

Groton Daily Independent

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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

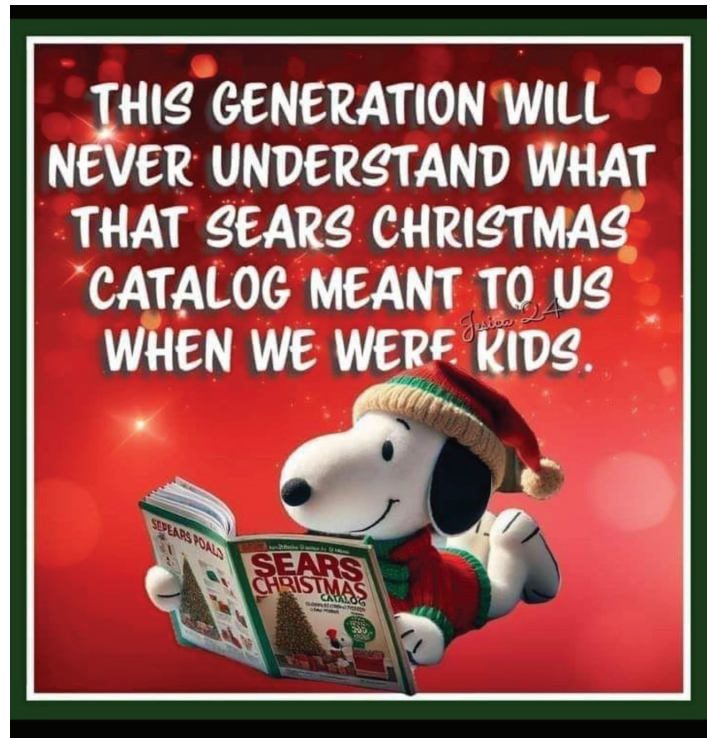
Sunday, Dec. 15

St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion: at St. John's, 9 a.m.; at Zion, 11 a.m. Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Sunday School kids practice for program. 9 a.m.; Sunday School Christmas Program, 10:30 a.m.; Choir, 6 p.m.
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

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PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460



First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.;
Worship, 11 a.m.

Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship,
10:30 a.m.; Christmas program and dinner, 5 p.m.

United Methodist: Conde worship at 8:30 a.m.;
Groton Sunday School program at 10:30 a.m.; Sun-
day School Christmas Practice, 9:30 a.m.; Coffee
Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Lunch at Groton, 11:30 a.m.

Monday, Dec. 16

Senior Menu: Chicken tetrazzine, peas and carrots,
pineapple tidbits, breadsticks.

School Breakfast: Breakfast sliders.

School Lunch: Chicken legs, mashed potatoes.

Groton Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Com-
munity Center, 1 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Christian Literature Circle,
7:30 p.m.

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

JH GBB at Sisseton, one game at 4 p.m.; Boys JH
Wrestling at Webster, 4:30 p.m.; Boys JV Invitational
Wrestling at Madison, 5 p.m.

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

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1440

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

Opioid Consulting Settlement

Consulting firm McKinsey & Company has agreed to pay \$650M to settle a federal investigation into its role in boosting opioid sales for now-bankrupt Purdue Pharma. OxyContin, a powerful prescription painkiller, is widely blamed for fueling the opioid epidemic that resulted in nearly 500,000 US deaths between 1999 and 2019.

According to court documents, McKinsey continued to advise Purdue Pharma and other drug manufacturers on increasing OxyContin sales despite knowing the risks associated with opioids. The firm's strategies included identifying high-prescribing doctors and developing marketing tactics to "turbocharge" sales. McKinsey, which cut ties with opioid manufacturers in 2019, issued an apology Friday for its role. The firm has paid nearly \$1B to settle civil lawsuits related to the epidemic in all 50 states.

Under the settlement, McKinsey must fulfill a government-mandated compliance program supervised by the Department of Health and Human Services for prosecution to be deferred and terminated. A former senior partner also agreed to plead guilty to obstruction of justice for destroying records related to the case.

Centrist François Bayrou named France's new prime minister.

French President Emmanuel Macron appointed Bayrou roughly a week after Michel Barnier was ousted as prime minister in a no-confidence vote triggered by budget disputes in the National Assembly. Barnier's government was the shortest-serving in the modern French republic's history. Bayrou, 73, is the leader of the Democratic Movement and is expected to form his government in the coming days.

South Korean president faces second impeachment vote.

The National Assembly will hold the impeachment vote against President Yoon Suk Yeol Saturday late afternoon local time. The vote comes a week after the conservative president survived the first impeachment vote over his short-lived declaration of martial law. At least 200 votes from the National Assembly's 300 members are needed to impeach Yoon.

Initial public offering launches for stegosaurus skeleton.

Rally, a company that sells shares in a wide range of items, announced an initial public offering for a nearly complete stegosaurus fossil nicknamed "Steg." The offering values the fossil—still being unearthed in Wyoming—at almost \$14M, with 200,000 shares available at \$68.75 each. Trading is set to begin Dec. 20 on Rally's app and website. Shareholders are expected to receive a payout in a year once the fossil is sold privately or auctioned to the highest bidder.

Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D, CA-11) hospitalized after injury on overseas trip.

The former House speaker is being evaluated after falling during an event in Luxembourg. The 84-year-old was traveling with a bipartisan congressional delegation to mark the 80th anniversary of a World War II battle. Earlier in the week, Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell also suffered an injury after falling at the US Capitol. The 82-year-old sprained his wrist, cut his face, and is experiencing leg stiffness.

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New Jersey governor seeks federal resources in drone probe.

Gov. Phil Murphy (D) requested more resources from the Biden administration to investigate drone sightings reported in New Jersey and nearby states. Residents first reported the sightings last month; up to 180 aircraft have been reported since Nov. 18. The FBI and Department of Homeland Security have jointly said the sightings appear to be aircraft operating lawfully and don't pose national security risks or safety threats.

Humankind(ness)

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Robert W. in Milam, Texas.

"Many years ago, when I was about 4.5-years-old (I'm now 74.5!), I was watching my Dad fishing. After a bit, he asked me to hold his rod while he got something from his pocket. After just a few seconds, I felt something tugging on the rod. I hollered at Dad and tried to give the rod back to him, but he told me to go ahead and reel it in. It was a small Bluegill. My first fish I ever caught. Many years later, I realized that he probably had the fish already online but wanted me to think I caught it myself. That one act inspired me to love fishing for the rest of my life. I remember it like it was yesterday but that was about 70 years ago! My Dad, what a guy!"

Holiday OPEN HOUSE

Sat. Dec 14th
11am to 3pm

Meet
Santa!



Free Event & Family Fun!

21 S. MAIN ST., ABERDEEN, SD 605 626-7117
DACOTAHPRAIRIEMUSEUM.COM



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NSU Men's Basketball

Northern State Unable to Fend Off Bemidji State Comeback

Bemidji, Minn. – The Northern State University men's basketball team fell on Friday evening to Bemidji State, following a second half Beaver rally. BSU stormed back with 44 points in the second and hit the game winner as the clock expired.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 70, BSU 72

Records: NSU 1-7 (0-3 NSIC), BSU 4-5 (1-2 NSIC)

Attendance: 204

HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern led 32-28 at the half, shooting 41.4% from the floor in the opening 20 minutes of action

Bemidji State out-scored the Wolves 44-38 in the second, shooting 55.2% from the floor to the Wolves 50.0%

The game saw 14 lead changes and 11 tie scores

NSU knocked down five from beyond the arc, shooting just 20.0%, while BSU drained eight shooting 30.8%

The Wolves led the contest with 34 rebounds, nine steals, 42 points in the paint, 18 points off the bench, 12 second chance points, and nine points on fast breaks

Kaleb Mitchell led the team with his first double-double of the season, notching career highs in both points, with 18, and rebounds, with 12

Marcus Burks followed, scoring 14 points on 6-of-12 from the floor and two made free throws

James Glenn dished out a team best five assists and led the Wolves with three steals, while Ethan Russell led the team off the bench with eight points and two steals

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Kaleb Mitchell: 18 points, 61.5 field goal%, 12 rebounds, 1 block, 1 steal

Marcus Burks: 14 points, 50.0 field goal%, 5 rebounds, 2 assists

James Glenn: 7 points, 5 rebounds, 5 assists, 3 steals

UP NEXT

Northern returns to action this evening at St. Cloud State. Tip-off is scheduled for 5:30 p.m. against the Huskies.

NSU Women's Basketball

Wolves Cruise to Victory Over Beavers

Bemidji, Minn. – The Northern State University women's basketball team surged to an early lead and took down Bemidji State, 77-60. Rianna Fillipi led the charge for the Wolves, scoring 18 points, while two other players also reached double digits in points

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 77, BSU 60

Records: NSU 5-4 (NSIC 2-1), BSU 2-5 (NSIC 0-3)

Attendance: 172

HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern State scored 25 points in the first quarter, followed by 14 in the second, 17 in the third, and 21 in the fourth.

The Wolves matched their season high with 46 points in the paint, adding 18 points from the bench, 13 points off turnovers, and eight second-chance points.

NSU shot well from the floor with a 50.9% shooting percentage along with 18 made free throws

Rianna Fillipi led the team with 18 points, six rebounds, and four assists, shooting an impressive 63.6% from the field

Alayna Benike and Madelyn Bragg followed as top scorers, contributing 15 and 12 points, respectively, with Bragg going six-of-eight from the free-throw line

Decontee Smith made an impact off the bench, adding nine points and one assist

NORTHERN STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Rianna Fillipi: 18 points, 6 rebounds, 4 assists, 2 steals, 63.6 FG%

Alayna Benike: 15 points, 8 rebounds, 2 assists, 53.8 FG%

Madelyn Bragg: 12 points, 4 rebounds, 75.0 FT%

Decontee Smith: 9 points, 2 rebounds, 2 assists, 2 steals

UP NEXT

Northern State is back in action to take on St. Cloud State in NSIC action. Tip-off is slated for 3:30 p.m. from St. Cloud, Minnesota, against the Huskies.

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Sub varsity teams win, varsity teams drop games to Hamlin

Friday, Dec. 13 Double Header at Hamlin

Girls Varsity: Hamlin 44, Groton Area 41

Groton Area's girls basketball team was two of 10 from the free throw line in the second quarter which kept Hamlin in the game and the Chargers went on to win, 44-41. Hamlin held a 13-10 first quarter lead, it was tied at 22 at half time and Groton Area held a 38-37 lead after three quarters.

The game was tied four times and there were three lead changes.

Groton Area scoring:

Taryn Traphagen: 10 points (2 3-pointers), 3 rebounds, 1 assist, 2 steals, 3 fouls.

Kennedy Hansen: 9 points (2 3-pointers), 3 rebounds, 1 assist, 2 steals, 4 fouls.

Rylee Dunker: 8 points, 8 rebounds, 2 assists, 4 fouls, 1 block.

Jerica Locke: 5 points, 3 rebounds, 2 assists, 2 steals, 4 fouls.

Brooklyn Hansen: 5 points (1 3-pointer), 3 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 steal, 1 foul, 1 block.

Jaedyn Penning: 2 points, 4 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 steal, 2 fouls.

Laila Roberts: 2 points, 1 rebound, 2 fouls.

Faith Traphagen: 3 rebounds, 2 assists, 1 steal, 2 fouls.

Total: 11-31 field goals for 35 percent, 5-17 3-pointers for 29 percent, 4-12 free throws for 33 percent, 28 rebounds, 18 turnovers, 10 assists, 9 steals, 22 fouls, 2 blocks.

Scoring for Hamlin: Addi Steffesen 15, Addi Neuendorf 14, Issie Steffensen 7, Jo Steffensen 7, Kayde Neble 1.

13-19 free throws for 68 percent, 16 fouls, 18 turnovers.

Girls Junior Varsity: Groton Area 30, Hamlin 26

The Groton Area junior varsity team had key plays by Talli Wright and Taryn Traphagen in the final minutes to pull out a 30-26 win. Groton Area led after the first quarter, 6-2, the game was tied at 12 at half time and Hamlin held a 24-19 lead after three quarters.

The game was tied four times and there were seven lead changes.

Scoring for Groton Area: Chesney Weber 10, Taryn Traphagen 9 (1 3-pointer), Talli Wright 5, McKenna Tietz 4, Makenna Krause 2.

Scoring for Hamlin: Ava Taschner 14 (2 3-pointers), Kayde Nebel 5, Paxton Neuendorf 5, Paige Stormo 2.

Boys Varsity: Hamlin 69, Groton Area 41

Defending state champion Hamlin started out its new season with a 69-41 win over Groton Area. The mercy rule took effect with 13 seconds left in the third quarter.

Hamlin led at the quarter stops at 16-6, 33-19 and 61-31.

Scoring for Groton Area:

Ryder Johnson: 15 points (1 3-pointer), 4 rebounds, 2 assists, 2 fouls, 1 block.

Keegen Tracy: 10 points (1 3-pointer), 3 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 steal, 1 foul.

Karson Zak: 5 points, 3 rebounds, 1 steal, 3 fouls.

Easton Weber: 5 points (1 3-pointer), 1 rebound, 1 steal.

Becker Bosma: 4 points (1 3-pointer), 4 rebounds, 1 foul.

Gage Sippel: 2 points, 4 rebounds.

Blake Pauli: 2 rebounds, 1 foul.

Turner Thompson: 2 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 foul.

Jayden Schwan: 2 rebounds, 1 assist.

Logan Warrington: 2 rebound.

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Totals: 8-22 field goals for 36 percent, 4-18 3-pointers for 22 percent, 13-18 free throw sfor 72 percent, 27 rebounds, 15 turnovers, 5 assists, 3 steals, 9 fouls, 1 block.

Scoring for Hamlin: Easton Neuendorf 27 points (3 3-pointers), Evan Storm 17 points (1 3-pointer), Zac VanMeeteren 14 points, Turner Stevenson 6 points (2 3-pointers), Ted Smith 3 points (1 3-pointer), Boden Stevenson 2 points.

Hamlin made 28 of 54 field goals for 52 percent, 6 of 9 free throws for 67 percent, had 22 team fouls and 4 turnovers.

Boys Junior Varsity: Groton Area 43, Hamlin 24

Groton Area won the boys junior varsity game, 43-24, leading at the quarterstops at 13-8, 21-12 and 32-19. Karson Zak set the tempo for the game with an game opening dunk followed by two more through the game as he led the scoring with 15 points including one 3-pointer. Easton Weber had eight points (2 3-pointers), Jayden Schwan six points (1 3-pointer), Ethan Kroll 5 points (1 3-pointer), Asher Johnson 3, Logan Warrington 2 and Anthony Tracy 2.

Jaden Olsen led Hamlin with 8 points.

Boys C Game: Groton Area 38, Hamlin 34

Groton Area won the C game, 38-34. Scoring: Asher Johnson 13, Anthony Tracy 11, Jace Johnson 5 (1 3-pointer), Ethan Kroll 5, Zac Flihs 3 (1 3-pointer), Jordan Schwan 1.

Varsity sponsors on GDILIVE.COM: Agtegra, Avantara Groton, Bierman Farm Service, BK Custom T's & More, Blocker Construction, Cassie's Confectionery, Dacotah Bank, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Jungle Lanes & Lounge, Locke Electric, Krueger Brothers, R&M Farms/Rix Farms, The Meathouse in Andover. Paul Kosel and Jeslyn Kosel provided the streaming.

Bary Keith from Valley River Equipment provided the sponsorship of the girls junior varsity game. The boys junior varsity game sponsor was grandparents of the players.

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

90th BIRTHDAY

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

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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

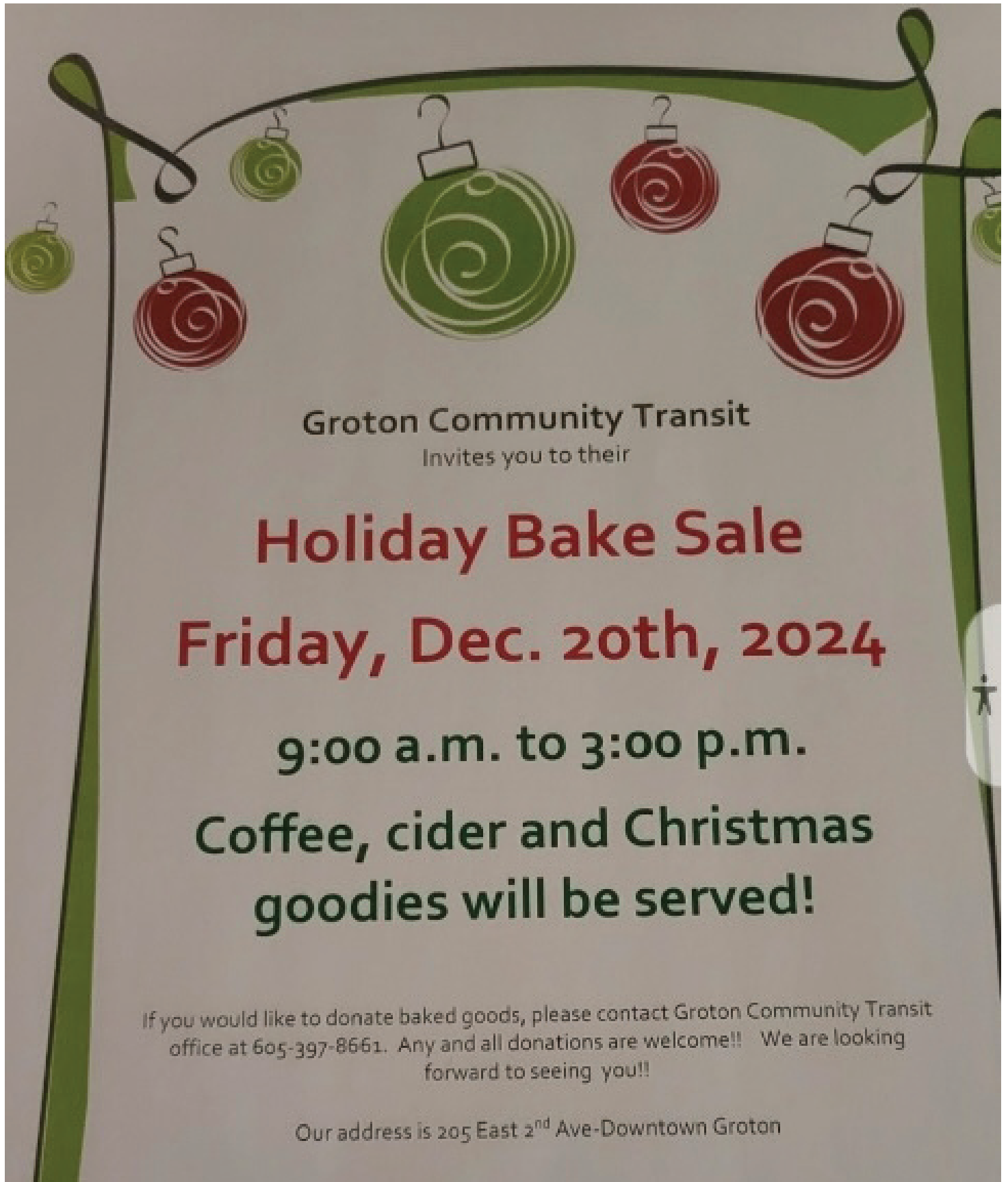
Call/Text Paul: 605-397-7460

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**

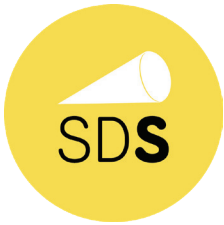
Presents "God's Gift of Love"

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!**





SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

COMMENTARY

'RINOs,' 'patriots,' 'wackadoodles': Republicans head to Pierre with fresh fractures

by Dana Hess

It was almost two years ago that this space was used to offer the idea that the South Dakota Legislature was operating under a two-and-a-half party system. The half party was Democrats, too few to make much of an impact. The other two parties both called themselves Republicans, but seemed to come from different planets.

