden and will continue to be with Biden."

Some voters said they were concerned about the 81-year-old Biden's age, as many Americans have said they are in public polling. Trump is 77. Both men have had a series of public flubs that have fueled skepticism about their readiness.

"They're as old as I am and to have these two guys be the only choices, that's kind of difficult," said Charles Trower, a 77-year-old from Blythewood, South Carolina. "But I would much rather have President Biden than even consider the other guy."

Penn Museum buries the bones of 19 Black Philadelphians, causing a dispute with community members

By GRAHAM LEE BREWER Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — For decades, the University of Pennsylvania has held hundreds of skulls that once were used to promote white supremacy through racist scientific research.

As part of a growing effort among museums to reevaluate the curation of human remains, the Ivy League school laid some of the remains to rest last week, specifically those identified as belonging to 19 Black Philadelphians. Officials held a memorial service for them on Saturday.

The university says it is trying to begin rectifying past wrongs. But some community members feel excluded from the process, illustrating the challenges that institutions face in addressing institutional racism.

"Repatriation should be part of what the museum does, and we should embrace it," said Christopher Woods, the museum's director.

The university houses more than 1,000 human remains from all over the world, and Woods said repatriating those identified as from the local community felt like the best place to start.

Some leaders and advocates for the affected Black communities in Philadelphia have pushed back against the plan for years. They say the decision to reinter the remains in Eden Cemetery, a local historic Black cemetery, was made without their input.

West Philadelphia native and community activist Aliy A. Muhammad said justice isn't just the university doing the right thing, it's letting the community decide what that should look like.

"That's not repatriation. We're saying that Christopher Woods does not get to decide to do that," Muhammad said. "The same institution that has been holding and exerting control for years over these captive ancestors is not the same institution that can give them ceremony."

Woods told the crowd at Saturday's interfaith commemoration at the university's Penn Museum that the identities of the 19 people were not recorded, but that the process of interment in above-ground mausoleums "is by design fully reversible if the facts and circumstances change." If future research allows any of the remains to be identified and a claim is made, they can be "easily retrieved and entrusted to descendants," he said.

"It will be a very happy day if we can return at least some of these fellow citizens to their descendants," Woods said.

At a blessing and committal ceremony later at Eden Cemetery, about 10 miles southwest of the museum in Collingdale, Renee McBride Williams, a member of the community advisory group, said she was "relieved that finally the people who created the problem are finding a solution."

"In my home growing up, when you made a mistake, you fixed it – you accepted responsibility for what you did," she said.

"We may not know their names, but they lived, and they are remembered, and they will not be forgotten," said the Rev. Charles Lattimore Howard, the university's chaplain and vice president for social equity & community.

As the racial justice movement has swept across the country in recent years, many museums and universities have begun to prioritize the repatriation of collections that were either stolen or taken under unethical circumstances. But only one group of people often harmed by archaeology and anthropology,

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Native Americans, have a federal law that regulates this process.

In cases like that between the University of Pennsylvania and Black Philadelphians, institutions maintain control over the collections and how they are returned.

The remains of the Black Philadelphians were part of the Morton Cranial Collection at the Penn Museum. Beginning in the 1830s, physician and professor Samuel George Morton collected about 900 crania, and after his death the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia added hundreds more.

Morton's goal with the collection was to prove — by measuring crania — that the races were actually different species of humans, with white being the superior species. His racist pseudoscience influenced generations of scientific research and was used to justify slavery in the antebellum South.

Morton also was a medical professor in Philadelphia, where most doctors of his time trained, said Lyra Monteiro, an anthropological archaeologist and professor at Rutgers University. The vestiges of his since-disproven work are still evident across the medical field, she said.

"Medical racism can really exist on the back of that," Monteiro said. "His ideas became part of how medical students were trained."

The collection has been housed at the university since 1966, and some of the remains were used for teaching as late as 2020. The university issued an apology in 2021 and revised its protocol for handling human remains.

The university also formed an advisory committee to decide next steps. The group decided to rebury the remains at Eden Cemetery. The following year, the university successfully petitioned the Philadelphia Orphans' Court to allow the burial on the basis that the identities of all but one of the Black Philadelphians were unknown.

Critics note the advisory committee was comprised almost entirely of university officials and local religious leaders, rather than other community members.

Monteiro and other researchers challenged the idea that the identities of the Philadelphians were lost to time. Through the city's public archives, she discovered that one of the men's mothers was Native American. His remains must be repatriated through the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, the federal law regulating the return of Native American ancestral remains and funerary objects, she said.

"They never did any research themselves on who these people were, they took Morton's word for it," Monteiro said. "The people who aren't even willing to do the research should not be doing this."

The university removed that cranium from the reburial so it can be assessed for return through NAGPRA. Monteiro and others were further outraged to discover the university had already interred the remains of the other Black Philadelphians last weekend outside of public view, she said.

Members of the Black Philadelphians Descendant Community Group, which was organized by people including Muhammad who identify as descendants of the individuals in the mausoleum, said in a statement they are "devastated & hurt" that the burial took place without them.

"In light of this new information, they are taking time to process and consider how best to honor their ancestors at a future time," the group said, adding that members plan to offer handouts at Saturday's memorial with information they have gathered on the individuals in the mausoleum.

"To balance prioritizing the human dignity of the individuals with conservation due diligence and the logistical requirements of Historic Eden Cemetery, laying to rest the 19 Black Philadelphians was scheduled ahead of the interfaith ceremony and blessing," the Penn Museum said in a statement to The Associated Press.

Woods said he believes most of the community is happy with the decision to reinter the remains at Eden Cemetery, and it is a vocal minority in opposition. He hopes that eventually all the individuals in the mausoleum will be identified and returned.

"We encourage research to be done moving forward," Woods said, noting the remains of the Black Philadelphians were in the collection for two centuries and, along with his staff, he felt the need to take more immediate action with those remains.

"Let's not let these individuals sit in the museum storeroom and extend those 200 years anymore," he said.

Even if all the crania are identified and returned to the community, the university has a long way to go. More than 300 Native American remains in the Morton Cranial Collection still need to be repatriated through the federal law. Woods said the museum recently hired additional staff to expedite that process.

1 icon, 6 shoes, \$8 million: An auction of Michael Jordan's championship sneakers sets a record

NEW YORK (AP) — A collection of sneakers that superstar Michael Jordan wore as he and the Chicago Bulls won six NBA championships has fetched \$8 million at auction, setting a new record for game-worn sneakers, Sotheby's said.

The six Air Jordan shoes — one apiece from the last games of the 1991, 1992, 1993, 1996, 1997 and 1998 championship series — sold Friday. Sotheby's dubbed it the "Dynasty Collection."

"Serving as both a reminder of Michael Jordan's lasting impact on the world and a tangible expression of his recognized legendary status, its significance is further validated by this monumental result," Brahm Wachter of Sotheby's said in a statement. Wachter oversees modern collectables for the auction house.

Sotheby's didn't identify the buyer and described the seller only as "a private American collector" who obtained them from a longtime Bulls executive.

Jordan first gave a sneaker to the executive after the championship-winning game in 1991 and continued the tradition afterward, according to Sotheby's. The auction lot included photos of Jordan wearing a single shoe as he celebrated the 1992, 1993, 1996 and 1998 wins.

A five-time league MVP and two-time Olympic gold medalist, Jordan was so singular a player that then-NBA Commissioner David Stern in 1992 called him "the standard by which basketball excellence is measured." The NBA renamed its MVP trophy for Jordan in 2022.

He also helped shake up the athletic shoe industry and supercharge sneaker culture by teaming up with Nike to create Air Jordans in the mid-1980s.

The pair he wore in the second game of the 1998 NBA Finals was sold through Sotheby's last April for \$2.2 million, a record for a pair of sneakers. The highest auction price for any Jordan memorabilia was \$10.1 million for his jersey from the first game at that series, according to Sotheby's, which sold it 2022.

Simply an unused ticket to Jordan's 1984 debut with the Bulls was sold through Heritage Auctions in 2022 for \$468,000 — over 55,000 times the face value.

Another 'Pineapple Express' storm is expected to wallop California

By STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Another potentially dangerous "Pineapple Express" storm was expected to hit California late Saturday, bringing the threat of flooding and mudslides over the next couple of days.

