

Groton Daily Independent

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Sunday, March 31

Resurrection Sunday

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, 7 a.m. (Breakfast by Luther League), worship with communion, 9:30 a.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Zion at 7:30 a.m.; St. John's at 9 a.m.

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

Monday, April 1

NO SCHOOL - Easter Break
Pantry Open 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Senior Menu: Sloppy Joe on bun, oven roasted potatoes, broccoli, ice cream sundae, fruit.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study 6:30 a.m.

Tuesday, April 2

Senior Menu: Baked pork chops, au gratin potatoes, vegetable capri blend, honey fruit salad, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Cereal.
School Lunch: Chicken strips, fries.
Thrift Store open 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.
Food Pantry open 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.
Wage Memorial Library Board meeting, 2 p.m. at the Library
City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Ladies Aid / LWML, 1 p.m.
United Methodist: Bible Study meeting, 11 a.m., Groton Dairy Queen

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

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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Date: 3/30/2024
Time: 5:36 pm

Arena:
City, State:

VISITOR: Class B Boys 2024 ()

NO	PLAYER	TOT-FG 3-PT					REBOUNDS											MIN
		P	FG	FGA	FG	FGA	FT	FTA	OFF	DEF	TOT	PF	TP	A	TO	BK	S	
3	Marshall, Nic	*	5	12	0	1	0	1	0	3	3	0	10	6	0	0	4	10:26
4	Tvedt, Lane	*	2	11	1	6	4	4	0	3	3	0	9	2	1	0	1	10:01
10	Mitchell, Daniel	*	3	6	1	1	2	4	0	3	3	0	9	1	1	2	0	8:13
11	Schauer, Jackson	*	11	18	8	11	2	2	1	5	6	5	32	2	0	0	0	10:26
33	Jensen, George	*	4	10	0	3	0	0	3	3	6	1	8	0	1	0	0	8:49
1	Ortman, Tage		4	10	3	7	0	0	0	2	2	0	11	0	1	0	0	21:59
5	Uhlir, Jordan		1	4	0	0	0	0	1	2	3	0	2	3	2	0	0	23:11
13	Lieber, Aiden		5	11	0	1	0	0	2	3	5	1	10	3	1	0	1	21:34
15	Cotton, Layne		5	9	0	3	0	0	2	1	3	0	10	0	0	0	0	20:33
21	Koepsell, Kolt		7	14	2	5	0	2	1	9	10	3	16	2	3	4	1	24:48
TEAM REBOUNDS										0	16	16			1			
Team Totals			47	105	15	38	8	13	10	50	60	10	117	19	11	6	7	160

Total FG% - 1st: 26/53 0.491 2nd: 21/52 0.404 Game: 0.448 Deadball
 3-PT FG% - 1st: 11/21 0.524 2nd: 4/17 0.235 Game: 0.395 Rebounds
 Total FT% - 1st: 3/6 0.500 2nd: 5/7 0.714 Game: 0.615 (2,0)

HOME: Class A Boys 2024 ()

NO	PLAYER	TOT-FG 3-PT					REBOUNDS											MIN
		P	FG	FGA	FG	FGA	FT	FTA	OFF	DEF	TOT	PF	TP	A	TO	BK	S	
1	Engelbretson, Max	*	3	10	3	8	0	0	0	2	2	0	9	2	1	0	0	9:36
2	Stevenson, Tyson	*	5	17	1	9	5	7	1	5	6	1	16	1	2	0	1	23:42
10	Slaba, Jayce	*	1	5	0	2	0	0	1	3	4	0	2	2	3	0	1	6:54
12	Anderson, Matt	*	6	8	1	2	0	0	1	2	3	1	13	0	0	0	0	6:54
23	Kuhl, Jake	*	2	6	2	3	1	1	0	7	7	0	7	1	0	2	1	15:43
4	Ihnen, Porter		4	11	2	7	3	3	2	5	7	2	13	2	1	0	2	17:24
5	Erickson, Jack		5	8	0	1	0	0	2	4	6	0	10	1	1	1	1	24:01
11	Tietz, Lane		9	21	2	6	2	2	1	8	9	1	22	2	3	1	1	27:41
33	Squires, Alec		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2:06
34	Wingert, Jaxon		10	21	0	4	1	2	3	4	7	2	21	0	0	0	2	25:59
TEAM REBOUNDS										0	12	12			1			
Team Totals			45	107	11	42	12	15	11	52	63	7	113	11	12	4	9	160

Total FG% - 1st: 22/51 0.431 2nd: 23/56 0.411 Game: 0.421 Deadball
 3-PT FG% - 1st: 5/20 0.250 2nd: 6/22 0.273 Game: 0.262 Rebounds
 Total FT% - 1st: 5/6 0.833 2nd: 7/9 0.778 Game: 0.800 (3,0)

Technical Fouls: B Boy (0)
: A Boy (0)

OFFICIALS :
ATTENDANCE : 0

SCORE BY PERIODS	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	TOTAL
Class B Boys 2024	28	38	30	22	118
Class A Boys 2024	29	25	29	29	112

Last FG: Class B Boys 2024 4th- 0:05, Class A Boys 2024 4th- 1:34
 Largest lead: Class B Boys 2024 by 28 3rd- 6:12, Class A Boys 2024 by 5 1st- 8:00
 Score tied: 5 times, Lead changed: 10 times

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15 N Main St. - Ste. 101
Downtown Groton

Call/Text Paul: 605-397-7460
Call/Text Tina: 605-397-7285



Bones need strong muscles for support.
Not exercising weakens those supporting muscles.
Weak muscles put more stress on joints. - Mayo Clinic

Groton Area Elementary Kindergarten Roundup (Screening) for children turning 5 on or before September 1, 2024 Friday, April 5, 2024

If your child is currently attending Junior Kindergarten at Groton Area Elementary School, please **DISREGARD** this notice. Your teacher will be sending information if necessary.

Packets are being or have been sent home with information regarding KG Roundup. These would apply to families who have children eligible for Kindergarten and Junior Kindergarten this coming 2024-25 school year who are not currently enrolled in our school. Please contact the school if you do not receive a packet. We do not have all children in our census. Thank you!!

EMPLOYMENT

Dairy Queen in Groton is hiring! If you're looking for a fun job with lots of variety, look no further! We're looking for energetic, smiling people – we provide free meals, uniforms, competitive wages, fun atmosphere and flexible scheduling. Part-time – day, evening, week-end shifts available. We will work with your schedule. Stop in today and pick up an application.

.....

Position available for full-time Public Works Laborer. Formal training and/or experience preferred. Salary negotiable DOE. Benefits include medical insurance, life insurance, and SD State Retirement. Please send application and resume to the City of Groton, PO Box 587, Groton, SD 57445, or email to city.doug@nvc.net. Applications will be accepted until 5pm on April 16, 2024. Full job description and application may be found at <https://www.grotonsd.gov/o/grotoncity/page/employment-options>. For more information, please call 605-397-8422. Equal opportunity employer.

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Easter Baskets by Tina ~ 605-397-7285



Only
\$20
each



Fire truck Easter basket with a light up cup three mystery eggs, a light up football, a space game, blue peeps bubbles and a blue fan



The stuff inside it a cup that lights up, a stuffed cow, a bow with a arrow toy, a shooter game, a blue peeps bubble and a green bubble fan



It has a blue speaker , pink bubbles a blue fan, and stress carrot a stuffed bunny with three clear Easter bunnies with jelly beans in side them



The stuff that's in this basket yellow peeps bubbles a duck puzzle, a stuffed bunny, four mystery colored Easter eggs with prize inside a jump rope, a cup that lights up on top and a pink fan with bubbles in it

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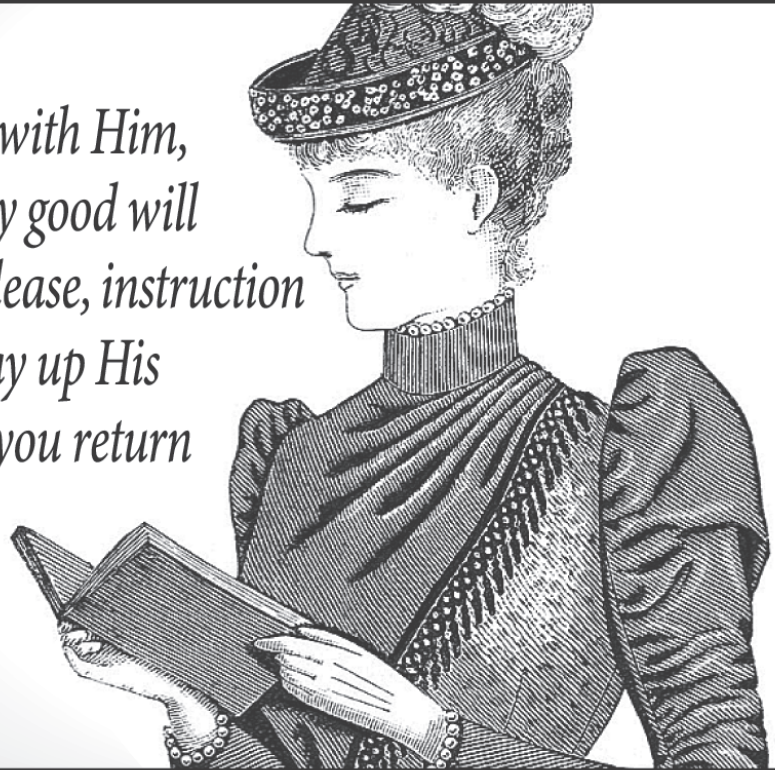
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THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE

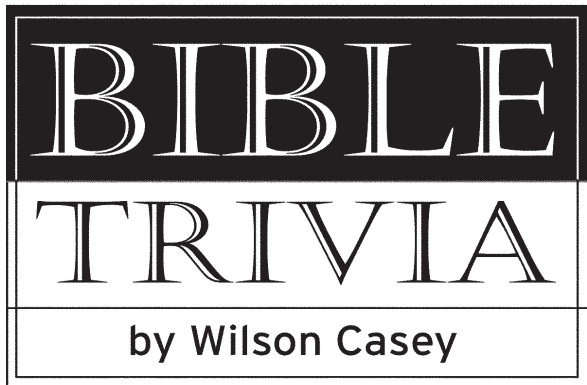
*Now acquaint yourself with Him,
and be at peace; thereby good will
come to you. Receive, please, instruction
from His mouth, and lay up His
words in your heart. If you return
to the Almighty,
you will be built up...*

JOB 22:21-23



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

2. From Proverbs 30, what will pluck out the eyes of anyone who scorns their parents? *Demons, Ravens, Doves, Quails*

3. How many times is the word "apple" or "apples" mentioned in the Bible (KJV)? *2, 11, 37, 51*

4. From Matthew 8, what Roman official asked Jesus to heal his servant? *Marshall, Governor, Centurion, Jailer*

5. Who wrote, "The love of money is the root of all evil"? *Timothy, Isaiah, Moses, Paul*

6. Who was the father of Hosea? *Uzzah, Beerli, Joash, Ahab*

ANSWERS: 1) New, 2) Ravens, 3) 11, 4) Centurion, 5) Paul (1 Timothy 6:10), 6) Beerli

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

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FLASH GORDON

I GREW UP IN THE FORESTS OF ARBORIA ALONGSIDE MY COUSIN BARIN.

AS PRINCES, WE REALLY ONLY HAD TWO MAIN DUTIES: LEARN ARMS AND MARRY WELL.

NOW I LIVE FAR AWAY FROM THOSE TREES...

...STANDING INSTEAD BESIDE BRAVE, BEAUTIFUL FRIA.

I MARRIED VERY WELL.

OUR TRAIN TO FRIGIA DERAILED. FRIA -- MY WIFE, MY QUEEN -- WAS THROWN TO HER DOOM...

...IF NOT FOR FLASH GORDON.

PRINCE RONAL IS IN YOUR DEBT AGAIN, FLASH.

I LIKE THE HUMANS -- THEIR ACCENTS, THEIR ODD HUMOR.

I ESPECIALLY LIKE DALE...

INASMUCH AS I'M ALLOWED TO.

ANYWAY:

COME MORNING, A SQUAD OF SNOWBIRD LANCERS ARRIVES TO RETRIEVE US.

THEY TAKE US HOME TO DAY'S PEAK, CAPITAL OF FRIGIA.

WE'VE BEEN OFF AT WAR FOR A YEAR...

...LEAVING COUNT KORRO IN CHARGE. NOT A BAD MAN, BUT BY TOA, A HARD ONE.

PROBLEMS HAVE ARISEN UNDER HIS WATCH.

RAIDING GIANTS.

PIRATE MINERS.

AND... SOMETHING.

SOMETHING BIG.

NEXT: THE SNOW SPRINGS

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DAN SCHWABE 3-31-24

Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS

BY PRESSING THE CLUBHEAD HARD AGAINST THE GROUND AT ADDRESS YOU RISK STUBBING IT AS YOU START BACK, PLUS A PENALTY FOR INADVERTENTLY MOVING THE BALL WHEN THE LIE IS UNSTABLE.

YOU CAN AVOID BOTH DANGERS -- AND ALSO PROMOTE A SMOOTHER TAKEAWAY -- BY STARTING THE SWING WITH THE CLUBHEAD HELD CLEAR OF THE GROUND. AS I HAVE DONE WITH EVERY CLUB THROUGHOUT MY CAREER.

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Slower Heart Rates Are More Common in Athletes

DEAR DR. ROACH: I have a question about a resting heart rate, specifically when it is considered too slow for one's health. I am a 67-year-old male who, from an early age to the present time, has always been physically active every day. Now retired, I feel a great sense of accomplishment when I work out. The endorphin boosts and benefits to my body are my daily rewards.

Recently, I received a fitness watch that tracks my heart rate. My nightly sleep sessions show a range of 39-58 bpm over the past month. During a dental visit a while ago, I was told by the hygienist that she knew of an athlete who died in his sleep, and his heart rate was so slow that it just stopped. Is this possible? — *D.M.*

ANSWER: This really wasn't a great thing for the hygienist to say, as there is very little truth to it. Most people who exercise do have a slower heart rate, and it's a good sign of a healthy heart. However, some older people can develop heart block when the electrical impulse from the natural pacemaker of the heart fails to pass to the ventricles. This is an occasional cause of sudden cardiac death.

Your heart rate suggests, to me, that it's more likely the healthy heart rate of an athlete than it is a disease of the electrical conduction system, but a visit with your regular doctor or cardiologist can separate this through a simple electrocardiogram in most cases. Some people just have slow heart rates, but they can be treated with a pacemaker if they're symptomatic.

DEAR DR. ROACH: I am a 79-year-old man with diabetes and high blood pressure. What are your thoughts on taking a supplement designed for horses by humans? My son-in-law takes 1 teaspoon of this every other day for building his body and suggests that it might help me. — *Anon.*

ANSWER: Please don't take products designed for other animals. The dosing that is healthy for some animals can be toxic for others. I looked up the product — it contains vitamins and minerals that are important for humans, but the dosing isn't right.

Supplements are not an effective treatment for diabetes or high blood pressure. Strong data show that people who eat well don't benefit much, or at all, from vitamin and mineral supplementation, but if you choose to do so, choose one designed for humans, not horses.

DEAR DR. ROACH: I read your recent column on overactive bladders. Like many middle-aged and older women, I've progressively had more and more trouble with frequent urination and bladder control. I saw a urologist who diagnosed me with bladder spasms. I got very good improvement on an expensive drug called Myrbetriq.

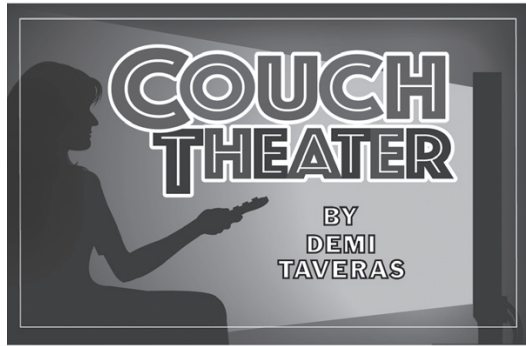
A few years later, an abdominal scan done for another reason revealed a large uterine fibroid. I eventually had a hysterectomy a year ago. Now at 75, I don't have any bladder spasms and don't take any medication. — *C.J.R.*

ANSWER: Fibroid tumors and other pelvic masses can press on the bladder and cause symptoms that feel like an overactive bladder. These aren't common causes, but I am glad you wrote in about this cause and that your symptoms have gone away after surgery. Since the medicine worked, I suspect that the mechanical pressure of the fibroid triggered bladder contractions.

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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"The Iron Claw" (R) -- Based on a true story, this biographical sports film follows a family of professional wrestlers called the Von Erichs. Taking place in 1979, the patriarch of the family, Fritz, owns the World Class Championship Wrestling company and pushes his four boys -- Kevin, David, Kerry and Mike -- to fight in the ring. However, a "Von

Erich curse" seems to shadow their family wherever they go. As Fritz pushes each of his sons further into wrestling, whether they want to or not, the repercussions of his actions become more dire for the boys, even deadly. Zac Efron ("Ricky Stanicky"), Jeremy Allen White ("The Bear") and Harris Dickinson ("Trust") lead this tragic film that is available to rent now. (Apple TV+)

"Mean Girls" (PG-13) -- Twenty years after the pop culture phenomenon "Mean Girls" premiered, a musical-comedy film based on the film of the same name released in theaters. This new adaptation stars Angourie Rice ("Spider-Man: No Way Home") as Cady Heron, a homeschooled teen who moves from Kenya to the United States and begins her first public school experience. Cady quickly learns the rules of North Shore High regarding the "Plastics" who own the school, and she teams up with her new friends, Janis and Damian, to take the Queen Bee Regina George (Renee Rapp) down. Overall, the performances of Rapp, Auli'i Cravalho ("Moana"), and Jaquel Spivey were stand-outs in this campy musical. Keep an eye out for a cameo from Lindsay Lohan, who played Cady in the original film. Out now. (Paramount+)

"Anyone but You" (R) -- Another fun pick this week is this romantic comedy starring two all-American heartthrobs -- Sydney Sweeney ("Euphoria") and Glen Powell ("Top Gun: Maverick"). Sweeney plays law student Bea, who meets Goldman Sachs employee Ben (Powell) randomly at a coffee shop. The two spend the night together, but due to a miscommunication, they don't end up seeing each other for another six months. When they meet again due to a mutual friends' wedding, they're forced to swallow their pride, and even though they butt heads, Bea and Ben make a deal to pretend to be together to ensure that the wedding goes smoothly. This movie is full of romantic tropes, so this watch will either make you cringe or entertain the heck out of you. Out now to rent. (Prime Video)

"Ripley" (TV-MA) -- Andrew Scott ("Fleabag") is putting his own twist on the character of Tom Ripley, who you might've met in Patricia Highsmith's 1955 novel or in the 1999 film adaptation starring Matt Damon. In this eight-episode series taking place in 1960s New York, Tom is hired by a wealthy businessman to convince his son, Dickie, to come home from Italy. But Tom is a grifter who's accustomed to studying and impersonating people in an eerily accurate manner. So, when Tom arrives in Italy to get Dickie back, he unexpectedly becomes enamored with Dickie's life, so much so that he thinks he can become him. Johnny Flynn and Dakota Fanning co-star in this limited series premiering April 4. (Netflix)



Andrew Scott stars as Tom Ripley in the series "Ripley." Courtesy of Netflix

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1. Who recorded "I Can't Help Myself (Sugar Pie, Honey Bunch)"?
2. What was the original name of Creedence Clearwater Revival?
3. Which Beatles song has the longest final chord?
4. Who wrote and released "R.O.C.K. in the U.S.A."?
5. Name the song that contains this lyric: "For just a little while I thought that I might lose the game, But just in time I saw that twinkle in your eyes."

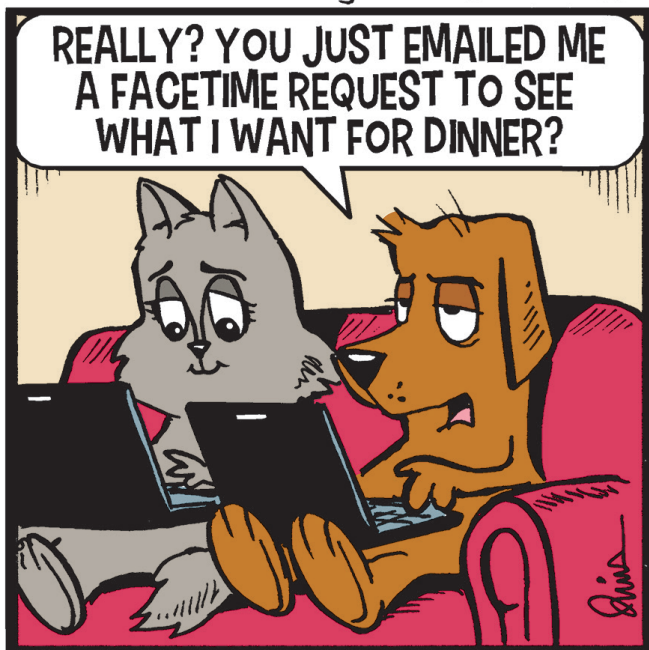
Answers

1. The Four Tops, in 1965. It was named the Billboard No. 1 R&B single for the year.
2. The Blue Velvets, starting in 1959. For a few years they called themselves The Golliwogs, before becoming CCR in 1964.
3. "A Day in the Life," 1967. That final chord ended up 40 seconds long by turning up the sound on three pianos as they began to fade. Listen carefully, and you can hear the sound of a squeaking chair and paper rustling.
4. John Mellencamp, in 1986.
5. "From a Jack to a King," by singer-songwriter Ned Miller in 1957. The song wasn't noticed until a few years later when Miller asked for it to be released again. At that point it raced to the Top Ten on the contemporary, country and pop charts.

