

Groton Daily Independent

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Thursday, Nov. 14

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

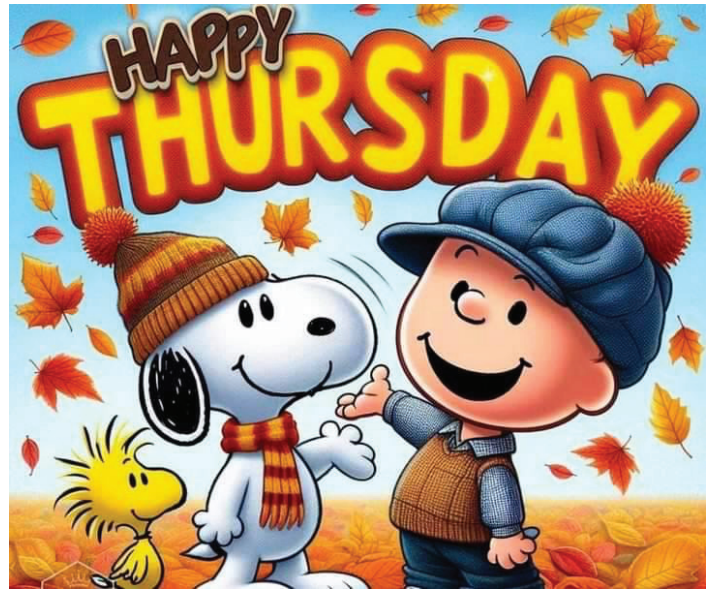
School Breakfast: Biscuits.

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

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



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.

Sunday, Nov. 17

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; Choir, 6 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion at St. John's, 9 a.m., and at Zion, 11 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.

United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:30 a.m., and at Groton, 10:30 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Sunday School Christmas Practice, 10:30 a.m.

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

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

Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.

FROSTY CLUE

I/My.....
14. Children all graduated from Groton High School



Funding Approved for Various Projects Across South Dakota

PIERRE, S.D. -- The South Dakota Governor's Office of Economic Development (GOED) Board of Economic Development and the Economic Development Finance Authority (EDFA) approved projects totaling over \$28 million in capital investment at their monthly meetings. The actions are expected to create approximately 245 full-time jobs across the state.

"These investments demonstrate South Dakota's commitment to economic growth and job creation," said GOED Commissioner Joe Fiala. "We're supporting diverse industries that will strengthen our communities and provide opportunities for South Dakotans."

The EDFA approved a \$325,000 Beginning Farmer Bond for Raymond Freeman of Britton to purchase 160 acres of agricultural land in Brown County.

CNF Enterprises, LLC, doing business as I-90 Meats, was approved for a \$600,000 SD Works Loan to support its operations in New Underwood, South Dakota. This funding will provide working capital for the company's first year of business following the completion of construction on its new 30,000-sq ft USDA protein processing facility.

A \$500,000 SD Works Loan was approved for Mother of God Monastery in Watertown to renovate its Village Campus into a licensed childcare and educational center for up to 225 children.

Smack Pet Food Inc., a Canadian-based company establishing operations in Aberdeen, was granted a \$101,591 South Dakota Jobs Program grant.

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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.

Republican Leadership Emerges

House Republicans will keep their majority, projections revealed yesterday. The news gives the party command of the House, Senate, and presidency. Democrats secured at least 208 House seats to Republicans' 218 as of this writing; nine races are still uncalled.

The news came as Republicans held secret ballot votes for House and Senate leadership yesterday, with Sen. John Thune (R-SD) tapped to replace retiring Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R) in January. House Majority Leader Mike Johnson (R, LA-4) won GOP approval to continue in his role. Republican majorities in both chambers could pave the way for President-elect Donald Trump to enact his legislative agenda, including tax cuts and immigration reform.

Separately, Trump announced Rep. Matt Gaetz (R, FL-1) as his pick for attorney general, pending Senate confirmation. The announcement prompted Gaetz to resign immediately from Congress, effectively ending the ethics probe against him. Gaetz was the subject of a since-dropped Justice Department probe and led the effort to oust former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R, CA-20).

Trump also announced Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) as his pick for secretary of state and ex-Democrat Rep. Tulsi Gabbard as director of national intelligence. Both roles require Senate confirmation.

Amazon Decks the Haul

Amazon launched Amazon Haul yesterday, a new low-cost digital storefront for US mobile users. The new feature promises prices below \$20 for a variety of household products, with free, roughly two-week shipping on orders over \$25 and free returns on items over \$3 within 15 days.

The product launch from the US' largest online retailer comes amid growing competition from China-based e-commerce platforms Temu and Shein, whose gamified user interfaces and low-cost products have earned a quick, widespread user base in the US. Retailers use proprietary inventory software to precisely shift orders to sellers based on customer behavior. Estimates peg the companies hold roughly 1% of US e-commerce market share each, compared to Amazon's 40%.

Analysts say Haul's interface resembles the gamified grid of Temu and Shein and that its longer shipping times suggest Haul's products will likely ship from China. A company announcement highlighted sellers would be screened for safety and compliance, a recurring complaint against the Chinese apps.

A Timeline for Teeth

Humans' tendency toward long childhoods may have evolved earlier than previously thought, a new study found, potentially even predating our large brain sizes. The study challenges the prevailing hypothesis the two evolved simultaneously.

The study, published yesterday in *Nature*, centers on the 1.8-million-year-old fossil of a roughly 11-year-old child discovered in Dmanisi, Georgia. Researchers studied X-rays of the child's molar teeth to identify stress lines and nutritional patterns, which they used to create a visual timeline of the child's dental development.

The study suggests the child experienced slow early dental growth, relying on milk teeth for the first five years of life. Because the child belonged to a *Homo* species with only slightly larger brains than modern chimpanzees, the authors say long childhoods—in which humans rely on parents, grandparents, and other adults for support—may have predated humans' ability to grow larger brains.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Actor and filmmaker John Krasinski named People magazine's Sexiest Man Alive for 2024.

Timothy West, British stage and screen actor, dies at age 90.

"Full House" actor Dave Coulier reveals stage 3 Non-Hodgkin lymphoma cancer diagnosis.

Disney settles class-action lawsuit with 9,000 female workers alleging they were paid less than their male counterparts in comparable roles.

Science & Technology

Researchers use data from millions of smartphones across the globe to map Earth's ionosphere, the layer of charged particles in the upper atmosphere.

Scientists identify the gene controlling tomato sweetness, genetically modify the plant to control sugar levels without affecting size.

Well-preserved fossil allows scientists to reconstruct the brain of a bird living 80 million years ago, during the Mesozoic era; discovery sheds light on the evolution of avian intelligence.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close near flatline (S&P 500 +0.0%, Dow +0.1%, Nasdaq -0.3%) after consumer price index rose 2.6% year-over-year in October, in line with expectations.

Netherlands-based Just Eat Takeaway sells Grubhub for \$650M four years after buying it for \$7.3B.

Spirit Airlines shares close down 59% on reports company is preparing to file for bankruptcy after failed merger talks with Frontier Airlines.

Rivian shares close up nearly 14% after Volkswagen boosts investment in the EV company to \$5.8B as part of new joint venture.

Swedish payments giant Klarna files for US initial public offering, though number of shares and price range of offering are yet to be determined; analysts value Klarna around \$15B.

Politics & World Affairs

CIA official Asif William Rahman is arrested in Cambodia, charged with violating the Espionage Act by leaking top-secret classified documents on Israel's retaliation plans against Iran last month.

Pakistan reveals plans to add hospital beds to treat the nearly 70,000 people suffering respiratory issues on average each day amid record levels of smog in eastern Punjab province.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration releases US snowfall predictions, expected to be lower this year due to La Niña weather pattern, with some northwestern and Great Lakes states experiencing higher snowfall.

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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



AGENDA

BROWN COUNTY PLANNING/ZONING COMMISSION REGULAR SCHEDULED MEETINGS

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2024 – 7:00 PM
BROWN COUNTY COURTHOUSE ANNEX in the BASEMENT
(STAIRWAY AND ELEVATOR ACCESS TO BASEMENT)

- I. **Call to Order:** for Brown County Planning/Zoning Commission
- II. **Roll Call:** David North - Vice Chair, Dale Kurth, Patrick Keatts, James Meyers, Carrie Weisenburger, County Commissioner Mike Gage, Alternate Paul Johnson, and Stan Beckler-Chairman.
- III. **Approval of November 19, 2024, Agenda:** Motion: 1st _____ 2nd _____
- IV. **Approval of October 15, 2024, Minutes:** Motion: 1st _____ 2nd _____

ZONING BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT

- V. **Old Business:**
 - 1. **Sign-up sheet:** On the table by the door entrance, there is a Sign-up Sheet. Please legibly sign in and mark YES or NO if you want to speak to the Board on any Agenda Item.
 - 2. **Permits:** Anyone that has submitted a Variance Petition (VP) or a Conditional Use Petition (CUP) to the Zoning Board of Adjustment (BOA) is still required to get their required PERMITS from the Zoning Office before starting their project if their Petition gets approved. Penalties may be assessed per Ordinance when starting projects without proper permits in place.
- VI. **New Business:** Brown County Planning/Zoning Commission as Zoning Board of Adjustment (BOA).
 - 1. **Appeal to County Ordinances & P&Z Director's Interpretations** in a Mini-Agriculture District (M-AG) described as Lot 1, "Evelo Second Subdivision" in the S1/2 of Section 29-T123N-R63W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (3202 E Melgaard Road; Aberdeen Twp.).
 - 2. **Variance to Building Setbacks** in a Highway Commercial District (HC) described as Lot 1, "Beadle First Subdivision" in the SW1/4 of the NW1/4 of Section 26-T124N-R64W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (12850 386th Avenue; Lincoln Twp.).

- VII. **Other Business:**

Completed as Zoning Board of Adjustment (BOA) & going to Planning Commission

AGENDA

BROWN COUNTY PLANNING/ZONING COMMISSION REGULAR SCHEDULED MEETINGS

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2024 – 7:00 PM
BROWN COUNTY COURTHOUSE ANNEX in the BASEMENT
(STAIRWAY AND ELEVATOR ACCESS TO BASEMENT)

PLANNING COMMISSION

I. **Old Business:**

II. **New Business:** *Brown County Planning/Zoning Commission as [Planning Commission](#).*

10. **Rezone Petition** for a property described as proposed Lots 1 & 2, “Keatts Eighth Subdivision to Richmond Lake” in the W1/2 of Section 23-T124N-R65W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (12704 & 12705 Camdon Court; Ravinia Twp.) to be rezoned from Agriculture Preservation District (AG-P) to Mini-Agriculture District (M-AG).
11. **Rezone Petition** for a property described as proposed former Lot 1, “Ole Crow Addition” in the NW1/4 of Section 17-T123N-R63W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (765 Ole Crow Lane; Aberdeen Twp.) to be rezoned from Commercial District (C) to Residential District (R-1).
12. **Plat Vacation** for financial purposes on a property described as “Ole Crow Addition” in the NW1/4 of Section 17-T123N-R63W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (585, 705 & 765 Ole Crow Lane; Aberdeen Twp.).
13. **Final Plat** for conveyance purposes on a property described as “Keatts Eighth Subdivision to Richmond Lake” in the W1/2 of Section 23-T124N-R65W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (12704 & 12705 Camdon Court; Ravinia Twp.).
14. **Plat Vacation** for financial purposes on a property described as Lot 1, “Reece Treeby Addition” in the NW1/4 of Section 15-T128N-R61W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (40343 102nd Street; Hecla Twp.).
15. **Preliminary & Final Plat** for financial purposes on a property described as “B. Olson Addition to the Town of Claremont” in the NW1/4 of Section 2-T125N-R60W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (604 4th Avenue; Claremont Villa).
16. **Preliminary & Final Plat** for financial purposes on a property described as “Adam and Brittany Holcomb First Addition” in the SE1/4 of Section 18-T123N-R62W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (13275 Country Drive; Bath Twp.).
17. **Other Business:** Executive Session if requested.

18. **Motion to Adjourn:** 1st _____ 2nd _____

Deuel County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle fatal crash

Where: US 212, mile marker 399, 10 miles northeast of Clear Lake, SD

When: 5:45 p.m., Tuesday, November 12, 2024

Driver 1: 53-year-old male from Sioux Falls, SD, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2022 Chrysler Voyager LX

Seat Belt Used: Yes

Driver 2: 27-year-old male from White Bear Lake, MN, serious, non-life-threatening injuries

Vehicle 2: 2013 Ford Econoline

Seat Belt Used: Yes

Deuel County, S.D.- A man died Tuesday evening in a two-vehicle crash near Clear Lake, SD.

The names of the people involved have not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates a 2022 Chrysler Voyager was traveling eastbound on US 212 near mile marker 399. At the same time, the driver of a 2013 Ford Econoline was traveling westbound on US 212 and crossed into the eastbound lanes to pass a vehicle in front of him. While passing, he collided head-on with the approaching vehicle.

The driver of the Chrysler Voyager passed away at the scene. The driver of the Ford Econoline was transported to a Sioux Falls hospital with serious, non-life-threatening injuries.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is only preliminary.

The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.

Stoutenburg talks about Destiny Rescue

This past Sunday November 10th, the Fellowship of Christian Students had the privilege of hearing Groton's own Scott Stoutenburg's share what his role is with Destiny Rescue. It was a hard concept to grasp at times as we live in the USA where we talk about freedom and the opportunities our youth have. Scott spoke about the horrifying reality of what some youth face in other countries. The mission of Destiny Rescue aims to end child trafficking and rewrite the destinies of vulnerable children. In addition to the guest speaker, students wrote letters to their pen pal Tina along with sharing their favorite Christian songs to be shared each Monday for #musicmonday.



Students listening intently as Scott shares facts about the ages from 8 months to teenagers being rescued across the world. (Courtesy Photo)

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(Left to right) Rylee Dunker, Hannah Sandness and Talli Wright writing their notes to pen pal Tina. (Courtesy Photo)



Speaker Scott Stoutenburg and adult leader Ryan Olson. (Courtesy Photo)

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Adult leader, Sarah Schuster, gathers students favorite Christian songs to be shared with others. (Courtesy Photo)

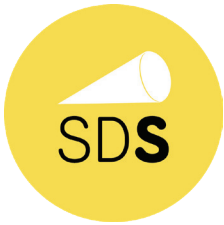


Scott Stoutenburg, Emerlee Jones, Ashlynn Warrington, Avery Crank and Teagan Hanten work together to set up a link to raise funds to rescue a child from human trafficking.

(Courtesy Photo)



Tori Schuster writes a note to pen pal, Tina. (Courtesy Photo)



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

South Dakota U.S. Sen. John Thune elected as next majority leader for Republicans

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT AND ARIANA FIGUEROA - NOVEMBER 13, 2024 12:04 PM

WASHINGTON — Republicans on Wednesday elected their leadership teams for the next Congress, opting for a new slate in the Senate while reelecting many of the same lawmakers in the House.

South Dakota Sen. John Thune will become that chamber's next majority leader, marking the first time since 2007 that Kentucky Sen. Mitch McConnell hasn't held the top GOP slot after choosing to retire from leadership.

Thune defeated Texas Sen. John Cornyn and Florida Sen. Rick Scott during the closed-door, secret ballot. "We're excited to reclaim the majority and to get to work with our colleagues in the House to enact President (Donald) Trump's agenda," Thune said during a press conference. "We have a mandate from the American people — a mandate, not only to clean up the mess left by the Biden-Harris-Schumer agenda, but also to deliver on President Trump's priorities."

Thune said border security, deregulation and energy policy would be among the top policy areas GOP senators pursue once the new Congress begins.

He also pledged to "be a leader who serves the entire Republican Conference" and noted the GOP has "an ambitious agenda that will take each and every Republican working together" to achieve.

More new GOP leaders

Senate Republicans also elected a new slate of new leaders during the Wednesday elections, all of whom will take on their new roles in January.

Wyoming's John Barrasso, who ran unopposed, will become the assistant majority leader next Congress, holding the No. 2 slot in the Senate that was previously referred to as the whip.

Arkansas Sen. Tom Cotton defeated Iowa's Joni Ernst for the No. 3 leadership post of conference chair.

West Virginia's Shelley Moore Capito was elected as the Republican Policy Committee chair, Oklahoma Sen. James Lankford received his colleagues' backing for conference vice chair, and South Carolina's Tim Scott will become the next chair of the National Republican Senatorial Committee.

Trump made demands of the next Senate Republican leader ahead of the election, writing on social media that whoever is chosen should recess the chamber early next year so he can appoint whoever he wants without having to go through the confirmation process.

Thune said during the press conference Wednesday the Senate would work quickly to vet and confirm Trump's nominees, but didn't fully commit to recessing the chamber for the 10 days minimum that's required for recess appointments.

"What we're going to do is make sure that we are processing his nominees in a way that gets them into those positions, so they can implement his agenda," Thune said. "How that happens remains to be seen."

"Obviously, we want to make sure our committees have confirmation hearings, like they typically do, and that these nominees are reported out to the floor," Thune added. "But I've said this, and I mean it, that we expect a level of cooperation from the Democrats; to work with us to get these folks installed. And obviously we're going to look at, explore all options to make sure that they get moved and get moved quickly."

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Building trust

South Dakota GOP Sen. Mike Rounds said after the election that Thune was able to secure the votes needed to win after spending years building trust.

"For a lot of people, it was that sense of comfort with John Thune of being able to represent what we believe — the fact that they knew that they could go to him and talk to him privately, and that he was not going to be doing this as 'I'm going to tell the conference what to do,' but rather, 'We're going to, as a conference, move forward, and we will find consensus as we do it, because we need everybody to support the vast majority of the things that we're going to get done,'" he said.

Rounds, an early backer of Thune in the race, said his fellow South Dakota senator voted in support of Trump's policies "more than 90% of the time when he was in office."

South Dakota veteran lawmaker

Thune, 63, was elected to the Senate in 2004 after spending six years in the U.S. House of Representatives.

He currently holds the title of Republican whip, but has done stints as Republican Conference vice chair, Republican Policy Committee chair, Republican Conference chair and chairman of the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

Thune has given dozens of floor speeches and press conferences during his time in the Senate, but highlighted his support for bipartisanship in April 2021, applauding Democrats, who were in the majority, for working with the GOP on legislation.

"The Senate was designed to promote moderation and consensus. It was intended to be a check on the more partisan — or as the founders would put it, factious — House of Representatives," Thune said during a floor speech. "The Senate fulfills its constitutional role best when it engages in serious, bipartisan consideration and negotiation and ensures that members of both parties are heard."

He then pressed lawmakers from both parties to adopt that framework to negotiate infrastructure legislation in the months ahead.

Control of Congress and White House

Thune will have to break from those beliefs a bit during the next two years as Republicans use what is expected to be unified control of government to move through as much conservative legislation as they can via the complex budget reconciliation process.

That legislative pathway will allow Republicans to get around the Senate's 60-vote legislative filibuster, which typically forces bipartisanship on major legislation.

The GOP used the process to try to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare, during the first Trump administration, but were unsuccessful. Republicans were able to use it to enact the 2017 tax law.

Democrats used budget reconciliation to approve a \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package and their signature climate change, health care and tax package called the Inflation Reduction Act, or IRA, during the first two years of President Joe Biden's term.

Thune expressed frustration during his April 2021 floor speech that Democrats had used the process to avoid negotiating with Republican senators on those two laws.

"Our Founders established a democratic republic instead of a pure democracy because they wanted to balance majority rule with protection for minority rights. They knew that majorities could be tyrants, so they wove protection for minority rights into our system of government," Thune said at the time. "The Senate was one of those protections. That is why we should be preserving rules like the filibuster, which ensures that the minority party and the many Americans it represents have a voice in legislation."

House Republican leaders

In the House, Rep. Mike Johnson of Louisiana received his party's nomination for speaker for a second

time, but he'll need to secure the votes to hold the gavel in the 119th Congress during a floor vote in January.

Louisiana Rep. Steve Scalise was reelected as House Republican leader and Minnesota Rep. Tom Emmer secured the votes needed to continue as the whip. Both ran unopposed.

Michigan Rep. Lisa McClain will become the Republican Conference chairwoman, succeeding New York Rep. Elise Stefanik, whom President-elect Donald Trump has said he'll nominate as ambassador to the United Nations. McClain defeated Florida Rep. Kat Cammack for the role.

Indiana Rep. Erin Houchin will become conference secretary. Utah Rep. Blake Moore will become conference vice chairman. Oklahoma Rep. Kevin Hern will become policy chairman. And North Carolina Rep. Richard Hudson will remain chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee for another two years.

Johnson said during a press conference after the closed-door elections that the GOP was ready to begin passing legislation as soon as the new Congress begins on Jan. 3.

"I know you're all tired of hearing my football metaphors, but we have a very well-designed playbook. We will begin to execute those plays with precision on day one,"

Emmer signaled the potential speed bumps ahead during that press conference, referencing some challenges the GOP has faced with small margins in the House during the last two years.

"As the 118th Congress proved, it may not always be smooth sailing, and we may have some disagreements along the way, but I've always been a firm believer that there's more that unites us than divides us," Emmer said. "So long as we work together as a team, I have no doubt we will seize the opportunity in front of us."

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.

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

Thune's political journey comes full circle, 20 years after toppling a leader

Like Daschle, who juggled loyalties to South Dakotans and national Democrats, Thune faces potential conflicts between Trump and traditional Republican ideals

BY: SETH TUPPER - NOVEMBER 13, 2024 11:42 AM

Twenty years after he won his Senate seat by assailing Tom Daschle's performance as minority leader, John Thune is the chamber's next majority leader.

Thune's Republican colleagues elected him to the job Wednesday. The South Dakotan now faces a test like the one he accused Daschle of failing.

"There is a line where seniority and influence go from being an asset to being a liability," Thune said during a 2004 debate against Daschle, "and Tom has crossed that line."

The 63-year-old Thune expects an easier balancing act than Daschle, who worked to advance a national Democratic agenda while representing a Republican-leaning state.

"I think the majority of South Dakotans' views on the big issues of the day sync up nicely with the Republican Party," Thune told South Dakota Searchlight in a March interview.

Wednesday, after winning the leadership election, Thune issued a statement saying "this Republican team is united behind President Trump's agenda."

Yet some of Thune's own views — political and personal — don't sync up with Trump. They've clashed repeatedly during Trump's eight years in the national political spotlight.

In 2016, after an "Access Hollywood" tape exposed Trump's crude remarks about women, Thune urged Trump to drop out of that year's presidential race.

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In 2021, after Thune criticized Trump's attempt to overturn the 2020 election, Trump said South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem should run against Thune in a primary (on Tuesday, Trump said he plans to nominate Noem for secretary of Homeland Security).

In February of this year, Thune endorsed Trump for president only after it was clear he would win the Republican nomination, following Thune's earlier endorsement of South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott.

And in August, Thune called Trump's proposals to broadly expand tariffs — which are taxes on imported goods — “a recipe for increased inflation.”

That history between the two men hints at possible future conflicts that could force Thune, like Daschle before him, to consider what lines he's willing to cross.

Small-town roots

Thune's rise to political prominence began far away from the national consciousness.

He grew up in Murdo, a city of fewer than 500 people next to Interstate 90 on the plains of western South Dakota. The town's truck stop and tourist attraction, the Pioneer Auto Show, pull motorists off the highway, while the rest of the economy depends mostly on ranchers and farmers.

Thune's mother was the high school librarian. His father was a teacher, basketball coach and a recipient of the Distinguished Flying Cross for his combat pilot service in World War II. John is one of Harold and Pat Thune's five children.

Thune has recalled his mother as “eternally optimistic” and someone who ensured her children “got some culture — whether we wanted it or not.” That included piano lessons, participating in a choir, and scheduled reading.

“My dad was the embodiment of the American dream,” Thune said in 2020 after Harold died at age 100. “He was a small-town South Dakota kid who worked hard and valued God, family and country.”

Young John Thune grew to a 6-foot-4-inch star on his high school basketball team. He went on to play college basketball while earning a bachelor's degree in business from Biola University, a private Christian university in California.

Thune added a master's in business administration from the University of South Dakota and went to work in 1985 for his political mentor, Republican U.S. Sen. Jim Abdnor.

Abdnor lost his Senate seat to Daschle in 1986, adding another layer of meaning to the eventual Thune-Daschle campaign.

A struggle to reach the Senate

In the early 1990s, Thune worked as the leader of South Dakota's railroad office and then as director of an association representing South Dakota cities.

He launched his political career with a bid for an open U.S. House seat in 1996. He won that race and easily won two reelection campaigns.

In 2002, he challenged the popular and moderate Democratic Sen. Tim Johnson. Thune lost by 524 votes — 0.15% of the votes cast. Though he expressed concerns about alleged voting improprieties, Thune conceded the race eight days after the election.

“I have had to ask myself if putting the people of South Dakota through a recount would be divisive or helpful to the process,” Thune said at the time.

More recently, he said the loss “humbled” him and shaped him as a person and politician.

“You're grateful for the opportunities but realize they're all temporary,” Thune said in March, “and you want to make the most of what you've been given in the amount of time we have here.”

The loss threatened to end his political career. He consulted his wife, Kimberley, and their two daughters about challenging Daschle in 2004.

“I remember we were having a discussion around the kitchen table, and we actually put it to a secret ballot vote,” Thune recalled in a 2014 interview. “The vote was 3-1 in favor, and I was the no vote.”

Thune waged a nationally scrutinized campaign against Daschle, the sitting minority leader and previ-

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ous majority leader. The high-stakes contest included a combined \$30 million of spending and a debate on NBC's "Meet the Press."

