

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Saturday, Feb. 17

Region Boys Wrestling at Gettysburg  
Boys Basketball at Henry: 7th at 11 a.m., 8th at Noon, C game at 1 p.m., JV at 2:15 p.m., Varsity at 3:30 p.m.  
Thrift Store open 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.

## Sunday, Feb. 18

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.

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



*"Sometimes it takes only one act of kindness and caring to change a person's life."*  
-Jackie Chan

First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.; No Sunday School; Choir, 6 p.m.

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

United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:30 a.m.; and at Groton, 10:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; No Sunday School.

## Monday, Feb. 19

No Senior Meal  
No School - President's Day  
Senior Citizens Meet at the Groton Community Center, 1 p.m.  
Pantry Open 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Christian Literature Circle, 7:30 p.m.  
Boys Basketball: Dakota Valley at Groton Area. Junior varsity game at 4:30 p.m. followed by varsity.

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

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

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# 1440

## Financial Fraud Fine

Former President Donald Trump and the Trump Organization have been ordered to pay \$354M in a New York civil fraud case that previously found Trump overvalued his real estate assets to secure favorable terms on financial deals.

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The judge overseeing the case backed away from a previous order seeking the cancellation of Trump's business licenses in the state, which prosecutors had sought. Instead, the judge banned Trump from serving in top roles at a New York company for three years and ordered a two-part oversight process of Trump's businesses. Donald Trump Jr. and Eric Trump were also banned from conducting business in New York for two years and each fined \$4M. Read the ruling here.

Friday's ruling comes after a nearly three-month trial in Manhattan, which featured 40 witnesses, including Trump, and follows an investigation from New York Attorney General Letitia James, who filed the lawsuit and had sought a \$370M penalty. Trump is expected to appeal the ruling; however, he will need to either pay the fine or secure a bond within 30 days.

## Trump, the Republican presidential frontrunner, also faces four criminal cases.

Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny dies in prison.

Navalny, who was serving time at an Arctic penal colony 1,200 miles northeast of Moscow, died Friday at age 47, Russian officials announced. While the cause of death was not revealed, officials said Navalny collapsed and lost consciousness after a walk at the colony. Navalny had been in prison since January 2021 for multiple convictions, including on extremism charges and fraud (see overview).

## Two juveniles charged in Chiefs parade mass shooting.

The two suspects are being held at a juvenile detention center on gun-related and resisting arrest charges in the shootout that killed one person and wounded 22 others after a Chiefs Super Bowl parade in Kansas City. Additional charges are expected as police continue their investigation. Separately, Taylor Swift donated \$100K to the family of a local radio DJ who was killed in the shooting.

## Jury deliberates in trial against NRA and former CEO Wayne LaPierre.

The jury is tasked with determining whether LaPierre and others at the National Rifle Association (the largest gun-rights lobby in the US) used millions of dollars to fund personal expenses. The lawsuit, filed by New York's attorney general, seeks to bar the defendants from leading New York nonprofits as well as financial penalties.

## Nike to lay off 1,500 employees amid restructuring.

The job cuts amount to roughly 2% of the sneaker company's total workforce and will occur in two phases between now and the end of May. The reductions are part of a broader restructuring plan that Nike hopes will help it save at least \$2B over the next three years so it can invest in its growth areas, which include women's shoes and the Jordan line.

## Brian Wilson's family seeks conservatorship for The Beach Boys star.

Wilson, 81, is suffering from a neurocognitive disorder similar to dementia and is unable to provide for his own personal needs, his family said in a court filing. The request for the conservatorship comes after Wilson's wife of 28 years died last month. Wilson, along with his two brothers, their cousin, and a school friend, founded The Beach Boys in 1961, creating hits like "Surfin' USA" and "I Get Around."

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## Humankind(ness)

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Dan T. in St. Louis, Missouri.

"I grew up on a dairy farm in a small town in southern Illinois. My dad passed away unexpectedly in 2006, just as harvest was starting. The prospect of getting our harvest in was daunting to say the least. Just days after the funeral, our farmer neighbors turned out in force and completed a month long harvest in just two days. The turnout was a testament to the sense of unity in small towns, the solidarity among farmers and the respect people had for our dad. That remains one of the most remarkable examples of kindness, generosity and love I have ever witnessed."

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Sun Dial Manor is an Equal Employment Opportunity Employer  
(0214.0221)

## Finance Officer Wanted

The Town of Andover is seeking a Finance Officer. This is a part time position. Must know word and excel. Resume can be sent to P O Box 35,

Andover, SD 57422, or email to [bsmith@nvc.net](mailto:bsmith@nvc.net). A complete job description is available by call 605-265-0236. EOE. (0214.0221)



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## Groton Area wins all six games over Britton-Hecla

### Boys Varsity: Groton 77, Britton-Hecla 35

Groton Area made 70 percent of its two-pointers as the boys basketball team posted a 77-35 win over Britton-Hecla. Groton Area led at the quarterstops at 21-10, 40-22 and 66-33.

Lane Tietz led the Tigers with 25 points, two rebounds, three assists and five steals. Keegen Tracy had 19 points, four rebounds, two assists and two steals. Ryder Johnson had 10 points, four rebounds, two assists, three steals and one block. Jacob Zak had nine points, seven rebounds, six assists, six steals and one block. Logan Ringgenberg had four points, one rebound and three steals. Gage Sippel had four points and three rebounds. Jayden Schwan had two points, Logan Warrington had two points and one rebound, Colby Dunker had one point and three rebounds, Blake Pauli and Kassen Keough each had one assist, Turner Thompson had one rebound and Karson Zak had two rebounds and one steal.

Three-Pointers: Jacob Zak - 1, Tietz - 3, Tracy - 3.

Groton Area made 23 of 33 two-pointers for 70 percent, seven of 25 three-pointers for 28 percent, 10 of 16 free throws for 63 percent, had 27 rebounds, 14 turnovers, 14 assists, 21 steals, 11 team fouls and two blocks.

Ty Fagerland led the Braves with 12 points followed by Daniel Person with 10, Jaxon Zuehlke had seven and adding two points apiece are Isaiah Jackson, Graham Fosness and Jordyn McGregor.

Three-Pointers: Zuehlke - 1.

Britton-Hecla made 15 of 32 field goals for 47 percent, four of 10 free throws for 40 percent, had 25 turnovers and 12 team fouls.

### Boys Junior Varsity: Groton 47, Britton-Hecla 19

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 47-19, leading at the quarterstops at 11-5, 18-7 and 31-12.

Gage Sippel led Groton Area with 14 points followed by Kassen Keough with eight, Easton Weber five, Blake Pauli, Turner Thompson and Ethan Kroll each had four, Jayden Schwan and Logan Warrington each had three and Jace Johnson added two points.

Benjamin Folkman led Britton-Hecla with five points while Mitchell Burger and Nathaniel Schuller each had four, Jordyn McGregor had had three, Riley Holland two and Jace Rein added one point.

### Boys Eighth Grade: Groton 43, Britton-Hecla 35

Groton Area won the eighth grade game, 43-35. The game was tied at 13 after the first quarter and the Tigers took a 27-18 lead at halftime and a 37-31 lead after the third quarter.

Jace Johnson led Groton Area with 19 points followed by Ryder Schelle with 12 and Anthony Gilmore and Ethan Kroll each had six points.

LaFrom Herr and Chaz Victor each had nine points for the Braves while Jack Teveldal had seven, Kaden Mills six and Luke Bosse had four.

### Boys Seventh Grade: Groton 52, Britton-Hecla 13

Groton Area won the seventh grade game, 52-13, leading at the quarterstops at 20-4, 28-9 and 36-13.

Anthony Gilmore led Groton Area with 24 points followed by Asher Johnson with 11, Jordan Schwan six, Zach Flihs five and Connor Kroll, Ian Kutter and Sam Crank each had two points.

Jett Ford led Britton-Hecla with four points while Bowman Micko, Luke Bosse and Trey Biel each had two points.

### Girls Varsity: Groton 69, Britton-Hecla 31

Groton Area's Lady Tigers defeated Britton-Hecla, 69-31. Jaedyn Penning did not commit a single foul on the night and Emily Clark made her first three-pointer of the year.

Groton Area led at the quarter stops at 21-8, 43-16 and 54-22. Groton Area had a 16-point run in the first half.

Sydney Leicht led Groton Area with 16 points, one rebound, one assist and two steals. Faith Traphagen had 12 points, one assist and two steals. Jaedyn Penning had 10 points, five rebounds, one assist and one



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steal. Mia Crank had five points and one rebound. Jerica Locke had four points, one rebound, four assists and one steal. Kennedy Hansen had four points, six rebounds, three assists and three steals. Brooklyn Hansen had four points, three rebounds, three assists and one block. Rylee Dunker had four points, six rebounds, four assists, one steal and two block shots. Emily Clark had three points. Laila Roberts had three points, five rebounds and four assists. Talli Wright had two points. Taryn. Traphagen had two points, two rebounds and one assist. McKenna Tietz had one assist.

Three-Pointers: Leicht - 3, Faith Trpahgen - 2, Crank - 1, Clark - 1.

Groton Area made 20 of 38 field goals for 53 percent, seven of 21 three-pointers for 33 percent, eight of 10 free throws for 80 percent, had 30 rebounds, seven turnovers, 23 assists, 10 steals, 12 rebounds and three block shots.

Sterling Brassfield led. Britton-Hecla with with points followed by Tiyanna Schott six, Jayden Bender four, Danika Zuehlke and Faith Small each had three points, RaeAnn Hagenson had two and Maddi Micko added a free throw.

Three-Pointers: Brassfield - 1.

The Braves made nine of 31 in field goals for 29 percent, 12 of 20 free throws for 60 percent, had 19 turnovers and seven team fouls.

Groton Area, now 13-7, will play Webster in the first round of the Region 1A tournament Tuesday at Aberdeen Roncalli.

## Girls Junior Varsity: Groton 36, Britton-Hecla 8

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 36-8, leading at the quarterstops at 3-2, 19-8 and 30-8.

Groton Area scored the last 21 points of the game, limiting Britton-Hecla's scoring from the free throw line, making eight of 14 free throws.

McKenna Tietz led Groton Area with nine points while Emerlee Jones. Had six points, Faith Traphagen and Mia Crank each had four points, Kella Tracy had three and adding two points apiece were Laila Roberts, Taryn Traphagen, Ashlynn Warrington, Talli Wright and Sydney Locke.

Koryn Jones had four points and Karlie Zuehlke and Adriana Buer each had two points for Britton-Hecla.

The games were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM. Varsity 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. The junior varsity game sponsors was were Craig and Jodi Sterhagen and Tom and Lindsey Tietz. The junior high game sponsor was the Groton Chiropractic Clinic. Shane Clark, Paul Kosel and Jeslyn Kosel were on the scene for the games.



**Senior Emily Clark gets ready to launch and make this three-pointer.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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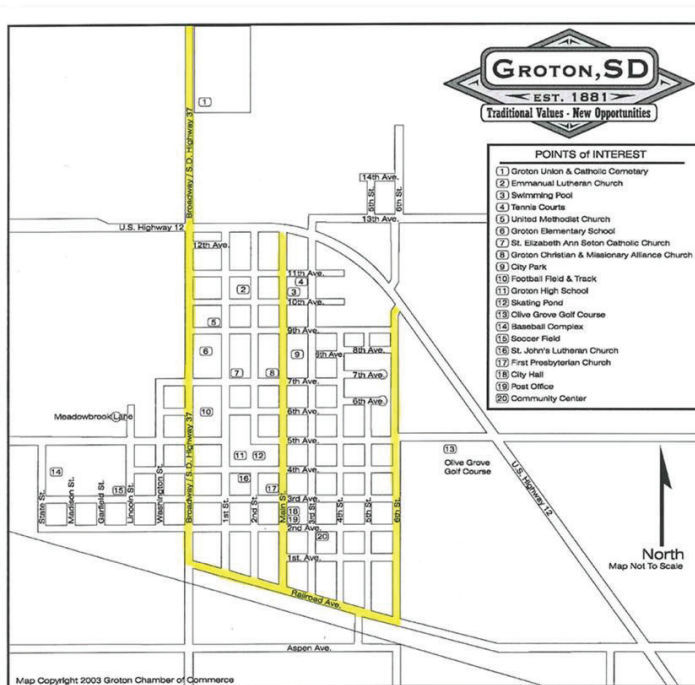
**Shane Clark and Jeslyn Kosel ran the GDIL-IVE broadcasts for the junior varsity games.**



**Anna Bisbee sang the National Anthem prior to the girls varsity game Friday night.**



## Notice of Garbage Pickup- Effective the week of February 12<sup>th</sup>



To help preserve our streets, Groton residents are asked to bring their garbage to the following locations until further notice:

**Railroad Avenue, Main Street, Sixth Street, & Highway 37**

Residents of the Broadway Mobile Home Park need to take their garbage to **Highway 37**.

Residents north of 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue (Olson and Jacobson Developments) need to bring their garbage to the **Bus Barns**.

*Your cooperation is greatly appreciated during the spring thaw.*

**Please bring your garbage bags and/or cans to these locations for Tuesday pickup!**

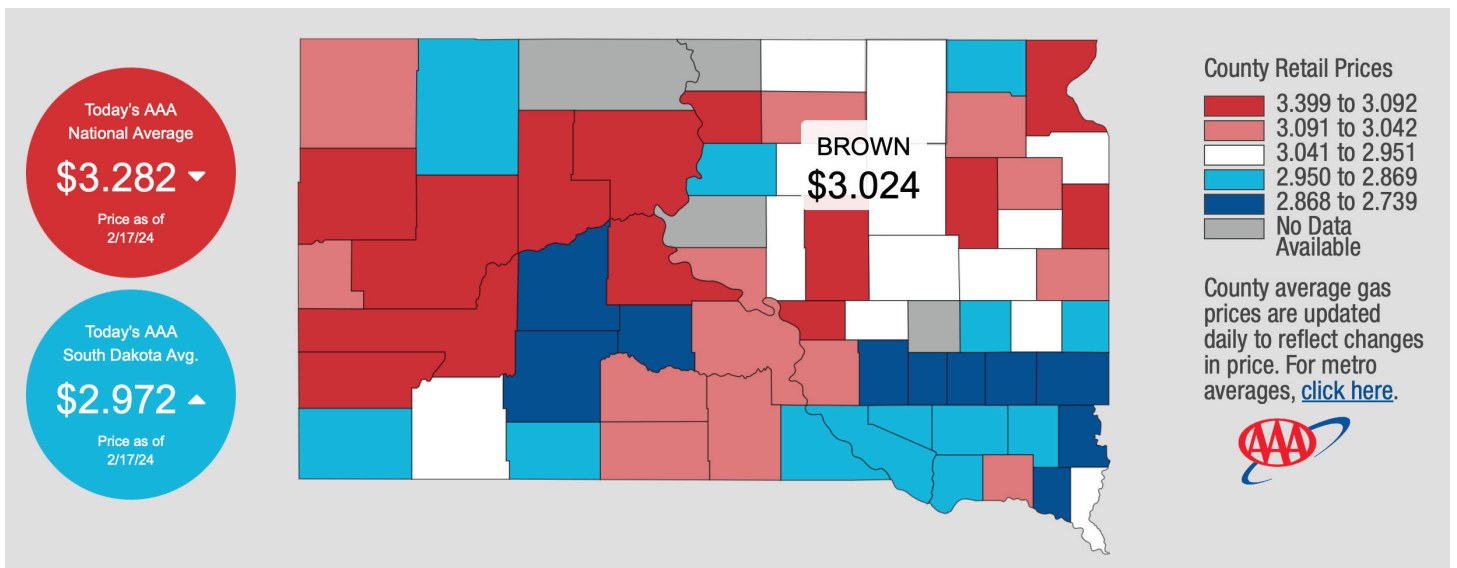
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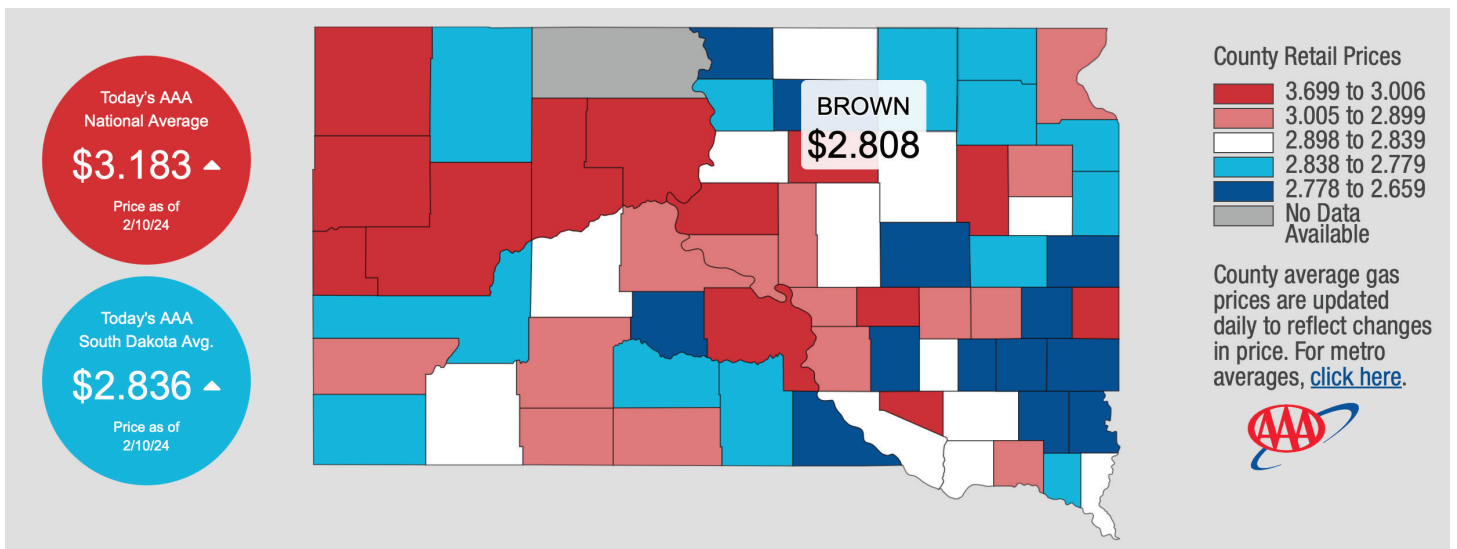
## South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$2.972	\$3.137	\$3.593	\$3.778
Yesterday Avg.	\$2.942	\$3.132	\$3.566	\$3.769
Week Ago Avg.	\$2.836	\$2.999	\$3.468	\$3.617
Month Ago Avg.	\$2.866	\$3.047	\$3.517	\$3.704
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.355	\$3.508	\$3.955	\$4.277

### This Week



### Two Weeks Ago

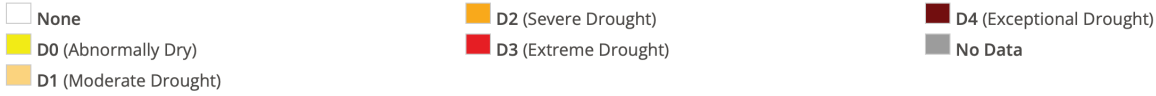




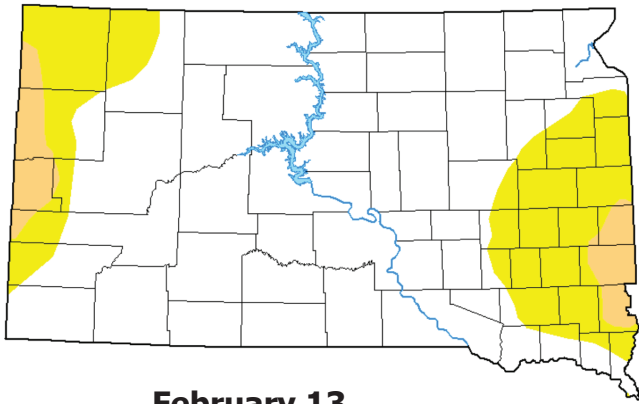
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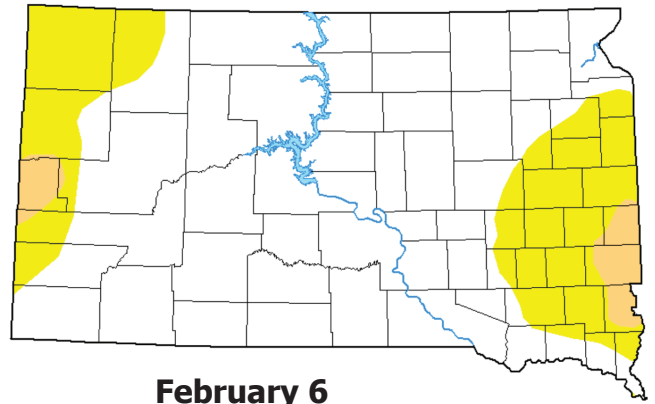
## Drought Classification



## Drought Monitor



February 13



February 6

High temperatures averaged about 8 to more than 20 degrees above normal. Precipitation of less than 0.5 inches fell across much of the Dakotas, Nebraska, and Kansas. Southwest Nebraska, Kansas, and eastern Colorado saw 1-category improvements to long-term drought areas. Short-term moisture deficits have largely been eliminated. A dry signal remains in Nebraska and Kansas at timescales longer than about 6 months and moisture deficits linger in deeper soil levels and ground water. Moderate drought (D1) expanded in western South Dakota, near the Black Hills, and northeast Wyoming due to a lack of snow and below-normal soil moisture levels.

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## NSU Men's Basketball

### **Friday Night Match-up with Winona State Slips Away**

Aberdeen, S.D. – The Northern State University men's basketball team was stunned by Winona State University on Friday, falling with under a second to play in regulation. The Wolves led by 14 at the half, however the Warriors stormed back in the second, out-scoring NSU 48-33.

#### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 79, WSU 80

Records: NSU 10-15 (8-11 NSIC), WSU 17-9 (12-8 NSIC)

Attendance: 2378

#### HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern was the definition of efficiency in the opening half hitting 18-of-31 (58.1%) from the floor and 8-of-15 (53.3%) from the 3-point line

The Wolves shot over 40.0% in the second, however cooled off from beyond the arc, hitting just 4-of-13

The contest saw just nine turnovers between the two teams and only three points off turnovers by the Warriors

Winona State out-rebounded Northern State 36-32 in the game and recorded nine second chance points off nine offensive boards; on the flip side the Wolves tallied just three offensive boards and could not convert those into points on the board

Through 40 minutes of play, the Wolves tallied 32 rebounds, a game high 20 assists, 12 made 3-pointers, and five turnovers; scoring 26 points in the paint and four points off the bench

Jackson Moni dropped a new career high of 40 points, hitting 15-of-25 (60.0%) from the floor and 5-of-9 (55.6%) from the 3-point line

Augustin Reede followed with 14 points as the only other Wolf in double figures

Josh Dilling dished out a season high 9 assists and added nine points

#### NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL LEADERS

Jackson Moni: 40 points (career high), 60.0 field goal%, 8 rebounds, 4 assists

Augustin Reede: 14 points, 4 rebounds

#### UP NEXT

The Wolves will host No. 5 Minnesota State today for a 6 p.m. tip-off from Wachs Arena. Northern will honor their seniors prior to start of the game. For full game promotions visit [nsuwolves.com/promotions](http://nsuwolves.com/promotions). With three games remaining in the regular season, Northern sits tenth in the NSIC Standings.

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## NSU Wrestling

### **No. 18 Northern State Returns to the Win Column in Marshall**

Aberdeen, S.D. – The No. 18 Northern State University wrestling team opened the final weekend of the regular season with an 11-point victory over No. 25 Southwest Minnesota State. The Wolves defeated the Mustangs with six weight class victories, including four bonus point wins.

#### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 25, SMSU 14

Records: NSU 8-12 (3-5 NSIC), SMSU 3-7 (1-7 NSIC)

#### HOW IT HAPPENED

The first bout of the evening headed to extras, with Southwest Minnesota State grabbing a narrow 4-1 sudden victory win

Northern answered with back-to-back-to-back victories led off by a technical fall shutout by Jason Henschel Jr.; the Wolves 133-pounder defeated Chase Murphy at 4:31 in the match with a score of 17-0

Braydon Mogle extended the lead at 141-pounds, notching an 8-0 major decision over Hunter Pfantz

No. 2 Wyatt Turnquist added three team points, giving NSU a 12-3 lead with his 4-0 decision win over Luke Peterson

The Mustangs broke through with three points at 157-pounds, however the Wolves quickly responded with three straight wins to secure the dual

Chase Bloomquist recorded the team's third shutout of the evening, defeating Ashton Labelle in an 8-0 major decision

With his seventh bonus point win of 2024, Seth Brossard pinned Lucas Hodges at 2:18 in the first period, giving Northern a 22-6 lead

Sam Kruger closed out the final dual win of the evening for NSU, defeating Elijah Sterner by a score of 13-6

The two teams wrestled a pair of extra matches with Ayden Viox recording a victory by fall at 6:04 over Jackson Esping in a 285-pound bout

#### UP NEXT

Northern closes out their weekend and the 2023-24 dual season today at Minnesota State. Dual start time is set for 7 p.m. versus the Mavericks.

