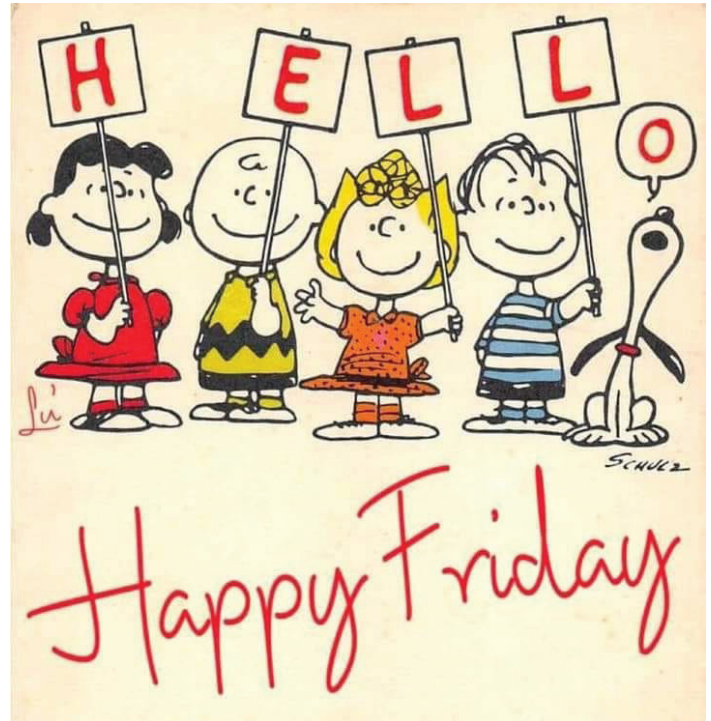


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Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m. (Daniel and Karla Grenz will be speaking); worship, 10:30 a.m.

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.

United Methodist: Worship with communion: Conde at 8:30 a.m.; Groton at 10:30 a.m.; No Sunday School, Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

Friday, Nov. 29

No School - Thanksgiving Break

Saturday, Nov. 30

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

Sunday, Dec. 1

St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion: St. John's at 9 a.m.; Zion at 11 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; No Sunday School; Choir, 6 p.m.

FFA State LDE, Rapid City

Pancake Sunday: 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., Groton Community Center (proceeds benefit the Historical Society's jail restoration.

Snow Queen Contest, 4:30 p.m., GHS Gym.

Monday, Dec. 2

Senior Menu: Spaghetti with meat sauce, corn, garlic bread, fruit.

School Breakfast: French Toast.

School Lunch: Chicken patty, sweet potato puffs.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

First day of allowable boys' basketball practice

FFA State LDE in Rapid City

JH and JV Boys Wrestling Invitational at Faulkton

JH GBB at Clark (7th at 6 p.m., 8th at 7 p.m.)

Pantry, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Groton Community Center

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

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Newsweek

The Bulletin



WORLD IN BRIEF

Amazon workers' strike: Amazon workers in 20 countries, including the United States, are staging strikes on Black Friday to protest what the organizing labor union describes as anti-worker and antidemocratic practices.

Musk, Stallone join Trump for Thanksgiving: Tech billionaire Elon Musk joined President-elect Donald Trump and his family for Thanksgiving at Mar-a-Lago in Florida. Sylvester Stallone too spent Thanksgiving at Mar-a-Lago.

Mail on Black Friday? Because Black Friday is considered something of a holiday, some people are unsure how it will affect their mail and other deliveries.

Weather alert: National Weather Service (NWS) meteorologists have issued freeze warnings or freeze watches across nine Southern states amid a cold front that could drop temperatures below freezing.

India launches nuclear-capable missile: India continues testing its military power as a new submarine launched a nuclear-capable missile, confirming New Delhi's second-strike capability to respond to a nuclear attack.

Russia-China's nuclear bomber exercise: Russia and China sent nuclear-capable bombers over the waters between Japan and South Korea, which are the treaty allies of the United States, for their ninth joint strategic air patrol.

In the Russia-Ukraine war, Ukraine has more than doubled military taxes on its citizens, amid fears Donald Trump may cut U.S. funding of its defense.

Groton Prairie Mixed Bowling League Week #4 Results

Team Standings: Coyotes 11, Chipmunks 9, Jackelopes 8, Cheetahs 8, Foxes 7, Shihtzus 5

Men's High Games: Brad Waage 222, Lance Frohling 217, Brad Larson 206

Women's High Games: Darci Spanier 176, Sue Stanley 169, Sam Bahr 159

Men's High Series: Brad Waage 574, Brad Larson 529, Lance Frohling 527

Women's High Series: Darci Spanier 449, Sam Bahr 441, Sue Stanley 431

Week 4 Fun Game – Most 8/Spares – Jackelopes with 16!

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FROSTY CLUE

I/My.....

29. Played amateur
baseball and softball



****LAND AUCTION****

Up for auction is 66+/- acres land. 22.91 acres of tillable, 24.10 acres of CRP/CREP, 19.12+/- acres of hunting in Groton, SD on US Hwy 12. No easements on any of the acres. Unlimited possibilities ranging from recreational property of development property. You can bid online at HIBid.com up until we start the live auction Dec. 7th at 1 p.m. From there we will be taking live bids and internet bids. Auction will be held at the American Legion in Groton at 1 p.m.

Terms of the auction, 10% down on sale day (non-refundable). Closing within 20 days of auction at Kolker Law Office in Groton SD.

SAM HANSON, EXIT REALTY CONNECTION
1001 9th Ave SE., Watertown, SD 57201, 605-520-6349
shauctioneer@hotmail.com

Charles Mix County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash

Where: 395th Avenue and 305th Street, six miles south of Wagner, SD

When: 5:56 a.m., November 28, 2024

Driver 1: 29-year-old female from Marty, SD, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2012 Dodge Charger

Seat belt Used: No

Charles Mix County, S.D.- A 29-year-old woman died in a single vehicle crash this morning six miles south of Wagner, SD.

The name of the person involved has not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2012 Dodge Charger had entered the west ditch near 395th Avenue and 305th Street, vaulted over the culvert, and rolled. The driver was ejected and suffered fatal injuries from the crash.

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

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

Names Released in Jackson County Fatal Crash

What: Three-vehicle fatal crash

Where: I-90, mile marker 135, 15 miles west of Kadoka, SD

When: 3:12 p.m., Sunday, November 24, 2024

Driver 1: Howard Louis Ireland, 80-year-old male from Belvidere, SD, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 1997 Dodge Ram 1500

Seat Belt Used: No

Driver 2: Morgan Dane Visto, 33-year-old male from Rapid City, SD, minor injuries

Vehicle 2: 2024 Honda Civic

Seat Belt Used: Yes

Passenger: 11-year-old male from Rapid City, SD, serious, non-life-threatening injuries. The passenger's name has not been released.

Seat Belt Used: Yes

Driver 3: Ahmed Mohomed Warsame, 36-year-old male from Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, no injuries

Vehicle 3: 2024 Freightliner Cascadia

Seat Belt Used: Yes

Jackson County, S.D.- A Belvidere, SD man died following a collision Sunday afternoon near Kadoka, SD.

Preliminary crash information indicates Howard Louis Ireland, the driver of a 1997 Dodge Ram was traveling eastbound on I-90 near mile marker 157. At the same time, a 2024 Honda Civic, driven by Morgan Dane Visto, and a 2024 Freightliner Cascadia, driven by Ahmed Mohomed Warsame, were traveling westbound on I-90. Ireland lost control of the Dodge in icy conditions, crossed the median, entered the westbound lanes and collided with the other two vehicles.

Ireland was transported to a Rapid City hospital. He passed away from his injuries November 25. Visto sustained minor injuries and a juvenile passenger in the Civic received serious, non-life-threatening injuries. Warsame had no injuries.

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

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

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2X TWO-STAGE POWER

INTELLIPOWER TRAC MAX EFI

When the winters get tough, the Cub Cadet® 2X gets tougher. This two-stage snow blowers are engineered for clearing between 12-18 inches of powder and slush. If you measure snow in feet instead of inches, step up to the commercial-grade 2X MAX™ trim package to help tackle the deep stuff. Featuring trigger-controlled power steering, push-button electric start, dual LED headlights, 16-inch X-Trac™ tires and a 3-year limited warranty.**

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SNOWFALL DRIVEWAY SURFACES



Up to 18-23" (18" x 23" for EFI and MAX™ units)



Up to 8-15+ cars



Smooth & gravel



2X 24" WITH INTELLIPOWER®

Clear paths with the 2X 24" snow blower featuring a 243cc Cub Cadet® engine with IntelliPOWER®.

- IntelliPOWER® engine technology delivers consistent power in heavy and wet snow conditions
- Trigger-control power steering
- Single-hand remote chute and pitch control
- 3-year limited residential / 1-year commercial limited warranty**

\$1,199* Additional models available with 26", 28" clearing width



2X 26" TRAC WITH INTELLIPOWER®

Designed to provide steady traction in extreme weather conditions—try the 2X 26" TRAC with IntelliPOWER®.

- TRAC drive designed for traction on slopes, inclines and gravel
- Heavy-duty 14-gauge steel side plates and auger housing
- 23" intake height
- Heated hand grips
- High-arc steel chute
- Cast aluminum auger gear box w/ 5-year limited warranty**

\$1,999*



2X 30" MAX INTELLIPOWER®

Take on winter with the 357cc Cub Cadet® engine with IntelliPOWER®.

- 14" augers and impeller
- Sealed ball bearings on auger and wheel shafts
- LED light bar on auger housing
- Heavy-duty 14-gauge steel side plates and auger housing
- 23" intake height
- Heated hand grips
- High-arc steel chute
- Cast aluminum auger gear box w/ 5-year limited warranty**

\$2,399*

• Indicates step-up feature



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* Restrictions apply. See dealer or cubcadet.com/en_US/financing for details.

** Actual retail prices are set by dealer and may vary. Taxes are additional and vary by location. Freight and POI charges may be additional and vary by dealer. Models subject to limited availability. Images may not reflect dealer inventory and/or unit specifications.

•• See owner's manual for warranty details and information. Certain restrictions apply.

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EXCEPTIONAL FINANCING OFFERS AVAILABLE!

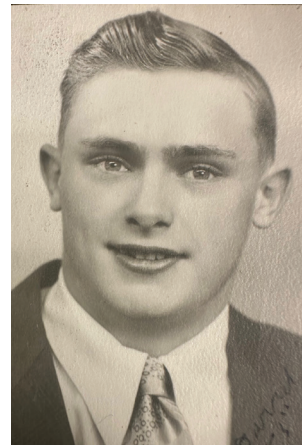




Wedding Reception

A wedding reception will be held for Julianna (Kosel) and Isaac Moll on Saturday, Nov. 30, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., at the Paul and Tina Kosel home, 110 N Washington St. The reception will be held in the garage.

The couple was married on July 30, 2024 at Sarasota, Fla. Julianna and Isaac are coming home for the Thanksgiving break.



90th Birthday Card Shower

A card shower is requested for Darrell Henderson on his 90th birthday, December 1, 2024.

Darrell and Deanna have two children: Jeffrey and Beth, with Jeff's wife, Joyce, and grandson, Dustin, and a great granddaughter, Avianna.

Cards may be sent to:
Darrell Henderson
PO Box 494
Groton, SD 57445

Thank You!

It is hard to believe that I have been your newspaper publisher for 38 years. I came to Groton as a single person, ended up being married to my wonderful wife, Tina, and having two great daughters, Jeslyn and Julianna. It's been an up and down time, but overall, it has been a fun challenge. For you to read this article this morning is a feat in itself. The Groton Daily Independent is the only publication of this type in the state and probably one of the few in the nation. When we first launched the Groton Daily Independent, we had a whole some of six subscribers. To go through the work of publishing it would seem like a lost cause. Today, we have over 250 subscribers.

I hope you enjoy our publication nearly every day of the year, published from here in Groton and even published all the way from Florida. It takes team work to pull this off. Our family has been instrumental in this process. I also appreciate our reporters Dorene Nelson and Elizabeth Varin, and also thankful to our regular contributors which include April Abeln and Bruce Babcock. And if you have news to contribute, feel free to send it to news@grotonsd.net.

From all of us from the GDI, Happy Thanksgiving!



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Daughter gives thanks for journey of deceased mother's quilt

Rummage sale discovery leads to reconnection years later

BY: CURT NETTINGA - NOVEMBER 28, 2024 6:00 AM

HURON — There are those rare times — very emotional, memorable instances — when all of the good things fall into place and the outcome is a heartwarming experience for everyone involved.

This is the story of one of those times.

It begins, oddly enough, at a neighborhood rummage sale in 2015 or 2016. What makes it odd, with what was to come, is that Jeanine Tschetter Greenwood is not really sure when she came across a partially completed quilt top, folded up and in a bag with other items.

"I remember taking it out and thinking to myself, 'My gosh, someone has \$2 marked on this!'"

The pieced top was in a classic quilt pattern referred to as "Trip Around the World." Small identically sized squares, in this instance more than 1,200 of them, are sewn together in a concentric diamond shape. The pattern starts with a single central square, and the use of varied prints and contrasting colors accentuate the diamond design as it radiates outward.

Jeanine is quick to note that she is not a quilter. "Not like cutting little pieces of fabric and sewing them together into a pattern. I have done a tied baby quilt with a panel on it, but nothing to the extent of what I found in the bag."

She thought that perhaps it could be a good winter project for when she and her husband Doug went to Arizona. Which is what she did. After washing and ironing the top to determine a size, she began working with a fabric store to select a border fabric that she added to the pieced top.

"I shared how I came upon the top with a woman at the shop and we both marveled at the work that had gone into the cutting and sewing the blocks."

She went back to the store, selected fabric for the back and binding, the batting to layer between the top and the back and had the fabric store do the quilting. "They sewed the binding on the front," Jeanine



Brenna Bowerman-Stark, left, and her niece Skylar display the quilt that was completed by Jeanine Greenwood. (Courtesy

of Brenna Bowerman-Stark)

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said, "then I took it home and stitched the binding to the back."

She said that the quilt saw use in Arizona on the couples' king-size bed, and, after she sold the property there, on her bed in Sioux Falls.

"Every time I saw the quilt or made the bed," she recalls, "I thought about the work that some woman put into creating this beautiful quilt, only to have it end up in a bag at a rummage sale with a bunch of stuff."

Jeanine grew up in Huron, graduating from Huron High School in 1970. She worked at Bell Telephone for 17 years, 15 years in Huron until the company closed the Huron location. She then moved to Rapid City with Bell and worked there for two years.

She had been married and had three children, but later divorced. While in Rapid City, she met Doug Greenwood, who was with the Air Force, and they married. His career took the couple to Germany for three years until he retired, when they moved to Huron.

"Doug grew up on the East Coast and always wanted to move there again," Jeanine said. "So, when my youngest graduated high school, I was out of reasons for not going and we moved to New Hampshire."

It didn't take long to determine that living 45 miles away from work in Boston was difficult. A year of fighting traffic was enough and they moved to Sioux Falls.

During those years, Jeanine worked in various departments of the federal government, landing at the EROS Center when they returned to South Dakota in 2000. In 2012, Doug and Jeanine retired and within a couple of years, the increased population in Sioux Falls led them back to Huron in 2017.

While they lived in Sioux Falls after retirement, the couple owned a cabin at Lake Byron, spending time there throughout the summer, and it was on one of those summer trips to the area that Jeanine found herself at a rummage sale, set up in a garage in the alley behind 895 12th Street, SW.

"Doug was very big on not accumulating 'STUFF'" Jeanine said. "He said 'Jeanine, it's just STUFF. Life doesn't have to be about STUFF!' So, it was really odd that I found myself at a rummage sale, looking at 'stuff.'"

A short time later, Doug received a kidney transplant, as the effects of Agent Orange, with which he came in contact during the Vietnam War, caused issues. After the transplant, the couple returned to Sioux Falls to be nearer his medical provider.

"When we retired," Jeanine said, "We had vowed to do what we could for as long as we could and we did just that." Doug Greenwood passed away Sept. 11, 2023 – on Patriots Day.

"I decided that I didn't want the Arizona property and 'stuff,'" Jeanine said. "I sold it, packed up the things I wanted and headed home." When she got back to Sioux Falls, she went through a storage unit and got rid of more "stuff."

"But that quilt was always there," she said. "I decided that I would do what I could to find someone – I figured a granddaughter – of the woman who had made the quilt and try to get it back to a member of her family."

She didn't have much to go on.

"I grew up there, remember," she said. "And while I was at Bell, I had gained a pretty thorough knowledge of the area and remembered the neighborhood where I hit the rummage sale."

Armed with a cup of coffee and a computer, she went to work, using Google Maps to zero in on the house. She used street view to be positive she was looking at the correct home.

Next, she turned to social media for some assistance.

"I posted pictures of the house and the garage, with the address, on the Facebook site 'I grew up in Huron, South Dakota and damn proud of it!'" she said. "And a picture of the quilt. I guess I hoped someone would recognize the house, know who may have lived there and would share the information. But I didn't know."

That was on Oct. 21. The response was more than she could have expected. Dozens of people were commenting what they recalled and even more people were sharing Jeanine's post.

Brenna Bowerman-Stark also grew up in Huron, and is a 2005 HHS graduate. She is a real estate photographer in Springfield, Mo., an area to which she moved after graduation.

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When she checked her Facebook on Oct. 22, she was inundated with messages from friends of hers and those of her mother, pointing out the address with the same question: Didn't you grow up there?

She had.

"I lived there with my mom and stepdad," Brenna said. "My mother's name was Melanie Haugen and my stepdad was Lee. Mom was diagnosed with cancer and passed away in September of 2004, only nine months after her diagnosis."

After Melanie's passing, Brenna and her twin brother, Bryan, moved in with her mother's sister and lived there through graduation. She had planned to attend SDSU, but plans change. An opportunity to live with a family member and attend school in Missouri was too good to pass up. Brenna left Huron the summer after graduation.

"Brenna sent me a private message the next morning," Jeanine said.

"I was forwarded your posting on the Huron page by multiple friends, in regards to a quilt you found at a rummage sale. I am almost certain that the woman who spent the time making that quilt was my mother, Melanie Haugen. The house pictured in your post is the one I grew up in and I am very familiar with it."

Jeanine shared that Brenna told her Lee remarried, later passing away as did his spouse. The folks in charge of cleaning out the house had no knowledge or connection to anyone from more than a decade earlier.

"We never had the opportunity to claim any of Mom's things after her passing," Brenna said. "I had a photo of her with another quilt she made and shared that with Jeanine. I told her that I really appreciated her posting and sharing the quilt that Mom spent so much time making."

Brenna said, thinking back to that conversation, that it was almost like her Mom was overseeing the process. "Mom had wanted 'Dust in the Wind' played at her funeral service," Brenna recalled. "When my wife sent a message to Jeanine, with some details to demonstrate that we were who we said were, 'Dust in the Wind' came on the radio as she was leaving for work."

Jeanine got Brenna's address, folded the bulky quilt for one final time and put it in the mail.

"I stayed in touch with Brenna, letting her know when I mailed it and shared tracking information," Jeanine said. "It was, ironically, scheduled to arrive the Saturday that they were hosting their wedding reception."

Unfortunately, delivery didn't take place until the Monday after the reception. "It would have been so great to have it arrive when all of my brothers and sister were there," Brenna said. "It worked out in the end though."

She said her niece Skylar, who was there for the reception, was scheduled to fly out on that Monday. "In fact, when we dropped her off at the airport, I got a notice that the quilt had been delivered."

Brenna said she got home, opened the package, and for the first time held the quilt her mother had pieced together more than 20 years before. Someone with no connection to her family had rescued the quilt, finished it and then took the additional steps to find a family member and return it to them.

A short time later, Brenna got a call from Skylar. Skylar's flight had been delayed and she ended up staying two more days.

"She is my mom's first grandchild and the only one born before Mom passed," Brenna said. "She slept under her grandma's quilt both nights she stayed with us."

"I do believe this is one of the final things she made," Brenna said. "When Jeanine sent the photo it was familiar to me. Mom was always making something. Knitting, making candles – a lot of different things. And sewing and quilting."

She added that an aunt suggested the quilt become a "traveling quilt," moving among Melanie's five children and their children. "But nothing is decided yet. Right now, I am just enjoying the quilt."

"I just feel good about this," Jeanine said. "We need to be kind – nobody knows what people are going through. I just feel that we can all help somewhere. I am glad that the quilt is back in the hands of the family of the person who made the quilt top and they will have it to love and cherish forever."

When arrangements were underway to ship the heirloom, Brenna offered to pay for the postage, but Jeanine declined.

"I told her that she could consider it a wedding gift from her mom – and from me."

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"We've stayed in touch," Jeanine added. "I hope that we can meet at some time."

Brenna described how it feels to have a piece of her mother's creation.

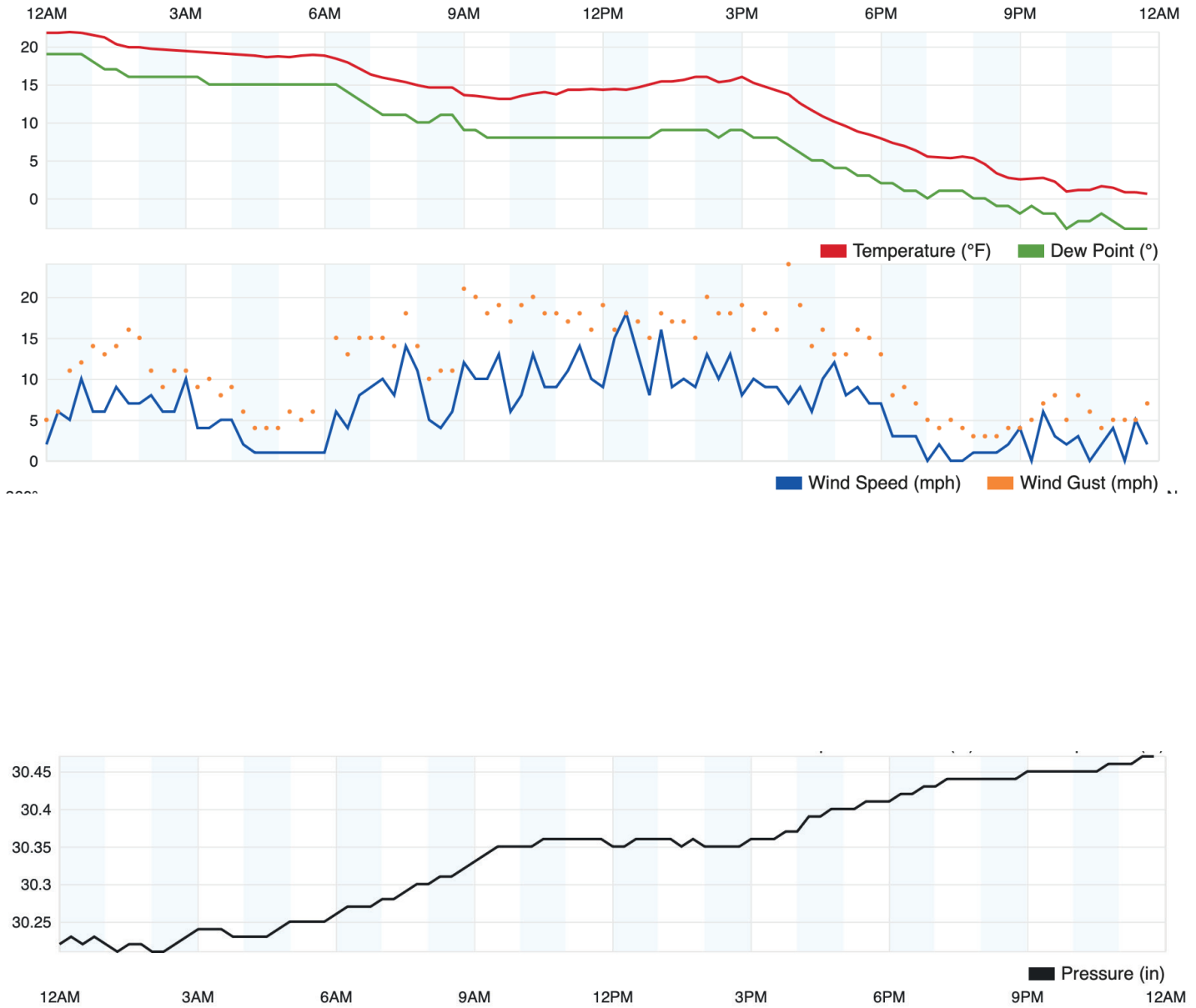
"Oh it's perfect," she said. "It's big and it's cozy. And it's perfect."

