

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 1 of 98

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- Frosty Clue](#)
- [3- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [5- Legion Turkey Party Ad](#)
- [6- School Board Story](#)
- [7- SD News Watch: Rhoden could be 'steady hand' if Noem joins Trump Cabinet](#)
- [10- Titans stop Tigers trek to State A](#)
- [11- SD SearchLight: Prison opponents appeal to higher court; Lennox approves wastewater deal with state](#)
- [12- SD SearchLight: Major bills responding to alleged state employee crimes may have to wait, lawmaker says](#)
- [13- SD SearchLight: Trump readies for mass deportations with pick of Noem as Homeland Security chief](#)
- [14- SD SearchLight: Trump legal case in New York on hold as prosecution studies effect of presidential win](#)
- [15- SD SearchLight: U.S. House GOP claims mandate on immigration, lower food prices, 'end to the wokeness'](#)
- [17- SD SearchLight: Tribal health leaders say feds haven't treated syphilis outbreak as a public health emergency](#)
- [18- SD SearchLight: Trump picks South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem to run Homeland Security](#)
- [21- Weather Pages](#)
- [25- Daily Devotional](#)
- [26- Subscription Form](#)
- [27- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [28- Upcoming Groton Events](#)
- [29- News from the Associated Press](#)

## Wednesday, Nov. 13

Senior Menu: Turkey with dressing, mashed potatoes with gravy, glazed baby carrots, pumpkin bar, dinner roll.

School Breakfast: Oatmeal.

School Lunch: Beef stew with a biscuit.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, time to be determined.

St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

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



Groton C&MA: Missions Night with Mike Picconatto (for all ages), 7 p.m.  
FCCLA Food Drive, 6 p.m.

## Thursday, Nov. 14

Senior Menu: Chicken cacciatore, rice pilaf, Italian blend, apple sauce, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Biscuits.

School Lunch: Chicken nuggets, wedge fries.

JH GBB hosts Webster (7th at 4 p.m., 8th at 5 p.m.)

Groton Lions Club meeting, 6 p.m., 104 N Main

## Friday, Nov. 15

Senior Menu: Baked pork chop, sweet potato, Normandy blend, chocolate pudding with banana, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Breakfast cookie.

School Lunch: Cheese pizza, green beans.

## Saturday, Nov. 16

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., 209 N Main

JH GBB Jamboree at Roscoe

Groton Legion Turkey Party, 6:30 p.m.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 2 of 98

## FROSTY CLUE

I/My.....

13. College and University Graduate



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 3 of 98

# 1440

**Why 1440? The printing press was invented around the year 1440, spreading knowledge to the masses and changing the course of history. More facts: In every day, there are 1,440 minutes. We're here to make each one count.**

## **Pentagon Leaker Sentenced**

Jack Teixeira, a former Massachusetts Air National Guard member who was arrested last year for leaking classified US military documents, was sentenced yesterday to 15 years in prison. The incident is considered the most extensive intelligence breach in at least a decade.

The sentencing comes after Teixeira, who turns 23 next month, pleaded guilty in March to six federal counts of willfully retaining and transmitting national defense information. In exchange for his plea, officials spared Teixeira from being charged with additional counts under the Espionage Act.

Teixeira was an information technology specialist who gained top-secret security clearance in 2021, two years after enlisting in the Air National Guard. Outside of work, he had been uploading a wide range of classified information, including about the war in Ukraine, to users on a Discord server (a gamer communication app) every week. The defense claimed Teixeira didn't mean to harm the US and was instead keeping his friends apprised of world events.

## **EPA Methane Fee**

Federal regulators announced oil and gas companies will be required for the first time to pay a fee for excess methane emissions, a rule likely to be overturned once the Trump administration takes office in January. The move stems from the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act's initiatives supporting clean energy.

Characterized as a super-pollutant, methane is 28 times more potent than carbon dioxide over 100 years. The oil and gas sector is the largest industrial source of methane in the US, particularly due to its reliance on a process known as gas flaring, a cost-cutting and safety measure that burns off excess gas amid drilling operations.

The fee would charge companies \$900 per metric ton of methane in the first year. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates the fee would reduce emissions through 2035 by an amount equivalent to removing 8 million gas-powered cars from the roads each year.

Relatedly, a Dutch appeals court overturned a 2021 ruling requiring energy giant Shell to nearly halve its emissions by 2030.

## **China Car Attack**

At least 35 people were killed and dozens injured after a man drove his small SUV into a crowd exercising at a sports complex in Zhuhai, southern China. The 62-year-old suspect, surnamed Fan, was reportedly distraught over how property was divided in a divorce settlement when he carried out the attack.

Fan was found unconscious in his vehicle with self-inflicted wounds and is currently receiving medical attention. The popular sports complex was busy with people engaged in various activities like running, dancing, and soccer. Chinese President Xi Jinping has called for severe legal action and urged local governments to prioritize public safety and social stability.

While China generally experiences low rates of violent crime due to its strict gun control laws, the country has seen a recent surge in attacks on civilians, including a fatal stabbing at a shopping center in September and an attack on US instructors in June.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 4 of 98

## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

English author Samantha Harvey's novel "Orbital" wins prestigious 2024 Booker Prize for best English-language novel published in the UK or Ireland.

Frank Auerbach, iconic British-German painter, dies at age 93.

John Robinson, former head football coach for Southern Cal and the Los Angeles Rams, dies at age 89.

Gerry Faust, former Notre Dame head football coach, dies at age 89.

Film about former FTX founder Sam Bankman-Fried in the works at Apple and A24.

Denzel Washington tapped for role in upcoming "Black Panther 3" film.

## Science & Technology

Alphabet's Waymo makes its driverless robotaxis available to the general public in Los Angeles; company now logs 1 million autonomous miles per week.

Physical exercise can help stimulate the growth of nerve cells, study suggests; muscle contraction releases myokines, molecules shown to facilitate neural growth in lab experiments.

Ice core sample study suggests average global temperatures have risen 1.49 degrees Celsius (2.6 degrees Fahrenheit) above preindustrial levels; current estimates are about 1.3 degrees Celsius.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close lower (S&P 500 -0.3%, Dow -0.9%, Nasdaq -0.1%) for first time since Election Day. Bitcoin briefly hits \$90K for first time.

Justice Department sues to block UnitedHealth Group's \$3.3B acquisition of home and hospice care provider Amedisys.

Elliott Management pushes Honeywell to separate into two businesses after taking \$5B stake.

23andMe reports 12% year-over-year revenue decline in second quarter; report comes one day after company said it is laying off 40% of its workforce.

Elon Musk, Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang, and Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella top Fortune's annual list of 100 most powerful people in business.

## Politics & World Affairs

President-elect Donald Trump selects South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem (R) to lead Department of Homeland Security, former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee (R) to serve as US ambassador to Israel, Fox News host Pete Hegseth as secretary of defense, former Texas congressman John Ratcliffe (R) as CIA director.

Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, head of the Church of England, resigns following review indicating he failed to report a barrister's serial sexual abuse of boys in the 1980s; Welby is the first Anglican archbishop to resign over a sexual abuse scandal.

Federal Aviation Administration pauses US flights to Haiti for 30 days after gangs in Port-au-Prince open fire on Spirit Airlines flight from Florida to Haiti and separate JetBlue flight from Haiti to New York City; violence follows Haiti leadership shake-up.



**Groton Post No. 39 American Legion**

# *Annual Turkey Party*

**Saturday, Nov. 16, 2024**

**Starting at 6:30 p.m.**

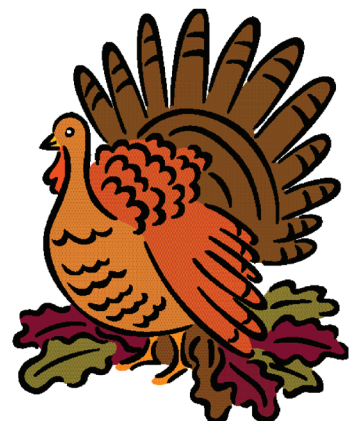
Groton Legion Post Home, 10 N. Main.

Turkey, Ham and Bacon  
to be given away

**FREE ADMISSION**

**DOOR  
PRIZE!**

Lunch served  
by Auxiliary



## Groton Area School Board continues discussion on football field improvements

by Elizabeth Varin

The Groton Area School District board is taking a cautious approach to recently proposed improvements to the district's football field.

School board members expressed hesitancy while keeping the conversation going at Tuesday morning's meeting.

"We know we have a responsibility to that football field, and one thing, there is a need and we realize there is a need," said Board President Grant Rix. "I mentioned that with the crows nest, there is a need with the crows nest. We need to do something there.

"So if we talk about that building and maybe determine what the needs are," he added.

Lighting at the field also has to be addressed before next season, said Superintendent Joe Schwan. Depending on which direction the board chooses to go, that could be a \$13,000 project to replace the current wiring harness or a \$300,000 project to switch to LEDs.

The district can't move forward with the football field without looking at what other projects are a priority, said board member Heather Lerseth-Fliehs. Is the football field the priority, or is the band room the priority, or is the old gym the priority, she asked.

Replace the crows nest on the west side of the field has got to be a priority, said board member Marty Weismantel. It's a safety issue. Other than that, the district will have to identify what it needed vs. what is wanted.

"Do we want to replace what we've got," he asked the board. "That's a million dollar question, literally."

Middle School/High School Principal Shelby Edwards said while she supports athletics, she's got to advocate for the school building. There are continuing issues, including recent plumbing problems that are going to need to be handled.

"Our kids are in school eight hours a day, and the football field is used four nights out of the week," she said.

Superintendent Schwan added the district is approaching a time when it will need to talk about major projects at the old high school building. For now, they're just fixing issues that spring up.

"It's coming," he said of major school improvement discussions. "It's not that far off."

The board agreed to have its Building, Grounds and Transportation Committee, manned by board members Tigh Fliehs and TJ Harder, review the project's score and assess its place within the district's long-term facilities plan.

- The board approved hiring multiple positions, including special education paraprofessional Stacey Wellnitz, assistant wrestling coach Troy Zoellner and junior high wrestling coach Chris Ehresmann. The board also approved volunteer coaches for winter sports, including Teagan Block and Jeremy Krueger for wrestling, Ryan Tracy for boys basketball and Justin Hanson for girls basketball. The board also approved volunteer weight room coach Quintin Biermann.

- Whooping cough cases have been making their way around South Dakota, though Groton Area hasn't seen any yet, said Superintendent Joe Schwan. The education department has provided some protocols and procedures to use should anyone be exposed in the district.

- Some upcoming state legislative issues the school district will keep an eye on include school voucher discussion as it could impact funding for school districts.

- The board approved the first reading of job descriptions for elementary principal, food service director and transportation director. Those are not open positions, said Superintendent Joe Schwan. The vote is just to make sure the district has the job descriptions on record.

## Rhoden could be 'steady hand' if Noem joins Trump Cabinet

BY STU WHITNEY

South Dakota News Watch

There will be lots of history made if South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem is confirmed as secretary of the Department of Homeland Security in President-elect Donald Trump's administration.

She was selected by Trump for the role Tuesday and pledged to "secure the border and restore safety to American communities."

Noem, in her second term as Republican governor, would become the first South Dakotan to serve in a president's Cabinet, extending an alliance with Trump that first developed during her time in Congress.

It would also be the first time a South Dakota governor hands over the reins of power during a legislative session, assuming Noem waits to resign until she is confirmed by the U.S. Senate, a process set for January at the earliest.

That puts the focus on Lt. Gov. Larry Rhoden, a 65-year-old Meade County rancher and legislative veteran who would be thrust into the spotlight as the state's 34th governor.

Rhoden would also preside over a consequential 2025 legislative session fraught with budgetary battles and Republican infighting, all while potentially preparing for a 2026 gubernatorial election in which he would be the incumbent candidate.

"Having a changeover happen during the legislative session would be a first," said Rep. Tony Venhuizen, R-Sioux Falls, Noem's former chief of staff and a curator of South Dakota gubernatorial history.

"We're fortunate that (Rhoden) is a longtime legislator who has been heavily engaged in past sessions and would be well-prepared to step in at any point."

Neither Rhoden nor Noem's office responded to requests for comment Tuesday.

### Legislative experience seen as valuable

Rhoden, a resident of Union Center, served in the state House of Representatives from 2001-09 and 2017-19, including a stint as House majority leader from 2005-08. He served in the state Senate from 2009-2015 and chaired the State Affairs Committee.

Rhoden finished second in the 2014 Republican primary for governor to now-U.S. Senator Mike Rounds, with Rhoden drawing 18% of the vote.



**South Dakota Lt. Gov. Larry Rhoden, appearing March 13, 2024, at a town hall meeting in Mitchell, S.D., will become South Dakota's 34th governor if Kristi Noem is confirmed as secretary of the Department of Homeland Security in Donald Trump's administration.** (Photo: Stu Whitney / South Dakota News Watch)



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 8 of 98

Longtime Republican legislator Lee Schoenbeck, who stepped down this year and was clearing out his state Capitol office on Tuesday, told News Watch that it “would not be the best thing” to have the transition occur in the middle of session.

He said that Noem could potentially resign earlier to accommodate Rhoden if she were sure to get confirmed in the U.S. Senate, where Republicans will have the majority and South Dakota U.S. Sen. John Thune is favored to become party leader in a caucus vote Wednesday.

Either way, said Schoenbeck, Rhoden has a “steady hand” to handle the role from a legislative perspective, drawing a contrast between Noem and Rhoden in terms of focus on day-to-day operations at the Capitol.

While Noem was criticized for frequent travel outside the state and pursuing national political goals, Rhoden could be found in the Capitol hallways chatting with lawmakers when he wasn’t presiding over the Senate.

“He’s been way more engaged in the Legislature during his lifetime,” said Schoenbeck, who presided over the executive board for the Legislative Research Council in Pierre on Tuesday. “His entire political experience, other than a brief stint on the Meade County School Board, is all about the Legislature. I think his ability to work with and understand those relationships will put him in a strong position. He’s somebody that you might not agree with on every issue, but you can still work together. Nobody agrees with everybody.”

In 2023, when Schoenbeck was in a Senate leadership position and publicly feuded with Noem, he told News Watch: “If I have any questions, I contact Larry.”

## **Rhoden’s style: ‘Personable and direct’**

It’s an open question whether Rhoden will have the same sway with the 2025 Legislature, which features new faces and re-structured leadership that reflects recent electoral gains by the GOP’s populist wing.

Freedom Caucus members have clashed with Noem over their contention that she took establishment positions initially on COVID restrictions, transgender rights and carbon pipelines, with Rhoden caught in the crossfire.

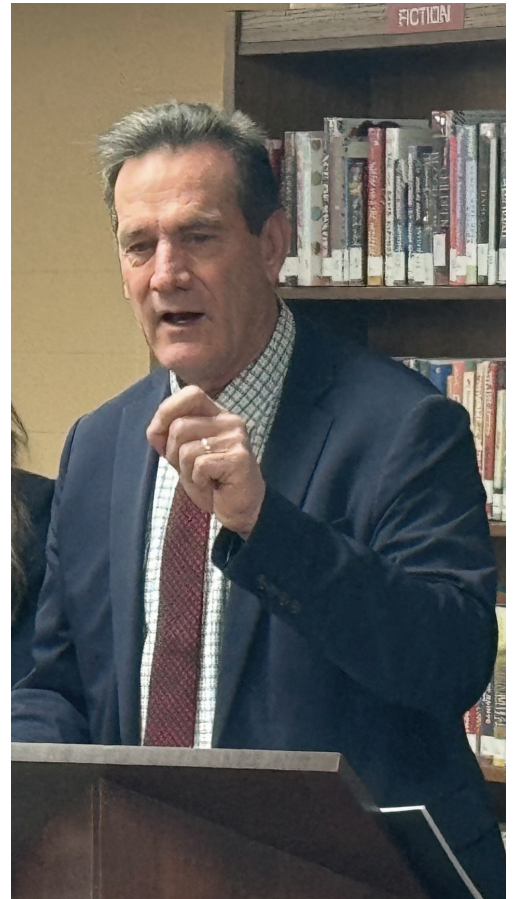
He was challenged at the 2022 party convention by former Speaker of the House Steve Haugaard and escaped with a narrow win, an episode that widened the populists’ rift with Noem.

Jim Bolin, a Canton legislator who served 16 years in Pierre but was term-limited in 2024, told News Watch that Rhoden could have the right temperament to navigate choppy political waters.

“I would describe him as personable and direct,” said Bolin. “He doesn’t beat around the bush. Having the transition (in the middle of session) might be challenging, but a lot of the people who have worked in the executive branch have been there for many years. They probably aren’t leaving South Dakota to become part of Homeland Security, so that will help make it easier. The issues themselves will be difficult, but the transition can be handled.”

## **Rhoden could run as incumbent in 2026**

At a Mitchell town hall earlier this year, Noem credited Rhoden with helping her learn the ropes in 2007 as a rookie legislator in Pierre, something she kept in mind when it came time to choose a running mate



**South Dakota Lt. Gov. Larry Rhoden, speaking March 13, 2024, at a town hall meeting in Mitchell, S.D., will become South Dakota’s 34th governor if Kristi Noem is confirmed as secretary of the Department of Homeland Security in Donald Trump’s administration.** (Photo: Stu

Whitney / South Dakota News Watch)



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 9 of 98

for her 2018 gubernatorial run.

"Because I was a farmer and rancher, I was advised to choose a businessman from Sioux Falls," Noem told attendees. "So instead I chose a rancher from West River. I trust his instincts and values. He loves the Lord and loves his family. I knew that if I got killed the next day, he'd run this state exactly as I would, and that was important to me."

Rhoden, who runs a cow-calf operation and custom welding business near Union Center, joined the South Dakota National Guard after graduating from high school and served six years.

He has four sons with his wife, Sandy, and also six grandchildren.

Accepting the role as Noem's lieutenant governor in 2018, he said it was clear that "Kristi is fighting for something much bigger than herself, and she expects the same of those serving in her administration."

Rhoden withstood Noem's often-turbulent time in office, marked by five different chiefs of staff and no one currently in that role. The administration saw higher-than-normal turnover among Cabinet positions and executive staff.

Rhoden is viewed as a likely candidate for governor in 2026, which would mean a highly competitive GOP primary battle against U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson and possibly Attorney General Marty Jackley, among other candidates.

## Past transitions include 1993 tragedy

This would mark the third time that a South Dakota lieutenant governor has taken the reins as top executive while a term was still ongoing.

Democratic governor Dick Kneip resigned in July 1978 to become U.S. ambassador to Singapore under President Jimmy Carter, ending his final term about five months early. He handed the reins to former state Sen. Harvey Wollman, who had already lost the Democratic primary for governor but served until Republican Gov. Bill Janklow took office in January 1979.

The next occurrence was prompted by one of South Dakota's most profound tragedies. George Mickelson was killed April 19, 1993, when a propeller blade broke loose on his airplane and it crashed into a farm silo about 10 miles south of Dubuque, Iowa, killing everyone on board.

Also killed in the crash were two state pilots, Ron Becker and David Hanson, banker David Birkeland, power company executive Angus Anson, Sioux Falls Development Foundation leader Roger Hainje, economic development commissioner Roland Dolly and energy commissioner Ron Reed.

Lt. Gov. Walter Dale Miller, a Meade County rancher and former speaker of the House, then became the oldest person to serve as governor at age 67.

He declared the rest of April a special period of mourning after huddling in Pierre with staff members, who had received a call from the Federal Aviation Administration around 5 p.m. with news that the state-owned plane had gone down.

Plans were made for Miller to be sworn in as governor the next day. As he left the Capitol on the night of the tragedy, he had a simple message for reporters that had gathered.

"Say a prayer for us," he said.

Janklow challenged Miller in the 1994 Republican primary and prevailed, setting up his return to Pierre for two terms, followed by eight-year stints by Rounds and Dennis Daugaard and what appears to be a truncated tenure for Noem.

*This story was produced by South Dakota News Watch, an independent, nonprofit news organization. Read more in-depth stories at [sdnewswatch.org](http://sdnewswatch.org) and sign up for an email every few days to get stories as soon as they're published. Contact investigative reporter Stu Whitney at [stu.whitney@sdnewswatch.org](mailto:stu.whitney@sdnewswatch.org).*

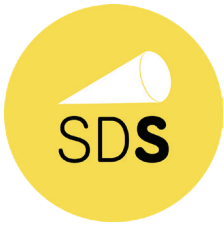
## Titans stop Tigers trek to State A

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton defeated Groton Area, 3-1, in the SoDak16 held Tuesday in Huron. The Titans had an eight point run late in the first set and went on to win, 25-18. The match was tied nine times, the last at 13, and there were three lead changes. The second set was tied four times in the early part of the set before the Titans got the upper hand and went on to win, 25-19. The third set was tied six times with two lead changes before the Tigers got the upper hand. Taking a 19-15 lead, Groton Area went on to win the third set, 25-18. The fourth set was tied three times with the Tigers having a 5-4 lead before Mt. Vernon/Plankinton rallied to take a 14-6 lead and went on to win, 25-14.

Rylee Dunker led the Tigers with 10 kills, three assisted blocks and one ace serve. Chesney Weber had eight kills, two assisted blocks, 15 digs and 12 assists. Taryn Traphagen had six kills, Laila Roberts had five kills and 15 digs; Jaedyn Penning had two kills, 15 digs and one assisted block, Elizabeth Flihs had one kills, two ace serves and 15 assists; Jerica Locke had one ace serve, one kill and 22 digs; Kella Tracy and Faith Traphagen each had one kill and Sydney Locke had one ace serve.

Reagan Rus led the Titans with 15 kills and three ace serves, Madalynn Lorang had eight kills; Taryn Hegg had six kills, one block and one ace serve; Brooklyn Bosma had five kills, Maggie Overbay had four kills and Alexis Hauge had one kill and one ace serve.

Groton Area finishes the season 19-7 while the Titans got to 27-5.



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **Prison opponents appeal to higher court; Lennox approves wastewater deal with state**

**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - NOVEMBER 12, 2024 9:00 PM**

The city of Lennox agreed Tuesday to accept wastewater from a proposed state men's prison in rural Lincoln County, the same day an opposition group filed a court appeal challenging the state's right to build the prison without a county permit.

The Lennox City Council vote Tuesday evening came after state Rep. Kevin Jensen, R-Canton, shared news of the court appeal during a morning press conference at the downtown Sioux Falls library. He and others raised concerns about the management of the state Department of Corrections under Secretary Kellie Wasko.

"I'm being told by officers on the inside, they feel like the only policy changes being made are in order to show that it's a disruptive system and we need a new prison," Jensen alleged. "Maybe I'll be challenged on that statement, but that's what they're telling me on the inside, that the policy changes make no sense."

Wasko has said the aging state penitentiary in Sioux Falls is out of date and unsafe for prisoners and staff.

Some other state lawmakers have also expressed reservations about the prison project, particularly regarding escalating costs and the state's transparency on the plan. However, not all believe Jensen's allegation.

"This notion that she intentionally instituted policies to create instability in the prison to further her getting the new prison is completely ridiculous," said Rep. Tim Reisch, R-Howard, who formerly served as secretary of corrections.

Jensen has been working with Neighbors Opposed to Prison Expansion, or NOPE. It's a coalition of Lincoln County residents who filed a lawsuit in 2023 to block the construction of the new prison, claiming the state needs county permits and that local zoning boards should have a say in the project. Last month, a judge ruled in favor of the state, dismissing the case. NOPE's appeal to the state Supreme Court seeks to overturn that decision.

The lawsuit came up Tuesday evening during the Lennox City Council's discussion of the proposed prison wastewater agreement.

"We're planning on moving forward," said Ryan Brunner, a senior policy adviser to Gov. Kristi Noem.

The unanimous vote to accept the agreement will provide the city with \$10.5 million in state funds. Testimony at the meeting included multiple NOPE members and allies pleading for a "no" vote. Others expressed excitement about the additional funds.

"This is going to give us a great opportunity to drastically affect the water bill of our community," said Councilman Chad Swier.

Lennox is about 15 miles from the prison site, across Interstate 29 to the west. The state pursued Lennox because, in August, the Harrisburg City Council rejected an agreement to allow the prison to connect to that city's treatment facility.

The state Legislature has set aside \$569 million for the prison project over the past several years while awaiting a final cost estimate. The 1,500-bed facility would largely replace the Sioux Falls penitentiary, which has sections dating to 1881.

Lawmakers on the state budget committee will meet Thursday with an update about the prison project on their agenda.



*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.*

## Major bills responding to alleged state employee crimes may have to wait, lawmaker says

**Investigation continues into former Social Services and Revenue staffers**

**BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - NOVEMBER 12, 2024 5:20 PM**

After several cases of allegedly criminal state employee conduct were unearthed during the summer, a legislative committee chairman said Tuesday he doesn't know if lawmakers will introduce bills addressing the issue during the next legislative session.

A former state Department of Social Services worker pleaded not guilty in August to stealing an estimated \$1.8 million from the department's Division of Child Protection Services over the course of 13 years.

In the state Department of Revenue, an employee allegedly used her position to create 13 fake vehicle titles used to secure \$400,000 in loans, according to the Attorney General's Office. The office filed charges against that employee last month, along with charges against another employee for allegedly failing to report the situation and cooperate with law enforcement.

While department heads say they plan to strengthen internal controls and Attorney General Marty Jackley plans to propose mandatory reporting requirement legislation, Rep. Ernie Otten, R-Tea, said the Government Operations and Audit Committee should continue investigating the cases to find where the agencies "ended up going off the rails."

He suspects the issue is systemic and deserves more than reactive legislation, Otten told South Dakota Searchlight after he presented the committee's annual report to the Legislature's Executive Board on Tuesday in Pierre. If lawmakers don't understand the systemic issue, then legislation introduced prematurely could leave a hole in the system, he said.

He told the Executive Board that, although the cases threaten the credibility of state government, the Legislature won't have "the full dive into correcting some of these things" until 2026.

Most of the concerns can be solved with internal control software updates, he added. But, he told South Dakota Searchlight, stronger understanding and legislation is required in addition to the internal control improvements.

The State Board of Internal Control is tasked with implementing a system to detect and prevent financial fraud. The board is still implementing the statewide internal control framework.

Otten's committee will subpoena Revenue Secretary Michael Houdyshell and Motor Vehicle Division head Rosa Yaeger to testify in a closed-door session at the committee's next meeting Dec. 11-12. Houdyshell refused to answer lawmakers' questions last month because of the pending prosecutions, and the prospect of lawsuits from banks that issued loans based on the allegedly fake titles.

Lawmakers should hold a public hearing after the cases are resolved, Otten added, even though lawmakers will "know all the answers" by that time.

"If I did nothing, the public would sit there and say, 'There they go again. They're hiding it,'" he said. "And so I thought it was incumbent that even though it might not get all the answers, at least the public knows we are looking into it. We take this very seriously."

Otten also told board members another investigation is ongoing involving a contractor with the Department of Human Services.

The Meals on Wheels program in western South Dakota, which provides free meals to elderly South Dakotans, unexpectedly shut down programs in several northwestern towns this year, according to The Dakota Scout and Timber Lake Topic.

The closure reportedly left several vendors uncompensated and was allegedly a violation of a contract with the Department of Human Services by the program's provider, Western SD Senior Services Inc., which is based in Rapid City. Meals on Wheels is funded with federal and state dollars, which can include Medicaid support, in addition to private donations.

Sen. Ryan Maher, R-Isabel, fielded calls from concerned local seniors and vendors involved with the Meals on Wheels program. Maher referred the concerns to Otten and the Government Operations and Audit Committee.

"A lot of money is unaccounted for," Maher told South Dakota Searchlight.

The Attorney General's Office confirmed it is conducting a Medicaid fraud investigation. Otten said information could be slow to emerge.

"By the time we get to December, I doubt any of that information will be brought forward," Otten said, "but we'll still dive into that somewhat."

*Makenzie Huber is a lifelong South Dakotan who regularly reports on the intersection of politics and policy with health, education, social services and Indigenous affairs. Her work with South Dakota Searchlight earned her the title of South Dakota's Outstanding Young Journalist in 2024, and she was a 2024 finalist for the national Livingston Awards.*

## Trump readies for mass deportations with pick of Noem as Homeland Security chief

**BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - NOVEMBER 12, 2024 3:58 PM**

WASHINGTON — President-elect Donald Trump said Tuesday night he will nominate South Dakota Republican Gov. Kristi Noem to lead the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, which will carry out Trump's plan to conduct mass deportations of millions of people in the country without proper legal status.

"Kristi has been very strong on Border Security," Trump said in a statement. "She will work closely with "Border Czar" Tom Homan to secure the Border, and will guarantee that our American Homeland is secure from our adversaries. I have known Kristi for years, and have worked with her on a wide variety of projects – She will be a great part of our mission to Make America Safe Again."

DHS is the agency primarily responsible for immigration enforcement and border security and handles temporary protections to allow immigrants to live and work in the United States. As Trump rolls out his nominees, Noem would be the first governor to get the nod for the Cabinet.

DHS has about 260,000 federal employees and a nearly \$62 billion discretionary budget authority.

The news had already caused a backlash among Democrats even before Trump's announcement, as media reports said Noem would be selected.

"With a long history of championing Trump's draconian immigration policies, Governor Kristi Noem will carry out his cruel plans without a second thought," Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren said in a statement.

Noem said in a statement she is "honored and humbled" to be selected.

"I look forward to working with Border Czar Tom Homan to make America SAFE again," said Noem. "With Donald Trump, we will secure the Border, and restore safety to American communities so that families will again have the opportunity to pursue The American Dream."

Noem, a staunch Trump ally, was one of several Republican governors who sent U.S. National Guard troops to the southern border in Texas, in a rebuke to the Biden administration and its immigration policies. She's also visited the southern border several times.

Noem served in Congress from 2011 until 2019, when she left after winning her 2018 run for governor. She's in her second term that is set to expire in 2026.

While in Congress, she served on the U.S. House Armed Services, Ways and Means and Agriculture committees.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 14 of 98

Noem did not sit on the committee that provides oversight for DHS, the Homeland Security Committee.

## Noem joins border czar

In Trump's second administration, Noem would join several former Trump officials who were the architects and biggest defenders of his hard-line immigration policies. The three are among Trump's first staffing announcements.

On Monday, Trump dubbed the former acting director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement in the previous Trump administration, Homan, as his "border czar." Homan backed the controversial "zero tolerance" policy that separated nearly 5,000 migrant families at the southern border.

Stephen Miller, who steered many of Trump's first-term immigration policies, is set to join the White House as a deputy chief of staff for policy.

Vanessa Cárdenas, the executive director of the immigration advocacy group America's Voice, said in a statement that the appointment of Miller and Homan signals that "mass deportations will be indiscriminate and unsparing."

"The Stephen Miller and Tom Homan appointments are disturbing, if unsurprising, signals that we should take Donald Trump seriously and literally about his proposed largest deportation operation in American history and the unsparing, indiscriminate, and costly nature of what's to come," Cárdenas said.

Noem's nomination to Trump's Cabinet would have to go through Senate confirmation, where she could face questions about an anecdote in her memoir. She retracted a story about meeting North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un after reporters questioned whether the meeting actually happened.

Additionally, in the same memoir, she disclosed that she shot her 14-month-old puppy, named Cricket, because of behavioral issues. The revelation drew intense criticism from both sides of the political aisle.

## Vast responsibilities

DHS is a sprawling agency consisting of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Transportation Security Administration, U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Coast Guard, among other national security agencies.

The Secret Service is under intense scrutiny after major shortfalls in its prevention of the first assassination attempt against Trump last summer, where he sustained an injury to his ear. That first assassination attempt in Butler, Pennsylvania, led to the director, Kimberly Cheatle, resigning.

Ronald L. Rowe, the U.S. Secret Service deputy director, is currently serving as the acting director, and was praised for the agency's swift action in the second assassination attempt against Trump at his private golf course in Florida.

*Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her areas of coverage include politics and policy, lobbying, elections and campaign finance.*

## Trump legal case in New York on hold as prosecution studies effect of presidential win

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - NOVEMBER 12, 2024 1:03 PM

WASHINGTON — All court proceedings for President-elect Donald Trump's guilty conviction in New York are now paused, as the prosecution examines moving forward with the case against the man who will be sworn in as the 47th president of the United States.

New York Judge Juan Merchan stayed all actions Monday in the People of New York v. Donald J. Trump until Nov. 19, according to email correspondence between all parties that was published by the court.

U.S. special counsel Jack Smith has similarly requested a federal judge to delay proceedings in Trump's 2020 election interference case.

Trump, who was found guilty by a jury in late May of 34 felonies in falsifying business, is scheduled to



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 15 of 98

be sentenced on Nov. 26.

Merchan has yet to rule on Trump's motion to dismiss the case based on the U.S. Supreme Court's July presidential immunity ruling that triggered questions over what evidence against a former president can or cannot be admitted to a court of law.

## Delay sought

Merchan granted the delay in response to a joint application from both the District Attorney of New York's office and Trump's defense team, which wants the case altogether dismissed.

New York prosecutor Matthew Colangelo informed Merchan in an email Sunday that Trump's team requested on Friday the state delay the case "to provide time to review and consider a number of arguments based on the impact on this proceeding from the results of the Presidential election."

Colangelo agreed the "unprecedented circumstances" presented by Trump's election victory "require careful consideration to ensure that any further steps in this proceeding appropriately balance the competing interests of (1) a jury verdict of guilt following trial that has the presumption of regularity; and (2) the Office of the President."

Colangelo asked Merchan to give him until Nov. 19 to decide how and whether the prosecution will move forward.

Later Sunday morning, Trump attorney Emil Bove followed with an email to Merchan agreeing with the prosecution's deadline request.

"The stay, and dismissal, are necessary to avoid unconstitutional impediments to President Trump's ability to govern, which is the broader argument that we made to DANY on Friday," Bove wrote.

## 34 felony charges

Trump made history as the first former president to become a convicted felon when the New York jury on May 30 found him guilty on all 34 felony charges for covering up hush money payments to adult film actress Stormy Daniels just ahead of the 2016 presidential election.

The trial that stretched throughout the spring featured witness testimony from Daniels about a sexual encounter with Trump in 2006 at a Lake Tahoe golf resort.

Former Trump attorney Michael Cohen was also called by the prosecution to give an account of Trump's concealment of 11 invoices, 11 checks and 12 ledger entries to repay Cohen for the \$130,000 in hush money he paid to Daniels.

Trump slammed the trial and conviction as a "scam," and Republicans showed resounding support for the former president during and after the proceedings, with House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, calling the verdict a "shameful day in American history."

*Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.*

## U.S. House GOP claims mandate on immigration, lower food prices, 'end to the wokeness'

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - NOVEMBER 12, 2024 11:24 AM

WASHINGTON — U.S. House Republican leaders said Tuesday voters have given them a "mandate" to enact as much conservative policy as possible once they gain unified control of the federal government in January, but declined to provide details about exactly what policies they'd seek to enact.

"The American people want us to implement and deliver that America first agenda," said Speaker Mike Johnson. "And we have to do that while we have that energy and that excitement, beginning on the very first day of the Congress in the new year."

The Louisiana Republican said the election results showed that Americans want lawmakers to focus their

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 16 of 98

attention on "secure borders" and preventing "terrorists and criminals from entering the country."

"They want and deserve low costs for groceries and gasoline," Johnson said. "They want us to project strength on the world stage again and not the weakness that we have projected for the last four years. They want an end to the wokeness and the radical gender ideology and a return to common sense in our children's classrooms and corporate boardrooms and government agencies. We're going to ensure all that's true."