Thune emerged with a reputation as a political giant slayer. He won by highlighting conflicts between Daschle's responsibilities to Senate Democrats and conservative South Dakotans. A Thune television ad featured video clips of Daschle "in his own words" praising Hillary Clinton's election to the Senate, advocating for abortion rights and saying "I'm a D.C. resident."

To avoid being labeled a "D.C. resident" himself, the new senator kept his home and family in Sioux Falls as he flew back and forth to the nation's capital.

An early test

Several months after Thune took his Senate oath of office, the U.S. Department of Defense initiated a long-rumored plan to close South Dakota's Ellsworth Air Force Base.

The base supported nearly 7,000 military and civilian jobs. During the '04 campaign, Thune insisted he'd be just as able to protect Ellsworth as Daschle. Thune quickly learned how difficult it would be to honor that pledge.

"Nobody was going to say, 'Gee whiz, you fought and bled for us in back-to-back Senate races, so we're going to take care of you,'" Thune said in a 2019 interview. "We realized we were going to have to win this one on the merits. So that's when we just really went to work."

Thune was part of a bipartisan South Dakota team that convinced the Base Realignment and Closure Commission to spare Ellsworth. He went on to work with Ellsworth boosters to expand the base's training airspace, add a remotely piloted aircraft squadron, and earn Ellsworth's selection as the first home for B-21 bombers, which are currently under development by the Air Force. Thune now counts his efforts to save and solidify Ellsworth's future among his greatest achievements.

Rising through the ranks

In the years after the Ellsworth fight, Thune climbed the Senate leadership ladder. He progressed through the chairmanships of the Senate Republican Policy Committee, Republican Conference, and Commerce Committee.

He's served as Republican Senate whip since 2019, second in rank behind the party's Senate leader, Mitch McConnell.

Along the way, Thune has never faced a significant reelection challenge. He was so popular with South Dakota voters by 2010 that nobody ran against him, and he earned about 70% of the votes in each of his 2016 and 2022 campaigns. The lack of serious competitors allowed him to build up a large campaign account — its balance is \$15 million — and make millions in contributions over the years to other Republicans and the National Republican Senatorial Committee.

But as the Trump era dawned, Thune found himself occupying a shrinking traditional wing of the Republican Party.

His political future grew cloudy in 2022 as he considered retirement from the Senate amid Trump's calls for Noem to challenge Thune in a primary. Yet Thune was also thinking about his potential to succeed McConnell.

"As I thought about running for reelection, one of the things that kind of motivated me to do it was the idea that this possibility might come along," he said in March.

His 2022 reelection did nothing to endear him to Trump supporters. Last year, Thune stayed away from a Trump rally at a Rapid City arena where Noem gave Trump her endorsement. A crowd of about 7,000 people responded by booing Thune's image when it was shown on a video board.

Noem took a veiled jab at Thune and other no-shows in her speech at the rally, criticizing those who "didn't even show up tonight to welcome a former president of the United States to South Dakota."

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Adapting to 'the reality' of Trump

Undeterred, Thune announced his candidacy for Senate Republican leader in February, after McConnell said he'd step down as leader following the general election. Thune had endorsed Trump several days earlier.

"We're more animated these days by the personality of Donald Trump, and that's the reality we live with and deal with if you want to be involved in public life," Thune said in March. "That's kind of where our voters are, and you have to listen to your voters."

Thune has said he's likely to agree with Trump on policy issues "95% of the time." But Thune has also said the Republican Party is "a different party than it was" when he first ran for Senate 20 years ago, while he's "still the same person" with the same commitments to individual responsibility, economic freedom, free markets, free enterprise and a strong national defense.

Like Daschle, who had to balance his representation of conservative constituents against his duties as a Democratic leader, Thune may have to balance his traditional Republican approach against Trump's radically different style.

The new Senate majority leader thinks he's up for the challenge.

"I think if you present your views and articulate the things you believe in, I still believe that you can do that with the strength of your convictions, and knowing that many times you're going to disagree and disagree strongly with people on the other side of the aisle or the other side of the issue," Thune said in March. "But you can still do it in a way that is respectful and hopefully appeals to people's hopes and aspirations rather than preying on their fears."

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.

Trump to pick Florida Congressman Matt Gaetz as attorney general amid ethics probe

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY AND JENNIFER SHUTT - NOVEMBER 13, 2024 4:47 PM

WASHINGTON — President-elect Donald Trump announced Wednesday that he intends to nominate U.S. Rep. Matt Gaetz as the next attorney general of the United States, an unexpected pick as the Florida Republican remains the subject of a congressional ethics investigation for alleged sexual misconduct, illicit drug use and accepting improper gifts.

House Speaker Mike Johnson announced on Wednesday night at a GOP press conference following leadership elections that Gaetz has already submitted a letter of resignation from the House.

"I think out of deference to us, he issued his resignation letter effective immediately of Congress," Johnson said. "That caught us by surprise a little bit, but I asked him what the reasoning was, and he said, 'Well, you can't have too many absences.'"

Florida state law, Johnson said, provides an eight-week time frame for the governor to fill a vacancy. He's already placed a call to Gov. Ron DeSantis, who is in Italy, to ask him to begin that timeline.

"And if we start the clock now, if you do the math, we may be able to fill that seat as early as January 3, when we take the new oath of office for the new Congress," Johnson said. "So Matt would have done us a great service by making that decision, as he did on the fly. And so we're grateful for that."

The position of attorney general requires U.S. Senate approval, and if confirmed, the four-term congressman and Trump ally would lead the massive U.S. Justice Department that oversees more than 40 component organizations and 115,000 employees, according to the department.

The announcement comes as U.S. special counsel Jack Smith winds down two federal investigations of Trump — one, alleging Trump improperly stored classified government documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate after leaving office, and the other stemming from his alleged scheme to subvert the 2020 presidential election. Justice Department memos from 1973 and 2000 concluded that criminally prosecuting a sitting president would impair the leader's capacity to carry out the office's functions.

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Trump first announced his decision to choose Gaetz on social media, describing the congressman as "a deeply gifted and tenacious attorney, trained at the William & Mary College of Law, who has distinguished himself in Congress through his focus on achieving desperately needed reform at the Department of Justice."

Revealing the information on Truth Social roughly 10 minutes before his transition team sent an official statement, the president-elect wrote that Gaetz "will root out the systemic corruption at DOJ, and return the Department to its true mission of fighting Crime, and upholding our Democracy and Constitution. We must have Honesty, Integrity, and Transparency at DOJ. Under Matt's leadership, all Americans will be proud of the Department of Justice once again." Trump routinely writes on social media in mixed capitalization.

Gaetz quickly published on the social media platform X that, "It will be an honor to serve as President Trump's Attorney General!"

Ethics probe

The House Committee on Ethics revealed in June that it would continue pursuing allegations in its ongoing investigation of Gaetz, including the possibility the lawmaker may have "engaged in sexual misconduct and illicit drug use, accepted improper gifts, dispensed special privileges and favors to individuals with whom he had a personal relationship, and sought to obstruct government investigations of his conduct."

Gaetz has "categorically denied all of the allegations before the Committee," according to the committee's June update on the matter.

The committee's probe began in April 2021 and originally included allegations that the lawmaker "shared inappropriate images or videos on the House floor, misused state identification records, converted campaign funds to personal use, and/or accepted a bribe or improper gratuity." The committee announced in June that it was no longer pursuing those specific accusations.

As of June, the panel had spoken with more than a dozen witnesses, issued 25 subpoenas, and reviewed thousands of pages of documents regarding the Gaetz probe.

Rep. Michael Guest, chair of the House Ethics Committee, told reporters Wednesday that if Gaetz is confirmed by the Senate as attorney general, his committee will no longer have jurisdiction over the probe.

"Once we lose jurisdiction, there would not be a report that would be issued," said Guest, a Mississippi Republican elected to Congress in 2019. "That's not unique to this case, we have that every new Congress, where there are members who are under ethics investigation, who either choose not to run again, in some instances, or they resign or they lose reelection."

"We're not going to rush this investigation because of the appointment. And so we're going to again follow the rules and the procedures that we set in place."

The ethics investigation is expected to wrap up following Gaetz's resignation, though Punchbowl News reported that the panel was set to release a "highly damaging" report in the days ahead

Lawmakers taken aback

Senators on Capitol Hill, who will have to vet and possibly vote to confirm Gaetz, expressed surprise at Trump's announcement.

Alaska Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski said that she expected to consider another option at some point. "I don't think he's a serious nomination for the attorney general," Murkowski said. "We need to have a serious attorney general and I'm looking forward to the opportunity to consider somebody that is serious."

Sen. Susan Collins of Maine said she was shocked when she heard the news. She said that she and her colleagues will want to question Gaetz.

"Obviously, the president has the right to nominate whomever he wishes. But I'm certain that there will be a lot of questions," Collins, a Republican, said.

Texas Republican Sen. John Cornyn said he doesn't know Gaetz "other than his public persona," but said Gaetz will face questions and possibly challenges getting the votes needed for Senate confirmation.

"I'm sure we'll have a lot of questions, and I'm sure all that stuff will come out," Cornyn said. "And then it's a question of, can he get 51 votes?"

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Sen. John Fetterman, D-Pa., said that Republicans were the ones to question about whether they'd support Gaetz's nomination, since Democrats were unlikely to do so.

"Talk to my colleagues, like, to see who's gonna vote for, like, a jerk-off like that," Fetterman said.

Iowa Republican Sen. Joni Ernst said Gaetz "has his work cut out for him," and that it will be up to the Judiciary Committee to decide whether to confirm him to the post.

Florida GOP Sen. Marco Rubio, who Trump on Wednesday nominated as secretary of State, said that he was supportive of the president-elect's pick.

"I've known Matt for a long time, I think he would do a good job," Rubio said, adding that he wouldn't comment further about the recent ethics complaints against Gaetz.

Democrats who sit on the Judiciary Committee that would be tasked with holding a nomination hearing for Gaetz, such as Cory Booker of New Jersey and Jon Ossoff of Georgia, declined to comment on the news.

"I'm literally just walking out of a meeting and hearing this," Booker said. "Give me a minute."

Wisconsin GOP Sen. Ron Johnson said he honestly doesn't "know (Gaetz) that well or know his professional qualifications."

"I know of his skill in questioning witnesses in the House," Johnson said. "I really don't know his legal background that much. I've never really spent much time with him, other than a couple times in different meetings, so I just don't know him that well."

Rep. Jim Himes, ranking member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, issued a strong rebuke of Trump's choice of Gaetz for the position.

"The Attorney General of the United States must have strong judgement, moral character, and a deep respect for the law. As almost all members of Congress know, Matt Gaetz has none of those things. What he does have is unconditional loyalty to Donald Trump and a willingness to weaponize the government against his political allies—an affinity that he and the president-elect share," Himes, a Connecticut Democrat, said in a statement.

Ariana Figueroa and Shauneen Miranda contributed to this report.

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

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Trump picks Fox News host to run Pentagon; Tulsi Gabbard to head national intelligence

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - NOVEMBER 13, 2024 3:40 PM

President-elect Donald Trump says he plans to nominate Pete Hegseth, a U.S. Army National Guard veteran and a weekend host on Fox News' morning show, as secretary of Defense.

Trump also announced on Wednesday afternoon he would nominate Florida Sen. Marco Rubio to be secretary of State and former Rep. Tulsi Gabbard to be the director of national intelligence, as he rounds out his national security team.

The Hegseth pick, announced late Tuesday, immediately drew more scrutiny than some more conventional choices Trump announced for other Cabinet-level positions.

Outside of his time in the Army, Hegseth, 44, has no government experience. He was the CEO of the veterans' advocacy group Concerned Veterans for America, according to a bio on his personal website. He served in Afghanistan, Iraq and Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. He was awarded two Bronze Stars and a Combat Infantryman Badge for his combat service.

"Pete is tough, smart and a true believer in America First," Trump said in a statement from his transition team. "With Pete at the helm, America's enemies are on notice – Our Military will be Great Again, and America will Never Back Down."

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No women in combat

On Fox, in several books he's written and in other public forums, Hegseth has been vocal about his socially conservative views.

He told a podcast host last week that "women should not serve in combat roles."

"It hasn't made us more effective, it hasn't made us more lethal, has made fighting more complicated," he said on the Shawn Ryan Show podcast.

He's also criticized the DoD's work under Democratic Presidents Joe Biden and Barack Obama to pursue diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives.

"Unfortunately, the incentives for generals under the Biden administration and the Obama administration was to conform to ideologies of leftist politicians who were ramming stuff into the Pentagon that has nothing to do with winning wars," he said during a Fox News appearance to promote a book on the military. "What is your gender? What is your race? DEI, (Critical Race Theory)."

Hegseth's focus on culture war issues has won praise from some conservatives, including the influential think tank The Heritage Foundation.

"At a time when bloat and woke initiatives detract from the core warfighting mission of our armed forces, we need a secretary like Pete who has both served in combat and advocated for veterans on Capitol Hill. Under President Biden and Secretary (Lloyd) Austin, our military has grown weaker while foreign conflicts have increased. President Trump and Secretary Hegseth will make our military great again while continuing to put America First," the foundation said in a statement.

Inexperience a factor?

But Democratic members of Congress voiced unease with the nomination, and even Republicans withheld full-throated endorsements.

Adam Smith, a Washington Democrat and ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee, said in a statement on X that the Senate should give the nomination "the utmost scrutiny."

"The job of Secretary of Defense should not be an entry-level position, and I question President-elect Trump's choice of a television news host to take on this immensely important role," Smith said. "While I respect and admire Mr. Hegseth's military service, I am concerned about his inexperience given the security challenges we face around the world."

Even Sen. Tommy Tuberville, an Alabama Republican and close Trump ally, voiced skepticism over the pick, Fox News congressional correspondent Chad Pergram reported.

"Really? I'd have to think about it," Tuberville, who sits on the Senate Armed Services Committee that will manage the confirmation process, reportedly said.

The ambivalence toward Hegseth stands out from Trump's other early picks.

Indiana Republican Sen. Todd Young sent a series of posts on X this week praising the selections of Rep. Elise Stefanik as United Nations ambassador, former Rep. Lee Zeldin for Environmental Protection Agency administrator, Rep. Mike Waltz to be national security adviser, former National Intelligence Director John Ratcliffe to lead the CIA and former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee to be the ambassador to Israel.

He did not communicate on X his support of Hegseth.

Similarly, the official X account for the House Armed Services Committee, which is chaired by Alabama's Mike Rogers, posted praise for Stefanik and Waltz on X, but did not comment on Hegseth.

Tattoos raised red flags

Hegseth grew up in Forest Lake, Minnesota. He attended Princeton University as an undergraduate and received a master's degree in public policy from Harvard University.

He sought the 2012 Minnesota Republican nomination for U.S. Senate, but withdrew after the state convention backed the eventual nominee, Kurt Bills. Incumbent Democratic Sen. Amy Klobuchar easily defeated Bills in the general election.

Hegseth served in the Army National Guard until 2021, when he says he was taken off a detail to work

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Biden's inauguration due to questions about a tattoo.

"Ultimately, members of my unit in leadership deemed that I was an extremist or a white nationalist because of a tattoo I have, which is a religious tattoo, it's a Jerusalem Cross, everybody can look it up," he said in the June appearance on Fox. "It was used as a premise to revoke my order to guard the inauguration."

He speculated that there was another reason for his removal, possibly that he was a Trump supporter, Fox News host or a "patriot extremist."

Hegseth has a chest tattoo depicting the Jerusalem Cross, a symbol of the crusaders that fought against Muslims and Jews during the Middle Ages.

Broad support for Rubio

Trump's selections of Rubio and Gabbard came Wednesday, although media reports for days had said Rubio would be named.

"Marco is a Highly Respected Leader, and a very powerful Voice for Freedom," a statement from Trump read. "He will be a strong Advocate for our Nation, a true friend to our Allies, and a fearless Warrior who will never back down to our adversaries."

Cabinet designees from the Senate often have an easier path to confirmation through that chamber due to the personal connections they've established.

That appears likely to be the case with Rubio, who quickly secured votes of confidence from Democrats John Fetterman of Pennsylvania and Mark Warner of Virginia.

Gabbard, a former Democratic member of Congress from Hawaii who sought the party's presidential nomination in 2020, campaigned for Trump this year.

"I know Tulsi will bring the fearless spirit that has defined her illustrious career to our Intelligence Community, championing our Constitutional Rights, and securing Peace through Strength," Trump wrote. "Tulsi will make us all proud!"

Jacob covers federal policy as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Based in Oregon, he focuses on Western issues. His coverage areas include climate, energy development, public lands and infrastructure.

Trump arrives at White House to meet with Biden as transition gets underway

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY AND ARIANA FIGUEROA - NOVEMBER 13, 2024 2:39 PM

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden welcomed President-elect Donald Trump to the White House Wednesday, a tradition between incoming and outgoing American leaders, though the courtesy was not extended to Biden after he won the 2020 election.

The pair met behind closed doors in the Oval Office for most of the meeting that lasted just under two hours. Biden's Chief of Staff Jeff Zients and Trump's incoming counterpart, Susie Wiles, joined the president and president-elect.

Biden had been seeking reelection against Trump until late July, when Biden dropped his bid. Vice President Kamala Harris lost the race to Trump after just over 100 days of campaigning as the Democratic nominee.

Harris did not attend the meeting, according to the White House.

In brief remarks before cameras, Biden congratulated his predecessor who will again take the oath of office in January as the nation's 47th president.

"Well, Mr. President-elect, former president, Donald, congratulations," Biden said, as Trump interjected with "Thank you very much, Joe."

"And looking forward to having a, like I said, smooth transition, do everything we can to make sure you're accommodated, what you need," Biden continued. "And we're gonna get a chance to talk about some of that today."

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Trump again thanked Biden and responded "And politics is tough. And it's, many cases, not a very nice world, but it is a nice world today. And I appreciate it very much, a transition that's so smooth, it'll be as smooth as it can get. I very much appreciate that, Joe," Trump said.

A 'substantive' conversation

First lady Jill Biden joined the president in greeting Trump and presented a handwritten letter of congratulations and offer for transition assistance addressed to incoming first lady Melania Trump, according to the White House.

The meeting got underway just after 11 a.m. Eastern, and the press was ushered out after the brief welcoming remarks and photo opportunity. Biden and Trump finished their private discussion at roughly 1 p.m. Eastern.

Neither addressed a large gathering of reporters and photographers outside afterward.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Biden and Trump had "a very good back and forth." "(Biden) wants you all to know that the president-elect was gracious, came with a detailed set of questions, it was, again, substantive" Jean-Pierre said at the daily press briefing.

Jean-Pierre declined to provide the meeting's specifics but said "the length of the meeting tells you they had an in-depth conversation on an array of issues."

Trump did not invite Biden to the White House following his 2020 presidential election win, nor did he attend his successor's inauguration that occurred just 14 days after a mob of his supporters violently tried to stop Congress' certification of Biden's victory.

The president-elect's transition team did not immediately respond to States Newsroom's inquiries on why Trump did not invite Biden to the White House in 2020.

Musk, Ramaswamy to head new initiative

The president-elect continues to announce numerous Cabinet and staff positions, stacking his administration with staunch loyalists.

Late Tuesday, Trump announced he named billionaire Elon Musk and former presidential hopeful Vivek Ramaswamy to what he describes as a new "Department of Government Efficiency," or shortened to "DOGE," also the name for a popular internet dog meme and cryptocurrency in the last decade.

Trump said the new entity would function outside of government.

"To drive this kind of drastic change, the Department of Government Efficiency will provide advice and guidance from outside of Government, and will partner with the White House and Office of Management & Budget to drive large scale structural reform, and create an entrepreneurial approach to Government never seen before," Trump said in a statement.

Musk was also present, sitting in the front row during Trump's visit with House Republicans earlier Wednesday.

Also on Tuesday night, Trump announced Fox News host Pete Hegseth as his pick for secretary of Defense, a position that requires managing hundreds of billions in Pentagon spending.

Trump endorses Johnson

Trump joined House Republicans Wednesday morning before his meeting with Biden at the White House. At a hotel near the U.S. Capitol, Trump received a standing ovation from GOP lawmakers, according to congressional pool reports.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, Republican of Louisiana, introduced Trump, calling him a "singular figure in American history," according to congressional pool reports.

House Republicans are also planning to have their leadership elections late Wednesday, but it's expected that Johnson will be selected to continue the role, although an official vote for the speaker's gavel will take place in January.

At the meeting, Trump threw his support behind Johnson to continue in his role as House speaker, ac-

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ording to NBC News.

During the meeting, Trump touted GOP wins in keeping control of the lower chamber. Although Republicans are on track to hold their slim majority, The Associated Press, the news organization that States Newsroom relies upon for race calls based on decades of experience, has not called the House for Republicans though it might happen soon.

As of Wednesday afternoon, Republicans have 216 seats, just two short of the 218 seats needed for control. Democrats have 207 seats, with 12 races still to be called.

Trump also joked about wanting to run for another term in office — something that the U.S. Constitution prohibits, as presidents are limited to only serving two terms.

"I suspect I won't be running again unless you do something," Trump told members, who laughed, according to pool reports.

Democrats ready to push back

Chair of the House Democratic Caucus Pete Aguilar said Wednesday that Democrats are ready to work with the incoming administration in a bipartisan manner, but are also prepared to push back on efforts to further restrict reproductive rights, such as a national abortion ban, and any changes to the Affordable Care Act.

"We're clear-eyed about the challenge ahead of us," Aguilar, Democrat of California, said.

He acknowledged the failure of Democrats to regain control of the House.

"I think it's appropriate for the current caucus to reflect on what happened, to listen to listen to our constituents, to listen to American people, to listen to our members, to gather data, and then to chart a path forward," he said.

Aguilar added that Democrats plan to look at voter data to understand the issues important to their voting bloc.

"I don't want to have broad generalizations of any group or geographic or otherwise, without that data in front of me," he said. "I think it's very clear to us that for people with two jobs, the economy is, gas and groceries and rent. We'll need to speak to those issues if we're going to be the party that speaks to our community members and people working, everyday Americans, then we need to speak to those issues, and ... that's on us to communicate."

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

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

Summit carbon pipeline decision coming soon in North Dakota

BY: JEFF BEACH, NORTH DAKOTA MONITOR - NOVEMBER 13, 2024 1:44 PM

The North Dakota Public Service Commission will meet Friday to vote on the Summit Carbon Solutions pipeline project that aims to permanently store carbon emissions underground west of Bismarck.

The commission will meet at 10 a.m. in the Pioneer Room on the ground floor in the Judicial Wing of the Capitol Building.

The PSC denied Summit a permit in 2023, but the company made changes to its route in North Dakota and appealed the decision.

The three-person commission has held multiple public hearings on the \$8 billion pipeline network that would gather carbon emissions from ethanol plants in five states, including Tharaldson Ethanol at Casleton, North Dakota.

Supporters view the project as vital to helping the ethanol industry compete in low-carbon fuel markets. Ethanol is a key market for corn growers.

Opponents cite safety concerns, damage to farmland and property values and an infringement on prop-

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erty rights. Some landowners also have complained about Summit's business practices.

Iowa has granted Summit a permit, and the company says it plans to try again for a permit in South Dakota. Minnesota's Public Utilities Commission is expected to vote Dec. 12 on a 28-mile segment near the North Dakota state line.

The project also includes Nebraska, which has no state agency in charge of issuing permits for CO2 pipelines.

Summit would benefit from federal tax credits of \$85 per ton of CO2 that it plans to put underground in North Dakota, and would sequester 18 million tons of carbon dioxide per year.

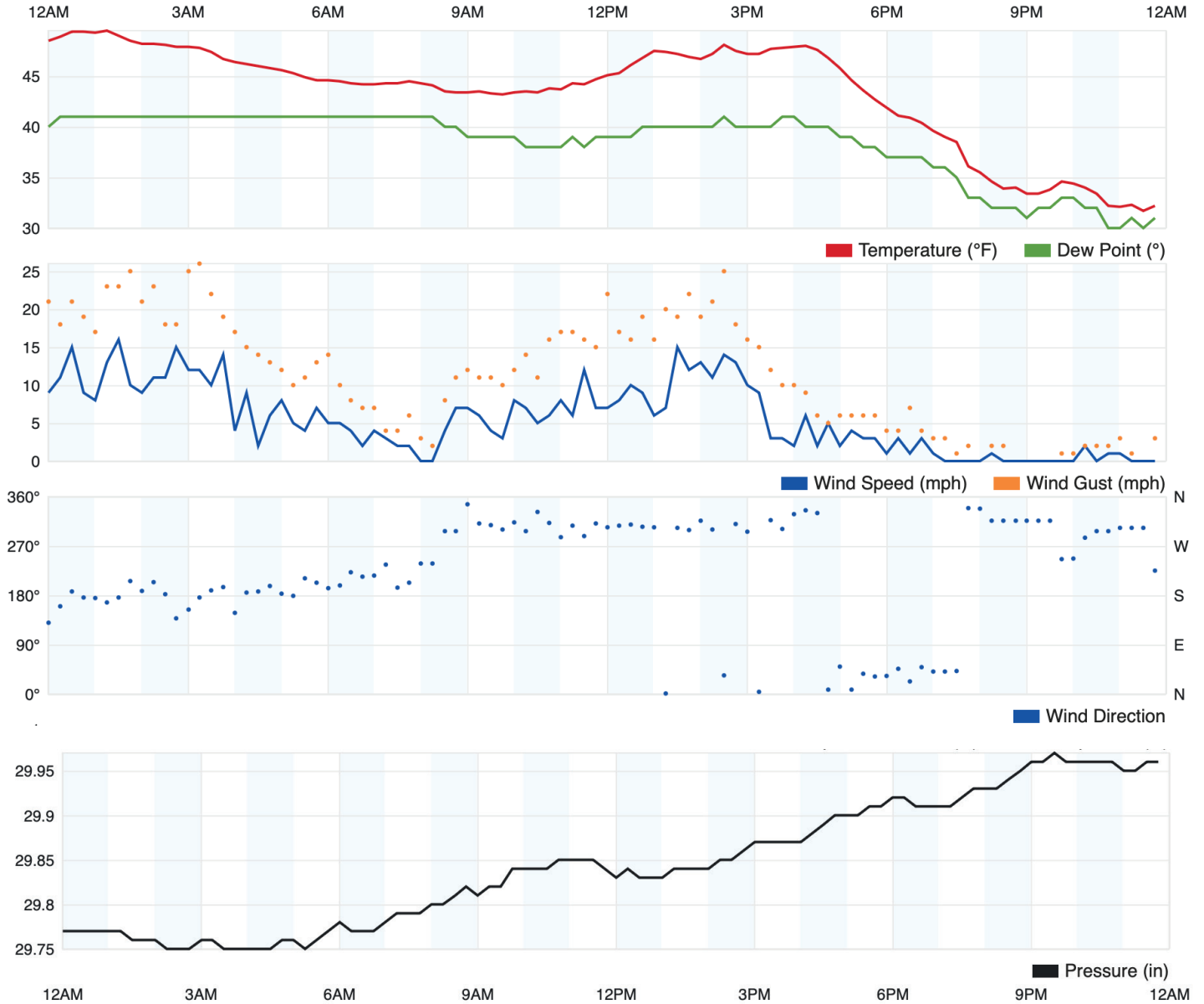
Iowa-based Summit will need a separate storage permit from the North Dakota Industrial Commission.

