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Saturday, Nov. 23

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., 209 N Main
State Volleyball Tournament in Sioux Falls

Sunday, Nov. 24

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; Congregational meeting, League Pie Auction; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; Choir, 6 p.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m., and at Zion, 11 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.
United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:30 a.m., and at Groton, 10:30 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Sunday School Christmas Practice, 10:30 a.m.
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.
First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.
Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.

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



Monday, Nov. 25

Senior Menu: Spanish rice, green beans, peaches, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Breakfast sliders.
School Lunch: French bread pizza, peas.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.
Pantry, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Groton Community Center
First allowable day for girls basketball
JH GBB at Britton (7th at 4 p.m., 8th at 5 p.m.)
Fall Sports Awards Night, 7 p.m., GHS Gym
Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Community Center, potluck at noon

Tuesday, Nov. 26

Senior Menu: Macaroni and cheese with kielbasa, Italian blend, vanilla pudding with oranges, whole wheat bread.
Senior Menu: Egg omelets.
School Lunch: Sloppy joes, fries.
United Methodist: No Bible Study
Common Cents Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., 209 N Main.
Pantry, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m., Groton Community Center

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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.

F1 Returns to Sin City

An estimated 300,000 people are expected to flock to Las Vegas this weekend as Formula 1 racing returns for a second year. The flag for the Las Vegas Grand Prix drops at 10 pm PT tonight, with the 50-lap race concluding early Sunday morning—a timing optimized for European viewers.

The 3.8-mile track begins at a racing garage with drivers reaching speeds of up to 217 mph as they head down the Vegas Strip, passing resorts and landmark venues, including the Venetian, Bellagio, and the iconic Sphere. See a map of the course here.

Superstar driver Max Verstappen, the 27-year-old Red Bull racer who won last year's Las Vegas Grand Prix, looks to join a club of four-time world champions. With two more races to go this season (Qatar and Abu Dhabi next month), the world title fight comes down between the part-Belgian, part-Dutch racer and his British, 25-year-old rival, McLaren racer Lando Norris. Verstappen leads Norris by 62 points so far.

Last year's Vegas Grand Prix brought in roughly \$1.5B for Nevada's economy.

Trump's sentencing in hush money case paused indefinitely.

A New York judge removed a Nov. 26 sentencing in President-elect Donald Trump's hush money case while allowing the defense to file a motion to dismiss the case by Dec. 2. Trump was found guilty in May of falsifying business records to cover up payments to adult film star Stormy Daniels in the lead-up to the 2016 election.

Former Rep. Matt Gaetz (R) says he won't return to Congress.

Gaetz's announcement comes a day after he withdrew himself from the attorney general nomination following renewed scrutiny over allegations of sex trafficking, drug use, and inappropriate conduct with a minor. Gaetz resigned Nov. 13 from Congress on the same day Trump nominated him to serve as attorney general. See our previous write-up here. See a timeline of events here.

Amazon invests additional \$4B in OpenAI rival Anthropic.

The new funding brings Amazon's total investment in the artificial intelligence startup to \$8B; Amazon remains a minority owner of Anthropic. Anthropic is known for its AI-powered text-generating chatbot Claude 2, which rivals OpenAI's ChatGPT. Last month, Anthropic revealed a new model of Claude that can perform a range of computer tasks on behalf of a person.

Oldest direct evidence of hot water activity on Mars found.

Scientists have discovered that a 4.45-billion-year-old zircon grain from a renowned Martian meteorite, known as "Black Beauty" (w/photo) and found in the Sahara Desert in 2011, indicates hot water once existed on Mars. The finding suggests the red planet may have had conditions suitable for supporting life in its ancient past.

DirecTV ends deal to buy Dish TV over failed debt swap.

DirecTV was initially expected to buy Dish TV and Sling TV from EchoStar for a nominal fee of \$1 plus the assumption of \$9.75B of debt. The deal would have created the largest US pay-TV provider with roughly 18 million subscribers total. DirecTV called off the deal because Dish bondholders rejected the proposal.

Humankind(ness)

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Kathy D. in Sunset Beach, North Carolina.

"During a recent trip to NYC, we had to take a coach bus to Mountain Lakes, NJ...when we approached the line it was hard to tell which end to join. I asked a gentleman which end of the line to join and he looked at our huge, overstuffed suitcase and my limping leg and said, 'You're fine to be here, at the front'...then he turned to the other passengers waiting and asked if it was OK if we remained at the front and they all gave their assent...I was so moved by these kind acts of some very good people! Thank you NYC and NJ!!"

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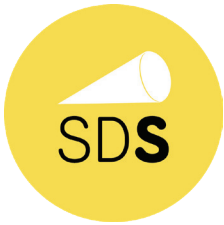
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FROSTY CLUE

I/My.....

23. I play a lot of cribbage





SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

SD teacher salaries increase nearly 6%, but gap in pay and state funding remains

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - NOVEMBER 22, 2024 2:24 PM

The average South Dakota teacher salary increased by \$3,125 between 2023 and 2024, or 5.87%, according to a recent state Department of Education report. Average teacher compensation, which includes salary and benefits, increased by 5.66%.

That's enough to outpace the past year's inflation rate and meet requirements set forth by the 2016 Legislature, which aimed to increase teacher salaries. The state ranked last in average teacher salary that year and currently ranks 49th, according to the National Education Association.

Despite the recent increases, the average South Dakota teacher's purchasing power is still less than it was in 2017, when factoring in inflation since then. It also comes in below the 7% increase in state education funding lawmakers allocated for fiscal year 2024, which ran from July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2024.

South Dakota's average teacher salary in 2017 was \$47,096. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, that has the same buying power as \$60,404.51 in June 2024, which was the end of the state's fiscal year. The actual statewide average teacher salary in 2024 is \$56,342.

Statewide average teacher compensation, which includes salary and benefits, increased from \$60,687 in 2017 to \$72,615 in 2024 — an increase of 19.66%.

This is the last year school districts will abide by the 2016 rules, which said school districts had to report average compensation at or above 2017 levels. All school districts met the requirements, based on the School Finance Accountability Board report presented at the board's Friday meeting.

This year's compensation sets the baseline for the teacher compensation accountability model passed by the Legislature last winter.

Beginning in July this year, the start of fiscal year 2025, each public school district must increase its average teacher compensation by at least 97% of the increase in state education funding. The requirement does not include additional money for schools beyond the regular, annual increases in state funding.

The Legislature increased state education funding by 4% in March, meaning districts must increase their average teacher compensation by nearly that much by next year to comply.

Beginning July 1, 2026, each school district must also pay each teacher at least the state minimum salary. That's set at \$45,000 this year and will increase each year equal to the increase in state education funding.

Opponents of the legislation were skeptical the new plan will provide enough flexibility for school districts and said it will have unintended consequences due to declining enrollment in public schools across the state, especially rural areas. As enrollment decreases in school districts, it means less state funding for districts to pay for salary increases and other costs.

Between 2023 and 2024, Plankinton reported the highest percentage increase in average teacher salary, from \$49,542 to \$59,098, or 16%. Six school districts saw a decrease in average teacher salary from 2023 to 2024: Pierre, Tripp-Delmont, Eagle Butte, Rosholt, Parker and Doland. Decreases in the average can be attributed to teacher retirements and younger, less experienced teachers being hired at lower salaries. The average teacher salary for each district was still above 2017.

Rapid City teachers have seen the lowest average teacher salary increases since 2017 at 5.24%, while

Plankinton and Elk Mountain saw the highest average teacher salary increases during that period at 36.5% and 54.4%, respectively.

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.

Educators' association, Democrats condemn Rounds' bill to eliminate US Department of Education

Senator says legislation keeps worthwhile programs while empowering states

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - NOVEMBER 22, 2024 1:49 PM

The South Dakota Education Association and the state Democratic Party criticized Republican U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds' proposal to eliminate the federal Department of Education, calling it a bad idea with potentially harmful effects for schools and students.

Rounds' "Returning Education to Our States Act," introduced Thursday, would eliminate the department and transfer about 25 of its programs to other federal agencies.

The South Dakota Education Association is the largest organization in the state representing education professionals, serving over 6,000 teachers, education support staff, retired educators and future teachers.

On Friday, the association's president, Loren Paul, highlighted the federal department's oversight of programs such as Title I and the Individuals with Disabilities Act, which he said are designed to support low-income and disabled children and are vital to their success and well-being.

"The U.S. Department of Education plays a crucial role in protecting our most vulnerable children, ensuring they receive the quality education they deserve," Paul said in a written statement. "Transferring these programs to other departments would expose these children to bureaucracies where their specific needs are not the primary focus, leaving them vulnerable and underserved."

Paul emphasized the need for a centralized federal agency to ensure equitable access to resources for all students, regardless of their socioeconomic or geographic backgrounds.

Rounds, in a phone call Friday with South Dakota Searchlight, responded to the criticism by saying his office is being deliberate about where to transfer programs if the department is abolished.

"We've taken extra time to take it program by program, putting many of them in the same departments they have come from," Rounds said.

He alleged that housing the programs in the department since its creation in 1979 has not improved educational outcomes.

"We've literally been working on and trying to craft this for more than a year and a half so we would not harm those children," he said.

South Dakota Democrats also condemned the legislation in a news release.

"Shifting responsibilities to another federal department will still require people to implement and manage these programs," said Dan Ahlers, executive director of the state party. "The cost to operate these programs does not go away."

Democrats said sending "education back to the states" would put it in the hands of a Republican Party that has not adequately funded it. South Dakota ranks 49th in average teacher pay, according to the National Education Association.

"It's time for people like Senator Rounds to stop the pandering and grandstanding," Ahlers said. "Stop making these uninformed and unsubstantiated comments about our schools, teachers and support staff. For once, maybe listen to our educators and their needs."

Rounds said South Dakota officials, including the Legislature, are more accountable to their local constituents than federal employees.

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"Our goal is to make sure that funding that comes from the federal government back to the states has fewer one-size-fits-all mandates," Rounds said.

State Rep. Kadyan Wittman, D-Sioux Falls, chimed in on social media, calling Rounds' legislation "absurd." "The Dept. of Ed ensures equity in schools, funds low-income districts (Title I), provides financial aid, supports special ed (IDEA), enforces civil rights, collects key data, and sets standards," Wittman wrote on X (formerly Twitter). "If cut, it will widen disparities and harm students nationwide."

The Department of Education was established during the administration of Democratic President Jimmy Carter. Rounds alleged Thursday in a news release that the department's budget has swollen ever since then without improving education.

"Local school boards and state departments of education know best what their students need, not unelected bureaucrats in Washington, D.C.," Rounds said Thursday.

Calls to eliminate the Department of Education have been boosted by Republican President-elect Donald Trump, who recently issued a statement supporting the idea when he announced his plan to nominate Linda McMahon for secretary of the department. McMahon is a decades-long executive with World Wrestling Entertainment and was the head of the Small Business Administration during Trump's first presidency.

"We will send Education BACK TO THE STATES, and Linda will spearhead that effort," Trump said.

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

Thune, who lost to Tim Johnson, sponsors resolution honoring him

BY: SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - NOVEMBER 22, 2024 11:09 AM

U.S. Sen. John Thune, R-South Dakota, sponsored a resolution adopted by the Senate honoring the late Tim Johnson, a Democrat who defeated Thune 22 years ago in a Senate race.

Republican Mike Rounds of South Dakota was among the 99 cosponsors of the legislation, which passed Thursday with unanimous consent. The two senators issued a joint statement afterward.

"Former Senator Tim Johnson was a steadfast leader who represented South Dakota with integrity and compassion," the statement said. "It is fitting that he be honored in this way, a tribute to his nearly 30 years in Congress and lifetime of service to the state he loved."

In 2002, Johnson won reelection to the Senate over Thune by 524 votes. Thune went on to beat Democratic Sen. Tom Daschle in 2004. Earlier this month, Thune's Republican colleagues elected him to serve as the Senate's next majority leader.

Johnson died Oct. 8 at the age of 77. Since 2006, he had been dealing with the lingering effects of brain bleeding caused by a congenital defect known as a cerebral arteriovenous malformation.

The resolution summarizes many of Johnson's achievements, including his service as "the longest-serving public official in South Dakota history." He served a combined 36 years in the state Legislature, U.S. House and U.S. Senate, never losing an election. He retired from the Senate rather than seek reelection in 2014.

Several other lesser-known details about Johnson are revealed in the resolution, including his record for the most single-season touchdowns scored at Vermillion High School. It also says he learned how to write with his left hand and relearned how to drive after his stroke-like health problems in 2006.

"Tim Johnson served the people of South Dakota in the Senate and elsewhere for decades with honor and distinction and was known for his work ethic and commitment to South Dakota constituents," the resolution says, adding that the Senate "has heard with profound sorrow and deep regret" the announcement of Johnson's death.

Iowa Supreme Court upholds land survey abilities of pipeline companies in Summit case

Opponents say they'll go back to court to address survey and examination limits

BY: CAMI KOONS, IOWA CAPITAL DISPATCH - NOVEMBER 22, 2024 3:18 PM

The Iowa Supreme Court affirmed a lower court's decision that Summit Carbon Solutions is allowed temporary access to properties for surveying, because it is a pipeline company that would be transporting a hazardous liquid.

The case involved Kent Kasischke, a Hardin County landowner who refused to let Summit surveyors on his land to survey for their proposed pipeline that would transport carbon dioxide, primarily sequestered from ethanol plants, to underground storage in North Dakota. The pipeline route includes South Dakota.

The Iowa Supreme Court heard oral arguments on the case in early October.

Kasischke argued Iowa Code section 479B.15, which allows a pipeline company to enter private land to survey, was unconstitutional because the invasion of property required compensation.

Justice Thomas Waterman, who issued the court's decision, said Kasischke's argument "fails."

"He has no right to exclude the surveyor because section 479B.15 is a lawful pre-existing limitation on his title to the land," the decision said.

According to the decision, this is consistent with rulings in "at least four" district courts, including the Iowa District Court for Hardin County that originally ruled in the case, and with Supreme Court decisions in North Dakota and South Dakota.

The decision in South Dakota, while it upheld the constitutionality of a similar statute in the state, was touted as win by those opposed to the pipeline because it said the company must prove it is a common carrier and said surveying was only constitutional if they were "minimally invasive superficial inspections that, at most, cause minor soil disturbances."

A press release from the Iowa Easement Team and Bold Alliance, groups opposed to the pipeline that supported Kasischke, and his attorney, Brian Jorde, said the Friday Iowa Supreme Court's decision "side-steps" questions around surveying.

"Right now Iowa has no guardrails as to the level of invasive activity a pipeline company can do to private property as they can claim anything they want to do falls under 'survey' or 'examination,'" the press release said.

Jorde, who has represented numerous landowners in cases against Summit, said "we will have to go back to the Court" to address the limitations, with a hope that Iowans will be granted the "same protections" as South Dakotans.

As part of its ruling, the Iowa Supreme Court affirmed the district court's decision that Summit Carbon Solutions is a pipeline company and fits the definition under Iowa Code by transporting a hazardous liquid.

Kasischke argued the supercritical carbon dioxide that would be transported in the pipeline was not a liquid.

Waterman's written decision said the court relied on testimony from the district court trial for its decision, though he noted that since the district court trial, the Iowa Utilities Commission (then the Iowa Utilities Board) "determined that supercritical carbon dioxide is a liquefied carbon dioxide."

The CEO of Summit Carbon Solutions, Lee Blank, said in a statement Friday the Iowa Supreme Court's decision was a "win for infrastructure projects across the state and the nation."

"It underscores the importance of balancing landowner rights with the need to advance critical infrastructure that benefits communities, agriculture, and the broader economy," Blank said.

The press release said the ruling "confirms" the company has met "all statutory requirements" and it supports infrastructure "vital to enhancing economic competitiveness and ensuring energy and agricultural sustainability."

Opponents of the pipeline project said in their press release, the ruling "did not conclude" the proposed 2,500 mile pipeline is a public use, nor that the company is a common carrier.

However, Summit was granted use of eminent domain in August when the Iowa Utilities Commission

approved its permit.

A final element of the case was whether or not Kasischke had a tenant on the property who would have impacted Summits' efforts to provide adequate notice of their plans to survey his property.

Waterman wrote the court agreed with the district court's credibility analysis calling Kasischke's testimony on the issue "evasive and not credible."

Jorde and the Iowa Easement Team called this "puzzling and disappointing, but a minor issue to the appeal."

The Iowa justices affirmed that Summit complied with notice requirements and the district court's ruling and injunction.

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.

Trump's sentencing on felony convictions indefinitely postponed following election win

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - NOVEMBER 22, 2024 11:33 AM

A New York state judge officially postponed President-elect Donald Trump's sentencing date Friday for the 34 felonies a jury convicted the former president of in May.

The order from Judge Juan Merchan indefinitely postponing a sentencing hearing that had been scheduled for next week was something of a formality after New York District Attorney Alvin Bragg said Tuesday he would not oppose Trump's motion to suspend the criminal case during Trump's upcoming term in the Oval Office.

Trump's attorneys and prosecutors jointly asked for a delay on Nov. 12 as Bragg's office determined how and if they would proceed following Trump's election victory, which created an unprecedented situation for the court as Trump became the first convict to win a presidential election.

Legal experts have held for decades that a sitting president cannot face criminal prosecution.

In a statement Friday afternoon, Trump campaign communications director Steven Cheung asserted the election result this month showed voters rejected the criminal charges against Trump.

"President Trump won a landslide victory as the American People have issued a mandate to return him to office and dispose of all remnants of the Witch Hunt cases," Cheun wrote. "All of the sham lawfare attacks against President Trump are now destroyed and we are focused on Making America Great Again."

Merchan also granted the Trump defense team's request to file a motion to dismiss the charges altogether. He set a Dec. 2 deadline for Trump's brief arguing to dismiss the case, with prosecutors' response due a week later on Dec. 9. Bragg said Tuesday he would fight Trump's attempt to dismiss the entire case.

A jury convicted Trump of falsifying business records by paying hush money to porn star Stormy Daniels to conceal an alleged tryst. Trump sought to keep disclosure of the affair, which he denies took place, from voters during the 2016 presidential campaign.

Each of the 34 convictions is punishable by up to four years in state prison.

The case was the only one of four prosecutions against Trump to reach the trial stage in the nearly four years since he left the White House.

U.S. Justice Department special counsel Jack Smith is winding down the two federal cases against the president-elect, consistent with longstanding department policy not to prosecute sitting presidents. Smith is reportedly planning to resign before Trump takes office.

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.

Under Trump, states including SD might pursue Medicaid work requirements

Measure approved by South Dakota voters authorizes consideration by legislators

BY: SHALINA CHATLANI - NOVEMBER 22, 2024 9:41 AM

Trevor Hawkins, an attorney at Legal Aid of Arkansas, remembers how busy his job got when the state for a time imposed work requirements on Medicaid recipients: His office was swamped with frantic phone calls from people who said they couldn't comply with the new rule because they weren't healthy enough to work or had to care for sick relatives.

"A whole heap of folks, after a month or two, started getting notices saying, 'Hey, you're out of compliance, and you're going to lose your coverage,'" Hawkins told Stateline. For many people, he said, keeping their coverage was "absolutely vital to maintaining their health or getting better so they might work again."

