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Wednesday, Nov. 20

Senior Menu: Hamburger cabbage hot dish, corn, pears, muffin.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, time to be determined; League, 6:30 p.m.

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

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton Ad Council, 7 p.m.

Groton C&MA: Kids' Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study at 7 pm.



Due to the weather, the Groton Area School District will be closed on Wednesday, November 20, 2024.

Thursday, Nov. 21

Senior Menu: Ham rotini bake, capri blend, fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Pancake on a stick.

School Lunch: Glazed ham, baby bakers.

Emmanuel Lutheran: WELCA: Praise and Thanksgiving, 1:30 p.m. (Program - Sarah, Hostess - Nigeria)

State Volleyball Tournament in Sioux Falls

Friday, Nov. 22

Senior Menu: Meatballs, mashed potatoes with gravy, California blend, fruit cocktail, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Egg bake.

School Lunch: Stromboli squares, mixed vegetables.

State Volleyball Tournament in Sioux Falls

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

Saturday, Nov. 23

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

State Volleyball Tournament in Sioux Falls

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

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Remembering Our American Veterans



Clint Jacobson



by Talli Wright

Clint Jacobson was inducted into the military on February 16, 1971, by the "Draft". Clint received a letter from the President which opened by saying, "Greetings, you are ordered to be inducted into the armed forces." While in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, he was sworn into the US Army. Clint married his wife, Audrey Jacobson, on September 9, 1977, after which they had their son, Clint L. Jacobson.

Clint did not pick the branch he was in. His basic training was in Fort Lewis, Washington, and he was flown from Sioux Falls to Fort Lewis. Clint stated that basic training can be stressful with all of the rules and military talk that you're not used to, but eventually you fall in, and it goes from there with the training. Clint's basic training took about 9 weeks, with the first week being called the zero week in which you get orientated by receiving haircuts, military clothing, and equipment. It consists of much training to include exercising, running, and learning about everything. You must become proficient with your M-16 rifle and

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attend many training courses. The one training session Clint remembers was the tear gas training, in which they were ushered into a small building with gas masks on, then required to remove them and sing, "Mary had a Little Lamb". Clint said by the time you were allowed to exit, you knew all about the gas and that you didn't want it anymore. Every day seemed to get better for Clint and eventually he graduated and felt much accomplished. It made him feel like a real soldier at that point in his life, because he was.

When asked, "When and where did you serve?" Clint responded by saying, "I served my AIT training in Fort Sil, Oklahoma, where we were to learn about cannons. The military name for this is 13 alpha 10. You study the cannons and jobs that it takes to fire them in different situations and learn about forward observers, etc. Since computers weren't available yet." In addition to Clint's training, he was picked to have a second military occupational school. This was because Clint was able to type quite proficiently and was used to office duties. As a result, he became the Battery Clerk and took care of most of the paperwork coming and going. Clint says it was a lot. During this time, Clint was stationed at Fork Sill, Oklahoma, for about 9 months and then transferred to Stocker Busch, Kaserne, in Northern Germany with the same job as a Battery Clerk, since they had just lost their current one getting out of the Army. This was HHD US Army and was a NATO base with only about 200 Americans and fully supported by Belgians as far as Jeeps, Trucks, and equipment. The base consisted of the Headquarters and also had an area called, "down below," where the nuclear warheads were. Clint said this area was very secretive and unless you worked with them, no one could talk about it. Clint also wanted to mention that it felt good to be a part of the military and serve his country, the wonderful USA.

During Clint's time in the Army, he met many friends and great people. Some of these people have been lifelong friends and several years ago, Clint and some others, along with their wives, met in Las Vegas for a get together. Clint said this was really something because he hadn't seen his buddies for 43 years. Clint said it was wonderful. When asked what he did for entertainment, Clint said there was much to do in Germany and many sights to see. Clint had a car there, which was a 1965 Karmanghia, so he could get around quite well. As for humorous events, Clint said there were many, but most should not be talked about. Clint had lots of fun and there were many nice times. An unusual event that Clint had was in 1972. Clint had a friend. They went to Munich for the Olympics. This was very special to Clint. While he and his friend were there, there was a terrorist attack that killed some people. Clint didn't know this happened until he got back to base. Clint also went to the concentration camp, Dachau, where the Jews were persecuted during World War II. "It was very strange and quiet to tour because of all of the killing and pain that had happened there," said Clint, "The posters with photos were everywhere in three languages: German, English, and French." Clint believes the reason the camp was not destroyed is so people will remember it and never let it happen again.



Clint Jacobson (center) pictured with Talli Wright (right) and Legion Auxiliary member Laila Roberts. (Photo by Bruce Babcock)

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During Clint's service, he traveled to Paris, France; North Africa; Belgium; and Spain. The supplies he needed were readily available for him. Clint stayed in touch with his father and sisters by letters. Telephone calls were much too expensive at the time, so he took many pictures and sent them to his family, which they enjoyed.

Clint was not in the combat zone, but he was awarded the Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Expert M-16, and attended the Basic Leadership School. He also has a letter of Commendation from his commanding officer, Captain Ralph E. Fleetham.

After Clint was released from duty, he returned to his father's home near Groton, South Dakota, where he was living. During Clint's time in the Army, his mother sadly passed away from cancer. Shortly after returning home, Clint got a job as a firefighter working for the Aberdeen Fire Department. He later went to Forestry School in Montana after which he became involved in the Insurance Industry and has also been in some farming for the rest of his life.

Clint Jacobson is a 50-year member of the Groton American Legion Post 39. The service affected his life positively and he has no regrets of going into the service. Clint believes it helped him in many ways that he hadn't dreamed possible.

Clint's message to young adults who are contemplating entering the military is, "It can be very rewarding, but also hard. Think it over and visit veterans about your goals and ambitions."

FROSTY CLUE

I/My.....
20. Two of my children are employed in the medical field



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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.

1,000 Days of War

The Ukrainian military launched six US-supplied short-range ballistic missiles into Russia for the first time early Tuesday, two days after the Biden administration greenlit their expanded use. Russian officials claimed five of the missiles were intercepted, with a sixth hitting an ammunition depot in Russia's southwestern region of Bryansk. The incident came on the 1,000th day of the deadliest conflict in Europe since World War II.

Army Tactical Missile Systems are American-made short-range (up to 190 miles) ballistic missiles designed to be launched from mobile platforms. Their high speed—a result of their high launch trajectory through the atmosphere—makes them more difficult to intercept than the drones and cruise missiles Ukraine has previously fired into Russia. Biden reportedly shifted the policy to help Ukraine counter Russia's concentration of troops—including more than 10,000 North Koreans—in the Ukrainian-occupied Kursk territory of Russia.

Later Tuesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin lowered the threshold for justifying the use of nuclear weapons to include any attack from a nonnuclear country supported by a nuclear ally.

Hong Kong Subversion Trial

Forty-five pro-democracy activists were sentenced Tuesday to prison terms ranging from four to 10 years in Hong Kong's largest case under Beijing's 2020 national security law. The defendants were accused of conspiring to subvert the government by holding unofficial primary elections for Hong Kong's legislature in July 2020.

Authorities said the elections undermined state power by attempting to secure a majority needed to veto budgets, which could have dissolved the legislature and forced its leader to resign. Benny Tai, a 60-year-old former law professor, received the longest sentence of 10 years for co-organizing the primary elections. The case was brought under China's national security law, which criminalized dissent in June 2020 after mass antigovernment protests in 2019. In total, 47 people were charged in the elections; two were acquitted in May.

In recent years, Beijing has asserted more control over Hong Kong—a special administrative region that was mostly autonomous from Communist Party control following the UK ceding it to China in 1997.

Travel Guide Guru Dies

Arthur Frommer, the travel guidebook author and founder of the Frommer's brand, has died at age 95 from complications of pneumonia. Frommer revolutionized travel for Americans with his 1957 guidebook, "Europe on 5 Dollars a Day," which made international travel accessible and affordable. The book, updated annually until 2007, has sold millions of copies since its initial publication.

Born in 1929 in Virginia, Frommer began writing his first travel book for US soldiers overseas while serving in the Army in Germany in the 1950s. His 1957 guidebook—which coincided with the rise of jet travel that made trips to Europe more feasible—emphasized budget-conscious travel, advising readers to avoid first class, use public transportation, and save money in other ways.

The Frommer's brand has grown to include more than 130 active titles covering destinations worldwide, as well as podcasts, a radio show, and other media.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Katie Taylor-Amanda Serrano boxing match brought in 74 million live viewers; the match was the co-main event to the Mike Tyson-Jake Paul fight and is now the most-watched professional women's sporting event in US history.

Bob Love, three-time NBA All-Star, dies at age 81.

Colin Petersen, founding member and drummer for the Bee Gees, dies at age 78 just four days after another Bee Gees drummer, Dennis Bryon, passed away.

Tennis great Rafael Nadal plays in last match of his more than 20 year career as Spain loses to the Netherlands in the Davis Cup quarterfinals.

Science & Technology

SpaceX makes sixth test launch of its massive Starship space vehicle; skips second attempt at a "chop-stick" catch of the Super Heavy rocket booster using giant mechanical arms.

Embattled physicist Ranga Dias ousted from the University of Rochester following retractions of controversial papers claiming room-temperature superconductivity.

Octopuses expend significant amounts of energy to change color, new study finds; amount is roughly equal to what is needed to maintain all bodily functions while at rest.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 +0.4%, Dow -0.3%, Nasdaq +1.0%).

Nvidia stock rises over 4% ahead of third-quarter earnings report today.

Justice Department will reportedly ask federal judge to force Google to sell Chrome—the world's most popular internet browser—today; expected proposal follows August ruling the company operates an illegal search monopoly.

President-elect Donald Trump nominates Cantor Fitzgerald CEO Howard Lutnick for commerce secretary, pending Senate confirmation.

Dr. Mehmet Oz nominated to oversee Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Linda McMahon nominated to lead Education Department.

Politics & World Affairs

Major storm expected this week in Northern California and Pacific Northwest as plumes of moisture known as atmospheric rivers are expected to combine with bomb cyclone to bring heavy rainfall, flash flooding.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg (D) agrees to postpone sentencing in Trump hush money case.

Hacker accesses depositions in since-dropped investigations on former Rep. Matt Gaetz (R); includes remarks from woman who says she had sex with the attorney general nominee when she was 17.

Two undersea cables in the Baltic Sea have been damaged, per European officials, raising suspicions of foul play; one connected Finland and Germany, the other connected Sweden and Lithuania.

Names Released in Lincoln County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle fatal crash

Where: SD Highway 115 and 276th Street, three miles south of Harrisburg, SD

When: 10:05 a.m., November 16, 2024

Driver 1: Jeffrey Lynn Joneson, 59-year-old male from Harrisburg, SD, no injuries

Vehicle 1: 1999 Ford F-250

Seat belt Used: Yes

Driver 2: Arnold Topf, 79-year-old male from Harrisburg, SD, fatal injuries

Vehicle 2: 2019 Toyota Camry

Seat belt Used: Yes

Passenger 1: Rita Ardell Topf, 79-year-old female from Harrisburg, SD, fatal injuries

Seat belt Used: Yes

Lincoln County, S.D.- Two people died Saturday morning in a two-vehicle collision three miles south of Harrisburg, SD.

Preliminary crash information indicates Jeffrey Lynn Joneson, the driver of a 1999 Ford F-250 was traveling southbound on SD Highway 115 near 276th Street. At the same time, a 2019 Toyota Camry was eastbound on 276th Street. After stopping at the stop sign, the Camry entered the intersection and collided with the Ford. Both vehicles came to rest in the ditch.

The driver and passenger in the Camry, Arnold and Rita Ardell Topf, passed away on-scene. Joneson had no injuries.

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

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

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NSU Men's Basketball

James Glenn Knocks Down 34 in Northern's Home Opening Win

Aberdeen, S.D. – The Northern State University men's basketball team entered the win column Tuesday evening against Dakota State. The 10-point victory for the Wolves was also the 100th of Saul Phillip's career leading the pack.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 81, DSU 71

Records: NSU 1-3, DSU 4-3

Attendance: 1489

HOW IT HAPPENED

Dakota State led 38-34 at the half, however the Wolves made adjustments and dropped 47 points to the Trojans 33 in the second

Northern shot 51.6% in the second half and 64.3% from beyond the arc with nine made 3-pointers

They led the contest with 17 assists, 14 made 3-pointers, eight steals, and four blocks, while out-rebounding Dakota State 36-28

Northern scored 26 points in the paint, 26 points off turnovers, 20 points off the bench, and 12 second chance points in the win

In addition, they limited production for the Trojans, giving up just eight points off turnovers and five on fast breaks

NSU shot 47.5% from the field, 50.0% from the 3-point line, and 73.3% from the foul line in the win

The team was led by James Glenn with a Northern State career high of 34 points, hitting 11-of-14 from the floor, including 8-of-10 from the 3-point line

Kwat Abdelkarim followed adding 12 points, while both Glenn and Adbelkarim dished out three assists

Marcus Burks led the team passing with six assists and finished the evening second on the team with six rebounds behind Tobi Obiora with seven

Noah Baca led NSU off the bench with seven points and four rebounds, hitting 3-of-4 from the floor

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

James Glenn: 34 points, 78.5 field goal%, 80.0 3-point field goal%, 4 rebounds, 3 assists, 2 steals, 1 block

Kwat Abdelkarim: 12 points, 80.0 3-point field goal%, 3 rebounds, 3 assists, 2 steals, 1 block

Tobi Obiora: 8 points, 7 rebounds, 2 steals, 1 block, 1 assist

UP NEXT

Northern travels North on Saturday for an evening match-up at the University of Jamestown. Tip-off is set for 6 p.m. against the Jimmies in non-conference action.

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NSU Volleyball

No. 18 Wolves Advance to NSIC Semifinals Following Road Win

Marshall, Minn. – The No. 18 Northern State University volleyball team returned to favor to No. 12 Southwest Minnesota State Tuesday evening. The Wolves defeated the Mustangs on their home court in the opening round of the NSIC Tournament.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 3, SMSU 1

Records: NSU 21-6, SMSU 23-5

Attendance: 833

HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern opened the match with a 25-19 victory in set one and fell 25-20 in set two

They rallied back for 25-18 and 25-20 victories in the third and fourth, sealing the win and advancing in the post season

The Wolves led the match with 76 digs, 12 blocks, and five aces, while adding 55 kills and 53 assists

They hit .239 in the win and held the Mustangs to a .179 attack percentage

Three Wolves recorded double figure offensive numbers led by Natalia Szybinska with 20 kills, hitting .450 to lead the team

Hanna Thompson and Morissen Samuels followed notching 15 and 13 kills respectively

The defense was led by Abby Meister with 25 digs, while Keri Walker tallied 17

Walker served up 42 gems for the Wolves in the forms of assists and was second on the team with four blocks

All seven offensive players who entered the game recorded multiple blocks in the win led by Abby Brooks with five

Reese Johnson and Sara Moberg added eight digs apiece and Johnson led the squad with two aces

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Natalia Szybinska: 20 kills, .450 attack%, 2 digs, 2 blocks

Keri Walker: 42 assists, 17 digs, 4 blocks, 1 ace

Abby Mesiter: 25 digs, 2 assists, 1 ace

BEYOND THE BOX SCORE

NCAA Regional Rankings will be released Wednesday afternoon, however tonight's win will not be included in the ranking information

UP NEXT

Northern advances to the semifinal round and will face top-seeded St. Cloud State. First serve is set for 5 p.m. in St. Cloud on Saturday, November 23.

Combined or separate? City Council asks for numbers to compare meter replacement options

By Elizabeth Varin

The Groton City Council directed staff to seek more bids for new utility meters. Instead of evaluating separate meters for water and electricity, council members requested quotes for combined water-electric meters.

Technology Specialist Paul Kosel, who has been presenting an electric meter replacement project for a few months, told the council he recommends moving forward with a new system, but Electric Superintendent Todd Gay disagreed. Gay said he wanted the council to consider a combined water and electric meter through a different company. The electric meters need immediate attention, and the batteries in the city's water meter have a shelf life that is running out.

If the city will have to make a big investment in the water meter system in three to four years, the council may as well see if it can combine the two meter systems, he said. Current staff who also know the meter systems will also retire or leave the city at some point.

"I'm trying to think down the road, and that's what you pay me for," he said.

Gay presented rough numbers for a new electric metering system from Irby Utilities.

Kosel said the water meters need immediate attention. He had to replace six last week, and there are more on downward slide.

Councilwoman Karyn Babcock asked that Gay and Kosel to put their brains together to find a solution.

"You have to take the personal out of the equation and do what's best for the city," she said. "We need to figure out what's best for everybody."

To Kosel, Mayor Scott Hanlon added, "it's not that your system is not good, but we need to think on that. Everything's changing quick, but if you're not around... I don't know."

Council members directed Kosel to order some replacement water meter modules for immediate repairs, and asked Kosel and Gay to come up with numbers for council members to compare.

2025 staff salaries set

The council approved city employee salaries for 2025.

The full-time, non-seasonal employee salaries are set to rise 2.5 percent for a cost-of-living increase, as well as a 2 percent salary increase.

Salaries for elected and appointed positions, like council members, board of equalization members, and planning and zoning commissioners, will stay the same as the 2024 rate.

Salaries that increased include:

- Finance officer salary rising from \$27.79 hourly to \$32 hourly
- Deputy finance officer salary rising from \$28.89 hourly to \$30.28 hourly
- Assistant finance officer salary rising from \$23.97 hourly to \$25.05 hourly
- Public works coordinator/street and water superintendent salary from \$37.02 hourly to \$38.69 hourly
- Wastewater superintendent salary from \$33.09 hourly to \$34.58 hourly
- Assistant street superintendent salary from \$30.75 hourly to \$32.13 hourly
- Technology specialist salary from \$32.38 hourly to \$33.84 hourly
- Electric superintendent salary from \$57.09 hourly to \$59.66 hourly
- Electric lineman salary from \$42.03 hourly to \$43.92 hourly
- Police chief salary from \$36.30 hourly to \$37.93 hourly
- Police officer/assistant chief salary from \$33.05 hourly to \$34.54 hourly
- Level one police officer salary from \$30.89 hourly to \$32.28 hourly
- Level two police officer salary from \$30.16 hourly to \$31.52 hourly

A public works laborer position was added to the 2025 ordinance. That position earns \$31.35 hourly.

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A garage has caused questions about who signs off on building permits.

At Tuesday's meeting, Councilman Brian Bahr asked the council to consider having the contracted code enforcer sign off on building permits. That would allow him to consider if the proposed project falls in line with the city's current building code.

The idea came after the city's Planning and Zoning Commission denied a special permit last week for someone to build a standalone garage.

Finance Officer Douglas Heinrich said he doesn't know if having the code enforcer look through the permit application would have caught the issue at last week's meeting. It would just add another signature to the paperwork, he added.

Bahr asked why the finance officer position signs off on the permits.

Heinrich replied that he hadn't signed off on the one presented to the commission. He strictly goes off of existing city ordinance.

"You have to abide by the rules," he said.

The permit to build a secondary building, in this case a garage, before the primary residence, was brought before the planning and zoning commission because the builder wanted a special exemption to build the garage before any other structures on the property, Heinrich said. The planning commission denied the special exemption, and the builder has appealed that decision. The City Council will review the appeal at its December 3 meeting.

More funds budgeted for electric meter system replacement

Budget numbers continued to shift as the City Council approved the second and final reading of its 2025 appropriations ordinance.

The City Council asked for a larger amount to be allocated for an electric system upgrade. The total budgeted rose from \$200,000 to \$350,000.

The council also added a \$10,000 line item for the Groton Development Corporation.

"We've got to support them," said Mayor Scott Hanlon. "This committee is working hard to get something going. It's good for the community."

In other action:

- City electric workers plan to help out a neighboring community. Electric Superintendent Todd Gay asked the council for permission to assist the city of Hecla, who had requested help to move a transformer. The city of Hecla will pay for the Groton utility employees time and expenses. The project is a "piece of cake. It's not hard. It'd be half to three-quarters of a day," Gay said.

- The council put a hold on adding swinging gates next to the soccer field. The proposed gates would swing closed during soccer games and possibly practices to block off West Third Avenue between Garfield Street and North Lincoln Street. Councilman Kevin Nehls said that while he thinks a gate would be "100 percent" safer than using cones to block off the roadway, Groton soccer leaders said they wanted to keep using traffic cones. "I think it's going to be a waste if they don't want it," he said of the cost of the gate. Mayor Scott Hanlon added if they want something later on, city staff can make the fence themselves.

- The council approved the second reading of an ordinance that would allow residents to apply for a "Budget Billing Program." City staff would calculate the monthly average utility cost for that residential household and charge that amount each month to equalize the resident's bill.

- City offices will be closed on November 28 and 29 for the Thanksgiving holiday.

- Mayor Scott Hanlon reminded residents with dogs to get their 2025 dog licenses by Dec. 31, 2024 or they will face a fine.

- The annual holiday lighting contest judging will take place Dec. 19. The top three household light displays will receive either a \$100, \$75 or \$50 utility bill credit.

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Groton City October Financial Report

October 2024

Dacotah Bank Checking Acct	\$ 4,018,011.78
General Cash	\$ 300.00
SD FIT Acct	\$ 1,718,907.47
Dacotah Bank Water CD	\$ 85,849.13
Cemetery Perp Care CD	\$ 32,876.69
Total	\$ 5,855,945.07

Invested In		
Cash	\$ 300.00	0.01%
Dacotah Bank	\$ 4,136,737.60	70.64%
SD Fit	\$ 1,718,907.47	29.35%
Total	\$ 5,855,945.07	100.00%

	Beginning	Revenue	Expenses	Transfers	Ending
	Cash Balance				Cash Balance
General	\$ 1,078,883.31	\$ 94,063.11	\$ 99,060.33		\$ 1,073,886.09
Bed, Board, Booze Tax	\$ 215,083.83	\$ 2,855.52			\$ 217,939.35
Baseball Uniforms	\$ 6,981.75				\$ 6,981.75
Airport	\$ 38,590.92		\$ 41.79		\$ 38,549.13
**Debt Service	\$ 36,039.28				\$ 36,039.28
Cemetery Perpetual Care	\$ 34,756.69				\$ 34,756.69
Water	\$ 719,014.55	\$ 55,827.06	\$ 35,462.25		\$ 739,379.36
Electric	\$ 2,986,676.78	\$ 137,844.89	\$ 109,237.24		\$ 3,015,284.43
Wastewater	\$ 366,209.12	\$ 25,807.71	\$ 13,746.12		\$ 378,270.71
Solid Waste	\$ 96,257.71	\$ 11,109.60	\$ 10,418.27		\$ 96,949.04
Family Crisis	\$ 9,068.22		\$ 969.80		\$ 8,098.42
Sales Tax	\$ 10,331.20	\$ 8,291.70	\$ 9,181.76		\$ 9,441.14
Employment	\$ 19,380.24		\$ 2,153.84		\$ 21,534.08
Utility Prepayments	\$ 76,267.97	\$ (1,475.79)			\$ 74,792.18
Utility Deposits	\$ 97,094.34	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 250.00		\$ 97,844.34
Other	\$ 6,199.08				\$ 6,199.08
Totals	\$ 5,796,834.99	\$ 335,323.80	\$ 280,521.40	\$ -	\$ 5,855,945.07

**Debt to be Paid		
**2015 Refinance	\$ 1,675,000.00	by 12/1/2035
Total Debt	\$ 1,675,000.00	



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Carbon pipeline company reapplies for South Dakota permit

State regulators rejected earlier application last year

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - NOVEMBER 19, 2024 12:34 PM

An Iowa company proposing a carbon dioxide pipeline said it resubmitted its permit application to South Dakota regulators Tuesday with what the company described as "major reroutes."

The move comes more than a year after the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission rejected Summit Carbon Solution's initial application. At that time, the commission cited the route's non-compliance with county laws mandating minimum distances between pipelines and existing features.

A new route map was not immediately available from the company or state officials Tuesday morning, but maps became available later Tuesday amid hundreds of pages of application documents released by the state.

An application letter from project lawyer Brett Koenecke addresses the route changes.

"Despite Applicant's best efforts, the proposed route is not fully compliant with existing ordinances as presently enacted in several counties," Koenecke wrote. "Those ordinances would result, in some cases, in no project being built at all, or, in other cases, in needless additional length, involving more landowners, not fewer, and would have resulted in project participants being stranded by the project."

Summit's latest South Dakota route includes 700 miles with connections to 14 ethanol plants in the eastern part of the state, plus a proposed sustainable aviation fuel plant, the company said. Overall, the \$9 billion pipeline would span 2,500 miles with connections to 57 ethanol plants in five states.

Summit already has permits in Iowa and North Dakota. A decision is pending in Minnesota, and Nebraska has no state permitting processing for carbon pipelines.



Wade Boeshans, executive vice president of Summit Carbon Solutions, testifies April 22, 2024, in Mandan, North Dakota, during a Public Service Commission hearing. (Kyle Martin/For the North Dakota Monitor)

Project details

Summit plans to capture some of the carbon dioxide produced during ethanol production, liquefy it, and transport it via pipeline to North Dakota for injection underground in a process known as "sequestration." That could qualify the company for billions of dollars in federal tax credits that are intended to incentivize the removal of heat-trapping carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

A Tuesday news release from Summit said the pipeline could also make carbon available for uses includ-

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ing green methanol, water treatment, food processing and dry ice production.

The sequestration area is near the oilfields of western North Dakota, and project critics have long alleged that some of the carbon dioxide in the pipeline could be used for enhanced oil recovery. In that process, liquid CO₂ is injected into aging oil wells to extract additional crude oil.

Summit's website says the pipeline "will not be used for enhanced oil recovery." Yet during a 2023 permit hearing in Iowa, Summit Chief Operations Officer Jimmy Powell said it's "a possibility" that Summit could transport CO₂ for "another carrier" that might use it for enhanced oil recovery.

The project has faced staunch opposition in South Dakota from landowners who don't want the pipeline crossing their land, and from landowners and others concerned about potential leaks of toxic carbon dioxide plumes.

A Tuesday press release from Summit mentioned reroutes in Spink, Brown, McPherson and Lincoln counties — areas where local siting laws played a role in state regulators' denial of Summit's first permit application.

Ed Fischbach, a pipeline opponent and Aberdeen-area farmer, said the company previously claimed it could not abide by those local laws.

"That's what they were saying under oath," Fischbach said. "It is just more evidence that this company has not been telling the truth. They said, 'There's no way we can make these work, and they're too restrictive.'"

The company said Tuesday it incorporated input from landowners and local officials during a yearlong series of negotiations.

"This project represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to strengthen South Dakota's agricultural future while advancing energy innovation," said Lee Blank, Summit's CEO, in a statement. He emphasized the company's commitment to "working hand in hand with landowners and communities" to achieve a balanced solution.

Lawsuits pending, legislation possible

But the proposal is politically fraught in South Dakota. Fourteen incumbent state legislators lost to challengers in the June primary election, and the incumbents' support of a controversial pipeline law was a factor in many races.

Legislators and Gov. Kristi Noem approved the law last winter, describing it as balanced approach to implement new protections for landowners and county governments while leaving open a regulatory door for the pipeline's potential approval.

Opponents attacked a portion of the law they said would require counties to prove their siting laws are reasonable, rather than requiring Summit prove them unreasonable. Opponents also gathered petition signatures and forced the law onto the November ballot, where 59% of voters rejected it.

One of the many organizations that joined in the fight against the law was Dakota Rural Action. Chase Jensen, an organizer with the group, said voters sent a message with their rejection of Referred Law 21.

"It shows that South Dakota trusts local governments to regulate these projects," Jensen said. "Summit's new route will be telling whether they heard the message or not."

Summit aims to begin construction in 2026 and start operations in 2027. State regulators will review Summit's new application in the coming months, which could overlap with legislative action on the proposal. Many of the new South Dakota legislators who will take office in January are opponents of the project's potential use of eminent domain, a legal process for obtaining access to land from unwilling landowners in exchange for just compensation.

A further complication for the company is a set of lawsuits in South Dakota challenging Summit's right to use eminent domain.

In August, the South Dakota Supreme Court ruled that Summit had not yet proven its status as a "common carrier," a designation necessary to the eminent domain process. The court sent the lawsuits back to lower courts, where Summit said it would try to prove its case.

Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public af-

fairs 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.

Prison official: Sweat lodges rebuilt, operating at state penitentiary after contraband found

BY: JOHN HULT - NOVEMBER 19, 2024 2:25 PM



Corrections Secretary Kellie Wasko speaks to lawmakers on Feb. 21, 2024, in Pierre. (John

Hult/South Dakota Searchlight)

Corrections Secretary Kellie Wasko told the South Dakota Corrections Commission that prison staff found contraband in sweat lodges disassembled during a weekslong prison lockdown earlier this fall in Sioux Falls.

She also said the lodges have been rebuilt and became operational again a few weeks ago on the grounds of the South Dakota State Penitentiary. Sweat lodges are ceremonial spaces for Native Americans. Ceremonies involve pouring water over hot rocks in an enclosed dome while prayers are sung, typically in an Indigenous language.

Wasko gave the commission an update on the lockdown Tuesday during the advisory group's last meeting of the year. The secretary offered the same presentation she'd shared last month with the Legislature's Government Operations and Audit Commission, which includes several photos of contraband seized during the lockdown.

Most of the details on the results of the 17-day lockdown were shared with lawmakers behind

closed doors during that October audit committee meeting. The following day, Teresa Bittinger was out as penitentiary warden. Through a spokesman, the Department of Corrections declined to share if she'd resigned or been let go, saying the agency can't share personnel information.

DOC: Contraband continues to circulate

The lockdown, Wasko said in October and again on Tuesday, was a preemptive measure meant to clear the Sioux Falls prison facilities of dangerous contraband, not a response to a specific incident.

Wasko told the commission that the photos shared, including fiberglass and plexiglass formed into weapons, only represent a portion of the contraband seized during the lockdown. She also said that more contraband has been found in the periodic cell shakedowns that have taken place since.

Lynette Johnson, the widow of a correctional officer killed by two inmates in 2011, attended Tuesday's meeting. She wanted to know where the contraband was found, and how inmates were able to access the materials. She also asked how many inmates had been referred to the Attorney General's Office for prosecution as a result of the lockdown.

Individual inmates had some of the contraband, Wasko said, but other items were found in common areas. "I want to say that it involved roughly six inmates that were directly correlated to contraband," she said. She declined to offer details on where any of the items might have come from before being uncovered by DOC staff, citing security.

The DOC's job, Wasko said, is to "stay ahead" of contraband issues.

Complaint management

The commission also discussed the finances of the prison shops. Two years ago, the DOC adopted a policy of instituting corrective action plans for prison industry shops that lose money for six consecutive fiscal quarters. DOC Finance Director Brittni Skipper said this month, for the first time in that two-year window, none of the shops currently operating are on corrective action plans.

