

Groton Daily Independent

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Saturday, Nov. 16

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., 209 N Main
JH GBB Jamboree at Roscoe
Groton Legion Turkey Party, 6:30 p.m.

Groton Daily Independent
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.

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FROSTY CLUE

I/My.....

16. Children all played soccer in Groton



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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.

Malcolm X Lawsuit

Malcolm X's three daughters filed a \$100M federal lawsuit yesterday against the CIA, FBI, and the New York Police Department, alleging these agencies were complicit in the 1965 assassination of the civil rights leader.

The filing comes nearly six decades after Malcolm X was fatally shot 21 times at age 39 while beginning a speech at a Manhattan ballroom. The lawsuit claims the law enforcement agencies had prior knowledge of the assassination plot but deliberately failed to prevent Malcolm X's murder. The legal action seeks to uncover the truth about Malcolm X's death and provide reparations for his family.

Born Malcolm Little, the Nebraska native rose to prominence as a lead figure in the Nation of Islam. He was shot to death almost one year after a bitter high-profile split with the Nation of Islam. Three men were initially convicted of crimes related to the death until two of them were exonerated in 2021 after an investigation found the original authorities withheld evidence in the case.

Japan's oldest royal, Princess Yuriko, dies at age 101.

Princess Yuriko was the oldest living member of Japan's imperial family and the wife of wartime Emperor Hirohito's brother, Prince Mikasa. She died after a recent decline in health, following a stroke and pneumonia in March. Her passing reduces the imperial family to 16 members, highlighting ongoing concerns about succession due to a 1947 Imperial House Law restricting the throne to male heirs.

Samples from far side of the moon show history of volcanoes.

The first lunar soil and rock samples retrieved by China's Chang'e-6 mission from the moon's far side this year reveal volcanic activity that occurred as recently as around 2.8 billion years ago. The findings suggest the moon was molten for a longer period than previously thought. The samples were taken from the South Pole-Aitken Basin of the moon, the solar system's oldest-known impact crater.

Jake Paul beats Mike Tyson by unanimous decision.

Youtuber-turned-boxer Paul, 27, defeated former heavyweight boxing champion Tyson, 58, Friday. Paul is expected to make roughly \$40M, and Tyson is expected to make roughly \$20M. The win improves Paul's career record to 11-1, while Tyson's career record falls to 50-7.

Comedian Conan O'Brien to host 2025 Academy Awards.

O'Brien will emcee the 97th Oscars ceremony March 2 on ABC for the first time. The Emmy-winning late-night television host, writer, and producer has previously hosted the 2002 and 2006 Emmy Awards as well as the 2014 MTV Movie Awards. O'Brien's stint comes after Jimmy Kimmel emceed the Oscars for two consecutive years.

Super Micro faces deadline to keep Nasdaq listing amid stock plunge.

Super Micro Computer is at risk of being delisted from the Nasdaq composite after its stock price dropped by 85% since its peak in March due to allegations of accounting irregularities and an ongoing investigation. Super Micro has until Monday to submit a plan to meet Nasdaq's minimum bid price requirement to maintain its listing.

Over 35,000-year-old preserved saber-toothed kitten studied in world first.

Researchers discovered the well-preserved mummy in Siberia's Arctic permafrost, with its fur, head, torso, limbs, and claws still intact. The kitten is estimated to have died three weeks after birth. The finding provides new insights into the saber-toothed cat's physical characteristics and adaptations to ice age conditions.

Humankind(ness)

Today, we're sharing a story from reader James R. in Cupertino, California.

"I went to my granddaughter's high school to see her in a play. When I came out, I couldn't remember where I parked my car. The drama teacher who helped put on the show stayed with me for about 15 or 20 minutes until we finally found my car. Without her, I'm not sure I would've ever found my car!"

Minnehaha County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle injury crash

Where: SD Highway 11, mile marker 94, three miles north of Garretson, SD

When: 6:19 p.m., November 14, 2024

Driver 1: 33-year-old male from Baltic, SD, serious, non-life-threatening injuries

Vehicle 1: 2015 Kia Sorento

Seatbelt Used: Yes

Driver 2: 71-year-old female from Jasper, MN, serious, non-life-threatening injuries

Vehicle 2: 2020 Buick Encore

Seatbelt Used: Yes

Passenger 1: 81-year-old male from Jasper, MN, fatal injuries

Seatbelt Used: Yes

Minnehaha County, S.D.- A Jasper, MN man died in a collision Thursday evening three miles north of Garretson, SD.

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

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2020 Buick Encore was traveling northbound on SD Highway 11. At the same time, the driver of a 2015 Kia Sorento was traveling eastbound on 250th Street and failed to yield at a stop sign at the intersection with Hwy 11 and collided with the oncoming Buick. Dense fog is a contributing factor in the crash.

The drivers of both vehicles sustained serious, non-life-threatening injuries. A passenger in the Buick sustained fatal injuries and passed away at the scene.

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

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

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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



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**BROWN COUNTY
BROWN COUNTY COMMISSION AGENDA
REGULAR MEETING TUESDAY**

November 19, 2024 8:45 A.M.

COMMISSIONER'S CHAMBERS, COURTHOUSE ANNEX - 25 MARKET STREET, ABERDEEN SD

1. Call To Order - Pledge of Allegiance
2. Approval of Agenda
3. Opportunity of Public Comment
4. Consent Calendar
 - a. Approval of General Meeting Minutes of November 12, 2024
 - b. Approval of Post Election Audit Minutes of November 14, 2024
 - c. Claims/Payroll
 - d. HR Report
 - e. Claim Assignments
 - f. Abatement/Refund
5. Other Business
6. Executive Session (if requested per SDCL 1-25-2)
7. Adjourn

Brown County Commission Meeting

Please join my meeting from your computer, tablet, or smartphone.

<https://meet.goto.com/BrCoCommission>

You can also dial in using your phone. United States: [+1 \(872\) 240-3311](tel:+18722403311)

Access Code: 601-168-909 #

Get the app now and be ready when your first meeting starts: <https://meet.goto.com/install>

Public comment provides an opportunity for the public to address the county commission but may not exceed 3 minutes.

Public comment will be limited to 10 minutes (or at the discretion of the board).

Public comment will be accepted virtually when the virtual attendance option is available.

Official Recordings of Commission Meetings along with the Minutes can be found at

<https://www.brown.sd.us/department/commission>

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NSU Men's Basketball

Second Half Spark Not Enough in Non-Conference Loss to the Nighthawks

Nampa, Idaho – Despite a 39-point second half comeback the Northern State University men's basketball team fell to Northwest Nazarene on Saturday. The Wolves battled in the second with the teams trading small leads as the clock ticked down.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 66, NNU 68

Records: NSU 0-3, NNU 3-0

Attendance: 1489

HOW IT HAPPENED

Northwest Nazarene led 36-27 at the half, while Northern State out-scored their opponents 39-32 in the second

The Wolves shot 44.8% from the floor, 30.4% from the 3-point line, and 77.8% from the foul line, while the Nighthawks shot 43.5% from the floor, 43.8% from the 3-point line, and 65.6% from the foul line

NSU out-rebounded NNU 37-30 in the game and led the contest with ten steals, five blocks, and 34 points in the paint

They added 12 points off the bench, eight second chance points, and seven points off turnovers

Northwest capitalized on Northern's 15 turnovers in the game, scoring 17 points

Four Wolves scored in double figures led by Kwat Abdelkarim with a season high 16 points, hitting 5-of-7 from the floor including four three pointers

James Glenn and Tobi Obiora followed with 15 and 13 points respectively, while Obiora led the team with seven rebounds and Glenn dished out a team high eight assists

Kaleb Mitchel was the final Wolf in double figures, leading the team off the bench with 12 points and six rebounds

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Kwat Abdelkarim: 16 points, 71.4 FG%, 6 rebounds, 2 steals

James Glenn: 15 points, 50.0 FG%, 8 assists, 5 rebounds

Tobi Obiora: 13 points, 55.6 FG%, 7 assists, 2 blocks

Kaleb Mitchell: 12 points, 75.0 FG%, 6 rebounds

UP NEXT

Northern will open their regular season home slate on Tuesday in Wachs Arena. Tip-off time is set for 7 p.m. versus Dakota State.

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NSU Volleyball

No. 18 Wolves Slide Past Augustana, Hit 20 Wins on the Season

Aberdeen, S.D. – The No. 18 Northern State University volleyball team played efficiently in their Friday win over Augustana, recording the sweep. Northern hit .291 in the win and led Augustana in four statistical categories.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 3, AU 0

Records: NSU 20-5 (12-5 NSIC), AU 12-15 (8-9 NSIC)

Attendance: 782

HOW IT HAPPENED

The Wolves defeated the Vikings by set scores of 25-18, 25-15, and 25-22, notching their third win over AU this season

Northern recorded a match leading 46 kills, 40 assists, and 59 digs, adding five blocks and three aces

The NSU defense forced 16 Viking hitting errors and held Augustana to a .130 attack percentage

Natalia Szybinska and Abby Brooks led the offense with 13 and ten kills respectively, hitting .310 and .474

Keri Walker dished up 13.33 assists per set with 40 total in the win; she added a pair of kills and digs, as well as one block and one ace

Abby Meister nearly averaged ten digs a set, notching 29 on the evening; she was the lone Wolf in defensive double figures

Brooks also led the team at the net with three blocks, followed by Victoria Persha and Hanna Thompson with two each

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Natalia Szybinska: 13 kills, .310 attack%, 1 block

Abby Brooks: 10 kills, .474 attack%, 3 blocks

Keri Walker: 40 assists, 2 digs, 2 kills, 1 block, 1 ace

Abby Meister: 29 digs

UP NEXT

Northern closes out the regular season at home today against Southwest Minnesota State. First serve is set for 3 p.m. on Saturday versus the Mustangs.

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NSU Women's Basketball

Wolves Take Down Yellow Jackets to Start the Weekend

Rapid City, S.D. – An explosive second quarter led the Northern State University women's basketball team to take down Black Hills State, 72-60. Four Wolves tallied double-digit points, with Madelyn Bragg leading the charge with 20 points on the day.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 72, BHS 60

Records: NSU 1-2, BHS 2-2

Attendance: 150

HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern State recorded 12 points in the first quarter, 23 in the second, 17 in the third, and 20 in the fourth

NSU tallied 30 points in the paint, 28 points off the bench, 16 second-chance points, and ten points off turnovers

They shot 41.3% from the floor, along with 35.3% from beyond the three-point arc, and 77.8% from the foul line

Madelyn Bragg led the team with 20 points, a season high, along with five rebounds

Izzy Moore and Michaela Jewett followed with 13 and 11 points, respectively

In addition, Jewett and Alayna Benike grabbed nine boards each to lead the team

Deontee Smith was first off the bench with ten points, seven rebounds, and one steal

NORTHERN STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Madelyn Bragg: 20 points, 5 rebounds, 44.4 FG %

Michaela Jewett: 11 points, 9 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 block, 44.4 FG %

Izzy Moore: 13 points, 4 rebounds, 44.4 FG %

Deontee Smith: 10 points, 7 rebounds, 1 steal, 50.0 FG %

Alayna Benike: 6 points, 9 rebounds, 2 assists

UP NEXT

Northern State returns to the court to take on South Dakota Mines. Tip-off is slated for 7 p.m. today from Rapid City, South Dakota, against the Hardrockers.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

State lawmakers question authority for \$20 million shooting complex, but it moves ahead anyway

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - NOVEMBER 15, 2024 3:00 PM

Some lawmakers on a budget committee questioned whether a state department has spending authority to move forward with a controversial \$20 million shooting complex north of Rapid City.

Yet the project is under construction and the lawmakers have not taken action to stop it.

Department of Game, Fish and Parks Secretary Kevin Robling presented a status update Thursday in Pierre to the Legislature's Joint Appropriations Committee.

One of the committee's responsibilities is vetting departmental budgets. Rep. Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, has served on the budget committee since 2017. He questioned Robling about the source of the department's authority to pursue the shooting complex.

Robling said it was in recent informational budgets presented to the committee with line items labeled for "Black Hills Shooting Range" and "Rapid City Shooting Complex."

Karr said he remembered discussing various projects, but not the shooting complex.

"I remember asking you questions about capital projects: How you rank them, how you prioritize them, how many dollars you have available, etcetera," Karr said. "I don't remember seeing this and going, 'Hey this looks like it's going to go to the shooting range, and in a couple years you're going to build a \$20 million shooting range based on the authority we're giving you in these last couple of budgets.'"

In 2021, lawmakers rejected a \$2.5 million appropriation for the project. They rejected more funding attempts for the complex in 2022, citing concerns over a lack of project details and potential costs.

Monday, Karr asked if other lawmakers on the committee recalled giving the department the spending authority. He was met with an audible "no" from lawmakers including Rep. Linda Duba, D-Sioux Falls, and Sen. Ryan Maher, R-Isabel.

After the meeting, Maher voiced frustration to South Dakota Searchlight over what he described as declining legislative oversight over state spending. He said the amount of funding departments transfer for other purposes, or spend without direct approval, has increased since he came to office in 2007. Maher



Rep. Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, questions an official from the Governor's Office of Economic Development during a hearing on Jan. 8, 2024, at the Capitol in Pierre. (Joshua Haiar/South

Dakota Searchlight)

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lost his primary election in June and will leave office in January.

"This business of continuous appropriations and budget transfers, there's just too much of it," Maher said. He hopes lawmakers lead efforts to give the Legislature more budgetary oversight during the upcoming session.

Maher and Karr have been frustrated with how Gov. Kristi Noem's administration has gone about the shooting-range project for a while now.

While legislators were passing a law in March requiring more information from her administration about the Future Fund that she controls, Noem was awarding \$13.5 million from it to the shooting range, unbeknownst to lawmakers. Karr and Maher didn't find out about the Future Fund award until South Dakota Searchlight learned about it and told them.

The late Gov. George Mickelson convinced lawmakers to create the Future Fund in 1987. State law says the fund must be used "for purposes related to research and economic development for the state." The fund is held by the Governor's Office of Economic Development, but unlike other funds managed by the office, the Future Fund is not overseen by a board of citizen appointees.

The shooting range is being built on a 400-acre site roughly 15 miles north of Rapid City and 25 miles southeast of Sturgis. Robling said it will host national shooting competitions and shooters from around the county.

The department initially said in 2021 that the project would cost \$9.9 million. That grew to \$12 million in 2022. Then the department paused the project when calls for bids attracted only one. The department wanted to use federal Pittman-Robertson funds – which come from taxes on guns, bows and ammunition to support wildlife conservation and hunter education – to help offset the cost. That is, until it learned more time was needed to analyze the site's archaeological significance to Native Americans, which led the department to withdraw its federal funding request.

Then, Noem gave the project \$13.5 million from the Future Fund. Another \$6.5 million has come in the form of donations. About \$7 million has been spent so far, Robling told lawmakers.

Robling said the project will need three full-time employees, who will be reallocated internally, as well as seasonal staff and volunteers.

Some lawmakers expressed doubt about the staffing plan Thursday.

"I think you're really underestimating what it's going to take to run this facility," Karr said.

Duba, who did not seek reelection this year and will leave office in January, told South Dakota Searchlight after the meeting that she fears the maintenance of the shooting complex could strain the department's resources.

"The 2025 Appropriations Committee needs to take a close look at the plan," Duba said. "The secretary referenced using existing funds. What other facilities will suffer?"

Robling told the committee he expects a grand opening for the shooting range in the fall of 2025. The department expects the complex to generate around \$550,000 in annual revenue, though he acknowledged it would not be profitable and would require financial supplementation through federal Pittman-Robertson funds.

No lawmakers asked how the department can use those funds for the project's operations after the department withdrew its request for Pittman-Robertson construction funds to avoid allowing more time to analyze the project site's significance to Native Americans. The Department of Game, Fish and Parks did not immediately respond to a South Dakota Searchlight message seeking an explanation.

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.

High court rules in favor of victim, but says Marsy's Law is not absolute

Victim's right to privacy does not overrule a defendant's right to a fair trial, justices write

BY: JOHN HULT - NOVEMBER 15, 2024 1:29 PM

A state constitutional amendment on victims' rights approved by voters in 2016 is not absolute, the South Dakota Supreme Court concluded this week.

The justices decided that South Dakota's Marsy's Law amendment does not trump a defendant's right to a fair trial. Their decision came Thursday in the case of South Dakota vs. Waldner.

Even so, the justices shot down a lower court's ruling that had granted two defendants access to an alleged sexual assault victim's diaries. Marsy's Law may not be absolute, the justices wrote, but it does grant victims the ability to appeal decisions that affect their privacy.

Several states have passed versions of Marsy's Law, billed as a crime victim's bill of rights and named after Marsy Nicholas, who was murdered by an ex-boyfriend in 1983.

Her brother, California billionaire and Broadcom co-founder Henry Nicholas, has financially backed multiple state-level efforts to institute the provisions since California voters backed a version of Marsy's Law in 2008. Nicholas funded the ballot initiative in South Dakota, as well.

Opponents of the initiative at the time decried the wording of the South Dakota proposal. They worried South Dakota's version lacked provisions in other states to define the limits of a victim's right to privacy, and how that right could be balanced with a defendant's right to a fair trial. Ohio, for example, specifies that its version of Marsy's Law does not outweigh a defendant's Sixth Amendment rights to a fair and speedy trial.

The law in South Dakota has been used since its passage to shield the names of police in officer-involved shootings from the public, and led the Sioux Falls Police Department to remove the addresses of criminal incidents from publicly available police logs.

Case speaks to limits on victim rights

The Waldner decision doesn't address every issue of concern with Marsy's Law, but it does clear up some of the questions created by the broad language of its South Dakota iteration.

In the Waldner decision, the South Dakota Supreme Court concluded that Marsy's Law did afford the victim the right to appeal a decision granting the alleged perpetrators access to diary entries, because the decision affected the victim's protected right to privacy.

The victim had argued that the protections afforded through Marsy's Law were absolute. The justices concluded that they are not.



The Supreme Court at the South Dakota Capitol in Pierre.

(Getty Images)

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"To read a victim's right of privacy under the State constitution as absolute, or superior to the rights of a defendant, would at some point infringe upon a defendant's federal due process right to defend against a charge," Justice Patricia DeVaney wrote in the ruling, which was affirmed by the court's other four justices.

The decision to overturn the lower court's ruling and deny access to the diaries was based on the defendant's overly broad request for information.

The defendants were charged with multiple counts of sexual assault in 2021 for incidents that allegedly took place in late 2019 into early 2020.

The victim and defendants are Hutterites — members of a communal branch of the Anabaptist faith — and the victim was moved to a separate colony after disclosing the alleged abuse. She shared her story and diary entries with confidants at that colony, who in turn shared the information with law enforcement.

The pages describing the assaults, as well as forensic interviews and police reports, were given to the defendants.

The defendants later requested "any and all disciplinary records from the colony" on the victim, as well as any diary entries written between 2010 and the present. The victim's writings, the defendants argued, might speak to the victim's mental state and credibility.

A Brule County judge ruled that the victim must produce those documents. The victim appealed. In their arguments to the state Supreme Court, the defendants said the victim did not follow proper procedure for asserting Marsy's Law rights, and that the victim had waived those rights by once stating they didn't care who read the diary entries.

Justices: Information request not specific enough

That statement wasn't enough, the Waldner ruling says. It came in response to a question about whether the mother of one of the men who'd helped the victim work with law enforcement could see the entries the victim hadn't shared with police. That alone, DeVaney wrote, was not enough to constitute a voluntary, knowing and intelligent waiver of privacy rights.

The lack of a waiver wouldn't be enough to shield the entries from a defendant, though. The issue with the Waldner request, the ruling says, is that it failed to meet the standards for admissibility often used by the justices in South Dakota. The standards are defined by a U.S. Supreme Court case involving former President Richard Nixon, who unsuccessfully tried to shield presidential audio recordings from release.

Under what have come to be known as the "Nixon factors," a request for evidence that would otherwise be shielded from a defendant's view for reasons of confidentiality or privacy can be granted if the information requested is relevant, admissible and specific.

In the Waldner case, DeVaney wrote, the request didn't clear the bar.