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GRIN and BEAR IT ^{Wagner}

Just Like Cats & Dogs by Dave T. Phipps



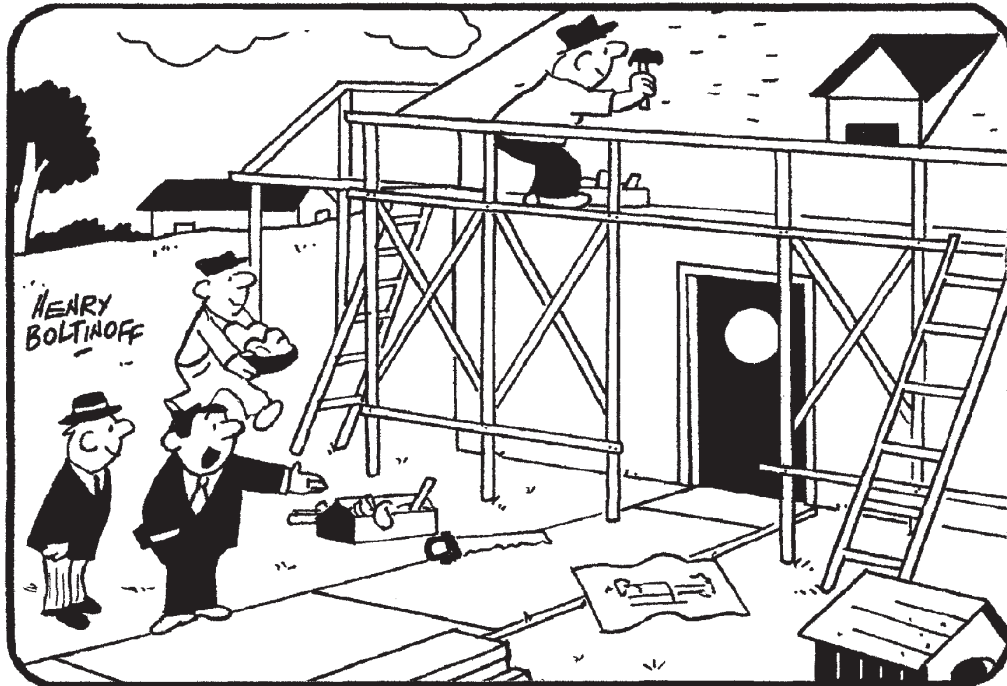
"For 10 bucks more, he's even taller, darker and more handsome!"

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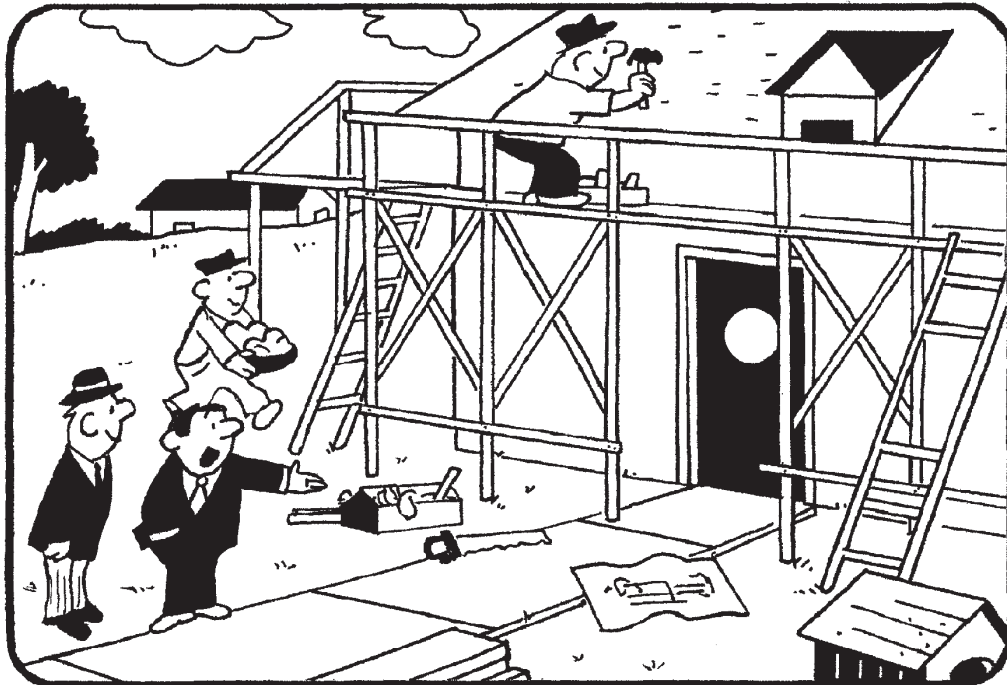
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HOCUS-FOCUS

BY
HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



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Differences: 1. Door is taller. 2. Toolbox is moved. 3. Man is taller. 4. Dormer is moved. 5. Ladder rung is missing. 6. Line in walkway is moved.

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King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Goal
- 4 Hosp. hook-ups
- 7 "Peter Pan" pooch
- 11 "Pygmalion" writer
- 13 Use a straw
- 14 Bone-dry
- 15 Teeny bit
- 16 Capita lead-in
- 17 Makes lace
- 18 Tic
- 20 Laptop connection
- 22 Deli choice
- 24 Radiated
- 28 Reach
- 32 Battery part
- 33 King of the jungle
- 34 Dog's foot
- 36 Similar
- 37 Canal vessel
- 39 iPads, e.g.
- 41 "In America" writer Susan
- 43 — Perignon
- 44 Partially mine
- 46 Chip choice
- 50 First light
- 53 Suitable
- 55 Roller coaster feature
- 56 "Zounds!"
- 57 Three, in Rome
- 58 Links org.
- 59 Pear variety
- 60 Storm center

1	2	3			4	5	6		7	8	9	10
11			12		13				14			
15					16				17			
18				19		20		21				
			22		23		24			25	26	27
28	29	30				31		32				
33					34		35		36			
37				38		39		40				
41					42		43					
			44			45		46		47	48	49
50	51	52			53		54		55			
56					57				58			
59					60					61		

- 61 Designer monogram
- 9 Quibble
- 31 Chow down
- 10 Billboards
- 35 Bankroll
- 12 Capital on the Potomac and 7-Down
- 38 Vichy water
- 40 "— voyage!"
- 42 Shred, as cheese
- 43 — Perignon
- 45 Agile
- 47 Mimic
- 48 Swine
- 49 October birthstone
- 50 Cotillion celeb
- 51 Previously
- 52 Existed
- 54 Golf peg
- 19 Astronaut Jemison
- 21 Ga. neighbor
- 23 Super Bowl VIP
- 25 Stirred
- 26 Tend texts
- 27 Cozy rooms
- 28 Priestly vestments
- 29 Pisa farewell
- 30 Trumpet

DOWN

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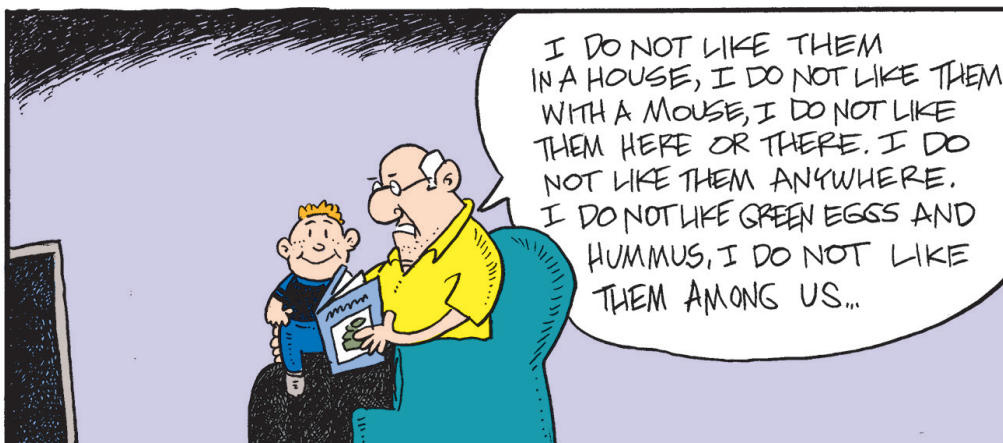
— King Crossword —

Answers

Solution time: 22 mins.

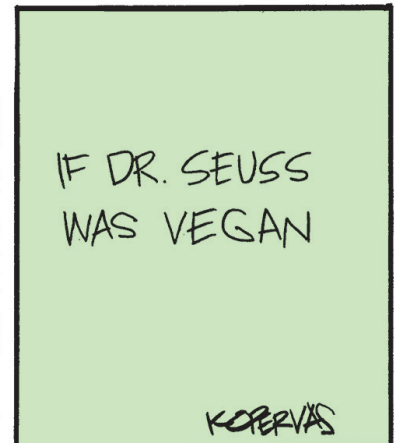
A	I	M		I	V	S		N	A	N	A		
S	H	A	W		S	I	P		A	R	I	D	
I	O	T	A		P	E	R		T	A	T	S	
S	P	A	S	M		W	I	F	I				
				H	A	M		G	L	O	W	E	D
A	C	H	I	E	V	E		A	N	O	D	E	
L	I	O	N		P	A	W		A	K	I	N	
B	A	R	G	E		T	A	B	L	E	T	S	
S	O	N	T	A	G		D	O	M				
				O	U	R	S		N	A	C	H	O
D	A	W	N		A	P	T		L	O	O	P	
E	G	A	D		T	R	E		L	P	G	A	
B	O	S	C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

Out on a Limb



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by Gary Kopervas



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THIMBLE THEATRE PRESENTS
POPEYE
 BY RANDY MILHOLLAND

WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?! YOU'RE NOT GONNA STAY MAYOR LONG BY SELLING A POSITION OF POWER TO SWEETHAVEN'S MOST HATED MAN!

FIRST OFF, IT WAS A CAMPAIGN DONATION.

SECOND, MY ADVISER SAYS I MADE A GOOD CHOICE.

IT'S NICE TO KNOW I CAN ALWAYS DEPEND ON YOU.

GOOD JOB JOHN!

THIMBLE THEATRE PRESENTS
"ENOFFS FISTICUFFS!"
 PART 3

HAVING BEEN GIVEN A GOVERNMENT POSITION AFTER "DONATING" TO MAYOR SAPPO, PROF. KILPH HAS BANNED ANYTHING RELATED TO FIGHTING IN HOPES OF MAKING POPEYE'S LIFE MUCH HARDER.

HOW'S THE FIGHTING BAN GOING?

IT'S SWEETHAVEN, SIR. PEOPLE LOVE TO FIGHT.

THEY HATE IT.

"THE POLICE ARE OVERWORKED HANDING OUT FINES, AND MOST CITIZENS ARE STRETCHED THIN."

TOAR'S DOJO
 KARATE • JUDO • GRAPLING
 OUT OF BUSINESS

BUT ANGER MANAGEMENT COUNSELORS ARE DOING GREAT.

AND POPEYE? IS HE IN THE POORHOUSE YET? OR ARRESTED?

ACTUALLY, SIR, HE HASN'T BROKEN THE BAN ONCE.

WHAT?! THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE! ALL HE EVER DOES IS FIGHT!

IS HE AT LEAST MISERABLE?

"NO, SIR. APPARENTLY, SETTING A GOOD EXAMPLE FOR HIS SON AND OTHER KIDS IS VERY IMPORTANT TO HIM."

I SEE. WOULD IT BE EASIER TO BAN CHILDREN OR CARING ABOUT THEM?

ONE AWFUL CHOICE AT A TIME, SIR.

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BARNEY GOOGLE AND
SNUFFY SMITH

IT'S JEST FEATHERS, SHERIFF !! MAW'S MAKIN' US NEW PILLERS !!

JEST FEATHERS, EH ?

WELL, WOULD'JA LOOKA THAR !! A STOWAWAY !!

HA !! GOT'CHA NOW, SMIF !!

THAT'S WHAT YOU THINK, SHERIFF !!

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HUH ?! WHAT TH'...?!!

4-9

WHY, YOU SNEAKY L'L VARMINT !!

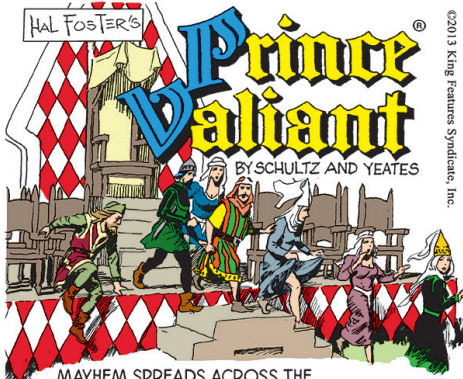
A ZIPLINE !!

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JOHN ROSE

Groton Daily Independent

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MAYHEM SPREADS ACROSS THE TOURNAMENT GROUNDS, AS REBELLION SEETHES AGAINST SIR ROGER! THOSE VISITING LOCKBRAMBLE SLINK AWAY—THIS ISN'T THEIR BATTLE.



THE DESPERATE ROGER HAS CALLED HIS GUARD TO OVERWHELM HIS CHALLENGER, RHODA RED HOOD, AND HER DEFENDERS, VAL AND GAWAIN...

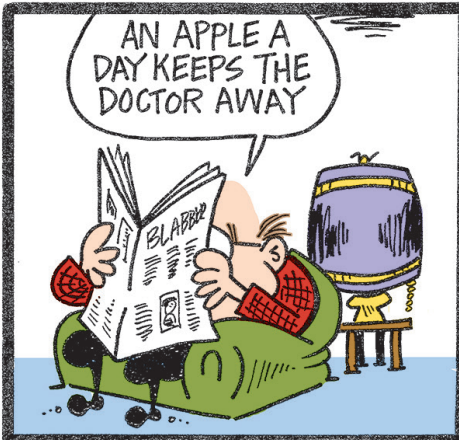


...AND THE END OF THE KNIGHTS FROM CAMELOT AND THEIR LADY CHAMPION SEEMS INEVITABLE WHEN, WITH A MIGHTY BELLOW, LITTLE OX LEADS A RAGTAG MOB OF ENRAGED PEASANTS INTO THE FRAY!

NEXT:
Desperate measures

The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



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PICKERING

SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

When Do We Become Too Old to Climb Ladders?

Months ago I'd made my resolutions list for 2024, carefully picking options that I could surely accomplish this year. I chose things like adopting a kitten pal for my cat, selling my father's coin collection, and hiring my handyman neighbor to paint the bathroom.

Thus far it's the bathroom painting that is causing the greatest annoyance and hesitation. Why, I keep wondering, can't I do it myself? I've painted many, many rooms over the years and done a fine job. But, dare I climb a ladder again?

I even went to the internet for support that would tell me it's OK at my age to climb a ladder and apply paint to the walls.

An Australian study cut right to the chase with statistics about how many over the age of 65 had died from injuries sustained after falling from a ladder, not to mention the list of possible ladder-related injuries that put many others in the hospital.

A U.S. home-care website was aimed at the adult children who need to convince elderly parents to stay off ladders, and suggested citing statistics about deaths and injuries. Should that not work, said the website, pull in reinforcements like doctors and extended family to convince the renegade senior to stay off ladders.

The NIH (National Institutes of Health) even chimed in with a study about the risks of ladder use by seniors and went so far as to analyze the types of dangerous tasks seniors might do that involve ladders. That's where I part company with the NIH's study: I'm not interested in trimming tree limbs or cleaning leaves out of gutters.

I only want to paint a bathroom.

Update: I will not be painting the bathroom. Neither will my handyman neighbor. That neighbor, a good 20 years younger than I am, fell off a ladder and is now facing shoulder surgery.

The bathroom will stay as it is.

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1. What South Korean golfer won the Women's PGA Championship tournament three straight years from 2013-15?

2. What basketball defensive strategy, named after a single-celled organism, was developed by the University of Pittsburgh Panthers in the 1970s?

3. Yoshinobu Yamamoto, the three-time Pacific League MVP who signed with the Los Angeles Dodgers in 2023, pitched for what Nippon Professional Baseball club in Japan?

4. In 2018, former pro triathlete Colin O'Brady completed a 54-day, 932-mile solo crossing of what continent?

5. What country music star played defensive end for the Oklahoma City Drillers semi-pro football team?

6. How many successful field goals did Tennessee Titans kicker Rob Bironas make in a 38-36 win over the Houston Texans on Oct. 21, 2007?

7. Joel Embiid, the 2023 NBA MVP, was born in 1994 in what African country?



by Ryan A. Berenz

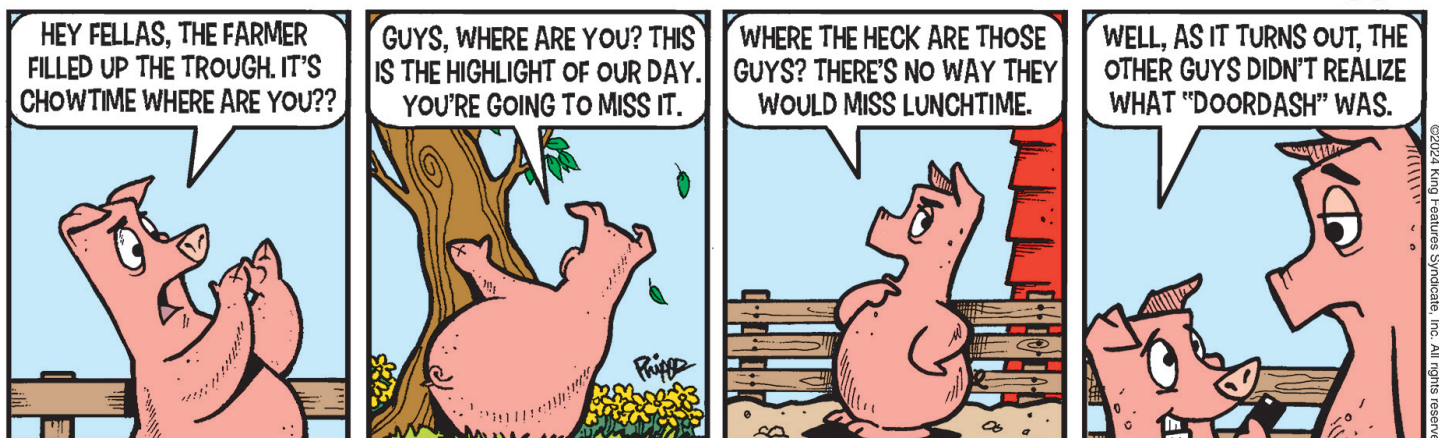
Answers

1. Inbee Park.
2. The amoeba defense.
3. The Orix Buffaloes.
4. Antarctica.
5. Toby Keith.
6. Eight, an NFL record.
7. Cameroon.

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Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps





Bringing an Old Dog to Heel

DEAR PAW'S CORNER: After my aunt passed away, I gladly agreed to take in her dog, "Hunter," a rather squat, obese Beagle. He's a happy old dog of about 9 years, but my aunt gave him little to no training other than housetraining. That makes walking him -- something the vet recommended I do twice a day, in addition to a diet -- a chore. Hunter will walk a few steps, then sit down and refuse to budge. When he does feel like walking, he either tugs the leash forward or lags behind. How can I correct this? -- James T., Plano, Texas

DEAR JAMES: Hunter is not used to the new life-style yet, and he's reacting in a predictable way. He's

also out of shape and probably more stressed than you think. The first thing I prescribe is patience. The second thing I'd prescribe is persistence.

You'll want to gradually lengthen his walks. Each day, always at the same time, put Hunter on his leash and start the walk. As soon as Hunter begins to lag or tug forward, stop walking, adjust the distance so that he's standing or sitting next to you, and start again, saying, "Heel" as you step forward.

When he sits and won't budge, encourage him to go a few more steps by giving him a very small treat. Then turn around and go home. On your next walk, repeat this encouragement, going just a little farther. See what I'm getting at? Make each walk just a tiny bit farther.

As Hunter loses weight, learns to trust you and gains confidence on the leash, he will eventually pull you along. Time, patience and consistency will do the trick.

Readers, how did you train an older dog? Tell me about it at ask@pawscorner.com.

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Strange BUT TRUE

By Lucie Winborne

* Modern brunch was first proposed in 1895 as a post-hangover meal.

* Quetzalcoatlus, the largest known flying animal, was as tall as a giraffe and may have used its powerful forelimbs to pole-vault into the sky.

* Cathay Williams became the first African-American woman to serve in the U.S. Army in 1866. Since women were barred from joining the military at the time, she enlisted as a man under the pseudonym William Cathay.

* In Australia, weed whackers are called whipper snippers.

* Beaver College changed its name to Arcadia in 2001, partly because anti-porn filters blocked access to its website.

* The human body emits visible light, but it's not visible to the naked eye.

* The FBI dubbed Ted Kaczynski "The Unabomber" because his early mail bombs were sent to universities (UN) and airlines (A).

* As astronauts spend months traveling to Mars, their eyeballs may change shape. Some scientists believe that's due to the pressure from fluids that won't drain from their heads, thanks to the low-gravity environment.

* President Thomas Jefferson hated formal affairs so much that he would often greet foreign dignitaries in his pajamas.


* Newborn babies have nearly 100 more bones than full-grown adults.

* The Antikythera mechanism, discovered by sponge divers in 1900, is sometimes called the world's first analog computer. Designed to calculate dates and predict astronomical phenomena, it was so advanced nothing surpassed it for nearly 1,500 years.

* Some libraries have been known to use extraordinary measures to ensure titles remained on shelves. A notable example is Marsh's Library in Dublin, Ireland, where in the 1800s, visitors desiring to peruse rare books were locked in cages until they finished reading!

Thought for the Day: "If we open a quarrel between past and present, we shall find that we have lost the future." -- Winston Churchill

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Light needs for plants

Low light	Medium light	High light
Peace lily	Asparagus fern	Cactus
Snake plant	Boston fern	Hibiscus
Philodendron	Spider plant	Ti plant
English ivy	Jade plant	Gardenia
Diffenbachia	African violet	Geraniums

Source: extension.umn.edu



by Freddy Groves

The OIG in Our Corner

You hate to learn of it, but per a Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General (OIG) report, a former veteran who worked at a VA hospital was found guilty of stealing money out of patient accounts. It came about when the sister of a deceased veteran checked her brother's account and discovered the missing funds. An investigation showed that the thief was stealing from accounts where the veteran was unable to appear in person at the cashier window to withdraw money due to illness and tried to blame the missing funds on someone using fake identifica-

tion. All he got for his crimes was six months in jail and six months with an ankle bracelet at home.

An elderly veteran lost his foot due to deficient podiatry care. The whole sorry mess involved defective specialty diabetic shoes, blocked blood flow to the leg, a patient fall due to the shoes, lack of patient education, lack of communication among staff ... and ended with amputation of the patient's foot.

There was enough blame to go around, but nobody to throw in jail. The podiatrist didn't adequately instruct on the proper fitting of the shoes. The fall wasn't correctly reported because the safety officer was new. It could not be determined who did/didn't warn the patient about possible amputation. And so on.

But not all OIG investigations are so serious. There was the VA employee auction of VA property, which was for the purpose of gathering funds for employee activities and parties. When purchasing agents placed orders for supplies, sometimes there were freebies or incentives sent by the manufacturer when the order was large enough. The employees would then auction off the extra goods, which were government property. It appears that the auctioning of the freebies had gone on for many years, with nobody admitting to the OIG that the vendor was selected because of the freebies they would get. The bulk of the free goodies were big-name expensive coolers.

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Wishing Well®

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

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

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1. GENERAL KNOWLEDGE: When did April Fools' Day come into being?
2. GEOGRAPHY: In which nation is the Great Victoria Desert located?
3. MOVIES: What sport is featured in the movie "The Mighty Ducks"?
4. HISTORY: What is the name of the island where Napoleon was exiled in 1814?
5. ANIMAL KINGDOM: What is the largest rodent in the world?
6. LITERATURE: What is the name of Ron Weasley's pet rat in the "Harry Potter" book series?
7. U.S. STATES: Which letter of the alphabet is not in any U.S. state's name?
8. TELEVISION: Which iconic 1960s sitcom inspired two spinoff hits, "Petticoat Junction" and "Green Acres"?
9. U.S. PRESIDENTS: Which president was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for bravery in WWII?
10. ANATOMY: How many pairs of spinal nerves exist in humans?