Skipper also offered an update on commissary, essentially the inmate general store. The DOC took on the management of commissary a few months ago under the terms of a new contract with Union Supply Group, a company owned by food service giant Aramark.

The company pays to lease warehouse space in the prison in Sioux Falls, and also pays inmate labor costs. Skipper said the next update on prison finances will reflect a 5% commission.

There was also discussion from commission members on what to do with citizen or inmate inquiries. Commission member and Minnehaha County Circuit Judge Jon Sogn said he'd gotten letters from inmates in recent months, as did state Sen. Shawn Bordeaux, D-Rosebud, who chairs the commission. Bordeaux also mentioned calls and emails from DOC employees, who told him they didn't want to share their names for fear of retribution.

David McGirr, who represents retailers on the commission, said he'd gotten messages about changes in the price of popular commissary items.

Several inmates and family members have expressed frustration over price increases, or over items in smaller packages priced similarly to the larger packages available through the previous contractor.

At the last commission meeting in September, Skipper said most of the prices are within a few cents of the old prices. After being questioned on the much higher price attached to in-cell televisions, Wasko said the new TVs are corrections-grade, sturdier and clear for security purposes.

On Tuesday, Wasko told commissioners that any complaints should be forwarded to the DOC to investigate and resolve. Judge Sogn asked if the responses and resolutions would be distributed to all the commission members, and Wasko said that typically wouldn't happen.

"Our goal is more so to answer the questions and rectify any problems that come up," Wasko said. "To then send it out to the whole commission, I'm not sure what that would accomplish."

Bordeaux, who was elected to serve as chair but will vacate his legislative seat on the commission due to his loss on Election Day, suggested that commissioners share complaints among themselves, and that the DOC ought to share any follow-up information.

"I think it's very important that we all stay informed, especially right now," Bordeaux said. "It seems like it's more chaotic now than all the years that I've sat on a commission."

Wasko said the agency is committed to resolving problems. When an inmate, DOC employee, volunteer or inmate family member has a complaint, Wasko said, "we're going to look into it."

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.

COMMENTARY

On Cabinet nominees, Thune can lead the Senate band or be part of Trump's

President-elect's demand for recess appointments is a test of 'advise and consent' role
by Dana Hess

Lord, I've seen the world with a five-piece band
Looking at the back side of me
Singing my songs, one of his now and then
But I don't think Hank done 'em this way, no
I don't think Hank done 'em this way.
"Are You Sure Hank Done it this Way"
Waylon Jennings

You've seen the photo plenty of times. Sen. Mitch McConnell standing at a microphone with what amounts to his own "five-piece band" lined up behind him. These are Republican Party leaders in the Senate showing their support for whatever McConnell has to say as their party's leader.

For quite a while now, one of the members of McConnell's band has been South Dakota's own John Thune. He's back there in those photos, showing his loyalty. Depending how close the camera zooms in on McConnell, sometimes part of Thune's head gets cropped off because he's so tall.

Soon it will be Thune at the microphone with his own band of loyalists lined up behind him as he takes over McConnell's role as Republican leader in the Senate. Time will tell if he does things McConnell's way or not.

Here's hoping as the guard changes in the GOP's Senate leadership that Thune adheres to that institution's traditions. After the recent election victory of Donald Trump, those traditions are under fire.

In particular, Trumps wants the Senate to stay out of session so that he can make recess appointments to fill out his Cabinet. It seems Trump doesn't want the appointment process to be slowed down by a bunch of fool questions from senators inquiring about the worth of his nominees.

The president-elect floated this idea as a way to save precious time so that his administration could get right to work. Now, with a few nominations under his belt, it looks as if Trump is trying to bypass the traditional advise and consent role of the Senate because his roster of nominees reads like a skit on "Saturday Night Live."

It's hard to tell which nominee inspires a bigger laugh: Matt Gaetz as attorney general or Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as secretary of Health and Human Services. His other nominees are no laughing matter: Tulsi Gabbard with her well-documented fondness for dictators as director of National Intelligence and Pete



Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., speaks at a 2022 press conference following Senate Republicans' vote on their leadership for the next Congress. From left behind McConnell are GOP Sens. Joni Ernst, John Barrasso, John Thune and Shelley Moore Capito. (Jennifer Shutt/States Newsroom)

Hegseth whose main qualification for secretary of Defense is his role as a weekend anchor on Fox News.

Thune's new role in presiding over this circus is not the only South Dakota connection. Gov. Kristi Noem is Trump's choice to lead the Department of Homeland Security. A case could be made that even with Noem's experience as governor and congresswoman, her resume is a little thin for taking on the job of running Homeland Security. Lucky for her, senators are so aghast at the thought of Gaetz ruining the Department of Justice and Kennedy unleashing his conspiracy theories on the Department of Health that in comparison, Noem looks like a competent pick.

(Trump may be pushing for recess appointments because he doesn't want senators who have read Noem's book, "No Going Back," to ask for her definition of "security." In the book, she admits to using Hell's Angels to keep the roads open around Mount Rushmore during Trump's Fourth of July visit. If that's her definition of security, maybe the Bandidos can lend a hand with airport screenings.)

This piece started with a quote from Waylon Jennings in a song that was a plea for a change in country music. When it's Thune's turn at the microphone with his own five-piece band behind him, it would be best for us all if he resisted Trump's call for change in the way the Senate conducts its business. Certainly Thune's leadership style will be different from McConnell's. However, despite the pressure he faces from the president-elect, the nation is counting on Thune to resist change and uphold the Senate's tradition of holding hearings that question the competence and worth of Trump's Cabinet nominees.

Dana Hess spent more than 25 years in South Dakota journalism, editing newspapers in Redfield, Milbank and Pierre. He's retired and lives in Brookings, working occasionally as a freelance writer.

Trump picks Dr. Oz to run mammoth Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - NOVEMBER 19, 2024 5:09 PM

WASHINGTON — Former TV personality and onetime U.S. Senate candidate Mehmet Oz could become the next administrator for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, an expansive government agency that is responsible for large swaths of the country's health care.

President-elect Donald Trump announced his intent to nominate Oz on Tuesday, writing in a statement "there may be no Physician more qualified and capable than Dr. Oz to Make America Healthy Again."

Oz won the Republican primary in the 2022 Pennsylvania U.S. Senate race but was defeated during the general election by Democratic Sen. John Fetterman.

Trump wrote that Oz would "work closely" with Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who will be nominated for Health and Human Services secretary, "to take on the illness industrial complex, and all the horrible chronic diseases left in its wake."

"He will also cut waste and fraud within our Country's most expensive Government Agency, which is a third of our Nation's Healthcare spend, and a quarter of our entire National Budget," Trump wrote in the announcement.

The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services manages the country's largest health care programs, including Medicare, Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program, or CHIP, and the health insurance marketplaces created by the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare.



President-elect Donald Trump on Tuesday announced his intent to nominate Dr. Mehmet Oz as administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. In this photo, Oz speaks at a March 15, 2022 press conference in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

(Photo by Pennsylvania Capital-Star).

There are 67.7 million people enrolled in Medicare, with nearly 90% of those enrollees over the age of 65. The program also provides health care coverage for younger people with severe illnesses or disabilities.

Medicaid, a state-federal program that provides health coverage for low-income people, has about 72.4 million enrollees.

There are 7.1 million CHIP program participants.

And 21.3 million people purchased health insurance through the ACA marketplace during the 2024 open enrollment period.

When added together, the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services provides health care coverage to 1 in 4 Americans, according to its latest financial report.

The agency spent about \$1.516 trillion during the last fiscal year and has more than 6,700 federal employees as well as contractors to handle the workload.

"CMS and its contractors process over one billion Medicare claims annually, monitor quality of care, provide the states with matching funds for Medicaid benefits, and develop policies and procedures designed to give the best possible service to beneficiaries," according to the report.

"CMS also assures the safety and quality of medical facilities, provides health insurance protection to workers changing jobs, and maintains the largest collection of healthcare data in the United States."

Oz received his undergraduate degree from Harvard University before earning a joint M.D. and MBA from the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine and Wharton Business School.

He starred in the daytime show "Dr. Oz," which ran from 2009 until 2022.

Oz's nomination is subject to Senate confirmation and is under the jurisdiction of the Finance Committee, currently led by Oregon Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden and Idaho Republican Sen. Mike Crapo.

Oz's confirmation hearing won't be the first time he's testified before a Senate committee. More than 10 years ago, he testified in front of a Senate panel that his comments on his TV show about certain weight loss supplements were "flowery."

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

Prosecutors in Trump NY criminal case signal they won't oppose delay

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - NOVEMBER 19, 2024 4:58 PM

WASHINGTON — Consequences for President-elect Donald Trump's guilty conviction in a New York state case will be years away, as prosecutors signaled they will not oppose suspending the lawsuit while the incoming 47th president carries out his four years in the Oval Office.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg wrote Tuesday that he will fight Trump's request to toss the case altogether. But Bragg said he will not get in the way of a stay, or pause, on the proceedings.

"Given the need to balance competing constitutional interests, consideration must be given to various non-dismissal options that may address any concerns raised by the pendency of a post-trial criminal proceeding during the presidency, such as deferral of all remaining criminal proceedings until after the end of Defendant's upcoming presidential term," Bragg wrote in a memo that had been due Tuesday to New York Judge Juan Merchan.

Bragg requested that motions be due Dec. 9. Trump still has a criminal sentencing date on the calendar for Nov. 26, unless Merchan orders otherwise.

Trump spokesman Steven Cheung declared "a total and definitive victory" in a statement issued shortly after Bragg's letter became public.

"The Manhattan DA has conceded that this Witch Hunt cannot continue. The lawless case is now stayed, and President Trump's legal team is moving to get it dismissed once and for all," said Cheung.

History-making conviction

Trump, the first former president to become a convicted felon, was found guilty in May of 34 felonies for falsifying business records related to paying off porn star Stormy Daniels ahead of the 2016 presidential election to hide a decade-old sexual encounter with her at a Lake Tahoe golf club.

The likely delay of Trump's sentencing while he serves as president brings to a close, if temporarily, the only one of Trump's criminal cases that went to trial.

The case, brought by Bragg's office, was among four criminal cases the then-former president faced as he campaigned to again occupy the Oval Office. Trump also faced several civil lawsuits and now stares down roughly half a billion dollars in damages for committing fraud, defamation and sexual abuse.

As Trump readies to take the oath of office in just two months, U.S. Department of Justice special counsel Jack Smith's office is also winding down its two federal cases against Trump, as the department does not prosecute sitting presidents.

The federal cases include fraud and obstruction charges stemming from Trump's actions to undermine his 2020 election loss, which culminated in a violent attack by his supporters on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

The other case, appealed by Smith after a federal judge tossed it, revolved around charges that the then-former president unlawfully took and stockpiled classified documents at his Florida Mar-a-Lago estate upon leaving the White House.

Not the first delay in NY

Each of the 34 class E felonies Trump is convicted of carries a penalty of up to four years, according to the New York penal code.

Trump's sentencing date was twice delayed. Merchan granted Trump's request in September to delay the criminal sentencing until after November's presidential election.

Merchan had already delayed Trump's initial July sentencing date following the U.S. Supreme Court's decision ordering that former presidents are immune from criminal charges for core constitutional duties, and presumed immune for other actions while in office. The court's opinion also brought into question what types of evidence can be admitted in criminal cases against former presidents.

Trump asked Merchan to "set aside" the guilty verdict almost immediately after the Supreme Court's presidential immunity ruling. Merchan has yet to rule on the motion.

New York prosecutors and Trump's defense team on Nov. 12 jointly asked Merchan to delay all proceedings while the prosecutors decide if and how their case would proceed following Trump's election victory.

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



President-elect Donald Trump, at the time a candidate for president, speaks on May 28, 2022 in Casper, Wyoming. (Photo by Chet Strange/Getty Images)

Trump plans to nominate billionaire buddy Howard Lutnick as Commerce secretary

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - NOVEMBER 19, 2024 2:32 PM

WASHINGTON — President-elect Donald Trump announced Tuesday he will nominate transition co-chair and billionaire businessman Howard Lutnick as the country's next secretary of Commerce, a position that will have a hand in shaping Trump's tariff policies.

If confirmed by the Senate, Lutnick would lead a 13-bureau department that houses the U.S. International Trade Commission, where tariff policy is managed. Trump campaigned on levying at least 10% tariffs on all foreign products and steep targeted tariffs on Chinese and Mexican imports upwards of 60%.

"He will lead our Tariff and Trade Agenda, with additional direct responsibility for the Office of the United States Trade Representative," Trump said in a brief statement on his social media platform, Truth Social.

Trump also praised Lutnick's role on his transition team, crediting him with creating "the most sophisticated process and system to assist us in creating the greatest Administration America has ever seen."

Lutnick is CEO of the large financial services firm Cantor Fitzgerald, which lost more than 650 employees in the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York City's World Trade Center. Lutnick became known for rebuilding the company afterward and establishing a multimillion-dollar fund for the victims' families.

The CEO is a backer of cryptocurrency and reportedly was in the running for Trump's choice for Treasury secretary, though according to The Bulwark, lost the bid because he annoyed advisers at Mar-a-Lago. Billionaire Elon Musk, who has been tapped by Trump to lead a not-yet-defined commission to evaluate government spending, backed Lutnick for the Treasury post.

Lutnick was a featured speaker at Trump's October Madison Square Garden campaign rally, an event infamous for a comedian calling Puerto Rico "an island of garbage" and where former Fox News personality Tucker Carlson joked about Vice President Kamala Harris' race.

"We must elect Donald J. Trump president because we must crush jihad," Lutnick said on stage after telling the story of losing employees on 9/11.

During his speech, Lutnick assailed income taxes and advocated for a return to the "rockin'" U.S. economy at the turn of the 20th century.

"All we had was tariffs, and we had so much money that we had the greatest businessmen of America get together to try to figure out how to spend it," Lutnick said.

The United States is now "letting the rest of the world eat our lunch," Lutnick said.

Lutnick, who spoke before Musk took the stage, introduced the fellow billionaire as "the greatest capital-



Howard Lutnick, left, the CEO of Cantor Fitzgerald, was tapped by President-elect Donald Trump on Tuesday to be Commerce secretary in Trump's second administration. Lutnick is shown in this photo at a Trump rally at Madison Square Garden in New York City with billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk on Oct. 27, 2024. (Photo by Ashley Murray/States Newsroom)

ist in the United States of America” and bantered with him about cutting \$2 trillion in federal spending. Economists across the political spectrum warn increasing tariffs will cost typical American households up to \$2,600 annually and potentially cause a trade war.

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

U.S. House GOP urged to bar transgender women from using women's bathrooms at the Capitol

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - NOVEMBER 19, 2024 12:52 PM

WASHINGTON — Republican U.S. Rep. Nancy Mace of South Carolina led a charge Monday to try to ban transgender women from using women's restrooms in the U.S. Capitol and House office buildings, following the election of a transgender lawmaker.

The move, which the House Democratic leader characterized as attempting to “bully” another member, came as Democrat Sarah McBride of Delaware will soon be sworn in as the first openly transgender member of Congress. Republicans also have undertaken broader efforts to bar transgender people from using restrooms that align with their gender identity.

“Biological men do not belong in private women's spaces,” Mace wrote in a post on X alongside the resolution she is pushing. “Period. Full stop. End of story.”

The resolution would prohibit members of Congress, officers and employees of the House from using “single-sex facilities” other than those corresponding to their “biological sex.”

It reads: “A Member, Delegate, Resident Commissioner, officer, or employee of the House may not use a single-sex facility (including a restroom, changing room, or locker room) in the Capitol or House Office Buildings, other than those corresponding to the biological sex of such individual.”

The House sergeant-at-arms would be tasked with enforcement, according to the resolution, so it appears it would apply only to bathrooms on the House side of the Capitol and not the Senate.

Mace told the Washington Examiner in 2021 that she strongly supports LGBTQ rights and equality and said “no one should be discriminated against.”

The South Carolina Republican co-sponsored a Republican alternative to the Democratic-backed Equality Act in 2021. The GOP effort sought to “prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity; and to protect the free exercise of religion.”

In a post on X Monday appearing to respond to Mace's push, McBride said “every day Americans go to work with people who have life journeys different than their own and engage with them respectfully, I hope members of Congress can muster that same kindness.”

“This is a blatant attempt from far right-wing extremists to distract from the fact that they have no real solutions to what Americans are facing,” McBride added.

Meanwhile, U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene said Mace's resolution “doesn't go far enough” and “we



Rep.-elect Sarah McBride, D-Del., who will become the first openly transgender member of Congress, poses for a photograph after joining other congressional freshmen of the 119th Congress for a group photograph on the steps of the House of Representatives at the U.S. Capitol Building on Nov. 15, 2024 in Washington, D.C. (Photo by Andrew Harnik/Getty Images)

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need something more binding” while speaking to reporters Tuesday.

The Georgia Republican, who referred to McBride as a “biological man,” said “America’s fed up with the trans ideology being shoved into our face.”

Greene said she asked U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson at the House GOP conference meeting Tuesday “what the men in our leadership are going to do about this, because this has to be stopped.”

According to Greene, the Louisiana Republican committed to her that McBride “will not be using our restrooms.”

However, at a Tuesday press conference following that GOP meeting, Johnson would not specify how he would respond to Mace’s resolution.

“This is an issue that Congress has never had to address before,” Johnson said, while also noting that “it’s a command that we treat all persons with dignity and respect.”

“We’ll provide appropriate accommodation for every member of Congress,” he added.

House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries questioned House Republicans’ priorities Tuesday regarding Mace’s effort.

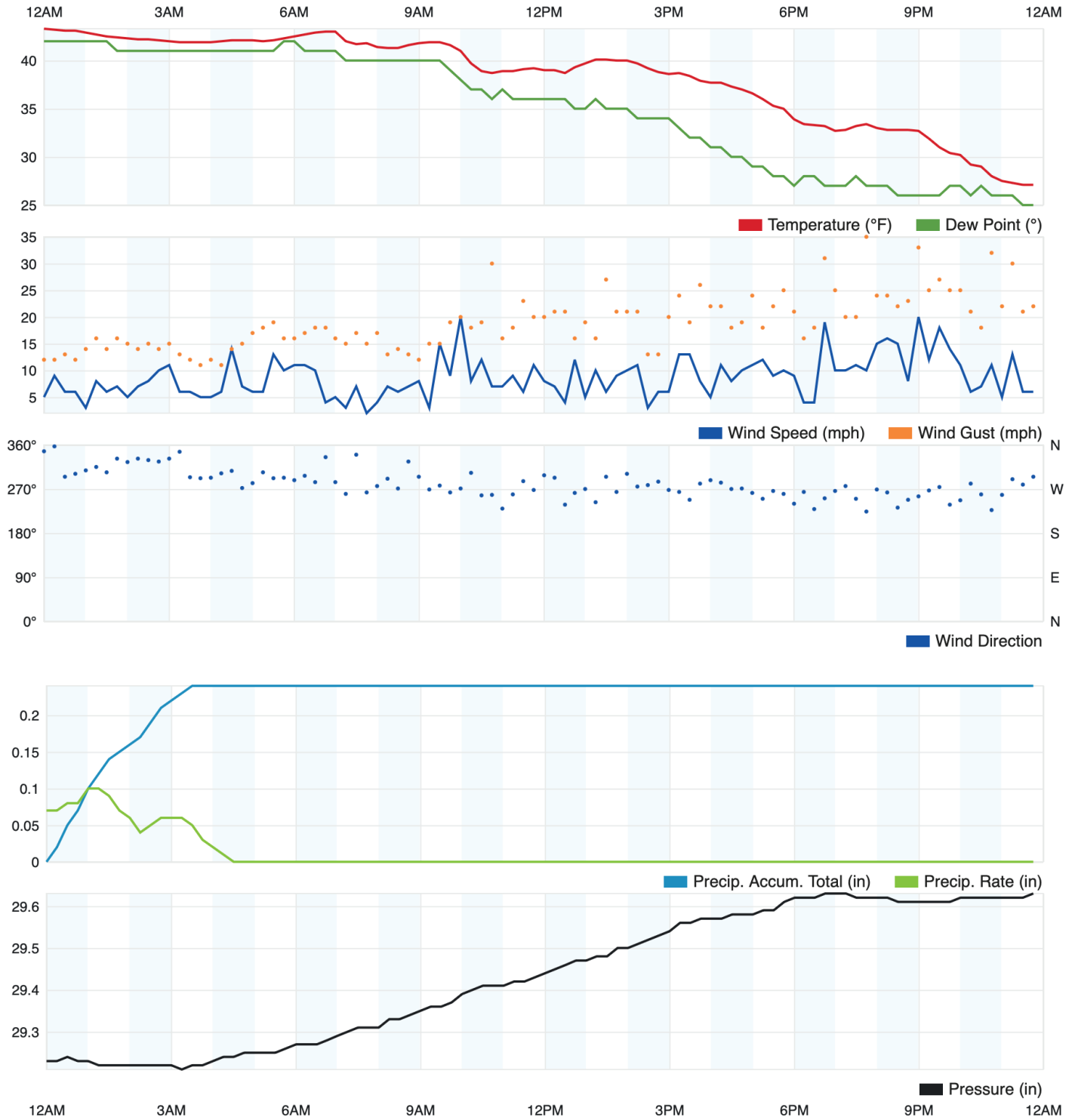
“This is your priority — that you want to bully a member of Congress as opposed to welcoming her to join this body so that all of us can work together to get things done and deliver real results for the American people?” said the New York Democrat at a Tuesday news conference.

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.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Wind Advisory

Today



50%

High: 29 °F

Chance Snow
and Patchy
Blowing Snow

Tonight



Low: 18 °F

Patchy
Blowing Snow
and Blustery

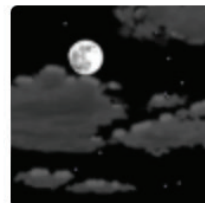
Thursday



High: 32 °F

Mostly Sunny

**Thursday
Night**



Low: 15 °F

Partly Cloudy

Friday



High: 31 °F

Partly Sunny



Strong Winds and Snow Today

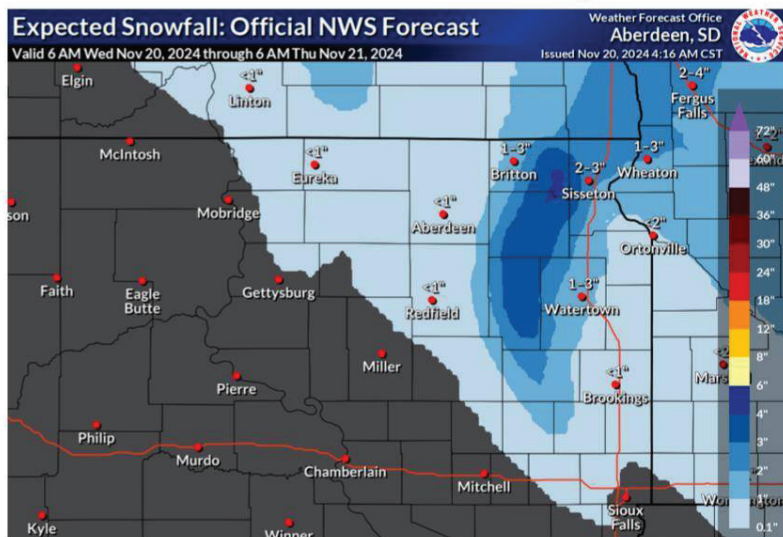
November 20, 2024
5:34 AM

Strong Winds Today. Snow and Blowing Snow through this evening over eastern SD and western MN.

Key Messages

- **Snow:** Snow to continue over mainly northeastern SD into west central MN, ending this afternoon through this evening from west to east. **Additional snow accumulations today through this evening of 1 to 5 inches over northeastern SD**, highest from Clark through Day and Marshall Counties (the higher elevations of the Prairie Coteau)
- **Winds & Blowing Snow:** Winds out of the northwest gusting **40 to near 60 mph** to continue through the day today, highest over central SD and the eastern slopes of the Prairie Coteau. Visibility will be as low as one-half mile while snow is falling over northeastern SD today.

Additional Snow Today



NEW Important Updates

- No significant changes



National Oceanic and
Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Winds out of the northwest gusting 50 to near 60 mph over central SD and gusting 40 to near 50 mph over eastern SD could result in travel difficulties for high profile vehicles.

Snow will continue over mainly northeastern SD into west central MN, ending this afternoon through this evening from west to east. Additional snow accumulations today through this evening of 1 to 5 inches over northeastern SD will be possible, highest from Clark through Day and Marshall Counties (the higher elevations of the Prairie Coteau). Blowing Snow will be possible when snow is falling, with visibilities reduced to one-half mile at times over mainly northeastern SD.

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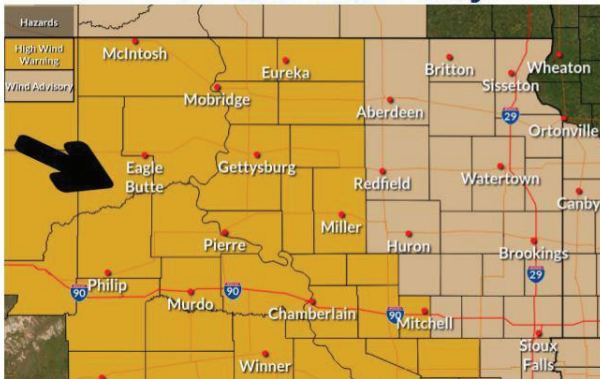
Strong Winds Today

November 20, 2024
5:34 AM

Strongest over central SD & Prairie Coteau of northeastern SD

- Winds out of the northwest gusting 50 to near 60 mph over central SD and gusting 40 to near 50 mph over eastern SD. could result in travel difficulties for high profile vehicles
- Blowing Snow possible mainly over northeastern SD today as strong winds combine with falling snow. Visibilities reduced to one-half mile at times

Wind Headlines Today



Maximum Wind Gust Forecast (mph)

	11/20 Wed					11/21 Thu		
	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am
Aberdeen	48	48	47	38	35	30	28	22
Britton	45	47	47	41	39	32	30	23
Brookings	46	47	46	39	36	33	30	25
Chamberlain	55	54	54	43	39	32	28	18
Clark	43	44	44	40	36	32	29	23
Eagle Butte	63	62	55	43	37	31	28	21
Ellendale	52	53	52	43	37	32	29	23
Eureka	58	60	59	47	41	35	30	22
Gettysburg	55	54	52	41	35	30	26	21
Huron	45	48	47	38	35	30	29	22
Kennebec	56	58	55	47	39	32	28	21
McIntosh	61	60	56	46	36	29	24	17
Milbank	39	41	40	37	35	32	30	25
Miller	51	51	49	40	37	32	29	21
Mobridge	55	52	49	43	39	32	28	21
Murdo	56	55	53	45	36	29	24	17
Pierre	53	52	51	43	36	28	23	16
Redfield	45	46	46	37	33	30	28	21
Sisseton	44	44	44	40	37	35	33	29
Watertown	46	46	46	41	38	33	31	25
Webster	47	51	52	45	41	36	32	26
Wheaton	36	37	37	36	33	31	30	26

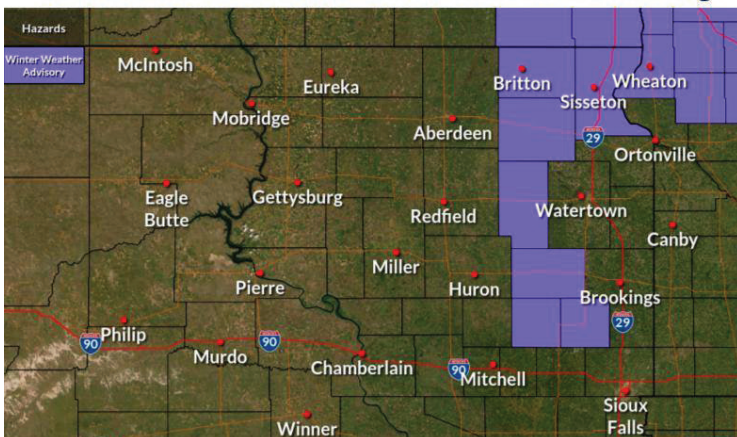
Snow and Strong Winds Today

November 20, 2024
5:34 AM



- Additional snow accumulations today through this evening of 1 to 5 inches over northeastern SD, highest from Clark through Day and Marshall Counties (the higher elevations of the Prairie Coteau)
- Strong winds out of the northwest gusting 40 to near 60 mph today with visibility as low as one-half mile while snow is falling over northeastern SD

Winter Weather Advisories into this Evening



Snowfall Timing and Probability

	11/20 Wed					11/21 Thu
	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am
Aberdeen	40%		30%	15%		
Britton	65%	65%	35%		15%	10%
Brookings	40%	35%	40%	5%		
Chamberlain						
Clark	80%	75%	55%	20%	5%	
Eagle Butte						
Ellendale	50%	35%	20%	5%		
Eureka	15%	15%	5%			
Gettysburg	5%					
Huron	35%	25%	20%			
Kennebec						
McIntosh						
Milbank	60%	55%	40%	25%		
Miller	10%	5%	5%			
Mobridge	5%					
Murdo						
Pierre						
Redfield	30%	25%	15%			
Sisseton	80%	80%	50%	30%	10%	
Watertown	65%	55%	45%	20%	5%	
Webster	85%	80%	50%	30%	15%	5%
Wheaton	55%	50%	45%	35%	20%	5%

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 43 °F at 12:00 AM

Low Temp: 27 °F at 11:21 PM

Wind: 35 mph at 7:40 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 21 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 69 in 1962

Record Low: -12 in 1985

Average High: 40

Average Low: 17

Average Precip in Nov.: 0.53

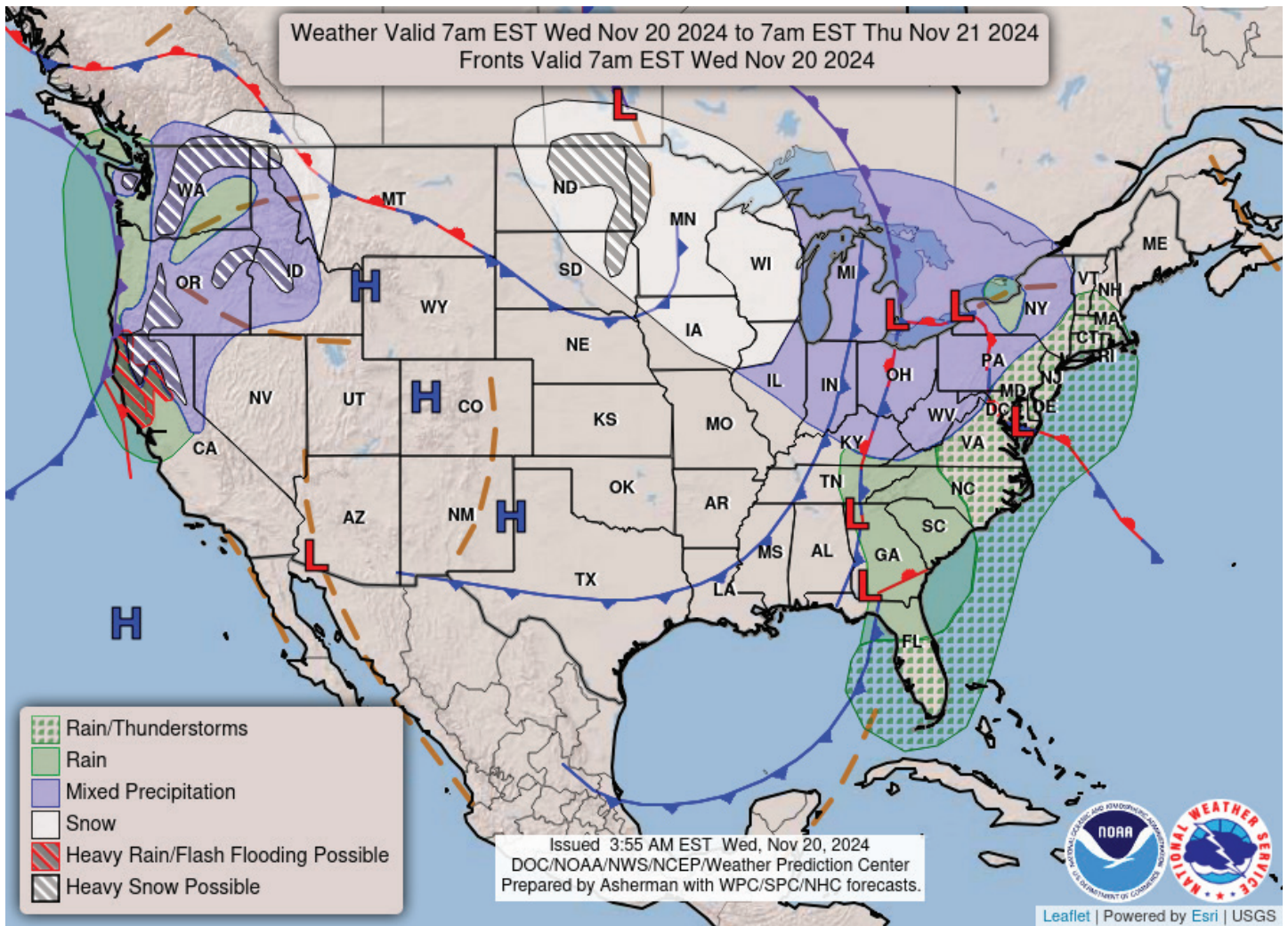
Precip to date in Nov.: 1.83

Average Precip to date: 21.00

Precip Year to Date: 21.71

Sunset Tonight: 4:58:57 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:38:44 am



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Today in Weather History

November 20, 1975: A storm center located in Oklahoma on Tuesday, November 18th, moved northeastward across Kansas into Iowa and Wisconsin on Wednesday the 19th and Thursday the 20th. Light rain began in the eastern half South Dakota on the morning of the 19th. The rain changed to snow during the afternoon and continued through the evening of the 20th. The winds increased, and blizzard conditions were reached by 6 pm CST on Wednesday the 19th. The snow was driven by sustained winds 40 to 50 miles per hour, gusting to 75 mph on some occasions, which reduced visibility to less than one-half mile. Heavy snow ranging from six to fifteen inches fell over an area southeast of a line from Todd to Aurora to Grant County. Traffic came to a standstill by Wednesday evening the 19th. The snow abruptly ended on the night of the 20th, but winds diminished rather slowly that night. Storm total snowfalls included 9 inches at Clear Lake and 7 inches at Watertown.