#### FINAL RESULTS

	Match Summary	SMSU	NSU
125	Carlo Arreola (Southwest Minn. St.) over Landen Fischer (Northern State) (SV-1 4-1)	3.0	0.0
133	Jason Henschel (Northern State) over Chase Murphy (Southwest Minn. St.) (TF 17-0 4:31)	0.0	5.0
141	Braydon Mogle (Northern State) over Hunter Pfantz (Southwest Minn. St.) (MD 8-0)	0.0	4.0
149	#2 Wyatt Turnquist (Northern State) over Luke Peterson (Southwest Minn. St.) (Dec 4-0)	0.0	3.0
157	Sean Howk (Southwest Minn. St.) over Cael Larson (Northern State) (Dec 4-2)	3.0	0.0
165	Chase Bloomquist (Northern State) over Ashton Labelle (Southwest Minn. St.) (MD 8-0)	0.0	4.0
174	Seth Brossard (Northern State) over Lucas Hodges (Southwest Minn. St.) (Fall 2:18)	0.0	6.0
184	Sam Kruger (Northern State) over Elijah Sterner (Southwest Minn. St.) (Dec 13-6)	0.0	3.0
197	#3 Caden Steffen (Southwest Minn. St.) over Tyson Lien (Northern State) (TF 19-3 4:37)	5.0	0.0
285	#10 Jacob Dykes (Southwest Minn. St.) over Nathan Schauer (Northern State) (Dec 1-0)	3.0	0.0
184E	Adam Sylvester (Southwest Minn. St.) over Mason Fey (Northern State) (TF 21-5 4:19)	0.0	0.0
285E	Ayden Viox (Northern State) over Jackson Esping (Southwest Minn. St.) (Fall 6:04)	0.0	0.0
	Dual Meet Score	14.0	25.0



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## NSU Women's Basketball

### **Wolves Rally Back to Take Down Warriors in Friday Night Action**

Aberdeen, S.D. – The Northern State University women's basketball team ran away with the win against Winona State, 61-47. The Wolves rallied back after being down heading into the third quarter to out-score the Warriors by 16 points.

#### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 61, WSU 47

Records: NSU 18-7 (14-5 NSIC), WSU 8-17 (7-13 NSIC)

Attendance: 2217

#### HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern State tallied 11 points in the first quarter, 12 in the second, 22 in the third, and 16 in the fourth; out-scoring Winona State by 16 points in the third quarter

They grabbed 46 boards, 24 bench points, 22 points in the paint, 14 assists, 11 points off of turnovers, and eight blocks

The Wolves defense held the Warriors shooting to 26.3 % from the floor

Northern State shot 36.2 % from the floor, 33.3 % from the 3-point arc, and 73.3 % from the foul line

Brynn Alfson was first on the team with 15 points and four rebounds while shooting 77.8 % from the floor

Deontee Smith and Alayna Benike both notched double digits with 14 and ten points respectively

Madelyn Bragg dished out a team lead of 11 boards

Rianna Fillipi controlled the court with seven assists along with nine rebounds and five points

#### NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Brynn Alfson: 15 points, 4 rebounds, 77.8 FG %

Deontee Smith: 14 points, 4 rebounds, 2 blocks

Alayna Benike: 10 points, 5 rebounds

Rianna Fillipi: 9 rebounds, 7 assists, 5 points

#### UP NEXT

Northern State returns to Wachs Arena to take on No. 14 Minnesota State today. Tip-off time is set for 4 p.m. against the Mavericks.

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## The Life of Susan Kurth

"Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." Luke 23:43

Memorial services for Susan Kurth, 77, of Groton will be 11:00 a.m., Thursday, February 22nd at St. John's Lutheran Church, Groton. Pastor Jeremy Yeadon will officiate. Inurnment will follow in the spring at Union Cemetery, Groton.

Visitation will be held on Wednesday, February 21st at Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel from 5-7 p.m. with a prayer service at 7:00 p.m.

Surrounded by her loving family, Susan Kurth was called home by her Lord to her eternal resting place on February 15, 2024 after several years of battling dementia.

Susan Lynn Ulrich was born in Aberdeen, SD on November 11, 1946 to Ervin and Ruth (Stablein) Ulrich. She was raised on the Ulrich farm near Putney, SD. Susie, as she was often known by her family and friends, attended the two room Putney country school through the 8th grade. Her fondest memories of growing up was time spent with her beloved mother, often in her flower garden, from which Susan entered many varieties in the Brown County Fair. She spent time swimming and playing at Tacoma Park with her sisters and friends. She also enjoyed trips with her mother to Aberdeen to visit her cousins and family. And, of course, her very favorite television show, "The Howdy Doody Show." To which she was known, in her later years, to greet everyone with a very, cheery, "Howdy Doody!"

From Putney, she attended Groton High School and graduated in the Class of 1964. In high school she was an active member of Girls' Glee Club, Pep Club, the school newspaper, chorus, class plays and "declam" contests, where she advanced to the district contest for her dramatic reading. She carried her love of these activities throughout life as she enjoyed many musicals, plays, and public speaking - often, with her dear friends through her association in the local Red Hat Society club.

After high school, Susan attended Dakota Wesleyan University in Mitchell, SD where she pursued a degree in teaching, receiving a Bachelor's degree in English. The summer before leaving for college, Susan met Dale Kurth in Claremont. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Dale and Susan dated throughout her time in college and were married following her graduation from DWU on June 29th, 1968 at the First Methodist Church in Groton. They settled on Dale's family farm near Claremont, SD, where they would reside for over 50 years. Time spent together centered around their children but also meant attending church events, card parties, dancing or taking in a local baseball game. She was a member of the Claremont American Legion Auxiliary and Putney Ladies Aid. At the time of Susan's passing, Susan and Dale were lovingly married for 55 years.

Susan joined the faculty at Britton High School teaching English, speech and directing class plays. Upon the arrival of her first child in 1971, she made the decision to stay at home to raise their family. They were blessed with 3 children - Travis, Troy and Tiffany. She rarely, if ever, missed an event in which her children participated. Somehow, she attended more sporting events than could be counted - while never really becoming a "sports fan." All for her kids and grandkids.

As her children grew, Susan returned to college earning a degree in Special Education from Northern State University in 1990. She spent the next 20 years teaching Special Ed, coaching oral interp and directing class plays in Langford, Roslyn, and Groton. She retired from Groton High School in 2011. She continued to scratch her teaching itch by guiding classes for Weight Watchers, something she had done throughout her life. She was an inspiration for many in their pursuit toward healthier lives.

A "city girl" at heart, one of Susan's favorite pastimes was window shopping. Which, admittedly, sometimes became actual shopping, much to Dale's chagrin. She loved to model jewelry and new clothing, always finding the perfect match. Susan also loved decorating her home for the various holidays, with her



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favorite being Christmas. She loved Christmas. Baking, singing, shopping, wrapping gifts and celebrating the birth of Jesus. She often reminisced about visiting the famous Christmas scene on the 8th floor of the Dayton's store in downtown Minneapolis as a youth. She was an avid collector of The Dicken's Village houses and created stunning winter model scenes that she enjoyed sharing with the community.

Susan loved playing games. You might often find yourself at the wrong end of a witty jab as she placed another winning Scrabble tile or a winning hand in cards. She was always quick with a smile or a laugh, even to the very end. Her greatest laughs, however, were shared with her grandchildren whom she loved to pamper, whether with a gift, a special trip, an amusement park ride or a "sweet treat" – which she definitely shared.

Susan's deepest passion was reserved for her faith and relationship with Jesus. She was firm in her conviction her entire life and spent a lifetime cultivating her relationship with God. Before she was called home, she expressed her excitement to find her final resting place in heaven where she could be reunited with all her loved ones, but especially her cherished mother and sister. Today she is celebrating that reunion with the same vigor she showed in life.

Susan is survived by her husband of Claremont; sons, Travis (Debbie) Kurth of Groton and Troy (Jessica) Kurth of Minnetonka, MN; one daughter, Tiffany (Jake) Unzen of Groton; her sister Penny (Craig) Wenzel of Wessington Springs, SD; 10 grandchildren, Marlee, Cali, Boston, Laken, Annie, JD, Haley, Megan, Erin, and Nathan; and 1 great-grandchild Stetson.

She was preceded in death by her parents and her sister Sharon.





## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### COMMENTARY

## South Dakota was tardy with a gold tax. Can it afford to sleep on lithium?

SETH TUPPER

When lawmakers convened in Pierre during the depths of the Great Depression in 1935, they faced a vote on "possibly the most widely advertised and discussed piece of legislation that has ever been brought before the South Dakota Legislature."

That's how proponents of a tax on gold mining described their bill.

Gold was famously discovered nearly six decades earlier in the Black Hills, so you might wonder why the state lacked a gold tax as late as 1935.

The answer is simple: Until that year, legislators refused to enact it.

Meanwhile, about \$308 million worth of South Dakota gold had been mined since the 1870s without being taxed, wrote historian R. Alton Lee in "A New Deal for South Dakota."

Each of the past two winters, lawmakers faced a similar choice about another form of mining. But unlike legislators in 1935, who finally stood up to the powerful Homestake Mine and imposed a tax on gold, modern legislators failed to adopt a tax on lithium.

It wasn't for a lack of trying. Kirk Chaffee, a Republican representative from the Black Hills community of Whitewood, started last year with a bill that passed the House of Representatives but failed in a Senate committee.

He tried again this year. The bill cleared the House and a Senate committee but failed by one vote in the full Senate. The bill's other sponsor, Sen. Randy Deibert, R-Spearfish, got the bill reconsidered, only to fail by three votes on the second try.

All the while, multiple companies have been exploring for lithium in the Black Hills. They see economic opportunity in the world's growing appetite for lithium ion batteries, which are used to power electric devices and vehicles. And that activity has sparked important questions about whether and where lithium mining should be allowed in the state.

We already know there's lithium in the Black Hills. It was mined for other purposes in decades past. Whether anybody will seek to mine it again depends on the findings from exploratory drilling, which companies will use to determine if there's enough lithium left, and whether it can be extracted profitably.

Sen. David Johnson, R-Rapid City, said the state should not discourage that work.

"What this bill does is put up a big banner that says 'tax, tax, tax,' and it's going to be a disincentive to future mining in South Dakota," Johnson said this month during a debate in the Senate.

Opponents of the gold tax made similar arguments in 1935.

"Any tax upon the mining industry greater than that imposed upon other properties will inevitably frighten foreign capital and embarrass and retard the development of the mining industry of the state," said materials distributed by opponents of the tax that year.

Yet the Homestake Mine operated another 67 years after the enactment of the gold tax. It became the deepest and most productive gold mine in the western hemisphere. Since the Homestake's closure in 2002, operations have continued unabated at the Wharf, another gold mine not far from the Homestake.

Of course, gold mining was already a well-established and lucrative South Dakota business when legislators decided to tax it. Lithium mining is just a possibility.

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But whether it's gold or lithium, companies can only mine it where it's found. And once it's mined completely, that's it. It's gone.

History shows that when there's a material to be mined in South Dakota and money to be made from mining it, permission to do so is typically granted. Maybe that'll happen with lithium mining, or maybe it won't.

Before those difficult debates are settled, legislators could answer an easier set of questions.

If mining is ever to occur, should we allow companies to extract and potentially deplete a natural resource for profit alone? Or, in exchange for granting that privilege, should we extract a public benefit in the form of tax revenue?

We can look to the gold tax for a cautionary tale about the importance of answering those questions early on.

When South Dakota lawmakers finally enacted the gold tax in 1935, they set it at 4%. Applying that percentage to the value of gold already mined by then would've yielded roughly \$12 million.

Adjusting for inflation, that would be nearly \$300 million today.

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

## Pace of Medicaid enrollment remains slower than expected

**South Dakota does not advertise availability of expanded health care program**

**BY: JOHN HULT - FEBRUARY 16, 2024 3:28 PM**

Fewer people than expected are signing up for Medicaid through an expansion backed by voters in 2022, and the state Department of Social Services is adjusting its budget to reflect the slower pace.

That's at least partially because the state hasn't publicized the expansion. Most enrollees sign up when they have a medical issue and need coverage to help pay for it, DSS Deputy Secretary and Director of Operations Brenda Tidball-Zeltinger told the budget-setting Joint Appropriations Committee this week.

Medicaid expansion opened the subsidized health care program to people whose incomes sit at 138% of the federal poverty level or less, which is up to \$41,400 for a family of four or \$15,060 a year for a single person.

Enrollment for Medicaid expansion opened on July 1, 2023, after South Dakota voters approved the expansion in 2022.

The appropriations committee typically has one budget hearing for each state department during the regular legislative session. For DSS, the committee set aside a second meeting date explicitly to dive into Medicaid and Medicaid expansion.

Initially, state officials projected that about 57,530 people would be eligible for expanded services, Tidball-Zeltinger told the committee. But those figures were pulled from 2015 data, and assumed that all eligible residents would sign up.

"Now, as we examine and have a few months of data in terms of how many people have enrolled in the program, we're really revising that," Tidball-Zeltinger said.

At the end of December, she said, the state had 17,520 people on the expansion enrollment list.

Based on that slower uptake – enrollments have grown a little more than 26% each month for the last three months – Tidball-Zeltinger told lawmakers that about 40,000 people will have expanded coverage in 2025.

Those people are mostly adults without children, she told the committee. That group makes up 67% of the expansion population, the rest being parents. Sixty-five percent of enrollees also qualify for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, commonly referred to as food stamps.

### Minimal outreach

Another figure offered during Monday's meeting in Pierre caught the attention of lawmakers: 80%. That's the number of newly enrolled Medicaid participants to have signed up with a medical claim.

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"Oftentimes people come to us when they've got a health care issue, or they come to us through a provider as they're seeing them," Tidball-Zeltinger said.

Rep. Linda Duba, D-Sioux Falls, pressed the deputy secretary on why the agency hasn't been more proactive in seeking out eligible adults.

"I can see billboards about vaccinations, and I can see billboards about STDs, but I have never seen any advertisements or any proactive community health workers that are out in communities as a result of DSS encouraging enrollment in those populations," Duba said.

The department doesn't intend to advertise, Tidball-Zeltinger said, but there are community organizations encouraging sign-up. The Community HealthCare Association of the Dakotas has worked to guide potential enrollees through the process.

The department sees providers as partners in sign-ups, as they are often the ones who suggest that coverage might be available when someone shows up seeking care.

"We have done a lot of stakeholder webinars and communication work with our partners," Tidball-Zeltinger said.

Duba pointed to North Carolina to suggest that South Dakota could do more. She said she'd recently visited and saw ads encouraging sign-up.

Tidball-Zeltinger said that "some states took an approach very much like South Dakota," which involved outreach to providers, while others used ad campaigns.

"It's really a mix," she said.

She also pointed to a chart in the DSS presentation that compared rates of Medicaid expansion take-up in states surrounding South Dakota. Some states, like Iowa, had faster uptake for Medicaid initially. Others saw rates similar to South Dakota. But all of them saw steadily increasing numbers during the first two years of expansion.

Adding around 2,000 people a month, Tidball-Zeltinger said, is "in the ballpark with what we've seen in other states that surround us."

Duba suggested, however, that the DSS work to track how much the state pays per enrollee and separately report the cost for those who sign up when seeking care versus those who sign up beforehand.

Duba argued that the second group of enrollees is likely to be less expensive to cover in the long run.

"If we were more proactive, people would be using preventative services, instead of coming in when they're sicker, or they're in greater need, which drives our utilization costs up," Duba said.

## Budget adjustments

Lower enrollments have also had an impact on the DSS budget, at least for 2024 and 2025. The federal government covers 90% of the cost for Medicaid expansion, and South Dakota also gets 5% more per year in federal dollars until 2026 to help the state ease into the expansion.

Lawmakers set aside about \$54 million in state money for the first year of expansion. The department needed \$37.5 million less than that.

The department also revised its ask for 2025 downward by \$16.4 million based on the lower enrollments.

Those budget revisions don't signal savings, though. The department also set aside \$11.4 million in "buy-down" dollars in 2024, and will ask to set aside another \$18.3 million for 2025, in hopes of softening the budgetary blow when the 5% federal boost dries up in 2026.

Jason Simmons, the budget director for the DSS, told appropriators that the \$29.7 million set aside over those two years still won't be enough come 2026.

"That's still going to leave \$34.5 million that the state is going to have to come up with (for 2026) just to maintain that baseline level of services," Simmons said. "Any additional enrollment, any provider inflation, anything we see added to Medicaid is going to make that number go up."

The DSS, Bureau of Finance and Management and the Legislative Research Council worked to adjust projections after enrollments began. The revised projections are a sign that a work group that met last year to discuss Medicaid expansion did its job, according to Rep. Tony Venhuizen, R-Sioux Falls.



"This is a big area in our state budget with a lot of unknowns right now and a lot of future growth, and it's going to take up a lot of ongoing revenue into the future," Venhuizen said. "And I think we've done a very good job of working together to project this to the extent that we can and to plan for building it into our budget."

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

## Dakota Access Pipeline protest costs debated during federal trial

**BY: MARY STEURER AND AMY DALRYMPLE - FEBRUARY 16, 2024 12:19 PM**

BISMARCK — A trial expected to shed new light on a federal agency's management — and potential mismanagement — of the Dakota Access Pipeline protests kicked off Thursday in federal court.

North Dakota is seeking to recoup \$38 million it claims it spent policing the protest camps north of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in rural Morton County in 2016 and early 2017 opposing the pipeline, often referred to as DAPL.

U.S. District Court Judge Daniel Traynor will hear from witnesses for the state and federal government over the next two weeks. The bench trial is expected to last through Feb. 29, but may continue into March.

Gov. Doug Burgum and former Gov. Jack Dalrymple are expected to be among the dozens of witnesses expected to testify.

Attorneys for the state say federal officials' response to the protests was poorly coordinated, that the United States denied necessary support to North Dakota and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers encouraged the protests to continue despite their substantial drain on local government and state resources. The state claims these actions put law enforcement, emergency responders, protesters and Morton County residents in harm's way.

North Dakota attorneys argue in court records the protest that spanned 233 days resulted from an illegal occupation on federal lands and led to "frequent outbreaks of illegal, dangerous, unsanitary, and life-threatening activity on federal, state and private property."

"North Dakota was left to deal with this crisis on its own," Special Assistant Attorney General Paul Seby said Thursday.

Attorneys representing the United States say North Dakota is exaggerating the financial impact of the protests and wants the Corps to take responsibility for matters that were outside its control.

According to Seby, the \$38 million figure fairly represents the total cost of the protests and officials have meticulous documentation of each expense incurred by local and state agencies.

North Dakota has already received \$25 million to offset the costs of the demonstrations — \$10 million from the U.S. Justice Department in 2017, and another \$15 million from pipeline developer Energy Transfer Partners.

The court complaint estimates the protest camps grew to 5,500 people at their peak, with some estimates as high as 8,000 people. Protesters came from several states and countries. Law enforcement arrested 761 people, court records show, with North Dakotans accounting for about 7% of the arrests. Many criminal charges were later dismissed.

Central to the case is a Sept. 16 press release issued by the Corps claiming the agency gave the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe a special use permit to protest on Corps land, despite the fact that no such permit was ever granted.

In a December order, Traynor said these actions constituted a breach of the Corps' own special use permit procedure.

North Dakota asserts the Corps, in claiming it had issued the permit, encouraged more people to come

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protest. The Corps followed the permit press release with a letter to Standing Rock announcing it had also established a "free speech zone" south of the Cannonball River.

Cody Schulz, director of the North Dakota Parks and Recreation Department, was the state's first witness. During the DAPL protests, he served as chairman of the Morton County Commission and the disaster recovery chief for the state's Department of Emergency Services.

According to Schulz, state and local law enforcement were left on the hook for policing the camps and cleaning them up after the protesters were removed. Morton County received no financial assistance from the federal government to help manage the protests, either, he said.

Beyond the drain on law enforcement, the protests caused a range of impacts on Morton County — everything from minor inconveniences like sluggish traffic to damage to private property, Schulz said. He said there were multiple days when protesters caused a local school to temporarily close.

"I'm just very disappointed in the Corps' responses to the incident and the resources that they put forward," he said.

Schulz estimated that 80% of the protesters were peaceful, which he defined as not trying to cause harm to people or property.

According to Schulz, it took personnel four days to clean up the camps. They hauled away more than 9 million pounds of garbage, he said.

The state showed a handful of photos taken by Schulz on Feb. 23, the day after the camps were cleared of protesters. The photos depicted abandoned tents, protest signs, piles of garbage and personal items strewn across the snowy landscape.

In multiple photographs, plumes of smoke were visible. Schulz said some protesters had set fire to parts of the camps the day before.

Jane Bobet Rejko, the lead attorney for the United States, argued that the Corps did the best it could to assist North Dakota in the midst of what she called "unique, unpredictable and often uncontrollable" circumstances.

The Corps is not a law enforcement agency, she noted, and didn't have the training or resources to address the protests.

During cross examination of Schulz, Bobet Rejko presented an email from the Corps to North Dakota officials that indicated the state had jurisdiction to enforce laws on Corps property. Schulz said a local prosecutor told him that North Dakota trespass law would require the landowner — in this case the Corps — to request removal of the trespassers in order to enforce the law.

Bobet Rejko also said the Corps' statements regarding the permit and "free speech zone" did not change the number of protesters.

The popularity of the DAPL demonstrations can be attributed to a mix of factors, she added, including the historical context behind the U.S.' relationship with the tribes, encouragement from tribal leadership, the 2016 elections and coverage of the protests in the press and on social media.

Schulz also agreed with a statement by Bobet Rejko that political decisions made by former presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump impacted the protests.

Bobet Rejko also indicated Thursday that the Corps did clean protest camps south of the Cannonball River and had plans in place to clean the camp north of the river. Schulz said the state handled the Morton County cleanup because officials didn't have confidence the Corps would handle it before spring flooding.

The other witness to testify Thursday was the North Dakota Highway Patrol chief pilot who flew over the protest camps almost daily and took 20,000 photographs.

The \$3.8 billion pipeline has been operating since June 2017, carrying oil from North Dakota to a transportation hub in Illinois. In 2020, a judge revoked the easement for the pipeline crossing under the Missouri River just north of the Standing Rock reservation, requiring additional study but allowing the pipeline to continue operating. The Army Corps is expected to complete its environmental impact statement by the end of the year.

North Dakota officials advocated during a public comment period to keep the pipeline operating, warn-

ing that shutting it down would shift oil transportation to rail. Leaders of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe continue to oppose the pipeline and argue it should be shut down, citing concerns about potential risk to their water supply.

*Mary Steurer is a reporter based in Bismarck for the North Dakota Monitor. A native of St. Louis, Steurer previously worked as the local government reporter for the Casper Star-Tribune newspaper in Wyoming.*

*Amy Dalrymple is editor-in-chief of North Dakota's States Newsroom outlet, North Dakota Monitor. She previously was editor of The Bismarck Tribune and a newspaper journalist in Williston and Fargo.*

## Death of Russian dissident raises stakes for U.S. aid to Ukraine, Biden warns

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - FEBRUARY 16, 2024 3:48 PM

President Joe Biden urged U.S. House Republicans on Friday to approve funding for Ukraine after Russian dissident Alexei Navalny died in the custody of Vladimir Putin's government.

Speaking from the White House Friday afternoon, Biden said the death of Navalny, a persistent critic of Russian President Putin, should add urgency to assisting Ukraine's defense against Russia's invasion. The United States could not resupply Ukraine without Congress passing a supplemental funding bill, Biden said.

Biden criticized efforts by congressional Republicans to block funding for Ukraine, saying he hoped Navalny's death would push them to pass an aid bill.

The Senate passed a \$95 billion emergency spending package with assistance for Israel, Ukraine and Taiwan on Feb. 13, but the U.S. House adjourned Thursday for a President's Day recess without acting on aid.