Curt Nettinga is the managing editor of the Huron Plainsman and previously served as editor of the Hot Springs Star.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 15 °F

Sunny

Tonight



Low: -5 °F

Mostly Clear

Saturday



High: 15 °F

Mostly Sunny
then Slight
Chance Snow

Saturday Night



Low: 0 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Sunday



High: 15 °F

Partly Sunny

DON'T FORGET YOUR PETS

Even with a natural fur coat, winter can be deadly for your pets unless proper care is given.

Keep them warm and dry, and indoors whenever possible.

Provide plenty of food and water. Dehydration is especially dangerous in winter.

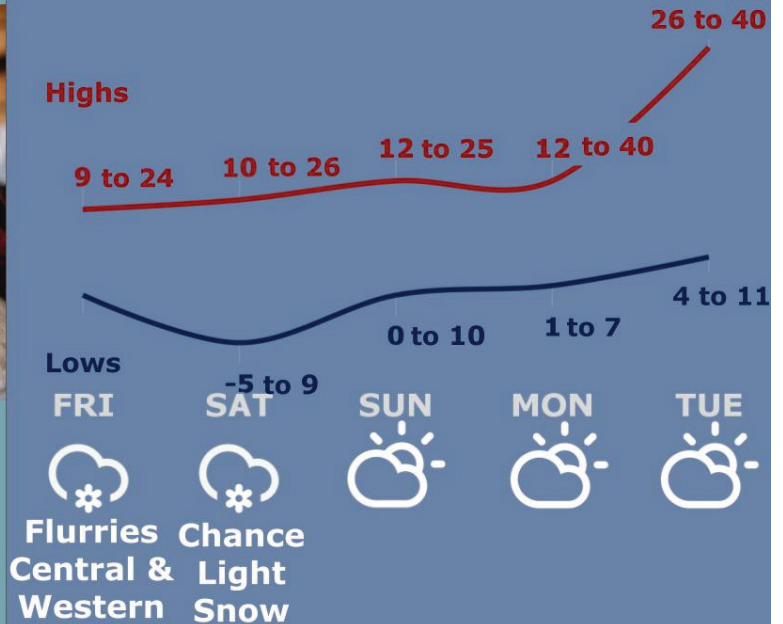
When outside, keep them bundled up. Limit outside time, and thoroughly clean (including paws) when bringing them in.



Temperature Forecast



Warmer Temps For Central South Dakota
Cooler Temps for Northeastern South Dakota/Western MN



Updated: November 29, 2024 3:21 AM

The ongoing cold snap will see little moderation until the middle of next week. Until then, temperatures will be running some 10 to 20 degrees below normal. Just some low chances for snow with limited accumulations.

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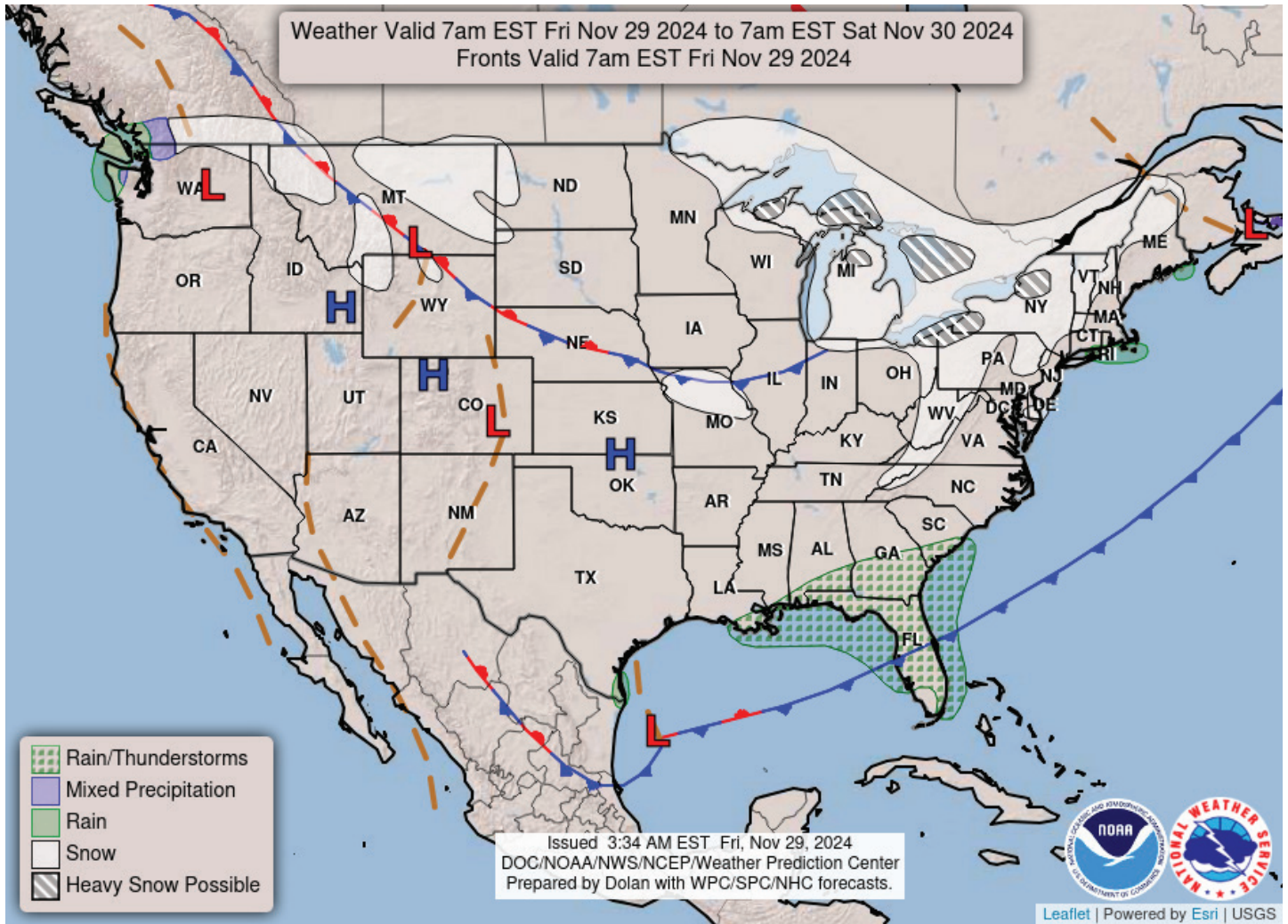
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 20 °F at 3:02 PM
Low Temp: 10 °F at 12:00 AM
Wind: 11 mph at 4:45 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 60 in 2021
Record Low: -26 in 1964
Average High: 36
Average Low: 14
Average Precip in Nov.: 0.72
Precip to date in Nov.: 1.83
Average Precip to date: 21.19
Precip Year to Date: 21.71
Sunset Tonight: 4:53:12 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:49:52 am

Day length: 9 hours, 4 minutes



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Today in Weather History

November 29, 1896: The mercury plunged to 51 degrees below zero at Havre Montana. It marked the culmination of a two week long cold wave. A stagnate high-pressure area similar to those over Siberia during the winter was the cause. During the month of November temperatures across Montana and the Dakotas averaged 15 to 25 degrees below normal. Aberdeen's low temperature on this day was 25 degrees below zero. The average temperature for the month was 9.7 degrees, or 19.6 degrees below normal.

November 29, 1996: Widespread freezing rain laid down a thick layer of ice across a large part of north-east South Dakota and west central Minnesota on the 29th and 30th, making driving on area highways and Interstate 29 treacherous. Later on the 29th, the freezing rain changed over to snow. Snowfall amounts ranged from 2 to 4 inches across the area. Numerous accidents occurred throughout the weekend with mainly minor injuries. Many cars and trucks also went into ditches. The South Dakota Highway Patrol reported in, one three hour period that along I-29, from the Clear Lake exit to the Codington County line 40 to 45 vehicles were in the ditch. Many activities and sporting events were also postponed or cancelled.

November 29, 2002: High winds of 30 to 50 mph, gusting to near 70 mph, occurred much of the afternoon across central and north central South Dakota. A tractor-trailer, carrying a load of livestock, was overturned on Highway 12 about three miles east of Mobridge. The tractor was totaled, four cattle were killed, and the driver suffered minor injuries. High winds of 30 to 50 mph, with gusts to near 60 mph, also occurred across Roberts and Grant counties in the late afternoon hours.

1896 - The mercury plunged to 51 degrees below zero at Havre, MT. It marked the culmination of a two week long cold wave caused by a stagnate high pressure area similar to those over Siberia during the winter. During the month of November temperatures across Montana and the Dakotas averaged 15 to 25 degrees below normal. (David Ludlum)

1969 - Dense fog along the Jersey Turnpike resulted in a chain reaction of vehicle collisions during the morning rush hour. A propane truck jackknifed and was struck by a trailer truck, and other vehicles piled into the fiery mass. (David Ludlum)

1975 - Red River was buried under 34 inches of snow in 24 hours, establishing a record for the state of New Mexico. (The Weather Channel)

1985 - The temperature at Bismarck, ND, plunged to 30 degrees below zero to establish their record low for the month of November. The high that day was 4 degrees below zero. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Snow blanketed the Upper Mississippi Valley, with heavy snow reported near Lake Superior. Up to ten inches of snow was reported in Douglas County and Bayfield County of Wisconsin. Brule WI received nine inches of snow. Heavy rain soaked the Middle Atlantic Coast States, while gale force winds lashed the coastline. Flooding was reported in Maryland and Virginia. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Nine inches of snow at Alta UT brought their total for the month to 164 inches, surpassing their previous November record of 144 inches. Snowbird UT, also in the Little Cottonwood Valley, surpassed their November record of 118 inches of snow. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Strong Santa Ana winds diminished over southern California, but record cold was reported in some of the California valleys, with readings of 27 degrees at Redding and 31 degrees at Bakersfield. Gale force winds, gusting to 44 mph at Milwaukee WI, produced snow squalls in the Great Lakes Region. Sault Ste Marie MI finished the month of November with a record 46.8 inches of snow. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

November 29, 1991: A tornado struck southeast Springfield, Missouri, causing F4 damage. Shortly after touchdown, the tornado reached F3 intensity, approximately 3 miles north of the town of Nixa. While crossing Highway 65, the tornado picked up a truck and dropped it onto a frontage road, killing one passenger and injuring ten others. The tornado intensified to F4 strength as it moved through the Woodbridge and Natural Bridge Estates subdivisions where 15 homes were destroyed. Altogether, two people were killed and 64 others were injured.



WHAT WE HAVE IN CHRIST

Looking at a gallon of water in a plastic container hardly suggests that it has any power. But if it seeps into the crack of a rock or a cement road and turns into ice, the rock and the road will split into pieces. If the water is turned into steam, it can drive the pistons of a large engine and turn into a massive amount of power. Water has the potential to do many great things.

So do we.

When we become Christians, God empowers us to change our lives into something completely different and special. Paul teaches us that there are four things that Christ can do for us:

He gives us wisdom. By walking with Him and listening to Him, we hear the truth because He is the expert in living.

He is righteousness. Righteousness in Paul's writings always mean a right relationship with God. We can never achieve a right relationship with God through ourselves or what we do – only through Christ.

He is holy. It is only through the presence of Christ in our lives that we can be or become all that God intends or expects us to be or become.

He is deliverance. Only Christ can deliver us from our past sin and present helplessness to sin and only He can deliver us from our slavery to sin and set us free from self-destruction.

Prayer: Lord, help us to understand the goodness of Your grace and the power of Your presence in our lives. With You, all things are possible – most importantly salvation. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord." 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

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:
11.26.24

5 22 24 39 42 3

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$514,000,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 15 Mins
DRAW: 39 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.27.24

2 20 23 24 29 9

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$16,180,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 30
DRAW: Mins 39 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.28.24

18 33 42 44 45 2

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 45 Mins
DRAW: 39 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.27.24

4 5 18 22 27

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$125,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 45
DRAW: Mins 39 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.27.24

19 37 41 42 62 13

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 14
DRAW: Mins 39 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.27.24

1 6 7 13 40 5

Power Play: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$214,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 14
DRAW: Mins 39 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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Upcoming Groton Events

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

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Santa's annual train visit delivers hope and magic to one corner of coal country

By TRAVIS LOLLER Associated Press

ON BOARD THE SANTA TRAIN (AP) — Since 1943, the people of Appalachian Kentucky, Virginia, and Tennessee have looked forward to Santa's arrival. Not in a sleigh on their rooftops, but on a train.

The Santa Train marks its 82nd running this year, bringing presents and joy to small towns along a 110-mile portion of the CSX rail line tucked into remote coal-country river valleys. Many of the children who line the tracks and wait for Santa on the Saturday before Thanksgiving are the third, fourth or fifth generation to do so.

"I look for it every year. I count the days down," said Sandra Owens, of Haysi, Virginia, who held a pink pillowcase with a message in black ink, "Thank you CSX and volunteers for the Santa Train. 82."

Owens moved to Kentucky from Delaware 55 years ago when she got married and experienced her first Santa Train a few years later, when her son turned 3. He is 46 now, and these days she brings her grandchildren. In a few more years, she hopes to bring great-grandchildren.

"The faces of the kids, that's what makes me happy," she said. "You can't see anything better."

The train starts out in Shelbiana, Kentucky, where families wait in the pre-dawn. At each stop there are dozens to hundreds of people. Many crowd around the back of the train, where Santa and his helpers toss stuffed animals. Meanwhile, groups of volunteer "elves" carrying bags full of gifts fan out, making sure every child goes home with something. Each year they hand out more than 15 tons of gifts that include hats, mittens and fuzzy blankets along with board games, skate boards and teddy bears.

Donna Dougherty from Snowflake, Virginia, remembers coming to see the Santa Train as a child in nearby Fort Blackmore.

"Years back, we didn't get a lot," she said. "So back then this was kind of what we got, and we were proud of it. It meant a lot to us."

Over the years, her kids have at times received handmade gifts from the Santa Train, like crocheted hats, which they still have and cherish.

Even though it is easier for people in these isolated, rural communities to buy Christmas presents these days, Dougherty made the short trek to Fort Blackmore with her niece on Saturday, carrying on the family tradition that she is glad she can still share.

"It's really nice that they do this," she said. "It shows the true Christmas spirit."

CSX employees consider it an honor to be chosen to staff the Santa Train as volunteers. Jesse Hensley had been trying to get a spot for 35 years, ever since he met his wife, Angie, who grew up with the Santa Train in St. Paul, Virginia.

"It was such a thrill when we heard that whistle blow," she remembered. "When I was a little girl, you know, you have dreams. My dream was to ride that train. Never in my life did I ever think that I would get to."

The pair was selected to ride the train this year because they volunteered countless hours after the flooding caused by Hurricane Helene devastated their community of Erwin, Tennessee, where Jesse Hensley works as a machinist mechanic for CSX.

The Santa Train doesn't run to Erwin, but CSX added a special event this year to bring cheer to the community. Residents were invited to a holiday party with food, music, and gifts in the Erwin rail yard. Santa paid a visit on train with cars decked out in lights forming the shapes of ornaments, moving jingle bells, marching toy soldiers, and the words "Holiday Express" in giant red letters.

Two days later, Angie Hensley was all smiles on the Santa Train and nearly as excited as the children she helped distribute toys to, including grandnieces and grandnephews in St. Paul. The joy of helping on the Santa Train was even better than she had imagined, she said.

Her fellow volunteers included CSX President and CEO Joe Hinrichs, who got off at every stop, handing out toys and talking to those who had come to see the train. Hinrichs' best memory so far was at a stop a couple of years ago when a family brought a disabled child but were hanging back from the train to avoid the tussle of the crowd. Helpers cleared a path to bring the boy forward and gave him a giant teddy bear they had saved for a special occasion.

"We brought it out there, and everybody got around it, and we gave it to him. And there wasn't a dry eye anywhere," Hinrichs said. "It was a magical moment."

Without formal addresses, Indigenous communities experience voter suppression

Prism undefined

Alameda, CA (Prism)

Many Native Americans on rural reservations do not have a traditional street address, creating insurmountable barriers to voting

Chances are you've probably never heard of an "addressing coordinator," though the work these local government employees perform literally shapes communities.

This is because they're responsible for verifying and enforcing addresses, creating new locations on maps, and tracking changes to roads and road names, among other essential tasks. As the Navajo Nation's rural addressing/geographic information systems (GIS) coordinator, MC Baldwin has his work cut out for him.

For more than 24 years, a major component of Baldwin's job has been to help people obtain coordinates to map the locations of their homes -- a difficult task, given that many homes in the Navajo Nation lack a "backbone," according to the coordinator.

"We have a lot of roads of Navajo Nation that do not have official names, and we have a lot of roads and streets that are paved, but we have probably four times the amount of paved roads that are not paved," Baldwin said. "And when a road out in the rural area [is] not paved, then about 80% of the time it will not have a road name."

A home needs to be located on a street with an official name to have a physical address. This, too, is more difficult than it should be. Part of the problem, Baldwin said, is a need for more care and concern for the people in the area, which translates to a lack of financial resources and too few employees to get people the addresses they need in a timely manner.

The effect of this neglect has significant consequences for residents in rural areas -- including during presidential elections.

"The outside world, including mainly the Republicans, they are aware of our challenges, but they don't consider us," Baldwin said. "[T]hey kind of use this tool as vote suppression."

Baldwin's office provides locals with proof of residency for voter registration, but it can be a cumbersome process that creates another barrier to voting. If someone lives in a rural area without a street name, Baldwin must get the coordinates for their house and then find two of the nearest official roads on the map. If he can find at least two such roads, he measures the distance from the intersection of the two center lines to the location of the person's house.

"That way, we can say the house is located 2.75 miles northeast of road 2715 and county road 327 junction on Navajo Nation," Baldwin explained.

Google Plus Codes are also increasingly used in the Navajo Nation. These codes are made up of numbers and letters based on latitude and longitude, and they can act as addresses for places that don't have one. With a Plus Code, rural residents can receive deliveries and ensure that emergency responders and social services can find them.

Plus Codes made their way to the Navajo Nation in large part thanks to the Rural Utah Project (RUP) led by addressing specialist Daylene Redhorse.

In 2018, Redhorse conducted a voter registration drive that, in part, included checking whether voters were registered to vote in the correct precincts. While carrying out this work, she realized that her own

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precinct was incorrect and that she'd been voting in the wrong precinct. Many others in the region experienced similar issues, she said.

This realization led Redhorse to begin working with Google developers in 2019. To ensure residents were informed of their home's Plus Code address, Redhorse went door-to-door and in many cases, traveled to the most remote parts of Utah's Navajo Nation. The process of actually finding the Plus Code for each house was also tedious.

"So let's say you're looking at a map, you're looking at a house, you're going to zoom to it further, and then you're going to zoom in really close, drop a pin in the center of the roof, whatever that center or that pin, that grid that it's sitting in, that number is what would they use, that's going to be your Plus Code," Redhorse explained.

Within the first year of Redhorse's efforts, 1,600 people registered as new voters. Redhorse also made sure to re-register people with their Plus Codes if they were unsure of their registration status or voting precinct. The team finished the project late last year, identifying 5,500 addressable structures -- just in time for this year's presidential election.

Baldwin and Redhorse's efforts speak to a much larger problem: Many Native Americans -- especially those living on rural reservations -- do not have a traditional street address. In fact, sometimes they have multiple addresses: A 911 address, a utility address, and the address they give themselves, all of which are different. The lack of standard street addresses poses a major challenge when registering to vote or voting by mail.

Making matters worse, many Native American reservations also do not have full U.S. Postal Service (USPS) coverage, meaning that they are not able to receive mail directly to their homes. Voter registration, election-day voting, and vote-by-mail are nearly impossible for those lacking a residential address or access to home mail delivery, and nonexistent or unreliable mail service disrupts the delivery of timely registration forms and ballots. When combined, these systemic barriers disenfranchise Native American voters and suppress their political participation -- especially in states that rely heavily on vote-by-mail.

Voter registration forms overwhelmingly rely on standard residential addresses, which creates a challenge for many Native Americans living on reservations. According to Ronnie Jo Horse, a member of the Oglala Lakota Nation in South Dakota and a descendant of the Northern Cheyenne Nation in Montana, these communities often use P.O. boxes or descriptive direction. Horse is currently the executive director of Western Native Voice, a Native American leadership and advocacy organization that serves 12 Tribal Nations in Montana.

"Descriptive direction" is exactly how it sounds, according to Horse. Instead of an address, it's a series of directions like, "You go a mile down river road, and I live in the last white house on the right." Allison Neswood, a Navajo attorney working with the Native American Rights Fund (NARF), told Prism that voter registration forms with descriptive addresses are disproportionately rejected.

The Census Bureau uses several methods to count the U.S. population, including Type of Enumeration Area, a classification identifying how the agency obtained addresses for each census collection block. There are five different types of enumeration areas, including the category "Update Leave," which requires a personal visit to the households to drop off a

Census questionnaire for the respondent to complete and mail back. This category is more common in rural areas, though it accounts for only 4.52% of housing units in the country that "either do not have mail delivered to the physical location of the housing unit, or the mail delivery information for the housing unit cannot be verified."

A recent NARF study found a strong correlation between Native American addresses, especially on reservations, and Update Leave addresses. In Arizona, for example, a recent study found that residents off-reservation are 105 times more likely to have a standard address than residents on reservation.

The study also found this correlation to be true even for off-reservation areas that were heavily Native American.

