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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.

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PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460



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.....

15. My children are all college graduates



Three named to All-Conference Volleyball Team

Chesney Weber, Jerica Locke and Rylee Dunker were all named to the Northeast Conference All-Conference Volleyball Team.

Others on the team are Addie Neuendorf, Addie Steffensen and Issie Steffensen from Hamlin, Ava Hanson and Maddie Huber from Aberdeen Roncalli, Heather Storbakken and Abby Lee from Britton-Hecla, Addison Krause and Claire Snaza from Milbank, Shay Michalski from Clark/Willow Lake, Hayden Gall from Redfield, Krista Langager from Sisseton and Mallory Steiner from Webster Area. Tiospa Zina and Deuel did not have anyone on the team.

Queen of Hearts

The Queen of Hearts drawing was held Thursday with the jackpot at \$6,233. Ticket sales for the week were \$990. The name of Dennis and Shirley Larson was drawn with card number 40 which was the Eight of Hearts. They won the consolation prize of \$99.

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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.

South Africa Miners

South African authorities have restricted food and water supplies to an estimated 350 to 4,000 illegal miners in a shaft in the country's North West province. The standoff is the latest flashpoint in a government policy to end illegal mining by closing off supply lines, forcing workers to resurface and face arrest.

Illegal mining is common in South Africa, once the world's largest gold producer, now home to thousands of abandoned mines. Migrant workers—including those from Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Lesotho—join local syndicates to search for abandoned minerals. It's a dangerous industry reportedly costing the country hundreds of millions of dollars in lost sales and taxes, with some workers linked to violent crimes.

Since police encircled this latest mine shaft weeks ago, 1,000 workers have resurfaced and have been arrested; others are reportedly growing weak from lack of access to food and water. The body of at least one miner has been recovered.

Mike Tyson vs. Jake Paul

Mike Tyson and Jake Paul are set to fight tonight at the Dallas Cowboys AT&T Stadium in front of an expected 100,000 attendees (Netflix, 8 pm ET). The match has generated attention for pitting one of the sport's legends against an upstart YouTuber-turned-boxer roughly half his age.

Tyson, 58, holds the record for youngest heavyweight boxing champion, a feat he achieved at age 20. Tyson served three years in prison for rape in the early 1990s. In 1997, he famously bit the ear of opponent Evander Holyfield twice midmatch. He has not fought professionally since a loss in 2005. Paul, 27, has converted a successful influencer stint into a boxing career; he is the younger brother of fellow social media influencer—and wrestler—Logan Paul.

The officially sanctioned fight will feature tweaks to the rules, with bigger gloves used and fewer, shorter rounds. It will be one of seven contests streaming live on Netflix tonight as the company debuts live boxing, part of a broader effort to expand live programming.

Colossal Coral Colony

Scientists announced yesterday the discovery of the world's largest known coral colony near the Pacific's Solomon Islands. The 300- to 500-year-old coral measures roughly 112 feet wide and 105 feet long—so large it is visible from space and three times larger than the previous record holder.

The coral colony is a single entity composed of at least 1 billion genetically identical polyps functioning as one organism; coral reefs are ecosystems formed by multiple coral colonies. The coral, part of the *Pavona clavus* species, is predominantly brown with splashes of color.

Recent studies show nearly 44% of warm-water coral species face extinction. Since last year, about 77% of reefs have experienced bleaching heat stress, a process whereby corals lose their essential algae. This colony's survival in cooler waters suggests some corals may adapt better to environmental changes than previously thought.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Satire news outlet The Onion purchases Alex Jones' InfoWars with backing from Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting families, owed nearly \$1.5B by Jones following defamation lawsuits.

Craig Melvin tapped to replace Hoda Kotb as "Today" show coanchor; Kotb announced in September she'd be stepping down after more than two decades.

Skiing legend Lindsey Vonn to come out of retirement at age 40, more than five years since her last competition.

Tampa Bay Rays to play 2025 home games at New York Yankees' spring-training field in Tampa after Hurricane Milton tore roof off Tropicana Field.

Science & Technology

OpenAI to launch AI-powered agent capable of independently carrying out tasks, such as booking travel and sending emails; "Operator" to launch in January, compete with similar products from Anthropic and Microsoft.

Researchers develop algorithm to predict when lithium-ion batteries are about to catch fire by analyzing sounds from inside the devices; batteries can briefly emit flames almost as hot as a blowtorch during failure.

Skull's bone marrow continues to grow and expand over time, study finds, allowing production of healthy new blood cells as we age.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close lower (S&P 500 -0.6%, Dow -0.5%, Nasdaq -0.6%) as Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell signals caution on further rate cuts.

Disney shares close up 6% after company reports growth in profits and customers, forecasts stronger-than-expected earnings outlook.

European Union fines Meta \$841M for violating antitrust laws by tying its Marketplace online classified ads business to its Facebook social network.

US regulators reportedly seeking to put Google under federal supervision similar to how banks are overseen.

Coach owner Tapestry ends bid for \$8.5B acquisition of Michael Kors owner Capri following regulatory hurdles.

Politics & World Affairs

President-elect Donald Trump taps Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to head Department of Health and Human Services; role requires Senate confirmation.

NY Gov. Kathy Hochul (D) unveils revised New York City congestion pricing plan, the first such plan in the US; plan would charge a daily \$9 toll on most vehicles entering Manhattan's central business district during peak hours.

Tropical Storm Sara forms in Caribbean Sea, expected to bring life-threatening flash-flooding and mud-slides across Central America, including Honduras.

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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



Two Years of Telemedicine in Motion: Enhancing Emergency Care Across South Dakota

PIERRE, SD – The South Dakota Department of Health (DOH) and Avel eCare EMS proudly celebrate two years of the Telemedicine in Motion program, which has transformed emergency medical services (EMS) in 107 communities statewide.

Launched on Nov. 14, 2022, this initiative enables first responders to consult with emergency physicians, nurses, and paramedics in real time, improving response and patient outcomes, especially in rural areas where timely access to advanced care is essential.

"Telemedicine in Motion has strengthened emergency response and rural health across South Dakota," said Department of Health Secretary, Melissa Magstadt. "This partnership ensures that all residents have access to high-quality emergency care, regardless of location."

With over 80 percent of South Dakota's ambulance services staffed by volunteers, the program provides crucial support to rural EMS teams, allowing them to offer expert-level care with guidance from Avel's team. This capability to consult en route helps improve patient outcomes and allows seamless transitions to in-hospital care.

"Telemedicine in Motion empowers EMS teams to deliver high-quality care, sustaining the vitality of our rural communities," said Dr. Tyler Price, Avel eCare Medical Director. "Every South Dakotan can feel secure knowing that expert help is just a call away."

Avel eCare EMS and the DOH remain committed to expanding this life-saving service to even more communities.

Dacotah Bank is Named One of American Banker Magazine's 2024 Best Banks to Work For

In recognition of its dedication to employees and their families, Dacotah Bank has again been named one of the Best Banks to Work For by American Banker! This marks the seventh consecutive year Dacotah Bank has received this honor and is proud to be ranked #52 on this year's list. In the past three years, our rankings have been #31, #28, and #39, demonstrating our commitment to excellence. Dacotah Bank strives to be one of the best banks to work for and an employer of choice throughout our territory. This recognition is a testament to the bank's efforts to center its focus around employees, communities, customers, and shareholders.

"We are proud to have built an inclusive workplace that prioritizes the well-being of our employees and their families. This year, we expanded our benefits to include additional wellness programs and professional development opportunities. These initiatives underscore our commitment to supporting our Dacotah Bank family, who contribute so much to the Company and the communities in which we live and work. Creating a great workplace culture is the best way to retain and recruit employees" said Chairman and CEO Robert Fouberg.

"Dacotah Bank is dedicated to attracting and retaining top talent by focusing on appreciation, investment in our people, and succession planning. The DacotahGrown internship program provides young professionals with hands-on experience within the organization's functions, teams, and culture, and lays the groundwork for their success should they choose to join Dacotah Bank after graduation. The bank's Culture Committee is committed to making Dacotah Bank an employer of choice by prioritizing employee satisfaction and engagement. Through its Give Where We Live program, Dacotah Bank empowers employees to support community organizations that matter to them, enabling them to direct a portion of our bank's contributions. This initiative fosters community engagement and encourages involvement in causes that resonate with all employees. Additionally, Dacotah Bank prioritizes employee growth by offering various leadership and development programs for all staff levels. A comprehensive performance management framework supports ongoing discussions about employee development and career advancement, ensuring a vibrant and engaged workforce.

The Best Banks to Work For program, initiated in 2013 by American Banker and Best Companies Group, identifies, recognizes and honors US banks for outstanding employee satisfaction. Full results of this year's program are available at AmericanBanker.com and in the November issue of American Banker Magazine.

Determining the Best Banks to Work For involves a two-step process. The first step is an evaluation of participating companies' workplace policies, practices, and demographics. In the second step, employee surveys are conducted to directly assess the experiences and attitudes of individual employees with respect to their workplace. The combined scores determine the top banks and the final ranking.

Best Companies Group managed the overall registration, survey process and analysis of the data. They used their expertise to determine the final ranking. The program is open to commercial banks, thrifts, savings banks and other chartered retail financial institutions with at least 50 employees in the United States.

PUC to host large electric load education session

PIERRE, S.D. - The South Dakota Public Utilities Commission will host a large electric load education session beginning at 9 a.m. CST on Tuesday, Nov. 26, 2024, in Room 414 of the South Dakota State Capitol in Pierre. The agenda will include discussion of large electric load requests and planning from representatives of investor-owned utilities, generation and transmission cooperatives, municipal utilities, regional transmission organizations and data centers.

Space at the event is limited, but the session will be audio livestreamed through the PUC website. Recordings will also be made available following the meeting. No information shared during this conference will be considered part of the evidentiary record for any pending PUC proceeding and participants have been asked to refrain from any discussion specific to any open docket before the PUC.

"This educational session will give commissioners the opportunity to learn about inquiries our South Dakota utilities are receiving regarding data centers, crypto mining facilities, and other potential large load entities and discuss the challenges that possible large load requests present," commented PUC Chairperson Kristie Fiegen.

"One of the most important goals for the PUC and our staff is to protect South Dakota citizens. Educational opportunities like this to share information are an essential portion of fulfilling that goal," said PUC Vice Chair Gary Hanson.

"During the event, commissioners will moderate the discussion and have the opportunity to ask questions of invited presenters, gaining insight into how future large load demands will be managed and may impact the grid and South Dakota consumers," explained PUC Commissioner Chris Nelson.

The commission expects representatives from investor-owned utilities Black Hills Energy, Montana-Dakota Utilities, MidAmerican Energy, NorthWestern Energy, Otter Tail Power Co., Xcel Energy; electric cooperatives Basin Electric Power Cooperative, East River Electric Power Cooperative, Rushmore Electric Power Cooperative; energy services providers Heartland Energy and Missouri River Energy Services; regional transmission organizations Midcontinent Independent System Operator and Southwest Power Pool; data centers Allied Digital and Big Watt Digital; and SDN Communications.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Fiscal analysts caution lawmakers as state sales tax revenue dips

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - NOVEMBER 14, 2024 5:23 PM

South Dakota is on track to see negative sales tax revenue growth for the current fiscal year.

As the largest source of revenue for state government, the trend is concerning for lawmakers heading into the 2025 legislative session and beyond, fiscal experts told lawmakers on the Joint Committee on Appropriations Thursday in Pierre.

Sales tax collections so far this fiscal year are down nearly 4% compared to the same time last year, a difference of about \$19 million. If that keeps up, it would be the only time collections have declined in the last 14 years except for last year, when a slight dip was attributed to the reduction of the state sales tax rate from 4.5% to 4.2%.

The state's total revenue collection July through October fell over \$41 million compared with the same period last year.

"If you look at the path we're on, it does not look good," said Jeff Mehlhaff, the Legislative Research Council's deputy director and chief fiscal analyst.

Mehlhaff and Derek Johnson, state economist with the governor's Bureau of Finance and Management, cited factors including lower consumer spending due to inflation and decreasing farm incomes.

If the trend continues, Mehlhaff said, South Dakota will fall \$78.2 million short of projections lawmakers adopted last legislative session for sales tax revenue.

But Mehlhaff and Johnson told lawmakers the state could replace the lost sales tax revenue with other sources, including large remittances in unclaimed property.

"I still think the target can be achieved," Mehlhaff said. "Given the extra unclaimed property, it's going to be close to the target overall even with negative sales tax."

Unclaimed property is abandoned or forgotten money from bank accounts, stocks, life insurance payouts, uncashed checks and the contents of safe deposit boxes. The holder of the money or items, such as a bank, tries to find the owners. After three years of dormancy, the property reverts to the state.

Gov. Kristi Noem will present her fiscal year 2025 budget address on Dec. 3, and the committee will adjust revenue projections in February.



Derek Johnson, state economist with the governor's Bureau of Finance and Management, and LRC Chief Fiscal Analyst Jeff Mehlhaff (left to right) present to the Revenue Projection Subcommittee in Pierre during the 2023 legislative session. (Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

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Inflation impacts consumer spending

South Dakota raked in revenue over the last two years, buoyed by federal stimulus funding from the COVID-19 pandemic. But revenue growth slowed this summer.

In July, the beginning of fiscal year 2025, sales tax revenue dropped 6% compared to 2024. Four months into the 2025 fiscal year, sales tax revenue decreased 1.7% year-to-date compared to 2024.

South Dakota is seeing a "huge" reduction in consumer spending, according to Johnson.

"Prolonged, increased inflation and interest rates are weighing on the consumer, especially in more discretionary spending areas," Johnson said.

He added that contractor's excise tax, the state's second largest source of revenue, flattened out "as we expected." The revenue source is down from the legislative adoption by \$5.8 million, or 6.7%. That's down 3.1% year-over-year.

"It's still a strong number," Johnson said.

The state saw significant growth in construction during the pandemic due to an increased demand for housing and an influx in federal funds to meet the demand. The state expected the revenue source to decrease after federal funding made its way through the economy.

Farm income impact

Sales tax is losing the most ground in retail trade, Mehlhaff told lawmakers. Farm machinery, especially, is experiencing a large decline along with building materials and garden supplies, while online sales are growing.

Four months into fiscal year 2025, tax revenue derived from farm equipment sales decreased 20.2% compared to this time last year.

Sales tax revenue mirrors personal income growth in the state. The state's personal income growth peaked in 2021 at over 14% growth. Current personal income growth stands at just under 4%.

Farm income in South Dakota peaked at \$4.4 billion in 2022 due to rising demand and commodity prices. Since then, prices decreased and overall farm income fell to \$3.8 billion in 2023. In 2024, overall farm income in South Dakota stands around \$2.9 billion.

Farm income is volatile, and some South Dakotans worry impending tariff policies from the incoming Trump administration will worsen the situation. Rep. Lance Koth, R-Mitchell, is a retired banker and told lawmakers he is worried the policy could lead to "another very troublesome time."

"We'll see in the next year or so, or until this gets sorted out, that this number is going to drop pretty dramatically," Koth said, referring to farm income.

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

Men's prison price comes in at \$825 million, sparking questions from lawmakers, public

Cost will require additional funding requests, does not include price of road upgrades

BY: JOHN HULT - NOVEMBER 14, 2024 4:16 PM

A new men's prison in Lincoln County will cost the state \$825 million, lawmakers learned Thursday morning.

That figure is \$256 million more than the \$569 million state lawmakers have appropriated for the project over the past few years. It also does not include the cost of paving and widening the two-lane gravel roads that surround the project site, about 15 miles south of Sioux Falls at the intersection of 477th Avenue and 277th Street.

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Even without those road costs, the \$825 million “guaranteed maximum price” now locked in for the multi-building complex is higher than any previous estimate publicly offered for the prison’s construction.

Department of Corrections Secretary Kellie Wasko, her finance director and the project’s construction manager faced pointed questioning from members of the Joint Appropriations Committee and the public on Thursday about the price tag, plans for flooding mitigation and about the possibility of building somewhere else.

Throughout the questioning, Wasko returned several times to a common theme: That the state studied its options for a new men’s prison, and that the \$825 million project was the most fiscally responsible option to address overcrowding and security issues within the state’s correctional system.

“The decision to construct a men’s prison was not made hastily,” Wasko said.

Finance Director Brittnei Skipper said that the DOC’s next prison project budget request will be less than \$200 million because the money lawmakers have already allocated has been placed in an interest-bearing incarceration construction fund. The interest from the \$505 million currently in the fund is anticipated to return \$61 million, Skipper said. The prison is set to open in 2029. Skipper did not say how long it would take for the project to generate that much interest, and the DOC did not immediately return a request for clarification.

Some lawmakers on the committee and several members of the public, however, urged caution on the project. It would be the most expensive state-led, taxpayer-funded capital project in South Dakota history, and lawmakers are headed into a budget year with fewer dollars to spare than they’ve had in recent years.

“The Legislature is going to be challenged to find the additional funding you may need for this facility,” said Rep. John Mills, R-Volga.

The facility is intended to largely replace the existing penitentiary in Sioux Falls, parts of which date to 1881.



A rendering of a new men’s prison proposed for an area of Lincoln County about 15 miles south of Sioux Falls, presented to state lawmakers on Nov. 14, 2024. The complex would house about 1,500 inmates. (Courtesy of SD DOC)

Price scrutinized

JE Dunn Construction and Henry Carlson Construction were selected to build the project. Vance McMillan of JE Dunn was on hand for Thursday’s meeting, and told lawmakers that there’s a “gluttony” of prison and jail projects in the works across the U.S.

Dunn talked about a handful of what he called “comparable” projects in Georgia, Alabama and Utah. Comparing price per square foot, McMillan said, South Dakota’s prison project is in line with those correctional facilities.

Mills noted that a 2022 study from a consultant company called DLR suggested a price tag of less than \$350 million for a 1,200-bed facility. Mills wanted to know how the price tag for a 1,500-bed facility could be so different, given that the 2022 report adjusted for inflation.

“What are the differences between what’s anticipated to be built today that makes up your guaranteed

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maximum price, and what the DLR study envisioned?" Mills said.

McMillan said he doesn't know how those consultants came up with their numbers, but said his company returned a fair price based on South Dakota's design.

Every bed in the new facility could be used for maximum- or medium-security inmates, with each cell designed to house two inmates. The price for the new prison is tied in large part to the needs of inmates at those security levels.

"I will tell you that since we've been working with Kellie Wasko's team, we've been very diligent about trying to roll up our sleeves and save you guys money," McMillan said.

Rep. Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, said South Dakota was set to spend twice the price that Utah did per bed, and asked McMillan why that might be.

McMillan said the other projects mix maximum, medium and lower-security inmates, which can lower the price. Some of the facilities planned to house four inmates per cell, as well. That skews the per-bed comparison, McMillan said, again urging lawmakers to consider the price per square foot.

Mills and Karr asked Wasko why the state couldn't save money by designing with four-bed cells in mind.

Wasko said four beds per unit is more like a minimum security setup, and that South Dakota has plenty of minimum security beds. What the state needs, she said, are beds for about 800 medium security inmates at the state penitentiary and about 250 inmates at Mike Durfee State Prison in Springfield.

"Can we go to a multi-bed, four-bed setup? We talked about it," Wasko said. "When we discussed it, considering some of the management issues that we're having right now, the population issues and our ability to separate people, it was decided that we were going to get the best use out of our beds if we went with double occupancy."

McMillan also addressed the possibility of paring down the design. He told Mills and Karr that adjusting the design in hopes of saving money might not save much if the cost of construction continues to rise. There are only so many subcontractors with security expertise, he said, and they might be committed to other projects and more costly to hire if the state waits to start construction.

"I'm not trying to scare people," McMillan said. "I'm just trying to be a realist for you."

Questions about drainage, roads

Rep. Jim Bolin, R-Canton, asked Wasko if the \$825 million price included road upgrades. They'll be needed, he said, with about 400 employees coming and going from work throughout the day and the prison's need to transfer prisoners in and out of the facility.

The price did not include the cost of roads, Wasko said. The DOC has worked with the state Department of Transportation to identify needed upgrades, and she said the details and cost of that work would be part of the governor's proposed annual budget, which will be released next month.

The transportation department did not return a request for further information on the cost of road upgrades, how many miles would need to be built or when work might begin. The agency's 2025-28 Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan map shows a four-mile stretch of County Highway 278 set for "corridor modifications" in 2027 at a price of \$541,000. That road runs east to west adjacent to the project land. There are no projects listed on the map for the north-to-south road that runs by the new prison site, 477th Avenue, which runs through Harrisburg and into Sioux Falls.

Dan Paulson of Harrisburg testified against the project on Thursday. He lives near the area, and said he'd expect the state would need two lanes of highway in either direction on the cross streets around the prison site to make transportation feasible.

The cost of roads should be considered part of the price, he said.

"If they are not in the budget request, then it does not reflect the true cost of the facility," Paulson said.

Another neighbor to the facility, Sam Eiesland, also talked about the road situation. Eiesland owns the land across 477th Avenue from the prison site.

"Where is the ground coming from to widen those roads?" Eiesland said. "I own that ground, and it's not for sale."

Michelle Jensen, another neighbor to the project, asked lawmakers on the committee why they wouldn't push the DOC to consider alternative sites, perhaps on other land it owns, in light of the opposition and practical concerns about building a prison in an undeveloped area.

She compared the prison to a walled city plopped onto a field.

"It is fiscally irresponsible to build a new 2,000-person town in an area with no infrastructure, with volunteer emergency services, that is not zoned for such a project and is not wanted in the area," said Jensen, who is among the landowners suing the DOC in hopes of forcing the agency to ask Lincoln County's permission to build. A county judge dismissed the lawsuit, but the plaintiffs announced their intent to appeal on Tuesday morning.

Rep. Karr noted the catastrophic flooding that hit McCook Lake earlier this year, saying development around the area was among the factors that exacerbated the problems.

"I just want to make sure we're thinking about the impact of this build on those other individuals around us in the community," Karr said.

Wasko promised to get lawmakers a drainage plan to show how the agency planned to mitigate potential damage during major rain events. She also urged lawmakers to put faith in her agency and the prison it has designed.

"We are indeed building a small city within a city, and it is going to be a secure city," Wasko said. "And I promise you that the dollars that we're using to build this are what make it safe, because at the end of the day, I don't think that you can put a price on public safety if one inmate gets out."

John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.

Attorney general announces first Open Meetings Commission hearing in nearly four years

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - NOVEMBER 14, 2024 2:00 PM

A state commission that considers complaints about alleged violations of open-meetings laws will soon have its first hearing in nearly four years.

"This commission's role is to bring transparency to government proceedings, and its work always has been invaluable," Attorney General Marty Jackley said Thursday in a statement. "It is my goal to make the commission active again."

The Open Meetings Commission was established by the South Dakota Legislature in 2004. The commission has not met since December 2020, leaving some complaints in limbo.

The state attorney general appoints the commission's five member attorneys. The commission went dormant during the administration of Jason Ravnsborg, who served as attorney general from 2019 until he was impeached and removed from office in 2022 because of his conduct after his involvement in a fatal traffic accident.

Jackley has said he doesn't know why the commission was inactive under Ravnsborg. Since Jackley became attorney general in January 2023, he said, challenges in maintaining a full roster of members contributed to the commission's continued dormancy. Jackley said earlier this year that a commission member lost a state's attorney election, and he hired another two members to work in his own office, leaving three vacancies on the commission.

Jackley convinced lawmakers to pass a bill last winter that expanded commission eligibility to include deputy state's attorneys. Previously only state's attorneys were eligible.

"It has taken time to reestablish this commission, appoint members, and review open meeting complaints," Jackley said. "The goal of the commission remains the same – to ensure government agencies at all levels are transparent and accountable to citizens of South Dakota."

The commission will meet at 9 a.m. Central time Monday on the Microsoft Teams digital platform. The agenda includes introductory remarks, election of officers, procedural discussions, and reviews of pending complaints.

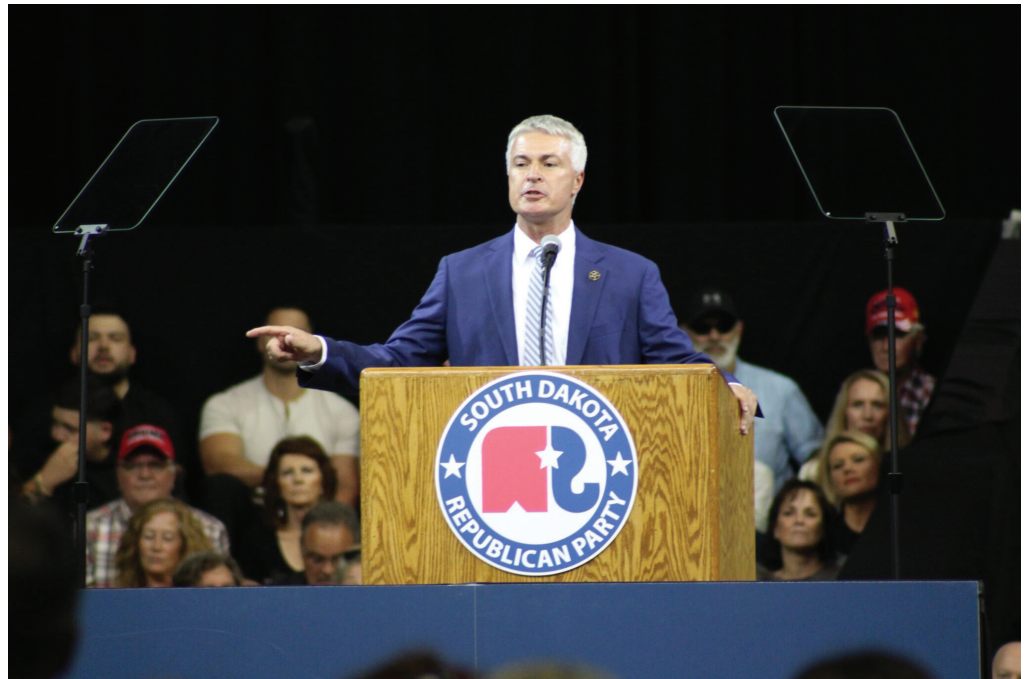
Cases scheduled for review involve accusations against the Bennett County Board of Commissioners, Martin City Council, Piedmont Board of Trustees, Lincoln County Commission and North Sioux City Council, with allegations ranging from improper closed-door sessions to a commission meeting with a quorum without posting a public notice.

The current five-member panel consists of State's Attorneys Austin Hoffman of McPherson County, Katelynn Hoffman of Turner County, Lance Russell of Fall River/Oglala Lakota County, Michael Smith of Clay County, and Emily Sovell of Sully County.

Another meeting is scheduled for Nov. 25 to hear more complaints against the Carlyle Township in Beadle County, Pennington County Board of Commissioners, Sturgis City Council, City of Lead Commission, Green Valley Sanitary District in Pennington County, Charles Mix County Commission and Tripp City Council.

After reviewing a complaint, the commission may issue findings of fact and conclusions of law and may also issue a reprimand. The renewed activity of the Open Meetings Commission comes amid Jackley's efforts to emphasize government transparency. In collaboration with the South Dakota NewsMedia Association, his office recently released an updated open meetings guide for the public, the first revision since 2017.

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



Attorney General Marty Jackley speaks during a rally featuring former President Donald Trump on Sept. 8, 2023, at The Monument in Rapid City. (Seth Tupper/South Dakota Searchlight)

Trump taps vaccine skeptic RFK Jr. to lead Department of Health and Human Services

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - NOVEMBER 14, 2024 3:49 PM

WASHINGTON — President-elect Donald Trump announced Thursday he plans to nominate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to head the Department of Health and Human Services, another controversial candidate who could face a challenging confirmation process in the U.S. Senate given his non-scientific beliefs about public health, including his anti-vaccine stance.

"I am thrilled to announce Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as The United States Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS)," Trump posted on social media. "For too long, Americans have been crushed by the

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industrial food complex and drug companies who have engaged in deception, misinformation, and disinformation when it comes to Public Health.

"The Safety and Health of all Americans is the most important role of any Administration, and HHS will play a big role in helping ensure that everybody will be protected from harmful chemicals, pollutants, pesticides, pharmaceutical products, and food additives that have contributed to the overwhelming Health Crisis in this Country."