One group was your father's Republicans, believing in tight budgets, a small government and less regulation. The other Republicans, famously labeled "wackadoodles" by fellow Republican and Senate President Pro Tempore Lee Schoenbeck, had another agenda that was pro-gun, anti-vaccine and deeply concerned about the integrity of elections, among other things.

Now, with the passage of time and a recent election, one of those Republican Parties is going to bulk up, big time. In the June primary, 14 incumbent lawmakers were shown the door. Eleven of them had the bad luck to vote for the Landowners' Bill of Rights, which would've implemented new protections for landowners and counties along a proposed carbon dioxide pipeline route but also would have left open the door for the pipeline's regulatory approval. Those incumbents' primary opponents were only too happy to characterize their support for that Bill of Rights as a slap in the face to anyone who believes in the sanctity of property rights.

With only three Democrats in the Senate and six in the House, Republicans continue to maintain a super majority in the Legislature. However, as members of the GOP choose up sides, that super majority may be more splintered than ever.

It's hard to quantify how many of the Republican newcomers will fall in line with the ultra-conservative group. Before we paint them all with a broad, wackadoodle brush, consider the case of Secretary of State Monae Johnson. Johnson earned her spot on the Republican ballot by claiming that the incumbent secretary of state was not working hard enough on election integrity. Once she had the nomination, she resolutely refused to say whether Joe Biden beat Donald Trump in the 2020 election.

Yet, Johnson has gone through a primary and an election acting like any other secretary of state. She has run largely error-free elections, yet a portion of her political party is turning on her.

Last month in The Dakota Scout there appeared a small advertisement calling out the "Blacklist RINOs." RINOs, of course, stands for Republicans in Name Only. The print in the ad was small but compelling: "Hardworking South Dakota Republican taxpayers have long supported candidates claiming to represent our values, only to find that they betray their promises once in power. With recent successes against crony capitalism and globalism, we now call on the following RINOs to either renounce their past actions or resign from the Republican Party."

In addition to Johnson, the list of alleged RINOs includes a who's who of South Dakota Republicans: Sens. Mike Rounds and John Thune, Gov. Kristi Noem, Rep. Dusty Johnson and Sioux Falls Mayor Paul TenHaken. Also on the list were current or past officeholders and politicians including Schoenbeck, of course, as well as Mary Fitzgerald, Will Mortenson, John Wiik, David Knudson, Casey Crabtree, David Wheeler, Randy Deibert, Helene Duhamel, Brett Koenecke, Joe Kippley, Joe Kirby, Pat Powers and Walt Bones.

The advertisement was sponsored by Chris Larson, a conservative Republican activist and entrepreneur.

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Larson was no doubt emboldened by the success of his NO in NOvember campaign that saw the defeat of four ballot issues he opposed: changes to the primary election system, the Landowners' Bill of Rights and the legalization of abortion and recreational marijuana.

Online the advertisement linked to a blog post by Larson that said the offending Republicans were guilty of putting economic development ahead of individual rights, having voting records that go against traditional conservative values, ignoring their constituents and showing contempt or disrespect for Patriots (which is probably a kinder, gentler name for his group than wackadoodles).

If Republicans are paying attention to Larson, the influx of "patriots" in the next legislative session could shake things up in Pierre. Maybe instead of being one-issue wonders, these new Republicans will show that they have more on their minds than property rights and can actually care about balancing the budget and funding education and health care.

So far, their predecessors in that wing of the Republican Party have not set a very high bar, often acting as if they didn't want to run the government so much as just mess with it. They sponsored measures to beef up gun rights in a nation that already has the protections of the Second Amendment. They complained about election security in a state where election outcomes are rarely questioned. They numbered among our "rights" the right to refuse vaccines.

Time will tell how or if these Republican factions can get along. They all need to remember that there's more at stake in the next legislative session than ideological differences. That budget isn't going to balance itself. Instead of name-calling, someone is going to have to do the hard work of governing.

Dana Hess spent more than 25 years in South Dakota journalism, editing newspapers in Redfield, Milbank and Pierre. He's retired and lives in Brookings, working occasionally as a freelance writer.

Noem's plan to cut \$17 million from maintenance and repairs is 'shortsighted,' regent says

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - DECEMBER 13, 2024 3:42 PM

South Dakota Republican Gov. Kristi Noem's proposal to cut the state's maintenance and repair budget by \$17 million is "shortsighted," a former Cabinet member said at a state board meeting Thursday.

Noem is proposing to fund the maintenance and repair of state buildings at 1.25% of replacement value instead of 1.75%.

Pam Roberts was appointed to her second term on the South Dakota Board of Regents by Noem in 2022. Roberts is also a former South Dakota Republican Party chairwoman and former secretary of the South Dakota Department of Labor and Regulation. During Thursday's Board of Regents meeting, Roberts said she was disappointed in Noem's repair and maintenance recommendation.

"We have such a huge investment in buildings and facilities across the state, and to reduce that at this point is, I think, a little shortsighted," Roberts said. "And I'm very concerned about it, frankly."

The state normally sets a maintenance and repair goal of 2% of replacement value, said Heather Forney, vice president of finance and administration for the regents, during Thursday's meeting. She said the system has talked with the six state campuses about how the cut would impact their ongoing plans.

The Board of Regents will take the biggest hit if lawmakers accept Noem's proposal, losing just over \$9 million. The Department of Executive Management, which maintains executive facilities, faces a \$6.4 million cut. Technical colleges face \$824,007 and the state Department of the Military faces \$593,302 in cuts.

The regents requested an increase of \$7.4 million for maintenance and repair.

Executive Director Nathan Lukkes said during his report Thursday that state universities will "be at the table to see what we can do" to come out "the best we can" by the end of the 2025 legislative session, which starts next month. He added that he has "the utmost confidence" in lawmaker's ability to "do the right thing for the state and the system."

"This is really just the start of the conversation," he said.

The maintenance and repair reduction is one of numerous cuts Noem proposed earlier this month during her budget address, in response to the depletion of federal pandemic relief funds and declining sales tax revenue.

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.

Uncertainty abounds for farm community as new administration takes shape

Trump choice for ag secretary unknown in farm advocacy circles

BY: JOHN HULT - DECEMBER 13, 2024 10:52 AM

HURON — The farm community faces uncertainty about tariffs and Cabinet picks but some opportunities to fight beef industry consolidation with the incoming presidential administration, according to the president of the National Farmers Union.

President Rob Larew spoke Thursday at the annual convention of the South Dakota Farmers Union in Huron. President-elect Donald Trump's promise to levy tariffs on trade partners like China and some of his Cabinet picks have Larew concerned about what farmers might see in the coming years.

Tariffs from the first Trump administration that were continued by the Biden administration hit farmers hard, Larew said. A study from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Institute said the tariffs resulted in a \$27 billion reduction in agricultural exports, with the largest export declines tied to trade with China.

Trump has threatened to issue additional tariffs against China, as well as against Mexico and Canada, upon taking office next month.

"We're already getting the signals that we're going to see these tariffs change and imposed on day one," Larew said.

Matthew Roberts, an agricultural economist from Ohio, spoke to the group earlier in the day about tariffs. They have the potential to hurt farmers' bottom lines, he said, and are all but certain to affect the price of groceries.

"Sorry, but tariffs are ultimately paid for by consumers in about 80% of the cases," Roberts said.

Concern about nominees

In their separate speeches, Roberts and Larew both mentioned Trump's Cabinet picks and the promised efforts of other Trump-aligned insiders, like billionaire Elon Musk, as factors contributing to the unpredictability of farm policy in the coming years.

The work Musk and former presidential candidate and venture capitalist Vivek Ramaswamy plan to do after promising to trim \$2 trillion from the federal budget in the name of efficiency might create headaches for farmers, Larew said, though there isn't a clear picture of what the pair intends to accomplish.

"We don't really know what's going to happen there," Larew said.

Larew also mentioned Trump's selection of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as secretary for the Department of Health and Human Services. The one-time independent presidential candidate and scion of the Kennedy political dynasty has long contended that high fructose corn syrup poisons the American diet and contributes to an epidemic of obesity.

Trump said he would allow Kennedy to "go wild" on public health, which has sparked concerns in some quarters about policy shifts such as removing foods and beverages sweetened with the corn byproduct from schools.

Roberts said the selection of RFK Jr. as HHS secretary was the one factor that made Trump less palat-

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able for agriculture and free trade than his opponent.

There have now been three election cycles where the winner of the presidential contest has taken an anti-free trade stance, Roberts said, even as free trade policies have improved the economic lot of millions around the world and opened new markets for farmers.

Roberts said he suspects Kennedy could struggle to gain Senate support. If he gets it, he may struggle to remain in the 47th president's good graces.

"Kennedy will probably end up opening his mouth, making the president angry, and he'll get jettisoned before he can do anything terribly permanent," Roberts said.

Hope on antitrust

But Larew said he has hope in other areas, in spite of the concerns about people like Kennedy or Musk. He believes that Gail Slater, who has been selected to serve as a top Trump adviser on antitrust issues, takes consolidation seriously.

With antitrust enforcement – a top priority for Farmers Union, which is part of a five-year ongoing legal battle over beef industry consolidation – Larew expects his organization to appeal to Slater on areas affecting agriculture.

He described Brooke Rollins, the incoming president's choice for agriculture secretary, as a blank slate. Rollins was an adviser to Trump in his first term, and is currently CEO of an organization called the America First Policy Institute.

"I meet at least every couple of weeks with the heads of a lot of other farm and ag organizations," Larew said. "Even within that big space, nobody knew who she was."

As far as the farm bill goes, Larew said there is growing fatigue about the topic.

The bill, which includes crop insurance money and a host of other programs for farmers and food assistance for needy families, stalled this year after a series of fits and starts in both chambers of Congress.

At this point, he said, he doesn't see an immediate end to the logjam.

"I wish I had some hope to offer on that," Larew 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.

Pipeline opponents receive cease and desist letters from Summit

BY: CAMI KOONS, IOWA CAPITAL DISPATCH - DECEMBER 13, 2024 4:48 PM

Several opponents of the proposed Summit Carbon Solutions carbon sequestration pipeline have received letters on behalf of the company threatening lawsuits over perceived defamation, an environmental group representative said.

Jess Mazour, a conservation program associate with the Sierra Club Iowa Chapter, said in a press release Thursday she received a letter from the company, "threatening to sue for compensatory or punitive damages if statements were not retracted."

The letter, dated Nov. 12, 2024, directed Mazour to cease and desist from "interfering" with and making any "further false and defamatory statements" about the pipeline project.

The letter was sent from Jason Torchinsky with Holtzman Vogel law firm in Washington, D.C. and Todd Lantz with Weinhardt Law Firm in Des Moines.

The letter points to a quote from Mazour in a *nwestiowa.com* article from August 2023, where she said Summit Carbon Solutions was in "in collusion" with the Iowa Utilities Board (now Iowa Utilities Commission) to "take away democracy and people's rights."

The letter called the statement "false and defamatory" and said it, combined with Mazour's "explicitly stated goal" to stop the pipelines, exposes her to "significant legal liability."

The letter then stated Summit Carbon Solutions and investors have \$1 billion invested into the project

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to date and Mazour should "issue an immediate" public retraction of her statement to avoid legal action. Mazour said in a call with Iowa Capital Dispatch that she and Sierra Club counsel believe Summit has no "grounds to stand on" with the threatened lawsuit.

"This is clearly an intimidation attempt just to keep us quiet and hamper our free speech rights," Mazour said.

Representatives from Summit Carbon Solutions did not respond to requests for comment or to verify the letters were sent on the company's behalf.

According to the press release from Mazour and the Sierra Club Iowa Chapter, at least six people have received similar letters.

Trent Loos, who hosts several rural broadcasts, has also publicly stated he received a similar letter about comments he has made. During a Dec. 2 broadcast on X, Loos admitted he was wrong about one of the statements quoted in the letter, but he doubled down on two other statements the letter called false and defamatory.

"In no way, shape, or form did I make a mistake," Loos said of the two other alleged defamatory statements against him.

Mazour said the intention of the letters is "intimidation" and urged Iowans to "stand strong when companies take this kind of action."

"It's just really important that we don't let this intimidation stop us from doing what's right," Mazour said. "It is our responsibility as citizens of the state to protect our land, and our water, and our rights, and our democracy, and no one should stand in the way of that."

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

Landowners, two counties appealing Summit's ND pipeline permit

BY: JEFF BEACH - DECEMBER 13, 2024 4:06 PM

A group of landowners and two counties are appealing a North Dakota's agency's approval of a large carbon dioxide pipeline.

The North Dakota Public Service Commission on Nov. 15 approved a route permit for 333 miles of the Summit Carbon Solutions pipeline in North Dakota. The state is the planned endpoint of a 2,500-mile pipeline network to carry CO2 from ethanol plants in five states, including South Dakota, to an underground storage area west of Bismarck.

Attorney Brian Jorde of Domina Law, which represents landowners across the pipeline area, said Friday in an email that there are several problems with the PSC's findings.

He said the PSC received plume modeling and dispersion risk analysis as prepared by Summit that would show how CO2 might spread if there was a rupture of the hazardous liquid pipeline.

The PSC did not allow the other parties to the case access to the plume information.

"This 'confidential' information was also shared with other members of the public, yet potentially directly affected citizens engaged in the routing application process were kept in the dark," Jorde wrote. He said that constituted a violation of due process rights.

If CO2 leaks from a pipeline, it can sicken or kill people in the immediate area.

"The public of North Dakota deserve transparency before hazardous pipelines are forced upon them," Jorde said.

Jorde said the landowner appeal will be filed in Burleigh County District Court.

The two counties that are appealing are Burleigh and Emmons, both on the main trunk of the pipeline in central North Dakota.

The counties are appealing the PSC's February ruling that state rules supersede county ordinances on issues including how close a residence can be to a carbon pipeline.

Emmons County filed an appeal on the ruling in March, but the matter was set aside until the commis-

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sion voted on the permit application.

Burleigh County filed its appeal this week.

In South Dakota, the Public Utilities Commission ruled that county ordinances preempt state carbon pipeline rules, a main reason Summit was denied a permit there. Summit has since filed a new application.

Summit has a permit in Iowa and for a short segment of its route in Minnesota. Nebraska has no state agency that issues carbon pipeline permits.

The North Dakota Industrial Commission on Thursday approved Summit's plan for underground storage of the carbon dioxide.

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

Pelosi injured, admitted to hospital while on official trip to Europe

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - DECEMBER 13, 2024 11:59 AM

WASHINGTON — Former U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi was injured while on an official trip to Luxembourg to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge and admitted to a hospital, her office said Friday.

"Speaker Emerita Pelosi is currently receiving excellent treatment from doctors and medical professionals," spokesperson Ian Krager wrote in a statement.

"She continues to work and regrets that she is unable to attend the remainder of the CODEL engagements to honor the courage of our servicemembers during one of the greatest acts of American heroism in our nation's history," Krager wrote, using the abbreviation for congressional delegation, the term for an official trip.

"Speaker Emerita Pelosi conveys her thanks and praise to our veterans and gratitude to people of Luxembourg and Bastogne for their service in World War II and their role in bringing peace to Europe."

Krager wrote in the statement that after sustaining "an injury" Pelosi "was admitted to the hospital for evaluation." He didn't provide any additional details. The Associated Press reported that Pelosi "tripped and fell while at an event with the other members of Congress."

Pelosi, 84, was sworn in as a member of Congress in June 1987 and rose through the ranks to become the first woman in the country's history to hold the speaker's gavel.

House Democrats elected Pelosi speaker in 2007 and she remained the top member of the party in the House until January 2023, when New York Democratic Rep. Hakeem Jeffries became minority leader following his election by Democrats.

After she retired from leadership at the beginning of this Congress, she took on the title of speaker emerita.

Pelosi represents California's 11th Congressional District, which covers parts of San Francisco.

Voters in the district reelected Pelosi to another two-year term in Congress during November's elections. She secured 81% of the vote in the heavily Democratic district over a Republican challenger.

Pelosi's undisclosed injury came just days after Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., fell in the U.S. Capitol, sustaining an injury to his wrist and a small cut on his face.

Lawmakers on trip

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., led the bipartisan trip that included House Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Michael McCaul, R-Texas; House Republican Policy Committee Chair Gary Palmer, of Alabama; House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chair Mike Bost, R-Ill; and House Veterans' Affairs Committee ranking member Mark Takano, D-Calif.

Reps. Salud Carbajal, D-Calif; Andrew Clyde, R-Ga.; Neal Dunn, R-Fla.; Scott Franklin, R-Fla.; Scott Fitzgerald, R-Wis.; John Joyce, R-Pa.; Thomas Kean Jr., R-N.J.; Mariannette Miller-Meeks, R-Iowa; Nathaniel Moran, R-Texas; Keith Self, R-Texas; Lloyd Smucker, R-Pa.; Derrick Van Orden, R-Wis.; and Joe Wilson,

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R-S.C., also attended.

The U.S. Embassy in Luxembourg posted a photo showing the group on social media on Friday.

