

Groton Daily Independent

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Wednesday, Dec. 18

Senior Menu: Chicken fried steak, mashed potatoes with gravy, oriental blend, fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Cereal.

School Lunch: Sweet and sour pork, rice.

St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.; DFC

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PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

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



Youth supper, 6 p.m.; Advent Service, 7 p.m.

Groton United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton Ad Council, 7 p.m.

Thursday, Dec. 19

Senior Menu: Baked pork chop, sweet potato, Catalina blend, chocolate pudding with banana, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Pancake on stick.

School Lunch: Chicken nuggets, tater tots.

JH GBB at Aberdeen Roncalli

NEC Boys and Girls Wrestling at Groton Area, 4 p.m.

Holiday Light Contest

Friday, Dec. 20

Senior Menu: Bean and ham soup, egg salad sandwich, tomato spoon salad, fruit.

School Breakfast: Egg bake.

School Lunch: Cheese pizza, green beans.

End of Second Quarter

Elementary Christmas Program, 1 p.m., in the Arena.

Early Dismissal, 2 p.m.

Basketball hosts West Central: Gym: Boys C at 4 p.m.; Girls C at 5:15 p.m.; Arena: Girls JV at 4 p.m., Boys JV at 5:15 p.m.; followed by girls varsity and boys varsity.

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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.

Russian Weapons Leader Killed

Ukraine's secret service assassinated Igor Kirillov—the head of Russia's chemical and biological weapons defense program—yesterday. It marks the highest-level killing of a Russian military official inside Russia since the start of the war in 2022; Russia has vowed to retaliate.

The 54-year-old general died after a bomb detonated at 6:12 am local time on an electric scooter in Moscow, shattering windows on residential buildings nearby; warning—sensitive content). Ukraine acknowledged the killing, calling it legitimate. Kyiv had charged Kirillov in absentia the day before, tying him to over 4,800 alleged cases of chemical weapons deployment in Ukrainian territory. Kirillov was separately known for publicly accusing the US of a biological weapons program in Ukraine.

Russia lost over 1,520 soldiers per day last month, according to UK estimates, and is believed to be struggling to replenish its ranks. Russia is relying in part on North Korean troops to counter Ukrainian forces in Kursk.

Binary Stars Discovery

Scientists discovered the first-ever pair of binary stars in the vicinity of the black hole at the center of our galaxy, according to research released yesterday. The discovery suggests black holes are not as destructive as previously believed and sheds light on the evolution of stars in the universe.

Using spectrometers mounted on the European Southern Observatory's Very Large Telescope, researchers identified a young pair of several-million-year-old stars bound together by gravity, which they dubbed D9. The pair orbit Sagittarius*, the supermassive black hole occupying the center of our Milky Way galaxy roughly 26,000 light-years away. For decades, researchers had observed clouds of dust and gas in the region called an S cluster, as well as solo stars, but believed the black hole's powerful pull would destabilize binary systems.

The researchers believe the two stars will merge within a million years—relatively soon on a cosmic level.

Cash App Murder Verdict

A San Francisco jury has found tech consultant Nima Momeni guilty of second-degree murder in the 2023 fatal stabbing of 43-year-old Cash App founder Bob Lee. Yesterday's verdict came after seven days of deliberation, following a six-week trial that featured a narrative involving drugs, partying, and alleged sexual assault.

Prosecutors contended the now-40-year-old Momeni stabbed Lee three times with a kitchen knife after taking him to a secluded area on April 4, 2023. They argued Momeni was motivated by anger over Lee introducing Momeni's younger sister, Khazar, to a drug dealer, which allegedly led to her sexual assault. The defense claimed Lee attacked Momeni first while intoxicated, but the jury rejected the self-defense argument. However, the jury did acquit Momeni of first-degree murder, which is premeditated.

Momeni, who is not a repeat offender, faces between 16 years to life in prison. His sentencing will be set at a later date.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

"Dirty Dancing" and "Beverly Hills Cop" are among 25 movies added to Library of Congress National Film Registry.

Children's television series "Bluey" to get feature film in 2027 produced by BBC and Disney.

Diane Delano, actress known for roles on "Northern Exposure" and "Popular," dies at 67.

Vermont tops Marshall 2-1 to win their first-ever NCAA men's soccer national championship.

The European Super League relaunches as the Unify League, will feature 96 soccer clubs across Europe.

Science & Technology

Alabama woman receives gene-edited pig kidney, becomes the fifth person to undergo animal-to-human gene-edited organ surgery.

Study suggests brain cells mature faster in microgravity environments like space compared to Earth; research used organoids—lab-grown organ-like structures—to study the effects.

Archaeologists discover evidence of systematic cannibalism in a Bronze Age burial site near Bristol, England.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close lower (S&P 500 -0.4%, Dow -0.6%, Nasdaq -0.3%); Dow falls for ninth straight day, its longest losing streak since 1978.

Grammarly, maker of AI-powered writing assistant, acquires productivity startup Coda; financial terms of the deal not disclosed.

Databricks raises \$10B in financing, valuing the data analytics company at \$62B.

Japan's Honda and Nissan reportedly to begin merger talks; automakers are considering operating under a single holding company and eventually bringing in Mitsubishi.

Politics & World Affairs

Luigi Mangione, accused of killing UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson, is indicted in New York on 11 counts, including first-degree murder and murder as an act of terrorism.

Gilgo Beach murder suspect Rex Heuermann is charged with another murder, bringing number of alleged victims to seven.

Federal Trade Commission announces rule banning junk fees—hidden charges—on hotel and event ticket prices.

Biden administration finalizes rule clarifying who can apply for H-1B work visas, including expanding definitions of specialty occupation positions.

President-elect Donald Trump sues The Des Moines Register for a poll in the lead-up to Election Day showing him trailing Vice President Kamala Harris in Iowa by 3%; Trump ultimately won the state by 14%.

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Pictured with Santa are Raelynn, 7, and Oliver, 4, with their mom, Nicole Freeman. Photo taken at Santa Day at Professional Management Services. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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Pictured with Santa are Esther, 6, and Josiah, 7, along with their mom, Andrea Lone. Photo taken at Santa Day at Professional Management Services. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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Pictured with Santa is Kaylee, 11, daughter of Lisa Sippel. Photo taken at Santa Day at Professional Management Services. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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Pictured with Santa is Ella, 9, from the family of B.J. Clocksene. Photo taken at Santa Day at Professional Management Services. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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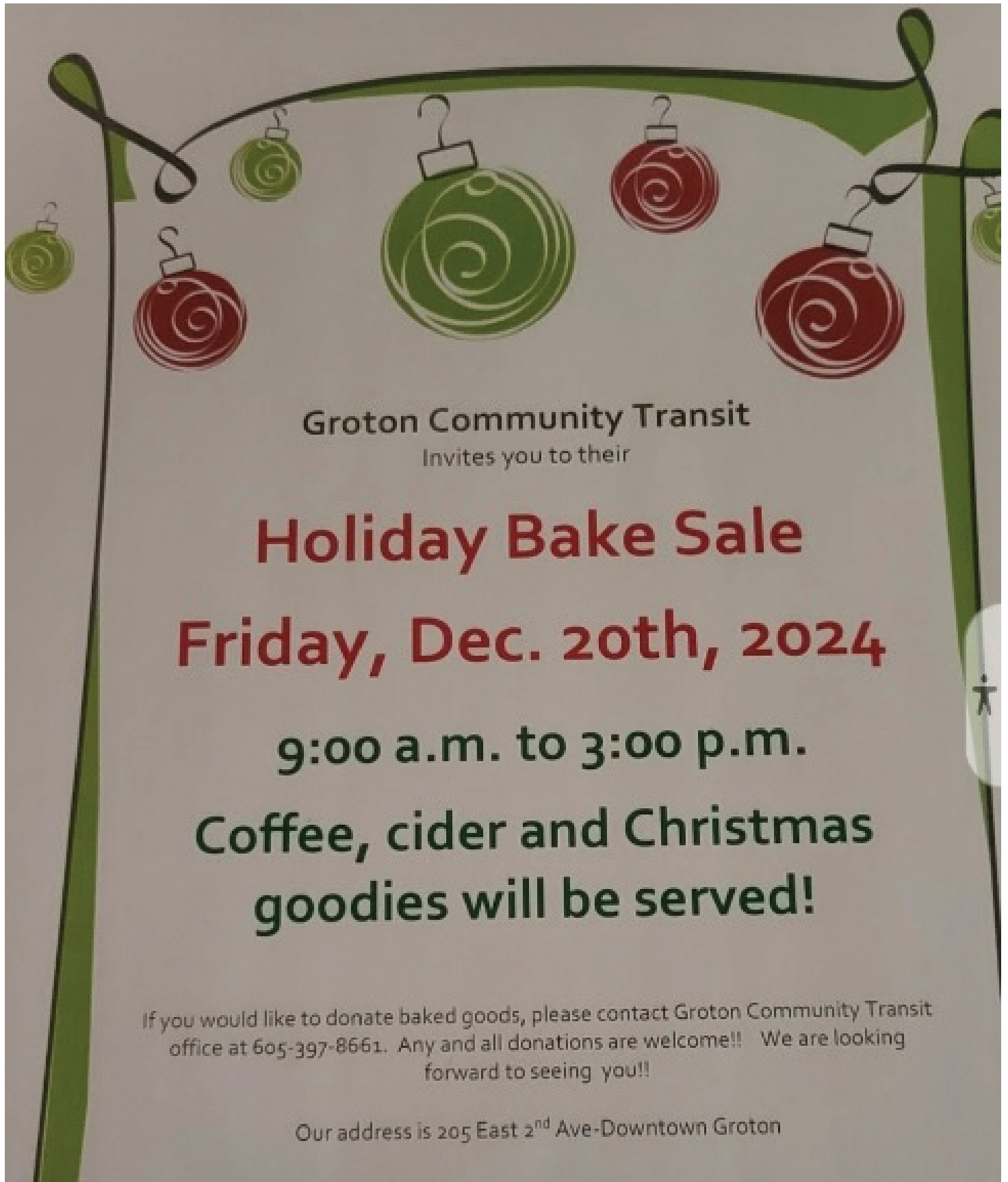
Pictured with Santa is Amelia, 1, daughter of Aubray and Braden Miller. Photo taken at Santa Day at Professional Management Services. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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Pictured with Santa are Blake, 5; and Landon, 8; children of Heidi and Mitchell Locke. Photo taken at Santa Day at Professional Management Services. (Courtesy Photo)



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



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Card Shower

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



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

Conde National League

Dec. 16 Team Scores: Braves 8, Giants 7, Cubs 4, Mets 3, Pirates 2, Stooges 0.
Men's High Games: Butch Farmen 190, Aaron Severson 181, Skip Kettering 177.
Men's High Series: Butch Farmen 524, Aaron Severson 474, Chad Furney 464.
Women's High Games: Sam Bahr 204, Alice Severson 189, Nancy Radke 184
Women's High Series: Alice Severson 516, Sam Bahr 506, Suzi Easthouse 466

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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

Meade County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash
Where: Interstate 90, Mile marker 36, four miles east of Sturgis, SD
When: 8:30 a.m., December 10, 2024

Driver 1: 77-year-old male from Custer, SD, serious, non-life-threatening injuries
Vehicle 1: 2003 Toyota Tacoma
Seat belt Used: Yes
Passenger 1a: 80-year-old female from Custer, SD, fatal injuries
Seat belt Used: Yes

Meade County, S.D.- The passenger in a December 10 crash near Sturgis, SD, passed away Monday evening from her injuries.

The names of the persons involved have not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2003 Toyota Tacoma was traveling west bound on Interstate 90 near mile marker 36 and lost control of the vehicle, entering the center median where the vehicle rolled.

The driver and a passenger were taken to a nearby hospital. The driver sustained serious, non-life-threatening injuries. A passenger in the vehicle passed away from her injuries on December 16th.

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

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

Name Released in Lincoln County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash
Where: Interstate 229 Near Interstate 29, Sioux Falls, SD
When: 4:38 p.m., December 14, 2024

Driver 1: Brittany Lynn Lee, 22-year-old female from Sioux Falls, SD, fatal injuries
Vehicle 1: 2020 Chevrolet Malibu
Seat belt Used: Yes

Lincoln County, S.D.- A 22-year-old woman died in a single vehicle accident on Interstate 229 Saturday afternoon in Sioux Falls, SD.

Preliminary crash information indicates Brittany Lynn Lee, the driver of a 2020 Chevrolet Malibu, was traveling southbound on Interstate 229 exiting onto Interstate 29 South. The driver lost control of the vehicle and entered the westbound ditch then collided with a tree. Lee was pronounced deceased at the scene.

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

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

The Life of Betty Lou Oliver



Betty Lou Oliver, 80, of Groton, SD, passed away peacefully in 2024, leaving behind a legacy of resilience, determination, and love.

A mass of Christian burial and celebration of Betty's remarkable life will be held on Saturday, December 21st at 1:00pm, honoring the legacy of a woman who inspired everyone she met. She will be deeply missed but forever remembered.

Visitation will be held at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church from 11-1 p.m. on Saturday. Father Greg Tschakert will officiate. Burial will follow in Union Cemetery, Groton under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel.

She was born on January 1, 1944, in Aberdeen, South Dakota, to Erma and Mike Burckhartzmeyer. One of eight children, Betty grew up surrounded by her siblings, where her personality shone brightly. She shared a lively childhood filled with neighborhood baseball games, countless adventures, and a competitive spirit that would stay with her for life.

Betty's early years were marked by her courageous battle with polio, a challenge that shaped her tenacity and determination. Through numerous surgeries and immense perseverance, she overcame the disease, ultimately paving the way for her successful journey as a business owner, wife, mother, and friend.

A graduate of Aberdeen Central High School, Betty pursued her passion for beauty and design, beginning her career as a hairdresser. She honed her craft at Dayton's in Minneapolis before returning to Aberdeen, where she worked at Bostwick's Department Store managing the wig counter. Her creativity and initiative led her to restyle display wigs, a small act that launched a career traveling the country hosting department store wig shows as "Ms. Bette."

In 1969, Betty married Jim Oliver, whom she met at the Aberdeen Horse Races. Together, they embraced an active lifestyle, even racing snowmobiles, with Betty collecting first-place trophies in oval track competitions. As newlyweds, they became part owners of Jungle Lanes & Lounge, all while farming and raising a family. In the late 1970s, Betty opened her own business, Betty's Salon, which she successfully operated for over 30 years.

Betty's devotion to her family was unparalleled. She supported her daughters, Carmen and Katie, in every aspect of their lives, particularly during their horse show years. Whether coaching, hauling trailers, or cheering from the sidelines, Betty was their unwavering champion.

Creative and visionary, Betty had a passion for home design and décor. She poured her heart into creating beautiful spaces, from the family farmhouse near Groton to her dream home in the Black Hills, which she designed and built in 2015. Her meticulous attention to detail and boundless creativity made her homes a true reflection of her spirit.

Betty will be remembered for her laughter, generosity, and unyielding love for her family and friends. She never did anything halfway, embracing every challenge and opportunity with all her heart.

Blessed and beyond grateful to have shared in her life are her husband, Jim, her daughters Carmen (Mike), and Katie and countless friends and family members who cherished her.

Statewide Homeless Count to be Conducted in January

Pierre – On Jan. 28, 2025, the South Dakota Housing for the Homeless Consortium (SDHHC), an affiliate of South Dakota Housing, will conduct its annual statewide point-in-time (PIT) homeless count. The PIT Count is a national one-day census and estimate of all people experiencing homelessness and fleeing domestic violence.

The PIT is an important source of annual data, providing characteristics of people who are experiencing homelessness. Every year this data is used to measure homelessness on local, state, and national levels. PIT Count data helps policy makers and communities measure progress, identify strengths and gaps in services, increases public awareness of homelessness, and enhances system planning and responses. The PIT Count is the primary tool for showing unmet need in our communities and participation is recommended for communities and organizations seeking homeless response grants in the coming years.

Volunteers across the state help SDHHC conduct the count of those experiencing homelessness. To be effective, SDHHC divides the state into six count areas with local coordinators in each area who work with agencies and volunteers to conduct the PIT Count. Coordinators and their areas are listed below. We urge communities and projects to contact their local coordinator to inquire as to how they can participate. Federally funded homeless programs are required to participate in the PIT.

- o City of Sioux Falls; Suzy Smith, suzanne.smith@augie.edu, Augustana Research Institute, or 605-274-5010
- o Rapid City & Region 1; Bennet, Butte, Corson, Custer, Dewey, Fall River, Jackson, Haakon, Harding, Lawrence, Meade, Pennington, Perkins, Ziebach, Oglala Lakota counties. Amy Richie, amy.richie@voanr.org, Volunteers of America-Northern Rockies (VOA-NR)
- o Region 2; Beadle, Brown, Campbell, Day, Edmunds, Faulk, Hand, Hughes, Hyde, Marshall, McPherson, Potter, Roberts, Spink, Stanley, Sully, Walworth counties. Yvette Heesch, yvette@growsd.org, Grow South Dakota
- o Region 3; Aurora, Bon Homme, Brule, Buffalo, Charles Mix, Clay, Davison, Douglas, Gregory, Lyman, Mellette, Sanborn, Todd, Tripp, Union, Yankton, Hanson, Hutchinson, Jerauld, Jones counties. Karli Marts, kmarts@rocsinc.org, Rural Office of Community Services (ROCS)
- o Region 4; Minnehaha, Grant, Deuel, Codington, Hamlin, Clark, Kingsbury, Brookings, Miner, Lake, Lincoln, Moody, McCook, Turner counties. Jamie Kessler, jkessler@interlakescap.com, Inter-Lakes Community Action Partnership (ICAP)
- o Veterans Affairs (VA) staff will collect information for VA programs.
- o West River contact Andrew Havens, andrew.havens@va.gov, 605-490-9705
- o East River contact Kristy Anderson, Kristy.Anderson438@va.gov, 605-323-8546

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Groton Area has clean sweep over Sisseton

All six teams were winners Tuesday in a basketball double header played in Groton.

Girls Varsity: Groton Area 48, Sisseton 45

Groton Area led at the quarter breaks at 12-7, 28-18 and 40-26 en route to a 48-45 win over Sisseton. Game was tied once at six. Largest lead for Groton Area was 14 points at 34-20 and 40-26.

Jerica Locke: 11 points, (3 3-pointers), 3 rebounds, 5 assists, 3 steals, 2 fouls.

Kennedy Hansen: 9 points, (1 3-pointer) 4 rebounds, 1 steal, 1 foul.

Rylee Dunker: 9 points, (1 3-pointer), 9 rebounds, 2 assists, 4 steals, 3 fouls.

Taryn Traphagen: 9 points, (3 3-pointers), 2 rebounds, 1 foul.

Jaedyn Penning: 4 points, 1 rebound, 2 assists, 1 steal, 5 fouls.

Brooklyn Hansen: 3 points, (1 3-pointer), 1 rebound, 3 assists, 1 steal, 2 fouls.

Chesney Weber: 4 points, 1 rebound, 1 assist, 1 steal, 1 foul.

Totals: Field Goals: 6-31 19 percent, 3-Pointers: 9-25 36 percent, Free Throws: 9-14 64 percent, 23 rebounds, 12 turnovers, 14 assists, 13 steals, 16 fouls.

Sisseton: Krista Langager 25, Ruby Rice 5, Elliot Hortness 5, Saylor Langager 4, Alexa Quinn 2, Kennedy Hanson 2, Tara Nelson 2.

Field Goals: 17-49 34 percent. Free Throws: 10-18 56 percent. 15 team fouls, 12 turnovers.

Girls Junior Varsity: Groton Area 43, Sisseton 7

Girls Junior Varsity: Groton Area 43, Sisseton 7. Mercy rule took effect with 5:23 left in the game.

Groton Area: Mia Crank 10, Chesney Weber 9 (1 3-pointer), Kella Tracy 9, Taryn Traphagen 7 (1 3-pointer), Talli Wright 4, McKenna Tietz 2, Sydney Locke 2.

Sisseton: Nikki Hoeger 3, Saylor Langager 2, Amani DuMarce 2.

Girls C Game Groton Area 42, Sisseton 8

Girls C Game: Groton Area 42, Sisseton 8. Mercy rule took effect with 4:48 left in the third quarter.

Groton Area: Emerlee Jones 11, Kella Tracy 9, Makenna Krause 7, Sydney Locke 7, Ashlynn Warrington 5, Avery Crank 1.

Sisseton: Amani DuMarce 4, Mahree Geyer 2, Mary Pelzel 1, Jaylee 1.

Boys Varsity: Groton Area 73, Sisseton 41

Groton Area led at the quarterbreaks at 18-11, 40-22 and 62-30 en route to a 73-41 win over Sisseton. The mercy rule kicked in with 1:29 left in the third quarter. There were two lead changes. Groton's largest lead was 37 at 70-33 and Sisseton's largest lead was 2 at 5-2 and 7-5.

Ryder Johnson: 22 points, (1 3-pointer), 1 rebound, 2 assists.

Karson Zak: 15 points, (1 3-pointer), 1 rebound, 3 assists, 1 foul, 1 block shot.

Keegen Tracy: 9 points, (1 3-pointer), 2 rebounds, 4 assists, 3 steals, 3 fouls.

Becker Bosma: 7 points, 4 rebounds, 3 assists, 2 steals.

Easton Weber: 7 points, (2 3-pointers), 2 assists, 1 steal, 4 fouls.

Gage Sippel: 5 points, 7 rebounds, 2 steals, 3 fouls.

Turner Thompson: 5 points, 1 assist, 3 steals, 2 fouls.

Jayden Schwan: 3 points, 4 rebounds, 2 assists.

Totals: Field Goals: 25-32 78 percent. 3-Pointers: 5-18 28 percent. Free Throws: 8-15 53 percent. 20 rebounds, 12 turnovers, 17 assists, 16 steals, 15 fouls, 1 block.

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Boys Junior Varsity: Groton Area 43, Sisseton 8

Junior Varsity: Groton Area 43, Sisseton 8.

Groton Area: Jayden Schwan 10, Easton Weber 8, Logan Warrington 7, Asher Johnson 7, Anthony Tracy 5, Ethan Kroll 4, Jace Johnson 2.

Boys C Game: Groton Area 39, Sisseton 35 (OT)

C Game: Groton Area 39, Sisseton 35 in overtime.

Groton Area: Anthony Tracy 17, Jace Johnson 8, Jordan Schwan 6, Asher Johnson 6, Ethan Kroll 2.

Both varsity games were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by 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.

The girls junior varsity game and C game were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by the Krause family.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

In win for biofuels, stopgap spending bill allows year-round sales of E15 gas nationwide

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - DECEMBER 17, 2024 7:39 PM

A spending bill U.S. House appropriators released Tuesday evening to keep the government open into next spring includes a provision to allow sales of a gasoline blend that includes up to 15% ethanol nationwide throughout the year.

After years of prohibiting the blend, known as E15, from being sold at gas stations during the summer months, the Environmental Protection Agency this year allowed year-round sales in eight Midwestern states. The provision in the stopgap funding bill would allow E15 sales in all states throughout the year.

The provision is a major win for corn producers and their allies in Congress from both parties. Supporters of ethanol, which is derived from corn, say it boosts U.S. production and lowers gas prices.

Sen. Deb Fischer, a Nebraska Republican who sponsored a bill to make the blend available all year, said the move was part of the GOP agenda to “unleash American energy.”

“My bill puts an end to years of patchwork regulations and uncertainty — year-round, nationwide E15 will now be a reality,” Fischer said. “This legislation also delivers on the mandate we received in November to unleash American energy. Not only will my bill lower gas prices and give consumers more choices, but it will also create new opportunity for American producers, who are especially hurting right now from lower prices.”

House Energy and Commerce ranking Democrat Frank Pallone of New Jersey applauded inclusion of the measure, saying it would help reduce gas prices and bolster U.S. energy production.

“By allowing for a higher blend of ethanol in our gasoline, Americans can rely more on homegrown biofuels that save drivers money at the pump and help insulate Americans from dramatic global price fluctuations,” Pallone said in a statement.

U.S. Rep. Don Bacon, R-Neb., one of a handful of farm-state House Republicans pushing for the E15 provision, said in a statement, “Year around E-15 is the most important policy we can embrace for Midwestern farmers and ranchers. I was glad to advocate for this on the Agriculture Committee and to our Speaker, and glad to see it embraced. I also know our entire Nebraska delegation was pulling for this. It is a team win.”

At a U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee hearing last year, Sen. Debbie Stabenow, a Michigan Democrat who chairs the Senate Agriculture Committee, and Sen. Pete Ricketts of Nebraska promoted E15 availability as a way to lower greenhouse gas emissions and lower prices.

The EPA issued a waiver in May 2022 to allow the blend to be available nationwide throughout the year, as President Joe Biden’s administration sought to tame gas prices.

The stopgap measure, known as a continuing resolution, would keep the government funded at current levels through mid-March. It includes a few additional provisions, including funding to rebuild the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Maryland.

The House and Senate are expected to pass the catch-all measure before members depart for their holiday break on Friday. Biden is expected to sign the bill.

Jacob covers federal policy as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Based in Oregon, he focuses on Western issues. His coverage areas include climate, energy development, public lands and infrastructure.

Rash of state employee criminal charges continues with allegedly fake food-service inspections

Attorney general announces new indictment and pledges legislation

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - DECEMBER 17, 2024 5:18 PM

A former state employee faces criminal charges for allegedly forging and falsifying reports of food-service health inspections she never conducted, South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley announced Tuesday.

Renee Lynn Strong, 55, of Springfield, was indicted Tuesday on 26 forgery-related charges carrying a maximum combined sentence of up to 91 years in prison and up to \$182,000 in fines, Jackley said.

Strong allegedly filed food-service health inspection reports without actually inspecting the businesses between February and June of this year. Five impacted businesses — including bars, restaurants and other businesses serving food — cooperated with the investigation, said Jackley, who believes there may have been more forgeries than investigators have found so far. Jackley said the businesses are not suspected of wrongdoing.

Strong was paid for the inspections with state funding, Jackley said. He did not disclose the cost to taxpayers.

Strong worked for the state Department of Public Safety as an inspector for a year, Jackley said. The department has a contract to provide inspections for the state Department of Health. Strong made \$24.96 hourly, according to the state financial website Open SD.

This is the fourth case of alleged state employee criminal activity that Jackley's office has prosecuted this year, after two former Department of Revenue employees were accused in a false vehicle titling scheme and a retired Department of Social Services employee was accused of stealing \$1.8 million by creating and approving fraudulent child support orders. Yet another recent case of a state employee allegedly falsifying vehicle titles did not result in prosecution because the accused woman is deceased.

More potential criminal cases involving state employees are being investigated, Jackley said.

In the new case, a state employee tipped off Jackley's office through its Consumer Protection office in October. Strong is being held on 13 felony counts of forgery and 13 felony counts of offering false or forged instruments for filing or recording in a public office. Her bail is set at \$1,000.

Jackley proposes legislative package

This case "cries out" for what Jackley proposes as a legislative solution, he said. He plans to introduce a legislative package in January requiring state employees to notify the Attorney General's Office of suspected felonies, expanding whistleblower protections, increasing transparency and strengthening the state's auditing process by giving additional powers to the Internal Control Board.

"There are clearly some problems in state government, or the attorney general wouldn't have brought four different charging documents," he said.

Jackley said increased attention on state accountability led to the whistleblower tip and Tuesday's indictment. State department heads have also said they plan to strengthen internal controls to catch potential fraud. Gov. Kristi Noem recently added an internal control officer position to the executive branch and ordered state employees to undergo annual training aimed at preventing criminal activity.

Update on vehicle title cases

Lynne Hunsley and Danielle Degenstein, former Department of Revenue employees, were charged in late October.

Hunsley, accused of using a fake vehicle title to secure bank loans and duck state excise taxes, is out of custody on a \$500 cash bond. Degenstein is out on a \$100 cash bond for allegedly failing to report the situation and cooperate with law enforcement.

Trial dates for the two ex-revenue employees have yet to be set.

The Government Operations and Audit Committee subpoenaed Revenue Secretary Michael Houdyshell and Motor Vehicle Division head Rosa Yaeger to testify in a closed-door session at the committee's meeting last week. But the two are fighting the subpoena in court, and the committee's meeting was canceled.