In June 2018, Arkansas became the first state to require some Medicaid recipients to work, volunteer, go to school or participate in job training to receive benefits. By the time a federal judge halted the policy in April 2019, 18,000 adults had lost coverage.

Arkansas was one of 13 states that received permission to impose work rules on at least some Medicaid recipients during the last Trump administration. Nine additional states, including South Dakota, requested permission to enact Medicaid work requirements during Trump's term but had not won approval by the time it ended.

When the Biden administration came into office, it rescinded all the approvals. But now that Trump is coming back, many of those states will try again — and they'll have a supportive U.S. Congress in their corner.

Republicans on Capitol Hill are eager to find ways to pay for extending tax cuts enacted during Trump's first term in office, and Medicaid — funded jointly by the federal government and the states — is in their sights. Requiring states to establish Medicaid work rules, as many Republicans would like to do, would cut federal spending by an estimated \$109 billion over a decade, according to the Congressional Budget Office. That's because the cost for about 900,000 people would shift entirely to states, while another 600,000 people would become uninsured, CBO estimated. About 72.4 million people are enrolled in Medicaid.

Arkansas renewed its efforts even before Trump's victory. Last year, Republican Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders requested federal approval from the Biden administration to apply work rules to able-bodied adults who are covered through the state's expansion of Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, and who are enrolled in health plans that Arkansas Medicaid purchases for them on the state's health insurance exchange. That application is pending.

Georgia, after prevailing in a legal fight with the Biden administration, already has work requirements in place for people covered by its partial expansion of Medicaid. And Idaho, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Dakota and Tennessee have pending requests to require at least some of their Medicaid recipients to work.

South Dakota voters approved a ballot question earlier this month that authorizes legislators to consider imposing work requirements on Medicaid expansion recipients if the federal government allows it.

Meeting requirements

Supporters say requiring Medicaid recipients to work, study or train for a career gives them a boost toward self-sufficiency and financial stability. Kristi Putnam, the secretary of the Arkansas Department of Human Services, said in a statement announcing her state's latest request that it would challenge people to "embrace economic opportunities that can lead to true job advancement."

"Meaningful work connects people to purpose — and through the pandemic we have seen negative mental health impacts from people feeling disconnected," Putnam said.

Critics, however, say such rules end up hurting far more people than they help. In a 2020 study examining how the Arkansas work requirements played out, researchers from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health "found no evidence that the policy succeeded in its stated goal of promoting work and

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instead found substantial evidence of harm to health care coverage and access.”

More than 95% of the Arkansas beneficiaries the researchers surveyed already met the work requirement or should have qualified for an exemption. The main reason people lost coverage, the researchers found, was because they had trouble verifying that they were complying with the rules. Many of those who lost their coverage stopped taking their medications, delayed care and fell into medical debt.

“Our results should provide a strong note of caution for federal and state policy makers considering work requirement policies in the future,” the researchers concluded.

Under the rules Arkansas put in place during the first Trump administration, Medicaid participants under age 50 had to report that they spent at least 80 hours each month working, attending school, in job training or volunteering. The rule only applied to people who became eligible after Arkansas expanded Medicaid under the ACA to cover adults making up to 138% of the federal poverty level. And people were exempt if they were pregnant, had a child under 18 at home, were disabled, had to care for a person unable to care for him or herself, were in alcohol or drug treatment, or were in school or job training full time.

About 70,000 of the roughly 270,000 Arkansans on Medicaid were subject to the new rules, and about 1 in 4 of those lost coverage.

Unlike Arkansas, Georgia has not expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act. But its Pathways to Coverage program, launched in July 2023, allows people with household incomes up to 100% of the federal poverty level who aren't already eligible for Medicaid to enroll in the program if they fulfill work requirements. Georgia's qualifying activities and exemptions are similar to the ones Arkansas had.

Fiona Roberts, a spokesperson for the Georgia Department of Community Health, told Stateline that as of Nov. 15, there were 5,548 people enrolled in the program and that a total of 7,518 people had been enrolled at some point — evidence, she said, that the program is helping people move from Medicaid to private insurance.

But in its first year, Pathways to Coverage only enrolled about 4,200 people — many fewer than the 25,000 the state had predicted. The cost of the program as of the end of 2023 was \$26.6 million, and more than 90% of that went toward administrative and consulting costs, according to KFF, a nonprofit health research group. If Georgia had opted for a full expansion under the ACA, the federal government would have picked up 90% of the tab and the state would have covered about 359,000 people.

Leah Chan, director of health justice at the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute, said work requirements are particularly challenging for people living in rural areas.

“If you don't have broadband internet at your house, you're not going to be able to upload the documentation and your pay stubs,” Chan told Stateline. “Even eligible people can't keep up with it, particularly in rural areas where there are additional barriers to participation.”

'Learning from mistakes'

Benjamin Sommers, a professor of health care economics at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and one of the authors of the Arkansas study, said the experience with work requirements there and in Georgia should give other states pause.

“All that ended up happening was people lost coverage due to red tape, became uninsured, and in some cases, we saw that they had worse access to health care,” Sommers said.

But Arkansas Republican state Rep. Aaron Pilkington, who serves on the health committee in his chamber, said Medicaid work rules are “100% on the table and something we'll look to ask for from the Trump administration.”

“They can find work and get better health insurance through their employer,” said Pilkington. He said the volunteering and education options make the rules even more attractive.

Meanwhile, in some of the 10 states that have not expanded Medicaid under the ACA, the inclusion of work requirements might be the only way politically to get expansion over the finish line.

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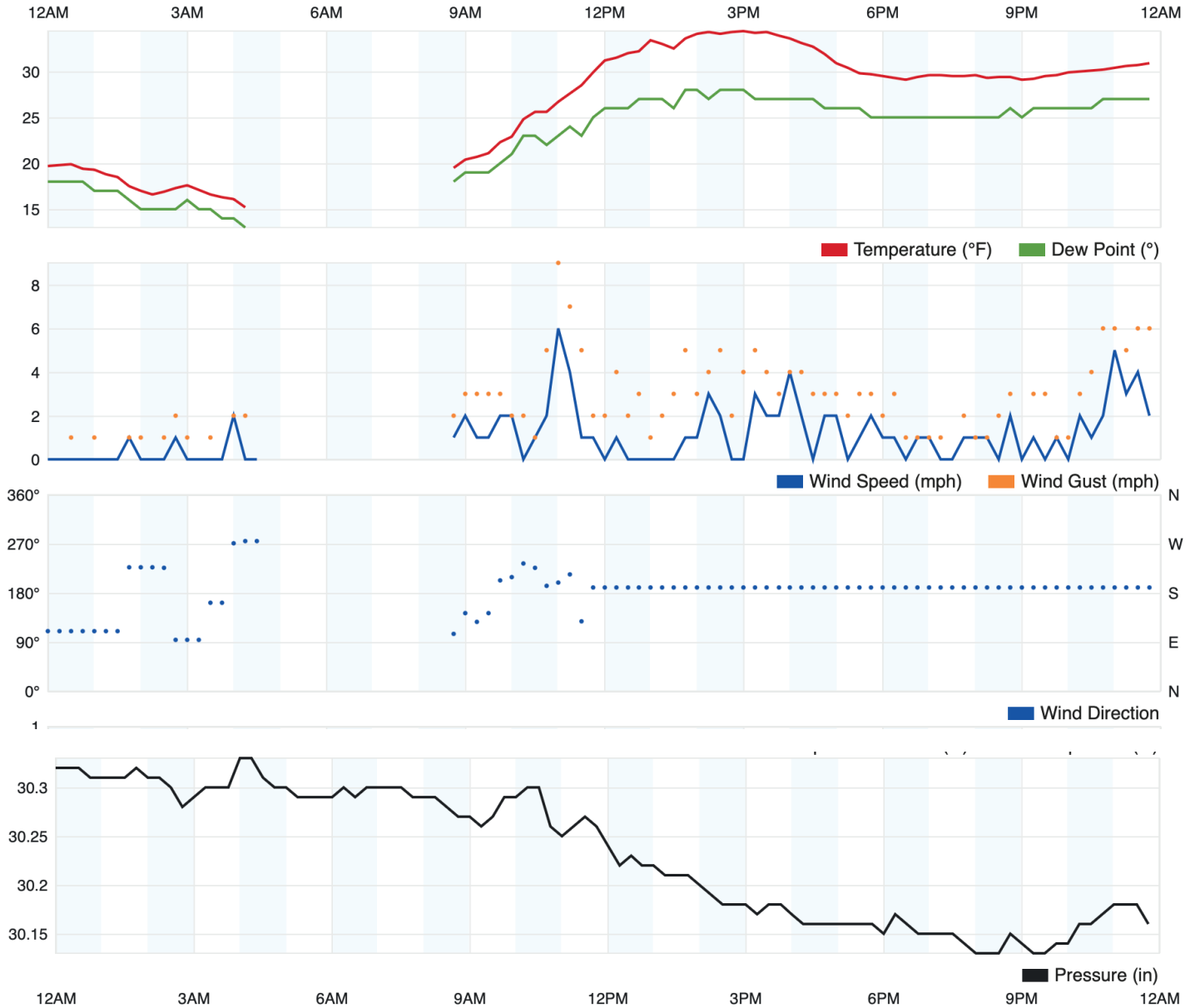
"Most of the Democrats I've spoken to did not want the work requirements, but to get it passed through the Mississippi legislature it's most likely going to have one," Mississippi Republican state Rep. Sam Creekmore told Stateline.

"We've looked at Georgia's plan. We recognize the pitfalls and are hopefully learning from mistakes."
Shalina Chatlani covers health care and environmental justice for Stateline.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 28 °F

Cloudy

Tonight



Low: 27 °F

Cloudy

Sunday



High: 34 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Sunday Night



Low: 11 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Monday



High: 22 °F

Sunny

Weekend Outlook

Today



Highs: 30-38°F
Lows: 21-26°F

Sunday



Highs: 32-37°F
Lows: 8-18°F

15-20% chance light snow
over northeast SD

Cloudy skies are expected this weekend, but it should stay pretty dry. Some snow will be possible over far northeastern SD, but little to no accumulation is expected at this time. Highs will be in the 30s.

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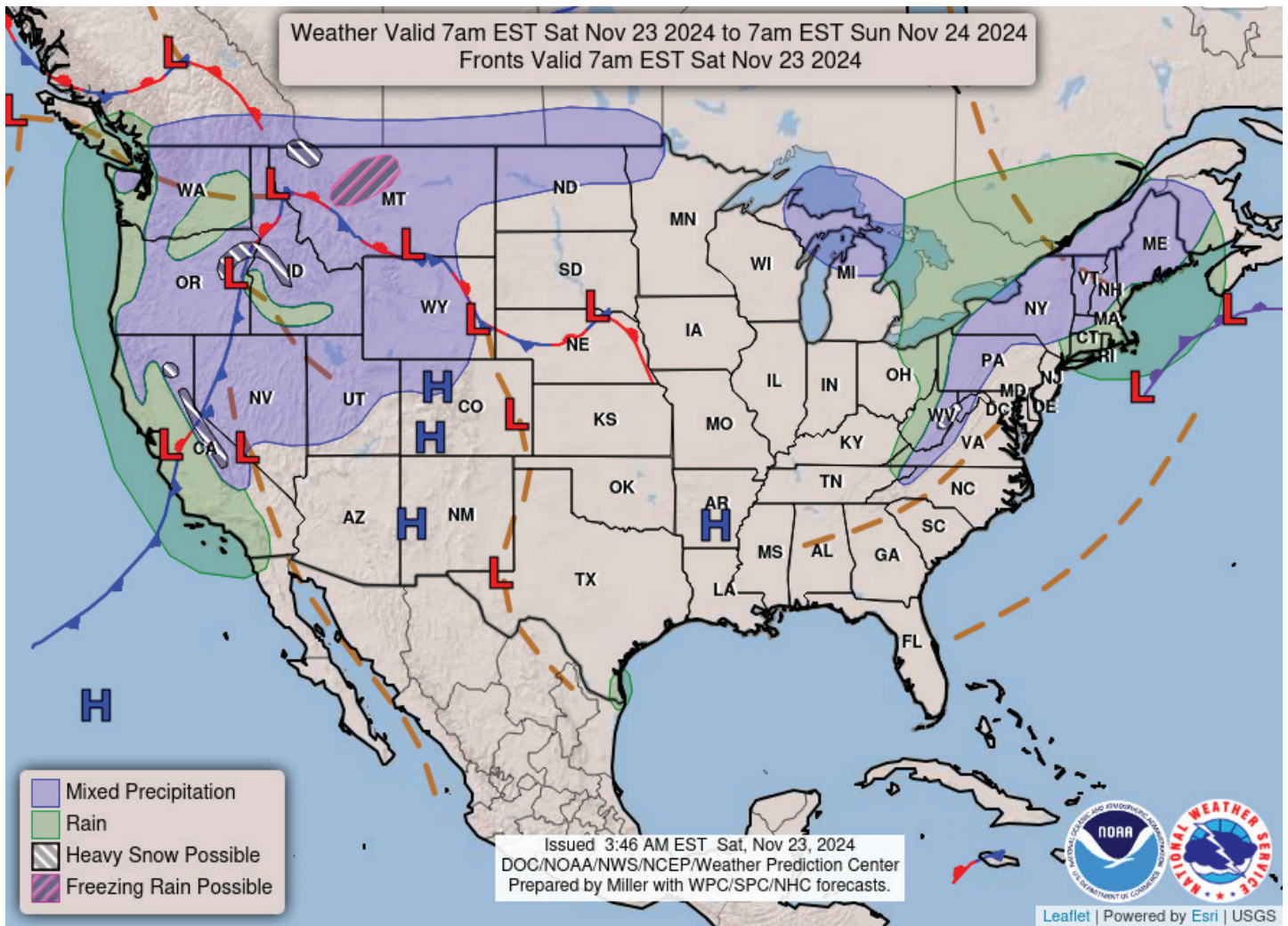
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 32 °F at 3:32 PM
Low Temp: 19 °F at 11:24 PM
Wind: 25 mph at 12:16 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 15 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 59 in 2017
Record Low: -17 in 1985
Average High: 39
Average Low: 16
Average Precip in Nov.: 0.60
Precip to date in Nov.: 1.83
Average Precip to date: 21.07
Precip Year to Date: 21.71
Sunset Tonight: 4:56:40 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:42:36 am



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Today in Weather History

November 23, 1996: Heavy snow of 6 to 8 inches fell across most of northern South Dakota, adding to already significant snow depth. Roads became snow-packed, which hampered travel, resulting in the postponement of many activities. Some snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Aberdeen, Isabel, Roscoe, and Mellette; 7 inches at Eagle Butte, Timber Lake, Selby, Faulkton, Leola, Frederick, Webster, and Sisseton; and 8 inches at Britton, Ipswich, Eureka, and McLaughlin.

1909 - Rattlesnake Creek was deluged with 7.17 inches of rain in 24 hours to establish a record for the state of Idaho. (The Weather Channel)

1912: The Rouse Simmons was a three-masted schooner famous for sinking during a violent storm on Lake Michigan on this day. The ship was bound for Chicago with a cargo of Christmas trees when it foundered off the coast of Two Rivers, Wisconsin, killing all on board.

1943 - Northern New Hampshire was in the grips of a record snowstorm which left a total of 55 inches at Berlin, and 56 inches at Randolph. The 56 inch total at Randolph established a 24 hour snowfall record for the state. In Maine, Middle Dam received a record 35 inches of snow in 24 hours. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Rain and gale force winds prevailed along the Northern Pacific coast. Quillayute, WA, received 1.57 inches of rain in 24 hours, including nine tenths of an inch in six hours. Heavy snow fell over northern Oregon and the Cascade Mountains of Washington State. Temperatures began to moderate in the eastern U.S. following a bitterly cold weekend. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Low pressure crossing the Great Basin brought wintry weather to parts of the western U.S. Up to a foot of snow blanketed Yellowstone Park, and winds gusted to 70 mph at Casper WY, and reached 95 mph near Reno NV. Up to seven inches of rain was reported in the Grass Valley and Nevada City area of California. Paradise CA was soaked with 5.37 inches of rain in 24 hours. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Low pressure tracking across the Carolinas brought heavy rain to parts of the Southern Atlantic Coast Region for Thanksgiving Day, and blanketed the Middle Atlantic Coast States and southern New England with heavy snow. The storm produced up to nine inches of snow over Long Island NY, and up to 14 inches over Cape Cod MA, at Yarmouth. Totals of 4.7 inches at New York City and 6.0 inches at Newark NJ were records for Thanksgiving Day, the 8.0 inch total at Providence RI was a record for any given day in November, and the 6.5 inch total at Strasburg CT was a record for the month of November as a whole. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2004 - An outbreak of severe thunderstorms produced reports of 54 tornadoes across portions of Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas and Alabama. In Texas's Hardin county, one person was killed with three injured when a tornado struck during the afternoon (Associated Press).



TAKE TIME TO PREACH

Saint Francis is remembered for his greatness and goodness in spreading the Gospel of Christ. His writings still inspire people today.

One day he said to a fellow brother who lived with him in the monastery, "Let's go to town and preach to the people."

As they walked the dusty road, they stopped to talk to people and play games with the children. Tired and hungry, St. Francis turned to his young companion and said, "Let's return to the monastery."

"But," protested his young colleague, "when do we preach to the people?"

"Every step we took," said St. Francis, "and every word we spoke and every smile we shared with the people and everything we did was our sermon. We have been preaching all day!"

The only sermon some people will ever hear are the words that come from our lips, and the only preaching that many will "listen" to is what they see in our lives. For many we are what we say we believe.

John wrote, "Those who say they live in God should live as Christ did." To live as Jesus did we must obey His teachings and follow His example by being obedient to His teachings.

Years ago, a hymn writer asked most effectively: "Can others see Jesus in you?"

Prayer: Father, may the disturbing words of that hymn trouble our minds and hearts and force us to examine our lives and make changes that will please You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Those who say they live in God should live as Christ did. 1 John 2:6

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:
11.22.24

13 20 26 32 65 2

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$489,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[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 DRAW: 16 Hrs 37 Mins
27 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.22.24

17 31 33 38 46 17

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 52 Mins
27 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.20.24

17 22 26 30 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$112,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 52 Mins
28 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.20.24

3 10 37 40 68 1

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 21 Mins
28 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 DRAW: 17 Hrs 21 Mins
28 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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Upcoming Groton Events

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

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News from the **AP** Associated Press

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP VOLLEYBALL

SDHSAA Playoffs

Class AA Semifinal

Harrisburg def. O'Gorman High School, 25-17, 23-25, 25-21, 25-21

Sioux Falls Roosevelt def. Brandon Valley, 25-20, 25-14, 25-19

Sioux Falls Washington def. Sioux Falls Jefferson, 25-20, 25-13, 25-16

Watertown def. Aberdeen Central High School, 25-19, 25-13, 25-17

Class A Semifinal

Dakota Valley def. Sioux Falls Christian, 19-25, 28-26, 25-20, 15-25, 16-14

Dell Rapids def. Hamlin, 25-11, 25-9, 25-16

Miller def. Mt. Vernon/Plankinton, 21-25, 25-14, 26-24, 25-18

Sioux Valley def. Winner, 22-25, 25-14, 25-19, 13-25, 16-14

Class B Semifinal

Castlewood def. Kadoka, 25-20, 25-17, 25-19

Chester def. Burke, 19-25, 25-17, 28-26, 25-18

Colman-Egan def. Gayville-Volin High School, 25-17, 25-17, 25-10

Warner def. Hitchcock-Tulare, 25-20, 25-23, 25-20

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

Southern Indiana knocks off South Dakota 92-83

By The Associated Press undefined

EVANSVILLE, Ind. (AP) — Jayland Randall had 24 points in Southern Indiana's 92-83 win against South Dakota on Friday night.