HHS receives about \$116.8 billion in federal funds each year and houses several big-name public health agencies, including the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response or ASPR, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, the Food and Drug Administration, the National Institutes of Health and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Kennedy ran in this year's presidential election as an independent candidate, often repeating inaccurate information about vaccines and spreading other conspiracy theories about public health.

He has no background in science, research, or medicine. He graduated from Harvard University before going on to receive a law degree from the University of Virginia Law School.

He pleaded guilty to felony heroin possession in Rapid City, S.D., in February 1984, before receiving two years of probation, which ended a year early. He volunteered with the Natural Resources Defense Council as part of that probation.

Kennedy spent much of his career as an environmental lawyer and published several books.

After ending his own presidential bid this year, Kennedy endorsed Trump and campaigned frequently for him.

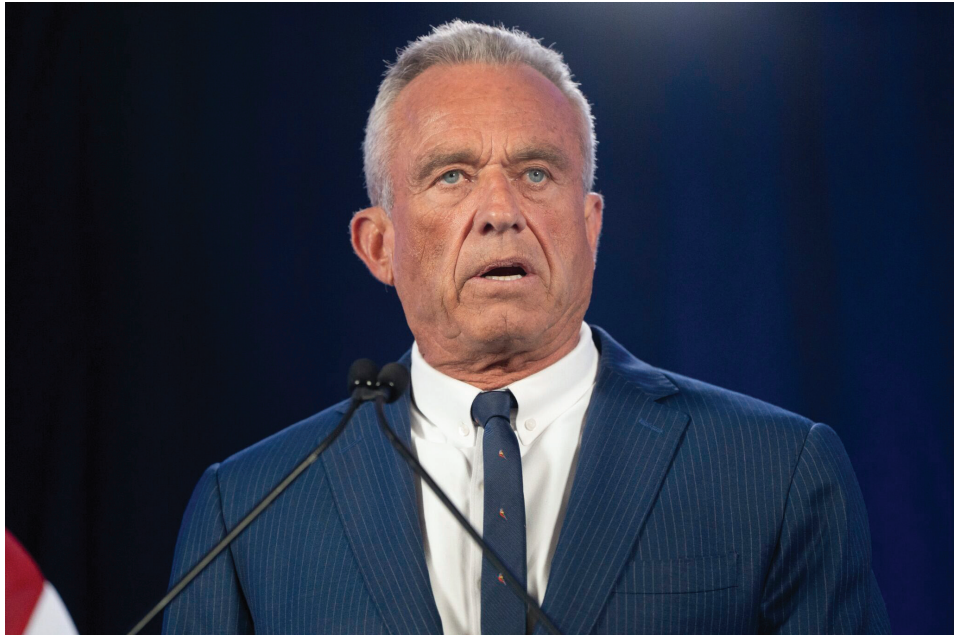
Criticism of the nomination began quickly after news broke Thursday, though far-right Republicans are expected to celebrate the nomination.

Lisa Gilbert, co-president of the watchdog nonprofit organization Public Citizen, released a written statement saying, "Kennedy is a science-denying, morally-bankrupt conspiracy theorist who will endanger people's lives if placed in a position of authority over health. The U.S. Senate should unanimously reject this nomination."

Louisiana Republican Sen. Bill Cassidy, ranking member on the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, released a written statement that he's interested in learning more about Kennedy during the confirmation process.

"RFK Jr. has championed issues like healthy foods and the need for greater transparency in our public health infrastructure," Cassidy wrote. "I look forward to learning more about his other policy positions and how they will support a conservative, pro-American agenda."

Washington state Democratic Sen. Patty Murray, a senior member of the HELP panel that will hold the



Robert F. Kennedy Jr. gives remarks at the Renaissance Phoenix Downtown Hotel on Aug. 23, 2024 in Phoenix, Arizona. (Photo by Rebecca Noble/Getty Images)

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confirmation hearing, wrote in a statement that Kennedy “could not be more dangerous — this is cause for deep concern for every American.”

“There is no telling how far a fringe conspiracy theorist like RFK Jr. could set back America in terms of public health, reproductive rights, research and innovation, and so much else,” Murray wrote. “The consequences here are not theoretical or superficial — health care access, coverage, research, and public health are life or death issues for people — and the COVID pandemic was an all too recent, all too painful reminder.”

Kentucky Republican Sen. Rand Paul congratulated Kennedy on social media, writing “Congratulations to @RobertKennedyJr on his nomination as Secretary of Health and Human Services. Finally, someone to detox the place after the Fauci era. Get ready for health care freedom and MAHA!”

Colorado’s Democratic Gov. Jared Polis, a former member of Congress who previously criticized Kennedy’s anti-vaccine stance as a way to bring back polio and measles, cheered his nomination in a lengthy social media post.

“I hope he leans into personal choice on vaccines rather than bans (which I think are terrible, just like mandates) but what I’m most optimistic about is taking on big pharma and the corporate ag oligopoly to improve our health.”

Polis added another post about an hour later, writing that science “must remain THE cornerstone of our nation’s health policy and the science-backed decision to get vaccinated improves public health and safety.”

“But if as a country we follow the science we would also be far more concerned about the impact of pesticides on public health, ag policy on nutrition, and the lack of access to prescription drugs due to drug high prices,” Polis added. “This is why I am for a major shake-up in institutions like the FDA that have been barriers to lowering drug costs and promoting healthy food choices. Lest there be any doubt, I am vaccinated as is my family. I will hold any HHS Secretary to the same high standard of protecting and improving public health.”

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.

How will Republicans handle 7 key issues with their trifecta control of Washington?

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT AND ARIANA FIGUEROA - NOVEMBER 14, 2024 1:33 PM

WASHINGTON — Republicans in the Nov. 5 election took over the White House, the U.S. Senate and as of late Wednesday, the House, after calls were made in enough races to project a majority.

They are expressing high hopes for unified control of government. But before they’ll be able to celebrate enacting sweeping changes to the country’s tax code or overhauling the health insurance marketplace, they’ll need to broker agreement between centrist lawmakers and far-right members in Congress.

More often than not, those two factions of the GOP hold significantly different ideas about how to draft legislation and strong opinions about whether to amend it on the floor.

Keeping everyone on the same page will be crucial for Republican leaders once the new Congress begins Jan. 3, especially since they have just three votes to spare in the Senate and a razor-thin majority in the House.

States Newsroom looked at what’s ahead for Republicans as they begin sorting through where to make changes to U.S. law in seven key policy areas:

TAXES

Nearly every Republican politician campaigned on addressing the country’s tax structure, making it one of the first issues the party is expected to take up when the next session of Congress begins.

The GOP will likely use the complicated budget reconciliation process to address the tax code, the same

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way lawmakers did in 2017 when they passed their signature tax law during President-elect Donald Trump's first term in office.

That reconciliation process would allow Republicans to avoid the Senate's 60-vote legislative filibuster that would otherwise require them to get Democratic support. But the process has strict rules and requires a marathon amendment voting session in the Senate that's often called a vote-arama.

Some provisions in Republicans' original tax law have already expired or will do so in the coming months, giving the GOP incentives to jump through the many hoops that come with the reconciliation process.

Extending the expiring provisions will bring along a hefty price tag, however.

The nonpartisan Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget wrote in an analysis released in late September that extending the individual and estate tax elements in the law would increase the deficit by \$3.9 trillion through 2035. Republicans opting to extend or bring back tax code changes for business would likely increase the deficit to \$4.8 trillion.

Maya MacGuineas, president of the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, expressed concerns at the time about lawmakers ignoring or diminishing the deficit impact.

"There will undoubtedly be efforts to pretend that extending the tax cuts is free – obviously this is not the case," she said. "Extending policies that are scheduled to expire — and were scored as expiring — would clearly add to the national debt."

MacGuineas added that lawmakers "should consider carefully which parts of the TCJA are working, which parts aren't, and if they want to extend some parts, how to responsibly extend them without increasing the debt beyond current law."



South Dakota Sen. John Thune speaks to reporters after being elected Republican leader during a closed-door, secret ballot election held inside the old Senate chamber in the U.S. Capitol building on Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024. At right is Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, a West Virginia Republican elected as the Republican Policy Committee chair. (Photo by Jennifer Shutt/States Newsroom)

IMMIGRATION

Republicans are expected to hold votes on legislation addressing border security and immigration after much of their campaign for Congress focused on those two areas.

Whether they'll be able to do that through the reconciliation process with only GOP support or through the traditional legislative process, which requires bipartisanship in the Senate, will depend on how exactly they write the bill and what budget impacts the various provisions will have.

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Immigration and border security legislation would fail to comply with a reconciliation rule in the Senate, also known as the Byrd Rule, if it produces a change in federal revenues or spending that is deemed “merely incidental” by the Senate parliamentarian.

While the requirement is vague, it could apply to several items that don’t have big price tags when considered as part of the multi-trillion-dollar federal budget.

For example, Democrats’ efforts to raise the federal minimum wage as part of the reconciliation process in 2021 were deemed “merely incidental” by the Senate parliamentarian and removed from the bill.

Trump has already laid out his wish list for an immigration-related bill he wants Congress to send to his desk.

Trump reposted campaign videos on social media in early September requesting Congress pass legislation to prevent future presidents from using executive authority to grant humanitarian parole — something the Biden administration has used to allow more than 1 million people to obtain work permits and live in the United States temporarily.

Trump has called the use of parole authority “abuse,” but it’s been used by presidents since 1956, during the Eisenhower administration.

Trump, who campaigned on mass deportations of immigrants without proper legal status, is also expected to ask Congress to foot the bill for his promise to deport more than 13 million people.

Getting any immigration-related policy to the president-elect’s desk will be daunting since it’s been almost four decades since Congress overhauled U.S. immigration law.

“The last big immigration bill was passed in 1986 when Ronald Reagan was president and both houses of Congress were held by Democrats,” according to an analysis from the nonpartisan Brookings Institution. “A smaller bill was passed in 1990 when George H.W. Bush was president and both houses of Congress were still controlled by Democrats.”

Earlier this year, a bipartisan border security and immigration bill was brokered by Connecticut Democratic Sen. Chris Murphy, Oklahoma Republican Sen. James Lankford and Arizona independent Sen. Kyrsten Sinema.

The trio of senators spent months negotiating the particulars of the deal only to have it scuttled after Trump told GOP members he didn’t want the legislation to pass.

That legislation could be used as a starting point if Republicans are unable to move an immigration bill through the reconciliation process and want to get a bill past the Senate’s 60-vote legislative filibuster.

TARIFFS

Tariffs could become one point of contention between Republicans in Congress and the Trump administration.

The president-elect has vowed to stack tariffs of at least 10% on nearly all goods entering the country, raising alarm bells with economists and free-trade Republicans about the impact that would have on consumer prices.

Trump said in mid-October at the Economic Club of Chicago that he hoped to implement tariffs on foreign-made products as high as 100% or 200%.

“The higher the tariff, the more likely it is that the company will come into the United States, and build a factory in the United States so it doesn’t have to pay the tariff,” Trump said, rejecting the premise that high tariffs could harm Americans.

Mary Lovely, senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, told States Newsroom in an October interview that imposing tariffs could risk “starting a trade war with the entire world.”

Lovely’s research with economist Kimberly Clausing, also of PIIIE, found that Trump’s threats to slap tariffs as high as 20% on all foreign products, combined with his threats of 60% tariffs on all Chinese goods, could cost the typical American household over \$2,600 annually.

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HEALTH CARE

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said repeatedly during the final weeks of the campaign that he wants to overhaul the 2010 health care law that most people refer to as the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare.

He hasn't shared details about what aspects of that law he wants to end or change, but said during a late October interview on Fox Business that he wants to address health outcomes.

"I said the ACA, unfortunately, is deeply ingrained in our health care system now," Johnson said. "Do we need further improvements? Absolutely. We need to expand quality of care, access to care and obviously lower the cost of health care."

Republicans used the budget reconciliation process to try to repeal and replace the ACA in 2017, but were unsuccessful, largely due to the late Arizona Sen. John McCain rejecting the bill.

Even with the budget reconciliation process to get Republicans around the Senate's 60-vote legislative filibuster, it will be extremely difficult for leaders to get the party unified on any health care bill of that magnitude.

Republicans using the budget reconciliation process for tax policy and health care would take up two of the three opportunities they'll have to adopt budget resolutions with reconciliation instructions during the 119th Congress.

GOP leaders could try for a round three, though once all is said and done with the first two reconciliation bills, Republicans might need to shift their attention toward the 2026 midterm campaigns.

VOTING

Republican lawmakers have argued legislation is needed to bar noncitizens from voting in federal elections, even though it is already illegal and rarely happens. The party is expected to try again next Congress, once it holds a majority in both chambers of Congress.

The GOP House passed a bill this summer that would have required proof of citizenship to register to vote, but the Democratic-controlled Senate never acted on it.

Trump wrote on social media that he would demand that voter ID laws and proof of citizenship be required for voting, something that Congress would have to pass, although it's unclear if such legislation could overcome the 60-vote threshold in the Senate.

The issue is important to Trump, as Johnson traveled to the president-elect's residence in Palm Beach, Florida, to unveil the House's intention to pursue the issue.

SPENDING

Republicans campaigned this year on cutting government spending, but have rarely done so when they held the majority in both chambers of Congress.

The challenge lies in how government spending is approved and how much the various departments and agencies require to function.

During fiscal 2023, the federal government spent \$6.1 trillion, with \$3.4 trillion going to mandatory programs, like Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. Those programs run on autopilot, so lawmakers don't need to negotiate the particulars every year the way they do other programs.

An additional \$1.7 trillion was spent on so-called discretionary programs, which are funded through Congress' annual appropriations process. That funding went to programs categorized as either nondefense, which received \$917 billion, or defense, which got \$805 billion.

The nondefense funding goes to several departments, including Agriculture, Energy, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Interior, Justice, State and Transportation. Smaller agencies, like NASA and the National Science Foundation, are also funded through nondefense accounts.

Republicans have proposed cuts in the past, but members of the party who understand the federal ledger often explain that if members really want to address the government spending more than it takes in, they'll have to address Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security.

The math, otherwise, won't work.

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Republicans could make tweaks when they write their reconciliation bills, though they'll need those to comply with the Byrd Rule and not have a "merely incidental" impact on the federal ledger.

EDUCATION

Having secured unified GOP control of government, Trump's sweeping vision to "save American education" could set the stage for significant changes in U.S. education policy.

The president-elect has vowed to eliminate the U.S. Department of Education and said he wants to move education "back to the states." States and local governments bear much of the responsibility for funding K-12 schools, but the Department of Education handles Pell Grants for college students who demonstrate financial need and enforces civil rights cases, among other things.

Congress going along with plans to eliminate the department could have profound impacts on the billions of dollars in funding the agency provides for low-income K-12 schools, special education and federal student aid.

Trump also vowed to roll back updated Title IX regulations on his first day back in office.

President Joe Biden unveiled the final rule for Title IX in April, which strengthens federal protections for LGBTQ+ students and "protects against discrimination based on sex stereotypes, sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics," according to the Education Department.

GOP members on the House Committee on Education and the Workforce have criticized the new Title IX rules and are likely to fall in step with Trump's wishes to roll back the regulations.

Trump has also criticized the Biden administration's student loan forgiveness efforts, dubbing them "not even legal." He could discontinue the Biden administration's new student loan repayment plan known as Saving on a Valuable Education, or SAVE. The plan is currently on pause due to legal challenges from Republican-led states.

Last year, Senate Republicans tried to strike down the rule.

Like Trump, Republicans have focused on "parental rights" in education. House Republicans passed their own bill on the issue last year.

Republicans are likely to continue scrutinizing higher education institutions from diversity initiatives to college students protesting the war in Gaza.

A GOP measure that would bar accrediting organizations from requiring colleges and universities to adopt diversity, equity and inclusion policies as a condition of accreditation passed the House in September.

Shauneen Miranda and Ashley Murray contributed to this report.

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.

Lawmakers honor longest-serving female state legislator

BY: JOHN HULT - NOVEMBER 14, 2024 12:54 PM

Lawmakers on the state's budget-setting committee gave 24 roses Thursday to the longest-serving female member of the South Dakota Legislature.

Sen. Jean Hunhoff, R-Yankton, was first elected to the state House of Representatives in 2000. She's bounced back and forth between the House and Senate over the years, and has been a member of the Joint Appropriations Committee for more than a decade. The committee's gift was one flower for each year of her service.

Hunhoff lost her primary race for reelection by 96 votes in June to challenger Lauren Nelson, who went on to victory in the general election.

Thursday morning's meeting of the Joint Appropriations Committee in Pierre, which she co-chairs, comes near the end of her time as a lawmaker. Several other members of the committee thanked Hunhoff for

her commitment to budgetary oversight and praised her for helping newer lawmakers navigate the workings of legislating during her historic run of service.

Tony Venhuizen, a Sioux Falls Republican representative who blogs about the history of state government, noted that no other female lawmaker has served 20 years, let alone 24.

"I don't need to get into too many details, but I will say that during her first year in the Legislature, I was a Senate page," Venhuizen said.

Hunhoff's voice cracked with emotion as she thanked her fellow lawmakers for the flowers, which she said she liked even though "they make me think of a funeral."

"I tried to listen, and I've tried to do my best," Hunhoff said.

John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He

has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.

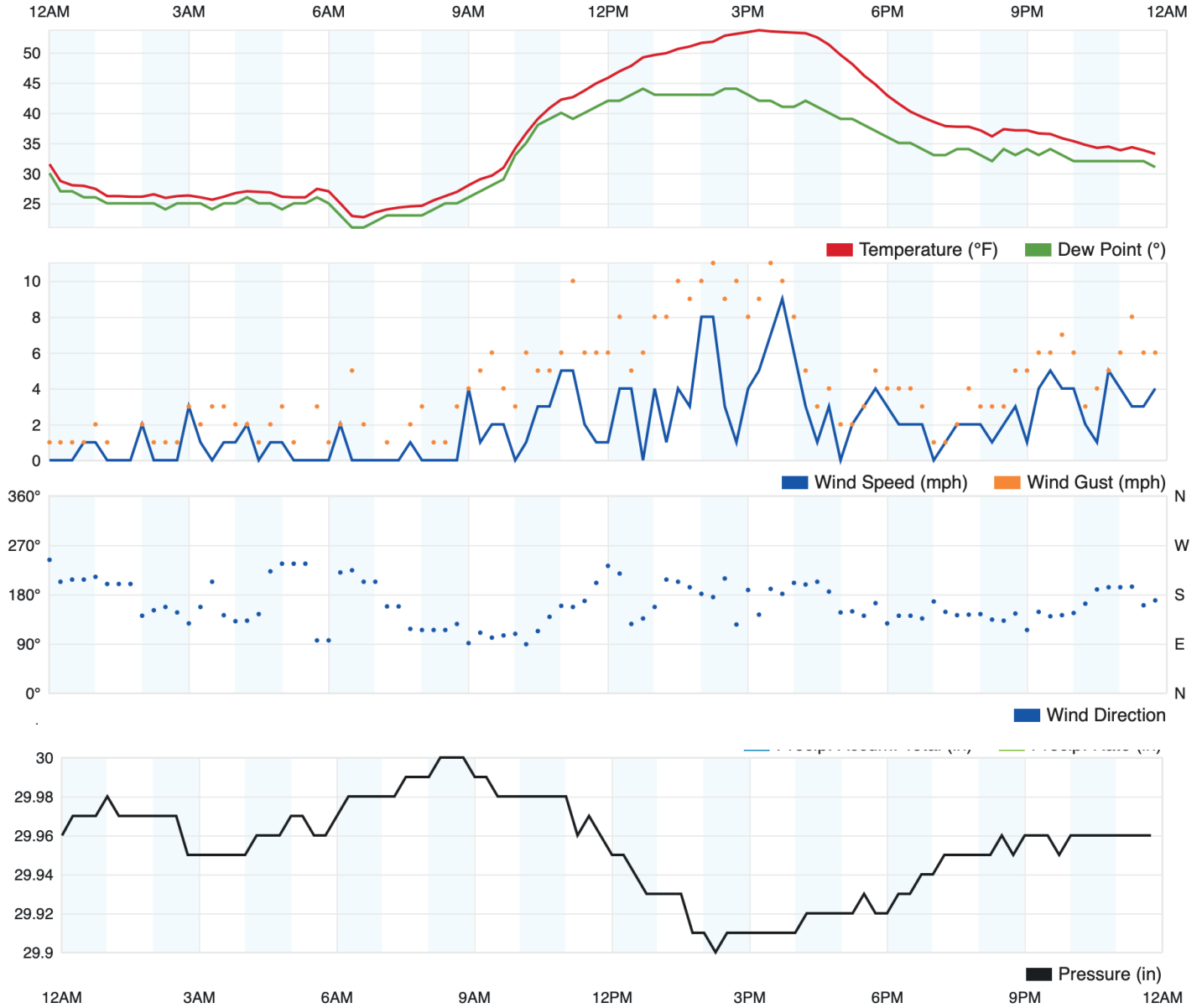


Sen. Jean Hunhoff, R-Yankton, was given flowers by her fellow lawmakers on Nov. 14, 2024, to honor her for being the longest-serving female lawmaker in South Dakota history. (Submitted photo)

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
				
High: 56 °F	Low: 38 °F	High: 55 °F	Low: 31 °F	High: 51 °F
Areas Dense Freezing Fog and Areas Dense Fog	Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Sunny



The Weekend + Midweek Timeline


November 15, 2024 3:39 AM

High levels of uncertainty remain with the next storm. Stay up to date with the latest forecast.

Friday	Saturday	Sunday
 52-59° Winds SE 10-15 mph	 48-56° Winds SE->SW 15-25 mph	 47-53° Winds SW 15-20 mph

Monday **Tuesday** **Wednesday** **Thursday**

Potential first onset of the storm, precipitation falling as rain.	Highest chances for precipitation in the morning, in the form of rain.	Potential changeover to snow. Strong winds pose an additional hazard.	Storm moves out of the area, winds diminish.
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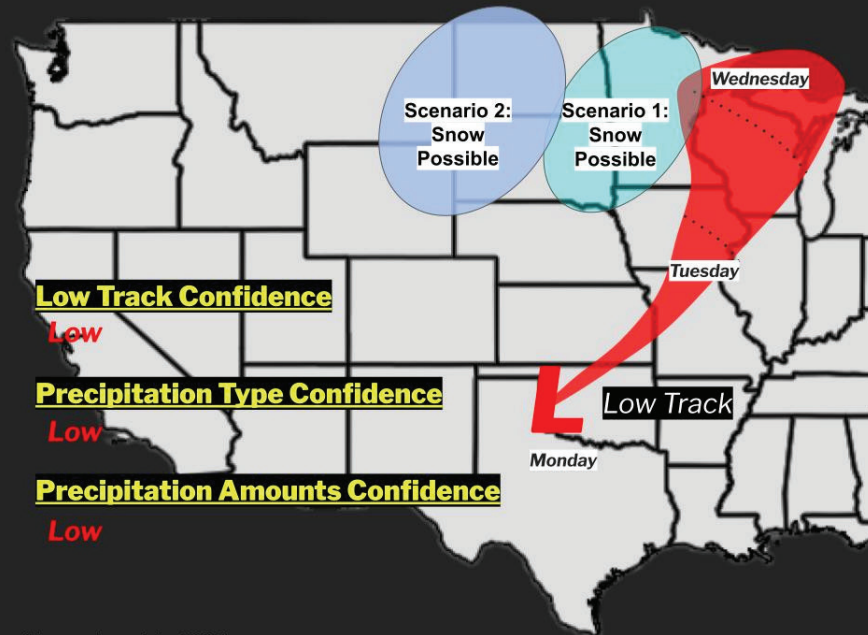
 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

This weekend will be free of precipitation, but the same can't be said for midweek next week. Rain chances are best on Tuesday, with a possible changeover to snow on Wednesday. There is still a high level of uncertainty and low confidence in the forecast, so be sure to stay up to date with the latest information!

Rain Possibly Changing To Snow Next Week?

Low Confidence In Accumulating Snow



November 14, 2024

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.



NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

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!

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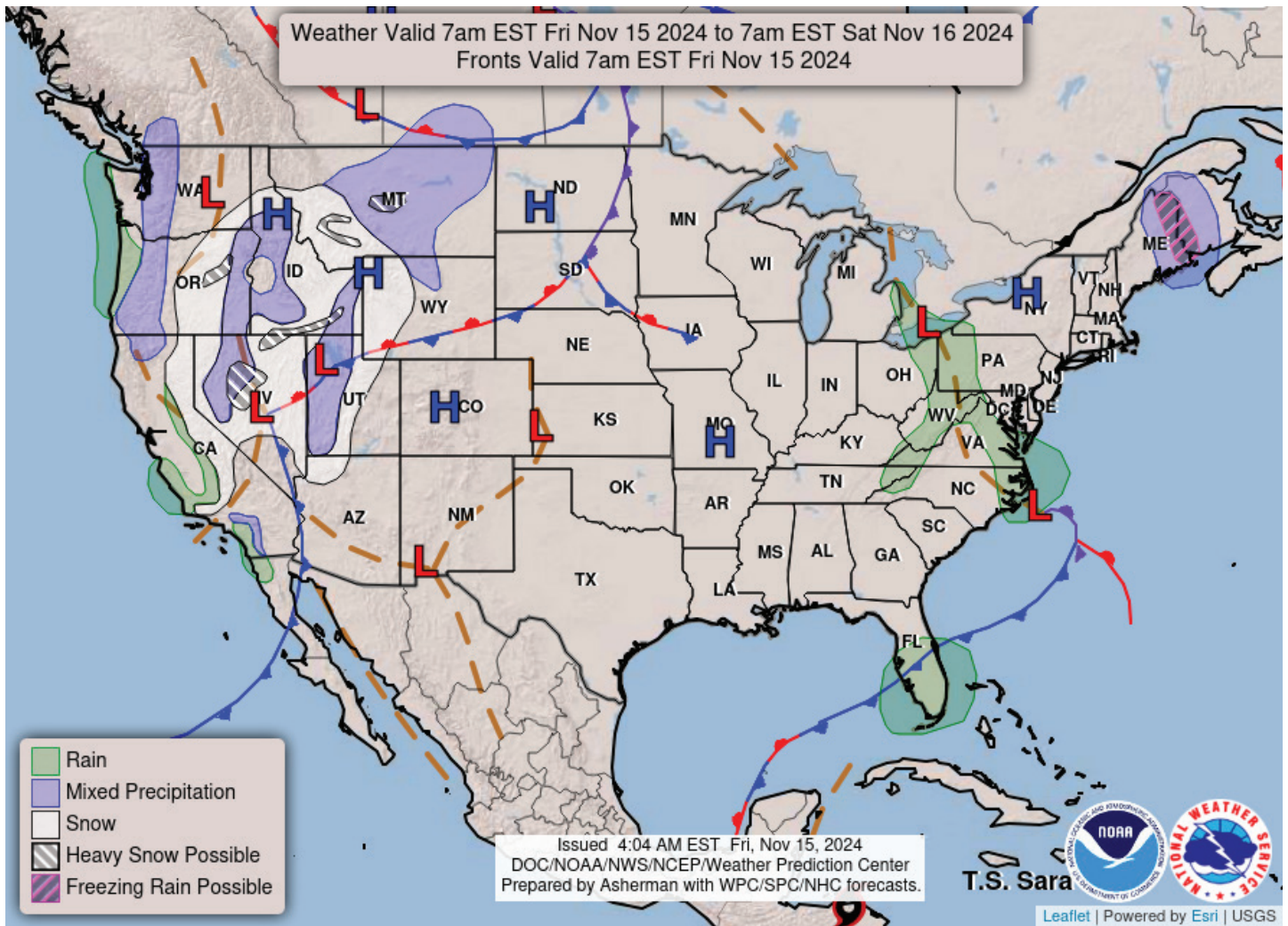
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 54 °F at 3:11 PM
Low Temp: 23 °F at 6:39 AM
Wind: 11 mph at 2:05 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 32 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 72 in 1953
Record Low: -8 in 1900
Average High: 43
Average Low: 20
Average Precip in Nov.: 0.42
Precip to date in Nov.: 0.76
Average Precip to date: 20.89
Precip Year to Date: 20.64
Sunset Tonight: 5:03:29 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:32:05 am



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Today in Weather History

November 15, 1988: A mixture of sleet, freezing rain and snow fell from north central South Dakota into west central Minnesota before changing over to all snow by the afternoon of the 15th. Snow continued across Minnesota during the morning hours on the 16th, along with increasing winds. The winds and falling snow created near zero visibility due to blowing snow in the northwest and west central Minnesota. A 60 mph wind gust was recorded in Morris, MN. Snow and blowing snow blocked roads, caused power outages and closed schools. Snow in many locations accumulated over a sheet of ice that coated roads from preceding rainfall.