House members are scheduled to return Feb. 28.

"It's about time they step up, don't you think? Instead of going on a two-week vacation?" Biden told reporters. "Two weeks. What are they thinking? My God, this is bizarre. And it's just reinforcing all the concern, and almost — I won't say panic, but real concern about the United States being a reliable ally. This is outrageous."

Biden renewed his criticism of his predecessor, former President Donald Trump, who last weekend said he would encourage Russia to "do whatever the hell they want" to NATO allies that had not met their obligations to the alliance.

"This is an outrageous thing for a president to say," Biden said Friday. "As long as I'm president, America stands by our sacred commitment to our NATO allies."

Trump is the leading Republican candidate to oppose Biden's reelection in November.

Asked if Navalny's death was an assassination, Biden said it was unclear exactly what happened, but that blame clearly lay with Putin.

"There's no doubt that the death of Navalny was a consequence of something that Putin and his thugs did," Biden said.

Navalny was a longtime critic of the authoritarian leader. He survived a poisoning widely seen as an assassination attempt in 2020. After receiving treatment and recuperating in Berlin, he returned to Russia in 2021 and was imprisoned. Russia's prison service said Friday he died in custody.

Biden called the death "more proof of Putin's brutality."

The U.S. president praised Navalny's courage and dedication to his cause.

"Even in prison, he was a powerful voice for the truth, which is kind of amazing when you think about it. And he could have lived safely in exile after the assassination attempt on him in 2020, which nearly killed him," Biden said. "He knew it was a cause worth fighting for and even worth dying for."

### Conversations with Netanyahu

Biden spoke for about five minutes, then took a handful of questions from reporters, including on the Israel-Hamas war.

Biden said he's had "extensive conversations" with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in recent days in which he urged Netanyahu to seek a ceasefire with Hamas to allow the release of hostages held by the militant group.

Biden said he did not anticipate Israel would launch "any massive land invasion in the meantime."

U.S. citizens are among those still held hostage after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on the U.S. ally, Biden said.

Biden has faced increasing pressure from progressive members of his party to take a stronger role in forcing Israel to cease its counteroffensive.

*Jacob covers federal policy as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Based in Oregon, he focuses on Western issues. His coverage areas include climate, energy development, public lands and infrastructure.*

## Standing Rock Sioux Tribe celebrates new electric vehicles, charging station

**BY: MICHAEL ACHTERLING - FEBRUARY 16, 2024 6:00 AM**

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe celebrated a \$13.4 million inter-tribal electric vehicle charging network project in Fort Yates, North Dakota, on Wednesday.

Standing Rock received six EVs that will be transferred to SAGE Development Authority, Sitting Bull College, tribal casinos and Standing Rock Public Transit.

The vehicles are five Ford F-150 Lightnings and a Ford E-Transit passenger van, which will be used by the tribal transit system to ferry veterans, elderly residents and others to appointments and locations around the region.

Attendees of an event Wednesday also viewed a freshly powered-up EV charging station at Sitting Bull College.

Joseph McNeil, chief executive officer of the SAGE Development Authority, said it is "vital" that tribal lands have this new EV technology and infrastructure so they can participate in the nationwide transition to clean energy.

"People are going to be turning to this," McNeil said. "If it all just exists around us and not within our communities, then we won't be involved in the economy of it and the tourism of it."

SAGE Development Authority describes itself as a Native-led, community development organization for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. The organization also is the Public Power Authority on the reservation, which oversees energy production in the region.

McNeil said they have plans to install two more EV charging stations this year. One will be at the Fort Yates Tribal Office and the other in McLaughlin, South Dakota.

The new EV charging station network is part of a larger regional project across the Upper Midwest conducted by Minneapolis-based Native Sun Community Power Development.

Half of the project's funding will come from a \$6.7 million grant from the U.S. Department of Energy's Vehicle Technology Office with the remaining costs covered by partnering organizations, which are listed on the project website.

The effort is part of a larger regional initiative that will see 120 new charging stations installed on tribal lands across North Dakota, South Dakota and Minnesota, according to Native News Online.

McNeil said SAGE is looking at applying for more grants to install additional EV charging stations across the Standing Rock tribal lands to expand their renewable footprint, including an independent, solar-powered unit.

McNeil said he was overjoyed to see a group of local middle school students attend Wednesday's event because the new EV infrastructure is setting up a much larger generational transition to clean energy.

"I was able to relate to them how our culture is involved in renewable energy as we talk about our relationship to the Earth," McNeil said. "That was a really important part of the morning ... is to connect this, not just to my generation and how we're utilizing it, but connect it to the next generations coming up."



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John Pretty Bear, a member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Council, said he's excited to see the tribe moving into clean energy transportation. He added the new technology is bound to create new jobs and training opportunities for their youth.

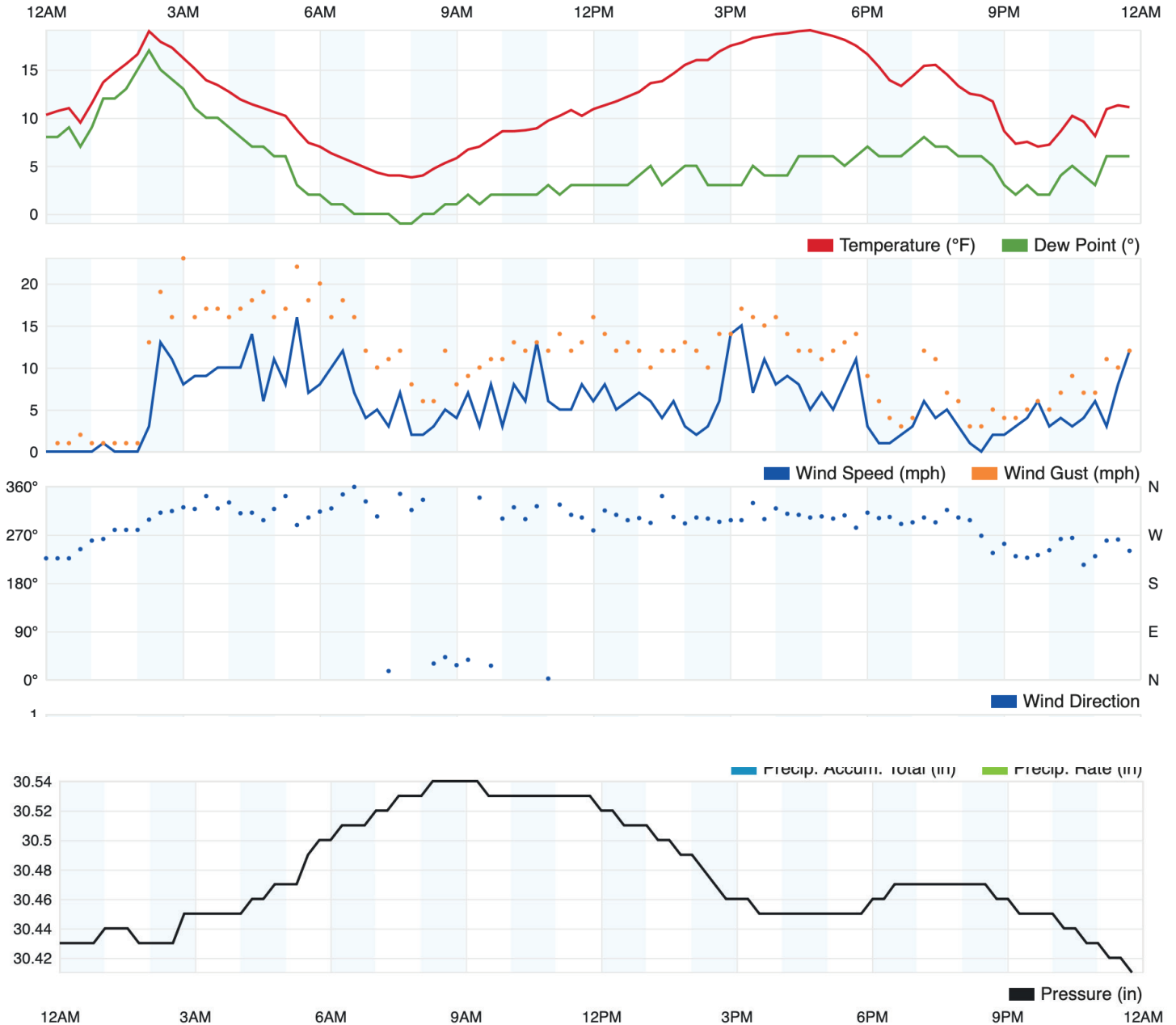
"It shows these kids and the people here on Standing Rock that we are moving in a new direction in this day and age," Pretty Bear said.

*Michael Achterling is a reporter based in Bismarck. He recently worked as digital editor and city government reporter for the Detroit Lakes Tribune in Minnesota and as news director for KDLM/KRCQ/KBOT, a part of Leighton Broadcasting.*

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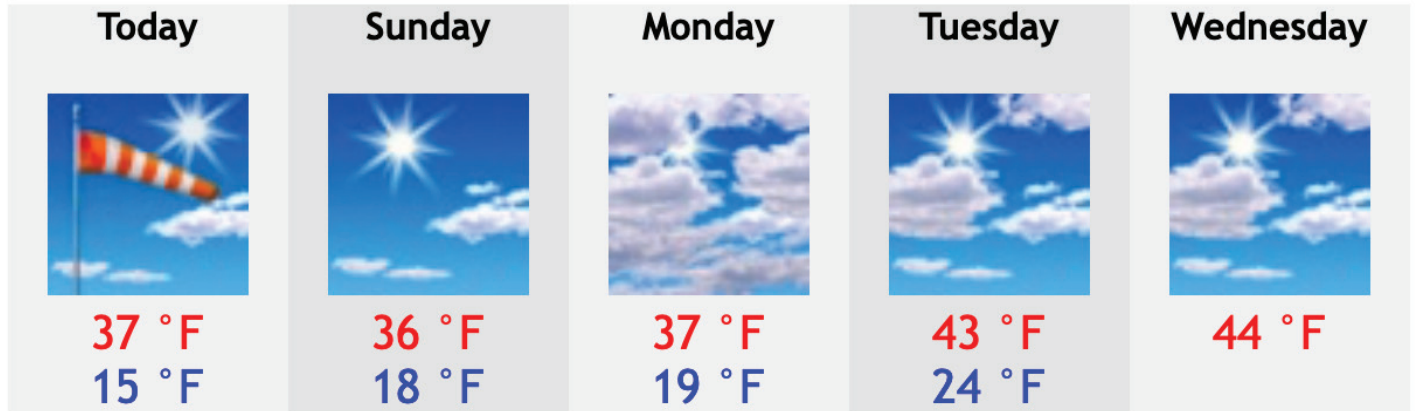
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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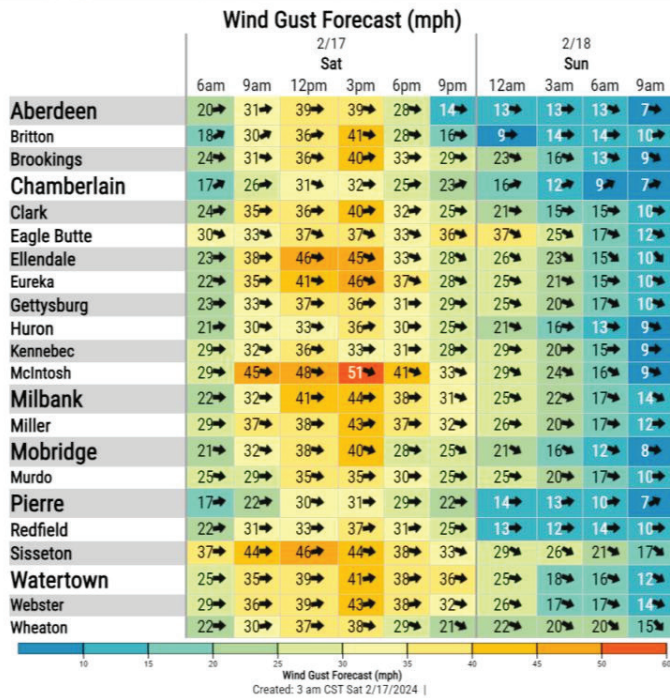


## Warming Temperatures...

...on strong west winds.

February 17, 2024

3:25 AM



### Today

*Clear. Windy  
Highs: 29-42°*

*Pockets of Blowing/Drifting Snow may affect travel*



Strong west winds will enhance mixing for temperatures in areas that are snow free, but while temperatures will see a boost it will be much less so for areas that still have snow. Additionally, some blowing and drifting is possible today, and may result in icy road surfaces.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 19 °F at 2:17 AM

Low Temp: 4 °F at 8:05 AM

Wind: 23 mph at 2:54 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 10 hours, 33 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 58 in 1930

Record Low: -39 in 1903

Average High: 29

Average Low: 7

Average Precip in Feb.: 0.35

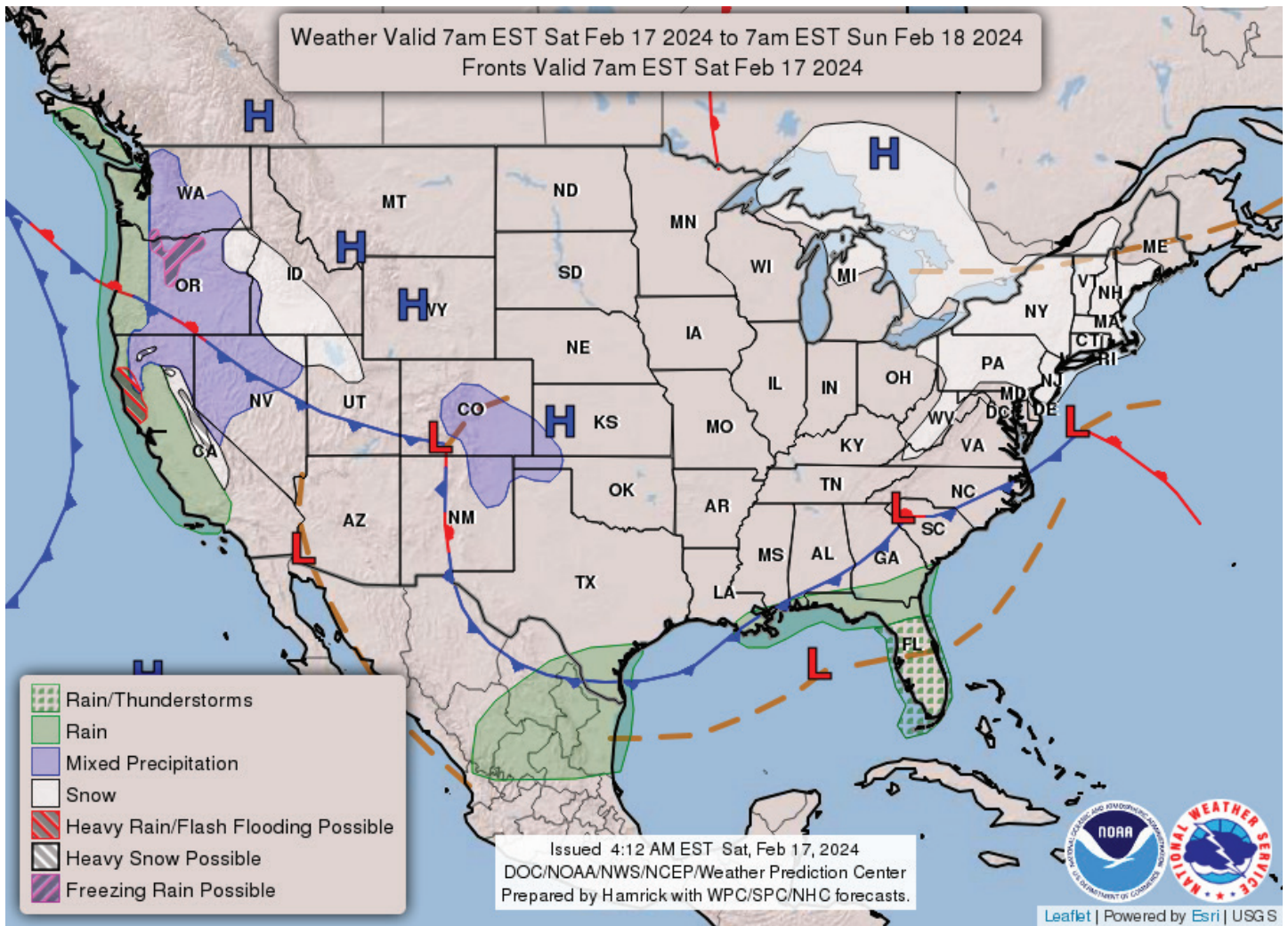
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.07

Average Precip to date: 0.90

Precip Year to Date: 0.07

Sunset Tonight: 6:03:13 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:27:56 am





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## Today in Weather History

February 17th, 1962: Very heavy snow of 20 to 30 inches fell across the southeastern half of South Dakota. One location had 44 inches of snowfall from the storm. Everything was shut down due to the storm, including roads, schools, and businesses. Some snowfall amounts included 10 inches at Bryant, 11 inches at Miller, 20 inches at Mitchell, 21 inches at Redfield, 23 inches at Huron, and 32 inches at Sioux Falls.

February 17th, 1972: In Minnesota, high winds of 30 to 50 mph across southern and central Minnesota reduced visibilities to zero at times from blowing snow. Wind gusts of 90 mph were reported at Worthington and Fairmont. Snow of 2 to 6 inches fell across the state. The blizzard stopped almost all traffic from west-central through the south-central part of the state. Most schools in the area were closed. Dozens to hundreds of people were stranded in nearly every town. Many communities stopped all traffic from leaving town. The snow derailed a train at Butterfield. In South Dakota, freezing rain followed by snow accompanied by winds of over 60 mph produced hazardous driving conditions in the area. Traffic was brought to a standstill in many areas resulting in cancellations of school and other activities. Some accidents occurred due to the icy roads. Although the snowfall was light, strong winds caused drifting with visibilities to near zero at times.

February 17th, 1991: On February 17th, a significant snowstorm dumped massive amounts of snow on most of the state from the Black Hills, southwest, central, east-central, and the northeast. At the storm's end, parts of the black hills received up to 2 feet of snow while the rest of the affected area had between 8 and 15 inches. The heavy snow caused most of Interstate 90 west of the Missouri River to close and many other highways in the central part of the state. In addition, many cars and trucks skidded off the roads, causing many minor injuries. The only serious injury was a man rolled his vehicle over after losing control near Belvidere.

1894: According to Grazulis, an estimated F2 tornado hits 5 miles south of Warren, Arkansas. An older woman was killed in one of the small homes that were destroyed. In addition, fruit trees were ripped out and carried a half-mile. Another tornado, estimated F3, killed two people in Claiborne County, Louisiana.

1926: A deadly avalanche, Utah's worst, demolishes 14 miner's cottages and a three-story boarding house in Bingham Canyon. Thirty-six were killed and 13 injured.

1930 - Eureka, CA, reported an all-time record high of 85 degrees, a record which lasted until September of 1983. (The Weather Channel)

1936 - The temperature at McIntosh SD plunged to 58 degrees below zero to establish a state record. (David Ludlum)

1958: From the 14th through the 17th, one of the most significant snowstorms of the mid 20th century struck the northeastern U.S. The storm produced 30 inches of snow in the interior of New England, including more than 19 inches in 24 hours at the Boston Airport. The same storm produced up to three feet of snow in the Middle Atlantic Coast Region, with 14 inches in Washington D.C. and 15.5 inches in Baltimore, Maryland. The storm resulted in 43 deaths and 500 million dollars damage over the Middle Atlantic Coast States.

1973: Snow showers moved across southeast Texas, with most locations only reporting snow flurries. However, the Houston Intercontinental Airport measured 1.4 inches of snow.

1987 - A couple of winter storms, one off the Atlantic coast and another over the south central U.S., produced snow and ice from the Mississippi Valley to the Mid Atlantic Coast Region. Freezing rain produced a coat of ice three inches thick in northern South Carolina, and 30,000 homes around Pee Dee were left without electricity. Parts of south central Kentucky were without electricity for three days following the storm, which was their worst in 35 years. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Santa Ana winds in southern California gusted to 63 mph at Ontario. Heavy snow blanketed parts of Colorado, with 11 inches reported at Strontia. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Low pressure off the Washington coast produced more than a foot of snow in the Cascade Mountains, and more than three inches of rain along the Northern Pacific Coast. Spokane WA was blanketed with 13 inches of snow. Cold arctic air in the Upper Midwest produced all-time record high barometric pressure readings of 31.10 inches at Duluth MN, 31.09 inches at Minneapolis MN, and 31.21 inches at Bismarck ND. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### WHAT DO YOU SEE?

The citizens of a small community were overwhelmed with discouragement. The drought had destroyed the crops of the farmers, and they were facing bankruptcy. The merchants were unable to purchase inventory for their stores because their customers could not pay their bills. And things went downhill from there.

Everyone was heartbroken and depressed except one elderly man of God. He invited the leaders of the community to his home for a meeting to see if he could encourage them to continue a little longer.

His friends came to his home and sat around his kitchen table. He asked them to turn from facing him while he hung a large piece of white paper on a wall. Then, he asked them to turn and look at it. As they did, he placed a black dot in the center and asked, "Gentlemen, what do you see?"

In unison, they said, "A black dot." Not one of them mentioned the white paper that surrounded the one small black dot.

"Gentlemen," he asked, "are there some blessings in your life that we can place around the black dot that might make it not so obvious?" One by one, they thought of the good things that they had been overlooking in their time of loss and grief.

God's goodness sometimes disappears from our horizon. When days are difficult and nights are long, it is easy to see the dot and not the One who can remove it.

Prayer: Help us, Heavenly Father, to be aware of all that we have because of Your goodness and grace. Give us faith to endure the difficulties of life through Your strength. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Jesus looked at them intently and said, "Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible." Matthew 19:26



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

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.16.24

19 23 39 42 67 18

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$493,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.14.24

2 3 15 16 45 10

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$3,050,000**

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 32 Mins 34 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.16.24

4 12 15 36 46 17

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 47 Mins 35 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.14.24

2 10 19 25 28

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$51,000**

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 47 Mins 35 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.14.24

33 40 45 48 53 17

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 16 Mins 35 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.14.24

1 4 45 47 67 18

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$306,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 16 Mins 35 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)



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News from the  Associated Press

## Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

### BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Central 56, Brookings 50  
Belle Fourche 59, Faith 56  
Brandon Valley 69, Spearfish 42  
Bridgewater-Emery 77, Mitchell Christian 33  
Canistota 78, Colman-Egan 59  
Canton 72, Hanson 65, OT  
Castlewood 63, Estelline-Hendricks 19  
Chester 57, Centerville 46  
Crow Creek Tribal School 87, St Francis 67  
Dakota Valley 74, Madison 52  
DeSmet 70, Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 34  
Dell Rapids 74, Lennox 63  
Dell Rapids St Mary 62, Baltic 53  
Gregory 63, Bon Homme 43  
Groton 77, Britton-Hecla 35  
Harrisburg 74, Douglas 38  
Howard 81, Arlington 28  
Jones County 75, Bennett County 37  
Kadoka 55, Lyman 46  
Kimball-White Lake 52, Avon 41  
Lemmon High School 62, Dupree 57  
Leola-Frederick High School 75, Herreid-Selby 40  
Lewis Central, Iowa 54, Aberdeen Roncalli 52  
Marty 94, Flandreau Indian 38  
Menno 49, Scotland 46  
Milbank 68, Webster 49  
Mitchell 74, Pierre 50  
North Central 50, Sunshine Bible Academy 31  
Platte-Geddes 40, Wagner 31  
Potter County 62, Aberdeen Christian 52  
Rapid City Stevens 49, Sturgis Brown 39  
Sioux Falls Washington 56, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 52  
Standing Rock, N.D. 53, McLaughlin 41  
Tea 66, Elk Point-Jefferson 43  
Tiospa Zina 76, Redfield 33  
Vermillion 63, Ponca, Neb. 53  
Watertown 67, Huron 56  
Wessington Springs 66, James Valley Christian 47  
West Central 67, Chamberlain 33  
White River 52, New Underwood 38  
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=  
Crazy Horse vs. Edgemont, ccd.  
Lakota Tech vs. Chadron, Neb., ccd.

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Mobridge-Pollock vs. Winner, ppd.