Answers

1. Likely in the late 16th century, when calendars changed from Julian to Gregorian.
2. Australia.
3. Ice hockey.
4. Elba.
5. Capybara.
6. Scabbers.
7. Q.
8. "The Beverly Hillbillies."
9. George H.W. Bush.
10. 31 pairs.

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South Dakota Governor

Kristi Noem



South Dakota: *Under God, the People Rule*

Growing in Faith: Celebrating Easter

“He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.” -Matthew 28:6

This week, we celebrate the holiest day in the Christian calendar – the day of Jesus’ resurrection. Christians around the world are celebrating God raising our savior from the dead, granting us our salvation, and marking the beginning of a new hope for our faith.

Easter is the perfect time to spend with the people that we love most. In recent years, Bryon and I have spent our Easter Sundays hosting the annual Easter Egg Hunt at the Governor’s Residence. While we have had some great times with the kids at the Easter Egg Hunt, I think my favorite Easter memories were spent back at the ranch with my family.

Most of our Easters were spent waking up, the kids opening their Easter baskets, going to church, and then gathering as a family for lunch and spending the afternoon together. Unless, of course, there was a blizzard or bad weather – then we were home caring for our cattle and working together as a family to support our livestock and the family business. I have a very vivid memory of a bad blizzard on Easter Sunday right after Bryon and I were married. At one point, my dad turned to me and said, “I’ve never seen work as hard as this.” I was shocked. I thought, “wow, my dad works harder than anybody I’ve ever met. And if he’s never seen work like this before, we must really be working hard!”

I could go on and on about all the memories I have to look back on from Easter Sundays spent with my own family. And while it is great to reflect on the past, I have always thought of Easter as a time of new beginnings – a time to look towards the future, as well.

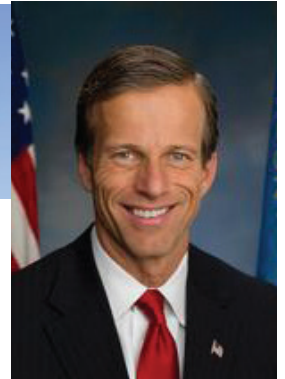
Jesus’ death and resurrection is the ultimate symbol of new beginnings. This historic event started the Christian faith, it started the church, and it marked the beginning of mankind’s reconciliation with God. Because of the events of Easter, all of us who have faith in Jesus Christ have hope of new life.

Easter also typically falls around the beginning of spring – yet another symbol of new beginnings. Of course, here in South Dakota, we still have snow on the ground. We just had a pretty brutal winter storm. Fortunately, it was not as bad as it could have been. And I was happy to see and hear about so many folks across our state embracing the spirit of the Easter season and lending their neighbors a helping hand. Whether it’s people helping an elderly neighbor shovel their driveway, or a small town coming together to help their farmers care for their newborn calves during the winter weather, I have seen so many helping others. It makes me proud to be a South Dakotan.

But hopefully we will soon see the snow and ice thaw and the grass and flowers grow and bloom. I hope that this Easter we can all remember that because the work of Jesus, we are no longer bound by death, but we can grow in faith and love just like the flowers will grow as spring comes.

Bryon and I wish everyone a very happy Easter. God bless you.

John Thune
U.S. SENATOR - SOUTH DAKOTA



Getting National Security Right

I often say that if we don't get national security right, the rest is just conversation. Getting it right requires demonstrating not only the strength to deter threats from materializing in the first place and maintaining the capabilities to defeat them, but also the will and credibility to hold such threats accountable. In this era of complex challenges, securing our nation requires a holistic approach that encompasses defense, border security, and energy security, among other elements.

A strong military capable of countering almost any threat is essential to American strength. Unfortunately, the Biden administration does not seem to be prioritizing investing in our military capabilities, focusing instead on its reckless tax-and-spending agenda. Despite persistent readiness and recruitment challenges, not to mention an increasingly unstable world, the Biden administration has made little attempt to ensure our military has what it needs to face future threats. In the administration's recently released budget request, the president uses budget gimmicks to blow through non-defense budget caps to fund progressive priorities, yet he couldn't seem to find an extra dollar for the defense budget.

On other aspects of our national security, the Biden administration's policies have made the United States more vulnerable. The crisis at the southern border is a prime example. More than 7.4 million illegal immigrants have been caught trying to cross the border since President Biden took office. Another 1.8 million "gotaways" have evaded Border Patrol to enter the country, and hundreds of individuals on the terrorist watch list have been caught at the southern border. I agree with the chief of Border Patrol, who recently said the situation is a "national security threat," with the number of gotaways keeping him up at night. And it's unfortunately the result of President Biden dismantling effective border security policies.

A secure energy supply is also critical to our national security. We've recently seen the consequences of overreliance on foreign energy sources as Europe struggled to wean itself off of Russian energy. But, the Biden administration's rushed energy transition jeopardizes the secure energy supply on which we all depend. Actions like the recent liquefied natural gas export permit pause, heavy-handed environmental regulations and taxes, and other actions to discourage domestic energy production are good news – not for America, but for Iran and Russia. And at a time when our electric grid is struggling to meet existing demand, the president's plan to create a de facto mandate for Americans to buy electric vehicles is especially misguided.

As the president has pursued policies that make America more vulnerable, he has also failed to demonstrate a requisite strength to our allies and adversaries. Iran might be the best example. In the last few months, Iran-backed militant groups have launched numerous attacks against American troops in the Middle East and against civilian shipping operations in the Red Sea. Not long ago, the Biden administration was seeking to revive the flawed Iran nuclear deal and offered sanctions relief to the ayatollahs. While lately the Biden administration has suggested "red lines" for our ally Israel in its war against Hamas terrorists, there have been no such "red lines" issued for our enemies in Iran.

The United States needs to be clear-eyed about the threats we face and the steps we can take to safeguard our national security. We have to get national security right, and that means getting all of America's national security right. That's what I will continue to pursue as my Republican colleagues and I push back against the Biden administration's dangerous national security policies.

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



Great Faces, Great Places

BIG Update

March 29 is Vietnam War Veterans Day, a day on which we remember and honor those who served in the Vietnam War. Earlier this week, I had the privilege of meeting 24 men and women who served our country during the Vietnam War era. Since 2019, I have been participating in the Vietnam Veteran Commemoration Program to honor and give a warm welcome home to Vietnam-era veterans, including many who were never greeted properly when returning after the war. Through this program, I've heard the stories of nearly 1,000 veterans who sacrificed for our country. Whether one served as a fire control technician, heavy duty diesel truck mechanic, torpedoman, or flight surgeon, each individual's story is impactful. Join me in thanking them for their service. It's never too late to do so.

BIG News

You may have seen the news of the cargo ship colliding with the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, Maryland, causing it to collapse. I'm grateful for the first responders at the scene working to carry out search and recovery efforts.

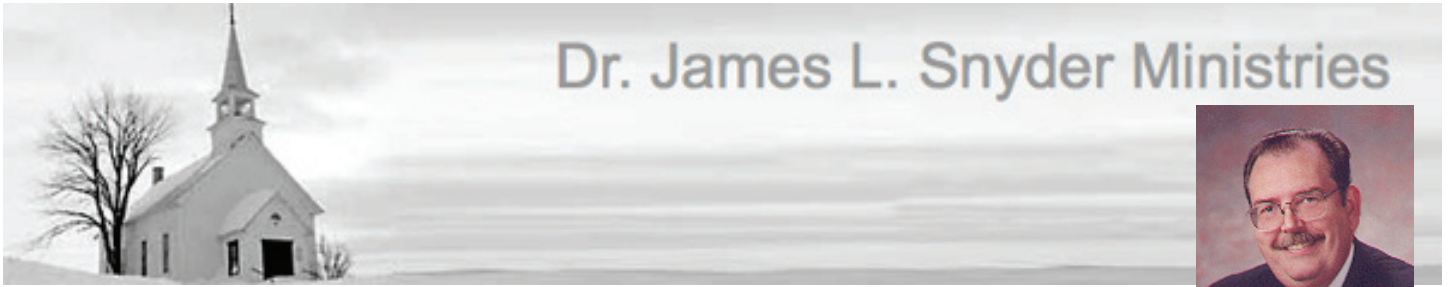
Conversations have begun on what the impact of this devastating event will have on our supply chains. The Port of Baltimore handles over \$80 billion of foreign cargo each year and is a hub for autos, coal, and machinery. Adjustments are already being made to reallocate cargo and ensure the supply chain keeps moving in hopes disruptions will be as minimal as possible. My team and I will continue to monitor this situation as more information becomes available.

BIG Idea

Accessibility to health care is crucial, and rural South Dakota knows that well. Thankfully, providers such as Prairie Lakes do a great job ensuring South Dakotans receive quality health care. Prairie Lakes provides care for 90,000 people in South Dakota and Minnesota and recently made the National Rural Health Association's Top 20 rural and community hospitals. During my visit this week, we discussed the importance of software infrastructure, caring for all individuals, and delivering services to patients.

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Second Thoughts Can Be Dangerous to My Health



Many things in life can be rather dangerous. For me, the most dangerous things in my life are thoughts.

I thought about this one day, and by the end of the day, I was in deep trouble. Thoughts have a way of doing that with me.

My New Year's resolution one year was to have one thought per day. After the first week, I ran out of thoughts.

This year, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage and I will be married 53 years. During that time, I discovered how vital just one thought can be.

If anybody thinks a lot, it is The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage. She has everything thought through before I have a chance to even know what it is. Like most women, she is an expert in multitasking. That means it takes a lot of thought to do all those things simultaneously. She does it quite well.

She often says how many headaches she has during the day, and if I could put several thoughts together, I might tell her that those headaches are a result of all that thinking she does during the day. But, on second thought, I better just leave that one alone.

Over the years, I have tried to focus on thinking, but I haven't gotten very far. This may be why I don't have any headaches during the week. From my point of view, that's one benefit that I relish every day.

I was once relaxing in my easy chair and staring at the ceiling. Looking at me, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage said, "Me thinkest thou ponderous too much."

Once, while we were driving along the highway, she was driving, and I was staring out the window. She took one quick look at me, and said, "What are you thinking about?"

Looking back at her, I responded, "You're not really thinking that I'm doing any thinking, are you? That's way above my pay scale."

Of course, she laughed, and I laughed along with her, but sometimes the truth is the truth.

One of her favorite phrases along this line is, "Do you have any second thoughts on that?"

Recently we were remodeling our house and adding a room that would be my office upon retiring. I had some really great ideas, at least I thought so, and I shared them with her. When I was done with my presentation, she looked at me and said, "Do you want to give that a second thought?"

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It was enough for me to give her the first thought, let alone come up with a second thought. But by that time, I was all thought-out.

Then she gave me a whole list of her thoughts about the project and she did it so fast I couldn't keep up with it and I had no idea what she was talking about. I was almost ready to say, "Do you want to give them a second thought?" I knew if I did that, her second thought may not be what I want it to be; if you know what I mean.

Over the years, we have become a wonderful team. I call it the T&N team. What that means is that she Thinks, and I cannot Nod my head in agreement. I'm sure I didn't think that through, but I must confess it sure does work. It has produced almost 53 years of marital bliss.

After 53 years of being "thought-free," my life is quite remarkable. I've had very few headaches because there is nothing up there to ache.

Sometimes, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage will ask me about a particular problem and ask, "What do you think about that problem?"

After 53 years of the T&N team experience, I simply shoot back, "I'm not sure. What do you think about it, and what should we do?"

And when I say that, I can sit back and listen to all the good advice and nod my head at the appropriate places, and at the end, we both are smiling. No thought on my part involved.

The best thought I have ever had, and where I harbor no second thoughts, is when I asked The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage to marry me. I'm not sure what her thought process was then, but I can assure you there were no second thoughts on my side of the aisle.

I can sit back and remember a lot of the things I did in the past. Of course, at my age, my memory is not up to par, but at least there's a little bit left. There were a few times when I thought about something and then had second thoughts, and it was the second thought that got me into trouble.

I have learned that I need to gather all the information before exercising my first thought. If I have everything before me, then I can proceed to the next step in making a decision based on my thought process.

I remembered a special verse of scripture that encouraged me in this regard.

"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

This is where I need to surrender all my thoughts to God and obey His Word.

EARTHTALK ™

Dear EarthTalk: Which are the greenest toilet paper varieties?
— Sam Atkins, Poughkeepsie, NY

When thinking of ways to live a greener lifestyle, toilet paper isn't usually the first thing people think of, but the average American uses more than 50 pounds of tissue paper per year. Like other paper products, toilet paper is typically made from trees. As consumer demand grows, trees continue to be cut down at alarming rates. Between 1996 and 2015, loggers cut down around 28 million acres of woodland, an area roughly the size of the state of Ohio. Finding alternatives, or ways to cut down on paper use, is a great way to limit your impact on the environment.

As new companies emerge and come out with new toilet paper options, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) has come up with a system to grade how sustainable certain toilet and tissue paper brands are. The grades rank from A+ to F and account for a variety of factors like the percentage of recycled material used in the toilet paper. A grade of A+ means that the toilet paper was made entirely of recycled materials, used a chlorine-free bleaching process, and had the highest percentage of post-consumer recycled paper. Post-consumer recycled means that the recycled materials came from products that had reached the end of their life cycle and would have otherwise ended up in landfills. When going green it's also smart to look for "processed chlorine free" papers over bleached and "elemental chlorine free" papers, because the latter can emit cancer causing dioxins into the air and water when they are processed. Toilet paper brands that were awarded an A+ grade by the NRDC include 365 by Whole Foods Market, Green Forest, Natural Value and Trader Joe's.

A grade of A means that the paper brands contain 100% recycled material, but a lower percentage of post-consumer recycled paper. Some good A rated toilet papers include Seventh Generation Extra Soft & Strong, Who Gives a Crap, and Everspring. The B and B+ grade is typically reserved for the emerging market of bamboo-based paper brands. While bamboo is less environmentally friendly than recycled material, it is still greener than using pure forest fibers. The other catch is that the largest bamboo producers are in China, which does not have the best track record when it comes to environmental and labor rights. Amazon Aware and Caboo are both B rated bamboo toilet paper brands.

Paper brands with a grade of D or F rely entirely, or almost entirely, on forest fiber for their toilet paper. There is no recycled material used in their product. Most of the well-known toilet paper brands are rated D or F, including Charmin, Cottonelle, Angel Soft and Scott 1000.

More sustainable toilet paper is typically more expensive than the lower rated brands and not everyone can afford to change their lifestyle and buy more expensive products. However, there are other ways to live greener. One option is to simply reduce the use of toilet paper, paper towels and facial tissues. Use what you need, but avoid being excessive. It's not like paper just grows on trees!



The toilet paper you choose may just say a lot about your commitment to saving the planet.

Credit: Pexels.com.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Parks department skips federal funding for shooting range to avoid additional site scrutiny

Tribal Historic Preservation Officer says artifacts were found but are likely destroyed

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MARCH 30, 2024 2:35 PM

The South Dakota Department of Game, Fish, and Parks wanted to use federal funding to help offset the cost of a \$20 million shooting range outside Rapid City.

That is, until the department learned more time was needed to analyze the site's significance to Native Americans. Artifacts had been found, according to the state Tribal Historic Preservation Office familiar with the site.

At that point, the department pulled its application for federal funding.

The project has secured some funding already, just not from the federal government. The department said it has thus far received \$5.1 million in pledges and donations. It broke ground in early December 2023.

The federal Advisory Council of Historic Preservation sent a letter to the state parks department on Feb. 5, 2024, criticizing it for skirting federal funding when it learned of the need for a more complete historical analysis of a site.

"These actions appear to indicate a pattern of behavior in which the SDGFP changes course for its proposed projects after learning about historic properties located in the projects' area of potential effects and the federal requirement to take into account the effects of the undertaking on those historic properties," wrote Christopher Koepfel, assistant director of the federal Advisory Council of Historic Preservation.

The department withdrew its federal funding application in January.

The proposed shooting complex would be located on Elk Vale Road in Meade County. The complex is expected to host around 180 shooters at a time, offering free public use while potentially bringing national competitions to the area. The design includes a south-end range for the general public and a north range for more experienced shooters, with "action bays" for tactical shooting practice.

Until January, funding plans included \$2.5 million in federal money. The "Pittman Robinson" funds came from a federal excise tax on firearms, ammunition and archery equipment. Money from the tax is funneled into wildlife conservation, restoration and hunter education programs across the U.S. To use the funds, states must submit project plans for federal approval.

GFP Communications Manager Nick Harrington answered questions for this story over email. He said the department staff spent hours conducting an environmental assessment and a cultural resources survey.

"GFP was issued a Finding of No Significant Impact and ultimately awarded a Pittman Robinson grant from the USFWS early in 2022," he said in an email, referring to the \$2.5 million planned for the project.

But in November 2023, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) flagged the proposed project, saying its location could affect nearby historical locations. The determination brought the project under the National Historic Preservation Act, which mandates a thorough review of any federally funded projects on historical sites.

A separate survey conducted by the state's Tribal Historic Preservation Office identified seven sites near the proposed range that the office believes are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

That resulted in a need for more thorough investigation, according to the federal letter. Harrington said that because the federal government changed the survey requirements after giving the project a greenlight,

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the department chose not to pursue the \$2.5 million.

"GFP decided to forego the Pittman Robinson funding and move ahead with the complex project without any further delays," Harrington said.

Garrie Kills A Hundred, the tribal historic preservation officer who helped with the site survey, said the issue began with the USFWS, which did not consult with tribes when conducting its initial site assessment.

"That is where things first started to go south," he said.

Kills A Hundred said he was later informed the state had begun developing the location, resulting in "the bulldozing of the sites we located." He worries all of the historical sites and artifacts within them that were identified have been destroyed.

The shooting range proposal has elicited mixed reactions from nearby residents. Concerns have been raised regarding potential noise pollution, increased traffic, impacts on wildlife and the environment, and the disruption of residents' rural way of life.

Additionally, some lawmakers have expressed concern with the inflated price tag to complete the project. The \$20 million price for the 400-acre shooting range is a significant increase from 2020 estimates of \$11 million.

The shooting complex is expected to be completed in the fall of 2025.

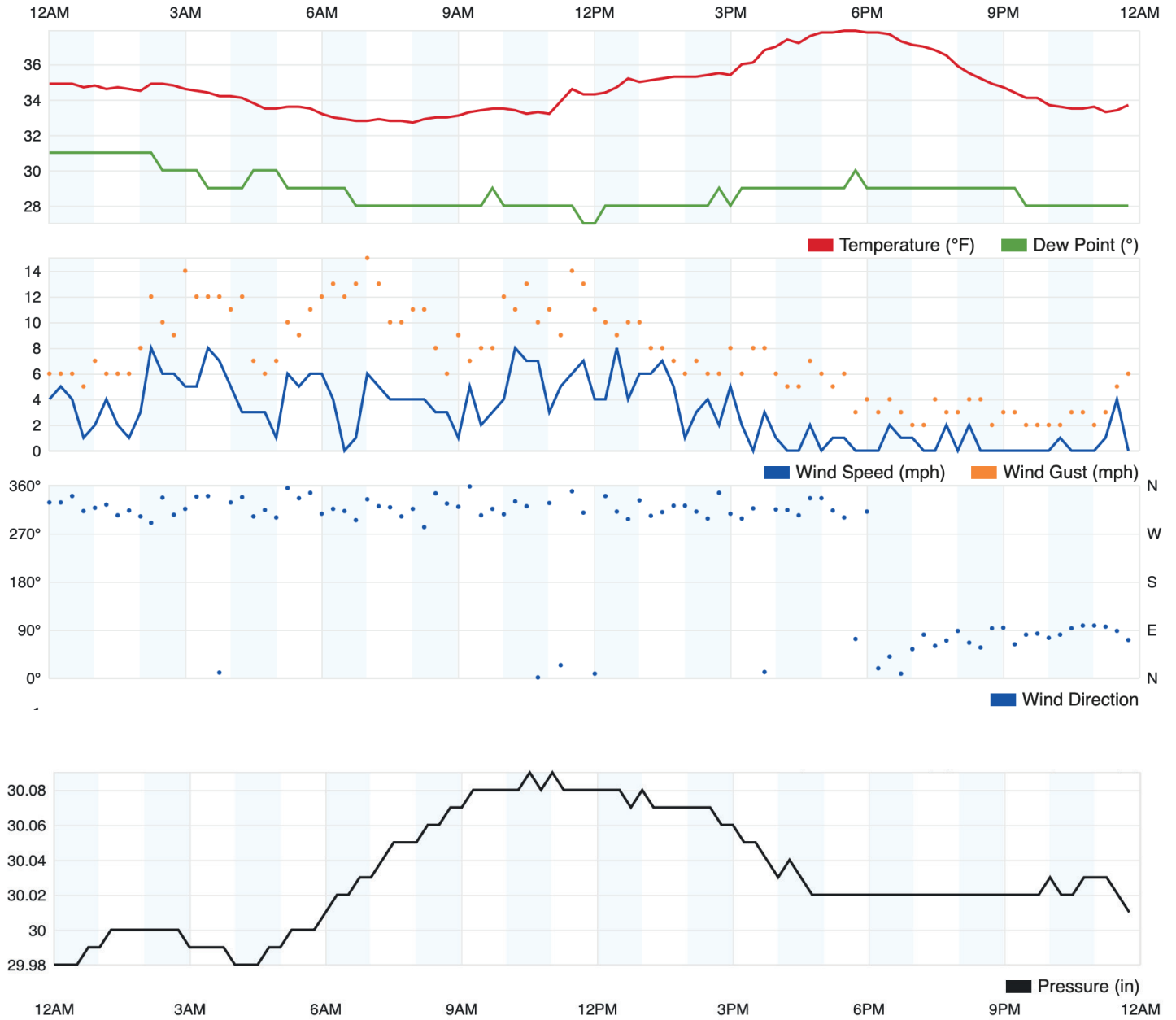
Harrington said funding to construct the complex will be a combination of private and public dollars. He and the Governor's Office did not answer questions regarding where the public dollars would come from, given the federal funding hiccup.