1900 - A record lake-effect snowstorm at Watertown, NY, produced 45 inches in 24 hours. The storm total was 49 inches. (14th-15th) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1967 - A surprise snow and ice coating paralyzed Boston during the evening rush hour. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Thunderstorms spawned twenty-two tornadoes in eastern Texas, Louisiana and Oklahoma. A tornado moving out of northeastern Texas killed one person and injured ninety-six others around Shreveport LA causing more than five million dollars damage. Tornadoes in Texas claimed ten lives, and injured 191 persons. A tornado caused more than nineteen million dollars damage around Palestine TX. Severe thunderstorms spawned eighteen tornadoes in Mississippi and seven in Georgia the next day, and thunderstorms in southeastern Texas produced wind gusts to 102 mph at Galveston, and wind gusts to 110 mph at Bay City, killing one person. There were a total of forty-nine tornadoes in the south central U.S. in two days. The tornadoes claimed eleven lives, injured 303 persons, and caused more than seventy million dollars damage. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from Oklahoma and northeastern Texas to northern Indiana and southern Wisconsin from mid morning through the pre-dawn hours of the following day. Thunderstorms spawned forty-four tornadoes, including thirteen in Missouri, and there were more than two hundred reports of large hail or damaging winds. A tornado in central Arkansas hit Scott and Lonoke killing five people, injuring sixty others, and causing fifteen million dollars damage. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A tornado hit Southside, AR, killing one person, injuring ten others, and causing more than two million dollars damage, and a tornado near Clarksville AR injured nine persons and caused more than two million dollars damage. A tornado moving through the southwest part of Topeka KS injured twenty-two persons and caused nearly four million dollars damage. A tornado near Jane MO killed one person and injured twelve others, and a tornado moving across the southwest part of O'Fallon MO injured ten persons. Severe thunderstorms also produced hail three and a half inches in diameter east of Denison TX, and wind gusts to 85 mph at Kirksville MO. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing along a powerful cold front began to produce severe weather in the Middle Mississippi Valley before sunrise, and by early the next morning thunderstorms had spawned seventeen tornadoes east of the Mississippi River, with a total of 350 reports of severe weather. There were one hundred reports of damaging winds in Georgia, and five tornadoes, and there were another four tornadoes in Alabama. Hardest hit was Huntsville AL where a violent tornado killed 21 persons, injured 463 others, and caused one hundred million dollars damage. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms in Kentucky produced hail three inches in diameter in Grayson County, and wind gusts to 110 mph at Flaherty. Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the eastern U.S. through the morning and afternoon hours. Severe thunderstorms spawned 23 tornadoes, and there were 164 reports of damaging winds. There were fourteen tornadoes in New Jersey, central and eastern New York, and eastern Pennsylvania, and 122 reports of damaging winds. A tornado at Coldenham NY killed nine school children and injured eighteen others, and thunderstorm winds gusted to 100 mph at Malvern PA. Thunderstorms spawned a total of thirty-nine tornadoes east of Great Plains in two days, and there 499 reports of large hail and damaging winds. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2005 - Severe thunderstorms produced over 30 tornadoes in 6 states, resulting in one fatality and at least 35 injuries (Associated Press). Some of the worst damage occurred in Henry county, Tennessee, where numerous homes and businesses were damaged or destroyed.



I WANT TO HELP OTHERS

He could feel the damp moisture in the late-night London fog each time a gust of wind blew over him. Blind and alone, he was feeling his way down a deserted street with a white cane in one hand and a lantern in the other.

Eventually a stranger approached him walking in the opposite direction. Amused, and in a sarcastic voice he said, "Why are you, a blind man, carrying a lantern?"

"Oh, sir," replied the blind man, "I'm not carrying it for myself. It's for others. I want to help them so they won't stumble over me."

Often we think only of ourselves: our problems and our pains, our difficulties and our diseases, our hard times and horrible tasks.

It is the duty of the Christian to think of everyone and everything that may cause problems for ourselves and others as well. We are responsible to hold up a light in the darkness of this world for others who are seeking their way through life.

And not only to light a pathway for them in times of life's darkest moments, but to help them find the "Light of the World" – Jesus – who is "the Way, the Truth and the Life!"

God's Word is clear and unconditional when it states, "Each one of us will give an account of himself to God." We must hold high the Light!

Prayer: Father, even though we are kind and gracious when we help others through times of darkness, it does not relieve us of our responsibility to present the Light. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 1 John 1:5

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 17 Hrs 26 Mins 7
DRAW: 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 1 Days 16 Hrs 41
DRAW: Mins 7 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.14.24

5 22 30 33 44 3

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 56 Mins
DRAW: 7 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.13.24

5 19 20 24 29

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$101,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 56
DRAW: Mins 7 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.13.24

14 41 45 55 59 13

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 25
DRAW: Mins 7 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 1 Days 17 Hrs 25
DRAW: Mins 7 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

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News from the **AP** Associated Press

Hawthorne scores 21, Northern Colorado takes down South Dakota State 78-69

By The Associated Press undefined

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Isaiah Hawthorne's 21 points helped Northern Colorado defeat South Dakota State 78-69 on Thursday night.

Hawthorne added five rebounds for the Bears (3-1). Langston Reynolds scored 16 points, going 7 of 10 from the field. Zack Bloch finished 5 of 6 from 3-point range to finish with 15 points.

Oscar Cluff finished with 22 points and 11 rebounds for the Jackrabbits (2-1). Joe Sayler added 10 points for South Dakota State.

The Associated Press created this story using technology provided by Data Skrive and data from Sportradar.

Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP FOOTBALL=

SDHSAA State Playoffs=

Class 9AA=

Championship=

Hamlin 32, Parkston 8

Class 9B=

Championship=

Sully Buttes 34, Faulkton 14

Some high school football scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

SDHSAA Playoffs=

SoDak 16=

Class AA=

State Qualifier=

Aberdeen Central High School def. Spearfish, 25-9, 27-25, 25-22

Brandon Valley def. Rapid City Stevens, 25-19, 25-22, 17-25, 25-20

Harrisburg def. Douglas, 25-6, 25-18, 25-14

O'Gorman High School def. Rapid City Central, 25-7, 25-8, 25-14

Sioux Falls Jefferson def. T F Riggs High School, 25-18, 25-15, 25-16

Sioux Falls Roosevelt def. Sioux Falls Lincoln, 25-21, 22-25, 25-14, 25-14

Sioux Falls Washington def. Huron, 25-20, 25-17, 25-19

Watertown def. Brookings, 25-18, 25-14, 25-15

Some high school volleyball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

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South Dakota defeats Dakota Wesleyan 92-69

By The Associated Press undefined

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Isaac Bruns had 23 points in South Dakota's 92-69 victory over Dakota Wesleyan on Thursday night.

Bruns went 10 of 14 from the field (3 for 5 from 3-point range) for the Coyotes (4-1). Kaleb Stewart scored 13 points, shooting 5 for 7, including 3 for 5 from beyond the arc. Chase Forte had 11 points and went 5 of 10 from the field (1 for 3 from 3-point range).

The Tigers were led by Blaze Lubbers, who recorded 15 points and six rebounds. Tampa Scott IV added 13 points for Dakota Wesleyan. Samuel Aslesen had nine points and six rebounds.

The Associated Press created this story using technology provided by Data Skrive and data from Sportradar.

Party of Sri Lanka's new Marxist-leaning president wins two-thirds majority in parliament

By KRISHAN FRANCIS and BHARATHA MALLAWARACHI Associated Press

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — The party of Sri Lanka's new Marxist-leaning President Anura Kumara Dissanayake won a two-thirds majority in parliament, according to official election results Friday, providing a strong mandate for his program for economic revival.

Dissanayake's National People's Power Party won 159 of the 225 seats, according to the Elections Commission.

The Samagi Jana Balawegaya, or United People's Power Party, led by opposition leader Sajith Premadasa had 40 seats and was in second place.

The election comes at a decisive time for Sri Lankans, as the island nation is struggling to emerge from the worst economic crisis in its history, having declared bankruptcy after defaulting on its external debt in 2022.

The margin of victory will enable Dissanayake to carry out sweeping reforms, including a campaign promise of anew constitution, without having to rely on other parties.

Dissanayake was elected president on Sept. 21 in a rejection of traditional political parties that have governed the island nation since its independence from British rule in 1948. He received just 42% of the votes, fueling questions over his party's prospects in Thursday's parliamentary elections. But the party received a large increase in support less than two months into his presidency.

In a major surprise and a big shift in the country's electoral landscape, his party won the Jaffna district, the heartland of ethnic Tamils in the north, and many other minority strongholds.

The victory in Jaffna represents a great dent for traditional ethnic Tamil parties that have dominated the politics of the north since independence.

It is also a major shift in the attitude of Tamils, who have long been suspicious of majority ethnic Sinhalese leaders. Ethnic Tamil rebels fought an unsuccessful civil war in 1983-2009 to create a separate homeland, saying they were being marginalized by governments controlled by Sinhalese.

According to conservative U.N. estimates, more than 100,000 people were killed in the conflict.

Top NPP official Tilvin Silva described the victory as "complete and one with political weight," because voters from all corners of the country voted for a single program. He especially thanked Tamil voters in the north for trusting a leader outside their stronghold.

"We have very well understood the weight of this victory. The people have placed immense trust on us and we must keep that trust," he said.

Veeragathy Thanabalasingham, a Colombo-based political analyst, said northern voters chose the NPP because they were disillusioned with traditional Tamil parties but could not find a local alternative.

"The Tamil parties were divided and contested separately, and as a result the Tamil people's representation is scattered," he said.

Of the 225 seats in parliament, 196 were up for grabs under Sri Lanka's 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.

Sri Lanka is in the middle of a bailout program with the International Monetary Fund, with debt restructuring with international creditors nearly complete.

Dissanayake said during the presidential campaign that he would propose significant changes to the targets set in the IMF deal signed by his predecessor, Ranil Wickremesinghe, 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 militant attacks in 2019 devastated the 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 rupee 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.

Voters were also drawn by the NPP's cry for change in the political culture and an end to corruption, because they perceived the parties that ruled Sri Lanka so far caused the economic collapse.

Dissanayake's promise to punish members of previous governments accused of corruption and to recover allegedly stolen assets also raised much hope among the people.

Jeewantha Balasuriya, 42, a businessman from the town of Gampaha, said he hopes Dissanayake and his party will use their resounding victory to rebuild the country.

"People have given them a strong mandate. I am hopeful that the NPP will use this mandate to uplift the country from the present pathetic situation," he said.

The last actions the Biden administration will take before Trump takes over the White House

By FATIMA HUSSEIN, MATTHEW DALY and COLLIN BINKLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Biden administration officials are working against the clock doling out billions in grants and taking other steps to try to preserve at least some of the outgoing president's legacy before President-elect Donald Trump takes office in January.

"Let's make every day count," President Joe Biden said in an address to the nation last week after Vice President Kamala Harris conceded defeat to Trump in the presidential race.

Trump has pledged to rescind unspent funds in Biden's landmark climate and health care law and stop clean-energy development projects.

"There's only one administration at a time," Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg told reporters at a news conference Thursday. "That's true now, and it will also be true after January 20th. Our responsibility is to make good use of the funds that Congress has authorized for us and that we're responsible for assigning and disbursing throughout the last three years."

But Trump will control more than the purse strings come January. His administration also can propose new regulations to undo some of what the Biden administration did through the rule-making process.

Here are some of the moves the Biden administration is taking now:

Getting infrastructure spending out the door

Biden administration officials hope that projects funded under the \$1 trillion infrastructure law and \$375

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billion climate law will endure beyond Biden's term and are working to ensure that money from the landmark measures continues to flow.

On Friday, Buttigieg announced over \$3.4 billion in grants for projects designed to improve passenger rail service, help U.S. ports, reduce highway deaths and support domestic manufacturing of sustainable transportation materials.

"We are investing in better transportation systems that touch every corner of the country and in the workers who will manufacture materials and build projects," he said. "Communities are going to see safer commutes, cleaner air and stronger supply chains that we all count on."

Speeding up environmental goals

Announcements of major environmental grants and project approvals have sped up in recent months in what White House officials describe as "sprinting to the finish" of Biden's four-year term.

The Environmental Protection Agency recently set a nationwide deadline for removal of lead pipes and announced nearly \$3 billion to help local water systems comply. The agency also announced that oil and gas companies for the first time will have to pay a federal fee if they emit dangerous methane above certain levels.

The Energy Department, meanwhile, announced a \$544 million loan to a Michigan company to expand manufacturing of high-quality silicon carbide wafers for electric vehicles. The loan is one of 28 deals totaling \$37 billion granted under a clean-energy loan program that was revived and expanded under Biden.

"There is a new urgency to get it all done. We're seeing explosions of money going out the door," said Melinda Pierce, legislative director of the Sierra Club. Biden and his allies "really want to finish the job they started."

Ukraine aid

Pentagon press secretary Sabrina Singh told reporters this week that Biden wants to "spend down the authority that Congress has allocated and authorized before he leaves office. So we're going to work very hard to make sure that happens."

The Biden administration would have to rush \$7.1 billion in weapons — \$4.3 billion from the 2024 supplemental and \$2.8 billion that is still on the books in savings due to the Pentagon recalculating the value of systems sent — from the Pentagon's stockpiles in order to spend all of those funds obligated before Trump is sworn in.

There's also another \$2.2 billion available to put weapons systems on long-term contracts. However, recent aid packages have been much smaller in size, around \$200 million to \$300 million each.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has said the funds are already obligated, which should make them harder to take back because the incoming administration would have to reverse that.

Pressure to quickly confirm judicial picks

Another priority for the White House is getting Senate confirmation of as many federal judges as possible before Trump's inauguration on Jan. 20.

The Senate this week voted 51-44 to confirm former prosecutor April Perry as a U.S. District Court judge in northern Illinois. More than a dozen pending judicial nominees have advanced out of the Senate Judiciary Committee; eight judicial nominations are awaiting committee votes and six are waiting for committee hearings.

Trump has urged Republicans to oppose efforts to confirm judicial nominees. "No Judges should be approved during this period of time because the Democrats are looking to ram through their Judges as the Republicans fight over Leadership," he wrote on social media site X on Nov. 10, before congressional Republicans chose their new leaders.

Student loan forgiveness

The Education Department has been hurrying to finalize a new federal rule that would cancel student loans for people who face financial hardship. The proposal — one of Biden's only student loan plans that hasn't been halted by federal courts — is in a public comment period scheduled to end Dec. 2.

After that, the department would have a narrow window to finalize the rule and begin carrying it out, a

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process that usually takes months. Like Biden's other efforts, it would almost certainly face a legal challenge.

Additionally, the Biden administration has room to speed up student loan cancellation for people who were already promised relief because they were cheated by their colleges, said Aaron Ament, an Education Department official for the Obama administration and president of the National Student Legal Defense Network.

Education Secretary Miguel Cardona could decide that case and others rather than hand them off to the Trump administration, which is expected to be far friendlier to for-profit colleges. "It's a no-brainer," Ament said. "There's a good number of cases that have been sitting on Cardona's desk. It's hard to imagine that those would just be left untouched."

Trump has not yet said what he would do on student loan forgiveness. However, he and Republicans have criticized Biden's efforts.

The far side of the moon once had erupting volcanoes too

By ADITHI RAMAKRISHNAN AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Volcanoes were erupting on the mysterious far side of the moon billions of years ago just like on the side that we can see, new research confirms.

Researchers analyzed lunar soil brought back by China's Chang'e-6, the first spacecraft to return with a haul of rocks and dirt from the little-explored far side.

Two separate teams found fragments of volcanic rock that were about 2.8 billion years old. One piece was even more ancient, dating back to 4.2 billion years.

"To obtain a sample from this area is really important because it's an area that otherwise we have no data for," said Christopher Hamilton, a planetary volcano expert at the University of Arizona who was not involved with the research.

Scientists know there were active volcanoes on the near side, the part of the moon seen from Earth, dating back to a similar time frame. Previous studies, including data from NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter, suggested the far side might also have a volcanic past. The first samples from that region facing away from Earth confirm an active history.

The results were published Friday in the journals Nature and Science.

China has launched several spacecraft to the moon. In 2020, the Chang'e-5 spacecraft returned moon rocks from the near side, the first since those collected by NASA's Apollo astronauts and Soviet Union spacecraft in the 1970s. The Chang'e-4 spacecraft became the first to visit the moon's far side in 2019.

The moon's far side is pockmarked by craters and has fewer of the near side's flat, dark plains carved by lava flows. Why the two halves are so different remains a mystery, said study co-author Qiu-Li Li from the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Li said the new findings reveal over 1 billion years of volcanic eruptions on the lunar far side. Future research will determine how the activity lasted so long.

As airlines avoid Israel, UAE's FlyDubai and Etihad keep up flights for both diplomacy and dollars

By JON GAMBRELL and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

BEN GURION INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, Israel (AP) — At Israel's Ben Gurion International Airport, more than a year of war has taken its toll. Global airlines have canceled flights, gates are empty and pictures of hostages still held in the Gaza Strip guide the few arriving passengers to baggage claim.

But one check-in desk remains flush with travelers: the one serving flights to the United Arab Emirates, which have kept up a bridge for Israelis to the outside world throughout the war.

The Emirati flights, in addition to bolstering the airlines' bottom line, have shined a light on the countries' burgeoning ties — which have survived the wars raging across the Middle East and could be further strengthened as U.S. President-elect Donald Trump prepares to return to office.

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"It's a political and economic statement," said Joshua Teitelbaum, a professor of Middle Eastern studies at Israel's Bar-Ilan University. "They are the main foreign airlines that continue to fly."

Since the wars began with Hamas' initial Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel, many international airlines have halted, restarted and halted again their flights into Israel's main gateway to the rest of the world. The concern is real for the carriers, who remember the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over Ukraine 10 years ago and Iran shooting down Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752 after takeoff from Tehran in 2020.

But FlyDubai, the sister airline to the long-haul carrier Emirates, has kept up multiple flights daily and kept Israel connected to the wider world even as its other low-cost competitors have stopped flights. Abu Dhabi's Etihad has continued its flights as well.

While maintaining the flight schedule remains politically important for the UAE after its 2020 diplomatic recognition of Israel, it also provided a further shot in the arm for revenues — particularly for FlyDubai.

Since the wars started, international carriers such as Atlanta-based Delta Air Lines Inc., Germany's Lufthansa and other major airlines halted their flights. Some resumed, only to stop again after Iran's Oct. 1 ballistic missile attack on Israel and Israel's Oct. 26 retaliatory strike on the Islamic Republic. Tehran has threatened to strike Israel again.

That's brought major business to Israel's national carrier El Al, which had struggled in the coronavirus pandemic and prior years. The airline posted its best-ever half-year results this year, recording a \$227 million profit as compared to \$58 million profit in the same period last year. El Al stock has risen by as much 200% over the last year, as compared to a 29% rise in the wider Tel Aviv 125 stock market index.

El Al, however, lacks the routes and connections of major international carriers. Low-cost carriers as well have stopped flying into Israel during periods of the war, sending the price of El Al tickets ever higher. Passenger numbers through Ben Gurion halved compared to the same period the year before, El Al said in its second-quarter financial results.

However, FlyDubai has kept flying. The carrier has operated over 1,800 flights to Israel since October last year, cancelling only 77 flights overall, according to Cirium, an aviation analytics company. In September alone, it flew over 200 flights.

As a line snaked toward the FlyDubai check-in counters at Ben Gurion Airport, UAE-bound Motti Eis said the flights were "a symbol that the Emirates countries decided to keep the peace."

FlyDubai declined to answer questions from The Associated Press about the flights.

Etihad, the flag carrier for Abu Dhabi, has kept flying into Tel Aviv, but the number of its flights has been dwarfed by FlyDubai. FlyDubai had 3.6% market share at Ben Gurion, compared to El Al's 43.2% in the second half of 2024. However, at least two of the foreign low-cost airlines with greater market, Wizz Air and Blue Bird, stopped flying for extended periods this year.

Etihad said it maintains a close watch on the situation in the region, but continues its daily flights to and from Tel Aviv.

"Ben Gurion International Airport remains open, employing best practices in safety and security practices, enabling Etihad and other airlines to provide essential air connectivity as long as it is secure to do so," the airline said in a statement.

But beyond the financial impact, the decision also takes root in the UAE's decision to recognize Israel in 2020, under agreements brokered by then President Trump known as the Abraham Accords. While Abu Dhabi has repeatedly expressed concern and outrage as Israel's conduct during the wars, Israel's Consulate in Dubai and Embassy remain open in the country.

And while Dubai broadly speaking remains focused on business in the country, Abu Dhabi's focus long has been on its geopolitical aims — which since the 2011 Arab Spring have been squarely focused on challenging Islamist movements, and those who back them, in the wider region. The UAE, a hereditary autocracy, long has viewed those groups as serious challenges to its power.

The Emirati government, in response to questions from the AP over the flights, sent a story published by its state-run WAM news agency about its participation in a Nov. 1 conference in Riyadh in support of a two-state solution to the decadeslong Israel-Palestinian crisis. The UAE has called repeatedly for a cease-fire in the Gaza Strip, along with the release of hostages and Palestinian prisoners.

However, likely given the wider anger in the Arab world over Israel's devastating militant campaign in Gaza, Dubai International Airport no longer advertises on its electronic billboard the location of the check-in for Tel Aviv. It sits in a distant corner of one of the airport's terminals, next to a Dubai police stand. Private security guards also keep watch over the line, while individuals who appeared to be undercover police officers watched the gate, a higher level of security than normally noticed at the airport.

But in the lines, Hebrew and Arabic can be heard and those traveling routinely have their blue-backed Israeli passports out in their hands.

"It's just a symbol of the UAE's commitment to the relationship," said Dina Esfandiary, a senior advisor on the Middle East at the International Crisis Group, a think tank. "No matter what happens, no matter where the war goes, no matter how much Israel flouts international law, the UAE has decided that this is a step they took, that the relationship remains beneficial to them."

The world's most polluting cities are revealed at COP29 as frustration grows at fossil fuel presence

By SETH BORENSTEIN and SIBI ARASU Associated Press

BAKU, Azerbaijan (AP) — Cities in Asia and the United States emit the most heat-trapping gas that feeds climate change, with Shanghai the most polluting, according to new data that combines observations and artificial intelligence.

Nations at U.N. climate talks in Baku, Azerbaijan are trying to set new targets to cut such emissions and figure out how much rich nations will pay to help the world with that task. The data comes as climate officials and activists alike are growing increasingly frustrated with what they see as the talks' — and the world's — inability to clamp down on planet-warming fossil fuels and the countries and companies that promote them.

Seven states or provinces spew more than 1 billion metric tons of greenhouse gases, all of them in China, except Texas, which ranks sixth, according to new data from an organization co-founded by former U.S. Vice President Al Gore and released Friday at COP29.

Using satellite and ground observations, supplemented by artificial intelligence to fill in gaps, Climate Trace sought to quantify heat-trapping carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide, as well as other traditional air pollutants worldwide, including for the first time in more than 9,000 urban areas.

Earth's total carbon dioxide and methane pollution grew 0.7% to 61.2 billion metric tons with the short-lived but extra potent methane rising 0.2%. The figures are higher than other datasets "because we have such comprehensive coverage and we have observed more emissions in more sectors than are typically available," said Gavin McCormick, Climate Trace's co-founder.

Plenty of big cities emit far more than some nations

Shanghai's 256 million metric tons of greenhouse gases led all cities and exceeded those from the nations of Colombia or Norway. Tokyo's 250 million metric tons would rank in the top 40 of nations if it were a country, while New York City's 160 million metric tons and Houston's 150 million metric tons would be in the top 50 of countrywide emissions. Seoul, South Korea, ranks fifth among cities at 142 million metric tons.

"One of the sites in the Permian Basin in Texas is by far the No. 1 worst polluting site in the entire world," Gore said. "And maybe I shouldn't have been surprised by that, but I think of how dirty some of these sites are in Russia and China and so forth. But Permian Basin is putting them all in the shade."

China, India, Iran, Indonesia and Russia had the biggest increases in emissions from 2022 to 2023, while Venezuela, Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States had the biggest decreases in pollution.

The dataset — maintained by scientists and analysts from various groups — also looked at traditional pollutants such as carbon monoxide, volatile organic compounds, ammonia, sulfur dioxide and other chemicals associated with dirty air. Burning fossil fuels releases both types of pollution, Gore said.

This "represents the single biggest health threat facing humanity," Gore said.

Climate talks wrestle with fossil fuel interests

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Gore criticized the hosting of climate talks, called COPs, by Azerbaijan, an oil nation and site of the world's first oil wells, and by the United Arab Emirates last year.

"It's unfortunate that the fossil fuel industry and the petrostates have seized control of the COP process to an unhealthy degree," Gore said. "Next year in Brazil, we'll see a change in that pattern. But, you know, it's not good for the world community to give the No. 1 polluting industry in the world that much control over the whole process."

Brazil President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has called for more to be done on climate change and has sought to slow deforestation since returning for a third term as president. But Brazil last year produced more oil than both Azerbaijan and the United Arab Emirates, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

On Friday, former U.N. secretary-general Ban Ki-moon, former U.N. climate chief Christina Figueres and leading climate scientists released a letter calling for "an urgent overhaul" on climate talks.

The letter said the "global climate process has been captured and is no longer fit for purpose" in response to Azerbaijan's president Ilham Aliyev saying that oil and gas are a "gift of the gods."

U.N. Environment Programme Executive Director Inger Andresen said she understands much of the frustration in the letter calling for massive reform of the negotiation process, but said their push to slash emissions fits nicely with U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' constant prodding.

One key benefit of the U.N. climate talks process is it is the only place where victim small island nations have an equal seat at the table, Andersen told The Associated Press. But the process has its limits because "the rules of the game are set by member states," she said.

An analysis from the Kick Big Polluters Out coalition said Friday that the official attendance list of the talks featured at least 1,770 fossil fuel lobbyists.

At a press conference with small island nations chair Cedric Schuster said the negotiating bloc feels the need to remind everyone else why the talks matter.

"We're here to defend the Paris agreement," Schuster said, referring to the climate deal in 2015 to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit). "We're concerned that countries are forgetting that protecting the world's most vulnerable is at the core of this framework." _____

The Associated Press' climate and environmental coverage receives financial support from multiple private foundations. AP is solely responsible for all content. Find AP's standards for working with philanthropies, a list of supporters and funded coverage areas at AP.org.

Trump wants to end 'wokeness' in education. He has vowed to use federal money as leverage

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump's vision for education revolves around a single goal: to rid America's schools of perceived "wokeness" and "left-wing indoctrination."

The president-elect wants to keep transgender athletes out of girls' sports. He wants to forbid classroom lessons on gender identity and structural racism. He wants to abolish diversity and inclusion offices.

Throughout his campaign, the Republican depicted schools as a political battleground to be won back from the left. Now that he's won the White House, he plans to use federal money as leverage to advance his vision of education across the nation.

Trump's education plan pledges to cut funding for schools that defy him on a multitude of issues.

On his first day in office, Trump has repeatedly said he will cut money to "any school pushing critical race theory, transgender insanity, and other inappropriate racial, sexual or political content on our children." On the campaign trail, Trump said he would "not give one penny" to schools with vaccine or mask requirements.

He said it would be done through executive action, though even some of his supporters say he lacks the authority to make such swift and sweeping changes.

Trump's opponents say his vision of America's schools is warped by politics — that the type of liberal indoctrination he rails against is a fiction. They say his proposals will undermine public education and hurt

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the students who need schools' services the most.

