

Meth bust

More than 200 pounds of met is dicovered during a traffic stop in S.D.

PAGE 4



Sharing knowledge

SDSU experts will be on hand at Dakotafest next week.

PAGE 3



Weather

Partly sunny Saturday with a high near 87. Saturday night's low near 69

MORE WEATHER ON PAGE 3



Volume 146  
No. 150  
Brookings, SD

The Brookings

Register

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FRIDAY  
August 15, 2025

have you heard?

Register turns the page

BROOKINGS — A new chapter has likely opened for the Brookings Register. The newspaper, which has served the Brookings community for more than a century, closed its doors last week when its parent company, News Media Corporation closed down. “It’s something that has truly shaken this community over the last several days,” said Brookings City Councilor Holly Tilton Byrne said of the newspaper closure at this week’s board meeting.

However, another out-of-state company has expressed interest in taking over the South Dakota operations that were abandoned by NMC. In addition to the Register, NMC owned and operated three of other newspapers in South Dakota, the Huron Daily Plainsman, as well as two weekly newsopapers, the Moody County Enterprise in Flandreau and the Redfield Press. The newly revived newspaper could be back in print by as early as next week, according to Shaun Sarvis, who will oversee operations for both the Huron Plainsman and the Register.

Sarvis added that the paper will work to take care of the needs of subscribers and advertisers as the newspaper will continue to serve the community. The paper turned daily in January 1970, publishing five days per week, Monday through Friday. Later that year, the paper was sold to Stauffer Communications of Topeka, Kansas. Stauffer held onto the Register until 1990, when Omaha World-Herald of Omaha, Nebraska purchased the paper. The newspaper added a sixth day of publication—Saturday—in March 1995. News Media Corporation, of Rochelle, Illinois, bought the Register on Feb. 1, 1999. The company ceased and shuttered the paper on Aug. 6.

— From staff reports

Volga family loses home in fire

American Red Cross lending a helping hand

By MONDELL KECK  
The Brookings Register

VOLGA — A family of two adults and six children escaped injury in an Aug. 8 blaze in Volga that left their home with an estimated \$220,000 in damage, along with the death of a pet cat. The blaze was reported at 2:38 p.m. at the

home of Eddie and Jeanne Waldner, 315 Samara Ave., No. 15, according to information from the Brookings County Sheriff’s Office. The American Red Cross is assisting the family in the aftermath of the fire. “A 13-year-old female was at the residence at the time and reported the fire to her father,” Assistant Sheriff David Biteler wrote. “When units arrived on scene, there was heavy smoke and flames in the northwest corner of the house.” He said the blaze damaged four rooms, and that there was extensive smoke damage else-

where. While the cause of the blaze hasn’t been determined, Biteler said the owners indicated there was a battery charging for an RC car in the room where the fire started. Responding agencies were fire departments from Volga, Bruce and Brookings, Brookings Ambulance and Brookings County Emergency Management.

— Contact Mondell Keck at [mondell.keck@brookingsregister.c](mailto:mondell.keck@brookingsregister.c)



Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight

From left, Tim Ridgway, vice president of health affairs and Sanford School of Medicine dean, speaks with medical students including Tanner Smith and Tanner Berg, as well as South Dakota Gov. Larry Rhoden, at the Canopy by Hilton in downtown Sioux Falls on Aug. 14 .

South Dakota’s only medical school will move from Vermillion to Sioux Falls

By MAKENZIE HUBER  
South Dakota Searchlight

SIOUX FALLS — The University of South Dakota announced Thursday it plans to move the state’s only medical school from Vermillion to Sioux Falls. Starting in 2027, students will attend temporary locations provided by Sanford Health. USD President Sheila Gestring said the university plans to build a new Sioux Falls facility in seven to 10 years, costing about \$150 million. She hopes most of the funding will come from donors. The medical school has been in Vermillion for 51 years. The move will increase the school’s competitiveness and improve clinic and research access for beginning medical students, Gestring said. Two of South Dakota’s

three major health systems — Sanford and Avera — are based in Sioux Falls, and there is also a Veterans Affairs hospital in the city. Gov. Larry Rhoden said the move will benefit South Dakota. “Students standing here with us will have more opportunities for clinical experiences, and they’ll develop closer ties to our South Dakota health systems,” Rhoden said, gesturing to dozens of USD medical students at the announcement. “When they graduate, we should expect to see more of them stay right here in South Dakota.” **Vermillion leaders respond** Vermillion’s population is just under 12,000, making it one of the smallest cities with a medical school in the **See SCHOOL, page 2**