## Not at 218 quite yet

The Associated Press, the news organization that States Newsroom relies upon for race calls based on decades of experience, hadn't called the House for Republicans as of Tuesday, but was expected to in the coming days.

GOP politicians have won 214 seats so far, just short of the 218 minimum needed to hold the majority, though they'll need a few more seats for safe margins after President-elect Donald Trump nominated a few of their colleagues to posts in his next administration.

Democrats are projected to hold at least 205 seats in the House, with 16 races yet to be called by the AP. That will give Republicans a slim majority when the next Congress begins in January and not much room to lose votes from either centrist or far-right members.

GOP lawmakers will hold 53 seats in the U.S. Senate next year after flipping seats previously held by Democrats in Montana, Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia, according to the AP.

Johnson said during the press conference on the steps of the Capitol building that he expected the GOP will hold a larger majority during the next Congress than the 220 seats it currently has.

But he cautioned that every Republican vote will matter since the party isn't likely to have a large majority. "Every single vote will count because if someone gets ill or has a car accident or a late flight on their plane, then it affects the votes on the floor," Johnson said.

Republicans in Congress, he said, are coordinating closely with Trump, who is expected to meet with lawmakers on Wednesday at the Capitol before Johnson heads to Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida this weekend to hash out details of a legislative agenda with him.

"President Trump is going to meet with President Biden at the White House. And so it was suggested ... that he wanted to come and visit with House Republicans," Johnson said. "So we're working out the details of him gathering with us, potentially tomorrow morning, before he goes to the White House. And that would be a great meeting and a moment for all of us. There's a lot of excitement, a lot of energy here."

## Details on reforms to come

Holding unified control of government will allow Republicans to use the complicated budget reconciliation process to pass legislation without needing the bipartisan support that's typically required to get past the Senate's 60-vote legislative filibuster.

Johnson said the party is looking to employ that process for any policy areas that comply with the instructions, which allow lawmakers to make changes to revenue, spending, or the debt that are not "merely incidental" as part of the \$6 trillion federal budget.

"We have lots of very specific plans to kind of do that, and the details of that will come together in the coming week," he said.

Johnson said he didn't want to "get into any details about any specifics with regards to reforms," after being asked if Republicans would get rid of the Department of Education, one of Trump's campaign promises.

"There's lots of ideas on the table, but we got to work together, build consensus, work in coordination with the Trump administration on the order of the reforms and how we do it," Johnson said. "So I'm not getting ready to give you details on that. But you can stay tuned."

*Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.*

## Tribal health leaders say feds haven't treated syphilis outbreak as a public health emergency

**BY: JAZMIN OROZCO RODRIGUEZ, KFF HEALTH NEWS - NOVEMBER 12, 2024 10:00 AM**

Natalie Holt sees reminders nearly everywhere of the serious toll a years-long syphilis outbreak has taken in South Dakota. Scrambling to tamp down the spread of the devastating disease, public health officials are blasting messages to South Dakotans on billboards and television, urging people to get tested.

Holt works in Aberdeen, a city of about 28,000 surrounded by a sea of prairie, as a physician and the chief medical officer for the Great Plains Area Indian Health Service, one of 12 regional divisions of the federal agency responsible for providing health care to Native Americans and Alaska Natives in the U.S.

The response to this public health issue, she said, is not so different from the approach with the coronavirus pandemic — federal, state, local, and tribal groups need to “divide and conquer” as they work to test and treat residents. But they are responding to this crisis with fewer resources because federal officials haven't declared it a public health emergency.

The public pleas for testing are part of health officials' efforts to halt the outbreak that has disproportionately hurt Native Americans in the Great Plains and Southwest. According to the Great Plains Tribal Epidemiology Center, syphilis rates among Native Americans in its region soared by 1,865% from 2020 to 2022 — over 10 times the 154% increase seen nationally during the same period. The epidemiology center's region spans Iowa, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. The center also found that 1 in 40 Native American and Alaska Native babies born in the region in 2022 had a syphilis infection.

The rise in infections accelerated in 2021, pinching public health leaders still reeling from the coronavirus pandemic.

Three years later, the outbreak continues — the number of new infections so far this year is 10 times the full 12-month totals recorded in some years before the upsurge. And tribal health leaders say their calls for federal officials to declare a public health emergency have gone unheeded.

Pleas for help from local and regional tribal health leaders like Meghan Curry O'Connell, the chief public health officer for the Great Plains Tribal Leaders' Health Board and a citizen of the Cherokee Nation, preceded a September letter from the National Indian Health Board, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit that advocates for health care for U.S. tribes, to publicly urge the Department of Health and Human Services to declare a public health emergency. Tribal leaders said they need federal resources including public health workers, access to data and national stockpile supplies, and funding.

According to data from the South Dakota Department of Health, 577 cases of syphilis have been documented this year in the state. Of those, 430 were among Native American people — making up 75% of the state's syphilis cases, whereas the group accounts for just 9% of the population.

The numbers can be hard to process, O'Connell said.

“It's completely preventable and curable, so something has gone horribly wrong that this has occurred,” she said.

The Great Plains Tribal Leaders' Health Board first called on HHS to declare a public health emergency in February. O'Connell said the federal agency sent a letter in response outlining some resources and training it has steered toward the outbreak, but it stopped short of declaring an emergency or providing the substantial resources the board requested. The board's now months-old plea for resources was like the recent one from the National Indian Health Board.

“We know how to address this, but we do need extra support and resources in order to do it,” she said.

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection that can result in life-threatening damage to the heart, brain, and other organs if left untreated. Women infected while pregnant can pass the disease to their babies. Those infections in newborns, called congenital syphilis, kill dozens of babies each year and can lead to devastating health effects in others.

Holt said the Indian Health Service facilities she oversees have averaged more than 1,300 tests for syphilis monthly. She said a recent decline in new cases detected each month — down from 92 in January to 29



in September — may be a sign that things are improving. But a lot of damage has been done during the past few years.

Cases of congenital syphilis across the country have more than tripled in recent years, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In 2022, 3,700 cases were reported — the most in a single year since 1994.

The highest rate of reported primary and secondary syphilis cases in 2022 was among non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native people, with 67 cases per 100,000, according to CDC data.

O'Connell and other tribal leaders said they don't have the resources needed to keep pace with the outbreak.

Chief William Smith, vice president of Alaska's Valdez Native Tribe and chairperson of the National Indian Health Board, told HHS in the organization's letter that tribal health systems need greater federal investment so the system can better respond to public health threats.

Rafael Benavides, HHS' deputy assistant secretary for public affairs, said the agency has received the letter sent in early September and will respond directly to the authors.

"HHS is committed to addressing the urgent syphilis crisis in American Indian and Alaska Native communities and supporting tribal leaders' efforts to mobilize and raise awareness to address this important public health crisis," he said.

Federal officials from the health department and the CDC have formed task forces and hosted workshops for tribes on how to address the outbreak. But tribal leaders insist a public health emergency declaration is needed more than anything else.

Holt said that while new cases seem to be declining, officials continue to fight further spread with what resources they have. But obstacles remain, such as convincing people without symptoms to get tested for syphilis. To make this easier, appointments are not required. When people pick up medications at a pharmacy, they receive flyers about syphilis and information about where and when to get tested.

Despite this "full court press" approach, Holt said, officials know there are people who do not seek health care often and may fall through the cracks.

O'Connell said the ongoing outbreak is a perfect example of why staffing, funding, data access, and other resources need to be in place before an emergency develops, allowing public health agencies to respond immediately.

"Our requests have been specific to this outbreak, but really, they're needed as a foundation for whatever comes next," she said. "Because something will come next."

*Jazmin Orozco Rodriguez is a Nevada correspondent for KFF Health News.*

## Trump picks South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem to run Homeland Security

**BY: SETH TUPPER AND JOSHUA HAIAR - NOVEMBER 12, 2024 7:13 AM**

South Dakota Republican Gov. Kristi Noem is President-elect Donald Trump's choice to run the federal Department of Homeland Security.

After CNN and other news outlets reported the news early Tuesday, citing sources familiar with the situation, Trump and Noem confirmed the reports Tuesday evening.

Trump issued a statement saying Noem would "guarantee that our American Homeland is secure from our adversaries."

"I have known Kristi for years, and have worked with her on a wide variety of projects," Trump said. "She will be a great part of our mission to Make American Safe Again."

Trump's statement included comments from Noem.

"With Donald Trump, we will secure the Border, and restore safety to American communities so that

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 19 of 98

families will again have the opportunity to pursue The American Dream," Noem said.

Noem, 52, is serving her second four-year term as governor. Term limits prevent her from running again in 2026. She previously served four terms in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Noem has been closely associated with Trump since at least 2020, when she convinced the then-president to authorize and speak at a Mount Rushmore fireworks show during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

She was widely considered to be a potential running mate for Trump in his recent campaign, until last April. That's when media reports began to emerge about her new book, "No Going Back," in which she disclosed that she had once fatally shot a hunting dog in anger over its poor performance, and then fatally shot a goat while still angry about the dog.

She also retracted a story in the book about meeting North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un after reports questioning whether the meeting had happened.

Those and other revelations from the book made Noem a figure of ridicule for weeks as she went on a book tour. National television anchors grilled her in interviews, late-night TV hosts mocked her, and she was the butt of jokes and memes on social media.

Yet, several months later, she delivered a televised speech at the Republican National Convention. As Trump continued his campaign, speculation grew that Noem could be considered for a job in his administration.

Jon Schaff, a professor of government at Northern State University in Aberdeen, in northeastern South Dakota, said Noem's appointment would be the culmination of her yearslong devotion to Trump.

"Trump rewards loyalty, and Kristi Noem has been loyal," Schaff said.

The president-elect's choice of Noem to run Homeland Security — which includes the Secret Service — also signals Trump's high level of trust in her.

"She's been given a position that deals with a Trump administration priority: the border," Schaff said. "This is a big, important task. It requires more than photo opportunities and media spots. It takes hard work."

Trump has also selected Tom Homan as "border czar" for his administration as the president-elect seeks to carry out his campaign commitment of mass deportations of immigrants who lack permanent legal status. Homan is the former acting director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement in the previous Trump administration who backed the controversial "zero tolerance" policy that separated families at the southern border.

In his statement Tuesday evening, Trump said Noem would "work closely with 'Border Czar' Tom Homan to secure the Border."

The Department of Homeland Security's responsibilities include border and immigration enforcement, disaster response, antiterrorism and cybersecurity. Then-President George W. Bush created the department in 2002 in response to the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Offices under the department's umbrella include the Transportation Security Administration, Citizenship and Immigration Services, the Coast Guard, Customs and Border Protection, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the Secret Service.

Noem has been a vocal supporter of Trump's calls to strengthen border security. While serving as governor, she has ordered three National Guard deployments to support border security efforts in Texas and has signed off on several other federally ordered border deployments. She's also visited the southern border multiple times.

If Noem's appointment is subjected to Senate confirmation hearings, she could face difficult questioning about the Kim Jong Un anecdote in her book and its retraction, Schaff said. Trump has called for the Senate to recess after he takes office early next year so he can make appointments without going through the confirmation process.

That will be among the first choices facing the next Senate majority leader, who is scheduled to be elected by Republican senators on Wednesday. South Dakota Republican Sen. John Thune is among the candidates.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 20 of 98

## Speculation begins about 2026 governor race

Noem's appointment as secretary of Homeland Security would elevate Republican Lt. Gov. Larry Rhoden to governor for the rest of her term. Meanwhile, a campaign would likely begin for the 2026 Republican gubernatorial nomination, with Republicans including U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson and state Attorney General Marty Jackley among those rumored to be interested in running.

Rhoden did not immediately respond to a message Tuesday from South Dakota Searchlight.

Johnson, who was reelected to the U.S. House last week, told Searchlight in a text message, "I'm not making any political announcements anytime soon."

Jackley provided Searchlight with a statement: "Right now I'm focused on being the best attorney general I can be for South Dakota and doing the job South Dakotans elected me to do."

Jackley lost to Noem in the 2018 Republican gubernatorial primary election, and she went on to become the state's first female governor. When Noem ran for reelection in 2022, she beat Democratic nominee Jamie Smith in that year's general election. He said Tuesday that he's focused on serving in the state Senate after his election last week from a district in Sioux Falls.

"In our race, we called that she wouldn't finish her second term, and it turns out we were likely correct," Smith said.

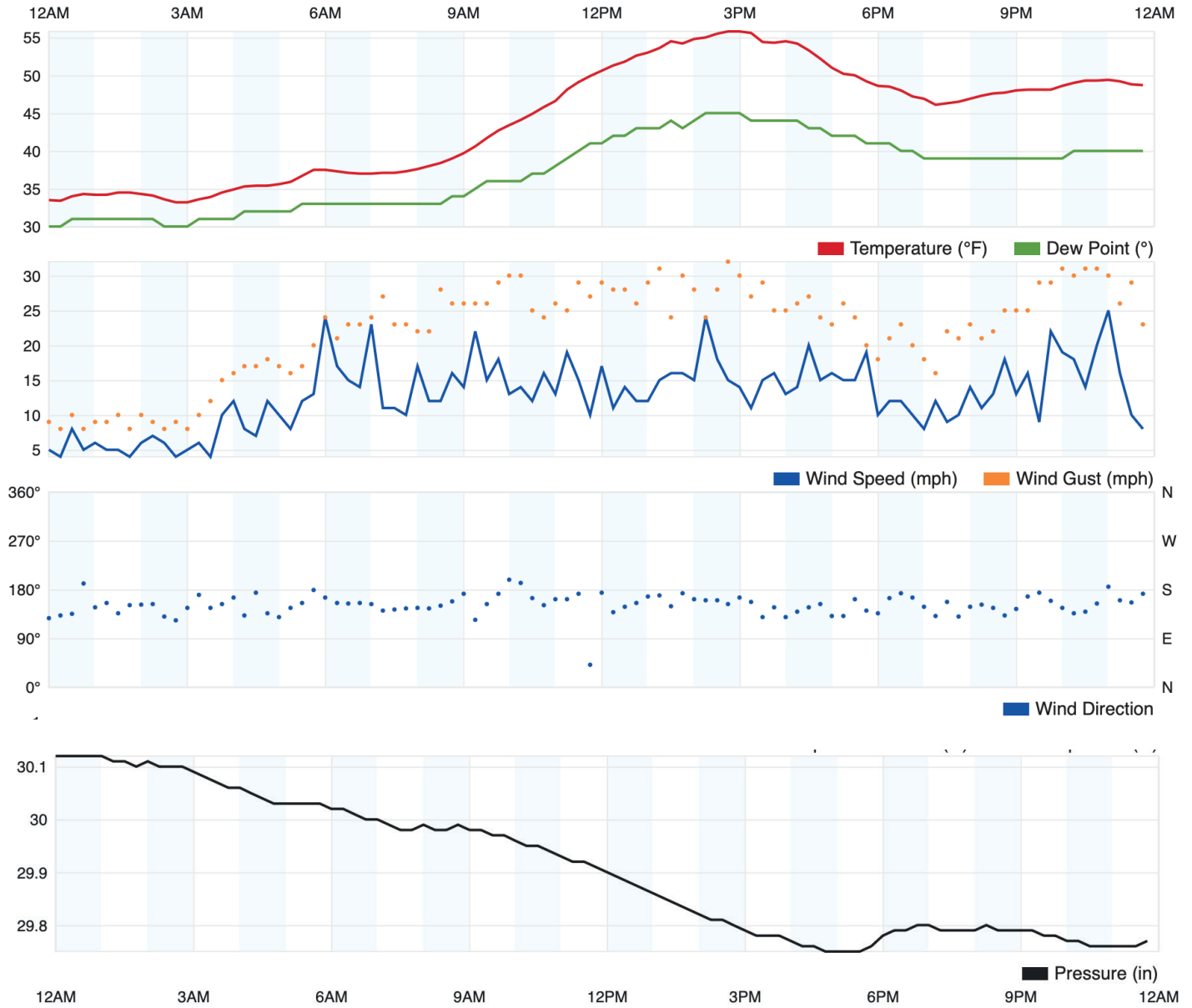
*Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.*

*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.*

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 21 of 98

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs





# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 22 of 98

**Wednesday**

**Wednesday  
Night**

**Thursday**

**Thursday  
Night**

**Friday**



**High: 47 °F**

**Low: 27 °F**

**High: 51 °F**

**Low: 27 °F**

**High: 55 °F**

Chance Rain  
then Slight  
Chance Rain

Mostly Clear

Sunny

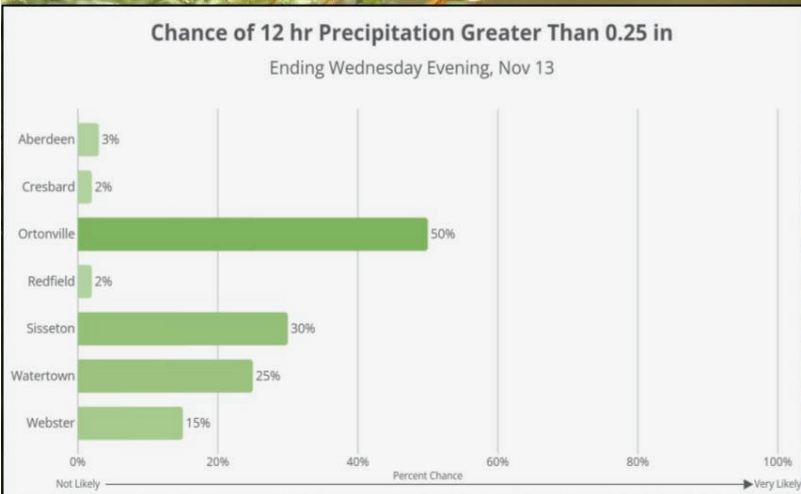
Mostly Clear

Partly Sunny



## Rain Mainly Along and East of the James River Today

November 13, 2024  
4:37 AM



### Today



- 30 to 85% chance of rain along and east of the James River, ending this afternoon
- Highest chances further east

**Highs: 45 to 55°**

### Tonight



- Clear becoming partly cloudy west of the James River
- Cloudy east of James River

**Lows: 27 to 35°**



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

A system will continue to push eastward today bringing a 30 to 85% chance of rain along and east of the James River. Highest percentages will be along the SD/MN border. Probability of rain over a quarter inch is about 30 to 50% east of I29. Dry conditions expected tonight through the end of the week with temperatures running about 10 to 15 degrees above average.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 23 of 98

## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 56 °F at 2:50 PM

Low Temp: 33 °F at 2:52 AM

Wind: 34 mph at 10:51 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 37 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 71 in 2016

Record Low: -11 in 1919

Average High: 44

Average Low: 20

Average Precip in Nov.: 0.38

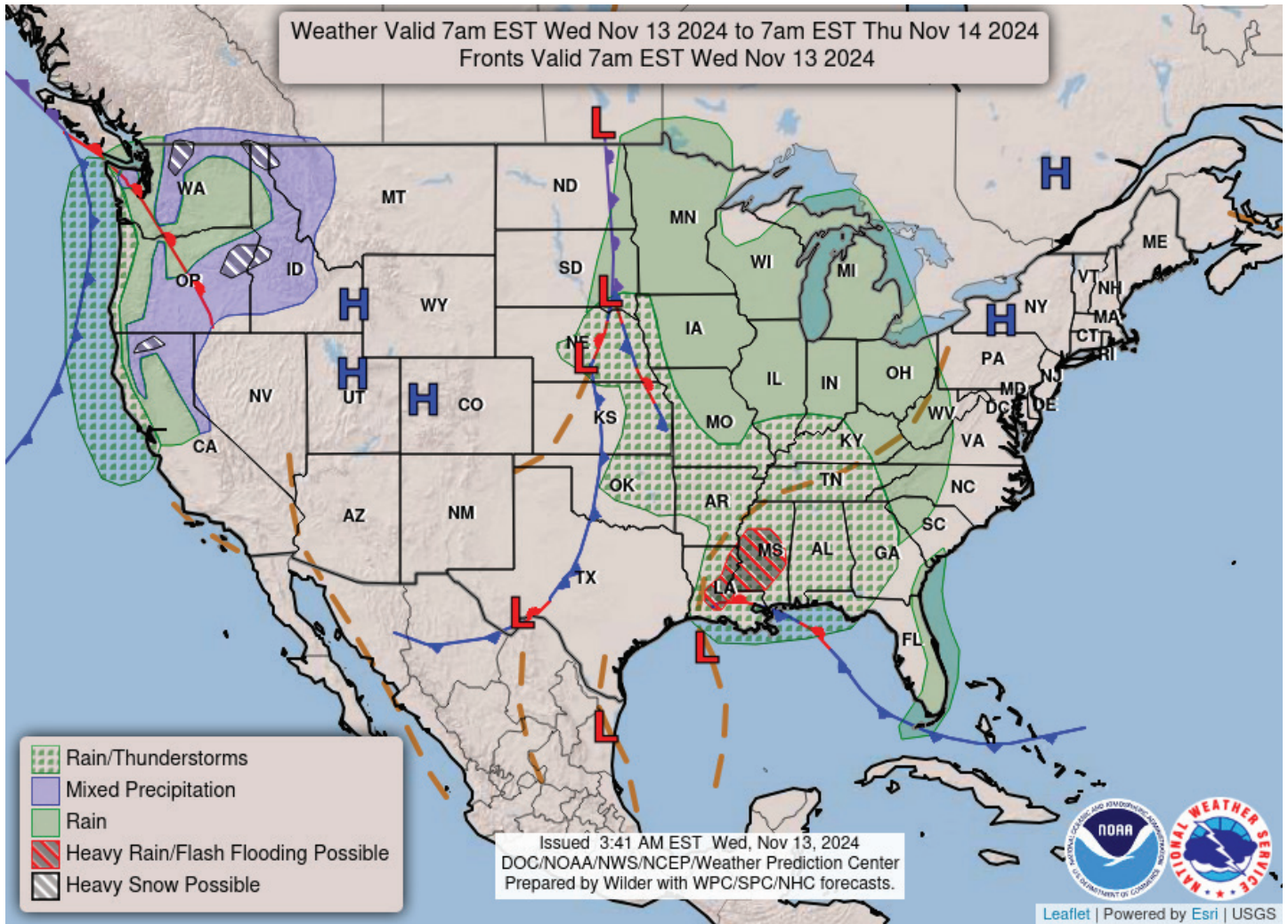
Precip to date in Nov.: 0.76

Average Precip to date: 20.85

Precip Year to Date: 20.64

Sunset Tonight: 5:05:33 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:29:22 am



## Today in Weather History

November 13, 1985: Snowfall of 4 to 8 inches spread from the southwest part of South Dakota on the morning of the 13th to the northeast part of the state by early morning on the 14th. Winds gusted to 35 mph in the western half of the state and produced considerable blowing and drifting snow, which significantly reduced visibilities. The snowfall caused many accidents, including a four-vehicle pileup that occurred three miles east of De Smet in Kingsbury County, during the afternoon of the 13th. Some snowfall amounts include; 7.0 inches in Britton; 5.5 inches in Timber Lake and 5.0 inches in Leola.

1833: In 1833, observers were familiar with the Leonid meteor shower, but the event that year was very intense and leads to the first formulation of a theory on the origin of meteors. By some estimates, the 1833 Leonid meteor shower had 240,000 meteors in a nine-hour period.

1933 - The first dust storm of the great dust bowl era of the 1930s occurred. The dust storm, which had spread from Montana to the Ohio Valley the day before, prevailed from Georgia to Maine resulting in a black rain over New York and a brown snow in Vermont. Parts of South Dakota, Minnesota and Iowa reported zero visibility on the 12th. On the 13th, dust reduced the visibility to half a mile in Tennessee. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1946: General Electric scientists produced snow in the Massachusetts Berkshires in the first modern-day cloud seeding experiment. Scientist Vincent Schaefer dropped six pounds of dry ice pellets into a cloud over Pittsfield, MA. The cloud seeding experiment produced snowfall, as a 4-mile long cloud was converted into snow flurries. The success of the experiment became the basis of many weather modification projects.

1953 - Strong southeasterly winds associated with a Pacific cold front reached 70 mph at Sacramento CA to equal their all-time record. The previous record had been established in a similar weather pattern on December 12th of the previous year. (The Weather Channel)

1981 - A powerful cyclone brought high winds to Washington State and Oregon. The cyclone, which formed about 1000 miles west of San Francisco, intensified rapidly as it approached the Oregon coast with the central pressure reaching 28.22 inches (956 millibars). A wind trace from the Whiskey Run Turbine Site, about 12 miles south of Coos Bay in Oregon, showed peak gusts to 97 mph fifty feet above ground level. The wind caused widespread damage in Washington and Oregon, with 12 deaths reported. As much as four feet of snow fell in the Sierra Nevada Range of northern California. (Storm Data)

1987 - A storm moving off the Pacific Ocean produced rain and gale force winds along the northern and central Pacific coast, and heavy snow in the Cascade Mountains. Cold weather prevailed in the southeastern U.S. Five cities reported record low temperatures for the date, including Asheville NC with a reading of 21 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Low pressure brought rain and snow and gusty winds to the northeastern U.S. A thunderstorm drenched Agawam MA with 1.25 inches of rain in fifteen minutes. Winds gusted to 58 mph at Nantucket MA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thirty-two cities in the central and eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date as readings warmed into the 70s as far north as Michigan and Pennsylvania. Afternoon highs in the 80s were reported from the Southern Plains to the southern Atlantic coast. Columbia SC reported a record high of 86 degrees, and the high of 71 degrees at Flint MI was their warmest of record for so late in the season. (The National Weather Summary)





## GOD BLESS OUR BUMPS

Little Martha was in a hurry to run out the door so she would not be late for school. In her haste she tripped and fell, hitting her head on the floor. Immediately, a bump appeared and frightened her. As the tears ran down her cheeks, she climbed into her mother's arms to be comforted.

Her Mom, holding her tightly, placed a cold pad on the lump and said, "Let's pray and ask Jesus to heal you so you can go to school."

Soon the tears stopped, Martha left her mother's lap, stood up and said, "Jesus healed me. Now I can go to school."

That night when they knelt to pray the mother asked, "What do you want to thank Jesus for tonight?"

"My bump," answered Martha quickly. "Because now I know He loves me because He made my bump go away."

"Whenever trouble comes your way," wrote James, "let it be an opportunity for joy. For when your faith is tested your endurance has an opportunity to grow." In the life of every Christian, there is always a connection between the problem and the promise, between the hardship and the hope.

James reminds us to turn our difficulties into optimism and to have a positive outlook for life. Troubles are not an end in themselves. If we are willing to work with God, He can teach us perseverance.

Prayer: May we understand and accept, Father, that "whatever comes our way" is for our good and that we can profit from every hardship as we learn to trust You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. James 1:2-7

*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*



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 26 of 98

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# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 27 of 98



## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

11.12.24

18 31 33 64 68 17

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$387,000,000**

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 43  
DRAW: Mins 34 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

11.11.24

15 38 39 50 52 10

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$14,430,000**

NEXT 14 Hrs 58 Mins  
DRAW: 34 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

11.12.24

11 21 22 24 48 8

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT 15 Hrs 13 Mins  
DRAW: 35 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

11.09.24

5 6 18 25 28

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$96,000**

NEXT 15 Hrs 13 Mins  
DRAW: 35 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

11.11.24

16 23 38 40 57 10

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT 15 Hrs 42 Mins  
DRAW: 35 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

11.11.24

3 21 24 34 46 9

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$113,000,000**

NEXT 15 Hrs 42 Mins  
DRAW: 35 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 28 of 98

## Upcoming Groton Events

07/04/2024 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course  
07/09/2024 FREE SNAP Application Assistance 1-6pm at the Community Center  
07/14/2024 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm  
07/17/2024 Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar at the Groton Legion 11am-1pm  
07/17/2024 Pro Am Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course  
07/25/2024 Dairy Queen Miracle Treat Day  
07/25/2024 Summer Downtown Sip & Shop 5-8pm  
07/25/2024 Treasures Amidst The Trials 6pm at Emmanuel Lutheran Church  
07/26/2024 Ferney Open Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Start  
07/27/2024 1st Annual Celebration in the Park 1-9:30pm  
08/05/2024 School Supply Drive 4-7pm at the Community Center  
**Cancelled:** Wine on 9 at Olive Grove Golf Course 6pm  
08/08/2024 Family Fun Fest 5:30-7:30pm  
08/9-11/2024 Jr. Legion State Baseball Tournament  
08/12/2024 Vitalant Blood Drive at the Community Center 1:15-7pm  
09/07/2024 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm  
09/07-08/2024 Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport  
09/08/2024 Sunflower Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 10am  
10/05/2024 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm  
10/11/2024 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am  
10/31/2024 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm  
10/31/2024 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm  
11/16/2024 Groton American Legion "Turkey Raffle" 6:30-11:30pm  
11/28/2024 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm  
12/01/2024 Groton Snow Queen Contest, 4:30 p.m.  
12/07/2024 Olive Grove 8th Annual Holiday Party with Live & Silent Auctions 6pm-close  
12/14/2024 Santa Day at Professional Management Services, downtown Groton  
04/12/2025 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt at the City Park 10am Sharp  
05/03/2025 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm  
05/26/2025 Memorial Day Services Groton Union Cemetery with lunch at Legion Post #39, 12pm  
07/04/2025 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course  
07/09/2025 Legion Auxiliary Salad Luncheon  
07/13/2025 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm  
09/06/2025 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm  
09/20/2025 NSU Gypsy Day  
10/31/2025 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm  
11/27/2025 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm

## News from the **AP** Associated Press

### A look at the candidates vying to be the next Senate majority leader

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In the first seriously contested Senate Republican leadership election in decades, three senators are vying to replace longtime GOP leader Mitch McConnell when he steps down from the post at the beginning of next year and Republicans take back the Senate majority.

South Dakota Sen. John Thune, Texas Sen. John Cornyn and Florida Sen. Rick Scott have been furiously campaigning to win their colleagues' support in the secret-ballot election Wednesday. All three are trying to convince their colleagues that they have the ear of President-elect Donald Trump and will be the best person to implement his agenda.

They are also trying to differentiate themselves from McConnell, saying they will give rank-and-file senators more power and be more communicative.

It's not clear who will win, or if there will be multiple rounds of votes before a winner is chosen.

A look at the three candidates:

SEN. JOHN THUNE

Thune, 63, defeated then-Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle in 2004 after arguing during the campaign that Daschle had lost his South Dakota roots during his years in Democratic leadership. Now Thune is running to become majority leader himself.

Well liked and a respected communicator, Thune has been perceived as a front-runner for much of the year. He is currently the No. 2 Republican in the Senate, and took over for McConnell for a few weeks last year when he was on a medical leave. He is also a former chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee.

As he geared up to run for leader, Thune spent much of the year campaigning for his colleagues. According to his aides, he raised more than \$31 million to elect Senate Republicans this cycle, including a \$4 million transfer from his own campaign accounts to the Senate's main campaign arm.

One potential liability for Thune has been his previously rocky relationship with Trump. Thune was highly critical of the then-president as he tried to overturn his election defeat in 2020 and after the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol by Trump's supporters. Thune said then that Trump's efforts to disrupt the peaceful transfer of power were "inexcusable."

This year, though, Thune and Trump have talked frequently on the phone and Thune visited the then-GOP candidate at his home in Florida. Thune told The Associated Press over the summer that he views their potential relationship as a professional one. If they both win their elections, Thune said, "we've got a job to do."

SEN. JOHN CORNYN

Like Thune, Cornyn is a popular and respected member of the Senate GOP conference. A former Texas attorney general and member of the state Supreme Court, much of his work has been on the Senate Judiciary Committee. He was also McConnell's No. 2, the job Thune now holds, for six years before he was term-limited out of the job.

Cornyn, 72, has also spent much of the year courting his colleagues one by one and fundraising for them around the country. He has long been one of the best fundraisers in the Senate, and his aides say he has raised more than \$400 million for party candidates during his 22 years in office.

In 2022, after a gunman stormed a Texas elementary school and killed 19 children and two teachers, Cornyn was tapped by McConnell to lead the GOP in negotiating gun legislation with Democrats. The bill, passed that summer, stepped up background checks for buyers under 21, increased prosecutions for unlicensed gun sellers and put millions of dollars into youth mental health services. While Cornyn has touted his work on the gun bill, it could cost him some votes with the conference's most conservative members.

Cornyn also had some past tensions with Trump, including his early suggestions that Trump might not be



the best GOP candidate to run in 2024. But he, too, has smoothed relations with the incoming president, meeting him when he was in Texas to campaign and visiting him in Florida.

SEN. RICK SCOTT

While Thune and Cornyn both have leadership experience and have spent the better part of the year methodically trying to woo individual senators, Scott is running a different kind of campaign. And he believes he has a distinct advantage: his relationship with Trump.

Scott, a former two-term governor of Florida and a successful businessman, was reelected to a second term in the Senate last week, beating Democrat Debbie Mucarsel-Powell by more than 10 points. He is a longtime booster of the incoming president, and has positioned himself as a strong ally. Scott traveled to New York to support Trump during Trump's hush money trial earlier this year, and has openly said he wants Trump to endorse him.

He won a rush of support on social media over the weekend when he was endorsed by people close to Trump, including Elon Musk. But Trump has not weighed in on the Senate contest.

It's unclear if Scott's outside approach could win him more support in the clubby Senate. He won 10 votes when he challenged McConnell for the post in 2022, and he will be aiming to improve that count in the first round of balloting Wednesday.

Scott, 71, is part of a growing group of far-right senators who have criticized McConnell's tenure and advocated for more power for individual members. Several senators in that group, including Utah Sen. Mike Lee and Wisconsin Sen. Ron Johnson, have endorsed him, arguing that his business experience and relationship with Trump should put him over the top.

## Senate Republicans are gathering behind closed doors to pick a new majority leader

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican senators will gather behind closed doors Wednesday to decide who will replace longtime Senate leader Mitch McConnell and lead their new majority next year — a decision that could shape the future of the Senate, and the party, as Donald Trump reclaims the presidency.

South Dakota Sen. John Thune, Texas Sen. John Cornyn and Florida Sen. Rick Scott have been scrambling to win the most votes in the secret ballot election, promising a new direction in the Senate even as they furiously compete for Trump's favor. It will be the first test of Trump's relationship with Congress after he won the election decisively and claimed a mandate for his agenda.

It's uncertain who will win.

Thune and Cornyn have campaigned mostly within the Senate, working senators individually and privately and raising millions of dollars for Senate GOP candidates. Both quickly mobilized in March after McConnell announced he would step aside from leadership.

Scott has run an insurgent campaign outside of the Senate, campaigning publicly as the candidate closest to Trump and winning endorsements from people who are close to the former and future president. Scott received an outpouring of support on X over the weekend as Trump allies, including Elon Musk, pushed his bid.

Who senators choose, and whether Trump ultimately endorses a candidate in the final hours, could set the tone for Trump's attempts to assert control over the legislative branch in his second presidency. His relationship with McConnell was strained in his first term, and Trump was often frustrated that lawmakers would not fully bend to his will.

Both Cornyn and Thune have drawn closer to Trump in recent months after criticizing him as he tried to overturn his election defeat in 2020. But the two longtime senators are both viewed by their colleagues as institutionalists more in the mold of McConnell, while Scott has worked to gather support outside of the Senate, and within Trump's inner circle, to pressure an overhaul within.