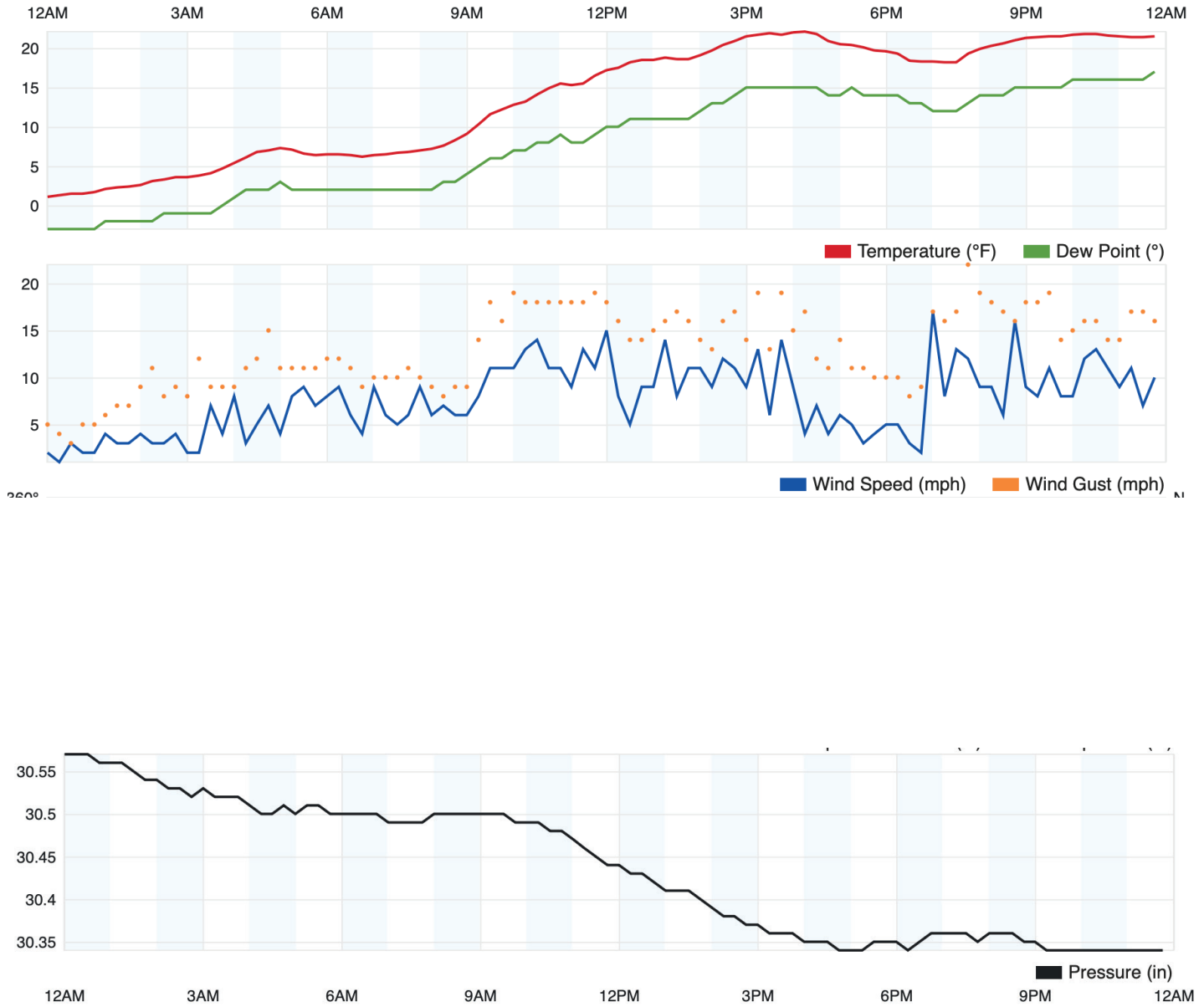
The photo shows Wyoming GOP Sen. John Barrasso, Maine Republican Sen. Susan Collins, New Hampshire Democratic Sen. Maggie Hassan and Kansas Republican Sen. Jerry Moran were on the trip as well.

Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 29 °F

Slight Chance
Wintry Mix
then Mostly
Cloudy

Tonight



Low: 22 °F

Cloudy

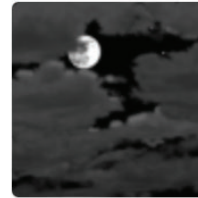
Sunday



High: 38 °F

Decreasing
Clouds

Sunday Night



Low: 26 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Monday



High: 34 °F

Partly Sunny
and Breezy



Freezing Drizzle Possible Through The Morning

December 14, 2024
4:29 AM

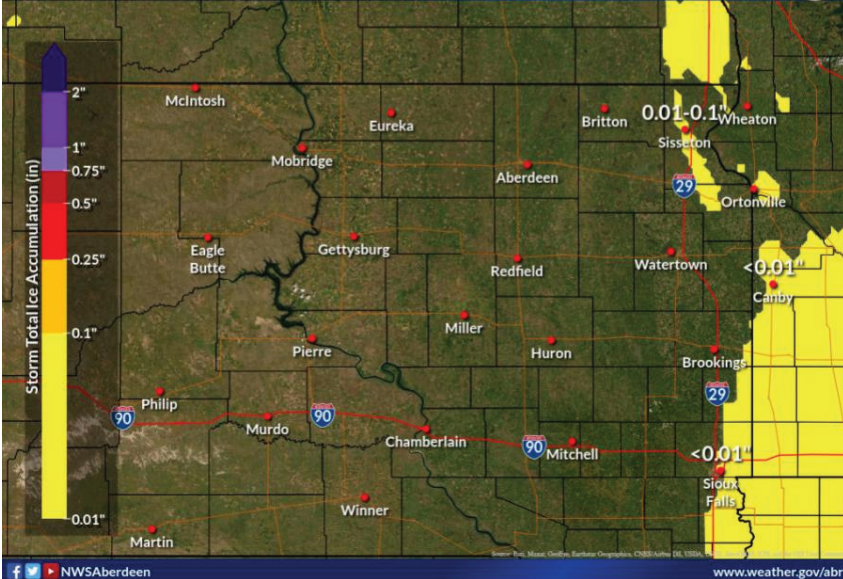
Event Total Ice Accumulation

Valid 6 AM Sat Dec 14, 2024 through 6 AM Sun Dec 15, 2024 CST

Weather Forecast Office

Aberdeen, SD

Issued Dec 14, 2024 2:23 AM CST



Key Messages

- **Freezing drizzle** is possible through the morning for areas east of the James River
 - Potentially creating **icy/slick roads**
 - A light glaze of ice is possible for the northern portions of the Sisseton Hills and west central MN

NWSAberdeen
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Freezing drizzle is possible through the morning for areas mainly east of the James River. A light glaze of ice is possible for the northern portions of the Sisseton Hills through west central MN

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 22 °F at 4:12 PM

Low Temp: 1 °F at 12:00 AM

Wind: 22 mph at 7:42 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 8 hours, 47 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 55 in 1998

Record Low: -30 in 1917

Average High: 29

Average Low: 8

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.27

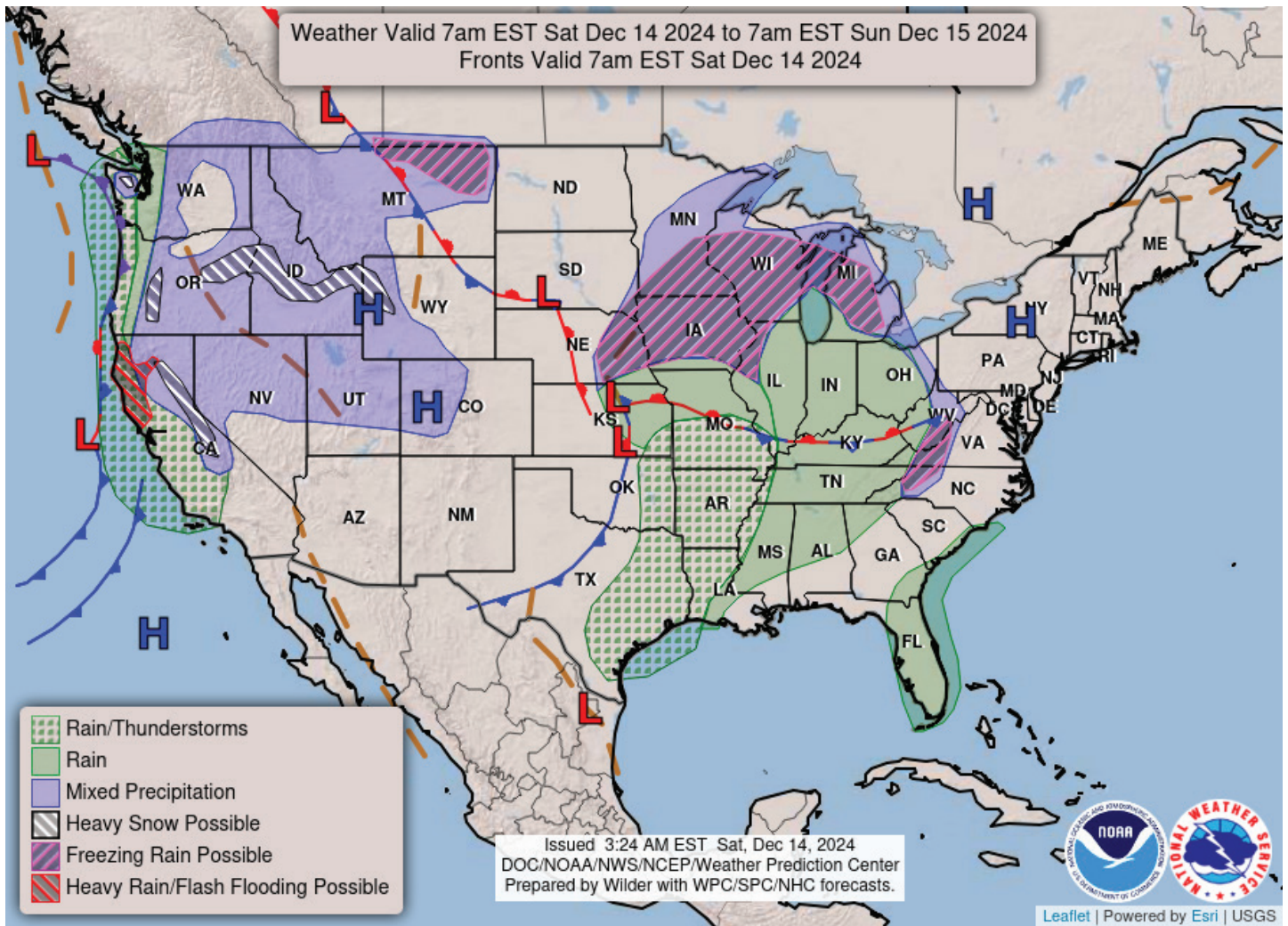
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 21.48

Precip Year to Date: 21.71

Sunset Tonight: 4:51:22 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:04:09 am



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Today in Weather History

December 14, 1994: Snow accumulated over all of South Dakota on the 14th but was heavy in the central part of the state and at a few places in the northwest. The greatest accumulations were 11 inches at Murdo and 10 inches at the Lake Sharpe project and near Stephan. The storm caused numerous accidents, but no fatalities or injuries were reported. Eight inches of snow fell at McLaughlin and Miller, with 7 inches at Faulkton and McIntosh, 6 inches at Eagle Butte and Timber Lake, and 5 inches at Mobridge, Kennebec, and near Highmore.

December 14, 1996: Heavy snow of 6 to 20 inches fell across most of central, north central, and part of northeast South Dakota during the late evening of the 14th. Strong north winds of 20 to 35 mph created near-blizzard conditions and heavy drifting across the area. Travel was tough if not impossible, with several cars going into the ditch. A two-car accident between Blunt and Pierre left several people injured. Many activities were postponed or canceled. Some snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Fort Pierre, Ipswich, Kennebec, Aberdeen, and Pollock; 7 inches at Mobridge; 8 inches at Lake Sharpe, Clark, and Mellette; 9 inches at Roscoe, Gettysburg, and McIntosh; 10 inches at Highmore, Eagle Butte, 22 miles SSW of Keldron, and at West Whitlock; 11 inches at Blunt and Miller; 12 inches at Ree Heights, McLaughlin, and Onida; 13 inches at Highmore; 14 inches at Redfield; 15 inches at Timber Lake; 18 inches at Faulkton; and 20 inches at Hoven.

December 14, 1287: A powerful storm affected the Netherlands and Northern Germany on this day. Called the St. Lucia's flood, which was the day before, this storm broke a dike, flooding much of the land in what is now the Waddenzee and IJsselmeer. A significant percentage of the country's population perished in this disaster and had been rated as one of the most destructive floods in recorded history. The death toll from this storm was between 50,000 to 80,000 people. Also, 180 residents of Hickling village, which is 137 miles north-east of London was impacted by this storm. The storm surge rose a foot above the high altar in the church. From British-History.ac.uk, "Hickling was one of the townships that suffered most severely from the tremendous storm of December, 1287, no fewer than nine score persons being drowned there. In the priory the water rose more than a foot above the high altar, and all the canons fled away except two, who stayed behind and managed to save the horses and other property by bringing them up into the dormitory over the vaulted undercroft."

1924 - The temperature at Helena, MT, plunged 79 degrees in 24 hours, and 88 degrees in 34 hours. The mercury plummeted from 63 above to 25 below zero. At Fairfield MT the temperature plunged 84 degrees in just 12 hours, from 63 at Noon to 21 below zero at midnight. (David Ludlum)

December 14, 1952: Trace of snow or sleet at or near Pensacola, Crestview, DeFuniak Springs, Quincy, Carrabelle, Tallahassee, St. Marks, Monticello, Madison, Mayo, Live Oak, Lake City, Glen St. Mary, and Hilliard in Florida. Frozen precipitation occurred before noon at most points, but happened in the afternoon at Mayo and Lake City and near Hilliard. Temperatures were above freezing and snow or sleet melted as it fell.

December 14, 1997: Central Mississippi and western Alabama saw significant snowfall of 4 to 8 inches on this day. In Mississippi, this was one of the heavier snowfalls to occur since 1929. The weight of the snow caused limbs of trees to break, which knocked down power lines.

2006 - The Hanukkah Eve Wind Storm of 2006 caused storm to hurricane-force wind gusts and heavy rainfall hit the Pacific Northwest and southern British Columbia. Damage estimates in Washington and Oregon totaled \$220 million. Over 1.8 million residences and businesses without power. 18 people were killed, most of whom died of carbon monoxide poisoning in the days following the storm because of improper use of barbecue cookers and generators indoors.

2010 - A rare tornado struck the small town of Aumsville, Oregon, tearing roofs off buildings, hurling objects into vehicles and homes and uprooting trees. No one was injured but the destruction left behind was severe. The National Weather Service classified the tornado as an EF2 with wind speeds of 110-120 mph and they said the tornado's damage trail was five miles long and 150 yards wide. 50 houses in Aumsville and the surrounding county area were affected, with 10 of them being unsuitable for occupancy. (KATU)



The Real Thing!

It has always been difficult for missionary families to be together at special times for important occasions. Often hearts ache for the joy and happiness that bonds hearts and unites loved ones for special reasons and seasons.

The headmaster of a school for the children of missionaries knew that feeling very well. His parents were missionaries, and he spent many birthdays alone as well as many holidays apart from family members. He knew that one of his students, in particular, was having a difficult time one Christmas and decided to visit him in his room.

After talking for a few minutes he asked, "John, what would you like for Christmas this year?"

Looking at a picture of his father on the wall, he said, "I would like my father to step out of that frame."

That's what Jesus did. He "stepped out" of the Old Testament "frames" that prophesied His coming. He became the "real thing" when he walked among the people, laid His hands on the sick, and restored them to health, fed the hungry with bread that would last throughout eternity, and gave the water of life to those dying of thirst.

The Son of God willingly and voluntarily made Himself "nothing" when He assumed a human body and a human nature and became the "real thing." Jesus is God seeing us through human eyes, hearing us with human ears, touching lives with human hands, and loving us with a human heart. In Jesus, we see God with us – Immanuel!

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for sending us the "Real Thing." Through Your Son we know how much You love us, understand us, and know our every need. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Philippians 2:5-11 Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
12.13.24

36 43 52 58 65 16

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$740,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[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 DRAW: 14 Hrs 25 Mins
21 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
12.13.24

3 15 32 34 37 18

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 40 Mins
21 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
12.11.24

19 22 27 28 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$149,000

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 40 Mins
21 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
12.11.24

18 23 34 60 62 19

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 9 Mins 21
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 DRAW: 15 Hrs 9 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

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Central 39, Rapid City Central 26
Avon 60, Marty 34
Bennett County 65, Little Wound 11
Beresford 68, Baltic 30
Britton-Hecla 43, Tiospa Zina 29
Brookings 55, Watertown 49, OT
Burke 52, Kimball-White Lake 39
Castlewood 57, Waubay/Summit 18
Centerville 58, Canistota 19
Colman-Egan 55, Arlington 43
Dell Rapids St Mary 63, Howard 24
Deubrook 46, DeSmet 33
Edgemont 48, New Underwood 44
Elkton-Lake Benton 33, Estelline-Hendricks 29
Great Plains Lutheran 68, Illinois Lutheran, Ill. 8
Hamlin 44, Groton 41
Harding County 74, Newell 23
Huron 43, Tea 39
Irene-Wakonda 42, Bon Homme 32
Kadoka 39, Hill City 30
Lemmon High School 57, Timber Lake 28
Northwestern 61, Warner 37
Parkston 51, Tri-Valley 33
Rapid City Stevens 64, T F Riggs High School 30
Sioux Falls Christian 46, Lennox 33
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 44, Sioux Falls Jefferson 42
Sioux Falls Washington 73, Sioux Falls Lincoln 39
Spearfish 64, Belle Fourche 43
Sturgis Brown High School 52, Custer 34
Sully Buttes 53, North Central 50
Valentine, Neb. 41, Todd County 27
Vermillion 41, Mitchell Christian 24
Viborg-Hurley 67, Freeman 40
Wagner 71, Winner 57
Gillette Early Bird Tournament=
Buffalo, Wyo. 50, St Thomas More 47
Cody, Wyo. 81, Pine Ridge 18
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Harrisburg vs. Yankton, ppd.

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BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Roncalli 63, Redfield 34
Baltic 45, Beresford 31
Bison 56, Grant County/Mott-Regent, N.D. 52
Brandon Valley 54, O'Gorman High School 49
Bridgewater-Emery 42, Corsica/Stickney 39
Britton-Hecla 67, Tiospa Zina 38
Castlewood 57, Waubay/Summit 56
Centerville 50, Canistota 37
Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 61, Crazy Horse 56
Colman-Egan 78, Arlington 48
Crow Creek Tribal School 68, Flandreau Indian 47
Custer 71, Sturgis Brown High School 54
DeSmet 53, Deubrook 38
Dell Rapids St Mary 62, Howard 48
Deuel 53, Florence-Henry 44
Faith 49, Tiospaye Topa 26
Flandreau 57, Chester 22
Freeman 57, Viborg-Hurley 53
Great Plains Lutheran 69, Illinois Lutheran, Ill. 29
Hamlin 69, Groton 41
Hanson 80, Ethan 62
Herreid-Selby 47, McLaughlin 44
Hill City 71, Kadoka 64
Irene-Wakonda 52, Bon Homme 18
Iroquois-Lake Preston 43, Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 35
Lemmon High School 64, Timber Lake 62
Little Wound 63, Bennett County 22
New Underwood 80, Edgemont 24
Parkston 63, Tri-Valley 56
Rapid City Central 61, Aberdeen Central 58
Sioux Falls Christian 66, Lennox 59
Sioux Falls Jefferson 69, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 56
Sioux Falls Lincoln 65, Sioux Falls Washington 55
Spearfish 64, Belle Fourche 28
T F Riggs High School 52, Rapid City Stevens 41
Tea 69, Huron 63
Valentine, Neb. 70, Todd County 51
Vermillion 81, Sioux Falls Lutheran 29
Watertown 78, Brookings 45
Waverly-South Shore 52, Wilmot 43
West Central 51, Dell Rapids 44
White River 44, Jones County 33
Winner 51, Wagner 49, OT
Gillette Early Bird Tournament=
Pine Ridge 52, Cody, Wyo. 48
St Thomas More 47, Buffalo, Wyo. 35
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Yankton vs. Harrisburg, ppd.