Randall shot 9 of 15 from the field, including 3 for 6 from 3-point range, and went 3 for 4 from the line for the Screaming Eagles (2-4). Jared Washington scored 16 points, shooting 6 for 10 (2 for 3 from 3-point range) and 2 of 3 from the free-throw line. Stephen Olowoniyi finished 7 of 12 from the floor to finish with 14 points, while adding seven rebounds and three blocks.

The Coyotes (5-2) were led by Kaleb Stewart, who recorded 21 points. Chase Forte added 14 points for South Dakota. Cameron Fens had 12 points and six rebounds.

Negotiators work through the night at UN climate talks to try to reach a cash deal for poor nations

By MELINA WALLING, SETH BORENSTEIN, MICHAEL PHILLIS and SIBI ARASU Associated Press

BAKU, Azerbaijan (AP) — The United Nations' annual climate talks pushed into overtime Saturday as negotiators pressed on to get a deal on money for developing nations to curb and adapt to climate change.

Several countries were left angry and disappointed at the latest proposed deal from the talks on Friday afternoon. That draft pledged \$250 billion annually by 2035, more than double the previous goal of \$100 billion set 15 years ago but far short of the annual \$1 trillion-plus that experts say is needed.

Top leaders and negotiators — including the U.K.'s Ed Miliband, Germany's climate envoy Jennifer Morgan and delegates from Central and South American countries — huddled in offices much of Saturday as they hashed out a new deal that both rich and developing nations could agree on. Sources within the negotiations told The Associated Press that the next version of the deal could see a new, higher figure of \$300

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billion under the right conditions.

But for Panama's negotiator Juan Carlos Monterrey Gomez even a higher figure is "still crumbs."

"How do you go from the request of \$1.3 trillion to \$300 billion? I mean, is that even half of what we put forth?" he asked.

Alden Meyer, of the European think tank E3G, said negotiators now have very little room for error.

"They've got to make sure whatever they put on the table is something that can fly. ... Because otherwise we start to lose critical mass as ministers start to leave tonight and into tomorrow," Meyer said. "So, they are under a deadline, but this is when it gets real."

The climate talks, called COP29, in Baku, Azerbaijan, were scheduled to end Friday. Workers have already begun dismantling the venue for the talks.

A climate cash deal is still elusive

Wealthy nations are obligated to help vulnerable countries under an agreement reached at these talks in Paris in 2015. Developing nations are seeking \$1.3 trillion to help adapt to droughts, floods, rising seas and extreme heat, pay for losses and damages caused by extreme weather, and transition their energy systems away from planet-warming fossil fuels and toward clean energy.

"We're doing everything we can on each of the axes to build bridges and to make this into a success," said EU climate commissioner Wopke Hoekstra.

On Saturday morning, Irish environment minister Eamon Ryan said that he felt there'll be a new number in the next draft.

"We'll have to see what the final number is. I don't think it'll be the one initially published yesterday," Ryan said. "But it's not just that number — it's how do you get to 1.3 trillion."

Ryan said that any number reached at the COP will have to be supplemented with other sources of finance, for example through a market for carbon emissions where polluters would pay to offset what they emit.

The amount in any deal reached at COP negotiations — often considered a "core" — will then be mobilized or leveraged for greater climate spending. But much of that means loans for countries drowning in debt.

"We have to get agreement quickly. And I hope and believe we can," Ryan said.

Anger and frustration over state of negotiations

Panama's Monterrey Gomez slammed rich nations for how they've handled the talks so far.

"This is what always the developed world does to us in all multilateral agreements," he said. "They push and push and push, and at the last minute, they get us tired, they get us hungry, they get us dizzy."

It means any agreements reached "don't truly represent the needs of our people," he said.

Some observers were also wary about how negotiations were going Saturday.

"A fundamental principle of U.N. summits is that they are a party driven process, where countries are supposed to negotiate directly with each other," said Mohamed Adow, director of the think tank Power Shift Africa.

But this year, open negotiations have been replaced with backroom deals, and there's been pressure on developing countries to accept an offer that's far from what they wanted, he said. "This is a worrying sign and must not be allowed to happen," he said.

Meyer of E3G said it's also still up in the air whether a deal will come out of Baku at all.

"It is still not out of the question that there could be an inability to close the gap on the finance issue," he said. "That obviously is not an ideal scenario."

Activists push for more ambitious deal

Activists continued to protest within the venue Saturday, with dozens outside one of the main plenary halls calling for a more ambitious finance deal. They called for "trillions, not billions" in climate cash and pushed for countries to phase out planet-warming fossil fuels.

Late Friday, Several dozen activists marched in silence outside the halls where delegates meet, raising and crossing their arms in front of themselves to indicate rejection of the draft text.

Also late Friday, 355 civil society organizations released a letter in support of the G77 and China negotiating group's rejection of the latest draft.

The letter urged negotiators to "stand up for the people of the Global South," saying that "no deal in

Baku is better than a bad deal.”

Lidy Nacpil, a Filipino coordinator with the Asian Peoples’ Movement on Debt and Development, said activists would still be unhappy if the climate finance number doubles to \$500 billion.

“We’re still at this point where we are asking developing countries to stay strong and not just give in to far, far less than what should be,” she said.

At least 11 killed and dozens injured in Israeli strikes in Beirut as diplomats push for cease-fire

By ABBY SEWELL and BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

BEIRUT, Lebanon (AP) — Israeli airstrikes Saturday killed at least 11 people and injured dozens in central Beirut, as diplomats scrambled to broker a cease-fire.

Lebanon’s civil defense said the death toll was provisional as emergency responders were still digging through the rubble looking for survivors. The strikes were the fourth on the Lebanese capital in less than a week.

The escalation comes after U.S. envoy Amos Hochstein traveled to the region this week in an attempt to broker a cease-fire deal to end the more than 13 months of fighting between Israel and Hezbollah, which has erupted into full-on war in the past two months.

Israeli bombardment has killed more than 3,500 people in Lebanon and wounded more than 15,000, according to the Lebanese health ministry. It has displaced about 1.2 million, or a quarter of Lebanon’s population. On the Israeli side, about 90 soldiers and nearly 50 civilians have been killed by rockets, drones and missiles in northern Israel and in fighting in Lebanon.

The strikes occurred at 4 a.m. local time, destroying an eight-story building and leaving a crater in the ground. Also on Saturday a drone strike killed one person and injured another in the southern port city of Tyre, according to the state-run National News Agency.

The agency said the people killed and injured in Tyre were fishermen. An Associated Press journalist, who saw the strike from a nearby hotel overlooking the beach, said he had watched the fishermen set up their nets beforehand and they appeared to both be young teenagers.

The strikes came a day after heavy bombardment of Beirut’s southern suburbs and as heavy ground fighting between Israeli forces and Hezbollah militants continues in southern Lebanon, with Israeli troops pushing farther from the border.

Israel’s military did not issue a warning for residents to evacuate prior to the strikes in central Beirut and would not comment on those strikes or on the one in Tyre.

The army said in a statement Saturday, that over the past day it had conducted intelligence-based strikes on Hezbollah targets in Dahiyeh, a Hezbollah stronghold in Beirut’s southern suburbs, including on several command centers and weapons storage facilities. The army said prior to the strikes it issued advance warnings to civilians in the area.

Strikes also continued in Gaza on Saturday. At least six people were killed, half of them children, and two women, in the southern city of Khan Younis, according to Associated Press reporters and staff at Nasser hospital.

After the attack, AP reporters saw people grieving over what appeared to be the lifeless body of a man, and bloodied children were seen helping each other away from the wreckage.

The death toll in the fighting in the Gaza Strip between Israel and Hamas has surpassed 44,000 this week, according to local health officials. The Gaza Health Ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its count, but it has said that more than half of the fatalities are women and children. The Israeli military says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence.

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting another 250. Around 100 hostages are still inside Gaza, at least a third of whom are believed to be dead. Most of the rest were released during a cease-fire last year.

The Israeli offensive in Gaza has caused heavy destruction across wide areas of the coastal territory,

leading many to wonder when or how it will ever be rebuilt. Around 90% of the population of 2.3 million people have been displaced, often multiple times, and hundreds of thousands are living in squalid tent camps with little food, water or basic services.

Japan will hold first memorial for 'all workers' at Sado gold mines but blurs WWII atrocity. Why?

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

SADO, Japan (AP) — Japan will hold a memorial ceremony on Sunday near the Sado Island Gold Mines, which were listed this summer as a UNESCO World Heritage site after the country moved past years of historical disputes with South Korea and reluctantly acknowledged the mines' dark history.

At these mines, hundreds of Koreans were forced to labor under abusive and brutal conditions during World War II, historians say. The Japanese government said Sunday's ceremony will pay tribute to "all workers" who died at the mines, but without spelling out who they are — part of what critics call a persistent policy of whitewashing Japan's history of sexual and labor exploitation before and during the war.

The ceremony, which was supposed to further mend their wounds, renewed tensions between the two sides. On Saturday, South Korea's government said it will boycott the memorial service due to unspecified disagreements with Tokyo over the event.

There was no immediate response from Japanese officials.

Ahead of the ceremony on Sunday, The Associated Press explains the Sado mines, their history and the controversy.

What are the Sado gold mines?

The 16th century mines on the island of Sado, about the size of the Pacific island of Guam, off the western coast of Niigata prefecture, operated for nearly 400 years beginning in 1601 and were once the world's largest gold producer. They closed in 1989. During the Edo period, from 1600 to 1868, the mines supplied gold currency to the ruling Tokugawa Shogunate.

Today, the site has been developed as a tourist facility and hiking site where visitors can learn about the changes in mining technology and production methods while looking at the remains of mine shafts and ore dressing facilities.

Critics say the Japanese government only highlights the glory of the mines and covers up its use of Korean victims of forced labor and their ordeals. The mines were registered as a cultural heritage site in July after Japan agreed to include an exhibit on the conditions of Korean forced laborers and to hold a memorial service after repeated protests from the South Korean government.

What's the controversy?

At the July meeting of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, the Japanese delegate said Tokyo had installed new exhibition material to explain the "severe conditions of (the Korean laborers') work and to remember their hardship."

Japan also acknowledged that Koreans were made to do more dangerous tasks in the mine shaft, which caused some to die. Those who survived also developed lung diseases and other health problems. Many of them were given meager food rations and nearly no days off and were caught by police if they escaped, historians say. But the Japanese government has refused to admit they were "forced labor."

South Korea had earlier opposed the listing of the site for UNESCO World Heritage on the grounds that the Korean forced laborers used at the mines were missing from the exhibition. South Korea eventually supported the listing after consultations with Japan and Tokyo's pledge to improve the historical background in the exhibit and to hold a memorial that also includes Koreans.

Historians say Japan used hundreds of thousands of Korean laborers, including those forcibly brought from the Korean Peninsula, at Japanese mines and factories to make up for labor shortages because most working-age Japanese men had been sent to battlefronts across Asia and the Pacific. About 1,500 Koreans were forced to work at the Sado mines, according to Yasuto Takeuchi, an expert on Japan's wartime history, citing wartime Japanese documents.

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The South Korean government has said it expects Japan to keep its pledge to be truthful to history and to show both sides of the Sado mines.

"The controversy surrounding the Sado mines exhibit underscores a deeper problem" of Japan's failure to face up to its wartime responsibility and its growing "denialism" of its wartime atrocities, Takeuchi said.

Who does the ceremony commemorate?

All workers who died at the Sado mines will be honored. That includes hundreds of Korean laborers who worked there during Japan's 1910-1945 colonization of the Korean Peninsula.

Officials say the ceremony is organized by a group of local Japanese politicians, business owners and other volunteers who campaigned for the Sado mines to win the UNESCO status, but preparations were handled by local government officials, who did not disclose details, including guests and programs, until the last minute.

Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya announced the ceremony on Friday, but he declined to comment on "diplomatic exchanges."

Officials at Sado city and the Foreign Ministry said about 100 people, including officials from Japan's local and central government, as well as South Korean Foreign Ministry officials and the relatives of Korean wartime laborers, have been invited. Attendants are expected to observe a moment of silence for the victims who died at the mines due to accidents and other causes.

The ceremony dredged up long-standing frustrations in South Korea, where the Foreign Ministry said in a statement it was impossible to settle the disagreements between both governments before the planned event on Sunday, without specifying what those disagreements were.

The cancelation came a day after Japan said it will send a parliamentary vice minister, Akiko Ikuina, who in 2022 visited Tokyo's controversial Yasukuni Shrine, which honors Japan's 2.5 million war dead including convicted war criminals and is seen by Japan's neighbors as a symbol of its wartime militarism.

Some South Koreans had criticized the Seoul government throwing its support behind an event without securing a clear Japanese commitment to highlight the plight of Korean laborers. There were also complaints over South Korea agreeing to pay for the travel expenses of Korean victims' family members who were invited to attend the ceremony.

How has Japan faced up to its wartime atrocities?

Critics say Japan's government has long been reluctant to discuss wartime atrocities. That includes what historians describe as the sexual abuse and enslavement of women across Asia, many of them Koreans who were deceived into providing sex to Japanese soldiers at frontline brothels and euphemistically called "comfort women," and the Koreans who were mobilized and forced to work in Japan, especially in the final years of World War II.

Korean compensation demands for Japanese atrocities during its brutal colonial rule have strained relations between the two Asian neighbors, most recently after a 2018 South Korean Supreme Court ruling ordered Japanese companies to pay damages over their wartime forced labor.

Japan's government has maintained that all wartime compensation issues between the two countries were resolved under the 1965 normalization treaty. Ties between Tokyo and Seoul have improved recently after Washington said their disputes over the historical issues were hampering crucial security cooperation as China's threat grows in the region.

Japan's whitewashing of wartime atrocities has risen since the 2010s, particularly under the past government of revisionist leader Shinzo Abe. For instance, Japan says the terms "sex slavery" and "forced labor" are inaccurate and insists on the use of highly euphemistic terms such as "comfort women" and "civilian workers" instead.

South Korea's conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol announced in March 2023 that his country would use a local corporate fund to compensate forced labor victims without demanding Japanese contributions. Japan's then-Prime Minister Fumio Kishida later expressed sympathy for their suffering during a Seoul visit. Security, business and other ties between the sides have since rapidly resumed.

Takeuchi said listing Japan's modern industrial historical sites as a UNESCO World Heritage is a govern-

ment push to increase tourism. The government, he said, wants "to commercialize sites like the Sado mines by beautifying and justifying their history for Japan's convenience."

Laos government pledges justice in mass alcohol poisoning case that has killed 6 tourists

By JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI Associated Press

VANG VIENG, Laos (AP) — The Laotian government on Saturday officially acknowledged the mass poisoning that has killed at least six tourists, promising it would bring perpetrators to justice.

Two Australian teenagers and a British woman died from suspected methanol poisoning after drinking tainted alcohol in Laos. An American man and two Danes also died, though their exact causes of death have not been released. A New Zealander also has been sickened.

In a short statement released to the media, the Lao government said it was "profoundly saddened over the loss of lives of foreign tourists" in the town Vang Vieng and offered its condolences to the families of the victims.

"The Government of the Lao PDR has been conducting investigations to find causes of the incident and to bring the perpetrators to justice in accordance with the law," it said.

Laos is a one-party communist state with no organized opposition and the government keeps a tight lid on information. In this case, officials have released almost no details. The police have said they detained a number of people but refused to provide further information.

Details have been murky over the number of tourists affected and the possible source of the methanol-laced drinks.

Methanol is sometimes added to mixed drinks at disreputable bars as a cheaper alternative to ethanol, but can cause severe poisoning or death. It is also a byproduct of poorly distilled homebrew liquor, and could have found its way into bar drinks inadvertently.

The U.S. State Department on Friday issued a health alert for citizens traveling in Laos, warning of "suspected methanol poisoning in Vang Vieng, possibly through the consumption of methanol-laced alcoholic drinks," following similar alerts from other countries whose citizens were involved.

Nineteen-year-old Australians Bianca Jones and Holly Bowles died in Thai hospitals on Thursday and Friday respectively after being evacuated from Laos for emergency treatment. Thai authorities confirmed that Jones had died by "brain swelling due to high levels of methanol found in her system."

Both were found sick in their room at the Nana Backpacker Hostel on Nov. 13 after they failed to check out as planned.

The U.K. Foreign Office named 28-year-old British woman Simone White as another of the victims.

Landlocked Laos is one of Southeast Asia's poorest nations and a popular tourist destination. Vang Vieng is particularly popular among backpackers seeking partying and adventure sports.

Fighting between armed sectarian groups in restive northwestern Pakistan kills at least 33 people

By RIAZ KHAN Associated Press

PESHAWAR, Pakistan (AP) — Fighting between armed Sunni and Shiite groups in northwestern Pakistan killed at least 33 people and injured 25 others, a senior police officer from the region said Saturday.

The overnight violence was the latest to rock Kurram, a district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, and comes days after a deadly gun ambush killed 42 people.

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

Although the two groups generally live together peacefully, tensions remain, especially in Kurram.

The senior police officer said armed men in Bagan and Bacha Kot torched shops, houses and government property.

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Intense gunfire was ongoing between the Alizai and Bagan tribes in the Lower Kurram area.

"Educational institutions in Kurram are closed due to the severe tension. Both sides are targeting each other with heavy and automatic weapons," said the officer, who spoke anonymously because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

Videos shared with The Associated Press showed a market engulfed by fire and orange flames piercing the night sky. Gunfire can also be heard.

The location of Thursday's attack was also targeted by armed men, who marched on the area.

Survivors of the gun ambush said assailants emerged from a vehicle and sprayed buses and cars with bullets. Nobody has claimed responsibility for the attack and police have not identified a motive.

Dozens of people from the district's Sunni and Shiite communities have been killed since July, when a land dispute erupted in Kurram that later turned into general sectarian violence.

Storm dumps record rain in Northern California, while US Northeast deals with winter storms

By NOAH BERGER and OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ Associated Press

HEALDSBURG, Calif. (AP) — A major storm dropped more snow and record rain in California, causing small landslides and flooding some streets, while on the opposite side of the country blizzard or winter storm warnings were in effect Saturday for areas spanning from the Northeast to central Appalachia.

The storm on the West Coast arrived in the Pacific Northwest earlier this week, killing two people and knocking out power to hundreds of thousands, mostly in the Seattle area, before its strong winds moved through Northern California.

Santa Rosa, California, saw its wettest three-day period on record with about 12.5 inches (32 centimeters) of rain falling by Friday evening, according to the National Weather Service in the Bay Area.

Flooding closed part of scenic Highway 1, also known as the Pacific Coast Highway, in Mendocino County and there was no estimate for when it would reopen, according to the California Department of Transportation.

On the East Coast, another storm brought much-needed rain to New York and New Jersey, where rare wildfires have raged in recent weeks, and heavy snow to northeastern Pennsylvania. Parts of West Virginia were under a blizzard warning through Saturday morning, with up to 2 feet (61 centimeters) of snow and high winds making travel treacherous.