If people do not receive mail at their house, especially on reservations, they often must travel significant

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distances to participate in the electoral process. Some Navajo Nation members travel 140 miles round trip to access postal services. Some precincts do not allow P.O. boxes or shared boxes for voter registration, and it's also worth noting that P.O. boxes can be costly.

"In the community that I lived in, it was very limited in the hours that the post office was actually open," Horse noted.

Native Americans have a 26.6% poverty rate, nearly double the national rate. On reservations and in Alaska Native villages, the poverty rate is 38.3%. Mailing a ballot on a reservation requires gas money, time, and access to a vehicle. Over 90% of reservations also lack broadband access, making it difficult for Native American voters to register online.

"So it really is this sort of layered situation, where all of these barriers add up," Neswood said.

Some states have tried to implement laws to further disenfranchise Native voters.

In Montana, HB 176 ended Election Day voter registration, which reservation voters have disproportionately relied on to cast votes in Montana. HB 530 also blocked paid third-party ballot collection, another practice relied on heavily by Native Americans living on reservations. Horse referred to these laws as "voter suppression tactics" aimed at Native American communities.

This is why Western Native Voice and Montana Native Vote challenged these laws. The Montana Supreme Court ruled that these laws made it "much more difficult on average for people living on reservations to either get to a polling place on or before election day, or to mail an absentee ballot prior to election day." However, earlier this year the state decided to review the Montana Supreme Court's decision with the U.S. Supreme Court and the case is currently ongoing.

In 2022, Arizona House Bill 2492 required voters to provide a government-issued photo ID that contains or is paired with another document that shows their current physical address. Otherwise, a prospective voter must provide two documents that contain their current physical address. More than 40,000 homes on Native American reservations across the state do not have physical addresses, and the lack of access to postal delivery also means that most residents did not have many documents featuring their name and an address corresponding with the physical location of their home.

The law was challenged by the Tohono O'odham Nation and the Gila River Indian Community, and last year the U.S. District Court ruled in their favor, finding that the proof of address requirement in Arizona's HB 2492 is preempted by the National Voter Registration Act. The court ruled that the bill's address requirements must be liberally interpreted so that voters aren't required to have a standard street address while also allowing numerous documents to satisfy the requirement, including an Arizona-issued ID listing a P.O. box or any Tribal identification document, regardless of whether it has an address. In September, however, the Supreme Court stopped the lower court's ruling that blocked election officials from automatically rejecting state voter registration forms without documentary proof of citizenship.

While the court did reject part of the request that sought to block registered Arizona voters without proof of citizenship from voting in federal elections or by mail, this also meant that voters who registered to vote using state-created voter registration forms would still need documentation proving citizenship for the registration to be valid. If no proof is provided, the state could reject the registration without informing the resident. If the court were to have granted the request to block registered voters without proof of citizenship from voting in federal elections, it could have impacted thousands of Arizona voters in this year's presidential election -- despite all Indigenous peoples being declared citizens of the U.S. in 1924.

Arizona is a swing state and it's expected to play a critical role in the 2024 election. Native voters have the potential to be a major deciding factor.

"There are way more Native American voters in states like Arizona and Wisconsin than there are votes that made up the margins in critical statewide elections," Neswood said. "Even up to the presidential election in 2020, the number of voters exceeded the margin between the winner and the loser in those states, and those states are certainly in the mix as swing states again."

From 1996 to 2020, Arizona was a Republican stronghold until President Joe Biden's presidency. Native Americans played a pivotal role in flipping the state.

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Voters in precincts on the Navajo and Hopi reservations in northeastern Arizona cast nearly 60,000 ballots in the 2020 election, 17,500 more than in 2016, according to an Associated Press analysis of election data. Biden won Arizona by 10,457 votes. Compared with a 4% uptick among all Arizona voters, participation in two of the larger precincts on the reservations heightened by 12% and 13%, respectively, with Biden securing a significant lead in these areas.

According to Neswood, a great deal of work must be done to ensure Native American voters get the information and support they need and to make sure they are not denied the time and access at the polls. Neswood said that volunteers monitoring early voting in Montana recently found that one polling location opened an hour later than its scheduled time, requiring her team to negotiate an extra hour of voting time.

Much of the focus for groups like the Native American Rights Fund is empowering voters to perform tasks many take for granted, like filling out voter registration forms and informing these voters that they can describe the location of their home on the address line or draw a map that shows where their home is located. Of course, this also means that part of their work is holding county and other election workers accountable when they incorrectly reject this information.

To Neswood, the efforts to disenfranchise Native American voters are transparent: These voters “can really have an impact all the way up to the top of the ticket,” she said.

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Please coordinate with lara@prismreports.org should you want to publish photos for this piece. This content cannot be modified, apart from rewriting the headline. To view the original version, visit: <http://prismreports.org/2024/11/05/without-formal-addresses-indigenous-communities-experience-voter-suppression/>

Syria insurgents push their advance toward 2nd largest city Aleppo

SARAH EL DEEB undefined

BEIRUT (AP) — Thousands of Syrian insurgents pushed on with their advances on government-held areas in the country’s northwest, reaching the outskirts of Syria’s second largest city Aleppo and wrestling control of several strategic towns and villages along the way, activists and fighters said Friday.

Syria’s state media said projectiles from insurgents landed in the student accommodations at Aleppo’s university in the city center, killing four people, including two students. Public transportation to the city has also been diverted from the main highway linking Aleppo to the capital Damascus to avoid clashes, state-controlled media reported.

Residents in Aleppo reported hearing sounds of missiles on the city’s outskirts.

Fighters also advanced on the town of Saraqab, in northwestern Idlib province, a strategic area that would secure supply lines to Aleppo.

This week’s advances were one of the largest by opposition factions, led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS, and comes after weeks of low simmering violence. It is most intense fighting in northwestern Syria since 2020, when government forces seized areas previously controlled by opposition fighters. It is also the largest offensive by opposition fighters on the city since they were ousted from its eastern area in 2016.

Syria’s Armed Forces said the insurgents are violating a 2019 agreement that de-escalated fighting in the area, which has been the last remaining opposition stronghold for years.

State media reported airstrikes on insurgents’ positions in Aleppo and Idlib countryside.

The war monitor Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said dozens of fighters from both sides have been killed in the battles that started Wednesday. The insurgents have seized control of more than 50 villages in their advance, which seem to have caught the government forces unprepared.

The offensive came as Iran-linked groups, who had backed Syrian government forces since 2015, have been preoccupied with their own battle at home.

Israel and Hezbollah, the lead group in the Iran-backed alliance, have been locked in a war that escalated since September. A cease-fire was announced Wednesday, the day the Syrian opposition factions announced their offensive. Israel has also escalated its attacks against Hezbollah and Iran-linked targets in Syria during the last 70 days. "Hezbollah was the main force in the government's control of the city," said Rami Abdurrahman, the head of the Observatory, the war monitor.

The insurgents reported that fighters have wrestled control of the Scientific Research Center neighborhood, about 4 kilometers (2.5 miles) from the western outskirts of Aleppo city. Government-linked media reported ongoing clashes in the area, denying the insurgents have seized it.

The Associated Press was not able to immediately verify the claims.

Insurgents posted videos online showing they were using drones in their advance, a new weapon they had not had previously in the earlier stages of their confrontation with government forces. It was not clear to what extent the drones were used on the battleground.

Turkey's state-run Anadolu Agency, reporting from Idlib, estimated that the Syrian opposition fighters have seized control of an area of some 400 square kilometers in Aleppo and Idlib province, reaching one kilometer (0.6 miles) outside of Aleppo City.

The agency also reported that the insurgents attacked a military airbase southeast of Aleppo city with drones early Friday, destroying a helicopter.

It said the opposition groups seized heavy weapons, depots and military vehicles belonging to the government forces during their advance.

Aid groups said the fighting has displaced thousands of families, and forced some services to be suspended. The opposition fighters said their offensive will allow the return of thousands of displaced people who were forced to flee government bombardment in recent weeks.

The 2016 battle for Aleppo was a turning point in the war between Syrian government forces and rebel fighters since the 2011 protests against Bashar Assad's rule turned into an all-out war.

Russia and Iran and its allied groups had helped Syrian government forces reclaim control of all of Aleppo that year, after a gruelling military campaign and a siege that lasted for weeks.

Turkey has been a main backer of an array of opposition forces and its troops have established military presence in parts of northwestern Syria. Separately and largely in the east of Syria, the United States has supported Syrian Kurdish forces fighting Islamic State militants.

Notre Dame Cathedral unveils its new interior 5 years after devastating fire

By THOMAS ADAMSON and JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — After more than five years of frenetic reconstruction work, Notre Dame Cathedral showed its new self to the world Friday, with rebuilt soaring ceilings and creamy good-as-new stonework erasing somber memories of its devastating fire in 2019.

Images broadcast live of a site visit by French President Emmanuel Macron showed the inside of the iconic cathedral as worshippers might have experienced it back in medieval times, its wide, open spaces filled with bright light on a crisp and sunny winter's day that lit up the vibrant colors of the stained glass windows.

Outside, the monument is still a construction site, with scaffolding and cranes. But the renovated interior — shown in its full glory Friday for the first time before the public is allowed back in on Dec. 8 — proved to be breathtaking.

Stonemasons fixed the ripped-open ceilings

Gone are the gaping holes that the blaze tore into the vaulted ceilings, leaving charred piles of debris. New stonework has been carefully pieced together to repair and fill the wounds that had left the cathedral's insides exposed to the elements. Delicate golden angels look on from the centerpiece of one of the rebuilt ceilings, soaring again above the transept.

The cathedral's bright, cream-colored limestone walls look brand new, cleaned not only of dust from the

fire but also of grime that had accumulated for centuries.

The cathedral attracted millions of worshippers and visitors annually before the April 15, 2019, fire forced its closure and turned the monument in the heart of Paris into a no-go zone except to artisans, architects and others mobilized for the reconstruction.

Macron entered via the cathedral's giant and intricately carved front doors and stared up at the ceilings in wonder. He was accompanied by his wife, Brigitte, the archbishop of Paris and others.

Techniques new and old deployed

Powerful vacuum cleaners were used to first remove toxic dust released when the fire melted the cathedral's lead roofs.

Fine layers of latex were then sprayed onto the surfaces and removed a few days later, taking dirt away with them. Cleaning gels were also used on some walls that had been painted, removing many years of accumulated dirt and revealing their bright colors once again.

Carpenters worked by hand like their medieval counterparts as they hewed giant oak beams to rebuild the roof and spire that collapsed like a flaming spear into the inferno. The beams show the marks of the carpenters' handiwork, with dents made on the woodwork by their hand axes.

Some 2,000 oak trees were felled to rebuild roof frameworks so dense and intricate that they are nicknamed "the forest."

It's a sneak peak ahead of the reopening

Macron's visit kicked off a series of events ushering in the reopening of the 12th-century Gothic masterpiece.

Macron will return on Dec. 7 to deliver an address and attend the consecration of the new altar during a solemn Mass the following day.

Macron's administration is hailing the reconstruction as a symbol of national unity and French can-do.

Iran to begin enriching uranium with thousands of advanced centrifuges, UN watchdog says

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran will begin enriching uranium with thousands of advanced centrifuges at its two main nuclear facilities at Fordo and Natanz, the United Nations' nuclear watchdog said Friday, further raising tensions over Tehran's program as it enriches at near weapons-grade levels.

The notice from the International Atomic Energy Agency only mentioned Iran enriching uranium with new centrifuges to 5% purity, far lower than the 60% it currently does — likely signaling that it still wants to negotiate with the West and the incoming administration of President-elect Donald Trump.

However, it remains unclear how Trump will approach Iran once he enters office, particularly as it continues to threaten to attack Israel amid its war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip and just after a ceasefire started in its campaign in Lebanon. Trump withdrew America from the accord in 2018, setting in motion a series of attacks and incidents across the wider Mideast.

Iran's mission to the United Nations did not immediately respond to a request for comment over the IAEA's report. Tehran had threatened to rapidly advance its program after the Board of Governors at the IAEA condemned Iran at a meeting in November for failing to cooperate fully with the agency.

In a statement, the IAEA outlined the plans Iran informed it of, which include feeding uranium into multiple cascades of its advanced IR-2M, IR-4 and IR-6 centrifuges.

Cascades are a group of centrifuges that spin uranium gas together to more quickly enrich the uranium. Each of these advanced classes of centrifuges enrich uranium faster than Iran's baseline IR-1 centrifuges, which have been the workhorse of the country's atomic program. The IAEA did not elaborate on how many machines would be in each cascade but Iran has put around 160 centrifuges into a single cascade in the past.

It's unclear if Iran has begun feeding the uranium yet into the centrifuges. Tehran so far has been vague about its plans. But starting the enrichment at 5% gives Tehran both leverage at negotiations with the

West and another way to dial up the pressure if they don't like what they hear. Weapons-grade levels of enrichment are around 90%.

Since the collapse of Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers following the U.S.' unilateral withdrawal from the accord in 2018, it has pursued nuclear enrichment just below weapons-grade levels. U.S. intelligence agencies and others assess that Iran has yet to begin a weapons program.

Iran, as a signatory to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, has pledged to allow the IAEA to visit its atomic sites to ensure its program is peaceful. Tehran also had agreed to additional oversight from the IAEA as part of the 2015 nuclear deal, which saw sanctions lifted in exchange for drastically limiting its program.

However, for years Iran has curtailed inspectors' access to sites while also not fully answering questions about other sites where nuclear material has been found in the past after the deal's collapse.

Iranian officials in recent months, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and reformist President Masoud Pezeshkian, had signaled a willingness to negotiate with the West. But Iran also has launched two attacks on Israel amid the war.

Kazem Gharibabadi, an Iranian diplomat, said in a post on the social platform that he met with EU diplomat Enrique Mora, criticizing Europe as being "self-centered" while having "irresponsible behavior."

"With regard to the nuclear issue of Iran, Europe has failed to be a serious player due to lack of self-confidence and responsibility," Gharibabadi wrote.

For his part, Mora described having a "frank discussion" with Gharibabadi and another Iranian diplomat. Those talks included "Iran's military support to Russia that has to stop, the nuclear issue that needs a diplomatic solution, regional tensions (important to avoid further escalation from all sides) and human rights," he wrote on X.

Ukrainian energy workers carry out repairs despite Russia's pounding of the country's power grid

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

On a bright winter day, workers at a Ukrainian thermal power plant repair its heavily damaged equipment as drops of water from melted snow leak through gaping holes in its battered roof.

Several weeks earlier, the facility was targeted by a Russian air attack that left scorch marks, shrapnel scars on the walls, and missile fragments scattered across the production floor.

"This is our life now. Workers at a thermal power plant that's supposed to produce electricity are walking on frozen floors and using firewood to keep warm," Oleksandr, 52, head of the Production Management Department, told The Associated Press. He spoke on condition that only his first name be used citing security concerns.

Repeated Russian strikes on infrastructure have seriously impacted Ukraine's energy sector often resulting in rolling blackouts across the country. On Thursday, Moscow launched another large-scale air attack. Ukrainian authorities said nearly 200 drones and missiles targeted infrastructure, disrupting power supply to more than a million people.

The scale of the ongoing work to fix the sector is huge. Since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, the G7 and other allied countries have allocated more than \$4 billion in energy assistance to Ukraine, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in September.

Oleksandr, who works at the power plant operated by Ukraine's largest private energy company, DTEK, says since the station was first attacked in November 2022, it has been unable to return to full capacity due to continuous strikes that have left critical equipment in ruins. The exact location of the plant visited by the AP, details on the damage and even workers' last names cannot be disclosed for fear this information could help Russia coordinate future attacks.

DTEK operated around 20% of Ukraine's electricity production before the full-scale invasion, but this figure dropped to 12% since the war broke out. The company says its facilities have been attacked by Russia almost 200 times since 2022. They also say nearly 90% of the company's infrastructure was destroyed or

suffered damage and that was before Russia launched its large-scale attack on Nov 17.

Oleksandr says he expects repairs at the station to continue through the winter into next year, and potentially far beyond. Repair efforts at the plant are further complicated by the fact that some critical equipment was manufactured in the Soviet Union and finding parts is now difficult. To mitigate this, some former Soviet countries who are now Ukraine's allies have helped supply equipment.

"Potentially, Western countries could also help us with equipment, but their power grids have different characteristics," Oleksandr said.

Only half of DTEK's generating capacities have been restored since the first attacks on its plants in November 2022 until the latest large-scale strike. Earlier this week, the European Commission and the U.S. government announced a donation of \$112 million in equipment and construction materials to help DTEK prepare for the winter.

With the war in its third year, staff at DTEK's plant have adapted to the grim reality of their day-to-day existence. They know the protocols by heart. Not everyone can take shelter during an air alert. A minimal crew must remain in the control room to oversee operations, putting themselves at risk of a direct strike.

"You have to sit and wait while monitoring the trajectories of whatever was fired, but the power units keep working so we cannot just leave, we stay in the control room," said Dmytro, 41, a power unit operator at the plant.

Despite the challenges, Dmytro and his colleagues press on, driven by a mission to keep the lights on in their town and region over the winter months.

"Who'll do it, if not us? I also have family waiting for me at home, but if we all leave and the equipment breaks down, the responsibility will be on our shoulders, the entire city will lose electricity and heating," he said.

"Some are risking (their lives) at the frontline, while we here have our own energy front."

Russian defense minister visits North Korea for talks with military and political leaders

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov arrived in North Korea on Friday for talks with North Korean military and political leaders as the countries deepen their cooperation over Russia's war in Ukraine.

In announcing the visit, Russia's Defense Ministry didn't say whom Belousov would meet or the purpose of the talks. North Korean state media didn't immediately confirm the visit.

Belousov, a former economist, replaced Sergei Shoigu as defense minister in May after Russian President Vladimir Putin started a fifth term in power.

Photos released by the Defense Ministry showed Belousov walking alongside North Korean Defense Minister No Kwang Chol on a red carpet at a Pyongyang airport. North Korean military officials were seen clapping under a banner that read, "Complete support and solidarity with the fighting Russian army and people."

Belousov noted after his arrival that military cooperation between the countries is expanding. He applauded a strategic partnership agreement signed by Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un following their June meeting in Pyongyang, which he said is aimed at reducing tensions by maintaining a "balance of power" in the region and lowering the risk of war, including with nuclear weapons.

The June meeting demonstrated the "highest level of mutual trust" between the leaders, Belousov said, and "also the mutual desire of our countries to further expand mutually beneficial cooperation in a complex international environment."

North Korean Defense Minister No also praised the expanding cooperation between the countries' militaries and reiterated North Korea's support for Russia's war in Ukraine, describing it as a "just struggle to protect the country's sovereign rights and security interests."

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The visit comes days after South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol met with a Ukrainian delegation led by Defense Minister Rustem Umerov in the South Korean capital, Seoul, and called for the two countries to formulate countermeasures in response to North Korea's dispatch of thousands of troops to Russia to help its fight against Ukraine.

Kim in recent months has prioritized relations with Russia as he tries to break out of isolation and strengthen his international footing, embracing the idea of a "new Cold War."

The United States and its allies have said North Korea has sent more than 10,000 soldiers to Russia in recent weeks and that some of those troops were engaging in combat.

North Korea has also been accused of supplying artillery systems, missiles and other military equipment to Russia that may help Putin further extend an almost three-year war. There are also concerns in Seoul that North Korea, in exchange for its troops and arms supplies, could receive Russian technology transfers that could improve its nuclear weapons and missile programs.

"The Russian defense minister doesn't visit North Korea just to celebrate bilateral ties," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul. "This visit indicates Putin and Kim's military cooperation in violation of international law is about to increase further."

Yoon's national security adviser, Shin Wonsik, said in a TV interview last week that Seoul believes that Russia has provided air defense missile systems to North Korea in exchange for sending its troops.

Shin said Russia also appears to have given economic assistance to North Korea and various military technologies, including those needed for the North's efforts to build a reliable space-based surveillance system, which Kim has stressed is crucial for enhancing the threat of nuclear-capable missiles targeting South Korea. Shin didn't say whether Russia has already transferred sensitive nuclear weapons and ballistic missile technologies to North Korea.

Yoon's office hasn't said whether the two governments discussed the possibility of South Korea supplying weapons to Ukraine in his talks with Umerov.

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, South Korea has joined U.S.-led sanctions against Moscow and provided humanitarian and financial support to Kyiv. But it has avoided directly supplying arms, citing a longstanding policy of not giving lethal weapons to countries actively engaged in conflicts.

Yoon has said his government will take phased countermeasures, linking the level of its response to the degree of Russian-North Korean cooperation.

It wasn't immediately clear whether Belousov will meet with Kim, the North Korean leader. Last year, Kim hosted a Russian delegation led by then-Defense Minister Shoigu and gave him a personal tour of a North Korean arms exhibition, in what outside critics likened to a sales pitch.

That event came weeks before Kim traveled to Russia for talks with Putin which sped up military cooperation between the countries. During another meeting in Pyongyang in June this year, Kim and Putin signed a pact stipulating mutual military assistance if either country is attacked, in what was considered the two countries' biggest defense deal since the end of the Cold War.

The Russian report about Belousov's visit came as South Korea scrambled fighter jets to repel six Russian and five Chinese warplanes that temporarily entered the country's air defense identification zone around its eastern and southern seas, according to the South's Joint Chiefs of Staff. It said the Russian and Chinese planes did not breach South Korea's territorial airspace.

South Korea's Defense Ministry said it held telephone calls with Chinese and Russian defense attaches based in Seoul to protest the flights and urge the countries to prevent recurrences. ___ Associated Press writer Emma Burrows in London contributed to this report.

Ireland votes in a close-run election where incumbents hope to cling on to power

By JILL LAWLESS and PETER MORRISON Associated Press

DUBLIN (AP) — Ireland is voting Friday in a parliamentary election that will decide the next government — and will show whether Ireland bucks the global trend of incumbents being ousted by disgruntled voters

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after years of pandemic, international instability and a cost-of-living pressures.

Polls opened at 7 a.m.. (0700GMT), and Ireland's 3.8 million voters are selecting 174 lawmakers to sit in the Dail, the lower house of parliament.

Here's a look at the parties, the issues and the likely outcome.

Who's running?

The outgoing government was led by the two parties who have dominated Irish politics for the past century: Fine Gael and Fianna Fail. They have similar center-right policies but are longtime rivals with origins on opposing sides of Ireland's 1920s civil war.

After the 2020 election ended in a virtual dead heat they formed a coalition, agreeing to share Cabinet posts and take turns as taoiseach, or prime minister. Fianna Fail leader Micheál Martin served as premier for the first half of the term and was replaced by Fine Gael's Leo Varadkar in December 2022. Varadkar unexpectedly stepped down in March, passing the job to current Taoiseach Simon Harris.

Opposition party Sinn Fein achieved a stunning breakthrough in the 2020 election, topping the popular vote, but was shut out of government because Fianna Fail and Fine Gael refused to work with it, citing its leftist policies and historic ties with militant group the Irish Republican Army during three decades of violence in Northern Ireland.

Under Ireland's system of proportional representation, each of the 43 constituencies elects multiple lawmakers, with voters ranking their preferences. That makes it relatively easy for smaller parties and independent candidates with a strong local following to gain seats.

