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Sunday, March 17

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

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

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

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

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

Welcome home for the Groton Area Tigers, 4:30 p.m., GHS Arena

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



Monday, March 18

School Breakfast: Pancake on stick.

School Lunch: Chicken patty, baked beans.

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

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

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

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

St. John's Lutheran: Christian Literature Circle, 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 19

School Breakfast: Scones.

School Lunch: Meatballs, roasted potatoes.

Indoor track meet at Northern State University

Thrift Store open 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Food Pantry open 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.

City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.

Senior Menu: Baked fish, au gratin potatoes, 3 bean salad, tropical fruit, whole wheat bread.

St. John's Lutheran: Quilting, 9 a.m.

United Methodist: Spring Tea luncheon, 10:30 a.m.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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2024 SDHSAA State Boys Basketball, Saturday Recap

SDPB Radio | By Nate Wek

Published March 17, 2024 at 12:23 AM CDT

The 2024 SDHSAA state boys basketball tournaments came to an end on Saturday with three incredible championship games. Two went to overtime, while the other was decided by just one-point.

Mitchell won their first state championship since 1995, Hamlin claimed its first since 1983, and Howard celebrated a championship for the first time since 1964.

Class AA

Championship: No. 1 Mitchell 46 No. 3 Brandon Valley 45

Mitchell defeated Brandon Valley in thrilling fashion 46-45 to win the 'AA' state title. A Josh Olthoff shot at the horn fell short, clinching the championship for Mitchell. The Kernels were led by Gavin Soukup, who scored 16-points. Marcus Talley also had nine points for Mitchell. Josh Olthoff and Brayden Anderson each had 13-points for Brandon Valley.

3rd Place: No. 2 Harrisburg 50 No. 5 Sioux Falls Washington 48

Harrisburg took down Washington 50-48 in thrilling fashion due to a last second shot by Camden Phipps. Phipps finished with 17-points for the Tigers. Braeden VanBockern had 12-points and a couple steals defensively for Harrisburg as well. Lubab Kambalo, Jhace Woods, and Thomas Hoffman all had 10-points for Washington in the loss.

5th Place: No. 8 Sioux Falls Jefferson 60 No. 7 Watertown 58

Jefferson won the 'AA' consolation championship with a 60-58 victory over Watertown. The Cavaliers shot 45% in the game from field, and they won the rebound battle by +14. Jefferson was led by Dawson Sechser, who scored 14-points, and Mason Payne, who put 13-points in the scoring column. Dylan Rawdon was the top scorer for Watertown with 27-points.

7th Place: No. 6 Huron 63 Sioux Falls No. 4 Roosevelt 58

Huron defeated Roosevelt 63-58 in the 'AA' seventh place game on Saturday. Free throws were the difference in this contest as 21-points for the Tigers came at the charity stripe. Blake Ellwein led Huron with 26-points and seven rebounds. He also had two blocks and two steals defensively. The Rough Riders were led by Kamari Thomas, who finished with 12-points.

Class A

Championship: No. 2 Hamlin 53 No. 1 Sioux Falls Christian 50 (OT)

For the first time since 1983, Hamlin has won a boys state basketball championship. They defeated Sioux Falls Christian 53-50 on Saturday to clinch the title. Hamlin shot 45% from the field. Tyson Stevenson finished with 16-points for Hamlin, while Easton Neuendorf dropped 12-points. Griffen Goodbary led Sioux Falls Christian with 19-points and ten rebounds.

3rd Place: No. 5 Dakota Valley 78 No. 6 Rapid City Christian 73

Dakota Valley took down Rapid City Christian 78-73 in the 'A' third place game. The Panthers shot 51% in the game, but it was kept close with the Comets winning the turnover and rebounding battle. Dakota Valley was led by Luke Bruns, who finished with 19-points and ten rebounds. Jaxson Wingert also scored 17-points for the Panthers. Rapid City Christian was led by Benson Kieffer, who scored 29-points, and Simon Kieffer who contributed 24-points.

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5th Place: No. 3 Sioux Valley 69 No. 4 Pine Ridge 51

Sioux Valley defeated Pine Ridge 69-51 in the consolation championship. The Cossacks shot an impressive 60% from the field, which was in big part due to the performance by Alec Squires, who went 9 of 10 for 21-points and grabbed 17-rebounds. Marvin Richard III led the scoring for Pine Ridge with 19-points.

7th Place: No. 7 Groton Area 67 No. 8 Vermillion 49

Groton Area rolled past Vermillion on Saturday afternoon 67-49 in the 'A' seventh place game. Lane Tietz finished with 25-points and six rebounds to lead the way for the Tigers. Jacob Zak also contributed 15-points and grabbed nine rebounds for Groton Area. Vermillion was led by Connor Roerig and Zoan Robinson, who both scored 13-points in the game.

Class B

Championship: No. 5 Howard 60 No. 2 De Smet 55 (OT)

In what was a crazy end to regulation with both teams scoring a pair of buckets in the closing seconds, Howard defeated De Smet 60-55 to win their first boys basketball championship since 1964. The Tigers shot 56% from the field. Kolt and Luke Koepsell led the way for the Tigers, combining for 40-points in the contest. Kolt also led the team in rebounds with 13 in the title game. Kadyn Fast scored 18-points for De Smet.

3rd Place: No. 3 Castlewood 74 No. 1 White River 54

Castlewood defeated White River 74-54 on Saturday night in the 3rd place game. The Warriors shot 53% from the floor, and outrebounded the Tigers 43-21. Bryan Laue (20), Jamison Keszler (18), and Lane Tvedt (17) combined for 55-points for Castlewood. Nicolas Marshall was the leading scorer for White River with 31-points in the game.

5th Place: No. 4 Wessington Springs 55 No. 6 Gregory 51

Wessington Springs won the consolation championship in 'B' on Saturday with a 55-51 performance against Gregory. The Spartans shot 53% from the field. Wessington Springs was led by Parker Graff, who scored 17-points, and Colby Flowers, who added 14-points towards the total. Noah Bearshield and Daniel Mitchell both scored 15-points for Gregory.

7th Place: No. 8 Viborg-Hurley 84 No. 6 Leola/Frederick Area 75

Viborg-Hurley defeated Leola/Frederick Area 84-75 on Saturday. The Cougars shot an impressive 67% from the floor. Viborg-Hurley also went +9 in the rebound category. Brady Schroedermeier led the Cougars with 25-points. Nick Hanson also scored 19-points and grabbed eleven rebounds for Viborg-Hurley. Leola/Frederick Area's Brayd Sumption put up 19-points in the contest.

Lane Tietz earns "Spirit of Su" Award

Each year the "Spirit of Su" Award will be given to an outstanding senior player who exemplifies the life of SuAnne Big Crow, Pine Ridge. SuAnne was killed in a car accident on her way to the Miss Basketball Banquet in 1992.

The player will be judged in the categories of outstanding athletic ability, leadership, character, sportsmanship and grade point average.

The criteria is:

1. Athletic Ability: All-State caliber. All-around ability team player. Offensive and defensive standout.

2. Sportsmanship: Ability to act in a respectful manner with officials, opponents, teammates, and fans.

3. Leadership: Handles one-self in a manner which has earned the respect of teammates, opponents and fans.

4. Character: Able to interact in a positive fashion with students and adults, displaying self-discipline, high ethics, and respectful behavior. And is also a positive role model for young people.

5. Academic Ability: Maintains a 3.0 or above on a 4.0 scale.



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Groton Area earns Spirit of Six Award

The Spirit of Six honors six Rapid City High School cheerleaders who died in a plane crash on March 17, 1968, at Rapid City Regional Airport as they returned from leading Cobbler fans at the state championships in Sioux Falls. Jan Glaze, Shirley Landstrom, Laureen "Kay" McNutt, Terry Blanton, Diana McCluskey, and Gail Flohr died, along with pilot Ivan Landstrom, his wife, Mary (Shirley's parents), and English teacher and cheer adviser Dorothy Lloyd. The South Dakota Peace Officers originated the award to memorialize the girls by recognizing an outstanding cheerleading squad that exemplifies the late leaders' commitment and dynamism.



Photo courtesy of South Dakota Public Broadcasting. ©2024 SDPB | Aidan DeBoer



Cheerleader Advisor Maddie Bjerke talks with the cheer team. (Photo

by Paul Kosel)

State A Tournament

Groton Area takes seventh with stunning win over Vermillion

Groton Area was never threatened in the seventh place game as the Tigers avenged an earlier loss to Vermillion and posted a 67-49 win at the State A Basketball Tournament.

The Tigers jumped out to a 7-0 lead and Vermillion called two quick time-outs to try and reorganize, but the Tiger defense was too much for Vermillion to handle and the Tigers held a 21-14 lead after the first quarter. Groton Area had a 10-point run to start the second quarter and led at half time, 42-25. The Tanagers scored seven straight points midway in the third quarter, but the Tigers would score the final six points of the quarter to take a 57-34 into the fourth quarter and would go on for the win.

Lane Tietz led the Tigers with 25 points, seven rebounds and four assists. Jacob Zak had 15 points and nine rebounds. Keegen Tracy had 12 points and four assists. Colby Dunker had six points while Kassen Keough had three points and Ryder Johnson, Logan Ringgenberg and Gage Sippel each had two points

Groton Area made 21 of 34 two-pointers for 62 percent while Vermillion was 14 of 33 for 42 percent. In three-pointers, the Tigers were five of 21 for 24 percent and the Tanagers were four of 11 for 36 percent. Tietz made three three-pointers while Tracy and Keough each had one. From the line, Groton Area was 10 of 12 for 83 percent off of Vermillion's 15 team fouls. Groton Area's 22 team fouls allowed Vermillion to make nine of 16 free throws for 56 percent.

Groton Area controlled the boards, 30-27. The Tigers had 12 turnovers of which seven were steals. Vermillion had 16 turnovers of which seven were steals. Groton Area had 14 assists while Vermillion had four. Zak and Johnson each had one block.

Groton Area finishes it season with a 19-6 record while Vermillion is 16-9.

There will be a welcome home celebration this afternoon at 4:30 p.m. at the GHS Arena.

- Paul Kosel



Lane Tietz puts up a shot to get the Tiger offense rolling. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Colby Dunker made this shot to give the Tigers a 33-19 lead. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Jacob Zak puts up the shot while being double teamed. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Holden Sippel got a rebound and passes off the ball as the Tiger offense kept on rolling.

(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Logan Ringgenberg makes this shot to give Groton Area a 23-14 lead. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Keegen Tracy breaks free to score and give the Tigers a 25-14 lead. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Ryder Johnson makes this basket to make it 31-19. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Taylor Diegel looks to pass off the ball. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Gage Sippel got the offensive rebound and put the ball back up and in to give Groton Area 42-22 lead. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Easton Weber dribbles the ball as he got some playing time at the end of the game.

(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Blake Pauli applies defense to Vermillion's Bryson Skogsberg.

(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Kassen Keough sank this three-pointer to Groton Area a 67-46 lead.

(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Turner Thompson launches a shot late in the game.

(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Logan Warrington gets ready to pass off the ball at the State A Tournament. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Jayden Schwan looks to where he should pass the ball. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Major Dolan and Trey Tietz make sure there is plenty of water cups filled. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Ryder Johnson suffered a head injury during the seventh place game. He was unable to come back in to play for the rest of the game. Coach Brian Dolan and a medic are quick to check on him. Bottom left photo features an official and Easton Weber checking in on Ryder and bottom right photo features Braxton Imrie checking in on him. (Photos by Paul Koseil)



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Official Box Score
Groton Area vs Vermillion
 Game Totals -- Final Statistics
 March 16, 2024 at Rapid City , SD



Groton Area 67

Record: 19-6

| No. | Player | S | Pts | FG | 3FG | FT | OR | DR | TR | PF | A | TO | Blk | Stl | Min | +/- |
|---------------|--------------------|---|-----------|--------------|-------------|--------------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|------------|-----|
| 01 | TRACY, KEEGAN | | 12 | 4-9 | 1-6 | 3-3 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 30 | 21 |
| 04 | JOHNSON, RYDER | | 2 | 1-4 | 0-1 | 0-0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 17 | 12 |
| 10 | TIETZ, LANE | | 25 | 10-19 | 3-8 | 2-3 | 0 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 26 | 20 |
| 22 | ZAK, JACOB | | 15 | 5-10 | 0-1 | 5-6 | 3 | 6 | 9 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 25 | 23 |
| 42 | RINGGENBERG, LOGAN | | 2 | 1-2 | 0-1 | 0-0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 10 |
| 03 | PAULI, BLAKE | * | 0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 4 |
| 05 | DUNKER, COLBY | | 6 | 3-3 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 13 | 1 |
| 11 | KEOUGH, KASSEN | | 3 | 1-1 | 1-1 | 0-0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 0 |
| 12 | SCHWAN, JAYDEN | * | 0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | -3 |
| 20 | WEBER, EASTON | * | 0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | -4 | -3 |
| 24 | WARRINGTON, LOGAN | * | 0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | -3 |
| 25 | DIEGEL, TEYLOR | | 0 | 0-1 | 0-1 | 0-0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 5 |
| 30 | SIPPEL, GAGE | | 2 | 1-2 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 6 |
| 32 | THOMPSON, TURNER | * | 0 | 0-2 | 0-2 | 0-0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 8 | -6 |
| 34 | SIPPEL, HOLDEN | | 0 | 0-1 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | -1 |
| TOTALS | | | 67 | 26-54 | 5-21 | 10-12 | 8 | 23 | 31 | 21 | 11 | 14 | 2 | 6 | 152 | |

Shooting By Period

| Period | FG | FG% | 3FG | 3FG% | FT | FT% |
|-------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Game | 26-54 | 48.1% | 5-21 | 23.8% | 10-12 | 83.3% |

Deadball Rebounds: 0.0
 Last FG: 4th-2:40
 Largest lead: By at
 Technical Fouls: None.

Vermillion 49

Record: 16-9

| No. | Player | S | Pts | FG | 3FG | FT | OR | DR | TR | PF | A | TO | Blk | Stl | Min | +/- |
|---------------|-------------------|---|-----------|--------------|-------------|-------------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|------------|-----|
| 20 | ROERIG, CONNOR | | 13 | 4-4 | 2-2 | 3-3 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 25 | -21 |
| 22 | SKOGSBERG, BRYSON | | 12 | 5-12 | 0-4 | 2-2 | 1 | 5 | 6 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 26 | -9 |
| 23 | ROBINSON, ZOAN | | 13 | 6-7 | 1-1 | 0-2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 3 | 27 | -25 |
| 24 | HANSEN, CARTER | | 1 | 0-5 | 0-1 | 1-2 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 28 | -21 |
| 33 | HANSEN, TREY | | 7 | 2-9 | 1-2 | 2-4 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 28 | -15 |
| 10 | REUVERS, KADE | * | 0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 |
| 12 | CERNY, LANDON | | 0 | 0-1 | 0-1 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | -2 |
| 14 | MORSE, HUNTER | | 1 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 1-2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 21 | THOMAS, TRENTON | | 0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 30 | JENSEN, LUKE | * | 2 | 1-3 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| 32 | LARSEN, GABE | | 0 | 0-1 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 35 | PREISTER, KARSON | * | 0 | 0-2 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| 40 | ORR, FRANKIE | * | 0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| 44 | MORSE, WYATT | * | 0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 |
| 50 | TWETEN, COLE | | 0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 8 | -12 |
| TOTALS | | | 49 | 18-44 | 4-11 | 9-16 | 6 | 21 | 27 | 15 | 4 | 16 | 2 | 7 | 160 | |

Shooting By Period

| Period | FG | FG% | 3FG | 3FG% | FT | FT% |
|-------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| Game | 18-44 | 40.9% | 4-11 | 36.4% | 9-16 | 56.3% |

Deadball Rebounds: 3.0
 Last FG: 4th-0:07
 Largest lead: By at
 Technical Fouls: None.

Game Notes:

Officials: , ,

Start Time: 12:00:00
 Postseason Game;

| Score | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | 4th | TOT |
|-------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----------|
| GRO | 21 | 21 | 15 | 10 | 67 |
| VER | 14 | 10 | 10 | 15 | 49 |

| Points | GRO | VER |
|--------------|----------------|----------------|
| In the Paint | 34 | 28 |
| Off Turns | 17 | 10 |
| 2nd Chance | 10 | 6 |
| Fast Break | 0 | 0 |
| Bench | 11 | 3 |
| Per Poss | 1.031 31/65 | 0.817 23/60 |

GRO led for 0:0. VER led for 0:0.
 Game was tied for 0:0.
 Times tied: 0 Lead Changes: 0

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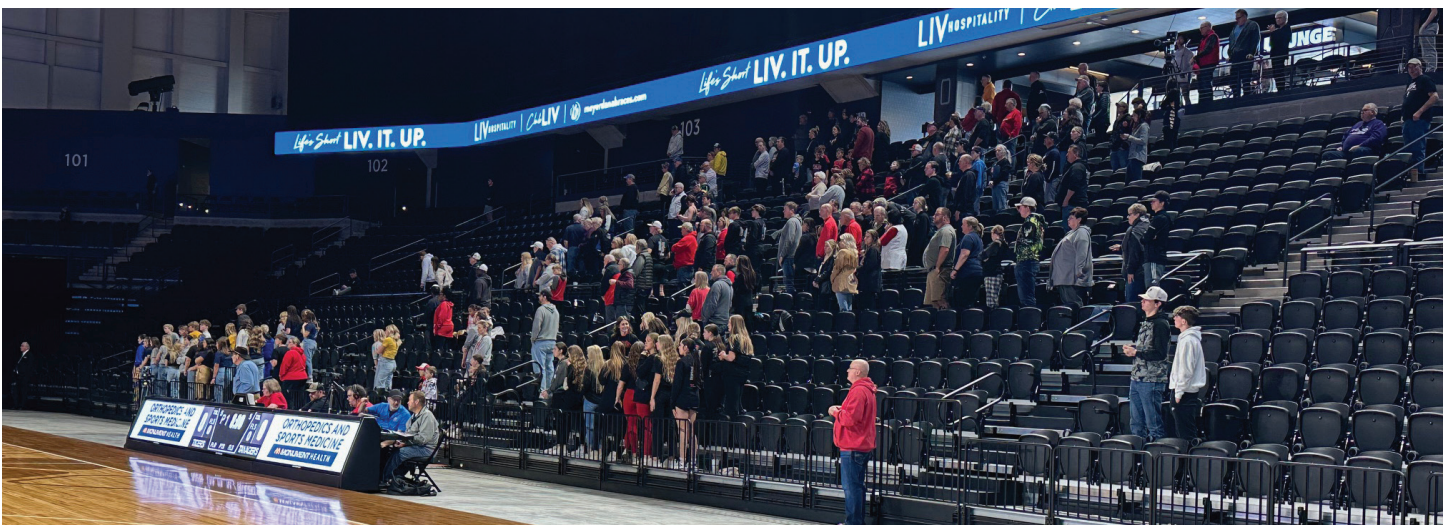
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What a crowd

What a difference in crowd size in the seventh place game of the State A Tournament. Groton Area was the smallest high school in the State a while Vermillion is the second largest. The Groton section is pictured above. The Vermillion is pictured below.

High school enrollment of the State A Tournament qualifiers were Dakota Valley 459, Vermillion 440, Sioux Falls Christian 412, Pine Ridge 281, Hamlin 232, Rapid City Christian 232, Sioux Valley 206 and Groton Area 171. (Photos by Paul Kosel)



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These eager Tiger fans were waiting to get in to get their seats at the State A Basketball Tournament. Pictured are Taryn Traphagen, Rylee Dunker, Tali Wright, Elizabeth Flihs, Austin Aberle, Anna Fjeldheim, Faith Traphagen, Hannah Sandness, Teagan Hanten and McKenna Tietz. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Groton Area school board member, Marty Weismantel, also serves on the board of the South Dakota High School Activities Association. Weismantel handed out the medals to the Groton team after winning the seventh place game. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Photo courtesy of South Dakota Public Broadcasting. ©2024 SDPB | Aidan DeBoer

Lane Tietz (front row, third from left) was named to the All Tournament Team at the 2024 State A Boys Basketball Tournament.



Bruce Babcock captured these shots as the Tigers won the Spirit of Six and the Spirit of Su awards.



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Keegen Tracy
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Blake Pauli
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Ryder Johnson
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Colby Dunker
(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Lane Tietz
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Kassen Keough
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Jayden Schwan
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Karsen Zak
(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Easton Weber
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Jacob Zak
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Logan Warrington
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Teylor Diegel
(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Gage Sippel
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Turner Thompson
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Holden Sippel
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Logan Ringgenberg
(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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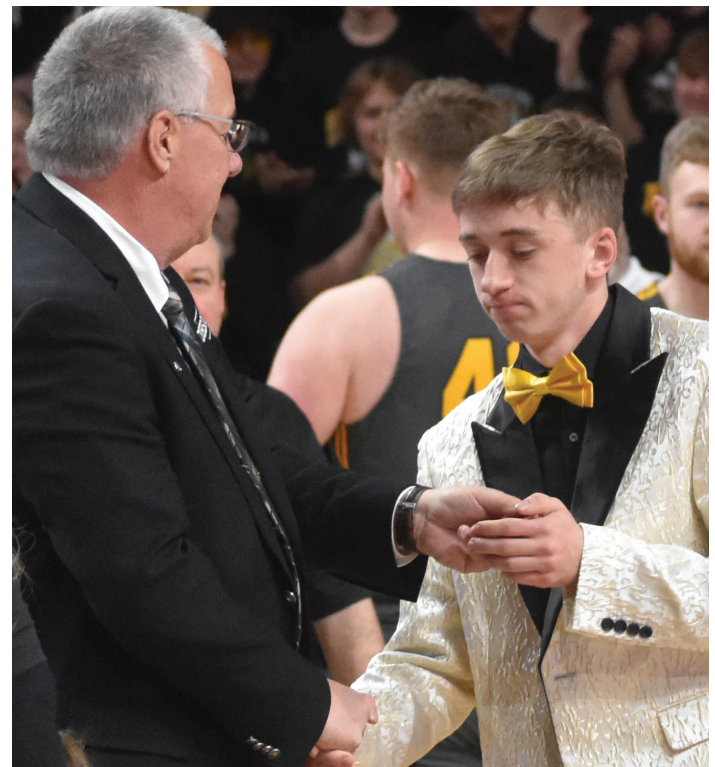
Water Boy Trey Tietz
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Water Boy Major Dolan
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Statistician Becky Erickson
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Manager Braxton Imrie
(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Assistant Coach Matt Locke
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Assistant Coach Kyle Gerlach
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Head Coach Brian Dolan
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Head Coach Brian Dolan
(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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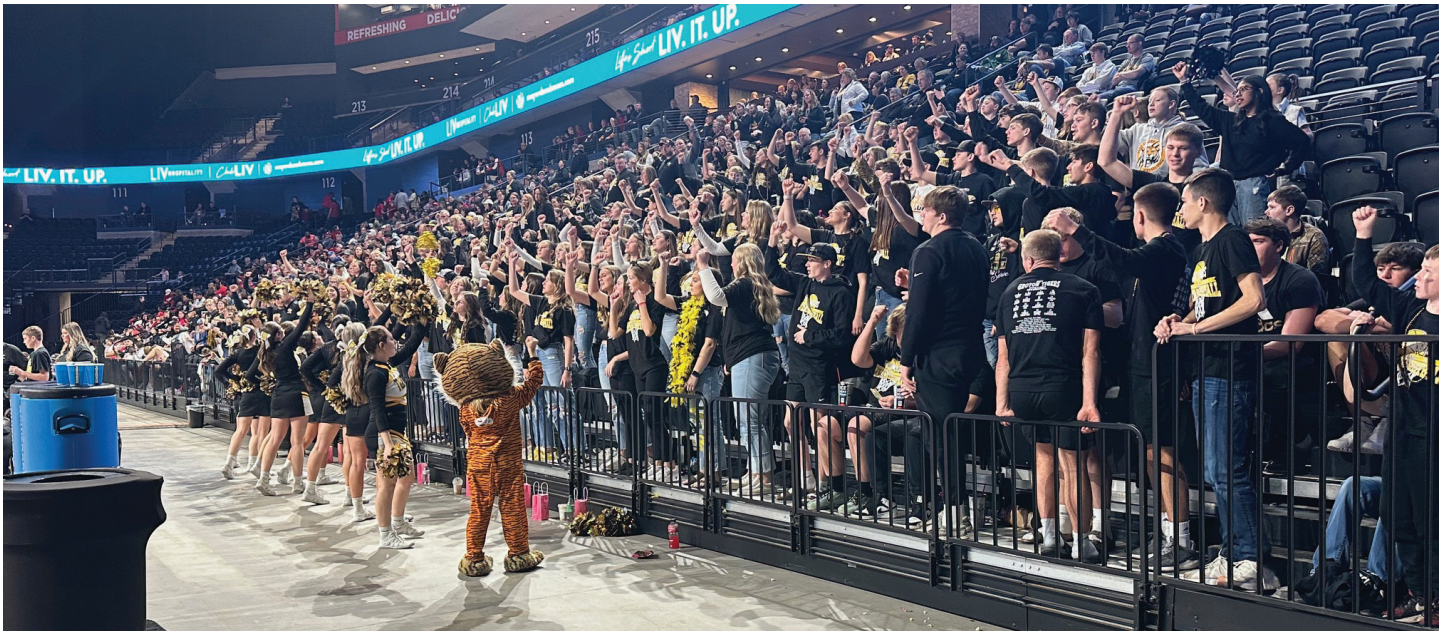
Head Coach Brian Dolan is being interviewed by a reporter from South Dakota Public Broadcasting at halftime of the seventh place game. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



It got a little emotional at the end of the game as Senior Lane Tietz and his younger brother Trey Tietz hug each other. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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VICTORY - That's the Tiger battle cry!

(Photo by Paul Kosel)

Congratulations Tigers from

Allied Climate Professionals
Avantara
Bary Keith at Harr Motors
Basekamp Lodge
BK Custom Ts & More
Blocker Construction
Dacotah Bank
Farmers Union Coop
Fliehs Sales & Service
Full Circle Ag
Greg Johnson Construction
Groton Ag Partners
Groton American Legion
Groton Chamber

Groton Chiropractic Clinic
Groton Dairy Queen
Hanlon Brothers
Heartland Energy
James Valley
Telecommunications
John Sieh Agency
Jungle Lanes & Lounge
Ken's Food Fair
KR Body Shop
Krueger Brothers
Lavish Luxury Salon Suite
Lori's Pharmacy
Merry Lone Real Estate
MJ's Sinclair
Northeast Chiropractic Clinic

Paetznick-Garness Funeral
Chapel
Poet
Rix Farms/R&M Farms
S & S Lumber
Spanier Harvesting
& Trucking
Sun & Sea Travel Co.
by Becah Fliehs
The Groton Independent
The Meat House of Andover
Weber Landscaping
Weismantel Insurance
Agency
Witte Exteriors LLC

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2024 SDWCA State Tournament Results for Groton

The State Youth Wrestling Tournament was held over the weekend at The Monument in Rapid City. Veda Stiegelmeier placed first, Ryker Herron, Ben Hoeft and Henry Pharis placed second, Keenan Moody placed fourth, Landry Johnson, Kroy Khali and Madison Little played sixth, and Layne Johnson, Wyatt Hagen, Huntley Overacker and Elsa Hagen placed eighth.

Girls Tots 67: Veda Stiegelmeier's place is 1st.