The judge in Brule County had ruled that the defendants' right to a fair trial was more important than the victim's right to privacy, but he hadn't applied the Nixon factors. The state Supreme Court did, and concluded that the diary entry request was not specific enough to warrant disclosure to the defendants.

Seeking "all" entries, the ruling says, constitutes a "fishing expedition."

Attorney General Marty Jackley, whose office argued the case on the victim's behalf, praised the ruling for its recognition of a victim's privacy rights.

"The Supreme Court has reaffirmed that victims have rights in South Dakota including their privacy," Jackley said in a prepared statement.

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.

North Dakota approves Summit carbon pipeline route

Company plans to reapply next week in South Dakota

BY: JEFF BEACH - NOVEMBER 15, 2024 11:09 AM

North Dakota regulators on Friday approved a route permit for the Summit Carbon Solutions pipeline, a significant win for what the company says is the world's largest carbon capture project.

The three-person Public Service Commission voted unanimously to approve the pipeline permit. The commission had denied Summit a route permit in 2023, but changes the company made to its route helped convince the commission to reverse its position.

Summit plans to put 333 miles of pipeline through North Dakota, part of a 2,500-mile network of pipelines in five states. The pipelines are planned to connect 57 ethanol plants, including Tharaldson Ethanol at Casselton, to an underground carbon storage site west of Bismarck.

"We commend and respect the North Dakota Public Service Commission for their diligence and thoughtful approach in reviewing this project," Wade Boeshans, executive vice president of Summit Carbon Solutions, said in a news release. "This decision is a testament to North Dakota's commitment to fostering innovation while working closely with communities and industries."

Ethanol plants emit carbon dioxide as part of the fermentation process in turning corn into fuel. That carbon can be captured, compressed and put into a hazardous liquid pipeline.

Summit announced its plans in 2021 and had hoped to begin construction in 2023, but has faced push-back from some landowners and several legal challenges as it has tried to obtain the needed permits.

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

Opponents cite safety concerns, damage to farmland and property values and an infringement on property rights. Some landowners also have complained about Summit's business practices.

Troy Coons, is president of the Northwest Landowners Association, a North Dakota property rights group that has challenged Summit over survey access and other issues.

"I don't know that the PSC really answered adequately the citizens' questions, or held the company accountable enough to move forward," Coons said.

Brian Jorde of Nebraska-based Domina Law, which represents landowners fighting the pipeline in North Dakota and other states, said the decision was expected based on comments and questions by the PSC during the re-hearing process.

"We will carefully review the written order for errors and address those accordingly," Jorde said in an email. "The PSC decision is phase one in a multi-phase process."

While Summit has said the plan to capture greenhouse gas emissions is good for the environment,



Public Service Commissioners, from left, Sheri Haugen-Hoffart, Randy Christmann and Administrative Law Judge Tim Dawson meet Nov. 15, 2024, on the Summit Carbon Solutions Pipeline. (Mary Steurer/North Dakota Monitor)

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several environmental groups, including the North Dakota-based Dakota Resource Council, have opposed the project as doing more harm than good.

Summit would benefit from federal tax credits of \$85 for every ton of CO₂ stored. It would sequester 18 million tons of carbon dioxide per year.

Commission Chair Randy Christmann emphasized that the PSC approval in North Dakota does not guarantee that Summit has the right to use eminent domain to force landowners to provide easements for the pipeline. A decision on eminent domain would have to be made in the courts.

"I certainly do encourage the company not to use eminent domain, at least not more than absolutely necessary," Christmann said before the vote.

Christmann recounted his family's bad experience with eminent domain when a highway was routed through the family's ranch.

"I understand how offensive it is," Christmann said of eminent domain. "Occasionally, it's needed. But I damn sure understand it ought never be abused."

Summit says it is working on obtaining voluntary property easements. A Summit filing with the PSC said as of Oct. 9, it had obtained voluntary easements on about 81.4% of the miles it needs in North Dakota.

Burleigh County, which includes Bismarck, had the lowest voluntary easement rate at more than 65%.

Christmann also said the ruling does not conclude that the Summit pipeline is a common carrier, an important designation for obtaining the right to use eminent domain.

"We need to challenge the common carrier status of CO₂ pipelines and restore power over zoning for pipelines to our county commissions," landowner David Moch, a farmer in Emmons County, said in a news release through the Dakota Resource Council. "This is an attack on our property rights. Summit Carbon has shown my community who they are, after threatening the use of eminent domain at an Emmons County Commission meeting."

Emmons and Burleigh counties had passed ordinances that would have severely restricted Summit's ability to site a pipeline through those counties, but the PSC ruled that state law supersedes local ordinances on carbon pipelines.

Carbon pipeline regulation is of interest to North Dakota's oil and gas industry. Summit's plan is for permanent underground storage, but carbon dioxide can be pumped into oil well sites to help extract more oil, a process called enhanced oil recovery.

Summit CEO Lee Blank told the North Dakota Monitor earlier this year that it had not been approached by oil companies interested in taking CO₂ from the pipeline.

Carbon capture and sequestration is being used by two North Dakota ethanol plants, Red Trail at Richardton and Blue Flint at Underwood.

Christmann noted that North Dakota has had a CO₂ pipeline operating for about 20 years, running from the Dakota Gasification plant near Beulah to an oil field in Canada. It runs about 10 miles from his ranch in western North Dakota.

Commissioner Sheri Haugen-Hoffart also mentioned that pipeline.

"North Dakota has managed successfully the CO₂ transportation and sequestration projects," Haugen-Hoffart said. "Our state has a history of reasonable pipeline management, and thousands of miles of pipeline operate under strict state and federal regulations."

Summit chose western North Dakota as a permanent storage site because the area has geology to keep the CO₂ deep underground with a cap rock keeping it from reaching the surface.

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

Summit also needs a permit in South Dakota, where it already has been denied once.

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

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

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

'Drill, drill, drill': New energy council signals Trump to prioritize energy production

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - NOVEMBER 15, 2024 6:12 PM



North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum delivers remarks during the Williston Basin Petroleum Conference at the Bismarck Event Center on May 16, 2024. (Michael Achterling/North Dakota Monitor)

President-elect Donald Trump's announcement Friday afternoon that his pick for Interior secretary, North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum, would also coordinate a new council on energy policy is a sign the incoming administration will make energy production a core part of its domestic policy.

Few details of the new National Energy Council were available Friday, as activists and lawmakers processed the surprise 4 p.m. Eastern announcement. But the move likely reflects a focus by Trump and his next administration on energy production, including fossil fuels.

"They're signaling ahead of time that this is one of their priority areas," Frank Maisano, a senior principal at the energy-focused law and lobbyist firm

Bracewell LLP, said in an interview.

Burgum "will be joining my Administration as both Secretary of the Interior and, as Chairman of the newly formed, and very important, National Energy Council, which will consist of all Departments and Agencies involved in the permitting, production, generation, distribution, regulation, transportation, of ALL forms of American Energy," a written statement from Trump said.

"This Council will oversee the path to U.S. ENERGY DOMINANCE by cutting red tape, enhancing private sector investments across all sectors of the Economy, and by focusing on INNOVATION over longstanding, but totally unnecessary, regulation."

Trump said the council's objective to increase U.S. energy supply would benefit the domestic economy and allies overseas and help power "A.I. superiority."

"The National Energy Council will foster an unprecedented level of coordination among federal agencies to advance American energy," Burgum said in a written statement. "By establishing U.S. energy dominance, we can jumpstart our economy, drive down costs for consumers and generate billions in revenue to help reduce our deficit."

It was unclear what the role of the Department of Energy would be in such an arrangement. The current secretary in the Biden administration is Jennifer Granholm, a former governor of Michigan.

'Drill, drill, drill'

Throughout the presidential campaign, Trump frequently pledged to expand oil and gas production. The issue was one of two he told Fox News host Sean Hannity he would seek to address as a "dictator" on the first day of his administration.

Trump told Hannity during an Iowa appearance in December that he would not be a dictator, "except

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for day one. I want to close the border, and I want to drill, drill, drill.”

Comments like that foreshadowed something like a new council to oversee energy policy, said Lisa Frank, executive director of the advocacy group Environment America.

“President Trump has been very clear that one of his top priorities is to ‘drill, baby, drill,’” Frank said. “I’m not surprised. It was such an important part of his campaign, and it is the case that energy decisions are made by all sorts of different agencies in different ways, and that can be kind of a difficult thing to manage if you’re trying to drive an agenda.”

Under outgoing President Joe Biden, the administration promoted an “all-of-government approach” to climate change, with several departments and agencies across the federal bureaucracy tasked with addressing the issue. White House National Climate Advisor Ali Zaidi was tasked with coordinating a consistent climate approach across the executive branch.

Burgum’s role could be similar, though the aim likely will be much different.

“This is similar to what the previous administration did, but the previous administration focused on climate,” Maisano said. “It’s just energy instead of climate.”

Another key difference is that Burgum will also be tasked with running an entire, separate Cabinet-level department with a nearly \$18 billion annual budget.

Balancing the priorities of the Interior Department — which includes public lands management, protecting endangered species, maintaining national parks and overseeing tribal relations — with an initiative to vastly expand fossil-fuel production could be difficult, Frank said.

“The really tough decisions about balancing those two agendas will lie, to some extent, with Secretary Burgum, if he’s confirmed,” she said. “Do we want more drilling at our national parks? Do we want it on our families’ ranches? Do we want it where you want your kids to hunt? Do we want fracking near the best trout streams? Those are going to be very difficult questions for both him and the American public.”

All of the above

Burgum is seen across the political spectrum as favoring an all-of-the-above approach to energy, meaning he wants to expand both fossil-fuel and sustainable-energy sources. Environmental groups see his record on climate as mixed.

His state ranks ninth in wind-energy production, Frank said, but also last in reducing carbon emissions over the last two decades.

“He’s familiar with all aspects of energy, because as governor of an all-of-the-above energy state, he has to be,” Maisano said.

Some Democrats and left-leaning groups voiced immediate opposition to the selection of Burgum. The U.S. House Natural Resources Committee Democrats sent a series of tweets Friday dubbing the governor “Big Oil Burgum” over ties to the oil and gas industry.

But others were more tempered in their reaction to Burgum’s selection as Interior chief than some of Trump’s other picks for Cabinet positions.

Patrick Donnelly, the Great Basin director for the environmental group Center for Biological Diversity, tweeted Thursday evening that it did not seem likely the Trump administration would roll back expansion of renewable energy.

Trump’s first term saw an expansion of clean-energy projects, Donnelly wrote. Burgum is “not a climate denier” who doesn’t have a record of stifling renewable energy, he added.

“Burgum sucks but he’s not a complete lunatic that I’m aware of,” Donnelly said in an earlier tweet. “Could have been worse.”

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

Trump rapidly unveils appointments to Cabinet, staff posts in dizzying post-election week

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - NOVEMBER 15, 2024 3:40 PM



President-elect Donald Trump attends the America First Policy Institute Gala held at Mar-a-Lago on Nov. 14, 2024 in Palm Beach, Florida. The annual event supports Grey Team, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preventing military suicide. (Photo by Joe Raedle/Getty Images)

WASHINGTON — President-elect Donald Trump continued his blitz of Cabinet and senior staff selections, closing the week Friday with the announcement that North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum, a former presidential rival turned Trump surrogate, is his candidate to lead the federal department responsible for vast swaths of federal lands and U.S. relations with Native American tribes.

Burgum also will head up a brand new "National Energy Council," Trump said.

In just 10 days since his decisive win, Trump from his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida rapidly disclosed his picks to lead major U.S. policy areas, including relationships around the globe

and the health and well-being of Americans at home.

The president-elect, who trounced Democratic nominee Kamala Harris on Nov. 5, has named roughly half of his intended nominees for the 15 executive departments that traditionally comprise a president's Cabinet. If Trump follows through on his nominations, he'll need the U.S. Senate's approval for each.

That feat could be an uphill battle for Trump's more controversial nominees — namely a Fox News host to oversee the entire U.S. military, a vaccine skeptic to administer health and science funding, and a recent Florida congressman who was investigated by the Department of Justice to wield the power of attorney general.

Trump has also drawn from his 2024 campaign staff, personal attorneys and pool of first-administration loyalists to fill several senior White House staff picks that do not require Senate approval.

Here are some of the president-elect's latest choices:

Burgum as secretary of the Interior. Trump announced Friday he will nominate Burgum, a former 2024 Republican presidential hopeful, to lead the U.S. Department of the Interior. The \$18 billion, 70,000-employee department oversees 11 bureaus that have a vast reach over relations with Native American tribes; control of hundreds of wildlife refuges and fish hatcheries; and the management of 245 million acres of public land, a third of the country's minerals, and leasing for energy extraction from U.S. ocean waters. Trump said in a statement Friday that he will create a National Energy Council, with Burgum at the helm, "to oversee the path to U.S. ENERGY DOMINANCE," he wrote. Burgum, a wealthy software executive turned governor, has filed a handful of lawsuits against the agency, including a challenge to open more oil and gas leasing in his state, according to the North Dakota Monitor. He dropped his 2024 presidential bid in January and endorsed Trump.

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Former U.S. Rep. Doug Collins of Georgia as secretary of Veterans Affairs. Trump announced Thursday his choice of the ex-congressman from Georgia to lead the agency that distributes health care to 9 million veterans at over 1,200 facilities annually. The department, which asked Congress for a \$369.3 billion budget for next year, also oversees veterans disability benefits and manages national veterans cemeteries and memorials. Collins, a lawyer, pastor and member of the U.S. Air Force Reserve since 2002, served in the U.S. House from 2013 to 2021, according to his congressional biography.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as secretary of Health and Human Services. The president-elect tapped Kennedy Jr. Thursday as his choice to lead the massive 80,000-employee Department of Health and Human Services that projects mandatory spending — think Medicare and Medicaid — will reach \$1.7 trillion in 2025, and discretionary spending at \$130.7 billion. Also under the huge HHS umbrella are the Food and Drug Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health. Kennedy Jr., a former 2024 presidential hopeful who dropped out and endorsed Trump, is well known for his spreading of vaccine misinformation. The former environmental lawyer and son of the late Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy also made headlines during the 2024 race for admitting he dumped a dead bear cub in New York's Central Park nearly a decade ago, among other unusual revelations.

Trump attorney D. John Sauer as solicitor general of the United States. In his last staffing announcement Thursday, Trump said he intends to nominate his defense attorney in his federal election interference case to be the U.S. Justice Department's litigator before the U.S. Supreme Court. Sauer successfully argued Trump's presidential immunity case before the Supreme Court in April. Sauer made headlines at Trump's federal January appeal hearing for appearing to argue that a president's order for SEAL Team Six to assassinate a political rival would be covered under presidential immunity. Sauer, Missouri's former solicitor general, was among those who filed friend-of-the-court briefs in support of Texas' lawsuit to overturn the 2020 presidential election results.

Former U.S. Rep. Matt Gaetz as attorney general. Trump dropped a bombshell Wednesday afternoon when he revealed he will nominate the now-ex-lawmaker Gaetz of Florida as attorney general. Gaetz resigned from the U.S. House hours after Trump's announcement, getting ahead of an anticipated ethics report on his alleged sexual misconduct and illicit drug use that could have been released Friday, according to several news outlets. Politico reported Friday that U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., does not want the report released, despite pressure from some in his own party. Gaetz, who if confirmed by the Senate would be the nation's top law enforcement officer, was investigated by the Justice Department for two years, beginning under Trump's first administration, for possible sex trafficking. The probe was dropped last year, as has been widely reported. Trump campaigned on meting out retribution from the Justice Department for his political foes following two federal investigations into his alleged stockpiling of classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate, and his alleged subversion of the 2020 presidential election. Gaetz is a staunch Trump ally and was among the nearly 140 House Republicans who objected to the 2020 election results. Trump has also tapped his personal criminal defense lawyer Todd Blanche to serve as deputy attorney general.

Within the past seven days, Trump also announced his plans to nominate former chair of the U.S. Securities and Exchange Jay Clayton as a U.S. attorney, former Democratic Congresswoman-turned-Republican Tulsi Gabbard as the director of national intelligence, Sen. Marco Rubio as secretary of State, Fox News host Pete Hegseth as secretary of Defense, South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem as Homeland Security chief, GOP Rep. Mike Waltz as national security adviser, former head of national intelligence John Ratcliffe as CIA director, former Immigration and Customs Enforcement Director Tom Homan as "border czar," former Trump White House adviser and immigration policy architect Stephen Miller as deputy chief of staff for policy, House Republican Conference Chair Elise Stefanik as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, former Congressman Lee Zeldin as Environmental Protection Agency administrator, and his 2024 campaign manager, Susie Wiles as his chief of staff.

The president-elect made waves as well when declaring this past week that billionaire campaign donor

Elon Musk and former presidential hopeful, now a staunch Trump supporter, Vivek Ramaswamy will together run an ambiguous entity titled the Department of Government Efficiency. Shortened to DOGE, it is still unclear how the organization would operate and interact with the federal government.

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

U.S. House passes bill to move up annual FAFSA release deadline

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - NOVEMBER 15, 2024 12:23 PM

WASHINGTON — A measure to ensure the federal student aid form opens up annually by Oct. 1 passed the U.S. House Friday with overwhelming bipartisan support.

The effort — which passed 381-1 — came after the U.S. Department of Education faced major backlash over the botched rollout of the 2024-25 Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA. California Democratic Rep. Zoe Lofgren was the only lawmaker to vote against the bill.

Though the form got a make-over after Congress passed the FAFSA Simplification Act in late 2020, users faced multiple glitches and technical errors throughout the form's soft launch in December and past its full debut in January, prompting processing delays and gaps in submissions.

The department has worked to correct these glitches and close that gap while also fixing major issues that prevented parents without Social Security numbers from completing the form.

Adding another complication, the department said in August it would use a phased rollout of the 2025-26 form in an attempt to address any errors that might arise before it opens up to everyone — making the application fully available two months later than usual.



A sign reminding people to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid — better known as FAFSA — appears on a bus near Union Station in Washington, D.C. (Shauneen Miranda/States Newsroom)

Codified deadline

Though the department legally has until Jan. 1 to roll out the form, it typically launches Oct. 1. U.S. Rep. Erin Houchin, an Indiana Republican and member of the U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce, in July introduced the bill to standardize that deadline.

"I'm especially frustrated considering the Department of Education has had three years to simplify the FAFSA as Congress has dictated," Houchin said during floor debate Friday.

She also referenced recent findings from the Government Accountability Office, including that nearly

three-quarters of all calls to the call center went unanswered in the first five months of the 2024-25 rollout.

"We want this program to work — we want to make sure that children and families that want to send their kids to college have the availability to do that and that the FAFSA is available and workable," she added.

U.S. Rep. Bobby Scott, ranking member of the House education panel, echoed his support during the floor debate, saying the measure will "help ensure that even more students have the information they need in a timelier manner to access Pell Grants and other vital student aid."

Scott initially opposed the effort when the committee took it up in July out of concerns that the implementation deadline could force the department to roll out an incomplete form on Oct. 1 of this year.

"However, because we're now considering the bill after Oct. 1, the deadline will apply next year, 2025, and that gives the department ample time to make improvements and fix any lingering issues," the Virginia Democrat said.

U.S. Sen. Bill Cassidy, a Louisiana Republican, introduced a companion bill in July.

The bill was referred to the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, where Cassidy serves as ranking member. After Republicans won a Senate majority in the Nov. 5 elections, Cassidy is in line to chair the panel next year.

Shauneen Miranda is a reporter for States Newsroom's Washington bureau. An alumna of the University of Maryland, she previously covered breaking news for Axios.

Trump expected to tap North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum to be secretary of Interior

BY: MICHAEL ACHTERLING, JEFF BEACH AND MARY STEURER - NOVEMBER 15, 2024

President-elect Donald Trump said Thursday he plans to name North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum to lead the Department of Interior.

"We're going to do things with energy and with land, Interior that is going to be incredible," Trump said during a Thursday event at Mar-a-Lago. A clip of the event was captured on CSPAN.

"I look forward to doing the formal announcement," Trump said. That announcement is expected Friday.

Burgum, who has served two terms as governor of North Dakota, was among the field of Republican candidates for president during the primaries before endorsing Trump.