"We got a mandate a week ago that people want change," said Republican Sen. Tommy Tuberville of Alabama, who is supporting Scott, as he walked into a forum for the candidates on Tuesday night. "They

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 31 of 98

want President Trump to have more leeway than he had last time. He was kind of tied down a little bit.”

Tuberville said that whoever is chosen, he wants to make sure Trump “feels good about it.”

No matter who wins, all three senators have shown they will defer to the incoming president as the leader of the party, and that they are willing to cede some of the Senate’s power to do so.

When Trump posted on X Sunday that the new leader “must agree” to allow him to appoint Cabinet members and others when the Senate is on recess, avoiding confirmation votes, all three quickly signaled they were open to the idea.

To select the new leader, Senate Republicans will meet privately in a ceremonial space in the Capitol for several hours to hear the candidates make their case. Few aides are allowed in. The contenders will each be introduced and nominated by two other senators, and then they make a speech of their own. Ballots are cast secretly. If no one wins a majority on the first ballot, they proceed to a second round, and so on, until someone wins a majority of the vote.

The clubby contest is a stark contrast from the House, where lawmakers publicly announce their votes for speaker in an election on the House floor.

And aside from Scott’s challenge to McConnell two years ago, in which he won 10 votes, it is the first competitive election for Republican leader in three decades. McConnell, who has been a force for the party but has repeatedly feuded with Trump, was uncontested when he first became party leader in 2007.

Unlike most previous contests, there is no clear front-runner going into the election. Because senators are casting secret ballots, the majority won’t say who they are voting for. And some may never tell.

“It’s a secret ballot and it’s a secret ballot for a reason,” said South Dakota Sen. Mike Rounds, who said early on he would support his home state colleague Thune. “Each member chooses the leader that they think they can work with the best over this two year period of time.”

Rounds said that he prefers the way that Thune and Cornyn have “handled it one-on-one with everybody,” but that he had talked to Scott as well. “We’ve got three qualified individuals,” he said.

One thing all candidates agree on is change from McConnell, who called most of the shots as leader — a top demand from the far-right faction of the caucus who disagreed with McConnell on aid to Ukraine and increasingly turned on him as he feuded with Trump.

Thune, Scott and Cornyn said they would like to see more opportunity for individual senators to bring bills to the floor and offer amendments, and they have pledged to be better communicators within the conference than the often-reserved McConnell. At the forum on Tuesday evening, the three agreed on many of the issues discussed, according to senators leaving the meeting.

Thune, McConnell’s current No. 2, has been seen by colleagues as an incumbent of sorts, having taken over for several weeks last year when McConnell was absent due to medical reasons. He is well-liked among his fellow senators, and was seen for some time as the front-runner in the race. But Cornyn, who served as McConnell’s No. 2 before Thune, is also well-liked and has also won some commitments from colleagues.

Thune and Cornyn are similar on policy, voting generally in step with the conference but working with Democrats at times. Cornyn is a longtime member of the Senate Judiciary Committee who took a leading role on bipartisan gun legislation two years ago. Thune worked across the aisle as a former chairman of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee.

The two differ on whether the leader should be term limited — a key demand from some in the conservative wing. Cornyn has pushed for limits, while Thune has not.

Scott, the former governor of Florida, was elected in 2018 and quickly positioned himself as a foil to McConnell, running against him for leader in 2022 and aligning with Utah Sen. Mike Lee and others who have been highly critical of the current leadership. As Thune and Cornyn wooed their colleagues all year, Scott spent most of the year tied up in his own reelection race. He handily defeated Democrat Debbie Mucarsel-Powell by more than 10 points.

Scott has campaigned on his business experience. He said Tuesday night that the pitch boils down to that “I support Donald Trump’s agenda. He’s got a mandate.”

Also voting in the election on Wednesday are the senators-elect who handed Republicans the majority

next year, even though they aren't yet sworn in. Republican Bernie Moreno, who beat Democratic Sen. Sherrod Brown, attended the forum on Tuesday night and said afterward that there was "incredible energy" in the room.

Still, he said that he hasn't decided who he will vote for. "We've got three great candidates who should get us to where we are going," he said.

## **Josh Dix scores 23 to lead 5 Iowa players in double figures, Hawkeyes beat South Dakota**

IOWA CITY, Iowa (AP) — Josh Dix made 5 of 6 from 3-point range and finished with 23 points on 8-of-10 shooting to lead five Iowa players scoring in double figures Tuesday night and helped the Hawkeyes beat South Dakota 96-77.

Seydou Traore and Payton Sandfort scored 12 points apiece for Iowa (3-0). Ladji Dembele and Drew Thelwell each added 11.

Dix hit from behind the arc to make it 3-2 with 19:20 left in the first half and the Hawkeyes led the rest of the way. They made 13 3-pointers and shot 54% (37 of 68) overall, including 22 of 35 (65%) from the field in the second half.

Kaleb Stewart led South Dakota (3-1) with 26 points on 11-of-19 shooting, 4 of 10 from behind the arc. Isaac Bruns scored 11.

Dix sandwiched a pair of 3-pointers around a jumper by Dembele before Sandfort added a 3 and Riley Mulvey threw down a dunk to cap a 13-0 run that gave Iowa a 59-41 lead with 15:26 to play and the Coyotes trailed by double figures the rest of the way.

## **What to know about Kristi Noem, Trump's pick for Homeland Security secretary**

REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump has selected South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem to head the Department of Homeland Security, one of the biggest government agencies that will be integral to his vow to secure the border and carry out a massive deportation operation.

Here are five things to know about Noem:

She's a rancher

The 52-year-old was born in Watertown, South Dakota, and raised on a ranch and farm outside the city. Her father died in a grain-bin collapse at the age of 49.

"When Dad passed away it was devastating for our entire family," she said during a 2022 interview with the Christian Broadcasting Network. "He was my best friend. He was the person I admired the most, the one that I cared the most what he thought of me and had planned my entire life just to grow up and to work with him and be in business with him."

She was involved in a number of family businesses before successfully running for the South Dakota House of Representatives in 2006. In 2010, she won the state's at-large House seat, and in 2018, she was elected the state's first female governor. She was reelected in 2022.

After becoming governor, Noem started working closely with Corey Lewandowski, Trump's 2016 campaign manager. Then, during the pandemic, she rose to prominence in conservative circles for resisting most government regulations to slow the spread of infections. She has since become a regular presence in Trump's political world and at one point was considered to be his running mate.

She enjoys pheasant hunting and hosts the yearly governor's hunt. And she's an excellent horseback rider.

The dog story

She was vilified this year for a story she told in her book about killing her 14-month-old wirehaired pointer named Cricket.

Cricket was Noem's hunting dog but was rambunctious. Noem took the dog with her on a hunting trip

with older dogs in hopes of calming her down.

It didn't work and then on the way home, Noem wrote that when she stopped to talk to a family, Cricket got out of Noem's truck and attacked and killed some of the family's chickens. Then the dog "whipped around to bite me," she wrote.

"At that moment," Noem wrote, "I realized I had to put her down." She led Cricket to a gravel pit and killed her.

Critics lambasted her while she defended the killing of Cricket as an example of her willingness to make hard choices.

She talks tough on immigration

Noem has been a key Trump supporter, including backing his tough immigration talk.

"President Trump will deport the most dangerous illegal aliens first — the murderers, rapists, and other criminals that Harris and Biden let into the country. They do not belong here, and we will not let them back in," Noem said in a post on X after Trump was elected.

Noem joined other Republican governors who sent troops to Texas to assist Texas' Operation Lone Star, which sought to discourage migrants.

Noem's decision was met with particularly harsh criticism because she covered most of the deployment cost with a \$1 million donation from a Tennessee billionaire who has often donated to Republicans.

Noem described the U.S. border with Mexico as a "war zone" when she sent the troops there, saying they'd be on the front lines of stopping drug smugglers and human traffickers. But records from the Guard painted a more nuanced picture of their mission.

Testy relations with tribes

The Oglala Sioux told her in 2019 that she was not welcome on the Pine Ridge reservation after she led efforts to pass a state law targeting demonstrations such as those in neighboring North Dakota that plagued the Dakota Access oil pipeline.

"I am hereby notifying you that you are not welcome to visit our homelands," Oglala Sioux President Julian Bear Runner said in a letter to Noem. He told Noem that if she ignored the directive "we will have no choice but to banish you" from the reservation.

The governor also has clashed with the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe over Fourth of July fireworks displays at Mount Rushmore. The tribe has opposed the fireworks displays at a monument they view as a desecration of land violently stolen from them decades ago.

Daughter's real estate appraiser license

In 2020, the South Dakota agency responsible for licensing real estate appraisers denied Noem's daughter's application.

Days later, Noem summoned the state employee who ran the agency, the woman's direct supervisor and the state labor secretary to her office for a meeting with her daughter. Four months later, Noem's daughter got the certification.

South Dakota lawmakers later unanimously approved a report finding that Noem's daughter got preferential treatment while applying for the license.

An Associated Press report on Noem's actions surrounding her daughter's licensure sparked the investigation. The governor has said her daughter did not get preferential treatment.

## Trump builds out national security team with picks of Hegseth for Pentagon, Noem for DHS

By ZEKE MILLER, MICHELLE L. PRICE and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump moved to build out his national security team Tuesday, announcing he is nominating Fox News host and Army veteran Pete Hegseth to serve as his defense secretary and former Director of National Intelligence John Ratcliffe to lead the Central Intelligence Agency.



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 34 of 98

In a flurry of announcements, Trump said he had chosen former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee as ambassador to Israel and his longtime friend Steven Witkoff to be a special envoy to the Middle East. Trump also said he would nominate South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem to run the Department of Homeland Security and named Bill McGinley, his Cabinet secretary in his first administration, as his White House counsel.

Trump is rolling out a steady stream of appointees and nominees for his upcoming administration, working thus far at a faster pace and without as much drama as his first transition following his 2016 victory. His selection of Hegseth, who lacks senior military or national security experience, was sure to draw questions about his qualifications to lead the department.

Hegseth, 44, is a co-host of Fox News Channel's "Fox & Friends Weekend" and has been a contributor with the network since 2014, where he developed a friendship with Trump, who made regular appearances on the show.

If confirmed by the Senate, he would inherit the top job during a series of global crises — ranging from Russia's war in Ukraine and the ongoing attacks in the Middle East by Iranian proxies to the push for a cease-fire between Israel, Hamas and Hezbollah and escalating worries about the growing alliance between Russia and North Korea.

Hegseth is also the author of "The War on Warriors: Behind the Betrayal of the Men Who Keep Us Free," published earlier this year, and has been outspoken about rooting out what he has called "woke-ness" in the military.

The book, according to its promo, combines "his own war experiences, tales of outrage, and an incisive look at how the chain of command got so kinked," and bills itself as "the key to saving our warriors — and winning future wars."

While the Pentagon is considered a key coveted post in any administration, the defense secretary was a tumultuous post during Trump's first term. Five men held the job during his four years only to resign, be fired or serve briefly as a stopgap. Just two of them were actually confirmed by the Senate.

Trump's relationship with his civilian and military leaders during those years was fraught with tension, confusion and frustration, as they struggled to temper or even simply interpret presidential tweets and pronouncements that blindsided them with abrupt policy decisions they weren't prepared to explain or defend. Many of the generals who worked in his first administration — both on active duty and retired — have slammed him as unfit to serve in the Oval Office and he has condemned them in return.

Hegseth was an infantry captain in the Army National Guard and served overseas in Afghanistan, Iraq and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. He was formerly head of the Concerned Veterans for America, a group backed by conservative billionaires Charles and David Koch, and he unsuccessfully ran for the Senate in Minnesota in 2012.

He also championed the case of four former Blackwater contractors convicted in a 2007 shooting rampage in Baghdad that killed more than a dozen Iraqi civilians. They were pardoned by Trump in one of his final acts in office.

"With Pete at the helm, America's enemies are on notice — Our Military will be Great Again, and America will Never Back Down," Trump said in a statement. "Nobody fights harder for the Troops, and Pete will be a courageous and patriotic champion of our 'Peace through Strength' policy."

Hegseth has "an excellent background as a junior officer but does not have the senior national security experience that secretaries need," said Mark Cancian, a senior advisor at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "I think Trump was tired of fighting with his secretaries of defense and picked one who would be loyal to him." Cancian said the lack of experience might make it more difficult for Hegseth to get through Senate confirmation.

Noem is a well-known conservative and former member of Congress who used her two terms leading a state to vault to a prominent position in Republican politics. She was considered a potential presidential contender herself, but declined to challenge Trump. She instead launched an overt pitch to be selected vice president but lost that nod when Trump chose JD Vance as his running mate.

If confirmed, Noem would head an agency that is at the center of Trump's sweeping immigration plans and his campaign vow to carry out mass deportations of immigrants in the United States illegally. There

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 35 of 98

are an estimated 11 million people in the country illegally.

The Department of Homeland Security is a sprawling agency of 260,000 employees created in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks with a vast area of responsibility. It was patched together from 22 various agencies with the weighty task of preventing future attacks and is the subject of constant suggestions that it is too unwieldy and should be broken up.

Ratcliffe, a former Republican congressman from Texas, served as director of national intelligence for the final months of Trump's first term, leading the U.S. government's spy agencies during the coronavirus pandemic. He is a more traditional pick for the role, which requires Senate confirmation, than some rumored loyalists pushed by some of Trump's supporters.

Huckabee is a staunch defender of Israel, and his intended nomination comes as Trump has promised to align U.S. foreign policy more closely with Israel's interests as it wages wars against Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Witkoff is a Florida real estate investor who is serving as a chair of Trump's inaugural committee. He also spent time in the world of New York real estate, where Trump first made his mark as a public figure.

As intelligence director, Ratcliffe was criticized by Democrats for declassifying in the final days of the 2020 presidential election Russian intelligence alleging damaging information about Democrats during the 2016 race even though he acknowledged it might not be true.

Ratcliffe's visibility rose as he emerged in 2019 as an ardent defender of Trump during the House's first impeachment proceedings against him. He was a member of Trump's impeachment advisory team and strenuously questioned witnesses during the impeachment hearings.

After the Democratic-controlled House voted to impeach Trump, Ratcliffe said, "This is the thinnest, fastest and weakest impeachment our country has ever seen." He also forcefully questioned former special counsel Robert Mueller when he testified before the House Judiciary Committee about his investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election.

"I look forward to John being the first person ever to serve in both of our Nation's highest Intelligence positions," Trump said in a statement. "He will be a fearless fighter for the Constitutional Rights of all Americans, while ensuring the Highest Levels of National Security, and PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH."

Huckabee has led paid tour group visits to Israel for years, frequently advertising the trips on conservative-leaning news outlets.

"Mike has been a great public servant, Governor, and Leader in Faith for many years," Trump said in a statement. "He loves Israel, and the people of Israel, and likewise, the people of Israel love him. Mike will work tirelessly to bring about Peace in the Middle East!"

David Friedman, who served as Trump's ambassador to Israel in his first term, said he was "thrilled" by Trump's selection of Huckabee.

Witkoff is also the president-elect's golf partner and was with him when he was the target of a second assassination attempt at his golf club in West Palm Beach, Florida, in September.

Trump's transition team did not offer details about the Middle East envoy role, but Trump said in a statement, "Steve will be an unrelenting Voice for PEACE, and make us all proud."

The selection of Witkoff follows a pattern for Trump in putting people close to him in pivotal roles on the Middle East portfolio. Eight years ago he appointed his former corporate attorney Jason Greenblatt as his special representative for international negotiations and relied on his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, as his personal envoy in talks in the region.

## Here are the people Trump has picked for key positions so far

By THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

President-elect Donald Trump is starting to fill key posts in his second administration, putting an emphasis so far on aides and allies who were his strongest backers during the 2024 campaign.

Here's a look at whom he has selected so far.

Pete Hegseth, secretary of defense

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 36 of 98

Hegseth, 44, is a co-host of Fox News Channel's "Fox & Friends Weekend" and has been a contributor with the network since 2014, where he developed a friendship with Trump, who made regular appearances on the show.

Hegseth lacks senior military or national security experience. If confirmed by the Senate, he would inherit the top job during a series of global crises — ranging from Russia's war in Ukraine and the ongoing attacks in the Middle East by Iranian proxies to the push for a cease-fire between Israel, Hamas and Hezbollah and escalating worries about the growing alliance between Russia and North Korea.

Hegseth is also the author of "The War on Warriors: Behind the Betrayal of the Men Who Keep Us Free," published earlier this year.

Kristi Noem, secretary of homeland security

Trump picked a well-known conservative who faced sharp criticism for telling a story in her memoir about shooting a rambunctious dog to lead an agency crucial to the president-elect's hardline immigration agenda.

Noem used her two terms leading a tiny state to vault to a prominent position in Republican politics.

South Dakota is usually a political afterthought. But during the COVID-19 pandemic, Noem did not order restrictions that other states had issued and instead declared her state "open for business." Trump held a fireworks rally at Mount Rushmore in July 2020 in one of the first large gatherings of the pandemic.

She takes over a department with a sprawling mission. In addition to key immigration agencies, the Department of Homeland Security oversees natural disaster response, the U.S. Secret Service, and Transportation Security Administration agents who work at airports.

William McGinley, White House counsel

Trump says William McGinley, a lawyer who has served in Trump's White House and in a key political role this year, will be his White House counsel.

McGinley was White House Cabinet secretary during Trump's first administration, and was outside legal counsel for the Republican National Committee's election integrity effort during the 2024 campaign.

In a statement, Trump called McGinley "a smart and tenacious lawyer who will help me advance our America First agenda, while fighting for election integrity and against the weaponization of law enforcement."

John Ratcliffe, CIA director

Trump has picked John Ratcliffe, a former Texas congressman who served as director of national intelligence during his first administration, to be director of the Central Intelligence Agency in his next.

Ratcliffe was director of national intelligence during the final year and a half of Trump's first term, leading the U.S. government's spy agencies during the coronavirus pandemic.

"I look forward to John being the first person ever to serve in both of our Nation's highest Intelligence positions," Trump said in a statement, calling him a "fearless fighter for the Constitutional Rights of all Americans" who would ensure "the Highest Levels of National Security, and PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH."

Steven Witkoff, special envoy to the Middle East

Trump on Tuesday named real estate investor Steven Witkoff to be special envoy to the Middle East.

The 67-year-old Witkoff is the president-elect's golf partner and was golfing with him at Trump's club in West Palm Beach, Florida, on Sept. 15, when the former president was the target of a second attempted assassination.

Witkoff "is a Highly Respected Leader in Business and Philanthropy," Trump said of Witkoff in a statement. "Steve will be an unrelenting Voice for PEACE, and make us all proud."

Trump also named Witkoff co-chair, with former Georgia Sen. Kelly Loeffler, of his inaugural committee.

Mike Huckabee, ambassador to Israel

Trump will nominate former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee to be ambassador to Israel, the president-elect announced Tuesday.

Huckabee is a staunch defender of Israel and his intended nomination comes as Trump has promised to align U.S. foreign policy more closely with Israel's interests as it wages wars against the Iran-backed Hamas and Hezbollah.

"He loves Israel, and likewise the people of Israel love him," Trump said in a statement. "Mike will work tirelessly to bring about peace in the Middle East."

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 37 of 98

Huckabee, who ran unsuccessfully for the Republican nomination in 2008 and 2016, has been a popular figure among evangelical Christian conservatives, many of whom support Israel due to Old Testament writings that Jews are God's chosen people and that Israel is their rightful homeland.

Trump has been praised by some in this important Republican voting bloc for moving the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Mike Waltz, national security adviser

Trump asked Waltz, a retired Army National Guard officer and war veteran, to be his national security adviser, Trump announced in a statement Tuesday.

The move puts Waltz in the middle of national security crises, ranging from efforts to provide weapons to Ukraine and worries about the growing alliance between Russia and North Korea to the persistent attacks in the Middle East by Iran proxies and the push for a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas and Hezbollah.

"Mike has been a strong champion of my America First Foreign Policy agenda," Trump's statement said, "and will be a tremendous champion of our pursuit of Peace through Strength!"

Waltz is a three-term GOP congressman from east-central Florida. He served multiple tours in Afghanistan and also worked in the Pentagon as a policy adviser when Donald Rumsfeld and Robert Gates were defense chiefs.

He is considered hawkish on China, and called for a U.S. boycott of the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing due to its involvement in the origin of COVID-19 and its mistreatment of the minority Muslim Uighur population.

Susie Wiles, chief of staff

Wiles, 67, was a senior adviser to Trump's 2024 presidential campaign and its de facto manager.

Wiles has a background in Florida politics. She helped Ron DeSantis win his first race for Florida governor. Six years later, she was key to Trump's defeat of him in the 2024 Republican primary.

Wiles' hire was Trump's first major decision as president-elect and one that could be a defining test of his incoming administration considering her close relationship with the president-elect. Wiles is said to have earned Trump's trust in part by guiding what was the most disciplined of Trump's three presidential campaigns.

Wiles was able to help keep Trump on track as few others have, not by criticizing his impulses, but by winning his respect by demonstrating his success after taking her advice.

Tom Homan, 'border czar'

Homan, 62, has been tasked with Trump's top priority of carrying out the largest deportation operation in the nation's history.

Homan, who served under Trump in his first administration leading U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, was widely expected to be offered a position related to the border, an issue Trump made central to his campaign.

Though Homan has insisted such a massive undertaking would be humane, he has long been a loyal supporter of Trump's policy proposals, suggesting at a July conference in Washington that he would be willing to "run the biggest deportation operation this country's ever seen."

Democrats have criticized Homan for defending Trump's "zero tolerance" policy on border crossings during his first administration, which led to the separation of thousands of parents and children seeking asylum at the border.

Elise Stefanik, United Nations ambassador

Stefanik is a representative from New York and one of Trump's staunchest defenders going back to his first impeachment.

Elected to the House in 2014, Stefanik was selected by her GOP House colleagues as House Republican Conference chair in 2021, when former Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney was removed from the post after publicly criticizing Trump for falsely claiming he won the 2020 election. Stefanik, 40, has served in that role ever since as the third-ranking member of House leadership.

Stefanik's questioning of university presidents over antisemitism on their campuses helped lead to two



of those presidents resigning, further raising her national profile.

If confirmed, she would represent American interests at the U.N. as Trump vows to end the war waged by Russia against Ukraine that began in 2022. He has also called for peace as Israel continues its offensive against Hamas in Gaza and its invasion of Lebanon to target Hezbollah.

Stephen Miller, deputy chief of staff for policy

Miller, an immigration hardliner, was a vocal spokesperson during the presidential campaign for Trump's priority of mass deportations. The 39-year-old was a senior adviser during Trump's first administration.

Miller has been a central figure in some of Trump's policy decisions, notably his move to separate thousands of immigrant families.

Trump argued throughout the campaign that the nation's economic, national security and social priorities could be met by deporting people who are in the United States illegally. Since Trump left office in 2021, Miller has served as the president of America First Legal, an organization made up of former Trump advisers aimed at challenging the Biden administration, media companies, universities and others over issues such as free speech and national security.

Lee Zeldin, Environmental Protection Agency

Trump has chosen former New York Rep. Lee Zeldin to serve as his pick to lead the Environmental Protection Agency.

Zeldin does not appear to have any experience in environmental issues, but is a longtime supporter of the former president. The 44-year-old former U.S. House member from New York wrote on X, "We will restore US energy dominance, revitalize our auto industry to bring back American jobs, and make the US the global leader of AI."

"We will do so while protecting access to clean air and water," he added.

During his campaign, Trump often attacked the Biden administration's promotion of electric vehicles, and incorrectly referred to a tax credit for EV purchases as a government mandate. Trump also often told his audiences during the campaign that his administration would "drill, baby, drill," referring to his support for expanded petroleum exploration.

In a statement, Trump said Zeldin "will ensure fair and swift deregulatory decisions that will be enacted in a way to unleash the power of American businesses, while at the same time maintaining the highest environmental standards, including the cleanest air and water on the planet."

## Israel's West Bank settlers hope Trump's return will pave the way for major settlement expansion

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

BEIT EL, West Bank (AP) — As Donald Trump's victory became apparent in last week's U.S. elections, Jewish West Bank settlement advocates popped bottles of champagne and danced to the Bee Gees at a winery in the heart of the occupied territory, according to a post on Instagram. The winery said it was rolling out a special edition red named for the president-elect.

Settlement supporters believe they have plenty of reasons to celebrate. Not only did the expansion of housing for Jews in the West Bank soar past previous records during Trump's first term, but his administration took unprecedented steps to support Israel's territorial claims, including recognizing Jerusalem as its capital and moving the U.S. Embassy there, and recognizing Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights.

This time around, as Israel is embroiled in a multifront war, settlement advocates believe Trump's history of fervent support could translate into their supreme goal: Israeli annexation of the West Bank — a move that critics say would smother any remaining hopes for Palestinian statehood. Some are even gunning for resettling Gaza under a Trump administration.

"God willing, the year 2025 will be the year of sovereignty in Judea and Samaria," Israeli Finance Minister and settlement firebrand Bezalel Smotrich said Monday, referring to the West Bank by its biblical name, in comments that sparked international uproar. He said he would make sure the government lobbies the Trump administration on the idea.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 39 of 98

Israel captured the West Bank, along with east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians want those territories for their hoped-for future state. Israel annexed east Jerusalem in a move most of the international community does not recognize and in 2005 it withdrew its settlers and troops from the Gaza Strip, where it has been fighting a war against Hamas.

Settlement expansion in the West Bank has ballooned during Israel's open-ended occupation, with more than half a million Israelis living in about 130 settlements and dozens of unauthorized outposts. The Western-backed Palestinian Authority administers semiautonomous parts of the West Bank that are home to most of the Palestinian population.

During his first term as president, Trump abandoned decades-long U.S. opposition to the settlements. He proposed a Mideast plan that would have allowed Israel to keep them all. His ambassador to Israel was a staunch settlement advocate and opponent of Palestinian statehood.

But Trump also took steps that are keeping some settler proponents cautious. His Mideast plan did leave room for a Palestinian state, even if critics say it was an unrealistic vision for one. And the Trump-brokered normalization agreements between Israel and Arab countries held the country back from annexing the West Bank.

While he has not explicitly stated his policy for his second term, his initial administration picks, including ambassadors to Israel and the U.N., are deeply pro-Israel, indicating he likely will not stand in the way of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right government advancing settlement building.

"There has never been an American president that has been more helpful in securing an understanding of the sovereignty of Israel," Mike Huckabee, Trump's nominee for ambassador to Israel, told Israel Army Radio, when asked about the possibility of West Bank annexation. "I fully expect that to continue."

A spokesperson for Netanyahu declined to say whether the Israeli leader would pursue annexation during Trump's presidency. But Netanyahu has named an American-born, hard-line settlement activist, Yechiel Leiter, to serve as ambassador to Washington.

Rights groups already claim Israel is enforcing an apartheid system in the West Bank, and annexation would open Israel up to similar charges if it doesn't grant Palestinians there equal rights. Israel opposes giving West Bank Palestinians citizenship, saying it would destroy Israel's Jewish character.

Regardless of whether annexation comes, settler advocates envision unbridled expansion under Trump and under an Israeli government where settler leaders and supporters hold key positions. They see a presidential term where they will be able to more deeply entrench their presence in the West Bank with a proliferation of housing, roads and industrial zones.

"I'm sure that with President Trump it will be much easier because he supports the state of Israel," said Israel Ganz, the chairman of the Yesha Council, a settler lobbying group.

Israeli settlement expansion has carried on to varying degrees under multiple American administrations. During Trump's term, Israel advanced nearly 33,000 housing units, according to Peace Now, an antisettlement watchdog group, almost three times as much as during President Barack Obama's second term.

The numbers fell significantly during the first two years of the Biden administration, but shot up again in 2023, shortly after Israel's current far-right, prosettlement government was formed, and have surged throughout the war.

The Biden administration has slapped sanctions on Jewish settlers suspected of fomenting violence against Palestinians, an approach that is likely to end under Trump.

In the West Bank, billboards advertise new settlement housing, beckoning passersby to make their home there. In Beit El, next to the Palestinian administrative center of Ramallah, a new neighborhood boasts not the red-roofed, single-family homes that became icons of the settler movement, but rather six towering multistory apartment buildings that can house hundreds, and look like any Israeli suburb.

Palestinians view the settlements as a violation of international law and an obstacle to peace, a position with wide international support. Israel considers the West Bank to be the historical and biblical heartland of the Jewish people and says any partition should be agreed on in negotiations. Peace talks have been moribund for more than a decade, and support for a Palestinian state among Israelis fell after Hamas'

Oct. 7, 2023, attacks that sparked the war.

Wasel Abu Yusuf, a Palestinian official, said Trump hadn't yet made his positions clear and it was unknown if he would support Israeli annexation.

Dror Etkes, an antisettlement researcher and activist, said that during the first Trump administration, West Bank outpost farms, which have forced entire Palestinian communities off huge swaths of land, saw a "meteoric rise," as did infrastructure projects that allow settlements to expand, like roads and water systems.

Over the next four years, "we can assume that we will see more significant steps of de facto annexation or maybe even official annexation," Etkes said.

Some settler advocates, like Daniella Weiss, believe Trump will not pressure Netanyahu to withdraw troops swiftly from Gaza, creating an opening for resettlement. That notion would be a nonstarter with other American administrations, and much of the international community would oppose it.

A similar strategy in the early years of Israel's West Bank occupation led to the proliferation of settlements there. Two of Netanyahu's key governing partners also support resettling Gaza, although the Israeli leader has said it is not "realistic."

Yair Sheleg, a research fellow at Jerusalem's Shalom Hartman Institute who studies the settler movement, said Trump was "fickle" and that in his expected push to normalize ties between Israel and Saudi Arabia, he could end up being less favorable to the settlement enterprise than many hope.

But nonetheless, he said, the overarching feeling among settler advocates is that "Trump understands ... the needs of the settlement enterprise."

## Residents in a southern Chinese city mourn 35 people killed in a car-ramming attack

By NG HAN GUAN, EMILY WANG FUJIYAMA and HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

ZHUHAI, China (AP) — People in a southern Chinese city were paying respects Wednesday to 35 of its residents killed by a driver who rammed his vehicle into a sports complex, mowing down people as they were exercising.

Police have offered little information about the 62-year-old attacker beyond saying the man, identified only by his surname of Fan, was upset about his divorce settlement. He was arrested immediately after the assault as he tried to flee the scene in the city of Zhuhai on Monday night.

The attack, which also severely injured 43 people, took place on the eve of the Zhuhai Airshow, sponsored by the People's Liberation Army and held every other year. China often makes extra efforts to tightly control information around major or sensitive events.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, Zhuhai residents laid flowers in honor of the victims outside the Zhuhai People's Fitness Plaza in southern Guangdong province. Police presence was light, though the number of officers later increased. The sports complex was closed until further notice.

Police allowed the public to leave bouquets just outside the entrance of the sports complex but volunteers then quickly moved the flowers inside the sports center.

"May there be no thugs in heaven," said a message on one of the bouquets. "Good deeds will be rewarded and evil deeds will be punished."

Chinese authorities are careful what is publicly said around major catastrophes or violence, often censoring eyewitness accounts. It took almost 24 hours following the attack before information with definite casualty tolls was released.

Videos, quickly censored inside China, circulated outside the Great Firewall. Most were posted by "Teacher Li," an artist turned dissident who runs a X account with 1.7 million followers that posts crowdsourced videos about news in China.

Articles from Chinese media featuring interviews with survivors were quickly taken down Monday and Tuesday. One of the articles said that among the many injured were elderly who had joined speed walking groups.

Zhuhai residents were still processing the news of the attack.

"It is very shocking," said Dong Chilin. "My husband goes jogging there every night. I called him immediately. ... Fortunately, none of the people I know was there that day."

She said her two children asked their father to stay away from the area for now.

Another woman, who only gave her last name as Guan, said she had passed by the site around 8 p.m. Monday night but had thought it was just a traffic accident. "Of course this was very shocking. It was very horrible."

Police said their preliminary investigation found that Fan was unhappy with his divorce settlement but gave no further information on his divorce or alleged motive.

Chinese leader Xi Jinping called for strict punishment according to law in a statement on Tuesday evening.

He also urged all local governments "to strengthen prevention and ... prevent extreme cases from occurring, and to resolve conflicts and disputes in a timely manner," according to the official Xinhua news agency.

## At UN climate talks, nations big and small get chance to bear witness to climate change

By MELINA WALLING, SIBI ARASU and SETH BORENSTEIN Associated Press

BAKU, Azerbaijan (AP) — More than two dozen world leaders are delivering remarks at the United Nations' annual climate conference Wednesday, with many hard-hit nations detailing their nations' firsthand experience with the catastrophic weather that has come with climate change.

Leader after leader recounted climate disasters, with each one seeming to top the other. Grenada's prime minister Dickon Mitchell detailed a 15-month drought at the beginning of the year giving way to a Category 5 Hurricane Beryl.

"At this very moment, as I stand here yet again, my island has been devastated by flash flooding, landslides and the deluge of excessive rainfall, all in the space of a matter of a couple hours," Mitchell said. "It may be small island developing states today. It will be Spain tomorrow. It will be Florida the day after. It's one planet."

Small island nations call for stronger climate action

Grenada's premier wasn't the only small island nation leader who came with fighting words.

Prime minister Philip Edward Davis warned that "it will be our children and grandchildren who bear the burden, their dreams reduced to memories of what could have been."

"We do not — cannot — accept that our survival is merely an option," Davis said.

Davis said too often progress in the fight against climate change gets hurt when governments change, as is happening in the United States and Germany.

"If we leave climate action to the whims of political cycles, our planet's future becomes precarious, very precarious," Davis said. "The climate crisis does not pause for elections or to accommodate the way of changing political ideas or ties. It demands continuity, commitment and most of all, solidarity."

Leaders on a panel with members of the High Ambition Coalition, a group of nations that want to see strong climate action, highlighted the "inverted morality" of big emitters who aren't taking responsibility for their impacts on countries who have the most to lose.

Gaston Browne, the prime minister of Antigua and Barbuda, said high-polluting nations are "deliberately burning the planet."

Past promises of financial aid went unfulfilled for too long, so small island nations will have to seek justice and compensation in international courts, he said.

Marshall Islands president Hilda Heine called the climate crisis "the most pressing security threat" her country faces, but said she thinks the Paris Agreement process — where countries agreed to limit warming to 1.5 degrees (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) since pre-industrial times — is resilient.

Azerbaijan president Ilham Aliyev took the opportunity to align his country with the predicament of small island developing states in a speech where he called out developed countries, in particular France and the



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 42 of 98

Netherlands, for their colonial histories.

He described the harms of colonialism that continue today. Biodiversity loss, rising seas and extreme weather hit communities that are often "ruthlessly suppressed," he said.

The United States also tried to show sympathy to hard-hit places.

"Do we secure prosperity for our countries or do we condemn our most vulnerable to unimaginable climate disasters?" United States chief climate envoy John Podesta said. "Vulnerable communities do not just need ambition. They need action."

European leaders recount a year of extreme weather

European nations also warned of climate catastrophe on their continent.

"Over the past year, catastrophic floods in Spain, Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as in southern Croatia have shown the devastating impact of rising temperatures," said Croatia's prime minister, Andrej Plenkovic. "The Mediterranean, one of the most vulnerable regions, calls for urgent action."

Albania Prime Minister Edi Rama said he was dismayed by the lack of political action and political will and leaders of many nations not showing up at climate talks as extreme weather strikes harder and more frequently. Frustrated with other leaders mere talk, Rama decried that "life goes on with old habits" and all these speeches filled with good intent change nothing.

