

Groton Daily Independent

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Monday, Jan. 13

Senior Menu: Chicken and rice casserole, mixed vegetables, tropical fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: French toast.

School Lunch: Corn dog, baked beans.

Groton Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Community Center, 1 p.m.

Boys JH/JV hosting Invitational Tournament, 5 p.m.

School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

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

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

United Methodist: PEOPLE Meeting (outside group), 7 p.m.

Tuesday, Jan. 14

Senior Menu: Salisbury steak, mashed potatoes with gravy, carrots, mandarin orange salad, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Scones.

School Breakfast: Chicken strips, fries.

JH Basketball hosts Roncalli (7th at 6 p.m., 8th at 7 p.m.)

Common Cents Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., 209 N Main.

Pantry, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m., Groton Community Center

Emmanuel Lutheran: Council meeting, 6 p.m.

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



**One day you will realize
that material things
mean nothing. All that
matters is the well
being of the people in
your life. Amen.**

Wednesday, Jan. 15

Senior Menu: Vegetable soup, ham salad sandwich, peaches, cookie.

School Breakfast: Oatmeal.

School Lunch: Cheese quesadilla, corn.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.

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

Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.

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

Thursday, Jan. 16

Senior Menu: Lasagna rotini bake, salad with dressing, baked apples, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Biscuits.

School Lunch: BBQ Chicken sandwich, puzzle tots. Basketball Double Header at Tiospa Zina (Girls JV 4 p.m., Boys JV at 5 p.m., Girls Varsity and Boys Varsity to follow)

Triangular Wrestling at Groton Area with Redfield and Webster, 6 p.m.

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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.

Flames Continue in LA

The death toll from devastating Los Angeles wildfires rose to 24 over the weekend, with more than 10,000 structures inside the city's metro area damaged or destroyed. Officials say the fires may be the costliest in US history—the cause of the fires has not yet been identified.

The two primary fires are the Palisades Fire to the west and the Eaton Fire on the city's east side. The former—around 10% contained as of this morning—destroyed the affluent Pacific Palisades neighborhood and left parts of nearby Malibu and Santa Monica under evacuation orders. The latter was close to 30% contained but had burned through the suburb of Altadena and surrounding areas.

Strong Santa Ana winds—blowing westward from the desert down the San Gabriel Mountains—are expected to return today and tomorrow, threatening to spread the flames toward the city.

India's Massive Pilgrimage

Today marks the opening of India's Maha Kumbh Mela festival, touted as one of the largest gatherings in history. A projected 400 million visitors will participate in the pilgrimage over the next six weeks, as officials have set up a temporary 10,000-acre city, including 150,000 tents, 3,000 kitchens, and 99 parking lots.

The Hindu pilgrimage occurs once every three years at a rotation of four traditional river sites, with the most sacred occasion taking place in the city of Prayagraj (formerly Allahabad) in the country's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, every 12 years. A sprawling pop-up economy of vendors supports participants as they ceremonially bathe in the Ganges River to wash away their sins and attend talks and discussions with religious leaders.

Observers claim the scale of investment in the event reflects the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's priority of reclaiming Hindu traditions from Islamic influences in the country, where 80% of the population is Hindu and 15% follows Islam.

North Korean Soldiers Captured

A pair of North Korean soldiers fighting for Russia were captured by Ukrainian forces, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy revealed over the weekend. It marks the first time North Korean forces have been taken alive and held for questioning since their arrival at the front lines.

While estimates vary, analysts believe North Korea sent upward of 10,000 troops to assist Russia sometime in October. The group represents less than 1% of North Korea's 1.3 million-person military—though how effective they are is unknown, as the country hasn't deployed troops in a large-scale combat scenario since the Korean War in 1950-53.

Separately, the US leveled a new round of sanctions targeting Russia's energy sector, including "shadow fleets" of ships secretly ferrying oil and gas. The restrictions are expected to impact China and India, which have become top destinations for Russian energy exports since the start of the war.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

The 2025 Grammy Awards (Feb. 2) face possible postponement due to Los Angeles wildfires. Jeff Bridges, Paris Hilton, and Billy Crystal among Hollywood stars who have lost homes to wildfires. Sam Moore, Rock & Roll Hall of Famer and one-half of soul duo Sam & Dave, dies at age 89. Leslie Charleson, actress best known for starring on "General Hospital" for 46 years, dies at age 79. Ohio State tops Texas 28-14 in College Football Playoff semifinal, will take on Notre Dame in national championship (Jan. 20). NFL Wild Card round wraps up tonight; see latest playoff bracket and schedule.

Science & Technology

Blue Origin attempts delays first full launch of New Glenn rocket due to vehicle issues; date of next launch attempt to be determined.

Researchers discover new type of cell in cartilage that acts as "bubble wrap," providing cushioning and structure to surrounding tissue, including making the human nose flexible.

New theory suggests Pluto may have captured its largest moon after a collision billions of years ago; how Charon, almost half the size of Pluto, became trapped in orbit has been a longstanding mystery.

Business & Markets

Markets tumble Friday (S&P 500 -1.5%, Dow -1.6%, Nasdaq -1.6%) as strong jobs report lowers expectations of interest rate cuts.

Apple antitrust lawsuit begins in the UK today; tech giant faces claims it charges excessive fees on App Store downloads, faces up to \$1.8B in fines.

Federal judge rules American Airlines violated federal law by emphasizing environmental, social, and governance principles in investment decisions for employee 401(k) plans.

Politics & World Affairs

Special counsel Jack Smith resigns from the Department of Justice; Smith led separate probes into President-elect Donald Trump over alleged election interference and mishandling of classified documents.

Senate confirmation hearings for Trump nominees begin this week; see schedule.

Israel sends David Barnea, director of the country's Mossad intelligence service, to Qatar to join Gaza ceasefire talks.

Winter storm brings freezing temperatures, multiple inches of snow across the US South from Texas to Georgia; more than 10,000 flights canceled or delayed over the weekend.

“The Seven Warning Signs of Cancer”

Recently I was working with my son’s scout troop to help them achieve the personal fitness merit badge. This merit badge has many requirements including discussions about healthy habits, diet, and exercise. The scouts keep track of their exercise over a 12 week period and log everything they eat over a few days as well. One of the discussions covers the seven warning signs of cancer.

This is a simple list of concerning symptoms to watch out for and reasons to go see a doctor. Indeed, with each of these I am reminded of patients that caught their

cancer diagnoses early enough to get the treatments they needed. While having any of these symptoms certainly does not mean someone has cancer, it would be wise to seek medical attention.

One warning sign is a change in bowel or bladder habits. These could be signs of colon or bladder cancer.

A second sign is abnormal bleeding. Blood in the stool and blood in the urine are symptoms to get checked out soon. Abnormal uterine bleeding, which may include heavy or irregular periods, and bleeding after menopause, deserve more attention as well.

If you experience a sore that does not heal on the skin or in the mouth, or see changes to moles or other skin lesions, then these may be a third sign of cancer that warrant an examination and possibly a biopsy to evaluate for skin cancer.

Abnormal lumps or bumps is a fourth sign. If you experience a breast lump or thickening or change in breast tissue, please get this checked out as it could be a sign of breast cancer. A lump in the testicle could be a sign of testicular cancer. Persistent swollen lymph nodes warrant further attention.

Unintentional weight loss is a fifth reason to see your doctor. While efforts at a healthy diet and exercise are good reasons to lose weight, bad reasons can include thyroid problems, depression, diabetes, and cancer.

Trouble swallowing or ongoing indigestion or heartburn is a sixth sign that could be a sign of cancer of the mouth, throat, esophagus, or stomach.

Finally, a seventh set of symptoms to watch for include a chronic cough or hoarseness that persists for a month or more. These could be a sign of throat or lung cancer, and warrant further evaluation.

This list could be longer and more detailed, and having any of these symptoms can often be caused by benign, common reasons that are nothing to worry about. However, it is important to see your trusted physician or other medical provider if you experience any of the above symptoms. Please, do not delay and wait for a symptom to pass on its own. Your body is giving you a chance to get evaluated and help yourself. Pay attention!

Andrew Ellsworth, MD. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices Family Medicine at Avera Medical Group in Brookings, South Dakota. Follow The Prairie Doc® at www.prairiedoc.org, Facebook, Instagram, Youtube and Threads. Prairie Doc Programming includes On Call with the Prairie Doc®, a medical Q&A show (most Thursdays at 7pm streaming on Facebook and SDPB), 2 podcasts, and a Radio program (on SDPB), providing health information based on science, built on trust.



Andrew Ellsworth, MD

Gregory County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle fatal crash

Where: 350th Avenue and 286th Street, nine miles north of Herrick, SD

When: 2:09 p.m., Saturday, January 11, 2025

Driver 1: 40-year-old male from Herrick, SD, no injuries

Vehicle 1: 2001 Ford F-250

Seat belt Used: No

Driver 2: 59-year-old female from Fairfax, SD, fatal injuries

Vehicle 2: 2007 Honda CR-V

Seat belt Used: No

Gregory County, S.D.- A Fairfax, SD woman died in a two-car crash, nine miles north of Herrick, SD Saturday afternoon.

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

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2001 Ford F-250 was traveling northbound on 350th Avenue near 286th Street. At the same time, the driver of a 2007 Honda CR-V was traveling southbound on 350th Avenue. The vehicles met at the crest of a hill where they collided.

The driver of the Ford was uninjured. The driver of the Honda sustained fatal injuries.

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

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



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Alternative school teachers tout new approaches, but oversight concerns linger

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JANUARY 12, 2025 12:14 PM

Sara VanDerVliet didn't have a minute to spare.

The agricultural education teacher was responsible for 150 students split between seven classrooms in the Tri-Valley School District. She saw each student for an hour a day, with 20 other students in each class.

As a Future Farmers of America adviser, she also managed up to 100 students with nearly 30 competitions throughout the year jammed between her responsibilities as a teacher, farm wife and a mother of four.

She felt guilty. She didn't have the time to do her job well, she thought. After teaching for 17 years in the public school, she felt like she was failing her students and herself.

"It got to the point where it was sucking the life out of me, and my own kids were put on the back-burner," VanDerVliet recalled.

So she quit.

VanDerVliet is one of thousands of teachers across the country to leave their jobs since the pandemic, which has added to understaffing problems at some public schools, including in South Dakota. Reasons for leaving other than retirement include too many responsibilities, too little pay and concerns about well-being, based on a 2022 McKinsey and Company survey.

But VanDerVliet didn't leave the profession. She started a hybrid school called Buffalo Christian Home-school Academy. The school combines in-person teaching in a classroom setting twice a week and at-home learning the rest of the week.

She incorporates her faith into her work, teaches a smaller number of students, and threads agriculture — the lifeblood of her rural southeastern South Dakota students — throughout all grade levels, rather than reserving it for high school.

For decades, alternative instruction was synonymous with homeschooling. In recent years, it's changed to include pods, co-ops, microschools, hybrid schools and online schools. For a growing number of South Dakota students, alternative instruction exists on a spectrum between school and home, in person and online, with teachers ranging from parents to paid professionals.

Alternative instruction has nearly tripled in South Dakota over the last decade from 3,933 students in 2014 to 11,489 — now making up about 7% of school-age children in the state.

The rise is one of the highest in the nation, and Gov. Kristi Noem is proposing to support it with \$4 million for education savings accounts of \$3,000 per student, which could be used to pay for a portion of private school tuition or curriculum for alternative instruction.

Noem's proposed funding could be used for tuition to Buffalo Christian Homeschool Academy. VanDerVliet's alternative school is one of over a dozen in South Dakota — many started within the last four years by former educators.

As alternative instruction grows and shifts toward online and microschool models, critics have grown concerned about quality and accountability, because some alternative schools lack accreditation and have uncertified teachers.

Buffalo Christian, which is unaccredited, opened in the fall of 2022. Families from within an hour and a half's drive of Humboldt bring their children to the two-story farmhouse twice a week, trusting VanDerVliet and her teaching partner with their children's education.

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VanDerVliet plans to keep her teaching certification up to date, especially so her students can participate in Future Farmers of America as a chapter. Her teaching partner was an elementary school teacher for 13 years, but did not keep her certification.

The first year, 22 students enrolled at Buffalo Christian. This school year, there are 31.

"If people have the heart to teach, no matter what form, they'll teach," VanDerVliet said. "And they'll teach well."

Wide variance in alternative schools

Hybrid schools like Buffalo Christian are one of several schooling options for alternative instruction students. Schools like VanDerVliet's are private schools unaccredited by the state. The schools aren't accountable to state standards, testing or oversight like public or state-recognized private schools, such as some religious, colony or tribal schools. The state Department of Education has virtually no oversight of unaccredited alternative schools due to deregulation passed by lawmakers and Gov. Noem in 2021.

Alternative schools vary by how they're operated: some meet five days a week, others less; some teach all subjects while others leave some for parental instruction; and some are religious while others are not. Ultimately, the structure depends on the founder.

At Acton Academy in Sioux Falls, the school doesn't use classrooms, it has "studios." Students don't learn from teachers, they learn from "guides." And it's not a school year, it's a "hero's journey."

Students lead their parent-teacher conferences and present their learning — through projects and debate — to their parents after each unit instead of taking a test.

The school encourages students to take ownership of themselves and their education before they dive heavily into academics, said Aaron Johnson, administrator of the Sioux Falls location. There are over 300 Acton Academy locations internationally.

Johnson has no background in education but some of his "guides" do.

"As a society, we've got it wrong on both ends," Johnson said. "You have a 5-year-old raised in academics when they need to understand themselves and peer relationships and do that through play, freedom and being an actual child — not 'here's your set of academic achievements as a 5-year-old.'"

Lack of regulation concerns critics

Samantha Field, government relations director for the national nonprofit Coalition for Responsible Home Education, said she has concerns about the rise in hybrid and microschools. She sees too much trust among the alternative instruction community in other adults and instructors. For example, not all learning communities require background checks to teach children.

While the onus is largely on the parents to ensure instructors are safe, it should also be a responsibility of the state, Field said. She was homeschooled from 1993 through 2005 in New Mexico, Florida and Iceland. She said her co-op instructors were not able to teach some subjects adequately.

"Generally, it's accepted that the state has a duty and responsibility to make sure its students are protected, even if the parent is not being responsible," Field said. "That's why teachers have background checks."

Some alternative schools are accredited through nongovernmental programs, such as Lakota Waldorf School on the Pine Ridge Reservation. The school is accredited through the Association for Waldorf Schools of North America. Acton Academy in Sioux Falls is accredited by the International Association of Learner Driven Schools.

Accreditation isn't required for alternative schools and programs in South Dakota. But it can mean more funding to the school, since it ensures the school meets expectations and standards. Accreditation can also inform parents of what the standards are at the school.

South Dakota law allows alternative instructors to teach up to 22 children at a time. Certification and background checks aren't required. Many staff members teaching alongside former educators aren't certified.

State accreditation would require certified staff. Most alternative school founders interviewed for this

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article said they do not want to be accredited.

They said accreditation requirements can counter alternative teaching methods, especially if the school does not want to comply with state-mandated content standards, classroom hours or testing. Complying with those requirements could make alternative schools no different than public schools, said Mary Jo Fairhead, founder of a microschool in Martin, which would defeat the purpose of starting an alternative school.

Jason Watson, superintendent of Sunshine Bible Academy in Miller, has a different view. The school is accredited by the state and the Association of Christian Schools International. Watson said few textbooks used at the academy would be found in a public school, and testing is not a driving force for the school. Most of the state requirements are "common sense" and what the school would be doing anyway, Watson said.

The "only specific benefit" to state accreditation for the private school, Watson said, is to receive tax-credit scholarships for students. The state created the private-school scholarship program in 2016 by giving tax credits to insurance companies for their scholarship donations. Last year, the Legislature raised the program's cap to \$5 million. About 30 of Sunshine Bible Academy's 77 students receive the scholarships.

Rob Monson, executive director of School Administrators of South Dakota, said the benefit of accreditation is that it provides expectations and standards for participating schools to show they are "viable."

Monson also advocates for stronger oversight of alternative instruction. He'd like to see the state return to "some sort of assessment" to check student progress and authorize school districts to reenroll students into an accredited program, either public or private, if they do not meet standards.

'We basically have an IEP for every child'

Fairhead said becoming state-accredited could undermine her mission at Onward Learning in Martin.

Her state certification as a teacher, principal and superintendent is still valid, and she plans to keep it up to date just in case the state changes its regulations and requires certification. But her other teachers at the school aren't certified, which she said isn't a concern for her.

While earning her undergraduate degree in education, she tutored students in Spearfish and came to believe public schools aren't serving some students who are "falling through the cracks." That belief grew while she served as a principal in Batesland, part of the Oglala Lakota County School District.

Schools identified as "improvement schools" by the state and federal government test their students more heavily than other school districts. Oglala Lakota schools start testing in kindergarten. Field trips or class parties are used to incentivize students to perform better on tests, Fairhead said. Students who don't perform don't participate.

Fairhead didn't like that approach.

"We've gone too far with it. We're using it in a way that has major consequences," she said. "At the end of the day, kids are humans and not a percentage on a test."

At Onward Learning, a birth through eighth-grade child care provider, preschool and microschool, Fairhead gives her students a placement test in math and reading when they enroll in school and tests them sparingly afterward. The microschool is based out of Fairhead's former house, which her family lived in before moving to a new home just outside of Martin.

"We basically have an IEP for every child based on their needs and interests and strengths," Fairhead said, referring to individualized education programs.

Fairhead conducts unit tests for math to help her understand if students need to revisit skills or concepts. She does not report test scores to the state or another entity.

Tests in English, writing, reading and science are mostly observation or essay based, Fairhead said. Students present a project or portfolio for history rather than take a test.

"A multiple choice test, anyone can guess and get right," Fairhead said, "but if you're presenting a project on the Civil War and you've done your research, you can create an awesome presentation showing all the things you've learned and explain it in your own words and voice. That's a deeper level of learning than filling in the right circle."

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She has 35 children, split among four teachers. Twelve children sit on the waiting list. About 90% of Fairhead's students are enrolled in the Oglala Sioux Tribe.

VanDerVliet's Buffalo Christian Homeschool Academy is also growing. She's planning to increase to 40 students and add another teacher to the program.

She still works as an FFA adviser for her students, since it's an integral part of agricultural education in the state. But she has 12 advisees instead of the hundred or so some other advisers handle.