As governor, Burgum has railed against what he sees as government overreach and bureaucracy under the Biden administration, especially on energy policy.

"I'm honored and excited to serve and will have more to say after the official announcement," Burgum said Thursday in a statement through his spokesman.

The \$18 billion Interior Department is responsible for managing public lands, protecting wildlife, maintaining national parks and monuments and overseeing most tribal programs,



North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum encourages voters to support Republican presidential candidate and former President Donald Trump during a campaign rally in the basement ballroom of The Margate Resort on Jan. 22, 2024, in Laconia, New Hampshire. (Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)

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among other things.

A tension point in recent years has been over how much oil and gas development the department's Bureau of Land Management should allow. President Joe Biden pledged not to offer new leases for oil and gas producers. Trump, during his first term, sought "energy dominance," and he and allies campaigned this year on a return to that approach.

North Dakota is the nation's third largest oil producing state, with some of the production coming from federal lands on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation.

North Dakota has filed multiple lawsuits against federal agencies under Burgum's leadership. A handful of the lawsuits challenge the Department of the Interior, including one against the Bureau of Land Management that seeks to force the agency to hold more oil and gas lease sales.

Burgum, speaking to North Dakota reporters Tuesday, would not comment on a potential Cabinet appointment. But he did speak to the need for a more coordinated approach to national energy policy.

"If any administration wants to change these problems, there needs to be a more coordinated approach at the federal level to energy than what we have right now," Burgum said after a Tuesday news conference in Bismarck.

Burgum said the Trump administration wants to focus on large-scale changes, not incremental progress. "They are thinking about significant, substantial change," Burgum said. "They are thinking about changing the direction of how the federal government works."

He also said some of the authority given to intervening federal agencies could return to the states.

Burgum, a native of small-town Arthur, North Dakota, made his mark by investing in Great Plains Software, which he later sold to Microsoft. He went on to found real estate development firm Kilbourne Group, which is credited with revitalizing downtown Fargo, before seeking elected office for the first time in 2016.

When Burgum became governor in 2016, he was faced with thousands of demonstrators camping near the Missouri River in North Dakota in support of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe to oppose the Dakota Access Pipeline. The pipeline was built to transport crude oil out of North Dakota.

Although Burgum and the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe have opposing stances on the pipeline crossing, many credit the governor with improving relationships between the state and the five Native American tribes that share geography with North Dakota.

Mark Fox, chairman of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation, told the North Dakota Monitor earlier this year that Burgum would be a valuable ally to the tribes as a Cabinet member.

"There's so much he could help facilitate," said Fox, who also supported Burgum's bid for the presidency.

As governor, Burgum has championed the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library that's under construction near Theodore Roosevelt National Park in western North Dakota. Burgum has pushed federal officials to address deferred maintenance at the national park.

Sen. Kevin Cramer, R-N.D., said Burgum's love of nature and national parks make him well-suited to lead the Interior Department, one of the largest landowners in the world.

"He loves the land. He loves riding horseback. He loves hiking," Cramer told the North Dakota Monitor. "It's really a great fit for Doug and he'll do a great job for all of us, and he'll do North Dakota proud."

Michael Achterling is a reporter based in Bismarck. He recently worked as digital editor and city government reporter for the Detroit Lakes Tribune in Minnesota and as news director for KDLM/KRCQ/KBOT, a part of Leighton Broadcasting.

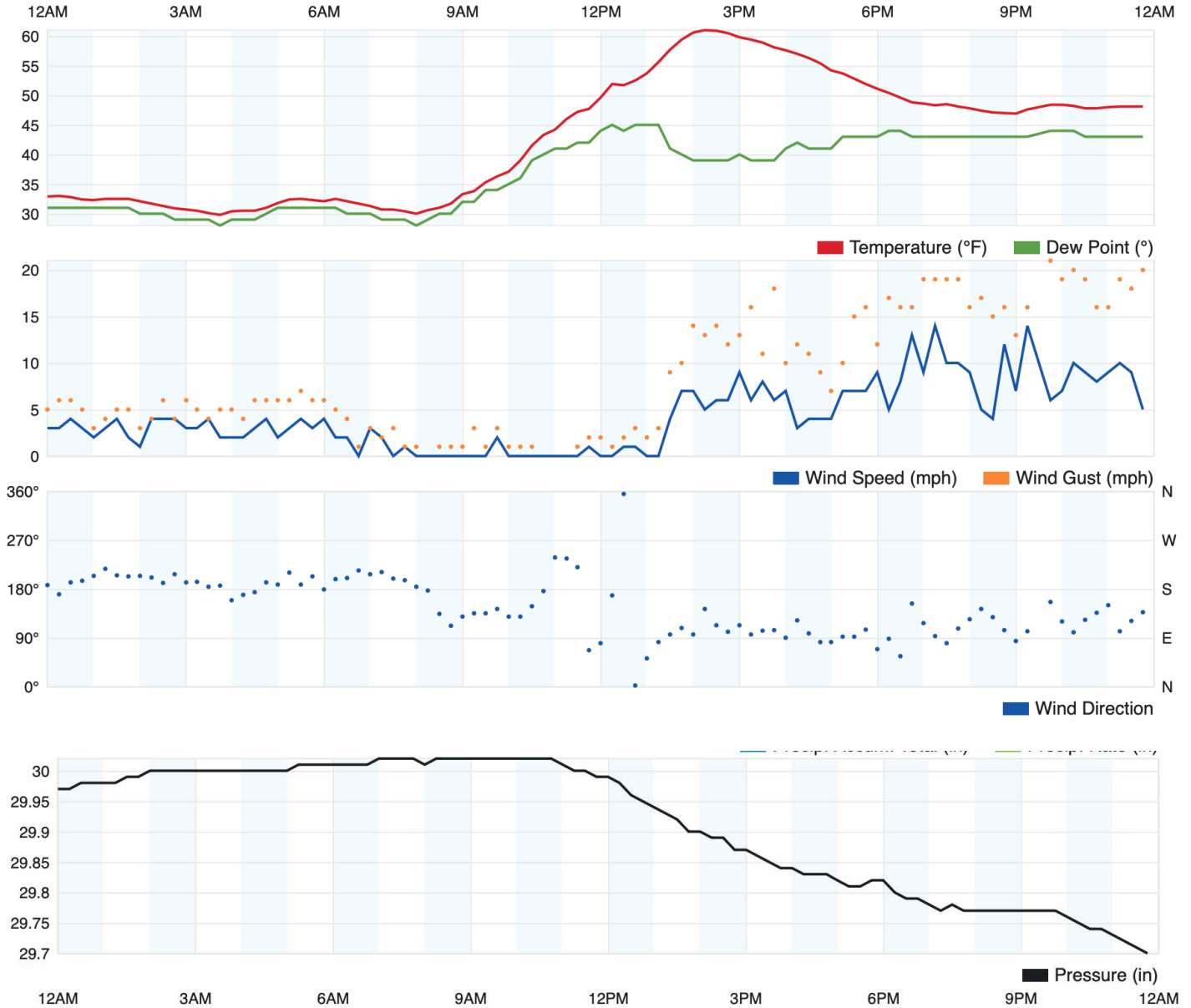
North Dakota Monitor Deputy Editor Jeff Beach is based in the Fargo area. His interests include agriculture, renewable energy and rural issues.

Mary Steurer is a reporter based in Bismarck for the North Dakota Monitor. A native of St. Louis, Steurer previously worked as the local government reporter for the Casper Star-Tribune newspaper in Wyoming.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 57 °F

Becoming
Sunny

Tonight



Low: 29 °F

Partly Cloudy

Sunday



High: 53 °F

Sunny

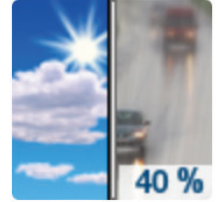
Sunday Night



Low: 29 °F

Mostly Clear

Monday



High: 54 °F

Mostly Sunny
then Chance
Rain

Warm Today

Windy over Central South Dakota this afternoon



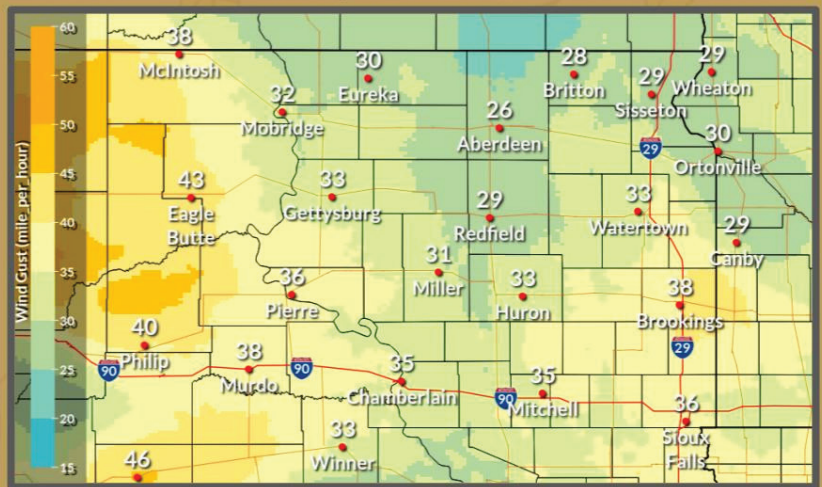
50s



Aberdeen, SD
weather.gov/abr

Peak Wind Gusts Today

Out of the west to southwest, gusts 30 to 40 mph over central South Dakota



We have only 3 more days of well above normal temperatures before cooler air settles across the Northern Plains. Highs today will be in the 50s, with decreasing clouds through much of the day. Winds will increase out of the west this afternoon, strongest over central South Dakota where gusts will peak between 30 and 40 mph.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 61 °F at 2:11 PM

Low Temp: 30 °F at 3:43 AM

Wind: 22 mph at 9:32 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 30 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 71 in 2001

Record Low: -12 in 1955

Average High: 42

Average Low: 19

Average Precip in Nov.: 0.44

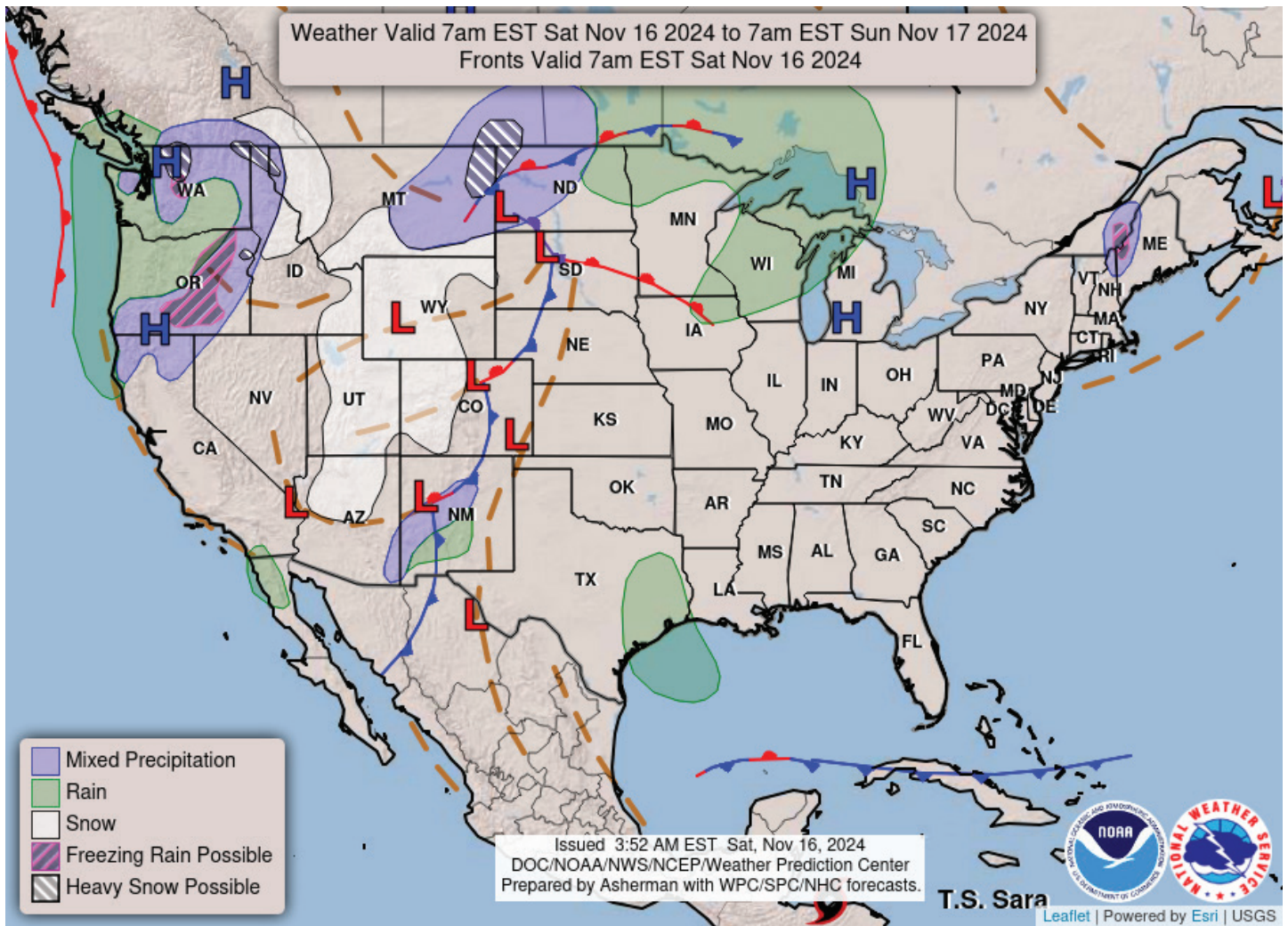
Precip to date in Nov.: 0.76

Average Precip to date: 20.91

Precip Year to Date: 20.64

Sunset Tonight: 5:02:31 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:33:26 am



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Today in Weather History

November 16, 1996: An area of low pressure brought 6 to 9 inches of snowfall to most of central and parts of north-central South Dakota on the 16th, while widespread freezing rain associated with the warm front of the system, along with 4 to 10 inches of snow, fell in northeast South Dakota. Travel was significantly affected, and a few minor accidents occurred during the storm. Several sporting events and activities were postponed or canceled. Strong north winds late on the 16th into early the 17th resulted in near-blizzard conditions across northeast South Dakota. Some storm total snowfall amounts include, 9.0 inches 12SSW of Harrold; 8.5 inches near Highmore; 8.2 inches in Roscoe; 8.0 in Eureka; 7.9 inches near Mellette; 7.0 inches in Waubay; 6.5 inches in Murdo and Redfield; 6.0 inches in Kennebec and Miller; 5.5 inches near Victor; and 5.3 inches in Sisseton.

1958 - More than six inches of snow fell at Tucson, AZ. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1959 - The most severe November cold wave in U.S. history was in progress. A weather observing station located 14 miles northeast of Lincoln MT reported a reading of 53 degrees below zero, which established an all-time record low temperature for the nation for the month of November. Their high that day was one degree above zero. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - High winds and heavy snow created blizzard conditions across parts of eastern Colorado. Wind gusts reached 68 mph at Pueblo, and snowfall totals ranged up to 37 inches at Echo Lake. In Wyoming, the temperature dipped to 14 degrees below zero at Laramie. Strong thunderstorms in Louisiana drenched Alexandria with 16.65 inches of rain in thirty hours, with an unofficial total of 21.21 inches north of Olla. Flash flooding in Louisiana caused five to six million dollars damage. (15th-16th) (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - A powerful low pressure system in the north central U.S. produced high winds across the Great Lakes Region, with wind gusts to 60 mph reported at Chicago IL. Heavy snow blanketed much of Minnesota, with eleven inches reported at International Falls. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Snow and gusty winds invaded the north central U.S. Winds gusting to 40 mph produced wind chill readings as cold as 25 degrees below zero, and blizzard conditions were reported in Nebraska during the late morning hours. High winds around a powerful low pressure system produced squalls in the Great Lakes Region. Winds gusted to 63 mph at Whitefish Point MI, and snowfall totals in Michigan ranged up to 19 inches at Hart, north of Muskegon. (15th-16th) (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2006: An early morning F3 tornado killed eight people, injured 20 others and left 100 people homeless in Riegelwood, North Carolina. This storm was the second deadliest tornado in the state in the past 50 years.



KNOWING AND DOING

A young, energetic salesman approached a wise, old farmer and offered to sell him a set of newly published books on "Farming: Things You Need to Know."

"If you buy them, read them carefully and study them thoroughly," said the confident young man, "you'll farm twice as good as you do now."

"Listen, young fellow," said the farmer, "I ain't farming half as good as I know how now!"

It's not what I do not know or understand about the Bible that troubles me, it's what I know and often do not apply as I go about my daily responsibilities.

At the conclusion of one of His lessons, Jesus said, "You know these things – now do them! That is the path of blessing."

Often we are anxious to purchase a new Bible that promises to provide insight and knowledge about the teachings of Scripture. And it seems as though there are new study Bibles published every month that offer "easy-to-understand" interpretations of difficult passages. Other editions promise to teach the reader how to study the Bible "inductively" or "deductively." Others focus on timelines and prophecies, culture and geography.

What is most helpful, however, is to actually read the Bible every day, meditate on its teachings and ask God, through His Holy Spirit, to teach us His ways.

Prayer: Father, help us to accept and apply Your Word that challenges us to "realize what is wrong in our lives"...and know that it will straighten us out to do right. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. 2 Timothy 3:16

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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Pay with Venmo: [@paperpaul](https://venmo.com/paperpaul) Phone Number to Confirm: 7460



WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.15.24

5 17 35 55 69 19

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$420,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[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 16 Hrs 32 Mins
DRAW: 55 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.15.24

5 28 34 38 44 13

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 47 Mins
DRAW: 55 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.13.24

5 19 20 24 29

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$101,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 47 Mins
DRAW: 55 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.13.24

14 41 45 55 59 13

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 16 Mins
DRAW: 55 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 17 Hrs 16 Mins
DRAW: 55 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

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP FOOTBALL

SDHSAA State Playoffs

Class 11AA Championship: Watertown 14, T F Riggs High School 13

Class 11B Championship: Winner 20, Sioux Valley 14

Class 9A Championship: Howard 38, Wolsey-Wessington 30

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

Regulators approve North Dakota section of planned 5-state Midwest carbon dioxide pipeline

By JACK DURA Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — North Dakota utility regulators granted approval on Friday for a span of a proposed carbon dioxide pipeline that would cross five Midwestern states — a key victory for the company that has faced vociferous landowner objections and various hurdles and setbacks in its plans.

The state Public Service Commission voted unanimously to approve a siting permit for Summit Carbon Solutions' modified, 333-mile route in North Dakota. The company's proposed \$8 billion, 2,500-mile pipeline system would carry tons of planet-warming CO2 emissions from 57 ethanol plants in five states for storage deep underground in North Dakota.

No construction has begun anywhere on Summit's proposed route. Iowa has approved the project, but other hurdles remain in North Dakota as well as South Dakota, Minnesota and Nebraska.

The approval is a win for the company after North Dakota initially denied a permit in 2023, shortly followed by rejection in South Dakota. Another company, Navigator CO2 Ventures, canceled its project around the same time due to the "unpredictable nature of the regulatory and government processes involved, particularly in South Dakota and Iowa."

Supporters cheer carbon capture projects as a way to combat climate change, with lucrative federal tax credits available for such efforts. The ethanol industry sees Summit's project opening up sustainable aviation fuel markets, a boost for ethanol and No. 1 corn producer Iowa.

North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum, now President-elect Donald Trump's choice for Interior Secretary, a position with wide influence over natural resources, has touted his state's underground CO2 storage potential as a "geologic jackpot." Carbon-capture skeptics say the technology is untested at scale and allows the fossil-fuel industry to continue largely unchanged.

Summit opponents, including many landowners across the Midwest, decry the potential of a pipe rupture releasing hazardous, heavy CO2 gas to flow over the land, endangering people's health and lives. They also fear the taking of their land through eminent domain.

North Dakota Public Service Commission Chairman Randy Christmann urged Summit not to use eminent domain, "at least not more than absolutely necessary." Eminent domain is not in the panel's jurisdiction or a part of the siting process, he said.

