

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 1 of 74

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [3- Carnival of Silver Skates on GDILIVE.COM](#)
- [4- NSU Women's Basketball](#)
- [5- NSU Men's Basketball](#)
- [5- Nelson's 80th Birthday](#)
- [6- Multiple GFP Items Available for Public Comment](#)
- [7- Johnson selected for MS All-State Jazz Band](#)
- [8- Brown County Commission Agenda](#)
- [9- South Dakota Department of Health Reports Pertussis Death](#)
- [10- SD SearchLight: U.S. Senate advances Noem's nomination to head Department of Homeland Security](#)
- [10- SD SearchLight: Lieutenant governor signals future role for his predecessor as Noem's departure looms](#)
- [11- SD SearchLight: State's bill for 2024 flood response and recovery is \\$3.5 million, officials say](#)
- [12- SD SearchLight: Hegseth confirmed as Pentagon chief after Vance breaks tie vote in U.S. Senate](#)
- [13- Weather Pages](#)
- [17- Daily Devotional](#)
- [18- Subscription Form](#)
- [19- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [20- Upcoming Groton Events](#)
- [21- News from the Associated Press](#)

Saturday, Jan. 25

C Girls Tournament in Groton: 10 a.m.: Groton vs Warner, 11 a.m.: Groton vs. Oakes, Noon: Warner vs. Tiospa Zina, 1 p.m.: Warner vs Oakes, 2 p.m.: Groton vs. Tiospa Zina

HOSA Winter Formal, GHS Gym

Girls C Invitational, 10 a.m. Groton Arena

Girls and Boys Varsity Wrestling at Arlington, 10 a.m.

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

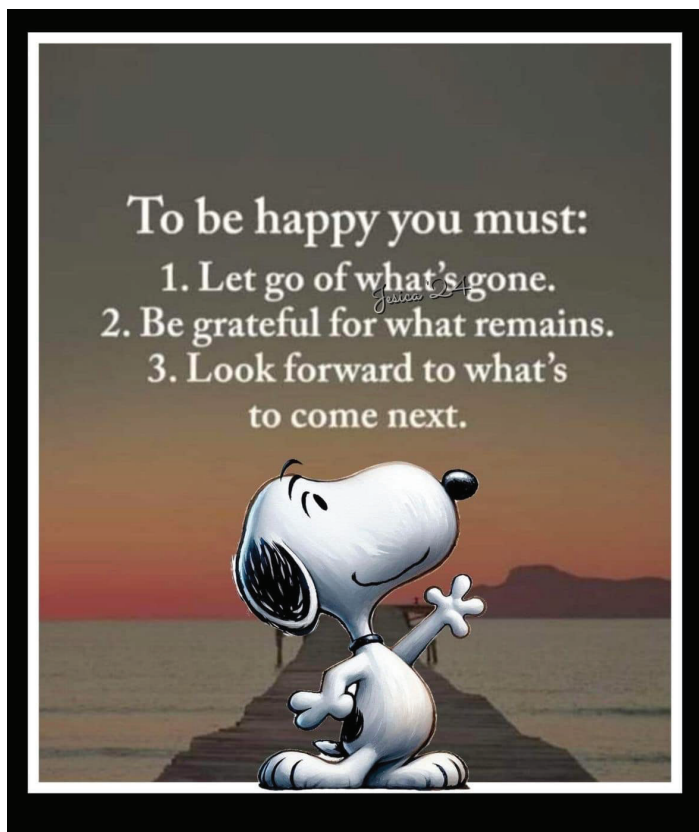
United Methodist: PEO (outside group), 1:30 p.m.

Sunday, Jan. 26

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; annual meeting; no Sunday School; Choir, 6 p.m.

Groton Robotics Pancake Feed 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., Groton Community Center

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



Carnival of Silver Skates, 2 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.

United Methodist: Conde worship, 8:15 a.m.; Groton worship, 9:30 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.; Coffee Time, 10:30 a.m.; Britton worship, 11:15 a.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

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

Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.;

St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m.; at Zion, 11 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.

Monday, Jan. 27

Senior Menu: Tater tot hot dish, mixed vegetables, vanilla pudding with oranges, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Breakfast sliders.

School Lunch: Chicken patty, tiny whole potatoes.

Boys JH Wrestling at Ipswich, 6 p.m.

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

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

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Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 2 of 74

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.

Weight-Loss Drug Trial

Novo Nordisk's shares surged as much as 14% yesterday after the pharmaceutical giant released promising results from an early-stage trial of its new weight-loss drug, amycretin. The latest experimental once-a-week injection builds on the success of Novo Nordisk's existing weight-loss medications like Wegovy and Ozempic.

The Danish company found 125 obese and overweight adults who participated in the clinical trial lost around 22% of their body weight after 36 weeks. Similar to Wegovy and Ozempic (functionally the same drug, w/video), amycretin mimics a gut hormone known as GLP-1, which regulates appetite and feelings of fullness. Amycretin also stimulates a pancreas hormone called amylin, which controls appetite and regulates blood sugar. Relatedly, Novo Nordisk is working on a pill version of amycretin, which helped separate trial participants lose about 13% of their body weight in 12 weeks.

Roughly 30% of US adults are clinically overweight, while 40% of US adults are clinically obese, a risk factor for diabetes, heart disease, and more.

Hamas to free four Israeli female soldiers today.

Their release is part of a ceasefire deal struck between Hamas and Israel. In exchange, Israel will free at least 200 imprisoned Palestinians. The swap will be the second such exchange after Hamas released three civilian hostages and Israel released 90 Palestinian prisoners last week. Israel will free 30 Palestinians in custody for every civilian hostage Hamas frees and 50 Palestinians in custody for every female Israeli soldier Hamas frees.

Storm Éowyn leaves one-third of Ireland without power.

Storm Éowyn (pronounced "Ay-oh-win") unleashed record-breaking winds of up to 114 mph across Ireland and the UK Friday, causing widespread disruption with over 725,000 homes in Ireland losing power. The wind speed beat a national record of 113 mph set in 1945. The storm is partly erupting from the same weather pattern that brought historic snowfall along the US Gulf Coast.

New giant pandas debut at Smithsonian National Zoo. (w/photos)

Male Bao Li (pronounced "BOW-lee") and female Qing Bao (pronounced "ching-BOW") made their official public debut at the National Zoo in Washington, DC. Bao Li and Qing Bao, both 3 years old, arrived in the US in October as part of a 52-year-old conservation partnership with China. View a live panda cam daily from 7 am to 7 pm ET here.

Trump, Vance address annual pro-life March for Life rally.

President Donald Trump delivered a remote address, while Vice President JD Vance spoke in person to the tens of thousands of people who attended the 52nd annual March for Life in Washington, DC, yesterday. The event is the country's largest pro-life demonstration. Trump's remarks came a day after he pardoned nearly two dozen activists convicted of blocking access to reproductive health clinics.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 3 of 74

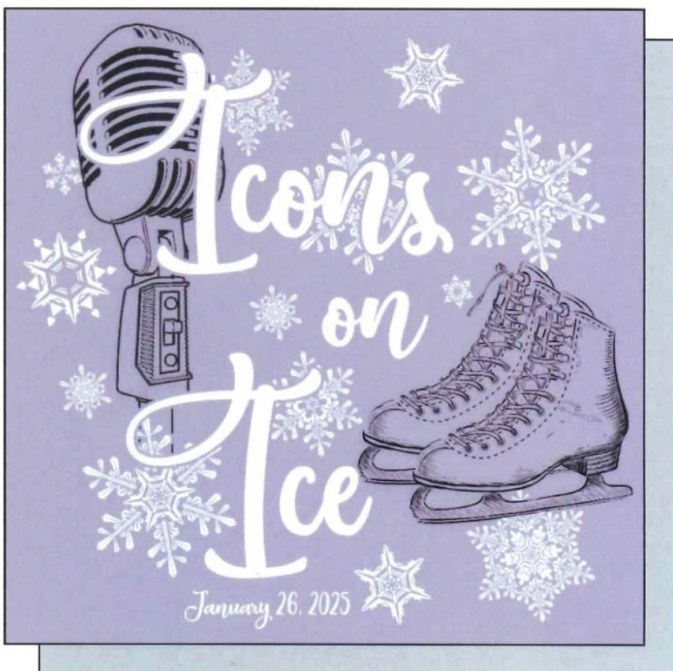
Judge bars Oath Keepers from entering Washington, DC.

A federal judge yesterday banned the antigovernment Oath Keepers militia group from entering Washington, DC, and the US Capitol without court approval. The group includes Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes, who was released from prison this week and met with lawmakers after Trump pardoned roughly 1,500 defendants charged in the Jan. 6, 2021, storming of the US Capitol.

Humankind(ness)

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Jeannie S. in Seattle, Washington.

"A co-worker recently left our current team for a different position. She was hired to replace me when I left 2 years ago for my own different position, and now I have returned. She shared her goodbye thoughts in an email to the team, and named qualities she admired about each of us. My named qualities were 'discipline, vulnerability, and fearlessness.' These are some pretty powerful words and qualities, and certainly not what I was expecting. What a great gift of kindness it is to uplift someone through simple and positive word choices."



Free Viewing
sponsored by the
Carnival of Silver
Skates.

Free livestream
internet provided by
Midco

Sunday, Jan. 26
2 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.

GDILIVE.COM

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 4 of 74

NSU Women's Basketball

Wolves Down No. 6 Mavericks in Friday Night Action

Aberdeen, S.D. – A team effort led the Northern State University women's basketball team to a 93-82 victory over #6 Minnesota State. NSU took control late in the second quarter and never looked back, combining for 57 points in the second and third quarters to seal the win. Four Wolves reached double figures, with Michaela Jewett leading the charge, posting her fifth double-double of the season with 28 points and 10 rebounds.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 93, MSU 82

Records: NSU 12-7 (NSIC 9-4), MSU 17-3 (NSIC 13-1)

Attendance: 2603

HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern State posted 13 points in the first quarter, 29 in the second, 28 in the third, and 23 in the fourth. The Wolves shot well on the night, finishing with a 53.3% shooting percentage from the field, 50.0% from beyond the three-point line, and 83.3% from the free-throw line.

NSU scored 44 points in the paint, 20 points from free throws, 18 points off the bench, and 9 points from turnovers.

Michaela Jewett came within one point of setting a new career high, finishing with 28 points and 10 rebounds.

She shot 62.5% from the field and led the team with four made three-pointers, also going a perfect 4-for-4 from the foul line.

Izzy Moore matched her career-high with 18 points, adding four rebounds and four assists.

In addition, she connected on 5-of-8 shots from the field and 8-of-9 from the free-throw line.

Rianna Fillipi followed closely with 18 points, seven rebounds, and a team-high seven assists.

Morgan Fiedler and Madelyn Bragg rounded out the top scorers, contributing 12 and 11 points, respectively, with four assists each.

NORTHERN STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Michaela Jewett: 28 points, 10 rebounds, 52.6 FG %, 57.1 3PT %

Rianna Fillipi: 21 points, 7 rebounds, 7 assists, 57.1 FG %

Izzy Moore: 18 points, 4 rebounds, 4 assists, 62.5 FG %

Morgan Fiedler: 12 points, 4 assists, 55.6 FG %

Madelyn Bragg: 11 points, 8 rebounds, 4 assists, 1 steal

UP NEXT

Northern State will return to action against Winona State to close out the I Hate Winter weekend. Tip-off is scheduled for 6 p.m. against the Warriors.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 5 of 74

NSU Men's Basketball

NSU Men Open "I Hate Winter Weekend" with a Loss to Minnesota

Aberdeen, S.D. – The Northern State University men's basketball team opened I Hate Winter weekend Friday against Minnesota State. The Wolves dropped the contest after falling behind early in the first half.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 59, MSU 87

Records: NSU 1-18 (0-13 NSIC), MSU 13-8 (9-4 NSIC)

Attendance: 2089

HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern tallied 28 points in the first and 31 in the second, while Minnesota State notched 43 in the first and 44 in the second

The Wolves recorded 33 rebounds, 16 assists, nine made 3-pointers, four steals, and three blocks in the contest

They shot 38.2% from the floor, 39.1% from the 3-point line, and 72.7% from the foul line

In addition, the team scored 20 points in the paint, 24 points off the bench led by Devon Brooke, six points off turnovers, and four second chance and fast break points

Brooke led the team both off the bench and in total with 17 points in the contest, knocking down 6-of-11 from the floor

Kaleb Mitchell followed with 15 points, shooting 50.0% from the floor, while adding a team best eight rebounds and two blocks

James Glenn dished out a team leading six assists and added a team second best seven rebounds

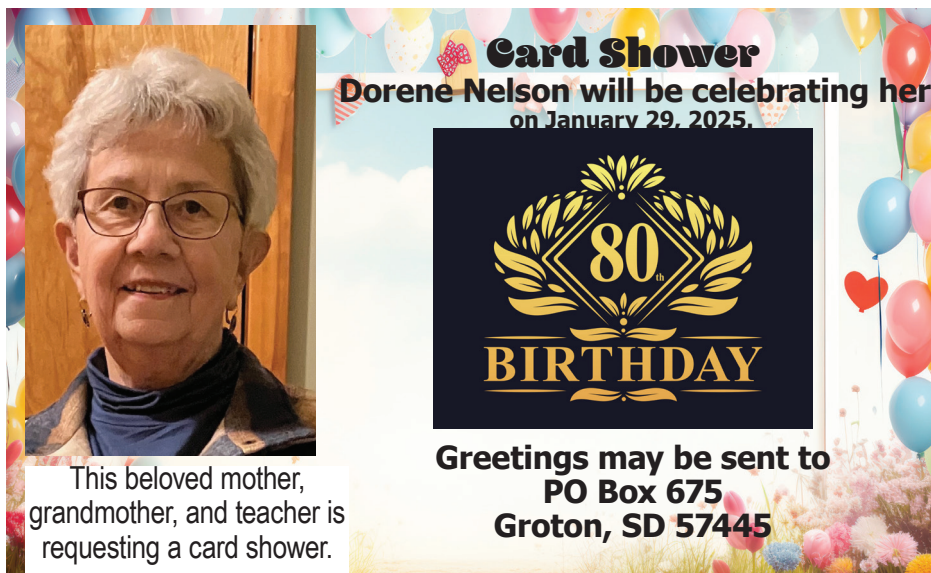
NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Devon Brooke: 17 points, 54.5 field goal%, 2 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 steal


Kaleb Mitchell: 15 points, 50.0 field goal%, 8 rebounds, 2 blocks

UP NEXT

Northern returns to Wachs Arena this afternoon for a 4 p.m. match-up against Winona State University. The I Hate Winter festivities continue tomorrow with courtside hot tubs, DJ Rob Moore, halftime entertainment, the alumni association's pre-game social, and giveaways.



Card Shower
Dorene Nelson will be celebrating her
on January 29, 2025.



80th
BIRTHDAY

Greetings may be sent to
PO Box 675
Groton, SD 57445

This beloved mother, grandmother, and teacher is requesting a card shower.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 6 of 74

Multiple GFP Items Available for Public Comment

PIERRE, S.D. – At their January meeting, the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Commission heard several action items that are currently available for public comment in addition to the Commission's proposals.

These items include:

Spring Creek Restaurant Prospectus;
Mountain Goat Action Plan; and,
Property Disposals.

GFP Accepting Proposals for Spring Creek Restaurant Concession Operator

The prospectus for the operation of a restaurant in Spring Creek Recreation Area, located 20 miles North of Pierre, is now available [online](#) and through the Department of Game, Fish and Parks. It contains the details, terms, and conditions necessary to submit a proposal for consideration. Required services include restaurant operation, with an additional option to operate the convenience store.

Proposals are due by 8:00 A.M. February 14, 2025.

A copy of the prospectus is available by contacting the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks, Division of Parks and Recreation at 523 East Capitol, Pierre, SD 57501 or at 605.773.3391. Printable versions of the prospectus are also available for free download from the [Game, Fish and Parks website](#).

GFP Seeking Comments on Draft Mountain Goat Action Plan

GFP is seeking comments on the draft Mountain Goat Action Plan.

The 2024-2028 Mountain Goat Action Plan is a document that will be used by GFP to guide mountain goat management in South Dakota through identified management objectives and measurable strategies to meet those management objectives.

The draft plan can be found online at gfp.sd.gov/management-plans.

Individuals interested in mountain goat management in South Dakota may provide suggestions and comments on the revised action plan by the February 28, 2025 deadline. Written comments must be received by the deadline and include your full name and city of residence. Comments can be sent to 523 E. Capitol Ave., Pierre, S.D. 57501, or submitted at gfp.sd.gov/forms/positions/.

GFP Seeking Comment on Property Disposals

GFP is proposing to dispose of property at Lake Faulkton in Faulk County and the Twin Lakes Diversion Ditch in Spink County. The GFP Commission will be asked to take action on the disposal of these properties at their March 6 and 7 Commission meeting. If approved, these properties would be sent to public auction with minimum bids starting at the appraised value.

The disposal at Lake Faulkton includes approximately 56 lake lots which have been compiled into 19 groups or parcels. The remaining large tracks of Game Production Area property around the lake would be retained for outdoor recreation.

The Twin Lakes Diversion Ditch disposal is composed of two separate parcels located approximately 2.5 miles southwest of Twin Lakes in Spink County. One is 2.28 acres in size and the other is 15.4 acres.

Comments regarding the disposal of these properties can be emailed to Ryan.Wendinger@state.sd.us, mailed to Attn: Ryan Wendinger, 4500 S. Oxbow Ave Sioux Falls, SD 57106, or submitted online by going to <https://gfp.sd.gov/forms/positions/>. Comments must be received by 11:59 p.m. CT on March 2 to be included in the public record and considered by the Commission.

Johnson selected for MS All-State Jazz Band

Congratulations to Liam Johnson for being selected the 2025 South Dakota Middle School All-State Jazz Band for the second year in a row. Liam will be the first chair alto saxophone in the top Mahon Ensemble. This year 80 students auditioned from 22 different schools in South Dakota. Out of the 22 schools, 16 will be represented at this event. Liam's MS Band Director is Mrs. Desiree Yeigh.

"If you have a dream, chase it, and if you want to accomplish this dream you must work hard at it. Nothing comes easy and nothing is impossible," says Johnson.

The South Dakota Music Education Association will present the Middle School All-State Jazz Band, taking place at the Performing Arts Center in Mitchell, South Dakota on January 31st and February 1st, and featuring two big bands directed by Dr. Erik Mahon and Mr. Ryan Stahle.

The final concert is open to the public on Saturday February 1st at 3:00 pm. Tickets for the event will be \$5 at the door. Students 18 and under will be free of charge.

The mission of the National Association for Music Education is to advance music education by promoting the understanding and making of music by all. SDMEA is a state affiliate of the National Association for Music Education. With over 400 members, SDMEA is the largest association of instructional musicians in the state catering to the needs of band, choral, general music and orchestral teachers.



CONGRATULATIONS 🎵

MS All State Jazz

**Liam Johnson
1st Chair Alto Sax!
2nd year member**

Broton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 8 of 74

**BROWN COUNTY
BROWN COUNTY COMMISSION AGENDA
REGULAR MEETING TUESDAY**

January 28, 2025, 8:45 A.M.

COMMISSIONER'S CHAMBERS, COURTHOUSE ANNEX - 25 MARKET STREET, ABERDEEN SD

1. Call To Order - Pledge of Allegiance
2. Approval of the Agenda
3. Opportunity for Public Comment
4. Approve & Authorize Chairman to sign Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Dickey County, ND on Bridge Inspections
5. Rachel Kippley, Fair/Fairgrounds/Parks Manager
 - a. Approve/Authorize Publication for Small Animal Barn Bids
6. Discuss Sheriff Department Imprest Fund
7. Patty VanMeter, Treasurer
 - a. Tax Deeds
 - b. Uncollectible Taxes
8. Consent Calendar
 - a. Approval of General Meeting Minutes of January 21, 2025
 - b. Claims/Payroll
 - c. HR Report
 - d. 2024 Corrections to Landfill Charge Accounts
 - e. Zoning Ordinance – Set Hearing Date/Authorize Advertising
9. Other Business
10. Executive Session (if requested per SDCL 1-25-2)
11. Adjourn

Brown County Commission Meeting

Please join my meeting from your computer, tablet, or smartphone.

<https://meet.goto.com/BrCoCommission>

You can also dial in using your phone. United States: +1 (872) 240-3311

Access Code: 601-168-909 #

Get the app now and be ready when your first meeting starts: <https://meet.goto.com/install>

Public comment provides an opportunity for the public to address the county commission.

Presentations may not exceed 3 minutes.

Public comment will be limited to 10 minutes (or at the discretion of the board) - Public comment will be accepted virtually when the virtual attendance option is available.

Official Recordings of Commission Meetings along with the Minutes can be found at <https://www.brown.sd.us/node/454>

South Dakota Department of Health Reports Pertussis Death

PIERRE, SD – The Department of Health is reporting the death of a child due to a co-infection of Pertussis and influenza. The last Pertussis death occurred in 2023 among a pediatric patient.

“I, along with everyone at the Department of Health, extend our heartfelt condolences to the grieving family during this unimaginable loss,” said Department of Health Secretary Melissa Magstadt.

South Dakota is currently experiencing Pertussis cases in multiple communities and influenza activity state-wide. The Pertussis component of DTaP and Tdap vaccines and the influenza vaccine are the best protection against infection. Protection is highest among those fully vaccinated, but that protection decreases over time.

“Pertussis or whooping cough can be a very serious illness,” said Dr. Joshua Clayton, State Epidemiologist for the Department of Health. “Taking preventative measures like washing hands often and staying current with the pertussis vaccine helps protect you and your family.”

During respiratory season, we encourage all South Dakotans to take the following steps to avoid becoming sick or spreading disease:

Avoid close contact with sick people;

If sick, limit contact with others;

Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze;

Cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve or elbow, not your hands, if you don't have a tissue;

Wash your hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand gel; and

Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

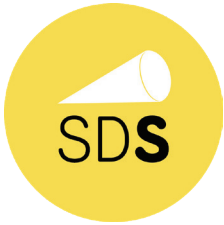
Pertussis is spread from person to person when breathing in respiratory particles from an infected person. The respiratory particles are spread when a person with pertussis sneezes or coughs.

It usually takes seven to 10 days after exposure to develop symptoms. Early symptoms resemble the common cold with runny nose, low-grade fever, and mild cough which are more severe at night. Later symptoms (within two weeks) include numerous rapid coughs followed by a high-pitched whoop, and mucus discharge or vomiting following a coughing episode.

Antibiotics are effective at stopping a person who is sick from spreading pertussis. Five days of treatment is needed to stop the bacteria from spreading, even though the person may continue to cough. Without antibiotics, a person can spread the pertussis bacteria for 21 days.

For more information on pertussis, please visit the [DOH Website](#).

At the heart of the Department of Health's mission is a simple yet profound goal: to protect and improve the health of all South Dakotans. The department is entrusted with the vital task of promoting wellness, preventing disease, and ensuring access to quality healthcare for all South Dakotans across our great state.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

U.S. Senate advances Noem's nomination to head Department of Homeland Security

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - JANUARY 24, 2025 9:59 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate on Friday advanced the nomination of South Dakota GOP Gov. Kristi Noem to lead the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Senators voted 61-39 for cloture on President Donald Trump's choice to lead the federal agency responsible for border protection, disaster response and cybersecurity. A final confirmation vote is expected as soon as Sunday.

Appearing before the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs last week, Noem said "border security must remain a top priority."

"As a nation, we have the right and the responsibility to secure our borders against those who would do us harm, and we must create a fair and a lawful immigration system that is efficient and is effective and that reflects our values," she said.

If confirmed, Noem will be pivotal in carrying out Trump's immigration crackdown. The president kick-started those efforts shortly after he took office Monday.

In part of a barrage of executive orders this week, Trump moved to end birthright citizenship in the United States. But on Thursday, a federal judge temporarily blocked the plan, which was met with a flurry of legal challenges.

Trump also declared a national emergency at the U.S.-Mexico border, and earlier this week, the Pentagon said it would immediately send 1,500 active duty troops to secure the area.

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

Lieutenant governor signals future role for his predecessor as Noem's departure looms

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JANUARY 24, 2025 4:40 PM

Republican former Lt. Gov. Matt Michels addressed the South Dakota Senate on Friday at the Capitol in Pierre, signaling his role in the soon-to-be administration of current Lt. Gov. Larry Rhoden.

But neither said exactly what Michels' role will be.

Rhoden will become governor if the U.S. Senate confirms Gov. Kristi Noem's nomination to lead the federal Department of Homeland Security. As of Friday afternoon, that confirmation vote was considered to be imminent.

Rhoden, as the current lieutenant governor, is the president of the state Senate. He gave an emotional speech Friday, during what could turn out to be his last session presiding over the body.

Rhoden also called Michels — who does not hold an elected office currently — to the podium and praised him as a "long-time mentor and hero and adviser."

Michels, a Yankton attorney, served as lieutenant governor from 2011 to 2019 under Gov. Dennis Daugaard. He also served eight years in the Legislature, including a stint as speaker of the House.

Michels told the Senate, "it's a great honor to be back here."

"We will all be remembered for our deeds, but not our names," Michels said. "And it is a great privilege

to help you, future Governor Rhoden.”

Michels played an advisory role to Rhoden in the state Senate’s first impeachment trial in 2022, which led to the removal of former Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg.

In response to messages from South Dakota Searchlight, Michels declined to say what role he will play in the upcoming administration, but said to stay tuned.

State Sen. Sydney Davis, R-Burbank, wrote on Facebook that Michels will serve as a policy adviser to Rhoden.

Rhoden is a rancher from Union Center who served 16 years in the Legislature, including a stint as House majority leader, prior to becoming Noem’s lieutenant governor. If he’s elevated to governor, he will choose a lieutenant governor, subject to confirmation by the Legislature.

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

State’s bill for 2024 flood response and recovery is \$3.5 million, officials say

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JANUARY 24, 2025 12:35 PM

PIERRE — Work to respond and recover from June 2024 flooding that ravaged the southeastern corner of South Dakota, including McCook Lake, will cost state government nearly \$3.5 million, according to state officials.

The costs associated with the flood make up the majority of Emergency and Disaster Fund costs impacting the state in fiscal year 2024, which ran from July 2023 through June 2024. The South Dakota Department of Public Safety is requesting nearly \$5 million in general funds from the state Legislature to cover anticipated expenses from the flood and other state emergencies this year.