She's "still crazy busy," but she has more time to teach her students and raise her children, to work on the family farm with her husband and create lesson plans, and to care for herself and those around her.

Another FFA adviser chatted with her at a competition last year. Before leaving to run after his students, he made sure she knew: She doesn't look as stressed.

What happens when alternative school children apply for college?

Typically, a transcript and passing score on a standardized exam, such as the ACT, are required to apply to colleges and universities. In South Dakota, transcripts of a student's educational career can be personally submitted by alternative instruction students rather than an official transcript from a school district, according to the South Dakota Board of Regents. Northern and Black Hills state universities don't require potential students to submit exam scores.

The headcount of public university students with an alternative instruction background grew from 248 systemwide in 2015 to 377 this fall. The number of alternative instruction high school dual enrollment students — taking a college class while still in high school — increased from 24 in 2015 to 71 this school year.

The average ACT score for first-year South Dakota public university students who self-identified as coming from an alternative instruction background stands at 26, according to state data for 2024 enrollment. The average score for South Dakota public school students is nearly 23. Retention among first-time alternative and public school students is comparable, with around 84% of students returning the next school year.

Types of alternative instruction

South Dakota recognizes three educational paths for students: public, nonpublic and alternative instruction. Public and nonpublic schools are accredited through the state Department of Education. The state doesn't accredit alternative instruction schools. Such programs can be accredited through other entities.

Types of alternative instruction include:

Homeschool: Parents take a leading role in their child's education by teaching them and assigning work at home. The state began regulating homeschooling in 1939.

Co-op: Homeschooling families gather on a weekly or monthly basis to share the educational workload of their children. Participating parents lead certain classes or subjects, or the group hires a tutor for a specific class, such as art or foreign language.

Microschool: Private, non-state accredited schools where alternative instruction students, either same- or mixed-age, are taught entirely by non-relative educators. Self-identified microschools in South Dakota often have a physical classroom space where children gather four to five days a week.

Online school: Private, non-state accredited educational program through Zoom, recorded lessons, interactive games, and more. Depending on the online school, students can take one or two courses to supplement their alternative instruction, or they take an entire course load.

Pod: Often used interchangeably with microschools, alternative instruction students, either same- or mixed-aged, are taught together by an educator who is not a parent. This can include online schooling that the students enroll in together.

Hybrid school: Private, non-state accredited school where alternative instruction students, either same- or mixed-age, are taught by non-relative educators. The school only meets some days a week and does not cover all of a child's education, leaving time for families to educate their children in other subjects.

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.

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EARTHTALK

Dear EarthTalk: Why are some people in the green building industry so bullish on bamboo? - -
Tim Carey, Puyallup, WA

Bamboo, one of the fastest-growing plants on the planet, is well-known as a rudimentary building material used for many centuries. Today, although the resource is often limited to scaffolding or remote housing projects, advocates have recently rallied for its usage in modern construction. To combat growing greenhouse gas emissions in this industry, bamboo can become an alternative to traditional building materials, mitigating climate change with both economic benefits and sustainable qualities.



While trees die after harvest & take decades to regrow, bamboo stalks can be continually harvested & regenerated without killing the plant. Credit: Pexels.com.

Contrary to popular belief, bamboo is a type of grass, not a tree, so it has a unique advantage as timber. While trees typically die after wood harvest and take decades to regrow, bamboo stalks can be continually harvested and regenerated without killing the plant, practically turning it into a limitless renewable resource. In addition, bamboo can match the sturdy properties of more resource-intensive substances. It withstands compression forces greater than concrete and has a tensile strength similar to steel.

What makes bamboo so unique is its ability to fight climate change directly. Like most plants, it absorbs carbon dioxide (CO₂), the primary greenhouse gas, throughout its life, removing it from the atmosphere and storing it. Researchers at China's Xihua University note that every cubic meter of bamboo structural components store up to 187 kilograms of CO₂ in its entire lifecycle. If harvested and utilized as a material, bamboo can act as a long-lasting vault for emissions.

"It's a great way of taking carbon out of the environment and making sure it doesn't get re-released," Atelier One engineer Chris Matthews told Dezeen in 2023. "In general, the idea of bio-based materials where we are capturing carbon and locking it up in a building—that has to be the way forward." Usually, industrially refining timber like tropical hardwood emits CO₂ enough to offset the benefits of this carbon bio-capture, making the process carbon neutral. Bamboo, however, is different. Dutch researchers found that the carbon footprint of flattened bamboo (similar uses to tropical hardwood) is a net-negative.

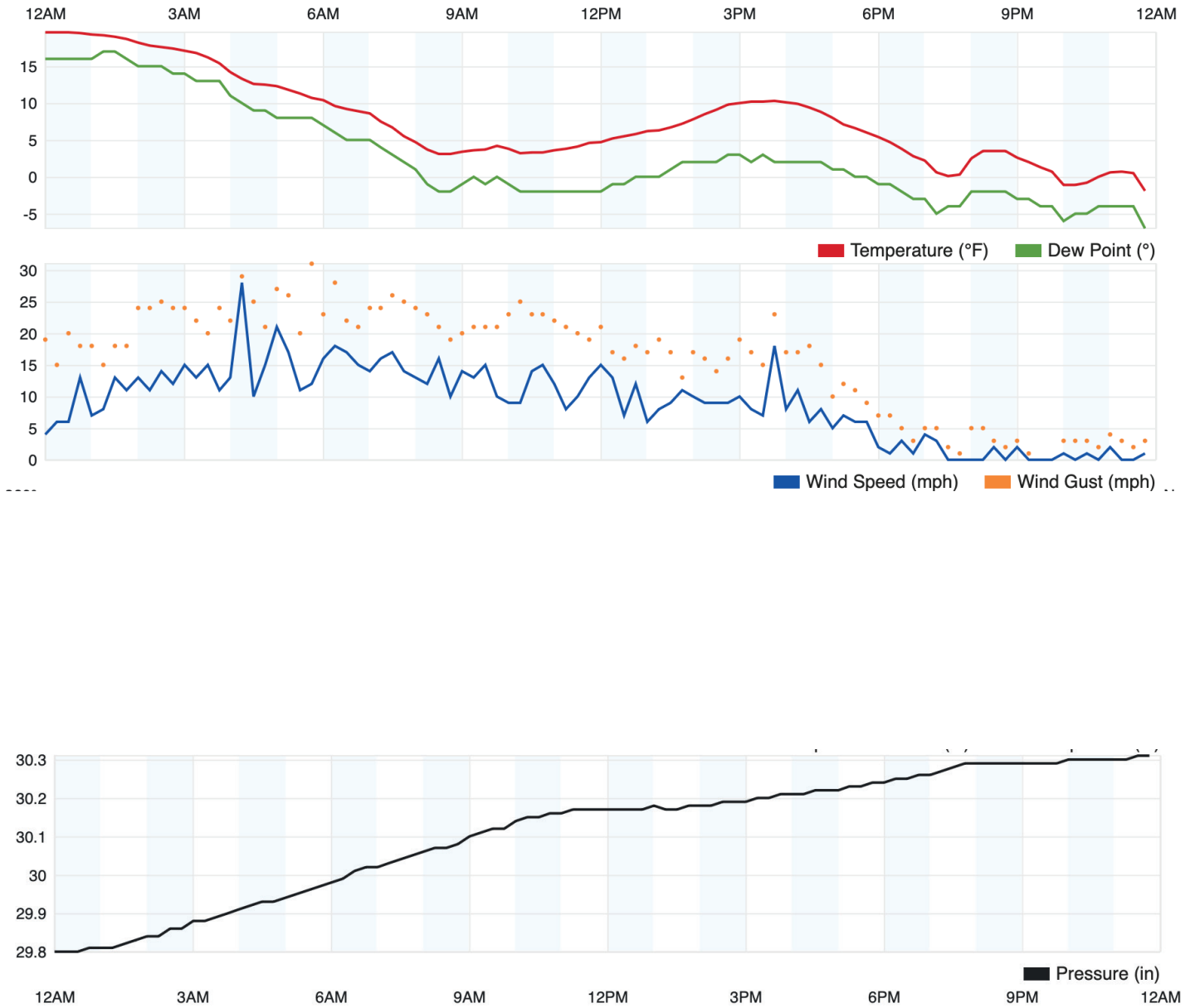
Bamboo isn't perfect; Matthews admits that it is "prone to fungal and insect attack." Thus, researchers continue to engineer more effective products such as laminated bamboo, densely glued blocks of bamboo fiber and hybrid materials. Project Drawdown, which provides free climate solutions ideas and guides to facilitate the transition to a carbon-neutral world, sponsors projects to implement bamboo into degraded forestland to help mitigate climate change. Bamboo can become the future of sustainable construction. Bamboo's renewability and carbon-sequestering abilities make it an ever more valuable building material.

EarthTalk® is produced by Roddy Scheer & Doug Moss for the 501(c)3 nonprofit EarthTalk. See more at <https://emagazine.com>. To donate, visit <https://earthtalk.org>. Send questions to: question@earthtalk.org.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 5 °F

Cold

Tonight



Low: -15 °F

Partly Cloudy

Tuesday



High: 8 °F

Cold

Tuesday Night



Low: 2 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Wednesday



High: 35 °F

Partly Sunny



Temperature Rollercoaster

January 13, 2025
2:54 AM

Key Messages

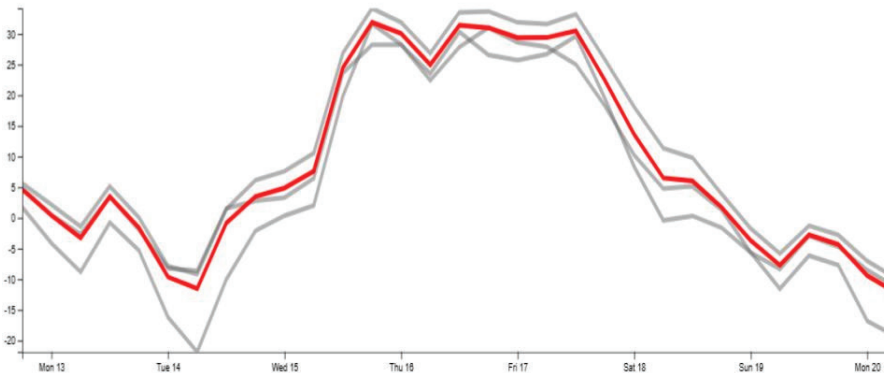
- Light snow west river today - inch or less accumulations
- Arctic air in place today through Tuesday
- Milder temperatures mid-week through Friday
- Arctic air returns - below normal temps Friday into next week

Maximum Temperature Forecast (°F)

	1/13 Mon	1/14 Tue	1/15 Wed	1/16 Thu	1/17 Fri	1/18 Sat	1/19 Sun	1/20 Mon
Aberdeen	6	9	36	38	29	10	2	3
Miller	12	13	35	38	33	12	4	5
Mobridge	13	17	41	42	33	15	4	7
Murdo	22	22	37	37	33	13	5	6
Ortonville	5	10	34	38	33	13	0	2
Pierre	18	18	39	40	34	15	6	7
Sisseton	2	10	34	36	32	7	-2	0
Watertown	5	10	31	36	28	7	-1	1

Minimum Temperature Forecast (°F)

	1/14 Tue	1/15 Wed	1/16 Thu	1/17 Fri	1/18 Sat	1/19 Sun	1/20 Mon
Aberdeen	-13	2	20	12	-1	-9	-11
Miller	-6	9	25	16	3	-4	-8
Mobridge	-3	14	23	16	3	-4	-7
Murdo	3	16	21	17	5	-3	-8
Ortonville	-10	0	25	14	-1	-7	-10
Pierre	3	15	21	17	6	-1	-6
Sisseton	-8	4	24	11	-3	-10	-10
Watertown	-12	4	20	11	-2	-9	-11



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

We will continue to see temperatures yo-yo below normal, above normal and then back below normal over the next several days. Otherwise it will remain generally dry with merely breezy conditions for Wednesday, and a little more wind with the Arctic front for Friday.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 20 °F at 12:05 AM

Low Temp: -1 °F at 10:03 PM

Wind: 31 mph at 5:40 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 7 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 56 in 1987

Record Low: -40 in 1912

Average High: 23

Average Low: 2

Average Precip in Jan.: 0.26

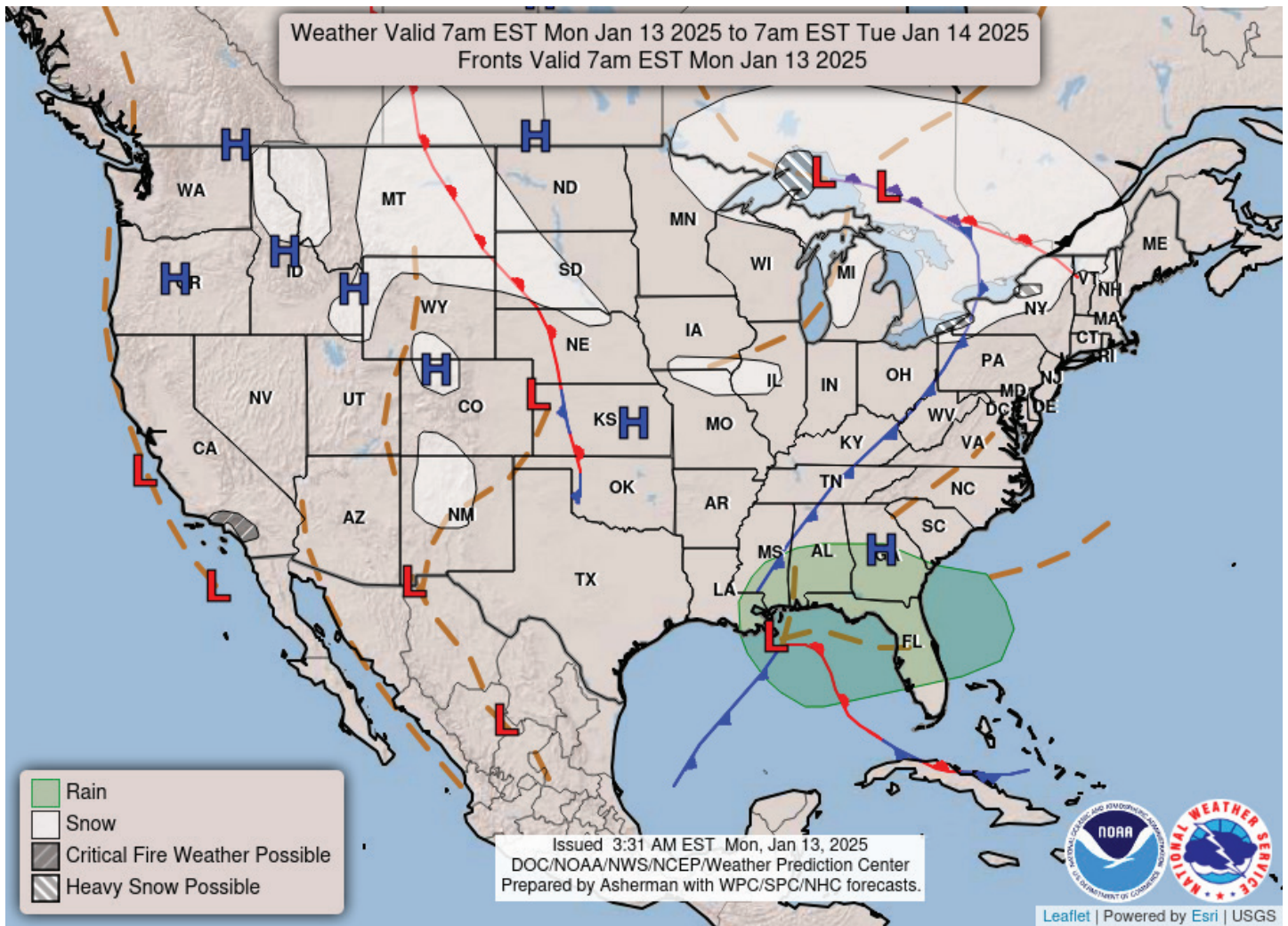
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.26

Precip Year to Date: 21.71

Sunset Tonight: 5:15:05 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:06:55 am



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Today in Weather History

January 13, 1913: The temperature at Rapid City, South Dakota, rose sixty-four degrees in just fourteen hours.

January 13, 1916: An extreme cold affected central and northeast South Dakota and west-central Minnesota on January 13th, 1916. Record low temperatures were set at Kennebec, Timber Lake, Wheaton, and Watertown. Timber Lake recorded a low temperature of 37 degrees below zero. Wheaton fell to 38 degrees below zero. Kennebec recorded a low of 39 degrees below zero, with 40 degrees below zero recorded at Watertown on this day in 1916. Aberdeen and Mobridge recorded 38 degrees below zero and 36 degrees below zero, respectively.

January 13, 2009: After a clipper system dropped from 1 to 4 inches of snow on the 13th, Arctic air and blustery north winds pushed into the area. The coldest air and the lowest wind chills of the season spread across much of central and northeast South Dakota. Wind chills fell to 35 to 50 degrees below zero late in the evening of the 13th and remained through the 14th and into the mid-morning hours of the 15th. Across northeast South Dakota and west-central Minnesota, wind chills were as low as 60 degrees below zero by the morning of the 15th. Many vehicles did not start because of the extreme cold, and several schools had delayed starts. The Arctic high-pressure area settled in on the morning of the 15th, bringing the region's coldest temperatures in many years. The combination of a fresh and deep snowpack, clear skies, and light winds allowed temperatures to fall to record levels at many locations on the 15th. Daytime highs remained well below zero across the area. This was one of the coldest days that most areas experienced since the early 1970s. The records were broken by 1 to as much as 7 degrees. Some of the record lows included -30 degrees at Kennebec; -31 degrees at Sisseton; -32 degrees at Milbank; -33 degrees at Mobridge; -35 degrees at Andover and near Summit; -38 degrees at Eureka; -39 degrees 8 miles north of Columbia and Castlewood; -42 degrees at Aberdeen; and -47 degrees at Pollock. Some near-record low temperatures included -24 degrees at Pierre, -29 degrees at Redfield and Victor; -32 degrees at Roscoe; and -34 degrees at Watertown. In Aberdeen, the low temperature of -42 degrees is the third coldest temperature ever recorded.