This election includes a large crop of independent candidates, ranging from local campaigners to far-right activists and reputed crime boss Gerry "the Monk" Hutch.

What are the main issues?

As in many other countries, the cost of living — especially housing — has dominated the campaign. Ireland has an acute housing shortage, the legacy of failing to build enough new homes during the country's "Celtic Tiger" boom years and the economic slump that followed the 2008 global financial crisis.

"There was not building during the crisis, and when the crisis receded, offices and hotels were built first," said John-Mark McCafferty, chief executive of housing and homelessness charity Threshold.

The result is soaring house prices, rising rents and growing homelessness.

After a decade of economic growth, McCafferty said "Ireland has resources" — not least 13 billion euros (\$13.6 billion) in back taxes the European Union has ordered Apple to pay it — "but it is trying to address big historic infrastructural deficits."

Tangled up with the housing issue is immigration, a fairly recent challenge to a country long defined by emigration. Recent arrivals include more than 100,000 Ukrainians displaced by war and thousands of people fleeing poverty and conflict in the Middle East and Africa.

This country of 5.4 million has struggled to house all the asylum-seekers, leading to tent camps and makeshift accommodation centers that have attracted tension and protests. A stabbing attack on children outside a Dublin school a year ago, in which an Algerian man has been charged, sparked the worst rioting Ireland had seen in decades.

Unlike many European countries, Ireland does not have a significant far-right party, but far-right voices on social media seek to drum up hostility to migrants, and anti-immigrant independent candidates are hoping for election in several districts. The issue appears to be hitting support for Sinn Fein, as working-class supporters bristled at its pro-immigration policies.

What's the likely outcome?

Opinion polls suggest voters' support is split into five roughly even chunks — for Fine Gael, Fianna Fail, Sinn Fein, several smaller parties and an assortment of independents.

Fine Gael has run a gaffe-prone campaign, Fianna Fail has remained steady in the polls and Sinn Fein says it has momentum, but is unlikely to win power unless the other parties drop their opposition to working with it.

Analysts say the most likely outcome is another Fine Gael-Fianna Fail coalition, possibly with a smaller

party or a clutch of independents as kingmakers.

"It's just a question of which minor group is going to be the group that supports the government this time," said Eoin O'Malley, a political scientist at Dublin City University. "Coalition-forming is about putting a hue on what is essentially the same middle-of-the-road government every time."

When will we know the results?

Polls close Friday at 10 p.m. (2200GMT), when an exit poll will give the first hints about the result. Counting ballots begins on Saturday morning. Full results could take several days, and forming a government days or weeks after that.

Harris, who cast his vote in Delgany, south of Dublin, said Irish voters and politicians have "got a long few days ahead of us."

"Isn't it the beauty and the complexity of our system that when the clock strikes 10 o'clock tonight, there'll be an exit poll but that won't even tell us the outcome of the election," he said.

Stripped of citizenship, these Nicaraguans live in limbo scattered across the world

By MEGAN JANETSKY and SONIA PERÉZ D. Associated Press

GUATEMALA CITY (AP) — Sergio Mena's life dissolved in hours.

After years resisting President Daniel Ortega, the rural activist fled Nicaragua in 2018, joining thousands of protesters fleeing a yearslong crackdown on dissent.

Mena returned from exile in neighboring Costa Rica in 2021 to continue protesting, only to be thrown in a prison where he said jailers hung prisoners by their feet and shocked them with electricity.

"We were tortured all the time, physically and psychologically, from the moment we arrived until the very last day," said Mena, 40.

Now in exile in Guatemala, Mena may be out of prison but he's far from free. Upon their release, he and hundreds of religious leaders, students, activists, dissidents and journalists were rendered "stateless" — stripped of their citizenship, homes and government pensions.

The United Nations says that they're among 4.4 million stateless people worldwide who struggle to find jobs, education and healthcare or even open bank accounts or marry without valid ID documents.

"Statelessness is torture," said Karina Ambartsoumian-Clough executive director of United Stateless, a U.S.-based organization advocating for the stateless. "You just legally cease to exist, even if you're here physically as a human."

Free but unfree

In September, Ortega's government loaded Mena and 134 other prisoners onto the flight that took them to Guatemala. They joined 317 others whom the government has deemed adversaries who no longer deserve legal Nicaraguan identities.

The Associated Press spoke to more than 24 Nicaraguan exiles who have been stripped of their citizenship and are trying to chart paths forward. They're scattered across the United States, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Mexico and Spain in limbo as they struggle to recover from physical and psychological trauma, extending the torture many suffered in Nicaragua.

The Ortega government did not respond to a request for comment by the AP.

The agony of statelessness

The majority of stateless people worldwide are born to refugees and migrants in countries that don't offer birthright citizenship, the right to become a citizen if you're born within a country's territory.

Many Nicaraguans struggle to scrape together enough money to feed themselves. Others hide away in fear that the Nicaraguan government will someday come for them. Many more reel from watching their lives go up in smoke. For those stranded in the U.S. or seeking respite there, President-elect Donald Trump's promises to crack down on immigration and asylum have added more uncertainty.

Intensifying repression

Ortega's government began stripping people of their citizenship early last year.

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It was in that crackdown that Mena, the member of a rural activist movement, said he was imprisoned. The government claimed that he had participated in drug trafficking and organized crime, which he denies.

In February 2023, the government broke international law when it began sending prisoners to the U.S. and most recently to Guatemala. Others in exile were stripped of their citizenship without ever having been jailed.

Torment beyond borders

The Nicaraguan government has not explained why it released Mena and other people from prison, although experts have speculated about the desire to duck international criticism and the costs involved while continuing to maintain a grip on enemies.

Mena lives in a hotel in Guatemala City, where he flips through photos of a crumbling jail, scraps of food and his bruised, beaten body – indelible memories of more than two years in prison. His life is painted by constant fear.

“The tentacles of (the Nicaraguan government) still reach here,” he said with tears in his eyes.

The Biden administration has offered the Nicaraguans temporary protections and Mena hopes the U.S. government will grant him asylum, but such protections are likely to vanish or be severely restricted under Trump. The Spanish government has offered to provide nationality to some of the stateless exiles, but few have the resources needed to build a new life in Spain, or are confused about the process.

Stateless struggle

Allan Bermudez, 54, was a university professor in Nicaragua. He was imprisoned after accusations that he was conspiring against the government as Ortega identified universities as hotbeds for antigovernment protests.

In February 2023, he was among 222 prisoners loaded onto a flight to the United States with no idea where they were going. While the U.S. government provided Bermudez and others with temporary support, a few days at a hotel, a new phone, \$400 and limited access to aid from a group of NGOs, help has since dried up.

Today, Bermudez, who has multiple advanced degrees, works at a Dunkin’ Donuts on the fringes of Salisbury, Maryland, struggling to pick up hours.

He rents a small room, suffers from chronic heart problems and post-traumatic stress disorder, and has no medical care.

“I haven’t bought my medicine, because if I do, I’ll have nothing to eat,” he said.

Back in Nicaragua, his mother had stroke this year. He’s struggled to send money home. With his daughter and wife also back home, he’s plagued with anxiety and depression.

He applied for asylum in February after living in the U.S. under humanitarian parole offered by the Biden administration, but said he hasn’t heard back. He’s put all his hopes into building a life in the U.S. and doesn’t know what he’ll do if asylum doesn’t come through.

“I can’t leave, I have my hands tied,” he said. “All I can do is pray that God helps me.”

Lives upended

Like Bermudez, hundreds of thousands have fled Nicaragua. Thousands of civil society organizations have been shuttered, their assets seized as the government seeks to silence any dissent.

While many of the Nicaraguan exiles hope to one day return to their country, 82-year-old Moises Hassan has given up hope as he hides away in a town in the mountains of Costa Rica.

Hassan was once a guerrilla fighter against the Anastasio Somoza dictatorship and then, alongside Ortega, a member of the junta that succeeded it. He built a family and a home with thousands of books, and planned to live out the rest of his days there.

He was elected mayor of the capital, Managua, but saw his life and hopes sour when he began to criticize Ortega’s anti-democratic moves. He fled the country in 2021. While on a trip to visit his daughter he heard the government was detaining critics, and knew they would come for him.

It was no surprise when his name appeared on a list of people who were stripped of their citizenship and home and called traitors.

"The message is ... 'Don't think that just because you're out of the country that you're out of our reach,'" he said.

But he said that with his pension seized along with his belongings, it has been a shock to depend on money from his children.

He and his wife remain in their corner of Costa Rica, too scared to even go to the capital, where they worry Ortega's agents could track them down.

"I feel like I'm under house arrest," he said, cradling his worn, now useless Nicaraguan passport. "I'm a prisoner in my own home."

China's aging population fuels 'silver economy' boom, but profits can prove elusive

By KANIS LEUNG Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Every Wednesday, retiree Zhang Zhili travels an hour by bus to an education center, drawn by the pulsing rhythms of the African drum she plays there in a classroom filled with fellow retirees whose hands move in unison, every beat lifting her spirits.

Zhang, 71, has found joy and new friends at the "elderly university" in Beijing. Besides African drums, the former primary school teacher joins social dance classes, paying about 2,000 yuan (\$280) for two courses this semester. Seeing herself standing tall in dance class boosts her confidence. After class, she hangs out with her friends.

"When we get old, what do we need?" she said. "To love ourselves."

Many older Chinese are looking beyond traditional nursing homes, afraid of abandonment by their families and quality issues. That's driving a boom in universities, home care services, and communities catering to older adults. Though some providers struggle to turn a profit, they persist because they see promise in the growing market.

China has a rapidly aging population. Last year, about 297 million people were aged 60 or above, over one-fifth of the population. By 2035, this number is forecast to exceed 400 million, or over 30% of all Chinese.

That's fueling growth in services and products aimed at older adults in what Beijing calls the silver economy, which is projected to balloon from about 7 trillion yuan (about \$982 billion) currently to approximately 30 trillion yuan (about \$4.2 trillion) in 2035, raising its share in the economy from about 6% to roughly 10%, Hu Zuquan, a researcher at the State Information Center, a public institution affiliated with China's main planning agency, told state media.

Du Peng, dean of the school of population and health at Beijing's Renmin University, said the government is expanding basic care services to all older people who need them, moving beyond its traditional focus on those without family support. Last year, officials compiled a list of basic care services they aim to make available nationwide, including providing ability assessments for those over 65 and care training subsidies for family members of those who are disabled.

Filial piety runs deep in China and most older people prefer aging at home with family after they retire, typically when they're 50 to 60 years old, one of the youngest retirement ages among the world's major economies. Many help care for their grandchildren, and for some, nursing homes are seen as a kind of abandonment, except in cases of serious disability.

In January, Beijing issued new guidelines calling for expanding home care services and meal deliveries and more clothing, food and tech products tailored for older adults. They include enriching their lives through education.

Home-based services offer a more affordable alternative to nursing homes, alleviating accommodation costs, Du said. Most older Chinese are relatively healthy, and these able people perhaps need richer cultural lives rather than disability care, he said.

Cai Guixia, 60, said she has found fulfillment in African drumming and modeling classes. She thinks she

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would feel "forsaken" in a conventional nursing home, preferring to hire a domestic helper.

Liu Xiuqin, an owner of two care homes, saw business opportunities in meeting those needs.

She invested more than 800,000 yuan (about \$112,000) to open a school in Beijing. Cai and Zhang are among its 150 students attending classes in dance, singing, yoga and modeling training for about 1,000 yuan (\$140) per course each semester. Outside the classroom, her team organizes gatherings where students can socialize.

Liu expects to break even in another year and is prepared for the wait. She believes in the market's future, given that the generation born in the 1960s and later values quality of life and health more than their parents did.

"It's not about making quick money," she said. "It requires persistence."

Turning a profit is proving challenging for some silver economy businesses.

In the southern city of Guangzhou, Wu Tang co-founded a school last year after his geotechnical investigation and surveying business was hit by the downturn in China's property market. His school offers courses to help people achieve some of their childhood dreams, but he has yet to cover his costs. He also faces competition from cheaper government-run courses.

And there's Cui Yang, who runs a care station in Beijing, sending helpers zigzagging across the district to provide 30 yuan (\$4.20) haircuts at home; accompanying people on hospital visits for 50 yuan (\$7) per hour and other services. Even with government subsidies including free rent, Cui is losing money. Without the subsidies, the business would fail, she said.

The struggles aren't limited to small operators.

Wu Wenjing heads the home care department of a healthcare subsidiary of state-owned financial conglomerate China Everbright Group in southwest China's Chongqing. It has been in the red for 13 straight years, spending 5 million yuan (about \$702,000) annually and still losing 1 million (about \$140,000) a year, she said.

Wu's business employs 70 workers who visit homes as caregivers, rehabilitation therapists and psychotherapists. The industry is competitive and it has a high turnover rate given the difficulties of working alone in clients' homes. Wu hopes to break even in five years, and is delighted about the government's efforts to grow the silver economy.

"The spring of China's elderly care business has finally come," she said.

Various companies are looking to grab a slice of this government-backed market. Property developers like Vanke Co. and Sino-Ocean Group and insurance companies such as Taikang Insurance Group have built high-end communities for older adults with amenities such as movie-screening and mahjong rooms and dining services.

China's also working to tackle the problem of dementia, providing cognitive screening tests and training staff who work in memory clinics or as social workers. Several Chinese pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies are working on drugs targeting Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia.

Some vacant schools and kindergartens -- casualties of the country's declining birthrate -- are meanwhile being transformed into care facilities for older people.

Government efforts to back the silver economy are paying off: official data showed the country had 410,000 care facilities by June, double the number in 2019.

Still, questions remain about the spending power of many older Chinese.

A 2021 national survey co-conducted by China's Civil Affairs Ministry found older adults had a median annual income of 11,400 yuan (\$1,574). In rural areas it was less than half of that. More than one in 10 older Chinese are living in poverty, with living standards much lower in rural areas and western China, according to data from surveys conducted by Peking University.

China's silver economy is still in its infancy, said Gary Ng, a senior economist at Natixis Corporate and Investment Banking.

If they lack enough insurance to cover medical and other expenses, many older Chinese must set aside funds for such costs, limiting their spending capacity, he said, and it takes time to build industries producing senior-focused products and people trained to provide such services. Tax incentives and investments

in training a skilled workforce would help, he said.

"There are prospects here, but it seems there's still much that needs to be done," he said.

Desertion threatens to starve Ukraine's forces at a crucial time in its war with Russia

By SAMYA KULLAB and VOLODYMYR YURCHUK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Desertion is starving the Ukrainian army of desperately needed manpower and crippling its battle plans at a crucial time in its war with Russia, which could put Kyiv at a clear disadvantage in future ceasefire talks.

Facing every imaginable shortage, tens of thousands of Ukrainian troops, tired and bereft, have walked away from combat and front-line positions to slide into anonymity, according to soldiers, lawyers and Ukrainian officials. Entire units have abandoned their posts, leaving defensive lines vulnerable and accelerating territorial losses, according to military commanders and soldiers.

Some take medical leave and never return, haunted by the traumas of war and demoralized by bleak prospects for victory. Others clash with commanders and refuse to carry out orders, sometimes in the middle of firefights.

"This problem is critical," said Oleksandr Kovalenko, a Kyiv-based military analyst. "This is the third year of war, and this problem will only grow."

Although Moscow has also been dealing with desertions, Ukrainians going AWOL have laid bare deeply rooted problems bedeviling their military and how Kyiv is managing the war, from the flawed mobilization drive to the overstretching and hollowing out of front-line units. It comes as the U.S. urges Ukraine to draft more troops, and allow for the conscription of those as young as 18.

The Associated Press spoke to two deserters, three lawyers, and a dozen Ukrainian officials and military commanders. Officials and commanders spoke on condition of anonymity to divulge classified information, while one deserter did so because he feared prosecution.

"It is clear that now, frankly speaking, we have already squeezed the maximum out of our people," said an officer with the 72nd Brigade, who noted that desertion was one of the main reasons Ukraine lost the town of Vuhledar in October.

The troops who walk away

More than 100,000 soldiers have been charged under Ukraine's desertion laws since Russia invaded in February 2022, according to the country's General Prosecutor's Office.

Nearly half have gone AWOL in the last year alone, after Kyiv launched an aggressive and controversial mobilization drive that government officials and military commanders concede has largely failed.

It's a staggeringly high number by any measure, as there were an estimated 300,000 Ukrainian soldiers engaged in combat before the mobilization drive began. And the actual number of deserters may be much higher. One lawmaker with knowledge of military matters estimated it could be as high as 200,000.

Many deserters don't return after being granted medical leave. Bone-tired by the constancy of war, they are psychologically and emotionally scarred. They feel guilt about being unable to summon the will to fight, anger over how the war effort is being led, and frustration that it seems unwinnable.

"Being quiet about a huge problem only harms our country," said Serhii Hnezdilov, one of few soldiers to speak publicly about his choice to desert. He was charged shortly after the AP interviewed him in September.

Another deserter said he initially left his infantry unit with permission because he needed surgery. By the time his leave was up, he couldn't bring himself to return.

He still has nightmares about the comrades he saw get killed.

"The best way to explain it is imagining you are sitting under incoming fire and from their (Russian) side, it's 50 shells coming toward you, while from our side, it's just one. Then you see how your friends are getting torn to pieces, and you realize that any second, it can happen to you," he said.

"Meanwhile guys (Ukrainian soldiers) 10 kilometers (6 miles) away order you on the radio: 'Go on, brace yourselves. Everything will be fine,'" he said.

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Hnezdilov also left to seek medical help. Before undergoing surgery, he announced he was deserting. He said after five years of military service, he saw no hope of ever being demobilized, despite earlier promises by the country's leadership.

"If there's no end term (to military service), it turns into a prison – it becomes psychologically hard to find reasons to defend this country," Hnezdilov said.

A growing problem for Kyiv

Desertion has turned battle plans into sand that slips through military commanders' fingertips.

The AP learned of cases in which defensive lines were severely compromised because entire units defied orders and abandoned their positions.

"Because of a lack of political will and poor management of troops, especially in the infantry, we certainly are not moving in a direction to properly defend the territories that we control now," Hnezdilov said.

Ukraine's military recorded a deficit of 4,000 troops on the front in September owing largely to deaths, injuries and desertions, according to a lawmaker. Most deserters were among recent recruits.

The head of one brigade's legal service who is in charge of processing desertion cases and forwarding them to law enforcement said he's had many of them.

"The main thing is that they leave combat positions during hostilities and their comrades die because of it. We had several situations when units fled, small or large. They exposed their flanks, and the enemy came to these flanks and killed their brothers in arms, because those who stood on the positions did not know that there was no one else around," the official said.

That is how Vuhledar, a hilltop town that Ukraine defended for two years, was lost in a matter of weeks in October, said the 72nd Brigade officer, who was among the very last to withdraw.

The 72nd was already stretched thin in the weeks before Vuhledar fell. Only one line battalion and two rifle battalions held the town near the end, and military leaders even began pulling units from them to support the flanks, the officer said. There should have been 120 men in each of the battalion's companies, but some companies' ranks dropped to only 10 due to deaths, injuries and desertions, he said. About 20% of the soldiers missing from those companies had gone AWOL.

"The percentage has grown exponentially every month," he added.

Reinforcements were sent once Russia wised up to Ukraine's weakened position and attacked. But then the reinforcements also left, the officer said. Because of this, when one of the 72nd Brigade battalions withdrew, its members were gunned down because they didn't know no one was covering them, he said.

Still, the officer harbors no ill will toward deserters.

"At this stage, I do not condemn any of the soldiers from my battalion and others. ... Because everyone is just really tired," he said.

Charging deserters

Prosecutors and the military would rather not press charges against AWOL soldiers and do so only if they fail to persuade them to return, according to three military officers and a spokesperson for Ukraine's State Investigative Bureau. Some deserters return, only to leave again.

Ukraine's General Staff said soldiers are given psychological support, but it didn't respond to emailed questions about the toll desertions are having on the battlefield.

Once soldiers are charged, defending them is tricky, said two lawyers who take such cases. They focus on their clients' psychological state when they left.

"People cannot psychologically cope with the situation they are in, and they are not provided with psychological help," said attorney Tetyana Ivanova.

Soldiers acquitted of desertion due to psychological reasons set a dangerous precedent because "then almost everyone is justified (to leave), because there are almost no healthy people left (in the infantry)," she said.

Soldiers considering deserting have sought her advice. Several were being sent to fight near Vuhledar.

"They would not have taken the territory, they would not have conquered anything, but no one would have returned," she said.

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Retailers bank on Black Friday to energize bargain-hungry holiday shoppers

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Retail Writer
NEW YORK (AP) — It's show time.

After weeks of pushing early deals, retailers in the United States and some other countries are promising bigger discounts on Black Friday, the sales event that still reigns as the unofficial kickoff of the holiday shopping season even if it's lost some luster.

Department stores, shopping malls and merchants — big and small — see the day after Thanksgiving as a way to energize shoppers and to get them into physical stores at a time when many gift-seekers do the bulk of their browsing and buying online.

Enough traditionalists must still be around, because Black Friday remains the biggest day of the year for retail foot traffic in the U.S., according to retail technology company Sensormatic Solutions.

"Black Friday is still an incredibly important day for retailers," Grant Gustafson, head of retail consulting and analytics at Sensormatic, said. "It's important for them to be able to get shoppers into their store to show them that experience of what it's like to browse and touch and feel items. It also can be a bellwether for retailers on what to expect for the rest of the holiday season."

In the U.S., analysts envision a solid holiday shopping season, though perhaps not as robust as last year's, with many shoppers under financial pressure and cautious with their discretionary spending despite the easing of inflation.

Retailers will be even more under the gun to get shoppers in to buy early and in bulk since there are five fewer days between Thanksgiving and Christmas this year.

Mall of America, in Bloomington, Minnesota, hopes to surpass the 12,000 shoppers who arrived last year within the first hour of the giant shopping center's 7 a.m. opening. This year, the mall is giving the first 200 people in line at the center's north entrance a \$25 gift card.

"People come to get the deals, but more importantly, they come for the excitement, the energy, the traditions surrounding Black Friday," Jill Renslow, Mall of America's chief business development and marketing officer, said.

Target is offering an exclusive book devoted to Taylor Swift's Eras Tour and a bonus edition of her "The Tortured Poets Department: The Anthology" album that only will be available in stores on Black Friday before customers can buy them online starting Saturday.

Best Buy has introduced an extended-release version of the doorbuster, the limited-time daily discounts that for years were all the rage — and sometimes the spark for actual brawls. The nation's largest consumer electronics chain has released doorbuster deals every Friday since Nov. 8 and plans to continue the weekly promotion through Dec. 20.

"(Stores) are very hungry for Black Friday to do well," Marshal Cohen, chief retail advisor at market research firm Circana, said. "They recognize that they're not going to clobber and win big growth in online because the pie has gotten so competitive. They have to find a way to win in the stores."

Impulse purchases and self-gifting are a potential area for big sales growth, and business isn't going to increase without them, Cohen said. Shoppers are three times more likely to buy on impulse at a physical store than online, according to Circana research.