Champ. Round 1 - Veda Stiegelmeier (Groton) received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Veda Stiegelmeier (Groton) received a bye () (Bye)

Semifinal - Veda Stiegelmeier (Groton) won by fall over Remington Champagne (Chamberlain) (Fall 0:11)

1st Place Match - Veda Stiegelmeier (Groton) won by major decision over Elsie Lauritsen (Mitchell) (Maj 14-1)

Tots 46: Ryker Herron's place is 2nd.

Champ. Round 1 - Ryker Herron (Groton) won by fall over Caleb Sisk (Yankton Jr Bucks) (Fall 2:04)

Quarterfinal - Ryker Herron (Groton) won by fall over Drake Fulkerson (Hill City) (Fall 0:31)

Semifinal - Ryker Herron (Groton) won by fall over Parker Carda (Yankton Jr Bucks) (Fall 0:45)

Tots 67: Kase Ronning.

Champ. Round 1 - Emmett Schroeder (Winner) won by fall over Kase Ronning (Groton) (Fall 0:44)

Cons. Round 1 - Kase Ronning (Groton) received a bye () (Bye)

Cons. Round 2 - Gavin Martinsen (West Central) won by fall over Kase Ronning (Groton) (Fall 0:53)

Bantam 50: Landry Johnson's place is 6th.

Champ. Round 1 - Bennett Michael (Platte/Geddes) won by fall over Landry Johnson (Groton) (Fall 1:09)

Cons. Round 1 - Landry Johnson (Groton) won by fall over Cooper Hogg (Parker) (Fall 4:01)

Cons. Round 2 - Landry Johnson (Groton) won by decision over Lucas Kuphal (Alcester/Hudson) (Dec 7-3)

Cons. Round 3 - Landry Johnson (Groton) won by fall over Hudson Gassen (Harrisburg) (Fall 1:07)

Cons. Semi - Tell Johnson (Watertown) won by fall over Landry Johnson (Groton) (Fall 0:37)

Bantam 76: Kroy Khali's place is 6th.

Champ. Round 1 - Kroy Khali (Groton) won by fall over Grayson Schone (Douglas Wrestling Club) (Fall 0:10)

Quarterfinal - Kroy Khali (Groton) won by fall over Grayson Bevers (Watertown) (Fall 3:51)

Semifinal - Iven Meyer (Chamberlain) won by fall over Kroy Khali (Groton) (Fall 0:27)

Cons. Semi - Lucchese Helkenn (Winner) won by decision over Kroy Khali (Groton) (Dec 12-5)

Girls Midget 84: Elsy Hagen's place is 8th.

Champ. Round 1 - Elsy Hagen (Groton) won by major decision over Amelia Apland (Sturgis) (Maj 13-0)

Quarterfinal - Ella Haines (Tea Area) won by fall over Elsy Hagen (Groton) (Fall 0:53)

Cons. Round 2 - Elsy Hagen (Groton) won by fall over Scottie Silver (Westside Raider Youth Wrestling) (Fall 2:06)

Cons. Round 3 - Mycah Zuhlsdorf (Watertown) won by fall over Elsy Hagen (Groton) (Fall 1:25)



Veda Stiegelmeier took first place at the State youth wrestling tournament held Sunday in Rapid City. She wrestled in the 67 pound Tots division. (Photo from Groton Youth Wrestling Club facebook page)

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Girls Midget 96: Rosalyn Block's place is 2nd.

Champ. Round 1 - Rosalyn Block (Groton) received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Rosalyn Block (Groton) won by fall over Elizabeth Tonsager (Belle Fourche) (Fall 2:25)

Semifinal - Rosalyn Block (Groton) won by fall over Paisley Volker (Sully Buttes) (Fall 3:27)

Midgets 53: Bennett Iverson.

Champ. Round 1 - Kaddilac Coleman (Pony Hills) won by fall over Bennett Iverson (Groton) (Fall 3:33)

Cons. Round 1 - Bennett Iverson (Groton) won by fall over Pierce Luten (Hill City) (Fall 0:26)

Cons. Round 2 - Eli Engelhart (Watertown) won by fall over Bennett Iverson (Groton) (Fall 2:11)

Midgets 72: Henry Pharis's place is 2nd.

Champ. Round 1 - Henry Pharis (Groton) won by fall over Ty Roskens (Parkston) (Fall 0:35)

Quarterfinal - Henry Pharis (Groton) won by fall over Kade Reiff (Dell Rapids) (Fall 2:55)

Semifinal - Henry Pharis (Groton) won by fall over Haizen DeBruin (Alcester-Hudson) (Fall 2:09)

Midgets 89: Huntley Overacker's place is 8th.

Champ. Round 1 - Huntley Overacker (Groton) won by forfeit over Forfeit Forfeit (Brandon Valley) (FF)

Quarterfinal - Ladd Riopel (Spearfish) won by decision over Huntley Overacker (Groton) (Dec 6-0)

Cons. Round 2 - Huntley Overacker (Groton) won by fall over Kash Pugh (Miller/Highmore) (Fall 1:01)

Cons. Round 3 - Luke Finnicum (SF Roosevelt) won by major decision over Huntley Overacker (Groton) (Maj 10-1)

Midgets 113: Keenan Moody's place is 4th.

Champ. Round 1 - William Selwyn (Bon Homme) won by fall over Keenan Moody (Groton) (Fall 2:07)

Cons. Round 1 - Keenan Moody (Groton) won by forfeit over Forfeit Forfeit (Edgemont) (FF)

Cons. Round 2 - Keenan Moody (Groton) won by fall over Darrian Kills Enemy (Dupree) (Fall 0:12)

Cons. Round 3 - Keenan Moody (Groton) won by fall over Dexton Fuhrmann (Cobbler Kids Wrestling) (Fall 0:14)

Cons. Semi - Keenan Moody (Groton) won by fall over Sullivan Nedved (Dell Rapids) (Fall 0:40)

Novice 77: Bentley Ehresmann.

Champ. Round 1 - Dylan Ingalls (LOG) won by fall over Bentley Ehresmann (Groton) (Fall 2:13)

Cons. Round 1 - Rowdy Schrempp (Dupree) won by fall over Bentley Ehresmann (Groton) (Fall 2:52)

Novice 82: Preston Hinkelman.

Champ. Round 1 - Preston Hinkelman (Groton) won by major decision over Tate Krul (Belle Fourche) (Maj 16-2)

Quarterfinal - Axl Jones (LOG) won by major decision over Preston Hinkelman (Groton) (Maj 8-0)

Cons. Round 2 - Kallan Peterson (Miller/Highmore) won by decision over Preston Hinkelman (Groton) (Dec 13-9)

Novice 93: Parker Zoellner.

Champ. Round 1 - Grayson Licht (Sioux Valley) won by decision over Parker Zoellner (Groton) (Dec 8-1)

Cons. Round 1 - Parker Zoellner (Groton) won by fall over Crawston Craven (Winner) (Fall 2:51)

Cons. Round 2 - Joe Murphy (Pierre) won in sudden victory - 1 over Parker Zoellner (Groton) (SV-1 2-0)

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Schoolgirl 112: Madison Little's place is 6th.

Champ. Round 1 - Madison Little (Groton) won by fall over Layla Crowe (DeSmet) (Fall 1:05)

Quarterfinal - Madison Little (Groton) won in tie breaker - 1 over Kaidynce Hand (Sturgis) (TB-1 3-2)

Semifinal - McKayla Schardin (Madison) won by fall over Madison Little (Groton) (Fall 2:34)

Cons. Semi - Kalley Teason (Miller/Highmore) won by forfeit over Madison Little (Groton) (FF)

Schoolboy 110: Wyatt Hagen's place is 8th.

Champ. Round 1 - Wyatt Hagen (Groton) won by major decision over Tucker Larson (Cobbler Kids Wrestling) (Maj 10-2)

Quarterfinal - Rayne Wickre (Alcester/Hudson) won in sudden victory - 1 over Wyatt Hagen (Groton) (SV-1 7-5)

Cons. Round 2 - Wyatt Hagen (Groton) won by decision over Bode Minder (Pierre) (Dec 5-1)

Cons. Round 3 - Mason Hagen (Sturgis) won by major decision over Wyatt Hagen (Groton) (Maj 10-0)

Cadet - 16U 120: Lincoln Krause.

Champ. Round 1 - Zachary Pederson (Colman) won by fall over Lincoln Krause (Groton) (Fall 2:32)

Cons. Round 1 - Lincoln Krause (Groton) received a bye () (Bye)

Cons. Round 2 - Shea Deering (Sturgis Youth Wrestling) won by fall over Lincoln Krause (Groton) (Fall 2:10)

Cadet - 16U 175: Layne Johnson's place is 8th.

Champ. Round 1 - Layne Johnson (Groton) received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Kamden Needham (Yankton Jr Bucks) won by decision over Layne Johnson (Groton) (Dec 6-5)

Cons. Round 2 - Layne Johnson (Groton) received a bye () (Bye)

Cons. Round 3 - Tanner Gouldin (Sturgis Youth Wrestling) won by fall over Layne Johnson (Groton) (Fall 1:15)

7th Place Match - Radley Barrick (Madison) won by fall over Layne Johnson (Groton) (Fall 0:28)

Junior 175: Ben Hoeft's place is 2nd.

Round 1 - Elliot Bratland (605 Grapplers) won by tech fall over Ben Hoeft (Groton) (TF 10-0)

Round 2 - Elliot Bratland (605 Grapplers) won by tech fall over Ben Hoeft (Groton) (TF 10-0)

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NSU Wrestling

Northern State Duo Secures Top-5 Placings from NCAA Championships

Wichita, Kan. – Seth Brossard and Devin Bahr wrestled to top-5 finishes from the NCAA Championships today. Brossard placed fourth at 174-pounds, while Bahr took fifth at 157-pounds. Full team placings will be updated later this evening on nsuwolves.com, following the Championship matches.

HOW IT HAPPENED FOR BAHR

Bahr opened his meet with a 4-1 decision victory over Owen Zablocki from Indianapolis
In the 157-pound quarterfinal, he fell to No. 5 Guy Deleonardis from Glenville State in an 8-6 decision
The graduate student rallied back with a 4-2 decision win over Ben Durocher of Wisconsin Parkside in the consolation round
Bahr kicked off Saturday with an 11-3 major decision victory over Bailey Gimbor of Kutztown
He fell in the consolation semifinals to No. 2 Jack Haskin from Lake Erie in an 11-5 decision, and rallied back to take the fifth place match
Bahr secured his top-5 finish with a victory by fall (2:25) over No. 8 Keegan Roberson of UNC Pembroke

HOW IT HAPPENED FOR BROSSARD

The graduate student kicked off the meet with a victory by fall at 1:38 over David Davis from Tiffin
Brossard led at the end of the first period in his quarterfinal match against No. 7 Trey Sizemore from Indianapolis, however dropped the bout in a 12-6 decision
He rallied back in the consolation round, defeating Brandon Matthews from Lander in a 12-0 major decision
Brossard opened his Saturday slate with a victory by fall at 2:49 over No. 3 Cole Hernandez of Western Colorado
He then matched up against No. 8 Brody Hemauer from Parkside for the third time this season, recording a 10-4 decision win
It was No. 1 versus No. 2 in the third place match, as Brossard took on Scott Joll of UNC Pembroke
Joll came away with a 16-3 major decision win and Brossard recorded a fourth place finish at the national tournament


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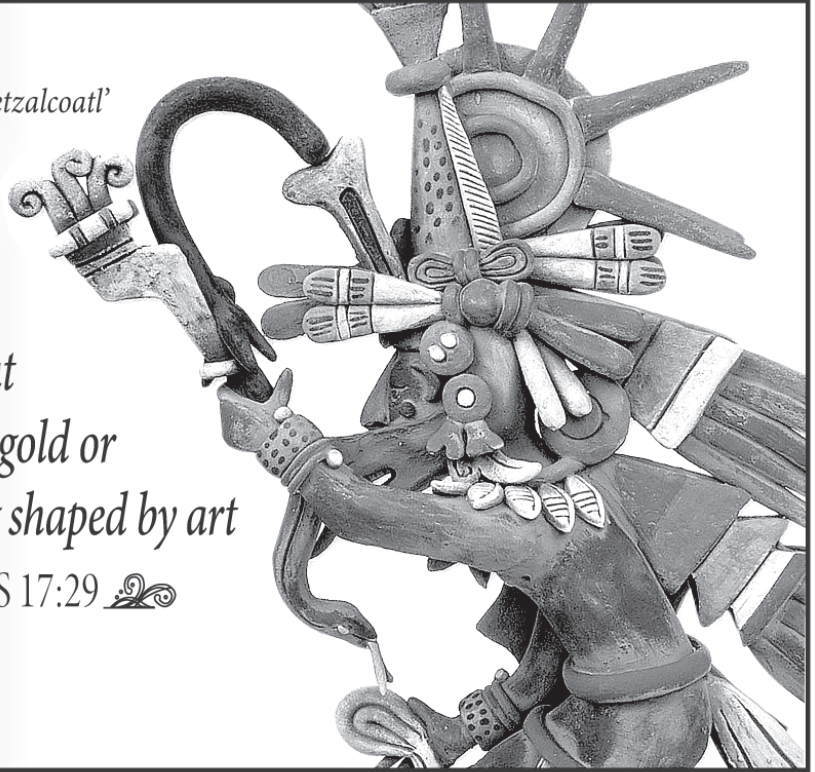
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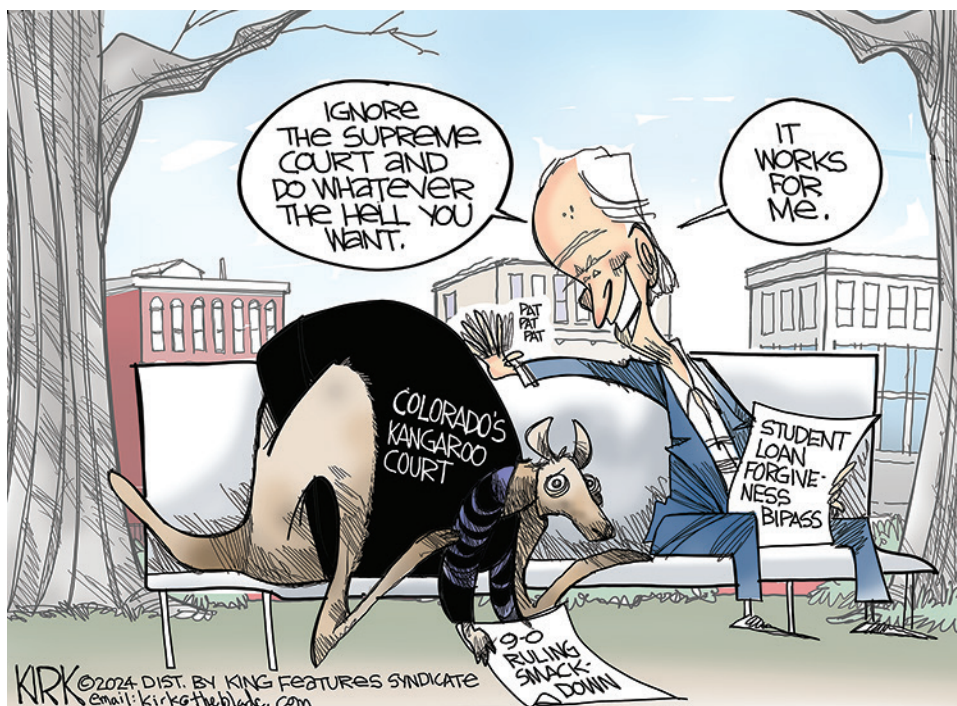
THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE

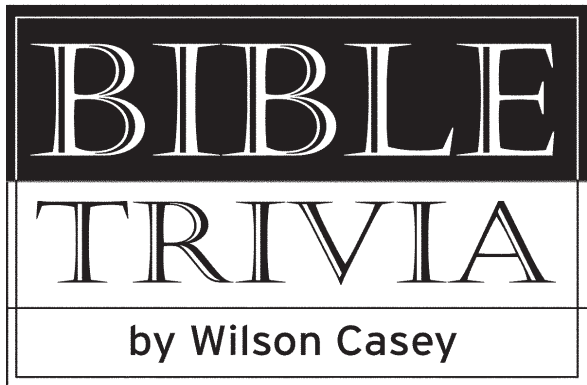
Detail of sculpture of Aztec god 'Quetzalcoatl'

Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. ACTS 17:29 



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1. Is the book of 2 Thessalonians (KJV) in the Old or New Testament or neither?

2. From Titus 1, Paul wrote that unto the pure all things are ...? *Gold, Righteous, Worthy, Pure*

3. What archangel is mentioned by name in the book of Jude? *Gabriel, Silas, Michael, Melchizedek*

4. In 1 Kings 21, who forbid Naboth to give his vineyard to Ahab? *The Lord, Jezebel, Absalom, Balaam*

5. Jared was the father of Enoch and lived how many years? *110, 450, 600, 962*

6. In Psalm 103:5, what bird's youth is renewable? *Dove, Eagle, Raven, Swallow*

ANSWERS: 1) New, 2) Pure, 3) Michael (Jude 1:9), 4) The Lord, 5) 962, 6) Eagle

“Test Your Bible Knowledge,” a book with 1,206 multiple-choice questions by columnist Wilson Casey, is available in stores and online.

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FLASH GORDON

I AM ASSASSIN FROM KIRA. BORN TO IT. NO CHOICE.

BIG FOREIGNER PAY US TO GET PRINCE. PRINCE IS HARD TO GET, SO GENERAL MAKE ME INVISIBLE.

IT STING.



BUT I MIX UP. GET WRONG PRINCE.

SO GENERAL MAKE ME TRY AGAIN.

OUCH.



BIG FANCY IMPORTANT PEOPLE ALL LEAVING.

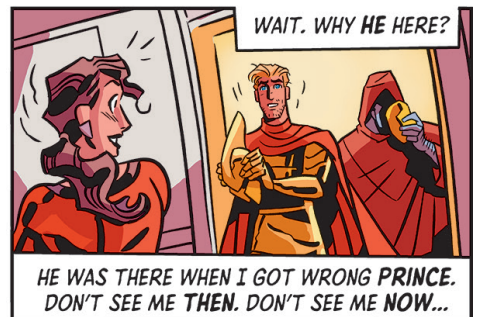
I AM HERE. INVISIBLE.

TO MAKE IT SO ONE DON'T GET HOME.



THIS ONE.

WOMAN IN RED KNOW ABOUT ME. WARN PRINCE. BIG SMART-- SHE DON'T EVEN KNOW I'M HERE.



WAIT. WHY HE HERE?

HE WAS THERE WHEN I GOT WRONG PRINCE. DON'T SEE ME THEN. DON'T SEE ME NOW...



...BUT HIM BUDDY A DRAGON MAN.

FROM KIRA, LIKE ME.

HE SEE ME.



FIGHT.

LOSE.



WAKE UP GOT.

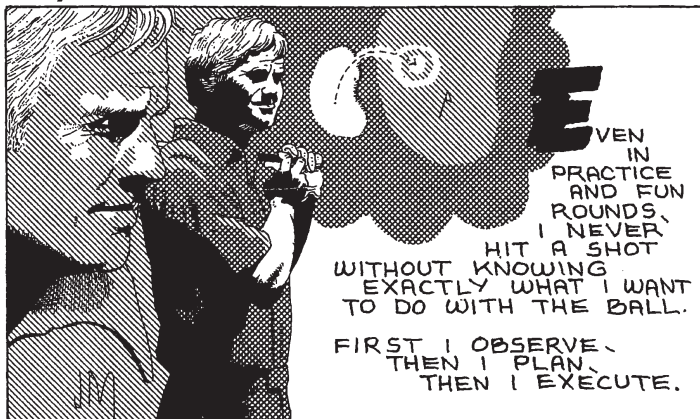
BE VISIBLE SOON.

OUCH.

DAN SCHRADE 3-17-23

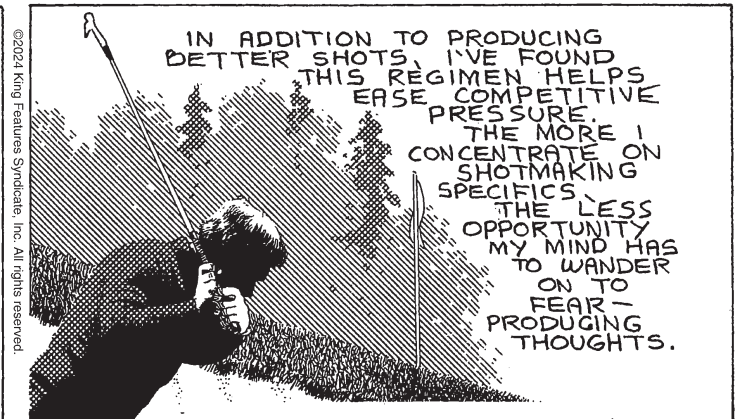
NEXT: ICEBREAKER

Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS



EVEN IN PRACTICE AND FUN ROUNDS, I NEVER HIT A SHOT WITHOUT KNOWING EXACTLY WHAT I WANT TO DO WITH THE BALL.

FIRST I OBSERVE. THEN I PLAN. THEN I EXECUTE.



IN ADDITION TO PRODUCING BETTER SHOTS, I'VE FOUND THIS REGIMEN HELPS EASE COMPETITIVE PRESSURE. THE MORE I CONCENTRATE ON SHOTMAKING SPECIFICS, THE LESS OPPORTUNITY MY MIND HAS TO WANDER ON TO FEAR-PRODUCING THOUGHTS.

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Is It Necessary To Stop Viagra After a Stroke?

DEAR DR. ROACH: My husband had a small stroke last spring, causing a minor loss of vision in his left eye. He is 81 and an otherwise active man. He has even been told by several doctors that he can drive.

One doctor told him to stop using meclizine and Viagra. Another physician said that he didn't see a problem with taking the meds. Both physicians are very skilled. Whose advice should he follow? — M.M.

ANSWER: A stroke is caused by the death of brain cells, most commonly due to poor blood flow in the brain, and it's critical to avoid any medication that will increase the risk of stroke. Meclizine is an antihistamine medicine most commonly used for motion sickness and sometimes used for vertigo. Although it has been reported to cause blurry vision, the risk of taking meclizine in a person with a history of a stroke is minimal.

The situation with Viagra is more complex. A rare side effect of Viagra is nonarteritic anterior ischemic optic neuropathy (NAION), affecting one in every 10,000 people over 50. A person with a history of NAION should not take Viagra.

There isn't good evidence that Viagra is dangerous for a person who had a stroke. One trial suggested that there was benefit in reducing the size of a stroke with Viagra. However, Viagra does lower blood pressure by a few points, so if your husband's blood pressure is on the borderline, this might be an issue.

I can't give you a definitive answer, but

most authorities say that a man who is stable, has good blood pressure and is more than six months out from his stroke does need not stop Viagra.

DEAR DR. ROACH: At 75, I developed stress urinary incontinence, but in the past two years, it has become more uncomfortable. My urogynecologist has recommended a urethral bulking agent called Bulkamid. Are you familiar with this procedure? Can you give any insight on the pros and cons? — M.F.

ANSWER: My preferred treatment for female stress incontinence are pelvic floor exercises, ideally with the help of a pelvic floor physical therapist, as this has a very high patient-satisfaction rate without the risk of medication or surgery. Unfortunately, they don't work for everyone. In women well past menopause, I look carefully for evidence of vulvovaginal atrophy and consider topical estrogen.

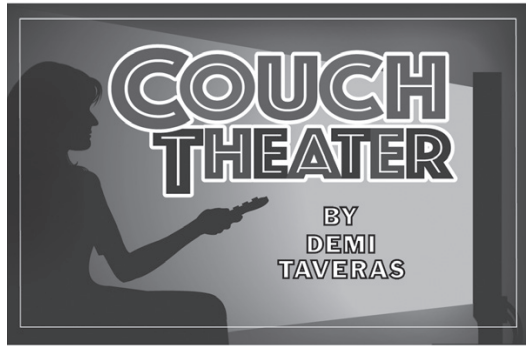
If these low-risk therapies are ineffective, then a visit to the urologist or urogynecologist is in order. The most common treatments include surgery, such as the minimally invasive sling surgery, and also the injection of a bulking agent into the urethra, like Bulkamid. Comparing the two, surgery tends to have higher patient-satisfaction rates, but the injection is less invasive. It has good results for most women, although sometimes additional injections are necessary (about 25% in a large study).

For younger women, especially those with fewer medical problems, surgical treatment is often recommended. For older women or those who aren't in good medical shape (or who just want to avoid surgery), the Bulkamid injection is a good option. Your urogynecologist can explain why they recommended Bulkamid over a urethral sling procedure.

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

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Martin Freeman, left, and Jenna Ortega star in "Miller's Girl." Courtesy of MovieStillsDB

"Wonka" (PG) -- The origin story of chocolatier Willy Wonkawas such a success at the box office that it became the eighth highest-grossing film of 2023. Starring Timothee Chalamet as the title character, the movie kicks off in a dreary 1934 Europe, where Willy arrives with a few coins in his pocket and an intention to establish his own

chocolate shop. However, a grimy pair of locals hoodwink Willy into staying at their boarding house, tricking him into signing a contract that he wouldn't be able to pay off for years. Not to mention, the rival chocolatiers won't let him sell chocolate anywhere in the town. But even with all the odds stacked against him, the happy-go-lucky chocolatier is determined not to fail. Co-starring a great ensemble cast, including Calah Lane, Keegan-Michael Key, Sally Hawkins and Olivia Colman, "Wonka" is out now. (Max)

"Damsel" (PG-13) -- Millie Bobby Brown ("Stranger Things") leads this dark-fantasy film out now! Elodie (Brown) is a princess whose father has found a match for her in Prince Henry (Nick Robinson). Ever the dutiful daughter, Elodie agrees to marry Prince Henry, amid warnings from her stepmother, Lady Bayford (Angela Bassett), that she doesn't trust his family, especially his mother, Queen Isabelle (Robin Wright). Elodie quickly discovers this for herself after participating in a ceremony that leads to the prince himself chucking her into a cave with a dragon to repay an ancient debt. Stuck with nothing but the clothes on her back, Elodie must outwit the fearsome dragon to escape the cave in one piece. (Netflix)

"Miller's Girl" (R) -- Martin Freeman ("Black Panther: Wakanda Forever") and Jenna Ortega ("Wednesday") star opposite each other in this erotic thriller, produced by Seth Rogen. Ortega portrays Cairo Sweet, an 18-year-old Tennessean girl who lives alone in her family's mansion. Cairo begins taking the creative writing class of Jonathan Miller (Freeman), a semi-successful author who is impressed by Cairo's extensive knowledge of literature. Cairo's best friend, Winnie (Gideon Adlon), raves about the idea of a teacher-student affair and even convinces Cairo to seduce Miller. Cairo does attempt to entice Miller, but the repercussions that follow are quite dangerous. Out now to rent. (Prime Video)

"Love Island: All Stars" (TV-MA) -- You might've heard of the "Love Island" dating game show and its many versions around the world. But the U.K. series came back in a major way with a season featuring former contestants and fan favorites from previous seasons. The show follows its original format, with a handful of men and women who enter the "Love Island" villa for a few weeks and "couple up with" another contestant to win the prize money of 50,000 pounds. But you should expect some insane twists along the way, in true "Love Island" style. Notable contestants are footballer Tom Clare, Georgia Steel ("Celebs on the Ranch"), former Playboy Bunny Hannah Elizabeth and Chris Taylor ("Barbie"). The full season is out now! (Peacock)

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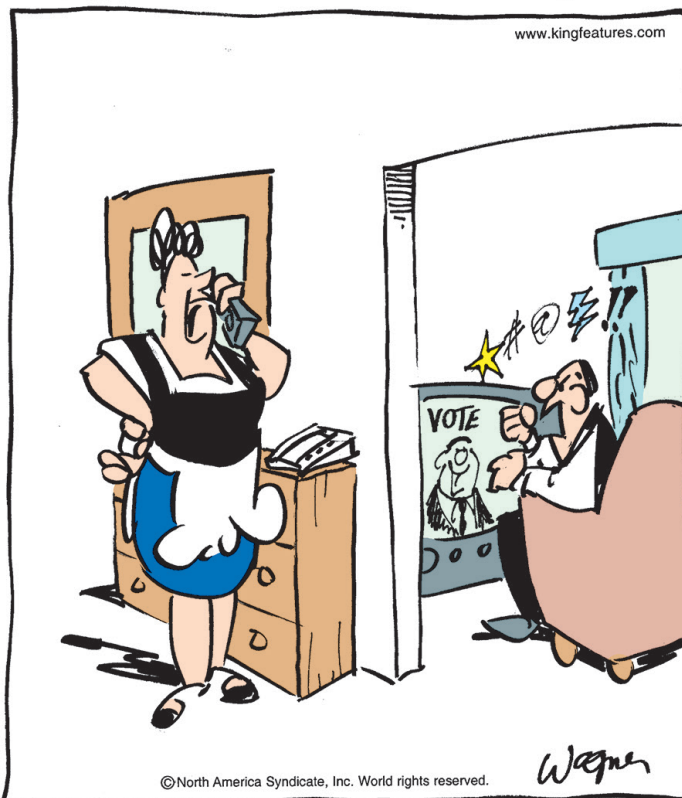
1. Name the actor/singer who was born Arthur Andrew Kelm.
2. Which group topped the charts with "Nashville Cats"?
3. Name the album with all four Beatles holding umbrellas.
4. Randy & the Rainbows were best known for which song?
5. Name the song that contains this lyric: "Aruba, Jamaica, ooh I wanna take ya, Bermuda, Bahama, come on, pretty mama, Key Largo, Montego, baby why don't we go, Jamaica."