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

Julian Hammond III scores season-high 23 as Colorado pulls away from South Dakota State, 81-70

BOULDER, Colo. (AP) — Julian Hammond III scored a season-high 23 points as Colorado rolled to an 81-70 nonconference win over South Dakota State to remain unbeaten on its home floor Friday night.

Colorado (8-2) is 7-0 at home and its only losses came at the Maui Invitational. The Jackrabbits lost for the third time in their last four games.

Matthew Mors scored at the basket midway through the second half to give South Dakota a 56-55 lead but Elijah Malone and Hammond hit back-to-back 3-pointers to jumpstart a 12-2 run that put the Buffaloes firmly in charge. Hammond scored eight of Colorado's final 10 points in the final 2:24 to put the game out of reach.

Hammond was 8 of 14 from the field and a perfect 5-for-5 from the free-throw line while dishing six assists to lead Colorado, which shot 50% from the field as a team (28-for-56) and was 18 of 19 from the free-throw line. Malone finished with 15 points and nine rebounds and RJ Smith added 11 points with four assists.

Joe Saylor led South Dakota State (8-5) with 16 points and three steals. Kalen Garry hit 3 of 4 from beyond the arc and added 12 points, four rebounds and two steals.

Noem's Cabinet role could be 'untenable:' Former DHS chief

South Dakota News Watch undefined

Sioux Falls, SD (South Dakota News Watch)

"I suspect there will be many days when she wishes she were back in South Dakota," said Jeh Johnson, who served as Homeland Security secretary under Barack Obama.

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem's rise to secretary of the Department of Homeland Security would put her in charge of a sprawling federal network of 22 agencies and 260,000 employees tasked with keeping the United States safe from outside threats.

Whether she's prepared for that position depends on whom you ask, and she still needs to be confirmed by the U.S. Senate.

But most everyone agrees her potential role in President-elect Donald Trump's Cabinet comes at a pivotal time in the country's approach to illegal immigration and national security.

Jeh Johnson, who served as Homeland Security secretary under President Barack Obama from 2013-17, told News Watch that he wishes the South Dakota Republican success "in promoting the department's missions and its people."

But Johnson, former general counsel of the Department of Defense, added a note of caution as Noem prepares to join an administration that has vowed to carry out mass deportations of illegal immigrants in the country, facing likely legislative and legal hurdles along the way.

"I fear she will be placed in the untenable position of having to publicly defend the Trump Administration's most controversial and harshest immigration enforcement policies," Johnson told News Watch. "I suspect there will be many days when she wishes she were back in South Dakota."

The Department of Homeland Security, formed in response to the 9/11 attacks of 2001, began operations in 2003 and is the third-largest Cabinet department behind the Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs.

Though it is largely associated with immigration oversight through Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Homeland Security also oversees cybersecurity and disaster response, as well as the Secret Service and Coast Guard.

John Sandweg, who served as acting director of ICE from 2013-14, said Noem's experience as governor could help prepare her for coordinating the various agencies and supervising the budget, though DHS has a significantly larger budget and workforce than the state of South Dakota.

Sandweg noted that two other governors, Tom Ridge of Pennsylvania (2003-05) and Janet Napolitano

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of Arizona (2009-13) have served as Homeland Security secretary, managing a budget that reached \$108 billion for fiscal year 2025, of which \$62 billion is net discretionary funding.

"Managing an executive function and one that can be highly political (as governor) is a unique background that can serve as training ground to being secretary, dealing with a state Legislature instead of Congress," said Sandweg, a national security lawyer who also served as acting DHS general counsel.

Noem, who didn't respond to interview requests for this story, has said that she asked Trump for the Homeland Security position and looks forward to "discussing our nation's security challenges and my commitment to addressing them head-on" during Senate confirmation hearings.

In a recent poll conducted by Echelon Insights, 27% of respondents either strongly or somewhat supported Noem as the DHS nominee, compared to 26% who strongly or somewhat oppose the choice.

That net approval of plus-1 was third-lowest of eight high-profile Trump Cabinet picks, ahead of only Matt Gaetz for attorney general (negative-11) and Pete Hegseth for secretary of Defense (negative-2).

Noem has deployed South Dakota National Guard troops to the Southern border five times during her administration. In 2021, she drew criticism for accepting a \$1 million donation from a Republican donor to help cover the cost of a two-month deployment of 48 troops to the U.S.-Mexico border in Texas.

Noem has also made several trips to the border to support the enforcement efforts of Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, who praised her on the social media site X the day she was nominated as a "border hawk who has worked with me to secure the Texas border."

Sandweg, a lawyer in Washington specializing in DHS compliance and immigration, said that Noem's new role will likely be an eye-opener compared to her past brushes with border security as an Upper Midwest governor without federal oversight.

"I think she'll find that she has a lot to learn about border security," Sandweg told News Watch. "(Homeland Security) is a different type of responsibility in which she's constrained in ways she wasn't in the past by federal law, budgetary concerns and international diplomacy."

Trump has tapped former ICE director Tom Homan to serve as his "border czar" at the White House, which could free up Noem to focus on other DHS agencies such as the Secret Service and FEMA.

The administration's immigration strategy will also be shaped by Stephen Miller, who was hired as deputy chief of staff for policy after working on the Muslim travel ban and other hardline initiatives during Trump's previous White House stint.

But Noem will still oversee the DHS budget, which will have to be ramped up significantly to carry out some of the deportation and enforcement policies being pushed by Trump and his team.

Trump has indicated that he plans to declare a national emergency to carry out his campaign promise of mass deportations of migrants living in the U.S. illegally, of which there are an estimated 11.7 million, according to the Center for Migration Studies based on U.S. Census Bureau data.

Finding resources for those plans could put Noem on the firing line of appropriation-based battles with Congress, where Republicans will hold a 53-47 majority in the U.S. Senate but a slimmer advantage in the U.S. House.

"Border and immigration issues tend to dominate the job, and she has the added wrinkle of having more seasoned policy and operational people at the White House," said Sandweg, referring to Homan and Miller.

"It will be interesting to see how that dynamic plays out. It might work out very well, but you can also have personality conflicts because (Homan and Miller) will be sitting with the president every day, but yet (Noem) is the person who's in charge and responsible for the actual border patrol agents and ICE officers executing the mission."

She'll also be answering to Trump, a notoriously volatile leader who saw 14 Cabinet members depart during his first four-year White House tenure, compared to three for Obama (eight years) and two for Biden (four years).

"It's something to keep an eye on," said Sandweg. "It's certainly not uncommon for there to be some tension between the White House and DHS."

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Please coordinate with carson.walker@sdnewswatch.org should you want to publish photos for this piece. This content cannot be modified, apart from rewriting the headline. To view the original version, visit: <https://www.sdnewswatch.org/kristi-noem-homeland-security-secretary-president-trump-dhs/>

South Korea's parliament votes to impeach President Yoon Suk Yeol over his martial law order

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

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's parliament on Saturday impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol over his stunning and short-lived martial law decree, a move that ended days of political paralysis but set up an intense debate over Yoon's fate, as jubilant crowds roared to celebrate another defiant moment in the country's resilient democracy.

The National Assembly passed the motion 204-85. Yoon's presidential powers and duties were subsequently suspended and Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, the country's No. 2 official, took over presidential powers later Saturday.

The Constitutional Court has up to 180 days to determine whether to dismiss Yoon as president or restore his powers. If he's thrown out of office, a national election to choose his successor must be held within 60 days.

It was the second National Assembly vote on Yoon's impeachment after ruling party lawmakers boycotted the first floor vote last Saturday. Some People Power Party lawmakers had since said they would vote for Yoon's impeachment as public protests intensified and his approval rating plummeted.

National Assembly Speaker Woo Won Shik said Yoon's impeachment was an outcome driven by "the people's ardent desire for democracy, courage and dedication."

Hundreds of thousands of people gathered near the parliament roared in jubilation, waved banners and brandished colorful K-pop glow sticks, as a lead activist shouted on stage, "We have preserved the constitutional order!"

In a central Seoul plaza, another huge crowd gathered supporting Yoon, but they grew subdued after hearing he had been impeached. Both rallies have largely been peaceful.

The acting leader bolsters the country's security posture

Yoon issued a statement saying he would "never give up" and calling for officials to maintain stability in government functions during what he described as a "temporary" pause of his presidency.

"I will carry with me all the criticisms, encouragement and support directed toward me, and I will continue to do my utmost for the country until the very last moment," Yoon said.

Yoon's Dec. 3 imposition of martial law, the first of its kind in more than four decades in South Korea, lasted only six hours, but has caused massive political tumult, halted diplomatic activities and rattled financial markets. Yoon was forced to lift his decree after parliament unanimously voted to overturn it.

Han, the acting leader, ordered the military to bolster its security posture to prevent North Korea from launching provocations by miscalculation. Han asked the foreign minister to inform other countries that South Korea's major external policies remain unchanged, and the finance minister to work to minimize potential negative impacts on the economy by the political turmoil, according to Han's office.

"I earnestly ask public servants this. At this moment, we have the critical task of ensuring normal and stable operations of state affairs ... I ask you to carry out your duties without any neglect to ensure that the government is operated without being shaken," Han said in a televised statement.

South Korea's executive power is concentrated with the president, but the prime minister leads the country if the president becomes incapacitated. Han is a seasoned official and has previously held a string of

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top government posts such as trade minister and finance minister and was the ambassador to the U.S. He also served as a prime minister from 2007-2008.

Philip S. Goldberg, the U.S. ambassador in South Korea, wrote on X that he just met South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul and they reaffirmed the two countries' alliance will remain "ironclad." Goldberg said the U.S. supports South Korea's "democratic and constitutional process here and stands with its people."

After declaring martial law, Yoon sent hundreds of troops and police officers to the parliament to try to impede its vote on the decree, before they withdrew after the parliament rejected Yoon's decree. No major violence occurred.

Opposition parties and many experts accuse Yoon of rebellion, citing a law that categorizes as rebellion the staging of a riot against established state authorities to undermine the constitution. They also say that a president in South Korea is allowed to declare martial law only during wartime or similar emergencies and has no right to suspend parliament's operations even under martial law.

The impeachment motion alleged that Yoon "committed rebellion that hurt peace in the Republic of Korea by staging a series of riots." It said Yoon's mobilization of military and police forces threatened the National Assembly and the public and that his martial law decree was aimed at disturbing the constitution.

Yoon remains defiant

In a fiery speech on Thursday, Yoon rejected the rebellion charges, calling his martial law introduction an act of governance. The conservative Yoon said he aimed to issue a warning to the main liberal opposition Democratic Party, calling it "a monster" and "anti-state forces" that he argued has flexed its legislative muscle to impeach top officials and undermine the government's budget bill for next year. He claimed the deployment of troops was meant to maintain order, rather than disrupt it.

Democratic Party leader Lee Jae-myung called Yoon's speech a "mad declaration of war" against his own people.

Observers say Yoon's speech suggested a focus on legal preparations to defend his martial law decree at the Constitutional Court, even as opinion surveys showed more than 70% of South Koreans supported his impeachment. A survey released Friday put Yoon's approval rating at 11%, the lowest since he took office in 2022.

Some of Yoon's claims don't align with testimony by some military commanders whose troops were deployed to the Assembly.

Most notably, Kwak Jong-keun, commander of the Army Special Warfare Command, said that after martial law was announced, Yoon called him and asked for his troops to "quickly destroy the door and drag out the lawmakers who are inside." Kwak said he didn't carry out Yoon's orders.

Yoon is the third South Korean president impeached while in office. In 2016, parliament impeached Park Geun-hye, the country's first female president, over a corruption scandal. The Constitutional Court upheld her impeachment and dismissed her from office.

In 2004, President Roh Moo-hyun was impeached at parliament over an alleged election law violation but the court later overturned his impeachment and restored his presidential powers. Roh jumped to his death in 2009, after he had left office, amid a corruption scandal involving his family.

Yoon has been banned from leaving South Korea.

He has the presidential privilege of immunity from criminal prosecution but that doesn't extend to allegations of rebellion or treason. Subsequently, Yoon could be investigated, detained, arrested or indicted 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.

Yoon's defense minister, police chief and the head of Seoul's metropolitan police agency have been arrested. Other senior military and government officials also face investigations.

Ex-soccer player Kavelashvili becomes Georgia's president in a blow to its EU aspirations

By SOPHIKO MEGRELIDZE Associated Press

TBILISI, Georgia (AP) — Former soccer player Mikheil Kavelashvili became president of Georgia on Saturday, as the ruling party tightened its grip in what the opposition calls a blow to the country's EU aspirations and a victory for former imperial ruler Russia.

Kavelashvili, 53, was the only candidate on the ballot and easily won the vote given the Georgian Dream party's control of a 300-seat electoral college that replaced direct presidential elections in 2017. It is made up of members of Parliament, municipal councils and regional legislatures.

Georgian Dream retained control of Parliament in the South Caucasus nation in an Oct. 26 election that the opposition alleges was rigged with Moscow's help. Georgia's outgoing president and main pro-Western parties have since boycotted parliamentary sessions and demanded a rerun of the ballot.

Georgian Dream has vowed to continue pushing toward EU accession but also wants to "reset" ties with Russia.

In 2008 Russia fought a brief war with Georgia, which led to Moscow's recognition of two breakaway regions as independent, and an increase in the Russian military presence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Critics have accused Georgian Dream — established by Bidzina Ivanishvili, a shadowy billionaire who made his fortune in Russia — of becoming increasingly authoritarian and tilted toward Moscow, accusations the ruling party has denied. The party recently pushed through laws similar to those used by the Kremlin to crack down on freedom of speech and LGBTQ+ rights.

Pro-Western Salome Zourabichvili has been president since 2018 and has vowed to stay on after her six-year term ends Monday, describing herself as the only legitimate leader until a new election is held.

Georgian Dream's decision last month to suspend talks on their country's bid to join the European Union added to the opposition's outrage and galvanized protests.

Who is the outgoing president?

Zourabichvili, 72, was born in France to parents with Georgian roots and had a successful career with the French Foreign Ministry before President Mikheil Saakashvili named her Georgia's top diplomat in 2004.

Constitutional changes made the president's job largely ceremonial before Zourabichvili was elected by popular vote with Georgian Dream's support in 2018. She became sharply critical of the ruling party, accusing it of pro-Russia policies, and Georgian Dream unsuccessfully tried to impeach her.

"I remain your president — there is no legitimate Parliament and thus no legitimate election or inauguration," she has declared on the social network X. "My mandate continues."

Speaking to The Associated Press, Zourabichvili rejected government claims that the opposition was fomenting violence.

"We are not demanding a revolution," Zourabichvili said. "We are asking for new elections, but in conditions that will ensure that the will of the people will not be misrepresented or stolen again."

"Georgia has been always resisting Russian influence and will not accept having its vote stolen and its destiny stolen," she said.

Zourabichvili called Saturday's vote a "provocation" and "a parody" while a leader of one of Georgia's main opposition parties said it was unconstitutional.

Giorgi Vashadze of the Unity National Movement Coalition said Zourabichvili is "the only legitimate source of power."

Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze meanwhile said that Kavelashvili's election "will make a significant contribution to strengthening Georgia's statehood and our sovereignty, as well as reducing radicalism and so-called polarization."

"The main mission of the presidential institution is to care for the unity of the nation and society," said Kobakhidze, a former university professor and later chairman of Georgian Dream.

Who's the ruling party presidential candidate?

Georgian Dream nominated Kavelashvili — mocked for lacking higher education by Georgia's opposition.

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Some protesters outside Tbilisi's Parliament building on Saturday morning brought their own university diplomas while others kicked soccer balls.

Kavelashvili was a striker in the Premier League for Manchester City and in several clubs in the Swiss Super League. He was elected to Parliament in 2016 on the Georgian Dream ticket and in 2022 co-founded the People's Power political movement, which was allied with Georgian Dream and become known for its strong anti-Western rhetoric.

Kavelashvili was one of the authors of a controversial law requiring organizations that receive more than 20% of their funding from abroad to register as "pursuing the interest of a foreign power," similar to a Russian law used to discredit organizations critical of the government.

The EU, which granted Georgia candidate status in December 2023 on condition that the country meets the bloc's recommendations, put its accession on hold and cut financial support in June following approval of the "foreign influence" law.

How did opposition protests unfold?

Thousands of demonstrators converged on the Parliament building every night after the government announced the suspension of EU accession talks on Nov. 28.

Riot police used water cannons and tear gas almost daily to disperse and beat scores of protesters, some of whom threw fireworks at police officers and built barricades on the capital's central boulevard.

Hundreds were detained and over 100 treated for injuries.

Several journalists were beaten by police and media workers accused authorities of using thugs to deter people from attending anti-government rallies, which Georgian Dream denies.

The crackdown has drawn strong condemnation from the United States and EU officials.

"(Kavelashvili) is not elected by us. He is controlled by a puppet government, by Bidzina Ivanishvili, by Putin," protester Sandro Samkharadze said. Another protester waved a sign saying "We are children of Europe."

Demonstrators vowed the rallies would continue. "If (the government) wants to go to Russia, they can go to Russia, because we are not going anywhere. We are staying here," said protester Kato Kalatozishvili.

A look at the whirlwind events that led to the impeachment of South Korea's president

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's parliament on Saturday voted to impeach embattled President Yoon Suk Yeol over his short-lived martial law decree this month, a shocking stunt that paralyzed the country's politics, halted foreign policy and spooked financial markets.

His suspension from power comes almost eight years after the impeachment of Seoul's last conservative leader, Park Geun-hye, formally removed from office by the Constitutional Court in March 2017.

Yoon, a former public prosecutor, was part of the investigation team that examined Park's charges of bribery, abuse of power and other crimes that the court concluded warranted her removal from office.

Now, Yoon faces potentially even more serious charges in the same court, which must decide whether his ill-conceived power grab amounted to rebellion.

Here's a look at the whirlwind events that have shaken one of Asia's most robust democracies:

Dec. 3

In a surprise announcement at 10:29 p.m., President Yoon tells a national television audience he's declaring martial law, saying the opposition-controlled parliament has become a "den of criminals" paralyzing government affairs.

Yoon vows to "eradicate" his political rivals, describing them as North Korea-sympathizing, "anti-state forces" responsible for "wreaking havoc and are the main culprits of our nation's downfall." He doesn't back his claims with direct evidence.

In reaction, the main opposition Democratic Party calls for an emergency meeting.

As lawmakers begin rushing to the National Assembly, the military's martial law command issues a proc-

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lamation declaring sweeping government powers, including the suspension of political parties' activities and other political gatherings that could cause "social confusion" and control over media and publications. It says anyone who violates the decree could be arrested without a warrant.

Hundreds of heavily armed troops encircle the Assembly, apparently to prevent lawmakers from gathering to vote on the martial law declaration. Democratic Party leader Lee Jae-myung live-streams his journey from a car, pleading for people to converge on the parliament to help lawmakers get inside. The shaky footage shows him climbing over a fence to reach the grounds.