Library appeals now include city council

By MONDELL KECK  
The Brookings Register

BROOKINGS — Patrons of the Brookings Public Library who have an issue with how their materials complaint is being handled have a new authority to appeal to — the Brookings City Council. It certainly isn’t because councilors wanted to get involved in the process; no, it’s because of a new South Dakota law that recently went into effect. It mandates the council’s involvement if earlier steps in the appeals process — such as decisions by library personnel, the library director and library’s

board of trustees — don’t meet with the patron’s satisfaction. Then and only then would the City Council become involved if so requested by the patron. Would the council’s decision be the final action? Not necessarily, as the patron could go so far as to involve the courts if they’re still not satisfied. The ordinance, formally known as Ordinance 25-024, was approved on a 7-0 vote. Afterward, Councilor Nick Wendell continued to express reservations about the state-mandated change, concerns that echoed his from the first reading of the ordinance at the City Council’s July 22 meeting. “I’m a bit uneasy with the role we’ll

be expected to play should something move up through the process in this way, but we don’t have a choice but to pass this particular policy in response to new state law,” he said. That said, he expressed his thanks to city and library staff leading up to the vote. “I appreciate the work that our staff and the board of trustees have done in the library. They have very sound policies and processes in place. I think you’ve guided us through your response to this state law accordingly, and I appreciate that.” If it’s any consolation to councilors, they might not have to deal with too **See LIBRARY, page 2**

One injured in crash

Incident occurred on US 14 Bypass on Aug. 8

By MONDELL KECK  
The Brookings Register

BROOKINGS — A two-vehicle crash involving a truck and a motorcycle on Aug. 8 on the U.S. Highway 14 Bypass left a Brookings resident with life-threatening injuries. The late-night crash sent motorcyclist Ronald Flute, 71, to Brookings Health System, where he was later flown to Sioux Falls for additional treatment, according to information from the Brookings County Sheriff’s Office. The truck’s driver, 52-year-old James Neilsen of Shakopee, Minnesota, was not injured. The crash occurred at 11:15 p.m. Assistant Sheriff David Biteler wrote that information from the scene indicated Neilsen — driving a 2020 Ram 1500 truck with a 2019 cargo trailer — was southbound on the eastern diagonal, at the stop sign to U.S. Highway 14. He stopped at the stop sign and continued to make a left turn onto U.S. 14. Neilsen crossed in front of Flute’s westbound motorcycle — a 2013 Harley Davidson FLHR — causing Flute to collide with the side of the trailer. “(Flute) indicated that he saw the truck/trailer pull away from the stop sign and tried to stop and avoid the trailer,” Biteler wrote. Damages to the trailer were not available at the time of the accident. Meanwhile, damage was estimated at \$14,000 to Flute’s motorcycle. Other responding agencies were the Brookings Police Department and Brookings Ambulance. Biteler added that the sheriff’s office is continuing to investigate the incident.

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# SCHOOL: Some students support school’s move to Sioux Falls

Continued from page 1

nation.

There are 57 medical students living in Vermillion, while most other students already commute from Sioux Falls.

It’ll also impact 24 faculty, 15 researchers and 29 staff within the medical school, Gestring told South Dakota Searchlight. About half of the 24 faculty members commute from Sioux Falls. The university will offer others based in Vermillion relocation packages or the opportunity to switch positions within the university.

Vermillion Mayor Jon Cole responded to Searchlight with a written statement.