The National Retail Federation predicted that shoppers would increase their spending in November and December by between 2.5% and 3.5% over the same period a year ago. During the 2023 holiday shopping season, spending increased 3.9% over 2022.

So far this holiday season, online sales have beaten expectations, according to Adobe Digital Insights, a division of software company Adobe. U.S. consumers spent \$77.4 billion online from Nov. 1 to Nov. 24, 9.6% more than during the same period last year. Adobe predicted an 8.4% increase for the full season.

Despite the early sales, better bargains are coming with Black Friday, according to Adobe. Analysts consider the five-day Black Friday weekend, which includes Cyber Monday, a key barometer of shoppers' willingness to spend for the rest of the season.

Vivek Pandya, the lead analyst at Adobe Digital Insights, said shoppers are paying more attention to discounts than last year, and their focus on bargain-hunting will drive what sells and when.

For example, Thanksgiving Day is the best time to shop online to get the deepest discount on sporting goods, toys, furniture and appliances, according to Adobe's analysis. But Black Friday is the best time to buy TVs online. People shopping for televisions earlier in the season found discounts that averaged 10.8%, while waiting until this Friday is expected to yield 24% discounts, Adobe Digital Insights said.

Cyber Monday, however, is expected to be the best time to buy clothing and gadgets like phones and computers online. Electronics discounts peaked at 10.9% off the suggested manufacturer's price between Nov. 1 and Nov. 24 but are expected to hit 30% off on Cyber Monday, Adobe said.

Across the board, Black Friday weekend discounts should peak at 30% on Cyber Monday and then go down to around 15%, according to Adobe's research.

Donald Trump's call for 'energy dominance' is likely to run into real-world limits

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump is set to create a National Energy Council that he says will establish American "energy dominance" around the world as he seeks to boost U.S. oil and gas drilling and move away from President Joe Biden's focus on climate change.

The energy council — to be led by North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum, Trump's choice to head the Interior Department — will be key in Trump's pledge to "drill, drill, drill" and sell more oil and other energy sources to allies in Europe and around the globe.

The new council will be granted sweeping authority over federal agencies involved in energy permitting, production, generation, distribution, regulation and transportation, with a mandate to cut bureaucratic red tape, enhance private sector investments and focus on innovation instead of "totally unnecessary regulation," Trump said.

But the president-elect's energy wishes are likely to run into real-world limits. For one, U.S. oil production under Biden is already at record levels. The federal government cannot force companies to drill for more oil, and production increases could lower prices and reduce profits.

A call for energy dominance — a term Trump also used in his first term as president — "is an opportunity, not a requirement," for the oil industry to move forward on drilling projects under terms that are likely to be more favorable to industry than those offered by Biden, said energy analyst Kevin Book.

Whether Trump achieves energy dominance — however he defines it — "comes down to decisions by private companies, based on how they see supply-demand balances in the global marketplace," said Book, managing partner at ClearView Energy Partners, a Washington research firm. Don't expect an immediate influx of new oil rigs dotting the national landscape, he said.

Trump's bid to boost oil supplies — and lower U.S. prices — is complicated by his threat this week to impose 25% import tariffs on Canada and Mexico, two of the largest sources of U.S. oil imports. U.S. The oil industry warned the tariffs could raise prices and even harm national security.

"Canada and Mexico are our top energy trading partners, and maintaining the free flow of energy products across our borders is critical for North American energy security and U.S. consumers," said Scott Laueremann, speaking for the American Petroleum Institute, the oil industry's top lobbying group.

American Fuel & Petrochemical Manufacturers, which represents U.S. refineries, also opposes potential tariffs, saying in a statement that "American refiners depend on crude oil from Canada and Mexico to produce the affordable, reliable fuels consumers count on every day."

Scott Segal, a former Bush administration official, said the idea of centering energy decisions at the White House follows an example set by Biden, who named a trio of White House advisers to lead on climate policy. Segal, a partner at the law and policy law firm Bracewell, called Burgum "a steady hand on the tiller" with experience in fossil fuels and renewables.

And unlike Biden's climate advisers — Gina McCarthy, John Podesta and Ali Zaidi — Burgum will probably take his White House post as a Senate-confirmed Cabinet member, Segal said.

Dustin Meyer, senior vice president of policy, economics and regulatory affairs at the American Petroleum

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Institute, called the new energy council "a good thing" for the U.S. economy and trade. "Conceptually it makes a lot of sense to have as much coordination as possible," he said.

Still, "market dynamics will always be the key" for any potential increase in energy production, Meyer said. Jonathan Elkind, a senior research scholar at Columbia University's Center on Global Energy Policy, called energy dominance a "deliberately vague concept," but said, "It's hard to see how (Trump) can push more oil into an already saturated market."

Trump has promised to bring gasoline prices below \$2 a gallon, but experts call that highly unlikely, since crude oil prices would need to drop dramatically to achieve that goal. Gas prices averaged \$3.07 nationally as of Wednesday, down from \$3.25 a year ago.

Elkind and other experts said they hope the new energy council will move beyond oil to focus on renewable energy such as wind, solar and geothermal power, as well as nuclear. None of those energy resources produces greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change.

"Failure to focus on climate change as an existential threat to our planet is a huge concern and translates to a very significant loss of American property and American lives," said Elkind, a former assistant energy secretary in the Obama administration. He cited federal statistics showing two dozen weather disasters this year that caused more than \$1 billion in damage each. A total of 418 people were killed.

Trump has played down risks from climate change and pledged to rescind unspent money in the Inflation Reduction Act, Biden's landmark climate and health care bill. He also said he will stop offshore wind development when he returns to the White House in January.

Even so, his Nov. 15 announcement of the energy council says he will "expand ALL forms of energy production to grow our Economy and create good-paying jobs."

That includes renewables, said Safak Yucel, associate professor at Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business.

"The mandate for the energy council is U.S. dominance globally, but what's more American than American solar and American wind?" he asked. A report from Ernst & Young last year showed that solar was the cheapest source of new-build electricity in many markets.

Trump, in his statement, said he wants to dramatically increase baseload power to lower electricity costs, avoid brownouts and "WIN the battle for AI superiority."

In comments to reporters before he was named to the energy post, Burgum cited a similar goal, noting increased demand for electricity from artificial intelligence, commonly known as AI, and fast-growing data centers. "The AI battle affects everything from defense to health care to education to productivity as a country," Burgum said.

While Trump mocks the climate law as the "green new scam," he is unlikely to repeal it, Yucel and other experts said. One reason: Most of its investments and jobs are in Republican congressional districts. GOP members of Congress have urged House Speaker Mike Johnson to retain the law, which passed with only Democratic votes.

"A lot of Southern states are telling Trump, 'We actually like renewables,'" Yucel said, noting that Republican-led states have added thousands of jobs in recent years in wind, solar and battery power.

If renewables make economic sense, he added, "they'll continue."

Battered by war and divisions, Lebanon faces a long list of challenges after ceasefire deal

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Hours after a U.S.-brokered ceasefire to end the war between Israel and Hezbollah went into effect, Lebanon woke up to the sound of celebratory gunfire instead of Israeli airstrikes and drones buzzing overhead.

It was a rare moment of respite for Lebanon, as bombs stopped falling after a year of war. Thousands of displaced people joyfully drove back to their towns and villages in southern and eastern Lebanon.

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But the realization of what lies ahead quickly sank in. Town after town in the south and east as well as parts of Beirut have been destroyed, entire border villages leveled to the ground, and thousands of buildings damaged. The World Bank estimates losses amounting to some \$8.5 billion.

For the tiny and broken Mediterranean country, which has dealt with compounded calamities for over half a decade, the ceasefire deal has brought more questions than answers.

Among them, who will foot the bill for rebuilding? Will Hezbollah fully remove its fighters and arsenals from the south, relocating north of the Litani River — and how will the Lebanese army ensure that it does so? And will Israel ultimately accept the militants being pushed back, battered but not destroyed?

Meanwhile, Lebanon's political paralysis between groups allied and opposed to Hezbollah has only worsened during the war — raising the possibility of instability that could rattle the ceasefire. Anger has grown among some over that they see as the Iran-backed group's decision to provoke another disastrous war with Israel.

Temporary calm or a step toward long-term security?

During the 60-day first phase of the ceasefire deal, based on Security Council Resolution 1701, Hezbollah and Israeli forces are to withdraw from south Lebanon, and the Lebanese military is to step in.

The Lebanese troops are to ensure that Hezbollah dismantles its facilities and military positions and that it doesn't try to rebuild. That's a major point of tension, potentially putting the army in a dangerous confrontation with the more powerful militant group.

The army, largely funded by the United States and other Western governments, is a rare point of unity in Lebanon's tense sectarian power-balancing political system. But it's always tried to avoid friction with Hezbollah, which is backed by a large constituency among Lebanon's Shiite Muslims.

Hassan Fadlallah, a Hezbollah lawmaker, told reporters Thursday that the group will cooperate with the army to implement the ceasefire. But he also said the military doesn't have the capability to defend Lebanon against Israel — a role Hezbollah has long claimed. He said the group would continue in that role.

"Can anyone say if Israel attacks, we watch?" Fadlallah said. "When Israel attacks our country, we will fight and resist. This is our right."

Mike Azar, a Lebanese commentator, said the army is "in an impossible position."

"To suggest that it can disarm or dismantle Hezbollah's infrastructure is, frankly, absurd," he said in an online post.

A Lebanese military official told The Associated Press that troops' deployment will be gradual into areas of the south, including those from which Israeli troops withdraw. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because of not being cleared to speak to the media.

The U.S. and France will also be involved in a monitoring mechanism to make sure Resolution 1701 is implemented.

Its viability is really being put to the test — "if there really is going to be that commitment" by all sides, said Salman Shaikh, who served as political adviser to the U.N. special envoy for Lebanon during the 2006 war, when the resolution was passed. He now runs The Shaikh Group, a mediation and conflict resolution organization.

Critics of the deal fear the pressure is far greater on Lebanon, and Israel has more space to attack Hezbollah — which it has vowed to do if it believes Hezbollah isn't abiding by its terms.

With U.S. support, Israel has given itself "almost total freedom to determine when it needs or wants to attack Lebanon again for whatever reason," said Matt Duss, executive vice president of The Center for International Policy, a Washington-based think tank.

Cash-strapped Lebanon needs support for its military and battered country

Lebanon since late 2019 has been mired in a crippling financial crisis that pushed millions into poverty, destroyed its banking system, and limited the country to just a few hours of state electricity daily.

The Lebanese military has suffered as well, with troops quitting or working second jobs to pay the bills. Yet, the aim of the agreement is for Lebanon to recruit more and deploy an additional 10,000 troops south of the Litani River. Without significant funding, this would be impossible — especially with the huge

rebuilding costs Lebanon now faces.

The international community in a donor conference in Paris last month pledged \$1 billion dollars for Lebanon, including \$800 million for humanitarian assistance and \$200 million to support the army. But aid groups say none of that funding has materialized yet.

Mercy Corps says Lebanon's gross domestic product shrunk by 6.4% — some \$1.15 billion — just in the last two months of the war. The organization is scrambling to secure housing and services for displaced people ahead of the winter.

"The worst civilian impacts could still be ahead," Laila Al Amine, Mercy Corps' Lebanon country director, said in a statement.

A looming question is who will foot the bill. Iran has offered to help, but it's cash-strapped and under Western sanctions. Oil-rich Gulf Arab states, who helped rebuild after the 2006 war, are weary of Lebanon's political class and not inclined to step in.

Growing tensions over Hezbollah at home

Even before the war, Hezbollah and its arsenal were a point of contention in Lebanon. Its allies say Hezbollah's militants are crucial in protecting Lebanon, while critics say its weaponry violates state sovereignty and is used to pressure political opponents. They have long demanded Hezbollah be disarmed.

Senior parliamentarian Alain Aoun said Lebanon has a long list of urgent matters to address, including electing a president after over two years of vacuum, securing reconstruction funding and resolving a host of neglected economic issues.

"There are a number of challenges awaiting us," Aoun told the AP.

Hezbollah's opponents were also angered over its decision to unilaterally start firing rockets into northern Israel on Oct. 8, 2023. The group said it was acting in solidarity with its ally Hamas in the Gaza Strip and vowed not to stop until a ceasefire there was reached. Critics say it dragged Lebanon into war and brought Israel's destructive bombardment.

Even some of its allies expressed frustration.

Lawmaker Gebran Bassil, who heads a party that for years was Hezbollah's main Christian ally in government, said in a video posted on X that Hezbollah "should be at the service of the state," not the other way around.

Hezbollah's top ally Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, who spearheaded negotiation efforts, has long pushed for Hezbollah to decouple its campaign against Israel from the war in Gaza. Now he is calling for parliament to vote for a president in January in order to ease Lebanon's political gridlock — a move that could put Hezbollah's political power to the test.

This is where international funding and political support would also be crucial, says Shaikh.

The international community, he said, needs "to help the Lebanese sort out their issues, which still persist and which are not exclusively just to do with the Israeli actions against them."

Crew mistakes caused the sinking of a New Zealand navy ship off Samoan coast, inquiry finds

By CHARLOTTE GRAHAM-McLAY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — Mistakes by members of the crew caused a New Zealand navy ship to plow into a reef off the coast of Samoa, where it caught fire and sank, according to the preliminary findings of a military Court of Inquiry released Friday.

The ship's crew did not realize autopilot was engaged, believed something else had gone wrong with the ship, and did not check the HMNZS Manawanui was under manual control as it maintained course toward land, a summary of the inquiry's first report said. The full report has not been made public.

All 75 people on board the vessel evacuated safely as the boat foundered about 1.6 kilometers (a mile) off the coast of Upolu, Samoa, in October. The ship was one of only nine in New Zealand's navy and was the first the country lost at sea since World War II.

Officials did not know the cause of the sinking at the time, and Chief of Navy Rear Admiral Garin Golding

ordered a Court of Inquiry to investigate.

"The direct cause of the grounding has been determined as a series of human errors which meant the ship's autopilot was not disengaged when it should have been," Golding told reporters in Auckland on Friday. "Muscle memory from the person in control should have leaned over to that panel and checked whether the screen said autopilot or not."

The crew "mistakenly believed its failure to respond to direction changes was the result of a thruster control failure," he said. A number of contributing factors were identified, Golding said, including training, planning, supervision, readiness and risk assessment.

The Court of Inquiry is expected to continue until the first quarter of next year. Golding said given human error was identified as the cause, a separate disciplinary process will begin after the inquiry.

Three crew members who were on the bridge as the disaster unfolded are likely to face such a process, Golding added. They were the officer in control of the ship, an officer supervising that person, and the ship's commanding officer. The navy chief would not name them.

"I want to reassure the public of New Zealand that we will learn from this situation and that it is on me, as the Chief of Navy, to earn back your trust," Golding said.

In the days after the sinking, New Zealand's Defense Minister gave stinging rebukes of "misogynistic" online commenters who directed abusive comments at the ship's captain because she was a woman.

The specialist dive and hydrographic vessel had been in service for New Zealand since 2019 and was surveying the reef that it ran aground on.

The sinking prompted fears in villages along the Samoan coastline near the wreck about damage caused by the ship's diesel spilling into the ocean. New Zealand officials have said since the sinking that most of the fuel burned off in the fire and that no environmental damage has been recorded.

The current flow of fuel into the sea was a "persistent slow leak" which divers are monitoring, Golding said Friday. Specialist equipment is due to be transported from New Zealand to Samoa by sea, departing this week, to remove fuel and other potential pollutants from the ship.

New Zealand officials have not made public plans to remove the ship from the reef.

"This has had an impact to our reputation," Golding said. "We will own it, fix it and learn from it."

Democratic lawmakers from Connecticut report Thanksgiving bomb threats against their homes

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — At least five Democratic members of Congress from Connecticut were targeted by bomb threats on their homes Thursday, the lawmakers or their offices said.

Sen. Chris Murphy and Reps. Jim Himes, Joe Courtney, John Larson and Jahana Hayes all reported being the subject of such threats. Police who responded said they found no evidence of explosives on the lawmakers' properties.

There was no immediate word whether Rep. Rosa DeLauro, the fifth Democratic House member from the state, and Connecticut's other Democratic senator received threats.

The bomb threats against Democrats happened a day after a number of President-elect Donald Trump's most prominent Cabinet picks and appointees reported that they had received such threats, as well as "swatting attacks," in which perpetrators initiate an emergency law enforcement response against a victim under false pretenses.

Murphy's office said his Hartford home was the target of a bomb threat, "which appears to be part of a coordinated effort involving multiple members of Congress and public figures." Hartford Police and U.S. Capitol Police determined there was no threat.

Hayes said the Wolcott Police Department informed her Thursday morning that it had received "a threatening email stating a pipe bomb had been placed in the mailbox at my home." State police, U.S. Capitol Police, and the House sergeant at arms were notified, Wolcott and state police responded "and no bomb or explosive materials were discovered."

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Courtney's Vernon home received a bomb threat while his wife and children were there, his office said. Hines said he was told of the threat against his home during a Thanksgiving celebration with his family. The U.S. Capitol Police, and Greenwich and Stamford police departments responded.

Hines extended his family's "utmost gratitude to our local law enforcement officers for their immediate action to ensure our safety." Echoing other lawmakers who were threatened, he added: "There is no place for political violence in this country, and I hope that we may all continue through the holiday season with peace and civility."

Larson also said Thursday that East Hartford Police responded to a bomb threat against his home.

The FBI declined to give details on the latest episodes except to say it is investigating them in partnership with other agencies.

s working with our state and local partners on these matters. No further details of the investigation will be released at this time."

The threats follow an election season marked by violence. In July, a gunman opened fire at a Trump rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, grazing him in the ear and killing one of his supporters. The Secret Service later thwarted a subsequent assassination attempt at Trump's West Palm Beach, Florida, golf course when an agent spotted the barrel of a gun poking through a perimeter fence while Trump was golfing.

Among those who received threats Wednesday were New York Rep. Elise Stefanik, Trump's pick to serve as the next ambassador to the United Nations; Matt Gaetz, Trump's initial pick to serve as attorney general; Oregon Rep. Lori Chavez-DeRemer, whom Trump chose to lead the Department of Labor, and former New York congressman Lee Zeldin, who has been tapped to lead the Environmental Protection Agency.

Mexican president says she is confident that a tariff war with the US can be averted

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said Thursday she is confident that a tariff war with the United States can be averted.

But her statement — the day after she held a phone call with U.S. President-elect Donald Trump — did not make clear who had offered what.

"There will be no potential tariff war," Sheinbaum said flatly when asked about the issue at her daily morning news briefing.

On Wednesday, Trump wrote that Sheinbaum had agreed to stop unauthorized migration across the border into the United States. She wrote on her social media accounts the same day that "migrants and caravans are taken care of before they reach the border."

But whether that constituted a promise, a pledge or a simple statement of reality remains unclear. In recent years, migrants who have been unable to obtain permission to cross Mexico have joined together in caravans to walk or hitchhike north toward the U.S. border, seeking safety in numbers.

In fact, apart from the first caravans in 2018 and 2019 — which were provided buses to ride part of the way north — no caravan has ever reached the border walking or hitchhiking in any cohesive way.

For years, migrant caravans have often been blocked, harassed or prevented from hitching rides by Mexican police and migration agents. They have also frequently been rounded up or returned to areas near the Guatemalan border. So, Sheinbaum's statement appears to reflect a reality that has been true for some time.

U.S. President Joe Biden on Thursday said he hoped Trump would rethink his plan to impose tariffs on Mexico and Canada, saying it could "screw up" relationships with close allies.

"I hope he rethinks it. I think it's a counterproductive thing to do," he told reporters in Nantucket, Massachusetts.

Trump had earlier threatened to impose 25% tariffs on imports from Mexico and Canada until those countries satisfactorily stop illegal immigration and the flow of illegal drugs such as fentanyl into the United States. He also said Chinese imports would face additional tariffs of 10% until Beijing cracks down on the production of materials used in making fentanyl.

Despite Sheinbaum's confidence — she described the phone conversation with Trump as "excellent" — many Mexicans worry that U.S. tariffs could affect a wide range of iconic Mexican products and threaten entire regional economies.

In western Mexico, no crop supplies an income for so many small growers as avocados, and Mexico is the main supplier of the fruit for the U.S. market. But avocado growers, pickers and packers worry that U.S. consumers, faced with 25% higher prices, may just skip the guacamole.

And earlier this week, Sheinbaum said Mexico was preparing a list of retaliatory tariffs if Trump went ahead with his plans for import duties.

If Mexico, Canada and China faced the additional tariffs proposed by Trump on all goods imported to the United States, that could be roughly equal to \$266 billion in tax collections, a number that does not assume any disruptions in trade or retaliatory moves by other countries.

The cost of those taxes would likely be borne by U.S. families, importers and domestic and foreign companies in the form of higher prices or lower profits.

Australian Parliament bans social media for under-16s with world-first law

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — A social media ban for children under 16 passed the Australian Parliament on Friday in a world-first law.

The law will make platforms including TikTok, Facebook, Snapchat, Reddit, X and Instagram liable for fines of up to 50 million Australian dollars (\$33 million) for systemic failures to prevent children younger than 16 from holding accounts.

The Senate passed the bill on Thursday 34 votes to 19. The House of Representatives on Wednesday overwhelmingly approved the legislation by 102 votes to 13.

The House on Friday endorsed opposition amendments made in the Senate, making the bill law.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said the law supported parents concerned by online harms to their children.

"Platforms now have a social responsibility to ensure the safety of our kids is a priority for them," Albanese told reporters.

The platforms have one year to work out how they could implement the ban before penalties are enforced.

Meta Platforms, which owns Facebook and Instagram, said the legislation had been "rushed."

Digital Industry Group Inc., an advocate for the platforms in Australia, said questions remain about the law's impact on children, its technical foundations and scope.

"The social media ban legislation has been released and passed within a week and, as a result, no one can confidently explain how it will work in practice — the community and platforms are in the dark about what exactly is required of them," DIGI managing director Sunita Bose said.

The amendments passed on Friday bolster privacy protections. Platforms would not be allowed to compel users to provide government-issued identity documents including passports or driver's licenses, nor could they demand digital identification through a government system.

Critics of the legislation fear that banning young children from social media will impact the privacy of all users who must establish they are older than 16.

While the major parties support the ban, many child welfare and mental health advocates are concerned about unintended consequences.

Sen. David Shoebridge, from the minority Greens party, said mental health experts agreed that the ban could dangerously isolate many children who used social media to find support.

"This policy will hurt vulnerable young people the most, especially in regional communities and especially the LGBTQI community, by cutting them off," Shoebridge told the Senate.

Exemptions will apply for health and education services including YouTube, Messenger Kids, WhatsApp, Kids Helpline and Google Classroom.

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Opposition Sen. Maria Kovacic said the bill was not radical but necessary. "The core focus of this legislation is simple: It demands that social media companies take reasonable steps to identify and remove underage users from their platforms," Kovacic told the Senate.

"This is a responsibility these companies should have been fulfilling long ago, but for too long they have shirked these responsibilities in favor of profit," she added.