North Dakota Monitor Deputy Editor Jeff Beach is based in the Fargo area. His interests include agriculture, renewable energy and rural issues.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 51 °F

Becoming
Sunny

Tonight



Low: 26 °F

Partly Cloudy

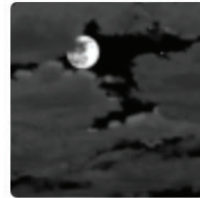
Friday



High: 55 °F

Partly Sunny

Friday Night



Low: 36 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Saturday



High: 54 °F

Mostly Sunny

INTO THE WEEKEND

THURSDAY



HIGHS: 47-58°F
LOWS: 27-33°F

FRIDAY



HIGHS: 47-56°F
LOWS: 30-38°F

SATURDAY



HIGHS: 47-54°F
LOWS: 27-35°F

15-25% CHANCE RAIN
FAR NORTH CENTRAL SD



The rest of the week and first part of the weekend will feature above average temperatures in the upper 40s to upper 50s. Friday will have clouds but they look to clear out a bit for Saturday.

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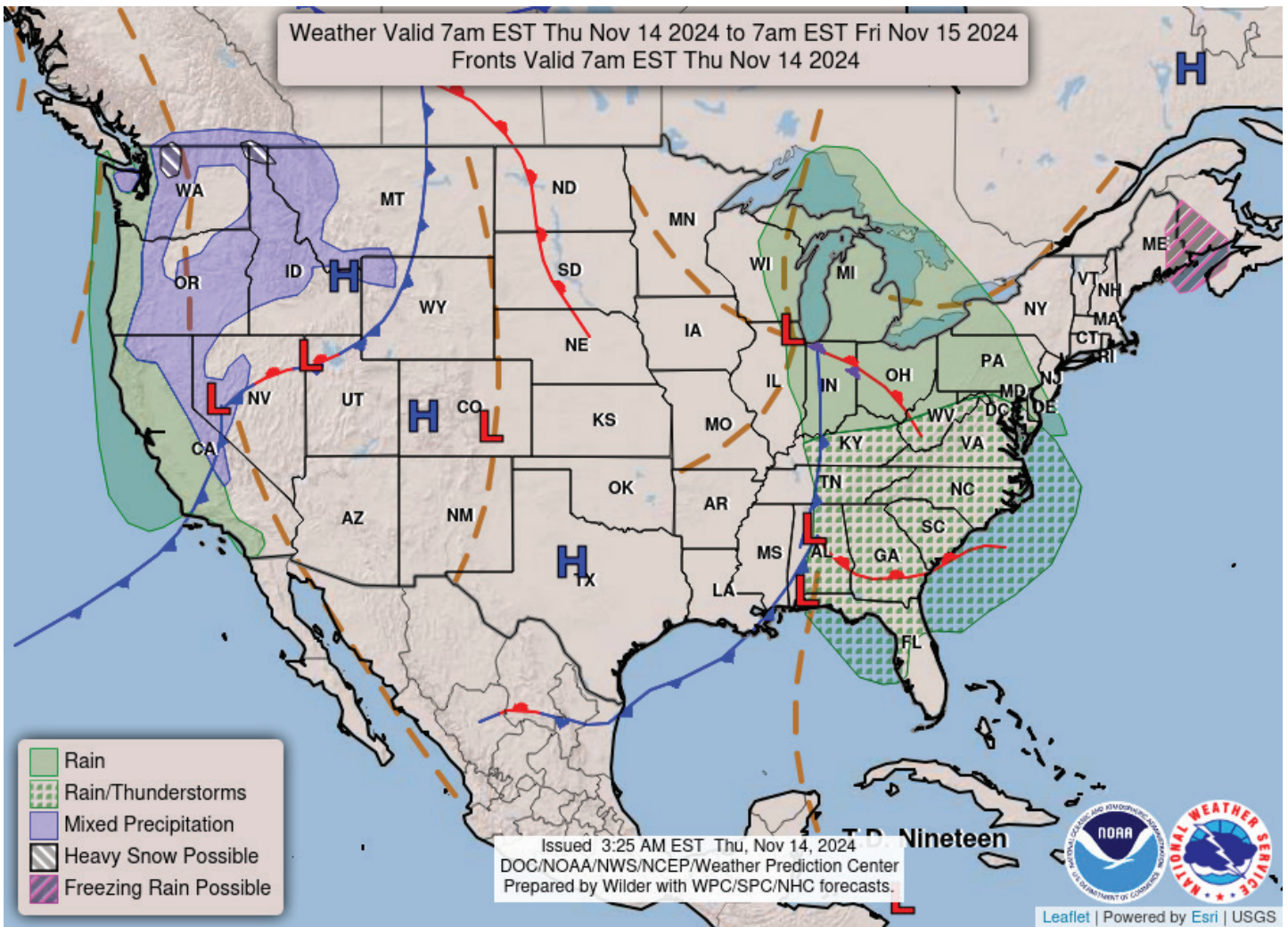
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 50 °F at 1:14 AM
Low Temp: 32 °F at 11:07 PM
Wind: 26 mph at 3:11 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 35 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 68 in 2015
Record Low: -17 in 2014
Average High: 43
Average Low: 20
Average Precip in Nov.: 0.40
Precip to date in Nov.: 0.76
Average Precip to date: 20.87
Precip Year to Date: 20.64
Sunset Tonight: 5:04:30 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:30:44 am



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Today in Weather History

November 14, 1997: A low-pressure system produced snow and blowing snow, creating near whiteout conditions at times. Six inches of snow fell in the Sisseton foothills by Friday evening in Roberts and eastern Marshall Counties. Strong north winds gusting to near 35 mph, combined with the snow, caused visibilities to fall below one-half mile at times over a large portion of northeast South Dakota during the evening of the 13th and through the 14th. Classes were canceled around Summit because of near-whiteout conditions, while classes were delayed for two hours in Britton. Interstate 29 was closed just north of the Grant County line for a time after a semi-trailer rolled. Some snowfall amounts include; 6.5 inches in Summit; 6.2 inches in Waubay; 6.0 inches in Roscoe; and 5.0 inches in Sisseton and Wilmot.

1921: During the afternoon hours, thunderstorms brought severe hail to portions of Alabama. The hailstones ranged from about the size of buckshot to as large as a baseball. The largest stoned weighed as much as a pound.

1964 - With the help of a fresh three inch cover of snow, the temperature at Ely, NV, dipped to 15 degrees below zero to establish an all-time record low for the month of November. That record of -15 degrees was later equalled on the 19th of November in 1985. (The Weather Channel)

1969: Apollo 12 was launched into a threatening gray sky with ominous cumulus clouds. Pete Conrad's words 43 seconds after liftoff, electrified everyone in the Control Center: "We had a whole bunch of buses drops out," followed by "Where are we going?" and "I just lost the platform." Lightning had stricken the spacecraft. Warning lights were illuminated, and the spacecraft guidance system lost its attitude reference.

1974 - A storm produced 15 inches of snow at the Buffalo, NY, airport, and 30 inches on the south shore of Lake Erie. (David Ludlum)

1986 - An early season cold wave set more than 200 records from the northwestern U.S. to the east coast over a seven day period. For some places it proved to be the coldest weather of the winter season. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1987 - The first major snowstorm of the season hit the Southern and Central Rockies, producing 12 inches at the Brian Head ski resort in Utah overnight. Strong and gusty winds associated with the storm reached 52 mph at Ruidoso NM. In the eastern U.S., the temperature at Washington D.C. soared to 68 degrees, just three days after being buried under more than a foot of snow. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A massive storm produced snow and gusty winds in the western U.S., with heavy snow in some of the higher elevations. Winds gusted to 66 mph at Show Low AZ, and Donner Summit, located in the Sierra Nevada Range of California, was buried under 23 inches of snow. Heavy rain soaked parts of California, with 3.19 inches reported at Blue Canyon. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Unseasonably warm weather prevailed east of the Rockies. Temperatures reached 70 degrees as far north as New England, and readings in the 80s were reported across the southeast quarter of the nation. Nineteen cities reported record high temperatures for the date. For the second time in the month Dallas/Fort Worth TX equalled their record for November with an afternoon high of 89 degrees. The high of 91 degrees at Waco TX was their warmest of record for so late in the season. Heavy snow blanketed parts of Wyoming overnight, with a foot of snow reported at Cody, and ten inches at Yellowstone Park. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



GUARD YOUR HEART!

She was over eighty years old and still worked every day. Though old in years, she was young at heart. She made her way through life in a wheelchair and was very successful in several different business ventures. Additionally, she was known for being involved in doing kind things for others going through difficult times.

"What caused you to end up in a wheelchair?" asked a friend one day.

"Infantile paralysis," she replied.

"My goodness! How do you cope," the friend wondered, "and do so many kind things for so many people?"

"Well," she said with a gracious smile, "the paralysis never touched my head or my heart."

Our head is the door to our heart. What we see, think and dwell upon shapes our feelings and is expressed in what we do and the way we act.

It was the writer of Proverbs who expressed this so well. "Keep and guard your heart with all vigilance," he wrote, "for out of it flow the springs of life."

Our heart, the source of our feelings of love and desire, dictates the things that we do and say. How we live and what we find time to do and enjoy all come from within. Wisely, Solomon advises us to concentrate on those things that will reflect God's love to others. We must make sure that what matters most leads us in the right direction. We can only do this if we focus on God.

Prayer: Help us, Heavenly Father, to look straight ahead and keep our eyes focused on You. Keep us from becoming sidetracked by things that would destroy us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. Proverbs 4:23

We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.12.24

18 31 33 64 68 17

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$387,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 30
DRAW: Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.13.24

11 23 29 41 42 10

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$14,660,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 45
DRAW: Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.13.24

18 24 27 43 45 8

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 17 Hrs 11
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.13.24

5 19 20 24 29

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$101,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 11
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.13.24

14 41 45 55 59 13

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 29
DRAW: Mins 11 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.13.24

9 20 26 43 58 9

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$130,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 29
DRAW: Mins 11 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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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

Nevada trial set for 'Dances with Wolves' actor in newly-revived sex abuse case

By RIO YAMAT Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Former "Dances with Wolves" actor Nathan Chasing Horse is set to stand trial early next year in Las Vegas on charges that he sexually abused Indigenous women and girls, a significant development in the sweeping criminal case after more than a year of stalled court proceedings while he challenged it.

His trial in Clark County District Court is currently scheduled to begin on Jan. 13, court records show. He pleaded not guilty on Wednesday to 21 felonies, including sexual assault, kidnapping and producing and possessing videos of child sexual abuse, KLAS-TV in Las Vegas reported.

Prosecutors are now able to move forward with their case because Chasing Horse was again indicted last month following a Nevada Supreme Court decision that his original indictment be dismissed. The high court's order left open the possibility for the charges to be refiled, and prosecutors quickly took their case before another grand jury.

The high court said in its September order that prosecutors had abused the grand jury process when they provided a definition of grooming as evidence of Chasing Horse's alleged crimes without any expert testimony. But the justices also made clear in their ruling that their decision was not weighing in on Chasing Horse's guilt or innocence, saying the allegations against him are serious.

Best known for portraying the character Smiles A Lot in the 1990 movie "Dances with Wolves," Chasing Horse was born on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota, which is home to the Sicangu Sioux, one of the seven tribes of the Lakota nation.

After starring in the Oscar-winning film, according to prosecutors, Chasing Horse began promoting himself as a self-proclaimed Lakota medicine man while traveling around North America to perform healing ceremonies.

Prosecutors said he used his authority to gain access to vulnerable women and girls for decades until his arrest in January near Las Vegas. He has been jailed ever since.

Chasing Horse's arrest reverberated around Indian Country as law enforcement in the U.S. and Canada quickly followed up with more criminal charges. In Montana, authorities there said his arrest helped corroborate long-standing allegations against him on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation. Tribal leaders banished Chasing Horse from the reservation in 2015 amid allegations of human trafficking.

His latest indictment in Las Vegas includes new allegations that Chasing Horse filmed himself having sex with one of his accusers when she was younger than 14. Prosecutors have said the footage, taken in 2010 or 2011, was found on cellphones in a locked safe inside the North Las Vegas home that Chasing Horse is said to have shared with five wives, including the girl in the videos.

Noem's Cabinet appointment will make a plain-spoken rancher South Dakota's new governor

By JOHN HANNA and STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem built a national profile during the COVID-19 pandemic, had fellow Republicans buzzing about her future, and published two political memoirs in three years. Lawmakers describe the man set to replace her as a friendly, plain-spoken rancher and specialty welder whom they expect to focus more on issues within the state.

Lt. Gov. Larry Rhoden's biggest — and fleeting — brush with national fame came in 2017 when he triggered a panic alarm during a hearing to test how quickly police would arrive to support his argument that people should be allowed to carry guns in the Capitol.

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He's now receiving bipartisan praise as a South Dakota-focused conservative well-versed in how the state's Republican-dominated Legislature works.

President-elect Donald Trump announced Tuesday he would nominate Noem, 52, as the next U.S. homeland security secretary. If the Senate confirms Noem, Rhoden would automatically become governor. It's unclear how quickly that could happen.

Noem's first memoir says Rhoden took her under his wing in 2006 when she won a seat in the South Dakota House where he was serving as majority leader. He served in the Legislature for 16 years. Noem described Rhoden as "direct and honest" when she named him to her ticket for governor in 2018.

Others describe the 65-year-old, operates a custom welding business producing cattle brands, as a true western South Dakota rancher. In his photo on the governor's office website, he wears a leather jacket and cowboy hat.

"He's legitimately legit," said Republican state Rep. Greg Jamison, of Sioux Falls, one of five House majority whips, calling Rhoden "a real reflection on South Dakota and how anybody from across the country would perceive our state."

Rhoden pledged Wednesday to keep working closely with Noem through the expected transition but neither of them provided details. Noem posted on social media that she is honored and humbled by Trump's appointment, and Rhoden predicted that she will be an excellent homeland security secretary.

"I have worked with Gov. Noem for decades, first as a legislator and for the last six years as her lieutenant governor," he said in a statement. "I have seen her leadership transform this state to advance freedom and opportunity."

Rhoden is considered a possible Republican candidate for governor in 2026, when Noem would have been term-limited. U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson and state Attorney General Marty Jackley also are possible contenders.

State lawmakers do not expect big policy shifts once Rhoden takes office: Like Noem, he embodies the socially conservative, small-government Republican common in Plains and western states. But they don't expect him to spend any time focusing on national politics like his predecessor.

Rhoden has always been more visible in the state capital of Pierre, Jamison said.

"Larry is often seen in the hallways around the Capitol and at different events. He attends a lot of them. I see him all the time socializing with everybody. Gov. Noem was a little more out of sight in that fashion," he said.

"This is a guy who was on the school board and then ran for the Legislature and did that for a long time and rose up through the ranks," Jamison said.

Retiring state Sen. Lee Schoenbeck, the top GOP leader in the Senate, said Rhoden is a good problem solver but more importantly he's a "South Dakota kid."

"His interests will all be within the (state's) 605 area code," Schoenbeck said.

Term-limited House Speaker Hugh Bartels agreed Rhoden would offer a distinct type of leadership.

"Oh yeah. I think there will be differences in style," Bartels said. "They're just different people."

Before Noem, perhaps the two best-known political figures from South Dakota were Democrats: former U.S. Sen. George McGovern, the party's 1972 presidential nominee, and former U.S. Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle. On Wednesday, Republican senators elected John Thune, who unseated Daschle in 2004, as the next majority leader.

South Dakota hasn't elected a Democratic governor in 45 years, and more than 90% of the 35 state senators and 70 state House members will be Republicans after this year's elections.

The dominance of GOP conservatives hasn't always meant harmony. Some harder-right Republicans have fought with Noem and other more establishment Republicans over issues such as cutting taxes, COVID-19 vaccine exemptions, transgender athletes, commercial surrogacy, and landowners' rights.

Lawmakers allied with the Freedom Caucus, which formed in 2022 to push the Legislature and Noem to the right, will lead both chambers come January.

Michael Card, professor emeritus of political science at the University of South Dakota, said "the Freedom Caucus probably would have wanted a pound of flesh," if Noem had not been nominated for a Cabinet

position. He warned that "Mr. Rhoden may face fights simply of guilt by association."

But lawmakers generally praised Rhoden for his ability to build alliances and work across the aisle.

Republican state Rep. Tony Venhuizen, of Sioux Falls, said building relationships has always been Rhoden's "real strength."

Incoming House Minority Leader Erin Healy, a Sioux Falls Democrat, welcomed the transition.

"Lieutenant-Governor Rhoden has demonstrated a willingness to collaborate," Healy said. "So I'm very optimistic that as governor he will foster an open, transparent dialogue with the Legislature."

Republican John Thune of South Dakota is elected the next Senate majority leader

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans have elected South Dakota Sen. John Thune as the next Senate majority leader, completing a momentous shift in their leadership that elevates a top deputy of Mitch McConnell into a key position as President-elect Donald Trump returns to the White House.

Thune, 63, is in his fourth Senate term and has promised to work closely with Trump, despite differences the two have had over the years, and will be a crucial part of the incoming president's efforts to push through his policy agenda. The two spoke on the phone shortly after Thune was elected, the senator posted on X Wednesday afternoon, adding that "Senate Republicans are excited and ready to get to work" with the incoming president.

Trump later congratulated Thune on his social media platform, Truth Social. "He moves quickly, and will do an outstanding job," Trump wrote. "I look forward to working with him."

Thune beat out two other competitors, Sens. John Cornyn and Rick Scott, by gaining majority support from GOP senators in two rounds of secret ballots behind closed doors. Scott was eliminated on the first round and the final vote between Thune and Cornyn was 29-24, according to several people who requested anonymity to discuss the private meeting.

Republicans are replacing McConnell, the longest serving Senate party leader, as they prepare to take majority control of the Senate with the 53 seats they won in last week's elections. It was the first competitive election for Republican leader in three decades and Senate Republicans' first regime change since McConnell became GOP leader in 2007.

Thune's election represents a major shift in the upper chamber's GOP conference as many senators have been eager to move on from McConnell's long and powerful reign. But it will also be a complicated test for Thune as he will have to manage a conference that is often divided over policy, navigate Trump's demands of the legislative branch and secure policy wins for the president as he begins his second term.

"It is a new day in the United States Senate," Thune told reporters immediately after he was elected. He said his majority will work to toughen border security laws, lower energy costs and overturn regulations they see as burdensome.

"We are excited to reclaim the majority and to get to work with our colleagues in the House to enact President Trump's agenda," Thune said.

As the candidates tried to win over individual senators, all of their pitches centered around how close they would be to Trump. That was a more difficult task for Cornyn and Thune, who broke publicly with the former president over his effort to overturn his defeat in the 2020 presidential election and the Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol. At the time, Thune called Trump's actions "inexcusable."

In recent months, though, Thune has worked to smooth over that relationship, visiting Trump at his Florida home and consulting with him on how to implement the incoming president's agenda. Thune told The Associated Press over the summer that he views their potential relationship as a professional one. If they both won their elections, Thune said then, "we've got a job to do."

As he made his case, Thune has made clear that he will listen to Trump's demands. 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, Thune quickly responded in a statement that the

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Senate must “quickly and decisively” act to get nominees in place and that “all options are on the table to make that happen, including recess appointments.”

Speaking to reporters after he was elected, Thune noted that “the Senate has an advise and consent rule in the Constitution” but that they will do everything they can to get his nominees in place.

“How that happens remains to be seen,” Thune said.

Thune’s win is all the more extraordinary because of his 2004 election to the Senate – defeating then-Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle after arguing during the campaign that Daschle had lost his South Dakota roots during his years in Democratic leadership. Twenty years later, Thune will become majority leader himself.

Well liked and a respected communicator, Thune has been perceived as a front-runner for much of the year. Like McConnell, he hails from the Republican Party’s more traditional wing.

He is a former chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee and has held the Republican whip position — no. 2 in party leadership — since 2019. He took over for McConnell for several weeks last year when he was on a medical leave, a move that was widely seen as an audition of sorts as speculation surrounded McConnell’s future.

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.

The election was difficult for many in the conference who saw Thune and Cornyn as similar choices. They are alike 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.

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

Scott, the former governor of Florida, was elected to the Senate 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 one by one all year, Scott was tied up in his own reelection race. He handily defeated Democrat Debbie Mucarsel-Powell by more than 10 points.

In the week since the election, Scott aggressively stepped up his campaign for GOP leader, campaigning publicly as the candidate closest to Trump and winning endorsements from people who are close to the former and future president, such as billionaire Elon Musk. But some questioned whether that strategy might backfire.

South Dakota Sen. Mike Rounds, Thune’s home state colleague, 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 ahead of the race.

Still, both Thune and Cornyn adopted some of Scott’s ideas as they worked to win over voters. Thune told the conference in a candidate forum Tuesday evening that he would allow more amendments on the floor and improve communication from McConnell’s regime, addressing frequent complaints from that wing of the conference.

McConnell did not say who he was supporting, but said after the vote that Thune’s victory was a “clear endorsement of a consummate leader.”

“The American people elected Republicans to restore stability and order after four years of Washington Democrats’ failure,” McConnell said. “John Thune will take the reins with a tremendous opportunity to lead this transformation, and Senate Republicans stand behind him, ready to get to work.”

Middle East latest: Israel says 15 trucks carrying aid have been allowed into northern Gaza

By The Associated Press undefined

Israel says 15 trucks carrying aid have been allowed into northern Gaza, where aid groups have warned that a monthlong Israeli offensive could cause a famine.

The trucks entered Gaza on Wednesday with aid from the United Arab Emirates, said the military body handling aid deliveries into the territory, COGAT. It said the aid consisted of food and water as well as hygiene, shelter and medical supplies.

U.N. agencies did not immediately confirm the delivery of the aid.

Israeli forces have encircled the Gaza Strip's northernmost areas for the past month, saying Hamas militants have regrouped there. Experts say the Israeli military campaign has caused a new wave of displaced civilians and warn that famine is imminent or may already be happening there.

Human Rights Watch said in a report released Thursday that Israel has committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Gaza Strip, including massive forced displacements that amount to ethnic cleansing.

It said people have been killed while evacuating under Israeli orders and in Israeli-designated humanitarian zones, where hundreds of thousands are crammed into squalid tent camps.

Israel has also been striking deeper inside Lebanon since September as it escalates the war against Hezbollah.

Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza has killed more than 43,000 people, more than half of them women and children, Palestinian health officials say. The officials do not distinguish between civilians and combatants.

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.

Here's the latest:

Syrian state media report explosions near Damascus and Homs

DAMASCUS, Syria — Syrian state media are reporting explosions near the capital, Damascus, and the central city of Homs in what appeared to be Israeli airstrikes.

State news agency SANA said the country's air defenses were activated against a "hostile target" south of Homs on Thursday. It gave no further details.

The agency later reported an explosion near Damascus, adding that the cause of the blasts was not immediately clear.

Israel has carried out hundreds of airstrikes in Syria targeting members of Lebanon's Hezbollah and officials from Iranian-backed groups.

Israel says it has allowed 15 trucks carrying aid into northern Gaza

JERUSALEM — Israel says 15 trucks loaded with aid have been allowed into northern Gaza, where aid groups have warned that a monthlong offensive could cause a famine.

The military body handling aid deliveries into the territory, COGAT, said the 15 trucks entered Gaza on Wednesday with aid shipped in by sea by the United Arab Emirates. It said the aid consists of food and water, as well as hygiene, shelter and medical supplies.

U.N. agencies did not immediately confirm that the aid was delivered to its destination inside northern Gaza.

Over the past week, the U.N. says aid trucks have entered the north but have not reached their final destinations due to Israeli movement restrictions and hungry crowds taking items from the trucks.

Israel has scrambled to ramp up aid to Gaza after a monthlong stretch during which aid plunged to its lowest levels this year.

The U.S. Biden administration warned Israel to increase the aid last month, saying a failure to do so

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could lead to a reduction in military support. The White House backed down this week, citing some improvements and ruling out any reduction in arms supplies, even after international aid groups said Israel had fallen far short of the American demands.