November 20, 1977: The second blizzard of the month began very early on Saturday, November 19th and continued through most of Sunday, November 20th. Wind speeds exceeding 50 mph caused much blowing and drifting snow. Visibility was reduced to near zero. Most of the roads in the northern and western parts of the state were blocked. Snowfall amounts north of Milbank and Pierre to Ardmore exceeded five inches. Most of the counties in the northwest and a significant portion of those in the north-central parts of the state reported snowfall amounts exceeding ten inches. Some drifts reached 4 to 5 feet. The highest reported snowfall was 20 inches in Eagle Butte. An eastbound train from Milbank had six freight cars derailed near Albee, in Grant County as a result of the storm. Snowfall totals from this blizzard included; 20 inches at Eagle Butte; 14 inches at Leola; 12 inches at Timber Lake and Britton; 11 inches 4NNE Victor and at Mobridge; 10 inches at 6SE McIntosh, 4W Mellette, Sand Lake, and Ipswich; 9.3 inches in Aberdeen; 9 inches 4NW Onida, at Sisseton, and 2N Onaka; 8 inches at Selby; 7 inches at McLaughlin and Waubay; 6 inches at Conde and Faulkton; 5 inches at Summit and Webster; 4 inches at Pierre, Wilmot and Highmore; and 3 inches at Watertown, Clear Lake, Miller, 3NE Raymond, Redfield, and Wheaton. The 9 inches at Sisseton helped to contribute to the snowiest November on record for Sisseton, which recorded 27.5 inches for November 1977.

1900: An unusual tornado outbreak in the Lower Mississippi Valley resulted in 73 deaths and extensive damage across Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee.

1985: Kate intensified to a major Category 3 Hurricane and as she moved west of Key West, Florida with top winds of 115 mph and a minimum central pressure of 954 millibars or 28.17 inches of mercury. The next day Kate made landfall between Panama City and Apalachicola, Florida. Tides ran 8 to 10 feet above normal. Many power poles and lines were downed. Several roads were washed out.

2014: From the NWS Office in Buffalo, New York, "the epic November 17-19th 2014 lake effect event will be remembered as one of the most significant winter events in Buffalo's snowy history. Over 5 feet of snow fell over areas just east of Buffalo, with mere inches a few miles away to the north. There were 13 fatalities with this storm, hundreds of major roof collapses and structural failures, 1000s of stranded motorists, and scattered food and gas shortages due to impassable roads. Numerous trees also gave way due to the weight of the snow, causing isolated power outages. While this storm was impressive on its own, a second lake effect event on Nov-19-20 dropped another 1-4 foot of snow over nearly the same area and compounded rescue and recovery efforts. Storm totals from the two storms peaked at almost 7 feet, with many areas buried under 3-4 feet of dense snowpack by the end of the event."

2015: Season's first snow is Chicago's largest November snowfall in 120 years starting on November 20 and ending on the 21st. The season's first snowfall dropped as much as 17 inches across Chicago's northern suburbs, and the total of 11.2 inches at O'Hare International Airport made it the largest November snowfall in 120 years.



NO CUSHION FOR HIS CROSS

A missionary told the story of watching a man, dressed like Jesus, carrying a cross through crowded streets during Easter week. He was intrigued by the scene and got as close to the man as possible. He wanted to observe him more carefully so he could tell the story to others. When he finally was a few feet from him, he noticed that under his garment was a pillow that cushioned the weight of the cross so it would not hurt him.

We must never forget the weight of the cross that Jesus carried on our behalf. Picture, if you can, the scene: the heat of the day, the blood streaming down His face from the crown of thorns and down His back from the horrible beatings He endured before the nails were driven through His hands and feet, crowds laughing and taunting, alone and abandoned by His trusted friends and followers.

Too often we look at an empty cross and forget the reality of the cross and what it cost Jesus and His Father. Our religion has become a religion of convenience – not of conviction.

We have glamorized the cross and made it into a piece of jewelry that adorns the necks of people who do not know or want to know the story of redemption. To many it is simply an ornament – something worn but not born. Jesus said, "If you want to be my follower, then shoulder your cross and follow me closely."

Prayer: Help us, Father, through Your grace, to understand the cost and value of our salvation. May we accept our part of the price by shouldering our cross with You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Mark 8:34

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

11.19.24

5 35 50 51 59 8

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$453,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 33
DRAW: Mins 56 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

11.18.24

20 36 37 42 43 6

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$15,430,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 48 Mins
DRAW: 56 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

11.19.24

7 10 17 24 26 13

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 17 Hrs 3 Mins 56
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

11.16.24

1 11 15 16 20

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$107,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 3 Mins 56
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

11.18.24

2 6 24 36 43 13

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 32 Mins
DRAW: 56 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

11.18.24

27 31 41 52 69 26

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$155,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 32 Mins
DRAW: 56 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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Upcoming Groton Events

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

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Judge dismisses a lawsuit over South Dakota abortion-rights measure voters rejected

By JACK DURA Associated Press

A South Dakota judge dismissed a lawsuit that an anti-abortion group filed in June targeting an abortion rights measure that voters rejected this month.

In an order dated Friday, Circuit Court Judge John Pekas granted Life Defense Fund's motion to dismiss its lawsuit against Dakotans for Health, the measure group.

In a statement, Life Defense Fund co-chair Leslee Unruh said: "The people have decided, and South Dakotans overwhelmingly rejected this constitutional abortion measure. We have won in the court of public opinion, and South Dakotans clearly saw the abortion lobby's deception."

Dakotans for Health co-founder Rick Weiland said he had expected the lawsuit to be dismissed.

"The Life Defense Fund's accusations were part of a broader, failed effort to keep Amendment G off the ballot and silence the voices of South Dakota voters," Weiland said in a statement. "But make no mistake — this dismissal is just one battle in a much larger war over the future of direct democracy in South Dakota."

Life Defense Fund's lawsuit had challenged petitions that got the measure on the ballot, saying they contained invalid signatures and circulators committed fraud and various wrongdoing. The anti-abortion group sought to invalidate the ballot initiative and bar the measure group and its workers from doing ballot-measure work for four years.

The judge initially dismissed the lawsuit in July, but the state Supreme Court sent it back to him in August. In September, an apparent misunderstanding between attorneys and the court regarding scheduling of the trial pushed the case back until after the election.

Even before the measure made the ballot in May, South Dakota's Republican-led Legislature cemented its formal opposition and passed a law allowing people to withdraw their petition signatures.

A South Dakota law that took effect after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in 2022 outlaws abortion and makes it a felony to perform one except to save the life of the mother.

South Dakota was one of three states where abortion rights measures failed this month. The others were Florida and Nebraska. Voters in six other states passed such measures.

US Embassy in Kyiv shuts due to Russian air attack threat after Biden policy shift

By SAMYA KULLAB and ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The U.S. Embassy in Kyiv said it would stay closed Wednesday after receiving a warning of a potentially significant Russian air attack on the Ukrainian capital.

The precautionary step came after Russian officials promised a response to President Joe Biden's decision to let Ukraine strike targets on Russian soil with U.S.-made missiles — a move that angered the Kremlin.

The war, which reached its 1,000-day milestone on Tuesday, has taken on a growing international dimension with the arrival of North Korean troops to help Russia on the battlefield — a development which U.S. officials said prompted Biden's policy shift.

Russian President Vladimir Putin subsequently lowered the threshold for using his nuclear arsenal, with the new doctrine announced Tuesday permitting a potential nuclear response by Moscow even to a conventional attack on Russia by any nation that is supported by a nuclear power.

That could potentially include Ukrainian attacks backed by the U.S..

Western leaders dismissed the Russian move as an attempt to deter Ukraine's allies from providing further support to Kyiv, but the escalating tension weighed on stock markets after Ukraine used American-made ATACMS longer-range missiles for the first time to strike a target inside Russia.

The U.S. Embassy said its closure and attack warning were issued in the context of ongoing Russian missile and drone attacks on Kyiv and anticipated a quick return to regular operations.

Western and Ukrainian officials say Russia been stockpiling powerful long-range missiles, possibly in an upcoming effort to crush the Ukrainian power grid as winter settles in.

Military analysts say the U.S. decision on the range over which American-made missiles can be used isn't expected to be a game-changer in the war, but it could help weaken the Russian war effort, according to the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington think tank.

"Ukrainian long-range strikes against military objects within Russia's rear are crucial for degrading Russian military capabilities throughout the theater," it said.

Meanwhile, North Korea recently supplied additional artillery systems to Russia, according to South Korea. It said that North Korean soldiers were assigned to Russia's marine and airborne forces units and some of them have already begun fighting alongside the Russians on the front lines.

Ukraine struck a factory in Russia's Belgorod region that makes cargo drones for the armed forces in an overnight attack, according to Andrii Kovalenko, the head of the counterdisinformation branch of Ukraine's Security Council.

He also claimed Ukraine hit an arsenal in Russia's Novgorod region, near the town of Kotovo, located about 680 kilometers (420 miles) behind the Ukrainian border. The arsenal stored artillery ammunition and various types of missiles, he said.

It wasn't possible to independently verify the claims.

Hong Kong ex-publisher Jimmy Lai testifies he didn't ask Pence, Pompeo to take action against city

By KANIS LEUNG Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Former Hong Kong publisher Jimmy Lai denied in his landmark national security trial on Wednesday he had asked then U.S. Vice President Mike Pence and then Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to take action against the city and China during the territory's anti-government protests in 2019.

Lai, founder of the now-shuttered Apple Daily pro-democracy newspaper, was arrested in 2020 in the crackdown that followed the protests. He is accused of colluding with foreign forces to endanger national security and conspiring with others to issue seditious publications. If convicted, he faces up to life in prison.

He testified about his meetings with former U.S. officials and gave details about his alleged political connections with people in the U.S., Britain and Taiwan, including Taiwan ex-President Tsai Ing-wen and Hong Kong's last British governor, Chris Patten.

The media tycoon, who also describes himself as a businessman and social activist, said he never tried to influence foreign policy on Hong Kong or China through the people he met overseas or ask them to take action against them.

Lai's case is widely seen as a measure of media freedom and judicial independence in the Asian financial hub.

Lai testified in English that he asked Pence to voice his support for Hong Kong during a 2019 visit to the U.S. But he said he did not ask the U.S. government to take any action, saying, "It's beyond me."

During the same trip Lai also met with Pompeo and had a similar discussion about the situation in Hong Kong, he said.

When Lai's lawyer, Steven Kwan, asked him whether he had requested the U.S. to do something at that meeting, Lai said "not to do something but to say something. To voice out its support for Hong Kong."

Beijing promised to retain the former British colony's civil liberties for 50 years when it returned to Chinese rule in 1997. But critics say that promise has become threadbare under the rubric of maintaining national security.

Authorities have used a Beijing-imposed national security law to prosecute many of Hong Kong's leading activists, including Lai and 45 democracy advocates who were sentenced to four to 10 years in prison on Tuesday. Other pro-democracy figures were forced into self-exile or silenced. Dozens of civil society

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groups have disbanded under the threat of the law.

Beijing and Hong Kong governments insist that the law restored stability to the city following the 2019 protests.

Prosecutors alleged that Lai asked foreign countries, especially the United States, to take actions against Beijing "under the guise of fighting for freedom and democracy."

They pointed to Lai's meetings with Pence, Pompeo and U.S. senators in July 2019 to discuss a now-withdrawn extradition bill that sparked the anti-government protests. They allege that Lai sought support from the U.S. in sanctioning mainland Chinese and Hong Kong leaders who cracked down on the movement.

Dozens of people stood in the rain to secure a seat in the courtroom, including former Apple Daily reader William Wong, who said he wanted to remind Lai that Hong Kongers have not forgotten him.

"I haven't seen him for a few months. I know he will testify himself, so I want to encourage him," said Wong, 64.

Upon entering the court, Lai waved and smiled at his family members, who sat next to the city's Roman Catholic Cardinal Joseph Zen.

During the hearing, Lai said that he had introduced former U.S. officials Paul Wolfowitz and Jack Keane to Tsai, whom he called a friend.

Lai said Tsai wanted to know more about the thinking of then President Donald Trump's administration, and knew he was "supportive of Trump." She thought he was familiar with the U.S. because of his links with U.S. think tanks. But he never communicated with Trump, he said.

He said he wanted to help Taiwan to know how to better deal with the U.S., because the island was the only democracy of Chinese people.

But Lai rejected the idea of Hong Kong independence, saying it was a "crazy" idea and he never allowed his staff or the newspaper to mention it.

He said he broke into the media world "to participate in delivering freedom."

"The more you know, the more you are free," he said, adding that the core values of Apple Daily were the core values of the people of Hong Kong, including the rule of law, freedom and the pursuit of democracy.

In May 2020, a month before the security law took effect, Lai took up the role of executive chairman of Next Digital, the parent company of Apple Daily.

The trial will continue on Thursday.

The U.S. and U.K. governments and independent U.N. human rights experts have called for Lai's release.

Asked before his reelection this month whether he would talk to Chinese President Xi Jinping to seek Lai's release, Trump said: "100%, I will get him out."

Hong Kong leader John Lee said that mutual respect is important for the development of trade relations and there should be no interference in local affairs.

U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer also raised concerns over Lai's detention to Xi in a meeting during the Group of 20 summit in Brazil.

Hong Kong's security minister Chris Tang maintained the prosecution was based on facts.

Lai's son, Sebastien Lai, said on Friday that his father's treatment in prison is "inhumane." "My father is now 77 and has spent nearly four years in a maximum-security prison in solitary confinement," he said in the statement released by Britain-based law firm Doughty Street Chambers.

On Sunday, the Hong Kong government condemned some members of the law firm for what it called spreading misinformation. It said the separation of Lai from other inmates "has been made at his own request" and was approved by prison authorities. It added judges remain independent and partial when handling national security cases.

Chinese foreign ministry's spokesperson Lin Jian told reporters on Wednesday that Lai is a major mastermind in the rise of anti-China sentiments in Hong Kong and a "pawn of anti-China forces." He said China firmly opposes the interference of certain countries in its internal affairs.

On the eve of the court hearing, some U.S. lawmakers gathered with the younger Lai in a restaurant near the U.S. Capitol in Washington in a show of support for the publisher.

Mother of cinematographer killed on set of Alec Baldwin film 'Rust' boycotts its world premiere

By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

TORUN, Poland (AP) — The mother of late cinematographer Halyna Hutchins is boycotting the world premiere of "Rust" at a film festival in Poland on Wednesday, saying she views it as an attempt by Alec Baldwin to "unjustly profit" from her daughter's death.

The Western is premiering at the International Film Festival of the Art of Cinematography Camerimage in the city of Torun three years after Hutchins was shot accidentally on set.

Baldwin, the lead actor and co-producer for "Rust," was pointing a gun at Hutchins during a rehearsal on the set outside Santa Fe, New Mexico, in October 2021 when the revolver went off, killing Hutchins and wounding director Joel Souza. Baldwin has said he pulled back the hammer — but not the trigger — and the revolver fired.

Souza was expected to introduce the film at the festival, a popular industry event dedicated to the art of cinematography, and the premiere was being dedicated to Hutchins.

"It was always my hope to meet my daughter in Poland to watch her work come alive on screen," said Hutchins' mother Olga Solovey in a statement issued by her lawyer and carried by Britain's national news agency, PA.

"Unfortunately, that was ripped away from me when Alec Baldwin discharged his gun and killed my daughter," she said. "Alec Baldwin continues to increase my pain with his refusal to apologize to me and his refusal to take responsibility for her death. Instead, he seeks to unjustly profit from his killing of my daughter."

"That is the reason why I refuse to attend the festival for the promotion of Rust, especially now when there is still no justice for my daughter," she added.

Hutchins, 42, was a Ukrainian cinematographer on the rise and a mother of a young son when she was killed. She grew up on a remote Soviet military base and worked on documentary films in Eastern Europe before studying film in Los Angeles and embarking on a promising movie-making career.

A New Mexico judge dismissed an involuntary manslaughter charge against Baldwin in the fatal shooting. But while the threat of criminal liability was lifted, he is facing other civil lawsuits, including one by Solovey.

The film armorer, Hannah Gutierrez-Reed, received the maximum sentence of 18 months in jail for involuntary manslaughter. A New Mexico judge found earlier this year that her recklessness amounted to a serious violent offense. Prosecutors blamed Gutierrez-Reed for unwittingly bringing live ammunition onto the set of "Rust," where it was expressly prohibited, and for failing to follow basic gun-safety protocols.

This year's Camerimage festival, where Cate Blanchett is serving as jury president, has already been beset by controversy.

"Blitz" director Steve McQueen dropped out of the festival to protest an editorial about female cinematographers written by festival founder Marek Żydowicz that McQueen viewed as sexist. Director Coralie Fargeat also pulled her film "The Substance" from the festival due to the comments. Żydowicz has since apologized.

'Bomb cyclone' knocks out power to over 600,000 and downs trees across northwest US, killing 1

By HALLIE GOLDEN and LISA BAUMANN Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — A major storm swept across the northwest U.S. Tuesday evening, battering the region with strong winds and rain and causing widespread power outages and downed trees that killed at least one person.

The Weather Prediction Center issued excessive rainfall risks through Friday and hurricane-force wind warnings were in effect as the strongest atmospheric river — a large plume of moisture — that California and the Pacific Northwest has seen this season overwhelms the region. The storm system is considered

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a “bomb cyclone,” which occurs when a cyclone intensifies rapidly.

Downed trees struck homes and littered roads across northwest Washington. In Lynnwood, Washington, a woman died Tuesday night when a large tree fell on a homeless encampment, South County Fire said in a statement on X. In Seattle, a tree fell onto a vehicle, temporarily trapping a person inside, the Seattle Fire Department reported. The agency later said the individual was in stable condition.

“Trees are coming down all over the city & falling onto homes,” the fire department in Bellevue, about 10 miles (16 kilometers) east of Seattle, posted on the social platform X. “If you can, go to the lowest floor and stay away from windows. Do not go outside if you can avoid it.”

Early Wednesday, over 600,000 houses in Washington State were reported to be without power on poweroutage.us. But the number of outage reports fluctuated wildly throughout the evening likely due in part to several weather and utility agencies struggling to report information on the storm because of internet outages and other technical problems. It wasn’t clear if that figure was accurate. More than 15,000 had lost power in Oregon and nearly 19,000 in California.

As of 8 p.m., the peak wind speed was in Canadian waters, where gusts of 101 mph (163 kph) were reported off the coast of Vancouver Island, according to the National Weather Service in Seattle. Along the Oregon coast, there were wind gusts as high as 79 mph (127 kph) Tuesday evening, according to the National Weather Service in Medford, Oregon, while wind speed of 77 mph (124 kph) was recorded at Mount Rainier in Washington.

Winds were expected to increase in western Washington throughout the evening, the weather service said. The national Weather Service warned people on the West Coast about the danger of trees during high winds, posting on X, “Stay safe by avoiding exterior rooms and windows and by using caution when driving.”

In northern California, flood and high wind watches were in effect, with up to 8 inches (20 centimeters) of rain predicted for parts of the San Francisco Bay Area, North Coast and Sacramento Valley. Dangerous flash flooding, rock slides and debris flows were expected, according to the National Weather Service Weather Prediction Center.

A winter storm watch was issued for the northern Sierra Nevada above 3,500 feet (1,066 meters), where 15 inches (28 centimeters) of snow was possible over two days. Wind gusts could top 75 mph (120 kph) in mountain areas, forecasters said.

The National Weather Service issued a flood watch for parts of southwestern Oregon through Friday evening, while rough winds and seas halted a ferry route in northwestern Washington between Port Townsend and Coupeville.

A blizzard warning was issued for the majority of the Cascades in Washington, including Mount Rainier National Park, starting Tuesday afternoon, with up to a foot of snow and wind gusts up to 60 mph (97 kph), according to the weather service in Seattle. Travel across passes could be difficult if not impossible.

Ukraine has seen success in building clean energy, which is harder for Russia to destroy

By PETER PRENGAMAN Associated Press

BAKU, Azerbaijan (AP) — Maxim Timchenko, CEO of DTEK, the largest private energy company in Ukraine, pulls out a piece of paper with bar charts showing how much new electricity his company has brought online this year in the country versus how much Russian bombs have destroyed.

Total electricity goes up, then down, then up, then down — capturing the company’s constant rebuilding each time Russian missile attacks take out a facility, which include wind and solar farms and thermal (coal or gas-fired) generating stations. The Russian strikes are part of a campaign to target energy infrastructure to reduce power in Ukraine as winter looms.

“What other choice do we have?” said Timchenko during an interview on the sidelines of this year’s U.N. climate talks, taking place in Azerbaijan. “Sit and wait and pray that they don’t hit us, or do our job and bring lights back to our people?”

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The nearly three-year-long Russia-Ukraine war, which has left large swaths of Ukraine destroyed, has accelerated a transition to clean energy. At Ukraine's pavilion at COP29, on display is a large smashed solar panel, destroyed in an attack this year.

Russian forces continue to make small but steady gains in capturing Ukrainian territory at a time when there are questions about how much the United States, which has been providing weapons and money, will continue to support the country once President-elect Donald Trump assumes office in January. During the campaign, Trump repeatedly said he could quickly end the war if elected, although he hasn't said how.

Whatever the future, the decentralized nature of some clean energies, in particular wind and solar, has allowed Ukraine to quickly restore power in ways that would be impossible with Ukraine's more traditional energy sources, such as coal-fired power plants.

In centralized systems, all power is generated and sent to the grid over transmission lines from the same area. That means if the plant goes down, say in an attack, a large section of grid, or even the entire grid, comes to a halt. By contrast, wind and solar installations are usually more scattered, so less of the system goes down with one hit, and if the solar is on rooftops, the impact can be even more limited.

Attacks on two DTEK solar farms last spring is a good example. They destroyed many solar panels and some of the transformers, which step up voltage for long distances or step it down for use in homes. Replacing the transformers and swapping out destroyed panels allowed the farms, which generate 400 megawatts, to be back up in seven days.

Timchenko said an attack on a thermal generating station, which experienced a similar amount of damage, took three to four months to rebuild.

"That's the difference between centralized and so-called decentralized generation. It's much more resistant and difficult to destroy," said Timchenko.

Geoffrey Pyatt, assistant secretary of the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Energy Resources, said that Russian attacks on energy infrastructure have evolved. In 2022 and 2023, they focused on transformers.

"The Ukrainians were incredibly efficient in working around those attacks. So Putin changed his tactics beginning in March to go after generation capacity," said Pyatt, referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Since then, about 50% of Ukraine's total power generation has been knocked out, leaving mostly nuclear, some hydropower and large new renewable projects, like a wind farm being built by DTEK, he added.

Renewable and other infrastructure projects are financed by partnerships between governments and businesses, spreading out the risk, since there is no guarantee that something built isn't destroyed by missiles. In June, turbine maker GE Vernova and manufacturer Honeywell announced plans to partner with DTEK for major wind and battery storage projects in Ukraine.

Roger Martella, chief sustainability officer for GE Vernova, said that developing public-private partnerships was key to lowering risk and making investment more attractive. Ukraine's resistance was also an inspiration, Martella told a panel on Ukrainian renewables at COP29.

"We're humbled by the fact that Ukraine has done something no one has ever done before, which is to maintain the grid in a war-torn environment," said Martella.

Pyatt, a former ambassador in Ukraine, said he has seen widespread support for Ukraine's energy systems in the G7, a group of leading industrialized nations.

While making clear he couldn't speak for the incoming Trump administration, Pyatt said he believed support for Ukraine in the energy sector would "continue in any scenario."

"If you start to get big American companies like GE and Fluxus and Honeywell involved in energy reconstruction, and there's going to be billions of dollars of energy reconstruction," he said.

What to know about Transgender Day of Remembrance and violence against trans people

By ANDREW DeMILLO Associated Press

Wednesday is Transgender Day of Remembrance, which focuses on trans people who have lost their lives because of violence. Here is what to know.

What is Transgender Day of Remembrance?

Transgender Day of Remembrance is marked every Nov. 20 and began in 1999 to honor Rita Hester, a trans woman who was killed in Massachusetts.

The day marks the end of Transgender Awareness Week, which is used to raise public knowledge about the transgender community and the issues they face.

The Williams Institute at UCLA Law estimates there are more than a million and a half transgender people in the U.S. ages 13 and older. And it says transgender people are over four times more likely than others to be victims of violence.

Candlelight vigils, memorials and other events are held to mark the day. The Human Rights Campaign also released its annual report on deaths of transgender people in conjunction with the day.

International Transgender Day of Visibility, which is designed to bring attention to transgender people, is commemorated in March.

How many transgender people have lost their lives to violence?

At least 36 transgender people have died from violence in the past 12 months since the last Day of Remembrance, the Human Rights Campaign said in its annual report. Since 2013, the organization has recorded the deaths from violence of 372 victims who were transgender and gender-expansive — which refers to someone with a more flexible range of gender identity or expression than typically associated with the binary gender system.

The number of victims is likely higher because many deaths often aren't reported or are misreported, or misgendering of the victims leads to delays in their identification.

The Human Rights Campaign said there was a slight increase from the previous year, when it identified at least 33 transgender victims of violence.

A large number of the victims tracked over the past year were young or people of color, with Black transgender women making up half of the 36 identified. The youngest victim identified was 14-year-old Pauly Likens of Pennsylvania.

Two-thirds of the fatalities involved a firearm, the organization said. Nearly a third of the victims with a known killer were killed by an intimate partner, a friend or a family member.

What is at stake politically?

This year's remembrance follows an election where advocates say victories by President-elect Donald Trump and other Republican candidates who focused on issues like transgender athletes dealt a setback to trans people's rights.

It also follows a wave of measures enacted in Republican states this year restricting the rights of transgender people, especially youth.

Half the states have banned gender-affirming medical care for transgender youth. The U.S. Supreme Court is set to hear arguments next month in a lawsuit challenging Tennessee's ban.

Advocates say the legislation and rhetoric is creating fewer safe spaces for transgender people, and they worry it could spur more violence against trans people.

Trump has called for dismantling the Education Department. Here's what that would mean

By ANNIE MA AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Throughout his campaign, President-elect Donald Trump heaped scorn on the federal Department of Education, describing it as being infiltrated by “radicals, zealots and Marxists.”

He has picked Linda McMahon, a former wrestling executive, to lead the department. But like many conservative politicians before him, Trump has called for dismantling the department altogether — a cumbersome task that likely would require action from Congress.

The agency's main role is financial. Annually, it distributes billions in federal money to colleges and schools and manages the federal student loan portfolio. Closing the department would mean redistributing each of those duties to another agency. The Education Department also plays an important regulatory role in services for students, ranging from those with disabilities to low-income and homeless kids.

Indeed, federal education money is central to Trump's plans for colleges and schools. Trump has vowed to cut off federal money for schools and colleges that push “critical race theory, transgender insanity, and other inappropriate racial, sexual or political content” and to reward states and schools that end teacher tenure and enact universal school choice programs.

Federal funding makes up a relatively small portion of public school budgets — roughly 14%. Colleges and universities are more reliant on it, through research grants along with federal financial aid that helps students pay their tuition.

Here is a look at some of the department's key functions, and how Trump has said he might approach them.