"It's fear-based, non-factual information, and I would call it propaganda," said Wil Del Pilar, senior vice president for Education Trust, a research and advocacy organization. "There is no evidence that students are being taught to question their sexuality in schools. There is no evidence that our American education system is full of maniacs."

Trump's platform calls for "massive funding preferences" for states and schools that end teacher tenure, enact universal school choice programs and allow parents to elect school principals.

Perhaps his most ambitious promise is to shut down the U.S. Education Department entirely, a goal of conservative politicians for decades, saying it has been infiltrated by "radicals."

America's public K-12 schools get about 14% of their revenue from the federal government, mainly from programs targeting low-income students and special education. The vast majority of schools' money comes from local taxes and state governments.

Colleges rely more heavily on federal money, especially the grants and loans the government gives students to pay for tuition.

Trump's strongest tool to put schools' money on the line is his authority to enforce civil rights — the Education Department has the power to cut federal funding to schools and colleges that fail to follow civil rights laws.

The president can't immediately revoke money from large numbers of districts, but if he targets a few through civil rights inquiries, others are likely to fall in line, said Bob Eitel, president of the conservative Defense of Freedom Institute and an education official during Trump's first term. That authority could be used to go after schools and colleges that have diversity and inclusion offices or those accused of antisemitism, Eitel said.

"This is not a Day One loss of funding," Eitel said, referencing Trump's campaign promise. "But at the end of the day, the president will get his way on this issue, because I do think that there are some real legal issues."

Trump also has hinted at potential legislation to deliver some of his promises, including fining universities over diversity initiatives.

To get colleges to shutter diversity programs — which Trump says amount to discrimination — he said he "will advance a measure to have them fined up to the entire amount of their endowment."

His platform also calls for a new, free online university called the American Academy, to be paid for by "taxing, fining and suing excessively large private university endowments."

During his first term, Trump occasionally threatened to cut money from schools that defied him, including those slow to reopen during the COVID-19 pandemic and colleges he accused of curbing free speech.

Most of the threats came to nothing, though he succeeded in getting Congress to add a tax on wealthy university endowments, and his Education Department made sweeping changes to rules around campus sexual assault.

Universities hope their relationship with the administration won't be as antagonistic as Trump's rhetoric suggests.

"Education has been an easy target during the campaign season," said Peter McDonough, general counsel for the American Council on Education, an association of university presidents. "But a partnership between higher education and the administration is going to be better for the country than an attack on education."

Trump's threats of severe penalties seem to contradict another of his education pillars — the extraction of the federal government from schools. In closing the Education Department, Trump said he would return "all education work and needs back to the states."

"We're going to end education coming out of Washington, D.C.," Trump said on his website last year. In his platform, he pledged to ensure schools are "free from political meddling."

Rather than letting states and schools decide their stance on polarizing issues, Trump is proposing blanket bans that align with his vision.

Taking a neutral stance and letting states decide wouldn't deliver Trump's campaign promises, said Max

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Eden, a senior fellow at AEI, a conservative think tank. For example, Trump plans to rescind guidance from President Joe Biden's administration that extended Title IX protections to LGBTQ+ students. And Trump would go further, promising a nationwide ban on transgender women in women's sports.

"Trump ran on getting boys out of girls' sports. He didn't run on letting boys play in girls' sports in blue states if they want to," Eden said.

Trump also wants a say in school curriculum, vowing to fight for "patriotic" education. He promised to reinstate his 1776 Commission, which he created in 2021 to promote patriotic education. The panel created a report that called progressivism a "challenge to American principles" alongside fascism.

Adding to that effort, Trump is proposing a new credentialing body to certify teachers "who embrace patriotic values."

Few of his biggest education goals can be accomplished quickly, and many would require new action from Congress or federal processes that usually take months.

More immediately, he plans to nullify executive orders issued by Biden, including one promoting racial equity across the federal government. He's also expected to work quickly to revoke or rewrite Biden's Title IX rules, though finalizing those changes would require a lengthier rulemaking process.

Trump hasn't detailed his plans for student loans, though he has called Biden's cancellation proposals illegal and unfair.

Most of Biden's signature education initiatives have been paused by courts amid legal challenges, including a proposal for widespread loan cancellation and a more generous loan repayment plan. Those plans could be revoked or rewritten once Trump takes office.

As Trump picks Florida men for top jobs, new political possibilities open up in the Sunshine State

By KATE PAYNE Associated Press/Report for America

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — As President-elect Donald Trump names picks for his new administration from his private club in Palm Beach and prepares to return to the White House, he's bringing the Sunshine State with him.

With Sen. Marco Rubio tapped to be the next secretary of state, Rep. Matt Gaetz nominated to be attorney general, and Rep. Mike Waltz in line to be national security adviser, Trump's reliance on Floridians is setting off a chain reaction that's opening up new possibilities in the state in 2026 and beyond — and Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis, Trump's onetime challenger for the party's presidential nomination, will have a key role to play.

Gaetz's nomination to lead the Department of Justice, which once investigated him for allegations of sex trafficking, sent a shock wave through Washington, and his confirmation to be the country's top law enforcement officer is not a done deal. But the vacancy for his seat in northwest Florida's 1st Congressional District is, after Gaetz resigned Wednesday night. That decision effectively ended a House Ethics Committee investigation into his alleged sexual misconduct and illicit drug use, though the allegations could resurface in Senate confirmation hearings. Gaetz has categorically denied them all.

Waltz, a three-term congressman who represents Florida's 6th Congressional District south of Jacksonville, has not yet resigned his seat and neither has Rubio — though Florida Republicans hoping to leverage the upcoming openings are running the if-then calculations.

Under federal and state law, the processes for filling vacancies in the U.S. House and Senate are different. To fill an open House seat, Florida must hold a special election where voters will be able to directly choose their next representative. On the Senate side, DeSantis will get to appoint someone to take over Rubio's seat, assuming his colleagues confirm him as secretary of state. Rubio's replacement would hold the seat until the next regularly scheduled election in 2026.

Among the names being floated for Rubio's seat: DeSantis himself.

"I'm not familiar with anything that prevents him from naming himself," said Tallahassee-based elections lawyer Ron Meyer, "other than hubris, I suppose."

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DeSantis' term as governor runs out in 2026, putting the state's top executive office back on the ballot and offering its own political possibilities. With DeSantis expected to consider another presidential run in 2028, Florida politicians say it may not be to his advantage to appoint himself to the Senate. Another name being floated is first lady Casey DeSantis, whose own political ambition has long been a topic of speculation.

Speaking to students at Notre Dame the week before the Rubio pick was announced, DeSantis demurred when asked whether he would consider joining the new Trump administration.

"I'm not seeking anything," DeSantis said. "I've got a great job in the state of Florida. ... How can I best make a difference? I think, you know, given where we are, I think me quarterbacking the Sunshine State is probably how I make the biggest difference."

Other possible nominees include DeSantis' lieutenant governor Jeanette Nuñez — though she'd be in line to become the state's first female governor if DeSantis nominated himself — or state Attorney General Ashley Moody. A name being floated in Trump's orbit is Lara Trump, the president-elect's daughter-in-law, who was his pick to co-chair the Republican National Committee and who lives in Palm Beach County with her husband Eric.

As far as filling the House seats, state officials haven't yet announced the dates for a special election, apart from saying they want to move quickly.

"I've instructed Secretary of State Cord Byrd to formulate and announce a schedule for the upcoming special elections immediately," DeSantis posted on social media on Thursday.

Byrd said on social media that his team is working on it and will have a schedule posted soon.

In announcing Gaetz's resignation on Wednesday, House Speaker Mike Johnson framed the move as a way to fill the vacancy quickly as Republicans work to leverage their hard-fought but thin majority next year.

Florida elections experts told The Associated Press the process will still likely take months, due to statutory requirements to publicize the elections, mail ballots to military and overseas voters and certify primary results — as well as the logistical challenges of carrying out another election right after a busy presidential cycle. That could make the Republicans' thin House majority even thinner, at least for the first part of 2025.

"There is a bit of flexibility for a few of these things, but it seems like there's no practical way of having a replacement House member in less than half a year," said Michael Morley, an elections law expert and professor at Florida State University's College of Law.

The state's most recent special election to fill a U.S. House seat vacancy took 10 weeks between the primary election and the general alone, according to state records.

Trump is already testing Congress and daring Republicans to oppose him

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — After a resounding election victory, delivering what President-elect Donald Trump and Republicans call a "mandate" to govern, an uneasy political question is emerging: Will there be any room for dissent in the U.S. Congress?

Trump is laying down a gauntlet even before taking office challenging the Senate, in particular, to dare defy him over the nominations of Matt Gaetz, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and other controversial choices for his Cabinet and administration positions.

The promise of unified government, with the Republican Party's sweep of the White House and GOP majorities in the House and Senate, is making way for a more complicated political reality as congressional leaders confront anew what it means to line up with Trump's agenda.

"This is going to be a red alert moment for American democracy," Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., said on CNN after Trump tapped Gaetz for attorney general.

Trump is returning to the White House at the height of his political power, having won both the Electoral College and the popular vote for his party for the first time in decades. The trifecta in Washington offers a tantalizing political opportunity for Republicans, opening up a universe of political and policy priorities

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— from tax cuts to mass deportations to the gutting of the regulatory and federal bureaucracy, along with Trump's vows to seek vengeance and prosecution of his perceived enemies and pardon those who attacked the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

But for Congress, it's also a potentially existential moment, one that is testing whether its status as a co-equal branch of U.S. government can withstand a second Trump administration.

"One of the possible futures for Congress is that it becomes a rubber stamp," said Phillip Wallach, a scholar at the conservative American Enterprise Institute, who writes extensively about Congress.

Wallach said the threat to Congress has been on his mind, but he also believes it would be more pronounced if Republicans had won larger majorities. The House, in fact, may end up with slimmer numbers, and the Senate's 53-seat advantage, while more than the simple majority needed to confirm nominees, can hardly be seen as mandates.

Besides, "they're not wimps," he said of elected lawmakers. "There's no reason for them to just turn themselves into a doormat."

It's a changed Washington from Trump's first term. Congress has been purged of his strongest critics. At the same time, the Supreme Court has shifted dramatically rightward, with three Trump-appointed justices, and a majority decision over the summer that granted the president broad immunity from prosecution.

Trump's Cabinet picks are posing the biggest early test for Congress.

While Trump's choice of Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., for secretary of state is expected to have somewhat broad support, including from Democrats, others like Kennedy, Tulsi Gabbard for director of national intelligence and Pete Hegseth as defense secretary are raising more scrutiny.

The choice of Gaetz, a fierce Trump loyalist who talks about the wholesale upheaval of the Justice Department, is all the more troubling for senators because of a House ethics probe over alleged sexual misconduct and illicit drug use. He denies the allegations but submitted his resignation from Congress as soon as he was nominated, effectively shutting down the probe.

Sen. Dick Durbin, the Democratic chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, which would consider the Gaetz nomination, called on the House to "preserve and share their report" with the panel.

Sen. John Cornyn of Texas, a Republican member of the Judiciary committee, said he expects "any and all" information on the nominees will be made available.

Other Republicans in the House and Senate stood with Gaetz, supporting his effort to take on the Justice Department over what they see as perceived bias, particularly over its prosecutions of Trump for trying to overturn the 2020 election ahead of the Capitol attack and for hoarding classified documents.

"I know the Democrats are clutching their pearls right now, and they're very, very upset about everything," said Sen. Bill Hagerty, R-Tenn., on Fox News.

"But if you think about how they have weaponized the DOJ, this is a situation that needs serious reform," he said. "It's President Trump's prerogative to choose who he wants to nominate."

Incoming Senate GOP Leader John Thune said confirming Trump's nominations will be a priority next year and senators "should expect an aggressive schedule until his nominees are confirmed."

Complicating the matter for senators is the Trump campaign's decision to not engage, so far, in the traditional transition process, having declined to sign agreements with the federal government that would launch FBI background checks of nominees, among other standard steps before confirmation hearings.

Senators may be forced to consider nominees that have not been vetted in the traditional ways.

Rep. Mike Quigley, D-Ill., a former member of the House Intelligence Committee, worried Americans may be left in the dark about their top officials. "People have a right to know who's leading critical aspects of their government," he said.

Intensifying his demands on the Senate, Trump suggested it should consider so-called recess appointments of his nominees — a highly unorthodox request that essentially asks the Senate to drop its constitutional advise-and-consent role and allow his nominees to be installed without a vote.

Wallach said if senators chose that route it would be "an act of extreme institutional self-sabotage."

Congress has been here before, in the first Trump administration, when the White House tested the limits of its executive power.

One of the most significant confrontations of that earlier Trump era was over his promised border wall, when the White House tried to poach congressionally approved funds for military base construction projects and repurpose them for the wall between the U.S. and Mexico.

Congress largely won that round, after long fights, but it's about to be tested in new ways.

Trump is planning a series of executive orders on Day One of the new administration to launch his mass deportations and other priorities.

Trump allies, including Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., and influential commentator Charlie Kirk, have warned of consequences in the form of primary challenges to senators who fail to confirm nominees.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., the on-again-off-again Trump ally, said he typically confirms a president's nominees, regardless of party, and intends to be a yes vote again.

"I consider this matter closed," he said.

Clean energy could create millions of tons of waste in India. Some are working to avoid that

By SIBI ARASU Associated Press

KENCHANAHALLI, India (AP) — On the edges of a dense forest in southern India, six women in a small garage are busy stitching cloth bags, pants, hospital gowns and office uniforms with automated sewing machines.

About four years ago, power cuts constantly interrupted their work. Heavy rain disrupted transmission lines and air conditioners pumping in extreme heat exhausted the grid. But now a small black box in a corner of the garage, not much larger than an office printer, keeps their operations running. The battery pack, made from used electric vehicle batteries, keeps their sewing machines and lights on even when the main power is off.

"This battery is a godsend for us," said H. Gauri, one of the women. "Before the battery came, we'd have to stitch manually when there was no electricity which is exhausting. That is not a concern anymore and we're able to finish all our orders on time."

While the group is successful, initiatives like it in India are still few and far between. As the country gets more electric vehicles, solar panels and wind turbines, all aimed at reducing the country's dependency on planet-warming fossil fuels, energy experts say that India will need to find ways to repurpose the batteries, panels and blades at the end of their lifespans or risk creating millions of tons of waste. If the country comes up with a comprehensive strategy to recycle components, it would both reduce waste and lead to fewer imports of the critical minerals needed for clean power in the future.

Currently, many panels, batteries and other clean energy parts end up in landfills. But others are processed by unlicensed waste recyclers, and some newer businesses and organizations are coming up with ways to recycle the valuable components.

Old EV car batteries can power rural livelihoods

The six tailors in Kenchanahalli say their lives have completely changed since the battery smoothed over power cuts.

Gauri, 32, said the steady income from the tailoring work has helped build a new home for her and her three children. She said it has also brought her more independence.

"Earlier, my husband was not happy about me working long hours or going to nearby towns to get tailoring orders," she said. "However, after seeing how much I was earning, he has taken a step back. It's not only me, this job has changed everything for all the women in this room."

The lithium-ion batteries can provide backup power for up to six hours. They were provided by battery refurbishing and energy storage company Nunam and set up at the campus of the Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement, a nongovernmental organization that works to help poor and Indigenous communities in remote regions of Karnataka.

These relatively small electricity needs are perfect ways to reuse electric vehicle batteries, said Prithvi

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Raj Narendra, an engineer at Nunam. "The way EVs use these batteries is like asking it to run. Using it to power small machines and streetlights is like asking it to walk," he said.

In the four years since the tailoring operation was set up, Nunam's orders have exponentially increased. Their two dozen employees in Bengaluru's electronic city neighborhood are busier than ever designing and packaging battery packs from used EV batteries from cars and three-wheelers.

Narendra said the company aims to produce one gigawatt-hour of power — enough to power one million homes for a year — by the end of this decade for homes and small businesses across India, especially those without consistent sources of electricity.

With a surge in solar, planning can minimize waste

India is the world's most populous nation and among the biggest emitters of planet-warming gases. Like the rest of the world, a major part of transitioning away from dirty fossil fuels for electricity comes in the form of solar panels.

Solar panels typically last between 20 and 30 years. Some estimates say that 100 kilotons of solar power-related waste is already produced every year in India and this number could grow to 340 kilotons by 2030.

"The issue is not very large right now, but it will become so as the installed base of solar panels becomes larger," said Adarsh Das, who's worked in India's solar power sector for the past 30 years.

The country has set an ambitious target of producing 500 gigawatts of clean power by the end of this decade and is also aiming to become a global hub for manufacturing clean power components like solar cells, panels and wind turbines.

The Indian government has included solar, wind and EV components in its electronic waste regulations, and has called for producers to recycle components, but there's little clarity about how they should do that.

U.S.-based renewable energy company First Solar owns a solar manufacturing site in Chennai, India, and has already included solar panel recycling in their business model. In the future, new panels will be made from old recycled components.

Sujoy Ghosh, their managing director for India, said the government's waste regulations show it's thinking in the right direction, but the "devil is in the details." Rules around how solar panels should be recycled, and how companies can profit from setting up recycling facilities, are needed, he said.

Anjali Taneja, a senior policy specialist at the Indian think-tank Centre for Study of Science, Technology and Policy, thinks recycling can definitely be profitable for Indian solar producers. But without a clear recycling plan, Taneja worries that the country "could become one of the largest waste generators."

Creating a national effort to recycle raw materials

India currently imports over 95% of lithium-ion batteries as well as large amounts of nickel, cobalt and other rare earth minerals that are needed for clean power and EV batteries, government reports say. Experts estimate that nearly 90% of those materials can be recovered to make new solar power panels, batteries and wind turbines within India.

The ability to recycle critical minerals is "a huge opportunity for India," said Akansha Tyagi of the New Delhi-based Council on Energy, Environment and Water. "Many strategies can be put in place to design products better, use them better over their lifetime, repair them before you recycle and eventually responsibly recycle."

The next step, Tyagi said, is to create a comprehensive policy for creating a circular economy — an economic model that aims to maximize the use of anything that is manufactured and create as little waste as possible.

Industry stakeholders agree.

Deepali Sinha Khetriwal, who runs a coworking space for electronic waste recyclers just outside New Delhi, said there is tremendous potential for creating jobs in the clean energy sector if recycling is taken up more seriously.

"You need skilled and semi-skilled people," she said. "The resource recovery industry is such a great job creator."

Khetriwal added that her hope is to see more recyclers like her across the country, creating national

momentum for clean energy recycling.

"While our setup is still small, what we're trying to do can be replicated," she said. "We're excited about what the future holds if as a country we plan ahead."

Australia's plan to ban children from social media proves popular and problematic

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — How do you remove children from the harms of social media? Politically the answer appears simple in Australia, but practically the solution could be far more difficult.

The Australian government's plan to ban children from social media platforms including X, TikTok, Facebook and Instagram until their 16th birthdays is politically popular. The opposition party says it would have done the same after winning elections due within months if the government hadn't moved first.

The leaders of all eight Australian states and mainland territories have unanimously backed the plan, although Tasmania, the smallest state, would have preferred the threshold was set at 14.

But a vocal assortment of experts in the fields of technology and child welfare have responded with alarm. More than 140 such experts signed an open letter to Prime Minister Anthony Albanese condemning the 16-year age limit as "too blunt an instrument to address risks effectively."

Details of what is proposed and how it will be implemented are scant. More will be known when legislation is introduced into the Parliament next week.

The concerned teen

Leo Puglisi, a 17-year-old Melbourne student who founded online streaming service 6 News Australia at the age of 11, laments that lawmakers imposing the ban lack the perspective on social media that young people have gained by growing up in the digital age.

"With respect to the government and prime minister, they didn't grow up in the social media age, they're not growing up in the social media age, and what a lot of people are failing to understand here is that, like it or not, social media is a part of people's daily lives," Leo said.

"It's part of their communities, it's part of work, it's part of entertainment, it's where they watch content — young people aren't listening to the radio or reading newspapers or watching free-to-air TV — and so it can't be ignored. The reality is this ban, if implemented, is just kicking the can down the road for when a young person goes on social media," Leo added.

Leo has been applauded for his work online. He was a finalist in his home state Victoria's nomination for the Young Australian of the Year award, which will be announced in January. His nomination bid credits his platform with "fostering a new generation of informed, critical thinkers."

The grieving mom-turned-activist

One of the proposal's supporters, cyber safety campaigner Sonya Ryan, knows from personal tragedy how dangerous social media can be for children.

Her 15-year-old daughter Carly Ryan was murdered in 2007 in South Australia state by a 50-year-old pedophile who pretended to be a teenager online. In a grim milestone of the digital age, Carly was the first person in Australia to be killed by an online predator.

"Kids are being exposed to harmful pornography, they're being fed misinformation, there are body image issues, there's sextortion, online predators, bullying. There are so many different harms for them to try and manage and kids just don't have the skills or the life experience to be able to manage those well," Sonya Ryan said.

"The result of that is we're losing our kids. Not only what happened to Carly, predatory behavior, but also we're seeing an alarming rise in suicide of young people," she added.

Sonya Ryan is part of a group advising the government on a national strategy to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse in Australia.

She wholeheartedly supports Australia setting the social media age limit at 16.

"We're not going to get this perfect," she said. "We have to make sure that there are mechanisms in

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place to deal with what we already have which is an anxious generation and an addicted generation of children to social media.”

A major concern for social media users of all ages is the legislation’s potential privacy implications.

Age estimation technology has proved inaccurate, so digital identification appears to be the most likely option for assuring a user is at least 16.

Australia’s eSafety Commissioner, an office that describes itself as the world’s first government agency dedicated to keeping people safer online, has suggested in planning documents adopting the role of authenticator. The government would hold the identity data and the platforms would discover through the commissioner whether a potential account holder was 16.

The skeptical internet expert

Tama Leaver, professor of internet studies at Curtin University, fears that the government will make the platforms hold the users’ identification data instead.

The government has already said the onus will be on the platforms, rather than on children or their parents, to ensure everyone meets the age limit.

“The worst possible outcome seems to be the one that the government may be inadvertently pushing towards, which would be that the social media platforms themselves would end up being the identity arbiter,” Leaver said.

“They would be the holder of identity documents which would be absolutely terrible because they have a fairly poor track record so far of holding on to personal data well,” he added.

The platforms will have a year once the legislation has become law to work out how the ban can be implemented.

Ryan, who divides her time between Adelaide in South Australia and Fort Worth, Texas, said privacy concerns should not stand in the way of removing children from social media.

“What is the cost if we don’t? If we don’t put the safety of our children ahead of profit and privacy?” she asked.

Juan Luis Guerra 4.40 wins album of the year at the 2024 Latin Grammys, a 25th anniversary party

By MARIA SHERMAN AP Music Writer

Juan Luis Guerra 4.40 took home the album of the year trophy at the 2024 Latin Grammy Awards for his “Radio Güira,” not long after receiving record of the year for “Mambo 23.”

“Let me share this with all the nominees, it is a great privilege to be with you,” Guerra said onstage, speaking in Spanish. “I love you, I admire you, and after 40 years of (my) career, I feel joyful to be with you,” said Guerra. “The idea of ‘Radio Güira’ was from Jesus, completely from Jesus, he gave us wisdom and he gave us understanding so all the glory and honor goes to him.”

It was the performances that stood out Thursday night, and a tribute to salsa really bringing the house down: Marc Anthony and La India powerfully dueted “Vivir Lo Nuestro,” a vivacious set jumpstarted by “De Mí Enamórate,” as performed by Tito Nieves and Christian Alicea. Make no mistake: the Latin Grammy Awards brought the fun on its 25th anniversary, and from the very beginning.

Like with “Si Si Si!” It’s the song that Carlos Vives opened the night with in his medley, and a perfect distillation of the spirit of the event. There was a lot to say “yes” to — especially when he was joined by fellow Colombian musicians Juanes, Sebastián Yatra and Camilo.

He was honored as the Latin Grammys’ Person of the Year at a ceremony the night before, and given his award on stage Thursday night by Jon Bon Jovi. Past winners include Juanes, Laura Pausini, Marco Antonio Solís, Rubén Blades and more.

The first award of the night was given out shortly thereafter: best contemporary Música Mexicana album to Carín León for his “Boca Chueca, Vol. 1.” Then Joe Jonas and Ela Taubert teamed up for a bilingual take on her viral hit, “¿Cómo Pasó?” A few hours later, she’d take home the coveted best new artist trophy, delivering a heartfelt speech.

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"I think any musician or artist dreams of a moment like this," she said through tears. "I want to thank God because he gave me this dream, to my mother for having believed in me from the beginning... to all the nominees, this is yours, I admire and respect you very much, to the people who listen to my music, you brought me here, thank you very, very much."

Song of the year went to Jorge Drexler for his composition, "Derrumbe."

Performances hit hard and fast: Kali Uchis, Luis Fonsi, Elena Rose, The Warning, Myke Towers with "La Falda" into "Lala" and Juan Luis Guerra 4.40's brought his modern merengue "Mambo 23," Danny Ocean's "Amor" bled into Alvaro Díaz's emo-trap rock "Quién te quiere como el nene."

Pitbull and Jon Bon Jovi teamed up "Now or Never," a remix song of the latter's huge hit, "It's My Life."

Anitta brought bossa nova to the awards show, paying tribute to the late great Sergio Mendes, her fellow Brazilian.

Traditional pop vocal album went to Puerto Rican singer-songwriter Kany García for her album, "García." And Draco Rosa won pop/rock album for his 2024 record, "Reflejos de Lo Eterno."

Karol G won música urbana album "Mañana Será Bonito (Bichota Season)." Pop vocal album went to Luis Fonsi for "El Viaje."

It's a big year: the three-hour award show celebrated the Latin Grammys' 25th anniversary, held at the Kaseya Center in Miami, in a time when Latin music genres have never been bigger globally.

Most of the awards at the Latin Grammys were presented a few hours before, at the Latin Grammy Premiere. There, Edgar Barrera — the producer and songwriter known for his work with such artists as Madonna, Karol G, Peso Pluma, Shakira, Grupo Frontera and beyond — who led the nominations for a second year in a row, picked up three trophies. Nathy Peluso did the same.

Barrera was up for nine awards. This year, he took home songwriter of the year, producer of the year and best regional Mexican song — alongside Keytin — for cowriting Grupo Frontera and Grupo Firme's "El Amor de Su Vida."

APEC leaders to open Lima summit as Trump prepares to return to office

By DAVID BILLER Associated Press

LIMA, Peru (AP) — Representatives from 21 members representing the Pacific Rim are meeting in Peru on Friday for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, the first global summit since U.S. President-elect Donald Trump's victory featuring several major world leaders.

The annual gathering brings together countries and members that jointly account for almost two-thirds of global GDP and half the world's trade, according to organizers. They confirmed heads of government attending in Lima include outgoing U.S. President Joe Biden, China's President Xi Jinping, Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Indonesia's President Prabowo Subianto, Japan's Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba and Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, among others, as the world wonders how a new U.S. government might upend global dynamics.

Leaders and other representatives will hold closed-door discussions in the morning among themselves, and in the afternoon with members of APEC's business advisory council. The council met Wednesday and called on APEC nations and members to boost inclusive growth and prioritize the needs of micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises, particularly those led by women and Indigenous entrepreneurs.

"While the global economy remains resilient, APEC economies are grappling with persistent inflation, economic disparities, high interest rates and the urgent need to increase investments for a green, climate-resilient future," said council chairwoman Julia Torreblanca.

APEC is bound to be one of Biden's last before leaving office, and White House officials insist that his attendance as well as his subsequent visit to Brazil for the Group of 20 meeting next week will be substantive, with talks to focus on climate issues, global infrastructure, counter-narcotic efforts. For the first time since last year's APEC forum, Biden will meet one-on-one with Chinese President Xi on Saturday. He will also meet with South Korea's Yoon Suk Yeol, Japan's Shigeru Ishiba and Peru's President Dina Boluarte.

The officials say Biden also will use the summits to press allies to keep up support for Ukraine as it tries to fend off Russia's invasion and persist in negotiating an end to Israel's wars in Lebanon and Gaza.