Human Rights Watch accuses Israel of war crimes, crimes against humanity in the Gaza Strip

JERUSALEM — Human Rights Watch says Israel has committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Gaza Strip, including massive forced displacements that amount to ethnic cleansing.

A report released by the New York-based rights group on Thursday says Israeli evacuation orders have often caused “grave harm” to civilians. People have been killed while evacuating and in Israeli-designated humanitarian zones, where hundreds of thousands are crammed into squalid tent camps.

“The Israeli government cannot claim to be keeping Palestinians safe when it kills them along escape routes, bombs so-called safe zones, and cuts off food, water, and sanitation,” said Nadia Hardman, refugee and migrant rights researcher at Human Rights Watch.

The report said the widespread, deliberate demolition of homes and civilian infrastructure in Gaza — some of them to carve a new road bisecting the territory and establish a buffer zone along Israel’s border — was likely to “permanently displace” many Palestinians.

“Such actions of the Israeli authorities amount to ethnic cleansing,” Human Rights Watch said.

The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the report.

Human Rights Watch called on governments to stop supplying weapons to Israel and to comply with a July opinion by the International Court of Justice saying Israel’s presence in the Palestinian territories is unlawful and must end.

The group says its researchers interviewed 39 displaced Palestinians in Gaza, reviewed evacuation orders Israel has released throughout the war and analyzed satellite imagery and video of attacks along evacuation routes and in “safe zones.”

Israel’s blistering campaign in Gaza has killed over 43,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to local health officials who do not distinguish between civilians and combatants.

Around 90% of the territory’s population has fled their homes, with many displaced multiple times. The Israeli offensive has also damaged or destroyed around two-thirds of homes and other buildings in Gaza, according to U.N. assessments.

Israel says it does not deliberately target civilians and blames Hamas for their deaths, saying the militants hide among civilians and operate in residential areas.

US military says it conducted strikes against Houthi rebels

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The U.S. military says it has conducted several days of strikes targeting Yemen’s Houthi rebels.

The strikes included U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy aircraft, including the Navy’s F-35C stealth fighter jet, it said Thursday.

The military also released video showing a strike by an MQ-9 Reaper drone on a mobile missile launcher placed on the back of what appeared to be a truck. A person standing next to the launcher is seen running away after the strike.

“This targeted operation was conducted in response to the Houthi’s repeated and unlawful attacks on international commercial shipping, as well as U.S., coalition and merchant vessels in the Red Sea, Bab al-Mandeb Strait and the Gulf of Aden,” the U.S. military’s Central Command said. “It also aimed to degrade the Houthi’s ability to threaten regional partners.”

The strikes happened Saturday and Sunday.

The Houthis launched an attack this week targeted two U.S. Navy destroyers entering the Red Sea. The Americans said they “engaged and defeated” eight bomb-carrying drones, five anti-ship ballistic missiles and four cruise missiles that the Houthis used to target the vessels.

Food aid interventions can curb climate change-induced hardship. But should they do more?

By FARAI MUTSAKA and MELINA WALLING Associated Press

CHIPINGE, Zimbabwe (AP) — Gertrude Siduna appears to have little appetite for corn farming season. Rather than prepare her land in Zimbabwe's arid southeastern Chipinge district for the crop that has fed her family for generations, the 49-year-old — bitter at repeated droughts that have decimated yields — turns her thoughts to the prices and farming techniques of chilies.

"I pick my chilies from the fields and take them to the processing center close to my home. It's simple," she said. She's received about \$400 from the drought-resistant crop, and plans to grow some more. "Chilies are far better than corn."

Siduna has been growing chilies for a year since being trained under a climate-smart agriculture program funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development. The program was designed to strengthen small-scale farmers' resilience to climate change-induced droughts, many requiring food assistance from the government or international donors. But as climate change worsens droughts and floods worldwide, government agencies and local operators have found that aid efforts can still be made more effective and financially sustainable.

Experts say rich nations like the United States, which have been the biggest contributors of planet-warming emissions historically, have a responsibility to fund humanitarian aid in the countries that are experiencing its effects first and most severely.

The U.S. is the world's largest international donor of food aid, reaching over 60 million people in about 70 countries annually with direct contributions of food or via programs to help farmers adapt to extreme weather. USAID plans to mobilize \$150 billion for climate-related initiatives, according to the agency's climate strategy report.

In Zimbabwe, around 7.7 million people or almost half the country's population require food assistance, according to government and United Nations figures. Frequent droughts are decimating people's ability to feed themselves, a phenomenon worsened by climate change.

Switching from corn to chilies and millets

Water-guzzling white corn has been the staple crop of choice for rural farmers in Zimbabwe since its introduction to much of sub-Saharan Africa by the Portuguese in the 17th century.

But with the threat of drought, some, like Siduna, now think it may be better to buy the staple than grow it.

"I don't lack corn meal, I just use my earnings from chilies to buy it from the local shops," she said.

Unlike corn or other crops that she has typically grown, chilies do well in the hotter, drier conditions. And, because they end up in stores in the United States, they offer cash rewards.

"You have to continuously pray for the rain if you grow corn," said the mother of three. "The crop just can't stand heat. But chilies can. One is assured of a harvest, and the market is readily available."

Other crops such as millets, a cereal tolerant of poor soils, drought and harsh growing conditions, are also gaining traction under climate resilience programs.

In Chiredzi, southeast Zimbabwe, 54-year-old Kenias Chikamhi describes growing corn as "a gamble ... whereas with millets you have a good chance of at least getting something." Millet was the country's staple before the introduction of maize.

But not all the corn is gone yet. Zimbabwe's agriculture ministry says it plans to increase land under maize to 1.8 million hectares (4.4 million acres) by using farming techniques such as digging holes into dry land and mulching to cover the growing crops as well as by planting drought resilient varieties that can better cope with the lack of rain.

The country harvested about 700,000 tons of corn this year, 70% down from the season before and far short of the 2 million tons required annually for humans and livestock.

Solar-powered irrigation as rivers dry

Farming techniques are also changing.

Another of USAID's initiatives has seen a community garden in Mutandahwe village, where Siduna lives,

irrigated by three small solar panels. The panels pump water from a borehole into storage tanks that are connected to the garden taps by pipes, turning the 1-hectare plot of vegetables like onions, leaf cabbage and cow peas into an island of lush green.

Solar-powered community gardens have been spreading across the district and much of the country's dry areas.

"We were struggling walking long distances to fetch water from rivers, and right now the rivers are dry," said Muchaneta Mutowa, secretary of the plot. The plot is shared by 60 members, each growing vegetables they can eat and sell.

"We now have easy access to reliable water that flows from the taps (and) we don't pay for the sun," she said. And money from the sale of vegetables goes a long way to pay for family basics such as school fees.

Members pay a dollar each into a savings pot that can be used to lend each other for a small interest or pay for minor repairs "so that we are not always reliant on the donor," said Mutohwa.

Working to make food aid programs more effective

Because USAID's investments can be so consequential for receiving countries, it's important they're done right, said Lora Iannotti, a professor who studies global maternal and youth nutrition at the Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis.

Richer countries like the U.S. have tended to use direct donations of surplus staple and commodity crops like corn and wheat as a way to benefit their own farmers, according to Iannotti's research.

Iannotti has seen advances in food aid considering dietary variety, but thinks there's room for improvement. Undernourishment became more prevalent after the COVID-19 pandemic, and climate change is making hunger a more pressing issue than ever, with crises that resemble "stuff from 100 years ago," she said.

Daniel Maxwell, a professor of food security at Tufts University, thinks countries providing aid also need strategies to address problems "causing the hunger in the first place," whether that's climate change, war or other factors. He also thinks countries need a more balanced approach including projects promoting health, protection from violence or nutrition.

USAID and the U.S. Department of Agriculture haven't yet explained how food aid efforts might be changed or altered by the incoming U.S. administration, but the delay on renewing expired Farm Bill legislation does hold up USDA programming including food aid projects in a variety of ways, said Alexis Taylor, undersecretary of trade and foreign agricultural affairs at USDA.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office, the investigative arm of Congress, released reports finding that USAID and its partner agencies needed to improve the ways they measured the outcomes of their programs.

USAID says they worked with the GAO to address its recommendations. The GAO has closed six of the eight recommendations, indicating satisfactory response. The two remaining recommendations will be resolved with the release of the latest Global Food Security Strategy Implementation Plan in October, a spokesperson for USAID said.

"We are committing a lot of U.S. taxpayer dollars," said Chelsa Kenney, the GAO's director for international affairs issues. "It's important that we're good stewards of those taxpayer dollars to ensure that the kind of programming that we are providing to these countries is really making a difference."

Japan's sake brewers hope UNESCO heritage listing can boost rice wine's appeal

By YURI KAGEYAMA Associated Press

OME, Japan (AP) — Deep in a dark warehouse the sake sleeps, stored in rows of giant tanks, each holding more than 10,000 liters (2,640 gallons) of the Japanese rice wine that is the product of brewing techniques dating back more than 1,000 years.

Junichiro Ozawa, the 18th-generation head of Ozawa Brewery, founded in 1702, hopes sake-brewing will win recognition as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, when the decision is made next month.

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"We always think about the people who're enjoying our sake when we make it. I'm now so excited, imagining the faces of all the people around the world," he told reporters Wednesday during a tour of his brewery on the pastoral outskirts of Tokyo.

Sake, the drink of choice for the nobility in "The Tale of Genji" — Japan's most celebrated work of literature — has been widening its appeal, boosted by the growing international popularity of Japanese cuisine.

Sake exports from Japan total more than 41 billion yen (\$265 million) a year, with the biggest destinations being the U.S. and China, according to the Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association.

That's up from about 22 billion yen in 2018. But exports still make up a tiny fraction of overall sake production in Japan. Brazil, Mexico and Southeast Asia, as well as France and the rest of Europe, all places where Japanese restaurants are gaining popularity, are starting to take a liking to sake.

What's key to sake-making, which takes about two months, including fermentation and pressing, are the rice and the water.

For a product to be categorized Japanese sake, the rice must be Japanese. The relatively soft quality of freshwater in Japan, like the supplies provided by the two wells at Ozawa Brewery, is also critical.

Among Ozawa's sake is the full-bodied aromatic Junmai Daiginjo, one of the top offerings, with 15% alcohol content and costing about 3,630 yen (\$23) for a 720 milliliter bottle.

Karakuti Nigorizake is unrefined sake, murky and not clear like usual sake, with 17% alcohol content and a rugged no-nonsense taste. It sells for 2,420 yen (\$16) for a 1,800 milliliter bottle.

The religious connotations of sake are evident at the brewery. The big cedar-leaves ball hanging under the eaves is a symbol of a shrine for the god of sake-making. In Japan, sake is used to purify and to celebrate. Sips from a cup signify the sealing of a marriage.

"Sake is not just an alcoholic beverage. It is Japanese culture itself," said Hitoshi Utsunomiya, director of the Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association.

The UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage designation is given to not just historical monuments but also practices passed down generations, such as oral traditions, performing arts, rituals and festivals.

It's not meant to be used for commercial purposes. But sake officials make no secret of their hope that it will boost global sales, helping the tradition stay alive amid competition from beer, wine and other modern beverages.

Among previous Intangible Cultural Heritage inclusions are Kabuki theater and Gagaku court music from Japan, as well as Sona, which are drawings on sand in Angola; the Chinese zither called guqin and Cremonese violin craftsmanship from Italy. Washoku, or Japanese cuisine, won the honors in 2013.

One reason for sake's growing popularity around the world is that its smooth flavor goes well with varieties of food, including sushi, spicy Asian and Western dishes, says Max Del Vita, a certified sake sommelier and co-founder of The Sake Company, an import and distribution retailer in Singapore.

"These brewers are cultural stewards, passing down techniques through generations and blending ancient practices with quiet innovation," he told The Associated Press. "Sake is more than a drink. It is a living embodiment of Japan's seasonal rhythms, community values and artistic heritage."

1 million migrants in the US rely on temporary protections that Trump could target

By ANITA SNOW and CEDAR ATTANASIO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Maribel Hidalgo fled her native Venezuela a year ago with a 1-year-old son, trudging for days through Panama's Darien Gap, then riding the rails across Mexico to the United States.

They were living in the U.S. when the Biden administration announced Venezuelans would be offered Temporary Protected Status, which allows people already in the United States to stay and work legally if their homelands are deemed unsafe. People from 17 countries, including Haiti, Afghanistan, Sudan and recently Lebanon, are currently receiving such relief.

But President-elect Donald Trump and his running mate, JD Vance, have promised mass deportations and

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suggested they would scale back the use of TPS that covers more than 1 million immigrants. They have highlighted unfounded claims that Haitians who live and work legally in Springfield, Ohio, as TPS holders were eating their neighbors' pets. Trump also amplified disputed claims made by the mayor of Aurora, Colorado, about Venezuelan gangs taking over an apartment complex.

"What Donald Trump has proposed doing is we're going to stop doing mass parole," Vance said at an Arizona rally in October, mentioning a separate immigration status called humanitarian parole that is also at risk. "We're going to stop doing mass grants of Temporary Protected Status."

Hidalgo wept as she discussed her plight with a reporter as her son, now 2, slept in a stroller outside the New York migrant hotel where they live. At least 7.7 million people have fled political violence and economic turmoil in Venezuela in one of the biggest displacements worldwide.

"My only hope was TPS," Hidalgo said. "My worry, for example, is that after everything I suffered with my son so that I could make it to this country, that they send me back again."

Venezuelans along with Haitians and Salvadorans are the largest group of TPS beneficiaries and have the most at stake.

Haiti's international airport shut down this week after gangs opened fire at a commercial flight landing in Port-Au-Prince while a new interim prime minister was sworn in. The Federal Aviation Administration barred U.S. airlines from landing there for 30 days.

"It's creating a lot of anxiety," said Vania André, editor-in-chief for The Haitian Times, an online newspaper covering the Haitian diaspora. "Sending thousands of people back to Haiti is not an option. The country is not equipped to handle the widespread gang violence already and cannot absorb all those people."

Designations by the Homeland Security secretary offer relief for up to 18 months but are extended in many cases. The designation for El Salvador ends in March. Designations for Sudan, Ukraine, and Venezuela end in April. Others expire later.

Federal regulations say a designation can be terminated before it expires, but that has never happened, and it requires 60 days' notice.

TPS is similar to the lesser-known Deferred Enforcement Departure Program that Trump used to reward Venezuelan exile supporters as his first presidency was ending, shielding 145,000 from deportation for 18 months.

Attorney Ahilan T. Arulanantham, who successfully challenged Trump's earlier efforts to allow TPS designations for several countries to expire, doesn't doubt the president-elect will try again.

"It's possible that some people in his administration will recognize that stripping employment authorization for more than a million people, many of whom have lived in this country for decades, is not good policy" and economically disastrous, said Arulanantham, who teaches at the University of California, Los Angeles School of Law, and helps direct its Center for Immigration Law and Policy. "But nothing in Trump's history suggests that they would care about such considerations."

Courts blocked designations from expiring for Haiti, Sudan, Nicaragua and El Salvador until well into President Joe Biden's term. Homeland Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas then renewed them.

Arulanantham said he "absolutely" could see another legal challenge, depending on what the Trump administration does.

Congress established TPS in 1990, when civil war was raging in El Salvador. Members were alarmed to learn some Salvadorans were tortured and executed after being deported from the U.S. Other designations protected people during wars in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kuwait, from genocidal violence in Rwanda, and after volcanic eruptions in Montserrat, a British territory in the Caribbean, in 1995 and 1997.

A designation is not a pathway to U.S. permanent residence or citizenship, but applicants can try to change their status through other immigration processes.

Advocates are pressing the White House for a new TPS designation for Nicaraguans before Biden leaves office. Less than 3,000 are still covered by the temporary protections issued in 1998 after Hurricane Mitch battered the country. People who fled much later under oppression from President Daniel Ortega's government don't enjoy the same protection from deportation.

"It's a moral obligation" for the Biden administration, said Maria Bilbao, of the American Friends Service

Committee.

Elena, a 46-year-old Nicaraguan who has lived in the United States illegally for 25 years, hopes Biden moves quickly.

"He should do it now," said Elena, who lives in Florida and insisted only her first name be used because she fears deportation. "Not in January. Not in December. Now."

Ukrainian soldiers focus on keeping Russian advances at bay and brace for storm to come from US

By VASILISA STEPANENKO and YEHOR KONOVALOV Associated Press

KHARKIV REGION, Ukraine (AP) — The four drones were designed to carry bombs, but instead the men of Ukraine's Khartia brigade pack them with food, water and handwarmers and launch them in darkness toward the front line, a 15-minute flight away.

The unit commander who goes by the callsign Kit, or "cat," pilots the tiny uncrewed aircraft from a basement room he jokingly calls their Airbnb. Guided by the drone's night-vision camera, he drops the 10-kilogram (22-pound) packages one by one as close as he can to the position where as many as five infantrymen battle Russian forces in the late autumn chill. The delivery will hold them for two or three days.

That's about as far as Kit dares look into the future. He knows that the reelection of Donald Trump will change something in his life, but as far as he and other Ukrainian soldiers on the front are concerned, trying to figure out how is a game for politicians. For him, all that matters is the distance he measures in the meters (yards) that Russian forces advance or retreat in the front-line sector that is his responsibility.

"We are trying with all our might to destroy them and win back our territories, so that it does not go any further, so that there are no more destroyed cities and destroyed lives," Kit said. "We need to focus on the present in our work and try to do it effectively in the here and now."

But he cannot escape the sense of a gathering storm.

Russia is increasingly hitting the Kharkiv region with unstoppable, building-leveling glide bombs and swarms of drones and chipping away at territory there. Its troops are advancing in the Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia regions. Up to 12,000 North Korean troops have been sent to Russia's Kursk border region to help beat back Ukrainian forces there, according to U.S., South Korean and Ukrainian intelligence assessments.

Trump, who has called President Vladimir Putin "pretty smart" for invading Ukraine, has repeatedly criticized American backing of Ukraine. He characterized Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy as "the greatest salesman on Earth" for winning U.S. aid.

Zelenskyy was among the first world leaders to publicly congratulate Trump, and said the two discussed how to end "Russian aggression against Ukraine" when they met in September.

Between now and Trump's Jan. 20 inauguration, the Biden administration has said it will send as much aid to Ukraine as possible to help hold back Russian forces and possess a strong hand in any potential peace negotiations. But Russia is pressing just as hard for an advantage in what most believe are crucial weeks to come.

Aviator, a Khartia soldier launching the supply drones, said he can only do his job and hope for the best. His attention is fixed on how many hours remain before the coming dawn, when Russian forces will be able to spot the uncrewed aircraft and shoot them down. If his mission fails, he knows that the men he calls brothers will suffer.

"You feel you're useful, that you are in the right place, that the lives and health of our brothers depend on your work," said Aviator, who returned to Ukraine from a job in Poland to join the army. "We're just doing our job, we don't have time to worry about the election."

Tolstiy, who runs a drone repair workshop not far away, knows firsthand what happens to territory captured by Russia. A former infantryman, he fought in Bakhmut and watched the city fall to Russian forces who bombed it to rubble. He confessed that sometimes, reading the news makes him want to give up. But that's simply unthinkable.

"It's like we're in another world here," he said. "When you see that your comrades are injured or killed, it motivates you."

Trump issues early challenge to GOP Senate with defiant nominations

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Just hours after Republican Sen. John Thune was elected as the incoming Senate majority leader on Wednesday, President-elect Donald Trump presented him with one of his first tests — an announcement that he intends to nominate controversial Rep. Matt Gaetz as attorney general.

The Florida Republican is one of the more universally disliked members of Congress, including among GOP lawmakers after he led the effort to oust House Speaker Kevin McCarthy last year. He has spent his congressional career agitating against the Justice Department and has been under a House Ethics investigation probing whether he engaged in sexual misconduct and illicit drug use, accepted improper gifts and sought to obstruct government investigations of his conduct. Gaetz denies the allegations.

Asked about the nomination as he left a Senate vote, Thune smiled and declined to answer. "That's probably a good question for the chairman of the Judiciary Committee," he said.

An hour earlier, the likely incoming chairman of the Judiciary panel, Republican Sen. Charles Grassley of Iowa, also deflected, saying he doesn't know Gaetz but will look at the nomination. "Don't ask me any other questions," Grassley said.

It's a familiar posture for Republican senators who have lived through the last eight years dodging questions about Trump and defending him, even after he tried to overturn his election defeat in 2020 and his supporters violently stormed the U.S. Capitol. But the stakes are even higher now that he has been decisively elected to a second term. Congressional Republicans have rallied intensely around him, betting their political futures on his success.

Two months before Trump even takes office, he is already challenging those congressional Republicans to defy him as he nominates potentially controversial figures to his Cabinet — including Gaetz, former Democratic House Rep. Tulsi Gabbard for director of national intelligence and conservative media personality Pete Hegseth for secretary of defense. On Sunday, Trump even said in a post on X that he wants the new Senate leader to allow him to make appointments when the chamber is on recess, bypassing confirmation votes altogether.

"I think it's a little bit of a test," said Republican Sen. Kevin Cramer of North Dakota, who called the Gaetz nomination a "Hail Mary" pass from Trump. Cramer said he sees Gaetz as a disruptive force in the House and has concerns about the "serious allegations" against him, but stopped short of saying he wouldn't vote for his confirmation.

"It will take a lot of political capital to get him across," Cramer said, adding that "there will forever be tension between the branches."

What's unclear is how much political capital Trump will have to expend to get his picks through — or whether it will even be necessary. Republicans will have a 53-seat majority in the Senate next year, giving them room to lose a few votes.

Immediately after his election as the incoming GOP leader, Thune suggested that the Senate will not fully relinquish its power to vet nominations — but kept the door open to Trump's suggested changes.

"The Senate has an advise and consent rule in the Constitution," Thune said, adding that Senate Republicans will do everything they can to get Trump's nominees quickly in place.

"How that happens remains to be seen," Thune said.

While Trump's announcement about Gaetz sent an immediate shock wave around Capitol Hill, many Republican senators who will be tasked with confirming him were reluctant to publicly criticize the pick.

Texas Sen. John Cornyn, a member of the Judiciary panel, said he didn't know Gaetz "other than his public persona," and said he won't "prejudge any of these" nominations.

Wyoming Sen. John Barrasso, elected Wednesday as the incoming No. 2 Republican in the Senate next

year, would only say that Trump "is going to continue to make his appointments. We're going to continue to look forward to them coming to the Senate and have hearings and get his Cabinet confirmed as quickly as possible."

"I've got nothing for you," said Sen. Katie Britt, an Alabama Republican. "We'll see," said Sen. Ron Johnson of Wisconsin when asked whether he would support Gaetz's confirmation.

A few GOP senators praised Gaetz, who resigned from the House shortly after the announcement, ending the House Ethics investigation and making way for a replacement to be elected before the new Congress is sworn in Jan. 3.

"I've known Matt for a very long time, we're friends," said Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, who was nominated for secretary of state Wednesday, but was instead flooded with questions about Gaetz. "I think he would do a very good job for the president."

Gaetz is "a smart, clever guy," said South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham, though he said "he'll have to answer some tough questions in the hearing, and we'll see how he does."

Other Republican senators, like Cramer, were skeptical while stopping short of saying they would oppose his nomination.

Gaetz "will have his work cut out for him," said North Carolina Sen. Thom Tillis, adding that it should "make for a popcorn-eating confirmation hearing."

Maine Sen. Susan Collins said she was "shocked" by Gaetz's nomination.

"I recognize that the president-elect has the right to nominate whomever he wishes, but we in Congress have a responsibility under the Constitution and our advise and consent, which will lead to hearings, an FBI background check and an awful lot of questions being asked in this case," Collins said.

Gaetz has vehemently denied any wrongdoing, and said last year that the Justice Department's investigation into sex trafficking allegations involving underage girls had ended with no federal charges against him.

Democrats were appalled.

"This nomination is the first test of whether Republicans are willing to stand up to Donald Trump and go with conscience and conviction as opposed to just politics," said Connecticut Sen. Richard Blumenthal, a Democratic member of the Judiciary panel.

New Mexico Sen. Martin Heinrich, D-N.M., was even more blunt.

"People voted for cheaper eggs, not whatever the f@#€ this is," he posted on X, referring to last week's election.

Trump's mainstream picks for top foreign policy posts could reassure allies — and worry China

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER and DIDI TANG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump is famously unconventional, but he made conventional picks for his two top foreign policy positions. That could be reassuring to American allies, while China and Iran have reasons to be wary.

Trump on Wednesday announced his choice of Sen. Marco Rubio for secretary of state. Two days earlier, he picked Rep. Mike Waltz for national security adviser.

Both men share Trump's hard-line stance on China and Iran. They have shown themselves willing to adapt their foreign-policy positions to echo aspects of Trump's more isolationist "America First" approach — a requirement for anyone serving under a president who demands absolute loyalty.

But both are fairly mainstream conservatives with foreign policy experience who have previously differed with Trump on Russia, NATO and other issues.

They've also been open to working with Democrats — a point underscored when Sen. Mark Warner, the Democratic chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said Rubio would be a "strong voice for American interests" abroad.

Rubio and Waltz stand in contrast to some other national security selections. Trump named Pete Hegseth,

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a Fox News host untested on the global stage, as defense secretary. He picked a congresswoman with little foreign policy experience, Rep. Elise Stefanik, as ambassador to the United Nations. His choice for ambassador to Israel, former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, rejects the two-state solution to the conflict with Palestinians.

And U.S. allies may be relieved that Rubio was selected over Richard Grenell for secretary of state. Grenell is an ardent and combative Trump advocate and former diplomat and intelligence official, with a reputation for favoring autocratic strongmen abroad.