“The most difficult part of this decision is its impact on the faculty and staff who have built their careers and lives here in Vermillion,” he said. “We recognize the university’s challenging position and understand the factors that led to this

choice, but we also know that change is never easy.”

The loss of dozens of students and families from Vermillion will hurt, said City Council President Rich Holland, but the move could open up some needed housing.

“I won’t say I’m looking forward to it, but I understand it,” Holland said in a phone interview. “It’s a shift that needs to be done for the benefit of the students.”

Republican South Dakota state Sen. Sydney Davis, whose district includes Vermillion, said she’s heard some residents say they’re worried the town is losing the university to Sioux Falls. But she said other programs at the Vermillion campus are growing, and the move will provide better efficiencies for the programs already existing on campus.

Gestring said the university doesn’t have plans to wholly relocate any other programs to Sioux Falls. The university

has expanded several programs to Sioux Falls to meet workforce needs, including education and nursing, and plans more expansion.

The move to Sioux Falls will open up part of the Lee Medicine Building on the Vermillion campus, which houses the medical school and the School of Health Sciences. University officials plan to move some programs housed in the Akeley-Lawrence Science Center into the vacated space due to structural problems in the center.

The move will allow those programs to grow in the larger space and could benefit the Vermillion community in the future, Gestring said.

“Be patient,” Gestring said. “My hope is that we will replace those 57 students with a whole lot more than 57 students.”

### Students react

Some students attending the event were supportive of the move. Fourth-year medical student Tanner Berg plans to go into anesthesiology and practice in South Dakota. He formerly lived in Vermillion and said it was difficult to find housing.

Vermillion is “isolated” from research and clinicians, he added, and moving to Sioux Falls will improve access and students’ education.

Earlier access to research will improve education as well, said Tim Ridgway, vice president of health affairs and Sanford School of Medicine dean.

The move will allow students to learn from professionals, apply their experience right away and think more critically, he said, which will improve treatment for South Dakotans.

“That’s when they retain the information,” Ridgway said. “That’s when they become true physicians.”

# LIBRARY: City gets grant for children’s spaces at library

Continued from page 1

many materials complaints. How so? Well, at the July 22 meeting, library director Ashia Gustafson said that in her nine and a half years at the library, only one complaint was filed that went through the entire appeals process, with one other complaint not even getting that far.

In other library-related news, councilors heard the first reading of a budget amendment, formally known as Ordinance 25-029, recognizing revenue in the form of a \$120,000 Lowe’s Hometown Grant. The funds will be used to enhance the children’s and teen spaces at the library, including the replacement of 25-year-old shelving and to “support the creation of more welcoming and functional youth areas,” per information from the city.

It’s hoped the project will wrap up sometime in November, but that timeline is provisional.

The budget amendment also provides \$54,900 for design and development services by Johnson Controls Inc. for a future chiller replacement project at the Brookings City & County Government Center.

In other action at Tuesday night’s meeting, councilors:

- Approved a budget amendment, formally known as Ordinance 25-027, on a 7-0 vote that will allocate \$1.3 million for the purchase of property in downtown Brookings that will be used for future public parking. The funds will cover property appraisal, environmental study, land purchase and legal and real estate closing costs, according to City Manager Paul Briseno. The money will be pulled from the city’s unassigned general fund reserves.
- Gave final approval, also on a 7-0 vote, to rezone roughly 68 city-owned properties to the newly minted Civic C District. Before this, the properties had a variety of zoning designations.
- The goal, per information from Community Development Director Mike Struck, is to “provide for a zoning district for public and civic buildings and large institutional uses which otherwise may not fit into other zoning districts because of their specialized land use needs and public purpose.”
- Gave the go-ahead, again on a 7-0 vote, to remove cannabis dispensaries as an approved use on a Business B-2A Office

District-zoned property. The change will not affect any existing dispensaries, as none are within such zoning. There had been some concerns raised by residents about the potential, thus the council’s action. Per city documentation, its purpose is to prevent “a concentration of certain cannabis establishments near residential areas.”