Summit CEO Lee Blank told reporters the company is pleased with the panel's decision. He said Summit has worked with landowners on a voluntary basis and will continue to do so.

"Our goal is, again, to acquire as much right of way possible as we can voluntarily, and ultimately at the end of the day, we hope to do 100% of that," Blank said.

Summit said Friday it has acquired easements for over 82% of its North Dakota route.

Republican state Sen. Jeff Magrum, an opponent whose district the pipeline would cross, said he'd rather

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see investments in roads, bridges and dams instead of "Green New Deal projects that don't create any benefit for our state or our country." He expects the panel's decision to be challenged.

In a statement, landowner attorney Brian Jorde said, "No surprise on the decision. We need to analyze the written decision. Like in Iowa, the courts will sort this out and ultimately decide if the PSC decision will stand or be reversed."

In August, the Iowa Utilities Commission issued Summit a hazardous liquid pipeline permit after approving the company's application in June. The panel also granted Summit the right of eminent domain over numerous parcels of land.

But the company cannot start construction in Iowa until it has route approvals from both Dakotas and approval for underground storage in North Dakota, among other requirements. The Iowa panel's decision sparked lawsuits in opposition.

Christmann said the North Dakota permit has no restrictions based on what any other states do.

The North Dakota panel had denied Summit a siting permit in August 2023. The regulators said Summit hadn't sufficiently addressed several issues, including geologic instability, wildlife areas, cultural resource impacts and some landowner concerns.

Soon afterward, the panel agreed to reconsider, beginning more than a year of meetings and document filings.

Summit submitted three storage facility permit applications to North Dakota's Department of Mineral Resources, but no decision has been made.

In 2022, Minnkota Power Cooperative and Summit agreed to collaborate on developing CO2 storage in central North Dakota, a pact that also lets Summit use Minnkota's previously permitted 100-million-ton underground storage.

In September 2023, South Dakota's Public Utilities Commission denied Summit's permit application after commission staff said the route would violate county ordinances for setback distances. Summit has said it plans to reapply this month for a permit.

In a referendum earlier this month, South Dakota voters rejected a suite of regulations that opponents said would deny local control over such projects and consolidate authority with state regulators. Supporters had promoted it as a "landowner bill of rights."

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission is expected to decide Dec. 12 whether to approve a 28-mile segment of pipeline that would connect an ethanol plant near Fergus Falls to Summit's network in North Dakota. An administrative law judge recommended that the commissioners find that the environmental review for the Minnesota section met the legal requirements, and issue a route permit to Summit.

In Nebraska, where there is no state regulatory process for CO2 pipelines, Summit is working with individual counties to advance its project. At least one county has denied a permit.

Presidential pause in relocations

South Dakota News Watch undefined

Sioux Falls, SD (South Dakota News Watch)

MITCHELL, S.D. - It's a rare sight to see Tim Allen in the wood-paneled office space just off of Mitchell's Main Street. Sitting behind the counter on a Monday in October, he calls a customer.

"This is Tim with Tobin's. Guys should be there probably about 3:00, 3:30 to move the stuff out of the basement. Okay. Yep. Thank you. You bet. Bye."

Allen, one of the owners of North American moving company Tobin Transfer, is usually on the road, driving cross-country with a semitrailer full of people's possessions.

But this year is a presidential election year and without fail (2020 doesn't count because of the pandemic), business slows down. His cross-country shipments are down 7% so far this year.

"This is about the stupidest year I've seen," Allen says.

And he's seen a lot. Allen's been in the business since he was 13 and started working full-time when his parents bought the company in 1978. His sister, Becky Riggs, was 14 when she started.

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"Our parents didn't let us go get into trouble and be hoodlums. They made us go to work," says Riggs, also an owner.

Through the decades, the moving business has gone through many changes. Insurance costs climbed, labor supply dwindled and semi trucks with automatic transmissions became the norm.

But there's at least one constant. Every four years the moving business takes a dip. Riggs doesn't even need to turn on the news to know there's a presidential election.

"I don't go to political rallies, but I know what's going on as soon as the phone don't ring," she says.

The why makes sense when Allen explains it.

"Companies don't know if the United States is going to take a different turn or if it's going to go back or going to move forward, everything is in an uproar," he says. So, many companies sit in a holding pattern, not relocating employees.

Just last month at a global conference in Washington for relocation companies, this topic was discussed.

Anthony Horton, CEO of Corporate Relocation International (CRI) was there. This year the company's volume is down 9-10% from 2023.

"Many companies sort of adopt a wait-and-see approach regarding hiring, relocations, other investments as they prefer to assess the political and regulatory landscape under the next administration before committing to any long-term plans," he tells News Watch.

And this presidential election was particularly uncertain. Economic policy proposals from President-elect Donald Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris were broad.

"They're both in their own way a little difficult to pin down," says Joseph Santos, director of Ness School of Management and Economics at South Dakota State University.

"That's the nature of political campaigning, to some extent. But they don't really have attached to them really, clearly defined plans in terms of policy."

North American Van Lines' corporate spokesperson declined to speak, citing the company's strict policy not to comment on political matters.

Sirva, which owns North American, Allied and Global Van Lines, among other relocation companies, produces a podcast. In an October episode titled "The Vote that Moves: Exploring the Impact of Political Elections on Global Talent Mobility," the participants discussed how 2024 is the biggest election year in world history, with half of the world's population voting in 72 countries.

Immigration is a key election topic globally, so who's elected can also make it harder for employees to relocate to certain countries.

Business in 2020 was once-in-a-lifetime for Allen. "You could have ran 24 hours a day and not moved everybody," he says.

He moved plenty of out-of-staters into South Dakota who were looking for fewer COVID restrictions and cheaper taxes, many from California and Washington.

According to U-Haul migration data from more than 2 million transactions, more trucks left California than entered in 2020, with the largest net loss of self-movers, ranking last in the nation for growth that year. Washington dropped from a top 5 growth state in 2019 to 36, indicating more people were leaving. South Dakota placed 25.

In the past two years, Allen has been contacted by seven of those families he moved into South Dakota in 2020. They now want to move out saying, "We can't deal with the politics in here," Allen recalls.

California remained dead last for growth in 2023 and Washington moved back toward the top with 7 place, according to more than 2.5 million U-Haul transactions. South Dakota climbed to 19 because it still had more people coming than leaving.

The American Trucking Associations, an industry trade group, says the economy generally dictates the direction of the moving industry.

"While it may be true that there is a level of uncertainty surrounding each election, we do not have data to demonstrate any measurable impact of elections on the industry. Economic indicators such as the federal interest rate and inflation are much more impactful," says spokesperson Jessica Gail.

Indeed, high interest rates serve a second punch this year to Allen's moving business. People don't want to upgrade their house with high interest rates on loans.

"So people can't get out of apartments and go to a home and start building equity neither. And it's just kind of that domino effect," he says.

In the office, Allen thumbs through a large desk calendar on the back counter. And yes, they prefer the paper. It's easier, as Riggs will tell you. And a calendar doesn't crash.

The daily squares filled with black ink show several moving appointments. But looks can be deceiving. They're short moves.

"These are both locals this afternoon," Allen points to today's date.

He expects cross-country travel to pick up in February, March and April. Until then, he spends more time in Mitchell with his wife. Allen's unsure if she's happy about that.

"Could be not such a good thing," he smiles.

This story is provided as a service of the Institute for Nonprofit News' On the Ground news wire. The Institute for Nonprofit News (INN) is a network of more than 475 independent, nonprofit newsrooms serving communities throughout the US, Canada, and globally. On the Ground is a service of INN, which aggregates the best of its members' elections and political content, and provides it free for republication.

Protesters' biggest day expected at UN climate talks, where progress is slow

By MELINA WALLING, SIBI ARASU and SETH BORENSTEIN Associated Press

BAKU, Azerbaijan (AP) — The United Nations climate talks neared the end of their first week on Saturday with negotiators still at work on how much wealthier nations will pay for developing countries to adapt to planetary warming. Meanwhile, activists planned actions on what is traditionally their biggest protest day during the two-week talks.

The demonstration in Baku, Azerbaijan is expected to be echoed at sites around the world in a global "day of action" for climate justice that's become an annual event.

Negotiators at COP29, as the talks are known, will return to a hoped-for deal that might be worth hundreds of billions of dollars to poorer nations. Many are in the Global South and already suffering the costly impacts of weather disasters fueled by climate change. Several experts have said \$1 trillion a year or more is needed both to compensate for such damages and to pay for a clean-energy transition that most countries can't afford on their own.

Panama environment minister Juan Carlos Navarro told The Associated Press he is "not encouraged" by what he's seeing at COP29 so far.

"What I see is a lot of talk and very little action," he said, noting that Panama is among the group of countries least responsible for warming emissions but most vulnerable to the damage caused by climate change-fueled disasters. He added that financing was not a point of consensus at the COP16 biodiversity talks this year, which suggests to him that may be a sticking point at these talks as well.

"We must face these challenges with a true sense of urgency and sincerity," he said. "We are dragging our feet as a planet."

The talks came in for criticism on several fronts Friday. Two former top U.N. officials signed a letter that suggested the process needs to shift from negotiation to implementation. And others, including former U.S. Vice President Al Gore, criticized the looming presence of the fossil fuel industry and fossil-fuel-reliant nations in the talks. One analysis found at least 1,770 people with fossil fuel ties on the attendees list for the Baku talks.

Progress may get a boost as many nations' ministers, whose approval is necessary for whatever negotiators do, arrive in the second week.

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Jake Paul beats 58-year-old Mike Tyson as the hits don't match the hype

By SCHUYLER DIXON AP Sports Writer

ARLINGTON, Texas (AP) — The boos from a crowd wanting more action were growing again when Jake Paul dropped his gloves before the final bell, and bowed toward 58-year-old Mike Tyson.

Paying homage to one of the biggest names in boxing history didn't do much for the fans that filled the home of the NFL's Dallas Cowboys on Friday night.

Paul won an eight-round unanimous decision over Tyson as the hits didn't match the hype in a fight between the 27-year-old YouTuber-turned-boxer and the former heavyweight champion in his first sanctioned pro bout in almost 20 years.

All the hate from the pre-fight buildup was gone, replaced by boos from bewildered fans hoping for more from a fight that drew plenty of questions about its legitimacy long beforehand.

The fight wasn't close on the judge's cards, with one giving Paul an 80-72 edge and the other two calling it 79-73.

"Let's give it up for Mike," Paul said in the ring, not getting much response from a crowd that started filing out before the decision was announced. "He's the greatest to ever do it. I look up to him. I'm inspired by him."

Tyson came after Paul immediately after the opening bell and landed a couple of quick punches but didn't try much else the rest of the way.

Even fewer rounds than the normal 10 or 12 and two-minute rounds instead of three, along with heavier gloves designed to lessen the power of punches, couldn't do much to generate action.

Paul was more aggressive after the quick burst from Tyson in the opening seconds, but the punching wasn't very efficient. There were quite a few wild swings and misses.

"I was trying to hurt him a little bit," said Paul, who improved to 11-1. "I was scared he was going to hurt me. I was trying to hurt him. I did my best. I did my best."

Tyson mostly sat back and waited for Paul to come to him, with a few exceptions. It was quite the contrast to the co-main event, another slugfest between Katie Taylor and Amanda Serrano in which Taylor kept her undisputed super lightweight championship with another disputed decision.

Paul said he eased up starting about the third round because he thought Tyson was tired and vulnerable. "I wanted to give the fans a show, but I didn't want to hurt somebody that didn't need to be hurt," Paul said.

It was the first sanctioned fight since 2005 for Tyson, who fought Roy Jones Jr. in a much more entertaining exhibition in 2020. Paul started fighting a little more than four years ago.

"I didn't prove nothing to anybody, only to myself," Tyson said when asked what it meant to complete the fight. "I'm not one of those guys that looks to please the world. I'm just happy with what I can do."

The fight was originally scheduled for July 20 but had to be postponed when Tyson was treated for a stomach ulcer after falling ill on a flight. His record is now 50-7 with 44 knockouts.

Tyson slapped Paul on the face during the weigh-in a night before the fight, and they traded insults in several of the hype events, before and after the postponement.

The hate was long gone by the end of the anticlimactic fight.

"I have so much respect for him," Paul said. "That violence, war thing between us, like after he slapped me, I wanted to be aggressive and take him down and knock him out and all that stuff. That kind of went away as the rounds went on."

The fight set a Texas record for combat sports with a gate of nearly \$18 million, according to organizers, and Netflix had problems with the feed in the streaming platform's first live combat sports event. Netflix has more than 280 million subscribers globally.

"This is the biggest event," Paul said. "Over 120 million people on Netflix. We crashed the site."

Among the celebrities were basketball Hall of Famer Shaquille O'Neal and former NFL star Rob Gronkowski, along with Cowboys owner Jerry Jones.

Evander Holyfield and Lennox Lewis, two foes with Tyson's heyday, greeted him in his locker room before

the fight.

Tyson infamously bit Holyfield on the ear in a 1997 bout, and appeared to have one of his gloves in his mouth several times during the Paul bout. He was asked if he had problem with his mouthpiece.

"I have a habit of biting my gloves," Tyson said. "I have a biting fixation."

"I've heard about that," the interview responded.

Mario Barrios retained the WBC welterweight title in a draw with Abel Ramos on the undercard. Barrios was in control early before Ramos dominated the middle rounds. Each had a knockdown in the 12-round bout.

It was the first fight for the 29-year-old Barrios since he was appointed the WBC welterweight champ when Terence Crawford started the process of moving up from the 147-pound class.

Barrios, who is 29-2-1, won the interim WBC title with a unanimous decision over Yordenis Ugás last year. The 33-year-old Ramos is 28-6-3.

Fire engulfs hospital ward in northern India, killing 10 newborn babies

By BISWAJEET BANERJEE Associated Press

LUCKNOW, India (AP) — A fire tore through a neonatal intensive care unit in a hospital in northern India, killing 10 newborn babies and injuring 16 others, authorities said.

The fire occurred late Friday at a hospital in Jhansi city in India's Uttar Pradesh state. Officials said the blaze spread quickly through the ward, where 55 infants were being treated. Forty-five babies were rescued and are receiving medical care, said Bimal Kumar Dubey, a local official.

It was not immediately clear what sparked the blaze. Brajesh Pathak, the deputy chief minister of the state, visited the hospital and met with families on Saturday. He pledged government support for the victims' families and promised a thorough investigation.

"We will identify those responsible for this tragedy and take strict action. The government stands with families during this difficult time," he said.

When the firefighters arrived, the ward was engulfed in flames and plumes of smoke. Rescuers had to break through windows to reach the newborn babies. Eyewitnesses said the rescue operation began about 30 minutes after the fire erupted, delaying evacuation efforts.

The accident has raised questions over the hospital's safety measures. While fire alarms had been installed in the intensive care unit, parents and witnesses said they did not activate during the blaze. Hospital staff acted only after they saw signs of smoke and fire.

"If the safety alarm had worked, we could have acted sooner and saved more lives," said Naresh Kumar, a parent who lost his baby.

Akhtar Hussain, whose son was rescued and is receiving treatment in an adjacent ward, agreed that the tragedy could have been prevented if the hospital had better safety protocols.

Fires are common in India, where building laws and safety norms are often flouted by builders and residents. Poor maintenance and lack of proper firefighting equipment in the country also leads to deaths.

Operation False Target: How Russia plotted to mix a deadly new weapon among decoy drones in Ukraine

By EMMA BURROWS, HANNA ARHIROVA and LORI HINNANT Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — At a secretive factory in Russia's central grasslands, engineers are manufacturing hundreds of decoy drones meant to overwhelm Ukrainian defenses as they try to protect against a horrific new weapon, an Associated Press investigation has found.

The plant at Russia's Alabuga Special Economic Zone recently started churning out thermobaric drones alongside the decoys, the investigation found. The thermobaric warheads create a vortex of high pressure and heat that can penetrate thick walls. They suck out all the oxygen in their path, and have a fearsome reputation because of the injuries inflicted even outside the initial blast site: Collapsed lungs, crushed

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eyeballs, brain damage.

Russia came up with the plan for decoys in late 2022 and codenamed it Operation False Target, according to a person familiar with Russia's drone production who spoke on condition of anonymity because the industry is highly sensitive. The idea was to launch armed drones along with dozens of decoys, sometimes stuffed with rags or foam, and indistinguishable on radar from those carrying real bombs. Ukrainian forces must make split-second decisions about how to expend scarce resources to save lives and preserve critical infrastructure.

"The idea was to make a drone which would create a feeling of complete uncertainty for the enemy. So he doesn't know whether it's really a deadly weapon ... or essentially a foam toy," the person said. With the thermobarics, there is now a "huge risk" an armed drone could deviate from its course and end up in a residential area where the "damage will be simply terrifying," he said.

Russia's drone factory

In recent weeks, decoys have filled Ukraine's skies by the dozens, each one appearing as an indistinguishable blip on military radar screens. During the first weekend of November, the Kyiv region spent 20 hours under air alert, and the sound of buzzing drones mingled with the boom of air defenses and rifle shots.

Unarmed decoys now make up more than half the drones targeting Ukraine, according to the person and Serhii Beskrestnov, a Ukrainian electronics expert whose black military van is kitted out with electronic jammers to down drones.

Both the unarmed decoys and the armed Iranian-designed Shahed drones are being built at a factory in Russia's Alabuga Special Economic Zone, an industrial complex set up in 2006 about 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) east of Moscow to attract businesses and investment to Tatarstan. It expanded after the 2022 invasion of Ukraine and some sectors switched to military production, adding new buildings and renovating existing sites, according to satellite images analyzed by The Associated Press.

In social media videos, the factory promotes itself as an innovation hub. But David Albright of the Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security said Alabuga's current purpose is purely to produce and sell drones to Russia's Ministry of Defense. The videos and other promotional media were taken down after an AP investigation found that many of the African women recruited to fill labor shortages there complained they were duped into taking jobs at the plant.

Russia and Iran signed a \$1.7 billion deal for the Shaheds in 2022, after President Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine, and Moscow began using Iranian imports of the unmanned aerial vehicles, or UAVs, in battle later that year. Soon after the deal was signed, production started in Alabuga.

In October, Moscow attacked with at least 1,889 drones – 80% more than in August, according to an AP analysis tracking the drones for months. On Saturday, Russia launched 145 drones across Ukraine, just days after the re-election of Donald Trump threw into doubt U.S. support for the country.

Since summer, most drones crash, are shot down or are diverted by electronic jamming, according to an AP analysis of Ukrainian military briefings. Less than 6% hit a discernible target, according to the data analyzed by AP since the end of July. But the sheer numbers mean a handful can slip through every day – and that is enough to be deadly.

Daily drone swarms

The swarms have become a demoralizing fact of life for Ukrainians.

Russian drone tactics continue to evolve. Now, more powerful missiles often follow close behind as air defenses are exhausted by the drones. The most destructive are the ballistic and cruise missiles that fly many times faster than the drones, which buzz loudly and can be tracked by the naked eye.

Even the decoys can be useful to Russia. One decoy with a live-feed camera allows the aircraft to geolocate Ukraine's air defenses and relay the information to Russia in the final moments of its mechanical life.

Night after night, Ukrainian sharpshooters spring into action to down the drones with portable surface-to-air missiles.

One sharpshooter, who like most Ukrainian soldiers asked to be identified by his call-sign Rosmaryn, said he's shot down perhaps a dozen drones in all over nearly two years and saw one that was stuffed

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with rags and foam. Rosmaryn sees his adversary in almost human terms, describing the aircraft's quest to outwit his small unit.

"It was part of a swarm, flying as one of the last ones," he said. "When it's in the sky, we can't tell what kind it is, because everything is inside the drone. We only find out after it's shot down."

Many fly at 2,000 to 3,000 meters (6,500 feet to around 10,000 feet) before dropping to lower altitudes on their final approach, Rosmaryn said. Leaked videos suggest Ukraine is now using helicopters to shoot down the high-altitude drones.

Three decoys of Russian origin have crashed in Moldova in the past week, authorities there said.