1862: Known as the Great Flood of 1862, a series of storms from December 1861 to January 1862 produced the largest flood in the recorded history of Oregon, Nevada, and California. Estimated property damage in California alone was \$10 million in 1862 dollars. More than 200,000 head of cattle lost their lives. The State of California went bankrupt, and the economy evolved from ranching to farm-based. The same areas are expected to be flooded again if another ARkStorm (USGS name) impacts California, which could cause over \$750 billion (2011 USD), making it more disastrous than California's long-overdue major earthquake. California is currently overdue for a Megastorm, and such an event would have severe impacts on the entire U.S. economy.

1950: January 1950 was one of the worst winter months on record for Seattle, Washington, and surrounding areas. By the end of the month, Seattle measured 57.2 inches of snow, the most snowfall in any month since records began in 1894. The normal January snowfall is 1.4 inches. On this day, a crippling blizzard produced 40 to 50 mph winds and an astounding 20 inches.



GREAT HANDS AND GREATER HEART

Our Lord has hands that give and a heart that forgives. The closing words of David in Psalm 23 exclaim, "Surely your goodness and unfailing mercy shall pursue me all the days of my life!"

The word goodness in this verse refers to all of the gracious gifts that God will lavishly bestow on those who are His own. It includes kindness, love and loyalty as well the fact that He will meet our every physical need.

Mercy in this verse assures us that the Lord will forgive our sins when we call on Him. It leaves no doubt that our God is the "God of mercy." He alone is responsible for providing the gift of His salvation to those who call upon Him. And furthermore, it assures us that He will forgive us for those times when we fail Him and sin as we strive to grow into the likeness of His Son and, unfortunately, fail.

This goodness and mercy that David writes about are neither conditional nor temporary. It is with us today and will be with us as long as we live – "all the days of our lives" – that is, until we enter His house and dwell with Him forever more.

How wonderful it is to know that our Lord goes before us and is always along side of us waiting to meet our every need – spiritually, emotionally and physically.

What a wonderful Shepherd is ours!

Prayer: Lord, we rejoice in the greatness of our salvation, knowing that we need fear nothing or no one because You are with us all day, every day! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today : Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever. Psalm 23:6

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: 01.10.25

9 23 39 65 66 22

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$95,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 30 Mins 35 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.11.25

7 10 16 47 52 1

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$21,510,000

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 45 Mins 35 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.12.25

2 10 22 26 47 8

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 36 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.11.25

4 6 7 16 23

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 15 Hrs 36 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.11.25

22 24 25 44 53 20

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 29 Mins 35 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.11.25

3 6 32 37 65 4

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$285,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 29 Mins 35 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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Upcoming Groton Events

- 01/05/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 01/26/2025 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed at the Community Center 10am-1pm
- 01/26/2025 87th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm
- 02/02/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 02/05/2025 FB Live Electronic Hwy 12 Sign Drawing City Hall 12pm
- 03/02/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 03/22/2025 Spring Vendor Fair at the GHS Gym 10am-2pm
- 04/05/2025 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39, 6-11:30pm
- 04/06/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 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
- 06/07/2025 Day of Play
- 07/04/2025 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/13/2025 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm
- 07/09/2025 Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar at the Groton Legion 11am-1pm
- 08/09/2025 2nd Annual Celebration in the Park/Rib Cook-Off 1-9:30pm
- 09/06/2025 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 10/31/2025 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
- 11/27/2025 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1:30pm

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Australian Open: Novak Djokovic and new coach Andy Murray get a win against US teen in debut

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP Tennis Writer

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Novak Djokovic's first match with former rival Andy Murray as his coach did not start all that well, even against a 19-year-old making his Grand Slam debut.

Still, after dropping his opening set at the 2025 Australian Open on Monday night to Nishesh Basavareddy, an American who left Stanford University and turned pro last month, Djokovic eventually asserted himself for a 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 victory to begin his bid for an 11th championship at Melbourne Park and a record 25th major title overall.

"I'm obviously thrilled to have him in my corner," Djokovic said about Murray. "I must say, it was a little bit of a strange experience to have him at courtside in my box. We played for over 20 years against each other at the highest level. Great to have him on the same side of the net. He gave me some great advice mid-match."

Before heading out into Rod Laver Arena, Djokovic and Murray chatted in the gym. They wrapped up the conversation with a fist bump, before Djokovic hopped on the treadmill to warm up.

During the match, apart from an extended conversation before the fourth set, there was only the occasional interaction between player and coach — a pairing between 37-year-olds born a week apart, and opponents from the age of 12, including in a series of Slam finals as pros. Murray retired at the Paris Olympics in August; Djokovic proposed teaming up in November.

As a player, Murray was known for mid-match dramatics, plenty of gesticulating and muttering, often directed at his entourage. Djokovic does similar.

Djokovic showed some of his usual fire when that vital break came at the 1 1/2-hour mark. He watched the 107th-ranked Basavareddy's forehand land wide and let out a yell, clenched a fist, pointed a finger at his ear. That was the beginning of the end for Basavareddy, who started stepping gingerly between points and grabbing at his legs, and took a medical timeout before the third set.

On a busy and warm Day 2, which included nine Grand Slam champions with a combined 43 major trophies in action plus another half-dozen players with runner-up showings, the winners included No. 2 Iga Swiatek, No. 3 Coco Gauff and No. 7 Jessica Pegula among the women, and No. 1 Jannik Sinner and No. 3 Carlos Alcaraz among the men.

Naomi Osaka, who won two of her four major titles in Australia, faced Caroline Garcia in Monday's last match at Rod Laver Arena.

Noteworthy exits came from two-time Australian Open champion Victoria Azarenka, 2017 French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko, and two-time major finalist Stefanos Tsitsipas. Ostapenko's 6-3, 7-6 (6) loss came against Tokyo Olympics gold medalist Belinda Bencic, who is ranked outside the top 400 after returning in October from maternity leave.

Also one-and-done, but not that surprisingly: Nick Kyrgios, who lost to Djokovic in the 2022 Wimbledon final and played one match the past two seasons because of injuries. Kyrgios dealt with a strained abdominal muscle in the lead-up to this week and was defeated by Jacob Fearnley 7-6 (3), 6-3, 7-6 (2).

"Sorry for Nick," said Fearnley, a 23-year-old from Scotland who played college tennis at TCU in Fort Worth, Texas. "I could tell he was dealing with some stuff."

The intensity and physicality of the points against Djokovic wore on Basavareddy. Another key: Djokovic's backhand grew faster in the second set, while Basavareddy's shots off that wing slowed. And one more: Djokovic hit 23 aces.

At 3-all, a half-hour in, Basavareddy moved out front by breaking Djokovic with a backhand return winner. Soon enough, that set belonged to the youngster, who is not shy about saying the Serb is his favorite player. Basavareddy showed off some great touch with drop shots and lob winners, while hanging in there

at the baseline with the consummate baseliner.

"Very complete player," Djokovic said. "He did very pleasantly surprise me with all of his shots and his fighting spirit toward the end."

They are currently separated by exactly 100 spots in the ATP rankings. The gulf is far wider, of course, when it comes to experience and accomplishments.

This outcome left Basavareddy's career record at Grand Slam tournaments at 0-1; his tour-level debut only came in December. Djokovic, meanwhile, picked up his record-extending 378th victory at a major on Monday; he hasn't lost in the first round of one since bowing out at that stage of his first two Australian Opens in 2005 and 2006.

"He didn't get carried away by the significance of the moment," Djokovic said about Basavareddy. "I'm sure we'll see a lot of him in the future."

Hegseth could lead troops who'd face getting fired for actions he's done in the past

By TARA COPP and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — If Pete Hegseth were still in uniform, his extramarital affairs and a decision to flatly ignore a combat commander's directive would not just be drawing the attention of senators — they could have run afoul of military law.

That is raising questions among current and former defense leaders and veterans about whether Hegseth would be able to enforce discipline in the ranks if confirmed as President-elect Donald Trump's defense secretary. Hegseth would oversee more than 2 million troops who could be disciplined or kicked out of the service for the same behavior he has acknowledged or been accused of in the past.

Hegseth, a 44-year-old Army National Guard veteran and former Fox News Channel weekend host, has acknowledged having multiple extramarital affairs — which occurred while he was in the military, according to divorce records — and has said he told his troops to ignore commands about when to fire on potential enemies. Both violate the Uniform Code of Military Justice and can get troops court-martialed and dishonorably discharged.

He's also facing questions over his past drinking — which, had it occurred in uniform, also could have led to disciplinary action.

Hegseth, however, has the support of some veterans' groups that say his past indiscretions are not as important as getting in the job someone who will focus on improving military readiness to fight.

Four defense officials pointed to Hegseth's acknowledged problems and said senior officers have expressed unease about having him at the helm because the defense secretary often sits in judgment of generals and admirals accused of bad behavior — including infidelity and refusal to obey orders.

Service members expect those holding them accountable to set an example and meet equally high standards, said the officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to relay private discussions.

"Character is everything in an institution," said former Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, who served in the Obama administration and was a longtime Republican senator. "You can't minimize how important character is in leadership."

While it's very rare for service members to be disciplined solely for consensual affairs, it's more likely to be done as part of a broader incident that affects the good order and discipline of a unit or their ability to lead. Those instances would include fraternization within a unit, anything involving an assault or a relationship between a service member and a subordinate's civilian spouse.

A test before the Senate

The issues are expected to come up Tuesday at Hegseth's Senate confirmation hearing, which will be an early test of Trump's ability to ensure loyalty among a slim Republican majority.

In a letter to Hegseth last week, Sen. Elizabeth Warren, who is on the Senate Armed Services Committee holding the hearing, asked that he answer a number of questions about his previous conduct. The Massachusetts Democrat said she was "deeply concerned by the many ways in which your past behavior

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and rhetoric indicates that you are unfit to lead the Department of Defense.”

Asked about his ability to discipline others under the Uniform Code of Military Justice considering his own behavior, Hegseth said on the “Megyn Kelly Show” last month that “my job is to follow the law, the UCMJ, and I will do that.”

Hegseth also has promised not to drink on the job and has denied a 2017 sex assault allegation but acknowledged paying the woman a settlement. He was going through a divorce at the time after having a child with a Fox News producer who became his current wife, according to court records and his social media posts.

Trump and his supporters have rallied around Hegseth, saying he will strengthen what they see as a “woke” military.

He “is an incredibly tough and smart candidate that will fight to put America First,” Steven Cheung, Trump’s communications director, said in a statement. “With Pete as our Secretary of Defense, America’s enemies are on notice and our military will be great again.”

Only one other Cabinet nominee in the last 60 years has gone through the confirmation process only to be rejected by the Senate. Texas Republican Sen. John Tower, President-elect George H.W. Bush’s choice for defense secretary, was voted down in 1989 after contentious confirmation hearings looking into allegations of Tower’s drinking and womanizing.

In meetings with senators on Capitol Hill, Hegseth has worked to assuage concerns. Trump’s base also has piled pressure on those seen as not fully on board.

Sen. Susan Collins, a moderate Maine Republican, said after meeting Hegseth last month that she pressed him about the drinking allegations and settlement payment and would wait to decide on his nomination until the confirmation hearing and a background check.

The military’s strict code of conduct

Hegseth’s indiscretions could impede his ability to lead by example, said the chief executive officer of the nation’s largest group of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans.

“The average American might scratch their head that you can literally be kicked out of the military for cheating on your spouse. But it is fact. And that’s just because the military holds itself to a higher standard when it comes to character,” said Allison Jaslow, who served as an Army officer in Iraq and now heads the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, a group of about 425,000.

In a November podcast, Hegseth said he told his platoon in Iraq in 2005 to ignore a commander’s directive not to fire on someone unless they raised their weapon to shoot at U.S. troops.

“Clear as day, I remember walking out of that briefing and pulling my platoon together and being like, ‘Guys, we’re not doing that,’” Hegseth said. “If you see an enemy, engage before he’s able to point his weapon at you and shoot.”

Asked whether that had given Trump’s team pause, transition spokesman Brian Hughes said “all nominees and appointees will comply with the ethical obligations of their respective agencies.”

Hegseth was awarded a Bronze Star for his service in Iraq from 2005 to 2006 and earned a second for his tour in Afghanistan in 2012.

Hegseth gains support from some veterans

He has gotten a boost from 32 House Republicans who served in the military, who asked the Senate to evaluate him on his service and vision. They don’t vote on his nomination, however.

A group of Navy SEALs is hosting a rally for him this week in Washington, and one of those involved said Hegseth’s indiscretions are not as important as refocusing the military on readiness.

“I think the core of my support ... kind of goes back to the fact that I was a SEAL on 9/11 and that changed my life forever,” Bill Brown said.

He said Hegseth understands their anger and sense of betrayal over failures in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Regarding potential military code violations, “the No. 1 rule of engagement is you come home,” Brown said. “The military is not a social justice project.”

Jeff Bezos' space company calls off debut launch of massive new rocket in final minutes of countdown

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Blue Origin called off the debut launch of its massive new rocket early Monday because of technical trouble.

The 320-foot (98-meter) New Glenn rocket was supposed to blast off before dawn with a prototype satellite from Florida's Cape Canaveral Space Force Station. But launch controllers had to deal with an unspecified rocket issue in the final minutes of the countdown and ran out of time. Once the countdown clock was halted, they immediately began draining all the fuel from the rocket.

Blue Origin did not immediately set a new launch date, saying the team needed more time to resolve the problem.

The test flight already had been delayed by rough seas that posed a risk to the company's plan to land the first-stage booster on a floating platform in the Atlantic.

New Glenn is named after the first American to orbit Earth, John Glenn. It is five times taller than Blue Origin's New Shepard rocket that carries paying customers to the edge of space from Texas.

Amazon's Jeff Bezos founded the company 25 years ago. He took part in Monday's countdown from Mission Control, located at the rocket factory just outside the gates of NASA's Kennedy Space Center about 50 miles (80 kilometers) east of Orlando, Florida.

No matter what happens, Bezos said Sunday evening, "we're going to pick ourselves up and keep going."

Russian forces bypass a key stronghold in a bid to cut off its supplies, a Ukrainian officer says

By SAMYA KULLAB and YEHOR KONOVALOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian forces are bypassing a key stronghold in eastern Ukraine that they have fought for months to capture and are focusing instead on cutting supply lines to it, a Ukrainian official said Monday.

Russian troops are going around the vital logistics hub of Pokrovsk, where a steadfast Ukrainian defense has kept them at bay, and are taking aim at a highway that leads from there to the central Ukraine city of Dnipro, Maj. Viktor Trehubov, a local Ukrainian army spokesperson, told The Associated Press.

That route is crucial for supplies feeding Ukrainian forces in the entire region. Cutting the highway traffic would also severely weaken Pokrovsk.

"So far, they have not achieved their goal and (Ukrainian forces) are working to ensure that they do not achieve it in the future — just as they have not been successful in other attempts to bypass the city," Trehubov said in a WhatsApp message.

Ukraine's army is under severe strain along parts of the approximately 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line, especially in the eastern Donetsk region where Pokrovsk is located.

After almost three years of war, Ukrainian units are depleted and are outnumbered by Russian forces. Though its battlefield progress has been slow and costly, momentum in the war is in Russia's favor and its onslaught has gradually swallowed up towns and villages.

In his daily video address to the nation late Sunday, Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said fighting around Pokrovsk was "the most intense" in recent days.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is pressing his advantage ahead of U.S. President-elect Donald Trump's arrival in the White House next week. Trump says he wants to bring a swift end to the war, though he hasn't publicized details of his plans.

In 2022, Moscow illegally annexed the Donetsk and neighboring Luhansk regions, which make up the economically important Donbas industrial area, together with the southeastern provinces of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia. But Russian forces don't fully control any of them.

Incoming Trump team is questioning civil servants at National Security Council about their loyalty

By AAMER MADHANI and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Incoming senior Trump administration officials have begun questioning career civil servants who work on the White House National Security Council about who they voted for in the 2024 election, their political contributions and whether they have made social media posts that could be considered incriminating by President-elect Donald Trump's team, according to a U.S. official familiar with the matter.

At least some of these nonpolitical employees have begun packing up their belongings since being asked about their loyalty to Trump — after they had earlier been given indications that they would be asked to stay on at the NSC in the new administration, the official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive personnel matters.

Trump's pick for national security adviser, Florida Rep. Mike Waltz, in recent days publicly signaled his intention to get rid of all nonpolitical appointees and career intelligence officials serving on the NSC by Inauguration Day to ensure the council is staffed with those who support Trump's agenda.

A wholesale removal of foreign policy and national security experts from the NSC on Day 1 of the new administration could deprive Trump's team of considerable expertise and institutional knowledge at a time when the U.S. is grappling with difficult policy challenges in Ukraine, the Mideast and beyond. Such questioning could also make new policy experts brought in to the NSC less likely to speak up about policy differences and concerns.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan is making a robust case for the incoming Trump administration to hold over career government employees assigned to the NSC at least through the early going of the new administration.

"Given everything going on in the world, making sure you have in place a team that is up to speed, and, you know, ready to continue serving at 12:01, 12:02, 12:03 p.m. on the 20th is really important," Sullivan said on Friday.

The NSC staff members being questioned about their loyalty are largely subject matter experts who have been loaned to the White House by federal agencies — the State Department, FBI and CIA, for example — for temporary duty that typically lasts one to two years. If removed from the NSC, they would be returned to their home agencies.

Vetting of the civil servants began in the last week, the official said. Some of them have been questioned about their politics by Trump appointees who will serve as directors on the NSC and who had weeks earlier asked them to stick around. There are dozens of civil servants at the directorate level at the NSC who had anticipated remaining at the White House in the new administration.

A second U.S. official told the AP that he was informed weeks ago by incoming Trump administration officials that they planned on raising questions with career appointees that work at the White House, including those at the NSC, about their political leanings. The official, who was not authorized to comment publicly, however, had not yet been formally vetted.

Waltz told Breitbart News last week that "everybody is going to resign at 12:01 on January 20." He added that he wanted the NSC to be staffed by personnel who are "100 percent aligned with the president's agenda."

"We're working through our process to get everybody their clearances and through the transition process now," Waltz said. "Our folks know who we want out in the agencies, we're putting those requests in, and in terms of the detailees they're all going to go back."

A Trump transition official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss personnel matters, said the incoming administration felt it was "entirely appropriate" to seek officials who share the incoming president's vision and would be focused on common goals.

The NSC was launched as an arm of the White House during the Truman administration, tasked with advising and assisting the president on national security and foreign policy and coordinating among various

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government agencies. It is common for experts detailed to the NSC to carry over from one administration to the next, even when the White House changes parties.