Answers

1. Tab Hunter. He released a half dozen songs but only one topped the chart: "Young Love," in 1957. He found greater success when he appeared in dozens of films and television shows over his long career.
2. The Lovin' Spoonful, in 1966. The group's name came from Mississippi John Hurt's "Coffee Blues."
3. "Beatles '65," released in 1964. Over the years there have been posters and T-shirts using that image. Originals can be worth quite a bit.
4. "Denise," in 1963.
5. "Kokomo," by the Beach Boys, in 1988. Even though the song topped the charts in the U.S. and other countries, it can't seem to get rid of the negative reviews coming from music critics. The only ones to like it have been the fans.

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GRIN and BEAR IT Wagner



"I don't think this is the right time to ask him for a campaign contribution."

Just Like Cats & Dogs by Dave T. Phipps



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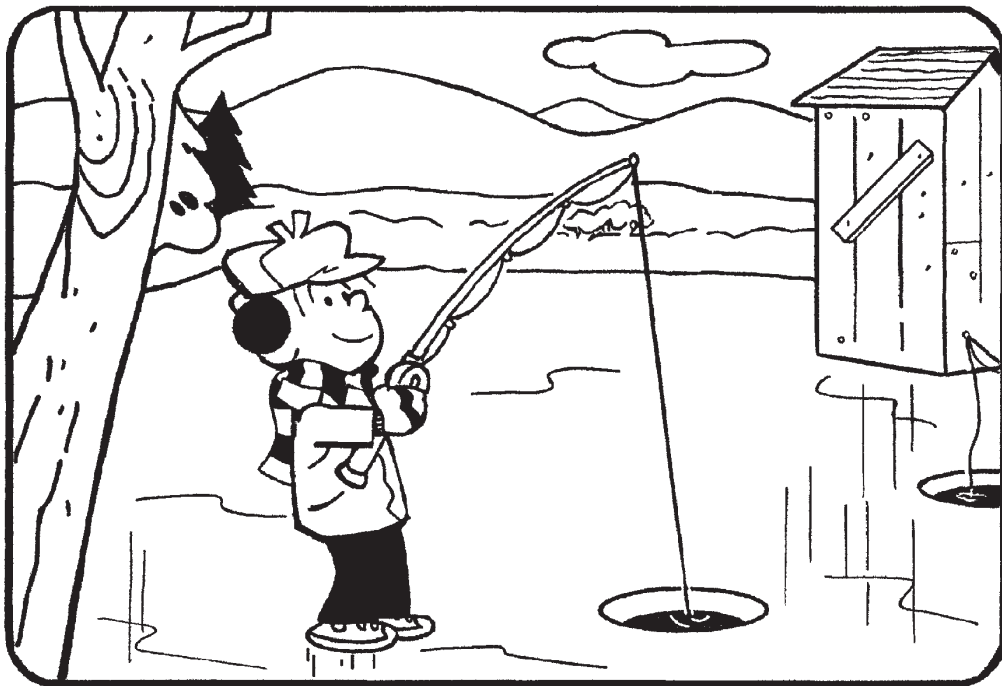
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HOCUS-FOCUS

BY
HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



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Differences: 1. Fishing line is different. 2. Branch is higher. 3. Hut is different. 4. Mountain is added. 5. Cloud is larger. 6. Cap is different.

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* Have stubborn stains in the toilet? Put some teeth in your cleaning job by dropping in a denture-cleaning tablet and letting it sit overnight. In the morning, scrub and flush. It just might do the job.

* "Lighten blemish spots on your skin with lemon juice. Just dab on several times per day." -- O.M. in Georgia

* "Collect small bits of soap into a cup or jar. When you have several, add a tablespoon or two of water to the cup to soften the soap pieces. When they are moderately soft, pour out the contents on a washcloth, fold it over and press into a bar shape with your hands. Peel away the cloth to reveal what should be a reasonably solid new bar of soap." -- C.T. in Pennsylvania

* Save power with this tip: Use cold water to wash towels and jeans. Then hang them to dry -- preferably outside, but on an inside line is OK, too. When they are mostly dry, pop them in the dryer on air dry to fluff up. Towels and jeans take the longest to dry in the clothes dryer, and use a lot of electricity.

* Take soap scum right off your shower curtain -- spray with vinegar and water mixture, then throw it in the washer. Hang it right back up, and those mildew stains are gone!

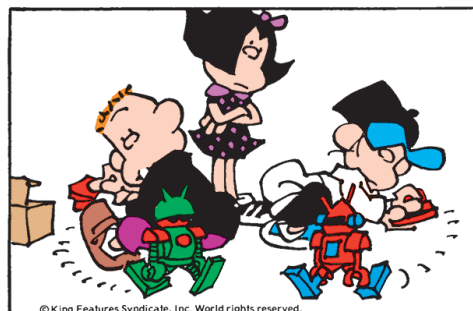
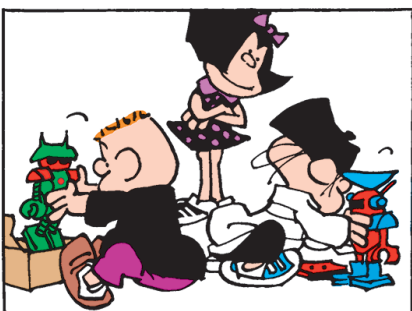
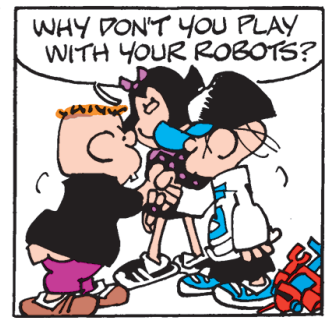
* "When canning or doing another job, always do the thing you hate first, then the rest will be easier." -- L.D.W. in Illinois

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

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TIGER

by BUD BLAKE



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King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Gold-loving king
- 6 Soviet space station
- 9 Actress Dennings
- 12 "That — I ask"
- 13 Longoria of TV
- 14 Writer LeShan
- 15 "What — mean?"
- 16 Journal
- 18 Singer Timberlake
- 20 Monster
- 21 Med. plan option
- 23 Sweetie
- 24 Different
- 25 Exile isle
- 27 Russian villa
- 29 Deceived
- 31 There
- 35 Rocker Adams
- 37 Harvard rival
- 38 City near Venice
- 41 Prefix with gender
- 43 Shrill bark
- 44 Teensy bit
- 45 Frenzied
- 47 Pampering places

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| 38 | 39 | 40 | | | | 41 | | 42 | | 43 | | |
| 44 | | | | | 45 | | | | 46 | | | |
| 47 | | | | 48 | | | | 49 | | | 50 | 51 |
| 52 | | | | 53 | | | | 54 | | | | |
| 55 | | | | 56 | | | | 57 | | | | |

- 49 Dizzying designs
- 52 Dad on "Black-ish"
- 53 Swiss canton
- 54 Bellini opera
- 55 Feminine side
- 56 Favorite
- 57 Idyllic spots
- 6 Islamic holy city
- 7 Infamous tsar
- 8 Shaft of light
- 9 IRA relative
- 10 Worship
- 11 Greedy sort
- 17 Plant science
- 19 Hot rum drink
- 21 Skirt edge
- 22 Roman 1051
- 24 Discoverer's call
- 26 Photo collections
- 28 Doubter
- 30 Notable time
- 32 Workplace perk, maybe
- 33 Yalie
- 34 Gym unit
- 36 Nails the test
- 38 Rice field
- 39 Arcade pioneer
- 40 Senior member
- 42 14 pounds
- 45 Aesopian also-ran
- 46 Apple product
- 48 Young dog
- 50 LBJ's successor
- 51 Prof's aides

DOWN

- 1 Central
- 2 Equal (Pref.)
- 3 Nine-to-five gigs
- 4 Matty of baseball
- 5 Melting snow

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— King Crossword —

Answers

Solution time: 26 mins.

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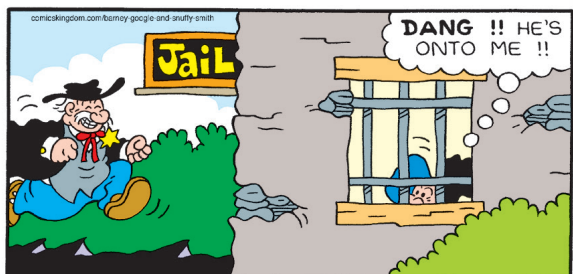
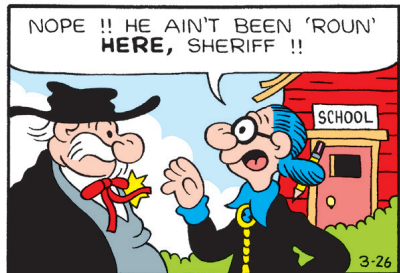
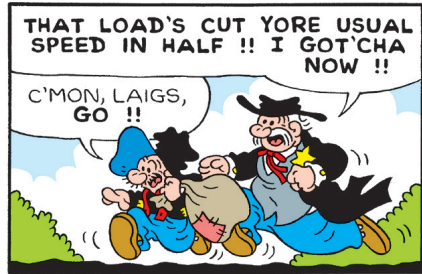
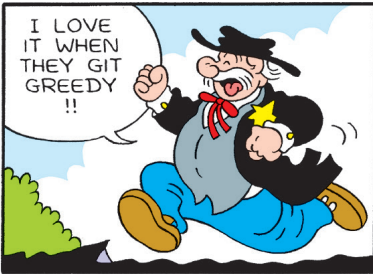
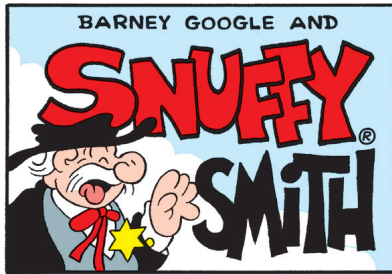
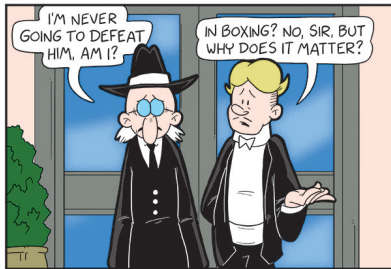
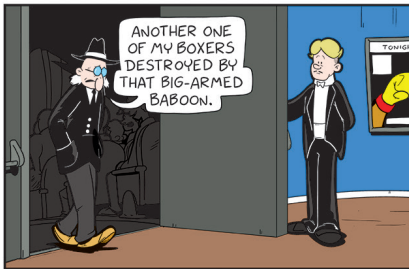
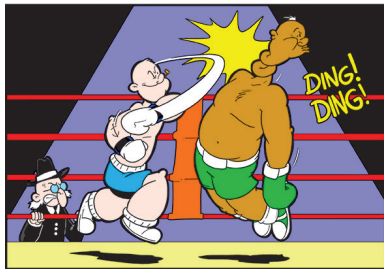
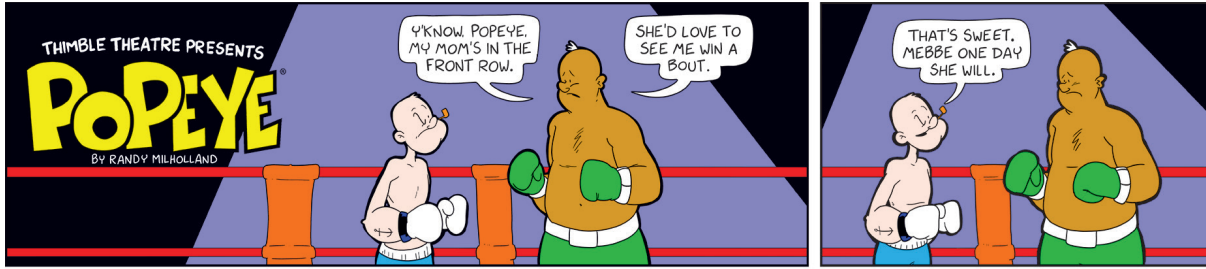
Out on a Limb

by Gary Kopervas



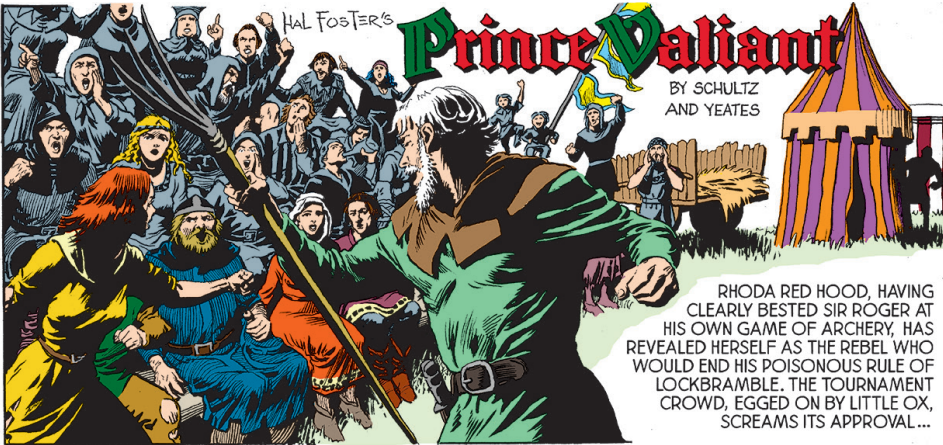
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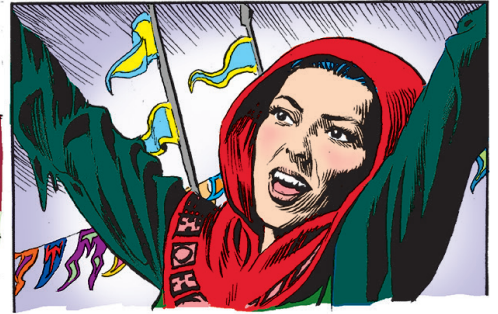


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RHODA RED HOOD, HAVING CLEARLY BESTED SIR ROGER AT HIS OWN GAME OF ARCHERY, HAS REVEALED HERSELF AS THE REBEL WHO WOULD END HIS POISONOUS RULE OF LOCKBRAMBLE. THE TOURNAMENT CROWD, EGGED ON BY LITTLE OX, SCREAMS ITS APPROVAL ...



... WITH YEARS OF RESENTMENT TOWARD ROGER AND HIS RUINOUS ECONOMIC STRATEGY FOCUSED BY THE SPIRITED DEFIANCE OF RHODA! "SURELY," SHE CRIES, "WE HAVE SUFFERED LONG ENOUGH UNDER ROGER'S EDICTS!"



ROGER IS NOW FRIGHTENED—HIS PEASANTS ARE NO LONGER THE COWED MINIONS THEY WERE BEFORE THE TOURNAMENT BEGAN. HE BARKS TO HIS GUARDS: "SEIZE THE TRAITOROUS WENCH!"

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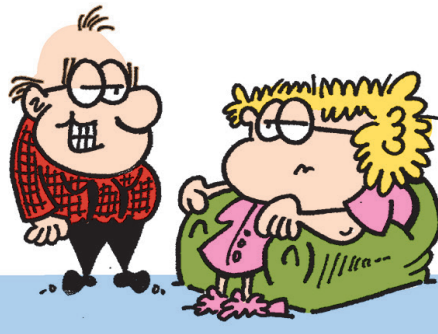


The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



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SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

Making Big Decisions

Sometimes we need to make tough decisions. We don't want to. We want to wake up and find the problem is resolved. But we can't do that, and we know it.

Sometimes we're faced with a serious life-changing situation such as acknowledging that we need to move a spouse or parent to a care facility because we just can't manage anymore.

Or perhaps one of our children needs our long-term help. The question becomes: Do we sell our current home? Do we rent it out in the hope we'll eventually move back?

Other times the situation isn't quite as grim but still requires a serious decision: We clearly need a new vehicle. But where will the money come from?

While my current situation isn't earthshaking (except maybe to me), it does require a very serious decision to be made. It is: Will I once again register to vote this year? While it might appear to be a no-brainer to many, it really isn't. During the last presidential election cycle, my life was consumed with harassing phone calls and people at my door all day, every day, day and night. This went on for a year.

The only peace (and uninterrupted sleep) I got was by unplugging the phone. If I answered the door, I was faced with pushy people insisting I make cash donations to their party and fill out requests for absentee ballots that they would (supposedly) deliver to the polls on voting day.

Worst, I think, were the get-out-the-vote workers who tried to insist on coming into my house to discuss the issues.

I hung in there until Election Day, stood in line to vote and then went directly to the town office and had them delete me from the voter rolls. I remain, for the first time in my adult life, not registered to vote.

It feels very wrong.

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1. What speedy outfielder became the fifth Negro leagues player in the National Baseball Hall of Fame when he was inducted in 1974?

2. Who did "Terrible" Terry Norris defeat in a 1991 boxing match at New York City's Madison Square Garden to retain his WBC light middleweight title?

3. In 1895, William G. Morgan invented a sport he called "Mintonette." What is the sport known as today?

4. What NCAA men's basketball team had a record 32-game losing streak at home from 1988-91?

5. What now-demolished venue was home to the NBA's Dallas Mavericks (1980-2001) and the NHL's Dallas Stars (1993-2001)?

6. Patty Smyth, singer for the 1980s rock band Scandal, married what tennis legend in 1997?

7. What Oklahoma Sooners basketball star was selected No. 2 overall by the Indiana Pacers in the 1985 NBA Draft?



by Ryan A. Berenz

Answers

1. James "Cool Papa" Bell.
2. Sugar Ray Leonard.
3. Volleyball.
4. The University of New Hampshire Wildcats.
5. Reunion Arena.
6. John McEnroe.
7. Wayman Tisdale.

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Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps





DEAR PAW'S CORNER: My little dog Barnsey is quite a barker for a terrier, but for the past several days his bark has been very hoarse. He sometimes snorts or sneezes, too. I make sure he has plenty of water, but I'm not sure what else to do. It doesn't seem to be getting better. -- Faye H., Hartford, Connecticut

DEAR FAYE: This is a perfect time to take Barnsey to the vet. Chronic hoarseness when barking can have several different causes, and the veterinarian can better evaluate him to see what's happening.

I'll go over some of the reasons for a barker suddenly getting hoarse. Laryngitis is a common diagnosis, but it's important to figure out the cause. A bacterial or viral infection may be the culprit, or gastroesopha-

geal reflux (where stomach acid flows up into the esophageal tract, causing irritation and inflammation).

Less common causes are masses or tumors growing on or near the dog's larynx, or other conditions affecting the larynx. These may require surgery, and the vet will discuss this option with you.

The vet will evaluate Barnsey to see if he has an infection, acid reflux, or if the hoarse barking has another cause. They'll then be able to recommend an effective treatment. For example, a bacterial infection would likely be treated with antibiotics. A viral infection has to run its course, but Barnsey would be treated with medications to make him comfortable and reduce inflammation.

If acid reflux is the suspected culprit, the vet may recommend changes to his feeding schedule and the amount of food at each meal. You can also try different varieties of dog food.

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

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Strange BUT TRUE

By Lucie Winborne

* Using high-pressure, high-temperature techniques that mimic Earth's diamond-forming conditions, scientists can transform the carbon in peanut butter into sparkling gemstones. Chew on that!

* And speaking of chewing, snails have thousands of tiny teeth on their radula, the tongue-like organ they use for grinding up food, making them one of the earth's toothiest creatures.

* Mary, Queen of Scots, was history's youngest monarch, ascending to the throne at a mere 6 days old. Coming in at second place was Emperor Shang

of China's Han Dynasty, who in 105 A.D. assumed his royal position at 100 days old.

* If stored correctly and not contaminated, honey can last for thousands of years without spoiling.

* A piano's frame is made of iron.

* Though T-shirts have existed since the late 1800s, the plain white version gained popularity as a wear-alone garment thanks to Marlon Brando's portrayal of Stanley Kowalski in the movie "A Streetcar Named Desire."

* One out of every seven American jobs is related to transportation.

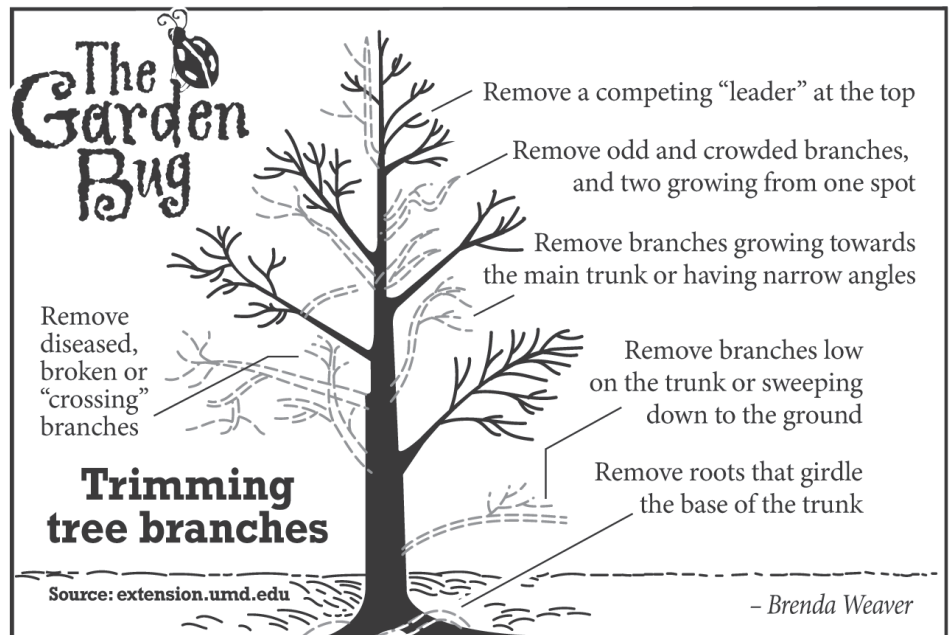
* Some architectural structures, known as whispering galleries, have unique acoustics allowing a whisper at one end of the gallery to be heard clearly at the other end, due to sound waves following the curved surfaces.

* The "United States Postal Service Anthem," a unique song composed by (appropriately) Jack Stamp, is an official musical salute to the USPS, its employees, and its role in American life.

* In some WWII POW camps, the Nazis would allow Allied soldiers to play board games like Monopoly, even providing the games. The British exploited this opportunity by using compasses, banknotes, and real-world maps in place of standard boards and pieces, as a means of helping prisoners to escape.

Thought for the Day: "If no one ever took risks, Michelangelo would have painted the Sistine floor." -- Neil Simon

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by Freddy Groves

Small Punishments for Scammers

What always stands out, at least to me, are the low penalties for the criminals who steal from veterans and the Department of Veterans Affairs. The number of scams seems to grow, and one wonders if it's because thieves don't perceive there to be much punishment if they should be caught.

An example: A veteran threatened to blow up a VA medical facility. He verbally told the crisis line and even identified the person he specifically wanted to kill and when. He was found and arrested for making

threats and even made additional threats after the arrest. Now, he hasn't gone to court yet, but the evidence is pretty strong. Why, one wonders, would he only be in line for five short years in the slammer? Yes, there could be a hefty fine, but it's the time behind bars that would keep society safe.

Another example: There was the VA employee who stole prescription drugs that were mailed to VA patients. He knew where they were going, of course, since the drugs were shipped from the VA pharmacy and he therefore had the addresses. He and his pals would break into the mailboxes to steal the drugs, which he would then sell for big profits. I think about cancer patients when I learn of something like this, cancer patients who need their drugs on time, not to mention the likely pain medications. The main thief in this scam only received a sentence of 42 months in prison; his scammer pals got sentences of 12 and 35 months. Not long enough, not nearly long enough.

Then there was the guy who convinced everyone that he was blind and therefore 100% disabled and needed some benefits. Turned out he had both a drivers license and a gun carry permit and could see well enough for those activities. Not so blind after all, but his punishment was a few years of probation and some cash restitution.

So where is the deterrence to thieves and scammers when the punishment is so light?

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Wishing Well®

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| 7 | 2 | 3 | 7 | 2 | 7 | 6 | 2 | 7 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 7 |
| O | U | E | R | D | P | N | E | L | E | A | S | Y |

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

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1. LITERATURE: What is the name of the kingdom in "The Princess Bride"?
2. GENERAL KNOWLEDGE: In British royalty, what is King Charles' family name?
3. TELEVISION: Which TV sitcom features Sheldon's catchphrase "Bazinga!"?
4. U.S. STATES: Which U.S. state is home to the Awatovi Ruins, a national historic landmark?
5. HISTORY: According to a WWII government slogan, what sinks ships?
6. GEOGRAPHY: What is the name of the small principality that lies between Spain and France?
7. ANATOMY: Which part of the brain controls hunger?
8. LANGUAGE: The Latin word "caput" refers to what part of the human anatomy?
9. SCIENCE: Which color has the longest wavelength in the visible spectrum?
10. FOOD & DRINK: What is the primary alcohol used in margaritas?

Answers

1. Florin.
2. Mountbatten-Windsor.
3. "The Big Bang Theory."
4. Arizona.
5. Loose lips.
6. Andorra.
7. Hypothalamus.
8. The head.
9. Red.
10. Tequila.

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South Dakota Governor

Kristi Noem



South Dakota: *Under God, the People Rule*

Looking Back on Legislative Session

Back in December, when I gave my annual Budget Address to the state legislature, I told them that we had to remember our core function as the state governments. I told them that we needed to prioritize people, not projects. Our primary responsibility is to serve the people of the great state of South Dakota. And now, as we have wrapped up the 2024 legislative session, I am proud to say that we have done just that.

My top priority this session was to put forward a conservative budget that showed exactly what our priorities are. I have worked with legislators on both sides on the aisle to make sure that conservative budget passed. We cut \$70 million in spending from the overall budget this legislative session. The final budget gives a 4% increase to education, the state's technical colleges, reimbursement rates for health and human service providers, and salary increases for state employees.

We had some incredible wins for education in South Dakota this legislative session. I just recently held bill signing ceremonies for three important bills. First, we are funding a Center for Quantum Information Science and Technology. South Dakota is a leader in emerging technology, and this center will combine numerous fields to make tremendous advancements in cybersecurity, agriculture, healthcare, and more.

And we are making sure that our teachers, the ones we trust to care for and teach our kids, are receiving the paychecks that they deserve. I signed a bill to increase teacher pay and ensure that we are no longer leaving our teachers behind when we increase state funding for education.

Finally, we know that our kids are our future, and we want to do all that we can to set them up for success. The legislature passed funding so that my Department of Education can continue their literacy program – where they help teachers learn the proven best way to teach students how to read.

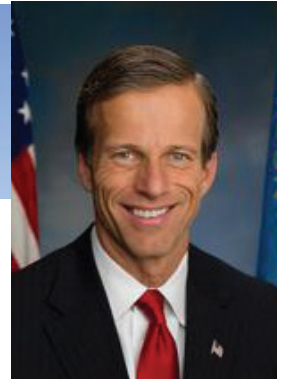
Whether we're talking about our kids in the classrooms, our hardworking employees and businessowners, or our retirees who call South Dakota home, everyone deserves to feel safe. I am very proud that the legislature passed a historic piece of legislation to combat antisemitism in our state. We have seen a shocking rise in antisemitic acts of hate across the country. This bill ensures the safety of our Jewish brothers and sister, and it will serve as model legislation for other states.

The safety and security of every South Dakotan should always be the top priority of state government. This session, we worked together to pass a very important bill that prohibits six Evil Foreign Governments from buying agricultural land in South Dakota. Nations like China will do all they can to take down the United States and become the world's largest power. And if they control our food supply, they will effectively control us. I am very proud of the work we have done over the last year to create, pass, and sign this legislation into law.

We were able to accomplish all of this while staying true to the fiscally conservative principles that made our state's economy the success that it is today. South Dakota has now set aside \$656.2 million for our prisons over the last three legislative sessions. By allocating this money now, the state will save over \$500 million in interest and fees over the next 25 years.

Our legislative session this year was certainly a successful one. Now, I'm looking forward to meeting with South Dakotans and continuing to do all I can to serve them every single day.

John Thune
U.S. SENATOR - SOUTH DAKOTA



Celebrating Farmers and Ranchers

Agriculture is the lifeblood of South Dakota, and it is a heritage deeply rooted in our state. You can't go far in South Dakota without encountering some sign of our bustling agriculture sector; whether it's fields of corn and soybeans, ranches teeming with cattle, or freight trains and trucks transporting agricultural products to market. During National Agriculture Week, we have a lot to celebrate.

National Agriculture Week, which we celebrate March 17-23, is an opportunity to celebrate America's farmers and ranchers. I consider it a privilege to represent South Dakota's hardworking farmers and ranchers in the U.S. Senate. These men and women, often with the support of their entire families, work hard to feed our nation and the world, and I'm proud to be able to work with them on policies that support their important work. As a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, I am able to shape agriculture policy, and this work often begins and ends with South Dakota's producers, whose input over the years has been invaluable.

Unfortunately, farmers and ranchers are currently facing some significant headwinds. Farm incomes have decreased, inflation continues to strain producers' budgets, and agriculture exports are down. In addition to continuing to advocate for a strong farm bill that provides producers with the support they need to overcome these challenges, I'm also working to improve market conditions for South Dakota's agricultural products.

South Dakota ranchers produce high-quality beef, and, in South Dakota, we take our beef seriously. Our current beef labeling system, however, has long allowed imported beef that is neither born nor raised in the United States, but is simply finished here, to be labeled as "Product of the U.S.A." Like a lot of South Dakotans, I want to be sure the beef I'm buying at the local grocery store is coming from producers in our state, or at least from the United States. I don't think that's too much to ask.

I have long advocated for a return to mandatory country of origin labeling for beef. I'm encouraged that the U.S. Department of Agriculture recently finalized a regulation allowing only products born, raised, slaughtered, and processed in the United States to bear the voluntary "Product of the U.S.A." or "Made in the U.S.A." label. But I will continue to push for my American Beef Labeling Act to require mandatory country of origin labeling for beef to ensure full transparency that benefits beef producers and consumers alike.

In addition to a robust domestic market, international trade benefits our farmers and ranchers by opening new markets to sell their products. Unfortunately, the Biden administration has put increasing market access on the backburner to the detriment of American producers. The current decline in U.S. agricultural exports can be directly linked to the Biden administration's trade strategy, or lack thereof.

The reality is that the rest of the world has not put trade on hold, and the Biden administration's unambitious agenda is putting America at a serious disadvantage. I recently led a letter to the U.S. trade representative and the secretary of agriculture urging them to increase agricultural exports and improve competitiveness of American products in foreign markets. American producers cannot afford to continue to be put at a competitive disadvantage by this administration's inaction.

Agriculture is part of our way of life in South Dakota, and I'll continue to work with our farmers and ranchers to ensure our agriculture sector remains strong for current and future generations.

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



Tick Tock, TikTok.

BIG Update

This week, I voted YES when the House overwhelmingly passed legislation to encourage TikTok to divest from its parent company ByteDance, which is under the influence of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The bill would require TikTok, and apps under similar control from a foreign adversary, to divest from the foreign adversary in question, or be removed from U.S. app stores and web platforms. I want to be clear, this is not a TikTok ban. TikTok can continue operating in America as long as they cut ties with the Chinese Communist Party.

I've been opposed to TikTok for years. Not because of the app itself, but because of the CCP's use of the app to gather personal and private information of millions of Americans and to promote anti-American propaganda. I hope the Senate takes this bill seriously and passes it soon, and I hope TikTok makes the right decision to cut ties with the Chinese Communist Party.

BIG News

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) issued a new rule to finalize the voluntary "Product of the USA" label claim for meat, poultry, and egg products. USDA's final rule makes it clear—to receive the "Product of the USA" label, the meat must be born in the USA, raised in the USA, slaughtered in the USA, and processed in the USA.

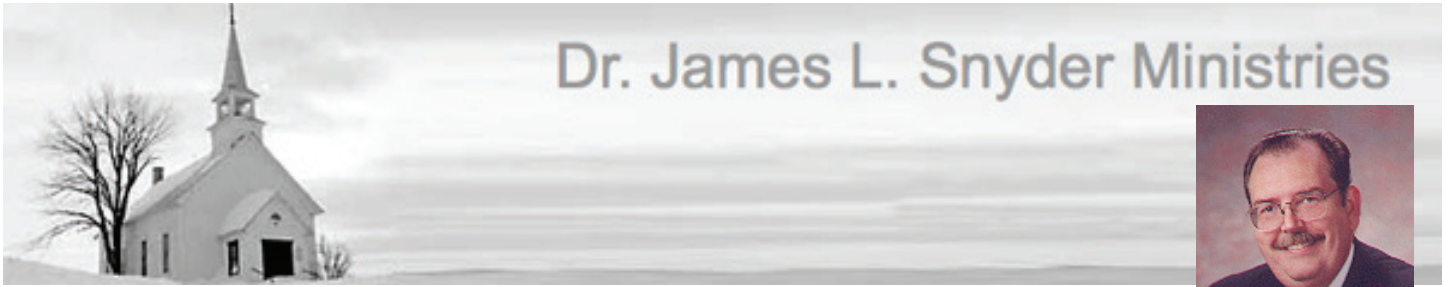
"Product of the USA" should mean it's an American product from farm to table. USDA's final rule will close a loophole to meet consumer and producer expectations.

BIG Idea

I met with Ryan Olson from the National Pest Management Association to talk about science-based pesticide labeling. Together, we're working to address labeling from the state and federal levels. Last year, I introduced the Agricultural Labeling Uniformity Act to ensure states' and localities' pesticide regulations don't negatively impact the labeling on the package. Creating different labels for each state or locality and ensuring the package gets to the right location would make it almost impossible for manufacturers to get the produce out the door efficiently and at a reasonable cost.

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Touch My Coffee And You Die



Recently, illegitimate aliens of the worst kind have invaded our house illegally.

It came to a head just the other day when we were sitting down to lunch, and The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage had a lovely bowl of tomato soup. I forgot what I was eating because all the attention went to her bowl.

As I was eating my lunch, I glanced over at her bowl of tomato soup. The top of it was covered with little black dots of some sort. Looking at it, I asked her, "Oh, my dear, what kind of soup are you eating today?"

She looked down at her soup, and her world came to a crashing end. She jumped up and yelled, but I had no idea what was happening.

Looking at her soup again, I noticed that those little black dots were swimming around in it. As I looked closely, I noticed they were the tiniest little bugs I had ever seen, but there they were, swimming cheerfully in her soup.

Being the affectionate husband I am, I laughed uncontrollably as I pointed to her soup. "You do make the best soup in town." And then I laughed some more.

Looking at her, I noticed she was not laughing. She was doing the opposite of laughing, so I had to calm down just a bit.

I don't believe in karma. I think it's a bunch of knucklehead idiocy. But in my experience, I have had things come back on me in a very alarming way. I wasn't thinking of that as I was making fun of The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage and her bug-infected tomato soup.

That was just the beginning. From then on, the bugs were everywhere in our house. Whenever I saw a bug, I would look at The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage and say, "Do you want this one for your tomato soup?"

For some reason, I'm not sure why, she didn't find any of that very funny.

But things were about to change.

Those bugs flew around my head, and one landed on my nose. Not thinking, which is my MO, I smacked that bug with my right hand as hard as possible. Of course, I did not consider that the bug was as small as it was, and it was on my nose. I'm unsure if I hurt the bug, but my nose began to bleed.

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The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage caught me and said with a little smirk, "Are you having fun playing with your little bug friends?"

I wouldn't say this out loud in her presence, but I deserved that.

The next incident was a bunch of those bugs flying up my nose. I sneezed 17 times, and the bugs went everywhere in the room.

Laughing at me again, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage said, "The next time you sneeze cover your nose and mouth with your hand." I think she was having a giggle attack at the time.

Later that afternoon, the bugs were still flying all around. As I sat in my easy chair drinking coffee, I noticed bugs flying around my coffee.

I grabbed my coffee and shouted to those illegitimate aliens, "Touch my coffee and you die!"

I'm okay if they spoil the tomato soup, but my coffee is an entirely different situation. Something about my coffee prohibits these illegitimate aliens from drinking it.

Where these illegitimate aliens come from and how they got in our house, is a mystery to me.

For example, the cats on the porch are allowed to look in our house, but they're not allowed to be in our house. The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage has some idea that they have fleas and other things. But if they're not allowed in, what gives these bugs the right to enter our house? Do they have permission from The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage?

To take control of the coffee in my cup is a severe malfunction of what is right. Therefore, there must be consequences to that kind of activity.

I saw these little bugs flying around everywhere I walked in our house. Something has to be done to deal with this major calamity in our house.

The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage noticed that I was getting somewhat agitated by these bugs. No matter what we did in the house, they were still there.

Towards suppertime, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage looked at me and said, "Why don't we go out for supper tonight and celebrate a bug free zone?"

I know my wife is right all the time, and this time, she was more than right, so I was all in with her on this.

A little later, I thought of a bible verse along this line. James 3:5, "Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!"

Sometimes I don't realize how important such little things are. Looking back on my life, I remember some small events that turned into big events.

The biggest distractions in my life are the little things we sometimes ignore.

Sometimes just a few words can cause a big problem, which can last for a long time and cause a big problem. Say one wrong word and the problems begin.

No matter how big a fire is, it always starts with a small flame.

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EARTHTALK ™

Dear EarthTalk: How do different regions of the U.S. compare with regard to vulnerability to impending climate threats?
-- Peter Greenville, Detroit, MI

Climate change causes rising temperatures, fluctuating rain patterns and other extreme weather phenomena. However, the effects of climate change are not equally distributed across the country.

Regional climate change experiences can be broadly divided into two categories: (1) geographical and climatic factors (i.e., the actual climate change); (2) and socio-economic factors (i.e., the vulnerability of the population to these changes). It is crucial to understand how different regions experience climate change in order to develop effective climate policies. Some regions, for example, rely on climate-sensitive industries such as agriculture, tourism and natural resource extraction, while others do not. Those that do tend to be home to vulnerable populations like people with low income, and marginalized communities.

The Fifth National Climate Assessment (NCA5) recognized certain region-specific patterns. The U.S. Northeast is experiencing significant increases in extreme precipitation, with some areas seeing up to a 60 percent rise from the historical average. Also, warming water temperatures are impacting local wildlife. In the Southeast, lengthy coasts make the region particularly vulnerable to hurricanes and increasing sea levels. This vulnerability is exacerbated by the region's reliance on coastal ecosystems and tourism.

Climate change negatively affects the Great Plains' huge energy sector. Agriculture is disrupted through the depletion of a critical water source: the High Plain Aquifer. The region is also vulnerable to habitat loss, changes in food availability, and other unique problems. The Midwest, with its intense agricultural production, suffers extreme weather events and changes in precipitation patterns that dramatically impact crop yields. A severe drought in 2012 caused billions of dollars in losses to Midwest farmers.

The Northwest's vulnerable water resources are greatly impacted by higher temperatures. Snowpack, a critical water source, is declining. Also, the region's extensive forests face a higher risk of wildfires and insect infestations. The Southwest, characterized by a hot and dry climate, is also vulnerable to prolonged droughts, severe wildfires and water scarcity, further straining its already limited water resources.

Alaska and its large population of indigenous people is affected by melting permafrost, coastal erosion and loss of wildlife. Hawaii and the U.S. Caribbean's coastal communities suffer sea level rise, coral reef degradation and extreme weather events. And the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration reports that degradation of coral reefs due to rises in sea surface temperatures could incur coastal damages costing approximately \$1.2 billion (in 2022 dollars) annually to Hawai'i and the U.S. Pacific territories.

While impacts of climate change vary, it is important to remember no region is immune. We will need to continue to collect and analyze data to fully understand this issue. Furthermore, we need to empower vulnerable communities and prioritize their needs. Finally, we need to make collaborative efforts at the local, state and national levels to truly combat this issue.



The effects of climate change could be drastically different in one part of the U.S. from another depending on a variety of environmental factors. Credit: Pexels.com.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Serial bank robber who learned yoga, took courses in prison offered future chance for freedom

BY: JOHN HULT - MARCH 17, 2024 7:00 AM

SIOUX FALLS — A three-time bank robber and repeat escape artist who learned yoga and logged more than 300 hours of coursework in prison may have a shot at freedom in old age thanks to a Thursday vote from the South Dakota Board of Pardons and Paroles.

If Gov. Kristi Noem signs on to the board's recommendation, 45-year-old James Pasek would see his sentence commuted from life to 50 years in state prison.

If she issues a denial letter before July 1, Pasek can ask again in a year. If she denies it after that, he'll need to wait a lot longer.

Senate Bill 9, which Noem signed into law on March 4, pushes back the waiting period between clemency requests for inmates with a conviction for a crime of violence and a life sentence from one to four years.

SB 9 passed with wide support during the just-ended legislative session. It had the backing of victims and family members, who told lawmakers they don't want to relive a crime and face those who victimized them every year.

The Belle Fourche Dairy Queen employee who was a bank teller in Spearfish in 2003 when Pasek slipped her a note demanding cash did not appear in person or virtually for Pasek's commutation hearing. Parole specialist Stacy Cole told the board members she'd spoken with the victim, who said she'd offer a statement but never did.

Pasek has served 22 years of a life sentence for first-degree robbery already, and would serve another decade or more with a commutation and a favorable parole vote. At that point, he'd have another 13 years of federal prison time to look forward to for the two bank robberies that preceded his theft-by-note in Lawrence County. He'd likely be in his 60s by the time he walks free.

From robber to studious inmate

Pasek told the board he was a foolish and selfish young man when his crime spree began in 2002. That's the year he and an accomplice stole some pawn shop guns in Gillette, Wyoming, and drove south to Casper to rob a bank. Police nabbed the pair in short order, but Pasek said he wasn't ready to give up.

"I ripped the bars out of the window and took off," Pasek said. "I wasn't ready to face my problems. I tried running from them, but it didn't work out, obviously."

After his jail break, he stole a car and drove it to Bozeman, Montana, where he bought a pellet gun, robbed another bank and was again apprehended quickly. He broke out of that jail, as well, again stealing a car, this time for a drive to Spearfish.

Less than 24 hours after robbing a Spearfish bank, he and his \$2,500 haul were in the hands of local police.

Typically, a conviction for first-degree robbery would not carry a life sentence. The sheer number of offenses in Pasek's recent past put his sentencing judge in a position to levy one in his case.

Pasek told the board he matured quite a bit by the time South Dakota prison officials sent him to North Carolina for plotting yet another escape. He remains incarcerated in that state.

Part of the reason, he said, was the murder of former correctional officer Ronald "R.J." Johnson, who was beaten to death with a metal pipe by two inmates trying to escape on his 63rd birthday, a day he had agreed to cover someone else's shift.

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"It kind of sat me down," Pasek said of Johnson's murder. "I didn't want to be that guy who hurts someone trying to get out."

While behind bars in North Carolina, he told the board, he came to understand the importance of bettering himself and thinking of others instead of chasing fantasies of a career in bank robbery.

Learning yoga a decade ago has been helpful, he said, as have the hundreds of hours of college courses he's completed using a prison tablet.

His father testified on his behalf. He said his son would have an oil field job in Wyoming upon release, and that he could become a high earning, contributing member of society with the aid of that career and his extended family.

Board member Ken Albers said he doesn't like Pasek or the tattoos on his head.

Yet Albers moved to commute the sentence because he agreed with Board Vice Chair Kirsten Aasen, who pointed out moments before the motion that regardless of what happens in South Dakota, Pasek will remain incarcerated for a long time.

A commutation would recognize the inmate's personal growth and potential without threatening public safety by freeing someone who's not ready.

"Whatever we do, he's still got so much time hanging over his head that he has several ways he can screw this up," Aasen said.

Future lifers could wait longer for commutation requests

After the hearing, as the board discussed its schedule for the coming months, Board Chair Myron Rau returned to the subject of SB 9 and referenced the potential timing of a commutation denial for Pasek. If it comes before July 1, when the law takes effect, Rau said he'd likely be able to ask again in a year.

Rau testified against SB 9 in February and called it "stupid, but not complicated" on Thursday. Even so, he said, instructions to applicants like Pasek will need to be adjusted as a result.

"Come July, anybody who comes here and gets denied will have to wait four years," Rau said.

By coincidence, one of the men who inspired SB 9 will appear before the parole board at its July meeting. The family of killer Joaquin Ramos' victim testified in favor of the bill.

They've testified to the board against paroling him every year or so since Gov. Mike Rounds commuted his life sentence and made him eligible for parole.

Parole, however, is not clemency, and therefore not impacted by SB 9. South Dakota's legal definition of "clemency" includes commutations, which reduce a sentence for a current inmate, and pardons, which erase an old conviction from a free person's record.

Because Ramos earned clemency from Rounds, he's legally entitled to a parole hearing every eight months.

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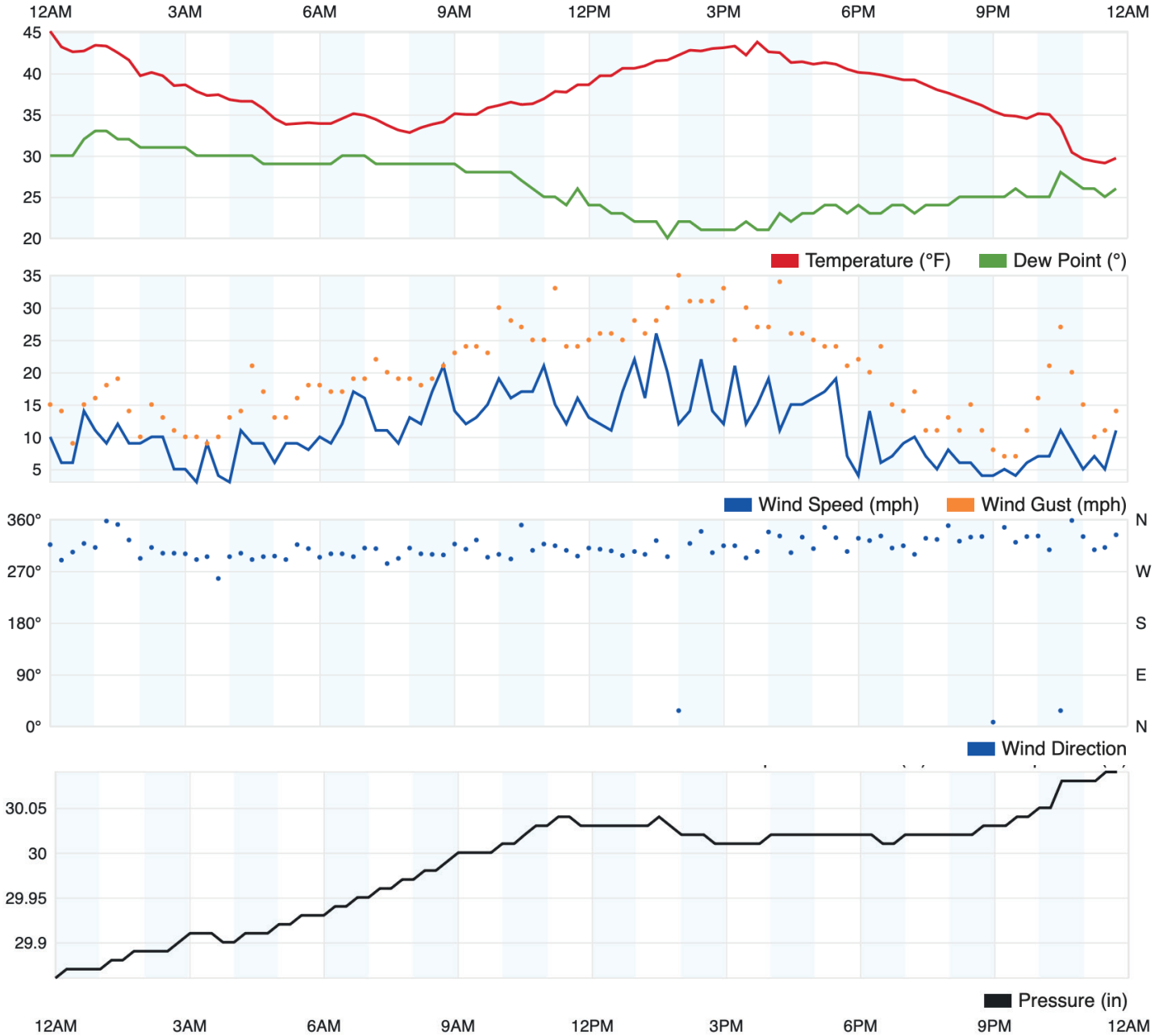
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Scattered
Flurries and
Breezy

High: 32 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 13 °F

Monday



Sunny then
Mostly Sunny
and Breezy

High: 49 °F

Monday
Night



Mostly Clear
and Breezy
then Partly
Cloudy

Low: 31 °F

Tuesday



Mostly Sunny

High: 53 °F



Chilly Today ...

... Fire Danger On The Increase Monday

March 17, 2024
4:01 AM

Today
Upper 20s to Upper 30s
North Winds
20 - 30 mph

Tonight
Teens

Monday
Low 40s (east) - Low 60s (west)
West Winds
25 - 40 mph

National Oceanic and
Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

High pressure moving in will result in continued windy to breezy conditions and a few flurries. As that high moves south for Monday, increasing winds will bring in warmer air but also result in an increased threat for fires.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 48 °F at 4:26 PM

Low Temp: 15 °F at 7:02 AM

Wind: 11 mph at 9:51 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 12 hours, 05 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 77 in 2012

Record Low: -10 in 1906

Average High: 42

Average Low: 20

Average Precip in March.: 0.43

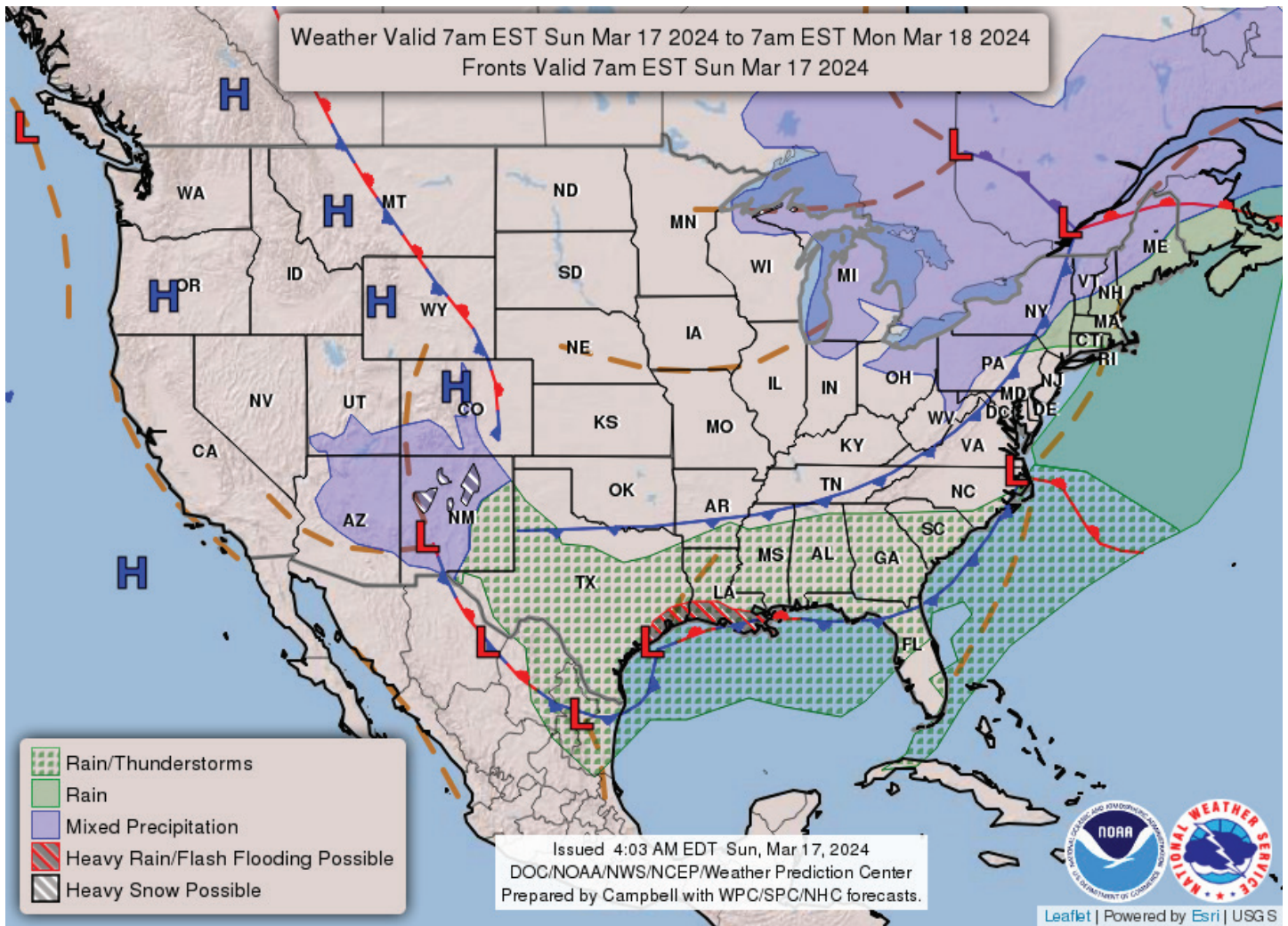
Precip to date in March: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 1.60

Precip Year to Date: 0.07

Sunset Tonight: 7:43:00 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:36:06 am



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Today in Weather History

March 17, 1997: High winds of 30 to 50 mph, gusting to over 60 mph, occurred over much of northeast South Dakota through the morning and into the early afternoon hours. Several homes and businesses sustained some roof damage. In Aberdeen, the high winds tore a large piece of the roof off the bowling alley and also ripped a part of a roof off an appliance store. The winds damaged some power lines and connections in Aberdeen, including some traffic lights. In Aberdeen, the power was out for 2500 customers for a few hours in the morning. The wind also damaged two old farm buildings west of Aberdeen. One barn lost 75 percent of its roof. The second barn was pushed six inches off of its foundation, suffering minor structural damage. The Edmunds County Highway Department Shop, under construction east of Ipswich, suffered much damage as many rafters came down, and the sidewall frame shifted. Finally, much small to medium-sized branches were brought down by the high winds. Some peak wind gusts across the area included 58 mph in Aberdeen and 63 mph in Watertown.

1892: A winter storm in southwestern and central Tennessee produced 26.3 inches of snow at Riddleton and 18.5 inches at Memphis. It was the deepest snow on record for those areas.

1906: The temperature at Snake River Wyoming dipped to 50 degrees below zero, a record for the U.S. for March.

1906: A magnitude 7.1 earthquake caused significant damage in Taiwan. According to the Central Weather Bureau in China, this earthquake caused 1,258 deaths, 2,385 injuries, and destroyed over 6,000 homes.

1952: The ban on using the word "tornado" issued in 1886 ended on this date. In the 1880s, John P. Finley of the U.S. Army Signal Corps, then handling weather forecasting for the U.S., developed generalized forecasts on days tornadoes were most likely. But in 1886, the Army ended Finley's program and banned the word "tornado" from forecasts because the harm done by a tornado prediction would eventually be greater than that which results from the tornado itself. The thinking was that people would be trampled in the panic if they heard a tornado was possible. The ban stayed in place after the Weather Bureau; now, the National Weather Service took over forecasting from the Army. A tornado that wrecked 52 large aircraft at Tinker Air Force Base, OK, on 3/20/1948, spurred Air Force meteorologists to begin working on ways to forecast tornadoes. The Weather Bureau also began looking for ways to improve tornado forecasting and established the Severe Local Storm Warning Center, which is now the Storm Prediction Center in Norman, OK. The ban on the word "tornado" fell on this date when the new center issued its first Tornado Watch.

1987 - A powerful spring storm produced severe thunderstorms over the Central Gulf Coast States, and heavy snow in the High Plains Region. A tornado caused three million dollars damage at Natchez MS, and six inches of rain in five hours caused five million dollars damage at Vicksburg MS. Cactus TX received 10 inches of snow. Western Kansas reported blizzard conditions. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A winter storm produced heavy snow from the northeast Texas panhandle to the Ozark area of Missouri and Arkansas. Up to fifteen inches of snow was reported in Oklahoma and Texas. Snowfall totals in the Ozark area ranged up to 14 inches, with unofficial reports as high as 22 inches around Harrison AR. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Strong northerly winds ushered snow and arctic cold into the north central U.S. Winds gusted to 58 mph at Sydney NE and Scottsbluff NE, Cadillac MI received 12 inches of snow, and International Falls MN reported a record low of 22 degrees below zero. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Showers and thunderstorms associated with a slow moving cold front produced torrential rains across parts of the southeastern U.S. over a two day period. Flooding claimed the lives of at least 22 persons, including thirteen in Alabama. Up to 16 inches of rain deluged southern Alabama, with 10.63 inches reported at Mobile AL in 24 hours. The town of Elba AL was flooded with 6 to 12 feet of water causing more than 25 million dollars damage, and total flood damage across Alabama exceeded 100 million dollars. Twenty-six counties in the state were declared disaster areas. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

GRATITUDE OR GREED?

Aesop was a Greek slave who became famous for writing a number of intriguing fables. One of his stories involved a dog and a bone.

He once told the story of a dog that was crossing a bridge carrying a bone in its mouth. Seeing his reflection in the water beneath him, he thought that the bone in the mouth of the "other dog" was larger.

In his greed, he opened his mouth to try to snatch the bigger bone from the other dog. However, when he opened his mouth, he dropped his bone into the water. Then he had nothing - for the water in the stream carried the bone to the river and then into the sea.

Paul compares people who are greedy with those who are immoral and impure and assures his readers that they will not inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. In fact, he says, "greedy people are actually idolaters" - and indeed they are. An idolater is one who worships and wants "things" more than they do God. Sadly, this lifestyle leads to the worship of things, and the "things" above and beyond the worship of God.

It is not wrong to want nice things. But if we want nice things more than we want God, it takes our minds away from Him and changes our priorities to the things of this world. As Christians, we must be careful to focus our minds and place our thoughts on Heaven with Jesus.

Prayer: Give us discerning minds and faithful hearts, Father, to desire those things that are best for us. May we be careful and cautious at all times to honor You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: You can be sure that no immoral, impure, or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. Ephesians 5:5



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: 03.15.24

13 25 50 51 66 6

MegaPlier: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$875,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.16.24

11 30 43 47 51 4

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$2,250,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.16.24

1 6 19 27 45 14

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 13 Hrs 10 Mins 43 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.16.24

2 15 17 21 24

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$24,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.16.24

9 11 13 29 69 12

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.16.24

12 23 44 57 61 5

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$645,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

Saturday's Scores

The Associated Press
BOYS PREP BASKETBALL
SDHSAA State Playoffs

Class AA

Consolation Champion: Sioux Falls Jefferson 60, Watertown 58
Seventh Place: Huron 63, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 58
State Champion: Mitchell 46, Brandon Valley 45
Third Place: Harrisburg 50, Sioux Falls Washington 48

Class A

Consolation Champion: Sioux Valley 69, Pine Ridge 51
Seventh Place: Groton 67, Vermillion 49
State Champion: Sioux Falls Christian 53, Hamlin 50, OT
Third Place: Dakota Valley 78, Rapid City Christian 73

Class B

Consolation Champion: Wessington Springs 55, Gregory 51
Seventh Place: Viborg-Hurley 84, Leola-Frederick High School 75
State Champion: Howard 60, DeSmet 55, OT
Third Place: Castlewood 74, White River 54

Russians crowd polling stations in apparent protest as Putin is set to extend his rule

By The Associated Press undefined

Russians crowded outside polling stations at midday Sunday on the last day of a three-day presidential election, apparently heeding an opposition call to protest against President Vladimir Putin, who is poised to extend his rule of nearly a quarter century for six more years after a relentless crackdown on dissent.

The election that began Friday has taken place in a tightly controlled environment where there are no real alternatives to Putin, no public criticism of him or his war in Ukraine. Putin's fiercest political foe, Alexei Navalny, died in an Arctic prison last month, and other critics are either in jail or in exile.

Navalny's associates have urged those unhappy with Putin or the war to protest by coming to the polls at noon on Sunday, a strategy endorsed by Navalny shortly before his death. Team Navalny described it as a success, releasing pictures and videos of people crowding near polling stations in cities across Russia around noon.

The 71-year-old Russian leader faces three token rivals from Kremlin-friendly parties who have refrained from any criticism of his 24-year rule or his full-scale invasion of Ukraine two years ago. Putin has boasted of Russian battlefield successes in the run-up to the vote, but a massive Ukrainian drone attack across Russia early Sunday sent a reminder of challenges faced by Moscow.

The Russian Defense Ministry reported downing 35 Ukrainian drones overnight, including four near the Russian capital. Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin said there were no casualties or damage.

Russia's wartime economy has proven resilient, expanding despite bruising Western sanctions. The Russian defense industry has served as a key growth engine, working around the clock to churn out missiles, tanks and ammunition.

Voting is taking place at polling stations across the vast country's 11 time zones, in illegally annexed regions of Ukraine, and online. More than 60% of eligible voters had cast ballots as of early Sunday.

Dmitry Sergiyenko, who cast his ballot in Moscow, said he voted for Putin: "I am happy with everything

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and want everything to continue as it is now.”

Olga Dymova, who also backed Putin, said, “I am sure that our country will only move forward towards success.”

Another Moscow voter, who identified himself only by his first name, Vadim, said he hopes for change, but added that “unfortunately, it’s unlikely.”

Navalny’s associates broadcast footage with comments by those who turned up at the polls at noon to protest Putin, their faces blurred to protect their identities.

“The action has achieved its goals,” Ivan Zhdanov, the head of Navalny’s Anti-Corruption Foundation, said in a YouTube broadcast. “The action has shown that there is another Russia, there are people who stand against Putin.”

Another Navalny ally, Leonid Volkov, said that the protest was meant to help unify and encourage those who oppose Putin.

It wasn’t possible to confirm if the voters shown lining up at polling stations in videos and photos released by Navalny’s associates and some Russian media had responded to the protest call, or merely reflected strong turnout.

Huge lines also formed around noon outside Russian diplomatic missions in Berlin, Paris, Milan and other cities with large Russian communities. Navalny’s widow, Yulia Navalnaya, joined the line at the Russian Embassy in Berlin as some in the crowd applauded and chanted her name.

In Tallinn, where hundreds stood in a line snaking around the city’s cobbled streets leading to the Russian Embassy, 23-year-old Tatiana said she came to take part in the protest at noon. “If we have some option to protest I think it’s important to utilize any opportunity,” she said, only giving her first name citing personal security reasons.

Boris Nadezhdin, a liberal politician who tried to join the race on an anti-war platform but was barred from running by election officials, voiced hope that many Russians cast their ballots against Putin.

“I believe that the Russian people today have a chance to show their real attitude to what is happening by voting not for Putin, but for some other candidates or in some other way, which is exactly what I did,” he said after voting in Dolgorpudny, just outside Moscow.

The OVD-Info group that monitors political arrests said that more than 65 people were arrested in 16 cities across Russia on Sunday.

Despite tight controls, several dozen cases of vandalism at polling stations were reported.

A woman was arrested in St. Petersburg after she threw a firebomb at a polling station entrance, and several others were detained across the country for throwing green antiseptic or ink into ballot boxes.

Dmitry Medvedev, a deputy head of the Russian Security Council chaired by Putin, called for toughening the punishment for those who vandalize polling stations, arguing they should face treason charges for attempting to derail the vote amid the fighting in Ukraine.

Some Russian media also posted images of spoiled ballots posted by voters, with “killer and thief” inscribed on one, and “waiting for you in The Hague” written on another, in a reference to an arrest warrant issued for Putin on war crimes charges related to his alleged responsibility for the abductions of children from Ukraine.

Ahead of the election, Putin cast his war in Ukraine, now in its third year, as a life-or-death battle against the West seeking to break up Russia.

Russian troops have recently made slow advances relying on their edge in firepower, while Ukraine has fought back by intensifying cross-border attacks and launching drone strikes deep inside Russia.

The Ukrainian shelling of the city of Belgorod near the border killed a 16-year-old girl on Sunday and injured her father, according to the local governor, who also reported two deaths from Ukrainian attacks the previous day.

Putin described the attacks as an attempt by Ukraine to frighten residents and derail Russia’s presidential election, saying they “won’t be left unpunished.”

Western leaders have derided the election as a travesty of democracy.

Beyond the lack of options for voters, the possibilities for independent monitoring are very limited. No

significant international observers were present. Only registered, Kremlin-approved candidates, or state-backed advisory bodies, can assign observers to polling stations, decreasing the likelihood of independent watchdogs.

Shooting in Washington leaves 2 dead, 5 injured. Police are looking for a single gunman

WASHINGTON (AP) — Two people have been killed and five others injured in a shooting in the nation's capital early Sunday.

Police were looking for a single gunman after the seven people were shot around 3 a.m. in the Shaw neighborhood of Washington. The five people who were injured were all taken to local hospitals, said Jeffrey Carroll, the executive assistant chief of the Metropolitan Police Department. All of the victims are adults, he said.

Police did not immediately provide details of the circumstances surrounding the shooting or the conditions of those injured.

The District of Columbia is struggling with a sharp increase in violent crime, which went up 39% in 2023. The increase was largely fueled by a 35% rise in homicides and growth in carjackings, which nearly doubled. Police Chief Pamela Smith has pushed lawmakers to pass legislation that would strengthen penalties for gun offenses in the nation's capital.

Biden says at DC roast that of 2 presidential candidates, 1 was mentally unfit. 'The other's me'

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The big news this week, President Joe Biden said at a weekend Washington roast, was that two candidates had clinched their party's nomination for president. But one was too old, too mentally unfit for the job, he said.

"The other's me," Biden quipped.

The digs against Republican Donald Trump kept coming from the president at the annual Gridiron Club and Foundation Dinner, as Biden deflected ongoing criticism that his memory is hazy and he appears confused, instead highlighting moments when the 77-year-old Trump has slipped up, too.

"Don't tell him, he thinks he's running against Barack Obama, that's what he said," said Biden, 81, who also quipped that he was staying up way past his bedtime.

It was the first time Biden has attended the dinner during his presidency, and comes as the 2024 election looms and the rematch between Biden and Trump heats up. The annual bacchanalia, now in its 139th year, traces its history to 1885 — that was the year President Grover Cleveland refused to attend. Every president since has come to at least one Gridiron.

Biden veered quickly into the somber, though, highlighting what he sees as a real threat to democracy should Trump — who continues to falsely claim the 2020 election was stolen — return to the White House. The speech had echoes of Biden's campaign remarks, criticizing Trump as well as too soft on Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"We live in an unprecedented moment in democracy," he said. "An unprecedented moment for history. Democracy and freedom are literally under attack. Putin's on the march in Europe. My predecessor bows down to him and says to him, 'do whatever the hell you want.'"

Biden then introduced the Ukrainian ambassador, Oksana Markarova, and Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas.

"We will not bow down. They will not bow down, and I will not bow down," he said.

Biden, dressed in white-tie attire as is the custom, brought his daughter Ashley.

The dinner has a reputation as a night of bipartisan mirth, and was jam-packed with politicians and who's-who of Washington, including Vice President Kamala Harris and her husband Doug Emhoff, at least

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eight other Cabinet members, at least five members of Congress, five governors and at least five ambassadors. Irish Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, who's in town for St. Patrick's Day, also attended.

Also speaking at the dinner were Harris, Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, a Democrat, and Utah Gov. Spencer Cox, a Republican.

Biden closed out the dinner, speaking also about the importance of a free press. Although he may not agree with everything the news media prints, he said, he understands the necessity of journalism and said he was still working to bring home journalists Evan Gershovitch and Austin Tice, one held in Russia, the other who disappeared during a reporting trip in Syria.

"Good journalism holds a mirror up to society," he said. "We need you."

Biden and Harris were seated at the head table along with other administration officials and the foreign leaders, plus Gridiron president Dan Balz of the Washington Post. Seated also at the table were Balz's bosses, the Post's Executive Editor Sally Buzbee and the newspaper's owner, Jeff Bezos.

The dinner was held at the Grand Hyatt. No photos or TV were allowed.

'There's no agenda here': A look at the judge who is overseeing Trump's hush money trial

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Judge Juan M. Merchan looked across his high-ceilinged courtroom, facing the defendant in a complicated case.

Not the one everyone knows about.

Yes, Merchan could become the first judge ever to oversee a former U.S. president's criminal trial: Donald Trump's hush money case. But on a recent morning, the judge was attending to a much less conspicuous cases in Manhattan's once-weekly Mental Health Court, where selected mentally ill offenders agree to closely monitored treatment in hopes of getting charges dismissed and their lives on track.

As Merchan talked with defendants about their progress, stumbles, jobs, families and even workouts, it was a far cry from the upcoming trial in which Trump will be at the defense table, but the judge also will be in a hot seat.

The ex-president and presumptive Republican nominee has called Merchan a "Trump-hating" judge, and defense lawyers unsuccessfully asked him to exit the case. Merchan received dozens of death threats after Trump slammed him on social media last year.

Ten days before jury selection was to start, Merchan on Friday postponed the trial until at least mid-April because of a last-minute evidence dump. He scheduled a March 25 hearing on next steps.

Merchan wouldn't talk about the case last week, but allowed that getting ready for the historic trial is "intense."

He is striving "to make sure that I've done everything I could to be prepared and to make sure that we dispense justice," he said in an interview, emphasizing his confidence in court staffers.

"There's no agenda here," he said. "We want to follow the law. We want justice to be done."

"That's all we want," he said.

THE PATH TO TRUMP'S CASE

Born in Colombia, Merchan emigrated as a 6-year-old and grew up in New York. He worked his way through college, graduated from Hofstra University's law school, and was a state lawyer and Manhattan prosecutor before being appointed a family court judge in 2006. Three years later, he was assigned to a felony trial court, which New York calls a state Supreme Court.

Now 61, he has presided over cases alleging murder, rape and many other crimes: a multimillion-dollar investment fraud, a clubland stabbing, stolen laptops, harassment.

He oversaw trials of three men who parachuted off the rebuilt World Trade Center's tallest skyscraper and of at least one defendant in a sprawling Social Security disability fraud case against police officers, firefighters and others accused of faking psychological problems to get benefits.

Merchan is still dealing with the aftermath of the 2012 case of Anna Gristina, the "soccer mom madam

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“ whose alleged exploits spurred a 2021 Lifetime movie. She now wants to rescind her guilty plea and is suing the judge to try to get some case transcripts unsealed. Lawyers for Merchan have said the sealing was justified.

The spotlight on Merchan grew white-hot in the last three years as he took on cases involving Trump’s company, its former longtime finance chief Allen Weisselberg and, eventually, Trump himself.

Trump has pleaded not guilty to doctoring business records to veil a 2016 effort to squelch claims of extramarital affairs, which he denies. Prosecutors say he was trying to protect his first campaign; he has said he is fighting a “fake case” brought to impede his current run.

Trump wasn’t charged in the tax fraud case against his company, the Trump Organization. A jury voted to convict. Merchan imposed a \$1.6 million fine, the legal maximum. The company denied wrongdoing and is appealing.

If some might see Merchan’s familiarity with the Trump Organization case as preparation for the hush money trial, the ex-president and his lawyers see a problem.

They have asserted Merchan has “preconceived bias” against Trump, saying the judge strong-armed Weisselberg behind the scenes into taking a plea deal, agreeing to testify in the tax fraud case and serve a five-month jail sentence.

Merchan and prosecutors have disputed the claims. The judge wrote that defense lawyers drew “misleading” conclusions from an “inaccurate” portrayal of his involvement in Weisselberg’s plea negotiations.

Trump’s lawyers also have pointed out that Merchan’s daughter is a political consultant whose firm has worked for Democrats and the judge donated \$35 in 2020 to Democratic causes, including \$15 to now-President Joe Biden. A state court ethics panel opined that Merchan could continue on the case. The judge has vouched he can be fair and impartial.

Trump has a history of assailing judges in cases involving his business or administration. He tangled with jurists in person during his recent civil trials over New York state’s claims of business fraud and writer E. Jean Carroll’s sexual assault and defamation allegations. Trump denied all the accusations.

Federal Judge Lewis A. Kaplan presided with stern authority over two jury trials on Carroll’s claims. In the non-jury business fraud trial, state Judge Arthur Engoron at times gave latitude, such as letting lawyers revisit issues he had decided, but at other points pounded his desk in frustration.

Merchan has conducted the criminal court dates so far with a mannerly but firm formality. When one of Trump’s lawyers complained last month that the trial would burden the candidate as he campaigned, Merchan responded: “That’s not a legal argument. Anything else?”

Roger Stavis, a lawyer who testified before Merchan during a jury trial years ago, recalls the judge as self-confident but “not overbearing.”

“He’s in command of his courtroom,” Stavis said. “He won’t be baited, and he won’t be pushed around.”

As for Merchan himself, he says that in his courtroom, “everybody gets treated respectfully, professionally.”

‘A DIFFERENT LENS’

During long trials, Manhattan judges often reserve a day each week for other cases. Merchan is keeping Wednesdays for mental health court, which he has overseen since its 2011 start, and a similar veterans’ docket he took on in 2019.

The mental health court currently handles nearly 70 cases while budgeted for 50 a year, coordinator Amber Pettit-Cifarelli said. About 100 participants successfully finished between 2014 and 2021, while 190 were accepted, according to a report from Manhattan prosecutors.

“We help a lot of people, but it’s hard work. ... You get really invested in people’s lives,” Merchan said, adding that it lets him “see people through a different lens” than he did when presiding only over criminal cases.

Last week, Merchan offered encouragement to a newcomer who teared up while describing how mental illness ended his full-scholarship college studies. He urged one assault defendant not to lose patience with residential treatment rules and congratulated another on passing her real estate class final. He handed progress certificates to some, including a residential treatment patient approved for an apartment.

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It wasn't all good news. Merchan issued a warrant for someone who didn't return to a residential program after a medical visit. A robbery defendant apologized for having smoked K2, his first misstep in a year of court-supervised treatment.

When Merchan asked what happened, the man said he had been depressed because his mom and siblings were far away, but he later talked with his counselor about handling such feelings.

"So we're not going to harp on that situation that happened. Because you've earned good faith," Merchan decided, noting the man's honesty. He remains on course for a progress certificate if he avoids further slips.

Another man was making headway toward quitting marijuana, avoiding old hangouts and getting a library card to make reading a new pastime.

"You've got this one issue, and you're working through it," Merchan told him. "I'm very proud of you."

Usher, Fantasia Barrino, 'Color Purple' honored at 55th NAACP Image Awards

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Usher was named entertainer of the year at the 55th annual NAACP Awards on Saturday night, which highlighted works by entertainers and writers of color.

After Usher accepted his award at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles, the superstar R&B singer spoke about being thankful about the journey of his successful career that has lasted three decades.

He reeled off several of his recent big moments including his sold-out residency in Las Vegas, getting married, releasing his ninth studio album "Coming Home" and his Super Bowl halftime performance, which became the most-watched in the game's history.

Usher beat out Colman Domingo, Fantasia Barrino, Halle Bailey and Keke Palmer.

"I don't know how many people do that much stuff in one setting," said the multi-Grammy winner, who was presented the award by Oprah Winfrey. After being surprised by Winfrey's presence, he thanked those who have supported him throughout the years.

"This is for you, you, my number ones," the singer said as the audience repeated his words back to him. The final words of his speech were recited lyrics from his popular song "Superstar" from his 2024 album "Confessions," which has sold more than 10 million units in the U.S.

Earlier in the ceremony, Usher was honored with the President's Award for the singer's public service achievements through his New Look Foundation. He thanked the strong women in his life, including his mother and wife Jenn Goicoechea, whom he married after his Super Bowl halftime performance last month.

"The say behind or beside or with every strong man is a stronger woman," he said.

Queen Latifah hosted the awards ceremony aired live on BET.

"The Color Purple" was awarded best motion picture. The musical film featured star-studded cast including Barrino, Taraji P. Henson, Domingo, H.E.R., Danielle Brooks, Corey Hawkins and Bailey.

Barrino, who starred as Celie in the film, won for best actress in a motion picture.

"I didn't prepare a speech, because I didn't think I was going to win," the singer-actor said. "I was afraid to play Celie, but I'm glad I did. Because I kept saying 'If I don't win an award, the awards that I will win will come from the people who watched 'Color Purple' and the women who will relate to her and feel like Oscars when they walk out.'"

New Edition was inducted into the NAACP Image Awards Hall of Fame. The induction is bestowed on individuals who are viewed as pioneers in their respective fields and whose influence shaped their profession.

"We stand here in brotherhood," said Michael Bivins while his group members behind him. The Grammy-nominated group includes Bobby Brown, Johnny Gill, Ralph Tresvant, Ronnie DeVoe and Ricky Bell.

"You've seen our story. You know what we've been through," said Bivins, who spoke about the group overcoming conflict and tension in their earlier years to now holding a residency in Las Vegas.

"But we call each other every day," he continued. "We text each other every day. We check on our families. You watched us grow up. We're still growing."

Damson Idris won best actor in a drama television series for his role in "Snowfall." Henson and Domingo

took home best supporting roles in "The Color Purple." Domingo also won best actor in a motion picture for his role in "Rustin."

Long recovery ahead for some in path of deadly tornadoes in central US

By PATRICK ORSAGOS Associated Press

LAKEVIEW, Ohio (AP) — Residents in a swath of the central U.S. hit by deadly tornadoes were cleaning up, assessing damage and helping neighbors on Saturday. But it will be a long recovery from the storms that ripped through parts of Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana and Arkansas.

Thursday night's storms claimed three lives in the Indian Lake area of Ohio's Logan County, one of the hardest-hit regions, and about 40 people were injured and dozens of homes damaged in one Indiana community. Tornadoes were also reported in Illinois and Missouri.

Samantha Snipes, 33, said that when she first heard the tornado warning, she called her father who lives seven minutes away and told him to take cover. He said he was trying get into the closet in her childhood home and then the phone cut out, she told The Associated Press.

She and her husband attempted to drive down the main road to get to him but couldn't and had to get through the back way after the tornado passed.

"It looked like out of a movie, like 'Twister'" she said. "My dad's garage was leveled. The back of his house is gone. Like everything's gone."

They climbed over everything screaming for him. When they found him, he wasn't injured and he told them to stop crying, she said.

Her father, Joe Baker, had always told his children to hide in the closet if there was ever a tornado.

"We grew up here. Like this is our childhood home," said Snipes who Saturday was throwing away things and figuring out what could be saved. "And you see it on the news. But you never imagine it's going to happen to you."

Steve Wills, a pastor who owns a vacation home down the road on Orchard Island, said Saturday he was bringing a family crew to finish cleaning up and cover a hole in the roof.

"We're saddened for the families that lost people. There's three deaths in our community. You know, that breaks our heart," Wills said. "But it could have been so much more, so much more. Yeah, so I still have faith."

The community has been really helpful, Snipes said.

The school superintendent was dropping off food, clothes and diapers on Friday. The night of the tornado, neighbors on her dad's street were going house to house shutting off the gas, she said.

"Everybody on this road is safe. You know neighbors helping neighbors is what it's been," Snipes said.

It's March Madness and more people than ever can legally bet on basketball games

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

People in North Carolina may have a little more riding on this year's NCAA men's and women's basketball tournaments, as they will be able to legally bet on the games through their smartphone apps and computers for the first time.

For the sixth straight year, the number of states allowing legal sports betting has expanded since the last rendition of March Madness. A total of 38 states and the District of Columbia now allow some form sports betting, including 30 states and the nation's capital that allow online wagering.

That's up from one state, Nevada, where people could legally wager on games during the 2018 college basketball tournaments, before the U.S. Supreme Court cleared the way for expansion.

The rules for sports betting vary by state. Some states prohibit bets on home-state college teams or the performance of specific players. Others allow bets not only on the outcome of any college games but

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also on a variety of other things, such as the number of points, rebounds and assists that a particular player will tally.

Here are some things to know about sports betting as the tournaments open, with the men's games starting Tuesday and the women's competition beginning Wednesday.

BIG MONEY

Fans have long filled out NCAA tournament brackets while wagering in office pools or against friends and family. But those casual bets have increasingly been supplemented with more formal gambling.

The total amount bet on all sports through legal wagering sites exceeded \$121 billion in 2023, up 30% from the previous year, according to the American Gaming Association. After paying out winnings, sports betting operators reaped \$11 billion in revenue, up from about \$7.5 billion the previous year.

The American Gaming Association estimates \$2.7 billion will be bet this year on the NCAA men's and women's basketball tournaments through legal sports books.

"March Madness is the biggest kind of individual event of the year for sports betting," said David Forman, the American Gaming Association vice president of research.

The Super Bowl also draws big bets, but it's only one game between two NFL teams. The NCAA Division 1 men's and women's basketball tournaments feature a total of 136 teams playing 134 games over three weeks.

CAN YOU BET ON YOUR TEAM?

Despite living where sports betting is legal, some fans still could be blocked from betting on their favorite teams and players.

Roughly a dozen states bar bets on college games involving home-state teams. Four additional states — Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Vermont — generally prohibit bets involving their own college teams but make exceptions for tournaments.

Some states only allow bets on the outcome of college games, not how particular players will perform. Maryland and Ohio, for example, banned so-called proposition bets on college players, effective this month.

The NCAA has raised concerns that player-specific bets can lead to problems, including the harassment of college athletes and strain on their mental health. The organization also says such bets could entice players to wager on themselves or alter their play to affect stats-based bets.

NEW BETTING STATES

Since the University of Connecticut won the men's tournament last year, half a dozen states have launched or expanded sports betting.

Nebraska began taking sports bets at casinos last June, though it doesn't allow mobile wagers. Kentucky launched sports betting in September to coincide with the start of the NFL season, and Maine began doing so in November.

After a court victory, the Seminole Tribe of Florida in December began taking online sports bets in addition to wagers at its casinos. Wagering has continued while a challenge is pending before the Florida Supreme Court. Opponents also have asked the U.S. Supreme Court to take up the case.

In January, Vermont launched online sports betting.

North Carolina, which previously allowed sports betting only at three tribal casinos, began permitting online sports wagering statewide on March 11, a day before the start of the popular ACC men's basketball tournament but a day after the women's tournament ended.

ODDS FOR OTHER STATES

Several states have a chance to join the sports betting trend.

In Missouri, where legislative attempts have repeatedly failed, the St. Louis Cardinals are leading a coalition of professional sports teams supporting an initiative petition that could place sports betting on the November ballot. Sports betting operators DraftKings and FanDuel have contributed a combined \$3 million to the effort. Supporters say they are on track to exceed the required signatures by a May 5 deadline.

Lawmakers in Alabama and Georgia also are considering constitutional amendments authorizing sports betting. Georgia senators passed a measure last month, but it still needs a two-thirds vote from the House to appear on this year's ballot.

Alabama's House included sports betting in a wide-ranging gambling measure, but the state Senate stripped it out earlier this month. The House now must decide whether to accept that change or negotiate a final version to go to voters.

Legislation to legalize sports betting also is pending in Oklahoma and Minnesota. A Minnesota state Senate committee endorsed a revised version on Thursday that would raise the proposed tax rate.

Mississippi, which legalized casino sports betting in 2018, is considering an expansion to online betting. A bill passed the House last month and is now in the state Senate.

CROSSING STATE LINES

Although sports betting remains illegal in a dozen states, some residents place bets by crossing state lines. In Missouri's two largest cities, St. Louis and Kansas City, some people drive to the nearest commuter lots or highway exit ramps just across the border in Illinois or Kansas, respectively, to place legal bets through mobile apps.

Many other would-be bettors get thwarted by technology.

During the weekend of the Super Bowl, where the Kansas City Chiefs defeated the San Francisco 49ers, technology company GeoComply Solutions said it processed more than 431,000 location checks from about 40,500 mobile devices in Missouri that attempted to access other states' legal sports betting sites. The location checks allowed those bets to be blocked.

During that weekend, GeoComply said it processed an additional 256,000 location checks for sports betting sites coming from 30,000 devices in Alabama, Georgia, Minnesota and Mississippi.

How should Israel bring to justice the perpetrators behind the worst attack in its history?

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Hamas' unprecedented raid on southern Israel has prompted a legal predicament: How does a country scarred by the deadliest attack in its history bring the perpetrators to justice?

Israel is holding hundreds of Palestinians from Gaza accused of taking part in the Oct. 7 attack that sparked its war with Hamas. It is grappling with how to prosecute suspects and offer closure to Israelis, including victims' families.

None of the available legal options seem to fit.

Mass criminal trials could overwhelm Israel's already sluggish courts. An ad hoc war crimes tribunal established under Israel's far-right government could lack credibility. Freeing the suspects as part of a deal to release hostages held in Gaza would trouble many traumatized Israelis.

"They slaughtered, raped, looted and were caught red-handed," said Yuval Kaplinsky, a former senior official in the Israeli Justice Ministry. "There is no silver bullet here for how to try them."

Rights groups say the longer Israel takes to decide the right legal path, the longer suspected perpetrators languish in poor conditions and with no known contact with the outside world. At least 27 Palestinians from Gaza have died in Israeli custody since the war began, according to Israeli figures.

HOW DOES ISRAEL HANDLE PALESTINIAN SUSPECTS?

Israel has long contended with legal issues surrounding Palestinian suspects — and has long been criticized for its approach. It regularly uses a measure called administrative detention to hold Palestinians without charge or trial.

Palestinian suspects from the West Bank are tried in Israeli military courts that have been a longtime fixture of its open-ended occupation of the territory. Palestinians and human rights groups say the system almost always renders guilty verdicts. Israel says it provides due process and imprisons those who threaten its security.

Shawan Jabarin, who heads the Palestinian rights group Al-Haq, said any trial held by Israel would not be credible.

"This is the system that Israelis have: Inhuman. Unfair. No due process," he said.

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In the Oct. 7 attack, thousands of Palestinians crossed the border from Gaza into Israel, breaking down the country's defenses and rampaging through sleepy communities. They killed entire families, hunted down revelers at an outdoor music festival and committed sexual violence.

Hamas took roughly 250 hostages, including women, children and older adults, and is believed to still be holding 100 of them.

Israel's subsequent invasion has killed more than 31,000 Palestinians and led to widespread hunger.

WHAT ABOUT THE CRIMINAL COURTS?

Israel's criminal courts are distinct from the military courts and are widely seen as independent of political influence.

But Barak Medina, a law professor at Jerusalem's Hebrew University, said trying the hundreds of suspects there would overwhelm the backlogged system and could take years.

Israel's public defenders' office has said it will not provide a state-funded attorney for the suspects, seeing Israeli lawyers also scarred by Hamas' attack as unsuitable and unwilling to do so.

According to Israel's public broadcaster Kan, the office has suggested foreign lawyers be enlisted, like in Israel's 1961 criminal trial of Adolf Eichmann, one of Nazi Germany's main organizers of the Holocaust.

Some experts have pointed to that trial as a possible precedent because it was high profile, dealt with a traumatic event and challenged Israel's existing legal framework. In publicly airing the Nazis' heinous crimes, the trial offered some catharsis for Holocaust survivors.

Eichmann, who was captured by Mossad agents in Argentina, was represented by a German lawyer and was found guilty of crimes against humanity, crimes against the Jewish people and war crimes. He was executed in 1962, the only time Israel has carried out a death sentence.

A similarly public trial for Hamas' crimes might offer Israelis some sense of justice. But Eichmann's trial focused on just one defendant.

Kaplinsky, the former Justice Ministry official, said the narratives presented at criminal trials could also work against Israel by providing fodder for its opponents.

For example, if prosecutors fail to include rape charges in any indictment because the evidence they have doesn't meet the legal threshold, that could fuel arguments about whether sexual violence occurred at all. Defense attorneys might use friendly fire shootings to whip up suspicions about the death toll from the attack.

WHAT ABOUT A TRIBUNAL?

Kaplinsky presented a plan to an Israeli parliamentary committee that suggests creating a tribunal that takes the events of Oct. 7 as established fact. The tribunal would not call witnesses but would be based on documents from Israel's security forces as well as the suspects' interrogations. Suspects would fund their own defense.

It was not clear if his plan was being considered.

Dahlia Scheindlin, a political analyst who wrote a book about Israel's democracy, said any tribunal created under Israel's current far-right government would be politically tainted.

"It will look like the laws are tailored according to the political whim of the current government," she said.

Medina, the law professor, said it appeared the state was holding off on making any decisions on how to try the suspects because it was expecting them to be released as part of a deal to free hostages.

The Israeli Justice Ministry declined to comment.

WHAT IS HAPPENING TO SUSPECTS NOW?

For now, many of the suspects are said to be considered "unlawful combatants," meaning Israel can extend their detention indefinitely, delay their access to a lawyer and keep legal proceedings classified. Rights groups say that lack of transparency can enable abuse.

Israel's predicament is similar to the one the U.S. faced after the 9/11 attacks as it sought to capture al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden. The U.S. sent hundreds of suspects to Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. The detention center became the focus of international outrage because of the torture of prisoners and the U.S. insistence that it could hold men indefinitely without charge.

Avi Kalo, who heads the international law program at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism at

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Israel's Reichman University and is a former legal advisor to the Israeli military's intelligence corps, said this situation is different because the Oct. 7 detainees are being held in Israeli territory and are subject to Israeli law. That includes judicial oversight on their cases, though rights groups say that oversight is flawed.

Tal Steiner, executive director of the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel, said that accounts from freed prisoners indicate detainees are receiving little food and experiencing inhumane treatment that could amount to torture.

The Israel Prison Service, which holds some of the suspects, said prisoners are granted their basic rights.

Steiner said the committee hasn't taken a position on the best way to bring the attackers to justice.

"It's a complicated legal question," she said. "But the alternative of holding them in lengthy detention, incommunicado, in such harsh conditions is also not a normal legal option."

A suspected attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels has targeted a ship in the Gulf of Aden

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A suspected attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels saw an explosive detonate near a ship early Sunday in the Gulf of Aden, potentially marking their latest assault on shipping through the crucial waterway leading to the Red Sea.

The British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said the vessel's crew saw the blast as it passed off the coast of Aden, the port city in southern Yemen home to the country's exiled government.

"No damage to the vessel has been reported and the crew are reported safe," UKMTO said.

The Houthis have launched repeated drone and missile attacks in the same area, disrupting energy and cargo shipments through the Gulf of Aden.

The rebels did not immediately claim responsibility for the attack, though it typically takes the Houthis several hours before acknowledging their assaults.

Separately, the U.S. military's Central Command said it carried out a series of strikes targeting the Houthis. It said it destroyed five drone boats and one drone before takeoff from Houthi-controlled territory in Yemen on Saturday. It was an unusually high number of drone boats to be destroyed.

Separately, the U.S. military shot down one Houthi drone over the Red Sea, while another was "presumed to have crashed."

"There were no reports of damage or injuries from ships in the vicinity," Central Command said.

The Houthis have attacked ships since November, saying they want to force Israel to end its offensive in the Gaza Strip against Hamas.

The ships targeted by the Houthis, however, largely have had little or no connection to Israel, the U.S. or other nations involved in the war. The rebels have also fired missiles toward Israel, though they have largely fallen short or been intercepted.

The assaults on shipping have raised the profile of the Houthis, who are members of Islam's minority Shiite Zaydi sect, which ruled Yemen for 1,000 years until 1962.

A report Thursday claimed the Houthis now have a hypersonic missile, potentially increasing that cachet and putting more pressure on Israel after a cease-fire deal failed to take hold in Gaza before the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Hypersonic missiles would pose a more serious threat to American and allied warships in the region.

Earlier in March, a Houthi missile struck a commercial ship in the Gulf of Aden, killing three of its crew members and forcing survivors to abandon the vessel. It marked the first fatal attack by the Houthis on shipping.

Other recent Houthi actions include an attack last month on a cargo ship carrying fertilizer that later sank after drifting for several days.

India's Bengaluru is fast running out of water, and a long, scorching summer still looms

By SIBI ARASU Associated Press

BENGALURU, India (AP) — Bhavani Mani Muthuvel and her family of nine have around five 20-liter (5-gal-lon) buckets worth of water for the week for cooking, cleaning and household chores.

"From taking showers to using toilets and washing clothes, we are taking turns to do everything," she said. It's the only water they can afford.

A resident of Ambedkar Nagar, a low-income settlement in the shadows of the lavish headquarters of multiple global software companies in Bengaluru's Whitefield neighborhood, Muthuvel is normally reliant on piped water, sourced from groundwater. But it's drying up. She said it's the worst water crisis she has experienced in her 40 years in the neighborhood.

Bengaluru in southern India is witnessing an unusually hot February and March, and in the last few years, it has received little rainfall in part due to human-caused climate change. Water levels are running desperately low, particularly in poorer areas, resulting in sky-high costs for water and a quickly dwindling supply.

City and state government authorities are trying to get the situation under control with emergency measures such as nationalizing water tankers and putting a cap on water costs. But water experts and many residents fear the worst is still to come in April and May when the summer sun is at its strongest.

The crisis was a long time coming, said Shashank Palur, a Bengaluru-based hydrologist with the think tank Water, Environment, Land and Livelihood Labs.

"Bengaluru is one of the fastest growing cities in the world and the infrastructure for fresh water supply is not able to keep up with a growing population," he said.

Groundwater, relied on by over a third of the city's 13 million residents, is fast running out. City authorities say 6,900 of the 13,900 borewells drilled in the city have run dry despite some being drilled to depths of 1,500 feet. Those reliant on groundwater, like Muthuvel, now have to depend on water tankers that pump from nearby villages.

Palur said El Nino, a natural phenomenon that affects weather patterns worldwide, along with the city receiving less rainfall in recent years mean "recharge of groundwater levels did not happen as expected." A new piped water supply from the Cauvery River about 100 kilometers (60 miles) from the city has also not been completed, adding to the crisis, he said.

Another concern is that paved surfaces cover nearly 90% of the city, preventing rainwater from seeping down and being stored in the ground, said T.V. Ramachandra, research scientist at the Centre for Ecological Sciences at Bengaluru-based Indian Institute of Science. The city lost nearly 70% of its green cover in the last 50 years, he said.

Ramachandra compared the city's water shortage to the "day zero" water crisis in Cape Town, South Africa, 2018, when that city came dangerously close to turning off most taps because of a drought.

The Indian government estimated in 2018 that over 40% of Bengaluru residents won't have access to drinking water by the end of the decade. Only those that receive piped water from rivers outside Bengaluru are still getting regular supply.

"Right now, everyone is drilling borewells in buffer zones of lakes. That is not the solution," Ramachandra said.

He said the city should instead focus on replenishing the over 200 lakes spread across the city, stop new construction on lake areas, encourage rainwater harvesting and increase green cover across the city.

"Only if we do this will we solve the city's water problem," he said.

Palur added that identifying other sources and using them smartly, for example by reusing treated wastewater in the city "so that the demand for fresh water reduces," could also help.

Until then, some residents are taking serious measures. S. Prasad, who lives with his wife and two children in a housing society made up of 230 apartments, said they have begun water rationing.

"Since last week we've closed the water supply to houses for eight hours every day, starting at 10 a.m. Residents have to either store water in containers or do everything they need to in the allotted time. We

are also planning on installing water meters soon," he said.

Prasad said their housing society, like many others in Bengaluru, is willing to pay high costs for water, but even then it's hard to find suppliers.

"This water shortage is not only impacting our work but also our daily life," Prasad said. "If it becomes even more dire, we'll have no choice but to leave Bengaluru temporarily."

With green and glee, major US parades mark St. Patrick's Day — a little early

NEW YORK (AP) — People across the United States celebrated Irish heritage at several major St. Patrick's Day parades Saturday, marking the holiday a day early at events that included a big anniversary in Savannah, Georgia, and honored a pioneering female business leader as grand marshal in New York.

The holiday commemorates Ireland's patron saint and was popularized largely by Irish Catholic immigrants. While St. Patrick's Day falls on March 17, some parades were moved up from Sunday, a day of worship for the Christian faithful.

Manhattan's St. Patrick's Day Parade, which dates to 1762 — 14 years before the U.S. Declaration of Independence — is one of the world's largest Irish heritage festivities.

Megan Stransky of Houston and two relatives planned a Broadway weekend to coincide with the parade, seeing it as a prime opportunity to remember their family's Irish roots and the traditions that helped shape their upbringing.

The event didn't disappoint.

"There is no comparison to any other parade or city that I've been to," Stransky marveled as she took in the bagpipers, bands, police and military contingents and more.

The grand marshal, Irish-born Heineken USA CEO Maggie Timoney, is the first female CEO of a major U.S. beer company. At a pre-parade reception at New York's mayoral residence, Irish Minister for Justice Helen McEntee hailed the recognition for Timoney and noted some other causes for celebrating Irish American links this year, including Irish actor Cillian Murphy's best actor Oscar win last weekend.

New York City has multiple parades on various dates around its five boroughs — including, on Sunday, the first St. Patrick's Day parade allowing LGBTQ+ groups to march on Staten Island.

Mayor Eric Adams last month announced the plan for the new, privately organized celebration, arranged after a local organization asked for years to join the borough's decades-old parade. That longstanding event, which does not allow groups to march under LGBTQ+ banners, happened earlier this month.

The Manhattan parade began allowing LGBTQ+ groups and symbols in 2015, after decades of protests, legal challenges and boycotts by some politicians.

Ahead of Chicago's parade, thousands of people — many decked out in green with beers in hand — gathered along the Chicago River to watch the local plumbers union boats turn the water green. Organizers say the tradition, started by the union, uses an environmentally friendly powder once used to check pipes for leaks.

Katie and Ryan Fox, of suburban Mount Pleasant, landed a spot on a tour boat and saw one of the union boats spraying the dye in front of them.

Ryan Fox, 37, said seeing the river dyed by boat was one of his "bucket list" items.

"If there's a city that does it better than Chicago, I'd like to see it," he said.

Large, green-garbed crowds also lined the streets of Savannah for the bicentennial of a parade that began with a few dozen Irish immigrants in 1824. It's now one of the South's major annual events, much so that the Savannah area had nearly 18,000 hotel rooms booked for the weekend.

Other communities lent their own flavor to the St. Patrick's Day revelry.

In Oklahoma City, hundreds lined the streets of Stockyard City — the country's largest stockyard operation — for a parade including longhorn cattle, clowns and a man dressed as St. Patrick. The grand marshal was Anita Swift, granddaughter of American film legend John Wayne.

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In San Francisco, revelers wearing dark green T-shirts and lime green feather boas watched bands, floats and buses in the city's annual St. Patrick's Day parade. The event called for unity and aimed to bring together different cultural groups with dance, music and food.

Trump campaigns for GOP Senate candidate Bernie Moreno in Ohio

By MEG KINNARD and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

VANDALIA, Ohio (AP) — Former President Donald Trump claimed that he — not President Joe Biden — will protect Social Security and warned of a “bloodbath” if he loses in November as he campaigned for Senate candidate Bernie Moreno in Ohio.

Trump, speaking on a wind-whipped airfield outside of Dayton Saturday, praised his chosen candidate in the race as an “America first champion” and “political outsider who has spent his entire life building up Ohio communities.”

“He’s going to be a warrior in Washington,” Trump said, days after securing enough delegates to clinch the 2024 Republican nomination.

Moreno faces Secretary of State Frank LaRose and state Sen. Matt Dolan in Tuesday’s GOP primary. LaRose and Moreno have aligned themselves with the pro-Trump faction of the party, while Dolan is backed by more establishment Republicans, including Gov. Mike DeWine and former Sen. Rob Portman.

Saturday’s rally was hosted by Buckeye Values PAC, a group backing Moreno’s candidacy. But Trump used the stage to deliver a profanity-filled version of his usual rally speech that again painted an apocalyptic picture of the country if Biden wins a second term.

“If I don’t get elected, it’s going to be a bloodbath for the whole — that’s going to be the least of it. It’s going to be a bloodbath for the country,” he warned, while talking about the impact of offshoring on the country’s auto industry and his plans to increase tariffs on foreign-made cars.

Biden campaign spokesperson James Singer accused Trump of doubling “down on his threats of political violence.”

“He wants another January 6, but the American people are going to give him another electoral defeat this November because they continue to reject his extremism, his affection for violence, and his thirst for revenge,” Singer charged in a statement.

Trump campaign spokesman Steven Cheung said that Trump had clearly been talking about the impact of a second Biden term on the auto industry and broader economy.

“Crooked Joe Biden and his campaign are engaging in deceptively, out-of-context editing,” he said.

Trump repeatedly noted his difficulty reading from his teleprompters, which could be seen visibly whipping in 35-mile-per-hour wind gusts.

A one-time Trump critic, Moreno, a wealthy Cleveland businessman, supported Marco Rubio for president in the 2016 Republican primary, and once tweeted that listening to Trump was “like watching a car accident that makes you sick, but you can stop looking.” In 2021, NBC News reported on an email exchange around the time of Trump’s first presidential run in which Moreno referred to Trump as a “lunatic” and a “maniac.”

On Saturday, however, Moreno praised Trump as a “great American” and railed against those in his party who have been critical of the former president, who this week became his party’s presumptive nominee for a third straight election.

“I am so sick and tired of Republicans that say, ‘I support President Trump’s policies but I don’t like the man,’” he said as he joined Trump on stage.

Trump also dismissed recent allegations against Moreno, comparing them to attacks he has faced through the years, including his criminal indictments. Trump has been charged in four separate cases that span his handling of classified documents to his efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election.

“He’s getting some very tough Democrat fake treatment right now,” Trump said. “And we’re not going to stand for it because I know this man. We all know this man. He’s a hero, he’s a winner. And we’re not going to let these people — these people are sick.”

The Associated Press reported on Thursday that in 2008, someone with access to Moreno’s work email

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account created a profile on an adult website seeking "Men for 1-on-1 sex." The AP could not definitively confirm that it was created by Moreno himself. Moreno's lawyer said a former intern created the account and provided a statement from the intern, Dan Ricci, who said he created the account as "part of a juvenile prank."

Questions about the profile have circulated in GOP circles for the past month, sparking frustration among senior Republican operatives about Moreno's potential vulnerability in a general election, according to seven people who are directly familiar with conversations about how to address the matter. They requested anonymity to avoid running afoul of Trump and his allies.

Trump, in his remarks, also accused Biden of posing a threat to Social Security as he continued trying to clean up comments from an interview earlier this week in which he appeared to voice openness to cuts.

"You will not be able to have Social Security with this guy in office because he's destroying the economics of our country. And that includes Medicare, by the way, and American seniors are going to be in big trouble," he warned, even though Biden has pledged to protect and strengthen Social Security as it faces a projected budget shortfall.

"I made a promise that I will always keep Social Security, Medicare. We always will keep it. We never will cut it," he said.

In a Monday interview with CNBC, Trump had answered a question about Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid by saying that, "there is a lot you can do in terms of entitlements, in terms of cutting and in terms of also the theft and the bad management of entitlements, tremendous bad management of entitlements. There's tremendous amounts of things and numbers of things you can do."

Trump also continued to criticize Biden over his handling of the border as he cast migrants as less than human. "In some cases, they're not people, in my opinion," he said. Trump laced into Dolan, calling him a "weak RINO" — a Republican in name only — and accused him of "trying to become the next Mitt Romney." He also criticized the Dolan family, which owns Cleveland's baseball team, for changing its name from the Cleveland Indians to the Cleveland Guardians.

Trump was joined at the rally by Ohio Sen. JD Vance and South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, who have both stumped with Moreno and are considered potential vice-presidential candidates.

Trump's decision to back Moreno marked a major blow to LaRose, who had taken a number of steps to win his favor. Just days after entering the Senate race, LaRose endorsed Trump for president — reversing an earlier stance that the state's elections chief should remain politically neutral. The next month, he fired a long-time trusted aide after old tweets surfaced in which the staffer criticized Trump.

The winner of Tuesday's primary will face third-term Sen. Sherrod Brown, viewed as among the nation's most vulnerable Democrats, in November.

Brown, first elected in 2006 and uncontested in his primary this year, has managed to hold onto his seat even as the state has shifted to the right. In his most recent reelection in 2018, he defeated then-Rep. Jim Renacci by almost 7 percentage points. Two years later, Ohio voted for then-President Trump by 8 points.

Israel strikes several sites in Syria, wounding a soldier, Syrian military says

BEIRUT (AP) — Israeli airstrikes hit several sites in southern Syria early Sunday wounding a soldier, Syrian state media reported.

State news agency SANA, citing an unnamed military official, said air defenses shot down some of the missiles, which came from the direction of the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights at around 12:42 a.m. local time. The strikes led to "material losses" and the wounding of a soldier, the statement said.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, said Israeli strikes also hit two military sites in the Qalamoun mountains northeast of Damascus, an area where the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah has operations. One of the targets was a weapons shipment, the observatory said.

The observatory said the strikes represented the 24th time Israel has struck inside Syria since the beginning of 2024. They have killed 43 fighters with various groups — including Hezbollah and Iran's paramilitary

Revolutionary Guard — and nine civilians.

There was no immediate statement from Israeli officials on the strikes. Israel frequently launches strikes on Iran-linked targets in Syria but rarely acknowledges them. The strikes have escalated over the past five months against the backdrop of the war in Gaza and ongoing clashes between Hezbollah and Israeli forces on the Lebanon-Israel border.

Last week, the Israeli army said it has carried out 4,500 strikes against Hezbollah targets over the past five months, most of which were in Lebanon, while a few were in Syria.

The army said in a statement that it "will not allow for any attempted actions which could lead to the entrenchment of Hezbollah on the Syrian front."

Man suspected of killing 3 people in Philadelphia area arrested in New Jersey, police say

By MIKE CATALINI and RON TODT Associated Press

TRENTON, N.J. (AP) — A man suspected of fatally shooting three family members in their Philadelphia-area homes Saturday was arrested in New Jersey after evading law enforcement for hours as police mobilized across two states, shutting down a parade and an amusement park and ordering some residents to stay in their homes.

Steve Wilson, police director for the city of Trenton, New Jersey, said the man was arrested near a house where officers had believed he was barricaded inside. He apparently left the home before the police cordon was erected, Wilson said.

Wilson added that he did not believe the suspect was armed at the time.

The suspect was identified earlier as 26-year-old Andre Gordon Jr. Authorities said they believe he killed his stepmother, his teenage sister and the mother of his children in shootings at two homes in eastern Pennsylvania's Falls Township in the morning, Bucks County District Attorney Jennifer Schorn said. His children's grandmother was injured when she was bludgeoned with a rifle.

Officials said they couldn't yet speak to a motive for the attacks. While Gordon had had some minor brushes with the law, they were "nothing that would indicate that anything like this would happen," Falls Township Police Chief Nelson Whitney said at a news conference.

Police said Gordon was believed to be homeless. It was unclear whether he had an attorney or anyone else who could comment on his behalf.