Thanks to optical trickery, radar can't distinguish a drone armed with a Shahed's usual 50-kilogram payload of explosives or with a thermobaric weapon – also known as a vacuum bomb – from those without a warhead or topped with live-feed surveillance cameras. There are also other even rougher-quality drones, armed and unarmed, but in fewer quantities than the Shahed-style unmanned aircraft.

That's why, even knowing that decoys now make up most of an incoming swarm, Ukraine can't afford to let anything through.

"For us, it's just a point on the radar ... It has speed, direction, and altitude," said Col. Yuriy Ihnat, an Air Force spokesman. "We have no way of identifying the exact target during flight, so we have to either jam them with electronic warfare or use firepower to neutralize them. The enemy uses these to scatter our attention."

The engines and electronics for the armed Shaheds and decoys are a mix of Chinese and Western imports, according to fragments seen by The Associated Press at a Ukrainian military lab. Without them, the drones can't fly. Despite nearly three years of sanctions, Moscow can still source the parts – largely from China and via third countries in Central Asia and the Middle East.

Halfway through the series of air alerts on Nov. 2, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the swarms of Shaheds, which he put at 2,000 for the month of October alone, were made possible by Western technology slipping through sanctions.

"Included in this many Shaheds are more than 170,000 components that should have been blocked for delivery to Russia. Microcircuits, microcontrollers, processors, many different parts, without which this terror would simply be impossible," Zelenskyy said.

The joint manufacturing of the drones — some to carry bombs, others to divert attention — is saving Russia's military money. Production of the decoys started earlier this year and now the plant turns out about 40 of the cheaper unarmed drones a day and around 10 armed ones, which cost an estimated \$50,000 and take longer to produce, according to the person with knowledge of Russian drone production.

The Russian news outlet Izvestia in late October said the aim of the decoy is to "weaken" the enemy by forcing it to waste ammunition before sending in armed Shaheds.

Both Beskrestnov and the person familiar with Russian drone production said engineers at Alabuga are also constantly experimenting, putting Moscow at the cutting edge of drone production. To make electronic interference harder, they add Ukrainian SIM cards, roaming SIMS, Starlinks, fiberoptics – and can sometimes receive real-time feedback before the drones are jammed, downed or run out of fuel. Sometimes they attach a silver-painted foam ball to make the drone seem larger on a radar.

But the latest thermobaric variant is causing new anguish in Ukraine.

Thermobaric fears

From a military point of view, thermobarics are ideal for going after targets that are either inside fortified buildings or deep underground.

Alabuga's thermobaric drones are particularly destructive when they strike buildings, because they are also loaded with ball bearings to cause maximum damage even beyond the superheated blast, said Albright.

Beskrestnov, who is more widely known as Flash and whose black military van is kitted out with electronic jammers to down drones, said the thermobarics were first used over the summer and estimated they now make up between 3% and 5% of all drones.

"This type of warhead has the possibility to destroy a huge building, especially block flats. And it's very effective if the Russian Federation tries to attack our power plants," he said.

They have a fearsome reputation because of the physical effects even on people caught outside the initial blast site, said Arthur van Coler, an expert in international humanitarian law at South Africa's University of Fort Hare.

"With a thermobaric explosion, because of the cloud it would create, everything in its radius would be affected," he said. "It creates massive fear in the civilian population. Thermobaric weapons have created this idea that they are really horrible weapons and that creates fear."

The family of Israeli-American hostage pleads with Biden and Trump to bring hostages home

By MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Over the past two weeks, the political landscape around the negotiations for a cease-fire in Gaza have undergone a dramatic transformation.

The American elections, the firing of Israel's popular defense minister, Qatar's decision to suspend its mediation, and the ongoing war in Lebanon all seem to have pushed the possibility for a cease-fire in Gaza further away than it has been in more than a year of conflict.

Still, some families of the dozens of hostages who remain captive in Gaza are desperately hoping the changes will reignite momentum to bring their loved ones home — though the impact of Donald Trump returning to the White House and a hard-line new defense minister in Israel remains unknown.

"I think maybe there is new hope," said Varda Ben Baruch, the grandmother of Israeli-American hostage Edan Alexander, 20, a soldier kidnapped from his base on the Gaza border during the Hamas attack on Oct. 7, 2023.

Alexander's parents, Adi and Yael Alexander, who live in New Jersey, met this week with Trump and President Joe Biden in Washington and pleaded with them to work together to bring all the hostages home in a single deal.

"As a grandmother, I say, cooperate — Trump wants peace in this region, Biden has always said he wants to release the hostages, so work together and do something important for the lives of human beings," Ben Baruch said.

She said neither leader offered specific details or plans for releasing the hostages or restarting negotiations for a Gaza cease-fire.

Talks have hit a wall in recent months, largely over Hamas' demands for guarantees that a full hostage release will bring an end to Israel's campaign in Gaza and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's vows to continue fighting until Hamas is crushed and unable to rearm.

"We're not involved in politics, not American and not Israeli, the families are above politics, we just want our loved ones home," she said. "Edan was kidnapped because he was Jewish, not because he voted for a certain party."

More than 250 people were kidnapped and 1,200 killed when Hamas militants burst across the border and carried out a bloody attack on southern Israeli communities. Israel's campaign of retaliation since has killed more than 43,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, and some 90% of its 2.3 million people have been displaced.

As militants attacked on the morning of Oct. 7, Edan Alexander, then 19, was able to send a quick message to his mother amid the intense fighting around his base. He told her that despite having shrapnel embedded in his helmet from the explosions, he had managed to get to a protected area. After 7 a.m., his family lost contact.

Alexander was considered missing as the family desperately searched hospitals for him. After five days, friends recognized him in a video of Hamas militants capturing soldiers.

The family was happy: He was alive, Ben Baruch said. "But we didn't understand what we were entering into, what is still happening now."

When a week-long cease-fire last November brought the release of 105 hostages in exchange for 240

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Palestinian prisoners, some of the freed hostages said they had seen Alexander in captivity. Ben Baruch said they told her Alexander kept his cool, encouraging them that everyone would be released soon.

Ben Baruch said she was disheartened when Netanyahu last week fired Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, who she said had consistently reassured the families that the hostages were at the top of his agenda.

"I felt he was a partner," she said. Gallant was replaced by a Netanyahu loyalist who has urged a tough line against Hamas.

A mass protest movement urging the government to reach a hostage deal has shown signs of weariness, and hostage families have struggled to keep their campaign in the headlines. A delegation of former hostages and their relatives met with the pope on Thursday and expressed hope the incoming and outgoing American administrations would bring their loved ones home.

In Tel Aviv's Hostage Square, the headquarters of the protest movement, opinions were mixed on the effect of Trump's election on hostages.

"I don't think this is good for Israel or the hostages, I'm really scared of him," said David Danino, a 45-year-old hi-tech worker from Tel Aviv. He was at Hostages Square with his family, visiting from France, who wanted to pay their respects.

Danino noted that Israel had already achieved many of its war goals, including killing Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar and Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah. "They are building us a photo of what is 'victory,' but how is there victory without the hostages?" he asked.

Others thought Trump's reputation might help the situation.

"When he decides to do something, he does it, without blinking, and he can create ultimatums," said Orly Vitman, a 54-year-old former special education teacher from the Tel Aviv suburb of Holon.

She comes every few months to the square with her daughter to light candles in honor of the hostages. While she was opposed to the firing of Gallant in the middle of the war, she was heartened by Trump's election.

"We will have the legitimacy and ability to use the full force of what we know how to do," she said.

Ben Baruch, a philanthropist and accomplished artist whose modernist sculptures dot the Tel Aviv home where she has lived for 52 years, said she has pushed everything aside in her life to focus on the struggle to bring her grandson home. Her days are filled with meetings, interviews, rallies, protests and communal prayer sessions uniting different groups of Israelis from across the religious spectrum.

"It's like people's lives went back to their routine, but ours did not," she said. "There's nothing left to say. All the words have been said. We have heard everything. We have met with everyone. But they are still there."

In the polar bear capital of the world, a community lives with the predator next door and loves it

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

CHURCHILL, Manitoba (AP) — Sgt. Ian Van Nest rolls slowly through the streets of Churchill, his truck outfitted with a rifle and a barred back seat to hold anyone he has to arrest. His eyes dart back and forth, then settle on a crowd of people standing outside a van. He scans the area for safety and then quietly addresses the group's leader, unsure of the man's weapons.

"How are you today?" Van Nest asks. The leader responds with a wary, "We OK for you here?"

"You're good. You got a lot of distance there. When you have people disembarking from the vehicle you should have a bear monitor," Van Nest, a conservation officer for the province of Manitoba, cautions as the tourists gaze at a polar bear on the rocks. "So, if that's you, just have your shotgun with you, right? Slugs and cracker shells if you have or a scare pistol."

It's the beginning of polar bear season in Churchill, a tiny town on a spit of land jutting into Hudson Bay, and keeping tourists safe from hungry and sometimes fierce bears is an essential job for Van Nest and many others. And it's become harder as climate change shrinks the Arctic sea ice the bears depend on to hunt, forcing them to prowl inland earlier and more often in search of food, according to the International

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Union for the Conservation of Nature, a group of scientists that tracks how endangered species are.

"You're seeing more bears because there are more bears on the land for longer periods of time to be seen" and they are willing to take more risks, getting closer to people, said Polar Bears International research and policy director Geoff York. There are about 600 polar bears in this Western Hudson Bay population, about half what it was 40 years ago, but that's still close to one bear for every resident of Churchill.

Yet this remote town not only lives with the predator next door, but depends upon and even loves it. Visitors eager to see polar bears saved the town from shrinking out of existence when a military base closed in the 1970s, dropping the population from a few thousand to about 870. A 2011 government study calculated that the average polar bear tourist spends about \$5,000 a visit, pumping more than \$7 million into a tiny town that boasts fancy restaurants and more than two dozen small places to stay amid dirt roads and no stoplights.

"We're obviously used to bears so (when you see one) you don't start to tremble," Mayor Mike Spence said. "It's their area too. It's important how the community coexists with bears and wildlife in general to really get along. We're all connected."

It's been more than a decade since a bear mauled two people in an alley late on Halloween night before a third person scared off the animal.

"It was the scariest thing that's ever happened in my life," said Erin Greene, who along with a 72-year-old man who tried to fight off the bear with a shovel survived their injuries. Greene, who had come to Churchill the year before for a job in the tourist trade, said it was the other animals of Churchill — the beluga whales that she sings to as she runs paddleboat tours and her dozen rescued retired sled dogs — that helped her recover from the trauma.

There have been no attacks since then, but the town is watchful.

At Halloween, trick-or-treating occurs when bears are hungriest, and dozens of volunteers line the streets to keep trouble at bay. Any time of year, troublesome bears that wander into town too often may be put into the polar bear jail — a big Quonset hut-style structure with 28 concrete-and-steel cells — before being returned to the wild. The building doesn't fill up, but it can get busy enough to be noisy from banging and growling inside, Van Nest said.

Residents show polar bear pride in a way that mixes terror and fun, kind of like a rollercoaster.

"You know we're the polar bear capital of the world, right? We have the product, it's just about getting out there to see the bears safely," said Dave Daley, who owns a gift shop, runs dog sleds and talks up the city like the former Chamber of Commerce president he is. "I always tell tourists or whatever "You know what, they're the T. rex like, of the dinosaur era. They're the Lords of the Arctic. They'll eat you."

Usually they don't.

The military base's rocket launch site seemed to keep bears away, and when it closed in the 1970s, they came around more, longtime residents said. So Churchill and province officials "put together a polar bear alert program to make sure the community members were looked after, protected," said Spence, mayor since 1995.

The town's old curfew siren blares nightly at 10 p.m., suggesting to people that it's time to go home for safety from bears. But on this Saturday night, three different bonfire parties are going on at the town beach — a spot next to the school, library and hospital that is a particular hot spot for bears coming inland. Yet no one is leaving.

Then a truck shows up, and a lone figure — one of government's paid guards — gets out, armed with a shotgun. He walks out on the dunes about 100 yards from the parties and scans the horizon for polar bears. The guards are expected to scare any bears away with warning shots, flares, bear spray or noise — not kill them.

"It's just everybody watches out for everybody," Spence said. "So it's just, it's just normal. It kicks into gear as a community that lives alongside polar bears, you're always accustomed to coming out of your house and you look like this and you look ahead. And that's just in your DNA now."

Georgina Berg recalls growing up in the 1970s outside of Churchill, where many First Nations people

lived, and how differently her father and mother reacted to a bear sighting. Her father, she said, would see a bear poking in garbage and just walk on by.

"He said, 'If you don't bother them, then they won't bother you,'" she recalled.

When a bear came near in later years, after her father had died, her mom was scared.

"Everything was like pandemonium. Everybody was yelling, and all the kids had to come in and everybody had to go home. And then we stayed silent in the house for a long time until we knew for sure that bear was gone," Berg recalled.

For Van Nest, the provincial officer, the group he came upon that day was plenty safe from a bear about 300 yards (meters) away. He said the bear was "putting on a bit of a show" for the tourists.

"This is a great situation to be in," he said. "The tourists are a safe distance away and the bear's doing his natural thing and not being harassed by anybody."

An Indian family froze to death crossing the Canada-US border, a perilous trip becoming more common

By MICHAEL GOLDBERG and RYAN J. FOLEY Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — On the last night of their lives, Jagdish Patel, his wife and their two young children tried to slip into the U.S. across a near-empty stretch of the Canadian border.

Wind chills reached minus 36 Fahrenheit (minus 38 Celsius) that night in January 2022 as the family from India set out on foot to meet a waiting van. They walked amid vast farm fields and bulky snowdrifts, navigating in the black of an almost-moonless night.

The driver, waiting in northern Minnesota, messaged his boss: "Make sure everyone is dressed for the blizzard conditions, please."

Coordinating things in Canada, federal prosecutors say, was Harshkumar Patel, an experienced smuggler nicknamed "Dirty Harry." On the U.S. side was Steve Shand, the driver recently recruited by Patel at a casino near their Florida homes, prosecutors say.

The two men, whose trial is scheduled to start Monday, are accused of being part of a sophisticated human smuggling operation feeding a fast-growing population of Indians living illegally in the U.S. Both have pleaded not guilty.

Over the five weeks the two worked together, documents filed by prosecutors allege they spoke often about the bitter cold as they smuggled five groups of Indians over that quiet stretch of border.

"16 degrees cold as hell," Shand messaged during an earlier trip. "They going to be alive when they get here?"

On the last trip, on Jan. 19, 2022, Shand was to pick up 11 more Indian migrants, including the Patels. Only seven survived.

Canadian authorities found the Patels later that morning, dead from the cold.

In Jagdish Patel's frozen arms was the body of his 3-year-old son, Dharmik, wrapped in a blanket.

Dreams of leaving India

The narrow streets of Dingucha, a quiet village in the western Indian state of Gujarat, are spattered with ads to move overseas.

"Make your dream of going abroad come true," one poster says, listing three tantalizing destinations: "Canada. Australia. USA."

This is where the family's deadly journey began.

Jagdish Patel, 39, grew up in Dingucha. He and his wife, Vaishaliben, who was in her mid-30s, lived with his parents, raising their 11-year-old daughter, Vihangi, and Dharmik. (Patel is a common Indian surname and they are unrelated to Harshkumar Patel.) The couple were schoolteachers, local news reports say.

The family was fairly well off by local standards, living in a well-kept, two-story house with a front patio and a wide veranda.

"It wasn't a lavish life," said Vaibhav Jha, a local reporter who spent days in the village. "But there was no urgent need, no desperation."

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Experts say illegal immigration from India is driven by everything from political repression to a dysfunctional American immigration system that can take years, if not decades, to navigate legally.

But much is rooted in economics, and how even low-wage jobs in the West can ignite hopes for a better life.

Those hopes have changed Dingucha.

Today, so many villagers have gone overseas — legally and otherwise — that blocks of homes stand vacant and the social media feeds of those who remain are filled with old neighbors showing off houses and cars.

That drives even more people to leave.

"There was so much pressure in the village, where people grew up aspiring to the good life," Jha said.

Smuggling networks were glad to help, charging fees that could reach \$90,000 per person. In Dingucha, Jha said, many families afforded that by selling farmland.

Satveer Chaudhary is a Minneapolis-based immigration attorney who has helped migrants exploited by motel owners, many of them Gujaratis.

Smugglers with ties to the Gujarati business community have built an underground network, he said, bringing in workers willing to do low- or even no-wage jobs.

"Their own community has taken advantage of them," Chaudhary said.

The pipeline of illegal immigration from India has long existed but has increased sharply along the U.S.-Canada border. The U.S. Border Patrol arrested more than 14,000 Indians on the Canadian border in the year ending Sept. 30, which amounted to 60% of all arrests along that border and more than 10 times the number two years ago.

By 2022, the Pew Research Center estimates there were more than 725,000 Indians living illegally in the U.S., behind only Mexicans and El Salvadorans.

In India, investigating officer Dilip Thakor said media attention had led to the arrest of three men in the Patel case, but hundreds of such cases don't even reach the courts.

With so many Indians trying to get to the U.S., the smuggling networks see no need to warn off customers.

They "tell people that it's very easy to cross into the U.S. They never tell them of the dangers involved," Thakor said.

U.S. prosecutors allege Patel and Shand were part of a sprawling operation, with people to scout for business in India, acquire Canadian student visas, arrange transportation and smuggle migrants into the U.S., mostly via Washington state or Minnesota.

On Monday, at the federal courthouse in Fergus Falls, Minnesota, Patel, 29, and Shand, 50, will each face four counts related to human smuggling.

Patel's attorney, Thomas Leinenweber, told The Associated Press his client came to America to escape poverty and build a better life and "now stands unjustly accused of participating in this horrible crime."

Shand's attorney's did not return calls seeking comment. Prosecutors say Shand told investigators that Patel paid him about \$25,000 for the five trips.

His final passengers, though, never made it.

The last night

By 3 a.m. on Jan. 19, 2022, the 11 Indian migrants had spent hours wandering in gusting snow and brutal cold trying to find Shand. Many were in jeans and rubber work boots. None wore serious winter clothing.

Shand, though, was stuck. Prosecutors allege he had been heading to the pickup spot in a rented 15-passenger van when he drove into a ditch roughly a half-mile (0.8 kilometers) from the border.

Eventually, two migrants stumbled across the van. Sometime later, a passing pipeline company worker pulled the vehicle from the ditch.

Soon after that, a U.S. Border Patrol agent, on watch for migrants after boot prints were found near the border, pulled over Shand.

Shand repeatedly insisted there was no one else outside, even as five more desperate Indians wandered to the vehicle from the fields, including one going in and out of consciousness.

They had been walking for more than 11 hours.

There were no children among the migrants, but one man had a backpack filled with toys, children's clothes and diapers. He said a family of four Indians asked him to hold it, because they had to carry their young son.

Sometime in the night they had become separated.

Hours later, the Patels' bodies were found just inside Canada, in a field near where the migrants had crossed into the U.S.

Jagdish was holding Dharmik, with daughter Vihangi nearby. Vaishaliben was a short walk away.

Hemant Shah, an Indian-born businessman living in Winnipeg, some 70 miles (110 kilometers) north of where the migrants were found, helped organize a virtual prayer service for the Patels.

He's accustomed to hard winters and can't fathom the suffering they endured.

"How could these people have even thought about going and crossing the border?" Shah said.

Greed, he said, had taken four lives: "There was no humanity."

House elections produced a stalemate. Can Republicans figure out how to work with a thin majority?

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — After one of the most chaotic and least productive sessions in modern history, voters made a surprising choice in elections for the U.S. House -- they overwhelmingly stuck with the status quo.

House Republicans will hold onto a thin majority, and while the chamber's exact partisan divide is still to be determined as votes are tallied in a handful of states, the results of 435 House races nationwide have produced hardly any change to the makeup of the chamber.

In fact, it's more like a stalemate: Republicans and Democrats have each flipped seven seats, while just eight incumbents nationwide have lost their races.

The results show just how entrenched the political dynamics have become in a legislative chamber that is meant to closely reflect the will of the people. Neither Donald Trump's sweep of swing states nor a record of two years marked by infighting among GOP House members seemed to weigh much on House election results. Instead, the contest for control of the chamber boiled down to just a couple dozen politically divided districts and fewer truly close races even as House candidates nationwide spent a combined \$1.5 billion, according to Open Secrets, which tracks political spending.