Online safety campaigner Sonya Ryan, whose 15-year-old daughter Carly was murdered by a 50-year-old pedophile who pretended to be a teenager online, described the Senate vote as a "monumental moment in protecting our children from horrendous harms online."

"It's too late for my daughter, Carly, and the many other children who have suffered terribly and those who have lost their lives in Australia, but let us stand together on their behalf and embrace this together," she said.

Wayne Holdsworth, whose teenage son Mac took his own life after falling victim to an online sextortion scam, had advocated for the age restriction and took pride in its passage.

"I have always been a proud Australian, but for me subsequent to today's Senate decision, I am bursting with pride," Holdsworth said.

Christopher Stone, executive director of Suicide Prevention Australia, the governing body for the suicide prevention sector, said the legislation failed to consider positive aspects of social media in supporting young people's mental health and sense of connection.

"The government is running blindfolded into a brick wall by rushing this legislation. Young Australians deserve evidence-based policies, not decisions made in haste," Stone said.

The platforms had complained that the law would be unworkable and had urged the Senate to delay the vote until at least June 2025 when a government-commissioned evaluation of age assurance technologies will report on how young children could be excluded.

"Naturally, we respect the laws decided by the Australian Parliament," Facebook and Instagram owner Meta Platforms said. "However, we are concerned about the process which rushed the legislation through while failing to properly consider the evidence, what industry already does to ensure age-appropriate experiences, and the voices of young people."

Snapchat said it was also concerned by the law and would cooperate with the government regulator, the eSafety Commissioner.

"While there are many unanswered questions about how this law will be implemented in practice, we will engage closely with the Government and the eSafety Commissioner during the 12-month implementation period to help develop an approach that balances privacy, safety and practicality. As always, Snap will comply with any applicable laws and regulations in Australia," Snapchat said in a statement.

Critics argue the government is attempting to convince parents it is protecting their children ahead of a general election due by May. The government hopes that voters will reward it for responding to parents' concerns about their children's addiction to social media. Some argue the legislation could cause more harm than it prevents.

Criticisms include that the legislation was rushed through Parliament without adequate scrutiny, is ineffective, poses privacy risks for all users, and undermines the authority of parents to make decisions for their children.

Opponents also argue the ban would isolate children, deprive them of the positive aspects of social media, drive them to the dark web, discourage children too young for social media to report harm, and reduce incentives for platforms to improve online safety.

Displaced families in Lebanon who return home are faced with piles of rubble

By BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

HANOUIYEH, Lebanon (AP) — During their 37 years of marriage, Mariam Kourani and her husband ran a butcher shop in southern Lebanon, started a business selling serving containers and opened a small restaurant.

An Israeli airstrike in late September destroyed it all.

Walking through the rubble of what used to be her house and restaurant in the village of Hanouiyeh, Kourani, 56, watched as her son-in-law picked up some of his young daughter's clothes and toys from the ruins.

"This was my house, my dreams and my hard work," she said, holding back tears. She pointed to one of the serving containers she used to sell, and estimated her family's total losses at \$120,000.

Kourani is among the tens of thousands of residents who have started streaming back into southern Lebanon to check on their homes after the U.S.-mediated ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah went into effect early Wednesday. Intense Israeli airstrikes over the past two months leveled entire neighborhoods in eastern and southern Lebanon, and in the southern suburbs of Beirut, which are predominantly Shiite areas of Lebanon where Hezbollah has a strong base of support. Nearly 1.2 million people have been displaced.

Like Kourani, many are returning home to find that their homes are gone.

The World Bank said earlier this month that housing has been the hardest hit sector with almost 100,000 units partially or fully damaged during the 14-month war, which intensified in late September. It estimated the damage at \$3.2 billion.

Who will pay for the reconstruction is unclear. Iran has offered to help, but it's under Western sanctions and its economy has suffered. Kourani said Hezbollah members have told her those who lost a house during the war will be given a place to stay until their homes are rebuilt. After spending thousands of dollars in rent for the two months the family was displaced in the village of Qarnayel in Mount Lebanon, Kourani said her priority is to fix their butcher shop across the street so they can start earning money.

"We are starting from below zero," she said.

A history of loss

Ali Saleh lost his home in 2006, during the 34-day war between Israel and Hezbollah. He was able to rebuild when the gulf nation of Qatar funded the reconstruction of several areas in southern Lebanon.

On Wednesday, Saleh drove to his hometown near the border with Israel, only to find that it had happened again: his two-story home was destroyed.

"All the memories are gone," he said, as he smoked a cigarette.

The 59-year-old man drove back with his wife and three of his six children hoping to find a place to stay close to his hometown of Aita al-Shaab, a village that witnessed some of the most intense fighting.

"It is a disaster-stricken village," he said.

In the ancient city of Baalbek in eastern Lebanon, 34-year-old Souad al-Outa walked around what was left of her home, shocked.

She knew her neighborhood had been badly hit like many other parts of this city, a designated UNESCO World Heritage site famous for its ancient Roman ruins. She was not prepared for the devastation she saw when she went back on Thursday.

A strike earlier this month killed multiple people in the street nearby, she said, including several of her husband's relatives.

"I feel like my heart has come out of its place," she said as she looked around what used to be her children's bedroom.

"We had a beautiful life here."

Homes can be rebuilt

About 170 kilometers (105 miles) southwest of there, in the village of Qana near the port city of Tyre, Abu Ahmad Salameh stood in what was left of several buildings that belonged to his family. He was able

to pull two carpets from under the rubble.

"All this damage can be rebuilt. This is our land and we will stay here no matter what," Salameh said. "It is painful to see the destruction. These are the homes of my parents, grandparents, daughter and my house."

He said that when the area was struck about two weeks ago, Hezbollah fighters found a safe full of jewelry and cash in the rubble of his house, and returned it to his family.

Back in Hanouiyeh, Kourani said the family left their home in the early afternoon on Sept. 23, the day the war intensified, and moved in with relatives a few miles away. Shortly after they got there, they received a call saying that their house had been destroyed.

As the Israeli airstrikes increased, they fled north to Qarnayel, where they rented an apartment for 1,000 a month in addition to \$250 for electricity and water.

Once the ceasefire went into effect, she drove back home with her husband, son and her daughter's family. They spent the night with relatives.

Despite everything, Kourani said she is embarrassed to speak about her material losses at a time when thousands of people have been killed, including friends and relatives and Hezbollah fighters among them.

"Israel has filled our land with blood. Our big loss is our men," she said.

Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade:

Big balloons, wet weather and 21 protesters arrested

NEW YORK (AP) — The Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade marched, soared and roared into its second century on Thursday despite a drenching rain and a brief disruption from pro-Palestinian demonstrators.

New York City police said they arrested 21 people after protesters jumped barricades and sat down on the parade route with Palestinian flags and a "Don't Celebrate Genocide" banner. They chanted "Free, free Palestine!" as a giant Ronald McDonald balloon bore down on them on Manhattan's Sixth Avenue.

People protesting Israel's war in Gaza also interrupted last year's parade.

Thanks to the wet weather, ponchos and umbrellas were part of the festivities, along with the usual giant balloons, floats and star-studded performances.

The latest edition of the annual holiday tradition featured new Spider-Man and Minnie Mouse balloons, zoo and pasta-themed floats, an ode to Big Apple coffee and bagels, performances from Jennifer Hudson, Idina Menzel and Kylie Minogue, and more.

The lineup was a far cry from the parade's initial incarnation 100 years ago, which featured floats showing scenes from Mother Goose, Red Riding Hood and the Wolf, Miss Muffet and the Spider, and other fairy tales.

Some things remained the same, though. As in 1924, there were plenty of marching bands and lots of clowns, followed by the grand finale of Santa Claus ushering in the holiday season.

This year's parade featured 17 giant, helium-filled character balloons, 22 floats, 15 novelty and heritage inflatables, 11 marching bands from as far away as Texas and South Dakota, 700 clowns, 10 performance groups, award-winning singers and actors, and the WNBA champion New York Liberty.

Other highlights included reality TV star Ariana Madix, hip-hop's T-Pain, country duo Dan + Shay, The War and Treaty, The Temptations, Jimmy Fallon & The Roots, Broadway veteran Lea Salonga, and "Glow" actor and Macy's spokesperson Alison Brie.

One new float spotlighted the Rao's food brand, featuring a knight and a dragon in battle made with actual pasta elements. Another celebrated the Bronx Zoo's 125th anniversary with representations of a tiger, a giraffe, a zebra and a gorilla.

"The work that we do, the opportunity to impact millions of people and bring a bit of joy for a couple of hours on Thanksgiving morning, is what motivates us every day," said Will Coss, Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade executive producer.

The parade route stretched 2.5 miles (4 kilometers) from Manhattan's Upper West Side to Macy's Herald Square flagship store on 34th Street, which served as a performance backdrop.

NBC's Al Roker walked part of the route before joining co-hosts Savannah Guthrie and Hoda Kotb outside

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the store for the remainder of the live TV coverage. "Wicked" film star Cynthia Erivo presented the retiring Kotb with flowers to commemorate what could be her last parade broadcast.

The rain didn't stop anything — the parade has only been canceled three times, from 1942 to 1944 during World War II — but organizers monitored wind speeds to make sure the big balloons were safe to fly.

Temperatures hovered near 50 degrees F (10 degrees C), with rain throughout the morning and winds around 10 mph (16 kph), well within the acceptable range for letting Snoopy, Bluey and their friends soar. City law prohibits Macy's from flying full-size balloons if sustained winds exceed 23 mph (37 kph) or wind gusts are over 35 mph (56 kph).

Jon Batiste, Ledisi, Trombone Shorty and Lauren Daigle to perform during Super Bowl pregame

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The Super Bowl pregame will have some Louisiana flavor: Multi-talented performer Jon Batiste will hit the stage to sing the national anthem, while Trombone Shorty and Lauren Daigle are slated to perform "America the Beautiful."

The performances will take place Feb. 9 at Caesars Superdome in New Orleans before the NFL's championship matchup and halftime show featuring rap megastar Kendrick Lamar, the league announced Thursday.

"We're honored to work with this year's pregame lineup to celebrate the rich musical legacy of New Orleans and the entire state," said Seth Dudowsky, the head of music at the NFL.

Ledisi will perform "Lift Every Voice and Sing" as part of the pregame performances that will air on Fox. The pregame performers are all Louisiana natives.

The national anthem and "America the Beautiful" will be performed by actor Stephanie Noguera in American sign language.

Otis Jones IV will sign "Lift Every Voice and Sing," and the halftime show will be signed by Matt Maxey.

Jay-Z's Roc Nation company and Emmy-winning producer Jesse Collins will serve as co-executive producers of the halftime show.

Batiste is a Grammy and Oscar winner who is the former bandleader for the "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert." His documentary "American Symphony" is nominated for best music film, and his "It Never Went Away" from the documentary is up for best song written for visual media at the upcoming Grammys. He composed the score for Jason Reitman's film "Saturday Night" and this month released "Beethoven Blues (Batiste Piano Series, Vol. 1)," which reimaged the iconic German pianist's work.

Trombone Shorty, a Grammy winner known for blending funk, soul, R&B and rock, has toured with major acts such as Lenny Kravitz, Red Hot Chili Peppers and the Foo Fighters. Daigle made her way as a contemporary Christian singer, winning two Grammys for her 2018 song "You Say" from her third studio album, "Look Up Child."

Ledisi won a Grammy for her 2020 single "Anything for You." She also appeared in the films "Leatherheads," "Spinning Gold" and the Oscar-nominated "Selma."

'It's a bird! It's a plane!' In Alaska, it's both, with a pilot tossing turkeys to rural homes

By MARK THIESSEN and BECKY BOHRER Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — In the remotest reaches of Alaska, there's no relying on DoorDash to have Thanksgiving dinner — or any dinner — delivered. But some residents living well off the grid nevertheless have turkeys this holiday, thanks to the Alaska Turkey Bomb.

For the third straight year, a resident named Esther Keim has been flying low and slow in a small plane over rural parts of south-central Alaska, dropping frozen turkeys to those who can't simply run out to the grocery store.

Alaska is mostly wilderness, with only about 20% of it accessible by road. In winter, many who live in

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remote areas rely on small planes or snowmobiles to travel any distance, and frozen rivers can act as makeshift roads.

When Keim was growing up on an Alaska homestead, a family friend would airdrop turkeys to her family and others nearby for the holidays. Other times, the pilot would deliver newspapers, sometimes with a pack of gum inside for Keim.

Her family moved to more urban Alaska nearly 25 years ago but still has the homestead. Using a small plane she had rebuilt with her father, Keim launched her turkey delivery mission a few years back after learning of a family living off the land nearby who had little for Thanksgiving dinner.

"They were telling me that a squirrel for dinner did not split very far between three people," Keim recalled. "At that moment, I thought ... 'I'm going to airdrop them a turkey.'"

She decided not to stop there. Her effort has grown by word of mouth and by social media posts. This year, she's delivering 32 frozen turkeys to people living year-round in cabins where there are no roads.

All but two had been delivered by Tuesday, with delivery plans for the last two birds thwarted by Alaska's unpredictable weather.

Among the beneficiaries are Dave and Christina Luce, who live on the Yentna River about 45 miles (72 kilometers) northwest of Anchorage. They have stunning mountain views in every direction, including North America's tallest mountain, Denali, directly to the north. But in the winter it's a 90-minute snowmobile ride to the nearest town, which they do about once a month.

"I'm 80 years old now, so we make fewer and fewer trips," Dave Luce said. "The adventure has sort of gone out of it."

They've known Keim since she was little. The 12-pound (5.44-kilogram) turkey she delivered will provide more than enough for them and a few neighbors.

"It makes a great Thanksgiving," Dave Luce said. "She's been a real sweetheart, and she's been a real good friend."

Keim makes 30 to 40 turkey deliveries yearly, flying as far as 100 miles (161 kilometers) from her base north of Anchorage toward Denali's foothills.

Sometimes she enlists the help of a "turkey dropper" to ride along and toss the birds out. Other times, she's the one dropping turkeys while her friend Heidi Hastings pilots her own plane.

Keim buys about 20 turkeys at a time, with the help of donations, usually by people reaching out to her through Facebook. She wraps them in plastic garbage bags and lets them sit in the bed of her pickup until she can arrange a flight.

"Luckily it's cold in Alaska, so I don't have to worry about freezers," she said.

She contacts families on social media to let them know of impending deliveries, and then they buzz the house so the homeowners will come outside.

"We won't drop the turkey until we see them come out of the house or the cabin, because if they don't see it fall, they're not going to know where to look," she said.

It can be especially difficult to find the turkey if there's deep snow. A turkey was once missing for five days before it was found, but the only casualty so far has been a lost ham, Keim said.

Keim prefers to drop the turkey on a frozen lake if possible so it's easy to locate.

"As far as precision and hitting our target, I am definitely not the best aim," she joked. "I've gotten better, but I have never hit a house, a building, person or dog."

Her reward is the great responses she gets from families, some who record her dropping the turkeys and send her videos and texts of appreciation.

"They just think it's so awesome that we throw these things out of the plane," Keim said.

Ultimately, she hopes to set up a nonprofit organization to solicit more donations and reach people across a bigger swath of the state. And it doesn't have to stop at turkeys.

"There's so many kids out in the villages," she said. "It would be cool to maybe add a stuffed animal or something they can hold."

San Jose State is disappointed Boise State forfeited but looks forward to volleyball final

By MARK ANDERSON AP Sports Writer

LAS VEGAS (AP) — San Jose State said Thursday it was disappointed Boise State forfeited its semifinal match in the Mountain West women's volleyball tournament but that the Spartans were focused on the future.

Boise State, which twice boycotted regular-season matches with San Jose State, pulled out of the conference tournament Wednesday night, hours after securing a spot against the Spartans in Friday's semifinals. With Boise State's withdrawal, San Jose State advanced to Saturday's championship match.

While the Broncos didn't announce explicitly why they withdrew, a lawsuit was recently filed in Colorado by players from various schools against the conference and San Jose State officials calling for a Spartans player not to be allowed to participate in the tournament. They cited unspecified reports asserting there was a transgender player on the San Jose State volleyball team, even naming her.

U.S. Magistrate Judge S. Kato Crews in Denver ruled Monday that the player was allowed to play, and a federal appeals court upheld the decision the following day.

"In this time of Thanksgiving, we are especially thankful for those who continue to engage in civil and respectful discourse," San Jose State's statement said. "We celebrate and support all of our students, including our student-athletes as they compete for our community on this holiday weekend. While we are disappointed in Boise State's decision, our women's volleyball team is preparing for Saturday's match and looks forward to competing for a championship."

San Jose State, which received six forfeit victories because of boycotts from Mountain West opponents during the regular season, is seeded second in the conference tournament and received a first-round bye. Now the Spartans will play No. 1 Colorado State or No. 5 San Diego State in the championship.

Both teams, which meet in a semifinal on Friday, played the Spartans this season rather than sit out.

"Decisions to forfeit matches are at the institutions' discretion and are considered a loss," the Mountain West said in a statement Thursday.

Boise State's decision to withdraw came hours after the Broncos defeated Utah State 25-19, 18-25, 25-20, 25-23 in the quarterfinals.

The Broncos' athletic department released a statement that night that read in part: "Our team overcame forfeitures to earn a spot in the tournament field and fought for the win over Utah State in the first round on Wednesday. They should not have to forgo this opportunity while waiting for a more thoughtful and better system that serves all athletes."

Mountain West members Boise State, Wyoming, Utah State and Nevada as well as Southern Utah canceled matches this season against the Spartans. Nevada's players said they "refuse to participate in any match that advances injustice against female athletes," without providing further details.

Idaho Gov. Brad Little signed an executive order Aug. 28 called the Defending Women's Sports Act that challenges how Title IX rules are interpreted in that state.

"Biological males – men and boys – have physical differences that give them an unfair advantage when competing with women and girls in athletics," Little said at the time.

While some media have reported those and other details, San Jose State has not confirmed the school has a trans women's volleyball player. The Associated Press is withholding the player's name because she has not publicly commented on her gender identity and through school officials has declined an interview request.

Participation of transgender women in women's sports became a hot political topic ahead of the recent election.

'AI Jesus' avatar tests man's faith in machines and the divine

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

LUCERNE, Switzerland (AP) — Would you trust an "AI Jesus" with your innermost thoughts and troubles?

Researchers and religious leaders on Wednesday released findings from a two-month experiment through art in a Catholic chapel in Switzerland, where an avatar of "Jesus" on a computer screen — tucked into a confessional — took questions by visitors on faith, morality and modern-day woes, and offered responses based on Scripture.

The idea, said the chapel's theological assistant, was to recognize the growing importance of artificial intelligence in human lives, even when it comes to religion, and explore the limits of human trust in a machine.

After the two-month run of the "Deus in Machina" exhibit at Peter's Chapel starting in late August, some 900 conversations from visitors — some came more than once — were transcribed anonymously. Those behind the project said it was largely a success: Visitors often came out moved or deep in thought, and found it easy to use.

A small sign invited visitors to enter a confessional — chosen for its intimacy — and below a lattice screen across which penitent believers would usually speak with a priest, a green light signaled the visitor's turn to speak, and a red one came on when "AI Jesus" on a computer screen on the other side was responding.

Often, a lag time was needed to wait for the response — a testament to the technical complexities. After exiting, nearly 300 visitors filled out questionnaires that informed the report released Wednesday.

Of love, war, suffering and solitude

Philipp Haslbauer, an IT specialist at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts who pulled together the technical side of the project, said the AI responsible for taking the role of "AI Jesus" and generating responses was GPT-4o by OpenAI, and an open-source version of the company's Whisper was used for speech comprehension.

An AI video generator from Heygen was used to produce voice and video from a real person, he said. Haslbauer said no specific safeguards were used "because we observed GPT-4o to respond fairly well to controversial topics."

Visitors broached many topics, including true love, the afterlife, feelings of solitude, war and suffering in the world, the existence of God, plus issues like sexual abuse cases in the Catholic Church or its position on homosexuality.

Most visitors described themselves as Christians, though agnostics, atheists, Muslims, Buddhists and Taoists took part too, according to a recap of the project released by the Catholic parish of Lucerne.

About one-third were German speakers, but "AI Jesus" — which is conversant in about 100 languages — also had conversations in languages like Chinese, English, French, Hungarian, Italian, Russian and Spanish.

'Work of the Devil'?

"What was really interesting (was) to see that the people really talked with him in a serious way. They didn't come to make jokes," said chapel theologian Marco Schmid, who spearheaded the project. Most visitors were aged 40 to 70, and more Catholics respondents found the experience stimulating than did Protestants, the report showed.

Schmid was quick to point out that the "AI Jesus" — billed as a "Jesus-like" persona — was an artistic experiment to get people thinking about the intersection between the digital and the divine, not substitute for human interaction or sacramental confessions with a priest, nor was it intended to save pastoral resources.

"For the people it was clear that it was a computer ... It was clear it was not a confession," Schmid said. "He wasn't programmed to give absolutions or prayers. At the end, it was more summary of the conversation."

The Catholic Church from the Vatican on down has been wrestling with the challenges — and possible opportunities — presented by the explosion in public interest in AI since generative artificial intelligence captured the world's attention two years ago when OpenAI's ChatGPT made its debut.

The Vatican has appointed a friar from a medieval Franciscan order as its top expert on AI, and a Lu-

theran church in Bavaria served up sermons delivered by a chatbot last year. Pope Francis, in his annual peace message for this year, pushed for an international treaty to ensure the ethical use of AI technology.

Chatbots like ChatGPT are powered by algorithmic models trained on vast pools of text and other data to mimic speech and generate seemingly unique and human-like responses.

Haslbauer is sensitive to public reaction and has noted chatter on social media saying the project is "blasphemous" or the "work of the devil."

"If you read comments on the internet about it, some are very negative — which is scary," Haslbauer, whose long-haired look featured as a basis for the image of the virtual Jesus.

In a demonstration of the technology in the chapel, Haslbauer queried "AI Jesus" about its message for a troubled world, and about whether AI could be helpful as a way for people to find God.

"All knowledge and wisdom ultimately come from God," the chatbot said in a soothing voice, after a pause to respond, and the image briefly crackled. "If used wisely, AI can indeed be a tool to explore the wonders of creation, deepen our understanding of Scripture, and foster connections among people."

"Yet it remains essential to seek God with all your heart and soul beyond any technology," it added.

A good side, and downsides

Kenneth Cukier, a journalist, author and expert with the U.S.-based nonprofit group called "AI and Faith," said if "AI Jesus" helps people connect deeper to themselves and the world, it "has to be a good thing."

"It will lead to better individuals and a better world," he said. "However — and there's a big however — this does feel a little bit infantile, and pardon my pun, machine-like."

"The risk is that it pulls people, ultimately, farther away from that which is more meaningful, deeper and authentic in spirituality," said Cukier, co-author of "Big Data: A Revolution that Will Transform How We Work, Live and Think."

For Schmid, the exhibit was a pilot project — and he doesn't foresee a second coming of "AI Jesus" anytime soon.