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Sunday



Chance Snow
then Chance
Rain/Snow

High: 41 °F

Sunday
Night



Chance
Rain/Snow
then Slight
Chance Snow

Low: 25 °F

Monday



Mostly Sunny

High: 44 °F

Monday
Night



Mostly Clear

Low: 26 °F

Tuesday



Sunny and
Breezy

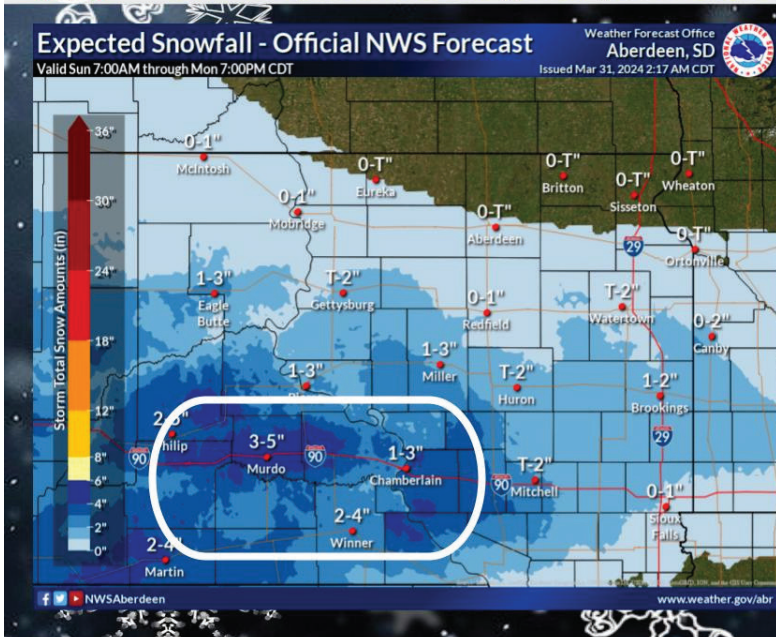
High: 52 °F



Winter Hangs on for Today and Monday

March 31, 2024
2:23 AM

snow accumulations likely, mainly central/southern SD



Key Messages

- Accumulating snows likely (>60%) over south central South Dakota both today, and again tonight into early Monday.
- Lots of uncertainty on snow amounts, with a banded snow event possible in the **HIGHLIGHTED** region.
- Clearing off Monday afternoon.

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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

A couple different snow events are expected through early Monday. First off is today over south central South Dakota. And then more snow likely tonight over basically the same area. Several inches or more possible, but forecast confidence is low concerning amounts.

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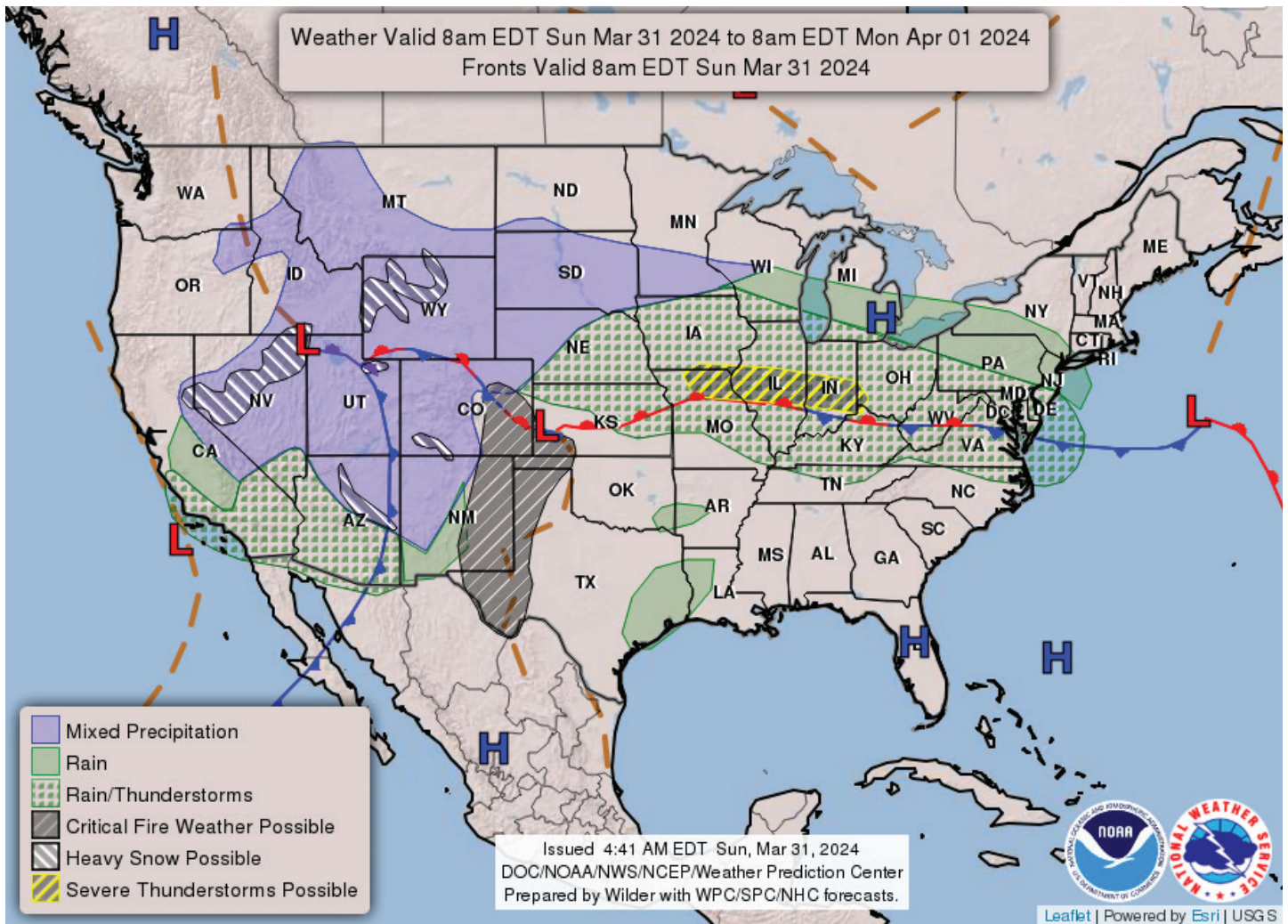
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 38 °F at 5:32 PM
Low Temp: 33 °F at 6:44 AM
Wind: 16 mph at 11:36 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 12 hours, 49 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 86 in 1946
Record Low: 0 in 1899
Average High: 50
Average Low: 26
Average Precip in March.: 0.89
Precip to date in March: 0.78
Average Precip to date: 2.06
Precip Year to Date: 0.85
Sunset Tonight: 8:01:14 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 77:09:31 am



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Today in Weather History

March 31, 1967: Heavy snow of 6 to 15 inches combined with 30 to 50 mph winds, caused blizzard conditions across most of northeast South Dakota. Many people were stranded, especially along Interstate-29 and Highway 12. In Hamlin County, a man was injured when his snowmobile struck a snowplow in Bryant in the early evening. Also, in the early afternoon, 4 miles west of Lake Norden on Highway 28, a car crossed the lane and hit a semi. The car was destroyed with thousands of dollars of damage to the semi. The driver of the car was injured. Many schools were let out early on the 31st and were canceled for April 1st. Many activities and sports events were either postponed or canceled. Some snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Doland, Conde, and Castlewood, 7 inches at Turton and Clear Lake, 8 inches at Clark and Britton, 9 inches at Bryant and Webster, 10 inches near Peever, and 11 inches at Summit. Snowfall amounts of a foot or more included, 12 inches at Watertown and Big Stone City, 13 inches at Victor, the Waubay NWR, and Sisseton, 14 inches at Wilmot, and 15 inches at Milbank.

March 31, 2014: A strong surface low-pressure area moving across the region brought mixed precipitation to all of the area including rain, freezing rain, sleet, snow along with some thunder. As the precipitation changed to over to all snow, northwest winds increased substantially to 30 to 40 mph with gusts to 50 to 60 mph causing widespread blizzard conditions. Much of the area received a coating of ice with trace amounts up to a tenth of an inch with several locations receiving up to 2 inches of sleet. Snowfall amounts from 2 to as much as 10 inches occurred with this storm. The precipitation changed over to snow in the morning out west and into the late afternoon hours across the east. The light snow did not end in the eastern portion of South Dakota until the early morning hours of April 1st. Many schools, government offices, and businesses were closed or canceled early. Travel was not advised across much of region with Interstate-29 being closed for a time from Brookings to the North Dakota border.

1890 - Saint Louis, MO, received 20 inches of snow in 24 hours. It was the worst snowstorm of record for the St Louis. (David Ludlum)

1942: 107 inches of rain fell during the month at Puu Kukui at Maui, Hawaii to set the U.S. record for rainfall in one month. The same place also holds the annual rainfall record for the United States with 578 inches in 1950.

1954 - The temperature at Rio Grande City, TX, hit 108 degrees, which for thirty years was a U.S. record for the month of March. (The Weather Channel)

1962 - A tornado struck the town of Milton, FL, killing 17 persons and injuring 100 others. It was the worst tornado disaster in Florida history. (David Ludlum)

1973 - A devastating tornado took a nearly continuous 75 mile path through north central Georgia causing more than 113 million dollars damage, the highest total of record for a natural disaster in the state. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - March went out like a lion in the northeastern U.S. A slow moving storm produced heavy snow in the Lower Great Lakes Region, and heavy rain in New England. Heavy rain and melting snow caused catastrophic flooding along rivers and streams in Maine and New Hampshire. Strong southerly winds ahead of the storm gusted to 62 mph at New York City, and reached 87 mph at Milton MA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - March went out like a lion in eastern Colorado. A winter-like storm produced 42 inches of snow at Lake Isabel, including 20 inches in six hours. Fort Collins reported 15 inches of snow in 24 hours. Winds gusted to 80 mph at Centerville UT. Albuquerque NM received 14 inches of snow. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Afternoon thunderstorms produced severe weather from North Carolina to Pennsylvania. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 76 mph at Cape Henry VA. While squalls blanketed northwest Pennsylvania with up to 9 inches of snow, thunderstorms in eastern Pennsylvania produced golf ball size hail at Avondale. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - The month of March went out just as it came in, like a lamb. Marquette MI, which started the month with a record high of 52 degrees, equalled their record for the date with a reading of 62 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

2010 - Jacksonville, Florida's, record streak of days with high temperatures below 80 degrees comes to an end at 105 days. It was also Jacksonville's first 80 degree reading of the year. The previous latest first 80 degree day was on March 14, 1978.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

IS IT HOW LONG OR HOW WELL?

Most people who read the Bible at least know that Methuselah lived to be 969 years old. Some might even remember that he was the son of Enoch and the grandfather of Noah. Some will be able to recall that he "walked and talked with God," but we have no idea what they talked about, or when or where this occurred.

Imagine holding the world record for having more birthdays than anyone else who ever lived but being remembered for nothing else.

According to the Bible, Methuselah lived when the earth was full of wickedness. Everywhere he walked, he was surrounded by sin and sinners. But, he never mentioned a word about God or godliness, or God's grace or goodness. He knew God but did not serve Him.

Imagine the positive influence he could have had on the multitudes of individuals whom he knew. Consider what he might have done for God if he had followed in the footsteps of his father, Enoch. Scripture tells us, "he enjoyed a close relationship with God throughout all of his life - then he suddenly disappeared because God took him!"

Methuselah lived almost three times as long as his father, Enoch. Yet, when he died, he left no legacy of having made a difference for God or good. In the final analysis, it is not how long we live but what we do. What matters most is whether or not our relationship with God empowered us to leave a legacy of serving God and others through our lives.

Prayer: Help each of us, Father, to recognize the importance of living for You and professing our faith. May our lives reflect Your love and salvation each day we live. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: When Enoch was 65 years old, he became the father of Methuselah. Genesis 5:21



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:
03.29.24

11 30 33 38 60 16

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$36,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.30.24

9 17 34 48 52 5

All Star Bonus: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,550,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.30.24

17 29 36 38 47 16

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 58 Mins 24 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.30.24

1 15 19 30 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$40,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.30.24

20 29 43 57 63 16

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.30.24

12 13 33 50 52 23

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$975,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Gmail revolutionized email 20 years ago. People thought it was Google's April Fool's Day joke

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Google co-founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin loved pulling pranks, so much so they began rolling outlandish ideas every April Fool's Day not long after starting their company more than a quarter century ago. One year, Google posted a job opening for a Copernicus research center on the moon. Another year, the company said it planned to roll out a "scratch and sniff" feature on its search engine.

The jokes were so consistently over-the-top that people learned to laugh them off as another example of Google mischief. And that's why Page and Brin decided to unveil something no one would believe was possible 20 years ago on April Fool's Day.

It was Gmail, a free service boasting 1 gigabyte of storage per account, an amount that sounds almost pedestrian in an age of one-terabyte iPhones. But it sounded like a preposterous amount of email capacity back then, enough to store about 13,500 emails before running out of space compared to just 30 to 60 emails in the then-leading webmail services run by Yahoo and Microsoft. That translated into 250 to 500 times more email storage space.

Besides the quantum leap in storage, Gmail also came equipped with Google's search technology so users could quickly retrieve a tidbit from an old email, photo or other personal information stored on the service. It also automatically threaded together a string of communications about the same topic so everything flowed together as if it was a single conversation.

"The original pitch we put together was all about the three 'S's' — storage, search and speed," said former Google executive Marissa Mayer, who helped design Gmail and other company products before later becoming Yahoo's CEO.

It was such a mind-bending concept that shortly after The Associated Press published a story about Gmail late on the afternoon of April Fool's 2004, readers began calling and emailing to inform the news agency it had been duped by Google's pranksters.

"That was part of the charm, making a product that people won't believe is real. It kind of changed people's perceptions about the kinds of applications that were possible within a web browser," former Google engineer Paul Buchheit recalled during a recent AP interview about his efforts to build Gmail.

It took three years to do as part of a project called "Caribou" — a reference to a running gag in the Dilbert comic strip. "There was something sort of absurd about the name Caribou, it just made me laugh," said Buchheit, the 23rd employee hired at a company that now employs more than 180,000 people.

The AP knew Google wasn't joking about Gmail because an AP reporter had been abruptly asked to come down from San Francisco to the company's Mountain View, California, headquarters to see something that would make the trip worthwhile.

After arriving at a still-developing corporate campus that would soon blossom into what became known as the "Googleplex," the AP reporter was ushered into a small office where Page was wearing an impish grin while sitting in front of his laptop computer.

Page, then just 31 years old, proceeded to show off Gmail's sleekly designed inbox and demonstrated how quickly it operated within Microsoft's now-retired Explorer web browser. And he pointed out there was no delete button featured in the main control window because it wouldn't be necessary, given Gmail had so much storage and could be so easily searched. "I think people are really going to like this," Page predicted.

As with so many other things, Page was right. Gmail now has an estimated 1.8 billion active accounts — each one now offering 15 gigabytes of free storage bundled with Google Photos and Google Drive. Even though that's 15 times more storage than Gmail initially offered, it's still not enough for many users who

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rarely see the need to purge their accounts, just as Google hoped.

The digital hoarding of email, photos and other content is why Google, Apple and other companies now make money from selling additional storage capacity in their data centers. (In Google's case, it charges anywhere from \$30 annually for 200 gigabytes of storage to \$250 annually for 5 terabytes of storage). Gmail's existence is also why other free email services and the internal email accounts that employees use on their jobs offer far more storage than was fathomed 20 years ago.

"We were trying to shift the way people had been thinking because people were working in this model of storage scarcity for so long that deleting became a default action," Buchheit said.

Gmail was a game changer in several other ways while becoming the first building block in the expansion of Google's internet empire beyond its still-dominant search engine.

After Gmail came Google Maps and Google Docs with word processing and spreadsheet applications. Then came the acquisition of video site YouTube, followed by the introduction of the the Chrome browser and the Android operating system that powers most of the world's smartphones. With Gmail's explicitly stated intention to scan the content of emails to get a better understanding of users' interests, Google also left little doubt that digital surveillance in pursuit of selling more ads would be part of its expanding ambitions.

Although it immediately generated a buzz, Gmail started out with a limited scope because Google initially only had enough computing capacity to support a small audience of users.

"When we launched, we only had 300 machines and they were really old machines that no one else wanted," Buchheit said, with a chuckle. "We only had enough capacity for 10,000 users, which is a little absurd."

But that scarcity created an air of exclusivity around Gmail that drove feverish demand for an elusive invitations to sign up. At one point, invitations to open a Gmail account were selling for \$250 apiece on eBay. "It became a bit like a social currency, where people would go, 'Hey, I got a Gmail invite, you want one?'" Buchheit said.

Although signing up for Gmail became increasingly easier as more of Google's network of massive data centers came online, the company didn't begin accepting all comers to the email service until it opened the floodgates as a Valentine's Day present to the world in 2007.

A few weeks later on April Fool's Day in 2007, Google would announce a new feature called "Gmail Paper" offering users the chance to have Google print out their email archive on "94% post-consumer organic soybean sputum" and then have it sent to them through the Postal Service. Google really was joking around that time.

Pope overcomes health concerns, presides over blustery Easter Sunday Mass in St. Peter's Square

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis overcame concerns about his health to preside over Easter Sunday Mass, leading some 30,000 people in a flower-decked St. Peter's Square in one of the most important liturgies of the year.

Just hours after celebrating the 2½-hour nighttime Easter Vigil, the 87-year-old Francis appeared in good form at the start of the liturgy in the blustery piazza. Francis, who had part of one lung removed as a young man, has been battling respiratory problems all winter that the Vatican and he have said were bronchitis, the flu or a cold.

The Vatican said some 30,000 people attended the Mass, with more packing the Via della Conciliazione boulevard leading to the piazza. At the start of the service, a gust of wind knocked over a large religious icon on the altar just a few feet from the pope; ushers quickly righted it.

Easter Mass is one of the most important dates on the liturgical calendar, celebrating what the faithful believe was Jesus' resurrection after his crucifixion. The Mass precedes the pope's "Urbi et Orbi" (to the city and the world) blessing, a lengthy speech that traditionally rounds up all the threats facing humanity.

For the past few weeks, Francis has generally avoided delivering long speeches to avoid the strain on

his breathing. He ditched his Palm Sunday homily last week and decided at the last minute to stay home from the Good Friday procession at the Colosseum.

The Vatican said in a brief explanation that the decision was made to “conserve his health.”

The decision appeared to have paid off, as Francis was able to recite the prayers of the lengthy Saturday night Easter Vigil service, including administering the sacraments of baptism and First Communion to eight new Catholics, and preside over Easter Sunday Mass.

After a busy Holy Week, Francis should have some time to recover as there are no major foreign trips scheduled for several months.

Extreme drought in southern Africa leaves millions hungry

By FARAI MUTSAKA and GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

MANGWE, Zimbabwe (AP) — Delicately and with intense concentration, Zanyiwe Ncube poured her small share of precious golden cooking oil into a plastic bottle at a food aid distribution site deep in rural Zimbabwe.

“I don’t want to lose a single drop,” she said.

Her relief at the handout — paid for by the United States government as her southern African country deals with a severe drought — was tempered when aid workers gently broke the news that this would be their last visit.

Ncube and her 7-month-old son she carried on her back were among 2,000 people who received rations of cooking oil, sorghum, peas and other supplies in the Mangwe district in southwestern Zimbabwe. The food distribution is part of a program funded by American aid agency USAID and rolled out by the United Nations’ World Food Programme.

They’re aiming to help some of the 2.7 million people in rural Zimbabwe threatened with hunger because of the drought that has enveloped large parts of southern Africa since late 2023. It has scorched the crops that tens of millions of people grow themselves and rely on to survive, helped by what should be the rainy season.

They can rely on their crops and the weather less and less.

The drought in Zimbabwe, neighboring Zambia and Malawi has reached crisis levels. Zambia and Malawi have declared national disasters. Zimbabwe could be on the brink of doing the same. The drought has reached Botswana and Angola to the west, and Mozambique and Madagascar to the east.

A year ago, much of this region was drenched by deadly tropical storms and floods. It is in the midst of a vicious weather cycle: too much rain, then not enough. It’s a story of the climate extremes that scientists say are becoming more frequent and more damaging, especially for the world’s most vulnerable people.

In Mangwe, the young and the old lined up for food, some with donkey carts to carry home whatever they might get, others with wheelbarrows. Those waiting their turn sat on the dusty ground. Nearby, a goat tried its luck with a nibble on a thorny, scraggly bush.

Ncube, 39, would normally be harvesting her crops now — food for her, her two children and a niece she also looks after. Maybe there would even be a little extra to sell.

The driest February in Zimbabwe in her lifetime, according to the World Food Programme’s seasonal monitor, put an end to that.

“We have nothing in the fields, not a single grain,” she said. “Everything has been burnt (by the drought).”

The United Nations Children’s Fund says there are “overlapping crises” of extreme weather in eastern and southern Africa, with both regions lurching between storms and floods and heat and drought in the past year.

In southern Africa, an estimated 9 million people, half of them children, need help in Malawi. More than 6 million in Zambia, 3 million of them children, are impacted by the drought, UNICEF said. That’s nearly half of Malawi’s population and 30% of Zambia’s.

“Distressingly, extreme weather is expected to be the norm in eastern and southern Africa in the years to come,” said Eva Kadilli, UNICEF’s regional director.

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While human-made climate change has spurred more erratic weather globally, there is something else parching southern Africa this year.

El Niño, the naturally occurring climatic phenomenon that warms parts of the Pacific Ocean every two to seven years, has varied effects on the world's weather. In southern Africa, it means below-average rainfall, sometimes drought, and is being blamed for the current situation.

The impact is more severe for those in Mangwe, where it's notoriously arid. People grow the cereal grain sorghum and pearl millet, crops that are drought resistant and offer a chance at harvests, but even they failed to withstand the conditions this year.

Francesca Erdelmann, the World Food Programme's country director for Zimbabwe, said last year's harvest was bad, but this season is even worse. "This is not a normal circumstance," she said.

The first few months of the year are traditionally the "lean months" when households run short as they wait for the new harvest. However, there is little hope for replenishment this year.

Joseph Nleya, a 77-year-old traditional leader in Mangwe, said he doesn't remember it being this hot, this dry, this desperate. "Dams have no water, riverbeds are dry and boreholes are few. We were relying on wild fruits, but they have also dried up," he said.

People are illegally crossing into Botswana to search for food and "hunger is turning otherwise hard-working people into criminals," he added.

Multiple aid agencies warned last year of the impending disaster.

Since then, Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema has said that 1 million of the 2.2 million hectares of his country's staple corn crop have been destroyed. Malawian President Lazarus Chakwera has appealed for \$200 million in humanitarian assistance.

The 2.7 million struggling in rural Zimbabwe is not even the full picture. A nationwide crop assessment is underway and authorities are dreading the results, with the number needing help likely to skyrocket, said the WFP's Erdelmann.

With this year's harvest a write-off, millions in Zimbabwe, southern Malawi, Mozambique and Madagascar won't be able to feed themselves well into 2025. USAID's Famine Early Warning System estimated that 20 million people would require food relief in southern Africa in the first few months of 2024.

Many won't get that help, as aid agencies also have limited resources amid a global hunger crisis and a cut in humanitarian funding by governments.

As the WFP officials made their last visit to Mangwe, Ncube was already calculating how long the food might last her. She said she hoped it would be long enough to avert her greatest fear: that her youngest child would slip into malnutrition even before his first birthday.