As residents in the Seattle area headed into the weekend, more than 112,000 people were still without power from this season's strongest atmospheric river — a long plume of moisture that forms over an ocean and flows through the sky over land. Crews worked to clear streets of downed lines, branches and other debris, while cities opened warming centers so people heading into their fourth day without power could get warm food and plug in their cellphones and other devices.

Gale warnings were issued off Washington, Oregon and California, and high wind warnings were in effect across parts of Northern California and Oregon. There were winter storm warnings for parts of the California Cascades and the Sierra Nevada.

Forecasters predicted that both coasts would begin to see a reprieve from the storms as the system in the northeast moves into eastern Canada and the one in the West heads south.

By Friday night, some relief was already being seen in California, where the sheriff's office in Humboldt County downgraded evacuation orders to warnings for people near the Eel River after forecasters said the waterway would see moderate but not major flooding.

The system roared ashore on the West Coast on Tuesday as a "bomb cyclone," which occurs when a cyclone intensifies rapidly. It unleashed fierce winds that toppled trees onto roads, vehicles and homes.

Debra Campbell said she was sitting in the dark with a flashlight that night, unable to sleep as strong winds lashed her house in Crescent City, California. With a massive boom, a 150-foot (46-meter) tree came crashing down on her home and car.

"It was just so incredibly frightening," Campbell said. "Once I realized it wasn't going to come through

the ceiling where I was at, I was able to grab my car keys and my purse. ... And I open the front door and it's just solid tree."

In the Northeast, which has been hit by drought, more than 2 inches (5 centimeters) of rain was expected by Saturday morning north of New York City, with snow mixed in at higher elevations.

Despite the mess, the precipitation was expected to help ease drought conditions in a state that has seen an exceptionally dry fall.

"It's not going to be a drought buster, but it's definitely going to help when all this melts," said Bryan Greenblatt, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Binghamton, New York.

Heavy snow fell in northeastern Pennsylvania, including the Pocono Mountains, prompting a raft of school closures. Higher elevations reported up to 17 inches (43 centimeters), with lesser accumulations in valley cities like Scranton and Wilkes-Barre. More than 85,000 customers in 10 counties lost power, and the state transportation department imposed speed restrictions on some highways.

Voters rejected historic election reforms across the US, despite more than \$100M push

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — Two weeks before Election Day, activists from across the country gathered for an online rally heralding the historic number of state ballot initiatives seeking to change the way people vote. Hopes were high that voters would ditch traditional partisan primaries and embrace ballots with more candidate choices.

Instead, the election reform movement lost almost everywhere it appeared on a statewide ballot.

"It turns out, in retrospect, we weren't yet ready for prime time," said John Opdycke, president of the advocacy group Open Primaries, which organized the rally.

In Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, Oregon and South Dakota — a mixture of red, blue and purple states — voters rejected either ranked choice voting, open primaries or a combination of both.

The open primary proposals sought to place candidates of all parties on the same ballot, with a certain number of top finishers advancing to the general election. Under ranked choice voting, people can vote for multiple candidates in order of preference. If no one receives a majority of first place votes, then candidates who receive the fewest votes are eliminated and their votes redistributed to people's next choices.

Election reform advocates raised about \$110 million for the statewide ballot measures, vastly outpacing their opponents, according to an Associated Press analysis of campaign finance figures that could grow even larger as post-election reports are filed. Still, their promotional push wasn't enough to persuade most voters.

"While Americans are frustrated with politics, I think most Americans are just fine with the traditional way of voting," said Trent England, executive director of Save Our States, which opposes ranked choice voting.

Advocates for alternative election methods had thought momentum was on their side after Alaska voters narrowly approved a combination of open primaries and ranked choice voting in 2020. Then voters in Nevada — where initiatives proposing constitutional amendments require approval in two consecutive elections — gave first-round approval to a similar measure in 2022. But Nevada voters reversed course this year.

In Alaska, an attempt this year to repeal open primaries and ranked choice voting appears to have fallen just short of passing, garnering 49.9% support in results released Wednesday. Final results are expected to be certified Nov. 30.

In addition to Alaska, versions of ranked choice voting already exist in Maine's federal elections and about 50 counties or cities. Voters in Washington, D.C., and the Chicago suburb of Oak Park, Illinois, both approved ranked choice voting this November. And voters in the Minneapolis suburb of Bloomington, Minnesota, reaffirmed their use of it.

Data suggests that ranked choice voting rarely results in different outcomes than traditional elections

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won by candidates receiving a plurality, but not majority, of support. The AP analyzed nearly 150 races this fall in 16 jurisdictions where ranked choice voting is authorized, ranging from the Board of Assessors elections in the Village of Arden, Delaware, to the presidential elections in Alaska and Maine. The ranking system was needed in just 30% of those cases, because the rest were won by candidates receiving a majority of the initial votes.

Nationwide, just three candidates who initially trailed in first-place votes ended up winning after ranked vote tabulations — one for Portland City Council and two for the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.

In San Francisco, two progressive candidates campaigned together, encouraging voters to rank them No. 1 and 2. Initially, they fell behind a moderate candidate who would have won a traditional election. But after six rounds of rankings, one of the progressive candidates emerged the victor when the other was eliminated and his supporters' votes were redistributed to her.

Supporters of ranked choice voting point to that as a success, because it avoided two similar candidates splitting the vote and both losing.

"It's kind of like a pressure valve — you don't always need it, but when you do, you really do," said Deb Otis, director of research and policy at FairVote, which advocates for ranked choice voting.

In Portland, Oregon, voters used ranked choice voting for the first time this November in their mayoral and City Council elections, even as Oregon voters simultaneously rejected a measure to implement it for federal and statewide offices. Political outsider Keith Wilson, who led Portland's 19-person mayoral field with about one-third of the initial vote, ultimately won election after 19 rounds of ranked tabulations. One City Council seat took at least 30 rounds to decide.

But not everyone participated in the new voting method. About one-fifth of Portland voters skipped the council races, and about one-in-seven voters left the mayoral election blank.

Opponents of ranked choice voting contend that some people find it confusing and don't vote in ranked races.

Academic research also has cast doubt on the benefits of ranked choice voting, said Larry Jacobs, a professor of politics at the University of Minnesota. Fewer Black voters tend to rank candidates than white voters, he said, and there is little evidence that ranked choice voting reduces political polarization or negative campaigning.

"I think the tide for ranked choice voting is turning away from it," Jacobs said.

Groups that heavily financed this year's election reform initiatives aren't giving up, but may retool their approach. Supporters are considering whether to separate the efforts to end partisan primaries from those to adopt ranked choice voting, and whether to focus more on incremental changes that state legislatures can make instead of on high-stakes initiatives to amend state constitutions.

Opdycke said some of this year's initiatives may have launched prematurely, counting on ads to persuade voters without first cultivating enough grassroots support.

"I think there's a deeper appreciation for the kind of brick work, foundation-building, conversation creation that has to go on as a precursor of launching a formal campaign," he said.

Unite America, which spent around \$70 million this year in its effort to end partisan primaries, is analyzing voter surveys and focus group results to help reshape its approach.

"The question is not if we should continue that effort," Unite America Executive Director Nick Troiano said, "but how are we ultimately going to succeed at it?"

Trump raced to pick many Cabinet posts. He took more time to settle on a treasury secretary

By JOSH BOAK and FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump launched a blitz of picks for his Cabinet, but he took his time before settling on billionaire investor Scott Bessent as his treasury secretary nominee.

The Republican not only wanted someone who jibes with him, but an official who can execute his eco-

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conomic vision and look straight out of central casting while doing so. With his Yale University education and pedigree trading for Soros Fund Management before establishing his own funds, Bessent will be tasked with a delicate balancing act.

Trump expects him to help reset the global trade order, enable trillions of dollars in tax cuts, ensure inflation stays in check, manage a ballooning national debt and still keep the financial markets confident.

"Scott will support my Policies that will drive U.S. Competitiveness, and stop unfair Trade imbalances, work to create an Economy that places Growth at the forefront, especially through our coming World Energy Dominance," Trump said in a statement.

But for all the confidence, Trump was cautious in picking the 62-year-old, a sign that he understood the stakes after winning a presidential election largely shaped by inflation hitting a four-decade peak in 2022. He felt comfortable making faster decisions on Fox News host Pete Hegseth for defense secretary, Florida Sen. Marco Rubio for secretary of state and Robert F. Kennedy Jr. for health and human services secretary.

His choice of Bessent went against the opinion of billionaire Elon Musk, who is co-leading Trump's advisory panel known as the "Department of Government Efficiency" initiative. The head of Tesla and SpaceX posted on his social media site X before Trump's selection that Bessent would be "a business-as-usual choice."

The pick also showed the internal tensions of a candidate who won by appealing to blue-collar voters but who depends on an administration staffed by those, who like Trump, enjoy a life of extreme wealth.

Senate Finance Committee Chair Ron Wyden, D-Ore., was unimpressed by Bessent.

"Donald Trump pretends to be an economic populist, but it wouldn't be a Trump Treasury Department without a rich political donor running the show," Wyden said in a statement rushed out immediately after the announcement Friday evening. "When it comes to the economy, the government under Trump is of, by, and for the ultra-wealthy."

Bessent caught Trump's attention during the campaign with his ideas for 3% growth, a reduced budget deficit equal to 3% of gross domestic product and 3 million additional barrels a day of oil production. Larry Kudlow, the TV host and a director of the White House National Economic Council during Trump's initial term, supported him. But critics in Trump's orbit said Bessent was weak on tariffs.

Another onetime contender, Howard Lutnick, the billionaire CEO of the investment firm Cantor Fitzgerald, was more pro-tariffs but less reassuring to some business leaders. Trump picked him to head the Commerce Department and take the lead on trade issues.

Trump also looked at other candidates, including former Federal Reserve governor Kevin Warsh, Marc Rowan, the chief executive of Apollo Global Management, and Sen. Bill Hagerty, R-Tenn.

Trump's decision on his treasury chief is tied in part to most Republican voters' biggest motivation for returning him to the White House: the state of the U.S. economy and the pressure from high prices.

According to AP VoteCast, an early November survey of about 120,000 voters nationwide, about 3 in 10 voters said they wanted total upheaval in how the country is run. Bessent has been deeply critical of President Joe Biden's economic policies, saying in remarks at the conservative Manhattan Institute that he was "alarmed" by the size of government spending and deficits and that Biden had embraced a "central planning" mindset that he thought belonged on "the scrap heap of history."

Biden, for his part, chose Janet Yellen, the former Federal Reserve chair, to be his treasury secretary, relying on her credibility as an economist as his administration successfully pushed for \$1.9 trillion in pandemic aid in 2021. But inflation jumped as the United States recovered from pandemic shutdowns, driven by supply chain challenges, global conflict and — according to Biden administration critics — an excessive amount of pandemic aid.

Government officials and economists are uncertain about what Trump would prioritize. The Republican campaigned on jacking up tariffs against China and other trade partners. But people in his economic orbit privately insist that what he cares about are fair terms in which other countries such as China don't disadvantage the United States by subsidizing industries, manipulating currencies and suppressing their own workers' wages.

The president-elect wants to extend and expand his 2017 tax cuts, many of which are set to expire after 2025. He's also proposed an array of tax cuts, such as no taxes on tips or overtime pay or Social Security

benefits, that would create possible deficit increases.

The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, an independent fiscal watchdog, estimated that Trump could possibly add between \$1.7 trillion to \$15.6 trillion to projected deficits over 10 years, a sign of the uncertainty regarding his economic plans.

The economist Olivier Blanchard, a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, this week laid out the contradictions of "Trumponomics." Deficit-funded tax cuts and tariff hikes could be inflationary, yet Trump won November's election in large part because of voter frustration with inflation. There's also his promise of deportations of unauthorized immigrants that could lower employment, though it's not clear what Trump will do once in office.

"The U.S. should be thinking about reducing the deficit, quite apart from Trump," Blanchard said in a webcast. "Trump is probably going to make it worse."

Trump's treasury secretary might ultimately face the additional responsibility of trying to pressure Fed Chair Jerome Powell to do as Trump wants, since the inflationary pressures outlined by Blanchard likely mean the Fed would try to slow growth to keep inflation from overheating, likely upsetting Trump.

"The risk of a conflict between the Trump administration and the Fed is very high," Blanchard said in a webcast.

Storm inundates Northern California with rain, heavy snow. Thousands remain in the dark in Seattle

By NOAH BERGER and OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ Associated Press

HEALDSBURG, Calif. (AP) — Heavy downpours fell over much of Northern California on Friday, causing small landslides, overflowing a river and flooding some streets, including in parts of San Francisco. Meanwhile tens of thousands of people were still without power in the Seattle area after several days in the dark.

The storm arrived in the Pacific Northwest earlier this week, killing two people and knocking out power to hundreds of thousands, mostly in the Seattle area, before moving through Northern California, where several roads were closed due to flooding and strong winds toppled trees.

Forecasters warned about the risk of flash flooding and rockslides in areas north of San Francisco from this season's strongest atmospheric river — a long plume of moisture that forms over an ocean and flows through the sky over land.

On the East Coast, another storm brought much-needed rain to New York and New Jersey, where rare wildfires have raged in recent weeks. The rain eased the fire danger for the rest of the year and was a boost for ski resorts preparing to open in the weeks ahead. Parts of West Virginia were under a blizzard warning through Saturday morning, with up to 2 feet (61 centimeters) of snow and high winds making travel treacherous.

In California's Humboldt County, the sheriff's office downgraded evacuation orders to warnings for people near the Eel River after forecasters said the waterway would see moderate but not major flooding. Officials urged residents to prepare for storm impacts throughout the week.

Flooding closed scenic Highway 1, also known as the Pacific Coast Highway, in neighboring Mendocino County north of Point Arena near the Garcia River, and there was no estimate for when it would reopen, according to the California Department of Transportation.

Santa Rosa saw its wettest three-day period on record with about 12.5 inches (32 centimeters) of rain, according to the National Weather Service in the Bay Area.

A small mudslide threatened a home in the community of Fitch Mountain, near Healdsburg, nestled in hills along the Russian River in Sonoma County. Moderate rain was falling, and officials worried the slide could grow and hit several homes downhill.

"Our concern is while this property may be OK, the earth between it and the road below is slipping, and the mudslide is affecting downhill properties," said Tennis Wick, permits and resource director for Sonoma County.

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Dana Eaton, who lives in one of the downhill properties and was clad in a yellow rain slicker and hat, said she was worried, too. In 2019, mud cascaded into a neighbor's garage.

Asked what the last few days have been like, she laughed: "Wet. Constant rain. It's like everywhere else in the county, but so far nothing major, just concerns."

In Washington state nearly 117,000 people were still without electricity, mostly in the Seattle area's King County, as crews worked to clear streets of downed lines, branches and other debris. Utility officials said the outages, which began Tuesday, could last into Saturday.

People flocked to a suburban senior center in Issaquah to get warm food and plug in their cellphones and other devices. One of them, Melissa Tryon, said she had been unable to charge her electric motorized wheelchair and had to throw out all the food in her refrigerator after it went bad.

"Today I kind of had a little bit of a meltdown," Tyron said. "It's hard to be cut off for that long."

Gale warnings were issued off Washington, Oregon and California, and high wind warnings were in effect across parts of Northern California and Oregon. There were winter storm warnings for parts of the California Cascades and the Sierra Nevada.

The National Weather Service in Reno, Nevada, reported a 128-mph (206-kph) gust of wind in the morning at the top of Palisades Tahoe ski resort, about 10 miles northwest of Lake Tahoe, where some runs were open. Gusts up to 86 mph (138 kph) were recorded at Mt. Rose, which closed due to the weather.

The system roared ashore on the West Coast on Tuesday as a "bomb cyclone," which occurs when a cyclone intensifies rapidly. It unleashed fierce winds that toppled trees onto roads, vehicles and homes.

Debra Campbell, 65, said she was sitting in the dark with a flashlight that night, unable to sleep as strong winds lashed her house in Crescent City, California. With a massive boom, a 150-foot (46-meter) tree came crashing down on her home and car.

"It was just so incredibly frightening," Campbell said. "Once I realized it wasn't going to come through the ceiling where I was at, I was able to grab my car keys and my purse. ... And I open the front door and it's just solid tree."

She was able to stay with her boyfriend that night, but now, living on Social Security and with no savings, she worries about how she will pay for repairs.

Officials warned of the risk of flash flooding, rockslides and debris flows, especially where hillsides were loosened by recent wildfires.

In the Northeast, which has been hit by drought, more than 2 inches (5 centimeters) of rain was expected by Saturday morning north of New York City, with snow mixed in at higher elevations.

Despite the mess, the precipitation was expected to help ease drought conditions in a state that has seen an exceptionally dry fall.

"It's not going to be a drought buster, but it's definitely going to help when all this melts," said Bryan Greenblatt, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Binghamton, New York.

Heavy snow fell in northeastern Pennsylvania, including the Pocono Mountains, prompting a raft of school closures. Higher elevations reported up to 17 inches (43 centimeters), with lesser accumulations in valley cities like Scranton and Wilkes-Barre. More than 92,000 customers in 10 counties lost power, and the state transportation department imposed speed restrictions on some highways.

Gary Wilson, 37, of Dunmore, Pennsylvania, was heading to his casino job in the Poconos in the morning when he got stuck in standstill traffic, a consequence of accidents and downed wires. At one point he worried about getting stranded because it was snowing hard and plows couldn't get through. Traffic began moving again only after about five hours, and Wilson never did make it to work.

"I'm done for the day," Wilson said. "Five and a half hours in the car, turn around and get home safe."

Colorado funeral home owners who let nearly 190 bodies decay plead guilty to corpse abuse

By JESSE BEDAYN Associated Press/Report for America

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (AP) — The owners of a Colorado funeral home who let nearly 190 bodies decay in a room-temperature building and gave grieving families fake ashes pleaded guilty on Friday to corpse abuse.

Jon and Carie Hallford, who own the Return to Nature Funeral Home, began storing bodies in a decrepit building near Colorado Springs as far back as 2019 and gave families dry concrete in place of cremated remains, according to the charges. The grim discovery last year upended families' grieving processes.

Plea deals reached between the defendants and prosecutors call for Jon Hallford to receive a 20-year prison sentence and Carie Hallford to receive 15 to 20 years in prison.

Over the years, the Hallfords spent extravagantly, prosecutors say. They used customers' money and nearly \$900,000 in pandemic relief funds to buy laser body sculpting, fancy cars, trips to Las Vegas and Florida, \$31,000 in cryptocurrency and other luxury items, according to court records.

Last month, the Hallfords pleaded guilty to federal fraud charges in an agreement in which they acknowledged defrauding customers and the federal government. Under the agreement, prosecutors could request sentences of up to 15 years in prison for the couple.

Even as the couple lived large, prosecutors said the bodies at their funeral home were decomposing.

"The bodies were laying on the ground, stacked on shelves, left on gurneys, stacked on top of each other or just piled in rooms," prosecutor Rachael Powell said. She said the family members of the bodies that were discovered "have been intensely and forever outraged."

The Hallfords each pleaded guilty to 191 counts of corpse abuse for the bodies found decaying and two instances where the wrong bodies were buried.

They also agreed to pay restitution, with the amount yet to be determined. Additional charges of theft, forgery and money laundering would be dismissed under the agreements.