The mayhem forced the cancellation of a St. Patrick's Day parade and shut down a Sesame Street-themed amusement park. Authorities in Pennsylvania's Bucks County issued a shelter-in-place order for some areas for several hours.

After fleeing in a stolen car, then taking another in a carjacking in a store parking lot, Gordon went to the home in nearby Trenton, authorities said. By midafternoon, officers surrounded the house on a taped-off block, calling to Gordon through a loudspeaker and trying to persuade him to come out.

"Andre, get away from the windows. If you would like to surrender, dial 911 now," one message went.

Neighbors gathered by the barricade to watch what was happening. The home's residents had been taken to safety with no injuries, the Trenton Police Department said.

Schorn said police believe Gordon first broke into a home in the Falls Township community of Levittown and killed his 52-year-old stepmother, Karen Gordon, and his 13-year-old sister, Kera Gordon. Three other occupants, including a 14-year-old, hid as the suspect went through the house, searching for them, the district attorney said.

She said police believe Gordon then drove to another home in Levittown and fatally shot 25-year-old Taylor Daniel, the mother of his two children, who were also there. Daniel's mother, who was bludgeoned, was expected to recover.

Shaun Murphy, who lives in Levittown, said he was headed to the local St. Patrick's Day parade when he saw that the road had been blocked.

"All the neighbors were outside wondering what was going on, and then we got the notice about shelter

in place," Murphy said, recalling that he and his neighbors had just been talking the night before about "how great of a town and how great of a neighborhood it is."

Schorn said officers believe that after the shootings, Gordon carjacked a vehicle in a parking lot in Morristown, Pennsylvania, from a 44-year-old man who wasn't harmed. From there, officials said, he drove to the home in Trenton.

Police in Middletown Township, Pennsylvania, said the suspect has ties to addresses in Bucks County and Trenton and "stays in Trenton primarily."

Maui's mayor prioritizes housing and vows to hire more firefighters after Lahaina wildfire

By AUDREY McAVOY Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — Maui's mayor says he is prioritizing housing, evaluating evacuation routes and hiring more firefighters as his Hawaii community recovers from the deadliest U.S. wildfire in more than a century.

Mayor Richard Bissen outlined the steps in emotional remarks more than seven months after the Aug. 8 wildfire killed 101 people in the historic town of Lahaina.

He kicked off his address by saying "the state of the county is heartbroken" and then paused several times throughout his 45-minute speech to collect himself as he spoke of those who died and of the heroism and sacrifices of residents and county employees. He recounted stories of those who rescued people from the flames and opened evacuation centers and food distribution hubs for survivors.

"It will take strength, courage and faith to keep moving forward. But the foundations of that will be in how we care for one another, always leading with aloha," Bissen said in his Friday night address, which was delivered in Kahului and streamed online.

Maui had a housing shortage and some of the nation's most expensive housing even before the fire. The island's housing crisis only intensified after the blaze destroyed more than 2,000 buildings and displaced 4,500 residents. About 87% of those who lost their homes were renters.

Thousands of people are still staying in hotels while they look for places to rent and wait for longer-term housing options. The Federal Emergency Management Agency, the state and private charities have been paying for the hotel rooms.

To boost housing options, Bissen said his legal team would review an exemption to county laws that allows owners of selected properties to turn their condos into vacation rentals and lease them to visitors for less than 30 days at a time.

Activists say there are 2,500 such properties in West Maui alone that could be used to house displaced residents. Since November, activists have been camping on the beach facing waterfront hotels in a "Fishing for Housing" protest to demand that the county revoke the exemption.

Bissen said his administration would boost enforcement against illegal vacation rentals by investigating anonymous tips in addition to those submitted by a named source. He said it would also prepare for both interim and long-term housing development, but he didn't mention specifics.

The mayor said he would submit rent-stabilization legislation to the county council with the aim of bringing relief to residents while fairly balancing the needs of property owners.

Some of those who died in the fire were caught in traffic jams trying to leave Lahaina. Like many Hawaii towns, it sits sandwiched between the ocean and the mountains and has limited roads in and out. Bissen said county planning, emergency management, fire and police departments were examining evacuation routes in Lahaina and elsewhere.

Bissen said he has approved the addition of 29 positions for the Department of Fire and Public Safety.

"These expansion positions will undoubtedly increase overall firefighting capability across our county and enhance the fire department's capacity to respond to future large-scale emergencies," Bissen said.

Cease-fire talks with Israel and Hamas are expected to resume on Sunday in Qatar

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Stalled talks aimed at securing a cease-fire in the Israel-Hamas war are expected to resume in earnest in Qatar as soon as Sunday, according to Egyptian officials.

The talks would mark the first time both Israeli officials and Hamas leaders join the indirect negotiations since the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. International mediators had hoped to secure a six-week truce before Ramadan started earlier this week, but Hamas refused any deal that wouldn't lead to a permanent cease-fire in Gaza, a demand Israel rejected.

But both sides have made moves in recent days aimed at getting the talks, which never fully broke off, back on track.

Hamas gave mediators a new proposal for a three-stage plan that would end the fighting, according to two Egyptian officials, one who is involved in the talks and a second who was briefed on them. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to reveal the contents of the sensitive discussions.

The first stage would be a six-week cease-fire that would see the release of 35 hostages — women, those who are ill and older people — held by militants in Gaza in exchange for 350 Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

Hamas would also release at least five female soldiers in exchange for 50 prisoners, including some serving long sentences on terror charges, for each soldier. Israeli forces would withdraw from two main roads in Gaza, let displaced Palestinians return to northern Gaza, which has been devastated by the fighting, and allow the free flow of aid to the area, the officials said.

Nearly one in three children under 2 years old in the isolated north have acute malnutrition, the U.N. children's agency said Friday.

In the second phase, the two sides would declare a permanent cease-fire and Hamas would free the remaining Israeli soldiers held hostage in exchange for more prisoners, the officials said.

In the third phase, Hamas would hand over the bodies it's holding in exchange for Israel lifting the blockade of Gaza and allowing reconstruction to start, the officials said.

Talks were expected to resume Sunday afternoon, though they could get pushed to Monday, the Egyptian officials said.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the proposal "unrealistic" but agreed to send Israeli negotiators to Qatar. His government has rejected calls for a permanent cease-fire, insisting it must first fulfill its stated goal of "annihilating Hamas."

Thousands of people demonstrated Saturday night in Tel Aviv to show their impatience with Netanyahu's government and demand a deal to free hostages. Some expressed support for U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer's sharp criticism of Netanyahu's handling of the war and his call for a new election.

"I think that we are in a situation where they are completely right, that we have a war that is continuing well beyond what is necessary," protester Yehuda Halper said.

Netanyahu's office said Friday he approved military plans to attack Rafah, the southernmost town in Gaza where about 1.4 million displaced Palestinians — more than half the enclave's population — are sheltering. Israel wants to target Hamas battalions stationed there.

Many fled to Rafah when Israel attacked Gaza following the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel that killed 1,200 people and left another 250 hostage.

The United States and other countries have warned that a military operation in Rafah could be disastrous.

Netanyahu's office didn't give details or a timetable for the Rafah operation, but said that it would involve the evacuation of the civilian population. The military has said it planned to direct civilians to "humanitarian islands" in central Gaza.

"Many people are too fragile, hungry and sick to be moved again," World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on social media, adding that there are no fully functional,

safe health centers they can reach elsewhere in Gaza. "In the name of humanity, we appeal to Israel not to proceed."

The Gaza Health Ministry said at least 31,553 Palestinians have been killed in the war. The ministry doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count, but says women and children make up two-thirds of the dead.

An Israeli strike early Saturday flattened a house in the urban Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza, killing at least 19 people, including nine children, according to records at the al-Aqsa Martyrs hospital. An Associated Press journalist there saw the bodies.

Israel's offensive has driven most of Gaza's 2.3 million people from their homes. A quarter of Gaza's population is starving, according to the U.N.

As part of efforts to deliver desperately needed aid, a ship inaugurated a sea route from Cyprus on Friday and offloaded 200 tons of humanitarian supplies sent by the aid group World Central Kitchen destined for people in northern Gaza.

The group said it was preparing another vessel in Cyprus with hundreds of tons of aid.

Also on Saturday, Germany joined a group of countries, including the U.S. and Jordan, in conducting airdrops of aid over Gaza. The U.S. also has announced separate plans to construct a pier to get aid in.

Displaced Palestinians living in tents along the Mediterranean coast remained hungry and bleak.

"The situation is so bad that no one can imagine it, and the ship, even if it helps, will be a drop in the ocean," said Zahr Saqr in Muwasi. "We run like dogs behind air drops."

State Medicaid offices target dead people's homes to recoup their health care costs

By AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As Salvatore LoGrande fought cancer and all the pain that came with it, his daughters promised to keep him in the white, pitched roof house he worked so hard to buy all those decades ago.

So, Sandy LoGrande thought it was a mistake when, a year after her father's death, Massachusetts billed her \$177,000 for her father's Medicaid expenses and threatened to sue for his home if she didn't pay up quickly.

"The home was everything," to her father said LoGrande, 57.

But the bill and accompanying threat weren't a mistake.

Rather, it was part of a routine process the federal government requires of every state: to recover money from the assets of dead people who, in their final years, relied on Medicaid, the taxpayer-funded health insurance for the poorest Americans.

A person's home is typically exempt from qualifying for Medicaid. But it is subject to the estate recovery process for those who were over 55 and used Medicaid to pay for long-term care such as nursing home stays or in-home health care.

This month, a Democratic lawmaker proposed scuttling the "cruel" program altogether. Critics argue the program collects too little — roughly 1% — of the more than \$150 billion Medicaid spends yearly on long-term care. They also say many states fail to warn people who sign up for Medicaid that big bills and claims to their property might await their families once they die.

LoGrande says that's how she ended up in a two-year legal battle with Massachusetts after her father died. Several years before he died in 2016, she had turned to a local nonprofit for advice on caring for her elderly father. The group suggested she sign him up for Medicaid. She even remembers asking about the house, but was assured the state would only seek the house if it sent her father to a nursing home.

"He never would have signed on with anything that would put his home in jeopardy," she said.

For years, her father got an annual renewal notice from the state's Medicaid office. She says it wasn't until after his death, when the state's demand for \$177,000 arrived, that she saw the first bill for his care, which included a brief stint in the hospital for pain from cancer, medications and hospice.

"That's what ripped my guts out," LoGrande said. "It was dishonest."

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The state settled with the LoGrandes in 2019 and released its claim on the house.

State policies around this recovery process vary widely, according to a 2021 report from the Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission, which makes policy recommendations to Congress.

Some states will put a lien — a legal right — on a home while others don't. Meanwhile, some Medicaid offices try to recoup all medical costs from patients, like doctor visits or prescriptions, while others just pursue the costs for long-term care. Alaska and Arizona pursued just dozens of properties in recent years while other states go after thousands of homes, totaling hundreds of millions of dollars.

New York and Ohio topped the country for such collections, recovering more than \$100 million combined in a single year, a Dayton Daily News investigation found.

An investigation into the Kansas program, released Tuesday by the Health and Human Services inspector general, found that program was cost effective — yielding \$37 million while only spending \$5 million to recover the money. But the state didn't always collect the money from estates that were eligible.

Last month, a foundation for one of the industry's biggest health insurance giants called on Massachusetts to overhaul its process, which includes collecting reimbursement for most Medicaid costs, beyond the federal government's minimum requirement to recover long-term care expenses. The Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation of Massachusetts recommended the state Legislature pass a law that would prohibit those additional collections.

Estate recovery "has the potential to perpetuate wealth disparities and intergenerational poverty," said Katherine Howitt, a Medicaid policy director with the foundation.

In Tennessee, which recovered more than \$38.2 million from more than 8,100 estates last year, Imani Mfalme found herself in a similar predicament after her mother's death in 2021.

As her mother's early-onset Alzheimer's worsened, Mfalme continued to care for her. But in 2015, when Mfalme was diagnosed with breast cancer and needed a double mastectomy, she started looking at other options. She hosted a meeting in her mother's home with the local Medicaid office. The representative told her to drain her mother's bank accounts — money Mfalme poured into assisted living facility payments for her mom — so her mother would qualify for the program.

She recalls being somewhat offended during the meeting after the representative asked her three times: "This is your mother's home?" The representative, Mfalme said, made no mention that she could be forced to sell the house to settle her mother's bill with Medicaid once she died.

Now, Tennessee's Medicaid office says she owes \$225,000 and the state is seeking a court order that would require Mfalme to sell the house to pay up.

Mfalme, now 42, said she wants to pay what she can, but the house is a particular pain point. Her mother, a Black woman, purchased her dream home in Knoxville after she won a landmark discrimination lawsuit against her former employer, Boeing, for paying her less than her male coworkers.

"She fought hard for equal pay and equal rights. Just to see that ripped away just because she was sick and I was sick, it's just absolutely devastating," Mfalme said of her mother.

TennCare, Tennessee's Medicaid office, said in an email to The Associated Press that it would not comment on specific cases.

The Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission's report recommended that Congress reverse the 1993 law that required states to recover money from estates, instead making it optional.

Earlier this month, Democratic Rep. Jan Schakowsky of Illinois reintroduced legislation that would end the federal government's mandate. Schakowsky believes the rule is a losing proposition for families, who give up their homes, and taxpayers, who don't see big returns from the recovery efforts.

"It is one of the most cruel, ineffective programs that we see," Schakowsky told the AP. "This is a program that doesn't work for anybody."

In a gridlocked Congress, where some Republicans are clamoring to trim Medicaid entitlements, the bill is unlikely to garner the bipartisan support needed to become law.

There's at least one person who acknowledges the rule isn't working: the man who engineered it.

Many people don't know about the decades-old mandate, which was intended to encourage people to

save for long-term care — or risk losing the equity from their home, explained Stephen Moses, who now works for the conservative Paragon Health Institute.

“The plan here was to ensure that people who need long-term care can get it but that you plan ahead to be able to pay privately so you don’t end up on the public health care program,” Moses said.

Russians cast ballots in an election preordained to extend President Vladimir Putin’s rule

By EMMA BURROWS Associated Press

Voters across Russia cast ballots Saturday on the second day of an election set to formalize six more years of power for President Vladimir Putin, who faces no serious challengers after crushing political dissent over his nearly quarter-century of rule.

The election comes against the backdrop of a ruthless crackdown that has stifled independent media and prominent rights groups. Putin’s fiercest foe, Alexei Navalny, died in an Arctic prison in February, and other critics are either in jail or in exile.

The 71-year-old Putin faces three token rivals from Kremlin-friendly parties who have refrained from any criticism of him or his full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Putin has cast his war in Ukraine, now in its third year, as an existential battle against the U.S. and other Western powers bent on destroying Russia.

Officials said voting was proceeding in an orderly fashion. But despite tight controls, at least a half-dozen cases of vandalism at polling stations were reported Friday and Saturday, including a firebombing and several people pouring green liquid into ballot boxes. The latter was an apparent homage to Navalny, who in 2017 was attacked by an assailant who splashed green disinfectant in his face.

A 50-year-old university professor was arrested Saturday after she unsuccessfully tried to throw green liquid into a ballot box in the Urals city of Ekaterinburg. She was imprisoned for 15 days for “petty hooliganism”, but could face further charges, according to local news outlet Ura.ru. A pensioner in the Altai region in southern Siberia was also detained after attempting to damage ballots, Russia’s state news agency Tass reported.

In Podolsk, a town close to Moscow, a woman was detained by police Saturday after she spoiled her ballot by writing an unspecified message, said OVD-Info, a police monitoring group that provides legal aid. She was charged with “discrediting the Russian army” and fined 30,000 rubles (\$342).

Russian lawmakers have suggested introducing a new law to punish election saboteurs with sentences of up to eight years in prison.

Meanwhile, a video released on social media by Russian election monitoring group Golos appeared to show staff at a polling station in the southern city of Krasnodar stuffing multiple voting slips into ballot boxes.

Also Saturday, Ukrainian drone and missile attacks once again hit deep inside the country. Tass said an armed group also tried to penetrate Russia’s border region from Ukraine.

Two people were killed in Ukrainian shelling of the Russian border city of Belgorod, regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said on Telegram, ordering shopping centers and schools to shut down because of the security situation. Meanwhile, local officials denied reports of explosions at polling stations in the border city, Tass said.

Dozens of people have been killed in Belgorod since the war began.

Elsewhere, a Ukrainian drone attack caused a fire at an oil refinery belonging to Russian oil company Rosneft in the Samara region, 1,065 kilometers (660 miles) southeast of Moscow, the regional governor said.

One person was killed and four other people were wounded in the city of Kakhovka in the illegally annexed Kherson region of Ukraine, the Russia-installed governor Vladimir Saldo said, blaming a Ukrainian drone attack that he said was aimed at disrupting the election.

Earlier, Tass reported that a Ukrainian drone also dropped an explosive on a polling station in the illegally annexed Zaporizhzhia region of Ukraine.

In the period leading up to the vote, Putin boasted about battlefield successes in Ukraine, where Russian troops have recently made incremental gains relying on their edge in firepower.

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On Friday, Putin described the week's cross-border shelling and incursions by Ukrainian forces as an attempt by Ukraine to frighten Russians and derail the vote. He vowed that the attacks "won't be left unpunished."

Despite the attacks, analysts say the Kremlin needs a high turnout in the election to signal that Russians approve of the war and to legitimize Putin for another term.

The Russian defense ministry has served as a key growth engine, working around the clock to churn out missiles, tanks and ammunition and cushioning Russians from the economic impact of the war — driving down unemployment and driving up wages. Russia's wartime economy has also proven to be resilient, expanding despite bruising Western sanctions.

Russia's opposition movement has urged those unhappy with Putin or the war to show up at the polls at noon Sunday, the final day of voting, as a form of protest. The strategy was endorsed by Navalny not long before his death.

Voting is taking place at polling stations across Russia's 11 time zones, in illegally annexed regions of Ukraine, and online.

Western leaders have derided the vote as a travesty of democracy.

European Council President Charles Michel mockingly congratulated Putin on Friday on "his landslide victory" in an election that was technically still underway. "No opposition. No freedom. No choice," he wrote on the social media platform X.

Beyond the lack of options for voters, the possibilities for independent monitoring are very limited. No significant international observers were present. Only registered, Kremlin-approved candidates — or state-backed advisory bodies — can assign observers to polling stations, decreasing the likelihood of independent watchdogs.

Schumer's rebuke of Netanyahu shows the long, fragile line the US and allies walk on interference

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans and Israeli officials were quick to express outrage after Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer sharply criticized Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's handling of the war in Gaza and called for Israel to hold new elections. They accused the Democratic leader of breaking the unwritten rule against interfering in a close ally's electoral politics.

Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell reacted to Schumer by saying it was "hypocritical for Americans who hyperventilate about interference in our own democracy to call for the removal of a democratically elected leader."

House Speaker Mike Johnson said Schumer's call for new elections was "inappropriate." Even Benny Gantz, a political rival of Netanyahu and member of Israel's war cabinet, said Schumer's remarks were "counterproductive."

Schumer's stinging rebuke of Netanyahu — the senator said the Israeli leader had "lost his way" and was an obstacle to peace — was certainly provocative but it was hardly norm-breaking. U.S. leaders, as well as American allies, are more frequently butting into electoral politics beyond the water's edge.

Look no further than the close and historically complicated relationship that American presidents and congressional leaders have negotiated with Israel leaders over the last 75 years.

"It is an urban legend that we don't intervene in Israeli politics and they don't try to intervene in ours," said Aaron David Miller, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, who worked as a Middle East negotiator in Republican and Democratic administrations. "We do intercede and they do intercede in ours."

In 2019, with just weeks to go before Netanyahu faced a difficult election, President Donald Trump abruptly declared the U.S. was recognizing Israel's sovereignty over the disputed Golan Heights, giving Netanyahu a political boost just when he badly needed it.

In 2015, Republican House Speaker John Boehner invited Netanyahu to deliver an address to Congress

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during sensitive negotiations about Iran's nuclear program and shortly before a national election in Israel. Boehner did not coordinate the invitation with President Barack Obama's administration. Obama declined to invite Netanyahu to the White House during the visit, with White House officials saying that holding such a visit so close to Israel's election would be inappropriate.

The standard Obama set for a White House visit wasn't one Bill Clinton subscribed to years earlier. In April 1996, Clinton invited Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres to the White House to sign a \$100 million counter-terrorism accord shortly before an Israeli election. Years later, Clinton acknowledged in an interview that he was trying to give Peres a boost with voters.

It didn't work; Peres lost to Netanyahu.

In practice, keeping out of allies' elections has been more of a professed American value than enshrined protocol. U.S. leaders have frequently demonstrated a "varsity versus junior varsity" approach to how overtly they noodle in the internal politics of friends, says Edward Frantz, a University of Indianapolis historian. The bigger the ally's economy, the less likely American leaders are to meddle openly in its elections.

"American politicians want to have it both ways," Frantz said. "There are moments when American leaders want to and need to speak out and have their say. But there is reason to stay close to the lines on elections. You don't want foreign governments to interfere in our own internal politics, either."

The lines have only become blurrier in recent years, and are being tested by how world leaders are approaching November's Biden-Trump rematch.

This past week, during a White House visit on the 25th anniversary of Poland's accession into NATO, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk didn't obscure his desire to see Biden win another term.

"I want you to know that your campaign four years ago was really inspirational for me and for so many Poles," said Tusk, with conservative Polish President Andrzej Duda by his side. "And we were encouraged ... after your victory. Thank you for your determination. It was something really important for — not only for the United States."

Tusk later singled out Johnson, the Republican House speaker, to blame for Washington's deadlock on a spending bill with \$60 billion in aid for Ukraine, which is running low on ammunition and arms in its war with Russia.

"This is not some political skirmish that has significance only here, on the American political stage," said Tusk. He told reporters that inaction by Johnson could "cost thousands of human lives in Ukraine."

Last week, Biden slammed Trump for hosting Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who has described a possible comeback by Trump as the "only serious chance" for an end to the war in Ukraine.

Hungary, like the U.S., is a member of NATO. Orbán has become an icon to some conservative populists for championing "illiberal democracy," replete with restrictions on immigration and LGBTQ+ rights.

Biden during a recent campaign event noted that Trump was meeting Orbán, and said the Hungarian leader is "looking for dictatorship." Hungary summoned the U.S. ambassador to Budapest, David Pressman, to register displeasure with the president's comments.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said the president stood by his comments.

"Our position is that Hungary has engaged in an assault on democratic institutions, and that remains a source of grave concern to us," Sullivan said.

The Schumer comments in the midst of Israel's difficult five-month war offer new strain to the U.S.-Israel relationship.

That relationship already has seen tensions between Biden and Netanyahu mount as the Palestinian death toll rises and innocent civilians suffer while the U.S. and others struggle to get aid past Israel's blockade and into Gaza. National elections are set for 2026 in Israel though they could well come earlier.

Biden, in a brief exchange with reporters on Friday, said he thought Schumer had delivered "a good speech." The president and White House officials, however, stopped short of endorsing Schumer's call for elections.

There have been other moments of deep tension in the U.S.-Israeli relationship.

President Dwight Eisenhower pressured Israel with the threat of sanctions into withdrawing from the Sinai in 1957 in the midst of the Suez Crisis. Ronald Reagan delayed the delivery of F16 fighter jets to

Israel at a time of escalating violence in the Middle East. President George H.W. Bush held up \$10 billion in loan guarantees to force the cessation of Israeli settlement activity in the occupied territories.

But the press by Schumer for new elections ventures into uncharted territory.

"All of those other crises were sort of one-offs," Miller said. "They were efforts to move Israel in a focused, discrete way on a specific issue. What you have now after years of Netanyahu's premierships is a fundamental crisis of confidence, which cuts to the core of the U.S.-Israel relationship."

Mnuchin's interest in TikTok and distressed NY bank echoes his pre-Trump investment playbook

By STAN CHOE and CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — It seems like a bizarre mishmash: A former Trump cabinet official is saying he wants to buy TikTok just days after leading a group that pumped \$1 billion into a beaten-down bank. But it all actually fits in with the complicated career of Steven Mnuchin.

The man who served as former President Donald Trump's Treasury secretary is well connected in the world of finance, after all. From 1985 to 2002, he worked at Goldman Sachs, one of the most storied — and criticized — investment banks on Wall Street.

Mnuchin also has a history in media and entertainment. Among his Hollywood credits are "Mad Max: Fury Road" and "The Lego Movie," where he was one of the executive producers. Think of them as much bigger-budget versions of TikTok videos.

And Mnuchin certainly has experience taking risks with troubled institutions. He famously swooped in to turn around the struggling IndyMac bank after its failure in the financial crisis of 2008.

But for critics, Mnuchin's dealmaking also raises concerns about ethics. Robert Weissman, president of the watchdog group Public Citizen, points to TikTok in particular, where the U.S. government may force its Chinese owners to sell. Imagine something similar happening in another country, where its former finance minister ended up as the buyer, he said.

"When you're at the top of the financial policymaking hierarchy, you don't jump from that to figure out how you can help yourself," Weissman said.

Other former Treasury secretaries have gone to Wall Street after their terms ended, including Robert Rubin, a Goldman Sachs executive who served under President Clinton. In all cases, the move carries the appearance of cashing in on their time in government, Weissman said.

Mnuchin, who couldn't be reached for comment through a request via his private-equity firm, has often generated controversy as he has generated cash.

After leaving the Treasury Department in January 2021, he launched his private-equity fund, Liberty Strategic Capital, which raised \$2.5 billion by that September, according to news reports.

Much of that money was from government-controlled investment funds in Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf states, which Mnuchin had frequently visited as Treasury secretary. He was in the Middle East just weeks before leaving office, cutting the trip short after the Jan. 6 Capitol riot.

The rapid shift from his government travel overseas to business dealings in those same countries prompted a watchdog group, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, to call for a one-year ban on senior government officials doing business overseas after leaving office.

Earlier this month, Mnuchin jumped back into the headlines when his PE firm led a roughly \$1 billion investment in embattled New York Community Bancorp.

NYCB was looking for a lifeline, and its stock had at one point plunged more than 80% from the start of the year. The bank is struggling with falling values for investments tied to commercial real estate and the growing pains associated with some of its past acquisitions.

It all hearkens back to the move that may have defined Mnuchin's career.

In 2009, OneWest Bank Group, where Mnuchin was chairman and CEO, bought the troubled IndyMac after federal regulators took over the bank. Other big-name backers included funds tied to George Soros and hedge-fund manager John Paulson.

OneWest bought all of IndyMac's deposits and assets at a discount of \$4.7 billion following an auction by the Federal Deposit of Insurance Corp. The FDIC also agreed to share in the losses created by some mortgages tied to single-family homes.

Kevin Kaiser, an adjunct professor of finance at the Wharton School, said such investors can profit by buying at steep discounts when markets are panicking. To ensure the investment pays off, however, investors like Mnuchin have to pay hardball with borrowers at risk of default, he said.

"They're a little bit sharp elbowed," Kaiser said, referring to distressed-property investors as a group. "And what that means is they're not shy to get into a bit of a conflict situation."

After OneWest, Mnuchin was Trump's top fundraiser in the 2016 election. He came under fire in Congress when he was nominated for the Treasury post, after it came out that OneWest foreclosed on tens of thousands of homes after the U.S. housing bubble popped.

Advocates found the bank particularly difficult to work with under government mortgage modification programs. Some of those who lost their homes had voted for Trump in 2016 and were disappointed in Mnuchin's nomination.

