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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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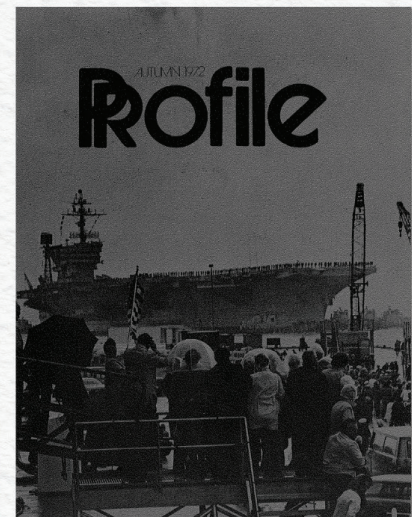
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Remembering Our American Veterans



Gary Hoops



by Jaedyn Penning

Hello my name is Jaedyn, and I am going to introduce you to Gary Hoops.

Gary Hoops was drafted into the army in the summer of 1971. He went into the Navy. He chose this branch because his cousin was killed in Vietnam on his mother's birthday and because he had always liked the water. He went to boot camp in San Diego, California which consisted of lots of marching. That didn't affect him much though, because he was in his high school marching band. He was put on the 50 states flag team, so he was able to be in parades.

After boot camp, his home port became Norfolk, Virginia Pier 12. He first started in the GSE shop where he worked on electric forklifts and huffers used to start planes on the flight deck. He also worked in AFT-Air Start where he ran and serviced 4 engine turbines sitting on pods that sent forced air to the flight deck, which was also used to start planes. The flight deck was a very dangerous place because of possible fires.

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Gary Hoops (center) pictured with Legion Auxiliary Members Deb McKiver (left) and Tami Zimney (right). (Courtesy Photo)

lot of great people from all over the US.

His advice to anyone contemplating entering the military is that the service is not for everyone, but it is a good place to find direction. As a bonus, when you leave the military, the GI bill has great benefits. You also get to travel the world and understand other people and their problems. If you asked him if he would do it again, he would say YES!

Gary was not able to be here today, but he did come to Mr. Wanner's classroom, where he was honored with his quilt.

Everyone please give Gary an applause.

His shifts were 12 hours on and 12 hours off, varying with different war games. Gary also traveled to Europe for 18 months, getting to see Portugal, Spain, Italy, Turkey, Greece, the Arctic Circle, and Scotland. While he was away, he and his family wrote letters back and forth because there were no cell phones.

Gary received a medal in 1973 for Battle Efficiency and a Pennant and Ship Dept Excellence Insignia during his service. After his service ended, he spent 30 days in South Dakota and is still a member of the Groton Legion Post 39. He was married with 3 kids, then divorced and remarried with 2 step kids. Since getting out of the military, he has worked 55 years as a Body AM, has coached basketball, soccer, girls fastpitch softball, summer travel softball and still coaches a U10 summer team. He currently is coaching at Southridge High School in Beaverton, Oregon.

Although the best part of his military career was traveling around and getting to see other parts of the world, he has learned how to work hard and work with other people from different backgrounds. Gary got to meet a



Jaedyn Penning read the story of Gary Hoops, who was unable to make it to the event.

(Photo lifted from GDILIVE.COM)

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FROSTY CLUE

I/My.....
21. Love playing board games with my grandkids



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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.

Landmines in Ukraine

President Joe Biden announced yesterday the US will send antipersonnel landmines to Ukraine, reversing a ban in place since 2022. Officials suggested the devices will shore up Ukraine's defenses against Russia's deployment of small squads across its lines; rights groups say the mines will endanger civilians.

More than 160 countries are signatories to the 1997 Ottawa Convention banning the mines designed to detonate on contact. Russia and the US are not party to the treaty, with Russia deploying mines since the start of the conflict. Ukraine—a signatory—manufactures them. The US-supplied mines are reportedly nonpersistent, designed to self-deactivate after a set period. Analysts estimate that since the war began, 20% of Ukraine's territory has become contaminated by mines.

Separately, the US closed its embassy in Kyiv yesterday amid tips of a possible air attack following the launch of short-range US-made ballistic missiles into Russia; the embassies of several European countries have followed suit.

Bomb Cyclone Hits Northwest

Two people have died in Seattle, as a bomb cyclone impacts the Pacific Northwest. Nearly 600,000 customers have lost power.

A bomb cyclone occurs when a storm system undergoes bombogenesis, with its central pressure dropping rapidly within 24 hours. This particular storm system has been fueled by an atmospheric river, a band of moisture in the sky with water vapor levels comparable to average flow levels at the mouth of the Mississippi River. The resulting weather system has unleashed hurricane-level winds in parts of Oregon and Canada, with Vancouver Island witnessing winds as high as 101 mph—the equivalent of a Category 2 storm.

Heavy winds, rain, and snow are expected to continue impacting the region in the coming days. A separate storm is due to hit the Northwest tomorrow as the current storm moves east.

Laken Riley Killer Sentenced

Georgia nursing student Laken Riley's killer was convicted yesterday of all 10 counts related to her Feb. 22 murder. The defendant, a 26-year-old Venezuelan migrant, was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

The trial, which began Friday, followed the relatively rare trajectory in which a criminal defendant foregoes their right to a trial by jury in favor of a bench trial, with the judge determining the outcome. The trial centered on DNA, surveillance video, and photo evidence tying Jose Ibarra to Riley's death after she went on a morning run near the University of Georgia and failed to return.

Ibarra entered the US illegally in September 2022. His immigration status did not play a role in the trial; however, it became a flashpoint in the 2024 presidential election, in which immigration was regularly cited as a leading concern for voters.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Green Day, Lady Gaga, Travis Scott, and Post Malone tapped to headline 2025 Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival (April 11-13, 18-20).

"Rust" film debuts in Poland just over three years after on-set shooting death of cinematographer Halyna Hutchins.

Detroit Tigers' Tarik Skubal and Atlanta Braves' Chris Sale win AL and NL Cy Young Awards for MLB's best pitchers; MVP announced tonight (6 pm ET, MLB Network).

LPGA announces \$131M in prize money for 2025 season, a 90% increase from 2021.

Science & Technology

The gut microbiome is shaped in part by social networks in localized areas, study finds, suggesting such microbes can be passed from person to person.

Researchers release updated Human Cell Atlas, cataloging 62 million cells across 18 biological networks; dubbed the "Wikipedia of cells," project seeks to map 37 trillion cells from birth to old age.

Squid-inspired device allows doctors to deliver drugs orally that would otherwise require needles; design uses tiny jets to shoot drugs into tissue lining once in the digestive tract.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 +0.0%, Dow +0.3%, Nasdaq -0.1%).

Target shares close down 21% after retailer posts weaker-than-expected quarterly earnings, lowers forecast for holiday quarter.

Nvidia beats Q3 revenue and earnings expectations.

Billionaire Gautam Adani indicted in US on federal charges of securities fraud, including for allegedly lying to US investors over \$250M in bribe payments to Indian government officials.

Archegos Capital founder Bill Hwang sentenced to 18 years in prison for fraud, market manipulation tied to his firm's 2021 collapse.

Vertical farming startup Oishii raises \$150M in funding; company is best known for growing strawberries in its New Jersey vertical farm.

Politics & World Affairs

House Speaker Mike Johnson (R, LA-4) announces policy requiring people to use Capitol bathrooms aligned with their biological sex; decision follows election of first openly transgender Congress member.

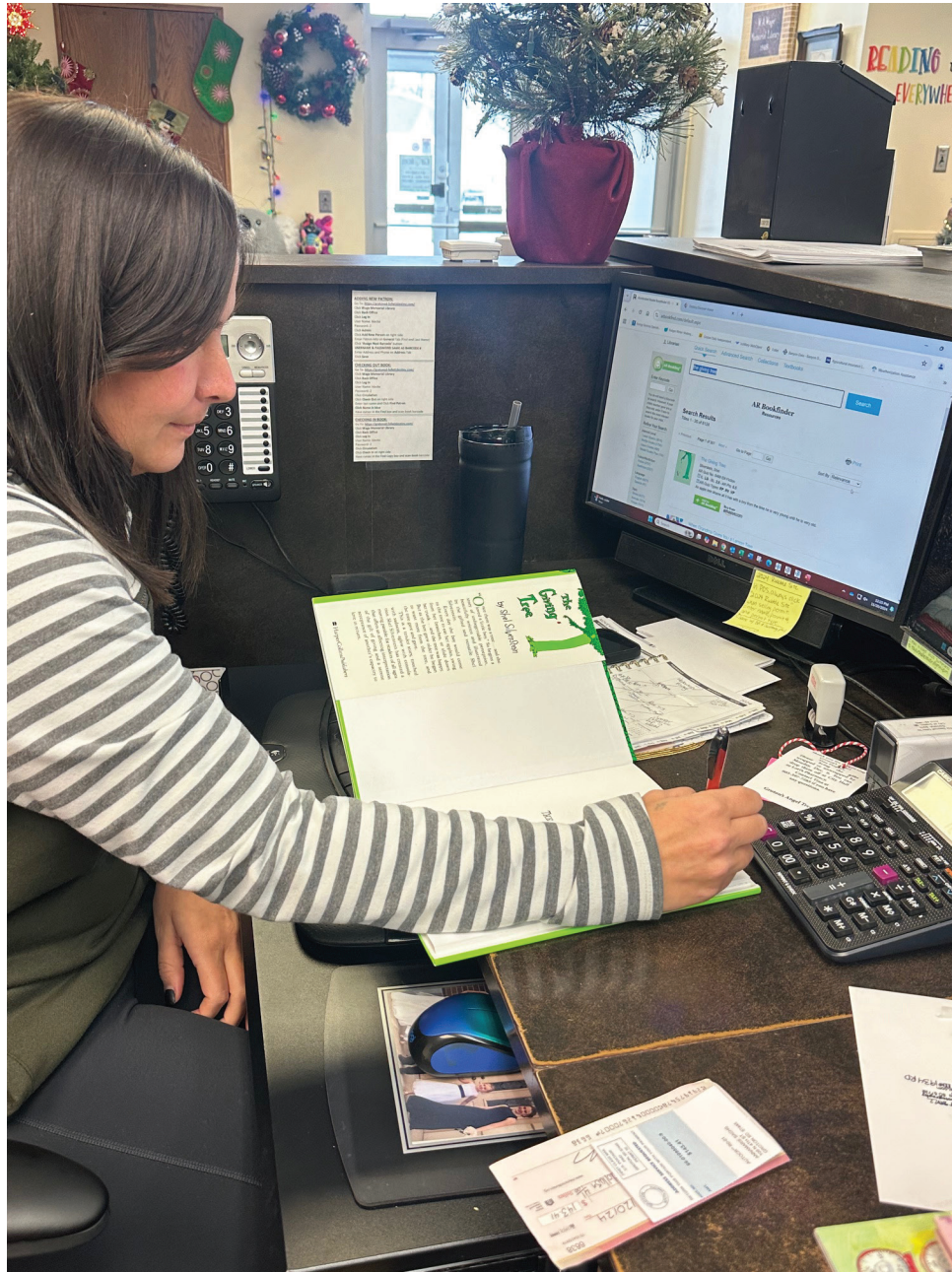
Senate Judiciary Committee requests FBI files on since-dropped investigation into attorney general pick Matt Gaetz (R); House Ethics Committee defers decision on releasing their report.

President-elect Donald Trump selects former acting attorney general Matthew Whitaker to serve as ambassador to NATO.

Board denies parole to Susan Smith, convicted in the 1994 murders of her children; case gained world-wide attention alongside OJ Simpson trial, with Smith originally pinning the murders on a Black gunman.

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Librarian Kellie Locke is taking the guess work out of Accelerated Reading Books at the Wage Memorial Library. She has gone through all the children's books and has put down on the front inside cover the book level, AR points and AR quiz. (Photo

by Paul Kosel)

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Thanksgiving boxes on the way



Karyn Babcock and Torre Raap organize food into piles to ensure every family gets the appropriate items. Items were delivered to over five dozen families in Groton. (Photo courtesy April Abeln)



Jerry Wieseler, Kroy Kahli and Tom Woods add fliers to food bags letting families know of pantry and Common Cents hours as well as information on the Groton Community Thanksgiving. (Photo courtesy April Abeln)



Carol Wieseler, Denise Raap, and Ruby Larson take a look at the menu to ensure all items are packed for local families. (Photo courtesy April Abeln)



Wednesday morning, Enrich Groton volunteers and several members of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church organized and packed food to be delivered to local families for the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday.

Pictured in the group photo: Diane Warrington, Denise Raap, Ruby Larson, Torre Raap, April Abeln, Topper Tastad, Karyn Babcock, Kroy Khali, Jerry Wieseler, Carol Wieseler, Pam Heiser, and Tom Woods

If your family would like to be included in future food deliveries or if you are interested in volunteering, please reach out to Diane (605) 216-2350, Nancy (605) 397-7097, or April at City Hall (605) 397-8422, or via email city.april@nvc.net (Photo courtesy April Abeln)

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Legions hosts Annual Turkey Party



A good size crowd attended the Groton American Legion annual turkey party held Saturday night. The event is a fundraiser that the Legion uses the funds to help support community activities. (Photos by Bruce Babcock)



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Groton Auxiliary members served supper. L-R Addison and Michelle Everson. (Photo by Bruce Babcock)



Legion Auxiliary members Jan Siebel and Tami Zimney take a much deserved break. (Photo by Bruce Babcock)



Legion member Ben Smith assists Topper Tastad in the Chuck-O-Luck game. (Photo by Bruce Babcock)

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Legion members Bruce Babcock and Aaron Grant run the horse races. (Photo by Bruce Babcock)



Both young and old attended the annual Groton American Legion Turkey party last Saturday evening in the newly remodeled Legion Hall. (Photo by Bruce Babcock)



Delbert Hinkelman did a great job as announcer of the paddle wheel raffles. (Photo by Bruce Babcock)



Press

Navigating the future of obesity care: Insights on modern anti-obesity medications

An excerpt from The Mayo Clinic Diet: Weight-Loss Medications Edition A healthy-eating and prescription medicine program to help you lose excess pounds

By Mayo Clinic Press Editors

Do you have questions about diet or weight-loss medications? Find the answers in the Mayo Clinic Diet: Weight-Loss Medications Edition, by Donald D. Hensrud, M.D., M.P.H., Andres J. Acosta, M.D., Ph.D., and Tara M. Schmidt, M.Ed., RDN. This book has a strong focus on weight-loss medications, a rapidly changing landscape where reliable facts from a trusted source are key to decision-making. Throughout the book, Mayo Clinic experts answer questions regarding several topics related to diet and weight-loss medications such as in the following excerpt about anti-obesity medication and the future of obesity care.

Anti-obesity medications and the future of obesity care: Questions and answers with Andres J. Acosta, M.D., Ph.D., Internal Medicine

Q: How do current weight-loss medications compare with drugs from the late 1990s, such as fenfluramine-phentermine ("fen-phen"), dexfenfluramine (Redux) and sibutramine (Meridia)? Some of these older drugs, which were approved by the FDA, were recalled because of serious side effects. How safe are the new ones approved for weight loss, such as semaglutide (Wegovy) and phentermine-topiramate (Qsymia)?

A: The newer anti-obesity medications such as semaglutide and phentermine-topiramate have completed a rigorous process guided by the FDA to prove their safety, which is most important and the FDA's priority. The FDA will continue to monitor anti-obesity medications, as it monitors all medications, for potential side effects not seen in clinical trials. Thus far, in clinical trials and real-world experience, these medications are safe with only rare serious side effects. Common side effects include nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

Q: There are lots of ads online for alternative weight-loss medications that you can get for much less and without a prescription. Are these just generic versions of the prescription medications? Are they safe to take?

A: The field of nutrition, and especially weight loss, is full of snake oils and baseless offers. Unfortunately, most of them claim to have "evidence," "science" or "studies." Be careful. The majority are not evidence based, or their evidence is not well supported. For that reason, our program recommends only medications that use the name, formulation, brand and package recommended by the FDA. There are no generic or compounded versions of these medications.

There are two important reasons to avoid alternative weight-loss medications. First, there is no control of their quality, so you may be spending a lot of money for an untested "water" or "placebo" injection. Second, these alternative drugs may have serious side effects, unknown to the FDA and not reported in studies.

Q: In social media, people are talking a lot about the side effects of Wegovy, Saxenda and other drugs used for weight loss. Are common gastrointestinal side effects simply a part of how these drugs work to help a person lose weight?

A: Unfortunately, yes. These drugs, known as GLP-1 agonists, work by slowing down your stomach and making you feel full. Researchers are trying to figure out whether these two effects are connected or independent. Nonetheless, when you feel overly full, you are likely to feel nauseated and even get sick. These effects are all on the spectrum of fullness and excessive fullness. For that reason, it's important to eat less to avoid excessive fullness.

Q: Are current weight-loss medications appropriate for people with a BMI lower than 27 and no other conditions?

A: No. The FDA approved these medications for people with a BMI greater than 30 or a BMI greater than 27 with obesity-related diseases, such as diabetes or hypertension.

Q: What happens if you stop taking a prescription weight-loss drug such as Wegovy?

A: The studies have shown that you will likely regain weight if you did not adopt lifestyle changes. For that reason, work with your healthcare team to prevent weight regain if you decide to stop taking medication.

Q: What do you see in the future for obesity care?

A: The future of obesity care is precision medicine for obesity. I see a future in which the right intervention is selected for the right patient, minimizing side effects and optimizing outcomes. Our goal is to reduce trial and error. We have made great progress with our phenotyping approach, but a lot more needs to be done.

An excerpt from Mayo Clinic Diet: Weight-Loss Medications Edition, by Donald D. Hensrud, M.D., M.P.H., Andres J. Acosta, M.D., Ph.D., and Tara M. Schmidt, M.Ed., RDN.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

\$50 million for Native American mortgages is on track for approval, US senator says

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - NOVEMBER 20, 2024 5:57 PM

U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds, R-South Dakota, is confident that bipartisan legislation to help low-income Native Americans obtain home mortgages on tribal land will win approval from Congress.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture offers low-interest housing loans to low-income rural Americans, often without private mortgage insurance or a down payment. But the department struggled for years to distribute its rural housing loans to Native Americans on tribal trust lands.

Trust lands are held by the federal government for tribes and tribal members, making mortgages on trust land more complex and less appealing to traditional banks.

That's where Native Community Development Financial Institutions come in. The institutions represent rural reservation and urban Native communities, and are better able to navigate lending on trust land for the USDA program and other housing loans while also investing more time in their communities through financial and homebuyer education.

The USDA expanded its rural housing relending program to include Native institutions in 2018, starting with a pilot program on the Pine Ridge and Cheyenne River reservations. Since then, the program has expanded to 10 states with over \$20.1 million loaned to Native organizations.

The bill, introduced by Minnesota's Democratic Sen. Tina Smith and cosponsored by Rounds, would set aside \$50 million annually within the USDA's relending program for Native financial institutions and homebuyers.

Rounds said Native institutions on Pine Ridge and Cheyenne River made the pilot program a "real success." "They knew the right people to go to, they knew how to have that happen," Rounds told South Dakota Searchlight after a recent appearance at the Downtown Sioux Falls Rotary Club. "And what we found was that once it had occurred there, it was repeatable elsewhere."

Nikki Gronli, state director of USDA Rural Development, said the bipartisan bill will solidify the program and support her office's mission to make "thriving, economically sustainable communities."

"We all know that when it comes to economic development and generational wealth, owning a home is very important," Gronli said. "Economically, we know over time this builds a stronger community."

She added some homes purchased through the program are constructed through the Governor's House



U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds speaks during a fireside chat with former Gov. Dennis Daugaard at a Downtown Sioux Falls Rotary event on Oct. 28, 2024.

(Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

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program.

Cheyenne River's Four Bands Community Fund and Pine Ridge's Mazaska Owescaso Otipi Financial have received a combined \$7.1 million from the program and have made a combined total of 24 loans.

"People want to get out of rentals, create assets, have something to pass down," said Lakota Vogel, executive director of Four Bands.

Vogel wants to buck the stereotype that low homeownership rates on reservations are because of poor credit scores or because community members don't make enough income to support a mortgage. Even people who can afford private mortgages struggle to obtain them, she said, because of systemic problems that make it more complex and burdensome to leverage private wealth on trust land.

"There's been misinformation in the financing world that you can't collateralize trust land. I've seen it written in papers and listened to bankers say it, and it's just not true," Vogel said.

While Vogel sees a permanently funded program as a "win-win" for Native communities and the federal government, she said rising housing costs have made it more difficult for the program to help qualifying people.

The legislation awaits action by the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs, which includes Rounds and Smith as members.

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

Rail board sends \$12.6 million to Mitchell area to support \$500 million soy processing plant

BY: JOHN HULT - NOVEMBER 20, 2024 4:11 PM



Mike Scully harvests soybeans at Scully Family Farms in Spencer, Indiana, on Sept. 29, 2022. (USDA

Natural Resources Conservation Service photo by Brandon O'Connor)

The South Dakota Railroad Board voted Wednesday to send \$12.6 million to the Davison Regional Rail Authority for upgrades to service the state's largest soybean processing facility.

The \$504 million High Plains Processing plant 2 miles south of Mitchell broke ground about a year ago. The South Dakota Soybean Processors-led project is designed to help meet demand for soybean feed for livestock and for soy-based biofuels.

The Davison County Commission dedicated \$21 million in financing in 2023 through a tax increment financing deal that the company will pay back through new and higher property tax revenues.

The Governor's Office of Economic Development also chipped in funding, to the tune of \$6.7 million. The plant is expected to process 35 million bushels of beans a year, produce 570,000 tons of seed meal

and 300,000 tons of oil and employ 85 people.

The new funding will flow to the Davison rail authority, and will be used to build out 6.2 miles of rail line,

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22 industrial turnouts and two mainline turnouts for trains to switch tracks. The new rail infrastructure is expected to service 147 rail cars a week, according to the project application submitted to the Railroad Board. Unit trains with 100 or more cars will move through once or twice a month, the application says.

The money will come from the State Rail Trust Fund. The application notes that while there are several private investors for the plant itself, there are none for the rail lines needed to service it.

Shipping by rail, the project's application says, will keep 30,000 long-haul trucks off the road each year, though project backers told the board that truck traffic would spike in the immediate area as farmers bring crops to the facility.

Rail Board Member Greg Carmen of Brandon recused himself from the discussion and decision on the rail funding because he's an investor in High Plains.

Tom Kersting of South Dakota Soybean Processors told the board the processing plant will be a boon to economic growth, and that the plant could be up and running in October of 2025.

He noted that the plant might also process crops like sunflower, camelina and canola, which can be more easily grown on the west side of the state.

"We could also consider some of these new, novel oilseed energy crops," Kersting said. "Some of those crops can be grown in the poorer ground out west."

The Davison Regional Rail Authority was created in August to service the project, but High Plains will sign the promissory note on the loan. Project backers had hoped to secure a \$16 million loan, but Transportation Secretary Joel Jundt told the board that the rail fund has about \$35 million at the moment, with \$10.8 million in funding needs already identified. There are another \$15 million or so in potential projects that might seek grant funding soon, he said.

If a rail bridge were to collapse, Jundt said, the board might see a loan application to cover the rebuilding.

"I would caution you to, in essence, not loan out everything we have so we'll be able to handle some of those emergencies in the future," Jundt said.

The board agreed, voting to approve a \$12.6 million amount for the loan, with a 2.95% interest rate.

Previously, the largest-ever loan from the fund was \$7 million in 2007, Jundt said.

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

Abortion bans could reverse decline in teen births, experts warn **Trump administration policies could further limit abortion and contraception access for teens**

BY: NADA HASSANEIN, STATELINE - NOVEMBER 20, 2024 9:30 AM

Houston OB-GYN Dr. Hillary Boswell says she has seen how abortion bans affect teenage girls: More of them are carrying their pregnancies to term.