- Heard a presentation that dealt with the 2024 annual comprehensive financial report and audit summary. Long story short, the city is doing very well overall with no audit surprises, according to certified public accountants with Eide Bailly LLP, a firm that conducts municipal audits in South Dakota.

— Contact Mondell Keck at [mondell.keck@brookingsregister.com](mailto:mondell.keck@brookingsregister.com).

# Scientists discover an ancient whale with a Pokémon face and a predator bite

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — Long before whales were majestic, gentle giants, some of their prehistoric ancestors were tiny, weird and feral. A chance discovery of a 25 million-year-old fossil on an Australian beach has allowed paleontologists to identify a rare, entirely new species that could unlock mysteries of whale evolution.

Researchers this week officially named Janjucetus dullardi, a cartoonish creature with bulging eyes the size of tennis balls, in the Zoological Journal of the Linnean Society. Unlike today’s whales, the juvenile specimen was small enough to fit in a single bed.

Boasting fiendish teeth and a shark-like snout, however, this oddball of the ocean was nasty, mean and built to hunt.

“It was, let’s say, deceptively cute,” said Erich Fitzgerald, senior curator of vertebrate paleontology at Museums Victoria Research Institute, and one of the paper’s authors.

“It might have looked for all the world like some weird kind of mash-up between a whale, a seal and a Pokémon but they were very much their own thing.”

The rare discovery of the partial skull, including ear bones and teeth, was made in 2019 on a fossil-rich stretch of coast along Australia’s Victoria state. Jan Juc Beach, a cradle for some of the weirdest whales in history, is becoming a hotspot for under-

standing early whale evolution, Fitzgerald said.

Few family trees seem stranger than that of Janjucetus dullardi, only the fourth species ever identified from a group known as mammalodontids, early whales that lived only during the Oligocene Epoch, about 34 to 23 million years ago. That marked the point about halfway through the known history of whales.

The tiny predators, thought to have grown to 3 meters in length, were an early branch on the line that led to today’s great baleen whales, such as humpbacks, blues and minke. But the toothy ancestors with powerful jaws would have looked radically different to any modern species.

“They may have had tiny little nubbins of legs just projecting as stumps from the wall of the body,” said Fitzgerald.

That mystery will remain tantalizingly unsolved unless a specimen is uncovered with more of its skeleton intact, which would be something of a miracle. Even the partial skull that allowed the initial identification this week was an astonishing discovery.

Janjucetus dullardi was named by researchers after an amateur fossil hunter who doesn’t mind its looks in the slightest.

“It’s literally been the greatest 24 hours of my life,” said Ross Dullard, who discovered the skull while fossil hunting at Jan Juc Beach. After Wednesday’s confirmation of



Ruairidh Duncan via AP

In this illustration provided by Ruairidh Duncan a Janjucetus dullardi is depicted chasing a fish.

the new species, the school principal walked like a rock star onto campus with “high fives coming left, right and center,” he said.

His friends and family are probably just relieved it’s over.

“That’s all they’ve heard from me for about the last six years,” he said.

Dullard was on a regular low-tide hunt at Jan Juc the day he spotted something black protruding from a cliff. Poking it dislodged a tooth.

He knew enough to recognize it was unlikely to belong to a dog or a seal.

“I thought, geez, we’ve got something special here,” he said. Dullard sent photos to Museums Victoria, where Fitzgerald saw them and immediately suspected a new species.



Roxie Corbett’s recent hospitalization included swing bed care at Brookings Hospital. The care team listened to her and explained things in a way she could understand. The staff also encouraged and supported Roxie.

She says, “I can’t say enough good about them.”

Watch Roxie’s story at [brookingshealth.org/RoxieCorbett](https://brookingshealth.org/RoxieCorbett).





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# LOCAL/STATE

## SDSU Extension experts to attend 2025 Dakotafest

BROOKINGS — South Dakota State University Extension experts will attend the 2025 Dakotafest trade show in Mitchell, providing educational resources and hands-on activities for a variety of topics.