Sullivan said he had not spoken to Waltz about the staffing matter, and said it was "up to the next national security adviser to decide how they want to play things. All I can say is how we did it and what I thought worked."

"When they are selected to come over, they're not selected based on their political affiliation or their policy opinions, they're selected based on their experience and capacity and so we have a real diversity of people in terms of their views, their politics, their backgrounds," Sullivan said of those assigned to the NSC. "The common element of all of it is we get the best of the best here" from agencies including the State Department, the intelligence community, the Pentagon and the Homeland Security and Treasury departments.

Sullivan noted when Biden took office in 2021, he inherited most of his NSC staff from the outgoing Trump administration.

"Those folks were awesome," Sullivan said. "They were really good."

Trump, during his first term, was scarred when two career military officers detailed to the NSC became whistleblowers, raising their concerns about Trump's 2019 call to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in which the president sought an investigation of Biden and his son Hunter. That episode led to Trump's first impeachment.

Alexander Vindman was listening to the call in his role as an NSC official when he became alarmed at what he heard. He approached his twin brother, Eugene, who at the time was serving as an ethics lawyer at the NSC. Both Vindmans reported their concerns to superiors.

Alexander Vindman said in a statement Friday that the Trump team's approach to staffing the NSC "will have a chilling effect on senior policy staff across the government."

He added, "Talented professionals, wary of being dismissed for principled stances or offering objective advice, will either self-censor or forgo service altogether."

The two men were heralded by Democrats as patriots for speaking out and derided by Trump as insubordinate. Eugene Vindman in November was elected as a Democrat to represent Virginia's 7th Congressional District.

Seoul's spy agency says North Korean soldiers captured in Ukraine haven't shown desire to defect

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's spy agency told lawmakers on Monday that two North Korean soldiers who were captured by Ukrainian forces while fighting alongside Russian forces in Russia's Kursk border region haven't expressed a desire to seek asylum in South Korea.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said he's willing to hand over the soldiers to North Korea if the country's authoritarian leader, Kim Jong Un, arranges for an exchange with Ukrainian prisoners of war in Russia. Zelenskyy said one of the North Korean soldiers wishes to stay in Ukraine while the other wants to return to his country, which was consistent with interview videos released by his government. "If Kim Jong Un even remembers these citizens of his and is capable of organizing an exchange for our warriors being held in Russia, we are ready to transfer such soldiers. Undoubtedly there will be more POWs from North Korea," Zelenskyy said in an address late Sunday. He said in a separate posting on the social media platform X that "there may be other options" for North Korean prisoners who don't wish to go back.

In a closed-door briefing at South Korea's National Assembly, the National Intelligence Service confirmed its participation in the questioning of the North Korean soldiers by Ukrainian authorities. The agency said the soldiers haven't expressed a request to resettle in South Korea, according to two lawmakers who attended the meeting.

The agency said it was willing to discuss the matter with Ukrainian authorities if the soldiers eventually do ask to go to South Korea. About 34,000 North Koreans have defected to capitalist rival South Korea to

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avoid economic hardship and political suppression at home, mostly since the late 1990s.

Koo Byoungsam, spokesperson of South Korea's Unification Ministry, which handles inter-Korean affairs, said facilitating the asylum of the North Korean soldiers would require "legal reviews, including on international law, and consultations with related nations."

"There's nothing we can say at the current stage," Koo said.

Seoul says about 300 North Korean troops killed in combat

Seoul's spy agency believes that about 300 North Korean soldiers have died and another 2,700 have been injured while fighting against Ukrainian forces, in what represents North Korea's first involvement in large-scale conflict since the 1950-53 Korean War.

The agency assessed that the North Koreans are struggling to adapt to drones and other elements of modern warfare. They are further disadvantaged by the crude tactics of their Russian commanders, who have thrown them in assault campaigns without providing rear-fire support, according to Lee Seong Kweun, a lawmaker who attended the agency's briefing.

The agency said memos found on dead North Korean soldiers indicated that they had been ordered to commit suicide before being captured, according to Lee. The agency said one North Korean soldier, facing the threat of being captured by Ukrainian forces, shouted "General Kim Jong Un" and tried to detonate a hand grenade before he was shot and killed.

Zelenskyy confirmed the capture of the North Korean soldiers on Saturday, days after Ukraine, facing a slow Russian onslaught in the east, began pressing new attacks in Kursk to retain ground captured in a lightning incursion in August — the first occupation of Russian territory since World War II.

Moscow's counterattack has left Ukrainian forces overstretched and demoralized, killing and wounding thousands and retaking more than 40% of the 984 square kilometers (380 square miles) of Kursk that Ukraine had seized.

North Koreans struggle to adapt to Kursk terrain, modern warfare

Moon Seong Mook, a retired South Korean brigadier general, said the high death toll for North Korean soldiers was predictable, as they would not have been sufficiently prepared for an unfamiliar mission in the terrain of the Kursk region, which is vastly different from North Korea's mountainous landscape.

Another disadvantage for the North Koreans is that they are not conducting independent operations but are being thrust into combat under Russian commanders, possibly struggling with unfamiliar tactics and communication issues due to language barriers, said Moon, who has taken part in numerous military talks with North Korea. The North Korean forces could be operating special surveillance teams to arrest or execute attempted deserters, he said.

"The current battlefield environment, combined with drones and other technologies, have created situations North Korean soldiers have never encountered before," Moon said. "They are also being deployed in large numbers in wide-open fields, where there is no place to hide, in continuous battles to retake the area, and that seems to be where the casualties are coming from."

North Korea's decadeslong financial troubles, which have forced many soldiers to grow their own food or spend long hours deployed in construction and other work to sustain the national economy, could also have impacted the quality of training they receive at home, Moon said.

Still, there are concerns in Seoul that North Korea's participation in the Ukraine crisis poses a significant threat to South Korea, as North Korean forces may gain crucial combat experience and Russia may provide technology transfers that could enhance North Korea's nuclear-armed army. ___ Associated Press writer Samya Kullab in Kyiv, Ukraine contributed to this report.

Progress made in talks over Israel-Hamas ceasefire and hostage release, officials say

By VICTORIA EASTWOOD, SAMY MAGDY and JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — U.S. and Arab mediators made significant progress overnight toward brokering a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war and the release of scores of hostages held in the Gaza Strip, but a deal hasn't

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been reached yet, officials said Monday.

Three officials acknowledged that progress has been made and said the coming days would be critical for ending more than 15 months of fighting that has destabilized the Middle East. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss the talks.

One of the three officials and a Hamas official said that there were still a number of hurdles to clear. On several occasions over the past year, U.S. officials have said that they were on the verge of reaching a deal, only to have the talks stall.

One person familiar with the talks said there had been a breakthrough overnight and that there was a proposed deal on the table. Israeli and Hamas negotiators will now take it back to their leaders for final approval, the person said.

The person said that mediators from the Gulf country of Qatar had put renewed pressure on Hamas to accept the agreement, while U.S. President-elect Donald Trump's envoy, Steve Witkoff, was pressing the Israelis. Witkoff recently joined the negotiations and has been in the region in recent days.

The person said that the mediators had handed off the draft deal to each side and that the next 24 hours would be pivotal.

An Egyptian official said that there had been good progress overnight, but that it would likely take a few more days, and that the sides were aiming for a deal before Trump's inauguration on Jan. 20. A third official said that the talks were in a good place, but hadn't been wrapped up. That official also assessed that a deal was possible before the inauguration.

Asked about the talks at a press conference, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar said "progress has been made, and I hope that within a short time we will see things happening. But it is still to be proved."

A Hamas official said a number of contentious issues still need to be resolved, including an Israeli commitment to ending the war and details about the withdrawal of Israeli troops and the hostage-prisoner exchange. The official wasn't authorized to brief media and spoke anonymously.

The Egyptian official confirmed that those issues were still being discussed.

Months of negotiations have repeatedly stalled

The Biden administration, along with Egypt and Qatar, has spent more than a year trying to broker an agreement to end the deadliest war ever fought between Israelis and Palestinians and secure the release of scores of hostages captured in Hamas' attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, which triggered the conflict.

But the sides have been divided over the details of the planned exchange of hostages for Palestinian prisoners held by Israel, as well as the nature of the ceasefire itself. Hamas has said that it won't release the remaining captives without an end to the war, while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to continue the campaign until "total victory" over the militant group.

Under discussion now is a phased ceasefire. Netanyahu has repeatedly signaled that he is committed only to the first phase, a partial hostage release in exchange for a weeklong halt in fighting. The possibility of a lasting ceasefire and other issues would be negotiated after the first phase begins. Hamas has demanded a full withdrawal and complete end to the war, and is hoping that this first phase will lead to that outcome.

A deal could weaken Netanyahu's coalition, which includes two far-right factions that have threatened to leave the government if Israel makes too many concessions. Members of the opposition have promised to give Netanyahu the support that he needs to approve a hostage release, but the hardliners' anger could be a source of instability down the road.

Netanyahu is hoping that the prospect of a Trump administration — which includes allies of the West Bank settler movement — will persuade his partners to remain in the government.

U.S. President Joe Biden, who hopes to wrap up a deal before leaving office next week, spoke with Netanyahu about the talks on Sunday.

The head of Israel's Mossad foreign intelligence agency, David Barnea, and Biden's top Middle East adviser, Brett McGurk, were both in the Qatari capital, Doha. Barnea's presence meant high-level Israeli officials who would need to sign off on any agreement are once again involved in the talks.

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McGurk has been working on final details of a text to be presented to both sides, Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, told CNN's "State of the Union." But he said that he would not predict whether a deal can be reached by Jan. 20.

"We are very, very close," he said. "Yet being very close still means we're far, because until you actually get across the finish line, we're not there."

Palestinians and families of the hostages hope for a deal

Just one brief ceasefire has been achieved during the war, and that was in the earliest weeks of fighting. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said last week that a deal is "very close" and he hoped to complete it before handing over diplomacy to the incoming Trump administration.

Israel's campaign in Gaza has killed more than 46,000 Palestinians, the majority women and children, according to the territory's Health Ministry, whose count doesn't give a breakdown between fighters and civilians. Hamas-led militants killed about 1,200 people and abducted around 250 others in the attack that ignited the war.

Families of the roughly 100 hostages still held in Gaza are pressing Netanyahu to reach a deal to bring their loved ones home. Israelis rallied again Saturday night in Tel Aviv, with photos of hostages on display.

In Gaza, Palestinians were tempering their hopes for a stop to Israel's campaign, which has devastated much of the territory and driven around 90% of its 2.3 million people from their homes.

"We hear that there are negotiations every day, but we see nothing," said Mazen Hammad, a resident of the southern city of Khan Younis. "When we see it on the ground, then we believe that there is a truce."

Los Angeles wildfire death toll surges to 24 as firefighters brace for more fierce winds

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER and HOLLY RAMER Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — After a weekend spent blocking the explosive growth of fires that destroyed thousands of homes and killed at least 24 people in the Los Angeles area, firefighters got a slight break with calmer weather but cast a wary eye on a forecast for yet more wind.

Should that happen, already burned homes and valleys could flare anew, sending embers to unburned territory miles downwind. New fires could add to the complication.

The death toll surged late Sunday with an update from the Los Angeles County medical examiner. At least 16 people were missing, a number authorities said was also likely to rise.

The relative calm Sunday allowed some people to return to previously evacuated areas, however.

The National Weather Service issued red flag warnings for severe fire conditions through Wednesday, with sustained winds of 50 mph (80 kph) and gusts in the mountains reaching 70 mph (113 kph). The most dangerous day will be Tuesday, warned fire behavior analyst Dennis Burns at a community meeting Sunday night.

"It will kind of ebb and flow over the next couple days," Burns said. "Tomorrow night, it will really ramp up."

Spotting — new fires caused by blowing embers — could happen as much as 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) or more downwind of areas that have already burned, Burns said.

Despite their recent losses, stress, and uncertainty, the crowd in a Pasadena City College gym was mostly respectful, in contrast with harsh criticism elsewhere for Los Angeles and California leaders. Applause followed each of the experts, police, firefighters and community leaders who spoke.

Los Angeles County Fire Chief Anthony C. Marrone said 70 additional water trucks arrived to help firefighters fend off flames spread by renewed gusts. "We are prepared for the upcoming wind event," Marrone said.

Fire retardant dropped by aircraft will act as a barrier along hillsides, officials said.

Fierce Santa Ana winds have been largely blamed for turning the wildfires sparked last week into infernos that leveled entire neighborhoods around the city where there has been no significant rainfall in

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more than eight months.

Twelve people were missing within the Eaton Fire zone and four were missing from the Palisades Fire, Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna said. Investigators were reconciling whether some of the missing might be among the dead but so far no children were among those reported missing, he said.

Meanwhile, the death toll rose to 24 over the weekend. Eight deaths were attributed to the Palisades Fire and 16 to the Eaton Fire, according to the Los Angeles County coroner's office.

The toll could rise still more as cadaver dogs conducted systematic searches in leveled neighborhoods. Authorities established a center where people could report the missing.

Officials also were building an online database to allow evacuated residents to see if their homes were damaged or destroyed. In the meantime, LA city Fire Chief Kristin Crowley urged people to stay away from scorched neighborhoods.

"There are still active fires that are burning within the Palisades area, making it extremely, extremely dangerous for the public," Crowley said at a Sunday morning briefing. "There's no power, there's no water, there's broken gas lines, and we have unstable structures."

Officials warned the ash can contain lead, arsenic, asbestos and other harmful materials.

About 150,000 people in Los Angeles County remained under evacuation orders, with more than 700 residents taking refuge in nine shelters, Luna said. Officials said most of the orders in the Palisades area were unlikely to be lifted before the red flag warnings expire Wednesday evening.

"Please rest assured that first thing Thursday we will begin talking about repopulation," Marrone said.

In all, four fires had consumed more than 62 square miles (160 square kilometers), an area larger than San Francisco. The Palisades Fire was 11% contained and containment on the Eaton Fire reached 27%. Those two blazes alone accounted for 59 square miles (nearly 153 square kilometers).

Crews from California and nine other states are part of the ongoing response that includes nearly 1,400 fire engines, 84 aircraft and more than 14,000 personnel, including newly arrived firefighters from Mexico.

Fighting to save public and private areas

After a fierce battle Saturday, firefighters managed to fight back flames in Mandeville Canyon, home to Arnold Schwarzenegger and other celebrities near Pacific Palisades not far from the coast, where swooping helicopters dumped water as the blaze charged downhill.

The fire ran through chaparral-covered hillsides and also briefly threatened to jump over Interstate 405 and into densely populated areas in the Hollywood Hills and San Fernando Valley.

Arrests for looting

Looting continued to be a concern, with authorities reporting more arrests as the devastation grew. Those arrested included two people who posed as firefighters going into houses, Los Angeles Police Department Capt. Michael Lorenz said.

With California National Guard troops on hand to guard properties, Gov. Gavin Newsom posted on X: "California will NOT allow for looting."

Historical cost

The fires that began Tuesday just north of downtown LA had burned more than 12,000 structures. No cause for the largest fires was determined.

Early estimates suggest they could be the nation's costliest ever, as much as \$150 billion according to an AccuWeather estimate.

Inmate firefighters on the front lines

Along with crews from other states and Mexico, hundreds of inmates from California's prison system were also helping fight the fires. Nearly 950 prison firefighters were removing timber and brush ahead of the fires to slow their spread, according to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

The practice is controversial as the inmates are paid little for dangerous and difficult work: \$10.24 each day, with more for 24-hour shifts, according to the corrections department.

Rebuilding will be a challenge

Newsom issued an executive order Sunday aimed at fast-tracking rebuilding by suspending some environmental regulations and ensuring that property tax assessments were not increased.

"We've got to let people know that we have their back," he said. "We want you to come back, rebuild, and rebuild with higher quality building standards, more modern standards."

More than 24,000 people had registered for federal assistance made available by a major disaster declaration by President Joe Biden, according to the White House.

Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass said Sunday that she had spoken with President-elect Donald Trump's incoming administration and expected that he would visit the city.

Leadership accused of skimping

Bass faces a critical test of her leadership during the city's greatest crisis in decades, but allegations of leadership failures, political blame and investigations have begun.

Newsom on Friday ordered state officials to determine why a 117 million-gallon (440 million-liter) reservoir was out of service and some hydrants had run dry.

China's exports in December up 10.7%, beating estimates as higher US tariffs loom

By ZEN SOO and ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writers

HONG KONG (AP) — China's exports in December grew at a faster pace than expected, as factories rushed to fill orders to beat higher tariffs that U.S. President-elect Donald Trump has threatened to impose once he takes office.

Exports rose 10.7% from a year earlier, according to official customs data released Monday. Economists had forecast they would grow about 7%. Imports rose 1% year-on-year. Analysts had expected them to shrink about 1.5%. With exports outpacing imports, China's trade surplus grew to \$104.84 billion in December, and nearly \$1 trillion for the year, at \$992.2 billion.

Here are some highlights from the report.

Higher tariffs on the horizon

Trump has pledged to raise tariffs on Chinese goods and close some loopholes that exporters now use to sell their products more cheaply in the U.S. If enacted, his plans would likely raise prices in America and squeeze sales and profit margins for Chinese exporters.

China's exports are likely to remain strong in the near-term, said Zichun Huang of Capital Economics, as businesses try to "front-run" potentially higher tariffs.

"Outbound shipments are likely to stay resilient in the near-term, supported by further gains in global market share thanks to a weak real effective exchange rate," she wrote in a note.

Chinese exports to the U.S. jumped 15.6% in December compared to the same time last year, while exports to the European Union jumped 8.8%. Outbound shipments to Southeast Asia grew almost 19%.

But exports will likely weaken later in the year if Trump follows through on his threat to impose tariffs, Huang said.

Record exports and total trade

Officials who briefed reporters in Beijing said the total value of China's imports and exports reached a record 43.85 trillion yuan (nearly \$6 trillion), up 5% from a year earlier. China is the world's largest exporter and the main trading partner of more than 150 countries and regions, said Wang Lingjun, the Customs Administration's deputy director general.

China's economy has slowed following the pandemic, partly because of job losses and a downturn in the housing industry, while exports have surged. Under leader Xi Jinping, the ruling Communist Party is promoting upgrading of factories and a shift to more high-tech manufacturing. The report Monday said China's export of mechanical and electrical products increased by almost 9% last year from a year earlier, with growth in exports of "high-end equipment" jumping more than 40%.