"What is happening in Europe and around the world today doesn't leave much room for optimism, though optimism is the only way of survival," Rama said.

Greek prime minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said Europe and the world needs to be "more honest" about the trade-offs needed to keep global temperatures down.

"We need to ask hard questions about a path that goes very fast, at the expense of our competitiveness, and a path that goes some much slower, but allows our industry to adapt and to thrive," he said. His nation this summer was hammered by successive heat waves after three years of below-average rainfall. The misery included water shortages, dried-up lakes and the death of wild horses.

Ireland environment minister Eamon Ryan channeled some hope, saying that the 2015 Paris climate treaty "still lives" and that countries who drop out will realize they are falling behind as other countries move forward and see benefits to their economies.

Negotiators labor on for elusive deal on money

Negotiators at the summit are looking to hammer out a deal on how much money, and in what form, developed countries will pledge for adapting to climate change and transitioning to clean energy for developing nations.

On Wednesday morning, an early draft of what that final deal will look like was released, but it still contained multiple options that negotiators will wrestle over to reach a consensus by the end of the climate talks.

David Waskow, director of international climate action at the World Resources Institute said the latest 34-page draft reflects "all of the options on the table."

"Negotiators now need to work to boil it down to some key decisions" that can be worked on at the second half of the summit.

The latest draft "does incorporate some new demands" including an ask for one of the largest negotiating blocs — the G77 plus China — for \$1.3 trillion in climate finance, said Avantika Goswami, a climate policy analyst with the New Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment.

"Developing countries have been clear that a provisional goal must be carved out to hold developed country governments to account," she said.

## **Biden is sending aid to help Ukraine keep fighting next year, Blinken says**

By SAMYA KULLAB and LORNE COOK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The Biden administration is determined in its final months to help ensure that

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 43 of 98

Ukraine can keep fighting off Russia's full-scale invasion next year, sending it as much aid as possible so that it might hold Russian forces at bay and possess a strong hand in any potential peace negotiations, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Wednesday.

"President Biden has committed to making sure that every dollar we have at our disposal will be pushed out the door between now and Jan. 20," when president-elect Donald Trump is due to be sworn in, Blinken said.

NATO countries must focus their efforts on "ensuring that Ukraine has the money, munitions and mobilized forces to fight effectively in 2025, or to be able to negotiate a peace from a position of strength," Blinken said during a visit to Brussels.

The U.S. will "adapt and adjust" with the latest equipment it is sending, Blinken said, without providing details.

The almost three-year war has shown no signs of winding down.

Russia attacked the Ukrainian capital Kyiv with a sophisticated combination of missiles and drones for the first time in 73 days on Wednesday. That came a day after the Pentagon said most of the North Korean troops sent to help Moscow's war effort are fighting to drive Ukraine's army off Russian soil in the Kursk border region.

Ukraine is also straining to hold back a monthslong Russian onslaught in the eastern Donetsk region.

Political uncertainty over how a U.S. administration under Trump will change Washington's policy on the war is a key new factor in the conflict. U.S. military aid is vital for Ukraine, but Trump has signaled that he doesn't want to keep giving tens of billions of dollars to Kyiv.

Air raid warnings blared for hours as Russia targeted eight regions of Ukraine on Wednesday, firing six ballistic and cruise missiles and 90 drones, the Ukrainian air force said.

Air defenses downed four missiles and 37 drones, and another 47 drones were stopped by electronic jamming, the statement said. The damage was being assessed.

The air assault came as most of the more than 10,000 North Korean troops sent by Pyongyang to help Moscow in the war are engaged in combat in Russia's Kursk border region, according to the Pentagon. A Ukrainian army incursion into Kursk three months ago has succeeded in holding a broad area of land and has embarrassed the Kremlin.

Russia's military has trained the North Korean soldiers in artillery, drone skills and basic infantry operations, including trench clearing, Pentagon deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel told a briefing Tuesday. The cooperation faces challenges, according to the Pentagon, including how to achieve military interoperability and overcoming the language barrier.

Kyiv officials say that Russia has deployed around 50,000 troops to Kursk in a bid to dislodge the Ukrainians.

Russia has in recent months been assembling forces for a counteroffensive in Kursk, according to the Institute for the Study of War think tank, though the timescale of the operation isn't known.

## Trump's defense choice stuns the Pentagon and raises questions about the Fox News host's experience

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump stunned the Pentagon and the broader defense world by nominating Fox News host Pete Hegseth to serve as his defense secretary, tapping someone largely inexperienced and untested on the global stage to take over the world's largest and most powerful military.

The news was met with bewilderment and worry among many in Washington as Trump passed on a number of established national security heavy-hitters and chose an Army National Guard captain well known in conservative circles as a co-host of Fox News Channel's "Fox & Friends Weekend."

While some Republican lawmakers had a muted response to the announcement, others called his combat experience an asset or said he was "tremendously capable."

Hegseth's choice could bring sweeping changes to the military. He has made it clear on his show and

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 44 of 98

in interviews that, like Trump, he is opposed to “woke” programs that promote equity and inclusion. He also has questioned the role of women in combat and advocated pardoning service members charged with war crimes.

In June, at a rally in Las Vegas, Trump encouraged his supporters to buy Hegseth’s book and said that if he won the presidency, “The woke stuff will be gone within a period of 24 hours. I can tell you.”

The 44-year-old Hegseth, a staunch conservative who embraces Trump’s “America First” policies, has pushed for making the military more lethal. During an interview on “The Shawn Ryan Show” podcast, he said allowing women to serve in combat hurts that effort.

“Everything about men and women serving together makes the situation more complicated, and complication in combat, that means casualties are worse,” Hegseth said.

And while he said diversity in the military is a strength, he said it was because minority and white men can perform similarly but the same isn’t true for women.

By opening combat slots to women, “we’ve changed the standards in putting them there, which means you’ve changed the capability of that unit,” Hegseth said in the podcast interview.

Since then-Defense Secretary Ash Carter opened all combat roles to women in 2016, women have successfully passed the military’s grueling tests to become Green Berets and Army Rangers, and the Naval Special Warfare’s test to serve as a combatant-craft crewman — the boat operators who transport Navy SEALs and conduct their own classified missions at sea.

While Trump lauded Hegseth as “tough, smart and a true believer in America First,” others were quick to point to the TV personality’s lack of experience. Some suggested he could be Pentagon chief in name only as the Trump White House runs the department.

A number of other names floated as possible defense choices had included Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Ala., chairman of the House Armed Services Committee; retired Lt. Gen. Keith Kellogg; Sen. Joni Ernst, R-Iowa; and Robert Wilkie, a former Pentagon official who was head of the Department of Veterans Affairs in Trump’s first term.

“There is reason for concern that this is not a person who is a serious enough policymaker, serious enough policy implementer, to do a successful job,” said Rep. Adam Smith of Washington, the ranking Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee.

Mark Cancian, a senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said Hegseth’s lack of senior national security experience makes it more difficult to get Senate confirmation.

“I think Trump was tired of fighting with his secretaries of defense and picked one who would be loyal to him,” Cancian said.

Military officials said the choice came out of the blue. A senior military officer, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the media, said Hegseth’s selection is raising concerns about whether he has the practical experience to manage a large department with an enormous budget.

The Defense Department has a budget exceeding \$800 billion, with about 1.3 million active-duty troops and another 1.4 million in the National Guard, Reserves and civilian employees based worldwide.

If confirmed, Hegseth would face a daunting array of global crises, from the wars in the Middle East and Ukraine and the expanding alliance between Russia and North Korea to the growing competition with China. There is also the need to upgrade the complex U.S. missile and nuclear defense apparatus and ensure the defense industry can keep up with America’s need for weapons systems.

Smith said that while Hegseth’s combat experience is a plus, running the Pentagon requires a lot of other skill sets, and his nomination will need some time for consideration.

“What’s your plan? What are you going to do? ... How can you assure us that that lack of experience, you know, isn’t going to make it impossible for you to do the job?” Smith said. “I think those are questions that need to be answered over the next couple of months.”

Even some Republicans in the Senate, who would vote on his nomination, had a subdued response.

North Carolina Sen. Thom Tillis called the choice “interesting.” Indiana Sen. Todd Young, who served in the Marine Corps, said, “I don’t know much about his background or his vision, so I look forward to

learning more.”

North Dakota Sen. John Hoeven said he’s not surprised that Trump chose Hegseth because Trump is “close to him and likes him and trusts him.”

“The guy’s obviously tremendously capable, a great communicator,” Hoeven said. “I look forward to getting to know him better.”

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said Hegseth brings a lot to the table and will be “reform-minded in the areas that need reform.”

Hegseth has been a contributor since 2014 for Fox News, developing a friendship with Trump, who made regular appearances on his show. He is the author of “The War on Warriors: Behind the Betrayal of the Men Who Keep Us Free.”

“With Pete at the helm, America’s enemies are on notice — Our Military will be Great Again, and America will Never Back Down,” Trump said in a statement. “Nobody fights harder for the Troops, and Pete will be a courageous and patriotic champion of our ‘Peace through Strength’ policy.”

## Middle East latest: 3 young siblings killed in Gaza as Israeli strikes leave 6 dead in Lebanon

By The Associated Press undefined

An Israeli strike on a home in northern Gaza killed three siblings aged 6 and under, among at least six people killed in airstrikes in the war-ravaged territory, Palestinian medics said. In Lebanon, an Israeli airstrike on an apartment building south of Beirut on Wednesday killed at least six people and wounded 15, the Health Ministry said.

The Biden administration said Tuesday it won’t limit weapons transfers to Israel because it has made limited progress in increasing the flow of humanitarian aid to Gaza. Eight international aid groups had earlier said that Israel failed to meet U.S. demands for greater humanitarian access to the Gaza Strip, where hunger experts say the north may already be experiencing famine.

Israel’s war in Gaza has killed more than 43,000 people, Palestinian health officials say. The officials do not distinguish between civilians and combatants, but say more than half of those killed were women and children.

The Israel-Hamas war began after Palestinian militants stormed into Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people — mostly civilians — and abducting 250 others.

Lebanon’s Hezbollah group began firing into Israel on Oct. 8, 2023, in solidarity with Hamas in Gaza. Since then, more than 3,200 people have been killed in Lebanon and more than 14,200 wounded, the country’s Health Ministry reported. In Israel, 76 people have been killed, including 31 soldiers.

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Here’s the latest:

A new video shows an Israeli hostage in Gaza

CAIRO — The Palestinian Islamic Jihad militant group has released a new video showing an Israeli hostage who has been held in Gaza for over a year.

The video shows Sasha Troufanov, likely speaking under duress, describing the harsh conditions inside Gaza, warning against military operations to free him and calling on Israelis to protest for his release.

It was the first such video to be released in several weeks. It was not clear when it was filmed, but Troufanov appeared to refer to Israel’s war against Hezbollah in Lebanon and its recent exchange of fire with Iran, which occurred in October.

Islamic Jihad took part in Hamas’ Oct. 7, 2023 attack into Israel, in which militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took another 250 people hostage. Some 100 hostages are still inside Gaza, about a third of whom are believed to be dead.

Islamic Jihad released two previous videos of Troufanov earlier this year. He turned 29 on Monday, marking his second birthday in captivity. His mother, grandmother and girlfriend were also taken captive, but they were released during a November 2023 cease-fire. His father was killed in the Oct. 7 attack.



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 46 of 98

The U.S., Egypt and Qatar have spent most of this year trying to broker a cease-fire and the release of the remaining hostages. Hamas has said it will only release the remaining hostages in return for a lasting cease-fire, the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza and the release of Palestinian prisoners.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to retain Israeli control over parts of Gaza and to continue the war until "total victory" over Hamas and the return of the remaining captives.

At least 6 dead and 15 wounded in an Israeli strike south of Beirut

BEIRUT — An Israeli airstrike on an apartment building in the town of Aramoun, just south of Beirut, killed at least six people and wounded 15 others Wednesday, Lebanon's Health Ministry said.

The state-run National News Agency reported that there were children missing after the strike and it wasn't clear if they are under the rubble or were transferred to a hospital.

There was no warning issued before the strike, and it was not clear what the target was. There was no immediate statement from the Israeli military.

Also Wednesday morning, the Israeli military struck several sites in Beirut's southern suburbs, an area known as Dahiyeh, after issuing evacuation warnings. It said the strikes were targeting "Hezbollah facilities and interests." There were no immediate reports of casualties.

Israeli forces and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah have been clashing since Oct. 8, 2023, when Hezbollah began launching rockets across the border in support of its ally, Hamas, in Gaza. The conflict escalated beginning in mid-September. Israel has launched a widespread aerial bombardment of Lebanon and a ground invasion that it said is intended to push Hezbollah back from the border.

3 young siblings were killed in an Israeli strike in northern Gaza, Palestinian medics say

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — Palestinian medics say an Israeli strike on a home in northern Gaza killed three siblings aged 6 and under.

They were among at least six people killed in Israeli strikes on Tuesday in the war-ravaged territory, where Israel has been at war with Hamas for more than 13 months.

The Gaza Health Ministry's emergency service says the three children were killed in a strike on a home near a clinic in the urban Jabaliya refugee camp, where Israel has been waging an offensive for over a month.

In the central city of Deir al-Balah, a strike hit a tent in the western side of the city, killing at least two people, including a 15-year-old boy, Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital said. Another strike on a tent in the built-up Nuseirat refugee camp killed a man, the hospital said. An Associated Press journalist counted the three bodies at the hospital.

Israel says it only targets militants and tries to avoid harming civilians. It accuses Hamas militants of hiding among civilians in homes and shelters.

The military rarely comments on individual strikes, which often kill women and children.

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking another 250 people hostage. Around 100 captives are still inside Gaza, a third of whom are believed to be dead.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed over 43,000 Palestinians, according to local health authorities. They do not distinguish between militants and civilians in their count but say women and children make up more than half of those killed.

US forces conduct strikes in Syria against Iranian-aligned militia groups

WASHINGTON — U.S. forces conducted strikes in Syria against Iranian-aligned militia groups for a second day in a row Tuesday in response to further attacks on U.S. personnel, U.S. Central Command said late Tuesday.

In the latest retaliatory strikes, U.S. forces hit a weapons storage and logistics facility after militia groups launched a rocket attack on U.S. personnel at Patrol Base Shaddadi in eastern Syria.

Earlier Tuesday, Pentagon press secretary Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder said that over the weekend the militias had also targeted U.S. personnel with a drone attack and indirect fire at another base, Green Village, where U.S. troops are operating — which prompted the U.S. to strike nine militia targets on Monday in self-defense.

There are about 900 U.S. troops deployed in Syria. No U.S. troops were wounded in either attack.

## Trump pledged to roll back protections for transgender students. They're flooding crisis hotlines

By JOCELYN GECKER and SHARON LURYE AP Education Writers

Transgender youth in the United States have been flooding crisis hotlines since the election of Donald Trump, who made anti-transgender themes central to his campaign. Many teens worry about how their lives could change once he takes office.

During his presidential bid, Trump pledged to impose wide-ranging restrictions and roll back civil rights protections for transgender students. And his administration can swiftly start work on one major change: It can exclude transgender students from Title IX protections, which affect school policies on students' use of pronouns, bathrooms and locker rooms.

One ad that aired over 15,000 times crystallized Trump's stance on rights for transgender and nonbinary Americans: "Kamala is for they/them. President Trump is for you."

For one Alabama teen, the ad seemed to paint transgender and nonbinary people as a threat to society. The weekend before Election Day, the 16-year-old teen, who identifies as nonbinary and uses the pronouns "he" and "they," called a crisis hotline at the Rainbow Youth Project. The group that serves LGBTQ+ young people has received more than 5,500 calls to its crisis hotline in the past 10 days, up from the 3,700 calls it typically gets every month.

The teen was in despair and struggling with suicidal thoughts, according to his mother, Carolyn Fisher. She said she hadn't realized the depth of her child's depression and how painful it was for him to see political ads that felt like a personal attack.

With the help of crisis counselors, Fisher said her teen has begun feeling better. But bullying at school has gotten worse, with some students telling her child Trump is going to make him "go back in the closet," Fisher said.

"The kids who have taunted him are now proud of themselves, and they rub it in," she said.

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EDITOR'S NOTE — This story includes discussion of suicide. If you or someone you know needs help, the national suicide and crisis lifeline in the U.S. is available by calling or texting 988. There is also an online chat at [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org).

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Opposition to transgender rights was a focal point of Trump's campaign: Republican ads attacking political opponents over transgender or LGBTQ+ issues have aired over 290,000 times on network TV since March 2023, according to data from the media tracking firm AdImpact.

The messaging may have resonated with many Americans. More than half of voters overall — and the vast majority of Trump supporters — said support for transgender rights in government and society has gone too far, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of more than 120,000 voters nationwide.

President Joe Biden's administration expanded recognition of transgender rights just this year. Interpretation of Title IX, a landmark sex discrimination law, is largely up to the executive branch, although court rulings can affect enforcement.

Originally passed in 1972, Title IX was first used as a women's rights law. This year, Biden's administration said the law forbids discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation, but Trump can undo that. Biden's new guidance had limited implementation in any case: After a spate of lawsuits, courts had issued injunctions pausing the rule in 26 states.

"Title IX will be a top priority. It is emblematic of all the culture war issues that have been created over the past few years surrounding gender identity versus sex," said Candice Jackson, a lawyer who led the Education Department's Office for Civil Rights in the first Trump administration.

Trump also has said he would ask Congress to pass a bill stating there are "only two genders" and to ban hormonal or surgical intervention for transgender youth in all 50 states. Most Republican-controlled states already have banned gender-affirming health care for transgender youth under age 18 or 19, and

several have adopted policies limiting which school bathrooms trans people can use.

While Biden's election-year guidance did not extend to transgender students in sports, Trump has promised to end "boys in girls' sports." The administration likely would "approach these issues from a traditional understanding" of what Title IX has meant, "with a biological, binary understanding of sex," said Bob Eitel, who served during the first Trump administration as a senior counselor to the education secretary.

In the U.S., 3.3% of high school students identify as transgender and another 2.2% question their gender, according to a U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention survey released last month.

The survey found 72% of transgender and gender-questioning teens experienced persistent feelings of sadness and hopelessness in the past year. These teens also reported higher rates of bullying at school compared with peers. About 1 in 4 transgender students said they had attempted suicide in the past year, the CDC said.

LGBTQ+ advocates are mobilizing to address the despair they see rising among transgender and non-binary youth. The Rainbow Youth Project, for one, has increased virtual peer groups and town halls so LGBTQ+ youth can connect. Another organization, It Gets Better, has focused on reaching young people online through social media platforms like Twitch and YouTube to create supportive environments even if legal protections are rolled back, said Brian Wenke, the group's executive director.

Across the country, particularly in conservative areas, LGBTQ+ youth are discussing whether it would be safer to live somewhere else.

Jude Armstrong, a transgender high school senior in New Orleans, has led protests against Louisiana laws that regulated pronoun usage and discussions of gender and sexuality in the classroom. With the potential for federal changes on the horizon, Armstrong, 17, said he has thought of going to school in the United Kingdom, but worries about leaving behind the queer culture and history he loves at home.

"How do you feel like you're protecting your own community when you're leaving that community and going to another country?" he asked.

Alejandro Jimenez, a sophomore at Texas State University, dreams of being a theater teacher in Texas. He knows how important it is for trans kids to see someone like them in the classroom. Now, he's not sure if he'll stay in his home state.

Already, tensions have risen on his campus in a way that makes him feel unsafe. The day after the election, two protestors held up signs that said, "Homo sex is sin" and "Women are property."

"I feel it's my duty to stay here, but I'm scared of being pushed out," said Jimenez, who is transgender.

Under the new Trump administration, advocates worry efforts anywhere to accommodate transgender and nonbinary students could face scrutiny. Trump's platform called for pulling federal funding for any school pushing "gender ideology, or other inappropriate racial, sexual, or political content on our children."

"It sounds really dystopian to say that trying to be more inclusive could actually result in punishment from the federal government. But that is a risk," said Elana Redfield, federal policy director for the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law.

With so much uncertainty, Eli, an 18-year-old trans college student in New York, stressed the importance of community, especially online for youth who feel concerned right now.

"You are not alone," said Eli, an ambassador for It Gets Better, who asked to be identified only by his first name for safety reasons. "We will come out the other side. There are queer adults who have lived long and happy lives, and you will get there too."

## What happens to Donald Trump's criminal conviction? Here are a few ways it could go

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump's election victory created a profound conundrum for the judge overseeing his criminal case in New York. Can he go ahead and sentence the president-elect, or would doing so potentially get in the way of Trump's constitutional responsibility to lead the nation?

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 49 of 98

Court documents made public Tuesday revealed that Judge Juan M. Merchan has effectively put the case on hold until at least Nov. 19 while he and the lawyers on both sides weigh in on what should happen next. Trump's sentencing had been tentatively scheduled for Nov. 26.

Trump's lawyers are urging Merchan to act "in the interests of justice" and rip up the verdict, the first criminal conviction of a former and now future U.S. president.

Manhattan prosecutors told Merchan they want to find a way forward that balances the "competing interests" of the jury's verdict and Trump's responsibilities as president.

Here are some scenarios for what could happen next:

Wait until Trump leaves office

If Merchan wants to preserve the verdict without disrupting Trump's presidency, he could opt to delay sentencing until the president-elect leaves office in 2029.

Trump would be 82 at the end of his second term and more than a decade removed from the events at the heart of the case.

Trump's conviction on 34 felon counts of falsifying business records involves his efforts to hide a \$130,000 payment during his 2016 presidential campaign to squelch porn actor Stormy Daniels' claims that she had sex with him years earlier, which he denies.

If he opts to wait, Merchan might not be on the bench by then. His current term ends before Trump is slated to leave office.

Grant Trump's immunity claim

Another way Merchan could get rid of the case is by granting Trump's previous request to overturn the verdict because of a U.S. Supreme Court decision in July that gave presidents broad immunity from criminal prosecution.

The judge had said he would issue a ruling Tuesday, but that was before Trump's election victory up-ended the schedule.

The high court's ruling gives former presidents immunity from prosecution for official acts and bars prosecutors from using evidence of official acts in trying to prove their personal conduct violated the law.

Trump's lawyers argue prosecutors "tainted" the case with testimony about his first term and other evidence that shouldn't have been allowed. Prosecutors have said the ruling provides "no basis for disturbing the jury's verdict."

The judge could order a new trial — potentially to take place after Trump leaves office — or dismiss the indictment entirely.

Hold off until a federal court rules

Merchan could choose to delay things until the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals rules on Trump's earlier bid to move the case from state court to federal court.

Trump's lawyers have been appealing a Manhattan federal judge's decision to deny the transfer. Their argument: Trump's case belongs in federal court because as a former president he has the right to assert immunity and seek dismissal.

Waiting for the appeals court to rule, though, might trigger further delays down the road. The court has given prosecutors until Jan. 13 to respond to Trump's appeal. That's a week before he is to be sworn in to office. Once Trump is in the White House, his legal team could make fresh arguments around presidential immunity.

Case dismissed

Merchan could end the case immediately by overturning Trump's conviction on 34 felony counts of falsifying business records and throwing out the indictment.

That would mean no sentencing or punishment, sparing the president-elect from the possibility of prison time or other penalties.

Trump's lawyers insist tossing the case is the only way "to avoid unconstitutional impediments" to his ability to govern.

Prosecutors acknowledged the "unprecedented circumstances" of Trump's conviction colliding with his



election but also said the jury's verdict should stand.

Proceed to sentencing

Merchan could also opt for none of the above and move to sentencing — or at least try, barring an appeal by Trump's lawyers.

George Mason University law professor Ilya Somin said whether the case reaches sentencing "could go either way."

If it does, he said, "it probably won't be a prison sentence."

Trump's charges carry a range of punishments from a fine or probation to up to four years in prison.

"Any prison sentence would likely be blocked or suspended in some way," but a lesser sentence "probably wouldn't impede Trump to any meaningful degree," Somin said.

## Speaker Johnson begins fight for the House gavel promising to be Trump's 'quarterback'

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Speaker Mike Johnson is beginning the hard fight for his gavel, a weeks-long campaign that starts Wednesday during internal House Republican leadership elections and will establish the new power centers in Congress for a Washington dominated by President-elect Donald Trump.

Johnson and his leadership team are all working behind the scenes to shore up support to stay on the job. While Johnson has no serious challenger, he faces dissent within his ranks, particularly from hard-right conservatives and the Freedom Caucus withholding their votes as leverage to extract promises ahead.

The speaker is expected to host Trump ahead of voting, presenting a unified front.

"This leadership will hit the ground running to deliver President Trump's agenda," Johnson said Tuesday on the Capitol steps as lawmakers returned to Washington.

It's been a remarkable political journey for Johnson, the accidental speaker who rose as a last, best choice to replace ousted former speaker Kevin McCarthy more than a year ago and quickly set course by positioning himself alongside Trump and leading Republicans during the elections.

As Johnson tells it, Trump is the "coach" and he is the "quarterback" as their GOP team prepares to run the plays in the new year.

Johnson has embraced Trump's agenda of mass deportations, tax cuts, gutting the federal workforce and a more muscular U.S. image abroad. Together they have been working on what the speaker calls an "ambitious" 100-days agenda hoping to avoid what he called the mistakes of Trump's first term when Congress was unprepared and wasted "precious time."

"We will be ready on day one," Johnson said.

While Johnson expects to lead the House in unified government, with Trump in the White House and Republicans having seized the Senate majority, the House is expected to remain narrowly split, even as House control remains undecided with final races particularly in California still too early to call.

But the problems that come with a slim House majority and plagued Johnson's first year as speaker when his own ranks routinely revolted over his plans are likely to spill into the new year, with a potential fresh round of chaotic governing.

Johnson needs just a simple majority in Wednesday's closed-door voting to win the GOP nomination to become speaker. But he will need majority support of the full House, 218 votes, to actually take hold of the gavel on Jan. 3, when the new Congress convenes and conducts the election for its speaker. It took McCarthy some 15 rounds of voting in a weeklong election to win the gavel in 2023.

Trump has made Johnson's problems more complicated by tapping House Republicans for his administration, reducing the numbers further. Some Republicans want the House leadership elections postponed until control of the House is fully decided.

Still, with Trump in the White House, the speaker may enjoy a period of goodwill from his own ranks as Republicans are eager to disrupt the norms of governing and institutionalize Trump's second-term agenda.

"His challenge is what it's always been," Rep. Ralph Norman, R-S.C., a member of the Freedom Caucus,

said of Johnson.

But he said, "With Trump in charge, it'll be easier for him to deliver."

Conservatives have been discussing whether to field their own candidate as a signal to Johnson as they push their own priorities, using the same tactic they did with McCarthy to force the speaker into concessions, particularly on steeper budget cuts.

As Johnson begins the budget process for next year, including using a so-called budget reconciliation process that makes it easier in unified government to push Trump's agenda through the House and Senate on simple majority votes, conservatives want him to load up those packages with their own policy priorities.

Democrats, who lent Johnson a hand at governing multiple times in Congress — supplying the votes needed to keep the federal government funded and turn back an effort by Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene to bounce him from office — are unlikely to help him in the new year.

"Voters voted for them," said Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., the chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus. "Let's see what they do."

It's not just the speaker election Wednesday, but Republicans will also determine their down-ballot leadership.

Majority Leader Steve Scalise, also of Louisiana, and GOP Whip Tom Emmer of Minnesota, are expected to sail to their reelections in leadership.

The No. 4 position, the House GOP conference chair, is the most contested with Trump's decision to tap Rep. Elise Stefanik of New York as his ambassador to the United Nations. Her departure opens up the post that is being contested by several GOP lawmakers.

## **Senate Republicans are gathering behind closed doors to pick a new majority leader**

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican senators will gather behind closed doors Wednesday to decide who will replace longtime Senate leader Mitch McConnell and lead their new majority next year — a decision that could shape the future of the Senate, and the party, as Donald Trump reclaims the presidency.

South Dakota Sen. John Thune, Texas Sen. John Cornyn and Florida Sen. Rick Scott have been scrambling to win the most votes in the secret ballot election, promising a new direction in the Senate even as they furiously compete for Trump's favor. It will be the first test of Trump's relationship with Congress after he won the election decisively and claimed a mandate for his agenda.

It's uncertain who will win.

Thune and Cornyn have campaigned mostly within the Senate, working senators individually and privately and raising millions of dollars for Senate GOP candidates. Both quickly mobilized in March after McConnell announced he would step aside from leadership.

Scott has run an insurgent campaign outside of the Senate, campaigning publicly as the candidate closest to Trump and winning endorsements from people who are close to the former and future president. Scott received an outpouring of support on X over the weekend as Trump allies, including Elon Musk, pushed his bid.

Who senators choose, and whether Trump ultimately endorses a candidate in the final hours, could set the tone for Trump's attempts to assert control over the legislative branch in his second presidency. His relationship with McConnell was strained in his first term, and Trump was often frustrated that lawmakers would not fully bend to his will.

Both Cornyn and Thune have drawn closer to Trump in recent months after criticizing him as he tried to overturn his election defeat in 2020. But the two longtime senators are both viewed by their colleagues as institutionalists more in the mold of McConnell, while Scott has worked to gather support outside of the Senate, and within Trump's inner circle, to pressure an overhaul within.

"We got a mandate a week ago that people want change," said Republican Sen. Tommy Tuberville of Alabama, who is supporting Scott, as he walked into a forum for the candidates on Tuesday night. "They

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 52 of 98

want President Trump to have more leeway than he had last time. He was kind of tied down a little bit.”

Tuberville said that whoever is chosen, he wants to make sure Trump “feels good about it.”

No matter who wins, all three senators have shown they will defer to the incoming president as the leader of the party, and that they are willing to cede some of the Senate’s power to do so.

When Trump posted on X Sunday that the new leader “must agree” to allow him to appoint Cabinet members and others when the Senate is on recess, avoiding confirmation votes, all three quickly signaled they were open to the idea.

To select the new leader, Senate Republicans will meet privately in a ceremonial space in the Capitol for several hours to hear the candidates make their case. Few aides are allowed in. The contenders will each be introduced and nominated by two other senators, and then they make a speech of their own. Ballots are cast secretly. If no one wins a majority on the first ballot, they proceed to a second round, and so on, until someone wins a majority of the vote.

The clubby contest is a stark contrast from the House, where lawmakers publicly announce their votes for speaker in an election on the House floor.

And aside from Scott’s challenge to McConnell two years ago, in which he won 10 votes, it is the first competitive election for Republican leader in three decades. McConnell, who has been a force for the party but has repeatedly feuded with Trump, was uncontested when he first became party leader in 2007.

Unlike most previous contests, there is no clear front-runner going into the election. Because senators are casting secret ballots, the majority won’t say who they are voting for. And some may never tell.

“It’s a secret ballot and it’s a secret ballot for a reason,” said South Dakota Sen. Mike Rounds, who said early on he would support his home state colleague Thune. “Each member chooses the leader that they think they can work with the best over this two year period of time.”

Rounds said that he prefers the way that Thune and Cornyn have “handled it one-on-one with everybody,” but that he had talked to Scott as well. “We’ve got three qualified individuals,” he said.

One thing all candidates agree on is change from McConnell, who called most of the shots as leader — a top demand from the far-right faction of the caucus who disagreed with McConnell on aid to Ukraine and increasingly turned on him as he feuded with Trump.

Thune, Scott and Cornyn said they would like to see more opportunity for individual senators to bring bills to the floor and offer amendments, and they have pledged to be better communicators within the conference than the often-reserved McConnell. At the forum on Tuesday evening, the three agreed on many of the issues discussed, according to senators leaving the meeting.

Thune, McConnell’s current No. 2, has been seen by colleagues as an incumbent of sorts, having taken over for several weeks last year when McConnell was absent due to medical reasons. He is well-liked among his fellow senators, and was seen for some time as the front-runner in the race. But Cornyn, who served as McConnell’s No. 2 before Thune, is also well-liked and has also won some commitments from colleagues.

Thune and Cornyn are similar on policy, voting generally in step with the conference but working with Democrats at times. Cornyn is a longtime member of the Senate Judiciary Committee who took a leading role on bipartisan gun legislation two years ago. Thune worked across the aisle as a former chairman of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee.

The two differ on whether the leader should be term limited — a key demand from some in the conservative wing. Cornyn has pushed for limits, while Thune has not.

Scott, the former governor of Florida, was elected in 2018 and quickly positioned himself as a foil to McConnell, running against him for leader in 2022 and aligning with Utah Sen. Mike Lee and others who have been highly critical of the current leadership. As Thune and Cornyn wooed their colleagues all year, Scott spent most of the year tied up in his own reelection race. He handily defeated Democrat Debbie Mucarsel-Powell by more than 10 points.

Scott has campaigned on his business experience. He said Tuesday night that the pitch boils down to that “I support Donald Trump’s agenda. He’s got a mandate.”

Also voting in the election on Wednesday are the senators-elect who handed Republicans the majority next year, even though they aren't yet sworn in. Republican Bernie Moreno, who beat Democratic Sen. Sherrod Brown, attended the forum on Tuesday night and said afterward that there was "incredible energy" in the room.

Still, he said that he hasn't decided who he will vote for. "We've got three great candidates who should get us to where we are going," he said.

## In Africa, meager expectations and some hopes for a second Trump presidency

By CHINEDU ASADU Associated Press

ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) — African leaders may have been quick to congratulate Donald Trump on his election, professing a desire for mutually beneficial partnerships, but there are meager expectations that his presidency will change things for this continent of over 1.4 billion people.

In the wake of Trump's win, Kenya's William Ruto said his country "stands ready" to deepen its ties with Washington. Nigeria's Bola Tinubu spoke of a second Trump administration ushering in an era of "earnest, beneficial, and reciprocal" cooperation.

Still, observers say African countries — once described by Trump as "shithole countries" — are definitely not going to be high on his to-do list.

Low priority or not even a concern?

U.S. foreign policy has not made Africa a priority for a long while — beyond seeing the continent through the lens of countering rivals such as Russia and China, said Charles Ray, chair of the Foreign Policy Research Institute's Africa Program.

President Joe Biden talked about Africa as a key partner, said Ray, who served as the U.S. ambassador to Zimbabwe between 2009 and 2012.

But not much action followed those words.

Africa "will be at the very bottom of (Trump's) list of priorities" and any U.S. action on the continent would likely be driven by his "transactional, ego-driven leadership style," Ray added.

Many experts agree, citing Trump's "America First" strategy.

Murithi Mutiga, program director for Africa at the Crisis Group, says the president-elect is "a committed isolationist and clearly wants to pull back" on various fronts across the world.

Some say there are deals to be made, even in Africa

J. Peter Pham, Trump's former special envoy to Africa's Great Lakes and Sahel regions, says the next Trump presidency may look for a "win-win" situation in Africa.

That could include a renewal of the African Growth and Opportunity Act, which grants eligible African countries duty-free access to U.S. markets, Pham said during a Voice of America broadcast.

However, U.S. lawmakers have been asking questions about whether African countries are complying with conditions under the program — or if they are undermining U.S. foreign policy interests and national security, Pham said.

South Africa, one of the biggest beneficiaries of the program, was accused by U.S. Ambassador Reuben Brigety in 2023 of providing weapons and ammunition to Russia for its war in Ukraine and its professed neutral stance on the war was brought into question.

Basically, you don't "kick America in the teeth" in ways that raise questions about compliance with such deals, Pham said.

Those that do "will be treated as pariahs," said Ray, with the Foreign Policy Research Institute.