SDSU Extension experts will be at booth No. 216 during the popular annual trade show just east of Mitchell on Aug. 19-21. Free ice cream will be served starting at 1:30 p.m. daily. For more information, visit the SDSU Extension Events page and search “Dakotafest.”

Thursday, Aug. 21, will feature “Ask the Tree Guy” with John Ball, professor, SDSU Extension forestry specialist and South Dakota Department of Agriculture and natural resources forest health specialist. Phil Urso, assistant professor in the SDSU Department of Animal Science, will be available to provide information on the unique bison studies program at SDSU.

Logan Vandermark, SDSU Extension precision livestock field specialist, and Ali Nafchi, assistant professor and SDSU Extension precision agriculture specialist, will be available with information on SDSU Extension’s work with cybersecurity and precision agriculture, including demonstrations of precision agricultural equipment like SDSU’s Virtual yield mapping system and cutting-edge biosensor technology designed to improve nitrogen use efficiency. There will also be drones, an electrical conductivity mapping machine and a laser scarecrow.

The booth will also feature a kids corner, where children can play in corn, milo and other feeds while learning about their uses and differences.

Other SDSU Extension experts plan to bring this additional information to the booth:

- Sandi Traupel, SDSU Extension Better Choices, Better Health engagement and enrollment coordinator, and Emily Vincelli, SDSU Extension worksite program manager, on chronic disease management.
- Addie Stamps, SDSU Extension livestock production and stewardship field specialist, with cattle equipment demonstrations.
- Stephen Robertson, SDSU Extension pesticide



Dakotafest visitors enjoy SDSU ice cream while talking with SDSU Extension staff.

education field specialist, on safe pesticide usage.

- Madison Kovarna, SDSU Extension beef nutrition field specialist, on cattle feeding strategies.
- Matt Diersen, Griffith Endowed professor and SDSU Extension risk and business management specialist, and Sarah Sellars, assistant professor and SDSU Extension sustainable farm and food systems specialist, on agribusiness, insurance and risk management.
- Kaylyn Rudy, SDSU Extension swine field specialist, and Rafe Royall, assistant professor and SDSU Extension swine specialist, on swine breeding basics and with farm biosecurity demonstrations.
- Graig Reicks, SDSU Extension weed ecology field specialist, on weed control.
- Hans Klopp, SDSU Extension soil health field specialist, on soil health.
- Heather Gessner, interim Agriculture and Natural

Resources Program Leader and SDSU Extension livestock business management field specialist, on estate planning.

- Hoanh Le, assistant professor and SDSU Extension economics research specialist, on South Dakota land values and cash rental rates.
- Kyle Beach, SDSU Extension 4-H program manager and regional youth educator, with knot-tying lessons.
- Robin Salverson, SDSU Extension cow/calf field specialist, with cattle ultrasound demonstrations.

“Dakotafest is a great time for staff to talk with farmers and ranchers from across South Dakota and the region. We enjoy meeting with them in this informal setting,” said Gessner. “We encourage you to bring your questions, samples of problems you may have in your field, pasture or trees. We will try to get you a same-day answer.”

— From SDSU Extension

## SDSU Extension welcomes new specialty crop expert

BROOKINGS — South Dakota State University Extension has welcomed Nick Volesky as a new horticulture and specialty crop field specialist.

In his role, Volesky will work with the SDSU Extension horticulture team to address South Dakota’s consumer needs, including home landscape plantings and specialty crop production in farms, homes, schools and community gardens. He will be based in Rapid City at West River Research and Extension.

Volesky joins Cody Molnar, SDSU Extension horticulture plant pathology field specialist, as the newest members of the SDSU Extension horticulture team, which includes experts in gardening, lawn care, trees and shrubs, water management, soil health, Master Gardener

training, and more.

“Horticulture questions include everything from gardens, lawns, trees and crops. The addition of Cody and Nick to the horticulture team will ensure SDSU Extension is able to answer those questions promptly and by an expert in that area,” said Heather Gessner, interim Agriculture and Natural Resources Program Director and SDSU Extension Livestock Business Management Field Specialist. “We encourage everyone to reach out to any SDSU Extension staff with questions or concerns, and we will do our best to get them answered.”