"For us, it was also clear it was just a limited time that we will expose this Jesus," he said, adding that any return would need to be done after deeper thought.

"We are discussing ... how we could revive him again," he said, noting interest from parishes, school-teachers, researchers and others as the project got media attention in Switzerland and beyond. "They all are interested and would like to have this 'AI Jesus'. So we have now a little bit to reflect on how we want to continue."

Trump promised federal recognition for the Lumbee Tribe. Will he follow through?

By GRAHAM LEE BREWER Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — When Kamala Harris and Donald Trump campaigned in North Carolina, both candidates courted a state-recognized tribe there whose 55,000 members could have helped tip the swing state.

Trump in September promised that he would sign legislation to grant federal recognition to the Lumbee Tribe, a distinction that would unlock access to federal funds. He ultimately won North Carolina by more than 3 percentage points, in part due to continued support from Lumbee voters.

Now, as Trump prepares to return to the White House in January, the promise will be put to the test. He has Republican allies in Congress on the issue, and now the Lumbee, as well as tribal nations across the country, are watching closely to see what comes next.

Tribal nations typically receive federal recognition through an application with the Department of the Interior, but the Lumbee have been trying for many years to circumvent that process by going through Congress. Chairman John Lowery called Interior's application process "flawed" and overly lengthy and said it should be up to Congress to right what he calls a historic wrong.

"It's just crazy that we're sitting here fighting this battle, and I have to tell you that I am real in 2024,"

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Lowery said.

Following the presidential election, the Lumbee hope there will be momentum behind their cause, but they face deep-rooted opposition from tribal nations across the country.

There are questions about Trump's next move

Several tribes, including the only one that is federally recognized in North Carolina, argue that if the Lumbee Tribe wants federal acknowledgment, it should go through the formal process in the Department of the Interior. One person familiar with Trump's thinking said the president-elect will require the Lumbee Tribe to do just that, and he won't sign a Lumbee recognition bill. The person requested anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly speak about Trump's views.

Trump's spokeswoman, Karoline Leavitt, said "no policy should be deemed official unless it comes directly from President Trump."

Federal recognition is of enormous importance, as it comes with access to resources like healthcare through Indian Health Services and the ability to create a land base such as reservations through the land-to-trust process. But before that happens, a tribal nation has to file a successful application with the Office of Federal Acknowledgement, a department within the Interior.

The Lumbee Tribe has applied for federal recognition, but that petition was denied in 1985 because it "could not establish the group's descendency either culturally, politically, or genealogically from any tribe which existed historically in the area."

In 2016, the Interior reversed a decision barring the Lumbee Tribe from reapplying, but the Lumbee have opted for the congressional route.

Gaining federal recognition through legislation is a rare but not unheard of path. But the Lumbee's approach has stoked a simmering debate in both Indian Country and Congress about Indigenous identity and tribal nationhood.

The Lumbee have received support from members of both parties

Members of Congress from both parties have supported recognizing the Lumbee through legislation, including Oklahoma Republican Sen. Markwayne Mullin, a member of the Cherokee Nation who campaigned for Trump in North Carolina and backed the legislation.

But perhaps the state-recognized tribe's most ardent ally in Congress is North Carolina Republican Sen. Thom Tillis, who is up for reelection in 2026.

Tillis introduced the Lumbee Fairness Act last year and has been a vocal supporter of the Lumbee. In interviews with The Associated Press, several tribal leaders, lobbyists, and advocates said they were told by Tillis directly or by his staff that the senator is currently and will continue to block certain bills backed by tribal nations unless the leaders of those tribes support the Lumbee.

One of the bills he's promised to block, according to those interviewed by the AP, is a land transfer that would allow the Tennessee Valley Authority to return 70 acres of land to the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, the only federally recognized tribal nation in Tillis's state. It would allow the tribe to put the land in Monroe County, Tennessee into trust. The plot is part of the tribal nation's homelands and contains the birthplace of Sequoyah.

"It's appalling to me. It's disgraceful," Principal Chief of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Michell Hicks said. He said that Tillis told him earlier this year that he would stop any legislation dealing with the Eastern Band unless Hicks pledged his support.

Hicks is among the tribal leaders who question the validity of the Lumbee's historical claims, and he said that is out of the question. At one point about a century ago, the Lumbee were known as the Cherokee Indians of Robeson County, and for many years now all three Cherokee tribes — the Eastern Band, the Cherokee Nation, and the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians — have denounced this and been vocal opponents of granting the Lumbee federal recognition.

Representatives for Tillis declined to comment.

Tillis held up legislation last week that would have allowed for the preservation of the site of the Wounded Knee massacre. While doing so, he singled out the heads of the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, who have backed the preservation measure, for not supporting his efforts to federally

recognize the Lumbee.

"This is not about you," Tillis said to the two tribal nations, who he acknowledged had been trying for a century to preserve the site of the massacre. "But you need to know that your leadership is playing a game that will ultimately force me to take a position."

Tillis suggested it was a "casino cartel" in part driven by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and an Osage attorney named Wilson Pipestem working for the tribe, that is trying to keep the Lumbee from gaining recognition, which could one day lead to the Lumbee opening their own casinos. Tillis threatened to continue publicly naming tribal leaders and their employees who he felt were standing in the way of his bill.

In a statement to the AP, Pipestem said Tillis should "apologize to the Tribal leaders for his false allegations and unscrupulous tactics."

Lowery acknowledged that Tillis has held up both pieces of legislation, but he said that Tillis has not done so at the direction of the Lumbee.

"If he's put a hold on the bill it's because he reached out to tribal leaders to see where they stand on his bill, and they apparently have told him that they're not in support," Lowery said. "So, he said 'well, if you can't be supportive of my bill, I can't be supportive of your bill.'"

Thousands of displaced Lebanese return from Syria as ceasefire with Israel holds

By ALBERT AJI Associated Press

QUSAIR, Syria (AP) — Thousands of people made the crossing back into Lebanon from Syria on the second day of a ceasefire between Hezbollah and Israel, after nearly 14 months of fighting.

At the Jousieh border crossing in the Qusair area of Syria's Homs province, on Lebanon's northeastern border, bumper-to-bumper cars lined up on Thursday waiting to be cleared for crossing. All four lanes were taken up by cars making their way into Lebanon, while those waiting to cross into Syria had to use an offroad.

Of the six border crossings between Lebanon and Syria, two remain functional after Israeli airstrikes forced the others shut. The two countries share a border 375 kilometers (233 miles) long.

Over 600,000 people fleeing Lebanon poured into Syria in the past year, most of them after the war between Israel and Hezbollah escalated in mid-September. The cross-border flow was a striking reversal in fortunes given that Lebanon is still hosting more than 1 million Syrian refugees who fled the war in their country that began in 2011.

As the ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah took hold early Wednesday, thousands of people began their return to Lebanon.

Families packed into vehicles with suitcases, mattresses and blankets, while children clutched backpacks, some wrapped in blankets, as they made their way back to Lebanon Thursday. The mood was mixed with relief and sorrow as many returnees faced the grim reality of returning to their homes that might be destroyed.

"We have been in Syria since Sept. 23, we had to leave our jobs, our homes and our loved ones because of the war," said Hasan Fliti, a 54-year-old dairy shop owner who is returning to Lebanon with his wife and two children. "I am happy that there is a ceasefire and there is no more destruction. You are not afraid anymore of the airstrikes to hit."

On the first day of the ceasefire, more than 2,000 people crossed into Lebanon, a Syrian security official at the Jousieh border told The Associated Press.

On Thursday, more than 4,000 crossed back into Lebanon and the number continues to rise. The hall at the border was filled with families waiting to get their passports or IDs stamped. Some smoked, others sat on their luggage, waiting for clearance as the flow of returnees steadily increased.

Among them was 37-year-old Wafa Wehbe, who had sought refuge with her family in Syria for more than a month.

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"My house is gone, but it is an indescribable feeling to go back," she said. "There's a tragic sensation for the martyrs who had to die. The children are mourning."

Wehbe's home in Khiyam, located in an area still under Israeli control, was destroyed, but she said she will now stay at her sister's. "I am also going back to mourn our martyrs. They died fighting at the frontlines."

Ghinwa Arzouni, who had sought refuge in Homs from southern Lebanon, said the journey home is both a relief and a challenge. "We're excited to go back, but I am afraid of the trip, it's a long way back," she said.

"Our house in the south is okay, it might have broken glass but will have to get there first to inspect for ourselves. We hope to return to Syria as tourists and not displaced."

Why retailers still see Black Friday as the high point of the holiday shopping season

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — After weeks of plugging increasingly inviting discounts, retailers in the United States and several other countries are preparing for prime time: Black Friday, the bargain bonanza that still reigns as the unofficial kickoff of the holiday shopping season even if it's lost some luster.

Department stores, shopping malls and merchants — big and small — see the day after Thanksgiving as a way to energize shoppers and to get them into physical stores at a time when many gift-seekers are content to do their browsing online. There are enough traditionalists that Black Friday remains the biggest day of the year for retail foot traffic.

"I'm excited about it," Texas resident Emily Phillips said while visiting the Galleria Dallas last week. "I save up all the things that I want all year and usually try and get them around Black Friday. I prefer to shop in person because then I can try stuff on. It's a better experience."

In the U.S., analysts envision a solid holiday shopping season, though perhaps not as robust as last year's, with many shoppers under financial pressure and cautious with their discretionary spending despite the easing of inflation.

Retailers will be even more under the gun to get shoppers in to buy early and in bulk since there are five fewer days between Thanksgiving and Christmas this year.

Mall of America, in Bloomington, Minnesota, is giving the first 200 people in line at the center's north entrance a \$25 gift card. Target is offering an exclusive book devoted to Taylor Swift's Eras Tour and a bonus edition of her "The Tortured Poets Department: The Anthology" album that only will be available in stores on Black Friday before customers can buy them online starting Saturday.

Best Buy has introduced an extended-release version of the doorbuster, the limited-time daily discounts that for years were all the rage — and sometimes the spark for actual brawls — before the coronavirus pandemic. The nation's largest consumer electronics chain has released doorbuster deals on its app, online and in stores every Friday since Nov. 8 and plans to continue the weekly promotion through Dec. 20.

"(Stores) are very hungry for Black Friday to do well," Marshal Cohen, chief retail advisor at market research firm Circana, said. "They recognize that they're not going to clobber and win big growth in online because the pie has gotten so competitive. They have to find a way to win in the stores."

Impulse purchases and self-gifting are a potential area for big sales growth, and business isn't going to increase without them, Cohen said. Shoppers are three times more likely to buy on impulse at a physical store than online, according to Circana research.

Shoppers stepped up their spending at American retailers in October, the Commerce Department said. Although sales at auto dealers drove much of the gain, electronics and appliance stores, and bars and restaurants also saw increased purchases, a sign of healthy consumer spending.

The latest quarterly results from Best Buy, Target and other retailers, however, underscored that some will have an easier time than others getting customers to part with their cash.

Walmart, the nation's largest retailer, is heading into the holidays with strong momentum after ratcheting up better-than-expected fiscal third-quarter sales for toys, home goods and groceries. But Target reported sluggish quarterly sales as cautious consumers curtailed their spending on apparel and other

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non-essential items.

Many retailers pushed holiday sales earlier in October than they did last year to help shoppers spread out their spending.

Shoppers were distracted heading into this month's U.S. presidential election. Sales of general merchandise dropped 9% the two weeks ended Nov. 9, according to Circana, but have been rebounding since the election.

The National Retail Federation predicted that shoppers would increase their spending in November and December by between 2.5% and 3.5% over the same period a year ago. During the 2023 holiday shopping season, spending increased 3.9% over 2022.

So far this holiday season, online sales have beaten expectations, according to Adobe Digital Insights, a division of software company Adobe. U.S. consumers spent \$77.4 billion online from Nov. 1 to Nov. 24, 9.6% more than during the same period last year. Adobe predicted an 8.4% increase for the full season.

Despite the early sales, better bargains are coming with Black Friday, according to Adobe. Analysts consider the five-day Black Friday weekend, which includes Cyber Monday, a key barometer of shoppers' willingness to spend for the rest of the season.

Vivek Pandya, the lead analyst at Adobe Digital Insights, said shoppers are paying more attention to discounts than last year, and their focus on bargain-hunting will drive what sells and when.

For example, Thanksgiving Day is the best time to shop online to get the deepest discount on sporting goods, toys, furniture and appliances, according to Adobe's analysis. But Black Friday is the best time to buy TVs online. People shopping for televisions earlier in the season found discounts that averaged 10.8%, while waiting until this Friday is expected to yield 24% discounts, Adobe Digital Insights said.

Cyber Monday, however, is expected to be the best time to buy clothing and gadgets like phones and computers online. Electronics discounts peaked at 10.9% off the suggested manufacturer's price between Nov. 1 and Nov. 24 but are expected to hit 30% off on Cyber Monday, Adobe said.

Across the board, Black Friday weekend discounts should peak at 30% on Cyber Monday and then go down to around 15%, according to Adobe's research.

For physical stores, the day after Thanksgiving is slated to again mark the busiest single shopping day of the season, according to retail technology company Sensormatic Solutions, which tracks retail foot traffic.

"Black Friday is still an incredibly important day for retailers," Grant Gustafson, head of retail consulting and analytics at Sensormatic, said. "It's important for them to be able to get shoppers into their store to show them that experience of what it's like to browse and touch and feel items. It also can be a bellwether for retailers on what to expect for the rest of the holiday season."

Mall of America hopes to surpass the 12,000 shoppers it saw last year within the first hour of its 7 a.m. opening.

"People come to get the deals, but more importantly, they come for the excitement, the energy, the traditions surrounding Black Friday," Jill Renslow, the mall's chief business development and marketing officer, said.

Regulators cracked down on sweet vapes after use by kids spiked. Now the Supreme Court is wading in.

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vaping is coming before the Supreme Court next week as federal regulators ask the high court to uphold its block on sweet, flavored products following a spike in youth e-cigarette use.

The Food and Drug Administration has denied more than a million marketing applications for candy- or fruit-flavored products that appeal to kids, part of a wider crackdown that advocates say helped drive down teen vaping after an "epidemic level" surge in 2019.

Vaping companies, though, said the agency unfairly disregarded arguments that their sweet e-liquid products would help adults quit smoking traditional cigarettes without putting kids at greater risk.

Republican Donald Trump's administration could take a different approach after he vowed in a September

social-media post to “save” vaping.

The Supreme Court on Monday is hearing arguments in the FDA’s appeal of a decision from the conservative 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. While other courts upheld FDA refusals, the appeals court sided with the Dallas-based company Triton Distribution.

It tossed out a decision blocking the marketing of nicotine-laced liquids like “Jimmy The Juice Man in Peachy Strawberry” that are heated by an e-cigarette to create an inhalable aerosol.

Triton said the FDA had unfairly changed its requirements without enough warning.

“It sort of pulls the chair out from the applicants,” said Marc Scheineson, a former FDA associate commissioner and attorney who now represents other small electronic tobacco companies.

The FDA was slow to regulate the now multibillion-dollar vaping market, and even years into the crack-down flavored vapes that are technically illegal nevertheless remain widely available. The agency has approved some tobacco-flavored vapes, and recently allowed its first menthol-flavored electronic cigarettes for adult smokers.

The marketing refusals combined with age-limit enforcement on the federal and state levels have helped drive down youth nicotine use to its lowest level in a decade, said Dennis Henigan, vice president for legal and regulatory affairs at the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids.

He says the FDA was clear in its requirements and fears a court decision that leads to wider availability for flavored vape products, which are the dominant choice among the 1.6 million high school students who still vape. “We think that would be a real harm to public health,” Henigan said.

‘Everything is expensive!’ Bolivia faces a shocking economic collapse

By PAOLA FLORES and ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

EL ALTO, Bolivia (AP) — Fuel is rapidly becoming one of Bolivia’s scarcest commodities.

Long lines of vehicles snake for several kilometers outside gas stations all over Bolivia, once South America’s second-largest producer of natural gas. Some of the queues don’t budge for days.

While frustration builds, drivers like Victor García now eat, sleep and socialize around their stationary trucks, waiting to buy just a few gallons of diesel — unless the station runs dry.

“We don’t know what’s going to happen, but we’re going to be worse off,” said García, 66, who inched closer to the pump Tuesday as the hours ticked by in El Alto, a bare-bones sprawl beside Bolivia’s capital in the Andean altiplano.

Bolivia’s monthslong fuel crunch comes as the nation’s foreign currency reserves plummet, leaving Bolivians unable to find U.S. dollars at banks and exchange houses. Imported goods that were once commonplace have become scarce.

The fuel crisis has created a sense that the country is coming undone, disrupting economic activity and everyday life for millions of people, hurting commerce and farm production and sending food prices soaring.

Mounting public anger has driven crowds into the streets in recent weeks, piling pressure on leftist President Luis Arce to ease the suffering ahead of a tense election next year.

“We want effective solutions to the shortage of fuel, dollars and the increase in food prices,” said Reinerio Vargas, the vice rector of Gabriel René Moreno Autonomous University in the eastern province of Santa Cruz, where hundreds of desperate truckers and residents flooded main squares Tuesday to vent their anger at Arce’s inaction and demand early elections.

In a similar eruption of discontent, protesters shouting “Everything is expensive!” marched through the streets of the capital, La Paz, last week.

Bolivians say Arce’s image has suffered not only because of the crisis but also because his government insists that it doesn’t exist.

“Diesel sales are in the process of returning to normal,” Economy Minister Marcelo Montenegro said Tuesday.

Arce has repeatedly vowed that his government will end the fuel shortages and lower the prices of basic goods by arbitrary deadlines. On Nov. 10, he again promised he would “resolve this issue” in 10 days.

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As the deadlines come and go, the black market currency exchange rate has risen to nearly 40% more than the official rate.

Arce's office did not respond to interview requests.

"The queues are getting longer and longer," said 38-year-old driver Ramiro Morales, who needed a bathroom after four hours in line Tuesday but feared losing his place if he went searching for one. "People are exhausted."

It's a shocking turnaround for the landlocked nation of 12 million people that was a South American economic success story in the 2000s, when the commodities bonanza generated tens of billions of dollars under the nation's first Indigenous president, former President Evo Morales.

Morales, Arce's one-time mentor, is his present-day rival in the fight to be the ruling party's candidate next year.

But when the commodities boom ended, prices slumped and gas production dwindled. Now, Bolivia spends an estimated \$56 million a week to import most of its gasoline and diesel from Argentina, Paraguay and Russia.

Economy Minister Montenegro on Tuesday pledged that the government would continue providing fuel subsidies that critics say it can't afford.

Banners from two years ago boasting that Bolivia's inflation is the lowest in South America still greet tourists arriving at El Alto International Airport. Now, inflation is among the highest in the region.

Fuel shortages prevent farmers from getting their produce to distribution centers and markets, triggering a sharp price hike for food staples.

Last week in La Paz and neighboring El Alto, hungry Bolivians jostled in long lines to buy rice after much-delayed shipments finally arrived from Santa Cruz, the country's economic engine some 850 kilometers (528 miles) away.

With the diesel shortage affecting everything from the operation of tractors to the sourcing of machinery parts, the shortage is also hurting farmers during the crucial planting season.

"Without diesel, there is no food for 2025," said Klaus Frerking, the vice president of the Eastern Agricultural Chamber of Bolivia.

The prices of potatoes, onions and milk have doubled in El Alto's main wholesale food market in the past month, vendors said, overshooting the country's nearly 8% inflation rate.

Nervous Bolivians are cutting back on their consumption.

"You have to search a lot to find the cheapest food," said 67-year-old Angela Mamani, struggling to pull together meals for her six grandchildren at El Alto's open-air market Tuesday. She planned to buy vegetables but didn't have enough cash and went home empty-handed.

This week, Arce's government presented a 2025 budget — with a 12% increase in spending — that drew backlash from lawmakers and business leaders who said it would lead to more debt and more inflation.

While the governing Movement Toward Socialism party tears itself apart in the power struggle between Arce and Morales, both politicians have seen the economic morass as a way to strengthen their positions ahead of 2025 elections.

"They deny there are problems. They blame external contexts and conflicts," said Bolivian economic analyst Gonzalo Chávez.

Morales' supporters last month launched 24-day protest partly targeting Arce's handling of the economy that blocked main roads and stranded commercial shipments, costing the government billions of dollars.

Security forces broke up the rallies almost a month ago. But on Tuesday, Arce's government continued to blame Morales' blockades for spawning the ubiquitous fuel lines.

"We need change," said Geanina García, a 31-year-old architect scouring the grocery hub of El Alto for cheap deals — a once-routine errand that she said had turned into a nightmare.

"People don't live off politics, they live day to day, off of what they produce and what they earn."

Avocados, tequila and other iconic Mexican products are jeopardized by Trump's tariff threats

By ARMANDO SOLÍS Associated Press

URUAPAN, Mexico (AP) — Mexicans are worried that threats by Donald Trump to impose 25% tariffs could affect a wide range of iconic Mexican products and threaten entire regional economies.

In western Mexico, no crop supplies an income for so many small growers as avocados. But avocado growers, pickers and packers worry that U.S. consumers, faced with 25% higher prices, may just skip the guacamole.

"I think that when there is an increase in the price for any product, demand declines," said avocado grower Enrique Espinoza. Orchards like his are the economic lifeblood in the western Mexico state of Michoacan. "It would be a tragedy if they closed down (the border) on us," he said.

Trump's Jan. 20 inauguration — when he said he would impose tariffs — couldn't come at a worse time: It's around when Mexico starts shipping crates of the green fruit north for Super Bowl Sunday, the annual peak of consumption.

José Luis Arroyo Sandoval, a manager at an avocado packing house in Michoacan, says the economy would be affected.

"Work for us could decrease because it won't be quite so attractive to export," Arroyo said, "because avocados would get expensive, and avocados are already expensive."

It may not just be Mexican producers who are affected; U.S. consumers may also be howling.

Mexican business leader Gina Diez Barroso told a news conference Tuesday that one U.S. agriculture official told her he had never had as many complaints as when the U.S. government halted import inspections on Mexican avocados in 2022.

"Never in his life had he had so much chaos in his office, because they halted Mexican avocados," Diez Barroso said.

Espinoza agrees that consumers are likely to share the pain.

"The gringos need avocados, it is a good product, and I don't think they are going to stop consuming it," he said.

Rather, the reverse effect has him worried; if Mexico retaliates with its own tariffs, as President Claudia Sheinbaum has suggested, Mexicans will face not just a drop in income, but high prices for U.S. products like corn, which is a main supply of feed for animals in Mexico.

"There are more poor people here, so in some ways it is going to hit us," Espinoza said. "The United States can pay 25% more for Mexican products, very few of us have enough money to pay 25% more for what we import from the United States."

It's not just the guacamole; Mexican tequila producers have seen a bonanza in the U.S. market. In 2023, the U.S. imported \$4.6 billion worth of tequila and \$108 million worth of mezcal from Mexico.

That has raised cautious concern among tequila producers, including farmers who grow agave on some of the driest, marginal soils that couldn't support many other crops.