House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries called it "bitterly disappointing" to see his party's bid to retake the House fall short by just a few seats. But he also made sure to note, "Notwithstanding the adverse political environment that happened with a Trump wave sweeping every single battleground state in America, Democrats will actually have increased the number of seats in the new Congress."

Still, that hasn't stopped Republican leaders from taking a victory lap and talking of a mandate to implement a conservative agenda.

"On Election Day, Americans sent a clear message to reject the consequences of Democratic control," said Rep. Richard Hudson, the chair of the GOP's House campaign committee, adding, "That's why voters delivered House Republicans a majority and sent Donald Trump to the White House in a landslide."

Trump is on track to win the popular vote for the first time, but it will likely be a narrow victory once all ballots are counted, reflecting how politically deadlocked the country has become. In the House, the margins will also be close, particularly after Trump chose several House Republicans for roles in his administration.

"Every single vote will count," said House Speaker Mike Johnson. "Because if someone gets ill, or has a car accident or a late flight on their plane, then it affects the votes on the floor."

Johnson's party held onto the majority largely thanks to two seats the party flipped in Pennsylvania, as well as three more that were redistricted by the GOP-controlled North Carolina General Assembly to favor their party.

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Democrats, meanwhile, did best in New York — Jeffries' home state — where they flipped three seats. They also picked up two redistricted seats, in Louisiana and Alabama, that were ordered by courts to ensure fair representation for Black voters.

But as the congressional map becomes clear after the latest redistricting cycle following the 2020 census, some democracy advocates are concerned about the small number of House districts that are in play.

While Republicans for years won more congressional seats than expected through gerrymandered districts, Democrats have battled back by shaping districts to their advantage and essentially evened out the playing field.

"The consequences are that the people's House barely reflects the will of the people. Voters have very little possibility to shift the balance of power in the House even when their moods change," said David Peters, who has written about gerrymandering and is a senior fellow at FairVote, an organization that advocates for voting reforms.

FairVote estimates that 85% of House seats are now safe for one party — the highest percentage it has tracked in two decades. Political polarization also plays a role in that trend, and Peters said it has resulted in a dynamic where House members are less likely to work across the aisle and are more worried about facing a primary opponent who criticizes them for not being partisan enough.

Several of the incumbents who lost reelection, such as Democratic Rep. Yadira Caraveo of Colorado or Republican Rep. Marc Molinaro of New York, were some of the most willing to work on bipartisan legislation.

But now that Republicans hold the House, Senate and White House, there is little talk of working with Democrats. Instead, they hope to use a special budget process to implement partisan legislation aimed at extending tax breaks, bolstering immigration enforcement at the southern border and dismantling federal regulations.

To do that, they will also have to overcome the infighting that has hampered them the last two years — and cracks are already showing in their unity.

In an internal vote this week, Johnson received his party's nomination to remain speaker when the new Congress starts Jan. 3. But lawmakers are still haggling over whether to keep in place rules that allowed a small group of conservatives to trigger the ouster of Johnson's predecessor, former Speaker Kevin McCarthy.

With a razor-thin majority, almost any Republican can block legislation from moving forward, as the conservative bloc has done periodically.

"As usual, it's going to be very difficult for Congress to get anything done," said Rob Speel, a political science professor at Penn State Behrend.

In final talks, Biden to press China's Xi on North Korea's ties with Russia

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

LIMA, Peru (AP) — President Joe Biden is expected to use his final meeting with China's leader, Xi Jinping, to urge him to dissuade North Korea from further deepening its support for Russia's war on Ukraine.

Saturday's talks on the sidelines of the annual Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Peru come just over two months before Biden leaves office and makes way for Republican President-elect Donald Trump. It will be Biden's last check-in with Xi — someone the Democrat saw as his most consequential peer on the world stage.

With the final meeting, officials say Biden will be looking for Xi to step up Chinese engagement to prevent an already dangerous moment with North Korea from further escalating.

Biden on Friday, along with South Korean President Yoon Seok Yul and Japan's Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, condemned North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's decision to send thousands of troops to help Moscow repel Ukrainian forces who have seized territory in Russia's Kursk border region.

Biden called it "dangerous and destabilizing cooperation."

White House officials also have expressed frustration with Beijing, which accounts for the vast majority of North Korea's trade, for not doing more to rein in Pyongyang.

Biden, Yoon and Ishiba spent most of their 50-minute discussion focused on the issue, agreeing it "should not be in Beijing's interest to have this destabilizing cooperation in the region," according to a

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senior administration official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss their private conversations.

The North Koreans also have provided Russia with artillery and other munitions, according to U.S. and South Korean intelligence officials. And the U.S., Japan and South Korea have expressed alarm over Pyongyang's stepped-up cadence of ballistic missile tests.

Kim ordered testing exercises in the lead-up to this month's U.S. election and is claiming progress on efforts to build capability to strike the U.S. mainland.

Biden and Xi have much beyond North Korea to discuss, including China's indirect support for Russia, human rights issues, technology and Taiwan, the self-ruled democracy that Beijing claims as its own.

There's also much uncertainty about what lies ahead in the U.S.-China relationship under Trump, who campaigned promising to levy 60% tariffs on Chinese imports.

Already, many American companies, including Nike and eyewear retailer Warby Parker, have been diversifying their sourcing away from China. Shoe brand Steve Madden says it plans to cut imports from China by as much as 45% next year.

"When Xi meets with Biden, part of his audience is not solely the White House or the U.S. government," said Victor Cha, an analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. "It's about American CEOs and continued U.S. investment or trying to renew U.S. investment in China and get rid of the perception that there's a hostile business environment in China."

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said Biden administration officials will advise the Trump team that managing the intense competition with Beijing will likely be the most significant foreign policy challenge they will face.

Administration officials are concerned that tensions between China and Taiwan could devolve into all-out war if there is a miscalculation by either side, with catastrophic consequences for the world.

Sullivan said the Trump administration will have to deal with the Chinese military's frequent harassment of its regional neighbors.

Skirmishes between the Philippine and Chinese coast guards in the disputed South China Sea have become a persistent problem. Chinese coast guard ships also regularly approach disputed Japanese-controlled East China Sea islands near Taiwan.

Ishiba met with Xi on Friday. Afterward, the Japanese prime minister said he told Xi he was "extremely concerned about the situation in the East China Sea and escalating activity of the People's Liberation Army."

The White House worked for months to arrange Saturday's meeting between Xi and Biden, something the Democrat badly wanted to do before leaving office in January.

Sullivan traveled to Beijing in late August to meet with his Chinese counterpart and also sat down with Xi. Beijing agreed to the meeting earlier this week.

It's a big moment for Biden as he wraps up more than 50 years in politics. He saw his relationship with Xi as among the most consequential on the international stage and put much effort into cultivating that relationship.

Biden and Xi first got to know each other on travels across the U.S. and China when both were vice presidents, interactions that both have said left a lasting impression.

But the last four years have presented a steady stream of difficult moments.

The FBI this week offered new details of a federal investigation into Chinese government efforts to hack into U.S. telecommunications networks. The initial findings have revealed a "broad and significant" cyberespionage campaign aimed at stealing information from Americans who work in government and politics.

U.S. intelligence officials also have assessed China has surged sales to Russia of machine tools, microelectronics and other technology that Moscow is using to produce missiles, tanks, aircraft and other weaponry for use in its war against Ukraine.

And tensions flared last year after Biden ordered the shooting down of a Chinese spy balloon that traversed the United States.

Trump names Interior-designee Doug Burgum to head new White House council on energy

By MATTHEW DALY and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump announced Friday that North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum, his choice to head the Interior Department, will also lead a newly created National Energy Council that will seek to establish U.S. “energy dominance” around the world.

Burgum, in his new role, will oversee a panel that crosses all executive branch agencies involved in energy permitting, production, generation, distribution, regulation and transportation, Trump said in a statement. As chairman of the National Energy Council, Burgum will have a seat on the National Security Council, Trump said.

“This Council will oversee the path to U.S. ENERGY DOMINANCE by cutting red tape, enhancing private sector investments across all sectors of the Economy, and by focusing on INNOVATION over longstanding, but totally unnecessary, regulation,” Trump wrote.

The Republican president-elect accused the “radical left” of engaging in a war on American energy, in the name of fighting climate change. His policy of energy dominance, which he also espoused during his first term, will allow the U.S. to sell oil, gas and other forms of energy to European allies, making the world safer, Trump said.

Trump’s policies, if adopted, would represent a near-complete reversal from actions pursued by Democratic President Joe Biden, who has made fighting climate change a top priority and has pushed for more electric vehicles and stricter regulation of carbon pollution from coal-fired power plants. Trump has pledged to rescind unspent funds in Biden’s landmark climate and health care bill and stop offshore wind development when he returns to the White House in January.

Trump, who has called oil “liquid gold,” said oil and natural gas, along with minerals such as lithium and copper, should be exploited to the maximum extent possible. “We will “DRILL BABY DRILL,” expand ALL forms of Energy production to grow our Economy, and create good-paying jobs,” Trump wrote.

Speaking to reporters at Trump’s Mar-a-Lago resort before his selection as interior secretary was announced Thursday night, Burgum said he and Trump are concerned about “the nexus between energy and inflation and the nexus between energy and national security.”

“Energy is a component of everything — it’s the clothes you wear, the food you eat,” Burgum said, adding that the U.S. needs to boost electricity production to meet increased demand from data centers and artificial intelligence.

“The AI battle affects everything from defense to healthcare to education to productivity as a country,” Burgum said, referring to artificial intelligence. “And the AI that’s coming in the next 18 months is going to be revolutionary. So there’s just a sense of urgency and a sense of understanding in the Trump administration” to address it.

Burgum, 68, was elected North Dakota governor in 2016, his first campaign for elected office. A former software executive, he led Great Plains Software, which Microsoft acquired for \$1.1 billion in 2001. Burgum has also led other companies in real estate development and venture capital.

Burgum, a Republican, has taken a pro-business style as governor of a state where agriculture and oil are the main industries. He’s pushed income tax cuts, reduced regulations, and changes to animal agriculture laws and higher education governance. Burgum also emphasized a “data-driven” approach to governing, advocated for a Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library in the state and prioritized engagement with tribal nations.

He ran for president in 2023, but dropped out after his bid failed to resonate. He later endorsed Trump.

Industry groups welcomed Burgum to the new administration and said Trump’s creation of an energy council signaled renewed emphasis on spurring domestic production and streamlining regulations.

Burgum’s “deep understanding of American energy resources and public lands positions him to tackle critical issues such as enhancing energy affordability ... and strengthening the U.S. in the global energy marketplace,” said Erik Milito, president of the National Ocean Industries Association, which promotes

offshore drilling. Milito is a former vice president of the American Petroleum Institute, the industry's top lobbying group.

David Seabrook, president of The Wilderness Society, called Burgum "a longtime friend to fossil fuel interests" who played a role in an April event at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort where Trump reportedly asked industry leaders and lobbyists to donate \$1 billion to his campaign, with the expectation that he would curtail environmental regulations if re-elected.

"The first Trump administration treated (public lands) like they're meant to be dug up, drilled or sold off for profit," Seabrook said. "Gov. Burgum's long track record of pushing for unchecked fossil fuel development sends a loud signal about which path they will take this time around."

Later Friday, Trump named his campaign press secretary Karoline Leavitt to serve as his White House press secretary. The 27-year-old Leavitt would be the youngest White House press secretary in history.

Earlier, Trump announced that Steven Cheung will serve as his White House communications director and Sergio Gor will run the personnel office. Both are longtime advisers.

Cheung led communications for Trump's latest campaign, where he gained a reputation for combative and insulting attacks on the Republican's opponents. A native of Sacramento, California, he worked in Republican politics and for the Ultimate Fighting Championship before joining Trump's team in 2016.

Gor ran Winning Team Publishing, which he started with Donald Trump Jr. The company has published books by Trump and his allies. Gor also led the super PAC Right for America.

And late Friday night, during a Conservative Political Action Conference event at Trump's Mar-a-Lago club in Florida, the president-elect asked Republican National Committee Chairman Michael Whatley to remain in the role, according to a person in the room who spoke anonymously to share details of a private event.

Trump Pentagon pick had been flagged by fellow service member as possible 'Insider Threat'

By TARA COPP, MICHELLE R. SMITH and JASON DEAREN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pete Hegseth, the Army National Guard veteran and Fox News host nominated by Donald Trump to lead the Department of Defense, was flagged as a possible "Insider Threat" by a fellow service member due to a tattoo on his bicep that's associated with white supremacist groups.

Hegseth, who has downplayed the role of military members and veterans in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack and railed against the Pentagon's subsequent efforts to address extremism in the ranks, has said he was pulled by his District of Columbia National Guard unit from guarding Joe Biden's January 2021 inauguration. He's said he was unfairly identified as an extremist due to a cross tattoo on his chest.

This week, however, a fellow Guard member who was the unit's security manager and on an anti-terrorism team at the time, shared with The Associated Press an email he sent to the unit's leadership flagging a different tattoo reading "Deus Vult" that's been used by white supremacists, concerned it was an indication of an "Insider Threat."

If Hegseth assumes office, it would mean that someone who has said it's a sham that extremism is a problem in the military would oversee a sprawling department whose leadership reacted with alarm when people in tactical gear stormed up the U.S. Capitol steps on Jan. 6 in military-style stack formation. He's also shown support for members of the military accused of war crimes and criticized the military's justice system.

Hegseth and the Trump transition team did not respond to emails seeking comment.

As the AP reported in an investigation published last month, more than 480 people with a military background were accused of ideologically driven extremist crimes from 2017 through 2023, including the more than 230 arrested in connection with the Jan. 6 insurrection, according to data collected and analyzed by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, or START, at the University of Maryland. Though those numbers reflect a small fraction of those who have served honorably in the military — and Lloyd Austin, the current defense secretary, has said that extremism is not widespread in the U.S. military — AP's investigation found that plots involving people with military backgrounds were

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more likely to involve mass casualties.

'People who love our country'

Since Jan. 6, Hegseth, like many Trump supporters, has minimized both the riot's seriousness and the role of people with military training. Amid the widespread condemnation the day after the assault, Hegseth took a different approach. On a panel on Fox News, Hegseth portrayed the crowd as patriots, saying they "love freedom" and were "people who love our country" who had "been re-awoken to the reality of what the left has done" to their country.

Of the 14 people convicted in the Capitol attack of seditious conspiracy, the most serious charge resulting from Jan. 6, eight previously served in the military. While the majority of those with military backgrounds arrested after Jan. 6 were no longer serving, more than 20 were in the military at the time of the attack, according to START.

Hegseth wrote in his book "The War on Warriors," published earlier this year, that just "a few" or "a handful" of active-duty soldiers and reservists had been at the Capitol that day. He did not address the hundreds of military veterans who were arrested and charged.

Hegseth has argued the Pentagon overreacted by taking steps to address extremism, and has taken leadership to task for the military's efforts to remove people it deemed white supremacists and violent extremists from the ranks. Hegseth has written that the problem is "fake" and "manufactured" and characterized it as "peddling the lie of racism in the military." He said efforts to root extremism out had pushed "rank-and-file patriots out of their formations."

"America is less safe, and our generals simply do not care about the oath that they swore to uphold. The generals are too busy assessing how domestic 'extremists' wearing Carhartt jackets will usurp our 'democracy' with gate barriers or flagpoles," he wrote in "The War on Warriors."

In a segment on Fox News last year about Jacob Chansley, a Navy veteran known as the "QAnon Shaman" who walked through the Capitol while wearing a horned fur hat, Hegseth played a misleading video clip from his then-colleague Tucker Carlson that sought to portray Chansley as a passive sightseer.

In fact, Chansley was among the first rioters to enter the building and pleaded guilty to a felony charge of obstructing an official proceeding in 2021. Chansley acknowledged using a bullhorn to rile up the mob, offering thanks in a prayer while in the Senate chamber for having the chance to get rid of traitors and writing a threatening note to Vice President Mike Pence saying, "It's Only A Matter of Time. Justice Is Coming!"

In a message on Facebook Hegseth posted with an excerpt of the video, he wrote the way Chansley had been treated by the justice system "is disgusting."

"Trump, Chansley, and many more... the Left wants us all locked up," Hegseth wrote.

Support for convicted war criminals

Hegseth served for almost 20 years and deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay. He has two Bronze Stars. In speaking about his service and advocating for other service members and veterans, he has taken actions to support convicted war criminals and recently said he had told his platoon they could ignore directives limiting when they can shoot.

In a podcast interview released earlier this month, Hegseth described getting a briefing from a military lawyer in 2005 in Baghdad on the rules of engagement. Hegseth said the lawyer told them they could not shoot someone carrying a rocket-propelled grenade unless it was pointed at them.

"I remember walking out of that briefing, pulling my platoon together and being like, 'Guys we're not doing that. You know, like if you see an enemy and they, you know, engage before he's able to point his weapon at you and shoot, we're going to have your back,'" Hegseth said.

"All they do is take one incident and yell 'war criminal,'" he said, referring to The New York Times, the left and Democrats, adding, "Why wouldn't we back these guys up even if they weren't perfect?"

He said he was proud of his role in securing pardons from Trump in 2019 for a former U.S. Army commando set to stand trial in the killing of a suspected Afghan bomb-maker, as well as a former Army lieutenant convicted of murder for ordering his men to fire upon three Afghans, killing two. At Hegseth's urging, Trump also ordered a promotion for Eddie Gallagher, a Navy SEAL convicted of posing with a dead

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Islamic State captive in Iraq.

Biden's inauguration

Hegseth has complained that he himself was labeled an extremist by the D.C. National Guard and said he was prevented from serving during Biden's inauguration, a few weeks after the Jan. 6 Capitol attack, because of a cross tattoo on his chest. He said he decided to end his military service shortly after that in disgust.

But a fellow Guard member who was working as a security officer ahead of the inauguration gave AP an email he sent that showed him raising concerns about a different tattoo.

Retired Master Sgt. DeRicko Gaither, who was serving as the D.C. Army National Guard's physical security manager and on its anti-terrorism force protection team in January 2021, told the AP that he received an email from a former D.C. Guard member that included a screenshot of a social media post that included two photos showing several of Hegseth's tattoos.

Gaither told AP he researched the tattoos — including one of a Jerusalem Cross and the context of the words "Deus Vult," Latin for "God wills it," on his bicep — and determined they had sufficient connection to extremist groups to elevate the email to his commanding officers.

Several of Hegseth's tattoos are associated with an expression of religious faith, according to Heidi Beirich of the Global Project Against Hate and Extremism, but they have also been adopted by some far right groups and violent extremists. Their meaning depends on context, she said.

Former Navy intelligence officer Travis Akers was the person who initially saw the photos on a group chat, then researched them and decided to post the photos to social media. Those images were then seen by the former member of the D.C. National Guard, who sent them in an anonymous email to Gaither.

"It was just quite concerning to see that on a service member's body, but even more concerning now that a person who chose to bear those symbols is being nominated to lead the most powerful, nuclear military in the world," Akers told the AP in a phone interview Friday.

Some extremists invoke their association with the Christian crusades to express anti-Muslim sentiment. The Global Project Against Hate and Extremism notes that in 2023 the words were in the notebooks of the Allen, Texas, shooter Mauricio Garcia. Anders Breivik, a right-wing extremist who killed 77 people in 2011, had similar markings in his manifesto.

In an email Gaither sent on Jan. 14, 2021, which he provided to the AP, he raised concerns about Hegseth, a major at the time, and mentioned only the "Deus Vult" tattoo. In the email addressed to then-Maj. Gen. William Walker, who was commanding general of the D.C. National Guard, Gaither raised concern that the phrase was associated with white supremacists who invoke the idea of a white Christian medieval past as well as the Christian crusades.

"MG Walker, Sir, with the information provided this falls along the line of Insider Threat and this is what we as members of the U.S. Army, District of Columbia National Guard and the Anti-Terrorism/Force Protection Team strive to prevent," Gaither wrote.