Dec. 4

Shortly after midnight, National Assembly Speaker Woo Won Shik says through his YouTube channel that the Assembly will respond to Yoon's martial law declaration with "constitutional procedure."

Also climbing over a fence, Woo reaches the Assembly's main chamber around 12:35 a.m. Some South Korean troops break windows to enter the parliament building but fail to reach the main chamber. Woo opens a meeting at 12:47 a.m. to hold a vote on whether to lift martial law.

At around 1 a.m., 190 lawmakers, including 18 from Yoon's own conservative People Power Party, voted unanimously to lift martial law. Troops and police begin to retreat from the Assembly shortly later.

At 4:30 a.m., martial law is formally lifted following a Cabinet meeting.

Hours later, opposition parties submit a motion to impeach Yoon. They say his martial law declaration is a blatant violation of the constitution, which limits the presidential exercise of such emergency powers during wartime or comparable national emergencies, and doesn't allow for the suspension of parliamentary activities under any situation.

"It was a grave act of rebellion and provides perfect grounds for his impeachment," the Democratic Party said.

Dec. 5

Yoon replaces his Defense Minister Kim Yong Hyun, a close associate believed to be the person who recommended the president declare martial law. Han Dong-hun, leader of Yoon's party, says he would work to defeat the opposition-led impeachment motion — even though he criticized Yoon's declaration as "unconstitutional." Han says there's a need to "prevent damage to citizens and supporters caused by unprepared chaos."

Dec. 6

In a bombshell reversal, Han expresses support for suspending the constitutional powers of Yoon, saying that the president poses a "significant risk of extreme actions, like reattempting to impose martial law, which could potentially put the Republic of Korea and its citizens in great danger."

Han says he received intelligence that Yoon had ordered the country's counterintelligence commander to arrest and detain key politicians based on accusations of "anti-state activities" during the brief period martial law was in force.

A high-ranking spy official tells lawmakers that the politicians targeted for detainment included Han, National Assembly speaker Woo and opposition leader Lee.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Lee questions Yoon's mental fitness to remain president. He vows to make all-out efforts to get Yoon impeached as soon as possible.

Dec. 7

Yoon apologizes and says he won't shirk legal or political responsibility for declaring martial law. Yoon says he would leave it to his party to chart a course through the country's political turmoil, "including matters related to my term in office."

Yoon survives an impeachment vote that most ruling party lawmakers boycotted, denying the motion the required two-thirds majority.

The Democratic Party vows to prepare a new impeachment motion.

Dec. 8

Prosecutors detain the former defense minister over his alleged role in planning and executing Yoon's martial law enforcement.

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Dec. 9

South Korea's Justice Ministry bans Yoon from traveling overseas as police, prosecutors and South Korea's anti-corruption agency expand competing investigations into allegations of rebellion and other charges in connection with his martial law decree.

Dec. 10

Kwak Jong-keun, commander of the Army Special Warfare Command whose troops were sent to parliament after Yoon declared martial law, tells parliament that he received direct instructions from the former defense minister, Kim, to obstruct lawmakers from entering the National Assembly's main chamber. He says Kim's instructions were to prevent the 300-member parliament from gathering the 150 votes necessary to overturn Yoon's martial law order.

Kwak says Yoon later called him directly and asked for the troops to "quickly destroy the door and drag out the lawmakers who are inside." Kwak says he did not carry out Yoon's orders.

Dec. 11

Kim, the former defense minister, is formally arrested over his alleged collusion with Yoon and others in imposing martial law. The Justice Ministry says Kim was stopped from attempting suicide hours before a Seoul court issued his arrest warrant.

South Korean police send officers to search Yoon's office to look for evidence related to the martial law introduction but they are blocked by Yoon's security team from entering the compound.

Police detain the national police chief and the top officer for Seoul over their roles in enforcing Yoon's martial law orders.

Dec. 12

Yoon defends his martial law decree as an act of governance and denies rebellion charges, vowing to "fight to the end" in the face of attempts to impeach him. Opposition parties submit a new impeachment motion against him for a floor vote this weekend.

Parliament also passes motions to impeach national police chief Cho Ji Ho and Justice Minister Park Sung Jae, suspending them from official duties, over their alleged roles in the enforcement of martial law.

Dec. 14

South Korea's National Assembly votes 204-85 to impeach Yoon.

Yoon says he will "never give up" and calls for officials to maintain stability in government functions during what he described as a "temporary" pause of his presidency. With his powers suspended, his fate now lies with the Constitutional Court, which must decide whether to formally remove him from office or reinstate him.

A look at the South Korean leader who has been impeached after shocking martial law edict

By FOSTER KLUG and HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's parliament has voted to impeach President Yoon Suk Yeol, a stunning fall from grace for a man who rose from political obscurity to the height of political power.

His decades of achievement could be on the verge of crumbling due to a single, baffling decision to send out troops under martial law over vague claims that one of Asia's leading democracies was under threat.

The impeachment suspends Yoon's presidential powers until the Constitutional Court determines whether to dismiss him as president or restore his powers. Yoon also faces investigations meant to find whether his Dec. 3 decree amounts to rebellion, a crime that is punished by up to the death penalty in South Korea if convicted.

Yoon, a staunch conservative and longtime prosecutor, went from political novice to president of South Korea in 2022, ending five years of liberal rule that saw failed efforts to resolve the North Korean nuclear crisis and a slackening economy.

His time in office, however, was marked by near-constant friction with an opposition-controlled parliament, threats of annihilation from North Korea and a series of scandals involving him and his wife. Observers

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said he was impulsive, took criticism personally and relied too much on the advice of hardcore loyalists. No one thing explained his attempt to shut down the mechanisms of a democratic nation over his claim that "anti-state forces" were acting under the influence of North Korea.

But there are strands in Yoon's background, and especially in the intense acrimony with the liberal opposition and his hardline standoff with North Korea, that help illuminate the defining moment of his presidency.

A turbulent rise to top prosecutor

Despite 2 1/2 years as president, Yoon's career was overwhelmingly about the law, not politics.

Yoon, 63, was born in Seoul to two professors, and went to prestigious Seoul National University, where he studied law.

A major moment, according to Yoon, happened in 1980 when he played the role of a judge in a mock trial of then-dictator Chun Doo-hwan, who had staged a military coup the previous year, and sentenced him to life imprisonment. In the aftermath, Yoon had to flee to the countryside as Chun's military extended martial law and placed troops and armored vehicles at various places including his university.

Yoon returned to the capital and eventually began a career as a state prosecutor that would last nearly three decades, building an image as strong-minded and uncompromising.

Prone to confrontation

But he also faced criticism that his personality was unsuited to high-level leadership.

"President Yoon isn't well-prepared, and he does things off the cuff," Choi Jin, director of the Seoul-based Institute of Presidential Leadership, said. "He also tends to express his emotions too directly. The things that he likes and dislikes are easy to see, and he tends to handle things with a small group of his own people, not the majority of people."

During a parliament audit in 2013, Yoon, then a senior prosecutor, said he was under pressure from his boss, who said he opposed Yoon's investigation into an allegation that the country's spy agency had conducted an illicit online campaign to help conservative President Park Geun-hye win the previous year's election.

At the time, he famously said, "I'm not loyal to (high-level) people."

He was demoted, but after Park's government was toppled over a separate corruption scandal in 2017, then President Moon Jae-in made Yoon head of a Seoul prosecution office, which investigated Park and other conservative leaders. Moon later named Yoon the nation's top prosecutor.

A neophyte in politics

Yoon only joined party politics about a year before he won the presidency, abandoning the liberal Moon after an impasse over a probe of Moon's allies. Moon's supporters said he was trying to thwart Moon's prosecution reforms and elevate his own political standing.

The 2022 presidential race was Yoon's first election campaign.

Yoon beat his rival, liberal firebrand Lee Jae-myung, by less than 1 percentage point in South Korea's most closely fought presidential election.

Their campaign was one of the nastiest in recent memory.

Yoon compared Lee's party to "Hitler" and "Mussolini." Lee's allies called Yoon "a beast" and "dictator" and derided his wife's alleged plastic surgery.

Domestic political strife

Yoon's time as president was dominated by frustration and acrimony, much stemming from his narrow victory and his party's failure to win control of parliament throughout his term.

When Yoon declared the state of emergency, he said a goal was to eliminate "shameless North Korea followers and anti-state forces" in an apparent reference to the opposition Democratic Party.

In a fiery speech on Thursday, Yoon again defended his martial law decree and vowed to "fight to the end" in the face of attempts to impeach and investigate him. He called the Democratic Party "a monster" and "anti-state forces" that he argued has flexed its legislative muscle to impeach top officials and undermined the government's budget bill for next year.

Claims of corruption also battered his approval ratings.

Yoon recently denied wrongdoing in an influence-peddling scandal involving him and his wife. Spy camera footage in a separate scandal also purportedly shows the first lady, Kim Keon Hee, accepting a luxury bag as a gift from a pastor.

Choi said he thinks Yoon likely planned the “clumsy martial law” edict to divert public attention away from the scandals.

“He tried to massively shake up the political world,” Choi said. “But he failed. He likely believed there was no other option.”

North Korea lashed out at his hard line

If political squabbles and scandal set the tenor of Yoon’s domestic presidency, its foreign policy was characterized by a bitter standoff with North Korea.

Yoon early on in his presidency promised “an audacious plan” to improve the North’s economy if it abandoned its nuclear weapons.

But things turned sour quickly, as North Korea ramped up its weapons tests and threats to attack the South. North Korea eventually began calling Yoon “a guy with a trash-like brain” and “a diplomatic idiot.”

North Korea took that trash theme literally, sending thousands of balloons filled with garbage over the border, including some that made it to the presidential compound in Seoul at least twice.

Yoon’s mention of North Korea as a domestic destabilizing force reminded some of an earlier South Korea, which until the late 1980s was ruled by a series of strongmen who repeatedly invoked the threat from the North to justify effort to suppress domestic dissidents and political opponents.

UN talks fail to reach agreement on dealing with rising risk of global drought

By SIBI ARASU Associated Press

BENGALURU, India (AP) — Despite two weeks of U.N.-sponsored talks in Saudi Arabia’s Riyadh, the participating 197 nations failed to agree early Saturday on a plan to deal with global droughts, made longer and more severe by a warming climate.

The biennial talks, known as COP 16 and organized by a UN body that deals with combating desertification and droughts, attempted to create strong global mandates to legally bind and require nations to fund early warning systems and build resilient infrastructure in poorer countries, particularly Africa, which is worst affected by the changes.

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification released a report earlier this week warning that if global warming trends continue, nearly five billion people — including in most of Europe, parts of the western U.S., Brazil, eastern Asia and central Africa — will be affected by the drying of Earth’s lands by the end of the century, up from a quarter of the world’s population today. The report also said farming was particularly at risk, which can lead to food insecurity for communities worldwide.

This is the fourth time UN talks aimed at getting countries to agree to make more headway on tackling biodiversity loss, climate change and plastic pollution have either failed to reach a consensus or delivered disappointing results this year, worrying many nations, particularly the most vulnerable.

Nations participating in the Riyadh discussions decided to push the can down the road to the 2026 talks, hosted by Mongolia.

“Parties need more time to agree on what’s the best way forward to address the critical issue of drought,” said Ibrahim Thiaw, the UNCCD chief, speaking at the end of the Riyadh talks.

Thiaw said the conference was “like no other” in the talks’ 30-year history. “We have elevated the land and drought agenda beyond sector-specific discussions, establishing it as a cornerstone of global efforts to address inter-connected challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, food insecurity, migration and global security.”

Longer-lasting solutions to drought — such as the curbing of climate change — were not a talking point.

Host Saudi Arabia has been criticized in the past for stalling progress on curbing emissions from fossil fuels at other negotiations. The Gulf nation is one of the world’s largest oil producers and exporters with

the second-largest global oil reserves.

Earlier in the conference, hosts Saudi Arabia, a few other countries and international banks pledged \$2.15 billion for drought resilience. And the Arab Coordination Group, made up of 10 development banks based in the Middle East, committed \$10 billion by 2030 to address degrading land, desertification and drought. The funds are expected to support 80 of the most vulnerable countries prepare for worsening drought conditions.

But the U.N. estimates that between 2007 and 2017, droughts will cost \$125 billion worldwide.

Erika Gomez, lead negotiator from Panama said while a decision on dealing with drought was not reached, significant progress was made in other key issues.

"We have achieved several key milestones, particularly in the growing traction of civil society engagement and the gender decision," Gomez said. "Until the very end, parties could not agree on whether or not the new instrument to respond to drought should be legally binding or not," said Jes Weigelt of European climate think-tank TMG Research who has been tracking the talks.

"I fear, the UNCCD COP 16 has suffered the same fate as the biodiversity and climate COPs this year. It failed to deliver," he said.

Stay sober and have a jolly holiday season with these expert tips

By MELISSA RAYWORTH Associated Press

Last year, when Lauren Haydel began her first sober holiday season, she wondered how difficult it would be to avoid alcohol at family parties and celebrations with friends. She owns a boutique, Fleurty Girl, in New Orleans' French Quarter, a neighborhood synonymous with drinking.

But few people questioned her choice. "Instead of them asking me why," Haydel says, "they ask me, 'Oh, do you feel better?'"

Many friends told her they're considering avoiding alcohol themselves.

Sobriety has been having a moment, says Jessica Jeboult, founder of the website and online community A Sober Girl's Guide.

"This is the ultimate time to rediscover or change your relationship with alcohol," she says. With so many alcohol-free products available and growing awareness about the benefits of staying sober, "there is maximum support."

If you are planning to stay sober this holiday season, here are tips from sober coaches, sober bar managers and happily sober people:

Plan drink options in advance of social events

"Having something in your hand just ups your comfort level, because you feel like you're socializing with this thing in your hand, instead of standing there with your hands at your side," says Abby Ehmann, who owns Hekate Cafe and Elixir Lounge, a sober bar on New York City's Lower East Side.

It can help to choose your alcohol-free options in advance. If you prefer something that reminds you of alcohol, sample some of the many non-alcoholic wines and beers on the market (they're not all equally tasty) and check which are on the menu at a bar or restaurant you'll be visiting.

If you'll be hosting a party or attending one at someone's home, you also can mix up your own mocktail recipes in advance.

"Treat these drinks like they're really special," says Vermont-based chef Suzanne Podhaizer, who makes an assortment of mocktails when she entertains.

Don't forget the garnish, she says: "Consider putting a sugar rim on your glasses or using luster dust on top. The more you make the non-alcoholic drinks feel celebratory, the better people are going to feel."

Mocktails also make great hostess gifts. Mix up a batch of your favorite recipe, pour it into a large Mason jar and tie it with a ribbon to bring with you.

Make social plans that don't focus on drinking

This year, plan to gather somewhere other than a bar. It's the perfect season "to have some lovely hot chocolates, take them outdoors and go ice skating," says Kate Bailey, a women's health coach in the U.K.

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and host of the podcast Love Sober.

If you're invited to an event that is all about drinking, give yourself permission to skip it, says Adam Cannon, a real estate agent in Pittsburgh who has been sober for 18 years.

In his industry, "at this time of year, there's a different networking event every night of the week," Cannon says. He opts not to go if "ostensibly, it's about networking, but it's at a bar. People are getting hammered."

Know your sober social window

Even if it's your habit to stay out late, "you don't have to do what you've always done at this particular Christmas party," Haydel says. Drop in for the first hour, then allow yourself to leave when you wish.

You won't miss much. "There's a witching hour when you're out at a bar or drinking with friends," Jeboult says. "When people get past two drinks, three drinks, the stories are the same."

If need be, slip out without explanation. Whether you call it a "French exit" or an "Irish goodbye," it's totally an option.

Take breaks and connect with sober support

If you're feeling stressed during a holiday gathering, "take a time out," Jeboult says. Escape to the bathroom, step outside for a minute or go for a walk.

Snack breaks help, too. Jay Bridwell, a recovery counselor at Red Rock Behavioral Health in Oklahoma City, often uses the acronym HALT with patients in addiction recovery. If you are "Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired," he says, you may be more likely to reach for alcohol. So build in time for rest and meals.

And have a plan if things get tough. Whether it's an Alcoholics Anonymous sponsor, a sober relative or a group text with healthy friends, stay connected with people who will support you, Bridwell says. You can also join an online sober group and follow sobriety-related social media accounts.

Plan your transportation

Map out multiple transportation options, rather than relying on one person for a ride home from a party. You'll have less stress, and feel less motivated to temper stress with alcohol, if you have the freedom to leave when you wish.

View being sober as a holiday gift to yourself

During her first sober holiday season last year, Haydel reveled in meaningful conversations and the joy of waking up feeling good each morning with clear memories of the night before.

"Sobriety is the gift that you keep on giving to your future self over and over and over again," says Elliott Edge, who manages Hekate, the sober bar.

Focus on enjoying this very real gift, Baily says. Take your time getting dressed, visualizing yourself having a great time, and imagine how you'll feel as your head hits the pillow when you get home.

As a finishing touch, plan a reward for the next day. Maybe a breakfast date with a friend or a morning walk in the park that will feel especially good because you won't be hung over.

"You've got the best bits of the evening," Baily says, "and there are no costs."

A diminished Hezbollah is made even weaker by the toppling of Assad in Syria

By BASSEM MROUE and KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — A severely hobbled Hezbollah was in no position to help defend former Syrian President Bashar Assad, a longtime ally, from the lightning-fast insurgency that toppled him. With Assad gone, the militant group based in Lebanon is even weaker.

Hezbollah was dealt a major blow during 14 months of war with Israel. The toppling of Assad, who had strong ties to Iran, has now crippled its ability to bounce back by cutting off a vital weapons-smuggling route through Syria.

Hezbollah officials are deeply concerned but defiant.

"What is happening in Syria is a major, dangerous and new change, and to know why this happened

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needs evaluation," Hassan Fadlallah, a Lebanese lawmaker who represents Hezbollah's political wing, said during a speech at a funeral for militants killed by Israel. "Whatever is happening in Syria, despite its dangers, will not weaken us."

Analysts say the diminishment of Hezbollah will have big consequences for Lebanon, where for decades it has been a major political player — and for Iran, which has relied on the group as one of several proxy forces projecting power across the Middle East. It is also a game-changer for Israel, whose nemesis on its northern border is now at its most vulnerable point in decades.

Ties to Syria influenced the rise and fall of Hezbollah's power

The Assad dynasty, which ruled Syria for half a century with an iron fist, played a crucial role in empowering Hezbollah, which was founded in the early 1980s by Iranian advisers who came through Syria. In addition to being a conduit for Iranian weapons, Syria also was a place where Hezbollah trained fighters and manufactured its own weapons.

As Hezbollah grew more powerful, it became a force Assad could rely on for protection in times of crisis. Hezbollah sent thousands of fighters to bolster Assad's forces when a civil war broke out in 2011.

As insurgents swept across Syria in early December and took the city of Homs — a stone's throw from a Syrian border town where Hezbollah had a presence — many expected the militants to put up a fierce fight. After all, they did just that in 2013, preventing Assad's opponents from advancing into Damascus.