Alabama rides tidal wave of 3-pointers to beat Clemson 89-82 and reach 1st Final Four ever

By BETH HARRIS AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Every time Clemson tried to cut down its deficit, Alabama fired up a 3-pointer. Over and over and in such quick succession that the Crimson Tide looked like a video game.

Mark Sears made seven 3-pointers and Alabama recovered from its early long-distance woes with 16 3s to beat Clemson 89-82 on Saturday night, sending the Tide to the Final Four for the first time.

"Man, just feeling a lot of emotion," said Sears, the only Alabama native on the team. "Being from the state of Alabama and to do it with this group of guys, it's amazing."

The Tide (25-11) will face defending national champion UConn in Glendale, Arizona, next Saturday. Alabama knocked off top-seeded North Carolina to reach the Elite Eight.

Sears' 3-pointers were one off his career high. He finished with 23 points and was named the Most Outstanding Player of the NCAA Tournament's West Region.

Freshman Jarin Stevenson airballed a couple 3s in the first half, when Alabama missed 12 of its first 13 from long range. He ended up making a career-high five 3s and had 19 points off the bench.

"We don't win this game without him," Sears said. "Jarin hit 3 after 3 after 3 and kept us in this ballgame."

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He was huge.”

Tide coach Nate Oats added, “Jarin grew up tonight.”

The Tide donned red T-shirts with the entirely appropriate slogan “Net Worthy” as they celebrated while a bucket of red-and-white confetti was dumped on them. Oats walked into the postgame news conference wearing the net around his neck.

Clemson (24-12) was seeking its first Final Four appearance, too, in a matchup of schools better known for their national championship football teams.

Joseph Girard III led Clemson with 19 points, and Ian Schieffelin had 18 points and 11 rebounds.

The Tide buried the Tigers in an avalanche of 10 3s in the second half to pull away. Sears hit a 3, turned and put his fingers to his lips. After he sank the Tide’s eighth 3 of the half, Sears playfully stuck out his tongue and nodded his head as he ran up the court.

“I live for those moments. This is what March Madness is about,” Sears said. “When you’re a kid, you want to be in these moments. It feels like my dream came true today. My dream definitely came true today.”

Clemson had allowed only 14 3-pointers in its first three March Madness games.

“They get those 3s up fast and it seems like they’ll never miss,” Girard said.

The Tide were shooting before the Tigers could get back downcourt and set their zone defense.

“There’s not very many teams that play that way,” Clemson coach Brad Brownell said.

The Tigers tried desperately to keep up and finished 8 of 26 from 3-point range. While Sears was putting on a show, Girard, who struggled offensively in the regional semifinal, hit back-to-back 3s and PJ Hall added another that left Clemson trailing 68-62.

“They hit big-time shots and we couldn’t quite get the misses we needed them to make,” Hall said. “Credit to them, man, they went out there and hit them. It was big-time basketball.”

Girard’s 3 cut Clemson’s deficit to 76-73. But Nick Pringle was in the midst of scoring eight in a row for the Tide, making 4 of 6 free throws down the stretch. He finished with 16 points and 11 rebounds.

Sears stepped back left of the key and sank the Tide’s 10th 3 of the half for an 82-75 lead, drawing applause from Alabama alum and seven-time NBA champion Robert “Big Shot Bob” Horry.

“What a basketball game. The shot-making was elite,” Brownell said. “Their second-half performance was outstanding and for whatever reason we had a hard time guarding them.”

The fourth-seeded Tide were in the Elite Eight for just the second time in school history. They lost in the 2004 regional final to UConn.

The sixth-seeded Tigers upended second-seeded Arizona in the regional semifinals to earn their second Elite Eight berth in 44 years.

Clemson broke the game open with an early 16-4 run, including six straight by RJ Godfrey, to take a 26-13 lead.

Alabama answered Clemson’s burst with a 22-6 spurt — including 11 in a row — to close the first half leading 35-32. The Tide hit five 3s after missing 12 of 13 to start the game.

“We’re big, physical, tough and smart, but we’re not very fast,” Brownell said. “In the second half that was a problem for us.”

UP NEXT

Top-seeded UConn has won a March Madness record 10 straight games by double digits, reaching the Final Four with a 25-point drubbing of Illinois.

New \$20 minimum wage for fast food workers in California set to start Monday

By TERRY CHEA and ADAM BEAM Associated Press

LIVERMORE, Calif. (AP) — Most fast food workers in California will be paid at least \$20 an hour beginning Monday when a new law is scheduled to kick in giving more financial security to an historically low-paying profession while threatening to raise prices in a state already known for its high cost of living.

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Democrats in the state Legislature passed the law last year in part as an acknowledgement that many of the more than 500,000 people who work in fast food restaurants are not teenagers earning some spending money, but adults working to support their families.

That includes immigrants like Ingrid Vilorio, who said she started working at a McDonald's shortly after arriving in the United States in 2019. Fast food was her full-time job until last year. Now, she works about eight hours per week at a Jack in the Box while working other jobs.

"The \$20 raise is great. I wish this would have come sooner," Vilorio said through a translator. "Because I would not have been looking for so many other jobs in different places."

The law was supported by the trade association representing fast food franchise owners. But since it passed, many franchise owners have bemoaned the impact the law is having on them, especially during California's slowing economy.

Alex Johnson owns 10 Auntie Anne's Pretzels and Cinnabon restaurants in the San Francisco Bay Area. He said sales have slowed in 2024, prompting him to lay off his office staff and rely on his parents to help with payroll and human resources.

Increasing his employees' wages will cost Johnson about \$470,000 each year. He will have to raise prices anywhere from 5% to 15% at his stores, and is no longer hiring or seeking to open new locations in California, he said.

"I try to do right by my employees. I pay them as much as I can. But this law is really hitting our operations hard," Johnson said.

"I have to consider selling and even closing my business," he said. "The profit margin has become too slim when you factor in all the other expenses that are also going up."

Over the past decade, California has doubled its minimum wage for most workers to \$16 per hour. A big concern over that time was whether the increase would cause some workers to lose their jobs as employers' expenses increased.

Instead, data showed wages went up and employment did not fall, said Michael Reich, a labor economics professor at the University of California-Berkeley.

"I was surprised at how little, or how difficult it was to find disemployment effects. If anything, we find positive employment effects," Reich said.

Plus, Reich said while the statewide minimum wage is \$16 per hour, many of the state's larger cities have their own minimum wage laws setting the rate higher than that. For many fast food restaurants, this means the jump to \$20 per hour will be smaller.

The law reflected a carefully crafted compromise between the fast food industry and labor unions, which had been fighting over wages, benefits and legal liabilities for close to two years. The law originated during private negotiations between unions and the industry, including the unusual step of signing confidentiality agreements.

The law applies to restaurants offering limited or no table service and which are part of a national chain with at least 60 establishments nationwide. Restaurants operating inside a grocery establishment are exempt, as are restaurants producing and selling bread as a stand-alone menu item.

At first, it appeared the bread exemption applied to Panera Bread restaurants. Bloomberg News reported the change would benefit Greg Flynn, a wealthy campaign donor to Newsom. But the Newsom administration said the wage increase law does apply to Panera Bread because the restaurant does not make dough on-site. Also, Flynn has announced he would pay his workers at least \$20 per hour.

Powerball jackpot jumps to \$975 million after another drawing without a big winner

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — The Powerball jackpot climbed to an estimated \$975 million after no one matched the six numbers drawn Saturday night, continuing a nearly three-month stretch without a big winner.

The winning numbers drawn were: 12, 13, 33, 50, 52 and the red Powerball 23.

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No one has won Powerball's top prize since New Year's Day when a ticket in Michigan hit for \$842.4 million, bringing the number of consecutive drawings without a jackpot winner to 38. That winless streak nears the record of 41 consecutive drawings, set twice in 2022 and 2021.

The \$975 million prize is for a sole winner who chooses an annuity paid over 30 years. A winner opting for cash would be paid \$471.7 million. The prizes would be subject to federal taxes, and many states also tax lottery winnings.

As the prizes grow, the drawings attract more ticket sales and the jackpots subsequently become harder to hit. The game's long odds for Saturday's drawing were 1 in 292.2 million.

Powerball is played in 45 states plus Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

First they tried protests of anti-gay bills. Then students put on a play at Louisiana's Capitol

By SHARON LURYE Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Ava Kreutziger was in high school English class last year when she heard about the passage of legislation that could affect LGBTQ+ students like her. She excused herself from class to go cry in the bathroom, and found two of her classmates already there in tears.

Those bills were vetoed, but similar proposals — now with a better shot of passing under a new Republican governor — would regulate students' pronouns, the bathrooms they can use and discussions of gender and sexuality in the classroom, which opponents call "Don't Say Gay" bills.

In the past, students at Kreutziger's high school in New Orleans have held walkouts to protest anti-inclusion proposals. This year, a group of students tried something different: a play, based on their own experiences, performed on the steps of the state Capitol. Compared with a raucous demonstration, the students hoped a play could spark more empathy.

They have seen up close the mental health struggles of queer students, who were four times more likely to attempt suicide during the pandemic compared with straight students. For those involved in the play, the proposals before the legislature are a matter of life and death.

"I just hope they can see something in us that's worth saving," said Kreutziger, a 17-year-old senior at Benjamin Franklin High School.

For students who can feel like pawns in political and cultural fights playing out around the country, the play also offered an opportunity to regain a sense of power.

"It's the deepest expression of who they are. And that part of it, knowing that you can create something beautiful, that can make change," said Ariella Assouline, a program manager at the It Gets Better Project, an organization that supports LGBTQ+ youth.

Benjamin Franklin High, a selective charter school, used part of a grant from It Gets Better to fund the production and hired Broadway director Jimmy Maize to help students develop a script. Maize is a member of the Tectonic Theater Project, best known for "The Laramie Project," a play about the 1998 murder of gay college student Matthew Shepard.

The students' play, dubbed "The Capitol Project," came together with just a few rehearsals on Saturdays and in the school's elective playwriting course. They performed it on Wednesday, four days ahead of Sunday's international Transgender Day of Visibility.

Students were jittery with nerves as they ascended the steps of the Capitol building, the tallest in the U.S. Facing the entrance, the teenagers shared their stories. Some were about the joy they felt when they learned about LGBTQ+ history in school, or about their parents' acceptance. One student laughed about a plan concocted at the age of 12 to come out to family by kissing their best friend at midnight on New Year's Eve.

Others spoke to feelings of despair and shame. In one scene, two students brought out a thick rope tied into a noose at one end. Jude Armstrong, 17, walked across it like a tightrope, legs wobbling.

"What do you you say to a little kid who prays to the same God you do?" Jude, who is transgender, asked in another scene. "When they ask God how much longer until they're allowed to be themselves?"

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Bills targeting the rights of gay and trans people have topped conservative agendas in statehouses around the country, with state legislatures over the last two years considering hundreds of proposals affecting teachers and LGBTQ+ students.

Earlier versions of the Louisiana proposals were vetoed last year by the state's Democratic governor. But with a new Republican governor and supermajority control of the legislature, there is a clear path to passage for the bills introduced this session.

Louisiana state Rep. Raymond Crews, a Republican who wrote a bill that would ban schools' use of a child's preferred pronouns without parental permission, said the debate over pronouns is a distraction from learning that he hopes the bill will "relegate to the background." He said it is misguided to adopt a students' preferred pronouns if they don't align with their gender at birth.

"We can't ultimately be responsible for people's feelings," he said.

As the students performed, legislators inside the Capitol were on the House floor debating a bill about car insurance. It appeared that only one lawmaker — state Sen. Royce Duplessis, a Democrat — stopped to watch the play for an extended time.

Royce said he is worried the bill will drive talented young people to leave the state.

"How do we expect kids to stay in a state like this when laws are being passed that basically say to them, we don't care about you?" he said.

In the production's final scene, a mother and her child came forward for a dialogue. Eve Peyton, a marketing and communications coordinator at the school, spoke of how she struggled when her child chose a new name. It felt like they were rejecting a precious family gift. Eventually, Peyton realized "gifts can be outgrown."

"I'm here to fight with them, every step of the way," Peyton said.

She passed the mic to another adult, who said the same thing. The mic got passed again, and again. For a total of 49 times, while the performers looked on with tears streaming down their faces, adults and kids in the audience said the same thing: "I'm here to fight with them, every step of the way."

In Key Bridge collapse, Baltimore lost a piece of its cultural identity

By LEA SKENE Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — Generations of Maryland workers — longshoremen, seafarers, steelworkers and crabbers whose livelihoods depend on Baltimore's port — watched in disbelief this week as an iconic symbol of their maritime culture crumbled into the Patapsco River.

The deadly collapse of the historic Francis Scott Key Bridge has shaken Baltimore to its core.

"What happened was kind of a travesty," said Joe Wade, a retired port worker who remembers fishing near the bridge as a child. "I'm not a crier, but ... I got emotional."

Baltimore was a port long before it was incorporated as a city — and long before the United States declared its independence from Britain. Many of the city's brick rowhouses were built to house fishermen, dockworkers and sailors. They earned a reputation for being pioneering and tough, unafraid of rough seas and long days.

It's a cultural identity that persists among modern-day watermen like Ryan "Skeet" Williams, who makes a living harvesting crabs from the Chesapeake Bay.

"We're rugged and salty," he said. "You build your own life."

Williams relied on the Key Bridge to connect his small maritime community outside Baltimore with Maryland's Eastern Shore, the lifeblood of the state's robust seafood industry. Many of his friends and relatives used the bridge for their daily commutes.

Scott Cowan, president of the International Longshoremen's Association Local 333, said the union represents about 2,400 people whose jobs now hang in the balance. Shipping traffic through the Port of Baltimore can't resume until the underwater wreckage has been cleared.

"They always say it's the port that built the city," said Cowan, who followed in his father's footsteps when he became a longshoreman decades ago.

The disaster early Tuesday marks the latest blow to a city whose storied history often gets lost in con-

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versations about its more recent struggles: poverty, violent crime and population loss.

Six members of a roadwork crew plunged to their deaths after a 985-foot (300-meter) cargo ship lost power and crashed into the bridge, eliminating a key piece of Baltimore's skyline and halting maritime traffic to one of the east coast's busiest ports.

In the aftermath, some experts questioned whether the span's supporting columns should have been better protected against the gigantic container ships that would routinely pass by them. But Baltimore is an old city with aging infrastructure that often receives little attention from national politicians.

Officials have promised to rebuild the Key Bridge, but that could take years.

"This is no ordinary bridge. This is one of the cathedrals of American infrastructure," U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said during a news conference in Baltimore earlier this week. "So the path to normalcy will not be easy. It will not be quick. It will not be inexpensive."

A storied history: Francis Scott Key, and generations of dockworkers

Baltimore became a global leader in shipbuilding early on in its history. It later became a major transportation hub with the addition of a railroad line connecting the east coast to the Midwest and beyond.

During the War of 1812, British forces attacked Baltimore in hopes of weakening its industrial and maritime prowess. But American troops successfully defended south Baltimore's Fort McHenry, and the invasion inspired Francis Scott Key to write the national anthem after he witnessed an American flag flying defiantly overhead following a night of heavy bombing.

More than 150 years later, construction began on a bridge that would be named in his honor.

The Key Bridge opened in 1977, spanning 1.6 miles (2.6 kilometers) at the entrance of Baltimore's harbor and allowing residents to traverse the waterway without driving through the city. It provided a direct connection between two working-class, water-oriented communities that formed during World War II — when nearby steel mills produced hundreds of massive warships to aid in the defense effort.

Baltimore's history is rife with iconic characters, from debauchorous pirates and corrupt politicians to the treasured poet Edgar Allan Poe and jazz legend Billie Holiday. Through it all, the port was a relative constant.

It has allowed countless people to earn a decent living by showing up and putting in the hours, including immigrants and other disenfranchised groups. And it has remained an economic engine, adapting and evolving even as other local businesses have shuttered amid declines in industrial production.

It currently processes more cars and farm equipment than any other port in the country. Last year alone, it handled \$80 billion of foreign cargo, Maryland Gov. Wes Moore said at a news conference earlier this week.

"The collapse of the Key Bridge is not just a Maryland crisis. The collapse of the Key Bridge is a global crisis," he said. "The national economy and the world's economy depends on the Port of Baltimore."

The loss of life falls on one of Baltimore's hardworking communities

The men who died in the collapse were filling potholes during an overnight shift. While police quickly stopped traffic after the ship sent a mayday signal, they didn't have time to alert the construction crew — a group of Latino immigrants in active pursuit of the American dream.

Two survivors were rescued almost immediately and divers recovered two bodies the following day. The remaining four victims are still missing and presumed dead.

Advocates say their deaths take on larger significance in the context of the myriad challenges facing immigrants in the U.S. The men were performing a physically grueling job for relatively low wages. They were laboring during nighttime hours to avoid inconveniencing Maryland commuters.

It comes as little surprise that these already disenfranchised workers are the ones who ended up paying the ultimate price, said Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, president of the Baltimore-based immigration services nonprofit Global Refuge. Immigrants will almost inevitably be involved in rebuilding the bridge as well, she added.

The workers came to Maryland from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, seeking higher wages and better opportunities for themselves and their families.

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By settling in the Baltimore area, they added to a long history of immigration that has played a key role in shaping the city's culture and commerce. That history is inextricably linked to the port.

Between the Civil War and World War I, Baltimore became one of the country's largest points of entry for European immigrants. In 1868, an immigration pier opened in south Baltimore not far from the historic battlefield that birthed the Star-Spangled Banner.

Many immigrants passed through the city on their way to the Midwest, but others stayed and put down roots. Those without specialized skills or advanced education worked on the docks and in the railroad yards, often alongside African Americans who came north to escape slavery. Their contributions are memorialized in the Baltimore Immigration Museum, which occupies a historic building constructed in 1904 to house European immigrants.

"Baltimore became a real melting pot of cultures," said local historian Johns Hopkins, who directs the nonprofit Baltimore Heritage.

In more recent decades, Latino immigrants have settled in and around Baltimore, though other cities have received larger influxes, likely because they're experiencing more job growth.

CASA, an immigrant advocacy group based in Maryland, has been in contact with two of the families whose loved ones are among those still missing. Both men — Maynor Suazo Sandoval and Miguel Luna — were husbands and fathers who left their home countries over 15 years ago.

"These construction workers are absolutely essential," said Gustavo Torres, the organization's executive director. "In a time when there is so much hatred against the immigrant community, we look to the quiet leadership of Maynor and Miguel and appreciate how they uphold our society so that Americans can live comfortably."

A key thoroughfare

Many port workers and thousands of others used the Key Bridge on a daily basis.

Along with their neighbors, they awoke Tuesday morning to news of its demise and quickly logged onto social media, still in disbelief. They watched video footage showing every detail of the catastrophic collapse, replaying the horrific sequence until it finally seemed real.

Seeing a major piece of their city's infrastructure crumble like a toy left some Baltimoreans with an uneasy sense of shock, jolted by the realization that anything can happen.

In the days that followed, many residents stopped at various vantage points near the collapse site to survey the wreckage and pay their respects. Some recalled watching the bridge take shape in the 1970s, arching majestically across the water.

"It was always there. It was a landmark," said Niki Putinski, who spent years living in a small residential neighborhood at the base of the bridge. "I just didn't think something could bring it down like that."

The whole city is grieving, said Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott, whose father moved to Baltimore as a young man to work at the port. But there's a reason Baltimoreans are known for their grit and perseverance, Scott said.

"You can't talk about Baltimore — past, present and future — without talking about the port," he said. "And this will be the latest example of Baltimore bouncing back. That's really ingrained in us here. We don't give up, we ignore the noise and we keep that gritty chip on our shoulder."

Japanese officials inspect 2 factories making health supplements linked to 5 deaths

By YURI KAGEYAMA Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japanese government health officials on Sunday inspected a factory producing health supplements linked to at least five deaths and the hospitalization of more than 100 others, one day after the authorities investigated another plant that manufactured the product.

A team of 17 health officials from the central and prefectural governments raided a plant operated by the Kobayashi Pharmaceutical Co.'s subsidiary in Kinokawa, in the western Japanese prefecture of Wakayama, under the food sanitation act. NHK public television showed the officials walk into the factory.

The Wakayama plant took over the production of the supplements after Kobayashi Pharmaceutical closed another plant in nearby Osaka, which authorities searched on Saturday, NHK said.

Kobayashi Pharmaceutical spokesperson Yuko Tomiyama told reporters that the company is fully cooperating in the investigation.

The company says little is known about the exact cause of the sicknesses, which include kidney failure.

The supplements being investigated all used "benikoji," a kind of red mold, including Kobayashi Pharmaceuticals' pink pills called Benikoji Choleste Help, which were billed as helping lower cholesterol levels.

The Osaka-based Kobayashi Pharmaceutical said about a million packages were sold over the past three fiscal years. It also sold benikoji to other manufacturers, and some products have been exported. The supplements could be bought at drug stores without a prescription from a doctor.

Reports of health problems surfaced in 2023, although benikoji has been used in various products for years.

The recall came March 22, two months after the company had received official medical reports about the problem. Company president Akihiro Kobayashi has apologized for not having acted sooner.

On Friday, the company said five people had died and 114 people were being treated in hospitals after taking the products.

Japan's health ministry says the supplements could be responsible for the deaths and illnesses, and warned that the number of those affected could grow. The government has ordered a review of the approval system in response to the supplement-related illnesses.

Some analysts blame the recent deregulation initiatives, which simplified and sped up approval for health products to spur economic growth. Deaths from a mass-produced item is rare in Japan, as government checks over consumer products are relatively stringent.

Donovan Clingan, UConn power back into Final Four behind 30-0 run in 77-52 rout of Illinois

By JIMMY GOLEN AP Sports Writer

BOSTON (AP) — Thirty points in a row — that's quite a run.

The NCAA Tournament streak UConn is putting together is pretty, pretty impressive, too.

The defending national champions scored 30 straight points to power their way back to the Final Four on Saturday night, steamrolling Illinois 77-52 — a March Madness record 10th straight double-digit victory for the top-seeded Huskies.

Donovan Clingan had 22 points, 10 rebounds and five blocked shots, and UConn scored the first 25 points of the second half to turn a five-point lead into a blowout. The Huskies, who cruised to their fifth national title last year, seem inexorably headed for a sixth: Their NCAA Tournament wins this year have come by 39, 17, 30 and 25 points.

"We're going to be tough to beat," UConn coach Dan Hurley said. "It was a special level of basketball that we were playing."

Actor Bill Murray, whose son, Luke, is a Huskies assistant coach, watched the game from a courtside seat and took video of the postgame celebration, where his grandchildren were showered with confetti. "Curb Your Enthusiasm" star Larry David was also part of a heavily partisan crowd the Huskies (35-3) called "Storrs North" for the East Region games that were played about 90 miles from campus.

UConn, which won the Big East Tournament at Madison Square Garden and advanced to the Sweet 16 in Brooklyn, will now get on an airplane for the first time in almost a month and head to the Final Four outside of Phoenix. It will face West Region champion Alabama, which advanced with an 89-82 victory over Clemson later Saturday night.

