

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Thursday, Dec. 5

Senior Menu: Chicken cordon bleu hot dish, catalina blend, oranges, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Biscuits.  
School Lunch: Italian Rice Bake, corn.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Nigeria Circle, 2 p.m.  
MS/HS Christmas Program, 7 p.m., GHS Gym



## Friday, Dec. 6

Senior Menu: New England Ham Dinner, California blend, peaches, dinner roll.  
School Breakfast: Breakfast cookie.  
School Lunch: Potato soup, ham sandwich.  
St. John's Lutheran: Preschool Christmas Program, 7 p.m.  
GBB hosts Timber Lake (C game at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m., varsity to follow)  
Girls Varsity Wrestling at Watertown, 4 p.m.  
Christmas Tour of Trees at Wage Memorial Library, 3:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

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

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# 1440

**Why 1440? The printing press was invented around the year 1440, spreading knowledge to the masses and changing the course of history. More facts: In every day, there are 1,440 minutes. We're here to make each one count.**

## UnitedHealthcare CEO Killed

Brian Thompson, CEO of UnitedHealthcare, the insurance division of UnitedHealth Group, was shot and killed yesterday in what police called a targeted attack in Manhattan. The company was holding its annual investor day at the Hilton Hotel. A search for the suspect is underway.

The 50-year-old Thompson was arriving around 6:45 am ET when the suspect, wearing a ski mask and a dark hooded sweatshirt, fired three shots at his back and leg using a handgun before escaping on an e-bike. Police say the suspect was lying in wait for several minutes before the killing. Authorities have not publicly identified a motive as of this writing, but they say Thompson had recently faced several threats.

UnitedHealthcare is the largest private health insurance provider in the US, serving roughly 50 million customers. Thompson had worked at the company for more than 20 years, becoming CEO of UnitedHealthcare in April 2021.

## France Prime Minister Ousted

France's National Assembly voted to oust conservative Prime Minister Michel Barnier yesterday, marking the country's first successful no-confidence effort since 1962. He is expected to resign imminently.

The vote—331 out of 577—came two days after Barnier sidestepped Parliament to pass a 2025 budget with roughly \$63B in spending cuts and tax increases. While France reels from two years of flat growth and high levels of debt, the budget—and its mode of passage—was opposed by both left-wing and conservative populist parties. Barnier's budget is now null and void, leaving some concerned about the direction of Europe's second-largest economy.

Barnier's government lasted only three months—the shortest-lived government in France's history. He was appointed by President Emmanuel Macron in September after snap elections over the summer left the National Assembly without a party in the majority. Barnier is expected to stay on as a caretaker prime minister until Macron appoints his replacement.

## Sunny with a Chance of Accuracy

Google's DeepMind yesterday unveiled an AI model capable of predicting the weather more accurately than existing forecasting systems. The breakthrough marks an advancement in the field, promising quicker and cheaper results.

DeepMind researchers trained their model, GenCast, on data from 1979 to 2018 to predict the weather for 2019. In a study published in Nature, they found GenCast outperformed the world's leading atmospheric predictor—the ensemble system from the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts—over 97% of the time on factors like wind speeds, temperatures, and precipitation. GenCast was also fast, producing 15-day predictions in eight minutes rather than the hours conventional systems can take. GenCast also outperformed in predicting fast-changing hurricane paths but underperformed in predictions of hurricane intensity.

At least 35 countries rely on Europe's ensemble system, which forecasts weather using room-sized supercomputers that calculate global observations from satellites and weather stations. In contrast, GenCast runs on smaller machines and uses historical data to spot patterns and present scenarios.

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## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Disney+ integrates ESPN live sports and other select content into its offering, including two new Disney+ exclusive sports studio shows.

Texas, Georgia, and Alabama highlight top 2025 recruiting classes for college football's national signing day.

Sports streamer DAZN signs roughly \$1B deal for broadcast rights to all 63 matches for the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup.

Taylor Swift named Spotify's most-streamed artist worldwide for second straight year; The Weeknd, Bad Bunny, Drake, and Billie Eilish round out the top five.

## Science & Technology

Drugmaker Eli Lilly reports its weightloss drug Zepbound showed more than 20% reduction in body weight, roughly 50% more effective than rival Wegovy in randomized control trials.

Researchers discover brain circuit linked to resilience against stress in mice; findings may lead to new treatments for chronic depression.

Engineers develop new catalyst that efficiently turns methane gas into useful polymers; reaction produces formaldehyde, which can be combined with urea to create a resin found in common consumer goods.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +0.6%, Dow +0.7%, Nasdaq +1.3%), with all three indexes reaching all-time session highs and closing at records.

Bitcoin surpasses \$100K in value for the first time; the cryptocurrency has jumped over 45% in value since the US presidential election last month.

Amazon sued by Washington, DC, Attorney General Brian Schwab (D) for allegedly excluding two historically underserved communities from access to Prime's expedited two-day deliver.

General Motors to record over \$5B hit to Q4 profit as it aims to restructure an unprofitable joint venture in Shanghai that has lost market share to Chinese manufacturers in recent years.

## Politics & World Affairs

South Korea's opposition parties submit motion to impeach President Yoon Suk Yeol following martial law declaration this week; vote could come as early as tomorrow.

President-elect Donald Trump to nominate cryptocurrency advocate Paul Atkins to lead the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Former Sen. Kelly Loeffler (R) selected to lead Small Business Administration.

Peter Navarro selected as top trade adviser.

Jared Isaacman—first billionaire to conduct private spacewalk—chosen to lead NASA.

Army veteran Dan Driscoll selected for Army secretary.

Final House race called as Democrat Adam Gray is declared winner of California's 13th District; Republicans to hold five-seat majority (220-215).

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**X SERIES** | *Cub Cadet*

## PUT WINTER IN ITS PLACE.






**2X** TWO-STAGE POWER

INTELLIPOWER<sup>®</sup> TRAC MAX EFI

When the winters get tough, the Cub Cadet<sup>®</sup> 2X gets tougher. This two-stage snow blower is 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<sup>™</sup> trim package to help tackle the deep stuff. Featuring trigger-controlled power steering, push-button electric start, dual LED headlights, 16-inch X-Trac<sup>™</sup> tires and a 3-year limited warranty.\*\*

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Up to 18"-23" (18"-23" for EFI and MAX <sup>™</sup> units)	Up to 8-15+ cars	Smooth & gravel



### 2X 24" WITH INTELLIPOWER<sup>®</sup>

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

- ▶ IntelliPOWER<sup>®</sup> 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<sup>®</sup>

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

- ✦ 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<sup>®</sup>

Take on winter with the 357cc Cub Cadet<sup>®</sup> engine with IntelliPOWER<sup>®</sup>.

- ✦ 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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www.harrysinc.com  
605-395-6421

<sup>1</sup> 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 PDI 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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UNITS AVAILABLE IN  
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[5star-mgmt.com/listings](https://5star-mgmt.com/listings)



5-STAR MANAGEMENT, LLC

## South Dakota Counties and Tribes to Enter Local Winter Road Conditions into SD511

PIERRE, S.D. – South Dakota travelers rely on SD511 for real-time travel information, including road conditions, closures, construction, incidents, weather forecasts, and roadway camera images, especially during winter. This year, the South Dakota Department of Transportation (SDDOT) has partnered with numerous counties and tribes across the state allowing them to directly update road conditions on the statewide SD511 system.

SDDOT provides a 511 website at <https://sd511.org>, mobile apps for both iOS and Android devices, and the legacy 511 phone number that can be dialed toll-free anywhere in South Dakota. Callers outside South Dakota can dial 800-MYSD511 (800-697-3511). People can also subscribe to receive text messages and/or email notifications for road closure updates and travel advisories along routes of their choice.

Craig Smith, SDDOT Director of Operations, noted, "Local officials will now be able to designate their counties and tribal areas as "no travel advised" or "roads closed" during severe storms. The local restrictions will be displayed on SD511's maps and road condition reports and transmitted to navigation app providers, enabling travelers to plan and complete their travel more safely."

To date, sixty of the state's sixty-six counties and eight of nine tribes are registered to participate this winter.



**8th Annual Holiday Party**  
**Live & Silent Auctions**  
**Olive Grove Golf Clubhouse**  
**Groton, SD**

**Saturday, Dec. 7, 2024**  
**Holiday Party - 6 p.m. to close**  
**A variety of snacks served.**

**Silent Auction Basket Items**  
**Bidding closes at 8:30 p.m.**  
**Live Auctions begin at 8:30 p.m.**

**Proceeds raised to replace cooler in clubhouse!**

**Come on out for a fun evening and support your local golf course!**

## The Life of Wesley Snoozy

April 30, 1951 — December 3, 2024  
Twin Brooks



Wesley "Wes" Snoozy, 73, passed away on Tuesday, December 3, 2024, at his home near Twin Brooks, SD, following a courageous fight against cancer.

Funeral services will be held on Monday, December 9, 2024, at 11:00 a.m. at Mundwiler Funeral Home in Milbank, SD. Visitation will be held on Sunday, December 8, 2024, from 5:00 p.m. until 7:00 p.m. at Mundwiler Funeral Home. Visitation will continue on Monday, one hour prior to the service. Pastor Ken Nelson will officiate.

Wesley "Wes" Julius Snoozy was born on April 30, 1951, in Sioux Falls, SD, to Everette and Eloise (Lunning) Snoozy. He spent his early years in Centerville, SD, attending Morning Star Country School until the sixth grade. In 1962, the family moved six miles north of South Shore, where Wes attended South Shore School and graduated in 1969. After graduation, Wes joined the National Guard's 147th Field Artillery unit and played an active role in the Rapid City flood recovery efforts during his service. He was honorably discharged in 1975.

In June 1972, Wes married Jeanette Brandriet, and together they had three children: Scott, Andrea, and Amber. Wes loved ranching and was involved in buying and selling yearlings until 1986. He also worked for Elshere Bulk Spray and later for West-Con, where he specialized in spraying and spreading fertilizer. In 1995, Wes was united in marriage with Marie (Arnold) Pauli, welcoming her two

children: Cristy and Richard into his life. Wes had a passion for the outdoors and enjoyed hunting, fishing, and trapping. He also loved reading, watching Westerns, and most of all, spending cherished time with his children and grandchildren.

Left to cherish his memory are his loving wife, Marie Snoozy of Twin Brooks, SD; children, Scott (Wanda) Snoozy of Twin Brooks, SD; Andrea (Scott) Eisenbeisz of Aberdeen, SD; Amber (Casey) Stowman of Fargo, ND; Cristy (Bryan) Krause of Sioux Falls, SD; Richard (Stephanie) Pauli of Milbank, SD; eight grandchildren; four great-grandchildren; brother-in-law, Chuck Noeldner of South Shore, SD; sister-in-law, Jill Snoozy of Thief River Falls, MN; parents-in-law: Stanley "Stan" and Pauline Arnold of Ortley, SD; brothers-in-law: Alan (Angie) Arnold of Vine Grove, KT; Bryan Arnold of Cumberland, WI; sisters-in-law: Julie (Perry) Althoff of Webster, SD; and Lori Arnold of Ortley, SD; and many nieces, nephews, and several cousins.

Wes was preceded in death by his parents: Everette and Eloise; brothers: Keith and Kevin; sister, Joyce; two infant siblings; maternal and paternal grandparents; and aunts and uncles.

Special thank you to Avera @ Home Hospice for the exceptional care given to Wes.

Memorials may be sent to:

Avera @ Home Hospice

(Attn: Rhonda)

301 Flynn Dr.

Milbank SD 57252.

## The season for community partnerships

By Jim Speirs, Executive Director, Arts South Dakota

Look around your community and chances are you'll discover the arts everywhere this season. Maybe there's a play at school, or a choral concert celebrating the holidays. You may find an arts and crafts fair that's an annual tradition or perhaps your community has a South Dakota Arts Council-sponsored artist in the schools, bringing a new and exciting perspective to your students.

People working to make these events possible are partners in making their community better through the arts. In fact, we're all partners. Anyone who buys a ticket to a holiday show, compliments a student on a school art project, sings in a choir, has an original work of art framed for an office or just tells a neighbor about an upcoming arts event is a partner in advancing the arts in South Dakota. Now is the best time to join that partnership supporting our communities and the creative activities that help them thrive.

We're about to turn the calendar page to a new year, with the hopes and dreams of making every day better, lifting up the arts and being even stronger local champions of creativity, culture and community. Arts education programs in our schools help students acquire knowledge in a variety of effective ways, using the arts to teach other core curricula subjects. Communities that nurture the arts have something to be proud of—and something to grow each year.

You can be a vital partner in building strong communities. This is a good time of year to celebrate the creative activities we all enjoy on a daily basis and think about the ways you support the arts in your town. Let's strengthen our community partnerships for an even better year in 2025!

For more about celebrating and growing the arts in South Dakota, visit [www.ArtsSouthDakota.org](http://www.ArtsSouthDakota.org) and don't forget to check out the calendar of arts events near you.



### **\*\*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](http://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](mailto:shauctioneer@hotmail.com)



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## GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT 06-6

### MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL

P.O. Box 410  
502 North 2<sup>nd</sup> Street  
Groton, SD 57445  
Fax: (605) 397-8453

### ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

P.O. Box 410  
810 North 1<sup>st</sup> Street  
Groton, SD 57445  
Fax: (605) 397-2344

#### Groton Area School

##### Board

Grant Rix, President  
Nick Strom, VP  
Debra Gengerke  
Martin Weismantel  
Tigh Flichs  
Travis Harder  
Dr. Heather Lerseth-Flichs,  
DVM

##### Superintendent

Joseph J. Schwan  
(605) 397-2351 ext. 1003  
Joe.Schwan@k12.sd.us

##### High School Principal

Shelby Edwards  
(605) 397-8381 ext. 1004  
Shelby.Edwards@k12.sd.us

##### Elementary Principal

Brett Schwan  
(605) 397-2317  
Brett.Schwan@k12.sd.us

##### Business Manager

Becky Hubsch  
(605) 397-2351 ext. 1008  
Becky.Hubsch@k12.sd.us

##### Athletic Director

Alexa Schuring  
(605) 397-8381 ext. 1068  
Alexa.Schuring@k12.sd.us

##### Opportunity Coordinator

Jodi Schwan  
(605) 397-8381 ext. 1015  
Jodi.Schwan@k12.sd.us

##### K-12 School Counselor

Emily Neely  
(605) 397-2317  
Emily.VanGerpen@k12.sd.us

##### Technology Coordinator

Aaron Helvig  
(605) 397-8381 ext. 1025  
Aaron.Helvig@k12.sd.us

### Girls Basketball Game

Timber Lake @ Groton Area  
Friday, December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024

#### Game Times/Locations: Main Court in Arena

- 5:00 PM CT → Girls C
- 6:00 PM CT → Girls JV
- 7:30 PM CT → Girls Varsity

**Prior to the Girls Varsity game, the National Anthem will be first, with Varsity Introductions/Lineups to follow.**

**ADMISSION & SPECTATORS: Adults: \$5.00 Students: \$4.00.**

**CONCESSIONS:** Will be available

**LOCKER ROOM:** Timber Lake will use the far back locker room down the JH Locker Room Hallway.

**Team Benches – Groton:** South Bench  
**Timber Lake:** North Bench

**ATHLETIC TRAINER:** There will be an athletic trainer on site. AED is located near the ticket booth.

**Livestream:** GDlive.com (must pay to watch) or NFHS

**C Game Officials:** Kasey Kurtz, Kristi Zoellner, Marty Weismantel

**C Game Shot Clock:** Jacob Zak

**JV/Varsity Officials:** Eric Donat, Paul Rozell, Daren Lorenz, Shane Franks

**Announcer:** Mike Imrie

**C/JV/V Scoreboard:** Kristen Dolan

**C/JV/V Official Book:** Alexa Schuring

**Shot Clock Operator:** Kristi Zoellner

**National Anthem:** TBD

Thank you,  
Alexa Schuring, Athletic Director



**DACOTA BANK**

**HOLIDAY  
OPEN HOUSE**

**Cookies & Calendars**

**DECEMBER 10 -13**

**9:00 - 4:00 PM**

*Stop in for cookies,  
coffee and a calendar!*

**7 E. US Hwy 12 | Groton**

MEMBER FDIC



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## The Groton Community Historical Society holds December 1st pancake feed

The Groton Community Historical Society extends its heartfelt gratitude to everyone who attended the inaugural pancake fundraiser and the many volunteers who made this a successful event. Your support is invaluable as we strive to foster community engagement while raising funds for our important restoration project.

We invite all community members to join us for the next pancake meal scheduled for Sunday, January 5th, from 10 AM to 1 PM. This event will take place at the Community Center, located at 109 N 3rd Street, with the Groton Historic 1912 Jail situated directly south on the same block.

The funds raised from these events will directly contribute to the restoration efforts of the Groton Historic Jail, preserving an important piece of our local history. We look forward to seeing everyone again as we work together to keep our heritage alive.



**Servers were Travis McGannon, Topper Tastad, April Abeln, Nancy Larsen, Elizabeth Barajas, Karyn Babcock.** (Courtesy Photos)







## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Man presented by Noem as alleged face of tribal cartel influence sentenced for Rapid City crime

**Case was not connected to cartels, US Attorney's Office says**

**BY: JOHN HULT - DECEMBER 4, 2024 5:56 PM**

A man whose photograph was used by Gov. Kristi Noem as alleged proof of rampant drug cartel activity on tribal lands has been sentenced to eight years in federal prison for conspiring to distribute methamphetamine in Rapid City, but prosecutors said the case was not connected to cartels.

Charles Cain Merrival, 32, has spent most of the past four years in the Pennington County Jail in Rapid City, awaiting trial on federal drug conspiracy and firearms charges and a state-level robbery charge.

Merrival's photo was shown to reporters at a spring news conference in Pierre, at which Gov. Kristi Noem doubled down on earlier comments about the prevalence and influence of Mexican drug cartels on South Dakota's reservations.

His name was not shown in the photo, but Noem showed it and a handful of other photos showing men who appeared to be Native American, wearing leather biker jackets, as the governor referenced drug activity on reservations. Merrival's face was the clearest of any of the men who appeared in the photos.

Merrival is a member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, but was living in Rapid City when the criminal activity occurred. When contacted at the Pennington County Jail, Merrival said he hadn't been to the reservation for years and that the photo Noem used was snapped inside a shopping mall in Rapid City.

Shortly after the election of Donald Trump to a second presidential term last month, Noem was announced as Trump's choice to direct the Department of Homeland Security. That position would put her in charge of the U.S. southern border, across which most of the illicit methamphetamine and fentanyl flow.

Noem's comments on drug cartel influence – which contributed to votes by leadership in all nine South Dakota tribal governments to ban her from their lands – pointed the finger at drugs brought to the U.S. by people crossing the border illegally.



**Charles Merrival, front, pictured during a 2019 march in Rapid City.** (Courtesy of Charles Merrival family)



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Merrival told Searchlight that Noem's use of his image to make those points hindered his right to a fair trial by unfairly painting him with the broad brush of drug cartels – international crime syndicates to which Merrival insists he has no ties.

"Kristi Noem herself falsely labeled me a gang member that is affiliated with Mexican drug cartels and the commission of murders," Merrival said in a phone interview last spring. "Because of Kristi Noem's decision to personally intervene, any presumption of innocence that I had is gone forever."

Merrival took a plea deal over the summer and admitted guilt for conspiring to distribute methamphetamine in exchange for a cap of eight years in prison.

A press release on his sentencing from U.S. Attorney Alison Ramsdell said Merrival was involved in the conspiracy from July of 2021 through January of 2022, the month he was arrested after officers watched him pass a backpack containing methamphetamine and weapons to a co-conspirator. A search of Merrival turned up additional ammunition, the release said.

"During the investigation, multiple sources confirmed Merrival's history of violence and firearm possession. Merrival is prohibited from possessing firearms due to previous felony convictions," the release said.

The U.S. Attorney's Office press release also noted that Merrival had served as sergeant-at-arms for the Ghost Dance Motorcycle Club, a support group for the Bandidos. Merrival told Searchlight over the summer that the Ghost Dance group ceased to exist as a club in mid-2021. Merrival was released from the Pennington County Jail around that time after spending more than a year there awaiting trial on state-level robbery charges. He also has pending state cases for drug possession and harassing phone calls, the latter of which came during his time in jail. He returned to the Pennington County Jail in early 2022 and remained there until his sentencing late last month.

Shortly after his sentencing hearing, Merrival sent a text to South Dakota Searchlight saying the subject of the governor's cartel allegations came up at his sentencing. He did not respond to a follow-up text.

Ace Crawford, spokeswoman for the U.S. Attorney's Office, confirmed that the topic was broached at the sentencing and addressed by an assistant U.S. attorney (AUSA) in the courtroom.

"In response to a question by Judge Schreier, our AUSA did confirm in open court that Merrival's case was not connected to Mexican drug cartels," Crawford said via email.

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

## **Police commission: Complaints against cops rising, but fewer than 1% of SD officers disciplined**

**BY: JOHN HULT - DECEMBER 4, 2024 4:48 PM**

Complaints about law enforcement have steadily risen over the past few years, owing in part to an on-line portal that simplifies the process of making a complaint to the state Division of Criminal Investigation about alleged police misconduct.

Even with the rise, though, fewer than 1% of certified officers in South Dakota were disciplined for their behavior in 2024.

"I know we get mired down sometimes in the misconduct, the complaints, the investigations. It's easy for us to see or be of the perspective that there's a lot of things going on in the state that are concerning," Law Enforcement Training Director Hank Prim said Wednesday at a meeting of the state's Law Enforcement Officers Standards and Training Commission in Pierre. "But the perspective in that stat I think really shows us where reality is."

Prim presented the figures in a summary of what he called an "Integrity Report," which lays out complaints against officers and their disposition. Prim pulled it together at the urging of commission member Neil Fulton, who is the dean of the University of South Dakota Knudson School of Law. Fulton said the

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State Bar of South Dakota produces a similar report for the edification of that group's board members.

In Prim's one-page rundown, he noted that complaints against officers are up again this year, continuing a trend in increased complaints that's held for the past three years. There have been 142 complaints filed in 2024 thus far, a 24% increase over this point in 2023.

The commission also reviews applications for possible certification and entry into the state's basic law enforcement training course. In 2024, the commission denied 13 total applications: eight from law enforcement hopefuls, four for people hoping to become 911 dispatchers, and one from a person who'd hoped to be a school sentinel. Sentinels are non-law enforcement personnel allowed to carry weapons in schools, in theory to retaliate against safety threats.

Another 13 students were dismissed from basic law enforcement training, five for disciplinary reasons, one for failure to prove their skills proficiency and seven for academic failure.

There were 16 officers who voluntarily gave up their certification after a misconduct complaint: 13 law enforcement officers, two 911 dispatchers and one person who was certified in both areas.

The commission held seven contested case hearings, and twice offered settlement agreements to officers, which typically require some measure of remedial training and a suspension but do not result in a loss of certification.

## Request for victim notification

The commission voted Wednesday to certify a handful of K-9 units, to reinstate eligibility for an officer with lapsed certification and to allow a student rejected for basic training several years ago for failure to disclose his full educational history another shot at joining the academy.

Before the integrity report or certification votes, however, Rapid City lawyer Jim Leach appeared briefly to suggest a change to commission protocol with regard to contested case hearings.

In those hearings, the commission serves as judge and jury in cases where an officer contests allegations of misconduct.

In October 2023, excessive force resulted in a suspended certification for a Brookings officer named Damian Weets. At the commission's most recent meeting, commissioners voted to allow Weets to return to duty without a second psychological examination.

Weets roughed up an intoxicated man — a client of Leach — at the Brookings County Jail. Leach appeared at Weets' hearing, but wasn't given any notice about it.

"The only way that I learned that there would be a contested case hearing was because I got a call two



**Akia Winters, a police recruit with the Oglala Sioux Tribal Police Department, practices a hand-to-hand technique on Ashaun Roach-Valandra, a recruit from the Sisseton-Wahpeton Tribal Police, during a basic law enforcement certification course in 2024. The 13-week course was taking place at the George S. Mickelson Law Enforcement Center in Pierre.** (John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight)

days before the hearing from a member of the news media," Leach said.