Californians spent Friday and Saturday preparing for what forecasters are saying could be the largest storm of the season, with the worst expected to hit Ventura and Santa Barbara counties on Sunday and Monday. Most of the state was under some sort of wind, surf or flood watch by Saturday afternoon.

The storm marks the second time this week the state will be pummeled by an atmospheric river, a long band of moisture that forms over the Pacific. The first arrived in the San Francisco Bay Area on Wednesday, delivering downpours and heavy snowfall that brought cable car service to a halt before moving south to Los Angeles and San Diego on Thursday.

Last winter, California was battered by numerous drought-busting atmospheric rivers that unleashed extensive flooding, big waves that hammered shoreline communities and extraordinary snowfall that crushed buildings. More than 20 people died.

WHAT IS EXPECTED FROM THIS LATEST 'PINEAPPLE EXPRESS'?

This "Pineapple Express" — called that because the atmospheric river's plume of moisture stretches back across the Pacific to near Hawaii — was to arrive in Northern California on Saturday afternoon, according to the National Weather Service. Heavy rains and strong winds were expected through the night into Sunday.

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The storm is forecast to move south down the Central Coast and hit the Los Angeles area with downpours, flash floods and high-elevation mountain snow beginning Sunday morning. It is expected to strike farther south, in Orange County and San Diego, on Monday. Heavy to moderate rain is expected to stay in Southern California until Tuesday.

The National Weather Service forecasts 3 to 6 inches (7.6 to 15.2 centimeters) of rainfall across Southern California's coastal and valley areas, with 6 to 12 inches (15.2 to 30.5 centimeters) likely in the foothills and mountains. Rainfall rates are expected to be 1/2 to 1 inch (1.3 to 2.5 centimeters) per hour, with locally higher rates. Forecasters predict mudslides, debris flows and flooding to occur.

In the mountains with elevation above 7,000 feet (2,134 meters), 2 to 4 feet (0.61 to 1.2 meters) of snow will likely fall.

WHERE IS THE WORST EXPECTED TO HAPPEN?

Parts of Santa Barbara and Ventura counties will likely get hammered hardest by this storm, according to the National Weather Service. The south-facing slopes in the Transverse Ranges will be getting the heaviest rainfall, and flooding is likely to be exacerbated by already saturated soil from earlier winter storms.

Evacuation orders were issued for parts of Ventura County and some of Santa Barbara County, including along burn scars caused by wildfires, and in the city of Santa Barbara's coastal areas. High winds will contribute to hazardous seas.

WILL THE WEATHER AFFECT WEEKEND SPORTS?

NASCAR moved The Clash at the Coliseum to Saturday night out of concerns for the impending inclement weather. Only heat races had been scheduled to be run Saturday at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, but with a forecast calling for heavy rains and flooding to begin Sunday, NASCAR abruptly changed the schedule.

The Santa Anita racetrack in Arcadia, northeast of downtown Los Angeles, canceled its eight-race program that was scheduled for Sunday. The park also rescheduled a pair of graded stakes, the Grade III, \$100,000 Las Virgenes and the Grade III, San Marcos, for next Saturday.

WHAT'S NEXT?

More damage is possible this year with El Nino, which is expected to bring additional storms to California caused by the temporary warming of parts of the Pacific that changes weather worldwide.

Rising sea levels from global warming are also causing the waves to be bigger off California's coast, according to research. The coast is additionally seeing some of the highest tides of the season.

House Republicans announce bill that provides more military aid to Israel but leaves out Ukraine

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans will move forward with a \$17.6 billion package next week that provides military aid to Israel and replenish U.S. weapons, but leaves out more help for Ukraine, underscoring the challenges facing supporters of a comprehensive national security package that would also include billions of dollars for immigration enforcement.

The move gives Speaker Mike Johnson and House Republicans the chance to show support for Israel even though there is little chance the Senate will go along. Meanwhile, text of a broader Senate compromise is expected to be released this weekend and a key test vote on that package will be held during the week.

Johnson said that Senate leadership is aware that by failing to include the House in their negotiations, they have eliminated the ability for swift consideration of any legislation.

"As I have said consistently for the past three months, the House will have to work its will on these issues and our priorities will need to be addressed," Johnson said in a letter to colleagues.

The House has already approved a nearly \$14.5 billion military aid package in November for Israel that the Senate declined to take up. Republicans also insisted it be paid for with cuts elsewhere. The bill targeted the Internal Revenue Service for cuts, though the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said doing so would end up costing the federal government a net \$12.5 billion because of lost revenue from

tax collections.

The tactic of including IRS cuts also turned it into a more partisan, 226-196 vote. Johnson said in his letter to colleagues that removing the offsets should allow for swift passage of the Israel aid.

"During debate in the House and in numerous subsequent statements, Democrats made clear that their primary objection to the original House bill was with its offsets," Johnson said. "The Senate will no longer have excuses, however misguided, against swift passage of this critical support for our ally."

Rep. Ken Calvert, R-Calif., released the text of the military assistance bill for Israel. It would provide \$4 billion to replenish missile defense systems and \$1.2 billion to counter short-range rockets and mortar threats. There's also funding for the procurement of advanced weapons system and to enhance the production of artillery and other munitions.

To ensure the support does not compromise U.S. readiness, it includes \$4.4 billion to replenish U.S. stocks of weapons provided to Israel. There's also \$3.3 billion for current U.S. military operations in the region.

For the first time, an Irish nationalist will lead Northern Ireland's government

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — An Irish nationalist made history Saturday by becoming Northern Ireland's first minister as the government returned to work after a two-year boycott by unionists.

Sinn Fein Vice President Michelle O'Neill was named first minister in the government that under the terms of the 1998 Good Friday peace accord shares power equally between Northern Ireland's two main communities — British unionists who want to stay in the U.K., and Irish nationalists who seek to unite with Ireland.

Northern Ireland was established as a unionist, Protestant-majority part of the U.K. in 1921, following independence for the Republic of Ireland, so O'Neill's nomination was seen as a highly symbolic moment for nationalists.

"This is a historic day which represents a new dawn," O'Neill said. "That such a day would ever come would have been unimaginable to my parents and grandparents' generation. Because of the Good Friday Agreement that old state that they were born into is gone. A more democratic, more equal society has been created making this a better place for everyone."

O'Neill will share power with deputy first minister Emma Little-Pengelly from the Democratic Unionist Party. The two will be equals, but O'Neill, whose party captured more seats in the Northern Ireland Assembly in the 2022 elections, will hold the more prestigious title.

Neither side can govern without agreement from the other. Government business ground to a halt over the past two years after the DUP walked out to protest trade issues related to Brexit.

O'Neill, 47, who was born in the Republic of Ireland but raised in the north, comes from a family with links to the militant Irish Republican Army. Her father was imprisoned as an IRA member, an uncle raised money for the group and two of her cousins were shot — one fatally — by security forces.

O'Neill has been criticized for attending events commemorating the IRA and told an interviewer there was "no alternative" to the group's armed campaign during the Troubles, a period of about 30 years of violent conflict over the future of Northern Ireland, which ended with the Good Friday accords.

"I don't think any Irish person ever woke up one morning and thought that conflict was a good idea, but the war came to Ireland," she said in 2022. "I think at the time there was no alternative, but now, thankfully, we have an alternative to conflict and that's the Good Friday agreement."

At 15, O'Neill became pregnant and her mother quit work to help raise her granddaughter so O'Neill could stay in school. She said the Catholic school she attended had not been supportive and pregnancy had been a "very negative" experience.

"You were nearly made to feel girls like you can't be at school, that kind of a thing," she said.

As a member of Sinn Fein, the party affiliated with the IRA, O'Neill was elected in 2005 to the Dunganon Borough Council, replacing her father. She was elected to the Stormont Assembly in 2007.

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Both O'Neill and Little-Pengelly, 44, grew up under the shadow of the Troubles and pledged to work together to bridge divides that once seemed insurmountable.

"The past with all its horror can never be forgotten, and nor will it be allowed to be rewritten but while we are shaped by the past, we are not defined by it," Little-Pengelly said. "The experience of my childhood gave me the drive and desire to make a different future not just for myself, but to do all that I could and can to ensure a better future for all of us."

Former Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams, who helped broker the historic peace agreement, was in the gallery to witness O'Neill's nomination along with her grown up daughter and son.

"As an Irish republican, I pledge cooperation and genuine honest effort with those colleagues who are British, of a unionist tradition, and who cherish the Union," O'Neill said. "This is an assembly for all — Catholic, Protestant and dissenter."