The Huskies, who set a school record for victories in a season, are the first defending champs to make it back to the national semifinals since Florida won back-to-back titles in 2006 and '07.

That's still a possibility for UConn, too.

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"It's not about really trying to win No. 6 or go back-to back," Hurley said. "It's this time of year, you love your team and you can't imagine what it would be like to not get up the next day and still coach your team. It's what you learn when you win the way we've won: It really is about the work, the journey, the process."

Marcus Domask scored 17 points — 15 in the first half — for Illinois (29-9), and star Terrence Shannon Jr. was held to eight points on 2-of-12 shooting. Shannon, who scored 29 points in Thursday night's Sweet 16 victory over Iowa State and played much of the season while facing a rape charge in Kansas, snapped a string of 41 straight games scoring in double digits.

Illinois, which had the most efficient offense in the country this season, shot 25% (17 of 67) and scored a season-low 52 points.

Cam Spencer had his first career double-double, scoring 11 points with 12 rebounds for UConn, which reached the Elite Eight with a 30-point win over San Diego State on Thursday night. Hassan Diarra scored 11 and Alex Karaban had 10 points for the Huskies.

But the big problem for third-seeded Illinois was the 7-foot-2 Clingan.

The Fighting Illini (29-9) managed just four points in the first half when Clingan was in the game, with the Connecticut native recording nine points, six rebounds and three blocks before the break. Overall, they were 0 for 19 on shots challenged by Clingan.

"We were getting the same shots we've always gotten, and Clingan erased a few of them," Illinois coach Brad Underwood said. "He's good. I mean, doesn't everybody have him projected in the (NBA) lottery or close to it? He does a great job of protecting the rim."

The Illini had several lengthy scoring droughts, falling behind 9-0 and failing to score before the first media timeout; they was shut out again between the under-12 minute break and the one that came under 8 minutes, missing 11 shots in a row. Still, they trailed only 28-23 at the half.

That's when things really fell apart.

Illinois missed its first 14 shots of the second — 17 misses in a row, in all. The 30-0 UConn run lasted for the last 1:49 of the first half and the first 7:19 of the second.

"I didn't expect that. But tons of credit to UConn," Underwood said. "I thought we were in a good spot at half, especially after the slow start. ... We obviously came out in the second half and got blitzed."

By the time Clingan took a break with 14:35 to play, the Huskies led by 23. On the next Illinois possession, Samson Johnson — who subbed in for Clingan — blocked Shannon under the basket and finished the fast break at the other end with a layup that gave UConn a 48-23 lead.

"It felt like no shots were going in. And it felt like they were getting out in transition and scoring every single time," Illinois forward Coleman Hawkins said. "You look up, and you're still at 23."

UP NEXT

The national semifinals are April 6 in Glendale, Arizona. Alabama will be making its first Final Four appearance.

Crews carefully start removing first piece of twisted steel from collapsed Baltimore bridge

By SERKAN GURBUZ and JEFFREY COLLINS Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — Teams of engineers worked Saturday on the intricate process of cutting and lifting the first section of twisted steel from the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge, which crumpled into the Patapsco River this week after a massive cargo ship crashed into one of its supports.

Sparks could be seen flying from a section of bent and crumpled steel in the afternoon, and video released by officials in the evening showed demolition crews using a cutting torch to slice through the thick beams. The joint incident command said in a statement that the work was being done on the top of the north side of the collapsed structure.

Crews were carefully measuring and cutting the steel from the broken bridge before attaching straps so it can be lifted onto a barge and floated away, Coast Guard Rear Adm. Shannon Gilreath said.

Seven floating cranes — including a massive one capable of lifting 1,000 tons — 10 tugboats, nine barges,

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eight salvage vessels and five Coast Guard boats were on site in the water southeast of Baltimore.

Each movement affects what happens next and ultimately how long it will take to remove all the debris and reopen the ship channel and the blocked Port of Baltimore, Maryland Gov. Wes Moore said.

"I cannot stress enough how important today and the first movement of this bridge and of the wreckage is. This is going to be a remarkably complicated process," Moore said.

Undeterred by the chilly morning weather, longtime Baltimore resident Randy Lichtenberg and others took cellphone photos or just quietly looked at the broken pieces of the bridge, which including its steel trusses weigh as much as 4,000 tons.

"I wouldn't want to be in that water. It's got to be cold. It's a tough job," Lichtenberg said from a spot on the river called Sparrows Point.

The shock of waking up Tuesday morning to video of what he called an iconic part of the Baltimore skyline falling into the water has given way to sadness.

"It never hits you that quickly. It's just unbelievable," Lichtenberg said.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

One of the first goals for crews on the water is to get a smaller auxiliary ship channel open so tugboats and other small barges can move freely. Crews also want to stabilize the site so divers can resume searching for four missing workers who are presumed dead.

Two other workers were rescued from the water in the hours following the bridge collapse, and the bodies of two more were recovered from a pickup truck that fell and was submerged in the river. They had been filling potholes on the bridge and while police were able to stop vehicle traffic after the ship called in a mayday, they could not get to the construction workers, who were from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.

The crew of the cargo ship Dali, which is managed by Synergy Marine Group, remained on board with the debris from the bridge around it, and were safe and were being interviewed. They are keeping the ship running as they will be needed to get it out of the channel once more debris has been removed.

The vessel is owned by Grace Ocean Private Ltd. and was chartered by Danish shipping giant Maersk.

The collision and collapse appeared to be an accident that came after the ship lost power. Federal and state investigators are still trying to determine why.

Assuaging concern about possible pollution from the crash, Adam Ortiz, the Environmental Protection Agency's mid-Atlantic Regional Administrator, said there was no indication in the water of active releases from the ship or materials hazardous to human health.

REBUILDING

Officials are also trying to figure out how to handle the economic impact of a closed port and the severing of a major highway link. The bridge was completed in 1977 and carried Interstate 695 around southeast Baltimore.

Maryland transportation officials are planning to rebuild the bridge, promising to consider innovative designs or building materials to hopefully shorten a project that could take years.

President Joe Biden's administration has approved \$60 million in immediate aid and promised the federal government will pay the full cost to rebuild.

Ship traffic at the Port of Baltimore remains suspended, but the Maryland Port Administration said trucks were still being processed at marine terminals.

The loss of a road that carried 30,000 vehicles a day and the port disruption will affect not only thousands of dockworkers and commuters, but also U.S. consumers, who are likely to feel the impact of shipping delays. The port handles more cars and more farm equipment than any other U.S. facility.

The Trump camp assails Biden for declaring March 31, Easter Sunday, as Transgender Day of Visibility

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is facing criticism from Donald Trump's campaign and religious conservatives for proclaiming March 31 — which corresponds with Easter Sunday this year — as "Transgender Day of Visibility."

The Democratic president issued the proclamation on Friday, calling on "all Americans to join us in lifting up the lives and voices of transgender people throughout our Nation and to work toward eliminating violence and discrimination based on gender identity."

But in 2024, the March 31 designation overlaps with Easter, one of Christianity's holiest celebrations. Trump's campaign accused Biden, a Roman Catholic, of being insensitive to religion, and fellow Republicans piled on.

"We call on Joe Biden's failing campaign and White House to issue an apology to the millions of Catholics and Christians across America who believe tomorrow is for one celebration only — the resurrection of Jesus Christ," said Karoline Leavitt, the Trump campaign's press secretary. She assailed what she called the Biden administration's "years-long assault on the Christian faith."

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said on social media that the "Biden White House has betrayed the central tenet of Easter" and called the decision "outrageous and abhorrent."

White House spokesperson Andrew Bates said the Republicans criticizing Biden "are seeking to divide and weaken our country with cruel, hateful and dishonest rhetoric."

"As a Christian who celebrates Easter with family, President Biden stands for bringing people together and upholding the dignity and freedoms of every American," Bates said. "President Biden will never abuse his faith for political purposes or for profit."

Biden devoutly attends Mass and considers his Catholic upbringing to be a core part of his morality and identity. In 2021, he met with Pope Francis at the Vatican and afterward told reporters that the pontiff said he was a "good Catholic" who should keep receiving Communion.

But Biden's political stances on gay marriage and support for women having the right to abortion have put him at odds with many conservative Christians.

3 UN military observers, a Lebanese interpreter wounded in blast while patrolling southern border

By BASSEM MROUE and KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Three United Nations military observers and a Lebanese interpreter were wounded Saturday when a shell exploded near them while patrolling the southern Lebanese border, the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Lebanon said.

The military observers are part of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, which supports the U.N. peacekeeping mission in southern Lebanon, known as UNIFIL. UNIFIL spokesperson Andrea Tenenti told The Associated Press that the four wounded were in stable condition.

Tenenti said UNIFIL had informed all warring parties of their patrols as usual and the observers' vehicle was carrying clear U.N. markings. The three military observers, from Chile, Australia, and Norway, were unarmed, he said.

The blast came as clashes between the Israeli military and Hezbollah militants escalated in recent weeks. Both sides have been exchanging fire since the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza broke out, propelling concerns that the near-daily clashes along the border known as the Blue Line could escalate into a full-scale war.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned the explosion and expressed "grave concern" at the daily exchanges of fire between armed groups in Lebanon and Israeli forces since Oct. 8 — the day after Hamas' surprise attack on southern Israel, U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

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The U.N. chief said the clashes, in violation of the 2006 Security Council resolution that halted hostilities in a war between Israel and Hezbollah militants, have caused dozens of civilian fatalities, destroyed residential and agricultural areas, and displaced tens of thousands of people on both sides of the Blue Line, Dujarric said.

"These hostile actions have not only disrupted the livelihoods of thousands of people, but they also pose a grave threat to the security and stability of Lebanon, Israel, and the region," the U.N. spokesman said.

Guterres urges all action to refrain from further violations of the 2006 cessation of hostilities "and to pursue a diplomatic solution to the crisis," Dujarric said, adding that the U.N. chief stands ready to support such efforts.

Local Lebanese media, citing security officials, said an Israeli drone strike targeted the observers in the southern village of Wadi Katmoun near the border town of Rmeich.

The Israeli military said on social media platform X: "Contrary to the reports, the IDF did not strike a @UNIFIL —vehicle in the area of Rmeish this morning."

Tenenti said UNIFIL was "investigating the origin of the explosion" but it was difficult to put investigators on the ground immediately because of the ongoing exchange of fire.

"The targeting of peacekeepers is unacceptable," Tenenti told The Associated Press. "We repeat our call for all actors to cease the current heavy exchanges of fire before more people are unnecessarily hurt."

Lebanese caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikat condemned the incident in a statement.

UNIFIL was created to oversee the withdrawal of Israeli troops from southern Lebanon after Israel's 1978 invasion. The U.N. expanded its mission following the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, allowing peacekeepers to deploy along the Israeli border to help the Lebanese military extend its authority into the country's south for the first time in decades.

In Indonesia, deforestation is intensifying disasters from severe weather and climate change

By VICTORIA MILKO Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Roads turned to murky brown rivers, homes were swept away by strong currents and bodies were pulled from mud during deadly flash floods and landslides after torrential rains hit West Sumatra in early March, marking one of the latest deadly natural disasters in Indonesia.

Government officials blamed the floods on heavy rainfall, but environmental groups have cited the disaster as the latest example of deforestation and environmental degradation intensifying the effects of severe weather across Indonesia.

"This disaster occurred not only because of extreme weather factors, but because of the ecological crisis," Indonesian environmental rights group Indonesian Forum for the Environment wrote in a statement. "If the environment continues to be ignored, then we will continue to reap ecological disasters."

A vast tropical archipelago stretching across the equator, Indonesia is home to the world's third-largest rainforest, with a variety of endangered wildlife and plants, including orangutans, elephants, giant and blooming forest flowers. Some live nowhere else.

For generations the forests have also provided livelihoods, food, and medicine while playing a central role in cultural practices for millions of Indigenous residents in Indonesia.

Since 1950, more than 74 million hectares (285,715 square miles) of Indonesian rainforest — an area twice the size of Germany — have been logged, burned or degraded for development of palm oil, paper and rubber plantations, mining and other commodities according to Global Forest Watch.

Indonesia is the biggest producer of palm oil, one of the largest exporters of coal and a top producer of pulp for paper. It also exports oil and gas, rubber, tin and other resources. And it also has the world's largest reserves of nickel — a critical material for electric vehicles, solar panels and other goods needed for the green energy transition.

Indonesia has consistently ranked as one of the largest global emitters of plant-warming greenhouse gases, with its emissions stemming from the burning of fossil fuels, deforestation and peatland fires, ac-

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ording to the Global Carbon Project.

It's also highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, including extreme events such as floods and droughts, long-term changes from sea level rise, shifts in rainfall patterns and increasing temperatures, according to the World Bank. In recent decades the country has already seen the effects of climate change: More intense rains, landslides and floods during rainy season, and more fires during a longer dry season.

But forests can help play a vital role in reducing the impact of some extreme weather events, said Aida Greenbury, a sustainability expert focusing on Indonesia.

Flooding can be slowed by trees and vegetation soaking up rainwater and reducing erosion. In dry season, forests release moisture that helps mitigate the effects of droughts, including fires.

But when forests diminish, those benefits do as well.

A 2017 study reported that forest conversion and deforestation expose bare soil to rainfall, causing soil erosion. Frequent harvesting activities — such as done on palm oil plantations — and the removal of ground vegetation leads to further soil compaction, causing rain to run off the surface instead of entering groundwater reservoirs. Downstream erosion also increases sediment in rivers, making rivers shallower and increasing flood risks, according to the research.

After the deadly floods in Sumatra in early March, West Sumatra Gov. Mahyeldi Ansharullah said there were strong indications of illegal logging around locations affected by floods and landslides. That, coupled with extreme rainfall, inadequate drainage systems and improper housing development contributed to the disaster, he said.

Experts and environmental activists have pointed to deforestation worsening disasters in other regions of Indonesia as well: In 2021 environmental activists partially blamed deadly floods in Kalimantan on environmental degradation caused by large-scale mining and palm oil operations. In Papua, deforestation was partially blamed for floods and landslides that killed over a hundred people in 2019.

There have been some signs of progress: In 2018 Indonesian President Joko Widodo put a three-year freeze on new permits for palm oil plantations. And the rate of deforestation slowed between 2021-2022, according to government data.

But experts warn that it's unlikely deforestation in Indonesia will stop anytime soon as the government continues to move forward with new mining and infrastructure projects such as new nickel smelters and cement factories.

"A lot of land use and land-based investment permits have already been given to businesses, and a lot of these areas are already prone to disasters," said Arie Rompas, an Indonesia-based forestry expert at Greenpeace.

President-elect Prabowo Subianto, who is scheduled to take office in October, has promised to continue Widodo's policy of development, include large-scale food estates, mining and other infrastructure development that are all linked to deforestation.

Environmental watchdogs also warn that environmental protections in Indonesia are weakening, including the passing of the controversial Omnibus Law, which eliminated an article of the Forestry Law regarding the minimum area of forest that must be maintained at development projects.

"The removal of that article makes us very worried (about deforestation) for the years to come," said Rompas.

While experts and activists recognize that development is essential for Indonesia's economy to continue to go, they argue that it should be done in a way that considers the environment and incorporates better land planning.

"We can't continue down the same path we've been on," said sustainability expert Greenbury. "We need to make sure that the soil, the land in the forest doesn't become extinct."

Pope presides over Easter Vigil, delivers 10-minute homily after skipping Good Friday at last minute

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis presided over the Vatican's somber Easter Vigil service on Saturday night, delivering a 10-minute homily and baptizing eight people, a day after suddenly skipping the Good Friday procession at the Colosseum as a health precaution.

Francis entered the darkened, silent St. Peter's Basilica in his wheelchair, took his place in a chair and offered an opening prayer. Sounding somewhat congested and out of breath, he blessed an elaborately decorated Easter candle, the flame of which was then shared with other candles until the whole basilica twinkled.

Over an hour later, Francis delivered a 10-minute homily in a strong voice, clearing his throat occasionally.

The evening service, one of the most solemn and important moments in the Catholic liturgical calendar, commemorates the resurrection of Jesus. The Vatican had said Francis skipped the Good Friday procession to ensure his participation in both the vigil service Saturday night, which usually lasts about two hours, and Easter Sunday Mass a few hours later.

The 87-year-old Francis, who had part of one lung removed as a young man, has been battling respiratory problems all winter that have made it difficult for him to speak at length. He and the Vatican have said he has had bronchitis, a cold or the flu.

He has canceled some audiences and often asked an aide to read aloud some of his speeches. But the alarm was raised when he ditched his Palm Sunday homily altogether last week at the last minute and then decided suddenly Friday to stay home rather than preside over the Way of the Cross procession at the Colosseum re-enacting Christ's crucifixion.

The Vatican said in a brief explanation that the decision was made to "conserve his health."

The decision appeared to have paid off Saturday night, as Francis was able to recite the prayers of the lengthy vigil service, and perform the sacrament of baptism for the eight adults. The baptism is a traditional feature of the Vatican's Easter Vigil service.

In his homily Francis referred to the stone that the faithful believe was removed from Christ's tomb after his death. Francis urged Catholics to remove the stones in their lives that "block the door of our hearts, stifling life, extinguishing hope, imprisoning us in the tomb of our fears and regrets."

"Let us lift our eyes to him and ask that the power of his resurrection may roll away the heavy stones that weigh down our souls," he said.

Holy Week is trying for a pope under any circumstance, given four days of liturgies, rites, fasting and prayer. But that is especially true for Francis, who cancelled a trip to Dubai late last year, with just days to go, on doctor's orders because of his respiratory problems.

In addition to his respiratory problems, Francis had a chunk of his large intestine removed in 2021 and was hospitalized twice last year, including once to remove intestinal scar tissue from previous surgeries to address diverticulosis, or bulges in his intestinal wall. He has been using a wheelchair or cane for nearly two years because of bad knee ligaments.

In his recently published memoirs, "Life: My Story Through History," Francis said he isn't suffering from any health problems that would require him to resign and that he still has "many projects to bring to fruition."

Ships with a second round of aid for Gaza have departed Cyprus as concerns about hunger soar

JERUSALEM (AP) — A three-ship convoy left a port in Cyprus on Saturday with 400 tons of food and other supplies for Gaza as concerns about hunger in the territory soar.

The World Central Kitchen charity said the vessels and a barge carried enough to prepare more than 1 million meals from items like rice, pasta, flour, legumes, canned vegetables and proteins. Also on board were dates, traditionally eaten to break the daily fast during the holy month of Ramadan.

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It was not clear when the ships would reach Gaza. The first ship earlier this month delivered 200 tons of food, water and other aid.

The United Nations and partners have warned that famine could occur in devastated, largely isolated northern Gaza as early as this month. Humanitarian officials say deliveries by sea and air are not enough and that Israel must allow far more aid by road. The top U.N. court has ordered Israel to open more land crossings and take other measures to address the crisis.

Meanwhile, Egypt's state-run Al Qahera TV said truce negotiations between Israel and Hamas will resume Sunday, citing an unnamed Egyptian security source. The channel has close ties to the country's intelligence services.

Just one weeklong cease-fire has been achieved in the war that began after Hamas-led militants stormed across southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking about 250 others hostage. On Saturday, some Israelis again rallied to show frustration with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government and urge him to resign.

Families of hostages vowed to take to the streets across Israel. "Give the negotiations team a wide mandate and tell them, 'Don't come home without a deal, bring back our loved ones,'" said Raz Ben Ami, wife of hostage Ohad Ben Ami.

Nearly six months of war has destroyed critical infrastructure in Gaza including hospitals, schools and homes as well as roads, sewage systems and the electrical grid. Over 80% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million has been displaced, the U.N. and international aid agencies say.

In the coastal tent camp of Muwasi, mothers said they feared young children were losing memories of life before the war. "We tell them to write and draw. They only draw a tank, a missile or planes. We tell them to draw something beautiful, a rose or anything. They do not see these things," said one mother, Wafaa Abu Samra. Children piled up for turns on a small slide twice the length of their bodies, landing in the sand.

Gaza's Health Ministry says 32,705 Palestinians have been killed, with 82 bodies taken to hospitals in the past 24 hours. The Health Ministry doesn't distinguish between civilians and combatants in its toll but has said the majority of those killed have been women and children.

Israel says over one-third of the dead are militants, though it has not provided evidence to support that, and it blames Hamas for civilian casualties because the group operates in residential areas.

Israel's military on Saturday acknowledged shooting dead two Palestinians and wounding a third on Gaza's beach, responding to a video broadcast earlier this week by Al Jazeera that showed one man falling to the ground after walking in an open area and a bulldozer pushing two bodies into the garbage-strewn sand. The military said troops opened fire after the men allegedly ignored warning shots.

Israel's military said it continued to strike dozens of targets in Gaza, days after the United Nations Security Council issued its first demand for a cease-fire.

Aid also fell on Gaza. The U.S. military during an airdrop on Friday said it had released over 100,000 pounds of aid that day and almost a million pounds overall, part of a multi-country effort.

The United States also welcomed the formation of a new Palestinian autonomy government, signaling it was accepting a revised Cabinet lineup as a step toward political reform. The Biden administration has called for "revitalizing" the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority in the hope that it can also administer Gaza once the war ends.

The authority is headed by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who chose U.S.-educated economist Mohammad Mustafa as prime minister this month. But both Israel and Hamas — which drove Abbas' security forces from Gaza in a 2007 takeover — reject the idea of it administering Gaza. The authority also has little popular support or legitimacy among Palestinians because of its security cooperation with Israel in the West Bank.

More than 400 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces or settlers in the West Bank or east Jerusalem since Oct. 7, according to local health authorities. Dr. Fawaz Hamad, director of Al-Razi Hospital in Jenin, told local Awda TV that Israeli forces killed a 13-year-old boy in nearby Qabatiya early Saturday. Israel's military said the incident was under review.

Israel has said that after the war it will maintain open-ended security control over Gaza and partner with Palestinians who are not affiliated with the Palestinian Authority or Hamas. It's unclear who in Gaza would be willing to take on such a role.

Hamas has warned Palestinians in Gaza against cooperating with Israel to administer the territory, saying anyone who does will be treated as a collaborator, which is understood as a death threat. Hamas calls instead for all Palestinian factions to form a power-sharing government ahead of national elections, which have not taken place in 18 years.

President Joe Biden is lapping Donald Trump when it comes to campaign cash — and he'll need it

By SEUNG MIN KIM and BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden's reelection campaign is raising gobs of cash. And it has an election-year strategy that, in a nutshell, aims to spend more — and spend faster.

Not only has Biden aimed to show himself off as a fundraising juggernaut this month, but his campaign is also making significant early investments both on the ground and on the airwaves — hoping to create a massive organizational advantage that leaves Republican Donald Trump scrambling to catch up.