This time, Hezbollah was in disarray. Many of its top officials, including longtime leader Hassan Nasrallah, were killed in Israeli airstrikes. And months of Israeli bombardment destroyed much of its military infrastructure. With Syria's key international allies, Russia and Iran, on the sidelines, Hezbollah withdrew, and Assad was ousted quickly.

"The fall of the regime marks the end of Iran's arms in Syria and Lebanon," said Lt. Col. Fares al-Bayoush, a Syrian army defector who fought in the civil war against Assad's forces and Hezbollah until 2017, when he moved to Turkey.

Lebanon begins to grapple with Hezbollah's 'new reality'

In Lebanon, the sapping of Hezbollah's strength has given the army the opportunity to reassert control it had ceded, especially along its southern border. A U.S.-brokered ceasefire between the militant group and Israel states that Hezbollah should have no armed presence along that border and it has led to growing calls within Lebanon for the group's disarmament.

"To Hezbollah, it's game over," Samir Geagea, who leads the Christian Lebanese Forces Party, said in a statement on Sunday, hours after insurgents took Damascus. "Sit with the Lebanese military to end your status as an armed group, and transform yourselves into a political party."

But Hezbollah's longtime sway in the political arena in Lebanon also faces a major challenge.

Many in Lebanon are angry with the group. Critics say Hezbollah violated its promise to use its weapons only to defend Lebanon when it began firing rockets into Israel last year, the day after Hamas — another Iranian-backed group — attacked Israel.

Nearly than 4,000 people were killed in Lebanon during the war with Israel, according to the country's health ministry. Entire towns and villages where Hezbollah militants and their supporters lived have been flattened. More than 1 million people have been displaced, and the country's economy — which was in bad shape before the war — is in a deep hole.

"With the (Syrian) regime gone, Hezbollah in Lebanon faces an entirely new reality," said Firas Maksad, of the Middle East Institute.

Maksad said many Lebanese leaders have yet to grasp the magnitude of the change that has taken place. Even some onetime allies of Hezbollah in parliament have begun distancing themselves from the group.

Gebran Bassil, a lawmaker who represents the Free Patriotic Movement, Lebanon's other major Christian party, said Hezbollah's loss of a weapons pipeline from Iran could help Lebanon extract itself from regional conflict.

"Hezbollah should focus on internal affairs and not the wider region," Bassil, a former ally of Hezbollah, said.

It may have no choice but to narrow its ambitions. With the fall of Assad, Iran has lost control of a cor-

ridor of land that stretched through Iraq and Syria all the way to the Mediterranean, and which gave it an unimpeded route to supply Hezbollah.

"They can maybe fly in some things and smuggle some things, but that's not gonna be on the same scale, not even close," said Aron Lund, a Syria expert with Century International, a New York-based think tank.

For Israel, breaking Iran's regional network has been a major goal, though it is wary over Islamic militants among the insurgents who toppled Assad. Israel on Sunday moved troops into a demilitarized buffer zone with Syria by the Israel-held Golan Heights in what it called a temporary security measure.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called Assad's fall a "historic day," saying it was "the direct result of our forceful action against Hezbollah and Iran, Assad's main supporters."

Court denies TikTok's request to halt enforcement of potential US ban until Supreme Court review

By HALELUYA HADERO AP Business Writer

A federal appeals court on Friday left in place a mid-January deadline in a federal law requiring TikTok to be sold or face a ban in the United States, rejecting a request made by the company to halt enforcement until the Supreme Court reviews its challenge of the statute.

Attorneys for TikTok and its China-based parent company, ByteDance, are expected to appeal to the Supreme Court.

It's unclear if the nation's highest court will take up the case, though some legal experts have said they expect the justices to weigh in due to the types of novel questions it raises about social media, national security and the First Amendment. TikTok is also looking for a potential lifeline from President-elect Donald Trump, who promised to "save" the short-form video platform during the presidential campaign.

Attorneys for TikTok and ByteDance had requested the injunction after a panel of three judges on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit sided with the U.S. government and rejected their challenge to the law.

The court rejected that request on Friday, calling it "unwarranted."

"The petitioners have not identified any case in which a court, after rejecting a constitutional challenge to an Act of Congress, has enjoined the Act from going into effect while review is sought in the Supreme Court," said the court's order, which was unsigned.

The statute, which was signed by President Joe Biden earlier this year, requires ByteDance to sell TikTok to an approved buyer due to national security concerns or face a ban in the U.S.

The U.S. has said it sees TikTok as a national security risk because ByteDance could be coerced by Chinese authorities to hand over U.S. user data or manipulate content on the platform for Beijing's interests. TikTok has denied those claims and has argued that the government's case rests on hypothetical future risks instead of proven facts.

In the request filed this week, attorneys for TikTok and ByteDance had asked for a "modest delay" in enforcement of the law so that the Supreme Court could review the case and the incoming Trump administration could "determine its position" on the matter.

If the law is not overturned, the two companies have said that the popular app will shut down by Jan. 19, just a day before Trump takes office again. More than 170 million American users would be affected, the companies have said.

The Justice Department had opposed TikTok's request for a pause, saying in a court filing this week that the parties had already proposed a schedule that was "designed for the precise purpose" of allowing Supreme Court review of the law before it took effect.

The appeals court issued its Dec. 6 ruling on the matter in line with that schedule, the Justice Department filing said.

Texas' abortion pill lawsuit against New York doctor marks new challenge to interstate telemedicine

By SEAN MURPHY, MICHAEL HILL and GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

Texas has sued a New York doctor for prescribing abortion pills to a woman near Dallas, launching one of the first challenges in the U.S. to shield laws that Democrat-controlled states passed to protect physicians after *Roe v. Wade* was overturned.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton filed the lawsuit on Thursday in Collin County, and it was announced Friday.

Such prescriptions, made online and over the phone, are a key reason that the number of abortions has increased across the U.S. even since state bans started taking effect. Most abortions in the U.S. involve pills rather than procedures.

Mary Ruth Ziegler, a law professor at the University of California, Davis, School of Law, said a challenge to shield laws, which blue states started adopting in 2023, has been anticipated.

And it could have a chilling effect on prescriptions.

"Will doctors be more afraid to mail pills into Texas, even if they might be protected by shield laws because they don't know if they're protected by shield laws?" Ziegler said in an interview Friday.

The lawsuit accuses New York Dr. Maggie Carpenter of violating Texas law by providing the drugs to a Texas patient and seeks up to \$250,000. No criminal charges are involved.

Texas bars abortion at all stages of pregnancy and has been one of the most aggressive states at pushing back against abortion rights. It began enforcing a state law in 2021 — even before the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* and opened the door to state bans — that barred nearly all abortions by allowing citizens to sue anyone who provides an abortion or assists someone in obtaining one.

Paxton said that the 20-year-old woman who received the pills ended up in a hospital with complications. It was only after that, the state said in its filing, that the man described as "the biological father of the unborn child" learned of the pregnancy and the abortion.

"In Texas, we treasure the health and lives of mothers and babies, and this is why out-of-state doctors may not illegally and dangerously prescribe abortion-inducing drugs to Texas residents," Paxton said in a statement.

The state said the Texas woman received a combination of two drugs that are generally used in medication abortions. Mifepristone blocks the hormone progesterone and primes the uterus to respond to the contraction-causing effect of the second drug, misoprostol. The two-drug regimen can be used to end pregnancies up through 10 weeks, but the drugs also have other uses and can help induce labor, manage miscarriages or treat hemorrhage.

The Abortion Coalition for Telemedicine, where Carpenter is co-medical director and founder, said in a statement that shield laws are essential to preserving abortion access.

"Ken Paxton is prioritizing his anti-abortion agenda over the health and well-being of women by attempting to shut down telemedicine abortion nationwide," the group said. "By threatening access to safe and effective reproductive health care, he is putting women directly in harm's way."

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul and Attorney General Letitia James, both Democrats, said they would defend reproductive freedom.

"As other states move to attack those who provide or obtain abortion care, New York is proud to be a safe haven for abortion access," James said in a prepared statement. "We will always protect our providers from unjust attempts to punish them for doing their job and we will never cower in the face of intimidation or threats."

It was not clear what specific actions Hochul or James would take.

While most Republican-controlled states began enforcing bans or tighter restrictions on abortion after *Roe v. Wade* was overturned, most Democratic states have adopted laws that aim to protect their residents from investigation or prosecution under other states' abortion laws. At least eight states have gone farther, offering legal protections to health care providers who prescribe abortion pills to patients in states where

abortion is banned. That scenario makes up for about 10% of all abortions in the U.S., a survey for the Society of Family Planning found.

The New York shield law includes a provision that allows a prescriber who is sued to countersue the plaintiff to recover damages.

That makes the Texas lawsuit thorny.

Even if Paxton prevails in Texas court, Ziegler said, it's unclear how that could be enforced. "Is he going to go to New York to enforce it?" she asked.

Still, anti-abortion groups cheered the filing and abortion rights supporters derided it.

Anti-abortion advocates, who legally challenged the Biden administration's prescribing rules around mifepristone, have been readying provocative and unusual ways to further limit abortion pill access when Trump takes office next year. They feel emboldened to challenge the pills' use and seek ways to restrict it under a conservative U.S. Supreme Court buttressed by a Republican-controlled Congress and White House.

Earlier this year, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a group of anti-abortion doctors and their organizations lacked the legal standing to sue to try to have the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's approval of mifepristone rescinded. But since then, the Republican state attorneys general from Idaho, Kansas and Missouri have sought to have some of the rules around the pills tightened — including to bar telemedicine prescriptions.

Also this year, Louisiana became the first state to reclassify the drugs as "controlled dangerous substances." They can still be prescribed, but there are extra steps required to access them.

Lawmakers in at least three states — Missouri, New Hampshire and Tennessee — have introduced bills for next year that would bar or restrict use of the pills.

"I began to think about how we might be able to both provide an additional deterrent to companies violating the criminal law and provide a remedy for the family of the unborn children," said Tennessee state Rep. Gino Bulso, who is sponsoring the legislation there targeting medications used in abortions.

Lindsey Vonn eager for her return to World Cup ski races next weekend in Switzerland at age 40

By PAT GRAHAM AP Sports Writer

BEAVER CREEK, Colo. (AP) — Lindsey Vonn now has a firm target for her return to World Cup ski racing at age 40: next weekend for a pair of super-G events in St. Moritz, Switzerland.

She has a goal, too, and it's not showing up at the starting gate simply to show up.

"You know me well enough to know that success is not just participating," Vonn said at a news conference Friday night. "I know my way back to a competitive level might take a race or two, but I certainly intend on getting back to where I was before."

Where she was before was on the podium. Her last major race was February 2019, when she took third in the downhill during the world championships in Sweden.

"For me, when I'm focused on something, I have no problem working 110 percent to get to my goal, and that's what it takes," Vonn said. "I don't just whimsically rejoin the U.S. Ski Team."

"I never stopped believing in myself. I never have my whole life — and I'm not going to stop now."

Vonn teased her return to World Cup racing early Friday in an Instagram post through her sponsor, Red Bull. She said, "My body is finally put back together. I hear St. Moritz is pretty nice this time of year."

She's had plenty of success in St. Moritz, too, winning five of her 82 World Cup races at the venue. There will be super-G competitions next Saturday and Sunday.

"It's the coolest thing ever," said Picabo Street, a two-time Olympic medalist and Vonn's former teammate. "I'm not surprised at all. I've seen her intermittently and she's stayed in great shape. She is the hardest-working person I've met in my life — period."

An assortment of injuries, including to her knee, sent Vonn into retirement. But a partial knee replacement last April has her feeling good enough again to give racing another chance.

"I'm lucky that I have this second chance where I am physically, I feel like, as I was before," Vonn said.

"I know what I'm capable of if my body is cooperating. And thankfully that titanium piece (part of the new knee) is really working out well."

Vonn earned enough points to be eligible to compete on the World Cup circuit through a series of lower-level competitions last weekend in Copper Mountain, Colorado. She's been testing out the Birds of Prey course at Beaver Creek as a forerunner in training runs this week. She didn't take the hill Friday, but will again in a forerunning capacity ahead of the downhill on Saturday and the super-G on Sunday.

"She's living her best life," said Street, who's doing commentary work at the Birds of Prey races this weekend for NBC. "She's earned every second of it."

When Vonn left the tour, she had 82 World Cup wins — the record for a woman at the time and within reach of the all-time Alpine mark of 86 held by Swedish standout Ingemar Stenmark. The women's record held by Vonn was eclipsed in January 2023 by Mikaela Shiffrin, whose 99 wins are more than any Alpine ski racer in the history of the sport.

"It's awesome" to have Vonn back, said Czech ski racer and snowboarder Ester Ledecka, who won the 2018 Olympic super-G in South Korea as Vonn finished tied for sixth. "It was for me a little bit sad to see her finishing her career. I thought, 'Hey, you should finish it when you want to, not because your body is not capable to let you do your runs.' I'm very happy that she's back and she's feeling good and she's happy.

"I think she'll be also very fast. So, I'm very happy to have her around."

Nancy Pelosi hospitalized after she 'sustained an injury' from fall on official trip to Luxembourg

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has been hospitalized after she "sustained an injury" during an official engagement in Luxembourg, according to a spokesman.

Pelosi, 84, was in Europe with a bipartisan congressional delegation to mark the 80th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge in World War II. Her spokesman, Ian Krager, said in a statement that she is "currently receiving excellent treatment from doctors and medical professionals" and is unable to attend the remainder of events on her trip.

He did not describe the nature of her injury or give any additional details, but a person familiar with the incident said that Pelosi tripped and fell while at an event with the other members of Congress. Another person familiar with the situation said she injured her hip. The people requested anonymity to discuss the fall because they were not authorized to speak about it publicly.

Krager said that Pelosi "looks forward to returning home to the U.S. soon."

Among the members on the trip was Rep. Michael McCaul, R-Texas, who posted on social media that he was "praying for a speedy recovery," for Pelosi. The two lawmakers were captured holding hands in a group photo Friday at the U.S. Embassy in Luxembourg.

"I'm disappointed Speaker Emerita Pelosi won't be able to join the rest of our delegation's events this weekend as I know how much she looked forward to honoring our veterans," McCaul wrote on X. "But she is strong, and I am confident she will be back on her feet in no time."

The former leader's fall comes two years after her husband Paul was attacked by a man with a hammer at their San Francisco home. The man, who was sentenced in October to 30 years in federal prison, broke into their home looking for Pelosi.

Pelosi, who was first elected in 1987 and served as speaker twice, stepped down from her leadership post two years ago but remained in Congress and was re-elected to represent her San Francisco district in November.

She has remained active in the two years since she left the top job, working with Democrats in private and in public and attending official events. Last summer, she was instrumental in her party's behind the scenes push to urge President Joe Biden to leave the presidential ticket.

She attended the Kennedy Center Honors in Washington last weekend and was on the Senate floor Monday to attend the swearing in of her former Democratic House colleagues, Adam Schiff of California

and Andy Kim of New Jersey.

Earlier this week, Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, 82, tripped and fell in the Senate, spraining his wrist and cutting his face. McConnell, who is stepping down from his leadership post at the end of the year, missed Senate votes on Thursday after experiencing some stiffness in his leg from the fall, his office said.

OpenAI's legal battle with Elon Musk reveals internal turmoil over avoiding AI 'dictatorship'

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

A 7-year-old rivalry between tech leaders Elon Musk and Sam Altman over who should run OpenAI and prevent an artificial intelligence "dictatorship" is now heading to a federal judge as Musk seeks to halt the ChatGPT maker's ongoing shift into a for-profit company.

Musk, an early OpenAI investor and board member, sued the artificial intelligence company earlier this year alleging it had betrayed its founding aims as a nonprofit research lab benefiting the public good rather than pursuing profits.

Musk has since escalated the dispute, adding new claims and asking for a court order that would stop OpenAI's plans to convert itself into a for-profit business more fully.

The world's richest man, whose companies include Tesla, SpaceX and social media platform X, last year started his own rival AI company, xAI. Musk says it faces unfair competition from OpenAI and its close business partner Microsoft, which has supplied the huge computing resources needed to build AI systems such as ChatGPT.

"OpenAI and Microsoft together exploiting Musk's donations so they can build a for-profit monopoly, one now specifically targeting xAI, is just too much," says Musk's filing that alleges the companies are violating the terms of Musk's foundational contributions to the charity.

OpenAI filed a response Friday opposing Musk's requested order, saying it would "debilitate OpenAI's business" and mission to the advantage of Musk and his own AI company and is based on "far-fetched" legal claims. A hearing is set for January before U.S. District Judge Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers in Oakland, California.

At the heart of the dispute is a 2017 internal power struggle at the fledgling startup that led to Altman becoming OpenAI's CEO.

Musk also sought to be CEO and in an email outlined a plan where he would "unequivocally have initial control of the company" but said that would be temporary. He grew frustrated after two other OpenAI co-founders said he would hold too much power as a major shareholder and chief executive if the startup succeeded in its goal to achieve better-than-human AI known as artificial general intelligence, or AGI. Musk has long voiced concerns about how advanced forms of AI could threaten humanity.

"The current structure provides you with a path where you end up with unilateral absolute control over the AGI," said a 2017 email to Musk from co-founders Ilya Sutskever and Greg Brockman. "You stated that you don't want to control the final AGI, but during this negotiation, you've shown to us that absolute control is extremely important to you."

In the same email, titled "Honest Thoughts," Sutskever and Brockman also voiced concerns about Altman's desire to be CEO and whether he was motivated by "political goals." Altman eventually succeeded in becoming CEO, and has remained so except for a period last year when he was fired and then reinstated days later after the board that ousted him was replaced.

OpenAI published the messages Friday in a blog post meant to show its side of the story, particularly Musk's early support for the idea of making OpenAI a for-profit business so it could raise money for the hardware and computer power that AI needs.

It was Musk, through his wealth manager Jared Birchall, who first registered "Open Artificial Intelligence Technologies, Inc.," a public benefit corporation, in September 2017. Then came the "Honest Thoughts"

email that Musk described as the “final straw.”

“Either go do something on your own or continue with OpenAI as a nonprofit,” Musk wrote back. OpenAI said Musk later proposed merging the startup into Tesla before resigning as the co-chair of OpenAI’s board in early 2018.

Musk didn’t respond to emailed requests for comment sent to his companies Friday.

Asked about his frayed relationship with Musk at a New York Times conference last week, Altman said he felt “tremendously sad” but also characterized Musk’s legal fight as one about business competition.

“He’s a competitor and we’re doing well,” Altman said. He also said at the conference that he is “not that worried” about the Tesla CEO’s influence with President-elect Donald Trump. OpenAI said Friday that Altman plans to make a \$1 million personal donation to Trump’s inauguration fund, joining a number of tech companies and executives who are working to improve their relationships with the incoming administration.

US military flies American released from Syrian prison to Jordan, officials say

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. military has transported out of Syria an American who had disappeared seven months ago into former President Bashar Assad’s notorious prison system and was among the thousands released this week by rebels, U.S. officials said Friday.