"These are vulnerable girls, and it's just heartbreaking to see the number of pregnant 13-year-olds I've had to take care of," Boswell said, referring to the change since Texas prohibited abortions after six weeks in September 2021. In June 2022, after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade, Texas enacted a total abortion ban.

"They would come in, and they would be very distressed," said Boswell, who spent the past decade treating underserved women and girls at community health clinics. Not being able to help them get an abortion when they wanted one, she said, "was so hard — and so against everything that I trained for."

In the year after Texas began implementing its six-week abortion ban, teen fertility rates in the state rose for the first time in 15 years, according to a study released earlier this year by the University of Houston.

Overall, the increase in teen fertility in Texas was slight: only 0.39%. But the University of Houston researchers said the change was significant, because it reversed a 15-year trend and because the national teen fertility rate declined during the same period. They also noted that the increases were larger for

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Hispanic teens (1.2%) and Black teens (0.5%), while the rate for white teens declined by 0.5%.

So far, the Texas data is the first evidence that abortion bans might lead to an increase in teen births. But as abortion restrictions have spread post-Roe — 13 states now have total bans — some providers and other experts predict that other states will see increases. If so, the nation's nearly 30-year trend of declining teen births could be in jeopardy.

Boswell and other providers note that teens are having a harder time accessing contraception and abortions — and they fear the incoming Trump administration could make it even more challenging for teens, whose pregnancies are riskier and who disproportionately sought abortions before the Supreme Court overturned Roe.

"In a lot of ways, Texas is sort of a microcosm of what we're going to see in other parts of the country," said Dr. Bianca Allison, a pediatrician and assistant professor at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine. "Historically, it has always felt like young people — those who are minors but of reproductive potential — are left out of the conversation of reproductive autonomy and rights."



Students wait for a bus outside Lane Tech College Prep High School in Chicago. Teen birth rates have been falling for decades, but abortion bans threaten to undo that progress, experts say. (Scott Olson/Getty Images)

Access to pills

People seeking abortions have been relying on the broader availability of telehealth for medication abortions, which now account for nearly two-thirds of all abortions. The number of abortions in the U.S. has increased since the fall of Roe, largely because more people are using the easier-to-access method, according to the Society of Family Planning.

But the Trump administration could make it harder to procure the pills by reversing a current U.S. Food and Drug Administration policy that allows them to be sent through the mail. Some anti-abortion groups want the Trump administration to enforce the Comstock Act, a long-dormant 1873 law they believe could be used to make it a federal crime to send or receive abortion medication.

States also could require in-person physician visits for abortion medication, effectively barring patients from accessing it via telemedicine.

And Louisiana last month began classifying mifepristone and misoprostol — the two medications used in nonsurgical abortions — as controlled substances, making it a crime to possess them without a prescription. A Texas state lawmaker has proposed similar legislation in his state.

"I would absolutely predict that we will see a reversal in our progress of reducing teen pregnancies," said developmental psychologist Julie Maslowsky, an associate professor at the University of Michigan who studies adolescent reproductive and sexual health.

"If someone does not want to be pregnant, they should have all the options available to them to prevent pregnancy," Maslowsky said. "And the majority of teens do not desire a pregnancy."

Teenage girls tend to have less money, less access to transportation and less independence than adult women. That makes it harder for them to cross state lines for abortion care, or to obtain and pay for

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abortion medication. A medication abortion can cost as much as \$800, according to Planned Parenthood.

Many teens have trouble ordering abortion medication online because they don't have credit or debit cards or a safe place where the pills can be mailed, said Rosann Mariappuram, senior reproductive rights policy counsel at the State Innovation Exchange, a nonprofit that advocates for progressive policies. Abortion funds that help people who can't afford the care have been struggling to keep up with demand.

Thirty-six states require parental consent or notification before a minor can get an abortion, creating another barrier. And teens are more likely to have irregular menstrual cycles, which makes them less likely to notice a missed period. Overall, about a fourth of women might not realize they're pregnant at six weeks, which is the gestational time limit for abortions in Florida, Georgia, Iowa and South Carolina.

In addition, a law in Texas that went into effect in April mandates that family planning clinics get parental consent for minors seeking birth control. Lawmakers in Oklahoma and Indiana have argued that IUDs and emergency contraceptives are types of abortions, and thus should not be covered by insurance or shouldn't be available, said Mariappuram.

"That conflation of contraceptives with abortion care is just evidence that they're coming for contraception," she said.

Health risks, diminished prospects

Teenage girls from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to become pregnant. There have been persistent racial disparities in the national teen birth rate, with rates at least twice as high among Black, Hispanic and Native American girls. And while the average age of a girl's first menstrual period has been declining for all girls, the trend is particularly pronounced among racial minorities.

"These downstream impacts [of abortion restrictions] are not the same for everyone," said Mayra Pineda-Torres, an assistant professor of economics at Georgia Tech who specializes in gender and inequality. "The reality is that, still, there is a racial component here that may be exacerbating racial inequalities or this inability to access abortion services."

Teenage motherhood often derails a girl's education and diminishes her long-term financial prospects. And pregnancy poses particular health risks for teens: They are more likely to experience serious complications, including blood pressure-related disorders such as preeclampsia, and their babies are more likely to be born underweight. For those reasons, the American Academy of Pediatrics says teens should have access to legal abortion care.

But to abortion opponents, teen pregnancies and births are preferable to teen abortions. Joe Pojman, founder and executive director of the Texas Alliance for Life, said the state has programs designed to help families, including teen parents, take care of their children.

"[The program] teaches them a variety of things, like how to manage a budget, how to apply for a job, how to basically make that child self-sufficient to be able to function," Pojman told Stateline.

"We don't want to encourage a child to be responsible for taking the life of her own unborn child," he said.

Last month, Missouri Attorney General Andrew Bailey filed a lawsuit with fellow Republican attorneys general in Kansas and Idaho that asked a Texas judge to order the FDA to reinstate restrictions on mifepristone. They argued that lower teen birth rates harmed their states by shrinking their population, costing them federal money and congressional representation.

But some studies suggest the opposite. The federal government cites research showing that teen pregnancy costs taxpayers about \$11 billion per year because it leads to more public spending on health care, foster care, incarceration rates of teen parents' children, and lower education and income.

"Pregnancy is not benign," said Allison, the North Carolina pediatrician. "It's not a joyful, welcome thing for a lot of people across the country."

Nada Hassanein is a health care reporter for Stateline with a focus on inequities.

U.S. appeals court hears Summit case against Shelby and Story counties

BY: CAMI KOONS, IOWA CAPITAL DISPATCH - NOVEMBER 20, 2024 6:26 PM

Judges in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit heard oral arguments Wednesday in Omaha for cases between Iowa counties and Summit Carbon Solutions, an Iowa-based company seeking to build a 2,000-mile carbon sequestration pipeline.

Shelby County and Story County had enacted county ordinances stipulating the proximity of hazardous liquid pipelines to residences and on providing emergency response plans in the event of a pipeline rupture.

Summit sued the counties in 2022, arguing that federal safety standards from the Pipeline Safety Act preempt local ordinances.

A federal judge in the Southern District of Iowa ruled in favor of Summit in December 2023, and the counties appealed the judge's decision.

The counties argued they could make these regulations because the Department of Transportation, under the federal Pipeline Safety Act, was not granted permission to regulate the location or route of a pipeline.

Sherri Webb traveled to Omaha for the oral arguments from Shelby County, she said, because she felt her county did its job in enacting the ordinance to protect the land, the people and its character.

"Why couldn't they have done another route?" Webb said and noted she was concerned about erosion to her grandmother's land. "We're trying to save her land from being ruined."

Does location equal safety?

Jason Craig argued on behalf of the counties on Wednesday at the Roman L. Hruska Federal Courthouse. "The district court erred and should be reversed because local land use regulations, zoning regulations, are not preempted safety standards under the Pipeline Safety Act," Craig argued.

Judge Duane Benton questioned Craig, and pointed out that the Shelby County ordinance notes safety risk "at length."

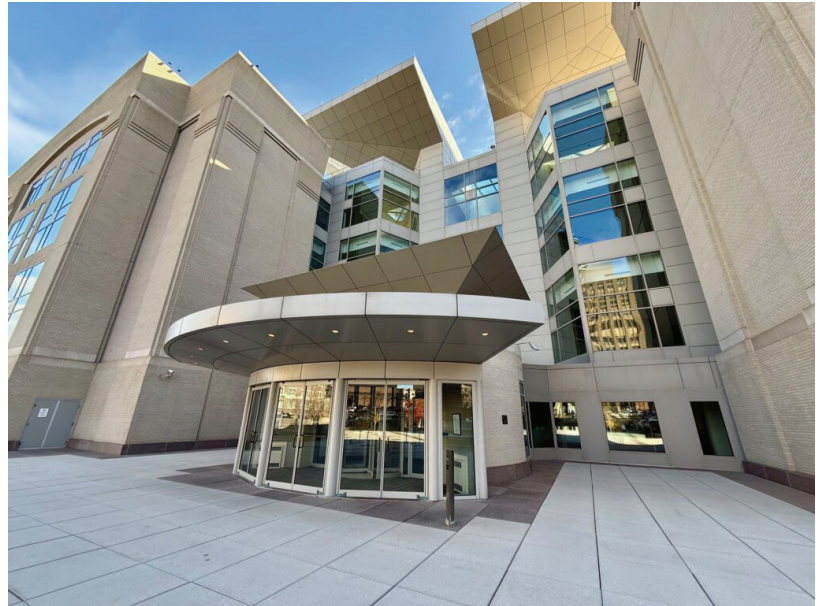
"Admittedly, safety was one concern – I think safety is part of any zoning decision," Craig said. "But that doesn't turn it into a preempted standard."

Craig said the thickness of a pipe, or the "actual design and construction of the pipeline" would be safety standards with federal oversight. The county ordinances pertained to the location of the pipeline, not how it would be constructed.

"Summit is asking this court to basically expand the scope of the version of a preemption clause to hold that any local law that's concerned with safety is preempted," Craig said.

Ryan Koopmans gave oral arguments on behalf of Summit Carbon Solutions. He argued the ordinances set by the counties were concerned with safety and should be preempted by federal laws.

"In this case, the setback requirements and other provisions are clearly safety standards," Koopmans said. Koopmans argued that the provision in the Pipeline Safety Act that says the U.S. Department of Trans-



The Roman L. Hruska Federal Courthouse in Omaha, where the Eighth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals held its hearing on the pipeline cases on Wednesday.

(Photo by Aaron Sanderford/Nebraska Examiner)

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portation cannot regulate location and routing, is "not a preemption savings clause."

Judge Jane Kelly said Koopmans' argument "makes sense" and that just because something affects location, "doesn't necessarily mean" it's not a safety standard. But she wondered whether there's a difference between a safety standard and a safety concern from a county.

"It's difficult to think of a local ordinance, like a zoning ordinance, that doesn't have safety baked into it," Kelly said.

Koopmans said there is no difference between a safety standard and a safety concern, and that the counties "have offered no other justification other than safety" for a 1,000-foot setback of the pipeline.

He gave an example that if the state made the argument it didn't want any above-ground pipelines so people could continue farming that land, it would be an economic regulation, not a safety regulation. A safety regulation, Koopmans explained, would be if the state said it wouldn't allow above-ground pipelines because they were unsafe.

"Is there any logical justification for 1,000-foot setback from a farmhouse in the middle of the county, other than safety?" Koopmans said.

Later, Benton questioned that same farmhouse-in-the-middle-of-nowhere example, saying if the resident farmed there, it could be a situation of economic development concerns.

"Farming is economic development in Iowa, isn't it?" Benton asked.

"It is, and you can farm overtop of the pipeline," Koopmans replied.

The Shelby County ordinance specifies a 1,000-foot setback from all residences, based on a public health position statement from the county's board of health.

"They admit it," Koopmans said when asked if it was necessary to look at the county supervisors' intent.

Who can set the standards?

Of interest to the court was an Iowa Supreme Court ruling, *Goodell v. Humboldt County*, that upheld state preemption over county ordinances.

Benton said he believes the case "settles that" against Craig's argument that counties have "broad authority to act" unless "expressly limited" by the Legislature.

"The statute says the authority to approve location, route of hazardous pipelines is to the Iowa Utilities Board, and ... gives them the just and proper discretion as to that," Benton said.

Craig argued the *Goodell* ruling pertained to county ordinances that created "direct conflicts" that were "irreconcilable" with state statute, which he said is different from the counties in this case that imposed additional requirements.

Koopmans argued the Iowa Supreme Court decision shows that a "county permitting scheme that sets any different standards" from state issued permits, would be preempted by the state.

Kelly asked if Summit had to show the Iowa Utilities Commission (referred to throughout the case as the Iowa Utilities Board, its former name) that its route was in compliance with all of these county ordinances, when the company applied for its permit.

Craig said "that's exactly what they're required to do."

Koopmans argued, pulling from the Iowa Utilities Commission approval of Summit's permit application, that the company had to show the commission how the project would "interact with the present and future land use and zoning, not necessarily how it complies."

Koopmans pointed again to the commission's approval of the permit, and said the commission moved some of the company's proposed routes through Shelby County to locations that "conflict with the ordinance."

Craig, in his rebuttal, said it was a "fool's errand" to "inquire into the motives" of state law.

"The question is: is it a preempted safety standard ... or is it a location and routing regulation?" Craig said. "And the zoning ordinances are location routing regulations."

Judges said a decision would be issued in "due course."

Summit is also waiting decisions on other pending lawsuits including one against landowners, heard in October by the Iowa Supreme Court, and it recently filed a similar lawsuit against Bremer County for its

ordinances.

Per the Iowa Utilities Commission, Summit cannot begin construction on the pipeline in Iowa until it has received permit approval from North Dakota and South Dakota. The company received approval from North Dakota Nov. 15 and resubmitted its application in South Dakota Tuesday.

Aaron Sanderford, a reporter for the Nebraska Examiner, contributed to this article.

Cami Koons is an Iowa Capital Dispatch reporter covering agriculture and the environment. She previously worked at publications in Kansas and Missouri, covering rural affairs.

U.S. House ethics panel Republicans vote against disclosure of Gaetz report

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - NOVEMBER 20, 2024 6:02 PM

WASHINGTON — Republicans on a U.S. House ethics panel Wednesday opposed the public release of a long-awaited report on Matt Gaetz, a former House member who is now the nominee for U.S. attorney general, according to the panel's top Democrat, Susan Wild.

The outgoing Pennsylvania congresswoman told reporters that the evenly divided 10-member House Committee on Ethics took a vote but split along party lines. The report contains findings on whether Gaetz engaged in sexual misconduct and illicit drug use, among other allegations involving gifts and privileges.

President-elect Donald Trump's announcement last week that he intends to nominate Gaetz to the nation's highest law enforcement position set off a maelstrom on Capitol Hill over whether the ethics panel should release its report after Gaetz abruptly resigned his Florida seat, effectively halting the probe.

Ethics Committee Chair Michael Guest said after the lengthy closed-door meeting that "there was not an agreement by the committee to release the report."

Guest, a Mississippi Republican, told reporters the panel would meet again but did not provide details.

Wild vehemently disputed Guest's statement to a group of reporters shortly afterward, calling it "inaccurate."

"I do not want the American public or anyone else to think that Mr. Guest's characterization of what transpired today would be some sort of indication that the committee had unanimity or consensus on this issue," Wild said.



Former U.S. Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., left, President-elect Donald Trump's pick to be attorney general, walks alongside Vice President-elect J.D. Vance as they arrive for meetings with senators at the U.S. Capitol on Nov. 20, 2024 in Washington, D.C. (Photo by Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images)

Committee inquiry since 2021

Gaetz, who denies all allegations, has been under the committee probe since April 2021. The former congressman was also investigated by the Department of Justice for sex trafficking but was never charged.

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ABC News reported Wednesday that it obtained financial records reviewed by the Ethics Committee showing that Gaetz paid two women, who were later witnesses in both the ethics and Justice Department probes, roughly \$10,000 between 2017 and 2019.

An attorney for one woman who testified before the committee told NBC News Friday that his client witnessed Gaetz having sex with a minor at an Orlando house party.

House Democrats urged the ethics panel to release the report. Democratic Reps. Steve Cohen of Tennessee and Sean Casten of Illinois introduced resolutions on the House floor late Wednesday to force the panel to release its findings.

Several Democrats wrote Tuesday to Guest and Wild that "there is precedent for the House and Senate ethics committees to continue their investigations and release findings after a member has resigned in a scandal."

"Given the seriousness of the charges against Representative Gaetz, withholding the findings of your investigation may jeopardize the Senate's ability to provide fully informed, constitutionally required advice and consent regarding this nomination," the lawmakers wrote in the letter led by Casten and signed by dozens of others.

The nomination for U.S. attorney general requires vetting by the Senate Committee on the Judiciary and a favorable confirmation vote on the Senate floor. Republicans will gain control of the chamber in January.

Vance accompanies Gaetz to meetings

On the other side of the Capitol, Vice President-elect J.D. Vance ushered Gaetz to private meetings with Senate Republicans.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, the Senate Judiciary Committee's ranking member, released a statement Wednesday morning following his "very good meeting" with Gaetz.

"This process will not be a rubber stamp nor will it be driven by a lynch mob," the South Carolina Republican said. "My record is clear. I tend to defer to presidential Cabinet choices unless the evidence suggests disqualification. I fear the process surrounding the Gaetz nomination is turning into an angry mob, and unverified allegations are being treated as if they are true."

A half hour before his meeting with Vance and Gaetz, GOP Sen. John Kennedy of Louisiana told reporters the House should "follow the rules" regarding releasing the Gaetz ethics findings.

"Now I don't know exactly what the House rules are. I'm told that if a member resigns, the report is not made public, but I also have read there have been exceptions to that. So the short answer is, I don't know," said Kennedy, a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

"Having said that, the Judiciary Committee staff properly vets all of our nominees, and it's been my experience in Washington that this place leaks like a wet paper bag," Kennedy continued. "So I would assume that anything that's out there will likely be made public. I'm not predicting that, but I'm not gonna faint with surprise if that happens."

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 Speaker Johnson bans trans women from women's bathrooms at the Capitol

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - NOVEMBER 20, 2024 3:09 PM

Transgender women will not be permitted to use women's restrooms in parts of the U.S. Capitol complex, House Speaker Mike Johnson said Wednesday, following some House Republicans' targeting of the first openly trans person to win a congressional election.

The three-sentence Johnson statement said public, single-sex facilities could be used only by "individuals of that biological sex." It did not mention how the directive would be enforced.

"All single-sex facilities in the Capitol and House Office Buildings — such as restrooms, changing rooms, and locker rooms — are reserved for individuals of that biological sex," Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, said.

"It is important to note that each Member office has its own private restroom, and unisex restrooms are available throughout the Capitol. Women deserve women's only spaces," he said, highlighting his objection to identifying trans women according to their gender identity.

There was no immediate reaction from most House Democrats, including leadership, but Rep. Mark Pocan questioned how the order would be policed.

"Will the Sergeant at Arms post officers in bathrooms?" asked Pocan, a Wisconsin Democrat, in a statement to States Newsroom. "Will everyone who works at the Capitol have to carry around their birth certificate or undergo a genetic test? This policy isn't going to protect anyone—but it is going to open the door to rampant abuse, harassment, and discrimination in the Capitol."



Speaker of the House Mike Johnson, R-La., on Wednesday issued an order banning transgender women from using women's bathrooms in some parts of the U.S. Capitol. In this photo, Johnson, right, answers questions during a press conference with Republican leadership on Capitol Hill on Sept. 18, 2024 in Washington, D.C. At left is Rep. Zach Nunn, R-Iowa. (Photo by Win McNamee/Getty Images)

Delaware lawmaker

The order is a response to the election this month of Rep.-elect Sarah McBride, a Delaware Democrat who will become the first openly trans member of Congress.

As Congress returned to Washington this week, a vocal portion of the House Republican Conference objected to McBride's gender identity and asked Johnson to constrict her bathroom usage.

South Carolina's Nancy Mace introduced a resolution Monday with similar language to Johnson's order. She made clear in social media posts and interviews she was targeting McBride.

"This is a person who's threatened to come into women's private spaces," Mace said on Fox News Tuesday night. "I'm a survivor of rape, sexual violence and abuse and I know how deeply vulnerable women are in places where we feel we have a right to privacy."

While opponents of trans rights often argue that letting trans women access women's bathrooms puts cis women at risk, there is no evidence to suggest such access increases incidence of sexual assault.

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A 2019 Harvard University study found that barring trans teens from bathrooms that conform with their gender identity increased the likelihood of sexual assault of trans people.

McBride disagrees but will comply

In a Wednesday statement, McBride said she would comply with the order even though she disagrees with it.

The statement continued McBride's messaging on the issue that it reflected a misplaced focus by House Republicans on wedge issues that don't meaningfully impact people's lives.

"I'm not here to fight about bathrooms. I'm here to fight for Delawareans and to bring down costs facing families," she wrote. "This effort to distract from the real issues facing this country hasn't distracted me over the last several days."

As the tumult at the Capitol gained attention Tuesday, House Democrats, reportedly with input from McBride, also framed it as a distraction.

In a short X thread on Monday, McBride called the GOP efforts "a blatant distraction from the fact that they have no real solutions to what Americans are facing" and said she would continue to focus on "making the American dream more affordable and accessible."

House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries, a New York Democrat, said in brief comments at a Tuesday press conference that Republicans were trying to "bully" McBride.

Day of Remembrance

In a statement, former Houston Mayor Annise Parker, who leads the advocacy group LGBTQ+ Victory Institute, called Johnson's order and Mace's resolution "bigoted and transphobic policies at the Capitol" and noted Wednesday was Transgender Day of Remembrance.

"Announcing an ill-conceived anti-trans policy, on Transgender Day of Remembrance no less, not only serves to cause more distraction and division but is a harmful stunt with real impact," she said. "This policy will harm many dedicated employees who work in the Capitol and is short-sided and dangerous."

Some Democrats did post messages of support for Transgender Day of Remembrance that alluded to discrimination within the halls of Congress.

In a thread opposing a separate bill, the Equality Caucus' X account said Republicans were "focusing on attacking the queer community."