A native of Nebraska, Volesky graduated with bachelor’s degrees in horticulture and applied science from the University of Nebraska, and a master’s degree in plant science from Utah State University.

Before joining SDSU Extension, Volesky worked with Utah State University Extension’s integrated pest management program, educating producers on diseases affecting specialty crops. He has also researched cut flowers and other aspects of specialty crop production.

“I am passionate about providing research-based knowledge to community stakeholders,” Volesky said. “I am especially committed to supporting specialty crop producers in optimizing their production through sustainable, evidence-based practices.”

For more information, contact Volesky at 605-394-1722.

— From SDSU Extension

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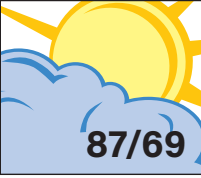
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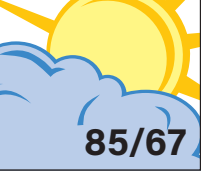
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## Brookings weather



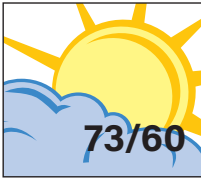
**Friday** Partly sunny, with a high near 87. East wind around 10 mph.

Night: A 50 percent chance of showers and thunderstorms, mainly after 2am. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 69. East wind 5 to 10 mph.



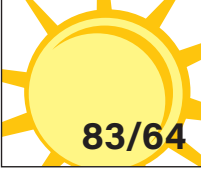
**Saturday** A 20 percent chance of showers and thunderstorms before 1 p.m. Partly sunny, with a high near 85. East southeast wind around 10 mph becoming north northeast in the morning.

Night: A 50 percent chance of showers and thunderstorms. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 67. East northeast wind around 10 mph.




**Sunday** A 30 percent chance of showers and thunderstorms, mainly before 1 p.m. Cloudy, then gradually becoming mostly sunny, with a high near 83. Southeast wind 10 to 15 mph, with gusts as high as 20 mph.

Night: A 40 percent chance of showers and thunderstorms, mainly before 1 a.m. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 65. East northeast wind 5 to 10 mph.



**Monday** Mostly sunny, with a high near 83.

Night: Partly cloudy, with a low around 64.



**Tuesday** Mostly sunny, with a high near 82.

Night: Partly cloudy, with a low around 61.

Information from the National Weather Service Forecast Office, Sioux Falls



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## State funding approved for business expansions

PIERRE — The South Dakota Board of Economic Development has approved funding for two projects expected to bring a combined investment of more than \$26 million and create approximately 52 new jobs in the state.

COAXIS LNG Processing, LLC was approved for an SD Works Loan of up to \$1.2 million to design, build, and operate a liquefaction facility in Buffalo. The project will use natural gas from orphan wells, which will be liquefied, stored, and transported to end users.

Spartan Fire LLC was approved for up to \$636,300 through the Reinvestment Payment Program. The Brandon facility will expand to include a world-class paint facility and a new assembly plant, increasing production capacity and reducing lead times.

— From the S.D. Board of Economic Development

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# STATE/NATION

## Highway Patrol makes record meth seizure, governor says

By **SETH TUPPER**  
South Dakota Searchlight

The South Dakota Highway Patrol made its largest-ever seizure of methamphetamine when it discovered 207 pounds of crystal meth during a recent traffic stop, according to Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden, whose Monday announcement said the subject is not a U.S. citizen and is “now in immigration proceedings.”

The estimated street value of the drugs is \$12 million, the news release said.

Rhoden used the arrest as an opportunity to tout his Operation Prairie Thunder, which commits state government personnel and resources to assist with the activities of federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

“We are taking action to protect the people of South Dakota from criminals and drug traffickers,” Rhoden said in the release.