"I said, 'you guys need to take a look at this,'" Gaither said in a phone interview with the AP on Thursday. "I later received an email that he was told to stay away."

Biden's inauguration took place just two weeks after the insurrection, and the Army was taking no chances. More than 25,000 Guard members were pouring into the city and each was going through additional vetting, depending on how close they were going to be to Biden.

A total of 12 National Guard members were told to stay home, former Pentagon press secretary Jonathan Hoffman told reporters in a briefing a day before the inauguration. At least two were flagged due to potential extremism concerns; the rest were due to other background check issues that were identified as concerning by either the Army, FBI or Secret Service. It was not clear whether Hegseth was among the 12 Hoffman referenced at the time.

Hegseth has also speculated in podcast interviews that he was asked to stand down because of his political views, his role as a journalist covering Jan. 6 or because he works for Fox News.

Hundreds of hospitality workers are on strike at a casino near the Las Vegas Strip

By RIO YAMAT Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Hundreds of hospitality workers at a casino near the Las Vegas Strip walked off the job just before dawn Friday amid a long and highly contentious fight for a new contract.

The work stoppage at Virgin Hotels Las Vegas marks the first open-ended strike in 22 years for the Culinary Workers Union, the largest labor union in Nevada, with about 60,000 members.

Workers at the casino also walked off the job for two days earlier this year as negotiations escalated, hoping to pressure Virgin Hotels to agree to a new five-year deal with higher wages and better benefits.

Housekeepers, porters, bellhops and servers picketed outside the hotel-casino, which was formerly the Hard Rock Las Vegas.

Michael Renick, a bartender who has worked at Virgin Hotels for about two years, said he's already used to living paycheck to paycheck and closely monitoring his bank balance. That's why, he said, he was willing to go on strike for as long as it takes to get a fair contract, even if it means getting a second job during the strike.

"I'm ready to go for as long as I need to, and I'm pretty sure that's how everyone else is feeling too," he said.

The union pays striking workers \$500 per week for picketing shifts for at least five days.

Virgin Hotels said in a statement that it is focused on reaching a deal with the union that is "economically viable" for both its union workers and its other employees.

"Our dedication to our team members' well-being and achieving sustainable performance at our property remains steadfast, and we are fully committed to finding a fair resolution that is in their best interest," the company said.

The strike comes a year after casinos up and down the Strip narrowly avoided tens of thousands of hospitality workers walking off the job on the weekend the city was set to host its first Formula One race on the famous boulevard. But agreements were reached just before the union's strike deadline, giving workers a roughly 32% salary increase over the life of the contract, including a 10% bump in pay in the first year.

After the breakthrough deals last November, the Culinary Union quickly reached similar agreements for the rest of its members at major hotel-casinos on the Strip, downtown and at off-Strip properties — with the exception of Virgin Hotels. The contracts on the Strip alone cover more than 40,000 workers.

Bethany Khan, a spokesperson for the union, said Virgin Hotels is the "final holdout." The union's contract covering about 700 employees there expired last June.

Both the union and Virgin Hotels said negotiations stalled because of disagreements over pay.

Ted Pappageorge, the union's secretary-treasurer, said the company's latest proposal amounted to an estimated \$0.30 more annually to wages over five years after deducting additional money union workers would have to contribute to their benefits.

"The Virgin Las Vegas' proposal is miles apart and is an insult to every worker, which is why the committee voted unanimously to refuse to settle for a second-class contract," Pappageorge said.

Virgin Hotels said Thursday night that it has tried to compromise with the union by offering earlier pay raises during a new five-year contract instead of only in the fourth and fifth years, but that "the union chose to engage in 'take it or leave it' bargaining."

Although Friday's walkout is far smaller than the strikes planned for last year on the Strip, disruptions are still likely at the 1,500-room property. The union says "24/7 picket lines" will be in place during the strike around the property located just off the Strip and along a common route to the tourist corridor from the city's international airport.

The hotel-casino sits on a recognizable lot where an 80-foot (24-meter) neon guitar sign stood for decades. It was removed in 2017 after the Hard Rock closed.

Culinary Union members last went on strike in 2002 for 10 days at the Golden Gate hotel-casino in downtown Las Vegas.

Trial begins for the man accused of killing Georgia nursing student Laken Riley

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATHENS, Ga. (AP) — A Venezuelan man “went hunting for females on the University of Georgia’s campus” earlier this year and ended up killing nursing student Laken Riley after a struggle, a prosecutor said Friday. A defense attorney said the evidence is circumstantial and doesn’t prove his client is guilty.

Jose Ibarra, who entered the U.S. illegally two years ago, is charged with murder and other crimes in Riley’s February killing, which helped fan the immigration debate during this year’s presidential campaign. Ibarra waived his right to a jury trial, meaning his case is being heard and decided by Athens-Clarke County Superior Court Judge H. Patrick Haggard.

Prosecutor Sheila Ross told the judge that Ibarra encountered Riley, a 22-year-old student at Augusta University College of Nursing, while she was out running on Feb. 22.

“When Laken Riley refused to be his rape victim, he bashed her skull in with a rock repeatedly,” Ross said, adding that the evidence will show that Riley “fought for her life, for her dignity.”

As a result of that fight, Ibarra’s DNA was left under her fingernails, Ross said. Riley called 911 and, in a struggle over her phone, Ibarra’s thumbprint was left on the screen, she said.

The forensic evidence is sufficient to prove Ibarra’s guilt, but digital and video evidence will also show that Ibarra killed Riley, the prosecutor said.

Defense attorney Dustin Kirby called the evidence in the case graphic and disturbing, but he said none of it proves that his client killed Riley.

“The evidence in this case is very good that Laken Riley was murdered,” he said. “The evidence that Jose Ibarra killed Laken Riley is circumstantial. The evidence that anyone had any intent or certainly committed any sexual assault is speculation.”

The killing added fuel to the national debate over immigration when federal authorities said Ibarra illegally entered the U.S. in 2022 and was allowed to stay to pursue his immigration case.

Republicans, including President-elect Donald Trump, blamed Democratic President Joe Biden’s border policies for her death. As he spoke about border security during his State of the Union address weeks after the killing, Biden mentioned Riley by name.

Riley’s mother, Allyson Phillips, and other family members packed the courtroom Friday. Phillips put her face in her hands and cried frequently, especially when photos of her daughter were shown and during testimony about what happened to her.

Ibarra sat at the defense table in a plaid shirt with his hands and feet chained. He wore headphones to hear a Spanish-language interpreter and appeared attentive, sometimes looking up when photos or video were shown and sometimes looking down at his lap.

During her opening statement, Ross laid out a timeline for the judge using doorbell and surveillance camera footage as well as data from Riley’s phone and watch to piece together her final moments.

Riley left home at 9:03 a.m. and headed for wooded trails where she often ran. Data from her watch shows that at 9:10 a.m., she was running at a fast pace when something happened that made her “stop dead in her tracks,” and she called 911 at 9:11 a.m.

A 911 dispatcher answered but no one responded when she repeatedly sought a response, and then the call was ended by the caller. The dispatcher immediately called back, but no one answered.

“Her encounter with him was long. Her fight with him was fierce,” Ross said, noting that Riley’s watch data showed her heart was still beating until 9:28 a.m.

Ross also played security camera video that shows a man she said is Ibarra at 9:44 a.m. in a parking lot at his apartment complex. The man tossed something in a recycling bin and then appeared to throw something in nearby bushes. In the recycling bin, officers found a dark hooded jacket with blood that turned out to be Riley’s on it and strands of long dark hair caught on a button. In the bushes, they found black disposable kitchen gloves, one of which had a hole in the tip of the thumb.

Another video from about 35 minutes later shows what appeared to be the same man wearing different

clothes and walking toward a trash bin with a bag and then walking back empty-handed. That bin was emptied before police were able to search it.

One of Riley's three roommates testified that she became worried when Riley didn't return from a run. The four friends used a phone app to track each other's whereabouts, and Lilly Steiner testified that she became more worried when she saw that Riley's phone showed her in the same location for a long time.

Riley often talked to her mother by phone when she ran, and her mother also became concerned that morning when her daughter didn't answer her calls.

Steiner and another roommate, Sofia Magana, walked to the trail where the phone app indicated Riley was located. They found what they believed was one of Riley's AirPods on the trail and returned home to call police.

One of the officers who responded found Riley's body partially covered by leaves, 64 feet (nearly 20 meters) off the trail. Although her shirt and underwear had been pulled up, Ross said there was no evidence that Riley had been sexually assaulted.

Before Ross played Maxwell's body camera video in court, she warned Riley's family that video of her dead body would be shown. Riley's mother left the courtroom, but other family members and friends remained in the courtroom, some of them crying or covering their faces.

Ibarra is charged with one count of malice murder, three counts of felony murder and one count each of kidnapping, aggravated assault, aggravated battery, hindering an emergency telephone call, tampering with evidence and being a peeping Tom.

Prosecutors say that on the day of Riley's killing, Ibarra peered into the window of an apartment in a university housing building, which is the basis for the peeping Tom charge.

The daughters of Malcolm X sue the CIA, FBI and NYPD over the civil rights leader's assassination

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Three daughters of Malcolm X have accused the CIA, FBI, the New York Police Department and others in a \$100 million lawsuit Friday of playing roles in the 1965 assassination of the civil rights leader.

In the lawsuit filed in Manhattan federal court, the daughters — along with the Malcolm X estate — claimed that the agencies were aware of and were involved in the assassination plot and failed to stop the killing.

At a morning news conference, attorney Ben Crump stood with family members as he described the lawsuit, saying he hoped federal and city officials would read it "and learn all the dastardly deeds that were done by their predecessors and try to right these historic wrongs."

The NYPD and CIA did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Nicholas Biase, a spokesperson for the Department of Justice, which was also sued, declined comment. The FBI said in an email that it was its "standard practice" not to comment on litigation.

For decades, more questions than answers have arisen over who was to blame for the death of Malcolm X, who was 39 years old when he was slain on Feb. 21, 1965, at the Audubon Ballroom on West 165th Street in Manhattan as he spoke to several hundred people. Born Malcolm Little in Omaha, Nebraska, Malcolm X later changed his name to El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz.

Three men were convicted of crimes in the death but two of them were exonerated in 2021 after investigators took a fresh look at the case and concluded some evidence was shaky and authorities had held back some information.

In the lawsuit, the family said the prosecution team suppressed the government's role in the assassination.

The lawsuit alleges that there was a "corrupt, unlawful, and unconstitutional" relationship between law enforcement and "ruthless killers that went unchecked for many years and was actively concealed, condoned, protected, and facilitated by government agents," leading up to the murder of Malcolm X.

According to the lawsuit, the NYPD, coordinating with federal law enforcement agencies, arrested the activist's security detail days before the assassination and intentionally removed their officers from inside

the ballroom where Malcolm X was killed. Meanwhile, it adds, federal agencies had personnel, including undercover agents, in the ballroom but failed to protect him.

The lawsuit was not brought sooner because the defendants withheld information from the family, including the identities of undercover "informants, agents and provocateurs" and what they knew about the planning that preceded the attack.

Malcolm X's wife, Betty Shabazz, the plaintiffs, "and their entire family have suffered the pain of the unknown" for decades, the lawsuit states.

"They did not know who murdered Malcolm X, why he was murdered, the level of NYPD, FBI and CIA orchestration, the identity of the governmental agents who conspired to ensure his demise, or who fraudulently covered-up their role," it states. "The damage caused to the Shabazz family is unimaginable, immense, and irreparable."

The family announced its intention to sue the law enforcement agencies early last year.

Lebanon's prime minister asks Iran to help secure a cease-fire in Israel-Hezbollah war

By BASSEM MROUE and DAVID RISING Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Lebanon's caretaker prime minister on Friday asked Iran to help secure a cease-fire in the war between Israel and Hezbollah and appeared to urge it to convince the militant group to agree to a deal that could require it to pull back from the Israel-Lebanon border.

As a top adviser to Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamenei visited Lebanon for talks, Lebanese officials said an American proposal for a cease-fire deal had been passed on to Hezbollah, aiming to end 13 months of exchanges of fire between Israel and the group.

Iran is a main backer of Hezbollah and for decades has been funding and arming the Lebanese militant group. Hezbollah began firing rockets into northern Israel the day after Hamas' surprise attack into Israel on Oct. 7, 2023 ignited the war in Gaza — prompting exchanges between the two sides ever since.

Since late September, Israel dramatically escalated its bombardment of Lebanon, vowing to cripple Hezbollah and end its barrages in Israel. More than 3,400 people have been killed in Lebanon by Israeli fire — 80% of them in the past month — Lebanon's Health Ministry says.

According to Lebanese media, U.S. Ambassador Lisa Johnson handed over a draft of a proposed cease-fire deal to Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, who has been leading the talks representing Hezbollah.

A Lebanese official confirmed that Beirut has received a copy of a draft proposal based on U.N. Security Council resolution 1701, which ended the last Israel-Hezbollah war, in the summer of 2006. A Lebanese politician said Hezbollah officials had received the draft, were studying it and would express their opinion on it to Berri. The politician, who knows the work of Hezbollah, and the official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media about the ongoing talks.

U.N. resolution 1701, among other things, holds that only the Lebanese army and U.N. peacekeepers should operate in southern Lebanon, meaning Hezbollah would have to end its presence there. That provision was never implemented. Lebanon accuses Israel of also violating the resolution by maintaining hold of a small, disputed border area and conducting frequent military overflights over Lebanon.

The Lebanese official did not give details other than to say Israel was insisting that some guarantees be included. The U.S. Embassy refused to either confirm or deny the reports.

In talks with Khamenei's adviser, Ali Larijani, Lebanon's caretaker prime minister, Najib Mikati, urged Iran to help implement resolution 1701. He said the Lebanese government wants the war to end and the resolution to be implemented "in all its details," according to a statement on the talks issued by his office.

Mikati, who in recent weeks has become more critical of Iran's role in Lebanon, also said the government wants Iran to help Lebanon's national unity and not take any stance backing one party against another.

Iran's backing for Hezbollah has helped the group, which is the most powerful faction among Lebanon's Shiite Muslims, dominate the country's politics the last decade.

After meeting Mikati and Berri, Larijani said his visit's main aim was "to loudly say that we will stand by

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Lebanon's government and people."

Asked if he was trying to thwart U.S. cease-fire mediation, Larijani said, "We are not trying to blow up any effort, but we want to solve the problem and we will stand by Lebanon, whatever the circumstances."

An Israeli airstrike on a home in the southern province of Nabatiyeh killed a mother, father and their three children on Friday, state media said, while three other Israeli strikes killed six people and wounded 32 in different parts of Tyre province.

Israeli forces also carried out new strikes around the Lebanese capital on Friday. Three waves of air raids hit buildings in Beirut's southern suburbs, setting off explosions in the area known as Dahiyeh.

In an earlier strike on the southeastern edge of Beirut, images taken by an Associated Press photographer captured a rocket about to strike an 11-story residential building in the Tayouneh neighborhood – then showed a blast of flame erupting from the side of the building. Much of a lower level of the building was smashed to rubble.

There were no immediate reports of casualties in any of the strikes. In each case, the Israeli military had issued a warning before the attack, saying it was targeting Hezbollah facilities.

Near the eastern Lebanese city of Baalbek, rescue workers called off their search for survivors from an Israeli strike a civil defense center, killing 14 civil defense workers and volunteers.

The Israeli military did not respond to a request for comment on why the civil defense center was targeted late Thursday. Lebanon's civil defense forces have no affiliation with Hezbollah, and provide crucial rescue and medical services in one of the world's most war-torn nations.

Israel has expanded its operations in Lebanon even as it continues its campaign in the Gaza Strip, vowing to destroy Hamas, which is also backed by Iran.

Funerals were held Friday for 11 Palestinians killed Thursday in a series of Israeli airstrikes in and around the central Gaza Strip city of Deir al-Balah. Two children were among the dead, seen with the other dead by an AP reporter.

On Thursday, the U.N. Security Council's 10 elected members circulated a draft resolution demanding "an immediate, unconditional and permanent cease-fire" in Gaza. The U.S., Israel's closest ally, holds the key to whether the U.N. Security Council adopts the resolution. The four other permanent members — Russia, China, Britain and France — are expected to support it or abstain.

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

Israel's bombardment and ground offensives since then have killed more than 43,000 people in Gaza, Palestinian health officials say. The officials don't distinguish between civilians and combatants but say more than half of those killed have been women and children.

Texas high court says execution in 'shaken baby syndrome' case can't be halted by lawmaker subpoena

By NADIA LATHAN Associated Press/Report for America

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — The Texas Supreme Court on Friday ruled that a legislative subpoena cannot stop an execution after Republican and Democratic lawmakers who say Robert Roberson is innocent used the novel maneuver to pause his execution at the last minute.

The ruling clears the way for Roberson's execution to move forward, weeks after a bipartisan group of state House lawmakers bought him more time by subpoenaing Roberson as he waited to be taken to the nation's busiest death chamber.

Roberson was sentenced to death in 2003 for killing his 2-year-old daughter, Nikki Curtis. He would be the first person in the United States to be executed over a conviction tied to "shaken baby syndrome," a diagnosis that has been questioned by some medical experts.

A new execution date for Roberson has not been set, but it is certain to proceed unless Republican Gov. Greg Abbott grants a 30-day reprieve. Abbott did not move to do so before Roberson's original execution date and his office challenged the subpoena tactic used by lawmakers, accusing them of overstepping

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their power.

The state's all-Republican high court agreed, ruling that "under these circumstances the committee's authority to compel testimony does not include the power to override the scheduled legal process leading to an execution," wrote Republican Justice Evan Young, issuing the opinion of the court.

The ruling addressed a subpoena issued for Roberson by the Texas House Criminal Jurisprudence Committee. Roberson was scheduled to die by lethal injection on Oct. 17 when lawmakers, in a last-ditch effort, issued a subpoena to have him testify at the Texas Capitol days after his planned execution.

This spurred a legal conundrum between the state's criminal and civil courts, which ultimately led to the Texas Supreme Court temporarily ruling in Roberson's favor while it considered the matter.

Roberson has gained bipartisan support from lawmakers and medical experts who say he was convicted on faulty evidence of "shaken baby syndrome," which refers to a serious brain injury caused when a child's head is hurt through shaking or some other violent impact, like being slammed against a wall or thrown on the floor.

Rep. Joe Moody, who has led the effort to stop Roberson's execution, said delaying the execution with the subpoena was "never our specific intention" and added that the court "rightly agreed" that the subpoena and lawsuit were valid.

Moody insisted that Roberson could still be called to testify since the court ruling "reinforced our belief that the Committee can indeed obtain Mr. Roberson's testimony and made clear it expects the executive branch of government to accommodate us in doing so."

Prosecutors said that Roberson killed his daughter by shaking her violently back and forth. Roberson's attorneys have argued that the child's symptoms did not align with child abuse and that she likely died from complications with severe pneumonia.

His case has garnered support from nearly 90 lawmakers across party lines and civil rights advocates who say Roberson is innocent and that he has not been given a fair trial under the state's "junk science law." The statute allows people convicted of a crime under outdated science to have their sentence overturned. The 2013 law was hailed as progressive and the first of its kind, however civil rights advocates say that the state's highest criminal court is not utilizing the law as they should for people facing execution.

The Supreme Court, which handles civil matters, made clear it was not ruling on the merits of whether Roberson was guilty or innocent of capital murder or on the evidence in question. Those questions reside with the criminal courts, which have so far denied Roberson's appeals, the Supreme Court said.

Roberson can still testify to fulfill the subpoena, but when that happens is up to the attorney general's office, which has quashed previous efforts, according to one of his attorneys, Gretchen Sween.

"Whether the attorney general's office will change its strategy and cooperate remains to be seen," she said.

The parole board voted to not recommend clemency for Roberson before his scheduled execution date, and the governor's office said lawmakers had stepped out of line when they issued the subpoena.

Germany's Scholz discusses Ukraine with Russia's Putin in first such call in 2 years

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — German Chancellor Olaf Scholz spoke Friday with Russian President Vladimir Putin, the Kremlin leader's first publicly announced conversation with the sitting head of a major Western power in nearly two years. Scholz urged Putin to be open to negotiations with Ukraine, his office said.