Still, analysts say he will be overshadowed at APEC by Xi, who arrived Thursday and proceeded to inaugurate a \$1.3 billion megaport that is perhaps the clearest sign of Latin America's ongoing reorientation in the region.

The Chancay port will shave 10 days off shipping times to China, which has seen trade with South America boom over the past two decades. Peru's economy minister in June said neighboring nations are actively modifying their supply chains to benefit from the port, in which total investment will top \$3.5 billion.

Ahead of the inauguration at the port, 60 kilometers (37 miles) north of Lima, locals told The Associated Press that the development hasn't buoyed their economic prospects. On the contrary, they said the port has impaired their ability to fish, threatening their livelihoods.

Discontent has been brewing in the middle-class San Borja neighborhood outside Lima's Convention Center, where the APEC conference is sited. Metal barriers and police equipped with riot gear surround the perimeter where, for the past two days, anti-government protesters angry about a recent spate of gang-fueled violence have shouted slogans demanding that their wildly unpopular president take action against the crime wave.

The rallies have devolved into scuffles with police, who used batons to drive away the more aggressive protesters on Thursday.

Trump meets with Argentina's president, the first foreign leader he's met with since election

By ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — Donald Trump met Thursday at his Mar-a-Lago club with Argentine President Javier Milei, the first foreign leader to meet with the president-elect since his victory in last week's election.

The meeting was confirmed by a person who insisted on anonymity to discuss an event that hadn't yet been announced publicly. The person said the meeting went well and said Milei also met with investors.

A short time later, Milei, a self-described "anarcho-capitalist" and frequent recipient of Trump praise, addressed the America First Policy Institute gala at Mar-a-Lago. He spoke briefly in English, then gave a longer speech in Spanish, pausing to allow an interpreter to translate, in which he slammed left-wing ideologies and saluted Elon Musk, the owner of X, saying his social media site is helping to "save humanity."

Milei criticized a political ruling class that he said was responsible for a system that used unfair tax systems to force "the redistribution of wealth at gunpoint."

The president of Argentina also congratulated Trump on his "resounding victory" in the election, saying, "Today the winds of freedom are blowing much stronger" and calling the victory "proof positive that the forces of heaven are on our side."

Trump also spoke to the gala crowd, congratulating Milei "for the job you've done for Argentina" and saying it was an "honor" to have Argentina's president at his club.

"The job you've done is incredible. Make Argentina Great Again, you know, MAGA. He's a MAGA person," Trump said to applause. "And you know, he's doing that."

Shortly after Milei's election in November 2023, Trump posted on social media, "You will turn your country around and truly Make Argentina Great Again!"

Milei first met Trump in February at the Conservative Political Action Conference, or CPAC, in the Washington area. He has openly declared his admiration for Trump and when he saw him, he rushed to him screaming "president!" and gave him a close hug before they posed for pictures.

The Argentine president is known for his eccentric personality and first made a name for himself by shouting against Argentina's "political caste" on television. The right-wing populist campaigned with a chainsaw as his prop to symbolize his plans to slash public spending and scrap government ministries.

Typhoon Usagi wreaks more damage and misery in Philippines as yet another storm looms

By JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — Typhoon Usagi swamped rural villages in floods, knocked down power and displaced thousands more people before blowing away on Friday from the northern Philippines, which has now been pounded by five major storms in less than a month.

A new storm in the Pacific could strengthen into a powerful typhoon before hitting the Philippine archipelago on Sunday, according to state forecasters.

There were no immediate reports of casualties from the onslaught caused by Usagi, which was blowing toward southern Taiwan on Friday.

In Cagayan province in the northernmost tip of the main Luzon region, a key concrete bridge connecting two towns partly collapsed Thursday after logs swept by rampaging river currents smashed into it. Several other bridges were engulfed in floodwaters and were unusable, provincial officials said.

Usagi made landfall in the northeastern Philippines on Thursday, just two days after the last typhoon, Toraji, exited after setting off floods and forcing more than 82,500 people to flee from their homes in northern provinces.

Many of the displaced were still in emergency shelters when Usagi hit, according to welfare officials, who have scrambled to transport large numbers of food packs and other aid to more than 300 evacuation centers as the back-to-back storms and typhoons lashed the region.

The government has struggled to deal with the impact of the multiple storms, which left at least 160 people dead, displaced more than 9 million others and devastated farmland and infrastructure, mostly in Luzon.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s administration has spent more than 1 billion pesos (\$17 million) for food and other aid for hundreds of thousands of storm victims, Welfare Assistant Secretary Irene Dumlao said.

Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro, who oversees disaster-response efforts, sought the help of neighboring countries, including Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei, in providing additional aircraft to transport food, water and other aid to villages isolated by the storms. The United States, Manila's longtime treaty ally, deployed cargo aircraft with food and other assistance.

The U.N. Humanitarian Country Team in the Philippines said it was raising \$32.9 million to help the government provide assistance to about 210,000 people in critical need of aid and protection, especially women, children and people with disabilities, in the next three months.

"The Philippines is facing an exceptionally challenging tropical cyclone season, with successive cyclones reaching unprecedented locations and scales," the U.N. team said in its emergency plan. "Local authorities, who are often impacted themselves, are overwhelmed as they simultaneously respond to the crisis and coordinate rescue efforts for affected families."

The Philippines is battered by about 20 typhoons and tropical storms each year. It is often hit by earthquakes and has more than a dozen active volcanoes, making it one of the world's most disaster-prone countries.

In 2013, Typhoon Haiyan, one of the strongest recorded tropical cyclones, left more than 7,300 people dead or missing, flattened entire villages and caused ships to run aground and smash into houses in the central Philippines.

Trump chooses anti-vaccine activist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as health secretary

By JILL COLVIN and AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump announced Thursday he will nominate anti-vaccine activist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to lead the Department of Health and Human Services, putting a man whose views public health officials have decried as dangerous in charge of a massive agency that oversees ev-

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everything from drug, vaccine and food safety to medical research, Medicare and Medicaid.

"For too long, Americans have been crushed by the industrial food complex and drug companies who have engaged in deception, misinformation, and disinformation when it comes to Public Health," Trump said Thursday in a post on his Truth Social site announcing the appointment. Kennedy, he said, would "end the Chronic Disease epidemic" and "Make America Great and Healthy Again!"

Trump said Kennedy would target drugs, food additives and chemicals.

As one of the most prominent anti-vaccine activists in the world, Kennedy's nomination immediately alarmed some public health officials.

Dr. Mandy Cohen, director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, told The Associated Press, "I don't want to go backwards and see children or adults suffer or lose their lives to remind us that vaccines work, and so I am concerned."

Trump also announced Thursday that he has chosen Doug Collins, a former congressman from Georgia, to run the Department of Veterans Affairs. Collins is a chaplain in the U.S. Air Force Reserve Command. The Republican served in Congress from 2013 to 2021, and he helped defend Trump during his first impeachment process.

Later Thursday, Trump said he was nominating North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum to lead the Department of the Interior. After ending his own presidential campaign in December 2023, Burgum endorsed Trump and became an outspoken supporter, appearing on TV news shows and at rallies and other events. He was on Trump's short list of potential running mates.

Kennedy hails from one of the nation's most storied political families and is the son of the late Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy and the nephew of President John F. Kennedy. He first challenged President Joe Biden for the Democratic nomination last year. He then ran as an independent but abandoned his bid this summer after striking a deal to endorse Trump in exchange for a promise to serve in a health policy role during a second Trump administration.

He and the president-elect have since become good friends. The two campaigned together extensively during the race's final stretch, and Trump made clear he intended to give Kennedy a major public health role.

"I'm going to let him go wild on health," Trump said at a rally last month.

During the campaign, Kennedy told NewsNation that Trump had asked him to "reorganize" agencies including the CDC, the National Institutes of Health and the Food and Drug Administration.

Kennedy has pushed against processed foods and the use of herbicides like Roundup weed killer. He has long criticized the large commercial farms and animal feeding operations that dominate the industry.

But he is perhaps best known for his criticism of childhood vaccines.

Again and again, Kennedy has made his opposition to vaccines clear. In July, he said in a podcast interview that "There's no vaccine that is safe and effective" and told FOX News that he still believes in the long-ago debunked idea that vaccines can cause autism.

In a 2021 podcast he urged people to "resist" CDC guidelines that advise when kids should receive routine vaccinations.

"I see somebody on a hiking trail carrying a little baby and I say to him, 'Better not get them vaccinated,'" Kennedy said.

Repeated scientific studies in the U.S. and abroad have found no link between vaccines and autism. Vaccines have been proven safe and effective in laboratory testing and in real world use in hundreds of millions of people over decades. The World Health Organization credits childhood vaccines with preventing as many as 5 million deaths a year.

Trump during his first term launched Operation Warp Speed, an effort to speed the production and distribution of a vaccine to combat COVID-19. The resulting vaccines were widely credited, including by Trump himself, with saving lives.

Kennedy has also worked to shore up support among young mothers in particular, on a message of ridding the U.S. of unhealthy ingredients in foods, promising to model regulations after those imposed

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in Europe. His claims that the U.S. obesity epidemic, as well as a rise in chronic diseases like diabetes, are the result of processed and unhealthy foods has resonated on social media among fitness gurus and mom influencers alike.

It remains unclear how that will square with Trump's history of deregulation of big industries, including food. Trump has pushed for fewer inspections of the meat industry, for example.

Kennedy's stance on vaccines raises question about his ability to get confirmed, even in a GOP-controlled Senate. He also has said he would make a controversial recommendation to remove fluoride from drinking water, although fluoride levels are mandated by state and local governments. The addition of the mineral has been cited as leading to improved dental health and is considered safe at low levels.

Incoming Senate Majority Leader John Thune would not comment on Trump's pick of Kennedy or any other potential nominee. "I'm not going to make any judgments about any of these folks at this point," he said.

But Republican Sen. Josh Hawley, R-MO, praised the HHS pick, posting on X: "Bad day for Big Pharma! @RobertKennedyJr."

Several Democrats quickly condemned the selection.

Washington Sen. Patty Murray, the No. 3 Democrat, said that Kennedy's confirmation would be "nothing short of a disaster for the health of millions of families."

But not every Democrat recoiled from the news. Colorado Gov. Jared Polis said he was "excited" for Kennedy to lead HHS. Polis said he wants to see Kennedy take on "big pharma" and hopes he will "lean into personal choice" on vaccines.

That idea is concerning to former New York Public Health Commissioner Dr. Ashwin Vasani, who said that if people opt against vaccines, deadly viruses could run wild. He points to an uptick in measles outbreaks — 16 have occurred so far this year compared to four last year. "That's going to continue if we have someone at the top of our health system that is saying, 'I'm not so sure about the science here,'" Vasani said.

FDA could have one of the biggest shakeups, with Kennedy's promises of more regulations — action that would buck the moves that previous Republican administrations have made. He has promised a crackdown on food dyes and preservatives. And with pharmaceutical companies, he's suggested that drugmakers be barred from advertising on TV, a multibillion-dollar enterprise that accounts for most of the industry's marketing dollars. He also proposed eliminating fees that drugmakers pay the FDA to review their products.

He wants to weaken FDA regulations around a host of unsubstantiated therapies, including psychedelics and stem cells as well as discredited COVID-era drugs like ivermectin and hydroxychloroquine.

Kennedy also will focus on ending the "revolving door" of employees who have previously worked for pharmaceutical companies or leave government service to work for that industry, his former campaign communications manager, Del Bigtree, told the AP last month.

This past weekend, Kennedy said he wanted to fire 600 employees at NIH, which oversees vaccine research and replace them with 600 new people. In separate comments, he has said that in his first week he would order a pause in drug development and infectious disease research, shifting the focus to chronic diseases.

Kennedy's anti-vaccine nonprofit group, Children's Health Defense, currently has a lawsuit pending against a number of news organizations, among them The Associated Press, accusing them of violating antitrust laws by taking action to identify misinformation, including about COVID-19 and COVID-19 vaccines. Kennedy took leave from the group when he announced his run for president but is listed as one of its attorneys in the lawsuit.

Trump also announced Thursday that he will nominate Jay Clayton, who served as chairman of the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission during his first term, to serve as U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York.

___ Seitz reported from Washington. Associated Press writers Zeke Miller, Mary Clare Jalonick and Matthew Perrone in Washington, Mike Stobbe in New York, and JoNel Aleccia in Temecula, California contributed to this report.

Masses of residents flee homes in Haiti's capital as gangs ratchet up violence

By PIERRE-RICHARD LUXAMA and EVENS SANON Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Masses of residents fled a running battle Thursday between gang members and police in one of the few neighborhoods of Haiti's capital that hadn't already been fully taken over by gangs, as violence flared amid political turmoil.

Families frantically packed mattresses and furniture into cars and carried their belongings on their heads as they left the Solino neighborhood, one of a handful of areas in Port-au-Prince where a coalition of gangs, called Viv Ansanm, and police were locked in a violent firefight over the past several days.

"We barely made it out," said 52-year-old Jean-Jean Pierre, who carrying his son in his arms as he fled the neighborhood with throngs of people. "I've lived here 40 years of my life and I've never seen it this bad."

Violence has exploded in the capital since Sunday when Haiti's transitional council created to restore democratic order fired the interim prime minister amid political infighting. The Caribbean nation hasn't held an election since 2016, largely because of the gang violence.

The U.N. International Office for Migration reports that since Sunday more than 4,300 people have fled their homes in Port-au-Prince and neighboring towns, U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric told reporters at the U.N. in New York on Thursday,

Gangs like the Viv Ansanm coalition often seize on moments of political chaos to make power grabs like the one seen in Solino in recent days.

Gangs also largely shut down the country's main airport by shooting a number of planes, wounding one flight attendant on Monday. The United Nations said that it documented 20 armed clashes in Port-au-Prince in just one day. The U.N. estimates that gangs control 85% of the city.

A U.N.-backed mission led by Kenyan police sent to subdue the gangs has been unable to quell the violence.

Pierre, the fleeing father, said he hasn't seen any presence of the U.N.-backed mission in his neighborhood, and that he and his family don't know where they'll go. Other residents said gang members had forced them from their homes and burned their belongings.

"These gangs are more powerful than the police," Pierre said.

The United Nations has mobilized help, spokesman Dujarric said.

In the past two days, he said the U.N. children's agency UNICEF provided cash to nearly 1,500 people in displacement sites in the capital and the U.N. population and migration agencies deployed mobile health clinics and are providing clean water. Starting Thursday, he said, the U.N. World Food Program delivered food to more than 50,000 displaced people in Port-au-Prince.

"Across Haiti, WFP has also provided cash to nearly 100,000 people and is delivering daily meals to 430,000 children in 2,000 schools across the country," Dujarric said.

The country's new interim prime minister, Alix Didier Fils-Aimé, has been largely silent about the violence since he was sworn in on Monday, but on Wednesday released a statement condemning the plane shootings. His office said that he ordered police to regain control of the airport and nearby areas.

Meanwhile, videos on social media have shown smoke rising up from the Solino area, as gunfire has echoed from the neighborhood's streets in recent days.

While it wasn't immediately clear how many people were fleeing the violence in Solino, it appeared that much of the neighborhood was emptying out.

Residents said that gang members had killed a police officer who was known as a community leader fighting back against the gangs. That killing also was reported by local media, though The Associated Press wasn't able to confirm the death with authorities.

In October, the same gang coalition made a similar violent push into the Solino neighborhood, setting fire to homes and leaving many fleeing with all they could carry or calling radio stations to plead for help.

Middle East latest: Human Rights Watch accuses Israel of war crimes in Gaza Strip

By The Associated Press undefined

Human Rights Watch says Israel is committing war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Gaza Strip, including massive forced displacements that amount to ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from parts of Gaza.

Palestinians have been killed while evacuating under Israeli orders and in Israeli-designated humanitarian zones, where hundreds of thousands are crammed into squalid tent camps, according to the report released Thursday by the New York-based rights watchdog.

The report said the widespread, deliberate demolition of homes and civilian infrastructure throughout Gaza, particularly in a military road that cuts Gaza in half as well as a buffer zone along the border, was likely to "permanently displace" many Palestinians.

Israel's military said the report distorts the facts and leaves out important context, blaming civilian casualties on Hamas operating in residential areas and emphasizing that Israel does not deliberately target civilians.

Israel's blistering 13-month war 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.

Israel has also been striking deeper inside Lebanon since September as it escalates the war against Hezbollah. After 13 months of war, more than 3,300 people have been killed and more than 14,400 wounded, Lebanon's Health Ministry says.

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, the fighting has left some 76 people dead in Israel, including 31 soldiers.

Here's the latest:

UN Security Council draft resolution demands "immediate, unconditional and permanent cease-fire" in Gaza

UNITED NATIONS — The U.N. Security Council's 10 elected members have circulated a draft resolution demanding "an immediate, unconditional and permanent cease-fire" in Gaza.

The draft resolution, which was sent to the council's five permanent members Thursday, reiterates the council's demand "for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages" seized during Hamas' surprise attacks in southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023. Israel says about 100 are still being held, though not all are believed to be alive.

The council's 10 elected members — Ecuador, Japan, Malta, Mozambique, Switzerland, Algeria, Guyana, South Korea, Sierra Leone and Slovenia — circulated the draft after they agreed to it.

The United States, Israel's closest ally, holds the key to whether the Security Council adopts the resolution. The four other permanent members — Russia, China, Britain and France -- are expected to support it or abstain.

The draft, obtained Thursday by The Associated Press, also demands immediate access for Gaza's civilian population to humanitarian aid and services essential for their survival.

It "underscores" that the U.N. agency helping Palestinian refugees known as UNRWA "remains the backbone of the humanitarian response in Gaza."

Israel's parliament passed two laws last month banning UNRWA's operations in the Palestinian territories, which take effect in 90 days.

The draft resolution would also express the council's "deep alarm over the ongoing catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza including the lack of adequate healthcare services and the state of food insecurity creating a risk of famine notably in the north."

Israeli strike kills at least 12 Lebanese rescuers in a civil defense center

BEIRUT — An Israeli airstrike on a civil defense center in eastern Lebanon killed at least 12 emergency

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rescue workers on Thursday, the Health Ministry said.

In a statement, Lebanon's civil defense said the strike completely destroyed its center in Douris in Baalbek province with a number of members inside, "ready to receive calls for relief and immediate intervention to provide assistance to citizens."

Three members were wounded in the strike, the statement said, adding that rescue operations were ongoing to look for more people under the rubble.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli army. Lebanon's civil defense forces have no affiliation with the militant group Hezbollah, and provide crucial rescue and medical services in one of the world's most war-torn nations.

The Health Ministry condemned what it called a "barbaric attack on a Lebanese state-run health center," adding that "it is the second Israeli attack on a health emergency facility in less than two hours."

In South Lebanon, an Israeli strike on Arabsalim village targeted the Health Authority Association, a civil defense and rescue group linked to Hezbollah, killing six people, including four paramedics, the Health Ministry said.

The ministry said that since Oct. 8, 2023, 192 medical and rescue workers have been killed while 308 have been wounded. Additionally, 88 medical and ambulatory centers have been affected, along with 65 hospitals, while 218 medical organizations have been targeted.

Elsewhere in Baalbek-Hermel province, Israeli strikes killed four more people in two different villages, the Health Ministry said.

In southern Lebanon, Israeli strikes killed 11 more people in six different villages in Tyre province, according to the ministry.

Lebanon's Health Ministry said Thursday that the death toll in Lebanon since the war began on Oct. 8, 2023 has reached 3,386 while the number of wounded climbed to 14,417. This includes 658 women and 220 children killed.

A top aide to Israel's Netanyahu is investigated over altering Oct. 7 phone records

JERUSALEM -- Israeli media say that a top aide to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is suspected of altering official phone records connected to the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks to benefit his boss.

Multiple reports on Thursday said that Netanyahu's chief of staff, Tzachi Braverman, is suspected of changing the time stamp of a conversation the prime minister held with his military secretary in the first minutes of the attack.

The reports were confirmed by an Israeli official who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the ongoing investigation.

According to the reports, Netanyahu spoke to the military official at 6:29 a.m. on a standard phone line and then again at 6:40 a.m. on a special secure line.

Braverman is suspected of changing the time stamp of the second conversation, in which the extent of the attack became clearer to the two men, to 6:29 a.m.

It was not immediately clear why Braverman made the change. He was reportedly questioned for three hours on Thursday. Netanyahu's office had no immediate comment.

The allegations come as another Netanyahu aide, Eli Feldstein, is suspected of leaking classified documents to foreign media. Critics have said the leaks were meant to bolster Netanyahu as cease-fire talks with Hamas were collapsing.

Netanyahu, who already is on trial in a series of corruption cases, has not been named as a suspect in the latest scandals.

Associated Press writer Josef Federman in Jerusalem contributed.

UN peacekeepers in southern Lebanon are shot at by unknown individuals; no casualties reported
BEIRUT — Unknown individuals opened fire on a convoy of United Nations peacekeepers in southern Lebanon on Thursday, the U.N. force said.

None of the U.N. peacekeepers or their vehicles were harmed by around 30 shots fired in their direction,

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according to a statement from the mission known as UNIFIL. The patrol returned fire from their vehicles and was able to leave the area.

The attack came shortly after the peacekeepers discovered a cache of ammunition near the roadway and informed the Lebanese Armed Forces, UNIFIL said. The patrol had stopped to clear debris from the road in Qalaouiyeh village in Bint Jbeil province, about 20 kilometers (12 miles) east of the port city of Tyre.

Despite ongoing combat between Israeli troops and Hezbollah militants, the U.N. remains committed to keeping UNIFIL in all of its positions in southern Lebanon, U.N. peacekeeping chief Jean-Pierre Lacroix told reporters in Lebanon on Thursday.

The peacekeeping mission urged Lebanese authorities to ensure the safety of its peacekeepers, requesting a thorough investigation into the episode.

UNIFIL has monitored the escalating violence along the Blue Line despite Israeli calls for a 5-kilometer pullback. In recent weeks, the mission has reported that Israeli forces allegedly destroyed U.N. observation equipment, and several peacekeepers have been injured in the ongoing crossfire.

Hospital director in northern Gaza tells of desperate conditions during Israeli siege

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — The director of the recently raided and barely functioning Kamal Adwan Hospital in northernmost Gaza described dire conditions on Thursday as Israeli forces conduct a major offensive and allow virtually no food or humanitarian aid into the area.

"We cannot provide even a single meal to the patients, which prolongs wound healing, nor can we offer a meal to the healthcare workers who work around the clock," said Dr. Hossam Abu Safiya in a statement.

The hospital is seeing cases of both kids and adults who are malnourished and dehydrated, he said, and is running extremely low on medical supplies. Last week, experts from a panel that monitors food security said famine is imminent in the north or may already be happening.

Abu Safiya said the hospital gets phone calls from civilians trapped alive under buildings destroyed by Israeli bombardments, but there's no way to rescue them because there aren't any ambulances or equipment.

"Sadly, the next day, their voices were gone, and they were counted among the dead, with their homes becoming their graves," the doctor said. "This scene is repeated daily."

UN says an aid convoy in Gaza was fired on and food stolen in an episode of lawlessness

UNITED NATIONS — The United Nations says 14 trucks in a 20-truck convoy carrying humanitarian aid were shot at and the food stolen in central Gaza, injuring three drivers.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric told reporters Thursday the trucks collected aid from the newly opened Kisufim border crossing with Israel and were heading to a warehouse in Deir Al-Balah when the shots rang out.

He called it a "law and order" episode — not the result of firing from either of the parties to the war in Gaza.

Dujarric said the six other trucks reached the warehouse.

"As we've said repeatedly, it is also critical that Israeli authorities facilitate the movement of aid workers and supplies across the Gaza Strip," he said.

"For months we've been calling for the opening of more land routes, both into and within Gaza," Dujarric said. "But we also need increased access and security assurances as well as more supplies so they can quickly reach all people across Gaza at necessary scale."

The U.N. spokesman said "It is also vital that essential commercial goods enter the Gaza Strip."

Freed Israeli hostages meet with Pope Francis, calling for a deal to free loved ones held in Gaza

ROME — A delegation of former Israeli hostages held by Hamas in Gaza and their relatives met Thursday with Pope Francis and expressed hope that the incoming and outgoing U.S. administrations would work together bring the remaining 101 hostages home.

The former hostages included Yelena Troufanov, who was released last November but whose son Sasha is still in Gaza and appeared in a video released Wednesday by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad group.

"You see in the picture how my child has changed over the course of this year," Yelena Troufanov told

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a press conference in Rome after the papal audience. "I am very worried about his condition, I see that he is not in a good mental state and not in a good physical state."

She and the other former hostages and relatives renewed their calls for a deal to bring the remaining hostages home, especially with winter approaching. They said they hoped the incoming Trump administration would work with the Biden administration to push the process forward.

Israel-Hezbollah war has cost Lebanon \$8.5 billion in physical damages and economic losses, World Bank says

BEIRUT — The World Bank estimated Thursday that Lebanon has been hit by \$8.5 billion in physical damages and economic losses from 13 months of Israel's war against the Hezbollah militant group.

Damages to physical infrastructure alone were valued at \$3.4 billion, while economic losses totaled \$5.1 billion, according to the World Bank's assessment. Housing has borne the brunt of the destruction with nearly 100,000 units damaged, totaling \$3.2 billion in destruction and losses.

Lebanon was already reeling from a severe economic crisis that has gripped the country since 2019. The war is expected to shrink Lebanon's real GDP growth by at least 6.6% in 2024, worsening an already dire economic situation after five consecutive years of steep recession, the report said.

The World Bank's report also said that approximately 166,000 individuals have lost their jobs, resulting in an estimated \$168 million in lost earnings.

Other sectors have suffered as well, with commerce losses nearing \$2 billion due to disrupted businesses and agricultural losses reaching \$1.2 billion as crops, livestock, and farmers have been severely impacted, the report said.

In comparison, after the monthlong war between Hezbollah and Israel in 2006, the World Bank had estimated damage from the hostilities at \$2.8 billion, "with indirect damages accounting for another US\$700-\$500 million in losses."

Peacekeeping chief says UN remains committed to operating in Lebanon

BEIRUT — United Nations peacekeeping chief Jean-Pierre Lacroix said the U.N. remains committed to keeping its peacekeeping force, known as UNIFIL, in place in all of its positions in southern Lebanon despite intense battles between Israeli forces and Hezbollah militants.

UNIFIL has continued to monitor the escalating conflict between Israel and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah across the boundary known as the Blue Line despite Israeli calls for peacekeepers to pull back 5 kilometers (3 miles) from the border. UNIFIL has accused Israel of deliberately destroying observation equipment, and 13 peacekeepers have been injured in the fighting.

Lacroix visited some of the wounded peacekeepers during his trip to Lebanon Thursday.

UNIFIL forces "continue to be deployed in all the positions, and we think it is very important to preserve that presence everywhere," LaCroix said. He added that had UNIFIL vacated its positions, they might have been taken over by one of the warring parties.

"We have a responsibility to make sure that the U.N. continues to be seen as neutral and impartial," he said.

Lebanon reports 9 killed in airstrike on eastern city; strikes continue targeting Beirut suburbs

BEIRUT — An Israeli airstrike hit a building in Baalbek city in eastern Lebanon, killing at least nine people and wounding five others, Lebanon's state media said.

The strike on Baalbek came without warning. The Israeli military did not immediately comment and the target was not clear.

Israeli warplanes intensified airstrikes on Thursday, targeting various areas in southern and eastern Lebanon, including the outskirts of the southern port city of Tyre city and the Nabatieh province, the National News Agency said.

Throughout the day, sporadic airstrikes targeted Beirut's southern suburbs in a clear uptick in attacks on the area over the past two days, with the Israeli army issuing evacuation warnings for several locations and buildings in the suburbs.

The Israeli military said it carried out strikes on Hezbollah targets in the Dahiyeh area, including weapons storage facilities and command centers.

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Lebanon's Health Ministry said the death toll in Lebanon since the war began on Oct. 8, 2023 has reached 3,365 while those wounded are 14,344. Nearly 1.2 million people have been displaced in Lebanon.