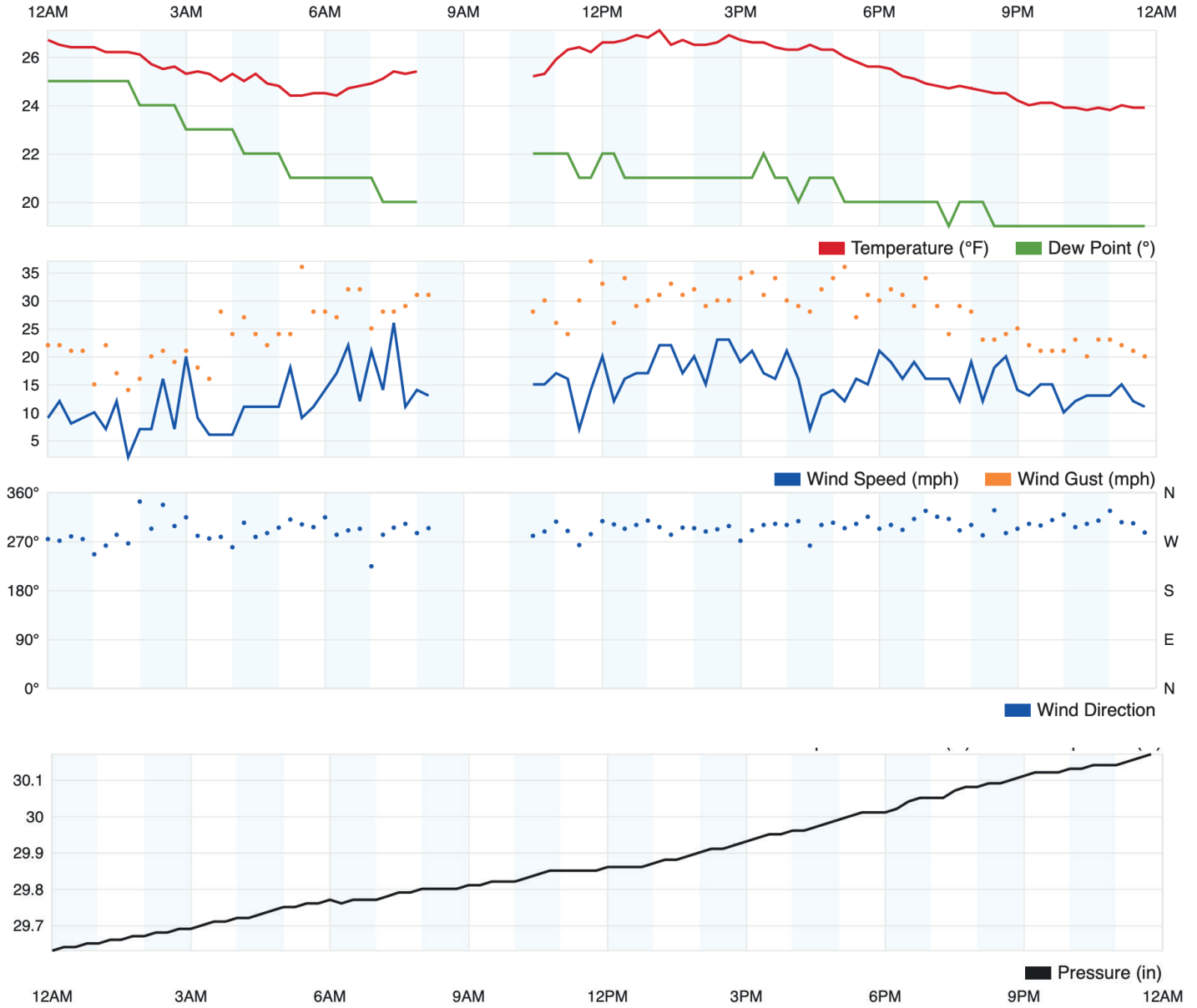
"Their obsession with performative stunts over actual solutions hurts Americans & benefits no one," one post read.

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 32 °F

Mostly Sunny

Tonight



Low: 14 °F

Partly Cloudy

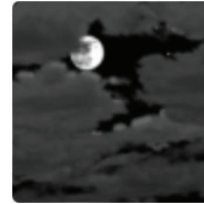
Friday



High: 32 °F

Mostly Sunny

Friday Night



Low: 17 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Saturday



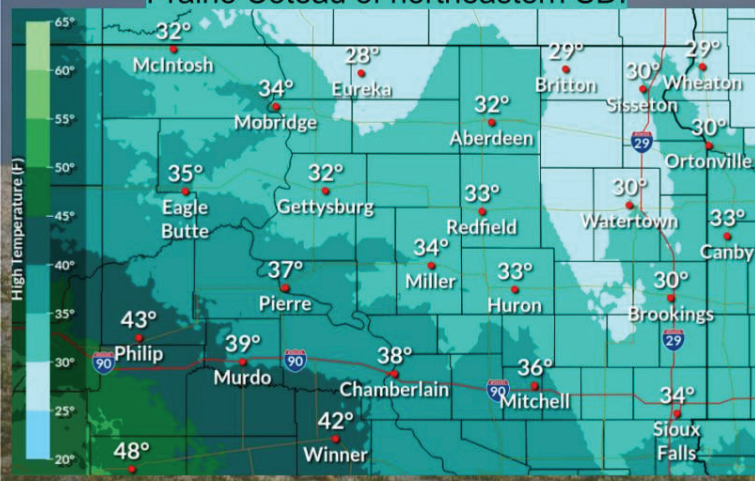
High: 33 °F

Mostly Cloudy


Today


Clouds decreasing over eastern SD through the day.

30s, except upper 20s over the Leola Hills and Prairie Coteau of northeastern SD.



Remaining Cool through at least next week!

 **Friday:** near 40° over central SD, otherwise in the 30s

 **Saturday:** 30s, except low 40s over south central SD

 **Sunday:** 30s

National Weather Service
weather.gov/abr Aberdeen, SD



Below normal temperatures will remain in place through at least next week! Expect highs in the 30s today, expect in the upper 20s over the Leola Hills and Prairie Coteau into west central Minnesota, where snow remains on the ground. Temperatures will rise into the 30s to near 40 degrees Friday through the weekend and stay mainly below freezing during the upcoming work week.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 27 °F at 12:38 PM

Low Temp: 24 °F at 10:08 PM

Wind: 39 mph at 7:52 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 19 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 65 in 1960

Record Low: -18 in 1964

Average High: 40

Average Low: 17

Average Precip in Nov.: 0.56

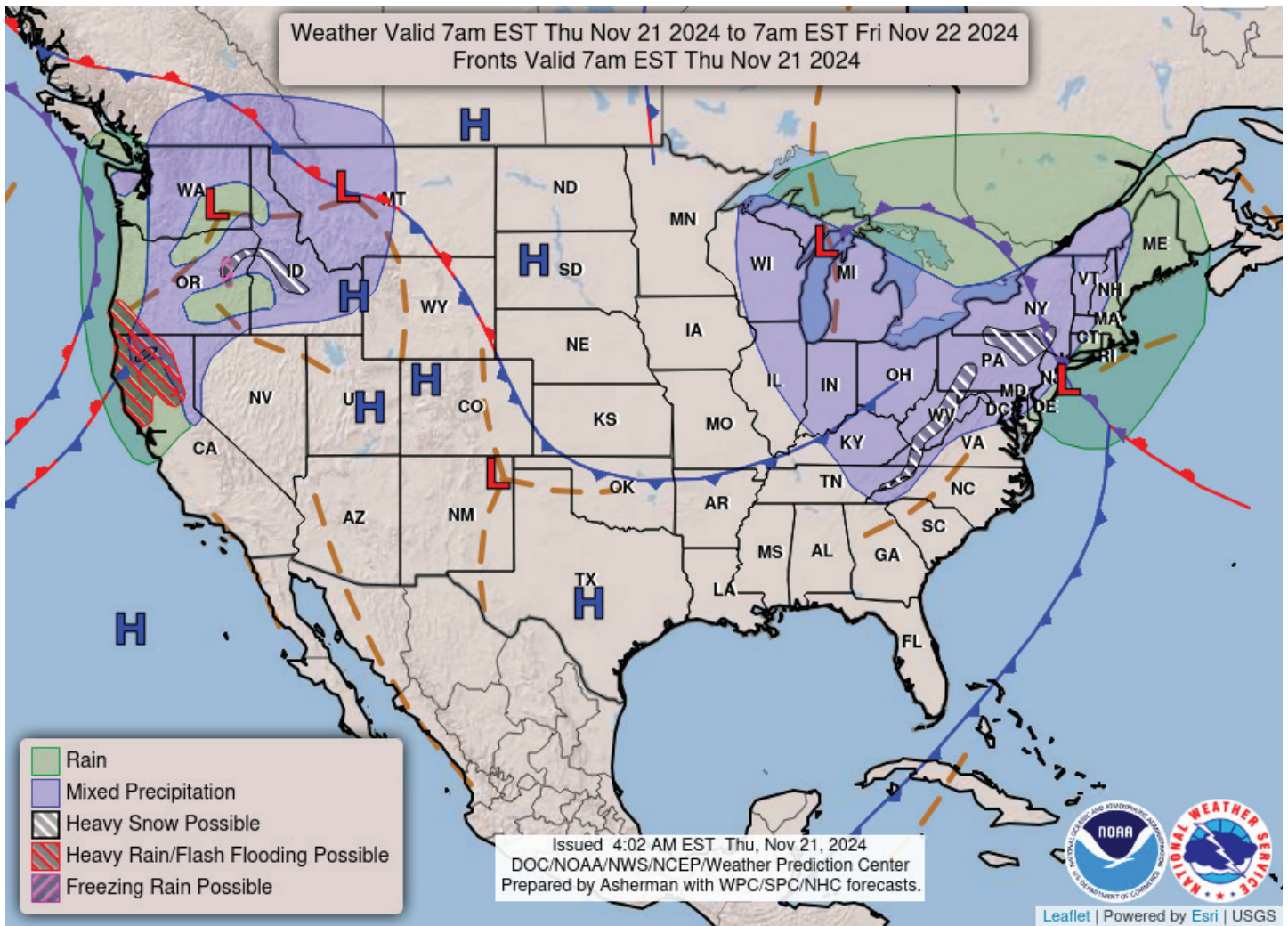
Precip to date in Nov.: 1.83

Average Precip to date: 21.03

Precip Year to Date: 21.71

Sunset Tonight: 4:58:09 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:40:02 am



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Today in Weather History

November 21, 1985: Winds gusting to over 40 mph caused blizzard conditions over the western and central parts of South Dakota on the 21st and 22nd. In addition to the existing snow cover, 1-2 inches of new snow fell and when blown by the wind, reduced visibilities to zero at times. Many roads were drifted shut by the blowing and drifting snow in the western part of the state.

November 21, 2003: Heavy snow of 6 to 10 inches fell from the late afternoon to the late evening hours of the 21st and into the early morning hours on the 22nd. Some snowfall amounts included 4 inches in Browns Valley, 2S Ashton, and Britton; 5 inches at Timber Lake, Blunt, 6 SE McIntosh, and Pollock; 6 inches at Clark, McLaughlin, 14 NNE Isabel, 17 WSW Fort Pierre and Miller; 7 inches at Castlewood, 1 W Highmore, and 4 NW Onida; and 8 inches north of Goodwin, at Ree Heights, at Eagle Butte, and near Troy. Thirteen inches of snow fell in Watertown.

1992: The November 21st – 23rd tornado outbreak was the 3rd largest outbreak in recorded history and one of the longest continuous outbreaks ever recorded. There was no break in tornado activity from 1:30 pm on the 21st when the tornadoes started in Texas until 7:30 am on the 23rd when the last tornadoes lifted in North Carolina. On this date, severe thunderstorms spawned six tornadoes within 70 minutes in the Houston metro area in Texas. At one time, there were three on the ground in Harris County. The strongest, an F4, tracked 20 miles through the eastern suburbs of Houston destroying 200 homes and damaging 1,000 more. In total, 23 tornadoes struck Mississippi and Alabama. An F4 tornado killed 12 people on a 128-mile track through 7 Mississippi counties. The deadliest tornado of 1992, an F4 tornado killed 12 people on a 128-mile path through 7 counties in Mississippi, one of the bodies was blown a quarter mile into a tree.

1798 - A four day storm was in progress in the northeastern U.S. The storm dropped a foot of snow on New York City and New Haven, and as much as three feet in Maine and New Hampshire. The snowstorm ushered in a long and severe winter, in some places the ground remained covered with snow until the following May. (David Ludlum)

1967 - Excessive rains in southern California caused the most severe flooding and the most damaging mud slides in 33 years. Downtown Los Angeles received eight inches of rain, and 14 inches fell in the mountains. (David Ludlum)

1985 - Hurricane Kate made landfall during the evening hours near Mexico Beach, FL. Wind gusts to 100 mph were reported at Cape San Blas FL. It was the latest known hurricane to hit the U.S. so far north. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Squalls in the Lower Great Lakes Region and the Upper Ohio Valley produced 14 inches of snow at Snowshoe WV, and nearly eight inches at Syracuse NY. Eleven cities in the eastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date. Record lows included 21 degrees at Pinson AL, 9 degrees at Syracuse NY, and 8 degrees at Binghamton NY. Gale force winds lash the Middle and Northern Atlantic Coast, and the strong northwesterly winds produced wind chill readings as cold as 30 degrees below zero. Winds gusting to 60 mph at Trumansburg NY toppled a chimney onto a nearby truck. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - High winds accompanied rain and snow in the northeastern U.S. Caribou ME received eight inches of snow in six hours, and Fort Kent ME was blanketed with a total of fourteen inches of snow. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - The storm which produced thunderstorms and high winds in the northeastern U.S. the previous day, produced snow and high winds in New England, with blizzard conditions reported in Maine. Winds gusted to 55 mph at Boston MA, and reached 58 mph at Augusta ME, and hurricane force winds were reported off the coast of Maine. Snowfall totals ranged up to 18 inches at Vanceboro ME, with 17 inches at South Lincoln VT. There were thirty-five storm-related injuries in Maine. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



ONE ANSWER

It was the first day in her new position as the secretary to the president. As she was being given her first task, she wanted to appear confident and competent.

Listening carefully he said to her, "These accounts that I am giving you are very important. They are the foundation of our income. I want you to go over each of them at least three times to make sure that all of the numbers are correct before you return them to me. Your results must be right!"

Working anxiously for quite some time, she finally completed her task. She went to him and handed him the results of her efforts. As he took the papers from her hands, she said, "Sir, I want you to know that I exceeded your expectations. I went over each page ten times, and there are ten different answers."

When asked the way to heaven and eternal life, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."

This statement in John's Gospel is one of the most basic and important passages in all of Scripture. If anyone anywhere wants to know the way to God and eternal life, this is the one and only answer. Jesus, with no hesitation, declared once and for all that He is the Way. Some may argue that this declaration and proclamation is too narrow. But in all reality, it is wide enough for anyone, anywhere to enter at any time.

Prayer: Thank You, Heavenly Father, for sending Your one and only Son into the world to become, if we choose, Our Savior and the Way to eternal life with You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6

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 1 Days 16 Hrs 56
DRAW: Mins 16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.20.24

11 17 25 38 47 9

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$15,670,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 11
DRAW: Mins 16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.20.24

3 29 30 39 45 13

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 26 Mins
DRAW: 16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.20.24

17 22 26 30 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$112,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 26
DRAW: Mins 16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.20.24

3 10 37 40 68 1

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 55
DRAW: Mins 16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.20.24

16 30 60 62 64 25

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$171,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 55
DRAW: Mins 16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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Upcoming Groton Events

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

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News from the **AP** Associated Press

Jackson scores 19 as South Dakota State beats Southern Miss 101-76

By The Associated Press undefined

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — Jaden Jackson scored 19 points as South Dakota State beat Southern Miss 101-76 on Wednesday night.

Jackson had 10 rebounds for the Jackrabbits (4-1). Oscar Cluff scored 16 points while shooting 7 of 7 from the field and added nine rebounds. Kalen Garry shot 3 for 8 (1 for 5 from 3-point range) and 7 of 7 from the free-throw line to finish with 14 points.

The Golden Eagles (2-2) were led by Neftali Alvarez, who posted 13 points. Christian Watson added 12 points and two steals for Southern Miss. Denijay Harris also had 11 points and 12 rebounds.

Bullock scores 20 as South Dakota knocks off Western Michigan 80-76

By The Associated Press undefined

KALAMAZOO, Mich. (AP) — Quandre Bullock scored 20 points off of the bench to lead South Dakota past Western Michigan 80-76 on Wednesday night.

Bullock also contributed three steals for the Coyotes (5-1). Paul Bruns scored 18 points, shooting 6 for 13 (3 for 8 from 3-point range) and 3 of 3 from the free-throw line. Cameron Fens had 16 points and shot 7 of 9 from the field and 2 for 4 from the foul line.

The Broncos (2-4) were led by Markhi Strickland, who posted 20 points and six rebounds. Western Michigan also got 13 points and six rebounds from Owen Lobsinger. Javaughn Hannah also recorded 12 points.

Bullock scored 12 points in the first half and South Dakota went into the break trailing 34-33. Bruns' 18-point second half helped South Dakota close out the four-point victory.

'Bomb cyclone' kills 2 and knocks out power to over half a million homes across the US Northwest

By MARTHA BELLISLE, HALLIE GOLDEN and LISA BAUMANN Associated Press

ISSAQUAH, Wash. (AP) — A major storm battered the U.S. Northwest with strong winds and rain, causing widespread power outages, closing schools and downing trees that killed at least two people.

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 overwhelmed the region. The storm system, which hit starting Tuesday, is considered a "bomb cyclone," which occurs when a cyclone intensifies rapidly.

In California the weather service extended a flood watch into Saturday for areas north of San Francisco. Up to 16 inches of rain (40 centimeters) was forecast in Northern California and southwestern Oregon through Friday. Dangerous flash flooding, rock slides and debris flows were possible, officials warned.

A winter storm watch was in place 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.

Heavy, wet snow was expected to continue along the Cascades and in parts of far Northern California. Forecasters warned of blizzard and whiteout conditions and near impossible travel at pass level due to accumulation rates of 2 to 3 inches (5 to 7.6 centimeters) per hour and wind gusts of up to 65 mph (105 kph).

Falling trees struck homes and littered roads across western Washington. In Lynnwood, a woman died Tuesday night when a large tree fell on a homeless encampment, South County Fire said in a statement. In Bellevue, east of Seattle, a tree fell on a home and killed a woman, fire officials said.

Tracy Meloy of Issaquah, Washington, felt well-prepared for the storm Tuesday afternoon, with dinner prepped and lanterns ready. But then she spent the night listening to wind-whipped debris hit the outside

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of her home, including a particularly loud "thump" around 9 p.m. The next morning morning she ventured outside to survey the damage to her neighborhood, about 17 miles (27 kilometers) east of Seattle.

"Now that I'm standing here in front of the house, I can tell it's the tree that was across the street," Meloy said. The tree pulled down the power lines in front of her home, and limbs, leaves and other plants were strewn all over the road.

"It looks like a forest floor instead of a street," she said.

The number of power outage reports in Washington fluctuated wildly Tuesday evening but steadily declined to about 460,000 by Wednesday afternoon, according to poweroutage.us. More than a dozen schools were closed in Seattle alone.

About 2,800 customers were reported to be without power Wednesday in Oregon, 38,000 in California and 10,000 around Carson City and Reno, Nevada. Three Reno schools were closed, and semi-trucks were prohibited on the main highway between the two cities due to high winds. All chairlifts were shut down at the Mt. Rose Ski Resort near Lake Tahoe.

The weather service warned people on the West Coast about the danger of trees during high winds, posting on the social platform X: "Stay safe by avoiding exterior rooms and windows and by using caution when driving."

Southbound Interstate 5 was closed for an 11-mile (18-kilometer) stretch from Ashland, Oregon, to the California border on Wednesday morning due to extreme winter weather conditions in northern California, according to the Oregon Department of Transportation. It was expected to be a long-term closure, the department said.

The 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 for part of the day.

As Robert and Lisa Haynes of Issaquah surveyed the damage in their neighborhood, they saw fallen branches or trees blocking driveways and roads. They were stuck at home.

"It's like a snow day," Robert Haynes said, "but with no snow."

In Juneau, Alaska, gusts of wind up to 60 mph (96 kph) were forecast.

To the east, the first significant snow of the season in the Dakotas and Minnesota led to accidents and slippery roadways. The weather service said up to 16 inches (40 centimeters) could fall in the Turtle Mountains of North Dakota, and Minot could get up to 8 inches (20 centimeters).

Officials advised people not to travel throughout northern North Dakota, and state troopers in northern Minnesota responded to several accidents including tractor-trailers that jackknifed on Interstate 94 after the roadway became slippery from snow and ice.

Winds were expected to be problematic in parts of Montana and Nebraska, with gusts up to 60 mph (97 kph), the weather service said.

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

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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

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

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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.

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

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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 first term and twice ran unsuccessfully in Connecticut as a Republican candidate for the U.S. Senate. She 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. 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

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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.

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.

AMBASSADOR 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.

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AMBASSADOR TO NATO: Matthew Whitaker

A former acting attorney general during Trump's first administration and tight end on the University of Iowa football team, Whitaker, 55, has a background in law enforcement but not in foreign policy.

A fierce Trump localist, Whitaker, is also a former U.S. attorney in Iowa and served as acting attorney general between November 2018 and February 2019 without Senate confirmation, until William Barr was confirmed for the role. That was when special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into Russian election interference was drawing to a close.

Whitaker also faced questions about his past business dealings, including his ties to an invention-promotion company that was accused of misleading consumers.

AMBASSADOR TO CANADA: Pete Hoekstra

A Republican congressman from Michigan who served from 1993 to 2011, Hoekstra was ambassador to the Netherlands during Trump's first term.

"In my Second Term, Pete will help me once again put AMERICA FIRST," Trump said in a statement announcing his choice. "He did an outstanding job as United States Ambassador to the Netherlands during our first four years, and I am confident that he will continue to represent our Country well in this new role."

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.

New study shows voting for Native Americans is harder than ever

By GRAHAM LEE BREWER Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY, Okla. (AP) — A new study has found that systemic barriers to voting on tribal lands contribute to substantial disparities in Native American turnout, particularly for presidential elections.

The study, released Tuesday by the Brennan Center for Justice, looked at 21 states with federally recognized tribal lands that have a population of at least 5,000 and where more than 20% of residents identify as American Indian or Alaska Native. Researchers found that between 2012 and 2022, voter participation in federal elections was 7% lower in midterms and 15% lower in presidential elections than among those living off tribal lands in the same states.

Earlier studies show voter turnout for communities of color is higher in areas where their ethnic group is the majority, but the latest research found that turnout was the lowest on tribal lands that have a high concentration of Native Americans, the Brennan Center said.

"There's something more intensely happening in Native American communities on tribal land," said Chelsea Jones, a researcher on the study.

Jones said the study suggests some barriers may be insurmountable in predominately Native communities due to a lack of adequate polling places or access to early and mail-in ballots. Many residents on tribal lands have nontraditional addresses, meaning they don't have street names or house numbers, making mail-in voting even more difficult. As a result, many Native American voters rely on P.O. boxes, but the study notes that several jurisdictions will not mail ballots to P.O. boxes.

Long distances to the polls that do exist on tribal lands and little to no public transportation creates additional hurdles for Native American voters.

"When you think about people who live on tribal lands having to go 30, 60, 100 miles (up to 160 kilometers) to cast a ballot, that is an extremely limiting predicament to be in," Jones said. "These are really, truly severe barriers."

Additionally, Jones said they found Native American voters were denied the ability to vote using their tribal IDs in several places, including in states where that is legally allowed. All of these roadblocks to the ballot can create a sense of distrust in the system, which could contribute to lower turnout, Jones said.

The Brennan Center study also highlights an ongoing issue when it comes to understanding how or why Native Americans vote: a lack of good data.

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"There are immense data inequities when it comes to studying Native American communities, especially as it pertains to politics," Jones said.

Native American communities are often overlooked when it comes to polling data and sometimes when they are included those studies do not reflect broader trends for Indigenous voters, said Dr. Stephanie Fryberg, the director of the Research for Indigenous Social Action & Equity Center, which studies systemic inequalities faced by Indigenous people.

"Generally speaking, polling is not well positioned to do a good job for Indian Country," said Fryberg, who is also a professor of psychology at Northwestern University. "There are ideas that are held up as the gold standard about how polling works that don't work for Indian Country because of where we live, because of how difficult it is to connect to people in our community."

Fryberg, a member of the Tulalip Tribe in Washington State, was one of several Indigenous researchers who denounced a recent exit poll conducted by Edison Research that found 65% of Native American voters who participated said they voted for Donald Trump. The poll only surveyed 229 self-identified Native Americans, a sample size that she said is too small for an accurate reading, and none of the jurisdictions in the poll were on tribal lands.

"Right there, you're already eliminating a powerful perspective," Fryberg said.

The Indigenous Journalists Association labelled that polling data as "highly misleading and irresponsible," saying it has led "to widespread misinformation."

In a statement to the Associated Press, Edison Research acknowledged that the polling size is small, but said the "goal of the survey is to represent the national electorate and to have enough data to also examine large demographic and geographic subgroups." The survey has a potential sampling margin of error of plus or minus 9%, according to the statement.

"Based on all of these factors, this data point from our survey should not be taken as a definitive word on the American Indian vote," the statement reads.

Native Americans are not just part of an ethnic group, they also have political identities that come with being citizens of sovereign nations. Fryberg said allowing those surveyed to self-identify as Native Americans, without follow-up questions about tribal membership and specific Indigenous populations, means that data cannot accurately capture voting trends for those communities.