Exports of electric vehicles rose 13%, exports of 3D printers jumped almost 33% and shipments of industrial robots surged 45%. E-commerce trade, including sales by companies including Temu, Shein and Alibaba, registered 2.6 trillion yuan (\$350 billion), more than twice the level in 2020.

What about imports?

China does not pursue a trade surplus and wants to increase its imports, the officials said. But while imports edged higher last year, they still lagged exports, partly due to lower prices for key commodities such as oil and iron ore.

Lagging imports also reflect weak demand as consumers and businesses cut back on spending.

"Regarding this year's imports, we believe that there is still a lot of room for growth. This is not only because my country's market capacity is large, there are many levels, and it has huge potential," said Lv Daliang, a Customs Administration spokesperson.

China also is blocked from exporting and importing some products due to trade restrictions, Lv said, alluding to controls by the U.S. and some other countries on strategically sensitive exports to China, such as sales of advanced semiconductors and items that can be used for military purposes.

"In addition, some countries politicize economic and trade issues, abuse export control measures, and unreasonably restrict the export of some products to China, otherwise we will import more," he said.

Where are all those exports going?

The officials emphasized China's efforts to expand trade with countries participating in its "Belt and Road" initiative to expand infrastructure construction and trade across much of the globe. Trade with those countries accounted for about half of China's total trade last year.

They noted that China has completely eliminated tariffs on imports from the world's poorest countries.

But China also values trade with traditional markets like Europe and the United States, and two-way trade with the U.S. grew nearly 5% last year.

"We imported agricultural products, energy products, medicines, and aircraft from the United States, and exported clothing, consumer electronics, and household appliances to the United States, achieving mutual benefit and win-win results," Wang said.

China and the overcapacity issue

U.S. officials and other critics say Beijing has pushed an expansion of exports to help make up for sluggish demand inside China as the economy has slowed. With factories in some industries operating well below capacity, they contend that the country has an "overcapacity" problem, while Chinese officials reject that contention.

"Whether from the perspective of comparative advantage or global market demand, there is no so-called 'China's overcapacity' problem. This problem is a pure false proposition," Wang said when asked about the issue.

China has made its industries more efficient through upgrading, investment and innovation supported by research and development, he said. "We have ensured the stability of the global production and supply chain with our own complete manufacturing industry chain, and driven technological progress and industrial upgrading around the world."

China's trade figures for December comes ahead of its full-year and fourth-quarter gross domestic product (GDP) figures that are due on Friday. Beijing had a growth target of about 5% for 2024.

Taiwan iPhone maker Foxconn sets its sights on the ever more crowded EV market

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

BANGKOK (AP) — Auto industry newcomers like Taiwan-based iPhone maker Foxconn and China's Huawei Technologies are maneuvering to gain an edge in the electric vehicle sector, prompting automakers like Japan's Nissan and Honda to announce plans to join forces against a flood of ambitious competitors.

Also known as Hon Hai Precision Industry, Foxconn has been snapping up links in the automotive supply chain, one of a growing number of technology companies that are leveraging their knowhow in electronics and communications.

Foxconn's auto venture with Taiwan automaker and importer Yulon Motor Co., Foxtron, showcased its Model B, a sleek EV hatchback, as well as its automotive electronics, at the Consumer Electronics Show

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in Las Vegas last week.

Honda and Nissan announced in December that they plan to seek a merger, a move that reports said may have partly been driven by Foxconn's interest in Nissan.

Here's an update on Foxconn's auto ambitions.

From iPhones to electric vehicles

Whether or not Foxconn wanted to make a bid for Nissan, it has big ambitions, saying it eventually intends to make four of every 10 EVs sold in the world. The contract manufacturer has invested nearly \$1.3 billion in auto-related acquisitions in the past decade, according to Mergermarket, a merger and acquisitions research firm.

In addition to Foxtron, its automaking joint venture with Taiwan's Yulon Motor, it has a 50% joint venture with Stellantis NV to design and sell automotive semiconductors and a 50% joint venture with Germany's ZF Friedrichshafen AG, a major auto supplier, to make passenger car chassis. It has invested in Indigo Technologies, which is commercializing a road sensing system developed at MIT. It also has a collaboration agreement with Blue Solutions to develop solid state batteries and has a collaboration with Italian auto designer Pininfarina.

Foxconn holds a 34% stake in Japanese electronics company Sharp, which has been inching toward the automotive sector. This year, Foxconn and Sharp introduced an LDK+ (living, dining, kitchen) concept vehicle, a boxy minivan that converts to a living space with solar and storage battery and a big LCD screen.

"Leveraging a plug-and-play strategy similar to its electronics operations, Foxconn's foray into electric vehicles is a pre-emptive move in anticipation of the increasing convergence of electronics and automotive technologies," Vivian Wong, head of Mergermarkets' M&A Analytics for the Asia Pacific, said in an emailed comment.

Other new tech companies turned automakers

China's Huawei Technologies, smartphone and appliance maker Xiaomi and e-commerce giant Alibaba and Baidu also are scaling up their EV operations, relying on their scale and strength in advanced technologies as vehicles become ever more computerized.

Huawei has several EV joint ventures in what it has dubbed its Harmony Intelligent Mobility Alliance, including Luxeed brand EVs with Chery Automobile and Aito brand EVs with Seres Group. Its joint venture with JAC Motor, an automaker based in eastern China's Anhui province, has announced plans to compete with luxury brands such as Rolls-Royce and Mercedes Benz AG.

Some Japanese electronics companies also are jumping on the bandwagon. Apart from Sharp's partnership with Foxconn, entertainment and technology giant Sony Corp. has an EV joint venture with Honda that plans to introduce the EV Afeela sedan for pre-sale this year.

The increasing reliance on connectivity between cars, phones, laptops and televisions has lured such companies into a market that is quickly being transformed by electrification, even if inroads into some markets have stalled due to tariffs and other factors.

What about Nissan?

Nissan introduced the Leaf, the first mass-market EV, in 2010 and has strong EV technology, vehicle platforms and sales capacity that would appeal to a newcomer like Foxconn.

Reports by Japanese media and by Taiwan's Central News Agency said Hon Hai's chief strategy officer, Nissan veteran executive Jun Seki, visited France for talks with France's Renault SA, which holds a 15% stake in Nissan and more shares held in a French trust. Seki is a former chief operating officer of Nissan and former president of Dongfeng Nissan, a joint venture in China.

In formally announcing plans to attempt a merger with Honda, Nissan Motor Corp. CEO Makoto Uchida said Foxconn had not directly approached his company about a possible merger. Foxconn did not respond to requests for comment.

Nissan's internal woes are a small part of the bigger challenge posed to all major automakers by the ascent of Tesla, which makes more than half of its EVs in China, and Chinese automakers like BYD in an industry so competitive that more than a dozen Chinese EV makers have already folded, bested by bigger

and stronger companies that got into the game before them.

So far, the road's not been smooth

As the pace of sales growth slows, with car buyers questioning the affordability and convenience of switching to electrics, the going has been rough, and Foxconn has a long way to go before it can compete with industry leaders like BYD and Tesla.

It was set to manufacture the Endurance battery EV truck at a former General Motors plant in Lordstown, Ohio, which it acquired in 2023. Lordstown Motors Corp. then filed for bankruptcy. Foxconn also set up a partnership in 2021 with Fisker Inc., maker of the Ocean EV truck, that called for making up to 250,000 vehicles. Fisker filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in June.

But the company appears undaunted.

Foxconn lists six models of EVs on its website, including its Model T bus, Model V pickup truck, Moden N van, its Model B, and its "luxury flagship" Model E sedan.

Biden says he was the steady hand the world needed after Trump, who's ready to shake things up again

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden strode into the White House four years ago with a foreign policy agenda that put repairing alliances strained by four years of Republican Donald Trump's "America First" worldview front and center.

The one-term Democrat took office in the throes of the worst global pandemic in a century and his plans were quickly stress-tested by a series of complicated international crises: the chaotic U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, and Hamas' brutal 2023 attack on Israel that triggered the ongoing war in the Middle East.

As Biden prepares to leave office, he remains insistent that his one-term presidency has made strides in restoring American credibility on the world stage and has proven the U.S. remains an indispensable partner around the globe. That message will be at the center of an address he will deliver Monday afternoon on his foreign policy legacy.

Yet Biden's case for foreign policy achievements will be shadowed and shaped, at least in the near term, by the messy counterfactual that American voters are returning the country's stewardship to Trump and his protectionist worldview.

"The real question is: Does the rest of the world today believe that the United States is the undisputed heavyweight champion of the world when it comes to our reservoir of national strength, our economy, our innovation base, our capacity to attract investment, our capacity to attract talent?" White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said in an Associated Press interview. "When we took office, a lot of people probably would have said China. ... Nobody's saying that anymore."

After a turbulent four years around the globe, the Democratic administration argues that Biden provided the world a steady hand and left the United States and its allies on a stronger footing.

But Biden, from the outset of his presidency, in which he frequently spoke of his desire to demonstrate that "America's back," was tested by war, calamity and miscalculation.

Chaotic US exit from Afghanistan was an early setback for Biden

With the U.S. completing its 2021 withdrawal from Afghanistan, Biden fulfilled a campaign promise to wind down America's longest war.

But the 20-year conflict came to an end in disquieting fashion: The U.S.-backed Afghan government collapsed, a grisly bombing killed 13 U.S. troops and 170 others, and thousands of desperate Afghans descended on Kabul's airport in search of a way out before the final U.S. aircraft departed over the Hindu Kush.

The Afghanistan debacle was a major setback just eight months into Biden's presidency that he struggled to recover from.

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Biden's Republican detractors, including Trump, cast it as a signal moment in a failed presidency. "I'll tell you what happened, he was so bad with Afghanistan, it was such a horrible embarrassment, most embarrassing moment in the history of our country," Trump said in his lone 2024 presidential debate with Biden, just weeks before the Democrat announced he was ending his reelection campaign.

Biden's legacy in Ukraine may hinge on Trump's approach going forward

With Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Biden rallied allies in Europe and beyond to provide Ukraine with billions in military and economic assistance — including more than \$100 billion from the U.S. alone. That allowed Kyiv to stay in the fight with Russian President Vladimir Putin's vastly bigger and better-equipped military. Biden's team also coordinated with allies to hit Russia with a steady stream of sanctions aimed at isolating the Kremlin and making Moscow pay an economic price for prosecuting its war.

But Biden has faced criticism that he's been too cautious throughout the war about providing the Ukrainians with certain advanced lethal weaponry in a timely matter and setting restrictions on how they're used — initially resisting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's requests to fire long-range ATACMS missiles deep into Russian territory as well as requests for Abrams tanks, F-16 fighter jets and other systems.

Biden often balked, before eventually relenting, out of a concern that it was necessary to hold the line against escalation that he worried could draw the U.S. and other NATO members into direct conflict with nuclear-armed Russia.

Trump, for his part, has criticized the cost of the war to U.S. taxpayers and vowed to bring the conflict to a quick end.

Biden said Friday he remains hopeful that the U.S. will continue to aid Ukraine after he leaves office.

"I know that there are a significant number of Democrats and Republicans on the Hill who think we should continue to support Ukraine," Biden said. "It is my hope and expectation they will speak up ... if Trump decides to cut off funding for Ukraine."

Daniel Fried, a former U.S. ambassador to Poland and adviser to Presidents Barack Obama, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton, said Biden's Ukraine legacy now will largely be shaped by Trump.

He added that Trump just may succeed in bringing what many Americans can accept as "a decent end" to the Ukraine war.

"That's not necessarily going to happen, but it could," Fried said. "And if he does, then the criticism of Biden will be that he acted to help Ukraine, but hesitated, dithered, did a lot of hand wringing, and it took Trump to actually bring about a fair settlement."

Sullivan makes the case that Trump, a billionaire real estate developer, should consider the backing of Ukraine through the prism of a dealmaker.

"Donald Trump has built his identity around making deals, and the way you make a good deal is with leverage," Sullivan said. "Our case publicly and privately to the incoming team is build the leverage, show the staying power, back Ukraine, and it is down that path that lies a good deal."

Biden's Mideast diplomacy shadowed by devastation of Gaza

In the Middle East, Biden has stood by Israel as it has worked to root out Hamas from Gaza. That war spawned another in Lebanon, where Israel has mauled Iran's most powerful ally, Hezbollah, even as Israel has launched successful airstrikes openly inside of Iran for the first time.

The degradation of Hezbollah in turn played a role when Islamist-led rebels last month ousted longtime Syrian leader Bashar Assad, a brutal fixture of Iran's "Axis of Resistance."

Biden's relationship with Israel's conservative leader Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been strained by the enormous Palestinian death toll in the fighting — now standing at more than 46,000 dead — and Israel's blockade of the territory that has left much of Gaza a hellscape where access to food and basic health care is severely limited.

Pro-Palestinian activists have demanded an arms embargo against Israel, but U.S. policy has largely remained unchanged. The State Department in recent days informed Congress of a planned \$8 billion weapons sale to Israel.

Aaron David Miller, a former State Department Middle East negotiator, said the approach has put Iran on its heels, but Biden will pay a reputational cost for the devastation of Gaza.

"The administration was either unable or unwilling to create any sort of restraint that normal humans would regard as significant pressure," Miller said. "It was beyond Joe Biden's emotional and political bandwidth to impose the kinds of sustained or significant pressures that might have led to a change in Israeli tactics."

More than 15 months after the Hamas-led attack that prompted the war, around 98 hostages remain in Gaza. More than a third of those are presumed dead by Israeli authorities.

Biden's Middle East adviser Brett McGurk is in the Middle East, looking to complete an elusive hostage and ceasefire deal as time runs out in the presidency. Trump, for his part, is warning that "all hell" will be unleashed on Hamas if the hostages aren't freed by Inauguration Day.

Sullivan declined to comment on Trump's threats to Hamas, but offered that the two sides are in agreement about the most important thing: getting a deal done.

"Having alignment of the outgoing and incoming administration that a hostage deal at the earliest possible opportunity is in the American national interest," he said. "Having unity of message on that is a good thing, and we have closely coordinated with the incoming team to this effect."

Ripples of Los Angeles fires continue as Meghan delays Netflix series launch, composer's works lost

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Weaker winds and intense firefighting efforts over the weekend boosted containment of fires burning in and around Los Angeles, but the effects of the blazes on the entertainment world continue.

Several projects and awards shows have been delayed, with the Producers Guild opting not to announce its nominations Sunday due to ongoing effects of the fire. Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex, also announced she would not launch a Netflix lifestyles program until March.

After a fierce battle Saturday, firefighters managed to fight back flames in Mandeville Canyon, home to Arnold Schwarzenegger and other celebrities near Pacific Palisades not far from the coast, where swooping helicopters dumped water as the blaze charged downhill. While firefighters have been able to push the flames away from several populated areas, strong winds are expected to resume this week and last through Wednesday.

Thousands of homes have been destroyed, and 24 people have died as a result of the fires. More are reported missing and officials expect that number to increase.

Here's more on how the fires are affecting celebrities and the entertainment world.

Meghan delays launch of Netflix series

The Duchess of Sussex has pushed back the release of her new Netflix series due to the wildfires that have ravaged the LA-area.

"With Love, Meghan" was set to debut Wednesday, but the streaming service said Sunday that it supports her request to push the premiere to focus on helping those affected by the fires.

The Duchess was born and raised in Los Angeles and now lives in Montecito, California, with Harry, the Duke of Sussex and their two children.

On Saturday, the royal couple visited Pasadena to hand out food and water to fire victims and thank first responders.

"With Love, Meghan" is a lifestyle program featuring the Duchess chatting with celebrity pals and demonstrating tasks like floral arrangements and baking. "I've always loved taking something pretty ordinary and elevating it," Meghan says in the trailer. The show will now drop March 4.

Composer Arnold Schoenberg's original work lost in fires

The publisher Arnold Schoenberg's works says original manuscripts and scores from the composer were lost in the Los Angeles wild fires.

Belmont Music Publishers, located in the Pacific Palisades neighborhood, made the announcement Sunday.

"We have lost our full inventory of sales and rental materials," the company said in a statement. "We hope that in the near future we will be able to 'rise from the ashes' in a completely digital form. ... There are some scores and performing materials for which we have digital scans."

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Born in Austria, Schoenberg moved to the U.S. when the Nazis took power and settled in Los Angeles, where he died in 1951.

Schoenberg gained attention for a 12-tone technique of composition and along with his students, including Alban Berg and Anton Webern, became known as the Second Viennese School. Among his most-known works are "Ewartung," "Gurre-Lieder," "Verklärte Nacht" and "Pierrot lunaire."

Screen Actors Guild pledges \$1 million to fire relief efforts

The Screen Actors Guild has joined the Walt Disney Co., the Grammys and other entertainment entities pledging millions in relief to help those affected by the fires.

SAG announced it would commit \$1 million to help members affected by the fires. While a lot of attention has been paid to stars who have lost homes, numerous less-famous industry workers have also lost homes or been displaced by the fires.

A tough-on-crime approach is back in US state capitols

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — Within minutes of his inauguration Monday, new Missouri Gov. Mike Kehoe is expected to issue a variety of orders targeting crime. The tone-setting move reflects a national trend.

After a period of relaxed sentencing laws, a tough-on-crime approach is back in political favor in the U.S.

Republicans and Democrats alike are promoting anti-crime initiatives as a new year of lawmaking gets underway in state capitols. That comes after voters in several states approved ballot measures in the fall imposing stricter penalties for crimes ranging from shoplifting to deadly drug dealing.

Kehoe, a Republican who cruised to election, is set to take the oath of office at noon. He plans a "Day One Action Ceremony" shortly afterward.

"As soon as my hand comes off the Bible, the Kehoe administration will be relentless in our efforts to make Missouri safer," Kehoe pledged.

In some states, the anti-crime measures are intertwined with efforts to crack down on those living in the U.S. illegally, mirroring an emphasis of President-elect Donald Trump. Many also propose tougher penalties for trafficking fentanyl, a synthetic opioid blamed for tens of thousands of overdose deaths annually in the U.S.

Other measures go beyond that. Some seek stricter sentences for sexual offenses involving children, violent crimes or retail theft rings, which have gained attention from social media videos showing shoplifting crews rampaging through stores.

In Maryland, Democratic state Sen. Ron Watson is sponsoring legislation he said would let prosecutors file felony charges against everyone involved in a group theft if the total value exceeds \$1,500, even if each person stole less than that.