Student loans and financial aid

The Education Department manages approximately \$1.5 trillion in student loan debt for over 40 million borrowers. It also oversees the Pell Grant, which provides aid to students below a certain income threshold, and administers the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), which universities use to allocate financial aid.

The Biden administration has made cancellation of student loans a signature effort of the department's work. Since Biden's initial attempt to cancel student loans was overturned by the Supreme Court, the administration has forgiven over \$175 billion for more than 4.8 million borrowers through a range of changes to programs it administers, such as Public Service Loan Forgiveness.

The loan forgiveness efforts have faced Republican pushback, including litigation from several GOP-led states.

Trump has criticized Biden's efforts to cancel debt as illegal and unfair, calling it a “total catastrophe” that “taunted young people.” Trump's plan for student debt is uncertain: He has not put out detailed plans.

Civil rights enforcement

Through its Office for Civil Rights, the Education Department conducts investigations and issues guidance on how civil rights laws should be applied, such as for LGBTQ+ students and students of color. The office also oversees a large data collection project that tracks disparities in resources, course access and discipline for students of different racial and socioeconomic groups.

Trump has suggested a different interpretation of the office's civil rights role. In his campaign platform, he said he would pursue civil rights cases to “stop schools from discriminating on the basis of race.” He has described diversity and equity policies in education as “explicit unlawful discrimination” and said colleges that use them will pay fines and have their endowments taxed.

Trump also has pledged to exclude transgender students from Title IX protections, which affect school policies on students' use of pronouns, bathrooms and locker rooms. Originally passed in 1972, Title IX was first used as a women's rights law. This year, Biden's administration said the law forbids discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation, but Trump can undo that.

College accreditation

While the Education Department does not directly accredit colleges and universities, it oversees the

system by reviewing all federally recognized accrediting agencies. Institutions of higher education must be accredited to gain access to federal money for student financial aid.

Accreditation came under scrutiny from conservatives in 2022, when the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools questioned political interference at Florida public colleges and universities. Trump has said he would fire "radical left accreditors" and take applications for new accreditors that would uphold standards including "defending the American tradition" and removing "Marxist" diversity administrators.

Although the education secretary has the authority to terminate its relationship with individual accrediting agencies, it is an arduous process that has rarely been pursued. Under President Barack Obama, the department took steps to cancel accreditors for a now-defunct for-profit college chain, but the Trump administration blocked the move. The group, the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools, was terminated by the Biden administration in 2022.

Money for schools

Much of the Education Department's money for K-12 schools goes through large federal programs, such as Title I for low-income schools and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Those programs support services for students with disabilities, lower class sizes with additional teaching positions, and pay for social workers and other non-teaching roles in schools.

During his campaign, Trump called for shifting those functions to the states. He has not offered details on how the agency's core functions of sending federal money to local districts and schools would be handled.

The Heritage Foundation's Project 2025, a sweeping proposal outlining a far-right vision for the country that overlaps in areas with Trump's campaign, offers a blueprint. It suggests sending oversight of programs for kids with disabilities and low-income children first to the Department of Health and Human Services, before eventually phasing out the funding and converting it to no-strings-attached grants to states.

Maui Invitational returns to a Lahaina still grappling with raw emotions left by deadly wildfire

By AUDREY McAVOY and JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — Three generations of TJ Rickard's family lost their homes in the deadly Maui wildfire more than a year ago, and he and his extended family still have not rebuilt. That leaves Rickard, a high school basketball coach, conflicted about next week's return of the storied Maui Invitational college tournament.

Like many, Rickard is excited to have top-drawer basketball played in Lahaina's humble arena, but he worries people will think it's business as usual in his hometown. In truth, he says, Lahaina is still struggling after the fire killed at least 102 people and leveled thousands of homes.

"Not even a minute drive away from where they play, there's houses that are burned down that are still waiting to be rebuilt," said Rickard, the boys head coach at Lahainaluna High School.

Many residents are excited about the local exposure to high-caliber competition and the economic boost the Maui Invitational will bring. But there's also a fear that travelers might show disrespect by wandering into the Lahaina burn zone and taking photos of the devastation, or trigger unpleasant memories with questions about that catastrophic day.

"People are in a weird state right now over here because there's so much displacement and loss of community," said Jon Conrad, Lahainaluna's athletic director. "It's a highly sensitive and slightly charged environment."

Boosters coming to Lahaina should know "it's been a year and more, but things are still a little raw," Conrad said.

The Maui Invitational will bring eight of the NCAA's best men's teams — including two-time defending champion UConn — to Lahaina's 2,400-seat gymnasium for three days.

Last year, organizers moved the tournament to Honolulu instead of intruding on Lahaina when many survivors were still living in hotels and charred rubble littered properties. This year, they decided to bring

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the 40-year-old event back after meeting with the governor's office, the Hawaii Tourism Authority and Maui's mayor, said Tom Valdiserri, executive vice president of KemperSports LIVE.

"It's our home and we want to be there. And Maui is our ohana, frankly," Valdiserri said, using the Hawaiian word for family.

Reconstruction is progressing slowly. The Army Corps of Engineers has fully cleared all residential lots and 91% of commercial lots of fire debris. Maui County has issued 133 building permits after receiving 291 applications. One property has been finished.

Rickard's experience shows how challenging housing is even 15 months after the fire. The blaze burned down his grandparents' house and the in-law unit on their property where Rickard lived with his wife and dog. His parents' house a few lots away got torched. The blaze claimed a cousin's house across the street and another cousin's place the next street over. A great-aunt who lived down the road lost her house, too.

Rickard now lives in an apartment a 45-minute drive away that's paid for by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. His relatives are living with friends or other family.

Maui officials hope the tournament will help rebuild the tourism industry, which took a massive hit. In 2022, the last year the Maui Invitational was held in Lahaina, the competition brought 6,500 visitors and \$24 million in spending to Maui, KemperSports LIVE said.

University of Hawaii researchers said last month that fewer than half of those who had full-time jobs in Lahaina's tourism industry still do. Those with jobs are working fewer hours, their report said.

Rebuilding helps Javier Barberi cope with the disaster. His company, Hana Hou Hospitality, reopened a popular beachfront restaurant that was spared by the flames — Mala Ocean Tavern — eight months after the fire. He and his partners overhauled another restaurant and launched it as a new establishment called Coco Deck. To him, the tournament's return is a sign of hope.

"Like, hey, we used to have this. It was gone. Now it's back," Barberi said. "That restaurant was gone. Now it's back. That house was gone, now it's being rebuilt. To see these things happen, it starts to bring things back to normal and bring Maui back."

Jason Donez, general manager of Leilani's restaurant, remembers his daughter Lola meeting Mike Krzyzewski, Duke's head coach at the time, at a free-throw contest in 2018. The Hall of Fame coach told the 12-year-old she had a nice shot, she should stick with it and he would see her in college one day, Donez said.

Today, Lola Donez is a freshman guard at Cal.

Being around the teams helped her "dream big," her father said.

Tickets to the games this year range from \$56 to \$236 depending on the game and seat location, but local residents get about a 28% discount. Tournament organizers and teams will hold basketball clinics for local students.

Organizers have reminded participating schools and their teams to be respectful, and the tournament website has the same message for fans. The athletes and their coaches say they understand.

"I think that's where you try to remind guys that we're very fortunate to be able to travel and do the things the way we do, and we're going to a community that had a huge devastation that none of us would want anyone go through," said North Carolina assistant coach Sean May. "So we've got to have some compassion."

"But I think at the end, they're happy we're there, we're happy to be there, it's great for the community. And to me, it brings so much excitement."

Trump's casting call as he builds out his administration: TV experience preferred

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — There's a common trait that President-elect Donald Trump is clearly prizing as he selects those to serve in his new administration: experience on television.

Trump loves that "central casting" look, as he likes to call it.

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Some, like his choices for defense secretary, Pete Hegseth, and transportation secretary, Sean Duffy, are TV hosts on Trump's favorite network, Fox News. Mike Huckabee, his choice for U.S. ambassador to Israel, hosted the Fox show "Huckabee" from 2008 to 2015 after his time as Arkansas governor.

Dr. Mehmet Oz, a former syndicated talk show host and heart surgeon, was tapped Tuesday to head the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the agency that oversees health insurance programs for millions of older, poor and disabled Americans. He would report to Trump's choice for health and human services secretary, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., himself a regular on the cable news circuit.

Trump, a former reality television star himself, has made no secret of his intention to stack his administration with loyalists after his decisive 2024 election win — including some whose lack of relevant experience has raised concerns among lawmakers. But he's also working to set up a more forceful administration in this term, and in his eyes, many of those people happen to intersect with celebrity.

The trend was not lost on Democratic Rep. Jim Himes of Connecticut, who posted on social media after the Oz nomination: "We are becoming the world's first nuclear-armed reality television show."

For good measure, Himes added: "Just spitballing here, but what if the Attorney General and the Secretary of HHS fight each other in an octagonal cage?" That was a reference to Trump's affinity for the UFC fighters who do battle in the octagon.

Choosing TV personalities isn't that unusual for the once-and-future president: A number of his first-term choices — John Bolton, Larry Kudlow, Heather Nauert and Mercedes Schlapp, were all on TV — mostly also on Fox. Omarosa Manigault Newman, a confrontational first-season member of Trump's NBC show "The Apprentice," was briefly at the White House before she was fired.

Former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, a Republican who ran Trump's 2016 transition team until he was fired, said that eight years ago, Trump held "Apprentice-like interviews at Bedminster," summoning potential hires to his club in New Jersey.

On a call on Tuesday organized by the Council on Foreign Relations, Christie said this year's Cabinet choices are different than 2016's but it's still "Donald Trump casting a TV show."

"He's casting," Christie said.

Trump has readily highlighted the media experience of his choices as he's announced them. He said Duffy, a former lawmaker and onetime cast member of MTV's "The Real World," was "a STAR on Fox News."

Hegseth, a military veteran, "has been a host at FOX News for eight years, where he used that platform to fight for our Military and Veterans," Trump said. He also noted that Hegseth's book "The War on Warriors" spent nine weeks on The New York Times "best-sellers list, including two weeks at NUMBER ONE."

As for Oz, Trump said: "He won nine Daytime Emmy Awards hosting 'The Dr. Oz Show,' where he taught millions of Americans how to make healthier lifestyle choices."

It's also true that those seeking positions in Trump's orbit often take to the airwaves to audition for an audience of one. Tom Homan, Trump's choice for "border czar," is a frequent Fox contributor. Ohio Sen. JD Vance was chosen as Trump's running mate in part because of how well he comes across on air.

Trump's choice to lead the Federal Communications Commission, Brendan Carr, upped his profile when he took to Fox News to argue that a pre-election appearance on NBC's "Saturday Night Live" by Democratic nominee Kamala Harris was a violation of the "equal time" rule governing candidate appearances on television.

The White House-to-cable news pundit pipeline tends to cut across administrations of both parties, to some extent. President Joe Biden had three MSNBC contributors on his transition team and his former press secretary went to the network after she left the White House. Biden, though, looked to career diplomats, longtime government workers and military leaders for key posts like the Defense Department.

Trump's affinity for Fox News is well-documented, though the romance cooled for a time after Fox made an early call of Arizona for Biden in 2020, a move that infuriated Trump and many of the network's viewers. Trump suggested viewers should migrate to other conservative news outlets.

While the Arizona call ultimately proved correct, it set in motion internal second-guessing and led some Fox personalities to embrace conspiracy theories, which ultimately cost the network \$787 million to settle

a defamation lawsuit by Dominion Voting Systems.

But Trump is still an avid watcher — the network provides Trump a window into conservative thinking, with commentary from Republican lawmakers and thinkers who are, often, speaking directly to the president-elect.

Health advocates in Africa worry Trump will reimpose abortion 'gag rule' governing US aid

By FARAI MUTSAKA Associated Press

EPWORTH, Zimbabwe (AP) — Carrying her infant daughter, 19-year-old Sithulisiwe Moyo waited two hours to get birth-control pills from a tent pitched in a poor settlement on the outskirts of Zimbabwe's capital, Harare.

The outreach clinic in Epworth provides Moyo with her best shot at achieving her dream of returning to school. "I am too young to be a baby-making machine," she said. "At least this clinic helps me avoid another pregnancy."

But the free service funded by the U.S. government, the world's largest health donor, might soon be unavailable.

As he did in his first term, U.S. President-elect Donald Trump is likely in January to invoke the so-called global gag rule, a policy that bars U.S. foreign aid from being used to perform abortions or provide abortion information. The policy cuts off American government funding for services that women around the world rely on to avoid pregnancy or to space out their children, as well as for health care unrelated to abortion.

Four decades of on-again, off-again restrictions

The gag rule has a 40-year history of being applied by Republican presidents and rescinded by Democratic presidents. Every GOP president since the mid-1980s has invoked the rule, which is known as the Mexico City Policy for the city where it was first announced.

As one of his first acts as president in 2017, Trump expanded the rule to the extent that foreign NGOs were cut off from about \$600 million in U.S. family planning funds and more than \$11 billion in U.S. global health aid between 2017 and 2018 alone, according to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, the investigative arm of Congress.

The money — much of it intended for Africa — covered efforts such as preventing malaria and tuberculosis, providing water and sanitation, and distributing health information and contraception, which might also have repercussions for HIV prevention.

Women's health advocates are "uneasy" following Trump's victory, said Pester Siraha, director of Population Services Zimbabwe, an affiliate of MSI Reproductive Choices, an NGO that supports abortion rights in 36 countries.

The policy stipulates that foreign NGOs that receive U.S. government funding must agree to stop abortion-related activities, including discussing it as a family planning option — even when they are using non-U.S. government funds for such activities. During Trump's first term, MSI did not agree to those conditions, effectively making it ineligible for U.S. government funding.

Siraha said that a blueprint offered to Trump by the conservative-leaning Heritage Foundation in its plan known as Project 2025 indicates that the new administration could enact "a more comprehensive global gag rule."

Even NGOs in countries that outlaw abortion, such as Zimbabwe, are affected. Population Services Zimbabwe, for instance, closed its outreach clinics during Trump's first term after losing funding due to its association with MSI Reproductive Choices. Such outreach clinics are often the only health care option for rural people with limited access to hospitals due to poverty or distance.

"It leaves women with no place to turn for help, even for information," said Whitney Chinogwenya, global marketing manager at MSI Reproductive Choices.

Some NGOs in other African countries such as Uganda, Ghana, Ethiopia, Kenya and South Africa rolled back services, including clinics, contraception, training and support for government and community health

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workers, as well as programs for young people, sex workers and LGBTIQ+ communities.

Other services shut down entirely. The risk of unplanned pregnancies, unsafe abortions and related deaths increased in many of the affected countries, according to the U.S.-based Guttmacher Institute, which supports abortion rights.

Chinogwenya, the MSI Reproductive Choices marketing manager, said her organization's donor income dropped by \$120 million during Trump's first term. The money would have provided 8 million women globally with family planning help, preventing 6 million unintended pregnancies, 1.8 million unsafe abortions and 20,000 pregnancy-related deaths, she said.

The gag-rule policy "leads to more unintended, unwanted, unsupportable pregnancies and therefore an increase in abortion," said Catriona Macleod, a professor of psychology at South Africa's Rhodes University.

"This legislation does not protect life ... it's been called America's deadly export," said Macleod, who heads the university's studies in sexuality and reproduction.

Trump's transition team did not respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press.

Damage isn't always easy to repair

President Joe Biden rescinded the gag-rule policy in 2021, resulting in Population Services Zimbabwe receiving \$9 million, about 50% of its donor funding, from USAID in 2023. "But we haven't regained all the loss we suffered," said Siraha, the organization's director.

"You need a minimum of five years to have an impact. If we then have another gap of five years, it means we are reversing all the gains," she said.

Her organization estimates that 1.3 million women could lose out on the care they need in Zimbabwe, leading to an additional 461,000 unintended pregnancies and 1,400 maternal deaths if the gag rule is reinstated.

Overseas aid budget cuts by other Western governments will make it harder to find alternative funding, Siraha said.

Forced into difficult choices

MSI Reproductive Choices is lobbying world leaders and alternative donors to fight for abortion rights.

"Trump's reelection may embolden the anti-choice movement, but the fight for women's reproductive rights is nonnegotiable," Chinogwenya said.

However, agencies that rely heavily or entirely on U.S funding might have little choice but "to quiet their guidelines on access to abortion" to qualify for funding, said Denise Horn, an international relations and civil society expert at Bryant University in Rhode Island.

In South Africa, where abortion is mostly legal, some NGOs, especially those without alternative funding, stopped openly discussing abortion as an option or changed their guidelines and the information they share publicly, according to an assessment by South Africa's Rhodes University and the International Women's Health Coalition, a New York-based NGO.

"Organizations thus have to evaluate what is most important: the non-abortion work they will still be able to do or the principle of pro-choice," read part of the 2019 assessment report. "Ultimately, these organizations will have to make this difficult decision."

The long lines of women at the outreach clinic in Zimbabwe's Epworth settlement underline the dire need for family planning services in impoverished communities.

Engeline Mukanya, 30, said she is already struggling to support her three children with the \$100 she earns monthly from plaiting women's hair. Nurses inserted a birth-control implant in her left arm to protect her from pregnancy for the next five years.

Like many here, she cannot afford private providers who charge \$20 to \$60.

"It's unfortunate that we are so far away from America yet we are being caught in the crossfire of its politics," she said. "All we want is the freedom to space our births."

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

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

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

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

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

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

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

The concerned teen

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

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

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

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

The grieving mom-turned-activist

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

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

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

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

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

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

"We're not going to get this perfect," she said. "We have to make sure that there are mechanisms in place to deal with what we already have which is an anxious generation and an addicted generation of children to social media."

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

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

The skeptical internet expert

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Bomb cyclone' brings high winds and soaking rain to Northern California and Pacific Northwest

By HALLIE GOLDEN and CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — What was expected to be one of the strongest storms in the northwest U.S. in decades arrived Tuesday evening, knocking out power and downing trees across the region.

The Weather Prediction Center issued excessive rainfall risks beginning Tuesday and lasting through Friday as the strongest atmospheric river — a large plume of moisture — that California and the Pacific Northwest has seen this season bears down on the region. The storm system is considered a "bomb cyclone," which occurs when a cyclone intensifies rapidly.

The areas that could see particularly severe rainfall will likely reach from the south of Portland, Oregon, to the north of the San Francisco area, said Richard Bann, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service Weather Prediction Center.

"Be aware of the risk of flash flooding at lower elevations and winter storms at higher elevations. This is going to be an impactful event," he said.

Hurricane-force winds, which are gusts above 75 mph (121 kph), could be felt along the Oregon coast, according to the National Weather Service in Medford, Oregon. And near Seattle, conditions for a "mountain wave" were shaping up, bringing large, low elevation wind gusts that could cause widespread power outages and downed trees, said Larry O'Neill, director of the Oregon Climate Service and Oregon State University associate professor.

"This will be pretty strong in terms of the last 10 or 20 years," he said. "We've only seen a couple storms that have really been this strong."

More than 106,000 customers had lost power in Washington as of Tuesday evening, according to poweroutage.us. More than 11,000 had lost power in Oregon and nearly 12,000 in California.

The National Weather Service in Seattle said a peak wind speed of 68 mph (109 kph) was recorded at Crystal Mountain near Mount Rainier. A wind speed of 53 mph (82 kph) was also recorded at Ediz Hook, a 3-mile-long (4.8-kilometer) sand spit northwest of Seattle that extends from the northern shore of the Olympic Peninsula at Port Angeles into the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Winds were expected to increase in western Washington throughout the evening, the weather service said.

In northern California, flood and high wind watches were in effect, with up to 8 inches (20 centimeters) of rain predicted for parts of the San Francisco Bay Area, North Coast and Sacramento Valley.

A winter storm watch was issued for the northern Sierra Nevada above 3,500 feet (1,066 meters), where 15 inches (28 centimeters) of snow was possible over two days. Wind gusts could top 75 mph (120 kph) in mountain areas, forecasters said.

"Numerous flash floods, hazardous travel, power outages and tree damage can be expected as the storm reaches max intensity" on Wednesday, the Weather Prediction Center warned.

In Northern California's Yolo County, crews spent Monday clearing culverts, sewers and drainage ditches to avoid clogs that could lead to street flooding. Mesena Pimentel said she hoped the efforts would prevent a repeat of floods last February that inundated her property near Woodland.

"We had about ten inches of water in our garage, had a couple gophers swimming around," Pimentel told KCRA-TV. Woodland city officials set up two locations where residents could pick up free sandbags. Authorities urged people to stock up on food and charge phones and electronics in case power goes out and roads become unpassable.

In southwestern Oregon near the coast, 4 to 7 inches (10 to 18 centimeters) of rain was predicted — with as much as 10 inches (25 centimeters) possible in some areas — through late Thursday night and early Friday morning, Bann said. The National Weather Service issued a flood watch for parts of southwestern Oregon through Friday evening.

Washington could also see strong rainfall, but likely not as bad as Oregon and California. From Monday evening through Tuesday, some of its coastal ranges could get as much as 1.5 inches (3.8 centimeters) of rain, Bann said.

The weather service warned of high winds from Tuesday afternoon until early Wednesday for coastal parts of Pacific County, in southwest Washington. With gusts potentially topping 35 mph (46 kph), trees and power lines are at risk of being knocked down, the Pacific County Emergency Management Agency warned.

A blizzard warning was issued for the majority of the Cascades in Washington, including Mount Rainier National Park, starting Tuesday afternoon, with up to a foot of snow and wind gusts up to 60 mph (97 kph), according to the weather service in Seattle. Travel across passes could be difficult if not impossible.

Tuesday evening, fallen trees blocked the a lane on Interstate 90 in Issaquah, Washington, while rough winds and seas halted a ferry route in northwestern Washington between Port Townsend and Coupeville.

Officials also urged motorists to consider delaying travel around the state until Wednesday because of high winds and heavy snow expected in the mountains.

"It will only be a winter wonderland in the sense that you'll be wondering where the heck you are on any given patch of land," the Washington State Department of Transportation said on social media.

Trump picks Dr. Oz to run Medicare and Medicaid, Linda McMahon for Education, Lutnick for Commerce

By FATIMA HUSSEIN, AMANDA SEITZ, COLLIN BINKLEY and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump on Tuesday tapped billionaire professional wrestling mogul Linda McMahon to be secretary of the Education Department, tasked with overseeing an agency Trump has promised to dismantle. He also selected Dr. Mehmet Oz, a former television talk show host and heart surgeon, to head the agency that oversees health insurance programs for millions of older, poor and disabled Americans, and named Wall Street executive Howard Lutnick to lead the Commerce Department.

McMahon led the Small Business Administration during Trump's initial term from 2017 to 2019 and twice ran unsuccessfully as a Republican for the U.S. Senate in Connecticut.

McMahon served on the Connecticut Board of Education for a year starting in 2009 and has spent years on the board of trustees for Sacred Heart University in Connecticut. She's seen as a relative unknown in education circles, though she has expressed support for charter schools and school choice.

"Linda will use her decades of Leadership experience, and deep understanding of both Education and Business, to empower the next Generation of American Students and Workers, and make America Number One in Education in the World," Trump said in a statement.

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In nominating McMahon, Trump is rewarding a loyal backer of his movement who, along with Lutnick, has also helped lead his transition team. She was with him Tuesday as he attended a launch of SpaceX's Starship craft in Texas.

After her time in the Trump administration, McMahon became the chair of the board of the America First Policy Institute, a think tank created by Trump supporters and former officials who have been preparing for his return to government. McMahon has also been chair of the pro-Trump America First Action SuperPAC.

She is married to Vince McMahon, who stepped down as World Wrestling Entertainment's CEO in 2022 amid a company investigation into allegations that he engaged in sexual battery and trafficking. He also resigned as executive chairman of the board of TKO Group Holdings this January, though he has denied the allegations.

If confirmed by the Republican-led Senate, Linda McMahon will be asked to bring the nation's schools and universities in line with Trump's vision of education. Trump has made sweeping promises centered on removing what he sees as "left-wing indoctrination" in America's schools.

Trump has vowed to cut federal money for "any school pushing Critical Race Theory, transgender insanity, and other inappropriate racial, sexual, or political content on our children." He has promised to fight university diversity initiatives, saying he will open civil rights investigations and fine colleges "up to the entire amount of their endowment."

Oz, who ran a failed 2022 bid to represent Pennsylvania in the U.S. Senate, has been an outspoken supporter of Trump and in recent days expressed support for Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s nomination for the nation's top health agency, the Department of Health and Human Services.

"Dr. Oz will be a leader in incentivizing Disease Prevention, so we get the best results in the World for every dollar we spend on Healthcare in our Great Country," Trump said in a statement. "He will also cut waste and fraud within our Country's most expensive Government Agency, which is a third of our Nation's Healthcare spend, and a quarter of our entire National Budget."

As the administrator for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Oz would report to Kennedy.

"Americans need better research on healthy lifestyle choices from unbiased scientists, and @robertfkennedyjr can help as HHS secretary," Oz said in an Instagram post last week.

If confirmed by the Senate, Oz would be responsible for the programs — Medicaid, Medicare and the Affordable Care Act — that more than half the country relies on for health insurance.

Medicaid provides nearly-free health care coverage to millions of the poorest children and adults in the U.S., while Medicare gives older Americans and the disabled access to health insurance. The Affordable Care Act is the Obama-era program that offers health insurance plans to millions of Americans who do not qualify for government-assisted health insurance, but do not get insurance through their employer.

Trump has said he wants to overhaul the Affordable Care Act but has said he only has "concepts of a plan" for how that redesign would operate. During his first term in office, he tried unsuccessfully to scrap the program altogether. Last month, Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson promised that health care reform would be a big part of Trump's second term agenda.

During his campaign for senate, Oz promised to expand Medicare Advantage, the privately run version of Medicare that has become increasingly popular but also a source of widespread fraud.

TV personality Oprah Winfrey helped launch Oz into fandom and fortune. After years of appearing on her show as a health expert, Oz landed a talk show of his own that aired for 13 seasons. Oz has been accused of hawking dubious medical treatments and products on his defunct TV show. And during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, he pressured government officials to make hydroxychloroquine widely available, despite unresolved questions about its safety and effectiveness.

He estimated his net worth to be between \$100 million and \$315 million, according to a federal financial disclosure he filed in 2022.

Democratic Sen. Patty Murray of Washington, the chamber's president pro tempore, said Tuesday in a statement that Oz, who has described himself as "strongly pro-life," was unqualified for the position.

"Dr. Oz has zero qualifications, pushes alarming pseudoscience, & holds extreme anti-abortion views,"

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she said in a post on X. "CMS is a critical agency & we need serious leaders to protect Americans' health care and bring down costs — not TV hosts whose main qualification is their loyalty to Trump."

Lutnick, meanwhile, will have a key role in carrying out Trump's plan to raise and enforce tariffs as commerce secretary, Trump said. Lutnick is a cryptocurrency enthusiast and head of brokerage and investment bank Cantor Fitzgerald.

Trump made the announcement on his social media platform, Truth Social. He said Lutnick "will lead our Tariff and Trade agenda, with additional direct responsibility for the Office of the United States Trade Representative."

The nomination would put Lutnick in charge of a sprawling Cabinet agency that is involved in funding new computer chip factories, imposing trade restrictions, releasing economic data and monitoring the weather. It is also a position in which connections to CEOs and the wider business community are crucial.

An advocate for imposing wide-ranging tariffs, Lutnick told CNBC in September that "tariffs are an amazing tool for the president to use — we need to protect the American worker." Trump on the campaign trail proposed a 60% tariff on goods from China — and a tariff of up to 20% on everything else the United States imports.

Mainstream economists are generally skeptical of tariffs, considering them a mostly inefficient way for governments to raise money and promote prosperity.

Lutnick had been considered for treasury secretary, a role that has been at the center of high-profile jockeying within the Trump world. At the same time, the treasury position is closely watched in financial circles, where a disruptive nominee could have immediate negative consequences on the stock market, which Trump watches closely.

Lutnick joined Cantor Fitzgerald in 1983 and rose through the ranks to be appointed president and CEO in 1991. He also chairs financial technology company BGC Group Inc. and the commercial real estate services firm Newmark Group Inc.

Lutnick has donated to both Democrats and Republicans in the past, and once appeared on Trump's NBC reality show, "The Apprentice." He has become a part of the president-elect's inner circle, and has shared the stage with Trump at events in the closing days of his campaign, including a rally at Madison Square Garden.

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

By THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

President-elect Donald Trump is filling key posts in his second administration, and it's shaping up much differently than his first. He's prioritizing loyalists for top jobs.

Trump was bruised and hampered by internal squabbles during his initial term in office. Now he appears focused on remaking the federal government in his own image. Some of his choices could face difficult confirmation battles even with Republicans in control of the U.S. Senate.

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

Cabinet nominees: SECRETARY OF STATE: Marco Rubio

Trump named Florida Sen. Marco Rubio to be secretary of state, making the critic-turned-ally his choice for top diplomat.

Rubio, 53, is a noted hawk on China, Cuba and Iran, and was a finalist to be Trump's running mate on the Republican ticket last summer. Rubio is the vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee and a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

The announcement punctuates the hard pivot Rubio has made with Trump, whom the senator once called a "con man" during his unsuccessful campaign for the 2016 Republican presidential nomination.

Their relationship improved dramatically while Trump was in the White House. And as Trump campaigned for the presidency a third time, Rubio cheered his proposals. For instance, Rubio, who more than a decade ago helped craft immigration legislation that included a path to citizenship for people in the U.S. illegally, now supports Trump's plan to use the U.S. military for mass deportations.

ATTORNEY GENERAL: Matt Gaetz

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Trump said Wednesday he will nominate Florida Rep. Matt Gaetz to serve as his attorney general, naming a loyalist in the role of the nation's top prosecutor.

In selecting Gaetz, 42, Trump passed over more established lawyers whose names had been mentioned as being contenders for the job.

"Matt will end Weaponized Government, protect our Borders, dismantle Criminal Organizations and Restore Americans' badly-shattered Faith and Confidence in the Justice Department," Trump said in a statement.

Gaetz resigned from Congress after Trump announced him. The House Ethics Committee has been investigating an allegation that Gaetz paid for sex with a 17-year-old, though that probe effectively ended when he resigned. Gaetz has denied any wrongdoing.

DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE: Tulsi Gabbard

Former Hawaii Rep. Tulsi Gabbard has been tapped by Trump to be director of national intelligence, another example of Trump prizing loyalty over experience.

Gabbard, 43, was a Democratic House member who unsuccessfully sought the party's 2020 presidential nomination before leaving the party in 2022. She endorsed Trump in August and campaigned often with him this fall, and she's been accused of echoing Russian propaganda.