Crystina Page's son, David, died in 2019 and his body languished in the funeral home's building until last year.

"He laid in the corner of an inoperable fridge, dumped out of his body bag with rats and maggots eating his face for four years," Page said outside the courtroom after the hearing. "Now every moment that I think of my son, I'm having to think of Jon and Carie, and that's not going away."

Sentencing was set for April 18.

Six people with objections to the plea agreements had asked prior to Friday's hearing to address the court. They considered the length of the sentences under the plea deal insufficient given the Hallfords' conduct, prosecutors said.

Judge Eric Bentley said they would get a chance to speak prior to the sentencings. If the judge rejects the plea agreement, the Hallfords would be able to withdraw their guilty pleas and go to trial.

Carie Hallford told the judge that while she didn't visit the building as much as Jon: "I knew how bad it was and chose to do nothing about it."

At the close of Friday's hearing, Bentley revoked a bond that had allowed Carie Hallford to remain free while the case was pending. She was handcuffed in the courtroom while family members of the deceased applauded.

Jon Hallford already was in custody, and was in an orange jumpsuit and handcuffed for the hearing.

Last month, the Hallfords pleaded guilty to federal fraud charges in an agreement in which they acknowledged defrauding customers and the federal government.

Jon Hallford is represented by the public defenders office, which does not comment on cases. Carie Hallford's attorney, Michael Stuzynski, declined to comment.

Over four years, customers of Return to Nature spread what they thought were their loved ones' ashes in meaningful locations, sometimes a plane's flight away. Others carried their urns on cross-country road trips or held them tight at home.

The bodies, which prosecutors say were improperly stored, were discovered last year when neighbors reported a stench coming from a building in the small town of Penrose, southwest of Colorado Springs.

Authorities found bodies too decayed for visual identification. The building was so toxic that responders had to wear hazmat gear and could remain inside only for brief periods.

The discovery of the bodies at Return to Nature prompted state legislators to strengthen what had been among the laxest funeral home regulations in the country. Unlike most states, Colorado didn't require routine inspections of funeral homes or credentials for the businesses' operators.

This year, lawmakers brought Colorado's regulations up to par with most other states, largely with support from the funeral home industry.

Trump chooses Bessent to be treasury secretary, Vought as budget chief, Chavez-DeRemer for Labor

By FATIMA HUSSEIN, CHRIS RUGABER, JOSH BOAK and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump announced Friday that he'll nominate billionaire hedge fund manager Scott Bessent, an advocate for deficit reduction, to serve as his next treasury secretary, one of several personnel decisions that he unveiled as he closed out the workweek.

Trump also said he would nominate Russell Vought to lead the Office of Management and Budget, the same position he held during Trump's first presidency. Vought was closely involved with Project 2025, a conservative blueprint for Trump's second term that the GOP nominee tried to distance himself from during the campaign.

The announcements showed how Trump was trying to balance competing perspectives as he pursues an aggressive and sometimes contradictory economic agenda that includes cutting taxes, reducing government spending, putting tariffs on foreign imports and lowering prices for American consumers.

Although Bessent is closely aligned with Wall Street and could earn bipartisan support, Vought is known as a Republican hardliner on budget and cultural issues.

Trump said Bessent would "help me usher in a new Golden Age for the United States," while Vought "knows exactly how to dismantle the Deep State and end Weaponized Government."

After announcing his choices for key financial posts, Trump kept up the pace of what has been a break-neck transition process.

Trump picked Rep. Lori Chavez-DeRemer of Oregon, a rare Republican who is considered a stalwart union ally, as his labor secretary. He also said he would nominate Scott Turner, a former football player who worked in Trump's first administration, to serve as his housing secretary.

More choices were named for health and national security positions. In less than three weeks since the election, Trump has announced decisions for almost his entire Cabinet.

Bessent, 62, is the founder of hedge fund Key Square Capital Management, after having worked on-and-off for Soros Fund Management since 1991. If confirmed by the Senate, he would be the nation's first openly gay treasury secretary.

He told Bloomberg in August that attacking the U.S. national debt should be a priority, which includes slashing government programs and other spending.

"This election cycle is the last chance for the U.S. to grow our way out of this mountain of debt without becoming a sort of European-style socialist democracy," he said then.

As of Nov. 8, the national debt stands at \$35.94 trillion, with both the Trump and Biden administrations having added to it. Trump's policies added \$8.4 trillion to the national debt, while the Biden administration increased the national debt by \$4.3 trillion, according to the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, a fiscal watchdog.

Even as he pushes to lower the national debt by stopping spending, Bessent has backed extending provisions of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, which Trump signed into law in his first year in office. Estimates from different economic analyses of the costs of the various tax cuts range between nearly \$6

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trillion and \$10 trillion over 10 years. Nearly all of the law's provisions are set to expire at the end of 2025.

Before becoming a Trump donor and adviser, Bessent donated to various Democratic causes in the early 2000s, notably Al Gore's presidential run. He also worked for George Soros, a major supporter of Democrats. Bessent had an influential role in Soros' London operations, including his famous 1992 bet against the pound, which generated huge profits on "Black Wednesday," when the pound was de-linked from European currencies.

Bessent previously told Bloomberg that he views tariffs as a "one time price adjustment" and "not inflationary," and he said tariffs imposed during a second Trump administration would be directed primarily at China. And he wrote in a Fox News op-ed this week that tariffs are "a useful tool for achieving the president's foreign policy objectives," such as encouraging allies to spend more on defense or deterring military aggression.

In addition, Bessent has floated ideas for how Trump could put pressure on Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell, whose term expires in May 2026. Last month, Bessent suggested Trump could name a replacement chair early, and let that person function as a "shadow" chair, with the goal of essentially sidelining Powell.

But after the election, Bessent reportedly backed away from that plan. Powell, for his part, has said he wouldn't step down if Trump asked him to do so, and added that Trump, as president, wouldn't have the authority to fire him.

Trump repeatedly attacked Powell during his first term as president for raising the Fed's key rate in 2017 and 2018. During the 2024 campaign, he said that as president he should have a "say" in the central bank's interest rate decisions. Presidents traditionally avoid commenting on the Fed's policies.

Vought, 48, was the head of the Office of Management and Budget from mid-2020 to the end of Trump's first term in 2021, having previously served as the acting director and deputy director. He's paired a deep knowledge of government finances with his own Christian faith.

After Trump's initial term ended, Vought founded the Center for Renewing America, a think tank that describes its mission as renewing "a consensus of America as a nation under God."

The Center for Renewing America released its own 2023 budget proposal entitled "A Commitment to End Woke and Weaponized Government." The proposal envisioned \$11.3 trillion worth of spending reductions over 10 years and about \$2 trillion in income tax cuts in order to bring the budget into surplus by 2032.

"The immediate threat facing the nation is the fact that the people no longer govern the country; instead, the government itself is increasingly weaponized against the people it is meant to serve," Vought wrote in the introduction.

Vought's proposed budget plan would cut spending on food aid through the Agriculture Department. There would be \$3.3 trillion in spending reductions in the Health and Human Services Department in large part through how Medicaid and Medicare funds are distributed. It also contains about \$642 billion in cuts to Affordable Care Act. The budgets for the Housing and Urban Development and Education departments would also be cut.

Vought's budget ideas were independent of Trump, who has not entirely spelled out the details of his economic plans.

Trump's choice for labor secretary, Chavez-DeRemer, 56, narrowly lost her reelection bid earlier this month. She received strong backing from union members in her district.

Chavez-DeRemer is one of a few House Republicans to endorse the "Protecting the Right to Organize" or PRO Act that would allow more workers to conduct organizing campaigns and would add penalties for companies that violate workers' rights. The act would also weaken "right-to-work" laws that allow employees in more than half the states to avoid participating in or paying dues to unions that represent workers at their places of employment.

Trump said in a statement that she would help "ensure that the Labor Department can unite Americans of all backgrounds behind our Agenda for unprecedented National Success."

In addition, Trump added to his health team on Friday evening. He chose Dr. Janette Nesheiwat, a general practitioner and Fox News contributor, to be surgeon general; Dr. Dave Weldon, a former Republican congressman from Florida, to lead the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; and Dr. Marty Makary,

a Johns Hopkins surgeon, as head of the Food and Drug Administration.

Trump previously said he would nominate Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a longtime spreader of conspiracy theories about vaccines, as health secretary.

Alex Wong was named as principal deputy national security adviser, while Sebastian Gorka will serve as senior director for counterterrorism. Wong worked on issues involving Asia during Trump's first term, and Gorka is a conservative commentator who spent less than a year in Trump's first White House.

2 convicted in human smuggling case after Indian family froze to death on US-Canada border

By MARK VANCLEAVE and MICHAEL GOLDBERG Associated Press

FERGUS FALLS, Minn. (AP) — A jury convicted two men on Friday of charges related to human smuggling for their roles in an international operation that led to the deaths of a family of Indian migrants who froze while trying to cross the Canada-U.S. border during a 2022 blizzard.

Harshkumar Ramanlal Patel, 29, an Indian national who prosecutors say went by the alias "Dirty Harry," and Steve Shand, 50, an American from Florida, were part of a sophisticated illegal operation that has brought increasing numbers of Indians into the U.S., prosecutors said.

They were each convicted on four counts related to human smuggling, including conspiracy to bring migrants into the country illegally.

"This trial exposed the unthinkable cruelty of human smuggling and of those criminal organizations that value profit and greed over humanity," Minnesota U.S. Attorney Andy Luger said.

"To earn a few thousand dollars, these traffickers put men, women and children in extraordinary peril leading to the horrific and tragic deaths of an entire family. Because of this unimaginable greed, a father, a mother and two children froze to death in sub-zero temperatures on the Minnesota-Canadian border," Luger added.

The most serious counts carry maximum sentences of up to 20 years in prison, the U.S. Attorney's Office told The Associated Press before the trial. But federal sentencing guidelines rely on complicated formulas. Luger said Friday that various factors will be considered in determining what sentences prosecutors will recommend.

Federal prosecutors said 39-year-old Jagdish Patel; his wife, Vaishaliben, who was in her mid-30s; their 11-year-old daughter, Vihangi; and 3-year-old son, Dharmik, froze to death Jan. 19, 2022, while trying to cross the border into Minnesota in a scheme Patel and Shand organized. Patel is a common Indian surname, and the victims were not related to Harshkumar Patel.

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

Experts say illegal immigration from India is driven by everything from political repression to a dysfunctional American immigration system that can take years, if not decades, to navigate legally. Much is rooted in economics and how even low-wage jobs in the West can ignite hopes for a better life.

Before the jury's conviction on Friday, the federal trial in Fergus Falls, Minnesota, saw testimony from an alleged participant in the smuggling ring, a survivor of the treacherous journey across the northern border, border patrol agents and forensic experts.

Defense attorneys were pitted against each other, with Shand's team arguing that he was unwittingly roped into the scheme by Patel.

Patel's lawyers, The Canadian Press reported, said their client had been misidentified. They said "Dirty Harry," the alleged nickname for Patel found in Shand's phone, is a different person. Bank records and witness testimony from those who encountered Shand near the border didn't tie him to the crime, they added.

Prosecutors said Patel coordinated the operation while Shand was a driver. Shand was to pick up 11 Indian migrants on the Minnesota side of the border, prosecutors said. Only seven survived the foot crossing. Canadian authorities found the Patel family later that morning, dead from the cold.

The trial included an inside account of how the international smuggling ring allegedly works and who it

targets.

Rajinder Singh, 51, testified that he made over \$400,000 smuggling over 500 people through the same network that included Patel and Shand. Singh said most of the people he smuggled came from Gujarat state. He said the migrants would often pay smugglers about \$100,000 to get them from India to the U.S., where they would work to pay off their debts at low-wage jobs in cities around the country. Singh said the smugglers would run their finances through "hawala," an informal money transfer system that relies on trust.

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

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

Jamie Holt, a Special Agent with Homeland Security Investigations, said the case is a stark reminder of the realities victims of human smuggling face.

"Human smuggling is a vile crime that preys on the most vulnerable, exploiting their desperation and dreams for a better life," Holt said. "The suffering endured by this family is unimaginable and it is our duty to ensure that such atrocities are met with the full force of the law."

One juror Kevin Paul, of Clearwater, Minnesota, told reporters afterward that it was hard for the jurors to see the pictures of the family's bodies. He said he grew up in North Dakota and is familiar with the kind of conditions that led to their deaths.

"It's pretty brutal," Paul said. "I couldn't imagine having to do what they had to do out there in the middle of nowhere."

Texas education board approves optional Bible-infused curriculum for elementary schools

By NADIA LATHAN and KENDRIA LAFLEUR Associated Press/Report for America

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Texas' education board voted Friday to allow Bible-infused teachings in elementary schools under optional new curriculum that could test boundaries between religion and public classrooms in the U.S.

The material adopted by the Texas State Board of Education, which is controlled by elected Republicans, passed in a 8-7 final vote over criticism that the lessons would proselytize to young learners and alienate students of faiths other than Christianity. Supporters argued the Bible is a core feature of American history and that teaching it will enrich lessons.

The vote allows schools in Texas, which has more than 5 million public school students, to begin using the material in kindergarten through fifth grade classrooms as early as next year.

Republican lawmakers celebrated the vote, including Texas' powerful lieutenant governor, Dan Patrick, who has pledged to pass legislation next year that would follow Louisiana in trying to require schools to display the Ten Commandments in classrooms.

In a statement, Gov. Greg Abbott called the vote "a critical step forward to bring students back to the basics of education and provide the best education in the nation."

What the material says

Schools are not required to use the material, but those that do would receive extra funding from the state.

In the newly approved kindergarten materials, one lesson on helping one's neighbor instructs teachers to talk about the Golden Rule using lessons from the Bible. It also instructs the teachers to explain that the Bible is "a collection of ancient texts" and that its different parts are "the core books of the Jewish and Christian religions."

In a third-grade lesson about the first Thanksgiving, the material directs teachers to discuss how the governor of Plymouth said a prayer and gave a speech that included references to "several passages

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from the Christian Bible in the book of Psalms." Teachers are then instructed to tell students the book of Psalms is a collection of songs, poems and hymns "that are used in both Jewish and Christian worship."

With the new curriculum, Texas would be the first state to introduce Bible lessons in schools in this manner, according to Matthew Patrick Shaw, an assistant professor of public policy and education at Vanderbilt University. Whether the lesson plans will be considered constitutional is up in the air, he said.

Creating Bible-infused lessons

The Texas Education Agency, which oversees public education for more than 5 million students state-wide, created its own instruction materials after a law passed in 2023 by the GOP-controlled Legislature required the agency to do so. The lesson plans were publicly released this spring.

"This curriculum is not age-appropriate or subject matter appropriate in the way that it presents these Bible stories," said Amanda Tyler, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty.

Children who would read the material, she said, "are simply too young to tell the difference between what is a faith claim and what is a matter of fact."

Mary Castle, director of government relations for Texas Values, a right-leaning advocacy group, said there are "close to 300 common-day phrases that actually come from the Bible" and that students "will benefit from being able to understand a lot of these references."

A narrow vote

More than 100 people testified at a board meeting this week that rung with emotion from parents, teachers and advocates.

One Democrat on the board, Rebecca Bell-Metereau, said the inclusion of religions in addition to Christianity in the materials was not an "adequate attempt to change that bias."

"It seems to me like it is trying to place a Band-Aid on a gaping wound," she said.

One of the board members, Leslie Recine, is a Republican who was appointed to the board just weeks ago by Republican Texas Gov. Greg Abbott to temporarily fill a vacant seat. She voted in favor of the curriculum. Days after her appointment, a Democrat who ran unopposed was elected to fill that same board seat starting next year.

Bringing religion into schools

Texas' plans to implement Biblical teachings in public school lesson plans is the latest effort by Republican-controlled states to bring religion into the classroom.

In Louisiana, a law to place the Ten Commandments in all public classrooms was blocked by a federal judge earlier this month. Republican Gov. Jeff Landry signed the bill into law in June, prompting a group of Louisiana public school parents of different faiths to sue.

In Oklahoma, the state's top education official has tried to incorporate the Bible into lesson plans for children in fifth through 12th grades. A group of teachers and parents recently filed a lawsuit to stop the Republican state superintendent's plan and his efforts to spend \$3 million to purchase Bibles for public schools.

NATO and Ukraine to hold emergency talks after Russia's attack with new hypersonic missile

By ILLIA NOVIKOV and VOLODYMYR YURCHUK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — NATO and Ukraine will hold emergency talks Tuesday after Russia attacked a central city with an experimental, hypersonic ballistic missile that escalated the nearly 33-month-old war.

The conflict is "entering a decisive phase," Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk said Friday, and "taking on very dramatic dimensions."

Ukraine's parliament canceled a session as security was tightened following Thursday's Russian strike on a military facility in the city of Dnipro.

In a stark warning to the West, President Vladimir Putin said in a nationally televised speech that the attack with the intermediate-range Oreshnik missile was in retaliation for Kyiv's use of U.S. and British longer-range missiles capable of striking deeper into Russian territory.

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Putin said Western air defense systems would be powerless to stop the new missile.

Ukrainian military officials said the missile that hit Dnipro had reached a speed of Mach 11 and carried six nonnuclear warheads each releasing six submunitions.

Speaking Friday to military and weapons industries officials, Putin said Russia is launching production of the Oreshnik.

"No one in the world has such weapons," he said with a thin smile. "Sooner or later other leading countries will also get them. We are aware that they are under development."

But he added, "we have this system now. And this is important."

Testing the missile will continue, "including in combat, depending on the situation and the character of security threats created for Russia," Putin said, noting there is "a stockpile of such systems ready for use."

Putin said that while it isn't an intercontinental missile, it's so powerful that the use of several of them fitted with conventional warheads in one attack could be as devastating as a strike with strategic — or nuclear — weapons.

Gen. Sergei Karakayev, head of Russia's Strategic Missile Forces, said the Oreshnik could reach targets across Europe and be fitted with nuclear or conventional warheads, echoing Putin's claim that even with conventional warheads, "the massive use of the weapon would be comparable in effect to the use of nuclear weapons."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov kept up Russia's bellicose tone on Friday, blaming "the reckless decisions and actions of Western countries" in supplying weapons to Ukraine to strike Russia.

"The Russian side has clearly demonstrated its capabilities, and the contours of further retaliatory actions in the event that our concerns were not taken into account have also been quite clearly outlined," he said.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, widely seen as having the warmest relations with the Kremlin in the European Union, echoed Moscow's talking points, suggesting the use of U.S.-supplied weapons in Ukraine likely requires direct American involvement.

"These are rockets that are fired and then guided to a target via an electronic system, which requires the world's most advanced technology and satellite communications capability," Orbán said on state radio. "There is a strong assumption ... that these missiles cannot be guided without the assistance of American personnel."

Orbán cautioned against underestimating Russia's responses, emphasizing that the country's recent modifications to its nuclear deployment doctrine should not be dismissed as a "bluff." "It's not a trick... there will be consequences," he said.

Separately in Kyiv, Czech Foreign Minister Jan Lipavský called Thursday's missile strike an "escalatory step and an attempt of the Russian dictator to scare the population of Ukraine and to scare the population of Europe."

At a news conference with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha, Lipavský also expressed his full support for delivering the necessary additional air defense systems to protect Ukrainian civilians from the "heinous attacks."