U.S. President Joe Biden welcomed the restoration of the Northern Ireland executive and assembly. In a statement from the White House, he said, "I look forward to seeing the renewed stability of a power-sharing government that strengthens the peace dividend, restores public services, and continues building on the immense progress of the last decades."

Clare Rice, an academic researcher in politics, said O'Neill's new position was "hugely symbolic" and "hugely significant" despite there being no difference beyond semantics from her previous role as deputy first minister.

"All eyes today will be on that symbolic nomination," Rice told the BBC. "That is going to be the story that comes out of today, second only to the fact that we're here at all."

The return to government came exactly two years after a DUP boycott over a dispute about trade restrictions for goods coming into Northern Ireland from Great Britain. Northern Ireland's 1.9 million people were left without a functioning administration as the cost of living soared and public services were strained.

An open border between the north and the republic was a key pillar of the peace process that ended the Troubles, so checks were imposed instead between Northern Ireland and the rest of the U.K.

An agreement a year ago between the U.K. and the EU, known as the Windsor Framework, eased customs checks and other hurdles but didn't go far enough for the DUP, which continued its boycott.

The U.K. government this week agreed to new changes that would eliminate routine checks and paperwork for most goods entering Northern Ireland, although some checks will remain for illegal goods or disease prevention.

The new changes included legislation "affirming Northern Ireland's constitutional status" as part of the U.K. and gives local politicians "democratic oversight" of any future EU laws that might apply to Northern Ireland.

The U.K. government also agreed to give Northern Ireland more than 3 billion pounds (\$3.8 billion) for its battered public services once the Belfast government is back up and running.

"I believe that my party has delivered what many said we couldn't," DUP leader Jeffrey Donaldson said outside the assembly chamber in Stormont. "We have brought about change that many said was not possible, and I believe that today is a good day for Northern Ireland, a day when once again our place in the United Kingdom and its internal market is respected and protected in our law and restored for all our people to enjoy the benefits of our membership of the union."

Former DUP leader Edwin Poots was elected as speaker of the chamber.

Pope reaffirms Christians' special relationship with Jews amid rising antisemitism, Gaza war

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis on Saturday reaffirmed Christians' special relationship with Jews amid rising antisemitism since the outbreak of the Gaza war in a letter to the Jews of Israel that he said was prompted by messages from Jewish organizations around the world.

The letter served as a belated fence-mending after Francis was criticized for his initial response to the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks on Israel. Francis said the Holy Land has been "cast into a spiral of unprecedented

violence," part of what the pope referred to as "a sort of 'piecemeal world war,' with serious consequences on the lives of many populations."

"My heart is torn at the sight of what is happening in the Holy Land, by the power of so much division and so much hatred," the pontiff wrote. "The whole world looks on at what is happening in that land with apprehension and pain."

In November, the pope set off a firestorm by using the word "terrorism" generically after meeting separately with relatives of Israeli hostages in Gaza and Palestinians living through the war.

Jewish leaders criticized his failure to explicitly condemn Hamas' attack, and bristled after the Palestinian visitors reported he had used the term "genocide" to describe Israel's actions in Gaza. The Vatican denied he had used the term in the private meeting, but since then Francis has been more balanced in his remarks and has explicitly condemned the Oct. 7 attack.

Without elaborating, Francis said in the letter to Israeli Jews that he was moved by communication from friends and Jewish organizations around the world to "assure you of my closeness and affection. I embrace each of you and especially those who are consumed by anguish, pain, fear and even anger."

He said that Catholics "are very concerned about the terrible increase in attacks against Jews around the world we had hoped that 'never again' would be a refrain heard by the new generations, yet now we see that the path ahead requires ever closer collaboration to eradicate these phenomena."

"My heart is close to you, to the Holy Land, to all the peoples who inhabit it, Israelis and Palestinians, and I pray that the desire for peace may prevail in all," he said.

The reconciliation between Jews and Catholics provides "a horizon" to imagine a future "where light replaces darkness, in which friendship replaces hatred, in which cooperation replaces war."

"Together, Jews and Catholics, we must commit ourselves to this path of friendship, solidarity and cooperation in seeking ways to repair a destroyed world, working together in every part of the world, and especially in the Holy Land, to recover the ability to see in the face of every person the image of God, in which we were created," Francis wrote.

Israel issues its most detailed warning yet to Hezbollah, while the war in Gaza marks 4 months

By NAJIB JOBAIN and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israel's military on Saturday issued its most detailed warning yet to Hezbollah in neighboring Lebanon that it would be "ready to attack immediately" if provoked, as it recounted its actions along the northern border during four months of war in Gaza and made a rare acknowledgement of dozens of airstrikes inside Syria against the militant group.

"We do not choose war as our first priority, but we are certainly prepared," military spokesperson Daniel Hagari said, adding: "We will continue to act wherever Hezbollah is present, we will continue to act wherever it is required in the Middle East. What is true for Lebanon is true for Syria, and is true for other more distant places."

The comments followed the defense minister's warning that a cease-fire in Gaza against the militant group Hamas wouldn't mean Israel wouldn't attack Hezbollah as needed.

Efforts to close wide gaps between Israel and Hamas in pursuit of a cease-fire continued in the region where concerns about a wider war with Iran-allied groups remain. A top Hamas official, Osama Hamdan, said they were studying the proposal put forward by the U.S., Egypt, Qatar and Israel but insist on Israel accepting conditions including a permanent cease-fire.

The war in Hamas-run Gaza has leveled vast swaths of the tiny besieged enclave, displaced 85% of its population and pushed a quarter of residents to starvation. The Health Ministry in Gaza said Saturday that 107 people were killed over the past 24 hours, bringing the wartime total to 27,238. More than 66,000 people have been wounded.

In Gaza's southernmost town of Rafah, at least 17 people including women and children were killed

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in two separate airstrikes overnight, according to the registration office at Abu Yousef al-Najjar hospital where the bodies were taken.

The first strike hit a residential building east of Rafah, killing at least 13 people from a single family. Four women and three children were among the dead, hospital officials said.

"Two children are still under the rubble, and we don't, still we don't know anything about them," relative Ahmad Hijazi said. The second strike hit a house in Rafah's Jeneina area, killing at least two men and two women.

More than half of Gaza's population of 2.3 million has taken refuge in Rafah and surrounding areas.

Israel's defense minister warned earlier in the week that Israel might expand combat to Rafah after focusing on Khan Younis, southern Gaza's largest city. While the statement alarmed aid officials and international diplomats, Israel would risk significantly disrupting relationships with the United States and neighboring Egypt if it sends troops into Rafah, a key entry point for aid.

In Khan Younis, where Israel's military said operations would continue for several days, the Palestinian Red Crescent said at least 11 people were injured when Israel's military fired smoke bombs at displaced people sheltering at its headquarters.

It followed a siege that Israel's military has laid on the Red Crescent's facilities for 12 days, the group said, adding that it had documented the killing of 43 people, including three staff members, inside the buildings by Israeli fire during that time.

Israel's military didn't address the charity's allegations of firing on the buildings, the killings or the blocking of access, and asserted that the Al-Amal Hospital facilities had adequate fuel and electricity.

Israel says it is determined to crush Hamas and prevent it from returning to power in Gaza, an enclave it has ruled since 2007, in response to its Oct. 7 attack on Israel that triggered the war.

Hamas still holds dozens of the roughly 250 hostages taken in the attack, after more than 100 were released during a one-week truce in November. Those releases were in exchange for 240 Palestinian prisoners.

Thousands of people gathered again in Tel Aviv on Saturday evening for anti-government protests to express growing frustration at how Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his administration have handled the war.

"If we need to stop the war now and call for a cease-fire in order to bring those people back home to their families, and start to rebuild them and take care of them, that's the most important thing for us to do," said one protester, Karen Levy.

In a sign of Hamas' resilience despite Israel's deadly air and ground campaign in the past four months, four residents and a senior official in the militant group said it has begun to resurface in areas where Israel withdrew the bulk of its forces a month ago, deploying police officers and making salary payments to some of its civil servants in Gaza City.

Four Gaza City residents told The Associated Press that in recent days, police officers deployed near police headquarters and other government offices, including near Shifa Hospital, the territory's largest. The residents said they saw subsequent Israeli airstrikes near the makeshift offices.

The return of police marks an attempt to reinstate order in the devastated city, a Hamas official told AP, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the media.