Both Fryberg and Jones said that in order to create better data on and opportunities for Native Americans to vote, researchers and lawmakers would have to meet the specific needs of Indigenous communities. Jones said passage of the Native American Voting Rights Act, a bill that has stalled in Congress, would ensure equitable in-person voting options in every precinct on tribal lands.

"This is not an issue that we see across the country," Jones said. "It's very specific to tribal lands. So we need provisions that address that uniquely."

At UN climate talks, nations blast draft of vague deal on climate cash for developing countries

By SETH BORENSTEIN, SIBI ARASU and MICHAEL PHILLIS Associated Press

BAKU, Azerbaijan (AP) — Countries of the world took turns rejecting a new but vague draft text released early Thursday which attempts to form the spine of any deal reached at United Nations climate talks on money for developing countries to transition to clean energy and adapt to climate change.

The draft left out a crucial sticking point: how much wealthy nations will pay poor countries. A key option for the lowest amount donors are willing to pay was just a placeholder "X." Part of that is because rich nations have yet to make an offer in negotiations.

So the host Azerbaijan presidency with its dawn-released package of proposals did manage to unite a fractured world on climate change, but it was only in their unease and outright distaste for the plan. Negotiators at the talks — known as COP29 — in Baku, are trying to close the gap between the \$1.3 trillion the developing world says is needed in climate finance and the few hundred billion that negotiators say richer nations have been prepared to give.

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No figure for climate cash leaves many disappointed

Independent experts say that at least \$1 trillion is needed in finance to help transition away from planet-warming fossil fuels and toward clean energy like solar and wind, better adapt to the effects of climate change and pay for losses and damages caused by extreme weather.

Colombia's environment minister Susana Mohamed said without a figure offered by developed nations, "we are negotiating on nothing."

Panama's Juan Carlos Monterrey Gomez called said the "lack of commitment transparency feels like a slap in the face to the most vulnerable."

"It is just utter disrespect to those countries that are bearing the brunt of this crisis," he said. "Developed countries must stop playing games with our life and put a serious quantified financial proposal on the table."

Esa Ainuu, from the small Pacific island of Niue also blasted the lack of a number in the draft deal.

"For us in the Pacific, this is critical for us," Ainuu said. "We can't escape to the desert. We can't escape somewhere else. This is reality for us. If finance is not bringing any positive, (then) why're we coming to COP?"

Mohamed Adow, director of the think tank Power Shift Africa, also expressed disappointment at the lack of a figure. "We need a cheque but all we have right now is a blank piece of paper," he said.

Iskander Erzini Vernoit, director of Moroccan climate think-tank Imal Initiative for Climate and Development, said he was "at a loss for words at how disappointed we are at this stage to have come this far without serious numbers on the table and serious engagement from the developed countries."

Negotiators slam an 'unbalanced' draft

Lead negotiator Yalchin Rafiyev emphasized how balanced the plan was, but all sides kept saying it was anything but balanced and pointed time was running out.

"We would like to correct the balance. It is completely tilted," Pakistan delegate Romina Khurshid Alam said.

The EU's climate envoy Wopke Hoekstra called the draft "imbalanced, unworkable, and not acceptable."

In a statement, the COP29 Presidency stressed that the drafts "are not final."

"The COP29 Presidency's door is always open, and we welcome any bridging proposals that the parties wish to present," the Presidency said in a statement. It added that possible numbers for a finance goal will be released in the next iteration of the draft.

COP29 President Mukhtar Babayev convened the Qurultay — a traditional Azerbaijani meeting — where negotiators spoke to hear all sides and hammer out a compromise. He said that "after hearing all views, we will outline a way forward regarding future iterations."

Nations big and small want more on slashing fossil fuels

Other areas that are being negotiated include commitments to slash planet-warming fossil fuels and how to adapt to climate change. But they've seen little movement.

European nations and the United States criticized the package of proposals for not being strong enough in reiterating last year's call for a transition away from fossil fuels.

"The current text offers no progress" on efforts to cut the world's emissions of heat-trapping gases, said Germany delegation chief Jennifer Morgan. "This cannot and must not be our response to the suffering of millions of people around the world. We must do better."

U.S. climate envoy John Podesta said he was surprised that "there is nothing the carries forward the ... outcomes that we agreed on last year in Dubai." The United States, the world's biggest historic emitter of greenhouse gases, has played little role in the talks as it braces for another presidency under Donald Trump.

Also on Thursday, the EU, Mexico, Norway and several other countries announced they would release plans to rapidly cut emissions over the next decade to meet the landmark Paris agreement's goal of restraining global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial times, although they did not detail how those cuts would happen.

"There is a real risk of falling short," said Tore Sandvik, Norway's minister of climate and environment. "We must reinforce the message that the Paris agreement is functioning as intended."

Under the agreement, countries need to detail their voluntary plans for reducing greenhouse gas emissions by early next year.

The other countries that joined the announcement include the United Kingdom, Panama, Switzerland and Canada.

Police say gunmen open fire on vehicles in Pakistan's restive northwest, killing at least 14 Shiites

By RIAZ KHAN Associated Press

PESHAWAR, Pakistan (AP) — Gunmen opened fire on passenger vehicles carrying Shiite Muslim civilians in restive northwest Pakistan on Thursday, killing at least 14 people and wounding 30 others in one of the deadliest such attacks in recent years in the region, police said.

The attack happened in Kurram, a district in the northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province where sectarian clashes between majority Sunni Muslims and minority Shiites have killed dozens of people in recent months.

No one has claimed responsibility. The latest violence came a week after authorities reopened a key highway in the region after keeping it closed for weeks following deadly clashes.

Local police official Nusrat Hussain said several vehicles carrying passengers were traveling in a convoy from the city of Parachinar to Peshawar, the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, when gunmen opened fire.

He said the dead included a woman, and least 15 passengers were in a critical condition at a hospital.

Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari condemned the attack and offered his condolences to the families of the victims. He also ordered authorities to take action against those who orchestrated the attack.

Shiite Muslims make up about 15 percent of the 240 million population of Sunni-majority Pakistan, which has a history of sectarian animosity between the two communities.

Although they live together largely peacefully in the country, tensions have existed for decades in some areas, especially in parts of Kurram, where Shiites dominate.

Nearly 50 people from the two sides were also killed over the same dispute in July when clashes between Sunni and Shiites erupted in Kurram

Pakistan is also currently carrying out intelligence-based operations in a separate conflict in northwest and southwestern Balochistan province, where militants and separatists often target police, troops and civilians, and the most violence has been blamed on Pakistani Taliban and an outlawed Baloch Liberation Army or BLA group.

Shares in India's Adani Group plunge 20% after US bribery, fraud indictments

By ASHOK SHARMA Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — One of Asia's richest men, controversial Indian tycoon Gautam Adani, is again in the spotlight. His companies' stocks plunged up to 20% on Thursday after he was indicted by U.S. prosecutors on charges he duped investors in a massive solar energy project in India by concealing that it was being facilitated by an alleged bribery scheme.

In an indictment unsealed by federal prosecutors in New York on Wednesday, Adani, 62, was charged with securities fraud and conspiracy to commit securities and wire fraud.

One result of the U.S. legal action is that the Adani group decided not to proceed with a proposed U.S. dollar-denominated bond offering. Adani Renewables announced the decision in letters to the Bombay Stock Exchange and the National Stock Exchange of India.

In a statement, the group said the allegations against directors of Adani Green "are baseless and denied." The U.S. Department of Justice said "the charges in the indictment are allegations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty."

Who is Gautam Adani?

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Adani is the son of a middle-class family in Ahmedabad in western India's Gujarat state. He quit college to become a diamond trader in Mumbai, India's financial capital. In the 1980s, he started importing plastics before establishing Adani Enterprises, which traded in everything from shoes to buckets and remains his flagship company.

India opened up its economy in the 1990s and a new middle class emerged as tens of millions of people escaped poverty and the economy boomed, prompting Adani to bet on infrastructure and coal.

Adani's first big project, the Mundra port in Gujarat, opened in 1998 and is now India's largest. Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd. is India's biggest private port operator. Within a decade, Adani became India's largest developer and operator of coal mines. According to Adani Power's website, it has expanded to Australia and Indonesia and is on track to be "one of the largest mining groups in the world."

Adani companies, India's second-largest conglomerate, operate airports in major cities, build roads, generate electricity, manufacture defense equipment, develop agricultural drones, sell cooking oil and run a media outlet. Despite his fossil fuel roots, the billionaire Adani Green aims to become the world's largest renewable energy player by 2030.

Why is Adani controversial?

Adani is considered close to the Hindu nationalist government, and the political opposition has long accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of having close ties with the tycoon. They both hail from the western state of Gujarat.

The businessman's critics say much of his success stems from his close ties to the government and Modi. For example, they have accused the government of adjusting bidding rules to make it easier for Adani to win contracts to operate airports. The company denies this, saying contracts were won relatively transparently.

Opposition Congress party leader Rahul Gandhi called for Adani's arrest for his criminal acts in the United States and India and has accused Modi of protecting him.

India's main opposition also demanded a parliamentary committee probe into Adani Group dealings, which Jairam Ramesh, a leader of the Congress Party, said are causing "growing monopolization in key sectors of the Indian economy, fueling inflation, and posing huge foreign policy challenges as well."

Ramesh said his party has been "bringing out the various dimensions of these scams and the intimate nexus between the PM (Modi) and his favorite businessman. These questions have remained unanswered."

Last year, the Adani companies lost \$68 billion in market value after short-selling firm Hindenburg Research accused Adani of "pulling the largest con in corporate history," triggering a massive sell-off of the group's stocks.

U.S.-based Hindenburg accused Adani companies of stock price manipulation and fraud just as the group began a share offering meant to raise \$2.5 billion.

The Adani group dismissed Hindenburg's allegations, saying none were "based on independent or journalistic fact finding." Adani's response included documents and data tables and it said the group had made all necessary regulatory disclosures and has abided by local laws.

How Adani became Asia's richest man

Adani's net worth shot up about 2,000% in recent years as share prices for his listed companies soared.

Before Modi took office, Adani was friendly with the rival Congress Party, which governed Gujarat state when many of his early projects began. Adani has been "close to every politician in power," R N Bhaskar, a journalist who wrote a biography on Adani, told The Associated Press.

Adani's supporters say he has cleverly aligned the group's priorities with those of the government by investing in key industries like renewable energy, defense, and agriculture. His projects overseas, in strategically important countries like neighboring Sri Lanka, help New Delhi compete with rival Beijing in the region.

Ukraine says Russia launched an intercontinental missile in an attack for the first time in the war

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine says Russia launched an intercontinental ballistic missile overnight targeting Dnipro city in the central-east of the country, which, if confirmed, would be the first time Moscow has used such a missile in the war.

In a statement Thursday on the Telegram messaging app, Ukraine's air force did not specify the exact type of missile, but said it was launched from Russia's Astrakhan region, which borders the Caspian Sea.

It said an intercontinental ballistic missile was fired at Dnipro city along with eight other missiles, and that the Ukrainian military shot down six of them.

Two people were wounded as a result of the attack, and an industrial facility and a rehabilitation center for people with disabilities were damaged, according to local officials.

While the range of an ICBM would seem excessive for use against Ukraine, such missiles are designed to carry nuclear warheads, and the use of one would serve as a chilling reminder of Russia's nuclear capability and a powerful message of potential escalation.

The attack comes two days after Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a revised nuclear doctrine that formally lowers the threshold for the country's use of nuclear weapons. Ukraine on Tuesday fired several American-supplied longer-range missiles and reportedly fired U.K.-made Storm Shadows on Wednesday into Russia.

The Russian Defense Ministry said in a statement Thursday that its air defense systems shot down two British-made Storm Shadow missiles, six HIMARS rockets, and 67 drones. The announcement came in the ministry's daily roundup regarding the military actions in Ukraine.

The statement didn't say when or where exactly it happened or what the missiles were targeting. This is not Moscow's first public announcement of the shooting down of Storm Shadow missiles, as Russia earlier reported downing some over the annexed Crimean Peninsula.

The developments come as the war has taken on a growing international dimension with the arrival of North Korean troops to help Russia on the battlefield — a development that U.S. officials said prompted U.S. President Joe Biden's policy shift on allowing Ukraine to fire longer-range U.S. missiles into Russia. The Kremlin responded with threats to escalate further.

Putin 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.

And 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.

While the doctrine envisions a possible nuclear response by Russia to a conventional strike, it is formulated broadly to avoid a firm commitment to use nuclear weapons and keep Putin's options open.

Volcano on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula erupts for the 7th time in a year

By MARCO DI MARCO and DAVID KEYTON Associated Press

GRINDAVIK, Iceland (AP) — A volcano on the Reykjanes Peninsula in southwestern Iceland has erupted for the seventh time since December.

The eruption started with little warning at 11:14 p.m. Wednesday and created a fissure around 3 kilometers (1.8 miles) long. The activity is estimated to be considerably smaller than the previous eruption in August, Iceland's meteorological office that monitors seismic activity said.

"In the big picture, this is a bit smaller than the last eruption, and the eruption that occurred in May," Magnús Tumi Guðmundsson, a professor of geophysics who flew over the scene with the Civil Protection agency to monitor the event, told the national RUV broadcaster.

While the eruption poses no threat to air travel, authorities warned of gas emissions across parts of the peninsula, including the nearby town of Grindavík.

Around 50 houses were evacuated after the Civil Protection agency issued the alert, along with guests at the famous Blue Lagoon resort, according to RUV.

The repeated volcanic eruptions close to Grindavík, which is about 50 kilometers (30 miles) southwest of the capital, Reykjavik, and has a population of 3,800 people, have damaged infrastructure and property and forced many residents to relocate to guarantee their safety.

"Grindavík is not in danger as it looks and it is unlikely that this crack will get any longer, although nothing can be ruled out," Magnús Tumi said.

Iceland, which sits above a volcanic hot spot in the North Atlantic, averages one eruption every four to five years. The most disruptive in recent times was the 2010 eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano, which spewed clouds of ash into the atmosphere and disrupted trans-Atlantic air travel for months.

US charges tycoon Gautam Adani with defrauding investors, hiding plan to bribe Indian officials

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — An Indian businessman who is one of the world's richest people has been indicted in the U.S. on charges he duped investors by concealing that his company's huge solar energy project on the subcontinent was being facilitated by an alleged bribery scheme.

Gautam Adani, 62, was charged in a federal indictment unsealed Wednesday with securities fraud and conspiracy to commit securities and wire fraud. The case involves a lucrative arrangement for Adani Green Energy Ltd. and another firm to sell 12 gigawatts of solar power to the Indian government — enough to light millions of homes and businesses.

The indictment paints Adani and his co-defendants as playing two sides of the deal.

It accuses them of portraying it as rosy and above-board to Wall Street investors who poured several billion dollars into the project over the last five years while, back in India, they were allegedly paying or planning to pay about \$265 million in bribes to government officials to help secure billions of dollars' worth of contracts and financing.

The tycoon and his co-defendants sought to "obtain and finance massive state energy supply contracts through corruption and fraud at the expense of U.S. investors," Deputy Assistant Attorney General Lisa Miller said.

U.S. Attorney Breon Peace said the defendants "orchestrated an elaborate scheme" and sought to "enrich themselves at the expense of the integrity of our financial markets."

Adani's company in India had no immediate comment, as meanwhile shares in the Adani corporate empire plunged Thursday in India.

Adani's co-defendants include his nephew Sagar Adani, the executive director of Adani Green Energy's board, and Vneet Jaain, who was the company's chief executive from 2020 to 2023 and remains managing director of its board.

Online court records did not list a lawyer who could speak on Adani's behalf. An email message seeking comment was left with an arm of his conglomerate, the Adani Group. Emails were also sent to lawyers representing his co-defendants.

Sagar Adani's lawyer, Sean Hecker, declined comment. The others did not immediately respond.

In a parallel civil action, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission accused Adani and two co-defendants of violating antifraud provisions of U.S. securities laws. The regulator is seeking monetary penalties and other sanctions.

Both cases were filed in federal court in Brooklyn.

Sanjay Wadhwa, acting director of the SEC's Enforcement Division, said Gautam and Sagar Adani are accused of persuading investors to buy their company's bonds by misrepresenting "not only that Adani Green had a robust anti-bribery compliance program but also that the company's senior management had not and would not pay or promise to pay bribes."

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Adani is a power player in the world's most populous nation. He built his fortune in the coal business in the 1990s. The Adani Group grew to involve many aspects of Indian life, from making defense equipment to building roads to selling cooking oil.

In recent years, the Adani Group has made big moves into renewable energy, embracing a philosophy of sustainable growth reflected in its slogan: "Growth with Goodness."

The company has a clean energy portfolio of over 20 gigawatts, including one of the world's largest solar power plants in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. Adani Group has stated its goal of becoming the country's biggest player in the space by 2030. In 2022, Gautam Adani said the company would invest \$70 billion in clean energy projects by 2032.

Adani's close ties with the government and with Prime Minister Narendra Modi have at the same time drawn criticism, including from India's opposition Congress party leader Jairam Ramesh. He said in a statement that the indictment was "consistent with a long record of fraud and criminality carried out with impunity with the obvious protection of the prime minister."

Noting that it took a foreign jurisdiction to produce charges, Ramesh called for a parliamentary inquiry into Adani's activities.

Last year, Hindenburg Research, a U.S.-based financial research firm accused Adani and his company of "brazen stock manipulation" and "accounting fraud." The Adani Group called the claims "a malicious combination of selective misinformation and stale, baseless and discredited allegations."

Hindenburg is known as a short-seller, a Wall Street term for traders that essentially bet that prices of certain stocks will fall, and it had made such investments in relation to the Adani Group. The company's stock plunged as a result and dipped again in August when Hindenburg levied more corruption allegations.

Jaain told The Associated Press last year that Hindenburg's allegations had little impact on Adani's ongoing projects, including work building 20 gigawatts of a solar and wind energy project in the northwest Indian village of Khavda.

Prosecutors allege that Adani and his co-defendants started plotting the bribery scheme in 2020 or 2021 to guarantee demand for the energy that Adani Green and another firm were under contract to produce for the national government's Solar Energy Corporation of India.

Adani Green and the other firm's high prices turned off India's state-run electricity distributors, which buy power from the national government and provide it to homes and businesses. But the companies needed those deals to make the project worthwhile and keep revenues high, so they offered bribes to get them done, prosecutors said.

After the defendants started promising bribes to government officials, in 2021 and 2022, electricity distributors in five Indian states or regions entered into agreements to purchase their energy, prosecutors said. Adani's company issued a statement in which he touted his deals as the "world's largest" power purchase agreement.

At the same time, prosecutors said, the Adanis and Jaain were attesting to global investors that Adani Green was and would never be involved in bribery. Those claims enabled them to secure billions of dollars in financing for the project at terms that "did not account for the true risk" involved, prosecutors said.

Police report reveals assault allegations against Hegseth

By MARTHA MENDOZA, BRIAN SLODYSKO and JULIET LINDERMAN Associated Press

SANTA CRUZ, Calif. (AP) — A woman told police that she was sexually assaulted in 2017 by Pete Hegseth after he took her phone, blocked the door to a California hotel room and refused to let her leave, according to a detailed investigative report made public late Wednesday.

Hegseth, a Fox News personality and President-elect Donald Trump's nominee to be defense secretary, told police at the time that the encounter had been consensual and denied any wrongdoing, the report said.

News of the allegations surfaced last week when local officials released a brief statement confirming that a woman had accused Hegseth of sexual assault in October 2017 after he had spoken at a Republican women's event in Monterey.

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Hegseth's lawyer did not immediately respond to a request for comment early Thursday. He has said Hegseth paid the woman in 2023 to head off the threat of a baseless lawsuit.

The 22-page police report was released in response to a public records request and offers the first detailed account of what the woman alleged to have transpired — one that is at odds with Hegseth's version of events. The report cited police interviews with the alleged victim, a nurse who treated her, a hotel staffer, another woman at the event and Hegseth.

The woman's name was not released, and The Associated Press does not typically name people who say they have been sexually assaulted.

A spokeswoman for the Trump transition said early Thursday that the "report corroborates what Mr. Hegseth's attorneys have said all along: the incident was fully investigated and no charges were filed because police found the allegations to be false."

The report does not say that police found the allegations were false. Police recommended the case report be forwarded to the Monterey County District Attorney's Office for review.

Investigators were first alerted to the alleged assault, the report said, by a nurse who called them after a patient requested a sexual assault exam. The patient told medical personnel she believed she was assaulted five days earlier but couldn't remember much about what had happened. She reported something may have been slipped into her drink before ending up in the hotel room where she said the assault occurred.

Police collected the unwashed dress and underwear she had worn that night, the report said.

The woman's partner, who was staying at the hotel with her, told police that he was worried about her that night after she didn't come back to their room. At 2 a.m., he went to the hotel bar, but she wasn't there. She made it back a few hours later, apologizing that she "must have fallen asleep." A few days later, she told him she had been sexually assaulted.

The woman, who helped organize the California Federation of Republican women gathering at which Hegseth spoke, told police that she had witnessed the TV anchor acting inappropriately throughout the night and saw him stroking multiple women's thighs. She texted a friend that Hegseth was giving off a "creeper" vibe, according to the report.

After the event, the woman and others attended an afterparty in a hotel suite where she said she confronted Hegseth, telling him that she "did not appreciate how he treated women," the report states.

A group of people, including Hegseth and the woman, decamped for the hotel's bar. That's when "things got fuzzy," the woman told police.

She remembered having a drink at the bar with Hegseth and others, the police report states. She also told police that she argued with Hegseth near the hotel pool, an account that is supported by a hotel staffer who was sent to handle the disturbance and spoke to police, according to the report.

Soon, she told police, she was inside a hotel room with Hegseth, who took her phone and blocked the door with his body so that she could not leave, according to the report. She also told police she remembered "saying 'no' a lot," the report said.

Her next memory was laying on a couch or bed with Hegseth hovering over her bare-chested, his dog tags dangling over her, the report states. Hegseth served in the National Guard, rising to the rank of major.

After Hegseth finished, she recalled him asking if she was "OK," the report states. She told police she did not recall how she got back to her own hotel room and had since suffered from nightmares and memory loss.

At the time of the alleged assault in 2017, Hegseth, now 44, was going through a divorce with his second wife, with whom he has three children. She filed for divorce after he had a child with a Fox News producer who is now his wife, according to court records and social media posts by Hegseth. His first marriage ended in 2009, also after infidelity by Hegseth, according to court records.

Hegseth said he attended an after party and drank beer but did not consume liquor, and acknowledged being "buzzed" but not drunk.

He said he met the woman at the hotel bar, and she led him by the arm back to his hotel room, which surprised him because he initially had no intention of having sex with her, the report said.

Hegseth told investigators that the sexual encounter that followed was consensual, adding that he ex-

PLICITLY asked more than once if she was comfortable. Hegseth said in the morning the woman "showed early signs of regret," and he assured her that he wouldn't tell anyone about the encounter.

Hegseth's attorney said a payment was made to the woman as part of a confidential settlement a few years after the police investigation because Hegseth was concerned that she was prepared to file a lawsuit that he feared could have resulted in him being fired from Fox News, where he was a popular host. The attorney would not reveal the amount of the payment.

US regulators seek to break up Google, forcing Chrome sale as part of monopoly punishment

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

U.S. regulators want a federal judge to break up Google to prevent the company from continuing to squash competition through its dominant search engine after a court found it had maintained an abusive monopoly over the past decade.

The proposed breakup floated in a 23-page document filed late Wednesday by the U.S. Department of Justice calls for sweeping punishments that would include a sale of Google's industry-leading Chrome web browser and impose restrictions to prevent Android from favoring its own search engine.