Leach suggested that the commission consider adopting a rule under which the alleged victim of an officer facing a misconduct hearing — and their lawyer, if applicable — be notified of the hearing.

In criminal proceedings, the South Dakota Constitution requires the notification of victims of upcoming hearings involving the person who victimized them, should they choose to be notified.

Adopting a similar approach to notification by the commission, Leach said, "would have no downside for you folks," but would reassure citizens who struggle to trust police that the overseers of ethics in the state take misconduct seriously.

"Just in terms of greater transparency in government, I think that's a good thing," Leach said. "I understand that some processes in government need to be in private, but this is not one of them."

Dan Satterlee, director of the Division of Criminal Investigation, told Leach the commission will take the matter under advisement the next time it reviews its policies.

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

## Board backs water rights for proposed Missouri River pipeline and increased use of James River

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - DECEMBER 4, 2024 4:22 PM

A state board approved additional usage of the James River for irrigation and endorsed a future-use permit for a proposed water pipeline from the Missouri River to western South Dakota.

The South Dakota Water Management Board's decisions, made Wednesday in Pierre, finalized the James River proposal and advanced the Western Dakota Regional Water System application to the state Legislature for consideration.

The pipeline application would reserve 20,765 acre-feet of Missouri River water annually for use in 19 western South Dakota counties. That's nearly 7 billion gallons per year.

Ron Duvall, a state engineer with the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources, recommended approval of the permit based on the abundant availability of water in the river, the need for the reserved amount and the potential beneficial use of the water.

He said the request is in addition to 52,545 acre-feet already reserved by other entities involved with the pipeline proposal, potentially bringing the total amount of the project's water rights to 73,310 acre-feet.

The Western Dakota Regional Water System, established in 2021 and based in Rapid City, aims to deliver Missouri River water to communities, tribes and rural water systems. The project has received some state and local funding but has a projected cost in the billions, which would require federal funding.

The application does not authorize immediate construction or use but would reserve the right to use the water in the future.



**A 2022 view of the Missouri River in Chamberlain.** (John

Hult/South Dakota Searchlight)



## James River increase

The board also approved a plan to increase pumping rights on the James River.

There are currently 116 water rights or permits and two future-use permits on the eastern South Dakota waterway, appropriating or reserving 298.92 cubic feet per second of the 300 cfs limit. Demand for more agricultural water rights and an increase in the amount of water flowing down the river prompted the state's Water Rights Program to reassess its James River management plan.

The river has experienced a nearly 300% increase in its annual flow since the late 1990s. A state report says increased precipitation is the cause. Other researchers have attributed widespread streamflow increases not only to higher precipitation, but also to urban development that sends rainfall running across concrete and asphalt into streams, expanding tile drainage systems under farmland that divert excess moisture into local creeks and rivers, and the conversion of grassland to cropland, which causes higher runoff.

Acknowledging the recommendation from the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources to exceed the 300 cfs cap established in 1965, the board voted to approve the plan.

The plan does not include a fixed cap. Instead, it transitions the state to a system in which individual water permit applications are evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

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

## Conservative justices lean toward allowing Tennessee's ban on gender affirming care

South Dakota among 23 other states with similar bans

BY: SAM STOCKARD - DECEMBER 4, 2024 5:26 PM

A conservative U.S. Supreme Court appeared ready to side with Tennessee on Wednesday in upholding the state's ban on gender affirming care for minors, a case likely to set legal precedent on equal protection for transgender children.

A decision from the court isn't expected until June 2025, but Republican-appointed justices such as Samuel Alito, Clarence Thomas and Brett Kavanaugh tipped their hands on how they would rule during three hours of oral arguments in Washington, D.C.

They were countered by the court's liberal justices, Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan and Ketanji Brown Jackson, who are outnumbered 6-3.

Conservative justices appeared leery of creating a protected class, but Jackson, for instance, indicated the law clearly discriminates on the basis of sex. Jackson used the *Loving v. Virginia* case that allowed racially integrated marriages to show that similar arguments



**Transgender rights opponents and a supporter rally outside of the U.S. Supreme Court as the justices hear arguments in a case on transgender health rights on Dec. 4, 2024, in Washington, D.C.**

(Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images)



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were made against those types of unions some 50 years ago.

Twenty-three other states, including South Dakota, have passed similar laws. But Sotomayor said it is clear that some children need gender affirming care because of the severity of gender dysphoria.

Three families with transgender children and Memphis Dr. Susan Lacy sued the state, then the federal government intervened on behalf of the plaintiffs who are challenging Tennessee's ban on puberty blockers and hormone therapy for transgender minors.

Thomas asked the federal government's attorney why the case would be a matter of age classification, as opposed to sex. Alito and Kavanaugh raised questions about the United Kingdom and European countries dialing back support for gender affirming care.

In addition, Chief Justice John Roberts said the court is "not the best situated to address issues" such as gender affirming care and should allow legislatures to make those types of decisions.

Tennessee lawmakers passed Senate Bill 1 in 2023 following an uproar over reports by a right-wing radio commentator that Vanderbilt University Medical Center was performing surgeries and administering puberty blockers and hormone therapy to children. Vanderbilt said it wasn't performing surgical procedures when the issue erupted.

Senate Bill 1 says Tennessee has a "compelling interest in encouraging minors to appreciate their sex, particularly as they undergo puberty" and in blocking treatments "that might encourage minors to become disdainful of their sex."

The American Civil Liberties Union, ACLU Tennessee, Lambda Legal and Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld filed suit against Tennessee, claiming the equal protection rights of transgender children were violated. The law was struck down in U.S. District Court, but that decision was overturned by the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals, and the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear the case.

Tennessee's legal strategy is based on the premise that the 2023 law prohibiting puberty blockers and hormone therapy for young people is based on "medical purposes," not someone's sex.

In contrast, attorneys for the plaintiffs said Senate Bill 1 created a blanket ban on gender affirming care based entirely on a minor's desire to change sexes. They pointed out minors suffering from gender dysphoria could be prone to suicide if they don't receive puberty blockers or hormone treatments that enable them to transition.

Attorneys for the plaintiffs say the Supreme Court should give the matter "heightened scrutiny," or a closer examination, because it involves discrimination against transgender children rather than review it under standard "rational basis," which is typically used when a law doesn't involve a constitutional right.

Elizabeth Prelogar, solicitor general for the Department of Justice, told the justices the state of West Virginia enacted a law that set up requirements for undergoing gender affirming care, whereas Tennessee passed a blanket ban affecting transgender children.

Justice Kagan made the point that the law is based on "transgender status" and not sex alone. She also said Tennessee appears to want to "conform to sex stereotypes."

Kavanaugh stuck with the argument that some transgender people want to detransition when they get older but are physically unable to make the change.

"How do we as a court choose which set of risks is more serious when we constitutionalize?" Kavanaugh said.

*Sam Stockard, a reporter for the Tennessee Lookout, is a veteran reporter and editor, having written for the Daily News Journal in Murfreesboro, where he served as lead editor when the paper won an award for being the state's best Sunday newspaper two years in a row. He has led the Capitol Hill bureau for The Daily Memphian. His awards include Best Single Editorial and Best Single Feature from the Tennessee Press Association.*

## South Dakota congressman reelected as chair of Main Street Caucus

BY: SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCH-  
LIGHT STAFF - DECEMBER 4,  
2024 9:43 AM

U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, was reelected as chairman of the Main Street Caucus, his office said Wednesday.

Johnson has led the group since 2022. The congressional caucus describes itself as a group of more than 80 “pragmatic conservatives” seeking to “come together to find practical solutions.”

“Now is a special time in American history,” Johnson said in a news release. “We must secure the border, cut spending, and roll back unnecessary regulations. The Republican Main Street Caucus will work with President Trump and the Senate to deliver on this strong, conservative agenda. I’m proud to lead this group during this exciting time.”

Johnson won reelection in November over Democratic challenger Sheryl Johnson.

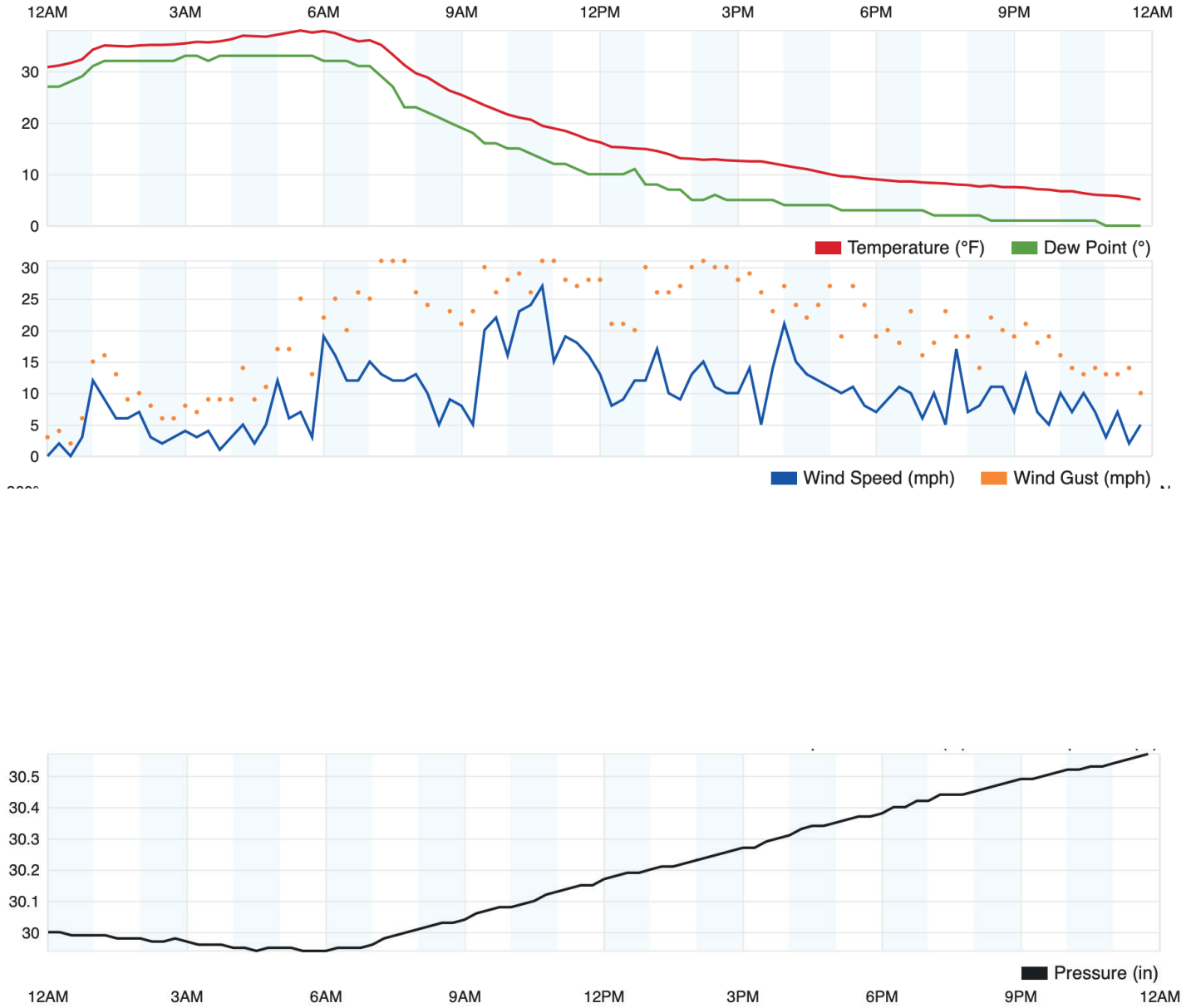


**U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, participates in a debate on Oct. 15, 2024, in Sioux Falls.** (Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 16 °F

Partly Sunny

Tonight



Low: 8 °F

Decreasing  
Clouds

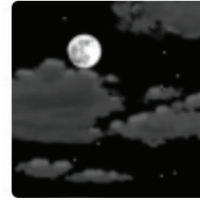
Friday



High: 33 °F

Mostly Sunny

Friday Night



Low: 18 °F

Partly Cloudy

Saturday



High: 44 °F

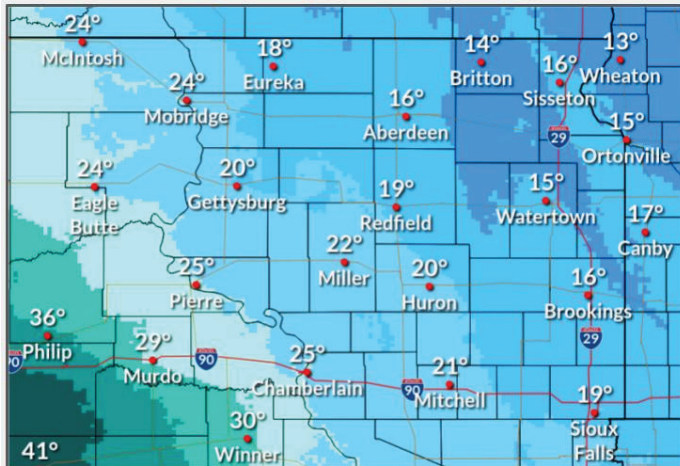
Mostly Sunny



## Arctic Chill Today Milder for the Weekend

December 5, 2024  
3:07 AM

### High Temperatures Today



### Friday



Highs:  
30 to 48

Lows:  
7 to 18

### Saturday



Highs:  
40 to 56

Lows:  
20 to 26

### Sunday



Highs:  
40 to 50

Lows:  
28 to 33



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

While we will have to deal with the arctic chill today, milder air moves into the region for late in the week and through the weekend. Minimal chances for moisture with a system that comes in late in the weekend along with increasing winds



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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 38 °F at 5:25 AM

Low Temp: 6 °F at 11:28 PM

Wind: 34 mph at 7:36 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 8 hours, 55 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 57 in 1939

Record Low: -25 in 2005

Average High: 33

Average Low: 11

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.10

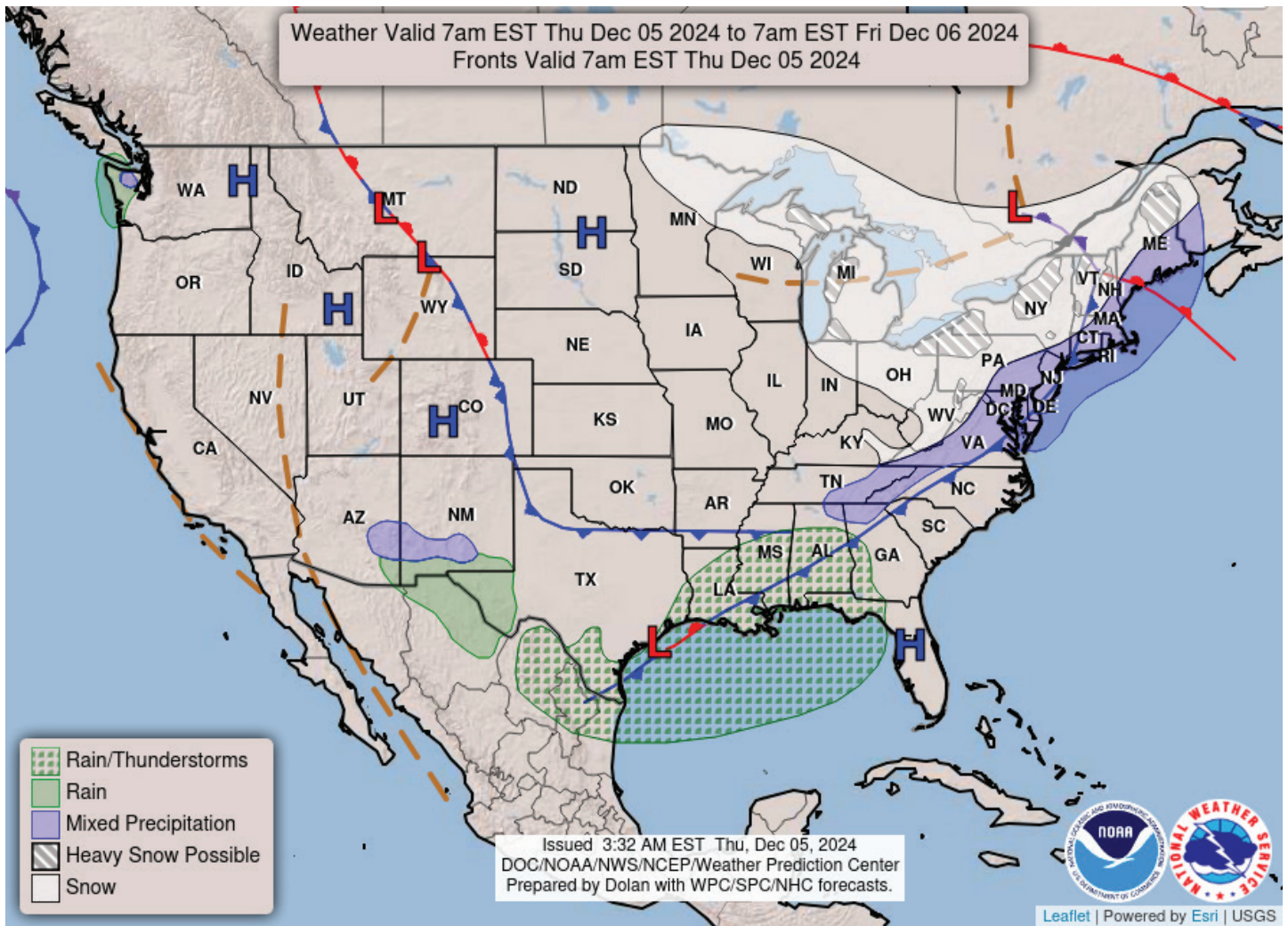
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 21.31

Precip Year to Date: 21.71

Sunset Tonight: 4:51:16 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:56:21 am



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## Today in Weather History

December 5, 1960: A storm dropped snow on the entire region from the morning of the 4th to the late afternoon of the 5th, with the highest amounts in the western, central and north central parts of South Dakota. Five to 10 inches of snow fell in these areas. The snow, blown by winds of 30 to 40 mph, caused extensive drifting of streets and highways. A brief period of freezing rain preceded the snow and added to hazardous driving conditions on roads. Schools were closed for one to two days, with 27 towns reporting closed schools in the Aberdeen area alone. Telephone and power disruption was widespread in central and north central counties of the state, as poles and wires were broken by a combination of ice, snow, and the wind. The storm produced mostly rain in the extreme eastern counties of South Dakota into west central Minnesota, with a narrow band of freezing rain preceding light snow immediately to the west. No serious automobile accidents or property damage was reported in this area of freezing rain and light snow.

December 5, 1976: Cold Canadian air moved across South Dakota during the day on Sunday, December 5th. High winds gusted to 63 mph at Philip and 55 mph at Rapid City. One to two inches of snow fell over all of South Dakota; however, many counties in the southeast, south central, and east-central parts of the state received amounts varying from three to five inches. After this storm, nighttime temperatures fell to below zero. Snowfall amounts included 2 inches at Pierre, Aberdeen, and Watertown; and 3 inches at Redfield and Clear Lake.

1886: A southern storm dumped heavy snow up into far southwest Virginia. The storm dumped 11 inches in Montgomery Alabama and 22.5 inches in Knoxville, TN. It also dropped 25 inches in Rome, Georgia, and 26 inches in Ashville, North Carolina.

1941 - The temperature at Enosburg Falls soared to 72 degrees to establish a state record for Vermont for the month of December. (The Weather Channel)

1953: A tornado outbreak occurred over northeastern Louisiana, southeastern Arkansas, and western Mississippi on this day. At least four confirmed tornadoes touched down. The strongest tornado was rated F5 as it destroyed the town of Vicksburg, Mississippi. This tornado first touched down just west of the Mississippi River in East Madison Parish in Louisiana. The tornado crossed the Mississippi River and tore through the downtown area of Vicksburg. On the ground for seven miles, this tornado caused 38 deaths, 270 injuries, and cost an estimated \$25 million in damages in 1953. Estimated cost adjusted for inflation in 2013 Dollars would be over \$200 million.

1987 - Heavy snow blanketed parts of the north central U.S., and freezing drizzle produced a coat of ice up to half an inch thick in northwestern Minnesota and eastern North Dakota. Snowfall totals ranged up to seven inches at Grand Rapids MN, and 12 inches at Seney MI. High winds in the north central U.S. gusted to 63 mph at Pellston MI, and reached 70 mph at Makinaw Bridge MI. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - There was only a "flurry" of activity, as for much of the nation winter remained on hold. The cold and snow of winter was primarily confined to the northeastern U.S. Five cities in the north central U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, including Norfolk NE with a reading of 65 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - A warm Pacific storm system brought high winds and heavy rain to western Washington and western Oregon. Up to ten inches of rain deluged the western slopes of the Cascade Mountain Range in Washington State over a three day period, and 500 persons had to be evacuated due to flooding along the Skagit River. Up to five inches of rain drenched northwest Oregon, and winds gusted to 71 mph at Netarts. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2003 - A major winter storm impacted parts of the Mid-Atlantic and northeastern United States during the 5th-7th. Snowfall accumulations of one to two feet were common across areas of Pennsylvania northward into New England. Boston, MA received 16.2 inches while Providence, RI had the greatest single snowstorm on record with 17 inches, beating the previous record of 12 inches set December 5-6, 1981. Boston's Logan International Airport was closed briefly on the 7th as heavy snowfall made regular airport operations impossible (AFP).



## What Gift?

Joyce fell behind in her Christmas shopping and suddenly realized that she had neglected to purchase cards for her friends. Hurriedly, she ran to the "surprise" section of a large greeting card store and purchased 100 cards with a beautiful scene of a family gathered in front of a glowing fireplace enjoying its warmth.

Returning home she hastily signed each of the cards without reading the message. Several days later she was sitting with her husband reviewing the guest list for a family dinner. She decided to show him the card she had sent to their friends.

After looking at the picture, she opened the card and read the verse to Jason, her husband: "This card is sent to you to say, A lovely gift is on the way!" Quite a surprise!

God gave us a "star" to alert us that His "lovely gift" would be discovered in a manger – His son. All of the books of the Bible describe the Gift that He promised to send, tell us the reason for His gift, and what we can enjoy now and in the life to come because of His gift.

But, as with every gift, there are two parts: one is the giver and the other is the receiver. An angel rejoiced and proclaimed: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior which is Christ the Lord." That is God the Giver, giving. And, John said, "As many as received Him...to them He gave life." But that is our choice: the receiver – to accept God's gift, His Son.

Prayer: We thank You, Father, for the Gift of life You provided for each of us in Your Son. May we accept Your Gift in faith believing, that He came to save us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.

*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:  
12.03.24

52 60 61 66 67 23

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$579,000,000**

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 33  
DRAW: Mins 22 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.04.24

10 13 32 42 44 9

All Star Bonus: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$16,420,000**

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 48  
DRAW: Mins 22 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.04.24

1 13 25 33 46 6

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$7,000/week**

NEXT 17 Hrs 3 Mins 22  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.04.24

4 7 9 11 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$136,000**

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 3  
DRAW: Mins 22 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.04.24

14 35 43 48 54 1

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$10,000,000**

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 32  
DRAW: Mins 22 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.04.24

1 23 25 28 61 13

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$260,000,000**

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 32  
DRAW: Mins 22 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  
04/05/2025 Dueling Duo at the Legion (Baseball/softball foundation fundraiser)  
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  
06/07/2025 Second Annual Day of Play at Groton Baseball Complex  
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

### **Moore scores 16, Montana beats South Dakota State 71-67**

By The Associated Press undefined

MISSOULA, Mont. (AP) — Malik Moore had 16 points in Montana's 71-67 victory against South Dakota State on Wednesday night.

Moore went 7 of 13 from the field (2 for 7 from 3-point range) for the Grizzlies (6-3). Austin Patterson scored 13 points, shooting 5 for 7, including 3 for 5 from beyond the arc. Brandon Whitney finished 5 of 7 from the field to finish with 12 points.

Matthew Mors finished with 14 points, nine rebounds and two steals for the Jackrabbits (7-3). Damon Wilkinson added 14 points and seven rebounds for South Dakota State. Joe Sayler also put up 11 points.

### **South Dakota secures 94-80 win over Idaho State**

By The Associated Press undefined

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Chase Forte had 21 points in South Dakota's 94-80 victory against Idaho State on Wednesday night.