Maxine Waters, the top Democrat of the House's financial committee, at the time called Mnuchin the "foreclosure king."

In testimony before a Senate committee considering his nomination, Mnuchin said he had worked to help homeowners remain in their homes and that his company had extended more than 100,000 loan modifications to borrowers.

Mnuchin was Treasury secretary in 2020, when the Trump administration brokered a deal where Oracle and Walmart would take a large stake in TikTok. That deal eventually fizzled for several reasons, but the popular video app is again under pressure after the House of Representatives passed a bill Wednesday to ban it in the U.S. if its China-based owner doesn't sell its stake.

On Thursday, Mnuchin said in an interview with CNBC that he had spoken with "a bunch of people" about creating an investor group to buy TikTok.

And Mnuchin may not be done.

Mnuchin has plenty of potential, distressed targets given the banking industry's troubles, said Chris Caulfield, who runs the banking practice at West Monroe, a consulting firm.

Besides having a history of bringing in new leadership teams to right struggling banks, Mnuchin also has experience in the potentially thorny world of regulations.

"He also has access to capital," Caulfield said of Mnuchin. "Should there be need for more capital, he's somebody who's very adept at putting consortiums together."

After the pandemic, young Chinese again want to study abroad, just not so much in the US

By DIDI TANG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In the Chinese city of Shanghai, two young women seeking an education abroad have both decided against going to the United States, a destination of choice for decades that may be losing its shine.

For Helen Dong, a 22-year-old senior studying advertising, it was the cost. "It doesn't work for me when you have to spend 2 million (yuan) (\$278,000) but find no job upon returning," she said. Dong is headed to Hong Kong this fall instead.

Costs were not a concern for Yvonne Wong, 24, now studying comparative literature and cultures in a master's program at the University of Bristol in Britain. For her, the issue was safety.

"Families in Shanghai usually don't want to send their daughters to a place where guns are not banned — that was the primary reason," Wong said. "Between the U.S. and the U.K., the U.K. is safer, and that's the biggest consideration for my parents."

With an interest in studying abroad rebounding after the pandemic, there are signs that the decades-long run that has sent an estimated 3 million Chinese students to the U.S., including many of the country's

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brightest, could be trending down, as geopolitical shifts redefine U.S.-China relations.

Cutting people-to-people exchanges could have a lasting impact on relations between the two countries.

"International education is a bridge," said Fanta Aw, executive director of the NAFSA Association of International Educators, based in Washington. "A long-term bridge, because the students who come today are the engineers of the future. They are the politicians of the future, they are the business entrepreneurs of the future."

"Not seeing that pipeline as strong means that we in the U.S. have to pay attention, because China-U.S. relations are very important."

Aw said the decrease is more notable in U.S. undergraduate programs, which she attributed to a declining population in China from low birthrates, bitter U.S.-China relations, more regional choices for Chinese families and the high costs of a U.S. education.

But graduate programs have not been spared. Zheng Yi, an associate professor of mechanical and industrial engineering at Northeastern University in Boston, has seen the number of Chinese applicants to one of the school's engineering programs shrink to single digits, compared with 20 to 30 students before the pandemic.

He said the waning interest could be partly due to China's growing patriotism that nudges students to attend Chinese institutes instead.

Andrew Chen, chief executive officer of Pittsburgh-based WholeRen Education, which has advised Chinese students in the U.S. for the past 14 years, said the downward trend is here to stay.

"This is not a periodic wave," he said. "This is a new era." The Chinese government has sidelined English education, hyped gun violence in the U.S., and portrayed the U.S. as a declining power. As a result, Chen said, Chinese families are hesitant to send their children to the U.S.

Beijing has criticized the U.S. for its unfriendly policy toward some Chinese students, citing an executive order by former President Donald Trump to keep out Chinese students who have attended schools with strong links to the Chinese military.

The Chinese foreign ministry also has protested that a number of Chinese students have been unfairly interrogated and sent home upon arrival at U.S. airports in recent months. Spokeswoman Mao Ning recently describing the U.S. actions as "selective, discriminatory and politically motivated."

State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said fewer than "one tenth of 1%" of Chinese students have been detained or denied admission. Another State Department official said Chinese students selected for U.S.-funded exchange programs have been harassed by Chinese state agents. Half of the students have been forced to withdraw, and those who participated in the programs have been faced with harassment after returning to China, the official said, speaking to reporters on condition of anonymity.

The U.S.-China Education Trust acknowledged the predicament facing Chinese students. "Students from China have been criticized in the U.S. as potential spies, and in China as too influenced by the West," the organization said in a report following a survey of Chinese students in the U.S. between 1991 and 2021.

Still, many young Chinese, especially those whose parents were foreign-educated, are eager to study abroad. The China-based education service provider New Oriental said the students hope degrees from reputable foreign universities will improve their career prospects in a tough job market at home, where the unemployment rate for those 16 to 24 stood at nearly 15% in December.

But their preferences have shifted from the U.S. to the U.K., according to EIC Education, a Chinese consultancy specializing in international education. The students like the shorter study programs and the quality and affordability of a British education, as well as the feeling of safety.

Wong, the Shanghai student now studying in the U.K., said China's handling of the pandemic pushed more young people to go abroad. "After three years of tight controls during the pandemic, most people have realized the outside world is different, and they are more willing to leave," she said.

The State Department issued 86,080 F-1 student visas to Chinese students in the budget year ending in September, up nearly 40% from the year earlier. Still, the number remains below the pre-pandemic level of 105,775.

Under communist leadership, China only opened its doors to the U.S. in the late 1970s when the two

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countries established formal ties. Beijing, desperate to revive its economy through Western technology, wanted to send 5,000 students to American universities; President Jimmy Carter replied that he would take 100,000.

The number of Chinese students in the U.S. picked up after Beijing in 1981 allowed Chinese students to "self-fund" their overseas studies, rather than relying on government money. Generous scholarships from U.S. schools allowed tens of thousands of Chinese students to study here, but it wasn't until 2009 when the number of Chinese students exceeded 100,000, driven by growth in family wealth.

In the following decade, the number of Chinese students in the U.S. more than tripled to peak at 372,532 in the 2019-2020 academic year, just as the COVID-19 pandemic took hold. The number slipped to 289,526 in 2022.

The Institute of International Education, which publishes annual reports on international students, has found that U.S. schools are prioritizing students from India over China, especially for graduate programs. However, it also found that 36% of schools reported increases in new Chinese students in fall 2023.

In its most recent report, the Council of Graduate Schools said U.S. universities have seen a surge in applications and enrollments from India and countries in sub-Saharan Africa since fall 2020, while those from Chinese nationals have declined.

"Increasing competition from Chinese institutions of higher learning and the growing geopolitical tension between China and the United States may be contributing to this trend," the council report said.

A new kind of hospital is coming to rural America. To qualify, facilities must close their beds

By DEVNA BOSE AP Health Writer

As rural hospitals continue to struggle financially, a new type of hospital is slowly taking root, especially in the Southeast.

Rural emergency hospitals receive more than \$3 million in federal funding a year and higher Medicare reimbursements in exchange for closing all inpatient beds and providing 24/7 emergency care. While that makes it easier for a hospital to keep its doors open, experts say it doesn't solve all of the challenges facing rural health care.

People might have to travel further for treatments for illnesses that require inpatient stays, like pneumonia or COVID-19. In some of the communities where hospitals have converted to the new designation, residents are confused about what kind of care they can receive. Plus, rural hospitals are hesitant to make the switch, because there's no margin of error.

"It's ironic" that the facilities that might need the most help can't afford to take the risk, said Carrie Cochran-McClain, chief policy officer at the National Rural Health Association. She pointed to having to give up certain services and benefits, such as a federal discount program for prescription drugs.

The government, which classifies hospitals by type, rolled out the rural emergency option in January 2023. Only 19 hospitals across the U.S. received rural emergency hospital status last year, according to the University of North Carolina's Sheps Center for Health Services Research.

The majority are in the South, with some in the Midwest, and hospitals in Nebraska and Florida recently started to explore the option.

The designation is aimed at a very specific population, said George Pink, deputy director of the Sheps Center's Rural Health Research Program, and that's rural hospitals on the brink of closure with few people getting inpatient care already.

Saving rural care

That was the case for Irwin County Hospital in Ocilla, Georgia, which was the second rural emergency hospital established in the U.S.

Weeks prior to converting, the hospital received at least \$1 million in credit from the county so it could make pay employees — money that county board of supervisors chairman Scott Carver doubted he'd see returned.

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"We operate on a \$6 million budget for the county, so to extend that kind of line of credit was dangerous on our part to some degree," he said. "But ... we felt like we had to try."

Irwin County Hospital became a rural emergency hospital on Feb. 1, 2023. Quentin Whitwell, the hospital's CEO, said it was an ideal candidate.

"We're still finding out what some of the impacts are, given that it's a new thing," said Whitwell, who through his company Progressive Health Systems owns and manages six hospitals in the Southeast, most of which are rural emergency hospitals or have applied for the designation. "But the change to a rural emergency hospital has transformed this hospital."

A combination of state programs and tax credits, plus the new designation, means the hospital has \$4 million in the bank, Carver said. Simply put, the work was worth it to him.

Traci Harper, a longtime Ocilla resident, isn't so sure. About a year ago, she rushed her son to the hospital for emergency care for spinal meningitis.

Because the new designation requires the hospital to transfer patients to larger hospitals within 24 hours, Harper's son was sent to another in-state facility and three days later ended up getting the care he needed in a hospital in Jacksonville, Florida.

"That's two hours away," she said. "The whole time I could have taken him there myself, but nobody told me that."

'Barely surviving'

Nebraska's first rural emergency hospital opened in February in a city called Friend.

Warren Memorial Hospital had reached a breaking point: Federal pandemic relief money had dried up. The city, which owns the hospital, had to start extending lines of credit so hospital employees could get paid. A major street repair project was even delayed, said Jared Chaffin, the hospital's chief financial officer and one of three co-CEOs.

"Back in the summer, we were barely surviving," said Amy Thimm, the hospital's vice president of clinical services and quality and co-CEO.

Though residents expressed concerns at a September town hall about closing inpatient services, the importance of having emergency care outweighed other worries.

"We have farmers and ranchers and people who don't have the time to drive an hour to get care, so they'll just go without," said Ron Te Brink, co-CEO and chief information officer. "Rural health care is so extremely important to a lot of Nebraska communities like ours."

The first federal payment, about \$270,000, arrived March 5. Chaffin projects the hospital's revenue will be \$6 million this year — more than it's ever made.

"That's just insane, especially for our little hospital here," he said. "We still have Mount Everest to climb, and we still have so much work ahead of us. The designation alone is not a savior for the hospital — it's a lifeline."

Rural troubles

That lifeline has proven difficult to hold onto for Alliance Healthcare System in Holly Springs, Mississippi, another one of Whitwell's hospitals and the fourth facility in the country to convert.

Months after being approved as a rural emergency hospital in March 2023, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services reneged on its decision.

Hospital CEO Dr. Kenneth Williams told The Associated Press that the government said the hospital isn't rural because it is less than an hour away from Memphis. A CMS spokesperson said the facility was "inadvertently certified."

The hospital has until April to transition back to full service, but many in the community of largely retirees believe the hospital has closed, Williams said. Patient volume is at a record low. If the federal payments stop coming, Williams isn't sure the hospital will survive.

"We might have been closed if we hadn't (become a rural emergency hospital), so ... something had to be done," he said. "Do I regret all of the issues that for some reason we've incurred that the other (hospitals) have not? I don't know."

Though Alliance appears to be one of few facilities that have been negatively impacted by converting to

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a rural emergency hospital, Pink said it's too soon to know if the federal designation is a success.

"If my intuition is correct, it will probably work well for some communities and it may not work well for others," he said.

Cochran-McClain said her organization is trying to work with Congress to change regulations that have been a barrier for rural facilities, like closing inpatient behavioral health beds that are already scarce.

Brock Slabach, the National Rural Health Association's chief operations officer, told the AP that upwards of 30 facilities are interested in converting to rural emergency hospitals this year.

As Whitwell sees it: "As this program evolves, there will be more people that I think will understand the value." ____

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Venezuelan opposition leader faces deadline for standing down in race against Maduro

By REGINA GARCIA CANO and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — It's her choice — but one on which the hopes of millions of Venezuelans fighting to restore their democracy depends.

Barred from running for office, opposition leader María Corina Machado is facing pressure from foreign leaders and fellow government opponents to abandon her dead-end presidential candidacy ahead of a March 25 candidate registration deadline and make space for a substitute to take on the entrenched incumbent, Nicolás Maduro.

It's an impossible choice that underlines Venezuela's increasingly authoritarian tilt. The last election widely recognized as meeting international standards took place almost a decade ago, when the opposition swept control of the National Assembly in 2015. But the opposition's boycotting of subsequent races has only strengthened Maduro's grip on power.

Machado, a former lawmaker, rose to the top of the opposition leadership in 2023, filling a void left when other leaders went into exile. Her courage and principled attack on government corruption and Maduro's mismanagement of the oil-dependent economy rallied millions of Venezuelans to overwhelmingly vote for her in an October opposition primary that the government tried to outlaw.

Success made her a target though. In January, in defiance of an electoral agreement Maduro signed with an opposition coalition, which earned him relief from U.S. economic sanctions, Venezuela's rubber-stamping high court affirmed Machado's ban on holding office.

Maduro's government has since also accused Washington of conspiring to assassinate him, arrested more political opponents and expelled the staff of the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Taken together, the actions indicate Maduro has no interest in a competitive race and is looking only to extend his decade-long rule, said Michael McKinley, who served as U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, Brazil, Colombia and Peru.

"We're no longer dealing with an imperfect electoral process," McKinley said. "It's a complete shutdown of all meaningful challenges to Maduro. In that context, it's hard to argue that the opposition participating in elections without Machado and with a token candidate somehow advances a democratic opening."

Polling suggests that Venezuelans overwhelmingly want to go to the polls and would trounce Maduro if given half a chance. And while Machado is their preferred candidate, a majority of opposition supporters want her to yield to someone else rather than have the opposition essentially sit out the race in which Maduro will be seeking a third six-year term.

"We're with Maria Corina until the end," retiree Sonia Alfonzo said, echoing Machado's campaign slogan of "Hasta el final" — Until the end. "But if she can't run, she must have an ace up her sleeve."

Machado has repeatedly rejected the idea of renouncing her candidacy, but she has not explained her strategy to overcome the ban. Gerardo Blyde, who negotiated the opposition's electoral agreement with Maduro's representatives, told a radio station Friday "that there is still time" for the government to rectify

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and “allow our candidacy without obstructions.”

But other allies are already floating a plan B. Two-time opposition presidential candidate Henrique Capriles this week urged fellow Maduro opponents to get “a sense of realism” and rally behind an alternative. Capriles, who exited the primary as support for Machado increased during the campaign, asked them to put Venezuelans and “the country above all else.”

The pressure is coming from outside Venezuela as well. (backslash)Brazil’s leftist president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, recently held up his own inability to run for president in 2018 while he was fighting corruption charges from jail as an example for Machado to follow.

“Instead of crying, I appointed another candidate,” said Lula, who was later cleared of criminal wrongdoing.

Machado’s meteoric rise as opposition leader last year was aided by careful messaging that softened her image as an elitist hardliner and allowed her to connect with skeptics. But throughout 2023, ruling-party leaders made clear she would never face off with Maduro.

There has been bad blood for decades between Machado and the disciples of Maduro’s mentor and predecessor, the late fiery leader Hugo Chávez.

Machado, a free-market conservative, once dared to interrupt Chávez as he gave a speech before the National Assembly, calling the expropriation of businesses theft. “An eagle does not hunt a fly,” he responded.

The Biden administration has tried to walk a fine line between expressing support for Machado — for years more closely aligned with Republicans in Washington — and keeping alive hopes for some sort of electoral participation.

A senior U.S. official said the Biden administration has not asked Machado to stand down and will respect whatever decision she makes. But the U.S. is stressing the need for the opposition to unite behind a common strategy, one that reflects the will of regular Venezuelans to cast ballots, said the official, who insisted on not being quoted by name to discuss the sensitive matter.

A key milestone in that delicate dance comes in April, when temporary sanctions relief that arose from the electoral agreement signed last year in Barbados expires and the White House must decide whether to reimpose restrictions blamed for a worsening humanitarian crisis that has led 7.4 million Venezuelans to abandon the country.

“As imperfect as the elections will be, they represent a huge opportunity for Venezuelans to mobilize and express their voice in ways they haven’t for a decade,” said Christopher Sabatini, a research fellow at the Chatham House in London. The group this month organized two days of closed door discussions on Venezuela attended by U.S. officials, international diplomats, human rights activists and members of the opposition.

Maduro’s government insists Machado’s ban is a done deal that cannot be revisited. After officials said election day would be July 28 — Chávez’s birthday — the government announced it would send invitations to international electoral observers like the European Union and the Carter Center, whose participation is part of the Barbados agreement. However, so far, the invitations haven’t been sent.

Entrenched, authoritarian leaders sometimes overestimate their strength and lose even heavily skewed elections. That’s what happened in Nicaragua in 1990, when Sandinista rebel leader Daniel Ortega was defeated after a decade in power, as well when Chileans in a 1988 referendum ousted dictator Augusto Pinochet.

But those examples have less relevance in a world where democracy is on the defensive and the United States’ ability to shape events is declining, said McKinley, the former U.S. ambassador.

He said it’s more likely Maduro is looking for inspiration to the presidential election in Russia, where Vladimir Putin is competing against a slate of candidates handpicked by the Kremlin, to dismantle Venezuela’s democracy even further.

“It’s hard to think Maduro isn’t watching Putin’s electoral example and believes he can follow suit,” he said.

Fasting at school? More Muslim students in the US are getting support during Ramadan

By COREY WILLIAMS, GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO, MARIAM FAM and DARREN SANDS Associated Press DEARBORN, Mich. (AP) — While Muslim students remain a rarity in many U.S. school districts, they are a major presence in some communities, prompting public schools to be more attentive to their needs during the holy month of Ramadan when dawn-to-sundown fasting is a duty of Islam.

For example, in Dearborn, Michigan — where nearly half the 110,000 residents are of Arab descent — public school teachers and staff strive to make things easier for students observing Ramadan.

"We allow students on their own to practice their faith as long as it's not a disruption to the school day," said Dearborn Schools spokesperson David Mustonen. "We also try to find other spaces or activities in the school during lunch for those students who may be fasting."

But he stressed that these students are still required to complete all assignments.

In St. Paul, Minnesota, East African Elementary Magnet School has set aside space in the library where students who are fasting and don't want to be in the cafeteria can spend the break doing other supervised activities like reading, said principal Abdisalam Adam.

The 220-student school opened last fall as part of St. Paul's public schools system, and shares that curriculum, but it also aims to reinforce cultural and linguistic connections with Somalia and other East African countries. Adam said about 90% of the students are Somali Muslims.

Adam, who has worked with the district for nearly 30 years, said he tells his staff that accommodating observance of Ramadan fits in with an overall goal of caring for students.

"All needs are connected," he said.

For school districts less familiar with Muslim traditions, resources are available. For example, Islamic Networks Group, a California-based nonprofit, provides, among other things, online information for educators about Ramadan and its significance to Muslims.

Many districts "don't know very much about Islam or any of our holidays," said Maha Elgenaidi, the group's executive director. "If they don't know very much about it, there's not much they can provide to students in terms of accommodation" until they learn more and the parents are actively involved in asking for accommodations.

She says fasting students may need to be excused from strenuous activities in gym class, and should be allowed to make up for tests missed due to absence to celebrate the Eid al-Fitr holiday that follows Ramadan.

"If they're not accommodated at school or the school doesn't know anything about this, they're kind of living dual lives there."

Fasting is not required of young children, but many Muslim children like to fast to share in the month's rituals and emulate parents and older siblings, according to ING. Educators also need to know of the typical changes to Muslim families' routines during Ramadan, such as waking up for the pre-dawn "suhoor" meal and staying up late to possibly attend prayers in the mosque, Elgenaidi said.

When Dr. Aifra Ahmed's children were younger, the Pakistani American physician and her husband would share insight about Ramadan with their classmates, reading to them a Ramadan story and distributing goodie bags with such things as dates.

"I realized that the Muslim families in school have to do a lot of education," said Ahmed, who lives in Los Altos, California.

Ahmed's husband, Moazzam Chaudry, said goodwill gestures, such as when educators offer a Ramadan greeting, send a message of inclusivity.

For immigrant families, "that's the first thing that ... naturally comes to your mind, 'Are we integrated into this society? Does this society even accept us?'" he said. "These little, little things make such a huge impact."

Punhal, the couple's daughter who attends a charter middle school, said she takes part in physical education during Ramadan but skips running when fasting because she would need water afterward.

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She said a few non-Muslim friends told her they would like to fast with her in companionship.

Naiel, her brother who's in a public high school, said he was pleased when a teacher talked to the class about Ramadan and told him that, if he needed, he could take a nap.

He wants others to better understand why he fasts.

"A lot of kids and teachers think ... I'm torturing myself or like it's a diet," he said. "When I'm fasting, I just feel a lot more gratitude towards everyone around me and towards people who don't have as much."

In Dearborn, 14-year-old Adam Alcodray praised the faculty at Dearborn High for their understanding during Ramadan.

"A lot of the teachers are just like more lenient, allowing us to do less," said Alcodray, a 9th grader. "They don't get mad because they realize we are hungry."

Alcodray says he fasts from 6:20 a.m. until around 8 p.m.

"It's not that bad to be honest," he said. "When you know you can't eat, something in your brain clicks."

Hussein Mortada, a 17-year-old senior at Dearborn High, said family solidarity is invaluable during Ramadan.

"In my family, everybody's fasting," Mortada said. "Everybody's going through the same thing. The whole month is meant for you to get closer to God and make your religion stronger."

This year, Ramadan carries extra significance due to the hardships being suffered by people in Gaza amid the Israel-Hamas war, Mortada said.

"I feel helpless just sitting here on my phone, looking at everything that's happening," he said. "All you can do is feel for them and pray for them."

Alcodray shared similar sentiments.

"When you look at what the children are eating in Gaza, you appreciate what your mom makes," he said. "When you're having a bad day, realize what they are going through."

At the East African magnet school in St. Paul, Marian Aden — who trains other teachers there — makes it a priority to encourage Ramadan-related accommodations for fasting students.

Aden said her youngest daughter, 4-year-old Nora, woke up excited about Ramadan's start on March 11 — but her teachers in the suburb where they live weren't familiar with the occasion. Aden said she'll be relieved when Nora starts attending the magnet school next year.

"She'll be celebrated for who she is," Aden said.

Minnesota has been home to growing numbers of refugees from war-torn Somalia since the late 1990s. Several school districts have recently made Eid a holiday.

In Washington, D.C., Abdul Fouzi has two daughters, ages 8 and 12, who have gradually learned the meaning and rituals of Ramadan.

Growing up in Sierra Leone in the 1980s, Fouzi said he was fasting for a full day as early as age 11. But he has not pushed his elder daughter to do likewise.

"They're still pretty young so they're not ready to go the whole day without food or water," he said. "They're not built like that."

Still, he wants them to get used to the idea; this year he'd like them to experiment with fasting for a half day.

To Fouzi, more important than strict adherence to the rules at their age is their understanding of Ramadan's meaning and the importance of praying for peace.

"They make up their own little rules and find loopholes figuring out how they want to participate in and practice Ramadan in different ways, and I'm okay with that," he said.

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Today in History: March 17, Golda Meir becomes prime minister of Israel

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Sunday, March 17, the 77th day of 2024. There are 289 days left in the year. This is St. Patrick's Day.

Today's highlight in history:

On March 17, 1969, Golda Meir took power in Israel, beginning a stint as prime minister that would last through five crucial years in the nation's history.

On this date:

In 1762, New York held its first St. Patrick's Day parade.

In 1776, the Revolutionary War Siege of Boston ended as British forces evacuated the city.

In 1905, Anna Eleanor Roosevelt married Franklin Delano Roosevelt in New York.

In 1941, the National Gallery of Art opened in Washington, D.C.

In 1942, six days after departing the Philippines during World War II, Gen. Douglas MacArthur arrived in Australia to become supreme commander of Allied forces in the southwest Pacific theater.

In 1950, scientists at the University of California at Berkeley announced they had created a new radioactive element, "californium."

In 1966, a U.S. Navy midget submarine located a missing hydrogen bomb that had fallen from a U.S. Air Force B-52 bomber into the Mediterranean off Spain. (It took several more weeks to actually recover the bomb.)

In 1970, the United States cast its first veto in the U.N. Security Council, killing a resolution that would have condemned Britain for failing to use force to overthrow the white-ruled government of Rhodesia.

In 2003, edging to the brink of war, President George W. Bush gave Saddam Hussein 48 hours to leave his country. Iraq rejected Bush's ultimatum, saying that a U.S. attack to force Saddam from power would be "a grave mistake."

In 2010, Michael Jordan became the first ex-player to become a majority owner in the NBA as the league's Board of Governors unanimously approved Jordan's \$275 million bid to buy the Charlotte Bobcats from Bob Johnson.

In 2013, two members of Steubenville, Ohio's celebrated high school football team were found guilty of raping a drunken 16-year-old girl and sentenced to at least a year in juvenile prison in a case that rocked the Rust Belt city of 18,000 people.

In 2016, finally bowing to years of public pressure, SeaWorld Entertainment said it would no longer breed killer whales or make them perform crowd-pleasing tricks.

In 2020, the Kentucky Derby and the French Open were each postponed from May to September because of the coronavirus.

In 2023, the International Criminal Court said it issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin for war crimes because of his alleged involvement in abductions of children from Ukraine.

Today's Birthdays: The former national chairwoman of the NAACP, Myrlie Evers-Williams, is 91. Singer-songwriter John Sebastian (The Lovin' Spoonful) is 80. Former NSA Director and former CIA Director Michael Hayden is 79. Rock musician Harold Brown (War; Lowrider Band) is 78. Actor Patrick Duffy is 75. Actor Kurt Russell is 73. Country singer Susie Allanson is 72. Actor Lesley-Anne Down is 70. Actor Mark Boone Jr. is 69. Country singer Paul Overstreet is 69. Actor Gary Sinise is 69. Actor Christian Clemenson is 66. Former basketball and baseball player Danny Ainge is 65. Actor Arye Gross is 64. Actor Vicki Lewis is 64. Actor Casey Siemaszko (sheh-MA'-zshko) is 63. Writer-director Rob Sitch is 62. Actor Rob Lowe is 60. Rock singer Billy Corgan is 57. Actor Mathew St. Patrick is 56. Actor Yanic (YAH'-neek) Truesdale is 55. Rock musician Melissa Auf der Maur is 52. Olympic gold medal soccer player Mia Hamm is 52. Rock musician Caroline Corr (The Corrs) is 51. Actor Amelia Heinle is 51. Country singer Keifer Thompson (Thompson Square) is 51. Actor Marisa Coughlan is 50. Actor Natalie Zea is 49. Sports reporter Tracy Wolfson is 49.

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Actor Brittany Daniel is 48. Singer and TV personality Tamar Braxton is 47. Country musician Geoff Sprung (Old Dominion) is 46. Reggaeton singer Nicky Jam is 43. TV personality Rob Kardashian is 37. Pop/rock singer-songwriter Hozier is 34. Actor Eliza Hope Bennett is 32. Actor John Boyega is 32. Olympic gold medal swimmer Katie Ledecky is 27. Actor Flynn Morrison is 19.