His office said the suspect is the eighth person who isn’t a citizen stopped by the Highway Patrol since it signed an agreement to assist ICE earlier this year amid an immigration crackdown by the Trump administration. The state’s Department of Corrections and the Division of Criminal Investigation have also signed agreements

with the federal agency.

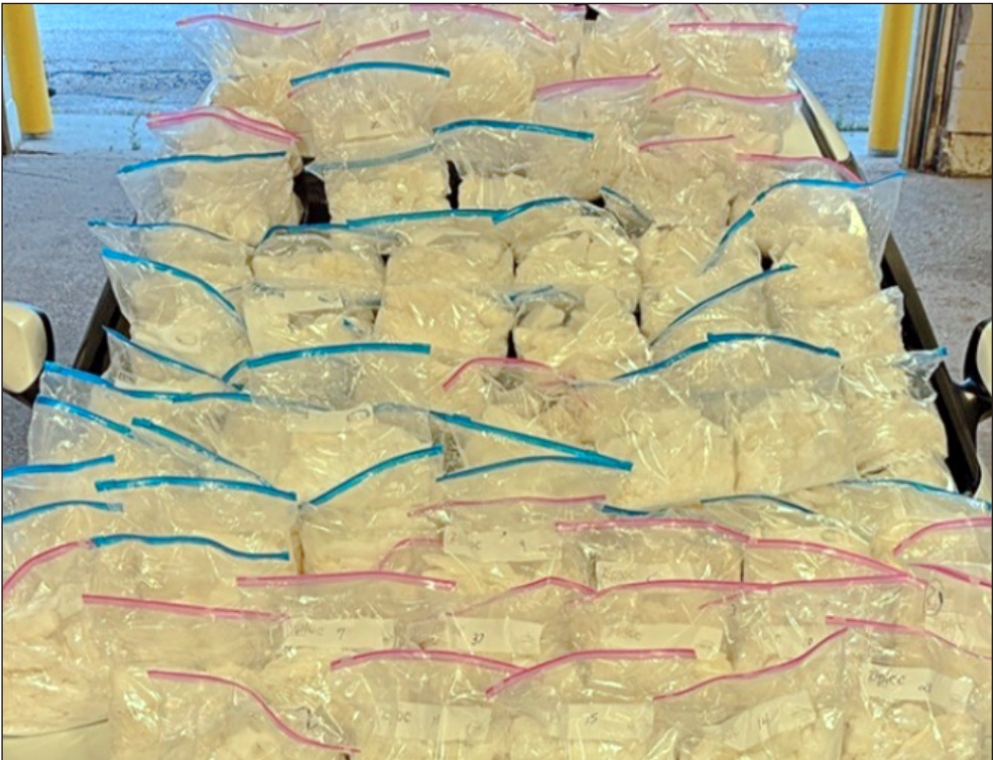
The type of agreement that the Highway Patrol has with ICE was discontinued during the Obama and Biden administrations, due to concerns about racial profiling.

The suspect in the meth seizure case is a 42-year-old man who was allegedly stopped for speeding on Interstate 90 in Sturgis. A service dog detected an odor that led to the discovery of the drugs, according to the news release from Rhoden’s office.

Although the release related those and other details of the arrest and said the suspect is charged with three crimes, it did not include his name, making it difficult for South Dakota Searchlight to immediately find court documents related to the case. Department of Public Safety spokesman Brad Reinert declined to provide the name.

“I am unable to release any details on the individual as this is still an active investigation,” Reinert wrote in an email.

The news release said other agencies assisting in the investigation include the Drug Enforcement Administration, FBI, Homeland Security Investigations, Meade County Sheriff’s Office and Rapid City Police Department.



Courtesy photo/S.D. governor’s office

The South Dakota Highway Patrol seized these 207 pounds of methamphetamine during a traffic stop, the most ever captured by the agency, according to a news release on Aug. 11.

### Across the Nation

## Trump to hold face-to-face meeting with Putin in Alaska

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska (AP) — President Donald Trump is meeting face-to-face with Russia’s Vladimir Putin on Friday for a pivotal Alaska summit that could reshape both the war in Ukraine and relations between Moscow and Washington.