He underlined that the Czech Republic will impose no limits on the use of its weapons and equipment given to Ukraine.

Three lawmakers from Ukraine's parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, confirmed that Friday's previously scheduled session was called off due to the ongoing threat of Russian missiles targeting government buildings in central Kyiv.

In addition, there also was a recommendation to limit the work of all commercial offices and nongovernmental organizations "in that perimeter, and local residents were warned of the increased threat," said lawmaker Mykyta Poturaiev, who added this is not the first time such a threat has been received.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's office continued to work in compliance with standard security measures, a spokesperson said.

Ukraine's Main Intelligence Directorate said the Oreshnik missile, whose name in Russian means "hazelnut tree," was fired from the Kapustin Yar 4th Missile Test Range in Russia's Astrakhan region, and flew 15 minutes before striking Dnipro.

Test launches of a similar missile were conducted in October 2023 and June 2024, the directorate said. The Pentagon confirmed the missile was a new, experimental type of intermediate-range missile based on its RS-26 Rubezh intercontinental ballistic missile.

Thursday's attack struck the Pivdenmash plant that built ICBMs when Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union. The military facility is located about 4 miles (6 1/2 kilometers) southwest of the center of Dnipro, a city of about 1 million that is Ukraine's fourth-largest and a key hub for military supplies and humanitarian aid, and is home to one of the country's largest hospitals for treating wounded soldiers from the front before their transfer to Kyiv or abroad.

The stricken area was cordoned off and out of public view. With no fatalities reported from the attack, Dnipro residents resorted to dark humor on social media, mostly focused on the missile's name, Oreshnik.

Elsewhere in Ukraine, Russia struck a residential district of Sumy overnight with Iranian-designed Shahed drones, killing two people and injuring 13, the regional administration said.

Ukraine's Suspilne media, quoting Sumy regional head Volodymyr Artiukh, said the drones were stuffed with shrapnel elements. "These weapons are used to destroy people, not to destroy objects," said Artiukh, according to Suspilne.

Vance takes on a more visible transition role, working to boost Trump's most contentious picks

By JILL COLVIN and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — After several weeks working mostly behind closed doors, Vice President-elect JD Vance returned to Capitol Hill this week in a new, more visible role: Helping Donald Trump try to get his most contentious Cabinet picks to confirmation in the Senate, where Vance has served for the last two years.

Vance arrived at the Capitol on Wednesday with former Rep. Matt Gaetz and spent the morning sitting in on meetings between Trump's choice for attorney general and key Republicans, including members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. The effort was for naught: Gaetz announced a day later that he was withdrawing his name amid scrutiny over sex trafficking allegations and the reality that he was unlikely to be confirmed.

Thursday morning Vance was back, this time accompanying Pete Hegseth, the "Fox & Friends Weekend" host whom Trump has tapped to be the next secretary of defense. Hegseth also has faced allegations of sexual assault that he denies.

Vance is expected to accompany other nominees for meetings in coming weeks as he tries to leverage the two years he has spent in the Senate to help push through Trump's picks.

Vance is taking on an atypical role as Senate guide for Trump nominees

The role of introducing nominees around Capitol Hill is an unusual one for a vice president-elect. Usually the job goes to a former senator who has close relationships on the Hill, or a more junior aide.

But this time the role fits Vance, said Marc Short, who served as Trump's first director of legislative affairs as well as chief of staff to Trump's first vice president, Mike Pence, who spent more than a decade in Congress and led the former president's transition ahead of his first term.

"JD probably has a lot of current allies in the Senate and so it makes sense to have him utilized in that capacity," Short said.

Unlike the first Trump transition, which played out before cameras at Trump Tower in New York and at the president-elect's golf club in Bedminster, New Jersey, this one has largely happened behind closed doors in Palm Beach, Florida.

There, a small group of officials and aides meet daily at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort to run through possible contenders and interview job candidates. The group includes Elon Musk, the billionaire who has spent so much time at the club that Trump has joked he can't get rid of him.

Vance has been a constant presence, even as he's kept a lower profile. The Ohio senator has spent

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much of the last two weeks in Palm Beach, according to people familiar with his plans, playing an active role in the transition, on which he serves as honorary chair.

Mar-a-Lago scene is a far cry from Vance's hardscrabble upbringing

Vance has been staying at a cottage on the property of the gilded club, where rooms are adorned with cherubs, oriental rugs and intricate golden inlays. It's a world away from the famously hardscrabble upbringing that Vance documented in the memoir that made him famous, "Hillbilly Elegy."

His young children have also joined him at Mar-a-Lago, at times. Vance was photographed in shorts and a polo shirt playing with his kids on the seawall of the property with a large palm frond, a U.S. Secret Service robotic security dog in the distance.

On the rare days when he is not in Palm Beach, Vance has been joining the sessions remotely via Zoom.

Though he has taken a break from TV interviews after months of constant appearances, Vance has been active in the meetings, which began immediately after the election and include interviews and as well as presentations on candidates' pluses and minuses.

Among those interviewed: Contenders to replace FBI Director Christopher Wray, as Vance wrote in a since-deleted social media post.

Defending himself from criticism that he'd missed a Senate vote in which one of President Joe Biden's judicial nominees was confirmed, Vance wrote that he was meeting at the time "with President Trump to interview multiple positions for our government, including for FBI Director."

"I tend to think it's more important to get an FBI director who will dismantle the deep state than it is for Republicans to lose a vote 49-46 rather than 49-45," Vance added on X. "But that's just me."

Vance is making his voice heard as Trump stocks his Cabinet

While Vance did not come in to the transition with a list of people he wanted to see in specific roles, he and his friend, Trump's eldest son, Donald Trump Jr., who is also a member of the transition team, were eager to see former Democratic Rep. Tulsi Gabbard and Robert F. Kennedy Jr. find roles in the administration.

Trump ended up selecting Gabbard as the next director of national intelligence, a powerful position that sits atop the nation's spy agencies and acts as the president's top intelligence adviser. And he chose Kennedy to lead the Department of Health and Human Services, a massive agency that oversees everything from drug and food safety to Medicare and Medicaid.

Vance was also a big booster of Tom Homan, the former acting director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, who will serve as Trump's "border czar."

In another sign of Vance's influence, James Braid, a top aide to the senator, is expected to serve as Trump's legislative affairs director.

Allies say it's too early to discuss what portfolio Vance might take on in the White House. While he gravitates to issues like trade, immigration and tech policy, Vance sees his role as doing whatever Trump needs.

Vance was spotted days after the election giving his son's Boy Scout troop a tour of the Capitol and was there the day of leadership elections. He returned in earnest this week, first with Gaetz — arguably Trump's most divisive pick — and then Hegseth, who has been accused of sexually assaulting a woman in 2017, according to an investigative report made public this week. Hegseth told police at the time that the encounter had been consensual and denied any wrongdoing.

Vance hosted Hegseth in his Senate office as GOP senators, including those who sit on the Senate Armed Services Committee, filtered in to meet with the nominee for defense secretary.

While a president's nominees usually visit individual senators' offices, meeting them on their own turf, the freshman senator — who is accompanied everywhere by a large Secret Service detail that makes moving around more unwieldy — instead brought Gaetz to a room in the Capitol on Wednesday and Hegseth to his office on Thursday. Senators came to them.

Vance made it to votes Wednesday and Thursday, but missed others on Thursday afternoon.

Vance will draw on his Senate background going forward

Vance is expected to continue to leverage his relationships in the Senate after Trump takes office. But many Republicans there have longer relationships with Trump himself.

Sen. Kevin Cramer, a North Dakota Republican, said that Trump was often the first person to call him back when he was trying to reach high-level White House officials during Trump's first term.

"He has the most active Rolodex of just about anybody I've ever known," Cramer said, adding that Vance would make a good addition.

"They'll divide names up by who has the most persuasion here," Cramer said, but added, "Whoever his liaison is will not work as hard at it as he will."

Cramer was complimentary of the Ohio senator, saying he was "pleasant" and "interesting" to be around.

"He doesn't have the long relationships," he said. "But we all like people that have done what we've done. I mean, that's sort of a natural kinship, just probably not as personally tied."

Under the Constitution, Vance will also have a role presiding over the Senate and breaking tie votes. But he's not likely to be needed for that as often as was Kamala Harris, who broke a record number of ties for Democrats as vice president, since Republicans will have a bigger cushion in the chamber next year.

Brazilian police formally accuse former President Bolsonaro and aides of alleged 2022 coup attempt

By GABRIELA SÁ PESSOA and MAURÍCIO SAVARESE Associated Press

SAO PAULO (AP) — Brazil's federal police on Thursday formally accused former President Jair Bolsonaro and 36 other people of attempting a coup to keep him in office after his defeat in the 2022 elections.

Police said their sealed findings were being delivered Thursday to Brazil's Supreme Court, which will refer them to Prosecutor-General Paulo Gonet, who decides either to formally charge Bolsonaro and put him on trial, or toss the investigation.

Bolsonaro told the website Metropoles that he was waiting for his lawyer to review the accusation, reportedly about 700 pages long. But he said he would fight the case and dismissed the investigation as being the result of "creativity."

The former right-wing president has denied all claims he tried to stay in office after his narrow electoral defeat in 2022 to his rival, leftist President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Bolsonaro has faced a series of legal threats since then.

Police said in a brief statement that the Supreme Court had agreed to reveal the names of all 37 people who were accused "to avoid the dissemination of incorrect news."

Dozens of former and current Bolsonaro aides also were accused, including Gen. Walter Braga Netto, who was his running mate in the 2022 campaign; former Army commander Gen. Paulo Sérgio Nogueira de Oliveira; Valdemar Costa Neto, the chairman of Bolsonaro's Liberal Party; and his veteran former adviser, Gen. Augusto Heleno.

Other investigations produced formal accusations of Bolsonaro's roles in smuggling diamond jewelry into Brazil without properly declaring them and in directing a subordinate to falsify his and others' COVID-19 vaccination statuses. Bolsonaro has denied any involvement in either.

Another probe found that he had abused his authority to cast doubt on the country's voting system, and judges barred him from running again until 2030.

Still, he has insisted that he will run in 2026, and many in his orbit were heartened by the recent U.S. election win of Donald Trump, despite his own swirling legal threats.

But the far-reaching investigations already have weakened Bolsonaro's status as a leader of Brazil's right wing, said Carlos Melo, a political science professor at Insper University in Sao Paulo.

"Bolsonaro is already barred from running in the 2026 elections," Melo told the The Associated Press. "And if he is convicted he could also be jailed by then. To avoid being behind bars, he will have to convince Supreme Court justices that he has nothing to do with a plot that involves dozens of his aides. That's a very tall order," Melo said.

A formal accusation of an attempted coup means the investigation has gathered indications of "a crime and its author," said Eloísa Machado de Almeida, a law professor at Getulio Vargas Foundation, a university in Sao Paulo. She said she believed there was enough legal grounds for the prosecutor-general to

file charges.

Bolsonaro's allies in Congress have been negotiating a bill to pardon individuals who stormed the Brazilian capital and rioted on Jan. 8, 2023 in a failed attempt to keep the former president in power. Analysts have speculated that lawmakers want to extend the legislation to cover the former president himself.

However, efforts to push a broad amnesty bill may be "politically challenging" given recent attacks on the judiciary and details emerging in investigations, Machado said.

On Tuesday, Federal Police arrested four military and a Federal Police officer, accused of plotting to assassinate Lula and Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes as a means to overthrow the government following the 2022 elections.

And last week, a man carried out a bomb attack in the capital Brasilia. He attempted to enter the Supreme Court and threw explosives outside, killing himself.

Archaeologists discover 4,000-year-old canals used to fish by predecessors of ancient Maya

By CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Long before the ancient Maya built temples, their predecessors were already altering the landscape of Central America's Yucatan peninsula.

Using drones and Google Earth imagery, archaeologists have discovered a 4,000-year-old network of earthen canals in what's now Belize. The findings were published Friday in Science Advances.

"The aerial imagery was crucial to identify this really distinctive pattern of zigzag linear canals" running for several miles through wetlands, said study co-author Eleanor Harrison-Buck of the University of New Hampshire.

The team then conducted digs in Belize's Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary. The ancient fish canals, paired with holding ponds, were used to channel and catch freshwater species such as catfish.

"Barbed spearpoints" found nearby may have been tied to sticks and used to spear fish, said study co-author Marieka Brouwer Burg of the University of Vermont.

The canal networks were built as early as 4,000 years ago by semi-nomadic people in the Yucatan coastal plain. According to the study, the canals were used for around 1,000 years or longer, including during the "formative" period when the Maya began to settle in permanent farming villages and a distinctive culture started to emerge.

"It's really interesting to see such large-scale modifications of the landscape so early — it shows people were already building things," said University of Pittsburgh archaeologist Claire Ebert, who was not involved in the study.

At the height of Maya civilization, people in this region built temples, roads, pyramids and other monuments. They also developed complex systems of writing, mathematics and astronomy. Scientists know far more about this era because there are many more significant archaeological sites, said Ebert.

But this new study reveals a link between the earlier people on the landscape and the later emergence of Maya culture. These ancient channels for catching fish may have played a role in helping later Maya pyramids rise above the Yucatan rainforest.

"This shows continuity," said University of Pennsylvania archaeologist Jeremy Sabloff, who wasn't part of the research.

On a practical level, the fish-trapping canals helped the early people in the region to diversify their diets and feed a growing population, building a foundation for later cultural heights.

A growing number of Oregon cities vote to ban psychedelic mushroom compound psilocybin

By CLAIRE RUSH Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Drug reform advocates hailed Oregon as a progressive leader when it became

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the first in the nation to legalize the therapeutic use of psilocybin, the compound found in psychedelic mushrooms.

But four years later, voters in a growing list of its cities have banned the substance.

Four cities, spanning Portland suburbs and rural and coastal towns, added new voter-approved prohibitions for the federally illegal compound in the Nov. 5 election. A dozen other communities that approved two-year moratoriums in 2022, when a majority of Oregon counties and over 100 cities voted to temporarily or permanently ban psilocybin, voted in this election to make the restrictions permanent.

In the wake of the fentanyl crisis, the rejection of drug liberalization measures in Oregon and states across the country this election has some experts questioning whether voters are rethinking their appetite for such policies.

In Massachusetts, for example, voters rejected a measure that would have allowed residents over 21 to grow and use plant-based psychedelic drugs in certain circumstances. All three states that had measures to legalize recreational marijuana voted against it.

Oregon voters, in particular, appear to have soured on drug reform. A law passed by voters four years ago that decriminalized the possession of small amounts of hard drugs, including heroin and methamphetamine, was rolled back by the state legislature earlier this year after heated debate over whether it played a role in a spike in public drug use and deaths.

"Perhaps the fact that the drug policy reform pendulum appears to be swinging back towards prohibition is part of a broader trend toward a preference for 'law and order' among American voters," said Josh Hardman, founder of Psychedelics Alpha, a consulting firm and newsletter on psychedelic research, business and policy. "Oregon, specifically, has been touted as an example of liberal drug policies gone wrong."

Despite the local bans, psilocybin remains accessible in over 30 licensed centers spanning the state's most populous cities, like Portland, and a handful of small towns. Some rural counties also have voted to stay in the program.

However, access to therapeutic psilocybin is further complicated by high costs: One session can be up to \$2,000 out of pocket. That is largely because center owners and facilitators have to pass on licensure expenses to consumers in order to stay afloat.

MJ Wilt, who just opened a licensed center in the Portland suburb of Gresham, spent tens of thousands of dollars of her own savings to get licensed and establish her center. It has been hard, she said, because her own experience with psilocybin changed her life for the better and she wants to bring that experience to others.

"The cost for the program has been astronomical and is not accessible to people across the socioeconomic spectrum," Wilt said. "It's certainly not the cash cow that people think or thought it was going to be."

In 2020, roughly 56% of Oregon voters approved Measure 109, which allowed for the manufacture and controlled, therapeutic use of psilocybin at licensed facilities for those over 21. But the measure allowed counties and cities to vote to opt out, resulting in a patchwork of regulations across the state.

Adding to the complexity, some cities have voted to allow psilocybin despite being in counties that banned it, as cities control the land incorporated within their borders while counties control unincorporated land.

The regulatory patchwork resembles that of cannabis law. In half of the 24 states that have legalized recreational cannabis, including Oregon, localities may opt out of most types of cannabis businesses, according to Kate Bryan, a policy specialist on criminal and civil justice at the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Colorado in 2022 became the only other state to legalize psilocybin for therapeutic use. It will begin accepting license applications for "healing centers" at the end of December, a spokesperson for the state's natural medicine division said in an email. The law allows localities to adopt certain regulations regarding how the centers operate, but it does not allow them to ban such centers entirely.

Multiple cities across the country also have voted to decriminalize psilocybin, meaning a person cannot be arrested or prosecuted for possessing limited amounts of plant-based hallucinogens.

Psilocybin, found in several species of mushrooms, can cause hours of vivid hallucinations. Indigenous

people have used it in healing rituals, and scientists are exploring whether it can help treat depression, addiction and post-traumatic stress disorder. Researchers and military veterans are among those who have advocated for the study of the substance for therapeutic use.

Kat Thompson, the founder and CEO of Fractal Soul, a licensed psilocybin center in the Portland suburb of Beaverton, said her center has served 400 people in its first year and that the "vast majority" have had positive outcomes. Many come seeking help for depression, anxiety, trauma and addiction after years of trying talk therapy and medication, she said, while others come to process grief or explore their spirituality.

But she said a lack of public awareness about the state's psilocybin program has led many to confuse it with Measure 110, the separate ballot measure also passed in 2020 that decriminalized the possession of small amounts of drugs. The botched implementation of the law — also a first of its kind in the nation — and rising overdose deaths amid the fentanyl crisis fueled pushback that prompted state lawmakers to backtrack on it earlier this year.

"We actually got lots of calls from people who had booked sessions with us who heard about the roll back of 110 and thought that that meant that we were closing," Thompson said. "So we've had to explain and educate the public that Measure 110 was really just about decriminalization for personal use. It has nothing to do with the professional therapeutic model."

Some people also confuse the model of the psilocybin center with cannabis dispensaries. At dispensaries, people buy cannabis and leave to consume it elsewhere. People who want to use psilocybin, meanwhile, must consume it at a licensed service center under the supervision of a licensed facilitator who administers it to them and remains with them for the duration of the trip, Thompson said.

"This is essentially a mental health clinic where someone is here all day with us," she said. "By and large, it is extremely safe."

Of the over 16,000 doses that have been administered since the first licensed center opened in June 2023, staff at such centers have called 911 or taken a patient to a hospital five times, an Oregon Health Authority spokesperson said in an email, confirming reporting from The Oregonian/OregonLive. There are roughly 350 licensed facilitators and a dozen psilocybin manufacturers in the state, according to the agency's most recent figures.

Joe Buck, the mayor of Lake Oswego, a Portland suburb that just passed a psilocybin ban, said he wasn't surprised by the outcome, even though a majority of the city's residents supported Measure 109 in 2020.

"Oregon really has not done a great job managing its drug policy," he said. "So I can understand how some people may be wary of the promises that are now being made around psilocybin."

But further research on psilocybin, he said, could change voters' perspective in the future.

"It really is up to state leaders, leaders in the federal government, to work these drugs through a good system that builds community trust."