Criminals "have become emboldened because they can get away with things and pretty much get a slap on the wrist," Watson said. "Violent or nonviolent, a crime is a crime. And that crime needs to be punished."

Drug crimes in the spotlight

Utah state Rep. Matthew Gwynn, a Republican, is among many lawmakers targeting fentanyl traffickers. Gwynn said his bill would impose heftier penalties for selling large quantities of illicit fentanyl than for other drugs like heroin and methamphetamine.

The federal government and many states have backed away from 1980s policies that imposed harsher sentences on crack cocaine than powder cocaine, as civil rights activists noted a disproportionate impact on minorities. But Gwynn, who is police chief of the Salt Lake City suburb of Roy, said sentencing enhancements for fentanyl are justified.

"I believe fentanyl to be almost terroristic in nature because of the amount of people it can kill," Gwynn said.

Many types of crimes rose during the coronavirus pandemic. More recently, the rates of violent crimes and many property crimes have trended back down, though shoplifting remains above pre-pandemic levels, according to the Council on Criminal Justice, a nonpartisan think tank.

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But people's sense of security isn't necessarily tied to statistics. High-profile crimes such as the New Year's Day attack in New Orleans, the burning of a woman on the New York subway or the fatal shooting of a health insurance executive outside a New York City hotel can impact perceptions of public safety.

"When you see randomness, brazenness, that makes people feel vulnerable and suggests there is a sense of lawlessness, a breakdown of behavioral norms," said Adam Gelb, president and CEO of the Council on Criminal Justice.

"Many people seem to think that the reforms over the past two decades overshot the mark and there needs to be a rebalancing," Gelb added.

Crime is on voters' minds

Nearly 8 in 10 voters in the U.S. said they were "very" or "somewhat" concerned about crime in their own communities, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of more than 120,000 voters conducted during the fall election. The percentage saying they were very concerned was higher than the national rate in several states including Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, Alabama and California.

California voters gave overwhelming approval in November to a ballot initiative making shoplifting a felony for repeat offenders and increasing penalties for some drug charges, including those involving fentanyl. The measure rolled back parts of progressive law passed by voters in 2014 that downgraded several nonviolent crimes to misdemeanors, including theft valued under \$950 and some drug offenses.

In Colorado, voters approved a ballot initiative lengthening the time people must serve in prison before they can be paroled for certain categories of murder, assault, sexual assault, kidnapping, arson, burglary and robbery.

Arizona voters approved measures boosting penalties for deadly fentanyl sales and mandating life imprisonment for certain child sex trafficking crimes.

Rethinking loose sentencing laws

Other states have backtracked just years after relaxing sentencing laws. Democratic Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek signed a measure rolling back a 2020 voter-approved law that had made possession of small amounts of hard drugs such as heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine only punishable by a ticket and a maximum fine of \$100. A new law that took effect last year makes that a misdemeanor punishable by up to six months in jail and imposes harsher penalties for selling drugs near parks and other places.

Republican Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry signed numerous anti-crime laws last year, including longer sentences for carjacking and fentanyl crimes, the elimination of parole for most offenders and the reversal of a 2016 law that had treated 17-year-olds charged with crimes as juveniles instead of adults.

In Missouri, lawmakers in 2014 approved an overhaul of the state's criminal laws that reduced possible prison sentences for some nonviolent drug crimes. In 2019, they added a law exempting some nonviolent offenders from requirements to serve between 40% and 80% of their prison terms, making hundreds of people eligible for release sooner.

This year, Missouri lawmakers are backing numerous anti-crime measures, including bills targeting fentanyl, stunt driving, rioting, retail theft and resisting arrest. Other measures encourage recruiting more police.

"Too many Missouri families are being torn apart by violence and crime," House Speaker Jon Patterson said on the Legislature's opening day. "Nothing is more harmful to the growth of our state than criminals who roam our streets with little fear of punishment."

What to know about the latest effort to bring an end to Turkey's 40-year Kurdish conflict

By SUZAN FRASER Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — Talks between politicians from Turkey's pro-Kurdish party and jailed Kurdish leaders have been gathering steam as they try to end 40 years of fighting between the state and the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK.

The latest peace effort comes at a time of heightened instability and fundamental changes reshaping the region. These include the ongoing Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, the weakening of the Hezbollah militant

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movement in Lebanon, and the reconfiguration of power in Syria after the toppling of President Bashar Assad.

The cautious process was initiated in October by Devlet Bahçeli, a firebrand ultranationalist who has usually opposed any concessions to Kurdish identity or rights.

Since then, the fall of Assad in a lightning rebel offensive has triggered intensified fighting between Turkish-backed and Kurdish groups in northern Syria.

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, who have controlled northeast Syria for the past decade, are under attack from the Syrian National Army, an umbrella of militias fighting on behalf of Turkey, which regards the SDF as an extension of the PKK and wants to neutralize it as an independent fighting force.

Recently, senior members of the Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party, or DEM, met jailed PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan and Selahattin Demirtaş, another imprisoned figurehead of the Kurdish movement. They have also met with the leaders of other political parties to explain their discussions.

What is the PKK?

The Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, has waged an armed insurgency against Turkey since 1984, initially with the aim of establishing a Kurdish state in the southeast of the country. Over time, the objective evolved into a campaign for autonomy and rights for Kurds within Turkey.

The conflict between militants and state forces, which has spread beyond Turkey's borders into Iraq and Syria, has killed tens of thousands of people. The PKK is considered to be a terror group by Turkey, the United States and the European Union.

Who is Öcalan?

Abdullah Öcalan, who as a student of political science in Ankara became deeply involved in leftist movements, formed the PKK in 1978 as a Marxist organization. He fled to Syria in 1979, along with other PKK members, where he remained until 1998, when Syria expelled him under intense pressure from Turkey.

Öcalan was captured in Kenya in 1999 and imprisoned on İmralı island in the Sea of Marmara, where he remains to this day. His death sentence for treason was commuted to a life term in prison after Turkey abolished the death penalty.

The 75-year-old endures as a symbol for Kurdish independence and rights and continues to wield influence over the Kurdish movement, with past messages relayed through family members or lawyers resonating beyond Turkey, in Iraq and Syria.

In a message relayed by his nephew in December, Öcalan said he has the power to end the conflict if the conditions are right.

Renewed effort for peace

In October, Bahçeli, a close ally of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, suggested Öcalan could be granted parole if he renounces violence and disbands the PKK. It was a major shift for the hardline politician who had previously strongly supported the state's military action against the militant group and its affiliates in neighboring Syria and rejected any notion of negotiation.

Erdoğan appears to have endorsed Bahçeli's stance.

There is a mixed reaction among politicians and analysts to suggestions of a new peace effort. Some describe it as a historic opportunity, while others strongly oppose any notion of leniency toward Öcalan or the PKK.

A recent attack on Turkey's key aerospace company outside of Ankara that killed several people was claimed by the PKK, complicating the debate.

Past peace efforts

There have been several peace efforts between the Turkish state and the PKK over the years, including secret negotiations held in Oslo, Norway from 2009 until 2011. However, none have yielded results.

The last attempt to reach a peace deal took place between 2013 and 2015 with a series of talks between Turkish officials and Öcalan, who declared a ceasefire and withdrew fighters to bases in northern Iraq.

Turkish officials took steps to improve Kurdish rights, including allowing Kurdish-language broadcasts. The process collapsed in July 2015, after a series of violent attacks, including one by the Islamic State group that killed 33 pro-Kurdish activists.

Since then, Turkey has cracked down on its pro-Kurdish movement and has jailed thousands of people, including the former leader of the main pro-Kurdish political party, Selahattin Demirtas, over alleged links to the PKK.

Why now?

The latest peace effort comes at a time when Turkey and the Kurds are both seeking security to face the challenges in the Middle East.

However, some believe the main aim of the reconciliation effort is for Erdogan's government to garner Kurdish support for a new constitution that would allow him to remain in power beyond 2028, when his term ends.

Bahceli has openly called for a new constitution, saying it was essential to keep Erdogan in power for Turkey's future. Erdogan and Bahceli are reportedly seeking parliamentary support from the DEM.

24 dead as fire crews try to corral Los Angeles blazes before winds return this week

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER and HOLLY RAMER Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Firefighters scrambled Sunday to make further progress against wildfires that have destroyed thousands of homes and killed 24 people in the Los Angeles area as forecasters again warned of dangerous weather with the return of strong winds this week. At least 16 people were missing, and authorities said that number was expected to rise.

The National Weather Service issued red flag warnings for severe fire conditions through Wednesday, with sustained winds of 50 mph (80 kph) and gusts in the mountains reaching 70 mph (113 kph). The most dangerous day will be Tuesday, said weather service meteorologist Rich Thompson.

"You're going to have really strong gusty Santa Ana winds, a very dry atmosphere and still very dry brush, so we still have some very critical fire weather conditions out there," Thompson said at a community meeting Saturday night.

Los Angeles County Fire Chief Anthony C. Marrone said 70 additional water trucks arrived to help firefighters fend off flames spread by renewed gusts. "We are prepared for the upcoming wind event," Marrone said. Fire retardant dropped by aircraft Sunday will act as a barrier along hillsides, officials said.

Fierce Santa Anas have been largely blamed for turning the wildfires sparked last week into infernos that leveled entire neighborhoods around the city where there has been no significant rainfall in more than eight months.

Twelve people were missing within the Eaton Fire zone and four were missing from the Palisades Fire, Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna said. Luna added that "dozens" more reports might have come in Sunday morning and investigators were reconciling whether some of the missing might be among the dead. There are no children among those reported missing, he said.

Meanwhile, the death toll rose to 24 over the weekend. Eight of the deaths were attributed to the Palisades Fire and 16 resulted from the Eaton Fire, the Los Angeles County coroner's office said in a statement Sunday evening.

Officials said they expected that figure to increase as teams with cadaver dogs conduct systematic grid searches in leveled neighborhoods. Authorities have established a center where people can report the missing.

Officials also were building an online database to allow evacuated residents to see if their homes were damaged or destroyed. In the meantime, LA city Fire Chief Kristin Crowley urged people to stay away from scorched neighborhoods.

"There are still active fires that are burning within the Palisades area, making it extremely, extremely dangerous for the public," Crowley said at a Sunday morning briefing. "There's no power, there's no water, there's broken gas lines, and we have unstable structures."

Officials warned the ash can contain lead, arsenic, asbestos and other harmful materials.

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About 150,000 people in Los Angeles County remained under evacuation orders, with more than 700 residents taking refuge in nine shelters, Luna said. Officials said most of the orders in the Palisades area were unlikely to be lifted before the red flag warnings expire Wednesday evening.

"Please rest assured that first thing Thursday we will begin talking about repopulation," Marrone said.

By Sunday morning, Cal Fire reported the Palisades, Eaton, Kenneth and Hurst fires had consumed more than 62 square miles (160 square kilometers), an area larger than San Francisco. The Palisades Fire was 11% contained and containment on the Eaton Fire reached 27%. Those two blazes accounted for 59 square miles (nearly 153 square kilometers).

Crews from California and nine other states are part of the ongoing response that includes nearly 1,400 fire engines, 84 aircraft and more than 14,000 personnel, including newly arrived firefighters from Mexico.

Fighting to save public and private areas

Minimal growth was expected Sunday for the Eaton Fire "with continued smoldering and creeping" of flames, an LA County Fire Department incident report said. Most evacuation orders for the area have been lifted.

After a fierce battle Saturday, firefighters managed to fight back flames in Mandeville Canyon, home to Arnold Schwarzenegger and other celebrities near Pacific Palisades not far from the coast, where swooping helicopters dumped water as the blaze charged downhill.

The fire ran through chaparral-covered hillsides and also briefly threatened to jump over Interstate 405 and into densely populated areas in the Hollywood Hills and San Fernando Valley.

Arrests for looting

Looting continues to be a concern, with authorities reporting more arrests as the devastation grows. Michael Lorenz, a captain with the Los Angeles Police Department, said seven people have been arrested in recent days, with two suspects "posing as firefighters coming and in and out of houses."

Asked exactly how many looters have been arrested, Lorenz said he couldn't give a precise number but that officers were detaining about 10 people a day. California National Guard troops arrived Friday to help guard properties.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom posted on X Saturday that "California will NOT allow for looting."

Historical cost

The fires that began Tuesday just north of downtown LA have burned more than 12,000 structures.

No cause has been determined for the largest fires and early estimates indicate the wildfires could be the nation's costliest ever. A preliminary estimate by AccuWeather put the damage and economic losses so far between \$135 billion and \$150 billion.

In an interview that aired Sunday on NBC, Gov. Gavin Newsom said the fires could end up being the worst natural disaster in U.S. history.

"I think it will be in terms of just the costs associated with it, in terms of the scale and scope," he said.

Inmate firefighters on the front lines

Along with crews from other states and Mexico, hundreds of inmates from California's prison system were also helping firefighting efforts. Nearly 950 incarcerated firefighters were dispatched "to cut fire lines and remove fuel to slow fire spread," according to an update from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

Though the state has long relied on prison labor to fight fires, the practice is controversial as the inmates are paid little for dangerous and difficult work. Inmates are paid up to roughly \$10.24 each day, with additional money for 24-hour shifts, according to the corrections department.

Overflowing kindness

Volunteers overflowed donation centers and some had to be turned away at locations including the Santa Anita Park horse racing track, where people who lost their homes sifted through stacks of donated shirts, blankets and other household goods.

Altadena resident Jose Luis Godinez said three homes occupied by more than a dozen of his family members were destroyed.

"Everything is gone," he said, speaking in Spanish. "All my family lived in those three houses and now we have nothing."

Rebuilding will be a challenge

Newsom issued an executive order Sunday aimed at fast-tracking the rebuilding of destroyed property by suspending some environmental regulations and ensuring that property tax assessments are not increased.

"We've got to let people know that we have their back," he said. "Don't walk away because we want you to come back, rebuild, and rebuild with higher quality building standards, more modern standards. We want to make sure that the associated costs with that are not disproportionate, especially in a middle-class community like this."

The White House said as of Sunday more than 24,000 people have registered for federal assistance made available by President Joe Biden's major disaster declaration last Wednesday.

LA Mayor Karen Bass said Sunday that she has spoken with members of the incoming presidential administration and said she expects Donald Trump will come visit the devastated region.

Leadership accused of skimping

Bass faces a critical test of her leadership during the city's greatest crisis in decades, but allegations of leadership failures, political blame and investigations have begun.

Newsom on Friday ordered state officials to determine why a 117 million-gallon (440 million-liter) reservoir was out of service and some hydrants had run dry.

Crowley, the LA fire chief, said city leadership failed her department by not providing enough money for firefighting. She also criticized the lack of water.

"When a firefighter comes up to a hydrant, we expect there's going to be water," Crowley said.

A dad and daughter help evacuees learn whether their homes survived the California wildfires

By GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

As the fire roared down a hillside toward their Altadena home, Vanessa Prata and her parents hurried to pack their car. They focused on saving irreplaceable items, like family photographs and a baby doll from Vanessa's childhood.

But they didn't leave.

Instead, the Pratas have remained in their family home of 27 years, which is somehow still standing amid widespread devastation from the Los Angeles wildfires, even as homes just over a block away burned. And as residents who did flee are kept away by police or military barricades, Prata and her dad have taken it upon themselves to check on their neighbors' homes.

"They're sitting in these shelters. They're not sure whether their house survived or didn't survive," Prata said. "Once you know what the situation is, you have an ability to regroup and see what you're going to do moving forward."

The fires raging around Los Angeles have consumed an area larger than San Francisco. Tens of thousands of people are under evacuation orders. Since the fires first began Tuesday, they have burned more than 12,000 structures, a term that includes homes, apartment buildings, businesses, outbuildings and some vehicles, and killed at least 24 people. The White House said Saturday that the Department of Defense is making its nearby bases available for emergency shelter, including more than 1,000 available beds.

Prata, a 25-year-old nursing student, had stopped at a hardware store on her way home from dinner Tuesday night when she saw the flames approaching the home she shares with her parents, two cats and a dog. She called her dad, then rushed home as many other people headed the other direction to evacuate.

At the house, the Pratas frantically packed, in the dark once the power went out. But Vanessa's father, Aluizio Prata, who teaches electrical and computer engineering at the University of Southern California, didn't want to go. He didn't think the fire would reach them, but if it did, he wanted to stay and help fight it.

They spent much of the night at a home up the street, carrying buckets of water, spraying the yard with a hose and stomping out embers before they spread in the powerful wind gusts.

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As the toll from the wildfires became clear, Vanessa Prata saw many people doing what they could to help those who lost their homes. They were donating food, clothing, household goods and pet supplies. Taco trucks from Los Angeles were offering free meals.

Prata remained home, with her family occasionally running a borrowed generator to check the news and keep the freezer cold. She wanted to help, too. But there was little she could do from behind the barricade. If she left her neighborhood, she wouldn't be allowed back.

So on Friday morning, Prata posted to an Altadena community group on Facebook, offering the one thing she could think of that would help.

"We are more than happy to drive around and take a picture for any person who would like to see their home or, God forbid, what is left of their home," she wrote.

The requests came pouring in — as many as 45 by Saturday morning. She and her dad set out on Friday, checking addresses written in a small notebook. They slowly make their way past fallen trees, downed wires and the husks of burned out cars.

Of more than two dozen homes they visited Friday and Saturday, fewer than half were still standing. At the end of a cul-de-sac, reached only after getting out of the car and walking past fallen trees and utility poles, the ruins of one home were still smoldering. One person whose house burned sent her a photo of what it had looked like before the fire.

"Those are devastating, when you get to the person's house and it's gone and you know that you're the one who's going to break the news," she said. "You're looking at the burnt ashes and then they send (a photo of) the house, how beautiful it was prior. And it's, there's no, there's no words. You just say, you know, 'I'm sorry. I wish there was more that I could do for you.'"

But her training as a nurse made her a good candidate for that work, she said.

"I'm not new to people crying, people passing away in front of me," she said. "I have an ability to be able to handle it."

And she is gratified to be part of the community effort. So many volunteers showed up to help at nearby donation centers Saturday that some were being turned away.

"Everyone is pitching in and doing what they can," Prata said. "It's overwhelmingly beautiful to see."

Biden and Netanyahu discuss the latest in the effort to reach an Israel-Hamas war ceasefire

By WAFAA SHURAFU and NATALIE MELZER Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and U.S. President Joe Biden spoke Sunday about efforts to reach a ceasefire and hostage release deal in the Israel-Hamas war, a sign of the intensifying push to reach a deal before Donald Trump's inauguration next week.

Talks mediated over the past year by the United States, Egypt and Qatar have repeatedly stalled at moments when they seemed close to a deal. Still, in recent days, U.S. officials have expressed hope of sealing an agreement.

Sunday's call between Biden and Netanyahu came as the head of Israel's Mossad foreign intelligence agency, David Barnea, and Biden's top Mideast adviser, Brett McGurk, were both in the Qatari capital Doha. Barnea's presence, confirmed by Netanyahu's office, meant high-level Israeli officials who would need to sign off on any agreement are now involved in talks.

McGurk has been working on final details of a text to be presented to both sides, Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, told CNN's "State of the Union." But he said he would not predict whether a deal can be reached by Jan. 20, the day of the inauguration.

"We are very, very close," he said. "Yet being very close still means we're far because until you actually get across the finish line, we're not there."

The White House and Netanyahu's office both confirmed the phone call between the two leaders without providing details.

Just one brief ceasefire has been achieved in 15 months of war, and that was in the earliest weeks of

fighting. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said this week a deal is "very close" and he hoped to complete it before handing over diplomacy to the incoming Trump administration.

Under discussion now is a phased ceasefire, with Netanyahu signaling he is committed only to the first phase, a partial hostage release in exchange for a weekslong halt in fighting.

Hamas has insisted on a full Israeli troop withdrawal from the largely devastated territory, but Netanyahu has insisted on destroying Hamas' ability to fight in Gaza.

Issues in the talks have included which hostages would be released in the first part of a phased ceasefire deal, which Palestinian prisoners would be released and the extent of any Israeli troop withdrawal from population centers in Gaza.

Israel's campaign in Gaza has killed more than 46,000 Palestinians, the majority women and children, according to the territory's Health Ministry, whose count does not give a breakdown between fighters and civilians. Israel's campaign was triggered by Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023 attack, in which militants killed some 1,200 people and abducted around 250 others.

Families of the roughly 100 hostages still held in Gaza are pressing Netanyahu to reach a deal to bring their loved ones home. Israelis rallied again Saturday night in the city of Tel Aviv, with photos of hostages on display.

In Gaza, Palestinians were tempering their hopes for a stop to Israel's campaign, which has devastated much of the territory and driven more than 80% of its 2.3 million people from their homes.

"We hear that there are negotiations every day, but we see nothing," said Mazen Hammad, a resident of the southern city of Khan Younis. "When we see it on the ground, then we believe that there is a truce."

EU ministers will consider easing sanctions on Syria at a meeting later in January

By BARAA ANWER Associated Press

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia (AP) — European Union foreign ministers will meet in late January to discuss easing sanctions imposed on Syria, the bloc's foreign policy chief said Sunday. However, she said the move would depend on Syria's new rulers carrying out an inclusive political transition after last month's overthrow of President Bashar Assad.

Kaja Kallas' comments came at a gathering of top European and Middle Eastern diplomats in the Saudi capital of Riyadh to discuss Syria's future.

Saudi Arabia called for the lifting of sanctions, which threaten to undermine Syria's recovery from nearly 14 years of civil war that killed an estimated 500,000 people and displaced half the country's prewar population of 23 million.

European countries and the United States have been wary over the Islamist roots of the former insurgents who drove Assad out of power and who now lead an interim government.

The former rebels have promised to hold a national dialogue summit that includes different groups across Syria to agree upon a new political road map leading to a new constitution and an election.

Kallas said EU foreign ministers will look at how to ease sanctions during a Jan. 27 meeting in Brussels. "But this must follow tangible progress in a political transition that reflects Syria in all its diversity," she said in a post on the social media platform X. She also posted a photo of herself meeting the new Syrian foreign minister, Asaad al-Shibani at Sunday's gathering.

Germany urges 'smart approach' to sanctions

The U.S., the EU and some Arab nations began imposing sanctions on Syria after Assad's brutal crack-down on the 2011 uprising against his rule and tightened them as the conflict spiraled into war.

Some of the measures are against individuals in Assad's government, including freezing of assets. But many target the government in general, including bans on many financial and banking dealings, on oil purchases and on investment or trade in some sectors, crippling the wider Syrian economy.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said sanctions against "Assad's henchmen who committed serious crimes" must remain in place.

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But she called for “a smart approach to sanctions, providing rapid relief for the Syrian population. Syrians now need a quick dividend from the transition of power.” Baerbock did not elaborate but announced an additional 50 million euros (\$51.2 million) in German aid for food, emergency shelters and medical care.

At the gathering, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan said international and unilateral sanctions on Syria should be lifted.

Continuing them “will hinder the aspirations of the brotherly Syrian people to achieve development and reconstruction,” he said. He praised steps taken so far by the interim Syrian government, including promises to start a political process “that includes various components” of the Syrian people.

Turkey urges ‘balance’ in international demands of Syria

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said his country, which was a strong supporter of the Syrian opposition to Assad, would try to help Syria in normalizing ties with the international community.

He said it was important to establish a “balance between the expectations of the international community and the realities faced by the new administration in Syria.”

He pledged Turkish support to the new government, especially in combating threats from the Islamic State group.

“As Turkey, we are ready to do our part to ease the difficult path ahead for the Syrian people,” he said in comments carried by Turkey’s state-run Anadolu Agency.

Washington has eased some restrictions

Last week, Washington eased some of its restrictions on Syria, with the U.S. Treasury issuing a general license, lasting six months, that authorizes certain transactions with the Syrian government, including some energy sales and incidental transactions.

The U.S. has also dropped a \$10 million bounty it had offered for the capture of Ahmad al-Sharaa, a Syrian rebel leader formerly known as Abu Mohammed al-Golani, whose forces led the ouster of Assad last month. Al-Sharaa was a former senior al-Qaida militant who broke with the group years ago and has pledged an inclusive Syria that respects the rights of religious minorities.

The rebels led a lightning insurgency that ousted Assad on Dec. 8 and ended his family’s decades-long rule.

Much of the world severed ties with Assad and imposed sanctions on his government — and its Russian and Iranian allies — over alleged war crimes and the manufacturing of the amphetamine-like stimulant Captagon, which reportedly generated billions of dollars as packages of the little white pills were smuggled across Syria’s porous borders.

With Assad out of the picture, Syria’s new authorities hope that the international community will pour money into the country to rebuild its battered infrastructure and make its economy viable again.

Canada’s Trudeau urges US consumers to consider the harm of Trump’s tariff threats

By JIM MORRIS Associated Press

VANCOUVER, British Columbia (AP) — Canada’s outgoing Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Sunday suggested that President-elect Donald Trump’s remarks about Canada becoming America’s “51st state” has distracted attention from the harm that steep tariffs would inflict on U.S. consumers.

Trump has threatened to impose 25% tariffs on all Canadian imports.

“The 51st state, that’s not going to happen,” Trudeau said in an interview with MSNBC. “But people are talking about that, as opposed to talking about what impact 25% tariffs (has) on steel and aluminum coming into the United States.”

Trudeau told MSNBC: “No American wants to pay 25% more for electricity or oil and gas coming in from Canada. That’s something I think people need to pay a little more attention to.”

Trump has also said that if Canada merged with the U.S., taxes would decrease and there would be no tariffs.

“I know that as a successful negotiator he likes to keep people off balance,” Trudeau said of Trump’s

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threats to use economic force to turn Canada into the 51st state. Trump has also erroneously cast the U.S. trade deficit with Canada — a natural resource-rich nation that provides the U.S. with commodities like oil — as a subsidy.

Canadian officials say that if Trump follows through with his threat of punishing tariffs, Canada would consider slapping retaliatory tariffs on American orange juice, toilets and some steel products. Already during Trump's first term in the White House, Canada responded to Trump's tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminum with its own on American products like bourbon, Harley Davidson motorcycles and playing cards.

"He got elected to try and make life easier for all Americans, to support American workers," Trudeau said of Trump. "These (tariffs) are things that are going to hurt them."

Trump said last week that the U.S. doesn't need oil, or anything else, from Canada. But almost a quarter of the oil that the U.S. consumes each day comes from Canada. The energy-rich western province of Alberta exports 4.3 million barrels of oil a day to the U.S.

Data from the United States Energy Information Administration shows that the U.S. consumes 20 million barrels a day, and produces about 13.2 million barrels a day.

Canada, a founding partner of NATO and home to more than 40 million people, is also the top export destination for 36 U.S. states. Nearly \$2.7 billion worth of goods and services cross the border each day.

Trump has said that he would reconsider his tariff threat if Canada made improvements in managing security at the Canada-U.S. border, which he and his advisers see as a potential entry point for undocumented migrants.

Trudeau has said that less than 1% of illegal immigrants and fentanyl cross into the U.S. from Canada. But after a meeting last November with Trump at Mar-a-Lago, the president-elect's private club and residence in Florida, Trudeau announced an increase in spending on border security, expressing willingness to address Trump's concerns in hopes that he would reconsider his tariff threat.

With the challenge of Trump's second administration looming and Trudeau's party trailing badly in the polls, the beleaguered Canadian prime minister announced his resignation last Monday. He will be replaced on March 9, when his Liberal party is set to pick a new leader.

Clippers, Lakers to resume their wildfire-delayed schedules on Monday

By BETH HARRIS AP Sports Writer

INGLEWOOD, Calif. (AP) — NBA games are scheduled to return to wildfire-ravaged Los Angeles on Monday night, with the Clippers planning to resume their schedule when they host the Miami Heat and the Lakers set to host Victor Wembanyama and the San Antonio Spurs.

The Clippers said at practice Sunday that the NBA had given the go-ahead for the game at Intuit Dome in Inglewood, south of the sprawling Palisades fire. The Spurs were told that, barring changes, they will play the Lakers on Monday as well at Crypto.com Arena in downtown Los Angeles.

"I pray this nightmare ends soon!" Lakers star LeBron James posted on social media.

It'll be the Clippers' first game in five days after having their home game against Charlotte on Saturday postponed because of the deadly wildfires across Los Angeles. The Lakers had two home games pushed back, one against the Hornets on Thursday and the other being the first in a planned two-game series against the Spurs on Saturday.

"When people are losing their homes, kids are losing schools, losing lives, it's very difficult to approach the game of basketball because life is bigger than basketball," Clippers coach Tyrone Lue said. "Hopefully we can bring some kind of joy with the game coming back tomorrow and some togetherness and try to put some smiles on people's faces in tough times."

Instead of spending the day before a game resting, the Clippers' Terance Mann planned to leave practice and scour a storage unit he keeps for useful items.

"I just want to give a lot of clothes, some money, shoes, whatever I can," he said. "I'm going to go help people out and donate and drive around and do what I can do to help."

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The Lakers announced plans for a donation drive for their upcoming games, starting Monday, asking fans to bring new, in-the-package items to support the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank's relief efforts.

The Lakers' UCLA Health Training Center in El Segundo will begin serving as a drive-thru donation center on Tuesday, the team said. The Lakers said non-food items such as deodorant, toothpaste, toothbrushes, lotion, waterless shampoo, battery-pack phone chargers, socks, mittens and gloves, hand warmers, beanies and blankets are priorities.

For food items, the Lakers said donations of peanut and other nut butters, protein-based snacks, crackers, peanut butter crackers, trail mix, fruit snacks, energy bars, pop top tuna, pop top chicken, 100% juice boxes, raisins and other dried fruit, UHT milk, individual cereal boxes, water and non-carbonated drinks are welcomed.

The Spurs had to change hotels because of fire concerns after arriving in Los Angeles, and the Heat arrived on Saturday night as scheduled after playing in Portland.

"Obviously, we just want to see the community come back together," Spurs forward Harrison Barnes said.

Checking apps and watching and listening to 24/7 news about the fires has become a habit since the disaster began Tuesday, with multiple fires burning around Los Angeles County.

"I've watched the news more than I ever have in my life over the past three days," Mann said, smiling. "I was just on YouTube TV watching the news in the locker room trying to get an update on what's going on."

The Clippers were on the road when the fires began. Kawhi Leonard left the team in Denver to return to his family and home in Pacific Palisades, one of the two biggest fires in the area.

"It was good to see that him and his family are doing good," Mann said.

Some members of the Clippers organization had to evacuate their homes and others know people who lost theirs. Lakers coach JJ Redick said last week that the house he and his family are renting this season — along with most of their possessions — was completely destroyed by fire.

"People are still barely getting sleep," Mann said. "Some guys lost power, some guys got family stuff to figure out, some peoples' kids school burned down. There's a lot going on. It's way bigger than basketball."

In Denver, Nicolas Batum said he checked his phone at halftime — something he never does — to see where the fires were burning. He got back to LA and rushed to pack boxes when he thought his family would have to flee.

Now, the Clippers are eager to return to their jobs and give their fans a break.

"We've been through the crazy stuff for the last five days," Batum said. "I think maybe people need that to get their mind off of it for two, three hours."

The Clippers and Lakers both have home games scheduled for Wednesday as well, with the Clippers taking on the Brooklyn Nets and the Lakers playing host to the Heat. ESPN was planning to broadcast the Lakers-Heat game; the network changed those plans on Sunday and put a game with Golden State visiting Minnesota on the national TV schedule in its place.

The California wildfires could be leaving deeper inequality in their wake

By TERRY TANG, JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER and JAE HONG Associated Press

ALTADENA, Calif. (AP) — The sight of celebrity mansions and movie landmarks reduced to ashes can make it seem like the wildfires roaring through the Los Angeles area affected a constellation of movie stars.

But a drive through the charred neighborhoods around Altadena shows that the fires also burned through a remarkable haven for generations of Black families avoiding discriminatory housing practices elsewhere. They have been communities of racial and economic diversity, where many people own their own homes.

Some now fear the most destructive fires in California's history have altered that for good. Recovery and rebuilding may be out of reach for many, and pressures of gentrification could be renewed.

Samantha Santoro, 22, a first-generation college student at Cal Poly Pomona, remembered being annoyed when the initial news coverage of the wildfires focused more on celebrities. She and her sister, who attends UC Berkeley, worry how their Mexican immigrant parents and working-class neighbors who lost

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their homes in Altadena will move forward.

"We don't have like, 'Oh, I'll just go to my second home and stay there,'" Santoro said.

The landlord of their family's two-bedroom house with a pool had never increased the \$1,650 rent, making it possible for the Santoros to affordably raise their daughters. Now, they're temporarily staying with a relative in Pasadena. The family has renters insurance but not much else.

"I think it's hard to believe that you have nothing," Santoro said, through tears, thinking of her parents. "Everything that they ever worked for was in that house."

Altadena had been a mix of tiny bungalows and magnificent mansions. The community of 42,000 includes blue-collar families, artists, entertainment industry workers and white-collar ones. About 58% of residents are non-white, with one-fourth of them Hispanic and nearly a fifth Black, according to Census data.

During the Civil Rights era, Altadena became a rare land of opportunity for Black Americans to reach the middle class without the discriminatory practices of denying them access to credit. They kept homes within the family and helped others to flourish. Today, the Black home ownership rate there is at 81.5%, almost double the national rate.

That's impressive considering 92% of the 15,000 residences in Altadena are single-family homes, according to the 2023 Census American Community Survey. The median income is over \$129,000. Just over 7% of residents live in poverty.

Victoria Knapp, chair of the Altadena Town Council, worries that the fires have irreparably changed the landscape for these families.

"Someone is going to buy it and develop who knows what on it. And that is going to change the character of Altadena," Knapp said, adding that those with fewer resources will be disproportionately hurt.

The family of Kenneth Snowden, 57, was one of the Black families able to purchase a home in 1962. That house, as well as the one Snowden bought almost 20 years ago, are both gone.

He is challenging state and federal officials to help all fire-affected communities fairly because "your \$40 million home is no different than my \$2 million home."

Snowden wants the ability to acquire home loans with 0% interest. "Give us the ability to rebuild, restart our lives," he said. "If you can spend billions of dollars fighting a war, you can spend a billion dollars to help us get back where we were at."

Shawn Brown lost not only her home but also the public charter school she founded in Altadena. She had a message for fellow Black homeowners who might be tempted with offers for their property: "I would tell them to stand strong, rebuild, continue the generational progress of African-Americans."

She and other staff at Pasadena Rosebud Academy are trying to raise money to rebuild while looking at temporary sites in churches.

But even some churches have burned. At Altadena Baptist Church, the bell tower is pretty much the only thing still standing.

The Rev. George Van Alstine and others are trying to help more than 10 church members who lost homes with needs like navigating insurance and federal aid. The pastor is worried the fires will lead to gentrification, with Black parishioners, who make up half the congregation, paying the price.

"We're seeing a number of families who are probably going to have to move out of the area because rebuilding in Altadena will be too expensive for them," he said.

The 32-year-old photographer Daniela Dawson, who had been working two jobs to meet the \$2,200 rent for her studio apartment, fled the wildfires with her Hyundai SUV and her cat, Lola. She lost almost everything else, including thousands of dollars of photography gear.

She did not have renter's insurance. "Obviously now I'm thinking about it. Wish I had it," she said.

Dawson plans to return to Arizona, where she lived previously, and regroup. But she likely won't be returning to Altadena.

Fires burn Los Angeles schools and destroy outdoor education sanctuaries

By CHEYANNE MUMPHREY and SHARON LURYE AP Education Writers

For Irina Contreras, a program manager for Los Angeles County's Department of Arts and Culture, outdoor education was a refuge for both her and her daughter during the pandemic.

Now, much of that refuge has been burned in the raging wildfires around Los Angeles.

Her 7-year-old daughter, Ceiba, hikes with a kid's adventure group called Hawks and attended Matilija, a bilingual forest school for preschool and kindergarten. Rain or shine, she and her friends would spend their days climbing, jumping, hiking, and swimming in places like Eaton Canyon Nature Area, a 190-acre (77-hectare) preserve near Altadena, now destroyed by fire.

Ceiba learned to ask plants for permission before taking samples to glue into her nature journal. Once, her group discovered a hidden path that led behind a waterfall. Ceiba couldn't stop talking about it for days.

For parents like Contreras, the wildfires have been devastating not just because of the loss of life and thousands of homes. They are mourning natural and educational areas that served as sanctuaries and learning spaces for local families, especially in the years since the pandemic. The fires have torn through natural areas that served every type of educational setting: public and private schools, nature-based preschools, homeschool groups, summer camps and more.

"It's about so much more than what she's been learning," Contreras said. "I can speak with absolute confidence that it totally affected me, personally."

The fires have burned school buildings, too, including Odyssey Charter School in Altadena, which Miguel Ordeñana's children attend.

"The community has been devastated by the fire," said Ordeñana, senior manager of community science at the Natural History Museum. "It's been a challenge to carefully share that news with my children and help them work through their emotions. A lot of their friends lost their homes. And we don't know the impact to school staff, like their teachers, but a lot of them live in that area as well and have lost their homes."

Some areas untouched by fire were inaccessible because of poor air quality. Griffith Park, home of the Hollywood sign, had not been affected by the end of the week but it's not clear when the air quality there will be good enough to resume outdoor programs, said Ordeñana, who was the first to capture on camera a late puma in the nearby area that gained fame under the name P-22.

Ordeñana said his family was able to connect with some other families from Odyssey Charter School for pizza and an indoor playdate, but he is uncertain what the days will look like for them with school closures already extending through next week.

All schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District, the nation's second largest, were closed Friday because of heavy smoke and ash over the city. Classes will not resume until conditions improve, officials said. Pasadena Unified School District also closed schools and several of its campuses sustained damage, including Eliot Arts Magnet Middle School.

The California Department of Education released a statement Wednesday saying 335 schools from Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Riverside, Ventura, and San Diego counties were closed. It was unclear how many would be closed Monday.

During the pandemic, Contreras felt like she was stuck on a screen. She devoted much of her energy to working, writing and organizing, but her daughter's outdoor education helped her better understand the value of stepping away from the grind.

Contreras feels confident the outdoor programs will return, although it's unclear when it will be safe for people to hike around areas like Eaton Canyon.

"The nature center is gone," Richard Smart, superintendent of the Eaton Canyon Natural Area in Pasadena, said Thursday. "The wildflowers, the shrubs are gone." The park hosted dozens of school field trips a year and Smart estimates more than a thousand students visited yearly.

"Teachers liked it because it was also free, it was local, it was nearby. And it was a place to see nature — wild nature but also in a friendly, safe environment," he said.

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Only a few exterior walls of the Eaton Canyon Nature Center were left standing, he said.

"For many of the local school districts, we truly were in their backyard, and now they won't be able to use it for the foreseeable future," he said. "The park is such a touchstone for people in the community, and so to lose that is just, devastating is not even the right word. It feels indescribable."

Many parents and teachers are likely wondering what to do and where to take their children as fires continue to burn across Los Angeles, said Lila Higgins, a senior manager for community science at the Natural History Museum and author of "Wild L.A.," a field trip and nature guidebook.

It can be healing to connect with the land after a disaster like the fires, Higgins said.

"Learning from our Indigenous partners, the original and continuing caretakers of Los Angeles, it is imperative we follow their leadership in the fire recovery," Higgins said.

A certified forest therapy guide, Higgins says time in nature lowers heart rates, lowers blood pressure and helps children with attention-deficit / hyperactivity disorder feel more calm and relaxed.

"For children's cognitive development, time in nature and time spent connecting with nature is so important," Higgins said. Outdoor spaces also can help children learn how to develop relationships through connections with animals, understand orientation through space by following trails and map-reading, and understand human impacts on wildlife.

Greg Pauly, co-author of "Wild L.A." and director of the Urban Nature Research Center at the museum, said he had hope natural areas like Eaton Canyon would continue to be places to interact with nature and once again welcome field trips. "But it's certainly going to be a while before that happens."

"This is the reality of modern Southern California," he said. "Fire changes the landscape and people's lives shockingly often."

Southern areas hit by winter storm thaw and power slowly returns

By SARA CLINE and BEN FINLEY Associated Press

After a freezing winter storm shut schools, cut power and cancelled or delayed flights, the South was slowly thawing Sunday.

Crews worked furiously and by Sunday morning power had been restored to parts of North Carolina and South Carolina where tens of thousands of customers lost electricity over the last few days, according to Duke Energy.

Power was back for 97% of the retail customers served by Georgia Power — the state largest utility — which serves all but four of the state's 159 counties, it said.

"Crews have not slowed down, in fact, we have brought in additional resources to help us get across the finish line," a press release on The City of Atlanta Government's Facebook page read.

Much of the winter weather has moved out of the area, said Dylan Lusk, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Peachtree, Georgia.

"For the most part, we are slowly warming up and finally thawing a little bit after snow fall and a coating of freezing rain," Lusk said.

Warmer weather was expected but some areas were still dealing with ice. Authorities warned people to drive slowly and be careful with slick spots on roads — especially when temperatures drop again at night and melted snow and ice refreezes.

"Black ice will return as temperatures drop below freezing this evening through Monday morning," the National Weather Service said.

Planes needed deicing and more than 100 flights to and from Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport were delayed on Sunday — an improvement from Saturday, when 1,000 flights were cancelled or delayed, according to FlightAware.com. By mid-afternoon Sunday operations had returned to normal, airport officials said.

Earlier this week the storm brought heavy snow, as much as 7 inches (about 18 centimeters) in some spots, and made roads slick across much of Texas and Oklahoma before moving east.

In some cities, the storm piled up more than a year's worth of snowfall. As much as a foot (about 31

centimeters) fell in parts of Arkansas. In Memphis, a city that usually sees 2.7 inches (6.9 centimeters) a year, the Memphis International Airport recording more than 7 inches (about 18 centimeters).

Atlanta was hit with more than 2 inches (5 centimeters) of snow on Friday, according to the National Weather Service. The agency said it was the first time the city had over an inch of snowfall since 2018.

While the National Weather Service says that Gulf Coast residents can expect showers Sunday and Monday, other parts of the country may see snow and brace for a mass of cold, dry air from the Arctic region — including in the Great Lakes region.

Although conditions are expected to improve, some places — including churches — announced closures for Sunday.

School was canceled on Friday for millions of children from Texas to Georgia and as far east as South Carolina, giving them a rare snow day. On Saturday, officials in northern Alabama said schools could remain closed Monday if ice doesn't melt off secondary roads.

France's battered Mayotte islands hit by a new tropical storm just weeks after a devastating cyclone

By GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — The French territory of Mayotte was battered by a new tropical storm Sunday, just weeks after the worst cyclone to hit the islands in nearly a century laid waste to entire neighborhoods and villages and left authorities facing a huge recovery effort.

Mayotte issued a red alert and people were ordered to stay in their homes or find a solid shelter, and store food and water, as Tropical Storm Dikeledi brought heavy rains and strong winds to once again pound France's poorest department. Some areas were experiencing flooding.

Mayotte, an archipelago in the Indian Ocean off the east coast of Africa, had only just begun the process of rebuilding after the devastation of Cyclone Chido last month, which killed at least 39 people, left more than 200 still missing, and injured more than 5,000 when it struck on Dec. 14.

Three people died in nearby Madagascar after Dikeledi made landfall there as a cyclone on Saturday, the country's National Office for Risk and Disaster Management said. Parts of northern Madagascar were also placed under red alert.

Dikeledi had weakened to a tropical storm by the time it reached Mayotte on Sunday, French meteorological service Meteo-France said. The center of the storm would pass about 100 kilometers (62 miles) south of Mayotte, Meteo said. Chido had hit Mayotte head-on.

But Meteo-France warned Dikeledi could strengthen into a cyclone again, while authorities in Mayotte said there was a high danger of flooding and landslides across the islands and issued the red alert on Saturday night. That alert would remain in place for Sunday and civilians were forbidden from being outside until the alert was lifted, said the Mayotte Prefecture, the French government department that runs the territory.

"The danger to the population persists," the prefecture said on its official Facebook page. It said the weather would be calm at one point on Sunday but would become violent again later in the day.

Mayotte was also again opening cyclone shelters at schools and community centers for those in need, the prefecture said. The international airport, which was heavily damaged by Chido, was closed again until further notice.

Officials said they were taking no chances after the devastation of Chido, which prompted an angry reaction by Mayotte residents who vented their frustration at French President Emmanuel Macron when he visited days after the disaster. Mayotte's people have previously accused the French government of neglecting them and the territory, which is the poorest in the European Union.

The French Interior Ministry said emergency personnel and security forces had been mobilized for Dikeledi's arrival, with much of the focus on the precarious shantytowns around the capital, Mamoudzou, and other areas, which were largely destroyed by Chido. Many who had lost their houses in Chido still had no proper shelter when Dikeledi struck.

National TV station Mayotte la 1ère said that the southern village of Mbouini, one of the few in Mayotte

spared by Chido, had been flooded and almost totally destroyed by Dikeledi. Mayotte la 1ère broadcast video of the residents of Mbouini escaping in wooden canoes as their homes were submerged under flood water.

Mayotte is a densely populated territory of around 320,000 people. Another 100,000 undocumented migrants from nearby Comoros and elsewhere are also believed to live on the islands, which are a draw for people from poorer countries because of the French welfare system.

Chido was the worst cyclone to hit Mayotte in 90 years, authorities said. While 39 deaths have been confirmed, French Prime Minister François Bayrou warned on a visit to the islands two weeks ago that the final death toll could be several hundred. Authorities have faced challenges in recording the deaths and injuries from Chido because many of those affected were undocumented migrants, and also because of the Muslim practice of burying people within 24 hours of them dying.

After smashing Mayotte, Chido made landfall on mainland Africa, killing more than 100 others in Mozambique and Malawi. Meteorologists expect Dikeledi to turn south and then east, tracking back toward Madagascar and out to sea after passing Mayotte.

November to April is cyclone season in the southwestern Indian Ocean, and the region has been pummeled by a series of strong ones in recent years. The worst was Cyclone Idai in 2019, which killed more than 1,500 people in Madagascar, Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe and affected more than 3 million people.

15 killed in an explosion and fire at a gas station in central Yemen

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — An explosion at a gas station triggered a massive fire in central Yemen, killing at least 15 people, health officials said Sunday.

The explosion occurred Saturday at the Zaher district in the province of Bayda, the Houthi rebel-run Health Ministry said in a statement. At least 67 others were injured, including 40 in critical condition.

The ministry said rescue teams were searching for those reported missing. It wasn't immediately clear what caused the explosion.

Footage circulated online showing a massive fire that sent columns of smoke into the sky and left vehicles charred and burning.

Bayda is controlled by Iranian-backed Houthi rebels, who have been at war with Yemen's internationally recognized government for more than a decade.

Elsewhere in Bayda, the Houthis attacked and looted Hanaka al-Masoud village in the al-Qurayshiya district last week, according to the internationally recognized government. It said there were fatalities but gave no figures.

Information Minister Moammar al-Eryani said the attack came after a weeklong siege of the village.

"This horrific attack targeted citizens' homes and mosques, and resulted in many casualties, including women and children, and the destruction of property," he said.

Rights activist Riyadh al-Dubai said the Houthis detained dozens of men and looted homes, seizing valuables such as gold, money, daggers and other possessions. He said shelling by the Houthis had continued relentlessly day and night for more than five days.

The U.S. Embassy in Yemen condemned the attack, saying in a statement that the "deaths, injuries, and wrongful detentions of innocent Yemenis perpetrated by Houthi terrorists are depriving the Yemeni people of peace and a brighter future."

Yemen's civil war began in 2014, when the rebels took control of the capital, Sanaa, and much of the country's north, forcing the government to flee to the south, then to Saudi Arabia. A Saudi-led coalition entered the war in March 2015, backed at the time by the U.S., in an effort to restore the internationally recognized government.

The war has killed more than 150,000 people including civilians and combatants, and in recent years deteriorated largely into a stalemate and caused one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

As Biden joins the former presidents club, here are some ideas for his retirement to-do list

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is about to have a lot more free time. He need look no further than past presidents for ideas on what to put on his retirement to-do list.

At age 82, Biden is the oldest U.S. president. In a recent interview with USA Today, he acknowledged uncertainty about his future stamina, saying, "Who knows what I'm going to be when I'm 86 years old?"

But his age isn't remarkable for former presidents, nine of whom lived past 90. They include George H.W. Bush, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, John Adams, Herbert Hoover and Jimmy Carter, who recently died at 100.

A look at some traditional — as well as a few decidedly less conventional — ways Biden might spend his upcoming years:

Try to bolster his place in history

Unlike his presidential predecessor-turned-successor, Donald Trump, Biden almost certainly won't try a political comeback.

The Democrat has said little publicly about his post-Oval Office plans. Those who have long known him say it's not something he's discussed much beyond a tight circle of close aides.

Some modern former presidents have collected large fees for post-White House speaking engagements. Biden, who was plagued most of his term by low approval ratings, could use such appearances to try to bolster his legacy and future popularity. He told USA Today that he wanted his legacy to be having worked "to restore the economy and reestablish America's leadership in the world."

The good news for Biden is that presidents often see their popularity improve after leaving office.

Republican George W. Bush was unpopular at the end of his term amid the Iraq War and the financial crisis. But he became more favorably viewed in subsequent years, despite keeping a low public profile while taking up painting. Trump was similarly dogged by low approval ratings throughout his first term, but won back the White House in November.

Fundraise and plan for a presidential library

A priority for Biden is likely to be fundraising and beginning work on plans for his presidential library. It probably would be in Biden's home state of Delaware, where he was a senator for 36 years and spent many weekends while president.

Officials have already enlisted at least one Biden administration ambassador to help with fundraising. A model can be the Barack Obama Presidential Center, a 19.3-acre (0.08-square-kilometer) library and museum in Chicago. Work began three years ago, with completion expected in 2026.

Sort through keepsakes — carefully

Biden can be something of a pack rat, aides say, and may want to hang on to memorabilia from his White House years. He needs to proceed with caution.

Federal elected officials are required to relinquish official documents and classified materials when they leave office. Biden's personal lawyers have been working on careful document management since even before classified material from Biden's time in the Senate and as vice president was found at the Penn Biden Center in Washington and in Biden's Delaware garage.

Those discoveries followed an FBI search in 2022 on Trump's Florida club, part of a documents case that was scrapped after he won back the White House. In Biden's case, special counsel Robert Hur later released a report impugning the president's age and mental competence but didn't seek criminal charges over mishandled documents.

"We are going to do our best, certainly, to be careful to follow the rules, to do this the right way," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said when asked about document retention on Friday.

Write another memoir — also carefully

Biden hasn't expressed much interest, those close to him say, in writing another book. He's written two memoirs, "Promises to Keep" published in 2007, and "Promise Me, Dad," released in 2017.

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He might eventually opt to work on a third, though, to help cement his aforementioned legacy. Again, he would need to proceed with caution.

Hur accused Biden of being sloppy about sharing classified information with ghostwriter Mark Zwonitzer, who worked on Biden's first two books. The special counsel considered charging Zwonitzer with obstruction of justice because the ghostwriter destroyed recordings of interviews he conducted with Biden while they worked on his second memoir.

Ultimately, Hur's report said Zwonitzer offered "plausible, innocent reasons" for having done so and subsequently cooperated with investigators.

Revel in the ex-president's club

A longtime enthusiast of political tradition, Biden could well embrace membership in the ex-presidents club. The former commanders in chief from time to time pose for pictures and pat one another on the back while milling around at historic events — and sit together at VIP funerals.

Former presidents also sometimes take on special projects together such as promoting vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic or raising money after natural disasters. They rarely criticize one another and tend to offer even fewer harsh words about current White House occupants.

This will be a chance for Biden to again differentiate himself from Trump, who showed little interest in spending time with former presidents after losing his 2020 reelection bid. That was similar to how he shunned typical post-presidency endeavors like working on building a presidential library, instead concentrating on his 2024 campaign.

Biden already convened his own former presidents club of sorts while still in office: He prepared for his State of the Union address last March by holding a video call with actors who had previously played presidents.

Morgan Freeman, Tony Goldwyn, Geena Davis and Michael Douglas offered advice and encouragement, as did Bill Pullman, who played President Thomas J. Whitmore in "Independence Day." Pullman seized on Biden's ever-present optimism in his public comments to predict, "People, when they look at all that you've managed to do, they're gonna remember. Time will remember, always, your words."

Try his hand at show business?

Speaking of celebrities, Biden has floated the idea of more glitzy post-presidential pursuits.

In August, about a month after he scrapped his reelection campaign, Biden joked at an event for online content creators: "That's why I invited you to the White House — because I'm looking for a job."

When Jessica Alba helped celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month at the White House a few weeks later, Biden joked that he might soon need the star's business connections to help find work, saying, "Jessica, if I'm really good, maybe you can get me a job?"

He offered a similar joke at a December event for Kennedy Center honorees, telling Robert De Niro, "If I get in trouble, I'm coming to you, pal."

"I'm looking for work in February," Biden said to laughter. "Maybe you've got something for me? A Biden-De Niro combination? I can't sing, I can't act, I can't dance, do a damn thing — but I could help ya."

Today in History: January 19, Howard Hughes sets coast-to-coast flight record

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Sunday, Jan. 19, the 19th day of 2025. There are 346 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Jan. 19, 1937, Howard Hughes set a new transcontinental air speed record in his H-1 Racer aircraft, flying from Los Angeles to Newark, New Jersey, in seven hours, 28 minutes and 25 seconds.

Also on this date:

In 1853, Giuseppe Verdi's opera "Il Trovatore" premiered in Rome.

In 1861, Georgia became the fifth state to secede from the Union; it would join the Confederacy the following month.

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In 1942, a German submarine sank the Canadian liner RMS Lady Hawkins off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, killing 251 people; 71 survived.

In 1955, President Dwight D. Eisenhower held the first televised presidential press conference.

In 1966, Indira Gandhi was elected to her first term as prime minister of India.

In 1987, H. Guy Hunt became Alabama's first Republican governor since 1874 as he was sworn into office, succeeding George C. Wallace.

In 2012, Rupert Murdoch's media empire apologized and agreed to cash payouts to 37 people whose telephones had been hacked by its tabloid press.

Today's birthdays: Actor Tippi Hedren is 95. Actor-singer Michael Crawford is 83. Actor Shelley Fabares (fab-RAY') is 81. Country musician Dolly Parton is 79. Actor Katey Sagal is 71. Comedian Paul Rodriguez is 70. Basketball coach and commentator Jeff Van Gundy is 63. Tennis Hall of Famer Stefan Edberg is 59. Actor Shawn Wayans is 54. Actor Drea (DRAY-uh') de Matteo is 53. Football Hall of Famer Walter Jones is 51. Comedian-impressionist Frank Caliendo is 51. Actor Jodie Sweetin is 43. U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg is 43. Film director Damien Chazelle is 40. Olympic gymnastics gold medalist Shawn Johnson is 33.