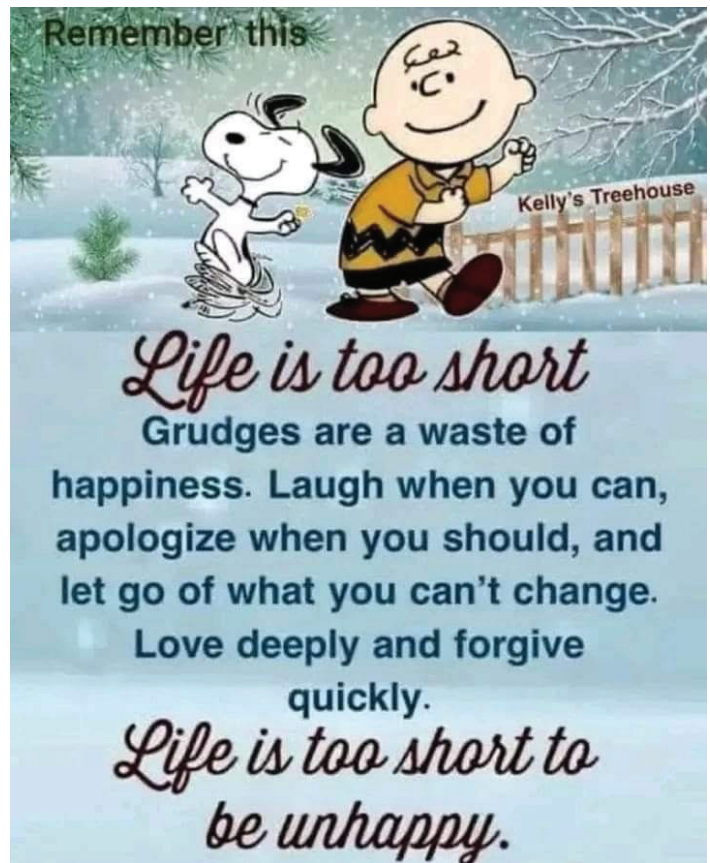


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Friday, Dec. 13

Senior Menu: Potato soup, ham salad croissant, Monterey blend, fruit.

School Breakfast: Egg wraps.

School Lunch: Garlic cheese bread, cooked carrots.

Girls Varsity Wrestling at Rapid City

Basketball Double Header at Hamlin (Boys C at 4 p.m., Girls JV at 4 p.m.; Boys JV at 5 p.m., Girls Varsity and Boys Varsity to follow)

Saturday, Dec. 14

Girls Varsity Wrestling at Rapid City

Santa Day at Professional Management Services, 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.

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

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.

Americans in Syria

Twenty-nine-year-old Travis Timmerman was freed from a Syrian prison cell this week, one of at least two US citizens who went missing under the Assad regime. The US has asked leading rebel group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham for its help in locating journalist Austin Tice, who has been missing since 2012.

Timmerman was last seen seven months ago in Hungary before he was discovered barefoot this week in a Damascus suburb. In an interview with CBS, he said he illegally crossed from Lebanon to Syria by foot while on a Christian pilgrimage. Timmerman said that upon his arrest, he was allowed to use the bathroom only three times per day but was otherwise well cared for and fed.

Roughly 150,000 people—mostly Syrians—have gone missing under the Assad regime, with nearly 60,000 believed to have been killed or tortured in prison cells. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham—which ended the regime's 54-year rule this week—has vowed to close the prisons. See footage from the Sednaya prison break.

Mirror Cell, Mirror Cell

Dozens of scientists issued a warning yesterday, urging others to end research on mirror cells. Such a microbe—potentially 10 to 30 years away—was likened to the possibility of creating a second "Tree of Life."

While it's not clear why, all DNA is made up of "right-handed" molecules, while proteins are made up of "left-handed" amino acids. In recent years, scientists have managed to create right-handed proteins mirroring those in our bodies. These proteins take longer to break down and may lead to treatments for HIV and Alzheimer's.

However, scientists now warn building other "mirror" elements of a cell could lead to a viable "mirror microbe" within years. They say such bacteria could evade not only humans' immune defenses but all organisms' immune defenses, faster than researchers could devise a mirror antibiotic to end a pandemic.

The group of 38 scientists includes two Nobel laureates and Dr. Craig Venter, who led the private effort to sequence the human genome in the 1990s.

Biden's Record Commutations

President Joe Biden commuted the sentences of roughly 1,500 prisoners and pardoned 39 nonviolent offenders yesterday, the largest single-day act of clemency by a US president since records began in 1900. The majority of those whose sentences were commuted were on home confinement since the pandemic.

The decision comes a week after the president unconditionally pardoned his son, Hunter, of all gun and tax convictions, walking back assurances he would not do so. More pardons are expected in the coming weeks, with Biden reportedly considering preemptively pardoning officials who investigated the Jan. 6, 2021, storming of the US Capitol.

The US Constitution's Article II grants the president broad power to pardon federal prisoners (which removes guilt) or commute (lessen) their sentences, except in impeachment cases. Every US president serving a full term has used this power, commonly used toward the end of a president's tenure.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

College football bowl season kicks off tomorrow; see schedule and preview of all 36 matchups.
Eighteen-year-old Indian Gukesh Dommaraju becomes youngest-ever World Chess Champion.
Sean "Diddy" Combs accused of rape by three men in separate lawsuits; Combs is currently awaiting trial on felony charges of racketeering and sex trafficking.
"Wicked" and "Conclave" lead nominations for the 2025 Critics Choice Awards with 11 apiece.
BuzzFeed to sell "First We Feast," the studio behind popular "Hot Ones" YouTube show, for \$82.5M.
YouTube TV to raise monthly subscription fee by \$10 to \$82.99.

Science & Technology

Google unveils Android XR, a mixed reality operating system for smart glasses and headsets integrating its AI platform Gemini ... and announces Gemini 2.0, built to support AI agents carrying out tasks for users.
Neanderthals and humans in Eurasia interbred for a window of about 7,000 years beginning roughly 50,000 years ago, genetic analysis suggests; between 1% to 2% of modern Eurasian genes are inherited from Neanderthals.
New study estimates superflares—bursts of radiation from stars equal to trillions of hydrogen bombs—may occur roughly once per 100 years; previous studies suggested events occurred every 1,000 to 10,000 years.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close lower (S&P 500 -0.5%, Dow -0.5%, Nasdaq -0.7%), weighed down by better-than-expected inflation report a day earlier.
ServiceTitan raises roughly \$625M in Nasdaq debut, valuing cloud software firm at nearly \$9B.
Warner Bros. Discovery shares close up over 15% after announcing it will split its TV business from its streaming studios.
Adobe shares close down over 13% in biggest drop since September 2022 after downbeat revenue forecast.
Federal Trade Commission sues Southern Glazer's Wine and Spirits, accusing the largest US alcohol distributor of offering discounts to large chain buyers like Costco and Kroger while charging higher prices to small businesses.
Stanley recalls 2.6 million mugs after 38 people suffer burns from faulty lids.

Politics & World Affairs

President-elect Donald Trump is named Time magazine's Person of the Year, rings the New York Stock Exchange's opening bell; magazine cites Trump's historic comeback and impact on news cycle.
Justice Department internal watchdog report on Jan. 6, 2021, storming of US Capitol finds FBI anticipated potential for violence, failed to canvass informants from field offices or dispatch undercover agents; four informants entered Capitol premises without FBI authorization.
UK's health secretary permanently bans puberty blockers for children under 18, extending a temporary ban in place since May; decision follows a review this year finding a lack of evidence to date supporting the treatment, with transgender advocates calling the decision discriminatory.

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Holiday OPEN HOUSE

Sat. Dec 14th
11am to 3pm



Free Event & Family Fun!

21 S. MAIN ST., ABERDEEN, SD 605 626-7117
DACOTAH PRAIRIE MUSEUM.COM

Groton Prairie Mixed Bowling League Week #6 Results

Team Standings: Jackelopes 15, Shihtzus 13, Coyotes 13, Cheetahs 11, Foxes 11, Chipmunks 9
Men's High Games: Brad Waage 215, Roger Spanier 207 & 202, Tony Waage 202
Women's High Games: Hayley Johnson 195, Vicki Walter 192 & 172, Sue Stanley 168
Men's High Series: Brad Waage 599, Roger Spanier 571, Tony Waage 507
Women's High Series: Vicki Walter 531, Hayley Johnson 461, Julie Holt 445
Week 6 Fun Game – Most 9 Counts w/out Fill – Cheetahs with 16!

Brown County Farmers Receive Farmers Union Ag Ambassador Award

By Lura Roti

South Dakota Farmers Union recognizes Paul Dennert and Don Schaunaman (posthumously) for their leadership and service to South Dakota agriculture. The state's largest agriculture organization honors the Brown County farmers with the Ag Ambassador award during its 109th State Convention held in Huron, S.D. December 11 and 12.

"South Dakota's number one industry benefited greatly from Paul and Don's passion for agriculture and service to its people," said Doug Sombke, President of South Dakota Farmers Union. "We recognize them with this award because they serve as great examples to those of us in leadership positions today and those who will lead in the future."

Columbia farmer Paul Dennert

A fourth-generation Brown County farmer, H. Paul Dennert said he fell in love with livestock as a child growing up on his family's farm.

"My dad bought me my first Angus heifer in 1956, and I raised a registered cow/calf herd until I sold it to my grandson in 2023," explained Dennert, who feels fortunate to have been able to farm and live on the land his great-grandfather Herman Dennert homesteaded in 1893.

"I can look out my kitchen window and see cattle and my great-grandchildren playing outside – there is no better place to raise children than on the farm," said Dennert who together with his wife, Peggy June, have two children Dana and Kelli McFarland. Today in their late 80s the couple has nine grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren.

A full-time farmer until 2023, Dennert said it feels good to know the family's farming legacy is in good hands. "It does my heart good to know they are interested, and the farm will remain in the family name going forward."

Along with farming and raising children, Dennert also made time to give back. For more than 50 years he served St John's Lutheran Church treasurer and now as a board member at Our Saviors Lutheran church. He volunteered as a Sunday School Teacher and Superintendent. He also served on the board of the Columbia Community Fire Association.

"Growing up taking part in our community, I learned to work with people, and I learned how rewarding it is to give back," Dennert said. "My parents were involved and gave back and my wife's parents did the same. So, for me, giving back just came natural."

In 1992 Dennert was asked to run for the South Dakota House of Representatives. He committed 20 years to serving the citizens of District 2 first in the House and then the Senate (over the years he served rural Brown County and portions of Marshall and Day Counties, as well as some of Aberdeen).

"As a farmer serving in the legislature, I was able to bring the agriculture view to policy," Dennert said.



Columbia farmer Paul Dennert is recognized by South Dakota Farmers Union for his leadership and service to South Dakota agriculture. The state's largest agriculture organization honored the Brown County farmer with the Ag Ambassador award during its 109th State Convention held in Huron, S.D. December 11 and 12. Pictured here with Doug Sombke, SDFU President.

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He worked tirelessly to revise how agriculture land was valued for taxation purposes. "The value of ag land was increasing so fast in areas of South Dakota, like the Black Hills or land near other urban centers, because they were using the value of the land around it, instead of basing the tax value on its productivity. I worked with a committee for years to get ag land tax value to be based on a productivity model."

In addition to his efforts to support positive change for the future of South Dakota agriculture, Dennert also focused on legislation to cover the costs for cochlear implants for South Dakota's children with hearing loss.

"When I think of the legislation I am most proud of, of course changing the way agriculture land is valued stands out, but all together different than farming, was the bill I introduced that passed to help pay for cochlear implants."

Dennert was 55 when he began serving in the Legislature. And he said he could not have done it without help from his son, Dana. "It was good timing, because our son was of the age where he could handle the operation while I was gone."

Dennert also appreciated his wife, Peggy's support. Peggy traveled to Pierre with Dennert during the Legislative Session.



Aberdeen farmer Don Schaunaman is recognized (posthumously) by South Dakota Farmers Union for his leadership and service to South Dakota agriculture. The state's largest agriculture organization honored the Brown County farmer with the Ag Ambassador award during its 109th State Convention held in Huron, S.D. December 11 and 12.

While he served, his grandchildren often visited him and Peggy in Pierre. As teens several served as Legislative Pages. In 2016 his grandson Drew was elected to serve as District 3 Representative.

After Dennert served his last term in the South Dakota Legislature in 2012, he was asked to serve on the South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks Commission.

Today, he and his wife continue to be involved in Our Saviors Lutheran Church, they enjoy travel and spending time with their family.

Aberdeen farmer Don Schaunaman

Ask brothers and Brown County farmers, Craig and Kirk Schaunaman what they want folks to know about their dad, Don Schaunaman, who passed away in 2021 at the age of 92, and without hesitation they say, "He was humble. He would not have liked all the attention an award like this brings," Kirk said.

"He was always willing to help somebody," Craig said. "And he always did the right thing."

A third-generation Brown County farmer, Don Schaunaman grew up on his family's farm near Westport, S.D., during the Depression. The middle child of 13, Don and eight of his 10 brothers would continue the farming legacy of their dad and grandpa.

Don's farming career was built alongside his wife, Hazel, on her family's farm just three miles from Aberdeen.

"You know, we are lucky, our parents were married for 70 years, they passed away a year apart," Kirk said. "They were also really fortunate because they never buried a child or a grandchild."

As a farmer, Don was a strong believer in the cooperative business model. He bought all the inputs he could from local cooperatives and served on the local Northern Electric Co-op board. He followed in the footsteps of his father, Henry.

"Dad was not a very talkative guy. But he didn't need to say much, because he really led by example," explained Craig.

Don served on the School Board for the Riverside Country School and was also an active member of South Dakota Farmers Union. "Dad really felt that Farmers Union provided a rural voice for farmers like us," Craig said. "Dad looked up to the leadership and believed that Farmers Union was there for rural agriculture in South Dakota."

Both sons say their dad's example led them to serve. From 2009 to 2017 Craig

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served as the State Director for the Farm Service Agency. And today, Kirk serves on the Rural Electric Co-op board of directors and on the Farmers Union Industries board of directors.

"Like we said, dad believed in doing the right thing and always said, "do the right thing and do the best you can do," Kirk said. "And when you know something is wrong, do not be afraid to stand up for what is right."

Kirk and Craig said even though times were tough in the 1980s when they were ready to farm full-time after high school, their dad made sure there was room for them on the family farm.

"Dad didn't encourage us or discourage us to farm. But as long as we were willing to earn it, he told us that if we wanted to farm, he would make room for us," Craig said.

"He wasn't going to hand it to us. We had to get up and work for it," Kirk said. "You want it, you earn it."

The brothers both said farming was the career they wanted.

"My favorite memories with dad are delivering grain to the West Terminal. In the 50s the co-op built a big, new cement terminal. It is still standing. I have a clear memory of driving the new truck dad bought in 1973 to deliver wheat to the elevator. It was only three miles from the farm. I think I was 14."

Don retired from farming in the 1990s when he was 65.

While Kirk and Craig built their career on the family farm, their older brother Mark made a career in ag banking in North Dakota and their sister, Kristie Erickson farms with her husband near Bath, S.D. Both Mark and Kristie also followed Don's Leadership serving in leadership capacities in their communities.

"Dad was happy that we continued the farming tradition. You know for dad, farming was always a family deal," Kirk said. "Today, our nephew, Chad, farms with us full time and other family members filling in when needed."



Aberdeen farmer Don Schaunaman is recognized (posthumously) by South Dakota Farmers Union for his leadership and service to South Dakota agriculture. The state's largest agriculture organization honored the Brown County farmer with the Ag Ambassador award during its 109th State Convention held in Huron, S.D. December 11 and 12.

Don's family accepted the award in his honor (left to right): Craig Schaunaman, Gary Schaunaman, Lee Schaunaman, Greg and Kristie Erickson; Karly Schaunaman and Kirk Schaunaman. Pictured here with SDFU President, Doug Sombke.

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You have to start some time! Why not **now!**

5 months to get your through the winter!

Student: \$175.75, Single: \$202.40, Couple: \$298.90,
Family: \$362.15

This will get you into the gym through the end of May!



Gift
Certificates
Available!

Daily Pass Available for \$5

Age 65 or older
Physical Therapy
\$20 per month

Annual Memberships:

Student: \$255.60

Single: \$319.50

Couple: \$575.10

Family: \$702.26



15 N Main St. - Ste. 101
Downtown Groton

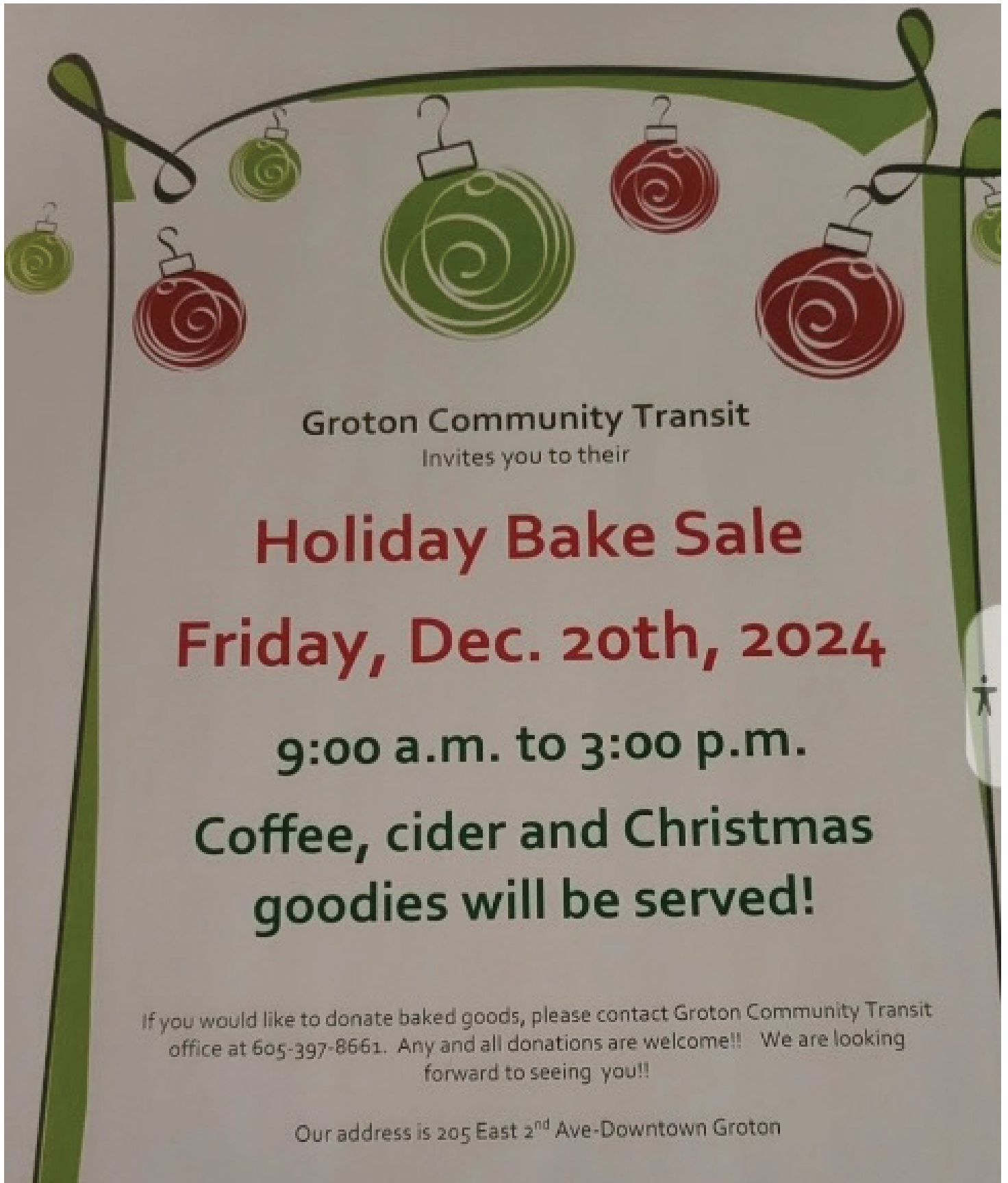
Call/Text Paul: 605-397-7460

Call/Text Tina: 605-397-7285



Living Heart Fitness Center

Open 24/7



Groton Community Transit
Invites you to their

Holiday Bake Sale

Friday, Dec. 20th, 2024

9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Coffee, cider and Christmas
goodies will be served!

If you would like to donate baked goods, please contact Groton Community Transit
office at 605-397-8661. Any and all donations are welcome!! We are looking
forward to seeing you!!

Our address is 205 East 2nd Ave-Downtown Groton

HOLIDAY BAKE SALE

12/20/2024-Friday

Happy Holidays! We hope this finds all of you staying well and healthy! Hoping you can enjoy what this wonderful season brings!

We are looking for donations of baked goods for our upcoming bake sale on Friday, December 20th 2024. If you would like to donate items please contact the dispatch office at 605-397-8661. Baked goods need to be delivered to the transit by 8:00 am the morning of the bake sale. Please feel free to package your items to your liking. We will price items as they are brought in. As always, we would like to thank you for supporting the GCT!! We look forward to hearing from you!

Please don't hesitate to call to arrange pickup of your donation...We would be happy to come and grab from you!!

Sincerely & Thank you Again!!

Groton Community Transit



**Groton Christian & Missionary
Alliance Church**

Presents "God's Gift of Love"

December 15th at 5pm

706 N Main

**A ham and turkey dinner with all the
trimmings will be served as a gift to
the community! The public is invited!**





DACOTAH 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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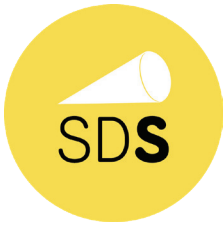
Card Shower
Merry Jo Ball will be celebrating her
on December 24, 2024.

Greetings may be sent to
915 Arbor Lane Apt 37
Aberdeen SD 57401

Queen of Hearts

Week number 10 of the Queen of Hearts was drawn Thursday night at the Groton American Legion. The name of Tony Madsen was drawn and he picked card number 21 which was the queen of clubs. He won the consolation prize of \$67 as the ticket sales for the week was \$670. The jackpot was \$8,455.

| | |
|---|---|
| Coming up on GDILIVE.COM | Friday, Dec. 13 |
| Groton Area Tigers | 4:00 Girls JV Sponsored by Bary Keith at Valley Plains Equipment |
| GT | 5:00 Boys JV Sponsored by Grandparents of the players. |
| | Girls Varsity around 6:15 p.m. followed by Boys Varsity \$5 ticket or GDI Subscription required to watch the games. |
|  | |



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

North Dakota approves CO2 storage for Summit pipeline

Application for South Dakota portion of route remains pending

BY: JEFF BEACH - DECEMBER 12, 2024 4:53 PM

North Dakota's Industrial Commission on Thursday approved a plan to accept millions of tons of carbon dioxide to be permanently stored underground against the wishes of some landowners in the storage area.

Iowa-based Summit Carbon Solutions plans to build a network of pipelines that gathers carbon emissions from ethanol plants across five states, including South Dakota. If built, the pipeline will end west of Bismarck, where three injection wells will pump the carbon deep beneath private property into pore space — gaps and voids between the rocks.

Summit compensates landowners for use of their pore space but an attorney for a group of landowners questions the accuracy of the model used by Summit to estimate where the gas will go when it is pumped underground.

The Industrial Commission is composed of outgoing Gov. Doug Burgum, Attorney General Drew Wrigley and Agriculture Commissioner Doug Goehring, who approved the permits unanimously.

Thursday's action by the Industrial Commission uses a North Dakota rule governing pore space called amalgamation. If at least 60% of the landowners in the pore space area approve, the other 40% are forced to comply.

A lawsuit by the Northwest Landowners Association in North Dakota is already challenging the constitutionality of the amalgamation rule.

About 92% of landowners in the 90,000-acre sequestration area for Summit are participating voluntarily. The region includes parts of Oliver, Mercer and Morton counties. Department of Mineral Resources staff said landowners objecting to the project accounted for less than 2% of the acres. Carbon will be injected into the Broom Creek Formation about 5,500 feet below ground level.

Summit estimates it will pump about 18 million tons of carbon dioxide into the storage area each year. The company will take advantage of federal tax credits — \$85 per ton of carbon stored — as an incentive to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

"These sequestration permits are the result of years of rigorous scientific study, engineering design, and input from regulators, landowners, and local leaders," Wade Boeshans, executive vice president of Summit Carbon Solutions, said in a news release. "With these permits, we're one step closer to providing vital infrastructure that benefits farmers, ethanol producers, and communities across the Midwest."

The carbon will come from 57 ethanol plants in five states — Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota.

Access to carbon capture and storage can significantly reduce an ethanol plant's carbon score. Low-carbon ethanol may be able to fetch a premium price, which could also benefit corn growers. The carbon is captured during the fermentation process of turning corn into ethanol fuel.

Tharaldson Ethanol at Casselton is the only North Dakota ethanol plant in the Summit pipeline project.

Two other North Dakota ethanol plants are already capturing and sequestering carbon — Red Trail Energy at Richardton and Blue Flint Ethanol near Underwood. Those plants sit close to the areas with the suitable geology for carbon sequestration.

After the vote, project opponents cited a leak at a carbon sequestration facility in Decatur, Illinois, where corrosion allowed the gas to go outside the storage area.

"Recent incidents in Illinois, where CO2 leaked underground, demonstrate that we do not know enough

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about this technology to use North Dakota as a testing ground. Even Summit has stated that they cannot know the impacts of carbon dumping until they do them," Scott Skokos, executive director of the Dakota Resource Council, a North Dakota-based environmental group, said in a news release.

The North Dakota Department of Mineral Resources determined that the storage wells do not endanger human health or the environment, and that Summit had made a good-faith effort to work with landowners in the sequestration area.

Officials did note the objection of some landowners, including Kurt Swenson, who lives south of Beulah and has property in Oliver and Mercer counties.

"I tried for a long time to negotiate with Summit," Swenson told the North Dakota Monitor last week. He said he has been waiting three years for a counter-proposal from the company.

Summit Carbon Solutions has obtained pipeline permits in Iowa and North Dakota. Minnesota approved a short segment of the route Thursday.

Summit still still needs a permit in South Dakota, where the Public Utilities Commission has scheduled six public input meetings in January. Nebraska has no state agency that permits carbon pipelines.

In most states, it is the Environmental Protection Agency that permits CO2 storage well

North Dakota Monitor Deputy Editor Jeff Beach is based in the Fargo area. His interests include agriculture, renewable energy and rural issues.

Video lottery operators plan to ask lawmakers for higher limits on bets and machines

BY: SETH TUPPER - DECEMBER 12, 2024 4:26 PM

Owners of South Dakota video lottery establishments hope a lean budget for state government might incentivize legislators to raise the bet limit and allow more machines per license.

The more money players bet, the more revenue the state makes. After players' winnings are subtracted from sales, the state and video lottery operators evenly split what's left.

Troy Erickson of M.G. Oil, a licensed video lottery operator in Rapid City, told the state Lottery Commission on Thursday in Pierre that the South Dakota Licensed Beverage Dealers and Gaming Association is seeking the introduction of legislation.

The proposals would raise the video lottery bet limit from \$2 to \$4 per play, and raise the cap on machines per license from 10 to 15.

Neither the bet limit nor the machine cap have been increased since South Dakota voters legalized video lottery 35 years ago, despite multiple tries.

"The squeaky wheel is just going to keep coming," Erickson said.

Opponents of past efforts expressed concerns about the proliferation of video lottery casinos, the pervasiveness of gambling in society and the prevalence of gambling addiction.

Lottery Commissioner Tona Rozum, a former legislator, said it's difficult to know how many legislators might express those concerns again this winter, given the high number of new lawmakers elected in November.

"You'll have that contingency, and it will depend on how large that contingency is this session," Rozum said.

Lawmakers will convene Jan. 14 for the annual legislative session. They'll confront a tighter budget than in recent years, due to the depletion of federal pandemic relief money and declining sales tax revenue. Republican Gov. Kristi Noem has proposed numerous cuts to balance revenues with expenses.

South Dakota has 1,398 licensed video lottery establishments and 11,092 video lottery machines, which take in more than \$1 billion annually from players and return about \$165 million in yearly revenue to the state.

Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.

Economist tells SD farmers that success means adapting to changing world, regulatory climate

Technology, managing people and close attention to bottom line key to future survival, research analyst says

BY: JOHN HULT - DECEMBER 12, 2024 3:41 PM

HURON – An agricultural economist told a group of farmers Thursday they'll be well served to adapt to the cultural and policy changes that affect their industry – even the changes they don't like.

Matthew Roberts is a former Ohio State University professor and independent economist who speaks to farm groups across the U.S. on global trends.

Roberts told attendees of the South Dakota Farmers Union annual convention that plummeting global poverty over the past 40 years has meant better access to food for a wider swath of the world population.

Roberts flashed slides showing that the number of people worldwide living on the equivalent of \$1.90 a day or less has dropped by two-thirds since 1980. That's meant more people are able to afford healthier food, and more people around the world are eating meat.

"It is simple, fundamental human nature that the wealthier people are, the better they eat," Roberts said.

Farmers play a huge role in addressing that demand, he said, by exporting the grain needed to feed livestock and humans. Since 2000, he said, China's soybean imports have grown enough to require 73 million more acres from U.S. producers.

People in the U.S., China and a host of other countries that import agricultural goods from the U.S. are having fewer children, Roberts said, but he's not concerned about a drop in demand for agricultural goods, because those children have more money and buy more expensive food.

That could mean changes in what's grown or raised, but he expects demand to continue.

There again he pointed to China, which now consumes 90 million metric tons of meat each year. In 1990, that figure was 25 million metric tons.

Labor force worries

What does worry him is a smaller labor force. Fewer births mean fewer workers across every industry, and that will force every industry to adapt with technology, automation and outsourcing for certain positions.

"The labor force decline is not a temporary thing, and there's not any good evidence that there's anything a government can do that really changes it," Roberts said.

For farmers, he said, dealing with that will force them to pay even closer attention to profits and losses and yields, but also to learn the soft skills necessary to manage employees and keep them happy enough to stick around. Complaining about younger generations being too soft or unwilling to work might feel good, he said, but won't change younger workers' expectations from their employers.

"Hard skills" like agronomy and accounting can be outsourced, but managing workers on site means learning kindness, positive intent and understanding.

"That's soft, that's squishy, but that's the world we live in," Roberts said. "Otherwise, you're going to have to learn how to run your operations."

He also encouraged attendees with family operations to lean on their children to handle the books and technology side of operations.

Embrace consumer demands, regulatory frameworks

Farmers might also scoff at changing consumer tastes. Some consumers in the U.S. want to know where their food comes from, and many are willing to pay a premium for that knowledge.

Roberts recalled picking up farm-to-table deliveries for a vacationing neighbor and noticing that they'd paid \$12 for a dozen eggs. Some of the eggs still had manure on them.

The eggs in the carton were nutritionally identical to the eggs his neighbors could've purchased in the store, he said, but they wanted to know where the eggs had come from.

More importantly for Farmers Union members, he said, was the fact that the farmer who sold them kept all the money. A farmer who thinks consumers make silly choices can nonetheless benefit by serving those customers.

"How much of that \$12 goes to the producer? Twelve dollars of it. Because I can guarantee you no processor is selling a poo-covered egg," Roberts said.

He also urged farmers to adapt as quickly as possible to regulatory changes. Farmers in California who adjusted their operations decades ago to comply with that state's farm management mandates are in better financial shape than those who thumbed their nose at them.

"Too many people say 'I think that's stupid, I'm not doing it,' instead of 'that's stupid, but I'm going to comply better and sooner than everyone else and take advantage of it,'" Roberts said.

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

FAFSA form must launch by Oct. 1 every year under new law

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - DECEMBER 12, 2024 2:49 PM

WASHINGTON — The form to apply for federal financial student aid must roll out by Oct. 1 annually after President Joe Biden signed a bill into law Wednesday that ensures an earlier processing cycle.

Though the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA, typically launches in October each year, the U.S. Department of Education legally had until Jan. 1 to make the form available.

The new law came as the department has taken heat over its botched rollout of the 2024-25 form, when users faced a series of glitches and errors. The form did not officially launch until January.

Adding fuel to the fire, the agency announced earlier this year that it would take a staggered approach to the 2025-26 form so it could address problems that might pop up before opening applications to everyone — again making the form available later than usual.

After testing stages that began Oct. 1, the department fully debuted the 2025-26 form in late November — 10 days ahead of its Dec. 1 official launch.

A spokesperson for the department said it is "committed to enforcing all laws duly passed by Congress" when asked about Biden signing the FAFSA bill into law.

Meanwhile, the department said Thursday it had received over 1.5 million 2025-26 FAFSA submissions and has delivered more than 7 million student records to states and schools.

U.S. Under Secretary of Education James Kvaal said that even with these developments, the department's work "is not done."

"We will continue to fix bugs and improve the user experience to make it easier for students and families to get the financial aid they need," Kvaal said on a call with reporters Thursday regarding updates on the 2025-26 form.

FAFSA deadline bill breezed through Congress

The bill was met with sweeping bipartisan support and swiftly passed both the House and Senate in November. Indiana GOP Rep. Erin Houchin, a member of the U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce, introduced the legislation in July.

Sen. Bill Cassidy, ranking member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, put forth the Senate version of the bill. The Louisiana Republican is in line to chair the panel next year.

Rep. Bobby Scott, ranking member of the House education panel, celebrated the bill becoming law on Wednesday.

"As college costs continue to rise, federal financial aid, including Pell Grants, is essential to making higher education more affordable and accessible," the Virginia Democrat said in a statement.

Scott said that by standardizing the deadline, the measure "gives students and families more time to complete their applications and secure the financial support they need to attend college without unneces-

sary delays.”

The 2024-25 application got a makeover after Congress passed the FAFSA Simplification Act in late 2020 but was met with several issues that prompted processing delays and gaps in submissions.

The department’s staff worked to fix these errors and close the gap in submissions from the previous processing cycle, and officials said they reflected on how to make improvements for the 2025-26 form and beyond.

Shauneen Miranda is a reporter for States Newsroom’s Washington bureau. An alumna of the University of Maryland, she previously covered breaking news for Axios.

Civics could soon be added as a South Dakota college graduation requirement

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - DECEMBER 12, 2024 2:25 PM

Students attending South Dakota public universities may soon face a civics proficiency requirement to graduate.

Students will take three credits worth of civics education — either new classes created to meet the requirement or a general education class already in place that meets the standard. Students will not have to take more credits to graduate, said Shuree Mortenson, spokeswoman for the system.

“The student will be able to select from a list of courses that have been deemed as fulfilling that civics proficiency,” Mortenson said.

The South Dakota Board of Regents held its first reading of the general education policy change during its Thursday meeting at Black Hills State University in Spearfish. The policy will have its second reading in April and could become effective for new and transfer students in fall 2025, if approved.

“This requirement reflects our commitment to fostering informed and responsible citizens ready to meet the challenges of today’s society,” Executive Director Nathan Lukkes said in a news release.

The change comes amid a renewed focus on civics education in the state. The South Dakota Department of Education will implement controversial new social studies standards in 2025. The Legislature approved nearly \$1 million this year to create a center for civic engagement at Black Hills State to help prepare civics programming and curriculum statewide.

House Majority Leader Scott Odenbach, R-Spearfish, an advocate for more civics education, said he’s hopeful and enthusiastic about the regents’ change.

“The next generation in our universities will be leading our country one day,” he said. “Whatever major they have, they need to be able to take the reins of government.”

Civics proficiency will be defined as a student’s understanding of civic knowledge, values and skills, “enabling them to actively participate in civic life as informed and responsible citizens.”

The Board of Regents said key learning outcomes for the new requirement include:

Civic knowledge: understanding the American political system, including foundational concepts such as the Constitutional framework, participatory democracy and the evolution of institutions.

Civic values: articulating “core principles” of democracy, justice and equality, and applying them to modern and historic situations.

Civic skills: communicating viewpoints on political issues, engaging in civil discourse and analyzing the impact of participation on democratic processes.

“The pendulum is moving in the right direction,” Odenbach said. “We’ll keep an eye on it. We’ll see if it’s enough.”

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

Minnesota PUC grants permit for carbon capture pipeline

Company still seeking approval for South Dakota portion of project

BY: CHRISTOPHER INGRAHAM - DECEMBER 12, 2024 1:36 PM

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission voted unanimously Thursday to grant a long-awaited permit to Summit Carbon Solutions, allowing the company to build a small portion of a planned 2,500-mile carbon capture pipeline network across five states including South Dakota.

The Minnesota segment would run 28 miles from an ethanol plant in Fergus Falls to the North Dakota border. It would consist of 4.5-inch diameter pipe sunk 54 inches underground. The company estimates construction could start as early as 2026, although it is still negotiating right-of-way agreements with seven landowners along the Minnesota route.

The pipeline would transport pressurized carbon dioxide from the ethanol plant to injection wells in North Dakota, which would pump the gas deep underground to be permanently stored in the rock. The goal is to prevent the greenhouse gas from entering the atmosphere and contributing to global warming.

Commissioners raised concerns about the project's long term viability, given that the company will be almost entirely dependent on federal carbon tax credits that a new Congress could decide to revoke as early as next year.

Summit is a "startup company who has built their model on tax credits that are somewhat tenuous in my mind," Commissioner John Tuma said. If the federal tax credits dried up, "it would definitely cause a reassessment" of the project's viability, a company representative said.

However, those concerns weren't enough to prevent the project from proceeding.

"We thank the Minnesota PUC for their thorough and diligent review of our project," said Lee Blank, CEO of Summit Carbon Solutions, in a statement. "This decision underscores the importance of balancing economic opportunities for local communities with environmental stewardship."

Summit was founded in 2021 with an eye toward capitalizing on federal 45Q tax credits, which were greatly expanded under the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022. Carbon Capture has been a central pillar of President Joe Biden's energy policy. If the project proceeds at the scale envisioned it could reap more than \$18 billion in tax credits over 12 years.

Summit first applied for a Minnesota pipeline permit in 2022. In early 2023 the Public Utilities Commission asked the Department of Commerce to put together an environmental impact statement, which was completed in July 2024.

The Commission ruled Thursday that the 394-page document is an adequate assessment of the project and its risks, and that those risks aren't sufficient to prevent the permit from being granted.

Environmental and rural advocacy groups oppose the pipeline, noting that the pipeline capture could one day be used to extract more oil from the ground, thus negating any decarbonization benefit.

The pipeline has additional route permits in Iowa and North Dakota, and is pursuing a permit in South Dakota, while Nebraska has no state permitting process for carbon pipelines. North Dakota is also considering a permit for the proposed underground storage site.

A separate carbon capture project, the Heartland Greenway pipeline, was scrapped late last year due to difficulties navigating state regulatory environments.

The staff of South Dakota Searchlight contributed to this report.

Christopher Ingraham covers greater Minnesota and reports on data-driven stories across the state. He's the author of the book "If You Lived Here You'd Be Home By Now," about his family's journey from the Baltimore suburbs to rural northwest Minnesota. He was previously a data reporter for the Washington Post.

Biden commutes sentences of nearly 1,500 people, pardons 39 in historic clemency action

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - DECEMBER 12, 2024 12:59 PM

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden Thursday commuted the sentences of roughly 1,500 people who were placed in home confinement during the coronavirus pandemic, and granted pardons for 39 individuals with convictions for nonviolent crimes.

"America was built on the promise of possibility and second chances," Biden said in a statement. He noted many of the 1,500 were serving long sentences that would be shorter under current laws, policies and practices.

As the Biden administration winds down, it's the largest single-day grant of clemency in modern day history.

The president added that his administration will continue to review clemency petitions before his term ends on Jan. 20. There are more than 9,400 petitions for clemency that were submitted to the White House, according to recent Department of Justice clemency statistics.

"As President, I have the great privilege of extending mercy to people who have demonstrated remorse and rehabilitation, restoring opportunity for Americans to participate in daily life and contribute to their communities, and taking steps to remove sentencing disparities for non-violent offenders, especially those convicted of drug offenses," Biden said.

Those 39 people who received pardons included 67-year-old Michael Gary Pelletier of Augusta, Maine, who pleaded guilty to a nonviolent offense, according to the White House, which provided brief biographies of the pardoned individuals.

After his conviction, Pelletier worked for 20 years at a water treatment facility and volunteered for the HAZMAT team, assisting in hazardous spills and natural disasters. He now grows vegetables for a local soup kitchen and volunteers to support wounded veterans.

Another pardon was granted to Nina Simona Allen of Harvest, Alabama.

Allen, 49, was convicted of a nonviolent offense in her 20s, the White House said. After her conviction, she earned a post-baccalaureate degree and two master's degrees and now works in the field of education. Additionally, she volunteers at a local soup kitchen and nursing home.

Hunter Biden pardon

The clemency action came after the president gave a full pardon for his son, Hunter Biden, on gun and tax charges and any other offenses, from 2014 until December. The president previously stated he would not pardon his son, but changed his mind because he said his son was constantly targeted by Republicans.

Other clemency actions Biden has taken include commuting sentences of those serving sentences for simple possession and use of marijuana under federal and District of Columbia law and a pardon of former U.S. service members who were convicted under military law of having consensual sex with same-sex partners — a law that is now repealed.

Additionally, advocates and Democrats have pressed Biden to exert his clemency powers on behalf of the 40 men on federal death row before President-elect Donald Trump returns to the White House. Democrats have pushed for this because Trump expedited 13 executions of people on federal death row in the last six months of his first term.

The co-executive directors of Popular Democracy in Action, a progressive advocacy group, Analilia Mejia and DaMareo Cooper, said in a joint statement that Biden should "not stop now."

"Thousands more of our people who have been wronged by an unjust system are still waiting for freedom and compassion," they said.

Millions will see rise in health insurance premiums if federal subsidies expire

The Trump administration is unlikely to extend aid that has cut the cost of exchange plans

BY: SHALINA CHATLANI - DECEMBER 12, 2024 6:00 AM

Andrea Deutsch, the mayor of Narberth, Pennsylvania, and the owner of a pet store in town, doesn't get health care coverage through either of her jobs. Instead, she is enrolled in a plan she purchased on Pennie, Pennsylvania's health insurance exchange.

Deutsch, who has been mayor since 2018, is paid \$1 per year for the job. Her annual income, from Spot's – The Place for Paws and her investments, is about \$50,000. The 57-year-old, who is diabetic, pays \$638.38 per month for health care coverage — about half of the \$1,272.38 she'd owe without the enhanced federal subsidies Congress and the Biden administration put in place in 2021.

But that extra help is set to expire at the end of 2025. It would cost an estimated \$335 billion over the next decade to extend it — a step the Republican-controlled Congress and the Trump administration are unlikely to take as they seek budget savings to offset potential tax cuts.

States say they don't have the money to replace the federal aid. In Pennsylvania, for example, doing so would take about \$500 million per year, according to Devon Trolley, the executive director of the state's exchange.

"That is a significant amount of money, an insurmountable amount of money," Trolley said.

The disappearance of the federal help would make coverage unaffordable for millions of Americans, including Deutsch. She said it would be a struggle to pay double what she is paying now.

"You try not to go bankrupt by the end of your life," Deutsch told Stateline. "You need assets to take care of yourself as you get older and to have a little bit of security."

Enhanced subsidies

The 2010 Affordable Care Act included some subsidies to help people purchase health insurance on the exchanges created under that law. Under the enhanced subsidies that started in 2021, some people with lower incomes who qualified for the original subsidies have been getting bigger ones. And those with higher incomes, who wouldn't have been eligible for any help under the original rules, are now receiving assistance.

Thanks to the enhanced subsidies, people making up to 150% of the federal poverty level, or \$22,590 for an individual, are now getting free or nearly free coverage. And households earning more than four times the federal poverty level, who didn't qualify for subsidies before, are getting some help.

The enhanced aid also has helped push ACA marketplace enrollment to record levels, reaching more than 21 million this year. Southern states that have not expanded Medicaid as allowed under the ACA have seen the most dramatic growth in marketplace enrollment since 2020, according to KFF, a health policy research organization. The top five states with the fastest growth are Texas (212%), Mississippi (190%), Georgia (181%), Tennessee (177%) and South Carolina (167%).

If the enhanced subsidies go away, premium payments will increase by an average of more than 75%, according to KFF. Some people, like Deutsch, would see their payments double.

Given those premium hikes, millions of Americans would no longer be able to afford the coverage they're getting on the exchanges, according to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office. CBO estimates that enrollment would drop from 22.8 million in 2025 to 18.9 million in 2026 to 15.4 million in 2030. Some of those people would find coverage elsewhere, but others would not.

Edmund Haislmaier, a senior research fellow at the conservative Heritage Foundation, said Republicans view the expiration of the enhanced subsidies as "an opportunity to rework and address some of the basic flaws in the ACA."

Before the ACA, Haislmaier said, many self-employed people, such as small-business owners and freelancers, were able to find their own private insurance at competitive prices. But the health care law destroyed

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that market, he said, leaving such people with a selection of expensive and subpar plans.

Haislmaier said it would take time for the Trump administration to determine how it wants to change the ACA — which President-elect Donald Trump unsuccessfully tried to repeal during his first term — but that “you can do that in a way that preserves access and preserves subsidies for the lower-income people who were the primary focus of the ACA.”

States' limitations

But Jared Ortaliza, a research associate at KFF, said letting the enhanced subsidies expire could result in higher premiums for everyone. That's because higher prices likely would prompt many healthier people to forgo insurance, he said. Their departure would leave only chronically ill people on the exchanges, and the cost of their care is higher.

“If sicker enrollees need coverage because they need care, they'll still choose to buy it, potentially. And if the market were sicker as a whole, that could drive premiums upward as well,” Ortaliza told Stateline.

Ortaliza said states might consider keeping premiums down through so-called reinsurance, or reimbursing insurers for their most expensive enrollees. Theoretically, they also could try to replace the expiring federal aid with their own money.

But few if any states have the financial flexibility to do that, said Hemi Tewarson, executive director of the nonpartisan National Academy for State Health Policy.

“There might be a couple states who don't have current state subsidies that might add that, but that will be very nominal,” Tewarson told Stateline, adding that officials from different states have been discussing potential solutions. “They are all assuming that they would just have to absorb the loss of coverage across the population.”

Trolley, the head of the Pennsylvania exchange, said her state is working to provide its own subsidy to make the marketplace plans even more affordable. But even when fully implemented, it would spend only \$50 million on that help, a tenth of what it would need to replace the federal aid.

Two-thirds of the 435,000 Pennsylvanians who purchase insurance on the marketplace joined after the enhanced federal subsidies were put in place in 2021. If they expire, Trolley said, she worries that 100,000 or more exchange participants will leave.

Jessica Altman, executive director of California's exchange, said her state is in a similar situation. California currently receives \$1.7 billion annually in enhanced subsidies from the federal government and spends an additional \$165 million of its own money to keep costs down.

California estimates that if the subsidies expire, monthly premiums for the state's enrollees would increase by an average of 63%. More than 150,000 people would no longer be eligible for federal help, and between 138,000 and 183,000 would disenroll, the state estimates. “There might be a couple states who don't have current state subsidies that might add that, but that will be very nominal,” Tewarson told Stateline, adding that officials from different states have been discussing potential solutions. “They are all assuming that they would just have to absorb the loss of coverage across the population.”

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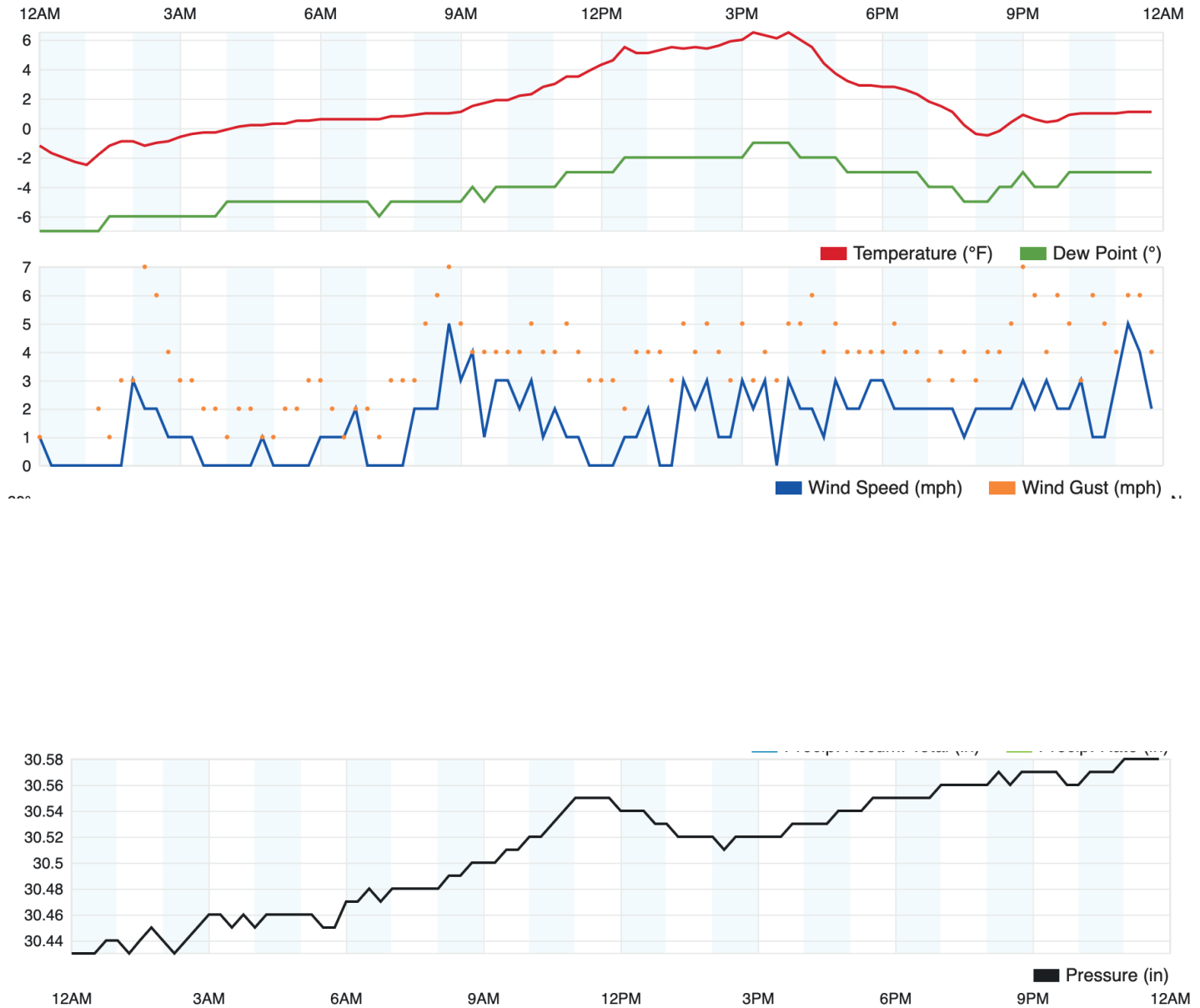
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Shalina Chatlani covers health care and environmental justice for Stateline.

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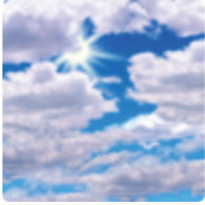
Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 21 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Tonight



Low: 13 °F

Mostly Cloudy

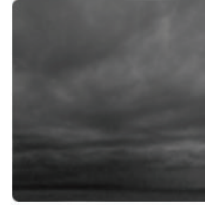
Saturday



High: 29 °F

Mostly Cloudy

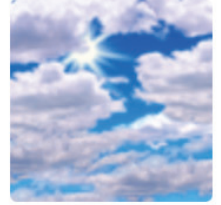
Saturday Night



Low: 21 °F

Cloudy

Sunday



High: 38 °F

Mostly Cloudy



Weekend Forecast

December 12, 2024

1:04 PM

Cloudy through the weekend, temperatures warm up Saturday and Sunday.

Friday



Highs:
18° to 28°

Friday Night Lows:
9° to 15°

Wind:
Eastern SD and Western MN:
SE 15 mph, gusts to 25 mph
Central SD:
SE 20 mph, gusts to 30 mph

Saturday



Highs:
26° to 34°

Saturday Night Lows:
16° to 23°

Wind:
SE 10 mph

Precipitation:
20-30% chance of snow or
freezing rain in the morning over
Eastern SD and Western MN

Sunday



Highs:
34° to 48°

Sunday Night Lows:
20° to 26°

Wind:
SE 15 mph, gusts to 25 mph



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Temperatures are set to rebound to normal or above normal this weekend, but cloudy skies persist. Winds Friday will gust to 25 to 30 mph. On Saturday, northeastern South Dakota and western Minnesota will see around a 20-30% chance for winter precipitation, including snow, freezing rain, and/or a wintry mix.

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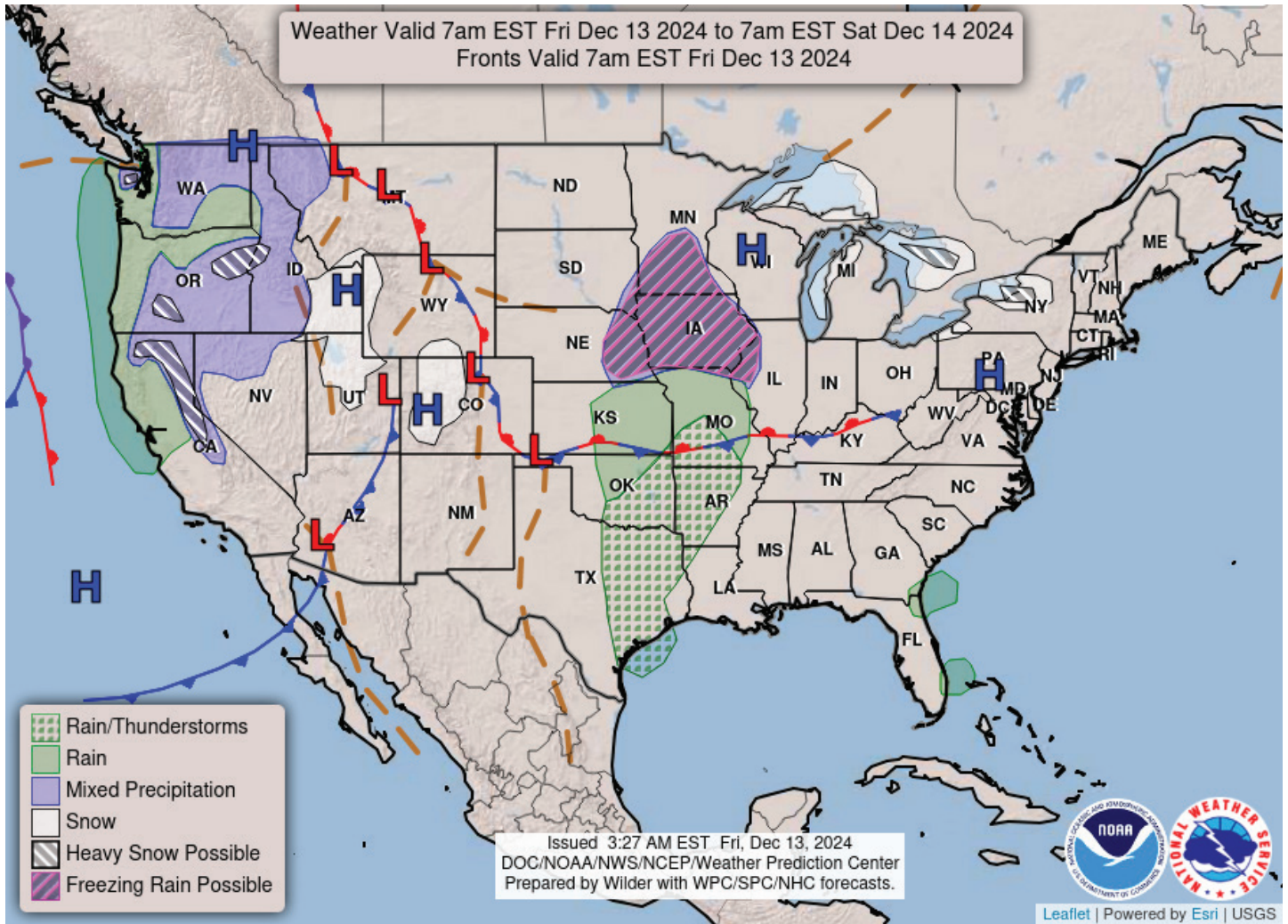
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 7 °F at 3:12 PM
Low Temp: -3 °F at 1:01 AM
Wind: 8 mph at 11:17 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 57 in 1921
Record Low: -34 in 1917
Average High: 29
Average Low: 9
Average Precip in Dec.: 0.25
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 21.46
Precip Year to Date: 21.71
Sunset Tonight: 4:51:11 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:03:25 am

Day length: 8 hours, 48 minutes



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Today in Weather History

December 13, 2008: An intense low-pressure area moved out of the Rockies and across the Central Plains, bringing widespread snow, blizzard conditions, and extreme wind chills to central and northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota into the early morning hours of the 15th. Snowfall amounts of 1 to as much as 12 inches, along with winds gusting to 50 mph, caused widespread near zero visibilities and dangerous travel conditions. Wind chills fell into the 35 below to 45 below zero range. Many vehicles became stuck or stranded along highways and Interstates 29 and 90. Interstate 90 was closed from the Wyoming line to Murdo from late on the 13th until the morning of the 14th. Interstate 29 was also closed for much of the 14th. The Onida, Agar, and Gettysburg Volunteer Fire Department found it difficult to respond to a structure fire south of Gettysburg. Due to whiteout conditions, the structure was lost to the fire when the fire departments arrived. Most area schools were closed on Monday due to the road conditions and the bitterly cold wind chills. Some of the heaviest snowfall amounts included: 6 inches at Watertown, Browns Valley, Sisseton, Waubay, and Castlewood; 7 inches at Ortonville, Webster, Clear Lake, Faulkton, and Aberdeen; 8 inches at Milbank, 9 inches at Britton and Wheaton; 10 inches at Clear Lake, and 12 inches at Roscoe. Mobridge received 2 inches, and Pierre received 4 inches of snowfall with this storm

1915 - A heavy snowstorm kicked off the snowiest winter in modern records for western New England. (The Weather Channel)

1962 - A severe Florida freeze occurred. Morning lows reached 35 degrees at Miami, 18 degrees at Tampa, and 12 degrees at Jacksonville. It was the coldest December weather of the 20th century and caused millions of dollars damage to crops and foliage. In Georgia, the morning low of 9 degrees below zero at Blairsville established a state record for the month of December. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A major winter storm produced high winds and heavy snow in the Southern Rockies and the Southern High Plains. Snowfall totals in New Mexico ranged up to 25 inches at Cedar Crest, with up to three feet of snow reported in the higher elevations. Winds of 75 mph, with gusts to 124 mph, were reported northeast of Albuquerque NM. El Paso TX was buried under 22.4 inches of snow, including a single storm record of 16.8 inches in 24 hours. The snowfall total surpassed their previous record for an entire winter season of 18.4 inches. Record cold was experienced the next three nights as readings dipped into the single numbers. High winds ushering unseasonably cold air into the southwestern U.S. gusted to 100 mph at Grapevine CA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Low pressure off the Atlantic coast produced up to a foot of snow in eastern Nassau County and western Suffolk County of southeastern New York State. Mild weather prevailed across the western half of the country. Nine cities reported record high temperatures for the date, including Goodland KS with a reading of 74 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Strong northwesterly winds, ushering bitterly cold arctic air into the central U.S., produced squalls with heavy snow in the Great Lakes Region. Snowfall totals in Upper Michigan ranged up to 24 inches at Manistique. Nine cities in Arkansas and Texas reported record low temperatures for the date, including Calico Rock AR with a reading of 4 degrees above zero. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

December 13, 1997: A freak cold snap and snowstorm struck parts of northern Mexico, leaving 12 people dead and the area paralyzed. It snowed in the city of Guadalajara for the first time since 1881, leaving amazed residents to gawk at the white stuff and make snowmen. The temperature plunged to 5 degrees in Chihuahua.

2002 - A powerful Pacific storm system plowed into the western United States during the 13th-16th, producing high winds, heavy rains, significant mountain snowfall and causing 9 deaths (Associated Press). Rainfall amounts exceeding 10 inches occurred in parts of California, and wind gusts over 45 mph produced up to 1.9 million power outages during the period (Pacific Gas & Electric).



What Kind Of Day Will It Be?

As you look forward to Christmas, what special memories will you take from the day that will remain with you after it's over? Will it be a "horrible day," a "holiday" or a "holy day?"

For some, it will be a "horrible" day. It will be a day when families gather and feuds erupt, unwanted gifts are exchanged, stomachs are stuffed, alcohol generated hangovers will dull minds and memories, and promises to "never do this again" are made. Not ever!

Or, will it be a holiday? Families traveling many miles to get together to share problems and pains that brought them closer together, share joyous memories of special events that united them in love and laughter, introducing a new-born child or one who will soon be the next in-law uniting two "love-birds."

Would it not be special, however, if we made it a "holy day?" A day of worship and praise, a day when we set aside time to share and emphasize the gift of our new birth through Christ?

Paul wrote some inspiring words about the gift of our new birth made possible because of the birth of Jesus. "You have clothed yourselves with a brand-new nature that is continually being renewed as you learn more and more about Christ, who created this new nature within you."

This "new nature" means that it is possible for us to have a new life through His Son, our Savior, and the hope that one day we will be like Him and spend eternity with Him.

Prayer: We thank You, Lord, for the gift of Jesus Who gives us a new life and the promise of joy, peace, and presence that comes with the assurance of salvation. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Colossians 3:10 Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him.

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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Pay with Venmo: [@paperpaul](https://venmo.com/paperpaul) Phone Number to Confirm: 7460

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.10.24

12 14 26 48 52 21

MegaPlier: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$670,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 31 Mins

DRAW: 22 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.11.24

4 14 30 45 50 4

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$16,700,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 46

DRAW: Mins 22 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.12.24

5 7 17 19 32 12

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 17 Hrs 1 Mins 22

DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.11.24

19 22 27 28 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$149,000

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 1

DRAW: Mins 22 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.11.24

18 23 34 60 62 19

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 30

DRAW: Mins 22 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.11.24

13 44 50 52 54 20

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$45,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 30

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
05/03/2025 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
05/26/2025 Memorial Day Services Groton Union Cemetery with lunch at Legion Post #39, 12pm
07/04/2025 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
07/09/2025 Legion Auxiliary Salad Luncheon
07/13/2025 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm
09/06/2025 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
09/20/2025 NSU Gypsy Day
10/31/2025 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
11/27/2025 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm

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News from the **AP** Associated Press

Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Roncalli 64, Redfield 10
Avon 49, Colome 12
Bennett County 58, Philip 42
Clark-Willow Lake 59, Waubay/Summit 18
Corsica/Stickney 60, Chamberlain 12
Dell Rapids 66, Madison 29
Elk Point-Jefferson 53, Canton 49
Faulkton 55, Wessington Springs 47
Flandreau 62, Chester 51
Iroquois-Lake Preston 61, Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 58
Milbank 67, Wahpeton, N.D. 62
Miller 42, Stanley County 12
Mobridge-Pollock 82, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 34
O'Gorman High School 53, Brandon Valley 43
Santee, Neb. 65, Flandreau Indian 16
Sisseton 77, Sioux Valley 64
St Mary's, Neb. 67, Gregory 27
Tri-State, N.D. 67, Waverly-South Shore 47
Tripp-Delmont-Armour 41, Scotland/Menno 32
Gillette Early Bird Tournament=
Campbell County, Wyo. 48, St Thomas More 45

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Avon 56, Colome 17
Bismarck Century, N.D. 76, Pine Ridge 63
Elk Point-Jefferson 71, Canton 27
Estelline-Hendricks 74, Garretson 49
Gayville-Volin High School 57, Alcester-Hudson 49
James Valley Christian School 64, Mitchell Christian 24
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 59, Kimball-White Lake 39
Philip 58, Bennett County 47
Santee, Neb. 80, Flandreau Indian 30
St Mary's, Neb. 64, Gregory 43
Stanley County 54, Miller 41
Tripp-Delmont-Armour 65, Scotland/Menno 56
Wall 71, Hot Springs 36
Wessington Springs 61, Faulkton 24
Gillette Early Bird Tournament=
St Thomas More 62, Campbell County, Wyo. 57

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

North Dakota regulators OK underground storage for proposed Midwest carbon dioxide pipeline

By JACK DURA and STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — North Dakota regulators approved permits Thursday for underground storage of carbon dioxide delivered through a massive pipeline proposed for the Midwest, marking another victory for a project that has drawn fierce opposition from landowners.

The governor-led Industrial Commission voted unanimously to approve permits for Summit Carbon Solutions' three proposed storage sites in central North Dakota. Summit says construction of the project would begin in 2026 with operations beginning in 2027, but it's expected that resistant landowners will file lawsuits seeking to block the storage plans.

"With these permits, we're one step closer to providing vital infrastructure that benefits farmers, ethanol producers, and communities across the Midwest," Summit Executive VP Wade Boeshans said in a statement.

Summit's proposed 2,500-mile (4,023-kilometer), \$8 billion pipeline would transport planet-warming CO2 emissions from 57 ethanol plants in North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Minnesota and Nebraska for underground storage. Carbon dioxide would move through the pipeline in a pressurized form to be injected deep underground into a rock formation.

The company has permits for its route in North Dakota and Iowa but can't yet begin construction. Also on Thursday, Minnesota regulators approved a permit for a 28-mile (45-kilometer) leg of the project in western Minnesota.

Summit also recently applied in South Dakota, where regulators denied the company's previous application last year.

Last month, the company gained approval for its North Dakota route, and Iowa regulators also have given conditional approval.

Summit faces several lawsuits related to the project, including a North Dakota Supreme Court appeal over a property rights law related to the underground storage plan. Further court challenges are likely.

North Dakota Republican Gov. Doug Burgum, who chairs the Industrial Commission, is President-elect Donald Trump's choice for Interior Secretary and to lead a new National Energy Council. Burgum has frequently touted North Dakota's underground carbon dioxide storage as a "geologic jackpot." In 2021, he set a goal for the No. 3 oil-producing state to be carbon-neutral by 2030. His term ends Saturday.

Summit's storage facilities would hold an estimated maximum of 352 million metric tons of CO2 over 20 years. The pipeline would carry up to 18 million metric tons of CO2 per year to be injected about 1 mile (1.6 kilometers) underground, according to an application fact sheet.

Jessie Stolark, who leads a group that supports the project and includes Summit, said the oil industry has long used similar technology.

"We know that this can be done safely in a manner that is protective of human health and underground sources of drinking water," said Stolark, executive director of the Carbon Capture Coalition.

Summit's project has drawn the ire of landowners around the region. They oppose the potential taking of their property for the pipeline and fear a pipeline rupture releasing a cloud of heavy, hazardous gas over the land.

A North Dakota landowners group is challenging a property rights law related to the underground storage, and attorney Derrick Braaten said they likely would challenge the granting of permits.

"The landowners that I'm working with aren't necessarily opposed to carbon sequestration itself," Braaten said. "They're opposed to the idea that a private company can come in and use their property without having to negotiate with them or pay them just compensation for taking their private property and using it."

Carbon capture projects such as Summit's are eligible for lucrative federal tax credits intended to encourage cleaner-burning ethanol and potentially result in corn-based ethanol being refined into jet fuel.

Some opponents argue the amount of greenhouse gases sequestered through the process would make little difference and could lead farmers to grow more corn despite environmental concerns about the crop.

In Minnesota, regulators granted a route permit that would connect an ethanol plant in Fergus Falls to

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Summit's broader network. They attached several conditions, including requirements that Summit first begin construction in North Dakota.

An administrative law judge who conducted hearings concluded in November that the environmental impacts from the Minnesota segment would be minimal and noted that Summit has secured agreements from landowners along most of the recommended route.

Environmental groups that oppose the project disputed the judge's finding that the project would have a net benefit for the environment.

Iowa regulators required Summit to obtain approvals for routes in the Dakotas and underground storage in North Dakota before it can begin construction in Iowa. The Iowa Utilities Commission's approval sparked lawsuits related to the project.

In Nebraska, where there is no state regulatory process for CO2 pipelines, Summit is working with individual counties to advance its project. At least one county has denied a permit.

Bone-chilling cold returns to the Midwest in the wake of a storm that soaked the East Coast

By PATRICK WHITTLE and DAVID SHARP Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — Frigid weather returned to the Upper Midwest on Thursday after a storm that swept up the East Coast delivered a blow to New England, packing powerful gusts that knocked out power along with a deluge of rain and warming temperatures that washed away snow and dampened ski resorts.

The Upper Midwest saw unseasonably cold early Thursday, with parts of North Dakota, Minnesota and Wisconsin experiencing wind chills well below zero degrees F (minus 17.8 degrees Celsius). The National Weather Service received a report of a low temperature of minus 27 degrees F (minus 32.7 degrees C) southwest of Inger, Minnesota. States to the south, including South Dakota, Nebraska and Iowa, saw wind chills in the single digits Thursday morning.

In Chicago, gusts of more than 40 mph (64 kph) Thursday coupled with a low temperature of 4 F (minus 15.5 C) at O'Hare International Airport to create a stinging wind chill of minus 28 F (minus 33.3 C). City officials designated more than two dozen community and senior centers to be used as warming shelters and urged the public to avoid unnecessary trips outside.

The weather service also issued freezing spray warnings on Lake Superior and Lake Michigan, with sub-zero temperatures and high winds resulting in up to an inch of ice per hour accumulating on ships and smaller vessels.

On Wednesday, an atmospheric river transported moisture northward from the tropics and brought heavy rain.

The city of Portland, Maine, got 2.33 inches (5.92 centimeters) of rain Wednesday, breaking a record of 2.01 inches (5.1 centimeters) for the date set in 1887, the National Weather Service said.

Utility workers were deployed to handle power outages after winds peaked Wednesday night into Thursday. Nearly 90,000 customers in Maine had lost power as of Thursday morning, according to poweroutage.us.

A deepening low pressure system was responsible for winds that lashed the region, said Derek Schroeter, a forecaster with the National Weather Service. Some areas in Maine had wind gusts of over 50 mph (80 kph).

Forecasters were concerned about bombogenesis, or a "bomb cyclone," marked by a rapid intensification over a 24-hour period, but the storm did not appear to meet the criteria for a bomb cyclone, according to National Weather Service meteorologist Jerry Combs in Gray, Maine.

Jen Roberts, co-owner of Onion River Outdoors sporting goods store in Montpelier, Vermont, lamented that a five-day stretch of snowfall that lured ski customers into the store was being washed away, underscoring the region's fickle weather.

"But you know, this is New England," Roberts said. "We know this is what happens."

Ski resort operators called it bad luck as the holidays approach.

"We don't say the 'r-word' around here. It's a forbidden word," said Jamie Cobbett, marketing director

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at Waterville Valley Resort in New Hampshire, which was pelted by rain on Wednesday. "We're getting some moist wet weather today. We'll put the mountain back together."

Skier Marcus Caston was waterlogged but shrugged it off. "The conditions are actually pretty good. The rain is making the snow nice and soft. It's super fun," he said while skiing at Vermont's Sugarbush.

More seasonal low temperatures suitable for snowmaking were returning Thursday.

New England wasn't the only region experiencing wild weather. Snow fell early Thursday around Lake Superior and Lake Michigan, and heavy lake-effect snow was expected through Thursday in parts of Michigan.

Areas east of Lake Ontario in northern New York were warned of 2 to 3 feet (0.6 to 0.9 meters) of lake-effect snow as well as wind gusts of up to 45 mph (72 kph), with "near whiteout conditions at times," according to the National Weather Service. Some schools and libraries in the area, historically one of the snowiest in the U.S., closed early as the wind plastered fresh snow to the sides of trees and snowplows rumbled.

A mail carrier, his head tucked against the frosty gusts, waved to a plow as it passed. Trump flags in the heavily Republican villages crackled and popped in the winds.

Areas south of Buffalo, New York, were again hit Thursday with heavy lake-effect snow, with some locations reporting more than a foot of accumulation. Treacherous driving conditions prompted two small towns to issue driving bans, and the Buffalo Bills NFL franchise canceled practice Thursday due to the weather. That area and those around Watertown, New York, could see up to three feet (almost one meter) of snow through Friday, according to forecasters. The region has already been hit with lake-effect snow after Thanksgiving and in early December.

In New York, Gov. Kathy Hochul on Wednesday declared a state of emergency in several counties in anticipation of heavy snowfall expected off of Lake Erie and Lake Ontario.

New England's weather brought the biggest variety, with the storm bringing a little bit of everything. It started early Wednesday with freezing rain. Then came a deluge of regular rain and warming temperatures — topping 50 F (10 C) in Portland, for example.

Alex Hobbs, a Boston college student, hoped that the weather wouldn't interfere with her plans to return home to San Francisco soon. "I'm a little worried about getting delays with heavy wind and rain, possibly snow," she said Wednesday.

South Dakota and Puerto Rico Towns Join Growing List of T-Mobile's Hometown Grant Recipients

BELLEVUE, Wash.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Dec 12, 2024--

T-Mobile (NASDAQ: TMUS) today announced its latest 25 Hometown Grant recipients, who will each receive up to \$50,000 in funding from T-Mobile to kickstart local development projects that enhance and strengthen their communities.

The Un-carrier has provided more than \$15 million in Hometown Grants to 350 communities across 48 states and one U.S. territory since kicking off its five-year commitment to small towns and rural communities in April 2021 — and for the first time since the initiative's inception, communities in Puerto Rico and South Dakota became recipients. To date, Hometown Grants has created more than 86,000 volunteer hours, rallying people to come together and uplift their towns.

"From Puerto Rico to Washington, we're excited to see the impact T-Mobile's Hometown Grants will have in bringing people together, sparking innovation and fostering growth in small towns and rural areas across the U.S. and its territories," said Jon Freier, President, Consumer Group, T-Mobile. "With each new project, we're inspired by the passion and dedication of these communities, and we can't wait to see the transformation that's to come."

Here are the next 25 Hometown Grant recipients and their projects:

Prichard, Ala.: Beautify the Center City area of Prichard by planting shade trees and other greenery to create an environmentally pleasing and friendly atmosphere, and to attract more families to the downtown social and shopping area.

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Superior, Ariz.: Update Regenerating Sonora's community center facilities, ensuring a more accessible, safe, comfortable and welcoming environment to support the organization's dynamic and community-driven programs.

Orosi, Calif.: Expand the Cutler Orosi Family Education Center by adding three new offices, a community closet and a conference area, significantly enhancing the ability to deliver and coordinate services and increase the community's access to essential resources and support, promoting well-being and empowerment among members.

Monticello, Fla.: Install a mural along a large highway-facing wall in Monticello's historic downtown, showcasing the unique natural beauty of the area, promoting ecotourism, conservation awareness and transforming the area into a tourist destination to fuel the Jefferson County economy.

Milledgeville, Ga.: Help develop Oconee Heights Park, including state-of-the-art playground equipment, which will foster local connections, enhance outdoor spaces, and contribute to the long-term revitalization of a historically neglected area.

Crystal Lake, Ill.: Transform an unused alleyway into a vibrant outdoor space at New Directions Addiction Recovery Services with secure access, seating and a sound system while enhancing the community room with new flooring, furniture and surround sound to create a safe, welcoming environment for recovery-focused gatherings and events.

Effingham, Ill.: Purchase training equipment for Effingham Regional Career Academy, soon Creating Opportunities for Regional Employment (CORE) Academy, creating on-site targeted educational opportunities and a pipeline of skilled individuals for area employers.

Gloucester, Mass.: Support the construction of the 2025 Sawyer Free Library Digital Learning Lab, a new learning space for quality educational experiences, resources and technology in downtown Gloucester, addressing crucial barriers like closing the digital divide including access to broadband internet, technology and digital literacy.

Great Barrington, Mass.: Renovate a downtown parking lot into an outdoor amphitheater as part of Berkshire Busk!, a summer-long street music and arts festival, providing a free, safe community space with accessibility enhancements for people of all income levels and physical needs.

Cumberland, Md.: Renovate a 9,500-square-foot historic building into the REACT Institute for STEM Education (RISE), offering programs to enhance youth participants' readiness for careers in engineering, computer science, and advanced fabrication.

Ellsworth, Maine: Replace audio and visual equipment at the Grand Theatre, including adding Audio Descriptions to improve the experience for patrons and artists and allow the theatre to feature more diverse performances.

Harrisonville, Mo.: Create the Community Connections Path to provide accessibility, exploration and connection within City Park by providing a safe path for walking where none currently exists and fostering community connections through physical connection within the park and throughout the community.

Morven, N.C.: Build an outdoor stage entertainment space for HOLLA! Community Amphitheater, breathing life into the performing arts while bringing live entertainment to the community.

Liberty, N.Y.: Install new trash receptacles and dumpsters along Liberty Main Street to increase beautification in the area.

Decatur, Ohio: Build new access ramps at Byrd Township Community Center and its remote work site space, increasing safety and accessibility and providing more jobs and opportunities for residents in this part of Appalachia.

Grove, Okla.: Provide Wi-Fi internet access throughout the museum and outdoor walking trails of Har-Ber Village, increasing connectivity and safety, and supporting education initiatives like QR code learning modules for students and community members.

Sallisaw, Okla.: Build an off-leash dog park at McGee Park, fostering connections for small and large breed dogs and enhancing the overall physical, mental and emotional well-being of the community and canine companions.

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North Bend, Ore.: Create the North Bend Community Hub: T-Mobile Stage & Performance Corner, a vibrant, multi-functional space for the community to host diverse events, art installations and a public art mural celebrating local history and culture.

Coopersburg, Penn.: Transform an unused church facility into a community center, including a dedicated local food pantry, space for Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and access to technology for senior citizens and the greater community.

Caguaitas, Aguas Buenas, P.R.: Transform the abandoned José González school into a service center that can be used for training sessions, as a shelter in emergency situations and for other community events, making it a vital asset for the community.

Saunderstown, R.I.: Repair the main road through the Boys & Girls Clubs of Newport County's Camp Grosvenor to increase ease of accessibility to the property for campers, residents, and emergency vehicles, and rebuild the waterfront area for all to enjoy and to address erosion.

Canton, S.D.: Replace the existing 110 plus year old Canton Senior Citizen Center with a new 8,400-square-foot Canton Community Center (CCC) to better serve the wants and needs of the Canton area.

Cleveland, Tenn.: Launch YouthForce technology program for youth to foster future career opportunities in technology, providing hands-on experiences in fields like coding, electrical engineering and other transferable skills to prepare them for the workforce.

Bremerton, Wash.: Build the Bremerton Foodline Community Garden, providing produce to clients and partners, offering agricultural learning opportunities for special needs students and serving as a community education and recreation space.

Sheridan, Wy.: Provide healthy, locally grown produce to students through the 5 th Street Greenhouse to Cafeteria Project, teaching students how to grow using hydroponic and raised bed systems, enhancing their understanding of agriculture and nutrition while promoting sustainable practices and improving the quality of school meals.

T-Mobile partners with Main Street America to administer the grant program and assess applications based on their level of detail, community impact, feasibility and other considerations. Learn about Main Street America's work to advance shared prosperity, create resilient economies and improve quality of life here.

"T-Mobile's Hometown Grants program is bringing critical resources to small towns and rural communities across America," said Erin Barnes, President and CEO, Main Street America. "These investments are transforming local landscapes and creating new opportunities for growth and connection."

T-Mobile's Hometown Grants commitment goes beyond community development programs. The Un-carrier has awarded more than \$3 million to small businesses through Hometown Grants to support projects like revitalizing farmers markets, launching business incubators and improving main streets.

Hometown Grants is one of T-Mobile's many initiatives to make sure no community, big or small, gets left behind. The Un-carrier's Project 10Million offers internet connectivity and mobile hotspots to eligible student households to help close the digital divide. And T-Mobile's Friday Night 5G Lights is a competition that recently wrapped its inaugural year to give a football field makeover valued at \$2 million to one deserving small town high school. The final champion was Inola High School from Inola, Oklahoma. Learn more about Friday Night 5G Lights and pre-register now for 2025 at FridayNight5GLights.com.

As the country's largest and fastest 5G network, T-Mobile is all in on small towns and rural areas. Plus, T-Mobile 5G Home Internet and Business Internet give homes and businesses across the country access to reliable and affordable broadband options.

NorthWestern Energy to Participate in Regional Transmission Projects

BUTTE, Mont. & SIOUX FALLS, S.D.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Dec 12, 2024--

NorthWestern Energy Group, Inc. d/b/a NorthWestern Energy (Nasdaq: NWE) is joining new high voltage transmission projects to expand Montana's grid, meet the state's increasing energy demand, enhance energy security and create opportunities to serve regional energy needs that will benefit all of our customers.

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NorthWestern Energy joins North Plains Connectoreast-west transmission line

NorthWestern Energy has signed a nonbinding memorandum of understanding with North Plains Connector LLC, a wholly owned entity of Grid United, to own 10% (300 megawatts) of North Plains Connector, a 3,000-megawatt, 420-mile high-voltage direct current (HVDC) transmission line to be constructed with endpoints near Bismarck, North Dakota, and Colstrip, Montana. Grid United and ALLETE, Inc. are jointly developing North Plains Connector. Avista, Portland General Electric and Puget Sound Energy also have ownership MOUs with North Plains Connector. The project is entering the permitting phase and initiating regulatory filings with approvals targeted in 2026. Construction is expected to commence in 2028, aiming for the project to be operational by 2032. Under the terms of the memorandum of understanding, Grid United will continue to fund the development of North Plains Connector. NorthWestern Energy would invest when project regulatory approvals and permits are in place.

"NorthWestern Energy's Colstrip, Montana substation is strategically located and will serve as a critical endpoint for North Plains Connector, reinforcing Colstrip's position as an essential energy hub," said NorthWestern Energy President and CEO Brian Bird. "The North Plains Connector developer's collaborative approach with Montana communities to address concerns and ensure the footprint reflects local priorities aligns with NorthWestern Energy's commitment to our customers."

North Plains Connector is the first interregional transmission line to create a major grid-to-grid connection across the three energy markets, the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO), Southwest Power Pool (SPP), and Western Electricity Coordinating Council (WECC). The transmission line will create connection between NorthWestern Energy's Montana and South Dakota service areas. The bidirectional transmission line will efficiently transport large amounts of power from areas with supply to areas in need and take advantage of diverse load and weather patterns.

"NorthWestern Energy is the only partner serving customers in both regions, which have diverse energy load demands and diverse energy generation resources," said Bird.

"We are pleased to welcome NorthWestern Energy to North Plains Connector," said Michael Skelly, CEO and co-founder of Grid United. "As Montana's largest energy provider, NorthWestern Energy brings a breadth of experience and deep understanding of the region's energy needs. Their support reinforces the importance of North Plains Connector as a meaningful solution for a strong and reliable electric grid."

Earlier this year, NorthWestern Energy supported the Montana Department of Commerce as part of the North Plains Connector Interregional Innovation (NPCII) consortium in its successful application for a \$700 million grant from the U.S. Department of Energy's Grid Resilience and Innovation Partnership (GRIP) program. The NPCII includes an upgrade of the Colstrip Transmission System and while the majority of the grant is earmarked for the North Plains Connector, the grant also includes funding for a potential upgrade of the Colstrip Transmission System, which is jointly owned and operated by NorthWestern Energy.

Montana to the South Transmission Corridor

NorthWestern Energy and Grid United have also entered into a letter of intent to continue transmission development to further enhance the grid through the southwest corridor of Montana. Development to expand the southwest corridor of Montana through grid buildout would represent a significant step in enhancing connectivity between Montana and the broader Western energy market - bolstering grid reliability, allowing for critical import capability and enabling customers to access and benefit from emerging energy markets in the West.

Russia targets Ukrainian infrastructure with a massive attack of cruise missiles and drones

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia launched a massive aerial attack against Ukraine on Friday, firing 93 missiles and almost 200 drones, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, describing it as one of the heaviest bombardments of the country's energy sector since Russia's full-scale invasion almost three years ago.

Ukrainian defenses shot down 81 missiles, including 11 cruise missiles that were intercepted by F-16

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warplanes provided by Western allies earlier this year, Zelenskyy said.

Russia is "terrorizing millions of people" with such assaults, he said on his Telegram channel, renewing his plea for international unity against Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"A strong reaction from the world is needed: a massive strike – a massive reaction. This is the only way to stop terror," Zelenskyy said.

But uncertainty surrounds how the war might unfold next year. President-elect Donald Trump, who takes office next month, has vowed to end the war and has thrown into doubt whether vital U.S. military support for Kyiv will continue.

In Moscow, the Defense Ministry said the Russian military used long-range precision missiles and drones on "critically important fuel and energy facilities in Ukraine that ensure the functioning of the military industrial complex."

The strike was in retaliation for Wednesday's Ukrainian attack using U.S.-supplied the Army Tactical Missile System, or ATACMs, on a Russian air base, it said.

The U.S. Embassy in Kyiv said Friday's attack also targeted transport networks and other key facilities. Ukraine's biggest private energy company, DTEK, said the attack "seriously damaged" its thermal power plants.

Russia has repeatedly attempted to cripple Ukraine's electricity system in an effort to break the will of civilians left in the dark with no running water or heating and to disrupt Ukrainian defense manufacturing.

Ukrainian Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko said energy workers were doing everything necessary to "minimize negative consequences for the energy system," promising to release more details on damages once the security situation allowed it.

Ukraine's air force reported multiple strike drones launched at Ukraine overnight followed by swarms of cruise missiles in the country's air space. It said Russia also used air-launched ballistic Kinzhal missiles against Ukraine's western regions.

A similar massive attack on Nov. 28 involved about 200 missiles and drones and left more than a million households without power until emergency teams restored supplies.

Ukrainian officials have warned that Russia is stockpiling cruise and ballistic missiles for more attacks.

On Nov. 21, Russia for the first time used an intermediate range hypersonic ballistic missile to strike an industrial plant in the city of Dnipro, in eastern Ukraine. Putin described the attack with the Oreshnik missile as retaliation for Ukrainian strikes on Russian territory with longer-range Western weapons.

He declared that more attacks with the new weapon could follow, and U.S. officials warned Wednesday that the Oreshnik could be used again in coming days. There was no immediate sign one was launched in Friday's attack.

Around half of Ukraine's energy infrastructure has been destroyed during the war, and rolling electricity blackouts are common and widespread.

Kyiv's Western allies have provided Ukraine with air defense systems to help it protect critical infrastructure, but Russia has sought to overwhelm the air defenses with combined strikes involving large numbers of missiles and drones called "swarms."

Russia has held the initiative this year as its military has steadily rammed through Ukrainian defenses in the east in a series of slow but steady offensives.

Middle East latest: Blinken urges Mideast nations to support a peaceful Syrian political transition

By The Associated Press undefined

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken is pressing ahead with efforts to unify Middle East nations in support of a peaceful political transition in Syria.

He is meeting on Friday with Turkey's foreign minister after talks with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to try to bring Turkey into a consensus to prevent Syria from collapsing into wider turmoil. It's Blinken's 12th trip to the Mideast since the Israel-Hamas war erupted in Gaza last year but first since the ouster of

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Syrian President Bashar Assad.

The outgoing Biden administration is particularly concerned that a power vacuum in Syria could exacerbate already heightened tensions in the region and create conditions for the Islamic State group to regain territory and influence.

The fighting between Israel and Hamas has plunged Gaza into a severe humanitarian crisis. Israel's offensive has killed over 44,800 Palestinians in Gaza, more than half of them 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 war in Gaza was sparked by an Oct. 7, 2023, attack by Hamas in southern Israel in which some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, were killed and around 250 others were taken hostage. Some 100 hostages are still inside Gaza, at least a third of whom are believed to be dead.

Here's the latest:

Blinken says there's 'broad agreement' between US and Turkey on Syria's future

ANKARA, Turkey -- U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Friday there was "broad agreement" between Turkey and the United States on what they would like to see in Syria following the ouster of President Bashar Assad.

"There's broad agreement on what we would like to see going forward, starting with the interim government in Syria, one that is inclusive and non-sectarian and one that protects the rights of minorities and women" and does not "pose any kind of threat to any of Syria's neighbors," Blinken said in joint statements with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan.

The insurgent groups that toppled Assad in Syria have not made clear their policy or stance on Israel, whose military in recent days has bombed sites all over the country, saying it is trying to prevent weapons from falling into extremist hands.

Blinken also said it was crucial to keep the Islamic State group under control.

"We also discussed the imperative of continuing the efforts to keep ISIS down. Our countries worked very hard and gave a lot over many years to ensure the elimination of the territorial caliphate of ISIS to ensure that that threat doesn't rear its head again," Blinken said.

The Turkish foreign minister said the two discussed ways of establishing prosperity in Syria and ending terrorism in the country.

"Our priority is establishing stability in Syria as soon as possible, preventing terrorism from gaining ground, and ensuring that IS and the PKK aren't dominant," Fidan said, in a reference to the banned Kurdistan Workers Party.

Blinken said: "We're very focused on Syria, very focused on the opportunity that now is before us and before the Syrian people to move from out from under the shackles of Bashar al-Assad to a different and better future for the Syrian people, one that the Syrian people decide for themselves."

Blinken and Fidan said they had also discussed a ceasefire for Gaza.

"We've seen in the last couple of weeks more encouraging signs that (a ceasefire) is possible," Blinken said.

Blinken, who is making his 12th trip to the Mideast since the Israel-Hamas war erupted last year but first since the weekend ouster of Assad, met with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan late Thursday.

The outgoing Biden administration is particularly concerned that a power vacuum in Syria could exacerbate already heightened tensions in the region, which is already wracked by multiple conflicts, and create conditions for the Islamic State group to regain territory and influence.

Later Friday, Blinken is to return to Jordan for meetings on Saturday with Arab foreign ministers and senior officials from the European Union, the Arab League and the United Nations.

Turkey to reopen its embassy in Syria

ANKARA, Turkey -- Turkey has appointed a temporary charge d'affaires to reopen its embassy in Syria, Turkey's state-run news agency reported.

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The Turkish Embassy in Damascus had suspended operations in 2012 due to the escalating security problems during the Syrian civil war and embassy staff and their families were recalled to Turkey.

The Anadolu Agency said late Thursday that Turkey appointed Burhan Koroğlu, its ambassador in Mauritania, to the post.

2 UN aid convoys violently attacked in Gaza, US food agency says

UNITED NATIONS- – Two U.N. aid convoys were violently attacked in Gaza, making it virtually impossible for humanitarian agencies to operate without putting staff and civilians at risk, the U.N. food agency says.

On Wednesday, a 70-truck convoy from Kerem Shalom was waiting for personnel to safeguard the food and other aid destined for central Gaza when there were reported attacks by Israeli forces in the nearby humanitarian zone, the U.N. World Food Program said Thursday.

More than 50 people are now estimated to have died in the attacks, including civilians and local security personnel who had been expected to ensure the convoy's safety, WFP said.

The Rome-based agency said the convoy was forced to proceed from Kerem Shalom to central Gaza without any security arrangements, using the Philadelphi corridor, an Israeli-controlled route that had been recently approved and successfully utilized twice.

On the way, WFP said, conflict and insecurity led to a loss of communications with the convoy for more than 12 hours. "Eventually, the trucks were found but all food and aid supplies were looted," the U.N. agency said.

In a second incident, Israeli soldiers approached a WFP convoy moving out of the Kissufim crossing into central Gaza, fired warning shots, conducted extensive security checks, and temporarily detained drivers and staff, the agency said.

"As the trucks were delayed, four out of the five trucks were lost to violent armed looting," WFP said.

UN chief urges Israel to stop attacks on Syria

UNITED NATIONS – The United Nations chief has a message for Israel: Stop the attacks on Syria.

Secretary-General António Guterres is particularly concerned about several hundred Israeli airstrikes on several Syrian locations and stresses "the urgent need to de-escalate violence on all fronts throughout the country," U.N. spokesman Stéphane Dujarric told reporters Thursday.

The Israeli military said Tuesday it carried out more than 350 strikes in Syria over the previous 48 hours, hitting "most of the strategic weapons stockpiles" in the country to stop them from falling into the hands of extremists.

Israel also acknowledged pushing into a buffer zone inside Syria following last week's overthrow of President Bashar Assad. The buffer zone was established after Israel seized the Golan Heights from Syria in the 1973 war.

Dujarric said Guterres condemns all actions violating the 1974 ceasefire agreement between the two countries that remains in force. And the U.N. chief calls on the parties to uphold the agreement and end "all unauthorized presence in the area of separation" and refrain from any action undermining the ceasefire and stability in the Golan Heights, the spokesman said.

Some in seafood industry see Trump as fishermen's friend, but tariffs could make for pricier fish

By PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — The incoming administration of President-elect Donald Trump is likely to bring big changes for one of the oldest sectors of the U.S. economy — seafood — and some in the industry believe the returning president will be more responsive to its needs.

Economic analysts paint a more complicated picture, as they fear Trump's pending trade hostilities with major trading partners Canada and China could make an already pricy kind of protein more expensive to consumers. Conservationists also fear Trump's emphasis on government deregulation could jeopardize fish stocks that are already in peril.

But many in the commercial fishing and seafood processing industries said they are excited for Trump's

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second presidency. They said they expect he'll allow fishing in protected areas as he did in his first presidency, crack down on offshore wind expansion and cut back regulations they describe as burdensome. And they expect a marked shift from the administration of President Joe Biden, who prioritized ocean conservation and championed wind power from the start.

The seafood industry isn't hungry for another tariff war, which hurt fishermen during Trump's first term, said Beth Casoni, executive director of the Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association. But she said the new Trump administration has a unique chance to throw its support behind U.S. fishermen.

"I think we should be focused on feeding Americans," Casoni said. "The 'America First' administration I think will make that point loud and clear. Know where your food is coming from."

But the seafood industry, which is international in nature, could be seriously disrupted if Trump goes through with a plan to impose a 25% tax on all products entering the country from Canada, said John Sackton, a longtime industry analyst and founder of Seafood News. Canada is the largest seafood market for the U.S. for both imports and exports, and nearly a sixth of the seafood imported by the U.S. is from its northern neighbor, according to federal statistics published in November. In total about 80% of seafood consumed in the U.S. is imported.

Losing Canada — an especially important buyer of American lobster — as a market for U.S. seafood could cause prices to fishermen to collapse, Sackton said. And some products could become unavailable while others become more expensive and still others oversupplied, he said. He described the seafood industry as "interdependent on both sides of the border."

In Canada, members of the country's seafood industry are watching closely to see what changes Trump ushers in, said Geoff Irvine, executive director of the Lobster Council of Canada, based in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

"A potential trade war will cost everyone (in Canada and the U.S.) and cause damage to the seafood section in Canada and the United States," Irvine said via email. "We are working with allies in Canada and the U.S. to send this message to all governments."

One of the major changes for fishermen under a new Trump administration is that they can expect to have a seat at the table when high-level decisions get made, said representatives for several commercial fishing groups. Last time around, Trump sat down with fishermen and listened to their concerns about loss of fishing rights in Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument, a nearly 5,000-square mile (13,000 square kilometers) protected area off New England, said Robert Vanasse, executive director of industry advocate Saving Seafood.

That goodwill is likely to carry over into Trump's new presidency. And the industry feels it has already scored a win with election of a president who is an outspoken critic of offshore wind power, said Drew Minkiewicz, an attorney who represents the New Bedford, Massachusetts-based Sustainable Scalloping Fund. Fishermen of valuable seafoods such as scallops and lobsters have long opposed offshore wind development because of concerns wind power will disrupt prime fishing grounds.

"There is excitement in the industry that offshore wind will basically be contained to its existing footprint and nothing beyond that," Minkiewicz said.

Others in the industry said they're concerned about how Trump will handle the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the federal agency that regulates fisheries. The undersecretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere, who is currently the Biden-appointed Rick Spinrad, will be one of Trump's key appointees. Trump went through three different administrators at the post during his first term of office.

The industry has recently suffered major recent crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic and trade hostilities with another major trading partner in Russia, and isn't in a position to withstand unstable leadership, said Noah Oppenheim, coordinator for Fishing Communities Coalition, which represents small-scale commercial fishing groups.

"The Fishing Communities Coalition is always deeply concerned that any administration's shifts away from a fishery management focus on conservation and accountability will do serious lasting damage to the industry," Oppenheim said.

Conservation groups who have pushed for stricter vessel speed rules and new fishing standards, such as new gear that is less likely to harm whales, said they're also waiting to see the direction Trump takes fisheries and ocean policy. They said they're hopeful progress made under Biden can withstand a second Trump presidency.

"It would be extraordinarily short-sighted for the incoming administration to ignore the science and set off a fishing free-for-all that will only hurt fisheries — and healthy oceans — in the long run," said Jane Davenport, a senior attorney with Defenders of Wildlife.

Watchdog finds FBI intelligence missteps before Jan. 6 riot, but no undercover agents were present

By ERIC TUCKER and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The FBI should have done more to gather intelligence before the Capitol riot, according to a watchdog report Thursday that also said no undercover FBI employees were on the scene on Jan. 6, 2021, and none of the bureau's informants was authorized to participate.

The report from the Justice Department inspector general's office knocks down a fringe conspiracy theory advanced by some Republicans in Congress that the FBI played a role in instigating the events that day, when rioters determined to overturn Republican Donald Trump's 2020 election loss to Democrat Joe Biden stormed the building in a violent clash with police.

The review, released nearly four years after a dark chapter in history that shook the bedrock of American democracy, was narrow in scope, but aimed to shed light on gnawing questions that have dominated public discourse, including whether major intelligence failures preceded the riot and whether the FBI in some way provoked the violence. It's the latest major investigation about a day unlike any other in U.S. history, one that has already yielded congressional inquiries and federal and state indictments.

The report offers a mixed assessment of the FBI's performance in the run-up to the riot, crediting the bureau for preparing for the possibility of violence and for trying to identify known "domestic terrorism subjects" who planned to come to Washington that day.

But it said the FBI, in an action the now-deputy director described as a "basic step that was missed," failed to canvass informants across all 56 of its field offices for any relevant intelligence. That was a step, the report concluded, "that could have helped the FBI and its law enforcement partners with their preparations in advance of January 6."

The report did find that 26 FBI informants were in Washington for election-related protests on Jan. 6, including three who had been tasked with traveling to the city to report on others who were potentially planning to attend the day's events. But while four informants entered the Capitol, none had been authorized to do so by the bureau or to break the law or encourage others to do so, the report said.

Many of the 26 informants did provide the FBI with information before the riot, but it "was no more specific than, and was consistent with, other sources of information" the FBI had acquired from other sources.

The FBI said in a letter responding to the report that it accepts the inspection general's recommendation "regarding potential process improvements for future events."

The lengthy review was launched days after the riot as the FBI faced questions over whether it had missed warnings signs or had adequately disseminated intelligence it had received, including a Jan. 5, 2021, bulletin prepared by the FBI's Norfolk, Virginia, field office that warned of the potential for "war" at the Capitol. The inspector general found that the information in that bulletin was broadly shared.

FBI Director Chris Wray, who announced this week his plans to resign at the end of Biden's term in January, has defended his agency's handling of the intelligence report. He told lawmakers in 2021 that the report was disseminated through the joint terrorism task force, discussed at a command post in Washington and posted on an internet portal available to other law enforcement agencies.

"We did communicate that information in a timely fashion to the Capitol Police and (Metropolitan Police Department) in not one, not two, but three different ways," Wray said at the time.

Separately, the watchdog report said the FBI's New Orleans field office was told by a source between

November 2020 and early January 2021 that protesters were planning to station a “quick reaction force” in northern Virginia “in order to be armed and prepared to respond to violence that day in DC, if necessary.”

That information was shared with the FBI’s Washington Field Office, members of intelligence agencies and some federal law enforcement agencies the day before the riot, the inspector general found. But there was no indication the FBI told northern Virginia police about the information, the report said. An FBI official told the inspector general there was “nothing actionable or immediately concerning about it.”

A cache of weapons at a Virginia hotel as part of a “quick reaction force” was a central piece of the Justice Department’s seditious conspiracy case against Oath Keepers leader Stewart Rhodes and other members of the far-right extremist group.

The conspiracy theory that federal law enforcement officers entrapped members of the mob has been spread in conservative circles, including by some Republican lawmakers. Rep. Clay Higgins, R-La., recently suggested on a podcast that agents pretending to be Trump supporters were responsible for instigating the violence.

Former Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., who withdrew as Trump’s pick as attorney general amid scrutiny over sex trafficking allegations, sent a letter to Wray in 2021 asking how many undercover agents or informants were at the Capitol on Jan. 6 and if they were “merely passive informants or active instigators.”

It wasn’t previously clear how many FBI informants were in the crowd that day. Wray refused to say during a congressional hearing last year how many of the people who entered the Capitol and surrounding area on Jan. 6 were either FBI employees or people with whom the FBI had made contact. But Wray said the “notion that somehow the violence at the Capitol on January 6 was part of some operation orchestrated by FBI sources and agents is ludicrous.”

One FBI informant testified last year at the trial of former Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrío about marching to the Capitol with his fellow extremist group members, and described communicating with his handler as the mob of Trump supporters swarmed the building. But the informant wasn’t in any of the Telegram chats the Proud Boys were accused of using to plot violence in the days leading up to Jan. 6.

3,700 people return to Malibu homes as weather conditions improve and help firefighters battle blaze

MALIBU, Calif. (AP) — More than 3,700 residents were allowed to return to their Malibu homes on Thursday after calmer winds and rising humidity in Southern California helped firefighters battle a blaze that had forced thousands, including college students and celebrities, to evacuate earlier this week.

But another 1,600 people with homes in Malibu — a city typically known for its rugged canyons, stunning bluffs and celebrities’ seaside mansions — remained under evacuation orders. All told, some 20,000 residents in the city and neighboring areas had been affected by mandatory evacuation orders and warnings since the fire broke out late Monday.

Firefighters continued to battle the blaze, dubbed the Franklin Fire, which was only 20% contained over about 6.3 square miles (16.3 square kilometers) Thursday. The flames were fed by powerful winds that swept through the region in the beginning of the week. But the weather improved so much Wednesday that meteorologists discontinued all red flag warnings, which indicate high fire danger, and fire crews were able to successfully push back against the flames.

Winds would continue to ease, said meteorologist Mike Wofford with the National Weather Service’s office for Los Angeles.

“We’ll even get a little sea breeze there that will increase humidity in the fire zone,” Wofford said Thursday. “Generally everything’s getting better.”

It’s unclear how the fire started. Officials said four homes have been destroyed and at least six others have been damaged, though crews had only surveyed about 25% of the affected area, said Deputy Chief Eleni Pappas of the Los Angeles County Fire Department.

“This is a tragedy that goes beyond our personal residences,” Malibu Mayor Doug Stewart said, adding

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that restaurants have lost food in their freezers from power outages and people who travel to Malibu for employment are out of work.

The 3,700 residents were allowed to return Thursday after the county sheriff's department lifted mandatory evacuation orders.

Flames also reached just short of Pepperdine University, where students were forced to shelter in place on campus on Monday and again Tuesday.

An early analysis showed little to no damage to structures on campus, the university said. Final exams were postponed or canceled and faculty members were determining how best to complete the semester, which ends at Pepperdine this week.

Lonnie Vidaurri's four-bedroom home in the Malibu Knolls neighborhood was one of those impacted. He evacuated to a hotel in Santa Monica with his wife and two young daughters.

"It's pretty torched all around," Vidaurri said of his house. He expects that the family's pet bunnies did not survive the fire, and that they lost most of their things. "My girls cried, obviously, but it could have been worse."

Mimi Teller, a Red Cross spokesperson who works at a shelter in nearby Pacific Palisades, said many evacuees arrived in pajamas and were "definitely in shock."

"Nobody even had a backpack, it was, 'Get out now,'" Teller said.

Cher, one of many celebrities with homes in Malibu, evacuated from her home when ordered and was staying at a hotel, her publicist, Liz Rosenberg, said Tuesday. Jane Seymour also fled the seaside city. "The fires in our community are a stark reminder of how quickly life can change," the actress wrote on Instagram Tuesday.

And Dick Van Dyke said in a Facebook post that he and his wife, Arlene Silver, evacuated as the fire swept in. The actor later told NBC's "Today" that neighbors helped them get out.

"I was trying to crawl to the car. I had exhausted myself. I couldn't get up," said Van Dyke, who turns 99 on Friday. "And three neighbors came and carried me out, and came back and put out a little fire in the guesthouse and saved me."

The fire erupted shortly before 11 p.m. Monday and swiftly moved south, jumping over the famous Pacific Coast Highway and extending all the way to the ocean. It was propelled by Santa Ana winds, with erratic gusts that topped 40 mph (64 kph). Santa Anas are notorious seasonal winds that blow dry air from the interior toward the coast, pushing back moist ocean breezes.

Utilities preemptively shut off power to tens of thousands of homes and businesses, starting Monday night, to mitigate the impacts of the Santa Anas, which can damage electrical equipment and spark wildfires. As of Thursday morning, electricity had been restored for all Southern California Edison customers, said utility spokesperson Gabriela Ornelas.

The Woolsey Fire that roared through the area in 2018, killing three people and destroying 1,600 homes, was sparked by Edison equipment. Asked Thursday if Edison equipment was involved in the Franklin Fire, Ornelas referred all questions regarding the cause to fire officials.

US Olympic and Paralympic officials put coach on leave after AP reports sexual abuse allegations

By MARTHA BELLISLE Associated Press

The U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee placed an employee on administrative leave Thursday after The Associated Press reported that one of its coaches was accused of sexually abusing a young biathlete, causing her so much distress that she attempted suicide.

Rocky Harris, USOPC chief of sport and athlete services, sent an email to U.S. Biathlon national team members to address the "concerning allegations of abuse" raised by several biathletes in the AP report.

"We want to commend these athletes for their immense courage and strength in coming forward," the email said. "Effective immediately, we have placed a USOPC staff member on administrative leave pending further investigation."

ing an internal investigation.”

Harris did not name the employee, but Gary Colliander was the only USOPC coach named in the AP report. Jon Mason, a USOPC spokesperson, told the AP that no additional information would be released while the inquiry is underway.

“While we are currently in the process of gathering all the necessary information surrounding these complaints, we want to emphasize that abuse and misconduct have no place in our community,” said the email, also sent to the AP.

Grace Boutot told the AP that after Colliander began coaching her when she was 15, he gave her a lot of attention, including long hugs and inappropriate touching. The conduct escalated after she turned 18 to “kissing, sexual fondling and oral sex,” according to a treatment summary by therapist Jacqueline Pauli-Ritz, shared with the AP.

The AP generally does not identify victims of sexual abuse except in cases where they publicly identify themselves or share their stories openly.

Boutot said she begged Colliander to stop but he ignored her. She said he warned her against telling anyone, saying his life would be ruined and her biathlon career would end.

In September 2010, Pauli-Ritz contacted Colliander and told him Boutot was suffering from major depression and post-traumatic stress disorder and he should stop coaching her, the treatment summary said.

“He did not do this until after the suicide attempt,” Pauli-Ritz wrote, referring to Boutot’s Oct. 7, 2010, overdose on antidepressants while at a training camp in Soldier Hollow, Utah. She was found by a teammate and hospitalized.

The next day, Colliander resigned his position with the Maine Winter Sports Center. He was hired in December 2016 by the U.S. Paralympic team, where he is associate director of high performance for U.S. Paralympics Nordic Skiing.

Colliander did not immediately respond to email and phone messages seeking comment.

Boutot, 33, said she’s glad the U.S. Olympic committee is taking action, but is “incredibly disappointed” that U.S. Biathlon has failed to do the same.

“The true origin of the misogynistic culture lies with U.S. Biathlon,” she said. “The silence is stunning, to be honest.”

U.S. Biathlon CEO Jack Gierhart sent an email to the AP and U.S. Biathlon members late Thursday saying the allegations in the AP report were troubling. “We are deeply concerned about the experiences of the athletes mentioned. To all of you, I want to reaffirm our commitment to athlete safety,” it said.

Boutot was among a half-dozen Olympians and other biathletes who came forward after the AP reported earlier this year that Olympian Joanne Reid was sexually abused and harassed for years, according to findings by the U.S. Center for SafeSport, created to investigate sex-abuse allegations in Olympic sports in the aftermath of the Larry Nassar U.S. Gymnastics scandal.

They described a culture of abuse dating back to the 1990s, and said that while the men involved climbed the ranks of the sport, they faced retaliation that forced them to end their racing careers early.

Biden commutes roughly 1,500 sentences and pardons 39 people in biggest single-day act of clemency

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is commuting the sentences of roughly 1,500 people who were released from prison and placed on home confinement during the coronavirus pandemic and is pardoning 39 Americans convicted of nonviolent crimes. It’s the largest single-day act of clemency in modern history.

The commutations announced Thursday are for people who have served out home confinement sentences for at least one year after they were released. Prisons were uniquely bad for spreading the virus and some inmates were released in part to stop the spread. At one point, 1 in 5 prisoners had COVID-19, according to a tally kept by The Associated Press.

Biden said he would be taking more steps in the weeks ahead and would continue to review clemency

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petitions. The second largest single-day act of clemency was by Barack Obama, with 330, shortly before leaving office in 2017.

"America was built on the promise of possibility and second chances," Biden said in a statement. "As president, I have the great privilege of extending mercy to people who have demonstrated remorse and rehabilitation, restoring opportunity for Americans to participate in daily life and contribute to their communities, and taking steps to remove sentencing disparities for non-violent offenders, especially those convicted of drug offenses."

The clemency follows a broad pardon for his son Hunter, who was prosecuted for gun and tax crimes. Biden is under pressure from advocacy groups to pardon broad swaths of people, including those on federal death row, before the Trump administration takes over in January. He's also weighing whether to issue preemptive pardons to those who investigated Trump's effort to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election and are facing possible retribution when he takes office.

Clemency is the term for the power the president has to pardon, in which a person is relieved of guilt and punishment, or to commute a sentence, which reduces or eliminates the punishment but doesn't exonerate the wrongdoing. It's customary for a president to grant mercy at the end of his term, using the power of the office to wipe away records or end prison terms.

Those pardoned Thursday range in age from 36 to 75. About half are men and half are women, and they had been convicted of nonviolent crimes such as drug offenses, fraud or theft and turned their lives around, White House lawyers said. They include a woman who led emergency response teams during natural disasters; a church deacon who has worked as an addiction counselor and youth counselor; a doctoral student in molecular biosciences; and a decorated military veteran.

Louisiana resident Trynitha Fulton, 46, was one of the pardons; she pleaded guilty to participating in a payroll fraud scheme while serving as a New Orleans middle school teacher in the early 2000s. She was sentenced to three years of probation in 2008.

"The pardon gives me a sense of freedom," Fulton said in a written statement to the AP. "The conviction has served as a mental barrier for me, limiting my ability to live a full life."

"The pardon gives me inspiration to make more impactful decisions personally and professionally," she added.

After her conviction, Fulton went on to earn a master's degree. She helps lead the nonprofit Skyliners-Youth Outreach, which supports New Orleans youth by providing hot meals, clothing, shelter and mental health referrals.

The president had previously issued 122 commutations and 21 other pardons. He's also broadly pardoned those convicted of use and simple possession of marijuana on federal lands and in the District of Columbia, and pardoned former U.S. service members convicted of violating a now-repealed military ban on consensual gay sex.

Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass., and 34 other lawmakers are urging the president to pardon environmental and human rights lawyer Steven Donziger, who was imprisoned or under house arrest for three years because of a contempt of court charge related to his work representing Indigenous farmers in a lawsuit against Chevron.

Others are advocating for Biden to commute the sentences of federal death row prisoners. His attorney general, Merrick Garland, paused federal executions. Biden had said on the campaign trail in 2020 that he wanted to end the death penalty but he never did, and now, with Trump coming back into office, it's likely executions will resume. During his first term, Trump presided over an unprecedented number of federal executions, carried out during the height of the pandemic.

More clemency grants are coming before Biden leaves office on Jan. 20, but it's not clear whether he'll take action to guard against possible prosecution by Trump, an untested use of the power. The president has been taking the idea seriously and has been thinking about it for as much as six months — before the presidential election — but has been concerned about the precedent it would set, according to people familiar with the matter who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss internal discussions.

But those who received the pardons would have to accept them. New California Sen. Adam Schiff, who was a part of the House committee that investigated the violent Jan. 6 insurrection, said such a pardon from Biden would be “unnecessary,” and that the president shouldn’t be spending his waning days in office worrying about this.

Former Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., another target of Trump’s threats, said in a statement this week that his suggestion that she and others be jailed for the investigations “is a continuation of his assault on the rule of law and the foundations of our republic.”

Before pardoning his son, Biden had repeatedly pledged not to do so. He said in a statement explaining his reversal that the prosecution had been poisoned by politics. The decision prompted criminal justice advocates and lawmakers to put additional public pressure on the administration to use that same power for everyday Americans. It wasn’t a very popular move; only about 2 in 10 Americans approved of his decision, according to a poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Trump extends unprecedented invites to China’s Xi and other world leaders for his inauguration

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump has invited Chinese President Xi Jinping and other world leaders to his inauguration next month — an unorthodox move that would fold U.S. allies and adversaries into a very American political tradition.

Trump said Thursday during an appearance at the New York Stock Exchange, where he was ringing the opening bell to kick off trading for the day, that he’s been “thinking about inviting certain people to the inauguration” without referring to any specific individuals.

“And some people said, ‘Wow, that’s a little risky, isn’t it?’” Trump said. “And I said, ‘Maybe it is. We’ll see. We’ll see what happens.’ But we like to take little chances.”

His comments came soon after his incoming White House press secretary, Karoline Leavitt, confirmed during a Thursday morning appearance on “Fox & Friends” that Trump had invited Xi and other world leaders to attend his inauguration. No head of state has previously made an official visit to the U.S. for the inauguration, according to State Department historical records.

The unprecedented invitations come at a moment when much of the world is bracing for what comes next when Trump and his “America First” worldview return to the White House.

The president-elect has vowed to levy massive tariffs against the United States’ chief economic competitor, China, as well as neighbors Canada and Mexico unless those countries do more to reduce illegal immigration and the flow of illegal drugs such as fentanyl into the United States.

Trump’s also pledged to move quickly to end Russia’s nearly three-year war in Ukraine and press NATO allies who are spending less than 2% of their GDP on defense to step up or risk the United States not coming to their defense, as required by the transatlantic alliance’s treaty, should they come under attack.

“We’ve been talking and discussing with President Xi some things, and others, other world leaders, and I think we’re going to do very well all around,” Trump said. “We’ve been abused as a country. We’ve been badly abused from an economic standpoint, I think, and even militarily, you know, we put up all the money, they put up nothing, and then they abuse us on the economy. And we just can’t let that happen.”

Xi is likely to see the invitation as too risky to accept, and the gesture from Trump may have little bearing on the increasingly competitive ties between the two nations as the White House changes hands, experts say.

Danny Russel, vice president for international security and diplomacy at the Asia Society Policy Institute, said Xi would not allow himself to “be reduced to the status of a mere guest celebrating the triumph of a foreign leader — the U.S. president, no less.”

Still, Leavitt saw it as a plus.

“This is an example of President Trump creating an open dialogue with leaders of countries that are not just our allies, but our adversaries and our competitors, too,” she said on “Fox & Friends.” “We saw this

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in his first term. He got a lot of criticism for it, but it led to peace around this world. He is willing to talk to anyone, and he will always put America's interest first."

Asked at a Chinese Foreign Ministry briefing Thursday about Trump's invitation, spokesperson Mao Ning responded, "I have nothing to share at present."

Leavitt did not detail which leaders beyond Xi have been invited.

But Trump's decision to invite Xi, in particular, squares with his belief that foreign policy — much like a business negotiation — should be carried out with carrots and sticks to get the United States' opponents to operate closer to his administration's preferred terms.

Jim Bendat, a historian and author of "Democracy's Big Day: The Inauguration of Our President," said he was not aware of a previous U.S. inauguration attended by a foreign head of state.

"It's not necessarily a bad thing to invite foreign leaders to attend," Bendat said. "But it sure would make more sense to invite an ally before an adversary."

Edward Frantz, a presidential historian at the University of Indianapolis, said the invitation helps Trump burnish his "dealmaker and savvy businessman" brand.

"I could see why he might like the optics," Frantz said. "But from the standpoint of American values, it seems shockingly cavalier."

White House officials said it was up to Trump to decide whom he invites to the inauguration.

"I would just say, without doubt, it's the single most consequential bilateral relationship that the United States has in the world," White House national security spokesperson John Kirby said. "It is a relationship both fraught with peril and responsibility."

It's unclear which leaders, if any, might show.

A top aide to Hungarian President Viktor Orban, one of Trump's most vocal supporters on the world stage, said Thursday that Orban isn't slated to attend the inauguration.

"There is no such plan, at least for the time being," said Gergely Gulyás, Orban's chief of staff.

The nationalist Hungarian leader is embraced by Trump but has faced isolation in Europe as he's sought to undermine the European Union's support for Ukraine, and routinely blocked, delayed or watered down the bloc's efforts to provide weapons and funding and to sanction Moscow for its invasion. Orban recently met with Trump at Mar-a-Lago.

Every country's chief of mission to the United States will also be invited, according to a Trump Inaugural Committee official who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity. Such invitations to diplomats stationed in Washington has been customary during past inaugurations.

Xi, during a meeting with President Joe Biden last month in Peru, urged the United States not to start a trade war.

"Make the wise choice," Xi cautioned. "Keep exploring the right way for two major countries to get along well with each other."

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has also pushed back on Trump's threats, warning that such tariffs would be perilous for the U.S. economy as well.

Trudeau earlier this week said Americans "are beginning to wake up to the real reality that tariffs on everything from Canada would make life a lot more expensive" and said he will retaliate if Trump goes ahead with them.

Trump responded by calling Canada a state and Trudeau the governor.

In addition to the tariff dispute, U.S.-China relations are strained over other issues, including what U.S. officials see as Beijing's indirect support of Russia's war on Ukraine.

The Biden administration says China has supported Russia with a surge in sales of dual-use components that help keep its military industrial base afloat.

U.S. officials also have expressed frustration with Beijing for not doing more to rein in North Korea's support for the Russian war. China accounts for the vast majority of North Korea's trade.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has dispatched thousands of troops to Russia to help repel Ukrainian forces from the Kursk border region. The North Koreans also have provided Russia with artillery and other munitions, according to U.S. and South Korean intelligence officials.

Trump's Jan. 20 inauguration is set to take place a day after the U.S. deadline for ByteDance, the Chinese parent company of social media giant TikTok, to sell the social media app or face a ban in the United States.

Back trouble and brain fog bothered suspect in UnitedHealthcare CEO killing, his posts show

By LEA SKENE and JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER Associated Press

After Luigi Mangione made the difficult decision to undergo spinal surgery last year for chronic back pain, he became a proponent of the procedure that changed his life for the better.

He repeatedly posted on Reddit about his recovery and offered words of encouragement for people with similar conditions, telling them to push back against doctors who suggested they had to live with pain.

But notably absent from the posts are explicit concerns about corporate greed in the health insurance industry. Those appear to have surfaced only later: in a handwritten note found after Mangione was detained as a suspect in the killing of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson.

That short document references "parasites" in the health care system and laments the power and profits of health insurers, according to law enforcement officials. During his first public words since his arrest in Pennsylvania, Mangione emerged from a patrol car shouting about an "insult to the intelligence of the American people" while sheriff's deputies pushed him into a courthouse.

There's no indication Mangione was ever insured by UnitedHealthcare, a senior New York City police official said in an interview Thursday with NBC New York.

The killing has nonetheless prompted widespread speculation about whether he had a bad personal experience with the health care system. But after his 2023 surgery, Mangione's Reddit posts suggest he was overwhelmingly pleased with the outcome and finally relieved of chronic pain. He encouraged others not to be frightened by horror stories of surgeries gone bad. He also referenced a backpacking trip to Asia earlier this year.

The 26-year-old Ivy League graduate appears to have stopped posting on social media roughly six months ago, around the time he lost touch with loved ones.

Family and friends expressed shock at news of Mangione's arrest, but little information has emerged about his recent mental and physical health.

Mangione's Reddit posts reference a spinal condition called spondylolisthesis, which occurs when a fracture causes a vertebra to slip out of alignment. It can result in severe pain if the bone puts pressure on spinal nerves.

The condition, which can originate in childhood or from an injury, started negatively impacting Mangione's life in recent years, according to his social media posts.

After earning his bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Pennsylvania, he worked at the Santa Monica-based car-buying website TrueCar until 2023 and lived in Hawaii for some time starting in January 2022. During a six-month stay at Surfbreak, a "co-living" space in Honolulu, Mangione's back pain worsened in part because of a surfing incident.

Josiah Ryan, a spokesperson for the owner and founder of Surfbreak, R.J. Martin, said Mangione had expressed growing concerns about the pain. In addition to missing out on recreational activities and exercise, he was worried about how it could affect romantic relationships.

"That was definitely a theme in his time there," Ryan said. "He wasn't a big complainer. So it wasn't like he was bringing it up constantly. But the people who knew him knew this was a significant part of his life."

In July 2023, Mangione wrote in a Reddit post that he had decided to get surgery.

"I got caught in this loop for a year, all the while putting my life on hold in my 20's and damaging my nerves while I waffled on the decision. I have surgery scheduled in two weeks and I keep wondering why I was so afraid of it," he wrote.

According to his posts, the operation was a success.

An image posted to an X account linked to Mangione showed what appeared to be an X-ray of a metal rod and multiple screws inserted into his lower spine.

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"Surgery was painful for the first couple days, but I was shocked that by day 7 I was on literally zero pain meds," Mangione posted on Reddit in August 2023. "Obviously will be awhile until I get into rigorous activity, but it was way less of a big deal than I had anticipated."

Medical experts say treating back pain is almost always a challenge.

"In the gross majority of treatments, surgery is when everything else has failed to provide relief," said Dr. Jason Pittman, co-director of the Spine Center at Boston's Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. He said doctors generally try conservative treatments like physical therapy, injections or medications before surgery.

Even people with health insurance can face thousands of dollars in bills from a surgery depending on their deductible and other factors, though it's unclear whether Mangione experienced any of those issues.

Experiencing chronic back pain can also significantly impact mental health, said Dr. Padma Gulur, a pain specialist with Duke Health.

"If you have underlying mental health issues — anxiety, depression — your pain can be worse because you have way more suffering," Gulur said. "But, the second aspect is pain can push you into anxiety and depression."

Little is known about Mangione's mental state in recent months, but it appears he was withdrawing from close relationships. Since-deleted posts on X show a friend repeatedly reaching out and getting no response.

His family reported him missing to San Francisco authorities in November, police said.

Earlier, while in college, Mangione posted on Reddit about experiencing severe brain fog and restless sleep.

In a July 2018 post, he said his grades were suffering and he had considered dropping out of school. But ultimately, "staying in college has at least let me maintain some semblance of normality," he wrote.

His last Reddit post is dated May 17, but other statements around that time suggest he wasn't experiencing unexpected complications or renewed back pain. He appears to be advocating for the type of surgery he received months earlier.

He posted in early April about the gear he brought on a two-month backpacking trip through Asia that included some cross-country motorcycling, saying he had found "the perfect balance between minimalism and practicality."

In late April, he advised another Reddit user with a back problem to "keep trying different surgeons" and, if necessary, convey an inability to keep working.

"We live in a capitalist society," he wrote. "I've found that the medical industry responds to these key words far more urgently than you describing unbearable pain and how it's impacting your quality of life."

US senator says mysterious drones spotted in New Jersey should be 'shot down, if necessary'

By BRUCE SHIPKOWSKI Associated Press

TOMS RIVER, N.J. (AP) — A U.S. senator has called for mysterious drones spotted flying at night over sensitive areas in New Jersey and other parts of the Mid-Atlantic region to be "shot down, if necessary," even as it remains unclear who owns the unmanned aircraft.

"We should be doing some very urgent intelligence analysis and take them out of the skies, especially if they're flying over airports or military bases," Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut said Thursday, as concerns about the drones spread across Capitol Hill.

People in the New York region are also concerned that the drones may be sharing airspace with commercial airlines, he said, demanding more transparency from the Biden administration.

The White House said Thursday that a review of the reported sightings shows that many of them are actually manned aircraft being flown lawfully. White House National Security spokesman John Kirby said there were no reported sightings in any restricted airspace. He said the U.S. Coast Guard has not uncovered any foreign involvement from coastal vessels.

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"We have no evidence at this time that the reported drone sightings pose a national security or a public safety threat, or have a foreign nexus," Kirby said, echoing statements from the Pentagon and New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy.

Pentagon spokesperson Sabrina Singh has said they are not U.S. military drones.

In a joint statement issued Thursday afternoon, the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security said they and their federal partners, in close coordination with the New Jersey State Police, "continue to deploy personnel and technology to investigate this situation and confirm whether the reported drone flights are actually drones or are instead manned aircraft or otherwise inaccurate sightings."

The agencies said they have not corroborated any of the reported sightings with electronic detection, and that reviews of available images appear to show many of the reported drones are actually manned aircraft.

"There are no reported or confirmed drone sightings in any restricted air space," according to the statement.

The drones appear to avoid detection by traditional methods such as helicopter and radio, according to a state lawmaker briefed Wednesday by the Department of Homeland Security.

The number of sightings has increased in recent days, though officials say many of the objects seen may have been planes rather than drones. It's also possible that a single drone has been reported more than once.

The worry stems partly from the flying objects initially being spotted near the Picatinny Arsenal, a U.S. military research and manufacturing facility, and over President-elect Donald Trump's golf course in Bedminster.

In a post on the social media platform X, Assemblywoman Dawn Fantasia described the drones as up to 6 feet (1.8 meters) in diameter and sometimes traveling with their lights switched off.

Drones are legal in New Jersey for recreational and commercial use but are subject to local and Federal Aviation Administration regulations and flight restrictions. Operators must be FAA certified.

Most, but not all, of the drones spotted in New Jersey appeared to be larger than those typically used by hobbyists.

Sen. Cory Booker of New Jersey said he was frustrated by the lack of transparency, saying it could help spread fear and misinformation.

"We should know what's going on over our skies," he said Thursday.

John Duesler, president of the Pennsylvania Drone Association, said witnesses may be confused about what they are seeing, especially in the dark, and noted it's hard to know the size of the drones or how close they might be.

"There are certainly big drones, such as agricultural drones, but typically they are not the type you see flying around in urban or suburban spaces," Duesler said Thursday.

Duesler said the drones — and those flying them — likely cannot evade detection.

"They will leave a radio frequency footprint, they all leave a signature," he said. "We will find out what kind of drones they were, who was flying them and where they were flying them."

Fantasia, a Morris County Republican, was among several lawmakers who met with state police and Homeland Security officials to discuss the sightings from the New York City area across New Jersey and westward into parts of Pennsylvania, including over Philadelphia. It is unknown at this time whether the sightings are related.

Duesler said the public wants to know what's going on.

"I hope (the government agencies) will come out with more information about this to ease our fears. But this could just be the acts of rogue drone operators, it's not an 'invasion' as some reports have called it," Duesler said. "I am concerned about this it but not alarmed by it."

Justice Department, Louisville reach deal after probe prompted by Breonna Taylor killing

By DYLAN LOVAN and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — The U.S. Justice Department and the city of Louisville have reached an agreement to reform the city's police force after an investigation prompted by the fatal police shooting of Breonna Taylor and police treatment of protesters, officials said Thursday.

The consent decree, which must be approved by a judge, follows a federal investigation that found Louisville police have engaged in a pattern of violating constitutional rights and discrimination against the Black community.

Louisville Mayor Craig Greenberg said the consent decree "builds upon and accelerates the transformational reform of community policing" in Louisville. He noted that "significant improvements" have already been implemented since Taylor's death in March 2020. That includes a city law banning the use of "no-knock" warrants, which were commonly used in late-night drug raids.

Taylor, a 26-year-old Black woman, was roused from her bed by police who came through the door using a battering ram after midnight on March 13, 2020. Three officers fired shots after Taylor's boyfriend, saying he feared an intruder, shot an officer in the leg. Taylor was struck several times and died in her hallway.

Taylor's mother, Tamika Palmer, attended the announcement but said she wants to see more action, not words, by city officials.

"We have a history of putting things on paper and not moving the needle, so we have to stay on top of the situation and definitely make sure they are doing what they say they are doing," said Palmer, who was awarded a \$12 million wrongful death settlement by the city in 2020.

The city's police department has undergone a half-dozen leadership changes since Taylor's death.

The newest chief, Paul Humphrey, a longtime veteran of Louisville police, said Thursday that the U.S. Justice officials are "not making decisions for the city of Louisville," but he applauded the agreement with the federal government.

"I believe that having an independent monitor gives us an opportunity to have the excellence of our work confirmed for the community," Humphrey said. "This has to be more than just words on a page. It is a promise to our officers and our professional staff that we are going to lead them and support them the right way."

The Justice Department report released in March 2023 said the Louisville police department "discriminates against Black people in its enforcement activities," uses excessive force and conducts searches based on invalid warrants. It also said the department violates the rights of people engaged in protests.

"This conduct harmed community members and undermined public trust in law enforcement that is essential for public safety," said Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke, who leads the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division. "This consent decree marks a new day for Louisville."

Once the consent decree is agreed upon, a federal officer will monitor the progress made by the city.

The agreement requires Louisville police to revise its use of force policies; ensure traffic stops and searches are constitutional and not based on race; and improve the department's response to public demonstrations that are critical of policing, among other initiatives.

The Justice Department under the Biden administration opened 12 civil rights investigations into law enforcement agencies, but this is the first that has reached a consent decree. The Justice Department and the city of Springfield, Massachusetts, announced an agreement in 2022 but the investigation into that police department was opened under President Donald Trump's first administration.

City officials in Memphis have taken a different approach, pushing against the need for a Justice Department consent decree to enact reforms in light of a federal investigation launched after Tyre Nichols' killing that found Memphis officers routinely use unwarranted force and disproportionately target Black people. Memphis officials have not ruled eventually agreeing to a consent decree, but have said the city can make changes more effectively without committing to a binding pact.

It remains to be seen what will happen to attempts to reach such agreements between cities and the

Justice Department once President-elect Trump returns to the White House. 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.

Drone operators worry that anxiety over mystery sightings will lead to new restrictions

By DAVID KOENIG Associated Press

Drones for commercial and recreational use have grown rapidly in popularity, despite restrictions on who can operate them and where they can be flown.

No-fly zones are enforced around airports, military installations, nuclear plants, certain landmarks including the Statue of Liberty, and sports stadiums during games.

Not everybody follows the rules. Sightings at airports have shut down flights in a few instances.

Reported sightings of what appear to be drones flying over New Jersey at night in recent weeks have created anxiety among some residents, in part because it is not clear who is operating them or why. Some state and local officials have called for stricter rules to govern drones.

After receiving reports of drone activity last month near Morris County, New Jersey, the Federal Aviation Administration issued temporary bans on drone flights over a golf course in Bedminster, New Jersey, that is owned by President-elect Donald Trump, and over Picatinny Arsenal Military Base. The FAA says the bans are in response to requests from "federal security partners."

Who regulates drones?

The FAA is responsible for the regulations governing their use, and Congress has written some requirements into law.

Who enforces the rules?

With a 2018 law, the Preventing Emerging Threats Act, Congress gave certain agencies in the Homeland Security and Justice departments authority to counter threats from unmanned aircraft to protect the safety of certain facilities.

New drones must be outfitted with equipment allowing law enforcement to identify the operator, and Congress gave the agencies the power to detect and take down unmanned aircraft that they consider dangerous.

The law spells out where the counter-drone measures can be used, including "national special security events" such as presidential inaugurations and other large gatherings of people.

What does it take to become a drone pilot?

To get a "remote pilot certificate," you must be at least 16 years old, be proficient in English, pass an aeronautics exam, and not suffer from a "mental condition that would interfere with the safe operation of a small unmanned aircraft system."

Are drones allowed to fly at night?

Yes, but the FAA imposes restrictions on nighttime operations. Most drones are not allowed to fly at night unless they are equipped with anti-collision lights that are visible for at least 3 miles (4.8 kilometers).

Are drones a hazard?

Over the past decade, pilots have reported hundreds of close calls between drones and airplanes including airline jets. In some cases, airplane pilots have had to take evasive action to avoid collisions.

Drones buzzing over a runway caused flights to be stopped at London's Gatwick Airport during the Christmas travel rush in 2018 and again in May 2023. Police dismissed the idea of shooting down the drones, fearing that stray bullets could kill someone.

Advances in drone technology have made it harder for law enforcement to find rogue drone operators — bigger drones in particular have more range and power.

Will drone rules get tougher?

Some state and local officials in New Jersey are calling for stronger restrictions because of the recent sightings, and that has the drone industry worried.

Scott Shtofman, director of government affairs at the Association for Uncrewed Vehicle Systems International, said putting more limits on drones could have a "chilling effect" on "a growing economic engine for the United States."

"We would definitely oppose anything that is blindly pushing for new regulation of what are right now legal drone operations," he said.

AirSight, a company that sells software against "drone threats," says more than 20 states have enacted laws against privacy invasion by drones, including Peeping Toms.

Will Austin, president of Warren County Community College in New Jersey, and founder of its drone program, says it's up to users to reduce public concern about the machines. He said operators must explain why they are flying when confronted by people worried about privacy or safety.

"It's a brand new technology that's not really understood real well, so it will raise fear and anxiety in a lot of people," Austin said. "We want to be good professional aviators and alleviate that."

Police say suspect in UnitedHealthcare CEO killing wasn't a client of the insurer

NEW YORK (AP) — The man charged with killing UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson was not a client of the medical insurer and may have targeted it because of its size and influence, a senior police official said Thursday.

NYPD Chief of Detectives Joseph Kenny told NBC New York in an interview Thursday that investigators have uncovered evidence that Luigi Mangione had prior knowledge UnitedHealthcare was holding its annual investor conference in New York City.

Mangione also mentioned the company in a note found in his possession when he was detained by police in Pennsylvania.

"We have no indication that he was ever a client of United Healthcare, but he does make mention that it is the fifth largest corporation in America, which would make it the largest healthcare organization in America. So that's possibly why he targeted that company," said Kenny.

UnitedHealthcare is in the top 20 largest U.S. companies by market capitalization but is not the fifth largest. It is the largest U.S. health insurer.

Mangione remains jailed without bail in Pennsylvania, where he was arrested Monday after being spotted at a McDonald's in the city of Altoona, about 230 miles (about 370 kilometers) west of New York City. His lawyer there, Thomas Dickey, has said Mangione intends to plead not guilty. Dickey also said he has yet to see evidence decisively linking his client to the crime.

Mangione's arrest came five days after the caught-on-camera killing of Thompson outside a Manhattan hotel.

Police say the shooter waited outside the hotel, where the health insurer was holding its investor conference, early on the morning of Dec. 4. He approached Thompson from behind and shot him before fleeing on a bicycle through Central Park.

Mangione is fighting attempts to extradite him back to New York so that he can face a murder charge in Thompson's killing. A hearing has been scheduled for Dec. 30.

The 26-year-old, who police say was found with a "ghost gun" matching shell casings found at the site of the shooting, is charged in Pennsylvania with possession of an unlicensed firearm, forgery and providing false identification to police.

Mangione is an Ivy League graduate from a prominent Maryland real estate family. In posts on social media, Mangione wrote about experiencing severe chronic back pain before undergoing a spinal fusion surgery in 2023. Afterward, he posted that the operation had been a success and that his pain had improved and mobility returned. He urged others to consider the same type of surgery.

On Wednesday, police said investigators are looking at his writings about his health problems and his criticism of corporate America and the U.S. health care system.

Kenny said in the NBC interview that Mangione's family reported him missing to San Francisco authorities in November.

Bill Belichick 'always wanted' to give college coaching a try. Now he will at North Carolina

By AARON BEARD AP Sports Writer

Bill Belichick had just been introduced Thursday as North Carolina's next football coach when chancellor Lee Roberts came armed with a gift: a short-sleeved gray hoodie — a bit of a trademark from Belichick's NFL coaching days — bearing a blue interlocking "NC" logo.

It was the visual confirmation, which will take some getting used to, that the six-time Super Bowl-winning head coach whose name became synonymous with NFL success has taken an unexpected first dive into college coaching. He now leads a program at a school with a national name brand but one that has been unable to sustain fleeting pockets of high-level success when it comes to football.

"I've always wanted to coach in college football," Belichick said during his introductory campus news conference. "It just never really worked out. Had some good years in the NFL, so that was OK. But this is really kind of a dream come true."

Belichick, who met with his new team before the media, certainly seemed at ease Thursday. He bypassed the terse and grumpy responses he became known for during his time with the Patriots — something he joked about as his news conference "aura" during Monday's appearance on ESPN's "The Pat McAfee Show." Instead, he came with a grin and quips, starting when he walked into the room and scanned the large crowd of reporters, former players and others with university ties.

"Big crowd," he said lowly to Roberts, then scanned the room with a smile before taking his seat.

And it was, along with the magnitude of a hire that had seized a national spotlight that typically falls on UNC more for its tradition-rich blueblood basketball program.

The school's trustees approved terms of the five-year deal earlier Thursday, followed by the governors of the state's public university system after the news conference. The deal pays Belichick \$10 million in base and supplemental salary per year — though it is guaranteed only for the first three years, including for buyout purposes — and there is also up to \$3.5 million in annual bonuses.

As for the buyout if Belichick leaves, there's a \$10 million fee if done before June 2025, which would discourage an unexpected jump to an NFL opening before next season, and then \$1 million after that date.

There are also estimates for the school to allocate \$10 million for assistant coaching salaries, \$1 million for strength-and-conditioning staff, \$5.3 million for support staff such as general manager, and \$13 million in eventual revenue sharing to athletes.

"I do think football is the economic driver in college sports, and we need to be really good in football to continue to remain relevant on a national basis," UNC athletic director Bubba Cunningham said after the news conference. "We're there in basketball, we're there in a lot of our Olympic sports. But we need to make sure our football program is elite."

"I think this demonstrates our commitment to it. Now the performance is going to demonstrate whether or not we can do it."

Belichick arrived wearing a dark suit, a light blue dress shirt and a tie bearing a white-and-light-blue pattern. He sat between Roberts and Cunningham, who paid his own tribute by donning a suit jacket with the sleeves cut off to mimic Belichick's cut-off sideline look.

"I'm here to, as Bubba said, teach, develop and build a program in the way that I believe in," Belichick said.

Moving on from the 73-year-old Mack Brown to hire the 72-year-old Belichick means UNC is turning to a coach who has never worked at the college level, yet had incredible success in the NFL alongside quarterback Tom Brady throughout most of his 24-year tenure with the Patriots, which ended last season.

Belichick holds 333 career regular-season and postseason wins in the NFL, trailing only Don Shula's 347 for the NFL record, while his 31 playoff wins are the most in league history.

He had been linked to NFL jobs in the time since his departure from the Patriots, notably the Atlanta Falcons in January. And he had seemingly settled into the media world, including appearances on former NFL quarterbacks Peyton and Eli Manning's "Manningcast" broadcasts during Monday Night Football as

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well as appearances on McAfee's show.

That's why word of Belichick's conversations with UNC — first reported by Inside Carolina and confirmed by the AP last week — stirred such surprise as an unexpected and unconventional candidate.

There's also at least a small family tie to the UNC program for Belichick; his late father, Steve, was an assistant coach for the Tar Heels from 1953-55. Belichick offered a nod to that by pulling out a white school sweatshirt of his father's during the news conference.

When asked about fan concerns that he might leave quickly for the next NFL job, Belichick said: "I didn't come here to leave."

And when asked how long he might want to keep coaching, he was quick with a quip.

"It beats working," Belichick said, drawing chuckles. My dad told me this: when you love what you do, it's not work. I love what I do. I love coaching."

He's arriving on campus at a time of rapid changes in college athletics, from free player movement through the transfer portal and athletes' ability to cash in on endorsements to the looming arrival of revenue sharing. And he's taking over a program that for a school with a national name-brand that has never sustained elite football success in its long history.

Belichick said his staff, both in coaching and support, would certainly have a "strong presence of NFL people." Interim Tar Heels coach Freddie Kitchens is an example; Belichick said he intends to retain the former Cleveland Browns head coach on his staff.

Another is Michael Lombardi, a former NFL general manager and executive who is leaving a media job to become UNC's GM. Lombardi attended Thursday's news conference.

"To work again with Belichick is probably another dream come true," Lombardi said. "We had success in Cleveland, we had success together in New England, and it feels right to work that way. And I love building football teams."

Israeli strike in Gaza kills 25 people as US makes new push for a ceasefire

By WAFAA SHURAFU Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — An Israeli airstrike hit the central Gaza Strip on Thursday, killing at least 25 Palestinians and wounding dozens more, Palestinian medics said, as U.S. President Joe Biden's two top national security officials were in the region making a renewed push for an Israel-Hamas ceasefire.

The strike on a multistory residential building in the Nuseirat refugee camp was just the latest in a series of Israeli attacks throughout Gaza that killed at least 54 Palestinians since late Wednesday night.

Palestinian officials at two of Gaza's remaining medical centers, Al-Awda Hospital in the north and Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the center, reported together receiving 25 bodies from the Nuseirat strike — which also wounded 40 people, most of them children.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military on the deadly strike. Israel is trying to eliminate Hamas, which led the attack on southern Israel in October 2023 that sparked the war in Gaza. The Israeli military says Hamas militants hide among Gaza's civilian population.

The U.N. General Assembly's member nations approved a new resolution this week demanding an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding, although they do reflect world opinion — the vote Wednesday was 158-9, with 13 abstentions.

Israel strikes all across Gaza

Photos from the scene in Nuseirat sent to journalists showed a completely collapsed building with people walking through its mangled and charred remains, smoke rising from piles of belongings strewn over the rubble. Palestinian rescuers were searching for more bodies trapped beneath the rubble.

The strikes Thursday evening came as Palestinian medics were still surveying the morning's deadly toll of fierce Israeli attacks, including on Nuseirat camp. Palestinian medical officials had reported at least 28 people killed earlier in the day, including seven children and a woman. One of the strikes flattened a house in Nuseirat, according to Al-Aqsa Hospital in the nearby city of Deir al-Balah, where the bodies were taken.

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Two other strikes killed 15 men who were part of local aid coordination committees set up by displaced Palestinians and the Hamas-run Interior Ministry, according to health officials at Nasser Hospital in the southern city of Khan Younis. Eight of the men were killed in an attack near the southern border town of Rafah and the remaining seven were killed by a strike in Khan Younis.

The committees aim to establish secure aid convoys, which often face challenges such as looting, hoarding and profiteering in their efforts to deliver humanitarian supplies to Palestinians facing the risk of famine.

Israel says it allows enough aid to enter and blames U.N. agencies for not distributing it. The U.N. says Israeli restrictions, and the breakdown of law and order after Israel repeatedly targeted the Hamas-run police force, make it extremely difficult to operate in the territory.

In Gaza's isolated and devastated north, Awda Hospital said an orthopedic doctor, Saeed Jouda, was shot in the head and killed Thursday morning. The Health Ministry said the doctor was killed by an armed quadcopter drone as he was traveling from Kamal Adwan Hospital to treat patients at Awda Hospital.

The two medical facilities are in northern towns where Israel has waged a blistering offensive against Hamas militants since early October, allowing in almost no humanitarian aid and ordering tens of thousands to flee to nearby Gaza City. Experts have warned that the north may be experiencing famine.

Biden administration makes final push for a Gaza ceasefire

The latest bombardment came as Jake Sullivan, the White House national security adviser, was holding official meetings in Israel as signs emerge that long-stalled negotiations between Israel and Hamas could regain momentum. On Thursday, Sullivan revived hopes for a deal, telling reporters in Jerusalem that Israel's ceasefire in Lebanon has helped clear the way for another deal to end the war in Gaza.

Sullivan plans to travel next to Qatar and Egypt, key mediators in the ceasefire talks, as the Biden administration makes a final push on negotiations before Donald Trump is inaugurated.

Sullivan said "Hamas' posture at the negotiating table did adapt" after Israel decimated the leadership of its ally Hezbollah in Lebanon and reached a ceasefire there. "We believe it puts us in a position to close this negotiation," he said.

Last month, the U.S. vetoes a Security Council resolution demanding an immediate Gaza ceasefire, objecting that the resolution did not link the truce to an immediate release of hostages taken by Hamas. The council's 14 other members supported the resolution.

The 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 44,800 Palestinians in Gaza, more than half of them 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.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu faces an international arrest warrant for alleged war crimes in the war in Gaza. The International Criminal Court found there were reasonable grounds to believe that Netanyahu and his former defense minister bear responsibility for the war crime of starvation and the crimes against humanity of murder, persecution and other inhumane acts.

China's Xi is likely to decline Trump's inauguration invitation, seeing it as too risky to attend

By DIDI TANG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Chinese leader Xi Jinping would likely see President-elect Donald Trump's invitation to attend his inauguration as too risky to accept, and the gesture from Trump may have little bearing on the increasingly competitive ties between the two nations as the White House changes hands, experts say.

Trump's incoming press secretary, Karoline Leavitt, confirmed on Thursday that Trump extended an invitation to the Jan. 20 ceremony. The Chinese Embassy in Washington said it had no information to provide. But experts don't see Xi coming to Washington next month.

Why wouldn't Xi attend?

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"Can you imagine Xi Jinping sitting outdoors in Washington, D.C., in January at the feet of the podium, surrounded by hawkish members of Congress, gazing up at Donald Trump as he delivers his inaugural address?" said Danny Russel, who previously served as assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs.

Russel, now vice president for international security and diplomacy at the Asia Society Policy Institute, said Xi would not allow himself to "be reduced to the status of a mere guest celebrating the triumph of a foreign leader — the U.S. president, no less."

Yun Sun, director of the China program at the Stimson Center, a Washington-based think tank, said Beijing will play it safe when there's no protocol or precedent for a Chinese leader to attend the inauguration of a U.S. president.

"I don't think the Chinese will take the risk," Sun said. There could be risks in the guest list, for example, Sun said, noting that Taiwan's top diplomat in the U.S. attended the swearing-in of President Joe Biden in 2021. Beijing considers Taiwan to be Chinese territory and has repeatedly warned the U.S. that it is a red line not to be crossed.

Should Trump slap tariffs as high as 60% on Chinese goods upon taking office as he's threatened, Xi would look like a fool if he had chosen to attend, and that's unacceptable to Beijing, Sun said.

Rather, Chinese officials are known for their obsession with the dignity and security of their leader when traveling abroad, said Russel, who has negotiated high-level summits with the Chinese. "They have always demanded that any leader trip to Washington be treated as a full 'state visit' with all the bells and whistles," Russel said.

What's ahead for U.S.-China relations?

But it should be expected that planning is underway for Trump and Xi to meet in person soon, Russel said. Trump prefers in-person meetings with foreign leaders, especially key adversaries, and Beijing might believe it can get a better deal by dealing directly with Trump, Russel said.

Trump's return to the White House is expected to further intensify the U.S.-China rivalry. He has picked several China hawks for his Cabinet, including Sen. Marco Rubio as the secretary of state and Rep. Mike Waltz as the national security adviser.

Beijing has adopted a "wait-and-see" approach but says it is prepared to hit back should Washington raise tariffs on Chinese goods or make other unfriendly moves.

Sun of the Stimson Center cautions that Trump's invitation does not exclude hostile policies toward China. Trump visited China in 2017 and "played nice," but the following year he launched the trade war, she said.

"We've seen this before," Sun said. "For Trump, there's no contradiction between carrot and stick. For China, that's a contradiction. It will add to China's desire to play safe, not to be played by Trump, whether it is a friendly or a hostile message."

Highlights from Trump's interview with Time magazine

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump was on the verge of backing a 16-week federal abortion ban earlier this year when aides staged an intervention.

According to Time magazine's cover story on his selection as its 2024 Person of the Year, Trump's aides first raised concerns in mid-March that the abortion cutoff being pushed by some allies would be stricter than existing law in numerous states. It was seen as a potential political liability amid ongoing fallout over the overturning of Roe v. Wade by a conservative majority on the Supreme Court that includes three justices nominated by Trump in his first term.

Trump political director James Blair went to work assembling a slide deck — eventually titled "How a national abortion ban will cost Trump the election" — that argued a 16-week ban would hurt the Republican candidate in the battleground states of Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin, the magazine reported.

"After flipping through Blair's presentation" on a flight to a rally in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in April, Trump dropped the idea, according to the report. "So we leave it to the states, right?" Trump was quoted as

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saying. He soon released a video articulating that position.

At the time, Trump's campaign denied that he was considering supporting the 16-week ban, calling it "fake news" and saying Trump planned to "negotiate a deal" on abortion if elected to the White House.

Here are other highlights from the story and the president-elect's 65-minute interview with the magazine: Jan. 6 pardons could start in the 'first nine minutes'

Trump reaffirmed his plans to pardon most of those convicted for their actions during the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol. "It's going to start in the first hour," he said of the pardons. "Maybe the first nine minutes."

Trump said he would look at individuals on a "case-by-case" basis, but that "a vast majority of them should not be in jail."

More than 1,500 people have been charged with federal crimes stemming from the riot that left more than 100 police officers injured and sent lawmakers running into hiding as they met to certify Democrat Joe Biden's 2020 victory. More than 1,000 defendants have pleaded guilty or been convicted at trial of charges, including misdemeanor trespassing offenses, assaulting police officers and seditious conspiracy.

Trump is open to holding detained migrants in camps

Trump insisted he has the authority to use the military to assist with his promised mass deportations, even though, as his interviewers noted, the Posse Comitatus Act prohibits the use of the military in domestic law enforcement.

"It doesn't stop the military if it's an invasion of our country, and I consider it an invasion of our country," he said. "I'll only do what the law allows, but I will go up to the maximum level of what the law allows. And I think in many cases, the sheriffs and law enforcement is going to need help."

Trump did not deny that camps would be needed to hold detained migrants as they are processed for deportation.

"Whatever it takes to get them out. I don't care," he said. "I hope we're not going to need too many because I want to get them out and I don't want them sitting in camp for the next 20 years."

Trump told Time he does not plan to restore the policy of separating children from their families to deter border crossings, but he did not rule it out. The practice led to thousands of children being separated from their parents and was condemned around the globe as inhumane.

"I don't believe we'll have to because we will send the whole family back," he said. "I would much rather deport them together, yes, than separate."

Musk prioritizes the country over his business interests, Trump insists

Trump dismissed the idea that Elon Musk will face conflicts of interest as he takes the helm of the Department of Government Efficiency, an advisory group that Trump has selected him to lead. The panel is supposed to find waste and cut regulations, including many that could affect Musk's wide-ranging interests, which include electric cars, rockets and telecommunications.

"I don't think so," Trump said. "I think that Elon puts the country long before his company. ... He considers this to be his most important project."

Trump acknowledges the difficulty of lowering grocery prices

Trump lowered expectations about his ability to drive down grocery prices.

"I'd like to bring them down. It's hard to bring things down once they're up. You know, it's very hard. But I think that they will," he said.

Trump plans 'virtual closure' of the Education Department

Trump said he is planning "a virtual closure" of the "Department of Education in Washington."

"You're going to need some people just to make sure they're teaching English in the schools," he said. "But we want to move education back to the states."

Yet Trump has proposed exerting enormous influence over schools. He has threatened to cut funding for schools with vaccine mandates while forcing them to "teach students to love their country" and promote "the nuclear family," including "the roles of mothers and fathers" and the "things that make men and women different and unique."

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Trump offers conflicting answers on future of abortion pills

Asked to clarify whether he was committed to preventing the Food and Drug Administration from stripping access to abortion pills, Trump replied, "It's always been my commitment."

But Trump has offered numerous conflicting stances on the issue, including to Time.

Earlier in the interview, he was asked whether he would promise that his FDA would not do anything to limit access to medication abortion or abortion pills. "We're going to take a look at all of that," he said, before calling the prospect "very unlikely."

"Look, I've stated it very clearly and I just stated it again very clearly. I think it would be highly unlikely. I can't imagine, but with, you know, we're looking at everything, but highly unlikely. I guess I could say probably as close to ruling it out as possible, but I don't want to. I don't want to do anything now."

Trump says US support for Ukraine will be leverage for a deal with Russia

Pressed on whether he would abandon Ukraine in its efforts to stave off Russia's invasion, Trump said he would use U.S. support for Kyiv as leverage against Moscow in negotiating an end to the war.

"I want to reach an agreement," he said, "and the only way you're going to reach an agreement is not to abandon."

Does he trust Netanyahu? 'I don't trust anybody'

Trump would not commit to supporting a two-state solution, with a Palestinian state alongside Israel, as he had previously.

"I support whatever solution we can do to get peace," he said. "There are other ideas other than two state, but I support whatever, whatever is necessary to get not just peace, a lasting peace. It can't go on where every five years you end up in tragedy. There are other alternatives."

Asked whether he trusted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, he told Time: "I don't trust anybody."

War with Iran? 'Anything can happen,' he says

Trump would not rule out the possibility of war with Iran during his second term. "Anything can happen. It's a very volatile situation," he said.

Trump mum on conversations with Putin

Asked if he has spoken to Russian President Vladimir Putin since the Nov. 5 election, Trump continued to play coy: "I can't tell you. It's just inappropriate."

Trump insists he had the votes to confirm Gaetz as attorney general

Trump insisted that his bid to install Matt Gaetz as attorney general "wasn't blocked. I had the votes (in the Senate) if I needed them, but I had to work very hard."

When the scope of resistance to the former Republican congressman from Florida became clear, Trump said, "I talked to him, and I said, 'You know, Matt, I don't think this is worth the fight.'"

Gaetz pulled out amid scrutiny over sex trafficking allegations, and Trump tapped former Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi for the Cabinet post.

Trump is open to changes for childhood vaccines

Trump, who has named anti-vaccine activist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to lead the Department of Health and Human Services, did not rule out the possibility of eliminating some childhood vaccinations even though they have been proved safe in extensive studies and real world use in hundreds of millions of people over decades and are considered among the most effective public health measures in modern history.

Pressed on whether "getting rid of some vaccinations" — neither Trump nor the interviewers specified which ones — might be part of the plan to improve the health of the country, Trump responded: "It could if I think it's dangerous, if I think they are not beneficial, but I don't think it's going to be very controversial in the end."

Trump weighs in on family political dynasty

"I think there could be, yeah," Trump said of the prospect of others in his family continuing in his footsteps.

He pointed to daughter-in-law Lara Trump, who served as co-chair of the Republican National Committee and is now being talked about as a potential replacement for Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, whom Trump has chosen for secretary of state.

Melania Trump will return to the White House, he says

Trump said the former and soon-to-be first lady Melania Trump will be joining him at the White House during second term and will "be active, when she needs to be."

"Oh yes," he said. "She's very beloved by the people, Melania. And they like the fact that she's not out there in your face all the time for many reasons."

Companies tighten security after a health care CEO's killing leads to a surge of threats

By DEVNA BOSE and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

"Wanted" posters with the names and faces of health care executives have been popping up on the streets of New York. Hit lists with images of bullets are circulating online with warnings that industry leaders should be afraid.

The apparent targeted killing of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson and the menacing threats that followed have sent a shudder through corporate America and the health care industry in particular, leading to increased security for executives and some workers.

In the week since the brazen shooting, health insurers have removed information about their top executives from company websites, canceled in-person meetings with shareholders and advised all employees to work from home temporarily.

An internal New York Police Department bulletin warned this week that the online vitriol that followed the shooting could signal an immediate "elevated threat."

Police fear that the Dec. 4 shooting could "inspire a variety of extremists and grievance-driven malicious actors to violence," according to the bulletin, which was obtained by The Associated Press.

"Wanted" posters pasted to parking meters and construction site fences in Manhattan included photos of health care executives and the words "Deny, defend, depose" — similar to a phrase scrawled on bullets found near Thompson's body and echoing those used by insurance industry critics.

Thompson's wife, Paulette, told NBC News last week that he told her some people had been threatening him and suggested the threats may have involved issues with insurance coverage.

Investigators believe the shooting suspect, Luigi Mangione, may have been motivated by hostility toward health insurers. They are studying his writings about a previous back injury, and his disdain for corporate America and the U.S. health care system.

Mangione's lawyer has cautioned against prejudging the case. Mangione, 26, has remained jailed in Pennsylvania, where he was arrested Monday. Manhattan prosecutors are working to bring him to New York to face a murder charge.

UnitedHealthcare's parent company, UnitedHealth Group, said this week it was working with law enforcement to ensure a safe work environment and to reinforce security guidelines and building access policies, a spokesperson said.

The company has taken down photos, names and biographies for its top executives from its websites, a spokesperson said. Other organizations, including CVS, the parent company for insurance giant Aetna, have taken similar actions.

Government health insurance provider Centene Corp. has announced that its investor day will be held online, rather than in-person as originally planned. Medica, a Minnesota-based nonprofit health care firm, said last week it was temporarily closing its six offices for security reasons and would have its employees work from home.

Heightened security measures likely will make health care companies and their leaders more inaccessible to their policyholders, said former Cigna executive Wendell Potter.

"And understandably so, with this act of violence. There's no assurance that this won't happen again," said Potter, who's now an advocate for health care reform.

Private security firms and consultants have been in high demand, fielding calls almost immediately after the shooting from companies across a range of industries, including manufacturing and finance.

Companies have long faced security risks and grappled with how far to take precautions for high-profile

executives. But these recent threats sparked by Thompson's killing should not be ignored, said Dave Komendat, a former security chief for Boeing who now heads his own risk-management company.

"The tone and tenor is different. The social reaction to this tragedy is different. And so I think that people need to take this seriously," Komendat said.

Just over a quarter of the companies in the Fortune 500 reported spending money to protect their CEOs and top executives. Of those, the median payment for personal security doubled over the last three years to just under \$100,000.

Hours after the shooting, Komendat was on a call with dozens of chief security officers from big corporations, and there have been many similar meetings since, hosted by security groups or law enforcement agencies assessing the threats, he said.

"It just takes one person who is motivated by a poster — who may have experienced something in their life through one of these companies that was harmful," Komendat said.

Head of the Federal Aviation Administration to resign, allowing Trump to pick his successor

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

The head of the Federal Aviation Administration, who has led a tougher enforcement policy against Boeing since a panel blew off a jetliner in January, said Thursday that he will step down next month, clearing the way for President-elect Donald Trump to name his choice to lead the agency.

Mike Whitaker announced his pending resignation in a message to employees of the FAA, which regulates airlines and aircraft manufacturers and manages the nation's airspace. He became the agency's administrator in October 2023.

Since then, the challenges confronting Whitaker have included a surge in close calls between planes, a need for stricter oversight of Boeing's antiquated equipment and a shortage of air traffic controllers at a time of high consumer demand for air travel.

"The United States is the safest and most complex airspace in the world, and that is because of your commitment to the safety of the flying public," Whitaker said in the message to employees. "This has been the best and most challenging job of my career, and I wanted you to hear directly from me that my tenure will come to a close on January 20, 2025."

Whitaker took the helm of the FAA after the Senate, which is frequently divided along partisan lines, voted 98-0 last year to confirm his selection by President Joe Biden. The agency had been without a Senate-confirmed chief for nearly 19 months, and a previous Biden nominee withdrew in the face of Republican opposition.

FAA administrators — who hold a job that has long been seen as nonpartisan — generally serve for five years, but that has not happened recently. Whitaker's predecessor, Stephen Dickson, also stepped down early before fulfilling his term.

Whitaker worked as a lawyer for TWA and spent 15 years at United Airlines, where he oversaw international and regulatory affairs. He served as deputy FAA administrator during the Obama administration, and later as an executive for an air taxi company.

Less than three months into his tenure leading the FAA, a Boeing 737 Max lost a door-plug panel during an Alaska Airlines flight over Oregon, renewing safety concerns about the plane and the company. Whitaker grounded similar models and required Boeing to submit a plan for improving manufacturing quality and safety.

Whitaker said the FAA's oversight of Boeing had been "too hands-off — too focused on paperwork audits and not focused enough on inspections."

In August, the FAA said it had doubled its enforcement cases against Boeing since the January door-plug blowout.

Senators from both parties praised Whitaker on Thursday before a hearing on the FAA's air traffic control

system, which has been plagued by a shortage of controllers and old equipment. A computer system that offers safety information to pilots failed in January 2023, causing more than 1,300 flight cancellations and thousands of delays in a single day.

Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, who led the opposition to Biden's first pick to lead FAA, said the unanimous confirmation vote for Whitaker was a "testament to his experience, his judgement and his apolitical nature. He has ably led the agency during a challenging period."

Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., who heads the Senate aviation subcommittee, said Whitaker's oversight of Boeing has been essential. "Our aviation system is safer because of his service," she said.

Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., chair of the Senate Commerce Committee, which will consider Trump's nominee to replace Whitaker, said the successor "needs to be ready on day one to continue the job of restoring the FAA's safety culture and providing real oversight of the aviation sector."

After Trump was elected president in 2016, he considered his personal pilot for the top FAA job before settling on Dickson, a former Delta Air Lines executive.

Trump's choice this time could be affected by input from Tesla CEO Elon Musk, who has clashed with the FAA for slowing the Starship mega rocket developed by the billionaire's SpaceX company. Musk, a huge campaign donor whom Trump named to lead an attempt to cut the size of government, has accused the FAA of being overly bureaucratic.

Ancient genes pinpoint when humans and Neanderthals mixed and mingled

By ADITHI RAMAKRISHNAN AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Neanderthals and humans likely mixed and mingled during a narrow time frame 45,000 years ago, scientists reported Thursday.

Researchers analyzed ancient genes to pinpoint the time period, which is slightly more recent than previous estimates for the mating.

Modern humans emerged in Africa hundreds of thousands of years ago and eventually spread to Europe, Asia and beyond. Somewhere along the way, they met and mated with Neanderthals, leaving a lasting fingerprint on our genetic code.

Scientists don't know exactly when or how the two groups entangled. But ancient bone fragments and genes are helping scientists figure that out.

"Genetic data from these samples really helps us paint a picture in more and more detail," said study co-author Priya Moorjani at the University of California Berkeley.

The research published Thursday in the journals *Science* and *Nature*.

To pin down the timeline, researchers peeked at some of the oldest human genes from the skull of a woman, called Zlatý kůň or Golden horse for a hill in the Czech Republic where it was found. They also examined bone fragments from an early human population in Ranis, Germany, about 140 miles (230 kilometers) away. They found snippets of Neanderthal DNA that placed the mating at around 45,000 years ago.

In a separate study, researchers tracked signs of Neanderthal in our genetic code over 50,000 years. They found Neanderthal genes related to immunity and metabolism that may have helped early humans survive and thrive outside of Africa.

We still carry Neanderthals' legacy in our DNA. Modern-day genetic quirks linked to skin color, hair color and even nose shape can be traced back to our extinct former neighbors. And our genetic code also contains echoes from another group of extinct human cousins called Denisovans.

Future genetic studies can help scientists detangle exactly what — and who — we're made of, said Rick Potts, director of the Smithsonian's Human Origins program who was not involved with the new research.

"Out of many really compelling areas of scientific investigation, one of them is: well, who are we?" Potts said.

Pressure on a veteran and senator shows what's next for those who oppose Trump

By JILL COLVIN, LISA MASCARO and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — She's an Iraq War combat veteran and sexual assault survivor who has advocated for years to improve how the military handles claims of sexual misconduct.

But when Sen. Joni Ernst, R-Iowa, appeared initially cool to the nomination of President-elect Donald Trump's choice of Pete Hegseth to serve as defense secretary — a man who once said women should not serve in combat and who has himself been accused of sexual assault — she faced an onslaught of criticism from within her own party, including threats of a potential primary challenge in 2026.

"The American people spoke," said Bob Vander Plaats, president and CEO of the Family Leader and a conservative activist in Ernst's home state.

"When you sign up for this job, it's a big boy and big girl job, and she's feeling the pressure of people vocalizing their disappointment, their concern with how she's handling this."

The pressure campaign against Ernst, once a rising member of the GOP leadership, shows there is little room in Trump's party for those who can't get to yes on Hegseth or any of his other picks for his incoming administration.

It underscores the power Trump is expected to wield on Capitol Hill in a second term and serves as a warning to other lawmakers who may be harboring their own concerns about other Trump selections, including Robert F. Kennedy Jr. for health secretary and Tulsi Gabbard to be director of national intelligence.

"If the king wants a different senator from Iowa, we'll have one. If he doesn't, we won't," said Iowa talk show host Steve Deace, suggesting on his show Monday that he would be willing to jump in against Ernst if Trump wanted a challenger. "I think someone's got to be made an example out of, whether it's Joni or someone else."

Ernst's allies say she can handle criticism.

People close to Ernst, a retired Army National Guard lieutenant colonel, stress her mettle and say her eventual decision will depend on her assessment of Hegseth, a former "Fox & Friends Weekend" host and veteran, and nothing else.

"Has there been Twitter pressure? Sure. But Joni's a combat veteran. She's not easily pressured," said David Kochel, an Iowa Republican strategist and longtime Ernst friend and adviser.

Ernst has worked steadily to shore up her relationship with Trump after declining to endorse him before the Iowa caucuses that kicked off this year's campaign for the Republican presidential nomination. During a recent visit to Mar-a-Lago, Trump's Florida club, she met with Trump and billionaire Elon Musk with ideas for their budget-slashing Department of Government Efficiency. She heads up a newly formed DOGE caucus in the Senate.

Trump has not tried personally to pressure Ernst to back Hegseth, according to a person familiar with their conversations who spoke on condition of anonymity to disclose them. And he has not targeted her — or any potential holdouts — publicly in social media posts.

He also hasn't had to.

The response to Ernst built quickly, first in whispers following her initially cool remarks after meeting with Hegseth, then into a pile-on from powerful figures in the "Make America Great Again" movement.

Only about 2 in 10 Americans approve of Hegseth's nomination, according to Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs polling. About one-third of Republicans approve of him as a pick, and 16% disapprove. Another 1 in 10 Republicans, roughly, are neutral and say they neither approve nor disapprove.

Trump allies had been concerned that a successful effort to derail Hegseth's candidacy would empower opposition to other nominees, undermining his projections of complete dominance of the party. In the narrowly held Senate, with a 53-47 GOP majority in the new year, any Trump nominee can only afford a few Republican "no" votes if all Democrats are opposed.

Those piling on included Trump's eldest son, Donald Trump Jr., and conservative activist Charlie Kirk, who warned that Ernst's political career was "in serious jeopardy" and that primary challengers stood at

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the ready.

One social media post from the CEO of The Federalist featured side-by-side photos comparing Ernst to ousted Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., whom Trump recently said deserves to be jailed, along with other members of the House committee that investigated the Capitol riot.

Building America's Future, a conservative nonprofit, announced plans to spend half a million dollars supporting Trump's pick of Hegseth, the Daily Caller first reported. The group has already spent thousands on Facebook and Instagram ads featuring Ernst's photo and is running a commercial urging viewers to call their senators to back him.

Criticism mounted at home, too. Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird, who quickly endeared herself to Trump when she became the highest-ranking state official to endorse him ahead of this year's caucuses, wrote an op-ed for the conservative Breitbart news site that was seen as a not-so-subtle warning.

"What we're witnessing in Washington right now is a Deep State attempt to undermine the will of the people," she wrote.

Local Republican groups also encouraged Iowans to call Ernst's office and urged her to back Trump's picks. While incumbents have particular staying power in Iowa, Trump has a track record of ending the careers of those who cross him.

Trump campaign senior adviser Jason Miller defended the tactics.

"Right now, this is President Trump's party," he said Tuesday at The Wall Street Journal's CEO Council Summit in Washington. "I think voters want to see the president being able to put in his people."

A warning of what is to come

Ernst has gradually appeared to soften on Hegseth. By Monday, after meeting with him once again, she issued a statement saying they had had "encouraging conversations."

Ernst said Hegseth committed "to completing a full audit of the Pentagon" and to hire a senior official who will "prioritize and strengthen my work to prevent sexual assault within the ranks."

"As I support Pete through this process, I look forward to a fair hearing based on truth, not anonymous sources," she said.

But for many Republican senators who have found themselves on the wrong side of Trump, it was hard not to see the campaign against Ernst as a warning.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski, the Alaska Republican who also met with Hegseth this week, said the attacks seemed "a little more intense than usual," while acknowledging that she is "no stranger" to similar MAGA-led campaigns. She was reelected in 2022 after beating a Trump-endorsed challenger.

Murkowski said the potential attacks don't weigh into her decision-making, but added, "I'm sure that it factors into Sen. Ernst's."

IRS recovers \$4.7 billion in back taxes and braces for cuts with Trump and GOP in power

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — IRS leadership on Thursday announced that the agency has recovered \$4.7 billion in back taxes and proceeds from a variety of crimes since the nation's tax collector received a massive glut of funding through Democrats' flagship tax, climate and health law in 2022.

The announcement comes under the backdrop of a promised reckoning from Republicans who will hold a majority over both chambers of the next Congress and have long called for rescinding the tens of billions of dollars in funding provided to the agency by Democrats.

IRS leadership, meanwhile, is hoping to justify saving the funding the agency already has.

On a call with reporters to preview the announcement, IRS Commissioner Danny Werfel said improvements made to the agency during his term will help the incoming administration and new Republican majority congress achieve its goals of administering an extension of the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.

Republicans plan to renew some \$4 trillion in expiring GOP tax cuts, a signature domestic achievement

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of Trump's first term and an issue that may define his return to the White House.

"We know there are serious discussions about a major tax bill coming out of the next Congress," Werfel said, "and with the improvements we've made since I've been here, I'm quite confident the IRS will be well positioned to deliver on whatever new tax law that Congress passes."

Tax collections announced Thursday include \$1.3 billion from high-income taxpayers who did not pay overdue tax debts, \$2.9 billion related to IRS Criminal Investigation work into crimes like drug trafficking and terrorist financing, and \$475 million in proceeds from criminal and civil cases that came from whistleblower information.

The IRS also announced Thursday that it has collected \$292 million from more than 28,000 high-income non-filers who have not filed taxes since 2017, an increase of \$120 million since September.

Despite its gains, the future of the agency's funding is in limbo.

The IRS originally received an \$80 billion infusion of funds under the Inflation Reduction Act though the 2023 debt ceiling and budget-cuts deal between Republicans and the White House resulted in \$1.4 billion rescinded from the agency and a separate agreement to take \$20 billion from the IRS over the next two years and divert those funds to other nondefense programs.

In November, U.S. Treasury officials called on Congress to unlock \$20 billion in IRS enforcement money that is tied up in legislative language that has effectively rendered the money frozen.

The \$20 billion in question is separate from another \$20 billion rescinded from the agency last year. However, the legislative mechanism keeping the government afloat inadvertently duplicated the one-time cut.

Treasury officials warn of dire consequences if the funding is effectively rescinded through inaction.

Trump last week announced plans to nominate former Missouri congressman Billy Long, who worked as an auctioneer before serving six terms in the House of Representatives, to serve as the next commissioner of the IRS. Democrats like Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) have called Long's nomination "a bizarre choice" since Long "jumped into the scam-plagued industry involving the Employee Retention Tax Credit."

Trump said on his social media site that "Taxpayers and the wonderful employees of the IRS will love having Billy at the helm."

Werfel's term is set to end in 2027, and he has not indicated whether he plans to step down from his role before Trump's inauguration. Trump is permitted to fire Werfel under the law.

House passes bill to add 66 new federal judgeships, but prospects murky after Biden veto threat

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — What was once a bipartisan effort to expand by 66 the number of federal district judgeships across the country passed the House of Representatives on Thursday, though prospects for becoming law are murky after Republicans opted to bring the measure to the floor only after President-elect Donald Trump had won a second term.

The legislation spreads out the establishment of the new trial court judgeships over more than a decade to give three presidential administrations and six Congresses the chance to appoint the new judges. It was carefully designed so that lawmakers would not knowingly give an advantage to either political party when it comes to shaping the federal judiciary.

The Senate passed the measure unanimously in August, but the Republican-led House brought it to the floor only after the election results were known. The bill passed by a vote of 236-173 Thursday with the vast majority of Democrats opposed.

The White House said Tuesday that if President Joe Biden were presented with the bill, he would veto it. That likely dooms the bill this Congress, as overruling him would require a two-thirds majority in both the House and Senate. The House vote Thursday fell well short of that.

Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Calif., the sponsor of the House version of the bill, apologized to colleagues "for the hour we're taking for something we should have done before the mid-term elections."

"But we are where we are," Issa said, warning that failure to pass the legislation would lead to a greater

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case backlog that he said is already costing American businesses billions of dollars and forcing prosecutors to take more plea agreements from criminal defendants.

"It would only be pettiness today if we were not to do this because of who got to be first," Issa said.

But Democrats said the agreement central to the bill was broken by GOP leaders because they opted not to bring it up for a vote before the election.

"Unfortunately, we are back where we have always been every time a bill to create new judgeships comes before Congress — with one party seeking a tactical advantage over the other," said Rep. Jerry Nadler, the lead Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee.

Organizations representing judges and attorneys urged Congress to vote yes, regardless of the timing of congressional action. They said that a lack of new federal judgeships has contributed to profound delays in the resolution of cases and serious concerns about access to justice.

"Failure to enact the JUDGES Act will condemn our judicial system to more years of unnecessary delays and will deprive parties in the most impacted districts from obtaining appropriate justice and timely relief under the rule of law," the presidents of the Federal Judges Association and Federal Bar Association said in a joint statement issued before the vote.

The change of heart from some Democrats and the new urgency from House Republicans for considering it underscored the contentious politics that surrounds federal judicial vacancies.

Senate roll-call votes are required for almost every judicial nominee these days, and most votes for the Supreme Court and appellate courts are now decided largely along party lines. Lawmakers are generally hesitant to hand presidents from the opposing party new opportunities to shape the judiciary.

Nadler said the bill would give Trump 25 judicial nominations on top of the 100-plus spots that are expected to open up over the next four years. He said that Trump used his first term to stack the courts with "dangerously unqualified and ideological appointees."

"Giving him more power to appoint additional judges would be irresponsible," Nadler said.

Nadler said he's willing to take up comparable legislation in the years ahead and give the additional judicial appointments to "unknown presidents yet to come," but until then, he was urging colleagues to vote against the bill.

Rep. Troy Nehls, R-Texas, said the bill would create 10 new judges in his state and authorize additional courtroom locations to improve access for rural residents. He said it would reduce case backlogs and ensure the administration of justice in a reasonable time frame.

"Make no mistake folks, the sudden opposition to this bill from my friends on the other side of the aisle is nothing more than childish foot-stomping," Nehls said.

Speaker Mike Johnson said Democrats were "standing in the way of progress, simply because of partisan politics."

"This should not be a political issue," Johnson said. "It should be about prioritizing the needs of the American people and ensuring the courts are able to deliver fair, impartial and timely justice."

But Sen. Dick Durbin, the Democratic chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said he would not try to talk the president out of vetoing the measure. He said acting on the bill made sense when the outcome of the presidential election was unknown, but now it's known, and "it's advantage Republicans."

"The consequence of it is we missed our opportunity," Durbin said.

Congress last authorized a new district judgeship more than 20 years ago, while the number of cases being filed continues to increase with litigants often waiting years for a resolution.

Last year, the policy-making body for the federal court system, the Judicial Conference of the United States, recommended the creation of several new district and court of appeals judgeships to meet increased workload demands in certain courts.

But in its veto threat earlier this week, the White House Office of Management and Budget said the legislation would create new judgeships in states where senators have sought to hold open existing judicial vacancies.

"These efforts to hold open vacancies suggest that concerns about judicial economy and caseload are not the true motivating force behind passage of the law," the White House said.

Working Well: When holidays present rude customers, taking breaks and the high road preserve peace

By CATHY BUSSEWITZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The December holidays are supposed to be a time of joyful celebration, but the season can be especially grueling for the millions of people who work in retail stores, staff airline counters and field complaints coming into call centers.

Instead of compassion or good cheer, service sector workers often encounter rude behavior from frazzled shoppers, irate customers demanding instant satisfaction and travelers fuming about flight delays and cancellations. And they must do their jobs to the mind-numbing soundtrack of nonstop Christmas music.

"Something happens around November and people just forget their manners," Kathryn Harper, senior bookseller at New York bookstore McNally Jackson, said. "Please and thank you go a huge way. Being rude to us or snippy to us is not going to make us go any faster. It's not going to make the thing that's out of stock magically appear."

Harper joined other members of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union last month for a virtual news conference where they made a plea for the public's patience and self-control during the hectic weeks ahead.

"There's a lot of disgruntled attitudes flying around this time of the year," Cynthia Russo, who has worked at Bloomingdale's in Manhattan for nearly two decades, said. "I try to kill them with kindness, but yet I take a firm stand with not being abused verbally, because that can happen and it's sad. My favorite line is, 'Let's start over.'"

Dealing with a difficult person is never easy. These are other strategies that veteran workers use to defuse tense situations and to preserve their own peace of mind.

Schedule sanity

Taking a break for five or 10 minutes can help a worker who got yelled at to reset emotionally. If long lines or other duties don't allow for stepping away in the moment, the rattled employee could ask a colleague to take over temporarily or inform a manager of a need for a brief respite.

Fitting exercise into the day is hard in any line of work, but retail workers put in long hours during the holidays, making it even more challenging. Russo tries to power walk around each floor of Bloomingdale's twice a day.

"I know I look crazy, probably, but I think my coworkers are used to seeing me do it," she said.

At Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, Nicole Ray escorts passengers who need wheelchair assistance safely make it to their planes and back. She feels panicky when there aren't enough wheelchairs or attendants to get the job done during busy periods.

The travelers she helps are kind for the most part, Ray says, but someone treats her with disrespect at least once a day. Such interactions often leave her in tears, she says. With two sons at home and extra side jobs to pay the bills, she has few opportunities to decompress.

If there's time between airport passengers, Ray escapes to a parking garage to breathe and listen to music. She copes with the unpleasant attitudes she comes across by expressing gratitude to friendly patrons, telling them "I really appreciate you being such a joy to be around and not being so hard on me."

Don't take it personally

Staying calm in the face of an irrational customer can be challenging, but remembering that another person's unreasonable demands are not a reflection of you makes it easier to react skillfully.

"You have to understand that if people are impatient or they're not in a good mood, obviously it has nothing to do with you," Tina Minshall, who is general manager at the Bridal and Formal shop in Cincinnati, said. "If you can respond in a pleasant way, it tends to de-elevate whatever is going on around you."