A sale of Chrome "will permanently stop Google's control of this critical search access point and allow rival search engines the ability to access the browser that for many users is a gateway to the internet," Justice Department lawyers argued in their filing.

Although regulators stopped short of demanding Google sell Android too, they asserted the judge should make it clear the company could still be required to divest its smartphone operating system if its oversight committee continues to see evidence of misconduct.

The broad scope of the recommended penalties underscores how severely regulators operating under President Joe Biden's administration believe Google should be punished following an August ruling by U.S. District Judge Amit Mehta that branded the company as a monopolist.

The Justice Department decision-makers who will inherit the case after President-elect Donald Trump takes office next year might not be as strident. The Washington, D.C. court hearings on Google's punishment are scheduled to begin in April and Mehta is aiming to issue his final decision before Labor Day.

If Mehta embraces the government's recommendations, Google would be forced to sell its 16-year-old Chrome browser within six months of the final ruling. But the company certainly would appeal any punishment, potentially prolonging a legal tussle that has dragged on for more than four years.

Besides seeking a Chrome spinoff and a corralling of the Android software, the Justice Department wants the judge to ban Google from forging multibillion-dollar deals to lock in its dominant search engine as the default option on Apple's iPhone and other devices. It would also ban Google from favoring its own services, such as YouTube or its recently-launched artificial intelligence platform, Gemini.

Regulators also want Google to license the search index data it collects from people's queries to its rivals, giving them a better chance at competing with the tech giant. On the commercial side of its search engine, Google would be required to provide more transparency into how it sets the prices that advertisers pay to be listed near the top of some targeted search results.

Kent Walker, Google's chief legal officer, lashed out at the Justice Department for pursuing "a radical interventionist agenda that would harm Americans and America's global technology." In a blog post, Walker warned the "overly broad proposal" would threaten personal privacy while undermining Google's early leadership in artificial intelligence, "perhaps the most important innovation of our time."

Wary of Google's increasing use of artificial intelligence in its search results, regulators also advised Mehta to ensure websites will be able to shield their content from Google's AI training techniques.

The measures, if they are ordered, threaten to upend a business expected to generate more than \$300 billion in revenue this year.

"The playing field is not level because of Google's conduct, and Google's quality reflects the ill-gotten gains of an advantage illegally acquired," the Justice Department asserted in its recommendations. "The

remedy must close this gap and deprive Google of these advantages.”

It’s still possible that the Justice Department could ease off attempts to break up Google, especially if Trump takes the widely expected step of replacing Assistant Attorney General Jonathan Kanter, who was appointed by Biden to oversee the agency’s antitrust division.

Although the case targeting Google was originally filed during the final months of Trump’s first term in office, Kanter oversaw the high-profile trial that culminated in Mehta’s ruling against Google. Working in tandem with Federal Trade Commission Chair Lina Khan, Kanter took a get-tough stance against Big Tech that triggered other attempted crackdowns on industry powerhouses such as Apple and discouraged many business deals from getting done during the past four years.

Trump recently expressed concerns that a breakup might destroy Google but didn’t elaborate on alternative penalties he might have in mind. “What you can do without breaking it up is make sure it’s more fair,” Trump said last month. Matt Gaetz, the former Republican congressman that Trump nominated to be the next U.S. Attorney General, has previously called for the breakup of Big Tech companies.

Gaetz faces a tough confirmation hearing.

This latest filing gave Kanter and his team a final chance to spell out measures that they believe are needed to restore competition in search. It comes six weeks after Justice first floated the idea of a breakup in a preliminary outline of potential penalties.

But Kanter’s proposal is already raising questions about whether regulators seek to impose controls that extend beyond the issues covered in last year’s trial, and — by extension — Mehta’s ruling.

Banning the default search deals that Google now pays more than \$26 billion annually to maintain was one of the main practices that troubled Mehta in his ruling.

It’s less clear whether the judge will embrace the Justice Department’s contention that Chrome needs to be spun out of Google and or Android should be completely walled off from its search engine.

“It is probably going a little beyond,” Syracuse University law professor Shubha Ghosh said of the Chrome breakup. “The remedies should match the harm, it should match the transgression. This does seem a little beyond that pale.”

Google rival DuckDuckGo, whose executives testified during last year’s trial, asserted the Justice Department is simply doing what needs to be done to rein in a brazen monopolist.

“Undoing Google’s overlapping and widespread illegal conduct over more than a decade requires more than contract restrictions: it requires a range of remedies to create enduring competition,” Kamyil Bazbaz, DuckDuckGo’s senior vice president of public affairs, said in a statement.

Trying to break up Google harks back to a similar punishment initially imposed on Microsoft a quarter century ago following another major antitrust trial that culminated in a federal judge deciding the software maker had illegally used his Windows operating system for PCs to stifle competition.

However, an appeals court overturned an order that would have broken up Microsoft, a precedent many experts believe will make Mehta reluctant to go down a similar road with the Google case.

Rain and snow pummel Northern California in latest wave of damaging weather to strike West Coast

By NOAH BERGER and HALLIE GOLDEN Associated Press

SANTA ROSA, Calif. (AP) — A major storm pummeled Northern California with rain and snow on Wednesday night and threatened to cause flash flooding and rockslides in the latest wave of damaging weather to wash over the West Coast.

The National Weather Service extended a flood watch into Saturday for areas north of San Francisco as the strongest atmospheric river — a large plume of moisture flowing onshore — that California and the Pacific Northwest has seen this season inundated the region. The storm system unleashed winds the night before that left two people dead and hundreds of thousands without power in Washington state.

Up to 16 inches of rain (about 41 centimeters) was forecast in Northern California and southwestern Oregon through Friday. By Wednesday evening, some areas in Northern California had experienced heavy

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rain, including Santa Rosa, which had seen about 5 inches (about 13 centimeters) within 24 hours, according to Marc Chenard, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

Dangerous flash flooding, rockslides and debris flows were possible, officials warned. About a dozen small landslides had struck in northern California in the last 24 hours, including one on Highway 281 on Wednesday morning that caused a vehicle crash, said Chenard.

The National Weather Service in the Bay Area warned people that the atmospheric river was focused on the North Bay and to "expect heavy rain to continue tonight, Thursday into Friday. This will result in mudslides, road closures."

The storm system, which first hit Tuesday, is considered a "bomb cyclone," which occurs when a cyclone intensifies rapidly.

A winter storm watch was in place for the northern Sierra Nevada above 3,500 feet (1,066 meters), where 15 inches (38 centimeters) of snow was possible over two days. Wind gusts could top 75 mph (121 kph) in mountain areas, forecasters said.

The storm had already dumped more than a foot of snow along the Cascades by Wednesday evening, according to the National Weather Service. Forecasters warned of blizzard and whiteout conditions and near impossible travel at pass level.

In Washington, there were nearly 376,000 power outage reports Wednesday evening, resulting from strong winds and rain the night before, according to poweroutage.us. Falling trees struck homes and littered roads across western Washington, killing at least two people. One woman in Lynnwood was killed when a large tree fell on a homeless encampment, while another woman in Bellevue was killed when a tree fell on a home.

More than a dozen schools were closed in the Seattle area Wednesday and some opted to extend those closures through Thursday.

In California, there were reports of nearly 21,000 power outages as of Wednesday evening.

Southbound Interstate 5 was closed for an 11-mile (18-kilometer) stretch from Ashland, Oregon, to the California border on Wednesday morning due to extreme winter weather conditions in northern California, according to the Oregon Department of Transportation. It was expected to be a long-term closure, the department said.

Hundreds of flights were delayed and dozens were canceled at the San Francisco International Airport, according to Flight Aware.

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

Sierra Leone loves rice and wants to free itself from imports. But how to do it?

By JACK THOMPSON Associated Press

FREETOWN, Sierra Leone (AP) — Rice borders on the sacred in Sierra Leone. Unless a meal includes rice, people say, you haven't eaten at all.

But as prices soar, consumers in the West African nation are giving up other food to buy it. That's a major reason why 83% of the population is food insecure, according to the U.N.'s World Food Program.

In the capital, Freetown, 28-year-old nail technician Anima Mangola dug into rice with stewed cassava leaves. "I'd eat rice five times a day if I had me the money," she said — even as its price has more than doubled this year.

Not everyone can keep up, and "people are suffering," she said.

Experts blame soaring prices on a heavy reliance on imports, which supply 35% of Sierra Leone's rice and eat up \$200 million annually in foreign currency.

Even though West Africa has a long tradition of growing rice and often excellent places to do it, experts said the import dependency is due to a lack of investment in agriculture, booming population growth and

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cheap rice imports from Asia.

Sierra Leone's agriculture minister, Henry Kpaka Musa, accused the International Monetary Fund of pressuring Sierra Leone in the 1980s to stop investing in agriculture and open its markets to imports as a condition for receiving loans.

"We used to export rice," Kpaka said in an interview.

Now he and President Julius Bio plan to do it again. The government has raised over \$620 million from global development banks this year to work towards food self-sufficiency, notably in rice, although Kpaka estimated the plan will cost \$1.8 billion in all. Experts from the Ivory Coast-based research center Africa Rice have commended the plan as "ambitious and forward-looking."

But NGOs and academics warn it will favor international agribusiness and large-scale farms, to the detriment of the nation's 5 million smallholder farms. They point to similar, failed attempts at food self-sufficiency in places such as Burkina Faso and Ghana.

Self-sufficiency challenges and potential

West Africa has an ancient rice tradition dating back an estimated back 3,500 years. Historian Judith Carney said its farmers were taken as slaves to work plantations in the U.S. South, giving birth to a booming rice economy.

Sierra Leone has the region's best climate and land for growing rice, with abundant annual rainfall in coastal regions.

But Kpaka, the minister, highlighted obstacles to rice self-sufficiency: poor roads to connect rice-growing areas with markets, unreliable electricity for processing, climate change and poor access to finance.

With the financial backing from development banks, he has approved plans to improve roads to the country's three main "rice bowls," create large areas of irrigated land and provide fertilizers, seeds and pesticides to smallholder farms.

"The plan starts with the infrastructure to attract the private sector to come," he said. He has promoted the plan to unspecified international investors, offering them thousands of hectares of irrigated land.

But some believe smallholders, who make up 70% of the country's population of 8 million, will be an afterthought.

The view from the field

Aboubacar Kowa, a farming leader in Bo district, gathered others to discuss their rice challenges, which also included access to land and a lack of storage, training and processing capacity.

They were united in their lack of optimism about government help. They've heard these ambitious plans before.

"We don't get support from the government," said one smallholder and village chief, Eric Amara Manyeh.

The most common concern was the lack of labor to create irrigated fields. Eliminating vegetation and digging channels is laborious, and an exodus of young people to urban areas means farmers have to employ laborers — a cost out of reach for many.

Although unemployment is high in towns, Manyeh said young people prefer easier jobs such as driving motorbike taxis.

Some farmers have formed collectives to share labor, but poor tools slow progress. In one government-backed project in Bo, digging 60 hectares (148 acres) of channels took three months by 82 people.

A cautionary tale

Sierra Leone's goal to get chemical fertilizer, seeds and pesticides into the hands of smallholders is meant to replicate the Green Revolution in Asia, which increased rice production by over 100% in two decades.

But Klara Fischer, a rural development professor at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences specializing in sub-Saharan Africa, warned that the approach exposes farmers to agribusiness giants such as Bayer Crop Science and Syngenta.

An initiative called A Green Revolution for Africa. backed by the Gates Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation and others, has spent over \$1 billion since 2006 to increase access to fertilizers and seeds for smallholders, but its own evaluation in 2022 said it hasn't increased food security. The initiative is supporting Sierra Leone's efforts.

One recent assessment by the German development ministry in Ghana and Burkina Faso found no evidence that providing fertilizer and seeds increased yield or profit for smallholders, and found that 41% of rice farmers struggled to pay off their debts.

"These fertilizer and seed packages are entangled with private interests," Fischer said. She also highlighted differences between Asia in the 1970s and the current situation in Africa. One is the cheap and available family labor in Asia compared to the rural exodus in Sierra Leone.

Kpaka, a former employee in the Gates Foundation's agricultural department, acknowledged concerns but was convinced his plan has the missing ingredient to unlock growth: the critical infrastructure to help farmers process and sell their rice, incentivizing them to grow more.

"If we don't make the road, (farmers) will forever remain subsistence," he said.

A different way

Others believe that Sierra Leone should spend its funding on measures that empower smallholder farms rather than big business.

Joseph Randall, director of an environmental NGO in Sierra Leone, Green Scenery, said the government should support sustainable practices such as organic compost instead of becoming dependent on imported chemical fertilizer, usually from Europe or North America, which contributes heavily to global warming.

Randall opposes the distribution of modern seeds, even though they are higher yielding. The hybrid varieties of rice can't be saved and replanted each year because they are bred by agribusinesses and have patents.

Meanwhile, in Manyeh's village, thunder echoed through the chief's rice fields. He pointed to a swamp that might be cultivated as part of the self-sufficiency goal.

"The willingness is there, the potential is there," he said. But he knows it takes more than potential to feed a nation.

Papuan women's mangrove forest in Indonesia is increasingly threatened by development and pollution

By EDNA TARIGAN and FIRDIA LISNAWATI Associated Press

JAYAPURA, Indonesia (AP) — On the southeastern coast of the city of Jayapura, Petronela Merauje walked from house to house in her floating village inviting women to join her the next morning in the surrounding mangrove forests.

Merauje and the women of her village, Enggros, practice the tradition of Tonotwiyat, which literally means "working in the forest." For six generations, women from the 700-strong Papuan population there have worked among the mangroves collecting clams, fishing and gathering firewood.

"The customs and culture of Papuans, especially those of us in Enggros village, is that women are not given space and place to speak in traditional meetings, so the tribal elders provide the mangrove forest as our land," Merauje said. It's "a place to find food, a place for women to tell stories, and women are active every day and earn a living every day."

The forest is a short 13 kilometers (8 miles) away from downtown Jayapura, the capital city of Papua, Indonesia's easternmost province. It's been known as the women's forest since 2016, when Enggros' leader officially changed its name. Long before that, it had already been a space just for women. But as pollution, development and biodiversity loss shrink the forest and stunt plant and animal life, those in the village fear an important part of their traditions and livelihoods will be lost. Efforts to shield it from devastation have begun, but are still relatively small.

Women have their own space — but it's shrinking

One early morning, Merauje and her 15-year-old daughter took a small motor boat toward the forest. Stepping off on Youtefa Bay, mangrove trees all around, they stood chest-deep in the water with buckets in hand, wiggling their feet in the mud to find bia noor, or soft-shell clams. The women collect these for food, along with other fish.

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"The women's forest is our kitchen," said Berta Sanyi, another woman from Enggros village.

That morning, another woman joined the group looking for firewood, hauling dry logs onto her boat. And three other women joined on a rowboat.

Women from the next village, Tobati, also have a women's forest nearby. The two Indigenous villages are only 2 kilometers (1.2 miles) apart, and they're culturally similar, with Enggros growing out of Tobati's population decades ago. In the safety of the forest, women of both villages talk about issues at home with one another and share grievances away from the ears of the rest of the village.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is part of a series of on how tribes and Indigenous communities are coping with and combating climate change.

Alfred Drunyi, the leader of Drunyi tribe in Enggros, said that having dedicated spaces for women and men is a big part of the village's culture. There are tribal fines if a man trespasses and enters the forest, and the amount is based on how guilty the community judges the person to be.

"They should pay it with our main treasure, the traditional beads, maybe with some money. But the fines should be given to the women," Drunyi said.

But Sanyi, 65, who's been working in the forest since she was just 17, notes that threats to the space come from elsewhere.

Development on the bay has turned acres of forest into large roads, including a 700-meter (2,300-foot) bridge into Jayapura that passes through Enggros' pier. Jayapura's population has exploded in recent decades, and around 400,000 people live in the city — the largest on the island.

In turn, the forest has shrunk. Nearly six decades ago, the mangrove forest in Youtefa Bay was about 514 hectares (1,270 acres). Estimates say it's now less than half that.

"I am so sad when I see the current situation of the forest," Sanyi said, "because this is where we live." She said many residents, including her own children, are turning to work in Jayapura instead of maintaining traditions.

Pollution puts traditions and health at risk

Youtefa Bay, where the sea's brackish water and five rivers in Papua meet, serves as the gathering bowl for the waste that runs through the rivers as they cross through Jayapura.

Plastic bottles, tarpaulin sheets and pieces of wood are seen stuck between the mangrove roots. The water around the mangrove forest is polluted and dark.

After dozens of years being able to feel the clams on the bay with her feet, Sanyi said she now often has to feel through trash first. And once she removes the trash and gets to the muddy ground where the clams live, there are many fewer than there used to be.

Paula Hamadi, 53, said that she never saw the mangrove forest as bad as it is now. For years, she's been going to the forest almost every day during the low tide in the morning to search for clams.

"It used to be different," Hamadi said. "From 8.00 a.m. to 8:30 in the morning, I could get one can. But now, I only get trash."

The women used to be able to gather enough clams to sell some at the nearest village, but now their small hauls are reserved for eating with their families.

A study in 2020 found that high concentrations of lead from waste from homes and businesses were found at several points in the bay. Lead can be toxic to humans and aquatic organisms, and the study suggests its contaminated several species that are often consumed by the people of Youtefa Bay.

Other studies also showed that populations of shellfish and crab in the bay were declining, said John Domingus Kalor, a lecturer on fisheries and marine sciences at Cenderawasih University.

"The threats related to heavy metal contamination, microplastics, and public health are high," Kalor said. "In the future, it will have an impact on health."

Some are trying to save the land

Some of the mangrove areas have been destroyed for development, leading to degradation throughout

the forest.

Mangroves can absorb the shocks of extreme weather events, like tsunamis, and provide ecosystems with the needed environment to thrive. They also serve social and cultural functions for the women, whose work is mostly done between the mangroves.

"In the future people will say that there used to be a women's forest here" that disappeared because of development and pollution, said Kalor.

Various efforts to preserve it have been made, including the residents of Enggros village themselves. Merauje and other women from Enggros are trying to start mangrove tree nurseries and, where possible, plant new mangrove trees in the forest area.

"We plant new trees, replace the dead ones, and we also clean up the trash around Youtefa Bay," Merauje said. "I do that with my friends to conserve, to maintain this forest."

Beyond efforts to reforest it, Kalor said there also needs to be guarantees that more of the forest won't be flattened for development in the future.

There is no regional regulation to protect Youtefa Bay and specifically the women's forests, but Kalor thinks it would help prevent deforestation in the future.

"That should no longer be done in our bay," he said.

Chris Stapleton wins 4 CMA Awards, but Morgan Wallen gets entertainer of the year

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

Chris Stapleton took home four Country Music Association Awards and hardly left the stage on Wednesday night, while an absent Morgan Wallen was shut out all evening until taking the night's biggest prize, entertainer of the year.

Stapleton's wins included song of the year and single of the year for "White Horse," and he took the stage at the Bridgestone Arena in Nashville, Tennessee, three times to perform during the ABC telecast, including a show-opening duet with Post Malone.

"I'm really honored for this, thank you very much," the always subdued country traditionalist Stapleton said as he accepted the male vocalist of the year award for a record-extending eighth time.

For much of the night it seemed the leading nominee Wallen, up for seven, would be shut out, until presenter Jeff Bridges gave a botched rendering of his name as "Morgan Waylon" when he announced entertainer of the year.

Four of Wallen's nominations came for his hit collaboration with Malone, "I Had Some Help," though the song, and the first-time nominee Malone, went winless.

But the rapper-singer Malone was all smiles all night at the CMAs after releasing his first country album earlier in the year. With Stapleton, he sang his song "California Sober" in full cowboy regalia, including a bolo tie as big as a belt buckle. He later took the stage solo to sing the emotional "Yours," which he dedicated to his young daughter.

Stapleton later performed his own "What Am I Gonna Do" with his wife Morgane, and performed yet again as part of an all-star tribute to George Strait, who received the Willie Nelson Lifetime Achievement Award.

Last year's entertainer of the year, Lainey Wilson, hosted the show along with Luke Bryan and NFL great Peyton Manning, and won two CMAs — female vocalist of the year, and best music video for "Wildflowers and Wild Horses."

For a while it seemed Stapleton would get a sweep, but he lost out on album of the year to a surprised Cody Johnson, who took the trophy for "Leather."

"I thought Chris Stapleton or Jelly Roll was going to win," Johnson said.

Old Dominion won vocal group of the year for a record seventh straight time, surpassing the six won by Little Big Town.

The Stapleton-Malone opening and much of the night were a celebration of a time of crossover and collaboration in country.

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The telecast, available on Hulu for streaming Thursday, featured performances from artist combos including Brooks & Dunn, representing the 1990s and 2000s, with Jelly Roll, representing country's current moment. They gave an emotional gospel-style performance of Brooks & Dunn's 2005 song "Believe."

Brooks & Dunn followed it up by winning vocal duo of the year for the 15th time and the first time since 2006.

Shaboozey brought the crowd to its feet with a solo performance that began with a bit of his more sober single "Highway" before launching into one of the year's defining hits, "A Bar Song (Topsy)."

But he lost out on best new artist to Megan Moroney, who won minutes after her own performance.

"Thank you Jesus for putting this dream on my heart," Moroney, a 27-year-old from Georgia, said with misty eyes as she accepted the award.

Wilson opened the tribute to Strait by singing part of his best remembered hit, "Amarillo by Morning."

She was followed by Jamey Johnson, Miranda Lambert, Parker McCollum, Stapleton and Strait contemporary Clint Black, who performed pieces of Strait hits including "Troubadour" and "Honky Tonk Hall of Fame"

Stapleton handed the 72-year-old Strait the award previously won by Dolly Parton, Johnny Cash, Charley Pride and Nelson himself, calling Strait "true country music royalty, the king of country."

A smiling Strait thanked everyone for the strong renditions of his songs.

"I'm glad I got 'em first," he said.

The CMA Awards are nominated and voted on by members of the Country Music Association, which includes music executives, artists, publicists, songwriters and other industry professionals.

Trump's incoming chief of staff is a former lobbyist. She'll face a raft of special interests

By BRIAN SLODYSKO, JOSHUA GOODMAN and ALAN SUDERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As incoming White House chief of staff, one of Susie Wiles' vexing challenges will be policing the buffet line of powerful interests who want something from Donald Trump.

It's a world she knows well. During Trump's first presidency, she lobbied for many of them.

Trump was first elected on a pledge to "drain the swamp" in Washington. But his transactional approach to the presidency instead ushered in a lobbying boom that showered allies, including Wiles, with lucrative contracts, empowered wealthy business associates and stymied his agenda after his administration was ensnared in a series of influence-peddling scandals.

Now, as Trump prepares to return to power, his victory is likely to embolden those who think they can get his ear, raising the prospect that his second administration could face many of the same perils as his first. That will test the ability of Wiles to manage a growing number of high-powered figures — including Trump's children, his son-in-law Jared Kushner and billionaires like Elon Musk — who will not be dependent on her for access to the president.

The appointment of a former lobbyist to such an important job "bodes very poorly for what we are about to see from the next Trump administration," said Craig Holman, himself a registered lobbyist for the government watchdog group Public Citizen. "This time around, Trump didn't even mention 'draining the swamp.' ... He's not even pretending."

In a statement, Brian Hughes, a spokesman from the Trump transition effort, rejected any suggestion that Wiles' history as a lobbyist would make her susceptible to pressure.

"Susie Wiles has an undeniable reputation of the highest integrity and steadfast commitment to service both inside and outside government," Hughes said. "She will bring this same integrity and commitment as she serves President Trump in the White House, and that is exactly why she was selected."

Wiles' job won't be easy

Wiles' selection as chief of staff was Trump's first announced hire after his win. Wiles co-led the former president's campaign and was widely credited with having run an operation that was far more disciplined than his two previous efforts. Even so, she will have her work cut out for her. Though the job has traditionally entailed policing who has access to the president, Trump chaffed at such efforts during his first

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presidency as he churned through four chiefs of staff.