But while the money pouring in has given Biden and the Democrats a major cash advantage, it's also becoming clear Biden will need it. Throughout his life in business and politics, Trump's provocations have earned him near limitless free media attention. Biden, meanwhile, has often struggled to cut through the noise with his own message despite holding the presidency.

That means Biden is going to need oodles of cash to blanket battleground states where a few thousand votes could mean the difference between victory or defeat. Add to that the challenge of reaching millennials, as well as even younger voters, who formed an important part of his 2020 coalition, in a far more fractured media ecosystem that skews toward streaming services over conventional broadcast and cable.

Biden's organizational and outreach effort began in earnest this month, with the campaign using his State of the Union address as a launching pad to open 100 new field offices nationwide and boosting the number of paid staff in battleground states to 350 people. It's also currently in the middle of a \$30 million television and digital advertising campaign targeting specific communities such as Black, Hispanic and Asian voters.

In one example of the incumbent president's organizational advantage, his reelection campaign in February had 480 staffers on the ground, compared with 311 to that of Trump and the Republican National Committee, according to Biden campaign officials.

"We're ramping up campaign headquarters and field offices, hiring staff all across the country before Trump and his MAGA Republicans have even opened one single office," Biden boasted Friday in New York during a meeting of his national finance committee, which included 200 of his largest donors and fundraisers from in and around the city.

A massive ground game disadvantage didn't prevent Trump from winning the presidency in 2016, a fact Democrats keenly remember.

"It's one of the stubborn challenges of Trump," said Robby Mook, campaign manager for Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential bid. "Trump is Trump's best organizer, and Trump can motivate people from the podium."

But, Mook added, the Biden campaign is doing what it needs to do, pointing to the State of the Union as a powerful example of how to effectively mobilize the base and harness the anti-Trump energy that will inevitably motivate many Democrats this year.

"The most magical and the scariest part of politics is, you never know until Election Day," Mook said. "And so I wouldn't want to leave anything on the table if I were them, and the great part about having a resource advantage is, you get to have all these different things."

Even Biden's bricks-and-mortar campaign is likely to be far more costly this year.

Unlike 2020, when many Americans were hunkered down due to the pandemic, Biden will need to travel more while also building a political infrastructure that will be far more expensive than the socially distanced,

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virtual campaign he waged from his basement the last time around.

His reelection campaign will also have expenses that Trump won't have to confront, such as reimbursing the federal government for use of Air Force One. So far, it has reimbursed \$4.5 million for use of the official presidential aircraft for political activity, according to the campaign.

Mook said decisions about how to strategically invest the campaign's cash are never as nimble as the staff wants them to be, and there is not only a risk in spending too much, too fast — but also spending far too late in an election year.

Last fall and summer, Democrats fretted about Biden's early lack of fundraising and campaign activity. Writers' and actors' guild strikes in Hollywood didn't help, either — effectively sidelining the pro-labor union president from raising money in a region that has long bankrolled the party's political ambitions.

Fast forward to the present and the second-guessing about his fundraising operation has tamped down. Aside from raking in millions at high-dollar events around the country — and bringing in \$26 million at an event featuring Biden, Barack Obama and Bill Clinton on Thursday evening — the president has frequently pointed to the 500,000 new donors who have contributed in recent weeks, arguing that he's expanding his appeal.

Now, even donors lukewarm to the president are contributing, Democratic Party donors and fundraisers say.

"I think people really want to hear what they have to say," said Michael Smith, a major Hollywood donor and fundraiser, who hosted a Los Angeles event earlier this year featuring rocker Lenny Kravitz and held another event last week in Palm Springs with the president's wife, Jill Biden. "They realize this is an investment."

Trump campaign officials concede that Biden and the Democrats will likely have more cash to spend, though they argue that Trump will still be able to run an effective campaign given his ability to attract media coverage.

"Our digital online fundraising continues to skyrocket, our major donor investments are climbing, and Democrats are running scared of the fundraising prowess of President Trump," said Steven Cheung, communications director for the Trump campaign. "We are not only raising the necessary funds but we are deploying strategic assets that will help send President Trump back to the White House and carry Republicans over the finish line."

But given Trump's propensity for making explosive remarks, that can also cut both ways, which Democrats are sure to exploit by using their cash advantage to run ads. Trump's legal fees from the myriad of court cases he is tied up with are also sure to be a drag on his cash situation. Records show his political operation has shelled out at least \$80 million to cover court costs over the past two years.

"Trump promises to be a Dictator on Day 1, suspend our Constitution and bring back political violence even worse than January 6. His MAGA agenda is so toxic and extreme that hundreds of thousands of Republicans in swing states voted for Nikki Haley over him, even after she dropped out — how unique!" Biden campaign spokesperson Lauren Hitt said. "Donald Trump has no resources or even the will to bring those critical voters back."

There's also the open question of whether Trump will be able to break through in the same ways he did in 2016, when he was a political novelty. Or as he did during the 2020 election, when he held the presidency and was a ubiquitous presence at a time when locked-down Americans were glued to their TVs.

"The media landscape and where voters get their news has changed and so assumptions based on Trump's ability to dominate mainstream media conversations should be questioned," said Josh Schwerin, a Democratic strategist who formerly worked at Priorities USA, the Democrats' primary super PAC during the 2020 presidential campaign.

"Fewer voters are getting their news from traditional outlets and finding ways to get information in front of them is getting harder and harder — and that takes money," he said. "Both candidates are going to have to do this. And this is one place where having a financial advantage is going to be a big benefit to the Biden campaign."

Zelenskyy fires more aides in a reshuffle as Russia launches drones and missiles across Ukraine

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy dismissed a longtime aide and several advisers on Saturday in a continuing reshuffle while Russia unleashed fresh attacks overnight.

Zelenskyy dismissed top aide Serhiy Shefir from his post of first assistant, where he had served since 2019. The Ukrainian president also let go three advisers, and two presidential representatives overseeing volunteer activities and soldiers' rights.

No explanation was given immediately for the latest changes in a wide-reaching personnel shakeup over recent months. It included the dismissal on Tuesday of Oleksii Danilov, who served as secretary of the National Security and Defense Council, and Valerii Zaluzhnyi as head of the armed forces on Feb. 8. Zaluzhnyi was appointed Ukraine's ambassador to the United Kingdom earlier this month.

Ukraine's air force said Saturday that Russia launched 12 Shahed drones overnight, nine of which were shot down, and fired four missiles into eastern Ukraine.

Russia unleashed a barrage of 38 missiles, 75 airstrikes and 98 attacks from multiple rocket launchers over the last 24 hours, Ukraine's armed forces said in social media posts.

Two people were killed and one wounded in Russian shelling in Ukraine's partially occupied Donetsk province, regional Gov. Vadym Filashkin said Saturday.

Ukrainian energy company Centrengo announced Saturday that the Zmiiv Thermal Power Plant, one of the largest thermal power plants in the eastern Kharkiv region, was completely destroyed following Russian shelling last week. Power outage schedules were still in place for around 120,000 people in the region, where 700,000 people had lost electricity after the plant was hit on March 22.

Russia has escalated its attacks on Ukrainian energy infrastructure in recent days, causing significant damage in several regions.

Officials in the Poltava region said Saturday there had been "several hits" to an infrastructure facility, without specifying whether it was an energy facility.

Meanwhile, the toll of Friday's mass barrage of 99 drones and missiles hitting regions across Ukraine came to light on Saturday, with local officials in the Kherson region on Saturday morning announcing the death of one civilian. A resident of the Dnipropetrovsk region died in a hospital from shell wounds, according to regional Gov. Serhiy Lisak.

Key takeaways about the condition of US bridges and their role in the economy

By DAVID A. LIEB and MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

The rapid collapse of a Baltimore bridge that was struck by large cargo ship highlighted the importance that bridges play in the daily lives of many Americans.

Six construction workers who were on the bridge are presumed dead. The drivers of more than 30,000 vehicles that crossed the bridge daily must find a new route around or over the Patapsco River. And shipments at the Port of Baltimore will be shut down for some time, forcing numerous businesses to find alternative means of getting their goods in and out of the U.S.

Though the Interstate 695 bridge in Baltimore had been in satisfactory condition before the shipping collision, thousands of other bridges stand in poor shape across the U.S. due to aging piers, beams and key structural components.

Here are some takeaways from an Associated Press analysis of the more than 621,000 roadway bridges that are more than 20 feet long and are listed in the federal government's National Bridge Inventory.

THOUSANDS OF POOR BRIDGES

Inspectors rate bridges using a 0-9 scale, with 7 or above considered "good." A "poor" rating reflects a 4 or below on any portion of a bridge's main components. A mid-range rating is considered "fair."

About 42,400 U.S. bridges are in poor condition, carrying about 167 million vehicles each day, according

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to the federal government. Those poor bridges are on average 70 years old.

Of those poor bridges, four-fifths have problems with their substructures (the legs holding them up) or their superstructures (the arms supporting their load). And more than 15,800 of the poor bridges also were listed in poor shape a decade ago, according to AP's analysis.

Iowa has the greatest number of poor bridges, followed by Pennsylvania, Illinois and Missouri.

WHY DO BRIDGES COLLAPSE?

Though unusual, the collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore was not the first bridge to fall down after being struck by a ship. From 1960 to 2015, there were 35 major bridge collapses worldwide due to ship or barge collisions, with a total of 342 people killed, according to a 2018 report from the World Association for Waterborne Transport Infrastructure. Eighteen of those collapses happened in the United States.

Though also rare, bad bridges can eventually just collapse.

In January 2022, a bridge collapsed over Fern Hollow Creek in Pittsburgh, causing injuries but no deaths to the occupants of several vehicles that were on it. Federal investigators determined the bridge's steel legs had corroded, creating visible holes, yet inspectors failed to calculate the severity of the problem and the city failed to follow repeated recommendations.

"This bridge didn't collapse just by an act of God. It collapsed because of a lack of maintenance and repair," National Transportation Safety Board member Michael Graham said.

A HIT TO THE ECONOMY

When bridges close or collapse, there are financial consequences.

Thirteen people died and 145 others were injured when an Interstate 35 bridge collapsed over the Mississippi River in Minneapolis in 2007. A state analysis estimated Minnesota's economy lost \$60 million in 2007-2008 due to increased travel time and operating costs for commuters and businesses.

Bridges in Providence, Rhode Island, and Tacoma, Washington, are currently closed because of safety concerns. Nearby businesses have taken a hit because motorists have diverted to other routes.

Marco Pacheco, who owns a liquor store along a main road in a Portuguese neighborhood of East Providence, said his business revenue is down 20% since the bridge closed late last year. But he's even more concerned about the long-term consequences.

"That traffic doesn't instantly come back. Folks have reshaped their patterns, their thought processes and so on," Pacheco said.

Business owners in Washington shared similar concerns about the indefinite closure of the Fishing Wars Memorial Bridge in an industrial area near the Port of Tacoma. A nearby Interstate 5 bridge provides a good alternative, but that means many motorists zoom right past an exit ramp without thinking about the nearby businesses, such as a Harley-Davidson motorcycle store.

"Is there a peril that exists?" Harley-Davidson store owner Ed Wallace asked. "Yeah, absolutely, a very serious one for me as a business owner."

FEDERAL FUNDING

A massive infrastructure law signed by President Joe Biden in 2021 directed \$40 billion to bridges over five years — the largest dedicated bridge investment in decades. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said that law already is funding over 7,800 bridge projects.

But even that will make only a dent in an estimated \$319 billion of needed bridge repairs nationwide, according to the American Road & Transportation Builders Association.

"The bottom line is that America's bridges need a lot of work," Buttigieg told the AP after visiting the closed Rhode Island bridge. He added: "The sooner we can address those significant bridges, the less likely they will be abruptly taken out of service, or worse, experience the risk of a collapse."

Israel acknowledges troops killed 2 Palestinians after video captures shooting on a Gaza beach

By JACK JEFFERY Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli troops shot dead two Palestinians and wounded a third on Gaza's beach, the military acknowledged Saturday, responding to a video that showed one man falling to the ground after walking in an open area and then a bulldozer pushing two bodies into the garbage-strewn sand.

The military said troops opened fire after the men allegedly ignored warning shots.

The video was broadcast earlier this week by the Al Jazeera television network. The origin of the footage remains unknown, as is the date of the incident. Al Jazeera said at least two of the three men seen in the blurry videos were waving white flags before being shot at.

The video follows a number of similar clips that have surfaced in recent months, showing Palestinians in war-stricken Gaza being fired at or killed while seeming to pose little threat to Israeli forces nearby. In January, footage showed a man being shot dead while walking in a group of people waving a white flag. Another video broadcast by Al Jazeera last week appeared to show an Israeli strike killing at least four Palestinians walking on a sandy path in southern Gaza.

In response to the beach shootings, the Israeli army said Saturday that the video was edited and depicts two separate incidents across different locations in central Gaza. Al Jazeera said both shootings took place close to each other on a beachfront southwest of Gaza City.

In the video, one man is seen walking away from Israeli forces before he falls to the ground, apparently after being shot. He is seen raising his hands above his head at one point, and Al Jazeera said he was waving a white flag in the moments before he is hit.

In a different part of the video, another Palestinian man is seen approaching nearby Israeli forces, waving what Al Jazeera says is also a white flag, before venturing off camera.

Finally, the bodies of two men are seen being dragged through the sand, one after the another, by an Israeli bulldozer. The army said the vehicle was used out of fear that the men may have had explosives on them.

The army said the two men who were killed had carried bags, although no bags were visible in the footage. The military said the wounded man was later released after questioning.

The Qatari network said all the men in the video were trying to return to their homes in northern Gaza, from where they were displaced earlier in the conflict. The north of the territory has seen the largest level of destruction since the start of the Israel-Hamas war nearly six months ago, with aid struggling to reach those that remain there.

Palestinians and human rights groups say the Israeli military has used disproportionate or indiscriminate force in its Gaza offensive, leading to heavy civilian casualties. They say that even when such killings are caught on video, military investigations rarely result in indictments of the soldiers involved.

Israel has held Hamas responsible for civilian casualties because the militants operate from within civilian areas. The army did not say whether the beach shootings would be investigated.

Israeli fire has killed over 32,000 Palestinians in Gaza, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-run enclave. The war erupted on Oct. 7. when Hamas-led militants invaded southern Israel, killing 1, 200 people, mostly Israelis, and kidnapping some 250 others.

The Baltimore collapse focused attention on vital bridges. Thousands are in poor shape across the US

By DAVID A. LIEB, MICHAEL CASEY, JEFF MCMURRAY and CHRISTOPHER KELLER Associated Press

After a yearlong closure, a bridge over the Puyallup River reopened in 2019 with a sturdy new span and a brand new name. It even won a national award.

But today, the Fishing Wars Memorial Bridge is closed again after federal officials raised concerns about a vintage section of the nearly century-old bridge that carried about 15,000 vehicles a day. It has no

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timetable to reopen because the city of Tacoma, Washington, first must raise millions of dollars to clean and inspect it.

"It's frustrating — and hard to comprehend how we got here," said Ed Wallace, whose Harley-Davidson motorcycle store has lost customers since the nearby bridge was shuttered.

Bridges fulfill a vital function that often goes overlooked until lives are lost or disrupted by a closure or collapse, like that of the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore early Tuesday. That bridge crumpled when struck by a cargo ship, not because of poor maintenance. But thousands of others stand in worse shape.

About 42,400 U.S. bridges are in poor condition, yet they carry about 167 million vehicles each day, according to the federal government. Four-fifths of them have problems with the legs holding them up or the arms supporting their load. And more than 15,800 of those bridges also were in poor shape a decade ago, according to an Associated Press analysis.

One of those persistently poor bridges — carrying about 96,000 westbound vehicles daily on Interstate 195 over the Seekonk River in Rhode Island — was suddenly shut to traffic late last year, resulting in long delays as drivers diverted to new routes. In March, the governor announced that the bridge must be demolished and replaced. That could cost up to \$300 million and take at least two years to complete.

These closures illustrate a nationwide issue.

"We have not maintained our infrastructure at the rate that we should for many, many years, and now we're trying to play catch-up," said Marsia Geldert-Murphey, president of the American Society of Civil Engineers.

When an old bridge gets closed because of safety concerns, it disrupts daily commutes, business supply chains and emergency response times by police, firefighters and medical personnel. Yet many bridges still await replacement or repairs because the costs can reach millions or even billions of dollars.

A FUNDING INFUSION

A massive infrastructure law signed by President Joe Biden in 2021 directed \$40 billion to bridges over five years — the largest dedicated bridge investment since construction of the interstate highway system, which began nearly 70 years ago.

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said that law already is funding over 7,800 bridge projects. One of the most notable is a \$3.6 billion project in Cincinnati to build a long-awaited new bridge carrying traffic on Interstates 71 and 75 over the Ohio River at the Kentucky border.

But funding from the infrastructure law will make only a dent in an estimated \$319 billion of needed bridge repairs nationwide, according to the American Road & Transportation Builders Association.

"The bottom line is that America's bridges need a lot of work," Buttigieg told the AP after visiting the closed Rhode Island bridge. He added: "The sooner we can address those significant bridges, the less likely they will be abruptly taken out of service, or worse, experience the risk of a collapse."

Inspectors rate bridges using a 0-9 scale, with 7 or above considered "good." A "poor" rating reflects a 4 or below. A mid-range rating is considered "fair." The nation's poor bridges are on average 70 years old.

Even before the federal funding infusion, the number of bridges in poor condition declined 22% over the past decade as structures were repaired, replaced or permanently closed, according to the AP's analysis. But in recent years, more bridges also slipped from good to fair condition.

COLLAPSING BRIDGES

Though potholes on bridges can jar cars, many of the most concerning problems are below the surface. Chipping concrete and rusting steel can weaken the piers and beams that keep a bridge upright. When the condition of substructures or superstructures deteriorates too much, a bridge typically is closed out of public safety concerns.

Though rare, bad bridges can eventually collapse.

Design flaws contributed to the evening rush hour collapse of an Interstate 35 bridge over the Mississippi River in Minneapolis in 2007. The collapse killed 13 people and injured 145 others. It also was costly financially. A state analysis estimated Minnesota's economy lost \$60 million in 2007-2008 due to increased travel time and operating costs for commuters and businesses.

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In January 2022, a bridge carrying a bus and several cars collapsed over Fern Hollow Creek in Pittsburgh, causing injuries but no deaths. Federal investigators determined the steel legs had corroded to the point of having visible holes, yet inspectors failed to calculate the severity of the problem and the city failed to follow repeated recommendations.

"This bridge didn't collapse just by an act of God. It collapsed because of a lack of maintenance and repair," National Transportation Safety Board member Michael Graham said.

FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

Iowa has the most poor bridges, followed by Pennsylvania, Illinois and Missouri. The twin Burlington Street bridges in Iowa City, Iowa, exemplify the financial challenges facing old bridges. The state owns the southbound span carrying vehicles over the Iowa River while the city owns the northbound span of what's also known as state Highway 1.

The city's part, constructed in 1915, was rated in poor condition in the 2023 and 2013 National Bridge Inventory. Inspection reports show numerous cracks and structural deficiencies in the concrete bridge. The state's side, built in 1968, is in much better condition.

Although the federal infrastructure law provided a grant to analyze the bridges, the split ownership has made it difficult to fund the more than \$30 million estimated cost of a replacement.

"It's not something we can just fund in a year and say: 'Here we go, let's do it quick,'" said city engineer Jason Havel. "It takes years of planning, years of working through dedicated funding."

ECONOMIC EFFECTS

In Rhode Island, problems had been mounting for the I-195 Washington Bridge connecting Providence to East Providence. It closed after an engineer in December noticed the failure of multiple steel tie rods in concrete beams at two piers. A subsequent examination found widespread structural problems.

Joseph McHugh, an engineer with 40 years of experience in bridge and road construction, reviewed a draft engineering report compiled after the bridge's closure along with inspection reports from July 2022 and July 2023.

"This failure didn't occur overnight," McHugh told the AP. "To me, it should have been caught by an inspection, not by a contractor or whomever was looking at what was going on."

The U.S. Department of Justice is investigating allegations that false payment claims for the bridge's construction, inspection or repair were submitted to the federal government.

Marco Pacheco, who owns a liquor store along a main road in a Portuguese neighborhood of East Providence, said he believes "mismanagement," "negligence" and "incompetence" caused the closure. His business revenue is down 20% since the bridge closed. But he's even more concerned about the long-term consequences.

"That traffic doesn't instantly come back. Folks have reshaped their patterns, their thought processes and so on," Pacheco said.

Business owners in Washington share similar concerns about the indefinite closure of the Fishing Wars Memorial Bridge, in an industrial area near the Port of Tacoma. Several years ago, the city spent \$42 million to replace a span leading up to the river. But the bridge was abruptly closed again last October after the Federal Highway Administration raised concerns that debris had prevented the inspection of potentially corroded steel connection points.

To clean and inspect the bridge, the city first must encapsulate it to protect debris from falling into the river. But the city lacks the more than \$6 million needed for the project. It also has no means of paying for a potential \$280 million replacement.

A nearby Interstate 5 bridge provides a good alternative but that means many motorists zoom right past an exit ramp without thinking about the Harley-Davidson store or other nearby businesses. At least one shop already has closed.

Wallace, the Harley-Davidson store owner, wishes the city could re-open the bridge, at least temporarily.

"Is there a peril that exists?" Wallace asks rhetorically. "Yeah, absolutely, a very serious one for me as a business owner."

UK counterterrorism police investigate an attack on an Iranian TV presenter outside his London home

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British counterterrorism police are investigating the stabbing of an Iranian television presenter outside his home in London as concern grows over threats to a Farsi-language satellite news channel long critical of Iran's theocratic government.

Pouria Zeraati, a presenter at London-based Iran International, was stabbed in the leg Friday afternoon and is in stable condition at a hospital, the station said. His condition is not believed to be life-threatening.

London's Metropolitan Police Service said Zeraati's occupation, together with recent threats to U.K.-based Iranian journalists, triggered the counterterrorism probe, even though the motivation for the attack is still unclear.

"While we continue to assess the circumstances of this incident, detectives are following a number of lines of inquiry and our priority at this time is to try and identify whoever was behind this attack and to arrest them," Commander Dominic Murphy, head of the Met's Counter Terrorism Command, said in a statement.

"I appreciate the wider concern this incident may cause — particularly amongst others in similar lines of work, and those from Iranian communities."

Iran International spokesman Adam Baillie said the stabbing was "hugely frightening." Although the channel's journalists have been threatened in the past, this is the first attack of its kind, Baillie told the BBC.

"It was a shocking, shocking incident, whatever the outcome of an investigation reveals," he said.

Mehdi Hosseini Matin, Iran's charge d'affaires in the UK, said "we deny any link" to the incident.

Police say they have disrupted "a number" of plots to kill or kidnap people in the U.K. who were seen as enemies of the Iranian government. Officers are working with intelligence agencies to disrupt future plots and provide protection for the targeted organizations and individuals, police said.