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

DEFENSE SECRETARY: Pete Hegseth

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

Hegseth served in the Army National Guard from 2002 to 2021, deploying to Iraq in 2005 and Afghanistan in 2011. He has two Bronze Stars. However, Hegseth lacks senior military and national security experience. If confirmed by the Senate, he would inherit the top job during a series of global crises — ranging from Russia's war in Ukraine and the ongoing attacks in the Middle East by Iranian proxies to the push for a cease-fire between Israel, Hamas and Hezbollah and escalating worries about the growing alliance between Russia and North Korea.

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

COMMERCE SECRETARY: Howard Lutnick

Lutnick heads up the brokerage and investment bank Cantor Fitzgerald and is a cryptocurrency enthusiast. He is co-chair of Trump's transition operation, charged along with Linda McMahon, a former wrestling executive who previously led Trump's Small Business Administration, with helping the president-elect build a Cabinet for his second administration.

As commerce secretary, Lutnick would play a key role in carrying out Trump's plans to raise and enforce tariffs. He would oversee a sprawling Cabinet department whose oversight ranges from funding new computer chip factories and imposing trade restrictions to releasing economic data and monitoring the weather.

HOMELAND SECURITY SECRETARY: Kristi Noem

Noem is a well-known conservative who used her two terms as South Dakota's governor to vault to a prominent position in Republican politics.

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

More recently, Noem faced sharp criticism for telling a story in her memoir about shooting and killing her dog.

She is set to lead a department crucial to the president-elect's hardline immigration agenda as well as other missions. Homeland Security oversees natural disaster response, the U.S. Secret Service and Transportation Security Administration agents who work at airports.

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CIA DIRECTOR: John Ratcliffe

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

If confirmed, Ratcliffe will have held the highest intelligence positions in the U.S.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES SECRETARY: Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

Kennedy ran for president as a Democrat, then as an independent, and then endorsed Trump. He's the son of Democratic icon Robert Kennedy, who was assassinated during his own presidential campaign.

The nomination alarmed people who are concerned about his record of spreading unfounded fears about vaccines. For example, he has long advanced the debunked idea that vaccines cause autism.

TRANSPORTATION SECRETARY: Sean Duffy

Duffy is a former House member from Wisconsin who was one of Trump's most visible defenders on cable news. Duffy served in the House for nearly nine years, sitting on the Financial Services Committee and chairing the subcommittee on insurance and housing. He left Congress in 2019 for a TV career and has been the host of "The Bottom Line" on Fox Business.

Before entering politics, Duffy was a reality TV star on MTV, where he met his wife, "Fox and Friends Weekend" co-host Rachel Campos-Duffy. They have nine children.

VETERANS AFFAIRS SECRETARY: Doug Collins

Collins is a former Republican congressman from Georgia who gained recognition for defending Trump during his first impeachment trial, which centered on U.S. assistance for Ukraine. Trump was impeached for urging Ukraine to investigate Joe Biden in 2019 during the Democratic presidential nomination, but he was acquitted by the Senate.

Collins has also served in the armed forces himself and is currently a chaplain in the United States Air Force Reserve Command.

INTERIOR SECRETARY: Doug Burgum

The governor of North Dakota, once little-known outside his state, is a former Republican presidential primary contender who endorsed Trump and then spent months traveling to drum up support for Trump after dropping out of the race.

Burgum was a serious contender to be Trump's vice presidential choice this summer. The two-term governor was seen as a possible pick because of his executive experience and business savvy. Burgum also has close ties to deep-pocketed energy industry CEOs.

Trump initially announced his choice of Burgum while addressing a gala at his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida. His formal announcement the following day said he wanted Burgum to be Interior secretary and chairman of a new National Energy Council. Burgum will also have a seat on the National Security Council, which would be a first for the Interior secretary.

ENERGY SECRETARY: Chris Wright

A campaign donor and CEO of Denver-based Liberty Energy, Wright is a vocal advocate of oil and gas development, including fracking — a key pillar of Trump's quest to achieve U.S. "energy dominance" in the global market.

Wright also has been one of the industry's loudest voices against efforts to fight climate change. He said the climate movement around the world is "collapsing under its own weight." The Energy Department is responsible for advancing energy, environmental and nuclear security of the United States.

Wright also won support from influential conservatives, including oil and gas tycoon Harold Hamm. Hamm, executive chairman of Oklahoma-based Continental Resources, a major shale oil company, is a longtime Trump supporter and adviser who played a key role on energy issues in Trump's first term.

EDUCATION SECRETARY: Linda McMahon

McMahon, a billionaire professional wrestling mogul, would be making a return appearance in a second Trump administration. She led the Small Business Administration from 2017 to 2019 during Trump's initial term and twice ran unsuccessfully as a Republican for the U.S. Senate in Connecticut. She served on the

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Connecticut Board of Education for a year starting in 2009 and has spent years on the board of trustees for Sacred Heart University in Connecticut. She has expressed support for charter schools and school choice.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY ADMINISTRATOR: Lee Zeldin

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

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

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

White House staff:CHIEF OF STAFF: Susie Wiles

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

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

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

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

NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISER: Mike Waltz

Waltz is a three-term Republican congressman from east-central Florida. A former Army Green Beret, he served multiple tours in Afghanistan and also worked in the Pentagon as a policy adviser when Donald Rumsfeld and Robert Gates were defense chiefs.

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

BORDER CZAR: Tom Homan

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

He led the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Trump's first administration and said at a conference over the summer that he would be willing to "run the biggest deportation operation this country's ever seen."

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

DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF FOR POLICY: Stephen Miller

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

Miller has been a central figure in some of Trump's policy decisions, notably his move to separate thousands of immigrant families. Trump argued throughout the campaign that the nation's economic, national security and social priorities could be met by deporting people who are in the United States illegally.

DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF: Dan Scavino

Scavino was an adviser in all three of the president-elect's campaigns, and the transition team referred to him as one of "Trump's longest serving and most trusted aides." He will be deputy chief of staff and assistant to the president. He previously ran Trump's social media profile in the White House during his first administration.

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DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF: James Blair

Blair was political director for Trump's 2024 campaign and for the Republican National Committee. He will be deputy chief of staff for legislative, political and public affairs and assistant to the president. Blair was key to Trump's economic messaging during his winning White House comeback campaign.

DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF: Taylor Budowich

Budowich is a veteran Trump campaign aide who launched and directed Make America Great Again, Inc., a super PAC that supported Trump's 2024 campaign. He will be deputy chief of staff for communications and personnel and assistant to the president.

WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY: Karoline Leavitt

Leavitt, 27, was Trump's campaign press secretary and currently a spokesperson for his transition. She would be the youngest White House press secretary in history.

Leavitt worked in the White House press office during Trump's first term.

In 2022, she ran for Congress in New Hampshire, winning a 10-way Republican primary before losing to Democratic Rep. Chris Pappas.

WHITE HOUSE COUNSEL: William McGinley

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

Ambassadors and envoys and other key posts
SPECIAL ENVOY TO THE MIDDLE EAST: Steven Witkoff

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

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

AMBASSADOR TO ISRAEL: Mike Huckabee

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

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

Huckabee has rejected a Palestinian homeland in territory occupied by Israel, calling for a so-called "one-state solution."

AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED NATIONS: Elise Stefanik

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

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

Stefanik's questioning of university presidents over antisemitism on their campuses helped lead to two of those presidents resigning, further raising her national profile.

CENTERS FOR MEDICAID AND MEDICARE SERVICES: Dr. Mehmet Oz

Oz, 64, is a former heart surgeon who hosted "The Dr. Oz Show," a long-running daytime television talk show. He ran unsuccessfully for the U.S. Senate as the Republican nominee in 2022 and is an outspoken supporter of Trump, who endorsed Oz's bid for elected office.

Multiple election offices report receiving mailed ballots misdirected from other states

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY, JOHN HANNA and AMY BETH HANSON Associated Press
HELENA, Mont. (AP) — Terry Thompson had an election to run for voters in Cascade County, Montana. Why then, she thought, was her office in Great Falls being sent mailed ballots completed by voters in places such as Wasilla, Alaska; Vancouver, Washington; and Tampa, Florida?

It was only about a dozen ballots total from voters in other states. But she said it still raised concerns about the ability of the U.S. Postal Service to deliver election mail and whether the errant ballots would ever be counted.

"I mean, I would have had to been doing FedEx overnight envelopes to all these states to try to get them where they needed to go," said Thompson, the county's election administrator.

She received about a half dozen others that should have gone to county election offices in other parts of Montana. For those, she said she "just had to hope and pray" they made it back on time.

While a stray ballot ending up in the wrong place can happen during election season, the number of ballots destined for other states and counties that ended up at Thompson's office is unusual. The Associated Press found it wasn't an anomaly. Election offices in California, Louisiana, New Mexico and elsewhere also reported receiving completed ballots in the mail that should have gone to other states.

The Postal Service said Tuesday that without additional information or tracking data from bar codes on ballot envelopes, it cannot comment further on those cases. It said earlier this month that it had been working closely with local election officials to resolve concerns.

But to some election officials, the misdirected ballots confirm concerns they raised before the Nov. 5 presidential election about the U.S. Postal Service's performance and ability to handle a crush of mail ballots, as early voting has become increasingly popular with voters.

State election officials warned in September that problems with the nation's mail delivery system threatened to disenfranchise voters in the upcoming presidential election. In a letter to U.S. Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, the election officials noted problems during the primaries that included mailed ballots postmarked on time but received too late to be counted and instances of properly addressed election mail returned as undeliverable.

In Louisiana, state election officials said some 40 to 50 ballots destined for 10 other states ended up being delivered to local election offices, mostly in Orleans Parish. Deputy Secretary of State Joel Watson Jr. said the Secretary of State's Office had "extraordinary frustration" for the Postal Service's continued "inconsistencies" and "lack of accountability."

Dozens of mail ballots from inside the state also were delivered to the wrong local election office, Watson said.

"There were many instances where our staff had to physically take these ballots and drive them to another parish to get them there on time to make sure those votes count," Watson said. "We had to use time and resources in the hours and days immediately preceding the biggest election we hold to make sure these ballots were delivered to the right places."

Louisiana law does not permit ballot drop boxes, and Watson indicated his office does not support moving in that direction and would continue to encourage voters to cast their ballots in person. He cited security concerns such as the arson attacks on drop boxes in Washington and Oregon ahead of the Nov. 5 election in which ballots were damaged.

The U.S. Postal Service said it puts election mail ahead of other mail for processing and accounts for it with daily checks, known as "all clears." Also, the USPS recommends that election offices use individual bar codes on ballot envelopes.

"The United States Postal Service is fully committed to fulfilling our role in the electoral process when policy makers choose to utilize us as a part of their election system, and to delivering election mail in a timely manner," Rod Spurgeon, a USPS spokesman, said in an email.

Mark Dimondstein, president of the American Postal Workers Union, said ballot monitors identified some

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problems inside facilities during the election season but said they were resolved.

"While we are waiting on the final statistics from the Postal Service, all indications show that vote-by-mail was a success in the 2024 general election," he said in an emailed statement Tuesday.

Still, state and local election officials reported numerous cases of ballots ending up in the wrong place.

In New Mexico's Santa Fe County, County Clerk Katharine Clark said seven ballots bound for her office were instead delivered to Los Angeles County in Southern California. Those ballots were redirected, Clark said, but did not arrive at her office before the state's deadline to be counted, which is 7 p.m. on Election Day.

"It does mean that person got denied the right to vote, because the ballots from Los Angeles County -- even though they were sent (to Santa Fe) with a four- or five-day lead time -- they didn't get to us in time to count," she said.

In addition, Clark said her office received two ballots destined for Los Angeles County and one for Maricopa County in Arizona that she sent back to the U.S. Postal Service. Nine ballots should have been delivered to other counties within New Mexico.

In addition to the Santa Fe County ballots, Los Angeles County election officials said they also received two ballots that should have been mailed to Torrance County, New Mexico. That county's clerk, Linda Jaramillo, said she did not recall receiving the ballots from Los Angeles County but expressed faith in the nation's mail service.

"There's going to be a few," Jaramillo said. "You can't have perfection."

The California Secretary of State's office said about 150 mail ballots from Oregon voters were misdirected to California before being sent back. Officials at the state election office in Springfield, Illinois, somehow ended up with a ballot intended for Massachusetts.

"Yeah, I have no idea how that happens," said Matt Dietrich, spokesperson for the Illinois State Board of Elections.

Amy Cohen, executive director of the National Association of State Election Directors, called the incidents "disappointing and heartbreaking."

"Election officials don't ever want to see misdelivered ballots, but it does happen for variety of reasons, not all of which are USPS's fault," Cohen said, noting that voters can sometimes forget to use the outer envelope that contains important address information.

But Cohen said the examples from this past presidential election seem to reflect the issues that election officials had been worried about since 2023 and were highlighted in their September letter to U.S. Postal Service leadership.

"We hope they will get to the bottom of what went wrong to prevent it from happening again in the future and that they will be responsive to the issues escalated by the election community," Cohen said.

In Kansas, Secretary of State Scott Schwab, a Republican, was so frustrated after the August primary with hundreds of mail ballots arriving after the deadline for counting them that he posted on social media, "The Pony Express is more efficient at this point." Schwab, unlike other Republicans, has touted the use of drop boxes.

There were no reports of ballots misdirected from or to other states, but Schwab said in a statement this week: "I still encourage voters to not use the USPS to mail their ballot unless there is no other option."

The dark energy pushing our universe apart may not be what it seems, scientists say

By ADITHI RAMAKRISHNAN AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Distant, ancient galaxies are giving scientists more hints that a mysterious force called dark energy may not be what they thought.

Astronomers know that the universe is being pushed apart at an accelerating rate and they have puzzled for decades over what could possibly be speeding everything up. They theorize that a powerful, constant force is at play, one that fits nicely with the main mathematical model that describes how the universe

behaves. But they can't see it and they don't know where it comes from, so they call it dark energy.

It is so vast it is thought to make up nearly 70% of the universe — while ordinary matter like all the stars and planets and people make up just 5%.

But findings published earlier this year by an international research collaboration of more than 900 scientists from around the globe yielded a major surprise. As the scientists analyzed how galaxies move they found that the force pushing or pulling them around did not seem to be constant. And the same group published a new, broader set of analyses Tuesday that yielded a similar answer.

"I did not think that such a result would happen in my lifetime," said Mustapha Ishak-Boushaki, a cosmologist at the University of Texas at Dallas who is part of the collaboration.

Called the Dark Energy Spectroscopic Instrument, it uses a telescope based in Tucson, Arizona to create a three-dimensional map of the universe's 11-billion-year history to see how galaxies have clustered throughout time and across space. That gives scientists information about how the universe evolved, and where it might be heading.

The map they are building would not make sense if dark energy were a constant force, as it is theorized. Instead, the energy appears to be changing or weakening over time. If that is indeed the case, it would upend astronomers' standard cosmological model. It could mean that dark energy is very different than what scientists thought — or that there may be something else altogether going on.

"It's a time of great excitement, and also some head-scratching and confusion," said Bhuvnesh Jain, a cosmologist at the University of Pennsylvania who is not involved with the research.

The collaboration's latest finding points to a possible explanation from an older theory: that across billions of years of cosmic history, the universe expanded and galaxies clustered as Einstein's general relativity predicted.

The new findings aren't definitive. Astronomers say they need more data to overturn a theory that seemed to fit together so well. They hope observations from other telescopes and new analyses of the new data over the next few years will determine whether the current view of dark energy stands or falls.

"The significance of this result right now is tantalizing," said Robert Caldwell, a physicist at Dartmouth College who is not involved with the research, "but it's not like a gold-plated measurement."

There's a lot riding on the answer. Because dark energy is the biggest component of the universe, its behavior determines the universe's fate, explained David Spergel, an astrophysicist and president of the Simons Foundation. If dark energy is constant, the universe will continue to expand, forever getting colder and emptier. If it's growing in strength, the universe will expand so speedily that it'll destroy itself in what astronomers call the Big Rip.

"Not to panic. If this is what's going on, it won't happen for billions of years," he said. "But we'd like to know about it."

GOP senators divided on release of Gaetz ethics report as Trump pressures them to move quickly

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, STEPHEN GROVES and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As President-elect Donald Trump digs in on his pick of former Rep. Matt Gaetz for attorney general, Republican senators are divided over how much information they will demand to move his confirmation — and how much to push back on Trump as he demands that they quickly rubber stamp his Cabinet once he takes office in January.

Gaetz, who has been calling senators and is expected to start meeting with some of them as soon as this week, is an unconventional pick for the nation's top law enforcement official. His nomination creates a confirmation climb in the Senate, where many Republicans are deeply uncomfortable with his selection.

The Florida Republican spent his congressional career agitating against the Justice Department and has faced a House Ethics investigation into whether he engaged in sexual misconduct and illicit drug use, accepted improper gifts and sought to obstruct government investigations of his conduct — allegations Gaetz denies. He is also deeply unpopular within his own party after leading the push to oust former

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House Speaker Kevin McCarthy last year.

Publicly, Republican senators say they will give Gaetz the same due process that they give any other nominee. Most are loath to criticize him directly. But they are split on whether to demand access to the ethics report, which the House ethics committee could choose to release after Gaetz resigned from the House last week.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, who has positioned himself as Trump's top ally in Congress, said last week that he will "strongly request" that the Ethics committee not release the results of its investigation.

Republican Sen. John Thune of South Dakota, who will become Senate majority leader in January, deferred to Johnson, saying Monday that the ethics report is "a House issue." But several in his conference argued that the Senate should see the report, whether it is released publicly or not.

"There's nothing about that that would smell right, to say, 'Hey, there's a report but none of us want to see it,'" said Sen. James Lankford, R-Okla.

Republican Sen. Markwayne Mullin, who served in the House with Gaetz, said the ethics report is important for the Senate's "advice and consent" role laid out in the Constitution. "I think the report from the House plays a pivotal role in that," he said.

Others said the information would come out one way or another, even if it isn't released. "I'm going to honor Speaker Johnson's position," said North Carolina Sen. Thom Tillis. "I think it's a reasonable position."

The simmering clash between the Senate, House and Trump could be just the first of many to come. Trump has made clear he expects next year's unified Republican Congress to give him broad leeway on his nominees, and has already been making some calls to senators.

Cabinet nominees have traditionally provided a flood of paperwork to Senate committees ahead of their confirmation hearings, participating in background checks by the FBI and filling out lengthy questionnaires that probe every aspect of their lives and careers. But Trump's transition has already signaled that it might not request the background checks and has so far declined to sign agreements with the White House and the Department of Justice to allow that process to begin.

The documentation, including the criminal background checks and financial vetting, could be key for senators in both parties who have questions about Gaetz and some of Trump's other more controversial nominees, including Tulsi Gabbard for director of national intelligence, Pete Hegseth for secretary of Defense and Robert F. Kennedy Jr. for secretary of Health and Human Services.

In the absence of the traditional process, whether to proceed without an FBI background check would be up to individual committee chairs, who will be under tremendous pressure from Trump and his allies to move his nominees quickly. On Tuesday, Wyoming Sen. John Barrasso, the incoming No. 2 Republican under Thune, said the Senate will begin hearings once Republicans take the majority on Jan. 3 and start holding confirmation votes once Trump is inaugurated on Jan. 20.

Republican senators say they will demand that documentation, but it's unclear how that might work if Trump's transition doesn't consent to it.

"I think that if they want a speedy consideration of this nomination we've got to have as much transparency as we can have," said Iowa Sen. Chuck Grassley, who will serve as Senate Judiciary Committee chairman next year. "Because you've heard my colleagues, especially on the Republican side, say that they have some questions."

Mississippi Sen. Roger Wicker, the incoming chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said he wants a traditional process involving the full FBI background check for Hegseth and the committee's other nominees. "We should do it by the numbers," Wicker said.

Democrats are wary, though, that the process could get muddled, or curtailed, as Trump puts the full force of his pressure on Senate Republicans.

"If there's a cursory background check, like we call 20 people — that's not going to be appropriate," said Rhode Island Sen. Jack Reed, the current chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee who will be the panel's top Democrat next year.

Meanwhile, Gaetz has already paid a visit to at least one group of potential allies, the hard-right House Freedom Caucus, where he outlined for the group "some of the things that that need to be done at the

Department of Justice to end the weaponization," said Rep. Andy Harris, R-Md., the chairman of the Freedom Caucus.

Among the ideas Gaetz discussed was "eliminating a lot of the senior staff," Harris said.

As for the allegations of sexual misconduct against Gaetz, Harris dismissed them saying, "last time I looked, in America, you're innocent until proven guilty." He said he did not believe the House Ethics files on Gaetz should be released.

"We think that the president deserves to get his selections approved for the cabinet, and Mr. Gaetz knows what to do to end the weaponization of the department," Harris said.

Speaker Johnson also made clear his position Tuesday, telling reporters that the Senate should do its job and "sure, take a look, do a deep dive" and then move them along for confirmation so "the president has the team in place to do what the American people have elected him to do."

"I think President Trump is looking for persons who will shake up the status quo," Johnson said. "And we got a mandate in this election cycle to do that."

Trump and Musk solidify their bond with Texas trip for rocket launch

By CHRIS MEGERIAN and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For two weeks, Donald Trump has welcomed Elon Musk into his world. On Tuesday, it was Musk's turn to play host to the president-elect.

Trump flew to South Texas to watch as Musk's SpaceX launched a Starship rocket near the Mexican border. Trump listened intently as the world's richest man explained how the test would work and demonstrated with a model. And then Trump squinted into the bright sky to watch liftoff.

It didn't go perfectly — the reusable booster did not return to the launch pad as it had done on a previous test last month. Instead, the booster was directed to a splashdown in the Gulf of Mexico.

But Trump's presence at the launch was a remarkable display of intimacy between the two men, one with implications for American politics, the government, foreign policy and even the possibility of humans reaching Mars.

Musk spent around \$200 million to help Trump beat Democrat Kamala Harris in the presidential race, and he's been given unparalleled access. He's counseled Trump on nominees for the new administration, joined the president-elect's phone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and been tapped to co-chair an advisory panel on cutting the size of the federal bureaucracy.

In addition to political influence, Musk could benefit personally as well. SpaceX, his rocket company, has billions of dollars in government contracts and the goal of eventually starting a colony on Mars. He's also CEO of Tesla, which manufactures electric vehicles, and has battled with regulators over safety concerns involving autonomous driving.

"Trump has the biggest possible regard for people who break the rules and get away with it," said William Galston, a senior fellow in governance studies at the Brookings Institution, a Washington-based think tank. "Musk has demonstrated extraordinary accomplishment in doing that."

To top it off, Musk owns the social media company X, formally known as Twitter, which he has harnessed as an influential perch to promote Trump and his agenda.

"Stop the Swamp!" he wrote Tuesday as he shared a warning that entrenched Washington interests are trying to undermine Trump before his inauguration.

Before the election, Musk rejected the idea that he was expecting any favors in return for supporting Trump in the presidential race.

"There is no quid pro quo," he posted on X in September. "With a Trump administration, we can execute major government reform, remove bureaucratic paperwork that is smothering the country and unlock a new age of prosperity."

However, Trump has hardly gone anywhere without Musk in the two weeks since beating Harris. Musk joined Trump at a meeting with House Republicans in Washington and sat next to him at an Ultimate Fighting Championship match in New York. The trip to Texas for the rocket launch was just Trump's third

time outside Florida since the election.

As Trump's protective motorcade left the launch site Tuesday evening to return to the airport, one of Musk's angular, shiny Tesla Cybertrucks was tucked in the middle of the formation of black SUVs.

Much of Trump's activity is happening with little public access for the press. Unlike his predecessors, he has opted against regularly making his travel plans or events open to journalists.

The relationship between Trump and Musk was not always so close.

Two years ago, Trump was mocking Musk in stump speeches and Musk was saying it was time for Trump to "hang up his hat & sail into the sunset."

"Trump would be 82 at end of term, which is too old to be chief executive of anything, let alone the United States of America," Musk wrote on social media.

But Musk swiftly endorsed Trump after the former president survived an assassination attempt in July. He quickly became a central figure in Trump's orbit, appearing at times more like his running mate than Ohio Sen. JD Vance.

Trump started boasting about Musk's accomplishments at campaign rallies, such as when Starship's reusable rocket booster returned to the launch tower on a previous occasion and was caught by mechanical arms.

"Those arms grab it like you grab your baby, just like you grab your little baby. And it hugged it and just put it down, and there it was," Trump said.

Musk was with Trump at his Mar-a-Lago resort on election night and has spent much of the two weeks since there. Trump's granddaughter Kai Trump posted a photo of her with Musk at one of Trump's golf resorts, writing that Musk was "achieving uncle status."

Last week, Musk appeared in a golden ballroom at Mar-a-Lago, seated in the center of the room as a guest of honor at an event. Trump, in his remarks at the black tie event, said Musk's IQ is "about as high as they can get" and praised him as "a really good guy."

"He launched a rocket three weeks ago and then he went to Pennsylvania to campaign because he considered this more important than launching rockets that cost billions of dollars," Trump said.

He joked about Musk's constant presence at Mar-a-Lago, saying: "He likes this place. I can't get him out of here."

He added, "And you know what, I like having him here."

Musk said of the election results, "The public has given us a mandate that could not be more clear."

SpaceX launches giant Starship rocket, but aborts attempt to catch booster with mechanical arms

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

SpaceX on Tuesday launched another Starship rocket, but passed up catching the booster with giant mechanical arms.

Unlike last month's success, the booster was directed to a splashdown in the Gulf of Mexico. The catch was called off just four minutes into the test flight from Texas for unspecified reasons, and the booster hit the water three minutes later.

Not all of the criteria for a booster catch was met and so the flight director did not command the booster to return to the launch site, said SpaceX spokesman Dan Huot. He did not specify what went wrong.

At the same time, the empty spacecraft launched from Texas atop Starship soared across the Gulf of Mexico on a near loop around the world similar to October's test flight. Skimming space, the shiny retro-looking craft descended into the Indian Ocean for a controlled but destructive end to the hourlong demo.

It was the sixth test for the world's biggest and most powerful rocket that SpaceX and NASA hope to use to get astronauts back on the moon and eventually Mars.

SpaceX kept the same flight path as last time, but changed some steps along the way as well as the time of day. Starship blasted off in late afternoon instead of early morning to ensure daylight to see the spacecraft's descent.

Among the new objectives that were achieved: igniting one of the spacecraft's engines in space, which would be necessary when returning from orbit. There were also thermal protection experiments aboard the spacecraft, with some areas stripped of heat tiles to see whether catch mechanisms might work there on future flights. And the spacecraft descended nose-first during the last part of entry, before flipping and splashing down upright into the Indian Ocean. Even more upgrades are planned for the next test flight.

Donald Trump flew in for the launch in the latest sign of a deepening bond between the president-elect and Elon Musk, SpaceX's founder and CEO.

SpaceX wants to eventually return and reuse the entire 400-foot (121-meter) Starship. Full-scale recycling would drive down the cost of hauling cargo and people to the moon and Mars, while speeding things up. The recycling of SpaceX's Falcon rockets flying out of Florida and California has already saved the company time and money.

NASA is paying SpaceX more than \$4 billion to land astronauts on the moon via Starship on back-to-back missions later this decade. Musk envisions launching a fleet of Starships to build a city one day on Mars.

This was the sixth launch of a fully assembled Starship since 2023. The first three ended up exploding.

Jets fire general manager Joe Douglas after team goes 3-8 to start the season

By DENNIS WASZAK Jr. AP Pro Football Writer

First, Robert Saleh. Now, Joe Douglas.

Woody Johnson is cleaning house for his woeful New York Jets in what has been a hugely disappointing season.

Douglas was fired Tuesday as the Jets' general manager, the latest shakeup for a franchise that had Super Bowl aspirations with a healthy Aaron Rodgers at quarterback but has limped to a 3-8 start and appears likely to miss the playoffs for a 14th consecutive year.

The dismissal of Douglas, who was 30-64 and had no winning seasons in his tenure, came exactly six weeks after Johnson fired Saleh as coach on Oct. 8 after the Jets were 2-3 to open the year.

"Today, I informed Joe Douglas he will no longer serve as the general manager of the New York Jets," Johnson said in a statement issued by the team. "I want to thank Joe for his commitment to the Jets over the last six years and wish him and his family the best moving forward."

Johnson also announced that Phil Savage, who has served as a senior football adviser since 2019, will be the Jets' interim general manager for the rest of the season. Johnson said the team would immediately begin the process of finding a new GM.

Douglas, who was in the final year of his contract after being hired in 2019, was not consulted by Johnson when the owner made the decision to dismiss Saleh and replace him on an interim basis with defensive coordinator Jeff Ulbrich. New York is 1-5 under Ulbrich.

Johnson said at the time he thought the Jets had "one of the most talented teams that has ever been assembled" in his 25 years as owner — and Douglas was largely responsible. But the absence of Douglas' input in the firing of Saleh was a clear indication that the GM's job could also be in jeopardy.

"I come in here every day and just want to do whatever I can to help this team reach its goals and reach its destination," Douglas said two weeks ago when asked if he was worried about his job status. "And whatever happens, happens."

The Jets were 3-6 at that time and Douglas insisted the team could turn things around and make a late run.

"Obviously, it starts with me," Douglas said. "I can look back and there's quite a few things that I could have done better. Obviously, when a situation happens like what happened four weeks ago (Saleh's firing), you have a lot of self-reflective moments on the things that you could have done better to keep that from happening.

"But we've got an opportunity here with these last stretch of games to change that narrative."

The Jets have since dropped two more games, including a humiliating 31-6 loss at Arizona two weeks

ago followed by New York blowing a late lead and losing 28-27 to Indianapolis last Sunday.

And Johnson apparently thought it was time during the Jets' bye-week break to complete what is a major overhaul rather than wait until the end of the season — when it appears likely the franchise will extend the NFL's longest active postseason drought.

Johnson's future outside of football could also be a factor in beginning the search now. He served as the U.S. ambassador to the United Kingdom during President-elect Donald Trump's first term, when Johnson's brother Christopher was in charge of the team and hired Saleh. Woody Johnson could potentially fill that role again with Trump elected for the second time, and that would cause him to relinquish day-to-day operations of the team at some point next year.

Douglas was widely celebrated when he swung the trade — with Johnson's urging — to acquire Rodgers from Green Bay. But the four-time NFL MVP tore his left Achilles tendon four snaps into the 2023 season opener and the Jets never recovered, finishing 7-10.

Rodgers entered training camp this summer healthy and with renewed zest for playing — and revived the franchise's Super Bowl hopes in the process. Instead, the Jets have been arguably the NFL's most disappointing team — and now the future of Rodgers, who will turn 41 on Dec. 2 and has a year remaining on his contract, is uncertain.

The failure of Rodgers to produce anywhere close to his usual level while with the Packers will be a stain on Douglas' resume. The GM's inability to successfully build a consistently solid offensive line will be another, along with the team's decision to trade quarterback Sam Darnold to Carolina and draft Zach Wilson as his replacement with the No. 2 overall pick in the 2021 draft.