Forte added five rebounds, six assists, and five steals for the Coyotes (7-3). Isaac Bruns scored 18 points, going 7 of 12 from the floor, including 2 for 5 from 3-point range, and 2 for 3 from the line. Paul Bruns had 14 points and went 4 of 8 from the field (4 for 6 from 3-point range).

AJ Burgin led the way for the Bengals (3-5) with 25 points. Dylan Darling added 16 points and three steals for Idaho State. Jake O'Neil also had 12 points and nine rebounds.

### **Amnesty International says Israel is committing genocide in Gaza. Israel rejects the allegations**

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Amnesty International accused Israel of committing genocide in the Gaza Strip during its war with Hamas, saying it has sought to deliberately destroy Palestinians by mounting deadly attacks, demolishing vital infrastructure and preventing the delivery of food, medicine and other aid.

The human rights group released a report Thursday in the Middle East that said such actions could not be justified by Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack into Israel, which ignited the war, or the presence of militants in civilian areas. Amnesty said the United States and other allies of Israel could be complicit in genocide, and called on them to halt arms shipments.

"Our damning findings must serve as a wake-up call to the international community: this is genocide. It must stop now," Agnès Callamard, Secretary General of Amnesty International, said in the report.

Israel, which was founded in the aftermath of the Holocaust, has adamantly rejected genocide allegations against it as an antisemitic "blood libel." It is challenging such allegations at the International Court of Justice, and it has rejected the International Criminal Court's accusations that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former defense minister committed war crimes in Gaza.

"The deplorable and fanatical organization Amnesty International has once again produced a fabricated report that is entirely false and based on lies," Israel's Foreign Ministry said in a statement. Israel accused Hamas, which has vowed to annihilate Israel, of carrying out a genocidal massacre in the attack that triggered the war, and said it is defending itself in accordance with international law.

Amnesty says Palestinians face a 'slow, calculated death'

Amnesty's report adds an influential voice to a growing list of players that have accused Israel of committing genocide — which would put it in the company of some of the deadliest conflicts of the past 80 years, including Cambodia, Sudan and Rwanda.

The accusations have largely come from human rights groups and allies of the Palestinians. But last

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month, Pope Francis called for an investigation to determine if Israeli actions amounted to genocide, and Saudi Arabia's crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, who has signaled readiness to establish diplomatic relations with Israel, accused it of committing genocide.

Israel says it is at war with Hamas, not the people of Gaza. And key allies, including the U.S. and Germany, have also pushed back against the genocide allegations. But Amnesty accused Israel of violating the 1951 Genocide Convention through acts it says are intended to bring about the physical destruction of Gaza's Palestinian population by exposing them to "a slow, calculated death."

Amnesty said it analyzed the overall pattern of Israel's conduct in Gaza between Oct. 7, 2023 and early July. It noted that there is no casualty threshold in proving the international crime of genocide, which is defined by the United Nations as acts intended to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group.

To establish intent, Amnesty said it reviewed over 100 statements by Israeli government and military officials and others since the start of the war that "dehumanized Palestinians, called for or justified genocidal acts or other crimes against them."

Israeli officials have previously said that such statements were taken out of context or referred to their stated goal of destroying Hamas, not Palestinian civilians.

Israel says it goes to great lengths to protect civilians and comply with international law -- including ordering civilians to evacuate areas ahead of airstrikes and ground offensives. It also says it has facilitated the deliveries of large quantities of food and humanitarian supplies -- a claim that is disputed by the U.N. and aid organizations working inside Gaza.

On Sunday, a former top Israeli general and defense minister accused the government of ethnic cleansing in northern Gaza, where the army has sealed off the towns of Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahiya and the Jabaliya refugee camp and allowed almost no humanitarian aid to enter.

Amnesty said it found that Israel "deliberately inflicted conditions of life on Palestinians in Gaza intended to lead, over time, to their destruction." Those actions included the destruction of homes, farms, hospitals and water facilities; mass evacuation orders; and the restriction of humanitarian aid and other essential services.

It also analyzed 15 airstrikes from the start of the war until April that killed at least 334 civilians, including 141 children, and wounded hundreds of other people. It said it found no evidence that any of the strikes were directed at military objectives.

It said one of the strikes destroyed the Abdelal family home in the southern city of Rafah on April 20, killing three generations of Palestinians, including 16 children, while they were sleeping. An Associated Press investigation identified at least 60 families in which at least 25 members had been killed.

Amnesty has previously angered Israel by joining other major rights groups in accusing it of the international crime of apartheid, saying that for decades it has systematically denied Palestinians basic rights in the territories under its control. Israel has also denied those allegations.

Israel blames civilian deaths on Hamas, lack of aid on UN

Israel says it only targets militants and blames civilian deaths on Hamas because the militants fight in dense, residential areas and have built tunnels and other militant infrastructure near homes, schools and mosques.

It blames the lack of humanitarian aid on United Nations agencies, accusing them of not delivering hundreds of truckloads of aid that have been allowed in. The U.N. says it is often too dangerous to retrieve and deliver the aid. It blames Israel as the occupying power for the breakdown of law and order — which has enabled armed groups to steal aid convoys — while also accusing it of heavily restricting movement within the territory.

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking around 250 hostage, including children and older adults. Some 100 captives are still held inside Gaza, at least a third of whom are believed to be dead.

Israel's retaliatory military campaign has killed more than 44,500 people, according to Gaza health officials, whose count doesn't distinguish between civilians and fighters, though they say more than half the



dead are women and children.

The offensive is among the deadliest and most destructive since World War II, and has destroyed vast areas of the besieged coastal territory. It has displaced some 90% of the population of 2.3 million, often multiple times. Hundreds of thousands of people have crammed into squalid tent camps with little in the way of food, water or toilets.

Aid groups say the population is at risk of disease and malnutrition, especially as winter sets in. Experts have warned of famine in northern Gaza, which Israel has almost completely sealed off since launching a major military operation there in early October. Hamas militants have repeatedly regrouped there and in other areas, and the group has faced no major internal challenge to its rule.

Amnesty says the US needs to press for an end to the war

The United States, which has provided crucial military aid to Israel and shielded it from international criticism, has repeatedly appealed to Israel to facilitate more aid, with limited results.

The Biden administration said in May that Israel's use of U.S.-provided weapons in Gaza at times likely violated international humanitarian law but that the evidence was incomplete.

Callamard urged the United States, Germany and other countries supplying arms to Israel to pressure Netanyahu to end the war.

## **Justice Department and the city of Memphis to address results of scathing police investigation**

By ADRIAN SAINZ, JONATHAN MATTISE and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — The fatal beating of Tyre Nichols by officers after he ran away from a traffic stop in January 2023 exposed serious problems in the Memphis Police Department, from the use of excessive force to its mistreatment of Black people in the majority-Black city, a federal investigation has found.

A report released Wednesday revealed the findings of a 17-month Department of Justice investigation into Memphis police that began after Nichols was kicked, punched and hit with a police baton. Members of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division plan to discuss the report during a Thursday morning news conference, followed by a rebuttal by the city of Memphis with its own press availability.

Nichols was Black, as are the former officers involved in his beating. His death led to national protests, raised the volume on calls for police reforms in the U.S., and directed intense scrutiny towards police in Memphis. The Memphis Police Department is more than 50 percent Black, and police chief Cerelyn "CJ" Davis is also Black.

The federal probe looked at the department's "pattern or practice" of how it uses force and conducts stops, searches and arrests, and whether it engages in discriminatory policing. The city said in a letter released before the report Wednesday that it would not agree to negotiate federal oversight of its police department until it could review and challenge results of the investigation.

The report said police officers would punch, kick and use other force against people who were already handcuffed or restrained, acts that the investigation described as unconstitutional but which were nearly always approved after the fact by supervisors. The investigation found that officers resort to force likely to cause pain or injury "almost immediately in response to low-level, nonviolent offenses, even when people are not aggressive."

"Memphis police officers regularly violate the rights of the people they are sworn to serve," said the report, which adds that "Black people in Memphis disproportionately experience these violations."

"MPD has never assessed its practices for evidence of discrimination," the report said. "We found that officers treat Black people more harshly than white people who engage in similar conduct."

The report says Memphis police cite or arrest Black people for loitering or curfew violations at 13 times the rate it does for white people, and cite or arrest Black people for disorderly conduct at 3.6 times the rate of white people.

Police video showed officers pepper spraying Nichols and hitting him with a Taser before he ran away from a traffic stop. Five officers chased down Nichols just steps from his home as he called out for his mother.

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The video showed the officers milling about, talking and laughing as Nichols struggled with his injuries.

Nichols died on Jan. 10, 2023, three days after the beating. The five officers — Tadarrius Bean, Demetrius Haley, Emmitt Martin, Desmond Mills Jr. and Justin Smith — were fired, charged in state court with murder, and indicted by a federal grand jury on civil rights and witness tampering charges.

The report specifically mentions the Nichols case, and it addresses the police department's practice of flooding neighborhoods with traffic stops.

"This strategy involves frequent contact with the public and gives wide discretion to officers, which requires close supervision and clear rules to direct officers' activity," the report said. "But MPD does not ensure that officers conduct themselves in a lawful manner."

The report says officers pepper sprayed, kicked and fired a Taser at an unarmed man with a mental illness who tried to take a \$2 soda from a gas station. By the end of an encounter outside the station, at least nine police cars and 12 officers had responded to the incident, for which the man served two days in jail for theft and disorderly conduct.

In other cases, officers hit a handcuffed man eight times with a baton in the face and torso, and pepper sprayed another handcuffed man inside the back seat of a squad car and left him inside with the doors closed, despite the man complaining that he could not breathe. DOJ said the department found no violations.

The investigation cited police training that "primed officers to believe that force was the most likely way to end an encounter," rather than talking to a suspect to de-escalate a situation. In one training example, officers were told that "If a fight is unavoidable, hurt them first and hurt them bad."

In a letter to the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, Memphis City Attorney Tannera George Gibson said the city had received a DOJ request to enter into a consent decree with federal oversight of the police department — but would not do so until it could review and challenge results of the investigation.

A consent decree is an agreement requiring reforms that are overseen by an independent monitor and are approved by a federal judge. The federal oversight can continue for years, and violations could result in fines paid by the city.

"Until the City has had the opportunity to review, analyze, and challenge the specific allegations that support your forthcoming findings report, the City cannot — and will not — agree to work toward or enter into a consent decree that will likely be in place for years to come and will cost the residents of Memphis hundreds of millions of dollars," the letter said.

The officers in the Nichols case were part of a crime suppression team called the Scorpion Unit, which was disbanded after Nichols' death. The team targeted drugs, illegal guns and violent offenders, with the goal of amassing arrest numbers, while sometimes using force against unarmed people.

Memphis police never adopted policies and procedures to direct the unit, despite alarms that it was minimally supervised, the report said. Prosecutors told investigators that there were some "outrageous" inconsistencies between body camera footage and arrest reports, and if the cases went to trial, they would be "laughed out of court." The unit's misconduct led to dozens of criminal cases being dismissed.

In court proceedings dealing with Nichols' death, Martin and Mills pleaded guilty to the federal charges under deals with prosecutors. The other three officers were convicted in October of witness tampering related to the cover-up of the beating. Bean and Smith were acquitted of civil rights charges of using excessive force and being indifferent to Nichols' serious injuries.

Haley was acquitted of violating Nichols' civil rights causing death, but he was convicted of two lesser charges of violating his civil rights causing bodily injury. All five men face sentencing by a federal judge in the coming months.

Martin and Mills also are expected to change their not-guilty pleas in state court, according to lawyers involved in the case. Bean, Haley and Smith have pleaded not guilty to state charges of second-degree murder. A trial in the state case is set for April 28.

Justice Department investigators have targeted other cities with similar probes in recent years, including Minneapolis after the killing of George Floyd, and Louisville, Kentucky, following an investigation prompted by the fatal police shooting of Breonna Taylor.

Pastor Earle Fisher, a Memphis community activist, said residents have long seen police engage in practices detailed in the report.

"We needed something like this to further validate the testimonies and narratives of the citizens," Fisher said.

## 2 kindergarteners wounded and gunman dead after shooting at California religious school

PALERMO, Calif. (AP) — Two children were in "extremely critical condition" Wednesday after being shot at a tiny religious K-8 school in Northern California and the gunman died at the scene, apparently from a self-inflicted gunshot, police said.

The gunman may have targeted the Feather River School of Seventh-Day Adventists in Palermo because of its religious affiliation, but isn't believed to have had a prior connection to the victims or the school, Butte County Sheriff Kory L. Honea said. He didn't explain further.

"Whether or not this is a hate crime or whether or not it's part of some sort of larger scheme at this point I don't have enough information to provide an answer to that," he said.

The wounded children, boys ages 5 and 6, are kindergarteners at the school and are being treated at a trauma center in the Sacramento area, officials said.

"I am thankful that they're still alive, but they've got a long road ahead of them," Honea said.

The shooting occurred shortly after 1 p.m. at the private Christian school with fewer than three dozen students in Palermo, which has about 5,500 people and is about 65 miles (104 kilometers) north of Sacramento.

It was the the latest among dozens of school shootings across the U.S. in recent years, including especially deadly ones in Newtown, Connecticut, Parkland, Florida, and Uvalde, Texas. The shootings have set off fervent debates about gun control and frayed the nerves of parents whose children are growing up accustomed to doing active shooter drills in their classrooms.

But school shootings have done little to move the needle on national gun laws. Firearms were the leading cause of death among children in 2020 and 2021, according to KFF, a nonprofit that researches health care issues.

Honea said the gunman was dropped off by an Uber driver who is being interviewed by detectives.

He said the shooter was in a meeting with an administrator about enrolling a child at the school, which he described as "cordial." But it seems that was his first visit to the school and he had no prior connection to the victims. Shortly after that, shots rang out, Honea said.

The gunman's body was found near the slide and other playground equipment on the grounds of the school, which abuts ranchland where cattle graze. A handgun was found nearby, Honea said.

Honea said they were trying to contact the shooter's family before releasing his name.

Laurie Trujillo, a spokesperson for the Northern California Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, said in a statement that they were "deeply saddened by the events that occurred today at our Feather River school." She added that they are grateful to the sheriff's office for acting quickly to protect the students.

The Seventh-Day Adventist Church is a Christian denomination in which members consider the Bible their only creed and believe that the second coming of Christ is near. The Feather River School has been open since 1965, according to its website.

After the shooting, authorities rushed students initially to a gymnasium where they stayed until a bus arrived to take them off the grounds and to the Oroville Church of the Nazarene to be reunited with their families, Honea said.

Travis Marshall, the senior pastor for the Oroville Church of the Nazarene, called the reunification between parents and their children "very moving."

"Some of the children were incredibly emotional," he said. "One woman was raising her hands up, praising the Lord" when she found her child.

Sixth grader Jocelyn Orlando described what happened to CBS News Sacramento.

"We were going in for lunch recess and basically everybody in my classroom heard shooting and most people were screaming," she said. "We all went into the office, we closed the curtains, locked the doors, basically did what we would do in a school shooting, and then one of the teachers came and we all ran into the gym."

Assemblyman James Gallagher, whose area includes Palermo, said his "heart is breaking for everyone impacted by this tragedy."

"As a community, we'll all be hugging our loved ones closer today as we pray for the victims and try to make sense of something so senseless," he said in a statement.

## **Yoon replaces the defense minister as South Korea's parliament moves to vote on their impeachments**

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's president replaced his defense minister Thursday as opposition parties moved to impeach both men over the stunning-but-brief imposition of martial law that brought armed troops into Seoul streets.

The Democratic Party and other small opposition parties submitted a joint motion to impeach President Yoon Suk Yeol on Wednesday over his martial law declaration the previous night. Martial law lasted about six hours, as the National Assembly quickly voted to overrule the president, forcing his Cabinet to lift it before daybreak Wednesday.

Jo Seoung-lae, spokesperson of the Democratic Party, said it will push for a National Assembly vote on Saturday evening to provide time for ruling party lawmakers to make their decisions on what he described as an "unconstitutional, illegal rebellion or coup."

On Thursday, Yoon's office said he decided to replace Defense Minister Kim Yong Hyun with Choi Byung Hyuk, a retired general who is South Korea's ambassador to Saudi Arabia.

Vice Defense Minister Kim Seon Ho will be the acting minister until Choi assumes the job after a parliamentary hearing. The hearing is a formality as the president holds the power to appoint ministers outside of the prime minister without the approval of lawmakers.

Yoon's office didn't provide any further comments by him. He hasn't appeared in public since his televised announcement that martial law was lifted.

The opposition parties earlier submitted a motion to impeach Kim, alleging he recommended that Yoon impose martial law. Kim had offered to resign and apologized for causing disruption and concern to the public. Kim said that "all troops who performed duties related to martial law were acting on my instructions, and all responsibility lies with me," according to the Defense Ministry.

On Thursday, the Democrats and other opposition lawmakers voted to impeach Choe Jae-hae, chairman of South Korea's auditing board, and three top public prosecutors, including Seoul Central District Prosecutors' Office chief Lee Chang-soo. The four will be suspended until the Constitutional Court rules whether to remove them from office. Members of the Yoon's People Power Party boycotted the votes, leaving the totals far over the threshold to impeach them.

Choe has been accused of softening a review of Yoon's 2022 decision to move the presidential office from a downtown palace to the Defense Ministry compound, which critics saw as inexplicable waste of money. The prosecutors were accused of watering down an investigation involving Yoon's wife, Kim Keon Hee, linked to suspected stock price manipulation.

The Democratic Party's continued attempts to impeach senior government officials and prosecutors have been a major source of conflict with Yoon, who during his martial law announcement accused the opposition of "anti-state activities" and "paralyzing the government."

The PPP opposes the motion to impeach Yoon, and party floor leader Choo Kyung-ho said it would meet again to determine how to act. Members could boycott a floor vote or cast ballots against the motion.

Impeaching the president would require support from two-thirds of the National Assembly, or 200 of



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its 300 members. The opposition parties together have 192 seats. Parliament's rejection of martial law passed unanimously Wednesday with support from 18 PPP lawmakers who belong to an anti-Yoon faction in the party.

But PPP leader Han Dong-hun, head of the anti-Yoon faction, told reporters Thursday he would work to defeat the impeachment motion even though he described Yoon's declaration as "unconstitutional." Han said there is a need to "prevent damage to citizens and supporters caused by unprepared chaos."

Experts say PPP factions could unite to avoid what happened after the 2016 impeachment of conservative President Park Geun-hye with the votes of some lawmakers in her own party. After she was removed from office, the liberals easily won the presidency in a by-election as conservatives remained in disarray. She went to prison but was eventually pardoned.

If Yoon is impeached, he would be suspended until the Constitutional Court rules on whether to remove him from office. Prime Minister Han Duck-soo would take over presidential responsibilities.

The impeachment motion against Yoon says he failed to meet the constitutional requirement that martial law should only be considered in wartime or a comparable severe crisis. It alleges he attempted a "self-coup" by mobilizing the military and that suspending political party activities and deploying troops to seal the National Assembly amounted to rebellion.

During a parliamentary hearing, Kim Seon Ho, the vice defense minister and acting defense chief, said he wasn't informed about Yoon's decision to impose martial law until the announcement was reported by the media.

He said he didn't know who wrote the military proclamation announced after Yoon's martial law declaration, which stated that the activities of political parties would be suspended, but that it didn't come from the defense ministry. He said the decision to deploy troops at the National Assembly came from the former defense minister, Kim Yong Hyun.

"I had fundamentally opposed the deployment of troops over this martial law and I expressed a negative opinion about it," said Kim Seon Ho, without elaborating. "I would like to apologize to our citizens once again, and, on a personal level, I feel devastated." Thousands of protesters marched in Seoul's streets Wednesday, carrying candles and signs calling for Yoon to step down, and another large anti-government gathering was expected Thursday evening.

Reflecting the country's deeply polarized politics, hundreds of Yoon's conservative supporters rallied in downtown Seoul on Thursday afternoon, holding signs criticizing Democratic Party leader Lee Jae-myung, seen as a potential successor to Yoon despite facing trials over various corruption allegations.

With Yoon's declaration sparking concerns about South Korea's democratic status, officials have been trying to mitigate backlash.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lee Jaewoong said the ministry sent diplomatic notes to foreign missions, emphasizing that martial law was lifted through democratic procedures and that travel advisories need not change, as public safety remains stable. When asked about the U.S. Embassy in Seoul canceling routine consular operations, including visa and passport interviews, based on its assessment that South Korea's "situation remains fluid," Lee said Seoul was maintaining "necessary communication" with the Americans.

Yoon's martial law declaration came hours after his summit with Kyrgyzstan President Sadyr Japarov, who traveled to Seoul on an official visit. Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson reportedly canceled a plan to visit South Korea this week.

"We are continuously trying to ensure a seamless and consistent implementation of our ministry's diplomatic policies," Lee said.

## Why Trump and the Federal Reserve could clash in the coming years

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump campaigned on the promise that his policies would reduce high borrowing costs and lighten the financial burden on American households.

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But what if, as many economists expect, interest rates remain elevated, well above their pre-pandemic lows?

Trump could point a finger at the Federal Reserve, and in particular at its chair, Jerome Powell, whom Trump himself nominated to lead the Fed. During his first term, Trump repeatedly and publicly ridiculed the Powell Fed, complaining that it kept interest rates too high. Trump's attacks on the Fed raised widespread concern about political interference in the Fed's policymaking.

On Wednesday, Powell emphasized the importance of the Fed's independence: "That gives us the ability to make decisions for the benefit of all Americans at all times, not for any particular political party or political outcome."

Political clashes might be inevitable in the next four years. Trump's proposals to cut taxes and impose steep and widespread tariffs are a recipe for high inflation in an economy operating at close to full capacity. And if inflation were to reaccelerate, the Fed would need to keep interest rates high.

Why is there so much concern that Trump will fight Powell?

Because Powell won't necessarily cut rates as much as Trump will want. And even if Powell reduces the Fed's benchmark rate, Trump's own policies could keep other borrowing costs — like mortgage rates — elevated.

The sharply higher tariffs that Trump has vowed to impose could worsen inflation. And if tax cuts on things like tips and overtime pay — another Trump promise — quickened economic growth, that, too, could fan inflationary pressures. The Fed would likely respond by slowing or stopping its rate cuts, thereby thwarting Trump's promises of lower borrowing rates. The central bank might even raise rates if inflation worsened.

"The risk of conflict between the Trump administration and the Fed is very high," Olivier Blanchard, former top economist at the International Monetary Fund, said recently. If the Fed hikes rates, "it will stand in the way of what the Trump administration wants."

But isn't the Federal Reserve cutting rates?

Yes, but with the economy sturdier than expected, the Fed's policymakers may cut rates only a few more times — fewer than had been anticipated just a month or two ago.

And those rate cuts might not reduce borrowing costs for consumers and businesses very much. The Fed's key short-term rate can influence rates for credit cards, small businesses and some other loans. But it has no direct control over longer-term interest rates. These include the yield on the 10-year Treasury note, which affects mortgage rates. The 10-year Treasury yield is shaped by investors' expectations of future inflation, economic growth and interest rates as well as by supply and demand for Treasuries.

An example occurred this year. The 10-year yield fell in late summer in anticipation of a Fed rate cut. Yet once the first rate cut occurred on Sept. 18, longer term rates didn't fall. Instead, they began to rise again, partly in anticipation of faster economic growth.

Trump has also proposed a variety of tax cuts that could swell the deficit. Rates on Treasury securities might then have to rise to attract enough investors to buy the new debt.

"I honestly don't think the Fed has a lot of control over the 10-year rate, which is probably the most important for mortgages," said Kent Smetters, an economist and faculty director at the Penn Wharton Budget Model. "Deficits are going to play a much bigger role in that regard."

OK, so Trump fights with Powell — so what?

Occasional or rare criticism of the Fed chair isn't necessarily a problem for the economy, so long as the central bank continues to set policy as it sees fit.

But persistent attacks would tend to undermine the Fed's political independence, which is critically important to keeping inflation in check. To fight inflation, a central bank often must take steps that can be highly unpopular, notably by raising interest rates to slow borrowing and spending.