Rubio, a 14-year veteran of the Senate, is a senior member of the Senate Intelligence Committee and Foreign Relations Committee. His roots as the son of Cuban immigrants who worked as a bartender and a hotel maid after coming to the United States helped shape his tough positions on the leftist governments of Cuba and Venezuela.

While Trump has alarmed U.S. allies in Europe with his criticism of the NATO military alliance and praise of Russian President Vladimir Putin, whose war on Ukraine has galvanized European fears of Russian expansionism, Rubio was instrumental in the Senate in securing the U.S. position in NATO. He and Democratic Sen. Tim Kaine spearheaded legislation to bar any president from pulling the U.S. out of NATO without Senate approval or an act of Congress.

But Rubio, like Waltz in the House, has altered his public statements and legislative votes to more closely align with Trump's criticism of the Biden administration's backing of Ukraine as it battles invading Russian forces.

After early votes and supportive statements for Ukraine after Russia's 2022 attack, Rubio and Waltz more recently voted against additional military aid to Ukraine. Rubio, like Trump, has increasingly stressed the need to end the war.

That's in contrast to Ukraine supporters in both parties who say the U.S. must support Ukraine's fight so it gets the best possible terms in any eventual cease-fire.

"I don't think he (Trump) puts people in positions that are going to disagree with him. He wants people to be loyal, and I don't think he's looking for people that are going to challenge his beliefs," said Kelly Grieco, a senior fellow at the Stimson Center, a Washington-based research institute. "So I think this is actually quite revealing, probably, of what the direction of U.S. policy will be, that it will be really hawkish on China in particular. And I think also on Iran."

In China, analysts consider Rubio and Waltz to be "ultra-hawkish" toward Beijing and have taken to calling them part of the "Florida faction" in foreign policy, since both are from the state. Trump piled tariffs on China in his first term and promises more tariffs in his next one.

Rubio has argued for a more confrontational approach toward China, and he has been a vocal supporter of Taiwan, which Beijing sees as Chinese territory.

Rubio is known in China as the "anti-China vanguard" for his ideologically driven, anti-communism stance. He landed on Beijing's blacklist in 2020 over his support for the minority Uyghurs in China's far western region of Xinjiang and for Hong Kong activists. He co-chaired the bipartisan Congressional-Executive Commission on China, which focuses on human rights, and introduced and supported numerous bills on China's rights issues.

The sanctions Beijing imposed on Rubio bar him from visiting the country. It's unclear if China's foreign minister will meet with him given the ban, or how the ban will otherwise affect his dealings with Chinese officials.

For his part, Waltz is a former Green Beret with combat tours in Afghanistan and the Middle East, a former defense policy director in the Pentagon, and a senior member of the House committees for armed services, intelligence and oversight.

He's supported Western backing for Ukraine, saying doing nothing would invite further Russian aggression in Europe and draw in U.S. troops. But Waltz increasingly emphasizes the importance of Ukraine's neighbors stepping up, saying Europeans should be spending as much on Ukraine's defense as the United States does.

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In a Nov. 2 article he co-wrote for The Economist, Waltz argued that China has benefited from the Biden administration's failures to deter conflicts in Europe and in the Middle East.

In 2021, Waltz introduced a resolution calling on the U.S. Olympic Committee to withdraw from the 2022 Winter Games in Beijing.

"The world cannot legitimize the CCP's acts of genocide in Xinjiang, destruction of the democratic rights of Hong Kong, and dangerous suppression of the coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan that cost lives by sending delegations to Beijing," Waltz said then, referring to the Chinese Communist Party.

At a daily briefing in Beijing, Lin Jian, a spokesman for the Chinese foreign ministry, said China would not comment on Trump's appointments.

Shen Dingli, a Shanghai-based international relations expert, noted the gap between Trump and his nominees on China. "Trump didn't say China was an enemy during his first term and the presidential elections, but the hawkish officials he has appointed may believe China is an enemy to some extent," Shen said.

Robert Manning, a China expert at the Stimson Center, said Trump is not as ideologically driven as Rubio but he raised concerns that Trump's foreign policy could be more disruptive than President Joe Biden's.

"I think some in the Trump camp want to get rid of the Communist Party of China, which I think is a fool's errand, but nonetheless I think they're more focused on a different endgame than achieving a stable balance of power," he said.

Gaetz pick shows value Trump places on loyalty — and retribution — as he returns to Washington

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump has had few defenders in Congress as reliable as Matt Gaetz, who has thundered at one prosecutor after another for perceived bias against the president-elect and emphatically amplified the Republican's rallying cry that the criminal investigations into him are "witch hunts."

That kinship was rewarded Wednesday when Trump named Gaetz as his pick for attorney general, turning to a conservative loyalist in place of more established lawyers who'd been seen as contenders.

In announcing his selection of Gaetz as attorney general and John Ratcliffe a day earlier as CIA director, Trump underscored the premium he places on loyalty, citing both men's support for him during the Russia investigation as central to their qualifications and signaling his expectation that leaders in his administration should function not only as a president's protector but also as an instrument of retribution.

The dynamic matters at a time when Trump, who will enter office in the wake of two federal indictments expected to soon evaporate and a Supreme Court opinion blessing a president's exclusive authority over the Justice Department, has threatened to pursue retaliation against perceived adversaries.

"Matt will root out the systemic corruption at DOJ, and return the department to its true mission of fighting Crime, and upholding our Democracy and Constitution. We must have Honesty, Integrity, and Transparency at DOJ," Trump wrote in a social media post about Gaetz, a Florida Republican.

The rhetoric from Trump reflects an about-face in approach from President Joe Biden, who has repeatedly taken a hands-off approach from the Justice Department even while facing a special counsel investigation into his handling of classified information and as his son, Hunter, was indicted and convicted on tax and gun charges.

Democrats immediately sounded the alarm, with Sen. Dick Durbin, the Democratic chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, saying Gaetz "would be a disaster" in part because of Trump's threat to use the Justice Department "to seek revenge on his political enemies." The president of Common Cause, a good government group, called the selection "shocking" and "a serious threat to the fair and equal enforcement of the law in our nation." Even several Senate Republicans expressed concern about the Gaetz pick.

That Trump would openly value Gaetz's role in "defeating the Russia, Russia, Russia Hoax, and exposing alarming and systemic Government Corruption and Weaponization" is not altogether surprising. In his first term, Trump fired an FBI director who refused to pledge loyalty to him at a private White House dinner and an attorney general who recused himself from the Justice Department's investigation into potential

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ties between Russia and his 2016 presidential campaign.

"I think this selection indicates that President-elect Trump was looking for an attorney general whose views were closely aligned with him with respect to the appropriate role of the Department of Justice," said former federal prosecutor Robert Mintz.

Ratcliffe, who served as Trump's director of national intelligence in the final months of his first term, rose to prominence on Capitol Hill as a staunch defender of Trump. He was a member of Trump's advisory team during his first impeachment hearings in 2019 and pointedly grilled multiple witnesses about the Russia investigation — including an FBI agent who led the inquiry but also traded anti-Trump text messages with a colleague.

That work was credited by Trump in his selection announcement, as he praised Ratcliffe for "exposing fake Russian collusion" and having "been a warrior for Truth and Honesty with the American Public."

Gaetz would be the first attorney general in decades without Justice Department experience, and in recent years became embroiled himself in a federal sex trafficking investigation that ended without criminal charges.

Hours before the announcement, Gaetz said in a social media post that there needs to be a "full court press against this WEAPONIZED government that has been turned against our people." He added: "And if that means ABOLISHING every one of the three letter agencies, from the FBI to the ATF, I'm ready to get going!" If confirmed as attorney general, he would oversee both the FBI and the ATF.

Advancing the theme of vengeance, billionaire Trump supporter Elon Musk weighed in on the Gaetz appointment with a post that said: "The Hammer of Justice is coming."

Gaetz has used the seat in Congress he first won in 2016 to rail against the Justice Department, repeatedly decrying what he — and Trump — contends is a criminal justice system biased against conservatives. He has blasted law enforcement officials he has perceived as being either overtly anti-Trump or ineffective in protecting Trump's interests.

When Robert Mueller visited Capitol Hill to discuss the findings of the Russia investigation, Gaetz condemned the prosecutor for leading a team that the congressman said was "so biased." The Trump Justice Department appointed a special prosecutor, John Durham, to examine errors in the Russia investigation, but Gaetz scolded Durham too for failing to uncover enough damaging information about the FBI's inquiry into Trump.

"For the people like the (committee) chairman who put trust in you, I think you let them down. I think you let the country down. You are one of the barriers to the true accountability that we need," Gaetz said.

He's directed outright fury at FBI Director Christopher Wray, snapping at him last year that FBI applicants in Florida "deserve better than you" and at the current attorney general, Merrick Garland. In 2022, Garland appointed special counsel Jack Smith to investigate Trump's hoarding of classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida and his efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election.

Both investigations ended in indictments expected to wind down before Trump takes office. Smith, too, is also likely to be gone by the time Gaetz arrives and a new FBI director is also expected to be appointed given Trump's lingering discontent with Wray, his own appointee.

"None of us can predict exactly what will happen there," said Ryan Fayhee, a former Justice Department national security prosecutor.

He added: "I think it's just more of a question of the department continuing to be independent and largely resting on the broad shoulders of the career prosecutors and agents that have held themselves to the highest standards."

China's president will unveil a megaport in Peru, but locals say they're being left out

By ISABEL DEBRE and FRANKLIN BRICEÑO Associated Press
CHANCAAY, Peru (AP) — On the edge of Peru's coastal desert, a remote fishing town where a third of all residents have no running water is being transformed into a huge deep-water port to cash in on the

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inexorable rise of Chinese interest in resource-rich South America.

The megaport of Chancay, a \$1.3 billion project majority-owned by the Chinese shipping giant Cosco, is turning this outpost of bobbing fishing boats into an important node of the global economy. China's President Xi Jinping inaugurates the port Thursday during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in Peru.

The development — expected to encompass 15 quays and a large industrial park drawing more than \$3.5 billion in investment over a decade — has met a skeptical response from impoverished villagers, who say it is depriving them of fishing waters and bringing no economic benefit to locals.

"Our fishing spots no longer exist here. They destroyed them," said 78-year-old fisherman Julius Caesar — "like the emperor of Rome" — gesturing toward the dockside cranes. "I don't blame the Chinese for trying to mine this place for all it's worth. I blame our government for not protecting us."

The Peruvian government hopes the port 60 kilometers (37 miles) north of Lima will become a strategic transshipment hub for the region, opening a new line connecting South America to Asia and speeding trade across the Pacific for Peru's blueberries, Brazil's soybeans and Chile's copper, among other exports. Officials cite the port's potential to generate millions of dollars in revenues and turn coastal cities into so-called special economic zones with tax breaks to lure investment.

"We Peruvians are focused primarily on the well-being of Peruvians," Foreign Minister Elmer Schialer told The Associated Press.

But many of Chancay's 60,000 residents are unconvinced. Fishermen returning to port with smaller catches complain that they have already lost out.

The dredging of the port — which sucked sediment from the seabed to create a shipping channel 17 meters (56 feet) deep — has ruined fish breeding grounds, locals said.

"I've been out in the water all day and I'm always needing to venture farther," said Rafael Ávila, a 28-year-old fisherman with sand in his hair, returning to shore empty-handed and exhausted.

"This used to be enough," he said, pointing at his painted dinghy. "Now I need a larger, more expensive boat to reach the fish."

To make extra cash, Ávila started offering occasional joyrides to selfie-taking visitors wanting to get a glimpse at the hulking Chinese ships.

With some of the world's largest container ships to berth at Chancay Port in January 2025, residents also fear the arrival of pollution and oil spills. In 2022, a botched tanker delivery at La Pampilla refinery nearby sent thousands of barrels of crude oil spilling into Peru's famously biodiverse waters, killing countless fish and putting legions of fishermen out of work.

Today a glance at the moribund town center, featuring mostly empty seafood restaurants, tells the story of diminished fishing stocks and decimated tourism even without the port being operational.

The port's breakwater changed the currents and destroyed good surfing conditions, locals said, affecting everyone from ice vendors to truckers to restaurant owners. "No to the megaport" is spray-painted on a wall overlooking the waterfront.

"This port is a monster that's come here to screw us," said 40-year-old Rosa Collantes, cleaning and gutting slimy drum fish on the shore. "People come to the port and they say 'Wow, tremendous!' but they don't see the reality."

Port authorities say they're aware of the stark contrast between the sleek modern port and the surrounding village of Chancay, where many live on unpaved roads lined with ragged shacks and littered with trash.

"You cannot build a state-of-the-art port and have a city next to it that has no drinking water, no sewage, a collapsing hospital and no educational centers," said Mario de las Casas, a manager for Cosco in Chancay, adding that the company had already launched studies to determine how the port could help reduce inequality and spur local growth.

"The port should not be a blemish," De las Casas said.

Matt Gaetz once faced a sex trafficking investigation by the Justice Department he could now lead

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump's pick for attorney general, Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida, was once embroiled in a sex trafficking investigation by the Justice Department he's been tapped to lead, and has been under scrutiny by the House Ethics Committee over allegations including sexual misconduct. That probe effectively ended Wednesday, though, when Gaetz resigned from Congress.

Gaetz, a staunch Trump defender, has spent years enmeshed in scandals that threaten to derail his confirmation as the nation's top federal law enforcement officer by the Republican-led Senate.

Gaetz has vehemently denied any wrongdoing, and said last year that the Justice Department's investigation into sex trafficking allegations involving underage girls had ended with no federal charges against him.

Trump's attorney general is expected to oversee radical changes to the Justice Department, which has been the target of Trump's ire over two criminal cases it brought accusing him of conspiring to overturn the 2020 election and hoarding classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate. Trump, who cast himself as the victim of politically motivated prosecutions, vowed repeatedly on the campaign trail to carry out retribution against his political enemies if returned to the White House.

It's unlikely Gaetz would be confirmed in time to oversee special counsel Jack Smith, who brought two federal indictments against Trump that are both expected to wind down before the incoming president takes office. Smith is expected to leave his post before Trump takes office, but special counsels are expected to produce reports on their work that historically are made public, and it remains unclear when such a document might be released.

In a statement Wednesday announcing his pick, Trump said Gaetz would root out "systemic corruption" at the Justice Department and return the department "to its true mission of fighting crime and upholding our democracy and constitution."

In a post on X, formerly known as Twitter, Gaetz wrote, "It will be an honor to serve as President Trump's Attorney General!"

Hours before the announcement, Gaetz said in a social media post that there needs to be a "full court press against this WEAPONIZED government." He added, "And if that means ABOLISHING every one of the three letter agencies, from the FBI to the ATF, I'm ready to get going!" If confirmed as attorney general, he would oversee both the FBI and the ATF, formally known as the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

Inside a private meeting of House Republicans, the news that Trump had chosen Gaetz to lead the Justice Department sent a shock. Republican Rep. Mike Simpson of Idaho said he has a hard time believing Gaetz will be able to get through the Senate confirmation process. Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska said she didn't believe Gaetz was a serious candidate.

Some of Gaetz' allies in the House defended him as Trump's pick, pointing to his experience as a member on the House Judiciary Committee. Asked Wednesday whether she thinks Gaetz could be confirmed, Rep. Anna Paulina Luna, a fellow Florida Republican, told reporters that many will try to "smear him," but "the evidence will speak for itself."

The federal sex trafficking investigation that began under Attorney General Bill Barr during Trump's first term focused on allegations that Gaetz and onetime political ally Joel Greenberg paid underage girls and escorts or offered them gifts in exchange for sex.

Greenberg, a fellow Republican who served as the tax collector in Florida's Seminole County, admitted as part of a plea deal with prosecutors in 2021 that he paid women and an underage girl to have sex with him and other men. The men were not identified in court documents when he pleaded guilty. Greenberg was sentenced in late 2022 to 11 years in prison.

Federal investigators scrutinized a trip that Gaetz took to the Bahamas with a group of women and a doctor who donated to his campaign, and whether the women were paid or received gifts to have sex with the men, according to people familiar with the matter who were not allowed to publicly discuss the

investigation. Prosecutors also investigated whether Gaetz and his associates tried to secure government jobs for some of the women, and scrutinized Gaetz's connections to the medical marijuana sector, including whether his associates sought to influence legislation Gaetz sponsored, the people have said.

Gaetz had remained under investigation by the House Ethics Committee over allegations that he was part of a scheme that led to the sex trafficking of a 17-year-old girl.

The committee began its review of Gaetz in April 2021, deferred its work in response to a Justice Department request, and renewed its work shortly after Gaetz announced that the Justice Department had ended a sex trafficking investigation.

Over the summer, the committee provided an unusual public update into its long-running investigation, saying its review now includes whether Gaetz engaged in sexual misconduct and illicit drug use, accepted improper gifts and sought to obstruct government investigations of his conduct. Gaetz has categorically denied all the allegations before the committee.

Rep. Michael Guest, the Republican chair of the House Ethics Committee, had told The Associated Press that Gaetz's nomination did not change the panel's ongoing probe. But Gaetz's resignation means the committee will no longer have jurisdiction to continue its probe.

Investigation into Chinese hacking reveals 'broad and significant' spying effort, FBI says

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal investigation into Chinese government efforts to hack into U.S. telecommunications networks has revealed a "broad and significant" cyberespionage campaign aimed at stealing information from Americans who work in government and politics, the FBI said Wednesday.

Hackers affiliated with Beijing have compromised the networks of "multiple" telecommunications companies to obtain customer call records and gain access to the private communications of "a limited number of individuals," according to a joint statement issued by the FBI and the federal Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency.

The FBI did not identify any of the individuals targeted by the hackers but said most of them "are primarily involved in government or political activity."

The hackers also sought to copy "certain information that was subject to U.S. law enforcement requests pursuant to court orders," the FBI said, suggesting the hackers may have been trying to compromise programs like those subject to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, or FISA, which grants American spy agencies sweeping powers to surveil the communications of individuals suspected of being agents of a foreign power."

The warning comes after several high-profile hacking incidents that U.S. authorities have linked to China, part of what they say is an effort to steal technological and government information while also targeting vital infrastructure like the electrical grid.

In September, the FBI announced that it had disrupted a vast Chinese hacking operation known as Flax Typhoon that involved the installation of malicious software on more than 200,000 consumer devices, including cameras, video recorders and home and office routers. The devices were then used to create a massive network of infected computers, or botnet, that could then be used to carry out other cyber crimes.

Last month, officials said hackers linked to China targeted the phones of then-presidential candidate Donald Trump and his running mate, Sen. JD Vance, along with people associated with Democratic candidate Vice President Kamala Harris.

Authorities did not disclose how or if the operations announced Wednesday are connected to the earlier campaigns.

In their statement Wednesday, the FBI and CISA said officials are working with the telecommunication industry and hacking victims to shore up defenses against continuing attempts at cyberespionage.

"We expect our understanding of these compromises to grow as the investigation continues," the agencies wrote.

China has rejected accusations from U.S. officials that it engages in cyberespionage directed against Americans. A message left with China's embassy in Washington was not immediately returned Wednesday.

India's Modi likely to find comfort in Trump's return and a shared worldview

By KRUTIKA PATHI and ASHOK SHARMA Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Donald Trump's return to the White House has made many countries anxious and recalculating where they stand with the U.S., but India appears to be welcoming the change that may embolden nationalist leaders like Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"I know today a lot of countries are nervous about the U.S., let's be honest about that," India's External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said over the weekend. India was "not one of them." A call from Modi "was among the first three calls, I think, that President (elect) Trump took," he added.

A second Trump presidency is likely to play out in New Delhi's favor, experts say, especially as Modi seeks to reset India's relationship with the West after recent frictions over his refusal to join sanctions against Russia or condemn its 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Modi has also been criticized over India's democratic backsliding.

"Trump's victory means that the Indian policies that have put New Delhi at odds with the West ... will no longer be a cause of concern for Washington," said Michael Kugelman, South Asia director at the Wilson Center.

There could be ruptures on trade, immigration and climate change goals — but on balance, "the return of Trump means that India's relations with the West — and specifically its most powerful country — will get a boost," he added.

Modi has sought to cast India as a rising global player with a fast-growing economy that can counter China. But critics say his authoritarian politics and right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party have deeply polarized the country with minorities increasingly marginalized and the right to free speech and press under attack.

When President Joe Biden honored Modi with a state visit last year, he walked a tightrope as activists and groups pressured him to confront Modi over his human rights record. Still, the two leaders rolled out new business deals on defense and technology.

Such concerns won't be an issue with Trump, said Uday Chandra, an expert on South Asia and foreign policy. "He is a refreshing reset from the Indian perspective ... he is much more transactional."

Trump, long an open admirer of Russian President Vladimir Putin, is also likely to be more understanding of India's strategic partnership with Moscow, which dates back to the Cold War, its record purchases of Russian crude, and its refusal to pick a side in the war in Ukraine. "This was the real sort of thorn in India-U.S. relations over the past two years ... but with Trump, I don't see this being an issue," Chandra said.

One hot-button issue is trade. In his first term, trade differences between the two countries came to the fore with Trump calling India the "tariff king" over disagreements on farm goods, Harley Davidson motorcycles and medical devices. In 2019, he canceled the country's special trade privileges and India responded by slapping tariffs on more than two dozen U.S. goods.

This time, Trump wants to impose a "universal" tax of 10% or 20% on all imports and raise tariffs on Chinese goods to 60%. India, which counts the U.S. as its second-largest trading partner, won't be an exception.

"New Delhi will have to do more than just tinkering with its policies to deal with Trump's emphasis on fair trade," said C Rajamohan, a professor at the Institute of South Asian Studies in Singapore.

Immigration could turn into a sore point if Trump attempts to also curb skilled migration. Indians have often been the largest group applying for the H1-B work visa but Trump had called the visa program "very bad" and "unfair" for U.S. workers.

Progress on climate change and clean energy could also be hit.

"India and the U.S. have done quite a lot on this front over the past four years — but this is something

that could unravel because a Trump administration is more aligned with the fossil fuel industry than with green technology," said Milan Vaishnav, South Asia Program director at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Both Trump and Modi embody strongmen tactics, count on an impassioned support base and have ramped up polarization to consolidate votes. And unlike liberal leaders in the West, Trump doesn't view Modi's policies at home problematic – or even relevant, said Kugelman.

"They're both ardent nationalists committed to making their nations stronger at home and abroad," he added.

Analysts also point to the personal bond between the two. When Trump visited India in 2020, Modi threw him an event in the world's largest cricket stadium.

The year before that, Trump held a massive rally for Modi in Texas and likened him to Elvis Presley for his crowd-pulling power. In his congratulatory post to Trump on X last week, Modi shared photos of the two leaders hugging, smiling and holding hands.

"There's a bromance between the two," said Chandra. "But they're also united by a shared worldview — that we are in a post-liberal world and that liberalism as an ideology for conducting global politics is no longer viable. That's as true in India as it is in America."

Trump picks Matt Gaetz for attorney general, Marco Rubio for secretary of state

By MICHELLE L. PRICE, ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON, JILL COLVIN and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump chose Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida to serve as his attorney general on Wednesday, bypassing more experienced options in favor of a loyalist who has built a national reputation as a disruptor and whom Trump has tasked with dramatically overhauling the Justice Department.

Trump also announced that he had tapped Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida as his nominee for secretary of state. And he selected Tulsi Gabbard, a former Democratic member of Congress and presidential candidate, to serve as his director of national intelligence.

The choices continued a pattern of Trump stocking his Cabinet with those he believes he can trust to execute his agenda rather than longtime officials with experience in their fields. Gaetz's selection, in particular, was seen as a shock. The Florida lawmaker was not among the more established attorneys who had been mentioned as contenders for the job, and even his colleagues in Congress appeared stunned by the news.

"Everybody was saying, 'Oh my God,'" said Republican Rep. Mike Simpson of Idaho. "That was about as big a surprise as I've had in a long time."

Gaetz resigned from his House seat Wednesday evening.

Trump announced the decision in a post in his Truth Social network, saying Gaetz would "root out the systemic corruption at DOJ, and return the Department to its true mission of fighting Crime, and upholding our Democracy and Constitution."

If confirmed by the Republican-led Senate, Gaetz would instantly become one of the most closely watched members of Trump's Cabinet given his avowed loyalty to a president-elect who has threatened to pursue retribution against perceived adversaries.

Gaetz represents much of the Florida Panhandle and became a conservative star when he joined Congress, appearing as a frequent staunch defender of Trump on cable news.

He irked fellow GOP members in early 2023 when he filed the resolution that successfully ousted former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy. McCarthy then helped fund a primary challenge to Gaetz that included commercials alleging that he paid for sex with a 17-year-old, an allegation that had been under investigation by the House Ethics Committee — though that probe effectively ended Wednesday when Gaetz resigned from Congress. Gaetz has denied any wrongdoing and the Justice Department ended its own sex trafficking investigation without bringing charges against him.

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House Republicans first got wind of the nomination during a private meeting and initially thought the news was a joke before realizing Trump had indeed named Gaetz to serve as the nation's chief law officer.

GOP Rep. Max Miller told reporters the shock in the room was more a reflection of members' happiness that the Florida Republican will no longer be a member of the chamber after years of instigating intraparty battles.

Even Trump's allies in the Senate were keeping their distance.

"We'll see," said Sen. Ron Johnson of Wisconsin when asked whether he would vote to confirm the congressman.

Sen. John Cornyn, a Texas Republican, suggested that the Senate would look closely into Gaetz, including the House Ethics Committee investigation.

"I'm sure it will make for a popcorn-eating confirmation hearing," said GOP Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., who serves on the committee that will take up the Gaetz nomination, said it would be "the first test of whether Republicans are willing to stand up to Donald Trump and go with conscience and conviction as opposed to just politics."