Travis Timmerman, 29, was flown to Jordan on a U.S. military helicopter, according to two U.S. officials who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss an ongoing operation.

It’s unclear where Timmerman may go next. He thanked his rescuers for freeing him but has told American officials that he would like to stay in the region, according to another person familiar with the matter who was not authorized to comment publicly.

Timmerman was detained after he crossed into Syria while on a Christian pilgrimage from a mountain along the eastern Lebanese town of Zahle in June.

He told The Associated Press in an interview earlier Friday that he was not ill-treated while in Palestine Branch, a notorious detention facility operated by Syrian intelligence.

In his prison cell, Timmerman said, he had a mattress, a plastic drinking container and two others for waste. He said the Friday calls to prayers helped keep track of days.

Timmerman said he was released Monday morning alongside a young Syrian man and 70 female prisoners, some of whom had their children with them, after rebels seized control of Damascus and forced Assad from power in a dramatic upheaval.

He said he was freed by “the liberators who came into the prison and knocked the door down (of his cell) with a hammer.” He had been held separately from Syrian and other Arab prisoners and said he didn’t know of any other Americans held in the facility.

Timmerman is from Urbana, Missouri, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) north of Springfield in the southwestern part of the state. He earned a finance degree from Missouri State University in 2017.

His mother, Stacey Gardiner, said she was told that he was being taken to a military base in Jordan. The family still had not spoken to him.

Mouaz Moustafa, a U.S.-based Syrian opposition activist who worked with rebels to arrange Timmerman’s transfer back to safety, tweeted a photo of the freed American standing next to a man in U.S. military uniform in the flat desert of the region.

“Safe and sound and back in American hands,” Moustafa wrote.

U.S. officials, meanwhile, are continuing their search for Austin Tice, an American journalist who disappeared 12 years ago near Damascus.

Nizar Zakka, president of the U.S.-based Hostage Aid Worldwide that was commissioned by Tice’s family to search for him, said he called Tice’s mother and sister after receiving a tip Thursday from a Syrian near where Timmerman was found. The caller thought the foreigner was Tice.

“We asked them for videos, we ask them for voice (recordings) to make sure,” Zakka said. “We had the

feeling from the minute, especially from the age, that it's not correct. But we sent it to the mom. It was 3 a.m. (in the U.S.), and we woke the sister, and she said to me one thing. She said that definitely it's not Austin."

In the search for Tice, Zakka said he had visited detention centers and the houses of prominent figures in Assad's circle, but the search had so far not produced results.

The three possible scenarios, Zakka said, are that "we will find him somewhere in Damascus, in the jail that he was left in or in the house, in the safe house where he is"; that a high-ranking member of Assad's circle took Tice along while escaping the country "as a security for his life"; or that Tice's captors killed him and other prisoners to erase evidence of their crimes.

He criticized the U.S. for announcing a \$10 million reward for information leading to Tice, saying that it had led to a flood of false tips and caused confusion.

Yankees get closer Devin Williams from Brewers for Nestor Cortes, Caleb Durbin

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — After acquiring Juan Soto for a one-year rental and failing to keep him as a free agent, the New York Yankees are taking the same chance with Devin Williams.

New York acquired the All-Star closer from the Milwaukee Brewers for left-hander Nestor Cortes and infield prospect Caleb Durbin on Friday. The Yankees will send \$2 million to the Brewers as part of the trade.

"He's a year away from free agency but someone that we've tried to acquire for a number of years," Yankees general manager Brian Cashman said. "I'm sure we weren't the only bidders here in the end."

A 30-year-old right-hander, Williams is eligible for free agency after the 2025 season. He was diagnosed during spring training with two stress fractures in his back and didn't make his season debut until July 28.

"Certainly not trying to downplay the impact the Devin had, but we feel like we still have a good amount of strength there with our bullpen," Brewers general manager Matt Arnold said.

Williams was 14 for 15 in save chances with a 1.25 ERA, striking out 38 and walking 11 among 88 batters over 21 2/3 innings. His fastball averaged 94.7 mph and he threw it on 53.5% of his pitches, mixing in 45% changeups — known as the "Airbender" — and around 1.5% cutters.

Williams' 43.2% strikeout percentage was the highest in the major leagues among pitchers with at least 20 innings.

"Certainly doesn't seem to be afraid," Cashman said. "You can't do that job if you're afraid of the big stage."

An All-Star in 2022 and 2023, Williams was a second-round pick in the 2013 amateur draft. He is 27-10 with a 1.83 ERA and 68 saves in 78 chances over six seasons, striking out 375 and walking 112 in 235 2/3 innings over 241 games.

Milwaukee declined a \$10.5 million club option in favor of a \$250,000 buyout last month, making Williams eligible for arbitration.

Williams joins a bullpen that includes Luke Weaver, who took over as closer from Clay Holmes in September, Jake Cousins and Ian Hamilton. The Yankees don't have a left-handed reliever on their 40-man roster.

"If you have right handers that can neutralize lefties, that's a benefit. It limits your desperation for immediately a left on left," Cashman said.

Cortes, who turned 30 on Tuesday, was an All-Star in 2022 when he went 12-4 with a career-best 2.44 ERA in 28 starts. He made just one start after May 30 in 2023 because of a strained left rotator cuff and was sidelined late in the 2024 season by a flexor strain in his left elbow.

He returned for the World Series against the Los Angeles Dodgers and entered in the 10th inning of the opener, retiring Shohei Ohtani on a foulout with his first pitch and giving up a game-ending grand slam to Freddie Freeman on his second.

"He's had a fully healthy offseason," Arnold said. "We expect him to come into camp ready to go as normal."

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Known for his many deliveries, Cortes is 33-21 with a 3.80 ERA in 86 starts and 49 relief appearances over seven seasons. He is eligible for arbitration and also can become a free agent after next season.

"He brings a real stability, I think, to our rotation," Arnold said. "Somebody that's been a major piece of a really good championship-caliber team in the New York Yankees, I think will fit us very well, especially after the loss of Willy Adames."

New York had an excess of starters after reaching a \$218 million, eight-year agreement with left-hander Max Fried that is pending. The rotation also is projected to include ace Gerrit Cole, Carlos Rodón, Luis Gil and Clarke Schmidt, with Marcus Stroman also available.

Durbin, who turns 25 in February, hit .287 with 10 homers, 60 RBIs and 29 stolen bases this year at Triple-A Scranton/Wilkes-Barre.

"We just felt it was harder to acquire someone at the level of Devin Williams than it would be to try to figure out the infield circumstances," Cashman said.

Durbin was with the big league team last spring training

"I think he's a stud," Yankees manager Aaron Boone said last month. "Great bat-to-ball, elite ability on the bases as a base stealer, good defender in the middle of the diamond, second base. He's really started over the last year-plus to create some position flexibility, too. He's played some short, he's played some third. We introduced him to some outfield this year."

Durbin hit .312 with five homers, 21 RBIs and 29 steals in 24 games at the Arizona Fall League.

"We love the style of game that he brings to our team," Arnold said. "I think that's going to be a really nice fit with Pat Murphy's style of baseball."

Cashman said he's spoken with Scott Boras about the agent's remaining free agent clients, who include third baseman Alex Bregman and first baseman Pete Alonso.

"Certainly respect the player and his ability and how much winning he's been a part of," Cashman said of Bregman, "but that's about as far as I will say at this point."

Paula Abdul settles lawsuit alleging sexual assault by 'American Idol' producer Nigel Lythgoe

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Paula Abdul and former "American Idol" producer Nigel Lythgoe have agreed to settle a lawsuit in which she alleged he sexually assaulted her in the early 2000s when she was a judge on the show.

Abdul filed a notice of settlement of the case in Los Angeles Superior Court on Thursday. It still must be approved by a judge.

"I am grateful that this chapter has successfully come to a close and is now something I can now put behind me," Abdul said in a statement Friday. "This has been a long and hard-fought personal battle. I hope my experience can serve to inspire other women, facing similar struggles, to overcome their own challenges with dignity and respect, so that they too can turn the page and begin a new chapter of their lives."

In his own statement, Lythgoe said, "We live in a troubling time where a person is now automatically assumed to be guilty until proven innocent, a process that can take years. That is why, like Paula, I am glad to be able to put this behind me. I know the truth and that gives me great comfort."

The court filing said the settlement was unconditional, but did not reveal the terms, and Abdul's attorney Melissa Eubanks said she could not comment on them.

The lawsuit filed nearly a year ago had also accused Lythgoe of sexually assaulting Abdul after she left "American Idol" and became a judge on Lythgoe's other competition show, "So You Think You Can Dance."

Lythgoe said at the time that he was "shocked and saddened" by the allegations, which he called "an appalling smear."

After other lawsuits were filed alleging sexual misconduct, Lythgoe stepped down in January from his role as a judge on "So You Think You Can Dance."

The 75-year-old English-born producer has been a prominent TV producer for decades in both the U.K. and the U.S., working on reality competition shows including "American Idol."

The Associated Press generally does not identify alleged victims of sexual assault unless they come forward publicly, as Abdul has done.

Abdul, a Grammy and Emmy-winning singer and dancer, said in the lawsuit that she remained silent for years about the alleged assaults out of fear of retaliation by "one of the most well-known producers of television competition shows."

She alleged that the first sexual assault occurred while Abdul and Lythgoe were on the road filming auditions for an early season of "American Idol," which premiered in 2002.

Abdul says Lythgoe groped her in the elevator of their hotel after a day of filming and "began shoving his tongue down her throat." Abdul pushed him away and ran to her hotel room when the elevator doors opened.

"In tears, Abdul quickly called one of her representatives to inform them of the assault," the lawsuit says, "but ultimately decided not to take action for fear that Lythgoe would have her fired."

Abdul starred as a judge for the first eight seasons, leaving in 2009.

In 2015, Abdul became a judge on "So You Think You Can Dance," appearing alongside Lythgoe.

Around that time, Abdul alleged in the lawsuit, Lythgoe forced himself on top of her during a dinner at his home and tried to kiss her. Abdul said she again pushed Lythgoe away and immediately left.

Abdul left that reality show after two seasons. She has not worked with Lythgoe since.

In a statement at the time of the suit, Lythgoe said "While Paula's history of erratic behavior is well known, I can't pretend to understand exactly why she would file a lawsuit that she must know is untrue."

Syrians cheer end of 50 years of Assad rule at first Friday prayers since government fell

By ALBERT AJI and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

DAMASCUS (AP) — Exuberant Syrians observed the first Friday prayers since the ouster of President Bashar Assad, gathering in the capital's historic main mosque, its largest square and around the country to celebrate the end of half a century of authoritarian rule.

The newly installed interim prime minister delivered the sermon at the Umayyad Mosque, declaring that a new era of "freedom, dignity and justice" was dawning for Syria.

The gatherings illustrated the dramatic changes that have swept over Syria less than a week after insurgents marched into Damascus and toppled Assad. Amid the jubilation, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with allies around the region and called for an "inclusive and non-sectarian" interim government.

Blinken arrived in Iraq on a previously unannounced stop after talks in Jordan and Turkey, which backs some of the Syrian insurgent factions. So far, U.S. officials have not talked of direct meetings with Syria's new rulers.

The main insurgent force, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, has worked to establish security and start a political transition after seizing Damascus early Sunday. The group has tried to reassure a public both stunned by Assad's fall and concerned about extremist jihadis among the rebels.

Insurgent leaders say the group has broken with its extremist past, though HTS is still labeled a terrorist group by the United States and European countries.

HTS's leader, Ahmad al-Sharaa, formerly known as Abu Mohammed al-Golani, appeared in a video message Friday congratulating "the great Syrian people for the victory of the blessed revolution."

"I invite them to head to the squares to show their happiness without shooting bullets and scaring people," he said. "And then after, we will work to build this country, and as I said in the beginning, we will be victorious by the help of God."

Syrians celebrate in the historic heart of Damascus

Huge crowds, including some insurgents, packed the historic Umayyad Mosque in the capital's old city, many waving the rebel opposition flag — with its three red stars — which has swiftly replaced the Assad-

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era flag with with its two green stars.

Syrian state television reported that the sermon was delivered by Mohammed al-Bashir, the interim prime minister installed by HTS this week.

The scene resonated on multiple levels. The mosque, one of the world's oldest dating back some 1,200 years, is a beloved symbol of Syria, and sermons there like all mosque sermons across Syria were tightly controlled under Assad's rule.

Also, in the early days of the anti-government uprising in 2011, protesters would leave Friday prayers to march in rallies against Assad before he launched a brutal crackdown that turned the uprising into a long and bloody civil war.

"I didn't step foot in Umayyad Mosque since 2011," because of the tight security controls around it, said one worshipper, Ibrahim al-Araby. "Since 11 or 12 years, I haven't been this happy."

Another worshipper, Khair Taha, said there was "fear and trepidation for what's to come. But there is also a lot of hope that now we have a say and we can try to build."

Blocks away in Damascus' biggest roundabout, named Umayyad Square, thousands gathered, including many families with small children — a sign of how, so far at least, the country's transformation has not caused violent instability.

"Unified Syria to build Syria," the crowd chanted. Some shouted slurs against Assad and his late father, calling them pigs, an insult that would have previously led to offenders being hauled off to one of the feared detention centers of Assad's security forces.

One man in the crowd, 51-year-old Khaled Abu Chahine — originally from the southern province of Daraa, where the 2011 uprising first erupted — said he hoped for "freedom and coexistence between all Syrians, Alawites, Sunnis, Shiites and Druze."

The interim prime minister, al-Bashir, had been the head of a de facto administration created by HTS in Idlib, the opposition's enclave in northwest Syria. The rebels were bottled up in Idlib for years before fighters broke out in a shock offensive and marched across Syria in 10 days.

Similar scenes of joy unfolded in other major cities, including in Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Latakia and Raqqqa.

US and its allies try to shape a rapidly changing Syria

Al-Sharaa, HTS' leader, has promised to bring a pluralistic government to Syria, seeking to dispel fears among many Syrians — especially its many minority communities — that the insurgents will impose a hard-line, extremist rule.

Another key factor will be winning international recognition for a new government in a country where multiple foreign powers have their hands in the mix.

The Sunni Arab insurgents who overthrew Assad did so with vital help from Turkey, a longtime foe of the U.S.-backed Kurds. Turkey controls a strip of Syrian territory along the shared border and backs an insurgent faction uneasily allied to HTS — and is deeply opposed to any gains by Syria's Kurds.

In other developments, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said Turkey's Embassy in Damascus would reopen Saturday for the first time since 2012, when it closed due to the Syrian civil war.

The U.S. has troops in eastern Syria to combat remnants of the Islamic State group and supports Kurdish-led fighters who rule most of the east. Since Assad's fall, Israel has bombed sites all over Syria, saying it is trying to prevent weapons from falling into extremist hands. It has also seized a swath of southern Syria along the border with the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, calling it a buffer zone.

After talks with Fidan, Blinken said there was "broad agreement" between Turkey and the U.S. on what they would like to see in Syria.

That starts with an "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.

Fidan said the priority was "establishing stability in Syria as soon as possible, preventing terrorism from gaining ground, and ensuring that IS and the PKK aren't dominant" — referring to the Islamic State group and the Kurdistan Workers Party.

Ankara considers the PKK within Turkey's borders a terrorist group, as it does the Kurdish-backed forces in Syria backed by the U.S.

A U.S. official said that in Ankara, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Fidan both told Blinken that Kurdish attacks on Turkish positions would require a response. The official spoke to reporters on condition of anonymity to discuss private diplomatic talks.

The U.S. has been trying to limit such incidents in recent days and had helped organize an agreement to prevent confrontations around the northern Syrian town of Manbij, which was taken by Turkey-backed opposition fighters from the U.S.-backed Kurdish forces earlier this week.

In Baghdad, Blinken met with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed al-Sudani, saying both countries wanted to ensure the Islamic State group — also known by its Arabic acronym Daesh — doesn't exploit Syria's transition to re-emerge.

"Having put Daesh back in its box, we can't let it out, and we're determined to make sure that that doesn't happen," Blinken said.

The U.S. official who briefed reporters said that Blinken had impressed upon al-Sudani the importance of Iraq exercising its full sovereignty over its territory and airspace to stop Iran from transporting weapons and equipment to Syria, either for Assad supporters or onward to the militant Hezbollah group in Lebanon.

Trump's lawyers rebuff DA's idea for upholding his hush money conviction, calling it 'absurd'

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump's lawyers urged a judge again Friday to throw out his hush money conviction, balking at the prosecution's suggestion of preserving the verdict by treating the case the way some courts do when a defendant dies. They called the idea "absurd."

The Manhattan district attorney's office is asking Judge Juan M. Merchan to "pretend as if one of the assassination attempts against President Trump had been successful," Trump's lawyers wrote in a blistering 23-page response.

In court papers made public Tuesday, District Attorney Alvin Bragg's office proposed an array of options for keeping the historic conviction on the books after Trump's lawyers filed paperwork earlier this month asking for the case to be dismissed.

They include freezing the case until Trump leaves office in 2029, agreeing that any future sentence won't include jail time, or closing the case by noting he was convicted but that he wasn't sentenced and his appeal wasn't resolved because of presidential immunity.

Trump lawyers Todd Blanche and Emil Bove reiterated Friday their position that the only acceptable option is overturning his conviction and dismissing his indictment, writing that anything less will interfere with the transition process and his ability to lead the country.

The Manhattan district attorney's office declined comment.

It's unclear how soon Merchan will decide. He could grant Trump's request for dismissal, go with one of the prosecution's suggestions, wait until a federal appeals court rules on Trump's parallel effort to get the case moved out of state court, or choose some other option.

In their response Friday, Blanche and Bove ripped each of the prosecution's suggestions.

Halting the case until Trump leaves office would force the incoming president to govern while facing the "ongoing threat" that he'll be sentenced to imprisonment, fines or other punishment as soon as his term ends, Blanche and Bove wrote. Trump, a Republican, takes office Jan. 20.

"To be clear, President Trump will never deviate from the public interest in response to these thuggish tactics," the defense lawyers wrote. "However, the threat itself is unconstitutional."

The prosecution's suggestion that Merchan could mitigate those concerns by promising not to sentence Trump to jail time on presidential immunity grounds is also a non-starter, Blanche and Bove wrote. The immunity statute requires dropping the case, not merely limiting sentencing options, they argued.

Blanche and Bove, both of whom Trump has tabbed for high-ranking Justice Department positions,

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expressed outrage at the prosecution's novel suggestion that Merchan borrow from Alabama and other states and treat the case as if Trump had died.

Blanche and Bove accused prosecutors of ignoring New York precedent and attempting to "fabricate" a solution "based on an extremely troubling and irresponsible analogy between President Trump" who survived assassination attempts in Pennsylvania in July and Florida in September "and a hypothetical dead defendant."

Such an option normally comes into play when a defendant dies after being convicted but before appeals are exhausted. It is unclear whether it is viable under New York law, but prosecutors suggested that Merchan could innovate in what's already a unique case.

"This remedy would prevent defendant from being burdened during his presidency by an ongoing criminal proceeding," prosecutors wrote in their filing this week. But at the same time, it wouldn't "precipitously discard" the "meaningful fact that defendant was indicted and found guilty by a jury of his peers."