The bill is a regular occurrence in the Legislature to adequately fund disaster response in the state. Last year, the Legislature appropriated \$4.28 million.

Kristi Turman, deputy secretary with the state Department of Public Safety, told the Legislature’s Joint Appropriations Committee on Friday at the Capitol that the expenses are for state agencies that respond to disasters, and for covering the state’s share of public assistance funds for local governments and utilities to fix infrastructure damage. The Federal Emergency Management Agency pays for 75% of eligible recovery work, while the state pays for 25%.

FEMA approved \$2.9 million in community recovery funds for South Dakota’s June 2024 flooding. As of November 2024, 84 projects were approved. The infrastructure-focused program is separate from the \$14.7 million in FEMA grants and loans to assist South Dakota individuals and businesses in recovery.

The June 2024 flooding followed several days of record rainfall, with some of the worst damage happening in the community of McCook Lake, where dozens of homes were destroyed or damaged. The state recently received notice of a potential lawsuit over its allegedly deficient response to the McCook Lake disaster.

Other anticipated bills to be paid from the fund in the coming year include \$350,000 related to sending the South Dakota National Guard to the Texas border between April and June 2024 (which was the latest of multiple border deployments ordered by Gov. Kristi Noem during the past several years) and older disasters that are still open cases, such as \$1.1 million associated with a 2019 blizzard and flooding.

Republican Gov. Kristi Noem has ordered the state National Guard to the Texas-Mexico border three times since 2021. Noem had spent a total of \$2.7 million from the state’s Emergency and Disaster Fund on those deployments through last spring. Additional border deployments were federally ordered and funded. The cost of one of Noem’s deployments was partially offset by a \$1 million donation from Ten-

nessee billionaire Willis Johnson.

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.

Hegseth confirmed as Pentagon chief after Vance breaks tie vote in U.S. Senate

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - JANUARY 24, 2025 9:04 PM

WASHINGTON — Veteran and former Fox News host Pete Hegseth will be the next secretary of defense, after he was confirmed late Friday by the U.S. Senate by the narrowest of margins.

Vice President J.D. Vance cast the deciding vote to break a 50-50 tie after three Republican senators — Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, Susan Collins of Maine and Mitch McConnell of Kentucky — parted ways with the rest of the GOP to vote against Hegseth.

Every Democratic and independent senator also opposed Hegseth.

It was only the second time in history that a vice president's vote was needed to break a deadlock for a Cabinet nominee — and the first one was also nominated by President Donald Trump, in his first term. In 2017, then-Vice President Mike Pence cast the deciding vote for Betsy DeVos as education secretary.

Hegseth, 44, has been in the thick of several allegations regarding alcohol abuse, sexual misconduct and financial mismanagement. He's also taken heat for previous comments he has made about women serving in combat roles.

On Friday night, Hegseth posted on X a copy of a letter he sent North Carolina Republican Sen. Thom Tillis in response to detailed questions Tillis raised about the allegations. Tillis, who had not earlier disclosed how he would vote, said on X that he had done "due diligence" and would back Hegseth.

Hegseth's confirmation followed a close procedural vote on Thursday when Murkowski and Collins alongside Democrats and independents opposed advancing his nomination.

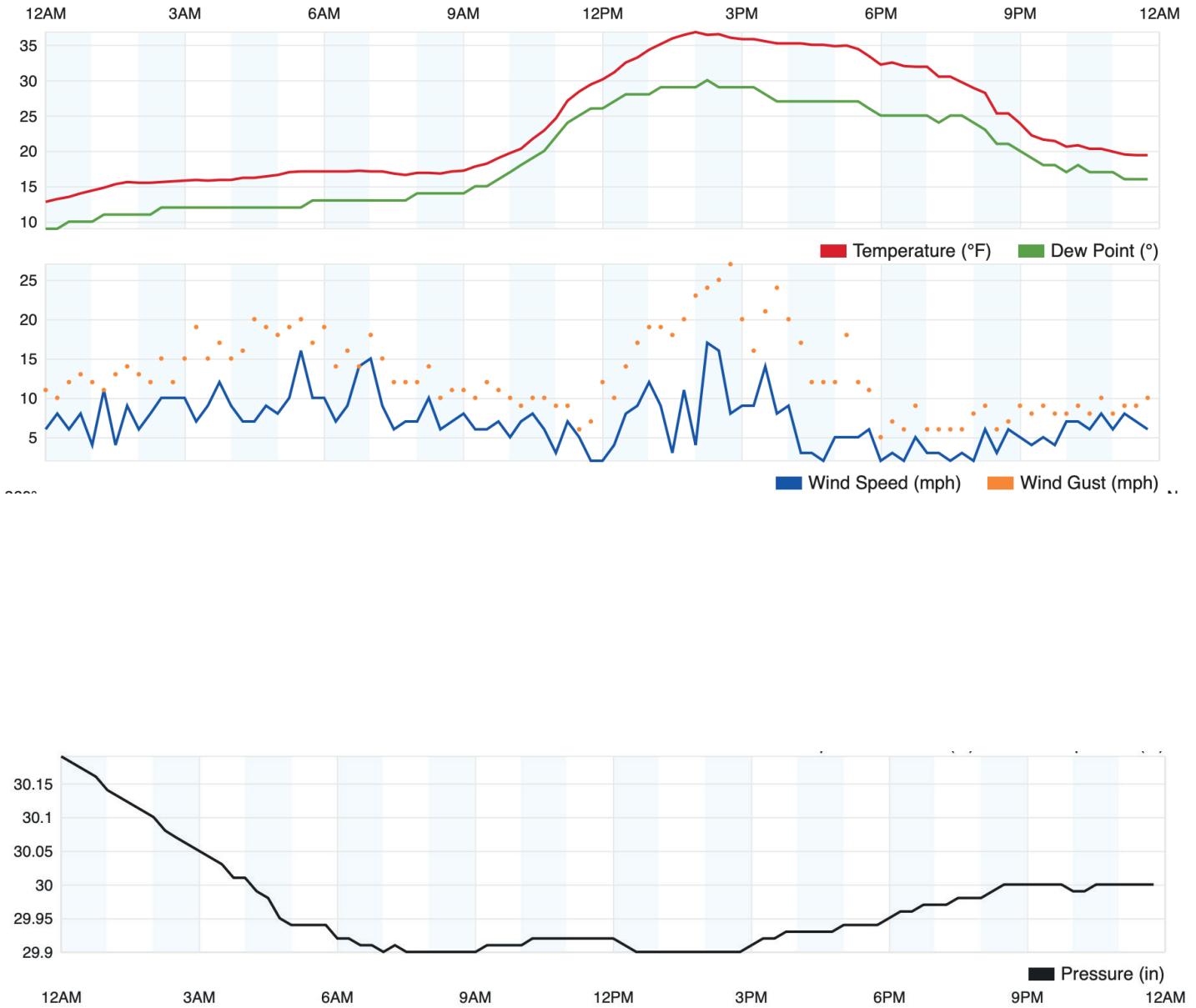
Hegseth will now join Trump's pool of Cabinet confirmations, which so far includes U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and CIA Director John Ratcliffe.

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

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 13 of 74

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Broton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 14 of 74

Today



High: 19 °F

Blustery.
Chance Snow
then Mostly
Sunny

Tonight



Low: 7 °F

Clear

Sunday



High: 35 °F

Sunny then
Sunny and
Breezy

Sunday Night



Low: 20 °F

Mostly Clear

Monday



High: 44 °F

Partly Sunny
then Mostly
Sunny and
Breezy

3 Day Outlook

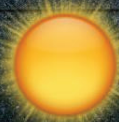
Today



20s

Morning flurries with little to no snow accumulation.
Northwest winds 20 to 30 mph.

Sunday



28 to 36°

Warmer.
West winds 15 to 30 mph.

Monday



37 to 47°

Warmer. West winds 20 to 30 mph.
Strong winds gusting to around 50 mph in the morning over the eastern slopes of the Sisseton Hills (Sisseton-Peever-Summit).

warmest over the Missouri & James River Valleys



DIFFICULT TRAVEL



NWS Aberdeen, SD

weather.gov/abr

High temperatures will rise from the 20s today to the upper 30s and 40s Monday. Winds will remain breezy around 15 to 30 mph. The strongest winds with gusts around 50 mph are possible over the eastern slopes of the Sisseton Hills (Sisseton-Peever-Summit) Monday morning. The strong cross winds could impact larger vehicles along Interstate 29 Monday morning.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 15 of 74

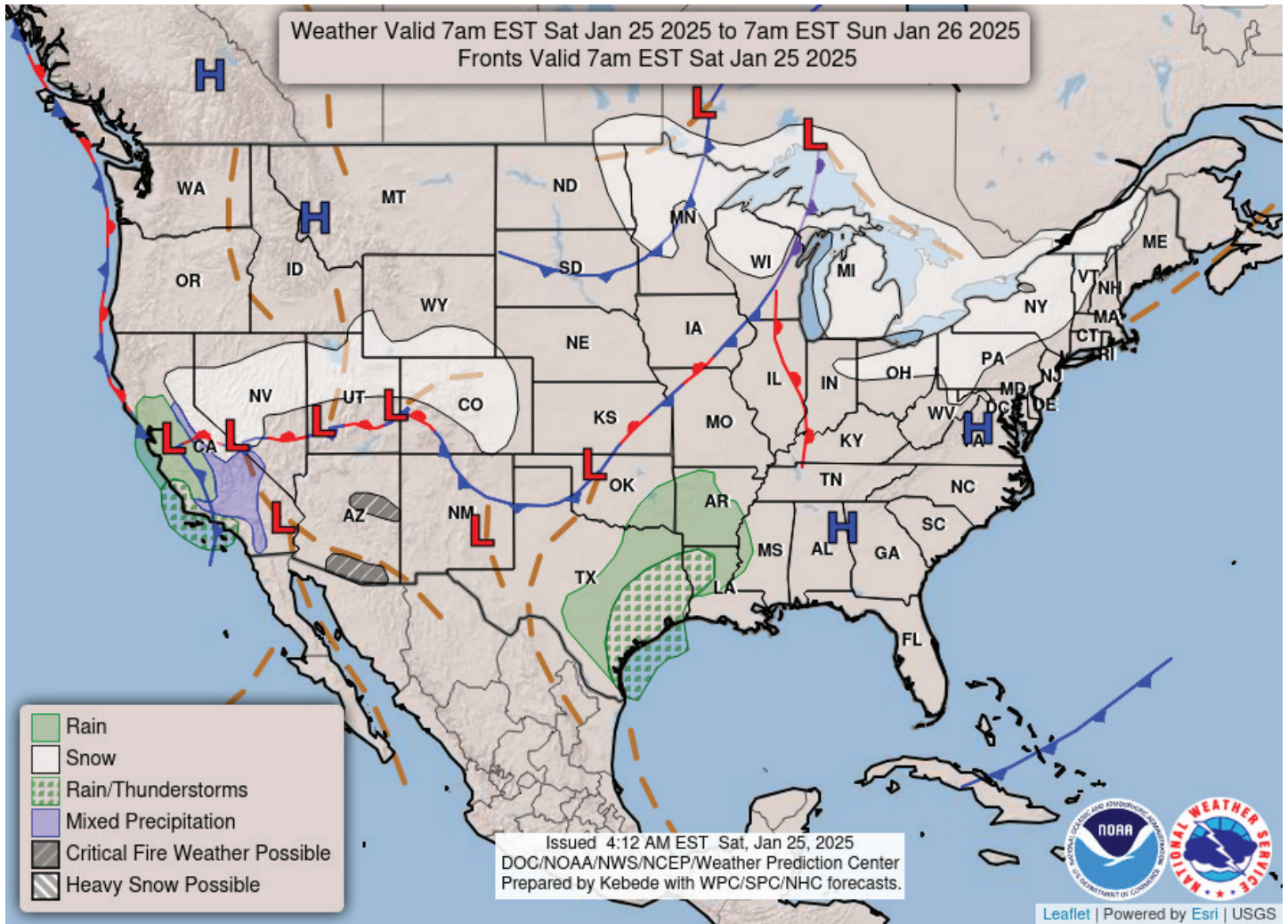
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 37 °F at 1:53 PM
Low Temp: 13 °F at 12:00 AM
Wind: 27 mph at 2:42 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 32 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 54 in 1942
Record Low: -33 in 1904
Average High: 24
Average Low: 1
Average Precip in Jan.: 0.45
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 0.45
Precip Year to Date: 21.71
Sunset Tonight: 5:31:08 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:57:29 am



Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 16 of 74

Today in Weather History

January 25, 2010: A large upper-level low-pressure area combined with a cold surface high-pressure area building in from the north brought light snow and extreme winds creating widespread blizzard conditions across north-central and northeast South Dakota. Snowfall amounts of 1 to 4 inches combined with north winds of 25 to 40 mph gusting up to 55 mph, created frequent whiteout conditions across the area. Travel was significantly affected or halted, and several schools were closed. Interstate-29 was closed from the North Dakota border and south on the 25th until the morning of the 26th. The blizzard hampered efforts to restore power to the thousands of customers from the previous winter storm. The snowfall began in the morning hours from 6 to 10 am and ended when the blizzard conditions subsided.

1821: The Hudson River was frozen solid amid the coldest winter in forty-one years. Thousands of persons crossed the ice from New York City to New Jersey, and refreshment taverns were set up in the middle of the river to warm pedestrians.

1837 - At 7 PM a display of the Northern Lights danced above Burlington, VT. Its light was equal to the full moon. Snow and other objects reflecting the light were deeply tinged with a blood red hue. Blue, yellow and white streamers were also noted. (The Weather Channel)

1937: Las Vegas, Nevada dropped to 8 degrees above zero, setting a record low for the city.

1949: Las Vegas, Nevada, recorded 4.7 inches of snow. This brought the monthly snowfall total to 16.7 inches which still ranks as their snowiest month on record.

1965 - Alta, UT, was in the midst of a storm that left the town buried under 105 inches of snow establishing a record for the state. (David Ludlum)

1987 - The second major storm in three days hit the Eastern Seaboard producing up to 15 inches of snow in Virginia, Maryland and Delaware. Up to 30 inches of snow covered the ground in Virginia following the two storms. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - High winds created blizzard conditions in the mountains of Colorado. Winds gusted to 109 mph at Echo Lake, and a wind gust to 193 mph was reported atop Mount Evans. A "nor'easter" moving up the Atlantic Coast spread heavy snow from the Carolinas to New England, with as much as 16 inches reported in the Poconos of eastern Pennsylvania. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Bitter cold air, coming down from Alaska, settled over the Northern Rockies. Wilson WY reported a morning low of 48 degrees below zero. Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the south central U.S. One thunderstorm in north central Texas spawned a tornado which injured three persons at Troy. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Low pressure developed explosively over east central Missouri and moved into Lower Michigan producing high winds and heavy snow across parts of Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin. Wind gusts to 60 mph and up to a foot of snow created near blizzard conditions in southeastern Wisconsin and northern Illinois. Wind gusts in Indiana reached 76 mph at Wabash. Thunderstorms associated with the storm produced wind gusts to 54 mph at Fort Madison IA. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2000 - Heavy snow fell from the Carolinas to New England, with up to 20 inches of snow and five deaths reported. (NCDC)



SETTING THE STANDARD

He is a central figure in the success of the New York Yankees. He has led the American League in the most single hits, runs scored and "at bats." He has over 3,000 hits, stolen more bases than any other player, has five golden glove awards, selected 13 times as an all-star and played more games than any other New York Yankee. Many of his records will stand for many years to come.

A reporter once asked, "What's the best advice your father ever gave you?"

"Don't let anyone outwork you," came the quick reply of Derek Jeter.

We are all compiling a list of accomplishments that will reflect what we have done with the time and talents God has given us. However, beyond that fact we must realize that the time we are allocated and the talents we are given are gifts from God and must be used to His glory.

Paul wrote, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as though you are working for the Lord rather than for people!" We are all accountable to someone for the work we do here on earth. Ultimately, though, the Christian is accountable to God and will be judged by Him for what we have done with the many opportunities He has given us. We must always remember that we represent Him in all that we do.

Prayer: We thank You, Lord, that You are interested in the work that You have given us to do. May we accept this with thanksgiving and bring You honor in what we do. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Colossians 3:23-24

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

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 18 of 74

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Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 19 of 74



WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.24.25

8 12 43 52 62 18

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$44,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.22.25

8 16 27 32 43 4

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$22,410,000

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 1 Mins 14 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.24.25

14 26 35 39 40 10

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 16 Mins 14 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.22.25

6 17 21 24 29

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 16 Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.22.25

1 12 39 40 52 15

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 45 Mins 14 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.22.25

5 6 27 40 49 5

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$46,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 45 Mins 14 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 20 of 74

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

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 21 of 74

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Roncalli 55, Northwestern 41
Beresford 78, Canton 38
Bison 58, McIntosh High School 16
Britton-Hecla 53, Warner 33
Dakota Valley 88, Tri-Valley 56
Flandreau 52, McCook Central-Montrose 42
Florence-Henry 73, Milbank 60
Gayville-Volin High School 71, Colome 11
Great Plains Lutheran 56, Sioux Falls Lutheran 46
Harrisburg 52, Sioux Falls Jefferson 43
Ipswich 39, Faulkton 29
Kadoka 60, Jones County 47
Lemmon High School 62, Faith 31
Marty 61, Tripp-Delmont-Armour 56
Rapid City Central 69, Brookings 47
Rapid City Stevens 56, Watertown 48
Sioux Falls Christian 97, Madison 43
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 69, Sioux Falls Lincoln 32
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 49, Yankton 40
Stanley County 51, Potter County 48
Sturgis Brown High School 72, Lead-Deadwood 50
Timber Lake 52, Harding County 46
Wagner 59, Burke 15
Wall 70, New Underwood 32
Waverly-South Shore 52, Wilmot 35
Panhandle Conference Tournament=
Consolation Semifinal=
Hyannis, Neb. 64, Edgemont 35

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Brookings 51, Rapid City Central 27
Canton 65, Beresford 62
Dakota Valley 76, Tri-Valley 67
Dell Rapids 70, Sioux Valley 39
Dell Rapids St Mary 70, Baltic 39
Flandreau 50, McCook Central-Montrose 37
Gayville-Volin High School 58, Colome 12
Harding County 68, Newell 15
Kadoka 59, Jones County 40
Lemmon High School 48, Timber Lake 38
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 47, Kimball-White Lake 43
North Central 51, Herreid-Selby 45
Sioux Falls Christian 71, Madison 18

Sioux Falls O’Gorman 66, Sioux Falls Lincoln 28
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 63, Yankton 46
Sturgis Brown High School 57, Lead-Deadwood 16
Tripp-Delmont-Armour 64, Marty 52
Warner 61, Britton-Hecla 39
Watertown 56, Rapid City Stevens 46
West Central 62, Elk Point-Jefferson 56
Wilmot 54, Hankinson, N.D. 27
Panhandle Conference Tournament=
Semifinal=
Edgemont 40, Hay Springs, Neb. 30

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

Senate heads toward confirming Noem as Trump’s homeland security secretary

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate is heading toward a vote on confirming Kristi Noem as homeland security secretary, putting the South Dakota governor in charge of a sprawling agency that is essential to national security and President Donald Trump’s plans to clamp down on illegal immigration.

Republicans threatened to keep the Senate working through the weekend to install the latest member of Trump’s national security team. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth was confirmed Friday night, joining Secretary of State Marco Rubio and CIA Director John Ratcliffe. A vote was expected mid-Saturday.

Noem, a Trump ally who is in her second term as governor, received some support from Democrats on the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee when it voted 13-2 to advance her nomination earlier in the week. Republicans, who already hold the votes necessary to confirm her, have also expressed confidence in her determination to lead border security and immigration enforcement.

“Fixing this crisis and restoring respect for the rule of law is one of President Trump and Republicans’ top priorities,” Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said Friday. “And it’s going to require a decisive and committed leader at the Department of Homeland Security. I believe Kristi has everything it takes to undertake this task.”

The secretary oversees U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Citizenship and Immigration Services. Beyond those agencies, the department is also responsible for securing airline transportation, protecting dignitaries, responding to natural disasters and more.

Trump is planning major changes to the way the department functions, including involving the military in immigration enforcement and reshaping the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Those plans could immediately put Noem in the spotlight after the new president visited recent disaster sites in North Carolina and California on Friday.

During her Senate hearing, Noem was repeatedly asked by Democratic senators whether she would administer disaster aid to states even if Trump asked her not to.

Noem avoided saying that she would defy the president, but she told lawmakers, “I will deliver the programs according to the law and that it will be done with no political bias.”

Six people cycled through as homeland security secretary during Trump’s first four years in office.

Noem, who held her state’s lone U.S. House seat for eight years before becoming governor in 2019, has risen in the GOP by tacking closely with Trump. At one point, she was even under consideration to be his running mate.

Her political stock took a momentary dip, however, when she released a book last year containing an account of her killing her hunting dog, as well as a false claim that she once met with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

If confirmed, she would be tasked with delivering on Trump's favorite issue, border security. The president's goals of deporting millions of people who entered the country illegally could put Noem, with her experience governing a rural state and growing up on a farm, in a difficult position. In South Dakota, many migrants, some in the country without permanent legal status, power the labor-heavy jobs that produce food and housing.

She has so far pledged to faithfully execute the president's orders and copied his talk of an "invasion" at the U.S. border with Mexico.

Noem joined other Republican governors who sent National Guard troops to Texas to assist Operation Lone Star, which sought to discourage migrants. Her decision was especially criticized because she accepted a \$1 million donation from a Tennessee billionaire to cover some of the deployment cost.

Noem said she opted to send National Guard troops "because of this invasion," adding that "it is a war zone down there."

Yemen's Houthi rebels unilaterally release 153 war detainees, Red Cross says

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Yemen's Houthi rebels unilaterally freed 153 war detainees Saturday, the International Committee of the Red Cross said, one of several overtures in recent days to ease tensions after the ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip.

Previous prisoner releases have been viewed as a means to jumpstart talks over permanently ending Yemen's decadelong war, which began when the Houthis seized the country's capital, Sanaa, in 2014. However, the Houthis' release comes just after they detained another seven Yemeni workers from the United Nations, sparking anger from the world body.

Those released previously had been visited by Red Cross staff in Sanaa and received medical checks and other assistance, the organization said while announcing the release. The Houthis had signaled Friday night they planned a release of prisoners.

The Red Cross said it "welcomes this unilateral release as another positive step towards reviving negotiations."

"This operation has brought much-needed relief and joy to families who have been anxiously waiting for the return of their loved ones," said Christine Cipolla, the ICRC's head of delegation in Yemen. "We know that many other families are also waiting for their chance to be reunited. We hope that today's release will lead to many more moments like this."

Abdul Qader al-Murtada, the head of the Houthis' Committee for Prisoners' Affairs, said in a statement carried by Houthi media that those released were "humanitarian cases" that included the sick, wounded and the elderly.

"The goal of the initiative is to build trust and establish a new phase of serious and honest dealing," al-Murtada reportedly said.

The Red Cross has helped oversee other prisoner releases, including one that saw some 1,000 prisoners swapped in 2020, over 800 detainees exchanged in 2023 and another release in 2024.

The rebels said earlier this week they would limit their attacks on ships in the Red Sea corridor and released the 25-member crew of the *Galaxy Leader*, a ship they seized back in November 2023, as the Gaza ceasefire took hold.

The war in Yemen has killed more than 150,000 people, including fighters and civilians, and created one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters, killing tens of thousands more.

The Houthis' attacks on shipping during the Israel-Hamas war have helped deflect attention from their problems at home. But they have faced casualties and damage from U.S.-led airstrikes targeting the group for months now, as well as other strikes by Israel.

Meanwhile, Yemen's economy is in tatters, something that's put increasing pressure on the Houthis and others in the conflict to potentially negotiate an end to the war. A de facto ceasefire in the conflict, which

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 24 of 74

drew in a Saudi-led coalition in 2015, has largely held for several years now even during the Houthis attacks over the Israel-Hamas war.

Yet the Houthis still conducted the raids that saw seven U.N. workers detained, likely alongside others. The rebels previously detained U.N. staffers, as well as individuals associated with the once-open U.S. Embassy in Sanaa, Yemen's capital, aid groups and civil society.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres late Friday demanded the immediate and unconditional release of the seven, as well as all other U.N. workers held by the Houthis, some since 2021.

"The continued targeting of U.N. personnel and its partners negatively impacts our ability to assist millions of people in need in Yemen," he warned in a statement. "The Houthis must deliver on their previous commitments and act in the best interests of the Yemeni people and the overall efforts to achieve peace in Yemen."

The U.N. has halted work in Yemen, which provides food, medicine and other aid to the impoverished nation.

U.S. President Donald Trump separately has moved to reinstate a terrorism designation he made on the group late in his first term that had been revoked by President Joe Biden, potentially setting the stage for new tensions with the rebels.

Analysts have linked the newest U.N. detentions as being connected to the decision, though the Houthis themselves have yet to comment on them. The rebels have been airing repeated programs on television channels they control parading people they describe as working with Western intelligence agencies or the Israelis.

He's emboldened, he's organized and he's still Trump: Takeaways from the president's opening days

By ZEKE MILLER and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's first week in office isn't over yet, but already it offers signals about how his next four years in the White House may unfold.

Some takeaways from the earliest days of his second term:

He's emboldened like never before

Within hours of being sworn in, Trump pardoned more than 1,500 people who were convicted or charged in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol by his supporters. Those pardoned include people who attacked, bloodied and beat police officers that day. The Republican president's decision was at odds with earlier comments by his incoming vice president, JD Vance, and other senior aides that Trump would only let off those who weren't violent.

The pardons were the first of many moves he made in his first week to reward allies and punish critics, in both significant and subtle ways. It signaled that without the need to worry about reelection — the Constitution bars a third term — or legal consequences after the Supreme Court granted presidents expansive immunity, the new president, backed by a Republican Congress, has little to restrain him.

Trump ended protective security details for Dr. Anthony Fauci, his former COVID-19 adviser, along with former national security adviser John Bolton, former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and his onetime deputy. The security protections had been regularly extended by the Biden administration over credible threats to the men's lives.

Trump also revoked the security clearances of dozens of former government officials who had criticized him, including Bolton, and directed that the portrait of a former Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman, retired Gen. Mark Milley be removed from the Pentagon walls.