The official said the group's leaders had given directions to reestablish order in parts of the north where Israeli forces had withdrawn, including by helping prevent the looting of shops and houses abandoned by residents who heeded Israeli evacuation orders and headed to southern Gaza.

Since seizing control of Gaza nearly 17 years ago, Hamas has operated a government bureaucracy with tens of thousands of civil servants, including teachers and police who operate separately from the group's secretive military wing.

Israeli military leaders had said they had broken up the command structure of Hamas battalions in the north, but that individual fighters were continuing to carry out guerrilla-style attacks. Israel claims to have killed more than 9,000 Hamas fighters.

Hamas demands Israel release Marwan Barghouti, a man some Palestinians see as their Nelson Mandela

By JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — He's viewed by some Palestinians as their Nelson Mandela, and he's a prime candidate to become their president in the future. He's also the highest-profile prisoner held by Israel.

Now Marwan Barghouti's freedom is at stake in cease-fire negotiations between Hamas and Israel. Hamas leaders demanded Friday that Israel release Barghouti, a leader of the militant group's main political rival, as part of any deal to end the fighting in Gaza.

The demand brings new attention to Barghouti, who plays a central role in Palestinian politics even after spending more than two decades behind bars. His release could lay the groundwork for his eventual election to national office.

Hamas' gambit to free him appears to be an attempt to rally public support for the militant group as well as a recognition of his status as a uniquely unifying Palestinian figure.

"Hamas wants to show to the Palestinian people that they are not a closed movement. They represent part of the Palestinian social community. They are trying to seem responsible," said Qadoura Fares, who heads the Palestinian Ministry of Prisoner Affairs in the occupied West Bank and has long been involved in negotiations over prisoner releases.

Senior Hamas official Osama Hamdan called for Barghouti's release as international mediators try to push Israel and Hamas toward an agreement after nearly four months of war.

Israel is seeking the release of more than 100 hostages still held by Hamas in Gaza. Hamas is demanding an end to Israel's devastating military offensive and the release of thousands of Palestinian prisoners.

The war broke out Oct. 7, when Hamas fighters crossed into Israel, killing some 1,200 people and dragging 250 hostages back to Gaza. The Hamas attack triggered an Israeli ground and air campaign that has killed more than 27,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, and triggered a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza.

Over 100 hostages were released during a weeklong truce in November. Israel estimates 136 hostages remain in captivity, though 20 have been pronounced dead. With protests calling for the hostages' immediate release sweeping Israel, and fears that time is running out to bring them home safely, pressure is mounting on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to reach a deal.

For Palestinians, the plight of their imprisoned loved ones is deeply emotional. While Israel considers "security prisoners" to be terrorists, Palestinians widely see them as heroes battling Israeli occupation. Virtually every Palestinian has a friend, relative or acquaintance who has been imprisoned.

The Israeli human rights group HaMoked says Israel is currently holding nearly 9,000 security prisoners. Hamas seeks the release of all of them. But in his remarks Friday, Hamdan mentioned only two by name — Barghouti and Ahmad Saadat.

Saadat heads a small faction that killed an Israeli Cabinet minister in 2001 and is serving a 30-year sentence for allegedly participating in attacks.

Palestinians see the 64-year-old Barghouti, a member of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah party, as a natural successor to the 88-year-old Abbas, who leads the internationally recognized Palestinian Authority, the self-ruled government that administers parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

Abbas, whose forces in Gaza were overrun by Hamas in 2007, hopes to regain control of the territory after the war. But he is deeply unpopular because of corruption within the authority and because of his security coordination with the Israeli army.

Palestinians have not held elections since 2006, when Hamas won a parliamentary majority.

Fares, a Barghouti supporter, said that if Barghouti is released, he could become a consensus candidate in a round of new elections that Hamas, Fatah and other Palestinian factions could rally behind. A wartime opinion poll published in December showed Barghouti to be the most popular politician among Palestinians, ahead of both Abbas and Hamas' leader, Ismail Haniyeh.

Israelis see Barghouti as an arch-terrorist, and convincing Israel to free him will be an uphill battle.

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Barghouti, a leader in the West Bank during the second Palestinian uprising in the early 2000s, is serving five life terms for his role in several deadly attacks. During that uprising, Palestinian militants carried out deadly suicide bombings and shooting attacks in Israel and the Palestinian territories, targeting buses, restaurants, hotels and Israelis driving in the West Bank, eliciting crushing Israeli military reprisals.

In 2002, Barghouti was arrested on multiple counts of murder. He did not offer a defense, refusing to recognize the court's authority. Since then, he has repeatedly thrust himself into the spotlight.

In 2021, he registered his own list for parliamentary elections that were later called off. A few years earlier, he led more than 1,500 prisoners in a 40-day hunger strike to call for better treatment in the Israeli prison system. From jail, he has continued to call for a Palestinian state in the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem — lands Israel seized in the 1967 war.

Barghouti was born in the West Bank village of Kobar in 1962. While studying history and politics at Bir Zeit University, he helped spearhead student protests against the Israeli occupation.

He emerged as an organizer in the first Palestinian uprising, which erupted in December 1987, but Israel eventually deported him to Jordan. He returned to the West Bank in the 1990s, as part of interim peace agreements that were meant to pave the way for a Palestinian state but got bogged down by the end of the decade when a second uprising erupted.

Barghouti was seen as political leader of the armed wing of Fatah at the time.

Israel has previously rejected calls to free him. It refused to include him in a 2011 exchange of more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners for a single soldier held captive in Gaza by Hamas, said Fares, who was party to the negotiations. Yehya Sinwar, the current Hamas leader in Gaza and a mastermind of the Oct. 7 attack, was freed in that exchange.

The 2011 negotiations revolved around the release of a single hostage. With the lives of over 100 hostages now hanging in the balance, there is more pressure than ever on Israel to release Palestinian prisoners. That may make conditions ripe for a deal that could simultaneously win Barghouti's release and bolster Hamas' standing among Palestinians.

"Hamas is more strong and more clever than ever before," Fares said. "They understand how necessary it is for the Palestinian people to have consensus."

The RNC chairwoman calls for unity as the party faces a cash crunch and attacks by some Trump allies

By THOMAS BEAUMONT and BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

LAS VEGAS, Nevada (AP) — Facing a cash crunch and harsh criticism from a faction of far-right conservatives, Republican National Committee Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel on Friday called for the party to unite behind the goal of defeating President Joe Biden.

McDaniel spoke at the RNC's winter meeting in Las Vegas behind closed doors on Friday, addressing a gathering of state chairmen and other top party members in what's expected to be a critical swing state in the November election.

"We Republicans will stick together, as united as the union our party long ago fought to preserve," McDaniel said, quoting Ronald Reagan, according to people who were in the room and disclosed her remarks on condition of anonymity to discuss a private gathering. "We'll have our battles ahead of us, but they're good battles, and they're worth fighting for."

McDaniel's appeal for unity comes as former President Donald Trump and his allies push the party to get behind him and effectively end the primary even though he still faces a final major rival, former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley. While McDaniel has fought off opponents before, winning a competitive race for a fourth term as chairwoman last year, she's now facing Trump supporters on the far right who are creating parallel efforts that could conflict with the national party.

Campaign finance disclosures released this week show the RNC had just \$8 million in the bank and \$1 million in debt. While the Trump campaign heads into 2024 with \$42 million cash on hand, Biden's political operation reported raising \$97.1 million across the various committees it uses to fundraise and ended the

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year with \$117.4 million on hand.

Biden is already working with the Democratic National Committee, which partners automatically with the incumbent president. An effort by Trump allies to have the RNC this week declare Trump the "presumptive nominee" was withdrawn after it drew criticism because Haley is still running.

Trump has previously backed McDaniel, though his campaign and the RNC have disagreed at times. Trump declined to participate in party-sponsored primary debates before this year's Iowa caucuses.

But there's long been tension between the party establishment and some people who consider themselves Trump's strongest supporters.

McDaniel faced a week of withering attacks launched by far-right figures spearheaded by the group Turning Point, a glitzy and well-funded organization founded by 30-year-old media figure Charlie Kirk, who was part of an unsuccessful effort to oust McDaniel last year.

Days before the party's winter meeting convened, Turning Point hosted a counterprogramming event and grassroots training session at a casino across Las Vegas Boulevard dubbed "Restoring National Confidence," a play on the RNC's initials. The invite-only event drew nearly 400 attendees aligned with the group, including some RNC members, as well as state and local Republican Party chairs.