Prosecutors acknowledged that "presidential immunity requires accommodation" during Trump's impending return to the White House but argued that his election to a second term should not upend the jury's verdict, which came when he was out of office.

Longstanding Justice Department policy says sitting presidents cannot face criminal prosecution. Other world leaders don't enjoy the same protection. For example, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is on trial on corruption charges even as he leads that nation's wars in Lebanon and Gaza.

Trump has been fighting for months to reverse his May 30 conviction on 34 counts of falsifying business records. Prosecutors said he fudged the documents to conceal a \$130,000 payment to porn actor Stormy Daniels to suppress her claim that they had sex a decade earlier, which Trump denies.

In their filing Friday, Trump's lawyers citing a social media post in which Sen. John Fetterman used profane language to criticize Trump's hush money prosecution. The Pennsylvania Democrat suggested that Trump deserved a pardon, comparing his case to that of President Joe Biden's pardoned son Hunter Biden, who had been convicted of tax and gun charges.

"Weaponizing the judiciary for blatant, partisan gain diminishes the collective faith in our institutions and sows further division," Fetterman wrote Wednesday on Truth Social.

Trump's hush money conviction was in state court, meaning a presidential pardon — issued by Biden or himself when he takes office — would not apply to the case. Presidential pardons only apply to federal crimes.

Since the election, special counsel Jack Smith has ended his two federal cases, which pertained to Trump's efforts to overturn his 2020 election loss and allegations that he hoarded classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate.

A separate state election interference case in Fulton County, Georgia, is largely on hold. Trump denies wrongdoing in all.

Trump had been scheduled for sentencing in the hush money case in late November. But following Trump's Nov. 5 election victory, Merchan halted proceedings and indefinitely postponed the former and future president's sentencing so the defense and prosecution could weigh in on the future of the case.

Merchan also delayed a decision on Trump's prior bid to dismiss the case on immunity grounds.

A dismissal would erase Trump's conviction, sparing him the cloud of a criminal record and possible prison sentence. Trump is the first former president to be convicted of a crime and the first convicted criminal to be elected to the office.

New Jersey governor wants more federal resources for probe into drone sightings

By BRUCE SHIPKOWSKI Associated Press

TOMS RIVER, N.J. (AP) — Gov. Phil Murphy has asked the Biden administration to put more resources into an investigation of mysterious drone sightings that have been reported in New Jersey and nearby states.

Murphy, a Democrat, made the request in a letter Thursday, noting that state and local law enforcement

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remain "hamstrung" by existing laws and policies in their efforts to successfully counteract any nefarious activity of unmanned aircraft. He posted a copy of the letter on the social media platform X.

"This leaves action surrounding the (drones) squarely on the shoulders of the federal government," Murphy said. "More federal resources are needed to understand what is behind this activity."

Murphy and other officials have repeatedly stressed that there is no evidence that the aircraft pose a national security or a public safety threat, or have a foreign nexus. The Pentagon also has said they are not U.S. military drones.

The drones have drawn intense public concern and curiosity since residents first reported seeing them last month. Assemblywoman Dawn Fantasia said from four to 180 aircraft have been reported to authorities since Nov. 18, appearing from dusk till 11 p.m.

The flying objects have been spotted near the Picatinny Arsenal, a U.S. military research and manufacturing facility, and over President-elect Donald Trump's golf course in Bedminster, but the number of reported sightings has grown greatly since then. Drones were also spotted in Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut and other parts of the Mid-Atlantic region.

The FBI, Federal Aviation Administration and other state and federal agencies involved in the investigation have not corroborated any of the reported sightings with electronic detection, and reviews of available images appear to show many of the reported drones are actually manned aircraft. They also say there have been no confirmed sightings in restricted air space. It's also possible that a single drone has been seen and reported more than once, officials said.

Some federal lawmakers have called on the military to "shoot down" the drones. The drones also appear to avoid detection by traditional methods such as helicopter and radio, according to a state lawmaker who was briefed by the Department of Homeland Security.

In one case, a medevac helicopter was unable to pick up a seriously injured car accident victim in Branchburg Township in Somerset County late last month due to drones hovering near the planned landing zone, according to NJ.com. The FAA said Thursday that it does not have a report on this incident.

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

Witnesses say the drones they think they have seen in New Jersey appear to be larger than those typically used by hobbyists.

McKinsey & Company agrees to pay \$650M for helping Purdue Pharma boost opioid sales

By GEOFF MULVIHILL, ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and STEVE LeBLANC Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — McKinsey & Company consulting firm has agreed to pay \$650 million to settle a federal investigation into its work to help opioids manufacturer Purdue Pharma boost the sales of the highly addictive drug OxyContin, according to court papers filed in Virginia on Friday.

As part of the deal with the U.S. Justice Department, McKinsey will avoid prosecution on criminal charges if it pays the sum and follows certain conditions for five years, including ceasing any work on the sale, marketing or promotion of controlled substances.

A former McKinsey senior partner, Martin Elling, has also agreed to plead guilty to obstruction of justice for deleting documents from his laptop after he became aware of investigations into Purdue Pharma, the maker of OxyContin that was then a client, according to the filings. A lawyer for Elling declined to comment Friday.

McKinsey said in a statement on Friday that it's "deeply sorry" for its work for Purdue Pharma.

"We should have appreciated the harm opioids were causing in our society and we should not have undertaken sales and marketing work for Purdue Pharma," the company said. "This terrible public health crisis and our past work for opioid manufacturers will always be a source of profound regret for our firm."

It's the latest effort by federal prosecutors to hold accountable companies officials say helped fuel the U.S. addiction and overdose crisis, with opioids linked to more than 80,000 annual deaths in some recent

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years. For the past decade, most of them have been attributed to illicit fentanyl, which is laced into many illegal drugs. Earlier in the epidemic, prescription pills were the primary cause of death.

Over the past eight years, drugmakers, wholesalers and pharmacies have agreed to about \$50 billion worth of settlements with governments — with most of the money required to be used to fight the crisis.

Purdue paid McKinsey more than \$93 million over 15 years for several products, including how to improve revenue from OxyContin. Prosecutors say McKinsey “knew the risk and dangers” of OxyContin and knew that Purdue Pharma executives had previously pleaded guilty to crimes related to the promotion of the drug, but decided to work with the opioid manufacturer anyway.

One of the jobs for McKinsey, the papers said, was to identify which prescribers would generate the most additional prescriptions if Purdue salespeople focused on that. That resulted in prescriptions that “were not for a medically accepted indication, were unsafe, ineffective, and medically unnecessary, and that were often diverted for uses that lacked a legitimate medical purpose,” the filing said.

“This was not hypothetical,” Christopher Kavanaugh, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Virginia Christopher Kavanaugh said in a news conference in Boston on Friday. “This was not just marketing. It was a strategy. It was executed and it worked.”

During work to “turbocharge” Purdue sales in 2013 after a drop in business, McKinsey consultants accompanied Purdue sales representatives on visits to prescribers and pharmacies to gather information. In a note about one ride-along, a McKinsey consultant said one pharmacist had a gun “and was shaking; abuse is definitely a huge issue.” The company continued looking for ways to increase OxyContin sales, according to court papers.

In 2014, McKinsey identified some small clinics that were writing more opioid prescriptions than entire hospital systems — and suggested they be targeted for more sales, the court filing said.

The company also tried to help Purdue get a say in shaping federal rules intended to ensure the benefits of addictive prescription drugs outweighed the risks. The government said in its new filings that that resulted in making high-dose OxyContin subject to the same oversight as lower-dose opioids and made training for prescribers voluntary rather than mandatory.

Since 2021, McKinsey has agreed to pay state and local governments about \$765 million in settlements for its role in advising businesses on how to sell more of the powerful prescription painkillers amid a national opioid crisis.

The firm also agreed last year to pay health care funds and insurance companies \$78 million.

Federal authorities say the deal represents the first time a management consulting firm is being held accountable like this for advising a client to break the law.

“If a consulting firm conspires with a client to engage in criminal conduct, the fact that you’re an outside consultant will not protect you,” said Joshua Levy, U.S. Attorney for Massachusetts.

Some advocates say the opioid crisis was touched off when Purdue Pharma’s OxyContin hit the market in 1996.

Three Purdue executives pleaded guilty to misbranding charges in 2007 and the company agreed to pay a fine. The company pleaded guilty to criminal charges in 2020 and agreed to \$8.3 billion in penalties and forfeitures — most of which will be waived as long as it executes a settlement through bankruptcy court that is still in the works.

Veteran Daniel Penny, acquitted in NYC subway chokehold, will join Trump’s suite at football game

By ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — Daniel Penny, a military veteran who choked an agitated New York subway rider and was acquitted of homicide this week, has been invited by Vice President-elect JD Vance to join Donald Trump’s suite at the Army-Navy football game on Saturday.

The Marine veteran was cleared of criminally negligent homicide in Jordan Neely’s 2023 death. A more serious manslaughter charge was dismissed last week.

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Vance said Penny, 26, accepted his invitation to join the president-elect and him at the game.

"Daniel's a good guy, and New York's mob district attorney tried to ruin his life for having a backbone," Vance said in a post on X. "I'm grateful he accepted my invitation and hope he's able to have fun and appreciate how much his fellow citizens admire his courage."

The case sparked national debate, with some hailing Penny as a hero for attempting to subdue a man he considered a menace to public safety and others seeing him as a white vigilante who choked a Black man to death.

Political figures on the right have defended Penny since he was charged for the death in May 2023. Entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy, who ran for the GOP presidential nomination and was tapped by Trump last month to lead an effort along with billionaire Elon Musk to cut government spending, donated money to his legal defense fund.

After the acquittal, Penny gave an extensive interview to Fox News and declared he's "not a confrontational person." He told the network that he wouldn't have been able to live with "the guilt I would have felt if someone did get hurt, if he did do what he was threatening to do."

"I'll take a million court appearances and people calling me names and people hating me, just to keep one of those people from getting hurt or killed," Penny said.

Trump has not referred to the case publicly recently, but last year he told The Messenger that he thought Penny and other people on the subway were "in great danger."

Some New Yorkers protested the trial outcome this week, holding signs and chanting Jordan Neely's name in a Manhattan square.

Vance, who served in the Marine Corps, including in Iraq, said this week that "justice was done in this case" and Penny never should have been prosecuted.

Penny has been hailed a hero by many, but Neely's death also divided the city as residents grapple with how to respond to mental health crises threatening public safety.

Passengers said Neely hadn't touched anyone but had expressed willingness to die, go to jail or even to kill. The former street performer was homeless, had schizophrenia and had synthetic marijuana in his system. He had been convicted of assaulting people at subway stations.

President Macron names centrist ally Bayrou as France's next prime minister

By SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — French President Emmanuel Macron on Friday named centrist ally François Bayrou as prime minister in an effort to address the country's deep political crisis, after a historic parliamentary vote ousted the previous government last week.

Bayrou, 73, a crucial partner in Macron's centrist alliance, has been a well-known figure in French politics for decades. His political experience is seen as key in efforts to restore stability as no single party holds a majority at the National Assembly.

Macron's office said in a statement that Bayrou "has been charged with forming a new government."

Former Prime Minister Michel Barnier resigned last week following a no-confidence vote prompted by budget disputes in the National Assembly, leaving France without a functioning government. Macron in an address to the nation vowed to remain in office until his term ends in 2027.

Bayrou vows to seek 'needed reconciliation'

During the handover ceremony, Bayrou said that "no one knows the difficulty of the situation better" than he does.

"I've taken reckless risks all along my political life to raise the issue of debt and deficits in the most important elections," he said.

France is under pressure from the European Union's executive body and financial markets to reduce its colossal debt, estimated to reach 6% of its gross domestic product this year.

"I know that the risks of difficulties are much greater than the chances of success," Bayrou said, adding

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that he hopes to lead the country towards a "needed reconciliation."

"I think this is the only possible path to success," he said.

Bayrou is expected to hold talks with political leaders from various parties in the coming days in order to choose new ministers.

A difficult political challenge

The task before him is challenging as Macron's centrist alliance does not have a majority in parliament and Bayrou's Cabinet will need to rely on moderate lawmakers from both the left and right to be able to stay in power.

Some conservatives are expected to be part of the new government.

Macron's strategy aims at preventing far-right leader Marine Le Pen from holding "make or break" power over the government. Le Pen helped oust Barnier by joining her National Rally party's forces to the left to pass the no-confidence motion last week.

Le Pen said on Friday that her party will adopt a wait-and-see approach for now and called on Bayrou to "hear" her voters' demands, including preserving their purchasing power.

Bayrou's appointment comes also in line with Macron's efforts to build a non-aggression pact with the Socialists so that they wouldn't support any future move to topple the new government.

The Socialists said Friday they would not take part in the new Cabinet but did not rule out possible "compromises" regarding policies. They asked Bayrou for a commitment not to use a special constitutional power to pass a law without a vote at parliament.

"We expect you to provide the guarantees needed to avoid another no-confidence vote," the party wrote in a letter to Bayrou.

A weighty partner in Macron's centrist alliance

Bayrou leads the centrist Democratic Movement, known as MoDem, which he founded in 2007.

In 2017, he supported Macron's first presidential bid and became a weighty partner in the French president's centrist alliance.

At the time, he was appointed justice minister, but he quickly resigned from the government amid an investigation into the MoDem's alleged embezzlement of European Parliament funds.

He this year was cleared in the case by a Paris court, which found eight other party officials guilty and sentenced the party to pay a fine.

Bayrou became well known to the French public when he was education minister from 1993 to 1997 in a conservative government.

Three times a presidential candidate

Bayrou was three times a candidate for president, in 2002, 2007 and 2012, which made him a familiar face in French politics.

His name had repeatedly surfaced as a potential prime minister in the past, but he was repeatedly passed over.

He is widely considered having helped lay the groundwork for Macron's rise to power in 2017. Long before the French president upended the country's politics by crushing the traditional right and left, Bayrou tapped into voter frustration with entrenched conservative and Socialist camps.

A father of six and a practicing Catholic, Bayrou has played up his rural farming roots in the Pyrenees mountains, showing off his knowledge of tractors and cattle-raising — even while spending most of his time in the corridors of political power in Paris.

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.

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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 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.

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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.

About 3 in 10 are highly confident in Trump on Cabinet, spending or military oversight: AP-NORC poll

By LINLEY SANDERS and MEG KINNARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Americans may have recently elected Donald Trump to a second term, but that doesn't mean they have high confidence in his ability to choose well-qualified people for his Cabinet — or effectively manage government spending, the military and the White House, according to a new poll from the AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

As Trump names his appointees for key posts in his administration — some of whom could face difficult confirmation fights in the Senate even with Republicans in control — about half of U.S. adults are “not at all confident” in Trump's ability to appoint well-qualified people for his Cabinet and other high-level government positions.

The appointment process and its breakneck speed have represented a manifestation of Trump's pledge to voters to be a disruptive force in the country and a return to the chaotic era of governance that defined his first four years in the Oval Office. But only around 3 in 10 Americans are “extremely” or “very” confident that Trump will pick qualified people to serve in his administration. A majority of Republicans say they do have high confidence.

Trump has promised to shake up Washington with an aggressive approach that includes the Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, a nongovernmental task force assigned to find ways to fire federal workers, cut programs and slash federal regulations, to be helmed by billionaire Elon Musk and fellow entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy.

Beyond his appointments, though, the survey finds a similar level of confidence in Trump's ability to manage government spending and perform other key presidential tasks, including overseeing the military and the White House — which, in Trump's first term, experienced significant high-level staff turnover, particularly in its early days.

That's not quite the same challenge faced four years ago by President Joe Biden, who came into office with higher levels of confidence in some areas than others.

Democrats and independents are most likely to doubt Trump's leadership

That low confidence is generally driven by Democrats and independents. A large share of Democrats are suspicious of Trump's abilities on all of these fronts — about three-quarters say they are “not at all

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confident" that he will be able to effectively manage the White House, government spending or the military, or choose well-qualified people for his Cabinet.

About 4 in 10 independents, meanwhile, say they are "slightly" or "not at all" confident in Trump's capacity to execute each of these responsibilities, while about 2 in 10 are "extremely" or "very" confident.

Republican confidence is higher, but it isn't overwhelming

Confidence among Republicans is higher, but not as overwhelming as Democrats' doubts. About 6 in 10 Republicans are "extremely" or "very" confident in Trump's ability to choose well-qualified people to serve in his Cabinet and manage the White House, the military and government spending. About 2 in 10 Republicans are "moderately confident," and another 2 in 10 are "slightly" or "not at all" confident in each case.

Biden had similar hurdles at the start of his term

When Biden took office in 2021, people also harbored some doubts about how he'd carry out some major responsibilities — but unlike with Trump, where concern is fairly even across different tasks, they were more confident in Biden's ability to do some things than others. When he entered the White House, Biden had served eight years as President Barack Obama's vice president, as well as decades in the U.S. Senate, and he ran the 2020 campaign largely on those years of experience.

A separate AP-NORC poll conducted shortly after Biden took office — which asked the question slightly differently — found a higher level of confidence in Biden's ability to appoint well-qualified people for his Cabinet and manage the White House than his ability to manage the military and government spending.

Today in History: December 14 The Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Saturday, Dec. 14, the 349th day of 2024. There are 17 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Dec. 14, 2012, a gunman with a semiautomatic rifle killed 20 first-graders and six educators at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, then took his own life as police arrived; the 20-year-old had also fatally shot his mother at their home before carrying out the attack on the school.

Also on this date:

In 1799, the first president of the United States, George Washington, died at his Mount Vernon, Virginia, home at age 67.

In 1911, Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen (ROH'-ahl AH'-mun-suhn) and his team became the first men to reach the South Pole, beating out a British expedition led by Robert F. Scott.

In 1964, the U.S. Supreme Court, in Heart of Atlanta Motel v. United States, ruled that Congress was within its authority to enforce the Civil Rights Act of 1964 against racial discrimination by private businesses (in this case, a motel that refused to cater to Blacks).

In 1995, the Dayton Accords were formally signed in Paris, ending the Bosnian War.

In 2020, the Electoral College confirmed Joe Biden as the nation's next president, ratifying his November victory in a state-by-state repudiation of President Donald Trump's refusal to concede he had lost; electors gave Biden 306 votes to Trump's 232.

In 2020, the largest vaccination campaign in U.S. history began with health workers getting shots on the same day the nation's COVID-19 death toll hit 300,000.

In 2021, Stephen Curry set a new NBA career 3-point record; the Golden State Warriors' guard hit his 2,974th 3-point shot against the New York Knicks at Madison Square Garden.

Today's Birthdays: Tennis Hall of Famer Stan Smith is 78. Actor Dee Wallace is 76. Rock musician Cliff Williams (AC/DC) is 74. Former FBI Director James Comey is 64. Baseball Hall of Famer Craig Biggio is 59. Actor Natascha McElhone is 53. Actor Jackson Rathbone is 40. Actor Vanessa Hudgens is 36. Rapper Offset is 33. Singer Tori Kelly is 32. NFL wide receiver DK Metcalf is 27.