The sit-down gives Trump a chance to prove to the world that he is both a master dealmaker and a global peacemaker. He and his allies have cast him as a heavyweight negotiator who can find a way to bring the slaughter to a close — something he used to boast he could do quickly.

For Putin, a summit with Trump offers a long-sought opportunity to try to negotiate a deal that would cement Russia’s gains, block Kyiv’s bid to join the NATO military alliance and eventually pull Ukraine back into Moscow’s orbit. Despite having so much at stake, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and European leaders aren’t invited.

There are significant risks for Trump. By bringing Putin onto U.S. soil — America bought Alaska from Russia in 1867 for 2 cents per acre — the president is giving him the validation he desires after his ostracization following his invasion of Ukraine 3 1/2 years ago. Zelenskyy’s exclusion from Trump and Putin’s first meeting is a heavy blow to the West’s policy of “nothing

about Ukraine without Ukraine” and invites the possibility that Trump could agree to a deal that Ukraine does not want.

Any success is far from assured because Russia and Ukraine remain far apart in their demands for peace. Putin has long resisted any temporary ceasefire, linking it to a halt in Western arms supplies and a freeze on Ukraine’s mobilization efforts, which were conditions rejected by Kyiv and its Western allies.

“HIGH STAKES!!!!” Trump posted shortly before he boarded Air Force One for Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Anchorage.

On his way to the meeting, Putin stopped in Magadan, in Russia’s Far East, where he visited a factory producing omega-3 fish oil capsules, according to Russian state news agency RIA Novosti. Putin was reviewing materials on Ukraine, tensions with the U.S., economic cooperation and global affairs during his four-hour flight to Alaska, where he will be greeted at his plane by Trump, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said in an interview with Russian state TV.

Trump and Putin have shared closely watched handshakes before — but Friday’s will be as scrutinized as any, as will any body language or hints about how each is feeling.

Trump on Thursday said there was a 25% chance that the summit would fail, but he also floated the idea that if the meeting succeeds he could bring Zelenskyy to Alaska

for a subsequent, three-way meeting — a possibility that Russia hasn’t agreed to.

## Hurricane Erin expected to hit Puerto Rico

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — Erin strengthened into a hurricane on Friday as it approached the northeast Caribbean, prompting forecasters to warn of possible flooding and landslides.

The storm is expected to remain over open waters, although tropical storm watches were issued for Anguilla, Barbuda, St. Martin, St. Barts, Saba, St. Eustatius and St. Maarten.

Heavy rains were forecast to start late Friday in Antigua and Barbuda, the U.S. and British Virgin Islands, and southern and eastern Puerto Rico. Up to 4 inches are expected, with isolated totals of up to 6 inches (15 centimeters), according to the National Hurricane Center in Miami.

Forecasters also warned of dangerous swells. The storm was located about 460 miles east of the Northern Leeward Islands. It had maximum sustained winds of 75 mph and was moving west-northwest at 18 mph.

Hurricane specialist and storm surge expert Michael Lowry said Erin is forecast to eventually take a sharp turn northeast that would put it on a path between the U.S. and Bermuda.

“The forecasts for next week still keep the future hurricane safely east of the mainland U.S.,” he said.

Erin, which is the Atlantic season’s first hurricane, is forecast to become a major Category 3 storm late this weekend.

The hurricane center noted “there is still uncertainty about what impacts Erin may bring to portions of the Bahamas, the east coast of the United States, and Bermuda in the long range.”

Dangerous surf and rip currents are expected to affect the U.S. East Coast next week, with waves reaching up to 15 feet (5 meters) along parts of the North Carolina coast that could cause beach erosion, according to Accuweather.

“Erin is forecast to explode into a powerful Category 4 hurricane as it moves across very warm waters in the open Atlantic. Water temperatures at the surface and hundreds of feet deep are several degrees higher than the historical average,” said Alex DaSilva, Accuweather’s lead hurricane expert.



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