Political leaders have typically wanted central banks to do the opposite: Keep rates low to support the economy and the job market, especially before an election. Research has found that countries with independent central banks generally enjoy lower inflation.

Even if Trump doesn't technically force the Fed to do anything, his persistent criticism could still cause problems. If markets, economists and business leaders no longer think the Fed is operating independently

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and instead is being pushed around by the president, they'll lose confidence in the Fed's ability to control inflation.

And once consumers and businesses anticipate higher inflation, they usually act in ways that fuel higher prices — accelerating their purchases, for example, before prices rise further, or raising their own prices if they expect their expenses to increase.

"The markets need to feel confident that the Fed is responding to the data, not to political pressure," said Scott Alvarez, a former general counsel at the Fed.

Could Trump just fire Powell?

He can try, but it would likely lead to a prolonged legal battle that could even end up at the Supreme Court. At a November news conference, Powell made clear that he believes the president doesn't have legal authority to do so.

Most experts think Powell would prevail in the courts. And from the Trump administration's perspective, such a fight might not be worth it. Powell's term ends in May 2026, when the White House could nominate a new chair.

It is also likely that the stock market would tumble if Trump attempted such a brazen move. Bond yields would probably rise, too, sending mortgage rates and other borrowing costs up.

Financial markets might also react negatively if Trump is seen as appointing a loyalist as Fed chair to replace Powell in 2026.

Haven't previous presidents criticized the Fed?

Yes, and in the most egregious cases, it led to stubbornly high inflation. Notably, President Richard Nixon pressured Fed Chair Arthur Burns to reduce interest rates in 1971, as Nixon sought re-election next year, which the Fed did. Economists blame Burns' failure to keep rates sufficiently high for contributing to the entrenched inflation of the 1970s and early 1980s.

Thomas Drechsel, an economist at the University of Maryland, said that when presidents intrude on the Fed's interest rate decisions, "it increases prices quite consistently and it increases expectations, and ... that worries me because that means inflation might become quite entrenched."

Since the mid-1980s, with the exception of Trump in his first term, presidents have scrupulously refrained from public criticism of the Fed.

"It's amazing, how little manipulation for partisan ends we have seen of that policymaking apparatus," said Peter Conti-Brown, a professor of financial regulation at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School. "It really is a triumph of American governance."

Do other countries have independent central banks?

Yes, most advanced economies do. But in some recent cases, as in Turkey and South Africa, governments have sought to dictate interest-rate policy to the central bank. And soaring inflation has typically followed.

Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, for years pressured the country's central bank to cut interest rates even as prices spiked. He even fired three central bankers who had refused to comply. In response, inflation skyrocketed to 72% in 2022, according to official measures.

Last year, Erdogan finally reversed course and allowed the central bank to raise rates.

## Bitcoin tops \$100,000 as big rally sparked by Trump election win rolls on

Associated Press undefined

NEW YORK (AP) — Bitcoin has topped the \$100,000 mark as a massive rally in the world's most popular cryptocurrency sparked by the election of Donald Trump rolls on.

The milestone comes just hours after the President-elect signaled a lighter regulatory approach to the crypto industry when he said he intends to nominate cryptocurrency advocate Paul Atkins to be the next chair the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Bitcoin has soared to unprecedented heights since Trump won the election Nov. 5. The cryptocurrency



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has climbed dramatically from \$69,374 on Election Day and rose as high as \$103,713 Wednesday, according to CoinDesk. Just two years ago, bitcoin dropped below \$17,000 following the collapse of crypto exchange FTX.

How long bitcoin will stay above the \$100,000 mark is uncertain. It fell back to just under \$102,000 early Thursday. As with everything in the volatile cryptoverse, the future is impossible to predict. And while some are bullish on future gains, other experts continue to warn of investment risks.

Here's what you need to know.

Back up. What is cryptocurrency again?

Cryptocurrency has been around for a while now. But, chances are, you've heard about it more and more over the last few years.

In basic terms, cryptocurrency is digital money. This kind of currency is designed to work through an online network without a central authority — meaning it's typically not backed by any government or banking institution — and transactions get recorded with technology called a blockchain.

Bitcoin is the largest and oldest cryptocurrency, although other assets like ethereum, tether and dogecoin have also gained popularity over the years. Some investors see cryptocurrency as a "digital alternative" to traditional money, but the large majority of daily financial transactions are still conducted using fiat currencies such as the dollar. Also, bitcoin can be very volatile, with its price reliant on larger market conditions.

Why is bitcoin soaring?

A lot of the recent action has to do with the outcome of the U.S. presidential election.

Trump, who was once a crypto skeptic, has pledged to make the U.S. "the crypto capital of the planet" and create a "strategic reserve" of bitcoin. His campaign accepted donations in cryptocurrency and he courted fans at a bitcoin conference in July. He also launched World Liberty Financial, a new venture with family members to trade cryptocurrencies.

Crypto industry players have welcomed Trump's victory, in hopes that he would be able to push through legislative and regulatory changes that they've long lobbied for — which, generally speaking, aim for an increased sense of legitimacy without too much red tape.

Trump made a move in that direction Wednesday when he said he intends to nominate Paul Atkins to chair the Securities and Exchange Commission. Atkins was an SEC commissioner during the presidency of George W. Bush. In the years since leaving the agency, Atkins has made the case against too much market regulation. He joined the Token Alliance, a cryptocurrency advocacy organization, in 2017.

Under current chair Gary Gensler, the SEC has cracked down on the crypto industry, penalizing a number of companies for violating securities laws. But he's also faced criticism from industry players in the process, like the chief legal officer of Robinhood, who described Gensler's approach toward crypto as "rigid" and "hostile." Gensler will step down when Trump takes office.

One crypto-friendly move the SEC did make under Gensler was the approval in January of spot bitcoin ETFs, or exchange trade funds, which allow investors to have a stake in bitcoin without directly buying it. The Spot ETFs were the dominant driver of bitcoin's price before the election — but, like much of the crypto's recent momentum, saw record inflows postelection.

What are the risks?

History shows you can lose money in crypto as quickly as you've made it. Long-term price behavior relies on larger market conditions. Trading continues at all hours, every day.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, bitcoin stood at just over \$5,000. Its price climbed to nearly \$69,000 by November 2021, during high demand for technology assets, but later crashed during an aggressive series of rate hikes by the Federal Reserve. And the late-2022 collapse of FTX significantly undermined confidence in crypto overall, with bitcoin falling below \$17,000.

Investors began returning in large numbers as inflation started to cool — and gains skyrocketed on the anticipation and then early success of spot ETFs. But experts still stress caution, especially for small-pocketed investors. And lighter regulation from the coming Trump administration could mean less guardrails.

"I would say, keep it simple. And don't take on more risk than you can afford to," said Adam Morgan McCarthy, a research analyst at Kaiko, adding that there isn't a "magic eight ball" to know for certain what

comes next.

What about the climate impact?

Assets like bitcoin are produced through a process called "mining," which consumes a lot of energy. Operations relying on pollutive sources have drawn particular concern over the years.

Recent research published by the United Nations University and Earth's Future journal found that the carbon footprint of 2020-2021 bitcoin mining across 76 nations was equivalent to the emissions from burning 84 billion pounds of coal or running 190 natural gas-fired power plants. Coal satisfied the bulk of bitcoin's electricity demands (45%), followed by natural gas (21%) and hydropower (16%).

Environmental impacts of bitcoin mining boil largely down to the energy source used. Industry analysts have maintained that clean energy has increased in use in recent years, coinciding with rising calls for climate protections

## 2 kindergarteners wounded and gunman dead after shooting at California religious school

PALERMO, Calif. (AP) — Two children were in "extremely critical condition" Wednesday after being shot at a tiny religious K-8 school in Northern California and the gunman died at the scene, apparently from a self-inflicted gunshot, police said.

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"I am thankful that they're still alive, but they've got a long road ahead of them," Honea said.

The shooting occurred shortly after 1 p.m. at the private Christian school with fewer than three dozen students in Palermo, which has about 5,500 people and is about 65 miles (104 kilometers) north of Sacramento.

It was the the latest among dozens of school shootings across the U.S. in recent years, including especially deadly ones in Newtown, Connecticut, Parkland, Florida, and Uvalde, Texas. The shootings have set off fervent debates about gun control and frayed the nerves of parents whose children are growing up accustomed to doing active shooter drills in their classrooms.

But school shootings have done little to move the needle on national gun laws. Firearms were the leading cause of death among children in 2020 and 2021, according to KFF, a nonprofit that researches health care issues.

Honea said the gunman was dropped off by an Uber driver who is being interviewed by detectives.

He said the shooter was in a meeting with an administrator about enrolling a child at the school, which he described as "cordial." But it seems that was his first visit to the school and he had no prior connection to the victims. Shortly after that, shots rang out, Honea said.

The gunman's body was found near the slide and other playground equipment on the grounds of the school, which abuts ranchland where cattle graze. A handgun was found nearby, Honea said.

Honea said they were trying to contact the shooter's family before releasing his name.

Laurie Trujillo, a spokesperson for the Northern California Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, said in a statement that they were "deeply saddened by the events that occurred today at our Feather River school." She added that they are grateful to the sheriff's office for acting quickly to protect the students.

The Seventh-Day Adventist Church is a Christian denomination in which members consider the Bible their only creed and believe that the second coming of Christ is near. The Feather River School has been open since 1965, according to its website.

After the shooting, authorities rushed students initially to a gymnasium where they stayed until a bus arrived to take them off the grounds and to the Oroville Church of the Nazarene to be reunited with their families, Honea said.

Travis Marshall, the senior pastor for the Oroville Church of the Nazarene, called the reunification between parents and their children "very moving."

"Some of the children were incredibly emotional," he said. "One woman was raising her hands up, praising the Lord" when she found her child.

Sixth grader Jocelyn Orlando described what happened to CBS News Sacramento.

"We were going in for lunch recess and basically everybody in my classroom heard shooting and most people were screaming," she said. "We all went into the office, we closed the curtains, locked the doors, basically did what we would do in a school shooting, and then one of the teachers came and we all ran into the gym."

Assemblyman James Gallagher, whose area includes Palermo, said his "heart is breaking for everyone impacted by this tragedy."

"As a community, we'll all be hugging our loved ones closer today as we pray for the victims and try to make sense of something so senseless," he said in a statement.

## Some young Kenyans turn to kung fu for self-improvement in difficult times

By EVELYNE MUSAMBI and DESMOND TIRO Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Growing up on the semi-arid plains of eastern Kenya, Evans Munzaa had planned his future. He envisioned an information technology job, a wife and two children by age 30.

But the 31-year-old father hasn't had a formal job since completing college 10 years ago, and he doesn't live with his daughter and her mother, citing "meager earnings that cannot sustain a family."

Now Munzaa has taken an interest in the Chinese martial art of kung fu to occupy his time and seeks to become a full-time coach. He hopes the Kenyan government, which allows kung fu groups to train in its facilities, will grant funding to a sport that is gaining popularity among young people.

"I have been forced to find ways to survive and earn a daily wage in the informal sector as a thespian, farmer and doing menial jobs despite my widowed mother sacrificing so much to pay my education," he told The Associated Press while attending a free training at a community hall in Nairobi's Waithaka neighborhood.

A growing number of young people in Kenya see kung fu as a path toward future income. It has emerged as an alternative to the more popular martial art of taekwondo that is part of some school programs in Kenya and has seen some Kenyans compete in international competitions.

The growing visibility of Chinese workers in Kenya for major infrastructure projects also has sparked an interest in their culture in a country globally known for its runners.

Coach Kennedy Murimi trains dozens of children and youth in Nairobi's Kawangware neighborhood and has noticed a significant increase in learners. He said the number of people attending his trainings has tripled in recent months to about 60.

"This year there have been more young people joining us. Most of them are saying they've lost their jobs and are trying out kung fu to see if they can become coaches or compete in tournaments and get paid," Murimi said.

Kenya has an overall unemployment rate of 12.7%, but the rate among those under 35 is 67% — part of a wider issue across much of Africa's booming young population.

Ngaruiya Njonge is the president of the Kenya Kung Fu Wushu Federation and was first trained in it 30 years ago after being inspired by Chinese martial arts films.

He conducts training near his home in Kiambu county on the outskirts of Nairobi, where rising levels of alcoholism and crime have raised concerns among local leaders.

According to Elvis Munyasia, one of Njonge's students, kung fu has helped him.



"Without kung fu, I would be an alcoholic right now," he said. "Doing some drugs and a lot of bad things, maybe theft, but since I started it has changed my life and it has given me a purpose in life."

In the last five years, about 4,000 students have received free training sessions through kung fu clubs that Njonge has established in 24 public primary schools across Kiambu county. There is a shortage of coaches for them, he said.

He believes that kung fu teaches discipline, improves health and gives people the skills to defend themselves — not just physically but also mentally and socially.

A student, Aisha Faith, said she has improved her school grades due to the precision and discipline acquired during training.

"Kung fu has transformed me physically, mentally and academically. I used to be a slow learner, but ever since I began practicing kung fu, I've become sharper and faster, which has significantly improved my academic performance," she said. "It has also helped me steer clear of vices and bad influences, as I now spend most of my time focused on training sessions."

For Munzaa, kung fu has also been a lifesaver. He said he once contemplated suicide due to financial constraints, but when he started attending training sessions he gained perseverance skills.

The more he trains, the more "my mind is also training to persevere in life," he said.

## Police hunt for the gunman who killed UnitedHealthcare's boss in Manhattan

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ, KAREN MATTHEWS and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Investigators are searching for clues that could help them identify the masked gunman who stalked and killed the leader of one of the largest U.S. health insurance companies on a Manhattan sidewalk, then disappeared into Central Park.

UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson, 50, died in a dawn ambush Wednesday as he walked to the company's annual investor conference at a Hilton in Midtown, blocks from tourist draws like Radio City Music Hall and the Museum of Modern Art.

The killing, and the shooter's movements in the minutes before and afterward, were captured on some of the multitudes of security cameras present in that part of the city.

One video showed him approach Thompson from behind, level his pistol and fire several shots, barely pausing to clear a brief gun jam while the dying health executive tumbled to the pavement.

Other security cameras captured the initial stages of the gunman's escape. He was seen fleeing the block across a pedestrian plaza, then escaping on a bicycle into Central Park, where he vanished.

Police used drones, helicopters and dogs in an intense search, but the killer's whereabouts remained unknown late into the night.

New York City Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch said that while investigators had not yet established a motive, the shooting was no random act of violence.

"Many people passed the suspect, but he appeared to wait for his intended target," Tisch said at a news conference Wednesday.

"From watching the video, it does seem that he's proficient in the use of firearms as he was able to clear the malfunctions pretty quickly," NYPD Chief of Detectives Joseph Kenny said.

Police issued several surveillance images of the man, who wore a hooded jacket and a mask that concealed most of his face and wouldn't have attracted attention on a frigid winter day. Some of the photos were taken at a Starbucks coffee shop shortly before the shooting.

The police department offered a reward of up to \$10,000 for information leading to an arrest and conviction.

"Brian was a highly respected colleague and friend to all who worked with him," the insurer's Minnetonka, Minnesota-based parent company, UnitedHealth Group Inc., said in a statement. "We are working closely with the New York Police Department and ask for your patience and understanding during this difficult time."

Thompson's wife, Paulette Thompson, told NBC News that he told her "there were some people that had been threatening him." She didn't have details but suggested the threats may have involved issues with insurance coverage.

Eric Werner, the police chief in the Minneapolis suburb where Thompson lived, said his department had not received any reports of threats against the executive.

Investigators recovered several 9 mm shell casings from outside the hotel and a cellphone from the alleyway through which the shooter fled. They were also searching Thompson's hotel room, interviewing his UnitedHealthcare colleagues and reviewing his social media, Kenny said.

Police initially said the shooter rode into Central Park on a bicycle from the city's bike-share program, CitiBike. But a spokesperson for the program's operator, Lyft, said police officials informed the company Wednesday afternoon that the bike was not from the CitiBike fleet.

Health care giant UnitedHealth Group was holding its annual meeting with investors to update Wall Street on the company's direction and expectations for the coming year. The company ended the conference early in the wake of Thompson's death.

Thompson, a father of two sons, had been with the company since 2004 and served as CEO for more than three years.

UnitedHealthcare is the largest provider of Medicare Advantage plans in the U.S. and manages health insurance coverage for employers and state and federally funded Medicaid programs.

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz posted on the social platform X that the state is "sending our prayers to Brian's family and the UnitedHealthcare team."

"This is horrifying news and a terrible loss for the business and health care community in Minnesota," the Democrat wrote.

## **Ex-Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrío to testify at retired police officer's trial**

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former Proud Boys national chairman Enrique Tarrío is expected to testify on Thursday at the trial of a retired Washington, D.C., police officer accused of leaking confidential information to the far-right extremist group leader after Tarrío and other Proud Boys burned a stolen Black Lives Matter banner.

Attorneys for former Metropolitan Police Department Lt. Shane Lamond plan to call Tarrío as their first defense witness for Lamond's federal trial on charges that he obstructed justice and made false statements about his communications with Tarrío.

Justice Department prosecutors rested their case against Lamond on Wednesday.

Tarrío is serving a 22-year prison sentence related to the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol by a mob of Donald Trump supporters. A jury convicted him and other Proud Boys leaders of seditious conspiracy for a plot to stop the peaceful transfer of presidential power from Trump to Joe Biden after the 2020 election.

U.S. District Judge Amy Berman Jackson will decide the case against Lamond after hearing testimony without a jury.

On Monday, the judge said Tarrío was waiting for the outcome of last month's presidential election before deciding whether to testify at Lamond's trial. President-elect Trump, who repeatedly has vowed to pardon people convicted of Capitol riot charges, suggested he would consider pardoning Tarrío.

Tarrío was sentenced to more than five months in jail for burning the banner that was stolen in December 2020 from a historic Black church in downtown Washington, and for bringing two high-capacity firearm magazines into the district.

Tarrío was arrested in Washington two days before the Jan. 6 siege. The Miami resident wasn't at the Capitol when a mob of Trump supporters stormed the building and interrupted the congressional certifica-

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tion of Biden's 2020 electoral victory.

During the trial's opening statements on Monday, a prosecutor said Lamond was a "Proud Boys sympathizer" who warned Tarrío about his impending arrest for the banner's destruction and later lied to investigators about their communications.

Lamond, who met Tarrío in 2019, had supervised the intelligence branch of the police department's Homeland Security Bureau. He was responsible for monitoring groups like the Proud Boys when they came to Washington.

Lamond's indictment accuses him of lying to and misleading federal investigators when they questioned him in June 2021 about his contacts with Tarrío.

One of the government's last witnesses was acting MPD Capt. Nicole Copeland, who supervised the police investigation of the banner burning. Copeland testified on Wednesday that it would have helped investigators to know that Tarrío had privately confessed to Lamond. The Proud Boys leader also publicly admitted on social media and on a podcast that he had burned the banner.

Lamond, of Stafford, Virginia, was arrested in May 2023. He retired from the police department that same month.

## As data centers proliferate, conflict with local communities follows

By DAN MERICA and JESSE BEDAYN Associated Press

ALEXANDRIA, Va. (AP) — Richard Andre Newman thought he would live the rest of his life in his quiet, leafy neighborhood in suburban Virginia. He was born and raised in Bren Mar Park, where children ride their bikes and neighbors wave hello.

But now, as he's approaching 60, he's considering selling his Fairfax County home and moving away. That's because he's getting a new neighbor: Plaza 500, a 466,000-square-foot data center and an adjacent electrical substation to be built a few hundred feet from townhomes, playgrounds and a community center.

Newman feels helpless to stop it.

"I planned on staying here until I died," he said, "until this came up."

The sprawling, windowless warehouses that hold rows of high-speed servers powering almost everything the world does on phones and computers are increasingly becoming fixtures of the American landscape, popping up in towns, cities and suburbs across the United States.

Demand for data centers ballooned in recent years due to the rapid growth of cloud computing and artificial intelligence, and local governments are competing for lucrative deals with big tech companies. But as data centers begin to move into more densely populated areas, abutting homes and schools, parks and recreation centers, some residents are pushing back against the world's most powerful corporations over concerns about the economic, social and environmental health of their communities.

Tyler Ray, a vocal critic of data centers and leader in the fight against the Virginia project, said the incentives offered are not enough to counteract the consequences of building a facility so close to homes.

"All that we are asking for is, as the county is trying to bring in this data center income, that they are doing it in a way that doesn't run residents away from their homes," he said.

Dotting the hills in Northern Virginia

In Northern Virginia, more than 300 data centers dot the rolling hills of the area's westernmost counties. Cyclists who ride the popular Washington & Old Dominion trail are at times flanked by data centers, and the thousands of commuters who head into the nation's capital each day can see them in the distance from the Metro.

Plaza 500, one of the latest proposals in the area, is encroaching on neighborhoods like never before, said Newman, who heads a homeowners association in the community.

The pitch from Starwood Capital Group, the private investment firm founded by billionaire Barry Sternlicht, to Fairfax County officials promised a significant property tax boost and, in addition to permanent positions in the data center itself, hundreds of temporary construction and electrical jobs to build the facility.

Tyler Ray and his husband moved to the Bren Pointe community in 2022, hoping to balance proximity



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to Washington with a desire for green space.

But shortly after the couple moved in, Starwood Capital began scoping out a commercial property near their new home as a possible location for the Plaza 500 project.

When Ray and his neighbors learned of the proposal, they held protests, attended regular county meetings and drew media attention to their concerns to try and stop the development. But their efforts were largely unsuccessful: the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors in September said all newly proposed data centers must adhere to stricter zoning rules, but the Plaza 500 project would be grandfathered in under the old rules.

Ray worries that more data centers in the area could compromise the already stressed power grid: Over 25% of all power produced in Virginia in 2023 went to data centers, a figure that could rise as high as 46% by 2030 if data center growth continues at its current pace. Some estimates also show a mid-sized data center commands the same water usage every day as 1,000 households, prompting concerns over the cost of water. Ray also frets over air quality, as the massive diesel generators that help power the data centers' hardware send plumes of toxic pollutants into the atmosphere.

A spokesman for the firm declined to respond to questions for this story.

"I don't know how a general resident, even someone who has been engaging intently on an issue," Ray said, "has any chance to go up against the data center industry."

Local leaders say data centers provide a financial boon

For local governments, attracting data centers to their municipalities means a financial boon: Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin said in 2024 that Virginia's existing data centers brought in \$1 billion in tax revenue, more than the \$750 million in tax breaks given to the tech companies that own them in 2023.

For average-sized facilities, data centers offer a small number of direct jobs — often fewer than 100 positions. Google announced recently that its two data centers in Loudoun County, which has about 440,000 residents, created only around 150 direct jobs. But data center advocates argue that the number of indirect jobs like construction, technology support and electrical work make the projects worthwhile. In that same announcement, Google said their investment spurred 2,730 indirect jobs.

Kathy Smith, the vice chair of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, voted in favor of the Plaza 500 proposal because, in her estimation, data center growth is inevitable in the region, and Fairfax County should reap the benefits.

"I have a responsibility to step back from what we do and look at the big picture," Smith said. "Data centers are not going away."

Amazon data centers welcomed by some in Oregon county

On the other side of the country, in Morrow County, Oregon, Amazon Web Services has built at least five data centers surrounding the 4,200-person town of Boardman, nestled among vast stretches of farmland flecked with mint patches and wind turbines, next to the Columbia river.

Last year, AWS, which is owned by Amazon, paid roughly \$34 million in property taxes and fees stipulated in the agreements after receiving a \$66 million tax break. The company also paid out \$10 million total in two, one-time payments to a community development fund and spent another \$1.7 million in charitable donations in the community in 2023.

That money has been instrumental in updating infrastructure and bolstering services for the roughly 12,000-person county, going toward a new ladder fire engine, a school resource officer, police body cameras, and \$5,000 grants for homebuyers among other things.

Still, some residents are skeptical of the scale of tax break deals. Suspicions started years ago, when three formerly elected officials allegedly helped approve data center deals while owning a stake in a company that contracted with AWS to provide fiber optic cables for the data centers. In June, they each paid \$2,000 to settle an ethics complaint against them.