During his recent victory speech, Trump called Wiles an "Ice Maiden" while praising her as a consummate behind-the-scenes player. She will be the first woman to ever hold the position.

What is also clear is that Wiles, 67, has successfully managed headstrong men across a lengthy career in politics, government and lobbying. The daughter of NFL player and sportscaster Pat Summerall, Wiles worked for U.S. Rep. Jack Kemp, a conservative icon, in the 1970s, followed by stints on Ronald Reagan's campaign and as a scheduler in his White House.

She later headed to Florida, where she advised two Jacksonville mayors and is credited with helping businessman Rick Scott, now a U.S. senator, win the governor's office. After briefly managing Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman's 2012 presidential campaign, she oversaw Trump's 2016 effort in Florida, when his win in the state helped him clinch the White House.

Wiles represented a Venezuelan TV network

Wiles was a partner at Ballard Partners, a regional firm that lobbied for Trump's companies in Florida. Shortly after Trump's election, Ballard set up shop in Washington and quickly became a dominant player, pulling in more than \$70 million in lobbying fees during Trump's presidency, representing a who's who of corporate America, lobbying disclosures show.

Many of Wiles' clients were plain vanilla entities with obvious aims — General Motors, a trade group for children's hospitals, homebuilders, and the City of Jacksonville, Florida.

One in particular stood out that speaks to the ways, subtle or otherwise, that foreign interests seek to influence U.S. policy. In 2017, Wiles registered as a lobbyist for Globovisión, a Venezuelan TV network owned by Raúl Gorrín, a businessman charged in Miami with money laundering.

Gorrín bought the broadcast company in 2013 and immediately softened its anti-government coverage. He hired Ballard to advise on "general government policies and regulations," lobbying disclosures show. But rather than working with the agencies that oversee telecommunications, Ballard's lobbying was trained on the White House, which would have little say in regulating a foreign broadcaster in the U.S. Globovisión paid Ballard \$800,000 for a year of work.

Gorrín worked to help Venezuelan leaders

Brian Ballard, president of the firm, said that it's clear to him that Gorrín's aims weren't limited to the media business. Gorrín, who owns several luxury properties in Miami, had long positioned himself as a bridge between Venezuela's socialist government and U.S. officials.

By the time Wiles and a team of Ballard lobbyists represented Globovisión, Gorrín was leading a quiet charm offensive for Nicolás Maduro's government that sought closer ties with Trump at a time when the country was facing food shortages, violent crime and hyperinflation. It started before Trump took office when Citgo, a subsidiary of Venezuela's state-owned oil company, kicked in a \$500,000 donation for Trump's inauguration.

"He was a fraud and as soon as we learned he was a fraud, we fired him," said Ballard. "He would ask us to set up a lot of things, in LA and D.C., and then nothing would happen. It was all a fantasy. He just wanted to use our firm."

A few days after Ballard dropped Gorrín in 2018, federal prosecutors unsealed charges against the businessman for allegedly using the U.S. finance system to supply Venezuelan officials with private jets, a yacht and champion show-jumping horses as part of a fake loan scheme perpetrated by insiders to pilfer the state's coffers. Last month, he was charged a second time, also out of Miami, in another scheme to siphon \$1 billion from the state oil company, PDVSA.

Wiles is described as a 'straight shooter'

Ballard said Wiles had almost no role in managing the relationship with Gorrín or several other clients for which she is listed as a lobbyist. But he praised her as someone who is a highly organized "straight shooter" and "tough as nails" despite her soft demeanor.

"She's the type of person who you want in a foxhole," he said. "She will serve the president well."

During Trump's first term, Maduro engaged in a peacemaking offensive that included attempts to hire

at least two other lobbyists. It fizzled out, however. In 2019, the White House slapped crushing oil sanctions on the OPEC nation, closed the U.S. Embassy in Caracas and recognized the head of the opposition-controlled National Assembly as the country's legitimate ruler. Maduro was then indicted in 2020 by the U.S. Justice Department on federal drug trafficking charges out of New York.

Gorrín has long denied any wrongdoing and remains a fugitive. In a brief interview with The Associated Press, he called Wiles a "lady" and said she always acted professionally and humanely.

Ballard called the firm's work for Gorrín a "big mistake." Going forward, Ballard expects access to the White House to be more tightly controlled just as his firm, after a steep learning curve during the first Trump administration, will do a better job vetting potential clients to make sure their interests align with the president's agenda.

"We learned a lot," he says, "and so did the president."

Foreign clients

Globovisión wasn't Wiles' only client with foreign ties.

In early 2019, she registered with the Justice Department as a foreign agent working for one of Nigeria's main political parties for two months. Another client was an auto dealership owned by Shafik Gabr, a wealthy businessman who was in a financial dispute related to selling cars in Egypt with the subsidiary of the German automaker Volkswagen.

Wiles was also a registered lobbyist for the subsidiaries of a multi-national gaming company and a Canadian company looking to build a massive copper and gold mine near Alaska's salmon-rich Bristol Bay.

Wiles was hardly an outlier in Trump's Washington, where his eponymously named hotel served as a hub for lobbyists, business leaders and foreign governments looking to rub shoulders with Trump World figures as they sought the president's favor.

Though much of it was part of the normal course of business in Washington, a number of Trump allies and advisers were investigated and charged with crimes linked to their work on behalf of foreign countries and entities.

After becoming Trump's de facto campaign manager in 2022, Wiles kept on lobbying, this time for Mercury, a multinational public affairs and lobbying firm. Most recently she was representing the maker of Swisher Sweets cigars.

Russia and China oppose changing the Kenya-led force in Haiti to a UN peacekeeping mission

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Russia and China on Wednesday opposed a U.S.-led campaign to transform the Kenya-led multinational force in Haiti helping police to tackle escalating gang violence into a U.N. peacekeeping mission.

The two allies called a U.N. Security Council meeting as gangs have intensified attacks, shooting at four aircraft which has shut the airport in the capital Port-au-Prince, and attacking its upscale neighborhood Petionville on Tuesday. The U.N. estimates the gangs control 85% of the capital and have spread into surrounding areas.

The United States proposed a U.N. peacekeeping mission in early September as one way to secure regular financing for the U.N.-backed multinational force, which faces a serious funding crisis.

The U.S. tried to get the 15-member U.N. Security Council to sign off on a draft resolution last week to start the transformation. But Russia and China refused to discuss the resolution and instead called for Wednesday's council meeting where they made their opposition clear.

China's Deputy U.N. Ambassador Geng Shuang said the council extended the mandate of the multinational force only a month ago, and discussing its transformation to a peacekeeping operation now "will only interfere" and make it harder to tackle its funding shortfall and get all the police pledged to Haiti.

Peacekeepers should only be deployed when there is peace to keep, and there is no peace in Haiti, Geng stressed. "Deploying a peacekeeping operation at this time is nothing more than putting peacekeepers

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into the front line of the battles with gangs.”

The multinational force was supposed to have 2,500 international police but the head of the U.N.’s political mission in Haiti, Maria Isabel Salvador, told the council late last month that only around 430 are deployed — some 400 from Kenya and the rest from the Bahamas, Belize and Jamaica.

She said the U.N. trust fund that finances the multinational force and relies on voluntary contributions, “remains critically under-resourced.” By last week, the trust fund had received \$85.3 million of the \$96.8 million pledged. The U.S. agreed to contribute \$300 million to the force, but that total is still far below the \$600 million cost to deploy a 2,500-strong force for a year.

Russia’s Deputy U.N. Ambassador Dmitry Polyansky, expressing “shock and horror” at what’s happening on the streets of Port-au-Prince, accused the U.S. and other countries that initially supported the multinational force of failing to fund it.

“Conditions on the ground in Haiti are not appropriate for U.N. peacekeepers,” he said. “Their role is to maintain peace and not to fight crime in urban areas or to save a dysfunctional state that has been plunged into domestic conflict.”

Whatever the future international presence in Haiti, Polyansky said Haitians need urgent assistance immediately which means providing the multinational force with the necessary materiel, funding and technical expertise. “Otherwise, quite simply, there will be just nobody left to host any future peacekeepers,” he said.

Haiti’s leaders have asked for a U.N. peacekeeping force, and the permanent council of the Organization of American States adopted a resolution on Nov. 13 entitled “In Support of Haiti’s Request for a United States Peacekeeping Operation.”

At the council meeting, there was also strong support for the transformation.

Monica Juma, national security adviser to Kenya’s president, told the council that joint operations by the multinational force and the Haitian police have secured critical infrastructure including the police academy, national palace, national hospital and port.

But it’s evident the multinational force urgently needs “a surge,” she said, and Kenya looks forward to additional deployments in the shortest possible time along with contributions of equipment and logistical support.

At the same time, Juma said, Kenya “strongly supports” the Haitian government’s appeal to the Security Council to authorize planning for the transformation of the multinational force to a U.N. peacekeeping force.

U.S. deputy ambassador Dorothy Shea told the council that with Haitian, regional and Kenyan support, “it is time for the Security Council to act to take the initial steps to realize Haiti’s request to help reestablish security for the people of Haiti.”

Transitioning to a U.N. peacekeeping mission, she said, would facilitate the multinational force and the countries supporting it “to take advantage of existing U.N. financial, personnel, and logistical support structures as well as predictable and sustainable financing.”

The most poignant appeal for a peacekeeping force came from Haitian Dr. Bill Pape, who left Port-au-Prince about two weeks ago where he works to combat infectious and chronic diseases. He is also a professor at Weill Cornell Medical College in New York.

Pape said he came with a message to the Security Council: The Haitian police and multinational force “are outgunned and outnumbered.”

He said he recognized the controversies of previous peacekeeping missions in Haiti. The most recent, from 2004-2017, was marred by allegations of sexual assault and the introduction of cholera, which killed nearly 10,000 people.

But Pape stressed that during previous foreign interventions, which date to the early 1900s, “insecurity did not exist at this scale.”

“I trust that seeking your support to restore security in my country is not asking too much,” he told council members. “It is a difficult task for any Haitian to request foreign troops on our soil. But there is no alternative.”

'Bomb cyclone' kills 2 and knocks out power to over half a million homes across the US Northwest

By MARTHA BELLISLE, HALLIE GOLDEN and LISA BAUMANN Associated Press

ISSAQUAH, Wash. (AP) — A major storm battered the U.S. Northwest with strong winds and rain, causing widespread power outages, closing schools and downing trees that killed at least two people.

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 overwhelmed the region. The storm system, which hit starting Tuesday, is considered a "bomb cyclone," which occurs when a cyclone intensifies rapidly.

In California the weather service extended a flood watch into Saturday for areas north of San Francisco. Up to 16 inches of rain (40 centimeters) was forecast in Northern California and southwestern Oregon through Friday. Dangerous flash flooding, rock slides and debris flows were possible, officials warned.

A winter storm watch was in place 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.

Heavy, wet snow was expected to continue along the Cascades and in parts of far Northern California. Forecasters warned of blizzard and whiteout conditions and near impossible travel at pass level due to accumulation rates of 2 to 3 inches (5 to 7.6 centimeters) per hour and wind gusts of up to 65 mph (105 kph).

Falling trees struck homes and littered roads across western Washington. In Lynnwood, a woman died Tuesday night when a large tree fell on a homeless encampment, South County Fire said in a statement. In Bellevue, east of Seattle, a tree fell on a home and killed a woman, fire officials said.

Tracy Meloy of Issaquah, Washington, felt well-prepared for the storm Tuesday afternoon, with dinner prepped and lanterns ready. But then she spent the night listening to wind-whipped debris hit the outside of her home, including a particularly loud "thump" around 9 p.m. The next morning she ventured outside to survey the damage to her neighborhood, about 17 miles (27 kilometers) east of Seattle.

"Now that I'm standing here in front of the house, I can tell it's the tree that was across the street," Meloy said. The tree pulled down the power lines in front of her home, and limbs, leaves and other plants were strewn all over the road.

"It looks like a forest floor instead of a street," she said.

The number of power outage reports in Washington fluctuated wildly Tuesday evening but steadily declined to about 460,000 by Wednesday afternoon, according to poweroutage.us. More than a dozen schools were closed in Seattle alone.

About 2,800 customers were reported to be without power Wednesday in Oregon, 38,000 in California and 10,000 around Carson City and Reno, Nevada. Three Reno schools were closed, and semi-trucks were prohibited on the main highway between the two cities due to high winds. All chairlifts were shut down at the Mt. Rose Ski Resort near Lake Tahoe.

The weather service warned people on the West Coast about the danger of trees during high winds, posting on the social platform X: "Stay safe by avoiding exterior rooms and windows and by using caution when driving."

Southbound Interstate 5 was closed for an 11-mile (18-kilometer) stretch from Ashland, Oregon, to the California border on Wednesday morning due to extreme winter weather conditions in northern California, according to the Oregon Department of Transportation. It was expected to be a long-term closure, the department said.

The 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 for part of the day.

As Robert and Lisa Haynes of Issaquah surveyed the damage in their neighborhood, they saw fallen branches or trees blocking driveways and roads. They were stuck at home.

"It's like a snow day," Robert Haynes said, "but with no snow."

In Juneau, Alaska, gusts of wind up to 60 mph (96 kph) were forecast.

To the east, the first significant snow of the season in the Dakotas and Minnesota led to accidents and slippery roadways. The weather service said up to 16 inches (40 centimeters) could fall in the Turtle Mountains of North Dakota, and Minot could get up to 8 inches (20 centimeters).

Officials advised people not to travel throughout northern North Dakota, and state troopers in northern Minnesota responded to several accidents including tractor-trailers that jackknifed on Interstate 94 after the roadway became slippery from snow and ice.

Winds were expected to be problematic in parts of Montana and Nebraska, with gusts up to 60 mph (97 kph), the weather service said.

Republicans on House Ethics reject for now releasing report on Matt Gaetz

By LISA MASCARO, STEPHEN GROVES and FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Ethics Committee Republicans voted Wednesday against releasing the panel's long-running investigation into President-elect Donald Trump's nominee for attorney general, former Rep. Matt Gaetz, the top Democrat on the panel said.

The outcome, however, is only a temporary reprieve for Gaetz, who faces allegations of sexual misconduct, as he works to personally secure his embattled nomination to be the nation's top law enforcement official.

The House panel expects to meet again Dec. 5 to reconsider releasing its findings.

"There was no consensus on this issue," said Rep. Susan Wild of Pennsylvania, the panel's ranking Democrat, who said the vote fell along party lines on the evenly split committee.

The standoff comes as Trump and Gaetz are digging in for a potentially lengthy, brutal confirmation fight ahead. Gaetz met privately for hours Wednesday with Republican senators who have heard questions about the allegations and will be considering their votes on his nomination.

Trump has in Gaetz a valued ally who is bringing wide-ranging proposals to rid the Department of Justice of those perceived to have "weaponized" their work against the president-elect, his allies and conservatives in general.

At least one Republican senator decried the scrutiny as a "lynch mob" forming against Gaetz.

"I'm not going to legitimize the process to destroy the man because people don't like his politics," said Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., as he left the private senators' meeting.

"He deserves a chance to make his argument why he should be attorney general," Graham said. "No rubber stamp, no lynch mob."

Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., who is supportive of Gaetz's nomination, emerged saying: "If you have concerns, that's fine. But don't make up your mind yet. Let the guy testify first."

Gaetz has long denied the mounting allegations against him.

The House ethics panel, however, is not finished with its work.

Wild said the committee voted at a lengthy closed-door meeting, and no Republican joined Democrats who wanted to release the report. A vote to release just the exhibits underlying the report also failed along party lines, according to a person granted anonymity to discuss the private session.

However, the House committee did vote to complete the report, which passed with some Republican support, the person said.

Wild said she was compelled to speak up after the panel's Republican chairman, Rep. Michael Guest of Mississippi, characterized what had transpired at its session. He had said there was no agreement reached on the matter.

As Gaetz mounts his campaign for confirmation, Trump himself told senators that he hoped "to get Matt across the finish line," said Sen. Kevin Cramer, R-N.D., who was with the president-elect and others for a SpaceX rocket launch Tuesday with billionaire Elon Musk in Texas.

Vice President-elect JD Vance, an Ohio senator, was shepherding Gaetz through the Senate talks, largely with members of the Judiciary Committee that will be the first stop in confirmation proceedings. The

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meeting with Senate allies was largely a strategy session where he emphasized the need to get a hearing where he could lay out his and Trump's vision for the Justice Department.

It follows a meeting Gaetz had at the start of the week with the conservative House Freedom Caucus, whose members have expressed enthusiasm for his approach to wholesale changes, which have instilled a climate of anxiety and dismay at the department.

Vance reminded the GOP senators that Trump's presidential victory had coattails that boosted their ranks to the majority. "He deserves a Cabinet that is loyal to the agenda he was elected to implement," the outgoing Ohio senator posted on social media.

At the same time, attorneys involved in a civil case brought by a Gaetz associate were notified this week that an unauthorized person accessed a file shared between lawyers that included unredacted depositions in a federal probe from a woman who has said Gaetz had sex with her when she was 17, and a second woman who says she saw the encounter, according to attorney Joel Leppard.

The Senate Judiciary Committee's Democrats sent a letter Wednesday asking FBI Director Christopher Wray to provide to the panel "the complete evidentiary file," including the forms memorializing interviews "in the closed investigation of former Congressman Matt Gaetz's alleged sex trafficking of minors."

Gaetz has said the department's investigation into sex trafficking allegations involving underage girls, separate from the House committee's probe, had ended with no federal charges against him.

"The grave public allegations against Mr. Gaetz speak directly to his fitness to serve as the chief law enforcement officer for the federal government," wrote Judiciary Chairman Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., and others on the panel.

While House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., has said the committee should not release the report because Gaetz swiftly resigned his congressional seat after Trump announced the nomination, several GOP senators have indicated they want all information before having to make a decision on how they would vote.

Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, who also met with Gaetz, said of the committee's report, "We didn't get into a lot of detail as to what he expects to be in there, but he expressed confidence that what is before the committee are a series of false accusations."

Gaetz emerged at congressional oversight hearings as he railed against what conservatives claim is favoritism within the Justice Department, which indicted Trump over alleged mishandling of classified documents after he left office and for his efforts to overturn the 2020 election before the Jan. 6, 2021, attack at the Capitol.

But the president-elect's pick has been among his most surprising and provocative.

Sen. Marsha Blackburn, R-Tenn., a Trump ally, said she had a great meeting with Gaetz and looked forward to "a speedy confirmation for our next attorney general." She wrote on social media that Trump's Cabinet "is going to shake up the D.C. swamp, and we look forward to moving his nominees."

Cramer still said Gaetz had a "steep climb" to confirmation.

"Donald Trump is understandably, legitimately and authentically concerned that he has an attorney general that's willing to do what he wants him to do," Cramer said. "Matt Gaetz is definitely the guy that will not hold on any punches."

As soon as the new Congress convenes Jan. 3, 2025, when Republicans take majority control, senators are expected to begin holding hearings on Trump's nominees, with voting possible on Inauguration Day, Jan. 20.

Biden has become notably quiet after the 2024 election and Democrats' loss

By AAMER MADHANI and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden has been notably quiet since the Democrats' gut-wrenching defeat at the polls.

After warning voters for years that a Donald Trump win would be calamitous for American democracy, Biden has gone largely silent on his concerns about what lays ahead for America and he has yet to sub-

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stantively reflect on why Democrats were decisively defeated up and down the ballot.

His only public discussion of the outcome of the election came in a roughly six-minute speech in the Rose Garden two days after the election, when he urged people to “see each other not as adversaries but as fellow Americans” and to “bring down the temperature.” Since then, there’s been hardly a public peep — including over the course of Biden’s six-day visit to South America that concluded on Tuesday evening. His only public comments during the trip came during brief remarks before meetings with government officials and a climate-related speech during a visit to the Amazon.

At a delicate moment in the U.S. — and for the world — Biden’s silence may be leaving a vacuum. But his public reticence has also underscored a new reality: America and the rest of the world is already moving on.

“His race is over. His day is done,” said David Axelrod, who served as a senior adviser in the Obama-Biden White House. “It’s up to a new generation of leaders to chart the path forward, as I’m sure they will.”

Edward Frantz, a historian at the University of Indianapolis, said Biden’s relative silence in the aftermath of the Republican win is in some ways understandable. Still, he argued, there’s good reason for Biden to be more active in trying to shape the narrative during his final months in office.

“The last time a president left office so irrelevant or rejected by the populace was Jimmy Carter,” said Frantz, referring to the last one-term Democrat in the White House. “History has allowed for the great rehabilitation of Carter, in part, because of all he did in his post-presidency. At 82, I’m not sure Biden has the luxury of time. The longer he waits, the longer he can’t find something to say, he risks ceding shaping his legacy at least in how he’s seen in the near term.”

Biden’s allies say the president -- like Democrats writ large -- is privately processing the election defeat, stressing that it’s barely been two weeks since Trump’s win. Biden hasn’t been vocally introspective about his role in the loss, and still has a lot to unpack, they said.

Biden, in his speech after the election, said: “Campaigns are contests of competing visions. The country chooses one or the other. We accept the choice the country made. I’ve said many times you can’t love your country only when you win.”

Biden’s aides say the president’s insistence on following electoral traditions — ensuring an orderly transition and inviting Trump to the White House — is especially important because Trump flouted them four years ago, when he actively tried to overturn the results of the election he lost and helped incite a mob that rioted at the U.S. Capitol.

But that doesn’t mean Biden isn’t privately stewing over the results even as he doesn’t say much in public.

White House spokesman Andrew Bates said Biden believes that it is “critical to respect the will of the voters by providing an orderly transition and peaceful transfer of power. President Biden was honest with the American people about the stakes for democracy, and his views are unchanged — which is all the more reason to uphold his principles and lead by example.”

During his six-day visit to Peru and Brazil for meetings with global leaders, Biden declined to hold a news conference -- typically a set piece for American presidents during such travel. Biden already was far less likely to hold news conferences than his contemporaries, but his staff often points to off-the-cuff moments when he answers questions from reporters who travel everywhere with him. In this case, he’s yet to engage even in an impromptu Q&A on the election or other matters.

And notably this week, Biden left it to allies Emmanuel Macron of France and Justin Trudeau of Canada to offer public explanations of his critical decision to loosen restrictions on Ukraine’s use of longer-range American weapons in its war with Russia.

Biden, for whom Ukraine has been a major focal point of his presidency, had long been concerned about escalation should the U.S. relax restrictions, and was cognizant of how Moscow might respond had he seemed to be thumping his chest at President Vladimir Putin. But Ukraine has also been a touchy subject because of Trump, who has claimed he’d end the war immediately and has long espoused admiration for Putin.

The GOP victory — Trump won both the popular vote and Electoral College count, and Republicans won control of Congress — comes as the president and Vice President Kamala Harris have both sounded dire alarms over what a Trump presidency might mean. Harris called Trump a fascist. Biden told Americans the

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very foundation of the nation was at stake, and he said world leaders, too, were concerned.

"Every international meeting I attend," Biden said after a trip in September to Germany, "they pull me aside — one leader after the other, quietly — and say, 'Joe, he can't win. My democracy is at stake.'"

His voice rising, Biden then asked if "America walks away, who leads the world? Who? Name me a country."

Perhaps the most important moment of his time in South America was a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Peru. His public comments at the start of that meeting were notably more backward looking than Xi's, the leader of America's most powerful geopolitical competitor.

"I'm very proud of the progress we've both made together," said Biden, fondly recalling a visit near the Tibetan plateau with Xi years ago. He added, "We haven't always agreed, but our conversations have always been candid and always been frank."

Xi, by contrast, looked past Biden in his remarks and sought to send a clear message to Trump.

"China is ready to work with the new U.S. administration to maintain communication, expand cooperation, and manage differences so as to strive for a steady transition of the China-U.S. relationship for the benefit of the two peoples," Xi said, while urging American leadership to make a "wise choice" as it manages the relationship.

The president also seemed in no mood to engage with reporters throughout his time in South America. Since Election Day, he's only briefly acknowledged media questions twice.

In one of those exchanges, he responded to a question from an Israeli reporter about whether he believed he could get a cease-fire deal in Gaza done before he leaves office with a sarcastic reply: "Do you think you can keep from getting hit in the head by a camera behind you?"

The terse answers and silence haven't stopped reporters from trying to engage him.

Over the course of his six-day trip, he ignored questions about his decision on providing antipersonnel mines to Ukraine, reflections on the election, and even why he's not answering questions from the press.

As he got ready to board Air Force One in Rio de Janeiro on Tuesday to make his way home, one reporter even tried endearing herself to the president by pointing to Biden's 82nd birthday on Wednesday.

"Mr. President, happy early birthday! For your birthday, will you talk to us, sir?" the reporter said. "As a gift to the press will you please talk to us? Mr. President! President Biden, please! We haven't heard from you all trip!"

Biden got on the plane without answering.

Brazil's Lula welcomes China's Xi for state visit as ties between countries strengthen

By ELÉONORE HUGHES Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva on Wednesday welcomed China's President Xi Jinping for a state visit at the Alvorada Palace in Brasilia, the latest sign of deepening ties between the two countries that analysts say may accelerate as Donald Trump returns to the White House in 2025.

China overtook the U.S. as Brazil's biggest export market in 2009. Since then, the links between the two nations have strengthened in trade and investment — and on Wednesday the two leaders signed 37 agreements in areas ranging from trade and tourism to agriculture, industry, science and technology, health, energy, culture and education.

That reflects a broader trend, experts said. Last week, Xi inaugurated a \$1.3 billion megaport in Peru, perhaps the clearest sign of Latin America's reorientation.

"Latin America has always been forgotten by the United States and the European Union. Who fills that void? China," said Flavia Loss, an international relations professor at Foundation School of Sociology and Politics in Sao Paulo.

"Donald Trump's election is already accelerating this proximity. We're clearly seeing it happening now, live," she added.

The state visit by the Chinese leader comes more than a year after Lula visited China seeking to strengthen ties and mend relations with its biggest trade partner after a rocky period under his predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro.

Bolsonaro's lawmaker son Eduardo blamed the COVID-19 pandemic on the Chinese Communist Party and referred to the giant Chinese technology company Huawei as "Chinese espionage," prompting sharp rebukes. During eight months in 2022, China did not have an ambassador in Brazil.

Lula has taken an opposite stance. Repairing relations with China is also part of his strategy to replace Brazil on the international scene after a period of isolation under Bolsonaro who showed little interest in global affairs.

In remarks to journalists on Wednesday, Lula said that what China and Brazil do together "reverberates around the world" highlighting the collaboration of both countries within the United Nations and BRICS group of developing nations.

Xi referred to China and Brazil as "reliable friends with a shared destiny and positive forces to promote peace."

From January to October 2024, trade between the countries amounted to \$136.3 billion, according to a Nov. 13 statement from Brazil's presidential palace.

"Since 2004, when President Lula visited China for the first time, bilateral trade has grown more than 17 times. Exports to China were greater than the sum of our sales to the United States and the European Union," Eduardo Saboia, secretary for Asia and the Pacific at the ministry of foreign affairs, said in the statement.

China has been pressuring Brazil to join its Belt and Road Initiative, BRI, which started as a program for Chinese companies to build transportation, energy and other infrastructure around the world.

While initially cautious, Brazil has considered the idea and is seeking partners in areas such as funds to limit human-caused climate change and finance adaptation measures, said Pedro Brites, an expert on China at the Getulio Vargas Foundation, a university and think tank in Sao Paulo.

"But Brazil, as this state visit shows, has managed to seal good agreements with China without having joined, so I don't know if the gain is still worth it in Brazil's calculation," he added.

While Trump's return to the White House may accelerate the proximity between China and Brazil, adhering too much to Chinese leadership could come with a cost for the South American nation, causing rifts with Washington and European nations, said Brites.

"Brazil will maintain its rapprochement and bargain to a certain extent, but I think there will be a limit," he added.

Susan Smith is denied parole 30 years after drowning 2 sons by rolling car into South Carolina lake

By JEFFREY COLLINS and MAKIYA SEMINERA Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — A parole board decided unanimously Wednesday that Susan Smith should remain in prison, despite her plea that God has forgiven her for infamously killing her two young sons 30 years ago by rolling her car into a South Carolina lake while they were strapped in their car seats.

It was the first parole hearing for Smith, 53, who is serving a life sentence after a jury convicted her of murder but decided to spare her the death penalty. She is eligible for a parole hearing every two years now that she has spent 30 years behind bars.

Smith made her case by video link from prison. She started by saying she was "very sorry," then broke down in tears and bowed her head.

"I know what I did was horrible," Smith said, pausing and then continuing with a wavering voice. "And I would give anything if I could go back and change it."

In her final statements, Smith said God has forgiven her. "I ask that you show that same kind of mercy, as well," she said.

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Smith made international headlines in 1994 when she insisted for nine days that a Black carjacker drove away with her sons. Prosecutors have long argued that Smith killed 3-year-old Michael and 14-month-old Alex because she believed they were the reason the wealthy son of the owner of the business where she worked broke off their affair. Her attorneys blame her mental health.

A group of about 15 people urged against parole. They included her ex-husband and the father of the boys, David Smith; his family members; prosecutors; and law enforcement officials. Along with a few others, David Smith had a photo of Michael and Alex pinned to his suit jacket.

He struggled to get out words at first, pausing several times to compose himself. He said he has never seen Susan Smith express remorse toward him. "She changed my life for the rest of my life that night," he said.

"I'm asking that you please, deny her parole today, and hopefully in the future, but specifically today," he said, adding that he plans to attend each parole hearing to make sure Michael and Alex aren't forgotten.

A decision to grant parole requires a two-thirds vote of board members present, according to the state. Parole in South Carolina is granted only about 8% of the time and is less likely with an inmate's first appearance before the board, in notorious cases, or when prosecutors and the families of victims are opposed.

Before Smith testified, she listened stoically to a statement from her attorney, Tommy Thomas. He called her situation one about "the dangers of untreated mental health." He also noted she had no criminal history before her conviction, making her "low risk" to the public.

The board's decision was the one David Smith had hoped for, Smith said in a news conference following the hearing. "In two more years, we'll go through this again," he said. "But at least I know, for now, she'll still be behind bars."

The family and prosecution had been "cautiously optimistic," former prosecutor Tommy Pope said, because Susan Smith has continually demonstrated that it's "always been about Susan."

A true-crime touchstone

Smith had claimed in October 1994 that she was carjacked late at night near the city of Union and that a Black man wearing a toboggan hat drove away with her sons. The claims by Smith, who is white, played into a centuries-old racist trope of Black men being a danger to white women and stoked concerns about crime that were prevalent in 1990s America and remain so today.

For nine days, Smith made numerous and sometimes tearful pleas asking that Michael and Alex be returned safely. The whole time, the boys were in Smith's car at the bottom of nearby John D. Long Lake, authorities said.

Investigators said Smith's story didn't add up. Carjackers usually just want a vehicle, so investigators asked why they would let Smith out but not her kids. The traffic light where Smith said she had stopped when her car was taken would only be red if another car was waiting to cross, and Smith said no other cars were around. Other bits and pieces of the story did not make sense.

Smith ultimately confessed to letting her car roll down a boat ramp and into the lake. A re-creation by investigators showed it took six minutes for the Mazda to dip below the surface, while cameras inside the vehicle showed water pouring in through the vents and steadily rising. The boys' bodies were found dangling upside-down in their car seats, one tiny hand pressed against a window.

The 1995 trial of the young mother became a national sensation and a true-crime touchstone.

Smith's lawyers said she was remorseful, was suffering a mental breakdown and intended to die alongside her children but left the car at the last moment. They were successful at sparing her life.

"I just felt strongly that had the Black man with the toboggan committed the crime, people would expect the death penalty," Pope said at Wednesday's hearing. "If David Smith had committed the crime, people would have expected the death penalty."

Pain to family, state and nation

The parole board asked Smith about the law enforcement resources used to try to locate her children. In reply, she told the board she was "just scared" and "didn't know how to tell them."

Smith's crime traumatized not only her family, prosecutor Kevin Brackett said, but also people in South

Carolina and around the country who “fixated” on this “global sensation.” Her allegation that a Black man kidnapped her children also led to other Black men being wrongfully pulled over as police searched for a “fictitious man,” he said.

From prison, Smith can make phone calls and answer text messages, many from journalists and interested men. Those messages and phone calls were released under South Carolina’s open records act, something Smith didn’t initially realize could happen. She said the invasion of her privacy upset her, along with the public revelation that she was juggling conversations about the future with several men.

Some men know why she is famous. Others are more coy. One told her he was going to use the dates of her birthday and those of her dead sons when he played the Powerball lottery. Others chatted about their lives and sports. Many promised her a home on the outside and a happy life.

Smith also had sex with guards. And she violated prison policies by giving out contact information for friends, family members and her ex-husband to a documentary producer who discussed paying her for her help, according to Pope, the former prosecutor.

As US ramps up nuclear power, fuel supplier plans to enrich more uranium domestically

By JONATHAN MATTISE Associated Press

OAK RIDGE, Tenn. (AP) — A supplier of fuel for nuclear power plants announced a \$60 million expansion in Tennessee on Wednesday, promising to resume and grow its manufacturing of high-tech centrifuges there to enrich uranium at its facility in Ohio.

The expansion by Centrus Energy at its massive facility in Oak Ridge comes as the U.S. ramps up its reliance on nuclear power as a climate change solution. The Tennessee facility, which stretches 440,000 square feet, is where they make and test 40-foot-high centrifuges that will be transported to the company’s enrichment facility in Piketon, Ohio. The company gave reporters a tour Wednesday, showing off the centrifuges but covering other classified equipment with tarps.

Centrus is one of several companies working on enriching uranium in the U.S., which is currently dependent on foreign providers. Russia has about 44% of the world’s uranium enrichment capacity, supplying some 35% of U.S. imports for nuclear fuel, according to the Department of Energy. Just last week, Russia announced it would temporarily limit its exports of enriched uranium to the U.S. in response to the U.S. deciding to ban Russian uranium starting in 2028.

Western nuclear operators have been looking for suppliers of nuclear fuel other than Russia since it invaded Ukraine in 2022, S&P Global Commodity Insights said Wednesday.

Centrus President and CEO Amir Vexler told reporters Wednesday that the expansion was not due to Russia’s decision-making, saying that the company’s board approved the plans a few weeks ago. But he said the move illustrates why the U.S. can’t depend on other countries for its nuclear fuel.

“Nuclear is one of the key essential stabilizers in our sources on the grid. And nuclear fuel is a key essential element of that,” Vexler said. “Why would you not worry about the security of supply of that key ingredient to our grid?”

The company partners with the nearby Oak Ridge National Laboratory, known for its role as one of the labs that helped develop the atomic bomb. Centrus is expanding in hopes of tapping into a fund of \$3.4 billion from the Department of Energy set aside for domestic uranium enrichment. Headquartered in Bethesda, Maryland, the company currently has about 300 employees, including about 120 in Oak Ridge. The expansion could add 300 more in Oak Ridge.

In the same city, another company, Orano USA, plans to build a uranium enrichment facility.

The Biden administration set a target this month of at least tripling nuclear power in the United States by 2050 to help avoid the worst consequences of climate change. The United States will aim to add 200 gigawatts of new nuclear energy capacity, according to the administration’s new strategy. One gigawatt can power roughly 750,000 to 1 million homes for a year, though the exact amount varies by region and depends on energy use.

The United States currently has 94 operating reactors that produce power without emitting planet-warming greenhouse gases. Nuclear power has provided about one-fifth of the nation's electricity since the 1990s.

Among the steps to expand nuclear power, the strategy recommends building large gigawatt-scale reactors, constructing small modular reactors and microreactors, extending the lifespan of some existing reactors and working to restart ones that retired for economic reasons. It also recommends improving licensing and developing the nuclear workforce.

President-elect Donald Trump has said he is also interested in developing the next generation of nuclear reactors that are smaller than traditional reactors.

For a company like Centrus, the business strategy includes producing uranium enriched to levels that are standard in the nuclear power plants operating today, plus at a higher level for the type of commercial small reactors that are being developed in the U.S., though none are under construction yet. Centrus' subsidiary, American Centrifuge Operating, was one of four companies awarded a Department of Energy contract aimed at growing the higher-level uranium enrichment.

Some advocates have raised concerns about the more highly enriched uranium.

Edwin Lyman, the director of nuclear power at the Union of Concerned Scientists, said his group thinks the uranium is enriched enough in the process to make nuclear weapons, and worries about the security of keeping the material from getting into the wrong hands either at enrichment facilities, en route elsewhere or at some of the small reactors still in the works.

"The concern is that we believe that this material is more dangerous than is currently widely accepted," Lyman said.

Asked about those kind of concerns, Vexler praised the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission as "the best regulator in the business," saying regulators ensure the material is safeguarded properly.

Lawmakers are concerned about background checks of Trump's Cabinet picks as red flags surface

By ERIC TUCKER, ZEKE MILLER and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As senators prepare to consider President-elect Donald Trump's picks for his Cabinet, they may be doing so without a well-established staple of the confirmation process: an FBI background check.

The Trump transition team has so far not signed the requisite agreements with the White House or the Justice Department to allow the FBI to screen his personnel choices, both for the process of obtaining security clearances and meeting the Senate's usual standards for nominations.

That means the Senate could be asked to vote on Trump's picks without the usual rigorous background checking meant to uncover personal problems, criminal histories or other red flags that would raise questions about a nominee's suitability for the job. There already are questions about problematic issues related to a number of the people Trump wants in his administration.

"There are very real liabilities on the security side if you don't get this right," said Dan Meyer, a Washington lawyer at the Tully Rinckey law firm who specializes in background checks, security clearances and federal employment law.

At issue is a memorandum of understanding under which a president — or in this case, an incoming one — submits requests for name and background checks and the FBI commits to flagging to the White House any adverse information uncovered during the process.

But that document has not yet been signed, with the Trump transition team relying instead on internal campaign aides, allied groups and law firms on the outside to support the personnel effort. Trump for years has regarded FBI leadership with suspicion, in part because of the Russian election interference investigation that shadowed his first term and more recently because of FBI investigations into his hoarding of classified documents and his efforts to undo the results of the 2020 election that led to his indictment last year.

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A Justice Department spokesperson said Wednesday that discussions were ongoing with the Trump transition team about signing the memo.

In a statement last week, the department said it was "committed to ensuring an orderly and effective transition" to the next administration.

"We are prepared to deliver briefings to the transition team on our operations and responsibilities, and we stand ready to process requests for security clearances for those who will need access to national security information," the statement said.

For those appointees whose jobs involve a security clearance, a background check would be required. But once Trump takes office on Jan. 20, 2025, he could simply order that people be given a security clearance, as he was reported to have done for son-in-law Jared Kushner during his first term.

"The president is the head of the personnel security system," Meyer said. "The director of national intelligence is his executive agent for that. The president could issue an executive order and he could change the security system in two seconds. It's all his."

Senate GOP leaders have said they would launch confirmation hearings as soon as the new Congress convenes on Jan. 3, and hope to begin voting on nominees as soon as inauguration day.

Lawmakers are complaining about what they see as insufficient screening of the picks they're being asked to consider. Two Democratic House members, Don Beyer of Virginia and Ted Lieu of California, introduced a bill Tuesday that would codify the FBI's role in the background check process for political appointees of the president.

The issue is of particular relevance given the eyebrow-raising backgrounds of some of Trump's picks.

Trump's choice for attorney general, former Florida Rep. Matt Gaetz, faced a Justice Department sex trafficking investigation into allegations involving underage girls that ended with no federal charges against him. There was also a House Ethics inquiry into whether Gaetz engaged in sexual misconduct and illicit drug use, accepted improper gifts and sought to obstruct government investigations of his conduct — allegations that he denies.

Asked Wednesday if she was concerned by the allegations, Republican Sen. Susan Collins of Maine said, "of course."

"I said from the beginning that I was shocked by the nomination given the many allegations," she added, "but that's why it's important that the Senate go through its process of making sure that we have a background check, that we have a Senate investigation which involves extensive interviews and questionnaires and then a public hearing."

Pete Hegseth, picked for the role of defense secretary, was accused of sexual assault in 2017 after a speaking appearance at a Republican women's event in Monterey, California, but was not charged after a police investigation.

His lawyer, Timothy Parlatore, described the sexual encounter as consensual and confirmed that Hegseth paid the woman a sum as part of a confidential settlement. Hegseth did so to head off a threatened lawsuit, according to Parlatore, who said his client was the victim of "blackmail" and a "successful extortion."

Democrats are signaling their interest in rigorous exploration of potential problem areas.

"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. He will be the committee's top Democrat next year, as Republicans regain the majority, when it takes up Hegseth's nomination.

The selection of former Democratic Rep. Tulsi Gabbard for director of national intelligence has alarmed U.S. intelligence analysts who point to her past criticism of Ukraine, comments supportive of Russia as well as secret meetings with Syrian president Bashar Assad, a close ally of Russia and Iran.

The Senate has a responsibility to closely examine Gabbard and should not approve the confirmation just because Republicans feel a loyalty to Trump, said Rep. Jim Himes, D-Conn., his party's ranking member on the House Intelligence Committee.

"The Republican senator who votes to confirm Matt Gaetz or Robert Kennedy or Tulsi Gabbard will be remembered by history as somebody who completely gave up their responsibility to Donald Trump," Himes said Sunday on CBS' "Face the Nation."

Donald Trump's latest branded venture is guitars that cost up to \$10,000

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump has endorsed a line of guitars, following up on the Bibles, sneakers, watches, photo books and cryptocurrency ventures launched during his third White House campaign.

Trump on Wednesday posted to Truth Social a photo of himself holding what he said was a "Limited Edition '45' Guitar," an electric model emblazoned with an American flag and eagle on the body, and Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan inlaid into the neck. Both acoustic and electric styles are available, for \$1,250 and \$1,500, respectively, as well as "Presidential" and "God Bless the USA" models and "Signature Edition" guitars, which — with a \$10,000 price tag — also include Trump's signature.

What's not clear is the financial relationship between Trump and proceeds from the guitar sales.

Following his long tradition of melding his political and business interests, Trump has hawked a series of branded products since he launched his 2024 White House campaign, a slew of items that went up for sale in the wake of a \$489 million civil fraud judgment against the former president.

Some of them, like the "Official Trump Watch Collection" — where one model costs \$100,000 — were listed as affiliated with CIC Ventures LLC, a company that Trump reported owning in his 2023 financial disclosure.

Websites for items like the watches note that the products are subject to a "paid license agreement," the same mechanism that allowed Trump, well before he entered politics, to profit for years from sales of everything from water to vodka and steaks.

As of Wednesday, GetTrumpGuitars.com included no such disclaimers, or even the name of the company selling the items. An FAQ page lists information about how many of each model are being made available — and notes that these models are "the ONLY guitars endorsed by President Donald J. Trump!" — but includes none of the disclaimers or licensing language on some of Trump's other product sites.

The guitar website's privacy policy does include a suburban Nashville address for a couple, neither of whom immediately returned a message seeking comment Wednesday. Photos on their social media pages showed that they attended Trump's election-night party in Florida.

Messages left with 16 Creative — a branding agency listed at the bottom of the guitar website — and Trump's transition team also were not immediately returned.

Leading up to his win in the general election, Trump this year has announced the sale of \$100 silver coins bearing his face, urged his supporters to spend \$59.99 for a "God Bless the USA Bible," inspired by country singer Lee Greenwood's patriotic ballad, and hawked new Trump-branded sneakers at "Sneaker Con," a gathering that bills itself as the "The Greatest Sneaker Show on Earth."

He also has dabbled in NFTs, or nonfungible tokens, and last year reported earning between \$100,000 and \$1 million from a series of digital trading cards that portrayed him in cartoon-like images, including as an astronaut, a cowboy and a superhero.

Liam Payne's One Direction bandmates among the mourners at singer's funeral

LONDON (AP) — The former members of One Direction reunited Wednesday for the funeral of bandmate Liam Payne.

Harry Styles, Zayn Malik, Niall Horan and Louis Tomlinson joined friends and family at the service for 31-year-old Payne, who died after falling from a hotel balcony in Buenos Aires last month.

A horse-drawn carriage carried the coffin to St. Mary's Church in Amersham, 25 miles (40 kilometers) northwest of London. Undertakers carried the dark blue casket with silver handles, topped with white roses, into the 800-year-old church for the private service.

The funeral location was not made public in advance to prevent a large crowd from gathering, though dozens of local people and fans still gathered nearby.

"Growing up, I was a massive fan of One Direction, so I almost felt like a little piece of the child in me

was gone," said 20-year-old Tara Lloyd, who works at the nearby Amersham Hospital.

The crowd fell silent when Payne's parents, Geoff and Karen, emerged from a car to stand beside the carriage, which was topped with floral tributes reading "Son" and "Daddy." Payne had a 7-year-old son, Bear, with the singer Cheryl Tweedy.

Among the mourners was Payne's girlfriend Kate Cassidy, actor and presenter James Corden, former soccer player Robbie Keane and music mogul Simon Cowell who put One Direction together.

After the service, Cowell embraced Payne's parents outside the church, before the late singer's coffin was driven away in a black hearse.

One Direction formed in 2010 after the five teenagers auditioned for "The X-Factor" as solo acts and were brought together by Cowell, a judge on the show. With their loyal fan base of "Directioners" they became one of the most successful boy bands of all time.

After the group split in 2016, Payne embarked on a solo career which failed to match the success of One Direction. He was also open about struggling with his mental health and alcohol amid the pressures of fame.

Prosecutors in Argentina said that Payne had traces of alcohol, cocaine and a prescription antidepressant in his system when he fell to his death from the third-floor balcony of his room at the Casa Sur Hotel in the Argentine capital on Oct. 16. They have charged three people over his death, with "abandonment of a person followed by death" and "supplying and facilitating the use of narcotics."

Spain to grant residency, work permits to hundreds of thousands of migrants in the country illegally

By SUMAN NAISHADHAM Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — Spain will grant residency and work permits to about 300,000 migrants living in the country illegally each year for the next three years, the country's migration minister said Wednesday.

The policy will take effect next May and aims to expand the country's aging workforce. Spain has remained largely open to receiving migrants even as other European nations seek to tighten their borders to illegal crossings and asylum seekers.

Spain needs around 250,000 registered foreign workers a year to maintain its welfare state, Migration Minister Elma Saiz said in an interview on Wednesday. She contended that the legalization policy is not aimed solely at "cultural wealth and respect for human rights, it's also prosperity."

"Today, we can say Spain is a better country," Saiz told national broadcaster Radio Nacional de España.

Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez has often described his government's migration policies as a means to combat the country's low birthrate.

The new policy, approved Tuesday by Sánchez's leftist minority coalition government, simplifies administrative procedures for short and long-term visas and provides migrants with additional labor protections. It extends a visa previously offered to job-seekers for three months to one year.

In August, Sánchez visited three West African nations in an effort to address irregular migration to Spain's Canary Islands.

The archipelago off the coast of Africa is seen by many as a step toward continental Europe with young men from Mali, Senegal, Mauritania and elsewhere embarking on dangerous sea voyages there seeking better job opportunities abroad or fleeing violence and political instability at home.

By mid-November, some 54,000 migrants had reached Spain this year by sea or land, according to the country's Interior Ministry. The exact number of foreigners living in Spain illegally is not clear.

Many such migrants make a living in Spain's underground economy as fruit pickers, caretakers, delivery drivers, or other low-paid but essential jobs often passed over by Spaniards.

Without legal protections, they can be vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Saiz said the new policy would help prevent such abuse and "serve to combat mafias, fraud and the violation of rights."

Spain's economy is among the fastest-growing in the European Union this year, boosted in part by a strong rebound in tourism after the pandemic.

In 2023, Spain issued 1.3 million visas to foreigners, according to the government.

Alec Baldwin film 'Rust' has world premiere with dedication to cinematographer killed on set

By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

TORUN, Poland (AP) — Alec Baldwin's Western "Rust" had its world premiere Wednesday at a film festival in Poland with a dedication to cinematographer Halyna Hutchins, who was fatally shot in an accident on the set three years ago.

Organizers called for a minute of silence before showing the film, which opened to a full house at the International Film Festival of the Art of Cinematography Camerimage in the city of Torun, and received applause at the end.

Baldwin, the lead actor and co-producer, was pointing a gun at Hutchins during a rehearsal 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 introduced the film at the festival, a popular industry event dedicated to cinematography. He told the audience that initially after the accident he could not have imagined continuing with the production, or even working on a movie set or writing again.

"It just hurt too much," he said.

But Hutchins' husband, Matthew, wanted the film to be finished, and came on as an executive producer.

"It was important to him that the people who knew and loved Halyna get to see her final work," Souza said. The mission became "to preserve every single frame that I could of hers, and to honor her final work."

"Rust" — which includes scene after scene of shootouts — is the story of a 13-year-old boy who is sentenced to be hanged after he fatally shoots a rancher by accident. He goes on the run with his estranged grandfather, played by Baldwin.

Bianca Cline, the cinematographer who finished the project, said Hutchins established the look and feel of the film, and filmed more than half of it. She studied Hutchins' notes to honor her vision.

Hutchins, 42, was a Ukrainian cinematographer on the rise and a mother of a young son. 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.

Ahead of the premiere, Hutchins' mother, who is suing Baldwin and the production, said she was refusing to attend and that she viewed the film as an attempt by Baldwin to "unjustly profit" from her daughter's death. Baldwin was also not present.

"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, Gloria Allred. "Alec Baldwin continues to increase my pain with his refusal to apologize to me and his refusal to take responsibility for her death."

Melina Spadone, a representative for Rust Movie Productions, issued a statement saying: "Gloria Allred's misrepresentation of both the Camerimage festival and any profit motivation is disappointing. The decision to complete 'Rust' was made with the full support of Halyna's family."

"The Camerimage festival celebrates the artistry of cinematographers; it is not a festival for buyers. None of the producers of Rust stand to benefit financially from the film. The suggestion that those involved in completing Halyna Hutchins' film were motivated by profit is disrespectful to those who worked tirelessly to honor her legacy."

Filmmaker Rachel Mason, a friend of Hutchins who was tapped by Matthew Hutchins to make a documentary about his late wife, told the audience that Solovey told her that she wanted the film to be completed because of how important the project was to her daughter.

Mason also described all those who continued to work on the film after the tragedy on set as "heroic."

"You could just feel and see the trauma that they had gone through," she said.

"Halyna didn't get the chance to do the biggest films that she was expected to do, that we all knew she would. 'Rust' was that film. 'Rust' was going to change her life but instead it took her life. And the people that feel the pain of that most are the people that made the film," Mason said. "I really hope the world can understand that it was a courageous act to complete this film."

A New Mexico judge dismissed an involuntary manslaughter charge against Baldwin in the fatal shooting. The case was thrown out halfway through trial on allegations that police and prosecutors withheld evidence from the defense.

The film armorer, Hannah Gutierrez-Reed, received the maximum sentence of 18 months in jail for involuntary manslaughter. A judge found 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 in which he argued that greater representation of female cinematographers could lead to mediocrity.

Director Coralie Fargeat pulled her film "The Substance" due to the comments, which led to protests by several cinematography groups. Żydowicz has since apologized.

Israeli officials demand the right to strike Hezbollah under any cease-fire deal for Lebanon

By TIA GOLDENBERG and KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli officials demanded Wednesday the freedom to strike Lebanon's Hezbollah as part of any cease-fire deal, raising a potential complication as a top U.S. envoy was in the region attempting to clinch an agreement.

The development came as an airstrike hit the historic Syrian town of Palmyra, killing 36 people, according to Syrian state-run media, which blamed the attack on Israel. The Israeli military declined to comment.

Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz and Foreign Minister Gideon Saar each said Israel sought to reserve the right to respond to any violations by Hezbollah under an emerging proposal, which would push the militant group's fighters and Israeli ground forces out of a U.N. buffer zone in southern Lebanon.

There have been signs of progress on the cease-fire deal and on Wednesday, Hezbollah leader Naim Kasseem said the Lebanese militant group supports the ongoing negotiations but has "some reservations" and rejects a provision for "freedom of movement" for Israeli troops in Lebanon.

"In any agreement we will reach, we will have to maintain our freedom to act if there will be violations," Israeli Foreign Minister Saar told diplomats in Jerusalem.

Katz said "the condition for any political settlement in Lebanon" was the right for Israel's military "to act and protect the citizens of Israel from Hezbollah."

Amos Hochstein, the Biden administration's point man on Israel and Lebanon, has been working to push the sides toward agreement and meeting this week with officials in Lebanon. He said Wednesday he would travel to Israel to "try to bring this to a close if we can."

The emerging deal would push Hezbollah and Israel out of southern Lebanon

Hezbollah began firing into Israel on Oct. 8, 2023, in solidarity with Hamas after its attack on southern Israel that sparked the war in the Gaza Strip. Israel has been responding with strikes in Lebanon, and dramatically escalated its bombardment in late September by launching a ground invasion just inside the border.

In the more than a year of exchanges, more than 3,500 people have been killed in Lebanon, most in the past month, the Health Ministry reported, and over 1 million people have been displaced. It's unknown how many of the dead were Hezbollah fighters. On Wednesday, 11 more were killed across Lebanon, according to the ministry and Lebanese state media.

In Israel, more than 70 people have been killed by Hezbollah fire, and tens of thousands have fled their homes. Israeli police said a Hezbollah rocket fell outside an empty kindergarten Wednesday in the northern city of Acre, causing damage but no injuries.

Hochstein's proposal is based on U.N. resolution that ended the 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel. It stipulates that only the Lebanese army and U.N. peacekeepers should operate in southern Lebanon.

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Still, Hezbollah never fully ended its presence in the south. Lebanon accuses Israel of also violating the resolution by maintaining hold of a small, disputed border area and conducting frequent military overflights.

Israel says that Hezbollah has since built up a military infrastructure in villages and towns in southern Lebanon.

The current proposal would include an implementation plan and a monitoring system to ensure each side follows its obligations to fully withdraw from the south. That could involve the United States and France, but details are still unclear.

There's been progress, but no done deal yet

The Israeli ministers didn't outline details of Israel's demand to maintain freedom of operation. Since the 2006 war, Israel has struck Hezbollah on the few occasions when border violence flared up, but any large-scale response could push the region back into turmoil.

It's also unlikely Lebanon would agree to a deal that permits Israeli violations of its sovereignty. Hezbollah's leader Kassem said Wednesday that any cease-fire must include "a complete and comprehensive end to the aggression," preserving Lebanon's sovereignty and ruling out any freedom of movement for Israel in Lebanese territory.

Though the proposal attempts to nail down an implementation mechanism, the failure to fully implement the U.N. resolution after the 2006 war could point to difficulties in getting the sides to uphold a sustainable cease-fire that would bring long-term quiet.

Israel has continued to pound Hezbollah, and rockets have continued to rain down on northern Israel. Any perceived escalation could derail the talks.

Even with Israel-Hezbollah cease-fire, the war in Gaza would grind on

The war in Gaza is now in its 14th month as Israel battles Hamas in the territory. The death toll has soared to nearly 44,000 dead — over half of them women and children, according to local health officials, who do not distinguish between civilians and combatants in their count.

Fifteen people, including five children and three women, were killed in various strikes in Gaza Wednesday, according to an AP journalist who counted the bodies at hospitals.

Hezbollah has said throughout the war in Gaza that it won't stop firing at Israel until the fighting in the Palestinian territory ends, but that condition was dropped in September after Israel intensified its offensive on the militant group, killing its top leadership and degrading its military capabilities.

That leaves Gaza waiting for a cease-fire of its own as a humanitarian crisis has displaced much of the territory's 2.3 million people and prompted widespread hunger, especially in the north, where the United Nations says virtually no food or humanitarian aid has been delivered to for more than 40 days because of the Israeli military's siege.

International mediation has stalled repeatedly amid disagreement between Israel and Hamas over whether the war should end as part of a cease-fire deal, with Israel insisting it wants to maintain troop presence in certain areas.

The U.S. on Wednesday vetoed a U.N. resolution calling for a cease-fire in Gaza because it was not linked to an immediate release of hostages taken captive by Hamas

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.

Other tumultuous areas of the Middle East won't likely be affected by a Hezbollah-Israel cease-fire, including Syria.

Israel frequently targets military sites and facilities associated with Iran-linked groups in Syria but rarely acknowledges the strikes. The death toll from Wednesday's strike in Palmyra was unusually high.

The Syrian news agency SANA said that along with the 36 killed, the strike on Palmyra also wounded more than 50 people and caused "significant material damage to the targeted buildings" and the surrounding area. Palmyra is known for the historic Roman temple complex nearby, but it wasn't immediately clear if the ruins were damaged.

The complex suffered significant damage years ago, during the Islamic State group's rampage across Syria.

The US is sending antipersonnel land mines to Ukraine. Here's what it means

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. decision to provide Ukraine with antipersonnel land mines expands the use of a weapon that the international community has long condemned because of its danger to innocent civilians. And it reflects another in a long line of American policy shifts on the controversial issue in the past 30 years.

U.S. officials say the mines are needed to help Ukraine stall Russian progress on the battlefield, where Moscow's forces are moving in smaller ground units on the front lines rather than in more heavily protected armored vehicles.

The Defense Department has been providing Ukraine with anti-tank mines throughout the war. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said the new policy will give Ukraine "nonpersistent antipersonnel land mines" that are safer because they lose the ability to detonate over time.

The change shows the Biden administration "has clearly and belatedly become less risk averse as it eyes troubling battlefield developments in Ukraine and worries how U.S. policy toward Ukraine and Russia may change on January 20," when President-elect Donald Trump takes office, according to Bradley Bowman, senior director of the Center on Military and Political Power at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

Trump has criticized U.S. support for Ukraine and vowed to quickly end the war.

As Ukraine has gotten more effective in drone warfare, Russian troops moving in armored vehicles are at greater risk of being hit by the drones, so have been moving by foot, making them harder to target, Bowman said.

Here is where the U.S. stands on antipersonnel mines and what it means:

TYPES OF MINES

Mines range from larger, destructive ones that can take out a tank to smaller, antipersonnel variants that are hidden just beneath the surface of the ground and explode by a person's weight.

The Biden administration is sending Ukraine antipersonnel mines that have a limited capacity. The so-called nonpersistent mines are electrically fused and powered by batteries. Once the battery runs out, they won't detonate, and they can become inert in anywhere from four hours to two weeks.

The U.S. has sought commitments from the Ukrainians to limit harm to civilians, according to a U.S. official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations. Ukraine would use the mines in its own country but wouldn't put them in civilian populated areas.

Throughout the war, the U.S. has given Ukraine larger, anti-tank mines, which are also battery-powered, so will become inert over time. The Remote Anti-Armor Mine System, or RAAM, is an artillery shell that contains the anti-tank mines.

When fired, it scatters the mines, which can damage armored vehicles. The mines can also be set to self-detonate in four hours or 48 hours.

AN OUTLIER ON LAND MINES

The U.S. is one of just a small number of major nations that have not signed on to the 1997 Ottawa Convention, which prohibited the use, production and transfer of antipersonnel mines.

As of 2022, 164 countries had ratified or agreed to the treaty. But several major powers, which are also past and current manufacturers of land mines, did not sign on, including the United States, China and Russia. South Korea, India and Pakistan also did not join the treaty.

A key issue is that the mines are widely used in North and South Korea, particularly along the demilitarized zone, and are part of the U.S. campaign to protect the South from invasion by Pyongyang.

Humanitarian groups for years have pushed the U.S. to join the ban treaty. According to NATO, nearly 70 countries and territories are still affected by the presence of 110 million land mines, which can "remain dormant, concealed beneath the earth, for many years before being triggered."

Earlier this year, NATO said Russia's invasion of Ukraine has turned the nation into one of the most mine-laden countries in the world. Human Rights Watch has said that 11 of Ukraine's 27 regions are now

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scattered with mines. The Russian mines are more deadly, as they largely are not those that become inert over time.

Biden's decision was immediately condemned by Amnesty International, which said that even those type of mines are a threat to civilians.

"This is a reckless decision and a deeply disappointing setback for a President who once agreed that land mines put more civilians at increased risk of harm," said Ben Linden, an advocacy director for Amnesty International USA. "It is devastating, and frankly shocking, that President Biden made such a consequential and dangerous decision just before his public service legacy is sealed for the history books."

THE EVOLVING U.S. POLICY

President Bill Clinton had a goal of limiting mine use and joining the treaty, but under President George W. Bush, the administration pulled back due to wide objections from military leaders. The policy under Bush was that the U.S. would use persistent mines — ones that do not automatically become inert — until 2010, and then not use them anymore.

President Barack Obama ordered up a review of the U.S. policy and eventually prohibited the military from using any land mines anywhere in the world except in defense of South Korea.

In January 2020, President Donald Trump canceled the Obama-era prohibition and eliminated geographic limits on the use of land mines that would become inert over time. Then-Defense Secretary Mark Esper wrote at the time that commanders "may authorize the use of nonpersistent land mines when necessary for mission success in major contingencies or other exceptional circumstances." The term "major contingency" was not explicitly defined.

When President Joe Biden took office, the Trump policy was rolled back, and use of the antipersonnel mines was prohibited outside of the Korean Peninsula. The administration decision, announced in June 2022, said all mines not required for the defense of South Korea would be destroyed. At that time, there were an estimated 3 million antipersonnel mines in the U.S. stockpile, but officials would not say how many of those would be considered necessary to defend South Korea.

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.

Some, like his choices for defense secretary, Pete Hegseth, and transportation secretary, Sean Duffy, were until recently TV hosts on Trump's favorite network, Fox News. Mike Huckabee, his pick 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

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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.

Pope approves new papal funeral rites to simplify ritual, allow for burial outside the Vatican

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis has revised the funeral rites that will be used when he dies, simplifying the rituals to emphasize his role as a mere bishop and allowing for burial outside the Vatican in keeping with his wishes.

The Vatican newspaper L'Osservatore Romano on Wednesday published details of the updated liturgical book, which Francis approved April 29 and which replaces the previous edition that was last published in 2000.

Francis turns 88 in December and, despite some health and mobility problems, appears in fine form. On Wednesday, he presided over a spirited general audience that featured children who spontaneously rushed the stage.

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While popes often tinker with the rules regulating the conclave that will elect their successor, a revision of the papal funeral rites became seemingly necessary after Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI died on Dec. 31, 2022.

The Vatican had to work out a funeral for the first retired pope in 600 years, and a few months later Francis revealed he was working with the Vatican's master of liturgical ceremonies, Monsignor Diego Ravelli, to overhaul the papal funeral rites to simplify them.

In that 2023 interview with Mexican Televisa broadcaster N+, Francis also revealed that he had decided he would be buried in Santa Maria Maggiore basilica in Rome, not in the grottoes underneath St. Peter's Basilica where most popes are buried.

Ravelli said the new reform simplifies the funeral rites, including eliminating the requirement that the pope be placed on an elevated bier in St. Peter's Basilica for public viewing. Rather, he will be on view in a simple coffin, and the burial no longer requires the traditional three coffins made of cypress, lead and oak.

The simplification, Ravelli was quoted as saying, is meant "to emphasize even more that the Roman Pontiff's funeral is that of a shepherd and disciple of Christ and not of a powerful man of this world."

Since his 2013 election, Francis has eschewed the pomp often associated with the papacy to emphasize his role as the bishop of Rome and a servant of the "church of the poor." The Argentine Jesuit lives in the Vatican hotel, not the Apostolic Palace, and travels in small Fords or Fiats, not fancy SUVs.

His desire to be buried at Santa Maria Maggiore reflects his veneration of an icon of the Virgin Mary that is located there, the Salus populi Romani (Salvation of the people of Rome).

After every trip, Francis goes to the basilica to pray before the Byzantine-style painting that features an image of Mary, draped in a blue robe, holding the infant Jesus who in turn holds a jeweled golden book.

"It's my great devotion," Francis told N+ in revealing his future burial plans. "The place is already prepared."

Deadline looms for negotiators seeking a deal for cash to curb global warming

By MELINA WALLING, SIBI ARASU, SETH BORENSTEIN and MICHAEL PHILLIS Associated Press

BAKU, Azerbaijan (AP) — With time running down, negotiators at the United Nations annual climate talks on Wednesday remained mired in the maze of a trillion-dollar money problem, turning to host Azerbaijan to lead the way to daylight with a promised map to be released in the dark of night.

Vulnerable nations are seeking \$1.3 trillion to deal with damage from climate change and to adapt to that change, including building out their own clean-energy systems. Experts agree that at least \$1 trillion is called for, but both figures are far more than the developed world has so far offered.

Negotiators are fighting over three big parts of the issue: How big the numbers are, how much is grants or loans, and who contributes.

After 10 days of talks, the host presidency of the talks, called COP29, promised a draft proposal around midnight local time, which they acknowledged will be far from final and have many decisions still to be made. But it's something, a clear step forward, said lead negotiator Yelchin Rafiyev.

Pressure on the presidency

German special climate envoy Jennifer Morgan late Wednesday afternoon put the onus on the COP29 presidency.

"Much is really now in the presidency's hands and the options that they will put in front of us, the text that will come out," Morgan said. "I think the options can help shift us into the fast lane towards a green and prosperous future or mire us in a fight about lowest common denominators."

And the key to a solution is one word, Morgan said: Trust.

"The most critical currency right now is trust — trust in the presidency and trust between and amongst parties," Morgan said. "And what this effectively means is a lot of shuttle diplomacy, numerous huddles between negotiating groups."

Negotiators relay some progress, but talks go in 'circles'

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At a session where ministers relayed their progress Wednesday, Australia's climate minister Chris Bowen — one of the ministers leading talks on the money goal — said that he's heard different proposals on how much cash should be in the pot. As well as the \$1.3 trillion proposed by developing countries, nations proposed figures of \$900 billion, \$600 billion and \$440 billion, he said.

Diego Pacheco Balanza, the chair of the Like-Minded Developing Countries negotiating bloc, said the group was also hearing a figure of \$200 billion in negotiating corridors. That's not enough, he said. "Developed countries whose legal obligations it is to provide finance continue to shift their responsibility to developing countries," Pacheco Balanza said.

When asked for his response to the \$200 billion suggestion, Adonia Ayebare, chair of the G77 plus China negotiating group asked, "Is it a joke?" Speaking to a room of reporters, he added that negotiations need a headline figure of \$1.3 trillion. "I used to be a member of the press, I know the headline is important," he said.

But European climate envoy Wopke Hoekstra said "it is important to determine the elements first, so that you can have an informed conversation about what an ambitious and also realistic number could be."

Elsewhere, there appeared to be some positivity on working through other issues at the talks.

South Africa's climate minister Dion George — one of two ministers leading talks on how to cut planet-warming fossil fuels — said that "all parties confirmed their commitment to delivering on the Dubai consensus reached last year" when countries pledged to transition away from fossil fuels.

Morgan said 150 nations are working "to come overcome the vocal but isolated minority trying to block progress on" reducing heat-trapping emissions and weaning the world from fossil fuels.

And New Zealand's climate minister Simon Watts was also "very encouraged" by movement on so-called Article 6, a proposal to slash emissions through, among other things, a system of carbon credits that allow nations to pollute if they offset emissions elsewhere.

But a lot was still left to work out.

Alden Meyer of the European think tank E3G summed up the state of negotiations on Wednesday by saying the word of the day at the talks is "circle... as in going around in circles."

Delegates feel both frustration and hope

Juan Pablo Hoffmaister of the Environmental Defense Fund said "the frustration is palpable" as time starts to run out.

Hoffmaister, who's a former negotiator for developing countries, said that while potential climate finance goals are finally out, it's still unclear how they will be delivered — loans, grants or other means. "We need to fix this over the next 72 hours," he said.

Italy's special envoy for climate change, Francesco Corvaro, said negotiations feel like they are moving in the right direction, but that it's likely going to take extra time to reach a deal. "We can't fail," he said. But he stressed that Europe doesn't have the capacity to cover the cost of climate finance alone.

Ali Mohamed, chair of the African Group of Negotiators said he hopes "that our partners will come forward with a justifiable number that will meet the needs and the the scale of the growing problems of climate change."

Mohamed said there is a clear obligation for developed countries to support poorer countries but "up to now, we don't seem to have a figure," he said expressing frustration at the slow progress.

Rizwana Hasan, adviser to the Bangladesh government on environment and climate change, also slammed developed countries in a press conference, saying "the global north and the major emitting countries still lack the feeling of urgency and true commitment" on curbing climate change.

But, she said, there is reason to keep trust in process. "You can't give up hope," she said. "Giving up hope makes no sense."

UN chief says success is in the hands of rich nations

Meanwhile, half the world away in Rio, Brazil, where the Group of 20 summit wrapped up on Tuesday, the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told the group of the world's largest economies that "the success of COP29 is largely in your hands."

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"That goal, the financial goal, in its different layers, must meet the needs of developing countries, beginning with a significant increase in concessional public funds," he said.

And the president of Brazil, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, said developed nations should consider moving their 2050 emission goals forward to 2040 or 2045.

"The G20 is responsible for 80% of greenhouse effect emissions," he said. "Even if we are not walking the same speed, we can all take one more step."

Today in History: November 21, Las Vegas hotel fire claims 85 lives

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, Nov. 21, the 326th day of 2024. There are 40 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Nov. 21, 1980, 85 people died, most because of smoke inhalation, after a fire broke out at the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Also on this date:

In 1920, on "Bloody Sunday," the Irish Republican Army killed 14 suspected British intelligence officers in the Dublin area; British forces responded by raiding a soccer match, killing 14 civilians.

In 1964, New York City's Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge, at the time the longest suspension bridge in the world, was opened to traffic.

In 1980, an estimated 83 million TV viewers tuned in to the CBS prime-time soap opera "Dallas" to find out "who shot J.R." (The shooter turned out to be J.R. Ewing's sister-in-law, Kristin Shepard.)

In 1985, U.S. Navy intelligence analyst Jonathan Jay Pollard was arrested and accused of spying for Israel. (Pollard later pleaded guilty to espionage and was sentenced to life in prison, but was released in 2015.)

In 1990, junk-bond financier Michael R. Milken, who had pleaded guilty to six felony counts, was sentenced by a federal judge in New York to 10 years in prison. (Milken served two.)

In 1995, Balkan leaders meeting in Dayton, Ohio, initialed a peace plan to end 3 1/2 years of ethnic fighting in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

In 2017, Zimbabwe's 93-year-old president, Robert Mugabe, resigned; he was facing impeachment proceedings and had been placed under house arrest by the military.

In 2022, NASA's Orion capsule reached the moon, whipping around the far side and buzzing the lunar surface on its way to a record-breaking orbit. It was the first time an American capsule visited the moon since NASA's Apollo program 50 years ago.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Marlo Thomas is 87. Basketball Hall of Famer Earl Monroe is 80. Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., is 80. Actor Goldie Hawn is 79. Sen. John Kennedy, R-La., is 73. Journalist Tina Brown is 71. Actor Cherry Jones is 68. Gospel musician Steven Curtis Chapman is 62. Musician Björk is 59. Football Hall of Famer Troy Aikman is 58. Baseball Hall of Famer Ken Griffey Jr. is 55. Football Hall of Famer-TV host Michael Strahan (STRAY'-han) is 53. Actor Jena Malone is 40. Actor-comedian Ronny Chieng is 39. Pop singer Carly Rae Jepsen is 39.