He's way more organized this time

In his first days in office, Trump demonstrated just how much he and his team had learned from four often-chaotic years in the White House and four more in political exile.

A president's most valuable resource is time and Trump set out in his first hours to make his mark on the nation with executive orders, policy memoranda and government staffing shake-ups. It reflected a

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 25 of 74

level of sophistication that eluded him in his first term and surpassed his Democratic predecessors in its scale and scope for their opening days in the Oval Office.

Feeling burned by the holdover of Obama administration appointees during his first go-around, Trump swiftly exiled Biden holdovers and moved to test new hires for their fealty to his agenda.

In a matter of days he uprooted four years of diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives across the federal government, sent federal troops to the U.S.-Mexico border and erased Biden's guardrails on artificial intelligence and cryptocurrency development.

In his first term, Trump's early executive orders were more showpieces than substance and frequently were blocked by federal courts. This time, Trump is still confronting the limits of his constitutional authorities, but is also far more adept at controlling what is within them.

But Trump is still Trump

An hour after concluding a relatively sedate inaugural address in the Capitol Rotunda, Trump decided to let loose.

Speaking to an overflow crowd of governors, political supports and dignitaries in the Capitol Visitor Center's Emancipation Hall, Trump ripped in to Biden, the Justice Department and other perceived rivals. He followed it up with an even longer speech to supporters at a downtown arena and in more than 50 minutes of remarks and questions and answers with reporters in the Oval Office.

For all of Trump's experience and organization, he is still very much the same Donald Trump, and just as intent as before on dominating the center of the national conversation. If not more.

Courts may rein Trump in or give him expansive new powers

He has acted to try to end civil service protections for many federal workers and overturn more than a century of law on birthright citizenship. Such moves have been a magnet for legal challenges. In the case of the birthright citizenship order, it met swift criticism from U.S. District Judge John Coughenour, who put a temporary stay on Trump's plans.

"I've been on the bench for over four decades. I can't remember another case where the question presented was as clear as this one is," Coughenour, who was nominated by Republican President Ronald Reagan, told a Justice Department attorney. "This is a blatantly unconstitutional order."

How those court cases play out will determine not only the fate of some of Trump's most controversial actions, but just how far any president can go in pushing an agenda.

Trump is betting that oil can grease the economy's wheels and fix everything

The president likes to call it "liquid gold."

His main economic assumption is that more oil production by the United States, the Saudis and the rest of OPEC would bring down prices. That would reduce overall inflation and cut down on the oil revenues that Russia is using to fund its war in Ukraine.

For Trump, oil is the answer.

He's betting that fossil fuels are the future, despite the climate change risks.

"The United States has the largest amount of oil and gas of any country on Earth, and we're going to use it," Trump said in a Thursday speech. "Not only will this reduce the cost of virtually all goods and services, it'll make the United States a manufacturing superpower and the world capital of artificial intelligence and crypto"

The problem with billionaires is they're rivals, not super friends

Trump had the world's wealthiest men behind him on the dais when he took the oath of office on Monday.

Tesla's Elon Musk, Amazon's Jeff Bezos, Meta's Mark Zuckerberg and LVMH's Bernard Arnault were all there. SoftBank billionaire Masayoshi Son was in the audience. Later in the week, Oracle's Larry Ellison and OpenAI's Sam Altman appeared with Son at the White House to announce an artificial intelligence investment of up to \$500 billion.

Musk, the Trump backer who is leading the president's Department of Government Efficiency effort, posted on X that SoftBank didn't have the money. Altman, a rival to Musk on AI, responded over X that the funding was there.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 26 of 74

By surrounding himself with the wealthiest people in tech, Trump is also stuck in their drama. "The people in the deal are very, very smart people," Trump said Thursday. "But Elon, one of the people, he happens to hate. But I have certain hatreds of people, too."

Trump has a thing for William McKinley

America's 25th president has a big fan in Trump. Trump likes the tariffs that were imposed during Republican William McKinley's presidency and helped to fund the government. Trump has claimed the country was its wealthiest in the 1890s when McKinley was in office.

But McKinley might not be a great economic role model for the 21st century.

For starters, the Tax Foundation found that federal receipts were equal to just 3% of the overall economy in 1900, McKinley's reelection year. Tax revenues are now equal to about 17% of the U.S. economy and that's still not enough to fund the government without running massive deficits. So it would be hard to go full McKinley without some chaos.

As Dartmouth College economist Douglas Irwin noted on X, the economic era defined by McKinley was not that great for many people.

"There was a little something called the Panic of 1893 and the unemployment rate was in double digits from 1894-98!!" Irwin wrote. "Not a great decade!"

Hamas frees 4 female Israeli soldiers as part of the Gaza ceasefire in exchange for 200 prisoners

By SAM MEDNICK, WAFAA SHURAF A and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Hamas militants handed over four captive female Israeli soldiers to the Red Cross in Gaza City on Saturday after parading them in front of a crowd. Israel followed with the release of 200 Palestinian prisoners or detainees as part of the fragile ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.

The four Israeli soldiers smiled broadly as they waved and gave the thumbs-up from a stage in Gaza City's Palestine Square, militants on either side of them and a crowd of thousands watching before they were led off to waiting Red Cross vehicles. They were likely acting under duress, with previously released hostages saying they were held in brutal conditions and forced to record propaganda videos.

Israel's Prison Service later said it had completed the release of 200 Palestinians. They include 120 who had been serving life sentences after being convicted of deadly attacks against Israelis. Around 70 were released into Egypt, according to Egypt's state-run Qahera TV. Egypt had served as a key mediator in the talks that led to the truce.

Thousands of Palestinians gathered in the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah to celebrate the arrival of buses carrying the prisoners. Many waved Palestinian flags or the flags of different political factions.

As the four Israeli soldiers were released, hundreds of people cheered in Tel Aviv's Hostages Square where they were watching the drama unfold on a big screen television.

"I'm speechless," said Aviv Bercovich, one of the onlookers. "I had goosebumps watching them. I just want the war to end."

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office later released a video showing the freed hostages being welcomed at an Israeli army base. One of them, Liri Albag, smiled, gave two thumbs up and made a heart shape with her hand before getting into a van.

Israel insists on the release of a civilian hostage

Netanyahu's office later said that Arbel Yehoud, a civilian hostage held by Hamas, was supposed to have been released Saturday. It said Israel would not allow Palestinians to begin returning to northern Gaza, which had been expected to begin by Sunday, until she is freed.

A senior Hamas official said the group has informed mediators that Yehoud will be released next week.

Meantime, an Egyptian official involved in the negotiations called the matter a "minor issue" that mediators are working to resolve. Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly.

The crowds in Tel Aviv and also in Gaza City began gathering early in the day in anticipation of the sec-

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 27 of 74

and such exchange between Israel and Hamas since a ceasefire began in the Gaza Strip last weekend. The excitement in Israel was palpable, with TV stations filled with live reports from smiling news anchors and reporters interviewing ecstatic friends and relatives of the hostages.

The truce is aimed at winding down the deadliest and most destructive war ever fought between Israel and the militant group. The fragile deal has so far held, quieting airstrikes and rockets and allowing for increased aid to flow into the tiny coastal territory.

When the ceasefire started Sunday, three hostages held by the militants were released in exchange for 90 Palestinian prisoners, all women and children.

Who are the soldiers and prisoners being released?

The four Israeli soldiers, Karina Ariev, 20, Daniella Gilboa, 20, Naama Levy, 20, and Albag, 19, were captured in Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack that ignited the war.

In exchange, Israel agreed to release 200 prisoners, including 121 who were serving life sentences, according to a list released by Hamas.

The more notorious militants being released include Mohammad Odeh, 52, and Wael Qassim, 54, both from east Jerusalem. They were accused of carrying out a series of deadly Hamas attacks against Israelis, including a bombing at a cafeteria at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 2002 that killed nine people, including five U.S. citizens.

Of the 70 who were expelled to Egypt, some may eventually go to other countries, with Algeria, Tunisia and Turkey all expressing a willingness to take them in, according to Abdullah al-Zaghari, the head of a Palestinian prisoner advocacy group.

The four Israeli soldiers released were taken from Nahal Oz base near the border with Gaza when Palestinian militants overran it, killing more than 60 soldiers there. The female abductees had all served in a unit of lookouts charged with monitoring threats along the border. A fifth female soldier in their unit, Agam Berger, 20, was abducted with them but not included in the list.

"This is huge," said Gaza City resident Radwan Abu Rawiya, one of thousands who watched the hostages turned over in Palestine Square.

"People forgot about the war, destruction and are celebrating," he said.

In a televised statement, Israel's army spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari confirmed the released hostages were in Israeli hands and on their way home, while criticizing what he called the "cynical" public display of the young women by Hamas before their release.

He also said that Israel is concerned about the fate of the two youngest hostages — Kfir and Ariel Bibas — and their mother Shiri. Kfir Bibas marked his second birthday in captivity earlier this month.

Hagari said the army is committed to bringing all hostages home.

What's next in the ceasefire deal

Israel had been expected to begin pulling back from the Netzarim corridor — an east-west road dividing Gaza in two — and allowing displaced Palestinians in the south to return to their former homes in the north for the first time since the beginning of the war.

But that appears to be on hold pending the release of Yehoud.

The Hamas-run interior ministry said earlier said that displaced Palestinians will be allowed to return to northern Gaza starting Sunday. The ministry, which oversees police forces, said Palestinians will be able to move between southern and northern Gaza on foot through the coastal Rashid road.

What happens after the deal's initial six-week phase is uncertain, but many hope it will lead to the end of a war that has leveled wide swaths of Gaza, displaced the vast majority of its population and left hundreds of thousands of people at risk of famine.

The conflict began with a cross-border attack led by Hamas on Oct. 7, 2023, when Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took around 250 others hostage.

More than 100 hostages were freed in a weeklong truce the following month. But dozens have remained in captivity for over a year with no contact with the outside world. Israel believes at least a third of the more than 90 captives still inside Gaza were killed in the initial attack or died in captivity.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 28 of 74

While many rejoiced in Tel Aviv's Hostage Square after the four soldiers were released Saturday, some worried about the fate of those still in captivity.

"It's hard that she's still there," said Yoni Collins, a family friend of Berger, the fifth female soldier taken from Nahal Oz base.

"There were five girls, four are out and now she's there alone," he said. "We're just waiting for her to come home."

Israel's air and ground war, one of the deadliest and most destructive in decades, has killed over 47,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, who do not say how many were militants. They say women and children make up more than half the fatalities.

Ukrainian winemaker and US veterans team up to show the best of Ukraine, a glass at a time

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

MONTCLAIR, Va. (AP) — In a wine shop an hour outside of Washington, owner Arthur Lampros sampled a wine from a part of the world that was totally new to him, racking his brain to pin down the tastes on his tongue.

Was there a body of water near the vineyards, he wondered, that would moderate any storms or heat waves buffeting the grapes?

"Absolutely, absolutely" — Ukraine's Black Sea coast, near Odesa, said Giorgi Iukuridze, a Ukrainian winery owner introducing Ukraine's modernized wines to a broad U.S. audience for the first time.

Sam Lerman, a U.S. Air Force vet and one of a number of American veterans and ex-diplomats in Ukraine backing him in the endeavor, nodded, beaming at the words of praise that followed for many of the wines.

Ukraine is in the eyes of the world as it battles the Russian invasion with the aid of the United States and dozens of other countries. But Lerman said he and the others who teamed up with Iukuridze for the U.S. launch want Americans to see "that Ukraine is more than an ally at war, suffering tremendous tragedy."

Bringing the wines to the U.S. will help show "what Ukraine was really about, and has always been about," he said.

For Kurt Volker, a former U.S. ambassador to NATO who served as President Donald Trump's special representative to Ukraine during a stormy time in his first term, what Ukraine is about is determination, dedication and hope.

"Right now, because of Russia's invasion and the military assistance the U.S. has given to Ukraine, when people hear and talk about Ukraine, it is all about the war. And it's a little bit groaning ... like, 'Oh, geez, you know, how much more we're going to spend on this?'" Volker told The Associated Press.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasions of neighboring countries have served to introduce a whole community of American military people and diplomats to the burgeoning wine regions of the former Soviet Union.

Volker met his winemaker wife, and bought a small winery in Georgia, owing to Russia's 2008 invasion. He traveled often to Iukuridze's SHABO winery in Ukraine for production tips.

It was Russia's invasions of Ukraine, especially in February 2022, that made more American military into fans of the wines of Ukraine's Black Sea coast, and of the country's best vodkas.

Lerman, a former technical sergeant decorated for valor in combat in Afghanistan, first went to Ukraine in a team of volunteer military advisers in the first weeks after Russia's 2022 invasion, and now represents a U.S. defense company there.

Militaries have a venerable history of revering alcohol. U.S. sailors treasure rationed beer at rare "steel beach picnics" on deck. Officers off-duty in Iraq sipped hoarded zero-alcohol beer and pretended it was more. Militias fighting brutal civil wars in West Africa spared the beer factories, if nothing else.

Lerman sampled Ukraine's alcohol for the first time in a safehouse with other U.S. vet volunteers and Ukrainian allies in the first weeks of the war. Someone had placed a bottle of Ukrainian vodka on the table where they worked, amid the laptops and firearms.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 29 of 74

"I was blown away," Lerman recounted. "I thought I didn't even like vodka."

Soon, Lerman was toting out bottles of vodka and SHABO wines for his family and friends back home. Searches of U.S. stores for more struck out, since much of what little Ukrainian wine was shipped to the U.S. was of an older, sweeter variety aimed at the Ukrainian diaspora.

That led to him teaming up with Iukuridze and partners to set up Spyrt Worldwide, a U.S. import company to bring in Iukuridze's wines and two Ukrainian vodkas. A share of the profits is designated for Invictus Global Response, a mine-removal nonprofit run by veterans.

Ukraine's Black Sea coast claims a 2,500-year history of growing wine thanks to settlements founded by ancient Greeks, and some of the vines at SHABO winery date back to the subsequent Ottoman era. Swiss settlers in the 1800s made the area a proper wine-growing region, prizing its soil and climate.

Wine under Soviet rule, on the other hand, was "barely drinkable muck," said Volker. He sees the region's best wines today as a model for private companies shaking off the Soviet mindset.

Soviet state-run wineries wanted cheap wines in big quantities, especially sweeter ones. SHABO's vines survived a Soviet crackdown on alcohol under Mikhail Gorbachev in the final years before the Soviet collapse thanks only to a winery worker who falsified forms, claiming the vineyards produced only table grapes, Iukuridze said.

After the Soviet Union crumbled in 1991, Iukuridze and his father, who have roots in wine production in Georgia, were among the largest producers in an independent Ukraine bringing production up to modern standards. SHABO's wines have won international awards and are featured in Michelin-starred restaurants.

The winery is far from the front lines of the war, but Russian rockets on rare occasions have fallen within sight of workers in the vineyards. Its traveling wine salesmen have faced checkpoints and immediate induction into Ukraine's military. The most reliable route for shipping the wines to the United States lies through neighboring Moldova.

"The grape does not wait for any diplomatic solutions," Iukuridze said. "We continue working without stopping any single day."

Over the winter holidays, members of Congress, a former defense secretary, defense industry executives and others, including Lerman and Volker, turned out in Washington for the launch of the import company.

All were attuned to the joint mission of wine and war. Unspoken was the worry about Russia's larger military grinding down Ukraine, and uncertainty over whether Trump would withdraw vital U.S. military support to Ukraine once back in office.

But Iukuridze told a story: In 2014, when the Russian military first invaded eastern Ukraine and seized Crimea on the Black Sea, a family that lived nearby drove by his vineyards as they fled toward the border with Moldova.

But the family spotted the head winemaker out in the field, planting new vines that would take three years to produce wine. They stopped the car.

"What is happening?" they asked the winemaker.

"We're planting new wines, for Ukrainian, independent, glorious country," Iukuridze recounted the winemaker answering.

Seeing the commitment to "the bright future of Ukraine," the family "turned around the car and went back," he told those at the Washington launch.

He raised a glass of his winery's white in a toast.

"For the bright future," Iukuridze said. "For being an example."

Australian Open: Keys upsets 2-time champion Sabalenka in women's final for 1st Grand Slam title

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP Tennis Writer

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — When Madison Keys stepped into Rod Laver Arena at 7:37 p.m. on Saturday night ahead of the Australian Open final, she strode right past the Daphne Akhurst Memorial Cup, the

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 30 of 74

trophy that goes to the women's champion and was placed on a pedestal near the entrance to the court.

Keys didn't break stride. Didn't stop to stare. That bit of hardware then was placed near the net for the pre-match coin toss, close as can be to where the American stood. Close enough to touch. Close enough to feel real. Also right there was her opponent, No. 1-ranked Aryna Sabalenka, the two-time defending champion at Melbourne Park, who would not make things easy on this cool, breezy evening.

Exactly 2 1/2 hours — and one 6-3, 2-6, 7-5 victory over Sabalenka — later, there was Keys, smiling the widest smile while holding that silver trophy with both hands, a Grand Slam champion for the first time at age 29. This was Keys' second chance to play for a major title: The first ended in a lopsided loss at the 2017 U.S. Open, an experience that taught her she would need to be able to play through nerves.

"I have wanted this for so long," said Keys, who was born in Illinois and now is based in Florida, "and I have been in one other Grand Slam final, and it didn't go my way, and I didn't know if I was going to get back in this position."

Sure did. She is the oldest woman to become a first-time Slam champ since Flavia Pennetta was 33 at the 2015 U.S. Open. This was the 46th Slam appearance for Keys, the third most before winning a women's major title, behind only Pennetta's 49 and Marion Bartoli's 47 when she won Wimbledon in 2013.

Keys did not take an easy path, either.

Before this three-set victory came one against No. 2 Iga Swiatek in the semifinals, saving a match point along the way. Not since Serena Williams in 2005 had a player defeated both of the WTA's top two women at Melbourne Park.

"Madison: Wow, what a tournament," Sabalenka said.

"Enjoy the celebration," she told Keys. "Enjoy the really fun part."

Keys, ranked 14th and seeded 19th, prevented Sabalenka from earning what would have been her third women's trophy in a row at the Australian Open — something last accomplished by Martina Hingis from 1997-99 — and her fourth major title overall.

When it ended, Keys covered her face with her hands, then raised her arms. Soon, she was hugging her husband, Bjorn Fratangelo — who has been her coach since 2023 — and other members of her team, before sitting on her sideline bench and laughing.

Sabalenka chucked her racket, covered her head with a white towel and briefly left the court, before returning for the post-match ceremony.

"I just needed ... that time for myself to kind of switch off and forget and ... be respectful," Sabalenka explained later. "Just wasn't my day."

Keys broke three times in the first set, helped in part by Sabalenka's four double-faults and 13 total unforced errors. But don't think this was merely an instance of Sabalenka being her own undoing.

Keys had a lot to do with the way things were going. She compiled an 11-4 edge in winners in the opening set, managing to out-hit the big-hitting Sabalenka repeatedly.

For a stretch, it seemed as though every shot off the strings of Keys' racket — the one she switched to ahead of this season, at Fratangelo's urging, to protect her oft-injured right shoulder and to make it easier to control her considerable power — was landing precisely where she wanted.

Near a corner. On a line. Out of the reach of Sabalenka, a 26-year-old from Belarus.

Also important was the way Keys, whose left thigh was taped for the match, covered every part of the court, racing to get to balls and send them back over the net with intent. On one terrific defensive sequence, she sprinted for a forehand that drew a forehand into the net from Sabalenka, capping a break for a 4-1 lead.

Never one to hide her emotions, Sabalenka kicked a ball after netting a volley and dropped her racket after missing an overhead.

She went to the locker room before the second set, and whether that helped clear her head or slowed Keys' momentum — or both — the final's complexion soon changed. Keys' first-serve percentage dipped from 86% in the first set to 59% in the second. Sabalenka raised her winner total to 13 in the second set and began accumulating, and converting, break points.

When she sent a backhand down the line to force an error by Keys for a break and a 2-1 lead in the

second, Sabalenka shook her left fist and gritted her teeth. The action in the third set was tight and tense, without so much as a single break point until its final game, when Keys came through with one last forehand winner.

Here's how close this was: Keys won just one more point than Sabalenka, 92-91. Both finished with 29 winners.

Keys had to wait for this moment, yes, but it did arrive.

Fighting in Sudan's civil war sets ablaze the country's largest oil refinery, satellite photos show

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Fighting around Sudan's largest oil refinery set the sprawling complex ablaze, satellite data analyzed by The Associated Press on Saturday shows, sending thick, black smoke over the country's capital.

Forces loyal to Sudan's military under army chief Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan later claimed they captured the refinery, owned by Sudan's government and the state-run China National Petroleum Corp. The facility represents a long-sought prize for the military in its civil war with the rebel Rapid Support Force.

International mediation attempts and pressure tactics, including a U.S. assessment that the RSF and its proxies are committing genocide, have not halted the fighting.

The al-Jaili refinery sits some 60 kilometers (40 miles) north of Khartoum, the capital. The refinery has been subject to previous attacks as the RSF has claimed control of the facility since April 2023 and their forces had been guarding it. Local Sudanese media report the RSF also surrounded the refinery with fields of landmines to slow any advance.

But the facility, capable of handling 100,000 barrels of oil a day, remained broadly intact until Thursday. On that day, an attack at the refinery set fires across the complex, according to satellite data from NASA satellites that track wildfires worldwide.

Satellite images taken by Planet Labs PBC on Friday for the AP showed vast areas of the refinery ablaze. The images, shot just after 1200 GMT, showed flames shooting up into the sky in several spots. Oil tanks at the facility stood burned, covered in soot.

Thick plumes of black smoke towered over the site, carried south toward Khartoum by the wind. Exposure to that smoke can exacerbate respiratory problems and raise cancer risks.

In a statement released Thursday, the Sudanese military alleged the RSF was responsible for the fire at the refinery.

The RSF "deliberately set fire to the Khartoum refinery in al-Jaili this morning in a desperate attempt to destroy the infrastructures of this country," the statement read.

"This hateful behavior reveals the extent of the criminality and decadence of this militia ... (and) increases our determination to pursue it everywhere until we liberate every inch from their filth."

The RSF for its part alleged Thursday night that Sudanese military aircraft dropped "barrel bombs" on the facility, "completely destroying it." The RSF has claimed the Sudanese military uses old commercial cargo aircraft to drop barrel bombs, such as one that crashed under mysterious circumstances in October.

Neither the Sudanese military nor the RSF offered evidence to support their dueling allegations. But on Saturday, multiple videos emerged of Burhan's forces claiming to have entered the refinery's compound, the sound of heavy gunfire heard in the background.

Sudan's military spokesman, Brig. Gen. Nabil Abdallah, also told the AP they had taken control of the refinery. The RSF did not immediately address the claim, nor another by Sudan's military they had broken a monthslong siege on the Signal Corps headquarters in northern Khartoum.

China, Sudan's largest trading partner before the war, has not acknowledged the blaze at the refinery. The Chinese Foreign Ministry did not respond to a request for comment.

China moved into Sudan's oil industry after Chevron Corp. left in 1992 amid violence targeting oil work-

ers in another civil war. South Sudan broke away to become its own country in 2011, taking 75% of what had been Sudan's oil reserves with it.

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres "is following with great concern the recent escalation of fighting in Sudan" a statement from his office Friday said, specifically mentioning the oil refinery attack.

"The secretary-general urges the parties to refrain from all actions that could have dangerous consequences for Sudan and the region, including serious economic and environmental implications," the statement said.

Losing the refinery would have a major effect on the economies of both Sudan and South Sudan.

"The destruction of the refinery would force the Sudanese people to rely on more expensive fuel imports," warned Timothy Liptrot in an analysis for the Small Arms Survey in May 2024. "As the conflict progresses, a norm that exists among the RSF and (the Sudanese military) against damaging Sudan's accumulated capital is breaking down, with permanent damage to Sudan's refining infrastructure becoming increasingly possible."

Sudan has been unstable since a popular uprising forced the removal of longtime dictator Omar al-Bashir in 2019. A short-lived transition to democracy was derailed when Burhan and Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo of the RSF joined forces to lead a military coup in October 2021.

Al-Bashir faces charges at the International Criminal Court over carrying out a genocidal campaign in the early 2000s in the western Darfur region with the Janjaweed, the precursor to the RSF. Rights groups and the U.N. say the RSF and allied Arab militias are again attacking ethnic African groups in this war.

The Biden administration also sanctioned Burhan in its last days over his forces' "lethal attacks on civilians, including airstrikes against protected infrastructure including schools, markets and hospitals." It also said Burhan's troops were "responsible for the routine and intentional denial of humanitarian access, using food deprivation as a war tactic."

The RSF and Sudan's military began fighting each other in April 2023. Their conflict has killed more than 28,000 people, forced millions to flee their homes and left some families eating grass in a desperate attempt to survive as famine sweeps parts of the country.

Other estimates suggest a far higher death toll in the civil war.

Manfred Goldberg wants you to know how the Nazis took his brother's life. And how an angel saved his

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Manfred Goldberg was just 13 years old when — stripped to his skin and shuffling toward an SS guard at a Nazi labor camp in Latvia — a man leaned over his shoulder and whispered the secret that saved the young Jew's life.

"If he happens to ask you your age, say you are 17," the man told him.

Goldberg followed the advice and the guard directed him to the group selected for slave labor. It was only later that he realized that the younger prisoners were sent to die because the guards believed anyone under 17 was too young to work profitably for the Nazi war machine.

"I sometimes think of that man as an angel who was sent to save me," Goldberg said. "I never saw him again."

Monday's ceremony marking the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz is more than a moment to remember some 6 million Jews who died in the Holocaust. It is a reminder that the number of survivors is dwindling, leaving fewer and fewer people to bear witness to the Nazi genocide at a time when Holocaust denial and antisemitism are on the rise.

"I'm only a drop in the ocean," he said in an interview at the Jewish Care Holocaust Survivors' Centre in London. "But I've made up my mind that as long as God gives me the strength, physical and mental, to continue doing it, I have committed myself to keep on doing it. So that's why I'm here at age 94, speaking to you."

This is his story.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 33 of 74

Nazi rise

Manfred was born in Kassel, a city of about 220,000 in central Germany. Just 3 years old when the Nazis came to power in 1933, he didn't realize how the country was changing until he enrolled in the Jewish primary school nearby.

