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Democracy Dies in Darkness

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2026 • \$4

8 skiers found dead after Calif. avalanche

Six survivors from 15-person group; search goes on for one missing

BY IAN LIVINGSTON AND BEN NOLL

Eight backcountry skiers were found dead on Wednesday as a significant rescue effort continues for one still missing near Truckee, California, following an avalanche in the area the day before, according to the Nevada County Sheriff's Office.

With eight people confirmed killed by the massive snow slide — described as the length of a football field — it is now the deadliest avalanche in modern California history. It surpasses the toll of seven killed in a March 1982 avalanche at the Alpine Meadows — now Palisades Tahoe — ski resort, in the same general region.

In an earlier email to The Washington Post, Leslie Williams of the Nevada County Sheriff's Office confirmed that six survivors from a 15-person group had been located and were being transported by rescue teams to receive medical care, but conditions continued to be a challenge for rescuers.

"There is limited access to the area affected by the avalanche," Williams said.

Officials initially believed there were 16 people in the skiing group, but that number was later revised to reflect 15 people who actually went on the trip, the sheriff's office said in an update late Tuesday local time. At their Wednesday morning news conference, the office reported there were nine women and six men in

SEE RESCUE ON A2

In reversal, FDA to assess mRNA-based flu vaccine

BY RACHEL ROUBEIN

The Food and Drug Administration has reversed course and agreed to review Moderna's application for the first mRNA-based flu vaccine under a revised approach, company and federal officials said Wednesday.

Last week, Vinay Prasad, the agency's top vaccine regulator, declined to review the vaccine, a rare move that shocked the company and that public health experts saw as the latest example of the Trump administration's hostility toward immunization. Federal health officials argued that Moderna lacked an "adequate and well-controlled" study and should have used a high dose flu shot for adults 65 and older in a large clinical trial.

The company met with the FDA and proposed seeking full approval for the vaccine for adults 50 to 64 years of age and accelerated approval for adults 65 and older, along with a requirement to further study the vaccine in older adults, according to Moderna.

"We appreciate the FDA's engagement in a constructive Type A meeting and its agreement to advance our application for review," Moderna CEO Stéphane Bancel said in a statement. "Pending FDA approval, we look forward to making our flu vaccine

SEE VACCINE ON A9



Jewish settlers clear land last month to build homes at a new unauthorized outpost near the West Bank settlement of Almon.

HEIDI LEVINE/FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Israel deepening control in West Bank

Despite Trump's opposition to annexation, experts say moves may lead to seizure of land

This article is by Abbie Cheeseman, Lior Soroka, Hazem Balousha, Siham Shamalakh and Heba Farouk Mahfouz

Israel has moved aggressively in recent days to deepen its control over the occupied West Bank, unilaterally adopting policies that analysts say represent a major shift toward annexation and appear to defy President Donald Trump, who has said he opposes annexation but has not publicly pushed back on the escalating Israeli measures.

This month, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's security cabinet, in a closed-door meeting, adopted measures to make it easier for settlers to purchase land and circumvent the Palestinian Authority in areas it has controlled since a 1995 agreement under the Oslo accords. The move was widely condemned in the Arab world and globally as a violation of international law and an undoing of decades-old regional security agreements.

After that decision, the White House issued a statement reiterating Trump's

opposition to annexation, and the president emphasized his position in an interview with Axios. "I am against annexation," Trump said, adding: "We have enough things to think about now. We don't need to be dealing with the West Bank."

Both Trump and the White House statement brushed over his opposition to annexation in vague terms, and neither referenced the accelerating measures by Israel to expand settlements.

SEE WEST BANK ON A12

Sewage spill is called a crisis

BOWSER REQUESTS HELP WITH CLEANUP

Emergency declaration in pollution of the Potomac

BY JENNY GATHRIGHT AND DANA HEDGPETH

D.C. Mayor Muriel E. Bowser (D) declared the Potomac River sewage spill a public emergency Wednesday and requested federal assistance with cleanup as the Trump administration continued to criticize local leaders for allegedly mishandling the environmental disaster.

Bowser also requested a presidential disaster declaration, and she asked the federal government to reimburse the D.C. government and D.C. Water for all costs associated with the spill and recovery effort.

"This is the best way to ensure that we have the full weight of resources that quite frankly the residents deserve," Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice Lindsey Appiah said in a news conference.

The spill began in mid-January, when part of a major D.C. Water sewage pipeline called the Potomac Interceptor collapsed, flooding the Potomac River with about 234 million gallons of wastewater. The sewer line carries about 60 million gallons of wastewater daily from the Virginia and Maryland suburbs to D.C. for treatment.

The cause of the collapse is

SEE SEWAGE SPILL ON A9



In her element

Mikaela Shiffrin delivered a dominant performance in slalom, seizing a gold with two splendid runs and helping to erase the sting of failure at the Beijing Games. Story, B1

FEMA travel to disaster sites limited amid funding lapse

BY BRIANNA SACKS

The Department of Homeland Security has halted almost all travel amid the ongoing standoff over its funding, restricting the ability of hundreds of Federal Emergency Management Agency staff members to move in and out of disaster-affected areas, according to emails and documents obtained by The Washington Post.

Much of the department ran out of money over the weekend after negotiations stalled between the White House and Democratic lawmakers over restrictions on federal immigration enforcement. It is normal

for the department to stop employees from traveling across the country for various assignments, such as trainings, during a funding lapse, 10 current and former FEMA officials said. But it is unusual for a government shutdown to impede ongoing disaster recovery efforts, the officials explained, saying it further reflects sweeping policies instituted under Homeland Security Secretary Kristi L. Noem.

Typically, FEMA staffers who work on disasters are able to travel to and from ongoing recovery projects regardless of DHS funding issues. And a current veteran officials said that disaster

SEE FEMA ON A7

Trump's Board of Peace to meet as Gaza stability plan languishes

BY KAREN DEYOUNG

President Donald Trump's Board of Peace will hold its inaugural meeting Thursday in Washington, gathering officials from dozens of countries to hear a status report on his peace plan for the Gaza Strip and what he has described as the board's "unlimited potential" to become "the most consequential international body in history."

"We're going to have all world leaders," Trump told reporters Monday.

But it remains unclear which leaders, or how many, will show

up for the meeting to be held at the recently renamed Donald J. Trump U.S. Institute of Peace.

Of the 60 or so invitations he sent to heads of state to serve on the board, about two dozen countries have agreed to join. They include some who are far removed from events in the Middle East but in Trump's good graces, such as Argentina's Javier Milei and Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orban.

Belarus's dictator, Alexander Lukashenko, accepted the invitation but is sending his foreign minister. More than half the countries

SEE TRUMP ON A11

IN THE NEWS

CDC critic now in charge Jay Bhattacharya, a top Trump administration health official and co-author of the Great Barrington Declaration, will lead the agency on an acting basis. A5

'No censorship' FCC chief Brendan Carr defended the agency's role in a dropped Stephen Colbert interview. A2

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Belgium summoned a U.S. ambassador over posts accusing officials of antisemitism. A13

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Ilia Malinin says the person he was when he came to Olympics a few weeks ago is "dust." B1
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Dennis Basso, the luxury fashion designer known for his fur and occasion clothing, has been dressing notable women for decades. B7

THE REGION
A prison ministry baptized over 50 inmates amid a "paradigm shift" in rehabilitation. B13
LOCAL LIVING
Let's get weird. A bathtub on the porch, a snail on a door hinge — the move toward strange is about prioritizing authenticity at home.

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