Those officials are no longer in office. But some remain wary of the relationships between the company and local officials, and raised eyebrows at one of the latest data center deals which gives AWS an estimated \$1 billion in tax breaks spread over the 15 years to build five new data centers.

Former county commissioner Jim Doherty described a meeting with AWS officials soon after he was

ected to office at an upscale restaurant in Boardman, where large windows opened onto the Columbia River.

The AWS representatives asked what Doherty wanted to accomplish as a commissioner. "They said, 'Tell us what your dreams are. Tell us what you need. Tell us what we can do for you,'" Doherty recalled. Other former officials have described similar interactions. Doherty said AWS didn't ask for anything in return, but the exchange left him uneasy.

"We engage with stakeholders in every community where we operate around the world, and part of that outreach is to better understand a community's goals," said Kevin Miller, AWS' Vice President of global data centers. "This helps AWS be a catalyst for communities to achieve those goals, and reflects our ongoing commitment to being good neighbors."

Doherty and another former county commissioner Melissa Lindsay said they pushed unsuccessfully in 2022 for AWS to pay more in taxes in new data center negotiations. They also lobbied to hire outside counsel to negotiate on their behalf, feeling outgunned by the phalanx of AWS-suited lawyers.

"We didn't want to blow it up. We didn't want to run them off," said Lindsay. "But there were better deals to be made."

Boardman Mayor Paul Keefer and Police Chief Rick Stokoe say their direct line to AWS allows them to get the most out of the company.

"This road right here? Wouldn't happen if it wasn't for AWS," said Keefer, riding in the passenger seat of Stokoe's cruiser, pointing out the window at construction workers shifting dirt and laying pavement. Both Keefer and Stokoe have been in positions to vote on whether to authorize tax breaks for AWS.

"These companies would not be here if they weren't getting some kind of incentive," Stokoe said. "There wouldn't be any money to talk about."

## **Hawaiian crow that went extinct in the wild decades ago released on Maui**

MAKAWAO, Hawaii. (AP) — Five Hawaiian crows on Wednesday were released on Maui for the first time as part of an ongoing effort to return the species to its home, conservationists said.

The Hawaiian crows, or alala, were last found on Hawaii's Big Island, but they went extinct in the wild in 2002, officials with the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance said in a statement. The birds, described as intelligent and charismatic, are the last survivor of all the Hawaiian crow species. Habitat loss, predation and disease by introduced species are threats, among other factors.

"The translocation of alala to Maui is a monumental step forward in conserving the species and a testament to the importance of partnership in reversing biodiversity loss," said Megan Owen, Ph.D., vice president of conservation science at San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance.

The release is the result of years of preparation by multiple organizations and agencies including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, State of Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources Division of Forestry and Wildlife and the University of Hawaii, she said.

The five alala released included two females and three males that spent months in a social group at Keauhou and Maui Bird conservation centers to establish strong bonds. The San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance evaluated the birds for the release based on how well they foraged for food and responded to predators. The birds were also assessed by veterinarians.

"It means a lot to me to care for the alala," Keanini Aarona, avian recovery specialist at Maui Bird Conservation Center, said in the statement. "To me, and in my culture, the alala are like our ancestors — our kūpuna. The forest wouldn't be there without these birds."

Thirty of the birds were reintroduced between 2016 and 2020 in the Big Island's Puu Makaala Natural Forest Reserve. After several successful years, alala numbers began to decline and reintroduction efforts were paused, officials said. The remaining alala were returned to human care.

## Memphis police use excessive force and discriminate against Black people, Justice Department finds

By ADRIAN SAINZ, JONATHAN MATTISE and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — The Memphis Police Department uses excessive force and discriminates against Black people, according to the findings of a U.S. Department of Justice investigation launched after the beating death of Tyre Nichols after a traffic stop in 2023.

A report released Wednesday marked the conclusion of the investigation that began six months after Nichols was kicked, punched and hit with a police baton as five officers tried to arrest him after he fled a traffic stop.

The report says that “Memphis police officers regularly violate the rights of the people they are sworn to serve.”

“The people of Memphis deserve a police department and city that protects their civil and constitutional rights, garners trust and keeps them safe,” Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division said in an emailed statement.

The city said in a letter released earlier Wednesday that it would not agree to negotiate federal oversight of its police department until it could review and challenge results of the investigation.

City officials had no immediate comment on the report but said they plan to hold a news conference Thursday after Justice Department officials hold their own news conference in Memphis on Thursday morning to address the findings.

Police video showed officers pepper spraying Nichols and hitting him with a Taser before he ran away from a traffic stop. Five officers chased down Nichols and kicked, punched and hit him with a police baton just steps from his home as he called out for his mother. The video showed the officers milling about, talking and laughing as Nichols struggled with his injuries.

Nichols died on Jan. 10, 2023, three days after the beating. The five officers — Tadarrius Bean, Demetrius Haley, Emmitt Martin, Desmond Mills Jr. and Justin Smith — were fired, charged in state court with murder, and indicted by a federal grand jury on civil rights and witness tampering charges.

Nichols was Black, as are the former officers. His death led to national protests, raised the volume on calls for police reforms in the U.S., and directed intense scrutiny towards the police department in Memphis, a majority Black city. The Memphis Police Department is more than 50 percent Black, and police chief Cerelyn “CJ” Davis is also Black.

The report specifically mentions the Nichols case, and it addresses the police department’s practice of using traffic stops to address violent crime. The police department has encouraged officers in specialized units, task forces, and on patrol to prioritize street enforcement, and officers and community members have described this approach as “saturation,” or flooding neighborhoods with traffic stops, the report said.

“This strategy involves frequent contact with the public and gives wide discretion to officers, which requires close supervision and clear rules to direct officers’ activity,” the report said. “But MPD does not ensure that officers conduct themselves in a lawful manner.”

The report said prosecutors and judges told federal investigators that officers do not understand the constitutional limits on their authority. Officers stop and detain people without adequate justification, and they conduct invasive searches of people and cars, the report said.

“Black people in Memphis disproportionately experience these violations,” the report said. “MPD has never assessed its practices for evidence of discrimination. We found that officers treat Black people more harshly than white people who engage in similar conduct.”

The investigation found that Memphis officers resort to force likely to cause pain or injury “almost immediately in response to low-level, nonviolent offenses, even when people are not aggressive.”

The report says officers pepper sprayed, kicked and fired a Taser at an unarmed man with a mental illness who tried to take a \$2 soda from a gas station. By the end of an encounter outside the gas station, at least nine police cars and 12 officers had responded to the incident, for which the man served two days in jail for theft and disorderly conduct.



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In a letter to the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division released earlier Wednesday, Memphis City Attorney Tanner George Gibson said the city had received a request from the DOJ to enter into an agreement that would require it to "negotiate a consent decree aimed at institutional police and emergency services."

A consent decree is an agreement requiring reforms that are overseen by an independent monitor and are approved by a federal judge. The federal oversight can continue for years, and violations could result in fines paid by the city.

It remains to be seen what will happen to attempts to reach such agreements between cities and the Justice Department once President-elect Donald Trump returns to office and installs new department leadership. The Justice Department under the first Trump administration curtailed the use of consent decrees, and the Republican president-elect is expected to again radically reshape the department's priorities around civil rights.

"Until the City has had the opportunity to review, analyze, and challenge the specific allegations that support your forthcoming findings report, the City cannot — and will not — agree to work toward or enter into a consent decree that will likely be in place for years to come and will cost the residents of Memphis hundreds of millions of dollars," the letter said.

The officers in the Nichols case were part of a crime suppression team called the Scorpion Unit, which was disbanded after Nichols' death. The team targeted drugs, illegal guns and violent offenders, with the goal of amassing arrest numbers, while sometimes using force against unarmed people.

Memphis police never adopted policies and procedures to direct the unit, despite alarms that it was minimally supervised, according to the Justice Department report. Some prosecutors told department investigators that there were some "outrageous" inconsistencies between body camera footage and arrest reports, and if the cases went to trial, they would be "laughed out of court." The report found that the unit's misconduct led to dozens of criminal cases being dismissed.

In court proceedings dealing with Nichols' death, Martin and Mills pleaded guilty to the federal charges under deals with prosecutors. The other three officers were convicted in early October of witness tampering related to the cover-up of the beating. Bean and Smith were acquitted of civil rights charges of using excessive force and being indifferent to Nichols' serious injuries.

Haley was acquitted of violating Nichols' civil rights causing death, but he was convicted of two lesser charges of violating his civil rights causing bodily injury. The five men face sentencing by a federal judge in the coming months.

Martin and Mills also are expected to change their not guilty pleas in state court, according to lawyers involved in the case. Bean, Haley and Smith have also pleaded not guilty to state charges of second-degree murder. A trial in the state case has been set for April 28.

Justice Department investigators have targeted other cities with similar probes in recent years, including Minneapolis after the killing of George Floyd, and Louisville, Kentucky, following an investigation prompted by the fatal police shooting of Breonna Taylor.

In its letter, the city of Memphis said the DOJ's investigation "only took 17 months to complete, compared to an average of 2-3 years in almost every other instance, implying a rush to judgment."

## **Police hunt for UnitedHealthcare CEO's masked killer after 'brazen, targeted' attack on NYC street**

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ, KAREN MATTHEWS and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A gunman killed UnitedHealthcare's CEO on Wednesday in a "brazen, targeted attack" outside a Manhattan hotel where the health insurer was holding its investor conference, police said, setting off a massive search for the fleeing assailant hours before the annual Rockefeller Center Christmas tree lighting nearby.

Brian Thompson, 50, was shot around 6:45 a.m. as he walked alone to the New York Hilton Midtown from a nearby hotel, police said. The shooter appeared to be "lying in wait for several minutes" before approaching Thompson from behind and opening fire, New York City Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch

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said. Police had not yet established a motive.

"Many people passed the suspect, but he appeared to wait for his intended target," Tisch said, adding that the shooting "does not appear to be a random act of violence."

Surveillance video reviewed by investigators shows someone emerging from behind a parked car, pointing a gun at Thompson's back, then firing multiple times from several feet away. The gunman continues firing, interrupted by a brief gun jam, as Thompson stumbles forward and falls to the sidewalk. He then walks past Thompson and out of the frame.

"From watching the video, it does seem that he's proficient in the use of firearms as he was able to clear the malfunctions pretty quickly," NYPD Chief of Detectives Joseph Kenny said.

Thompson was shot at least once in the back and once in the calf, Tisch said.

The shooter, who wore a jacket, face mask and large backpack, fled through Midtown on foot before pedaling an electric bike into Central Park a few blocks away, police said. The assailant remained at large Wednesday afternoon, sparking a search that included police drones, helicopters and dogs.

"Brian was a highly respected colleague and friend to all who worked with him," the insurer's Minnetonka, Minnesota-based parent company, UnitedHealth Group Inc., said in a statement. "We are working closely with the New York Police Department and ask for your patience and understanding during this difficult time."

Police issued a poster showing a surveillance image of the man pointing what appeared to be a gun and another image that appeared to show the same person on a bicycle. Minutes before the shooting, he stopped at a nearby Starbucks, according to additional surveillance photos released by police on Wednesday afternoon. They offered a reward of up to \$10,000 for information leading to an arrest and conviction.

Thompson's wife, Paulette Thompson, told NBC News that he told her "there were some people that had been threatening him." She didn't have details but suggested the threats may have involved issues with insurance coverage.

Eric Werner, the police chief in the Minneapolis suburb where Thompson lived, said his department had not received any reports of threats against the executive.

The killing shook a part of New York City that is normally quiet at that hour, happening about four blocks from where tens of thousands of people were set to gather for Wednesday night's tree lighting. Police promised extra security for the event.

The hotel is also a short walk from other tourist sites, including the Museum of Modern Art and Radio City Music Hall, and is often dense with office workers and visitors on weekday mornings. Many security cameras are nearby.

"We're encouraging New Yorkers to go about their daily lives and their daily business but to be alert," NYPD Chief of Department Jeffrey Maddrey said.

Investigators recovered several 9 mm shell casings from outside the hotel and a cellphone from the alleyway through which the shooter fled. They were also searching Thompson's hotel room, interviewing his UnitedHealthcare colleagues and reviewing his social media, Kenny said.

Police initially said the shooter rode into Central Park on a bicycle from the city's bike-share program, CitiBike. But a spokesperson for the program's operator, Lyft, said police officials informed the company Wednesday afternoon that the bike was not from the CitiBike fleet.

Health care giant UnitedHealth Group was holding its annual meeting with investors to update Wall Street on the company's direction and expectations for the coming year. The company ended the conference early in the wake of Thompson's death.

"I'm afraid that we — some of you may know we're dealing with a very serious medical situation with one of our team members," a company official told attendees, according to a transcript. "And as a result, I'm afraid we're going to have to bring to a close the event today. ... I'm sure you'll understand."

Thompson, a father of two sons, had been with the company since 2004 and served as CEO for more than three years.

UnitedHealthcare is the largest provider of Medicare Advantage plans in the U.S. and manages health insurance coverage for employers and state-and federally funded Medicaid programs.

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz posted on the social platform X that the state is "sending our prayers to Brian's family and the UnitedHealthcare team."

"This is horrifying news and a terrible loss for the business and health care community in Minnesota," the Democrat wrote.

## **What's next: South Korean leader's martial law declaration threatens his political career**

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — President Yoon Suk Yeol's stunning martial law declaration lasted just hours, but experts say it raised serious questions about his ability to govern for the remaining 2 1/2 years of his term and whether he will abide by democratic principles.

Parliament unanimously overturned the edict, and opposition parties have begun proceedings to impeach him. One analyst called his action "political suicide."

Yoon's political fate may depend on whether a large number of people in coming days take to the streets to push for his ouster.

Here's a look at the political firestorm caused by the martial law declaration, the first of its kind in South Korea in more than 40 years.

Why did Yoon impose martial law?

Yoon's declaration of emergency martial law on Tuesday night was accompanied by a pledge to eliminate "shameless North Korea followers and anti-state forces at a single stroke." He vowed to protect the country from "falling into the depths of national ruin." Yoon, a conservative, cited repeated attempts by his liberal rivals in control of parliament to impeach his top officials and curtail key parts of his budget bill for next year.

South Korea's constitution allows a president to impose military rule during "wartime, war-like situations or other comparable national emergency states." But a president can't maintain martial law if parliament opposes it with a majority vote.

That's what happened Wednesday. And it's why Yoon's move has baffled many experts.

Yoon's political fighting with the main opposition Democratic Party is not seen as an emergency requiring military intervention. Experts question why Yoon pushed ahead with the declaration even though the parliament would certainly vote it down.

"Conservatives and even moderates would agree with Yoon's criticism and his assessment of progressive lawmakers, but his choice of methods in the 21st century is being seen as the wrong move, miscalculation, and even political suicide," said Duyeon Kim, a senior analyst at the Center for a New American Security in Washington.

Yoon's decree resulted in the military deploying troops with assault rifles and police officers to the National Assembly to block its entrance. Even so, 190 of the parliament's 300 members managed to enter and unanimously vote down Yoon's martial law edict early Wednesday. Yoon then lifted martial law without any resistance.

The sequence of events suggests that his declaration wasn't carefully or thoroughly planned.

"His advisers should have tried to dissuade him not to do it, and they likely did so. But I think that didn't work, and Yoon just pressed ahead with his plan," said Hong Sung Gul, a public administration professor at Seoul's Kookmin University. "That shows he isn't capable of governing this country."

What political fate awaits Yoon?

The Democratic Party, which has a majority in parliament, demanded Wednesday that Yoon resign. Together with small opposition parties, it submitted a joint motion on Yoon's impeachment and said they aim for a floor vote as early as Friday.

Yoon hasn't commented on the impeachment bid and hasn't appeared in public since he announced he was lifting martial law. On Thursday, Yoon's office said he replaced his defense minister, who allegedly recommended him impose martial law.



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The opposition parties together hold 192 seats, eight short of the two-thirds needed to impeach Yoon. Eighteen legislators from the ruling People Power Party voted to reject his martial law decree, and PPP leader Han Dong-hun called his declaration "unconstitutional." But Han said Thursday his party decided to oppose the passage of Yoon's impeachment motion to prevent "prevent damage to citizens and supporters caused by unprepared chaos."

"Both his own ruling party and the opposition party want to hold him accountable. For the first time, in a highly polarized country, both sides of the aisle agree that Yoon's choice in declaring martial law was the wrong move," Duyeon Kim, the analyst, said. "It sounds like his own party is opposed to impeachment but still deliberating whether to ask Yoon to leave the party."

South Korean conservatives harbor traumatic memories of the 2016 impeachment of then-President Park Geun-hye, followed by her ouster and arrest the following year.

Yoon's martial law declaration may have killed his chances of fully completing his term through May 2027, said Park Sung-min, head of Seoul-based MIN Consulting, a political consulting firm.

His early exit would brighten the presidential prospects for Democratic Party chief Lee Jae-myung, who faces trials for corruption and other charges that have threatened to derail his career. Surveys show Lee, who narrowly lost the 2022 election to Yoon, is the favorite to become the next president.

If Yoon is impeached, the Constitutional Court would rule on whether to remove him from office.

How does the martial law decree affect foreign policy and the economy?

The South Korean developments may be troubling for Washington and Tokyo as they try to expand their three-way security cooperation.

"In these crucial times, especially with Donald Trump returning to office and the variety of difficult geopolitical challenges facing the region at the moment, political instability in South Korea is something that neither the United States nor Japan would want," said Park Won Gon, a professor at Seoul's Ewha Womans University in Seoul.

The White House said the U.S. was "seriously concerned" by the events in Seoul. A spokesperson for the National Security Council said President Joe Biden's administration was not notified in advance of the martial law announcement. Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba said that Tokyo is watching the development with "exceptional and serious interest."

North Korea hasn't commented. Leif-Eric Easley, professor of international studies at Ewha Womans University, said that North Korea will probably take a wait-and-see approach.

The political instability unleashed by Yoon could also make it more difficult for his government to nurse a decaying economy. South Korea's currency, the won, dipped to a two-year low against the U.S. dollar but had recovered by early Wednesday, while the benchmark Kospi stock index was trading 1.8% lower.

"There's a growing sentiment that the president himself has become the greatest risk to the Republic of Korea and that things cannot continue as they are," Park said.

## **Peter Navarro served prison time related to Jan. 6. Now Trump is bringing him back as an adviser**

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former White House adviser Peter Navarro, who served prison time related to the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol, will return to serve in Donald Trump's second administration, the president-elect announced Wednesday.

Navarro, a trade adviser during Trump's first term, will be a senior counselor for trade and manufacturing, Trump said on Truth Social. The position, Trump wrote, "leverages Peter's broad range of White House experience, while harnessing his extensive Policy analytic and Media skills."

The appointment was only the first in a flurry of announcements that Trump made on Wednesday as his presidential transition faced controversy over Pete Hegseth, Trump's choice for Pentagon chief. Hegseth faces allegations of sexual misconduct, excessive drinking and financial mismanagement, and Trump has considered replacing him with another potential nominee.

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As he works to fill out his team, Trump said he wanted Paul Atkins, a financial industry veteran and an advocate for cryptocurrency, to serve as the next chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission. He wrote on Truth Social that Atkins "recognizes that digital assets & other innovations are crucial to Making America Greater than Ever Before."

Trump also said he was changing course on his choice for White House counsel. He said his original pick, William McGinley, will work with the Department of Government Efficiency, which will be run by Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy with the goal of cutting federal spending. Now David Warrington, who has worked as Trump's personal lawyer and a lawyer for his campaign, will serve as White House counsel.

In addition, Trump announced the selections of former Rep. Billy Long of Missouri as IRS commissioner; the CEO of financial technology company Fiserv, Frank Bisignano, as Social Security Administration commissioner; former Sen. Kelly Loeffler of Georgia to lead the Small Business Administration; Daniel Driscoll, an Army veteran who was a senior adviser to Vice President-elect JD Vance, as Army secretary; Jared Isaacman, a tech billionaire who conducted the first private spacewalk on Elon Musk's SpaceX rocket, as NASA administrator; and Adam Bohler, a lead negotiator on the Abraham Accords team, as special presidential envoy for hostage affairs.

Navarro was held in contempt of Congress for defying a subpoena from the House committee that investigated Jan. 6. Sentenced to four months in prison, he described his conviction as the "partisan weaponization of the judicial system."

Hours after his release in July, Navarro spoke on stage at the Republican National Convention, where he told the crowd that "I went to prison so you won't have to."

Navarro, 75, has been a longtime critic of trade arrangements with China. After earning an economics doctorate from Harvard University, he worked as an economics and public policy professor at the University of California, Irvine. He ran for mayor of San Diego in 1992 and lost, only to launch other unsuccessful campaign efforts, including a 1996 race for Congress as a Democrat.

During Trump's initial term, Navarro pushed aggressively for tariffs while playing down the risks of triggering a broader trade war. He also focused on counterfeited imports and even helped assemble an infrastructure plan for Trump that never came to fruition.

Navarro often used fiery language that upset U.S. allies. In 2018, after a dispute between Trump and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Navarro said "there's a special place in hell for any foreign leader that engages in bad faith diplomacy with President Donald J. Trump and then tries to stab him in the back on the way out the door."

Canadians were outraged, and Navarro later apologized.

Isaacman has reserved two more flights with SpaceX, including as the commander of the first crew that will ride SpaceX's mega rocket Starship, still in test flights out of Texas. He said he was honored to be nominated.

"Having been fortunate to see our amazing planet from space, I am passionate about America leading the most incredible adventure in human history," he said via X.

Trump kept rolling out positions on Wednesday afternoon. He announced Gail Slater as assistant attorney general for the Justice Department's antitrust division. Trump wrote on Truth Social that "Big Tech has run wild for years, stifling competition in our most innovative sector."

Slater worked for Trump's National Economic Council during his first term, and she's been an adviser to Vance.

Trump also said Michael Faulkender would serve as deputy treasury secretary. A professor at the University of Maryland's Smith School of Business, Faulkender was the Treasury Department's assistant secretary for economic policy during Trump's initial term. He has also been the chief economist at the America First Policy Institute, a think tank formed to further the Trump movement's policy agenda.

Outside the White House, Trump said that he had asked Michael Whatley to remain on as chair of the Republican National Committee. Whatley ran the committee during the election along with Lara Trump, the wife of Trump's son Eric.

## Middle East latest: An Israeli strike on a Gaza tent camp kills at least 21 people

By The Associated Press undefined

An Israeli strike on a tent camp housing displaced people in southern Gaza killed at least 21 people and wounded 28 on Wednesday, said the director of Nasser Hospital, Atif al-Hout, in the nearby city of Khan Younis. The Israeli military said its aircraft struck senior Hamas militants "involved in terrorist activities" in the area.

At least 15 bodies arrived at the hospital, but reaching a precise number of dead was difficult because many were dismembered, some without heads or badly burned. The strike hit in the Muwasi area, a sprawling coastal camp housing hundreds of thousands of displaced people. Earlier strikes elsewhere in Gaza killed eight people, including four children, health officials said.

Israel's war against Hamas has destroyed vast areas of Gaza and displaced 90% of the population of 2.3 million, often multiple times.

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking around 250 people hostage.

Israel's blistering retaliatory offensive has killed at least 44,500 Palestinians, more than half of them women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not say how many of the dead were combatants. Israel says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence.

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Here's the Latest:

Amnesty International accused Israel of committing genocide in the Gaza Strip

CAIRO - Amnesty International accused Israel of committing genocide in the Gaza Strip during its war with Hamas, saying it has sought to deliberately destroy Palestinians by mounting deadly attacks, demolishing vital infrastructure and preventing the delivery of food, medicine and other aid.

The human rights group released a report Thursday in the Middle East that said such actions could not be justified by Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack into Israel, which ignited the war, or the presence of militants in civilian areas. Amnesty said the United States and other allies of Israel could be complicit in genocide, and called on them to halt arms shipments.

"Our damning findings must serve as a wake-up call to the international community: this is genocide. It must stop now," Agnès Callamard, Secretary General of Amnesty International, said in the report.

Israel, which was founded in the aftermath of the Holocaust, has adamantly rejected genocide allegations against it as an antisemitic "blood libel." It is challenging such allegations at the International Court of Justice, and it has rejected the International Criminal Court's accusations that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former defense minister committed war crimes in Gaza.