## **GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL**

Arlington 54, Elkton-Lake Benton 37  
Belle Fourche 71, Wall 56  
Bon Homme 69, Gregory 34  
Brandon Valley 49, Spearfish 37  
Brookings 48, Aberdeen Central 38  
Dakota Valley 63, Madison 12  
Edgemont 62, Crazy Horse 24  
Groton 69, Britton-Hecla 31  
Harrisburg 57, Douglas 28  
Marty 69, Flandreau Indian 28  
Mitchell 49, Pierre 48  
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 80, Kimball-White Lake 57  
North Central 45, Sunshine Bible Academy 29  
Potter County 48, Aberdeen Christian 33  
Rapid City Stevens 59, Sturgis Brown 30  
Red Cloud 88, Bennett County 22  
Redfield 58, Tiospa Zina 29  
Sioux Falls Washington 54, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 25  
St Francis 64, Crow Creek Tribal School 24  
St Thomas More 47, Hot Springs 29  
Tea 48, Elk Point-Jefferson 39  
Timber Lake 52, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 37  
Tri-Valley 58, Baltic 28  
Vermillion 62, Parker 18  
Wagner 74, Platte-Geddes 42  
Watertown 38, Huron 35  
Wessington Springs 50, James Valley Christian 45  
West Central 58, Chamberlain 37  
White River 69, Philip 39  
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=  
Little Wound vs. Stanley County, ccd.  
Mobridge-Pollock vs. Winner, ccd.

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

## **Kremlin foe Alexei Navalny's team confirms his death and says his mother is searching for his body**

By EMMA BURROWS Associated Press

Alexei Navalny's spokesperson confirmed Saturday that the Russian opposition leader had died at a remote Arctic penal colony and said he was "murdered," but it is unclear where his body is.

An official note handed to Navalny's mother stated that he died at 2:17 p.m. local time Friday, Kira Yarmysh said. She added that an employee of the prison colony said that Navalny's body was taken to the nearby city of Salekhard as part of a probe into his death.

When a lawyer and Navalny's mother visited the morgue in Salekhard, it was closed, Navalny's team said, writing on their Telegram channel. The lawyer called the morgue and was told that Navalny's body is not there, his team said. Another of Navalny's lawyers went to Salekhard's Investigative Committee and

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was told that the cause of Navalny's death has not yet been established and that new investigations are being done with the results to be released next week, Yarmysh said.

"It's obvious that they are lying and doing everything they can to avoid handing over the body," she wrote on X, formerly Twitter, adding that his team "demand that Alexei Navalny's body be handed over to his family immediately."

Russia's Federal Penitentiary Service reported that Navalny felt sick after a walk and became unconscious at the penal colony in the town of Kharp, in the Yamalo-Nenets region about 1,900 kilometers (1,200 miles) northeast of Moscow. An ambulance arrived, but he couldn't be revived. The cause of death is still "being established," it said.

Maria Pevchikh, head of the board of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation, said that the opposition leader would "live on forever in millions of hearts."

"Navalny was murdered. We still don't know how we'll keep on living, but together, we'll think of something," she wrote on X.

Arrests continued Saturday after more than 100 people were detained in various Russian cities Friday when they came to lay flowers in memory of Navalny at memorials to the victims of Soviet-era purges, according to OVD-Info, a group that monitors political repression in Russia.

The tributes were removed overnight, but people continued trickling in with flowers on Saturday. In Moscow, a large group of people chanted "shame" as police dragged a screaming woman from the crowd, video shared on social media showed.

More than 10 people were detained at a memorial in St. Petersburg, including a priest who came to conduct a service for Navalny there.

In other cities across the country, police cordoned off some of the memorials and officers were taking pictures of those who came and writing down their personal data in a clear intimidation attempt.

"After the murder of Alexei Navalny, it's absurd to perceive (Russian President Vladimir) Putin as the supposedly legitimate head of the Russian state. He is a thug who maintains power through corruption and violence," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said at the Munich Security Conference in Germany Saturday.

"Just yesterday he tried to send us all a clear message — as the Munich Security Conference opened, Putin murdered another opposition leader," Zelenskyy said.

U.K. Foreign Secretary David Cameron said Saturday that Britain "will be taking action" against the Russians responsible for the death of Alexei Navalny.

Speaking to broadcasters in Munich, Cameron said "there should be consequences" for "appalling human rights outrages like this." He said Britain would "look at whether there are individual people that are responsible and whether there are individual measures and actions we can take." Cameron did not say whether the response would consist of financial sanctions or other measures.

U.S. President Joe Biden Friday said Washington doesn't know exactly what happened, "but there is no doubt that the death of Navalny was a consequence of something Putin and his thugs did.

The Kremlin bristled Friday at the outpouring of anger from world leaders, with Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, saying the statements are "unacceptable" and "outrageous," noting that medics haven't issued their verdict on the cause of Navalny's death.

Navalny had been jailed since January 2021, when he returned to Moscow to face certain arrest after recuperating in Germany from nerve agent poisoning he blamed on the Kremlin. He was later convicted three times, saying each case was politically motivated, and received a sentence of 19 years for extremism.

After the last verdict, Navalny said he understood he was "serving a life sentence, which is measured by the length of my life or the length of life of this regime."

The news of Navalny's death comes less than a month before an election that will give Putin another six years in power.

It shows "that the sentence in Russia now for opposition is not merely imprisonment, but death," said Nigel Gould-Davies, a former British ambassador to Belarus and senior fellow for Russia & Eurasia at the

International Institute for Strategic Studies in London.

Hours after Navalny's death was reported, his wife, Yulia Navalnaya, made a dramatic appearance at the Munich conference.

She said she was unsure if she could believe the news from official Russian sources, "but if this is true, I want Putin and everyone around Putin, Putin's friends, his government to know that they will bear responsibility for what they did to our country, to my family and to my husband."

## **US envoy says Israel has not presented evidence that Hamas diverted U.N. aid deliveries in Gaza**

By WAFAA SHURAFa and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israel has not presented specific evidence that Hamas is diverting U.N. aid and its recent targeted killings of Gaza police commanders safeguarding truck convoys have made it "virtually impossible" to distribute the goods safely, a top U.S. envoy said in rare public criticism of Israel.

With the departure of police escorts following Israeli strikes, criminal gangs are increasingly targeting the convoys, said David Satterfield, the Biden administration's special Middle East envoy for humanitarian issues. He said the lawlessness as well as regular Israeli protests at crossing points by those opposed to aid going into Gaza have disrupted delivery and distribution.

"We are working with the Israeli government, the Israeli military in seeing what solutions can be found here because everyone wants to see the assistance continue," Satterfield told the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace on Friday. A solution "is going to require some form of security escorts to return."

Satterfield said that Israeli officials have not presented "specific evidence of diversion or theft" of U.N. assistance, but that the militants have their own interests in using "other channels of assistance ... to shape where and to whom assistance goes."

Even before the latest setback, the U.S. has said aid reaching Gaza is woefully inadequate. More than half of Gaza's 2.3 million people are packed into the southern city of Rafah, on the border with Egypt, having heeded Israeli evacuation orders. Yet nowhere is safe, with Israel also carrying out airstrikes in Rafah.

Israel's air and ground offensive, triggered by the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on Israel, has killed over 28,000 Palestinians, according to health authorities in the Hamas-run enclave. It has caused widespread destruction, displaced some 80% of the population and sparked a humanitarian crisis.

Rafah area residents say it's common for groups of children and teenagers to try to stop trucks as they enter Gaza and to grab supplies.

On Friday, police opened fire after a crowd charged toward an aid truck that had emerged from the Rafah crossing with Egypt. Wael Abu Omar, a spokesman for the local Crossings Authority, said one person was killed.

Israel has alleged repeatedly that Hamas is diverting aid, including fuel, after it enters Gaza, a claim denied by U.N. aid agencies. Last week, an Israeli airstrike on a car killed three senior police commanders in Rafah, the first entry point for aid deliveries. Two other officers were killed in another strike.

The police force is controlled by the Hamas-run Interior Ministry, but Satterfield noted that it also includes those who joined before Hamas seized Gaza in 2007.

### **EGYPT IS CONCERNED**

Israel has said it is determined to expand its ground combat to Rafah, portraying it as the last significant stronghold of Hamas fighters, but has not given a timeline. Addressing international concerns, Israel has said it would develop a plan to evacuate civilians before invading the southern city.

U.S. President Joe Biden has urged Israel not to carry out the operation without a "credible" plan to protect civilians and to instead focus on a cease-fire, while Egypt has said such an operation could threaten diplomatic relations between the countries. Many other world leaders have issued similar messages of concern.

Israel has said it has no plans to force Palestinians into Egypt. New satellite photos, however, indicate that Egypt is preparing for that very scenario. The images show Egypt building a wall and leveling land



near its border with Gaza. Egypt has not publicly acknowledged the construction.

Two senior Egyptian officials said Saturday that Egypt is building additional defensive lines in an already existing buffer zone. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss details with the media.

The buffer zone, which Egypt built in recent years as part of its battle against an Islamic State insurgency, is 5 kilometers (3 miles) from the border. It was meant to prevent weapons smuggling to and from Gaza through underground tunnels. Authorities said they destroyed over 1,500 tunnels over the years.

The newly fortified zone is not intended to shelter Palestinians fleeing Gaza, said Diaa Rashwan, the head of the State Information Service.

## THE WAR DRAGS ON

The Israeli military launched its war in response to a cross-border Hamas attack on Oct. 7 that killed some 1,200 people in Israel and took 250 others hostage.

The Gaza Health Ministry on Saturday raised the overall death toll in Gaza to 28,858, saying the bodies of 83 people killed in Israeli bombardments were brought to hospitals in the past 24 hours.

The count does not differentiate between combatants and civilians, but the ministry says two-thirds of those killed are women and children. More than 68,000 people have been wounded, including 11,000 who need urgent evacuation for treatment outside Gaza, it said.

In recent weeks, Israel's military has focused on Khan Younis, Gaza's second-largest city and a Hamas stronghold. The city's Nasser Hospital has been portrayed by the military as a Hamas hideout and as one of its last targets in Khan Younis.

The army said Saturday that it has arrested 100 suspected Hamas militants at the hospital. Israel's defense minister has said at least 20 of those detained had been involved in the Oct. 7 attack.

The Health Ministry said troops had turned the hospital into "military barracks" and detained a large number of medical staff, without providing details.

Israel says it does not target patients or doctors, but staff say the facility is struggling under heavy fire and dwindling supplies, including food and water.

## Japan's new flagship H3 rocket reaches orbit in a key test after failed debut last year

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan's flagship H3 rocket reached orbit and released two small observation satellites in a key second test following a failed debut launch last year, buoying hope for the country in the global space race.

The H3 rocket blasted off from the Tanegashima Space Center on time Saturday morning, two days after its originally scheduled liftoff was delayed by bad weather.

The rocket successfully reached orbit at an altitude of about 670 kilometers (about 420 miles) and released two satellites, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, or JAXA, said.

"We feel so relieved to be able to announce the good results," JAXA President Hiroshi Yamakawa told a news conference.

The H3's main missions are to secure independent access to space and be competitive as international demand for satellite launches grows. "We made a big first step today toward achieving that goal," Yamakawa said.

The launch is a boost for Japan's space program following a recent streak of successes, including a historic precision touchdown on the moon of an unmanned spacecraft last month.

The liftoff was closely watched as a test for Japan's space development after H3, in its debut flight last March, failed to ignite the second-stage engine. JAXA and its main contractor Mitsubishi Heavy Industries have been developing H3 as a successor to its current mainstay, H-2A, which is set to retire after two more flights.

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As the rocket soared and released its first payload successfully, project members at the JAXA command center cheered and hugged each other in livestreaming footage. NHK television showed some staff at a press center crying with relief and joy.

JAXA H3 project manager Masashi Okada called the result "perfect," saying H3 cleared all missions set for Saturday's flight. "After a long wait, the newborn H3 finally had its first cry."

"I now feel a heavy load taken off my shoulders. But now is the real start for H3, and we will work to steadily improve it," Okada said.

The H3 No. 2 rocket was decorated with thousands of stickers carrying messages sent from well-wishers around the country.

Two microsatellites — observation satellite CE-SAT-IE, developed by Canon Electronics, and TIRSAT, which was co-developed by a number of companies and universities — were piggybacked on the H3 Saturday. Their makers said they were willing to take the chance as they see a growing market in the satellite business.

The 57-meter (187-foot) -long H3 is designed to carry larger payloads than H-2A at much lower costs of about 50 billion yen (\$330 million), to be globally competitive.

Masayuki Eguchi, head of defense and space segment at Mitsubishi Heavy, said his company hopes to achieve better price competitiveness after about a dozen more launches.

"I'm delighted to see this incredible accomplishment in the space sector right after the success of the SLIM moon landing," Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said on X, formerly Twitter. "I expect the Japanese mainstay rocket will steadily make achievement."

Last month, a H-2A rocket successfully placed a spy satellite into its planned orbit, and days later JAXA's unmanned spacecraft SLIM made the world's first "pinpoint" moon landing then captured lunar data.

## Ukraine's Zelenskyy warns of an 'artificial deficit' of weapons after withdrawal from Avdiivka

By GEIR MOULSON and KERSTIN SOPKE Associated Press

MUNICH (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy warned allies Saturday that an "artificial deficit" of weapons for his country risks giving Russia breathing space, hours after his military chief said he was withdrawing troops from the eastern city of Avdiivka.

Zelenskyy spoke to the Munich Security Conference, an annual gathering of security and foreign policy officials. Ukraine is back on the defensive against Russia in the nearly 2-year-old war, hindered by low ammunition supplies and a shortage of personnel.

"Ukrainians have proven that we can force Russia to retreat," he said. "We can get our land back, and (Russian President Vladimir) Putin can lose, and this has already happened more than once on the battlefield."

"Our actions are limited only by ... our strength," he added, pointing to the situation in Avdiivka. Ukrainian commander Col. Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi said early Saturday that he was withdrawing troops from the city, where outnumbered defenders battled a Russian assault for four months, to avoid encirclement and save soldiers' lives.

"Dear friends, unfortunately keeping Ukraine in the artificial deficit of weapons, particularly in deficit of artillery and long-range capabilities, allows Putin to adapt to the current intensity of the war," Zelenskyy said. "The self-weakening of democracy over time undermines our joint results."

The president said that the troop withdrawal was "a correct decision" and emphasized the priority of saving Ukrainian soldiers' lives. He suggested that Russia has achieved little, adding that it has been attacking Avdiivka "with all the power that they had" since October and lost thousands of soldiers — "that's what Russia has achieved. It's a depletion of their army."

"We're just waiting for weapons that we're short of," he added, pointing to a lack of long-range weapons. "That's why our weapon today is our soldiers, our people."

Zelenskyy on Friday went to Berlin and Paris, where he signed long-term bilateral security agreements with Germany and France, following a similar agreement with Britain last month.

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Ukraine's European allies are appealing to the U.S. Congress to approve a package that includes aid for Ukraine, \$60 billion that would go largely to U.S. defense entities to manufacture missiles, munitions and other military hardware for the battlefields in Ukraine. The package faces resistance from House Republicans.

Zelenskyy said Saturday that the U.S. "did a lot for us" and thanked Washington for bipartisan support. He said he planned to meet U.S. senators in Munich on Saturday. They "have to understand (that) only in unity we can win (against) Russia," he said.

Asked whether it would be a good idea to invite former U.S. president and 2024 presidential hopeful Donald Trump to Kyiv, Zelenskyy replied: "I invited publicly, but it depends on his wishes."

"If ... he will come, I'm ready even to go with him to the front line," he added.

Speaking separately at the same conference, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said Congress' delay has meant the flow of U.S. weapons and ammunition dropped, with a direct impact on the front line.

"Every week we wait means that there will be more people killed on the front line in Ukraine," he said.

Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas, whose country directly borders Russia, pointed to the history of the 1930s.

"If America isolates itself, it eventually is going cost you more," she said, warning that if "aggression pays off somewhere, it serves as an invitation to use it elsewhere, jeopardizing global security."

Zelenskyy argued that "among us, there is no one for whom the ongoing war in Europe does not pose a threat."

"Please do not ask Ukraine when the war will end," he said. "Ask yourself why is Putin still able to continue it."

## **A man in Iran guns down 12 relatives in a shooting rampage with a Kalashnikov rifle**

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — A 30-year-old man gunned down 12 of his relatives Saturday in a remote rural area in southeast Iran, the deadliest shooting reported in decades.

Head of the justice department of the province of Kerman, Ebrahim Hamidi, told the semiofficial ISNA news agency the gunman opened fire on his father, brother and other relatives early morning in a village because of family disputes.

The report, which did not identify the assailant, stated he used a Kalashnikov assault rifle.

Local media report on occasional shootings, but this attack has had the highest death toll in Iran, where citizens are only legally allowed hunting rifles, common in rural areas.

In 2022, an employee, who was dismissed from a state-owned financial conglomerate, opened fire at his former workplace, killing three people and injuring another five before killing himself in the country's west. In 2016, a 26-year-old man shot 10 relatives in a rural area in the south of Iran.

In recent years, violence has spiked in the country suffering from deteriorating economic conditions coupled with crushing American sanctions that helped spark soaring inflation and increasing unemployment.

## **Judge orders Trump to pay \$355 million for lying about his wealth in staggering civil fraud ruling**

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, JAKE OFFENHARTZ and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A New York judge ordered Donald Trump on Friday to pay \$355 million in penalties, finding that the former president lied about his wealth for years in a sweeping civil fraud verdict that pierces his billionaire image but stops short of putting his real estate empire out of business.

Judge Arthur Engoron's decision after a trial in New York Attorney General Letitia James' lawsuit punishes Trump, his company and executives, including his two eldest sons, for scheming to dupe banks, insurers and others by inflating his wealth on financial statements. It forces a shakeup at the top of his Trump Organization, putting the company under court supervision and curtailing how it does business.

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The decision is a staggering setback for the Republican presidential front-runner, the latest and costliest consequence of his recent legal troubles. The magnitude of the verdict on top of penalties in other cases could dramatically dent Trump's financial resources and damage his identity as a savvy businessman who parlayed his fame as a real estate developer into reality TV stardom and the presidency. He has vowed to appeal and won't have to pay immediately.

Trump's true punishment could be far costlier because under state law he is also required to pay interest on the penalties, which James said puts him on the hook for a total of more than \$450 million. The amount, which would be paid to the state, will grow until he pays.

The judge made clear, however, that the Trump Organization will continue to operate, backing away from an earlier ruling that would have dissolved Trump's companies.

Engoron, a Democrat, concluded that Trump and his company were "likely to continue their fraudulent ways" without the penalties and controls he imposed. Engoron concluded that Trump and his co-defendants "failed to accept responsibility" and that experts who testified on his behalf "simply denied reality."

"This is a venial sin, not a mortal sin," Engoron wrote in a searing 92-page opinion. "They did not rob a bank at gunpoint. Donald Trump is not Bernard Madoff. Yet, defendants are incapable of admitting the error of their ways."

He said their "complete lack of contrition and remorse borders on pathological" and "the frauds found here leap off the page and shock the conscience."

Trump said the decision was "election interference" and "weaponization against a political opponent," complaining to reporters at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida that he was being penalized for "having built a perfect company, great cash, great buildings, great everything."

James, a Democrat, told reporters "justice has been served" and called the ruling "a tremendous victory for this state, this nation, and for everyone who believes that we all must play by the same rules — even former presidents."

"Now, Donald Trump is finally facing accountability for his lying, cheating, and staggering fraud. Because no matter how big, rich or powerful you think you are, no one is above the law," James said.

Trump still owns the Trump Organization, but he put his assets into a revocable trust and relinquished a leadership role when he became president in 2017, putting his sons Eric and Donald Trump Jr. in charge of day-to-day operations. Engoron's ruling imposes a three-year ban on Trump serving as an officer or director of any New York company and bars his sons for two years, effectively requiring the company to find new leadership, at least temporarily.

The monetary penalties involve what Engoron said were "ill-gotten gains" that Trump attained by making himself seem richer. They include money Trump saved by securing lower loan interest rates and profits from the sale of properties that he might not have been able to develop without that financing.

Eric and Donald Trump Jr. were each ordered to pay \$4 million, their share of profits from the 2022 sale of Trump's Washington, D.C. hotel, and the company's former longtime chief financial officer Allen Weisselberg was ordered to pay \$1 million — half of the \$2 million severance he's receiving. All told, Trump and his co-defendants owe \$364 million, which James' office said grows to \$464 million when interest is included. Weisselberg and another longtime company executive, Jeffrey McConney, were barred from ever holding a corporate finance or leadership role in the state.

Engoron put the Trump Organization under the supervision of an independent monitor for at least three years, extending oversight he ordered after James sued Trump in 2022, and said the company must hire an independent compliance director to ensure that it follows financial reporting obligations and rules.

Engoron wrote that stripping Trump of his companies, as he'd previously ordered, was no longer necessary because the company will be under a "two-tiered oversight" with the independent monitor, retired federal judge Barbara Jones, and the compliance director keeping an eye on any activities that could lead to fraud.

Because it was civil, not criminal, the case did not carry the potential of prison time.

Engoron issued his decision after a 2½-month trial that Trump turned into a frequent, albeit unorthodox campaign stage. He trekked to court nearly a dozen times, watching testimony, grousing to news cameras outside the courtroom and bristling under oath that he was the victim of a rigged legal system.



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During the trial, Trump called Engoron "extremely hostile" and James "a political hack." He also incurred \$15,000 in fines for violating a gag order that the judge imposed after he made a disparaging and untrue social media post about a key court staffer.

In a six-minute diatribe during closing arguments in January, Trump proclaimed "I am an innocent man" and called the case a "fraud on me."

Trump has boasted for years about his wealth, but James' lawsuit alleged that his claims weren't just harmless bragging but years of deceptive practices as he built the multinational collection of skyscrapers, golf courses and other properties that catapulted him to wealth, fame and the White House.

The suit accused Trump and his co-defendants of routinely puffing up his financial statements to create an illusion his properties were more valuable than they really were. State lawyers said Trump exaggerated his wealth by as much as \$3.6 billion one year.

James brought the case under a New York law that authorizes her to investigate persistent fraud in business dealings. Trump incorporated the Trump Organization in New York in 1981.

Even before the trial began, Engoron ruled that James had proven Trump's financial statements were fraudulent. The judge ordered some of Trump's companies removed from his control and dissolved. An appeals court put that decision on hold.

In that earlier ruling, the judge found that, among other tricks, Trump's financial statements had wrongly claimed his Trump Tower penthouse was nearly three times its actual size and overvalued his Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Florida, based on the idea that the property could be developed for residential use, even though he had surrendered rights to develop it for any uses but a club.

Trump, one of 40 witnesses to testify at the trial, said his financial statements actually understated his net worth. Trump maintains that he is worth several billion dollars and testified last year that he had about \$400 million in cash, in addition to properties and other investments.

Reiterating his testimony, Trump said Friday, "There were no victims because the banks made a lot of money."

Trump and his lawyers have said outside accountants who helped prepare the statements should have flagged any discrepancies and have said the documents came with disclaimers that shielded him from liability. They also argued that some of the allegations were barred by the statute of limitations.

Engoron decided the case because neither side sought a jury and state law doesn't allow for juries for this type of lawsuit.

The suit is one of many legal headaches for Trump as he campaigns for a return to the White House. He has been indicted four times in the last year — accused in Georgia and Washington, D.C., of plotting to overturn his 2020 election loss to Democrat Joe Biden, in Florida of hoarding classified documents, and in Manhattan of falsifying business records related to hush money paid to porn actor Stormy Daniels on his behalf.

On Thursday, a judge confirmed Trump's hush-money trial will start March 25. A judge in Atlanta heard arguments Thursday and Friday on whether to remove Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis from his Georgia election interference case because she had a personal relationship with a special prosecutor she hired.

Those criminal accusations haven't appeared to undermine his march toward a rematch with President Joe Biden, but civil litigation has threatened him financially.

Last month, a jury ordered Trump to pay \$83.3 million to writer E. Jean Carroll for defaming her after she accused him in 2019 of sexually assaulting her in a Manhattan department store in the 1990s. That's on top of the \$5 million a jury awarded Carroll in a related trial last year.

In 2022, the Trump Organization was convicted of tax fraud and fined \$1.6 million in an unrelated criminal case for helping executives dodge taxes on extravagant perks such as Manhattan apartments and luxury cars.

James, who campaigned for office as a Trump critic and watchdog, started scrutinizing his business practices in March 2019 after his former personal lawyer Michael Cohen testified to Congress that Trump

exaggerated his wealth on financial statements provided to Deutsche Bank while trying to obtain financing to buy the NFL's Buffalo Bills.