By then, the Hitler Youth, an organization that was outwardly similar to the Boy Scouts but was used to indoctrinate children in Nazi ideology, had begun to spread hatred of the Jews.

"They lay in wait of us sometimes, to ambush us and assault us or curse us," Goldberg said.

The children had been warned: Run or face more trouble.

As the Nazis systematically excluded Jews from public life, they first tried to deport Goldberg's father, then threatened to send him to a concentration camp. Manfred's mother, Rosa, pleaded for time to get him a visa to emigrate.

She heard diplomats at the British Embassy in Berlin might help, so she traveled 200 miles to see them. There she found Frank Foley, a British secret agent whose embassy job was cover for his spying activities and who ultimately authorized visas for more than 10,000 Jews to escape Germany.

"I believe he was a man with a heart," Goldberg said.

Foley gave Goldberg's father an emergency visa and told his mother that the rest of the family could follow in the coming weeks. But 10 days later, on Sept. 1, 1939, the Nazis invaded Poland. The family was split apart.

Wearing the star

As war raged, Germany stepped up anti-Jewish laws.

Jews were required to wear a yellow six-pointed star outdoors, and could only buy food in certain shops. When the shops ran out, Jews were out of luck.

One day, Goldberg's mother told him to put on his bookbag, which covered the star on his jacket, and go with her to a non-Jewish bakery. Standing across the street, she gave him a handful of coins and told him to run into the shop, ask for a loaf of bread, put the money on the counter and grab the bread before anyone could stop him.

"I was 7 or 8 years old. I just did as she asked me to," he said. "But in retrospect, I realize how serious the situation must have been. She probably would have been going hungry, but she couldn't bear to see her children suffer hunger."

Then in 1942, the Nazi regime embarked on what it called "The Final Solution," the systematic execution of European Jews.

When the SS pounded on the door of the Goldbergs' modest flat, they gave his mother just 10 minutes to pack a suitcase. After three days and three nights on a train without food or water, Manfred, his younger brother, Herman and their mother found themselves in Riga, the capital of Latvia, beginning a nightmare that would take him to five camps over the next three years.

Becoming a number

Manfred lost his name. He became No. 56478.

Soon they arrived at a sub-camp known as Precu, where Goldberg and his mother were put to work. But Herman was too young and stayed behind in the camp when Manfred and Rosa went out to work. The SS came and took the children away. Manfred never saw his brother again.

"The next morning, both my mother and I had to line up and go to work as though nothing untoward had happened," he said. "The mourning took place internally, but if we had refused to go to work, we would have lost our lives."

Only months later, Goldberg faced the same fate as his brother when the unknown benefactor whispered in his ear.

As the Nazis began to lose ground on the Eastern Front, they moved their prisoners west to keep them out of Russian hands and continue the killing.

Goldberg was moved to Stutthof, a camp near the Polish city of Gdansk whose front gate became known as the Gateway of Death because so few inmates left alive. More than 60,000 people died at the camp

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 34 of 74

due to typhus, lethal injections and, beginning in June 1944, after they were gassed with Zyklon B, the same compound used in the gas chambers at Auschwitz.

But there was one last horror to come.

With the war in Europe drawing to a close, the Nazis continued to drive the inmates west toward central Germany.

Goldberg and his mother were marched to 25 miles northwest, where hundreds of prisoners were herded onto barges and held offshore for days without food or water. When the SS guards disappeared, the stronger prisoners ripped up planks and used them as oars to paddle the massive boats back to shore.

But just as the inmates landed, the guards returned. First they shot those too weak to escape, and then rounded up those who had made it to shore, including Goldberg and his mother, and started marching them back to Germany.

Then a British tank column arrived.

"Suddenly our armed guards, who moments earlier had still been killing people for not keeping up to speed, turned and ran away in the opposite direction, away from us," Goldberg recalled. "People were jubilant. We're not under guard. We're free! We're free! ... You cannot imagine the joy we felt."

After being reunited with his father in England, Goldberg forged a career as an engineer, married and had four children.

For more than 50 years, he refused to tell his story.

He wanted his children to have normal parents, unburdened by the weight of the Holocaust. But about 20 years ago, when he was in his 70s, his synagogue asked him to take part in a remembrance service. His wife, Shary, encouraged him to remember: Who will tell your story when you are gone?

He never looked back.

"Silence never helps the oppressed," Goldberg said. "It always helps the oppressors."

The best revenge

The living room of Goldberg's home in London is a testament to all that matters to him, a gallery filled with pictures of children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and a lifetime of family gatherings. To stand in the room is to see a man who is celebrating the miracle that he was allowed to live.

But there's also another picture.

It's a painting of a chubby-cheeked boy with a checkered bowtie and the hint of a smile on his lips. Hung beside the front door, just where it can be seen every time Goldberg steps out into the world, it's the picture of another boy who didn't get that chance.

Herman.

Trump's attempt to end birthright citizenship would overturn more than a century of precedent

By GRAHAM LEE BREWER and JANIE HAR Associated Press

President Donald Trump has said since his first administration that he wants to end birthright citizenship, a constitutional right for everyone born in the United States.

This week he issued an executive order that would eliminate it, upending more than a century of precedent. On Thursday, however, a federal judge temporarily blocked it after 22 states quickly mounted a legal challenge.

Over the years the right to citizenship has been won by various oppressed or marginalized groups after hard-fought legal battles. Here's a look at how birthright citizenship has applied to some of those cases and how the Justice Department is using them today to defend Trump's order.

Citizenship for Native Americans

Native Americans were given U.S. citizenship in 1924. The Justice Department has cited their status as a legal analogy to justify Trump's executive order in court.

Arguing that "birth in the United States does not by itself entitle a person to citizenship, the person must

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 35 of 74

also be 'subject to the jurisdiction' of the United States." It raised a case from 1884 that found members of Indian tribes "are not 'subject to the jurisdiction' of the United States and are not constitutionally entitled to Citizenship," the department said.

Many scholars take a dim view of the validity of that analogy.

It's not a good or even new legal argument, said Gerald L. Neuman, a professor of international, foreign and comparative law at Harvard Law School. "But it's got a bigger political movement behind it, and it's embedded in a degree of openly expressed xenophobia and prejudice."

Some say the legal analogy to the citizens of tribal nations plays directly into that.

"It's not a valid comparison," said Leo Chavez, a professor and author at the University of California, Irvine, who studies international migration. "It's using the heat of race to make a political argument rather than a legal argument."

"They're digging into old, archaic Indian law cases, finding the most racist points they can in order to win," said Matthew Fletcher, a professor of law at the University of Michigan and a member of the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians. "There's nothing sacred in the Department of Justice. They'll do anything they can to win."

For Spanish and Mexican descendants

In addition to his order on birthright citizenship, Trump has directed immigration arrests to be expanded to sensitive locations such as schools. That holds special implications in the border state of New Mexico, where U.S. citizenship was extended in 1848 to residents of Mexican and Spanish descent under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the U.S.-Mexico war.

The state's 1912 Constitution includes a guarantee saying "children of Spanish descent in the state of New Mexico shall never be denied the right and privilege of admission and attendance at public schools ... and they shall never be classed in separate schools, but shall forever enjoy perfect equality with other children."

State Attorney General Raúl Torrez has highlighted that provision in guidance to K-12 schools about how to respond to possible surveillance, warrants and subpoenas by immigration authorities. The guidance notes that children cannot be denied access to public education based on immigration status, citing U.S. Supreme Court precedent.

For enslaved people

The issue of whether enslaved people were eligible for U.S. citizenship came to the forefront in 1857 when the Supreme Court ruled 7-2 against Dred Scott, a slave, and his bid to sue for freedom. In their decision, the court said Black people were not entitled to citizenship and even claimed they were inferior to white people.

The Dred Scott decision contributed to the start of the Civil War. With the North's victory over the South, slavery became outlawed. Among the constitutional protections put in place for formerly enslaved people, Congress ratified the 14th Amendment in 1868, guaranteeing citizenship for all, including Black people.

"All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside," the 14th Amendment says. "No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States."

That effectively nullified the Dred Scott ruling.

For children of immigrants

All children born in the U.S. to immigrants have the right to citizenship thanks to a Chinese man whose landmark 1898 case went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Wong Kim Ark was born in San Francisco to parents from China. But when he tried to return to the U.S. after a visit to that country, the government denied him reentry under the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, which restricted immigration from China and barred Chinese immigrants from ever becoming U.S. citizens.

Wong argued that he was a citizen because he was born in the U.S. In siding with him, the Supreme Court made explicit that the citizenship clause of the 14th Amendment automatically confers citizenship to all U.S.-born people regardless of their parents' status.

In its 6-2 decision, the court said that to deny Wong citizenship because of his parentage would be "to

deny citizenship to thousands of persons of English, Scotch, Irish, German, or other European parentage who have always been considered and treated as citizens of the United States.”

The ruling was a huge relief for the Chinese community as there was evidence that others were being denied entry, said Bill Ong Hing, a professor at the University of San Francisco School of Law. They carried birth certificates and applied for passports proving they were born in the U.S.

“All the Supreme Court concentrated on was, ‘Are you subject to the jurisdiction to the United States when you’re born here?’” Hing said. “And the answer is yes.”

Hing was among Chinese American leaders who criticized Trump’s order during a news conference Friday at the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association in San Francisco’s Chinatown. The association helped Wong with his legal case.

Annie Lee, policy director of Chinese for Affirmative Action, said that Trump’s executive order affects all immigrants and children of immigrants, regardless of legal status.

“When a racist man screams at me to go back to my country, he does not know or care if I am a U.S. citizen, if I am here on a work visa or if I am undocumented,” she said. “He looks at me and feels like I do not belong here. So make no mistake that the white supremacy which animates this illegal executive order impacts us all.”

Trump’s border emergency declaration comes amid relative calm after years of major turmoil

By ELLIOT SPAGAT, GREGORY BULL and EUGENE GARCIA Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Long stretches of silence on a Border Patrol scanner are punctuated with updates on tracking a single migrant for hours. The radio traffic sounds like a throwback to earlier times, before the United States became the largest destination for asylum-seekers in 2017.

“There’s a pair way down there. We’ll see if they start moving up,” one agent says.

“Yeah, maybe they’ll try to move north in a bit,” another responds.

Saying that “America’s sovereignty is under attack,” President Donald Trump’s declaration of a border emergency comes at a time of relative calm after years of deep turmoil. Active-duty military arrived Thursday in San Diego and in El Paso, Texas, as part of an initial deployment of 1,500 troops.

Arrests for illegal border crossings plummeted more than 80% to about 47,000 in December from an all-time high of 250,000 the same period a year earlier. Arrests fell by about half when Mexican authorities increased enforcement within their own borders a year ago and by about half again when former President Joe Biden introduced severe asylum restrictions in June.

For Trump, Biden didn’t go nearly far enough. The last monthly gauge of border arrests under Biden hovered near 4 1/2-year lows and was below much of 2019, during Trump’s first term, but about triple from April 2017, early in Trump’s presidency and a low point that he highlighted on giant charts at campaign rallies.

The Associated Press joined the Border Patrol for six hours Thursday in San Diego, the busiest corridor for illegal crossings much of the last year, and found no migrants until the last half-hour.

Three Chinese men and one Malaysian turned themselves in to agents minutes after walking through a gap in the border wall. Almost simultaneously, eight from India and one from Nepal crossed and waited for agents. The men were taken for processing to large white tents that opened during Biden’s presidency.

It was unclear what happened to them after that, but one of Trump’s biggest challenges is the enormous cost and diplomatic challenge of deporting people to faraway places. The governments of Venezuela and Nicaragua, both U.S. adversaries, refuse to take their citizens back, for example. Cuba allows only limited flights.

The job of a Border Patrol agent has changed dramatically in recent months, away from quickly processing and releasing asylum-seekers with notices to appear in immigration court. Agents are returning to a more traditional role tracking individuals and small groups trying to elude capture.

Many agents chafed under Biden as arrests topped 2 million for two straight years, though traffic slowed

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 37 of 74

sharply before Trump took office on Monday. The Border Patrol released fewer than 7,000 migrants in the U.S. in December, down 96% from nearly 192,000 a year earlier. El Paso reported 211 were released there in the third week of January, down from more than 10,000 a week in December 2023.

In San Diego on Thursday, agents focused on an area of deceptively treacherous mountain trails with expansive views of Tijuana, Mexico, its urban sprawl and industrial warehouses in San Diego. Migrants who elude capture walk as long as two days in the wilderness before arriving at smugglers' vehicles. Agents parked in staging areas follow their movements and discuss when to move in.

"Does anyone have eyes on them? You can't miss them," one agent says on the radio.

"Potentially two so far," another chimes in.

Less than a year ago, agents were overwhelmed by surrendering asylum-seekers who waited up to several days in the heat or cold, with the exposure of children to the dangerous temperatures inviting a judge's scrutiny. On some nights hundreds were gathered border walls in San Diego, as volunteers passed bandages, aspirin, juice and sandwiches between slats in the barrier.

In remote, boulder-strewn mountains east of San Diego, large groups crossed nightly, many from China and South America. Within a day or two, asylum-seekers were dropped off at a bus stop in San Diego.

Karen Parker provides support and medical attention to migrants in the mountains, such as treating broken ankles, cuts and parasite wounds. She said she encountered 600 to 800 people per night a year ago, but by early January there were mostly small groups with an occasional larger one of around 40.

Since Trump took office, Parker said, it has been "a dead standstill," perhaps partly a result of freezing temperatures and wildfires.

Parker sees more people getting picked up in sedans, a likely sign of smuggling activity, than last year when border crossers generally waited for the patrol to release them with notices to appear in immigration court.

Arrests in the San Diego sector plunged to an average of 236 a day during the last week of Biden's presidency, from more than 1,400 a day in April. Wednesday's arrest tally was 136.

Trump's orders will hinge to a large extent on how he pays for detention and transportation, as well as how he manages countries that won't take back their citizens. During his first term, he used emergency powers to divert billions of dollars from the Defense Department for a border wall.

"To protect the security and safety of United States citizens, to protect each of the States against invasion, and to uphold my duty to take care that the laws be faithfully executed, it is my responsibility as President to ensure that the illegal entry of aliens into the United States via the southern border be immediately and entirely stopped," Trump said Monday in his emergency declaration.

In Arizona, Pima County said Thursday it was closing two migrant shelters in Tucson because the government has stopped releasing people to them. Since 2019, the county had sheltered more than 518,000 migrants.

Jewish Family of Service of San Diego said Friday its shelter had not received any migrants since the Trump administration ended use of the online border app, CBP One, for migrants to legally enter. It served 791 people the week before Trump took office.

Conservatives of color have lofty expectations for Trump's second term

By MATT BROWN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Delivering his first address as a reinaugurated president, Donald Trump spoke directly to communities that had historically shunned his party.

"To the Black and Hispanic communities, I want to thank you for the tremendous outpouring of love and trust that you have shown me with your vote," Trump said. "We set records, and I will not forget it. I've heard your voices in the campaign, and I look forward to working with you in the years to come."

Trump, whose inauguration coincided with the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday, promised to "strive together to make his dream a reality." It's a vow that many prominent Black and Hispanic civil rights leaders view

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 38 of 74

skeptically. But among the conservatives of color who surround Trump, the moment was an endorsement of their biggest hopes, years in the making.

"This room was impossible twenty years ago," Rep. Byron Donalds, R-Fla., said Sunday evening during the "Legacy of Freedom Ball," a gala of a few hundred mostly Black conservatives who gathered to ring in the new administration. "But in 2024 not only are we back, but we're bringing Black people and Hispanic people into the Republican Party," Donalds told the crowd.

Trump's comments alluded to the record margins he garnered among heavily Black and Hispanic regions of the country compared to past Republican presidential candidates. At galas preceding Trump's inauguration, conservative Black and Hispanic activists and lawmakers toasted to a new era in which many of them hope to play a larger role than in Trump's first term.

"There's so much that we expect from the president, and I believe he's going to deliver," said Virginia Lt. Gov. Winsome Earle-Sears, an outspoken conservative who is running to become the state's first Black and female governor.

Earle-Sears listed stricter immigration policies, cracking down on crime and reducing the federal government's role in education as priorities she believed would speak to Black Americans. "Let's just give him a chance," she said.

The revelry came after a year of bifurcated messaging from the Trump campaign, which invested in appeals to Black and Hispanic voters while at the same time depicting immigrants and communities of color as violent criminals and the country as beset by diversity and inclusion policies that conservatives view as weakening the nation.

But Trump's divisive messages on "Black jobs" and "Hispanic jobs" spoke to a view of the economy and society that found salience with some voters, including voters of color, on top of concerns over inflation, rapid technological change and geopolitical unrest abroad.

Trump gained a larger share of Black and Latino voters than he did in 2020, when he lost to Democrat Joe Biden — most notably among young Black and Hispanic male voters — according to AP VoteCast, a nationwide survey of more than 120,000 voters.

Overall, about 16% of Black voters supported Trump in November, while about 8 in 10 voted for Democrat Kamala Harris. But that represented a shift from 2020 when only 8% of Black voters backed Trump and about 9 in 10 went for Biden. Among Hispanic voters, 43% voted for Trump in November, up from about one-third in 2020.

Black women are largely the exception to this shift — about 9 in 10 Black female voters supported Harris in 2024, similar to the share that backed Biden in 2020.

At the Hispanic Inaugural Ball the Saturday before Trump's inauguration, GOP members of Congress, state lawmakers and governors mingled with conservative activists and business executives from across the Western Hemisphere.

Latin American leaders like Argentinian President Javier Milei and Paraguayan President Santiago Peña rubbed elbows with Republican members of Congress, including Rep. Maria Elvira Salazar, Mexican actors and Hispanic business executives. Vivek Ramaswamy, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Texas Gov. Greg Abbott all made appearances.

"I don't think Trump gets enough credit for listening and tailoring his policies in part to what people want in these communities," said Francis Suarez, mayor of Miami. Suarez, who leads a city that is overwhelmingly Hispanic and sits at the nexus of the U.S. and Latin America, said Trump can maintain his support among Hispanic voters "and grow it again. It just goes back to the basics."

Texas Sen. Ted Cruz rallied gala attendees by recounting the November election, in which many majority-Hispanic counties in his home state that had traditionally backed Democrats flipped to Trump. Cruz, who trailed Trump in many of those same counties as he ran for reelection, called the GOP's inroads with Hispanic voters "unprecedented."

"The Rio Grande Valley has been bright blue for 100 years. Well, I'm here to tell you the Rio Grande Valley flipped red," said Cruz, who is Hispanic. "That is a generational change for Texas, and it is a generational change for America."

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 39 of 74

Other lawmakers took time to pitch a forward-looking vision.

"I think the biggest thing is that we're beginning to recognize we're Americans first. We have different backgrounds, but always share the same dreams. And that's what's happening across the board," said Rep. Burgess Owens, R-Utah, in an interview with The Associated Press. Owens is one of four Black Republicans in the House of Representatives.

Sen. Bernie Moreno, R-Ohio, who was born in Bogotá, Colombia, rejected stereotypes of Hispanics as solely laborers or immigrants and asked the crowd to envision the country after the four years of Trump's term.

"In four years, America will understand the positive impact of the Hispanic community. And we're going to build an alliance between a free South America, a prosperous South America and a strong, free and prosperous United States of America," Moreno said.

"That's what we're going to get done over the next four years and it's going to be the Hispanic community that makes it happen."

Black conservatives are energized as well. The GOP did not add any new Black members to Congress this cycle, but activists are hoping to change that in the 2026 midterms. And Donalds, a Florida Republican and one of the most prominent Black surrogates for Trump on the campaign trail, joked to attendees to "keep quiet" about his ambition for higher office — speakers throughout the night referred to him as "Governor Donalds."

The commingling scenes and aspirations were no accident.

Conservative groups like Bienvenido and the Black Conservative Federation, which hosted the balls, had worked for years behind the scenes to build up conservative Black and Hispanic organizing networks. And Trump's orbit has fostered friendly ties with Latin American's political right, most notably in Trump's friendship with then-Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro. Bolsonaro's wife attended Trump's inauguration.

Argentina's Milei "and I were friends before he was elected president," said Roger Stone, a longtime Trump confidant. "We were pen pals, you know, over the internet. I'm a strong believer in him."

Some in Trump's orbit hope Secretary of State Marco Rubio will deepen America's ties to right-wing Latin American leaders in the coming years.

The exuberance of the night reflected a desire among many Hispanic conservatives to solidify the party's inroads with Hispanic voters and increase their clout in the GOP.

"We're growing exponentially," said Jaime Florez, the Hispanic communications director for the Trump campaign.

And who knows? "The first Hispanic president of the United States might be here tonight," he added.

Auschwitz was liberated 80 years ago. The spotlight is on survivors as their numbers dwindle

By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — The world's focus will be on the remaining survivors of Nazi Germany's atrocities on Monday as world leaders and royalty join them for commemorations on the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.

The main observances take place at the site in southern Poland where Nazi Germany murdered over a million people, most of them Jews, but also Poles, Roma and Sinti, Soviet prisoners of war, gay people and others targeted for elimination in Adolf Hitler's racial ideology.

The anniversary has taken on added poignancy due to the advanced age of the survivors, and an awareness that they will soon be gone, even as rising warfare makes their warnings as relevant as ever.

The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum says it expects about 50 survivors of Auschwitz and other camps to attend the events on Monday afternoon, joined by political leaders and royalty.

On this occasion, the powerful will sit and listen to the voices of the former prisoners, while there is still time to hear them.

Auschwitz the labor and death camp

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 40 of 74

The German authorities founded the Auschwitz concentration camp in 1940 in the Polish town of Oswiecim after their invasion of Poland in 1939. Early on it was a camp for Polish prisoners, including Catholic priests and members of the Polish underground resistance. The Germans later established some 40 camps in the area, but the most infamous is Birkenau, a vast site used for mass killings in gas chambers.

Those arriving at Birkenau were brought in cramped, windowless cattle trains. At the infamous ramp, the Nazis selected those they could use as forced laborers. The others — the elderly, women, children and babies — were gassed to death soon after their arrival.

Altogether the Germans murdered 6 million Jews, or two-thirds of all of Europe's Jews, in the Holocaust at Auschwitz and other camps, in ghettos and in mass executions close to people's homes.

Liberated by the Red Army

On Jan. 27, 1945, Soviet troops arrived at the gates of the Auschwitz and found some 7,000 weak and emaciated prisoners.

Boris Polevoy, a correspondent for the Soviet newspaper Pravda who was a first eyewitness, described a scene of unbelievable suffering: "I saw thousands of tortured people whom the Red Army had saved — people so thin that they swayed like branches in the wind, people whose ages one could not possibly guess."

At the time Allied troops were moving across Europe in a series of offensives against Germany. Soviet troops first liberated the Majdanek camp near Lublin in July 1944, and would go on to liberate Auschwitz, Stutthof and others.

American and British forces, meanwhile, liberated camps to the west, including Buchenwald, Dachau, Mauthausen, Bergen-Belsen.

After liberation day, some prisoners died of disease. Many confronted the grief of murdered parents and children, spouses and siblings. Entire families were wiped out.

"For Jewish survivors, the liberation day is a very, very sad day," Havi Dreifuss, a historian of the Holocaust at Tel Aviv University said in a recent online discussion about the anniversary.

Auschwitz the memorial site

Today the site is a museum and memorial managed by the Polish state, and is one of the most visited sites in Poland. Its mission is to preserve the objects there and the memory of what happened there; it organizes guided tours and its historians carry out research. In 2024, over 1.83 million people visited the site.

The museum's challenges are huge, and include efforts to conserve barracks and other objects that were never intended to endure for long. One especially emotional project involves the conservation of shoes of murdered children.

Auschwitz as a symbol for all the Nazi terror

Auschwitz is not only the place where 1.1 million people, 90% of them Jews, were massacred. It also looms large in the world's collective memory as the embodiment of all the Nazis crimes, and an example of what hatred, racism and antisemitism can lead to.

One reason that Auschwitz has emerged as the leading symbol of the Holocaust and other Nazi crimes is that it was also a labor camp and thousands survived, eyewitnesses who could tell the world what happened there.

"Relatively many people survived, which for example barely happened in sites which didn't have such a forced labor component," said Thomas Van de Putte, a scholar specialized in cultural and collective Holocaust memory at King's College London.

Up to 900,000 people, mostly Jews, were murdered in Treblinka from 1942-43, and mass killings also took place at Belzec and other camps, but the Germans sought to cover up the evidence of their crimes, and there were almost no survivors.

At Auschwitz, the Germans left behind barracks and watchtowers, the remains of gas chambers and the hair and personal belongings of people killed there. The "Arbeit Macht Frei" (Work Will Set You Free) gate is recognized the world over.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 41 of 74

At Birkenau, what remains has also left its mark on the collective conscience. As Van der Putte notes: "You have the gate, you have the wagon. You have the incredibly long railway platform which leads to the former crematoria and gas chambers."

Who is going

Presidents, royalty, ambassadors, rabbis and priests will be joining the survivors in a heated tent set up at Birkenau on Monday afternoon.

Germany, a country that for decades has been expressing remorse for the nation's crimes under Hitler, will be represented by both Chancellor Olaf Scholz and President Frank-Walter Steinmeier. Also attending will be the president of Austria, which was annexed by Germany in 1938, and Italy, whose dictator Benito Mussolini formed an alliance with Hitler.

Others attending include Poland's President Andrzej Duda, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and French President Emmanuel Macron.

Britain's King Charles III, who has long worked to promote Holocaust remembrance, will also attend along with other European royalty, including Spain's King Felipe VI.

Who won't be there

Russian President Vladimir Putin was an honored guest at the 60th anniversary in 2005, a testament to the Soviet role in liberating Auschwitz and the heavy price paid by Soviet troops in defeating Germany.

But he is not welcome anymore due to Russian aggression in Ukraine. It will be the third year in a row — following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 — with no Russia representative.

"This is the anniversary of liberation. We remember the victims, but we also celebrate freedom. It is hard to imagine the presence of Russia, which clearly does not understand the value of freedom," museum director Piotr Cywiński said.

The war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza also created a stir about whether Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu should attend or not. The International Criminal Court, the world's top war crimes court, issued an arrest warrant for Netanyahu in November, accusing him of crimes against humanity for Israeli actions in Gaza. That meant that Poland, as a signatory, would have faced an obligation to arrest him.