The announcement came shortly after Trump confirmed that he had picked Rubio, a conservative lawmaker, as the nation's top diplomat. A onetime critic who evolved into one of the president-elect's fiercest defenders, Rubio is a noted hawk on China, Cuba and Iran, and was a finalist to be Trump's running mate this summer. He would be the first Latino in the job if confirmed.

On Capitol Hill, Rubio is the vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee and a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He has pushed for taking a harder line against China and has targeted social media app TikTok because its parent company is Chinese. He and other lawmakers contend that Beijing could demand access to the data of users whenever it wants.

"He will be a strong Advocate for our Nation, a true friend to our Allies, and a fearless Warrior who will never back down to our adversaries," Trump said of Rubio in a statement.

Trump made the personnel announcements while flying back to Florida from Washington after meeting with President Joe Biden.

The president-elect had been expected to pick Rubio for the post, but had also faced pressure from people pushing Ric Grenell, who served as acting director of national intelligence during Trump's first administration.

Grenell responded to the news on X, writing, "Congratulations, Senator. You will be great for America!"

The selection is the culmination of a long, complicated history between Trump and Rubio. During their tense competition for the GOP presidential nomination in 2016, Rubio was especially blunt in his criticism of Trump, calling him a "con artist" and "the most vulgar person to ever aspire to the presidency."

He tried to match Trump's often-crude attacks by joking about the size of Trump's hands in a reference to his manhood. Trump responded by branding Rubio as "little Marco," a nickname that stuck with the senator for years.

But like many Republicans who sought to maintain their relevance in the Trump era, Rubio shifted his rhetoric. As speculation intensified that Trump might pick him as his running mate, Rubio sought to play down the tension from 2016, suggesting the heated tone simply reflected the intensity of a campaign.

"That is like asking a boxer why they punched somebody in the face in the third round," Rubio told CNN when asked about his previous comments. "It's because they were boxing."

Rubio was first elected to the Senate in 2010 as part of the tea party wave of Republicans who swept into Washington. He quickly gained a reputation as someone who could embody a more diverse, welcoming Republican Party. He was a key member of a group that worked on a 2013 immigration bill that included a path to citizenship for millions of people in the country illegally.

But that legislation stalled in the House, where more conservative Republicans were in control, signaling the sharp turn to the right that the party — and Rubio — would soon embrace. Now, Rubio says he supports Trump's plan to deploy the U.S. military to deport those in the country illegally.

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"We are going to have to do something, unfortunately, we're going to have to do something dramatic," Rubio said in a May interview with NBC.

Gabbard, meanwhile, will serve as director of national intelligence. Both Vice President-elect JD Vance and Trump's son, Donald Trump Jr. had been advocating for her to get a position in the administration, after she grew close with them during the campaign.

She helped prepare Trump for his debate against Vice President Kamala Harris, announced she was becoming a Republican at a Trump rally during the race's final stretch, and received huge cheers from his crowds at events.

Gabbard, who has served in the Army National Guard for more than two decades, deploying to Iraq and Kuwait, would come to the role as somewhat of an outsider, compared to her predecessor. The current director, Avril Haines, was confirmed by the Senate in 2021 following several years in a number of top national security and intelligence positions.

Gabbard hasn't worked directly in the intelligence community, outside of House committees, including two years on the Homeland Security Committee. Like others Trump has selected for his agency leadership, she has been among his most popular political surrogates, often drawing thunderous responses from crowds as she stumped for him in the campaign's closing months.

Republicans win 218 US House seats, giving Donald Trump and the party control of government

By STEPHEN GROVES and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans have won enough seats to control the U.S. House, completing the party's sweep into power and securing their hold on U.S. government alongside President-elect Donald Trump.

A House Republican victory in Arizona, alongside a win in slow-counting California earlier Wednesday, gave the GOP the 218 House victories that make up the majority. Republicans earlier gained control of the Senate from Democrats.

With hard-fought yet thin majorities, Republican leaders are envisioning a mandate to upend the federal government and swiftly implement Trump's vision for the country.

The incoming president has promised to carry out the country's largest-ever deportation operation, extend tax breaks, punish his political enemies, seize control of the federal government's most powerful tools and reshape the U.S. economy. The GOP election victories ensure that Congress will be onboard for that agenda, and Democrats will be almost powerless to check it.

When Trump was elected president in 2016, Republicans also swept Congress, but he still encountered Republican leaders resistant to his policy ideas, as well as a Supreme Court with a liberal majority. Not this time.

When he returns to the White House, Trump will be working with a Republican Party that has been completely transformed by his "Make America Great Again" movement and a Supreme Court dominated by conservative justices, including three that he appointed.

Trump rallied House Republicans at a Capitol Hill hotel Wednesday morning, marking his first return to Washington since the election.

"I suspect I won't be running again unless you say, 'He's good, we got to figure something else,'" Trump said to the room full of lawmakers who laughed in response.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, who with Trump's endorsement won the Republican Conference's nomination to stay on as speaker next year, has talked of taking a "blowtorch" to the federal government and its programs, eyeing ways to overhaul even popular programs championed by Democrats in recent years. The Louisiana Republican, an ardent conservative, has pulled the House Republican Conference closer to Trump during the campaign season as they prepare an "ambitious" 100-day agenda.

"Republicans in the House and Senate have a mandate," Johnson said earlier this week. "The American people want us to implement and deliver that 'America First' agenda."

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Trump's allies in the House are already signaling they will seek retribution for the legal troubles Trump faced while out of office. The incoming president on Wednesday said he would nominate Rep. Matt Gaetz, a fierce loyalist, for attorney general.

Meanwhile, Rep. Jim Jordan, the chair of the powerful House Judiciary Committee, has said GOP lawmakers are "not taking anything off the table" in their plans to investigate special counsel Jack Smith, even as Smith is winding down two federal investigations into Trump for plotting to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election and hoarding classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate.

Still, with a few races still uncalled the Republicans may hold the majority by just a few seats as the new Congress begins. Trump's decision to pull from the House for posts in his administration — Reps. Gaetz, Mike Waltz and Elise Stefanik so far — could complicate Johnson's ability to maintain a majority in the early days of the new Congress.

Gaetz submitted his resignation Wednesday, effective immediately. Johnson said he hoped the seat could be filled by the time the new Congress convenes Jan. 3. Replacements for members of the House require special elections, and the congressional districts held by the three departing members have been held by Republicans for years.

With the thin majority, a highly functioning House is also far from guaranteed. The past two years of Republican House control were defined by infighting as hardline conservative factions sought to gain influence and power by openly defying their party leadership. While Johnson — at times with Trump's help — largely tamed open rebellions against his leadership, the right wing of the party is ascendant and ambitious on the heels of Trump's election victory.

The Republican majority also depends on a small group of lawmakers who won tough elections by running as moderates. It remains to be seen whether they will stay onboard for some of the most extreme proposals championed by Trump and his allies.

House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries, meanwhile, is trying to keep Democrats relevant to any legislation that passes Congress, an effort that will depend on Democratic leaders unifying over 200 members, even as the party undergoes a postmortem of its election losses.

In the Senate, GOP leaders, fresh off winning a convincing majority, are already working with Trump to confirm his Cabinet picks. Sen. John Thune of South Dakota won an internal election Wednesday to replace Sen. Mitch McConnell, the longest serving party leader in Senate history.

Thune in the past has been critical of Trump, but praised the incoming president during his leadership election bid.

"This Republican team is united. We are on one team," Thune said. "We are excited to reclaim the majority and to get to work with our colleagues in the House to enact President Trump's agenda."

The GOP's Senate majority of 53 seats also ensures that Republicans will have breathing room when it comes to confirming Cabinet posts, or Supreme Court justices if there is a vacancy. Not all those confirmations are guaranteed. Republicans were incredulous Wednesday when the news hit Capitol Hill that Trump would nominate Gaetz as his attorney general. Even close Trump allies in the Senate distanced themselves from supporting Gaetz, who had been facing a House Ethics Committee investigation into allegations of sexual misconduct and illicit drug use.

Still, Trump on Sunday demanded that any Republican leader must allow him to make administration appointments without a vote while the Senate is in recess. Such a move would be a notable shift in power away from the Senate, yet all the leadership contenders quickly agreed to the idea. Democrats could potentially fight such a maneuver.

Meanwhile, Trump's social media supporters, including Elon Musk, the world's richest man, clamored against picking a traditional Republican to lead the Senate chamber. Thune worked as a top lieutenant to McConnell, who once called the former president a "despicable human being" in his private notes.

However, McConnell made it clear that on Capitol Hill the days of Republican resistance to Trump are over.

Speaker Mike Johnson wins GOP nomination to remain in job, faces full House vote in new year

By LISA MASCARO, FARNOUSH AMIRI and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Speaker Mike Johnson won the House Republican nomination Wednesday to stay on the job, on track to keep the gavel after a morning endorsement from President-elect Donald Trump ahead of a full House vote in the new year.

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.

Trump told House Republicans, during the president-elect's first trip back to Washington since the party swept the 2024 election, that he's with the speaker all the way, according to a person familiar with the remarks but unauthorized to discuss the private meeting near the Capitol.

Johnson heaped praise on Trump, calling him the "comeback king."

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 a course by positioning himself alongside Trump and leading Republicans during this year's elections.

Johnson said Trump tipped him off early Wednesday that he would be tapping another House Republican for his administration — Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida, as attorney general — reducing Johnson's slim numbers in the new year. Gaetz submitted his resignation from Congress, effective immediately, launching an eight-week clock to fill his seat, Johnson said, possibly in time for the start of the new Congress on Jan. 3, 2025.

Gaetz is the third House GOP lawmaker tapped for the Trump administration, and Johnson said Gaetz wanted to help prevent the narrow numbers. The quick departure also ends a long-running House ethics probe into the Florida congressman.

As Johnson tells it, Trump is the "coach" and he is the "quarterback" as they prepare for a unified Republican government in the new year.

Johnson has embraced Trump's priorities on mass deportations, tax cuts, cutting 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."

Wednesday's internal GOP vote was by voice rather than roll call or ballots, with no objections to Johnson, according to the same person in the room. The rest of the top GOP leaders were also elected.

But the outcome belies a more difficult road ahead for the speaker.

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. Republicans have won enough seats to control the chamber after victories Wednesday in Arizona and California gave the GOP 218 victories.

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. Just before voting, Trump announced Gaetz as his nominee for attorney general, sending shockwaves through the room over the far-right pick.

"Everybody was saying, Oh my God," said Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho.

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."

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., who launched a failed effort last year to oust Johnson from the speaker's office said: "You know who he's going to have to answer to? Donald Trump."

And Rep. Troy Nehls, R-Texas, who wore his "Make America Great Again" tie with matching Trump gold sneakers, told reporters the party must put aside the chaos of the last few years and unify behind the president-elect.

"If Donald Trump says, 'Jump three feet high and scratch your head,' we all jump three feet high and scratch our head," Nehls said.

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.

Instead, they pulled Johnson aside for a lengthy private conversation, as other lawmakers watched and waited. The afternoon dragged on.

"It's nonsense, is what it is," Simpson said. "Sometimes you can't do everything our exotic members want to do."

Johnson said afterward a deal was struck between the Freedom Caucus and the more mainstream conservative Main Street Caucus on new GOP conference rules.

One change would make it harder to remove the speaker from office, requiring at least nine lawmakers to join in filing a so-called "motion to vacate" instead of just one. In return other proposals were dropped.

Democrats, who lent Johnson a hand at governing multiple times in Congress — supplying the votes needed to keep the federal government funded and turning back the effort by Greene to bounce him from office — are unlikely to help him in the new year as they try to put a check on Trump's agenda.

"House Democrats are ready to work with the new administration and will extend a hand of bipartisan-ship whenever possible," said Rep. Pete Aguilar of California, the chairman of the Democratic Caucus.

But he said Democrats "will be ready to push against efforts" to throw millions of Americans off health care and other GOP priorities.

It's wasn't just the speaker election Wednesday, but Republicans also reelected the rest of their top House GOP leadership team for the new year.

Majority Leader Steve Scalise, also of Louisiana, and GOP Whip Tom Emmer of Minnesota, sailed to their reelections in leadership, as did Rep. Richard Hudson, R-N.C., who will lead the campaign arm the National Republican Congressional Committee for another term.

The House GOP conference chair went to Rep. Lisa McClain of Michigan. It was the most competitive race for the job that opened up after Trump's decision to tap Rep. Elise Stefanik of New York as his ambassador to the United Nations.

Man kills himself with blasts outside Brazil's Supreme Court after failing to get inside

By MAURICIO SAVARESE Associated Press

SAO PAULO (AP) — A man who failed in an attempt to break into Brazil's Supreme Court killed himself in explosions outside the building Wednesday that forced justices and staff to evacuate, authorities said.

The two strong blasts were heard about 7:30 p.m. after the day's session finished and all the justices and staff left the building safely, Brazil's Supreme Court said in a statement.

Local firefighters confirmed one man died at the scene in the capital Brasilia, but did not identify him.

Celina Leão, the lieutenant governor of Brazil's federal district, said the suspect had earlier detonated explosives in a car in a Congress parking lot, which did not cause injuries.

"His first action was to explode the car. Then he approached the Supreme Court and tried to get in the building. He failed and then there were the other explosions," Leão said in a news conference.

Local media reported that the car that exploded belonged to a member of Brazil's Liberal Party, the same of former President Jair Bolsonaro. Leão said only investigations will determine whether the owner of the car is the same man who died in the blasts.

Leão recommended that Congress be closed Thursday to avoid new risks. Brazil's Senate heeded her call and the lower house will be shut until noon, speaker Arthur Lira said.

"It could have been a lone wolf, like others we've seen around the world," Leão said in a news conference. "We are considering it as a suicide because there was only one victim. But investigations will show if that was indeed the case."

Leão added only forensics will be able to identify the body, which remained outside the Supreme Court for three hours after the blasts.

The blasts outside the Supreme Court took place about 20 seconds apart in Brasilia's Three Powers Plaza, where Brazil's main government buildings, including the Supreme Court, Congress and presidential palace, are located.

President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was not in the neighboring presidential palace at the time, spokesman José Chrispiniano said.

Police blocked all access to the area and the presidential security bureau was conducting a sweep of the grounds around the presidential palace.

Brazil's federal police said it is investigating and did not provide a motive.

The Supreme Court in recent years has become a target for threats by far-right groups and supporters of Bolsonaro's due to its crackdown on the spread of false information. In particular, Justice Alexandre de Moraes has been a focus for their ire.

Lula's spokesman said that late on Wednesday the leftist leader was gathering at the presidential residence with federal police chief Andrei Rodrigues, and Supreme Court Justices de Moraes and Cristiano Zanin.

US ambassador says Mexico 'closed the doors' on security cooperation and denies its violence problem

By MARÍA VERZA Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — U.S. Ambassador Ken Salazar lashed out Wednesday at Mexico's failure to accept aid in the fight against drug cartels, claiming the country "closed the doors" on security cooperation.

In a press conference, Salazar launched his harshest criticism yet of rampant violence, police corruption and the Mexican government's mistaken attitude that "there is no problem."

"When they just say 'there is no problem, we have these statistics to show people there is no problem,' that is not based on reality," Salazar said. "There is a very big problem."

Mexico sent a diplomatic note to the U.S. embassy "expressing its surprise" at Salazar's statement, the foreign relations ministry said in a statement later Wednesday.

Salazar cited violence in recent days in the northern state of Sinaloa as an example. Sinaloa state police chief Gerardo Mérida said Wednesday authorities found a pile of between five and seven bodies on a roadside there, but were still counting body parts to see how many there were.

"There is a pile of various bodies, with what we have found we have identified five bodies, but some are in pieces, they have been dismembered, there are mentions of seven," said Mérida.

Sinaloa's embattled governor, Ruben Rocha, seemed to typify Mexico's attitude when he said Tuesday —after a similar number of dead bodies were dumped on roadsides - that "we're doing well, we'll get over this soon."

Salazar countered that in Sinaloa "the dead can be seen everywhere."

Salazar had previously defended many of the Mexican government's actions, but he now says former President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's "hugs not bullets" strategy of not confronting the cartels "did not work."

López Obrador left office on Sept. 30, but his successor, President Claudia Sheinbaum, has pledged to continue the policy, even though under her leadership troops appear more willing to open fire.

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Fighting between two factions of the Sinaloa drug cartel broke out after two drug capos — one from each faction — flew to the United States and were arrested there on July 25.

Drug lords Ismael “El Mayo” Zambada and Joaquín Guzmán López were apprehended in the United States after flying there in a small plane.

Zambada later claimed he was kidnapped and forced aboard the plane by Guzmán López, causing a violent battle between Zambada’s faction and the “Chapitos” group led by the sons of imprisoned drug lord Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzmán.

Mexico later blamed the United States for detaining the capos, saying that had caused the outbreak of violence. Salazar said Mexico also shut down anti-drug cooperation after that.

“It totally accelerated from there, the Mexican government closed its doors,” Salazar said. The ambassador also criticized efforts by both López Obrador and Sheinbaum to downplay the problem of crime and violence, claiming the problem was being exaggerated and crime statistics were dropping.

Salazar did not clarify why he thought the Mexican government’s numbers were untrustworthy, but in recent days the government appears to have changed the way it reports homicide figures.

“The reality for the Mexican people, and that is for businesspeople, members of the press like you who work on the streets, those who have ranches, like the cattleman killed in Sinaloa over the weekend because he was a leader, they don’t live with security,” Salazar said.

The continuing violence “is a very serious problem in Mexico and saying there is no problem, blaming someone else, blaming the United States, obviously is not (the solution),” he continued.

He also blamed López Obrador for having refused “\$32 million,” an apparent reference to López Obrador’s decision to drop out of a U.S.-funded program to donate money to train and equip Mexican police.

“It was rejected for ideological problems, and other explanations,” Salazar said. López Obrador said at the time he didn’t want U.S. helicopters and guns, but by that point most of the U.S. money was going for training, professionalization and legal reform.

After taking office in 2018, López Obrador also cut funding for police forces and gave the army, navy and militarized National Guard the lead role in law enforcement.

“Police become corrupt because they don’t earn enough to live on,” Salazar said. “You cannot pay a police officer almost nothing and expect them to do their job.”

Salazar had been previously known for defending López Obrador despite his constant efforts to militarize law enforcement, concentrate power, eliminate regulatory and oversight bodies and shore up Mexico’s government-run companies even at the expense of U.S. firms.

It was unclear if Wednesday’s critical turn in his rhetoric was in any way related to the victory of Donald Trump in last week’s U.S. presidential elections. Trump has long been fiercely critical of Mexico.

US government worker charged with leaking classified documents on Israel’s plans to strike Iran

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A man who worked for the U.S. government has been charged with leaking classified information assessing Israel’s earlier plans to attack Iran, according to court papers filed Wednesday.

The man, identified as Asif William Rahman, was arrested by the FBI this week in Cambodia and was due to make his first court appearance in Guam.

He was indicted last week in U.S. court in Virginia on two counts of willful transmission of national defense information — felony charges that can carry significant prison sentences.

It was not immediately clear whether Rahman had a lawyer or which federal agency employed him, but officials say he had a top-secret security clearance with access to sensitive compartmented information.

The charges stem from the documents, attributed to the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency and National Security Agency, appearing last month on a channel of the Telegram messaging app. The documents noted that Israel was still moving military assets in place to conduct a military strike in response to Iran’s blistering ballistic missile attack on Oct. 1.

Israel carried out a retaliatory attack on multiple sites in Iran in late October.

The documents were sharable within the "Five Eyes," which are the United States, Britain, Canada, New Zealand and Australia.

The emergence of the documents triggered an FBI investigation that examined how the documents were obtained — including whether it was an intentional leak by a member of the U.S. intelligence community or obtained by another method, like a hack — and whether any other intelligence information was compromised. Officials also worked to determine who had access to the documents before they were posted.

The New York Times was first to report his arrest.

Protests erupt in Paris over pro-Israel gala organized by far-right figures

By TOM NOUVIAN Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Protests erupted in Paris on Wednesday against a controversial gala organized by far-right figures in support of Israel. The event, intended to raise funds for the Israeli military, included Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich among its invited guests.

The demonstrations came on the eve of a high-stakes soccer match at France's national stadium against the Israeli national team, overshadowed by tensions around the wars in the Middle East. Authorities in Paris announced that more than 4,000 police officers and 1,600 stadium staff will be deployed for the game.

Smotrich, a vocal advocate of Israeli settlements, had been expected to attend Wednesday's gala, dubbed "Israel is Forever," which was planned by an association of the same name. The group's stated goal is to "mobilize French-speaking Zionist forces."

After days of growing criticism of the event, Smotrich's office confirmed Wednesday that the minister would not travel to Paris to participate.

But the invitation to Smotrich drew sharp criticism from local associations, unions and left-wing political parties, prompting two protests in the French capital. The minister, a hard-line settler leader, has been accused of inflaming tensions in the West Bank and drew international condemnations this week by saying he hopes the election of Donald Trump will clear the way for Israeli annexation of the West Bank — a step that would extinguish Palestinian statehood dreams.

The French Foreign Ministry called Smotrich's remarks "contrary to international law" and counterproductive to efforts to reduce regional tensions.

"France reiterates its commitment to the implementation of the two-state solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security, which is the only prospect for a just and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," the ministry said in a statement.

Critics also pointed at Nili Kupfer-Naouri, president of the "Israel is Forever" association, who sparked outrage in 2023, after the Israel-Hamas war started, when she tweeted that "no civilian in Gaza was innocent."

On Wednesday night, several hundred protesters marched through central Paris, denouncing the event as a "gala of hatred and shame."

"Imagine if an association were hosting a gala for Hezbollah or Hamas — there's no way the police would allow that," said Melkir Saib, a 30-year-old protester. "The situation is just unfair."

The march was largely peaceful, but some demonstrators broke windows at a McDonald's along the route.

A separate group, including Jewish leftist organizations opposed to racism and antisemitism, gathered near the Arc de Triomphe chanting slogans against the gala and Smotrich.

French authorities defended the event, with Paris police chief Laurent Nunez stating that the gala posed "no major threat to public order."

The protests came days after tensions flared in Paris and Amsterdam related to the conflicts in the Middle East. A massive "Free Palestine" banner was displayed during a Paris Saint-Germain Champions League match against Atletico Madrid, while violence broke out in Amsterdam last week targeting fans of an Israeli soccer club.

Middle East latest: 3 young siblings killed in Gaza as Israeli strikes in Lebanon kill 6

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.

Israeli forces have encircled and largely isolated the Gaza Strip's northernmost areas for the past month, saying Hamas militants have regrouped. Experts on hunger say famine is imminent or may already be happening there. Israel has also been striking deeper inside Lebanon since September as it escalates the war against Hezbollah.

Israel's war against Hamas 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.

Here's the latest:

US military says it conducted strikes against Houthi rebels

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The U.S. military says it has conducted several days of strikes targeting Yemen's Houthi rebels.

The strikes included U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy aircraft, including the Navy's F-35C stealth fighter jet, it said Thursday.

The military also released video showing a strike by an MQ-9 Reaper drone on a mobile missile launcher placed on the back of what appeared to be a truck. A person standing next to the launcher is seen running away after the strike.

"This targeted operation was conducted in response to the Houthi's repeated and unlawful attacks on international commercial shipping, as well as U.S., coalition and merchant vessels in the Red Sea, Bab al-Mandeb Strait and the Gulf of Aden," the U.S. military's Central Command said. "It also aimed to degrade the Houthi's ability to threaten regional partners."

The strikes happened Saturday and Sunday.

The Houthis launched an attack this week targeted two U.S. Navy destroyers entering the Red Sea. The Americans said they "engaged and defeated" eight bomb-carrying drones, five anti-ship ballistic missiles and four cruise missiles that the Houthis used to target the vessels.

UN says Israel blocked 6 recent attempts to deliver aid to northern Gaza

UNITED NATIONS — The U.N. humanitarian office says Israel blocked six attempts to deliver life-saving food and other humanitarian assistance to besieged Palestinians in northern Gaza in the last two days.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, known as OCHA, tried unsuccessfully to send three missions with food and water on Tuesday to Jabaliya, Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahiya — and three more on Wednesday, including one with psycho-social support for children in Jabaliya.

Dujarric reiterated that "every attempt by the U.N. to access these areas with food, water and health missions this month was either denied or impeded."

"We have submitted four additional requests to the Israeli authorities to reach these areas tomorrow (Thursday) with life-saving assistance," he said.

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On Tuesday, eight international aid groups said Israel failed to meet U.S. demands for greater humanitarian access to the war-ravaged Gaza Strip, where hunger experts say the north may already be experiencing famine.

However, the Biden administration said later Tuesday it won't limit weapons transfers to Israel because the U.S. says its key ally has made good but limited progress in increasing the flow of humanitarian aid to Gaza.

Dujarric said OCHA also reports that across Gaza strip, "Israeli bombardment from the air, land and sea continues to be reported, causing further death, displacement and destruction."

As of Tuesday, he said, 79% of the Gaza Strip remains under Israeli evacuation orders and OCHA warns that repeated displacements are leaving Palestinians "increasingly vulnerable, as critical resources are continuing to be exhausted."

UN Security Council demands peacekeepers' safety in southern Lebanon amid Israel's ground invasion against Hezbollah

UNITED NATIONS – The U.N. Security Council is condemning "incidents" that injured U.N. peacekeepers in southern Lebanon and impacted their positions along the U.N.-drawn boundary between Lebanon and Israel.

The statement was agreed to by all 15 council members, including the United States, and issued late Wednesday. The Security Council urged all parties — never naming Israel or the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah — to take measures to respect the safety and security of personnel and premises of the peacekeeping mission known as UNIFIL.