Embezzlement case scheduled for trial

Former Department of Social Services employee Lonna Carroll remains in custody on a \$50,000 cash or surety bond. Carroll is accused of embezzling \$1.8 million from the state by creating and approving fraudulent financial support orders for children from 2010 through 2023.

Prosecutors have filed several pre-trial motions. One signals their intent to produce evidence that Carroll allegedly lived beyond her means, such as comments from coworkers who said she never wore the same outfit twice and that at least one retail establishment knew her as such a reliable customer that she'd get calls when new inventory arrived.

Carroll is represented by a court-appointed attorney. According to her application for that attorney, Carroll had about \$3,000 to her name when she was arrested over the summer, had \$50,000 in investments, \$103,000 in real estate assets and \$10,000 worth of "household goods." A hand-written note on the application reads "receive retirement — but accts are suspended," suggesting she isn't able to access pay from the state employee retirement system.

Defendants are expected to repay attorney fees fronted to them during a criminal proceeding, though in many cases they cannot.

In addition to the yet-uncalculated attorney fees, Hughes County is currently on the hook for up to \$18,500 in expert witness fees. A judge has granted Carroll's attorney's requests to pay up to \$3,500 for a private investigator, up to \$5,000 for a mental health expert and up to \$10,000 for a forensic auditor, all to aid in her defense.

The trial is set to begin April 1.

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.

Second filing fee for carbon pipeline project raises total potential fees to \$1.47 million

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - DECEMBER 17, 2024 3:54 PM

South Dakota regulators will charge a carbon dioxide pipeline company up to \$876,000 to help cover the cost of evaluating its new permit application.

It's Summit Carbon Solutions' second attempt for a South Dakota permit. The state Public Utilities Commission rejected Summit's first application last year, due in part to the pipeline route's conflicts with local siting laws. The company recently reapplied with an adjusted route.

The filing fee for the first application was \$592,500, which the Iowa-based company paid in full. The new fee brings the company's total potential filing costs to \$1.47 million. New costs will be assessed up to the maximum \$876,000 that commissioners approved Tuesday during a meeting in Pierre.

The project would transport CO2 captured from 57 ethanol plants in five states—including 15 plants in eastern South Dakota—to underground storage wells in North Dakota. The company hopes to capitalize on federal tax credits incentivizing the prevention of heat-trapping carbon emissions.

The 2,500-mile route includes 698 miles in South Dakota. The South Dakota portion of the \$9 billion project would cost about \$1.35 billion.

The project has a storage permit in North Dakota and route permits in North Dakota, Iowa and Minnesota, although opponents continue to mount various legal and administrative challenges. Nebraska has no state permitting process for carbon pipelines.

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

Huge spending bill unveiled in Congress provides more than \$100 billion in disaster aid

Legislation also extends farm bill and allows year-round E15

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - DECEMBER 17, 2024 7:36 PM

WASHINGTON — Congressional leaders unveiled a catch-all, year-end package Tuesday that would provide more than \$100 billion in disaster aid and give lawmakers more time to wrap up overdue work on government funding, the farm bill and a handful of other issues they decided not to finish.

The disaster aid section of the package will bolster funding for the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Department of Agriculture, the Small Business Administration and several other federal agencies to continue their ongoing response efforts following a slew of natural disasters during the last two years.

The 1,547-page package would give Congress until mid-March to complete work on the dozen annual government funding bills that were supposed to become law by Oct. 1.

It also extends the farm bill through Sept. 30, 2025. In a victory for corn growers, the bill includes a provision to allow nationwide sales of a gasoline blend that includes up to 15% ethanol throughout the year.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, said during a press conference before the bill was publicly released he had hoped the year-end stopgap spending bill would simply extend current funding until next year, when the GOP will hold the House, Senate and White House.

"But a couple of intervening things have occurred. We had, as we describe them, acts of God. We had these massive hurricanes if you know, in the late fall — Helene and Milton and other disasters," Johnson said. "We have to make sure that the Americans who were devastated by these hurricanes get the relief they need. So we are adding to this a disaster relief package and that's critically important."

"Also important is the devastation that is being faced by our farming community," he said. "The agriculture sector is really struggling. They've had effectively three lost years and commodity prices are a bit of a mess. And you have input costs that have skyrocketed because of Bidenomics."

Johnson defended his decision to attach the other provisions in the stopgap spending bill, also known as a continuing resolution. Numerous Republicans have expressed frustration with his choice to bundle all the bills together in one package, instead of moving them individually.

"We have to be able to help those who are in these dire straits and that's what the volume of the pages to this is," Johnson said.

House Appropriations Committee ranking member Rosa DeLauro, a Connecticut Democrat, said in a written statement she would support the bill when that chamber votes on it later this week.

"While I — and so many of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle — wish we were voting on full-year funding bills, I am pleased that this package includes important resources for American farmers, emergency defense investments, investments in the Virginia Class submarine program, and increased funding for child care," DeLauro wrote. "It also includes outbound investment protections I have long fought for to prevent American dollars from fueling the Chinese Communist Party's policies with our capital and capabilities."

"However, I am concerned that we could not agree on additional funding for veterans health care, and we must be vigilant in ensuring that the incoming Administration does not ration care promised to every affected veteran," DeLauro added. "The passage of this bill should mark the beginning of negotiations on final 2025 funding bills. The start of a new Congress does not change the reality that any funding bills will still need the support of Democrats and Republicans in the House and in the Senate in order to become law."

Hurricanes, tornadoes, bridge collapse

President Joe Biden asked Congress to approve nearly \$100 billion in emergency aid to bolster the accounts of several agencies that are helping residents, small businesses, farmers, and local and state governments recover from dozens of natural disasters.

The emergency supplemental request came shortly after Hurricanes Helene and Milton caused widespread

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devastation throughout Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia.

The funding will also help communities recover following tornadoes throughout the Midwest; the collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, Maryland; and severe storms in Alaska, Connecticut, Illinois, Louisiana, New Mexico, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

The disaster response section of the spending package would include:

\$29 billion for FEMA's disaster relief fund

\$21 billion for disaster assistance for farmers and ranchers

\$12 billion for the Department of Housing and Urban Development's community development block grant program for disaster assistance

\$10 billion in economic assistance for farmers and ranchers

\$8 billion for the Department of Transportation to provide disaster relief for federal highways

\$3.25 billion for State and Tribal Assistance Grants for water infrastructure repairs.

\$2.2 billion for the Small Business Administration's disaster loan program

\$1.3 billion to replace the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, Maryland

Congress headed for finish line

The package is expected to pass the House and Senate before members depart for their holiday break on Friday. Biden is expected to sign the bill into law.

When Congress convenes again on Jan. 3 for the start of the 119th Congress, the Senate will flip from Democratic to Republican control. The House will remain red, though with a slightly smaller majority and very little, possibly no, room for GOP lawmakers to vote against partisan bills.

Republicans hope they can use unified control of Washington, which will begin after President-elect Donald Trump's inauguration on Jan. 20, to move through sweeping changes to federal spending and policy.

That is one of the reasons, Congress included a second continuing resolution in the package released this week. That stopgap spending bill will avoid a partial government shutdown until at least March 14.

That part of the bill is necessary since Congress has brushed off its responsibility to fund the government by failing to complete work on the dozen annual appropriations bills before the start of the fiscal year on Oct. 1.

Lawmakers approved another stopgap spending bill in late September to keep funding levels mostly flat through Dec. 20, but did not use the extra time to negotiate a compromise between the Republican House and Democratic Senate.

GOP leaders have opted to hold over those full-year government funding measures until they control both chambers of Congress next year, in hopes they'll be able to more closely align the final versions of the 12 bills to their goals.

But Republican leaders will still need Democratic support to get the final spending bills, or another stopgap spending bill, through the Senate next year if they want to avoid a partial government shutdown.

The Senate requires at least 60 lawmakers to vote to advance major legislation toward a final, simple majority passage vote. The GOP will hold 53 seats next year, short of the requirement. Several Republican senators have also staked their reputations on consistently voting against any spending bill, making Democratic votes necessary to avoid a shutdown.

Republicans in the House will also likely need Democrats to move government funding bills through that chamber, given they too have a significant faction of members who refuse to vote for the full-year spending bills and often vote against the short-term stopgap bills as well.

Farm bill extension

The end-of-year catchall bill released Tuesday also includes another extension for the farm bill through next year, a new version of which Congress was supposed to pass more than a year ago.

Instead, lawmakers in both chambers have prioritized other interests, delaying work on the legislation that authorizes agriculture and nutrition programs.

Congress last approved a farm bill in December 2018, which the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said at the time would cost \$428 billion during the five years it was supposed to cover.

Funding for nutrition, crop insurance, farm commodity programs and conservation accounted for about 99% of the mandatory spending in the law, according to a report from the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service.

Nutrition has become one of the higher price tag items in the farm bill during the last few decades and accounted for about \$326 billion of the mandatory spending in the 2018 farm bill. Another \$38 billion went to crop insurance, \$31 billion to commodities and \$29 billion to conservation during the five-year window that has since lapsed.

The nutrition funding goes toward several federal food programs for lower income people, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP and the Emergency Food Assistance Program.

The Republican House and Democratic Senate have been unable to work through their differences on a new five-year farm bill, despite giving themselves more than a year of extra time.

The bill lawmakers are set to approve this month will give unified Republicans in control of Washington another year to get the work done.

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.

13 more GOP states sign on to oppose Standing Rock Sioux in new lawsuit over DAPL

Tribe's lawsuit argues Army Corps is unlawfully allowing the pipeline to operate without an easement

BY: MARY STEURER - DECEMBER 17, 2024 4:55 PM

A federal judge this week allowed 13 more Republican-led states, including South Dakota, to intervene as co-defendants in the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's new lawsuit against the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The lawsuit, filed in October, accuses the Army Corps of unlawfully allowing the Dakota Access Pipeline to operate without an easement, a complete environmental assessment or sufficient emergency spill response plans. The tribe ultimately wants a federal judge to shut the pipeline down.

Standing Rock has opposed the pipeline for years, saying it infringes upon the tribe's sovereignty, has damaged sacred cultural sites and jeopardizes the tribe's water supply.

The Army Corps of Engineers has jurisdiction over a part of the pipeline that passes below the Missouri River less than a half-mile upstream from the Standing Rock Reservation.

"The Corps has failed to act and failed to protect the tribe," Standing Rock Chairwoman Janet Alkire said in an October press conference announcing the lawsuit.

The more than 1,000-mile pipeline, often referred to as DAPL, passes through North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa and Illinois. Its pathway includes unceded land recognized as belonging to the Sioux Nation under an 1851 treaty with the U.S. government.

North Dakota joined the case on the side of the Army Corps earlier this month, arguing that closing DAPL would cost the state hundreds of millions of dollars in tax revenue, put thousands of jobs at risk, hamper regional supply chains and harm the environment. State attorneys also argue that a federal court order shuttering DAPL would violate North Dakota's right to regulate its own land and resources.

In a brief filed Monday, the 13 additional co-defendant states made similar arguments. The group, led by Iowa, said DAPL is integral to the health of regional energy and agriculture markets.

"DAPL plays a vital role in ensuring the nation's crops can come to market — not because DAPL itself transports agricultural products, but because every barrel of oil that DAPL transports is a barrel that does not take space in a truck or a train," the states wrote.

This also makes highways and railways safer and reduces pollution, they added.

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The 13 states that joined the lawsuit this week are Iowa, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas and West Virginia.

According to the states' brief, the pipeline has paid over \$100 million in property taxes to Iowa counties and over \$33 million in property taxes to South Dakota counties since it began operating in 2017.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has not yet filed an answer to the tribe's lawsuit.

Energy Transfer, the developer of the Dakota Access Pipeline, has not requested to intervene in the suit.

The case is before U.S. District Court Judge James Boasberg, who oversaw the tribe's 2016 lawsuit against the Army Corps of Engineers opposing the pipeline.

North Dakota in 2021 sought to join that lawsuit as well, but Boasberg denied the request as the case was in the process of wrapping up.

That case concluded with Boasberg instructing the Army Corps of Engineers to conduct a full environmental impact study of the pipeline, which is still in the works. Boasberg also ordered the pipeline to stop operating pending the completion of the study, though that demand was ultimately overturned by an appellate court.

In a separate federal court case, North Dakota seeks \$38 million from the United States government for costs the state says it incurred responding to the Dakota Access Pipeline protests.

Mary Steurer is a reporter based in Bismarck for the North Dakota Monitor. A native of St. Louis, Steurer previously worked as the local government reporter for the Casper Star-Tribune newspaper in Wyoming.

Regulators approve natural gas rate hike for NorthWestern Energy

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - DECEMBER 17, 2024 2:42 PM

State regulators approved a settlement Tuesday in Pierre reducing NorthWestern Energy's proposed \$8.38 monthly increase on the average residential natural gas customer's bill to \$6.44.

The 7% rate increase began as a request for a 9% increase. NorthWestern serves 49,800 natural gas customers in South Dakota.

The Public Utilities Commission's unanimous approval of the settlement will increase the company's natural gas revenues by \$4.6 million annually, down from the originally proposed \$6 million.

NorthWestern Energy had not adjusted natural gas rates in South Dakota since 2011. In its application, the company cited rising operational costs and 13 years of infrastructure investments as justification for the rate hike. The average residential customer can expect an increase of approximately \$77 annually.

The settlement also includes a rate moratorium that prevents NorthWestern from seeking another natural gas rate increase until 2028, unless an "extraordinary event" occurs.

Earlier this year, NorthWestern Energy was approved for an 11% electricity rate increase, though it was also reduced from an initial request. That decision added \$13.67 per month to the average electric customer's bill.

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

Abortion-rights organizers talk failed ballot measures and what's next

BY: ELISHA BROWN - DECEMBER 17, 2024 6:00 AM

Most abortion-rights ballot measures succeeded this year, but November marked the first time since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* that some citizen-led bids to restore access failed.

Organizers with campaigns in Arkansas, Florida, Nebraska and South Dakota spoke with States Newsroom about what went wrong. A few said they're not giving up the fight, and one group hopes to get the question on the ballot in 2026.

Arkansas: Ballot access denied

In Arkansas, voters could have had a chance to decide whether to allow the right to an abortion up to 18 weeks post-fertilization, and beyond in cases of rape, incest, fatal fetal anomalies, or to protect patient's life or physical health.

But the question never made the ballot. The secretary of state disqualified around 14,000 of more than 100,000 signatures submitted by Arkansans for Limited Government, the group behind the proposed constitutional amendment, according to Arkansas Advocate. Measures require 90,704 signatures to make the ballot in the state.

The election official said the signatures were invalid due to a paperwork error, and the state Supreme Court agreed with his decision in August, the Advocate reported.

Gennie Diaz, Arkansans for Limited Government's spokesperson, said the defeat was "devastating because we felt very much like the facts were on our side, the law was on our side and that we did everything that was required of us."

All abortions are illegal in Arkansas except to save the life of the mother. Doctors violating the law could be fined up to \$100,000 and serve up to 10 years in prison. No abortions were reported to the state Department of Health in 2023, the latest info available.

While canvassing, the group spent a lot of time informing Arkansans about the law — some residents didn't know the ban was in effect — and telling them about medical emergencies that arise during pregnancies that require abortions, Diaz said. Family Council published a list of paid canvassers and their home cities in June, a move Arkansans for Limited Government denounced as an intimidation tactic.

Arkansans for Limited Government is looking to mount another abortion-rights initiative, she said, but the group will need financial support. "One of the biggest takeaways from our experience is that you do need substantial funding, robust funding up front in order to make sure your ducks are in a row and you have a really solid plan," Diaz said.

The abortion-rights committee raised \$306,314 in July, the penultimate month of the campaign, Arkansas Advocate reported. Arkansas Family Council reported more than \$238,000 at the end of July to oppose the abortion amendment, and Stronger Arkansas had about \$475,000 during that time period, according to the Advocate.

Diaz said national funding is crucial to a successful abortion-rights amendment: "I don't think it necessarily has to come from Planned Parenthood and ACLU National. That's typically who it has come from. But it is just the bare bones truth that in order for a ballot initiative to be successful, you have to have millions of dollars, even in a small state like Arkansas."

Big money in Florida election

Lack of money wasn't an issue in Florida, where voters weighed whether to allow abortion before fetal viability and when a provider determines the procedure is medically necessary. The abortion-rights group behind Amendment 4 had more than \$121 million in total contributions, according to state campaign finance data.

Several opposition committees popped up ahead of the election, including Do No Harm, Florida Voters

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Against Extremism — publicly known as “No on 4” — Keep Florida Pro Life and Life First PC. Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis created the Florida Freedom Fund to oppose abortion and marijuana initiatives. DeSantis’ PAC had \$7.3 million in contributions, according to state campaign finance data.

What set the counter-campaign apart in Florida was the DeSantis administration’s tactics in opposing the effort. It’s unclear how much the state government spent to oppose the abortion-rights ballot measure, but the governor ramped up critiques — even against members of his own party — as the election approached. A health agency created a government webpage warning against Amendment 4, DeSantis appeared alongside anti-abortion physicians, and he got a former NFL coach to speak out against the proposal, the Florida Phoenix reported.

“There were misconceptions and flat out lies about what Amendment Four was and what Amendment Four was not,” said Keisha Mulfort, spokesperson for the state’s American Civil Liberties Union affiliate who worked on Floridians Protecting Freedom’s campaign.

In October, state health officials sent cease-and-desist letters to TV broadcasters threatening to sue them over a Yes on 4 ad featuring a cancer survivor, the Phoenix reported. The group sued the administration, saying officials were trying to chill free speech. U.S. District Judge Mark Walker agreed, saying the Florida Department of Health could not intimidate broadcasters. Litigation in the case is ongoing.

The abortion-rights group is also disputing a \$328,000 fine stemming from a Florida Office of Election Crimes & Security preliminary report released in October accusing Floridians Protecting Freedom of “widespread election fraud.” Campaign Director Lauren Brenzel refuted the allegations, and Mulfort said the fine is also being litigated but can’t comment further on either case.

Fifty-seven percent of Florida voters approved the abortion-rights measure, but Amendment 4 fell short of the 60% threshold required in the state, according to the Phoenix. Although a majority of Floridians voted in favor of abortion rights, the supermajority requirement means most abortions are banned after six weeks.

“We all will continue to look at the ways in which we can ensure that reproductive freedom is seen in Florida and that these abortion bans come to an end,” Mulfort said.

South Dakota loss analyzed

Like Arkansas, South Dakota’s abortion-rights group did not receive any funding from the national branches of Planned Parenthood or the American Civil Liberties Union. Democratic Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker’s Think Big America PAC donated \$790,000 in the final weeks leading up to Election Day.

Dakotans for Health was outraised by three anti-abortion committees — Life Defense Fund, No G for SD and Celebrate Life Committee — that raised \$1.7 million, versus the abortion-rights coalition’s \$840,000 as of late October, South Dakota Searchlight reported.

Amendment G asked voters whether the state should ban legislators from regulating abortion until the end of the first trimester, allow regulations during the second trimester “in ways that are reasonably related to the physical health of the pregnant woman” and let the state prohibit abortion in the third trimester, unless the procedure is necessary to save the life or health of a pregnant patient.

Fifty-nine percent of South Dakota voters rejected the proposal, and 41% voted yes.

Dakotans for Health leader Rick Weiland chalked the loss up to a lack of resources. “We were in a tough spot. We knew that we needed to be on the air at the end. The last month or so, that’s what we had budgeted for,” he said. “But the other side of that coin, too — the reason we didn’t have the resources — was that the national organizations had written South Dakota off, which was really unfortunate.”

Weiland said he would not lead another effort to restore abortion rights in the state but would support other groups. South Dakota’s ACLU and Planned Parenthood affiliates did not support the campaign and questioned its timing and wording at the start, according to Searchlight.

“There’s no middle ground in politics anymore,” Weiland said. “You have to be beholden to the ultra-right or beholden to the ultra-left, and you can’t do what we thought was the right thing, which was just restore the rights that women had for almost 50 years.”

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He also challenged the Republican-controlled legislature to add exemptions to the state's abortion ban, which only allows abortions to save the mother's life. "They could declare a state of emergency, they could pass an exemption bill for rape, incest and nonviable pregnancies, the governor could sign it, and women would have at least some access."

He said such a mechanism could be passed swiftly, similar to the way lawmakers fast-tracked a bill this year that allowed citizens to remove their signatures from ballot petitions. Republican Rep. Jon Hansen authored that bill. He also served as co-chair of the anti-abortion Life Defense Fund and is the incoming speaker of the South Dakota House.

Dueling measures in Nebraska

In Nebraska, voters faced an unprecedented pair of ballot questions on abortion. One initiative asked voters whether to restore the right to an abortion up to fetal viability. The other asked voters whether to restrict access after the first trimester and allow lawmakers to further regulate abortion. Most abortions are banned after 12 weeks in the state.

Even though the abortion-rights group had the jump on organizing — launching in 2023, while the counter effort started up only this spring — the restrictive measure prevailed.

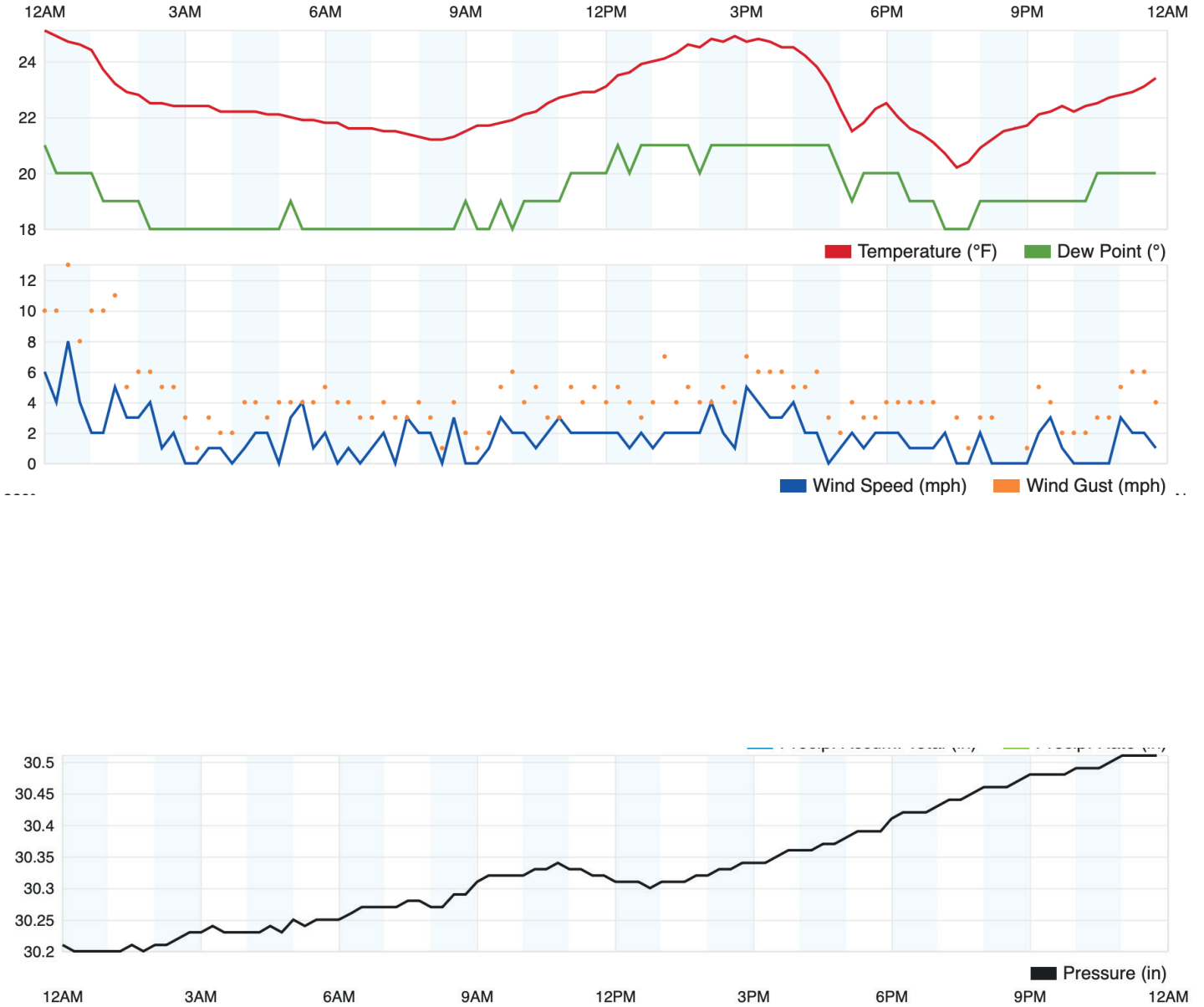
"The abortion restrictions amendment ... left the door open for further bans and restrictions," said Andi Curry Grubb, Planned Parenthood Advocates of Nebraska's executive director. "We've dusted ourselves off, regrouped and are prepared for what comes next. We will not rest in our fight to protect every person's right to control their life, body, and future."

Elisha Brown is the Reproductive Rights Today newsletter author at States Newsroom. She is based in Durham, North Carolina, where she previously worked as a reporter covering reproductive rights, policy, and inequality for Facing South. Her work has appeared in The New York Times, The Daily Beast, The Atlantic, and Vox. She attended American University in Washington, D.C. and was raised in South Carolina.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 21 °F

Partly Sunny

Tonight



Low: 16 °F↑

Chance Snow
then Chance
Wintry Mix

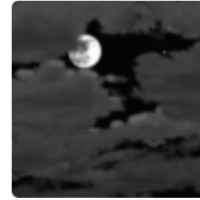
Thursday



High: 26 °F↓

Blustery.
Snow Likely
then Slight
Chance Snow

Thursday
Night



Low: -3 °F

Decreasing
Clouds

Friday



High: 15 °F

Partly Sunny



Light Snow and Ice Tonight Through Thursday

December 18, 2024
4:18 AM



What & When



- Snow will spread southeastward over northeastern SD and west central MN tonight and Thursday
 - ◆ 1 to 3 inches of snow will be confined from Marshall and Day Counties, eastward into west central MN
- A period of light freezing rain may occur between the Missouri River and the James River late tonight
 - ◆ Ice accumulations up to 0.04"
- Increasing winds, with gusts of 30 to 40 mph, will lead to patchy to areas of blowing snow over portions of northeastern SD into west central MN Thursday



Impacts

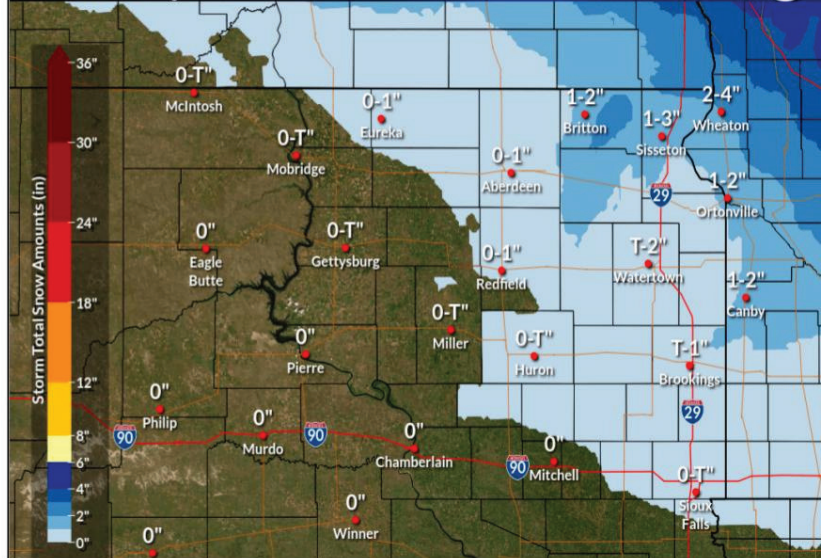
- Plan on slippery road conditions. The hazardous conditions may impact travel late tonight and Thursday

Expected Snowfall - Official NWS Forecast

Valid Wed 6:00PM through Thu 6:00PM CST

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD

Issued Dec 18, 2024 2:21 AM CST



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Snow will spread over northeastern SD into west central MN tonight into Thursday. The highest snow totals of 1 to 3 inches will lie from Marshall and Day Counties, eastward into west central MN. A period of light freezing rain is possible for locations between the Missouri River and James River late tonight. Winds will be on the increase Thursday.

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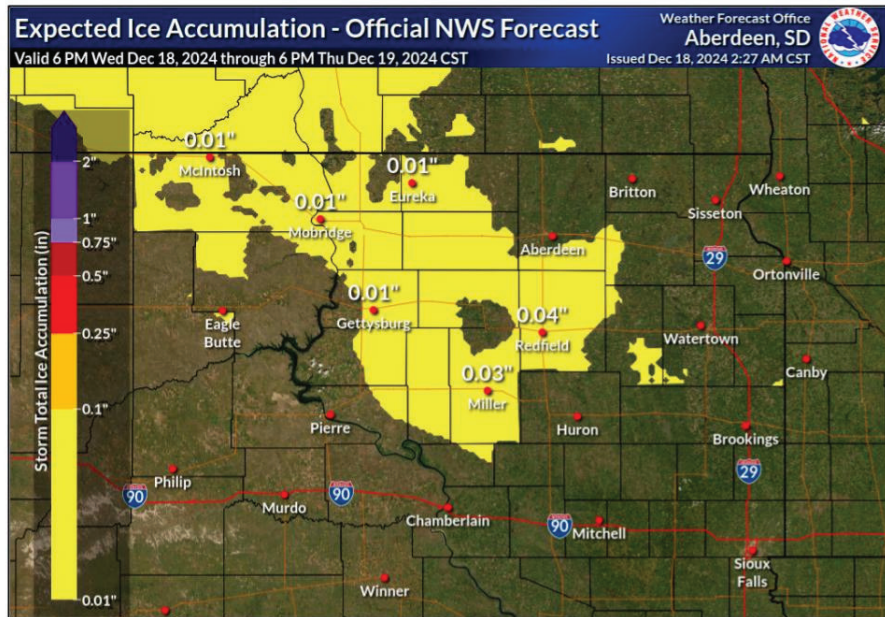
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Ice Potential

December 18, 2024
4:23 AM

Late Wednesday Night



- ➔ A period of light freezing rain is forecasted late tonight
- ➔ This may to occur between the Missouri River and the James River tonight
- ➔ Ice accumulations up to 0.04" possible
- ➔ This could create icy roads leading to hazardous travel conditions
- ➔ Visit <https://www.sd511.org/> for the latest road conditions.



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

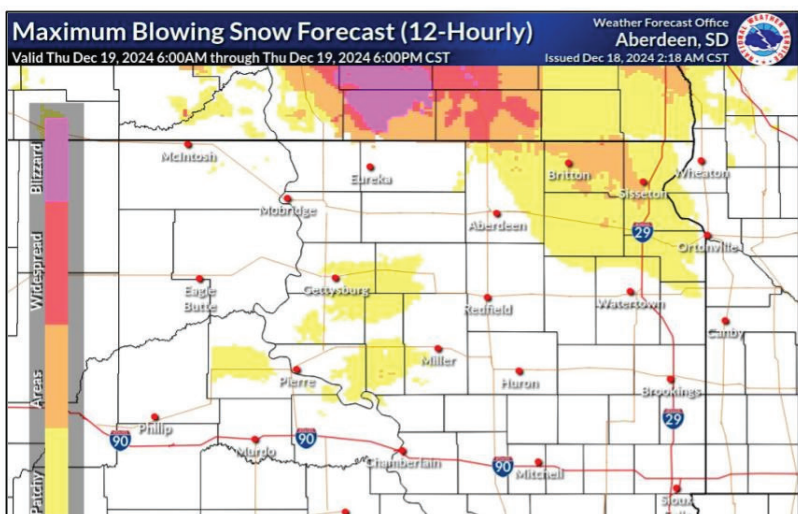
A period of freezing rain is possible (25-40%) for locations mainly between the Missouri River and James River late tonight. Up to 0.04" of ice accumulation is possible



Increasing Winds Thursday

December 18, 2024
4:25 AM

High Winds Expected Over the Area With Blowing Snow Potential



	Maximum Wind Gust Forecast (mph)										12/20 Fri Maximum
	12/19 Thu										
	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am			
Aberdeen	22	30	37	39	37	26	20	13			39
Britton	21	26	33	38	36	28	20	13			38
Brookings	21	23	30	33	33	29	23	16			33
Chamberlain	24	35	41	44	41	30	20	12			44
Clark	22	28	35	38	37	29	23	16			38
Eagle Butte	48	55	55	53	43	25	16	10			55
Ellendale	22	30	38	40	38	28	20	13			40
Eureka	32	41	46	47	41	28	18	10			47
Gettysburg	32	43	47	48	41	26	17	12			48
Huron	20	26	33	38	37	28	21	14			38
Kennebec	33	44	49	51	46	31	20	13			51
McIntosh	46	52	52	48	39	22	14	9			52
Milbank	17	22	29	32	31	28	24	18			32
Miller	31	41	45	45	40	28	20	13			45
Mobridge	36	45	45	44	38	24	16	9			45
Murdo	35	43	47	47	43	26	17	12			47
Pierre	31	43	47	47	40	24	14	7			47
Redfield	23	32	39	41	38	26	20	13			41
Sisseton	22	25	31	35	32	28	24	17			35
Watertown	22	28	35	37	35	30	24	17			37
Webster	24	30	36	40	38	31	24	17			40
Wheaton	22	23	26	30	29	28	23	18			30

- ➔ The combination of falling snow and wind gusts up to 40 mph, will lead to patchy to areas of blowing snow, mainly over northeastern SD. This could lead to a drop in visibility at times
- ➔ Winds will increase over central SD late tonight and across the rest of the area Thursday. Highest gusts of 45-50+ will be over north central and central SD

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 25 °F at 12:00 AM

Low Temp: 20 °F at 7:28 PM

Wind: 13 mph at 12:30 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 8 hours, 46 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 58 in 1979

Record Low: -37 in 2016

Average High: 28

Average Low: 7

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.34

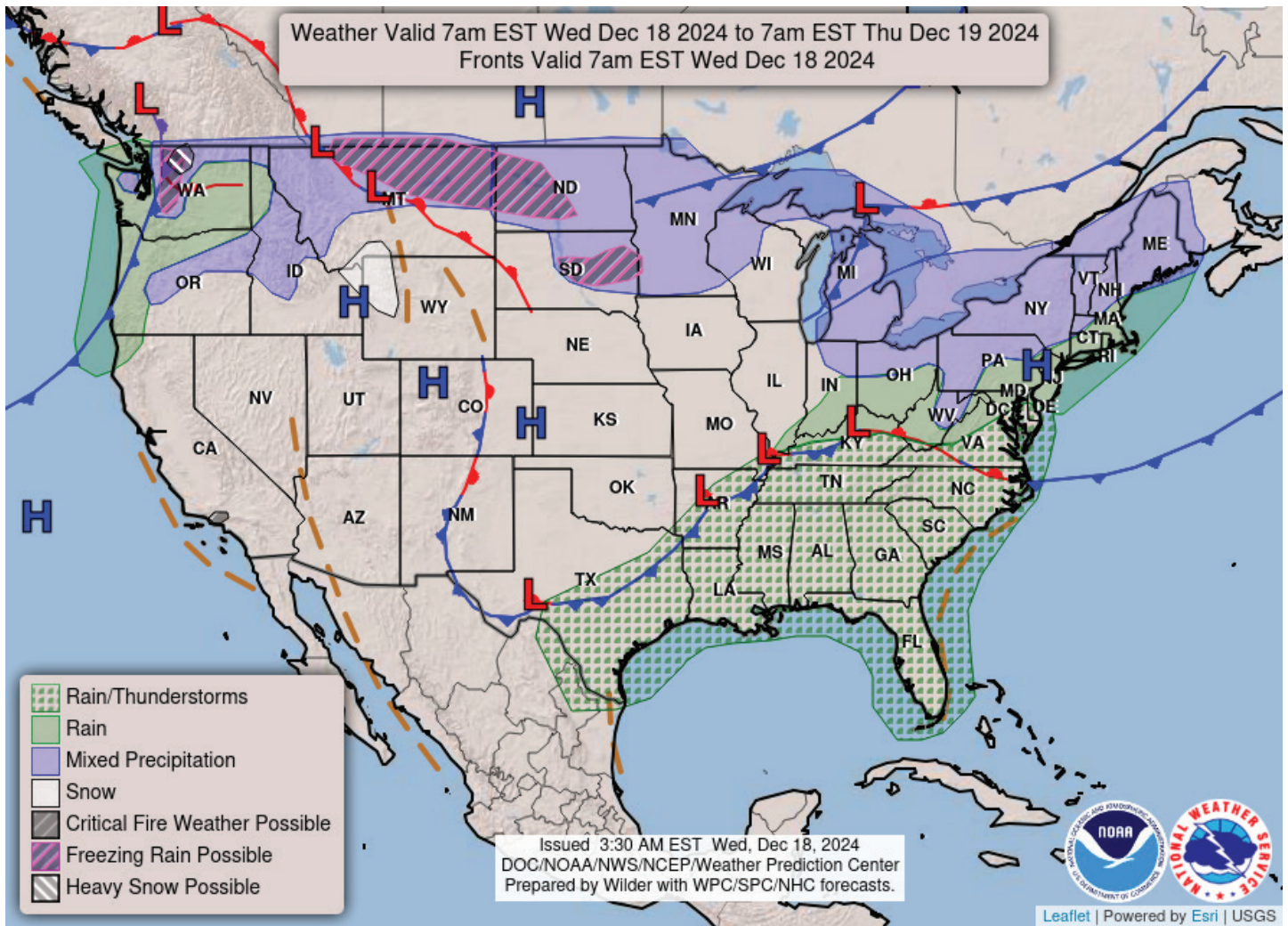
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 21.55

Precip Year to Date: 21.71

Sunset Tonight: 4:52:34 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:06:42 am



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Today in Weather History

December 18, 1985: Bitter cold impacted most places in South Dakota as low temperatures dropped 20 degrees below zero or lower. The coldest temperature was 30 below zero at Huron in Beadle County and Canton in Lincoln County. Aberdeen dropped to 22 below zero, Highmore and Mobridge fell to 23 below zero; Britton fell to 24 below zero, and Summit bottomed out at 25 below.

December 18, 1996: A powerful Alberta Clipper and a slow-moving deep Arctic high-pressure system brought widespread, prolonged blizzard conditions to the entire region from the 16th to the 19th. The clipper dropped from 1 to 5 inches of snowfall on top of the already extensive snow cover of 1 to almost 4 feet. Across central and north-central South Dakota, northerly winds increased to 25 to 40 mph with gusts to 55 mph late in the morning of the 16th. Temperatures also fell, and widespread blizzard conditions and dangerous wind chills of 40 to 70 below zero developed, prevailing through noon on the 18th. Across northeast South Dakota, conditions changed through late on the day of the 16th, with widespread blowing snow, falling temperatures, and dangerous wind chills. Blizzard conditions developed on the morning of the 17th and continued into the evening of the 18th. Conditions changed throughout the afternoon of the 16th in west-central Minnesota, with a full-fledged blizzard by the morning of the 17th.

North winds of 30 to 40 mph gusting to 50 mph brought visibilities near zero and caused heavy drifting, making travel difficult. Many people had to be rescued from their vehicles after getting stuck in massive snowdrifts or going into ditches because of low visibilities. Some people had to wait to be rescued for many hours, for some over a day. Due to the massive amount of blowing snow, widespread heavy drifting occurred across the entire area, blocking roads, making travel difficult, and leaving some people stranded to wait out the storm. Some snowdrifts from the storm were as high as 15 feet, with a few houses almost buried. A Burlington Northern locomotive became stuck in a 12-foot drift near Hazel and had to be dug out. Due to the weight of the snow, the roof of a hangar at the Gettysburg Airport collapsed on an airplane.

All schools were let out early on the 16th, with some schools not reopening until the 20th. Several school buses went into the ditch or got stuck in drifts and had to be pulled out. There were several accidents, most with minor injuries; however, one accident in Dewey County resulted in serious injury. Most of the roads, state highways and Interstate 90 were closed for a day or two until road crews could get to them. Interstate 29 also received heavy drifting, with parts of it closed for a while during the storm. Most snow plows had to be called back because they could not see the roads or the roads would be drifted over shortly after they were plowed. Some county snow removal budgets were already depleted or were close to being consumed. Emergency personnel and road crews were working extended hours to keep up with the storm. Rescue vehicles had a difficult time responding to emergencies. In one case, a lady from Mobridge had to be brought to Aberdeen. The 100-mile trip took six hours. Also, a rural Westport man died because the rescue units could not get to him in time.

Airports were closed, or flights were canceled or delayed. Mail was delayed for some people up to several days with a massive backup of Christmas packages. Some government offices and many businesses were closed for several days. All sports and other activities were postponed or canceled. Farmers and ranchers had a difficult time getting feed to their livestock. Many cattle were loose and had to be found as they walked on snowdrifts over fences. The storm also killed several animals and a countless number of pheasants with some buried in the snow. Several dairy producers had to dump thousands of pounds of milk because trucks could not get to them in time. Fortunately, there were only spotty power outages throughout the storm. For several hours on the night of the 16th in the extreme cold, 3000 people in Pierre were without power for several hours.

December 18th, 2016 An Arctic airmass over the Northern Plains produced bitterly cold temperatures. In South Dakota, both Aberdeen and Watertown broke their record low by several degrees, with both falling to 37 degrees below zero. The Arctic air combined with 10 to 20 mph winds brought wind chills to 35 to 60 degrees below zero across the region.



Never Quit!

"Don't let this be you!" said a coach to his football team after a difficult loss. He was pointing to a picture of a player sitting in front of his locker. His helmet was between his feet. His elbows were on his knees and his head was between his hands with a look of sadness in his eyes. Under his helmet were the words, "I quit!"

As we look into the manger this Christmas, we can rejoice together and say, "Thank You, God, that You didn't quit – that You never gave up!"

Whenever we think of the eternal love that God has for us, we often forget about the disappointments He must have endured. Imagine, if you can, what must have entered into His mind and heart when Adam and Eve rejected His plan and the path before them. Consider, if you will, the many agreements He made with people who promised to obey Him and then abandoned their word when they thought He was out of sight. We will never know the grief He suffered because of the hope He had that people would love Him and be obedient to Him.

But, He never gave up. He never quit. Finally, John wrote, "We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world!"

All of us have suffered many losses in life. None, however, can ever be compared to God's losses. But He refused to give up even though it cost the life of His one and only Son.

Prayer: We thank You, Father, for Your unfailing love and determination to rescue us. We are overwhelmed when we think that You would sacrifice Your Son for us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: 1 John 4:14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.

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:

12.17.24

56 66 67 68 69 18

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$825,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 13

DRAW: Mins 46 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.16.24

5 17 18 34 50 8

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$17,660,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 28 Mins

DRAW: 46 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.17.24

4 18 29 36 37 18

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 43 Mins

DRAW: 46 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.14.24

1 9 19 21 31

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$156,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 43 Mins

DRAW: 46 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.16.24

2 7 15 21 56 12

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 12 Mins

DRAW: 46 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.16.24

9 30 33 57 61 17

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$69,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 12 Mins

DRAW: 46 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

Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Christian 67, Warner 35
Baltic 49, Parker 27
Castlewood 59, Elkton-Lake Benton 40
Centerville 41, Freeman Academy-Marion 35
Clark-Willow Lake 62, DeSmet 54, OT
Corsica/Stickney 58, Avon 32
Dakota Valley 78, Beresford 60
Dell Rapids St Mary 77, Mitchell Christian 29
Deuel 64, Deubrook 60
Estelline-Hendricks 72, Langford 27
Ethan 50, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 47
Faulkton 58, Sunshine Bible Academy 45
Florence-Henry 57, Waverly-South Shore 51
Garretson 66, Canton 48
Gregory 74, Chamberlain 46
Groton 73, Sisseton 41
Hamlin 52, Flandreau 19
Hanson 56, McCook Central-Montrose 42
Howard 50, Chester 29
Huron 65, Brookings 60
Ipswich 53, North Central 43
Jones County 50, Colome 17
Lemmon High School 52, Philip 26
Leola-Frederick High School 57, Oakes, N.D. 46
Madison 65, Tri-Valley 58
Miller 68, Potter County 56
Mitchell 70, Watertown 44
Mobridge-Pollock 56, Aberdeen Roncalli 43
North Central, Neb. 53, Burke 29
Northwestern 60, Wilmot 40
Parkston 58, Tripp-Delmont-Armour 38
Platte-Geddes 56, Kimball-White Lake 25
Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 71, Hitchcock-Tulare 44
Scotland/Menno 57, Bon Homme 48
Sioux Falls Lincoln 65, Harrisburg 41
Sioux Falls Washington 51, Yankton 47
Sully Buttes 53, Lyman 43
Sundance High School, Wyo. 60, Harding County 45
Viborg 53, Bridgewater-Emery 28
Wagner 53, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 43
Waubay/Summit 45, Webster 44
Wausa, Neb. 63, Gayville-Volin High School 43
West Central 64, Vermillion 62

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Winner 48, Stanley County 33
Wolsey-Wessington 69, Iroquois-Lake Preston 37
GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=
Andes Central/Dakota Christian 49, Ethan 48
Baltic 51, Parker 28
Belle Fourche 58, Philip 45
Brandon Valley 51, Sioux Falls Jefferson 35
Brookings 48, Huron 27
Burke 57, North Central, Neb. 31
Canton 54, Garretson 15
Castlewood 52, Elkton-Lake Benton 25
Centerville 63, Freeman Academy-Marion 26
Chester 56, Howard 40
Colman-Egan 58, Canistota 26
Corsica/Stickney 54, Avon 40
Dakota Valley 71, Beresford 51
Deubrook 58, Deuel 33
Estelline-Hendricks 43, Langford 21
Faulkton 46, Sunshine Bible Academy 25
Freeman 50, McCook Central-Montrose 49
Gayville-Volin High School 58, Wausa, Neb. 23
Groton 48, Sisseton 45
Hamlin 51, Flandreau 37
Harding County 53, Bowman County, N.D. 50
Harrisburg 51, Sioux Falls Lincoln 36
Highmore-Harrold 54, James Valley Christian School 11
Ipswich 49, North Central 39
Jones County 59, Colome 15
Lemmon High School 53, Hettinger-Scranton, N.D. 9
Lennox 60, Dell Rapids 42
Lyman 59, Sully Buttes 16
Miller 69, Potter County 34
Mobridge-Pollock 50, Aberdeen Roncalli 45
Newell 51, Lead-Deadwood 35
Northwestern 62, Wilmot 34
Parkston 47, Tripp-Delmont-Armour 25
Platte-Geddes 30, Kimball-White Lake 25
Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 61, Hitchcock-Tulare 28
Scotland/Menno 25, Bon Homme 13
Sioux Falls Washington 72, Yankton 33
Timber Lake 60, Herreid-Selby 56
Tri-Valley 56, Madison 28
Vermillion 69, West Central 55
Viborg-Hurley 52, Bridgewater-Emery 48
Wagner 48, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 45
Warner 54, Aberdeen Christian 9
Watertown 41, T F Riggs High School 36
Winner 39, Stanley County 15

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

Rescuers dig for survivors of Vanuatu earthquake with no water and unclear death toll

By CHARLOTTE GRAHAM-McLAY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — Vanuatu's capital was without water on Wednesday, a day after reservoirs were destroyed by a violent magnitude 7.3 earthquake that wrought havoc on the South Pacific island nation, with the number of people killed and injured expected to rise.

The government's disaster management office said early Wednesday that 14 deaths were confirmed, but hours later said nine had been verified by the main hospital. The number was "expected to increase" as people remained trapped in fallen buildings, a spokesperson said. About 200 people have been treated for injuries.

Two of those killed were Chinese nationals, according to China's official Xinhua News Agency, which cited Gu Zihua, an official at the Chinese embassy in Vanuatu.

Frantic rescue efforts that began at flattened buildings after the quake hit early Tuesday afternoon continued 30 hours later, with dozens working in dust and heat with little water to seek those yelling for help inside. A few more survivors were extracted from the rubble of downtown buildings in Port Vila, also the country's largest city, while others remained trapped and some were found dead.

A near-total telecommunications collapse meant people struggled to confirm their relatives' safety. Some providers began to reestablish phone service but connections were patchy.

Internet service had not been restored because the submarine cable supplying it was damaged, the operator said.

The earthquake hit at a depth of 57 kilometers (35 miles) and was centered 30 kilometers (19 miles) west of the capital of Vanuatu, a group of 80 islands home to about 330,000 people. A tsunami warning was called off less than two hours after the quake, but dozens of large aftershocks continued to rattle the country.

The Asia-Pacific head of the International Federation of Red Cross, Katie Greenwood, speaking to The Associated Press from Fiji, said it was not clear how many people were still missing or killed.

"We have anecdotal information coming from people at the search and rescue site that are fairly confident that unfortunately those numbers will rise," she said.

The capital's main medical facility, Vila Central Hospital, was badly damaged and patients were moved to a military camp. Clement Chipokolo, Vanuatu country director at the Christian relief agency World Vision, said health care services, already strained before the quake, were overwhelmed.

No water in Port Vila

While power was out in swathes of Port Vila, the biggest fear among aid agencies was the lack of water. Two large reservoirs serving the capital were totally decimated, the National Disaster Management Office said.

Resident Milroy Cainton said people were joining large queues to buy water in stores, but could only purchase two or four bottles at a time. "People are not really concerned about electricity, they're just concerned about water," he said.

UNICEF was recording a rise in diarrhea among children, a sign that they had begun to drink tainted water, said the chief of the Vanuatu office, Eric Durpaire. Officials told residents of areas where water had been restored to boil it.

Some people remain trapped under the rubble

At least 10 buildings sustained major damage, many in a busy downtown area full of lunchtime shoppers when the quake hit. An unknown number of people were trapped inside, and Cainton, the resident, said rescuers had been forced to target their efforts to where they believed people could be saved.

Michael Thompson, who runs a tourism business in Vanuatu, was among the rescuers and posted a video on Facebook of the frenzied efforts and dust-covered survivors on gurneys along with pleas for people to bring tools and water to the site.

Officials said Wednesday night that Port Vila appeared to be the worst-hit area, but some nearby villages

and offshore islands had experienced landslides. Three bridges were “at high risk of collapse” in heavy rain, the government said.

Embassies are damaged

A building housing a number of diplomatic missions in Port Vila — including those of the United States, Britain, France and New Zealand — was destroyed, with a section of the building cleaving off and flattening the first floor. Windows were buckled and walls crumbled.

The U.S. State Department said its embassy staff were safe, but the building was no longer functional. The office opened in July as part of a push by the U.S. to expand its Pacific presence to counter China’s influence in the region.

New Zealand’s foreign ministry said officials have accounted for all embassy staff. Australia’s foreign ministry said its workers were safe.

All flights grounded

Damage to the seaport and airport is likely to hamper aid efforts and economic recovery in a country dependent on agricultural exports and tourism. The airport was closed to commercial flights for a further 72 hours from Wednesday.

But the runway was deemed functional for humanitarian flights by French engineers who arrived by helicopter. Military craft from Australia and New Zealand were due to begin arriving Wednesday night, carrying search and rescue personnel and equipment, as well as relief supplies.

Dan McGarry, a journalist living in Vanuatu, said there had been a “massive landslide” at the international shipping terminal. The government said the main wharf was closed.

Vanuatu’s position on a subduction zone — where the Indo-Australian tectonic plate moves beneath the Pacific Plate — means earthquakes of greater than magnitude 6 are not uncommon, and the country’s buildings are intended to withstand quake damage.

Russia says suspect detained in the killing of a senior general in Moscow

By The Associated Press undefined

Russia’s security service said Wednesday that it has detained a suspect in the killing of a senior general in Moscow.

The suspect was described as an Uzbek citizen recruited by Ukrainian intelligence services.

Lt. Gen. Igor Kirillov was killed Tuesday by a bomb hidden in a scooter outside his apartment building in Moscow, a day after Ukraine’s security service leveled criminal charges against him. His assistant also died in the attack. A Ukrainian official said the service carried out the attack.

Russia’s Federal Security Service, or FSB, didn’t name the suspect, but said he was born in 1995. According to a statement by the FSB, the suspect said himself that he was recruited by Ukrainian special services. AP can’t confirm the conditions under which the suspect spoke to the security services.

The FSB said the suspect had been promised a reward of \$100,000 and permission to move to a European Union country in exchange for killing Kirillov.

The agency stated that acting on instructions from Ukraine, the suspect traveled to Moscow, where he picked up a homemade explosive device. He placed the device on an electric scooter and parked it at the entrance to the residential building where Kirillov lived.

The suspect then rented a car to monitor the location and set up a camera that livestreamed the scene to his handlers in the central Ukrainian city of Dnipro. Once Kirillov was seen leaving the building, the suspect detonated the bomb. The suspect faces a sentence of up to life imprisonment, the FSB said.

The suspect was detained in a village in the Moscow region, according to Ministry of Internal Affairs official Irina Volk, who was quoted by Russian state news agency TASS.

Kirillov, 54, was the chief of the military’s nuclear, biological and chemical protection forces and was under sanctions from several countries, including the U.K. and Canada, for his actions in Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. On Monday, Ukraine’s Security Service, or SBU, opened a criminal investigation against

him, accusing him of directing the use of banned chemical weapons.

Russia has denied using any chemical weapons in Ukraine and has accused Kyiv of using toxic agents in combat.

Kirillov, who took his current job in 2017, was one of the most high-profile figures to level those accusations. He held numerous briefings to accuse the Ukrainian military of using toxic agents and planning to launch attacks with radioactive substances — claims that Ukraine and its Western allies rejected as propaganda.

An official with the SBU said Tuesday that the agency was behind the attack. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to release the information, described Kirillov as a “war criminal and an entirely legitimate target.”

The SBU official provided video that they said was of the bombing. It shows two men leaving a building shortly before a blast fills the frame.

Russia’s top state investigative agency said it’s looking into Kirillov’s death as a case of terrorism, and officials in Moscow vowed to punish Ukraine.

The Kremlin said Wednesday that it was “obvious” that Ukraine was behind Kirillov’s killing. Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said that Kyiv “does not shy away from terrorist methods.”

Man convicted of quadruple homicide is put to death in Indiana’s 1st execution in 15 years

By SOPHIA TAREEN and RICK CALLAHAN Associated Press

MICHIGAN CITY, Ind. (AP) — An Indiana man convicted of killing four people including his brother and his sister’s fiancé decades ago was put to death early Wednesday, marking the state’s first execution in 15 years.

Joseph Corcoran, 49, was pronounced dead at 12:44 a.m. CST at the Indiana State Prison in Michigan City, Indiana, the Indiana Department of Correction said in a statement. Corcoran was scheduled to be executed with the powerful sedative pentobarbital, but the state agency’s statement did not mention that drug. Corcoran’s execution was the 24th in the U.S. this year.

The state provided limited details about the execution process, and no media witnesses were permitted under state law. However, Corcoran chose a reporter for the Indiana Capital Chronicle as one of his witnesses, the outlet’s editor posted on X early Wednesday.

Four people viewed the execution through a one-way window in a small adjacent room, said Corcoran attorney Larry Komp. He said he, a reporter from Indiana Capital Chronicle and two family members were witnesses. The death took eight minutes, according to Komp who said he only had a partial view and could not hear anything, including if Corcoran spoke.

By the state’s account, Corcoran’s last words were: “Not really. Let’s get this over with.”

Komp said “there was no way to tell” if Corcoran was in pain.

Indiana and Wyoming are the only two states that do not allow members of the media to witness state executions, according to a recent report by the Death Penalty Information Center.

According to the Indiana Capital Chronicle, witnesses were only allowed to watch the execution for six minutes before blinds to the viewing room were closed. Corcoran, whose pastor was allowed in the room with him during the execution, “appeared awake with his eyes blinking, but otherwise still and silent,” according to the newspaper.

Corcoran was convicted in the July 1997 shootings of his brother, 30-year-old James Corcoran, his sister’s fiancé, 32-year-old Robert Scott Turner, and two other men, Timothy G. Bricker, 30, and Douglas A. Stillwell, 30.

According to court records, before Corcoran fatally shot the four victims he was under stress because the forthcoming marriage of his sister to Turner would necessitate moving out of the Fort Wayne, Indiana, home he shared with his brother and sister.

While jailed for those killings, Corcoran reportedly bragged about fatally shooting his parents in 1992 in

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northern Indiana's Steuben County. He was charged in their killings but acquitted.

Last summer, Gov. Eric Holcomb announced plans to resume state executions following a yearslong hiatus marked by a scarcity of lethal injection drugs nationwide.

Corcoran's attorneys had fought his death penalty sentence for years, arguing he was severely mentally ill, which affected his ability to understand and make decisions. This month his attorneys asked the Indiana Supreme Court to stop his execution but the request was denied.

Corcoran exhausted his federal appeals in 2016. But his attorneys asked the U.S. District Court of Northern Indiana last week to stop his execution and hold a hearing to decide if it would be unconstitutional because Corcoran has a serious mental illness. The court declined to intervene Friday, and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit did the same Tuesday.

Corcoran's attorneys then asked the U.S. Supreme Court issue an emergency order halting his execution, but the high court denied their request for a stay late Tuesday, ending Corcoran's options with the courts.

Komp said that he was disappointed with the high court's decision, adding that the question of Corcoran's mental health was not properly evaluated.

"There has never been a hearing to determine whether is he competent to be executed," he said in a statement to The Associated Press. "It is an absolute failure for the rule of law to have an execution when the law and proper processes were not followed."

Corcoran's sole remaining hope then became Holcomb, who could have commuted Corcoran's death sentence. But that commutation never came and the execution proceeded as scheduled.

At midnight, a group of activists who oppose the death penalty began singing "Amazing Grace."

Holcomb's office released a statement early Wednesday following Corcoran's execution.

"Joseph Corcoran's case has been reviewed repeatedly over the last 25 years – including 7 times by the Indiana Supreme Court and 3 times by the U.S. Supreme Court, the most recent of which was tonight. His sentence has never been overturned and was carried out as ordered by the court," Holcomb said in the statement.

Indiana's last state execution was in 2009 when Matthew Wrinkles was put to death for killing his wife, her brother and sister-in-law in 1994. Since then, 13 executions were carried out in Indiana but those were initiated and performed by federal officials in 2020 and 2021 at a federal prison in Terre Haute.

State officials have said they couldn't continue executions because a combination of drugs used in lethal injections had become unavailable.

For years, there has been a shortage across the country because pharmaceutical companies have refused to sell their products for that purpose. That's pushed states, including Indiana, to turn to compounding pharmacies, which manufacture drugs specifically for a client. Some use more accessible drugs such as the sedatives pentobarbital or midazolam, both of which, critics say, can cause intense pain.

Religious groups, disability rights advocates and others have opposed his execution. About a dozen people, some holding candles, held a vigil late Tuesday to pray outside the prison, which is surrounded by barbed wire fences in a residential area about 60 miles (90 kilometers) east of Chicago.

"We can build a society without giving governmental authorities the right to execute their own citizens," said Bishop Robert McClory of the Diocese of Gary, who led the prayers.

Other death penalty opponents also demonstrated outside the prison Tuesday night, some holding signs that read "Execution Is Not The Solution" and "Remember The Victims But Not With More Killing."

"There is no need and no benefit from this execution. It's all show," said Abraham Borowitz, director of Death Penalty Action, his organization that protests every execution in the U.S.

Prison officials said in a brief statement Tuesday evening that Corcoran "requested Ben & Jerry's ice cream for his last meal."

Corcoran said farewell late Tuesday to relatives, including his wife, Tahina Corcoran, who told reporters outside the prison that they discussed their faith and their memories, including attending high school together. She reiterated her request for Indiana's governor to commute her husband's death sentence.

Tahina Corcoran said her husband was "very mentally ill" and she didn't think he fully grasped what was happening to him.

"He is in shock. He doesn't understand," she said.

As wars rage around them, Armenian Christians in Jerusalem's Old City feel the walls closing in

By JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — As the war in Gaza rages, Syria's government transforms, and the Israeli-occupied West Bank seethes, Armenian residents of the Old City of Jerusalem fight a different battle — one that is quieter, they say, but no less existential.

One of the oldest communities in Jerusalem, the Armenians have lived in the Old City for decades without significant friction with their neighbors, centered around a convent that acts as a welfare state.

Now, the small Christian community has begun to fracture under pressure from forces they say threaten them and the multifaith character of the Old City. From radical Jewish settlers who jeer at clergymen on the way to prayer, to a land deal threatening to turn a quarter of their land into a luxury hotel, residents and the church alike say the future of the community is in flux.

Their struggle, playing out under the cover of many regional crises, reflects the difficulty of maintaining a non-Jewish presence in a Jerusalem where life has hardened for religious minorities in the Old City. Chasms have emerged between the Armenian Patriarchate, the traditional steward of community affairs, and the mainly secular community itself. Its members worry that the church is not equipped to protect their dwindling population and embattled convent from obsolescence and takeover.

A tent in a parking lot

Walk through the narrow passageways of the Armenian Quarter, past a perpetually manned guard post and into an open lot with a towering pile of shrapnel crested with the Armenian flag. You've arrived at the headquarters of the "Save the Arq" movement.

It's where some residents of the Armenian Quarter have decamped, in a structure with reinforced plywood walls hung with ancient maps, to protest what they see as an illegal land grab by a controversial real estate developer.

The land under threat is where the community parks their cars and holds group dinners. It also includes parts of the patriarchate itself. It's been a receiving point for those fleeing the mass killing of some 1.5 million Armenians by Ottoman Turks, widely viewed by scholars as the first genocide of the 20th century. Turkey denies the deaths constituted genocide.

The patriarchate has batted away offer after offer to sell the land. That changed in 2021, when an Armenian priest, Baret Yeretsian, signed a fraudulent deal leasing the lot for up to 98 years to a company called Xana Capital, registered just before the agreement was signed.

Xana then turned over half the shares to a local businessman, George Warwar, who has been involved in various criminal offenses, according to court filings, including a 24-month prison sentence for armed robbery, and has declared bankruptcy in the past.

In court documents seen by the AP, the patriarchate has admitted that Warwar bribed the priest and that the two had sustained "various inappropriate connections" leading up to the signing of the deal.

Community members were outraged when they found out, prompting the priest to flee the country. The patriarchate cancelled the deal in October, but Xana fought back, and the two are now in mediation over the contract. Xana Capital has since sent armed men to the lot, the activists say, attacking members of the community, including clergy, with pepper spray and batons.

With the future of the site unclear, the activists say they appealed to the patriarchate to find out what was going on. The activists say that Warwar has the backing of a prominent settler organization seeking to expand Jewish presence in Jerusalem's Old City. The organization, Ateret Cohanim, is behind several controversial land acquisitions in the Old City, and its leaders were photographed meeting with Warwar and Danny Rothman, the owner of Xana Capital who also uses the last name Rubinstein, in December 2023. The organization denied any connection to the land deal.

"But as soon as the deal was signed, the patriarchate went into silent mode, bunker mode," said Setrag Balian, 27, a ceramicist. "We decided that we have to take action and not once again be on the sidelines, watching and hoping that the patriarchy will take the right steps."

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So Balian and fellow resident Hagop Djernazian collected some 300 signatures from the community and filed suit against the patriarchate in February, asking them to declare the deal void and to say, for posterity, that the land belongs to the community.

In response, the patriarchate said it owns the land, not the community. Xana, meanwhile, filed a response calling the activists antisemitic squatters. The patriarchate's response and Xana's words, the activists said, leave open the chance that the land could be leased again in the future.

"It made us feel like we could not trust the institution who brought us to this day to solve this problem, to solve this conflict," said Hagop Djernazian.

The patriarchate declined to comment on the land deal for this article, saying it could impact mediation efforts underway with Xana.

A single observer

Inside the Armenian convent, the clergy are hushed, pathways empty.

On a recent afternoon, priests in black robes rang the bell for daily prayers at the St. James Cathedral, the storied Armenian church occupying one of the highest points in the Old City. Filing into the darkened space, the men and the young seminary choir were joined only by an Israeli tour group and one Armenian woman who'd come to pray.

Father Parsegh Galamterian, church sacristan, has watched prayers thin out over the years, as the Armenian population in the quarter has shrunk from about 15,000 in 1948, the founding of the state of Israel, to around 2,000.

"The future is difficult," he says.

Armenians began arriving in the Old City as early as the 4th century, inspired by the religious significance of the city to Christianity. In the early 20th century, they were joined by masses of Armenians who flocked to Jerusalem after being driven out of the Ottoman Empire. Theirs is the smallest quarter in the Old City, home to Armenians with the same status as Palestinians in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem — residents but not citizens, effectively stateless.

Today, the newcomers are mainly boys who arrive from Armenia to live and study in the convent. Some stay, but many drop out of studies. Clergy say that's partially because attacks against Christians have ramped up within the walls of the Old City, leaving the Armenians — whose convent is closest to the Jewish Quarter and is tucked along a popular route to the Western Wall — vulnerable.

Father Aghan Gogchyan, the patriarchate's chancellor, said he's regularly attacked by groups of Jewish fundamentalists.

He recalled one instance, a month ago, when clergy were headed to prayer. He was intercepted by a group of settlers, who asked if they were Christians.

"You know that you don't have a future here in the Holy Land. You're not going to continue to live here," he recalled one man saying. "This is our country. We are going to eradicate you."

"This is the word he used," said Gogchyan. "We are going to eradicate you from our country."

The Rossing Center, which tracks anti-Christian attacks in the Holy Land, documented about 20 attacks on Armenian observers, Armenian private property, and church properties in 2023, many involving ultra-nationalist Jewish settlers spitting at Armenian clergy or graffiti reading "Death to Christians" scrawled on the quarter's walls.

"What is being said behind closed doors is that Jerusalem is becoming a place that is no longer hospitable to Christianity," said Daniel Seidman, a Jerusalem lawyer and peace activist. "You can see the needle moving. The spike in hate crimes is not part of this plan, but it's part of the impact."

The incidents send a clear message to the next generation, said Gogchyan: stay away.

"The new generation doesn't want to be in the center of the conflict," said Gogchyan. "They're building their future in different countries."

Despite the fractures, Armenian clergy and activists told the AP they want the same thing: a continued presence in the Old City.

"Some people feel helpless and hopeless and they want to leave," said Balian. "But I think the majority sees that there is a struggle going on. It gives us a meaning. It gives us a purpose. It gives us a reason to stay here."

Community members wrestle with grief in aftermath of Wisconsin school shooting

By DEVI SHASTRI and SCOTT BAUER Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Community members in Wisconsin continued to wrestle with grief and called for change in the aftermath of a school shooting that killed a teacher and a student and wounded six others.

Several hundred people gathered outside the Wisconsin State Capitol for a vigil Tuesday night to honor those slain at Abundant Life Christian School in Madison the day before, with some passing candles to each other and standing close against the winter chill.

Among those in attendance was Naomi Allen, 16, who was in a nearby classroom Monday when a 15-year-old girl attacked people in a study hall before fatally shooting herself.

"It's doesn't matter who you are or where you are, something like this could happen. There's nothing that is going to exempt someone," Allen said at the vigil.

Allen's father, Jay Allen, reflected on the dangers students face these days.

"When I was in school these things never happened," he said. "This country at some point needs to take mental health seriously and we need to pour resources into it. We really need some changes in the way we handle that issue."

The motive for the shooting appears to be a "combination of factors," Madison Police Chief Shon Barnes said Tuesday as he appealed to the public to call in to a tip line and share what they might know about the shooter.

He offered no details about what that motive might be, though he said bullying at Abundant Life Christian School would be investigated. He also said police are investigating writings that may have been penned by the shooter, Natalie Rupnow, and could shed light on her actions.

"Identifying a motive is our top priority, but at this time it appears that the motive is a combination of factors," Barnes told reporters.

Two students among the six people wounded Monday remain in critical condition. Officials have declined to disclose the names of the victims.

"Leave them alone," Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway said.

The school shooting was the latest among dozens across the U.S. in recent years, including especially deadly ones in Newtown, Connecticut; Parkland, Florida; and Uvalde, Texas.

The shootings have set off fervent debates about gun control and frayed the nerves of parents whose children are growing up accustomed to doing active shooter drills in their classrooms. But school shootings have done little to move the needle on national gun laws.

School shootings by teenage females have been extremely rare in U.S. history, with males in their teens and 20s carrying out the majority of them, said David Riedman, founder of the K-12 School Shooting Database.

Abundant Life is a nondenominational Christian school — prekindergarten through high school — with approximately 420 students. Barbara Wiers, the school's director of elementary and school relations, said the school does not have metal detectors but uses cameras and other security measures.

Barnes said police were talking with the shooter's father and other family members, who were cooperating, and searching the shooter's home.

The shooter's parents, who are divorced, jointly shared custody of their child, but the shooter primarily lived with her 42-year-old father, according to court documents.

Investigators believe the shooter used a 9mm pistol, a law enforcement official told The Associated Press. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the ongoing investigation.

Madison resident Cristian Cuahutepitzi said he attended Tuesday's vigil to let the families of the victims know "we're thinking of them." He said his uncle's two daughters go to the school.

"They're still a little bit shook," he said.

Joe Gothard, the superintendent of the Madison Metropolitan School District, said at the vigil that the tragedy happened less than two blocks away from his childhood home. He said it wasn't enough to say the district would work on safety.

"We need to connect like we are tonight, each and every day and make a commitment that we know we're there for one another, hopefully to avoid preventable tragedies like yesterday," he said.

A prayer service was also held Tuesday night at City Church Madison, which is affiliated with the school. Several teachers from the school prayed aloud one by one during the service, speaking into a microphone and standing in a line. One middle school teacher asked for courage, while another sought help quieting her own soul.

"God, this isn't a Abundant Life Christian School tragedy," said Derrick Wright, the youth pastor at the church. "This is a community tragedy. This is a nation tragedy."

Nissan, Honda confirm talks on closer collaboration but say there's been no decision on a merger

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

BANGKOK (AP) — Japanese automakers Nissan Motor Corp. and Honda Motor Co. confirmed Wednesday that they are discussing closer collaboration but denied reports they have decided on a merger.

Nissan's share price soared more than 22% in Tokyo after reports citing unnamed sources said it might merge with Honda to form the world's third-largest automaking group. Honda's share price fell as much as 3%.

The reports said that Nissan alliance member Mitsubishi Motors Corp. was included in the talks.

All three Japanese automakers announced in August that they planned to share components for electric vehicles like batteries and jointly research software for autonomous driving to adapt better to dramatic changes in the auto industry centered around electrification. A preliminary agreement between Honda, Japan's second-largest automaker, and Nissan, third largest, was announced in March.

Trading in Nissan's shares was suspended but then resumed after the companies jointly issued a statement saying they were "considering various possibilities for future collaboration, but no decisions have been made."

A merger could result in a behemoth worth about \$55 billion based on the market capitalization of all three automakers.

Joining forces would help the two companies gain larger scale to compete with Japan's market leader Toyota Motor Corp. and with Germany's Volkswagen AG.

Nissan has an alliance with Renault SA that is under review. Last month, it said it was slashing 9,000 jobs, or about 6% of its global work force, and reducing global production capacity by 20% after reporting a quarterly loss of 9.3 billion yen (\$61 million).

Earlier this month it reshuffled its management and its chief executive, Makoto Uchida, took a 50% pay cut to take responsibility for the financial woes.

He said Nissan needed to become more efficient and respond better to market tastes, rising costs and other global changes.

Honda reported its profits slipped nearly 20% in the first half of the April-March fiscal year from a year earlier, as sales suffered in China.

The ascent of Chinese automakers is shaking up the industry at a time when manufacturers are struggling to shift from fossil fuel-driven vehicles to electrics.

Toyota made 11.5 million vehicles in 2023, while Honda rolled out 4.2 million and Nissan produced 3.4 million. Mitsubishi Motors made just over 1 million. Even after a merger Toyota would remain the biggest Japanese automaker.

Musk and Trump are viewed roughly the same by Americans, an AP-NORC poll finds

By THOMAS BEAUMONT, SARAH PARVINI and AMELIA THOMSON-DEVEAUX Associated Press
WASHINGTON (AP) — Elon Musk, clad in tuxedo and black tie, took the stage at President-elect Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort shortly after the election with all the swagger of the winning candidate himself.

"The public has given us a mandate that could not be more clear, the clearest mandate. The people have spoken. The people want change," Musk told the audience of Trump's biggest donors, campaign leaders and appointment seekers. "We are going to shake things up. It's going to be a revolution."

Musk's attachment to Trump has created an alliance between America's most powerful politician and its richest businessman — and roughly the same percentages of Americans have favorable views of each, according to a new poll from the AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Experts are split on whether that overlap in public opinion is a good or bad thing for Musk's businesses or for Trump's politics. But it could have far-reaching effects in both realms.

Musk, whose net worth tops \$400 billion, oversees six businesses while continuing to work closely with Trump: electric car manufacturer Tesla, the X social media platform, space technology company SpaceX, brain link company Neuralink, the startup xAI and tunneling operator The Boring Co.

"Even though there's a negative impact, in terms of potentially alienating some of their customers that might not be fans of Trump, the benefits far outweigh any negatives when it comes to having a right-hand seat next to Trump in the White House," said Dan Ives, an analyst at Wedbush Securities.

Ross Gerber, CEO of Gerber Kawasaki Wealth and Investment Management, identified himself as an investor in Musk's Tesla and a driver of Tesla's new Cybertruck, the futuristic pickup that has gotten huge amounts of attention but also been the subject of safety concerns and multiple recalls.

"Having your CEO not working at your company and working at the job of having to fire government employees ... as a shareholder, I'm paying someone to not work for my company," he said. "As a Cybertruck owner with self-driving that sucks and doesn't work, I'm like, 'Dude, this isn't fair.'"

But despite his skepticism, Gerber said he won't stop investing in Musk's businesses.

"I've made a lot of money with Elon," he said. "I'm not in the business of investing based on the popularity of CEOs."

Musk's favorability is similar to Trump's

Musk doesn't appear to give Trump much boost with people who don't back the incoming president.

He is no more popular with the U.S. public than the president-elect himself, and viewed unfavorably by about half of Americans, according to the AP-NORC poll.

About 4 in 10 Americans have a somewhat or very favorable view of the world's richest person, very similar to the percentage who view Trump positively. Likewise, about half of adults have a somewhat or very unfavorable view of Musk — again, similar to Trump.

Instead, said one political strategist, Musk is the ideal validator for someone who cultivates an image of success in business and who has stocked his Cabinet and key adviser roles with billionaires.

"Trump has always pushed this narrative that he's a successful developer and a very successful businessman. I think having Musk with him is his double-down on this business success, good-for-the-economy, good-for-everybody-making money kind of persona," said Christine Matthews, a national political pollster who has worked for Republicans. "In this case, Musk is seen as this successful, innovative, tech entrepreneur, frontier-buster."

Musk also has at his disposal X, the social media platform formerly known as Twitter that he purchased and turned into a megaphone for conservative ideas. And having spent an estimated \$250 million to support Trump in the election, Musk has signaled he is willing to back Republican primary challenges to GOP members in the House and Senate seeking reelection in 2026 who waver on Trump's appointments and agenda.

Trump has tasked him with leading a group to reduce the size of the federal government and reduce

the rulemaking authority of the federal bureaucracy.

Musk retains a wide array of businesses

Tesla stands to make significant gains under a Trump administration with the threat of diminished subsidies for alternative energy and electric vehicles doing the most harm to smaller competitors. Trump's plans for extensive tariffs on Chinese imports make it less likely that Chinese EVs will be sold in bulk in the U.S. anytime soon.

Some analysts believe the billionaire's role will create a very friendly landscape for Tesla over the coming years. Ives, the analyst at Wedbush Securities, said Musk's relationship with Trump could "revolutionize the Tesla story, especially around robotics, AI and autonomous."

Investors, he said, are betting on Musk and see his political ascent as a "champagne moment." Unlike Gerber, Ives believes that ending the EV credit and taking subsidies from Detroit carmakers, Hyundai and other companies will create only opportunity for Tesla.

"I think Wall Street is starting to fully digest the potential benefits from Musk," Ives said.

Tesla shares closed at a record high on Tuesday, with much of the company's recent gains coming after Trump's victory. But Gerber feels that jump is because investors believe Tesla will have an advantage when it comes to autonomous driving because Trump could grant the company a national autonomy license.

Still, he thinks Tesla will be the "big loser" of Musk's businesses because of Trump's promise to end the EV tax credit for carmakers.

"For Tesla, I don't see a ton of benefit from this," he said. "Elon is misleading people to say it hurts the competition if the credit goes away."

Musk's other companies — including his artificial intelligence company, xAI — could reap the benefits of working within the Trump administration, he said.

"AI is a transformative investment that will create lots of regulatory and governmental issues, especially around safety and information," Gerber said. "There's a lot of benefit, from an AI perspective, to having Elon where he is."

The relationship between the two men has no parallel in U.S. history, said David Nasaw, biographer of American business tycoons Andrew Carnegie and William Randolph Hearst. He noted that Musk, to a level unlike other tycoons, has relied on subsidies and favorable government decisions for his success from Tesla to SpaceX.

"He's a unicorn," Nasaw said of Musk.

Federal Reserve is set to cut key rate but consumers might not feel much benefit anytime soon

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal Reserve officials on Wednesday will likely signal a slower pace of interest rate cuts next year compared with the past few months, which would mean that Americans might enjoy only slight relief from still-high borrowing costs for mortgages, auto loans and credit cards.

The Fed is set to announce a quarter-point cut to its benchmark rate, from about 4.6% to roughly 4.3%. The latest move would follow a larger-than-usual half-point rate cut in September and a quarter-point reduction in November.

Wednesday's meeting, though, could mark a shift to a new phase in the Fed's policies: Instead of a rate cut at each meeting, the Fed is more likely to cut at every other meeting — at most. The central bank's policymakers may signal that they expect to reduce their key rate just two or three times in 2025, rather than the four rate cuts they had envisioned three months ago.

So far, the Fed has explained its moves by describing them as a "recalibration" of the ultra-high rates that were intended to tame inflation, which reached a four-decade high in 2022. With inflation now much lower — at 2.3% in October, according to the Fed's preferred gauge, down from a peak of 7.2% in June 2022 — many Fed officials argue that interest rates don't need to be so high.

But inflation has remained stuck above the Fed's 2% target in recent months while the economy has

continued to grow briskly. On Tuesday, the government's monthly report on retail sales showed that Americans, particularly those with higher incomes, are still willing to spend freely. To some analysts, those trends raise the risk that further rate cuts could deliver an excessively strong boost to the economy and, in doing so, keep inflation elevated.

On top of that, President-elect Donald Trump has proposed a range of tax cuts — on Social Security benefits, tipped income and overtime income — as well as a scaling-back of regulations. Collectively, these moves could stimulate growth. At the same time, Trump has threatened to impose a variety of tariffs and to seek mass deportations of migrants, which could accelerate inflation.

Chair Jerome Powell and other Fed officials have said they won't be able to assess how Trump's policies might affect the economy or their own rate decisions until more details are made available and it becomes clearer how likely it is that the president-elect's proposals will actually be enacted. Until then, the outcome of the presidential election has mostly heightened the uncertainty surrounding the economy.

Either way, it appears unlikely that Americans will enjoy much lower borrowing costs anytime soon. The average 30-year mortgage rate was 6.6% last week, according to mortgage giant Freddie Mac, below the peak of 7.8% reached in October 2023. But the roughly 3% mortgage rates that existed for nearly a decade before the pandemic aren't going to return in the foreseeable future.

Fed officials have underscored that they are slowing their rate reductions as their benchmark rate nears a level that policymakers refer to as "neutral" — the level that neither spurs nor hinders the economy.

"Growth is definitely stronger than we thought, and inflation is coming in a little higher," Powell said recently. "So the good news is, we can afford to be a little more cautious as we try to find neutral."

Most other central banks around the world are also cutting their benchmark rates. Last week, the European Central Bank lowered its key rate for the fourth time this year to 3% from 3.25%, as inflation in the 20 countries that use the euro has fallen to 2.3% from a peak of 10.6% in late 2022.

Verdicts are due in the historic French rape trial that turned Gisèle Pelicot into a feminist hero

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

AVIGNON, France (AP) — French judges plan to deliver hugely anticipated verdicts this week in a historic drugging-and-rape trial that has turned the victim, Gisèle Pelicot, into a feminist hero.

Everything about the trial in the southern French city of Avignon has been exceptional, most of all Pelicot herself.

She has been the epitome of steely dignity and resilience through the more than three months of appalling testimony, including extracts from her now ex-husband's sordid library of homemade abuse videos.

Dominique Pelicot carefully catalogued how he habitually tranquilized his wife of 50 years during their last decade together, so he and dozens of strangers he met online could rape her while she was unconscious.

Staggeringly, Dominique Pelicot found it easy to recruit his alleged accomplices. Many had jobs. Most are fathers. They came from all walks of life, with the youngest in his 20s and the oldest in their 70s. In all, 50 men, including Dominique Pelicot, stood trial for aggravated rape and attempted rape. Another man was tried for aggravated sexual assault.

"They regarded me like a rag doll, like a garbage bag," Gisèle Pelicot testified in court.

Sifting through the charges, the evidence, the backgrounds of the accused and their defenses took so long that Dominique and Gisèle Pelicot had birthdays during the trial, with both turning 72.

The verdicts are expected Thursday, or Friday at the latest, with the five judges ruling by secret ballot. Campaigners against sexual violence are hoping for exemplary prison sentences and view the trial as a possible turning point in the fight against rape culture and the use of drugs to subdue victims.

At protests during the trial, demonstrators held up pop-art images of Gisèle Pelicot with her bob haircut and round sunglasses, along with slogans such as, "Shame is changing sides" and "Gisèle, we believe you!" They also booed defendants as they entered the courthouse yelling, "We recognize you" and "Shame."

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How did the case come about?

Dominique Pelicot's meticulous recording and cataloguing of the encounters — police found more than 20,000 photos and videos on his computer drives, in folders titled "abuse," "her rapists" or "night alone" — provided police investigators with an abundance of evidence and helped lead them to the defendants. That also set the case apart from many others in which sexual violence is unreported or isn't prosecuted because the evidence isn't as strong.

Gisèle Pelicot and her lawyers fought successfully for shocking video and other evidence to be heard and watched in open court, to show that she bore no shame and was clearly unconscious during the alleged rapes, undermining some defendants' claims that she might have been feigning sleep or even have been a willing participant.

Her courage — one woman, alone, against dozens of men — proved inspirational. Supporters, mostly women, lined up early each day for a place in the courthouse or to cheer and thank Gisèle Pelicot as she walked in and out — stoic, humble, and gracious but also cognizant that her ordeal resonated beyond Avignon and France.

She said she was fighting for "all those people around the world, women and men, who are victims of sexual violence."

"Look around you: You are not alone," she said.

The blight of so-called chemical submission

Dominique Pelicot testified that he hid tranquilizers in food and drink that he gave his wife, knocking her out so profoundly that he could do what he wanted to her for hours.

In his medical records, police investigators found that he had been prescribed hundreds of tranquilizer tablets as well as the the erectile dysfunction drug Viagra. He told police that he started drugging his wife in 2011, before they left the Paris region to retire in Mazan, a small town in Provence where he invited other men to rape her in their bedroom.

In the videos, police investigators counted 72 different abusers but weren't able to identify them all. Dominique Pelicot told investigators that he also shared advice with people about drugging techniques and provided tranquilizers to others, too.

Gisèle Pelicot told investigators that blackouts she suffered grew more frequent after they retired to Mazan in 2013, but that they stopped after her then-husband was taken into custody in 2020.

Spurred on by the trial, France's government this month helped roll out a media campaign alerting the public to the dangers of chemical submission, with a number for victims to call. The campaign poster reads: "Chemical submission takes away your memories but leaves traces."

The trial focused attention on consent

Although some of the accused — including Dominique Pelicot — acknowledged they were guilty of rape, many did not, even in the face of video evidence. The hearings have sparked wider debate in France about whether the country's legal definition of rape should be expanded to include specific mention of consent.

Some defendants argued that Dominique Pelicot's consent covered his wife, too. Some sought to excuse their behavior by insisting that they hadn't intended to rape anyone when they responded to the husband's invites. Some laid blame at his door, saying he misled them into thinking they were partaking in consensual kink. And some suggested that perhaps he had also drugged them — which Dominique Pelicot denied.

Campaigners refused to buy it. "A rape is a rape" read a large banner hung opposite the courthouse.

Prosecutor Laure Chabaud appealed to the judges for a verdict that will make clear "that ordinary rape doesn't exist, that accidental or involuntary rape doesn't exist," according to French media that followed the daily proceedings.

Caught 'upskirting' in a supermarket

What Gisèle Pelicot initially described as a happy marriage to "a great guy" started to unravel in September 2020, when a supermarket security guard caught Dominique Pelicot surreptitiously filming up women's skirts.

Police investigators called her in for questioning and confronted her with the unfathomable — some of

her husband's secret photos of her.

She left him, taking just two suitcases, "all that was left for me of 50 years of life together."

Prosecutors have asked for the maximum possible penalty — 20 years — for Dominique Pelicot, and sentences of 10-18 years for the others tried on rape charges.

"Twenty years between the four walls of a prison," Chabaud, the prosecutor, said. "It's both a lot and not enough."

Israel's borders have shifted throughout its history. Action in Syria may reshape them again

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, entered Syrian territory Tuesday and said Israeli troops would remain in the area indefinitely, blurring the border with its northern neighbor.

Since its establishment in 1948, Israel has never had fully recognized borders. Throughout its history, the frontiers with its Arab neighbors have shifted as a result of wars, annexations, ceasefires and peace agreements.

Now, the downfall of Syrian President Bashar Assad has created a situation that could once again reshape Israel's borders.

As Assad was toppled early this month, Israel quickly moved into the Syrian side of a 50-year-old demilitarized buffer zone. Netanyahu described the move as defensive and temporary, and said it was aimed at making sure that none of the groups jostling for power inside Syria threatened Israel.

But in Tuesday's visit to the Syrian side of the buffer zone, Netanyahu made clear that Israel plans on staying for some time. Speaking on the windswept summit of Mount Hermon overlooking Syria, he said Israel would remain "until another arrangement is found that will ensure Israel's security."

Here is a closer look at the evolution of Israel's borders over the years.

Israel's establishment

In 1947, the United Nations approved a plan to partition what was then British-controlled Mandatory Palestine into Jewish and Arab states. The contested city of Jerusalem was to be administered by the U.N.

This plan, however, was never implemented. Israel declared independence in May 1948, and neighboring Arab countries declared war. That war ended with Israel in control of some 77% of the territory — with Jordan controlling the West Bank and east Jerusalem, and Egypt in control of the Gaza Strip.

1967 Mideast war

During the six days of fighting of the 1967 Mideast war, Israel captured the West Bank and east Jerusalem from Jordan, Gaza and the Sinai peninsula from Egypt, and the Golan Heights from Syria.

Initially celebrated by Israel, the lightning victory set the stage for decades of conflict that continue to reverberate today.

Israel quickly annexed east Jerusalem — home to the city's most sensitive Jewish, Muslim and Christian holy sites as well as its Palestinian population.

Although Israel has never formally annexed the West Bank, it has informally incorporated much of the territory by building settlements that are now home to over 500,000 Jewish Israelis.

The international community overwhelmingly considers both east Jerusalem and the West Bank occupied territory.

Israel also built settlements in the Sinai, Golan and the Gaza Strip.

1979 peace agreement with Egypt

Under Israel's first peace agreement with an Arab country, Israel returned the Sinai peninsula to Egypt and dismantled all settlements there.

1981 Golan annexation

Israel annexed the Golan Heights, a strategic mountainous region overlooking northern Israel. In 2019, then-President Donald Trump became the first and only foreign leader to recognize Israel's control. The rest of the world still considers the area occupied Syrian territory.

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Netanyahu announced this week he wants to expand the Golan settler population after Assad's downfall.
1982 invasion of Lebanon

After a brief invasion of Lebanon against Palestinian militants in 1978, Israel reentered the country in 1982 in an operation that turned into an 18-year occupation of southern Lebanon. Israel withdrew in 2000 under heavy fire from the Hezbollah militia.

1993 Oslo Accords

Israel and the Palestinians reached an interim peace deal granting the Palestinians autonomy in Gaza and parts of the West Bank, while leaving Israeli settlements intact. The accords were meant to pave the way for a two-state solution, but repeated rounds of peace talks ended in failure.

The Palestinians seek all of the West Bank and Gaza for their hoped-for state, with east Jerusalem as their capital.

2005 Gaza withdrawal

Then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon led a unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, uprooting all troops and 21 settlements from the territory. Two years later, Hamas militants overran Gaza and ousted the Palestinian Authority.

2023 war in Gaza and Lebanon

Responding to Hamas' Oct. 7 cross-border attack, Israel invades Gaza in an operation that continues.

Israeli leaders have not laid out a clear postwar plan but have indicated they will maintain a buffer zone along Gaza's border with Israel along with some sort of long-term military presence. Some hardliners in Netanyahu's governing coalition have called for the re-establishment of Jewish settlements.

In October, Israeli ground troops invaded southern Lebanon after a year of fighting with Hezbollah militants. Under a ceasefire, Israel has pledged to withdraw from a strip of land it is occupying by late January.

The fall of Assad

As opposition forces ousted Assad on Dec. 8, Israeli military forces moved into the Syrian side of the demilitarized buffer zone, established after the 1973 Mideast war. Israel now controls the zone and targets deeper inside the country.

Although Israel has said the move is temporary, its open-ended presence has drawn international criticism from countries such as Egypt, Turkey and Saudi Arabia as well as the United Nations.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has urged all countries with interests in Syria to "try to make sure that we're not sparking any additional conflicts."

The new Syrian government has already lodged a complaint with the U.N. Security Council about Israeli advances into Syrian territory. The leader of the largest insurgent group, Ahmad al-Sharaa, has publicly condemned Israel's operations but said Syria is not seeking a military conflict with Israel.

Carmit Valensi, an expert on Syria at Israel's Institute for National Security Studies, said she does not think the Israeli presence will morph into a longer-term occupation. She said Israel has little to gain by provoking al-Sharaa, who is also known as Abu Mohammed al-Golani, and a long-term occupation would be costly economically and for Israel's war-fatigued army.

"It could take some time for Israel to withdraw. It depends how things develop in Syria," she said. "If we see a moderate regime emerge, in the same line Golani is trying to pave, I don't see any reason to hold those territories for the long term."

Megan Thee Stallion seeks restraining order, says imprisoned Tory Lanez continues to harass her

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Megan Thee Stallion asked a court on Tuesday to issue a restraining order against Tory Lanez, who she says is harassing her from prison through surrogates as he serves a 10-year sentence for shooting her in the feet.

The petition filed by the hip-hop star in Los Angeles Superior Court asks the judge to prevent the Canadian rapper Lanez, whose legal name is Daystar Peterson, from using third parties to continue the same

online harassment of Megan, whose legal name is Megan Pete, that he engaged in and encouraged before his imprisonment.

"Even now, while behind bars, Mr. Peterson shows no signs of stopping," the petition says. "Despite being sentenced to 10 years in prison for shooting Ms. Pete, Mr. Peterson continues to subject her to repeated trauma and revictimization."

The petition says prison call logs from Lanez at the California Correctional Institution in Tehachapi show that he is coordinating attacks on Megan's credibility.

An email seeking comment from Lanez's lawyers was not immediately returned. A court hearing on the order is scheduled for Jan. 9.

The filing says bloggers acting on Lanez's behalf continue to cast doubt on her allegations, making false claims including that the gun and bullet fragments in the case are missing.

The petition says the protective order issued to prevent the previous harassment is no longer in effect, which it calls a loophole and flaw in the criminal justice system.

In December 2022, Lanez was convicted of three felonies: assault with a semiautomatic firearm; having a loaded, unregistered firearm in a vehicle and discharging a firearm with gross negligence.

A judge rejected a motion for a new trial from Lanez's lawyers, who are appealing his conviction.

In August of last year, he received the 10-year sentence, bringing what seemed to be a conclusion to a three-year legal and cultural saga that saw two careers, and lives, thrown into turmoil.

The petition says that one blogger in particular, Elizabeth Milagro Cooper, whom Megan is suing in a separate lawsuit, is acting as Lanez's "puppet and mouthpiece." She alleges Cooper is spreading falsehoods on social media and YouTube, saying in one video posted to X, "Can you even prove she was shot?" and calling her a "professional victim" in another post.

Cooper's attorney Michael Pancier declined comment on the California petition, and said in an email that their forthcoming response to the separate federal lawsuit against her will speak for itself.

A previous motion to dismiss Megan's lawsuit said it makes "dubious legal claims" and "irrelevant and impertinent allegations."

Megan testified during the trial that in July 2020, after they left a party at Kylie Jenner's Hollywood Hills home, Lanez fired the gun at the back of her feet and shouted for her to dance as she walked away from an SUV in which they had been riding. She revealed who had fired the gun only months later.

The case created a firestorm in the hip-hop community, churning up issues including the reluctance of Black victims to speak to police, gender politics in hip-hop, online toxicity, protecting Black women and the ramifications of misogynoir, a particular brand of misogyny Black women experience.

Megan Thee Stallion, now 29, was already a major rising star at the time of the shooting, and her music's popularity has soared since. She won a Grammy for best new artist in 2021, and she had No. 1 singles with "Savage," featuring Beyoncé, and as a guest on Cardi B's "WAP."

Lanez, 32, began releasing mixtapes in 2009 and saw a steady rise in popularity, moving on to major label albums. His last two reached the top 10 on Billboard's charts.

Congress unveils funding deal with more than \$100 billion in disaster aid

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congressional leaders have unveiled a stopgap spending bill that will keep the federal government funded through March 14 and provide more than \$100 billion in emergency aid to help states and local communities recover from Hurricanes Helene and Milton and other natural disasters.

The measure would prevent a partial government shutdown set to begin after midnight Friday. It would kick final decisions on this budget year's spending levels to a new Republican-led Congress and President-elect Donald Trump. The continuing resolution generally continues current spending levels for agencies.

Passage of the measure is one of the final actions that lawmakers will consider this week before adjourning for the holidays and making way for the next Congress. It's the second short-term funding measure the

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lawmakers have taken up this fall as they struggled to pass the dozen annual appropriations bills before the new fiscal year began Oct. 1, as they typically do.

The bill will provide \$100.4 billion in disaster relief, with an additional \$10 billion in economic assistance for farmers struggling with low commodity prices and high input costs.

"We have to be able to help those who are in these dire straits," said House Speaker Mike Johnson told reporters.

Net farm income is projected to decline 4.1% this year after falling 19.4% the year before from the record highs reached in 2022. Johnson indicated more farm aid could be delivered in the next Congress, saying "we can't do all it right now."

"Congress is doing the best it can under difficult circumstances, and I think it will be a big boost for the industry," Johnson said.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said the agreement was "free of cuts and poison pills," and would provide money for Democratic priorities like child care, workforce training and job placement.

"With this agreement, we are now on our way to avoiding a government shutdown," Schumer said.

Rep. Glenn Thompson, the Republican chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, said he was hoping for more economic relief for farmers, but "it's a great start."

"I think it's going to send the right signal to the markets that most farmers and ranchers are going to be able to get eligible for the credit they need to borrow in order to plant a crop or raise a herd," Thompson said.

President Joe Biden has sought about \$114 billion in disaster aid, submitting a \$99 billion request in November, telling lawmakers the funding was "urgently needed." The administration subsequently updated its request to include funding to repair federal facilities damaged due to natural disasters.

The largest share of the money, about \$29 billion, will go to the main disaster relief fund at the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The fund helps with debris removal, repairing public infrastructure and providing financial assistance to survivors. About \$21 billion goes to help farmers who have experienced crop or livestock losses.

Another \$8 billion will go to help rebuild and repair highways and bridges in more than 40 states and territories. And some \$12 billion would go toward helping communities recover through block grants administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. About \$2.2 billion would go to low-interest loans for businesses, nonprofits and homeowners trying to rebuild after a disaster.

"While this is not the legislation I would have written on my own, it is a strong, bipartisan package that provides the resources communities urgently need to recover," said Sen. Patty Murray, the Democratic chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Congress is expected to pass the measure just before another shutdown deadline. House Republicans generally give lawmakers 72 hours to review text of the legislation, which would push a vote on final passage to Friday if they follow through on that rule. The Senate is not known for acting speedily, but many lawmakers are anxious to adjourn for the year and make way for the next Congress.

Since the bill is the last must-pass legislation of the current Congress, lawmakers have worked to get certain priorities included. On the health care front, the legislation seeks to extend coverage of telehealth appointments for Medicare enrollees and rein in how much money pharmacy benefits managers — the companies that negotiate how and what drugs are covered by insurance plans — make off those deals.

The bill also includes provisions focused on countering China, including expanding on a Biden executive order that seeks to restrict investments into countries that pose a national security threat to the United States. Blocking China's high-tech ambitions is one of the few issues that enjoys broad support in Washington from both Republicans and Democrats.

There's also a provision to transfer the land that is the site of the old RFK Stadium from the federal government to the District of Columbia, which could potentially lead to a new stadium for the Washington Commanders.

The legislation also provides full federal funding to rebuild Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge, which collapsed when struck by a cargo ship that reported losing power just before the crash. Federal taxpayers will be reimbursed through proceeds from insurance payments and litigation.

Man who killed brother and 3 others set to be put to death in Indiana's first execution in 15 years

By SOPHIA TAREEN and RICK CALLAHAN Associated Press

MICHIGAN CITY, Ind. (AP) — An Indiana man convicted in the 1997 killings of his brother and three other men was set to receive a lethal injection by early Wednesday in the state's first execution in 15 years, without any independent witness present under the state's laws shielding information about the death penalty.

Joseph Corcoran, 49, has been on death row since 1999, the year he was convicted in the shootings of his brother, James Corcoran, 30; his sister's fiancé, Robert Scott Turner, 32; and two other men: Timothy G. Bricker, 30, and Douglas A. Stillwell, 30.

Barring intervention by Gov. Eric Holcomb, Corcoran is scheduled to be executed before sunrise Wednesday at the Indiana State Prison in Michigan City.

Holcomb's office did not immediately respond to an email sent late Tuesday by The Associated Press asking if he might commute Corcoran's death sentence.

Holcomb said recently he would let the legal process play out before deciding whether to intervene. And late Tuesday, Corcoran's options with the courts ended when the U.S. Supreme Court denied his attorneys' request to halt his execution.

Last summer the governor announced the resumption of state executions after a yearslong hiatus marked by a scarcity of lethal injection drugs nationwide.

Indiana and Wyoming are the only two states that do not allow members of the media to witness state executions, according to a recent report by the Death Penalty Information Center.

Indiana has provided few details about the process. Prison officials only provided photos of the execution chamber, which resembles a sparse operating room with a gurney, bright fluorescent lighting and an adjacent viewing room.

Corcoran's attorneys have fought the death penalty sentence for years, arguing he is severely mentally ill, which affects his ability to understand and make decisions. Corcoran exhausted his federal appeals in 2016, and this month his attorneys asked the Indiana Supreme Court to stop his execution but the request was denied.

Corcoran's attorneys asked the U.S. District Court of Northern Indiana last week to stop his execution and hold a hearing to decide if it would be unconstitutional because Corcoran has a serious mental illness. The court declined to intervene Friday, and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit did the same Tuesday.

Corcoran's attorneys then asked the U.S. Supreme Court to review his case and issue an emergency order halting his execution, but the high court denied their request for a stay.

According to court records, before Corcoran shot the men in July 1997, he was stressed because his sister's forthcoming marriage to Turner would necessitate moving out of the Fort Wayne home he shared with her and his brother.

Corcoran awoke to hear his brother and others downstairs talking about him, loaded his rifle and then shot all four, records show. While jailed, Corcoran reportedly bragged about fatally shooting his parents in 1992 in northern Indiana's Steuben County. He was charged in their killings but acquitted.

Indiana's last state execution was in 2009, when Matthew Wrinkles was put to death for killing his wife, her brother and sister-in-law in 1994.

Since that time 13 executions have been carried out in Indiana, but they were initiated and performed by federal officials in 2020 and 2021 at a federal prison in Terre Haute.

State officials have said they could not continue executions because a combination of drugs used in lethal injections had become unavailable.

For years there has been a shortage nationwide because pharmaceutical companies have refused to sell their products for that purpose. That has pushed states, including Indiana, to turn to compounding pharmacies, which manufacture drugs specifically for a client. Some use more accessible drugs such as the sedatives pentobarbital or midazolam — both of which, critics say, can cause intense pain.

Indiana planned to use pentobarbital to execute Corcoran and, like many states, is refusing to divulge the source of the drugs. When asked for details, the Indiana Department of Correction directed The Associated Press to a state law labeling the source of lethal injection drugs as confidential.

Religious groups, disability rights advocates and others have opposed his execution. About a dozen people, some holding candles, held a vigil late Tuesday to pray outside the prison, which is surrounded by barbed wire fences in a residential area about 60 miles (90 kilometers) east of Chicago.

"We can build a society without giving governmental authorities the right to execute their own citizens," said Bishop Robert McClory of the Diocese of Gary, who led the prayers.

Other death penalty opponents also demonstrated outside the prison Tuesday night, some holding signs that read "Execution Is Not The Solution" and "Remember The Victims But Not With More Killing."

"There is no need and no benefit from this execution. It's all show," said Abraham Borowitz, director of Death Penalty Action, his organization that protests every execution in the U.S.

Prison officials said in a brief statement Tuesday evening that Corcoran "requested Ben & Jerry's ice cream for his last meal."

Corcoran said farewell late Tuesday to relatives, including his wife, Tahina Corcoran, who told reporters outside the prison that they discussed their faith and their memories, including attending high school together. She reiterated her request for Indiana's governor to commute her husband's death sentence.

Tahina Corcoran said her husband is "very mentally ill" and she doesn't think he fully grasps what is happening to him.

"He is in shock. He doesn't understand," she said.

One of Corcoran's sisters, Kelly Ernst, who lost both a brother and her fiancé in the 1997 shootings, said she believes the death penalty should be abolished and executing her brother will not solve anything.

"I'm at a loss for words. I'm just really upset that they're doing it close to Christmas," she said. "My sister and I, our birthdays are in December. I mean, it just feels like it's going to ruin Christmas for the rest of our lives."

Police chief says motive for Wisconsin school shooting was a 'combination of factors'

By DEVI SHASTRI and SCOTT BAUER Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — The motive for a shooting that killed a teacher and a student and wounded others at a Wisconsin school appears to be a "combination of factors," a police chief said Tuesday as he appealed to the public to share what they might know about the 15-year-old girl who attacked a study hall before shooting herself.

Madison Police Chief Shon Barnes offered no details about a possible motive, though he said bullying at Abundant Life Christian School would be investigated.

Barnes said police are also investigating writings that may have been penned by Natalie Rupnow and could shed light on her actions.

"Identifying a motive is our top priority, but at this time it appears that the motive is a combination of factors," the chief told reporters.

Barnes gave the number to a tip line for anyone who might have known the shooter and her feelings.

"There are always signs of a school shooting before it occurred. We're looking into her online activity," he said.

In addition to the deaths, six people were wounded, including two students who remain in critical condition. The shooter died of a self-inflicted gunshot.

Barnes made remarks at a news conference but left without taking questions from reporters, leaving the Madison mayor and Dane County executive to face the media. They declined to disclose the names of the victims.

"Leave them alone," Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway snapped.

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Abundant Life is a nondenominational Christian school — prekindergarten through high school — with approximately 420 students in Madison, the state capital.

Mackenzie Truitt placed a red poinsettia plant at the school to honor the victims Tuesday. She said her brother is a graduate and some of his friends were wounded.

“My heart sunk because I know how awesome a lot of these kids are,” Truitt said. “I know how scared everybody was. Couldn’t get a hold of certain people. Just really scary having to deal with that.”

Barbara Wiers, the school’s director of elementary and school relations, said the school does not have metal detectors but uses cameras and other security measures.

Barnes said police were talking with the shooter’s father and other family members, who were cooperating, and searching the shooter’s home.

The shooter’s parents, who are divorced, jointly shared custody of their child, but the shooter primarily lived with her 42-year-old father, according to court documents.

Barnes said the first 911 call to report an active shooter came in shortly before 11 a.m. from a second grade teacher — not a second grade student as he reported publicly Monday.

First responders who were in training just 3 miles (about 5 kilometers) away dashed to the school for an actual emergency, Barnes said. They arrived three minutes after the initial call.

Investigators believe the shooter used a 9mm pistol, a law enforcement official told The Associated Press. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the ongoing investigation.

Carolyn Griese, 70, of Monona, didn’t have any affiliation with the school, but she felt moved to drive over Tuesday. She cried as she placed flowers on the sidewalk.

“When I was growing up, we worried about the atomic bomb,” she said. “And now they actually practice active shooter scenarios. And I think how could that be? They’re children. Innocent children.”

Vice President Kamala Harris addressed the shooting during a speech to students in Maryland on Tuesday. “Our nation mourns for those who were killed and we pray for the recovery of those who were injured,” she said.

Harris also called for stronger gun control laws.

A crowd of several hundred people gathered Tuesday evening at the foot of the Vel Phillips statue outside the Wisconsin State Capitol, passing candles to each other and standing close against the winter chill.

Madison resident Cristian Cuahutepitzi said he attended the vigil to let the families of the victims know “we’re thinking of them.” He said his uncle’s two daughters go to the school.

“They’re still a little bit shook,” he said.

Naomi Allen, 16, is a student at the school. She said she had been in a nearby classroom when the shooting happened.

“My best friend — if she hadn’t stayed home from school — she would have been in that room,” she said.

Allen’s father, Joe Allen, said the country needs to take mental health seriously.

“We really need some changes in the way we we handle that issue,” he said.

Joe Gothard, the superintendent of the Madison Metropolitan School District, said at the vigil that the tragedy happened less than two blocks away from his childhood home. He said it wasn’t enough to say the district would work on safety.

“We need to connect like we are tonight, each and every day and make a commitment that we know we’re there for one another, hopefully to avoid preventable tragedies like yesterday,” he said.

The school shooting was the latest among dozens across the U.S. in recent years, including especially deadly ones in Newtown, Connecticut; Parkland, Florida; and Uvalde, Texas.

The shootings have set off fervent debates about gun control and frayed the nerves of parents whose children are growing up accustomed to doing active shooter drills in their classrooms. But school shootings have done little to move the needle on national gun laws.

School shootings by teenage females have been extremely rare in U.S. history, with males in their teens and 20s carrying out the majority of them, said David Riedman, founder of the K-12 School Shooting

Database.

In a blog post last year, he mentioned a handful of school shootings that involved perpetrators who identified as female, including a 16-year-old girl who shot and killed two and injured several others at San Diego elementary school in 1979.

Firearms were the leading cause of death among children in 2020 and 2021, according to KFF, a nonprofit that researches health care issues.

Biathlon official apologizes to athletes who have suffered mistreatment

By MARTHA BELLISLE Associated Press

The secretary general of the International Biathlon Union apologized to any athlete who was mistreated during his tenure at U.S. Biathlon while speaking to a 90-minute meeting Tuesday that focused on concerns about athlete safety brought to light by multiple Associated Press reports.

"I appreciate anyone who comes forward with issues, especially issues of sexual misconduct, whether it's recent ones or old ones. I think that's an incredibly brave and important thing to do," Max Cobb said in remarks to the U.S. Biathlon Association's annual meeting, held over Zoom.

It was Cobb's first public statement since AP's report a week ago detailing how women said officials ignored or excused sexual abuse and harassment of female biathletes by their coaches and others over decades because they were more concerned about winning medals than holding offenders accountable.

While the men involved climbed the ranks of the sport, the women — who described a culture of abuse dating back to the 1990s — said they were forced to end their racing careers early. Biathlon combines cross-country skiing with target shooting.

"I can say personally I am very sorry for any athlete who suffered any kind of mistreatment during my time working with U.S. Biathlon," said Cobb, who rose from domestic team manager to CEO of the association and is now an official with the IBU, the worldwide governing body of the sport.

Cobb said Tuesday that he would cooperate with a U.S. Center for SafeSport investigation into a coach accused of sexually abusing a young biathlete, causing her so much distress that she attempted suicide. He said SafeSport holds exclusive jurisdiction over investigations and he could not speak further.

However, that biathlete, Grace Boutot, who also attended the virtual meeting, said no one is prohibited from speaking about her case because she has not filed a SafeSport complaint about the abuse she suffered. She said any SafeSport six-month suspension was not enough, while she has endured a life sentence.

Cobb was named in a different SafeSport complaint filed by another former biathlete, two-time Olympian Joan Wilder, who said her coach tried to sexually assault her and Cobb dismissed it when she reported it to him.

During the meeting Boutot accused Cobb and other board members of ignoring sexual abuse she suffered at the hands of two different coaches. "Other people were aware of what happened, and they did not reach out to me to investigate after my suicide attempt," she said.

Drew Hudon, vice president of the Colorado Biathlon Club, said that is why the board has lost the trust of U.S. Biathlon members. That includes board Chairman Bob Hall, who opened the meeting saying athlete safety was the priority and had said the body would investigate any allegations.

"We just heard point-blank, crystal clear, they did know and did not investigate," Hudon said. "That to me was a clear example of why I should not have trust right now in this board of directors, in their ability to oversee this organization and promote safety."

The U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee placed an employee on administrative leave after the AP reported about Boutot's case.

Boutot and Wilder contacted the AP with their stories after the news agency reported that two-time Olympian Joanne Reid was sexually harassed and abused for years by a ski wax technician while racing on the World Cup circuit, according to SafeSport. When she complained, she said, she was told his behavior was just part of male European culture and then faced retaliation.

SafeSport has launched a new investigation into U.S. Biathlon CEO Jack Gierhart and High Performance Director Lowell Bailey regarding the retaliation claims, though it is not known when they will finish their work. SafeSport spokeswoman Hilary Nemchik said she could not comment on an ongoing case.

The AP story on Reid's SafeSport case prompted U.S. Biathlon to order an independent investigation into team culture and safety. The assessment by auditor Vestry Laight found that biathletes faced "misogynistic" behavior while racing and feared retaliation if they came forward.

At Tuesday's meeting, Gierhart detailed the organization's plan to respond to auditor recommendations and create a supportive and accountable team culture.

"This is an ongoing process — it's a journey," he said. "It's a shift for us, and we're committed to making it happen."

After Assad's fall, the task of unearthing the dead from Syria's mass graves is just beginning

By SARAH EL DEEB Associated Press

NAJHA, Syria (AP) — Bones are visible here and there among the mounds of earth in a field south of Damascus, one of the mass graves around Syria believed to hold the bodies of tens of thousands of people killed under Bashar Assad's rule. With his ouster, residents, forensic teams and international groups face what could be a yearslong task of unearthing the dead.

In this site alone, by the town of Najha, several tens of thousands of bodies could have been buried, said Stephen Rapp, a former U.S. ambassador-at-large for war crimes issues who was visiting the site Tuesday. Some are believed buried under already existing graves of a regular cemetery nearby, he said.

It's too soon to start digging, and it's unknown how many bodies remain there or if some were moved over the years. But here and there, bones were visible, including some vertebrae from a human spine and fragments of a femur.

Rapp is working with two organizations that aim to help document mass graves and identify officials implicated in war crimes — the Commission for International Justice and Accountability and the Syria Emergency Task Force. They and other groups have for years been remotely gathering witness testimonies and satellite imagery to track and estimate the size of mass graves that swelled from crackdowns by Assad's feared security agencies, particularly in the early years of Syria's civil war that began in 2011.

With Assad's fall 10 days ago, they are now able to see them firsthand. That gives the chance to "really corroborate what we already know about the machinery of death that was maintained and operated by the Assad regime," Rapp said.

"It is all so unthinkable that this is happening in the 21st Century."

More than 150,000 Syrians remain unaccounted for after disappearing into Assad's prisons and most are believed to be in mass graves around the country, said Mounir al-Mustafa, deputy director of the White Helmets, a Syrian search and rescue team.

An array of prisons run by the military, intelligence and security agencies were notorious for systematic torture, mass executions and brutal conditions that killed other inmates from disease and starvation, according to human rights groups, whistle-blowers, and former detainees.

The White Helmets have received reports of at least 13 mass grave sites around the country, eight of them near Damascus, including Najha, al-Mustafa said.

"We can't open these mass graves yet. That is a massive task to document and take samples and give codes to the corpses before we can identify those people," he said.

The priority is to take stock of the unidentified bodies above ground, those in hospital morgues and in clashes, al-Mustafa said.

Rapp, who arrived in Syria on Monday, visited another suspected grave site, in al-Qutayfah, 37 kilometers (23 miles) north of the capital. He plans to meet with officials from the new transitional government installed since the lightning offensive on Damascus on Dec. 8 that forced Assad to flee the country. He intends to discuss ways to secure and eventually excavate the sites, gather samples from remains for

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identification and preserve thousands of documents discovered in many security branches and prisons. "There needs to be a process. That is what I will be engaging with government representatives about," Rapp said. He said he will also see what the international community can do to assist the government in criminal prosecutions and in ensuring they meet international standards.

On Monday, residents and medical teams began on their own digging up a mass grave in the village of Izraa in southern Daraa province. The remains of over 30 corpses were uncovered, and the teams estimated the total number could reach 70.

Moussa Al-Zouebi, the head of the village's health directorate, said some of the people whose remains were uncovered were executed by "shooting in the head, in the eye, or by burning." A local forensic team and rebel fighters handled bags of human remains as an excavator rumbled in the background, while relatives stood by.

Relatives said they initially had hopes that they would find their loved ones in a prison. "But we didn't find anyone and it broke our hearts. They were burned alive here after being doused in fuel," Mohammad Ghazaleh said at the mass grave site.

The new authorities in Damascus have designated a hotline for people and ex-prisoners to identify locations and secret prisons used by Assad's government to find any trace of missing persons. The insurgents have freed thousands of prisoners in Damascus and other cities, including Aleppo, Homs and Hama.

"It is understandable that the desperate family members will try to go to a site hoping that they find some sign of their relatives, some information," Rapp said. He said the same is happening with documents found at sites. "Although that is understandable, it can be damaging to an investigation," he said.

Rapp said the process of securing and cataloguing documents could take up to three months but identifying those buried in mass graves could take more than two years.

Ontario's premier says Trump's tariffs would be a disaster for US markets

By ROB GILLIES Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — The premier of Canada's most populous province said Tuesday President-elect Donald Trump's plan to impose sweeping 25% tariffs on all Canadian products would be a "disaster" that would hurt U.S. stock markets.

Ontario Premier Doug Ford also said in an interview with The Associated Press that he's "extremely worried" about Trump's plan to launch a mass deportation of millions of undocumented people. Ford said he has a plan to send hundreds of police officers to the border if they come north.

Ford said tariffs won't work considering how integrated the U.S. and Canadian economies are. He noted that in the auto sector alone parts and go back and forth between Canada-U.S. border seven or eight times before being assembled in Ontario or Michigan.

"It is so integrated. I don't even know how you separate that in the supply chain. It would be a disaster," Ford told the AP. "It will affect the market. The market will drop and we have every CEO saying that is not the way to go."

Ford said the market consequences will get Trump's attention.

"I know he has many scorecards, but one is the stock market. It will affect the market, the market will drop," Ford said.

Brian Hughes, a Trump-Vance transition spokesperson, said in response to Ford's comments that "President Trump has promised tariff policies that protect working Americans from the unfair practices of foreign companies and foreign markets."

Ford said he's also very worried about Trump's mass deportation plan. Trump has talked about creating "the largest mass deportation program in history," calling for using the National Guard and mobilizing domestic police forces.

"I am extremely concerned," Ford said. "We do have a plan ready. We have hundreds of provincial police officers that are ready within hours, if not immediately, to hit the borders."

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Ford said a combination of local police, provincial police and the federal government will all be working together. "We'll make sure that we tighten up that border like we've never seen before," he said.

Trump has threatened to impose 25% tariffs on all Canadian goods if Canada and Mexico do not stem the flow of migrants and fentanyl from entering the U.S. border — even though far fewer of each crosses into the U.S. from Canada than from Mexico.

Ford made the comments shortly after Canada's federal government announced some more details about a billion dollar border plan that's designed to avert the tariffs. Canada's national police plans to create a new aerial intelligence task force to provide round-the-clock surveillance of Canada's border using helicopters, drones and surveillance towers.

Canada will also propose to the United States the creation of a North American "joint strike force" to target organized crime groups that work across borders.

"We're stepping up to keep our border strong and secure: By deploying new helicopters, drones and surveillance tools. By adding new scanners and sniffer dog teams to stop and seize fentanyl. By cracking down on the money laundering that's funding cross-border crime," Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said in a post on X.

Trudeau is under pressure from some of his own lawmakers to resign after his finance minister quit cabinet. Ford said it's up to Trudeau to resign and said Canada's provincial premiers are united in telling the Americans how important U.S.-Canada trade is.

Ford reiterated he would restrict electricity exports to Michigan, New York and Minnesota if the sweeping tariffs are imposed.

"I want to sell them more energy, more critical minerals, but I'm going to always keep every tool in our tool box available" Ford said. "That's the the last thing I want to do. We have the energy. They need the energy."

About 60% of U.S. crude oil imports are from Canada, and 85% of U.S. electricity imports as well.

Canada is also the largest foreign supplier of steel, aluminum and uranium to the U.S. and has 34 critical minerals and metals that the Pentagon is eager for.

Nearly \$3.6 billion Canadian (\$2.7 billion) worth of goods and services cross the border each day. Canada is the top export destination for 36 U.S. states.

Ford said he spoke with the governors of Michigan and New York and they "fully understand." Michigan is Ontario's top trading partner.

"We want to sit down and explain to Trump and inform him that we aren't the enemy," Ford said. "And as for Mexico I want to do a bilateral trade deal directly with the U.S."

Flows of migrants and seizures of drugs at the two countries' border are vastly different. U.S. customs agents seized 43 pounds of fentanyl at the Canadian border during the last fiscal year, compared with 21,100 pounds at the Mexican border.

Most of the fentanyl reaching the U.S. — where it causes about 70,000 overdose deaths annually — is made by Mexican drug cartels using precursor chemicals smuggled from Asia.

On immigration, the U.S. Border Patrol reported 1.53 million encounters with migrants at the southwest border with Mexico between October 2023 and September 2024. That compares to 23,721 encounters at the Canadian border during that time.

Rayful Edmond, notorious DC drug kingpin, dies in federal custody at 60

WASHINGTON (AP) — Rayful Edmond, a drug kingpin once believed to control about a third of the cocaine trade in the nation's capital during the crack epidemic of the 1980s, has died in federal custody, the Bureau of Prisons confirmed Tuesday.

Edmond, 60, was known at the height of his criminal empire as the "king of cocaine" in Washington, D.C. He oversaw a sprawling drug network that fueled the city's devastating crack epidemic, contributing to a dramatic rise in homicides and the destruction of countless lives. Armed enforcers, wielding Uzi subma-

chine guns, protected Edmond's territory as he ran an operation linked to at least 30 murders, although none were directly attributed to him.

The Bureau of Prisons did not release details about the cause of Edmond's death. Rob Sperling, a spokesperson for the bureau, said only that Edmond had died, without elaborating on the circumstances.

In 1989, at the age of 24, Edmond was arrested and later sentenced to life in prison for his role in running a vast drug distribution network. His operation was estimated to be moving up to 1,700 pounds of cocaine per month, generating millions of dollars each week. At the time, Edmond was a household name in D.C., living a lavish lifestyle that included sponsoring local basketball tournaments and frequent trips to Las Vegas for high-profile boxing matches.

His trial was marked by unprecedented security measures, and jury members were kept anonymous for their protection. He received a sentence of life without parole and was sent to a maximum-security prison in Pennsylvania. He continued to run a drug distribution network from inside the prison, and when he was caught, Edmond received an additional 30-year sentence.

He began cooperating with authorities. Federal prosecutors, in a motion to reduce his life sentence, said Edmond helped jail dozens of other drug dealers and break up distribution rings and even taught prison authorities how to better prevent trafficking inside the prison system.

Netanyahu says Israeli troops will occupy a buffer zone inside Syria for the foreseeable future

By MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Tuesday that Israeli forces will stay in a buffer zone on the Syrian border, seized after the ouster of Syria's President Bashar Assad, until another arrangement is in place "that ensures Israel's security."

Netanyahu made the comments from the summit of Mount Hermon — the highest peak in the area — inside Syria, about 10 kilometers (6 miles) from the border with the Israel-held Golan Heights.

It appeared to be the first time a sitting Israeli leader had set foot that far into Syria. Netanyahu said he had been on the same mountaintop 53 years ago as a soldier, but the summit's importance to Israel's security has only increased given recent events.

Israel seized a swath of southern Syria along the border with the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights days after Assad was ousted by rebels last week.

Israel's capture of the buffer zone, a roughly 400-square-kilometer (155-square-mile) demilitarized area in Syrian territory, has sparked condemnation, with critics accusing Israel of violating a 1974 ceasefire and possibly exploiting the chaos in Syria in the wake of Assad's ouster to make a land grab.

"We will stay ... until another arrangement is found that ensures Israel's security," said Netanyahu who had traveled to the buffer zone on Tuesday with Defense Minister Israel Katz.

Katz said he instructed the Israeli military to quickly establish a presence, including fortifications, in anticipation of what could be an extended stay in the area. "The summit of the Hermon is the eyes of the state of Israel to identify our enemies who are nearby and far away," he said.

An Israeli military official, who spoke on condition of anonymity in line with military regulations, said there is no plan to evacuate the Syrians living in villages within the buffer zone.

The buffer zone between Syria and the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights was created by the U.N. after the 1973 Mideast war. A U.N. force of about 1,100 troops had patrolled the area since then.

A U.N. spokesman said Tuesday that the advance of Israeli troops, however long it lasts, violates the deal that set up the buffer zone.

That agreement "needs to be respected, and occupation is occupation, whether it lasts a week, a month or a year, it remains occupation," spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

There was no immediate comment from Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the insurgent group that led the ouster of Assad, or from Arab states.

Israel still controls the Golan Heights, which it captured from Syria during the 1967 Mideast war and later

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annexed — a move not recognized by most of the international community. Mount Hermon's summit is divided between the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights, Lebanon, and Syria. Only the United States recognizes Israel's control of the Golan Heights.

With Assad gone, a top U.N. official said Tuesday that militant leaders who have taken over Syria have committed to "an ambitious scaling-up of vital humanitarian support" for millions in desperate need of food and other aid.

The leader of the insurgent HTS — Ahmad al-Sharaa, formerly known as Mohammed al-Golani — and the country's caretaker prime minister, Mohammed al-Bashir, pledged to support the movement of aid from Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and other neighboring countries "for as long as humanitarian operations are required," said Tom Fletcher.

Fletcher, who heads the the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, known as OCHA, spoke to the U.N. Security Council members from Damascus via a video link.

Germany said Tuesday that its diplomats had also met with insurgent leaders to discuss Syria's political transition and "our expectations regarding the protection of minorities and women's rights."

German officials, who have noted the rebel group's history of links to al-Qaida, said they will measure the group and the new government based on its actions. The United States has previously said that its officials have been in direct contact with HTS insurgents who ousted Assad.

Also Tuesday, U.S.-backed and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces proposed that the Kurdish-majority town of Kobani in northern Syria become a demilitarized zone, and that there be a "redistribution of security forces under American supervision and presence."

Turkey, which backs the Syrian insurgents who toppled Assad, is also battling the Syrian Kurdish militia, considering it a terror group allied with the Kurdish insurgency within its own borders.

Syrian Kurdish forces were a key U.S. ally in the fight against the extremist Islamic State group.

In other developments, bodies of more than 30 Syrians who vanished under Assad's rule were uncovered in a mass grave on Monday. Forensic teams and rebels worked together to unearth the remains in the village of Izraa, north of the city of Daraa, as families of the missing stood by.

The relatives said they had initially hoped to find their loved ones in prison.

"But we didn't find anyone and it broke our hearts. They were burned alive here after being doused in fuel," said Mohammad Ghazaleh, who was waiting at the mass grave site.

Some of the bodies recovered showed evidence that they had been shot in the head or burned, said Moussa Al-Zouebi, head of Izraa's health directorate.

Syria's new authorities have set up a hotline for reporting missing persons and secret detention sites.

In the Syrian capital of Damascus, Qatar officially reopened its embassy on Tuesday — nearly 13 years after it severed diplomatic relations with Assad's government.

Qatar had reaffirmed its "categorical rejection of the regime's repressive policies against the Syrian people" in a statement earlier. Most foreign embassies in Syria have been shut down since after the country's civil war erupted in 2011.

The French Embassy in Damascus raised its flag Tuesday in a "symbolic gesture" to show support for the Syrian people during the transition. It's reopening is pending ongoing evaluation of political and security conditions, French Foreign Minister French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot said.

The Turkish Embassy in Damascus also recently reopened.

Nuclear bunker sales increase, despite expert warnings they aren't going to provide protection

By MARTHA MENDOZA Associated Press

When Bernard Jones Jr. and his wife, Doris, built their dream home, they didn't hold back. A grotto swimming pool with a waterfall for hot summer days. A home theater for cozy winter nights. A fruit orchard to harvest in fall. And a vast underground bunker in case disaster strikes.

"The world's not becoming a safer place," he said. "We wanted to be prepared."

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Under a nondescript metal hatch near the private basketball court, there's a hidden staircase that leads down into rooms with beds for about 25 people, bathrooms and two kitchens, all backed by a self-sufficient energy source.

With water, electricity, clean air and food, they felt ready for any disaster, even a nuclear blast, at their bucolic home in California's Inland Empire.

"If there was a nuclear strike, would you rather go into the living room or go into a bunker? If you had one, you'd go there too," said Jones, who said he reluctantly sold the home two years ago.

Global security leaders are warning nuclear threats are growing as weapons spending surged to \$91.4 billion last year. At the same time, private bunker sales are on the rise globally, from small metal boxes to crawl inside of to extravagant underground mansions.

Critics warn these bunkers create a false perception that a nuclear war is survivable. They argue that people planning to live through an atomic blast aren't focusing on the real and current dangers posed by nuclear threats, and the critical need to stop the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Meanwhile, government disaster experts say bunkers aren't necessary. A Federal Emergency Management Agency 100-page guide on responding to a nuclear detonation focuses on having the public get inside and stay inside, ideally in a basement and away from outside walls for at least a day. Those existing spaces can provide protection from radioactive fallout, says FEMA.

But increasingly, buyers say bunkers offer a sense of security. The market for U.S. bomb and fallout shelters is forecast to grow from \$137 million last year to \$175 million by 2030, according to a market research report from BlueWeave Consulting. The report says major growth factors include "the rising threat of nuclear or terrorist attacks or civil unrest."

Building bunkers

"People are uneasy and they want a safe place to put their family. And they have this attitude that it's better to have it and not need it than to need it and not have it," said Atlas Survival Shelters CEO Ron Hubbard, amid showers of sparks and the loud buzz of welding at his bunker factory, which he says is the world's largest, in Sulphur Springs, Texas.

Hubbard said COVID lockdowns, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war have driven sales.

On Nov. 21, in the hours after Russia's first-ever use of an experimental, hypersonic ballistic missile to attack Ukraine, Hubbard said his phone rang nonstop.

Four callers ended up buying bunkers in one day, he said, and more ended up ordering doors and other parts for shelters they were already building.

Hubbard said his bunkers are built for all disasters.

"They're good for anything from a tornado to a hurricane to nuclear fallout, to a pandemic to even a volcano erupting," he said, sweeping his arms toward a massive warehouse where more than 50 different bunkers were under construction.

A loaded shotgun at arm's length and metal mesh window shields to block Molotov cocktails nearby, Hubbard said he started his company after building his own bunker about 10 years ago. He says callers ask about prices — \$20,000 to multimillions, averaging \$500,000 — and installations — they can go just about anywhere. He said most days he sells at least one bunker.

Under Hubbard's doomsday scenario, global tensions could lead to World War III, a situation he is prepared to live through.

"The good news about nuclear warfare," he said, "if there ever was any, that it's very survivable if you're not killed in the initial blast."

He's not wrong, say U.S. government disaster preparedness experts.

"You want to go to your most robust building"

"Look, this fallout exposure is entirely preventable because it is something that happens after the detonation," said Brooke Buddemeier a radiation safety specialist at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, where the U.S. government designs nuclear weapons. Buddemeier and his colleagues are tasked with evaluating what could happen after an attack and how best to survive. "There's going to be a fairly obvi-

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ous nuclear explosion event, a large cloud. So just getting inside, away from where those particles fall, can keep you and your family safe."

Buddemeier and others in the U.S. government are trying to get Americans — who decades ago hid under desks during nuclear attack drills — educated about how to respond.

After a deadly and deafening blast, a bright flash and a mushroom cloud, it will take about 15 minutes for the radioactive fallout to arrive for those a mile or more away from ground zero, said Michael Dillon, a scientist at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.

"It's going to literally be sand falling on your head, and you're going to want to get out of that situation. You want to go to your most robust building," he said. In their models, they estimate people may need to stay inside for a day or two before evacuating.

The government's efforts to educate the public were reinvigorated after a false alarm missile alert in Hawaii in 2018 caused widespread panic.

The emergency alert, which was sent to cellphones statewide just before 8:10 a.m., said: "BALLISTIC MISSILE THREAT INBOUND TO HAWAII. SEEK IMMEDIATE SHELTER. THIS IS NOT A DRILL."

For the next 40 minutes there were traffic jams, workers running into and out of buildings, families huddling in their bathrooms, students gathering in gyms, drivers blocking tunnels, all in an attempt to seek shelter, without any clear idea of what "seek immediate shelter" actually meant.

Today the federal government offers a guide to prepare citizens for a nuclear attack that advises people to find a basement or the center of a large building and stay there, possibly for a few days, until they get word about where to go next.

"Gently brush your pet's coat to remove any fallout particles" it says, adding that the 15-minute delay between bomb and fallout allows "enough time for you to be able to prevent significant radiation exposure."

Jeffrey Schlegelmilch, who directs the FEMA-backed National Center for Disaster Preparedness at Columbia University, said "the scenarios of a nuclear detonation are not all or nothing."

If a small number of weapons detonate rather than all-out war, he said, sheltering inside a large building to avoid the fallout could save lives.

"Underground bunkers aren't going to protect people"

Nonproliferation advocates bristle at the bunkers, shelters or any suggestion that a nuclear war is survivable.

"Bunkers are, in fact, not a tool to survive a nuclear war, but a tool to allow a population to psychologically endure the possibility of a nuclear war," said Alicia Sanders-Zakre at the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons.

Sanders-Zakre called radiation the "uniquely horrific aspect of nuclear weapons," and noted that even surviving the fallout doesn't prevent long-lasting, intergenerational health crises. "Ultimately, the only solution to protect populations from nuclear war is to eliminate nuclear weapons."

Researcher Sam Lair at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies says U.S. leaders stopped talking about bunkers decades ago.

"The political costs incurred by causing people to think about shelters again is not worth it to leaders because it forces people to think about what they would do after nuclear war," he said. "That's something that very, very few people want to think about. This makes people feel vulnerable."

Lair said building bunkers seems futile, even if they work in the short term.

"Even if a nuclear exchange is perhaps more survivable than many people think, I think the aftermath will be uglier than many people think as well," he said. "The fundamental wrenching that it would do to our way of life would be profound."

That's been a serious concern of Massachusetts Congressman James McGovern for almost 50 years.

"If we ever get to a point where there's all out nuclear war, underground bunkers aren't going to protect people," he said. "Instead, we ought to be investing our resources and our energy trying to talk about a nuclear weapons freeze, initially."

Next, he said, "we should work for the day when we get rid of all nuclear weapons."

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Year after year he introduces legislation pushing for nonproliferation, but looking out his office window at the Capitol, he said he's disappointed by the lack of debate over what will be a \$1 trillion expenditure to build and modernize the U.S. arsenal.

"The stakes, if a nuclear weapon is ever used, is that millions and millions and millions of people will die. It really is shocking that we have world leaders who talk casually about utilizing nuclear weapons. I mean, it would be catastrophic, not just for those that are involved in an exchange of nuclear weapons, but for the entire world."

McGovern pushed back against FEMA's efforts to prepare the public for a nuclear attack by advising people to take shelter.

"What a stupid thing to say that we all just need to know where to hide and where to avoid the most impacts of nuclear radiation. I mean, really, that's chilling when you hear people try to rationalize nuclear war that way," he said.

Nuclear war was far from a couple's mind when they went house-hunting in Southern California a few years ago. They wanted a home to settle down and raise their family, and they needed extra garage space. They spotted an online ad for a home with at least eight parking spots. On the basketball court, there was a metal hatch. Beneath it was a bunker.

This was Jones' former home, which Jones said he put up for sale for family reasons.

The husband, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of concerns about his family's privacy, went ahead and bought Jones' home, bunker and all. They aren't particularly worried about nuclear war, and haven't spent a night in the bunker, but they have stored food and medical supplies down there.

"We have told some of our friends, if something goes crazy and gets bad, get over here as fast as possible," the husband said. "It does provide a sense of security."

At least 25 are killed and dozens are missing after an overcrowded boat capsizes in Congo

By JUSTIN KATUMWA, JEAN-YVES KAMALE and WILSON MCMAKIN Associated Press

KINSHASA, Congo (AP) — An overcrowded boat capsized on a river in central Congo on Tuesday, killing at least 25 people, including children, and leaving dozens missing, officials and local residents said.

The vessel was believed to have more than 100 passengers on board after leaving from the town of Inongo, northeast of the capital of Kinshasa. It capsized a few hundred meters (yards) into the journey along the Fimi River, the latest such tragedy to strike Congo.

A search was underway for the missing hours later on Tuesday as concerns rose that the death toll could be far higher.

"There was overloading at roof level and, as far as the lifeless human bodies are concerned, at least 25 have been recovered so far," said David Kalemba, Inongo's river commissioner.

The capsized boat was also loaded with goods, according to Alex Mbumba, a resident of the area. "Among the dead are children, but it's difficult to give an exact death toll at the moment as ... the boat had a lot of passengers," said Mbumba.

Tuesday's wreck was the fourth this year in the Mai-Ndombe province, a region surrounded by rivers and where many rely on river transportation.

Congolese officials have often warned against overloading and vowed to punish those violating safety measures for water transportation. However, in remote areas where most passengers come from, many are unable to afford public transport for the few available roads.

At least 78 people drowned in October when an overloaded boat sank in the country's east while 80 lost their lives in a similar accident near Kinshasa in June.

The latest accident prompted calls for the government to equip the province with flotation devices.

"The government must act to improve safety on the waters of our province (because) navigation conditions are dangerous," said Mbumba.

The capsizing of overloaded boats is also becoming increasingly frequent in this central African nation

as more people are abandoning the few available roads for wooden vessels crumbling under the weight of passengers and their goods because of security reasons.

The roads are often caught up in the deadly clashes between Congolese security forces and rebels that sometimes block major access routes. Hundreds have already been killed or declared missing in such accidents so far this year.

Deadly violence in Nigeria linked to breakup of United Methodist Church over LGBTQ policies

Associated Press undefined

A religious schism has turned deadly in Nigeria, with a church member fatally shot and two young children killed as homes were set ablaze, according to United Methodist News Service.

The news service said the reported violence on Sunday stemmed from a schism in the worldwide United Methodist Church over its decision to repeal LGBTQ bans — and the ensuing formation of the new Global Methodist Church by breakaway conservative churches.

According to the news service, a United Methodist church member was shot and killed in a confrontation between both factions in Taraba, a state in northeast Nigeria. Homes were set ablaze, claiming the lives of two children, ages 2 and 4, of the overseer of a United Methodist school and nursery, the news service said. Another 10 church members were reported injured.

The worldwide Global Methodist Church held its inaugural general conference earlier this year. It was created by churches breaking away from the United Methodist Church — an international denomination with a strong U.S. presence.

While the UMC, at its general conference in May, lifted its longstanding bans on LGBTQ ordination and same-sex marriage, it also granted local conferences the right to set their own standards. The West Africa Central Conference, which includes Nigeria, restricts marriage to between a man and a woman and instructs its churches to follow national laws on LGBTQ issues, according to the news service.

In a statement, local United Methodist bishops condemned the violence and asked that there be no retribution.

“We are outraged that such an atrocity would occur among Christians, especially brothers and sisters who were once part of the same Methodist family,” they said in a statement.

“We further urge GMC members, at all levels, to put an immediate end to the violence and refrain from disseminating misinformation that fuels fear and disdain that can lead to violence,” they said.

The Assembly of Bishops of the Global Methodist Church issued a statement saying it is actively looking into the allegations and is seeking to determine what has happened.

“We mourn the loss of human life, decry the use of violence in any form, and call on both Global Methodists and United Methodists to serve as agents of peace,” it said.

A couple hundred North Korean troops killed, wounded in battles with Ukrainian forces

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A couple hundred North Korean troops fighting alongside Russian forces against Ukraine have been killed or wounded during battle in the Kursk border region, a senior military official said Tuesday.

The official didn't provide details on exactly how many have been killed, but said the North Korean forces don't appear to be battle-hardened, which contributes to the number of casualties they've had. The official was providing the first significant estimate of North Korean casualties, which comes several weeks after Ukraine announced that North Korea had sent 10,000 to 12,000 troops to Russia to help in the almost 3-year war.

The White House and Pentagon on Monday confirmed that the North Korean forces have been battling

on the front lines in largely infantry positions. They have been fighting with Russian units and, in some cases, independently around Kursk.

The casualty disclosure comes as the Biden administration is pressing to send as much military aid as possible to Ukraine before President-elect Donald Trump takes over. But a senior defense official told reporters Tuesday that the Defense Department may not be able to send all of the remaining \$5.6 billion in Pentagon weapons and equipment stocks intended for Ukraine before Jan. 20, when Trump is sworn in.

Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity to provide a U.S. assessment of the war.

According to the Pentagon, there is about \$1.2 billion remaining in longer-term funding through the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, which is used to pay for weapons contracts that would not be delivered for a year or more. The official said the administration anticipates releasing all that money by the end of this year.

The \$5.6 billion is in presidential drawdown authority (PDA), which allows the Pentagon to take weapons off the shelves and send them quickly to Ukraine. That is a substantial amount of money, the defense official said, and while the U.S. will continue to provide weapons to Ukraine until Jan. 20, there may well be funds remaining that will be available for the incoming Trump administration to spend.

Trump has talked about getting some type of negotiated settlement between Ukraine and Russia, creating some unease about whether he will provide Ukraine all the weapons funding approved by Congress.

Ukrainian and Russian forces have been in a fierce battle around Kursk, and the official said Russia has been able to take back about 20% of the territory gained there by Kyiv. They said it will be possible for Ukraine to hold ground there for some time, but it will depend on how the rest of the fight is going, including the long-range strikes that Kyiv has been launching.

The officials said it's not clear if Moscow has asked Pyongyang for additional forces, but acknowledged that Russia continues to lose as many as 1,200 troops a day in casualties — including both dead and wounded. But so far, Russia has been able to generate enough forces to replace them.

NASA's 2 stuck astronauts face more time in space with return delayed until at least late March

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — NASA's two stuck astronauts just got their space mission extended again. That means they won't be back on Earth until spring, 10 months after rocketing into orbit on Boeing's Starliner capsule.

NASA announced the latest delay in Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams' homecoming on Tuesday.

The two test pilots planned on being away just a week or so when they blasted off June 5 on Boeing's first astronaut flight to the International Space Station. Their mission grew from eight days to eight months after NASA decided to send the company's problem-plagued Starliner capsule back empty in September.

Now the pair won't return until the end of March or even April because of a delay in launching their replacements, according to NASA.

A fresh crew needs to launch before Wilmore and Williams can return and the next mission has been bumped more than a month, according to the space agency.

NASA's next crew of four was supposed to launch in February, followed by Wilmore and Williams' return home by the end of that month alongside two other astronauts. But SpaceX needs more time to prepare the brand new capsule for liftoff. That launch is now scheduled for no earlier than late March.

NASA said it considered using a different SpaceX capsule to fly up the replacement crew in order to keep the flights on schedule. But it decided the best option was to wait for the new capsule to transport the next crew.

NASA prefers to have overlapping crews at the space station for a smoother transition, according to officials.

Most space station missions last six months, with a few reaching a full year.

Former Church of England leader resigns as priest after claims he mishandled an abuse case

LONDON (AP) — A former leader of the Church of England has resigned as a priest following allegations that he failed to properly handle the case of a priest accused of sexual misconduct.

George Carey, who was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1991 to 2002, quit after a BBC investigation reported that he allowed a priest who had been banned over sexual abuse claims to return to priesthood.

His resignation letter, sent on Dec. 4, said he had been in active ministry since 1962 and is turning 90. The letter did not mention the investigation.

The BBC reported that Carey agreed to allow a priest, David Tudor, to return to working in the church in 1994 after Tudor was suspended from ministry for five years over allegations of assault against teenage girls.

Documents suggested that Carey advocated for Tudor to get a job in a diocese, the BBC reported.

Carey's resignation came as another senior clergyman due to take temporary charge of the Church of England faced calls to resign over his handling of Tudor's case.

Archbishop of York Stephen Cottrell reportedly allowed Tudor to remain in his post despite knowing he had been barred by the church from being alone with children and had paid compensation to one of his accusers.

Tudor was barred for life from the ministry in October after acknowledging he had sexual relationships with two teenage girls, aged 15 and 16, in the 1980s.

Cottrell is due to take over next month as the church's spiritual head from Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, who resigned in November over the way he handled separate sexual abuse claims.

The archbishop of Canterbury is spiritual leader of the global Anglican Communion, which has 85 million adherents in 165 countries. It has been riven by sharply divergent views on issues such as gay rights and the place of women in the church.

Trump's lawyers allege juror misconduct in latest bid to get his hush money conviction dismissed

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump's lawyers are raising a new claim in their fight to overturn his hush money conviction, alleging that the historic verdict was tainted by juror misconduct.

But prosecutors contend that the allegations in a defense court filing made public Tuesday are "unsworn, unsupported" hearsay and part of a last-ditch effort to undermine public confidence in the case.

Trump's lawyers claimed in a letter to Manhattan Judge Juan M. Merchan that they had "evidence of grave juror misconduct during the trial."

Details of the allegations were redacted and hidden from public view.

The defense letter, dated Dec. 3, was added to the public court docket on Tuesday along with two partially redacted responses from the Manhattan district attorney's office, which prosecuted the hush money case, dated Dec. 5 and 9.

"Partisan political motivations infected nearly every aspect of this Witch Hunt, including the jury room," Trump spokesperson Steven Cheung said.

He accused Bragg and Merchan of allowing "their own personal political biases to fuel this charade" and said "they should be ashamed of their inaction in refusing to investigate this serious matter, and allowing the grievous misconduct to occur."

"It is clear that there is more information that should come to light regarding misconduct, and those with knowledge of such information should come forward and do what is right," Cheung said, calling on the judge to dismiss the case immediately.

The development comes as Merchan is weighing a pending defense request to throw out the case in light of his impending return to the White House.

In their written responses, Manhattan prosecutors argued that Trump's lawyers were trying to muddy the verdict by airing their claims in a letter to the judge rather than a formal motion to dismiss the case. Prosecutors also questioned the defense's resistance to having Merchan hold a court hearing where their juror misconduct claims could be examined more thoroughly.

Trump's lawyers, Todd Blanche and Emil Bove, argued in their letter that such a hearing would involve "extensive, time-consuming, and invasive fact finding" and would interfere with the president-elect's transition into office. Prosecutors wrote that by opposing a hearing, the defense was trying to force Merchan "to accept their untested, unsworn allegations as true."

Merchan said in a separate letter Monday that he ordered the redactions both to preserve the integrity of the case and to ensure the safety of jurors, whose names have been kept private. Three of the letter's seven pages were entirely covered in black ink.

Blanche and Bove's letter "consists entirely of unsworn allegations," Merchan wrote.

Allowing them to be filed publicly without redactions "would only serve to undermine the integrity of these proceedings while simultaneously placing the safety of the jurors at grave risk," he wrote.

"Allegations of juror misconduct should be thoroughly investigated," Merchan wrote. "However, this Court is prohibited from deciding such claims on the basis of mere hearsay and conjecture."

Trump has been fighting for months to reverse his May 30 conviction on 34 counts of falsifying business records to conceal a \$130,000 hush money payment to porn actor Stormy Daniels to suppress her claim that they had sex a decade earlier, which he denies. The payment was made shortly before the 2016 election.

On Monday, Merchan rejected Trump's request to throw out the case on presidential immunity grounds, finding that the U.S. Supreme Court's July 1 ruling granting the former president broad protection from prosecution did not require upending the case.

Trump's immunity claim was just one of several efforts he and his lawyers have made to get his conviction overturned and the case dismissed.

After Trump won last month's election, Merchan indefinitely postponed his late November sentencing so both sides could suggest next steps. Trump's lawyers argued that anything other than immediate dismissal would undermine the transfer of power and cause unconstitutional "disruptions" to the presidency.

Prosecutors, seeking to preserve the verdict, proposed several alternatives.

They included: freezing the case until Trump leaves office in 2029; agreeing that any future sentence won't include jail time; or treating the case the way some courts do when a defendant dies.

In the last scenario, borrowed from what some states do in such an occurrence, the case would be closed by noting that Trump was convicted but that he wasn't sentenced and his appeal wasn't resolved because he took office. Trump's lawyers branded the concept "absurd." They also objected to the other suggestions.

Trump, a Republican, takes office Jan. 20. He's the first former president to be convicted of a felony and the first convicted criminal to be elected to the office.

Suspect charged with killing UnitedHealthcare's CEO as an act of terrorism

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The man accused of killing UnitedHealthcare's CEO has been charged with murder as an act of terrorism, prosecutors said Tuesday as they worked to bring him to a New York court from a Pennsylvania jail.

Luigi Mangione already was charged with murder in the Dec. 4 killing of Brian Thompson, but the terror allegation is new.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg said Thompson's death on a midtown Manhattan street "was a killing that was intended to evoke terror. And we've seen that reaction."

Mangione's New York lawyer, Karen Friedman Agnifilo, declined to comment.

Thompson, 50, was shot while walking to a hotel where Minnesota-based UnitedHealthcare — the United

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States' biggest medical insurer — was holding an investor conference.

The killing kindled a fiery outpouring of resentment toward U.S. health insurance companies, as Americans swapped stories online and elsewhere of being denied coverage, left in limbo as doctors and insurers disagreed, and stuck with sizeable bills.

The shooting also rattled C-suites, as "wanted" posters with other health care executives' names and faces appeared on New York streets and some social media users extolled Mangione's deed as payback.

New York Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch said Tuesday that "any attempt to rationalize this is vile, reckless and offensive to our deeply held principles of justice."

A New York law passed after the Sept. 11 attacks allows prosecutors to charge crimes as acts of terrorism when they're "intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, influence the policies of a unit of government by intimidation or coercion and affect the conduct of a unit of government by murder, assassination or kidnapping."

Prosecutors have applied the statute to various contexts. Some related to international extremism, but the law was first used against a Bronx gang member after a hail of gunfire killed a 10-year-old girl and paralyzed a man outside a christening party in 2002. The state's highest court later said the conduct didn't amount to terrorism, and a retrial produced convictions on other charges.

Thompson's killing, Bragg noted, happened early on a workday in an area frequented by commuters, businesspeople and tourists.

"This was a frightening, well-planned, targeted murder that was intended to cause shock and attention and intimidation," the district attorney said.

After days of intense police searches and publicity, Mangione was spotted Dec. 9 at a McDonald's in Altoona, Pennsylvania, and arrested. New York police officials have said Mangione was carrying the gun used to kill Thompson, a passport and various fake IDs, including one that the suspected shooter presented to check into a New York hostel.

The 26-year-old was charged with Pennsylvania gun and forgery offenses and locked up there without bail. His Pennsylvania lawyer has questioned the evidence for the forgery charge and the legal grounding for the gun charge. The attorney also has said Mangione would fight extradition to New York.

Mangione has two court hearings scheduled for Thursday in Pennsylvania, including an extradition hearing, Bragg noted.

Hours after his arrest, the Manhattan district attorney's office filed paperwork charging him with murder and other offenses. The indictment builds on that paperwork.

Investigators' working theory is that Mangione, an Ivy League computer science grad from a prominent Maryland family, was propelled by anger at the U.S. health care system. A law enforcement bulletin obtained by The Associated Press last week said that when arrested, he was carrying a handwritten letter that called health insurance companies "parasitic" and complained about corporate greed.

Mangione repeatedly posted on social media about how spinal surgery last year had eased his chronic back pain, encouraging people with similar conditions to speak up for themselves if told they just had to live with it.

In a Reddit post in late April, he advised someone with a back problem to seek additional opinions from surgeons and, if necessary, say the pain made it impossible to work.

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

He was never a UnitedHealthcare client, according to the insurer.

Mangione apparently cut himself off from his family and close friends in recent months. His family reported him missing in San Francisco in November.

After San Francisco authorities got a tip to their New York counterparts, investigators spoke to Mangione's mother in San Francisco late on Dec. 7. In that interview, "she said it might be something that she could see him doing," New York Police Department Chief of Detectives Joseph Kenny said Tuesday.

Before the case detectives could follow up on that lead, Mangione was arrested, Kenny said.

Mangione's relatives have said in a statement that they were "shocked and devastated" by his arrest. Thompson, who grew up on a farm in Iowa, was trained as an accountant. A married father of two high-schoolers, he had worked at the giant UnitedHealth Group for 20 years and became CEO of its insurance arm in 2021.

Suspect in Gilgo Beach serial killings is charged in the death of a seventh woman

By PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

RIVERHEAD, N.Y. (AP) — The New York architect facing murder charges in a string of deaths known as the Gilgo Beach killings was charged on Tuesday in the death of a seventh woman.

Rex Heuermann pleaded not guilty to killing Valerie Mack, whose remains were first found on Long Island in 2000. Mack, 24, had been working as an escort in Philadelphia and was last seen by her family that year in New Jersey.

Some of Mack's skeletal remains were initially discovered in Manorville, New York; authorities found more of her remains about 50 miles (80 kilometers) west, in Gilgo Beach, more than 10 years later. They were unidentified until genetic testing revealed her identity in 2020.

Human hair found with Mack's remains was sent for testing earlier this year and found to be a likely match with the genetic profile of Heuermann's daughter, prosecutors said in court papers. His daughter is not accused of any wrongdoing and would have been 3 or 4 years old when Mack died.

Heuermann, 61, is charged with killing six other women whose remains were found on Long Island. He has pleaded not guilty to all the charges.

"The lives of these women matter," Suffolk County District Attorney Ray Tierney said at a news conference with Mack's parents and other victims' relatives. "No one understands that more than the families."

Mack's parents didn't speak. Four other victims' relatives gave the Macks roses and hugs and, through an attorney, expressed their sadness and solidarity.

"They were, and they are, loved. And they are missed every day by those who knew them and who had a strong bond with them," said Gloria Allred, who represents the families of Melissa Barthelemy, Maureen Brainard-Barnes, Jessica Taylor and Megan Waterman.

Outside of court, Heuermann's lawyer Michael Brown disputed evidence presented in Mack's death, saying the DNA technology used to connect her and other victims to Heuermann has never been deemed reliable in a New York case.

He also argued that Tierney's office has yet to produce proof any victims' DNA was found in Heuermann's home, including the many weapons and tools seized during recent searches of the property.

"There's something a little weird about these allegations," Brown said. "Something that doesn't sit right."

The investigation into the Gilgo Beach killings dates back to 2010, when police searching for a missing woman found 10 sets of human remains in the scrub along a barrier island parkway, prompting fears of a serial killer.

Over the years, investigators used DNA analysis and other clues to identify the victims, many of whom were sex workers. Police also began reexamining other unsolved killings of women on Long Island.

The case has dragged on through five police commissioners, more than 1,000 tips, and doubts about whether there was a serial killer at all.

Heuermann, who lived with his wife and two children in Massapequa Park on Long Island and commuted to a Manhattan architecture office, was arrested on July 13, 2023. At that point, he was charged with murdering Barthelemy, Waterman and Amber Lynn Costello.

Earlier this year, he was charged in the deaths of three other women — Brainard-Barnes, Taylor and Sandra Costilla.

In a June court filing, prosecutors said they had recovered a file on a hard drive in Heuermann's basement that he used to "methodically blueprint" his killings — including checklists with tasks for before, during and after, as well as lessons for "next time."

In court papers on Tuesday, prosecutors said the document, which was created the same year as Mack's murder, includes details that align with her case.

For example, it names "Mill Road" — a road near where Mack's first remains were found — under the heading "DS," which investigators believe stands for "dump site."

The document also lists "foam drain cleaner" under "Supplies." Prosecutors say that on Oct. 3, 2000, Heuermann's phone records appear to show him making two calls to a Long Island plumbing company, and he paid another company the following month to check his mainline drain.

In recent searches of Heuermann's home and office, authorities say they found old magazines and newspapers with articles about the Gilgo Beach killings and investigation that prosecutors believe he kept as "souvenirs" or "mementos." Among them was a July 29, 2003, copy of the New York Post that included an article about the investigation into Mack and Taylor's remains.

Tierney said Tuesday that evidence points to Heuermann's home as the scene of the killings — in most cases, when his family was out of town.

Heuermann's estranged wife, Asa Ellerup, said in a statement that she still does not believe her husband was capable of committing the crimes he's accused of.

The couple's now grown children said in a separate statement they remain "steadfast in observing the legal process play itself out, no matter how long it takes or how difficult it is."

Authorities have still not charged anyone in the deaths of some other people whose remains were found on Long Island.

Among them is an unidentified male victim who died in 2006 and likely presented outwardly as a female, and Karen Vergata, whose remains were discovered in 1996 but only identified through new DNA analysis in 2022.

Tech consultant found guilty of second-degree murder in stabbing death of Cash App founder Bob Lee

By JANIE HAR Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — A San Francisco jury on Tuesday found a tech consultant guilty of second-degree murder in the stabbing death of Cash App founder Bob Lee, which carries a sentence of 16 years to life, rejecting the defendant's claim that he had acted in self defense.

Jurors took seven days to deliver their verdict against Nima Momeni in the April 4, 2023, death of Lee, a beloved tech mogul who was found staggering on a deserted downtown street, dripping a trail of blood and calling for help. Lee, 43, later died at a hospital.

"We're happy that Nima Momeni will not be on the streets, he no longer has the opportunity to harm anybody else in this world," the victim's brother, Tim Oliver Lee, told reporters. "We think justice was done here today."

Mahnaz Tayarani, the mother of the defendant, had tears in her eyes Tuesday as she called the verdict unfair.

"My son is not the person that they think," she said. "He's very kind, he's very loving and respectful and caring."

Prosecutors said Momeni planned the attack on Lee, driving him to an isolated spot under the Bay Bridge and stabbing him three times, including once to the heart, with a knife he took from his sister's kitchen. They say Momeni was angry with Lee for introducing his younger sister to a drug dealer she says gave her GHB and other drugs and then sexually assaulted her.

But Momeni testified on the stand that Lee was the one who attacked him with a knife, angry after the tech consultant chided him about spending more time with his family instead of searching for a strip club that night. Momeni, who studies martial arts, said he didn't realize he had fatally wounded Lee or that Lee was even hurt.

The case has drawn national attention, partly given Lee's status in the tech world. At first, his death enflamed debate over public safety in San Francisco as X owner Elon Musk took to the social media site

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to post that "violent crime in SF is horrific and even if attackers are caught, they are often released immediately."

San Francisco District Attorney Brooke Jenkins said the verdict showed that the killing was a targeted crime and not an example of random lawlessness in the city.

"We are a city committed to accountability, we are a city committed to public safety," Jenkins told reporters after the hearing.

Momeni, 40, has been in custody since his arrest in April 2023, when he was charged with murder in the first degree.

Family members of both men faithfully attended the trial, which started Oct. 14. Relatives of the defendant sat on one side of the court room while Lee's father, brother and ex-wife sat on the other, recoiling at Lee's autopsy photos and 911 call.

Jurors received the case on Dec. 4 and reached their decision late Monday afternoon, but the court chose to announce the verdict Tuesday morning. The courtroom was crowded with Lee's family and friends and journalists who have been following the high-profile trial.

Lee had created mobile payment service Cash App and was the chief product officer of the cryptocurrency MobileCoin when he died. He had recently moved to Miami from the San Francisco Bay Area, where his ex-wife Krista Lee lives with their two children, and had returned to California for a visit.

Both sides agreed on the sequence of events that led to the two men facing off in the early morning hours of April 4. But there is no independent documentation of what they said to each other or who brought out the knife, and video of their final encounter is grainy.

The prosecution said the video showed Momeni stabbing Lee three times. They also said the murder weapon — a nearly 8-inch paring knife with a roughly 4-inch blade — had Momeni's DNA on its handle and Lee's DNA on the blade.

Two of Momeni's five attorneys were in court Tuesday, with the others attending by video from Florida. "This is obviously very disappointing for us," said Tony Brass, adding that the team would evaluate for an appeal.

Jurors in the end rejected a charge of murder in the first degree, which required prosecutors prove that Momeni acted deliberately, willfully and with premeditation. Murder in the second degree does not require premeditation.

Jurors on Tuesday declined to speak to the press.

The afternoon before the stabbing, Lee and Khazar Momeni had been doing drugs and drinking at the apartment of a drug dealer Lee knew. Lee left before Nima Momeni went to pick up his sister, who told him she had been assaulted.

A friend of Lee's testified Momeni then grilled Lee over the phone about what happened to his sister while at the drug dealer's apartment. He sent text messages saying that the two men were creeps and sexual predators.

Momeni later hung out with Lee at his sister's condo until she kicked them out, saying she needed to sleep.

Surveillance video shows the two men leaving Khazar Momeni's posh condo around 2 a.m. and getting into Nima Momeni's BMW. Other surveillance footage then shows them getting out of the car near the Bay Bridge, where the stabbing took place.

Momeni testified he stopped his car after going over a pothole that caused Lee to spill the beer he was holding. Momeni said he then cracked a joke suggesting Lee should spend the last night of his visit with family instead of trying to find a strip club to keep the party going.

That's when he says Lee snapped, yelled at him about questioning his parenting skills and pulled out the knife from his jacket pocket, and attacked.

"I was scared for my life," Momeni said during trial, in testimony that was rambling and contentious.

He said Lee walked away from the encounter, and showed no evidence of being hurt. He didn't realize Lee had died until the following day, he said.

"I feel awful to his family, to himself," Momeni said on the stand. "He didn't deserve it. I don't think

anyone deserved that.”

The prosecution mocked Momeni’s story, pointing out that he never called police to report Lee’s alleged attack or even after he learned Lee had died of stab wounds on the street where he had last seen him.

Prosecutors also showed text messages Khazar Momeni sent her brother, asking where he had dropped off Lee — a question he sidestepped. She sent a text message to Lee checking on him because her brother came “down hard” on him and to thank him for “handling it with class.”

Trump sues Des Moines Register, pollster for ‘election interference’ after pre-election poll

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

President-elect Donald Trump sued the Des Moines Register and its pollster for “brazen election interference” in publishing a survey the weekend before the election that showed Democrat Kamala Harris with a surprising lead of three percentage points in the state.

The Register’s parent Gannett Co. on Tuesday dismissed the lawsuit as meritless and said it would vigorously defend its First Amendment rights.

The lawsuit continues the president-elect’s campaign against media outlets he feels have wronged him. ABC this past weekend agreed to pay \$15 million toward a Trump presidential library in order to settle a defamation lawsuit against George Stephanopoulos for inaccurately saying Trump had been found civilly liable for rape.

The Des Moines survey, done by since-retired pollster J. Ann Selzer, was considered shocking for indicating that an earlier Trump lead in the Republican-leaning midwestern state had been erased. In the actual election, Trump won Iowa by more than 13 percentage points.

“There was a perfectly good reason nobody saw this coming: because a three-point lead for Harris in deep-red Iowa was not reality,” the lawsuit said. “It was election-interfering fiction.”

The poll increased enthusiasm among Democrats, compelled Republicans to divert campaign time and money to areas in which they were ahead, and deceived the public into thinking Democrats were doing better than they actually were, Trump charged.

The lawsuit was filed late Monday in Polk County district court in Iowa. It cites Iowa consumer fraud law, and doesn’t ask for specific monetary damages, but rather wants a trial jury to award triple the amount of what it determines actual damages to be.

Whatever happens legally, the case could have a chilling effect beyond Iowa. Trump said in legal papers that he wanted it to deter “radicals from continuing to act with corrupt intent in releasing polls manufactured for the purpose of skewing election results in favor of Democrats.”

Lark-Marie Anton, Des Moines Register spokeswoman, said the newspaper acknowledged the pre-election poll did not reflect Trump’s ultimate margin of victory and released the data and a technical explanation.

“We stand by our reporting on the matter and believe a lawsuit would be without merit,” she said.

Selzer did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Tuesday. But she told PBS in Iowa last week that “it’s not my ethic” to set up a poll to deliver a specific response. She said she was mystified about what motivation people would think she had.

“To suggest without a single shred of evidence that I was in cahoots with somebody, I was being paid by somebody, it’s all just kind of, it’s hard to pay too much attention to it except that they are accusing me of a crime,” she said.

Lawsuit accuses State Department of creating loopholes for Israel on military aid and human rights

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The State Department has carved out exceptions for close ally Israel that block a U.S. law restricting foreign military support over human rights abuses, a lawsuit from a group of Palestin-

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ians in Gaza and American relatives asserted Tuesday.

Former State Department officials and crafters of the 1997 Leahy law were among those advising and backing the lawsuit.

The lawsuit details the barriers that it accuses the State Department of creating on Israel's behalf to skirt enforcement and asks courts to intervene. That is after campus protests and moves by some lawmakers failed in their goal of limiting U.S. military support to Israel over civilian deaths in Gaza during the war with Hamas.

"It's really a modest set of goals here: There's a U.S. law. We'd like the federal government to adhere to U.S. law," said Ahmed Moor, a Philadelphia-based Palestinian American who joined the lawsuit on behalf of cousins, uncles and aunts displaced and killed in the 14-month war.

The law bars U.S. military assistance to foreign military units when there is credible evidence of gross human rights abuses.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken has denied that the department has given Israel a pass. "Do we have a double standard? The answer is no," he said in April. The State and Justice departments declined to comment Tuesday.

Israel says it makes every effort to limit harm to Palestinian civilians in its military operations. The Biden administration has warned Israel to do more to spare civilians in the Gaza war, holding back one known weapons shipment of 2,000-pound bombs.

A State Department report in May concluded there was "reasonable" evidence that Israel's use of U.S.-provided weapons in Gaza violated international law that protects civilians but bypassed a decision on limiting arms, saying the war itself made it impossible for U.S. officials to judge for certain. It also declined last month to hold back arms transfers as it had threatened over humanitarian aid to Gaza.

Charles Blaha, a former State Department official who helped oversee reviews under the Leahy law, argued that enforcing the law for Israel would have prevented much of the harm that civilians in Gaza are suffering.

"The secretary of state has made all the decisions so far on Israel and the Leahy law, and every single decision has resulted in those units being eligible" for continued U.S. military support, Blaha said. "And that's not the way the normal process works."

U.S. military support to Israel in the light of Palestinian civilian deaths was a fraught issue in the presidential election. Republicans and many Democrats demanded unwavering military backing to Israel. The Biden administration's refusal to limit support cost Democrats some votes from some Arab and Muslim voters and others.

Tuesday's lawsuit is part of a last push on the outgoing Biden administration by Muslim Americans and others to limit U.S. military support to Israel, which is estimated to have reached \$17.9 billion in the first year of the war — over its treatment of Palestinian civilians.

Two former Senate staffers, Tim Reiser and Stephen Rickard, were instrumental in crafting the law named for former Democratic Sen. Patrick Leahy and said the rising death toll in Gaza warranted the court case.

The nonprofit Democracy for the Arab World Now, an Arab-rights group founded by slain Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, helped bring the lawsuit for five Palestinians and Palestinian Americans. The plaintiffs include a former Gaza math teacher and humanitarian worker now living in a tent after losing 20 family members and being uprooted seven times.

Hamas militants began the war with an Oct. 7, 2023, attack in Israel, killing about 1,200 people and taking some 250 hostages, some of whom are still being held. The Gaza health ministry, which does not distinguish between combatants and civilians in its death tolls, said the war has killed 45,000 Palestinians.

The lawsuit was filed under the Administrative Procedures Act. Groups ranging from immigration advocates, Medicare groups, petroleum giants and fishermen have used the law in the past to try to shape how U.S. public agencies enforce laws.

It accuses State Department officials under President Joe Biden of creating a series of high barriers when vetting Israel's military for Leahy law violations. Former State officials, including Blaha, have accused the U.S. of effectively exempting Israel from enforcement, and the lawsuit offers some details for the first time.

It claims obstacles include setting up a multimember committee from the State and Defense departments in 2020 solely to consider possible violations by the Israeli military and uniquely requiring the deputy secretary of state to sign off on any findings of violations.

The process also carves out an additional loophole for Israel, the lawsuit says, giving its government alone a chance to stave off a restriction of military support over a human rights abuses by showing it has addressed the problem.

The State Department used that exception in August, saying it had decided against cutting off aid to an Israeli military unit in the West Bank over grave human rights abuses because it removed two responsible soldiers from combat and committed to special training and oversight of remaining members. The unit was accused in the death of a 79-year-old Palestinian American man it had taken into custody.

On Monday, Blinken met at the State Department with the family of another American, 26-year-old Seattle resident Aysenur Ezgi Eygi, who was shot and killed after taking part in a demonstration in the West Bank in September.

Blinken told the family that Israel had recently informed the U.S. it was wrapping up its investigation of her death, Miller said Monday.

State officials in the 50-minute meeting "kept repeating this frankly kind of bogus claim of it being an accident," widower Hamid Ali said after the meeting.

U.S. officials told the family they did not yet know enough details to say whether the family's demands for an independent U.S. criminal investigation were warranted, Ali said.

A top Russian general is killed in a Moscow bombing claimed by Ukraine

By The Associated Press undefined

A senior Russian general was killed Tuesday by a bomb hidden in a scooter outside his apartment building in Moscow, a day after Ukraine's security service leveled criminal charges against him. A Ukrainian official said the service carried out the attack.

Lt. Gen. Igor Kirillov, the chief of the military's nuclear, biological and chemical protection forces, was killed as he left for his office. Kirillov's assistant also died in the attack.

Kirillov, 54, was under sanctions from several countries, including the U.K. and Canada, for his actions in Moscow's war in Ukraine. On Monday, Ukraine's Security Service, or SBU, opened a criminal investigation against him, accusing him of directing the use of banned chemical weapons.

An official with the SBU said the agency was behind the attack. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to release the information, described Kirillov as a "war criminal and an entirely legitimate target."

The SBU has said it recorded more than 4,800 occasions when Russia used chemical weapons on the battlefield since its full-scale invasion in February 2022. In May, the U.S. State Department said that it had recorded the use of chloropicrin, a poison gas first deployed in World War I, against Ukrainian troops.

Russia has denied using any chemical weapons in Ukraine and, in turn, has accused Kyiv of using toxic agents in combat.

Kirillov, who took his current job in 2017, was one of the most high-profile figures to level those accusations. He held numerous briefings to accuse the Ukrainian military of using toxic agents and planning to launch attacks with radioactive substances — claims that Ukraine and its Western allies rejected as propaganda.

The bomb used in Tuesday's attack was triggered remotely, according to Russian news reports. Images from the scene showed shattered windows and scorched brickwork.

The SBU official provided video that they said was of the bombing. It shows two men leaving a building shortly before a blast fills the frame.

Russia's top state investigative agency said it's looking into Kirillov's death as a case of terrorism, and officials in Moscow vowed to punish Ukraine.

Dmitry Medvedev, deputy head of Russia's Security Council chaired by President Vladimir Putin, described

the attack as an attempt by Kyiv to distract public attention from its military failures and vowed that its "senior military-political leadership will face inevitable retribution."

Some Russian military bloggers and hawkish commentators made unsubstantiated claims that the U.S. could have been involved in Kirillov's killing.

Asked about Kirillov's death, U.S. State Department spokesman Matthew Miller told reporters Tuesday: "The United States was not aware of it in advance and was not involved."

Speaking on the sidelines of a summit in Estonia, Sweden's Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson said he did not have details of the attack but told The Associated Press that it would be understandable for the Ukrainians "to do everything in their power to hit back."

In the past year, Russia has been on the front foot in the war, grinding deeper into the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine despite heavy losses. Ukraine tried to change the dynamic with an incursion into Russia's Kursk region, but it has continued to slowly lose ground on its own territory.

Since Russia invaded, several prominent figures have been killed in targeted attacks believed to have been carried out by Ukraine.

Darya Dugina, a commentator on Russian TV channels and the daughter of Kremlin-linked nationalist ideologue Alexander Dugin, died in a 2022 car bombing that investigators suspected was aimed at her father.

Vladlen Tatarsky, a popular military blogger, died in April 2023, when a statuette given to him at a party in St. Petersburg exploded. A Russian woman, who said she presented the figurine on orders of a contact in Ukraine, was convicted and sentenced to 27 years in prison.

In December 2023, Illia Kyva, a former pro-Moscow Ukrainian lawmaker who fled to Russia, was shot and killed near Moscow. The Ukrainian military intelligence lauded the killing, warning that other "traitors of Ukraine" would share the same fate.

On Dec. 9, a bomb planted under a car in the Russian-occupied Ukrainian city of Donetsk killed Sergei Yevsyukov, the former head of the Olenivka Prison where dozens of Ukrainian prisoners of war died in a missile strike in July 2022. One other person was injured in the blast. Russian authorities said they detained a suspect in the attack.

An Alabama woman is doing well after the latest experimental pig kidney transplant

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — An Alabama woman is recovering well after a pig kidney transplant last month that freed her from eight years of dialysis, the latest effort to save human lives with animal organs.

Towana Looney is the fifth American given a gene-edited pig organ — and notably, she isn't as sick as prior recipients who died within two months of receiving a pig kidney or heart.

"It's like a new beginning," Looney, 53, told The Associated Press. Right away, "the energy I had was amazing. To have a working kidney — and to feel it — is unbelievable."

Looney's surgery marks an important step as scientists get ready for formal studies of xenotransplantation expected to begin next year, said Dr. Robert Montgomery of NYU Langone Health, who led the highly experimental procedure on Nov. 25.

On Tuesday, NYU announced that Looney is recuperating well. She was discharged from the hospital just 11 days after surgery although she was temporarily readmitted this week to adjust her medications. Doctors expect her to return home to Gadsden, Alabama, in three months. If the pig kidney were to fail, she could begin dialysis again.

"To see hope restored to her and her family is extraordinary," said Dr. Jayme Locke, Looney's original surgeon who secured Food and Drug Administration permission for the transplant.

More than 100,000 people are on the U.S. transplant list, most who need a kidney. Thousands die waiting and many more who need a transplant never qualify. Now, searching for an alternate supply, scientists are genetically altering pigs so their organs are more humanlike.

Looney donated a kidney to her mother in 1999. Later pregnancy complications caused high blood pressure that damaged her remaining kidney, which eventually failed. It's incredibly rare for living donors to develop kidney failure although those who do are given extra priority on the transplant list.

But Looney couldn't get a match — she had developed antibodies abnormally primed to attack another human kidney. Tests showed she'd reject every kidney donors have offered.

Then Looney heard about pig kidney research at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and told Locke, at the time a UAB transplant surgeon, she'd like to try one. In April 2023, Locke filed an FDA application seeking an emergency experiment, under rules for people like Looney who are out of options.

The FDA didn't agree right away. Instead, the world's first gene-edited pig kidney transplants went to two sicker patients last spring, at Massachusetts General Hospital and NYU. Both also had serious heart disease. The Boston patient recovered enough to spend about a month at home before dying of sudden cardiac arrest deemed unrelated to the pig kidney. NYU's patient had heart complications that damaged her pig kidney, forcing its removal, and she later died.

Those disappointing outcomes didn't dissuade Looney, who was starting to feel worse on dialysis but, Locke said, hadn't developed heart disease or other complications. The FDA eventually allowed her transplant at NYU, where Locke collaborated with Montgomery.

Moments after Montgomery sewed the pig kidney into place, it turned a healthy pink and began producing urine.

Even if her new organ fails, doctors can learn from it, Looney told the AP: "You don't know if it's going to work or not until you try."

Blacksburg, Virginia-based Revivicor provided Looney's new kidney from a pig with 10 gene alterations. Its parent company, United Therapeutics said Tuesday it plans to file an application with the FDA "very soon" to begin clinical trials with that type of kidney.

Looney was initially discharged on Dec. 6, wearing monitors to track her blood pressure, heart rate and other bodily functions and returning to the hospital for daily checkups before her medication readmission. Doctors scrutinize her bloodwork and other tests, comparing them to prior research in animals and a few humans in hopes of spotting an early warning if problems crop up.

"A lot of what we're seeing, we're seeing for the first time," Montgomery said.

Locke, who recently joined the federal Health Resources and Services Administration, visited last week to check her longtime patient's progress. Looney hugged her, saying, "Thank you for not giving up on me."

"Never," Locke responded.

Left-hander Max Fried and Yankees finalize \$218 million, 8-year contract

NEW YORK (AP) — Left-hander Max Fried and the New York Yankees finalized a \$218 million, eight-year contract on Tuesday.

The deal was agreed to last week at the winter meetings after the Yankees lost outfielder Juan Soto to the rival Mets.

Fried's deal is the largest for a left-handed pitcher in baseball history, \$1 million more than David Price's seven-year contract with the Boston Red Sox ahead of the 2016 season.

"He's one of the game's really, really good pitchers and has a really good track record now of success," Yankees manager Aaron Boone said last week. "He's a special talent."

Fried gets a \$20 million signing bonus, half payable on Jan. 31, 2025, and the rest on Jan. 31, 2026. He gets salaries of \$12 million in each of the first two seasons and \$29 million in each of the remaining six.

Yankees fans were angry after Soto accepted the Mets' \$765 million, 15-year offer over the Yankees' \$760 million, 16-year proposal. The Yankees then redirected money to starting pitching, though Fried represents some risk: The two-time All-Star has been on the injured list 10 times since 2018, including at least once each season.

A high school teammate of Jack Flaherty and Lucas Giolito at Harvard-Westlake in Los Angeles, Fried

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gets the fourth-highest contract among pitchers behind the Los Angeles Dodgers' Yoshinobu Yamamoto (\$325 million for 12 years through 2035), the Yankees' Gerrit Cole (\$324 million for nine years through 2028) and Washington's Stephen Strasburg (\$245 million for seven years through 2026). Strasburg hasn't pitched since 2022 and has retired.

Yankees staff met with Fried on a Zoom session during the negotiations.

"Obviously watching him from afar over the last several years you know this is a guy you can tell really competes well on the mound and that came across in our meeting with him," Boone said.

After spending his first eight seasons with the Atlanta Braves, Fried joins a list of rotation possibilities that also includes Cole, Carlos Rodón, Luis Gil, Clarke Schmidt and Marcus Stroman.

Fried was 54-25 with a 2.81 ERA with five complete games and four shutouts in 112 starts over the past five seasons. He was among only three pitchers to throw two complete games this year, when there were just 16 in the major leagues.

A three-time Gold Glove winner who turns 31 on Jan. 18, Fried has one of the broadest repertoires in the major leagues, throwing seven different pitches. He averaged 93.9 mph this year with his fastball, which he threw 33.6% of the time. Fried mixed in 21% curveballs, 15.6% sinkers, 13.6% changeups, 5.9% sweepers, 5.6% sliders and 4.7% cutters.

He was 11-10 with a 3.25 ERA over 29 starts this year, striking out 166 and walking a career-high 57 in 174 1/3 innings. Fried missed time for left forearm neuritis, his seventh straight season on the IL.

He had prior IL stints for a blister on the middle finger of his pitching hand and strained left groin (2018), blister on left index finger (2019), muscle spasm on left side of back (2020), strained right hamstring (2021), concussion (2022) and strained left hamstring, strained left forearm and blister on left index finger (2023).

"There's inherent risks," Boone said, "but we feel like he's a really good pitcher and the way he goes about it, prepares, trains, we feel like he's doing everything he can to be a guy that's able to consistently go to the post."

Fried was the seventh overall pick in the 2012 amateur draft by the San Diego Padres. He had Tommy John surgery in August 2014 and was traded to the Atlanta Braves in December 2014 as part of a six-player deal that sent outfielder Justin Upton to the Padres.

He made his major league debut in August 2017 and was optioned to the minors five times in 2018.

Fried was 17-6 with a 4.02 ERA in 2019 and 7-0 with a 2.25 ERA in the pandemic-shortened 2020 season, finishing fifth in the National League Cy Young Award voting.

He went 14-7 with a 3.04 ERA in 2021, when he pitched six scoreless innings to beat Houston in the World Series Game 6 clincher and was 14-7 with a 2.48 ERA in 2022, when he made his first All-Star team. Fried was 8-1 with a 2.55 ERA over 14 starts in 2023.

A timeline of the investigation of the Gilgo Beach killings

By The Associated Press undefined

For years, women had been disappearing on Long Island. Then in 2010, investigators searching for a missing woman began finding 10 sets of human remains in the scrub along a barrier island parkway, not far from the sands of New York's remote Gilgo Beach. Police almost immediately feared some were left by a serial killer.

Over the years, investigators used DNA analysis and other clues to identify the victims, many of whom were sex workers. In some cases, they were able to connect them to remains found elsewhere on Long Island years earlier. Police also began reexamining other unsolved killings of women found dead on Long Island.

Prosecutors have now charged a Long Island architect, Rex Heuermann in seven killings.

Here is a timeline of the investigation:

Nov. 20, 1993: Two hunters discover the body of Sandra Costilla, 28, in a wooded area of North Sea, a hamlet in the Hamptons near the eastern end of Long Island. Costilla had been living in New York City.

April 20, 1996: The partial remains of Karen Vergata are discovered on Fire Island, a barrier beach off

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Long Island's southern coast. Her name remains unknown to investigators until 2022, when new DNA analysis helps them make an identification. Vergata, 34, was last in contact with her family on Feb. 14, 1996. She was involved in sex work when she vanished.

June 28, 1997: The partial remains of a woman, nicknamed "Peaches" by investigators after a tattoo on her body, are discovered stuffed inside a plastic tub in a state park in West Hempstead, New York. Her identity remains unknown.

September 2000: The partial skeletal remains of Valerie Mack, who had been working as an escort in Philadelphia, are found in a wooded area in Manorville, New York. Mack, 24, was last seen by her family in the spring or summer of that year in Port Republic, New Jersey.

July 26, 2003: The partial skeletal remains of Jessica Taylor are discovered in a wooded area of Manorville. She was 20 when she vanished and had been an escort working in New York City.

July 9, 2007: Maureen Brainard-Barnes, 25, who had traveled to New York City from her home in Norwich, Connecticut, for sex work, is last heard from by a friend. She says she is leaving her hotel to meet a client. Investigators later say cellphone records showed her phone was last used on Long Island.

July 10, 2009: Melissa Barthelemy, a 24-year-old sex worker, is last seen at her apartment in the Bronx. She tells a friend she is going to see a man and will be back in the morning. Cellphone location data puts her phone's last known location on Long Island. Days later, a man begins using Barthelemy's mobile phone to make taunting phone calls to her relatives.

May 1, 2010: Shannan Gilbert, a sex worker, disappears in the barrier island community of Oak Beach, New York, after fleeing the house of a client and banging on a neighbor's door. In a recorded 911 call, she tells a dispatcher that people are after her, but she can also be heard refusing offers of help. Her pimp, the client and his neighbor all tell police she appeared disoriented and ran into the night on her own.

June 6, 2010: Megan Waterman, 22, who had traveled to Long Island from Maine for sex work, is last seen at a motel in Hauppauge, New York.

Sept. 2, 2010: Amber Lynn Costello, 27, is last seen leaving her home in West Babylon to meet with a sex work client. A male friend later tells investigators he noticed a Chevrolet Avalanche, presumably driven by the client.

December 11, 2010: A police officer and his dog discover Barthelemy's remains while conducting a training exercise along Ocean Parkway.

Dec. 13, 2010: Police find the bodies of Costello, Brainard-Barnes and Waterman on the same quarter-mile stretch of Ocean Parkway where Barthelemy's remains were located.

Dec. 14, 2010: Suffolk County Police Commissioner Richard Dormer publicly announces the discovery of the bodies and says a serial killer might be to blame. Police expand the search, looking for additional remains or any sign of Gilbert.

March 29, 2011: Some of Taylor's remains are discovered along Ocean Parkway.

April 4, 2011: Additional remains of Valerie Mack are found along Ocean Parkway. Near those remains, investigators also find the remains of an unidentified female toddler, later identified through DNA as the daughter of "Peaches." Elsewhere on the parkway, investigators discover the remains of an Asian male. Investigators estimate he died five to 10 years earlier and was in his late teens or early 20s. He still has not been identified.

April 11, 2011: Additional remains of Vergata are discovered along Ocean Parkway, several miles west of Gilgo Beach. Police also find remains belonging to "Peaches" along the beach parkway.

Dec. 13, 2011: Gilbert's skeletal remains are discovered in a tidal marsh near Oak Beach. After an autopsy and further investigation, Suffolk Police say she most likely accidentally drowned. Her family still suspects she was slain.

January 2022: The Suffolk County district attorney convenes a new task force to investigate the Gilgo Beach killings.

July 13, 2023: Investigators arrest Heuermann and charge him with murdering Costello, Waterman and Barthelemy. The key evidence in the case is mobile phone location data suggesting that Heuermann and

the women were in the same places at some of the same times, and traces of DNA found on the remains.

Jan. 16, 2024: Heuermann is charged in the death of Brainard-Barnes. Prosecutors say a hair found with her corpse is genetically similar to a DNA sample from Heuermann's wife.

Late April 2024: Police conduct a new, multiday search of a wooded area in Manorville where Taylor and Mack's remains were discovered more than a decade earlier. They also perform a new search on the spot where Costilla's body was discovered in 1993.

May 20, 2024: Investigators launch a new search of Heuermann's home. It lasts nearly a week.

June 6, 2024: Heuermann is charged with murdering Costilla and Taylor. He pleads not guilty.

Dec. 17, 2024: An indictment is unsealed charging Heuermann in Mack's death. Heuermann pleads not guilty.

Pennsylvania's Bethlehem: The city founded by Moravians on Christmas eve keeps its traditions alive

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO Associated Press

BETHLEHEM, Pa. (AP) — On Christmas Eve in 1741, Moravian settlers named this Pennsylvania city after the biblical birthplace of Jesus. Nearly 300 years later, Moravians continue celebrating their Christmas season traditions in Bethlehem.

They include the "putz," a Nativity scene that tells the story of Christ's birth with miniature wooden figurines, the making of thousands of beeswax candles by hand as a symbol of the light that Jesus brought to the world and a "lovefeast," a song service where worshippers share a simple meal of sweet buns and coffee in their pews.

"Like all Moravian traditions, the importance of it is that it brings people together," said the Rev. Janel Rice, senior pastor of Central Moravian Church — Bethlehem's first congregation and the oldest Moravian church in North America.

"Building community, emphasizing that, over doctrine or dogma, is really the Moravian practice and tradition at our core," she said.

Moravians relate to the story of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, Rice said, because their ancestors began as a refugee church fleeing religious persecution. The Nativity is also a poignant reminder today, when the number of people fleeing their homes because of war, violence and persecution continues to rise worldwide.

"It's so crucial because this story is not just Jesus's story of 2,000 years ago. It's today's story. And we need to make sure that we're living the word that we were told when it comes to these refugees," said church member Sarah Wascura. "That word is to give them refuge and to take care of them and to love them as ourselves."

A town founded on Christmas Eve

The Moravian Church is one of the world's oldest Protestant denominations. Its name comes from the historical provinces of Bohemia and Moravia in what is now the Czech Republic.

Their beliefs of practice over dogma began with a religious reformer, John Hus, who led a protest movement against some of the practices of Roman Catholic hierarchy. Hus believed congregants in his church should listen to Mass and read the Bible in their native Czech instead of Latin. He was accused of heresy and burned at the stake in 1415.

His ideas were carried on by his supporters, who broke with Rome and founded the Moravian Church, or Unitas Fratrum (Unity of Brethren) in 1457 — decades before Martin Luther's Protestant Reformation.

Moravians facing persecution eventually fled to Herrnhut, Germany, and established the original Renewed Moravian Church settlement, according to accounts of church history.

Moravian missionaries later settled in Pennsylvania.

On Christmas Eve in 1741, their leader, Count Nicolas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, who was visiting them, led them to a stable, where they sang the hymn "Jesus Call Thou Me." Its lyrics say: "Not Jerusalem — lowly Bethlehem 'twas that gave us Christ to save us." Thus inspired, Zinzendorf named the settlement Bethlehem.

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A beloved tradition retells the story of the birth of Jesus

Bethlehem's first settlers brought with them hand-carved figures to retell the story of Christ's birth. The tradition is known as the putz, from the German word "putzen," meaning to clean or decorate.

"It relates back to the creches of the Middle Ages," Rice said. "But it's not just a creche, which would be just the one Nativity scene."

Instead, it uses figures to tell different parts of the Gospel in miniature, including Mary's annunciation and the visit of the three wise men to the infant Jesus.

In Victorian days, Rice said, Bethlehem's residents would "go putzing" — visiting each other's homes between Christmas Eve and New Year's Day to look at Nativity scenes.

In 1937, the local chamber of commerce launched a campaign promoting Bethlehem as "Christmas City USA." As part of that promotion, they took the tradition of the putz to the historic Hotel Bethlehem on Main Street. Thousands turned up.

"The story goes that the hotel got so crowded that they couldn't really accommodate the number of people that were coming to see it, and they asked Central Moravian Church to host it."

For every Christmas since then, the community putz has been put together by the church's congregants and displayed at the nearby Christian education building.

"It's more than Christmas for four weeks a year," said Wascura, who went to the putz on her first date with Bob Wascura, her husband of 33 years.

"The nature of the faith heritage of the city is something that is never forgotten."

On a recent day, she led families visiting the community putz to their seats. After recounting a brief history of the Moravian Church and the Pennsylvania city, she drew a curtain to display the dozens of wooden figures — angels, shepherds, kings carrying gifts — in a tiny landscape decorated with pebbles, wood and moss.

Children and parents listened to the recorded voice of Janel Rice, who narrated the biblical story about the other Bethlehem.

"We might wonder why setting up a putz and telling the story of Jesus' birth is so important to the Moravians, and now to the city of Bethlehem," Rice says in the recording. "One reason has to do with the naming of the city itself."

The church choir, after some singing, gave way to the powerful sound of the renowned Moravian Trombone Choir, known for playing its brassy tunes from the belfry of Central Moravian Church. When the lights turned on, children approached the stage to look up close at the figurines and point at surprises near the manger, including miniature zebras, lions and giraffes.

"We feel really lucky to live so close to Bethlehem with all of the history here and specifically the history pertaining to Christmas," said visitor Kelly Ann Ryan. "It's just something that we can't miss every holiday season as it rolls around."

She came to Bethlehem from a nearby town with her husband, Daniel, and their 5- and 8-year-old sons to see the community putz, in what she said has become a family tradition.

"Telling the Christmas story this way is a great way for kids to connect with it."

Lighting candles on Christmas Eve, joining Santa for a sleigh ride

Christmas — from the Christian celebration to the secular commercial holiday — is omnipresent in Bethlehem.

On a recent day, Santa Claus checked on a red sleigh (drawn by horses instead of reindeer) outside Central Moravian before he led families who hopped on for a tour of Bethlehem and its Moravian church settlements, which were recently designated by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.

Others strolled to nearby holiday-themed wooden huts or along Main Street with its stores decorated with Christmas globes and Moravian stars. Some stopped outside an Italian restaurant to greet Santa and Mrs. Claus, who welcomed diners and posed for photos.

Across town, vendors sold ornaments at Christkindlmarkt, in the shadow of rusting blast furnaces of Bethlehem Steel illuminated in red and green. That company once supplied steel for construction of the

Empire State Building, the Golden Gate Bridge and other landmarks.

At Central Moravian, the choir sang hymns while sacristans handed out buns and mugs of coffee to families who enjoyed the sustenance in their pews at the "lovefeast."

After Rice delivered a final blessing, Linda Thudium walked up the stairs and opened a large closet, where the congregation keeps thousands of handmade candles wrapped in red ribbons that they light during Christmas services.

"To me, this is Christmas — looking at these candles," said Thudium. She recalled attending Christmas Eve services with lit candles since she was 5, a tradition she continued with her children and grandchildren.

"To me, this is just magical. I remember my parents doing this, my grandparents," she said. "It's just a wonderful warm feeling of being connected with this church."

Is that a drone or a plane? Experts help explain the differences

By JOHN SEEWER and MARK SCOLFORO Associated Press

Up in the sky, is that a drone, a plane or a helicopter?

Experts who study unmanned aircraft systems — better known as drones — say it can be tough to tell from miles away. But there are clues.

A light in the sky at night can easily be misinterpreted, according to John Slaughter, director of the Unmanned Aircraft Systems Research and Operations Center at the University of Maryland.

"You can't just walk outside and say, 'Oh, that's not a drone,' or 'That is one.' All you can really factually say is, 'I saw a light in the sky,'" Slaughter said.

Dozens of mysterious nighttime flights first spotted in New Jersey last month and now being seen across the U.S. have raised concerns among residents and officials. Part of the worry stems from the flying objects initially being spotted near the Picatinny Arsenal, a U.S. military research and manufacturing facility, and over President-elect Donald Trump's golf course in Bedminster.

Are those flashing lights a plane?

Planes and helicopters all have flashing lights and typically at least one red anti-collision light, often two. They also sport navigation lights, which are steady, red and green colored lights like the ones found on boats. Many will also have flashing white strobe lights at their wingtips. And they have bright landing lights.

Drones flying at night are only required to have one bright, anti-collision light that's visible 3 miles (5 kilometers) away. But drone owners can add other lights, so some have more than one. Drones are smaller, so when they have multiple lights they are close together, but at night it's often not possible to figure out precisely how far away they are.

"A light is just a bright point," Slaughter said. "And it might be 100 yards (90 meters) away, it could be literally 40 miles (65 kilometers) away, and it looks the same."

What noise does a drone make?

Drones tend to be quieter and make a higher-pitched buzzing noise than that generated by the jet engines or propellers that drive planes and helicopters. But bigger drones can be louder, and the sound may be difficult to discern from a distance.

Drones heavier than about a half-pound (0.2 kilograms) may have an identifying number displayed on the outside.

"You certainly wouldn't see it at night, and you'd have to be up close to see it, you know, in the daytime," said Paul R. Snyder, director of the Unmanned Aircraft System program in the University of North Dakota's Aerospace Sciences School.

Does a drone move like that?

Planes and even helicopters tend to move smoothly in the air, but multicopter drones can stop on a dime, pivot 90 degrees and reverse course, Slaughter said.

"That kind of motion can give you a clue that you're looking at a drone, not an aircraft," he said.

And the vast majority of drones will be operating below 400 feet (122 meters), following federal regulations.

Americans' trust in nation's court system hits record low, survey finds

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — At a time of heightened political division, Americans' confidence in their country's judicial system and courts dropped to a record low of 35% this year, according to a new Gallup poll.

The United States saw a sharp drop of 24 percentage points over the last four years, setting the country apart from other wealthy nations where most people on average still express trust in their systems.

The results come after a tumultuous period that included the overturning of the nationwide right to abortion, the indictment of former President Donald Trump and the subsequent withdrawal of federal charges, and his attacks on the integrity of the judicial system.

The drop wasn't limited to one end of the political spectrum. Confidence dropped among people who disapproved of the country's leadership during Joe Biden's presidency and among those who approved, according to Gallup. The respondents weren't asked about their party affiliations.

It's become normal for people who disapprove of the country's leadership to also lose at least some confidence in the court system. Still, the 17-point drop recorded among that group under Biden was precipitous, and the cases filed against Trump were likely factors, Gallup said.

Among those who did approve of the country's leadership, there was an 18-point decline between 2023 and 2024, possibly reflecting dissatisfaction with court rulings favoring Trump, Gallup found. Confidence in the judicial system had been above 60% among that group during the first three years of Biden's presidency but nosedived this year.

Trump had faced four criminal indictments this year, but only a hush-money case in New York ended with a trial and conviction before he won the presidential race.

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

Other Gallup findings have shown that Democrats' confidence in the Supreme Court dropped by 25 points between 2021 and 2022, the year the justices overturned constitutional protections for abortion. Their trust climbed a bit, to 34%, in 2023, but dropped again to 24% in 2024. The change comes after a Supreme Court opinion that Trump and other former presidents have broad immunity from criminal prosecution.

Trust in the court among Republicans, by contrast, reached 71% in 2024.

The judicial system more broadly also lost public confidence more quickly than many other U.S. institutions over the last four years. Confidence in the federal government, for example, also declined to 26%. That was a 20-point drop — not as steep as the decline in confidence in the courts.

The trust drop is also steep compared with other countries around the world. Only a handful of other countries have seen larger drops during a four-year period. They include a 46-point drop in Myanmar during the period that overlapped the return of military rule in 2021, a 35-point drop in Venezuela amid deep economic and political turmoil from 2012 to 2016 and a 28-point drop in Syria in the runup and early years of its civil war.

The survey was based on telephone interviews with a random sample of 1,000 U.S. adults between June 28 and August 1.

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Today in History: December 18 Donald Trump impeached for the first time

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Wednesday, Dec. 18, the 353rd day of 2024. There are 13 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Dec. 18, 2019, the U.S. House impeached President Donald Trump on two charges, sending his case to the Senate for trial; the articles of impeachment accused him of abusing the power of the presidency to investigate rival Joe Biden ahead of the 2020 election and then obstructing Congress' investigation. (It was the first of two Trump impeachment trials that would end in acquittal by the Senate.)

Also on this date:

In 1865, the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, abolishing slavery, was declared in effect by Secretary of State William H. Seward.

In 1892, Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky's ballet "The Nutcracker" publicly premiered in St. Petersburg, Russia; although now considered a classic, it received a generally negative reception from critics.

In 1917, Congress passed the 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibiting "the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors" and sent it to the states for ratification. (It was repealed in 1933 by the 21st Amendment.)

In 1957, the Shippingport Atomic Power Station in Pennsylvania, the first nuclear facility to generate electricity in the United States, went on line. (It was taken out of service in 1982.)

In 2011, the last convoy of heavily armored U.S. troops left Iraq, crossing into Kuwait in darkness in the final moments of a nearly nine-year war.

In 2022, Argentina beat France 4-2 in a penalty shootout to claim a third World Cup, the first for star Lionel Messi.

Today's Birthdays: Chef Jacques Pépin is 89. Rock musician Keith Richards is 81. Filmmaker Alan Rudolph is 81. Filmmaker Steven Spielberg is 78. Filmmaker Gillian Armstrong is 74. R&B singer Angie Stone is 63. Actor Brad Pitt is 61. Singer Alejandro Sanz is 56. Tennis Hall of Famer Arantxa Sanchez Vicario is 53. Pop singer Sia is 49. Country singer Randy Houser is 49. Actor Katie Holmes is 46. Singer Christina Aguilera is 44. MLB outfielder Ronald Acuña Jr. is 27. NFL quarterback Jayden Daniels is 24. Singer Billie Eilish is 23.