Kirk, who hosts a popular radio show, is part of a faction of conservatives who've openly stoked a feud with the RNC, which they have blasted for spending lavishly and being out of touch with the party's grassroots base. That, they argue, led to losses in 2018 and 2020 as well as underwhelming results in 2022.

Some Turning Point supporters have become RNC members, while the group is actively recruiting others, an effort that, if successful, would give the group more sway over the direction of the party and perhaps a stronger say in the party's chair.

"We know a pack of losers when we see it: top to bottom, the entire RNC staff in its current form," Kirk said Thursday on his radio show.

"They don't even know what winning is," he added.

Inside the RNC meeting, some members, including those who have been critical of McDaniel, said the Turning Point effort was ill-advised.

"Attacking the brand and the chair doesn't advance our fundamental goal of winning elections," said Mississippi national committeeman Henry Barbour, who has at times criticized McDaniel.

And McDaniel's allies note that the Democratic National Committee was in debt to the tune of \$5 million in the early days of the 2020 race, when the party was trying to return a Democrat to the White House.

Turning Point is looking to expand its influence and reach beyond the youth movement, with mixed results. The group has struggled in its adopted home state of Arizona, where many of its preferred candidates failed to win in statewide races that many saw as winnable.

Its leaders have also come under scrutiny over their own spending practices, including charter jet travel, offering lucrative salaries and hosting Kirk's wedding reception in 2021, which also commemorated the organization's ninth anniversary. Turning Point is currently trying to raise \$108 million for a three-state get-out-the-vote campaign in Wisconsin, Arizona and Georgia that would operate parallel to efforts that are already underway.

RNC spokeswoman Emma Vaughn dismissed the challenges as coming from people complaining online.

"Outside noise might be what keyboard warriors and the Democrats are focused on," she said. "Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel and the entire Republican National Committee are laser-focused on beating Biden this fall."

Can Trump be on the ballot?

It's the Supreme Court's biggest election test since Bush v. Gore

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A case with the potential to disrupt Donald Trump's drive to return to the White House is putting the Supreme Court uncomfortably at the center of the 2024 presidential campaign.

In arguments Thursday, the justices will, for the first time, wrestle with a constitutional provision that was adopted after the Civil War to prevent former officeholders who "engaged in insurrection" from re-claiming power.

The case is the court's most direct involvement in a presidential election since Bush v. Gore, a decision delivered a quarter-century ago that effectively delivered the 2000 election to Republican George W. Bush. It comes to a court that has been buffeted by criticism over ethics, which led the justices to adopt their first code of conduct in November, and at a time when public approval of the court is diminished, at near-record lows in surveys.

The dispute stems from the push by Republican and independent voters in Colorado to kick Trump off the state's Republican primary ballot because of his efforts to overturn his 2020 election loss to Democrat Joe Biden, culminating in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

Colorado's highest court determined that Trump incited the riot in the nation's capital and is ineligible to be president again as a result and should not be on the ballot for the state's primary on March 5.

A victory for the Colorado voters would amount to a declaration from the justices, who include three appointed by Trump when he was president, that he did engage in insurrection and is barred by the 14th Amendment from holding office again. That would allow states to keep him off the ballot and imperil his campaign.

A definitive ruling for Trump would largely end efforts in Colorado, Maine and elsewhere to prevent his name from appearing on the ballot.

The justices could opt for a less conclusive outcome, but with the knowledge that the issue could return to them, perhaps after the general election in November and in the midst of a full-blown constitutional crisis.

The court has signaled it will try to act quickly, dramatically shortening the period in which it receives written briefing and holds arguments in the courtroom.

Trump is separately appealing to state court a ruling by Maine's Democratic secretary of state, Shenna Bellows, that he was ineligible to appear on that state's ballot over his role in the Capitol attack. Both the Colorado Supreme Court and the Maine secretary of state's rulings are on hold until the appeals play out.

The former president is not expected to attend the Supreme Court session this coming week, though he has shown up for court proceedings in the civil lawsuits and criminal charges he is fighting.

Whatever the justices decide, they are likely to see more of Trump, who is facing criminal charges related to Jan. 6 and other issues. Other election-related litigation also is possible.

In 2000, in Bush v. Gore, the court and the parties were divided over whether the justices should intervene at all.

The conservative-driven 5-4 decision has been heavily criticized ever since, especially given that the court cautioned against using the case as precedent when the unsigned majority opinion declared that "our consideration is limited to the present circumstances."

In the current case, both parties want the matter settled, and quickly.

Trump's campaign declined to make anyone available for this story, but his lawyers urged the justices not to delay.

"The Court should put a swift and decisive end to these ballot-disqualification efforts, which threaten to disenfranchise tens of millions of Americans and which promise to unleash chaos and bedlam if other state courts and state officials follow Colorado's lead and exclude the likely Republican presidential nominee from their ballots," Trump's lawyers wrote.

Donald Sherman, the top lawyer at the group behind the ballot challenge, said voters and election officials need to have an answer quickly.

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"And I think, obviously, voters have a not small interest in knowing whether the Supreme Court thinks, as every fact-finder that has reached this question, that Jan. 6 was an insurrection and that Donald Trump is an insurrectionist," Sherman said in an interview with The Associated Press. He is executive vice president and chief legal counsel at Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington.

Justice Clarence Thomas is the only sitting member of the court who was on the bench for Bush v. Gore. He was part of that majority.

But three other justices joined the legal fight on Bush's side: Chief Justice John Roberts and Justices Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett. Bush eventually put Roberts on a federal appeals court and then appointed him chief justice. Bush hired Kavanaugh to important White House jobs before making him an appellate judge, too.

Kavanaugh and Barrett were elevated to the Supreme Court by Trump, who also appointed Justice Neil Gorsuch.

Thomas has ignored calls by some Democratic lawmakers and ethics professors to step aside from the current case. They note that his wife, Ginni Thomas, supported Trump's effort to overturn the results of the 2020 election. Ginni Thomas repeatedly texted White House chief of staff Mark Meadows in the weeks after that election, once referring to it as a "heist," and she attended the rally that preceded the storming of the Capitol by Trump supporters. Nearly two years later, she told the congressional committee investigating the attack that she regretted sending the texts.

Trump lost 60 different court challenges to his false claims that there was massive voter fraud that would have changed the results of that election.

The Supreme Court ruled repeatedly against Trump and his allies in 2020 election-related lawsuits, as well as his efforts to keep documents related to Jan. 6 and his tax returns from being turned over to congressional committees.

But the conservative majority Trump's appointees cemented has produced decisions that overturned the 5-decade-old constitutional right to abortion, expanded gun rights and struck down affirmative action in college admissions.

The issue of whether Trump can be on the ballot is just one among several matters related to the former president or Jan. 6 that have reached the high court. The justices declined a request from special counsel Jack Smith to rule swiftly on Trump's claims that he is immune from prosecution, though the issue could be back before the court soon depending on the ruling of a Washington-based appeals court.

In April, the court will hear an appeal that could upend hundreds of charges stemming from the Capitol riot, including against Trump.

Controversial podcast host Joe Rogan signs a new deal with Spotify for up to a reported \$250 million

Associated Press undefined

NEW YORK (AP) — Spotify has penned a new multi-year partnership deal with controversial podcast host Joe Rogan, whose enormously popular show will soon also be available on competing platforms, including YouTube and Apple Podcasts.

Spotify announced the renewed partnership in a post on the company's corporate blog Friday. Under a prior multimillion-dollar deal, "The Joe Rogan Experience," had been a Spotify exclusive since 2020.

The Wall Street Journal, which first reported the new deal on Friday, estimated that the new contract was worth as much as \$250 million over its multiyear term. It cited unnamed people familiar with the matter. The pact involves an upfront minimum guarantee, in addition to a revenue sharing agreement based on ad sales, the newspaper reported.

In an email to The Associated Press on Saturday, Spotify declined to comment on the deal's financial details, including the estimated value.

Over the years, Rogan has developed a huge audience who listen to his long, wide-ranging interviews with a variety of guests, including comedians, athletes, scientists and conspiracy theorists.

"There's no script of what we're going to talk about, and it all just sort of happens in real time," said Rogan on Spotify's blog post. "It's just an actual organic conversation with people enjoying themselves, which is something we all can relate to, and something we all love to do. These conversations have changed the way I think about life immeasurably and continue to do so."