Africa's myriad health and other crises, abortion and LGBTQ+ rights

The top concern is that the next Trump presidency will cut funding. In many parts of Africa, such cuts could be critical for millions of girls and young women whose reproductive health and choices are supported heavily by U.S.-funded programs.

"The situation is already bad for girls (and) it will turn into a disaster without these services," said Val-



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 54 of 98

entire Damitoni, a mother at 18.

She regularly visits a local clinic in Zimbabwe's capital of Harare to receive a contraceptive under a U.S.-funded program that allows her to return to school without fears of falling pregnant again.

Max Primorac, a former acting deputy administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development — one of Africa's biggest development aid donors — criticized some of the agency's programs in Project 2025, a 900-page blueprint proposed by the conservative-leaning Heritage Foundation to reshape the federal government.

In particular, Primorac criticized USAID programs that "promote abortion, climate extremism and interventions against perceived systematic racism." The document is said to align closely with Trump's vision — though he has distanced himself from it.

Kiron Skinner, the head of policy planning at the U.S. State Department during Trump's first term in office, recommends in the document that in Africa, America should "focus on core security, economic, and human rights" rather than impose "radical abortion and pro-LGBT initiatives."

New realignments in Africa, turning to Russia and China

In Africa's volatile Sahel region, soldiers are increasingly booting out elected presidents and riding anti-Western sentiments to sever ties with longstanding allies like the United States and France — while turning to a new friend: Russia.

China, which casts infrastructural loans to African countries as mutually beneficial cooperation, rarely interferes in internal politics of the recipients countries. Russia, the continent's biggest arms supplier, is often in bed with Africa's military juntas.

Both countries, as indeed America, have shown huge interest in Africa's rich mineral resources.

Mutiga, of the Crisis Group, says "the problem historically has been that the U.S. and the West viewed Africa as a problem" to be solved. China and others "saw it as an opportunity to be grasped."

Will Trump backpedal on Biden's pledges?

The Biden administration announced last December that it had invested at least \$22 billion in Africa and promised to do more. Trump, during his first term, continuously sought to slash foreign affairs funding, sometimes as much as 30%.

Analysts are concerned about whether key U.S. projects in health, security and development would be implemented under Trump — especially at a time of worsening hunger and resurgent threats to democracy in Africa.

For many ordinary Africans, Trump is just a distant leader who can't do much about their everyday problems.

"Trump ... is not going to save us from hunger caused by our government," said Isah Mohammed, a fruit seller in Nigeria's capital, Abuja.

Africa's flashpoints, from Western Sahara to Somalia

In Morocco, many rejoiced after Trump's win, hoping his return to office would help the North African country further its push to win global recognition for its sovereignty over the disputed Western Sahara.

"The return of the friend of Morocco to the White House," proclaimed the country's Assabah newspaper in its editorial.

As part of a larger deal that included Morocco normalizing its ties with Israel, Trump shifted longstanding U.S. policy and recognized Morocco's sovereignty claims before leaving office in 2020.

Biden has not reversed that decision — but has also not advanced the Trump administration's promise to build a consulate in the disputed territory.

The stability in the Horn of Africa is increasingly threatened by the raging war in Sudan and growing tensions between Somalia and Ethiopia over the latter's business deal with Somalia's breakaway region Somaliland.

Trump will likely cut funding to Somalia and engage more with Somaliland, predicts Rashid Abdi, an analyst at the Nairobi-based Sahan Research think tank.

What's stopping Africa's progress? Maybe Africa itself

The G20, the group of the world's leading economies, welcomed the African Union as a permanent mem-

ber last year — a powerful acknowledgement of the continent's more than 50 countries and something Biden had said was "a long time in coming."

But despite that step on the global stage, observers say the union and its leaders have not lived up to expectations, failing to articulate their interests and table their demands as a united front.

"The question is often, what will Washington do, but, really, what is Africa's interest?" said Mutiga, with the Crisis Group.

"We're in an age of transactional global relations and unless Africa can engage in a way that articulates its own interests, America's (interests in Africa) will continue to be determined by geopolitical competition with its rivals," he said.

## Children brought from Gaza to heal from war wounds become caught in another war, in Lebanon

By ABBY SEWELL Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — When Zarifa Nawfal's family arrived in Beirut for her wounded daughter's surgery, one of the first things she wanted to do was go to the sea. The Mediterranean had been a constant companion at their home in Gaza before the war.

"The moment I smelled the sea, I felt at peace inside — as if I were in Gaza," she said.

But soon their place of refuge reminded her of home in far more distressing ways.

Nawfal's 7-year-old daughter, Halima Abou Yassine, is one of a dozen severely wounded Palestinian children brought to Lebanon this year for treatment through a program launched by a British-Palestinian surgeon, Dr. Ghassan Abu Sitta.

But months after their arrival, Lebanon is itself embroiled in a war some fear will end in Gaza-like destruction.

In February, Nawfal was staying with her five children and her mother in an apartment in central Gaza. They had been displaced from their home in the north and Nawfal's husband was missing, likely dead.

The children were filling water containers outside when two missiles struck, Nawfal said. She rushed outside and found Halima, the youngest, lying in the street, her skull cracked open, her brain exposed.

Through her shock, Nawfal said, "I was relieved that her body was in one piece." In Gaza, blasts often ripped people apart, leaving their loved ones without even a body to bury.

Halima's brother was unconscious next to her. He was quickly revived at the hospital. But staff at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital confirmed Nawfal's fears, she said: Halima was dead. Her small body was placed in the morgue.

But as the family was preparing to bury her, the little girl's uncle noticed faint signs of life, the family said.

Officials at Al-Aqsa hospital could not be reached to confirm the account. But Abu Sitta, who has worked in several Gaza hospitals during the war, said in the chaotic situation it was not uncommon for patients to be misidentified as dead because normal protocols for emergency room examinations were often abandoned.

"Because of the sheer number of cases that would come in with each air raid ... the ambulance staff would take to the morgue immediately those who they thought were dead," he said.

In the days after her daughter was determined to be alive, Nawfal stayed with her, manually pumping oxygen into her lungs. After a week, the little girl began to breathe on her own. Finally, she woke up.

"Some of the doctors cried and said this is a miracle," Nawfal said.

But they were unable to do more than keep the little girl alive. Her skull was still gaping open, a shard of bone missing. Her brain was beset by infection.

The family was evacuated to Egypt in May. In July, they boarded a plane for Lebanon.

An unlikely refuge

The first of the wounded Palestinian children arrived in Lebanon in May. Five-year-old Adam Afana had nearly lost his left arm in a blast that killed his father and sister. His arm was paralyzed and he needed a complex surgery to correct the nerve damage.

At the time, Lebanon was already embroiled in a low-simmering conflict between Israel and Hezbollah.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 56 of 98

The Lebanese militant group began firing rockets across the border into Israel in support of its ally, Hamas, on Oct. 8, 2023, a day after Palestinian militants staged the deadly surprise incursion into southern Israel that sparked the ongoing war in Gaza. Israel responded with shelling and airstrikes.

For months, the conflict in Lebanon was mainly confined to the border area, far from Beirut.

Abu Sitta said he chose Lebanon for the wounded children's treatment because the Mediterranean country has specialists with wide experience treating war injuries.

Lebanon has been through its share of conflicts, including a 15-year civil war that ended in 1990 and a brutal monthlong war between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006, as well as spillover effects from other regional conflicts.

"Even after the end of the wars (in Lebanon), the wounded from Iraq and Syria would come here for that kind of complex and multistage treatment," Abu Sitta said.

The war that followed them

In July, Halima underwent successful surgery to repair her skull at the American University of Beirut Medical Center.

Nawfal said her daughter has lingering memory problems but is improving with therapy. A chipper, happy-go-lucky child, Halima thrived in Beirut. She swam in the hotel pool, loved to color and played with the other children from Gaza. She walked with her siblings to pick out fruit at the neighborhood produce stand, a straw hat covering the scar on the back of her head.

In mid-September, Israel launched an offensive against Hezbollah. It pummeled wide swathes of Lebanon with airstrikes, including Beirut's southern suburbs and some sites within the city center.

The children quickly snapped back into wartime habits. They cracked open the balcony's sliding glass doors to prevent the glass shattering from the pressure of a blast and began sleeping in the central sitting room in the family's hotel suite, away from windows.

Nawfal said some organizations offered to evacuate the family from Lebanon to continue treatment elsewhere, but she "completely refused."

"Lebanon isn't just another Arab country or a country we came to for treatment — Lebanon is a sister to Gaza," she said. "We are like two souls in one body. ... We live or die together."

Adam Afana's uncle, Eid Afana, said the escalation in Lebanon "reminds us of the beginning of the war in Gaza." Afana said the sound of airstrikes frightened Adam, who felt the war was pursuing them.

"What we hope for Lebanon is that what happened in Gaza won't happen here — that the beginning and the ending won't both be the same," Afana said.

'All wars are waged on children'

The Ghassan Abu Sitta Fund halted bringing wounded Palestinian children to Lebanon but continues to treat the existing patients — with some challenges.

Since arriving in Beirut, Adam has undergone a procedure to clear infection from his bones, a neurosurgery and regular physiotherapy sessions. With effort, he can now slightly clench his hand.

But the final operation — a muscle transfer and surgery to repair the damaged nerves to his arm — is on hold.

"There's just a handful of people who specialize in this globally, and we were expecting one of them to come to Lebanon," Abu Sitta said. The trip has been delayed by the escalation in Lebanon.

When he first launched the program, Abu Sitta hoped to treat 50 Palestinian children from Gaza at any given time. Unable to bring more patients in, the team is turning its resources to treating Lebanese children.

The numbers of wounded Lebanese children are still far lower than in Gaza. As of last week, Lebanon's Ministry of Public Health said 192 children had been killed and at least 1,255 wounded since October 2023. In Gaza, more than 13,000 children have been killed and thousands more have been wounded, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

Abu Sitta said the wounds of children in Lebanon are "identical to the injuries of Palestinian children from Gaza." Most were wounded while at home. They suffered "crush injuries to the limbs, blast injuries to the face" and often "multiple members of the family killed at the same time," he said.

"As in Gaza, this war takes its toll on children," he said. "All wars are waged on children."

## Trump makes a victor's return to Washington to meet with Biden and GOP lawmakers

By WILL WEISSERT and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump is making a victor's return to Washington.

President Joe Biden will welcome him to the White House on Wednesday for an Oval Office visit that is a traditional part of the peaceful handoff of power — a ritual that Trump himself declined to participate in four years ago.

Trump also planned to meet with Republicans from Congress as they focus on his Day 1 priorities and prepare for a potentially unified government with a GOP sweep of power in the nation's capital. His arrival amid Republican congressional leadership elections could put his imprint on the outcome.

It's a stunning return to the U.S. seat of government for the former president, who departed nearly four years ago a diminished, politically defeated leader after the Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol but is preparing to come back to power with what he and his GOP allies see as a mandate for governance.

Ahead of the visit, House Speaker Mike Johnson said that Republicans are "ready to deliver" on Trump's "America First" agenda.

After his election win in 2016, Trump met with President Barack Obama in the Oval Office and called it "a great honor." But he soon was back to heaping insults on Obama, including accusing his predecessor — without evidence — of having wire-tapped him during the 2016 campaign.

Four years later, Trump disputed his 2020 election loss to Biden, and he has continued to lie about widespread voter fraud that did not occur. He didn't invite Biden, then the president-elect, to the White House and he left Washington without attending Biden's inauguration. It was the first time that had happened since Andrew Johnson skipped Ulysses S. Grant's swearing-in 155 years ago.

Biden insists that he'll do everything he can to make the transition to the next Trump administration go smoothly. That's despite having spent more than a year campaigning for reelection and decrying Trump as a threat to democracy and the nation's core values. Biden then bowed out of the race in July and endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris to succeed him.

In the wake of the election, the president has abandoned his dire warnings about Trump, saying in a speech last week, "The American experiment endures. We're going to be okay."

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Biden is committed to "making sure that this transition is effective, efficient and he's doing that because it is the norm, yes, but also the right thing to do for the American people."

"We want this to go well," Jean-Pierre added. "We want this to be a process that gets the job done."

Biden's national security adviser Jake Sullivan echoed that sentiment, saying the administration will uphold the "responsible handoff from one president to the next, which is in the best tradition of our country."

Wednesday's visit is more than just a courtesy call.

"They will go through the top issues — both domestic and foreign policy issues — including what is happening in Europe and Asia and the Middle East," Sullivan told CBS of Wednesday's meeting. "And the president will have the chance to explain to President Trump how he sees things ... and talk to President Trump about how President Trump is thinking about taking on these issues when he takes office."

Traditionally, as the outgoing and incoming presidents meet in the West Wing, the first lady hosts her successor upstairs in the residence — but Melania Trump isn't expected to attend.

After his 2016 meeting with Obama, Trump also visited lawmakers on Capitol Hill and will be doing the same Wednesday — not far from where a mob of his supporters staged a violent January 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol to try and stop the certification of Biden's election victory.

When Trump left Washington in 2021, even some top Republicans had begun to decry him for his role in helping incite the Capitol attack. But his win in last week's election completes a political comeback that has seen Trump once again become the unchallenged head of the GOP.

It's not the first time Trump has returned to the Capitol area since the end of his first term, though.



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 58 of 98

Congressional Republicans hosted Trump over the summer, as Trump was again solidifying his dominance over the party.

His latest visit comes as Republicans, who wrested the Senate majority from Democrats in last week's elections and are on the cusp of keeping GOP control of the House, are in the midst of their own leadership elections happening behind closed doors Wednesday.

The president-elect's arrival will provide another boost to Johnson, who has pulled ever-closer to Trump as he worked to keep his majority — and his own job with the gavel.

The speaker said he expects to see Trump repeatedly throughout the week, including at an event later that evening, and at the president-elect's Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida "all weekend."

It's unclear whether Trump will also visit the Senate, which is entangled in a more divisive closed-door leadership election in the three-way race to replace outgoing GOP Leader Mitch McConnell.

Trump's allies are pushing GOP senators to vote for Sen. Rick Scott of Florida, who had been a longshot candidate challenging two more senior Republicans, Sen. John Thune of South Dakota and Sen. John Cornyn of Texas, for the job.

## US inflation may have picked up in October after months of easing

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Annual inflation may have risen in October for the first time in seven months, a sign that price increases might be leveling off after steadily cooling for more than two years.

Consumer prices are thought to have increased 2.6% from 12 months earlier, according to a survey of economists by the data provider FactSet, up from 2.4% in September. Measured month to month, prices are believed to have ticked up 0.2% from September to October, the same as in the previous month.

Excluding volatile food and energy costs, so-called core prices are forecast to have risen 3.3% from a year earlier, unchanged from the previous month. From September to October, core prices are expected to have risen 0.3% for a third straight month — a pace that, if sustained, would exceed the Federal Reserve's 2% inflation target.

An uptick in prices could fuel concerns in financial markets that progress in taming inflation might be slowing. It might make the Fed less inclined to cut its key interest rate in December and next year, as its officials have previously indicated they likely would.

Still, most economists think inflation will eventually resume its slowdown. Consumer inflation, which peaked at 9.1% in 2022, has since fallen steadily, though overall costs are still about 20% higher than they were three years ago. The price spike soured Americans on the economy and on the Biden-Harris administration's economic stewardship and contributed to Vice President Kamala Harris' loss in last week's presidential election.

Yet Donald Trump's election victory has raised considerable uncertainty about where inflation might be headed and how the Fed would react if it reaccelerated. Trump has vowed to reduce inflation, mostly by ramping up oil and gas drilling. But mainstream economists have warned that some of his proposals, notably substantially higher tariffs on U.S. imports and mass deportations of migrants, would worsen inflation if fully implemented.

Stock prices surged in the wake of Trump's election victory, mostly out of optimism that his proposed tax cuts and deregulation would boost the economy and corporate profits. But bond yields also jumped, likely reflecting fear that inflation could stay elevated or even increase.

In addition, the economy is growing faster than many economists had expected earlier this year. It has expanded at nearly a 3% annual rate over the past six months, with consumers, particularly those with higher incomes, spending freely and fueling growth.

"Tax cuts and tariffs, among other policy proposals, have the potential to materially impact inflation, inflation expectations and economic growth," said Seema Shah, chief global strategist at Principal Asset Management. "With uncertainties around tax and trade policies, inflationary pressures, and economic resilience, the Fed is likely to slow its rate-cutting pace."

Higher used-car prices are thought to have raised overall inflation last month. Airfares, too, may have helped fuel inflation.

But clothing costs are believed to have declined, along with prices for groceries, gas and other energy sources.

At a news conference last week, Fed Chair Jerome Powell expressed confidence that inflation is still heading down to the central bank's 2% target, though perhaps slowly and unevenly.

"We feel like the story is very consistent with inflation continuing to come down on a bumpy path over the next couple of years and settling around 2%," Powell said. "One or two really good data months or bad data months aren't going to really change the pattern at this point now that we're this far into the process."

Powell also noted that most sources of price pressures are cooling, suggesting that inflation isn't likely to accelerate in the coming months. Wages are still growing and have outpaced prices for the past year and a half. But Powell noted that wages aren't rising quickly enough to boost inflation.

A survey released Tuesday by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York found that consumers expect prices to rise just 2.9% in the next 12 months, which would be the lowest such measure in nearly four years. Lower inflation expectations are important because when consumers expect milder price increases, they're less likely to act in ways that raise inflation, such as accelerating their purchases or demanding higher pay to offset higher prices.

Another potential source of relief for Americans' budgets is in apartment rents. They are now barely rising on average nationwide, according to the real estate brokerage Redfin. Its measure of median rent was just 0.2% higher than it was a year ago in October, at \$1,619, though that figure reflects rents only for new leases.

The government's measurement of rents is rising faster because it includes existing rents. Many landlords are still raising monthly payments to reflect higher costs for new leases over the past three years.

## **Guns smuggled from the US are blamed for a surge in killings on more Caribbean islands**

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — Dozens of soldiers and police fanned out across a neighborhood on a recent night in the Turks & Caicos Islands just days after the archipelago reported a record 40 killings this year.

They were on the hunt for criminals and illegal weapons fueling a surge of violence across the Caribbean as authorities struggle to control a stream of firearms smuggled in from the U.S.

Half an hour into the Oct. 30 operation, one driver tried to run authorities off the road as he tossed a handgun into the bushes.

"Rest assured, we remain committed to disrupting the flow of illicit guns," Police Superintendent Jason James said hours later.

But the flow is too strong, with illegal firearms blamed for an increase or a record number of killings in a growing number of Caribbean islands this year, including Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas.

No Caribbean nation manufactures firearms or ammunition or imports them on a large scale, but they account for half of the world's top 10 highest national murder rates, according to a statement from U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy of Connecticut.

In a letter sent to U.S. legislators in late September, New York's attorney general and 13 other colleagues across the U.S. demanded new measures to stop the flow of guns, noting that 90% of weapons used in the Caribbean were bought in the U.S. and smuggled into the region.

"American-made guns are flowing into Caribbean nations and communities and fueling violence, chaos, and senseless tragedies throughout the region," wrote New York Attorney General Letitia James.

In mid-2023, the U.S. government appointed its first coordinator for Caribbean firearms prosecutions to help curb weapon smuggling from the U.S. to the region, with the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives already tracing firearms seized in the Caribbean.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 60 of 98

Last year, 266 firearms seized in the Bahamas were submitted to ATF, along with 234 firearms from Jamaica, 162 from the Dominican Republic and 143 from Trinidad and Tobago, according to the agency's most recent data.

The majority are handguns, followed by semiautomatic pistols.

The information gleaned from recovered weapons can help authorities in the U.S. determine where and when they were bought, triggering a domestic firearms trafficking investigation.

But it's a struggle to stop the flow of weapons, with smugglers disassembling them and hiding their parts in sea-bound containers.

"As much as you try to harden the infrastructure at the official ports, it is essentially like trying to plug a sift," said Michael Jones, executive director of the Implementation Agency for Crime and Security at Caricom, a Caribbean trade bloc.

Brazen killings

Homicides are not the only thing rising across parts of the Caribbean. There's an increase in privately made firearms using 3D printers, and gunmen are using higher caliber weapons and becoming more brazen, with younger and younger people committing crimes, Jones said.

Killings are now occurring during the day, and not necessarily via a drive-by shooting, he said.

"You have some who are so bold as to walk up to an individual, put the gun to their head, and walk away," he said.

Jones said gangs are franchising across the region, with gunmen sometimes traveling to a certain island to commit the crime and then leaving.

Gangs also are preying on young people because they lack opportunities, Jones said.

"Even now, there are some countries that will tell you they don't have a gang problem," he said.

The victims

On a recent afternoon in late October, a 42-year-old employee with Trinidad and Tobago's Forestry Division was fatally shot while in a car near his brother's house.

He was one of six people killed in the span of 48 hours, raising the death toll in the twin-island nation of 1.4 million people to 518 compared with 468 killings last year. The sister island of Tobago alone reported a record 20 killings — in mid-August — and still counting.

During a recent budget presentation, Prime Minister Keith Rowley urged lawmakers to draft a bill to ban assault weapons and high-powered rifles.

Experts say many killings in the Caribbean are a result of gang-on-gang violence, but civilians are increasingly getting caught in the crossfire.

"The proliferation of privately made rifles and semi-automatic pistols, combined with the circulation of conversion devices, increases the likelihood that significantly more rounds will be fired during criminal shootings, which may in turn increase the risk of multiple injuries, including among bystanders," warned a June report by Caricom's Impacs, the Small Arms Survey and others.

One of those bystanders was a 4-year-old boy shot in the leg when gunfire erupted outside his preschool in Trinidad in late September. The bullet fractured one of his bones.

In the Bahamas, a man holding his 8-month-old baby was shot and killed in early October as he stepped out of his car, where another 6-year-old child was sitting. Both children were unharmed.

It was the 90th slaying of the year for the Bahamas, which so far has reported a 23% increase in killings compared with last year. Overall crime is down, though, according to government statistics.

Jamaica, meanwhile, has one of the world's highest homicide rates among countries with reliable statistics: 53.3 per 100,000 people. As of Nov. 2 police statistics show 960 people were reported killed, a nearly 20% drop from last year and far from a record 1,683 homicides reported in 2009, but violence persists on the island of 2.8 million people,

"It is of grave concern to us," Prime Minister Andrew Holness said at a press conference in November about large-scale shootings.

In late October, five men were killed at a soccer game in a Kingston neighborhood that previously

struggled with gang violence. It was the island's latest massacre.

In a visit to the neighborhood, Holness noted police have reduced the number of gangs from almost 600 to 150.

While Jamaica has passed anti-gang legislation to crack down on violence, the Turks & Caicos Islands approved a law in early October that allows authorities to offer immunity or reduced sentences to those who provide key information about a crime.

Police in Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and the Turks & Caicos Islands did not respond to repeated messages for comment.

'We're asking the US to do more'

Most of the firearms smuggled into the Caribbean come from Florida, followed by Georgia and Texas. They usually are shipped directly to an island, although sometimes they first go through a port in Jamaica or the Bahamas.

Firearms have been found inside items ranging from cars to washing machines.

"It's a big problem," said James Sutton, police commissioner for St. Kitts and Nevis. "We're asking the U.S. to do more."

The twin-island nation has reported at least 27 homicides, the vast majority committed with guns. It's creeping close to a record 32 killings in 2016.

Haiti remains the Caribbean nation hardest hit by smuggled weapons that feed gangs controlling 85% of the capital of Port-au-Prince.

"Despite the strengthening of the arms embargo measures, arms trafficking continues unabated," stated a U.N. Security Council report released in late October. "Gangs have been increasingly procuring larger caliber weapons, resulting in more damage and a posing greater challenge to the police and the (U.N.-backed) mission."

The report said trafficking from the U.S. to Haiti is not a sophisticated process, noting there are numerous networks often based on family or social connections and that the "vast majority" of the 200 containers heading from South Florida to Haiti every week are not inspected.

"Despite being brought into the country in small quantities, this recurrent 'ant trafficking' quickly builds up, leaving the country awash with weapons," the report said.

## **A diminished Biden heads to APEC summit in Peru, overshadowed by China's Xi**

By ISABEL DEBRE and DAVID BILLER Associated Press

LIMA, Peru (AP) — If things had gone differently last week, U.S. President Joe Biden could have arrived at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in Peru on Thursday projecting confidence and pledging his successor's cooperation with eager Latin American partners. No longer.

Just as in 2016, the last time that Peru's capital Lima hosted APEC, Donald Trump's election victory has pulled the rug out from under a lame-duck Democrat at the high-profile summit attended by over a dozen world leaders.

The renewed prospect of Trump's "America First" doctrine hampers Biden's ability to reinforce the United States' profile on his first presidential trip to South America, experts say, leaving China and its leader, Xi Jinping, to grab the limelight in America's proverbial backyard.

President Xi's first order of business in Peru is inaugurating a \$1.3 billion megaport that will put China's regional influence on stark display. Total investment is expected to top \$3.5 billion over the next decade.

"This isn't the way the U.S. had hoped to participate in the summit," said Margaret Myers, the director of the China and Latin America program at the Inter-American Dialogue, a Washington policy group. "All eyes are going to be on the port, what Xi says about it and how he articulates relations across the Pacific."

With the U.S. seemingly headed back toward isolationism under Trump, "China will be seen as the alternative," Myers added.



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 62 of 98

Sitting 60 kilometers (37 miles) northeast of Lima, the Chancay megaport — once a serene fishing village — is perhaps the clearest sign of Latin America's reorientation. The Chinese shipping and logistics giant Cosco holds a 60% stake in the project it developed with Peruvian partner, Volcan.

"With this port, we're looking at the entire Pacific coast, from the United States and Canada all the way to Chile," Peruvian Foreign Minister Elmer Schialer told The Associated Press in his office on Monday. "The shipping business is being transformed."

Peruvian Economy Minister José Arista said in June during a visit to China that the country's neighbors — Brazil, Colombia, Chile — are "making constant trips to and from to see how they can modify their supply chain to use this port," which will cut shipping time to Beijing by 10 days.

China's trade with the region ballooned 35-fold from 2000 to 2022, reaching nearly \$500 billion, according to data from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. Most of the region's exports came from South America, and were concentrated in five products: soybeans, copper and iron ore, oil and copper cathodes.

At the same time, China's diplomatic engagement in the region has become more effective, with Xi visiting 11 Latin American countries since becoming president, according to Xinhua, China's main state news agency. Brazil, host of the G20 summit, and Peru will bestow the rare honor of a full state visit to Xi this month, but not to Biden.

The misguided notion that Latin America must choose between its two largest trading partners is "a strategic defeat" for the U.S., said Eric Farnsworth, vice president at the Washington-based Council of the Americas.

"The idea that China is somehow a better partner is increasingly being heard around the region and I think Xi wants to solidify that and amplify that," Farnsworth said.

Roughly a decade after China poured billions of dollars into building power plants, roads, airports and other infrastructure that saddled some developing countries with unserviceable debt, few expect Beijing to direct more massive loans to Latin America through its Belt and Road Initiative. But deeper cooperation on other infrastructure is possible, particularly renewable energy and telecommunications, said the Boston University bulletin.

The U.S. has appealed to Latin American governments to reject telecoms investment, particularly opposing Huawei, the Chinese tech giant that it argues could open the door to Chinese government spying. Similarly, U.S. officials have raised concerns over the Chancay port's possible dual-use by Beijing's navy in the Pacific — a prospect dismissed by Chinese officials.

China "is working to exploit insecurity in our hemisphere," said U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin at the Southern Command headquarters in Florida this week, adding that the Asian giant is leveraging the need for investment in the Americas to advance its "malign agenda."

Despite its objections to Chinese influence, the U.S. hasn't shown the ability or willingness to build infrastructure like Chancay's megaport, experts note.

Even when the U.S. government has worked to ensure competitive bidding in Latin American massive public works projects, American companies have refrained from participating, said Benjamin Gedan, director of the Wilson Center's Latin America Program.

A Kamala Harris administration wouldn't have changed that, but a Democratic victory would have enabled Biden to speak in Lima with authority about U.S. collaboration to come, such as building regional supply chains, Gedan said.

In sharp contrast to Biden's alliance-building approach, Trump has vowed to protect American interests and promised more of the same unilateralist action the world saw in his first term, when he staked out a combative stance against foreign competitors and deepened the U.S. trade war with China.

In 2022, Biden launched the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework to help integrate economies of the region and enable the U.S. to counterbalance China. But last year, on the campaign trail, Trump said he would kill the trade pact if he were to win the 2024 election and return to the White House — in the same way he pulled the U.S. from the Trans-Pacific Partnership immediately after taking office in 2017.

In the years since, U.S. clout in South America has diminished while China's has grown, said Farnsworth,

recalling how the last time Lima hosted APEC in 2016, the shock of Trump's victory sucked the energy out of then-President Barack Obama's delegation.

Peru's top diplomat insists that the U.S. hasn't ceded its dominant voice guiding discussions about trade at gatherings such as APEC — and doubted that it will, even under Trump.

"I'm not sure that Trump will go against these types of multilateral contexts just because he is worried about the American people," Schialer said. "He knows that the U.S. is too important for the world. We have to sit down and have a nice dialogue and see how we can face these challenges together."

Yet, in the wake of Trump's win and China's port opening in Peru, analysts expect the hard-nosed competition between the U.S. and China to overshadow APEC this week.

"The Chinese love the idea of outmaneuvering the U.S. in its near-abroad," Gedan said. "Xi will luxuriate in this dynamic of being able to arrive with a big delegation, (...) to inaugurate this transformational port and suck all the air out of the room when his American counterpart is very weak politically. That is significant to China."

## Welcome to China's underground raves, from street techno to quotes from Chairman Mao

By ELSIE CHEN and DAKE KANG Associated Press

CHANGCHUN, China (AP) — Crouch through the small metal door and walk down the dark tunnel, and even before you step into the abandoned air raid shelter, the air reverberates with pounding techno beats. Young Chinese holding booze and cigarettes shake and sway in a red-lit passageway, below a big screen rolling through quotations from Chairman Mao.

This is an underground rave in China, part of a subculture growing in hidden corners of the nation's cities, even as its political and cultural mainstream grow increasingly controlled, staid and predictable.

For Chinese ravers, these gatherings — often called "ye di," or "wild dances" — not only offer a rare space for unfettered fun, but signal resistance to the narrowly prescribed future a rigid society expects for them.

By day, Xing Long works in the office of a state-owned company in Changchun, an industrial city in China's northeastern rust belt region.

By night, he's a DJ and underground rave organizer, a side gig that offers an escape from the humdrum of reviewing corporate contracts.

"My job cannot make me feel I fulfilled my values," he said. "Going to work is like executing a prewritten program."

Chinese young people face intense pressure and high expectations from the society around them. In recent years, facing bleak economic prospects, Chinese youth culture has been swept by a series of viral slang terms to describe frustration and hopelessness: "996" — the brutal 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., six days a week work schedule many companies ask of employees. "Involution" — an endless treadmill of pointless competition that fresh graduates face. "Lying flat" — the growing trend among young people of giving up all ambition and aiming to do as little as possible.

Techno dance parties are an escape from all that for people like Xing. Every time he walks into a rave, the 31-year-old said, his brain "jolts awake like a bang."

Xing first learned about techno music from a documentary made by the American media company Vice. "My eyes brightened up when I heard it," he said. "I should've listened to this kind of music earlier."

Xing began going to raves in Shenzhen, a southern city with a population of 17 million, but when he moved home in 2021 he realized no one else was organizing them.

"I want this city to have an underground techno music scene," he said. "I want to listen to it myself, so I want to make it happen."

Xing said that the underground techno scene fascinated him because it's "real" even if not perfect, bad, not in the right order, or broken.

"It's not a beautiful thing that was deliberately produced into a mold to present to the mainstream."

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 64 of 98

In recent years, space for culture and creativity has been shrinking in China as the authorities have ramped up censorship of concerts, shows, and other cultural events. Comedians have been silenced after joking about topics considered politically sensitive. A growing number of independent bookstores and creative spaces have shut down under pressure, while state-sanctioned media promotes uplifting, often saccharine narratives.

Yet underground raves are free from all those limitations because they sprout in gray zones. Hidden from public view, they skirt formal approval processes, neither supported nor suppressed by the state.

Feng Zhe, 27, a rave organizer in Shenyang, a northeastern city about 400 miles from Beijing, said raves are about "refusing to be disciplined by society."

"This is probably not how the world functions nowadays," he said, adding that societies want to make people follow their rules and be useful but "underground culture is useless."

"Most people are going to be repressed," Feng said.

But for most rave organizers, the real meaning of underground rave culture is simply having fun. Loong Wu, a 26-year-old art student, started organizing raves in 2021 during COVID-19 lockdowns out of boredom.

"My original intention was just to break through the boredom," she said. "When you are truly enjoying it, you don't think about meanings."

On one recent Saturday night, civil servants, students, an ex-firefighter, girls with dyed hair, and a man with a full face mask and goggles filed into a bar tucked behind a flower shop in downtown Changchun to attend one of Xing's raves.

They danced to fast-paced industrial techno spun by Du Jizhe, a local part-time DJ who works in HR by day.

He said it's the natural soundtrack of auto manufacturing cities like Changchun and Detroit, which prides itself on being the birthplace of techno. For Du, techno evokes childhood memories of the auto factory where his father worked.

"Techno is basically industrial noise like hammering and mechanical sounds," Du said "These noises exert a subtle influence on people's ears in industrial cities."

Chen Xiangyu, a fashion student in an oversized black t-shirt with hair dyed blond, a black leather choker, a lip piercing, and smoky eye makeup, said raves are a pure release.

"The first time I came, I thought to myself, I don't know anyone, no one knows me, so nobody's paying any attention to how I dance, so long as I'm happy, it's all good," she said. "I shouldn't care too much about what others think."

Even at raves, illegal drugs are rarely seen in China, but promoters still face risks from authorities who have little patience for unapproved social gatherings.

Advertisements promoting raves are often cryptic, with only a date, a DJ line-up, and the cost of admission. Sometimes, the location won't be revealed until an hour ahead of the party. Some organizers require guests to cover their phone's camera with a sticker.

Loong Wu said her requirements for a rave spot were no CCTV cameras, no security, and no nearby residents. Even those aren't a guarantee — local police once busted one of her raves in an industrial port.

"It was pathetic how few such places exist in the city," she said.

Frustrated with how hard to find a good rave spot, she once organized a public party where she put her DJ equipment on a cart and pushed it through city streets as revelers danced alongside.

"Restrictions exist for sure, but that's exactly why we need to create our own scene," she said. "We always need 'wild dances.' We always need to dance outside of set rules."

## Oregon tops Week 2 College Football Playoff rankings and Georgia drops out of the bracket

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

Undefeated Oregon stayed on top in the second batch of College Football Playoff rankings, while Tuesday's poll shoved Georgia completely out of the bracket after its lopsided loss to Mississippi.

Led by the Ducks, then Ohio State, the Big Ten captured four of the top five spots — a string inter-

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 65 of 98

rupted only by Texas of the Southeastern Conference, which was slotted in at No. 3 and would receive a first-round bye.

Georgia's 28-10 loss to Ole Miss dropped the Bulldogs from third to all the way to 12th, but they would be the first team out because No. 13 Boise State of the Mountain West would receive an automatic bid and the final spot in the 12-team bracket as the fifth-best conference champion.

BYU was ranked sixth, but would receive a first-round bye as the Big 12's champion if it wins out.

Those byes go to the four highest-ranked conference champions, meaning Miami of the Atlantic Coast Conference would get a pass into the quarterfinals per this week's version of the bracket despite a loss to Georgia Tech that dropped the Hurricanes five spots to No. 9.

The other ranked teams: No. 4 Penn State, No. 5 Indiana, No. 7 Tennessee, No. 8 Notre Dame, No. 10 Alabama and No. 11 Ole Miss.

The CFP committee releases rankings every week, closing on Dec. 8 with the final poll that will determine the official pairings. College football's first 12-team playoff begins with first-round games Dec. 20-21 and concludes with the title game on Jan. 20.

Much of the hand-wringing this week had to do with Georgia's nine-spot drop in the rankings and its ouster from the bracket. Yes, the Bulldogs have two losses, but they also have what is widely regarded as the toughest schedule in the country. It wouldn't seem right, though, if they were ranked ahead of Ole Miss after last Saturday's beatdown.

"Both Alabama and Ole Miss beat them head-to-head," said Michigan athletic director Warde Manuel, who chairs the selection committee. "As we went through the rankings and looked at everyone, they obviously fell to 12, but it's based on who won in front of them, head-to-head and everything we look at in terms of body of work."

Both the SEC and Big Ten placed four teams in the projected Week 2 bracket.

Undefeated Army of the American Athletic Conference moved up one spot to No. 24 — still behind three teams with three losses — while Colorado came in at No. 17. Coach Deion Sanders' Buffaloes can earn a spot in the Big 12 title game by winning their next two games.

Projected first-round matchups

First-round games will take place on the campus of the better-seeded team. Here's what the matchups would look like based on this week's rankings (teams listed by seed, not ranking):

No. 12 Boise State at No. 5 Ohio State: The Buckeyes could still get a chance to avenge their one-point loss to Oregon in the Big Ten title game.

No. 11 Ole Miss at No. 6 Penn State: Rivalry brewing? The Rebels beat the Nittany Lions 38-25 in the 2023 Peach Bowl.

No. 10 Alabama at No. 7 Indiana: Alabama has 77 bowl appearances; Indiana has 13.

No. 9 Notre Dame at No. 8 Tennessee: The programs have split eight meetings. Notre Dame won the last one in 2005.

Big games this week

Utah at Colorado, Kansas at BYU: Last week, Utah and KU played like what a lot of people expected they would be this season: Big 12 contenders. Now they get a chance to play spoiler.

Tennessee at Georgia: the only matchup between top-12 teams this week. Would a Bulldogs win put them back into the bracket?

Clemson at Pittsburgh: The Tigers, ranked 20th, would conceivably get back into contention for something — a spot in the ACC title game? — with a win.

## Trump says Musk, Ramaswamy will form outside group to advise White House on government efficiency

By COLLEEN LONG and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump on Tuesday said Elon Musk and former GOP presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy will lead a new "Department of Government Efficiency" — which is



not, despite the name, a government agency.

The acronym "DOGE" is a nod to Musk's favorite cryptocurrency, dogecoin. Trump said in a statement that Musk and Ramaswamy will work from outside the government to offer the White House "advice and guidance" and will partner with the Office of Management and Budget to "drive large scale structural reform, and create an entrepreneurial approach to Government never seen before." He added that the move would shock government systems.

It's not clear how the organization will operate. It could come under the Federal Advisory Committee Act, which dictates how external groups that advise the government must operate and be accountable to the public.

Federal employees are generally required to disclose their assets and entanglements to ward off any potential conflicts of interest, and to divest significant holdings relating to their work. Because Musk and Ramaswamy would not be formal federal workers, they would not face those requirements or ethical limitations.

Musk posted on X: "Department of Government Efficiency. The merch will be (fire emojis)." Later he added: "Threat to democracy? Nope, threat to BUREAUCRACY!!!"

Musk has been a constant presence at Mar-a-Lago since Trump won the presidential election.

The president-elect has often said he would give Musk a formal role overseeing a group akin to a blue-ribbon commission that would recommend ways to slash spending and make the federal government more efficient. Musk at one point suggested he could find more than \$2 trillion in savings — nearly a third of total annual government spending.

Trump had made clear that Musk would likely not hold any kind of full-time position, given his other commitments.

"I don't think I can get him full-time because he's a little bit busy sending rockets up and all the things he does," Trump said at a rally in Michigan in September. "He said the waste in this country is crazy. And we're going to get Elon Musk to be our cost cutter."

Ramaswamy suspended his campaign in January and threw his support behind Trump.

Trump said in his statement the two will "pave the way for my Administration to dismantle Government Bureaucracy, slash excess regulations, cut wasteful expenditures, and restructure Federal Agencies."

## Trump spends first week as president-elect behind closed doors at Mar-a-Lago

By CHRIS MEGERIAN and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For a man who loves the spotlight, Donald Trump has been conspicuously out of view since his triumph in last week's presidential election.

There have been no rallies, no press conferences, no speeches. Instead, Trump has spent most of his first week as president-elect behind closed doors at Mar-a-Lago, his private club in Florida, where he's working the phones, reconnecting with foreign leaders and building his new administration.

Trump is hardly in seclusion. He's surrounded by advisers, friends and paying members of his club, who weigh in with advice as he selects people for top government jobs. Elon Musk, the world's richest man, whose companies have billions of dollars of federal contracts, has been a constant presence. Some see Musk as the second-most influential figure in Trump's immediate orbit after his campaign chief-turned-incoming chief of staff, Susie Wiles.

On Tuesday evening, Trump announced that Musk would help lead a "Department of Government Efficiency" — essentially an independent advisory panel — where he could recommend ways to "drive out the massive waste and fraud."

"This will send shockwaves through the system," said a statement from Musk, who will work with Vivek Ramaswamy, a biotech entrepreneur who ran for president himself.

Trump is expected to return to public view on Wednesday, when he goes to the White House to meet with President Joe Biden and visits Capitol Hill to consult with House Speaker Mike Johnson and Repub-

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 67 of 98

lican legislators. Overall, Trump is laying the groundwork for his second presidency at a much faster clip than his first.

Trump is also expected to meet with Republicans on Capitol Hill as they prepare for his day one priorities in a potentially unified government with a sweep of GOP power in Washington.

That doesn't mean the private process lacks the cutthroat atmosphere that Trump has long fostered within his orbit. A former White House official still close to Trump compared the situation at Mar-a-Lago to the Game of Thrones drama series, and another former Trump official also described chaotic jockeying for jobs. Both spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal dynamics.

Eight years ago, when Trump pulled off a shocking victory over Hillary Clinton, he wasn't out of sight for long. He visited President Barack Obama at the White House two days after the election, then met with Republican leaders on Capitol Hill.

"We're going to move very strongly on immigration," he said at the time. "We will move very strongly on health care. And we're looking at jobs. Big league jobs."

Back in New York, back then, Trump Tower was transformed into the backdrop for a new political reality show. The media camped out in the lobby of Trump's namesake skyscraper to see who was coming and going. Sometimes Trump would ride the elevator down to offer an update or show off a guest.

In one notable moment that December, the rapper then known as Kanye West emerged with Trump, who said the two had "been friends for a long time." Asked what they had discussed, Trump replied: "Life. We discussed life." Trump later came under intense criticism in 2022 for dining with Ye and a Holocaust-denying white nationalist.

Eight years ago, Trump also held transition meetings in New Jersey at his Bedminster golf course, where the media assembled many days for a procession of candidates before the assembled cameras.

Some, like future Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, ended up with job offers. Others, like Mitt Romney, did not. After the Romney meeting, the two walked out together and shook hands next to an American flag. Trump flashed a quick thumbs-up and said it "went great."

The current arrangement is far different. There's no public access to Mar-a-Lago, which appears to be under even tighter security than it was in the immediate aftermath of two assassination attempts targeting Trump.

The roundabout in front of the property's entrance is fully barricaded, and vehicles from the Palm Beach County sheriff's office and Secret Service were spotted standing guard, along with unmarked police cars, black vans and a golf cart on a recent afternoon.

Instead, Trump has announced his picks in statements and posts on his Truth Social site, while his comings and goings have been captured on social media by club members and their guests, who, as always, have near-unfettered access.

In one video, he's seen dancing to "YMCA" on the club's packed patio. In another, he and his wife, Melania, are cheered as they arrive for dinner. They were also spotted sitting together at a table with Musk.

Trump is known to have left Mar-a-Lago only once since the election, to visit another one of his properties. On Sunday, he returned to his nearby golf course — the same course where an eagle-eyed Secret Service agent spotted the barrel of a gun pointing through the property's fence, thwarting a potential shooting — to play with his teenage granddaughter, Kai.

"Sundays with Grandpa," she posted on Instagram. Other photos from that day show Trump in a golf cart, wearing a white golf shirt, and later sitting in a burgundy leather chair in the club's restaurant next to Kai while someone leans in for a conversation.

Musk was also spotted at the course, where he was introduced to members. Kai posted a photo of her posing with Musk and his young son, saying that Trump was "achieving uncle status."

Indeed, Musk has sometimes appeared to be a member of the family. On election night, he was spotted giving his son a piggyback ride through a Mar-a-Lago ballroom and joined a family photo of the president-elect with his children and grandchildren.

Since then, he's tried to put his imprint on every subject facing the new administration, according to people familiar with his efforts, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the dynamic.

His attempts at influence extend to issues beyond his expertise, like border security. In addition, Musk has suggested that he could find more than \$2 trillion in savings from the federal budget — nearly a third of total annual spending.

Trump also added Musk to a post-election call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who hopes the United States will continue the flow of military assistance to fend off Russia's invasion. Trump and Musk have both expressed skepticism about supporting Ukraine, and Trump often speaks admiringly of Russian President Vladimir Putin. He has vowed to end the war before Inauguration Day.

Positions in the coming Trump administration are being offered far more quickly now than they were the first time around. In 2016, Trump announced his senior leadership team, including chief of staff, the Sunday after the election. But he waited 10 days for his first Cabinet appointment.

This time, Trump swiftly named Wiles as his chief of staff. He's also chosen Stephen Miller, an anti-immigration firebrand, as a policy adviser, and Tom Homan as his "border czar." Trump has tapped New York Rep. Elise Stefanik as his ambassador to the United Nations and former New York Rep. Lee Zeldin to run the Environmental Protection Agency. He announced a flurry of additional personnel choices on Tuesday, including former Director of National Intelligence John Ratcliffe to lead the Central Intelligence Agency and Fox News host Pete Hegseth as defense secretary.

The competition for jobs this year has been intense. While Trump's 2016 election was a surprise, this time allies have spent four years pulling together personnel lists and policy proposals. Candidates are being represented by PR agencies and lobbyists. One potential Cabinet pick hired consultants to try to bolster his image.

While Trump had said he already had people in mind for various roles, Howard Lutnick, the co-chair of Trump's transition team in charge of personnel, previously told The Associated Press that he hadn't discussed any recommendations with Trump before his win because the president-elect is notoriously superstitious.

"What I do is I go and find the greatest candidates for the role. So each role will have, let's say, eight amazing candidates — fully vetted, fully capable of Senate confirmation, OK?" he said. "Then he'll start interviewing and he'll start considering. That's up to him, right? He's the chooser."

## Israeli strikes kill 46 people in the Gaza Strip and 33 in Lebanon, medics say

By WAFAA SHURAFI and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli airstrikes killed at least 46 people in the Gaza Strip in the past day, including 11 at a makeshift cafeteria in an Israeli-declared humanitarian zone, medics said. In Lebanon, warplanes struck Beirut's southern suburbs and killed 33 people elsewhere in the country on Tuesday.

The latest bombardment came as the United States said it would not reduce its military support for Israel after a deadline passed for allowing more humanitarian aid into Gaza. The State Department cited some progress, even as international aid groups said Israel had failed to meet the U.S. demands.

In Lebanon, large explosions shook Beirut's southern suburbs — an area known as Dahiyeh, where Hezbollah has a significant presence — soon after the Israeli military issued evacuation warnings for 11 houses there.

There was no immediate word on casualties. The Israeli military said it targeted Hezbollah infrastructure, including command centers and weapons production sites, without providing evidence.

Another Israeli strike on an apartment building east of Beirut killed at least six people. Wael Murtada said the destroyed home belonged to his uncle and that those inside had fled from the Dahiyeh last month. He said three children were among the dead and other people were missing.

An Israeli airstrike on a residential building in central Lebanon killed 15 people, including eight women and four children, and wounded at least 12 others, Lebanon's Health Ministry said. The strike came without warning, and state media said the building was sheltering displaced families.

Israel has been carrying out intensified bombardment of Lebanon since late September, vowing to cripple Hezbollah and stop more than a year of cross-border fire by the Lebanese militant group.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 69 of 98

A rocket exploded in a storage building in the northern Israeli town of Nahariya on Tuesday, killing two people, first responders said. Another two people were wounded by shrapnel in a separate impact outside the town.

A Hezbollah drone smashed into a nursery school near the northern Israeli city of Haifa on Tuesday morning, but the children were inside a bomb shelter and there were no injuries. The impact scattered debris across the playground.

Israeli strikes across Gaza kill 46

At the same time, Israel has continued its 13-month campaign in Gaza set off by Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack into southern Israel.

An Israeli strike late Monday hit a makeshift cafeteria used by displaced people in Muwasi, the center of a "humanitarian zone" that Israel's military declared earlier in the war.

At least 11 people were killed, including two children, according to officials at Nasser Hospital, where the casualties were taken. Video from the scene showed men pulling bloodied wounded from among tables and chairs set up in the sand in an enclosure made of corrugated metal sheets.

A strike on a house in the northern town of Beit Hanoun killed 15 people on Tuesday, including relatives of Al Jazeera journalist Hossam Shabat, who has been reporting from the north.

Mohamed Shabat and his wife Dima, both volunteer doctors at Kamal Adwan Hospital, were killed along with their daughter Eliaa, according to hospital director Hossam Abu Safiya.

Strikes in central and southern Gaza killed another 20 people, according to Palestinian medical officials.

The Israeli military had no immediate comment on the strikes.

Under US pressure, Israel allows more aid into Gaza

Hours earlier, the Israeli military announced a small expansion of the humanitarian zone, where it has told Palestinians evacuating from other parts of Gaza to take refuge. Hundreds of thousands are sheltering in sprawling tent camps in and around Muwasi, a desolate area with few public services.

Israeli forces have also been besieging the northernmost part of Gaza since the beginning of October, battling Hamas fighters it says regrouped there.

With virtually no food or aid allowed in for more than a month, the siege has raised fears of famine among the tens of thousands of Palestinians believed to still be sheltering there.

The United States gave Israel a 30-day deadline — that expired this week — to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza, calling on it to allow at least 350 truckloads to enter each day, among other things.

So far, Israel has fallen short. In October, 57 trucks a day entered Gaza on average, and 75 a day so far in November, according to Israel's official figures. The United Nations puts the number lower, at 39 trucks daily since the beginning of October.

Israel has announced a flurry of measures in recent days to increase aid, including opening a new crossing into central Gaza and some small deliveries of food and water to the north. But so far the impact is unclear.

More forced evacuations in isolated northern Gaza

The military announced Tuesday that four soldiers were killed in Jabaliya, bringing to 24 the number of soldiers killed in the assault there since it began.

Palestinian health officials say hundreds of Palestinians have been killed, though the true numbers are unknown as rescue workers are unable to reach buildings destroyed in strikes. Israel has ordered residents in the area to evacuate. But the U.N. has estimated some 70,000 people remain.

Many Palestinians there fear Israel aims to permanently depopulate the area to more easily keep control of it. On Tuesday, witnesses told The Associated Press that Israeli troops had encircled at least three schools in Beit Hanoun, forcing hundreds of displaced people sheltering inside to leave.

Drones blared announcements demanding people move south to Gaza City, said Mahmoud al-Kafarnah, speaking from one of the schools as sounds of gunfire could be heard. "The tanks are outside," he said. "We don't know where to go."

Hashim Afanah, sheltering with at least 20 other people in his family home, said the forces were evicting people from houses and shelters.

The U.N.'s top humanitarian official, Joyce Msuya, told the Security Council on Tuesday that "acts remi-



niscient of the gravest international crimes" are being committed in Gaza. "The daily cruelty we see in Gaza seems to have no limits," she said, pointing to recent developments in Beit Hanoun.

Israel's campaign in Gaza has killed more than 43,000 Palestinians, according to local health authorities that do not distinguish between civilians and militants in their count but say more than half the dead are women and children. Israel says it targets Hamas militants who hide among civilians.

The war in Gaza began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted about 250 as hostages. Around 100 hostages are still inside Gaza, about a third of them believed to be dead.

## Trump builds out national security team with picks of Hegseth for Pentagon, Noem for DHS

By ZEKE MILLER, MICHELLE L. PRICE and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump moved to build out his national security team Tuesday, announcing he is nominating Fox News host and Army veteran Pete Hegseth to serve as his defense secretary and former Director of National Intelligence John Ratcliffe to lead the Central Intelligence Agency.

In a flurry of announcements, Trump said he had chosen former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee as ambassador to Israel and his longtime friend Steven Witkoff to be a special envoy to the Middle East. Trump also said he would nominate South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem to run the Department of Homeland Security and named Bill McGinley, his Cabinet secretary in his first administration, as his White House counsel.

Trump is rolling out a steady stream of appointees and nominees for his upcoming administration, working thus far at a faster pace and without as much drama as his first transition following his 2016 victory. His selection of Hegseth, who lacks senior military or national security experience, was sure to draw questions about his qualifications to lead the department.

Hegseth, 44, is a co-host of Fox News Channel's "Fox & Friends Weekend" and has been a contributor with the network since 2014, where he developed a friendship with Trump, who made regular appearances on the show.

If confirmed by the Senate, he would inherit the top job during a series of global crises — ranging from Russia's war in Ukraine and the ongoing attacks in the Middle East by Iranian proxies to the push for a cease-fire between Israel, Hamas and Hezbollah and escalating worries about the growing alliance between Russia and North Korea.

Hegseth is also the author of "The War on Warriors: Behind the Betrayal of the Men Who Keep Us Free," published earlier this year, and has been outspoken about rooting out what he has called "woke-ness" in the military.

The book, according to its promo, combines "his own war experiences, tales of outrage, and an incisive look at how the chain of command got so kinked," and bills itself as "the key to saving our warriors — and winning future wars."

While the Pentagon is considered a key coveted post in any administration, the defense secretary was a tumultuous post during Trump's first term. Five men held the job during his four years only to resign, be fired or serve briefly as a stopgap. Just two of them were actually confirmed by the Senate.

Trump's relationship with his civilian and military leaders during those years was fraught with tension, confusion and frustration, as they struggled to temper or even simply interpret presidential tweets and pronouncements that blindsided them with abrupt policy decisions they weren't prepared to explain or defend. Many of the generals who worked in his first administration — both on active duty and retired — have slammed him as unfit to serve in the Oval Office and he has condemned them in return.

Hegseth was an infantry captain in the Army National Guard and served overseas in Afghanistan, Iraq and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. He was formerly head of the Concerned Veterans for America, a group backed by conservative billionaires Charles and David Koch, and he unsuccessfully ran for the Senate in Minnesota in 2012.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 71 of 98

He also championed the case of four former Blackwater contractors convicted in a 2007 shooting rampage in Baghdad that killed more than a dozen Iraqi civilians. They were pardoned by Trump in one of his final acts in office.

"With Pete at the helm, America's enemies are on notice — Our Military will be Great Again, and America will Never Back Down," Trump said in a statement. "Nobody fights harder for the Troops, and Pete will be a courageous and patriotic champion of our 'Peace through Strength' policy."

Hegseth has "an excellent background as a junior officer but does not have the senior national security experience that secretaries need," said Mark Cancian, a senior advisor at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "I think Trump was tired of fighting with his secretaries of defense and picked one who would be loyal to him." Cancian said the lack of experience might make it more difficult for Hegseth to get through Senate confirmation.

Noem is a well-known conservative and former member of Congress who used her two terms leading a state to vault to a prominent position in Republican politics. She was considered a potential presidential contender herself, but declined to challenge Trump. She instead launched an overt pitch to be selected vice president but lost that nod when Trump chose JD Vance as his running mate.

If confirmed, Noem would head an agency that is at the center of Trump's sweeping immigration plans and his campaign vow to carry out mass deportations of immigrants in the United States illegally. There are an estimated 11 million people in the country illegally.

The Department of Homeland Security is a sprawling agency of 260,000 employees created in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks with a vast area of responsibility. It was patched together from 22 various agencies with the weighty task of preventing future attacks and is the subject of constant suggestions that it is too unwieldy and should be broken up.

Ratcliffe, a former Republican congressman from Texas, served as director of national intelligence for the final months of Trump's first term, leading the U.S. government's spy agencies during the coronavirus pandemic. He is a more traditional pick for the role, which requires Senate confirmation, than some rumored loyalists pushed by some of Trump's supporters.

Huckabee is a staunch defender of Israel, and his intended nomination comes as Trump has promised to align U.S. foreign policy more closely with Israel's interests as it wages wars against Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Witkoff is a Florida real estate investor who is serving as a chair of Trump's inaugural committee. He also spent time in the world of New York real estate, where Trump first made his mark as a public figure.

As intelligence director, Ratcliffe was criticized by Democrats for declassifying in the final days of the 2020 presidential election Russian intelligence alleging damaging information about Democrats during the 2016 race even though he acknowledged it might not be true.

Ratcliffe's visibility rose as he emerged in 2019 as an ardent defender of Trump during the House's first impeachment proceedings against him. He was a member of Trump's impeachment advisory team and strenuously questioned witnesses during the impeachment hearings.

After the Democratic-controlled House voted to impeach Trump, Ratcliffe said, "This is the thinnest, fastest and weakest impeachment our country has ever seen." He also forcefully questioned former special counsel Robert Mueller when he testified before the House Judiciary Committee about his investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election.

"I look forward to John being the first person ever to serve in both of our Nation's highest Intelligence positions," Trump said in a statement. "He will be a fearless fighter for the Constitutional Rights of all Americans, while ensuring the Highest Levels of National Security, and PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH."

Huckabee has led paid tour group visits to Israel for years, frequently advertising the trips on conservative-leaning news outlets.

"Mike has been a great public servant, Governor, and Leader in Faith for many years," Trump said in a statement. "He loves Israel, and the people of Israel, and likewise, the people of Israel love him. Mike will work tirelessly to bring about Peace in the Middle East!"

David Friedman, who served as Trump's ambassador to Israel in his first term, said he was "thrilled" by

Trump's selection of Huckabee.

Witkoff is also the president-elect's golf partner and was with him when he was the target of a second assassination attempt at his golf club in West Palm Beach, Florida, in September.

Trump's transition team did not offer details about the Middle East envoy role, but Trump said in a statement, "Steve will be an unrelenting Voice for PEACE, and make us all proud."

The selection of Witkoff follows a pattern for Trump in putting people close to him in pivotal roles on the Middle East portfolio. Eight years ago he appointed his former corporate attorney Jason Greenblatt as his special representative for international negotiations and relied on his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, as his personal envoy in talks in the region.

## **US prohibits airlines from flying to Haiti and UN suspends flights after planes were shot by gangs**

By EVENS SANON and MEGAN JANETSKY Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — The Federal Aviation Administration prohibited U.S. airlines from flying to Haiti for 30 days after gangs shot three planes and the United Nations also Tuesday temporarily suspended flights to Port-au-Prince, limiting humanitarian aid coming into the country.

Bullets hit a Spirit Airlines plane when it was about to land in the capital Monday, injuring a flight attendant and forcing the airport to shut down. Photos and videos obtained by The Associated Press show bullet holes dotting the interior of a plane.

On Tuesday, JetBlue and American Airlines announced that postflight inspections found their planes also had been shot Monday while departing Port-au-Prince. American suspended flights to the capital until Feb. 12.

The shootings were part of a wave of violence that erupted as the country plagued by gang violence swore in its new prime minister after a politically tumultuous process.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said the agency documented 20 armed clashes and more roadblocks affecting humanitarian operation during the violence Monday. The Port-au-Prince airport will remain closed until Nov. 18, and Dujarric said the U.N. will divert flights to the country's second airport in the northern, more peaceful, city of Cap Haïtien.

Slashed access to the epicenter of the violence, Port-au-Prince, is likely to be devastating as gangs choking the life out of the capital have pushed Haiti to the brink of famine. Dujarric warned that cutting off flights would mean "limiting the flow of humanitarian aid and humanitarian personnel into the country."

Already, a convoy of 20 trucks filled with food and medical supplies in the south had been postponed and an operation providing cash assistance to a thousand people in the Carrefour area where violence broke out had to be canceled.

"We are doing all we can to ensure the continuation of operations amidst this challenging environment," he said. "We call for an end to the escalating violence, to allow for safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access."

On Tuesday, life in much of Haiti's capital was frozen after the wave of violence. Heavily armed police in armored cars outside the airport checked trucks used for public transportation passing by.

Schools were closed, as were banks and government offices. Streets, where just a day before gangs and police were locked in a fierce firefight, were eerily empty, with few driving by other than a motorcycle with a man who had been shot clinging to the back.

The sounds of heavy gunfire still echoed through the streets in the afternoon — a reminder that despite political maneuvering by Haiti's elites and a strong push by the international community to restore peace, the country's toxic slate of gangs kept its firm hold on much of the Caribbean nation.

The United Nations estimates that gangs control 85% of the capital, Port-au-Prince. A U.N.-backed mission led by Kenyan police to quell gang violence struggles with a lack of funding and personnel, prompting calls for a U.N. peacekeeping mission.

President Luis Abinader in the Dominican Republic, which shares a border with Haiti, was the first leader

on the island to condemn the violence, describing the shooting a “terrorist act”.

On Tuesday, a transitional council established in April to restore democratic order to Haiti also condemned the violence.

“This cowardly crime, which threatens Haiti’s sovereignty and security, aims to isolate our country on the international stage. The perpetrators of these heinous acts will be hunted down and brought to justice,” the council wrote in a statement.

The council has taken sharp criticism from many in Haiti who contend that its political fights and corruption allegations against three members created the political instability, allowing gangs to make violent power grabs like the one seen Monday.

That came to a head over the weekend, when it fired former interim Prime Minister Garry Conille — long at odds with the council. They replaced him with businessman Alix Didier Fils-Aimé, who was inaugurated Monday surrounded by suit-clad officials and diplomats while gangs terrorized the capital around them.

Neither Fils-Aimé or Conille have commented on the wave of violence.

Conille originally called the council’s move illegal, but on Tuesday acknowledged Fils-Aimé’s appointment in a post on the social media platform X.

“(I) wish him success in fulfilling this mission. At this crucial moment, unity and solidarity are essential for our country. Long live Haiti!” he wrote. Fils-Aimé promised to work with international partners to restore peace and hold long awaited elections, a vow also made by his predecessor.

But many Haitians, like 43-year-old Martha Jean-Pierre, have little taste for the political fighting, which experts say only gives gangs more freedom to continue expanding their control.

Jean-Pierre was among those to brave the streets of Port-au-Prince on Tuesday to sell the plantains, carrots, cabbage and potatoes she carried in a basket on her head. She had no choice, she said — selling was the only way she could feed her children.

“What good is a new prime minister if there’s no security, if I can’t move freely and sell my goods?” she said, nodding to her basket of vegetables. “This is my bank account. This is what my family depend on.”

It was a frustration that concerned international players like the U.N. and the U.S. that have pushed for a peaceful resolution in Haiti.

On Tuesday, the U.S. State Department lamented that Conille and the council “were unable to move forward in a constructive manner” and called on Fils-Aimé and the council to provide a clear action plan outlining a joint vision on how to decrease violence and pave the path for elections to be held to “prevent further gridlock.”

“The acute and immediate needs of the Haitian people mandate that the transitional government prioritize governance over the competing personal interests of political actors,” it wrote in a statement.

## **Women suing over Idaho’s abortion ban describe dangerous pregnancies, becoming ‘medical refugees’**

By REBECCA BOONE Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Four women suing over Idaho’s strict abortion bans told a judge Tuesday how excitement over their pregnancies turned to grief and fear after they learned their fetuses were not likely to survive to birth — and how they had to leave the state to get abortions amid fears that pregnancy complications would put their own health in danger.

“We felt like we were being made refugees, medical refugees,” said Jennifer Adkins, one of the plaintiffs in the case.

The women, represented by the Center for Reproductive Rights, aren’t asking for the state’s abortion ban to be overturned. Instead, they want the judge to clarify and expand the exceptions to the strict ban so that people facing serious pregnancy complications can receive abortions before they are at death’s door.

Currently, the state’s near-total ban makes performing an abortion a felony at any stage of pregnancy unless it is “necessary to prevent the death of the pregnant woman.”



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 74 of 98

Adkins' fetus had a severe medical condition that meant it would not survive the pregnancy. The illness also put Adkins at risk of developing "mirror syndrome," a dangerous syndrome that can cause fatally high blood pressure and other issues, she said.

Adkins and her husband decided to seek an abortion, and learned they would have to go out of state to get one after another ultrasound showed the fetus still had a heartbeat.

"No parent wants to wish that when they look at an ultrasound they don't see their baby's heartbeat, yet here I was hoping that I wouldn't," Adkins said. "I wanted the decision to be made for us, and I wanted to end her suffering, so it was really hard to see that and know that we had the challenges ahead of us that we did."

Kayla Smith cried as she told the judge how she found out she was pregnant for a second time on Mother's Day of 2022, and how she and her husband chose the name "Brooks" for their son. She was around 18 or 20 weeks along in her pregnancy when the sonographer grew quiet during a routine anatomy scan, Smith said.

Brooks' heart had fatal anomalies, and the young family could not find a pediatric cardiologist willing to attempt an operation. The veins supplying Brooks' lungs were also abnormal, Smith said, and he would not survive birth.

Smith had developed dangerously high blood pressure during a previous pregnancy, and she was at risk of developing the condition called preeclampsia again.

"If I were to continue pregnancy not only would I risk my life with preeclampsia, I was not willing to watch my son suffer and potentially gasp for air," Smith said, crying.

Idaho's abortion ban went into effect two days before Brooks' diagnosis, she said, making it impossible for her to get an abortion in her home state.

"We wanted to meet our son — that was really important to us — so we needed to do it in a hospital," she said. They took out a loan to cover the estimated \$16,000 to \$20,000 out-of-network cost and drove more than eight hours to a hospital where doctors induced labor.

"All four of these women were overjoyed to be pregnant with their second child and all four of them received the worst news a mother can imagine," attorney Gail Deady, with the Center for Reproductive Rights, told 4th District Judge Jason D. Scott during opening arguments. All of them sought abortions "to protect their health, to spare their babies from pain and suffering, and to remain alive and healthy to protect their young children."

James Craig, a division chief with the Idaho Attorney General's office, said the women and their attorneys are relying on hypotheticals rather than concrete facts to make their case. Under their proposal, a pregnant woman could receive her abortion for something as minor as stepping on a rusty nail — even though the risk of infection in that scenario could be easily treated by receiving a tetanus booster shot, Craig said.

"Unborn children have a fundamental right to life, and protecting the lives of children is a legitimate and fundamental government interest," Craig said.

The state also has the same interest in protecting the lives of women, Craig said — and the abortion ban laws do both, he contended.

In the "rare circumstances where abortion is necessary" to prevent the death of the mother, Idaho law allows that to occur, Craig said. The women suing are trying to "usurp the role of the Legislature" by asking the judge to rewrite the law, he said, and that is not the proper role of the court.

Dr. Emily Corrigan, an ob-gyn who works in emergency medicine at Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center who is also a plaintiff in the case, told the judge how Idaho's multiple abortion bans have created confusion for physicians and made it difficult to treat pregnant patients who need emergency care.

Doctors have had to "basically guess which pregnancy conditions would fall under the state medical exception," Corrigan said.

"I have had other hospital staff refuse to participate in the care of my patients because of the lack of understanding of the laws, and this has caused patient care delays," she said. "I have personally cared for several patients who have been denied stabilizing abortion care at other hospitals in Idaho. By the time

they arrive at my institution, their conditions have deteriorated and have lead to increased complications that I need to manage.”

Several conditions can put the health of pregnant people at risk, she said. Some are caused by pregnancy like preeclampsia, and others — including some chronic illnesses and cancers — can be made worse by pregnancy, she said. In those cases, delaying an abortion might not cause immediate death but can cause a shortened life span or have dramatic effects on a person’s health, Corrigan said.

“We are not trained to wait until things become urgent or emergent. We are trained to prevent harm to our patients,” she said.

## Amid Earth’s heat records, scientists report another bump upward in annual carbon emissions

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

BAKU, Azerbaijan (AP) — Even as Earth sets new heat records, humanity this year is pumping 330 million tons (300 million metric tons) more carbon dioxide into the air by burning fossil fuels than it did last year.

This year the world is on track to put 41.2 billion tons (37.4 billion metric tons) of the main heat-trapping gas into the atmosphere. It’s a 0.8% increase from 2023, according to Global Carbon Project, a group of scientists who track emissions. Several United Nations reports say the globe must cut emissions by 42% by 2030 to possibly limit warming to an internationally agreed-upon threshold.

This year’s pollution increase isn’t quite as large as last year’s 1.4% jump, scientists said while presenting the data at the United Nations climate talks in Azerbaijan.

If the world continues burning fossil fuels at today’s level, it has six years before passing 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels, the limit agreed to at the 2015 climate talks in Paris, said study co-author Stephen Sitch. The Earth is already at 1.3 degrees Celsius (2.3 Fahrenheit), according to the United Nations.

“We clearly are not doing enough on a global scale to reduce emissions. It’s as simple as that,” said study co-author Mike O’Sullivan, a University of Exeter climate scientist. “We need to massively increase ambition and actually just think outside the box of how we can change things, not be so tied to fossil fuel interests.”

Scientists used reported emissions from rich countries and oil industry data, O’Sullivan said. The 2024 figure includes projections for the last couple months or so. The Global Carbon Project team released figures for the four biggest carbon emitters — China, the United States, India and Europe. It also produced more detailed and final figures for about 200 countries for 2023.

The continued rise in carbon emissions is mostly from the developing world and China. Many analysts had been hoping that China — by far the world’s biggest annual carbon polluting nation with 32% of the emissions — would have peaked its carbon dioxide emissions by now. Instead China’s emissions rose 0.2% from 2023, with coal pollution up 0.3%, Global Carbon Project calculated. But it could drop to zero in the next two months and is “basically flat,” O’Sullivan said.

That’s nothing close to the increase in India, which at 8% of the globe’s carbon pollution is third-largest carbon emitter. India’s carbon pollution jumped 4.6% in 2024, the scientists said.

Carbon emissions dropped in both the United States and the European Union. They fell 0.6% in the U.S. mostly from reduced coal, oil and cement use. The U.S. was responsible for 13% of the globe’s carbon dioxide in 2024. Historically, it’s responsible for 21% of the world’s emissions since 1950, a figure that matters since the gas persists in the atmosphere for centuries.

Twenty-two nations have shown steady decreases in emissions, O’Sullivan said, singling out the United States as one of those. The biggest emission drops from 2014 to 2023 were in the United States, Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom and Ukraine.

Europe, which accounts for 7% of the world’s carbon pollution, saw its carbon dioxide output drop 3.8% from last year — driven by a big cut in coal emissions.

Global carbon emissions are well more than double what they were 50 years ago and 50% than they were in 1999. Emissions have gone up about 6% in the past decade.

"This is a needed reminder of the urgency with which we need to address the cause of the climate crisis," said PowerShift Africa founder Mohamed Adow, who wasn't part of the study. "The problem is the fossil fuel industry is kicking and screaming for us to slow down and to keep them in business for longer. That's why they poured money into Donald Trump's election campaign."

Carbon dioxide from humanity's burning of coal, oil and natural gas amounts to 2.6 million pounds (nearly 1.2 million kilograms) of the heat-trapping gas every second.

Total carbon emissions — which include fossil fuel pollution and land use changes such as deforestation — are basically flat because land emissions are declining, the scientists said. That's an important and encouraging milestone amid bad news, said University of Pennsylvania climate scientist Michael Mann

## **Pentagon secrets leaker Jack Teixeira sentenced to 15 years in prison by a federal judge**

By MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — A federal judge sentenced a Massachusetts Air National Guard member to 15 years in prison Tuesday for leaking classified military documents about the war in Ukraine, actions prosecutors said put the country's national security at risk, endangered other military members and damaged U.S. relationships with its allies.

Jack Teixeira had pleaded guilty in March to six counts of willful retention and transmission of national defense information under the Espionage Act, nearly a year after his arrest in the most consequential national security breach in years. Wearing an orange jumpsuit in court, he showed no reaction as he was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Indira Talwani.

"Today, Mr. Teixeira has paid a very heavy price for laws he broke, for the incredible damage that he caused," Acting Massachusetts U.S. Attorney Josh Levy said afterward. "This significant sentence sends a powerful message to every individual who holds a top secret clearance. Anyone who willfully threatens our national security by illegally disseminating classified information will face very serious repercussions."

Jodi Cohen, special agent in charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Boston Division, told reporters the sentence held Teixeira accountable for "being one of the most prolific leakers of classified information in American history."

"This former Air National Guardsman grossly betrayed our country and the oath he took to safeguard its secrets in order to boost his ego and impress his friends," Cohen said. "This was not a victimless crime. The exceptionally grave damage he caused will impact our national security for decades to come."

The leaks exposed to the world unvarnished secret assessments of Russia's war in Ukraine, including information about troop movements in Ukraine, and the provision of supplies and equipment to Ukrainian troops. Teixeira also admitted posting information about a U.S. adversary's plans to harm U.S. forces serving overseas.

Outside court, Teixeira's attorney Michael Bachrach called it a "very difficult day" for his client and said Talwani imposed a "very severe punishment." Still, he said, it was better than taking the case to trial, where Teixeira would have faced 30 years to life behind bars.

"It's a significant sentence that will deter others," Bachrach said. "But it's also one that will allow him to self-reflect and grow. And we fully expect that he will be doing so."

Before he was sentenced, Teixeira showed little emotion as he stood in court and apologized for his actions. The 22-year-old had previously admitted he illegally collected some of the nation's most sensitive secrets and shared them with other users on the social media platform Discord.

"I wanted to say I'm sorry for all the harm that I brought and caused," Teixeira said. "I understand all the responsibility and consequences fall upon my shoulders alone and accept whatever that will bring."

Afterward, Teixeira hugged one of his attorneys, looked toward his family and smiled before being led

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 77 of 98

from court. His family left without commenting to reporters but his mother and others did submit letters to the court seeking leniency.

"I know Jack deeply regrets his actions and is ready to accept his punishment for his part in this situation," his mother, Dawn Dufault, wrote. "While I understand the severity of his charges and the importance of ensuring justice, I implore you, Your Honor, to consider Jack's true nature and his unique challenges, as I have observed over the years."

The security breach raised alarm over the country's ability to protect its most closely guarded secrets and forced the Biden administration to scramble to try to contain the diplomatic and military fallout. The leaks also embarrassed the Pentagon, which tightened controls to safeguard classified information and disciplined members found to have intentionally failed to take required action about Teixeira's suspicious behavior.

Earlier in court, Assistant U.S. Attorney Jared Dolan told Talwani that 200 months — little more than 16 1/2 years - was appropriate given the "historic" damage from Teixeira's breach in aiding America's adversaries and hurting its allies. He also said such a sentence would send a message to anyone in the military who might consider similar conduct.

"It will be a cautionary tale for the men and women in the U.S. military," Dolan said. "They are going to be told this is what happens if you break your promise, if you betray your country ... They will know the defendant's name. They will know the sentence the court imposes."

But Bachrach told the judge Tuesday that 11 years was sufficient and would amount to half of the 22-year-old's life.

"It is a significant, harsh and difficult sentence, one that will not be easy to serve," Bachrach said, adding that Talwani should consider that his client was diagnosed with autism.

Defense attorneys had described Teixeira as an autistic, isolated individual who spent most of his time online, especially with his Discord community. They said his actions, though criminal, were never meant to "harm the United States," and he had no prior criminal record.

"Instead, his intent was to educate his friends about world events to make certain they were not misled by misinformation," they wrote. "To Jack, the Ukraine war was his generation's World War II or Iraq, and he needed someone to share the experience with."

Prosecutors countered in court filings that Teixeira did not suffer from any intellectual disability and understood what he was doing was wrong. They wrote that his post-arrest diagnosis of "mild, high-functioning" autism was of "questionable relevance" to the proceedings.

Teixeira, of North Dighton, Massachusetts, was part of the 102nd Intelligence Wing at Otis Air National Guard Base in Massachusetts. He worked as a cyber transport systems specialist, which is essentially an information technology specialist responsible for military communications networks. He remains in the Air National Guard in an unpaid status, an Air Force official said.

Authorities said he first typed out classified documents he accessed and then began sharing photographs of files that bore SECRET and TOP SECRET markings. Prosecutors also said he tried to cover his tracks before his arrest, and authorities found a smashed tablet, laptop and an Xbox gaming console in a dumpster at his house.

## Wall Street makes wagers on the likely winners and losers in a second Trump term

Associated Press undefined

NEW YORK (AP) — Wall Street is already making big bets on what take two for a White House led by Donald Trump will mean for the economy.

Since Election Day, investors have sent prices zooming for stocks of banks, fossil-fuel producers and other companies expected to benefit from Trump's preference for lower tax rates and lighter regulation. For retailers, meanwhile, the outlook is murkier because of uncertainty about whether they'll be able to



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 78 of 98

absorb any of the higher costs created by tariffs.

Professional investors are warning about the risk of getting carried away by the momentum. While strong rhetoric on the campaign trail can cause these big swings, not all of the promises turn into actual policy. Plus, the broad U.S. stock market tends to move more on long-term growth in profits than anything else.

— Stan Choe

Here's a look at where Wall Street is placing its bets at the moment:

## Technology

Technology stocks soared in Trump's first term, helped by the administration's tax policies. But the relationship was tempestuous: Trump's immigration stance threatened a source of high-skilled immigrants that comprises a significant part of the industry's work force and his trade wars threatened international sales and supply chains.

This time around, tech could benefit from an anticipated loosening of antitrust regulation that discouraged big deals from getting done and threatened to rein in the power of Google, Apple and Amazon. What's more, Trump is expected to clear the way for Big Tech to make more inroads in artificial intelligence technology — an area increasingly seen as a crucial battleground in the duel for global power between the U.S. and China.

Trump's vow to impose tariffs and other restrictions on trade does pose a potential downside for chip makers, particularly stock market darling Nvidia. A possible rollback of Biden administration efforts to boost U.S. semiconductor production also is a concern.

Still, in a sign of tech's more conciliatory attitude, Trump's election was greeted by congratulatory posts from most of the industry's luminaries, including Apple CEO Tim Cook, Amazon CEO Andy Jassy and Google CEO Sundar Pichai.

— Michael Liedtke

## Retail

Trump's victory brings a big dose of uncertainty for the retail industry.

Trump has proposed extending 2017 tax cuts for individuals and restoring tax breaks for businesses that were being reduced. He also wants to further cut the corporate tax rate. Those would be tailwinds for shoppers and businesses, analysts said.

But the president-elect's trade proposals could have a huge downside. He's proposed 60% tariffs on Chinese goods and tariffs of 10% to 20% on other imports. Neil Saunders, managing director of GlobalData, a research firm, said retailers would either take a big hit on profits or be forced to increase prices.

As opposed to Trump's first term, retailers will have a harder time absorbing tariffs this time because their costs of doing business are already higher, Saunders said.

Many companies, including Nike and eyewear retailer Warby Parker, have been diversifying their sourcing away from China. Shoe brand Steve Madden says it plans to cut imports from China by as much as 45% next year.

The National Retail Federation is forecasting higher prices for U.S. shoppers if Trump's new tariffs are implemented. For example, an \$80 pair of men's jeans would cost \$90 to \$96.

— Anne D'Innocenzio

## Energy

Trump has said he wants to "drill, drill, drill" starting on Day 1 of his presidency, so it's expected that traditional fossil fuel-focused companies will get a boost and renewable energy outfits could be disadvantaged.

Oilfield services companies including Haliburton and Schlumberger would likely benefit from initiatives to expand drilling in the Gulf of Mexico and Alaska. Natural gas companies including EQT and CNX Resources could benefit from facilities and pipeline projects. Meanwhile, clean energy companies, such as First Solar and many electric vehicle makers, could have a harder time growing if Trump cuts tax credits and other incentives for the industry.

But remember Trump's first term, says Austin Pickle, investment strategy analyst at Wells Fargo Investment Institute. The thought back then, like now, was that Trump would boost prices for oil-and-gas stocks.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 79 of 98

But energy stocks ended up struggling late in his term when the price of oil briefly went below zero during the COVID-19 pandemic.

— Damian Troise

## Health Care

Drugmakers, insurers and other health care companies could benefit from fewer regulatory roadblocks to mergers and a lighter regulatory stance overall.

Insurers, in particular, may see some regulatory relief for Medicare Advantage plans, which are privately run versions of the government's Medicare program mainly for people ages 65 and older. Under Democratic leadership, some insurers were facing smaller bonus payments tied to their Medicare Advantage plans. Some drugmakers are facing revenue hits on certain drugs covered by Medicare. Those challenges could abate under Republican rule, analysts at Morningstar noted.

A second Trump administration also may challenge health care companies.

The approval of drugs and vaccines could become less predictable, depending on the role anti-vaccine activist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. plays, said Morningstar analyst Karen Andersen.

Health insurers that sell coverage on the Affordable Care Act's insurance marketplaces or manage state- and-federally funded Medicaid coverage could face challenges if Republicans attempt to dismantle parts of the law, said Julie Utterback of Morningstar.

In particular, extra subsidies that help people buy marketplace coverage are slated to expire at the end of next year, which could lead to enrollment drops.

— Tom Murphy

## Autos

The auto industry is another that should welcome less restrictive regulations but dread tariffs.

Trump is likely to roll back or scrap tailpipe emissions limits for 2027 through 2032 imposed by the Biden administration. Companies like General Motors, Ford and Stellantis could more easily sell larger, less-efficient vehicles without paying hefty fines.

Companies would also face less pressure to sell more electric vehicles to offset emissions from big trucks and SUVs, which make big profit margins, said Kevin Tynan, research director for The Presidio Group.

Tariffs are a different story. Trump has threatened tariffs on imported vehicles to force more production in the U.S. The threat of 100% tariffs on vehicles imported from Mexico is a big concern.

Morningstar analyst David Whiston said such tariffs could potentially cost General Motors, Stellantis and Ford billions in profits. About 30% of GM's North American production comes from Mexico, while it's 24% for Stellantis and about 15% for Ford.

Whiston notes that tariffs on vehicles built in Mexico would violate the U.S.-Mexico-Canada free trade agreement negotiated during Trump's first term. But that can be reworked in July of 2026. Whiston said those tariffs would mean higher prices and many buyers already can't afford the current average price of over \$47,000.

Trump also has threatened to get rid of electric vehicle tax credits that have helped boost sales of EVs.

— Tom Krisher

## Banks

Bank stocks could benefit if Trump's policies boost the U.S. economy and more customers apply for loans. In addition, Wells Fargo banking analyst Mike Mayo believes the Trump victory can usher in a "new era" of lighter financial regulation after 15 years of stricter oversight following the financial crisis of 2008-2009. Under Biden, banks were facing requirements to set aside more capital to reduce risk, but the Trump administration is likely to take a step back.

Dealmaking could see a revival under Trump, which would help banks with large investment banking operations like Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs. That also increases the odds the pending merger between Capital One Financial and Discover Financial gets federal clearance. Regional banks should benefit if a growing economy prompts the creation of new small businesses or the expansion of existing ones.

— Paul Harloff

Building materials and construction

Construction companies are looking at a mixed bag, with lighter regulations a plus but higher materials costs a potential minus.

Construction companies, including homebuilders KB Home and PulteGroup, could benefit from tax incentives and more friendly regulations. A surge in development could help relieve some pressure on a housing market pressured by a lack of supply for new homes. A boost in construction could also help suppliers of raw materials including steel and aggregates used in concrete.

But the potential for overall raw material price increases is a threat. Higher costs could cut into profits for construction companies and homebuilders. Steel tariffs could help shield U.S. producers from competition, but a jump in global prices as a result could negate that benefit, while also squeezing construction companies.

Plans for an immigration crackdown could worsen an existing labor shortage and result in delays for projects.

— Damian Troise

Crypto

Trump, once a crypto skeptic, has pledged to make the U.S. “the crypto capital of the planet” and create a “strategic reserve” of bitcoin. Money has poured into crypto assets since he won. Bitcoin, the largest cryptocurrency, has surged above \$86,000. Shares of crypto platform Coinbase have surged more than 60% since the election.

Crypto industry players welcomed Trump’s victory, in hopes that he would push through legislative and regulatory changes that they’ve long lobbied for. And Trump had promised that, if elected, he would remove the chair of the Securities and Exchange Commission, Gary Gensler, who has been leading the U.S. government’s crackdown on the crypto industry and repeatedly called for more oversight.

## Trump ally Steve Bannon blasts ‘lawfare’ as he faces New York trial after federal prison stint

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — After spending four months in federal prison for snubbing a congressional subpoena, conservative strategist Steve Bannon had a message Tuesday for prosecutors in cases against him and President-elect Donald Trump.

“You wait. The hunted are about to become the hunters,” Bannon said outside a New York court where he’s now facing a state conspiracy trial as soon as next month.

He stepped into a waiting car without elaborating on what “the hunters” intend to do.

The longtime Trump ally’s latest trial is set to start Dec. 9 — but could be postponed after a hearing Monday — at the same Manhattan courthouse where the past-and-next president was convicted in his hush money case. Separately, a judge Tuesday delayed a key ruling in the hush money case for at least a week as prosecutors ponder how to proceed in light of Trump’s impending presidency.

Bannon cast Trump’s election win as a “verdict on all this lawfare.” Voters, he said, “rejected what’s going on in this court.”

The former Trump 2016 campaign CEO and White House strategist is charged with conspiring to dupe people who contributed money to build a U.S.-Mexico border wall.

He has pleaded not guilty to charges including conspiracy and money laundering in the case, which mirrors an aborted federal prosecution. That was in its early stages when Trump pardoned Bannon in 2021, during the last hours of the Republican’s first presidential term.

The following year, Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg and New York Attorney General Letitia James revived the case in state court, where presidential pardons don’t apply. Both are Democrats.

Bannon and others involved with a charity called WeBuildTheWall Inc. told the public and donors that every dollar they gave would go to the wall-building effort, prosecutors say. But, they say, Bannon helped steer at least \$140,000 of the nonprofit’s money to its president for a secret salary.

Bannon's indictment mostly accuses him of facilitating the payouts, not getting them himself, though it suggests he passed along only a portion of the WeBuildTheWall money that came under his control.

Prosecutors told a court Tuesday that some of the money was used to pay Bannon's credit card bill, and they'd like to be able to present evidence of those transactions at his trial.

"He saw an opportunity to use that money to forward his political agenda, and he did that," prosecutor Jeffrey Levinson said.

Defense lawyer John Carman said Bannon was simply reimbursed for expenses he incurred while traveling to the border to help WeBuildTheWall's cause. Bannon chaired the group's advisory board.

"They're attempting to smear Mr. Bannon by showing that he took money," Carman said. "The money that he was taking was money that he was entitled to take."

He asked Judge April Newbauer to delay the trial, saying that the defense would need to line up financial and nonprofit experts to rebut the evidence that prosecutors are seeking to introduce.

Newbauer scheduled a hearing Monday to decide whether to allow that evidence. She said she'd decide afterward whether to postpone the trial.

Bannon, 70, appeared to be at ease during Tuesday's hearing, which came less than two weeks after he was freed from a federal prison in Connecticut. A jury had convicted him of contempt of Congress for not giving a deposition and not providing documents for the body's investigation into the U.S. Capitol attack on Jan. 6, 2021.

Bannon, who had called himself a "political prisoner," is appealing his conviction.

## **Certifying this year's presidential results begins quietly, in contrast to the 2020 election**

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY and ALI SWENSON Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Local officials are beginning to certify the results of this year's presidential election in a process that, so far, has been playing out quietly, in stark contrast to the tumultuous certification period four years ago that followed then-President Donald Trump's loss.

Georgia was the first of the presidential battleground states to start certifying, with local election boards voting throughout the day Tuesday. As counties certified their results without controversy, Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger hailed Georgia's election as "free, fair and fast."

Trump won Georgia and the six other presidential battleground states, after losing six of them to Democrat Joe Biden in 2020. County certification meetings are scheduled later in the week in several other swing states — Nevada, North Carolina and Wisconsin.

The lack of certification drama so far this week is a return to how the typically routine process worked before Trump lost his bid for reelection four years ago. As he sought then to overturn the will of the voters, he and his allies pressured Republican members of certification boards in Michigan to delay or halt the process. They also sought to delay certifications in Arizona, Nevada and Pennsylvania.

The boards ultimately voted to certify, but Trump's focus on certification caught on among Republicans. Some local Republican officials have refused to certify results in elections since then, raising concerns of a wider movement to reject certification this year had Trump lost to Vice President Kamala Harris.

Some of that sentiment was present on Tuesday. Michael Heekin, a Republican member of the Fulton County Board of Registration and Elections said he disagreed that certifying election results "is purely a ministerial duty."

"We should be the first line of defense, at least one of the lines of defense in examining the goodness and the accuracy of the election," he said.

A lawyer for the county, which includes heavily Democratic Atlanta, explained during the meeting that certification was a necessary step before any election challenge could proceed. The county election board certified the results late Tuesday.

Unlike Trump four years ago, Harris acknowledged her loss and conceded. Trump also won the popular vote for the first time during his three runs for the White House and praised the election results. Rather



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 82 of 98

than descending on county ballot counting centers in anger, his supporters have been jubilant.

"This time four years ago, I was getting nasty phone calls constantly in my office," said Lisa Tollefson, the elections clerk in Rock County, Wisconsin. This year, she said, "it's been very quiet."

That's not to say everyone is happy. Conspiracy theories surrounding this year's election are circulating within both parties.

Following Election Day, left-wing conspiracy theories proliferated on TikTok, X and other social platforms as users questioned why Harris' total vote count was around 60 million — about 20 million fewer votes than Biden received four years ago.

Some right-wing accounts twisted the narrative, falsely claiming the vote gap was instead proof that Biden's 2020 tally must have included fake votes.

The claims didn't consider the fact that tabulation would take several days, including in Arizona and California, the nation's most populous state. As votes continue to be counted this week, Harris has made up ground and now has nearly 72 million votes, a number that will continue to grow.

Counties and other local jurisdictions across the country will be conducting post-election audits of the vote over the next few weeks. Those typically involve hand-counting a certain number of ballots and comparing the results to machine tallies to ensure accuracy.

Before local results are certified, the top election official typically provides the vote totals by candidate in each race along with how many voters cast ballots and how many total ballots were cast. Any discrepancies get reported and explained.

"The whole point of this period is to find those types of errors," said Kim Wyman, the former top election official in Washington state. "They are making sure the results were accurate, that the election was accurate."

Every state will be going through the process, including presidential battlegrounds.

Election certification meetings start Wednesday in Nevada, which backed a Republican in the presidential race for the first time in 20 years. The state's 17 counties have until Friday to certify, while Secretary of State Cisco Aguilar, a Democrat, and the Nevada Supreme Court must meet by Nov. 26 to finalize the statewide results.

Arizona's 15 counties must certify by Nov. 21 and forward the results to the governor and secretary of state — both of whom are Democrats — for statewide certification four days later.

In North Carolina, where election officials recovered quickly after Hurricane Helene devastated the western part of the state, election boards in all 100 counties were scheduled to meet Friday to certify results.

Pennsylvania counties have until Nov. 25 to certify. Some larger counties were still reviewing and counting provisional ballots on Tuesday, the deadline for them to report unofficial results to the state. Litigation was possible with a U.S. Senate race hovering near the threshold for an automatic statewide recount.

Michigan's 83 county canvassing boards have until Nov. 19 to review local results before forwarding them to the Board of State Canvassers. The four-member board, comprised of two Democrats and two Republicans, is scheduled to certify the results by Nov. 25.

In Wisconsin, counties began the canvass process on Tuesday and have until Nov. 19 to certify. The Wisconsin Elections Commission will review the county reports and the chair — currently a Democrat — will certify the results by Dec. 1.

The biggest potential problem in the state was identified on Election Day and corrected. Vote-tabulating machines used for mail ballots in Milwaukee were not properly sealed. A bipartisan decision was made to start over the process of counting the ballots once the problem was addressed.

The state's nonpartisan top election administrator, Meagan Wolfe, said the election had been a success with no major problems. She attributed that to years of training and preparations by local election workers.

"Well-run elections do not happen by accident," she said.

## After Baltimore mass shooting, neighborhood goes full year with no homicides

By LEA SKENE Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — As Baltimore gun violence continues trending downward after years of rampant bloodshed, a historically troubled neighborhood in the city's southwest corner is celebrating a long-awaited victory: zero homicides in over a year.

The numbers are especially meaningful for the Brooklyn community, where a mass shooting in July 2023 tore through an annual summer block party, leaving two people dead and 28 others injured in the courtyard of an aging public housing development. Most of the victims were teens and young adults.

In the aftermath of the tragedy, the city's flagship anti-violence program Safe Streets ramped up its work in the area, and officials say the efforts have paid off. On Tuesday afternoon, residents and city leaders gathered near the scene of the mass shooting to mark a year's worth of progress.

"This isn't just a Safe Streets accomplishment. It's a testament to Brooklyn's resilience and the power of community," Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott said. "This is a community that has been disinvested, neglected and ignored for a long, long time. But together, collectively, we are saying enough is enough."

Across the city, homicides are down about 24% compared to this time last year. That's on top of a roughly 20% decline in 2023, when Baltimore recorded less than 300 homicides for the first time in nearly a decade, ending a surge that began in 2015 following the death of Freddie Gray and widespread civil unrest.

Violent crime has also decreased nationally after spiking during the pandemic.

Baltimore's Safe Streets program has 10 offices based in some of the city's most dangerous neighborhoods. It was launched in 2007 and expanded in recent years under Scott's administration, which has often pledged to treat violence as a public health crisis and address its root causes.

Safe Streets focuses on deescalating conflicts by employing mediators with credibility and knowledge of the streets. It's inherently dangerous work as they form close relationships with individuals most at risk of becoming either perpetrators or victims of gun violence. Officials said reaching out to young people is key.

Adanus Sprillum, 22, said he recently enrolled in a residential job readiness program that was recommended by Safe Streets workers in Brooklyn. He had his first GED class last week. Sprillum said he was previously struggling with drug addiction and homelessness.

"I probably would've ended up being dead or in jail," he said.

A community survey conducted in the weeks after the Brooklyn mass shooting showed that many neighborhood residents placed more trust in Safe Streets than Baltimore police, local schools, nonprofits and other institutions, according to city officials. Only neighborhood churches ranked higher.

Even still, having Safe Streets workers present during the block party wasn't enough to prevent it from ultimately devolving into chaos and bloodshed.

Baltimore police received sharp criticism for their response to the event. A report pointed to potential officer bias after finding police ignored multiple warning signs and failed to take proactive measures in the hours before gunfire broke out. Critics questioned whether police would have responded differently if the shooting occurred in a more affluent area.

The department announced discipline charges against a dozen officers earlier this year.

Five teenagers were arrested in connection with the shooting. Four of them have since pleaded guilty to various charges.

Sean Wees, the director of Safe Streets' Brooklyn site, said many staff members have deep roots in the community. The team doubled down on promoting safety and connecting residents with services in response to the shooting. But Wees said there's still more work to do.

"We work to promote peace and progress here in Brooklyn," he said during Tuesday's gathering. "We can't stop until this kind of ceremony is no longer necessary — until peace is the standard and not a streak measured in days or months."

## US says it will not limit Israel arms transfers after some improvements in flow of aid to Gaza

By MATTHEW LEE, JULIA FRANKEL and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration said Tuesday that Israel has made some good but limited progress in increasing the flow of humanitarian aid to Gaza and will not limit arms transfers to Israel as it had threatened to a month ago if the situation had not improved. Relief groups say conditions are worse than at any point in the 13-month-old war.

State Department spokesman Vedant Patel told reporters the progress to date must be supplemented and sustained but “we, at this time, have not made an assessment that the Israelis are in violation of U.S. law.” It requires recipients of military assistance to adhere to international humanitarian law and not impede the provision of such aid.

“We are not giving Israel a pass,” Patel said, adding that the steps Israel has taken have not yet made a significant enough difference. “We want to see the totality of the humanitarian situation improve, and we think some of these steps will allow the conditions for that to continue to progress.”

The decision from the U.S. — Israel’s key ally and largest provider of arms — comes despite international aid organizations declaring that Israel has failed to meet U.S. demands to allow greater humanitarian access to the Gaza Strip. Hunger experts have warned that the north may already be experiencing famine.

The Biden administration last month set a deadline expiring Tuesday for Israel to “surge” more food and other emergency aid into the Palestinian territory or risk the possibility of scaled-back military support as Israel wages offensives against Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

The obstacles facing aid distribution were on this display this week. Even after the Israeli military gave permission for a delivery to the northernmost part of Gaza — virtually cut off from food for more than a month by an Israeli siege — the United Nations said it couldn’t deliver most of it because of turmoil and restrictions from Israeli troops on the ground.

In the south, hundreds of truckloads of aid are sitting on the Gaza side of the border because the U.N. says it cannot reach them to distribute the aid — again because of the threat of lawlessness, theft and Israeli military restrictions.

Dozens of people stood in long lines Tuesday waiting to receive food packages distributed by U.N. agencies in the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis.

“We hope that the world would sympathize with us because of this affliction we are in,” Salim Abu Mansi said. “Life is poverty, and the country is getting worse every day.”

Israel announces aid steps

It opened a new crossing in central Gaza, outside the city of Deir al-Balah, for aid to enter. It also announced a small expansion of its coastal “humanitarian zone,” where hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are sheltering in tent camps. It connected electricity for a desalination plant in Deir al-Balah. But the effect was unclear.

Israel’s new foreign minister, Gideon Saar, appeared to downplay the deadline, telling reporters Monday he was confident “the issue would be solved.” The Biden administration may have less leverage after Donald Trump — a staunch supporter of Israel — won the presidential election.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s closest aide, Ron Dermer, in Washington on Monday about the steps Israel has taken and stressed “the importance of ensuring those changes lead to an actual improvement in the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza,” the State Department said Tuesday.

President Joe Biden met Tuesday at the White House with Israeli President Isaac Herzog, but they didn’t speak publicly about the aid issue. White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said the U.S. knew how dire the conditions were and would keep discussing with Israel the extra steps it needs to take.

Aid organizations says Israel fails U.S. criteria

Eight international groups said in a report that the country also took actions “that dramatically worsened the situation on the ground, particularly in Northern Gaza. ... That situation is in an even more dire state

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 85 of 98

today than a month ago.”

The report listed 19 measures of compliance with the U.S. demands, saying Israel had failed to comply with 15 and only partially complied with four. It was co-signed by Anera, Care, MedGlobal, Mercy Corps, the Norwegian Refugee Council, Oxfam, Refugees International and Save the Children.

In an Oct. 13 letter, the U.S. gave Israel 30 days, among other things, to allow a minimum of 350 truckloads of goods into Gaza each day; open a fifth crossing; allow people in coastal tent camps to move inland before the winter; and ensure access for aid groups to northern Gaza. It also called on Israel to halt legislation that would hinder operations of the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, known as UNRWA.

Aid levels remain far below the U.S. benchmarks. Access to northern Gaza remains restricted, and Israel has pressed ahead with its laws against UNRWA.

Israel launched a major offensive last month in the north, where it says Hamas militants had regrouped. The operation has killed hundreds of people and displaced tens of thousands.

Little aid getting to northern Gaza

Through October and the first days of November, Israel allowed no food to enter the area, where tens of thousands of civilians have stayed despite evacuation orders.

Last week, Israel allowed 11 trucks to go to Beit Hanoun, one of the north’s hardest-hit towns. But the World Food Organization said troops at a checkpoint forced its trucks to unload their cargo before reaching shelters.

COGAT — the Israeli military body in charge of humanitarian aid to Gaza — said Tuesday it allowed a new delivery of food and water to Beit Hanoun a day earlier. The WFP said that while it tried to send 14 trucks, only three made it to the town “due to delays in receiving authorization for movement and crowds along the route.” When it tried to deliver the rest Tuesday, Israel denied it permission, it said.

Aid into all of Gaza plummeted in October, when just 34,000 tons of food entered, only a third of the previous month, according to Israeli data.

U.N. agencies say even less actually gets through because of Israeli restrictions, fighting and lawlessness that make it difficult to collect and distribute aid on the Gaza side.

In October, 57 trucks a day entered Gaza on average, and 75 a day so far in November, according to Israel’s official figures. The U.N. says it only received 39 trucks daily since the beginning of October.

COGAT said 900 truckloads of aid are sitting uncollected on the Gaza side of the Kerem Shalom crossing in the south.

“Before the organizations give out grades, they should focus on distributing the aid that awaits them,” COGAT said in response to the aid groups’ report.

Louise Wateridge, a spokeswoman for UNRWA, said the military was not coordinating movements for aid trucks to reach the stacked-up cargos. “If we are not provided a safe passage to go and collect it ... it will not reach the people who need it,” she said.

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 250 people. Around 100 hostages are still inside Gaza, a third of whom are believed to be dead.

Israel’s bombardment and ground invasion have killed over 43,000 Palestinians, according to local health authorities, who don’t say how many of those were militants but that more than half are women and children. Around 90% of the population of 2.3 million has been displaced, and hundreds of thousands are packed into squalid tent camps, with little food, water or hygiene facilities.

The United States has rushed billions of dollars in military aid to Israel during the war, while pressing it to allow more aid into Gaza.

Trump has promised to end the wars in the Middle East without saying how. Netanyahu says they have spoken three times since Trump won the White House last week.



## Church of England head Justin Welby resigns over handling of sex abuse scandal

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, head of the Church of England and spiritual leader of the global Anglican Communion, resigned Tuesday after an investigation found that he failed to tell police about serial physical and sexual abuse by a volunteer at Christian summer camps as soon as he became aware of it.

Pressure on Welby had been building since Thursday, when the archbishop's refusal to accept responsibility for his failure to report the abuse in England and in Africa in 2013 kindled anger about a lack of accountability at the highest reaches of the church. By Tuesday afternoon, Welby acknowledged that mistake.

"It is very clear that I must take personal and institutional responsibility for the long and retraumatizing period between 2013 and 2024," Welby said in the statement announcing his resignation. "I believe that stepping aside is in the best interests of the Church of England, which I dearly love and which I have been honored to serve."

Welby's resignation will send ripples around the world. The Archbishop of Canterbury is the symbolic head of the Anglican Communion, which has more than 85 million members in 165 countries, including the Episcopal Church in the United States. While each national church has its own leaders, the Archbishop of Canterbury is considered first among equals.

Welby, a former oil executive who left the industry in 1989 to study for the priesthood, was a controversial figure even before the scandal. A skilled mediator who has worked to resolve conflicts in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa, he struggled to unite the Anglican Communion, which has been riven by sharply divergent views on issues such as gay rights and the place of women in the church.

The Church of England on Thursday released the results of an independent investigation into the late John Smyth, a prominent attorney who the report said sexually, psychologically and physically abused about 30 boys and young men in the United Kingdom and 85 in Africa from the 1970s until his death in 2018.

The 251-page report of the Makin Review concluded that Welby failed to report Smyth to authorities when he was informed of the abuse in August 2013, soon after he became Archbishop of Canterbury. Had he done so, Smyth could have been stopped sooner and many victims could have been spared the abuse, the inquiry found.

Welby said he didn't inform law enforcement agencies about the abuse because he was wrongly told that police were already investigating. Even so, he took responsibility for not ensuring that the allegations were pursued as "energetically" as they should have been.

As late as Monday, Welby's office said he had decided not to resign, even as he expressed his "horror at the scale of John Smyth's egregious abuse."

Helen-Ann Hartley, the bishop of Newcastle, said Welby's position had become "untenable" after some members of the General Synod, the Church of England's national assembly, started a petition calling on him to step down because he had "lost the confidence of his clergy."

But the strongest outcry came from Smyth's victims. Andrew Morse, who was repeatedly beaten by Smyth over five years, said resigning was a chance for Welby to start repairing the damage caused by the church's broader handling of historical abuse cases.

"I believe that now is an opportunity for him to resign," Morse told the BBC before Welby stepped down.

Welby's resignation comes against the backdrop of widespread historical sexual abuse in the Church of England. A 2022 report by the Independent Inquiry Child Sexual Abuse found that deference to the authority of priests, taboos surrounding the discussion of sexuality and a culture that gave more support to alleged perpetrators than their victims helped make the Church of England "a place where abusers could hide."

Welby's supporters had argued that he should remain on the job because of his role in changing the culture of the church.

Church officials were first made aware of Smyth's abuse in 1982, when they received the results of an internal investigation into complaints about his behavior at Christian summer camps in England. The

recipients of that report “participated in an active cover-up” to prevent its findings from coming to light, the Makin Review found.

Smyth moved to Zimbabwe in 1984 and later relocated to South Africa. He abused boys and young men in Zimbabwe, and there is evidence that the abuse continued in South Africa until he died in August 2018, the investigation found.

Smyth’s actions weren’t made public until a 2017 investigation by Britain’s Channel 4 television station, which led police in Hampshire to start an investigation. Police were planning to question Smyth at the time of his death and had been preparing to extradite him.

Stephen Cherry, dean of the chapel at King’s College Cambridge, said Welby could no longer represent the people.

“There are circumstances in which something happens whereby a person in a position of prominent leadership essentially loses the trust and the confidence and the capacity to do that really wonderful thing that someone like an archbishop does, which is represent everyone at a certain moment publicly,” Cherry told the BBC before Welby resigned.

“And the pain in the victim community and the history of not listening to people and not responding to people who are profoundly hurt by those in positions of power means that this is no longer a person who can carry the representative role of that office.”

## Judge delays ruling on whether to scrap Trump’s conviction in hush money case

By JENNIFER PELTZ and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A judge has postponed a decision on whether to undo President-elect Donald Trump’s hush money conviction as prosecutors consider how to proceed in light of last week’s election and his lawyers argue for dismissal so he can run the country.

The postponement announced Tuesday comes at a dramatic and dynamic point in the New York case, which focused on how Trump accounted for payments to a porn actor before the 2016 election and produced a first-ever conviction of a former commander-in-chief.

Sentencing had been set for Nov. 26. But Manhattan prosecutors now say they’re reassessing, and they appear open to the possibility that the proceedings can’t go as planned.

“These are unprecedented circumstances,” Assistant District Attorney Matthew Colangelo wrote in an email to the court. He said prosecutors need to consider how to balance the “competing interests” of the jury’s verdict and the presidency.