"The deplorable and fanatical organization Amnesty International has once again produced a fabricated report that is entirely false and based on lies," Israel's Foreign Ministry said in a statement. Israel accused Hamas, which has vowed to annihilate Israel, of carrying out a genocidal massacre in the attack that triggered the war, and said it is defending itself in accordance with international law.

Israeli military bombs southern Lebanon as ceasefire with Hezbollah holds

JERUSALEM — The Israeli military said Wednesday it struck a launcher in southern Lebanon, which it said was in violation of the ceasefire it agreed to with the militant group Hezbollah.

Israel has struck Lebanon repeatedly in the week since the ceasefire began, saying it reserves the right under the U.S.- and France-brokered deal to strike what it views as violations by Hezbollah.

Hezbollah struck a disputed border territory held by Israel earlier this week, in what it said was a warning over the Israeli strikes.

U.S. State Department deputy spokesman Vedant Patel, speaking to reporters in Washington on Tuesday about the Lebanon ceasefire, said it was "largely holding in place." He would not speak to individual allegations of violations.

The ceasefire is meant to end nearly 14 months of cross-border fighting between Israel and Hezbollah



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that began when the militant group began firing at Israel in solidarity with Hamas and the war in Gaza.

Israeli strike on a Gaza tent camp kills at least 21 people, hospital says

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — A Palestinian health official said Wednesday that at least 21 people were killed by an Israeli strike on a camp housing displaced people in Gaza. Atif Al-Hout, the director of Nasser Hospital in the southern city of Khan Younis, said at least 28 people were wounded in the strike.

The Israeli military said its aircraft struck senior Hamas militants "involved in terrorist activities" in the area. The military said that the strike had set off secondary explosions, indicating explosives present in the area were set off. It was not possible to independently confirm the Israeli claims, and the strike could also have ignited fuel, cooking gas canisters or other materials in the camp.

At least 15 bodies arrived at the hospital, but reaching a precise number was difficult because many of the dead were dismembered, some without heads or badly burned.

The strike hit in the Muwasi area, a sprawling coastal camp housing hundreds of thousands of displaced people near the southern city of Khan Younis. It came after Israeli forces struck targets in other areas of the Palestinian enclave. Earlier strikes on central Gaza killed eight people, including four children.

Israel's war in Gaza began when Hamas-led militants attacked southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 250 people. Some 100 hostages are still inside Gaza, at least a third of whom are believed to be dead.

Israel's offensive has killed over 44,500 Palestinians in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not say how many were combatants. The Israeli military says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence.

Israel says it tries to avoid harming civilians and blames Hamas for their deaths because the militants often operate in residential areas and are known to position tunnels, rocket launchers and other infrastructure near homes, schools and mosques.

Body of an Israeli hostage is recovered from Gaza

JERUSALEM — Israel's Shin Bet domestic security agency said Wednesday that Israeli forces recovered the body of a hostage held in Gaza.

Itay Svirsky was captured alive from southern Israel during Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023 attack. Israel believes that he was killed while in captivity by his captors who held on to his body.

The Shin Bet did not disclose details of the mission to recover Svirsky's body.

During its attack, Hamas killed 1,200 people and kidnapped 250. Israel believes roughly 100 remain in Gaza, about a third of whom are dead.

Israeli military admits soldiers entered a West Bank hospital during a raid, after initially denying the claim

JERUSALEM — The Israeli military said Wednesday that soldiers had entered a West Bank hospital the previous day during a raid in search of militants, after initially denying the claim.

The military said several soldiers entered the hospital's entrance hall, suspecting that an armed militant was inside.

On Tuesday, a Palestinian doctor working at the hospital in the town of Tubas said Israeli soldiers opened fire inside, a claim the military did not address in its statement Wednesday. The military had said its troops were operating around the hospital searching for alleged militants struck in an earlier airstrike but had denied the troops had entered.

The doctor, Mahmoud Ghanam, said the troops had left after learning that a wounded man had been transferred to another hospital.

Israeli raids on hospitals in the occupied West Bank are rare but have grown more common since the start of the Israel-Hamas war.

Violence in the occupied West Bank has surged since the war in Gaza began. The Palestinian Health Ministry says Israeli forces have killed about 800 people in the West Bank during that time. Israel says many of the Palestinians killed have been militants. But stone-throwing youths protesting Israeli raids and others not involved in confrontations have also been killed.

Palestinian families describe being forcibly displaced from northern Gaza by Israeli military offensive

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BEIR LAHIYA, Gaza Strip — Dozens of Palestinian families in northern Gaza said Wednesday they were forcibly displaced when Israel's military expelled them from schools they were using as makeshift shelters.

The fleeing civilians said Israel was expanding its major offensive in the north, the most heavily destroyed and isolated part of the Gaza Strip, which Israeli forces have almost completely besieged since early October. Experts say famine may be underway there.

Associated Press footage showed dozens of displaced families on the road leaving Beit Lahia — some on foot while others used motorized rickshaws, bicycles or donkey carts to carry kids, older adults and their remaining belongings.

Sadeia al-Rahel said Wednesday she was staying in a school in the town of Beit Lahia when Israel's military dropped leaflets ordering everyone to evacuate.

"This morning a quadcopter (drone) detonated four bombs at the school. There were people injured, human remains, we left with nothing," she said. "They forcibly displaced us."

The 57-year-old said her family has been eating grass, leaves, and animal feed for two months due to the lack of food aid in the north. "But no one cares" she added. Al-Rahel said her family didn't even take blankets with them as they left.

Meanwhile, 20-year-old Hafez Warshal stayed in Beit Lahia with his family for 13 months before evacuating the school where he was sheltering. He said he had no idea where he would go next.

"We'll stay wherever we find a place," he said.

Israel's war against Hamas has killed over 44,500 Palestinians in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not say how many were combatants. The Israeli military says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence.

The International Criminal Court is seeking to arrest Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former defense minister over accusations of using "starvation as a method of warfare" by restricting humanitarian aid into Gaza. Israel rejects the allegations and says it has been working hard to improve the entry of aid.

Israel says six hostages in Gaza were likely shot by captors after an airstrike nearby

JERUSALEM — The Israeli military said Wednesday that an investigation into the deaths of six hostages whose bodies were recovered from Gaza earlier this year determined that they were likely shot and killed by their captors in an underground tunnel after an Israeli strike hit nearby.

The military recovered the bodies of the six hostages — all men, including three in their 70s and one in his 80s — from the southern city of Khan Younis in August. The investigation said the strike in question was one targeting Hamas commanders in February.

"Due to the extended time that had passed, it was not possible to determine with complete certainty the precise cause of death of the hostages or the exact timing of the gunfire," the military statement said.

An Israeli military official said the results were based on a "forensic examination" carried out after the bodies were recovered. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to discuss the findings with the media, and did not provide details on the examination.

The military said it had no intelligence indicating that hostages were held in the area and would not have struck had it known. The military said that while troops followed all the necessary approvals for conducting the strike, it has added additional approvals to its protocols for certain strikes in response to the hostages' deaths.

The war in Gaza was sparked when Hamas launched its Oct. 7, 2023 attacks on southern Israel, where militants killed 1,200 people and kidnapped 250. About 100 hostages remain in Gaza, with roughly a third said to be dead, according to Israeli authorities.

Israel has made destroying Hamas' military and governing capabilities, as well as freeing the hostages, the goals for its war in Gaza. But critics say those goals are in conflict, with the lives of hostages in danger the longer Israeli fights in Gaza.

— By Tia Goldenberg

Photographer for German news agency killed in an attack in Syria

BERLIN — A Syrian photographer working for the German news agency dpa was killed by a fighter jet

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attack near the Syrian city of Hama, dpa reported on Wednesday.

The news agency couldn't immediately give more details about when 32-year-old Anas Alkharboutli was killed. But the agency's editor-in-chief, Sven Gösmann, said "all of us at dpa are in shock and infinitely saddened by the death of Anas Alkharboutli."

"With his pictures he not only documented the horrors of war, he always worked for the truth," Gösmann said. "In recent days in particular, his photos were seen around the world as he reported on the civil war that flared up again."

Alkharboutli joined dpa as a photographer in the Middle East in 2017. He mainly reported from the Syrian civil war zone.

Alkharboutli's photography was recognized internationally. In 2020, he received the Young Reporter Trophy of the French Prix Bayeux for war reporting. At the 2021 Sony World Photography Awards, he won the Sports category with a series of images of children training in karate, the news agency said.

Settlers attack Palestinian towns, burning homes and clashing with Israeli troops

BEIT FURIK, West Bank — Jewish settlers mounted a string of attacks on Palestinian towns in the occupied West Bank overnight, burning homes and clashing with Israeli troops.

There were no immediate reports of any Palestinian casualties.

The Israeli military said Jewish settlers attacked the village of Beit Furik after troops arrived in the area to dismantle an unauthorized farming outpost they had built nearby on land privately owned by Palestinians. It said the settlers hurled stones, wounding two members of the paramilitary Border Police.

Adel Hanni, a resident of the village, told the AP that a group of roughly 70 settlers gathered on the village lands early morning as the troops took down the outpost. The settlers burned Hanni's son's home, a car, a village shop and smashed the windows of several more homes. An Associated Press reporter saw a blackened home and a destroyed car on Wednesday morning.

"Some settlers started to break into the house, while others carried incendiary materials," said Hanni, 57.

Settlers also attacked the village of Huwara, which has been the target of several previous attacks — even before the outbreak of the war in Gaza — and clashed with troops near Rujeib, another Palestinian village, the military said.

Israeli police and the Shin Bet security agency said in a statement that they were investigating the settler attacks. They said they arrested eight Israelis for suspected property damage and assaulting security forces.

The West Bank has seen a surge in settler violence since the start of the war, which was triggered by Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023 attack into Israel. Settlers have also raced to establish new farming outposts that rights groups say are among the biggest drivers of the violence.

The U.N.'s humanitarian office said settler attacks on Palestinian farmers during the recent olive harvest season "at least tripled" in 2024 compared to the last three years.

Israel captured the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians want all three territories for an independent state.

The West Bank is home to some 3 million Palestinians who live under Israeli military rule, with the Western-backed Palestinian Authority exercising limited autonomy in cities and towns. Some 500,000 Jewish settlers with Israeli citizenship live in more than 100 settlements across the West Bank, many of which resemble suburbs or small towns.

Most of the international community considers the settlements to be illegal and an obstacle to peace.

4 children killed in Gaza strike

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — Palestinian medics said Israeli airstrikes in Gaza on Wednesday killed eight people, including four children.

The Awda Hospital, which received the bodies from one strike, said five were killed as they gathered outside of shelters in the built-up Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza, which dates back to the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation.

The hospital said another 15 people, mostly children, were wounded in the strike.

Also in central Gaza, the Al-Aqsa Hospital in the city of Deir al-Balah said it received the bodies of three



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people who were killed in what it says were two separate Israeli strikes early Wednesday.

The three dead include a man and a woman who were killed in a strike in Deir al-Balah, and another man killed in the urban refugee camp of Bureij, the hospital said.

The Israeli military said it struck a "terrorist target" in Nuseirat, without elaborating. It had no immediate comment on the other strikes.

The war began when Hamas-led militants attacked southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 250 people. Some 100 hostages are still inside Gaza, at least a third of whom are believed to be dead.

Israel's offensive has killed over 44,500 Palestinians in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not say how many were combatants. The Israeli military says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence.

Israel returns bodies of militants who crossed border from Jordan

JERUSALEM — Israel's military said Wednesday it had returned the bodies of two militants who crossed into Israel from Jordan in October and shot two soldiers.

The militants entered Israeli territory south of the Dead Sea on Oct. 18, shooting and wounding two soldiers before being shot dead by Israeli troops. Hamas praised the incursion but not claim responsibility for it.

The Israeli military did not release the names of the militants who carried out the attack.

## Hegseth fights to save Pentagon nomination as sources say Trump considers DeSantis

By THOMAS BEAUMONT, FARNOUSH AMIRI, ZEKE MILLER and TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A defiant Pete Hegseth fought to save his nomination to be Donald Trump's defense secretary Wednesday as the president-elect considered possible replacements in the face of growing questions about the former Fox News host's personal conduct and ability to win Senate confirmation.

Hegseth met with legislators on Capitol Hill, conducted a radio interview and released an opinion article denying allegations of sexual assault and excessive drinking. He insisted he was "not backing down one bit," said Trump was still supporting him and planned to return Thursday for more meetings with lawmakers. But the president-elect's team was looking at alternatives, including Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis.

Trump himself remained quiet about Hegseth while issuing a flurry of statements on social media Wednesday about other nominees and his news coverage.

Hegseth, in an exchange with reporters, said he'd meet with Trump "anytime he'd like."

Trump's team was pleased with how things went Wednesday as Hegseth met with lawmakers, according to a person familiar with their thinking, and they are continuing to stand behind him for now -- all while Trump considers back-up options.

North Dakota Sen. Kevin Cramer, who had previously expressed concerns about reports of Hegseth's drinking, spoke positively about Hegseth's prospects after the two met Wednesday evening.

"I see no reason at this point not to be supportive," Cramer said.

He said he told Hegseth "it's really important that we have a clear eyed secretary of defense if the alarm goes off or the phone rings at three in the morning." Hegseth responded, according to Cramer, that he would be available "at three in the morning, three in the afternoon or any hour in between."

Hegseth is the latest nominee-designate to be imperiled by personal baggage after the recent withdrawal of Trump's initial pick for attorney general, former Rep. Matt Gaetz, whose vulnerabilities were well-documented. But Hegseth's past, including the revelation that he made a settlement payment after being accused of a sexual assault that he denies, was not widely known.

The Trump transition team went into the day concerned about Hegseth's path to Senate confirmation and actively looking at potential replacements, a person familiar with the matter said. Three other people said DeSantis, who competed against Trump for the Republican presidential nomination in 2024, was being discussed as an option if Hegseth's nomination does not move forward. The people spoke on condition of

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anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly discuss internal deliberations.

Beyond DeSantis, there have also been discussions about shifting Michael Waltz, who was chosen by Trump for national security adviser, to the Defense Department, according to another person familiar with the matter who spoke on condition of anonymity. The Florida congressman is a retired Army National Guard officer and war veteran.

As he made the rounds on Capitol Hill, Hegseth told reporters he had received a fresh message of support from Trump.

"I spoke to the president this morning. He supports me fully. We're not going anywhere," Hegseth said.

In an op-ed in *The Wall Street Journal*, Hegseth laid out a vigorous defense of his record, including his time spent at two veterans advocacy groups, Concerned Veterans for America and Veterans For Freedom.

In new allegations this week, *The New Yorker* cited what it described as a whistleblower report and other documents about his time leading CVA that alleged multiple incidents of alcohol intoxication at work events, inappropriate behavior around female staffers and financial mismanagement.

Hegseth, in the op-ed, acknowledged spending too much money during the 2008 campaign in support of then-candidate John McCain, so that Veterans For Freedom went into debt. But he said he stayed on until all bills were paid. And he said his split from CVA was over a "difference of opinion" about the group's future.

Republican Sen. Joni Ernst of Iowa, a military veteran and sexual assault survivor, stopped short of an endorsement after her meeting with Hegseth. She said she appreciates his military service and they "had a frank and thorough conversation."

The Trump transition team didn't respond to requests for comment on Hegseth's status.

In an interview taped Wednesday for Megyn Kelly's SiriusXM satellite radio show, Hegseth said Trump told him he wanted a "warfighter" who would clean out the "woke crap."

Citing his Capitol Hill meeting, Hegseth said, "No one has looked me in the eye and said, 'I have concerns.'" He added, "We're not backing down one bit."

Hegseth paid a woman who accused him of sexual assault at a California hotel in 2017 after Hegseth had given a speech at a Republican event. His lawyer said the payment was to head off the threat of a baseless lawsuit.

Asked by Kelly if he sexually assaulted the woman, Hegseth said "absolutely not." He called it a "really unfortunate situation" and said he paid her because he "had to," contending that her lawyers said they would "out him."

He declined to reveal the amount paid, but said it was done to protect his wife, himself and his job.

He said it is a "fair characterization" to call him a serial cheater, who cheated on all three of his wives. "Was I a perfect man, absolutely not," he said.

Hegseth flatly denied having a drinking problem and said he wouldn't drink while defense secretary, vowing, "I'm not going to have a drink at all." He likened it to following the Pentagon's general order No. 1, which prohibits troops from drinking while deployed.

GOP Sen. Markwayne Mullin, who joined Hegseth in a meeting with House Republicans, defended the nominee and said: "All of us, at least all of us, have a time to grow up. We're nominating Pete for who he is today, not for what he did seven years ago or five years ago or whatever it was."

Cramer said Hegseth during their meeting acknowledged there were times that he drank too much, but that nothing improper happened.

He said Hegseth also denied aspects of the *New Yorker* report, including that he was drunk at a strip club with coworkers and tried to get up on the stage and dance.

Cramer said Hegseth told him "I've never been at a strip club in Louisiana intoxicated" and that he has "certainly never been on a stage, you know, in an intoxicated state."

"I have no reason to doubt him any more than believe somebody else," Cramer said.

Earlier, Hegseth's mother appeared on Fox News to address some of the allegations.

Penelope Hegseth, on "Fox & Friends," discussed her son and a 2018 email she wrote him that was

obtained by The New York Times, in which she confronted him about mistreating women after he impregnated his current wife while he was married to his second wife.

That letter followed multiple allegations, reported by The New Yorker this week, of questionable conduct around female staffers, in addition to the 2017 allegation.

On Tuesday, Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., said some of the reports were "disturbing," telling CBS News that he wants to "make sure that every young woman that joins the military feels respected and welcomed."

Penelope Hegseth implored the lawmakers to listen to her son and give him a chance.

"I think it can be overcome," Penelope Hegseth said.

Hegseth is a former Fox News host and a former Army National Guard major and combat veteran who deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. If confirmed by the Senate, he would lead a 2-million-member strong military — more than 17% of whom are female. The revelations have concerned some members of Congress.

Hegseth said in his interview that he doesn't know how all this will turn out but is comfortable that he "took on the haters and the liars" and fought for it, adding, "the future's in God's hands."

## US senators grill airline officials about fees for seats and checked bags

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

Members of a U.S. Senate subcommittee took aim at airline executives Wednesday for using an expanding menu of fees to charge customers for early boarding, better seats and other comforts that used to be part of the ticket price.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., said he thinks the federal government should review and perhaps fine the airlines for their use of what he called junk fees.

Blumenthal, the chairman of the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, said seat fees were pure profit for the airlines because they don't have to create new seats or incur other expenses by allowing customers to pick where to sit.

Some senators expressed frustration during Wednesday's hearing when airline executives could not explain how they set the amount of various fees. They said the vagaries of airline pricing make it hard for consumers to budget for trips.

"We're all captives on your airplanes at a certain point. You just say, 'You want to pick seat? We're just going to charge you some random amount more,'" Sen. Maggie Hassan, D-N.H., said. "It would be good if you guys could be transparent about what you do and why."

The fees don't seem to be discouraging anybody. Americans are flying more than ever.

The Transportation Security Administration reported screening nearly 3.1 million travelers at airports around the country on Sunday, a new single-day record. The 15 busiest days in TSA history have all occurred this year, with traffic at airport checkpoints up 5% over 2023.

Airline executives bristle at the term "junk fees," and argue they are merely giving consumers what they want: choices.

"Our customers who prioritize affordability have the option to choose a lower-fare product and, in doing so, opt out of paying for additional services that they do not want," Andrew Nocella, the chief commercial officer of United Airlines, said in testimony prepared for the panel's hearing. "But we also have customers who seek more services, and they retain the ability to choose the services they value, for an incremental fee, like a seat with extra legroom or checked bags."

Airlines have been adding fees on desirable seats to take advantage of increasing demand.

The airline executives took offense at the charge that they are gouging travelers.

"It has never been more affordable to fly," said Steve Johnson, chief strategy officer for American Airlines.

Transportation Department figures indicate that airfares have fallen by about one-third since 2000 when taking inflation into account. However, those figures do not include fees.

Senators said fees should be described clearly during the ticket-buying process. The executives said their airlines do that.



Some subcommittee members also criticized airlines for the way they enforce fees.

Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., sparred with executives of Frontier Airlines and Spirit Airlines, which paid employees \$26 million in bonuses for spotting customers whose carry-on bags were too big to fit under a seat. The passengers were forced to pay a fee — up to \$77 on Spirit and \$99 on Frontier — to use an overhead bin.

“If people want to know why it’s such a terrible experience to fly, this is news for them today,” Hawley told the airlines executives Wednesday. “Your airlines are paying millions of dollars to your employees to harass people who have already paid!”

Frontier Chief Commercial Officer Robert Schroeter and his counterpart at Spirit, Matthew Klein, said ensuring that people follow the rules was a matter of fairness to all passengers.

When Hawley asked why bag fees may vary from one customer to another, Schroeter said Frontier must cover its costs.

“Overall, our job is to generate the most revenue we can so we can keep profitable as an airline,” he said.

U.S. airlines raised more than \$7 billion from fees on checked bags last year, with American Airlines and United Airlines leading the pack. They scooped up another \$1 billion in ticket-change and cancellation fees, although that was about one-third of what they raised before the coronavirus pandemic, when the biggest airlines dropped change fees.

Exact figures on other types of fees are hard to determine, but the Senate panel reported last week that United, American, Delta Air Lines, Frontier and Spirit collected a combined total of more than \$12 billion in seat fees between 2018 and 2023. That included charges for things such as more legroom or an aisle seat near the front of the plane.

Airline fees have been a frequent target of criticism by the Biden administration, all the way up to President Joe Biden.

A Transportation Department rule that took effect in October requires airlines to make automatic cash refunds for tickets and fees when flights are canceled.

The airline industry is suing to block another regulation requiring more prominent disclosure of baggage and cancellation fees. An appeals court has blocked that rule, and its fate is uncertain under President-elect Donald Trump. Blumenthal asked the five executives to drop the lawsuit. None agreed to do so.

The airline industry and Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg have continued to fight over fees and other regulations, even after the November election.

## Takeaways from the Supreme Court arguments on transgender health care ban: Conservatives skeptical

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court heard the most high-profile case of its term on Wednesday, weighing Tennessee’s ban on gender-affirming health care for transgender minors.

Similar laws have been passed by other conservative-leaning states. Challengers say they deprive kids of treatment they need, while the states defend them as protecting minors from life-changing decisions.

The conservative-majority court appeared ready to uphold Tennessee’s law. It comes against the backdrop of escalating pushback to transgender rights, notably from President-elect Donald Trump.

Here are some takeaways from the arguments:

What did key conservative justices say?

In the arguments on Wednesday, five of the court’s six conservatives seemed skeptical of the argument that the ban on gender-affirming care for minors is discriminatory.

Two key conservatives, Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Amy Coney Barrett, repeatedly challenged the arguments from lawyers challenging the ban.

Roberts questioned whether judges should be weighing in on a question of regulating medical procedures, an area usually left to state lawmakers. Barrett sounded skeptical of the administration’s argument that the law discriminates because of sex.

Conservative Justice Neil Gorsuch was notably silent, asking no questions.

The court's other three conservatives seemed to favor Tennessee. The three liberals largely backed the challengers, with Justice Sonia Sotomayor highlighting the risks of suicide among kids with gender dysphoria.

What's the court's track record on the issue?

The litigation marked only the second time the high court has heard a case that represented a fundamental test of transgender rights.

In a case involving LGBTQ+ rights four years ago, two conservative justices, Roberts and Gorsuch, joined with its liberals to expand protections for transgender workers. Barrett wasn't on the bench at the time and had no record on transgender rights.

Gorsuch wrote the opinion, which left open claims of discrimination in other situations.

What happens next?

The court isn't expected to rule for several months. The decision could have direct effects in the 26 states that have passed versions of the bans, and might have ripple effects on other measures that restrict sports participation and bathroom use by transgender people.

Supporters of the health care laws argue the gender-affirming treatments are risky, and the laws protect kids from making decisions before they're ready.

Challengers say many medical interventions come with some degree of risk, and families should be able to weigh those against the benefits. The arguments in favor of Tennessee's ban could also be used to back federal restrictions, said Chase Strangio, the ACLU attorney who represented three families challenging the law.

Tennessee Attorney General Jonathan Skrmetti said that his state's arguments would still let each state set its own policy.