Before the war intensified on Sept. 23, Hezbollah had said that it had lost nearly 500 members but the group has stopped releasing statements about their killed fighters since

2 Israeli airstrikes in Syria kill at least 15, state media report

DAMASCUS, Syria — Syria's state news agency says Israel carried out two airstrikes on a western neighborhood Damascus and one of the capital's suburbs, killing at least 15 people.

One of the strikes targeted an office of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad group. Sixteen people were also wounded in the airstrikes, state news agency SANA said, quoting an unnamed military official.

SANA said the airstrikes on the Mazzeh neighborhood in Damascus and the suburb of Qudsaya northwest of the capital struck two buildings. An Associated Press journalist at the scene in Mazzeh said a five-story building was damaged by a missile that hit the basement.

An official with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad Group said the strike in Mazzeh targeted one of their offices, and that several members of the group were killed. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media about the group's affairs.

SANA said Syria's air defenses were activated against a "hostile target" south of the central city of Homs. It gave no further details.

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

— By Albert Aji

2 Israeli airstrikes hit Syrian capital Damascus and suburb, Syrian state media say

DAMASCUS, Syria — Syria's state news agency says Israel carried out two airstrikes on a western neighborhood of the capital Damascus and one of its suburbs. At least two people were killed.

State news agency SANA said the airstrikes on the Mazzeh neighborhood in Damascus and the suburb of Qudsaya northwest of the capital struck two buildings. An Associated Press journalist at the scene said two bodies were removed from the five-story building.

SANA said the country's air defenses were activated against a "hostile target" south of the central city of Homs. 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.

EU's top diplomat proposes suspending political dialogue with Israel

BRUSSELS — The European Union's top diplomat is proposing that the bloc suspend political dialogue with Israel over concerns about human rights abuses and breaches of international law in its war against Hamas.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell will put the proposal to foreign ministers from the 27 member countries at a meeting he will chair in Brussels on Monday.

Borrell "will ask ministers to consider whether Israel is violating human rights, whether Israel is respecting or not international humanitarian law, and he will invite the ministers to express their views on his proposal to suspend political dialogue," his spokesman said.

The EU is deeply divided over Israel and the Palestinians and it's unlikely that all the ministers would agree to halt the dialogue.

"Any kind of decisions regarding the political parts of this agreement are subject to unanimity of all the member states," the spokesman, Peter Stano, told reporters on Thursday.

Under the pact, the dialogue covers "all subjects of common interest, and shall aim to open the way to new forms of cooperation with a view to common goals, in particular peace, security and democracy." It's meant to strengthen EU-Israeli relations.

Israeli police complete demolition of Arab Bedouin village in the Negev Desert

JERUSALEM — Israeli police completed the demolition of the Arab Bedouin village of Umm Al-Hiran

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Thursday, ending a years-old legal battle.

Many in the minority community had seen the village as a symbol of their larger struggle against Israeli plans to relocate them.

On Thursday, Israeli bulldozers entered the 400-person village in the Negev Desert and demolished the last building left standing — the mosque.

Residents had dismantled their makeshift homes earlier this week to avoid having to pay fees for the state to demolish them.

Israel says the hundreds of villagers were squatting on public land and has offered them plots in a nearby Bedouin township. The villagers accuse the authorities of forcibly displacing them so the land can be developed for Israel's Jewish majority.

Israel's far-right national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, celebrated the move, posting on X that there has been a 400% increase in the issuance of such demolition orders so far this year.

"Proud to lead a strong policy of demolishing illegal houses in the Negev!" he wrote.

Or Hanoch, an Israeli activist who witnessed the demolition, said drones and helicopters hovered overhead as seven police bulldozers took down the mosque.

"After the mosque was demolished, the rest of the heavy machinery started re-destroying the rest of the houses, which were already demolished," Hanoch said.

Three members of the village council were arrested early Thursday before the demolition began, said Nati Yefet, the spokesperson for the Regional Council for Unrecognized Villages in the Negev. The council has accused Israel of clearing the land for the construction of a Jewish community.

"The destruction of Umm al-Hiran to make way for the settlement of Dror is part of a systematic population replacement program in the Negev," it said. Four other Bedouin villages have been demolished this year as part of a larger plan to raze unrecognized villages and build new Jewish communities in their place, it said.

Umm al-Hiran was founded in its current location in 1956, after the Israeli military relocated the village clan multiple times following the 1948 war that led to Israel's creation.

Israel's more than 200,000 Bedouin are the poorest members of the country's Arab minority, which also includes Christian and Muslim urban communities. Israel's Arab population, which makes up roughly 20% of the country's 10 million people, are citizens with the right to vote but often suffer discrimination and tend to identify with Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

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.

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

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.

Mike Tyson concedes the role of villain to young foe in 58-year-old’s fight with Jake Paul

By SCHUYLER DIXON AP Sports Writer

ARLINGTON, Texas (AP) — Friendship is at the heart of how a fight came together between 58-year-old former heavyweight champion Mike Tyson and much younger YouTuber-turned-boxer Jake Paul.

Friction helped build the hype for a bout that is testing the formula for how boxing is delivered to the masses, a first-ever combat sports offering from the streaming platform Netflix rather than pay-per-view or traditional cable.

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"I think they're beloved fans of Mike Tyson," Paul said, trying to explain the boisterous boos that have greeted him when the two have appeared together in recent months to hype the event.

"And I'm the new kid on the block, the disrupter, loud mouth, polarizing figure," Paul said. "And I've built my career as the heel. Naturally people want to root against me, and that's great for the sport of boxing."

Tyson's first sanctioned professional fight in almost 20 years is set for Friday night at the home of the NFL's Dallas Cowboys. A crowd of at least 60,000 is expected while Netflix offers the bout at no additional cost to more than 280 million subscribers globally.

The 27-year-old Paul is relatively new to the sport, the one-time social media influencer bringing a 10-1 record with seven knockouts mostly against mixed martial artists and journeymen boxers.

Asked about the friendship earlier in the week, Tyson said, "There's no feeling attached." He proved it by slapping Paul as they faced off following the weigh-in Thursday night.

Tyson appeared to take offense to the way Paul approached him for the faceoff, but didn't bother explaining. "The talk is over," Tyson, who checked in at 228 pounds, said when one of the hosts tried to ask a question.

"Now it's personal," Paul screamed into a microphone before storming off the stage. Paul weighed 227 pounds.

Tyson was 50-6 with 44 knockouts when he retired after losing to Kevin McBride in 2005, saying he didn't have anything left to give the sport. He last fought in an exhibition against Roy Jones Jr. with no fans during the pandemic in 2020.

A fight originally scheduled for July 20 was postponed when Tyson had to be treated for a stomach ulcer after falling ill on a flight.

Tyson said in a documentary chronicling the preparations for the fight that he lost 26 pounds in the process of recovering.

Promoter Nakisa Bidarian, who co-founded Most Valuable Promotions with Paul, said Tyson was cleared medically weeks ago. Bidarian sidestepped a question of how concerned he was for Tyson's health once he steps in the ring.

"I'm nervous for both men," Bidarian said. "The reality is Jake's never been hit by someone like Mike Tyson flush on the chin. And Mike hasn't fought someone like Jake for a very long time. That's what makes this interesting."

Paul said he had a vision for the fight about two years ago and shared it with Tyson because he thought the Hall of Famer would understand — and be interested. It took about that long for the bout to come together.

Tyson appeared agitated at both hype events with fans in the Dallas area, first in the weeks before the originally scheduled fight and again at a news conference two nights before the bout.

He was more reflective in a smaller setting with reporters, suggesting he wasn't the same foul-mouthed, scowling fighter from his prime.

"I've been through so many ups and downs since my last fight with Kevin McBride," Tyson said. "I've been in rehab. I've been in prison, been locked up. Never in a million years did I believe I'd be doing this."

According to reports, Paul will get \$40 million for the fight, a number he mentioned at another news conference in New York in August.

Tyson, who had two stints in prison over convictions in the 1990s for rape and assault and declared bankruptcy 21 years ago, will get \$20 million. Tyson has said he isn't doing the fight for money.

"That old Mike Tyson ... he doesn't have no more purpose in my life. He just doesn't exist," Tyson said. "I'm having a good time in my life. I don't have much time left, so I'm having the best time of my life."

Several states wouldn't sanction the bout. Texas agreed to a fight that was eight rounds instead of 10 or 12, with two-minute rounds instead of three, and heavier gloves designed to lessen the power of punches.

Paul has faced persistent questions about why he would fight someone so much older, regardless of Tyson's pedigree. His answers have been consistent.

"I say talk to Mike and tell Mike that," Paul said. "He's the one that wanted it to be a pro fight and me, as a young person in this sport, is not going to (pass) up the opportunity to fight the GOAT of boxing. It's

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like Ja Morant turning down a 1-v-1 against LeBron. It's not going to happen."

There is a high-profile championship fight on the card — the co-main event of Katie Taylor vs. Amanda Serrano.

Paul said he wanted to give the women a spotlight after their slugfest at sold-out Madison Square Garden in 2022. It was the first time women headlined a boxing event at the famous venue.

Taylor won a split decision that many questioned. Bidarian and Paul say the rematch for the undisputed super lightweight title will be the most lucrative women's sporting event in history.

"A lot of people said the real main event is Taylor-Serrano," Bidarian said. "I'm OK if you feel that way. Jake has said he's more excited about that fight than his own fight. But we wanted to ensure the most eyeballs got to see that fight. To be quite honest with ourselves, Paul-Tyson draws a bigger audience."

Biden arrives in Peru for international summit and meeting with Xi as world leaders brace for Trump

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

LIMA, Peru (AP) — President Joe Biden arrived Thursday in Peru to start his six-day visit to Latin America for the final major international summits of his presidency, even as world leaders turn their attention to what Donald Trump's return to the White House means for their countries.

The visit to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Peru and stops in the Amazon rainforest and at the Group of 20 leaders summit in Brazil offer Biden one of his last chances as president to meet with heads of state he's worked with over the years.

But world leaders' eyes are firmly affixed on Trump.

They already are burning up Trump's phone with congratulatory talks. At least one leader, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, is dusting off his golf clubs, in case the chance to bond with the golf-loving Trump should present itself.

White House officials insist that Biden's visits will be substantive, with talks on climate issues, global infrastructure, counternarcotic efforts and one-on-one meetings with global leaders, including Chinese President Xi Jinping, and a joint meeting with South Korea's Yoon and Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba.

The meeting with Yoon and Ishiba would aim to solidify the progress made since their initial meeting last year, White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan told reporters on Air Force One. That includes tightening security and economic cooperation amid increasingly tense relations with China and North Korea.

It also would be an opportunity for them to discuss North Korean troops going to Russia to help with the war in Ukraine, Sullivan said.

He says the Biden administration is working to ensure the three-country meeting is "an enduring feature of American policy." He expects it would continue under Trump, noting its bipartisan support, but acknowledged it was up to the incoming president's team.

Biden's South American trip comes a day after he met with Trump in the White House. That wide-ranging discussion touched on the conflicts in Gaza, Lebanon and Ukraine.

"I wanted — I asked — for his views, and he gave them to me," Trump told The New York Post after his conversation with Biden.

Sullivan indicated that White House officials also are making clear to Trump's team that the delicate U.S.-China relationship is the "paramount priority for the incoming administration."

He stressed the risks if stability is upended in the Taiwan Strait: "that would be catastrophic for everyone involved — for Taiwan, for Beijing, for us, for the world," he said. "Because of the size of the risk, even if it's not that likely, it's something that has to be at the top of the agenda."

Beijing claims Taiwan as its own territory and vows to annex it — by force if necessary. The U.S. is Taiwan's biggest unofficial ally and is bound by law to provide the island with the means to defend itself.

Trump is nominating noted China hawks for key positions: Florida Sen. Marco Rubio for secretary of state and Florida Rep. Mike Waltz for his national security adviser.

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The White House had been working for months to arrange the meeting with Xi, whose country is the United States' most prominent economic and national security competitor.

For Xi, front of mind will be Trump's campaign promise to impose 60% tariffs on Chinese imports. White House officials avoided commenting in detail about how Biden will approach conversations with Xi and other world leaders about Trump.

Those officials say Biden also will use the summits to press allies to keep up support for Ukraine as it tries to fend off Russia's invasion and not lose sight on finding an end to the wars in Lebanon and Gaza. That includes bringing home hostages held by Hamas for more than 13 months.

Between the summits, Biden will visit the Amazon rainforest, the first such visit by a sitting U.S. president. James Bosworth, founder of the Latin America-focused political consultancy Hxagon, said Biden will use one of his last big moments in the international spotlight "to reassure the world that transitions of power are normal for democracies."

"Biden will get public applause and praise, even as world leaders nervously await the transition," Bosworth said.

Biden's meeting with Xi will likely be the most consequential moment during the American president's time in South America.

Biden has tried to maintain a steady relationship with Xi even as the U.S. administration repeatedly has raised concerns about what it sees as malign action by Beijing.

U.S. intelligence officials have assessed that 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 to use against Ukraine. The Biden administration last month imposed sanctions on two Chinese companies accused of directly helping Russia build long-range attack drones.

Tensions flared last year after Biden ordered the shooting down of a Chinese spy balloon that traversed across the intercontinental United States. And the Biden administration has criticized Chinese military assertiveness toward Japan, the Philippines and Taiwan.

During the campaign, Trump spoke of his personal connection with Xi, which started out well during the Republican's first term before becoming strained over disputes about trade and the origins of COVID-19.

In a congratulatory message to Trump, 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 finds himself in a similar position to when then-President Barack Obama traveled to Peru in 2016 for the annual APEC leaders gathering soon after Trump's first White House victory.

World leaders peppered Obama with questions about Trump's win would mean.

"His message was to wait and see ... because we didn't know Donald Trump," said Victor Cha, a National Security Council official in the George W. Bush administration. "Now we're in a very different situation where we do know what the first Trump administration was like."

Shel Talmy, produced hits by The Who, The Kinks and other 1960s British bands, dead at 87

NEW YORK (AP) — Shel Talmy, a Chicago-born music producer and arranger who worked on such British punk classics as The Who's "My Generation" and The Kinks' "You Really Got Me," helped oversee hits by Manfred Mann and the duo Chad & Jeremy and was an early backer of David Bowie, has died. He was 87.

Talmy's publicist announced that he died Wednesday at his home in Los Angeles. The cause was complications from a stroke.

Talmy was a recording engineer in his mid-20s when he visited London for a planned vacation and ended up in the midst of the emerging 1960s British rock music scene. As one of the rare independent producers of the time, he signed up The Kinks and oversaw many of their biggest hits during the mid-'60s, from the raw breakthrough single "You Really Got Me" to the polished satire of "A Well Respected Man" and "Dedicated Follower of Fashion."

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Talmy would then oversee the rise of another British act, The Who, producing such landmarks as "My Generation," featuring Keith Moon's explosive drumming and Roger Daltrey's stuttering vocals, and "Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere," an early experiment in guitar feedback.

Talmy's other British hits included Chad & Jeremy's "A Summer Song," The Easybeats' "Friday on My Mind" and Manfred Mann's cover of Bob Dylan's "Just Like a Woman." He also worked on some of the first recordings featuring Bowie, who was known as Davy Jones at the time, and used a teen-aged Jimmy Page as a session guitarist for The Kinks.

His post-1960s credits include projects with Vicki Brown, Band of Joy and The Damned.

Talmy is survived by his wife, Jan Talmy, brother Leonard Talmy, daughter Jonna Sargeant and granddaughter Shay Berg.

As he fills his new administration, Trump values loyalty above all else

By ZEKE MILLER and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump spent much of his first term feeling stung and betrayed by those he'd placed in power. This time, he's not taking chances.

As he works to fill his administration a second time, Trump has turned to a head-spinning mix of candidates. Many of those he's chosen are personal friends. Others are familiar faces on Fox News Channel or other conservative outlets. Some have extensive experience in the areas they've been chosen to lead, while others have seemingly none. Some seem chosen to shock and awe, some to reassure, others to unleash chaos.

Recent converts to his cause are lined up shoulder to shoulder with longtime allies. China hawks could serve in positions of power alongside a peace activist. But whatever the differences in ideology or strength of resume, above all, they will be there to carry out Trump's will.

In his first term, Trump grated at efforts by aides and advisers to "manage" the newcomer to Washington and grew frustrated by the leaks that emanated from rival factions engaged in ideological warfare and competing for his ear.

Now, aides and allies said, he's putting loyalty above all else, aiming to cut down on the infighting and maximize his ability to reshape Washington during his second tour in the Oval Office.

"When he was elected the first time," Trump "didn't have that kind of wealth of experience in D.C. or the relationships with people in Washington," said Marc Lotter, a former aide who now works at America First Policy Institute, which is closely tied to his transition. "So many people he turned to were trying to take advantage of that to get him to their view, rather than fulfilling what was his view and what he was elected to do."

Now, Lotter said of Trump, "if he makes a decision, he wants them to execute on it."

Presidents always install trusted aides and those likely to support their agendas. But critics fear Trump is building an administration designed to root out any significant internal pushback to his policies and impulses.

Bearing grievance, an appetite for retribution and a list of those he wants to target, Trump will enter office with far fewer guardrails and checks on his power than last time. He will return to Washington with a Republican-controlled Congress and a conservative Supreme Court, containing three justices he appointed, that ruled he is largely immune from prosecution.

Trump has long said the biggest mistake of his first term was choosing the wrong people. He had arrived in Washington as an outsider who had never served in government and says he relied on others for personnel recommendations.

"We did such a good job. But we'll do a much better job now because I know the people now. I know the good ones, the bad ones. I know the weak ones, the strong ones. I know the stupid ones. I know the smart ones. I know them all," he said at a rally in North Carolina during the race's final stretch.

He has blamed aides for stymying his first-term efforts, lashing out at them as "dumb" and weak. The

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degree to which Trump faced pushback from his own appointees was often a reflection of the extraordinary nature of his orders.

His first term was filled with examples of aides who tried to outmaneuver Trump by slow-walking or ignoring directives they saw as ill-advised. Sometimes, they tried to mount 11th-hour campaigns to reverse them. Other times, they dragged their feet, hoping Trump would forget what he'd ordered and move on to something else.

One major example came just weeks before leaving office: Trump signed informal paperwork drafted by some of his political aides ordering all U.S. troops out of Afghanistan immediately, only to face intense pushback from his national security team. He ended up reversing course.

When he pushed to send active-duty U.S. troops to contain mass protests in 2020 after the killing of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man, by Minneapolis police, aides resisted, concerned over illegal use of the military against the country's own citizens.

In 2016, Trump filled much of his team with high-powered business leaders, many of whom had worked in the industries they were tasked with regulating. They included names like Rex Tillerson, who had led energy giant ExxonMobil before becoming secretary of state.

Trump also tried to surround himself with a cadre of military brass he liked to refer to as "my generals." This time, Trump has gone in a very different direction.

In many cases that means expertise is not required. Lee Zeldin, nominated as the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, has little history with climate or regulatory issues. Tulsi Gabbard, the former Democratic congresswoman nominated to lead the nation's intelligence community, has been embraced by Kremlin allies for her dovish views on the war in Ukraine. And Pete Hegseth, a Fox News weekend co-host tapped to serve as secretary of defense, has no Pentagon experience.

Aides say Trump is choosing people he believes are committed to his America First agenda and those he thinks can best execute on it, and he delights that even his controversial picks are already shaking up Washington.

"The American people reelected President Trump by a resounding margin giving him a mandate to implement the promises he made on the campaign trail — and his Cabinet picks reflect his priority to put America First," said Trump-Vance Transition Spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt.

Some of his earliest announcements had suggested a fairly conventional approach, including his choice of U.S. Rep. Michael Waltz, a retired Army National Guard officer and war veteran, as his national security adviser.

But some of Trump's latest selections have landed like lead balloons.

His decision to nominate Florida Rep. Matt Gaetz for attorney general drew open shock and alarm from Democrats who worry he will unleash retribution on Trump's opponents and protect his allies from prosecution. Even Gaetz's fellow Republican House members, who were meeting in the Capitol when the announcement landed, initially thought the news was a joke.

Another pick that has raised eyebrows was his choice to lead the Defense Department. Hegseth is a veteran who served in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay and received two bronze stars. He served as executive director of Concerned Veterans for America and has written several books on the topic. But he has no experience at the Pentagon or in running an organization that comes close to the size and complexity of the Defense Department.

Running the Pentagon is a monumental task and Hegseth seems "totally unqualified," said Matthew Waxman, a Republican former senior official at the departments of state and defense and the National Security Council who chairs Columbia Law School's National Security Law Program.

"I respect anyone who served in uniform. But Hegseth is not a serious person to run the Pentagon," Waxman said. "I look at Hegseth and I say: He's going to be 100 times better at waging culture wars than real wars if, unfortunately, we have to fight one."

Overall, Waxman said of Trump's personnel picks so far: "I think he's placing a premium on loyalty over governance. And that's dangerous for the country. That's dangerous for American leadership in the world."

Trump's choice of Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a vaccine skeptic who has pledged to gut federal health research

and oversight, to lead the Department of Health and Human Services was the latest example of Trump prioritizing fealty over expertise.

Kennedy was a staunch opponent of the very COVID-19 vaccines whose production Trump jumpstarted in 2020. But he delivered a key endorsement for Trump and helped the Republican broaden his electoral appeal. While even Trump aides had dismissed Kennedy's chances for getting a Cabinet post given some of his extreme policy views, the president-elect pushed it through anyway, showing he would not submit to voices of caution. ___ Colvin reported from New York.

Israeli strikes kill at least 12 Lebanese rescuers and 15 people in Syria

By SALLY ABOU ALJOUD and ALBERT AJI Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — An Israeli airstrike killed at least 12 Lebanese rescue workers on Thursday inside a civil defense center in the eastern city of Baalbek, according to health and rescue officials, hours after state media in Syria said Israeli strikes in and around the capital killed at least 15 people.

Lebanese emergency workers were digging through the rubble Thursday evening to search for more of their colleagues still trapped under the destroyed rescue center, the group said in a statement. At least three civil defense members were wounded.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military. Lebanon's civil defense forces have no affiliation with the militant group Hezbollah, and they provide crucial rescue and medical services in one of the world's most war-torn nations.

The Health Ministry condemned what it called a "barbaric attack on a Lebanese state-run health center," adding that "it is the second Israeli attack on a health emergency facility in less than two hours."

In southern Lebanon, an Israeli strike on Arabsalim village targeted the Health Authority Association, a civil defense and rescue group linked to Hezbollah, killing six people, including four paramedics, the Health Ministry said.

Earlier, Israel carried out at least two airstrikes on the western Mazzeh neighborhood of Damascus and one of the suburbs of Syria's capital, Qudsaya, killing at least 15 and wounding another 16, Syria's state news agency said. An Associated Press journalist at the scene in Mazzeh said a five-story building was damaged by a missile that hit the basement.

The Israeli military said it hit infrastructure sites and command centers of the Islamic Jihad militant group.

In Syria, an official with Palestinian Islamic Jihad said the strike in Mazzeh targeted one of their offices, and several members were killed. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to speak to the media.

The airstrikes came shortly before Ali Larijani, an adviser to Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamenei, was scheduled to meet in Syria's capital with representatives of Palestinian factions at the Iranian Embassy in Mazzeh.

Israel's military says Islamic Jihad participated alongside the Palestinian militant group Hamas in the Oct. 7, 2023 attacks from Gaza into Israel that killed some 1,200 people — mostly civilians — and saw 250 others abducted.

The ensuing Israel-Hamas war has spilled into the wider region, affecting Lebanon, Syria and leading to strikes between Israel and Iran. The war has left much of Gaza in ruins and has killed over 43,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to local health authorities who do not distinguish between civilians and combatants.

Israeli warplanes intensified airstrikes in Lebanon on Thursday, targeting various areas in southern and eastern Lebanon, including the outskirts of the port city of Tyre and the Nabatieh province, the National News Agency said.

Throughout the day, sporadic airstrikes targeted Beirut's southern suburbs in a clear uptick in attacks on the district over the past two days, with the Israeli military issuing evacuation warnings for several loca-

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tions and buildings in the suburbs.

The Israeli military said it struck Hezbollah targets in the Dahiyeh area, including weapons storage facilities and command centers. Military spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said that over the past week, Israel had "struck more than 300 targets from the air across Lebanon, including about 40 targets in the heart of the Dahiyeh in Beirut."

Lebanon's state media said an earlier Israeli airstrike hit a building in Baalbek, killing at least nine people and wounding five others. The strike came without warning. The Israeli military did not immediately comment and the target was unclear.

A report by the World Bank on Thursday estimated that Lebanon has suffered \$8.5 billion in physical damages and economic losses from 13 months of war.

Hezbollah began firing into Israel on Oct. 8, 2023, in solidarity with Hamas in Gaza. Since then, Israeli strikes and bombardment in Lebanon have killed at least 3,380 people while the number of wounded has surpassed 14,400, the Health Ministry said Thursday. Among the dead were 658 women and 220 children.

In Israel, 76 people have been killed, including 31 soldiers.

Before the war intensified on Sept. 23, Hezbollah said that it had lost nearly 500 members but the group has stopped releasing statements about their killed fighters since.

United Nations peacekeeping chief Jean-Pierre Lacroix, speaking during a visit to Lebanon, said the U.N. remains committed to keeping its peacekeeping force, known as UNIFIL, in place in all of its positions in southern Lebanon, despite intense ongoing battles between Israeli forces and Hezbollah militants.

UNIFIL has continued to monitor the escalating conflict between Israel and Hezbollah across the boundary known as the Blue Line despite Israeli calls for peacekeepers to pull back 5 kilometers (3 miles) from the border. UNIFIL has accused Israel of deliberately destroying observation equipment, and 13 peacekeepers have been injured in the fighting.

Separately, Israeli media reported Thursday that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's chief of staff, Tzachi Braverman, has been questioned by police over suspicion of altering official records connected to the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks to benefit his boss.

Multiple reports said Braverman is suspected of changing the time stamp of a conversation Netanyahu held with his military secretary in the first minutes of the attack. The reports were confirmed by an Israeli official who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the ongoing investigation.

Netanyahu's office had no immediate comment. It was not immediately clear why Braverman made the change.

Satire publication The Onion buys Alex Jones' Infowars at auction with Sandy Hook families' backing

By DAVE COLLINS Associated Press

The satirical news publication The Onion was named the winning bidder for Alex Jones' Infowars at a bankruptcy auction Thursday, backed by families of Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting victims whom Jones owes more than \$1 billion in defamation judgments for calling the massacre a hoax.

The purchase would turn over Jones' company, which for decades has peddled in conspiracy and misinformation, to a humor website that plans to relaunch the Infowars platform in January as a parody. But the judge in Jones' bankruptcy case said Thursday that he had concerns about how the auction was conducted and ordered a hearing for next week after complaints by lawyers for Jones and a company affiliated with Jones that put in a \$3.5 million bid.

Within hours of the announcement about The Onion's winning bid, Infowars' website was down and Jones was broadcasting from what he said was a new studio location. Up for sale were Infowars' website; social media accounts; studio in Austin, Texas; trademarks; video archive; and other assets.

"The dissolution of Alex Jones' assets and the death of Infowars is the justice we have long awaited and fought for," Robbie Parker, whose daughter Emilie was killed in the 2012 shooting in Connecticut, said in a statement provided by his lawyers.

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The satirical outlet — which carries the banner of “America’s Finest News Source” on its masthead — was founded in the 1980s and for decades has skewered politics and pop culture, including making Jones a frequent target of mocking articles. Mass shootings in the U.S., such as the Sandy Hook attack, are often followed by The Onion publishing slightly updated versions of one of its most well-known recurring pieces: “No Way to Prevent This,’ Says Only Nation Where This Regularly Happens.”

On his live broadcast, Jones was angry and defiant, calling the sale “a total attack on free speech.” He later announced his show was being shut down. Jones then resumed his broadcast from a new studio nearby and carried it live on his accounts on X.

At a court hearing Thursday afternoon in Houston, the trustee who oversaw the auction, Christopher Murray, acknowledged that The Onion did not have the highest bid but said it was a better deal overall because some of the Sandy Hook families agreed to forgo a portion of the sale proceeds to pay Jones’ other creditors. First United American Companies, a business affiliated with one of Jones’ product-selling websites, submitted the only other bid. The trustee said he could not put a dollar amount on The Onion’s bid.