But Douglas also made several key moves to establish a young core, including drafting cornerback Sauce Gardner, wide receiver Garrett Wilson, edge rusher Jermaine Johnson and running back Breece Hall in the first two rounds of the 2022 draft.

Savage has extensive NFL experience as an executive, including front-office stints with Cleveland, where he was the GM for four years in his second stint with the Browns, as well as Baltimore and Philadelphia.

He was also the executive director for the Senior Bowl for six years, and served as general manager of the Arizona Hotshots of the Alliance of American Football in 2018 before joining the Jets.

US envoy says Israel-Hezbollah truce is 'within our grasp' as Gaza food crisis worsens after looting

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB, WAFAA SHURAFI and FATMA KHALED Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — A United States envoy said an agreement to end the Israel-Hezbollah war is "within our grasp" after talks in Lebanon on Tuesday.

However, there was no such optimism in the Gaza Strip, where the looting of nearly 100 aid trucks by armed men worsened an already severe food crisis.

Amos Hochstein, the Biden administration's pointman on Israel and Lebanon, arrived as Hezbollah's allies in the Lebanese government said the militant group had responded positively to the proposal, which would entail both its fighters and Israeli ground forces withdrawing from a U.N. buffer zone in southern Lebanon.

The buffer zone would be policed by thousands of additional U.N. peacekeepers and Lebanese troops. Israel has called for a stronger enforcement mechanism, potentially including the ability to conduct military operations against any Hezbollah threats, something Lebanon is likely to oppose.

An Israeli airstrike on Tuesday hit a Lebanese army base in the southern town of Sarafand, killing three soldiers, the army said — the second deadly strike on Lebanese soldiers in as many days. The Israeli military did not immediately comment. At least 41 soldiers have been killed by Israeli bombardment the past month, according to the Lebanese army.

Hochstein said he held "very constructive talks" with Lebanon's Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, an ally of Hezbollah who is mediating on the group's behalf.

"Specifically today, we have continued to significantly narrow the gaps," the envoy told reporters after the two-hour meeting. "It's ultimately the decisions of the parties to reach a conclusion to this conflict."

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... It is now within our grasp.”

Berri said the “situation is good in principle,” although some technical details remain unresolved. The Lebanese side was waiting to hear the results of Hochstein’s talks with Israeli officials, he told the Asharq al-Awsat newspaper.

Israeli siege blocks food to northern Gaza for more than 40 days, UN says

The United Nations humanitarian office says virtually no food or humanitarian aid has been delivered to northernmost Gaza for more than 40 days because of the Israeli military’s siege there.

Experts say famine may already have set in in the north, where Israel has been waging a weekslong offensive that has killed hundreds of people and driven tens of thousands from their homes.

So far in November, OCHA reports that 27 out of 31 planned humanitarian missions to the north were rejected by Israel and the other four were severely impeded, U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said Tuesday. Devastated towns like Beit Hanoun, Beit Lahiya and parts of Jabaliya remain cut off, he said.

Asked whether the U.N. believes Israel is trying to force the estimated 75,000 Palestinians in northern Gaza to move south by denying the aid deliveries, Dujarric replied: “I can’t speak to the intentions of the Israeli government and the Israeli policy. We’re just seeing the result of it and trying to deal with it.”

Israel says it puts no restrictions on the quantity of aid entering Gaza and that it is working to increase the amount. This month, it opened a new crossing into central Gaza. So far it has reported a few dozen trucks entering through it.

The flow of aid is at nearly the lowest level of the entire 13-month war. So far this month, Israel says it let into Gaza an average of 88 trucks a day – less than half the highest rate of the war, in April, which aid groups say was still too low.

From the aid that does enter, only about half actually reaches Palestinians because Israeli military restrictions and fears of theft often prevent the agency from collecting truck cargos at the border, according to UNRWA, the U.N. agency with the biggest role in the humanitarian operation.

Food prices soar in central Gaza after looting

The theft in Gaza over the weekend of nearly 100 trucks loaded with food and other humanitarian aid sent prices soaring and caused shortages in central Gaza, where most of the population of 2.3 million people have fled and where hundreds of thousands are crammed into squalid tent camps.

On Monday, a crowd of people waited outside a shuttered bakery in the central city of Deir al-Balah. A woman who had been displaced from Gaza City, identifying herself as Umm Shadi, said the price of flour had climbed to 400 shekels (over \$100) a bag, if it can even be found.

Nora Muhanna, also displaced from Gaza City, said she was leaving empty-handed after waiting five hours for a bag of bread for her children. “From the beginning, there are no goods, and even if they are available, there is no money,” she said.

The U.N. said armed men stole food and other aid from 98 trucks over the weekend, the largest single incident of its kind since the war began. It did not say who was behind the theft.

Dujarric, the U.N. spokesman, said the convoy of 109 trucks was instructed by the Israeli military to take an “alternative, unfamiliar route” after the aid was brought through the Kerem Shalom crossing, and that the trucks were robbed near the crossing itself.

Israel accuses criminal gangs and Hamas of stealing aid, allegations denied by the militant group.

Al-Aqsa TV, operated by the militants, said Hamas-run security forces in Gaza had launched an operation against looters, killing 20 of them.

Bassem Naim, a senior Hamas official based abroad, said the looters were young Bedouins who operate east of Rafah near Israeli military positions.

The Hamas-run government had a police force that maintained public security before the war, but they have vanished in many areas after being targeted by Israeli strikes. Hamas says it has taken measures to prevent looting and price-gouging in markets.

But the biggest problem is not theft – it’s the low amount of aid Israel allows into Gaza, said Tamara Alrifai, communications director for UNRWA.

“Take aid into a war zone a few trucks at a time, what do we expect a displaced, hungry and traumatized

population to do?" she said.

Wars rage on in Biden administration's final months

Hamas ignited the war in Gaza when its fighters stormed into Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 250. Around 100 hostages are still inside Gaza, at least a third of them believed to be dead.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed almost 44,000 Palestinians, more than half of them women and children, according to local health authorities, who do not distinguish between civilians and combatants in their toll. The war has left much of the territory in ruins and forced around 90% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million to flee, often multiple times.

Hezbollah began firing rockets into northern Israel the day after the Hamas attack in what it said was solidarity with the Palestinians and Hamas, a fellow Iran-backed militant group. Israel launched retaliatory airstrikes, and all-out war erupted in September.

Israeli bombardment has killed more than 3,500 people in Lebanon and wounded almost 15,000, according to the Lebanese Health Ministry. It also displaced nearly 1.2 million, or a quarter of Lebanon's population. On the Israeli side, 87 soldiers and 50 civilians have been killed by rockets, drones and missiles, and tens of thousands of Israelis have been evacuated from homes near the border.

Prosecution rests in trial over death of Georgia nursing student Laken Riley

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATHENS, Ga. (AP) — Prosecutors finished calling witnesses Tuesday in the trial of the man accused of killing Georgia nursing student Laken Riley, and the defense began presenting its case but quickly ran into snags.

Jose Ibarra, 26, is charged with murder and other crimes in Riley's February death. He waived his right to a jury trial, meaning the case will be decided alone by Athens-Clarke County Superior Court Judge H. Patrick Haggard.

The Feb. 22 killing on the University of Georgia campus 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 in the country while he pursued his immigration case. Riley, 22, was a student at Augusta University College of Nursing, which also has a campus in Athens, about 70 miles (115 kilometers) east of Atlanta.

The prosecution rested its case Tuesday afternoon after calling more than a dozen law enforcement officers, Riley's roommate and a woman who lived in an apartment with Ibarra to testify. The judge then asked Ibarra if he wants to testify and he said no.

Defense attorneys planned to call Ibarra's brother, Diego Ibarra, to testify. Throughout the trial they asked prosecution witnesses questions that seem designed to create doubt about Jose Ibarra's guilt by suggesting that his brother, Diego, could not be excluded as a suspect.

Diego Ibarra pleaded guilty in July to federal charges of possessing a fraudulent green card and is in federal immigration detention awaiting sentencing. Dressed in orange jail scrubs and with his wrists and ankles chained, he entered the courtroom and took the stand Tuesday afternoon.

But then one of Jose Ibarra's defense attorneys, John Donnelly, told the judge that he'd just found out Diego Ibarra has a new attorney for his immigration case. He said he spoke to the attorney by phone and the attorney was two hours away but said he would advise his client not to testify.

Donnelly said he could call another immigration detainee who could testify about statements Diego Ibarra had made while in detention. But the judge said that could run into hearsay concerns. Since it was already late in the day, he decided to let the lawyers work things out overnight and to resume the trial Wednesday morning.

Earlier Tuesday, University of Georgia police Sgt. Sophie Raboud, who examined data from Riley's phone, walked through a timeline of activity on Riley's phone the morning she died and read text messages aloud.

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Riley called her mother at 9:03 a.m. that morning, and by the time her mother called back about 20 minutes later, the student had encountered Jose Ibarra on a wooded running trail, according to trial testimony. Prosecutors have said Ibarra killed Riley after a struggle, and data from Riley's smartwatch shows her heart stopped beating at 9:28 a.m.

After Riley failed to answer the phone, her mother, Allyson Phillips, texted her several times, casually at first but then with increasing concern, according to data pulled from Riley's phone.

At 9:37 a.m., her mother texted, "Call me when you can." Phillips called twice, and when her calls went unanswered, she texted her daughter at 9:58 a.m., "You're making me nervous not answering while you're out running. Are you OK?" Phillips texted again at 11:47 a.m., writing, "Please call me. I'm worried sick about you." She and other family members continued to call Riley.

Raboud also testified about video from surveillance cameras near the wooded trail, and Phillips and some other family members and friends cried as video played showing Riley running on the trail in her final moments.

Prosecutor Sheila Ross said during her opening statement that Ibarra had gone out "hunting for females" that morning in February and that he killed Riley after a struggle when she "refused to be his rape victim." Law enforcement officers testified there was no evidence that Riley was sexually assaulted.

Dr. Michelle DiMarco, a GBI medical examiner, conducted the autopsy of Riley's body and testified that Riley had injuries, including scrapes, bruises and cuts, to her head, neck, torso, abdomen, left hand and left leg. Her injuries included eight cuts to her head, including one that fractured her skull, DiMarco said.

Prosecutors have said that Ibarra hit Riley in the head with a rock and DiMarco said the injuries "could be consistent with a rock." A GBI specialist testified Riley's DNA was found on two rocks at the scene.

The DNA specialist, Ashley Hinkle, also testified that testing showed that a blue jacket that police recovered from a trash bin at Ibarra's apartment complex had a blood stain that tested positive for Riley's DNA and that Ibarra's DNA was also on it. Ibarra's DNA was also found under the fingernails of Riley's right hand.

Defense attorney Dustin Kirby said in his opening that Riley's death was a tragedy and called the evidence in the case graphic and disturbing. But he said there is not sufficient evidence to prove that his client killed Riley.

Defense attorneys called three other witnesses before trying to put Diego Ibarra on the stand. One was a woman who lived next door to the Ibarras. Stephanie Slaton testified that the evening of the day Riley was killed, Diego Ibarra asked her what was going on because there were a lot of police around.

Slaton testified that she told him someone had been killed nearby and urged him to tell police anything he knew. She said he spoke into a translation app on his phone and showed her the screen, which said, "If you tell them, I will tell them you did it and then I will kill you, too."

But under questioning by Ross, Slaton said Diego Ibarra never told her he or his brother had killed Riley. She also acknowledged she'd been drinking that day and that she had been involved in an intimate relationship with Diego Ibarra and had been angry at him because she thought he was also involved with another woman.

A police officer called to testify by the defense said he found a pile of discarded clothing near the Ibarra's apartment complex the day after the killing but that it looked like it had been there a while. The defense also called a man who'd been out running the day Riley was killed and saw a suspicious man but described him as being taller and skinnier than Jose Ibarra.

US recognizes Venezuela's opposition candidate as president-elect months after the disputed election

By REGINA GARCIA CANO and JORGE RUEDA Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — The U.S. government recognized Venezuelan opposition candidate Edmundo González as the "president-elect" of the South American country on Tuesday, months after President Nicolás Maduro claimed to have won the July election.

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U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken recognized González in a post on X in which he also demanded “respect for the will” of Venezuelan voters.

The administration of U.S. President Joe Biden previously said González earned the most votes in the disputed July 28 election but it had fallen short of acknowledging him as president-elect.

Venezuela’s National Electoral Council, which is stacked with Maduro loyalists, declared Maduro the election winner hours after polls closed. Unlike previous presidential elections, electoral authorities did not provide detailed vote counts.

But the opposition coalition collected tally sheets from 80% of the nation’s electronic voting machines and posted them online. González and opposition leader Maria Corina Machado said the voting records showed the former diplomat won the election with twice as many votes as Maduro.

“We deeply appreciate the recognition of the sovereign will of all Venezuelans,” González said in a post on X shortly after Blinken’s statement Tuesday. “This gesture honors the desire for change of our people and the civic feat that we carried out together on July 28.”

González left Venezuela in September for exile in Spain after a warrant was issued for his arrest in connection with an investigation into the publishing of the vote tally sheets.

Venezuela’s Foreign Minister Yván Gil responded to Blinken’s comment with personal attacks.

“In the last days of his government, he should dedicate himself to reflecting on his failures, getting rid of imperial and colonial complexes and going to write the memoirs of how the Bolivarian Revolution made him bite the dust of defeat, just like his predecessors,” Gil said of Blinken in a statement, which did not mention election results.

Maduro and electoral authorities have rejected repeated calls from the U.S., the European Union, Colombia, Brazil and other nations to show the detailed vote records that back up the president’s reelection.

Swift condemnation of the lack of post-election transparency prompted Maduro to ask Venezuela’s Supreme Tribunal of Justice, whose members are aligned with the ruling party, to audit the results. The high court reaffirmed his victory.

Experts from the United Nations and the U.S.-based Carter Center, which observed the election at the invitation of Maduro’s government, determined the results announced by electoral authorities lacked credibility. The U.N. experts stopped short of validating the opposition’s claim to victory but said the faction’s voting records published online appear to exhibit all of the original security features.

Earlier in the week, Colombia’s President Gustavo Petro, who has friendly relations with Maduro, reversed his support for the July elections, calling the vote a “mistake.”

Petro spoke in an interview with Brazilian news outlet Globo News, which released excerpts online that Petro’s office shared Tuesday on social media. Petro told the news outlet Monday while visiting Brazil for the G20 summit that he initially was in favor of Venezuela holding the elections, but that he later decided that the vote was not “free.”

“I think the elections were a mistake,” Petro said. His office did not immediately respond to a request for him to elaborate on the reasons for his change of heart.

Petro, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and then-Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador — all leftists friendly with Maduro — attempted to make peace as the results came under dispute, but the effort went nowhere.

Venezuela’s next presidential term begins Jan. 10. Maduro has already received an invitation from the ruling party-controlled National Assembly for a swearing-in ceremony.

House Republicans signal support for proposal to ban bathroom access for 1st transgender member

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Speaker Mike Johnson signaled support Tuesday for a Republican effort to ban Democrat Sarah McBride — the first transgender person to be elected to Congress — from using women’s restrooms in the Capitol once she’s sworn into office next year.

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"We're not going to have men in women's bathrooms," Johnson told The Associated Press. "I've been consistent about that with anyone I've talked to about this."

Johnson earlier in the day emphasized the need to "treat all persons with dignity and respect," adding, "This is an issue that Congress has never had to address before, and we're going to do that in deliberate fashion with member consensus on it."

A resolution proposed Monday by GOP Rep. Nancy Mace of South Carolina would prohibit any lawmakers and House employees from "using single-sex facilities other than those corresponding to their biological sex." Mace said the bill is aimed specifically at McBride, who was elected to the House this month from Delaware.

The debate over whether transgender people should be allowed to use the bathrooms that align with their gender identity has been prevalent across the U.S. and was a focal point of President-elect Donald Trump's campaign. At least 11 states have adopted laws barring transgender girls and women from girls and women's bathrooms at public schools, and in some cases other government facilities.

"I'm absolutely, 100% gonna stand in the way of any man who wants to be in a women's restroom, in our locker rooms, in our changing rooms," Mace said told reporters Tuesday. The second-term congresswoman added that Johnson assured her the bathroom provision would be included in any changes to House rules for the next Congress.

"If it's not," she said. "I'll be ready to pick up the mantle."

Democrats, including McBride, denounced the GOP effort as "bullying" and a "distraction."

"This is a blatant attempt from far right-wing extremists to distract from the fact that they have no real solutions to what Americans are facing," McBride said. "We should be focused on bringing down the cost of housing, health care, and child care, not manufacturing culture wars."

Rep. Katherine Clark, the No. 2 Democrat in the House, quipped that House Republicans are already "off to a great start."

"What are they talking about there, on day one, is where one member out of 435 is going, where she is going to use the bathroom?" the Massachusetts lawmaker said during a press conference Tuesday. "That is their focus?"

McBride was elected to the House this month after building a national profile as an LGBTQ+ activist and raising more than \$3 million in campaign contributions from around the country. She became the first openly transgender person to address a major party convention in the United States in 2016, when she spoke at the Democratic National Convention.

After her election win earlier this month, McBride said that her victory was "a testament to Delawareans that we have shown time and time again that in this state of neighbors, we judge candidates based on their ideas and not their identities."

What is a 'bomb cyclone'?

By PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

A powerful storm is bearing down on the West Coast and bringing with it a scary-sounding weather term - bomb cyclone.

Bomb cyclone is a term used by weather enthusiasts to describe a process that meteorologists usually call bombogenesis. It's the rapid intensification of a cyclone in a short period of time, and it can happen during powerful storms such as the one northern California and the Pacific Northwest are preparing for this week.

But what is a bomb cyclone, why does it happen and why are these big storms so feared?

What is a bomb cyclone?

A bomb cyclone occurs during the rapid intensification of a cyclone located between the tropics and the polar regions, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. It can happen when a cold air mass collides with a warm air mass, which is something that can occur over ocean waters, the agency says.

The measurement needed to determine whether a cyclone can be classified a bomb cyclone can be tricky, but it largely concerns a swift drop in pressure. Atmospheric pressure is measured in millibars by the National Weather Service. If a storm decreases 24 millibars or more in 24 hours or less, it can be considered a bomb cyclone, said Stephen Baron, a forecaster with the weather service in Gray, Maine.

"I would say rapid intensification of hurricanes is one of the more common times we see it," Baron said. "We do see it with Nor'easters occasionally."

Why is it happening on the West Coast?

The National Weather Service Weather Prediction Center has issued excessive rainfall risks starting Tuesday and running through Friday because of the powerful storm expected in northern California and the Pacific Northwest. The storm is arriving as the region experiences an atmospheric river, which is a long plume of moisture, over the Pacific Ocean.

The Weather Prediction Center said the storm intensified swiftly enough that it's considered a bomb cyclone.

Bomb cyclones can happen in many places, and aren't unique to the West Coast. They can occur in several parts of the world's oceans, including the Northwest Pacific and North Atlantic.

What conditions could it bring?

This storm is expected to bring severe rainfall. That could lead to flash flooding as well as winter storms in different parts of the West Coast depending on elevation.

High wind watches are also expected in some parts of the West Coast.

Travel is expected to be hazardous, and power outages are expected. There could also be significant damages to trees and infrastructure.

When else has it happened?

Bomb cyclones have been associated with major weather events all over the country in recent years. Hurricane Milton, which made landfall in Florida last month as a Category 3 hurricane, was a recent example of a bomb cyclone, Baron said.

A bomb cyclone in 2018, which helped popularize the term on social media, brought snow to the Southeast and winds that were close to hurricane force. Another in 2022 brought extreme weather and bitter cold to much of the country.

Prosecutors oppose tossing Trump's hush money conviction but are open to sentencing delay

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — New York prosecutors oppose any effort to dismiss President-elect Donald Trump's hush money conviction, but they expressed openness Tuesday to delaying sentencing until after his second term.

The Manhattan district attorney's office said in a court filing that Trump's forthcoming presidency isn't grounds for dropping a case that was already tried. But, citing "the need to balance competing constitutional interests," prosecutors said "consideration must be given" to shelving the case until after he's out of office.

At the least, prosecutors said they're OK delaying Trump's sentencing — which had been set for Nov. 26 — while his lawyers fight to get the case tossed out.

Judge Juan M. Merchan has not said when he will rule on the fate of the first criminal conviction of a former, and now future, U.S. commander-in-chief. But with the sentencing schedule now effectively on hold, Trump's lawyers are pursuing multiple legal paths to try to dispose of the case — an effort that could reach the Supreme Court because of the unprecedented questions involved.

The president-elect was convicted in May of falsifying business records to cover up a scheme to influence the 2016 election by paying hush money to squelch a story of extramarital sex. Trump denies the allegations.

After Trump's election win this month, his lawyers urged Merchan to throw out the case and implored prosecutors to endorse that outcome, writing that the case must be scrapped "to facilitate the orderly

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transition of executive power — and in the interests of justice.”

Merchan gave prosecutors until Tuesday to weigh in on how to proceed.

Prosecutors responded that they “are mindful of the demands and obligations of the presidency” but also “deeply respect the fundamental role of the jury in our constitutional system.”

Trump spokesperson and incoming White House communications director Steven Cheung cast Tuesday’s filing from prosecutors as “a total and definitive victory for President Trump” in a case that he has long deplored as a “witch hunt.”

“President Trump’s legal team is moving to get it dismissed once and for all,” Cheung said in a statement.

The judge last week delayed ruling on Trump’s earlier bid to reverse his conviction because of a U.S. Supreme Court decision in July that gave presidents broad immunity from criminal prosecution.

A dismissal would erase Trump’s conviction, sparing him the cloud of a criminal record as well as a possible prison sentence.

Merchan could also decide to delay the case for some period, wait until a federal appeals court rules on Trump’s parallel effort to get the case moved out of state court, or choose some other option.

Trump was convicted on 34 counts of falsifying business records to conceal a \$130,000 hush money payment to porn actor Stormy Daniels to suppress her claim that they had sex a decade earlier. The payment was made shortly before the 2016 election.

Trump says they did not have sex and denies any wrongdoing.

Prosecutors cast the payout as part of a Trump-driven effort to keep voters from hearing salacious stories about him. Trump’s then-lawyer, Michael Cohen, paid Daniels. Trump later reimbursed him, and Trump’s company logged the reimbursements as legal expenses — concealing what they really were, prosecutors alleged.

Trump has pledged to appeal the verdict if the case is not dismissed. He and his lawyers said the payments to Cohen were properly categorized as being for legal work.

Trump’s lawyers have been fighting for months to reverse his conviction.

A month after the verdict, the Supreme Court ruled that ex-presidents can’t be prosecuted for official acts — things they did in the course of running the country — and that prosecutors can’t cite those actions to bolster a case centered on purely personal, unofficial conduct.

Trump’s lawyers cited the ruling to argue that the hush money jury got some improper evidence, such as Trump’s presidential financial disclosure form, testimony from some White House aides and social media posts made during his first term.

Prosecutors disagreed and said the evidence in question was only “a sliver” of their case.

After Trump’s election win, his lawyers redoubled their efforts. They said Trump’s status as president-elect affords him “the same complete immunity” from prosecution as he would enjoy while president.

“To require President Trump to address further criminal proceedings at this point would not only violate the federal Constitution, but also disrupt the presidential transition process,” Trump lawyers Todd Blanche and Emil Bove wrote.

Trump has tapped both for high-ranking jobs in Trump’s Justice Department.

If the verdict stands and the case proceeds to sentencing, Trump’s punishments would range from a fine or probation to up to four years in prison — but it’s unlikely he’d spend any time behind bars for a first-time conviction involving charges in the lowest tier of felonies.

Because it is a state case, Trump would not be able to pardon himself once he returns to office. Presidential pardons apply only to federal crimes.

The hush money case was the only one of Trump’s four criminal indictments to go to trial.

Special counsel Jack Smith is taking steps to wind down Trump’s federal election interference and classified documents cases. A separate state election interference case in Fulton County, Georgia, is largely on hold.

Trump, a Republican, pleaded not guilty in all four cases, and he has decried the hush money verdict as a “rigged, disgraceful” result. He has claimed, without evidence, that the case brought by Manhattan D.A. Alvin Bragg was part of a Democratic effort to harm Trump’s presidential campaign.

Biden appeals to world leaders to stay in the climate fight as Trump casts shadow

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — President Joe Biden made an urgent appeal to fellow world leaders Tuesday to surge money to developing nations to curb climate change as he wrapped up his final appearance at a major international summit.

Biden used the closing day's events at the Group of 20 gathering to announce hundreds of millions of dollars in new climate and development pledges and underscore his commitment to stemming the impact of climate-damaging fossil fuels on the planet.

But Biden's end-of-presidency call to leaders of the world's major economies was shadowed by the reality that many of his latest proposals were likely to be blocked — and past climate initiatives rolled back — under President-elect Donald Trump.

Nonetheless, Biden insisted it was up to the leaders in the room to take on the existential crisis.

It's critical that developing countries have "enough firepower and access to capital" to combat climate change and protect themselves from its effects, Biden told heads of government at a working session.

"We need to continue to give breathing space to countries that are weighed down by debt," Biden said, adding, "We as leaders need to find ways to flow money into their economies."

His administration used an event at the summit hosted by Britain and Brazil to roll out a new U.S. \$325 million contribution to the World Bank to help developing countries move away from climate-damaging fossil fuels.

It was one of a series of U.S. climate and development initiatives Biden announced at the G20.

However, many will require buy-in from Trump, who has shown an aversion to such projects. The president-elect has called the climate crisis a "hoax" and signaled plans to pull out of the Paris climate accord — as he did in his first term before Biden rejoined.

Trump has treated Democratic efforts on climate with contempt and skepticism. After rolling back environmental efforts and participation in global climate efforts in his first term, Trump campaigned for president with a slogan of "drill, baby, drill." He's vowed to further unleash U.S. oil and gas production, already at record highs.

While debate over U.S. support for Israel in its wars in Gaza and Lebanon has overshadowed much of Biden's foreign policy agenda, he has pointed to efforts against climate change and global poverty as legacies of his presidency.

Biden's administration early on achieved the most comprehensive climate legislation in U.S. history, the Inflation Reduction Act, which pumped hundreds of billions of dollars into clean energy, electric vehicles and other projects.

Trump has pledged to shut down further funding under Biden's climate act, calling it "the Green New Scam."

Touring Brazil's Amazon rainforest Sunday in the first such visit by a sitting U.S. president, Biden vowed that the fight to move the world to cleaner, climate-friendly energy would continue no matter what.

"It's true, some may seek to deny or delay the clean energy revolution that's underway in America," Biden said over the weekend from a podium set up on a sandy forest bed. "But nobody, nobody can reverse it, nobody — not when so many people, regardless of party or politics, are enjoying its benefits."

On Tuesday, Biden called the world's forests "some of the most powerful and valuable tools in the fight against climate change. Once they're gone, it's hard to get them back."

Among the pledges and new programming announced by the White House are a three-year, \$4 billion pledge to the International Development Association, the arm of the World Bank that supports the poorest and most vulnerable countries, and a new Brazil-U.S. partnership aimed at improving coordination on clean energy production and supply chain development.

Biden also called on G20 members to commit \$2 billion to replenish a pandemic fund that the group established in 2022. Biden made a U.S. pledge of up to \$667 million by 2026, but it would require approval

by Congress. Republicans will control both the House and Senate in the next administration.

On Tuesday, Biden also posed with other world leaders in a traditional group photo. He appeared near Chinese President Xi Jinping in the front row after causing a small stir when he and at least two other Western leaders missed a similar group photo Monday in what a U.S. official called a timing mishap.

Asked why other heads of government didn't wait for Biden and the others, Brazil Communications Minister Paulo Pimenta said his country places a premium on punctuality.

"Brazil is like this. When it's time, it's time," Pimenta said.

Iran defies international pressure, increasing its stockpile of near weapons-grade uranium, UN says

By STEPHANIE LIECHTENSTEIN Associated Press

VIENNA (AP) — Iran has defied international demands to rein in its nuclear program and has increased its stockpile of uranium enriched to near weapons-grade levels, according to a confidential report by the United Nations' nuclear watchdog seen Tuesday by The Associated Press.

The report by the International Atomic Energy Agency said that as of Oct. 26, Iran has 182.3 kilograms (401.9 pounds) of uranium enriched up to 60%, an increase of 17.6 kilograms (38.8 pounds) since the last report in August.

Uranium enriched at 60% purity is just a short, technical step away from weapons-grade levels of 90%.

The IAEA also estimated in its quarterly report that as of Oct. 26, Iran's overall stockpile of enriched uranium stands at 6,604.4 kilograms (14,560 pounds), an increase of 852.6 kilograms (1,879.6 pounds) since August. Under the IAEA's definition, around 42 kilograms (92.5 pounds) of uranium enriched to 60% purity is the amount at which creating one atomic weapon is theoretically possible — if the material is enriched further, to 90%.

The reports come at a critical time as Israel and Iran have traded missile attacks in recent months after more than a year of war in Gaza, which is governed by Hamas, a group supported by Iran.

Adding to the complexity, Donald Trump's reelection raises questions about whether and how the incoming administration and Iran may engage.

Trump's first term in office was marked by a particularly troubled period, when he pursued a policy of "maximum pressure" against Tehran. He unilaterally withdrew America from Iran's nuclear deal with world powers, leading to sanctions hobbling the economy and ordered the killing of the country's top general.

Western diplomats consider censuring Iran

Iran last week offered not to expand its stockpile of uranium enriched up to 60%, during a visit to Tehran by the IAEA chief, Rafael Mariano Grossi.

The IAEA said during the meetings that "the possibility of Iran not further expanding its stockpile of uranium enriched up to 60% U-235 was discussed, including technical verification measures necessary for the Agency to confirm this, if implemented."

The report said that one day after Grossi left Iran, on Nov. 16, IAEA inspectors verified that "Iran had begun implementation of preparatory measures aimed at stopping the increase of its stockpile of uranium enriched up to 60 % U-235" at its underground nuclear sites in Fordow and Natanz.

The reports come ahead of this week's regular IAEA Board of Governors meeting in Vienna.

A senior western diplomat, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive matter, confirmed to the AP that the United Kingdom, France and Germany, with the support from the U.S., are going ahead with a resolution at this week's IAEA Board of Governors meeting, censuring Iran for its lack of cooperation, leading to potential confrontation with Iran ahead of Trump's return to the White House.

"We remain tightly coordinated with our E3 partners (France, Germany and UK) in advance of the IAEA Board of Governors meeting. And, we strongly support efforts to hold Iran accountable," U.S. State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller told reporters Tuesday in Washington.

"The Iranian regime continues to amass a growing stockpile of highly enriched uranium for which there is no credible civilian purpose and they continue to not cooperate fully with the IAEA," he added.