Israel forces invaded south Lebanon on Oct. 1, causing widespread destruction in border villages but making little advances on the ground inside the country.

UNIFIL has accused Israel of deliberately destroying observation equipment, and a number of peacekeepers have been injured amid the fighting. Israel has called for peacekeepers to pull back 5 kilometers (3 miles) for their safety, but the U.N. force has stayed to monitor the escalating conflict.

U.N. peacekeeping chief Jean-Pierre Lacroix is currently in Lebanon and visited the UNIFIL headquarters in Naqoura and a peacekeeping position on Wednesday, U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said. Lacroix also spoke to peacekeepers who had been injured in direct attacks and exchanges of fire between Israeli and Hezbollah forces.

Council members called on "the parties" to abide by international humanitarian law. They also called for full implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 which ended the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war. That resolution also calls for the Lebanese army to deploy throughout the south, which Hezbollah mainly controls, and for all armed groups including Hezbollah to be disarmed.

The fighting since October 2023 has killed more than 3,200 people in Lebanon, according to the Health Ministry, and in Israel, 76 people have been killed including 31 soldiers.

Israeli strike kills five people in a Gaza refugee camp

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — An Israeli strike on a street in a refugee camp in central Gaza killed five people and injured two others on Wednesday, according to Palestinian health officials and Associated Press journalists.

The corpses were taken from Maghazi urban refugee camp by ambulance to Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the nearby city of Deir al-Balah, where they were counted by AP staff. All of the dead were men.

The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment about the strike.

Israel's war 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.

Six Israeli soldiers are killed in combat in Lebanon, one of Israel's deadliest days for the current ground invasion

JERUSALEM — The Israeli military said six soldiers were killed in combat in southern Lebanon on Wednesday.

It was one of the deadliest days for the Israeli military inside Lebanon during its current ground invasion,

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and came just one day after Israel's new foreign minister said there was "certain progress" in efforts to end the fighting with Lebanon's Hezbollah.

More than 370 Israeli soldiers have been killed in combat in Gaza and Lebanon in the past year. The army did not provide details on how the six soldiers died Wednesday.

Israel forces invaded south Lebanon on Oct. 1, causing widespread destruction in border villages but making little advances on the ground inside the country. Israel says it is destroying Hezbollah weapons and command centers near the border, including an extensive tunnel system built by Hezbollah.

According to the Lebanese Health Ministry, 3,243 people have been killed in Lebanon in a year of fighting and more than 1.2 million have been displaced.

Israel strikes a city in western Syria near Lebanon border

BEIRUT — Several Israeli airstrikes targeted a city in western Syria near the border with Lebanon on Wednesday, Syrian state media said.

Israel's warplanes hit bridges and military checkpoints in the area around al-Qusayr and led to the activation of air defenses, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based opposition war monitor.

There was no immediate word on casualties, and the Israeli military did not comment on the strikes.

Israel has carried out hundreds of strikes on targets inside government-controlled parts of war-torn Syria in recent years, but it rarely acknowledges or discusses the operations. The strikes often target Syrian forces or Iranian-backed groups.

The Lebanese militant group Hezbollah is believed to have received much of its weaponry through Syria from Iran, its main backer.

Israel won't provide evidence that some UN staffers in Gaza work for Hamas, UNRWA head says

UNITED NATIONS — The head of the U.N. agency helping Palestinian refugees is accusing Israel of refusing repeated requests to turn over evidence that some of its staff members work for Hamas so it can investigate the allegations.

But Philippe Lazzarini, who heads the agency known as UNRWA, told a U.N. General Assembly committee Wednesday that Israel continues to use the allegations "to undermine the agency."

Calling UNRWA "a soft target" for the warring parties in Gaza, Lazzarini said Hamas also has repeatedly accused the agency and its senior management "of colluding with the Israeli occupation." And Hamas has for many years opposed UNRWA's education program and challenged its commitment to gender equality and neutrality, he said.

Lazzarini again urged all nations to prevent Israel from implementing legislation that prohibits the agency's operations in the Palestinian territories. The laws, adopted by Israel's parliament last month, take effect in 90 days.

Israel alleges that around a dozen of UNRWA's 13,000 staff in Gaza participated in the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attacks in southern Israel that sparked the war in Gaza. It recently provided the U.N. with over 100 names of UNRWA staff it claims have militant ties — but Lazzarini said he has received no response to repeated requests for evidence, including proposing how sensitive information could be shared.

Israel's U.N. Ambassador Danny Danon — with the mother of a young Israeli kidnapped on Oct. 7, 2023, allegedly by an UNRWA employee who was a Hamas member, seated by his side — responded to Lazzarini saying: "We have a video of this terrorist. You don't need more evidence than that."

"If you have any decency, resign in shame," Danon told the UNRWA chief, accusing the agency of trading "humanity for bloodshed."

At the meeting of the General Assembly's decolonization committee, speaker after speaker supported UNRWA, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' repeated statements that the agency is essential and irreplaceable, and Lazzarini's warning that implementation of the Israeli laws would be a catastrophe for millions of Palestinians.

US government worker charged with leaking classified documents on Israel's plans to strike Iran

WASHINGTON — A man who worked for the U.S. government has been charged with leaking classified

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information assessing Israel's earlier plans to attack Iran, according to court papers filed Wednesday.

The man, identified as Asif William Rahman, was arrested by the FBI this week in Cambodia and was due to make his first court appearance in Guam.

He was indicted last week in U.S. court in Virginia on two counts of willful transmission of national defense information — felony charges that can carry significant prison sentences.

It was not immediately clear whether Rahman had a lawyer or which federal agency employed him, but officials say he had top secret security clearance.

The charges stem from the documents, attributed to the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency and National Security Agency, appearing last month on a channel of the Telegram messaging app. The documents noted that Israel was still moving military assets in place to conduct a military strike in response to Iran's blistering ballistic missile attack on Oct. 1.

Israel carried out a retaliatory attack on multiple sites in Iran in late October.

The documents were sharable within the "Five Eyes," which are the United States, Britain, Canada, New Zealand and Australia.

The New York Times was first to report his arrest.

Israel's military confirms it is building along UN-patrolled demilitarized zone in Syria

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The Israeli military acknowledged Wednesday it was building along the Alpha Line that separates the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights from Syria.

The acknowledgment comes after an Associated Press report on Monday published satellite images of the work. On Tuesday, United Nations peacekeepers there warned there had been "severe violations" by Israel of the cease-fire between it and Syria over the construction.

In a statement, the Israeli military told the AP on Wednesday it remains in "close contact with U.N. officials who are familiar with the threats in the region."

The Israeli military "is working to establish a security barrier on Israeli territory exclusively in order to thwart a possible terrorist invasion and protect the security of Israel's borders," it said in a statement. It did not elaborate.

Israel seized control of the Golan Heights from Syria in the 1967 Mideast war. Israel annexed the Golan Heights in 1981 — a move criticized by a U.N. resolution declaring Israel's action as "null and void and without international legal effect."

In 2019, President Donald Trump unilaterally announced that the United States would "fully recognize" Israel's control of the territory, a decision that has been unchanged by the Biden administration. However, it's the only other country to do so, as the rest of the world views it as occupied Syrian territory.

Blinken says Israel should end the war in Gaza and allow displaced to return home

BRUSSELS — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken is urging Israel to allow displaced Palestinians and aid back into Gaza and says it should end the war against Hamas now that it's achieved its main security aims.

"The situation is so difficult and so dramatic that to fully redress it, to fully answer the needs of people, the best way to do that is to end the war," Blinken told reporters in Brussels on Wednesday.

He said that Israel has accomplished its goals of dismantling the military wing of Hamas and ensuring that an attack like the one the militant group launched on Oct. 7 last year cannot happen again.

"Israel, by the standards it set itself, has accomplished the strategic goals it set for itself," Blinken said. "So this should be a time to end the war."

He said that hundreds of aid trucks in Gaza are unable to distribute relief supplies due to looting and other crime. "It's imperative that that be addressed. Israel has responsibilities to do that. We're also working with Egypt," he said.

Blinken called for "real and extended pauses" in the fighting in much of Gaza "so that the assistance can effectively get to people who need it."

A new video shows an Israeli hostage in Gaza

CAIRO — The Palestinian Islamic Jihad militant group has released a new video showing an Israeli hos-

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tage 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.

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.

Sri Lanka votes in a parliamentary election that's key for its new Marxist-leaning president

By KRISHAN FRANCIS Associated Press

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — Sri Lankans are voting in a parliamentary election Thursday that is key for the country's new, Marxist-leaning president to consolidate his party's power and follow through on promises of economic recovery.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake won the presidential election on Sept. 21 in a victory that marked a rejection of the traditional political parties, which have governed the island nation since its independence from British rule in 1948.

However, Dissanayake's failure to secure more than 50% of the vote has fueled concerns over his party's outlook in Thursday's election.

His National People's Power party must increase its votes significantly — from the 42% it won in the presidential election — if it is to acquire a minimum of 113 seats to take control of the 225-member Parliament.

The biggest challenge for the NPP — which was founded in 2019 and is a relative newcomer on Sri Lanka's political scene — is that many of its candidates are new faces in politics running against well-established politicians from the traditional parties.

Of the 225 parliament seats, 196 are up for grabs under Sri Lanka's proportional representative electoral system, which allocates seats in each district among the parties according to the proportion of the votes they get.

The remaining 29 seats — called the national list seats — are allocated to parties and independent groups according to the proportion of the total votes they receive countrywide.

There are 8,821 candidates vying for the 196 seats for elected members of Parliament.

Sajith Premadasa, who came in second in the presidential election and his Samagi Jana Balawegaya, or United People's Power party, is NPP's main competition.

Dissanayake, while campaigning for his party's candidates, has called on voters to help elect them to Parliament so he won't need to rely on a coalition to enact the reforms he promised.

Election results are expected on Friday.

The election comes at a decisive time for Sri Lankans, as the island nation is struggling to emerge from its worst economic crisis, having declared bankruptcy after defaulting on its external debt in 2022.

The country is now in the middle of a bailout program with the International Monetary Fund and debt restructuring with international creditors nearly complete.

Dissanayake had said during the presidential campaign that he planned to propose significant changes to the targets set in the IMF deal, which his predecessor Ranil Wickremesinghe signed, saying it placed too much burden on the people. However, he has since changed his stance and says Sri Lanka will go

along with the agreement.

Sri Lanka's crisis was largely the result of economic mismanagement combined with fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, which along with 2019 terrorism attacks devastated its important tourism industry. The pandemic also disrupted the flow of remittances from Sri Lankans working abroad.

The government also slashed taxes in 2019, depleting the treasury just as the virus hit. Foreign exchange reserves plummeted, leaving Sri Lanka unable to pay for imports or defend its currency, the rupee.

Sri Lanka's economic upheaval led to a political crisis that forced then-President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to resign in 2022. Parliament then elected Wickremesinghe to replace him.

The economy was stabilized, inflation dropped, the local currency strengthened and foreign reserves increased under Wickremesinghe. Nonetheless, he lost the election as public dissatisfaction grew over the government's effort to increase revenue by raising electricity bills and imposing heavy new income taxes on professionals and businesses, as part of the government's efforts to meet the IMF conditions.

Dissanayake's promise to punish members of previous governments accused of corruption and to recover allegedly stolen assets has also raised much hope among the people.

Bluesky has added 1 million users since the US election as people seek alternatives to X

By SARAH PARVINI AP Technology Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Social media site Bluesky has gained 1 million new users in the week since the U.S. election, as some X users look for an alternative platform to post their thoughts and engage with others online.

Bluesky said Wednesday that its total users surged to 15 million, up from roughly 13 million at the end of October.

Championed by former Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey, Bluesky was an invitation-only space until it opened to the public in February. That invite-only period gave the site time to build out moderation tools and other features. The platform resembles Elon Musk's X, with a "discover" feed as well a chronological feed for accounts that users follow. Users can send direct messages and pin posts, as well as find "starter packs" that provide a curated list of people and custom feeds to follow.

The post-election uptick in users isn't the first time that Bluesky has benefitted from people leaving X. Bluesky gained 2.6 million users in the week after X was banned in Brazil in August — 85% of them from Brazil, the company said. About 500,000 new users signed up in the span of one day last month, when X signaled that blocked accounts would be able to see a user's public posts.

Despite Bluesky's growth, X posted last week that it had "dominated the global conversation on the U.S. election" and had set new records. The platform saw a 15.5% jump in new-user signups on Election Day, X said, with a record 942 million posts worldwide. Representatives for Bluesky and for X did not respond to requests for comment.

Bluesky has referenced its competitive relationship to X through tongue-in-cheeks comments, including an Election Day post on X referencing Musk watching voting results come in with President-elect Donald Trump.

"I can guarantee that no Bluesky team members will be sitting with a presidential candidate tonight and giving them direct access to control what you see online," Bluesky said.

Across the platform, new users — among them journalists, left-leaning politicians and celebrities — have posted memes and shared that they were looking forward to using a space free from advertisements and hate speech. Some said it reminded them of the early days of X, when it was still Twitter.

On Wednesday, The Guardian said it would no longer post on X, citing "far right conspiracy theories and racism" on the site as a reason. At the same time, television journalist Don Lemon posted on X that he is leaving the platform but will continue to use other social media, including Bluesky.

Lemon said he felt X was no longer a place for "honest debate and discussion." He noted changes to the site's terms of service set to go into effect Friday that state lawsuits against X must be filed in the U.S.

District Court for the Northern District of Texas rather than the Western District of Texas. Musk said in July that he was moving X's headquarters to Texas from San Francisco.

"As the Washington Post recently reported on X's decision to change the terms, this ensures that such lawsuits will be heard in courthouses that are a hub for conservatives, which experts say could make it easier for X to shield itself from litigation and punish critics," Lemon wrote. "I think that speaks for itself."

Last year, advertisers such as IBM, NBCUniversal and its parent company Comcast fled X over concerns about their ads showing up next to pro-Nazi content and hate speech on the site in general, with Musk inflaming tensions with his own posts endorsing an antisemitic conspiracy theory.

Elon Musk says he and Trump have 'mandate to delete' regulations. Ethics laws could limit Musk role

By MATT O'BRIEN and TOM KRISHER AP Business Writers

In picking billionaire Elon Musk to be "our cost cutter" for the U.S. government, President-elect Donald Trump won't be the first American president to empower a business tycoon to look for ways to dramatically cut federal regulations.

President Ronald Reagan tapped J. Peter Grace to lead a bureaucratic cost-cutting commission in 1982. Still, the chemical business magnate had fewer conflicts of interest than the world's richest man does today.

Musk's SpaceX holds billions of dollars in NASA contracts. He's CEO of Tesla, an electric car business that benefits from government tax incentives and is subject to auto safety rules. His social media platform X, artificial intelligence startup xAI, brain implant maker Neuralink and tunnel-building Boring company all intersect with the federal government in various ways.

"There's direct conflicts between his businesses and government's interest," said Ann Skeet, director of leadership ethics at Santa Clara University's Markkula Center. "He's now in a position to try and curry favor for those enterprises."

Musk is also more influential, having pumped an estimated \$200 million through his political action committee to help elect Trump, made himself a fixture at Mar-a-Lago since the presidential election and is on regular speaking terms with like-minded political world leaders, from Argentina's President Javier Milei to Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

Trump has said Musk and former GOP presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy will lead a new "Department of Government Efficiency," or DOGE, — a joke name that references the cryptocurrency Dogecoin and appeals to Musk's sense of humor.

"We finally have a mandate to delete the mountain of choking regulations that do not serve the greater good," Musk said Wednesday on X.

Trump has said 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 structural reform — some of which could only be done through Congress.

"If it's a commission, it's outside the government" and Musk could not have a White House office or official government title, said Richard Painter, a White House ethics lawyer during the George W. Bush administration. "Then, the president takes the advice or doesn't."

If it were a true government agency, however, Musk would run afoul of federal conflict of interest laws unless he divested from his businesses or recused from government matters involving them, Painter said.

Trump could grant a rare waiver exempting Musk from those laws, a move that has been politically unpopular in the past, Painter said.

Tesla, SpaceX and X didn't immediately respond to requests for comment Wednesday about whether Musk would recuse himself. The Trump transition team also didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

However it is structured, Musk's ideas are expected to have an influence.

Regulating auto safety

Tesla, the electric vehicle company that made Musk the world's wealthiest person, has had repeated

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skirmishes with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which regulates vehicle safety. So any cuts to NHTSA funding or staffing could help Tesla.

The agency has forced Tesla to do recalls it didn't want, and it has opened investigations of Tesla vehicles, some of which raised questions about Musk's claims that Tesla is close to deploying autonomous vehicles without human drivers. The agency also is working on regulations that cover vehicle automation.

Auto safety advocates are worried that a Department of Government Efficiency co-chaired by Musk could propose draconian cuts at NHTSA.

"That could be incredibly problematic because that would impact every rule-making from all of the agencies that currently oversee companies that Musk owns," said Michael Brooks, executive director of the nonprofit Center for Auto Safety, a watchdog group.

If implemented, Musk's plan for efficiency at NHTSA could mirror what he did when he took over Twitter — draconian staff cuts, said Missy Cummings, director of the autonomy and robotics center at George Mason University and a former safety adviser to NHTSA.

While Cummings concedes there is room for much of the federal government to become more efficient, she said that NHTSA is already understaffed and she predicted that Musk would try to slow or stop NHTSA investigations or handicap the agency so it would have trouble enforcing regulations.

"It would just leave it as a shell of the agency that it was," she said. "Their whole job would be to put out commercials reminding people to just wear their seat belts."

Space exploration

Launching test flights out of South Texas, SpaceX's mega rocket Starship is how NASA intends to land astronauts on the moon for the first time in more than a half-century. NASA has awarded more than \$4 billion to SpaceX for the first two human moon landings coming up later this decade under the Artemis program. Musk has been at odds with the Federal Aviation Administration for slowing Starship over what he contends is excessive bureaucracy.

SpaceX also has racked up multiple contracts with NASA over the past decade for launching supplies and astronauts to the International Space Station. The contracts for crew flights alone from 2020 through 2030 total \$5 billion.

More recently, in June, NASA awarded an \$843 million contract to SpaceX to provide the vehicle for deorbiting the International Space Station at the end of its lifetime in early 2031, directing it to a fiery re-entry over the Pacific.

SpaceX also has multiple contracts with the Defense Department, some classified and said to be worth billions. In addition, the Pentagon has purchased internet services in Ukraine from SpaceX's Starlink constellation. The militarized version of Starlink is called Starshield.

Social media and AI

The social media platform X is another Musk company that has drawn scrutiny from federal regulators. The Federal Trade Commission has probed Musk's handling of sensitive consumer data after he took control of the company in 2022 but has not brought enforcement action. The SEC has an ongoing investigation of Musk's purchase of the social media company.

Musk has been forceful with his political views on the platform, changing its rules, content moderation systems and algorithms to conform with his world view. After Musk endorsed Trump following an attempt on the former president's life last summer, the platform has transformed into a megaphone for Trump's campaign, offering an unprecedented level of free advertising that is all but impossible to calculate the value of.

Musk's strong interest in AI is also likely to play a role. He's in the process of building an AI supercomputer in Memphis, Tennessee, for his AI startup xAI.

But environmental groups have raised concerns about pollution generated by the facility's gas turbines and its strain on the local power grid, prompting attention from the Environmental Protection Agency.

The facility is located near predominantly Black neighborhoods that have long dealt with pollution and health risks from factories and other industrial sites.

What makes walking so great for your health and what else you need to do

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — Janet Rapp strode briskly down a paved path through the city zoo, waving at friends and stopping briefly to greet emus she knows by name.

The 71-year-old retiree starts each morning this way with a walking club.

"I'm obsessed," she said. Not only does it ease her joint pain, "it just gives me energy ... And then it calms me, too."

Medical experts agree that walking is an easy way to improve physical and mental health, bolster fitness and prevent disease. While it's not the only sort of exercise people should do, it's a great first step toward a healthy life.

"You don't need equipment and you don't need a gym membership," said Dr. Sarah Eby, a sports medicine physician with Mass General Brigham. "And the benefits are so vast."

What can walking do for you?

Walking can help meet the U.S. surgeon general's recommendation that adults get at least 2 1/2 hours of moderate-intensity physical activity every week. This helps lower the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, dementia, depression and many types of cancer.

Walking also improves blood sugar levels, is good for bone health and can help you lose weight and sleep better, added Julie Schmied, a nurse practitioner with Norton Healthcare, which runs the free Get Healthy Walking Club.

Another advantage? It's a low-impact exercise that puts less pressure on joints as it strengthens your heart and lungs.

James Blankenship, 68, said joining the walking club at the Louisville Zoo last year helped him bounce back after a heart attack and triple bypass in 2022.

"My cardiologist says I'm doing great," he said.

For all its benefits, however, walking "is not enough for overall health and well-being" because it doesn't provide resistance training that builds muscle strength and endurance, said Anita Gust, who teaches exercise science at the University of Minnesota Crookston.

That's especially important for women's bone health as they age.

Experts recommend adding such activities at least twice weekly — using weights, gym equipment or your own body as resistance — and doing exercises that improve flexibility like yoga or stretching.

Do you really need 10,000 steps a day?

Nearly everyone has heard about this walking goal, which dates back to a 1960s marketing campaign in Japan. But experts stress that it's just a guideline.

The average American walks about 3,000 to 4,000 steps a day and it's fine to gradually work up to 10,000, Schmied said.

Setting a time goal can also be useful. Schmied suggests breaking the recommended 150 minutes per week into 30 minutes a day, or 10 minutes three times a day, for five days. During inclement weather, people can walk in malls or on treadmills.

As they become seasoned walkers, they can speed up the pace or challenge themselves with hills while still keeping the activity level moderate.

"If you can talk but not sing," Eby said, "that's what we consider moderate-intensity exercise."

How do you stay motivated?

Walking with friends — including dogs — is one way.

Walking clubs have popped up across the nation. In 2022, New York personal trainer Brianna Joye Kohn, 31, started City Girls Who Walk with a TikTok post inviting others to walk with her.

"We had 250 girls show up," she said.

Since then, the group has walked every Sunday for around 40 minutes, with some meeting afterward for brunch or coffee.

The Louisville Zoo launched its walking club in 1987, partnered with Norton in 2004 to expand it, and now boasts more than 15,000 registered members. Every day from March 1 through Oct. 31, people walk around and around the 1.4-mile loop before the zoo officially opens.

Tony Weiter meets two of his siblings every Friday. On a recent morning, they caught up on each other's lives as they zipped past zebras in a fenced field and a seal sunning itself.

"I enjoy the serenity of it. It's cold but the sun is shining. You get to see the animals," said Weiter, 63. "It's a great way to start the morning."

Trump returns to Washington vowing a smooth transition -- something he didn't ensure four years ago

By WILL WEISSERT, LISA MASCARO and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump made a victor's return to Washington on Wednesday, visiting the White House for a nearly two-hour meeting with President Joe Biden and committing to a straightforward transition of power despite actively working to disrupt the same process four years ago.

Sitting in the Oval Office, in front of a strong fire in the fireplace, the former rivals shook hands before Biden called Trump "Mr. President-elect and former president" and then settled simply on "Donald."

"Congratulations," the Democrat told the Republican. "I look forward to having, like they said, a smooth transition. Welcome. Welcome back."

Trump replied, "Thank you very much," saying that "politics is tough. And it's, in many cases, not a very nice world. But it is a nice world today, and I appreciate it very much."

Except for the opening moments, the meeting was private, with Biden and Trump joined by their chiefs of staff. Trump said the transition between the outgoing and incoming administrations "will be as smooth as it can get and I very much appreciate that, Joe."

Trump, the winner this time, says he's ready to ensure that there is a seamless move between administrations. But when he lost four years ago, it was a very different story: Trump filed scores of lawsuits falsely claiming widespread voter fraud, refused to actively participate in transition work, denied the election results and helped incite a mob that attacked the U.S. Capitol, trying to stop the certification of Biden's victory.

He also didn't invite Biden to the White House, and he refused to attend the inauguration — the first time that had happened since Andrew Johnson skipped Ulysses S. Grant's swearing-in 155 years ago.

The new, all-smiles scene at the White House — despite what occurred four years ago — put in stark relief the remarkable political rebound for Trump, who departed Washington in 2021 as a diminished, politically defeated leader. Today he's preparing to come back to power with the Republicans having taken back the Senate, on the cusp of clinching a House majority and with what he and his GOP allies see as a mandate for governance.

Neither the president-elect nor Biden answered questions shouted by reporters after their brief remarks. At one point, Biden looked at Trump, who moved his head to the side and gave a small shrug, but did not respond.

Trump later told The New York Post that he and Biden discussed two issues on which they have differed sharply, the war in Ukraine and Israel's ongoing war with Hamas in Gaza.

"I asked for his views and he gave them to me," Trump told the paper. "Also, we talked very much about the Middle East, likewise. I wanted to know his views on where we are and what what he thinks. And he gave them to me, he was very gracious."

It was unclear how long the president-elect's mild attitude toward Biden, set to be both his successor and predecessor at the White House, might last. After his 2016 election win, 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.

Trump looked at ease in the Oval Office in Wednesday, unlike eight years ago, when he appeared nervous and subdued when meeting with Obama. The president-elect left the White House after his session with Biden without addressing the large contingent of reporters on the driveway, waiting in case he made

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an appearance.

First lady Jill Biden greeted Trump upon his arrival and gave him a handwritten letter of congratulations for his wife, Melania, who did not make the trip to Washington. The letter also expressed the first lady's team's readiness to assist with the transition.

As he met with Biden, Trump sent out a fundraising email to supporters saying that he "is inside the White House right now conducting a very important meeting."