In the end, the Polish government adopted a resolution vowing to ensure the safe participation of the highest representatives of Israel. Israel, however, is sticking by plans to send its education minister, Yoav Kisch.

With the ceasefire in Gaza comes a gruesome challenge: Counting and collecting the dead

By WAFAA SHURAFU and ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — The corpses keep coming every day, sometimes dozens at a time, brought to morgues in the Gaza Strip after being pried from under 15 months of rubble and pulled from battle zones long too dangerous for search-and-rescue teams to reach.

These bodies, dug up as a ceasefire took hold this week, are Gaza's "missing," the uncounted dead haunting families scattered by the war. For the Gaza Health Ministry, they were reduced to a bullet-point caveat beneath every daily death toll: "A number of victims are still under the rubble and on the streets, and cannot be accessed."

On Sunday, as a deal between Israel and Hamas paused the deadliest war in a century of Israeli-Palestinian conflict, families across the enclave scrambled to reunite with their loved ones — the living, the dead and the missing.

Palestinians crowded the ruins that were once their homes, watching anxiously as civil defense teams hacked at the rubble in search of missing bodies. Each day of the ceasefire, the ministry has logged 50 to 120 recovered corpses.

"From the moment the truce began, we were searching and searching," said Samira Alshaar, 58, who returned Sunday to the house she fled nine months earlier when the southern city of Rafah came under attack. She watched as her son, Ibrahim Qeshta, was killed by an airstrike before he could escape with her.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 42 of 74

"We left our son behind," she said.

Ibrahim's younger brother, Abdullah Qeshta, clawed Wednesday with his bare hands through blasted concrete and twisted rebar, his face shining with sweat and smeared with the dust of his family's life together. For three days, running on adrenaline, and anguish, he and the civil defense workers said they took breaks only to perform daily prayers and to sleep.

Alshaar, looking on, said she felt herself losing hope.

But suddenly, the men began to shout. They heaved stones and shards of concrete to the side.

In the dirt were ragged pieces of 37-year-old Ibrahim's navy blue pajamas, the ones he was wearing on May 6, 2024, when Israeli airstrikes sent everyone running. Ibrahim was running in the opposite direction, shouting to his mother that he'd be back in a second and was grabbing blankets inside. Then the house was struck, the walls collapsing onto him.

"That's my brother's hair, I'm certain, it is him," Abdullah Qeshta said, his voice trembling. "Oh God, thank you, God."

Ibrahim's body was in a state of decay. But in some sense, Alshaar said, she felt "content." She could give her son the dignity of a proper burial. She could find a place to mourn him.

"He can rest now," she said.

In an interview, Gaza health official Zaher al-Wahidi put the number of disappeared people and unrecovered bodies at roughly 8,000, based on reports from families about their missing loved ones.

It's an estimate that's impossible to verify more than 15 months after Hamas launched its cross-border attack on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, abducting some 250 people, killing about 1,200, mostly civilians, and triggering the Israeli military's retaliatory campaign.

But rescue teams, experts and rights groups agree the Health Ministry's official death toll — 47,283, as of Friday, with no distinction between civilians and combatants — is a significant undercount. Israel blames Hamas for the heavy civilian casualties because the group embeds itself in residential areas.

"Missing" could mean bodies like Ibrahim's rotting under the ruins or in the blazing sun for months, authorities say. In parts of northern Gaza, where constant Israeli airstrikes and crossfire had blocked ambulances and rescue workers, residents tell of finding bloated corpses strewn in the streets.

The missing, al-Wahidi said, also includes Palestinians killed and buried before they could be identified, or those marched into Israeli detention centers.

Families who accept that their missing are dead have flocked to Gaza's forensics offices since the cease-fire took hold.

At the main forensics center in Rafah on Wednesday, workers wrapped bodies and small piles of remains in white plastic body bags and placed them on the pavement. Inside, a man brought in to identify a loved one gasped, blinking at a pile of bones. He recognized the scarf and shoe of a family member that was found with them — exactly who was unclear. He was too distraught to talk. He let out a moan as he doubled over.

Investigators scrawled names on the bags in green marker. If the identity remained unknown, they labeled the bags with numbers in hopes of the long-blockaded Gaza Strip one day obtaining the DNA testing that would allow authorities to return the unclaimed dead to their families.

"We leave the numbered bags in a specially designated place where the ministry can identify them in the future," said Dr. Ahmed Zuhair, director of Rafah's Department of Forensic Medicine. "All we can do is ask international bodies to please, please help us."

On Wednesday, officials said some of the recovered bodies had surfaced when recent rains washed away layers of dirt or had been dug up by wild dogs that ripped and scattered people's limbs.

The rest of the remains were found following hours, sometimes days, of digging and hurling aside mountains of rubble with little more than shovels. Civil defense workers reported that Gaza has no more than three excavators — the kind of heavy machinery needed for rescue work.

"We need help from hundreds of rubble removal specialists and thousands of large machines," said al-Wahidi. Otherwise, he warned, "we will not be able to recover the bodies."

Each day of the ceasefire so far, Mohammad Deifallah, like dozens of other Palestinians, has come to the forensics center in Rafah filled with despairing hope.

On Wednesday, he unzipped body bag after body bag, cupping his hand over his nose because of the smell. His brother — who he lost 50 days ago, he said, in the chaotic search for safety as Israel's bombardment of Rafah intensified — was nowhere to be found.

"I don't know where to go. I checked all these bodies," Deifallah said, lifting a tarp to find a skeleton. "Nothing resembles him. Nothing is even recognizable."

Democratic states weigh more support for immigrants as Trump administration cracks down

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

As President Donald Trump tightens the nation's immigration policies, lawmakers in Democratic-led states are proposing new measures that could erect legal obstacles for federal immigration officials and help immigrants lacking legal status avoid deportation.

The resistance efforts in California, New York and other states are a counterpoint to the many Republican-led states advancing measures to aid Trump's crackdown on illegal immigration, highlighting a national divide.

In just his first week in office, Trump's administration has halted refugee arrivals; fast-tracked deportations; sent military troops to the southern border; lifted longtime rules restricting immigration enforcement near schools, churches and hospitals; attempted to end birthright citizenship; and ordered federal prosecutors to investigate state or local officials who they believe are interfering with his crackdown on illegal immigration.

Hundreds of bills on immigration already have been introduced in states and more action is expected next week. Republican Govs. Ron DeSantis of Florida and Bill Lee of Tennessee have called special legislative sessions to begin Monday to support Trump's immigration agenda.

Meanwhile, Democrats in states such as Connecticut, Hawaii, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Oregon and Washington are backing measures to expand health care and higher education for immigrants, restrict landlords from inquiring about immigration status or block government agreements to open new immigrant detention centers.

Many U.S. adults support stronger security at the southern border and deporting immigrants in the U.S. illegally who have been convicted of violent crimes, according to a survey by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. But some actions have less consensus. About 4 in 10 American adults support deporting all immigrants living in the U.S. illegally while a similar share are opposed.

Legal aid to fight deportation

Unlike in criminal courts, there is no constitutional right to a government-funded attorney in immigration courts. As Trump ramps up deportation efforts, some state measures would help pay for attorneys to defend people facing immigration proceedings.

One leader of such efforts is New York Assemblywoman Catalina Cruz, who came to the U.S. at age 9 from Colombia and remained without legal status for over a decade before gaining permanent residency and becoming a U.S. citizen and a lawyer.

Cruz has filed more than a half-dozen bills to aid immigrants. One would assert a right under state law to legal counsel in immigration proceedings in New York, or elsewhere if the immigrant was living in New York. Another would authorize state grants for organizations to hire, train and equip staff to provide legal aid to people facing deportation.

"In a world where the threat of mass deportations is imminent," the legislation "gives people an opportunity to fight their case, to fight for their families, to fight for their rights," Cruz said.

Cruz estimates 60% of the residents in her New York City legislative district are noncitizens, adding, "People are terrified."

New York is among several states that already fund legal aid for immigrants. But advocates want about

twice as much money as Democratic Gov. Kathy Hochul has proposed.

"This is a moment where investing in due process and fairness for immigrants at risk in New York is of fundamental importance," said Shayna Kessler, director of a universal representation initiative at the nonprofit Vera Institute of Justice.

Help for immigrants seeking legal status

Some legislative proposals also would fund attorneys who could help immigrants obtain legal residency.

A bill by Oregon state Sen. Lisa Reynolds would require the state Department of Human Services to offer grants to nonprofits to help people who aren't citizens change their immigration status or become lawful permanent residents. It would provide \$6 million to launch the program during the budget biennium beginning in July.

"Oregon has had a very proud tradition of doing all we can to help those who have recently immigrated to our state from other countries, and especially those who have been political refugees," Reynolds said. "We're all feeling a little more urgency around this."

Since 1987, Oregon law has barred law enforcement officers from "detecting or apprehending persons for the purpose of enforcing federal immigration laws." Voters in 2018 defeated a ballot measure that would have repealed the so-called sanctuary law.

A shield for schools with immigrant students

Earlier this week, the Trump administration reversed guidance that for more than a decade had restricted federal agencies from carrying out immigration enforcement in sensitive locations, such as schools, churches and health care facilities. Some parents now fear immigration raids at schools.

In California, about 1 in 5 children live in families where at least one person does not have legal status, according to The Children's Partnership, a Los Angeles-based nonprofit.

California Assemblymember Al Muratsuchi, chair of the chamber's education committee, is sponsoring legislation that would make it more difficult for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials to enter schools and child-care centers.

The bill would require federal officials to have a judicial warrant, written statement of purpose, valid identification and approval from a facility administrator. If those criteria are met, federal immigration officials still could only access areas where children aren't present.

Muratsuchi said he started working on the legislation as soon as Trump was elected.

"This is a top priority to protect all of our students, including our immigrant students," Muratsuchi said.

A new luxury hotel towers over Havana as Cuba's economic troubles mount and tourism plummets

By ANDREA RODRÍGUEZ Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — It's impossible to miss. The huge rectangular mass of concrete and glass — the tallest building in Havana — dominates the city skyline, towering 150 meters (490 feet) above colonial homes with its 542 luxury rooms and majestic views of the city and the sea.

The Selection La Habana hotel, managed by Spanish chain Iberostar, has yet to be inaugurated but it is already the target of criticism — and not only for its unusual shape. Cubans are questioning the government's allocation of millions of dollars towards luxury tourism while the island grapples with a severe economic crisis and tourism numbers plummet to historic lows.

"All that money could have been spent to build hospitals and schools," lamented Susel Borges, a 26-year-old artisan, as she looked up to the towering edifice, known to locals as the "K and 23 building" because of its location.

Located near the legendary Habana Libre hotel and the iconic Coppelia ice cream parlor, the new hotel is part of a government plan to build a dozen luxury establishments — mainly in Havana — that did not stop even during the COVID-19 pandemic and while existing luxury hotels remained largely unoccupied.

For decades, tourism drove the Cuban economy, generating annual revenues of up to \$3 billion. But in December, Cuban authorities said only 2.2 million tourists visited the island in 2024, a decrease of roughly

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 45 of 74

200,000 from 2023 and significantly lower than the 4.2 million tourists who visited in 2019.

The government attributes the decline in tourism to a “perfect storm” of factors including supply shortages, a severe energy crisis causing massive blackouts and a lack of personnel, due to emigration and low wages. Furthermore, the island is grappling with a surge in U.S. sanctions, including restrictions on travel by U.S. citizens, a ban on cruise ships and other measures specifically designed to stifle the growth of Cuba’s tourism industry.

“Tourism is gone,” said Julio García Campos, driver of a shiny red 1951 Pontiac with an original engine. “Tourists used to line up to get on one of these!” he said, recalling a bygone era when the island was bustling with American and European travelers following a removal of sanctions by then-President Barack Obama.

The new Selection La Habana, like all other hotels in Cuba, is state-owned and operates under GAESA, a conglomerate belonging to the Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces that has often been criticized because of the opacity of its businesses. As a military-run operation, it is exempt from audits by the Comptroller General’s Office and has not disclosed the amount it invested in the 40-story hotel.

Cuban economist Pedro Monreal notes the “incongruity” of investing capital in the tourism sector when very little is being allocated to strategic areas such as agriculture.

“With food insecurity a concern, it’s troubling that agricultural investment lags significantly behind tourism investment, remaining 11 times lower,” Monreal noted last year on social media.

Architects also expressed little enthusiasm for the new hotel, pointing at its disruptive appearance within the environment, its excessive height violating urban regulations and tall glass windows that are ill-suited for a tropical climate.

“This building serves as a perfect example in our classes of what should not be done in terms of bioclimatic design,” said Abel Tablada, an architect and university professor, adding it’s “unforgivable” that the little money available to the Cuban state has been allocated to a building that does not add value to the city.

Trump proposes ‘getting rid of FEMA’ while touring disaster areas

By WILL WEISSERT, CHRIS MEGERIAN and MAKIYA SEMINERA Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — President Donald Trump surveyed disaster zones in California and North Carolina on Friday and said he was considering “getting rid of” the Federal Emergency Management Agency, offering the latest sign of how he is weighing sweeping changes to the nation’s central organization for responding to disasters.

In fire-ravaged California, the state’s Democratic leaders pressed Trump for federal assistance that he’s threatened to hold up, some setting aside their past differences to shower him with praise. Trump, in turn, pressured local officials to waive permitting requirements so people can immediately rebuild, pledging that federal permits would be granted promptly.

Instead of having federal financial assistance flow through FEMA, the Republican president said Washington could provide money directly to the states. He made the comments while visiting North Carolina, which is still recovering months after Hurricane Helene, on the first trip of his second term.

“FEMA has been a very big disappointment,” the Republican president said. “It’s very bureaucratic. And it’s very slow.”

Trump was greeted in California by Gov. Gavin Newsom, a Trump critic whom the president frequently disparages. The duo chatted amiably and gestured toward cooperation despite their bitter history.

“We’re going to need your support. We’re going to need your help,” Newsom told Trump. “You were there for us during COVID. I don’t forget that, and I have all the expectations we’ll be able to work together to get a speedy recovery.”

Newsom has praised Trump before when looking for help from the federal government. In the early months of the coronavirus pandemic, he called Trump “thoughtful” and “collaborative.”

Trump flew over several devastated neighborhoods in Marine One, the presidential helicopter, before landing in Pacific Palisades, a hard-hit community that’s home to some of Southern California’s rich and

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 46 of 74

famous. Accompanied by first lady Melania Trump, he walked a street where all the houses have burned, chatting with residents and police officers.

It takes seeing the damage firsthand to grasp its enormity, Trump said after. The fires, which continue to burn, could end up being the costliest natural disasters in U.S. history.

"It is devastation. It really is an incineration," Trump said.

Trump's brief but friendly interaction with Newsom belied the confrontational stance he signaled toward California earlier in the day. Even on the plane en route to Los Angeles, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt was using Trump's disparaging nickname for the governor, "Newscom," and telling reporters "he has wronged the people of his state" and saying Trump was visiting to pressure Newsom and other officials "to do right by their citizens."

Trump said Los Angeles residents who lost their homes should be able to get back onto their properties immediately to clear them, adding several told him it will be months before they can rebuild.

Mayor Karen Bass said residents should be able to return home within the week, but keeping people safe from hazardous materials is a top priority. She said the city was easing the process to get permits, but she was repeatedly interrupted by Trump as she tried to explain the city's efforts. He downplayed the concerns about toxins, saying: "What's hazardous waste? We're going to have to define that."

Trump has a long history of minimizing the risks of asbestos. In his 1997 book, "The Art of the Comeback," Trump called asbestos "the greatest fireproofing material ever used" and "100% safe, once applied," and claimed the movement against the insulator was led by the mob, "because it was often mob-related companies that would do the asbestos removal."

Before flying to California, Trump reiterated that he wants to extract concessions from the Democratic-led state in return for disaster assistance, including changes to water policies and requirements that voters need to show identification when casting ballots.

Beyond Trump's criticism of FEMA, he's suggested limiting the federal government's role in responding to disasters, echoing comments from conservative allies who have proposed reducing funding and responsibility.

"I'd like to see the states take care of disasters," he said in North Carolina. "Let the state take care of the tornadoes and the hurricanes and all of the other things that happen."

Trump said Michael Whatley, a North Carolina native and chair of the Republican National Committee, would help coordinate recovery efforts in the state, where frustrations over the federal response have lingered. Although Whatley does not hold an official government position, Trump said he would be "very much in charge."

FEMA helps respond to disasters when local leaders request a presidential emergency declaration, a signal that the damage is beyond the state's ability to handle on its own. FEMA can reimburse governments for recovery efforts such as debris removal, and it gives stopgap financial assistance to individual residents.

Trump has criticized former President Joe Biden for his administration's response to Helene in North Carolina. As he left the White House on Friday morning, he told reporters that "it's been a horrible thing the way that's been allowed to fester" since the storm hit in September, and "we're going to get it fixed up."

In a small town in western North Carolina, residents told Trump about wading through waist-deep water to escape from their homes while fearing for their lives. Some have battled with insurance companies to get their losses covered.

"We've come to North Carolina with a simple message," Trump said. "You are not forgotten any longer. You were treated very badly by the previous administration."

FEMA has distributed \$319 million in financial assistance to residents, but that hasn't alleviated the feeling of abandonment among residents who are struggling to rebuild their lives.

Trump has showered California leaders with disdain for water policies that he falsely claimed worsened the recent blazes. He said he would "take a look at a fire that could have been put out if they let the water flow, but they didn't let the water flow." In Los Angeles, he met with members of Congress and local officials from both parties in a meeting that was at times contentious.

Michael Coen, who served as chief of staff at FEMA during the Biden administration, said Trump was "mis-

informed” about an agency that provides critical help to states when they are overwhelmed by catastrophe.

In addition, Coen criticized the idea of attaching strings to assistance. “I think the American people expect the federal government will be there for them on their worst day, no matter where they live,” he said.

Trump tapped Cameron Hamilton, a former Navy SEAL with limited experience managing natural disasters, as FEMA’s acting director.

Friday’s trip could prompt some uncomfortable conversations about climate change, which Trump has played down and denied. Both Helene and the Los Angeles wildfires were exacerbated by global warming.

In Helene’s case, a study by international climate scientists at World Weather Attribution found that climate change boosted the storm’s rainfall by 10%. In California, the state suffered a record dry fall and winter — its traditional wet season — which made the area around Los Angeles more vulnerable to blazes.

“This is just breaking our comfort zone of what is supposed to be normal,” said University of Oregon researcher Amanda Stasiewicz.

After visiting North Carolina and California, Trump plans to hold a rally Saturday in Las Vegas.

Hegseth confirmed as Trump’s defense secretary in tie-breaking vote despite turmoil over his conduct

By LISA MASCARO, MARY CLARE JALONICK and FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate confirmed Pete Hegseth as the nation’s defense secretary late Friday in a dramatic tie-breaking vote, swatting back questions about his qualifications to lead the Pentagon amid allegations of heavy drinking and aggressive behavior toward women.

Rarely has a Cabinet nominee faced such wide-ranging concerns about his experience and behavior as Hegseth, particularly for such a high-profile role atop the U.S. military. But the Republican-led Senate was determined to confirm Hegseth, a former Fox News host and combat veteran who has vowed to bring a “warrior culture,” rounding out President Donald Trump’s top national security Cabinet officials.

Vice President JD Vance arrived to break the 50-50 tie, highly unusual for Cabinet nominees and particularly defense secretaries, who typically win wider bipartisan support. Hegseth himself was at the Capitol with his family.

“We have a great secretary of defense and we’re very happy,” Trump said as he boarded Air Force One after surveying fire devastation in California.

Trump said he didn’t care about the dissent from Sen. Mitch McConnell, the influential former Republican leader — who joined two other Republicans, Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Sen. Susan Collins of Maine, in voting against Hegseth — because the “important thing is winning.”

The Senate’s ability to confirm Hegseth despite a grave series of allegations against him provides a measure of Trump’s political power and ability to get what he wants from the GOP-led Congress, and of the potency of the culture wars to fuel his agenda at the White House.

Only once before has the vice president had to break a tie on a Cabinet nominee — during Trump’s first term, when Vice President Mike Pence cast the vote to confirm Betsy DeVos as education secretary.

Next week senators will be facing Trump’s other outside Cabinet choices including particularly Kash Patel, a Trump ally who has published an enemies list, as the FBI director; Tulsi Gabbard as director of the office of national intelligence; and Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the anti-vaccine advocate, at Health and Human Services.

“Is Pete Hegseth truly the best we have to offer?” said Sen. Jack Reed of Rhode Island, the top Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, urging his colleagues to think seriously about their vote. All Democrats opposed the nominee.

But Senate Majority Leader John Thune said Hegseth, as a veteran of the Army National Guard who served tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, “will bring a warrior’s perspective” to the top military job.

“Gone will be the days of woke distractions,” Thune said, referring to the diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives being slashed across the federal government. “The Pentagon’s focus will be on war fighting.”

Hegseth himself was working the phones late Friday to shore up his support, his confirmation at stake.

“He’s a good man,” Trump said of Hegseth while departing the White House to visit disaster-hit North

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 48 of 74

Carolina and Los Angeles. "I hope he makes it."

The uncertainty sent tensions soaring late Friday at the Capitol. It takes a simple majority to confirm nominees, and Republicans, with a 53-47 majority in the Senate, could only lose one more objection after Murkowski and Collins already announced they would vote no.

McConnell had signaled skepticism in an earlier speech when he declared he would confirm nominees to senior national security roles "whose record and experience will make them immediate assets, not liabilities."

One Republican, Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina, sent the Senate swirling as he raised fresh questions and was provided information and answers.

But Tillis ultimately voted to confirm Hegseth, who he said "has a unique perspective" and is passionate about modernizing the military. He said he spoke to Hegseth for "nearly two hours" about his concerns.

In contrast, McConnell said after the vote said Hegseth "did not reckon" with the reality of job, noting that the nominee's "mere desire to be a 'change agent' is not enough."

Democrats, as the minority party, have helped confirm Secretary of State Marco Rubio and CIA Director John Ratcliffe in bipartisan votes to Trump's national security team.

But Democrats gravely opposed to Hegseth had little power to stop him, and instead resorted to dragging out the process. Hours before the vote, Democrats took to the Senate floor to object.

Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., said there were few Trump nominees as "dangerously and woefully unqualified as Hegseth."

Hegseth faced allegations that he sexually assaulted a woman at a Republican conference in California, though he has denied the claims and said the encounter was consensual. He later paid \$50,000 to the woman.

More recently, Hegseth's former sister-in-law said in an affidavit that he was abusive to his second wife to the point that she feared for her safety. Hegseth has denied the allegation, and in divorce proceedings, neither Hegseth nor the woman claimed to be a victim of domestic abuse.

During a fiery confirmation hearing, Hegseth dismissed allegations of wrongdoing one by one, and vowed to bring "warrior culture" to the top Pentagon post.

Hegseth has promised not to drink on the job if confirmed.

Republican senators facing an intensive pressure campaign by Trump allies to support Hegseth stood by his nomination, echoing his claims of a "smear" campaign against him.

A Princeton and Harvard graduate, Hegseth represents a newer generation of veterans who came of age in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. He went on to a career at Fox News as the host of a weekend show, and was unknown to many on Capitol Hill until Trump tapped him for the top Defense job.

Hegseth's comments that women should have no role in military combat drew particular concern, including from lawmakers who themselves served. He has since tempered those views as he met with senators during the confirmation process.

Murkowski said in a lengthy statement ahead of a test vote on Hegseth that his behaviors "starkly contrast" with what is expected of the military.

"I remain concerned about the message that confirming Mr. Hegseth sends to women currently serving and those aspiring to join," Murkowski wrote on social media.

Collins said that after a lengthy discussion with Hegseth, "I am not convinced that his position on women serving in combat roles has changed."

But one prominent Republican, Sen. Joni Ernst of Iowa, herself a veteran and sexual assault survivor, came under harsh criticism for her skepticism toward Hegseth and eventually announced she would back him.

Hegseth would lead an organization with nearly 2.1 million service members, about 780,000 civilians and a budget of \$850 billion.

In exercising its advise and consent role over Trump's nominees, the Senate is also trying to stave off his suggestion that the GOP leaders simply do away with the confirmation process altogether, and allow him to appoint his Cabinet choices when the Congress is on recess.

Trump raised the idea of so-called "recess appointments" during a private White House meeting with Thune and House Speaker Mike Johnson, a step many senators are trying to avoid.

Las Vegas Raiders agree to hire 73-year-old Pete Carroll as their head coach, AP source says

By ROB MAADDI and MARK ANDERSON AP Sports Writers

Pete Carroll has a youthful energy that many people half his age don't possess, and the Raiders hope that enthusiasm — and, more importantly, his proven track record — translates to Las Vegas.

It's a gamble in a city that knows something about that subject on someone who will turn 74 in September, but younger coaches have come up short since the Raiders moved to Las Vegas in 2020.

The Raiders have agreed to hire Carroll as their head coach, a person with knowledge of the decision told The Associated Press on Friday.

The team and Carroll agreed in principle on a three-year deal with a one-year team option, the person told the AP on condition of anonymity because the contract hasn't been finalized.

Carroll returns to the sideline after leading Seattle to two NFC championships and the franchise's only Super Bowl title during a 14-year stretch that ended following the 2023 season. He will be the league's oldest head coach next season, surpassing 66-year-old Andy Reid of the Kansas City Chiefs.

"I think Pete's got a ton of energy," North Carolina and former Patriots coach Bill Belichick said on "The Pat McAfee Show." "If you look at some of the coaches in the league like Andy Reid, he's not doing too bad."

Carroll joins a team that's partly owned by Tom Brady, who beat Carroll and the Seahawks in the Super Bowl 10 years ago. Brady watched from the sideline as Malcolm Butler picked off Russell Wilson's pass at the goal line to seal the victory for New England.

Brady is believed to have a major hand in the hiring process for this job and the general manager spot, which was filled by Tampa Bay Buccaneers assistant GM John Spytek on Wednesday. Brady, a seven-time Super Bowl champion, finished his career with the Bucs.

The Raiders fired coach Antonio Pierce after going 4-13 in his first full season. Pierce was 5-4 as an interim coach in 2023 after replacing Josh McDaniels.

Carroll becomes the team's 14th head coach since Jon Gruden was traded to Tampa Bay in 2002. He will become the fifth coach, including those in an interim role, since the Raiders moved to Las Vegas in 2020.

The once-proud organization with three Super Bowl trophies and the motto "Commitment to Excellence" has appeared in just two playoffs since making the championship game in the 2002 season. The Raiders lost in the wild-card round in both years.

Carroll has the demanding job of trying to revive an organization in an AFC West loaded with proven coaches and quarterbacks who appear to be in place for years to come. It will become the first division to open a season in which each head coach has appeared in a Super Bowl.

One of his chief challenges will be what to do at quarterback in a division that includes the Chiefs' Patrick Mahomes, the Chargers' Justin Herbert and the Broncos' Bo Nix. Mahomes is pursuing his fourth Super Bowl title and third in a row. Herbert is considered a potentially top-level QB and Nix just completed a largely successful rookie season.

The Raiders pick sixth in the draft this year and likely won't be in position to take one of the top two QBs — Colorado's Shedeur Sanders and Miami's Cam Ward — barring a trade. The free-agent market doesn't appear robust, so the Raiders' options might be limited and could return to Aidan O'Connell as the starter.

If the Raiders are unable to make a major move at quarterback, they will have nearly \$100 million in salary-cap space, according to Over The Cap, to bolster the rest of the roster.

Carroll began his NFL head coaching career with the New York Jets in 1994, going 6-10. He was 27-21 in three seasons with the Patriots from 1997-99 and joined Seattle in 2010 after nine seasons at Southern California. He led the 2004 Trojans to a national championship and also the 2003 AP national title.

Overall, Carroll is 170-120-1 in the NFL.

He will become the third coach since 1940 to lead at least four teams, joining Bill Parcells and Marty Schottenheimer.

Trump and Vance join March for Life anti-abortion activists in celebrating the movement's gains

By GARY FIELDS, CHRISTINE FERNANDO and ASHRAF KHALIL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump vowed to support anti-abortion-rights protesters in his second term as tens of thousands of demonstrators rallied in Washington on Friday for the annual March for Life.

"We will again stand proudly for families and for life," Trump declared in a prerecorded video address.

Protesters had come to the capital for decades to call for the repeal of *Roe v. Wade*, which affirmed a constitutional right to an abortion. Now, with the repeal of *Roe* in 2022, they are now on the inside rather than the outside. With Trump's return to the White House and Republicans in control of Congress, the activists want to build on their victories.

"Our country faces the return of the most pro-family, most pro-life American president of our lifetimes," Vice President JD Vance told the crowd in his in-person speech.

Vance hailed Trump's previous actions on abortion, saying the president "delivered on his promise of ending *Roe*" and appointed hundreds of anti-abortion judges.

Abortion was largely absent from the stack of dozens of executive actions in Trump's first days of office. But he has already made quieter moves on abortion, including enforcing the Hyde Amendment, which restricts government funding for most abortions. He also reinstated a policy that requires foreign non-governmental agencies to certify that they don't provide or promote abortion if they receive U.S. federal funds for family planning assistance. Since it was introduced over 40 years ago, every GOP president has put it in effect, and every Democrat has rescinded it.

Trump also pardoned several right to life activists and used wording related to fetal personhood in an executive order rolling back protections for transgender people.

Despite frigid weather, a festive atmosphere surrounded the event as activists showed up with multicolored hats and signs declaring "Life is our revolution" and "MAGA: Make Abortion Gone Again."

"This is a significant moment in history," said Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of the Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America group. "Yes, we have a march every year but this one is pretty special...There is a trifecta of pro-life Republicans in the White House and the House and the Senate."

Kristen Cooper, 21, was among several thousand Students for Life America members attending. She said she was especially excited to be at the march with anti-abortion Republicans in the White House.

She said this march was her fourth but the first with a Republican administration. "It's surreal, actually."

Anna Henderson, a teacher at a Catholic high school near Jackson, Michigan, was also attending her fourth march with a busload of her students.

"Just because we have the backing of the administration doesn't mean the fight is over," she said. "We still need to change people's hearts."

Kristan Hawkins, president of Students for Life of America, said there is still work to be done, including calling on Trump to defund Planned Parenthood and offer resources such as paid family leave to women with unplanned pregnancies.

"The march now ends on the backside of the U.S. Capitol to remind our representatives that abortion is not only a state issue, but also a local issue and also a federal issue," she said.

Angela Vasquez-Giroux, vice president of communications at Planned Parenthood Action Fund, which supports abortion rights, said: "We know exactly what is at risk and we know the hate and lies they will spew at the March for Life."

The battle over abortion since the 2022 decision, has been in state courts and at the ballot box where voters in seven states approved ballot measures for constitutional amendments on reproductive freedom in November. Legislatures have been fighting back already with proposals that could make such measures more difficult to get passed.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis celebrated the 2024 defeat of an abortion rights amendment on the March for Life stage and boasted about his role in the state-funded campaign against the measure. Voters there

supported a state constitutional amendment overturning a six-week abortion ban but Florida requires 60% to pass constitutional amendments in the state. Most states require a simple majority.

"Most elected officials will say 'Look, what's on the ballot is not their issue — the people can decide,'" DeSantis told the crowd. "And they wash their hands of it and walk away."

Supporters of abortion rights spoke up, too.

"No matter what they said on the campaign trail to win an election, this shows their intentions to continue to attack abortion access," Ryan Stitzlein, vice president of political and government relations for the national abortion rights organization Reproductive Freedom for All, said of abortion-rights opponents.

"Each time one of these has taken place since the Dobbs decision, it's been a day to reflect on how much damage that's been caused by that decision and the crisis we continue to live in."

Ellie Smeal, president and founder of the Feminist Majority Foundation, said her group would counter-protest.

"We want to remind people of the popularity of abortion rights and the importance of this issue, that women and men are supportive of people making their own reproductive health decisions," she said.

Desperate families await return of 4 female soldiers held by Hamas for 15 months

By SHLOMO MOR and WAAFA SHURAFU Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Hamas announced Friday that it would release four female soldiers held hostage for 15 months in Gaza, as part of an exchange for dozens of Palestinian prisoners laid out in its ceasefire agreement with Israel. An advocacy group representing the families of hostages confirmed the identities of the captive Israelis to be released on Saturday.

Under the deal that paused the 15-month war, Israel would release 200 Palestinian prisoners or detainees in exchange for the four Israeli women, including 120 militants serving life sentences after being convicted of deadly attacks.

The four Israeli soldiers, Karina Ariev, 20; Daniella Gilboa, 20; Naama Levy, 20; and Liri Albag, 19, were captured in Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023 attack that ignited the war and have had no contact with the outside world since then.

In a statement, The Hostages and Missing Families Forum welcomed their expected release.

"An entire nation has fought for them and anxiously awaits their longed-for return to their families' embrace," it said.

The office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said it had received the list of names of hostages slated for release, without revealing their identities.

Relatives of hostages still being held in Gaza had earlier Friday called on Netanyahu to ensure that all remaining captives are freed, and appealed to U.S. President Donald Trump to continue pressing for their release.

Who are the Israeli hostages being released?

The four female soldiers on Hamas' list were taken from Nahal Oz base near the border with Gaza when Palestinian militants overran it on Oct. 7, 2023, killing more than 60 soldiers there.

The female abductees had all served in a unit of lookouts charged with monitoring threats along the border. A fifth female soldier in their unit, Agam Berger, 20, was abducted with them but not included in list.

On Oct. 7, Ariev, one of the soldiers being released, texted her family goodbye as she was being dragged into Gaza: "If I don't live, take care of Mom and Dad all their lives. Don't give up. Live."

Her family said she loves to cook, sing, dance and write poetry. A year ago, Hamas released a video clip showing her and Gilboa, another soldier in her unit, pleading for their release.

Daniella Gilboa's name was originally Danielle, but after her abduction her parents changed it to Daniella, citing the Jewish belief that changing a name can change someone's fortune. In videos of her kidnapping, Gilboa appears to be suffering from a foot injury as militants hustle her into a jeep bound for Gaza. Gilboa has said she dreams of becoming a professional singer.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 52 of 74

Other footage from Oct. 7 shared all over the world shows Levy, a soldier and triathlete, wearing blood-stained gray sweatpants as she is abducted from her base. When she was younger, she participated in the U.S.-based "Hands of Peace" delegation, which brings together Americans, Israelis and Palestinians to work on coexistence.

Earlier this month, as ceasefire negotiations dragged on, Hamas' military wing released a video that showed Albag, the youngest of the soldiers slated for release, in what her family said was "severe psychological distress."

What happens next?

As a fragile six-week ceasefire between Israel and Hamas entered its sixth day, there were more than 90 hostages still being held in Gaza. Israel believes about a third, or possibly as many as half, of the more than 90 hostages still in Gaza have died.

Hamas has not released definitive information on how many captives are alive or the names of those who have died.

Militants who burst across the border into Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing around 1,200 people in an attack that sparked the war in Gaza, took around 250 men, women and children hostage. About 100 were released during a brief ceasefire in November that year. The bodies of around three dozen hostages have been recovered in Gaza. Eight hostages have been rescued by the army.

In the first phase of the ceasefire deal, 33 hostages — including women, children, sick people and those over 50 — are expected to be released gradually in return for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. Most of the 33 are civilians, but the deal also commits Hamas to freeing all living female soldiers in Phase 1, which is expected to last 42 days.

Hamas will release living hostages first, but could release some bodies if they don't have enough living hostages in this category.

The first three Israeli hostages were freed in exchange for 90 Palestinian prisoners on Sunday, the first day of the ceasefire that has halted the longest and deadliest war in a century of Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The poignant scenes of hostages reuniting with their families last week brought joy and relief but also worry about the other hostages still trapped in Gaza.

"This week we were moved to watch images of mothers embracing their daughters, but our hearts break thinking that my son Nimrod and other men remain behind, and each day they're there poses a real danger to their lives," said Vicky Cohen, whose son Nimrod Cohen is among the hostages still held.

Another parent, Ayelet Samerano, whose son Yonatan Samerano is among those still being held, appealed to Trump for his help in releasing the rest of the Israelis captive in Gaza. Trump had warned that there would be "all hell to pay" if Israeli hostages were not released by his inauguration.

Israel is expected to release a list of which Palestinian prisoners will be freed. The Israeli Prison Service said late Friday it was preparing "for the process of releasing imprisoned terrorists in accordance with the agreement." It said the Red Cross would ferry Palestinian prisoners by bus from Ofer Prison near the West Bank city of Ramallah to different locations for their release.

Where does the agreement stand in Gaza?

By the weekend, the truce obligates Israeli forces to partially withdraw from a key route in central Gaza, in order to let hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians to return to the remnants of their homes in the battered north.

Palestinian civilians in the south should be allowed to take a coastal road to northern Gaza from Saturday.

Those in other parts of Gaza seized on the ceasefire this week to reunite with scattered family members, picking their way through vast swaths of rubble and trying to salvage what remained of their homes and their belongings. But those displaced from the north have had to wait.

"The first thing I'll do, I'll kiss the dirt of the land on which I was born and raised," said Nadia Al-Debs, one of the many people gathered in makeshift tents in Gaza's central city of Deir al-Balah preparing to set out north for Gaza City the next day. "We'll return so my children can see their father."

Wide swaths of Gaza have been destroyed, while more than 47,000 Palestinians have been killed, ac-

According to Gaza's health authorities, who do not differentiate between combatants and civilians but say more than half are women and children.

Federal agencies begin removing DEI guidance from websites in Trump crackdown

By ALIA WONG and ANNIE MA AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal agencies have begun removing resources for underrepresented Americans from their webpages following President Donald Trump's executive order cracking down on diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives.

Agencies also have been cancelling staff trainings and shuttering diversity offices to comply with the order from Trump, who has called for all DEI staff to be put on paid leave and eventually be laid off.

Documents on DEI have been removed from websites at agencies including the Office of Personnel Management, State Department and Department of Homeland Security. Web addresses that once led to DEI pages now display "Page Not Found — 404" messages or notes above archived material explaining the change.

At some agencies, the drive to remove diversity mentions was creating widespread questions and confusion. Lacking clear guidance, Defense Department staff members were pulling websites down in often inconsistent ways.

The Army, as an example, temporarily removed its sexual assault guidelines — raising questions about what message that might be sending, considering that Trump's defense nominee Pete Hegseth has been involved in sex assault allegations, which he denies. The guidelines were back up late Thursday.

Some of the materials that vanished aimed to help agencies recruit diverse workforces and foster a sense of belonging for employees and students in schools across America. Critics say the rollbacks could result in dramatic shifts in hiring and a return to discriminatory practices of the past.

Among the sites taken down was a page dedicated to the Inaugural Treasury Advisory Committee on Racial Equity created during the Biden administration. Dorothy Brown, a Georgetown law professor who served on the committee, said the order has far-reaching implications for workforce diversity.

"Conservatives would say it is wrong to target someone based on their race — but that is exactly what Trump is doing," she said.

The State Department on Wednesday dismantled its Office of Diversity and Inclusion and removed the link to it from its website. The office had been created by former Secretary of State Antony Blinken with fanfare shortly after he took office and had produced reports identifying strategies for attracting minorities and women into the department's workforce.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio sent a cable this week to all U.S. embassies and consulates abroad barring them from flying anything other than the American flag or flags to honor prisoners of war or the wrongfully detained. The directive effectively banned the display of LGBTQ+ pride or Black Lives Matter flags, which had been permitted under the Biden administration.

On Thursday night, the Education Department announced it had removed or archived hundreds of guidance documents, reports and training materials. The department said it cancelled contracts totaling more than \$2.6 million for staff DEI training.

The pages that were taken down include "Resources for LGBTQI+ Students," an overview of civil rights laws related to "Race, Color, or National Origin Discrimination," and guidance titled "Avoid the Discriminatory Use of Artificial Intelligence."

An Education Department statement said the deleted pages "encouraged schools and institutions of higher education to promote or endorse harmful ideological programs."

Trump has called DEI programs "discrimination" and insisted on restoring strictly "merit-based" hiring.

Conservative groups have praised the rollback. Parents Defending Education, an organization that has filed lawsuits challenging diversity initiatives at schools, applauded Trump for taking steps "to root out

these programs permanently.”

Attacks on DEI often target pipeline programs, which do not change the standards of hiring but simply encourage recruiters to look at different hiring pools, said Antonio Ingram, senior counsel at the NAACP Legal Defense fund. The disparities based on race and gender seen today are a result of the historical exclusion of women and people of color from opportunities, he said, and are not an arbitrary outcome.

The elimination of programs to ensure a diverse government workforce could be felt for years, he said. “There will be generations who don’t even know what they missed out on because there has been such an erasure and such a revision and such a redirection of federal resources,” he said. “I guess the real tragedy is that there were tools that could have been used to create more belonging, more justice.”

At schools, advocates say the crackdown will mean a loss of resources that foster success for students who historically were deprived of adequate learning opportunities, including tools that help teachers address achievement gaps.

The now-dissolved Education Department bodies include the Diversity & Inclusion Council, established under President Barack Obama, and the Employee Engagement Diversity Equity Inclusion Accessibility Council, which had been housed under its Office for Civil Rights.

The department’s Equity Action Plan has also been withdrawn. According to a snapshot of the plan’s former webpage, the initiative intended in part to improve college access, affordability and completion for underserved students.

Also Friday, the department’s Office for Civil Rights announced it dismissed 11 complaints alleging book bans had created a hostile environment for kids. The department said the complaints over restrictions on titles about race or LGBTQ+ issues were meritless. The office also rescinded all guidance that framed book bans as a violation of civil rights laws.

Supreme Court will weigh approval for US’ 1st publicly funded religious charter school, in Oklahoma

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court agreed Friday to take on a new culture war dispute: whether the nation’s first publicly funded religious charter school should be allowed to open in Oklahoma.

The justices said they would review an Oklahoma Supreme Court decision that invalidated a state board’s approval of an application by the Catholic Church in Oklahoma to open a charter school.

The conservative-dominated high court has issued several decisions in recent years signaling a willingness to allow public funds to flow to religious entities. At the same time, conservative-led states have sought to insert religion into public schools, including Louisiana’s requirement that the Ten Commandments be posted in classrooms.

The case probably will be argued in late April and decided by early summer. Justice Amy Coney Barrett is not taking part in the case, but did not explain why.

Last June, Oklahoma’s top court held by a 7-1 vote that a taxpayer-funded religious charter school would violate the part of the First Amendment that prohibits government from making any law “respecting an establishment of religion.”

The decision followed a 3-2 vote in 2023 by the Statewide Virtual Charter School Board to approve an application by the archdiocese for the St. Isidore of Seville Virtual Charter School. The K-12 online school had planned to start classes for its first 200 enrollees last fall, with part of its mission to evangelize its students in the Catholic faith.

A group of Oklahoma parents, faith leaders and a public education nonprofit sued to block the school. “Under Oklahoma law, a charter school is a public school,” Justice James Winchester, an appointee of former Republican Gov. Frank Keating, wrote in the court’s majority opinion. “As such, a charter school must be nonsectarian.

“However, St. Isidore will evangelize the Catholic school curriculum while sponsored by the state.”

In dissent, Justice Dana Kuehn wrote that excluding St. Isidore from operating a charter school based

solely on its religious affiliation would violate a different part of the First Amendment that protects religious freedom.

The high court's decision to intervene was warmly received by Alliance Defending Freedom, the Christian legal advocacy group representing the state board. "There's great irony in state officials who claim to be in favor of religious liberty discriminating against St. Isidore because of its Catholic beliefs," the group's chief legal counsel, Jim Campbell, said in a statement.

Opponents of the Oklahoma charter school called on the justices to uphold the state court ruling. "The law is clear: Charter schools are public schools and must be secular and open to all students," the American Civil Liberties Union and other legal groups said in a statement. They are representing the school's opponents in a separate lawsuit.

The case puts Oklahoma's Republican governor, Kevin Stitt, and its Republican attorney general, Gentner Drummond, on opposing sides. Stitt favors the school. Drummond reversed the advice given to the charter school board by his Republican predecessor, warning that the Catholic charter school would in his view violate the Constitution.

Oath Keepers founder Rhodes is barred from entering Washington or Capitol without court's permission

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal judge on Friday barred Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes from entering Washington without the court's approval after President Donald Trump commuted the extremist group leader's 18-year prison sentence in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

U.S. District Judge Amit Mehta, who oversaw the seditious conspiracy trial of Rhodes and other Oath Keepers, issued the order two days after Rhodes visited Capitol Hill, where he met with at least one lawmaker, chatted with others and defended his actions the day of the riot.

Mehta's order applies to seven other defendants who were charged in one of the most serious conspiracy cases brought by the Justice Department over the riot. The order also prohibits them from entering the Capitol building or surrounding grounds without the court's permission.

Ed Martin, who has been serving as U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia since Trump's inauguration on Monday, argued that Trump's commutations mean Rhodes and others are no longer subject to the court's supervision. In a court filing that bears only his name and signature, Martin urged the judge to vacate Friday's order.

Martin has served as a board member of the Patriot Freedom Project group, which portrays the Jan. 6 defendants as victims of political persecution. He's now overseeing the office that prosecuted the hundreds of riot defendants.

"The individuals referenced in our motion have had their sentences commuted — period, end of sentence," Martin said in a statement Friday.

Rhodes, of Granbury, Texas, was released from prison hours after the Republican president's sweeping clemency action Monday benefiting the more than 1,500 people charged in the attack that halted the certification of Joe Biden's 2020 presidential election victory over Trump.

While Trump pardoned most of the defendants, he only commuted the prison sentences of Rhodes and 13 others. That means they remain on supervised release and have to follow certain restrictions set by the court under the supervision of a probation officer.

Rhodes did not enter the Capitol on Jan. 6, but was accused of orchestrating a weeklong plot to forcibly stop the transfer of power. He was convicted of seditious conspiracy in 2022, and he received one of the longest sentences in the Justice Department's massive prosecution.

Rhodes said during his visit to the Capitol this week that he's now urging Trump to give him a full pardon. Rhodes stopped in at a Dunkin' Donuts inside the House office building in the Capitol complex before delivering a lengthy defense of himself and his actions.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 56 of 74

"I didn't lead anything," he said. "So why should I feel responsible for that?"

James Lee Bright, an attorney who defended Rhodes at the trial, told The Associated Press on Friday that he's concerned that criticism of the pardons from judges on Washington's federal court means his client and others on supervised release will be monitored "with a very heavy hand."

Trump's clemency order on Monday led to the release of more than 200 people in federal custody, including dozens of people convicted of assaulting police who defended the Capitol. The president also ordered the dismissal of hundreds of cases that were pending.

Trump has defended the pardons, saying the defendants had "already served years in prison" in conditions he described as "disgusting" and "inhumane."

Several judges have since spoken out about the pardons and efforts to rewrite the history of the Jan. 6 insurrection by a mob of Trump supporters. U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan, who presided over Trump's election interference case before its dismissal, said the pardons can't change the "tragic truth" about the attack.

"It cannot whitewash the blood, feces and terror that the mob left in its wake," Chutkan wrote in court papers this week. "And it cannot repair the jagged breach in America's sacred tradition of peacefully transitioning power."

Mehta has said pardoning Rhodes would be "frightening."

"The notion that Stewart Rhodes could be absolved of his actions is frightening and ought to be frightening to anyone who cares about democracy in this country," the judge said from the bench last month.

Rhodes' lawyer said the judge's comments show that the Jan. 6 defendants couldn't get a fair trial in Washington.

Nearly 1,600 people were charged with Capitol riot-related federal crimes. More than 1,000 of them pleaded guilty. About 250 others were convicted by a judge or jury after trials. Over 1,100 were sentenced, with more than 700 receiving a term of imprisonment ranging from several days to 22 years.

The man pushed onto New York's subway tracks says he will ride again

NEW YORK (AP) — A man who survived being shoved onto subway tracks ahead of an oncoming train said that in spite of the physical and psychological trauma, he eventually plans to make his way back to the train.

"This city is my home," Joseph Lynskey told The New York Times in an interview published Friday, "and I won't be intimidated."

Lynskey, 45, was standing on the platform in the West 18th Street station in Manhattan after lunch on New Year's Eve when a hard shove from behind sent him flying as a 1 train approached.

"My life did not flash before my eyes," he said. "My thought was 'I've been pushed, and I'm going to get hit by the train.'"

Lynskey landed on his left side between the tracks. He had four broken ribs, a fractured skull, a ruptured spleen and a concussion. But that wasn't all.

"I looked up, and I was underneath the 1 train," he said during the interview in the Brooklyn apartment he shares with his 16-year-old dachshund, Leo.

Police called the attack, which was captured on surveillance video, random. A 23-year-old man, Kamel Hawkins, was arrested later that day. He has pleaded not guilty to attempted murder and assault charges.

The possibility of being pushed onto the tracks is a long-running nightmare for many New Yorkers. While it occurs rarely compared to the millions of rides each day, a push this past March killed a person in East Harlem.

Lynskey's ordeal has left him convinced city and state officials need to do more to address the violence on a system that is vital to New York.

"The subway is the lifeline of this city," he said. "I don't think any New Yorker should have to stand against a wall or hold on to a pillar to feel safe as the train approaches."

"Unacceptable," he added. "Do better. Protect your citizens."

Amid the shove and other high-profile attacks, Gov. Kathy Hochul has called for an increase in police presence on subways at night and an expansion of the state's involuntary commitment laws to allow hospitals to compel more mentally ill people into treatment.

Lynskey has lived in New York for 25 years and is the head of content and music programming at Gray V, a company that creates background music and playlists for businesses. He performs as a DJ under the stage name DJ Joe Usher, the newspaper said.

He had met friends for lunch the afternoon of Dec. 31 and had planned to catch an express train back to Brooklyn to get ready for a New Year's Eve party later that day. His plans changed at the entrance to the 18th Street station, when he decided to get out of the cold and take the approaching local 1 for one stop and then transfer.

He said he was on the platform for under a minute and had glanced quickly at Spotify on his phone when "I felt the hardest shove."

Under the train, he knew the third rail just inches away could electrocute him so he kept as still as possible as he screamed for help: "I've been pushed! Someone, please, please help me!"

"Absolute chaos" from the platform followed as emergency workers arrived on the scene, he recalled. Two firefighters lowered themselves under the train and told Lynskey to remain perfectly still so that neither he nor they would be electrocuted.

"We need to get you the hell out," Lynskey recalled their saying before they dragged him out by his arms.

Lynskey spent a week in the hospital. Since then, he has been working with physical therapists and welcoming visitors while recuperating. He struggles to sleep because of his pain and although he has tried to avoid rewatching the surveillance video, Lynskey said it was the first video TikTok's algorithm showed him two days after the attack.

Now, weeks later, he said he is focusing on the positive, even finding moments of humor.

"When I was under the train, I thought a lot about my family and my life," he said. "I also was thinking, 'I guess I'm not going to Armando's 'Wicked' New Year's Eve party.'"

He believes his life was spared for a reason. "Being of service is something I really plan on focusing on for the next part of my life," he said.

London court clears way to extradite US mother accused of killing 2 of her children in Colorado

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A London judge on Friday rejected a U.S. mother's challenge to her extradition to face murder charges in Colorado in the deaths of two of her young children.

The ruling by Judge John Zani at Westminster Magistrates' Court clears the way for the British government to order Kimberlee Singler's return to America. It was not clear when that would happen.

Singler, 36, is accused of two counts of first-degree murder in the December 2023 shooting and stabbings of her 9-year-old daughter and 7-year-old son, and one count of attempted murder in the slashing of her 11-year-old daughter with a knife in Colorado Springs. She also faces three counts of child abuse and one count of assault.

Singler's attorney had argued that sending her back to the U.S. would violate European human rights law, in part, because she faces a sentence of life in prison without parole if convicted in Colorado of first-degree murder.

Such a sentence would be inhumane because it offers no prospect for release even if she is rehabilitated, attorney Edward Fitzgerald said.

Fitzgerald said that despite an option for a Colorado governor to commute her sentence at some point, it would be "political suicide" to do so.

Experts for the defense had originally said that a life sentence had never been commuted in Colorado. But prosecutors later found that Gov. John Hickenlooper in 2018 commuted life sentences of five men

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 58 of 74

convicted of murder.

The defense countered that three of those sentences were not life without parole and two were for men who committed their crime between the ages of 18 and 21, which is sometimes considered a mitigating factor at sentencing because of the offender's relative youth.

"This defendant, Kimberlee Singler, has no real prospect of release no matter what progress she makes" behind bars, Fitzgerald said.

Prosecutor Joel Smith said the judge only had to consider if there is a mechanism that could allow Singler to be freed someday — not the likelihood of it happening.

"Prospect of release — that is not your concern," Smith told the judge at a hearing in December.

Zani said in his ruling that he felt there was an option in Colorado to release an inmate serving a life sentence.

"I am satisfied that the defendant has failed to vault the hurdle necessary in order to succeed in the challenges raised," the judge said.

Fitzgerald said he planned to appeal to the High Court.

The Colorado Springs Police Department said it had no estimate for when Singler could be sent back to the United States.

"CSPD is aware of the ongoing extradition process regarding Kimberlee Singler, as well as the legal rights still afforded her in the UK. Our investigative efforts into the ongoing case are continuing, and we will continue to work diligently toward its conclusion," police spokesperson Ira Cronin said in a statement.

The Dec. 18, 2023 killings took place in an apartment where Singler had been staying with her mother during a custody battle with her ex-husband, who had recently been awarded more parenting time. Her mother was away at the time.

Two days before the crimes, Singler had been due to hand over the children to her husband for the holidays but had refused to let his sister pick them up. The husband's lawyer got a court order on Dec. 18 for her to exchange the children two days later.

Singler has denied that she harmed her children, Fitzgerald said. She told police that her ex-husband had either carried out the killings or hired a hitman.

She told police her ex-husband "had previously dreamt about killing his family, that the children's father was always trying to 'frame her' and 'get her arrested' and to have the kids taken away from her," Zani said in his ruling.

Police said her husband had a solid alibi, backed up by GPS records that showed he had been driving a truck at the time of the killings about 80 miles (130 kilometers) away.

Singler told police that an intruder had entered the apartment that morning through a patio door she forgot to lock and attacked her and she lost consciousness. Police said they found no footprints in the snow leading to the patio.

Singler described being too weak to get help and said she couldn't find her phone.

She said, however, that when she did have enough strength, she found her youngest children dead and gave her surviving daughter water throughout the day.

Late that night, she said she heard her phone ringtone playing Christmas music and called police for help when she located it.

Singler had superficial knife wounds and was initially treated as a victim.

But that changed after her surviving daughter, who initially told police a similar intruder story, said her mother tried to kill her.

After her daughter changed her story, police sought to arrest Singler on Dec. 26 but she had fled. She was found four days later in London's posh Chelsea neighborhood and arrested.

The girl, who has not been named, told police that her mother gave the children milk with a powdery substance to drink and told them to close their eyes as she guided them into a bedroom, prosecutors said.

Singler cut her neck and, as the girl begged her to stop, she slashed her again. The girl said her mother had a gun.

"The defendant told her that God was telling her to do it, and that the children's father would take them

away," Smith said at a previous hearing.

Police found Aden Wentz, 7, and Elianna "Ellie" Wentz, 9, dead when they entered the Colorado Springs apartment early the morning of Dec. 19. They had been shot and stabbed.

Colombia president decrees emergency powers to restore order in coca region wracked by rebel combat

By ASTRID SUAREZ Associated Press

BOGOTA, Colombia (AP) — Colombia's president issued a decree Friday giving him emergency powers to restore order in a coca-growing region bordering Venezuela that has been wracked in recent days by a deadly turf war among dissident rebel groups.

President Gustavo Petro's decree, which can be extended, gives him 90 days to impose curfews, restrict traffic and take other steps that would normally violate Colombians' civil rights or require congressional approval.

It is the first time in more than a decade that a Colombian president has used such an extreme measure and underscores the seriousness of the current conflict in a country that for decades was paralyzed by political violence.

However, it applies only to the rural Catatumbo region near the border with Venezuela, where the Colombian state has struggled for decades to gain a foothold. In the past week, at least 80 people have been killed and an estimated 36,000 more displaced as fighting intensifies between the National Liberation Army, or ELN, and holdouts from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC.

Petro's conservative opponents have criticized the move, accusing the former guerrilla of riding roughshod over the constitution. But some activists have celebrated it, saying they are hopeful the move translates into better infrastructure, health care and schools in the traditionally lawless region.

"Why are the armed groups here? Because the last government hasn't made investments. They've abandoned us," Jaime Botero, an activist in the town of Tibu, told The Associated Press.

Earlier this week Petro reactivated arrest orders against 31 top ELN commanders that had been suspended as part of an effort to woo the the Cuban revolution-inspired insurgency into a peace deal to end its 60 year war against the state. Petro also suspended all peace talks, which have advanced slowly since he took office in 2022.

The ELN has traditionally dominated in Catatumbo but has been losing ground to holdouts from the FARC, a guerrilla group that largely disbanded after signing a peace deal in 2016 with the government.

The current conflict is spilling across the border into Venezuela, where some of those fleeing the violence have sought refuge.

The current whereabouts of the ELN peace negotiators is unknown. But Cuba's government this week said they are not there, leading some to speculate they may be hiding in Venezuela, which is one of the sponsors of Petro's peace initiative with the ELN.

Target is ending its diversity goals as a strong DEI opponent occupies the White House

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Discount store chain Target said Friday that it would join rival Walmart and a number of other prominent American brands in scaling back diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives that have come under attack from conservative activists and, as of this week, the White House.

The Minneapolis-based retailer said the changes to its "Belonging at the Bullseye" strategy would include ending a program it established to help Black employees build meaningful careers, improve the experience of Black shoppers and to promote Black-owned businesses following the police killing of George Floyd in 2020.

Target, which operates nearly 2,000 stores nationwide and employs more than 400,000 people, said

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 60 of 74

it already had planned to end the racial program this year. The company said Friday that it also would conclude the diversity, equity and inclusion, or DEI, goals it previously set in three-year cycles.

The goals included hiring and promoting more women and members of racial minority groups, and recruiting more diverse suppliers, including businesses owned by people of color, women, LGBTQ+ people, veterans and people with disabilities.

Target has long been a fierce corporate advocate for the rights of Black and LGBTQ+ people. In a memo to employees, Kiera Fernandez, Target's chief community impact and equity officer, described the DEI decisions as a "next chapter" in the company's decades-long process to create "inclusive work and guest environments that welcome all."

"Many years of data, insights, listening and learning have been shaping this next chapter in our strategy," Fernandez wrote in the memo, which Target shared Friday. "And as a retailer that serves millions of consumers every day, we understand the importance of staying in step with the evolving external landscape, now and in the future."

There's no doubt the U.S. civil rights landscape has undergone a massive transformation in the five years since much of corporate America adopted DEI goals in response to the Black Lives Matter protests that followed Floyd's death in Minneapolis.

A 2023 U.S. Supreme Court decision that outlawed affirmative action in college admissions emboldened conservative groups to bring or threaten lawsuits targeting corporate initiatives such as employee resource groups and hiring practices that prioritize historically marginalized groups.

Walmart, McDonald's, Ford, Harley-Davidson and John Deere are among the well-known consumer brands that reduced or phased out their DEI commitments in recent months.

President Donald Trump this week signaled his administration's agreement with conservatives who argue that policies designed to increase minority representation by considering factors such as race, gender and sexual orientation are unconstitutional.

On his first day in office, Trump signed an executive order aimed at ending DEI programs across the federal government. The order calls for revoking all DEI mandates, policies, preferences and activities, along with the review and revision of existing employment practices, union contracts, and training policies or programs.

Still, some prominent companies have resisted public pressure to retreat from their diversity plans. On Thursday, Costco shareholders rejected a proposal urging the wholesale club operator to evaluate any risks posed by its diversity, equity and inclusion practices.

According to preliminary results shared by Costco executives, more than 98% of shares voted against the proposal submitted by a conservative think tank based in Washington. Costco's board of directors had recommended a no vote.

Apple's board and the CEO of JPMorgan bank also have expressed a commitment to preserving their companies' DEI activities.

Unlike some of the companies retooling or retiring their diversity initiatives, Target's work to build a more inclusive workforce predated 2020, and the company also was long seen as a trailblazer with respect to LGBTQ+ inclusion.

But the employee memo shared Friday said Target no longer would participate in surveys designed to gauge the effectiveness of its actions, including an annual index compiled by the Human Rights Campaign, a national LGBTQ+ rights organization. Target said it would further evaluate corporate partnerships to ensure they're connected directly to business objectives, but declined to share details.

Getting corporations to withdraw from the Human Rights Campaign's Corporate Equality Index and to stop sponsoring Pride activities have been goals of DEI opponents.

Steering clear of a backlash from conservative customers and organizations is something that Target has tried to navigate for a while. As transgender rights became a more prominent issue in 2016, the company declared that "inclusivity is a core belief at Target" and said it supported transgender employees and customers using whichever restroom or fitting room "corresponds with their gender identity."

But after some customers threatened to boycott Target stores, the company said that more stores would

make available a single-toilet bathroom with a door that could be locked.

In 2023, Target removed some of its Pride Month merchandise after online complaints and in-store confrontations that the retailer said threatened employees' well-being. The company decided last year not to stock Pride Month products at every U.S. store.

5 economic forces that could shape the first year of Trump's presidency

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Like most presidents, Donald Trump faces an economy that seldom bends to political ambitions.

The Republican has promised strong growth, high tariffs, income tax cuts and booming oilfields. But despite the solid job market and low 4.1% unemployment rate, he has to contend with headwinds like inflation, a budget deficit, increased tensions over trade, the fallout from his plans to curtail immigration and a persistent wealth gap.

Each of these issues could help to shape how voters feel about a president they returned to the White House with the specific goal of fixing the economy.

For his part, Trump wants to blame all the challenges before him on his predecessor, Joe Biden, who in turn blamed Trump in 2021 for the problems his own administration had to tackle.

"This begins with confronting the economic chaos caused by the failed policies of the last administration," Trump told the World Economic Forum on Thursday.

Here are five economic forces that could shape the first year of Trump's presidency:

For voters, the price still isn't right

Whipping inflation is easier said than done.

In AP VoteCast, an extensive survey of last year's electorate, 4 in 10 voters called inflation the "single most important factor" in their choice for president. About two-thirds of this group voted for Trump — a sign he owes his victory in large part to the high cost of groceries, gasoline, housing, autos and other goods.

Going forward, monthly reports on the consumer price index will be a clear measure of whether Trump can deliver. But inflation has actually increased in recent months. Consumer prices were increasing at a healthy 2.4% annual rate in September, compared with 2.9% in December. Economists say inflation could worsen if Trump imposes tariffs and uses deficit-funded income tax cuts.

Republicans often hit Biden hard on egg prices. But Democrats could use similar attacks on Trump. Over the past year, coffee costs have risen just 1% for U.S. consumers, but the International Monetary Fund has the price of the actual beans climbing 55% in a sign that lattes, espressos and plain old cups of joe could soon cost more.

Then there's housing. Voters are still frustrated by high mortgage rates and prices staying elevated due to a shortage of properties. Shelter is 37% of the consumer price index. Price increases for housing have eased, but shelter costs are still rising at 4.6% a year, compared with annual increases averaging 3.3% before the pandemic.

Trump is betting that more energy production can cut into inflation rates, but domestic production is already near record levels, according to the government.

Which tariffs are really coming

Trump says 25% tariffs are coming for Mexican and Canadian imports as soon as Feb. 1. He's also talked about additional tariffs of 10% on Chinese goods. His stated goal is to stop illegal border crossings and the flow of chemicals used to make drugs such as fentanyl.

For Trump, tariffs are a diplomatic tool for his policy goals. But they're also a threat possibly meant to jumpstart trade talks. They're also a revenue raiser that he claims could bring trillions of dollars into the treasury.

Trump did increase tariffs during his first term, with revenue collection more than doubling to an annual rate of \$85.4 billion, which might sound like a lot but was equal to just 0.4% of the gross domestic prod-

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 62 of 74

uct. Multiple analyses by the Budget Lab at Yale and the Peterson Institute for International Economics, among others, say the threatened tariffs would increase costs for a typical family in a way that effectively raises taxes.

What really matters is whether Trump delivers on his threats. That is why Ben Harris, a former Biden adviser who is now director of economic studies at the Brookings Institution, says voters should focus on average tariff rates.

"Trade is really tricky" Harris said. "But in broad terms, look at what he does and not what he says."

What happens with the national debt

Trump likes to blame inflation on the national debt, saying Biden's policies flooded the U.S. economy with more money than it could absorb. But about 22% of the \$36 trillion outstanding total debt originated from the policies of Trump's first term, according to the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, a fiscal watchdog.

Paul Winfree, a former Trump staffer who is now president and CEO of the Economic Policy Innovation Center, warned in a recent analysis that the U.S. is getting too close for comfort to its fiscal limits. His analysis suggests that if Trump can preserve 3% growth he could extend his expiring 2017 tax cuts while keeping the debt sufficiently stable by cutting spending \$100 billion to \$140 billion a year.

The risk is that higher borrowing costs and debt can limit what Trump does while keeping borrowing costs high for consumers. Lawmakers who once viewed the debt as problem years away increasingly see it as something to address now.

"One of the biggest vibe shifts I'm picking up on now among policymakers is they're beginning to realize the long-term is today," Winfree said.

Winfree said the key number to watch is the interest rates charged on U.S. debt — which will tell the public if investors think the amount of borrowing is problematic. Interest on the 10-year U.S. Treasury note is at roughly 4.6%, up a full percentage point since September.

Immigrants are still needed to fill jobs

Trump's executive orders are a clear crackdown on immigration — and that could be a drag on economic growth and cause monthly job gains to slow. Trump often frames immigration as a criminal and national security issue by focusing on people crossing the border illegally.

But economies that can't add enough workers are at risk of stagnating — and the U.S. labor market at this stage needs immigrants as part of the jobs mix. About 84% of America's net population growth last year came from immigrants, according to the Census Bureau. That's 2.8 million immigrants.

"They not only work in the economy, but they spend in the economy," said Satyam Panday, chief U.S. economist at S&P Global Ratings. "Their spending is somebody else's income in the economy."

If Trump were simply to put immigration back at his 2017 and 2019 averages of 750,000 immigrants annually, growth could slow from an estimated 2.7% last year to 2% going forward, Panday's analysis found. The construction, agriculture and leisure and hospitality industries would probably struggle to find employees.

In other words, it's worth monitoring the monthly jobs report and immigration flows.

Mind the wealth gap

Trump is going to have to figure out how to balance the interests of billionaires with those of his blue-collar voters. His inaugural events included several of the world's wealthiest men: Tesla's Elon Musk, Amazon's Jeff Bezos, Meta's Mark Zuckerberg and LVMH's Bernard Arnault. Each is worth roughly \$200 billion or more, according to the Bloomberg Billionaire's Index.

Scott Ellis, a member of the group Patriotic Millionaires, said it's worth monitoring just how much their wealth increases under Trump. This year, as of Friday, Arnault's net worth has risen \$23 billion, Bezos is up by \$15 billion, Zuckerberg is up by \$18 billion and Musk's wealth has risen by \$6 billion. Those are all monthly increases.

By contrast, the most recent available Census Bureau data show that the median U.S. household wealth rose \$9,600 in 2021-2022, to \$176,500.

Trump ends Fauci's security detail and says he'd feel no responsibility if harm befell him

By WILL WEISSERT and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

FLETCHER, N.C. (AP) — President Donald Trump has ended the federal security detail for Dr. Anthony Fauci, the infectious disease expert who advised him on the COVID-19 pandemic, a person familiar with the matter said Friday.

Fauci is the latest in a string of former Trump aides-turned-critics to see their federal protection canceled despite ongoing threats to their lives.

Speaking to reporters in North Carolina on Friday, Trump said he wouldn't feel any responsibility if harm befell the former government officials. A person familiar with the matter, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive security issues, said that Fauci's federal security detail was ended on Thursday and that he has since hired private security.

When asked about Fauci and former national security adviser John Bolton, Trump said, "They all made a lot of money. They can hire their own security, too."

Trump, a Republican, earlier this week revoked protection details for former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and his top aide, Brian Hook, as well as Bolton. All have faced threats from Iran since they took hard-line stances on the Islamic Republic during Trump's first administration and fell out with him in the years after he left office in 2021.

Fauci was a regular at Trump's side early in the COVID-19 outbreak but grew critical of Trump after the president tried to undermine public health guidance. Fauci faced regular threats to his life and has received federal protection for years.

Bolton, Hook and Pompeo had their security details repeatedly renewed by the Biden administration because of credible and ongoing threats from Iran. Fauci's was also repeatedly renewed by President Joe Biden, a Democrat, because of domestic threats.

"You can't have a security detail for the rest of your life because you worked for government," Trump said.

Djokovic quits mid-match and walks off to boos, putting Zverev in Australian Open final vs. Sinner

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP Tennis Writer

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Spectators booed an injured Novak Djokovic as he left the court in Rod Laver Arena after quitting one set into his Australian Open semifinal against Alexander Zverev on Friday.

Dealing with what he said was a torn muscle, Djokovic lost the opening set 7-6 (5) when he put a forehand volley into the net, then began shaking his head and immediately walked over to tell Zverev the match was over. The 37-year-old Djokovic packed up his equipment and walked off toward the locker room, pausing to respond to the jeers by giving two thumbs-up.

At his news conference, Djokovic said the pain in his taped left leg was "getting worse and worse." He hurt it during his quarterfinal victory over Carlos Alcaraz on Tuesday night.

"I knew," Djokovic said, "even if I won the first set, it was going to be a huge uphill battle for me."

He was bidding for an 11th championship at the Australian Open and record 25th Grand Slam title overall. Instead, it will be No. 1 seed and defending champion Jannik Sinner facing No. 2 Alexander Zverev in Sunday's final.

Sinner overcame some third-set cramping and beat No. 21 Ben Shelton of the United States 7-6 (2), 6-2, 6-2 in Friday's second semifinal to return to the Australian Open final as he seeks a third Grand Slam title.

Zverev is 0-2 in major finals; this will be his first at Melbourne Park.

"Everything can happen," said Sinner, who is on a 20-match unbeaten run. "He's an incredible player."

For Djokovic, this is the second time in the past four major tournaments he was unable to finish because of an injury: He withdrew from last year's French Open before the quarterfinals because he tore the meniscus in his right knee during a match.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 64 of 74

Djokovic underwent surgery in Paris and, less than two months later, reached the final at Wimbledon, then won a gold medal for Serbia at the Paris Olympics.

Zverev, a 27-year-old German, lost finals in five sets at the 2020 U.S. Open and 2024 French Open.

"My goal is still to compete with the big guys and to compete for these kind of tournaments and try to win them," Zverev said. "For that, I need to get better. I need to improve on the court. I need to improve physically."

During his on-court interview, Zverev pleaded with the fans not to give Djokovic a hard time.

"I know that everybody paid for tickets and everybody wants to see hopefully a great five-set match," he said. "But you've got to understand — Novak Djokovic is somebody that has given this sport, for the past 20 years, absolutely everything of his life."

The only set of Djokovic vs. Zverev lasted 1 hour, 21 minutes and included 19 points that lasted nine strokes or more apiece. The first four games alone lasted 31 minutes, slowed both by the lengthy baseline exchanges and Djokovic's deliberate pacing between points, taking the 25-second serve clock down to — and occasionally slightly beyond — the full allotment.

The match was grueling — and would have been even without dealing with a leg problem that initially became an issue late in the first set against Alcaraz.

"I didn't hit the ball (from after the) Alcaraz match until like an hour before today's match," Djokovic said.

"I did everything I possibly can to basically manage the muscle tear that I had. Medications and, I guess, the (tape) and the physio work helped to some extent today," he added. "But towards the end of that first set, I just started feeling more and more pain and it was too much for me to handle. Unfortunate ending, but I tried."

Zverev said he could sense "some dents" on the other side of the net in the tiebreaker and noticed that Djokovic was struggling "maybe a bit more."

Two years ago at Melbourne Park, Djokovic hurt his left hamstring but still managed to depart with the trophy. Against Alcaraz, he was down a set against someone who is 16 years his junior but won.

This time, Djokovic could not pull off a similar escape.

And afterward, there was a lot Djokovic was unsure about.

Might this have been his last appearance at Melbourne Park?

"There is a chance. Who knows?" Djokovic replied. "I'll just have to see how the season goes. I want to keep going."

He said it's too soon to know how long he might be sidelined.

He said he isn't sure yet what will happen to his coaching arrangement with former on-court rival Andy Murray.

What Djokovic did make clear: His focus and goals will not waver.

"It's not like I'm worrying approaching every Grand Slam now whether I'm going to get injured or not, but statistics are against me in a way in the last couple of years," he said. "But I'll keep going. I'll keep striving to win more Slams. And as long as I feel that I want to put up with all of this, I'll be around."

What to know about Mariann Budde, the bishop who upset Trump with her inaugural sermon

By TIFFANY STANLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Right Rev. Mariann Budde made headlines this week after she angered President Donald Trump with her sermon during an inaugural prayer service.

It was not the first time the cleric has publicly disagreed with Trump, but it became a striking moment in what is usually a staid and scripted event.

Here's more about the Episcopal bishop of Washington, who has continued to speak out in the wake of the president's derision.

What did Bishop Budde and President Trump say?

"Let me make one final plea, Mr. President," the soft-spoken bishop said from the pulpit of Washington

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 65 of 74

National Cathedral.

"I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now," she said.

"There are gay, lesbian, and transgender children in Democratic, Republican, and independent families, some who fear for their lives," Budde preached.

She said "the vast majority of immigrants are not criminals," calling them "good neighbors" and "faithful members" of religious communities.

The Trump administration has already issued executive orders rolling back transgender rights and toughening immigration policies.

Trump and Vice President JD Vance looked visibly disgruntled at times as they sat in the front pew with their wives. Vance raised his eyebrows and said something to second lady Usha Vance, who stared straight ahead.

At the White House afterward, Trump said he "didn't think it was a good service."

He later called Budde a "Radical Left hard line Trump hater" on his Truth Social site and demanded an apology for "her inappropriate statements."

In an interview with The Associated Press on Wednesday, Budde said she would continue to pray for the president, as is custom in Episcopal worship.

"I don't agree with many of his values and assumptions about American society and how to respond to the challenges of our time," she said. "I strongly disagree, actually. But I believe we can disagree respectfully."

She is the first woman to hold her church position

Budde, 65, is the first woman to lead the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, a position she has held since 2011. She oversees 86 churches across Washington, D.C., and Maryland, with 38,000 members.

National spokespeople for the Episcopal Church called Budde "a valued and trusted pastor." They said, "We stand by Bishop Budde and her appeal for the Christian values of mercy and compassion."

Before her current post, she served as a parish priest at St. John's Episcopal Church in Minneapolis for 18 years.

Budde grew up in New Jersey and Colorado, and for a time as a teenager, she identified as an evangelical. Later she returned to the Episcopal Church, the mainline Protestant denomination of her childhood.

She graduated from the University of Rochester and Virginia Theological Seminary, an Episcopal institution just outside Washington.

"I'm a mom. I'm a grandmother. I really care about the people in our communities," Budde said.

A different kind of prayer service

She revised her sermon over and over again.

Budde knew last summer that the theme of the inaugural service would be unity after a "divisive election season."

"Couldn't we just acknowledge that we can't paint whole groups of people in one broad stroke? That's the stuff of political campaigning. I understand that. But we're running the country now," she said.

And as she watched the inauguration the day before she was set to preach, she noted Trump-supporting clergy offered a different Christian perspective in their prayers than her own. She hoped to show another way to interpret the world through the lens of faith.

More than a dozen religious leaders spoke during the cathedral's interfaith service, including those from Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu traditions.

Notably absent from the invited clergy with speaking roles were conservative evangelicals, who are among Trump's strongest supporters and now among Budde's loudest critics.

The strong reactions to Budde's sermon largely fell along predictable political and religious lines. Progressive people of faith found in her an inspiring example of "speaking truth to power." Some conservative religious voices found her plea confrontational and disrespectful. Others took issue with a woman in a powerful church leadership role, which their traditions reserve for men.

Pastor Robert Jeffress of First Baptist Dallas, a prominent Trump supporter, was at the service and posted on X that Budde "insulted rather than encouraged our great president" and "there was palpable disgust

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 66 of 74

in the audience with her words.”

Budde felt some of that pushback when she processed down the aisle of the cathedral after the service. The president did not acknowledge her when she passed.

She thought phrasing her words to the president as a plea for mercy “was a very gentle way to do it because I was acknowledging his authority and his power.”

“I guess I had that wrong,” she said.

Budde has clashed with Trump before

The national cathedral has long been the ceremonial home of high-profile political events. But in 2017, it faced criticism from liberal-leaning Episcopalians for hosting Trump’s first inaugural prayer service. While Budde spoke at the service, there was no sermon that year at Trump’s request.

The content of Budde’s words this time should come as no surprise to those who have watched her career.

Budde has joined other cathedral leaders in rebuking Trump’s “racialized rhetoric” and blaming him for inciting violence on Jan. 6, 2021, when a mob of his supporters attacked the U.S. Capitol in an attempt to keep him in power.

Most notably, she said she was “outraged” in 2020 after Trump staged an appearance in front of St. John’s Episcopal Church, which is near the White House. He held up a Bible after the area had been cleared of peaceful protesters.

In 2023, Budde published a book that reflected on that summer of 2020 after George Floyd’s death, when she criticized the sitting president. It’s titled, “How We Learn to Be Brave.”

“The capacity to respond in such a moment doesn’t drop from the sky, nor is its significance measured by a week’s worth of media coverage,” Budde wrote.

That kind of boldness, she argued, is preceded by countless, smaller decisions that summon bravery.

“Its ultimate significance is determined by how we live after the moment passes.”

What to know about the ruling blocking Trump’s order on birthright citizenship

By GENE JOHNSON and MIKE CATALINI Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — President Donald Trump’s executive order denying U.S. citizenship to the children of parents living in the country illegally has faced the first of what will be many legal tests. It didn’t fare well.

A Justice Department lawyer had barely started making his arguments in a Seattle courtroom Thursday when U.S. District Judge John C. Coughenour began blistering him with questions, calling the executive order “blatantly unconstitutional.” Coughenour went on to temporarily block it pending further arguments.

Some things to know about the decision and the lawsuits challenging Trump’s order:

What is birthright citizenship?