Trump lawyer Emil Bove, meanwhile, argued the case must be thrown out altogether “to avoid unconstitutional impediments to President Trump’s ability to govern.”

The messages were exchanged over the weekend and released Tuesday, when Judge Juan M. Merchan had been set to rule on Trump lawyers’ earlier request to toss his conviction for a different reason — because of a U.S. Supreme Court ruling this summer on presidential immunity.

Instead, Merchan told Trump’s lawyers he’d halt proceedings and delay the ruling until at least Nov. 19 so that prosecutors can suggest a way forward. Both sides agreed to the one-week postponement.

Trump campaign spokesperson Steven Cheung heralded the delay. He said in a statement that the president-elect’s win makes it “abundantly clear that Americans want an immediate end to the weaponization of our justice system, including this case, which should have never been filed.”

Prosecutors declined to comment.

A jury convicted Trump in May of falsifying business records related to a \$130,000 payment to porn actor Stormy Daniels in 2016. The payout was to buy her silence about claims that she had sex with Trump.

Trump says they didn’t have sex, denies any wrongdoing and maintains the prosecution was a political tactic meant to harm his latest campaign. Trump is a Republican. Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, whose office brought the case, is a Democrat, as is Merchan.

Just over a month after the verdict, the Supreme Court ruled that ex-presidents can’t be prosecuted for

actions they took in the course of running the country, and prosecutors can't cite those actions even to bolster a case centered on purely personal conduct.

Trump's lawyers cited that ruling to argue that the hush money jury got some evidence it shouldn't have, such as Trump's presidential financial disclosure form and testimony from some White House aides.

Prosecutors disagreed and said the evidence in question was only "a sliver" of their case.

Trump's criminal conviction was a first for any ex-president. It left the 78-year-old facing the possibility of a fine, probation or up to four years in prison.

The case centered on how Trump accounted for reimbursing a personal attorney for the Daniels payment.

The then-lawyer, Michael Cohen, fronted the money. He later recouped it through a series of payments that Trump's company logged as legal expenses. Trump, by then in the White House, signed most of the checks himself.

Prosecutors said the designation was meant to cloak the true purpose of the payments and help cover up a broader effort to keep voters from hearing unflattering claims about Trump during his first campaign.

Trump said that Cohen was legitimately paid for legal services, and that Daniels' story was suppressed to avoid embarrassing Trump's family, not to influence the electorate.

Trump was a private citizen, campaigning for president, when Cohen paid Daniels in October 2016. He was president when Cohen was reimbursed, and Cohen testified that they discussed the repayment arrangement in the Oval Office.

Trump has been fighting for months to overturn the verdict. While urging Merchan to nix the conviction, the president-elect also has been trying to move the case to federal court. Before the election, a federal judge repeatedly said no to the move, but Trump has appealed.

Trump faces three other unrelated indictments in various jurisdictions.

But Justice Department special counsel Jack Smith has been evaluating how to wind down both the 2020 election interference case and the separate classified documents case against Trump before he takes office, a person familiar with the matter told The Associated Press. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly. Longstanding Justice Department policy says sitting presidents cannot be prosecuted.

Meanwhile, a Georgia election interference case against Trump is largely on hold while he and other defendants appeal a judge's ruling allowing Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis to continue prosecuting it.

## Speaker Mike Johnson says Republicans are 'ready to deliver' on Trump's agenda

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Speaker Mike Johnson said Tuesday that Republicans are "ready to deliver" President-elect Donald Trump's agenda after his election victory, insisting the GOP won't make the mistakes of last time and will be much better prepared for a second-term Trump White House.

Standing on the steps of the U.S. Capitol with the House GOP leadership team, the speaker said there would be no time wasted before work begins on Trump's "America First" agenda of securing the southern border, projecting strength on the world stage and ending "wokeness and radical gender ideology." He expects Republicans will lead a unified government, even though House control is still too early to call.

"We are ready to deliver on America's mandate," said Johnson.

"We will be ready day one. We are prepared this time."

With the Capitol as a backdrop, he said, "We're going to raise an 'America First' banner above this place."

Trump will meet with Johnson at the Capitol on Wednesday while the president-elect is in town for his visit to the White House, and Johnson said he will be spending the weekend with Trump at his Mar-a-Lago residence in Florida as they prepare for the new year.

Congress returned Tuesday to a changed Washington as Trump's hard-right agenda is quickly taking shape, buoyed by eager Republican allies eyeing a full sweep of power on Capitol Hill while Democrats

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 89 of 98

are sorting out what went wrong.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, who saw his party's control of the chamber vanquished by Republicans, said the election wasn't what many Democrats had hoped for, but he would speak with Trump soon.

"We should regard this election not merely as a defeat, but more importantly as a challenge," he said.

Even as final election results are still being tallied, the House and Senate leadership is pushing ahead toward a second-term Trump White House and what he's called a mandate for governing, with mass deportations, industry deregulation and wholesale reductions in the federal government.

Trump is already testing the norms of governance during this presidential transition period — telling the Senate to forgo its advise-and-consent role and simply allow recess appointments of his Cabinet nominees — and he is staffing his administration and finding lawmakers willing to bend those civic traditions.

"Trump's going to deliver his deportations, the drilling, the wall — it's going to take all of us getting together," said Rep. Ralph Norman, R-S.C., a conservative member of the House Freedom Caucus.

But first, the House and Senate leaders will hold internal party elections this week for their own jobs. Most of the top Republican leaders depend on Trump for their political livelihoods and have worked to draw closer to the president-elect to shore up loyalty.

In the Senate, the leadership race to replace outgoing GOP Leader Mitch McConnell is turning into a test of Trump loyalties, with the president-elect's allies — including billionaire Elon Musk and Make America Great Again influencers — pushing the senators to elect Sen. Rick Scott of Florida.

But Scott has not been the most popular candidate for the leadership post, and senators had been rallying around the two "Johns" — Sen. John Thune of South Dakota, the second-ranking GOP leader, and Sen. John Cornyn of Texas.

All three Republican senators vying to replace McConnell have rushed to agree with Trump's plan for quick confirmation of presidential nominees. The outcome of Wednesday's private balloting behind closed doors is highly uncertain.

In the House, Johnson wants to retain the speaker's gavel and told colleagues in a letter last week he is ready to "take the field" with them to deliver on Trump's agenda. But he is expected to face detractors behind closed doors.

While Johnson only needs a simple majority during Wednesday's private voting to become the GOP nominee to be speaker, he will need a 218-member majority in January during a floor vote of the whole House.

A low vote total this week would show the leverage Freedom Caucus members and others have to pry concessions from Johnson, much as they forced then-Speaker Kevin McCarthy into a prolonged vote for the gavel in 2023.

Johnson's troubles stem in part from his slim numbers, which are narrowing as Trump taps House Republicans to fill his administration. Trump has already asked Rep. Elise Stefanik, R-N.Y., to be ambassador to the United Nations and Rep. Mike Waltz, R-Fla., to be his national security adviser.

The speaker said he doesn't expect more departures and Trump "fully understands and appreciates the math here."

All told, it's a fundamental reshaping of not only the power centers in Washington, but the rules of governing, as Trump returns to the White House in January with a potential GOP-led Congress that is far less skeptical or wary of his approach than eight years ago, and much more willing to back him.

"This is going to be a very challenging time," said Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., the chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus.

She described the "horrific immigration policies" that Trump promised voters and she insisted the progressives in Congress will provide an "effective check" on the new White House, much the way Democrats did during his first term by fighting efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act and other policies.

At the same time, Jayapal warned Trump will have "many fewer restrictions."

First tests will come during the "lame duck" period of the remaining days of this Congress, the eight-week sprint until Jan. 3, 2025, when the new lawmakers are sworn into office.



In the weeks ahead, Congress faces another deadline, Dec. 20, to fund the federal government or risk a shutdown, and conservatives are redoubling their pressure on Johnson not to cave on their demands to slash spending.

The House and Senate also will consider replenishing the Disaster Relief Fund to help provide aid in the aftermath of Hurricanes Helene and Milton.

And with President Joe Biden preparing to exit and Democrats relinquishing their hold on the Senate, there will be pressure to confirm more judicial nominees and to usher out the door any other bills that could possibly become law before Trump takes over.

## STD epidemic slows as new syphilis and gonorrhea cases fall in US

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The U.S. syphilis epidemic slowed dramatically last year, gonorrhea cases fell and chlamydia cases remained below prepandemic levels, according to federal data released Tuesday.

The numbers represented some good news about sexually transmitted diseases, which experienced some alarming increases in past years due to declining condom use, inadequate sex education, and reduced testing and treatment when the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

Last year, cases of the most infectious stages of syphilis fell 10% from the year before — the first substantial decline in more than two decades. Gonorrhea cases dropped 7%, marking a second straight year of decline and bringing the number below what it was in 2019.

"I'm encouraged, and it's been a long time since I felt that way" about the nation's epidemic of sexually transmitted infections, said the CDC's Dr. Jonathan Mermin. "Something is working."

More than 2.4 million cases of syphilis, gonorrhea and chlamydia were diagnosed and reported last year — 1.6 million cases of chlamydia, 600,000 of gonorrhea, and more than 209,000 of syphilis.

Syphilis is a particular concern. For centuries, it was a common but feared infection that could deform the body and end in death. New cases plummeted in the U.S. starting in the 1940s when infection-fighting antibiotics became widely available, and they trended down for a half century after that. By 2002, however, cases began rising again, with men who have sex with other men being disproportionately affected.

The new report found cases of syphilis in their early, most infectious stages dropped 13% among gay and bisexual men. It was the first such drop since the agency began reporting data for that group in the mid-2000s.

However, there was a 12% increase in the rate of cases of unknown- or later-stage syphilis — a reflection of people infected years ago.

Cases of syphilis in newborns, passed on from infected mothers, also rose. There were nearly 4,000 cases, including 279 stillbirths and infant deaths.

"This means pregnant women are not being tested often enough," said Dr. Jeffrey Klausner, a professor of medicine at the University of Southern California.

What caused some of the STD trends to improve? Several experts say one contributor is the growing use of an antibiotic as a "morning-after pill." Studies have shown that taking doxycycline within 72 hours of unprotected sex cuts the risk of developing syphilis, gonorrhea and chlamydia.

In June, the CDC started recommending doxycycline as a morning-after pill, specifically for gay and bisexual men and transgender women who recently had an STD diagnosis. But health departments and organizations in some cities had been giving the pills to people for a couple years.

Some experts believe that the 2022 mpox outbreak — which mainly hit gay and bisexual men — may have had a lingering effect on sexual behavior in 2023, or at least on people's willingness to get tested when strange sores appeared.

Another factor may have been an increase in the number of health workers testing people for infections, doing contact tracing and connecting people to treatment. Congress gave \$1.2 billion to expand the workforce over five years, including \$600 million to states, cities and territories that get STD prevention

funding from CDC.

Last year had the “most activity with that funding throughout the U.S.,” said David Harvey, executive director of the National Coalition of STD Directors.

However, Congress ended the funds early as a part of last year’s debt ceiling deal, cutting off \$400 million. Some people already have lost their jobs, said a spokeswoman for Harvey’s organization.

Still, Harvey said he had reasons for optimism, including the growing use of doxycycline and a push for at-home STD test kits.

Also, there are reasons to think the next presidential administration could get behind STD prevention. In 2019, then-President Donald Trump announced a campaign to “eliminate” the U.S. HIV epidemic by 2030. (Federal health officials later clarified that the actual goal was a huge reduction in new infections — fewer than 3,000 a year.)

There were nearly 32,000 new HIV infections in 2022, the CDC estimates. But a boost in public health funding for HIV could also help bring down other sexually transmitted infections, experts said.

“When the government puts in resources, puts in money, we see declines in STDs,” Klausner said.

## **Jury awards Abu Ghraib detainees \$42 million, holds contractor responsible**

By MATTHEW BARAKAT Associated Press

ALEXANDRIA, Va. (AP) — A U.S. jury on Tuesday awarded \$42 million to three former detainees of Iraq’s notorious Abu Ghraib prison, holding a Virginia-based military contractor responsible for contributing to their torture and mistreatment two decades ago.

The decision from the eight-person jury came after a different jury earlier this year couldn’t agree on whether Reston, Virginia-based CACI should be held liable for the work of its civilian interrogators who worked alongside the U.S. Army at Abu Ghraib in 2003 and 2004.

The jury awarded plaintiffs Suhail Al Shimari, Salah Al-Ejaili and Asa’ad Al-Zubae \$3 million each in compensatory damages and \$11 million each in punitive damages.

The three testified that they were subjected to beatings, sexual abuse, forced nudity and other cruel treatment at the prison.

They did not allege that CACI’s interrogators explicitly inflicted the abuse themselves, but argued CACI was complicit because its interrogators conspired with military police to “soften up” detainees for questioning with harsh treatment.

CACI issued a statement expressing its disappointment in the verdict and its intention to appeal.

“For nearly two decades, CACI has been wrongly subjected to long-term, negative affiliation with the unfortunate and reckless actions of a group of military police at Abu Ghraib prison from 2003 through 2004,” the company said. “To be clear: no CACI employee has ever been charged — criminally, civilly, or administratively — in this matter. CACI employees did not take part in nor were any of our employees responsible for these disturbing events.”

Baher Azmy, a lawyer for the Center for Constitutional Rights, which filed the lawsuit on the plaintiffs’ behalf, called the verdict “an important measure of Justice and accountability” and praised the three plaintiffs for their resilience.

The \$42 million fully matches the amount sought by the plaintiffs, Azmy said. It’s also more than the \$31 million that the plaintiffs said CACI was paid to supply interrogators to Abu Ghraib.

“Today is a big day for me and for justice,” said Al-Ejaili, a journalist, in a written statement. “I’ve waited a long time for this day. This victory isn’t only for the three plaintiffs in this case against a corporation. This victory is a shining light for everyone who has been oppressed and a strong warning to any company or contractor practicing different forms of torture and abuse.”

Al-Ejaili traveled to the U.S. for both trials to testify in person. The other two plaintiffs testified by video from Iraq.

The trial and subsequent retrial were the first time a U.S. jury heard claims brought by Abu Ghraib survivors in the 20 years since photos of detainee mistreatment — accompanied by smiling U.S. soldiers inflicting the abuse — shocked the world during the U.S. occupation of Iraq.

None of the three plaintiffs were in any of the notorious photos shown in news reports around the world, but they described treatment very similar to what was depicted.

Al Shimari described sexual assaults and beatings during his two months at the prison. He also said he was electrically shocked and dragged around the prison by a rope tied around his neck. Al-Ejaili said he was subjected to stress positions that caused him to vomit black liquid. He was also deprived of sleep, forced to wear women's underwear and threatened with dogs.

CACI had argued it wasn't complicit in the detainees' abuse. It said its employees had minimal interaction with the three plaintiffs in the case, and CACI questioned parts of the plaintiffs' stories, saying that military records contradict some of their claims and suggesting they shaded their stories to support a case against the contractor. Fundamentally, though, CACI argued that any liability for their mistreatment belonged to the government.

As in the first trial, the jury struggled to decide whether CACI or the Army should be held responsible for any misconduct by CACI interrogators. The jury asked questions in its deliberations in both cases about whether the contractor or the Army bore liability.

In the first trial, which ended with a mistrial and hung jury, multiple jurors told The Associated Press that a majority wanted to hold CACI liable.

CACI, as one of its defenses, argued it shouldn't be liable for any misdeeds by its employees if they were under the control and direction of the Army. under a legal principle known as the "borrowed servants" doctrine.

Lawyers for the plaintiffs argued that CACI was responsible for its own employees' misdeeds. They said provisions in CACI's contract with the Army, as well as the Army Field Manual, make clear that CACI is responsible for overseeing its own workers.

The lawsuit was first filed in 2008 but was delayed by 15 years of legal wrangling and multiple attempts by CACI to have the case dismissed.

Lawyers for the three plaintiffs argued that CACI was liable for their mistreatment even if they couldn't prove that CACI's interrogators were the ones who directly inflicted the abuse.

Evidence included reports from two retired Army generals, who documented the abuse and concluded that multiple CACI interrogators were complicit in the abuse.

Those reports concluded that one of the interrogators, Steven Stefanowicz, lied to investigators about his conduct and that he likely instructed soldiers to mistreat detainees and used dogs to intimidate detainees during interrogations.

Stefanowicz testified for CACI at trial through a recorded video deposition and denied mistreating detainees.

CACI introduced a different report that concluded contractors like CACI did a "satisfactory" job of complying with military procedures.

## Supreme Court rejects push to move Georgia case against ex-Trump chief of staff Mark Meadows

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court refused Tuesday to let former Trump White House chief of staff Mark Meadows move the election interference case against him in Georgia to federal court, where he would have argued he was immune from prosecution.

The justices did not detail their reasoning in a brief order denying his appeal, as is typical. There were no publicly noted dissents.

Meadows was one of 19 people indicted in Georgia and accused of participating in an illegal scheme

to keep then-president Donald Trump in power after he lost the 2020 election. Trump was also charged, though after he won reelection last week to a second term any trial appears unlikely, at least while he holds office. Both men have denied wrongdoing.

Attorney George Terwilliger said Meadows will continue to assert his innocence in state court, and expects to win an exoneration.

It's unclear what effect the election results could have on others charged in the case, which is largely on hold after an appeals court agreed to review whether to remove Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis over her romantic relationship with the special prosecutor she had hired to lead the case.

Meadows had gone to the Supreme Court in an effort to move the charges out of Georgia courts. He argues the case belongs in federal court because it relates to his duties as a federal official. He pointed to the Supreme Court ruling giving Trump broad immunity from criminal prosecution to support his argument.

"A White House chief of staff facing criminal charges based on actions relating to his work for the president of the United States should not be a close call —especially now that this court has recognized that federal immunity impacts what evidence can be considered, not just what conduct can form the basis for liability," his attorneys wrote.

But prosecutors said that Meadows failed to show he was carrying out official duties during the alleged scheme, which included participating in a phone call where Trump suggested Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger could help "find" votes he needed to win the state.

They argued the case should stay with Georgia courts, and Meadows can raise federal defenses there. Prosecutors also pushed back against the contention that the charges could have ripple effects on other federal officials.

"His references to the overheated words of opinion editorials cannot suffice to demonstrate that a new era of ubiquitous prosecution of former federal officials is at hand," government attorneys wrote.

A spokesperson for Willis declined to comment on Tuesday's Supreme Court decision.

A U.S. district judge and the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals both ruled that the case against Meadows and some of his co-defendants should remain in state court. A federal judge has also refused to move an Arizona fake elector case against him there to federal court.

Four people have already pleaded guilty in the Georgia election case after reaching deals with prosecutors. The remaining 15, including Trump and Meadows, have pleaded not guilty.

## **Imprisoned Belarus activist resurfaces after no contact with her family for 20 months**

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — Imprisoned Belarusian opposition activist Maria Kolesnikova has resurfaced after more than 20 months without any communication with relatives or friends and met with her father, a human rights group said Tuesday.

Kolesnikova, one of the most popular and charismatic figures who helped lead protests of Belarus' authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko, was last heard from in February 2023.

The 42-year-old musician-turned activist, who suffered a serious illness and underwent surgery while in prison, has been serving her 11-year sentence at a facility near Gomel.

Viasna, Belarus' leading rights group, said Kolesnikova met her father, Alexander Kolesnikov, at a prison hospital.

Raman Pratasevich, a former opposition journalist who later became a government supporter after he was arrested, on Tuesday released photos of smiling Kolesnikova embracing her father, who previously had been denied permission to see her. He said the meeting took place Tuesday, but it was not immediately possible to verify the photos or when they might have been taken.

Kolesnikova gained prominence when mass protests erupted in Belarus after the widely disputed August 2020 election gave Lukashenko a sixth term in office. With her close-cropped hair, broad smile and trademark gesture of forming her outstretched hands into the shape of a heart, she often was seen at



the front of the demonstrations.

She became an even greater symbol of resistance the next month when Belarusian authorities tried to deport her. Driven to the Ukrainian border, she briefly broke away from security forces in the neutral zone at the frontier and tore up her passport, then walked back into Belarus. She was convicted a year later of charges including conspiracy to seize power.

In November 2022, Kolesnikova was moved to an intensive care ward to undergo surgery for a perforated ulcer. Former inmates told her sister, Tatiana Khomich, that the 5-foot-9-inch Kolesnikova weighed only about 45 kilograms (100 pounds).

Kolesnikova, who before the 2020 protests was a classical flautist, is one of several major Lukashenko opponents to disappear behind bars.

Viasna counts about 1,300 political prisoners in Belarus, including the group's Nobel Peace Prize-winning founder, Ales Bialiatsky. At least seven have died behind bars.

The U.N. Human Rights Committee has repeatedly demanded Belarusian authorities take "urgent protective measures" in relation to Kolesnikova and other political prisoners held incommunicado. In September, the European Parliament demanded that Belarus release all political prisoners.

Lukashenko, who is seeking a seventh term in an election set for January 2025, has released 146 political prisoners since July. Those freed had health problems, wrote petitions for pardons and repented. At the same time, Belarusian authorities have launched a new wave of arrests, seeking to uproot any sign of dissent before the election.

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the Belarusian opposition-leader-in-exile, told The Associated Press that she was happy that Kolesnikova was allowed to see her father and reaffirmed a demand that she and other political prisoners be released.

"We must to keep pressing for an end to the isolation of other political prisoners and their release," said Tsikhanouskaya, whose husband, Siarhei Tsikhanouski, is serving a 19 1/2-year prison sentence and has been held incommunicado for more than 20 months.

Pavel Sapelka of Viasna said allowing Kolesnikova to see her father could be a signal from Lukashenko that he's "ready to start a conversation about the fate of other political prisoners."

"Lukashenko is waiting for Western reaction to the latest steps and is prepared to bargain ahead of January's election," Sapelka said.

## Trump picks a pair of experienced advisers motivated to carry out his immigration crackdown

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Donald Trump's first picks for immigration policy jobs spent the last four years angling for this moment.

Stephen Miller and Thomas Homan had critical roles in the first Trump administration and are unapologetic defenders of its policies, which included separating thousands of parents from their children at the border to deter illegal crossings. With Trump promising sweeping action in a second term on illegal immigration, the two White House advisers will bring nuts-and-bolts knowledge, lessons from previous setbacks and personal views to help him carry out his wishes.

After Trump left office in 2021, Miller became president of America First Legal, a group that joined Republican state attorneys general to derail President Joe Biden's border policies and plans. Homan, who worked decades in immigration enforcement, founded Border 911 Foundation Inc., a group that says it fights against "a border invasion" and held its inaugural gala in April at Trump's Florida estate.

Homan "knows how the machine operates," said Ronald Vitiello, a former Border Patrol chief and acting Immigration and Customs Enforcement director under Trump. "He did it as a front line, he did it as a supervisor, and he did it as the lead executive. He doesn't have anything to learn on that side of the equation."

Miller, he said, is deeply knowledgeable, has firm ideas about how the system should work, and has Trump's confidence.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 95 of 98

Trump has promised to stage the largest deportation operation in American history. There are an estimated 11 million people in the country illegally. Questions remain about how people in a mass raid would be identified and where they would be detained.

Miller and Homan portray illegal immigration as a black-and-white issue and applaud Trump's policy of targeting everyone living in the country without status for deportation.

Trump frequently and sharply attacked illegal immigration during his campaign, linking a record spike in unauthorized border crossings to issues ranging from drug trafficking to high housing prices. The arrival of asylum-seekers and other migrants in cities and communities around the country has strained some budgets and broadly shifted political debate over immigration to the right, with Democratic nominee Kamala Harris during her campaign reversing several of her old positions questioning immigration enforcement.

Miller, 39, is a former Capitol Hill staffer who rose to prominence as a fiery Trump speechwriter and key architect of his immigration policies from 2017 to 2021. He has long espoused doomsday scenarios of how immigration threatens America, training his rhetoric on people in the country illegally but also advocating curbs on legal immigration.

Trump, Miller said at the former president's Madison Square Garden rally last month, was fighting for "the right to live in a country where criminal gangs cannot just cross our border and rape and murder with impunity."

"America is for Americans and Americans only," he added.

Homan, 62, decided on a career in law enforcement as a boy in West Carthage, New York, watching his father work as a magistrate in the small farming town. After a year as a police officer in his hometown, he joined the Border Patrol in San Diego and remembers thinking, "What the hell did I just do?"

Homan, then working in relative obscurity as a top ICE official, said in a 2018 interview with The Associated Press that he got "a seat at the table" under President Barack Obama's homeland security secretary, Jeh Johnson, to deliberate on policy change. Homan told others that he worried he may have been disrespectful and when word got back to the secretary, Johnson told him, "I may not agree with what you say, but I need to know what the effects are going to be if I don't listen to you."

Johnson said Monday that he didn't recall the exchange but doesn't dispute it, saying it sounded like him.

Homan rose to acting director of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement under Trump. He was "significantly involved" in the separation of children from their parents after they crossed the border illegally and parents were criminally prosecuted, said Lee Gelernt, an attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union, which successfully sued to halt the practice.

Under a court settlement, families cannot be separated until December 2031 as part of a policy to deter illegal crossings. Trump has defended the practice, claiming without evidence last year that it "stopped people from coming by the hundreds of thousands."

At the National Conservatism Conference in Washington earlier this year, Homan said while he thinks the government should prioritize national security threats, "no one's off the table. If you're here illegally, you better be looking over your shoulder."

In the 2018 interview, Homan said he had no reservations about deporting a man who had been in the United States illegally for 12 years and with two children who are U.S. citizens. He likened it to a ticket for speeding motorists or an audit for a tax cheat.

"People think I enjoy this. I'm a father. People don't think this bothers me. I feel bad about the plight of these people. Don't get me wrong but I have a job to do," he said.

He defended the "zero tolerance" policy that led to family separations when pressed by Democratic Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in a congressional hearing. He likened it to arresting someone for driving under the influence with a young child as a passenger.

"When I was a police officer in New York and I arrested a father for domestic violence, I separated that father," he said, inviting criticism that it was not the right analogy. Children couldn't be quickly reunited with their parents at the border because government computers didn't track that they were families. Many parents were deported while children were placed in shelters across the country.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 96 of 98

Critics of zero tolerance have argued separations that happen during criminal cases involving American citizens are different from the separations under "zero tolerance," when in many cases parents were deported without their children, who were sent to government-run facilities.

Miller and Homan do not require Senate approval, unlike homeland security secretary, ICE director and commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, which oversees the Border Patrol. Those appointees will be tasked with carrying out orders from the White House.

## **Eminem, Alanis Morissette, Sheryl Crow, N.W.A. and Janet Jackson get Songwriters Hall of Fame nods**

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Eminem, Boy George, George Clinton, Sheryl Crow, Janet Jackson, the Doobie Brothers, N.W.A. and Alanis Morissette are among the nominees for the 2025 class at the Songwriters Hall of Fame, an eclectic group of rap, rock, hip-hop and pop pioneers.

Joining them on the ballot are Bryan Adams, with radio staples like "Summer of '69" and "Have You Ever Really Loved a Woman?," and Mike Love of the Beach Boys, hoping to get in 25 years after band founder Brian Wilson. David Gates, co-lead singer of the pop-music group Bread, is also looking for entry.

The Hall annually inducts performers and non-performers alike, and the latter category this year includes Walter Afanasieff, who helped Mariah Carey with her smash "All I Want for Christmas Is You;" Mike Chapman, who co-wrote Pat Benatar's "Love Is a Battlefield;" and Narada Michael Walden, the architect of Whitney Houston's "How Will I Know" and Aretha Franklin's "Freeway of Love."

Eligible voting members have until Dec. 22 to turn in ballots with their choices of three nominees from the songwriter category and three from the performing-songwriter category. The Associated Press got an early copy of the list.

Several performers are getting another shot at entry, including Clinton, whose Parliament-Funkadelic collective was hugely influential with hits like "Atomic Dog" and "Give Up the Funk," and The Doobie Brothers — Tom Johnston, Patrick Simmons and Michael McDonald — with such classics as "Listen to the Music" and "Long Train Runnin.'" Steve Winwood, whose hits include "Higher Love" and "Roll With It," has also been on the ballot before.

Hip-hop this year is represented by Eminem — whose hits include "Lose Yourself" and "Stan" — and N.W.A. members Dr. Dre, Eazy E, Ice Cube, MC Ren and DJ Yella. Already in the Hall are hip-hop stars like Jay-Z, Snoop Dogg and Missy Elliot. Tommy James, with hits including "Mony Mony," "Crimson and Clover" and "I Think We're Alone Now," has also earned a nod.

If Jackson, whose 1989 album "Rhythm Nation" was a landmark, gets into the Hall, it will be more than two decades after her late brother Michael. The Canadian songwriter Morissette, whose influential "Jagged Little Pill" has won Grammys, Tonys, Junos and MTV awards would also add to the Hall's rocking women. (Glen Ballard, who helped produce and write the album, is already in.)

As would Crow, the "All I Wanna Do" and "Everyday Is a Winding Road" singer-songwriter, is having a critical resurgence after being inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 2023. Boy George lifts the flag for '80s New Wave with the Culture Club hits "Karma Chameleon" and "Do You Really Want to Hurt Me."

Other nominees for the non-performing category include Fanne Luskjova, who co-wrote Selena's "Dreaming of You;" Tom Douglas, who wrote country hits for Tim McGraw, Lady Antebellum and Miranda Lambert; Ashley Gorley, fresh off his co-writing smash "I Had Some Help" by Post Malone and Morgan Wallen; and Roger Nichols, who co-wrote The Carpenters' "We've Only Just Begun."

They join Rodney "Darkchild" Jerkins, who contributed to the hit "The Boy Is Mine" by Brandy and Monica; Sonny Curtis, former member of the Crickets who wrote and performed the theme song for "The Mary Tyler Moore Show," "Love is All Around," and British composer Tony Macaulay, who wrote "Build Me Up Buttercup."

The Hall also put forward three songwriting teams: Steve Barri and P.F. Sloan, who wrote "Secret Agent Man;" and Dennis Lambert and Brian Potter, who penned the Four Tops hit "Ain't No Woman (Like the

One I've Got);" and Dan Penn and Spooner Oldham, who wrote the Percy Sledge tune "Out of Left Field."

The Songwriters Hall of Fame was established in 1969 to honor those creating the popular music. A songwriter with a notable catalog of songs qualifies for induction 20 years after the first commercial release of a song.

Some already in the hall include Carole King, Paul Simon, Billy Joel, Jon Bon Jovi and Richie Sambora, Elton John and Bernie Taupin, Brian Wilson, James Taylor, Bruce Springsteen, Tom Petty, Lionel Richie, Bill Withers, Neil Diamond and Phil Collins. Last year saw R.E.M., Steely Dan, Dean Pitchford, Hillary Lindsey and Timbaland inducted.

## Women switched at birth in 1965 sue Norway for a breach of human rights

By MARK LEWIS Associated Press

STAVANGER, Norway (AP) — In 1965, a Norwegian woman gave birth to a baby girl in a private hospital. Seven days later she returned home with a baby.

When the baby developed dark curls that made her look different from herself, Karen Rafteseth Dokken assumed she just took after her husband's mother.

It took nearly six decades to discover the true reason: Rafteseth Dokken's biological daughter had been mistakenly switched at birth in the maternity ward of the hospital in central Norway.

The girl she ended up raising, Mona, was not the baby she gave birth to.

The babies — one born on Feb. 14 and the other on Feb. 15, 1965 — are now 59-year-old women who together with Rafteseth Dokken are suing the state and the municipality.

In their case, which opened in the Oslo District Court on Monday, they argue that their human rights were violated when authorities discovered the error when the girls were teenagers and covered it up. They claim Norwegian authorities had undermined their right to a family life, a principle enshrined in the European human rights convention, and demand an apology and compensation.

Rafteseth Dokken, now 78, was in tears as she described learning so many years later that she got the wrong baby, according to Norwegian broadcaster NRK.

"It was never my thought that Mona was not my daughter," she said in court on Tuesday. "She was named Mona after my mother."

Mona described a sense of never belonging as she grew up. That sense of uncertainty pushed her in 2021 to do a DNA test, which showed that she was not the biological daughter of those who raised her.

But the woman who raised the other baby knew long before.

A routine blood test in 1981 revealed that the girl she was raising, Linda Karin Risvik Gotaas, was not biologically related. The woman raising her, however, did not pursue a maternity case. Norwegian health authorities were informed of the mix-up in 1985, but refrained from telling the others involved.

Both women who were swapped at birth have said in interviews that it was a shock to learn about the mix-up, but the knowledge made pieces of their lives fall into place, explaining differences both in terms of appearance and demeanor.

Kristine Aarre Haanes, representing Mona, said the state "violated her right to her own identity for all these years. They kept it secret."

Mona could have learned the truth when she was a young adult, but instead "she did not find out the truth until she was 57."

"Her biological father has died. She has no contact with her biological mother," added Aarre Haanes.

Circumstances surrounding the 1965 swap at Eggesboenes hospital are unclear, but media reports by NRK suggest there were several cases during the 1950s and 1960s where children were accidentally swapped at the same institution. At the time babies were kept together while their mothers rested in separate rooms.

In other cases the errors were spotted before the children were permanently placed with the wrong families, according to the reports.



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 141 ~ 98 of 98

An official from the Norwegian Ministry of Health and Care Services said the state was unaware of similar cases and that there were no plans for a public inquiry.

Asgeir Nygaard, representing the Norwegian state, is fighting the case on the grounds that the 1965 switch took place in a private institution and that the health directorate in the 1980s did not have the legal authority to inform the other families when they discovered the error.

"Documentation from that time indicates that government officials found the assessments difficult, inter alia because it was legally unclear what they could do," he wrote in a statement to The Associated Press ahead of the trial's opening. "Therefore, in court, we will argue that there is no basis for compensation and that the claims being made are in any case statute-barred."

The trial is scheduled to run through Thursday, but it was not clear when a ruling is expected.

## Today in History: November 13, 130 die in Paris terror attacks

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Wednesday, Nov. 13, the 318th day of 2024. There are 48 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Nov. 13, 2015, Islamic State militants carried out a set of coordinated attacks in Paris at the national stadium, in a crowded concert hall, in restaurants and on streets, killing 130 people in the worst attack on French soil since World War II.

Also on this date:

In 1775, during the Revolutionary War, American troops captured Montreal under the command of Continental Army Gen. Richard Montgomery.

In 1909, 259 men and boys were killed when fire erupted inside a coal mine in Cherry, Illinois.

In 1956, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed a lower court ruling which found Alabama bus segregation laws were illegal.

In 1971, the U.S. space probe Mariner 9 went into orbit around Mars, becoming the first spacecraft to orbit another planet.

In 1982, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was dedicated on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

In 1985, some 23,000 residents of Armero, Colombia, died when a volcanic mudslide buried the city.

In 2001, U.S.-backed Northern Alliance fighters in Afghanistan entered Kabul as Taliban forces retreated from the capital city.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Joe Mantegna is 77. Hockey Hall of Famer Gilbert Perreault is 74. U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland is 72. Actor Frances Conroy is 72. Actor Chris Noth is 70. Actor-comedian Whoopi Goldberg is 69. Republican U.S. Sen. Dan Sullivan of Alaska is 60. Talk show host Jimmy Kimmel is 57. Actor Steve Zahn is 57. Actor Gerard Butler is 55. Olympic swimming gold medalist Dana Vollmer is 37. Actor Devon Bostick is 33. Tennis player Emma Raducanu is 22.