A senior diplomat, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue, said it is possible that the commitments made by Iran during the IAEA's chief visit may not stand in case a resolution is passed. In the past, Iran has responded to resolutions by the IAEA Board of Governors by further enhancing its nuclear program.

Iran has maintained its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only, but Grossi has previously warned that Tehran has enough uranium enriched to near-weapons-grade levels to make "several" nuclear bombs if it chose to do so. He has acknowledged the U.N. agency cannot guarantee that none of Iran's centrifuges may have been peeled away for clandestine enrichment.

Iran's mission at the United Nations in New York did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Little progress on improving ties

The IAEA also reported that Iran has failed to take concrete steps as of now to improve cooperation, despite pleas by Grossi, who held talks last week with Mohammad Eslami of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and Iran's reformist President Masoud Pezeshkian.

However, Tuesday's confidential report also said that during Grossi's visit to Iran on Nov. 14, "Iran agreed to respond to the Agency's concerns related to Iran's withdrawal of the designation of several experienced Agency inspectors by considering the acceptance of the designation of four additional experienced inspectors."

In September 2023, Iran barred some of the Vienna-based agency's most experienced inspectors.

The report also said there was no progress thus far in reinstalling more monitoring equipment, including cameras, removed in June 2022. Since then, the only recorded data comes from IAEA cameras installed at a centrifuge workshop in Isfahan in May 2023 — although Iran has not provided the IAEA with access to this data and inspectors have not been able to service the cameras.

Last week, Eslami warned that Iran could retaliate if challenged at the upcoming IAEA board meeting. Grossi acknowledged some nations were considering taking action against Iran.

In an effort to ensure Iran could not develop atomic weapons, world powers struck a deal with Tehran in 2015 under which it agreed to limit enrichment of uranium to levels necessary for nuclear power in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions. U.N. inspectors were tasked with monitoring the program

Under the original 2015 nuclear deal, Iran was allowed to enrich uranium only up to 3.67% purity, can maintain a stockpile of uranium of 300 kilograms and is permitted to use only very basic IR-1 centrifuges, machines that spin uranium gas at high speed for enrichment purposes.

A year after the U.S. withdrawal from the deal under Trump, Iran started to gradually abandon all limits the deal put on its program and began enriching uranium to up to 60% purity.

The Kremlin has revised its nuclear policy. Does that make the use of atomic weapons more likely?

By The Associated Press undefined

The 4-year-old document has a bland, bureaucratic title — "Basic Principles of State Policy on Nuclear Deterrence" — but its contents are chilling, especially with its newest revisions.

Better known as Russia's nuclear doctrine, the revamped version that was signed Tuesday by President Vladimir Putin spells out the circumstances that allow him to use Moscow's atomic arsenal, the world's largest.

This new version lowers the bar, giving him that option in response to even a conventional attack backed by a nuclear power. That possibly could include the use of U.S.-supplied ATACMS missiles by Ukraine to hit Russian territory — which Moscow says happened Tuesday when six missiles hit the Bryansk region.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov emphasized that such strikes could potentially be a trigger for a nuclear response under the revised document.

What is Russia's nuclear doctrine?

Its first iteration was signed by Putin in 2020, and he approved the latest version Tuesday, according to the Kremlin. It outlines when Russia could dip into its atomic arsenal.

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Since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, Putin and other Kremlin voices have frequently threatened the West with its nuclear arsenal. But that hasn't deterred Kyiv's allies from giving it billions of dollars of advanced weapons, some of which have hit Russian soil.

The revamped document describes nuclear weapons as "a means of deterrence," noting their use is an "extreme and compelled measure." It declares that Russia "takes all necessary efforts to reduce the nuclear threat and prevent aggravation of interstate relations that could trigger military conflicts, including nuclear ones."

Such nuclear deterrence is aimed at safeguarding the "sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state," deterring a potential aggressor, or, "in case of a military conflict, preventing an escalation of hostilities and stopping them on conditions acceptable for the Russian Federation," the document says.

"Nuclear deterrence is aimed to ensure that any potential adversary realizes the inevitability of retribution in case of an aggression against Russia and its allies," it says.

While formulated broadly to avoid a firm commitment of nuclear use and keep the West guessing at Moscow's response, the modernized version spells out conditions under which Putin could use a nuclear option in response to a conventional strike.

Changes in the doctrine have been in the works for months, and it's no coincidence that Tuesday's announcement of a new version follows by two days Washington's decision to allow Ukraine to use such longer-range missiles to hit targets in Russia. For months, U.S. President Joe Biden has been weighing the risks of such an escalation.

What triggers a Russian nuclear response?

The doctrine says Moscow could use nuclear weapons "in response to the use of nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction" against Russia or its allies, as well as "in the event of aggression" against Russia and Belarus with conventional weapons that threaten "their sovereignty and/or territorial integrity."

Any aggression against Russia by a nonnuclear power with the "participation or support of a nuclear power" will be seen as their "joint attack" on Russia, the document says.

It adds that nuclear weapons could be used in these scenarios:

— If reliable information is received about the launch of ballistic missiles targeting the territory of Russia or its allies.

— If nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction strike the territory of Russia or its allies, or are used to hit Russian military units or facilities abroad.

— If an enemy's impact on critically important Russian government or military facilities could undermine retaliatory nuclear-strike capability.

— If aggression against Russia or Belarus involving conventional weapons raises a critical threat to their sovereignty and territorial integrity.

— If reliable information is received about the takeoff or launch of strategic and tactical aircraft, cruise missiles, drones, hypersonic or other flying vehicles and their crossing the Russian border.

The president can inform military and political leaders of other countries or international organizations "about the readiness to use nuclear weapons," or that he has already decided to use them.

Is the use of nuclear weapons imminent?

Even before signing the revamped doctrine, Putin warned the U.S. and its NATO allies against allowing Ukraine to strike Russia with Western-supplied longer-range missiles, saying it would put Russia and NATO at war.

Asked Tuesday if such a Ukrainian attack could potentially trigger a nuclear response, Peskov answered affirmatively. He pointed to the doctrine's provision that opens the door after a conventional strike that raises critical threats for Russia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Peskov also emphasized the doctrine's new section that describes an attack by any country supported by a nuclear power as their joint aggression against Russia.

Tatiana Stanovaya of the Carnegie Russia and Eurasia Center noted that Peskov's comment marked the first time the Kremlin explicitly acknowledged "the potential use of nuclear weapons as a response to strikes on Russian territory using long-range missiles."

"Put simply, Peskov openly admits that the Kremlin is currently considering the possibility of a nuclear strike," she said.

While the doctrine envisions a possible nuclear response by Russia, it is formulated broadly to avoid a firm commitment to use nuclear weapons and keep Putin's options open.

The U.S. has seen no change to Russia's nuclear posture, according to a U.S. National Security Council official who was not authorized to comment publicly and requested anonymity. As a result, the Biden administration has "not seen any reason to adjust our own nuclear posture or doctrine in response to Russia's statements today," the official added.

Jack Watling, a senior research fellow at the Royal United Services Institute defense and security think tank in the U.K., said the use of Western longer-range missiles "certainly will not" trigger Moscow's nuclear response as some in the West feared.

But he added that "Russia can escalate in a range of ways to impose costs on the West, from undersea sabotage to the employment of proxies to harass trade in the Bab el-Mandeb," a strait off the Red Sea where attacks on shipping have been attributed to Yemen's Houthi rebels.

Dmitry Medvedev, deputy head of Russia's Security Council that is chaired by Putin, was even more blunt. Ukraine's use of NATO missiles for strikes on Russian territory "could be classified as an attack by bloc countries on Russia," he said.

"In such a scenario, Russia reserves the right to retaliate with weapons of mass destruction against Kyiv and key NATO facilities, wherever they may be located," he said. "This would amount to World War III."

Stanovaya said "the current situation offers Putin a significant temptation to escalate" and marks "an extraordinarily dangerous juncture."

"Putin may seek to present the West with two stark choices: 'Do you want a nuclear war? You will have it,' or 'Let's end this war on Russia's terms,'" she posted on X.

That would not interfere with any possible peace initiatives but could reinforce U.S. President-elect Donald Trump's argument for direct dialogue with Putin, she said.

"Simultaneously, it would expose Biden to criticism for being the catalyst of the escalation while potentially discouraging Ukraine from further using long-range missiles," Stanovaya added.

Putin lowers the threshold for using his nuclear arsenal after Biden's arms decision for Ukraine

By The Associated Press undefined

President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday formally lowered the threshold for Russia's use of its nuclear weapons, a move that follows U.S. President Joe Biden's decision to let Ukraine strike targets inside Russian territory with American-supplied longer-range missiles.

The new doctrine allows for a potential nuclear response by Moscow even to a conventional attack on Russia by any nation that is supported by a nuclear power.

Russia's Defense Ministry said Ukraine fired six U.S.-made ATACMS missiles early Tuesday at a military facility in Russia's Bryansk region that borders Ukraine, adding that air defenses shot down five of them and damaged one more. Ukraine's military claimed the strike hit a Russian ammunition depot.

While the doctrine envisions a possible nuclear response by Russia to such a conventional strike, it is formulated broadly to avoid a firm commitment to use nuclear weapons and keep Putin's options open.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov emphasized that the Ukrainian strike in Bryansk marked an escalation and urged the U.S. and other Western allies to study the modernized nuclear doctrine.

"If the long-range missiles are used from the territory of Ukraine against the Russian territory, it will mean that they are controlled by American military experts and we will view that as a qualitatively new phase of the Western war against Russia and respond accordingly," Lavrov said on the sidelines of the G20 meeting in Brazil without elaborating.

The approval of the document demonstrates Putin's readiness to tap his nuclear arsenal to force the West to back down as Moscow presses a slow-moving offensive in Ukraine as the war reached its 1,000th day.

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Asked Tuesday if a Ukrainian attack with longer-range U.S. missiles could potentially trigger a nuclear response, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov answered affirmatively, pointing to the doctrine's provision that holds the door open for it after a conventional strike that raises critical threats for the "sovereignty and territorial integrity: of Russia and its ally, Belarus.

Commenting on whether the updated doctrine was deliberately issued to follow Biden's decision, Peskov said the document was published "in a timely manner" and that Putin instructed the government to update it earlier this year so that it is "in line with the current situation."

Putin first announced changes in the nuclear doctrine in September, when he chaired a meeting discussing the proposed revisions. He has previously warned the U.S. and other NATO allies that allowing Ukraine to use Western-supplied longer-range weapons to hit Russian territory would mean that Russia and NATO are at war.

Washington has permitted Ukraine to use the longer-range weapons on targets inside Russia after declaring that thousands of North Korean troops were deployed in the Russian region of Kursk to fight an incursion by Kyiv's forces.

"I'm unfortunately not surprised by the comments the Kremlin has made around the publication of this new, revised document," said U.S. State Department spokesman Matthew Miller, adding that since the war began, Russia has sought to "coerce and intimidate both Ukraine and other countries around the world through irresponsible nuclear rhetoric and behavior."

He added that Washington has not seen any reason "to adjust our own nuclear posture, but we will continue to call on Russia to stop bellicose and irresponsible rhetoric."

A U.S. National Security Council official who was not authorized to comment publicly and requested anonymity underscored that the arrival of thousands of North Korea soldiers to take part in combat operations against Ukraine was a major escalation by Moscow that demanded a response.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer denounced the "irresponsible rhetoric coming from Russia, and that is not going to deter our support for Ukraine."

"We're now on Day 1,000 of a conflict. That's 1000 days of Russian aggression, 1,000 days of sacrifices in Ukraine," he said at the G-20 summit in Brazil. "We have stood with Ukraine from the start. I've been doubling down in my clear message that we need to ensure Ukraine has what is needed for as long as needed to win this war against Putin."

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said in Warsaw that her country would not be intimidated by Russia's new policy, saying her country made the mistake of cowering in the face of Moscow's aggression in the past but would not do so again.

In Warsaw, Poland's Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski described the revised Russian nuclear doctrine as a tacit acknowledgement that Moscow's conventional forces are weaker than NATO.

The updated doctrine says an attack against Russia by a nonnuclear power with the "participation or support of a nuclear power" will be seen as their "joint attack on the Russian Federation."

It says any massive aerial attack on Russia could trigger a nuclear response but avoids any firm commitment and mentions the "uncertainty of scale, time and place of possible use of nuclear deterrent" among the key principles of the nuclear deterrence.

The document also notes that aggression against Russia by a member of a military bloc or coalition is viewed as "an aggression by the entire bloc," a clear reference to NATO.

At the same time, it spells out conditions for using nuclear weapons in greater detail compared with previous versions of the doctrine, noting they could be used in case of a massive air attack involving ballistic and cruise missiles, aircraft, drones and other flying vehicles.

The formulation appears to significantly broaden the triggers for possible nuclear weapons use compared with the document's previous version, which stated Russia could tap its atomic arsenal if case of an attack with ballistic missiles.

President Alexander Lukashenko, who has ruled Belarus with an iron hand for more than 30 years and has relied on Russian subsidies and support, has allowed Russia to use his country's territory to send troops into Ukraine and to deploy some of its tactical nuclear weapons.

Since Putin sent troops into Ukraine, he and other Russian voices have frequently threatened the West with Russia's nuclear arsenal to discourage it from ramping up support for Kyiv.

Russian hawks called for toughening the doctrine for months, arguing the previous version failed to deter the West from increasing its aid to Ukraine and created the impression that Moscow would not resort to nuclear weapons.

Ukraine fires several US-made longer-range missiles into Russia for the first time

By HANNA ARHIROVA and ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine fired several American-supplied longer-range missiles into Russia, officials said Tuesday, marking the first time Kyiv used the weapons that way in 1,000 days of war.

The use of the Army Tactical Missile System, known as ATACMS, came as Russian President Vladimir Putin formally lowered the threshold for using nuclear weapons, opening the door to a potential nuclear response by Moscow to even a conventional attack by any nation supported by a nuclear power. That could include Ukrainian attacks backed by the U.S.

A Telegram channel affiliated with the Ukrainian military posted a video Tuesday that it says shows U.S.-supplied ATACMS missiles being fired from an undisclosed location in Ukraine. The Associated Press could not independently verify the date and location the video was filmed.

According to a U.S. official, Ukraine fired about eight of the missiles, and just two were intercepted by the Russians. The official said that the U.S. was still assessing battle damage, but that the missiles struck an ammunition supply location in Karachev, a city of about 18,000 people in Russia's Bryansk region. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence assessments.

The developments marked a worrying escalation in the conflict that has repeatedly ratcheted up international tensions. U.S. officials recently expressed dismay at Russia's deployment of North Korean troops to help it fight Ukraine, while Moscow seethed when Washington eased restrictions on the ATACMS in recent days.

The 1,000-day mark has magnified scrutiny of how the war is unfolding and how it might end, amid signs that a turning point may be coming with U.S. President-elect Donald Trump entering the White House in about two months' time. Trump has pledged to swiftly end the war and has criticized the amount the U.S. has spent on supporting Ukraine.

Neither Russia nor Ukraine can sustain the war for a long time, analysts say, though Russia would be able to keep going for longer due to its vaster resources.

Ukraine's forces are under severe Russian pressure on the battlefield at places on the about 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line where its army is stretched thin. Ukrainian civilians, meanwhile, have repeatedly been attacked by Russian drones and missiles.

Ukraine claimed Tuesday that it hit a military weapons depot in Russia's Bryansk region overnight, though it didn't specify what weapons it used. The Ukrainian General Staff said multiple explosions and detonations were heard in the targeted area around Karachev.

Asked at a news conference if Ukraine had struck the Bryansk region ammunition depot with ATACMS, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy declined to provide any details. However, he said, "Ukraine has long-range capabilities, including domestically produced long-range drones ... and now we have ATACMS as well."

In a statement carried by Russian news agencies, the Russian Defense Ministry said the military shot down five ATACMS missiles and damaged one more. The fragments fell on the territory of an unspecified military facility and sparked a fire, but didn't cause any damage or casualties, it said.

Neither side's claims could be independently verified.

Karachev is roughly 115 kilometers (70 miles) from the Russia-Ukraine border. Ukraine in the course of the war has been able to reach much deeper into the vast country — but with drones rather than missiles. For instance, Russian officials have reported intercepting Ukrainian drones over Moscow, which is about

500 kilometers (310 miles) from the border and most recently Izhevsk, a city about 1,450 kilometers (900 miles) from the frontier.

Earlier on Tuesday, Ukrainian officials reported a third Russian strike in as many days on a residential area in Ukraine killed at least 12 people, including a child.

The strike by a Shahed drone in the northern Sumy region late Monday hit a dormitory of an educational facility in the town of Hlukhiv and wounded 11 others, including two children, authorities said, adding that more people could be trapped under the rubble.

On Sunday, a Russian ballistic missile with cluster munitions struck a residential area of Sumy in northern Ukraine, killing 11 people and wounding 84 others. On Monday, a Russian missile barrage sparked apartment fires in the southern port of Odesa, killing at least 10 people and wounding 43.

Zelenskyy said that the series of aerial strikes proved that Putin wasn't interested in ending the war.

"Each new attack by Russia only confirms Putin's true intentions. He wants the war to continue. Talks about peace are not interesting to him. We must force Russia to a just peace by force," Zelenskyy said.

Zelenskyy told European Union lawmakers in a speech via video link that Russia has deployed about 11,000 North Korean troops along Ukraine's borders and that the number could swell to 100,000.

He appeared in person at the Ukrainian parliament, where he presented what he called a "resilience plan" to dig in against the relentless Russian onslaught. He said he expects pivotal moments to occur in the war next year.

The plan outlines new approaches to army management, including the creation of a military ombudsman position and a new system of handling military contracts.

There are no plans to lower the mobilization age from the current 25, even though Ukraine is short-handed on the front line, especially in infantry.

Ukraine urgently needs to tackle its manpower difficulties on the front, but it can use the longer-range missiles in the meantime to slow the tempo of Russia's recent advances, said Jack Watling, an analyst at the Royal United Services Institute, a London think tank.

"Ukraine's partners can do little to change the character of the fighting on the line of contact, but by targeting capabilities that are currently giving Russia a battlefield advantage, time can be bought," Watling wrote Tuesday.

Next year, Zelenskyy said, Ukraine plans to produce at least 30,000 long-range drones and aims to manufacture 3,000 long-range missiles, reducing its dependence on Western military support.

A fuller version of the plan will be presented next month, he said.

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte said Western countries are debating further help for Ukraine — "more aid, more money we have to make available to them, particularly now that the North Koreans have come on board," he said in Brussels.

Meanwhile, European Parliament President Roberta Metsola led a special plenary session on Ukraine marking "one thousand days of terror, suffering and unimaginable loss. One thousand days of courage, resilience and unbreakable spirits."

"Your people are an inspiration to all who value freedom around the world," she told Zelenskyy.

Forget driverless cars. One company wants autonomous helicopters to spray crops and fight fires

By MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

HENNIKER, N.H. (AP) — When Hector Xu was learning to fly a helicopter in college, he recalled having a few "nasty experiences" while trying to navigate at night.

The heart-stopping flights led to his research of unmanned aircraft systems while getting his doctorate degree in aerospace engineering at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Then, he formed Rotor Technologies in 2021 to develop unmanned helicopters.

Rotor has built two autonomous Sprayhawks and aims to have as many as 20 ready for market next

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year. The company also is developing helicopters that would carry cargo in disaster zones and to offshore oil rigs. The helicopter could also be used to fight wildfires.

For now, Rotor is focused on the agriculture sector, which has embraced automation with drones but sees unmanned helicopters as a better way to spray larger areas with pesticides and fertilizers.

On Wednesday, Rotor plans to conduct a public flight test with its Sprayhawk at an agriculture aviation trade show in Texas.

"People would call us up and say, 'hey, I want to use this for crop dusting, can I?' We'd say, OK maybe," Xu said, adding that they got enough calls to realize it was a huge untapped market. The Associated Press reporters were the first people outside the company to witness a test flight of the Sprayhawk. It hovered, flew forward and sprayed the tarmac before landing.

Rotor's nearly \$1 million Sprayhawk helicopter is a Robinson R44, but the four seats have been replaced with flight computers and communications systems allowing it be operated remotely. It has five cameras as well as laser-sensing technology and a radar altimeter that make terrain reading more accurate along with GPS and motion sensors.

At the company's hangar in Nashua, New Hampshire, Xu said this technology means there is better visibility of terrain at night.

One of the big draws of automation in agriculture aviation is safety.

Because crop dusters fly at around 150 mph (240 kph) and only about 10 feet (3 meters) off the ground, there are dozens of accidents each year when planes collide with power lines, cell towers and other planes. Older, poorly maintained planes and pilot fatigue contribute to accidents.

A 2014 report from the National Transportation Safety Board found there were more than 800 agriculture operation accidents between 2001 and 2010 including 81 that were fatal. A separate report from the National Agriculture Aviation Association found nearly 640 accidents from 2014 until this month with 109 fatalities.

"It is a very, very dangerous, profession and there are multiple fatalities every year," said Dan Martin, a research engineer with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agriculture Research Service. "They make all their money in those short few months so sometimes it may mean that they fly 10 to 12 hours a day or more."

Job hazards also include exposure to chemicals.

In recent years, safety concerns and the cheaper cost has led to a proliferation of drones flying above farmers' fields, Martin said, adding that some 10,000 will likely be sold this year alone.

"It's growing exponentially as a market, super fast," Martin said.

But the size of the drones and their limited battery power means they only can cover a fraction of the area of a plane and helicopters. That is providing an opening for companies building bigger unmanned aircraft like Rotor and another company Pyka.

California-based Pyka announced in August that it had sold its first autonomous electric aircraft for crop protection to a customer in the United States. Pyka's Pelican Spray, a fixed-wing aircraft, received FAA approval last year to fly commercially for crop protection. The company also sold its Pelican Spray to Dole for use in Honduras and to the Brazilian company, SLC Agrícola.

Lukas Koch, chief technology officer at Heinen Brothers Agra Services, the company which bought the Pelican Spray in August, has called unmanned aircraft part of a coming "revolution," that will save farmers money and improve safety.

The Kansas-based company operates out of airports from Texas to Illinois. Koch doesn't envision the unmanned aircraft replacing all the the company's dozens of pilots but rather taking over the riskiest jobs.

"The biggest draw is taking the pilot out of the aircraft inside of those most dangerous situations," Koch said. "There's still fields that are surrounded by trees on all borders, or you've got big, large power lines or other just dangers, wind turbines, things like that. It can be tough to fly around."

But Koch acknowledges autonomous aviation systems could introduce new dangers to an already chaotic airspace — though that is less of a concern in rural areas with plenty of open space and fewer people.

"Putting more systems into the air that don't have a pilot inside could introduce new dangers to our cur-

rent existing pilots and make their life even more dangerous," he said. "If you've got this full size helicopter flying beyond the line of sight, how is it going to react when it sees you? What is it going to do? ... That's a giant question mark, one that we take very seriously."

Companies like Rotor have incorporated built-in contingencies should something go wrong — its helicopter features a half-dozen communications systems and, for now, a remote pilot in control.

If the ground team loses contact with the helicopter, Rotor has a system which Xu referred to as a big, red button that ensures the engine can be shut off and the helicopter perform a controlled landing. "That means that we'll never have an aircraft fly away event," he said.

The safety measures will go a long way to helping the company receive what it expects will be FAA regulatory approval to fly its helicopters commercially. Once they have that, the challenge, as Xu sees it, will be scaling up to meet the demand in the United States but also Brazil which has a huge agriculture market but more relaxed regulatory environment.

"I think 2025 will be production hell as Elon Musk calls it," Xu said. "It's kind of the difference between building a couple to building tens and hundreds at scale ... These are no longer just like bespoke Rolls-Royces. You want to be stamping these out like you would production automobiles."

Trump thinks he can fix golf's mess.

He starts by playing golf with PGA Tour commissioner

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

President-elect Donald Trump boasted during the campaign he would need about 15 minutes to get a deal done between the PGA Tour and the Saudi investors of LIV Golf. That started with four hours on the golf course with PGA Tour Commissioner Jay Monahan.

The Washington Post reported Monahan accepted an invitation from Trump to play golf last Friday at Trump International Golf Club in West Palm Beach, Florida.

The PGA Tour confirmed the outing in a statement.

"President-Elect Trump has always been a champion of the game of golf and Commissioner Monahan was honored to accept his invitation to play at Trump International," the statement said. "The President-Elect and the Commissioner share a love for the game and the Commissioner enjoyed their time together."

The next day, Trump attended a UFC heavyweight championship in New York with Elon Musk and Yasir al-Rumayyan, the governor of Public Investment Fund of Saudi Arabia, the financial support of the rival LIV tour that has caused the massive rift in the game.

Monahan and al-Rumayyan played golf together in the Dunhill Links Championship in Scotland last month on the European tour.

The tour has not disclosed the nature of those discussions, and Monahan has not shared details even with key players to keep negotiations private.

The PGA Tour and PIF announced an agreement on June 6, 2023, for the Saudi sovereign wealth fund to become an investor in a new commercial venture by the PGA Tour. That quickly got the attention of the Justice Department, and while the agreement called for a Dec. 31 deadline, negotiations are still taking place.

The PGA Tour struck a deal with a consortium of sports owners, Strategic Sports Group, for an initial \$1.5 billion investment in PGA Tour Enterprises that could grow to \$3 billion.

Meanwhile, golf remains deeply divided as the PGA Tour has banned LIV players — U.S. Open champion Bryson DeChambeau, Brooks Koepka and Jon Rahm among them — from competing in its tournaments.

All of golf's best players meet only four times a year in the majors.

Trump joined the "Let's Go!" podcast with Jim Gray and Bill Belichick on the eve of the election and said, "it would take me the better part of 15 minutes to get that deal done."

"I'm really going to work on other things, to be honest with you," Trump said on the podcast. "I think we have much bigger problems than that. But I do think we should have one tour and they should have

the best players in that tour.”

Trump’s golf courses hosted two LIV events in the inaugural 2022 season, three events in 2023 and one event this year. None of the Trump courses — in Miami, New Jersey and the Washington area — is on the 2025 schedule, which still has not been completed.

Trump was bullish about LIV Golf when it started and predicted a merger was inevitable. He warned PGA Tour players on the Truth Social media platform in July 2022, “If you don’t take the money now, you will get nothing after the merger takes place, and only say how smart the original signees were.”

Trump also has had his fights with the PGA Tour before he was elected the first time, most notably when the tour took a World Golf Championships event from his Trump Doral in 2016 to Mexico City because the tournament couldn’t find a sponsor.

Among issues to be sorted out beyond any investment by PIF is how to bring together players who stayed loyal to the PGA Tour by not taking massive signing bonuses from the Saudi league and those who defected to the rival league.

How the Justice Department views any deal is another obstacle in the negotiations.

Rory McIlroy said after the election that having Trump in office couldn’t hurt the completion of any deal. “He might be able to,” McIlroy said Nov. 6, the day after the election. “He’s got Elon Musk, who I think is the smartest man in the world, beside him. We might be able to do something if we can get Musk involved, too.”

McIlroy is just not sure about a 15-minute solution.

“I think from the outside looking in, it’s probably a little less complicated than it actually is,” said McIlroy, who serves on a transaction committee involved in the deal. “But obviously Trump has great relationship with Saudi Arabia. He’s got a great relationship with golf. He’s a lover of golf. So, maybe. Who knows?”

‘Tis the season for holiday albums, from Jennifer Hudson to Toby Keith and Jimmy Fallon

By MARIA SHERMAN AP Music Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — It’s not the holiday season until the house is full of festive music, from classics to covers and reimaginings across genres, for all to enjoy.

In honor of the most wonderful time of the year, here are some of the best new holiday releases for the 2024 season.

Vince Gill and Amy Grant, “When I Think of Christmas”

When it comes to country music Christmas classics, Vince Gill and Amy Grant immediately come to mind. The couple is no stranger to the world of holiday music, and their latest collection, “When I Think of Christmas,” channels the spirit of their popular “Christmas at the Ryman” residency in Nashville, with two new recordings: a duet of “Til the Season Comes Round Again” and Grant’s take on the title track.

The Carpenters, “Christmas Once More”

Don’t fix what ain’t broke is an expression for a reason: Sometimes the best holiday album listening experience is enjoying the classics, but newly remixed and remastered. Enter the 16-track “Christmas Once More” from the Carpenters. Fall in love with “Sleigh Ride” and “(There’s No Place Like) Home For The Holidays” all over again.

Jennifer Hudson, “The Gift of Love”

Jennifer Hudson has done a ton in her career — including winning an Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony, making her the rare performer to EGOT, as the expression goes — but a holiday album? That’s new territory. “The Gift of Love” is her first, full of big-hearted classics like “O Holy Night,” “Winter Wonderland,” “Auld Lang Syne” and “Carol of the Bells,” which features the a cappella-meets-Zulu music South African group The Joy. The album also contains some inventive originals. In that category: “Almost Christmas” with Common. If there is only one album to grab this holiday season, you’d be wise to make it this one.

Little Big Town, “The Christmas Record”

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Another big name in contemporary music has released their first holiday album. Little Big Town's "The Christmas Record," produced by the legendary Dave Cobb, is a country music spectacular. Like Hudson's, this one is a collection of familiar tunes along with originals — like the opener "Glow," and the cheery vocal harmony of its chorus: "That shine, that shimmer deep inside of you / Find that magic, let the light in you show / Let it go / Let it glow."

Toby Keith, "Christmas to Christmas"

In February, country superstar Toby Keith, a hit crafter of pro-American anthems who riled up critics and was loved by millions of fans, died at 62. In the time since, he's been eulogized and celebrated, and that continues with a newly remastered reissue of his 1995 holiday classic, "Christmas to Christmas."

Clay Aiken, "Christmas Bells Are Ringing"

Clay Aiken — you read that name correctly, the onetime "American Idol" runner-up and politician — has returned with his first studio album in over a decade, "Christmas Bells Are Ringing." His voice sounds as sweet and theatrical as ever — a natural partner to holiday classics.

Jimmy Fallon, "Holiday Seasoning"

At the intersection of Christmas and comedy albums comes Jimmy Fallon's "Holiday Seasoning." The "Tonight Show" host gets into the spirit of the season with jokes — and some A-list guests — included. Check out "Almost Too Early for Christmas" with Dolly Parton, "Hallmark Movie" with Cara Delevingne, and "New Year's Eve Polka (5-4-3-2-1)" featuring the Roots and Weird Al. It's exactly what it sounds like.

The Philly Specials, "A Philly Special Christmas Party"

For a third year in a row, the Philly Specials — former Philadelphia Eagle Jason Kelce and current Eagles Lane Johnson and Jordan Mailata — have released a holiday album for charity. "A Philly Special Christmas Party" benefits a few organizations, including the Children's Crisis Treatment Center and Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. If getting NFL stars to sing sounds funny, well, that's kind of the point. The fun and absurdity are this album's superpowers: On the Americana "Maybe This Christmas," Kelce (brother to Travis Kelce) and Stevie Nicks duet, singing, "And maybe forgiveness will ask us to call / Someone we love / Someone we've lost for reasons we can't quite recall / Maybe this Christmas." It's moving.

Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong, "Ella & Louis Wish You a Swinging Holiday"

Let's be honest here. Around Christmas, everyone wants to hear Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong. Why not hear them together? "Ella & Louis Wish You a Swinging Holiday" is a new boxset, two jazz classics meeting in perfect harmony: "Ella Wishes You a Swinging Christmas" and "Louis Wishes You A Cool Yule."

Ben Folds, "Sleigher"

Ben Folds might not be an obvious pick for holiday music — "Sleigher" is his first Christmas album, after all — but it's a match made in heaven. His indie piano pop has charmed horn-rimmed glasses wearers for many years; his delicate compositions hit like falling snow. There are seven originals here and three covers.

The Temptations, "Give Love at Christmas"

The holidays, like every day, are a time for listening to Motown Records' vocal groups. This year, tuck into a new reissue of the Temptations' 1980 album, "Give Love at Christmas." It's for fans of five-part harmonies and soulful renditions of classics.

Takeaways from the AP's investigation into Osprey safety issues

By TARA COPP, KEVIN VINEYS and AARON KESSLER Associated Press

After being grounded for months following a crash last November that killed eight service members in Japan, the V-22 Osprey — a complicated aircraft that flies fast like a plane but converts to land like a helicopter — is back in the air.

But there are still questions as to whether it should be.

Since the military started flying the aircraft three decades ago, 64 personnel have been killed and 93 injured in crashes. Japan's military briefly grounded its fleet again late last month after an Osprey tilted violently during takeoff and struck the ground.

To assess its safety, The Associated Press reviewed thousands of pages of accident reports and flight

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data obtained through the Freedom of Information Act, interviewed more than 50 current and former program officials, crew members and experts, and flew both simulator and real training flights.

The AP found that safety issues have increased in the past five years and that the design of the aircraft itself is directly contributing to many of the accidents.

Yet past and present Osprey pilots — even those who have lost friends in accidents or been in crashes themselves — are some of the aircraft's greatest defenders. Ospreys have been deployed around the world, rescuing U.S. service personnel from ballistic missiles in Iraq and evacuating civilians in Niger.

"There's no other platform out there that can do what the V-22 can do," said former Osprey pilot Brian Luce, who has survived two crashes. "When everything is going well, it is amazing. But when it's not, it's unforgiving."

Osprey safety issues have increased

The AP found that the top three most serious types of incidents rose 46% between 2019 and 2023, while overall safety issues jumped 18% in the same period before the fleet was grounded.

Moreover, the AP found that over the past five years, not only have incidents climbed for both the Marine Corps and Air Force, but that the rise in safety problems largely involved the Osprey's engine or drive system.

There were at least 35 instances where crews experienced an engine fire, power loss or stall, 42 issues involving the proprotors and at least 72 instances of chipping. That means that the gears inside the transmission or drive system become so stressed they flake off metal chips that can quickly endanger a flight.

The Marine Corps maintains that the Osprey is still one of the safest aircraft in its fleet. Over the past decade, the rate that it experienced the worst type of accident resulting in either death or loss of aircraft was 2.27 for every 100,000 hours of flight. That compares with 5.66 for its other heavy lift helicopter, the CH-53.

Those numbers don't tell the whole story. The Marines' three most serious categories of accidents climbed from 2019 to 2023 — even as the number of hours they flew their Ospreys dropped significantly, from 50,807 total hours in fiscal 2019 to 37,670 hours in 2023, according to data obtained by the AP.

The Air Force's Osprey has a much higher rate of the worst type of accidents per 100,000 flight hours than its other major aircraft, and its accidents have also climbed even as flight hours have dropped.

Challenges are tied to the Osprey's design

Experts said the Osprey's failures have a variety of causes. In the 1980s, when the V-22 was still in early concept for Bell Flight and Boeing, the Marine Corps got to call the shots on the Osprey's final design because it committed to buying most of them. The Marines wanted an aircraft that could carry at least 24 troops and take up the same limited amount of space on a ship deck as the CH-46 helicopter, which the Osprey was replacing.

Those design limitations made the Osprey weigh more than twice as much as the CH-46.

Because of the Osprey's weight, the blades needed to be longer, but couldn't be — they would have hit the body of the aircraft or the tower on the ship deck.

As a result, the Osprey's proprotors — which work as propellers while flying like an airplane and as rotor blades when functioning as a helicopter — are too small in diameter for the aircraft's weight, which tops out at 60,500 pounds.

To help with weight, the Osprey's entire engine and transmission bends like an elbow to shift to a vertical position when it flies like a helicopter — and engines don't like to be vertical.

How the design affects safety

While designing the engines to rotate vertically helped the Osprey takeoff, it also created dangers that crews still have to mitigate today.

When flying as a helicopter, the engines can't cool down because they don't get enough air flow. The hydraulic lines at the joint can wear down, and the aircraft is difficult to maintain.

The Osprey's first fatal crash in 1992 occurred because pooled fluids spilled back down into the engine as the aircraft converted from flying horizontally like a plane to vertically like a helicopter to land. It caught

fire and crashed, killing seven.

A 2000 crash that killed four Marines happened when a worn-down hydraulic line ruptured and the Osprey lost power.

Then there's dust. When the Osprey hovers in helicopter mode, the air and exhaust it creates can kick up a wall of dust and debris that can get sucked back into the engines, clogging and degrading them.

In 2015, a Marine Corps Osprey hovering for 45 seconds in Hawaii disturbed so much sand and dust that the crew had to abort and try again to land, because they could no longer see. On their second attempt, the Osprey's left engine stalled and the aircraft dropped flat, killing two Marines.

Pilots have to fly perfectly

Pilots face very sensitive instruments that change from working like the controls inside an airplane to operating like those inside a helicopter.

The aircraft's cockpit is also crammed with messaging and navigation screens, and rows of control buttons. The aircraft is frequently flashing error codes — but crews can get desensitized to them, what one Osprey pilot called the "fatigue of small errors."

If there are other complications in flight or a pilot is distracted or misses the significance of an aircraft warning light, those mistakes can turn dangerous quickly.

Lt. Col. Seth Buckley, director of operations for the 20th Special Operations Squadron, which flies Ospreys, acknowledged that he puts a lot of pressure on his crews to be perfect for their own safety.

"You have to take that mindset because there are so many things you can do in this aircraft to induce worse problems," Buckley said.

Money to respond to climate change is key to UN talks in Baku.

Nations are finding ways to raise it

By SETH BORENSTEIN, SIBI ARASU and MELINA WALLING Associated Press

BAKU, Azerbaijan (AP) — Just as a simple lever can move heavy objects, rich nations are hoping another kind of leverage — the financial sort — can help them come up with the money that poorer nations need to cope with climate change.

It involves a complex package of grants, loans and private investment, and it's becoming the major currency at annual United Nations climate talks known as COP29.

But poorer nations worry they'll get the short end of the lever: not much money and plenty of debt.

Meanwhile, half a world away in Brazil, leaders of the 20 most powerful economies issued a statement that among other things gave support to strong financial aid for climate for poor nations and the use of leverage financial mechanisms. That was cheered by climate analysts and advocates.

Money is the key issue in Baku, where negotiators are working on a new amount of cash for developing nations to transition to clean energy, adapt to climate change and deal with weather disasters. It'll replace the current goal of \$100 billion annually — a goal set in 2009.

Looking for the first domino to fall

Negotiators are fighting over three big parts of the issue: How big the numbers are, how much is grants or loans, and who pays. The how big question is the toughest to negotiate and will likely be resolved only after the first two are solved, COP29 lead negotiator Yalchin Rafiyev told The Associated Press in an interview Tuesday.

"There are interlinkages of the elements. That's why having one of them agreed could unlock the other one," Rafiyev said.

It's like the first domino falling leading to another, he said.

In these negotiations, rich potential donor nations have been reluctant to offer a starting figure to negotiate from. So Rafiyev said the conference presidency is putting the pressure on them, telling "the developed countries that the figure should be fair and ambitious, corresponding to the needs and priorities of the world."

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India's junior environment minister Kirti Vardhan Singh, who is at the Baku talks, said that "the global south are bearing a huge financial burden."

"This is severely limiting our capacity to meet our developmental needs," he said.

Money could be in the form of loans, grants or private investment

Experts put the number needed for climate finance at \$1 trillion, while developing nations have said they'll need \$1.3 trillion. But negotiators are talking about different types of money as well as amounts.

So far rich nations have not quite offered a number for the core of money they could provide. But the European Union is expected to finally do that and it will likely be in the \$200 to \$300 billion a year range, Linda Kalcher, executive director of the think tank Strategic Perspectives, said Tuesday. It might be even as much as four times the original \$100 billion, said Luca Bergamaschi, co-founding director of the Italian ECCO think tank.

But there's a big difference between \$200 billion and \$1.3 trillion. That can be bridged with "the power of leverage," said Avinash Persaud, climate adviser for the Inter-American Development Bank.

When a country gives a multilateral development bank like his \$1, it could be used with loans and private investment to get as much as \$16 in spending for transitioning away from dirty energy, Persaud said. When it comes to spending to adapt to climate change, the bang for the buck, is a bit less, about \$6 for every dollar, he said.

But when it comes to compensating poor nations already damaged by climate change — such as Caribbean nations devastated by repeated hurricanes — leverage doesn't work because there's no investment and loans. That's where straight-out grants could help, Persaud said.

Whatever the form of the finance, Ireland's environment minister Eamon Ryan said it would be "unforgivable" for developed countries to walk away from negotiations in without making a firm commitment toward developing ones.

"We have to make an agreement here," he said. "We do have to provide the finance, particularly for the developing countries, and to give confidence that they will not be excluded, that they will be center stage."

For developing nations, the talk of loans brings fear of debt

If climate finance comes mostly in the form of loans, it means more debt for nations that are already drowning in it, said Michai Robertson, climate finance negotiator for the Alliance of Small Island States.

"All of these things are just nice ways of saying more debt," Robertson said.

His organization argues that most of the \$1.3 trillion it seeks should be in grants and very low-interest and long-term loans that are easier to pay back. Only about \$400 billion should be in leveraged loans, Robertson said.

Leverage from loans "will be a critical part of the solution," said United Nations Environment Programme Director Inger Andersen. But so must grants and so must debt relief, she added.

Rohey John, Gambia's environment minister, said the absence of a financial commitment from rich nations suggests "they are not interested in the development of the rest of the mankind."

"Each and every day we wake up to a crisis that will wipe out a whole community or even a whole country, to a crime that we never committed," she said.

Ministers giving their national statements also came out with fighting words.

"Our children, our elderly, our women, our girls, our Indigenous people, our youth deserve better," said St. Kitts and Nevis Climate Minister Joyelle Clarke. "Let us be seized by a desire for better."

Cuban environment minister Armando Rodriguez Batista urged countries not to "favor death over life."

Praise and worry about G20 statement

The G20's mention of the need for strong climate finance and especially the replenishment of the International Development Association gives a boost to negotiators in Baku, ECCO's Bergamaschi said.

"G20 Leaders have sent a clear message to their negotiators at COP29: do not leave Baku without a successful new finance goal," United Nations climate secretary Simon Stiell said. "This is an essential signal, in a world plagued by debt crises and spiraling climate impacts, wrecking lives, slamming supply chains and fanning inflation in every economy."

Analysts and activists said they were also worried because the G20 statement did not repeat the call for

a transition away from fossil fuels, a hard-fought concession at last year's climate talks.

Veteran climate talks analyst Alden Meyer of the European think tank E3G said the watering down of the G20 statement on fossil fuel transition is because of pressure by Russia and Saudi Arabia. He said it is "just the latest reflection of the Saudi wrecking ball strategy" at climate meetings.

The Osprey's safety issues spiked over five years and caused deaths. Pilots still want to fly it

By TARA COPP, KEVIN VINEYS and AARON KESSLER Associated Press

CANNON AIR FORCE BASE, N.M. (AP) — Over a New Mexico training range named the Hornet, two Osprey aircraft speed 100 feet off the ground, banking hard over valleys and hills as they close in on a dusty landing zone.

A flight engineer in the back braces a .50-caliber machine gun over the edge of the Osprey's open ramp as desert shrubbery blurs past. The aircraft's joints shift and rattle, and there is little steady to hold on to until the Osprey touches down with a bump, flooding seats with rust-colored dust.

After being grounded for months following a crash last November that killed eight U.S. service members in Japan, the V-22 Osprey is back in the air. But there are still questions as to whether it should be.

The Pentagon bought the V-22 Osprey more than 30 years ago as a lethal hybrid, with the speed of an airplane and the maneuverability of a helicopter. Since then, 64 personnel have been killed and 93 injured in more than 21 major accidents.

Japan's military briefly grounded its fleet again late last month after an Osprey tilted violently during takeoff and struck the ground. And four recent fatal crashes brought the program the closest it's come to being shut down by Congress.

To assess its safety, The Associated Press reviewed thousands of pages of accident reports and flight data obtained through the Freedom of Information Act, interviewed more than 50 current and former program officials, crew members and experts, and flew both simulator and real training flights.

The AP found that the top three most serious types of incidents rose 46% between 2019 and 2023, while overall safety issues jumped 18% in the same period before the fleet was grounded.

Yet current and former Osprey pilots — even those who have lost friends in accidents or been in crashes themselves — are some of the aircraft's greatest defenders.

Ospreys have been deployed worldwide — landing in deserts and on ship decks, rescuing U.S. service members from ballistic missiles in Iraq, evacuating civilians in Niger and even standing by ready to protect the president during a surprise trip to Ukraine last year.

"There's no other platform out there that can do what the V-22 can do," said former Osprey pilot Brian Luce, who has survived two crashes. "When everything is going well, it is amazing. But when it's not, it's unforgiving."

Unlike other aircraft, the Osprey's problems have not leveled off as the years passed, instead they spiked — even as the number of hours flown have dropped. Many of those incidents can be directly tied to the aircraft's design, experts said.

Parts are wearing out faster than planned, and it's so complex that a minor mistake by a pilot can turn deadly.

While some aspects of the Osprey are now getting modified to make it more reliable, it's unlikely the Osprey's core design will change. With about 400 aircraft that cost between \$75 million and \$90 million apiece, a major upgrade to the fleet could cost billions.

One pilot survives two crashes

In 2010, Luce was the co-pilot in an Osprey crash in Afghanistan that killed his aircraft commander, flight engineer, an Army Ranger and a translator.

There was no enemy fire. In the final seconds of flight, as the Osprey converted to land like a helicopter, it dropped at a rate of more than 1,800 feet per minute. The crash investigation was inconclusive but found possible crew errors and said the engines may have lost power from sucking in too much dust.

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Two years later, Luce was the aircraft commander overseeing a co-pilot on a Florida training range. Luce's aircraft was flying low to the ground and about 750 feet behind the lead Osprey — three times the safe minimum distance required.

Despite being football fields apart, when both Ospreys banked, their change in position put one of Luce's rotor blades inside the 25-foot vertical separation they needed. It crossed into the wake of the lead aircraft — a turbulent and unpredictable wash of air so strong that crews nicknamed it "Superman's cape."

In seconds, Luce's Osprey nearly inverted and began dropping at more than 2,800 feet per minute before crashing and catching fire.

All five crew members survived. As the most seriously injured were airlifted out, Luce called his wife at the time, his voice shaking.

"It happened again," he said.

She did not have to ask what he meant.

Both the 2010 and 2012 crashes exposed issues with the Osprey that the military still faces today.

After Luce's 2012 crash, Osprey pilots warned investigators that the program was in trouble, according to investigation interviews obtained by the AP. Pilots couldn't get enough training hours. Ground maintenance crews couldn't keep enough aircraft flying due to a shortage of parts.

To meet cost and schedule targets, the Pentagon's Osprey program office allowed manufacturers Bell Flight and Boeing to turn the Osprey over to the military without fully identifying all the ways the aircraft could run into trouble, a 2001 Government Accountability Office report found.

So even by Luce's 2012 crash, the military still didn't know the full size of the Osprey's wake, crash investigators found.

"The fact that they fell out of the sky just defies logic," Luce's commander Lt. Col. Matt Glover told crash investigators in documents reviewed by the AP.

"I wish I could say there's not going to be a next one, but where we are right now, is it 'if' or 'when,'" said a second pilot, who was flying the Osprey in front of Luce's and whose name is redacted.

The Osprey's safety record has been challenged in multiple congressional hearings over the years. But each time, it has returned to flight. Some members of Congress have said there is no more margin for error.

"If another Osprey goes down, we're done. This program's done," Rep. Stephen Lynch, a Massachusetts Democrat, told Osprey program officials during a hearing this spring.

The design of the Osprey is a big challenge

In the 1980s, when the \$56 billion V-22 program was in its early stages for Bell Flight and Boeing, the Marine Corps controlled the Osprey's final design because it committed to buying the most. The Marines wanted an aircraft that could carry at least 24 troops, but only take the same small space on a ship deck as the CH-46 helicopter, which the Osprey was replacing.

Experts say design choices have affected the Osprey's safety since:

— The Osprey's proprotors, which work as propellers while flying like an airplane and as rotor blades when functioning as a helicopter, are too small in diameter for the aircraft's weight, which can top out at 60,500 pounds.

— The Osprey's entire engine, transmission and proprotors rotate to a vertical position when it flies like a helicopter, which compromises the engines.

— That vertical rotation is at the core of what makes the Osprey complex. Crews must watch numerous factors: speed, the angles of the engine and rotor blades, and the up or down position of the aircraft's nose, related to the Osprey's weight and center of gravity to keep it from crashing.

The Osprey is twice as heavy as the CH-46, so the rotor blades needed to be longer but couldn't be because they would have hit the body of the aircraft or the tower on the ship deck. Instead, the Osprey's engines had to be more powerful to help the shorter blades generate enough lift.

That creates fast, violent airflow through the rotor blades, which can quickly destabilize the Osprey if one engine has more power than the other.

More powerful engines also meant they would weigh more. So engineers designed them to rotate and

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used their exhaust thrust to help lift the Osprey off the ground.

"It's an aircraft with a huge amount of performance packed into a very compact space. What that means is that it's a real hot rod to fly," said Richard Brown, a rotorcraft specialist at Sophrodyne Aerospace. "But it also has these foibles which are baked into the design."

Osprey crashes go back decades

Problems with the vertical engine caused the aircraft's first fatal accident in 1992. Oils that had pooled while the Osprey was flying like an airplane spilled down into the engine as it rotated to a vertical helicopter position, catching fire and killing seven crew.

In December 2000, repeated transitions to helicopter mode — where the engine and rotor blades rotate upward like an elbow joint — wore down one of the hydraulic lines in an Osprey to the point that it ruptured in flight, killing four Marines. That led to a grounding and system redesign.

Dusty landings present added danger. When the Osprey hovers in helicopter mode, the air and exhaust it creates can kick up a wall of dust and debris that can get sucked back into the engines, clogging and degrading them.

In 2015, a Marine Corps Osprey hovering for 45 seconds in Hawaii disturbed so much sand and dust the crew had to abort and try again to land, because they could no longer see. On their second attempt, the Osprey's left engine stalled and the aircraft dropped flat, killing two Marines.

"I heard what sounded like the entire aircrew yelling 'power, power, power,'" a surviving Marine told investigators, according to redacted interviews obtained by the AP. "The ceiling opened like a sardine can."

After the accident, the Marine Corps put out new guidelines reducing the amount of time the aircraft could hover in dusty environments.

But two years later, dust was a factor again. Pilots of a Marine Corps Osprey that had been dropping off troops in landing zones in Australia all day were concerned enough about the aircraft's weight and potential accumulated dust in the engines that they wanted troops to pour out their water jugs to cut weight.

On their final flight, as the Osprey neared the deck of the transport ship USS Green Bay, it dropped. Airflow generated by the Osprey had reflected off the ship deck and backed up through the rotors.

The pilots applied full throttle but the engines could not produce enough power to compensate for the loss. The Osprey kept falling, clipped the side of the ship and fell into the ocean, killing three.

"It just felt like there was nothing you could do," the lead pilot told investigators. "I don't recall seeing anything with the gauges at this point. I just remember being very frightened."

The Osprey's manufacturers, Bell Flight and Boeing, both referred questions about whether design changes could be made to either the rotors or engine orientation to the Pentagon.

In a statement to the AP, Bell said it took the heavier loads into account in its aircraft.

"While the capabilities of the Osprey have evolved over the years, the envelope of the aircraft based on configuration to support the varied missions has actually not adjusted significantly and was anticipated by the original design," Bell said.

The aging aircraft is wearing down

The Osprey's design strains critical components inside, especially in helicopter mode — and those parts are wearing out faster than expected.

When the Osprey is flying like a helicopter, everything has to work harder, because the engines and rotors are supporting the full weight of the aircraft. In airplane mode, the rotors only have to overcome the aircraft's drag, said Brown, the rotorcraft expert.

Air Force crews fly the heaviest Osprey variant because of all the special instruments needed to allow it to fly secret missions, such as conducting rescues or inserting special operations forces in hostile territory.

In helicopter mode, they have to use an option called "interim power" to land safely, said Glover, the former Osprey squadron commander. The option surges more power, but that also can overtax the gears in the Osprey's transmission, known as the proprotor gearbox.

"Bell-Boeing and the Marines had said: 'Hey, you're not supposed to use that thing very often. We don't recommend it.' Well, the Air Force, we've got to use it because we are heavy," Glover said. "If you don't

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use it, you won't have the power to land."

Japan's defense ministry blamed human error for its most recent accident, where the Osprey tilted and struck the ground, because the pilots did not engage the interim power option as they hovered like a helicopter during takeoff. The ministry announced last week that its Ospreys had been cleared to return to flight.

The strain from helicopter mode shows in the Osprey's transmission. A total of 609 have had to be replaced in the past 10 years, according to data obtained by the AP.

Wear and tear also puts a large demand on ground maintenance crews, who closely track components in the aircraft's drive system to monitor strain. After each flight, they examine the Osprey's engines, transmission and hydraulic lines for signs of stress.

On the hydraulic lines, "if one of those comes loose, it's a problem," said Master Sgt. Frank Williams, an Osprey maintenance supervisor at Cannon Air Force Base. "You have to pay attention."

In response to questions from the AP, the Marine Corps said the Osprey is still one of its safest aircraft. Over the past decade, the rate that it experienced the worst type of accident resulting in either death or loss of aircraft was 2.27 for every 100,000 hours of flight. The Marines said that compares with 5.66 for its other heavy lift helicopter, the CH-53.

Those numbers don't tell the whole story. The Marines' three most serious categories of accidents climbed from 2019 to 2023, even as the number of hours they flew dropped significantly — from 50,807 in fiscal 2019 to 37,670 in 2023, according to data obtained by the AP.

The Air Force's Osprey has a much higher rate of the worst type of accidents per 100,000 flight hours than its other major aircraft, and its incidents also climbed even as flight hours dropped.

The AP also found that the rise in safety problems over the past five years largely involved the Osprey's engine or drive system.

There were at least 35 instances where crews experienced an engine fire, power loss or stall, 42 issues involving the proprotors and at least 72 instances of the gears inside the transmission or drive system becoming so stressed they flake off metal chips that can quickly endanger a flight.

Pilots have to fly perfectly

The Osprey's complexity tests its crews.

Pilots control the angle of the engines and proprotors with a small notched wheel they move with their thumbs. It's sensitive to the touch — too much of a nudge and the engines' angle changes by several degrees. And they have to watch a computer display to see the angle.

As the engines and rotor blades begin to rotate upward, the flight controls inside the cockpit change, too — from working like the controls inside an airplane to operating like those in a helicopter.

"You have to just mentally switch, while you are on approach, what your hands are doing," said Osprey pilot Capt. Christian Eells.

The aircraft's computer is designed to autocorrect for a pilot if their movement of the wheel could result in the Osprey's internal components being damaged. But that adds to the danger if a pilot can't quickly force the nacelles, which house the engines, upward to slow down the aircraft, he said.

"It will not prevent you from stalling, sinking rapidly or entering any other unsafe flight," Luce said. "But if you are going too fast, it will not only prevent you from raising the nacelles to slow down, the flight control computers will bounce the nacelles forward" to reduce strain on the gears — which speeds the Osprey up, Luce said.

If there are other complications in flight or a pilot is distracted or misses the significance of an aircraft warning light, those mistakes can turn dangerous quickly.

Lt. Col. Seth Buckley, the 20th Special Operations Squadron director of operations at the Cannon base, acknowledged that he puts a lot of pressure on his crews to be perfect.

"You have to take that mindset because there are so many things you can do in this aircraft to induce worse problems," Buckley said.

Reminders of why hang inside the squadron's heritage room at Cannon, where they have put up a wooden

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memorial plaque with eight upside-down shot glasses for the friends they lost last November in Japan. Many of them also wear black metallic memorial bands on their wrists, with the Nov. 29, 2023, crash date and the Osprey's call sign, "Gundam 22," etched in.

Osprey faces investigations

The most recent accidents have spurred new lawsuits and congressional investigations.

Family members of the five Marines killed in a 2022 crash in California, caused by an unprecedented dual failure of the Osprey's clutch, are suing Bell and Boeing, and the maker of the engines, Rolls-Royce. Some of the families of the eight Air Force members killed last November in the Japan crash, which was caused in part by weakened metals in a critical transmission gear, also have hired a lawyer.

"Ultimately, the goal is an Osprey that is as airworthy and in as safe a condition as possible," said attorney Tim Loranger, who is representing the families.

Following the Japan crash, the military grounded the fleet for three months. Congress also was investigating, and there was frustration from some lawmakers that the Osprey returned to flight before those reviews were complete.

In the meantime, it's been difficult to get a clear picture of how the aircraft's manufacturers are responding. After investigations into the Japan and Australia crashes were released this year, neither Bell Flight nor Boeing commented, citing pending litigation.

Naval Air Systems Command, or NAVAIR, which runs the joint Air Force, Marine Corps and Navy Osprey program, is working on a variety of upgrades that should make the aircraft easier to maintain and looking at how else the program can be improved.

"This is the appropriate time to be looking at systemic improvements to the platform," former program manager Marine Corps Col. Brian Taylor said in a statement.

But it's unlikely to change any of the fundamentals of vertical engines or rotor size. Those problems are getting fixed in a new aircraft called the Valor that Bell Flight is selling to the Army.

The Valor looks a lot like the Osprey, but it's smaller. The Valor's engines stay in a horizontal position. Its smaller size means the rotor blades are more proportional with the aircraft's weight, which reduces strain on all the other components.

The Valor "captured many lessons learned from both tiltrotor and helicopter previous experience," Bell said in a statement.

What comes next for the Osprey?

Air Force leadership is watching the Osprey closely, investing in improvements to the engine to make it easier to maintain and looking at future alternatives. The Navy has taken steps to keep more of its legacy aircraft carrier transport planes around in case it can't make the Osprey work.

The Marine Corps is committed to flying its hundreds of Ospreys through 2050. But it's also doing a study to decide whether to "significantly modernize the MV/22 and/or begin the process to move forward" to a next-generation assault aircraft, Lt. Gen. Bradford Gering, Marine deputy commandant of aviation, said in a statement.

Until it has a new option, the Air Force is looking at what can be done to ensure pilots get the time and training needed to master the Osprey, Air Force special operations commander Lt. Gen. Michael Conley said.

"What I don't want is someone in my seat 10 years from now say, 'You know back in 2010, 2012, 2024, you knew crews weren't getting enough flight hours, you knew there were maintenance challenges, and here we are having the same discussion,'" Conley said.

But it's also about realizing that aspects of how the Osprey flies won't change, Buckley said.

"What you have to do is reduce your exposure," Buckley said.

For example, simulators can now model the full "Superman's cape" phenomenon, and crews can train to it. But there are still unknowns.

"I do think that we're still — and maybe even to this day — to a degree working through all the ins and outs aerodynamically what is different about this that has never been seen before with any other aircraft," Buckley said.

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But that doesn't mean ground it, he said.

In Iraq, Buckley flew a mission where the Osprey was the only aircraft that could help save a service member's life after a vehicle rollover.

"There wasn't another plane flying in the sky because the weather was so bad," Buckley said. "We flew up and down the line of the haboob trying to get around it, but the lightning was too bad, so we penetrated."

"To this day, that guy is with his family," he said.

Buckley understands the risks in a different way than many of his crews. He was a high school senior when his 25-year-old brother, 1st Lt. Nathaniel D. Buckley, died in an AFSOC MC-130H cargo aircraft crash in 2002.

In his office, Buckley pointed to the American flag that the Air Force presented to his family after his brother's death.

"I think my job here is to ensure that I'm going to push it to the level that we are making sure we aren't delivering any more of these," he said.

Today in History: November 20, the Mexican Revolution begins

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Wednesday, Nov. 20, the 325th day of 2024. There are 41 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Nov. 20, 1910, Francisco Madero led a revolt against Mexican President Porfirio Díaz, marking the beginning of the decade-long Mexican Revolution.

Also on this date:

In 1945, 22 former Nazi officials went on trial before an international war crimes tribunal in Nuremberg, Germany. (Almost a year later, the International Military Tribunal sentenced 12 of the defendants to death; seven received prison sentences ranging from 10 years to life; three were acquitted.)

1947, Britain's future queen, Princess Elizabeth, married Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, at Westminster Abbey.

In 1969, Native American activists began an occupation of Alcatraz Island that would last 19 months before they were forcibly removed by federal authorities.

In 1982, the University of California, Berkeley, football team defeated Stanford University by scoring a touchdown on a lateral-filled kickoff return on the last play of the game, despite the Stanford marching band entering the field of play, thinking Stanford had already won. In college football lore, the bizarre finish is often referred to simply as "The Play."

In 1992, fire seriously damaged Windsor Castle, the favorite weekend home of Britain's Queen Elizabeth II.

In 2003, record producer Phil Spector was charged with murder in the shooting death of an actor, Lana Clarkson, at his home in Alhambra, California. (Spector's first trial ended with a hung jury in 2007; he was convicted of second-degree murder in 2009.)

Today's Birthdays: Actor Estelle Parsons is 97. Author Don DeLillo is 88. Comedian Dick Smothers is 86. President Joe Biden is 82. Broadcast journalist Judy Woodruff is 78. Musician Joe Walsh is 77. Former national security adviser John Bolton is 76. Actor Bo Derek is 68. Actor Ming-Na Wen is 61. Rapper Michael "Mike D" Diamond (Beastie Boys) is 59. Actor-comedian Joel McHale is 53. Country singer Dierks Bentley is 49. Olympic gold medal-winning gymnast Dominique Dawes is 48. Rapper Future is 41.