The show is consistently Spotify's most popular podcast but also a frequent cause of controversy for the company. Most notably, Spotify came under huge pressure in 2022 to drop Rogan over his anti-coronavirus vaccine comments and use of racial slurs, with some musicians, including Neil Young, pulling their music from the platform in protest.

In February 2022, Spotify CEO Daniel Ek denounced the host's racist language but said, "I do not believe that silencing Joe is the answer."

Spotify's shares closed up \$3.51, or nearly 2% to \$222.47 per share on Friday.

Senegal's leader postpones Feb. 25 presidential vote, citing controversies over candidate lists

BY BABACAR DIONE Associated Press

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) — Senegalese President Macky Sall on Saturday postponed presidential elections scheduled for Feb. 25, citing controversies over the disqualification of some candidates and allegations of corruption in election-related cases.

Sall — who is not seeking another term in office — said he signed a decree repealing the law that convened the electoral body just as campaigning was set to begin in one of Africa's most stable democracies at a time the region is grappling with a wave of coups.

The controversies over the candidates "could seriously harm the credibility of the election by creating the seeds of pre- and post-electoral litigation," Sall said without announcing a new date for the vote.

He also said some of the 20 candidates cleared to run were discovered to have dual nationality, which would disqualify them under the Senegalese constitution.

The announcement came as federal lawmakers were set to deliberate on a bill on the postponement as requested by the opposition Senegalese Democratic Party, whose candidate was disqualified from the election.

Critics of the postponement included former Prime Minister Aminata Touré, who called it "sabotage."

"For a long time, they have sabotaged the process. This is the first time that a presidential election has been postponed in Senegal," Touré said.

The crucial vote has been dogged by controversies, from deadly clashes that resulted in Sall announcing that he would not seek a third term to the disqualification of two opposition leaders by the highest election authority.

Among those disqualified was Ousmane Sonko, who finished third in the 2019 presidential election and is seen as a favorite among young people. He has alleged a clampdown on the opposition, which Sall's government denies.

After the Constitutional Council published a final list of candidates two weeks ago, federal lawmakers set up a panel to investigate two judges on the council who were accused of corruption. The allegation was rejected by the association of Senegal's judges, who called for respect for the separation of powers.

Sall described the aftermath of the accusations as a "sufficiently serious and confusing situation," adding: "Our country cannot afford a new crisis."

Paris police say suspect in train station attack that injured 3 may have mental health issues

By HELENA ALVES and JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — A man armed with a knife and a hammer wounded three people Saturday in an early morning attack at the bustling Gare de Lyon train station in Paris, another nerve-rattling security incident in the Olympics host city before the Summer Games open in six months.

The 31-year-old man, carrying residency papers from Italy and medicines suggesting he was undergoing treatment, was quickly taken into police custody following the attack at 7:35 a.m. in one of the station's cavernous halls, authorities said. Millions of passengers ride the hub's high-speed and commuter trains.

"This individual appears to suffer from psychiatric troubles," said Laurent Nunez, the Paris police chief who is also in charge of the massive security operation for the July 26-Aug. 11 Olympic Games.

While stressing that the police investigation was still in early stages, Nunez said: "There are no elements that lead us to think that this could be a terrorist act."

A man was seriously wounded in the stomach and underwent surgery and two other people were more lightly hurt, authorities said.

Passersby helped railway police officers detain the suspect, Nunez said. He said the man was carrying residency papers delivered in Italy, allowing him to travel legally to other European countries.

The Paris prosecutor's office said the man is thought to be from Mali in northwest Africa and that the police investigation is looking at a potential preliminary charge of attempted murder.

Posting on social media, Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin described the attack as an "unbearable act."

Security in Paris is being tightened as it prepares to welcome 10,500 Olympians and millions of visitors for the first Olympic Games in a century in the French capital.

The Games are a major security challenge for the city that has been repeatedly hit by Islamic extremist attacks, most notably in 2015, when gunmen and bombers killed 147 people in waves of assaults in January and November.

Most recently, a suspect targeted passersby near the Eiffel Tower in December, killing a German-Filipino tourist with a knife and injuring two others. The man was under surveillance for suspected Islamic radicalization and had previously been convicted and served time for a planned attack that never took place.

Security concerns are particularly sharp for the Games' opening ceremony along the River Seine. Tens of thousands of police officers and soldiers will be deployed to secure the Games' first opening ceremony to be held outside the more easily secured confines of a stadium. Organizers recently downsized the planned number of spectators to about 300,000 from the 600,000 they'd initially mentioned.

Soldiers who patrolled the train station quickly helped restore a sense of calm and settle passengers' nerves.

"Unfortunately one gets used to these kind of happenings around the world," said Celine Erades, a 47-year-old at the station with her daughter. "We have very few cases like this, but it's always deplorable when they happen."

The New America's Team: How the Chiefs have become the new 'it team' in professional sports

By DAVE SKRETTA AP Sports Writer

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — The polarizing moniker is still applied to the Dallas Cowboys these days, regardless of whether it rings as true as it did during their 1990s heyday, when Troy Aikman, Michael Irvin and Emmitt Smith led them to three Super Bowl titles in a four-year span.

"America's Team."

The team that much of America loved, and perhaps just as much loved to hate.

In truth, there have been plenty of "America's Teams" over the years. It was the Steelers with Terry Bradshaw, Lynn Swann and Joe Greene in the 1970s. In the '80s, it became the 49ers with Joe Montana,

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Roger Craig and Jerry Rice. The 2000s, of course, belonged to the Patriots and Tom Brady, Troy Brown and Rob Gronkowski.

The title these days has fallen on the Kansas City Chiefs, who play the San Francisco 49ers next weekend in their fourth Super Bowl in five years. Patrick Mahomes has become the face of the league, a record-breaking crossover star at the game's most important position. Andy Reid has evolved into their mustachioed father figure, and a shoo-in for the Hall of Fame as he climbs the coaching career wins list. And then there's Travis Kelce, who happens to be dating pop icon Taylor Swift.

Just like those teams before them, the Chiefs have merged zeitgeist and success to create a rapidly expanding fan base that stretches from the heartland all the way to Hollywood. And abroad, for that matter, as evidenced by the overwhelming support they have received for games in London, Mexico City and Frankfurt, Germany.

"I think you feel it a little bit," acknowledged Mahomes, who has become ubiquitous on TV even when he's not slinging passes on Sundays. He might be stealing some nuggies from Reid on a spot for State Farm, or manicuring his iconic 'do in an ad for Head & Shoulders or teaming up with Kelce to take on the Warriors' Steph Curry and Klay Thompson in a made-for-TV golf match played at Wynn Golf Club, not far from Allegiant Stadium, where the Chiefs will play the 49ers next Sunday.

"The commercials probably help out a lot," Mahomes continued, "and the run that we've been on. I think until I actually go around the world and see the different types of stuff, I don't think I'll realize it enough, the impact that we've had."

Reid already has witnessed it. He took a vacation to Italy a couple of years ago and when he walked out of his hotel the first morning, Reid was recognized almost instantly by a group of kids.

"They loved Pat," he said with a smile. "They knew all our guys."

Their impact on the NFL has certainly been astounding.

The league was responsible for 24 of the 25 most-watched TV broadcasts during 2023, headlined by more than 115 million viewers when the Chiefs beat the Eagles in last year's Super Bowl. Next on the list was the AFC title game, when more than 53 million tuned in to watch the Chiefs beat the Bengals at Arrowhead Stadium.

In fact, according to Nielsen, the Chiefs were involved in 16 of the 100 most-watched TV broadcasts overall last year.

With huge viewership numbers comes massive merchandise sales, far outstripping what reasonably could be expected of a team that plays in one of the NFL's smallest markets. The sale of Chiefs gear increased by 20% last season to rank fourth among all franchises, according to Fanatics, which takes into account its own website along with the NFL Shop and other outlets, and shipments were made to more than 80 countries around the world.

Mahomes has the fourth-fastest selling jersey in the league, Fanatics said. Kelce is No. 8 with sales up 100% over last season.

On the subject of jerseys, Kelce's game-used threads from a 2015 game recently sold at auction for \$19,520, and a jersey from 2019 sold for \$36,905. The jersey Mahomes wore when he threw four touchdown passes in win over the Raiders on Oct. 10, 2022, went for \$213,500 just last month, the most expensive jersey of his ever sold.