"We are analyzing the statements by the authorities and their reactions, and in the coming days we will establish a position," the National Tequila Industry Chamber said in a statement.

And industry representatives say a drop in the consumption of tequila — America's third-most popular spirit, behind vodka and pre-mixed cocktails — could affect U.S. bars, restaurants and clubs.

"At the end of the day, tariffs on spirits products from our neighbors to the north and south are going to hurt U.S. consumers and lead to job losses across the U.S. hospitality industry just as these businesses continue their long recovery from the pandemic," the Distilled Spirits Council of the U.S. said in a statement.

The tariffs would probably plunge Mexico into an immediate recession. Mexican financial group Banco Base estimated in a report that for every 1% that Mexican exports increase in price, their volume falls by 1.33%

Supposing that Americans might absorb half the impact of the tariffs and just pay higher prices for Mexican goods, they still might reduce their consumption by 12%, Banco Base estimated.

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"This would be reflected in a 4.4% drop in gross domestic product," the bank wrote, adding "the decline would not just occur in 2025, but would get more serious the longer the tariffs last."

And the tariffs could affect some products that aren't thought of as particularly Mexican at all.

Mexico's Economy Secretary, Marcelo Ebrard, said Wednesday that 88% percent of all North American pickup trucks come from Mexico, though it was unclear if he meant just parts of the trucks or their final assembly.

Ebrard claimed that 25% tariffs would mean U.S. consumers might have to pay \$3,000 more per pickup truck.

"It is shooting yourself in the foot," Ebrard said.

Israeli airstrikes leave massive trail of destruction across Lebanon

By The Associated Press undefined

For more than 60 days, Lebanese have watched stunned as Israeli strikes smashed into buildings, raising giant explosions and palls of smoke in the heart of the capital and other cities.

Now, after a ceasefire was reached this week between Israel and the Hezbollah militant group, Lebanese are returning to their homes and viewing the damage.

In Beirut's southern suburbs, an area known as Dahiyeh, entire blocks in some areas are reduced to fields of shattered concrete where high-rise buildings once stood. Associated Press video caught the moment when a screeching rocket smashed into an apartment in Beirut last month, sending out a plume of fire and sparks.

In the southern city of Tyre, a towering bank of black and white smoke rose from the heart of downtown like a storm front and drifted over the Mediterranean Sea after missiles hit. In the southern village of Flawiyeh, a car was left flipped onto its hood amid a grove of trees from the force of a strike.

Israel launched its intensified campaign of bombardment in Lebanon in late September, vowing to cripple Hezbollah and stop its barrages into northern Israel after months of more limited cross-border exchanges between the two sides. Those exchanges started when Hezbollah began firing rockets into Israel in solidarity with Hamas after its attack on Oct. 7, 2023.

The Israeli strikes were heaviest in cities, towns and villages around southern Lebanon and in the southern suburbs of Beirut, where Hezbollah has the strongest presence. But for the first time in years, central Beirut was also regularly shaken by explosions.

More than 1.2 million Lebanese fled their homes during more than a year of fighting – as did tens of thousands of Israelis on their side of the border.

Pakistani police issues charges against Imran Khan and his wife for inciting violence

By MUNIR AHMED Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Pakistani police have levelled multiple charges against imprisoned former premier Imran Khan, his wife and others for inciting people to violence, officials said Thursday, following days of protests and clashes in which at least six people were killed and scores more were injured.

Khan's wife Bushra Bibi led thousands of people from the country's northwest to march on the capital Islamabad to demand the release of Khan, who has been behind bars since August 2023. Khan already has more than 150 cases against him but supporters say they are politically motivated.

Bibi, a spiritual healer, fled when police launched a midnight raid Tuesday to disperse thousands of demonstrators. She was out of prison on bail in a graft case when she led the protest from northwest Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Authorities said police arrested nearly 1,000 demonstrators since Sunday in and around Islamabad.

At least six people, including four security personnel, were killed when a vehicle rammed into them, according to Islamabad police which has blamed Khan supporters for the deaths.

Police issued charges against Khan, Bibi and others in Islamabad and the city of Rawalpindi under

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Pakistan's anti-terrorism laws. Authorities accuse them of inciting people to attack security forces and disrupting the peace.

Khan faces more than 150 cases against him but his political party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf or PTI, says it will continue to push for his release.

On Thursday, Planning and Development Minister Ahsan Iqbal and Information Minister Attaullah Tarar told international media that Khan supporters "wanted to take over the capital" and that some of them were carrying weapons. These were seized when the midnight raid was under way, they said.

Iqbal said security forces used tear gas and batons to disperse crowds. He dismissed the PTI's claim that some Khan supporters died from police firing live bullets. He added that it was not a peaceful rally because the protesters used guns.

The rally came after 42 Shiites were killed in the northwestern Kurram district earlier this month when gunmen opened fire on convoys of buses and cars. Retaliatory attacks in Kurram also left dozens more people dead.

Also on Thursday, eight people were killed in new sectarian clashes in Kurram, local police official Salim Shah said.

Meanwhile, Islamabad police filed terrorism charges against a journalist, Matiullah Jan, on Thursday after his family said he was abducted by unknown men. Police say Jan, who is now in police custody, refused to stop at a checkpoint and he had snatched a gun from an officer. Police also alleged that Jan was "drunk" when arrested, a charge he denied.

It's the latest turmoil to rock the country since Khan's ouster in 2022.

Pakistan's Stock Exchange lost more than \$1.7 billion on Tuesday due to the political tension, but it recovered from on Thursday by surpassing 100,000 points for the first time. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said the rebound was a sign of an improving economy.

The outlook is uncertain for AI regulations as the US government pivots to full Republican control

By DAN MERICA and ALI SWENSON Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With artificial intelligence at a pivotal moment of development, the federal government is about to transition from one that prioritized AI safeguards to one more focused on eliminating red tape.

That's a promising prospect for some investors but creates uncertainty about the future of any guardrails on the technology, especially around the use of AI deepfakes in elections and political campaigns.

President-elect Donald Trump has pledged to rescind President Joe Biden's sweeping AI executive order, which sought to protect people's rights and safety without stifling innovation. He hasn't specified what he would do in its place, but the platform of the Republican National Committee, which he recently reshaped, said AI development should be "rooted in Free Speech and Human Flourishing."

It's an open question whether Congress, soon to be fully controlled by Republicans, will be interested in passing any AI-related legislation. Interviews with a dozen lawmakers and industry experts reveal there is still interest in boosting the technology's use in national security and cracking down on non-consensual explicit images.

Yet the use of AI in elections and in spreading misinformation is likely to take a backseat as GOP lawmakers turn away from anything they view as potentially suppressing innovation or free speech.

"AI has incredible potential to enhance human productivity and positively benefit our economy," said Rep. Jay Obernolte, a California Republican widely seen as a leader in the evolving technology. "We need to strike an appropriate balance between putting in place the framework to prevent the harmful things from happening while at the same time enabling innovation."

Artificial intelligence interests have been expecting sweeping federal legislation for years. But Congress, gridlocked on nearly every issue, failed to pass any artificial intelligence bill, instead producing only a series of proposals and reports.

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Some lawmakers believe there is enough bipartisan interest around some AI-related issues to get a bill passed.

"I find there are Republicans that are very interested in this topic," said Democratic Sen. Gary Peters, singling out national security as one area of potential agreement. "I am confident I will be able to work with them as I have in the past."

It's still unclear how much Republicans want the federal government to intervene in AI development. Few showed interest before this year's election in regulating how the Federal Election Commission or the Federal Communications Commission handled AI-generated content, worrying that it would raise First Amendment issues at the same time that Trump's campaign and other Republicans were using the technology to create political memes.

The FCC was in the middle of a lengthy process for developing AI-related regulations when Trump won the presidency. That work has since been halted under long-established rules covering a change in administrations.

Trump has expressed both interest and skepticism in artificial intelligence.

During a Fox Business interview earlier this year, he called the technology "very dangerous" and "so scary" because "there's no real solution." But his campaign and supporters also embraced AI-generated images more than their Democratic opponents. They often used them in social media posts that weren't meant to mislead, but rather to further entrench Republican political views.

Elon Musk, Trump's close adviser and a founder of several companies that rely on AI, also has shown a mix of concern and excitement about the technology, depending on how it is applied.

Musk used X, the social media platform he owns, to promote AI-generated images and videos throughout the election. Operatives from Americans for Responsible Innovation, a nonprofit focused on artificial intelligence, have publicly been pushing Trump to tap Musk as his top adviser on the technology.

"We think that Elon has a pretty sophisticated understating of both the opportunities and risks of advanced AI systems," said Doug Calidas, a top operative from the group.

But Musk advising Trump on artificial intelligence worries others. Peters argued it could undercut the president.

"It is a concern," said the Michigan Democrat. "Whenever you have anybody that has a strong financial interest in a particular technology, you should take their advice and counsel with a grain of salt."

In the run-up to the election, many AI experts expressed concern about an eleventh-hour deepfake — a lifelike AI image, video or audio clip — that would sway or confuse voters as they headed to the polls. While those fears were never realized, AI still played a role in the election, said Vivian Schiller, executive director of Aspen Digital, part of the nonpartisan Aspen Institute think tank.

"I would not use the term that I hear a lot of people using, which is it was the dog that didn't bark," she said of AI in the 2024 election. "It was there, just not in the way that we expected."

Campaigns used AI in algorithms to target messages to voters. AI-generated memes, though not lifelike enough to be mistaken as real, felt true enough to deepen partisan divisions.

A political consultant mimicked Joe Biden's voice in robocalls that could have dissuaded voters from coming to the polls during New Hampshire's primary if they hadn't been caught quickly. And foreign actors used AI tools to create and automate fake online profiles and websites that spread disinformation to a U.S. audience.

Even if AI didn't ultimately influence the election outcome, the technology made political inroads and contributed to an environment where U.S. voters don't feel confident that what they are seeing is true. That dynamic is part of the reason some in the AI industry want to see regulations that establish guidelines.

"President Trump and people on his team have said they don't want to stifle the technology and they do want to support its development, so that is welcome news," said Craig Albright, the top lobbyist and senior vice president at The Software Alliance, a trade group whose members include OpenAI, Oracle and IBM. "It is our view that passing national laws to set the rules of the road will be good for developing markets for the technology."

AI safety advocates during a recent meeting in San Francisco made similar arguments, according to

Suresh Venkatasubramanian, director of the Center for Tech Responsibility at Brown University.

"By putting literal guardrails, lanes, road rules, we were able to get cars that could roll a lot faster," said Venkatasubramanian, a former Biden administration official who helped craft White House principles for approaching AI.

Rob Weissman, co-president of the advocacy group Public Citizen, said he's not hopeful about the prospects for federal legislation and is concerned about Trump's pledge to rescind Biden's executive order, which created an initial set of national standards for the industry. His group has advocated for federal regulation of generative AI in elections.

"The safeguards are themselves ways to promote innovation so that we have AI that's useful and safe and doesn't exclude people and promotes the technology in ways that serve the public interest," he said.

Latest 'massive' Russian aerial attack cuts power to 1 million homes in Ukraine

By HANNA ARHIROVA and BARRY HATTON Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia conducted a "massive" attack against Ukraine's energy infrastructure on Thursday, firing nearly 200 missiles and drones and leaving more than a million households without power, Ukrainian officials said.

Russia's second major aerial attack on Ukraine's power grid in less than two weeks amplified fears that the Kremlin aims to cripple the country's power generation capacity before winter.

"Attacks on energy facilities are happening all over Ukraine," Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko said in a post on Facebook. He added that emergency power outages were implemented nationwide.

Russia in previous years has targeted Ukraine's electricity generation, aiming to deny civilians critical heating and drinking water supplies during the bitter winter months and break Ukrainian spirits. The attacks also seek to hobble Ukraine's defense industry that is now producing missiles, drones and armored vehicles, among other military assets.

In some regions on Thursday, Kalibr cruise missiles with cluster munitions smashed into civilian targets, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, calling it "an insidious escalation." Cluster munitions release numerous small bombs over a wide area, making them dangerous to civilians both during and after an attack.

Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed his forces struck 17 Ukrainian targets Thursday, including military facilities and their "support systems," with 100 drones and 90 missiles.

It was the 11th massive combined attack by Russia on Ukraine's energy infrastructure this year.

But the Ukrainian air force claimed to have shot down 76 cruise missiles and three other types of missile as well as 32 drones. It added that it lost track of 62 Russian drones, which most likely were jammed by electronic warfare.

Neither side's claims could be independently verified.

Ukrainian officials have warned recently that Russia was stockpiling cruise and ballistic missiles, presumably for another pre-winter aerial campaign against Ukraine's power grid. Ukrainian officials have in the past accused Russia of "weaponizing winter." Such massive attacks have been a regular feature of the war.

Around half of Ukraine's energy infrastructure has been destroyed during the almost three years of war with Russia, and rolling electricity blackouts are common. Kyiv's Western allies have sought to help Ukraine protect power generation with air defense systems and funds for rebuilding.

Last March, the International Criminal Court in The Hague issued arrest warrants for two high-ranking Russian military officers on war crimes charges linked to attacks on Ukraine's civilian infrastructure, including power plants and electricity sub-stations.

The war has been going in Russia's favor in recent months as its bigger army uses its advantages in manpower and equipment to push Ukrainian forces backward in eastern areas, though its offensive has been slow and costly.

Putin said that over the past two days Russia had fired 100 missiles and 466 drones at Ukraine, saying

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they were a response to Ukraine using American-made missiles to hit targets on Russian soil after gaining permission to do so from President Joe Biden.

Speaking at a summit in Kazakhstan of a security alliance of former Soviet nations, Putin threatened to use a new intermediate-range ballistic missile, called Oreshnik, against “decision-making centers” in Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital.

The missile launched for the first time at Ukraine last week has six warheads and flies at 10 times the speed of sound, according to Putin, who declared that it can’t be intercepted by any modern air defense systems.

Oreshnik can penetrate underground bunkers and releases dozens of submunitions that “turn everything to dust,” Putin said. The use of several Oreshnik missiles in one strike would be comparable in its devastating power to a nuclear weapon, he claimed.

Explosions in Thursday’s Russian attack were reported in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Rivne, Khmelnytskyi, Lutsk, and many other cities in central and western Ukraine.

Zelenskyy urged Western countries to accelerate delivery of promised air defense weaponry. Ukrainian officials in the past have grumbled that military aid is slow to arrive.

“Each such attack proves that air defense systems are needed now in Ukraine, where they save lives, and not at storage bases,” Zelenskyy said on the Telegram messaging app.

Russia uses large numbers of missiles and drones to overwhelm Ukraine’s air defenses and exploits weather conditions such as dense fog and cloud cover to make interceptions harder, the Ukrainian air force said.

The head of Ukraine’s presidential office, Andrii Yermak, said in a Telegram post that Russia had stockpiled missiles to strike Ukrainian infrastructure and wage war against civilians during the cold season. “They were helped by their crazy allies, including from North Korea,” he wrote.

Western governments and South Korea say North Korea in recent months has intensified its military support for Russia.

The head of the Lviv region in western Ukraine, Maksym Kozytskyi, said the attack left more than half a million households without electricity.

Over 280,000 households in the northwestern Rivne region were without electricity because of the attack, according to regional Gov. Oleksandr Koval. Running water supplies were also patchy in affected areas. Some schools in Rivne city switched to online classes.

There were also strikes on the bordering Volyn region, where 215,000 households had no electricity, regional head Ivan Rudnytskyi said. All critical infrastructure that lost power was switched to generators.

Energy infrastructure was also targeted in the western Ivano-Frankivsk region, local officials said. Air defenses were activated there, and emergency power outages were introduced.

Local officials ordered the opening of “points of invincibility” — shelter-type places where people can charge their phones and other electrical devices and get refreshments during blackouts.

In Kyiv, where the air raid alert lasted over nine hours, missile debris fell in one neighborhood, local officials said. No casualties were reported.

Working Well: Practicing humility and finding support can help when political tensions rise at work

By CATHY BUSSEWITZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — There’s no easy way to bridge the political divides that have created rifts in communities, families and friendships.

But workplace morale and productivity can take a hit when ideological differences are left to fester, affecting teamwork and feelings of mutual respect. Finding a safe space to process emotions while remaining civil can be a delicate balancing act.

While talking politics with colleagues can be fortifying, the opposite also can be true when we disagree. Being exposed to strongly held beliefs that run counter to one’s own values can lead to people feeling

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mistreated or unsafe. This month's U.S. presidential election heightened those tensions.

"There was a lot of anxiety during this election, and in times of anxiety you need to create psychological safety in people," said Ron Gutman, an adjunct professor of leadership at Stanford University and the co-founder and co-CEO of health technology company Intrivo. "You need to create trust in people, to bring back the trust in each other."

Here are some tips from business leaders, psychologists and communication experts on how to navigate political conflicts in the workplace.

Practice humility

To cultivate a more peaceful working environment, executives, managers and employees can practice humility. That means seeing ourselves as equal and not superior to our colleagues and subordinates, and recognizing that no one has all the right answers.

When we listen to others thoughtfully and relinquish a reflexive belief in our own infallibility, it allows us to remain open to new ideas and perspectives, said Inclusivv CEO Jenn Graham, whose organization creates structured dialogues around social and political issues for corporate clients.

"We can say something like, 'I haven't heard of that or thought of that before. Thank you for sharing,'" Graham said. "And that simple act of 'thank you for sharing,' with gratitude and humility combined, creates a reciprocity for that brave space, for that psychological safety. And that's what we need to foster more than ever."

To cultivate a humble mindset, think about why you might be wrong, and consider that the opposite of what you believe might be true, said Jake Telkamp, an assistant professor at Augusta University in Georgia. "We are really good at seeking out information that supports our beliefs, and then we scrutinize evidence that challenges our beliefs," he said.

Find your supporters and know your rights

In some situations, a more guarded approach is warranted. If political talk feels like a personal attack, you may need to find allies who can help you process what you're hearing and feeling.

For example, when a comedian opened a campaign rally for President-elect Donald Trump last month by referring to Puerto Rico as a "floating island of garbage," many people were deeply upset, said psychologist Alfee Breland-Noble, founder of The AAKOMA Project, a nonprofit organization focused on empowering youth and young adults of color and people who face sexism and homophobia.

The same was true after Black teenagers and adults received text messages this month telling them they were "selected to pick cotton," she said.

"There's been a lot of sadness around, why isn't anybody publicly telling these people, 'You can't say these things about people who come from my community?'" Breland-Noble said.

People feel like their lives are on the line, and are asking, "Where do I go with this struggle that I'm having? Because people who look like me nationally, we all feel like we're under attack," she said.

Breland-Noble encourages employees who feel marginalized by political discourse to identify colleagues to confide in, to check workplace policies for any rules on unacceptable speech and behavior, and to consider speaking with a trusted supervisor about what they're experiencing.

"There is a lot that we can learn from how people have over time managed having a marginalized identity and being in the workplace because you have a plethora of people around you who are dealing with this stuff literally every day," Breland-Noble said.

Also check your employer's social media policy. In many states, workers can be fired for posting political beliefs online, said Brad Kelley, a shareholder who represents employers at the law firm Littler.

Look for common ground

When attempting to resolve discord, one way to foster a peaceful resolution is to seek common ground.

In the structured conversations she leads, Graham encourages participants to begin by listening to and acknowledging what the other person is saying. Repeat it back. Honor their emotions. Then you can share your perspective, and in the process you may find similarities, she said.

"When you're looking for common ground, you're ideally looking for a shared value," Graham said. It could be as simple as recognizing "we both have a need for and a desire for (fill in the) blank."

Most people want a happier, healthier, more prosperous country, but the disagreement often lies in how

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to best get there, Telkamp said. Acknowledging shared goals can help de-escalate tension.

"People on the left and the right are disliking, distrusting, and generally they think people on the other side are unintelligent and immoral," Telkamp said. "I'm interested in how we can kind of get off the ledge a little bit and come back to a better understanding of each other."

Foster fun conversations

One way managers can try to bridge divides is to create rituals for employees to share what's important to them, Gutman said. This can help build a baseline of trust within an organization.

Every Friday at Intrivo, the staff gathers for an hour and one person presents on a topic they're passionate about. It could be a hobby, an idea, a family experience or a skill. Political topics are fine as long as no one is putting anyone down, he said.

"It can be super technical or super silly," Gutman said. The conversations build trust, and a sense of safety and community, he said.

Know when to walk away

In circumstances where a discussion is getting heated, sometimes the best way to handle it is to remove ourselves from the conflict or to keep our views to ourselves.

Leaders may want to consider abstaining from sharing their political views, which may alienate some workers, Telkamp said. "That's not about silencing your beliefs," he said. "It's more about keeping the workplace focused on the work."

Today in History: November 29, the Sand Creek Massacre

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, Nov. 29, the 334th day of 2024. There are 32 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Nov. 29, 1864, a Colorado militia launched an unprovoked attack on an encampment of Cheyenne and Arapahoe tribal members, killing an estimated 230 people.

Also on this date:

In 1929, Navy Lt. Cmdr. Richard E. Byrd, pilot Bernt Balchen, radio operator Harold June and photographer Ashley McKinney made the first airplane flight over the South Pole.

In 1961, Enos the chimp was launched from Cape Canaveral aboard the Mercury-Atlas 5 spacecraft, which orbited earth twice before returning.

In 1981, film star Natalie Wood drowned at age 43 while boating off California's Santa Catalina Island with her husband Robert Wagner and actor Christopher Walken.

In 1987, a Korean Air 707 jetliner en route from Abu Dhabi to Bangkok was destroyed by a bomb planted by North Korean agents, killing all 115 people aboard.

In 2001, former Beatle George Harrison died in Los Angeles following a battle with cancer; he was 58.

In 2012, the United Nations voted overwhelmingly to grant Palestine non-observer member state status, a vote that came exactly 65 years after the General Assembly adopted a plan to divide Palestine into separate states for Jews and Arabs. (The 2012 vote was 138 in favor; nine members, including the United States, voted against and 41 abstained.)

In 2018, in a surprise guilty plea, former Trump lawyer Michael Cohen confessed that he lied to Congress about a Moscow real estate deal he pursued on Trump's behalf during the 2016 campaign.

In 2022, Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes was convicted of seditious conspiracy for a violent plot to overturn Democrat Joe Biden's presidential win, handing the Justice Department a major victory in its massive prosecution of the Jan. 6, 2021 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. (Rhodes would be sentenced to 18 years in prison in May 2023).

Today's Birthdays: Actor Diane Ladd is 89. Musician Chuck Mangione is 84. Filmmaker Joel Coen is 70. Actor-TV personality Howie Mandel is 69. Actor Cathy Moriarty is 64. Actor Kim Delaney is 63. Actor Andrew McCarthy is 62. Actor Don Cheadle is 60. Pop singer Jonathan Knight (New Kids on the Block) is 56. Baseball Hall of Famer Mariano Rivera is 55. Actor Brian Baumgartner is 52. Actor Anna (AH'-nuh) Faris is 48. Rapper The Game is 45. Actor Gemma Chan is 42. Actor Lucas Black is 42. NFL quarterback Russell Wilson is 36.