James' office previously sued Trump for misusing his own charitable foundation to further his political and business interests. Trump was ordered to pay \$2 million to an array of charities as a fine and the charity, the Trump Foundation, was shut down.

## 'No evidence' Russia has decided what to do with emerging anti-satellite weapon, Biden says

By SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden said Friday there was no sign Russia has decided to go ahead and deploy an emerging anti-satellite weapon, the disclosure of which has rattled Washington this week.

The White House has confirmed that U.S. intelligence officials have information indicating Russia has obtained such a capability, although such a weapon is not yet operational. Biden said Friday that "there's no evidence that they have made a decision to go forward with doing anything in space," while he continued to stress that there was no immediate danger to humans.

"There is no nuclear threat to the people of America or anywhere else in the world with what Russia's doing at the moment," Biden told reporters at the White House during remarks on the reported death of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

The president confirmed that the capability obtained by Russia "related to satellites and space and damaging those satellites potentially," and that those capabilities could "theoretically do something that was damaging."

But Russia hasn't moved forward with plans yet, and, Biden added: "My hope is, it will not."

The news of the capability emerged this week after a cryptic warning from House Intelligence Committee Chairman Mike Turner, R-Ohio, who urged Biden to declassify information relating to what he called a "serious national security threat."

That declassification process had been underway when Turner released the statement, according to the White House.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken, in Germany for the Munich Security Conference, raised the matter with Indian Foreign Minister Jaishankar and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and "emphasized that the pursuit of this capability should be a matter of concern," according to a U.S. official traveling with Blinken in Munich.

The official, who was granted anonymity to discuss details of meetings that hadn't been publicly disclosed, said Blinken will continue raising it throughout his meetings at the security forum.

## In video, Maine gunman said reservists were scared because he was 'capable' of doing something

By DAVID SHARP Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — An Army reservist responsible for Maine's deadliest mass shooting told state police in New York before his hospitalization last summer that fellow soldiers were worried about him because he was "gonna friggin' do something."

Reservist Robert Card told troopers who escorted him to a hospital in upstate New York that fellow reservists and others kept talking about him behind his back, "and it's getting old," according to police body cam video obtained by WMTW-TV and others under New York's Freedom of Information Law.

"They're scared 'cause I'm gonna friggin' do something. Because I am capable," Card said.

The release of the police body cam video recorded July 16 followed the release of a new detail Thursday by Maine State Police who addressed an independent commission investigating the tragedy: A review of Card's cellphone revealed a note he had written three days before the Oct. 25 shooting in Lewiston in which he said he'd "had enough" and warned he was "trained to hurt people."

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Army spokesperson Bryce Dubee told The Associated Press on Friday it's cooperating with the independent commission and that eight of Card's fellow reservists have been authorized to testify in their personal capacity at an upcoming meeting. The Army was also conducting its own investigation.

Liz Seal, who lost her husband, Josh, in the shooting and who is now raising four children on her own, called the videos "disturbing."

"They show there were clear warning signs that Card posed a risk to others and yet the system failed to ensure that his guns were taken away from him," she told AP via text message.

The 40-year-old Card killed 18 people and wounded 13 at a bowling alley and a bar, leading to the largest manhunt in state history and tens of thousands of people sheltering in their homes. Card's body was found two days later. He had died by suicide.

The police body cam video provided a chilling glimpse of Card after he had been involved in an altercation and locked himself in his motel room, alarming fellow reservists from Maine. He appeared thinner than normal, his fellow reservists said.

On the body cam video, Card's fellow reservists, whose names were redacted, expressed concern that he had lost weight and was all "skin and bones." They also said his behavior had changed markedly over six months, with a man who identified himself as Card's first sergeant telling the officers "our concern is that he's either going to hurt himself or someone else."

One of the reservists also described Card as a "gun nut" who spent \$14,000 on a scope. The reservist added, "I don't know what he's capable of. I'm not insinuating anything. But I'm just saying he does have a ton of guns."

The Ruger .308-caliber assault rifle used in the killings in Lewiston was legally purchased by Card on July 6, less than two weeks before his actions led to his two-week hospitalization, Maine state police said.

Travis Brennan, attorney for some of the victims, said the video corroborates concerns about the overall failures of the law enforcement, legal and mental health systems to take away Card's weapons.

"His fellow members in the reserves were so concerned about his behavior and the things he was saying that they didn't feel safe with him having guns on the military base and they didn't want to train with him," Brennan said Friday. "But somehow the system allowed him to walk out into the community and still have access to his guns."

An earlier report by state police indicated he had threatened fellow reservists. But New York State Police said in a statement that he was never in custody. Card was driven to Keller Army Hospital for evaluation by fellow reservists, and troopers followed the private vehicle. Card ended up spending two weeks at a psychiatric hospital.

In an email from its public information office, the New York State Police noted Card was not in police custody and declined further comment Friday, referring questions to the Army.

Police and the Army were warned Card was suffering from deteriorating mental health long before the shooting.

Family members warned police in May that the 40-year-old Card was growing paranoid and expressed concern about his access to guns before the incident unfolded while his unit was training in July in upstate New York. In August, the Army barred Card from handling weapons on duty and declared him nondeployable.

Then in September, a fellow reservist who considered Card to be his best friend provided a stark warning, telling an Army superior Card was going to "snap and do a mass shooting."

Dressed in gym shorts and an Army T-shirt, Card told New York state police people were talking behind his back for about six months. He said people were starting rumors that he was gay and a pedophile.

Card also told troopers he was not on any prescription medication.

In Maine, a warning that Card might "shoot up" the Saco armory where his reserve unit was based prompted a Sagadahoc County deputy to try to meet with Card at his home in Bowdoin. Card did not come to the door, even though he was believed to be inside, and the deputy said he did not have legal authority to knock down the door to force an encounter to assess whether he should be taken into protective

custody. That step is necessary to trigger Maine's "yellow flag" law, which allows a judge to temporarily remove someone's guns during a psychiatric health crisis.

The deputy said an Army official suggested letting the situation "simmer" rather than forcing a confrontation. The deputy also received assurances from Card's family that they were removing his access to guns.

Ben Gideon, another attorney for victims, said Friday the police video demonstrates there was a "command directive" for Card to be evaluated and that made his psychiatric hospitalization "compulsory and involuntary," and that he should not have had access to weapons under federal law, regardless of New York's red flag law and Maine's yellow flag law.

## Western officials and Kremlin critics blame Putin and his government for Navalny's death in prison

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — World leaders and Russian opposition activists wasted no time Friday in blaming the reported death of imprisoned opposition leader Alexei Navalny on President Vladimir Putin and his government.

"It is obvious that he was killed by Putin," said Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who was visiting Germany for the Munich Security Conference as he sought aid for his country's efforts to fight off an invasion by Russia.

"Putin doesn't care who dies — only for him to hold his position. This is why he must hold onto nothing. Putin must lose everything and be held responsible for his deeds," Zelenskyy added.

U.S. President Joe Biden said Washington does not know exactly what happened, "but there is no doubt that the death of Navalny was a consequence of something Putin and his thugs did."

Navalny "could have lived safely in exile," but instead returned to Russia to "continue his work," despite knowing he could be imprisoned or killed "because he believed so deeply in his country, in Russia."

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, whose country temporarily took in Navalny in 2020 after he was poisoned with a nerve agent, praised the Kremlin critic's bravery and said his death makes clear "what kind of regime this is."

"He has probably now paid for this courage with his life," Scholz said, standing next to Zelenskyy. The German leader said he met Navalny in Berlin during his convalescence.

Navalny, 47, was serving a 19-year prison sentence on extremism charges in a remote penal colony above the Arctic Circle at the time of his death. He had been behind bars since he returned from Germany in January 2021, serving time on various charges that he rejected as a politically motivated effort to keep him imprisoned for life.

Navalny was "brutally murdered by the Kremlin," said Latvian President Edgars Rinkēvičs in a post on X, formerly Twitter. "That's a fact, and that is something one should know about the true nature of Russia's current regime."

Navalny's associates stressed they did not have independent confirmation of his death in the reports that came from Russia's penitentiary officials. His close ally Ivan Zhdanov said authorities "must notify the relatives" within 24 hours, but there have been no such notifications.

Navalny's wife, Yulia Navalnaya, appearing at the Munich conference, said she did not know whether to believe the official Russian announcement because "we cannot trust Putin and the Putin government. They always lie."

"But if this is true, I want Putin and everyone around Putin, Putin's friends, his government, to know that they will bear responsibility for what they did to our country, to my family and to my husband. And this day will come very soon," she said.

Navalny's death also led to an outpouring of grief among Russians living abroad.

In the Serbian capital of Belgrade, hundreds of Russians and others lit candles and laid flowers outside the Russian embassy. Tens of thousands of Russians have moved to Serbia, a fellow Slavic country, since Russia invaded Ukraine two years ago.



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Hundreds gathered in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi, which has also seen a huge influx of Russians since the invasion of Ukraine. Some held banners saying "Putin is the killer" and "We will not forgive." Up to 300 people attended a similar rally in Georgia's third-largest city, Batumi.

Protesters also assembled in the Armenian capital of Yerevan, another country that attracted a lot of Russians after the start of the war in Ukraine.

In Israel, home to a large number of people who came from Russia, hundreds rallied outside the Russian Embassy in Tel Aviv, chanting "Russia without Putin!" and "Russia will be free!"

Crowds of protesters also rallied in Berlin and Paris, as well as the capitals of Latvia, Bulgaria and Estonia, plus other European cities.

The outpouring of sympathy for Navalny's family and outrage at the Kremlin, which in recent years mounted an unprecedented crackdown on dissent, came from all over the world.

"If this is true, then no matter the formal cause, the responsibility for the premature death is Vladimir Putin personally, who first gave the green light to the poisoning of Alexei and then put him in prison," said Mikhail Khodorkovsky, an exiled Russia tycoon turned opposition figure in exile, in an online statement.

Other Russian opposition activists echoed him.

"If it is confirmed, the death of Alexei is a murder. Organized by Putin," opposition politician Dmitry Gudkov said on social media. "Even if Alexei died of 'natural' causes, those were triggered by his poisoning and further torture in prison."

Former world chess champion-turned-Kremlin opponent Garry Kasparov said "Putin tried and failed to murder Navalny quickly and secretly with poison, and now he has murdered him slowly and publicly in prison."

"He was killed for exposing Putin and his mafia as the crooks and thieves they are," tweeted Kasparov, who lives abroad.

Pyotr Verzilov, a prominent member of the Russian protest group Pussy Riot, said "Navalny was murdered in prison." In a post on X, Verzilov added: "We will definitely take revenge and destroy this regime."

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said Navalny's death showed that "Putin fears nothing more than dissent from his own people."

She called it "a grim reminder of what Putin and his regime are all about," and added it should provide impetus to "unite in our fight to safeguard the freedom and safety of those who dare to stand up against autocracy."

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said the fact that Navalny was a prisoner "makes it extremely important that Russia now answer all the questions that it will be asked about the cause of death."

British Foreign Secretary David Cameron echoed her remarks, saying "Putin's Russia imprisoned him, trumped up charges against him, poisoned him, sent him to an Arctic penal colony and now he has tragically died. And we should hold Putin accountable for this."

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said the news had Canadians "reeling."

"He was such a strong fighter for democracy, for freedoms, for the Russian people. It really shows the extent to which Putin will crack down on anyone who is fighting for freedom for the Russian people," he said.

"There is no question that Alexei Navalny is dead because he stood up to Putin, he stood up to the Kremlin," Trudeau added.

Bulgarian Prime Minister Nikolay Denkov said Navalny was for years "a symbol of the fight against the dictatorship in Russia, of the fight for free speech, of the fact that a person cannot be imprisoned for a different opinion."

Russian lawmakers and other officials bristled at the Western outrage.

Sergei Mironov, head of a pro-Kremlin party, said Navalny's death helps Russia's foes.

"Of course, health issues could have been the cause of death. But in any case, a premature death of a notorious 'opposition figure', especially a month before the presidential election, is beneficial first and foremost to Russia's enemies," Mironov said in an online statement. "They will use it to the maximum to

pressure us from the outside and to rock with situation within the country.”

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said “the immediate reaction of NATO leaders to Navalny’s death in the form of direct accusations against Russia is self-exposing.”

The death was still being investigated, but “the West’s conclusions are already ready,” she said.

## **Fani Willis case ensnared in legal arguments during testimony about romantic relationship timeline**

By KATE BRUMBACK, ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — A man expected to be a key witness for lawyers trying to get Fani Willis disqualified from the Georgia election interference case against Donald Trump instead refused to answer most of their questions on Friday, citing attorney-client privilege during the second day of a hearing that sometimes bordered on theater.

During repeated interrogations by a series of attorneys for Trump and other defendants in the election case, Terrence Bradley declined to discuss a romantic relationship between Willis and Nathan Wade, a special prosecutor she hired for the case.

The lawyers contend the relationship started before Willis, the district attorney for Georgia’s Fulton County, hired Wade and that she improperly benefited from his earnings, creating a conflict of interest that should disqualify Willis’ office from the case. Robin Yeartie, Willis’ former friend and co-worker, testified Thursday that she saw the two hugging and kissing before Wade was hired in November 2021.

Meanwhile, attorneys for the state who are trying to discredit the misconduct allegations against Willis called two key witnesses of their own Friday: Willis’ father, who said he didn’t know about his daughter’s relationship until recently; and former Gov. Roy Barnes, who testified that Willis asked him to serve as special prosecutor, testimony the attorneys used to back her claim that Wade was not her first choice for the job.

Other testimony in the hearing — about cash stashes in homes and romantic dalliances to exotic locales — has lent a soap opera feel to the election case against Trump, one of the most politically consequential prosecutions ever initiated by a district attorney. Thousands watched a livestream of the proceedings, even during tedious lawyerly exchanges about legal theory, while some prominent local figures — including Atlanta’s mayor — dropped in to witness the hearing in person.

It was far from clear by the end of the day Friday that defense lawyers had succeeded in presenting indisputably persuasive evidence to push Willis or Wade off the case against Trump. But even if the allegations don’t derail the case, they threaten to taint the public’s perception of one of four criminal proceedings facing the former president and have provided an opening for Trump and his Republican allies to try to cast doubt on the case’s legitimacy as he vies to reclaim the White House in November.

Trump immediately jumped on the allegations in hopes of discrediting the entire case, part of a yearslong pattern of deflecting attention away from his own conduct by highlighting the personal lives and lapses in judgment — both perceived and real — of the officials investigating him. His use of the word “lover” to refer to Wade echoed his attacks years earlier on two FBI officials who had an extramarital relationship and exchanged derogatory text messages about him during the FBI’s investigation into Russian election interference.

On the witness stand Thursday, Willis forcefully pushed back against any suggestion that her relationship with Wade created a conflict of interest and accused a defense attorney of trying to smear her with salacious lies in an effort to discredit the case against Trump. Her team opted not to bring her back on Friday, avoiding the spectacle of more deeply personal testimony from the district attorney.

The relationship between Willis and Wade was first revealed by Ashleigh Merchant, an attorney for Trump co-defendant Michael Roman, a former campaign staffer and onetime White House aide. Merchant has alleged that Willis personally profited from the case, paying Wade large sums for his work and then benefiting when Wade used his earnings to pay for vacations the pair took.

Bradley, Wade's former business partner who also served as his divorce attorney for a while, repeatedly refused on Friday to answer questions about Wade and Willis, citing attorney-client privilege. But he did acknowledge communicating with Merchant between September and January as she was investigating the possibility of the relationship.

Wade testified Thursday that he and Willis took trips together, but said Willis paid him back in cash for some expenses that he had charged to his credit card. Attorneys for Trump and some of his co-defendants have sought to cast doubt on the claim that Willis paid Wade in cash, pressing both of them on why Willis would use cash and if they had any evidence that she reimbursed him.

Floyd, Willis' father, seemed to support his daughter's assertion that she keeps large amounts of cash at home with his testimony that he always told his daughter to have six months of cash on hand.

"It's a Black thing," Floyd said. "Most Black folks, they hide cash, they keep cash."

Fulton County Superior Court Judge Scott McAfee said he won't rule on whether Willis and her office should be disqualified from the case until after attorneys for both sides have a chance to present arguments, which he said would likely happen next Friday or the following week. He said during a hearing Monday that Willis could be disqualified "if evidence is produced demonstrating an actual conflict or the appearance of one."

Willis' removal would be a stunning development in the most sprawling of the criminal cases against Trump. If she were disqualified, a council that supports prosecuting attorneys in Georgia would need to find a new attorney to take over. That successor could either proceed with the charges against Trump and 14 others or drop the case altogether. Even if a new lawyer went forward with the case, it would very likely not go to trial before November, when Trump is expected to be the Republican nominee for president.

\_\_\_\_\_ Richer reported from Boston and Tucker reported from Washington.

## **Woman's corpse and 30 cremated remains found after ex-funeral home owner gets evicted from house**

By AMY BETH HANSON and COLLEEN SLEVIN Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — A financially troubled former funeral home owner kept a deceased woman's body in a hearse for two years at a house where police also found the cremated remains of at least 30 people, authorities said Friday in the latest case to underscore lax oversight of Colorado's funeral industry.

The grisly discovery occurred Feb. 6 during a court-ordered eviction of a house rented by Miles Harford, the 33-year-old owner of Apollo Funeral and Cremation Services in the Denver suburb of Littleton, police said. It had been closed since September 2022.

"Mr. Harford appears to have experienced financial trouble in his business. At times he was not able to complete cremations to provide remains to families for services," Denver Police Cmdr. Matt Clark said Friday. He said on occasion, Harford might have provided family members with another person's ashes instead of the ashes of their loved ones.

Temporary urns — plastic boxes the size of a shoe box — were found in the crawl space of the house while a Denver sheriff's deputy oversaw the removal of Harford's belongings, Clark said. Some of the boxes were empty.

Other urns were found in a moving truck parked outside and still others were in a hearse, where investigators found the woman's body covered with blankets, Clark said. Harford said she died in August of 2022.

The recovered cremains appear to be associated with individuals who passed away between 2012 and 2021, he said.

Authorities have been in contact with Harford and an arrest warrant was issued for him Friday. He's believed to be in the Denver area and police were "working to facilitate his arrest," Clark said, adding that Harford has been cooperative with investigators.

Former customer Crystallyn Nunez said it took months to get the ashes of her grandfather and father back from Harford after they died in 2021.

Repeated phone calls and texts were met with a series of excuses, she said. Harford at one point said

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he was in a car crash while transporting the remains, then later claimed his mother had gotten into an accident while trying to deliver them, Nunez said. When the family offered to come pick them up, Harford danced around the issue, she said.

She got her grandfather's ashes after a few months and her father's ashes after nearly a year, but never received necklaces containing their remains that the family had paid for, she said. Nunez said her family already had doubts that they had received the correct remains. The discovery at Harford's house only reinforced those fears.

"It's making our whole family question whether or not everything was done the correct way," said Nunez. Her family has contacted police to determine if they have the correct remains.

The discovery is the latest in a string of horrific cases involving funeral home operators in Colorado, which has some of the weakest oversight of the funeral industry in the nation. The state has no routine inspections of funeral homes or qualification requirements for operators.

A married couple is awaiting trial in Colorado Springs following their arrest last year for allegedly abandoning almost 200 bodies over several years inside a bug-infested facility and giving fake ashes to family members of the deceased. The operators of another funeral home in the western Colorado city of Montrose received federal prison sentences last year for mail fraud after they were accused of selling body parts and distributing fake ashes.

More than two dozen additional criminal cases and complaints involving Colorado funeral homes since 2007 were detailed in a January report to lawmakers from state regulators. The cases included bodies being mishandled, thefts of personal effects, improper embalming of bodies, mislabeled remains and remains never returned to families. The report concluded that additional regulation for the industry was "necessary to protect the public."

Harford is expected to be charged with abuse of a corpse, forgery of the death certificate and theft of the money paid for the cremation. Other charges are possible as the investigation continues, said Denver District Attorney Beth McCann.

No voicemail was set up on a telephone number listed for Harford. He also did not immediately respond to emails seeking comment.

Clark said Harford acknowledged to police that he owed money to several crematories in the area and none would cremate the 63-year-old woman's body, so he decided to store her body in the hearse. Her family told investigators they were given what they believed were the woman's ashes, which have been turned over to the Office of the Medical Examiner.

The family is devastated, Clark said.

"They're shocked. They were hurt by this," he said. "They believed that they were processing their grief with the remains that they had and had had services with that. And then they come to find out that that was not the person that was processed, and in fact, she was being held in that hearse there."

The other cremains found on the property appear to have been professionally cremated, officials said. Investigators are checking labels on the cremains and state databases and meeting with families.

"As you can imagine, these are extremely difficult conversations to have and the information comes as a shock to many of the families, several of whom believed they had the entire remains of their loved one," Clark said.

State licensing records show no discipline or board actions for Apollo Funeral and Cremation Services, which was licensed from March 2012 through May 2022.

In 2018, Harford and his company were sued by another funeral home company and ordered to pay about \$27,000 for unspecified services the other home provided, according to court records. The same company, Kansas-based Wilbert Funeral Services, sued Harford and the company again in 2021, saying Harford owed nearly \$9,000. That case is still pending.

Last year, a woman who said she was Harford's former employer sought a court order to keep him away from her over alleged harassment. In her application, she said she had paid Harford to cremate two of her pets but he didn't return them to her. There's no indication in court records that the order was granted.



## 2 juveniles charged in mass shooting at the Kansas City Chiefs Super Bowl parade

By NICK INGRAM, SCOTT MCFETRIDGE and JIM SALTER Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Two juveniles were charged with crimes connected to the mass shooting at the Kansas City Chiefs' Super Bowl rally, authorities said Friday, as the city tries to recover in the aftermath of the violence.

A news release from the Jackson County Family Court said the juveniles are being detained in the county's Juvenile Detention Center on gun-related and resisting arrest charges. Additional charges are expected as the investigation continues.

No further information was released. Defendants age 17 and under in Missouri are typically adjudicated through the juvenile system, which is far more private than the system for adults. Names of the accused are not released, nor are police documents such as probable cause statements.

In cases involving serious crimes such as murder, juveniles as young as 12 can be certified for trial as adults, said Lynn Urban, a professor who chairs the Criminal Justice and Criminology Department at the University of Central Missouri.

Federal law prohibits the death penalty for anyone under age 18 at the time of the crime.

Police initially detained three juveniles but released one who they determined wasn't involved in the shooting. Police are looking for others who may have been involved and are calling for witnesses, victims and people with cellphone video of the violence to call a dedicated hotline.

Meanwhile, Kansas Citians are turning to religious gatherings, vigils and counseling to try to cope with the horror of what happened.

A mother and popular disc jockey died in the burst of gunfire Wednesday as the parade and rally were concluding, and 22 others — more than half of them children — were injured. By Friday, two people remained in critical condition and one was in serious condition. Most of the injured children were out of the hospital and expected to recover.

But the emotional recovery is only just beginning in a community horrified that two juveniles could cause such trauma. Police believe a dispute between several people led to the shooting.

The slain woman was identified by radio station KKFI-FM as Lisa Lopez-Galvan, host of "Taste of Tejano." On Friday, a family friend, Katrina Rojas Vincent, said she could feel Lopez-Galvan's presence as she stood near the shooting site.

"Her spirit will always be here welcoming people back to this location, to not be afraid to not have any fear, to enjoy yourself and live your life," Vincent said.

She described Lopez-Galvan as a vibrant, giving person.

"Always had that a smile ear to ear and just the positivity that she brought to our community with the music that she would play" on her radio program, Vincent said.

The Jackson County Prosecuting Attorney's Office set up in-person counseling for the traumatized. Twelve people attended Thursday, including two children, spokesman Michael Mansur said Friday. The agency also established a hotline offering counseling, but Mansur didn't immediately have information on how many called the hotline.

The Chiefs won their third Super Bowl in five years Sunday, beating the San Francisco 49ers 25-22 in overtime. The two previous celebrations went off without any trouble.

On Wednesday, players rode double-decker red buses through Missouri's largest city. The parade ended with a rally at the sprawling Union Station. It was just breaking up with shots erupted. Many people thought they were hearing fireworks. Eventually, some ducked for cover. Others leapt over barriers and sprinted, many carrying children.

Beyond the gunshot wounds, several people were treated at hospitals for injuries suffered amid the chaos. So many personal belongings were left behind that police set up a site for people to try and find what they lost.

Two men at the rally jumped on and detained someone with a gun, though police have not confirmed

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whether it was one of the people arrested.

Paul Contreras of Bellevue, Nebraska, said he heard a man yelling to stop someone and was able to tackle the person from behind. Contreras noticed that the person he tackled had a gun, he said, and he wasn't sure if he might have another under a heavy jacket.

Soon, Contreras was joined by another man.

"We're like, we got to keep him down until law enforcement gets there. Because as much as we're fighting to keep him down, he's fighting to get up," Contreras, whose daughter captured it all on video, told The Associated Press.

The man who helped Contreras was Trey Filter. He was with his family when he heard yells of "get him."

"We was like, 'We got him,'" Filter, 40, of the Wichita, Kansas, area, told AP. "I'll always remember that. And then they started screaming, 'There's a gun!'"

The gun fell near his wife, Casey Filter, who picked it up. By then, the fleeing person was under a dogpile.

The shooting occurred despite the presence of more than 800 police officers in the area, including on top of nearby structures, said Mayor Quinton Lucas, who attended with his wife and mother and ran for safety when the shots were fired. But he doesn't expect to cancel the upcoming St. Patrick's Day parade.

"We have parades all the time. I don't think they'll end. Certainly we recognized the public safety challenges and issues that relate to them," Lucas said.

Taylor Swift, who is dating Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce, donated \$100,000 to Lopez-Galvan's family. Two \$50,000 donations were posted Friday under the singer's name on a GoFundMe page. Swift's representative confirmed the donations to Variety, the trade publication reported, and The Associated Press independently verified the posts.

Kansas City has long struggled with gun violence, and in 2020 it was among nine cities targeted by the U.S. Justice Department in an effort to crack down on violent crime. In 2023, the city matched a record with 182 homicides, most of which involved guns.

Lucas has joined with mayors across the country in calling for new laws to reduce gun violence, including mandating universal background checks.

## **Alexei Navalny, galvanizing opposition leader and Putin's fiercest foe, died in prison, Russia says**

By JIM HEINTZ, DASHA LITVINOVA and EMMA BURROWS Associated Press

Alexei Navalny, who crusaded against official corruption and staged massive anti-Kremlin protests as President Vladimir Putin's fiercest foe, died Friday in the Arctic penal colony where he was serving a 19-year sentence, Russia's prison agency said. He was 47.

The stunning news — less than a month before an election that will give Putin another six years in power — brought renewed criticism and outrage from world leaders toward the Russian president who has suppressed opposition at home.

After initially allowing people to lay flowers at monuments to victims of Soviet-era repressions in several Russian cities, police sealed off some of the areas and started making arrests.

More than 100 people were detained in eight cities, including Moscow, St. Petersburg, Murmansk in the Arctic Circle, Krasnodar and Rostov-on-Don in the south of Russia, according to the OVD-Info monitoring group. Shouts of "Shame!" were heard as Moscow police rounded up more than a dozen people — including one with a sign reading "Killer" — near a memorial to political prisoners, the group said.

But there was no indication Navalny's death would spark large protests, with the opposition fractured and now without its "guiding star," as an associate put it.

Russia's Federal Penitentiary Service reported Navalny felt sick after a walk Friday and lost consciousness at the penal colony in the town of Kharp, in the Yamalo-Nenets region about 1,900 kilometers (1,200 miles) northeast of Moscow. An ambulance arrived, but he couldn't be revived; the cause of death is "being established," it said.

Navalny had been jailed since January 2021, when he returned to Moscow to face certain arrest after

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recuperating in Germany from nerve agent poisoning he blamed on the Kremlin. He was later convicted three times, saying each case was politically motivated.

After the last verdict, Navalny said he understood he was "serving a life sentence, which is measured by the length of my life or the length of life of this regime."

Hours after his death was reported, Navalny's wife, Yulia Navalnaya, made a dramatic appearance at a security conference in Germany where many leaders had gathered.

She said she had considered canceling, "but then I thought what Alexei would do in my place. And I'm sure he would be here," adding that she was unsure if she could believe the news from official Russian sources.

"But if this is true, I want Putin and everyone around Putin, Putin's friends, his government to know that they will bear responsibility for what they did to our country, to my family and to my husband. And this day will come very soon," Navalnaya said.

Praise for Navalny's bravery poured in from Western leaders and others opposing Putin. Navalny's health has deteriorated recently and the cause of death may never be known, but many of them said they held Russian authorities ultimately responsible — particularly after the deaths of many Kremlin foes.

U.S. President Joe Biden said Washington doesn't know exactly what happened, "but there is no doubt that the death of Navalny was a consequence of something Putin and his thugs did."

Navalny "could have lived safely in exile" but returned home despite knowing he could be imprisoned or killed "because he believed so deeply in his country, in Russia."

In Germany, Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Navalny "has probably now paid for this courage with his life."

Standing beside Scholz, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy — whose country is fending off Russia's invasion — said: "Putin doesn't care who dies in order for him to hold onto his position."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Putin was told of Navalny's death. The opposition leader's spokeswoman, Kira Yarmysh, said on X, formerly known as Twitter, that the team had no confirmation yet.

Russia's main state TV channel interrupted its newscast to announce the death, while other broadcasters carried only terse reports.

The Russian SOTA social media channel shared video of Navalny — reportedly in a prison courtroom on Thursday — laughing and joking with the judge via video link on one of several hearings about conditions in jail.

Navalny was moved in December from a central Russia penal colony to the "special regime" facility — the maximum security level. His allies decried the transfer to the remote Arctic colony as yet another attempt to isolate and silence Navalny.

Before his arrest, Navalny campaigned against official corruption, organized major anti-Kremlin protests and ran for public office.

In Putin's Russia, political activists often faded amid factional disputes or went into exile after imprisonment, suspected poisonings or other repression. But Navalny grew consistently stronger and reached the apex of the opposition through grit, bravado and an acute understanding of how social media could circumvent the Kremlin's suffocation of independent news outlets.

He faced each setback — whether a physical assault or imprisonment — with intense devotion and sardonic wit. When authorities put Navalny in a tiny cell because of minor infractions — allowing access to a narrow exercise yard only in the early morning — he joked: "Few things are as refreshing as a walk in Yamal at 6:30 in the morning."

Navalny ally Lyubov Sobol told The Associated Press that Russia's repressive climate makes any rallies over his death risky, and "people could get long prison terms for taking part in a peaceful protest."

In the absence of a "guiding star" like Navalny, she said, "people will have an even greater fear of repressions, seeing the government's impunity."

A woman laying flowers for Navalny at a Moscow memorial said he was "the last beacon of hope for anything to change, and that hope died today. So the only thing I want to do now is cry, I have no more words." She identified herself only by her first name, Elmira, for fear of repression.

Navalny was born in Butyn, about 40 kilometers (25 miles) outside Moscow. He received a law degree

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from People's Friendship University in 1998 and did a fellowship at Yale in 2010.

He gained attention by focusing on corruption in Russia's murky mix of politicians and businesses; one of his early moves was buying a stake in oil and gas companies to become an activist shareholder and push for transparency.

His work had pocketbook appeal to Russians' widespread sense of being cheated, carrying stronger resonance than abstract concerns about democracy and human rights.

He was convicted in 2013 of embezzlement on what he called a politically motivated prosecution and was sentenced to five years in prison, but the prosecutor's office surprisingly demanded his release pending appeal. A higher court later gave him a suspended sentence.

A day before the sentence, Navalny registered as a candidate for Moscow mayor. The opposition saw his release as the result of large protests over his sentence, but many observers attributed it to a desire by authorities to add a tinge of legitimacy to the race.

Navalny finished second, an impressive performance against an incumbent who was backed by Putin's political machine and was popular for improving Moscow's infrastructure.

Navalny's acclaim increased after the leading charismatic politician, Boris Nemtsov, was shot and killed in 2015 on a bridge near the Kremlin.

Whenever Putin spoke about Navalny, he made it a point to never utter his name, referring to him as "that person" or similar wording, in an apparent effort to diminish his importance.

In opposition circles, Navalny was often viewed as having an overly nationalist streak for supporting the rights of ethnic Russians — he backed the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by Moscow in 2014 although most nations viewed it as illegal — but he was able to mostly override those reservations via investigations conducted by his Fund for Fighting Corruption.

Although state-controlled TV ignored Navalny, his investigations resonated with younger Russians via YouTube and posts on his website and social media accounts. The strategy helped him reach the hinterlands far from the political and cultural centers of Moscow and St. Petersburg and establish a strong network of regional offices.

His work broadened from focusing on corruption to criticism of the political system under Putin. He was a galvanizing figure in protests of unprecedented size against dubious national election results and the exclusion of independent candidates.

Navalny got attention using pithy phrases and a potent image. His description of Putin's power-base United Russia as "the party of crooks and thieves" gained instant popularity.

In 2017, after an assailant threw green-hued disinfectant in his face, seriously damaging an eye, Navalny joked that people were comparing him to the superhero the Hulk.

Much worse was to come.

While in jail in 2019 for an election protest, he was hospitalized for what authorities called an allergic reaction, but some doctors said it appeared to be poisoning.

A year later, he fell severely ill on a flight to Moscow from the Siberian city of Tomsk. The plane made an emergency landing in the city of Omsk, where he spent two days in a hospital before being flown to Germany for treatment.

Doctors there determined he had been poisoned with a strain of Novichok — similar to the nerve agent that nearly killed former Russian spy Sergei Skripal in 2018. Navalny was in a medically induced coma for about two weeks.

The Kremlin vehemently denied it was behind the poisoning, but Navalny challenged that with an audacious move: releasing the recording of a call he said he made to an alleged member of the Federal Security Service, or FSB, who purportedly carried out the poisoning and then tried to cover it up. The FSB called the recording a fake.

Russian authorities then announced that while in Germany, Navalny had violated the terms of a suspended sentence in one of his convictions and that he would be arrested if he returned home.

Navalny and his wife nevertheless flew to Moscow on Jan. 17, 2021. On arrival, he told waiting journalists



he was pleased to be back, walked to passport control and into custody.

Last month, he explained why he returned, saying: "I don't want to give up either my country or my beliefs."

Just over two weeks after his return, he was tried, convicted and sentenced to 2½ years in prison. That sparked massive protests reaching to Russia's farthest corners and saw police detain over 10,000 people.

As part of a massive opposition crackdown that followed, a Moscow court in 2021 outlawed Navalny's Foundation for Fighting Corruption and about 40 regional offices as extremist, a verdict that exposed members of his team to prosecution.

When Putin sent troops to invade Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022, Navalny strongly condemned it in social media posts from prison and during his court hearings.

Less than a month after the war began, he received another nine-year term for embezzlement and contempt of court in a case he said was fabricated. Last August, he was convicted of extremism and sentenced to 19 years in prison.

When a film called "Navalny" about his story won an Academy Award for best documentary in 2023, his wife told the ceremony: "My husband is in prison just for telling the truth. My husband is in prison just for defending democracy. Alexei, I am dreaming of the day you will be free and our country will be free."

Besides his wife, he is survived by a son and a daughter.

## Judge declares a mistrial in a former Ohio deputy's murder trial

By SAMANTHA HENDRICKSON Associated Press/Report For America

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — A former Ohio sheriff's deputy charged in the killing of a Black man remained free Friday, after a jury couldn't agree on a verdict and the judge twice declared a mistrial, ending tumultuous proceedings that saw four jurors dismissed.

Jason Meade was charged with murder and reckless homicide in the December 2020 killing of Casey Goodson Jr. in Columbus. Meade, who is white, shot Goodson six times, including five times in the back, as the 23-year-old man tried to enter his grandmother's home.

Judge David Young had already declared a mistrial Friday morning, but retracted it minutes later and commended the jurors for their hard work. Jurors came to Young again to say they couldn't agree and he instructed them to keep trying. He declared a final mistrial about two hours after that, when jurors — some of whom were crying — said they were deadlocked.

Young will meet with prosecutors and defense lawyers in the near future to decide how to proceed with the case, but it wasn't clear Friday when that would happen.

Sean Walton, an attorney for the Goodson family, told reporters that while there was indeed a mistrial, there were still jurors who clearly considered all the evidence and thought Meade was guilty.

"There were jurors back there that obviously felt that Jason Meade was responsible for the unjustifiable killing of Casey Goodson. And that should make a statement," Walton said.

The nearly four years since Goodson was killed have been a "rollercoaster of extremes" for his family, Walton said.

Meade's attorney, Mark Collins, expressed gratitude for how hard the jurors worked to be "as fair and impartial as possible," and said he and Meade are "ready to go," if a second trial is set.

"This is just the first step in the process," Collins said.

The special prosecutors who handled the case did not comment before leaving the courthouse. Franklin County Prosecuting Attorney G. Gary Tyack's office issued a news release saying their thoughts are with the Goodson family, and that they will decide whether to retry the case after a review.

Jurors also left the courthouse without speaking to reporters.

Meade testified that Goodson waved a gun at him as the two drove past each other so he pursued Goodson because he feared for his life and the lives of others. He said he eventually shot Goodson in the doorway of his grandmother's home because the young man turned toward him with a gun.

Goodson's family and prosecutors have said he was holding a sandwich bag in one hand and his keys

in the other when he was fatally shot. They do not dispute that Goodson may have been carrying a gun and note he had a license to carry a firearm.

Goodson's weapon was found on his grandmother's kitchen floor with the safety mechanism engaged.

There is no body camera video of the shooting, and prosecutors repeatedly asserted that Meade is the only person who testified Goodson was holding a gun. Meade was not wearing a body camera.

During closing arguments on Wednesday, prosecutors said Meade's claims about Goodson posing a threat were simply not credible. Defense lawyers insisted that the evidence in the case was consistent with Meade's testimony.

The jury was unsettled throughout the trial. One juror was dismissed and an alternate was elevated to the main panel during testimony, and three other jurors were dismissed and replaced with alternates during deliberations, forcing the jury to restart multiple times.

Court officials did not say why the jurors were removed, but they can be dismissed for a number of reasons, including if they fall sick, research the case outside the deliberation room, or talk about it to someone outside the court.

Goodson was among several Black people killed by white Ohio law enforcement over the last decade — deaths that have all sparked national outrage and cries for police reform.

Since 2014, at least three Black children have been shot and killed by Ohio law enforcement, including Tamir Rice in Cleveland, age 12, in 2014; Tyre King in Columbus, age 13, in 2016; and Ma'Khia Bryant in Columbus, age 16, in 2021.

John Crawford III in Beavercreek in 2014; Samuel DuBose in Cincinnati in 2015; Andre Hill in Columbus in 2020; Miles Jackson in Westerville in 2021; Donovan Lewis in Columbus in 2022; Jayland Walker in Akron in 2022; and Ta'Kiya Young, who was pregnant, in Columbus in 2023 also all died at the hands of white law enforcement officers.

Some of the officers involved were never charged or have been cleared of charges. Columbus police Officers Adam Coy, who killed Andre Hill, and Ricky Anderson, who killed Donovan Lewis, await trial in Franklin County on murder charges.

## **Nerve agents, poison and window falls. Kremlin foes have been attacked or killed over the years**

By DASHA LITVINOVA and EMMA BURROWS Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — The attacks range from the exotic — poisoned by drinking polonium-laced tea or touching a deadly nerve agent — to the more mundane of getting shot at close range. Some take a fatal plunge from an open window.

Over the years, Kremlin political critics, turncoat spies and investigative journalists have been killed or assaulted in a variety of ways.

On Friday, Russian authorities said President Vladimir Putin's key political challenger, Alexei Navalny, died in an Arctic prison colony. The details of what happened are unknown; Navalny's team says it has no official confirmation of his death and Russian authorities say they are establishing why he died. His allies previously accused Russian officials of trying to poison him with a nerve agent in 2020.

Assassination attempts against foes of Putin have been common during his nearly quarter century in power. Those close to the victims and the few survivors have blamed Russian authorities, but the Kremlin has routinely denied involvement.

There also have been reports of prominent Russian executives dying under mysterious circumstances, including falling from windows, although whether they were deliberate killings or suicides is sometimes difficult to determine.

Some prominent cases of documented killings or attempted killings:

### **POLITICAL OPPONENTS**

In August 2020, Navalny fell ill on a flight from Siberia to Moscow. The plane landed in the city of Omsk, where Navalny was hospitalized in a coma. Two days later, he was airlifted to Berlin, where he recovered.

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His allies almost immediately said he was poisoned, but Russian officials denied it. Labs in Germany, France and Sweden confirmed Navalny was poisoned by a Soviet-era nerve agent known as Novichok, which he reported had been applied to his underwear.

Navalny returned to Russia and was convicted last August of extremism and sentenced to 19 years in prison. It was his third conviction with a prison sentence in two years. He said the charges were politically motivated.

On Friday, Russia's Federal Penitentiary Service said Navalny felt unwell after a walk and lost consciousness. An ambulance arrived, but he could not be revived. The service said his cause of death was "being established."

In 2018, Pyotr Verzilov, a founder of the protest group Pussy Riot, fell severely ill and also was flown to Berlin, where doctors said poisoning was "highly plausible." He eventually recovered. Earlier that year, Verzilov embarrassed the Kremlin by running onto the field during soccer's World Cup final in Moscow with three other activists to protest police brutality. His allies said he could have been targeted because of his activism.

Prominent opposition figure Vladimir Kara-Murza survived what he believes were attempts to poison him in 2015 and 2017. He nearly died from kidney failure in the first instance and suspects poisoning but no cause was determined. He was hospitalized with a similar illness in 2017 and put into a medically induced coma. His wife said doctors confirmed he was poisoned.

Kara-Murza survived, and his lawyer says police have refused to investigate. Last year, he was convicted of treason and sentenced to 25 years in prison. In January he was moved to a prison in Siberia and placed in solitary confinement over an alleged minor infraction.

The highest profile killing of a political opponent in recent years was that of Boris Nemtsov. Once deputy prime minister under Boris Yeltsin, Nemtsov was a popular politician and harsh critic of Putin. On a cold February night in 2015, he was gunned down by assailants on a bridge adjacent to the Kremlin as he walked with his girlfriend in a death that shocked the country.

Five men from the Russian region of Chechnya were convicted for his killing, with the gunman receiving up to 20 years. But Nemtsov's allies said that was an attempt to shift blame from the government.

## FORMER INTELLIGENCE OPERATIVES

In 2006, Russian defector Alexander Litvinenko, a former agent for the KGB and its post-Soviet successor agency, the FSB, became violently ill in London after drinking tea laced with radioactive polonium-210. He died three weeks later.

Litvinenko had been investigating the shooting death of Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya as well as the Russian intelligence service's alleged links to organized crime. Before dying, Litvinenko told journalists the FSB was still operating a poisons laboratory dating from the Soviet era.

A British inquiry found that Russian agents had killed Litvinenko, probably with Putin's approval, but the Kremlin denied any involvement.

Another former Russian intelligence officer, Sergei Skripal, was poisoned in Britain in 2018. He and his adult daughter Yulia fell ill in the city of Salisbury and spent weeks in critical condition. They survived, but the attack later claimed the life of a British woman and left a man and a police officer seriously ill.

Authorities said they both were poisoned with the military grade nerve agent Novichok. Britain blamed Russian intelligence, but Moscow denied any role. Putin called Skripal, a double agent for Britain during his espionage career, a "scumbag" of no interest to the Kremlin because he was tried in Russia and exchanged in a spy swap in 2010.

## JOURNALISTS

Numerous journalists critical of authorities in Russia have been killed or suffered mysterious deaths, which their colleagues in some cases blamed on someone in the political hierarchy. In other cases, the reported reluctance by authorities to investigate raised suspicions.

Politkovskaya, the journalist for the newspaper Novaya Gazeta whose death Litvinenko was investigating, was shot and killed in the elevator of her Moscow apartment building on Oct. 7, 2006 — Putin's birthday. She had won international acclaim for her reporting on human rights abuses in Chechnya. The gunman,

from Chechnya, was convicted of the killing and sentenced to 20 years in prison. Four other Chechens were given shorter prison terms for their involvement in the murder.

Yuri Shchekochikhin, another Novaya Gazeta reporter, died of a sudden and violent illness in 2003. Shchekochikhin was investigating corrupt business deals and the possible role of Russian security services in the 1999 apartment house bombings blamed on Chechen insurgents. His colleagues insisted that he was poisoned and accused the authorities of deliberately hindering the investigation.

## YEVGENY PRIGOZHIN AND HIS LIEUTENANTS

A plane crash last August which killed Yevgeny Prigozhin and top lieutenants of his Wagner private military company came two months to the day after he launched an armed rebellion that Putin labeled "a stab in the back" and "treason." While not critical of Putin, Prigozhin slammed the Russian military leadership and questioned the motives for going to war in Ukraine.

A U.S. intelligence assessment found that the crash that killed all 10 people aboard was intentionally caused by an explosion, according to U.S. and Western officials. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment. One said the explosion fell in line with Putin's "long history of trying to silence his critics."

Putin's spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, rejected allegations the Kremlin was behind the crash. "Of course, in the West those speculations are put out under a certain angle, and all of it is a complete lie," he told reporters.

In his first public comments after the crash, Putin appeared to hint there was no bad blood between him and Prigozhin. But former Kremlin speechwriter turned political analyst Abbas Gallyamov said: "Putin has demonstrated that if you fail to obey him without question, he will dispose of you without mercy, like an enemy, even if you are formally a patriot."

## Tech companies sign accord to combat AI-generated election trickery

By MATT O'BRIEN and ALI SWENSON Associated Press

Major technology companies signed a pact Friday to voluntarily adopt "reasonable precautions" to prevent artificial intelligence tools from being used to disrupt democratic elections around the world.

Executives from Adobe, Amazon, Google, IBM, Meta, Microsoft, OpenAI and TikTok gathered at the Munich Security Conference to announce a new framework for how they respond to AI-generated deepfakes that deliberately trick voters. Twelve other companies — including Elon Musk's X — are also signing on to the accord.

"Everybody recognizes that no one tech company, no one government, no one civil society organization is able to deal with the advent of this technology and its possible nefarious use on their own," said Nick Clegg, president of global affairs for Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram, in an interview ahead of the summit.

The accord is largely symbolic, but targets increasingly realistic AI-generated images, audio and video "that deceptively fake or alter the appearance, voice, or actions of political candidates, election officials, and other key stakeholders in a democratic election, or that provide false information to voters about when, where, and how they can lawfully vote."

The companies aren't committing to ban or remove deepfakes. Instead, the accord outlines methods they will use to try to detect and label deceptive AI content when it is created or distributed on their platforms. It notes the companies will share best practices with each other and provide "swift and proportionate responses" when that content starts to spread.

The vagueness of the commitments and lack of any binding requirements likely helped win over a diverse swath of companies, but disappointed advocates were looking for stronger assurances.

"The language isn't quite as strong as one might have expected," said Rachel Orey, senior associate director of the Elections Project at the Bipartisan Policy Center. "I think we should give credit where credit is due, and acknowledge that the companies do have a vested interest in their tools not being used to



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undermine free and fair elections. That said, it is voluntary, and we'll be keeping an eye on whether they follow through."

Clegg said each company "quite rightly has its own set of content policies."

"This is not attempting to try to impose a straitjacket on everybody," he said. "And in any event, no one in the industry thinks that you can deal with a whole new technological paradigm by sweeping things under the rug and trying to play whack-a-mole and finding everything that you think may mislead someone."

Several political leaders from Europe and the U.S. also joined Friday's announcement. European Commission Vice President Vera Jourova said while such an agreement can't be comprehensive, "it contains very impactful and positive elements." She also urged fellow politicians to take responsibility to not use AI tools deceptively and warned that AI-fueled disinformation could bring about "the end of democracy, not only in the EU member states."

The agreement at the German city's annual security meeting comes as more than 50 countries are due to hold national elections in 2024. Bangladesh, Taiwan, Pakistan and most recently Indonesia have already done so.

Attempts at AI-generated election interference have already begun, such as when AI robocalls that mimicked U.S. President Joe Biden's voice tried to discourage people from voting in New Hampshire's primary election last month.

Just days before Slovakia's elections in November, AI-generated audio recordings impersonated a candidate discussing plans to raise beer prices and rig the election. Fact-checkers scrambled to identify them as false as they spread across social media.

Politicians also have experimented with the technology, from using AI chatbots to communicate with voters to adding AI-generated images to ads.

The accord calls on platforms to "pay attention to context and in particular to safeguarding educational, documentary, artistic, satirical, and political expression."

It said the companies will focus on transparency to users about their policies and work to educate the public about how they can avoid falling for AI fakes.