"Chiefs memorabilia has been skyrocketing this season," said Ken Goldin, founder and CEO of Goldin Auctions, which handled all three sales. "With the record-breaking Mahomes jersey sale and the two highest-priced Kelce jerseys ever selling within weeks of each other, we really see the Chiefs fanfare boosting the memorabilia market."

The Chiefs have become the "it team" for the Hollywood subset, too.

Jason Sudeikis, Paul Rudd, Eric Stonestreet and Heidi Gardner are regulars at games, though all have ties to Kansas City. Ryan Reynolds and Blake Lively joined Swift at a game this season. Brad Pitt often sports a hat with the Chiefs' logo, while Henry Winkler prefers to don the No. 15 jersey of his favorite quarterback.

Melissa Etheridge is one of the longest-serving celebrity Chiefs fans. The rock icon, who grew up in nearby

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Leavenworth, Kansas, was recently on "Who's Talking to Chris Wallace?" and was asked about Kelce's relationship with Swift, which began with a much-publicized friendship-bracelet saga this past season.

"I think it's fantastic. I love it," Etheridge told the CNN anchor during their wide-ranging interview. "I'm just worried he's going to retire early to be with her."

Spoken like a true diehard.

Just like so many versions of "America's Team," though, a certain amount of fatigue also is setting in. What was once a plucky underdog franchise that hadn't won a Super Bowl in 50 years, and whose quarterback had that adorable Kermit the Frog voice and whose tight end implored everyone to "fight for your right to party," has become suffocating.

They are everywhere. Overexposed. And some fans are downright sick of them.

"I was at a watch party for the games last weekend and every time a Kelce or Mahomes commercial came on, there was this collective groan from the room," said Justin Johnson, who helps produce the pregame show for Baltimore's flagship radio station, 98 Rock; the Chiefs beat the Ravens 17-10 in the AFC championship game.

"This wasn't a bunch of Baltimore fans, either. I think anyone with that level of success can quickly become the heel," Johnson added, before musing: "We should all be so lucky to be hated like this."

Mahomes believes the Chiefs still have plenty of work to do before they can be considered "America's Team," or replace the Patriots as the latest NFL dynasty. He points out that New England won six Super Bowls, tied with the Steelers for the most of any franchise, and the Chiefs have won only three — two since he's been the QB.

They can make it four next Sunday, when they play the 49ers in a Super Bowl trending to be the most expensive ticket in history. So many high-rollers are flying in that private jet parking is maxed out, leaving some to wonder if Swift will be able to find a spot when she is expected to land from her overnight flight from her Eras Tour concert in Tokyo.

"We know nothing is going to be given to us. We've got an even bigger target on our back than we did last year," Chiefs safety Justin Reid said. "But as far as the mentality in the room, we're working to continue this dynasty, and continue to build on what we did last year, not just rest on our laurels of what we did."

New Jersey comes West to kick off Grammy weekend with native sons Jon Bon Jovi and Bruce Springsteen

By BETH HARRIS Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — New Jersey came to the West Coast to kick off Grammy Awards weekend, with native sons Jon Bon Jovi and Bruce Springsteen teaming up.

The occasion was to honor Bon Jovi for his musical achievements and philanthropic efforts as MusiCares Person of the Year on Friday night.

Bon Jovi hailed Springsteen as "my hero, my friend, my mentor" to a crowd of 2,000 at the Los Angeles Convention Center.

Instead of performing at the end of the evening as is traditional for the honoree, Bon Jovi got the nearly three-hour show going. He and Springsteen traded guitar licks on "Who Says You Can't Go Home" as scenes of New Jersey were projected behind them.

With the crowd on its feet for a standing ovation, they segued into Springsteen's "The Promised Land," with Bon Jovi on harmonica before Springsteen joined him.

Bon Jovi then retreated to his star-studded table in the crowd. He was joined by his wife, Dorothea, Paul McCartney and his wife, Nancy, Springsteen, New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft and actor-singer Rita Wilson.

Springsteen appeared two days after his 98-year-old mother Adele died.

"When I first got the news he was already on the airplane on his way here," Bon Jovi told the crowd. "I certainly would have understood if he'd said that he couldn't make it, but he wanted to be here tonight for MusiCares and he wanted to be here tonight for me, and I am forever grateful to you."

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Melissa Etheridge was joined by Larkin Poe for a rip-roaring version of "Blaze of Glory" two days before the Grammy Awards.

Best new artist nominee Jelly Roll performed "Bad Medicine" and Lainey Wilson sang "We Weren't Born to Follow."

Pat Monahan of Train tackled "It's My Life" as Bon Jovi bobbed his head in time to the music.

Clad in black-fringed leather, Shania Twain sang "Bed of Roses" as the hall was bathed in red lighting. Bon Jovi touched his hand to his heart as she closed out the ballad.

Jason Isbell did "Wanted Dead or Alive" and Damiano David of Måneskin sang "Keep the Faith."

The War and Treaty took the crowd to church with their soulful in-the-round performance of "I'll Be There for You" that earned a standing ovation.

Van Halen fans got a treat when the band's former lead singer, Sammy Hagar, did "You Give Love a Bad Name" with Orianthi on guitar. Wolfgang Van Halen and his Mammoth WVH came out later to do "Have a Nice Day."

Brandy Clark, a six-time nominee on Sunday, played guitar and sang "(You Want to) Make a Memory" in the round backed by piano and cello.

Comedian Jim Gaffigan hosted and relentlessly mocked Bon Jovi for his big hair and penchant for wearing short-shorts in the 1980s. Proof of the rocker's questionable sartorial choices were flashed on video screens around the hall.

"Does it feel like you're looking in a mirror?" Gaffigan said when he later walked out dressed in a Jack Daniels sleeveless T-shirt, denim shorts, spiked hair and cowboy boots.

Bon Jovi broke out laughing.

"Livin' on a Prayer" became an all-star finale, with Bon Jovi joined onstage by the other performers for a singalong.

Kraft presented Bon Jovi with his award as MusiCares Person of the Year. The two first met on the sidelines at the 1997 Super Bowl.

Bon Jovi founded the JBJ Soul Kitchen Food Bank and his Soul Foundation, a nonprofit that operates community restaurants in three New Jersey cities. His foundation also has helped fund more than 700 units of affordable housing in 11 states and the District of Columbia.

"Tonight and every night I know how blessed I've been," Bon Jovi said.

Now in its 34th year, the dinner and auction raised money for programs and services supporting musicians in need.

As investors pile into psychedelics, idealism gives way to pharma economics

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

Money is pouring into the fledgling psychedelic medicine industry, with dozens of startup companies vying to be among the first to sell mind-expanding drugs for depression, addiction and other mental health conditions.

While psychedelics are still illegal under federal law, companies are jostling to try and patent key ingredients found in magic mushrooms, ayahuasca and other substances that have been used underground for decades or — in some cases — for millennia by indigenous cultures.

Wall Street's sudden exuberance for hallucinogens has rankled longtime advocates and philanthropists, who dreamed of making low-cost psychedelics widely available for mental health and personal growth. Instead, many now see a very different future for drugs like psilocybin and LSD: as expensive, specialty medications controlled by a handful of biotech companies.

"It's disappointing," said Carey Turnbull, an investor and philanthropist who sits on the board of several psychedelic nonprofits. "All the air is getting sucked out of the room by these for-profit companies who say, 'Wow, this stuff is awesome, if I could patent it I'd make a fortune.'"

Since 2010, Turnbull and his wife have donated millions to fund psychedelic research at New York Uni-

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versity, Yale and other top academic centers.

Promising results from those studies have sparked a wave of popular interest in psychedelics, amplified by books, documentaries and articles touting their potential to reshape care for mental illness, trauma and end-of-life care.

But in recent years, Turnbull has pivoted to challenging what he and other advocates consider frivolous patents filed by companies entering the field.

Most psychedelic startups are backed by venture capitalists or tech investors looking for the next industry "disruptor." Behind one of the biggest companies, Atai Life Sciences, is PayPal billionaire Peter Thiel, whose enthusiasm for psychedelics is shared by many in Silicon Valley.

About 50 such companies now trade on public stock exchanges, including developers of psychedelic drugs, retreats and training programs. Some analysts project the industry could grow to over \$10 billion within the decade.