Birthright citizenship is the principle that someone born in a country is a citizen of that country. In the United States, it’s enshrined in the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, which states: “All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside.” It was ratified in 1868 to ensure the citizenship of former slaves after the Civil War.

Critics of unfettered immigration have argued that provides an incentive for people to come to, or remain in, the U.S. illegally: They know that if they have children in the U.S., those children will be citizens, who might later petition for their parents to become legal permanent residents.

In an effort to curb unlawful immigration, Trump issued the executive order just after being sworn in for his second term on Monday. The order drew immediate legal challenges across the country, with at least five lawsuits being brought by 22 states and a number of immigrants rights groups. A lawsuit brought by Washington, Arizona, Oregon and Illinois was the first to get a hearing.

What’s next for the legal challenges?

The judge’s ruling Thursday was a temporary restraining order. It blocked the administration from en-

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 67 of 74

forcing or implementing Trump's order nationally for the next 14 days. Over the next two weeks, the sides will submit further briefings on the legal merits of the executive order. Coughenour scheduled another hearing for Feb. 6 to hear arguments on whether to issue a preliminary injunction, which would block the executive order long term while the case proceeds.

In the meantime, some of the other cases challenging the order are also getting underway.

The next hearing is in a case brought in Maryland by CASA, a nonprofit immigrants rights organization based in the mid-Atlantic. That's set for Feb. 5 at U.S. District Court in Greenbelt, Maryland.

Another lawsuit, led by New Jersey on behalf of 18 states, the District of Columbia and San Francisco, and a challenge brought in Massachusetts by the Brazilian Worker Center do not yet have hearings scheduled.

Aside from arguing the executive order's constitutionality, the states say the order would subject all the children affected by it to deportation and make many of them stateless. It would strip them of their rights and render them unable to participate in economic or civic life, the states argue.

Why did the judge block Trump's order?

Coughenour did not detail his reasoning during Thursday's hearing, but his assertion that the order is "blatantly unconstitutional," as well as point-blank questioning of DOJ attorney Brett Shumate — and his lack of questions for Washington's assistant attorney general, Lane Polozola — suggested he agreed with the states' arguments.

The states say it's well settled that the 14th Amendment guarantees birthright citizenship and that the president lacks authority to determine who should or should not be granted U.S. citizenship at birth.

"I've been on the bench for over four decades. I can't remember another case where the question presented was as clear as this one is," Coughenour told Shumate.

The Department of Justice later said in a statement that it will "vigorously defend" the president's executive order.

"We look forward to presenting a full merits argument to the Court and to the American people, who are desperate to see our Nation's laws enforced," the department said.

Who is the judge?

Coughenour, 84, got his law degree from the University of Iowa in 1966 and was appointed to the bench by President Ronald Reagan in 1981. He's been a federal judge for more than four decades; he has taken semi-retired "senior status" but continues hearing cases. He has a reputation as a tough, independent and sometimes cantankerous jurist.

Newly elected Washington Attorney General Nick Brown — a former Seattle U.S. attorney — said after Thursday's hearing that he wasn't surprised by Coughenour's reaction to the "absurdity" of the executive order.

"I've been in front of Judge Coughenour before to see his frustration personally," Brown said. "But I think the words that he expressed, and the seriousness that he expressed, really just drove home what we have been saying. ... This is fairly obvious."

Among the thousands of cases Coughenour has handled, covering everything from criminal to environmental law, probably the most famous was that of "millennium bomber" Ahmed Ressam. Ressam was arrested entering the U.S. in December 1999 with a trunk full of explosives and plans to bomb Los Angeles International Airport on New Year's Eve.

Coughenour repeatedly butted heads with federal prosecutors during Ressam's sentencing, disagreeing about how much credit Ressam should receive for cooperating with them after his conviction. Twice Coughenour sentenced Ressam to 22 years — far less than prosecutors were seeking — and twice the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals overturned him.

Coughenour finally sentenced Ressam to 37 years in 2012. At the time, he said Ressam's case was the only one he could think of in which the appeals court deemed him too lenient.

Europe considers sending troops to Ukraine if there's a ceasefire. But would Russia accept?

By SAMYA KULLAB and EMMA BURROWS Associated Press

With Russia wearing down Ukraine's stretched forces and new U.S. President Donald Trump pressuring the two sides to end their nearly 3-year-old war, Kyiv and some of its European allies are discussing how that might be achieved in a way that would guarantee Ukraine's future security.

Several ideas have been floated in the past, but the one currently gaining currency would station thousands of European troops in Ukraine, though not under a NATO banner, to serve as a deterrent and rapid reaction force should Russia invade again — an apparent non-starter for Moscow.

Kyiv has signaled a willingness to consider ceasefire terms, but Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said security promises from Kyiv's allies would be key to a just peace and that without them, it would only be a matter of time before Russia invaded again. Ukrainian officials say past agreements with the Kremlin were worthless, pointing to 2014 and 2015 pacts Russia signed after illegally annexing Crimea but then broke with its 2022 invasion.

It remains to be seen whether Russia would want to end the war while its forces appear to be on the front foot, even if they're sustaining heavy losses, or what terms the Kremlin might seek. But the rest of Europe is coming to terms with what a Ukrainian defeat would mean for its security.

"This isn't just about Ukraine's sovereignty. Because if Russia succeeds in this aggression, it will impact all of us for a very, very long time," U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer said during a recent visit to Kyiv.

What ceasefire plans have been discussed?

With Trump's return to the White House and his threats to withdraw crucial U.S. support from Kyiv unless Europe bears more of the Ukraine burden, some European leaders have pledged their resolve. French President Emmanuel Macron said building security guarantees for Ukraine is a key responsibility for European nations, while Starmer said the U.K. would play a "full part" in any peacekeeping efforts.

Ukraine considers NATO to be the most robust deterrent to Russia, but Trump and some top European leaders have poured cold water on the idea of a NATO-led peacekeeping presence in Ukraine.

Among the ideas that apparently haven't gained traction was one in which allies would invest massively to arm Ukraine to the hilt to deter a future Russian assault. It would almost surely require major American support that might not be forthcoming under Trump.

Another idea, suggested by Ukrainians, would have Ukraine's allies defend it from large-scale Russian air attacks, similar to how the U.S. helped defend Israel from an Iranian drone attack last year. Experts say one possible downside to this approach would be that it would expose sophisticated Western defense technology to Russian military learning.

A third idea, which is getting attention, is one Macron floated nearly a year ago and is modeled on the Korean armistice. It envisages Western troops being stationed in Ukraine as a deterrent and rapid reaction force.

Zelenskyy said there would need to be enough allied troops stationed in Ukraine to overcome Russia's manpower advantage.

Furthermore, he said, Kyiv would need sufficient flows of weapons, including long-range capabilities able to strike Moscow's defense industrial complex, including some that are more than 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) deep inside Russian territory. Trump opposes the idea.

Although Trump is pushing Zelenskyy and Russian President Vladimir Putin to "make a deal," European leaders are grappling with questions over how much military and financial support they could theoretically offer, and the amount of political risk they would be prepared to take domestically if they were to send troops to Ukraine and possibly put them in harm's way.

Allied troops in Ukraine?

The discussions could be for naught. Russia views Ukraine as part of its geopolitical backyard, not the West's. Putin believes he's winning the war and can outlast Kyiv, and he won't stomach a proposal that would put Western troops in Ukraine, current and former senior European and Russian officials told The

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 69 of 74

Associated Press.

"Putin would never say yes to this," and European nations would be unlikely to go ahead if Putin makes it clear it's a red line, said Boris Bondarev, a former Russian diplomat who quit his role in protest after the war started.

Maria Zakharova, Russia's Foreign Ministry spokesperson, said Thursday that NATO troops in Ukraine would be "categorically unacceptable" and provoke "uncontrolled escalation."

Nevertheless, an advisor to the Ukrainian government said "technical discussions" with allies are ongoing and speculated that Moscow might accept such scenario depending on what concessions Ukraine is willing to make. The official spoke to the AP on the condition of anonymity to speak freely about sensitive matters.

Zelenskyy indicated this week that he wants foreign support and that Ukraine would need tens of thousands of allied troops at a minimum.

If European nations were to agree to send troops to Ukraine, it would send a strong signal to Russia that Europe intends to have skin in the game, said Camille Grand, a former NATO official now with the European Council on Foreign Relations.

But even if European nations were to agree, there are questions around Europe's military production capacity, manpower and ability to fill a potential vacuum if there's an expected reduction in U.S. aid under Trump. The U.S. provides Kyiv with 40% of its military support.

Europe's defense production is fragmented along national lines and is underfunded, and there are questions around national governments' ability to defend their own people, let alone meet Ukraine's enormous needs.

Peacekeepers or a tripwire?

There are many aspects of the Macron proposal that would need to be ironed out, including where in Ukraine allied forces would be deployed, which countries would send troops and what capabilities they would have "because that would also be a signal of their ability to fight," said Marie Dumoulin, program director for Wider Europe at the European Council on Foreign Relations.

In conversations with the AP, Ukrainian officials described such allied troops as serving as a peacekeeping mission but also as a tripwire force, in which they would be committed to counterattacking in the event of a Russian assault.

"There are misrepresentations when people describe this as potential peacekeeping," said Dumoulin. A senior Ukrainian official and two Western official both concurred. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to speak freely about sensitive talks.

A traditional peacekeeping mission requires a UN vote, one that Russia can easily veto. It would also not include a guarantee to counterattack in the event of a Russian strike — a key component of the type of security guarantee Kyiv is seeking.

Though the initiative would occur outside of the NATO format, one Western official pointed to NATO's multinational battalions in the Baltic countries — which, unlike Ukraine, are members of the alliance — as a possible model. Others have also alluded to stabilization forces in Bosnia as an example.

The Ukrainian president said he discussed the French proposal for foreign contingents with the U.K., France, Poland and the Baltic states, but the reality is, it would meet fierce resistance from Putin. Even so, opening negotiations with a proposal for a Western troop presence in Ukraine could leave European nations with negotiating room to maneuver with Putin, who would see such a suggestion "as NATO in Ukraine anyway," Dumoulin said.

What Americans think about Trump and Musk's plans for the federal government: AP-NORC poll

By LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Americans see the federal government as rife with corruption, inefficiency and red tape — but they're less sure about whether Elon Musk is the right person to fix it.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 70 of 74

A new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research shows that only about 3 in 10 U.S. adults strongly or somewhat approve of President Trump's creation of an advisory body on government efficiency, which Musk is helming. About 4 in 10 disapprove, while the rest were neutral or didn't know enough to say. (The poll was conducted before Vivek Ramaswamy announced he would no longer be involved in the group.)

The goal of the advisory body, the Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, is to expose fraudulent and wasteful spending across the federal bureaucracy, and its leaders have floated a range of possible ways to cut costs, including eliminating entire agencies. But although most agree that the federal government is facing major problems, many Americans also have an unfavorable view of Musk and are hesitant about the Republican president relying on billionaires for advice about government policy.

As the plans take more concrete shape, the poll shows that Americans are ambivalent about some of the changes that Trump and his team have mentioned in the past few months — including eliminating large numbers of federal jobs and moving federal agencies outside Washington. Substantial shares don't have an opinion, indicating that there's plenty of room for opinion to shift in either direction.

A return-to-office policy for federal workers — which was one of Trump's first executive actions on Inauguration Day — is fairly popular.

Americans see a broken federal government — but aren't as concerned about the 'deep state'

As Trump sweeps into his second term with promises to cut regulations and reduce the role of government bureaucrats, most Americans think the federal government has serious problems. About two-thirds of U.S. adults say corruption and inefficiency are "major problems" in the federal government, and roughly 6 in 10 say the same about red tape, such as government regulations and bureaucracy.

Republicans are more likely than Democrats to think these are major problems — but a majority of Democrats still agree that corruption and inefficiency are significant challenges for the government.

But despite Trump's claims that career federal workers resisted his policies during his first term, concern about civil servants who are unwilling to implement the president's agenda is not as high. Only about one-third of Americans say this is a big problem in the government.

Many dislike Musk and mistrust billionaires' influence broadly

Musk was a prominent part of Trump's inauguration ceremonies — given a seat inside the Capitol Rotunda for the event, then speaking at a rally shortly after Trump was sworn in.

About one-third of Americans have a favorable view of Musk — a billionaire and the world's richest person — which is down slightly from December. Americans' views of Musk and Trump have a fair amount of overlap: About 8 in 10 Americans share the same view of both men, whether positive or negative. About half of Americans have an unfavorable view of both Musk and Trump.

Some Americans may also be wary of Musk's prominence. U.S. adults broadly think it's a bad thing if the president relies on billionaires for advice about government policy, according to the poll. About 6 in 10 U.S. adults say this would be a "very" or "somewhat" bad thing, while only about 1 in 10 call it a very or somewhat good thing, and about 3 in 10 are neutral.

Return-to-office for federal workers is more popular than cutting federal jobs

One of Trump's first executive orders on Monday was a broad directive for federal employees to return to the office. That was one of several policies aimed at increasing government efficiency that Trump and Musk floated before his inauguration, including a broader push to eliminate federal jobs.

A sizable share of Americans don't have an opinion on either proposal, which means there's plenty of room for views to shift as Trump begins to take action. But firings are less popular than a broad return-to-work mandate. About 4 in 10 Americans oppose eliminating a large number of federal jobs, according to the poll, while about 3 in 10 are in favor. But about 4 in 10 favor requiring federal workers to return to the office five days a week, and only about 2 in 10 are opposed.

Trump has said moving agencies outside Washington will help him shatter the "deep state," a supposed network of mainly nonelected government officials influencing government policy, and he began moving some federal jobs out of the area toward the end of his first term. But he may need to attempt this on a

larger scale before Americans decide what they think about it. Nearly half of U.S. adults in the poll were neutral on moving federal agencies outside Washington, while about one-quarter were in favor and a similar share were opposed.

Belarus election is poised to extend the 30-year rule of 'Europe's last dictator'

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

The last time Belarus staged a presidential election in 2020, authoritarian leader Alexander Lukashenko was declared the winner with 80% of the vote. That triggered cries of fraud, months of protests and a harsh crackdown with thousands of arrests.

Not wanting to risk such unrest again by those opposing his three decades of iron-fisted rule, Lukashenko advanced the timing of the 2025 election — from the warmth of August to frigid January, when demonstrators are less likely to fill the streets.

With many of his political opponents either jailed or exiled abroad, the 70-year-old Lukashenko is back on the ballot, and when the election concludes on Sunday, he is all but certain to add a seventh term as the only leader most people in post-Soviet Belarus have ever known.

Here's what to know about Belarus, its election and its relationship with Russia:

'Europe's last dictator' and his reliance on Russia

Belarus was part of the Soviet Union until its collapse in 1991. The Slavic nation of 9 million people is sandwiched between Russia and Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, the latter three all NATO members. It was overrun by Nazi Germany in World War II.

It's been closely allied with Moscow and Russian President Vladimir Putin — himself in power for a quarter century.

Lukashenko, a former state farm director, was first elected in 1994, riding public anger over a catastrophic plunge in living standards after chaotic and painful free-market reforms. He promised to combat corruption.

Throughout his rule, he's relied on subsidies and political support from Russia, allowing it to use Belarusian territory to invade Ukraine in 2022 and later agreeing to host some of Russia's tactical nuclear weapons.

Lukashenko was dubbed "Europe's last dictator" early in his tenure, and he has lived up to that nickname, harshly silencing dissent and extending his rule through elections that the West has called neither free nor fair.

An open admirer of the Soviet Union, he has restored Soviet-style controls on the economy, discouraged use of the Belarusian language in favor of Russian, and pushed for abandoning the country's red-and-white national flag in favor of one similar to what it used as a Soviet republic.

Belarus' top security agency kept its fearsome Soviet-era name of the KGB, and it's the only country in Europe to keep the death penalty, with executions carried out with a gunshot to the back of the head.

Flirtation with the West, repression at home

As he bargained with the Kremlin over the years for more subsidies, Lukashenko periodically tried to appease the West by easing repressions. Such flirtations ended after he unleashed a violent suppression of dissent after the 2020 election.

That election to his sixth term was widely seen at home and abroad as rigged, and it sparked months of massive protests, the largest ever seen in Belarus.

Authorities responded with a sweeping crackdown in which over 65,000 people were arrested, thousands were beaten by police and hundreds of independent media outlets and nongovernmental organizations were closed and outlawed, drawing Western sanctions.

Leading opposition figures have either been imprisoned or fled the country. Human rights activists say Belarus holds about 1,300 political prisoners, including Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski, the founder of the country's top rights group, Viasna.

"Through a brutal campaign against all dissent, the authorities have created a suffocating climate of fear,

silencing anything and anyone who challenges the government," said Marie Struthers, Amnesty International's Eastern Europe and Central Asia director.

Maneuvering before the election

Although Lukashenko's current term doesn't expire until summer, the election was moved up in what officials said would allow him "to exercise his powers at the initial stage of strategic planning."

Belarusian political analyst Valery Karbalevich gave a different reason. "There won't be mass protests in freezing January," he said.

In other maneuvering, Lukashenko has recently pardoned more than 250 people described as political prisoners by rights activists.

The pardons, however, come amid heightened repressions aimed at uprooting any remaining signs of dissent. Hundreds have been arrested in raids that targeted relatives and friends of political prisoners. Other arrests include participants in online chats organized by residents of apartment buildings in various cities.

Katya Glod, policy fellow with the European Leadership Network, noted the election "takes place in the atmosphere of fear and repression, which has been really unrelenting since 2020."

Unlike the 2020 election, Lukashenko faces only token challengers, with other opposition candidates rejected for the ballot by the Central Election Commission. The election began with early voting Tuesday and concludes Sunday.

"The politicians who once dared to challenge Lukashenko are now literally rotting in prison in torture conditions, there has been no contact with them for over a year, and some of them are in very poor health," said Viasna representative Pavel Sapelka.

Opposition leader-in-exile Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who challenged Lukashenko in the 2020 election and was forced to flee the country afterward, says the latest vote is a farce and urged Belarusians to vote against every candidate. Her husband, activist Siarhei Tsikhanouski, tried to run four years ago but was jailed and remains imprisoned.

Under Russia's nuclear umbrella

In December 2024, Lukashenko and Putin signed a treaty that gave security guarantees to Belarus that included the possible use of Russian nuclear weapons.

The pact followed Moscow's revision of its nuclear doctrine, which for the first time placed Belarus under the Russian nuclear umbrella amid tensions with the West over the war in Ukraine.

Lukashenko says Belarus is hosting dozens of Russian tactical nuclear weapons. Their deployment extends Russia's capability to target Ukraine and NATO allies in Europe.

He also said Belarus will prepare to host Russia's Oreshnik hypersonic missile that was used in Ukraine for the first time in November. Putin said the missiles could be deployed to Belarus in the second half of 2025, remaining under Moscow's control while Minsk will select the targets.

After 80 years, not many Auschwitz survivors are left. One man makes telling the stories his mission

By MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

HAIFA, Israel (AP) — Naftali Fürst will never forget his first view of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, on Nov. 3, 1944. He was 12 years old.

SS soldiers threw open the doors of the cattle car, where he was crammed in with his mother, father, brother, and more than 80 others. He remembers the tall chimneys of the crematoria, flames roaring from the top.

There were dogs and officers yelling in German "get out, get out!" forcing people to jump onto the infamous ramp where Nazi doctor Josef Mengele separated children from parents.

Fürst, now 92, is one of a dwindling number of Holocaust survivors able to share first-person accounts of the horrors they endured, as the world marks the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazis' most notorious death camp. Fürst is returning to Auschwitz for the annual occasion, his fourth trip to the camp.

Each time he returns, he thinks of those first moments there.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 73 of 74

"We knew we were going to certain death," he said from his home in Haifa, northern Israel, earlier this month. "In Slovakia, we knew that people who went to Poland didn't return."

Strokes of luck

Fürst and his family arrived at the entrance to Auschwitz on Nov. 3, 1944 — one day after Nazi leader Heinrich Himmler ordered the cessation of the use of the gas chambers ahead of their demolition, as the Soviet troops neared. The order meant that his family wasn't immediately killed. It was one of many small bits of luck and coincidences that allowed Fürst to survive.

"For 60 years, I didn't talk about the Holocaust, for 60 years I didn't speak a word of German even though it's my mother tongue," said Fürst.

In 2005, he was invited to attend the ceremony to mark the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Buchenwald, where he was liberated on April 11, 1945, after being moved there from Auschwitz. He realized there were fewer and fewer Holocaust survivors who could give first-person accounts, and decided to throw himself into memorial work. This will be his fourth trip to a ceremony at Auschwitz, having also met Pope Francis there in 2016.

Some 6 million European Jews were killed by the Nazis during the Holocaust — the mass murder of Jews and other groups before and during World War II. Soviet Red Army troops liberated Auschwitz-Birkenau on Jan. 27, 1945, and the day has become known as International Holocaust Remembrance Day. An estimated 1.1 million people, mostly Jews, were killed in Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Just 220,000 Holocaust survivors are still alive, according to the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, and more than 20 percent are over 90.

A meeting place after the war

Fürst, originally from Bratislava, then part of Czechoslovakia, was just 6 when the Nazis first started implementing measures against the country's Jews.

He spent ages 9 to 12 in four different concentration camps, including Auschwitz. His parents had planned to jump off of the cattle car on the way to the camp, but people were packed so tightly they couldn't reach the doors.

His father instructed the entire family, no matter what, to meet at 11 Šulekova Street in Bratislava after the war. Fürst and his brother were separated from their mother. After numbers were tattooed on their arms, they also were taken from their father. They lived in Block 29, without many other children. As the Soviet army closed in on the area, so close they could hear the booms from the tanks, Fürst and his brother, Shmuel, were forced to join a dangerous journey toward Buchenwald, marching for three days in the cold and snow. Anyone who lagged behind was shot.

"We had to prove our desire to live, to do another step and another step and keep going," he said. Many people gave up, longing to end the hunger and thirst and cold, and just sat down, where they were shot by the guards.

"We had this command from my father: 'You must adapt and survive, and even if you're suffering, you must come back,'" Fürst recalled.

Fürst and his brother survived the march, and an open-car train ride in the snow, but they were separated at the next camp. When Fürst was liberated from Buchenwald, captured in a famous photo that included Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel in the bunkbeds, he was sure he was alone in the world.

But within months, just as Fürst's father had instructed, the four family members reunited at the address they memorized, the home of family friends. The rest of their family — grandparents, aunts, uncles — were all killed. His family later moved to Israel, where he married, had a daughter, four grandchildren and three great-grandchildren, with another on the way.

'We couldn't imagine this tragedy'

On Oct. 7, 2023, Fürst awoke to the Hamas attack on southern Israel, and immediately thought of his granddaughter, Mika Peleg, and her husband, and their 2-year-old son, who live in Kfar Aza, a kibbutz on the border with Gaza where scores of people were killed or kidnapped.

"It just kept getting worse all day, we couldn't get any information what was happening with them," said Fürst. "We saw the horrors, that we couldn't imagine this type of horror is happening in 2023, 80 years

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 214 ~ 74 of 74

after the Holocaust.”

Toward midnight on Oct. 7, Peleg’s neighbors sent word that the family had survived. They spent almost 20 hours locked inside their safe room with no food or ability to communicate. Her husband’s parents, who both lived on Kfar Aza, were killed.

Despite his close connection, comparisons between Oct. 7 and the Holocaust make Fürst uncomfortable. “It’s awful and terrible and a catastrophe, and hard to describe, but it’s not a Holocaust,” he said. As awful as the Hamas attack was for his granddaughter and others, the Holocaust was a multi-year “death industry” with massive infrastructure and camps that could kill 10,000 people a day for months at a time, he said.

Fürst, who was previously involved in coexistence work between Jews and Arabs, said his heart also goes out to Palestinians in Gaza, although he believes Israel needed to respond militarily. “I feel the pain of everyone who is suffering, everywhere in the world, because I think I know what suffering is,” he said.

Fürst knows that he is one of very few Holocaust survivors still able to travel to Auschwitz, so it’s important for him to be present there to mark the 80th anniversary.

These days, he is telling his story as many times as he can, taking part in documentaries and movies, serving as the president of the Buchenwald Prisoner’s Association and working to create a memorial statue at the Sered’ concentration camp in Slovakia.

He feels a responsibility to be the mouthpiece for the millions who were killed, and people can relate to the story of a single person more than the hard numbers of 6 million deaths, he said.

“Whenever I finish, I tell the youth, the fact that you were able to see living testimony (from a Holocaust survivor) puts a requirement on you more than someone who did not: you take it on your shoulders the obligation to continue to tell this.”

Today in History: January 25

NASA Opportunity rover lands on Mars

Today is Saturday, Jan. 25, the 25th day of 2025. There are 340 days left in the year.

On Jan. 25, 2004, NASA’s Opportunity rover landed on Mars and sent its first pictures of the planet to Earth; originally planned as a 90-day mission, the rover remained operational for over 15 years, travelling a total of 28 miles across the planet’s surface.

Also on this date:

In 1924, the first Winter Olympic Games opened in Chamonix (shah-moh-NEE’), France.

In 1945, the World War II Battle of the Bulge ended as the German army concluded its final offensive on the Western Front; approximately 19,000 US soldiers were killed during the five-week campaign.

In 1945, Grand Rapids, Michigan, became the first city to add fluoride to its public water supply.

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy held the first live televised presidential news conference.

In 1971, Charles Manson and three of his followers were convicted in Los Angeles of murder and conspiracy in the 1969 slayings of seven people, including actor Sharon Tate.

In 2011, Egyptians began a nationwide uprising that forced longtime autocrat Hosni Mubarak to step down amid the Arab Spring uprisings that swept the Middle East and North Africa.

In 2021, President Joe Biden signed an order reversing a Pentagon policy that largely barred transgender people from military service.

In 2022, the Navy said it had discharged 23 active-duty sailors for refusing the coronavirus vaccine; it marked the first time the Navy had thrown currently-serving sailors out of the military over the mandatory shots.

Today’s birthdays: Football Hall of Famer Carl Eller is 83. Actor Leigh Taylor-Young is 80. Actor Jenifer Lewis is 68. Hockey Hall of Famer Chris Chelios is 63. Actor Ana Ortiz is 54. Actor Mia Kirshner is 50. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is 47. Soccer manager and former player Xavi is 45. Singer-songwriter Alicia Keys is 44. Football Hall of Famer Patrick Willis is 40. Actor-singer Ariana DeBose is 34.