## **UnitedHealthcare CEO kept a low public profile. Then he was shot to death in New York**

By ADAM GELLER and TOM MURPHY Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Brian Thompson led one of the biggest health insurers in the U.S. but was unknown to millions of people his decisions affected.

Then Wednesday's targeted fatal shooting of the UnitedHealthcare CEO on a midtown Manhattan sidewalk thrust the executive and his business into the national spotlight.

Thompson, who was 50, had worked at the giant UnitedHealth Group Inc for 20 years and run the insurance arm since 2021 after running its Medicare and retirement business.

As CEO, Thompson led a firm that provides health coverage to more than 49 million Americans — more than the population of Spain. United is the largest provider of Medicare Advantage plans, the privately run versions of the U.S. government's Medicare program for people age 65 and older. The company also sells individual insurance and administers health-insurance coverage for thousands of employers and state-and federally funded Medicaid programs.

The business run by Thompson brought in \$281 billion in revenue last year, making it the largest subsidiary of the Minnetonka, Minnesota-based UnitedHealth Group. His \$10.2 million annual pay package, including salary, bonus and stock options awards, made him one of the company's highest-paid executives.

The University of Iowa graduate began his career as a certified public accountant at PwC and had little name recognition beyond the health care industry. Even to investors who own its stock, the parent company's face belonged to CEO Andrew Witty, a knighted British triathlete who has testified before Congress.

When Thompson did occasionally draw attention, it was because of his role in shaping the way Americans get health care.

At an investor meeting last year, he outlined his company's shift to "value-based care," paying doctors and other caregivers to keep patients healthy rather than focusing on treating them once sick.

"Health care should be easier for people," Thompson said at the time. "We are cognizant of the chal-

lenges. But navigating a future through value-based care unlocks a situation where the ... family doesn't have to make the decisions on their own."

Thompson also drew attention in 2021 when the insurer, like its competitors, was widely criticized for a plan to start denying payment for what it deemed non-critical visits to hospital emergency rooms.

"Patients are not medical experts and should not be expected to self-diagnose during what they believe is a medical emergency," the chief executive of the American Hospital Association wrote in an open letter addressed to Thompson. "Threatening patients with a financial penalty for making the wrong decision could have a chilling effect on seeking emergency care."

United Healthcare responded by delaying rollout of the change.

Thompson, who lived in a Minneapolis suburb and was the married father of two sons in high school, was set to speak at an investor meeting in a midtown New York hotel. He was on his own and about to enter the building when he was shot in the back by a masked assailant who fled on foot before pedaling an e-bike into Central Park a few blocks away, the New York Police Department said.

Chief of Detectives Joseph Kenny said investigators were looking at Thompson's social media accounts and interviewing employees and family members.

"Didn't seem like he had any issues at all," Kenny said. "He did not have a security detail."

## **White House says at least 8 US telecom firms, dozens of nations impacted by China hacking campaign**

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A top White House official on Wednesday said at least eight U.S. telecom firms and dozens of nations have been impacted by a Chinese hacking campaign.

Deputy national security adviser Anne Neuberger offered new details about the breadth of the sprawling Chinese hacking campaign that gave officials in Beijing access to private texts and phone conversations of an unknown number of Americans.

Neuberger divulged the scope of the hack a day after the FBI and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency issued guidance intended to help root out the hackers and prevent similar cyberespionage in the future. White House officials cautioned that the number of telecommunication firms and countries impacted could still grow.

The U.S. believes that the hackers were able to gain access to communications of senior U.S. government officials and prominent political figures through the hack, Neuberger said.

"We don't believe any classified communications has been compromised," Neuberger added during a call with reporters.

She noted that because the hack appeared to be targeting a relatively small group of individuals, only a small number of Americans' phone calls and texts have been compromised. Neuberger added that impacted companies are all responding, but none "have fully removed the Chinese actors from these networks."

"So there is a risk of ongoing compromises to communications until U.S. companies address the cybersecurity gaps the Chinese are likely to maintain their access," Neuberger said.

She said that President Joe Biden has been briefed on the findings and that the White House "has made it a priority for the federal government to do everything it can to get to the bottom this."

The Chinese embassy in Washington on Tuesday rejected the accusations that it was responsible for the hack after the U.S. federal authorities issued new guidance.

"The U.S. needs to stop its own cyberattacks against other countries and refrain from using cyber security to smear and slander China," embassy spokesperson Liu Pengyu said.

The embassy did not immediately respond to messages on Wednesday.

White House officials believe that the hacking was regionally targeted and the focus was on very senior government officials.

Federal authorities confirmed in October that hackers linked to China targeted the phones of then-



presidential candidate Donald Trump and his running mate, Sen. JD Vance, along with people associated with Democratic candidate Vice President Kamala Harris.

The number of countries impacted by the hack is currently believed to be in the “low, couple dozen,” according to a senior administration official.

The official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity under ground rules set by the White House, said they believed the hacks started at least a year or two ago.

The suggestions for telecom companies released Tuesday are largely technical in nature, urging encryption, centralization and consistent monitoring to deter cyber intrusions.

If implemented, the security precautions could help disrupt the operation, which has been dubbed Salt Typhoon, and make it harder for China or any other nation to mount a similar attack in the future, experts say.

Neuberger pointed to efforts that have been made to beef up cybersecurity in the rail, aviation, energy and other sectors following the May 2021 ransomware attack on Colonial Pipeline.

“So, to prevent ongoing Salt typhoon type intrusions by China, we believe we need to apply a similar minimum cybersecurity practice,” Neuberger said.

The cyberattack by a gang of criminal hackers on the critical U.S. pipeline, which delivers about 45% of the fuel used along the Eastern Seaboard, sent ripple effects across the economy, highlighting cybersecurity vulnerabilities in the nation’s aging energy infrastructure. Colonial confirmed it paid \$4.4 million to the gang of hackers who broke into its computer systems as it scrambled to get the nation’s fuel pipeline back online.

## **Israeli strikes on a Gaza tent camp kill at least 21 people, hospital says**

By MOHAMMAD JAHJOUH and WAFAA SHURAFU Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli airstrikes tore through a tent camp for displaced Palestinians in southern Gaza on Wednesday, sparking fires and killing at least 21 people, according to the head of a nearby hospital, in the latest assault on a sprawling tent city that Israel designated a humanitarian safe zone but has repeatedly targeted.

The Israeli military said it struck senior Hamas militants “involved in terrorist activities” in the area, without providing additional details, and said it took precautions to minimize harm to civilians.

The strike on the Muwasi tent camp was one of several deadly assaults across the Gaza Strip on Wednesday. An Israeli attack in central Gaza killed at least 10 more people, including four children, according to Palestinian medics.

Israel’s devastating war in Gaza, launched after Hamas’ October 2023 attack, shows no signs of ending after nearly 14 months. Hamas is still holding dozens of Israeli hostages, and most of Gaza’s population has been displaced and is reliant on international food aid to survive. Israel is also pressing a major offensive in the isolated north, where experts say Palestinians might be experiencing famine.

The Biden administration has pledged to make a new push for a Gaza ceasefire now that there’s a truce in Lebanon between Israel and the militant group Hezbollah, ending more than a year of cross-border fighting. Meanwhile, President-elect Donald Trump demanded this week the release of hostages held by Hamas before he is sworn into office in January.

Wednesday’s strike in Muwasi — a desolate area with few public services that holds hundreds of thousands of displaced people — wounded at least 28 people, according to Atif al-Hout, the director of Nasser Hospital in the southern city of Khan Younis.

An Associated Press journalist at the hospital counted at least 15 bodies, but said reaching a precise number was difficult because many of the dead were dismembered, some without heads or badly burned. In the morgue, an infant’s blackened hand and face peeked out from beneath a heavy blanket used to transport bodies to the hospital.

“It was like doomsday,” said a wounded woman, Iman Jumaa, who held back tears as she described

how the strike killed her father, her brothers and her brothers' children.

Videos and photos of the strike shared widely on social media showed flames and a column of black smoke rising into the night sky, as well as twisted metal tent frames and shredded fabric. Palestinian men searched through the still-burning wreckage, shouting, "Over here guys!" Further away, civilians stood at a distance, observing the destruction.

The military said the strikes had set off secondary blasts, indicating explosives present in the area had detonated. It was not possible to independently confirm the Israeli claims, and the strikes could also have ignited fuel, cooking gas canisters or other materials in the camp.

Shortly after the strike, Al-Awda Hospital said two people had been killed and 38 wounded in an attack on a residential block in the Nuseirat refugee camp. The military had no immediate comment on the strike, but said earlier strikes in central Gaza had hit "terrorist targets."

Israel says it tries to avoid harming civilians and blames Hamas for their deaths, saying the militants often operate in residential areas and are known to position tunnels, rocket launchers and other infrastructure near homes, schools and mosques.

Previous Israeli strikes on tent camps in Gaza have drawn widespread international outrage, such as when a wounded student's last moments were caught on video as he burned to death in a tent outside a hospital.

In northern Gaza, dozens of Palestinian families said Israel's expanding offensive had forcibly displaced them from schools-turned-shelters. Associated Press footage showed people on the road Wednesday leaving Beit Lahia, many crowded onto donkey carts with their belongings in their arms. Others walked on foot.

"This morning a quadcopter (drone) detonated four bombs at the school. There were people injured, human remains — we left with nothing," said Sadeia al-Rahel.

The 57-year-old said her family has been eating grass, leaves, and animal feed for two months due to the lack of food aid in the north.

The amount of aid entering Gaza plunged in October, and hunger is widespread across the territory, even in central Gaza where aid groups have more access. Humanitarian organizations say Israeli restrictions, ongoing fighting and the breakdown of law and order make it difficult to deliver assistance. Israel has said it is working to increase the flow of aid.

Israel's offensive has killed over 44,500 Palestinians in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not say how many were combatants. The Israeli military says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence.

The Oct. 7, 2023 Hamas-led attack on southern Israel killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and around 250 people were abducted. Some 100 hostages are still inside Gaza, at least a third of whom are believed to be dead.

On Wednesday, Israel said its forces recovered the body of a hostage who was captured alive during the Oct. 7 attack. Israel believes Itay Svirsky was killed by his captors.

The families of hostages held in Gaza have grown increasingly concerned that their loved ones are at risk so long as the war continues. Israel's military released on Wednesday the findings of a probe into the circumstances behind the deaths of six hostages whose bodies were recovered in August, determining they were probably shot by their captors after a nearby Israeli strike in February.

## French lawmakers vote to oust prime minister in the first successful no-confidence vote since 1962

By TOM NOUVIAN and SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — France's far-right and left-wing lawmakers joined together Wednesday in a historic no-confidence vote prompted by budget disputes that forces Prime Minister Michel Barnier and his Cabinet members to resign, a first since 1962.

The National Assembly approved the motion by 331 votes. A minimum of 288 were needed.

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President Emmanuel Macron insisted he will serve the rest of his term until 2027. However, he will need to appoint a new prime minister for the second time after July's legislative elections led to a deeply divided parliament.

Macron will address the French on Thursday evening, his office said, without providing details. Barnier is expected to formally resign by then.

A conservative appointed in September, Barnier becomes the shortest-serving prime minister in France's modern Republic.

"I can tell you that it will remain an honor for me to have served France and the French with dignity," Barnier said in his final speech before the vote.

"This no-confidence motion... will make everything more serious and more difficult. That's what I'm sure of," he said.

Opposition to Barnier's proposed budget

Wednesday's crucial vote rose from fierce opposition to Barnier's proposed budget.

The National Assembly, France's lower house of parliament, is deeply fractured, with no single party holding a majority. It comprises three major blocs: Macron's centrist allies, the left-wing coalition New Popular Front, and the far-right National Rally. Both opposition blocs, typically at odds, are uniting against Barnier, accusing him of imposing austerity measures and failing to address citizens' needs.

Speaking on TF1 television after the vote, National Rally leader Marine Le Pen said "we had a choice to make, and our choice is to protect the French" from a "toxic" budget.

Le Pen also accused Macron of being "largely responsible for the current situation," adding that "the pressure on the President of the Republic will get stronger and stronger."

Speaking at the National Assembly ahead of the vote, hard-left lawmaker Eric Coquerel had called on the government to "stop pretending the lights will go out," noting the possibility of an emergency law to levy taxes from Jan. 1, based on this year's rules.

"The special law will prevent a shutdown. It will allow us to get through the end of the year by delaying the budget by a few weeks," Coquerel said.

Macron to pick a new prime minister

Macron must appoint a new prime minister, but the fragmented parliament remains unchanged. No new legislative elections can be held until at least July, creating a potential stalemate for policymakers.

Macron said discussions about him potentially resigning were "make-believe politics" during a trip to Saudi Arabia earlier this week, according to French media reports.

"I'm here because I've been elected twice by the French people," Macron said. He was also reported as saying: "We must not scare people with such things. We have a strong economy."

Impact on financial markets

While France is not at risk of a U.S.-style government shutdown, political instability could spook financial markets.

France is under pressure from the European Union to reduce its colossal debt. The country's deficit is estimated to reach 6% of gross domestic product this year and analysts say it could rise to 7% next year without drastic adjustments. The political instability could push up French interest rates, digging the debt even further.

Carsten Brzeski, global chief of macro at ING Bank, said uncertainty over France's future government and finances is deterring investment and growth. "The impact of France not having a government would clearly be negative for the growth of France and hence the Eurozone," Brzeski said.

France has seen bond market borrowing costs rise, bringing back ugly memories of the Greek debt crisis and default in 2010-2012.

Analysts say France is far from a similar crisis because much of its outstanding debt does not come due for years, and because its bonds remain in demand due to a shortage of German government bonds. Additionally, the European Central Bank could intervene to lower French borrowing costs in case of extreme market turmoil, though the bar for that remains high.



## Supreme Court seems likely to uphold Tennessee's ban on medical treatments for transgender minors

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Hearing a high-profile culture-war clash, the Supreme Court on Wednesday seemed likely to uphold Tennessee's ban on gender-affirming care for minors.

The justices' decision, not expected for several months, could affect similar laws enacted by another 25 states and a range of other efforts to regulate the lives of transgender people, including which sports competitions they can join and which bathrooms they can use.

The case is being weighed by a conservative-dominated court after a presidential election in which Donald Trump and his allies promised to roll back protections for transgender people, showcasing the uneasy intersection between law, politics and individual rights.

The Biden administration's top Supreme Court lawyer warned a decision favorable to Tennessee also could be used to justify nationwide restrictions on transgender healthcare for minors.

In arguments that lasted more than two hours, five of the six conservative justices voiced varying degrees of skepticism of arguments made by the administration and Chase Strangio, the ACLU lawyer for Tennessee families challenging the ban.

Chief Justice John Roberts, who voted in the majority in a 2020 case in favor of transgender rights, questioned whether judges, rather than lawmakers, should be weighing in on a question of regulating medical procedures, an area usually left to the states.

"The Constitution leaves that question to the people's representatives, rather than to nine people, none of whom is a doctor," Roberts said in an exchange with Strangio.

The court's three liberal justices seemed firmly on the side of the challengers. But it's not clear that any of the conservatives will go along.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor pushed back against the assertion that the democratic process would be the best way to address objections to the law. She cited a history of laws discriminating against others, noting that transgender people make up less than 1% of the U.S. population, according to studies. There are an estimated 1.3 million adults and 300,000 adolescents aged 13 to 17 who identify as transgender, according the UCLA law school's Williams Institute.

"Blacks were a much larger part of the population and it didn't protect them. It didn't protect women for whole centuries," Sotomayor said in an exchange with Tennessee Solicitor General Matt Rice.

Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson said she saw some troubling parallels between arguments made by Tennessee and those advanced by Virginia and rejected by a unanimous court, in the 1967 Loving decision that legalized interracial marriage nationwide.

Quoting from the 57-year-old decision, Jackson noted that Virginia argued then that "the scientific evidence is substantially in doubt and, consequently, the court should defer to the wisdom of the state legislature."

Justice Neil Gorsuch, who wrote the majority opinion in 2020, said nothing during the arguments.

The arguments produced some riveting moments. Justice Samuel Alito repeatedly pressed Strangio, the first openly transgender lawyer to argue at the nation's highest court, about whether transgender people should be legally designated as a group that's susceptible to discrimination.

Strangio answered that being transgender does fit that legal definition, though he acknowledged under Alito's questioning there are a small number of people who de-transition. "So it's not an immutable characteristic, is it?" Alito said.

Strangio did not retreat from his view, though he said the court did not have to decide the issue to resolve the case in his clients' favor.

There were dueling rallies outside the court in the hours before the arguments. Speeches and music filled the air on the sidewalk below the court's marble steps. Advocates of the ban bore signs like "Champion God's Design" and "Kids Health Matters," while the other side proclaimed "Fight like a Mother for Trans Rights" and "Freedom to be Ourselves."

Four years ago, the court ruled in favor of Aimee Stephens, who was fired by a Michigan funeral home

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after she informed its owner that she was a transgender woman. The court held that transgender people, as well as gay and lesbian people, are protected by a landmark federal civil rights law that prohibits sex discrimination in the workplace.

The Biden administration and the families and health care providers who challenged the Tennessee law urged the justices to apply the same sort of analysis that the majority, made up of liberal and conservative justices, embraced in the case four years ago when it found that "sex plays an unmistakable role" in employers' decisions to punish transgender people for traits and behavior they otherwise tolerate.

The issue in the Tennessee case is whether the law violates the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment, which requires the government to treat similarly situated people the same.

Tennessee's law bans puberty blockers and hormone treatments for transgender minors, but allows the same drugs to be used for other purposes.

Solicitor General Elizabeth Prelogar, the administration's top Supreme Court lawyer, called the law sex-based line drawing to ban the use of drugs that have been safely prescribed for decades and said the state "decided to completely override the views of the patients, the parents, the doctors."

She contrasted the Tennessee law with one enacted by West Virginia, which set conditions for the health care for transgender minors, but stopped short of an outright ban.

Rice countered that lawmakers acted to regulate "risky, unproven medical interventions" and, at one point, likened the use of puberty blockers and hormone treatments to lobotomies and eugenics, now thoroughly discredited but once endorsed by large segments of the medical community.

Rice argued that the Tennessee law doesn't discriminate based on sex, but rather based on the purpose of the treatment. Children can get puberty blockers to treat early onset puberty, but not as a treatment for gender dysphoria.

"Our fundamental point is there is no sex-based line here," Rice said.

While the challengers invoked the 2020 ruling in *Bostock v. Clayton County* for support, Tennessee relied on the court's precedent-shattering *Dobbs* decision in 2022 that ended nationwide protections for abortion and returned the issue to the states.

The two sides battled in their legal filings over the appropriate level of scrutiny the court should apply. It's more than an academic exercise.

The lowest level is known as rational basis review and almost every law looked at that way is ultimately upheld. Indeed, the federal appeals court in Cincinnati that allowed the Tennessee law to be enforced held that lawmakers acted rationally to regulate medical procedures, well within their authority.

The appeals court reversed a trial court that employed a higher level of review, heightened scrutiny, that applies in cases of sex discrimination. Under this more searching examination, the state must identify an important objective and show that the law helps accomplish it.

If the justices opt for heightened scrutiny, they could return the case to the appeals court to apply it. That's the course Prelogar and Strangio pushed for on Wednesday, though there did not seem to be much support for it.

Gender-affirming care for youth is supported by every major medical organization, including the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Psychiatric Association.

But Justices Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito and Brett Kavanaugh all highlighted a point made by Tennessee in its legal briefs claiming that health authorities in Sweden, Finland, Norway and the United Kingdom found that the medical treatments "pose significant risks with unproven benefits."

If those countries "are pumping the brakes on this kind of treatment," Kavanaugh said, why should the Supreme Court question Tennessee's actions?

None of those countries has adopted a ban similar to the one in Tennessee and individuals can still obtain treatment, Prelogar said.

Kavanaugh, who has coached his daughters' youth basketball teams, also wondered whether a ruling against Tennessee would give transgender athletes "a constitutional right to participate in girls' sports."

Prelogar said a narrow decision would not affect the sports issue.

## Australia is banning social media for people under 16. Could this work elsewhere — or even there?

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

It is an ambitious social experiment of our moment in history — one that experts say could accomplish something that parents, schools and other governments have attempted with varying degrees of success: keeping kids off social media until they turn 16.

Australia's new law, approved by its Parliament last week, is an attempt to swim against many tides of modern life — formidable forces like technology, marketing, globalization and, of course, the iron will of a teenager. And like efforts of the past to protect kids from things that parents believe they're not ready for, the nation's move is both ambitious and not exactly simple, particularly in a world where young people are often shaped, defined and judged by the online company they keep.

The ban won't go into effect for another year. But how will Australia be able to enforce it? That's not clear, nor will it be easy. TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram have become so ingrained in young people's lives that going cold turkey will be difficult.

Other questions loom. Does the ban limit kids' free expression and — especially for those in vulnerable groups — isolate them and curtail their opportunity to connect with members of their community? And how will social sites verify people's ages, anyway? Can't kids just get around such technicalities, as they so often do?

This is, after all, the 21st century — an era when social media is the primary communications tool for most of those born in the past 25 years who, in a fragmented world, seek the common cultures of trends, music and memes. What happens when big swaths of that fall away?

Is Australia's initiative a good, long-time-coming development that will protect the vulnerable, or could it become a well-meaning experiment with unintended consequences?

Platforms will be held liable

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. "It's clear that social media companies have to be held accountable, which is what Australia is trying to do," said Jim Steyer, president and CEO of the nonprofit Common Sense Media.

Leaders and parents in countries around the world are watching Australia's policy closely as many seek to protect young kids from the internet's dangerous corners — and, not incidentally, from each other. Most nations have taken different routes, from parental consent requirements to minimum age limits.

Many child safety experts, parents and even teens who have waited to get on social media consider Australia's move a positive step. They say there's ample reason to ensure that children wait.

"What's most important for kids, just like adults, is real human connection. Less time alone on the screen means more time to connect, not less," said Julie Scelfo, the founder of Mothers Against Media Addiction, or MAMA, a grassroots group of parents aimed at combatting the harms of social media to children. "I'm confident we can support our kids in interacting in any number of ways aside from sharing the latest meme."

The harms to children from social media have been well documented in the two decades since Facebook's launch ushered in a new era in how the world communicates. Kids who spend more time on social media, especially as tweens or young teenagers, are more likely to experience depression and anxiety, according to multiple studies — though it is not yet clear if there is a causal relationship.

What's more, many are exposed to content that is not appropriate for their age, including pornography and violence, as well as social pressures about body image and makeup. They also face bullying, sexual harassment and unwanted advances from their peers as well as adult strangers. Because their brains are not fully developed, teenagers, especially younger ones the law is focused on, are also more affected by social comparisons than adults, so even happy posts from friends can send them into a negative spiral.

What unintended harms could be caused?

Many major initiatives, particularly those aimed at social engineering, can produce side effects — often unintended. Could that happen here? What, if anything, do kids stand to lose by separating kids and the

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networks in which they participate?

Paul Taske, associate director of litigation at the tech lobbying group NetChoice, says he considers the ban "one of the most extreme violations of free speech on the world stage today" even as he expressed relief that the First Amendment prevents such law in the United States

"These restrictions would create a massive cultural shift," Taske said.

"Not only is the Australian government preventing young people from engaging with issues they're passionate about, but they're also doing so even if their parents are ok with them using digital services," he said. "Parents know their children and their needs the best, and they should be making these decisions for their families — not big government. That kind of forcible control over families inevitably will have downstream cultural impacts."

David Inserra, a fellow for Free Expression and Technology, Cato Institute, called the bill "about as useful as an ashtray on a motorbike" in a recent blog post. While Australia's law doesn't require "hard verification" such as an uploaded ID, he said, it calls for effective "age assurance." He said no verification system can ensure accuracy while also protecting privacy and not impacting adults in the process.

Privacy advocates have also raised concerns about the law's effect on online anonymity, a cornerstone of online communications — and something that can protect teens on social platforms.

"Whether it be religious minorities and dissidents, LGBTQ youth, those in abusive situations, whistleblowers, or countless other speakers in tricky situations, anonymous speech is a critical tool to safely challenge authority and express controversial opinions," Inserra said.