Early last year, Iran International temporarily shut down its operations in London and moved to studios in Washington, D.C., after what it described as an escalation of "state-backed threats from Iran." The station resumed operations at a new location in London last September.

An Austrian man was convicted in December of attempting to collect information likely to be useful for terrorism after security guards spotted him carrying out surveillance on the former headquarters of Iran International. Magomed-Husejn Dovtaev, 31, was sentenced to three years and six months in prison.

Alicia Kearns, chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons, expressed concern that Britain still isn't doing enough to protect opponents of the Iranian government.

"Whilst we don't know the circumstances of this attack, Iran continues to hunt down those brave enough to speak out against the regime," Kearns said on X, formerly Twitter. "Yet I remain unconvinced that we and our allies have clear strategies to protect people in our countries from them, and protect our interests abroad."

Earlier this month, Foreign Secretary David Cameron condemned the conviction in absentia of 10 journalists from the BBC's Persian service on propaganda charges against the Islamic Republic of Iran, calling it "completely unacceptable."

"And also, when I last met the Iranian foreign minister, I raised the case of the fact that Iran was paying thugs to try and murder Iranian journalists providing free and independent information for Iran TV in Britain," Cameron said in the House of Lords. "On both counts, in my view, they are guilty."

A man suspected of holding 4 hostages for hours in a Dutch nightclub has been arrested

By ALEKSANDAR FURTULA Associated Press

EDE, Netherlands (AP) — Dutch police detained a man Saturday after he left a nightclub where four people had been held hostage for hours, bringing a peaceful end to a tense standoff.

"We are exceptionally happy that it ended this way. That the victims came out safely and that we were

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able to arrest this suspect without using violence," said Marthyne Kunst, head of the regional public prosecutor's office.

There was no immediate word on a motive, but police and prosecutors said they did not believe it was a terrorist incident. Police said the hostage-taker was armed with knives, and a backpack he carried was being examined to establish if it contained explosives.

The hostage-taking in the central Dutch market town of Ede, 85 kilometers (53 miles) southeast of Amsterdam, ended around midday when a man walked out of the Cafe Petticoat club and was ordered by armed police to kneel with his hands on his head. He was then handcuffed before being led into a waiting police car.

Kunst told reporters that the man was known to law enforcement authorities and had previously been convicted of threatening behavior. She gave no further details, citing privacy and the ongoing investigation.

The suspect's identity was not released. Ede Mayor René Verhulst said he was a Dutch citizen.

Authorities also released no details about the four hostages.

Verhulst said that after an emotionally charged morning, "everything is fine. The hostage-taker is arrested by the police and they are now speaking to him. And the hostages are free, they are very emotional."

Earlier, three young hostages walked out of the club with their hands above their heads. A fourth person was released shortly before the suspect was arrested. The hostages were all workers at the club.

Heavily armed police and special arrest teams, some wearing masks, had gathered outside the popular club. Some 150 nearby homes were evacuated and trains did not stop at the town's station.

Some of Trump's allies in Congress already support his 2025 ideas on deportations and Jan. 6 pardons

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — As Donald Trump campaigns on promises of mass deportations and pardons for those convicted in the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the Capitol, his ideas are being met with little pushback and some enthusiasm by a new era of Republicans in Congress.

It's a shift from the first time around when the presumptive Republican presidential nominee encountered early skepticism and, once in a while, the uproar of condemnation.

Rather than being dismissed as campaign bluster or Trump speaking his mind to rouse his most devoted voters, his words are being adopted as party platforms, potentially able to move quickly from rhetoric to reality with a West Wing in waiting and crucial backing from key corners on Capitol Hill.

"We're going to have to deport some people," said Republican Sen. JD Vance of Ohio, one of Trump's biggest supporters, days after campaigning alongside Trump in his home state.

While Democratic President Joe Biden and his allies are sounding alarms about Trump's proposed agenda for a second term — and his promise that he would be a "dictator" but only on Day one — the Republican Party in Congress is undergoing a massive political realignment toward Trump's "Make America Great Again" movement.

Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, who clashed with Trump at times particularly over the Capitol riot while also pushing through dozens of his judicial picks, is preparing to step down from his leadership role at the end of the year. House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., faces constant threats of his ouster.

Rising in the churn are MAGA-aligned newcomers such as Vance, who wasn't yet elected during Trump's presidency, and Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia, who was elected as Trump lost to Biden in 2020. Both Vance and Greene are considered potential vice presidential picks by Trump.

Greene, who recently filed a motion to potentially force Johnson from the speakership, said it's too soon to be discussing a second-term policy agenda or who will fill West Wing positions.

As she campaigns for Trump, she said her priority is just winning the election.

Other Republicans in the House and Senate often simply shrug when asked about Trump's agenda, pointing to policies they like and others they might support.

Meanwhile, a cast of former Trump White House officials in Washington is pushing out policy papers,

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drafting executive actions and preparing legislation that would be needed to turn Trump's ideas into reality. These efforts are separate from Trump's campaign, whose senior leaders have repeatedly insisted that outside groups do not speak for them, though many group leaders would be in line to serve in a new Trump administration.

If Trump wins, "we are going to have a plan — and the personnel — ready to roll," said Paul Dans, a former Trump administration official who heads the conservative Heritage Foundation's Project 2025, which is collecting thousands of resumes and training staff for a potential second Trump administration.

Trump himself has suggested having a "very tiny little desk" on the Capitol steps so he can sign documents on Inauguration Day, Jan. 20, 2025.

"On Day 1 of President Trump's new administration, Americans will have a strong leader," said Karoline Leavitt, the campaign's national press secretary.

Congress pushed back at times during the first Trump administration, a stable of Republicans joining with Democrats to halt some of his proposals.

Republicans and Democrats resisted a White House effort to commandeer funds for a U.S.-Mexico border wall, leading to the longest government shutdown in history. Republican Sen. John McCain of Arizona, who died in 2018, famously gave a thumbs-down to Trump's effort to repeal the health law known as the Affordable Care Act.

And after Trump supporters stormed the Capitol to try to reverse his 2020 loss to Biden, 10 Republicans in the House voted to impeach Trump for inciting the insurrection and seven Republican senators voted to convict him. Many of those lawmakers have since left Congress. One, Sen. Mitt Romney of Utah, is retiring at the end of his term. Had the Senate convicted Trump, it could have then moved to bar him from holding federal office again.

As a result, there are fewer lawmakers now in Congress willing or able to stand up to Trump or publicly oppose his agenda as he has effectively commandeered the party apparatus, including the Republican National Committee, as his own.

"Those people are all kind of flushed out," said Jason Chaffetz, a former GOP representative who is close to Trump allies on and off Capitol Hill.

Trump still falsely argues the 2020 election was stolen and is claiming he should be immune from a four-count federal indictment alleging he defrauded Americans with his effort to overturn the results. He has made Jan. 6 a cornerstone of his 2024 campaign and often refers to those imprisoned for the attack as "hostages."

GOP Sen. Josh Hawley of Missouri, a leader of the effort to challenge the certification of electors on Jan. 6, said he does not agree with the idea of a "blanket pardon" for those convicted in the riot — some 1,300 people have been charged.

But he said he is closely watching the upcoming Supreme Court case contesting that rioters obstructed an official proceeding, which could call into question hundreds of cases, including some of the charges against Trump.

"My view is, let's see what the Supreme Court says on that," Hawley said.

Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, once a staunch Trump critic after their fierce rivalry during the 2016 campaign, said anyone who engaged in violence at the Capitol on Jan. 6 should be prosecuted. But Cruz, who also helped challenge the 2020 election that day, was open to pardons for others.

"One of the saddest legacies of the Biden presidency," he said, was what he called the "weaponization" of the Justice Department to "persecute" thousands of people who engaged in "peaceful protest."

Perhaps Trump's most enduring campaign promise in 2024 is his repeated pledge to launch the "largest domestic deportation operation in American history" — reviving the immigration and border security debates that helped define his presidency.

He points to the Eisenhower-era roundup of immigrants as a model, one that goes far behind his 2017 travel ban on migrants from mostly Muslim countries or the family separations at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., has been a leader on immigration issues, particularly the 2013 bill that provided a 10-year path to citizenship for immigrants in the U.S. without legal documentation, though it ultimately

failed to become law.

But with migrant crossings hitting record highs during Biden's term, Rubio said, "Whether they're deported through the hearings that they're waiting for, they're deported through some effort to expedite it, something's going to have to happen."

"No one's saying it would be easy, but something's going to have to happen with all the people that have come here," he said.

Added Vance: "I think you have to be open to deporting anyone who came to the country illegally."

Vanessa Cardenas, a former Biden campaign official who now heads the advocacy organization America's Voice, said she was worried that Trump allies in a second term would "actually know how to work the levers of government."

"I worry that there's a little bit of amnesia about how cruel his policies were," she said, describing the fear in migrant communities. "Our tolerance level for his language and his ideas keeps increasing."

Hours to make and seconds to destroy, Holy Week flower carpets are a labor of love in Guatemala

By GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO Associated Press

ANTIGUA, Guatemala (AP) — Overnight before the Holy Week processions pass in front of his house, Luis Álvarez works with two dozen family members and friends to create an elaborate, 115-foot-long (35-meter-long) carpet out of colored sawdust on the street.

"A carpet is a moment of thanksgiving for all the blessings we receive all year long," said the devout Catholic who's been preparing Holy Week carpets for more than 30 years. "Each speck of sawdust is a prayer."

For him and thousands of other residents of this volcano-fringed colonial city, participating in some of Guatemala's oldest and most popular Holy Week traditions is a laborious but unmissable way to be closer to God as well as to their families and a once tightknit community that's increasingly diluted by mass tourism.

"All my life this will unite me with my father, and even more so with my sons," said Francisco González-Figueroa, who as a child became an aspiring cucurucho, as the processions' float carriers are called, and now takes his two boys to help. "One is always waiting for this moment. It's the sensations — contact with the divine, but also the music, the colors, the smells."

He was among more than 9,100 cucuruchos who — in groups of 104 men — took turns carrying the block-long float with a 300-year-old, life-sized statue of Jesus bearing the cross. They started from the church of La Merced around 9 a.m. on Palm Sunday and were still winding their way through the cobblestoned streets after the punishingly hot tropical sun had set.

The brotherhood of Jesús Nazareno de La Merced, founded in 1675, runs one of the oldest processions in Guatemala, but there are half a dozen others in Antigua alone in the week preceding Easter — peaking with two on Good Friday.

Tens of thousands of people, of diverse ages and professions, sign up from across the region to be cucuruchos for a fee of about \$5. That helps the various brotherhoods pay for the elaborate, ever-changing float designs that accompany the sacred images and further their main mission of evangelizing.

The number of carriers — men for the main floats and women for the lighter ones that follow with images of the Virgin Mary — has been booming after processions were unprecedentedly canceled or restricted for three years during the pandemic.

"We asked Jesus to remove the pandemic because we wanted to carry him," said Julio de Matta, who's been a cucurucho for two decades. Like many participants and Antigua residents, he refers to the float as Jesus himself, a sign of his deeply felt faith.

"It's a feeling of penance. Since we were children, our fathers instilled much devotion," he added an hour before the Palm Sunday procession started. Even though his turn to carry wouldn't come for 12 hours, he was already waiting by La Merced church wearing the traditional white veil and violet tunic — the same shade as the town's jacaranda blossoms.

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A few blocks away, Ivan Lemus was also waiting, but for the cucuruchos to plod over the very first carpet he made. It was a promise to his ill grandmother.

Lemus and more than a dozen friends had worked overnight to prepare the base over the cobblestones. Then, they used stencils and spoonfuls of colored sawdust, to create the design, featuring a cross with grapes, wheat, a butterfly. It was all framed by actual colorful carrots, cauliflowers and corn. In the early morning, they had to redo a corner after a passing motorcyclist accidentally slid over and erased it.

Looking excited if bleary-eyed, Lemus, 28, said it has always been a dream to have the procession cross over one of his carpets.

"Jesus passes in front of your house, and you're offering something and are being blessed," Lemus said as a friend sprayed the sawdust with water to keep it from blowing away.

Down the street by the ruins of a 17th century church, the family that runs a hairdressing salon kept rushing back to their carpet to fix their blown-over little wooden boxes topped with crosses and filled with yellow chrysanthemums and other flowers.

"It's our way to thank God because the whole year we have work," said Alejandra Santa Cruz, as the procession got so close that drumbeats and incense clouds filled the air.

While homes and family businesses still line the historic center, Antigua's popularity with international tourists means many have been taken over by hotels, Airbnbs and restaurants — fraying the social fabric that makes Holy Week special.

"It's the only moment to get back the streets in Antigua," said Leonel González, who started as a cucurucho when he was 10 with his grandfather, father and uncles. "Antigua keeps belonging less and less to the people of Antigua."

He still travels more than three hours from the city where he works as a doctor each Good Friday to carry the float in Antigua and to catch up on local gossip with childhood friends. They might never meet the rest of the year, but without fail they always find each other.

"When one takes up his place carrying the float, one gives thanks for being there one more year, and remembers those who have gone," González-Figueroa said, adding that Holy Week events get remembered and planned at family gatherings all year long. "I always tell my sons, this doesn't make you better or worse, but it unites us."

That's why Álvarez is happy to see that young people who often no longer have homes in the historic center are interested in learning about the carpet traditions, despite the effort and cost they entail. He remembers one night in 2011 when three thunderstorms hit at intervals, forcing him to start over each time and complete the work with barely enough materials and just before the procession.

For Good Friday, he planned two different carpets, each of about 1,100 square feet (105 square meters) with 32 main designs — one made in somberly colored sawdust for the morning and one in flowers for the afternoon, when the wind picks up.

But even a few well-arranged pine needles are pleasing to God, if that carpet is made with the heart, and every Antigüeño has at least one design in their head, Alvarez said.

Don't they mind, then, seeing months of planning and overnights of painstaking work literally trampled into oblivion in less than minute?

On the contrary, he answers with a smile: "Waiting for that moment is special, waiting for Jesus to pass by."

LGBTQ-inclusive church in Cuba welcomes all in a country that once sent gay people to labor camps

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO Associated Press

MATANZAS, Cuba (AP) — Proudly wearing a rainbow-colored clergy stole and a rainbow flag in her clerical collar, the Rev. Elaine Saralegui welcomed all to her LGBTQ+ inclusive church in the Cuban port city of Matanzas.

"We're all invited. And no one can exclude us," Saralegui told same-sex couples who held hands sitting

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on wooden pews in the Metropolitan Community Church where she had recently married her wife.

These words and this kind of gathering would have been unimaginable before in the largest country in the conservative and mostly Christian Caribbean, where anti-gay hostility is still widespread.

Cuba repressed gay people after its 1959 revolution led by Fidel Castro and sent many to labor camps. But in recent years, the communist-run island barred anti-gay discrimination, and a 2022 government-backed "family law" — approved by popular vote — allowed same-sex couples the right to marry and adopt.

Members of Cuba's LGBTQ+ community say it marked a milestone that has allowed them to embrace their gender identity and worship more freely in a country that for decades after the revolution was officially atheist. Over the past quarter century, it has gradually become more tolerant of religions.

"It's huge. There aren't enough words to say what an opportunity it is to achieve the dream of so many," said Maikol Añorga. He was with his husband, Vladimir Marin, near the altar, where at a Friday service they joined other congregants taking turns to lay offerings of white and pink wildflowers to thank God.

"It's the opportunity for all people to be present here," he said, "to gather and participate without regards to their gender, race or religion."

The Catholic Church, in its doctrine, still rejects same-sex marriage and condemns any sexual relations between gay or lesbian partners as "intrinsically disordered." Yet Pope Francis has done far more than any previous pope to make the church a more welcoming place for LGBTQ+ people.

In December, the pope formally approved letting Catholic priests bless same-sex couples, a policy shift that aimed at making the church more inclusive while maintaining its strict ban on gay marriage.

The family law in Cuba faced opposition from the country's Catholic church as well as the growing number of evangelical churches that have mushroomed across the island.

Anti-LGBTQ+ rights demonstrations have faded since 2022. But back then, evangelical pastors spoke out from the pulpit, and handed out Bibles and pamphlets in the streets invoking God's "original plan" for unions between men and women and calling gay relationships a sin.

Still, the measure was overwhelmingly approved by nearly 67% of voters. It came after a huge government campaign of nationwide informative meetings and extensive state media coverage amid food shortages and blackouts that have prompted thousands to immigrate to the United States during one of one of the worst economic crises to hit Cuba in decades.

At the time, President Miguel Díaz-Canel told Cubans in a video message that he was pleased about the wide support that the measure received despite tough economic challenges. He celebrated, tweeting: "Love is now the law."

For years, the movement for LGBTQ+ rights has been proudly led by Cuba's best-known advocate for gay rights: Mariela Castro, daughter of former President Raul Castro and niece of his brother Fidel.

"This just brings happiness. This just makes people feel truly worthy, respected, loved, considered — a true citizen with their rights and duties," Castro told The Associated Press.

"I think we've taken a very valuable step forward."

Long before same-sex couples were granted the right to marry, Castro was advocating for it, while training police on relations with the LGBTQ+ community and sponsoring symbolical ceremonies where Protestant clergy from the U.S. and Canada blessed unions as part of the annual Pride parade.

"It was a beautiful spiritual experience for me, and I believe for those people as well," said Castro, who heads Cuba's National Center for Sex Education and is a member of the National Assembly. "First, our campaign was: 'Let love be the law.' Now, love is the law, and we're going to keep celebrating it."

In 2010, her uncle, then-retired leader Fidel Castro admitted that he was wrong to discriminate against gay people. Asked about this, she said it helped mark a turning point in public attitude.

"I think he was honest. It was good and healthy for him to say this because it helped the rest who were still clinging to prejudices to understand that this kind of thought can change," she said.

"Even in a revolutionary leader like him, there were prejudices that evolved, and he was able to understand it and help clear the way for change."

In the early years after the 1959 revolution, homophobia in Cuba, she said, was no different than in the rest of the world. In the United States, homosexuality was deemed a mental disorder by psychiatric

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authorities, and gay sex was a crime in most states. Currently, Russia — a major supporter of Fidel Castro when it was the core of the communist Soviet Union — is bucking the worldwide trend of greater LGBTQ+ acceptance with a multi-pronged crackdown on LGBTQ+ activism.

The previous Cuban Family Code, dating back to 1975, stipulated that marriage was between a man and a woman — not between two people — which excluded lifelong partners from inheritance rights.

The new law goes further than marriage equality — which activists tried to include in the Constitution in 2019 without success — or the ability for gay couples to adopt or use surrogates. It also expanded rights for children, the elderly and women.

The first members of Saralegui's congregation began gathering on a house terrace in Matanzas over a decade ago to sing and pray.

"The sky was our ceiling and when it rained, we'd all pack into a small room," Saralegui said. In 2015, with support from the U.S.-based LGBTQ+ affirming Metropolitan Community Churches, they converted a house into their church, decked with wooden pews and a stained-glass cross that hangs above the altar. Underneath, a local Tibetan Buddhist group that meets here during the week stores its musical instruments in an example of interfaith partnership.

"This church is a family," said Saralegui, who has a tattoo of the Jesus fish on one of her forearms and wears a Buddhist bracelet. "It's a sacred space, not just because there's a cross or an altar, but because it's the most sacred space for these people to come to — it's where they come to have a safe space."

After receiving Communion, congregant Nico Salazar, 18, said he was glad to have found that safe space here after members of an evangelical church where he grew up attending asked him not to return when he embraced his gender identity.

"It's the essence of the Bible: God is love, and other churches should emphasize that instead of repressing and harming others with a supposed sin," said Salazar, who was born a woman and this year started hormone treatment.

"Sin and love are not the same," said Salazar, who wore an earring in the shape of a cross.

"And to love," he added, "is not a sin."

Today in History: March 31 Ferdinand and Isabella expel Jews from Spain

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Sunday, March 31, the 91st day of 2024. There are 275 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 31, 1492, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain issued an edict expelling Jews from Spanish soil, except those willing to convert to Christianity.

On this date:

In 1814, Paris was occupied by a coalition of Russian, Prussian and Austrian forces; the surrender of the French capital forced the abdication of Emperor Napoleon.

In 1917, the United States took formal possession of the Virgin Islands from Denmark.

In 1931, Notre Dame college football coach Knute Rockne (noot RAHK'-nee), 43, was killed in the crash of a TWA plane in Bazaar, Kansas.

In 1968, at the conclusion of a nationally broadcast address on Vietnam, President Lyndon B. Johnson stunned listeners by declaring, "I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President."

In 1991, the Warsaw Pact military alliance came to an end.

In 1993, actor Brandon Lee, 28, was accidentally shot to death during the filming of a movie in Wilmington, North Carolina, when he was hit by a bullet fragment that had become lodged inside a prop gun.

In 1995, baseball players agreed to end their 232-day strike after a judge granted a preliminary injunction.

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tion against club owners.

In 2004, four American civilian contractors were killed in Fallujah, Iraq; frenzied crowds dragged the burned, mutilated bodies and strung two of them from a bridge.

In 2005, Terri Schiavo (SHY'-voh), 41, died at a hospice in Pinellas Park, Florida, 13 days after her feeding tube was removed in a wrenching right-to-die court fight.

In 2009, Benjamin Netanyahu took office as Israel's new prime minister after the Knesset approved his government.

In 2018, amid tight security, Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai and her family returned to her hometown in Pakistan for the first time since she was shot in the head in 2012 for her work as an advocate for young women's education.

In 2019, rapper Nipsey Hussle was fatally shot outside the clothing store he had founded to help rebuild his troubled South Los Angeles neighborhood; he was 33.

In 2020, Britain's Prince Harry and his wife Meghan officially stepped down from duties as members of the royal family.

In 2021, the Pentagon swept away Trump-era policies that largely banned transgender people from serving in the military.

In 2022, scientists announced they had finally finished deciphering the full genetic blueprint for human life.

Today's Birthdays: Actor William Daniels is 97. Actor Richard Chamberlain is 90. Actor Shirley Jones is 90. Musician Herb Alpert is 89. Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., is 84. Former U.S. Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass., is 84. Actor Christopher Walken is 81. Comedian Gabe Kaplan is 80. Sen. Angus King, I-Maine, is 80. Rock musician Mick Ralphs (Bad Company; Mott the Hoople) is 80. Former Vice President Al Gore is 77. Author David Eisenhower is 76. Actor Rhea Perlman is 76. Actor Ed Marinaro is 74. Rock musician Angus Young (AC/DC) is 69. Actor Marc McClure is 67. Actor William McNamara is 59. Alt-country musician Bob Crawford (The Avett Brothers) is 53. Actor Ewan McGregor is 53. Actor Erica Tazel is 49. Actor Judi Shekoni is 46. Rapper Tony Yayo is 46. Actor Kate Micucci is 44. Actor Brian Tyree Henry is 42. Actor Melissa Ordway is 41. Musician and producer Jack Antonoff (Fun, Taylor Swift) is 40. Actor Jessica Szohr is 39.