Most companies have previously said they're putting safeguards on their own generative AI tools that can manipulate images and sound, while also working to identify and label AI-generated content so that social media users know if what they're seeing is real. But most of those proposed solutions haven't yet rolled out and the companies have faced pressure to do more.

That pressure is heightened in the U.S., where Congress has yet to pass laws regulating AI in politics, leaving companies to largely govern themselves.

The Federal Communications Commission recently confirmed AI-generated audio clips in robocalls are against the law, but that doesn't cover audio deepfakes when they circulate on social media or in campaign advertisements.

Many social media companies already have policies in place to deter deceptive posts about electoral processes — AI-generated or not. Meta says it removes misinformation about "the dates, locations, times, and methods for voting, voter registration, or census participation" as well as other false posts meant to interfere with someone's civic participation.

Jeff Allen, co-founder of the Integrity Institute and a former Facebook data scientist, said the accord seems like a "positive step" but he'd still like to see social media companies taking other actions to combat misinformation, such as building content recommendation systems that don't prioritize engagement above all else.

Lisa Gilbert, executive vice president of the advocacy group Public Citizen, argued Friday that the accord is "not enough" and AI companies should "hold back technology" such as hyper-realistic text-to-video generators "until there are substantial and adequate safeguards in place to help us avert many potential problems."

In addition to the companies that helped broker Friday's agreement, other signatories include chatbot developers Anthropic and Inflection AI; voice-clone startup ElevenLabs; chip designer Arm Holdings; se-

curity companies McAfee and TrendMicro; and Stability AI, known for making the image-generator Stable Diffusion.

Notably absent is another popular AI image-generator, Midjourney. The San Francisco-based startup didn't immediately respond to a request for comment Friday.

The inclusion of X — not mentioned in an earlier announcement about the pending accord — was one of the surprises of Friday's agreement. Musk sharply curtailed content-moderation teams after taking over the former Twitter and has described himself as a "free speech absolutist."

In a statement Friday, X CEO Linda Yaccarino said "every citizen and company has a responsibility to safeguard free and fair elections."

"X is dedicated to playing its part, collaborating with peers to combat AI threats while also protecting free speech and maximizing transparency," she said.

## Israel's defense chief says military 'thoroughly planning' offensive in crowded Gaza border town

By JOSEF FEDERMAN, WAFAA SHURAFU and BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israel's defense minister on Friday said Israel is "thoroughly planning" a military offensive in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, signaling determination to move ahead despite growing international concerns about the safety of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians seeking refuge there.

U.S. President Joe Biden has urged Israel not to carry out the operation without a "credible" plan to protect civilians and to instead focus on a cease-fire, while Egypt has said an operation could threaten diplomatic relations between the countries. Many other world leaders have issued similar messages of concern.

An estimated 1.4 million Palestinians, more than half of Gaza's population, have crammed into Rafah, most of them displaced by fighting elsewhere in the territory. Hundreds of thousands are living in sprawling tent camps.

Speaking to reporters Friday, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said that Israel has inflicted heavy losses on Hamas during a war that is now in its fifth month and that Rafah is "the next Hamas center of gravity" Israel plans to target.

"We are thoroughly planning future operations in Rafah, which is a significant Hamas stronghold," he said. He declined to say when the operation might begin, though Israel has previously said it will first develop a plan to evacuate civilians.

Palestinians and international aid agencies say there is no safe place to go, with Israel also carrying out strikes in areas where it had told civilians to seek shelter, including Rafah.

The Israeli military launched its war in response to a cross-border Hamas attack on Oct. 7 that killed some 1,200 people in Israel and took 250 others hostage. The air and ground offensive has killed over 28,000 Palestinians, according to health authorities in the Hamas-run enclave, caused widespread destruction, displaced some 80% of the population and sparked a humanitarian crisis.

Egypt has repeatedly warned Israel not to push Palestinian civilians in Rafah across the border, saying a mass influx could lead to the end of the 1979 peace agreement between Israel and Egypt.

While some Israeli hard-liners have called for the expulsion of Palestinians from Gaza, Gallant said there were no plans to do so.

"The state of Israel has no intention of evacuating Palestinian civilians to Egypt," he said. "We respect and value our peace agreement with Egypt, which is a cornerstone of stability in the region as well as an important partner."

New satellite photos, however, indicate that Egypt is preparing for that very scenario. The images show Egypt building a wall and leveling land near its border with Gaza. Egyptian officials did not respond to requests for comment.

The Israeli offensive has included months of airstrikes as well as a ground invasion that has steadily moved southward through most of Gaza.

In recent weeks, it has focused on Khan Younis, Gaza's second-largest city and a Hamas stronghold.

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On Friday, Palestinian health officials in Khan Younis said that five patients in intensive care died after their oxygen ran out following a raid by Israeli troops in southern Gaza's largest hospital.

The Israeli army has been searching the Nasser Hospital complex, arresting suspected Hamas militants and searching for evidence that the remains of Israeli hostages abducted by Hamas might be there. Israel says it does not target patients or doctors, but staff say the facility is struggling under heavy fire and dwindling supplies, including food and water.

Gallant said 70 suspected militants have been arrested at the hospital, including 20 who allegedly participated in the Oct. 7 attack.

Two Israeli airstrikes on Rafah overnight killed at least 13 people, including nine members of the same family, according to hospital officials.

Also on Friday, a Palestinian assailant opened fire at a bus stop on a busy intersection in southern Israel, killing two people and wounding four before being shot dead by a bystander. There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

## CEASE-FIRE STALLING

Negotiations over a cease-fire in Gaza, meanwhile, appear to have stalled, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Friday pushed back hard against the U.S. vision for after the war — particularly its calls for the creation of a Palestinian state.

After speaking overnight with Biden and reportedly meeting with visiting CIA chief William Burns, Netanyahu wrote on X that Israel will not accept "international dictates regarding a permanent settlement with the Palestinians."

He said that if other countries unilaterally recognize a Palestinian state, it would give a "reward to terrorism."

Netanyahu has repeatedly rejected creation of a Palestinian state and even boasted about having been instrumental in preventing it during his time in office.

His governing coalition is dominated by hard-liners who oppose Palestinian independence and any diplomatic process would likely lead to the collapse of the government.

Netanyahu has vowed to continue the offensive until Hamas is destroyed and the more than 100 hostages who remain in captivity are freed.

Biden on Friday urged Netanyahu to put off a Rafah operation and instead pursue a cease-fire that could include the release of Israeli hostages.

"I'm still hopeful that that can be done and, in the meantime, I don't anticipate, I'm hoping that, that the Israelis will not make any massive land invasion," Biden said. "My hope and expectation is that we'll get this hostage deal."

## UNRWA UNDER PRESSURE AGAIN

Gallant released new Israeli allegations against the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, including a photo of what he said was a U.N. social worker participating in the kidnapping of an Israeli on Oct. 7.

Israel has long accused UNRWA of collaborating with Hamas or turning a blind eye to the militant group's activities.

Throughout the war, it has released images of tunnels built next to UNRWA facilities and last month it claimed that 12 UNRWA employees had actively participated in the Oct. 7 massacre.

That prompted the United States and other donor countries to suspend funding to UNRWA, the main provider of humanitarian aid in Gaza. The agency says it will have to halt operations by the end of the month if funding isn't restored.

UNRWA denies collaborating with Hamas. It already has dismissed the employees accused in the Oct. 7 attacks and launched a pair of investigations into its operations.

In his presentation to reporters, Gallant said Israeli intelligence has "significant indications" that more than 30 additional UNRWA workers joined the Oct. 7 attack.

He said nearly 1,500 workers, 12% of its work force, are members of Hamas or the Islamic Jihad militant group, and over 230 are in their armed wings.

"UNRWA has lost legitimacy and can no longer function as a U.N. body," he said. He said he has ordered Israeli authorities to begin working with alternative organizations that could replace UNRWA.

UNRWA's commissioner, Philippe Lazzarini, says he takes the allegations seriously but has also pointed out that the 12 workers identified by Israel are a tiny fraction of UNRWA's overall work force. He has warned that a halt in operations could endanger the well-being of Gazans who depend on the agency.

The agency did not comment on Gallant's latest accusations, but has said it regularly provides the names of its workers to Israel and takes action against anyone found to be violating U.N. rules of neutrality.

"These shocking allegations come as more than 2 million people in Gaza depend on lifesaving assistance that the agency has been providing since the war began," Lazzarini said last month.

"Anyone who betrays the fundamental values of the United Nations also betrays those whom we serve in Gaza, across the region and elsewhere around the world," he added.

## **In the chaos of the Kansas City parade shooting, he's hit and doesn't know where his kids are**

By NICK INGRAM and JOHN HANNA Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Jacob Gooch was having what was sure to be the best day of his year, hanging out with his wife and children and friends in the massive, happy, high-fiving crowd of fellow Kansas City Chiefs fans at the parade celebrating their Super Bowl victory. Then he heard "pop, pop, pop, pop, pop, pop," and saw flying debris and people coming toward him.

He didn't realize it was gunshots until after he felt his ankle or foot burning. He tried to run but collapsed and army-crawled up a median. People asked him what was happening, and he told them, get down; get away! His wife was there, and she had been hit. His daughter and two sons? Where were they? And why couldn't he walk?

"It was bullets, and it was panic, and it was like, 'Oh, are they going to shoot again?'" he said Thursday, the day after the parade. "We had to get our kids and take cover, and I couldn't help get our kids, and that killed me. I had to sit there and just wonder what was going to happen next."

Gooch, his wife and his oldest son, 13, were among 23 people shot at the end of Wednesday's parade, one of them fatally: Lisa Lopez-Galvan, a 43-year-old DJ known as Lisa G. and host of a local radio show on Tejano music.

Police say the shooting appears to have stemmed from a dispute among several people in a crowd of perhaps a million people watching the parade. Two juveniles face what prosecutors said were "gun-related and resisting arrest" charges. Gooch said his wife and daughter saw someone pull a gun.

Gooch was shot in the ankle, and the bullet broke a couple of bones before exiting through his foot. His wife was shot in the calf but could walk. His oldest son has a bullet in his foot. Officers or paramedics got them into a medical tent, and they eventually went to a hospital.

Gooch, a 37-year-old resident of Leavenworth, Kansas, about 25 miles northwest of Union Station, related his experiences in an Associated Press interview outside his apartment, his crutches leaning against the door jamb behind him. He wore a Chiefs cap and T-shirt.

He said he, his family and friends were in a crowd leaving the celebration in front of Union Station when the shooting started.

"We had heard a lady telling a guy, 'Not right now. This isn't the time or this isn't the place,' or something like that. And then pop, pop, pop, pop, pop, pop. You know, now, in my head, I'm thinking it's fireworks," Gooch said. "What I'm about to describe is all within, like, four seconds, real quick."

Gooch said he is expecting three to six months of physical rehabilitation for his injuries, and he will be off work. His disability benefits were arranged quickly because he messaged his boss after getting shot — and, he said, did a Snapchat professionally.

"I don't want people to be scared. I mean, this could happen anywhere at any time. It's like, OK, I'm scared. I just gotta keep going," he said.

Gooch said his family is now unsure about hanging out outside Union Station at another Super Bowl



parade. He is not, and he expects to go back for a parade for another championship next year. "I took a bullet for y'all. Y'all better go back next year," Gooch said.

## Satellite photos show Egypt building a wall near Gaza Strip as Israeli offensive on Rafah looms

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Egypt is building a wall and is leveling land near its border with the Gaza Strip ahead of a planned Israeli offensive targeting the border city of Rafah, satellite images analyzed Friday by The Associated Press show.

Egypt, which has not publicly acknowledged the construction, repeatedly has warned Israel not to forcibly expel the more than 1 million displaced Palestinians now in Rafah into its territory while Israeli troops battle the militant group Hamas for a fifth month.

Israel's defense minister said Friday that Israel has "no intention" of pushing Palestinian civilians across the border into Egypt. However, the preparations on the Egyptian side of the border in the Sinai Peninsula suggested that Cairo is preparing for such a mass ejection, a scenario that could threaten a 1979 peace deal with Israel that's been a linchpin for regional security.

The Egyptian government did not respond to requests for comment Friday from the AP. The Egyptian Foreign Ministry on Feb. 11 issued a statement warning Israel over the possible Rafah offensive and its "displacement of the Palestinian people."

The satellite images, taken Thursday by Maxar Technologies, show ongoing construction on the wall, which sits along the Sheikh Zuweid-Rafah Road some 3.5 kilometers (2 miles) west of the border with Gaza. The images show cranes, trucks and what appear to be precast concrete barriers being set up along the road.

Those satellite images correspond to features seen in a video released by the London-based Sinai Foundation for Human Rights on Feb. 12. The video shows a crane lifting concrete walls into place along the road.

The construction "is intended to create a high-security gated and isolated area near the borders with the Gaza Strip, in preparation for the reception of Palestinian refugees in the case of (a) mass exodus," the foundation said.

Nearby as well, construction crews appear to be leveling and clearing ground for an unknown purpose. That can also be seen in imagery from Planet Labs PBC of the area. The Wall Street Journal, quoting anonymous Egyptian officials, described "an 8-square-mile (20-square-kilometer) walled enclosure" being built in the area that could accommodate over 100,000 people.

Homes and farmland in the area previously had been razed during Egypt's war on an affiliate of the Islamic State group in the area.

Hard-line officials within Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government have raised the possibility of pushing Palestinians out of Gaza despite strong opposition from Israel's main ally, the United States. The Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank are lands the Palestinians hope to have for their future state.

Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, a member of the country's three-man War Cabinet, said Friday that there were no plans to push Palestinians into Egypt.

"The state of Israel has no intention of evacuating Palestinian civilians to Egypt," Gallant told reporters. "We respect and value our peace agreement with Egypt, which is a cornerstone of stability in the region as well as an important partner."

A report by the Israeli Intelligence Ministry, drafted six days after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack in southern Israel that killed 1,200 people and saw over 250 others taken hostage, included a proposal of moving Gaza's civilian population to tent cities in the northern Sinai, then building permanent cities and an undefined humanitarian corridor.

In the time since, the Israel-Hamas war has laid wide swaths of the seaside enclave to waste and killed more than 28,600 people, mostly women and children, according to the Health Ministry in Gaza.

## A chaotic US House is losing three Republican committee chairs to retirement in the span of a week

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a single week, the Republican chairs of three House committees announced they would not be seeking reelection, raising questions about whether the chaos that has reigned this Congress is driving out some of the GOP's top talent.

What makes the retirements particularly noteworthy is that none of the chairs were at risk of losing their position due to the term limits that House Republicans impose on their committee leaders. They conceivably could have returned to the same leadership roles in the next Congress, but chose instead to leave and give up jobs they had worked years to obtain.

"They would clearly rather be home with their family than in Washington with a dysfunctional Congress," said Republican strategist Doug Heye. "I would have said this to you 10 years ago, but it's just gotten worse. Congress has become a bad workplace."

The three are Reps. Cathy McMorris Rodgers of Washington, Mike Gallagher of Wisconsin and Mark Green of Tennessee.

McMorris Rodgers was the first to announce she would be leaving after four years as the top GOP member on the Energy and Commerce Committee, one of the most prestigious panels on Capitol Hill. Past chairmen such as Republican Billy Tauzin helped add prescription drug coverage to the Medicare program, while Democrat Henry Waxman authored the Affordable Care Act, expanding health coverage for millions of Americans.

The second retirement announcement came from the new chair of a special committee focused on China. Gallagher, announced "with a heavy heart," he would not seek reelection.

Gallagher's announcement came days after he voted against impeaching Homeland Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, frustrating the right flank of the GOP and generating a likely primary challenge. But Gallagher told the local Fox affiliate in his Wisconsin district that he and his wife were thinking about his leaving Congress long before the impeachment vote. He also said the pushback was nothing compared to what he endured when he refused to object to the Electoral College count in 2021.

And, on Wednesday, Rep. Green, now in just his second year as chair of the Homeland Security Committee, announced he would not seek reelection. The move came one day after he led the Mayorkas impeachment vote on the House floor. He said he wanted to get in front of a pending story about his retirement that had leaked to the press.

Green came the closest to acknowledging the chaos of the last 14 months played a role in his decision.

"Well, the work to productivity ratio may have had a little bit to do with it," Green said.

He said Republicans would have to increase their majority in the House to get anything done.

"So I'm going to go do a few other things," Green said.

McMorris Rodgers said chairing the Energy and Commerce Committee has been the best position that she's had in her 10 terms in Congress. She said there were a lot of factors in her decision "and it was mostly about my family."

"It was a difficult decision. I've worked very hard and I'm proud of what we accomplished, but for me, this was the time," she said.

Gallagher also said it was time for him to go.

"The Framers intended citizens to serve in Congress for a season and then return to their private lives. Electoral politics was never supposed to be a career and, trust me, Congress is no place to grow old. And so, with a heavy heart, I have decided not to run for reelection," Gallagher said.

Rep. Frank Lucas, R-Okla., said he believes the exodus includes the possibility that Republicans could be serving in the minority next year if they lose the House in the November election.

"Who wants to finish your career here in the minority?" Lucas said. "It's also a frustration with the difficulty of legislating at this time because of issues within factions and the balanced nature of the House membership."

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He also noted that there's been no cost-of-living adjustment for lawmakers. At \$174,000 a year, they make the same wage they did 15 years ago.

"Most of these members are experienced people on really important, relevant committees and the outside world realizes their skill sets, and they're probably trying to pull them," he said.

Lucas, who chairs the House Science, Space and Technology Committee, said he's not considering stepping down any time soon. He recalled how former Rep. Don Young of Alaska, the longest serving Republican member in the House before his death in 2022, admonished him during a particularly tough day.

"He looks me in the eye and says 'Lucas, people like you and I were here when this place still worked. We can't leave because if you leave before we get back to that point, some of these underclassmen don't have a clue about how things are supposed to happen, how to do anything'" Lucas said.

Rep. Byron Donalds, R-Fla., had a different take, saying the turnover is actually a good thing for the House. He said members of Congress are isolated because they go from meeting to meeting and from dinners to conferences.

"We're not living normal lives. I think having fresh perspectives come in is the best thing for the system," Donalds said.

Rep. Pete Aguilar, the chair of the House Democratic Caucus, called McMorris Rodgers and Gallagher "serious legislators who want to make things right."

"It's pretty clear, if you're holding a gavel and to say you're leaving, and you're not term-limited, I think it speaks volumes for where their side of the chamber is. And it's unfortunate, but that's where we are," Aguilar said.

The number of lawmakers retiring at the end of this term or seeking higher office stands at 44, with Democrats making up 23 of those members and Republicans 21. Republican Rep. Richard Hudson, the chair of the House Republican campaign arm, said all of the GOP members leaving are in safe Republican seats, but that some of the Democratic retirements would lead to "flips for us."

"I'm not concerned about it," Hudson said.

Heye, the Republican strategist, said the retirements of McMorris Rodgers, Green and Gallagher wouldn't make sense in normal times.

"It just makes sense in this current context of a broken Congress that can't do the good, normal work that it should be doing," Heye said.

He also doubted they would have many regrets about leaving.

"Every ex-member you talk to who is of some import, they're all happier now," Heye said. "They all see greener pastures now."

## UK voters deliver double blow to Rishi Sunak, electing Labour lawmakers in two special elections

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Beleaguered British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Friday urged voters, and his restless party, to stick with him after two English districts elected opposition-party lawmakers in seats that Sunak's Conservatives had held for years.

The results will worsen fears among Conservatives that, after 14 years in power, the party is heading for a drubbing when a national election is held in less than a year. The Tories consistently lag between 10 and 20 points behind the left-of-center Labour Party in nationwide opinion polls.

Labour candidate Damien Egan won the House of Commons seat of Kingswood in southwest England, and Labour's Gen Kitchen took Wellingborough in the country's center, results announced Friday showed. The Conservatives won both by large margins at the last national election in 2019 but saw support collapse in Thursday's special elections.

Reform U.K. — formerly known as the Brexit Party — came third, leaving the Conservatives facing pressure from the right as well as the left.

Labour leader Keir Starmer said the results "show people want change."

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But Sunak implored voters to “stick with our plan, because it is starting to deliver the change that the country wants and needs.”

“We’ve clearly been through a lot over the past couple of years as a country, but I genuinely believe at the start of this year we’re pointing in the right direction,” he told reporters.

Thursday’s elections replaced one lawmaker who quit to protest Sunak’s lack of commitment to green energy, and another who was ousted over allegations of bullying and sexual misconduct.

The Conservatives have now lost 10 by-elections since the last general election, more than any administration since the 1960s. That includes six defeats — and one win — since Sunak took office in October 2022. He replaced Liz Truss, who rocked the economy with a plan for unfunded tax cuts and lasted just seven weeks in office.

Sunak, the fifth Conservative leader since 2016, has restored a measure of stability, but failed to revive the governing party’s popularity.

The Conservatives have been in power nationally since 2010, years that saw austerity following the world banking crisis, Britain’s divisive decision to leave the European Union, a global pandemic and a European war that triggered the worst cost-of-living crisis in decades.

Polls show the Conservatives are losing support across the country, from affluent southern voters turned off by Brexit to working-class northern voters who switched from Labour for the 2019 election, when then-Prime Minister Boris Johnson promised to spread prosperity to long-neglected areas.

Those promises remain largely unmet, and Britain’s economic growth has come to a virtual standstill, with the country slipping into recession at the end of 2023 for the first time since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. That limits the government’s scope for wooing voters with pre-election tax cuts.

Victorious Kingswood candidate Egan said that “14 years of Conservative government have sucked the hope out of our country with a feeling that no matter how hard you work, you just can’t move forward.”

“It doesn’t have to be this way -- you know it, I know it, we all know it,” he said.

Conservative Party chairman Richard Holden called the results “very disappointing,” though the party said the low turnout — less than 40% of eligible voters cast ballots — was a sign British electors are not enthusiastic about Labour.

But University of Strathclyde polling expert John Curtice said the results confirmed that the Conservatives are in “very, very considerable electoral trouble.”

“The Conservatives are going to have to defeat the historical record to come back from where they are,” he told the BBC.

Sunak must call an election this year, though the exact date is up to him.

The Conservative losses may embolden Sunak’s many rivals in the fractious party, who are already positioning themselves for the leadership contest that would likely follow an election defeat. Some even want to oust Sunak sooner, replacing him with a hardliner who might win back voters from Reform, which wants to curb migration, cut taxes and scrap green-energy measures.

David Frost, a former Conservative Brexit minister, wrote on X: “To get voters back we need a shift to more conservative policy, on tax and spend, immigration, net zero, public sector reform, and more. It’s late, but not — yet — too late.”

As well as grappling with a stuttering economy, Sunak is trying to overcome a U.K. Supreme Court ban on his signature migration policy, a plan to send asylum-seekers who reach Britain across the English Channel on a one-way trip to Rwanda. The plan was announced almost two years ago, but no flights have taken off amid political and legal opposition.

Sunak’s only consolation is that Labour is also experiencing turbulence. Last week the party watered down a key green investment pledge, saying the Conservatives had left the economy too weak to honor the commitment.

Starmer also is struggling to stamp out allegations of antisemitism within the party. This week the party disowned its candidate for another special election after a newspaper published remarks he had made during a local party meeting claiming that Israel allowed Hamas’ Oct. 7 attack to happen as a pretext to



invade Gaza.

Critics say it's evidence Labour has not rooted out the antisemitism that festered under previous leader Jeremy Corbyn, a staunch supporter of the Palestinians and a critic of Israel. It's unclear whether the controversy has hurt Labour in opinion polls.

## **FBI informant charged with lying about Joe and Hunter Biden's ties to Ukrainian energy company**

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — An FBI informant has been charged with fabricating a multimillion-dollar bribery scheme involving President Joe Biden, his son Hunter and a Ukrainian energy company, a claim that is central to the Republican impeachment inquiry in Congress.

Alexander Smirnov falsely reported to the FBI in June 2020 that executives associated with the Ukrainian energy company Burisma paid Hunter and Joe Biden \$5 million each in 2015 or 2016, prosecutors said in an indictment. Smirnov told his handler that an executive claimed to have hired Hunter Biden to "protect us, through his dad, from all kinds of problems," according to court documents.

Prosecutors say Smirnov in fact had only routine business dealings with the company in 2017 and made the bribery allegations after he "expressed bias" against Joe Biden while he was a presidential candidate.

Smirnov, 43, appeared in court in Las Vegas briefly Thursday after being charged with making a false statement and creating a false and fictitious record. He did not enter a plea. The judge ordered the courtroom cleared after federal public defender Margaret Wightman Lambrose requested a closed hearing for arguments about sealing court documents. She declined to comment on the case.