But recently investors have pulled back, amid reminders of the stark challenges of converting illegal drugs into money-making medicines.

Atai laid off 30% of its staff last March after its depression treatment failed in a key study. Stocks are down 80% to 90% from their highs across the industry with several smaller companies restructuring or declaring bankruptcy.

"They're in this hype cycle, but then the reality of running a biotech company catches up with you," said Chris Yetter of Dumont Global, which trades in cannabis and psychedelic companies. "You do drug trials and some of them succeed and some fail and every quarter your cash drains away."

The cash crunch recently forced fundamental changes at the field's leading nonprofit, the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies.

For more than 30 years, MAPS' efforts have been funded almost entirely by donations from wealthy individuals, including billionaires like New York Mets owner Steven Cohen and Republican political donor Rebekah Mercer. On principle, MAPS has never patented its work.

The group's pharmaceutical arm, the MAPS Public Benefit Corp., is expected to win U.S. approval this year for the first psychedelic medicine accepted for review by the Food and Drug Administration: MDMA, or ecstasy, to help treat post-traumatic stress disorder.

But as investment opportunities have multiplied, charitable donations have dried up. The group was recently forced to take on private investors to continue funding the drug company, which changed its name to Lykos Therapeutics.

"We're a victim of our own success," said MAPS founder Rick Doblin. "It's heartbreaking because I had hoped to go the whole way with philanthropy, but I was unable to raise the mega millions to do that."

Psychedelics never fit the business model of the traditional blockbuster drug: an exclusive, patent-protected medicine that patients take regularly for years.

None of the psychedelics currently being studied are new. Synthetic drugs like LSD and ecstasy have been off patent for decades. Naturally occurring substances like psilocybin, found in certain mushrooms, can't be patented by themselves.

And then there's the challenge of administering drugs that bring about intense, disorienting visions and experiences. All the drugs vying for FDA approval will have to be given under professional supervision, typically during several therapy sessions lasting about six to eight hours each.

All those hours and professional fees will drive up costs, which many analysts say could range from \$5,000 to \$10,000 for one course of treatment.

Psychedelic executives say the only way to defer those costs is to conduct large, rigorous clinical studies needed for FDA approval, which could compel insurers to pay for psychedelics. But funding those studies requires raising tens of millions from investors, who typically only back drugmakers with strong patents.

"The only way you're going to bring about that broad and equitable access is with robust intellectual property," said Kabir Nath, CEO of Compass Pathways, which is studying laboratory-made psilocybin for depression, anorexia and other disorders.

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Compass is among the most aggressive companies in terms of trying to patent its technology, with dozens of applications filed with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

One submission describes the "soft furniture" and "muted colors" that would decorate rooms where patients take psilocybin. Another patent lays claim to a specific, microscopic structure found in Compass' synthetic psilocybin, which the company claims is uniquely suited for mass production.

The company's efforts have drawn ridicule from some researchers, who note that as early as the 1970s, psychedelic therapists had codified the settings and techniques described in Compass patents.

"It just seems like a blatant power grab," said Frederick Barrett, a neuroscientist who directs Johns Hopkins University's psychedelic center.

But attempts to challenge the patents on Compass' synthetic psilocybin have been unsuccessful, despite years of work by Turnbull's patent watchdog group, Freedom to Operate.

Other companies are taking more creative approaches to patenting psychedelics, such as reformulating them as dissolvable lozenges or films — or combining LSD and ecstasy into a combination pill. Skeptics note that that approach, dubbed "candyflipping," has been used recreationally for decades.

One of the more intriguing reformulation efforts involves trying to shorten the duration of the psychedelic experience, or even do away with it entirely, while retaining the psychological benefits for patients.

The rush to innovate worries some psychiatrists who point to the many fundamental questions about psychedelics that remain unanswered, including exactly how they affect the brain and how long their benefits might last.

As companies develop more psychedelic derivatives and combinations, deciphering their strengths and weaknesses will become more challenging, says Dr. Jeffrey Lieberman of Columbia University. Unless researchers can clearly demonstrate their benefits, they risk another backlash like the 1970 federal ban that wiped out psychedelic research for decades.

"Psychedelics could have tremendous benefit for treating a number of illnesses," Lieberman said. "But if we mess it up and rush the process, these drugs are going to get banned again and you lose that opportunity."

Today in History: February 4, Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin begin World War II Yalta conference

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Sunday, Feb. 4, the 35th day of 2024. There are 331 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 4, 1945, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Soviet leader Josef Stalin began a wartime conference at Yalta.

On this date:

In 1783, Britain's King George III proclaimed a formal cessation of hostilities in the American Revolutionary War.

In 1789, electors chose George Washington to be the first president of the United States.

In 1801, John Marshall was confirmed by the Senate as chief justice of the United States.

In 1913, Rosa Parks, a Black woman whose 1955 refusal to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama, city bus to a white man sparked a civil rights revolution, was born Rosa Louise McCauley in Tuskegee.

In 1974, newspaper heiress Patricia Hearst, 19, was kidnapped in Berkeley, California, by the radical Symbionese Liberation Army.

In 1976, more than 23,000 people died when a severe earthquake struck Guatemala with a magnitude of 7.5.

In 1977, eleven people were killed when two Chicago Transit Authority trains collided on an elevated track.

In 1997, a civil jury in Santa Monica, California, found O.J. Simpson liable for the deaths of his ex-wife,

Groton Daily Independent

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Nicole Brown Simpson, and her friend, Ronald Goldman, after he had been acquitted at his criminal trial.

In 1999, senators at President Bill Clinton's impeachment trial voted to permit the showing of portions of Monica Lewinsky's videotaped deposition.

In 2004, Facebook had its beginnings as Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg launched "Thefacebook."

In 2012, Florence Green, who had served with the Women's Royal Air Force and was recognized as the last veteran of World War I, died in King's Lynn, eastern England, at age 110.

In 2013, British scientists announced they had rescued the skeletal remains of King Richard III, who lived during the 15th century, from the anonymity of a drab municipal parking lot.

In 2017, running backs LaDainian Tomlinson and Terrell Davis and quarterback Kurt Warner were elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

In 2018, the Philadelphia Eagles, led by backup quarterback Nick Foles, became NFL champs for the first time since 1960, beating Tom Brady and the New England Patriots 41-33 in the Super Bowl.

In 2020, thousands of medical workers in Hong Kong were on strike for a second day to demand that the country's border with China be completely closed to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus; the territory reported its first death from the virus and the second known fatality outside China.

In 2021, a voting technology company, Smartmatic USA, sued Fox News, three of its hosts and two former Trump lawyers – Rudy Giuliani and Sidney Powell – for \$2.7 billion, for allegedly conspiring to spread false claims that the company helped "steal" the presidential election.

In 2022, Chinese President Xi Jinping declared the Winter Olympics open at a ceremony at Beijing's Bird Nest Stadium.

In 2023, the U.S. military shot down a suspected Chinese spy balloon off the Carolina coast on orders from President Joe Biden, after it traversed sensitive military sites across North America.

Today's birthdays: Actor Jerry Adler is 95. Former Argentinian President Isabel Peron is 93. Actor Gary Conway is 88. Actor John Schuck is 84. Rock musician John Steel (The Animals) is 83. Singer Florence LaRue (The Fifth Dimension) is 82. Former Vice President Dan Quayle is 77. Rock singer Alice Cooper is 76. Actor Michael Beck is 75. Actor Lisa Eichhorn is 72. Football Hall of Famer Lawrence Taylor is 65. Actor Pamelyn Ferdin is 65. Rock singer Tim Booth is 64. Rock musician Henry Bogdan is 63. Country singer Clint Black is 62. Rock musician Noodles (The Offspring) is 61. Actor Gabrielle Anwar is 54. Actor Rob Corddry is 53. Singer David Garza is 53. Actor Michael Goorjian is 53. TV personality Nicolle Wallace is 52. Olympic gold medal boxer Oscar De La Hoya is 51. Rock musician Rick Burch (Jimmy Eat World) is 49. Singer Natalie Imbruglia is 49. Rapper Cam'ron is 48. Rock singer Gavin DeGraw is 47. Rock singer Zoe Manville is 40. Actor/musician Bashy, AKA Ashley Thomas, is 39. Actor Charlie Barnett is 36. Olympic gold medal gymnast-turned-singer Carly Patterson is 36. Actor Kyla Kenedy (TV: "Speechless") is 21.