Matt Gaetz says he won't return to Congress next year after withdrawing name for attorney general

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former Rep. Matt Gaetz said Friday that he will not be returning to Congress after withdrawing his name from consideration to be attorney general under President-elect Donald Trump amid growing allegations of sexual misconduct.

"I'm still going to be in the fight, but it's going to be from a new perch. I do not intend to join the 119th Congress," Gaetz told conservative commentator Charlie Kirk, adding that he has "some other goals in life that I'm eager to pursue with my wife and my family."

The announcement comes a day after Gaetz, a Florida Republican, stepped aside from the Cabinet nomination process amid growing fallout from federal and House Ethics investigations that cast doubt on his ability to be confirmed as the nation's chief federal law enforcement officer. The 42-year-old has vehemently denied the allegations against him.

Gaetz's nomination as attorney general had stunned many career lawyers inside the Justice Department,

but reflected Trump's desire to place a loyalist in a department he has marked for retribution following the criminal cases against him.

Hours after Gaetz withdrew, Trump nominated Pam Bondi, the former Florida attorney general, who would come to the job with years of legal work under her belt and that other trait Trump prizes above all: loyalty.

It's unclear what's next for Gaetz, who is no longer a member of the House. He surprised colleagues by resigning from Congress the same day that Trump nominated him for attorney general. Some speculated he could still be sworn into office for another two-year term on Jan. 3, given that he had just won reelection earlier this month.

But Gaetz, who has been in state and national politics for 14 years, said he's done with Congress.

"I think that eight years is probably enough time in the United States Congress," he said.

California case is the first confirmed bird flu infection in a US child

By MIKE STOBBE and JONEL ALECCIA Associated Press

Health officials on Friday confirmed bird flu in a California child — the first reported case in a U.S. minor.

The child had mild symptoms, was treated with antiviral medication and is recovering, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in announcing the test results. State officials have said the child attends day care and lives in Alameda County, which includes Oakland and surrounding communities, but released no other details.

The infection brings the reported number of U.S. bird flu cases this year to 55, including 29 in California, the CDC said. Most were farmworkers who tested positive with mild symptoms.

One exception was an adult in Missouri who did not work at a farm and had no known contact with an infected animal. It remains a mystery how that person was infected — health officials have said there was no evidence of it spreading between people.

A British Columbia teen also was recently hospitalized with bird flu, Canadian officials have said.

H5N1 bird flu has been spreading widely in the U.S. among wild birds, poultry and a number of other animals over the last few years.

It began spreading in U.S. dairy cattle in March. California has become the center of that outbreak, with 402 infected herds detected there since August. That's 65% of the 616 herds confirmed with the virus in 15 states.

Officials said they were investigating how the child was infected. California health officials previously said in a statement that they were looking into a "possible exposure to wild birds."

There is no evidence bird flu spread from the child to other people.

People in the child's household reported having similar symptoms, but their test results were negative for bird flu. Health officials noted the child and the household members also tested positive for other common respiratory viruses.

Giants release quarterback Daniel Jones just days after benching him

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. (AP) — The Daniel Jones era in New York is over.

The Giants quarterback was granted his release on Friday by the team just days after the franchise said it was benching him in favor of third-stringer Tommy DeVito.

"Daniel came to see me this morning and asked if we would release him," Giants president John Mara said in a statement. "We mutually agreed that would be best for him and for the team. Daniel has been a great representative of our organization, first class in every way."

Mara added he was "disappointed" at the quick dissolution of the team's relationship with Jones, who signed a four-year \$160 million contract in March 2023 after leading the Giants to a playoff berth.

"We hold Daniel in high regard and have a great appreciation for him," Mara continued. "We wish him nothing but the best in the future."

The 27-year-old Jones told reporters Thursday that he gave the team everything he had after being taken sixth overall in the 2019 draft and he believes he still has a future in the NFL. He held himself accountable

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for the Giants (2-8) making the postseason once in his tenure as the starter.

The Duke product took over early in his rookie season when then-coach Pat Shurmur benched two-time Super Bowl MVP Eli Manning, who was near the end of his career.

Coach Brian Daboll benched Jones on Monday after the Giants returned to practice following a bye week and a 20-17 overtime loss to Carolina in Germany.

Tommy DeVito will start Sunday against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, with Daboll hoping he can spark the team.

"Definitely not happy about it," said Jones, who read a 90-second statement before taking questions from reporters. "Yeah, not what you want to hear. So, yeah, all those emotions you have. But at the end of the day, this is football. We're in a business where you're expected to get results and we weren't doing it."

Jones, who is now free to sign with any team, went 24-44-1 as a starter in New York after being the sixth overall pick in the 2019 draft. A significant portion of those victories came in 2022, when the Giants went 9-7-1 and beat Minnesota in the first round of the playoffs.

Yet whatever forward momentum the club generated in 2022 quickly evaporated in 2023. New York was 1-5 in Jones' six starts during an injury-marred season and he further regressed this fall.

Jones completed just 63% of his passes with eight touchdowns and seven interceptions even with dynamic rookie wide receiver Malik Nabers at his disposal. The Giants are last in the NFL in scoring and with public sentiment all but gone for the player once known as "Danny Dimes," Daboll opted to go in another direction while Jones can get a head start on trying to reboot his career elsewhere.

Noodles and wine are the secret ingredients for a strange new twist in China's doping saga

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

It looked like a recipe for disaster. So, when his country's swimmers were being accused of doping earlier this year, one Chinese official cooked up something fast. He blamed it on contaminated noodles.

In fact, he argued, it could have been a culinary conspiracy concocted by criminals, whose actions led to the cooking wine used to prepare the noodles being laced with a banned heart drug that found its way into an athlete's system.

This theory was spelled out to international anti-doping officials during a meeting and, after weeks of wrangling, finally made it into the thousands of pages of data handed over to the lawyer who investigated the case involving 23 Chinese swimmers who had tested positive for that same drug.

The attorney, appointed by the World Anti-Doping Agency, refused to consider that scenario as he sifted through the evidence. In spelling out his reasoning, lawyer Eric Cottier paid heed to the half-baked nature of the theory.

"The Investigator considers this scenario, which he has described in the conditional tense, to be possible, no less, no more," Cottier wrote.

Even without the contaminated-noodles theory, Cottier found problems with the way WADA and the Chinese handled the case but ultimately determined WADA had acted reasonably in not appealing China's conclusion that its athletes had been inadvertently contaminated.

Critics of the way the China case was handled can't help but wonder if a wider exploration of the noodle theory, details of which were discovered by The Associated Press via notes and emails from after the meeting where it was delivered, might have lent a different flavor to Cottier's conclusions.

"There are more story twists to the ways the Chinese explain the TMZ case than a James Bond movie," said Rob Koehler, the director general of the advocacy group Global Athlete. "And all of it is complete fiction."

Something in the kitchen was contaminated

In April, reporting from the New York Times and the German broadcaster ARD revealed that the 23 Chinese swimmers had tested positive for the banned heart medication trimetazidine, also known as TMZ.

China's anti-doping agency determined the athletes had been contaminated, and so, did not sanction them. WADA accepted that explanation, did not press the case further, and China was never made to

deliver a public notice about the “no-fault findings,” as is often seen in similar cases.

The stock explanation for the contamination was that traces of TMZ were found in the kitchen of a hotel where the swimmers were staying. In his 58-page report, Cottier relayed some suspicions about the feasibility of that chain of events — noting that WADA’s chief scientist “saw no other solution than to accept it, even if he continued to have doubts about the reality of contamination as described by the Chinese authorities.”

But without evidence to support pursuing the case, and with the chance of winning an appeal at almost nil, Cottier determined WADA’s “decision not to appeal appears indisputably reasonable.”

But how did the drugs get into the kitchen?

A mystery remained: How did those traces of TMZ get into the kitchen?

Shortly after the doping positives were revealed, the Institute of National Anti-Doping Organizations held a meeting on April 30 where it heard from the leader of China’s agency, Li Zhiqun.

Li’s presentation was mostly filled with the same talking points that have been delivered throughout the saga — that the positive tests resulted from contamination from the kitchen. But he expanded on one way the kitchen might have become contaminated, harkening to another case in China involving a low-level TMZ positive.

A pharmaceutical factory, he explained, had used industrial alcohol in the distillation process for producing TMZ. The industrial alcohol laced with the drug “then entered the market through illegal channels,” he said.

The alcohol “was re-used by the perpetrators to process and produce cooking wine, which is an important seasoning used locally to make beef noodles,” Li said. “The contaminated beef noodles were consumed by that athlete, resulting in an extremely low concentration of TMZ in the positive sample.

“The wrongdoers involved have been brought to justice.”

New information sent to WADA ... eventually

This new information raised eyebrows among the anti-doping leaders listening to Li’s report. So much so that over the next month, several emails ensued to make sure the details about the noodles and wine made their way to WADA lawyers, who could then pass it onto Cottier.

Eventually, Li did pass on the information to WADA general counsel Ross Wenzel and, just to be sure, one of the anti-doping leaders forwarded it, as well, according to the emails seen by the AP.

All this came with Li’s request that the noodles story be kept confidential.

Turns out, it made it into Cottier’s report, though he took the information with a grain of salt.

“Indeed, giving it more attention would have required it to be documented, then scientifically verified and validated,” he wrote.

Neither Wenzel nor officials at the Chinese anti-doping agency returned messages from AP asking about the noodles conspiracy and the other athlete who Li suggested had been contaminated by them.

Meanwhile, 11 of the swimmers who originally tested positive competed at the Paris Games earlier this year in a meet held under the cloud of the Chinese doping case.

Though WADA considers the case closed, Koehler and others point to situations like this as one of many reasons that an investigation by someone other than Cottier, who was hired by WADA, is still needed.

“It gives the appearance that people are just making things up as they go along on this, and hoping the story just goes away,” Koehler said. “Which clearly it has not.”

Trump gave Interior nominee one directive for a half-billion acres of US land: ‘Drill.’

By MATTHEW BROWN and JACK DURA Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — Donald Trump assigned Doug Burgum a singular mission in nominating the governor of oil-rich North Dakota to lead an agency that oversees a half-billion acres of federal land and vast areas offshore: “Drill baby drill.”

That dictate from the president-elect’s announcement of Burgum for Secretary of Interior sets the stage for a reignition of the court battles over public lands and waters that helped define Trump’s first term, with

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environmentalists worried about climate change already pledging their opposition.

Burgum is an ultra-wealthy software industry entrepreneur who grew up on his family's farm. He represents a tame choice compared to other Trump Cabinet picks.

Public lands experts said his experience as a popular two-term governor who aligns himself with conservationist Teddy Roosevelt suggests a willingness to collaborate, as opposed to dismantling from within the agency he is tasked with leading.

That could help smooth his confirmation and clear the way for the incoming administration to move quickly to open more public lands to development and commercial use.

"Burgum strikes me as a credible nominee who could do a credible job as Interior secretary," said John Leshy, who served as Interior's solicitor under former President Bill Clinton.

"He's not a right-wing radical on public lands," added Leshy, professor emeritus at the University of California College of the Law, San Francisco.

Frictions over lands

The Interior Department manages about one-fifth of the country's land with a mandate that spans from wildlife conservation and recreation to natural resource extraction and fulfilling treaty obligations with Native American tribes.

Most of those lands are in the West, where frictions with private landowners and state officials are commonplace and have sometimes mushroomed into violent confrontations with right-wing groups that reject federal jurisdiction.

Burgum if confirmed would be faced with a pending U.S. Supreme Court action from Utah that seeks to assert state power over Interior Department lands. North Dakota's attorney general has supported the lawsuit, but Burgum's office declined to say if he backs Utah's claims.

U.S. Justice Department attorneys on Thursday asked the Supreme Court to reject Utah's lawsuit. They said Utah in 1894 agreed to give up its right to the lands at issue when it became a state.

Trump's narrow focus on fossil fuels is a replay from his 2016 campaign — although minus coal mining, a collapsing industry that he failed to revive in his first term. Trump repeatedly hailed oil as "liquid gold" on the campaign trail this year and largely omitted any mention of coal.

About 26% of U.S. oil comes from federal lands and offshore waters overseen by Interior. Production continues to hit record levels under President Joe Biden despite claims by Trump that the Democrat hindered drilling.

But industry representatives and their Republican allies say volumes could be further boosted. They want Burgum and the Interior Department to ramp up oil and gas sales from federal lands, in the Gulf of Mexico and offshore Alaska.

The oil industry also hopes Trump's government efficiency initiative led by billionaire Elon Musk can dramatically reduce environmental reviews.

Biden's administration reduced the frequency and size of lease sales, and it restored environmental rules that were weakened under Trump. The Democrat as a candidate in 2020 promised further restrictions on drilling to help combat global warming, but he struck a deal for the 2022 climate bill that requires offshore oil and gas sales to be held before renewable energy leases can be sold.

"Oil and gas brings billions of dollars of revenue in, but you don't get that if you don't have leasing," said Erik Milito with the National Ocean Industries Association, which represents offshore industries including oil and wind.

Trump has vowed to kill offshore wind energy projects. But Milito said he was hopeful that with Burgum in place it would be "green lights ahead for everything, not just oil and gas."

Conservation, drilling and grazing

It is unclear if Burgum would revive some of the most controversial steps taken at the agency during Trump's first term, including relocating senior officials out of Washington, D.C., dismantling parts of the Endangered Species Act and shrinking the size of two national monuments in Utah designated by former President Barack Obama.

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Officials under Biden spent much of the past four years reversing Trump's moves. They restored the Utah monuments and rescinded numerous Trump regulations. Onshore oil and gas lease sales plummeted — from more than a million acres sold annually under Trump and other previous administrations, to just 91,712 acres (37,115 hectares) sold last year — while many wind and solar projects advanced.

Developing energy leases takes years, and oil companies control millions of acres that remain untapped. Biden's administration also elevated the importance of conservation in public lands decisions, adopting a rule putting it more on par with oil and gas development. They proposed withdrawing parcels of land in six states from potential future mining to protect a struggling bird species, the greater sage grouse.

North Dakota is among Republican states that challenged the Biden administration's public lands rule. The states said in a June lawsuit that officials acting to prevent climate change have turned laws meant to facilitate development into policies that obstruct drilling, livestock grazing and other uses.

Oil production boomed over the past two decades in North Dakota thanks in large part to better drilling techniques. Burgum has been an industry champion and last year signed a repeal of the state's oil tax trigger — a price-based tax hike industry leaders supported removing.

Burgum's office declined an interview request.

In a statement after his nomination, Burgum echoed Trump's call for U.S. "energy dominance" in the global market. The 68-year-old governor also said the Interior post offered an opportunity to improve government relations with developers, tribes, landowners and outdoor enthusiasts "with a focus on maximizing the responsible use of our natural resources with environmental stewardship for the benefit of the American people."

Under current Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, the agency put greater emphasis on working collaboratively with tribes, including their own energy projects. Haaland, a member of the Pueblo of Laguna tribe in New Mexico, also advanced an initiative to solve criminal cases involving missing and murdered Indigenous peoples and helped lead a nationwide reckoning over abuses at federal Indian boarding schools that culminated in a formal public apology from Biden.

Burgum has worked with tribes in his state, including on oil development. Badlands Conservation Alliance director Shannon Straight in Bismarck, North Dakota, said Burgum has also been a big supporter of tourism in North Dakota and outdoor activities such as hunting and fishing.

Yet Straight said that hasn't translated into additional protections for land in the state.

"Theodore Roosevelt had a conservation ethic, and we talk and hold that up as a beautiful standard to live by," he said. "We haven't seen it as much on the ground. ... We need to recognize the landscape is only going to be as good as some additional protections."

Burgum has been a cheerleader of the planned Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library in Medora, North Dakota.

Judge delays Trump hush money sentencing in order to decide where case should go now

NEW YORK (AP) — A judge confirmed Friday that President-elect Donald Trump won't be sentenced this month in his hush money case, instead setting a schedule for prosecutors and his lawyers to expand on their ideas about what to do next.

Amid a flurry of filings in the case since Trump's election win this month, it had already become clear that the Nov. 26 sentencing date wouldn't hold. Judge Juan M. Merchan's order Friday formalized that without setting a new one.

He called for more filing from both sides over the next 2 1/2 weeks about how to proceed in light of Trump's impending return to the White House.

Trump's lawyers want the case to be dismissed outright, and immediately. They have said that it otherwise will interfere with his presidential transition and duties.

Prosecutors have indicated that they're open to putting the case on hold, perhaps as long as he's in office, but they don't want it to be scrapped altogether. Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, a Democrat, has

said the solution needs to balance the obligations of the presidency with “the sanctity of the jury verdict.”

Bragg’s office declined to comment on Friday’s ruling. Trump spokesperson and incoming White House communications director Steven Cheung hailed it as “a decisive win” for Trump.

Trump, a Republican, was convicted in May of falsifying his business’ records to disguise the true nature of a chain of payments that provided \$130,000 to porn actor Stormy Daniels. She received it, through Trump’s then-lawyer, in the waning days of the 2016 presidential campaign.

The payout was meant to keep her quiet about a sexual encounter she says she had with the married Trump a decade earlier. He denies her claim and says he did nothing wrong.

Many in Gaza are eating just once a day, as hunger spreads amid aid issues

BY WAFAA SHURAFI and FATMA KHALED Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Yasmin Eid coughs and covers her face, cooking a small pot of lentils over a fire fed with twigs and scrap paper in the tent she shares with her husband and four young daughters in the Gaza Strip.

It was their only meal Wednesday — it was all they could afford.

“My girls suck on their thumbs because of how hungry they are, and I pat their backs until they sleep,” she said.

After being displaced five times, the Eids reside in central Gaza, where aid groups have relatively more access than in the north, which has been largely isolated and heavily destroyed since Israel began waging a renewed offensive against the militant group Hamas in early October. But nearly everyone in Gaza is going hungry these days. In the north experts say a full-blown famine may be underway.

On Thursday, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former defense minister, accusing them of using “starvation as a method of warfare” — charges Israel adamantly denies.

In Deir al-Balah, the Eids are among hundreds of thousands sheltering in squalid tent camps. The local bakeries shut down for five days this week. The price of a bag of bread climbed above \$13 by Wednesday, as bread and flour vanished from shelves before more supplies arrived.

The United Nations humanitarian office warned of a “stark increase” in the number of households experiencing severe hunger in central and southern Gaza. The amount of food Israel has let into Gaza the past seven weeks has plummeted, now at nearly the lowest levels of the entire war.

Even less than that is reaching the territory’s 2.3 million Palestinians because of the many obstacles to distribution, aid groups and the U.N. say — including restrictions on movement by the Israeli military, ongoing fighting, damage to roads, and theft. Armed men robbed nearly 100 aid trucks last weekend in southern Gaza, close to Israeli military positions. Israel blamed Hamas but appears to have taken no action to stop the looting, while Hamas said it was the work of local bandits.

For the Eids, hunger is the daily routine

For months, Yasmin and her family have gone to bed hungry.

“Everything has increased in price, and we cannot buy anything,” she said. “We always go to sleep without having dinner.”

She misses coffee, but a single packet of Nescafe goes for around \$1.30. A kilogram (2 pounds) of onions goes for \$10, a medium bottle of cooking oil for \$15 — if available. Meat and chicken all but vanished from the markets months ago, but there are still some local vegetables. Such sums are astronomical in an impoverished territory where few people earn regular incomes.

Crowds of hundreds wait hours to get food from charities, which are also struggling.

Hani Almadhoun, co-founder of the Gaza Soup Kitchen, said his teams can offer only small bowls of rice or pasta once a day. He said they “can go to the market on one day and buy something for \$5, and then go back in the afternoon to find it doubled or tripled in price.”

Its kitchen in the central town of Zuweida operated on a daily budget of around \$500 for much of the

war. When the amount of aid entering Gaza plummeted in October, its costs climbed to around \$1,300 a day. It can feed about half of the 1,000 families who line up each day.

The sharp decline in aid, and a U.S. ultimatum

Israel says it places no limits on the amount of aid entering Gaza and has announced a number of measures it says are aimed at increasing the flow in recent weeks, including the opening of a new crossing.

But the military's own figures show that the amount of aid entering Gaza plunged to around 1,800 trucks in October, down from over 4,200 the previous month. At the current rate of entry, around 2,400 trucks would come into Gaza in November. Around 500 trucks entered each day before the war.

Israel blames U.N. agencies for not retrieving the aid, pointing to hundreds of truckloads languishing on the Gaza side of the border. The U.N. says it often cannot reach the border to pick up aid cargos because the Israeli military denies requests for movement and because of ongoing fighting and the breakdown of law and order. As a result, it says, only about half the incoming aid is distributed.

The war started Oct. 7, 2023, when Hamas-led fighters stormed into Israel, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 250. Around 100 hostages are still inside Gaza, at least a third of whom are dead, and Hamas militants have repeatedly regrouped after Israeli operations, carrying out hit-and-run attacks from tunnels and bombed-out buildings.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed over 44,000 Palestinians, more than half of them women and children, according to local health authorities, who do not say how many of the dead were fighters.

The United States warned Israel in October that it might be forced to curtail some of its crucial military support if Israel did not rapidly ramp up the amount of aid entering Gaza. But after the 30-day ultimatum expired, the Biden administration declined to take any action, saying there had been some progress.

Israel, meanwhile, passed legislation severing ties with UNRWA. Israel accuses the agency of allowing itself to be infiltrated by Hamas — allegations denied by the U.N.

Israeli news outlets have reported that officials are considering plans for the military to take over aid distribution or contract it out to private security companies. Asked about such plans Wednesday, government spokesman David Mercer said "Israel is looking at many creative solutions to ensure a better future for Gaza."

Yoav Gallant, the former defense minister who was seen as a voice of moderation in the far-right government before being fired this month, warned on X that handing over aid distribution to a private firm was a "euphemism for the beginning of military rule."

As that debate plays out in Jerusalem, less than 100 kilometers (60 miles) away from central Gaza, most Palestinians in the territory are focused on staying alive in a war with no end in sight.

"I find it difficult to talk about the suffering we are experiencing. I am ashamed to talk about it," said Yasmin's husband, Hani. "What can I tell you? I'm a person who has 21 family members and is unable to provide them with a bag of flour."

Second Australian teen dies in tainted alcohol case in Laos that has killed 6 tourists

By JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI and DAVID RISING Associated Press

VANG VIENG, Laos (AP) — A second Australian teenager who fell critically ill after drinking tainted alcohol in Laos has died in a hospital in Bangkok, her family said Friday, bringing the death toll in the mass poisoning of foreign tourists to six.

Holly Bowles, 19, had been in critical condition on life support following the poisoning in Laos more than a week ago.

"We are so sad to say that our beautiful girl Holly is now at peace," her family said in a statement sent to Australian Network 10 and other Australian media. "We find comfort and solace in knowing that Holly brought so much joy and happiness to so many people."

An officer at Vang Vieng's Tourism Police office, who refused to give his name, told The Associated

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Press on Friday that a "number of people" had been detained in the case but that no charges have yet been filed. Staff at the Nana Backpacker Hostel, which was still operating but not accepting new guests, confirmed that the manager and owner were among those taken in for questioning.

Tourist police offices are common in Southeast Asia and are set up specifically to help with incidents involving tourists and other foreigners.

The U.S. State Department on Friday issued a health alert for citizens traveling in Laos, warning of "suspected methanol poisoning in Vang Vieng, possibly through the consumption of methanol-laced alcoholic drinks," following similar alerts from other countries whose citizens were involved.

Australia's prime minister announced Thursday that a 19-year-old citizen, Bianca Jones, had died in a Thai hospital where she had been evacuated for emergency treatment, and that her friend — Bowles — remained in a hospital "fighting for her life."

A 28-year-old British woman, Simone White, also died in the suspected poisoning, the British Foreign Office said.

An American and two Danish tourists also died, though specifics about the causes of death have not been released.

New Zealand's Foreign Ministry said one of its citizens was sickened in Laos and was a possible victim of methanol poisoning.

White's family said they were "devastated by the loss of our beautiful, kind and loving daughter Simone," who had "the most wonderful energy and spark for life."

"Our hearts go out to all other families who have been affected by this terrible tragedy," the family said in a statement issued by law firm Squire Patton Boggs, where White worked as a lawyer.

Laos is a one-party communist state with no organized opposition and the government keeps a tight lid on information. In this case, officials have released almost no details.

The Foreign Ministry has refused to comment, and in Vang Vieng the small hospital where some of the victims are believed to have been treated initially referred all questions to the town's health office on the hospital grounds. The town health officials refused to comment, saying they lacked proper permission.

Methanol is sometimes added to mixed drinks at disreputable bars as a cheaper alternative to ethanol, but can cause severe poisoning or death. It is also a byproduct of poorly distilled homebrew liquor, and could have found its way into bar drinks inadvertently.

Landlocked Laos is one of Southeast Asia's poorest nations and a popular tourist destination. Vang Vieng is particularly popular among backpackers seeking partying and adventure sports.

Neil Farmiloe, a New Zealander who owns the Kiwi Kitchen restaurant in town, said a lot of his customers were very worried about the incident.

"I think it's never happened before, so it is hopefully just a one-off incident," said Farmiloe, who has lived in Vang Vieng for 20 years. "It's very sad all around. I'm sure nobody intended to cause injury, but it's happened."

The two 19-year-old Australian women who have both now died fell ill on Nov. 13 following a night out drinking with a group.

They failed to check out from the Nana Backpacker Hostel as planned and were found sick in their room and then taken to Thailand for emergency treatment.

Thai authorities confirmed that Jones had died by "brain swelling due to high levels of methanol found in her system."

Duong Duc Toan, the manager of the Nana Backpacker Hostel, told the AP the day before he was detained that the two women had joined other guests for free shots of Laotian vodka before heading elsewhere and returning in the early hours of the morning.

JD Vance is leaving the Senate for the vice presidency. That's set off a scramble for his Ohio seat

By JULIE CARR SMYTH Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — JD Vance's election as vice president has opened up one of Ohio's U.S. Senate seats for the third time in as many years, setting off a scramble for the appointment among the state's ruling Republicans.

GOP Gov. Mike DeWine is tasked with filling the vacancy, giving the pragmatic center-right politician a hand in setting his party's course in the state potentially for years to come. His decision will be made in the afterglow of sweeping wins by Republicans in November under the leadership of Donald Trump, but a poor choice could also help Democrats reclaim a place in Ohio's Senate delegation when the seat comes up for reelection in less than two years.

"Look, being a United States senator is a big deal," the governor told reporters in the days after the election. "It's a big deal for the state, and we need to get it right."

DeWine has a long list to choose from — particularly given the number of GOP candidates who competed unsuccessfully in Senate primaries in 2022 and 2024. Those under consideration who previously lost crowded Republican primaries are former Ohio Republican Chair Jane Timken; two-term Secretary of State Frank LaRose; and state Sen. Matt Dolan, whose family owns baseball's Cleveland Guardians. Two-term Ohio Treasurer Robert Sprague and Republican attorney and strategist Mehek Cooke, a frequent guest on Fox News, are also in the mix.

One other prospective appointee — a 2024 presidential contender, Cincinnati pharmaceutical entrepreneur and Vance insider Vivek Ramaswamy — pulled out of contention after accepting a position in the new Trump administration.

While Vance's departure also offers DeWine an opportunity to alleviate a bottleneck at the top of Ohio Republicans' political pecking order, where Lt. Gov. Jon Husted and Attorney General Dave Yost are preparing to face off for governor in 2026, that appears unlikely. Husted is well into building his campaign organization, and Yost has said he would decline the appointment if offered. DeWine — a 77-year-old former U.S. senator term-limited in 2026 — also has said he would not appoint himself.

Meanwhile, ambitions for the seat among Republican members of Ohio's congressional delegation — which includes U.S. Reps. Jim Jordan, Mike Carey, David Joyce and Warren Davidson — are being tempered by the slim House majority their party scored in November. House vacancies necessarily take months to fill under Ohio's election protocols, likely a consideration for DeWine as Trump prepares to push early policy priorities through Congress.

Under state law, whoever gets the appointment will serve from the date of Vance's resignation, which he hasn't announced, until Dec. 15, 2026. A special election for the last two years of his six-year term would be held in November 2026.

That special election could provide a comeback opportunity for Democratic U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown, who was unseated earlier this month by Cleveland businessman Bernie Moreno. Though he wasn't specific, Brown told Politico last week: "I'm going to stay in this arena. I'm not going away." Former U.S. Rep. Tim Ryan, the Democratic Senate nominee who lost to Vance in 2022, could make another run, too. And Allison Russo, the Democratic leader of the Ohio House, also has been mentioned as a 2026 Senate contender.

DeWine has made clear that he wants the Republican he chooses to be well positioned to defeat the Democrats in 2026. Their strengths as a statewide candidate and fundraiser are particularly important because Ohio's statewide elections also take place that year — and every seat is open. A strong incumbent senator at the top of that ticket could be valuable to returning Republicans to the offices of governor, attorney general, treasurer, auditor and secretary of state.

Stamina also could be a factor. Timken ran for Senate most recently in 2022, LaRose ran this year, and Dolan ran both times. A win in 2026 would only give the victor a two-year reprieve before having to face Ohio voters again in 2028.

"This is not for the faint-hearted," DeWine said.

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Dolan, who along with Timken is a millionaire, is rare among Republicans competing for the Vance appointment in not having ever won Trump's backing.

In both 2022 and 2024, Dolan ran in Republicans' moderate lane, declining to align with Trump and disavowing his false claims that voter fraud lost him the 2020 election. Those stances won him DeWine's endorsement in last year's Senate primary, which could be a good sign for the term-limited Ohio Senate Finance chairman.

The president-elect backed Vance in 2022 and Moreno this year — lifting both to victory. Moreno won a three-way Republican primary against Dolan and LaRose, while Vance topped a field of seven, before both went on to defeat Democratic opponents in now reliably red Ohio.

In the state Legislature, Dolan opposed Ohio's now-blocked ban on abortions once fetal cardiac activity is detected and an unsuccessful effort to override then-Gov. John Kasich's veto. Both LaRose and Sprague, then a state senator and representative, respectively, supported both the bill and the override effort.

Timken, a Trump loyalist, has never held public office, but as a Senate candidate she described herself as "a powerful ally for the pro-life movement" and supported overturning *Roe v. Wade*.

Former U.S. Sen. Rob Portman backed Timken in the 2022 Senate primary, calling the Harvard-educated attorney and wife of former TimkenSteel CEO Tim Timken a smart, hard-working conservative.

Some believe DeWine's penchant for elevating women could give her or Cooke an edge in the competition. Both his chief of staff and communications director are women and more than half of his Cabinet is female.

Though Trump endorsed Vance over Timken for Senate in 2022, he had earlier hand-selected her to lead the Ohio Republican Party after his first election in 2016, and he has since supported her election as RNC National Committeewoman for Ohio.

While Trump also passed over LaRose for a Senate endorsement this year, he had backed both him and Sprague in bids for statewide office — and both have endorsed him back.

Both have twice won statewide races, though LaRose's high profile as Ohio's elections chief keeps him in the headlines more than Sprague, and he would be the first Green Beret to serve in the Senate. At the same time, the absence of controversy that has marked Sprague's tenure at the state treasury could make him less likely than LaRose to draw a primary challenger.

DeWine says he wants his appointee to be focused on both state and national issues and willing to work hard and "get things done." He also hinted that the person's politics can't be too extreme.

"It also has to be someone who can win a primary, it has to be someone who can win a general election, and then two years later do all that again," he said.

Beyond evangelicals, Trump and his allies courted smaller faith groups, from the Amish to Chabad

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

A social-media tribute to Coptic Christians. A billboard in Amish country. A visit to a revered Jewish gravesite.

While Donald Trump's lock on the white evangelical vote is legendary, he and his campaign allies also wooed smaller religious groups, far from the mainstream.

As it turned out, Trump won by decisive margins, but his campaign aggressively courted niche communities with the understanding that every vote could be critical, particularly in swing states.

Voter surveys such as exit polls, which canvass broad swaths of the electorate, aren't able to gauge the impact of such microtargeting, but some backers say the effort was worth it.

Just one week before the election, Trump directed a post on the social-media platform X to Coptic Christians in the United States — whose church has ancient roots in Egypt. He saluted their "Steadfast Faith in God, Perseverance through Centuries of Persecution and Love for this Great Country."

"This was the first time seeing a major U.S. presidential candidate address the community in this manner," said Mariam Wahba, a Coptic Christian and research analyst with the Foundation for Defense of Democra-

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cies, a Washington-based research institute. "It was really a profound moment."

She said many Copts share the conservative social views of other Christian groups in the Republican constituency, and they may already have been Trump supporters. But the posting reinforced those bonds. Coptic bishops sent the president-elect congratulations after his victory and cited their "shared social and family values."

Some Assyrian Christians — another faith group with Middle Eastern roots — similarly bonded with Trump, whose mispronunciation of "Assyrian" at a rally created a viral video moment and drew attention to their support.

Sam Darmo, a Phoenix real estate agent and co-founder of Assyrians for Trump, said many community members cited the economy, illegal immigration and other prominent voter issues. They echoed other conservative Christians' concerns, he said, on issues such as abortion, gender identity and religious expression in public. But he said Trump supported various Middle Eastern Christians recovering from the Islamic State group's oppressive rule.

Darmo also credited Massad Boulos, father-in-law to Trump's daughter Tiffany, for mobilizing various Middle Eastern Christian groups, including Chaldean Catholics, and other voters, particularly in Michigan, such as Muslims.

"He brought all these minority groups together," he said. "We're hoping to continue that relationship."

But members of Middle Eastern-rooted Christian groups, and their politics, are far from monolithic, said Marcus Zacharia, founder of Progressive Copts, a program of Informed Immigrants, an organization that promotes dialogue on sensitive topics among such groups in the United States and Canada.

He said many younger community members question Trump's stances on issues such as immigration, and sense that conservatives sometimes tokenize them by focusing on the plight of persecuted Christians in the Middle East while neglecting wider issues of repression in countries there that the U.S. supports.

He said there needs to be more informed dialogue across the political divide in these communities. "There is no more high time than these next four years to have that way of conducting conversations," he said.

Courting the Amish

Republicans also made an aggressive push for Amish voters, particularly in the swing state of Pennsylvania, where they are most numerous at about 92,000 (many below voting age).

The GOP has made similar efforts in the past, even though researchers have found that less than 10% of them typically vote, due to their separatism from society. But Republicans used billboards, mailers, ads and door-to-door campaigner to drive turnout in Lancaster County, home base to the nation's largest Amish settlement.

On Election Day, Amish voters Samuel Stoltzfus and his wife Lillian Stoltzfus said they were supporting Trump, citing their anti-abortion beliefs.

"We basically look at it as murder," Stoltzfus, 31, said outside a polling center in the Lancaster County community of New Holland, where dozens of other members of the local Amish community voted. Trump has wavered on the issue, dismaying some abortion opponents, though many have said Republicans still align more closely to their views.

Stoltzfus added: "Make America great again and keep the moral values," he said. "Let's go back to the roots."

Steven Nolt, a history professor at Elizabethtown College in Lancaster College who studies the Amish and their voting patterns, said that while it's too early to say definitively without further research, he doesn't see evidence of a larger turnout this year.

Lancaster County as a whole — most of which is not Amish — is a GOP stronghold that Trump won handily, though both parties' votes edged up from 2020, according to unofficial results posted by the Pennsylvania Department of State.

Trump's biggest increases were in urban or suburban areas with few Amish, while some areas with larger Amish populations generally saw a modest increase in the Trump vote, said Nolt, director of the college's Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies.

"Bottom line, percentage-wise, not much change in the parts of Lancaster County where the Amish

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live," he said.

Paying respects at a Chabad grave

Trump directly reached out to members of the Chabad Lubavitch movement, a prominent and highly observant branch of Orthodox Judaism.

On Oct. 7, the anniversary of the Hamas attack on Israel that triggered the Gaza war, Trump made a symbolically resonant visit to the "Ohel," the burial site of the movement's revered late leader, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson.

Wearing a yarmulke, the traditional Jewish skullcap, Trump, who has Jewish family members, brought a written prayer to the Ohel and laid a small stone at the grave in keeping with tradition. The site in New York City, while particularly central to Chabad adherents, draws an array of Jewish and other visitors, including politicians.

About two-thirds of Jewish voters overall supported Trump's opponent, Democrat Kamala Harris, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of more than 120,000 voters. But the Trump campaign has made a particular outreach to Orthodox Jews, citing issues including his policies toward Israel in his first administration.

Rabbi Yitzchok Minkowitz of Chabad Lubavitch of Southwest Florida said it was moving for him to see images of Trump's visit.

"The mere fact that he made a huge effort, obviously it was important to him," he said.

Today in History - November 23 Doug Flutie's 'Hail Mary' beats Miami

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Saturday, Nov. 23, the 328th day of 2024. There are 38 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Nov. 23, 1984, Boston College quarterback Doug Flutie completed one of the most famous passes in college football history, connecting with Gerald Phelan for a 48-yard touchdown with no time left on the clock as Boston College defeated the Miami Hurricanes 47-45.

Also on this date:

In 1963, President Lyndon B. Johnson proclaimed Nov. 25 a day of national mourning following the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

In 1971, the People's Republic of China was seated in the United Nations Security Council.

In 1980, an estimated 2,500-3,000 people were killed by a series of earthquakes that devastated southern Italy.

In 1996, a commandeered Ethiopian Airlines Boeing 767 crashed into the water off the Comoro Islands, killing 125 of the 175 people on board, including all three hijackers.

In 2005, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected president of Liberia, becoming the first woman to lead an African country.

In 2006, former KGB spy Alexander Litvinenko (leet-vee-NYEN'-koh) died in London from radiation poisoning after making a deathbed statement blaming Russian President Vladimir Putin.

In 2008, the U.S. government unveiled a bold plan to rescue Citigroup, injecting a fresh \$20 billion into the troubled firm as well as guaranteeing hundreds of billions of dollars in risky assets.

In 2011, Yemen's authoritarian President Ali Abdullah Saleh (AH'-lee ahb-DUH'-luh sah-LEH') agreed to step down amid a fierce uprising to oust him after 33 years in power.

Today's Birthdays: Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., is 74. Singer Bruce Hornsby is 70. TV journalist Robin Roberts ("Good Morning America") is 64. Olympic gold medal sprinter Asafa Powell is 42. NHL center Nicklas Bäckström is 37. Singer-actor Miley Cyrus is 32.