Walter Cicack, an attorney for First United American Companies, told U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Christopher Lopez that Murray changed the auction process only days before, deciding not to hold a round Wednesday where parties could outbid each other. Sealed bids were submitted last week, and the trustee chose only from those, Cicack said.

Murray said he followed the judge’s auction rules laid out in a September order that made the overbidding round optional. But Lopez said he was surprised such a round of bidding was not held and that he had concerns about transparency.

“We’re all going to an evidentiary hearing and I’m going to figure out exactly what happened,” he said. “No one should feel comfortable with the results of this auction.”

An exact date of next week’s hearing was not immediately set.

After the hearing, Jones said on his show that he thought the auction was unfairly rigged and expressed optimism that the judge would nullify the sale. He has repeatedly told his listeners that if his supporters won the bidding, he could stay on the Infowars platforms but that he had set up a new studio, websites and social media accounts in case they were needed.

“This was a auction that didn’t happen, with a bid that was lower, with money that wasn’t real,” he said.

Ben Collins, CEO of The Onion’s parent company, Global Tetrahedron, told The Associated Press in a video interview earlier Thursday that it planned to relaunch the Infowars website in January with satire aimed at conspiracy theorists and right-wing personalities, as well as educational information about gun violence prevention from the group Everytown for Gun Safety. Collins would not disclose the bid amount.

“We thought it would be a very funny joke if we bought this thing, probably one of the better jokes we’ve ever told,” Collins said. “The (Sandy Hook) families decided they would effectively join our bid, back our bid, to try to get us over the finish line. Because by the end of the day, it was us or Alex Jones, who could either continue this website unabated, basically unpunished, for what he’s done to these families over the years, or we could make a dumb, stupid website, and we decided to do the second thing.”

Jones did not lose his personal X account, which has more than 3 million followers, in the auction. But the bankruptcy judge is deciding whether his personal accounts can be sold off at the trustee’s request.

Sandy Hook families sued Jones and his company for repeatedly saying on his show that the shooting that killed 20 children and six educators in Newtown, Connecticut, was a hoax staged by crisis actors to spur more gun control. Parents and children of many of the victims testified that they were traumatized by Jones’ conspiracies and threats by his followers. Jones has since acknowledged the shooting was “100% real.”

The Onion, based in Chicago, bills itself as “the world’s leading news publication, offering highly acclaimed, universally revered coverage of breaking national, international, and local news events.” Recent headlines have included, “Trump Boys Have Slap Fight Over Who Gets To Run Foreign Policy Meetings,” “Oklahoma Law Requires Ten Commandments To Be Displayed In Every Womb” and “Man Forgetting Difference Between Meteoroid, Meteorite Struggles To Describe What Just Killed His Dog.”

New FDA rules for TV drug ads: Simpler language and no distractions

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Those ever-present TV drug ads showing patients hiking, biking or enjoying a day at the beach could soon have a different look: New rules require drugmakers to be clearer and more direct when explaining their medications' risks and side effects.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration spent more than 15 years crafting the guidelines, which are designed to do away with industry practices that downplay or distract viewers from risk information.

Many companies have already adopted the rules, which become binding Nov. 20. But while regulators were drafting them, a new trend emerged: thousands of pharma influencers pushing drugs online with little oversight. A new bill in Congress would compel the FDA to more aggressively police such promotions on social media platforms.

"Some people become very attached to social media influencers and ascribe to them credibility that, in some cases, they don't deserve," said Tony Cox, professor emeritus of marketing at Indiana University.

Still, TV remains the industry's primary advertising format, with over \$4 billion spent in the past year, led by blockbuster drugs like weight-loss treatment Wegovy, according to ispot.tv, which tracks ads.

Simpler language and no distractions

The new rules, which cover both TV and radio, instruct drugmakers to use simple, consumer-friendly language when describing their drugs, without medical jargon, distracting visuals or audio effects. A 2007 law directed the FDA to ensure that drug risk information appears "in a clear, conspicuous and neutral manner."

FDA has always required that ads give a balanced picture of both benefits and risks, a requirement that gave rise to those long, rapid-fire lists of side effects parodied on shows like "Saturday Night Live."

But in the early 2000s, researchers began showing how companies could manipulate images and audio to de-emphasize safety information. In one example, a Duke University professor found that ads for the allergy drug Nasonex, which featured a buzzing bee voiced by Antonio Banderas, distracted viewers from listening to side effect information, making it harder to remember.

Such overt tactics have largely disappeared from drug ads.

"In general, I would say the ads have gotten more complete and transparent," says Ruth Day, director of the medical cognition lab at Duke University and author of the Nasonex study.

The new rules are "significant steps forward," Day said, but certain requirements could also open the door to new ways of downplaying risks.

Information overload?

One requirement instructs companies to show on-screen text about side effects while the audio information plays. A 2011 FDA study found that combining text with audio increased recall and understanding.

But the agency leaves it to companies to decide whether to display a few keywords or a full transcript.

"You often cannot put all that on the screen and expect people to read and understand it," Day said. "If you wanted to hide or decrease the likelihood of people remembering risk information, that could be the way to do it."

Viewers tend to tune out long lists of warnings and other information. But experts who work with drug companies don't expect those lists to disappear. While the guidelines describe how the information should be presented, companies still decide the content.

"If you're a company and you're worried about possible FDA enforcement or product liability and other litigation, all your incentives are to say more, not less," said Torrey Cope, a food and drug lawyer who advises companies.

Experts also say the new rules will have little effect on the overall tone and appearance of ads.

"The most salient element of these ads are the visuals, and they are uniformly positive," said Cox. "Even if the risk message is about, for instance, sudden heart failure, they're still showing someone diving into

a swimming pool.”

Patient influencers

The new rules come as Donald Trump’s advisers begin floating plans for the FDA and the pharmaceutical industry.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr., an anti-vaccine activist who has advised the president-elect, wants to eliminate TV drug ads. He and other industry critics point out that the U.S. and New Zealand are the only countries where prescription drugs can be promoted on TV.

Even so, many companies are looking beyond TV and expanding into social media. They often partner with patient influencers who post about managing their conditions, new treatments or navigating the health system.

“They’re teaching people to live a good life with their disease, but then some of them are also paid to advertise and persuade,” said Erin Willis, who studies advertising and media at the University of Colorado Boulder.

Advertising executives say companies like the format because it’s cheaper than TV and consumers generally feel influencers are more trustworthy than companies.

FDA’s requirement for truthful, balanced risk and benefit information applies to drugmakers, leaving a loophole for both influencers and telehealth companies like Hims, Ro and Teledoc, who may not have a direct financial connection to makers of the drugs they’re promoting.

The issue has attracted attention from members of Congress.

“The power of social media and the deluge of misleading promotions has meant too many young people are receiving medical advice from influencers instead of their health care professional,” Sens. Dick Durbin of Illinois and Mike Braun of Indiana wrote the FDA in a February letter.

A recently introduced bill from the senators would bring influencers and telehealth companies clearly under FDA’s jurisdiction, requiring them to disclose risk and side effect information. The bill also would require drugmakers to publicly disclose payments to influencers.

“It’s asking the FDA to take a more serious stance with this kind of marketing,” said Willis. “They know it’s happening, but they could be doing more.”

Powell says Fed will likely cut rates cautiously given persistent inflation pressures

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Chair Jerome Powell said Thursday that the Federal Reserve will likely cut its key interest rate slowly and deliberately in the coming months, in part because inflation has shown signs of persistence and the Fed’s officials want to see where it heads next.

Powell, speaking in Dallas, said that inflation is edging closer to the central bank’s 2% target, “but it is not there yet.”

At the same time, he said, the economy is strong, and the policymakers can take time to monitor the path of inflation.

“The economy is not sending any signals that we need to be in a hurry to lower rates,” the Fed chair said. “The strength we are currently seeing in the economy gives us the ability to approach our decisions carefully.”

Economists expect the Fed to announce another quarter-point rate cut in December, after a quarter-point reduction last week and half-point cut in September.

But the Fed’s steps after that are much less clear. In September, the central bank’s officials collectively signaled that they envisioned cutting their key rate four times in 2025. Wall Street traders, though, now expect just two rate reductions, according to futures pricing tracked by CME FedWatch. And after Powell’s cautious remarks Thursday, traders estimated the likelihood of a Fed rate cut in December at just below 59%, down from 83% a day earlier.

The Fed’s benchmark interest rate tends to influence borrowing rates across the economy, including

for mortgages, auto loans and credit cards. Other factors, though, can also push up longer-term rates, notably expectations for inflation and economic growth.

For example, Donald Trump's presidential election victory has sent yields on Treasury securities higher. It is a sign that investors expect faster growth next year as well as potentially larger budget deficits and even higher inflation should Trump impose widespread tariffs and mass deportations of migrants as he has promised.

In his remarks Thursday, Powell suggested that inflation may remain stuck somewhat above the Fed's target in the coming months. But he reiterated that inflation should eventually decline further, "albeit on a sometimes bumpy path."

Under questioning, Powell also explained why he considers the Fed's role as an independent federal agency to be crucial to its ability to fight inflation. During his first term, Trump threatened to try to fire Powell for not cutting interest rates. And during this year's election campaign, Trump asserted that as president, he should have a "say" on the Fed's rate policies.

Powell said Thursday that the Fed's independence from political concerns has made the public confident that the policymakers will keep inflation low over time. That confidence, in turn, has helped reduce inflation after it had spiked in the wake of the pandemic. When consumers and businesses expect inflation to slow, they act in ways that help hold it down — by, for example, not demanding high cost-of-living raises.

"The public," Powell said, "believed that we would get inflation down, that we would restore price stability. And that's ultimately the key to it."

Powell declined to comment on other political topics, including the potential impacts of Trump's proposals to impose sweeping tariffs and implement mass deport

Other Fed officials have also recently expressed uncertainty about how much more they can cut rates, given the economy's steady growth and the apparent stickiness of inflation.

As measured by the central bank's preferred inflation gauge, so-called core prices, which exclude volatile food and energy costs, have been stuck in the high 2% range for five months.

On Wednesday, Lorie Logan, president of the Fed's Dallas branch, said it was not clear how much more the Fed should cut its key short-term rate.

"If we cut too far ... inflation could reaccelerate and the (Fed) could need to reverse direction," Logan said. "I believe it's best to proceed with caution."

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has a long record of promoting anti-vaccine views

By MICHELLE R. SMITH Associated Press

Long before the COVID-19 pandemic, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. was building up a following with his anti-vaccine nonprofit group, Children's Health Defense, and becoming one of the world's most influential spreaders of fear and distrust around vaccines.

Now, President-elect Donald Trump says he will nominate Kennedy to lead the Department of Health and Human Services, which regulates vaccines.

Kennedy has long advanced the debunked idea that vaccines cause autism. He has also pushed other conspiracy theories, such as that COVID-19 could have been "ethnically targeted" to spare Ashkenazi Jews and Chinese people, comments he later said were taken out of context. He has repeatedly brought up the Holocaust when discussing vaccines and public health mandates.

No medical intervention is risk-free. But doctors and researchers have proven that risks from disease are generally far greater than the risks from vaccines.

Vaccines have been proven to be safe and effective in laboratory testing and in real world use in hundreds of millions of people over decades — they are considered among the most effective public health measures in history.

Kennedy has insisted that he is not anti-vaccine, saying he only wants vaccines to be rigorously tested, but he also has shown opposition to a wide range of immunizations. Kennedy said in a 2023 podcast in-

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interview that "There's no vaccine that is safe and effective" and told Fox News that he still believes in the long-ago debunked idea that vaccines can cause autism. In a 2021 podcast he urged people to "resist" CDC guidelines on when kids should get vaccines.

"I see somebody on a hiking trail carrying a little baby and I say to him, better not get them vaccinated," Kennedy said.

That same year, in a video promoting an anti-vaccine sticker campaign by his nonprofit, Kennedy appeared onscreen next to one sticker that declared "IF YOU'RE NOT AN ANTI-VAXXER YOU AREN'T PAYING ATTENTION."

The World Health Organization has estimated that global immunization efforts have saved at least 154 million lives in the past 50 years.

In a study of verified Twitter accounts from 2021, researchers found Kennedy's personal Twitter account was the top "superspreader" of vaccine misinformation on Twitter, responsible for 13% of all reshares of misinformation, more than three times the second most-retweeted account.

He has traveled to states including Connecticut, California and New York to lobby or sue over vaccine policies and has traveled the world to meet with anti-vaccine activists.

Kennedy has also aligned himself with businesses and special interests groups such as anti-vaccine chiropractors, who saw profit in slicing off a small portion of the larger health care market while spreading false or dubious health information.

An Associated Press investigation found one chiropractic group in California had donated \$500,000 to Kennedy's Children's Health Defense, about one-sixth of the group's fundraising that year. Another AP investigation found he was listed as an affiliate for an anti-vaccine video series, where he was ranked among the Top 10 for the series' "Overall Sales Leaderboard."

His group has co-published a number of anti-vaccine books that have been debunked. One, called "Cause Unknown," is built on the false premise that sudden deaths of young, healthy people are spiking due to mass administration of COVID-19 vaccines. Experts say these rare medical emergencies are not new and have not become more prevalent.

An AP review of the book found dozens of individuals included in it died of known causes not related to vaccines, including suicide, choking while intoxicated, overdose and allergic reaction. One person died in 2019.

Children's Health Defense currently has a lawsuit pending against a number of news organizations, among them The Associated Press, accusing them of violating antitrust laws by taking action to identify misinformation, including about COVID-19 and COVID-19 vaccines. Kennedy took leave from the group when he announced his run for president but is listed as one of its attorneys in the lawsuit.

Former Marine misused a combat technique in fatal chokehold of NYC subway rider, trainer testifies

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — When Daniel Penny wrapped his arm around the neck of a homeless man on a Manhattan subway last year, the 25-year-old veteran appeared to be deploying a non-lethal chokehold long drilled into U.S. Marines.

Done right, the maneuver should knock a person out without killing them, according to Joseph Caballer, a combat instructor in the Marine Corps who trained Penny in several types of holds. But held too long, the technique can restrict the flow of blood to a person's brain, ending their life in a matter of minutes.

"Once the person is rendered unconscious, that's when you're supposed to let go," Caballer told a jury on Thursday.

His testimony came weeks into the trial of Penny, who faces charges of manslaughter and criminally negligent homicide after placing Jordan Neely, a homeless man and Michael Jackson impersonator, in the fatal chokehold last May.

Prosecutors allege that Penny "went way too far" in his attempt to restrain Neely, showing an "indiffer-

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ence" toward his life even after he had lost consciousness and stopped fighting back.

Penny, an architecture student who served four years in the U.S. Marines, told police he was seeking to protect himself and other riders from a man who was acting erratically on the train and frightening riders with distressing comments. His attorneys have emphasized Neely's previous arrests, along with his struggles with mental illness and drug use.

Bystander video of the encounter shows Penny with his bicep pressed across Neely's neck and his other arm on top of his head, a position he held for close to six minutes, even after the man went limp.

The technique — an apparent "blood choke" — can make a person feel like "trying to breathe through a crushed straw," Caballer said. In his own training sessions, Caballer recalled telling his fellow Marines: "You don't want to keep holding on. This can result in actual injury or death."

Asked by prosecutors whether Penny has used the chokehold in an "improper" manner, Caballer said that he had.

Attorneys for Penny argue their client had sought to restrain Neely by placing him in a headlock, but that he did not apply strong force throughout the interaction. They have raised doubt about the city medical examiner's finding that Neely died from the chokehold, pointing to his health problems and drug use as possible factors.

Pressed by Penny's attorney, Caballer acknowledged that he could not "definitively tell from watching the video how much pressure is actually being applied." But at times, he said, it appeared that Penny was using a hold that may have cut off the flow of blood to Neely's brain.

"He could possibly be cutting off maybe one of the carotid arteries," the witness added.

Later in the afternoon, Dr. Cynthia Harris, the city medical examiner who inspected Neely's body, reiterated her finding that he had died from a lack of oxygen caused by the chokehold. Though she did not describe the exact process of asphyxiation, she testified that "blocking both arteries in both veins, could kill a person in a matter of seconds."

Jurors were also shown video for the first time Thursday of Penny demonstrating the chokehold to detectives during an interview inside the precinct.

"He had his back turned to me and I got him in a hold, got him to the ground, and he's still squirming around and going crazy," Penny said, adding: "He gets a burst of energy at one point and I did have to hold him a little more steady."

Harris is expected to be the final witnesses called by prosecutors in a trial that has divided New Yorkers and cast a national spotlight on the city's response to crime and disorder in its transit system. It's unclear whether Penny will take the stand.

In the eighteen months since the killing, Penny has been embraced by conservatives as a good Samaritan who used his military training to protect his fellow riders. U.S. Rep. U.S. Matt Gaetz, who President-elect Donald Trump nominated this week as his attorney general, described him as a "Subway Superman."

But the trial has also drawn near daily protests from Black Lives Matter activists, who've labeled Penny a racist vigilante who overreacted to a Black man in the throes of a mental health episode.

Penny faces up to 15 years in prison if he is convicted.

How Alex Jones' Infowars wound up in the hands of The Onion

By SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

The purchase of Alex Jones' Infowars at a bankruptcy auction by the satirical news publication The Onion is the latest twist in a yearslong saga between the far-right conspiracy theorist and families of Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting victims.

The sale was ordered after relatives of many of the 20 children and six educators killed in the 2012 shooting successfully sued Jones and his company for defamation and emotional distress. Jones repeatedly made false claims on his show that the Newtown, Connecticut, shooting was a hoax staged by crisis actors to spur more gun control.

Here are some things to know about how Jones' misinformation empire ended up on the auction block.

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The rise of Infowars

Fresh out of high school in the early 1990s, Jones, a barrel-chested, gravelly voiced Texas native, started broadcasting on a public-access television channel in the state capital. From the start, Jones promoted conspiracies about the U.S. government and false claims about a secret New World Order.

In 2004, Jones had two employees and a tiny office in south Austin. In 2007, he formed Free Speech Systems, to run his growing media business, according to court records in his bankruptcy cases. By 2010, Jones had over 60 employees.

As the outlandish nature of his false claims grew, so did his media empire, with annual revenues of up to \$80 million, and a fanbase that at his height listened to him on more than 100 radio stations across the United States as well as through his Infowars website and social media.

Jones' Newtown lies

Jones has acknowledged in court that he promoted the conspiracy theory that the 2012 Sandy Hook massacre was a hoax perpetrated in part by the U.S. government as part of an effort to expand gun control. He called the parents of slain children "crisis actors" on his show and said the shooting was "phony as a three-dollar bill."

After separate defamation lawsuits were filed in Connecticut and Texas by family members of victims, Jones acknowledged in 2022 that the shooting was "100% real" and said it was "absolutely irresponsible" to call it a hoax.

The lawsuits against Jones

Victims' families who sued Jones said they were subjected to years of torment, threats and abuse by people who believed the lies told on his show.

Courts in Texas and Connecticut found Jones liable for defamation for his portrayal of the Sandy Hook massacre as a hoax and awarded the families nearly \$1.5 billion in damages. In both states, the judges issued default judgments finding Jones liable without trials because he failed to respond to court orders and turn over many documents. Juries then heard evidence and decided on the amount of damages, with judges tacking on additional penalties.

The sale of Jones' Infowars empire

The auctions resulted from Jones' personal bankruptcy case, which he filed in late 2022. Many of Jones' personal assets also are being liquidated to help pay the judgment. Up for sale was everything from Jones' studio desk to Infowars' name, video archive, social media accounts and product trademarks. Buyers could even purchase an armored truck and video cameras.

The Onion acquired Infowars' website; social media accounts; studio in Austin, Texas; trademarks; and video archive. The sale price was not disclosed.

After the sale was announced, Infowars' website was down and Jones was broadcasting from what he said was a new studio location.

Jones vowed to challenge the sale and auction process in court, and late Thursday a federal judge ordered a hearing into exactly how The Onion won the bidding. Lawyers for Jones and a company affiliated with Infowars alleged the trustee overseeing the auction changed the bidding process just days before it was held.

Veteran NBC host Craig Melvin tapped to replace Hoda Kotb for the first hours of 'Today' show

By MARK KENNEDY and DAVID BAUDER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Veteran NBC host and news anchor Craig Melvin has been tapped to replace Hoda Kotb as co-host of the 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. hours of "Today."

Melvin is a familiar face to "Today" show viewers. He currently hosts the show's third hour and is the news anchor during the first two hours. He will continue hosting the third hour with Al Roker, Dylan Dreyer and Sheinelle Jones.

"He's been an integral and beloved part of our family," Libby Leist, senior vice president of "Today," said

in a statement. "From breaking news coverage in the field, to presidential interviews, to multiple Olympics and Super Bowls, Craig's shown he has the talent and the range to cover all that we do here at 'Today.' And he does it without ever losing that Southern charm."

Kotb's last official day at the show will be Jan. 10. She announced in September that she was leaving "Today," which generally runs third in the morning ratings to ABC's "Good Morning America." NBC News hasn't revealed the pick for Kotb's other role, co-anchoring the 10 a.m. hour, which she does with Jenna Bush Hager.

"I've enjoyed just a lifetime of blessings and this is the latest," Melvin said Thursday on air. Of Kotb and Guthrie, he said: "You guys are the sisters I never thought I needed." And he said of Kotb — "you saved the show," which, while hyperbolic, was a reference to her taking over hurriedly after the Matt Lauer scandal.

Melvin's wife, sportscaster Lindsay Czarniak, who was host of NBC's coverage of the 2024 Paris Olympic Games on the USA Network, posted her congratulations on Instagram.

"The opportunity to watch the person you love see their dream come true is such a gift. I will never forget this day and the crowds' excitement to share your good news," she wrote.

Tennessee suspect in dozens of rapes is convicted of producing images of child sex abuse

GREENEVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — A Tennessee man who is accused in lawsuits of drugging and sexually assaulting dozens of women while police deliberately botched investigations into him was convicted Thursday of producing images of child sexual abuse.

Sean Williams, 53, faces a minimum mandatory term of 15 years in prison and up to 30 years in prison as to each of the three counts in the federal indictment. Sentencing is set for Feb. 24.

According to a police report, a Western Carolina University campus police officer found Williams asleep in his car last year. A search of his vehicle uncovered cocaine, methamphetamine, about \$100,000 in cash and digital storage devices with more than 5,000 images of child sexual abuse. Williams was also in possession of photos and videos showing him sexually assaulting at least 52 women at his Johnson City apartment while they were in an "obvious state of unconsciousness."

Jurors in Greeneville federal court found Williams guilty Thursday of all three counts related to the images of a 9-month-old boy, a 4-year-old girl and a 7-year-old girl. Prosecutors said Williams also raped the children's mothers while they were unconscious and that there were images and videos of them as well. Williams took the sexually explicit photos of one child in 2008 and the other two on separate occasions in 2020, all in his apartment, prosecutors said.

The mothers testified at trial but Williams did not. He has not yet been charged with sexually assaulting any of the dozens of women.

Williams also faces charges in Tennessee including child rape, aggravated sexual battery of someone under 13 and especially aggravated sexual exploitation of a minor. And in a North Carolina federal court, he is charged with possessing child sexual abuse images and illegal drugs.

In October 2023, Williams escaped from a van taking him from Kentucky's Laurel County Detention Center to the court in Greeneville for a hearing. Authorities caught him in Florida more than a month after the escape. A jury convicted him in July of the escape, for which he faces a maximum prison sentence of five years. Sentencing on that charge is scheduled for February.

Separately, three federal lawsuits accuse the Johnson City Police Department of refusing to properly investigate evidence that Williams was drugging and raping women in their east Tennessee community for years. Those lawsuits, which do not name Williams as a defendant, were filed by a former federal prosecutor; nine women listed as Jane Does 1-9; and another woman individually. One of them alleges Williams paid police to obstruct investigations into sexual assault allegations against him.

The first of the trials in the federal lawsuits is scheduled to begin in August 2025.

The city has denied the allegations of corruption, as have the officers named in the lawsuits. The parties are expected to depose Williams in at least one of those lawsuits.

Williams told The Tennessean he was framed by law enforcement to cover up a broader public corruption scandal.

The former prosecutor's lawsuit claims police deliberately botched her effort to arrest Williams on a federal felon-possessing-ammunition charge in April 2021, enabling him to flee. He was on the run from that charge when he was arrested on the Western Carolina University campus two years later. The city countered that she took five months to obtain an indictment when police requested one in 2020.

At least half a dozen names on the folders of videos of women were consistent with first names on a list labeled "Raped" that Johnson City officers found in his apartment, a police affidavit says.

Facing public criticism, Johnson City ordered an outside investigation into how officers handled sexual assault investigations in the summer of 2022. That November, the U.S. Department of Justice and the FBI opened a federal sex trafficking investigation.

The results of the city's outside investigation, released in 2023, found police conducted inconsistent, ineffective and incomplete investigations; relied on inadequate record management; had insufficient training and policies; and sometimes showed gender-based stereotypes and bias.

The city said it began improving the department's performance even before the findings were released, including following the district attorney's new sexual assault investigation protocol and creating a "comfortable space" for victim interviews.

Ford agrees to pay up to \$165 million penalty to US government for moving too slowly on a recall

By TOM KRISHER AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — Ford Motor Co. will pay a penalty of up to \$165 million to the U.S. government for moving too slowly on a recall and failing to give accurate recall information.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said Thursday that the civil penalty is the second-largest in its 54-year history. Only the fine Takata paid for faulty air bag inflators was higher.

The agency said Ford was too slow to recall vehicles with faulty rearview cameras, and it failed to give the agency complete information, which is required by the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Act.

Ford agreed to a consent order with the agency that includes a payment of \$65 million, and \$45 million in spending to comply with the law. Another \$55 million will be deferred.

"Timely and accurate recalls are critical to keeping everyone safe on our roads," NHTSA Deputy Administrator Sophie Shulman said. "When manufacturers fail to prioritize the safety of the American public and meet their obligations under federal law, NHTSA will hold them accountable."

Under the order, an independent third party will oversee the automaker's recall performance obligations for at least three years, and Ford has to cooperate with the monitor.

Ford also has to review all recalls over the last three years to make sure enough vehicles have been recalled, and file new recalls if necessary.

The company also must review and change its recall decision-making process, improving the way it analyzes data to find safety defects in its vehicles. It also has to invest in technology so it can trace parts by vehicle identification numbers.

Ford says it will invest the \$45 million into advanced data analytics, a new document system, and a new testing lab.

"We appreciate the opportunity to resolve this matter with NHTSA and remain committed to continuously improving safety," Ford said in a statement.

Under the law, an automaker has to notify NHTSA by filing a defect report within five working days of finding out that a line of vehicles has a safety defect.

The problematic recall of more than 620,000 vehicles in the U.S., over 700,000 in North America, came in September of 2020 for rear-view cameras that can fail on several 2020 models, including the F-Series pickup, the top selling vehicle in the U.S.

In agency documents, NHTSA said Ford found warranty claims about the faulty cameras from February through April of 2020, and the matter was brought to a Ford committee in May of that year.

In July of 2020, NHTSA contacted Ford about complaints it had received about failing cameras, and during an August 2020, meeting with NHTSA, Ford showed data for many 2020 models with high camera failure rates.

The company did the recall on Sept. 23, 2020, and about a year later NHTSA began investigating whether the recall was done quickly enough or included enough vehicles.

In 2022 and 2024, Ford did two more recalls for the same problem, adding about 24,000 vehicles to the first camera recall.

In the consent order, NHTSA said its investigation found that Ford violated multiple parts of the law by moving too slowly to recall vehicles with faulty cameras, giving the agency inaccurate or incomplete information, and failing to turn in required quarterly reports about additional recalls.

The order said that Ford disagreed with its assertions.

For several years, high warranty and recall costs have dinged Ford's profits, but the company says it's working to fix the issues.

The penalty doesn't end conflicts between Ford and NHTSA.