The informant's claims have been central to the Republican effort in Congress to investigate the president and his family, and helped spark what is now a House impeachment inquiry into Biden. An attorney for Hunter Biden, who is expected to give a deposition later this month, said the charges show the probe is "based on dishonest, uncredible allegations and witnesses."

The top Democrat on the House Oversight and Accountability Committee, Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland, called for an end to the Biden impeachment inquiry.

Raskin said the allegations from the Republicans against Biden "have always been a tissue of lies built on conspiracy theories." He called on Speaker Mike Johnson, Oversight Committee Chairman James Comer and House Republicans "to stop promoting this nonsense and end their doomed impeachment inquiry."

Comer, R-Ky., downplayed the importance of the informant, who had figured centrally to the start of the probe.

"To be clear, the impeachment inquiry is not reliant on the FBI's FD-1023," Comer said in a statement, referring to the form documenting Smirnov's allegations.

The chairman said the inquiry "is based on a large record of evidence, including bank records and witness testimony," including interviews this week. He said the committee will continue to "follow the facts" and determine whether to proceed with articles of impeachment against Biden.

In the indictment, prosecutors say that Smirnov had contact with Burisma executives, but it was routine and actually took place in 2017, after President Barack Obama and Biden, his vice president, had left office -- when Biden would have had no ability to influence U.S. policy.

Smirnov "transformed his routine and unextraordinary business contacts with Burisma in 2017 and later into bribery allegations against Public Official 1, the presumptive nominee of one of the two major political parties for President, after expressing bias against Public Official 1 and his candidacy," the indictment said.

He repeated some of the false claims when he was interviewed by FBI agents in September 2023 and changed his story about others and "promoted a new false narrative after he said he met with Russian officials," prosecutors said.

If convicted, Smirnov faces a maximum penalty of 25 years in prison.

The charges were filed by Justice Department special counsel David Weiss, who has separately charged

Hunter Biden with firearm and tax violations.

The Burisma allegations became a flashpoint in Congress as Republicans pursuing investigations of President Joe Biden and his family demanded the FBI release the unredacted form documenting the allegations. They acknowledged they couldn't confirm if the allegations were true.

Comer had subpoenaed the FBI last year for the so-called FD-1023 document as Republicans deepened their probe of Biden and his son Hunter ahead of the 2024 presidential election.

Working alongside Comer, Republican Sen. Chuck Grassley of Iowa released an unclassified document that Republicans at the time claimed was significant in their investigation of Hunter Biden. It added to information that had been widely aired during Donald Trump's first impeachment trial involving Trump attorney Rudy Giuliani's efforts to dig up dirt on the Bidens ahead of the 2020 election. After Grassley released the document, the White House said the claims in it had been "debunked for years."

The impeachment inquiry into Biden over his son's business dealings has lagged in the House, but the panel is pushing ahead with its work.

Hunter Biden is expected to appear before the committee later this month. His attorney, Abbe Lowell, said he had long warned the probe was based on "lies told by people with political agendas, not facts. We were right and the air is out of their balloon."

A judge set a detention hearing for Feb. 20 for Smirnov, who was arrested at the Las Vegas airport after arriving in the U.S. from overseas.

## **Protests, poisoning and prison: The life and death of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny**

By EMMA BURROWS and DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

Alexei Navalny, Russia's top opposition leader and President Vladimir Putin's fiercest foe, died in prison on Friday, a statement from the Federal Penitentiary Service said.

Navalny, who was serving a 19-year sentence on charges of extremism, felt unwell after a walk and collapsed, it said. The politician's team had no immediate confirmation of his death.

Navalny was moved in December from his former prison in central Russia to to a "special regime" penal colony — the highest security level of prisons in Russia — above the Arctic Circle.

In a span of a decade, he went from being the Kremlin's biggest foe to Russia's most prominent political prisoner.

Here's a look at key events in Navalny's life, political activism and the charges he has faced through the years:

June 4, 1976 — Navalny is born in a western part of the Moscow region.

1997 — Graduates from Russia's RUDN university, where he majored in law; earns a degree in economics in 2001 while working as a lawyer.

2004 — Forms a movement against rampant overdevelopment in Moscow, according to his campaign website.

2008 — Gains notoriety for alleging corruption in state-run corporations, such as gas giant Gazprom and oil behemoth Rosneft, through his blogs and other posts.

2010 — Founds RosPil, an anti-corruption project run by a team of lawyers that analyzes spending of state agencies and companies, exposing violations and contesting them in court.

2011 — Establishes the Foundation for Fighting Corruption, which will become his team's main platform for exposing alleged graft among Russia's top political ranks.

December 2011 — Participates in mass protests sparked by reports of widespread rigging of Russia's parliamentary election, and is arrested and jailed for 15 days for "defying a government official."

March 2012 — Following President Vladimir Putin's reelection and inauguration, mass protests break out in Moscow and elsewhere. Navalny accuses key figures, including then-Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov and Chechnya's strongman leader, Ramzan Kadyrov, of corruption.

July 2012 — Russia's Investigative Committee charges Navalny with embezzlement involving Kirovles, a

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state-owned timber company in the Kirov region, while acting as an adviser to the local governor. Navalny rejects the allegations as politically motivated.

December 2012 — The Investigative Committee launches another probe into alleged embezzlement at a Navalny-linked Russian subsidiary of Yves Rocher, a French cosmetics company. Navalny again says the allegations are politically motivated.

2013 — Navalny runs for mayor in Moscow — a move the authorities not only allow but encourage in an attempt to put a veneer of democracy on the race that is designed to boost the profile of the incumbent, Sergei Sobyenin.

July 2013 — A court in Kirov convicts Navalny of embezzlement in the Kirovles case, sentencing him to five years in prison. The prosecution petitions to release Navalny from custody pending his appeal, and he resumes his campaign.

September 2013 — Official results show Navalny finishes second in the mayor's race behind Sobyenin, with 27% of the vote, after a successful electoral and fundraising campaign collecting an unprecedented 97.3 million rubles (\$2.9 million) from individual supporters.

October 2013 — A court hands Navalny a suspended sentence in the Kirovles case.

February 2014 — Navalny is placed under house arrest in connection with the Yves Rocher case and banned from using the internet. His blog continues to be updated regularly, presumably by his team, detailing alleged corruption by various Russian officials.

December 2014 — Navalny and his brother, Oleg, are found guilty of fraud in the Yves Rocher case. Navalny receives a 3 ½-year suspended sentence, while his brother is handed a prison term. Both appeal to the European Court of Human Rights.

December 2015 — Navalny's Foundation for Fighting Corruption releases its first long-form video — a YouTube documentary called "Chaika," which means "seagull" in Russian but is also the last name of then-Prosecutor General Yury Chaika. The 44-minute video accuses him of corruption and alleged ties to a notorious criminal group and has piled up 26 million views on YouTube. Chaika and other Russian officials deny the accusations.

February 2016 — The European Court of Human Rights rules that Russia violated Navalny's right to a fair trial in the Kirovles case, ordering the government to pay his legal costs and damages.

November 2016 — Russia's Supreme Court overturns Navalny's sentence and sends the case back to the original court in the city of Kirov for review.

December 2016 — Navalny announces he will run in Russia's 2018 presidential election.

February 2017 — The Kirov court retries Navalny and upholds his five-year suspended sentence from 2013.

March 2017 — Navalny releases a YouTube documentary accusing then-Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev of corruption, getting over seven million views in its first week. A series of anti-graft protests across Russia draw tens of thousands and there are mass arrests. Navalny tours the country to open campaign offices, holds big rallies and is jailed repeatedly for unauthorized demonstrations.

April 27, 2017 — Unidentified assailants throw a green disinfectant in his face, damaging his right eye. He blames the attack on the Kremlin.

October 2017 — The European Court of Human Rights finds Navalny's fraud conviction in the Yves Rocher case to be "arbitrary and manifestly unreasonable."

December 2017 — Russia's Central Electoral Commission bars him from running for president over his conviction in the Kirovles case, a move condemned by the EU as casting "serious doubt" on the election.

July 2019 — Members of Navalny's team, along with other opposition activists, are barred from running for Moscow city council, sparking protests that are violently dispersed, with thousands arrested. Navalny's team responds by promoting the "Smart Voting" strategy, encouraging the election of any candidate except those from the Kremlin's United Russia party. The strategy works, with the party losing its majority.

2020 — Navalny seeks to deploy the Smart Voting strategy during regional elections in September and tours Siberia as part of the effort.

Aug. 20, 2020 — On a flight from the city of Tomsk, where he was working with local activists, Navalny

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falls ill and the plane makes an emergency landing in nearby Omsk. Hospitalized in a coma, Navalny's team suspects he was poisoned.

Aug. 22, 2020 — A comatose Navalny is flown to a hospital in Berlin.

Aug. 24, 2020 — German authorities confirm Navalny was poisoned with a Soviet-era nerve agent. After he recovers, he blames the Kremlin, an accusation denied by Russian officials.

Jan. 17, 2021 — After five months in Germany, Navalny is arrested upon his return to Russia, with authorities alleging his recuperation abroad violated the terms of his suspended sentence in the Yves Rocher case. His arrest triggers some of the biggest protests in Russia in years. Thousands are arrested.

Feb. 2, 2021 — A Moscow court orders Navalny to serve 2 ½ years in prison for his parole violation. While in prison, Navalny stages a three-week hunger strike to protest a lack of medical treatment and sleep deprivation.

June 2021 — A Moscow court outlaws Navalny's Foundation for Fighting Corruption and about 40 regional offices as extremist, shutting down his political network. Close associates and team members face prosecution and leave Russia under pressure. Navalny maintains contact with his lawyers and team from prison, and they update his social media accounts.

Feb. 24, 2022 — Russia invades Ukraine. Navalny condemns the war in social media posts from prison and during his court appearances.

March 22, 2022 — Navalny is sentenced to an additional nine-year term for embezzlement and contempt of court in a case his supporters rejected as fabricated. He is transferred to a maximum-security prison in Russia's western Vladimir region.

July 2022 — Navalny's team announces the relaunch of the Anti-Corruption Foundation as an international organization with an advisory board including Francis Fukuyama, Anne Applebaum, and the European Parliament member and former Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt. Navalny continues to file lawsuits in prison and tries to form a labor union in the facility. Officials respond by regularly placing him in solitary confinement over purported disciplinary violations such as failing to properly button his garment or to wash his face at a specified time.

2023 — Over 400 Russian doctors sign an open letter to Putin, urging an end to what it calls abuse of Navalny, following reports that he was denied basic medication after getting the flu. His team expresses concern about his health, saying in April he had acute stomach pain and suspected he was being slowly poisoned.

March 12, 2023 — "Navalny," a film about the attempt on the opposition leader's life, wins the Oscar for best documentary feature.

April 26, 2023 — Appearing on a video link from prison during a hearing, Navalny says he was facing new extremism and terrorism charges that could keep him behind bars for the rest of his life. He adds sardonically that the charges imply that "I'm conducting terror attacks while sitting in prison."

June 19, 2023 — The trial begins in a makeshift courtroom in the Penal Colony No. 6 where Navalny is held. Soon after it starts, the judge closes the trial to the public and media despite Navalny's objections.

July 20, 2023 — In closing arguments, the prosecution asks the court to sentence Navalny to 20 years in prison, his team reports. Navalny says in a subsequent statement that he expects his sentence to be "huge ... a Stalinist term," referring to Soviet dictator Josef Stalin.

Aug. 4, 2023 — Navalny is convicted of extremism and sentenced to 19 years, and he says he understands he's "serving a life sentence, which is measured by the length of my life or the length of life of this regime."

Oct. 13, 2023 — Authorities detain three lawyers representing Navalny after searching their homes, and his ally Ivan Zhdanov says on social media the move is a bid to "completely isolate Navalny." The raids targeting Vadim Kobzev, Igor Sergunin and Alexei Liptser are part of a criminal case on charges of participating in an extremist group, Zhdanov says. Navalny's spokesperson says if the opposition leader has no access to lawyers, "he will end up in complete isolation, the kind no one can really even imagine."

Dec. 2, 2023 — New charges are filed against Navalny. In comments passed to associates, Navalny says he has been charged under Article 214 of the penal code, covering vandalism. "I don't even know whether to describe my latest news as sad, funny or absurd," he writes on social media via his team. "I have no



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idea what Article 214 is, and there's nowhere to look. You'll know before I do."

Dec. 7, 2023 — Navalny's team erects billboards across Russia featuring QR codes that lead smartphones to a hidden website urging Russians to take part in a campaign against Putin, who is expected to run for reelection in March 2024. Navalny's team say the vote is important for Putin as a referendum on his war in Ukraine, rather than a real contest for the presidency.

Dec. 11, 2023 — Navalny is scheduled to appear in court via video link but does not appear, and his spokeswoman says prison officials are citing electricity problems. Navalny's allies express concern, saying neither they nor his lawyers have heard from him in several weeks.

Dec. 25, 2023 — Navalny's allies say he's been located in a prison colony in the town of Kharp, north of the Arctic Circle, notorious for long and severe winters. It's about 100 kilometers (60 miles) from Vorkuta, whose coal mines were among the harshest of the Soviet Gulag prison-camp system.

Jan. 10 — Navalny appears via video link from Kharp for the first time. Russian news outlets release images of him in black prison garb and with a buzz cut, on a live TV feed from the "special regime" penal colony in Kharp, about 1,900 kilometers (1,200 miles) northeast of Moscow. At the hearing, Navalny cracks jokes about Arctic weather and asks if officials at his former prison threw a party when he was transferred.

Feb. 16 — Russia's Federal Penitentiary Service says Navalny died in prison at the age of 47. It says he felt unwell after a walk and collapsed. An ambulance arrived but could not resuscitate him. Navalny's team says it has no confirmation of his death and that his lawyer is on the way to the Kharp penal colony.

## **Greece just legalized same-sex marriage. Will other Orthodox countries join them any time soon?**

By PETER SMITH and DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

Greece has become the first majority-Orthodox Christian nation to legalize same-sex marriage under civil law. At least for the near future, it will almost certainly be the only one.

Eastern Orthodox leadership, despite lacking a single doctrinal authority like a pope, has been united in opposing recognition of same-sex relationships both within its own rites and in the civil realm. Public opinion in majority Orthodox countries has mostly been opposed, too.

But there are some signs of change. Two small majority-Orthodox countries, Montenegro and Cyprus, have authorized same-sex unions in recent years, as did Greece in 2015 before upgrading to this week's approval of full marital status.

Civil unions may become more common among Orthodox countries gravitating toward the European Union. They remain off the table in Russia, which has cracked down on LGBTQ+ expression, and countries in its orbit.

Following is a summary of church positions and public opinion in the Orthodox world, followed by the situation in individual majority-Orthodox lands.

### THE ORTHODOX WORLD

Eastern Orthodoxy is a socially conservative, ancient church with elaborate rituals and a strict hierarchy. Churches are mostly organized along national lines, with multiple independent churches that share ancient doctrine and practices and that both cooperate and squabble.

Roughly 200 million Eastern Orthodox live primarily in Eastern Europe and neighboring Asian lands, with about half that total in Russia, while smaller numbers live across the world. Like other international church bodies, Orthodoxy has confronted calls for LGBTQ+ inclusion.

A 2016 statement by a council of most Orthodox churches called marriage between a man and a woman "the oldest institution of divine law" and said members were forbidden from entering same-sex unions.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, considered the first among equals among Orthodox leaders, affirmed that stance in a statement after the Greek vote. But he added that the church must respond to members in such unions "with pastoral responsibility and in Christ-like love."

In countries where they are a majority, Orthodox believers overwhelmingly said society should not accept homosexuality or approve same-sex marriage, according to surveys conducted in 2015 and 2016 by

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the Pew Research Center, a Washington-based think tank.

Greek Orthodox showed relative tolerance, with half of Orthodox saying homosexuality should be accepted and a quarter favoring same-sex marriage. In more recent polls, Greeks overall narrowly supported the marriage law.

The Greek law validates marriage in the civil realm but doesn't require any church to perform such rites. Nevertheless, Greece's Orthodox leadership unanimously opposed the law in January, saying the "duality of genders and their complementarity are not social inventions but originate from God."

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis acknowledged the church's position but said, "We are discussing the decisions of the Greek state, unrelated to theological beliefs."

Civil unions may be in some Orthodox countries' near future, said George Demacopoulos, director of the Orthodox Christian Studies Center at Fordham University in New York.

"In terms of civil marriage, I think the countries that are in the European Union will eventually all do it," Demacopoulos said. "My guess is the assemblies of bishops in those countries will offer some resistance to the measure, and depending on where you are, that may or may not delay it."

## UKRAINE

In Ukraine, same-sex couples cannot register their status legally.

In 2023, the issue became acute as many LGBTQ+ people joined Ukraine's armed forces. That year, a bill was introduced in Parliament to establish civil partnerships for same-sex couples, providing basic rights such as compensation if one of the partners is killed in action.

The All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations — which includes Ukraine's two rival Orthodox churches — opposed the draft law, contending that some international entities are using the country's current vulnerability to force unwanted changes.

The legislation remains pending.

The European Court of Human Rights ruled in 2023 that Ukraine violated the rights of a same-sex couple who sought legal protections provided to married heterosexual couples.

Ukraine is majority Orthodox, with various religious minorities.

## RUSSIA

In increasingly conservative Russia, President Vladimir Putin has forged a powerful alliance with the Russian Orthodox Church and has made "traditional family values" a cornerstone of his rule, juxtaposing them with "perversions" of the West.

Putin effectively outlawed same-sex marriages in the 2020 constitutional revision that added a clause stipulating that marriage is a union of a man and a woman.

In 2013, the Kremlin adopted what's known as the "gay propaganda" law, banning any public endorsement of "nontraditional sexual relations" among minors.

After sending troops into Ukraine in 2022, Russian authorities ramped up a campaign against what it called the West's "degrading" moral influence, in what rights advocates saw as an attempt to legitimize the war.

Patriarch Kirill of Moscow has assailed LGBTQ+ rights. As head of the Russian Orthodox Church, he oversees the world's largest Orthodox flock. He depicted his country's invasion of Ukraine as part of a metaphysical struggle against a liberal agenda that included "gay parades."

In November, Russia's Supreme Court effectively outlawed LGBTQ+ activism, labeling what the government called the LGBTQ+ "international movement" as an extremist group and banning it in Russia.

In 2021, a survey by Russia's top independent pollster, the Levada Center, showed that only 33% of Russians completely or somewhat agree that gay men and women should enjoy the same rights as heterosexuals, a decrease from earlier years.

## BELARUS

The Belarus Family Code defines marriage as a "union between a man and a woman." There is also no legislation prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Homosexuality was decriminalized in Belarus in 1994, but the LGBTQ+ community faces heavy stigma and high suicide rates, advocates say.

Human rights groups report hundreds of cases of the KGB — the country's main domestic security

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agency — trying to recruit gay people and threatening to out them.

## SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO

Serbia and Montenegro, two conservative Balkan nations where the Serbian Orthodox Church holds huge influence, have had mixed results addressing LGBTQ+ rights as part of efforts to join the European Union.

Tiny Montenegro passed a bill in 2020 allowing same-sex partnerships — not marriage and with fewer rights. In Serbia, a similar draft law never made it to a parliamentary vote.

The Serbian Orthodox Church, which maintains close relations with the Russian church, has opposed the idea of same-sex marriages.

Serbia's President Aleksandar Vucic has said he would not sign off a bill on same-sex marriages, although Serbia has had an openly lesbian prime minister for years. Activists have been campaigning for legal partnerships.

Pride marches in Serbia are routinely banned or held under tight security. In Montenegro, though same-sex partnerships are allowed, the highly male-oriented society of 620,000 people remains divided over the issue.

## ROMANIA AND MOLDOVA

Romania is one of the few European Union members that allows neither same-sex marriage nor civil unions, despite a growing social acceptance of LGBTQ+ people.

In 2023, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that Romania had failed to enforce same-sex couples' rights by not legally recognizing their relationships.

In early February in Romania, LGBTQ+ activists were allegedly assaulted while holding a peaceful protest outside the Bucharest headquarters of the country's far-right AUR party.

In 2018, Romania held a referendum — backed by the Orthodox Church — on whether to narrow the constitutional definition of marriage from a "union of spouses" to a "union between one man and one woman."

Rights campaigners urged Romanians to boycott the vote, which failed due to low turnout.

In neighboring Moldova, which isn't an EU member but has official candidate status, neither same-sex marriages nor unions are allowed.

Large majorities in both countries are Orthodox.

## BULGARIA

Public opinion in Bulgaria is mostly hostile to gay people and more so to same-sex marriages. In the Balkan country, patriarchal family traditions still predominate.

The European Court of Human Rights last year found that Bulgaria's government was violating European human rights law in failing to legally recognize same-sex couples. The court also ruled that Bulgaria is obliged to adopt legal recognition for same-sex couples, but Bulgaria shows no signs of implementing the decision.

Leaders of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, which includes about 80% of Bulgarians, condemned the ECHR ruling and called on the government not to give in.

Bulgaria's constitution explicitly prohibits the recognition of same-sex marriage. Amending the constitution requires a two-thirds majority in parliament on three consecutive votes. Such a scenario seems remote.

## Today in History: February 17

### House elects Thomas Jefferson president over Aaron Burr

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Feb. 17, the 48th day of 2024. There are 318 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 17, 1801, the U.S. House of Representatives broke an electoral tie between Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr, electing Jefferson president; Burr became vice president.

On this date:

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In 1815, the United States and Britain exchanged the instruments of ratification for the Treaty of Ghent, ending the War of 1812.

In 1863, the International Red Cross was founded in Geneva.

In 1864, during the Civil War, the Union ship USS Housatonic was rammed and sunk in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina, by the Confederate hand-cranked submarine HL Hunley in the first naval attack of its kind; the Hunley also sank.

In 1897, the forerunner of the National PTA, the National Congress of Mothers, convened its first meeting in Washington.

In 1944, during World War II, U.S. forces invaded Eniwetok Atoll, encountering little initial resistance from Imperial Japanese troops. (The Americans secured the atoll less than a week later.)

In 1959, the United States launched Vanguard 2, a satellite that carried meteorological equipment.

In 1964, the Supreme Court, in *Wesberry v. Sanders*, ruled that congressional districts within each state had to be roughly equal in population.

In 1972, President Richard M. Nixon departed the White House with his wife, Pat, on a historic trip to China.

In 1988, Lt. Col. William Higgins, a Marine Corps officer serving with a United Nations truce monitoring group, was kidnapped in southern Lebanon by Iranian-backed terrorists (he was later slain by his captors).

In 1995, Colin Ferguson was convicted of six counts of murder in the December 1993 Long Island Rail Road shootings (he was later sentenced to a minimum of 200 years in prison).

In 2013, Danica Patrick won the Daytona 500 pole, becoming the first woman to secure the top spot for any Sprint Cup race.

In 2014, Jimmy Fallon made his debut as host of NBC's "Tonight Show."

In 2015, Vice President Joe Biden opened a White House summit on countering extremism and radicalization, saying the United States needed to ensure that immigrants were fully included in the fabric of American society to prevent violent ideologies from taking root at home.

In 2021, Rush Limbaugh, the talk radio host who became the voice of American conservatism, died at age 70, a year after he announced he had Stage Four lung cancer.

In 2022, Anna Shcherbakova won a stunning gold medal in women's figure skating at the Beijing Games, while Russian teammate Kamila Valieva tumbled all the way out of the medals after a mistake-filled end to her controversial Olympics.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Christina Pickles is 89. Actor Brenda Fricker is 79. Actor Becky Ann Baker is 71. Actor Rene Russo is 70. Actor Richard Karn is 68. Actor Lou Diamond Phillips is 62. Basketball Hall of Famer Michael Jordan is 61. Actor-comedian Larry, the Cable Guy is 61. TV personality Rene Syler is 61. Movie director Michael Bay is 60. Singer Chante Moore is 57. Rock musician Timothy J. Mahoney (311) is 54. Actor Dominic Purcell is 54. Olympic gold and silver medal skier Tommy Moe is 54. Actor Denise Richards is 53. Rock singer-musician Billie Joe Armstrong (Green Day) is 52. Actor Jerry O'Connell is 50. Country singer Bryan White is 50. Actor Kelly Carlson is 48. Actor Ashton Holmes is 46. Actor Conrad Ricamora is 45. Actor Jason Ritter is 44. TV personality Paris Hilton is 43. Actor Joseph Gordon-Levitt is 43. TV host Daphne Oz is 38. Actor Chord Overstreet is 35.