Instead of reciprocating someone's misplaced anger, try to be the one who remains composed, said Justin Robbins, founder of Metric Sherpa, a research and advisory firm that coaches businesses on training front-line employees.

You can say, "I'm here to help you resolve this," or "I want to help you, but we need to keep this con-

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versation respectful," he said.

Maintaining an even keel can be especially difficult in customer call centers, where the pace of incoming complaints during the holidays is relentless and agents are often treated like punching bags.

Listening with empathy, without interrupting, goes a long way, said Melissa Copeland, founder and principal of Illinois-based Blue Orbit Consulting, which helps companies improve their customer service experience. After listening, repeat back what you've heard and explain the process you'll follow. Commit to what you can control, she said.

Smiling during tense interactions can make a difference. "It relaxes your face, and if you try and say something angry or be obnoxious while you're smiling, it's hard to do," Copeland said. "It just helps with a quick reset."

Focus on small joys

A sense of humor is a professional skill to cultivate during the holidays, said Carol Price, who has sold books, clothes and vitamins at shops in Fort Smith, Arkansas, for decades while holding down a full-time job at the local water agency. When the Christmas music in the stores where she works feels relentless and grates on her nerves, she sings along, sometimes changing the lyrics to "meow".

Some customers hug Price when she helps them find what they need. By contrast, a man once threw books at her. She chooses to focus on the former.

"There's nothing better than a kid asking for a book, and finding that book and handing it to them and seeing that look on their face," Price said.

Supervisors can help lighten the emotional burden that comes with customer relations by giving employees to small treats, according to Harper, the New York bookseller. "You can't pizza party your way up to worker protections, but it helps during holidays," she said.

Stephen Yalof, CEO of shopping center operator Tanger, said managers also can work to reduce the stress on shoppers. Managers at Tanger's outlet malls and open-air centers use \$25 gift cards to surprise customers or placate disgruntled ones.

"You'd be shocked what a gift card does to defuse a potential issue really quickly," Yalof said.

Organize

If working conditions are unbearable, employees can band together to request improvements. Laura Kelly, an unaccompanied minor escort and wheelchair attendant with Prospect Airport Services, earns \$12.50 an hour working at Charlotte Douglas International Airport and lives in a hotel with her two adult children.

During the holidays, there are more passengers to help but fewer workers because many quit or call in sick, Kelly said. She recently participated in a one-day Thanksgiving week strike to protest low wages.

"I'm just trying to help people get to where they need to go and just to keep a roof over my kids' heads and food in their belly," Kelly said. "I don't even have a way to relieve stress besides making sure that my kids are taken care of."

Her advice to customers is to remember that service workers are human too.

"Just be loving and caring and put yourself in our place," Kelly said. "Just imagine if we were the passenger and you were pushing us around."

Black denomination upholds stance against same-sex marriage. A gay pastor in its ranks seeks change

By DARREN SANDS Associated Press

When the African Methodist Episcopal Church, arguably the world's largest independent Black Protestant denomination, held its quadrennial General Conference in Ohio in August, among the agenda items was an issue that the Rev. Jennifer S. Leath had labored over for two decades: same-sex marriage.

Leath, 43, self-identifies as "quare" — terminology designed to capture both her same-sex attraction and intellectual heritage as a "blackqueer womanist" thinker. She was a 23-year-old future seminarian when a voice vote was taken in 2004, making participation in same-sex marriages or unions punishable according to official AME church law.

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The move was widely seen as a response to the Episcopal Church's election of the Rev. V. Gene Robinson as its first openly gay bishop the year prior.

Since then, marriage equality has become the law of the land. And now Leath is at the forefront of a fight within her own denomination on whether it should moderate its stance.

In doing so, she's attempting to hold together two opposing sides: one which hopes the AME church moves toward acceptance of same-sex marriage and the other, opposing same-sex marriage, which prevailed in August in scrapping a bill that would have triggered an open debate about the issue.

The recent conference decision effectively threw away three years of research by the Sexual Ethics Discernment Committee, which was established in 2021 by resolution in order to make a recommendation on how the AME should move forward.

It left her "disappointed and frustrated" but not prepared to leave. Instead, Leath contends that the church's posture explains the alienation of LGBTQ+ members of the church.

"LGBTQ+ people in the church suffer in relative silence while those who have left are forced to find or even create new spiritual communities," Leath told The Associated Press.

In the AME, according to interviews with clergy, lay leaders and academics, there is generally an older group who consider LGBTQ+ sexual relations as sinful and believe that God ordained marriage to be between a man and a woman. In contrast, Leath is mindful of a younger generation that accepts sexual diversities while celebrating that all are created in the image of God and should feel safe — especially in the church.

"I feel the undeniable urgency of the children who are feeling like the only way through this is death or out of the church," Leath said. "As a pastor who follows the way of Jesus, that weighs on me."

Her profile as a Ivy League-educated academic and her status as the daughter of an outspoken AME bishop adds heft to her commitment as a champion for LGBTQ+ members of the church.

She hopes to help her denomination avoid the schisms that have ruptured most of America's mainline Protestant denominations. Presbyterians, Lutherans, Episcopalians — and most recently United Methodists — dismantled their bans related to same-sex marriage, but substantial minorities of their U.S. congregations joined more conservative denominations.

"To me the AME church is a place where diverse perspectives on issues like these can co-exist while we faithfully pursue justice for all," she said. "But this is only viable and sustainable as long as we are collectively and individually committed to recognizing the least among us, and recalibrating our faith and practices accordingly."

Leath felt called to Christian ministry at a young age. She grew up at Mother Bethel AME in Philadelphia, the flagship congregation of the denomination. Her father, the Rev. Jeffrey N. Leath, served there for 14 years in his final pastoral assignment.

"Her dad is one who is willing to stand for what he believes in, even if he is bumping up against opposition," said the Rev. Reginald Blount, an AME pastor and associate professor at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois.

"I do believe that Jennifer carries some of those traits as well ... the willingness to be that voice in the wilderness when you truly believe that what you are fighting for is right," Blount said.

At the same time, her parents — at least initially — reacted harshly to learning about her sexuality, which they discovered by reading her diary.

Not long after an altar call through which she experienced a spiritual awakening, Leath attended the Youth Theology Institute at Emory University in Atlanta. Not only was her call to preach affirmed there, but she also met fellow LGBTQ+ Christians who were called to ministry and were further along on their journey of reconciling their Christian faith and sexuality.

The experience was distinct from the homophobic rebukes and warnings that shaped the cultural fabric of AME churches she grew up in. A handwritten message from that summer still hangs up in her childhood bedroom. "Jen," the note read, "we see God in you."

While attending the Youth Theology Institute prior to her senior year in high school, Leath met Blount, one of the directors of the Emory program. He saw her ministerial talent and knew she came from a lin-

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age of AME pastors. After graduation from William Penn Charter School in Philadelphia, she was accepted and enrolled at Harvard, graduating magna cum laude in 2003 with concentrations in Social Studies and African American Studies.

A year later, in 2004, the AME church voted to punish clergy members – potentially revoking their ordination – if they participated a same-sex marriage or civil union. The language stated that the AME church believes that “unions of any kind between persons of the same sex or gender are contrary to the will of God.”

By September 2004, Leath had enrolled in seminary at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. After earning her Master of Divinity there in 2007, she went on to study at Yale, where she earned her Ph.D in Religious Ethics and African American Studies in 2013.

A year into her time in New Haven, in 2008, Leath’s father was elected the AME church’s 128th bishop. Following in his footsteps, she received her first pastoral appointment in 2012 to Campbell AME Church in Media, Pennsylvania. She later served AME churches in New York and Colorado.

In 2015, Leath began teaching at Iliff School of Theology in Denver. It was the same year that Obergefell v. Hodges, the landmark Supreme Court case, legalized same-sex marriage in all 50 states.

In 2017, she wrote in the Christian Recorder, a publication of the AME, “Our legislation and position papers on sexual orientation and gender identities are dated, inconsistent, incomplete, prejudiced, contradictory, and unholy.”

She urged the church to adopt an “updated polity” and stressed “that there is not agreement within the AME Church when it comes to matters of sexual orientation and gender identity.” These identities have “sacred” status, she wrote. “People who exist “outside of heterosexual, cisgender categorization ... will neither hide and lie nor leave and disappear.”

The General Conference of the AME church meets again in 2028. Between now and then, the Sexual Ethics Discernment Committee is set to reconvene. Leath says she’s confident that bills honoring the gender and sexual diversity within the church membership will proliferate until the current language in the discipline is removed.

“Future generations will likely push for even stronger and unequivocal affirmation of our gender and sexual diversity,” she said.

As for the present, Leath has not been spared the challenges that LGBTQ+ AME pastors face at the congregational level. When parishioners at her current church in Windsor, Ontario, discovered her sexual identity, some of them wrote letters and left the church.

But the rejection hasn’t stopped her from commuting four hours from Toronto to pastor her people — or from writing on the subject and teaching courses like “Queering Religion” at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario, where she is an associate professor in Black Religion. “This is my vocation of unconditional love for God, the church, all creation, and myself,” she said.

Migrant workers in Lebanon are trying to return home after abuses and then war

By SALLY ABOU ALJOUD and LUJAIN JO Associated Press
BEIRUT (AP) — Isatta Bah wakes up from a nap in a crowded shelter on the outskirts of Beirut, clutching her baby, Blessing.

The 24-year-old from Sierra Leone spends her days waiting for an exit visa that could put her and her 1-year-old on a plane back to the West African nation. She wants to reunite with her family after what she called exploitative work conditions and sexual violence, along with the recent horrors of war in Lebanon.

“My experience in Lebanon is not good for me. I am really tired,” Bah said. “I want to go home.”
Hundreds of migrant workers in Lebanon are waiting to be repatriated after the ceasefire ending the 14-month war between the Lebanon-based Hezbollah and Israel went into effect last month.

Lebanon has long drawn migrant workers dreaming of building better lives for their families. Enticed by promises of stable jobs and decent pay, they enter Lebanon via recruitment agencies under a sponsorship-

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based labor system known as Kafala — only to find themselves often trapped with confiscated passports, long hours, withheld wages and, for many, abuse.

The Kafala system has long been criticized by human rights groups, but the government rarely if ever addresses the criticism. But Bah knew little of that when she came to Lebanon in 2022. She was promised a job at a supermarket with a \$200 monthly salary, she said. Instead, she was sent to care for an older woman once she arrived.

Within a month of her arrival, her 3-year-old son back home fell ill and died. She said she was not given the time to grieve and fled her employer's house. Since her employer held her passport and other documents, Bah said she had to leave them behind.

Her experience in Lebanon then took a darker turn. One day she and five housemates were picked up by a taxi driver who said he would take them home. Instead, she said, the driver dropped them at the wrong spot. As they tried and failed to find another cab, a group of men chased them and raped them.

"Men were coming and they were cheering for us," said Bah, who gave her consent to be named. "They beat us and they had sex with us." She said it took her about two weeks to recover and resume work at two hotels. Without documents, migrants can hesitate to go to police.

Two months later, she and another friend found out they were pregnant.

Bah recounted the experience as she watched her baby's wobbly footsteps.

With war, their lives became more precarious. When Israel intensified its bombardment of Beirut's southern suburbs in September, Bah fled the area with her baby and friends on foot.

Not every migrant worker escaped the attacks. An estimated 37 have been killed and 150 wounded since October 2023, said Joelle Mhanna with the U.N.'s International Organization for Migration.

There were few places to turn. Most government-run shelters refused to take in displaced people who were not Lebanese, said activist Dea Hage-Shaheen. After supporting migrant women during previous crises in Lebanon, she stepped in again along with other volunteers.

To house over 200 women from Sierra Leone including Bah, they repurposed an abandoned space owned by her family — a former car dealership that was later a venue for pop-up events and named The Shelter.

The kitchen was alive with activity as women cooked, some dancing to Nigerian music. In another area, rows of thin mattresses lay in the dim light from broken windows. Despite the modest conditions, the women set up a Christmas tree crafted from sticks.

While some migrants have been accepted at government-run shelters, there were regular reports of others being evicted or denied access, the IOM said.

Some migrants hesitate to approach the government shelters for fear of detention or deportation, Mhanna said. "As a result, most are being hosted by embassies, NGOs and community-based organizations including churches, monasteries and other religious groups."

The Lebanese government has not directly addressed the issue of migrant workers being rejected from government-run shelters, despite repeated calls for action from rights organizations and the United Nations.

Moving on from the shelters they found posed another challenge for migrants like Bah, as many had passports and other documents confiscated by former employers.

"We had to secure exit permits, immigration clearances and even child travel documents for the five children in this group," said Shaheen, who coordinated the repatriation last month of 120 women and their children with the support of IOM, who chartered the flight.

IOM said it has received requests from around 10,000 migrants seeking to be repatriated, a small fraction of the over 175,000 in Lebanon.

As of Nov. 26, the IOM had supported over 400 migrants to return home. That included two charter flights for people from Bangladesh and Sierra Leone. It wasn't clear how many more flights are planned, or to where.

Laughter and cheer filled Beirut-Rafic Hariri International Airport on Nov. 19. The women from Sierra Leone arrived in groups, dragging suitcases and sharing hugs. Some danced in celebration for their long-awaited flight.

"It wasn't easy in Lebanon," said Amanata Thullah after four years. "I am happy to be going back to

my country.”

Mariam Sesay, who described herself as the head of Sierra Leone’s community in Lebanon, said there had been “a lot of distress and trauma” in recent months.

Bah was not among those leaving, but she said she and others at the shelter were happy to see friends return home.

She now awaits her turn, along with over 50 others.

At first she was told she needed official documents for her baby and the father’s consent to travel. But a lawyer waived the requirement due to her circumstances, Shaheen said.

“I wish to go back home to continue my education,” Bah said. “Since I was little, I always wanted to be a computer science student, because I’m good at that.”

She looked down at Blessing. “Now I have something to take care of,” she said. “When I watch her walk or laugh, that gives me joy.”

Some breast cancer patients can avoid certain surgeries, studies suggest

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

Some early breast cancer patients can safely avoid specific surgeries, according to two studies exploring ways to lessen treatment burdens.

One new study, published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, examines whether removing lymph nodes is always necessary in early breast cancer. Another in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* suggests a new approach to a type of breast cancer called ductal carcinoma in situ, or DCIS.

The research was discussed Thursday at the San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium.

DCIS and active monitoring

Every year, about 50,000 women in the U.S. are diagnosed with ductal carcinoma in situ, or DCIS, where the cells that line milk ducts become cancerous, but the nearby breast tissue remains healthy. Many choose to have surgery, although it’s unclear whether they could instead take a “wait-and-see” approach with more frequent monitoring.

The new study, based on two years of data, suggests that such active monitoring is a safe alternative to surgery for many of these women, though some doctors will want to see if the results hold up over time.

“This is an option that patients should consider for their DCIS,” said Dr. Virginia Kaklamani of the University of Texas Health Science Center San Antonio, who was not involved in the research. “For a long time, we’ve had the feeling that we’re overtreating some patients with DCIS. This is a confirmation of what we suspected is happening.”

Taking a more cautious view, Dr. Monica Morrow of Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, who was not involved in the study, said a two-year study isn’t long enough to draw conclusions.

The finding is based on following more than 950 U.S. patients randomly assigned to surgery or active monitoring. All had low-risk DCIS with no sign of invasive cancer. They had the type of DCIS that responds to hormone-blocking drugs and many in the study took those drugs as part of their treatment.

After two years, the rates of invasive cancer were low and did not differ significantly between the groups, with about 6% in the surgery group and about 4% in the monitoring group diagnosed with invasive cancer.

Among patients in the monitoring group, changes spotted on a mammogram would prompt a biopsy. They also could opt for surgery at any time for any reason.

Some study participants didn’t stick with the treatment they were randomly assigned. So in a separate analysis looking at those who actually had surgery or not, the rates of invasive cancer were about 9% for the surgery group and 3% for the monitoring group.

The researchers will continue to follow the patients to see if the finding holds up over a decade.

Tina Clark, 63, of Buxton, Maine, joined the study after being diagnosed with DCIS in 2019. Randomly assigned to the monitoring-only group, she was able to avoid surgery and radiation during a time when she was raising a teenage nephew and going through the illness and death of her husband.

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"I feel just so grateful and fortunate that I found this study when I did," Clark said.

She has mammograms every six months to keep watch on the DCIS in her right breast, which has not advanced. The mammograms spotted a small cancer in her other breast in 2023, unrelated to the DCIS. She had a lumpectomy to remove it.

"If you're diagnosed with low-risk DCIS, you have time to understand more about your disease and understand what your options are," said study author Dr. Shelley Hwang of Duke University School of Medicine.

Lymph nodes and early breast cancer

Women having surgery for breast cancer often also have what's called a sentinel lymph node biopsy where a few lymph nodes in the armpit are removed to check for spreading cancer.

But removing lymph nodes can cause lasting pain and arm swelling, so research is underway to determine when it can be avoided. A study in Europe last year showed that older women with small tumors could safely avoid the added surgery.

In the new study, researchers in Germany looked at whether women with early breast cancer who were planning to have breast-conserving surgery could safely skip having lymph nodes removed. They followed 4,858 women who were randomly assigned to have lymph nodes removed or not.

After five years, about 92% of women in both groups were still alive and free of cancer.

"Removing lymph nodes does not improve survival, and the risk of cancer coming back in the armpit is quite low when lymph nodes are not removed," said Morrow, who added that some women will still need the lymph node procedure to help determine which treatment drugs they should take after surgery.

South Korea's Yoon defends martial law as an act of governance and vows to 'fight to the end'

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

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol defended his martial law decree as an act of governance and denied rebellion charges, vowing Thursday to "fight to the end" in response to attempts to impeach him and intensifying investigations into last week's dramatic move.

The main opposition Democratic Party quickly slammed Yoon's speech as "an expression of extreme delusion" and "false propaganda." Later Thursday, it and other opposition parties submitted a new impeachment motion against Yoon for a floor vote this weekend.

The opposition-controlled parliament also passed motions Thursday to impeach and suspend Yoon's police chief and justice minister over the imposition of martial law, escalating the pressure on Yoon's embattled government.

Yoon's short-lived Dec. 3 martial law declaration has generated political chaos and large protests calling for his ouster. The decree brought hundreds of armed troops who attempted to encircle parliament and raid the election commission, though no major violence or injuries occurred. Martial law lasted only six hours as Yoon was forced to lift it after the National Assembly unanimously voted it down.

In a televised speech Thursday, Yoon, a conservative, said he enacted martial law as a warning to the liberal Democratic Party. He called the party "a monster" and "anti-state forces" that he said tried to use its legislative muscle to impeach top officials, undermined the government's budget bill for next year and sympathized with North Korea.

"I will fight to the end to prevent the forces and criminal groups that have been responsible for paralyzing the country's government and disrupting the nation's constitutional order from threatening the future of the Republic of Korea," Yoon said. "The opposition is now doing a sword dance of chaos, claiming that the declaration of martial law constitutes to an act of rebellion. But was it really?"

Yoon said martial law was an act of governance that cannot be the subject of investigations and doesn't amount to rebellion. He said the deployment of nearly 300 soldiers to the National Assembly was designed to maintain order, not dissolve or paralyze it.

Kim Min-seok, head of a Democratic Party task force, dismissed Yoon's statement as "an expression of extreme delusion" and "a declaration of war against the people." Kim accused the president of attempting

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to incite pro-Yoon riots by far-right forces. He said the Democratic Party will focus on getting the motion impeaching Yoon passed on Saturday.

It's unclear how Yoon's comments will affect his fate. Opposition parties hold 192 seats combined, eight votes short of a two-thirds majority of the 300 members of the National Assembly. The earlier attempt to impeach Yoon failed with most lawmakers from Yoon's governing People Power Party boycotting the vote.

Yoon's speech was expected to deepen a divide inside the PPP. When party chair Han Dong-hun, a critic of Yoon, called Yoon's statement "a confession of rebellion" during a party meeting, Yoon loyalists angrily jeered and called on Han to stop speaking. Han has urged party members to vote in favor of Yoon's impeachment.

Opposition parties and even some PPP members say the martial law decree was unconstitutional. South Korean law allows the president to declare martial law during wartime or similar emergencies, and they said such a situation did not exist. They argue that deploying troops to seal the National Assembly to suspend its political activities amounted to rebellion because the constitution doesn't give a president such rights in any situation.

The country's law enforcement authorities are investigating whether Yoon and others involved in imposing martial law committed rebellion, abuse of power and other crimes. A conviction for rebellion carries a maximum penalty of death.

The National Assembly on Thursday passed a bill that could introduce an independent counsel to investigate Yoon on rebellion charges without his approval. A bill it endorsed earlier this week on appointing an independent counsel requires Yoon's approval. The Justice Ministry on Monday placed an overseas travel ban on Yoon.

South Korean law gives a president immunity from prosecution while in office, except for allegations of rebellion or treason. This means that Yoon can be questioned and detained by investigative agencies over his martial law decree, but many observers doubt that authorities will forcefully detain him because of the potential for clashes with his presidential security service.

On Wednesday, Yoon's presidential security service didn't allow police to search the presidential office.

Yoon's statement was seen as an about-face. Last Saturday, he apologized over declaring martial law and said he wouldn't avoid responsibility for it. He said he would leave it to his party to chart a course through the political turmoil, "including matters related to my term in office."

On Wednesday, Yoon's former defense minister, Kim Yong Hyun, was arrested on allegations of playing a key role in a rebellion and committing abuse of power. The national police chief, Cho Ji Ho, and the head of Seoul's metropolitan police have been detained while their actions of sending police forces to the National Assembly are investigated as a criminal matter.

The impeachment motion against Cho accuses him of committing rebellion and violating other laws by deploying police forces to the parliament after martial law was announced. The separate motion for Justice Minister Park Sung Jae accuses him of rebellion because he didn't question the constitutionality of Yoon's martial law decree and didn't actively stop its enforcement.

Kim, who resigned after martial law was lifted, is one of Yoon's close associates. He has been accused of recommending martial law to Yoon and sending troops to the National Assembly to block lawmakers from voting on it. He tried to kill himself in detention, but correctional officers stopped him and he was in stable condition, according to the Justice Ministry.

In his speech Thursday, Yoon said he had discussed imposing martial law only with Kim before he informed other top officials about it at a Cabinet meeting just before its declaration.

On the night of Dec. 3, besides the National Assembly, Yoon and Kim sent troops to the National Election Commission. That raised speculation that he might have tried to seize computer servers at the commission as he believed unfounded rumors that the results of April's parliamentary elections, in which his party suffered steep losses, were rigged.

Yoon said he asked Kim to examine the supposed vulnerabilities of the commission's computer systems, which Yoon said was hampering the credibility of election results. He accused the commission of resisting

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a thorough inspection by Seoul's spy agency following a cyberattack attributed to North Korea-backed hackers last year.

If Yoon is impeached, his presidential powers would be suspended until the Constitutional Court decides whether to remove him from office or restore his powers. If he is dismissed, a new presidential election would be required within 60 days.

Today in History: December 13, Saddam Hussein captured in Iraq

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, Dec. 13, the 348th day of 2024. There are 18 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Dec. 13, 2003, Saddam Hussein was captured by U.S. forces while hiding in a hole under a farmhouse in Adwar, Iraq, near his hometown of Tikrit.

Also on this date:

In 1862, Union forces led by Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside launched futile attacks against entrenched Confederate soldiers during the Civil War Battle of Fredericksburg; the soundly defeated Northern troops withdrew two days later.

In 1937, during the Second Sino-Japanese War, Japanese soldiers massacred an estimated 200,000 to 300,000 citizens, war prisoners and soldiers in the Chinese city of Nanjing.

In 1996, the U.N. Security Council chose Kofi Annan of Ghana to become the world body's seventh secretary-general.

In 2000, Republican George W. Bush claimed the presidency a day after the U.S. Supreme Court shut down further recounts of disputed ballots in Florida; Democrat Al Gore conceded, delivering a call for national unity.

In 2001, the Pentagon publicly released a captured videotape of Osama bin Laden in which the al-Qaida leader said the deaths and destruction achieved by the Sept. 11 attacks exceeded his "most optimistic" expectations.

In 2007, Major League Baseball's Mitchell Report was released, identifying 85 names to differing degrees in connection with the alleged use of performance-enhancing drugs.

In 2014, thousands of protesters marched in New York, Washington and other U.S. cities to call attention to the killing of unarmed Black men by white police officers.

In 2019, the House Judiciary Committee approved two articles of impeachment accusing President Donald Trump of abuse of power in his dealings with Ukraine and obstruction of Congress in the investigation that followed.

In 2022, President Joe Biden signed the Respect for Marriage Act providing federal recognition and protection for same-sex and interracial marriages, saying "the law, and the love it defends, strike a blow against hate in all its forms."

Today's Birthdays: Actor-comedian Dick Van Dyke is 99. Music/film producer Lou Adler is 91. Singer-TV host John Davidson is 83. Baseball Hall of Famer Ferguson Jenkins is 82. Rock musician Jeff "Skunk" Baxter is 76. Rock musician Ted Nugent is 76. Country singer-musician Randy Owen (Alabama) is 75. Actor Wendie Malick is 74. U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack is 74. Former Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke is 71. Country musician John Anderson is 70. Actor Steve Buscemi (boo-SEH'-mee) is 67. Singer-actor Morris Day is 67. Football Hall of Famer Richard Dent is 64. Actor-comedian Jamie Foxx is 57. Actor-reality TV star NeNe Leakes is 57. Hockey Hall of Famer Sergei Fedorov is 55. Rock singer-musician Tom DeLonge (Blink-182) is 49. Rock singer Amy Lee (Evanescence) is 43. Singer-songwriter Taylor Swift is 35. Actor Mandy Patinkin is 21.