The Kremlin leader responded that any peace deal should acknowledge Russia's territorial gains and security demands, including that Kyiv renounce joining NATO.

Government spokesman Steffen Hebestreit said Scholz urged Putin in the hour-long call to withdraw his troops and end the full-scale invasion launched in February 2022. The conflict will reach its 1,000th day on Tuesday, and exiled Russian opposition leaders, including Alexei Navalny's widow, Yulia, have set an antiwar rally for Sunday in Berlin.

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"The chancellor urged Russia to be willing to negotiate with Ukraine with the aim of achieving a just and lasting peace and stressed Germany's unwavering determination to support Ukraine in its fight against Russian aggression for as long as necessary," Hebestreit said in a statement.

The new communication between Scholz and Putin — their first since December 2022 — comes at a time of widespread speculation about what the new administration of President-elect Donald Trump will mean for Ukraine. Scholz faces a political crisis at home and has called for a vote of confidence next month, with an early election in February.

Washington has been Ukraine's biggest military backer, but Trump has repeatedly questioned the amount of aid being given to Ukraine. While Trump has suggested he could settle the war quickly, Ukraine has ruled out giving up any territory to Moscow in return for peace.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy criticized Scholz's call to Putin, calling it "a Pandora's box" and would only serve to make Russia less isolated.

"Now there may be other conversations, other calls. Just a lot of words. And this is exactly what Putin has wanted for a long time," Zelenskyy said in his nightly address. "It is crucial for him to weaken his isolation. ... And to engage in negotiations, ordinary negotiations, that will lead to nothing."

Scholz condemned Russian air raids on Ukrainian civilian infrastructure and warned that the deployment of North Korean troops to Russia to fight in the war would mark a serious escalation. The U.S., South Korea and Ukraine say North Korea has sent thousands of troops to Russia to support its war against Ukraine.

The Kremlin said Germany initiated the call, during which the leaders had a "detailed and frank exchange of opinions on the situation in Ukraine."

Putin blamed "the current crisis" on what he called NATO's "long-standing aggressive policy aimed at creating an anti-Russian stronghold on Ukrainian territory while ignoring our country's security interests and trampling on the rights of Russian-speaking residents," a Kremlin readout said.

Putin also said Russia remains open to resuming peace talks, pointing to conditions he laid out in June that included Kyiv renouncing its bid to join NATO and withdrawing troops from the four Ukrainian regions that Moscow illegally annexed in 2022.

"Possible agreements should take into account the interests of the Russian Federation in the security sphere, proceed from new territorial realities, and most importantly, eliminate the root causes of the conflict," the readout said.

Putin, who earlier this month said it's up to Western leaders to resume contact with Russia if they want, also noted the "unprecedented degradation" in bilateral relations between Germany and Russia, the Kremlin statement said, while noting that leaders also discussed the situation in the Middle East.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the leaders had a "detailed" and "frank" exchange of opinions but added that "there is no talk about convergence of opinions."

The two sides agreed to remain in contact after the call.

Ringo goes country, again. The ex-Beatle mixes peace and love with twang and heartache on new album

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Country comes naturally to Ringo Starr.

It's been a low-key part of his career since his Beatle beginnings, so it was not a serious swerve for him to make a whole country album, the forthcoming "Look Up," a collaboration with the modern maestro of classic country and Americana, T Bone Burnett.

"I've done 20 albums and there's always a track that's country-ish on each one," the 84-year-old Starr told The Associated Press recently.

His love of the music — Hank Williams and Kitty Wells are favorites — began in childhood, alongside his acquisition of affection for blues, swing and whatever else came to his hometown.

"Liverpool, it's the capital of country music in England," Starr said, "because a lot of I think it stems from it being a port, and why we got rock 'n' roll music physically, was because the lads on the boats would

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be going to America, they'd be going to Egypt, would be going all over. But they were bringing music in."

Starr — even his stage name has cowboy vibes — had a star turn with the Beatles in 1965 when he sang the Buck Owens' honky-tonk classic, "Act Naturally." Many of the Beatle originals the drummer sang, including "What Goes On" and "Don't Pass Me By," had country undertones.

It would culminate with his second solo album, 1971's "Beaucoups of Blues," going full country.

He kept dabbling — he recorded an "Act Naturally" duet with Owens in 1989 — but he didn't make a full country album again for decades.

Enter Burnett, the culture's chief curator of classic country for the last 25 years, the man behind the soundtracks to "O Brother Where Art Thou" and "Inside Llewyn Davis," and the unlikely pairing of Robert Plant and Alison Krauss.

Starr had known Burnett for decades, but had never collaborated on an entire project with him.

"In the '70s I used to throw a lot of parties and, and he was always there and I never invited him once," Starr said. "We often laugh about that."

The two were both at the Sunset Marquis last year for a poetry reading from Olivia Harrison, widow of Starr's former bandmate George Harrison.

Starr had been doing a series of EPs with different writers and producers, including a recent release with Linda Perry, and suggested Burnett give him a song for the next one.

Burnett quickly came back with a country tune.

"It was beautiful. The most beautiful song I've heard in a long time," Starr said. He began to think, "I'm going to do a country piece."

An inspired Burnett would write nine songs that along with two more, one of them written by Starr with his friend Bruce Sugar, turning the EP into an LP.

Starr played the drums and sang in Los Angeles, while Burnett recorded parts of the record in Nashville, bringing on young neo-classical country artists Billy Strings and Molly Tuttle for several tracks apiece.

And Krauss sings with Starr on the song he co-wrote, "Thankful," released Friday as the album's second single, in which he managed to smuggle his catchphrase, "peace and love," into a genre that's usually about anything but.

"Yeah, I put it in the song," he said with a smile.

"Look Up," to be released in January, comes at a major country moment across music, with everyone from Beyoncé to Post Malone pulling on cowboy boots and breaking out the twang.

"Mine just came together. I mean, I didn't think of any of that," Starr said. "I just thought, I'm going to do it."

Beyoncé did come up at one point in Burnett and Starr's work.

"He asked, 'what are you going to call the album?'" Starr said. "I thought, 'BE-ON-SAY.' But nobody laughed."

In January, he'll get to play one of his favorite places, Nashville's Ryman auditorium, former longtime home of the Grand Ole Opry, for a pair of concerts and a TV special.

"I'm excited because we're going to be doing like some of the other songs and some of the country songs," he said. "We'll be doing 'With a Little Help From My Friends' in a country fashion, country style. So let's see."

Frustration grows at fossil fuel influence and structure of UN climate talks. Some call for reform

By SETH BORENSTEIN and SIBI ARASU Associated Press

BAKU, Azerbaijan (AP) — Good or bad, the United Nations climate negotiations process itself became the focus of the international talks that aim to curb warming from coal, oil and natural gas.

Environmental advocates released reports Friday decrying fossil fuel industry influence at the climate talks called COP29. At the same time, a letter signed by a former United Nations secretary-general and ex-top climate negotiators called for dramatic reform. And the conference's chief negotiator said current

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talks — aimed at striking a deal worth hundreds of billions of dollars to help finance a transition to clean energy and adapting to climate change — were going too slowly.

All that put the focus on process — not results.

“We consider COP29 as a litmus test for the global climate architecture,” conference lead negotiator Yalchin Rafiyev said at a Friday news conference.

A letter causes a stir about the direction of future talks

A letter signed by former U.N. chief Ban Ki-Moon, former U.N. climate secretary Christiana Figueres and former Ireland President Mary Robinson called for “a fundamental overhaul of the COP.”

“We need a shift from negotiation to implementation,” it said.

Two signees — Figueres and Johan Rockstrom, director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research — said the letter was being badly misinterpreted as criticism of the climate talks. They said the letter was intended to show support for the process, which they said has worked and just needs to shift into a new mode.

Instead of spending so much effort negotiating new deals in annual conferences that can attract 70,000 people, the process should be smaller and more frequent and aimed at putting what was already agreed upon into action, Rockstrom said.

“It’s about strengthening the COP,” Rockstrom said. “It’s about recognizing we’ve accomplished so much that we have what we need. ... We really need to get serious about delivery.”

Climate Analytics CEO Bill Hare said he had issues with some of the suggestions in the letter and personally considers the COP process broken. His analysis this week showed that after the 2015 Paris agreement projected future warming dropped, but in the past three years, warming projections — based on negotiations, promises and policies — for the future have stayed the same or even gone up slightly.

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

Catherine Abreu, director of the International Climate Politics Hub, suggested that there should be a “firewall” between fossil fuel lobbyists, U.N. climate bodies and negotiators from countries. “We know over 1,700 fossil fuel lobbyists are here at COP29. That is not acceptable,” she said.

Former U.S. Vice President Al Gore, who on Friday presented new data on carbon pollution sites, said “it’s unfortunate that the fossil fuel industry and the petrostates have seized control of the COP process to an unhealthy degree.”

For his part, COP29 negotiator Rafiyev defended the process.

“The process has already delivered, the COP process so far by reducing projected warming, delivering finance to those in need,” Rafiyev said. “It’s better than any alternative.”

One key benefit of the U.N. climate talks process is it’s the only place where vulnerable small island nations have an equal seat at the table, United Nations Environment Programme Executive Director Inger Andersen told The Associated Press. But the process has its limits because “the rules of the game are set by member states,” she said.

At a press conference, Alliance of Small Islands States Chair Cedric Schuster said the negotiating bloc felt 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) above pre-industrial times. “We’re concerned that countries are forgetting that protecting the world’s most vulnerable is at the core of this framework.”

New data reveals the most polluting cities

Also at the talks Friday, new data from an organization co-founded by Gore that combines observations and artificial intelligence found that cities in Asia and the United States emit the most heat-trapping gas, with Shanghai the most polluting.

Using observations and artificial intelligence, Climate Trace quantifies 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.

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Seven states or provinces spew more than 1 billion metric tons of greenhouse gases, all of them in China, except Texas, which ranks sixth.

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.

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.

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

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 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

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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 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.

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 said is 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 — 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

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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.

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 archi-

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pelago 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 won more young voters, but many don't agree with him on issues: AP VoteCast

By AMELIA THOMSON-DeVEAUX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Americans ages 18 to 29 swung toward President-elect Donald Trump in this year's election, but they came to his coalition with sharply different views and interests than older conservatives or most top Republican leaders.

Trump won nearly half of voters in the age group, compared with about one-third in 2020, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of more than 120,000 voters nationwide. That means that although the youngest voters made up a relatively small share, about 15%, of his coalition, he was nearly as strong among this group as Vice President Kamala Harris, the Democratic candidate.

VoteCast found that Trump's younger voters were more motivated by the economy than by immigration, were broadly concerned about climate change, and wanted more government involvement in health care and canceling student loan debt.

That could inform the course Trump sets for his second term and how Republicans looking ahead to

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the 2026 midterm election and the 2028 presidential race respond. The GOP traditionally has opposed broad action on climate change, health care or student loans. Trump, meanwhile, has promised to stage the largest deportation operation in U.S. history and impose sweeping tariffs, actions that mainstream economists warn could drive up prices and cost jobs.

"Donald Trump's rhetoric did not prevent them from supporting him this time around," said Barrett Marson, a Republican strategist based in Arizona, a battleground state. "It sounds like the economic issues overrode everything. So if Donald Trump delivers on his economic promises, then will young people stick with Republicans? That is a question we can't answer right now."

More moderate and less motivated by immigration

Trump made inroads among younger voters, but that was not accompanied by a big ideological shift. According to AP VoteCast, just over one-half of Trump voters under 30 said they are somewhat or very conservative, compared with about 8 in 10 Trump voters age 65 and older.

While most younger Trump voters identified with his "Make America Great Again" movement, they were less likely to say they are MAGA Republicans than are older Trump voters.

Younger Trump voters' motivations for voting this year also looked different from older Trump voters. About 6 in 10 Trump voters 65 and older said the situation at the U.S.-Mexico border was the single most important issue for their vote, compared with about one-third of Trump voters under 30.

Younger Trump voters were more focused on the economy. About half of these voters said the economy and jobs are the top issue facing the country, compared with about 4 in 10 older Trump voters.

Many younger Trump voters want big government

A second Trump administration could target government programs and services such as Affordable Care Act subsidies, but that may not be popular with his younger supporters.

Trump voters under 30 were nearly evenly split on whether the government should do more to solve people's problems. Slightly less than half agreed with this, while about half said the government is doing too many things better left to businesses and individuals. That compares with about 2 in 10 Trump voters 65 and older who said the government should be doing more, and about 8 in 10 who said the government was doing too many things.

There is a bigger age divide on this question among Trump voters than there was in 2020, when about 6 in 10 Trump voters under 30 said the government was doing too many things that should be left to businesses and individuals, compared with about three-quarters of Trump voters 65 and older.

Two issues, health care and debt relief, could be particularly big sticking points for Trump's younger supporters. More than half of them want the government more involved in health care coverage, compared with about 3 in 10 older Trump voters. There is a similar split on whether government should be more involved in forgiving medical debt.

Trump has criticized Democratic President Joe Biden's student debt forgiveness program, although Trump has not specified how he will tackle the issue. Nearly half of 18- to 29 year-old Trump voters strongly or somewhat favor the government canceling student loan debt for more people, compared with about 1 in 10 Trump voters over 65.

Climate change is a significant concern

Trump has said he will target some of the national climate policies that are most effective at reducing planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions, according to climate change experts. About 6 in 10 of Trump voters under 30 were somewhat or very concerned about the effects of climate change in their community, compared with about 3 in 10 Trump voters 65 and older.

Younger Trump voters were much more split on how the U.S. should approach energy policy, with a significant share supporting the kinds of alternative energy investments that Trump has promised to roll back.

Just slightly more than half wanted the U.S. to expand production of fossil fuels, as Trump has promised, compared with about 8 in 10 Trump voters 65 and older. And about 4 in 10 Trump voters under 30 wanted the U.S. to focus on expanding the use of alternative energy, compared with 14% of Trump voters 65 and older.

Tariffs and hardline immigration policies are less popular

Another potential issue for Trump: The tariffs he has promised are another dividing line among his voters. Slightly less than half of Trump voters under 30 are somewhat or strongly opposed to tariffs, while about 8 in 10 Trump voters over 65 are in favor.

His immigration policies could be an issue for some younger Trump supporters, too. About half of Trump voters under 30 strongly favor reducing the number of people who can seek asylum at the border, compared with about 8 in 10 Trump voters 65 and older.

More than 4 in 10 Trump voters under 30 think immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally should be offered a chance to apply for legal status, compared with about 2 in 10 Trump voters 65 and older. There was no age divide on this question among Trump voters in 2020.

A lion cub evacuated from Lebanon to a South African sanctuary escapes airstrikes and abuse

By MALAK HARB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — When Sara first arrived at her rescuers' home, she was sick, tired, and was covered in ringworms and signs of abuse all over her little furry body.

After spending two months in a small Beirut apartment with an animal rights group, the four-and-half-month-old lion cub arrived Friday at a wildlife sanctuary in South Africa after a long journey on a yacht and planes, escaping both Israeli airstrikes and abusive owners.

Sara is the fifth lion cub to be evacuated from Lebanon by local rescue group Animals Lebanon since Hezbollah and Israel began exchanging fire a day after the Oct. 7 attack in southern Israel by Hamas that ignited the war in Gaza last year.

Animals Lebanon first discovered Sara on social media channels in July. Her owner, a Lebanese man in the ancient city of Baalbek, posted bombastic videos of himself parading with the little lion cub on TikTok and Instagram.

Under Lebanese law, it is prohibited to own wild and exotic animals.

The lion cub was "really just being used as showing off," said Jason Mier, executive director of Animals Lebanon.

In mid-September, the group finally retrieved her after filing a case with the police and judiciary, who interrogated her owner and forced him to give up the feline.

Soon after that, Israel launched an offensive against the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah - after nearly a year of low-level conflict - and Baalbek came under heavy bombardment.

Mier and his team were able to extract Sara from Baalbek weeks before Israel launched its aerial bombardment campaign on the ancient city, and move her to an apartment in Beirut's busy commercial Hamra district.

She was supposed to fly to South Africa in October, but international airlines stopped flights to Lebanon as Israeli jets and drones hit sites close to the country's only airport.

Hezbollah began firing rockets across the border into Israel in support of its ally, Hamas, on Oct. 8, 2023, a day after Palestinian militants staged the deadly surprise incursion into southern Israel. Israel responded with shelling and airstrikes. Beginning in mid-September, Israel launched an intense aerial bombardment of much of Lebanon, followed by a ground invasion.

Before the conflict, Animals Lebanon was active in halting animal trafficking and the exotic pet trade, saving over two dozen big cats from imprisonment in lavish homes and sending them to wildlife sanctuaries.

Since the war started, Animals Lebanon has also been rescuing pets that have been trapped in damaged apartments as hundreds of thousands of Lebanese fled bombardment - almost 1,000 over the past month alone.

"Lots are still in our care because the owners of these animals are still displaced," Mier said. "So we can't expect the person to take this animal back when he might be living on the street or in a school."

Before the conflict escalated, the rights group was able to move around the country more freely as the

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fighting largely remained in southern Lebanon along the border with Israel. But things became more difficult as airstrikes became more frequent and spread over wider swathes of the country.

Unaware of the war around her, Sara thrived. She was fed a platter of raw meat daily and grew to 40 kilograms (88 pounds). She cuddled every morning with Mier's wife Maggie, also an animal rights activist.

But the activists faced a major obstacle: How would they get her out of Lebanon?

Animals Lebanon collected donations from supporters and rights groups around the world to put Sara on a small yacht to take her to Cyprus. From there, she flew to the United Arab Emirates before her long journey ended in Cape Town.

Days before her evacuation Sara played in one of the bedrooms at Mier's apartment, with cushions and chew toys scattered.

Thursday at dawn, she arrived to the port of Dbayeh, just north of Beirut. Mier and his team were relieved, but also struggling to hold back their tears at her departure.

Mier anticipates Sara will be held for monitoring and disease-control, but soon will be part of a community of other lions.

"Then she'll be integrated with two recent lions that we've sent from Lebanon, so she'll make a nice group of three hopefully," he said. "That's where she will live out the rest of her life. That is the best option for her."

Today in History: November 16, Nixon authorizes Alaska pipeline

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Saturday, Nov. 16, the 321st day of 2024. There are 45 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Nov. 16, 1973, President Richard Nixon signed the Trans-Alaska Pipeline Authorization Act into law, authorizing the construction of an 800-mile (1,290-kilometer) oil pipeline from the Alaska North Slope to the port city of Valdez.

Also on this date:

In 1907, Oklahoma became the 46th state of the union.

In 1914, the newly created Federal Reserve Banks opened in 12 cities.

In 1982, an agreement was announced in the 57th day of a strike by National Football League players.

In 1988, Benazir Bhutto was voted prime minister of Pakistan, the first woman to be elected to lead a Muslim-majority country.

In 1989, six Jesuit priests, a housekeeper and her daughter were slain by army troops at the University of Central America José Simeón Cañas in El Salvador.

In 2001, investigators found a letter addressed to Democratic Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont containing anthrax; it was the second letter bearing the deadly germ known to have been sent to Capitol Hill.

In 2001, the first film in the Harry Potter series, "Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone" (U.S. title: "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone") debuted in theaters around the world.

In 2006, after midterm elections that saw Democrats take control of the U.S. House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi was nominated by the Democratic caucus to become speaker of the House. (Pelosi would officially become speaker by House vote the following January, becoming the first woman to serve in the role.)

In 2018, a U.S. official said intelligence officials had concluded that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman had ordered the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi (jah-MAHL' khahr-SHOHK'-jee).

Today's Birthdays: Actor Miguel Sandoval is 73. Video game designer Shigeru Miyamoto is 72. NASCAR Hall of Famer Terry Labonte is 68. Actor Marg Helgenberger is 66. Former MLB All-Star pitcher Dwight Gooden is 60. Jazz singer Diana Krall is 60. Actor Lisa Bonet is 57. Actor Martha Plimpton is 54. Olympic figure skating gold medalist Oksana Baiul (ahk-SAH'-nah by-OOL') is 47. Actor Maggie Gyllenhaal (JIHL'-ehn-hahl) is 47. Actor-comedian Pete Davidson is 31.