A spot check of kids at one mall in the Australian city of Brisbane on Wednesday didn't turn up a great deal of worry, though.

"Social media is still important because you get to talk to people, but I think it's still good that they're like limiting it," said Swan Son, a 13-year-old student at Brisbane State High School. She said she has had limited exposure to social media and wouldn't really miss it for a couple of years. Her parents already enforce a daily one-hour limit. And as for her friends? "I see them at school every day, so I think I'll be fine."

Conor Negric, 16, said he felt he'd dodged a bullet because of his age. Still, he considers the law reasonable. "I think 16 is fine. Some kids, I know some kids like 10 who're on Instagram, Snapchat. I only got Instagram when I was 14."

His mom, Sive Negric, who has two teenage sons, said she was happy for her boys to avoid exposure to social media too early: "That aspect of the internet, it's a bit 'meanland.'"

Other countries are trying to figure it out, too

Parents in Britain and across Europe earlier this year organized on platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram to promise not to buy smartphones for children younger than 12 or 13. This approach costs almost no money and requires no government enforcement. In the United States, some parents are keeping kids off social media either informally or as part of an organized campaign such as Wait Until 8th, a group that helps parents delay kids' access to social media and phones.

This fall, Norway announced plans to ban kids under 15 from using social media, while France is testing a smartphone ban for kids under 15 in a limited number of schools — a policy that could be rolled out nationwide if successful.

U.S. lawmakers have held multiple congressional hearings — most recently in January — on child online safety. Still, the last federal law aimed at protecting children online was enacted in 1998, six years before Facebook's founding. In July, the U.S. Senate overwhelmingly passed legislation designed to protect children from dangerous online content, pushing forward with what would be the first major effort by Congress in decades to hold tech companies more accountable. But the Kids Online Safety Act has since stalled in the House.

While several states have passed laws requiring age verification, those are stuck in court. Utah became the first state to pass laws regulating children's social media use in 2023. In September, a judge issued the preliminary injunction against the law, which would have required social media companies to verify the ages of users, apply privacy settings and limit some features. NetChoice has also obtained injunctions temporarily halting similar laws in several other states.



And last May, U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy said there is insufficient evidence to show social media is safe for kids. He urged policymakers to treat social media like car seats, baby formula, medication and other products children use.

"Why should social media products be any different? Scelfo said. "Parents cannot possibly bear the entire responsibility of keeping children safe online, because the problems are baked into the design of the products."

## **Biden says 'Africa is the future' as he pledges millions more on the last day of Angola visit**

By WILL WEISSERT and GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

LOBITO, Angola (AP) — President Joe Biden pledged another \$600 million Wednesday for an ambitious multi-country rail project in Africa as one of the final foreign policy moves of his administration, and told African leaders the resource-rich continent of more than 1.4 billion people had been "left behind for much too long."

"But not anymore," Biden added. "Africa is the future."

Biden used the third and final day of a visit to Angola — his long-awaited first trip to sub-Saharan Africa as president — to travel to the coastal city of Lobito and tour an Atlantic port terminal that's part of the Lobito Corridor railway redevelopment.

Biden described it as the largest U.S. investment in a train project outside America. The U.S. and allies are investing heavily in the project that will refurbish nearly 2,000 kilometers (1,200 miles) of train lines connecting to the mineral-rich areas of Congo and Zambia in central Africa.

The corridor, which likely will take years to complete, gives the U.S. better access to cobalt, copper and other critical minerals in Congo and Zambia that are used in batteries for electric vehicles, electronic devices and clean energy technologies that Biden said would power the future.

China is dominant in mining in Congo and Zambia. The U.S. investment has strategic implications for U.S.-China economic competition, which went up a notch this week as they traded blows over access to key materials and technologies.

The African leaders who met with Biden on Wednesday said the railway corridor offered their countries a much faster route for minerals and goods — and a convenient outlet to Western markets.

"This is a project that is full of hope for our countries and our region," said Congo President Félix Tshisekedi, whose country has more than 70% of the world's cobalt. "This is not just a logistical project. It is a driving force for economic and social transformation for millions of our people."

The leaders said the corridor should spur private-sector investment and improve a myriad of related areas like roads, communication networks, agriculture and clean energy technologies.

For the African countries, it could create a wave of new jobs for a burgeoning young population.

"It's a huge, huge opportunity," said Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema. "It's good for Africa."

Cargo that once took 45 days to get to the U.S. — usually involving trucks via South Africa — would now take around 45 hours, Biden said. He predicted the project could transform the region from a food importer to exporter.

It's "something that if done right will outlast all of us and keep delivering for our people for generations to come," he said.

The announcement of an additional \$600 million took the U.S.'s investment in the Lobito Corridor to \$4 billion. The corridor has drawn financing from others including the European Union, the Group of Seven leading industrialized nations, a Western-led private consortium and African banks. Biden said the total investment was \$6 billion.

Some calling for more U.S. involvement in Africa hope it will mark a new era of U.S.-Africa engagement.

Much of that depends on the administration of Donald Trump, who takes office Jan. 20. The White House says Republicans in Congress have supported past efforts to promote African business interests through targeted investments and that such initiatives have appealed to Trump in the past.

Trump also supports measures to counter China, and some see the Lobito Corridor as a direct counter to the Belt and Road Initiative infrastructure strategy that China has used to promote its economic and political influence in Africa and elsewhere.

A senior U.S. administration official called the Lobito Corridor the heart of competing with China not as a political adversary but from a business standpoint by sparking investment and helping countries over the long term.

The U.S. is looking to replicate the Lobito Corridor project in other parts of the world, said the official, who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity to offer details that hadn't yet been made public.

Biden had promised to visit sub-Saharan Africa last year but the trip was delayed. He was greeted Monday by thousands of Angolans on the streets of the capital, Luanda.

Angola has long and strong ties to China, and the Biden administration's ability to win it over as a partner for such a major project has been viewed as a rare success for the U.S. in Africa.

Biden, who has about six weeks left in office, said he would like to come back to see the railway's progress. "I want to come back and ride the whole thing," he told the African leaders, before departing.

## Raw milk recall in California expands after tests detect more bird flu virus

By JONEL ALECCIA AP Health Writer

A California farm expanded a recall of raw milk sold in stores and halted production after state health and agriculture officials found bird flu virus in more milk samples.

Raw Farm, of Fresno, voluntarily recalled all whole milk and cream products from stores late Tuesday after tests found bird flu virus in "multiple" retail samples and dairy storage and bottling sites. The recall covers all Raw Farm milk and cream produced between Nov. 9 and Nov. 27.

The California Department of Food and Agriculture quarantined the farm and suspended distribution of raw milk, cream, kefir, butter and cheese products produced on or after Nov. 27.

"Californians are strongly encouraged not to consume any raw milk or cream products in their possession or still on store shelves," officials said in a statement.

The move followed recalls of two lots of Raw Farm products after bird flu was first detected in retail milk on Nov. 21.

No known cases of bird flu virus have been confirmed in people who drank raw milk, health officials said. Pasteurized milk is heat-treated to kill the virus and remains safe to drink.

Pet owners also should avoid feeding Raw Farm products sold nationwide as "pet food topper" or "pet food kefir" to their animals, who can become ill, health officials said. Cats on farms with infected cows have developed brain damage and died after drinking contaminated raw milk.

Bird flu virus, also known as Type A H5N1 avian influenza, was detected for the first time in U.S. dairy cows in March. The virus has been spreading rapidly, particularly in California, where nearly 500 of the more than 700 infected U.S. herds have been detected.

The virus has infected 57 people in the U.S. this year, including 31 in California, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Mild illnesses have been seen in dairy and poultry workers who had close contact with infected animals. In two cases, an adult in Missouri and a child in California, no known source of the illnesses have been identified. No cases of bird flu spreading between people have been detected in the U.S.

Health officials have long warned against drinking raw milk because it can contain germs that cause illnesses that range from mild to life-threatening.

Raw Farm's owner, Mark McAfee, has called for less raw milk regulation. In an Instagram post on Wednesday, farm officials said they were working to restore supply quickly.

"There are no illnesses associated with H5N1 in our products. But rather this is a political issue," the post said. "There are no food safety issues with our products or consumer safety. We are working towards resolving this political issue while being cooperative with our government regulatory agencies."

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., who has been tapped as the nation's top health official, has vowed to allow wider distribution of raw milk. McAfee told The Associated Press that Kennedy is a customer of his products. Kennedy has criticized agriculture departments for cracking down on raw milk and promised that the Food and Drug Administration's "aggressive suppression" of unpasteurized milk would end under President-elect Donald Trump.

## **Harris found success with women who have cats, but Trump got the dog owner vote: AP VoteCast**

By LINLEY SANDERS, HUMERA LODHI and ANNIE NG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The lead-up to the 2024 election was all about cat owners. But in the end, the dogs had their day.

President-elect Donald Trump won slightly more than half of voters who own either cats or dogs, with a big assist from dog owners, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of more than 120,000 voters. Dog owners were much more likely to support the Republican over Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris. Cat owners were split between the two candidates.

About two-thirds of voters said they own a dog or cat, but pet owners don't usually get much attention from politicians. This year, however, past comments by Trump's running mate, Ohio Sen. JD Vance, about "childless cat ladies" briefly became a campaign issue — and Taylor Swift signed her Instagram endorsement of Harris in September as "Taylor Swift Childless Cat Lady."

Harris did end up decisively winning support from women who owned a cat but not a dog. Still, those voters were a relatively small slice of the electorate, and pet owners as a whole did not seem to hold Vance's remarks against the GOP ticket.

Harris found success with female cat owners, but not men who owned cats

Childless or not, women who only owned a cat were more likely to support Harris than were dog owners, or voters who had a cat and a dog. About 6 in 10 women who owned a cat but not a dog supported Harris, according to AP VoteCast. She did similarly well among women who did not own either kind of pet.

Her success with women who were cat owners didn't translate to men. Trump narrowly won the backing of men who only owned cats; slightly more than half of these voters supported him.

It's impossible to know how much Vance's comments played into Harris' success with women who only had cats, but most of those voters had a "very" or "somewhat" unfavorable opinion of Vance. They were more likely to dislike than women who only own dogs or women who have cats and dogs. They were also more likely than female voters overall to have a negative view of Trump and the Republican Party.

A simple explanation for the divide is that women who were cat owners were never very inclined to vote for Trump, even before Vance's comments resurfaced. According to AP VoteCast, only about 4 in 10 female voters who only owned a cat were Republicans.

More voters are dog owners, and Trump did better with them

If anything, the result of the 2024 election suggests that Democrats may have some work to do with dog owners. Voters who owned a dog, including those who owned a cat as well, were more likely to support Trump, and they made up a bigger share of the electorate.

Cat owners who didn't also have a dog made up only about 15% of voters. About 2 in 10 voters, by contrast, owned both kinds of pets, and about 3 in 10 only had a dog, which meant that dog owners were a much more influential voting bloc. Trump won about 6 in 10 men voters who owned a dog but no cat, and about half of female voters in this group.

While Trump's campaign did not make the same appeals to dog owners that Harris' campaign did with cat owners, Trump did falsely claim that immigrants in Ohio were stealing and eating dogs and cats. But, as with the Vance remarks, there is no evidence that Trump's statements ultimately influenced pet owners' decisions. In fact, party loyalty was likely a major factor — about 6 in 10 men who only own dogs identified as Republicans, as did about half of women who are dog owners.

So Democrats looking to make inroads with dog lovers may not have an easy fix ahead. But it's also true

that neither Trump nor Harris own pets, which meant no dogs accompanied the presidential candidates on the campaign. It's possible that future campaigns could benefit from a little more bark.

AP VoteCast is a survey of the American electorate conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago for Fox News, PBS NewsHour, The Wall Street Journal and The Associated Press. The survey of more than 120,000 voters was conducted for eight days, concluding as polls closed. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. The survey combines a random sample of registered voters drawn from state voter files; self-identified registered voters using NORC's probability based AmeriSpeak panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population; and self-identified registered voters selected from nonprobability online panels. The margin of sampling error for voters overall is estimated to be plus or minus 0.4 percentage points. Find more details about APVoteCast's methodology at <https://www.ap.org/elections/our-role/ap-votecast/>

## South Korea's opposition parties move to impeach president over sudden declaration of martial law

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's opposition parties moved Wednesday to impeach the president over the shocking and short-lived declaration of martial law that drew heavily armed troops to encircle parliament before lawmakers climbed walls to reenter the building and unanimously voted to lift his order.

Impeaching Yoon Suk Yeol would require the support of two-thirds of parliament, and at least six justices of the nine-member Constitutional Court would have to endorse it to remove him. The motion to impeach, submitted jointly by the main liberal opposition Democratic Party and five smaller opposition parties, could be put to a vote as early as Friday.

Yoon's senior policy advisers and Defense Minister Kim Yong Hyun offered to resign as the nation struggled to make sense of what appeared to be a poorly conceived stunt. The Democratic Party submitted a separate motion to impeach Kim, who allegedly recommended the martial law declaration to Yoon.

In his speech announcing the abrupt order Tuesday night, Yoon vowed to eliminate "anti-state" forces and continued to criticize the Democratic Party's attempts to impeach key government officials and senior prosecutors. But martial law lasted only about six hours, ending after the National Assembly voted to overrule Yoon and his Cabinet formally lifted it before daybreak Wednesday.

Democratic Party lawmakers, who hold a majority in the 300-seat parliament, called on Yoon to quit immediately or they would take steps to impeach him.

Yoon's martial law declaration "was a clear violation of the constitution. It didn't abide by any requirements to declare it," a party statement said. The order "was originally invalid and a grave violation of the constitution. It was a grave act of rebellion and provides perfect grounds for his impeachment."

What happens if Yoon is impeached?

Impeaching him would require support from 200 National Assembly members. The Democratic Party and other small opposition parties together have 192 seats. But they could seek additional votes from Yoon's ruling conservative People Power Party.

The 190-0 vote that rejected martial law included the votes of 18 lawmakers from the PPP, according to National Assembly officials. Party leader Han Dong-hun and Seoul Mayor Oh Se-hoon, also a member, criticized Yoon's martial law declaration.

If Yoon is impeached, he will be stripped of his constitutional powers until the Constitutional Court rules. Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, who holds the No. 2 position in the South Korean government, would take over presidential responsibilities. Han issued a public message pleading for patience and calling for Cabinet members to "fulfill your duties even after this moment."

The Constitutional Court has only six incumbent justices following three retirements. That means all six must approve the impeachment motion for it to succeed. The court includes justices appointed after Yoon took office, so the Democratic Party is expected to speed up the process of exercising its right to



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recommend two of the three new justices.

Yoon's martial law declaration, the first of its kind in more than 40 years, harkened back to South Korea's past military-backed governments when authorities occasionally proclaimed martial law and other decrees that allowed them to station soldiers, tanks and armored vehicles on streets or at public places such as schools to prevent anti-government demonstrations. Until Tuesday night and Wednesday morning, such scenes of military intervention had not been seen since South Korea achieved a democracy in the late 1980s.

Dramatic hours at the parliament

After Yoon's declaration, troops carrying full battle gear, including assault rifles, tried to keep protesters away from the National Assembly as military helicopters flew overhead and landed nearby. One soldier pointed his assault rifle at a woman who was among protesters outside the building demanding that the martial law be lifted.

It wasn't clear how the 190 lawmakers were able to enter a parliamentary hall to vote down Yoon's martial law decree. Opposition leader Lee Jae-myung and National Assembly Speaker Woo Won Shik were seen climbing over walls. As troops and police officers blocked some from entering, they didn't aggressively restrain or use force against others.

No major violence was reported. The troops and police personnel were later seen leaving the grounds of the National Assembly after the parliamentary vote to lift the martial law. Woo said: "Even with our unfortunate memories of military coups, our citizens have surely observed the events of today and saw the maturity of our military."

Under South Korea's constitution, the president can declare martial law during "wartime, war-like situations or other comparable national emergency states" that require the use of military force to restrict the freedom of press, assembly and other rights to maintain order. Many observers question whether South Korea is currently in such a state.

The constitution also states that the president must oblige when the National Assembly demands the lifting of martial law with a majority vote.

A presidential official said Yoon decided to impose martial law to resolve a political deadlock and did it in the middle of night to minimize its effect on the economy. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitive nature of the issue.

Some experts say Yoon clearly violated the constitution. While martial law allows "special measures" to restrict individual freedoms and the authority of agencies and courts, the constitution does not permit the functions of parliament to be restricted.

But in following Yoon's declaration on Tuesday, the South Korean military proclaimed that parliamentary activities were suspended and deployed troops to try to block lawmakers from entering the National Assembly.

Park Chan-dae, the Democratic Party's floor leader, called for Yoon to be immediately investigated on charges of rebellion over the way he deployed troops to the parliament. While the president mostly enjoys immunity from prosecution while in office, the protection does not extend to allegations of rebellion or treason.

In Seoul, the streets were busy Wednesday, like a normal weekday.

Tourist Stephen Rowan, from Brisbane, Australia, who was touring Gyeongbokgung Palace, said he was not concerned. He heard about calls for the president's resignation and expected demonstrations.

"I would have been concerned if martial law had stayed enforced," he said.

Natalia Slavney, research analyst at the Stimson Center's 38 North website, which focuses on Korean affairs, said Yoon's imposition of martial law was "a serious backslide of democracy" that followed a "worrying trend of abuse" since he took office in 2022.

## Trump's defense pick Pete Hegseth faces deepening scrutiny in Senate

By LISA MASCARO, MARY CLARE JALONICK and TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pete Hegseth, President-elect Donald Trump's pick for Defense Secretary, spent a second day on Capitol Hill, meeting privately with Republican senators amid rising questions about his ability to effectively lead the Pentagon.

Hegseth told reporters Tuesday that he was planning to sit down with senators, even with those potentially skeptical of his nomination.

"We're going to meet with every senator that wants to meet with us, across the board," Hegseth as he went from office to office. "And we welcome their advice as we go through the advice and counsel process."

Trump tapped the Fox News co-host, a former Army National Guard major and combat veteran who deployed to both Iraq and Afghanistan, as his Secretary of Defense, typically among the first Cabinet posts to be considered by the U.S. Senate for confirmation.

But Hegseth is running into questions amid a sexual assault allegation, which he has denied, and other emerging reports about his work conduct and history.

GOP Sen. Lindsey Graham said some of the reports are "disturbing."

"I want to make sure that every young woman that joins the military feels respected and welcomed," Graham told CBS News.

The South Carolina lawmaker told the AP later that he doesn't know whether to believe the allegations, and Hegseth "has a chance to say that's true or not true."

Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., said he's seen the reports. "I'll get the chance to talk to him, and I'm sure he'll address them," he said. "But my view is, have the hearing."

Before he was tapped to serve as a weekend host of "Fox & Friends," Hegseth served at two veterans advocacy groups, Concerned Veterans for America and Veterans For Freedom.

In new allegations this week, the New Yorker cited what it described as a whistleblower report and other documents about his time leading CVA that alleged multiple incidents of alcohol intoxication at work events, inappropriate behavior around female staffers and financial mismanagement.

NBC News reported that several unnamed current and former Fox employees who worked with Hegseth said his drinking habits raised concerns, including some who said he would show up smelling of alcohol.

The Associated Press spoke to four people who had either worked at CVA or were familiar with Hegseth's time there who insisted on anonymity because they were not allowed to speak to the media or had signed nondisclosure agreements.

While the group's all-day conferences could run late and often wind up at a nearby bar, three of the four said they had not seen Hegseth intoxicated at events.

One person who had been connected to CVA told the AP, however, that some employees had raised concerns about Hegseth's alcohol use but said that his departure from the group was more connected to growing ideological differences between him and the network of conservative nonprofits funded by billionaire donors Charles Koch and his late brother, David Koch.

Trump is drawing from the ranks of loyalists to fill his administration and to Cabinet positions, often stunning Washington with unusual choices that are provocative and testing the senators who will be asked to confirm them under the chamber's advise and consent role.

An early pick, Matt Gaetz, the former congressman from Florida, abruptly withdrew from consideration when it became clear that Senate support was crumbling. Gaetz, who had been investigated but never charged in a federal sex trafficking probe, faced a House Ethics investigation over sexual misconduct.

Trump's choices can only afford to lose a few detractors in the Senate, where it takes majority approval to be confirmed. Republicans will have a 53-seat majority in the new year, meaning four GOP votes could sink a nominee, if all Democrats are opposed.

Republican senators have been weighing their options.

If confirmed, Hegseth would not only be part of critical command and control of the nation's nuclear

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weapons, he would be sixth in the line of succession to the presidency. It's a position that ages its occupants and demands constant response, due to the number of middle-of-the-night contingencies that can occur when U.S. service members are put in harm's way.

There have been private discussions among senators about the allegations and how to approach the situation, according to one person granted anonymity to discuss the private conversations.

During a closed-door meeting with about a dozen senators late Monday evening, none asked Hegseth about the allegations against him.

"You know what? The American people care about restoring our military," said Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, after the meeting. He decried as "shameful" the criticism of Hegseth.

While Republican senators are reluctant to raise questions publicly — and several dismissed the reports outright — many of them indicated he could face tough questions in a confirmation hearing.

"That's what the process is for," said Utah Rep. John Curtis, an incoming freshman senator.

Questions about Hegseth and other nominees are "why a background check is important, why a committee investigation is critical," said Maine Sen. Susan Collins.

Alabama Sen. Tommy Tuberville said after meeting Monday with Hegseth that he is very supportive of the nomination.

But Tuberville said of the allegations: "If it's to a certain degree, people aren't going to vote to confirm him."

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

Hegseth served in the Army National Guard from 2002 to 2021, deploying to Iraq in 2005 and Afghanistan in 2011 and earning two Bronze Stars. He lacks senior military and national security experience and would oversee global crises ranging from Europe to the Middle East.

A woman told police that she was sexually assaulted in 2017 by Hegseth after he took her phone, blocked the door to a California hotel room and refused to let her leave, according to a detailed investigative report recently made public.

Hegseth told police at the time that the encounter had been consensual and has denied any wrongdoing.

## Today in History: December 5, Nelson Mandela dies at 95

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, Dec. 5, the 340th day of 2024. There are 26 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Dec. 5, 2013, Nelson Mandela, the anti-apartheid leader who became South Africa's first Black president, died at age 95.

Also on this date:

In 1848, in an address to Congress, President James K. Polk sparked the Gold Rush of '49 by confirming that gold had been discovered in California.

In 1933, national Prohibition came to an end as Utah became the 36th state to ratify the 21st Amendment to the Constitution, repealing the 18th Amendment.

In 1952, the Great Smog of London descended on the British capital; the unusually thick fog, which contained toxic pollutants, lasted five days and was blamed for causing thousands of deaths.

In 1955, the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations merged to form the AFL-CIO under its first president, George Meany.

In 1994, Republicans chose Newt Gingrich to be the first GOP speaker of the House in four decades.

In 2009, a jury in Perugia, Italy, convicted American student Amanda Knox and her former Italian boyfriend, Raffaele Sollecito, of murdering Knox's British roommate, Meredith Kercher, and sentenced them to long prison terms. (After a series of back-and-forth rulings, Knox and Sollecito were definitively acquitted in 2015 by Italy's highest court.)

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In 2017, Democratic Congressman John Conyers of Michigan resigned from Congress after a nearly 53-year career, becoming the first Capitol Hill politician to lose his job amid the sexual misconduct allegations sweeping through the nation's workplaces.

In 2019, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced that she had asked the relevant House committee chairs to begin drawing up articles of impeachment against President Donald Trump, saying his actions left them "no choice" but to act swiftly. (Trump would be impeached by the House on charges of obstruction and abuse of power, but the Senate voted to acquit in the first of two Trump impeachment trials.)

Today's Birthdays: Author Calvin Trillin is 89. Opera singer Jose Carreras is 78. Musician Jim Messina is 77. Golf Hall of Famer Lanny Wadkins is 75. Football Hall of Famer Art Monk is 67. Rock singer-musician John Rzeznik (REZ'-nihk) (The Goo Goo Dolls) is 59. Country singer Gary Allan is 57. Comedian-actor Margaret Cho is 56. Actor Paula Patton is 49. Singer-songwriter Keri Hilson is 42. Actor Frankie Muniz is 39.