Earlier this year the agency opened an investigation into a Ford SUV recall repair that doesn't fix gasoline leaks that can cause engine fires. Investigators wrote in an April 25 letter to Ford that they have "significant safety concerns" about a March 8 recall of nearly 43,000 Bronco Sport and Escape SUVs.

Ford said in documents that fuel injectors can crack, allowing gas or vapor to leak near hot engine parts, potentially causing fires and injuries. But the fix is to add a drain tube to send the gas away from hot surfaces and software that cuts off the fuel supply if it detects a leak.

In the letter, the agency's Office of Defects Investigation wrote that based on its review of the recall fix, it "believes that the remedy program does not address the root cause of the issue and does not proactively call for the replacement of defective fuel injectors prior to their failure."

Ford said that it has a strong recall process and is committed to complying with the law, but it can always improve. It said it has learned from the camera recall.

"We look forward to working with NHTSA and the independent third party to implement further enhancements," Ford said.

Hurricane-stricken Tampa Bay Rays to play 2025 season at Yankees' spring training field in Tampa

By CURT ANDERSON Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (AP) — The Tampa Bay Rays will play their 2025 home games at the New York Yankees' nearby spring training ballpark amid uncertainty about the future of hurricane-damaged Tropicana Field, Rays executives told The Associated Press.

Stuart Sternberg, the Rays' principal owner, said in an interview that Steinbrenner Field in Tampa is the best fit for the team and its fanbase. At about 11,000 seats, it's also the largest of the spring training sites in Florida.

"It is singularly the best opportunity for our fans to experience 81 games of major league Rays baseball," Sternberg said. "As difficult as it is to get any of these stadiums up to major league standards, it was the least difficult. You're going to see Major League Baseball in a small environment."

Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred said the Rays-Yankees deal is good for the sport and the Tampa Bay region.

"This outcome meets Major League Baseball's goals that Rays fans will see their team play next season in their home market and that their players can remain home without disruption to their families," Manfred said in a news release.

The Rays' home since 1998, the domed Tropicana Field in St. Petersburg was hit hard by Hurricane Mil-

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ton on Oct. 9, with most of its fabric roof shredded and water damage inside. The city of St. Petersburg, which owns the Trop, released an assessment of the damage and repair needs that estimated the cost at \$55.7 million if it is to be ready for the start of the 2026 season.

The work would have to be approved by the city council, which earlier this year voted for a new \$1.3 billion, 30,000-seat stadium to replace Tropicana Field beginning in 2028. The new stadium is part of a much larger urban revitalization project known as the Historic Gas Plant District — named for the Black community that once occupied the 86 acres (34 hectares) that includes retail, office and hotel space; a Black history museum; and restaurants and bars.

Amid all the uncertainty, the Rays know one thing: they will play 2025 in a smallish, outdoor ballpark operated by one of their main American League East division rivals. A ballpark with a facade mimicking that of Yankee Stadium in the Bronx and festooned with plaques of Yankee players whose numbers have been retired.

Brian Auld, the Rays co-president, said in an interview that Tampa Bay has to be ready for a regular-season MLB game March 27 against the Colorado Rockies, just three days after the Yankees break training camp.

"There will be a ton of work toward putting in our brand," Auld said. "The term we like to use for that is 'Rayful' into Steinbrenner Field."

It will also come with some weather challenges in the hot, rainy Florida summer climate the Rays didn't worry about in their domed ballpark. The Rays averaged about 16,500 fans per game during the 2024 season.

The Yankees will receive about \$15 million in revenue for hosting the Rays, a person familiar with the arrangement told The Associated Press, speaking on condition of anonymity because that detail was not announced. The money won't come from Tampa Bay but from other sources, such as insurance.

Once known as Legends Field, Steinbrenner Field opened in 1996 on Tampa's north side. It is named for longtime Yankees owner George Steinbrenner, who ran a shipbuilding company in Tampa and died at his home there in 2010. One of his sons, Yankees executive Hal Steinbrenner, was instrumental in getting the deal done with the Rays, Sternberg said.

"This is a heavy lift for the Yankees. This is a huge ask by us and baseball of the Yankees," Sternberg said. "(Hal Steinbrenner) did not waver for one second. I couldn't have been more grateful."

Hal Steinbrenner said in a news release that the Yankees are "happy to extend our hand to the Rays" and noted that the team and his family have "deep roots" in the Tampa Bay area.

"In times like these, rivalry and competition take a back seat to doing what's right for our community, which is continuing to help families and businesses rebound from the devastation caused by Hurricanes Helene and Milton," he said.

Pro teams in New Orleans made similar season-long moves after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The NFL's Saints played home games at multiple locations for one season while the Superdome was repaired, and the NBA's then-New Orleans Hornets played two seasons in Oklahoma City.

The Tampa Tarpons, one of the Yankees minor league teams, play their home games at Steinbrenner Field during the summer. They will use baseball diamonds elsewhere in the training complex this season.

It's not the first time a big league team will host regular season games in a spring training stadium. The Toronto Blue Jays played part of the 2021 season at their facility in Dunedin because of Canadian government restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Former AP German-language service head Ulrich Renz, who covered Nazi trials, dies at 90

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Ulrich Renz, a former head of The Associated Press German-language service who also covered the trials of leaders of the Auschwitz death camp in World War II, has died at the age of 90.

Renz died Monday, according to Peter Gehrig, a close friend for 50 years and a former AP colleague who

lived in the same senior citizen residence in Frankfurt. No cause of death was given.

Widely known as "Uli," Renz began working for the AP in Germany in 1971, after a stint at United Press International. At AP, he first worked on the foreign desk and eventually headed the German-language service at its Frankfurt headquarters from 1986-92.

The German-language news service was begun after World War II to help establish a free press and support democracy in postwar West Germany. It was sold to the German news agency DDP in 2009.

Renz was born in Stuttgart in 1934 and grew up in the village of Giengen an der Brenz in southwestern Germany. After graduating from high school, he worked as a reporter for the Heidenheimer Zeitung newspaper, where he stayed until moving to UPI in 1959.

During his decades as a journalist in Germany, he focused on reporting about the country's highest court, the Federal Constitutional Court, and wrote extensively about the trials of many former Nazis, including the Auschwitz trials.

The 1963-65 trial in Frankfurt of 22 men who helped run the Auschwitz death camp in Germany-occupied Poland was one of the biggest following the Allies' Nuremberg war crimes trials immediately after World War II. It confronted people in then-West Germany with the Nazi past and is credited as a turning point in German efforts to address the crimes of that period.

After retiring in 1992, Renz devoted his time to researching the life of Georg Elser, a carpenter who tried to kill Hitler in Munich but was thwarted because the Nazi leader unexpectedly left the room minutes before a bomb exploded. Renz published several books on Elser's life and the failed attempt, gaining recognition from scholars and political leaders. He was honored with the German Cross of Honor for his work.

"Renz's passion for researching the Third Reich sprang at least partly from his father's refusal to talk about his own role in it as a civilian administrator in Nazi-occupied Poland," Gehrig said. "Across vanquished Germany, there wasn't much interest into digging into the dark past. Uli was among the young Germans who thought otherwise."

Former AP Bonn correspondent Terrence Petty said that "as a journalist and digger into uncomfortable truths, Uli was an inspiration to those who knew him and worked with him, myself included."

Renz enjoyed biking, visiting coffee shops in Frankfurt and reading, although recently his sight had diminished, Gehrig said.

Renz is survived by his son, daughter-in-law and a granddaughter.

Trump hammered Democrats on transgender issues. Now the party is at odds on a response

By BILL BARROW and MARC LEVY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — After losing the White House and both houses of Congress, Democrats are grappling with how to handle transgender politics and policy following a campaign that featured withering and often misleading GOP attacks on the issue.

There is plenty of second-guessing after President-elect Donald Trump anchored his victory over Vice President Kamala Harris with sweeping promises on the economy and immigration. But Democrats also will not soon forget the punchline in anti-transgender Trump ads that became ubiquitous by Election Day: "Kamala is for they/them; President Trump is for you."

"Week by week when that ad hit and stuck and we didn't respond, I think that was the beginning of the end," former Democratic Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell said of the 30-second spot that was part of \$215 million in anti-transgender advertising by Trump and Republicans, according to tracking firm AdImpact.

"They painted her as something I don't think she is," Rendell said. "They painted her as a far-left liberal."

The fallout leaves some progressive and moderate Democrats struggling between the party's modern identity as a champion of civil rights and its electoral fortunes across swaths of America with whom those attacks resonated.

"There are just a number of issues where we're out of touch," Rep. Seth Moulton, a moderate Massa-

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chusetts Democrat said in an interview, days after he set off recriminations within his party for saying he didn't want his daughters playing in sports against biological males. Critics said Moulton echoed Trump's talking points about liberals allowing "men to compete in women's sports."

"I think that Republicans have a hateful position on trans issues," Moulton told The Associated Press, but insisted that Democrats still lose voters because of the party's "attitude."

"Rather than talk down to you and tell you what to believe," he argued, Democrats should "listen to hard-working Americans."

LGBTQ+ advocates, meanwhile, are arguing that the 2024 election turned more on economic issues than Trump's transgender rhetoric. They're urging political leaders to counter misinformation that they say threatens the health and safety of transgender Americans, who make up less than 1% U.S. population.

"Trans people have been existing and co-existing," receiving health care and participating in society for years, said Sarah Kate Ellis, CEO of GLAAD, a leading LGBTQ+ advocacy group. "Nothing new happened," Ellis said, other than Republicans singling them out in a presidential campaign year.

"It didn't change one vote," Ellis argued. "But it did make the world way more dangerous for trans people."

Another Democratic Massachusetts lawmaker, Rep. Ayanna Pressley, didn't name Moulton, but said some reactions to the election "scapegoated and dehumanized" transgender people. "This Congresswoman sees you and loves you," Pressley wrote on the social media platform X.

Certainly it's difficult, if not impossible, to pinpoint single issues that can tip a national election, and there are mixed findings on what voters think about transgender rights.

According to AP VoteCast, a survey of more than 120,000 people who cast ballots this fall, more than half of voters said support for transgender rights in government and society has gone too far. About 2 in 10 said support has not gone far enough and another 2 in 10 said it's about right. But among Trump voters, 85% said transgender support had gone too far.

Still, slightly more than half of all voters oppose banning gender affirming medical treatment such as hormone therapy and puberty blockers, while slightly less than half support such proposals.

About one-quarter of Harris voters said support for transgender rights in government and society has gone too far. About 4 in 10 said it's been about right and about 4 in 10 said it hasn't gone far enough.

Trump and Republicans were relentless in trying to capitalize on the issue. They piled on transgender athletes, with Trump falsely labeling two Olympic boxers as transgender women. They used Harris' comments as a presidential candidate in 2019 — before she became vice president — effectively to blame her for laws granting transgender health care to federal prisoners and detainees.

And Trump repeatedly and falsely claimed that "your kid goes to school and comes home a few days later with an operation" changing their sex.

In reality, the Biden administration has held that Title IX bars discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity — but Education Department rules do not explicitly address transgender athletes. Federal law that Trump ads cited does require people in U.S. government custody to have access to gender-affirming medical treatments. Those policies were in place throughout Trump's 2017-21 term; they are not something Biden's administration instituted specifically.

And it is not legal in any state for a school to determine and carry out surgical treatment for minor students.

"You gotta fight back" with those explanations, Moulton said, adding that the silence compounds the negative effects for transgender people. "What did we show about our willingness to stand up for trans people by just being silent and ignoring the issue and ignoring the attack?"

Still, Moulton said Democratic leaders on Capitol Hill and in statehouses should give individual elected officials and voters the space to take more conservative positions, and he defended his own comments that he doesn't want his daughters competing in athletics against men.

"I don't want them getting run over on a playing field by a male or formerly male athlete, but as a Democrat I'm supposed to be afraid to say that," Moulton told The New York Times last week.

Before he resigned his post as Texas Democratic chairman, Gilberto Hinojosa said supporting transgender rights doesn't necessarily have to include public funding for gender reassignment surgery.

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"We can say, 'OK, we respect people's right to say, we don't want my taxpayer money to be used for that,'" Hinojosa told Texas Public Radio. Hinojosa later apologized via social media, saying LGBTQ Americans "deserve to feel seen, valued and safe in our state and our party."

Ellis, the CEO of GLAAD, pointed to Delaware voters choosing to make state Sen. Sarah McBride the first transgender member of Congress as evidence that Americans "don't hate trans people."

For her part, McBride, a Democrat from Delaware, noted that she did not run on her identity – though it was not a secret – and instead talked to voters about "affordable health care, housing and child care" for everyone.

"The party that was focused on culture wars, the party that was focused on trans people was the Republican Party," McBride told reporters on Capitol Hill after her victory. "It was Donald Trump," she added, who "was trying to divide and distract from the fact that he has absolutely no policy solutions for the issues that are actually keeping voters up at night."

Suicides in the US military increased in 2023, continuing a long-term trend

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Suicides in the U.S. military increased in 2023, continuing a long-term trend that the Pentagon has struggled to abate, according to a Defense Department report released on Thursday. The increase is a bit of a setback after the deaths dipped slightly the previous year.

The number of suicides and the rate per 100,000 active-duty service members went up, but that the rise was not statistically significant. The number also went up among members of the Reserves, while it decreased a bit for the National Guard.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has declared the issue a priority, and top leaders in the Defense Department and across the services have worked to develop programs both to increase mental health assistance for troops and bolster education on gun safety, locks and storage. Many of the programs, however, have not been fully implemented yet, and the moves fall short of more drastic gun safety measures recommended by an independent commission.

In a statement Thursday, Austin said the new figures "urgently demonstrate the need for the Department to redouble its work in the complex fields of suicide prevention and postvention." He said the department is moving urgently to put changes in place, adding, "There's still much more work to do, and we won't let up."

The increase was fueled by spikes in the number of Army and Air Force deaths, while the Marine Corps and Navy saw a very small dip.

Overall, there were 523 reported suicides in 2023, compared with 493 in 2022. The number of active-duty troops who died by suicide increased to 363 from 331.

Officials have said that due to the decreasing size of the active-duty force in recent years, they believe the rate of suicides, rather than the number, is a more accurate measure. The suicide rate is calculated based on an active-duty force of about 1.28 million, about 330,000 Reserves and nearly 430,000 in the Guard. The rate for active-duty service members and Reserves went up, while the Guard was lower.

More broadly, however, the trend since 2011 has been an increase in suicides among active-duty service members, while the Guard and Reserve have stayed largely stable. Officials said the statistics generally reflect suicide rates for society as a whole, when adjusted for age and gender, because a majority of those in the military are young and male.

The analysis in the annual report also shows continuing trends for those who die by suicide and how they do it. The report shows that young, male enlisted troops still make up the vast majority of the suicides, and that the bulk of the deaths involve the use of a firearm.

Suicide data for troops' family members lags by a year. But it shows that fewer family members died by suicide in 2022 than the previous year, with a 9% decrease in the rate. While there are far fewer male spouses, they make up nearly half of the suicide deaths.

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An independent committee recommended early last year that the department put in place a series of gun safety measures to reduce suicides in the force, including waiting periods for the purchase of firearms and ammunition by service members on military property.

The commission said the department should raise the minimum age for service members to buy guns and ammunition to 25 and require anyone living in military housing to register all privately owned firearms. In addition, it said the department should restrict the possession and storage of privately owned firearms in military barracks and dorms.

In response to that report, Austin released a new campaign to address suicides in the force, but the department chose not to implement the key firearm changes suggested by the commission. Instead, the Pentagon said it would "incentivize" secure firearm storage, provide more storage locations and do more public education on how to safely store guns — similar to steps that officials have talked about in the past.

Defense officials said that those changes, which could include providing troops with a voucher to defray some costs of gun locks and storage, are in the works but have not been finalized. They are still working on modernizing the training programs to better instruct troops on the safe storage and use of guns and to reduce the stigma of seeking mental health support.

In addition, the military services are hiring personnel to staff prevention programs and, as of this summer, about 1,000 professionals have been hired with a goal of 2,500 by 2028.

Food prices worried most voters, but Trump's plans likely won't lower their grocery bills

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

Americans are fed up with the price of food, and many are looking to President-elect Donald Trump to lower their grocery bills.

Trump often railed on the campaign trail against hefty price increases for bacon, cereal, crackers and other items.

"We'll get them down," he told shoppers during a September visit to a Pennsylvania grocery store.

But the food price inflation that stunned the U.S. — and other parts of the world — in 2021 and 2022 had complicated causes that are difficult to unwind, from the pandemic to the Ukraine war to avian flu. And many economists think Trump's plans, including putting tariffs on imported foods and deporting undocumented workers, could actually make food prices rise.

As of October, U.S. prices for food eaten at home were up 28% from 2019, according to government figures released Wednesday. But the growth peaked in 2022; between October 2023 and October 2024, food prices rose 2%, which was lower than the overall inflation rate.

Supermarket sticker shock nevertheless weighed on the U.S. electorate. About 7 in 10 voters -- including 70% of women and 63% of men -- said they were very concerned about the cost of food and groceries, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of more than 120,000 voters. Only 1 in 10 said they were not too concerned or not at all concerned.

Trump won decisively among voters who said they were "very" concerned. Around 6 in 10 voters in that group supported him, while 4 in 10 supported Vice President Kamala Harris, his Democratic rival. Harris won strong majorities of voters who were somewhat concerned, not too concerned or not at all concerned.

Asked how he would lower grocery prices during a September town hall in Michigan, Trump said tariffs would help U.S. farmers. Trump has called for a 60% tariff on products made in China and a "universal" tariff of 10% to 20% on all other foreign goods that enter the United States. In some speeches, he mentioned even higher percentages.

Trump said U.S. farmers were getting "decimated" because the U.S. allows so many agricultural products into the country. As of 2021, the U.S. imported 60% of its fresh fruit, 38% of its fresh vegetables — excluding potatoes and mushrooms — and 10% of its beef, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"We're going to have to be a little bit like other countries," he said. "We're not going to allow so much

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come. We're going to let our farmers go to work."

But David Ortega, a professor of food economics and policy at Michigan State University, said that food producers rely on imported goods like fertilizer, equipment and packaging materials. If they're forced to pay more for those items, they will raise prices, Ortega said.

U.S. farmers also could have trouble selling their goods overseas, since other countries would likely respond with retaliatory tariffs, he said. Around 20% of U.S. agricultural production is exported each year, according to the USDA.

The American Farm Bureau did not respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press. The Consumer Brands Association, which represents big food companies like Coca-Cola and Nestle as well as personal care companies like Procter & Gamble, says many of its members need ingredients that are grown outside the U.S., like coffee, bananas and chocolate.

"There is a fundamental disconnect between a stated goal of reducing grocery prices and tariff policy that only stands to increase those costs," said Tom Madrecki, the association's vice president of campaigns and special projects.

Ortega said Trump's plans to deport people who are in the U.S. illegally could also drive up grocery prices. There are more than 2 million undocumented workers throughout the U.S. food chain, he said, including an estimated 1 million working on farms, 750,000 working in restaurants and 200,000 in food production.

At the Michigan town hall, Trump said lowering energy costs by increasing oil and gas drilling would also lower food prices.

"If you make doughnuts, if you make cars, whatever you make, energy is a big deal, and we're going to get that. It's my ambition to get your energy bill within 12 months down 50%," he said.

Energy makes up a relatively small portion of the cost of food production and sales. For every \$1 spent on food in 2022, a little less than 4 cents went toward energy costs, according to the USDA. Farm production cost 8 cents, while food processing cost 14 cents.

Joseph Glauber, a senior research fellow with the International Food Policy Research Institute, said energy prices are important, but they have already come down significantly over the past year.

"I think it would be difficult for the Trump administration to have much impact on energy prices in the short run," Glauber said.

When asked whether Trump had plans beyond energy and tariffs to lower grocery costs, a spokesperson for his transition team didn't give further details.

"The American people re-elected President Trump by a resounding margin, giving him a mandate to implement the promises he made on the campaign trail. He will deliver," Karoline Leavitt said.

Maria Kalaitzandonakes, an assistant professor of agricultural and consumer economics at the University of Illinois, said her research shows that most voters think politicians can bring down grocery prices.

Jordan Voigt, 34, a single parent of two toddlers, said she is currently living with her parents near Asheville, North Carolina, because the cost of fuel and groceries has gotten so high.

Voigt said she voted for Trump, in part, because she believes he's a businessman who can lower prices.

"He doesn't just say, 'Oh, this is how much this is costing, the American people have to take it.' I appreciate that," Voigt said during a gathering on election night. "He stands up and goes, 'Nope, the American people aren't going to pay that.' And he's like, 'You're going to have to figure out a way to make that cheaper.'"

But Ortega and other economists say there's very little a president can do, especially in the short term, to lower grocery prices. Sustained price declines typically only happen in steep, protracted recessions.

"People want grocery prices to get down to pre-COVID levels, and that's just not going to happen," he said. "Deflation is not something that we want."

Kalaitzandonakes agrees that the White House has little power to get food prices down swiftly.

But presidents can encourage policies that help tame grocery price inflation over the longer term, she said, like increasing competition and investing in infrastructure, agricultural technology and crops that are resistant to pests and extreme weather.

"Lowering food prices is not great," Kalaitzandonakes said. "What we would want to think about instead is, is your income keeping pace with your bills versus is your bill at the grocery store coming down."

One Tech Tip: Replacing passwords with passkeys for an easier login experience

By KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — If you're tired of memorizing passwords, then give passkeys a try.

You might have noticed that many online services are now offering the option of using passkeys, a digital authentication method touted as an easier and more secure way to log in. The passkey push started gaining major momentum after Google started accepting them about 18 months ago.

Passkeys are seen as eventual replacements for passwords, but if you're still not sure what they're all about, read on:

What are passkeys? And how do they work?

Forget about memorizing an optimized 14 character password consisting of letters, numbers and symbols. Passkeys do away with that because you never need to see them. Instead you are using existing biometrics like your face or fingerprints, digital patterns or PINs to access your accounts.

Passkeys are made up of two parts of a code that only makes sense when they're combined, kind of like a digital key and padlock. You keep half of the encrypted code, typically stored either in the cloud with a compatible password manager or on a physical security dongle. The other half is stored on the participating apps, services or accounts you want to access.

When you want to log in to your Gmail account, for example, both parts of the code will then communicate directly with each other and give you entry.

Do they offer better security?

A passkey won't work with any website except the one it has been created for, eliminating the security risks associated with traditional passwords.

That means bad actors carrying out phishing scams won't be able to trick you into entering your details into a copycat login page for your bank. And because passkeys use cryptographic security, they also can't brute force their way into your account by trying passwords exposed in previous data breaches or guessing them.

Where can you use passkeys?

Some 20% of the world's top 100 websites now accept passkeys, said Andrew Shikiar, CEO of the FIDO Alliance, an industry group that developed the core authentication technology behind passkeys.

Passkeys first came to the public's attention when Apple added the technology to iOS in 2022. They got more traction after Google started using them in 2023. Now, many other companies including PayPal, Amazon, Microsoft and eBay work with passkeys. There's a list on the FIDO Alliance website.

Still, some popular sites like Facebook and Netflix haven't started using them yet.

Passkey technology is still in the "early adoption" phase but "it's just a matter of time for more and more sites to start offering this," Shikiar said.

How to set up a passkey

I tried setting up passkeys for some of the major online services I use. It was fairly easy for some but confusing for others. Shikiar said his group is constantly working on ways to improve the user experience.

Google users can go to myaccount.google.com and under "How to sign in to Google", click Passkeys and security keys. Upon reaching the setup screen, I received a prompt to create a passkey while simultaneously my password manager's browser plug-in popped up offering to save it. I clicked to confirm and the setup work was all done automatically.

So far, pretty easy.

Then, I tried adding more Google passkeys to my Windows-based work laptop and a Yubico physical security key. This time, when I got to the Google setup screen, it asked for my existing passkey to confirm my identity. But then it somehow failed to authenticate through my password manager.

I tried again using other verification methods, including my Google authenticator app that I already had on my iPhone, and it eventually succeeded.

Adding multiple passkeys to my Microsoft account — one on my password manager, another on my Yubico key — involved some head scratching over a few of the prompts, but I eventually figured it out.

Setting up passkeys on LinkedIn and Amazon was much easier. And when I attempted to add a passkey to my WhatsApp account, I discovered I had, apparently, already created one months earlier when I activated the app lock feature requiring a fingerprint scan.

Logging in

Once set up, it was a breeze to sign in to some of my accounts with just a click or two. But there was some friction with my PayPal account because its passkeys don't work on some browsers, like Firefox.

When I tried to log in with my Amazon passkey, it asked for a one-time verification code from my authenticator app, which confused me because I thought passkeys were supposed to eliminate the need for multi-factor authentication.

Shikiar said it depends on the site, but, in theory, the passkey already has enough protection built in.

"When the primary factor's un-phishable, other factors aren't necessary," he said.

What happens if I lose my passkey?

If you've lost the device containing your passkey, that doesn't necessarily mean it's gone. That's because the typical method to store passkeys on phones is a cloud-based password manager from Apple, Google, or third-party providers. So just log back into the password manager from another phone or computer.

Passkeys stored on security dongles, on the other hand, aren't synced to the cloud so there's no way to recover them if they're lost. It'd be a good idea to get a second hardware key and keep it as a backup.

And don't forget you can always mix both cloud and hardware methods to keep multiple passkeys for extra redundancy.

Should I add a passkeys to all my accounts?

Based on my experience, setting up a passkey can be easy, or tedious and bewildering, depending on the service and what other security technology you want to layer in.

So I wouldn't recommend doing all your accounts right away.

Instead, choose a few of your most important and frequently used services or accounts and focus on a proper setup for those.

What about my passwords?

In theory, you could delete your old passwords. Some services like Microsoft already offer this option. Shikiar says it should be a "personal preference," because "some people may feel extremely nervous" about going passwordless.

It's fine to keep your password but make sure there's also multi-factor authentication set up for it, he said.

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 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

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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

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she fears deportation. "Not in January. Not in December. Now."

Today in History: November 15 Union troops begin 'Sherman's March'

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, Nov. 15, the 320th day of 2024. There are 46 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Nov. 15, 1864, late in the U.S. Civil War, Union forces led by Maj. Gen. William Tecumseh (teh-KUM'-seh) Sherman began their "March to the Sea" from Atlanta; the campaign ended with the capture of Savannah, Georgia on Dec. 21.

Also on this date:

In 1777, the Second Continental Congress approved the Articles of Confederation.

In 1806, explorer Zebulon Pike sighted the mountaintop now known as Pikes Peak in present-day Colorado.

In 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt laid the cornerstone of the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C.

In 1959, four members of the Clutter family of Holcomb, Kansas, were found murdered in their home. (Richard Hickock and Perry Smith were later convicted of the killings and hanged in a case made famous by the Truman Capote book "In Cold Blood.")

In 1966, the flight of Gemini 12, the final mission of the Gemini program, ended successfully as astronauts James A. Lovell and Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin Jr. splashed down safely in the Atlantic after spending four days in orbit.

In 1969, a quarter of a million protesters staged a peaceful demonstration in Washington against the Vietnam War.

In 2012, the Justice Department announced that BP had agreed to plead guilty to a raft of charges in the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill and pay a record \$4.5 billion, including nearly \$1.3 billion in criminal fines.

In 2019, Roger Stone, a longtime friend and ally of President Donald Trump, was convicted of all seven counts in a federal indictment accusing him of lying to Congress, tampering with a witness and obstructing the House investigation of whether Trump coordinated with Russia during the 2016 campaign. The president commuted Stone's 40-month sentence days before he was to report to prison.

In 2022, the world population reached 8 billion, based on United Nations projections.

Today's Birthdays: Singer Petula Clark is 92. Actor Sam Waterston is 84. Classical conductor Daniel Barenboim is 82. Pop singer Anni-Frid "Frida" Lyngstad (ABBA) is 79. Fashion designer Jimmy Choo is 76. Actor Beverly D'Angelo is 73. News correspondent John Roberts is 68. Former "Tonight Show" bandleader Kevin Eubanks is 67. Actor Jonny Lee Miller is 52. Actor Sean Murray is 47. Golf Hall of Famer Lorena Ochoa is 43. Actor Shailene Woodley is 33. NBA All-Star Karl-Anthony Towns is 29.