Trump had flown from Florida in the morning, joining up with billionaire Elon Musk for a morning session with House Republicans, telling them, "It's nice to win."

He received a standing ovation from GOP lawmakers, many of whom took cellphone videos of Trump, as he ran through their party's victories up and down the ballot.

"I suspect I won't be running again unless you say he's good, we got to figure something else," Trump said to laughter from the lawmakers. The Constitution's 22nd Amendment prevents presidents from running for a third term.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said of Trump's arrival, "He is the comeback king."

"We owe him a great debt of gratitude," Johnson said.

Trump's reemergence comes amid Republican congressional leadership elections. He's endorsed Johnson's return to the speaker's office, with the president-elect saying he is with Johnson all the way, according to a person familiar with the remarks but not authorized to publicly discuss the private meeting.

Musk joining Trump on the Washington trip came after the Tesla and SpaceX CEO has been spending much of his time at Mar-a-Lago, Trump's Florida estate, and participating in discussions as the incoming Trump administration prepares to transition from Biden's. Trump has named Musk to a government efficiency advisory role in his incoming administration. Some close to the president-elect and his team now see Musk as the second most influential figure in Trump's immediate orbit, after Susie Wiles, the campaign manager who is Trump's incoming chief of staff.

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.

Traditionally, as the outgoing and incoming presidents meet in the West Wing, the first lady hosts her successor upstairs in the residence, But her office said Melania Trump wasn't attending, saying in a statement that "her husband's return to the Oval Office to commence the transition process is encouraging, and she wishes him great success."

Wednesday's trip was not the first time Trump has returned to the Capitol area since the end of his first term. Congressional Republicans hosted him over the summer.

Trump left Washington Wednesday without visiting his party's senators. While he was in town, they chose Sen. John Thune of South Dakota in a three-way race to replace outgoing GOP leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky. Trump's allies were pushing GOP senators to vote for Sen. Rick Scott of Florida.

Biden and Xi will meet in Peru as US-China relations tested again by Trump's return

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press
WASHINGTON (AP) —

President Joe Biden will hold talks Saturday with China's Xi Jinping on the sidelines of an international summit in Peru, a face-to-face meeting that comes as Beijing braces for Donald Trump's return to the White House.

White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said the meeting will take place while the two leaders are in Lima for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit. That will come just over two months before Trump's inauguration.

Sullivan was opaque about how Biden and administration officials will answer expected questions from

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Xi and his aides about the incoming Trump administration.

"Transitions are uniquely consequential moments in geopolitics. They're a time when competitors and adversaries can see possibly opportunity," Sullivan said. "And so part of what President Biden will communicate is that we need to maintain stability, clarity, predictability through this transition between the United States and China."

During his campaign against Vice President Kamala Harris, Trump promised to slap blanket 60% tariffs on all Chinese exports to the U.S., a move that would jolt the already tumultuous relationship between Beijing and Washington.

Washington and Beijing have long had deep differences on the support China has given to Russia during its war in Ukraine, human rights issues, technology and Taiwan, the self-ruled democracy that Beijing claims as its own. A second Trump administration is expected to test U.S.-China relations even more than the Republican's first term, when the U.S. imposed tariffs on more than \$360 billion in Chinese products.

That brought Beijing to the negotiating table, and in 2020, the two sides signed a trade deal in which China committed to improve intellectual property rights and buy an extra \$200 billion of American goods. A couple of years later, a research group showed that China had bought essentially none of the goods it had promised.

The White House has been working for months to arrange a final meeting between Xi and Biden before the Democrat leaves office in January.

Sullivan traveled to Beijing in late August to meet with his Chinese counterpart and also sat down with Xi. After that, Sullivan indicated that there could be a final meeting between Xi and Biden at APEC or at next week's summit of the Group of 20 top economies in Rio de Janeiro, which both leaders are scheduled to attend.

Biden has sought to maintain a steady relationship with Xi even as his administration repeatedly has raised concerns about what it sees as malign actions by Beijing.

U.S. intelligence officials have assessed China has surged sales to Russia of machine tools, microelectronics and other technology that Moscow is using to produce missiles, tanks, aircraft and other weaponry for use in its war against Ukraine. The administration last month imposed sanctions against two Chinese companies accused of directly helping Russia build long-range attack drones used against Ukraine.

Tensions flared last year after Biden ordered the shooting down of a Chinese spy balloon that traversed the United States. And the Biden administration has criticized Chinese military assertiveness toward Japan, the Philippines and Taiwan.

On the campaign trail, Trump spoke of his personal connection with Xi, which started out well during his first term before becoming strained over disputes about trade and the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a congratulatory message to Trump after his victory over Harris, Xi called for the U.S. and China to manage their differences and get along in a new era, according to Chinese state media.

Biden, for his part, is expected in the meeting with Xi to focus on efforts to stem the flow of Chinese-manufactured chemicals used to make fentanyl, concerns about Beijing's indirect support for Russia's war in Ukraine, cybersecurity concerns and the importance of maintaining military-to-military communications.

Sullivan added that he expected that Biden would also raise an ongoing U.S. investigation into an alleged Chinese hacker operation targeting cellphones used by Trump, Vice President-elect JD Vance, and people associated with the Harris campaign.

Saturday's talks will be the third meeting between Biden and Xi during Biden's presidency. They met in Woodside, California, last November on the sidelines of the 2023 APEC summit, and the leaders last spoke by phone in April.

Sullivan also announced that Biden while at APEC will hold a joint meeting with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Japan's new prime minister, Shigeru Ishiba.

That meeting is a follow-up on the historic Camp David summit Biden hosted in August 2023 with Yoon and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

Biden has nudged the United States' two closest Asian allies to further tighten security and economic cooperation with each other amid their shared concerns about North Korea's nuclear provocations as well

as China's military and economic assertiveness in the Pacific.

The historic rivals have been divided by differing views of World War II history and Japan's colonial rule over the Korean Peninsula from 1910 to 1945.

US overdose deaths are down, giving experts hope for an enduring decline

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The decline in U.S. drug overdose deaths appears to have continued this year, giving experts hope the nation is seeing sustained improvement in the persistent epidemic.

There were about 97,000 overdose deaths in the 12-month period that ended June 30, according to provisional Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data released Wednesday. That's down 14% from the estimated 113,000 for the previous 12-month period.

"This is a pretty stunning and rapid reversal of drug overdose mortality numbers," said Brandon Marshall, a Brown University researcher who studies overdose trends.

Overdose death rates began steadily climbing in the 1990s because of opioid painkillers, followed by waves of deaths led by other opioids like heroin and — more recently — illicit fentanyl. Provisional data had indicated a slight decline for 2023, and the tally released Wednesday showed that the downward trend has kept going.

Of course, there have been moments in the last several years when U.S. overdose deaths seemed to have plateaued or even started to go down, only to rise again, Marshall noted.

"This seems to be substantial and sustained," Marshall said. "I think there's real reason for hope here."

Experts aren't certain about the reasons for the decline, but they cite a combination of possible factors.

One is COVID-19. In the worst days of the pandemic, addiction treatment was hard to get and people were socially isolated — with no one around to help if they overdosed.

"During the pandemic we saw such a meteoric rise in drug overdose deaths that it's only natural we would see a decrease," said Farida Ahmad of the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics.

Still, overdose deaths are well above what they were at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The recent numbers could represent the fruition of years of efforts to increase the availability of the overdose-reversing drug naloxone, and addiction treatments such as buprenorphine, said Erin Winstanley, a University of Pittsburgh professor who researches drug overdose trends.

Marshall said such efforts likely are being aided by money from settlements of opioid-related lawsuits, brought by state, local and Native American governments against drugmakers, wholesalers and pharmacies. Settlement funds have been rolling out to small towns and big cities across the U.S., and some have started spending the money on naloxone and other measures.

Some experts have wondered about changes in the drug supply. Xylazine, a sedative, has been increasingly detected in illegally manufactured fentanyl, and experts are sorting out exactly how it's affecting overdoses.

In the latest CDC data, overdose death reports are down in 45 states. Increases occurred in Alaska, Nevada, Oregon, Utah and Washington.

The most dramatic decreases were seen in North Carolina and Ohio, but CDC officials voiced a note of caution. Some jurisdictions have had lags in getting death records to federal statisticians — particularly North Carolina, where death investigations have slowed because of understaffing at the state medical examiner's office. The CDC made estimates to try to account for incomplete death records, but the decline in some places may ultimately turn out not to be as dramatic as initial numbers suggest.

Another limitation of the provisional data is that it doesn't detail what's happening in different groups of people. Recent research noted the overdose deaths in Black and Native Americans have been growing disproportionately larger.

"We really need more data from the CDC to learn whether these declines are being experienced in all racial ethnic subgroups," Marshall said.

Dolly Parton sings her family's story on 'Smoky Mountain DNA.' **She says it is her 'favorite album'**

By MARIA SHERMAN AP Music Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Dolly Parton's musical story starts further back than most might expect — to the British Isles of the 1600s. That's where her ancestors hail from, eventually landing in the hollers of East Tennessee and its familiar mountain ranges, bringing their songs with them. A new album out Friday, "Smoky Mountain DNA: Family, Faith & Fables" credited to Dolly Parton and Family, explores the great legacy of the Partons and the Owens, her maternal family, as she performs alongside five generations of family members.

"My grandpa used to say when I got famous, he said, 'Well, she came out crying in the key of D,'" she told The Associated Press. "I think we all did."

"Smoky Mountain DNA" was an inevitable labor of love, one that taught Parton more about her family line.

"We're kind of like the Carter family. We go back generations," Parton said. (The Carters are widely considered the first family of country music.)

"I would imagine this will be my favorite album," Parton said. "This really involves, you know, my grandmas and my grandpas, my uncles and my aunts and all the people going all the way back that had the biggest influence on my life. The ones that I remember from being little, and it even goes on farther back from there."

Richie Owens — Parton's cousin, who she describes as "the family historian" — produced "Smoky Mountain DNA." He says that the family has long been archivists, but the idea to curate a record started around 2010 and 2011, delayed by a few deaths. Then, right before the pandemic, Parton approached Owens and said, "we need to get together and start trying to get all this information (and) material together," he recalls. Because Owens had already been working on a family story, specifically tied to his grandfather's fiddle, they teamed up for what is now "Smoky Mountain DNA."

For some of the new songs, Owens utilized digital technology — what he compares to the AI-assist on the last new Beatles song, "Now and Then," used to extract John Lennon's voice from an old demo for a new composition — for "restoration work."

"With the technology that's been available, we were able to achieve wonderful, miraculous situations where we were able to go in and build new music tracks" from previous vocal recordings of deceased family members, he says. It was about cleaning up the crackles and noise — not about creating doctored recordings.

"I got very, very emotional many times when I was singing, especially with the ones that have already passed and just remembering their voices, hearing them," Parton says. "It just kind of threw me in to a deep emotional place, just like I had them back again. So, the whole thing was very heart wrenching. But it was really amazing and very restoring. It had so many colors of emotions in it."

Parton and Owens started curating the album by finding songs that she had co-written with deceased family members — or those of deceased family members that she had recorded previously. Others were hits and integral to the story of their heritage, and the songs recorded with younger members of the family — including those born in the 21st century — included more Parton co-writes, but with styles that felt true to each person.

That's one of the many reasons the album, which is centered in country, folk, hymns and bluegrass, spans a wide swath of genres, including a kind of soulful R&B performance (like on "Not Bad" with Shelley Rená), swamp pop ("I Just Stopped By" with Parton's late uncle Robert "John Henry" Owens), various rock genres ("Where Will We Live Tomorrow" with Rebecca Seaver and "Crazy in Love with You" with Richie Owens' daughter Estelle).

The album revisits Parton's own career, too: There is a delightful cover of "Puppy Love," originally recorded when she was 13, now sang with some of the youngest members of her family.

"Some of the little ones," she says, "remind me so much of myself when I was young and playing the

guitar.”

“Smoky Mountain DNA” could only end with one song: “When It’s Family,” originally co-written by Parton and released as “Family” on her 1991 album “Eagle When She Flies.” It’s a moving song about acceptance, Parton singing: “Some are preachers, some are gay / Some are addicts, drunks and strays / But not a one is turned away / When it’s family.”

“I don’t condemn nor condone anything. I just love and accept people where they are for who they are,” she explains. “And I don’t judge because I’ve said before, I’ve got some of everybody in my immediate family, whether they be trans, whether they be gay, whether they be drag queens or whatever. I mean, we’ve got drunks, we’ve got strays, we’ve got drug addicts — you always have that when you got a family as big as ours. And you love them all.”

So, what about all the material that isn’t included here? “I’m sure we’ll be doing compilation albums,” says Parton. “We’re doing a docuseries as well, taking all the music back to the old country with a lot of our relatives over there that are still singing all those old songs that got brought over here... It’s really moving.”

In the meantime, she’s working on a musical based on her life, scheduled to hit Broadway in 2026. It, like “Smoky Mountain DNA,” is an opportunity to reflect on her career, and maybe even what her legacy will become five more generations down the line.

“I hope that a lot of my songs may last that long,” she says. “And I hope I’ll be remembered as somebody that tried to do some good in the world and left, you know, a few good things.”

US inflation rose slightly last month after 2 years of steady cooling but remained low

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Inflation in the United States ticked up in October, driven by costlier rents, used cars and air fares, a sign that price increases might be leveling off after having slowed in September to their lowest pace since 2021.

Consumer prices rose 2.6% from a year earlier, the Labor Department said Wednesday, up from 2.4% in September. It was the first rise in annual inflation in seven months. From September to October, prices edged up 0.2%, the same as the previous month.

Excluding volatile food and energy costs, “core” prices rose 3.3% from a year earlier, just as in September. From September to October, core prices rose 0.3% for a third straight month. Over the long run, core inflation at that pace would exceed the Federal Reserve’s 2% target.

Most economists, though, think inflation will eventually resume its slowdown. Consumer inflation, which peaked at 9.1% in 2022, has since fallen steadily, though overall prices 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 victory has raised 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 his plan to substantially increase tariffs on imports and pursue mass deportations of migrants, would worsen inflation if fully implemented.

Most of the September-to-October increase in consumer prices reflected a rise in rents and housing costs, a trend that Fed officials expect to fade in the coming months. As a result, Wednesday’s figures could keep the Fed on track to cut its key rate for a third time in December, as its officials have previously indicated they likely would.

“Inflation is proving to be a little sticky, but not a big issue,” said Ryan Sweet, chief U.S. economist at Oxford Economics, a consulting firm. “What I think that means for the Fed is that they can still cut in December.”

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If it reduces its key rate again in December by an expected quarter-point, Sweet said, the Fed will have cut rates by a full percentage point. He thinks the policymakers will then pause to gauge the effects of their rate cuts on the economy and inflation.

"A pause is coming," Sweet said. "The path for interest rates next year is a lot murkier."

Stock prices surged in the wake of Trump's election victory, mostly on optimism that his proposed tax cuts and deregulation would boost the economy and corporate profits. But bond yields also moved higher, partly reflecting fear that inflation could accelerate.

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.

Gas prices fell 0.9% from September to October, helping to hold down overall inflation. Prices at the pump have since fallen further on average nationwide, to 3.08 a gallon on Wednesday, according to AAA. That's down from \$3.20 a month ago.

Grocery prices ticked up just 0.1% from September to October and are up just 1.1% over the past year, providing some relief to consumers after food costs surged roughly 23% over the past three years. Egg prices continue to be highly volatile. They fell 6.4% just last month, though they're up more than 30% from a year earlier.

Used car prices jumped 2.7% just from September to October, after having mostly declined for months before that. But that spike may prove to be an anomaly. Auto dealers have mostly rebuilt their inventories after they were depleted during COVID, and in some cases dealers have had to offer incentives again to entice buyers. Compared with a year ago, average used car prices are still down 3.4%.

As inflation has slowed, some consumers have felt a bit of relief. Lessie Owen, who works in sales, said she has noticed the drop in gas prices, which has made it easier for her to pay for her drive each day to work in Washington, D.C. And at grocery stores, she said, fruit and vegetable prices appear to have stabilized.

Owen still has a mortgage rate below 3%, which has helped her finances, and she says she has always been frugal.

"We take advantage of specials, discounts and coupons — all of that," she said.

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.

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.

The Fed chair also observed that some sources of rising prices, like auto insurance, reflect changes that occurred during the pandemic, such as a spike in car prices that made them costlier to insure. Such "catch-up inflation," as he called it, will likely fade over time.

And 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, 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.

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 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?

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 upended the schedule.

The high court's ruling gives former presidents immunity from prosecution for official acts and bars a prosecutor 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 fal-

sifying business records. He could throw 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."

In any case, 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.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz says he'll ask for a vote of confidence in December

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Wednesday that he will ask for a vote of confidence on Dec. 16, paving the way for early parliamentary elections in February. He declared his plans during a speech in parliament, a week after his three-party coalition government collapsed.

Germany has been governed since 2021 by a coalition led by Scholz's left-leaning Social Democrats, which included the smaller pro-business Free Democrats and the Greens. It was an uneasy and fractious alliance, and it fell apart when Scholz fired Finance Minister Christian Lindner of the Free Democrats in a late-night move following disagreements over how to revive the shrinking economy.

"The date at the end of February has now been set and I am very grateful for that," Scholz said, adding that he would try to pass important legislation through parliament before that, such as financial support for children of poor families, or amendments to the country's constitution to make the highest court more resilient to possible political interference.

He said he would submit a request for a vote of confidence on Dec. 11, so that the Bundestag can decide on this on Dec. 16. The chancellor had initially wanted to have an early election only by late March — ahead of the vote that is regularly scheduled for September 2025.

However, the center-right Christian opposition pushed for a quicker vote in the parliament to speed up the next election.

In the end, party leaders across the political spectrum agreed on Wednesday on the two dates for the vote of confidence and the new election on Feb. 23.

During his speech, Scholz as well as Friedrich Merz, the head of the main opposition party in parliament, the Christian Democrats, already shifted into campaign mode — though the heated part of campaigning usually only begins around six weeks before an election in Germany.

"There is a great sense of relief in our country. For a week now, the so-called progressive coalition ... has been history. And that is continuing good news for Germany," Merz said to the applause of his Christian Democrats as he spoke after Scholz in the parliament.

"You are dividing the country, Mr. Chancellor. You are the one responsible for these controversies and for this division in Germany," Merz attacked Scholz in his speech. "You simply cannot govern a country like this."

He accused the chancellor of having tried to delay the vote of confidence and said he should have called

for one immediately.

According to Scholz's announcement on Thursday, his Social Democrats and the Greens will lead the country in a minority government until the chancellor asks for the vote of confidence on Dec. 16, which he is expected to lose. That will then set the path for a new parliamentary election in a little over 100 days from now, on Feb. 23.

Four candidates are expected to make their bid for the chancellery with voters in February.

Scholz has said he wants to run as chancellor candidate again — even though his party has not yet announced his candidacy.

Merz of the Christian Democrats, currently leading the polls, was officially nominated as candidate by his party in September.

For the environmentalist Greens, the country's current economy minister and vice-chancellor, Robert Habeck, will lead his party as candidate for chancellor.

The Greens are a small party that lost popularity in recent elections and whose support currently hovers around 10%, meaning it is unlikely that he would end up as the country's leader.

The far-right Alternative for Germany, or AfD, has said they would nominate current party leader Alice Weidel next month as their candidate.

Merz's Christian Democrats have been polling around 30% or more in the polls for a year now. Scholz's Social Democrats, currently the strongest governing party, are in third place with around 16% — behind the AfD, which is at around 19%.

The main campaign issues are likely going to be the country's ailing economy which led to the collapse of the government in the first place, more efficient control of migration, and — when it comes to foreign policy issues — Russia's war on Ukraine and the next presidency of Donald Trump.

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.

Last year, 266 firearms seized in the Bahamas were submitted to ATF, along with 234 firearms from

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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.

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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.

Today in History: November 14, Marshall University football team killed in plane crash

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, Nov. 14, the 319th day of 2024. There are 47 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Nov. 14, 1970, a chartered Southern Airways plane crashed while trying to land in West Virginia, killing all 75 people on board, including the Marshall University football team and its coaching staff.

Also on this date:

In 1851, Herman Melville's novel "Moby-Dick; Or, The Whale" was published in the United States, almost a month after being released in Britain.

In 1889, journalist Nellie Bly began an attempt to travel around the world in 80 days; she would successfully complete the journey in a little more than 72 days.

In 1910, Eugene B. Ely became the first aviator to take off from a ship as his Curtiss pusher rolled off a sloping platform on the deck of the scout cruiser USS Birmingham off Hampton Roads, Virginia.

In 1940, during World War II, German bombing raids destroyed much of the English city of Coventry.

In 1960, 6-year-old Ruby Bridges became the first Black child to desegregate William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans.

In 1965, the U.S. Army's first major military operation of the Vietnam War began with the start of the five-day Battle of Ia Drang.

In 1969, Apollo 12 blasted off for the moon, three months after Apollo 11 became the first manned

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mission to land on it.

In 1972, the Dow Jones Industrial Average closed above the 1,000 level for the first time, ending the day at 1,003.16.

In 1993, Miami Dolphins coach Don Shula became the NFL's all-time winningest coach with a victory over the Philadelphia Eagles.

In 2020, supporters of President Donald Trump unwilling to accept Democrat Joe Biden's election victory gathered in cities across the country including Washington, D.C., where thousands rallied.

Today's Birthdays: Britain's King Charles III is 76. Filmmaker Zhang Yimou is 74. Musician Yanni is 70. Former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is 70. Five-time Tour de France winner Bernard Hinault is 70. Basketball Hall of Famer Jack Sikma is 69. Former presidential adviser Valerie Jarrett is 68. Rapper Joseph Simmons (Reverend Run of Run-DMC) is 60. News anchor Bill Hemmer is 60. Actor Josh Duhamel is 52. Rock drummer Travis Barker is 49. Actor-comedian Vanessa Bayer is 43. Tennis player Sofia Kenin is 26.

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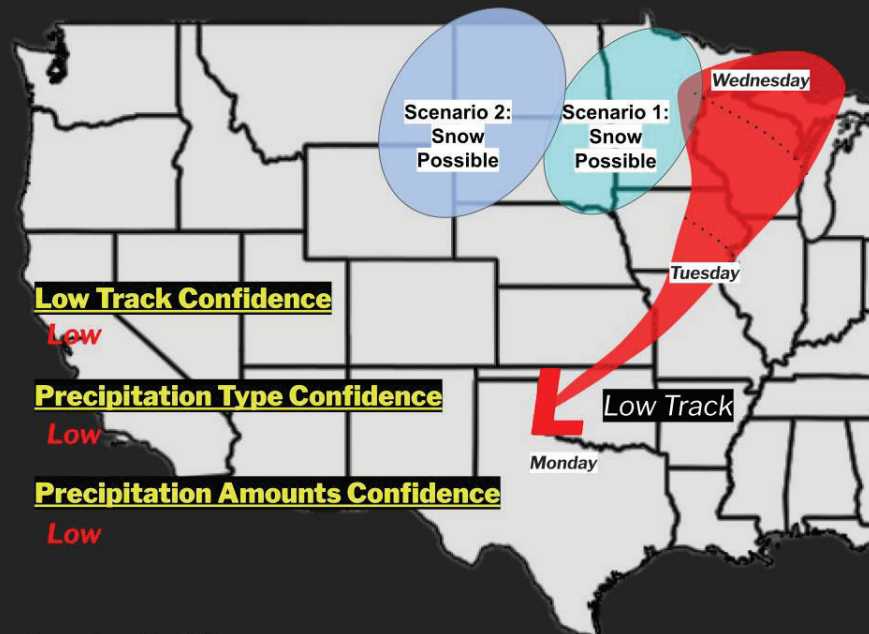
Potential Storm Next Week

Quiet conditions through the rest of the work week with 20 to 40% chance of rain, mainly over far north central SD for Saturday. Temperatures will continue to run about 10 to 15 degrees above average.

A storm system next week could bring rain to the area on Monday and may transition to all snow by the midweek. With this being several days out in time, confidence remains low on the exact track, timing, and strength of storm which leads to lower confidence on exact precipitation type and amounts over the forecast area. Stay tuned! Now is the time to winterize your car and home to prepare for the season!

Rain Possibly Changing To Snow Next Week?

Low Confidence In Accumulating Snow



What's the Concern?

Rain Monday may undergo a transition to rain/snow mix to snow Tuesday and Wednesday.

What's Uncertain?

- The exact **track** of the storm
- The exact **timing** of the storm
- The exact **strength** of the storm
- The exact **amounts** and **locations** of the heaviest precipitation

What Should You Do?

- Start to **monitor** the forecast for next week
- Consider **preparing** your car, home, and self for the risk of winter weather.



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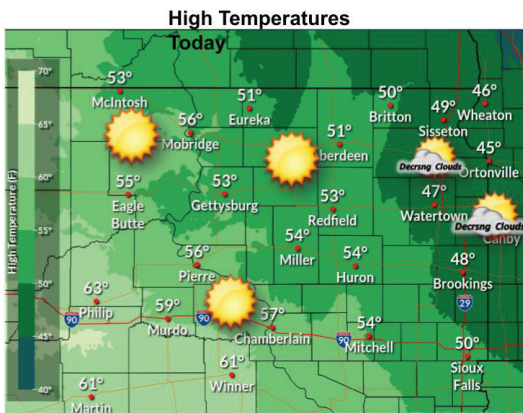


Weather Outlook

Temperatures 10 to 15 degrees above average

November 14, 2024

4:38 AM



Tonight	Friday	Saturday
Lows: 25-31°	Highs: 50-57°	Highs: 47-57°

Slight Chance
20-40% chance of rain over far north central SD



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD